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### True Wealth is Measured in Gumballs

To most people an ordinary brown paper sack holds no value. To me however, it is the gateway to fond childhood memories of my grandpa and his endless generosity. One of the earliest memories I have and hold close to my heart is of my Grandpa Martin. When I was a little girl I visited my grandparents' home often. Most days my grandpa came home late in the evening. He was a mechanic by trade, and he owned a full-service fuel station in a small South Texas town. He was always very busy with work. On the days that I would visit, the moment he walked through the door he would turn his attention to me and the brown paper sack full of gumballs he kept for my visits.

He kept an old brown paper sack tucked in the corner of my grandma's kitchen cupboard. It was an ordinary medium sized sack that smelled like gumballs, my grandpa's garage and his cigarettes. He kept large multicolored gumballs from the gumball machine at his garage in it just for me. He would go to the cupboard and pull the bag out while I waited impatiently as he unfolded the top and rolled it down like rolling a sock down your shin. He would bring the bag down to my two-and-a-half-foot eye level. "Pick whatever color you like sweetheart," he would say in that "I'm so glad you're here" voice. My eyes widened and the smell of gumballs filled my twitchy three-year-old nose. Grandpa waited patiently holding the bag for me while I would dig through the endless rainbow of gumballs hoping the next one I

picked would be larger than the last. He never hurried me. He knew somehow, what an important decision I was making. This ordinary brown paper sack was something special that only my grandpa and I shared.

When I think of the simple act of Grandpa keeping this bag stocked for my benefit and nothing else, I appreciate the time he took out of his day to remember me. Grandpa had an old rusty car that, despite the fact he was a mechanic and owned a shop, he never pampered. He was always busy working on someone else's problem. He could have been a fairly well-off business man, but he chose to be wealthy in spirit and kindness instead.

My mom recalls how sometimes farmers would come to him with sacks of potatoes and other produce instead of cash as payment. He knew their livelihood depended on him fixing their trucks or farming machines. She remembers how they didn't have money to buy fancy party dresses or shoes they wanted, but they were never cold, barefoot, naked, or hungry.

As a young child, I never paid any attention to the fact that my grandparents weren't rich; as a teenager, I began to question why. After all, I knew that owning a business like my grandpa's meant that they should have been living in a big house and driving nice cars. I didn't understand what my grandpa meant when he said that there were things in life more important than money. One of my uncles worked with him for a short period of time, and their different views of handling a business caused them to part ways as business partners. My uncle thought the same way that I did. I realize now that my grandpa had reasons for conducting business the way that he did. He measured wealth in a different way than most people do. On a warm September morning in 1992, I discovered how wealthy my grandparents really were.

The entire town, it seemed, had come to pay their last respects to my grandpa. The church was packed. You could have mistaken his funeral mass for Easter or Christmas mass. The procession from the church to the cemetery was one reminiscent of a rock star's funeral. My uncle had to wait to begin the graveside service since so many people had to park outside the cemetery. I swelled with pride as I sobbed and quietly said to myself, "this is who I come from, and this is the legacy my grandpa has left me." It was clear to me then that the responsibility was now mine to carry on in the same way my grandpa had lived.

I am reminded by my grandpa's example of how he lived his life as a generous human being and helped his neighbors when ever he could. He taught me that a person's true wealth is measured by the lives they touch, not by the size of their bank account. Sometimes I forget this lesson and wish for monetary wealth, and I guess there's nothing wrong with wanting to live comfortably, but we should always remember our neighbors.

I am still very fond of brown paper sacks and the smell of gumballs. They reminded me of my grandpa and the person he was. I never realized how this otherwise insignificant object really played a large role in forming the person I have become and the values that I hold dear. I hope I make my grandpa proud by trying to live a generous life in the same way he did.