

Chicken Soup for the Chocolate Lover's Soul: Indulging Our Sweetest Moments

By Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen

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If you can't live without a daily bite of chocolate, have visions of chocolate truffles dancing in your head, you will savor the decadence of this collection of stories.

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Editorial Review

About the Author
Jack Canfield is co-creator of the Chicken Soup for the Soul® series, which includes forty *New York Times* bestsellers, and coauthor of *The Success Principles: How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be*. He is a leader in the field of personal transformation and peak performance and is currently CEO of the Canfield Training Group and Founder and Chairman of the Board of The Foundation for Self-Esteem. An internationally renowned corporate trainer and keynote speaker, he lives in Santa Barbara, California.

Mark Victor Hansen is a co-founder of Chicken Soup for the Soul.

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1
Delectable Delights

Fifteen-Cent Surprise
You're on my list of things I love most—
right below chocolate.
Mary Englund Murphy

It was December 1963. Jack and I wanted to give each other something special on our first Christmas together, but we had no extra money for gifts. We had dated, fallen in love, and married all in the span of three months. We were young, in love, and broke—flat broke.

Jack was a private in the Marine Corps. He was stationed at the Naval Weapons Station, Charleston, South Carolina. The nicest house we could afford on Jack's ninety-dollar-a-month salary was half of a rickety old duplex. It sat smack-dab in the middle of a cow pasture on the backside of Goose Creek. It was drafty, the roof leaked, and it had no hot water. But we were together, and that was what mattered most to us.

Unknown to me, as December rolled along, Jack was determined to surprise me with something on our first Christmas together. On December 19, he hid a small hatchet under his field jacket. He slid his hands into his work gloves, pulled his cap down to keep his ears warm, and took a moonlit stroll to the back side of the cow pasture. About an hour later he returned with a pathetic little pine tree and a huge grin. That little tree's scrawny branches spread out like angel's wings to me. I welcomed the surprise with childish delight.

'Here's an empty coffee can, Jack. We can stand the tree in it,' I said. Jack filled the coffee can with South Carolina clay and jammed the tree's tiny trunk into it. I draped one of my scarves around the can. Then I decorated the pitiful tree with my earrings, necklaces, and bracelets. The rhinestones glittered like tinsel. 'It's not the biggest tree in the world, but it's the most beautiful Christmas tree I've ever had,' I said as I planted a kiss on Jack's cheek. I leaned on his strong shoulder and sighed with happiness.

But Jack wasn't satisfied. He wanted a gift to place under that tree. On Christmas Eve he stopped at the PX

on his way home from duty. He had a grand total of twenty-one cents in his pocket. For an hour he walked up and down the aisles searching for something—anything—he could buy for the love of his life with such meager savings. He had almost given up when his eyes locked on to a small sign that read '15¢.' He grabbed one, paid for it, and headed home with his treasure tucked inside the pocket of his field jacket.

That night Jack and I ate bologna sandwiches in front of our Christmas tree. We sang Christmas carols and snuggled near the gas space heater. Around midnight Jack disappeared into the bedroom. He reappeared with his right hand hidden behind his back. His mouth went dry and his hands shook as he announced, 'Close your eyes now. It's a surprise.'

'Oh, Jack, you shouldn't have spent money on a gift. We can't afford it.'
'I couldn't let Christmas come and go without doing something special for the most beautiful girl in the world. Close your eyes, and hold out your hand.'
I must admit I was excited. I giggled like a kid. Jack placed his treasure in my open palm. 'I know it isn't much. But, well, it's your favorite and you're my favorite.' He exhaled loudly. 'Merry Christmas!'

I opened my eyes. Resting in my palm was a miniature box containing four chocolate-covered confections. I pulled the little treasure close to my heart, then wrapped both arms around my hero's neck.

'This is the most wonderful gift I've ever received. It's so good to be loved by you, Jack. I can't believe that you're all mine. You're the best thing about my life.'

In the years that followed, our finances improved. Each Christmas the trees got fancier. Each year the presents got bigger and more expensive. But for thirty-four Christmases one gift occupied a place of honor under our Christmas tree. Every year until his death, Jack gave me his love—wrapped in a box of chocolate. And every year he became more and more my hero.

Jean Tomlinson
As told to Jean Matthew Hall

Skinny Dotty and Her Chocolates

All I really need is love, but a little chocolate now and then doesn't hurt!
Lucy Van Pelt
Peanuts, Charles M. Schulz

I live in a co-op apartment in Chelsea, New York City. It's like a small town here—our own little community. There's a family feeling, complete with gossip and tiffs and warm hugs and belly laughs. Skinny Dotty is a fixture. One time I asked if I could paint her portrait. She said, 'Maybe if I were younger and didn't have so many wrinkles. But it's too late now.' I asked her how old she was, and she wagged her finger back and forth and said, 'I'll never tell.' I'm left to guess she's seventy-five.

Dotty is shaped like a pencil, her blond hair in a bob where the eraser would be. She loves to wear clothes with pictures of cats on them—baseball caps with cats, T-shirts with cats, sneakers with cats, socks with cats, purses with cats.

Dotty spends most of her time checking on other people's cats and watering plants in the neighbors' apartments. I see her in the lobby, on the elevator, or when I pass through our private garden. Every time I see Dotty, she insists on giving me chocolate, handfuls of it. I try to refuse, worried about my dental bills and my waistline, but she ignores me and puts gobs of the little chocolates right into my pockets. Because I've tried to refuse, my guilt is gone. I eat each one, slowly, ecstatically, savoring every rich, creamy bite.

The superintendent's office is a cubicle right off the lobby entrance. It has a window that faces the lobby. A million years ago, Dotty placed a glass bowl on the ledge of the window and she fills it with chocolates every single day. I've witnessed the mailman grab whole handfuls and push them deep into his pockets. He thinks I don't see him.

Violet, a cranky, stout fiftyish woman who kvetches loudly at every annual shareholder meeting, regularly swipes more than her share. When she stands next to skinny Dotty, they look like the number ten. When Violet corners me in the lobby and I make the mistake of asking, 'How are you?' she responds with her litany of complaints.

Violet snatches handfuls of the chocolates, snaps her fake snakeskin purse open, drops the chocolates in, plink, plink, plunk, then she snaps the purse shut. She doesn't even care that I see her. If I were to ask why she took so many, I'm sure she'd say, 'Because nobody knows how I suffer.'
Violet doesn't tip the staff at Christmas. Dotty tips them and makes them cookies, even though she can't possibly be wealthy. Her husband was ill and out of work for a very long time. He would sit in the garden in his wheelchair with a book on his lap, snoring. Dotty often came downstairs and put a blanket over his legs while he snoozed. He reminded me of a beat-up old lawn chair. One night Jimmy died in his sleep. That week when I ran into Dotty in the lobby, she looked disoriented.

I asked, 'What's wrong?'
'Jimmy died,' she said.
'I'm so sorry to hear,' I said. 'You must miss him terribly.'
'Yes, the apartment is so quiet now.' Her voice trailed off and she looked down at her sneakers with the cats on them. Then, as if someone changed the channel, she perked up and said, 'Want some chocolates?'

I wanted to say something about Jimmy, about her pain, but instead I responded to her question, 'Oh, no, you keep them for yourself.'
As usual, she ignored me and stuffed a handful into my jacket pocket. As soon as I got to the elevator, I popped one into my mouth. The chocolate felt warm and snuggly and melted over my tongue. I felt a slight elevation in my mood. I slowly unwrapped the next one. I listened to the tin foil crinkle as I whiffed that spellbinding smell. Pop, it went into my mouth. By the time I got to my apartment on the third floor, all five chocolates had disappeared down the hatch and my day had improved 100 percent.

I often saw Dotty heading over to fill the glass bowl with a red and white bag from CVS drugstore. One day while I was at CVS, I walked over to the candy aisle and was surprised by how much those bags of chocolates cost. I suddenly felt bad for skinny Dotty always worrying about everybody else's chocolate cravings. I decided to surprise her and buy chocolates for her. I stocked my cart with Hershey's Kisses, mini-Snickers, Milk Duds, and Reese's Pieces.
I headed back to the building. I entered through the back gate that opens to the garden, and sure enough,

there was Dotty, as usual, chatting with a neighbor on a bench. I ran up to Dotty with a wide, proud grin.

'These are for you, my dear!' I exclaimed as I handed over the stuffed plastic bag.
'Oh, what's this? Aren't you sweet,' she said, smiling. But when she opened the bag her eyebrows twisted and her smile withered.
'What's wrong?' I said.
'I don't like chocolate,' she said.
'But, but . . .' I sputtered, 'then why do you always buy it for everybody?'
'So people will smile at me,' she said, very matter-of-factly.

I felt embarrassed, as if she were standing there naked. I wanted to cover her up. I wanted to drape a shawl around her bony shoulders. I wanted to fold her little pencil frame and stick her on my lap. It was all I could do not to burst out crying.
I breathed in deeply and summoned my composure. I gave her a gigantic hug and told her how lucky we all are to have her looking after us. Skinny Dotty beamed and handed me back the big bag of chocolates. I walked over to the glass bowl on the ledge and filled it up to the top.

Dorri Olds

Cards and Kisses

I believe there's biblical evidence that
confirms there will be chocolate in heaven. Revelation 7:17 says there will be no more tears. That pretty much cinches it for me.
Rhonda Rhea

It was Valentine's Day, and we were broke. It wasn't uncommon for us to b...

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