



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

The Watch

I have a watch, and even though it no longer tells time, it means the world to me.

This watch, you see, was given to me one Christmas by my mother. I was in high school at the time, and I spotted it while shopping with her one day. Made by Gucci, it came with colorful rings that screwed on and off the face, allowing me to color-coordinate with every wardrobe change.

I remember standing at Parisian's jewelry counter, coveting the watch with my teenage hands but never expecting to get it. One, it was pricey. Two, I understood that my mom had four other children with needs and desires. Although Christmas was coming up—and Mom *always* went overboard—this watch seemed too extravagant to request.

So I walked away from the counter trying to forget about the coolest watch I'd ever seen. And imagine my surprise Christmas morning when I opened a package and recognized the Gucci box.

I stared at Mom in astonishment. She blushed—and then smiled meekly. The look on her face clearly conveyed her love for me.

"You better appreciate that, Kari," she said with a small, nervous laugh, "because I wrote ten résumés to pay for it."

As it turned out, Mom had begun writing résumés for students at Shelton State Community College—her workplace—to pay for this one gift. I felt so special being singled out. When you come from a large family, you spend half your life being clumped together, defined as a unit. Discovering that Mom had devoted herself to something just for me left no doubt of my importance.

Now every time I see the watch, I remember that.

I should clarify that I'm not advocating the purchase of fancy possessions to win your children over. Truth be told,

I would have chunked that watch long ago if it weren't for the story behind it. I'm constantly de-cluttering, and unless something has a use in my life, it gets discarded or donated. The fact that this watch has made the "cut" and remained in my memory box for several decades is simple: I don't want to forget it.

Like many daughters, I often give my mom a hard time, jokingly pointing out her slip-ups and imperfections. What I forget to acknowledge is her commitment to our family, the selfless acts of love I once took for granted. Mom drove carpool for 25 years, clocked thousands of hours as a short-order cook and laundered clothes for seven people. My siblings and I used to throw dirty garments down the basement stairs and laugh at the smelly avalanche. Days later these garments would reappear in our rooms, fresh and neatly stacked. Yet again, the laundry fairy had come.

My mom is also a writer, and thanks to her I developed an early love for words and poems. I'm forever grateful that she helped me find my passion. She is kind, creative and generous beyond measure. She'd do anything for her kids, hand us the shirt off her back before we even thought to ask.

This Mother's Day, I wish to celebrate my mother, my mother-in-law, and all the other amazing women who helped raise today's moms. As my Gucci watch attests, your sacrifices didn't go unnoticed. You may have said "I love you" daily, but it was your actions that convinced us. Thank you for teaching us the transcending power and beauty of a mother's love and intuition.

Kari Kubiszyn Kampakis is a Mountain Brook mom of four girls with a background in PR, writing and photography. Visit her Ponytail Mom blog online at www.karikampakis.com or find her on Facebook and Twitter. Email her at kari@karikampakis.com.