

Little Things by Eli Stillman

Moving to a new city with little preparation can bring great feelings of liberation, but it also comes with repercussions.

When you get into the habit of leaving, you sort of categorize things into groups – what you want to see again one day and what you wouldn't mind parting ways with. When you're not sure about your living arrangements, you're also not sure what will be safer on your person or in the possession of your parents.

I'm always sure to tell my father what he absolutely may not throw out or get rid of in his random house purgings. Over the years we had delegated a space in his house that I was allowed to fill with things I would like to keep, but anything else found laying around was fair game to be donated or thrown out.

Because I struck out to Portland with little preparation, some of my prized possessions had to be left behind. *Boxes of letters, shirts from old sports teams, a piece of art made by a friend who is now deceased.*

When I moved back to Oregon, I had been making a mental list of things that I would grab next time I was back in Paradise. *A nice collared blue shirt, a camera tripod, my bicycle from college.*

Unfortunately, I don't have to make this list anymore and when I still find myself remembering the little things to grab, I'm hit with a short, swift sting in my stomach. Small material things – that I will be able to live without, but wish I still had.

Now instead of making a list of things to recollect, I'm constantly thinking of the things I should have crammed into my truck. *A backpack given to me by a friend in Costa Rica, photos I've taken on film cameras over the last 5 years and a crate with physical copies of every newspaper I've been published in.*

Among the things I set in the “don't throw away pile” was an old adidas shoebox filled with medals from over a decade of competitive running. A few represented the proudest moments in my athletic career, others – my shortcomings. I didn't look at these often, nor were they a high priority on my packing list.

My medals were all destroyed, which in the grand scheme of this terrible fire, is a petty concern to have, but an emotional bummer which I'm thinking about nonetheless.

I anger tweeted about how I will be running races with a vengeance from here on out to try and rebuild my collection. A former professor responded to the tweet saying that his kids wanted to help out. Not long after, I received a package in the mail with three shiny medals that the kids had earned from playing youth soccer and gave to me to restart my collection.

They made me remember my own soccer days, the formative years when you take the field on Saturdays to face off against the opposing nylon clad team. I remembered how much those games mattered to me at the time, though no one was really sure of the score because each side of parents counted goals differently.

Everyone has lost something as a result of the Camp Fire. Most people lost their entire homes, their jobs and some even their lives. I'm fortunate that the extent of my losses have just been possessions.

It will be a long time before I run another ten years worth of races, but for now, the three shiny medals in my room are a nice reminder of joyful memories and the caring people that I have in my life.

Much love to Justin, Jessica and the entire Dohrmann family.