

Things In Motion

All is change; all yields its place and goes.
—Euripides (485?-406BC)

A difficult job that someone must do

Of times when a person dies, it is left to one or more family members to dispose of a house full of personal belongings of the deceased. This can be a heart-breaking project, especially if the tie between the responsible one and the deceased was close. It fell my sad lot to do just this on the death of my sister.

I recall sitting at her kitchen table drinking coffee a few years before her passing. She was then sorting documents to file, and she commented that someday, it would fall to someone to go thru all the “stuff” she had kept over the years and throw it away. Now I was doing exactly that. There was a file cabinet with neatly arranged bank statements and canceled checks extending back for four decades; paid bills for at least half that time and various memos and letters pertaining to matters long forgotten. Now and

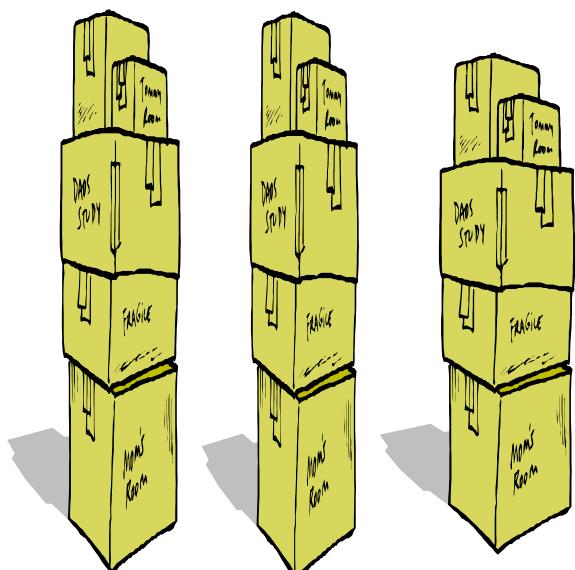
then a personal letter or greeting card had been saved, sometimes with a photo included. Over the years four photo albums had been filled, carefully noted with names and dates—something my routine sadly did not include. I debated sharing these photos, but in the end I kept them and spent several hours re-living the events they recorded—after all, my own son could review them at my passing, and distribute them as he chose. This dodge is known as “passing the buck.”

Jewelry that would normally be passed on to a mother's children still sits in my own small chest of keepsakes—my sister had no children. That realization opened the gates to a flood of memories; I cannot remember a Christmas without my sister being a large part of it—how poignant to think of the sadness she must have felt during holiday times—and I deeply regretted that I never held her hand and thanked her for all that she had meant to me—a lesson too late for the learning.

More practical treasures were her “good” china and silverware, long saved and used only for the most important occasions. Also her collection of exquisite glass and crystal collectibles, kept in her China Closet for most of her married life, each piece came with its own story, many of them gifts from friends and family now passed on; priceless objects.

Among a few surprises I found were several 45RPM records that I had allowed my sister to borrow from me some thirty-five years prior. I was convinced at the time that she would never listen to my records, and from their pristine condition, it appeared that she never did. Wanting to share my enthusiasm for something was one of the things that endeared her to me; although I fully understood that her desire to share my life was more to show approval than to actually participate.

It was easy to pass most of her apparel on to friends and a few family members who knew her wardrobe and had favorites from the clothes she loved to wear. As the administrator of her estate, I decided to offer her house for sale as a furnished property, so kitchen utensils, most furniture, and linens would go with the house. There was only one more challenge—the garage!



Over the years, my sister's garage was used for everything but a garage. There was a large room, an attic, and covered parking for the car, although the riding lawn mower usually got the preference for a protected shelter. The storage room was used to store home-canned jars of pickles, jellies, and jams. Also paint, spare shingles of roofing, spare tiles, lawn tools, fertilizer, spare tires, extra bricks, empty jars and bottles, clothes to be donated, two old radios from the 1940s, baskets of potatoes and onions, an assortment of pots, pans, and buckets and last but not least, my sister's old cedar chest. It had been filled with old clothing for many years; it was huge, ungainly, battered and in need of refinishing. It would go with the house. I enlisted the aid of two neighbors who quickly put everything to good use and in just two days the garage was a neat and empty place. Looking back to that time, I feel a certain regret that it was my hand which disposed of my sister's history. I console myself that such is the common fate of all and that my love for her lives on forever.

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