

Nicest Thing Anyone Has Done for Me

Pencil Box Held More Than Writing Implements

WHILE THE DEPRESSION devastated the entire country, it took a special toll on our family. My father died in 1934, when I was 3, also leaving my brothers, Bob, 5, and Edward, 13.

Mom's loss was hard, but her siblings quickly rallied around us, all five brothers and three sisters. We all lived in the small town of Harrison, New York.

One of Mom's sisters, Alice, and her husband, Arthur, who had no children of their own, welcomed us into their home. We lived there for 7 wonderful years before Mom remarried.

While extended family members helped us financially, their unselfish caring provided my brothers and me with stability and self-confidence that served us well in later life.

Uncle Arthur was the best. He was so kind and gentle. He'd sit between Bob and me on the sofa and read the Sunday comics to us, always with great expression.

On nice Sunday afternoons, we'd take a stroll, winding up at the local drugstore. He would give each of us a penny to buy candy.

One Sunday, on the way home, as we munched our candy, we stopped at a shop we never missed, a very enticing toy store.

We always examined the treasures in the window and noticed new additions and toys that had been removed. On that day, something new caught my attention, the most beautiful pencil box I had ever seen. It had two drawers full of wondrous school supplies,

including a compass, small ruler, scissors and many colored pencils.

Entering second grade in the fall, oh, how I yearned to own it.

Deep down, though, I knew it could never be mine. I was sure it was expensive and I had just heard Aunt Alice tell Mother that they were just about going to make the rent that month.

Months later, I found that beautiful pencil box under the Christmas tree. It was marked, simply, “To Joanie with love, from your Uncle Arthur.”

Years later, Aunt Alice told me that every week since I had seen that pencil box, Uncle Arthur had put away a nickel or a few pennies, whatever he could from his lunch money or by walking home and saving bus fare, so he could buy it for me.

My mom laughed and said that Christmas was the first time she had ever seen me speechless. Aunt Alice enjoyed the smile on her husband’s face as I ran to him and gave him a big hug, thanking him for making my dream come true.

That pencil box never left my side into my adult years. It graced my bureau, and looking at it brought me comfort, especially after my dear uncle died.

Sadly, during one of our family moves, it disappeared. I was very upset but I consoled myself knowing it will always exist in my memory and in my heart, along with the love Uncle Arthur gave me that one magical Christmas Day.

—Joan S., Wethersfield, Connecticut