

# Missed opportunity

## Carelessness toward loved one inspires life changes



In my parents' living room in our North Platte home sits a mistake. Well, my mistake, I suppose. It's something I screwed up a long time ago, something I'm still very ashamed of. I feel lower than dirt whenever I see it.

I'm not ashamed because it's ugly. Actually, it's quite beautiful. It's a stained glass window hanging that I made in my senior year of high school — a red rose against an amber background that looks pretty amazing with the sunlight streaming through it. I don't remember how long I worked on it, but I know that it was probably the most difficult project I ever undertook before college. Even though I should be proud of it, I just can't be.

I can't be because I made it for my grandma, and she never got it before she died.

In those few years that I had the

picture, I just never got around to giving it to her. I was supposed to put wire loops on it so she could hang it in her nursing home window. I was supposed to pick up the soldering iron and do that as the weekend project.

But there never seemed to be a weekend long enough. I couldn't find the time.

The worst part was that she was waiting for it. She knew about it, and she really wanted to hang it in that window.

I brought it to her when I finished it, showing her what a talented grandchild she had. We held it up to the light and looked through it together. I promised her that she would have it soon because, after all, it was for her. A rose for Rosa.

But I never got it to her. I never took the time to put those hanging loops on the corners of my picture. So now it's sitting in my parents' living room, never having been hung in her window.

It's been a year and a half since my grandma's death, and I still feel as guilty about that rose as I did the day she died.

But maybe I shouldn't feel guilty anymore. Recently I heard a good rea-

son not to be.

On a talk show a few weeks ago, a woman who couldn't stop grieving for her daughter sat before the audience. Her daughter had been gone for 10 years, and she still hadn't accepted life without her. She cried about it every day and asked God why every night. She just could not let go, and it was killing her.

A grief therapist was brought on to figure out why she still had not gotten over her daughter's untimely death. What she said really struck a nerve with me.

She told him that if she stopped grieving for her daughter, it would mean that she had stopped loving her.

You may roll your eyes over that comment, but I have a pretty good feeling there are a lot of people who think that way. When I felt that statement hit me like a ton of bricks, I knew that I was thinking that way, too.

I couldn't stop feeling bad about that picture because it was my way of grieving for my grandma.

We hold on to the things that make us feel guilty because something inside us tells us that it's wrong not to. And like the woman on the show, we let it eat us up inside, and we think it's

normal.

Why? How normal is it to feel terrible all the time? How can someone enjoy or experience anything new if she's clinging to the old?

Now, this doesn't mean we should forget about those that have passed away. This means we should really reconsider how we're honoring their memories.

When family members die, it's normal to question whether or not you were good enough to them when they were around. But what is "good enough?" Is it taking your great aunt out to eat every day? Is it reading your nephew a bedtime story every night?

Why do our standards get raised so ridiculously high when a loved one is gone?

You may think that "ridiculous" is a bit extreme, but I'm not so sure. I could never help thinking that I should have made 10 pictures for my grandma or that I should have visited her a lot more than I did before she died. But the time I had in art class was limited, and when I moved to Lincoln, she was still in North Platte. Home sweet home's not exactly a hop, skip and a jump away.

Although I feel bad for not being a

"better grandchild" all those years ago, I think I may have gotten to the point where I can accept things as they are and as they were.

For example, I can honor my grandma's memory.

I can honor her memory without grieving, without feeling guilty.

It's not too hard. I can make one of her recipes. I can plant a rose bush in my parents' garden. I can wear the locket she gave me when I was 5.

My remembrance of my grandma doesn't have to be a guilt-filled cry-session. And I can tell you that she sure as heck wouldn't have wanted it that way.

Since her death in February 1998, I've held on to the idea that I was the worst grandchild my grandma had. I made her a promise I never followed through on, but I'm not going to feel guilty anymore.

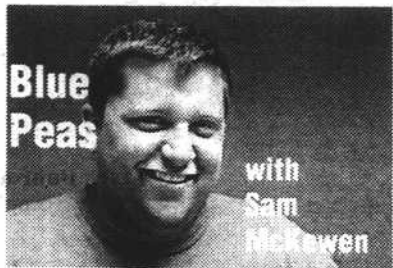
I'm just going to use this as a reminder of the other promises I've made. Promises that I need to follow through on. And I fully intend to, because I want to honor the people close to me while we're all still around.

So this is where I start over. If I owe you one, please let me know. I don't intend to let you down.

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# No second chance

## Cop found innocent in Rodney King case re-lives his mistake every day



Let me throw a name out at you: Timothy Wind.

Ring a bell? Probably not. Wouldn't with me, either, were it not followed by the title: one of the Rodney King police officers. But his story is worth understanding today, if only to see the consequences of his actions.

Wind, along with Theodore Briseno, Stacey Koon and Laurence Powell, beat King on the night of April 29, 1992, off a Los Angeles freeway.

A videotape of the event forever changed not only the face of race relations in Los Angeles, but all over America.

Wind and Briseno were the subject of an Aug. 30 article titled, "American Tragedy: How justice failed the Rodney King cops" written by Lou Cannon, published in National Review magazine.

If you haven't seen it, pick it up. Cannon makes a well-detailed, fair argument (which sorta makes me wretch, that something fair-minded could be found in National Review). It's a piece well-written enough to be worthy of debate.

Cannon recounts the incident, more specifically focusing on Wind and Briseno, who were never convicted of any crime. Still, after the second court case, those two men's lives took nosedives. Especially Wind's.

The night of the King beating, Wind was the only one who seemed slightly reasonable about the situation.

I've seen the video again recently. Wind applied his baton blows in proper fashion, hitting the suspect, King, and then stepping back to see if it had an effect.

While the others whaled away, Wind, at least, had the sense to do it by the book.

Therefore, he was never convicted. Cannon makes an argument for the other three, too, though not very convincingly, especially for Powell, who had no business being out on the street

that night, considering he couldn't even pass the baton test.

Wind was fired anyway. It wasn't as if they could keep him on at the LAPD, not after that incident, not if they didn't want more riots in the city. In fact, Wind was given a hearing and was suspended for six months. He was supposed to come back, the article said, but Willie Williams fired him right away.

So, as good an officer as Wind was, he got caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, and it's cost him since then. Cannon chronicles these events as if they were a downward spiral.

Wind couldn't find work for three years. His wife had a miscarriage. He got sick and became embroiled in a battle with the city of Los Angeles over disability payment. Rapper Ice Cube used him in a song, hoping Wind would return to his native Kansas in a coffin.

He became a community service officer. He washed the police chief's car. It was all he could get.

He entered a community college and later graduated with honors from Loyola Marymount University in urban studies. Once he tried to form an urban studies club, which did well until all the members found out about his connection to Rodney King.

He cannot find an entry-level job in urban planning. Every place rejects him. He is 39 years old.

It's easy to side with Mr. Cannon. I, like him, want to believe that if you are found innocent in a court of law, then innocent you shall be in the real world. The slate shall be wiped.

That if one is cursed for a crime one didn't commit, then one's rights are being violated.

Cannon takes me all the way to the edge of believing him. Logically, he's right.

But my better senses tell me I cannot agree. I will not. Because no matter what a legal hand-me-down says, Wind was wrong. Simply, he was wrong, and people died because of it. There was a riot because of it. Los Angeles has changed for the worse because of it.

If Wind knew what was happening, why didn't he stop it? Or throw his body over King's? Or hit Powell with his own baton, as Powell mercilessly beat King? Because that's not

what police do, they'd say. But it isn't about police. It's about humanity.

Somewhere along the way, a code entered into our society that right and wrong matter less than loyalty. That it's better to lie than squeal. That if you turn your back on a fellow police officer (or a fellow loan officer or whatever), then you're the bad guy.

Eventually, that philosophy boiled over into what happened to Rodney King that night. Later, the police were sorry, sure, even sober about the incident, but only because they got caught.

And when Wind is legally acquitted, are we supposed to forget what he did, or that he let it happen? I think Cannon would. Are we supposed to forget that Wind kicked King six times for no reason?

Legal documents don't change my gut feeling about right or wrong, even when we ourselves are doing wrong or living by stupid police-like code. Wind has been ostracized not because he was put in jail, but because he was wrong. And that is just as powerful as any prison sentence may be.

Understand, I would never trade places with Wind, nor can I say I'd have done anything different. I honestly don't know. Prosecutors boiled it down to 19 seconds of time when the Rodney King beating got out of hand. Nineteen seconds.

Imagine that in the time it took you to pick up and open the paper this morning, you had to determine what

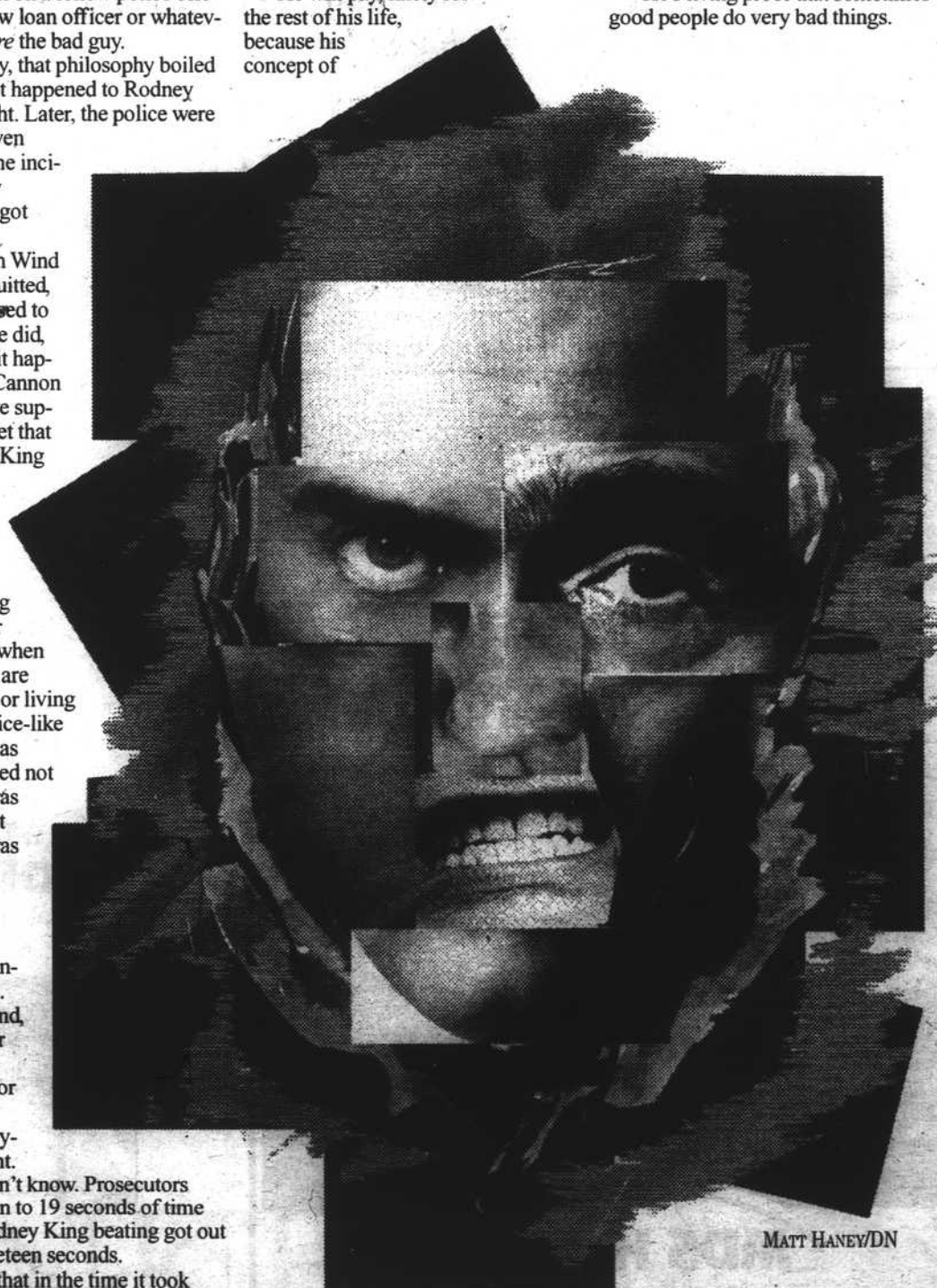
direction your life would head in. Now imagine you didn't even know when those 19 seconds were going to come or, even worse, which 19 seconds were going to matter. That's what happened to Timothy Wind.

He will pay, likely for the rest of his life, because his concept of

right and wrong got tested at exactly the time he wasn't ready for it.

So remember him. He wasn't molded from evil, but he helped create a disaster never to be forgotten.

He's living proof that sometimes good people do very bad things.



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