The Favors of Your Presence

Symbolic Keepsakes

Part One

Now, let's be honest. Why did you have such a pronounced physical reaction upon hearing that your dear Uncle Bucky had died? What do you mean, "which Uncle Bucky?" You know, the one with the compound in the Caribbean and the private jet, the one who always got out of his limo or seaplane with a rented lady on his arm, the one who sported wingtip shoes whenever he went to a ball game, the one who was interviewed by Eat Your Heart Out, the culinary magazine for wannabes.

After he moved to the "great mansion in the sky," don't you remember how you were all aflutter? Your salivary glands were in overdrive, so much so that you began drooling. Your adrenaline output was so astronomical that you finished a triathlon without having trained for it. Whenever you fantasized about the prospects of a monumental bequeathal, you perspired profusely in nervous anticipation of the good fortune you suspected would come your way. Within the hidden confines of your pants pocket, you began fondling your chunk of

change, imagining it enlarging exponentially to great proportions. Obsessed by visions of grandeur, you envisioned materialization of all of your dreams… the second home in the mountains you had never been able to afford, the snazzy car that had never made it out of the showroom and into your garage, and a chance to inch closer to the day when you'd be able to walk into the office and announce, "I quit."

Then the day of reckoning arrived. A small package changed your outlook on life. Instead of learning that you had been gifted millions of dollars (you had thought there would be enough to go around for the entire extended family, but apparently not), you received an insignificant little box in the mail, wrapped in plain brown packaging paper.

Inside was a handwritten note that read, "I remember fondly the many hours we spent together fishing on the lake when you were a little kid. Those were some of the best times of my life. I want you to have my favorite lure, which was your favorite as well. Use it blissfully. Appreciate nature's simple pleasures, as we did back then. Cherish the moments that are yours to capture, the experiences that money can't buy. They are the real treasures in life. I leave you with special memories and my abiding love. Uncle B."

Suddenly, your eyes filled with tears. You were touched, as if the hand of your childhood companion had reached out to you. You realized that this heartfelt gesture was far more powerful than amassing money. Life was good. You would make the most of it, even in your old beat-up jalopy.

Often when people think of receiving gifts as a result of a death, they think of MONEY. They think of inheritance. They think of wealth. They think of mortgage-free timeshares. They think of major acquisitions. They think of punctuating their lifestyles with appurtenances and enhancements that would not be possible through any other means.

But do they stop to think about materialistic fixations as a possible blight (beyond the estate taxes, that is)? Capitalistic members of society sometimes have become so infected by the pursuit of impressive possessions that they lose sight of simple measures that could be just as, or even more, personally rewarding. Their deprivation, though not from a shortage of goods, instead may stem from a deficiency of meaningful connections they crave.

Perhaps such a realization comes to one's attention especially when someone dies. This may be prime time for personal offerings from the decedent that have been carefully contemplated and perhaps even crafted... a priceless opportunity to engender emotional sustenance and an enduring bond. During and after occasions of death, people

appreciate symbolism. As a means for recognizing and retaining the essences of surrendered lives, it brings focus to associations with the past. As a source of comfort, it can promote an inner tranquility within the continuation of one’s own life.

Stimulation of memories through symbolism enriches existence. Recall to mind a graveside mother clinging to a flag that had been draped over the casket of her young son killed in battle. Consider the power of a piece of sheet music composed by a decedent, its melody sung at her funeral service, inviting reflective recollections of her artistry. Envision a memorial event at a community playground, originally constructed as an Eagle Scout project that endured and afforded exercise and happiness to throngs of children throughout the deceased builder's life. A flag, a song, a playground… all objectified markers of activities and relationships of importance to bereaved individuals… all with befitting associations attached… all stimulating release of feelings and facilitating expressions.

With an eye toward maintaining ties with the special people in your life after you die, you have all sorts of opportunities to give them symbolic treasures. Retailers have made it easier than ever. You could spend the rest of your life perusing a computer screen for mementos that would convey pertinence. The products are unlimited and the merchandise is magnificent. But shopping exclusively this way could detract one’s energies from alternative options.

Consider abandoning the electronic marvel periodically to divert your attention to more homespun offerings of personal significance. Focus on simplicity and relevance to your life and your affiliations with others. Instead of becoming fixated on bestowal of big-ticket items or retail goods, think about humble gestures. Ponder the potential offerings of easily accessible, mundane wares or items that are among your possessions. Often these types of unexpected keepsake gifts strengthen lives, rendering long-term fulfillment.

Excerpt from the recreational pre-planning book,
Pondering Leaves: Composing and Conveying Your Life Story's Epilogue
(no longer available)

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