

A Gift

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On my fifteenth birthday, I got a present from my mom. It was in a small cube-like box, wrapped in paper that had multicolored balloons on it. I had no idea what was inside, so I excitedly tore the wrapping paper, throwing it over my shoulders to get it out of my way. As I opened the box, I saw the word "Fossil" on a tin can. My eyes lit up with excitement as I put on my new Fossil watch, the kind that everyone else had in school. There was nothing special about the watch compared to other Fossil watches. It was silver with a blue diamond pattern under the dial. Other than the time it displayed, with glow-in-the-dark hands, it displayed the day of the week and the date. No, there was nothing special about it, but I was excited nonetheless. It was as if I joined an elite group of watch wearers, the rich kids.

That watch traveled with me to Mexico for a mission trip. I wore it proudly as I mixed cement and laid bricks for the local church I helped build. This was where my watch received the first scratch across its glass. I was shoveling gravel to add to the cement when my shovel collided with a rock the size of a small watermelon. This impact threw me off balance stumbling into another rock and scratching the glass on my watch. The scratch went from its deepest point at about the 5:30 mark towards the center, at which it was its shallowest, and stopped. The scratch was only about the length of the hour hand, but I was devastated. I ridiculed myself for even wearing it when I was working. So what did I do? I wore it again when I went back to Mexico for the second mission trip. I was more fortunate on the second trip as I did not damage it any further. On the other hand, it was during this trip that I noticed that my watch was getting

worn around the edges. It was losing its brilliance and shine that the silver originally had.

I wore my worn, scratched watch anyway.

From August 29 through September 19, in the year 2005, was when I relied on my watch most heavily. At 4:16 A.M. on August 29 everything in my house went silent. All I could hear was the deep breaths my brother took as he slept. The power went out. It was the first sign of Hurricane Katrina. From that moment on, my watch and the time it held were vital to everything that went on in my house. With my watch, I kept track of where everyone was supposed to be and at what time. For example, my family got out of bed at 6 A.M. and proceeded to make a quick breakfast so that we could jump in the cars and speed to the FEMA lines for food and ice at 7 A.M., while the other car went searching for gas for our generator. We had lunch at noon and dinner at 5 P.M., no questions asked. We kept this schedule for three straight weeks because of my watch. It never once flinched or faltered. It was vigilant even if I wasn't. It kept me on track to make sure that everyone else was on time. I was the timekeeper of the household.

It still keeps the time even as I write ... 3:44:23, 3:44:24, 3:44:25. Then I realized that the watch wasn't the gift, the time was.

The time that I have taken for granted was the gift that I should have been excited about, not the watch. My mother, who is a two-time cancer survivor, gave me this watch knowing that I would treasure this object, but she knew what the real gift was. She just did not say it aloud. She let me learn it through experience. All the things I regret not doing in high school, I look back now and see the time that I lost as if it was wisped away in the wind never to be seen again. Lost in some void, some black hole of nothingness. I cry out in that void trying to find what happened to the past four years of my life, but nothing answers, not even an echo. It is gone, forever in the eternal abyss of what we love to call the past. On the other hand, there is a lesson learned from

this, one I aspire to live by. I believe it goes something like this: You can't know where you are going until you know where you have come from.

It is in reflecting on our past that we discover where we should go and who we should be. If we did not learn from our past, we would make all the same mistakes. Remember the first time you rode a bike, the wind blowing your hair as you pedaled, with someone holding the bike upright so you did not fall. That ecstasy that you felt as the person holding up the bike let go and you were doing it all by yourself, and then crash. You fell, scratching your knees and elbows on the hard, cold pavement, letting out a terrified scream of pain. Now, imagine if we did not learn from our past. We would get back on that bike and fall a second and a third time until we got so tired of getting hurt that we would just give up. As Michael Caine said in the movie *Batman Begins*, "Why do we fall? So that we can pick ourselves up again." It is in learning from our worn, scratched past that we move forward into our future.

The truth is that we are not guaranteed a certain amount of time here on earth, so enjoy it with no regrets. Today is a new day. Live as if there is no tomorrow. More importantly, love as if there is no tomorrow. For it is the material possessions we lose when we die, but the love we carry lives on.