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The Gift of Time

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NC State Wolfpack, 1989-1993

WOLFPACK HISTORY

In 1990 my identical twin, Jenny, our friend Danyel Parker and I comprised the freshman class for the NC State women's basketball team. We formed such a tight bond, some joked that we were triplets! We had just endured our first pre-season, and were in the thick of a tough ACC schedule. Winning and earning a ranking as one of the country's top teams made it fun, but we faced major adjustments in learning how to navigate the life of a college student athlete: class, travel and less playing time. Definitely a challenge.

As freshmen, we had "cooler-duty"—the responsibility to bring the drink coolers to and from practice. That may not seem like a big deal, but those heavy suckers hurt our hands to carry! One day after practice, we purposely delayed the inevitable. Instead of immediately taking the coolers downstairs, the three of us stayed on the court, grabbed a seat and unwound with a cold cup of lemon-lime Gatorade.

While we rested, Coach Yow came over, we poured her a cold one and she joined us. To this day, I'm not sure why she did. Maybe she sensed that we needed her. Maybe she just had some extra time in her schedule that day. Whatever the reason, that simple action led to moments that I still treasure today.

After practice drinks became a tradition for us that year. Sometimes we sat in the quiet of Reynolds Coliseum, other times we watched the men's basketball team practice. We talked about everything—classes, family, life, you name it. The only thing we didn't talk about? Basketball. Some conversations lasted only fifteen minutes.

Others, an hour. But no matter the topic or the length, I always felt better when we finished.

To Coach Yow, role didn't matter. Freshmen, seniors, role players or All-Americans—all of us belonged to her team, her family. To her, we were people in need, and Coach Yow always made time in her schedule for people.

We all made it through that year, went on to enjoy successful collegiate basketball careers, and most importantly, graduated. Some of my fondest memories are those precious moments sharing stories by the Gatorade coolers—each second, each minute, each hour, better than the last.

Although my days as a Wolfpack player eventually came to an end, Coach Yow never stopped giving me some of her time. A few years after I graduated she attended my wedding in New Jersey. In fifteen years, she never missed sending me a birthday card with a hand written, personalized note. (She did this for all her former players, but I found her thoughtfulness toward me especially impressive since my birthday is in November, right when basketball season starts.)

Coach Yow continued to give her time, not just to me, but to lots of people. In the hectic world we live in, I can't imagine a more precious gift. She taught me that it doesn't take much to help people and to let them know you care. It just takes TIME, and that's something we can all give—a lesson I will never forget.

WOLFPACK WISDOM

One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” And they left their nets at once and followed him.

Matthew 4:18-20

Time—a precious commodity in a 21st century world obsessed with speed, efficiency, microwaves and drive thrus. Yet for as much as we try to get more time, a day will always equal 24 hours. We all get the same amount of time. The difference is in whether we spend it or invest it. And that difference has huge implications on the kind of legacy we leave.

Clearly Coach Yow loved her players and invested significant time in their lives to communicate that love. Absent of ulterior motives, she genuinely cared about them as people, whether they contributed on the court or not. In this sense, she was no respecter of persons—expressing the same love to the walk-on that she did to the All-American. What a stark contrast to a society where people develop relationships based on a “what can you do for me” mentality, dismissing people who can’t help them further their own agenda or who lack the right social status. Turns out society hasn’t changed much since Jesus’ day, when he often endured ridicule for spending time with tax collectors and other outcasts.

Though the masses followed Jesus from town to town to hear him teach or to see the next miracle, he selected 12 men to live more closely to him so as to learn how to “fish for men.” In that day, a rabbi chose his disciples—men who would learn from and imitate his every move. Disciples followed so closely, it was said that they followed in the dust of their rabbi.

If a young man wasn’t chosen by a rabbi, he typically began working in his father’s business. The biblical accounts indicate the disciples Jesus selected worked as fishermen and tax collectors.

These guys weren't the cream of the crop. They hadn't finished at the top of their synagogue class and weren't selected to follow other rabbis. Yet Jesus chose them and spent three years living with them, teaching and equipping them to fulfill their calling.

Can you imagine how it must have felt to be chosen by Jesus? They didn't make the cut with the other rabbi's, but this new Rabbi—the one everyone talked about and wanted to get close to—he chose them! For three years he literally poured his life into theirs as they watched him teach the masses, perform miracles and field questions from the doubters and skeptics. Jesus invested the last years of his earthly existence living among men who the world saw as common and ordinary because he saw their potential to accomplish the extraordinary. And people noticed:

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13 NIV)

Similarly, Coach Yow saw the potential in three freshmen and invested time in water-cooler conversations that meant the world to those young, aspiring players. She could have headed for the office to make recruiting calls or to the film room to watch that next game tape. But instead she invested time in ordinary people who she knew had extraordinary potential. And as these Wolfpack women move through life, many onlookers see their brilliance and take note that they had spent time with Coach Yow.