

How (not) to catch a snowflake

I do not have a science background. However, I do have a childish sense of wonder, one of the secrets of happiness I explored last spring. It was that quizzical side of me that took over as I gazed out my kitchen window at the biggest snowflakes I had ever seen. I just had to get my hands on one. To touch it. To examine it up close. To have possession over something so fleeting, even just for a moment.

But how?

As I already mentioned, I'm not a scientist and overall find myself lacking in common sense. Still I remembered hearing when I was a child that you could use black construction paper and a magnifying glass to see the tiny crystals that make up each snowflake. I bolted to find the materials before the snowflakes disappeared.

"Black construction paper should be easy to find," I thought. You can't color on it, so there's always plenty left over. I tore into my bin of school supplies, finding a number of items I'd been looking for (ahem, stapler), but no black construction paper.

As I turned around to look in the toy room for said paper, I passed Frank's tiny black T-shirt. I decided it would work. I continued to the toy room to find Collin's magnifying glass.

"What are you doing?" he asked, puzzled by my apparent hurry.

"I'm looking for your magnifying glass. I want to show you something cool," I explained.

"Oh," he said, returning to his silly putty.

After sifting through a pool of action figures and toy cars, I decided to use my magnifying light up mirror instead.

I unplugged the mirror, set it down on the washer, plugged it in, turned it on, and shuddered at the sight of my pores and wrinkles magnified 5x.

"Collin!" I called, thrusting open the back door. "Come here! I want to show you something."

"Not right now," he said.

"Aw, come on - it will only take a second."

His feet shuffled past our wall of coats, hats, and boots. He seemed surprised to see the mirror on the washer.

"You wanna see a snowflake up close?" I asked him.

He pretended to be interested.

I threw on my sneakers and barreled through the back door, T-shirt in hand. I held the shirt like a cookie tray and waved it from left to right, filling the shirt with flakes from the size of a tic-tac to the size of a silver dollar. I noticed that when the biggest

flakes hit they were actually clusters, which crumbled into specks that melted upon contact.

When I was satisfied with the number of flakes I'd gathered, I brought the shirt in for Collin to hold while I tilted the mirror. I'd expected to see crystals that looked like the snowflakes kids made by cutting paper. Instead I saw specks of white "lint" on a shirt growing wet and a bored, disappointed boy.

"I'm outta here," Collin said, sounding more like a 14-year-old than a 4-year-old.

Defeated, I headed to the kitchen to clean up breakfast dishes while I admired the snowfall from afar. Just then, out of the corner of my eye, I spotted Collin's magnifying glass between the piano and the table in the dining room. I picked it up and turned to find sheet music just beyond the magnifying glass. It was for "Falling Slowly," and about half of the cover was solid black. "It just might work," I thought.



I rushed to the front door, telling Collin to join me just one more time. We stood in the foyer as I prepared a paper "cookie tray" and handed him the magnifying glass.

Without taking a couple of seconds to put on a coat, I barged onto the front porch, pushing the sheet music out beyond the overhang.

I brought it back inside and quickly grabbed the magnifying glass from Collin. It was a little scratchy, but I could make out a couple of delicate crystals. "Look, Collin! Look at the crystals! Do you see them?" I asked, as I tried to point out the rapidly disintegrating fruit of my conquest.

"I'm outta here," he said. But this time I didn't feel defeated.

In my winter's morning journey, I desperately wanted to possess something that I didn't have the resources for. I wanted someone else to join me, but I couldn't make him interested. When I finally did capture my desired prize, it didn't last long.

Sound familiar? Life is like that. We're on this quest and the prizes we seek are often so far out of our reach because we don't have the right tools, or the right people, or enough time. But, maybe we're not packing right.

If I had taken the time to research snowflake capture, I would have found this awesome experiment. Then, I could have purchased and gathered the necessary materials into a "snowflake catching kit," ready for whenever the big flakes fall. If I was better planned or had asked him at a better time, maybe Collin would have been more interested. Or maybe I could have entertained Frank or Leo, instead.

As for time, snowflakes have a short life span. And so do we. So we should make use of it wisely. Even if that means you find yourself catching snowflakes.