

+ = good point

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Essay #1

In such an age as this, there are voices to be heard everywhere. People are always talking, but it often seems they don't have much to say. Music, in its pure form without lyrics, is another voice. Unlike common everyday blather, a musical instrument always says something relevant. The same exact instrument can hold vastly different meanings in accordance to whose hands are hefting it. One sandy-haired blonde may turn it into a sour noisemaker, and moments later, a gaunt-faced, older man will have its notes crooning and swooning you with a tear drop wrapping around the lower curve of your nose. An instrument can be a relaxer, a stress-reliever, and a favorite pastime. The more hours spent cultivating skill with it, the more significant it becomes to you. When it is not there, you pine for it like one missing a long-wedded spouse. Indeed, the bond is more akin to a relationship than anything else I can use in comparison. Even now as I write, my guitar is calling out to me. It implores me to put down my pencil and come mess about for awhile. The problem is, when we spend time together, the hours just while away.

The period of my first college stint came to a screeching halt, blasting into a fiery wreck. I broke up with my five-year girlfriend, quit my job, and was rarely attending class. I had one semester left for my degree when my hard work in exploding finally paid the dividend of two DWIs in one week. Amidst my first stay at chemical dependency treatment, patients were encouraged to explore pursuits in which they had previously garnered delight. One thing I came up with was how I had always found enjoyment in singing at church and in high school choir. After graduating, there was really no place in which I could continue my singing. While telling my roommate about my favorite folk group, Storyhill, I came to realize that every wonderful melody, harmony, and rhythm was comprised entirely of two voices and two guitars. So, on the phone I made the fateful choice to tell my parents, "When I get out of here, I want to learn the guitar..."

For Christmas, my Mother and Father gave me a nice new guitar. I set out to learn what I could from some books and the various resources I could find on the internet. For a time, I lived with my brother in the upper two stories of a house. Equipped with my precious Storyhill songbook, I would spend countless summer hours on the roof, disturbing the neighborhood with my racket. I didn't care how awful it sounded; it was my racket and I was putting my whole heart into it. I hold many pleasant memories from that year, just figuring out how to make the different sounds and notes with my new toy. But as with life, most good things come to an end. My brother moved away and my lease came up.

At this point, my precious guitar was replaced by a more cogent relationship. I moved in with the girl I was seeing and my guitar went to Mom and Dad's. For the next two years, this object of spruce, mahogany, and

die-cast metal was left deserted. While I was off chasing emptiness disguised as fun, my sweet instrument lie in wait. Truly, my guitar could be counted as fun forgotten and given to emptiness.

After surviving a period of chaos and disarray, I concluded a second treatment, this one twice as long as the first, and began to get my life back on track. I got married and had a child. We moved into a new house, to which I brought many of my personal belongings, including a once cast aside guitar. Working more than full-time as a cable guy and taking care of a family, I was very busy. But once in a while, I would find time to relax with a couple tunes. I played just enough to keep the dust off, but probably not as much as I would have liked.

Life went on in a fairly normal fashion for about a year, evidently too normal. As my wife was not accustomed to a life of tranquility, she began dabbling in such substances as I thought we had left behind. Being codependently vulnerable, I quickly followed suit. This time, our train wreck amped up. We were a Boeing 747 going down. May-day! I got fired, we lost custody of our child, and our residence was taken. We had no idea where we were going to live, so we moved all of our belongings into a storage locker, except objects too volatile to stand the harsh weather coming, or those very dear to us. My guitar had good standing in both categories. These we brought to the house of my spouse's Grandmother.

Due to an eviction deadline, I had worked a marathon of back-breaking days just to get the whole of our possessions out of the house. Subsequently, I was not in the greatest of spirits. At the precipice of unloading the remainder of our important items, including one guitar, our affability ruptured and an ugly fight ensued. Feeling that I had done more than enough in the past days to deserve a little gratitude, it was my decision that I should not stand to endure such trifling. So, I entered my then-defunct cable van and drove off to a friend's house.

Upon my return a couple days later, the wife informed me she had whisked away my prized musical implement to the pawnshop and received \$50 in return, which she hastily exhausted on crack-cocaine. Smoldering fire burned deep within me, overrun only by a wallowing sadness.

It was not the greatest guitar out there. It was not even in the upper echelon. But, when my parents presented it to me on Christmas morning, it was the most beautiful instrument I had ever seen. I found it unique. Whereas most guitars have a thick lacquer, this one had only a natural stain finish. I felt this bared a much less plastic feel and gave a more cohesive look to match the rambling folk I intended to rattle away on it. It had no pick-guard which, in my opinion, allowed a less sheltered visibility of the elegant spruce grain. Over my years of play, the interior of the body drew in oils from my hand and turned a lovely dark amber, like that of a hops filled pilsner. The rosette, the circular ornamentation surrounding the sound hole, was nothing spectacular, but its quaintness matched the device's natural trim. The dark brown umber of the mahogany neck and bridge served well to accentuate the light-gold strings I kept on it. At the top of the neck, the tuning pegs stuck out on each side of the head, like six silver dwarves sitting across from each other at an odd trapezoidal table. Since there were six strings hovering across the head on their way to finding the tuning apparatus, fingers did not often touch this area. This rendered it a haven for dust accumulation. The frets, metal bars that intermittently crossed the neck, were a silver to match their small dwarven counterparts. And although I had cleaned the entire

Ch. thought
terrible!
beautiful
descriptive

guitar a number of times over the years, debris from my fast moving fingers grinding against the rigid strings would tend to make grimy embankments on either side of each fret.

My remaining senses were also tied into the memories of this charming instrument. I can remember the sweet timber smell of that natural wooded body. It reminded me of saunas taken in more innocent times. My Dad would bring in the spruce boughs, convinced the aeration would open our pores and benefit our skin. A guitar never really loses its smell in the fashion a new car does. You can continue to enjoy it for years. Simply stick your nose in the sound hole. Just make sure you don't get your shnozz caught in between the strings. When I was first learning how to tame this beauty, my fingers hurt dreadfully. They felt like they were going to fall off. Soon, I had built up calluses and couldn't actually feel anything with the tips of my fingers. The change posed a difficulty when it came to typing, but I meekly adjusted.

Summertime reveries of saunas and hurting fingertips rolled away as life continued on. My wife and I sustained a meager struggle at the "tough times Tudor" for a couple of years, until we were at such odds that our togetherness was more of an apartness. After a major hallucinogenic breakdown, I decided to check into a heavy treatment, this one fifteen times greater in length than that of my first. Halfway through my stay there, I made the decision to let go of my wife, as she was running around with other men and still living the life I was attempting to leave behind.

Around this same time, I was finding much enjoyment in photography, using a feature-rich camera my parents had gifted me with (also for Christmas). Apparently, its niceties had caught the eyes of another. It was stolen. We searched everywhere for it, but came up empty. A couple weeks later, a friend relayed that he was certain he had seen my camera at a pawnshop. So, I went down and checked the place out. No... It was not my camera. My shoulders slumped as I turned to leave another dead end. Then, there it was! Not my camera, but my baby, my guitar! It was hanging on the wall in this ratty, run-down, old pawn shop. I knew it the moment my eyes fell on that amber glow. I knew its natural veneer. I knew its coniferous pungency. I knew each ding and nick, an evidence of my regular use throughout the years.

My parents put down a decent chunk of hard-earned money to buy this mundane object, years ago. The hock shop wanted half again what they had paid for it. To tender what the little hole-in-the-wall merchant was asking would bring my family's spending total to almost twice the actual monetary worth of such an item. Could I bring myself to surrender in a battle between money, common sense, and nostalgia? You bet I could! I received this handmade creation with only hopes and inspiration. Through the years, my skills had increased, my love for music had matured, and the instrument's capabilities while in my grasp had grown. But most of all, the sentimental worth of my first instrument had swelled exponentially. My guitar and I had been through a great deal. Bringing it back to my ownership was worth every extra penny.