

The Value of Remembering Ordinary Moments

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The Atlantic:

At Christmastime, my brother, my father, and our chocolate Labrador pile into the car to drive across the state of Washington to see my grandparents. We've been doing it since I was born. The three of us—before my brother and I put our headphones in to tune everything out—try to have meaningful conversations. Soon I'll go back to school in England, my brother will go back to school in California, and Dad will go back to work in Washington, a transatlantic triangle keeping us apart. The three of us are together twice a year, at best, but on our car trip there's rarely anything new exchanged. We recount memories of Mom; we discuss job prospects, baseball teams, and books (if we're lucky); and usually we end up having a brief argument about religion or politics to round it all out. Nothing to write down. Nothing to remember.

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Ting Zhang is on the eve of getting her doctorate at Harvard Business School, where her focus is the psychology of rediscovery. Most recently, she was the lead author of a four-part study published in *Psychological Science*. In it, she took 135 university undergraduates from the northeastern United States and had them create time capsules. In these capsules, the students wrote about a range of current experiences: their most recent conversation, their most recent social outing, how they met their roommate, three songs they had just listened to, an inside joke, a photo they had recently taken, a recent Facebook status they had posted, a sentence they wrote for a school essay, and a question they responded to on a final exam.

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