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| ***Delta Winds: A Magazine of Student Essays* A Publication of San Joaquin Delta College 2005** <http://www.deltacollege.edu/org/deltawinds/DWOnline05/mymostprizedpossession.html> |

**My Most Prized Possession: An In-depth Analysis of Materialism**

***Bryan Tortolani***

Possessions may come and go, but often the emotional attachment associated with them remains eternal. I have a disturbingly long history of losing my possessions. Given my history, I rarely allow myself to form an emotional attachment to my possessions. Nevertheless, there have been a few possessions that have provoked within me a deep psychological connection that continues to stir my emotions even today, even though I no longer possess them. A passport, photo album, and a stuffed animal were among my most treasured lost possessions. These lost possessions fill me with a feeling of profound grief and anxiety, which is accompanied by a warm nostalgic feeling of times long past. Three years ago I was psychologically reunited with one of my most prized possessions.

On my thirty-fourth birthday a huge package was delivered to my door. I was surprised to discover that it was sent by my mother. I could not begin to guess what the package might contain because my mother's standard gifts were always the same. My mother always sent me a check accompanied by a very impersonal card, which she rarely bothered to sign. I suppose she felt the signature on the check was enough, so she regularly adhered to her efficient nature by leaving the card unsigned, avoiding redundancy. My mother's aloofness has often bothered me, so it was not unusual for me to be excited at the sight of something that was potentially more personal and meaningful than her usual gifts.

Exhilarated, I quickly tore open the package as if I were a ten-year-old boy on Christmas morning. With stray pieces of cardboard littering the floor and lime-green Styrofoam scattered in every direction, I held up my new treasure, an exact replica of the stuffed animal I had lost years earlier. The original monkey had been given to me by my mother while I was undergoing a bone-marrow transplant. My mother and I had been estranged prior to my illness; we had always had a detached and remote relationship. The monkey symbolized a level of closeness that had been foreign to our relationship.

I could not control my tears as I inspected the dark-brown and incredibly soft stuffed monkey. His glass eyes had a humanlike characteristic of warmth and affection. His cute, happy expression, round soft stomach, and clumsy body were evocative of my unique characteristics as a child. As I squeezed him affectionately, out of the corner of my eye I noticed something else buried under the remaining packing material. I reached down and pulled out a second, much smaller monkey. With closer examination I discovered that it was a baby monkey with clenched forefingers and extended thumbs that fit in the monkey's open mouth. I took the little arm and placed the extended thumb in the cute little monkey's mouth. Spent with emotion, I drifted off into a daydream.

Suddenly, I was transported back to the lonely, cold hospital room where I had received the bone-marrow transplant. Most of my friends were unable to deal with watching me shrivel up and possibly die. Fortunately, I had a dedicated girlfriend and my mother as regular visitors. In fact, my girlfriend was allowed to sleep over as long as she underwent a rigorous disinfecting process. She also had to sport an entire surgical outfit with sanitary slippers, hat, and facemask. My father, on the other hand, was unable to accept my condition and chose instead to retreat into the safety of denial. Unfortunately for me, and the two women in my life, this meant that I had only two regular visitors. They both tried to make up for the others' weaknesses by dedicating an enormous amount of their time to visiting with me.

I will never forget the moment my mother brought me the stuffed monkey. I remember the smell of the disinfectant and the way the sun's rays swept past my window reflecting off the stainless steel bedrails as a dark reminder of the world outside moving along without me. The television was off and I was concentrating on the sound of the birds singing outside my window over the continuous beeping and pumping of the many machines needed to keep me alive. The contrast between machinery and nature was so great that I longed for some semblance of the natural world. My girlfriend's mother had sent me many crystals, which I surrounded myself with, and my aunt had sent me a tropical fish mobile from Hawaii. I valued these treasures greatly and lacked the words to fully express their significance and meaning. Each gift represented thoughtful devotion, love and the natural world, which was everything that my inert machine bound existence denied me. Yet I had nothing of equal meaning from my immediate family.

While lying in my hospital bed, I could hear the steady pattern of my mother's footsteps approaching my door. I felt relief to have a break in the monotony, but was not particularly excited because an emotional barrier remained between my mother and me. I was aware she was giving up much of her life to be with me each night, and I could tell by her graying hair and haggard face that she was under a great deal of stress over my condition, yet I longed for a relationship built on a deeper connection. I needed her to express verbally what I could see in her face, that she loved me and wanted me to live. On that day, when she came around the corner, holding something in her hand, my somber mood quickly lifted.

She was smiling as usual, but this time it didn't appear strained or artificial. I watched her go through the routine of disinfecting herself. Even after she washed up and tied on her surgical mask, I could still feel her smiling. She then walked over to her usual seat by the window and handed me the monkey. No words were needed. I realized that given her distant nature she was unable to express her feelings to me verbally and gifting the monkey to me was her way of showing me affection. The monkey represented the words she was unable to express. When she had brought me the tropical fish mobile from my aunt and I had told her how much it meant to me, her face turned white and she stammered for a few minutes before making a quick retreat. I felt that she wanted to tell me the things I need to hear, but she was unable to do so.

The feeling of my wife's arms tenderly wrapping around my waist snapped me out of my daydream. As I stood holding my two new possessions, I thought of the big monkey as representing my mother and the infant representing me. Although I no longer need the stuffed animals, the fact that my mother remembered after over ten years is what touched me so deeply. I keep the animals in plastic on top of a bookcase and rarely think of them. It is the act of receiving them that I prize, not the actual material object. What I consider to be my "prized possessions" are not material in nature, but are treasured in my heart and soul. Material objects often come and go but treasured memories last a lifetime.

Reaction annotation:

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*In her personal memoir, The Glass Castle, Jeanette is a young girl who faces harsh trails as a child because of her parents. Her father was an alcoholic, and neither of her parents properly took care of her or her brother. In this excerpt, Jeanette is forced (yet again) to move unexpectedly. Her father tells her that they are moving to Phoenix that very night and she is allowed to bring one thing with her…*

Dad allowed each of us to bring only one thing. I ran outside with a paper bag to gather up my favorite rocks. When I returned, holding the heavy bag at the bottom so it wouldn’t split, Dad and Brain were arguing over the plastic jack-o’-lantern filled with green plastic army soldiers that Brain wanted to bring.

“You’re bringing toys?” Dad asked.

“You said I could take one thing, and this is my thing,” Brian said.

“This is my one thing,” I said, holding up the bag. Lori, who was bringing The Wizard of Oz objected, saying that a rock collection wasn’t one thing but several things. It would be like her brining her entire book collection. I pointed out that Brian’s army soldiers were a collection. “And anyway, it’s not my entire rock collection. Just the best ones.”

Dad, who usually liked debates on questions such as whether a bag of things is one thing, was not in the mood and told me the rocks were too heavy. “You can bring one,” he said.

“There are plenty of rocks in Phoenix,” Mom added.

I picked out a single geode, its insides coasted with tiny white crystals and held it in both hands. As we pulled out, I looked through the rear window for one last glimpse of the depot. Dad had left the upstairs lights on, and the small window glowed. I thought of all those other families of miners and prospectors who had come to Battle Mountain hoping to find gold and who had to leave town like us when their luck ran out. Dad said he didn’t believe in luck, but I did. We’d had a streak of it in Battle Mountain, and I wished it had held.

We passed the Green Lantern, with the Christmas lights twinkling over its doors, and the Owl Club, with the winking neon owl in a chef’s hat, and then we wore out in the desert, the lights of Battle Mountain disappearing behind us. In the pitch-black night, there was nothing to look at but the road ahead, lit by the car’s headlights.

Reaction annotation:

WN Response/Narrative Write: *Consider what you read, and pick something to write about as a narrative in your writer’s notebook. For example: your most prized possession and the memories attach to it, Luck, Moving, Christmas, Relationships with Family, Illnesses, Childhood, etc…*