



from trash...

to treasure

focus on fabulous
creative photography

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Decorating the Christmas tree is a joyous occasion and one typically shared in many families among relatives. Perhaps the family's favorite Christmas music is playing in the background, or maybe there is a fire crackling, hot chocolate or munchies nearby or some other special customs that go along with your holiday tree-trimming traditions. Whatever the tree-decorating event holds, it generally serves as the beginning of the making of holiday memories for that specific year.

Not too long ago I offered to help my aunt and uncle decorate their tree. It is a massive tree and generally takes days—sometimes weeks—to get it all set up, as they are both in their seventies, my aunt has a bad shoulder and rheumatoid arthritis and my uncle has severe emphysema. My aunt, like me, is very sentimental and has ornaments from every trip and cruise she's ever been on, that every child or grandchild has ever made, some that (though through the years may now be broken) were my great-grandmother's, as well as ones she just liked and couldn't pass up purchasing. When I walked in I realized it was no wonder it took them weeks to decorate their tree. She has more than 35 years of accumulated ornaments in boxes that filled both sofas and most of the floor space in her living room.

Among her many ornaments—all of which had a story to be told, and believe me, she told me the origin of every single one of them—was a particularly special green-and-gold glass cross ornament that was broken on the top corner. Now, mind you, we had already placed many of my great-grandmother's broken ornaments on the tree that she just couldn't bear to part with, so what was so special about this one in particular that she gasped when we pulled it out of the box?

"Let me tell you the story about this one," she said. "I was in the store and I walked by the counter and there it was just lying in the trash. It looked perfectly good to me. So I BOLDLY...you know me..." she

laughed, "walked behind the counter and got it out of the trash can. I asked the clerk, 'What's wrong with this? Why are you throwing it away?' and the clerk replied, 'It's broken.'" Now my aunt grabs my arm, pulls me close, pointing and says, "Look, right here. Do you see that tiny little flaw, that little crack right there in the upper corner? That's why they were going to throw it away. And look, when you put it on the tree you can't even see that. And it was a \$10 ornament." That was several years ago, and it might as well have been a million-dollar ornament on her tight budget. She gently and proudly placed the cross on the tree among the lights with the other ornaments, and it simply glistened. I gave her about four hours that day before I had to leave, and there were still boxes that we could have gone through.

But that cross ornament, that message that she didn't even realize she spoke, that is what got me thinking the entire trip home and ultimately led to this message. We are ALL broken and cracked somewhere, be it big or tiny. Perhaps it may be in our hearts, our minds, our day-to-day attitudes and outlooks or our daily lives. But despite that flaw we do not deserve to be cast away, thrown out, forgotten by society, religious groups, friends, co-workers, family members—anyone. We should remember that we are all flawed somewhere, and given the right circumstances, the proper situation and the correct surroundings we all can sparkle.

Everyone deserves a chance to get out of the trash in his or her life and shine. I encourage you, especially this Christmas season, to find someone who feels broken, cracked or flawed and to hang them on your tree of encouragement and love and watch them sparkle and shine. The glow will brighten your world as well.

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