

# Hoarder of Memories

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## Rings

I had worn the same two rings since 2018: one will be my wedding ring and the other I will likely never see again. One, my Granny's wedding ring; the other, a cheap ring that my best friend in high school, Myah, gifted me. My Granny's ring fits perfectly on my right ring finger; over the years creating a small bump on the inside of it, mutating over time to support the constant wear. A slight tan line can be seen upon the removal of the ring, but I only do so to shower or swim. It's both silver and gold (14 karat, according to the inside of the band) with three small diamonds embedded into the two eye shapes, and one star shape in the middle. It is a simple band that my Granny hated; her father-in-law purchased the cheapest rings he could find at a pawn shop (it was what one might call a shotgun wedding), and she had little to no say in it. Today, she wears my grandpa's version of the ring, and my grandpa doesn't wear one. I've always told her that I love the ring, and her response is always the same; "Well, I'm glad somebody does." If I get married, I will use this ring.

My other ring was a Christmas gift from Myah. Christmas is her favorite holiday, and she never missed an opportunity to give thoughtful gifts to her friends. Among a large basket filled with various yellow items (my favorite color) was a thin-wired, double-stoned ring from Pura Vida. The price tag on the back read \$10. Upon further research, I realized that the ring used to have a rose gold band. Towards the end of its life, it turned silver with wear and morphed into some oblong shape.

This ring used to sit on my right thumb. It served as a fidget toy of sorts for many years; I often would place the ring right at the knuckle, then bend my thumb hard until it eventually created two large grotesque calluses on this knuckle. They started small, but now when I show people the calluses, their reaction is always somewhere along the lines of, "Ew, what happened?"

I was raking leaves recently and the ring was lost among the damp clumps of warm-colored leaves; maybe on the ground, or maybe in a trash bag? I didn't look for it; it could have been anywhere, and it was starting to rain. I replaced it with a similar ring for fidgeting, but it turns my thumb green and means nothing to me.

## Kitchen Table

My kitchen table has been in my family for almost eight decades. My great-grandparents built a wooden kitchen table for their three-person family somewhere around the late 1940s/early 1950s. The table is small, only about four feet long and two feet wide with the leaf out. It's a warm tan-ish color made of

cherry wood. They used the table until my Granny eventually moved out to live with my grandpa when she then acquired the table. In the heat of the late 70s, my grandpa covered the tabletop in a deep maroon color, keeping the legs the original wood.

They used the table for many years, but after having three kids, they outgrew the table and had to replace it with a newer, larger version. Knowing my grandma, I'm sure she wasn't jumping at the idea of having to get something "new." The now-old table sat in a corner and was used as a place to store junk for decades. She is a real hoarder (the kind that finds six dead cats in her house upon an attempt to clean the mountains of junk), so it would have easily been a victim of the house had it not meant so much to her. It was later passed down to my dad when he moved out of their home, and it became the table I used in my childhood, too.

Once the table came into my dad's possession, he stripped the maroon paint from it, returning it to its original state. He painted the legs of the table an awful off-white cream color; almost restoring it to its former glory. When I was no more than 10, we painted little treasure chests for my American Girl Doll-themed birthday party. I chose hot pink and electric orange paint and my parents didn't protect the table. Now, I see it as a bit of a mistake on my parents' part. The stains from the acrylic paint never came off. You don't have to look close to see it, even today. It does bring back fond memories when I do see the stains, however stark they are against the original wood.

When I grew up a bit, in middle school, my parents traded the small shaky table for a much more sturdy, darker wooden table that towered over the old one. I have always been quite sentimental with objects, so I made it clear that I did not support this choice. I said this until I realized how nice the new table was, and begrudgingly allowed the old one to be put in the crawlspace for the next foreseeable future. My dad dismantled the old table, wrapped it in thick heavy plastic, and hid it away. Out of sight, out of mind. When I moved out after high school into my first apartment and was frantically searching for furniture, I inherited the table. In my entire 20 years of living at that house, I never even knew we had a crawl space until the table had to be excavated from under all of the dust.

It still has the awful cream-colored legs on it, but I figure it's my turn to make it the way I want it to be. Once I figure out how to strip it, we'll be in good shape until whoever I pass it down to makes a mess of it again. Stains of pink and orange paint still scatter across it from the birthday party painting disaster. If you look close enough, you can even see the maroon still lingering in some of the wood grain, my dad likes to point out. I like the imperfectness of it, though. It holds the history in its grain, and I much prefer that to a shiny new table.

## **Cork Board**

Larger items I've collected over the years landed on my corkboard. At my high school graduation open house, I asked everyone to write a piece of advice or

memory on a slip of paper for me to read throughout college. Some examples of the wisdom provided were, “Don’t be TO stupid” (grammar was certainly not a strength for him), or “I will forever remember our blue slushie dates. Also don’t overdose on something” or simply, “I am not one who should be giving advice”. Although not very helpful, I love to look at them when I’m feeling down, for a good laugh and a rush of forgotten memories.

Along with those are various Christmas cards from work, a few mini *Thinking of You* cards mailed to me by my grandma in South Carolina, Valentine’s Day cards, a ginkgo leaf (my favorite tree), a few fortunes from Panda Express, and the top of a donut box from when my current best friend, Karina, revealed to me that she was pregnant; *Do-nut be mad, You’ll be a great auntie! (Please don’t be mad)*. I wasn’t mad. There’s also a top of a box from when said best friend asked me to be her maid of honor, which my brother’s dog partially destroyed. Accompanying these is an old license plate that says *Spread a Little Sunshine!* with a smiling sun on one side, as well as a wonderful crochet piece that reads *I <3 BOOBS* purchased from the Indy Gay Market. Alongside these are 6 bumper stickers with various phrases like “Propagate Peace” and “Well-behaved Women Seldom Make History” and “Don’t Judge Me Because I Sin Differently Than You.”

Looking at the board every day allows the nostalgia to flood back in, and excites me for the future and the new memories that will come with it. All of these things certainly make moving to a different living situation a major pain every time, but the memories are priceless, so I do it with happiness.

## **Card Box**

I also collect cards from family and friends. They primarily consist of birthday, graduation, and Christmas cards. For the most part, they are all generic cards that one could purchase at a CVS or Walmart, but there are quite a few handmade ones as well. These are mostly created by my grandma, Mommom, who is now enjoying her retirement in South Carolina. Some are simply printed onto a sheet of paper, others are drawn on, and others are so well-made that they appear to be purchased cards, but they have my name printed on them.

Going back to read the cards again has made me realize how many people that have gifted me the cards are now gone, passed away or otherwise out of my life. I can recognize the age of some of the givers of the cards because of the shaky, uneven way they write my name, then the cursive of their name below is perfect. Every card has something special that shows the reason in which they are writing to me, or a signature unique to them. One from my step-grandpa writes, “In Loving Memory of Grandma Nelson.” My dad always writes something about him being “so proud” of me, while his brother and husband always sign, “Love, your favorite uncles.” The ones from Mommom are usually my favorite. If they aren’t made directly from her, she always writes a sweet inspirational note, or a corny joke like, “What did the green grape say to the purple one? *BREATHE! BREATHE!*” then follows it up with “I’m tellin’ ya – I’m funny city!” She always

signs the same way; xoxo with smiley faces in the o's.

Ones from Karina usually have some horrible stick figure drawing of us or my favorite band at the time within a cheesy card, with something like a frog in skydiving goggles with the phrase "Dream it. Do it. Ribbit." written on the outside. Behind Mommom, my work birthday cards are another solid favorite. The one I received for my 21st birthday has big and small cartoon mushrooms that originally said, "Dad, you're such a fungi!" but "Dad" has been crossed out and replaced with my name. I can't repeat a majority of the notes from my coworkers, but because this card was for my 21st birthday that I celebrated at the restaurant, most of them have something to do with "shots on me tonight!" (I got wasted off of three drinks and was home in bed by 9:00, so no shots were taken or purchased). When I see those cards, I can't stop the memories from flooding back in; both from the event that the card was for, or the person who gifted it to me. Thankfully, a majority of the people who have written to me are still here, but when they're gone, I'll always have something to remember them by.

## Memory Book

I am a hoarder of memories. Since I was 12, I have held on to every movie and concert ticket, polaroid, and park map from any point in my life that I felt was worth remembering. In middle school, my friend, Maria, gifted me a 5x7 photo album to hold pictures. The outside cover is black with cheesy emboldened words like *moments* and *laughter* and *family* written in gaudy white script. She added in a few old photos of us at the beginning; the first being a photo of us holding hands and walking at the Indianapolis Zoo on the bouncy bridge while we were on a field trip for a biology class. The rest are random selfies of us from about 8th-9th grade. I have filled the rest over the years, only never with more 5x7 pictures. Almost 10 years later, I finally filled it to its full capacity. My first one is full to the brim and it will not get even close to closing, so it usually lays flat on its back, pages fanning out unevenly.

Taller items such as playbills, park maps, and love letters from past relationships spill out of the top; bound by the plastic pages. They are accompanied by molded dried flowers, vending machine fortune cards, the clock out sheet from the first day of my first job, a tattoo stencil my artist drew after I told him I wanted "junkless angels" on my thighs and he drew a massive penis on it, old ID's, gum wrappers with little notes from my high school friends scribbled on them, my first (and only) lottery ticket, the teal Good Dye Young box from the first time I dyed my hair, my cat's umbilical cord (don't ask), a signed sticker from a music artist that I don't remember meeting, Disney fast passes, balloons from the Grateful Dead Shakedown Street (need I say more?), photo booth strips, a broken reed from winning the state marching band champions, pamphlets of hateful propaganda dealt by Christian protestors at pride, endless parking passes, and my first "I Voted" sticker. Most of the items are out of order and I don't remember their significance, or when I came across them. I know that they were important to me at some point, so in the album they stay. I think I started the collection to remember the good and the bad times in my growing-up years, knowing that my

memory is shit from an early age.

I greatly underestimated how difficult it would be to find a similar book that also serves the purpose that I require it to. I eventually found something similar on Amazon, but it doesn't quite feel like the last one. It's a fake light wood cut into 5x7 squares and it flips open up and down, instead of like a book. It was the best I could do. The book itself holds no sentimental value, and it just doesn't quite feel like the old one. One day, all of it will be considered "vintage." Maybe I could sell it. I could never. Those memories are priceless.