



THE DISTELFINK – Learning to Share

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Some clever financial institution created a new twist on an old standard some years ago. They designed a piggy bank with three sections – one earmarked for saving, one designated for spending and one reserved for sharing. Originally I liked this concept a lot because of the obvious teaching opportunity with kids, and then I found that it didn't really work very well in practice. The saving and spending aspects functioned nicely enough, but the sharing component just wasn't coming together. My daughter would say, "It's not enough to make a difference. It's just a bunch of coins. I don't even know the people who are getting the money or what it's being used for." And then the idea of active philanthropy took hold. Now my children and I give together in three ways, first still with money, then with our time, and also, I give of myself.

Some years ago we were pretty enthusiastic American Idol fans. On the episode of "Idol Gives Back", when Ellen DeGeneres made her plea to kids to give up their allowances that week and get their parents to top up their pledge, I knew we were onto something. And so we made our first gift as a family. The children contributed \$20 together, and I rounded the total up to \$100. It was a start. We talked about how we liked Simon and Paula volunteering at an L.A. food bank. We got chills when we saw Carrie Underwood surrounded by children while she sang "I'll Stand by You" in Africa. And we loved the literacy program to get more books to kids in Appalachia. All of a sudden what our money could do was coming to life, and it made it real to my kids.

I have used that experience, and the momentum gained from it, to have my children make at least two gifts a year from their allowance. Usually one is to the collection plate at church during a special service like a confirmation or big holiday, and the other is to a cause we identify together. We have given money for a brick at a library in honor of a retired teacher, we have given to a local food bank at Thanksgiving time, and we have made a donation to start a school in Cambodia because we couldn't believe it only cost \$13,000. We felt like our \$100 would really make a difference there.

I've also tried to teach my children that we can give in other ways. We can give of ourselves by donating 10 inches of hair to Locks of Love to make wigs for children suffering from long-term medical hair loss, or we can give a pint of blood every couple of months. In addition, we can give our time and show a passion for a cause. I have a friend who bikes the Pan Massachusetts Challenge annually to raise money for the Dana Farber Cancer Research Center. The PMC is a two day ride from Sturbridge to Provincetown -192 miles. Almost 5,000 riders participate. It started small 20 years ago has ballooned into one of the largest fundraiser athletic events in the world. The PMC is now the single largest source of contributions to Dana Farber. My friend's children see him train throughout the year on a stationary bike during the inclement months, and many weekends once Spring arrives. His Father has become the honorary race director for his team, and he is hoping to get a tandem bike so his son can possibly join him in this endeavor some day. His passion for this cause is huge and his enthusiasm infectious, and I have no doubt that his children see it. My friend is the embodiment of how to give – with his heart, through his

legs, and using his wallet, and those of almost everyone he knows who support him in this glorious endeavor. Congratulations on another successful ride, HBoo44(my friend's race tracker for 2009), and for being such a wonderful inspiration to so many!

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