

ANNIVERSARY GIFT

My oldest son died in 2004 on a dreary and rainy Sunday in October. The tenth, to be exact. At that instant my heart shattered like a bottle thrown from a speeding car.

I've never been a fan of autumn. It's got a beauty all its own to be sure, but the taunt of barren trees and the threat of winter chill coming on its heels, not to mention the early sunsets, makes me long for spring at the sight of the first golden leaf. I'm glad the Lord was thoughtful enough to take Jordan in a season I already lament.

Everyone who has suffered the devastating punch in the solar plexus of the death of a loved one brings will tell you the first year is the hardest. Simple and necessary tasks take on a surreal and meaningless quality. It's true. The first year, when the shock is as deep as the grief, *is* the hardest. Unfortunately, the ones that follow are no cakewalk.

On the first anniversary of Jordan's death--on that very day--we learned that our entire house needed to be replumbed. For the next ten months our home was torn apart with every room in upheaval. We put the beds in the middle of the bedrooms and stacked furniture and belongings in the hallway.

We have old, plaster walls, which created a nightmare for the workmen who came in after the plumbers had gleefully knocked giant polka-dot holes in the walls. The repairs were so difficult two men separately walked off the job causing further delays as we took new bids and hired replacements. The repeated process of mudding, taping and sanding created a thick layer of sticky dust that stuck like glue to everything it touched, which was everything. The kind of powder that kills vacuum cleaners. It was a nightmarish, never-ending mess of colossal proportions.

It was also a brilliant distraction and quite a clever way for the Lord to shift my focus to something besides my grief. The silver lining was that I was able to redecorate all the bedrooms. Paint, faux finishes, borders, junk store treasures, rearranged and repainted furniture, window treatments, comforters, the whole Candice Olson deal.

My daughter Jessie, an aspiring interior decorator, wanted an Oriental theme in her room. We went all out. Or as all out as one can go with a husband whose motto is, "Free is right in the middle of our price range." Anyway, when we were finished, it looked great. The only thing missing was the finishing touch--a dresser. But not just any dresser. She wanted one with an Oriental look and intricate brass hardware. I wanted an antique and was sick and tired of painting furniture, so it needed to be black. We had very specific dimension requirements as well. I was desperate to find it and get everything back in order before she left for college in late August. We went to every new, used and antique furniture store in a three state area. Nothing. Not even a maybe.

The problem, I knew, was that we had been too exact with our wish list. "You realize of course that this dresser doesn't actually exist," I said to her after yet another fruitless shopping expedition. She left for college and we still hadn't found anything. I piled all her stuff in her room and cleared the hallway. But every once in a while during my prayer time I would say to the Lord, "Remember the dresser." That's all. Nothing fancy, nothing insistent; just, "Remember the dresser."

October tenth last year was another rainy, dreary day. A friend called and invited me to meet her at an antique store in Owasso. I walked in the door and there it was. The dresser. The *perfect* dresser. A beautiful black Oriental antique with intricate brass hardware. The dimensions were exact. As I stared at it in disbelief with spontaneous tears streaming down my cheeks, the Lord whispered to my heart, "I just wanted you to know I'm thinking about you today."

I can't pass her room without stopping to marvel over this tangible reminder of God's incredible compassion and love for me and the sweetness of experiencing it on the most difficult day of my year.