



Gold Stars

WORDS BY WENDY WOLF

It's the little things.

When I was in college, I was poor. I took out student loans and worked for a year after high school to save as much as I could. Even that didn't get me through six semesters, after which I returned home to work again.

While I was in school, I lived in a “house dorm” — an actual house with each room set up to accommodate one to four girls with twin and/or bunk beds. One of my roommates, Vicky, was from Canada. (Oh, Canada, what nice people you produce!) Her mother sent her money from time to time and told her to share it with everyone. And she did. Sometimes, she handed me \$5 or \$10 out of the blue, and it was much-needed laundry money, or allowed me to buy supplies like notebook paper or pens. It was a godsend.

I was in Chattanooga, Tennessee. There was a cute old-fashioned drugstore on the corner just off campus. Once, I went there to get a few things I needed, and saw a package of gold foil adhesive stars, the kind that teachers put on a third-grader's work to say, “Well done!” I've always loved stars and their symbolism — light, beauty, magic. They were fun and positive. And maybe I wanted to feel like I was doing a good job, even though I was running out of money fast. I really couldn't afford the stars, even though they only cost a dollar or so, but I bought them anyway.

I don't even remember what I stuck them on. Or if I did. But I do remember that they made me feel very happy. And I needed that.

I felt very alone at school and often sad. I was terrible at small talk, and it was hard for me to make new friends. I was adrift. Home had been a nightmare, but it was a “devil you know” situation. I was used to it. I wanted to get away so badly, but once I was, I didn't know what to do with myself.

Those little stars were like hope itself. Like wishes that might come true. It's hard to describe how much they cheered me up. I still remember the feeling.

It all worked out in the end, but I still recognize the importance of the little things. I actually keep a list on my phone titled, “Things that make me feel better.” You'd think I wouldn't forget, but I do. Here's what's on it:

- ★ A long walk outside
- ★ A nap
- ★ A hot shower
- ★ Baking cookies (with music!)
- ★ Singing
- ★ A creative project
- ★ Good food
- ★ A good book
- ★ A good TV show
- ★ Meditating
- ★ Journaling
- ★ Time with loved ones

They're all small and inexpensive. Most are free. And most of the time, any given one is doable.

So I'm thankful for the little things. Sometimes, they make all the difference.

Wendy Wolf is an artist and writer who lives with her husband in the misty, enchanted Pacific Northwest. She's short, has freckles, adores eating (especially chocolate, Indian food, and mashed potatoes!), and is vegan purely for the love of animals. You can find her on Twitter (@grasshopper93).

My Gold Stars

Take time to record the little, often free things that make you feel better.

