

Late September 2010

Dear friends,

We received two boxes yesterday filled with beautiful things that belonged to members of our family - our third set of parents (by choice), who are no longer with us. Within the boxes were pieces of Roger and Virginia's lives that we were given to remember them by.

When we were back in Connecticut to visit this summer, walking through their mostly empty house was such a concrete reminder that they were gone. My "second" sister (also by choice) was so open-hearted in understanding that their things had an energy that kept them present for us. So at her offer to take what we wanted, I tried to pick carefully. It was hard to choose... But the things that arrived yesterday in the boxes were amazing. Each piece had a story for me... I could see and feel the whole family together and all the energy that emerged from the bubble wrap was full of smiles.

So I've been wandering around my own house trying to figure out where these things belong. When I do this, unfortunately, I realize that almost everything we own has a history that matters to us and I am torn as to what to move or pack or give away. Some things are pieces we only use on special occasions - but they still bring warm memories by their very presence. However, I know it is time to rearrange things.

Our home is full of permanent reminders of people we have loved and lost as well as many wonderful places we have visited. We each have desks that belonged to our grandfathers. We have pieces of antique cut glass gifted to us by an aunt. We have on the wall the first piece of "serious" art we ever owned, bought as a gift from my parents when they saw how much we loved it. We have a modern glass collection, begun with a small heart bought in a gallery in Cambria and now grown into a history of our various road trips and the galleries we have visited, from Cannon Beach, Oregon to Salida, Colorado.

We also have photographs - of our children, of places visited, of water in all its various forms (they are in the bathroom) and pictures in which we have integrated favorite prayers and sayings - to keep us on our spiritual toes. Our home is the story of our lives, both together and apart. It is a history that has blended together over the years we have shared as well as the history that once was ours alone but now belongs to the family we have created. And now, with both sadness and joy, we will integrate these new memories in with the old.

How to do it is the issue. Do we box up things that don't have power for us but are just "pretty"? Are we obligated to keep things out because someone else gifted it to us? Do we load up the guest room with the things we don't need to be in touch with on a daily basis? Does this dilemma really have to do with things or with the story behind them? I'm at a stage of life where there are more pains than gains. That's not a bad thing since I banked a whole lot of gains before this... In response, I have developed a gleeful and

powerful urge to turn my back on things that make me sad, or angry, or anything that forces me in to a dark space. (This is going to tie in to the memory stuff in a second... hang on.) That means no "great books" or dark Swedish films or even television series that don't always have happy endings. I won't watch any movie with a dog in it and if there are children, nobody better get hurt...

Now I know this may seem a little idiosyncratic - but I now want my house to feel the same way. The darkness will not invade if I have anything to do about it.

I'm not being a Pollyanna... There is enough out there and within that I can't do anything about and it is often dark and painful. We lose friends and family... we watch people struggle with obstacles that appear without warning... There is enough that I have no control over... but our home... our stuff... even my hobbies... are all ways to make my "nest" a place of comfort. I can use the beauty that has been part of our lives and the lives of those we loved to remind us of the power of relationships. These concrete objects evoke the ephemeral... the gift is the memory.

So what does this have to do with you? This is to remind you that we all have choices. We have the choice to let the dark in and pull us down or we can turn our backs on the dark by doing what we can to bring in light. We can take a close look at what surrounds us on a daily basis and make it personal... make it welcoming... make it us. Each of us can take the walk around our living space and ask the questions about what each object does to bring us life.

I spend far more hours on my inner life than on my outer environment. But as I gently unwrapped a very old piece of red glass that once shone with beauty on a table 3000 miles away, my heart spilled over with love. It's time for me to reflect and remember. It's time to dive in to memories of those who were not only loved by us, but who also loved us. That's the real energy of these "things." They all are about love.

So, see what you've got. Touch it. Think of its origin and why you chose to bring it in to your home. Let these things tell the story of your life, or the lives of those you loved, and feel how embraced you really are. Gifts are so much more than the object... feel them.

Still dreaming of peace,

Barbara

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