



## If My Table Could Talk

What once seemed irredeemably damaged now held a story.

We're not rich. Actually, we're probably richer than 99% of the world, but, unfortunately, that doesn't seem to matter when you live in Southern California and can't buy whatever you want whenever you want it. Then you bemoan how "poor" you are and how you have to live on a (*oh, the dreaded word*) "budget." I admit it. We're those kind of pathetic people. So when we decide to buy something, it's a big deal.

Several years ago, we bought a new dining room set. "Mexican rustic," because we love Spanish style houses and daydream wistfully of acquiring one (*when we're rich*). In the meantime, we attempt to furnish and accent our simple traditional in as rustic a fashion as we can. The table we fell in love with wasn't terribly expensive, but when we added eight chairs, we felt like proud new parents.

The table was bar height, raw wood and we were carefully trained on how to wax it before we brought it home from the furniture hospital. After bringing it home, we trained our guests on the appropriate manner of care, throwing coasters at anyone who dared to put an icy glass down on its tender surface.

And then it happened. My kindergartener was doing her homework at the table. Without a mat. She pushed the pencil just a tad too hard, and the next thing I knew, the word "happy" was etched into the table top in large capital letters. I couldn't breathe. I immediately tried waxing it out, but the wax only showed up darker in the indentation. I tried covering the flaw with a vase of fresh flowers, but the placement was not entirely *feng shui*. My darling and overly practical husband gently expressed his belief that there could be a lot worse words than "happy" carved into our table. I asked how he would feel if I carved it into him!

I eventually learned to accept my happy table, and with tenacious diligence vowed to safeguard it from further harm. All was going well until I made the grave mistake of inviting my life group over for a Christmas

caroling party. The party was a brilliant success. We sang carols and worshiped our Savior. The children had a gift exchange that provided such delight for us grown-ups. The night left me with a deep sense of gratitude for the priceless gift of salvation.

Until I started clearing the table. Underneath the fruit platter I discovered a ghoulish stain of strawberry juice. Deeply red. Deeply saturated. The magic of the season evaporated like starch on a hot iron, and I lay face down on my table and wept. But the next day, a strange thing happened. I was cleaning up wrapping paper and putting decorations back in boxes when I began to feel trickles down my cheeks. The holidays had been so special this year. The year had been painful, but also astounding. Now it was ending, and I couldn't hold on to it.

But my table could! With tears streaming, I ran over and caressed the strawberry stain. Then I walked slowly around the corner and let my finger trace the letters "happy" over and over and over again. I had a piece of this year forever. My table wasn't ruined. What once seemed irredeemably damaged now held a story. The tale of a little girl who was happy. The story of a group of friends who had a Christmas worthy of great celebration. My table could talk.

The next spring, some longtime friends gathered around our scarred table for Easter dinner. I looked around at faces I had known for half my life—some dear college friends, a wonderful couple who had housed me when I was a graduate student, a favorite co-worker and his daughter who I had held as a tiny newborn. I was surrounded by people who were committed to loving God and loving me. I was overwhelmed with how rich I was.

My friend Fred spilled some wine on the table. He looked concerned and tried to quickly blot it up. But I just chuckled, patted his hand and said, "Oh no...leave it right there. It's just what this table needs." □

—Susan Reedy