In a folktale from my childhood, a man splits his money between his three sons, telling them to bring back the most valuable things they can find. However, they all appear to return with “nothing”. The oldest son’s gems are stolen. The second son’s furs are ruined on the trip home. The third son, however, has something valuable that can never be taken away from him. With his money, he went to school and received an education.

Now, when many people think of what it means to be successful, they still think of being wealthy or living in a nice house. However, after my grandfather died, I discovered that this is not always true.

When my grandfather passed away during my freshman year, my family and I had to clean out his house to sell it. This was particularly difficult because my grandfather lived hours away from us in the Mojave Desert and was a hoarder. With each passing year, he had accumulated more and more things until his house because a museum of miscellaneous mementos such as old-fashioned keys and bins of important papers mixed with old flyers and dry spaghetti. In the living room, cardboard boxes were stacked like a second wall. At one point, everything had been very valuable to my grandparents. Now, it was being either donated, thrown away, or stashed in a storage unit. Many “important” things in the house were now junk. As I worked with my mom to fill a 40 foot dumpster with the house’s contents, I discovered that most material things are worthless. They can’t be taken with you in the end. But if this is the case, then what things are important? After this experience, I truly realized that obtaining and sharing internal wealth, rather than material wealth is what makes an individual’s life meaningful.

What was it about my grandfather that I remembered? It wasn’t the figurines, and it wasn’t the history books he collected. It was the memories of the good times I had spent with him, and who he was as a person that mattered. It was countless weekends in the desert, and using a pickaxe with his help to mine for salt crystals. It was when he showed me with a magnet the hematite in the desert sand. These things are worth more to me than anything I found in that house.

That same year, I joined one of my school’s service clubs and have been an active member, and more recently an officer, ever since. I also volunteer to tutor students weekly as a member of the California Scholarship Federation, and every Summer I help international students as a peer mentor at UC Riverside’s Conversation and American Culture program. I have made my own positive memories just as my grandfather made positive memories for me; and just as the carpenter’s son has his education for as long as he lives, my education is something that will never lose its relevance and be thrown away.

Through these experiences, my aspirations have changed from earning the money to accumulate things, to accumulating the skills and knowledge necessary to help others. Rather than leaving behind a disposable trail of collectibles, I want to make a lasting difference. I believe that a UC education can help me do this.