

A Media Spotlight
Fairy Tale

Gather 'round boys and girls,
and Uncle Al will tell you a story
based on an exciting new movie.

It's called



A TALE OF TWO SHACKS

Or

How *The Shack* should have been written



nce upon a time, not so long ago, in a forest far, far away, there lived a little boy named Mack. Now Mack was a good little boy who loved his mother very, very much. His mother was very good to Mack and loved him in return.

But Mack's father was a very baaad man. He was an elder in their church, but that was all a show. In private, Mack's father was a drunkard, and would hit Mack's mother when he was mad at her. And when he was mad at Mack, he would take him to a shack they had near the house and whip him real bad. This made Mack very sad.

So one day, after the father had beaten Mack with a belt for telling a church leader about his father's secret, Mack decided to do something very bad himself. He went to the shack and found some poison. He took the poison and poured it into one of his father's liquor bottles. That was a very bad thing to do, because his father drank the poison and died. But evidently Mack was never found out. He kept his secret for a long, long time.

Eventually, Mack grew up and became a father himself. He had a beautiful wife and three nice children—a boy named Josh, and two girls: Kate, who was a teenager, and Missy, around six years old. His wife, Nan, was a good Christian and would call God by the name of Papa.

Even though he had a godly wife and good kids, Mack was not always very happy. His secret bothered him, but he never told anybody about it.

One day, Mack decided to take his children on a camping trip. It was a fun time for everyone! They played games, ate good food, and took canoe rides on the lake. Everything was going fine. While Mack was watching Missy drawing a picture at a picnic table, Josh and Kate were canoeing on the lake.

But Kate did a very foolish thing. She stood up in the canoe and called to her father to watch her.

Now, children, it's a very bad thing to stand up in a canoe. There is a very good chance that you could tip it over and fall into the water.

Well, that's what happened to Kate and Josh. And although Kate could swim to shore, Josh's belt on his life jacket got caught in the overturned canoe, and he was drowning.

That's when Mack sprang into action! He jumped into the water and swam out to Josh. He was able to release the strap and bring Josh back to the dock, but he had to do CPR on him. Luckily, Josh was okay, boys and girls, so everyone was happy again.

But suddenly, something terrible happened. While Mack was distracted with saving Josh, Missy went missing. He looked everywhere for her but couldn't find her. This made Mack very sad.

After a long time of searching for her, the police, and the park rangers, and a lot of other people, couldn't find Missy.

It turns out that a very, very bad man had taken her away, and nobody ever found him or Missy. Not only had the bad man taken Missy away, but he killed her and hid her body in a cave where nobody could find her.

Not only was Mack very sad, but now his whole family was very sad. Things were never the same without Missy.

Well, one day sometime later Mack was removing snow from his driveway when he saw an envelope in his mailbox. When he opened it he found a letter from someone inviting him to meet the next day

at the shack. And get this, boys and girls, it was signed "Papa"! The same name that Mack's wife called God!

Can you imagine that?

Could it be that God was inviting Mack to meet with Him? And of all places, at the shack that held such terrible memories for Mack?

Goodness! The plot thickens!

Well, Mack couldn't believe it. In fact, he thought it might be a joke. Or, even worse, a challenge from the bad man who had stolen Missy!

To make a long story a bit shorter, Mack decides to steal his friend's four-wheel-drive Jeep and go to the shack alone. His friend had given him a gun, just in case, all the while thinking they were going together. But Mack wanted to go alone, and that's why he took his friend's Jeep without his permission.

Now, children, that's a very bad thing to do. It's wrong to take something that doesn't belong to you. It's called "stealing."

But in this case, just like poisoning his father, Mack got away with it because his friend didn't want to call the cops.

Anyway, as he's driving along the road to the shack, Mack crosses the path of another "Mack"—a big truck. They almost hit each other, but somehow Mack manages to steer clear, almost losing control. After composing himself, he drives on, eventually coming to his parent's old house in the forest.

Expecting to find the bad man there, he takes the gun from his pocket and enters the shack.

But guess what? It's empty.

The shack has been neglected for many years, and is now very decrepit and forlorn. It's a very sad place to be.

Not finding anyone there, Mack thinks the bad man hasn't the courage to face him. Frustrated, he breaks an old chair and falls on the floor of the shack. There, he falls into a deep sleep.

Suddenly he wakes to find himself still alone. Disappointed, he gets up and takes the path back to the Jeep.

All of sudden, through the trees he sees a man walking toward the shack. He grabs the gun once again, and stalks the man, thinking he was the bad man who had taken Missy. But the man knows Mack's there, and tells him to follow him because Papa wants to meet him.

As they walk toward the shack, all of a sudden the wintry forest becomes alive with color. The snow is gone and it is like spring. Flowers are blooming and birds are singing.

This amazes Mack, and, his curiosity growing, he follows the man until they come to the shack. Only now it's a different shack. It isn't decrepit and forlorn. It's a nice, cheery house with flowers all around, and light coming through the windows.

Entering the house with the nice man, Mack is surprised to find a jolly, fat, black lady who greets him cheerfully, giving him a big hug. With her is a young lady who calls herself Sarayu. Her name means "Breath of Wind."

The nice young man, it turns out, is Papa's son. No one ever mentions his name, but he is really Jesus. And guess what? He has scars in both his wrists.

The woman introduces herself by the name Elousia, but she tells Mack to call her "Papa."

My goodness!

Can this be true? Is God a jolly fat black lady?

Well, it turns out that "Papa" chose to come to Mack as a fat black lady because he had such bad memories of his father. When Mack asks about it, Papa says, "After all you've been through I didn't think you could handle a father."

Now, boys and girls, isn't it nice that God didn't want to hurt Mack's feelings and wound his delicate psyche even more by appearing to him as a father? But to add a bit of humor, he chose to call himself "Papa"! Isn't God a nice person?

Well, back to our story.

Mack asks Papa if she's really God. She replies, "I am." Then she says, "I am that I am."

Well, that's good enough for Mack. He's convinced. But he's also a little mad at Papa. Remembering his pain at losing Missy, he asks, "If you're who you say you are, where were you when I needed you?"

Papa answers, "I never left you, and I never left Missy."

Then she explains, "When all you see is your pain, you lose sight of me."

Goodness, goodness! What a profound statement. It turns out, boys and girls, that the pain we feel as we go through the trials of life can keep us from trusting God. Now that is true—if we allow the pain to override our good judgment and we become so wrapped up in ourselves that we forget that God is always with us.

You'll find that there is a lot of truth in this tale. But beware, because if you're not careful, you'll not see the dangers that also lie ahead.

Papa and Sarayu continue to speak with Mack as the son goes to the workshop to complete a project he's been working on.

Mack asks Papa why she brought him back there. She tells him, "This is where you got stuck."

When Mack's emotions overwhelm him, Sarayu takes a small vial and gathers one of his tears into it. She tells him, "We all collect things we value, don't we."

As they converse, Mack comes to accept that he's really in the presence of God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. He tells them, "It's good to meet you guys."

My, how informal. But then, God never stands on ceremony or expects special treatment, does He?

In fact, God as Papa is so down-to-earth you'd think you were just in a neat, all-American family situation. As Mack is at the workshop talking to the son, Papa dons an apron and ear buds while

preparing to bake something for dinner. She rocks out to music while jivin' in place.

Isn't God fun, boys and girls?

So anyway, Mack asks the son, "You're God, too, right?"

Always self-deprecating, the son replies, "I'm the best way to relate to Papa and Sarayu."

We don't want a direct "yes" answer to such a question, boys and girls, because, after all, some people would be offended to think that Jesus is God in the flesh. Better to think of him as a nice boy who is always obedient to his father (and mother).

The son does remind Mack that "You're in the center of our love and purpose."

What a nice thing to say. Of course, we wonder if everyone is in the center of their love and purpose. Or are some people just so bad that they are always out of their love and purpose.

After all, didn't Jesus tell His disciples, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My commandments, and My Father will love Him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him"?

That's in the Bible, children. In John 14:23.

It's true that God loved the whole world so much that He sent His only-begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him would not perish, but would have everlasting life. But it also says that in order to enter into God's love we have to believe in Jesus as the only way to Him, and that He died for our sins, and that He rose again to give eternal life to those who believe in Him. It doesn't seem to offer such a nice future for those who refuse to believe in Him.

But, oh, forgive me. We shouldn't bring the Bible into the story. That tends to ruin fairy tales.

Let's forget about that negative stuff and continue with our story.

So. When Mack goes back to the shack (hey, that rhymes, huh? Isn't that fun?), he finds Papa and Sarayu jivin' to Brenton Wood's *Gimme a Little Sign*.

Just gimme some kind of sign, girl
Oh, my baby
To show me that you're mine, girl
Oh yeah!

Just gimme some kind of sign, girl
Oh, my baby
To show me that you're mine
All right!

It turns out that Papa is really a "Soul Sister." And she's "especially fond of Neil Young."

If you don't know who Neil Young is, children, he's a real inspiration to young people. He's called "The Godfather of Grunge." He's also considered an activist and philosopher. But the closest thing to a philosophy that has been attributed to him is, "Just do what you want to do. Don't listen to anyone else."

Isn't that a good thing for children and young people to learn? Don't listen to your parents; they just get in the way of being able to do what you want to do.

Besides, Papa has a special fondness for Neil Young, so why shouldn't we listen to him?

Oh, wait, Neil says not to listen to anyone. So I guess that means we shouldn't listen to him either.

This can be so confusing.

So let's not think about it. After all, this is a fairy tale.

And fairy tales have to have happy endings.

But before we can get to the happy ending, we have to experience a lot of different things that seem bad.

And along that line, as Mack is speaking with Papa, he asks her, "What about your wrath?"

Papa looks puzzled as she replies, "You lost me there."

It turns out that wrath (that's another word for "anger") isn't part of Papa's vocabulary. She says, "I don't need to punish people. Sin is its own punishment."

Isn't it nice to know that, children? There's no reason to fear Papa. She'd never punish anyone, no matter how bad they are. Their sins are their own punishment.

So if you can stand it, feel free to sin all you want. You'll feel bad about it, but so what? Just suck it up, and endure your punishment until you die. After that, you'll be in the arms of Papa.

As she says, "The real underlying flaw in your life is that you don't think I'm good."

If you can overcome thinking that Papa isn't good, then you won't be flawed anymore.

I guess that's what it means to be perfect as the Father is perfect.

Oooops! That's in the Bible, too, and we don't want to go there. Besides (don't tell anyone), that Bible verse isn't in agreement with Papa's definition, so we don't want to be confused, do we?

Now, at one point Mack is asked, "How confident are you in your ability to discern good from evil?"

That's a real good question, boys and girls. Because in order to not be fooled by bad people or the Devil, we have to have what is called discernment. And many times, good things seem to be bad, and bad things seem to be good.

Like this fairy tale. Can you tell if it's good or bad? The question asked of Mack is a good question for everyone, isn't it? Even those who listen to this fairy tale.

So on with our story.

Sarayu has been working in the garden while Papa's son has been in the workshop. She invites Mack to help her tend the garden, but when they get there the condition of the garden makes him sad. "It's a mess," he says.

But Sarayu tells him that the garden is "wild, wonderful, and perfectly in process." Then she says something that startles him: "This mess is you."

Goodness, gracious!

It turns out that Sarayu has been working on Mack all the time, and that the garden represents Mack's emotional condition. Sarayu wants to heal Mack so he will be happy, happy, happy, all the time.

But she needs Mack's help in the "garden."

Little does Mack know that the process of making him happy will involve some not-so-pleasant experiences.

The next step in Mack's "process" is undertaken by the son who tells Mack to take a rowboat to the other side of the lake where he will join him. As Mack rows across the lake, he notices that the water is beginning to turn black and sticky, and very choppy. Then the boat begins to break apart.

No, no, no! This is terrible!

But wait!

The son yells to him from the dock Mack had left, telling him that the black water is "inside you." He then tells him not to be afraid: "Don't think about the past. Don't think about the pain," says the son.

Suddenly, the water turns clear again and calms down.

The son walks on the water toward Mack and tells him to step out of the boat.

But Mack is skeptical. He's worried about sinking into the water.

This is kind of puzzling because we saw earlier that Mack is an excellent swimmer. Even if he couldn't walk on the water like the son could, he could have easily swam back to the dock.

But we can't let our reasoning get in the way of a good story, can we?

So anyway, Mack holds the son's hand while he tests the water with his foot. And of all things, He can walk on water, too! Before you

know it, they're on the other side of the lake, walking toward a path that leads into another part of the forest.

The son tells Mack to go down the path without him to the end. When he reaches the end, he is to keep going.

Again, Mack is puzzled, especially when he reaches the end of the path to find himself boxed into a dead end by tall rocks on all three sides. But heeding the son's words, he pushes against the rock in front of him and it gives way. Just like magic!

As he steps forward, Mack finds himself in a cavern, and in the cavern sits a beautiful woman on a chair made of stone. Oooooo!

What an adventure, boys and girls. Who is this mysterious woman? And why is she Hispanic?

Well, as to why she is Hispanic, we'll consider that later. In the meantime, in answer to Mack's question as to who she is, she replies, "My name is Sophia. I am Wisdom."

Whoaa! Now it's getting good, isn't it? What is Mack about to experience?

Of course, Mack then asks, "Why am I here?"

To which Wisdom replies, "You're here for judgment."

Ooooooooo! Naturally, Mack thinks he is to be judged. But Wisdom tells him otherwise.

"Today, you are the judge," she says.

Then she explains: "You've spent your whole life making snap judgments."

Her point is that it is wrong for people to judge others. After all, we don't know everything about everyone, so how can we judge them.

Wisdom shows him visions of different people, and asks if he would judge them—people like gang members, drug dealers, murderers, and all kinds of bad people. Then he sees himself as a boy.

"Would you judge him?" asks Wisdom.

Now, it's not clear if Mack recognizes himself, but he says, "He's a kid."

"You already have," says Wisdom.

In other words, Mack has already judged himself to be bad.

Then she says something really profound: "Doesn't the legacy of brokenness go all the way back to Adam?"

Oh, boy! Now we see what she is getting at.

Only instead of calling it "sin," she calls it "brokenness."

We don't want to call it "sin" because that would mean people are at fault for the bad things they do. But "brokenness" makes it easier to see that nothing is really our fault. We are the victims of our circumstances.

Mack's father was bad because *his* father was bad. People are really good, but they do bad things because bad things are done to them.

This is called "generational curses." Something really bad happened a long time ago to someone in your family, so you can't help doing bad things because you've been cursed with what they did bad.

A good fairy tale needs things like curses to make them exciting, so we have to have one here.

So because of Adam's what? Sin, well, no.... I'm not sure how to say this without using that word, 'cause we've seen that sin is actually punishment enough for itself.

It's just so confusing if we start thinking about it.

So let's not think about it, okay?

Let's just say that Mack's "brokenness" is the reason for his misery.

And Wisdom's way of dealing with Mack's "brokenness" is to put him in the place of a judge.

So she asks him if God is to blame. To which Mack replies, "Absolutely. He's to blame."

But Wisdom has the answer for Mack. She commands him to choose which of his two children to send to Heaven, and which to send to Hell. Mack refuses, but Wisdom tells him, "You must choose."

Still he refuses; still she insists that he must choose.

Finally, he says, "Take me. I'll go instead of them. I'll go in their place."

Does he mean he'll go to Heaven in their place, or to Hell in their place? After all, he was to choose which went where.

Well, let's not let that little problem get in the way of a good story.

The point is that Mack realizes that he made the only just decision: to take the place of his children so that neither would have to go to Hell.

Suddenly he sees water falling over the entrance to the cavern. He walks toward it and allows the water to wash over him. Then he sees a truly wonderful sight!

There through the water he sees children frolicking in a field of flowers. Among them is the son, and, surprise! There is Missy with him. Missy walks toward Mack with a great big smile and reaches out her hand.

Wisdom tells him that Missy can't see him but she knows that he's there, and that she is happy.

This comforts Mack greatly, as we would expect.

From there, Mack returns to the son and they race on foot across the lake to the side they had come from.

Later, Mack is taken by Papa, Sarayu, and the son to what they call "a special place." But the special place is just an open field. Until Mack's eyes are opened to see a crowd of people in the distance. But they don't appear normal. They are shining in rainbow colors. He is told that Papa, Sarayu, and the son see people in varying colors and brightness.

Then Sarayu opens Mack's eyes to see that a solitary figure is coming toward them.

The figure comes closer, and closer, until Mack sees that, my goodness! It's his father! The father that beat him and his mother, and was such a bad person!

Mack goes to his father and gives him a great big hug! They both say they are sorry for what they did, and that they forgive each other.

Isn't that nice, boys and girls?

It's nice to forgive isn't it?

And that is one truth in this fairy tale that cannot be disputed.

But what's especially nice is to find out that, no matter how bad Mack's father was, there he was in Heaven just like everyone else. Just like Papa had said, sin is its own punishment, so there was no real consequence for all the bad things Mack's father had done.

That's really nice. It's what's called "universalism."

That's a big word, children, so say it after me: "u-ni-ver-sal-ism." It means that everyone in the whole world will be in Heaven someday.

That should make us all very happy.

So. Anyway, the next morning Mack is in for another surprise.

He is awakened from his sleep in the new shack by an American Indian man. It turns out that the man is Papa in a new form.

Now here, it's good for us to learn an important lesson.

We've seen that Papa came first as a fat black woman, Sarayu is an Asian woman, the son is a Middle Eastern man, Sophia (Wisdom) is Hispanic, and now Papa is an American Indian.

What is the lesson, children?

Give up?

It's called "multiculturalism."

That's another big word, boys and girls, so let's say it together: "mul-ti-cul-tur-al-ism."

That's a politically-correct word that people use to make western Europeans feel guilty for being born. Or for not being born something else. It can also be used along with another word, "in-clusiv-ism," which means that we should accept everyone for who and

what they are without judging, even if they might do very bad things.

We don't want to hurt anyone's feelings by suggesting that God is anything but inclusive, so we take the whole counsel of this fairy tale to realize that God loves everyone, and never judges them. And if He doesn't judge them for what they do, then neither should we.

In fact, inclusivism is a big thing in a lot of churches these days. It means that all people are welcome into fellowship regardless of their "brokenness"—even if their "brokenness" exhibits itself in nasty, dirty things that are too shameful to speak of to children like you. Things like boys marrying boys, and girls marrying girls, and, well, I can't say any more about it.

Now, this particular fairy tale doesn't mention those kinds of things, but you should just know that if a lot of big churches say it's okay, then you should accept it, too.

So this time, we include the American Indian in God's character. And now he's a man because, as he says, Mack needs a man for the next part of his journey. And the next part of his journey is going to be the most difficult yet.

That journey is to lead Mack to forgive the man who took away Missy and killed her.

Papa explains to Mack that the killer "is my son, and I want to heal him."

That's really, really nice, isn't it, boys and girls. Even the killer is Papa's son. Even if the killer isn't yet "healed."

In fact, we'll never know if the killer was ever "healed."

Because that isn't important to our fairy tale. The important thing is that Mack gets "healed."

Now for Mack to be fully healed of his "brokenness," he must forgive Missy's killer. So Papa leads Mack on a path that leads to a cave. They enter the cave and there they find Missy's body, still perfectly preserved.

Now, in most fairy tales, a dead or "sleeping" princess would be brought back to life by the kiss of a handsome prince. But in this case there is no handsome prince. Only Mack and Papa are there, and Missy won't be brought back to life. So they wrap her in a large piece of cloth that Papa brought along.

Having found Missy's body, Mack has an experience we call "closure." It means that now he can be happy again. And because he has experienced "closure," he can forgive Missy's killer.

And that's what this tale is all about, boys and girls. And it has a name. It's called "inner healing."

Inner healing, boys and girls, is a psychological name for healing people's emotions so that they no longer feel sad about what they have done in the past, or what other people have done to them. They just accept things as they are and believe that Papa will make everything right.

Inner healing has become very popular in many, many churches, so we know it's good. Church leaders would never teach people to listen to things that are bad for them. They would never have bad things brought into their congregations. So if inner healing is in the churches, it must be good, right?

So we shouldn't listen to people who tell us that emotions and intellect don't allow this kind of healing to last forever—who tell us that the Bible is enough for us to be healed of our sins (oops, I mean "brokenness"). It's better if we listen to the very wise people in the world who practice psychology and psychiatry. They know what's best for us, and will lead us to a happy, happy life.

Anyway, healed from his "brokenness," Mack joins Papa in carrying Missy's body back to the new shack.

Now that Papa has fulfilled his purpose as a man, the next time Mack sees him he (or I should say she) is again the jolly fat black lady. Papa, Sarayu, and the son lay Missy's body in the casket that the son had made from wood decorated with inlaid butterflies. They bury Missy in the garden that Sarayu had been attending. Papa sprinkles flowers on the casket, and the son covers it with dirt.

And then a wonderful thing happens!

From the spot where Missy is buried there springs flowers and plants, and a tree that overspreads the burying spot.

All around, now, the garden has been healed, and is in perfect bloom everywhere!

My, isn't that nice?

Well, now we're in for a really big surprise.

Back at the new shack, we find Papa, again the jolly fat black lady, and with her are Sarayu and the son. Mack is given the choice to stay with them (and he will also be with Missy) or go back to his family. He is told that eventually they'll all be together no matter which choice he makes.

So Mack chooses to go back to his family, willing to wait to be with Missy again so he can help his family heal, too.

Suddenly, Mack wakes up on the floor of the old, decrepit and forlorn shack!

Was he there all the time? Was it all a dream?

Whatever it was, Mack has a new perspective on life. He's happy now, and anxious to get home to his family.

But on the way back, what do you think happens?

Why, there's that big ol' truck at the crossroads again! And this time they collide!

Oh, my!

What a terrible thing to happen, just as Mack was on his way home, healed and ready to heal his family!

But surprise, surprise!

Mack wakes up in a hospital where he's met by his friend from whom he stole the Jeep. After telling his friend briefly about what had happened to him, his family comes in to meet with him. They are happy to see him alive, and are anxious to speak with him.

After hugging his wife and his son Josh, he asks to be alone with his teenage daughter Kate.

Now, Kate had been living with a lot of guilt, blaming herself for Missy's death. If she hadn't stood up in the boat, Missy would not have been left alone by Mack to be kidnapped by the bad man.

Mack explains to her that it wasn't her fault, and that everything was going to be alright.

The family is together again.

And they all lived happily ever after.



But that's not the end of the story, boys and girls.

The man who made up this fairy tale ends it with these words:

You'll have to decide for yourself if everything happened as Mack recalled.

Or if it happened at all.

And boys and girls, I couldn't have ended it better than that, except to remind us all that this was just a tale from the imagination of a man. It isn't really reality.

Funny, though. A lot of people are more happy after reading this fairy tale than after reading the Bible that tells all the truth without adding in the imaginary psychological stuff.

It just gets curiouser and curiouser, doesn't it?❖

**It's easier to fool people
than to convince them that
they have been fooled.**

Mark Twain

