

Tennis Bracelet

A 6-minute Toastmasters speech written and presented by Matt Danda

It was a hot, awful August morning, and it had rained the night before. The Saturday morning sun reflected heinously from the damp streets. Soon, it would be too hot to do anything outside, let alone exercise. I had only an hour or so of freedom until the flurry of weekend kid activities started. I was desperate to go running. Everything is better after a run, and, if I didn't go now, the entire weekend would suck. So I laced up my running shoes and hit the road, narrowly escaping the crying kids and frazzled wife.

A mile in, the temperature was barely tolerable and rising fast. I needed to cover at least six more miles to balance my metabolism. This was not going to be easy.

As is my nature, I continually scanned the road a few steps ahead, nervous to avoid injury. I spotted what appeared to be a tiny snake near the curb. A thin, wavy, silvery thing about eight inches long, glistening in the light. Hmm. I ran past, but knew, right away, that I would contemplate this mystery for the rest of the run. So I did the almost unthinkable and stopped. It was a tennis bracelet, of all things. Well constructed, too. Strung with diamonds that sparkled brilliantly in the light. Lots of diamonds. Large ones.

Huh.

I was a few subdivisions away from my home, standing in the middle of Hallbrook Farms, the richest neighborhood in Leawood, KS. If not all of Kansas. I was also in dire need of exercise, with very little time to spare. And I found what appeared to be a very expensive piece of jewelry left on the road.

Last night, maybe a thief dropped it during a narrow escape. Or it flew off the arm of a spoiled teenager waving to music in a new convertible. Or it belonged to a middle-age woman of means who was walking her tiny premium-breed dog. And I found it. During my run. My extremely important run.

I knew what I had to do: find its owner. Damnit! I visualized returning home, writing up a lost-and-found flyer, and posting it in the neighborhood. And missing my run. Damnit! Damnit!! I could ring a doorbell to announce the find. And annoy the hell out of people. No way. It was 8:00AM in the morning, the temperature was rising fast, and I needed my run. Crap!! This sucks.

I looked closely at the bracelet. Big, sparkly diamonds encased in a sturdy, silver bracelet. I figured it was worth about ten grand. I don't know anything about jewelry, but that seemed right. I could keep it, sell it, post it on Craigslist. No, too easy to get caught. I could break apart the diamonds and sell them individually. Yeah, right. I'm clueless about such things. Besides, this subdivision has several prominently displayed cameras and surely they've recorded my route. Ahh, security. It wouldn't be good to get searched while carrying this thing. No, I didn't want it. No amount of money is worth the stress. Especially if I can't run.

But what about personal value? Maybe her ailing grandfather, brimming with pride, surprised her with this bracelet after she passed the bar exam. Or perhaps it was a special gift to herself the first time she sold a million dollar property in the real estate game. Maybe her over-achieving husband bought it out of guilt after an affair.

The woman who lost this could be really, really upset right now. I could be a sort of mini-hero for returning it. Even so, if this was a sentimental gift, the object is meaningless. The gesture is what's important. The memory of the event. The feelings of love. Not its monetary value. And, if it were valuable, she wouldn't have worn it while walking the dog.

Besides, in this neighborhood, losing a \$10,000 piece of jewelry is the financial equivalent of losing about \$500 for someone like me. A serious annoyance, definitely, but not a life-changing event, either.

My run--my time to run--is my most precious possession. I lost that ring in my 20s. I understand the value of things. A fancy object is nothing.

With each passing moment, the heat index edged closer and closer to my physical limits. Time was short. I scanned the area, looking for someone--anyone--else, to share this experience. Nothing. The neighborhood was dead.

I laid out the bracelet on the nearest mailbox. It would be clear that someone had found it and neatly placed it there. A neighbor or mailman would

soon discover it, and that person could do the good deed of matching up this expensive rock-and-metal thing with the person of means who carelessly lost it. Or maybe they would keep it, who knows. It just wasn't going to be me. I needed to run.