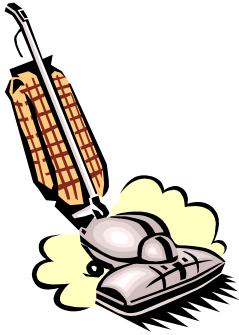


We'll Have to Keep It!

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It's Spring and time again, in our family, for the annual TRASH OR TREASURE DAY. That's the day when we all gather to sift and sort, clean and clear, not only the closets, but the attic as well. Being a military family for 28 years, you would think there would be very little to argue about, but like most families, we do have a number of "pack rats" who share the same last name. Those of us who are "neatnicks" look forward to T or T Day while others face this spring day with dread. It is a time of cleansing the spirit as well as the closets.

What are we going to do with Grandpa's shoes? They're black and shiny and he hardly ever wore them. But the last time he wore them was to walk one of us down the aisle. We can't get rid of them. We'll have to keep them!

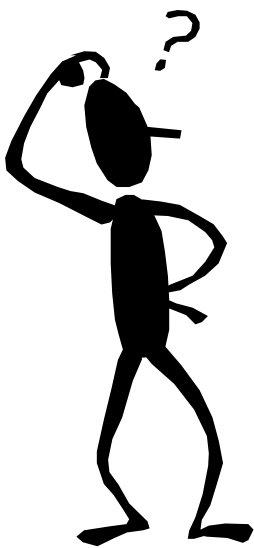
What are we going to do with Grandma's purse? It's pink and purple with lots of flowers and there is an old hankie in the bottom and she hardly ever carried it. But the last time she carried it was to visit one of us. We can't get rid of it. We'll have to keep it!

What are we going to do with Uncle's fishing pole? He hardly ever caught anything, but the last time he used it, we were with him and he caught 2 tiny trout. We can't get rid of that. We'll have to keep it.

What are we going to do with Auntie's hat? It's big and straw and really ugly and she always wore it. The last time she wore it was at Uncle's funeral and we were all there and she hugged us and told us stories of better times. We can't get rid of that. We'll have to keep it.

What are we going to do with Brother's bowling trophy? The one he made into a lamp? He hardly ever turned it on, but he was so proud of it and the last time we saw it, he had just dusted it. We can't get rid of it. We'll have to keep it.

What are we going to do with the dog's collar? It's red and frayed and most of the rhinestones are missing. He always had it on. The last time he wore it was when he went to sleep and never woke up. We can't get rid of that. We'll have to keep it.



What are we going to do with the old holiday decorations? They're faded, some are broken, and some we can't even remember what holiday they represented! There are plastic eggs that were filled with jelly beans or pennies. There's a box of tree ornaments and another box of lights, the kind that bubble. There's a bag of tinsel and another one of wrapping paper and bows. There's a big star, a giant leprechaun poster, 2 ceramic jack-o-lanterns and a huge rubber spider.

There's a can of "snow" to spray on wreaths and some paper chains and lots of old greeting cards. There are bits and pieces of ceramic figurines and a pretty tablecloth with gravy stains on the end where DAD used to sit. We can't get rid of those things. We'll have to keep it all.

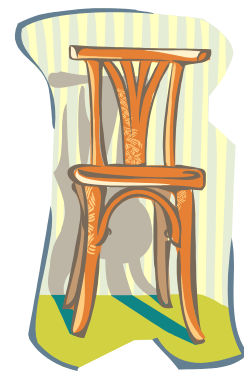
What are we going to do with the scrapbooks? They are old and heavy and missing some pages. Some of the pictures are so faded you can't tell what they are anymore. There is a page of matchbook covers and one of theater tickets. There are pictures of all of us and some we don't even know. They are our history and we can't get rid of that. We'll have to keep all of them!

What are we going to do with the letters? Tied with frayed ribbons, they tell of someone's thoughts and feelings, one's passions and fears. They are our link to yesterday and we can't get rid of that. We'll have to keep them.

What are we going to do with the records and all of the books? Some have never been played or read, while others are so worn you know the owner must have truly loved and enjoyed them. We can't get rid of those things. We'll have to keep them all.

What are we going to do with the quilt and the shawl and the afghan? They are faded with use, but so perfectly made that time has simply softened them and infused them with memories of those who used them before us. We can't get rid of those things. We'll have to keep them!

What are we going to do with the empty chair at the table? It has never been vacant before, but now it echoes our hurt and loneliness. It symbolizes our grief and reminds us of our emptiness. The last time it was filled, it was such a happy time and we can't help but remember the joy that spread across that table when all the chairs were filled. We can't get rid of that chair. We'll have to keep it!



We were trying to clear away a few things in order to make room for some other things, but instead of clearing a path, we've ADDED to our closets and to our memory banks. Now we have MORE stuff to think about, more stuff to store, more things to sort, more stories to tell, more memories to share.

What are we going to do with everything we've found that we thought we had lost? We're running out of room and it sometimes hurts so much to keep looking at the past. We want to clear away the past so we can find the future. But we keep finding little things that speak of the love we shared and we can't get rid of that. "We'll have to keep it" has become my new motto.

We'll have to keep it! Yes, we'll have to keep it, whatever it is because it has a story to tell and a gift to give. We'll wrap all this stuff up in pretty paper, stick lots of bows on it and celebrate this season by sharing reminders of the joy

that once lit up our lives. And as we uncover these bits and pieces of our family's history, we will strengthen the family ties that bind us in love across the years.

We do not lose those we love. They die, but the love we share can never be destroyed or lost. Our loved ones are still and always will be a part of us. We cannot lose their love.

"WE'LL HAVE TO KEEP IT" has become our family slogan. We will have to get a bigger house and begin to use a catalog system soon, but oh the joy we've rediscovered as we begin to remember the life, not just the death.

May you find a few treasures of your own as you sift and sort through life.



May you find the gifts of JOY and REMEMBRANCE that come with LOVE GIVEN AND RECEIVED. These are the treasures of your life. May you rediscover them again and again!