

## **Last but Not Least**

### *Don't Hope, ... Decide*

Michael was at the airport waiting to pick up a friend. While straining to locate his friend among the passengers spilling out through the exit corridor he noticed a man coming toward him carrying two light bags. He stopped right next to him to greet his family.

First he motioned to his youngest son, maybe six years old, as he laid down his bags. They gave each other a long, loving hug. As they separated enough to look in each other's face, Michael heard the father say, "It's so good to see you, son. I missed you so much!" His son smiled somewhat shyly, averted his eyes and replied softly, "Me, too, Dad!"

Then the man stood up, gazed in the eyes of his oldest son, maybe nine or ten, and while cupping his son's face in his hands said, "You're already quite the young man. I love you very much, Zach!" They too hugged a most loving, tender hug.

While this was happening, a baby girl, perhaps one or one-and-a-half, was squirming excitedly in her mother's arms, never once taking her little eyes off the wonderful sight of her returning father. The man said, "Hi, baby girl!" as he gently took the child from her mother. He quickly kissed her face all over and then held her close to his chest while rocking her from side to side. The little girl instantly relaxed and simply laid her head on his shoulder, motionless in pure contentment.

After several moments, he handed his daughter to his oldest son and declared, "I've saved the best for last!" and proceeded to give his wife the longest, most passionate kiss Michael ever remember seeing. He gazed into her eyes for several seconds and then silently mouthed, "I love you so much!" They stared at each other's eyes, beaming big smiles at one another, while holding both hands.

For an instant they reminded Michael of newlyweds, but he knew by the age of their kids that they couldn't possibly be. Michael, stunned by the wonderful display of affection and love taken place not more than an arm's length away from him heard himself nervously asking the man, "Wow! How long have you two been married?"

“Been together fourteen years total, married twelve of those.” he replied, without breaking his gaze from his lovely wife’s face. “Well then, how long have you been away?” Michael asked. The man finally turned and looked at Michael, still beaming his joyous smile. “Two whole days!”

Two days? Michael was stunned. By the intensity of the greeting, he had assumed he’d been away for at least several months – if not years.

Hoping to end his intrusion into their sacred privacy with some semblance of grace Michael said almost offhandedly, “Wonderful, I hope my marriage is still that passionate after twelve years!”

The man suddenly stopped smiling.

He looked Michael straight in the eye, and with forcefulness that burned right into his soul, he told him something that left Michael a different person.

This is what he said, “Don’t hope, friend... decide!”