

# **BITS AND PIECES: MEMORIES OF LOVE PACKING UP THE "STUFF"**

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I hate what I have to do now -- tearing apart a house, a life. Taking apart each tiny bit, each small piece of someone's life. Separately, everything just looks old and tired and worn, more like the reality of life than the fantasy that we hope memory will preserve. Together, these bits and pieces made up a lifetime, but alone, sorted into piles on the bare floor, they only look used and empty.

Each one comes, quietly, some with tears, some with stony faces, to pick over the bits and pieces. Each looking for something, some small something that will bridge yesterday with tomorrow and ease the hurt that is today.



Some find a moment of happiness, or a smile dances (oh so briefly!) across a tear stained face as these bits and pieces turn back the clock and once again life becomes good and whole and magical. A story is remembered. A joke retold. A laugh bubbles past the tears, and for a few moments, we are suspended in memory. Yesterdays can be painful or joyful.

These bits and pieces bring both to us in a single thought. For just as the joy reaches my heart, so too does the emptiness, and, once again, the weight of what we are doing descends upon our shoulders.

Packing up a lifetime is a hard thing to do. Packing up part of your lifetime is even harder, and packing up yesterday reminds us of how fragile

tomorrow really is. The bits and pieces of our lives will, one day, be reduced to neat piles on the polished floor ... waiting for someone to claim them or toss them.

What will they choose of me? Will someone remember my hat collection or my rose colored glasses? Will anyone want my magic wand or my books? What about my jewelry, my pots and pans, my neatly kept records, my underwear? Will anyone ask for my diaries, my journals, my recipes? Will someone cherish my stuffed animals as much as I do? Will the things that spoke of me be tossed or treasured?



The rows of boxes, now sealed against dust and time, speak of too many moves, too many new places, too few familiar ones. You would think we would be used to moving. But every time we move, we have to toss and tear, clean and clear, make ourselves a little bit smaller, a little lighter, a little less complicated. And when the final move arrives, it will be someone else who does the last sorting of everything we believed ourselves to be.

Death is perhaps the easier part of this last move. I don't know. I only know that this sorting and packing, tossing and trashing, is a cruel finale to a life well lived and loved. It is **HARD** to box up a lifetime of love.

Some of us have lots of love to package while others have so little that perhaps having less to do in this final forum is the most painful. As each bit and piece is picked up, turned, dusted and then cast either to the "Keep" or "Toss" box, thousands of memories tickle the heart. There are good memories, **GRAND** memories, awful memories, painful ones and scary ones. But perhaps the most difficult to deal with are the empty ones. For some, there are so few memories that the final disposition of property and

assets takes only a matter of moments ... a final turn of the head towards nothingness and it is finished.

For me, however, this final act of goodbye is the most painful journey I have taken. I guess I'm a ship without a compass, a gypsy without a home. It came so slowly and ended so quickly. I wasn't even there, and yet I was. Even though the goodbye had been rehearsed a thousand times before, the pain is still sharp, the silence still deep.

The emptiness is big. Now it is finished, and there will be no one left to say goodbye or hello. No more early Sunday morning phone calls to check up on how our week has been. No more eating Brussels sprouts or early peas. There won't be any more stories about how Great Great (and 3 more Greats!) Grandfather settled the West, crossing the wildness and the prairies with his trusted companions, the grandchildren: the **LITTLE BOY WHO LIVED WITH HIS GRANDFATHER IN THE CAVE WITH THE HORSE AND THE PIG**, the **LITTLE BOY WHO LIVED UNDER THE FENCE POST**, the **LITTLE BEBBLEBERRY GIRL** and the **LITTLE BOY WHO SOLD MUSHROOMS**. (Our Dad told wonderful but complicated stories!)

Gone are the countless trips to the kitchen for "night water" as well as the last minute "Check under the bed, please" requests in an attempt to stall the coming of night for a few more minutes.

Packed away in the boxes are the rocks we gathered on Saturday hikes and the arrowheads we found. Boxed too are the scrapbooks so carefully kept: our family history in faded photographs. Wrapped carefully against time are the quilts, the blankets, the cross stitch pictures, the handmade Christmas stockings, the matching, knitted, ski caps that sent us laughing across the snows one long ago holiday season. There are a few crumpled

finger paintings, one or two terrible pieces of child poetry and more than a few wilted Valentines stashed in one box, waiting for me to carry it to my home.

Perhaps there is an end some day, but as long as I have these few trinkets that speak of the treasured moments and memories of my life, I shall forever speak of the love that was given and received in my lifetime.

These trinkets (trash to some, treasures to others) are the reminders of one's life. We each have come to sift through the rooms, open the drawers and linger over the bookshelves, looking for some way to hold back the goodbyes.

Goodbye? You want me to say GOODBYE? I wasn't through saying HELLO!

It is perhaps not so much saying goodbye to someone as it is saying goodbye to the life we shared, to the things we did, to the moments when time stopped and we played, innocently, in the light. We can, I suppose, learn to bid farewell to those activities, but never will I say goodbye to the love and lives of those I cherish.

We are a part of each other, threads in our fabric, memories in the mind, whispers in the heart. We will always remember our past, but how we carry those memories is up to us. We can create a pedestal for them or bury them deep. It matters little which trinket we carry, for we carry it all ... the burdens and the gifts of the lives who touched ours in very special ways. We cannot escape the heritage we bear, but we can learn to hold it in ways that bring peace and comfort rather than fear and sorrow.

What will you remember of me? Will it be the same as I remember of you? Will you remember my laugh or my tears? My joy or my anger? Will you write a tribute to my love or a scandal of my failings? What will

someone remember of you? Time can ease the painful parts, but nothing erases the empty spaces. Live NOW as you dream of ... for there is no tomorrow that is worth losing today.

Don't wait until someone has to pack up your life to wish you had lived it differently. It was a lesson hard learned, but one I cannot forget as I box up the lifetime that was mine and carry it to the attic.

It is our daily task to create a safe harbor for ourselves and our loved ones, where peace and warmth and love and caring are the treasures we shall



bring with us into today. Whatever your memories are, however you have stashed them in your being, remember you can create new ones anytime you wish. You merely have to begin, and that journey begins with a simple HELLO.

Perhaps life does require a goodbye or two, but I like to think there are more hellos than goodbyes; and I think there are, if only we will look! The hellos are right here, in the bits and pieces that lie scattered on the bed and in the dresser drawers. Goodbye? Yes, it is goodbye to the *way* we love each other, but never to the love we share. I can no longer hug you or blow you a kiss across the room, but always, always, I can love you. Whether it is wearing your ring or singing your favorite song, I will remember. You are a part of my life, a moment of magic that still sings in the quiet spaces of my heart.

What will I choose, out of all these trinkets and gadgets and boxes of boxes of treasured trash? I choose it all. I claim it all as mine, the good, the sad, the difficult, the painful, the magical. I cannot choose a single piece, for it is the tapestry that it all weaves that is my life. You simply are and

forever will be, a part of who I am. I choose which part and place you occupy, but always you are with me.

Thank you for giving me life. It hasn't always been the best gift I could dream of, but it has never been boring! You gave me life, and I cherish the part you walked with me. My footsteps are my own, but I know you are beside me.

Mom, I've got on clean underwear and Dad, I filled the gas tank! Honey, I'm on my way, alone now, but never without your love to hold me in the night, to guide me in the light.

Time and space are meaningless to us. The bonds between us are too strong to let GOODBYE cut the ties. Thank you, God, for the moments we traveled together as a family. Our arms may be empty, but the boxes are full and so is the heart. It began with a HELLO and so it shall begin again, with another HELLO.

Sweetie, give "Big A" a hug, please and tell Mom I've finally got the meatloaf right. Darling daughter, I've bronzed your soccer shoes and Son, thanks for the big screen TV. Dad, your chair looks great in the den, and your hand is still in mine.

Thanks for the life we shared. I'm glad we spent it together. I love you.

