

The Objects of Our Lives

Installment 7

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We say “things” are not important, it is the people and experiences of our lives that make it rich. But is that always true? This is the question we put to Guild writers, asking them to craft a story—fiction or nonfiction, prose or poetry—about an everyday object that represents an



Photo by Jim Tegman

important part of their life. The project was inspired by a *Harvard Gazette* essay by Leslie Jamison (read it [here](#)).

We are overjoyed by the number of writers who participated. Rather than creating one large document, we are serializing these pieces. Several pieces will be posted each week for our readers to savor and contemplate.

“The objects in this week’s exhibit speak to our love for the children in our lives.”

Maribeth
RBWG Executive Director

Pink Plastic Gummy Shoes. 2000. Kathryn Racette.



My daughter walked into my life in these shoes, these shoes and a flimsy, yellow pajama suit zippered up the front. *Family Number Three!* the Chinese adoption facilitator called across the throng of prospective parents clustering in the sunlit hallway around his hotel room door. My heart bursting, my husband close behind, I pressed my way through Families 4 to 14 and a tearful young woman thrust a terrified toddler into my arms. *Mama! Mama!* The woman insisted into the ear of the sweaty, squalling two-year old, as if her words alone could make it so.

Twenty years later, these shoes still have the power to transport me into the swirl of joy and anguish in that chaotic moment. I cherish that now. But that day, once the crowd had cleared and we could breathe again, once we were just three bewildered people learning to be a family, I could not wait to take those shoes off and shove them into the suitcase with the other souvenirs. That day, I was too new and insecure a mother to appreciate a grieving caretaker who had lovingly buckled pretty, pink sandals onto the tender feet of a tiny child who had likely never had new ones of her own. Too fragile, yet, in motherhood to consider a woman somewhere in China who had given birth to this beautiful, bright, and absolutely perfect child she would likely never know.

Spiderman Bathrobe. Circa 2003. Sherri Wright.

Bought at Nordstrom's when I lived in the city
kimono style ankle length burn out web design
on black velour satin on the sleeves
my grandson named it when he was in his
action hero phase with Hulk underwear
Superman pajamas Batman cape for Halloween

This morning sitting in the kitchen with my cat
waiting for the coffee to perk I see that the burn
out has taken over the thinning velour dog and cat hair
have woven into the hem the belt is knotted
and the neckline starting to fray what was
soft and velvety feels like a washed-out towel

I have other robes an old blue one a new one
but this one is light weight long enough
to keep my legs warm no zippers to catch no
buttons to lose it wraps and folds
around me when I watch TV or read in bed

Hanging on the first hook inside
my closet door this old black robe
is always the one I choose

My grandson is sixteen now too big
for action hero pajamas too tall
for the onesie I sewed him last year too old
to crawl into my bed and ask me to read
graphic novels classics or the series
we used to love snuggling giggling
begging for one more chapter
before I turned out the light

Tonight he calls goodnight Grammy
from the homework screen in his room

I read alone in my Spiderman robe



Wooden Mug Tree. Circa 1981. Renay Regardie.



The mug tree sits on my black granite kitchen counter, next to the state-of-the-art Cuisinart, across from the newly purchased Henckels top of the line knife set. Four cups dangle off its crooked pegs.

The tree is a bit worn. Several nails pop out, but maybe they always did. This woodworker was a novice. I see glue stains on one of the panels. While some of the edges are smooth, others are rough, indicating carelessness, or haste, or probably the best efforts of an artisan who'd never worked with a sander. There's a deep fissure, very visible, on one side near the lopsided top. Young hands shaky with a saw.

The mug tree has traveled a long road with me. While handsome pieces of furniture, eye catching art, my collection of masks and ashtrays have been left behind, this cup holder has moved from a townhouse in Chevy Chase, to a single-family home in Kalorama, to a condo in Georgetown, DC.

One of my sons made it at Camp Minnehaha almost forty years ago. Sure, I could buy a new, sleek, unblemished one. Why, here's a stainless-steel beauty, \$39.95 at Pottery Barn.

But I can't give this up. It was made by my son. But which son? Jon or Marc? After all these years, I can't remember who created it. It doesn't matter. It was made with love. The mug tree will stand, regal in the kitchen, a testament to family.

Picture Frame Coaster Set. 2002. Sarah Barnett.

Long ago a friend gave me a housewarming gift: four coasters in the form of plexiglass picture frames. Lovely idea, but where would I find photos to fit the skimpy 2"x2" display space? My grandchildren were eight and five then, so I had plenty of 4"x6" snapshots. Which pictures could survive drastic downsizing to become eye-catching miniatures?

I snipped away grass, sea and sky to arrive at: my dignified dog Nellie, a pensive portrait of grandson Andrew plus a rear view of him gazing at the ocean, and a joyous close-up of my granddaughter Rachel.

Though my grandchildren are adults and Nellie is long gone, I've never updated the photos.



Piled in their case, the handy coasters sit on an end table in my current home, where Rachel, now 23, visited a few months ago. As we chatted in the living room, she fiddled with the coasters. "Remember when I used to visit you when I was younger?" Her smile matched her photo as she held up "her" coaster. "I always fixed them to make sure my picture was on top."

"Really?" We laughed at the image of her younger self eclipsing her older brother's photo with her own.

A second child myself, I recognized her need to be first. Now, the sight of the coasters conjures a vision of Rachel at six or seven, surreptitiously securing her place in my heart.

Back then, the coasters were simply useful accessories. Now they're a story I won't forget.

Toy Dog with Red Cape. Circa 2001. Maribeth Fischer.



When I visited Wisconsin from Delaware, my nephew Sam woke me by announcing how many days we had until I'd leave. "Five Days!" he'd shout gleefully. "Four!" On the last day, shoulders hunched like an old man, he'd say, "Only one day left." His chin quivered. It broke something in me every time.

I always scheduled my return flights early, before Sam woke. He never saw me leave. I never had to see him see me leave. On our last night, as I tucked him in, he'd nod to his stuffed dog Romper, and eyes bright, ask, "What do you think Romper's going to do?"

"He better not try anything funny!" I'd say.

For years, Sam and I had a story about how Romper would sneak into my suitcase to come home with me, and the pilot would "catch him" and throw him from the plane just as it passed over Sam's house. And so part of my leaving entailed placing Romper in a tree, a bush, the mailbox for Sam to find. Sometimes I'd attach old luggage tags to Romper's neck. Later, staring from the airplane window, heading back to my quiet single life, I pictured Sam finding Romper, and laughing. It made going home bearable.

After Sam died, my sister gave me Romper. He's on a shelf in my clothes closet. I see him every day and imagine Sam threw him to me from wherever he is now.