

## THE TRUE VALUE OF A \$500 CAR

I have a \$500 car. At least the way my son classifies it. But I know it's worth a lot more than that.

After 17 years of marriage, we were still a one-car family in 1983. We were in desperate need of a second vehicle when my wife saw one she really liked. When we heard the dealer had just unloaded one in the color we wanted, we went to check it out--and bought it that day.

Our son Barrett was just shy of three years old and quite excited to have something besides "Push Kitty," our old white Toyota station wagon to climb around in. Unlike our other vehicles, this new metallic blue Toyota wagon would be tagged with an uncreative name: "Bluie."

The years crept by, and Push Kitty was finally replaced with "Van Go," a minivan for mom. But Bluie endured. When Barrett was about 14, he started mowing lawns, and Bluie became the designated delivery vehicle. With a ramp made from a pair of boards, his mower could be pushed into the cargo space with a little room left for other mowing paraphernalia. It wasn't a safe arrangement.

When age 16 put Barrett in the driver's seat, the demands on Bluie increased in proportion to his business. Before long, she began to reek of grass and gas, and her interior gradually deteriorated. The need for a truck was obvious--and long overdue.

When we found a good deal on "Little Red Truck," I've never seen a happier young man. He could haul his equipment in style, and I could have Bluie all to myself. Puttering to meet my vanpool was more suited to a venerable lass of her years. But despite Bluie's faithful service, Barrett would sometimes remark, "Dad, you really need to sell Bluie and get a nicer car." Admittedly, Bluie had lost most of the pizzazz she once had, but she had a faithful heritage.

A growing business and a succession of progressively larger trailers soon saw Little Red Truck replaced by Big Black Truck, a one-ton pickup with a huge diesel engine.

And from his lofty perch in that hoss of a truck, Barrett would still occasionally peer on little Bluie with some disdain. "Dad, you really need to get rid of Bluie and get a nicer car. You could probably get \$500 for her."

But just this past week, Big Black Truck had to go into the shop again. When I was out of town one evening, mom and son were compelled to ride in Old Bluie. That brought a revealing comment. "Mom," he said, "why is it that Daddy's \$500 car runs better than my big black truck?" And for a whole week, Bluie once again happily ferried him to his jobs without complaint.

And therein is a timeless lesson. True value is a lot more than market price, and to find a person--or a thing--to be reliable and dependable in time of need is a precious treasure.