

The Eraser of Love

by Andrew Stenhouse

There is an eraser, a trophy and a picture that sit on the bookshelf in my office. The three items are arranged in a cluster and remind me of a November night five years ago. On that evening I took my daughters to a basketball game at the college where I work as a professor. Things were great for a while but as the night went on, my 5-year-old began to fade fast. As she grew sleepy, cranky, and downright irritable, I realized something had to be done quickly. Soon, I gave in and bought her a Coke (a terrible thing parents never admit to, but fully appreciate as a stimulant for a youngster who can't yet go to sleep). During our chaos in the stands, someone took a picture.

A moment remembered

This priceless picture captures my daughter with tears in her eyes, me with fire in mine, and a badge hung around her neck with white yarn. What I had failed to notice during the battle, was the badge she had made in class that day. She had been wearing it all night. It was a laminated drawing of a red balloon with the words "I did my best today." She did. I didn't.

A few months later, in February, she was visiting my office and noticed the framed picture on my shelf where I can see it everyday. When she saw the teary smile on my face as I recalled the evening for her, she could tell it was a true treasure to me. Wanting to trade one memory for another, she reached into her coat pocket. "Here, Daddy," she held out her hand for me to take something.

When I reached out my palm, she delicately released a small heart-shaped eraser that she had brought me from school. While the precious valentine gift was meaningful, her words were priceless. "This is just in case you make any mistakes." I cried.

In case?! I need so many erasers.

Kayla's genuine gift from that day sits inside a small two-inch high trophy (with the inscription: "Father of the Year") that she gave to me the following Father's Day. Both are next to the picture. The Eraser absolved me of that night at the basketball game, for being so impatient and intolerant. More importantly, it released me of my sins as a father, past, present, and future. I will still need to apologize and ask for forgiveness; however, I have the understanding from a child that it's okay to make mistakes. I've got an eraser of love.

Andrew Stenhouse holds on to his eraser of love in Costa Mesa, Ca.