

A Gift From Mother

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With dread, I anticipated the full blast of dry, body-baking heat in the attic. Already I felt it escaping down the stairway as I climbed the narrow steps. July 1980 was unusually hot in the small West Texas town of Anson.

Slitting the strapping tape on the first dusty box, I remembered the day I packed, labeled and stored the boxes in this attic on a cold, snowy day in 1968. Mother had died a few weeks previously and her house needed to be emptied because the new owners wanted to move in immediately. I gave the tools, furniture and furnishings, and clothing to the appropriate persons to be cherished and enjoyed, or maybe not, as they chose. The remaining items had no monetary value, yet Mother considered them her most treasured keepsakes.

I packed quickly on that long-ago sad day, only glancing at the diaries, birthday and Mother's Day cards, letters, telegrams, newspaper clippings, delicate handkerchiefs and gloves. Mother considered herself not properly dressed unless she wore a hat and gloves and carried a hanky in her purse. Struggling with tears, I put all her treasures away out of sight.

Now my three nieces planned to arrive soon for a visit and I wanted to share Mother's treasures with them. With their father dead, I would share his keepsakes equally among his children. At last, after all these years, I felt emotionally strong enough to

grandchildren never forget." Andy Rooney ~S~ "A grandma's name

examine each item and read each word of correspondence. Many of the cards, letters and clippings pertained to my nieces' families. I knew each one would find special pleasure in reading them, and in having some of Grandmother's gloves and handkerchiefs.

Parting the cardboard flaps, I reached for the first tissue-paper-wrapped object, and memories rushed to my mind for I held a pair of barber's scissors. The eight-inch blades were still the same cold, blue-black steel but Mother's fingers had worn away most of the shiny coating on the handles. By angling them to the light, I read "Simmons-Howe Co., Inc – Germany."

Recalling with clarity how Mother valued her special scissors, a longing for days past washed over me. Mother often said, with great pride, "Child, these scissors were a free gift when your daddy and I purchased a Home Comfort Range in 1928. I loved the stove, too, but it had a steep price tag."

Sitting on the floor among the boxes, I clearly saw Mother on Saturday evenings cutting Dad's hair, my brother's hair, giving haircuts to the seasonal hired hands, neighbors and anyone else who asked for cuts or trims. Several had beards and she shaped them, too. My nieces and I wore Buster Brown haircuts with bangs straight across the forehead, and Mother fretted that the bangs grew too fast even though she cut them short.

"I'm surprised you don't bump into the furniture," she commented. "I know you can't see where you're going."

One day when I was about 10 years old, the nieces' fast-growing hair and Mother's special scissors combined to cause me to get a spanking. Often I carefully observed Mother as she cut my nieces' hair. Confident I knew just how to do it, I draped an old sheet over each niece's shoulders in turn by age, and cut everyone's bangs off at the hairline, thus saving Mother a lot of time and trouble. For some reason, Mother did not appreciate

this act of kindness. In fact she promptly went into what can only be described as a “hissy fit.”

Another vivid memory was the day Mother caught me using the scissors to cut out paper dolls. She delivered a long lecture about how cutting paper dulled the blades and we must never ever use the hair-cutting scissors to cut paper.

Occasionally, the scissors appeared lost and no one could rest until they were found. She always sent me out to the porch to look, in case I had sneaked them out to cut paper dolls again. We all swore our innocence and, thankfully, each time the scissors were found again.

Mother spent her last few years as an Alzheimer’s patient. As the disease advanced, she lost the ability to speak sentences. She no longer remembered nouns. Even though she could not converse with anyone, she still asked for her scissors by opening and closing two fingers in a snipping motion.

Recovering from my reveries, I unpacked all the boxes, making a stack of memories for each of my nieces and one for myself. I tried to return each item to the rightful giver and divide all the treasures equally. Guess which of the four stacks received the scissors?

Yes, I still have them. Mother’s cherished barber scissors received many years of use, and I learned to cut hair quite well, because I had three little girls of my own, whose bangs grew very fast.

Memorial Day

Sharon Fish Mooney

*for Thomas Lewis Fish,
1908-1985*

A plumber and a carpenter by trade,
you fixed old ladies' toilets in our town,
hammered together boards to fill our home
with shelves and chairs and tables square and round.
You never talked much to your wife, or me,
your daughter, who grew up an only child.
I used to marvel at your silent world
until the day I found the letters piled
away inside the cedar chest upstairs;
letters from army bases in the States,
others from London, England, Paris, France.
Your other life I now appreciate
as I begin to read between the lines,
interpret actions influenced by that war,
remembering now on each Memorial Day
the flag you carried, purple heart you wore.
You marched in the parade route on our street,
shared memories with others of like mind
who fought in battles that I never knew
existed, yet for you those ties that bind
us to the ages past were true and strong.

correcting them often takes more energy than I have left." Gene Per-

I read your letters over just once more
and look between the lines into your heart,
catch glimpses of the gentle man you were.

The Linen Press

Becky Haigler

A tall pine cupboard with smooth-sanded doors
Holds my grandmother's dowry of linens:
Shelf upon shelf of crisp, white fabrics,
Starched and ironed;
Folded with love, precision, and tissue paper.

Fancywork of lace, cutwork and appliqué
Fashioned by caring hearts and hands.
Years of lady-like pastime
Stitched and snipped
By circles of women enweaving their dreams.

Creases, threadbare from years of folding,
Mark tea-stained tablecloths and cuptowels,
Tear-stained pillowslips and blood-stained sheets;
Scrubbed and bleached
Till only the stain of memory remains.

Prayer and Pie

Carrie McClure

The soft folds in grandmother's face
look like the dough she kneads
with strong, floured hands. I watch
eagerly, my thin frame pressed
against the counter; silent, while she
forms the gooey mound into fine crust.
As she shapes it, she mumbles quiet
prayers. In the mixture I catch
the mention of my name. It is good
and sweet, like the rich custard
she pours into the perfect shell.

Quiet Song

Margaret Gish Miller

mother and daughter
still estranged
back to back
silent accordions

for long periods, which is why most grandparents flee to 'Florida.'

The Quiet Man

Peter Goodwin

She cherished the memory
of her gentle father,
 who would never argue
 with her mercurial mother.

He was a quiet man
reluctantly putting on his hat
 and going for a walk
 until his wife calmed down

She never mentioned
the time he put on his hat
 went for a walk
 and never returned.

Will and Testament

Ann Howells

You sit at the kitchen table, deep
in some new novel you've discovered.

I contemplate mortality. Will leave
to you my walnut chair, rockers chamfered
with lullabies and time. Diamond lavalier
passed down and down and down
this matriarchal line. And, rosebud china,
one cup chipped, carried from New York
by horse and wagon two hundred years ago.
These things are your heritage, but
I long to leave you something
more useful. You, with your predilection
for weather. You, who conjure thunder
and ice. I leave what we've shared: egrets
dazzling overhead like whispered prayer,
sunsets framed in the kitchen window,
frogs that chant through sleepless nights.

You sweep hair from your cheek,
an unconscious gesture, and I smile.