



Treasures That Can't Be Stolen

A thief made off with a lot of my worldly goods, but not the things that mattered most.

A few months ago, I was on a business trip and checked my cell phone for messages in between my morning and afternoon meetings. There was one message, the one you never want to hear: “Honey, it’s me,” said my husband Eric, trying to sound nonchalant and doing a horrible job. “Call me as soon as you can. It’s important.”

It’s important. Those words rang in my head as I dashed off to my next meeting, no time to call Eric back until hours later. By that time, I was panicked with the possibilities. “What’s wrong? Is someone hurt? Are the boys OK?” I fired into the phone when Eric picked up. When he told me we’d been robbed, a wave of relief flooded through me. As I walked back to my hotel that evening, I gave thanks that everything with real value to me was still waiting for me at home.

The thief had worked fast, filling a laundry basket with what he could carry: cameras and loose cash from my oldest son’s room; a small TV, a video camera, an iPod from the kitchen; some old coins and the jewelry box from my dresser. There was only one item I really felt sad about losing: a cocktail ring of my great-grandmother’s, a modest sapphire surrounded by diamond chips, set in delicate silver. I hadn’t taken this heirloom out of its box for years, and I’d never worn it because it was a size too small. I had no idea what it was worth and that night when I returned to my hotel, I called my mom to ask about it.

Our conversation turned to the great-grandmother whom I knew so little about. My mom started telling me stories of the grandmother she lived with during her childhood, in a small apartment over a deli that was my great-grandfather’s sole investment and which pulled the entire family through the Depression.

I remembered the delectable cheesecakes of my childhood that my mom’s Uncle Milt used to send every Christmas cross-country from that very same deli. I thought how ironic it was that the thief who took my keepsakes had actually given me the opportunity to stash away all of these family memories.

Months later when the insurance check arrived, I realized that no amount of money could replace the sentiment that those tiny diamond chips held. So instead of buying a new ring,

I decided to spend the money on a trip to visit my parents. I also bought a new notebook and a tape recorder; I had a million questions I wanted to ask my mom and dad about their parents, uncles, aunts, and all of the other relatives I knew so little about.

Memories. These are the real family jewels that nobody can steal from you. And yet, so often these precious gems slip away with time, never to be recovered.

During the three-hour flight, as I thought of more and questions to ask my folks, I smiled and raised my complimentary juice glass to the mystery thief who had given me such a wonderful gift. — BN