

Shell of a Life

by Foster Trecost

A long time ago, a boy lived in a small village by the sea. His family had little money, so he learned to find happiness in the natural splendor that surrounded him. He would often walk along the seashore, and collect the shells he found on the beach.

One afternoon he sat beneath a tree sorting his shells in two piles when his mother appeared, and commented on what he was doing: "I see you have separated the pretty shells from the ones that aren't so pretty. When you finish, could you spread the ugly shells in the driveway? There are a few holes that need to be filled."

The boy looked at his mother. "Yes, I will fill the holes," he said, and pointed to the flawed pile, "but not with these shells. I will fill the holes with the others. I have no use of them."

"Why would you destroy such beautiful shells?" asked his mother.

"Because," said the boy, and took a shell from the impeccable pile. "This shell is perfect, without a single flaw. It is shiny and smooth, with no cracks or chips. No one I know is that way. No one I want to know is that way. But this shell," he said, taking one from the other pile, "is like the people in the village, this shell is like us. There are rough edges, and deep cracks, and even a few missing pieces. It is not shiny, but not delicate, either. It wears the scars given by a full life, one that has known tragedy and beauty, yet it is still a shell. It has survived. To me, this shell is more beautiful than all the other shells in the sea."

She placed a weathered hand on her son's shoulder. "How do you have so much wisdom at such a young age?"

The boy thought for a moment. "Because," he said, "it was given to me by you."

