

Katy's Box

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*Dedicated to my parents,
Ray and Charlene Notgrass,
and to John and Bethany, my brother and sister.*

Thank you for making me feel loved.

Katy's **Box**

1

The Box

Katy lay on her back in the grass, trying to be as lazy as she could since it was the last day of summer. The grass tickled her legs and the sun made her squint until her eyes were barely open as she tried to find pictures in the clouds. She saw the shapes of a dragon, a duck, and a canoe.

When she couldn't stand the brightness any more, she closed her eyes. She thought about school the year before. There were some things she would rather forget, like the day one of the class troublemakers spit glue in her face or all the times her teacher had given one of her classmates a sour look. There were some good memories, though, like playing with her friend during recess and finding roly pollys to take care of together.

Recess would be different this year. Almost everything about school would be different now that her only classmates would be her brother and her sister.

An ant crawled up a dandelion next to Katy's head. She turned to watch him walk gingerly down the other side of the stem. "Were you ever homeschooled?" Katy asked the ant. "Maybe you're homeschooled right now! I wonder how old you are. I'm eight, but I'll be nine in just a few weeks." The ant reached the bottom of the stem and Katy lost sight of him in the grass. Just then she heard the side gate screech open. Her sister Anna walked through the gate with her dog at her side. Once Anna and Sparky were in the back yard, Anna closed the gate and unhooked Sparky's leash. Sparky bolted across the yard toward the playhouse at the back, turned around so fast he fell sideways, and ran straight toward Katy. Katy shielded her face with her arms as Sparky jumped on her and Anna tried unsuccessfully to make him stop.

"Are you sure that's the same dog you picked out at the animal shelter?" Katy asked. "I think they must have made a switch when you weren't looking. Sparky has to be one of the wildest dogs in Urbana, Illinois!"

“He didn’t feel good that first day we saw him,” Anna replied. “He was waiting for someone to come love him and give him a reason to be happy.”

Earlier in the summer, on Anna’s eleventh birthday, their parents had surprised her with a trip to the animal shelter where she got to pick her very own dog. It was a dream come true for Anna and she was ecstatic. They looked at several different dogs and Anna really wanted a little female puppy named Belle. Another family had already picked her out, though, and Anna had to decide on a different one. She considered a feisty Pomeranian, but after he bit Dad while they were in the visiting room she thought she should keep looking.

Anna had finally decided on a black and white mutt whom she named Sparky. Sparky had shaggy paws and a scruffy beard. That day at the animal shelter he was calm and quiet and mannerly, but the Porters soon found out these qualities were not Sparky’s true character.

After climbing on Katy and giving her left leg a good scratch, Sparky finally ran out of steam and flopped down on the grass between Anna and Katy. Katy rubbed his spotted belly while Anna scratched his head behind his ears.

"It's going to feel strange not walking to school in the morning," Anna said.

"You'll still have to walk down the stairs to the basement!" Katy replied. Anna didn't think her joke was very funny.

"Ha, ha," she said sarcastically. "It's going to be so weird having Mom as the teacher all day."

"It will be kind of strange, but I think I'm excited. No more glue spitting or fire drills or waiting in long lines."

Their dad opened the back door and headed toward the garbage cans at the back of the garage.

"Hi, Dad!" Anna and Katy called out, surprised it was already time for him to be home from work. Dad carried a white cardboard box to the trash can they used for recycling.

"Dad, wait!" Katy called as she ran over to him. "May I have that box, please? I've been wanting one about that size."

"Sure, Honey," Dad said as he handed her the box.

Katy looked at the printing on the top. "Educational Supply Store," she read out loud. "What came in this?" Dad said it was Seth's math book and some flash cards for her. Katy felt a flutter in her stomach. At first she

wasn't sure if it was a nervous feeling or an excited one. She decided it was some of both.

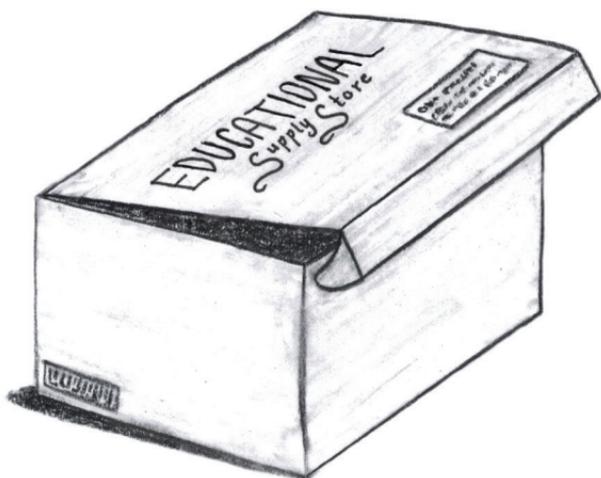
Anna followed Dad back inside. Katy sat down in the grass with her empty box, thinking. Anna soon poked her head outside and told Katy it was time to eat. Katy took the box to her room and laid it on the bottom bunk. Her project would have to wait until later.

While the Porters ate their chicken casserole, Mom talked about her plans for their first day of school. She had set up a desk for each of her students in the den and she and Anna had decorated the bulletin board together. Seth's math book and Katy's flash cards were the last of the materials she had ordered for the first semester. She was glad they had arrived in time.

After Katy helped clean up the kitchen, she hurried to her room. She was glad Anna wanted to read on the couch. There were nice things about sharing a room with her sister, but sometimes Katy liked to do things by herself.

"Okay, Sugar Plum," Katy said to the rag doll on her bed. Sometimes she talked to her doll like a friend just for fun. "This box is perfect. I've been wanting one just like it." Katy had seen an old movie a few months before

in which a little girl kept a cardboard box under her bed. The box contained the girl's most treasured possessions. Ever since she had seen the movie, Katy had thought about what she would put in a special box if she had one under her own bed. Now that the box was sitting in front of her, she had to rack her brain to come up with things to put in it.



She wanted the contents of the box to remind her of special events as well as everyday happenings. She imagined growing up and showing the box to her husband and children some day. She wondered what they would be interested in seeing. She thought about things her parents had shown her from their childhoods.

Katy liked to see the little stuffed panda her dad had loved when he was a boy. He had loved it until one button eye disappeared and the panda was dirty and floppy. Katy liked to think of what her dad must have been like as a little boy.

Mom always took special care of the little purple and white tea set that she kept on a shelf in her bedroom. Her grandmother had given it to her when she was little. Katy wanted to be able to show her own children things like that someday.

Katy treasured letters she received in the mail and notes people wrote to her. She liked to look back at drawings and paintings she did when she was younger and see how much her skills had improved.

Most of the photos in their house were in their family photo albums, but Katy had a few photos that were her own. One of her favorites was of Seth, Anna, and herself sitting with Irene in Irene's living room. Irene was their special friend from church who was like a grandmother to them.

Katy went to her dresser and opened the jewelry box on top. In the left compartment was a necklace with small white beads that spelled Katy's name. Katy had worn it

in a portrait session when she was four. Somehow it had become impossibly tangled, but Katy still kept it in her jewelry box because it was special. The necklace was the first thing Katy put in the cardboard box.

She found the picture with Irene and laid it in the box as well. On a shelf in her closet she found the first journal she ever kept. She put it in the box, along with a painting of a grassy field and a blue sky that was on another shelf in her closet. The painting was nothing grand, but Katy remembered how proud she had been

when she finished it a few years before.

In the bottom of Katy's closet was a basket of old toys. She found the little doll with the pink lacy dress her grandparents gave her when she was three. One of the doll's eyes was missing like her dad's panda. Katy always found it odd that the doll had blue hair. She never played with the little doll anymore, but it



was special because her grandparents had given it to her. Katy put the doll in the box on her bed.

Katy also put in a heart-shaped rock she had found at the ocean when she was six and the pink hairbow that matched a dress her mom had made for her. The dress was too small now. The last thing she put inside was an acorn that had been on her dresser since the previous fall when she and Anna had gathered acorns together at their neighbor's house down the street.

Katy looked in her box. There wasn't anything especially beautiful. She knew what she had chosen would not look significant to anyone else, but everything was special to her. The box looked rather empty, but Katy wanted to leave plenty of room, so she was satisfied.

"I'll let that be all for now," Katy said to Sugar Plum. There were two big drawers under the white wooden bunk bed in Anna and Katy's room. Katy pulled out the drawer that was hers and moved things around until she had room for her box in the corner. She pushed the drawer back under the bed with her feet. She hoped at least one special thing would happen during their first year of homeschooling that would give her something else to put in her box.

Author's Note

The story of Katy is based on memories of my own childhood. Most of the events that Seth, Anna, and Katy experienced in their first year of homeschooling are closely based on experiences my brother John, my sister Bethany, and I experienced throughout our years of homeschooling together. My family started out homeschooling the hard way, trying to make school like the public school we had known before. It took several years for us to figure out how to relax and let homeschooling be a lifestyle, but we got there eventually. I am thankful that my parents, Ray and Charlene Notgrass, made the decision and the sacrifices to homeschool us. I had a great childhood, and I feel richly blessed.

Now I'm a homeschool mom myself. I am excited to be making memories with my husband and children as we enjoy our own homeschooling adventure.

Wherever your homeschool adventure takes you, just make sure you enjoy the ride!

Mary Evelyn



Also available from
Notgrass History:

Katy

Katy Porter is enjoying her summer break from school, climbing trees, playing with her sister, and riding bikes with her brother. One day her parents tell her they are thinking about homeschooling in the fall. Katy likes being an average girl. Will being homeschooled make her too different from everyone else? Is being different okay?

A pure story of strong character, simple faith,
and a loving family.

