

5-16-01

Prepare to Move

When Mother's will named Martha, two years my junior, her executor, I was hurt. As events worked out, evaluating items to keep or discard was not at all my kind of job. Martha invited Ruth, our sister-in-law Peggy, and me to help her decide on a proper division of Mother's things.



Back: Peggy and Willett, Daddy and Mother; Front: Ruth and Roland

We began with the easy things. Only Peggy among us didn't have a sewing machine. She got Mother's well used machine. For some reason that I no longer remember, I was the only one who wanted Mother's pearls. As to Mother's chocolate set, a graceful china pot of white china decorated with a hand painted tracery of blue and pink flowers, with eight matching cups and saucers, we agreed that Ruth, because of her age (she was twelve years younger than I), had missed out on the Sunday evening family suppers made special by the hot chocolate with marshmallows that had made the chocolate set a significant part of our memories, and so we agreed that Ruth should have them. We hoped she would establish a new and meaningful ritual for her young family. She was delighted because she had long admired the dainty set, even without the happy memories we others shared of the cozy times the whole family had sat in front of the living room fireplace, sharing stories and the steaming chocolate served in the lovely small cups. And so it went for a happy afternoon of fully agreeing who should get what, as we recalled our shared memories of each item. I was assigned Mother's sterling silver flatware because the pattern was so nearly like mine. Martha had the tall cut-ware vase that she had always wanted to make into a lamp. Ruth also got Mother's Royal Doulton plate on which Mother served her molded cranberry jelly at every Thanksgiving gathering, mainly because she mentioned it first. I was thrilled to add to my possessions the fluted, covered aluminum pan in which Mother always steamed our grandmother's Christmas pudding. The same feelings, with variations, helped us dispose of much of the remaining estate. Some of the items seemed almost paltry in comparison with others, but the memory

attached to each thing, small or great, evened out our selections until we were each satisfied. All, that is, until late in the day when we reached the vast pile of photographs. We identified all the faces we could and chose our favorites. However, we left many pictures that none of us could find a name for. Martha, especially, was much disturbed, and we all resolved always to date and identify any photograph which fell into our possession. Finally, I got everyone's permission to use my judgment of what to do with them. I took them home, packed carefully in a box. After about four years, when no one had remembered who some of the people were and no one had asked for even one, I consigned the whole collection to the trash can. And, now, some forty years later, no one has asked me about them.



Ruth, Peggy, Martha, Mary Frances; Thomas Roland in back

I felt justified in my action, and I began to feel that I do, indeed, place little or no sentimental value on *things*. I have experienced no problems with giving away or disposing of many of Paul's and my possessions over the years. Now I am reaching the place in our belongings where, say, a bookmark given me by one of my Chinese students has to find a place in our household. After all, it's small and won't take up much space. A drawing one of the boys made in school is a bit larger than the bookmark, but it, and several others like it, are too important not to be kept. In like manner, several of the little pottery art objects George or Roland made in art class cannot possibly be discarded. They have made it clear *they* don't want any of them. Several of Paul's letters (certainly not all of the daily letters he wrote during the two-year separation before we were married) have to remain in our possession. Many of the papers written by students in my English classes over the years have to remain. A number of books which are not notable masterpieces have grown to be too important to be given away. Frequently I will begin in a closet with the idea of reducing its contents to fit into a small box, but at the end of the day I discover that the items which I cannot part with constitute the bulk of the contents of the closet, even if I know there will be no place for them in our new home. Frequently, boxes of keepsakes get reorganized instead of thrown away.

I'm beginning to understand a friend from many years ago who told us that moving is easy. Just pile everything into the middle of the yard. Light the pile; when it begins to burn steadily, jump into the middle and throw to safety those things you absolutely cannot part with.

I know I can't or won't do such a thing, but I also know that I must turn into the unsentimental person I believed myself to be all these years if we are ever to be ready to move.