

Simple Gifts September 29

“For thyself best Gift Divine, to the world so freely given...”

F. S. Pierpoint in “For the Beauty of the Earth”

God’s present, wrapped in the presence of others, is both simple and complex. It’s mine only because I have accepted it, often from others whose gifts have nurtured and influenced me along my journey.

Gifts of self-discipline and responsibility came in the guise of grandmothers, great-grandmothers, and a librarian, in particular. Sometimes the lessons were spoken. Great-Grandma Leliah, on taking leave of each other: “Do good to yourself.” Grandmother Minnie to me as a young mother: “Stand up straight; don’t let those babies ruin your posture.” Mom-mom, on watching your waistline: “We put a peanut roasting machine in the grocery store. I began eating them and gaining weight. I stopped.”

Sometimes the lessons came in envelopes. Miss Sally Haines helped me check out books in our small library in the basement of the courthouse. On Sundays, she sat in the middle of a pew near the front of our Mocksville Methodist Episcopal Church South, wearing a rather large wooden cross around her neck. My friend Pat and I sometimes sat with her. She always made sure I took a church envelope, wrote my name on it, and put my in my nickel for the offering plate.

The gift of patience I learned from my mother, that of generosity from my father. The gift to see gray, I acquired through reading, listening, observing, and learning. Gray is where black and white merge, and where there is no one answer. In a world where diverse answers coexist in peace, there are gifts of diversity, tolerance and acceptance.

My humble husband had great trouble asking for anything for himself, but when he became Dean of Duke Divinity School, one of his new responsibilities was to increase the endowment. He learned to invite people to give, because he knew that those who don’t share what they have to give will never experience the kind of joy that comes from giving.

“It is in giving that we receive.”

By Ann Marie Langford