

My Most Valuable Possession

When I was twenty, I found myself in California. I was working as a cashier on an airforce base. I was happy. It's funny, it was before the words depression, self-esteem, inner child were written and published everywhere. As long as I was healthy, got a paycheck, had an animal to love, I was happy. Some of that happiness must have spilled over, because one day a very old man, a regular customer, gave me a little white box. He said, "I want you to have this, because you are the nicest one of all." I knew what he meant. I was patient with his oldness. If it took five minutes to get his change out and count it, coin by coin, so be it. I was pleasant and nice, all youth with none of the hardships of life laid upon me...not yet. Inside the box was a cheap, silver-toned turtle, covered with rhinestones. It was certainly not something I would ever wear, but I thanked him, took it home and kept it.

Youth fades. Who cares about looks, it's that loss of exuberance that is the real tragedy. And there is nothing like the trials of life to wipe that exuberance away. There have been times in my life when I felt like I didn't have a friend in the world. There have been times when I didn't know how I could continue living. Suicide has never been an option for me, ever. I subscribe to the Scarlett O'Hara School of Psychology, you know, "Tomorrow is another day." But I have had some pretty bleak looking tomorrows.

I don't know when it first happened, I can't remember, but during one of these times I stumbled upon that little silver turtle, and as I held it, I thought, "Well, at least somebody thought I was nice once...once somebody liked me." Oh, pretty pitiful to be sure, but I suspect we all have had our moments. The important thing is to keep them moments and nothing more. Holding that turtle and remembering those kind words, "Because you are the nicest one of all", well, it was enough...it was enough.

There have been many times since, I have held that turtle and wished I could thank that old man. The world can scuff us up a bit, make a scar or two or even more, but nothing can change who we were when we started this incredible journey called life. That turtle has become a symbol to me of who I was and who I still am, and who I want to be.

I have had that turtle thirty-three years and consider it, without a doubt, my most valuable possession.