

Several weeks ago, I breezed through the usual morning routine—woke at 7, roused my daughters, got them dressed as my husband took a shower, dressed myself as my husband made breakfast. Together, we loaded kids into the car, and then my husband left for work. As if by reflex, I grabbed my purse, my briefcase, my phone, my lunch, my running shoes. All I needed was my car keys, but they weren't in their usual spot. I patted my coat pockets without success, and the typical places—the fruit bowl, the shoe bin, the kitchen table—yielded nothing.

All of my preparations for that day came to an abrupt halt as I felt my blood pressure rise and my breath quicken. I moved to an alternative approach, examining the deli drawer in the refrigerator, the dress-up bin in the play room, every pocket of every coat or pair of trousers I owned. I left no stone unturned as I unfolded bath towels, emptied the silverware drawer, took apart Tupperware containers and felt between couch cushions.

And then that moment of desperation set in—that moment that all of us have likely had, that moment when we pray to all that is holy and do anything and everything in the attempt to restore the balance and routine that we had mastered mere minutes before. In my moment of desperation, with dedication rivaled only by the woman with the lost coin, I grabbed a flashlight and dropped to my knees, heels and pantyhose and trench coat and all.

Cereal crumbs hitching a ride on the hem of my skirt, I shined the flashlight in every corner of the kitchen. Nothing, save a dusty raisin, a few stray coffee beans, a canning lid and a barrette. Nothing that resembled my keys.

Slowly, I inched into the dining room and began my pursuit anew. And it wasn't long before I happened upon a small cubby. Tucked into a corner, hidden from view, this petite space seemed trivial, almost forgettable—forgettable, that is, unless you are a three-

year-old seeking a really good place for all of your treasures. There, carefully placed next to a Spanish English pocket dictionary, lay my treasured keys.

As I drove to campus a few minutes later, I marveled at how my keys would have been lost for weeks, if not months, had I not crawled around on all fours. I shook my head, took a deep breath, and, staring at a red light, asked myself, “What can I possibly learn from this?”

And as I thought, I learned. I learned that these stressful, frantic moments hold a sacred place in my work as a teacher, where my frustration as an instructor often intersects with my students' exasperation as writers. In my frustration, I search for answers—I phone a colleague, email an expert, check a research journal, browse a publisher's website, check every pocket in my arsenal of teaching methods. But few of these tactics succeed apart from reorientation, that bit of crawling with a flashlight as I consider the student's unique viewpoint. Such consideration provides me with richer insights about my students' histories, or learning needs, or research interests, or pressing questions, or academic gifts. Such consideration provides answers. So-- I believe in the very moments that disrupt our smooth routines, force us to our knees, foster painstaking examination, make us beg for enlightenment, and push us toward different, more meaningful teaching.