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Try to Remember

Memories. Latent within them is the power to reawaken feelings of joy or feelings of great sadness. Memories are not sterile. They are linked to us in inextricable ways. They, at times, have a life of their own. Sometimes accurate and sometimes skewed by our desires or traumas or just our limited humanness.

My trip down Memory Lane began early today as I enjoyed what is my favorite part of each day. There is something about rising early while the sun is just peeping up over the horizon that I love. I feel the potential of the day. Birds are beginning to sing. The world is awakening with hope that the day will bring love and beauty and kindness.

Being raised on a farm, early rising was part of my existence. My dad would walk down the hall toward my bedroom and call out, "Let's go get 'em." He'd rub his hands together as if to say, "It's going to be a good day." His voice spoke excitement and his love of teasing and aggravating me. Now "Let's go get 'em" usually meant it was time to head to the chicken house to gather eggs (the commercial kind of chicken house with thousands of chickens). I hated that work with a passion. It was nasty, smelly, and completely unpleasant. Many times I vowed I'd never, ever have chicken houses when I grew up – a vow which I've kept and one which helped inspire me to go to college! My dad would then give me a little kind shake while I lay under my covers and say, "Rise and shine." Rising early was non-optional on the farm. The animals rose early and so must we. So I guess the early rising became a part of my inner code.

But now, my morning ritual is quite different. What I love so much is perhaps a statement against what I hated then. I love getting my morning cup of coffee, and it's not the caffeine I love as much as the experience. (Although I do love the caffeine at 5:30 a.m.!) Strangely enough, each night when I go to bed, I anticipate the pleasure of the next morning. After I get my coffee, I'm off to my computer to read my email or off to my comfy red chair and ottoman to read a book or my Bible. It is my time to enjoy the leisure of moments when I am not rushed, moments of quiet, moments to hear from God, and moments to connect with my husband and friends around the world.

Well, this morning as I sat in that red chair, covered with a hand-knit blanket, my Yorkie beside me, coffee in hand, I began to read *Grace*, a novel by Richard Paul Evans. As the book spoke of memories, I began to think. I thought of how memories have the potential to take us back to another time and place. I thought of a box of pictures that perhaps I would open and choose to throw some away. I reminisced of high school days when I might take my scissors and cut someone out of picture.

And then I realized that even though I might cut someone out of a picture or throw away a picture, the experiences are still a real part of my memory. And I find that in my life I have tried to rewrite my history at times by throwing away painful pictures.

Someone recently commented to me that the pictures of me and my family on my website were unrealistic – that no one could be that happy all the time – no one smiles all the time. How thought provoking! I wondered how many people would purposely choose to display pictures of sad times. Don't you hate those old pictures from centuries ago when everyone looks as if they were severely depressed? Certainly, I have never chosen to display those kinds of pictures. The pictures displayed in my home show pleasant memories, the beauty of my children, important people in my life. Well, perhaps there is one exception – a picture of Kara Beth at one year old with her little lips quivering and tears in her eyes. She wanted her mommy to hold her and get her out of that photography session! She was just so adorable in her expressiveness that I loved the picture and have chosen to display it ever since.

I thought of those horrid elementary school pictures! Why did my mother always cut my bangs two inches above my eyebrows and usually with a gap right before picture day?

I remembered pictures of me with weird hairdos like the one of me holding Kara Beth while I sported a hairdo that attempted to make me one of Charlie's Angels. Here is a free hairdo tip: When you are only five feet tall, you should never wear a hairdo that is bigger than you are.

I thought of a picture of my early teaching days when I actually had an afro type "do" – don't ask me why – I'm

sure there must have been a reason but for the life of me, I don't know what it was!

Have you ever sat with old friends and said, "Do you remember when...?" and laughter followed as you reminisced together?

I guess I am realizing that there are reasons to remember, not only the good things, but the bad. If buried emotions never die, perhaps the same is true of buried memories. Whether we bury them because they are painful or traumatic or frightening or sad, the events represented by the memories have impacted us in significant ways.

Yesterday I picked up my phone to call an old friend of mine and my husband's. A song had awakened an emotion within me, and I knew I needed to reach out to this friend. As I began to dial the number, I couldn't remember it. All the emotions swirled within me and clouded my memory. I knew parts of the number but after years of dialing it, on that day I just couldn't recall it. I looked in my phone's address book and realized I had deleted the number. The relationship had become so jumbled up and lost, that one day I just took the number out of my phone as if in doing so I could erase the pain of losing the friend. But alas, the pain was still there as evidenced by my flowing tears when I finally connected.

And I thought about how God teaches us the importance of memory. He had the children of Israel set up a memorial built of stones – a memorial to a change of season in their lives. A memorial to God's miraculous power. You see, the Jordan River was overflowing at the time when God asked them to cross over it. Moses had died. Joshua was leading them. Emotions were high. It was time for them to leave the wilderness season and enter the Promised Land. Yet they had to cross the Jordan to enter their land of promise. It seemed impossible, however as the priests stepped into the Jordan, God miraculously parted the waters for them once again as He had at the Red Sea and made a way for them if they would but follow Him. Then they were to choose stones out of the bed of the Jordan River to make a memorial. You see, right out of the deep, muddy places we have walked through in order to find our freedom, God asks us to pick up stones and make memorials. I believe that God was not only challenging them to remember His miraculous works, but also His merciful longsuffering for them. There were also to be memories of how disobedience had led them into bondage and wandering in the wilderness. The painful lessons learned were not to be forgotten and the miracles of God were not to be forgotten. They were to be passed on to their children as part of their history.

Then I pondered the cross of Christ. We must always remember the pain He bore for us on that cross. We can't deny the ugliness of our sin or the cost of our disobedience which cost Christ his life and brought the pain of being separated from His father for a season.

Although God tells us that He puts our sin into the sea of forgetfulness, in the totality of scripture, we do see that God doesn't forget our sin. He releases us from the penalty of our sin (yes, I know we can still have consequences). He says that He removes our sins as far as the east is from the west and we love to say that He doesn't remember our sins, but in truth, God doesn't have a memory problem. What He really does is release us from having to live identified by our sin. Christ identified with our sin so we can identify with him as a child of a loving Father.

As I sat in contemplation, in my mind I began to hear an old song written by Tom Jones in 1960 named Try to Remember. Some of you will recognize it.

Try to remember the kind of September
When life was slow and oh, so mellow.
Try to remember the kind of September
When grass was green and grain was yellow.
Try to remember the kind of September
When you were a tender and callow fellow.
Try to remember, and if you remember,
Then follow.

Follow, follow, follow, follow, follow,
Follow, follow, follow, follow.

Try to remember when life was so tender
That no one wept except the willow.
Try to remember when life was so tender
That dreams were kept beside your pillow.
Try to remember when life was so tender
That love was an ember about to billow.
Try to remember, and if you remember,
Then follow.

Follow, follow, follow, follow, follow,
Follow, follow, follow, follow.

Deep in December, it's nice to remember,
Although you know the snow will follow.
Deep in December, it's nice to remember,
Without a hurt the heart is hollow.
Deep in December, it's nice to remember,
The fire of September that made us mellow.
Deep in December, our hearts should remember
And follow.

And as the song spoke about the need to remember the good moments, the tender moments and then spoke in truth as it said that the snow will always follow the beautiful days of fall. Then the verse that brings deep introspection to me, Without a hurt the heart is hollow....

Is it then that without a measure of pain, we never really appreciate the joy? But during the pain, we are to remember the sweet times and we are to follow. Follow our hearts as they lead us to remember the snapshots of places in our heart where we experienced the joy of God, or places that must be healed so that we can be mellow instead of bitter. Follow our hearts as we follow Christ and he leads us to remember for the purpose of growing and changing and being healed.

So try to remember and if you remember, follow the wind of God. Perhaps the memory is an important key to something God wants to do.

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