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### The Value of a Few Inches

The United States of America's measuring system is much different than that of the countries around the world. Most of the world's countries use the metric units of measurements while the United States uses the customary units of measurements. When measuring length using the metric units of measurements you have centimeters, meters, and kilometers. In the customary units of measurements you have, respectively, inches, yards, and miles. Although the United States does use the metric system it primarily uses the customary units of measurements. In the sports of football, basketball, soccer, and baseball mere inches have been the deciding factor in a win or a loss. There is an interesting and true story where Dr. Martin Luther King, while signing autographs in Blumstein's Department Store in Harlem, was stabbed in the chest by Izola Ware Curry. He was rushed by ambulance to a nearby the hospital where he underwent emergency surgery, which lasted for four hours. While in recovery, Dr. King was told by the surgeon that the blade had been lodged inches from his aorta and if he had simply sneezed, he would have died. In his case, the value of few inches was a matter of life or death, anonymity, or worldwide recognition.

I had the honor of serving our country in the Armed Forces for approximately ten years. I was honorably discharged and had come home to resume a civilian way of life. Unfortunately, things did not work out the way I had planned so I sought employment with a government funded materiel recovery company that had offices located around the world. Desert Storm, the war in Iraq and Kuwait, also known as the Gulf War, was ending and the company that I was employed with, Brown and Root were awarded the contract to inventory, and retrieve all the

military equipment that was remaining in the country. I deployed as an inventory clerk because of my military experience, but as fate would have it, I was instead assigned to be an escort driver for all the foreign dignitaries that were visiting the area. My responsibilities were to greet the dignitaries and drive them to the different sites where ammunition, military vehicles, and other equipment that was being staged to ship back to their respective countries that participated in the war. The job may sound easy, but it was far from easy. It consisted of ten-to-twelve-hour days in the sweltering heat, even with the air conditioning on full blast. And you had to eat your lunch on the run, if you were fortunate enough to get lunch! There was also an inherent danger with being an escort driver. During the war, many of the roads had been booby trapped with IEDS or Improvised Explosive Devices by terrorist groups or anti-war groups. At the close of the war both American and Iraqi forces had the daunting task of clearing and securing these roads so that they would be safe and passable for military and civilian use. On one day, no different from any others, I was tasked with driving a group of American and Sri Lankan officers out to one of the newly cleared staging sites. They spent about an hour at the site inspecting the equipment and discussing the period when the shipment would be declared safe and ready to ship. I drove them back to the secured area of the military base and was relieved of my driving duties for the morning. Later that afternoon, a request came in for an escort to drive a different group of inspectors out to the same location that I had driven to earlier that day. Sadly, they did not return. While driving back from the site the driver ran over an IED and everyone in the vehicle was reported to have been killed by the explosion. The same road, on the same day, and in the same vehicle an earlier trip was successfully made with no incident. The second inspection was just a routine trip with another group of inspectors, but the one major factor that changed the outcome of this inspection was a few inches of a rubber tire on a dusty road. The news of this tragic incident left me both relieved and grieved in my heart. I was relieved, and thankful, that myself and those with me had been spared to see another sun rise. I was grieved for the families that were going to receive the heartbreaking news that a father, a brother, a close friend, or someone special had died in an unforeseen accident. Driving in a foreign country, on roads that were

capable of changing lives forever, enabled me to understand that life is not only measured in time, but can also be measured in distance. I've learned the value of a few inches.

In conclusion, one may ask, "What is the difference in a few inches here or there?" For the builder of a house, it is the difference of having a straight wall or a crooked one. For the baseball player in centerfield whose glove just barely missed catching the ball it is the difference of first place and second place. For the football player, with only seconds left in the game, it is the difference of winning or losing the Super Bowl. For the Olympic athlete it is the difference of winning gold, silver, or bronze. For several families, the value of a few inches, was the difference of ever seeing their loved ones again.