

Passing the Stories On

Dear Homekeeper,

There are watershed events throughout our lives. Births, coming of age parties, spiritual awakening, graduations, marriage, career milestones, becoming parents (or grandparents!), relocations, health changes, retirement and, last but not least, loss or grief.

The other day was my oldest sister's birthday who has been deceased for 6 years. I don't always remember her on her day but I did this year. Then I began to think of others in my birth family who are no longer here and with a little effort I remembered their birthdays.

Memorial Day is coming up, a day set aside to honor those who lost their lives while defending their country. Memorial Day (first known as Decoration Day) originated after the Civil War. I'm reminded of the sacrifices made by my military family members and honor them by flying flags on my house throughout the summer: Memorial Day, Flag Day, 4th of July to Labor Day. One of the quaintest things about this community is the small American flags our local scouts put at the residential yards each year. Fun to see the neighbors put the collection of flags accrued over the years.

Certain items, like my favorite recipes from my mom, an oil painting done by my father, my mom's mandolin, fishing excursions, childhood games played with my siblings, and even a whiff of cigar smoke evoke cherished memories. When I feel their loss a little more profoundly than usual or their birthday comes around, I try to commemorate them by

reliving a portion of the memory with grandchildren that never had a chance to know these family members. It could be doing a camping out trip, attending a favorite sporting event, visiting an art gallery, or participating in a charitable run (for me it is a walk) with proceeds to find a cure that took them too soon. Some homekeepers plant a perennial blooming bush or tree on their property in tribute to a loved one maybe because like me there is not a gravesite to visit to place a rock on the tombstone, or a flower on the grave.

These personal rituals of remembrance can be shared with others, fostering connection and preserving family history. On major holidays, our family dinners become more formal affairs where we share current and old stories and laughter, holding on to lasting memories together. We lingered at the table after eating the meal, telling more stories immediate ones and past ones with each other. We lingered at the table long after the meal to the point we were ready to dive in again for second helpings.

Why not separate those other significant days in our personal lives to celebrate their life with a remembrance to pass down?

One special recollection I have concerns the circle of life. My mother passed away in the month of February. I saw her last breath. Three months later, in early May, I saw the first breath of a newborn: (literally I was at the working end of things when that daughter gave birth to my granddaughter who turned to look toward me as she expelled her first breath.) It was so cathartic for me to experience these two moments as poignant reminders of the interconnectedness of life and the importance of cherishing each one.

As a homekeeper, I strive to keep these memories alive through meaningful rituals, storytelling, and preserving family heirlooms, even if my kids were not raised in the house, I live in now nor did the memory of my loved ones ever physically step foot in my current place. How do you intentionally preserve cherished memories in your homekeeping role?

Until next time, warmest regards. Cathenry.ch@gmail.com

P. S. Leftovers in their less visible form are called memories. Stored in the refrigerator (then known as an ice box) of the mind and the cupboard of the heart. ~Thomas Fuller, English churchman and historian (1608 – 1661)