

Traveling Light

“Travel light and you can sing in the face of the robber.” This quote, which is also a portion of the title of the book, has contributed most to the story of my current life has taught me key life lessons.

Several years ago, reading this book was an assignment for a class project. I had nearly forgotten about it until I recently learned of this essay contest on “books that stir us”. My heart and mind automatically referenced this book due to its’ poignant quotes that guide my life today and influence how I choose to live today. I read it again and again as a refresher.

Traveling Light, a first novel written by Katrina Kittle from Dayton, Ohio, moved me to make it a priority to embrace and celebrate life in many ways. One of the ways is my decision to return to the institution of higher education to pursue my Bachelor’s Degree, which has truly been a dream deferred. In 2001, the day after my son graduated high school, I began attending college after an academic hiatus of well over fifteen years. I never really believed I had the ability to achieve at a college level. I was a high school graduate, a single-mother, and a business school drop-out with low self-esteem, a history of victimization issues related to domestic violence and poor decision-making.

For the longest time, I lived in the past always looking over my shoulders and worrying about things I felt I had little to no control of in my life. I often felt anger and unforgiveness toward persons whom I believed had caused me harm at some point in my life. My focus was on all of “the wrong details” and I was not able to neither fully live my life nor look forward to a bright future as my inner light had seemingly been snuffed out by everything and anything negative occurring throughout my youth and young adult life. Many times I can recall being indecisive about crucial life-altering decisions mainly because of the many, many fears I

harbored deep within. Denying the existence of problems, I later learned, does not make them go away. I felt stuck in a cycle of one dead-end job after another. Unfortunately, much like the dead-end, abusive relationships I kept finding myself to be a part of, my life was not progressing in the manner in which I had always dreamed. Suddenly, out of the darkness and bondage of all the fears that had gripped me, including the fear of actually succeeding at something, I began to “sing in the robber’s face”.

The book, *Traveling Light*, is about a young lady named Summer, who comes of age and learns how to live during the process of losing her beloved brother, Todd to the disease of AIDS. Summer is learning through the impending death of her brother that “life is too short to be the caretaker of the wrong details.” Todd demonstrates by example, how to embrace life and love to the fullest even in the midst of difficult times. He often use famous quotes to make his point that despite all that happens in our lives, we should not allow *the robber* (time) to prevent us from those things that matter most. When we focus on all those things in our lives that did not go as well as hoped for, or when we constantly replay all the negative tapes, our minds and heart become clustered. Unforgiveness can lead to bitterness and until we figure out how to release people who have hurt us, then our own lives fail to be as productive as it could be if we were instead, “free”.

Todd forgives the person from whom he contracted AIDS, which ironically, is a female, contrary to what others who judged him harshly, believed. He also forgives his grandma for mistreating him because of her indignant attitude toward his homosexuality, as well as anyone who have hurt him in life. None of this is done on his sick bed, either. Todd has lived his life consciously refusing to “carry baggage” and choosing to “travel light” all while encouraging others to do the same. Todd’s strength included his ability to love people despite short-

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comings or judgmental attitudes toward his sexuality. He and his soul-mate, Jacob, had an evening ritual of toasting at the close of each day (for the five-years they were together). Even if they had been angry with each other, they honored their early agreement (prior to the discovery of Todd's illness) to always appreciate their time together in spite of what type of day was had. Todd travelled the world and sent post-cards home bearing some life-affirming quote that challenged one to soar to new heights, follow one's dreams, let go of (potential) baggage because in the end, the only lasting thing is love...for family; love for friends, and being loved.

This book helps me gain and maintain perspective of what is important in life. I am a mother, a grandmother, a survivor of domestic violence, and a woman who is making every effort today to embrace life and celebrate living. Releasing those people and situations which caused me emotional, physical and/or spiritual harm has indeed set me free! I am pursuing new heights and looking past barriers that I at one time allowed to keep me bound and from progressing forward. The "what-ifs, shoulda, woulda, coulda's" have taken a back seat to my endeavor to always strive to "travel light" and to "sing in the robber's face". Singing, to me, represents joy. Time robs us when we waste it on baggage. Learning how to sing despite difficult times life may bring is an empowering experience and this book help give me perspective on what is important and my focus is no longer on what I do not have but instead on all that I do have...and that is the ability to *travel light*" and enjoy my journey!