

**"There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."
-Leonard Cohen**

The story of how we landed here on 16th Avenue NE speaks volumes of our story in this neighborhood.

AOL mail from emilyjasonhuff@aol.com
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Subject: the story of our stuff

It has taken me a while to gear up tonight to write about what happened today.

Here is the short version:

Suffice it to say that our move was a nightmare. A lot of the boxed items made it fine (as I packed all of those in June and July myself), but unfortunately, the bigger sentimental items that were under the care of the moving company (dining room table, the wardrobe that my dad refinished for us, parts of the bed he made for us, and my grandmother's desk to name a few) were not even wrapped up and were just thrown in the truck. They have lots of scratches and breaks. At a certain point, we stopped reacting in shock and just kept taking pictures of damage so that we can file claims. The kicker is that many of these items aren't simple "Ikea replacements." And yet, our neighbors on 16th Avenue were incredible (over 10 people showed up to help us move stuff in). And let me remind you that we only moved here on August 25th, and we already feel such a deep sense of authentic community here. And at the end of the day, we are hoping that the scratches and eventual repair scars and marks will always serve as reminders to us of people's (and God's) grace and hospitality today and a challenge to remember that this is after all just "stuff."

And here is the long version:

The truck arrived around 11 and it took them about an hour to figure out how to park on our street. Because of some round-about on the street, the truck could not get over them or around them so they parked it on 52nd Street (about 100 feet away.) This company only allows a certain number of feet that they will carry items from the truck so when they measured it, the guy told us he could carry our items to the sidewalk in front of our house or we would have to pay more. Since this company has charged us over 3 times the original estimate and practically held us hostage twice with our stuff with this move, we agreed to just take what they could offer as we just could not pay more. When some of our neighbors heard about this, they rallied big time. Before we knew it, 5 guys showed up whom I had never met along with some other neighbors and friends and they worked to move boxes, heavy furniture, etc. into the house for the next 3 + hours.

As the guys started to unload the items, my heart sank. Some of the beautiful furniture that my dad made for us for our wedding and for our home in Nashville had been

gouged and crunched and broken. Our friend Adam was on the phone to Skip Lee down the street who is a lawyer and we got information on what we needed to do. Adam then started to video everything as it was coming off of the truck into the house to document the damage on everything. I was standing by the moving truck as they had boxes in the mix of our stuff that did not even belong to us. What in the world?! I can imagine that there are lots of people wondering where their stuff is since it was mixed up with ours.

We have come to find out that this company has terrible reviews and that our story is not uncommon with them. We learned that the good reviews that I had read were most likely written by their employees and I had not done enough digging to find the other ones.

Let me just say that the driver (Max) did not work for the moving company we used. He was contracted out just to drive the truck out here that had been loaded by the company last Friday. Also, the movers who showed up with Max were not with the company either. They were 3 guys from the Seattle area who were just working for Max for the afternoon to help out. One of the guys named Dennis was the first at our doorstep. When I found out that he was not with the moving company, I was relieved and simply told him that it had been so difficult with this company and that we had been praying a lot about this. He picked up on that and told me he would be with us in those prayers and told me that he was going to do everything he could to help us out today. Dennis carried stuff into the house and did above and beyond what he was being asked to do. At one point, he looked at the front of our house that was swarming with folks helping out. He came over and said to me, "Who are these people?" I looked over at the scene and said, "Dennis, this is the amazing thing. There has been so much damage to our stuff. *But look what God has given us.* Look at these people who are loving us and serving us. I didn't even know these people 2 weeks ago. And some of them I had never even met until today. This is grace."

It reminded me of after the flood in Nashville when folks showed up from so many places in the city to help those who had lost everything. The best of Nashville seemed to come out when there was great need. We had our own "barn raising" version of this today here and we were the recipients of such love that showed up at our doorstep.

I went on to process all of this out loud with Dennis and with a few other folks around at different parts of the day. I told them that this reminded me so much of when Anna and Taylor have come to me in tears with a broken toy. I hug them and let them know how sorry I am that it happened and then we always seem to say at one point when the tears have subsided, "*It is just a thing.*" That kept going through my head today. THIS IS JUST STUFF. THESE ARE JUST THINGS. In light of eternity, this does not matter. We cannot take this with us. And because of that, I had this calm this afternoon that I really cannot explain. I know that folks were doing the work of holding us up in prayer, and I am so very grateful.

Don't get me wrong. Yes, I was angered by this and shocked and very sad. When the truck finally pulled away, I hugged my friend Chris who was there and finally cried. I am not glossing over the injustice of this, but I am also so thankful that we saw grace in amazing ways today. My across the street neighbor Jaime came over this morning before the truck came and prayed with me and for me asking God for a miracle. I am convinced that the way God answered that prayer was through the way we saw so much love and light pouring into the darkness today.

My friend Heather emailed me tonight and shared this:

*"This is no real consolation, but I kept singing a line from a Basics song today when I thought of you..."**My barn having burned to the ground, I can now see the moon.**" It's a borrowed Chinese proverb. I was hoping that "the barn burning" part was just a metaphor, but I can see that there is a real loss of home in this. I'm so sad and angry for you and with you. Since you like quotes, I'll leave you with this one from Amy Carmichael... "We say, then, to anyone who is under trial, give Him time to steep the soul in His eternal truth. Go into the open air, look up into the depths of the sky, or out upon the wideness of the sea, or on the strength of the hills that is His also; or, if bound in the body, go forth in the spirit; spirit is not bound. Give Him time and, as surely as dawn follows night, there will break upon the heart a sense of certainty that cannot be shaken."*

As we said in Kenya a lot, "God is good all the time. All the time, God is good." I also was thinking about the hymn today; "It is well with my soul"-- this was written by a man who had just lost his 4 daughters in a shipwreck in a storm. Goodness, we did not lose people today. It was just stuff. It truly is ALL about perspective.

I walked down to church tonight and was not surprised that the sermon seemed to be written just for me. It was all about when Jesus turned water into wine and our pastor pointed out that this story points to the bigger truth that when we face problems, we have a choice to either focus on the problem or to look to Christ. With the gift of community today, I am so thankful that we have been able to lean into this truth more.

When I talked to Anna about it tonight and asked her how she was doing and feeling, she put it best: "I'm mad, sad, disappointed, and frustrated, but I am so happy about our neighborhood."

(If you read this whole thing, bless you... I just wrote it to try to process it and to leave it at the Lord's feet tonight as I go crash. Thank you for loving us and for being a support to us in this saga...)

As I look back, I am struck with how beautifully grace showed up on that particular day through our neighbors. Jaime showed up that morning in our empty house and offered to pray with me before the day began, and she got snacks and drinks that day to keep people's spirits up. Adam

made numerous calls to reach out and rally the neighborhood to pitch in when we realized that it was going to be a long day, and we had our first glimpse that he's a mover and a shaker and the best advocate a neighbor could ask for. Zack, George, Luke, and Dustin were among the first of the burly men to show up and recruit even more muscles to chip in with hauling boxes and furniture. The college guys living in Zack's house whom we had never met before that day created a human chain to carry boxes into the house and were worth their weight in gold. The Petries invited us over to their house that night for an unforgettable steak dinner and welcomed us around their table. We experienced John 1:14 in living color that day: "The word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one of a kind glory- like Father, like Son-- **GENEROUS INSIDE AND OUT**-- true from start to finish."

I was in a fragile place that day- exhausted from the move itself and emotionally raw from leaving beloved grandparents and dear friends behind. And I was just plain done from the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day that we had had, but the way our new neighbors showed up felt like a scene out of Les Mis when Jean Val Jean is given the silver candlesticks from the priest. We did not deserve this grace, but we were experiencing God's lavish gifts through our neighbors, and it was all I could do to not dissolve into a puddle of tears with gratitude.

A friend of ours who was a professor of English and cinema studies sent us this response after we relayed what had happened. "What a story! It's a cautionary tale about choosing moving companies, but it's also an IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE ending, isn't it? Potter may still have the \$8,000, but he's alone on Christmas Eve. So thankful for all those near and far who have helped to make this side of the story WONDERFUL!"

Another friend emailed me that following week these words that I now have displayed in our kitchen symbolically in one of the frames that was broken in our move: "In the coming days, as you discover and rediscover the brokenness of life, may you be reminded of His perfecting work. May your heart continually turn to Him to be repaired and healed, and may His glory shine through."

I was pinching myself in those early days in the neighborhood recognizing that we had landed a community that gathers around broken pieces and works together to bring healing and restoration. While I felt fragile and was literally piecing our stuff back together, I resonated deeply with these words from Ted Loder: "What can I believe, except what Jesus taught: that only what is first broken, like bread, can be shared; that only what is broken, is open to your entry; that old wineskins must be ripped open and replaced if the wine of new life is to expand."

We experienced hospitality in a way I had not seen it lived out in a neighborhood quite like this before. I remember an article in a Young Life magazine years ago talking about Young Life leaders being "Jesus with skin on," and I can say without a shadow of a doubt that we encountered the living Christ that day as we were welcomed so beautifully.

One year my neighbor Annie sent out holiday cards that said, “Loved people love people.” As we experienced such grace and hospitality, we then could settle in and begin to welcome others into the community who came after us. “Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand - shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:16.

Heidi Haverkamp writes about Benedictine hospitality and I think it relates to our neighborhood as well, “Receive every person who comes through your door as though they were bringing Jesus to you. Receive every person you meet as though you were encountering the face of Christ.....Part of what makes a monastery a healthy place is to receive guests, so that the monks or sisters don’t get turned in on themselves, or imagine that they’re the center of the world, or that only they are good Christians. Part of what makes a church a healthy place is to receive guests, so that we don’t imagine we’re a club, or a secret place. A church should be a place anyone can come to meet Jesus, and a church is a place where anyone who comes can be a way for the other people there to meet Jesus. That’s why hospitality is so important. *Because it helps us meet Jesus.*”

(<http://www.stbenedict.ws/sermon/meeting-jesus-through-hospitality/>)

I am grateful for the way I have met Jesus in profound ways here on 16th Avenue NE over the last 9 years as He has shown us His love through our neighbors time and time again. And, I am grateful for these people with whom I share the journey that we get to keep pointing each other to the light in the broken stories we carry together.