

Pearls are the only gem that is actually created by a living creature. They have been worn as jewelry for thousands of years, and were the bauble of choice amongst fashionable Roman women. Their popularity faded somewhat with the discovery of diamonds, but the pearl trade was revived in the early 1900s when three Japanese men figured out how to grow "cultured" pearls.

A Cherished Gift – Lost & Found

While playing a little basketball with family and friends, I became tangled with another player and soon discovered that one of my most prized possessions had gone missing.



Massaging my left ear, I called a time out, hoping to locate a Valentine's Day gift that helped me cope with a disturbing, painful event in my life.

Taking baby steps over every inch of the court, we began to survey the area where my gift may have fallen. I felt my heart grow heavy as the marbled concrete gave me a headache, as well as deflated my hopes of ever recovering my gift. To make matters worse, the ground was pierced with a rippled crack, where if anything fell into this abyss, it was quite unlikely you would be able to recoup your loss. Seconds turned into minutes, which felt like hours. My heart raced as time passed. Did it fall into the crack? Did it roll into the grass? Was it crushed under the feet of my heaving, tired companions?

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Out of nowhere, a 15-year-old muttered the words that every person, who has lost something, loves to hear: "I found it!" His strong, long fingers pinched my diamond and pearl earring with careful delicateness. A large weight lifted from my shoulders. As I placed the earring back into its rightful position, I resumed playing the game, eyeing my boyfriend to remind him of what a close call that was.



Did you know that earrings have been used as jewelry since prehistoric times? Ancient Egyptians wore gold hoops, and in Babylon earrings were worn by men to denote rank.

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Flashing back, I began to recount the history of this gift. I was in the middle of my first semester of graduate school when a routine check-up turned into the scare of a lifetime. I twisted my knee and had an X-ray done to make sure everything was all right. When the doctor returned, her face was plastered with regretful concern. She told me I had a tumor eating away at the bone below my kneecap. What are the chances of that? I then had the tumor scraped out and replaced with artificial bone filler, but afterwards, an allergic reaction and infection developed. My leg and thigh area swelled to the point that you could press my skin and leave behind indentations. I was hospitalized for weeks, missing important school events and class work, which made me unbearably miserable. The infection also prolonged the amount of time I would need to use crutches, which was really going to put a damper on my upcoming Valentine's Day.

But, my boyfriend was able to bypass my gloomy disposition with one of the sweetest gifts, mainly because it was so unexpected. When it came to gift giving, my boyfriend wasn't the type to provide an element of surprise. For every holiday, I basically knew what I was already getting and most of the time it wasn't even wrapped. Also, a lot of

things beyond my medical ordeal were occurring all at one time. I was touched that my boyfriend was able to take time out and pick out a special gift.

I've always seen pearls as a vulnerable gemstone with the potential to chip or become crushed, whereas the diamond has a reputation for being strong enough to cut through glass. For me, the earrings are important because they are a daily reminder of the strength, as well as fragility of life.