

When my parents departed this world, they left behind physical traces of the life they lived in our house. I take comfort in the unchanging nature of these things. In these constants, I touch their memories.

The fern green walls of their in-law apartment; a bold color choice to affirm their continuing independence upon leaving Florida to move in with us. Their Costco sized spice bottles nestled next to my cans of crushed tomatoes in the cupboard. My mother's recipe binder beside my husband's spy novels on what was their bookshelf, now ours.

We replaced the most intimate of their belongings. The twin beds they slept in three feet from each other for twelve years. The power recliners that lifted their aging bodies after their own muscles lost power. Sometimes at night when I go downstairs for ice cream from their freezer, I see shadows of their former furniture and their former selves. I can almost hear my dad's honey sweet greeting at any time of the day beckoning me with, "Hello, Dahling, come talk a little." and my mom chiming in with a playful swat of her hand, "George, with you, it's never a little talk, let her go."

My father's photographs hang on every wall and the excess fills cartons. These images show how closely he held nature to his heart; his jubilation for all things wild and untamed. Horses at the farm down the road in Easton, lady slippers in bloom in our backyard, or a hummingbird caught in mid-flight at our feeder on the deck where he planted himself all day waiting for that shot.

I can see what he saw and feel what he felt when he snapped photos of Lake Massapoag in the light of all four seasons. Pictures of boats, racecars and airplanes embody his drive for adventure. In one bearded self-portrait he resembles Ernest Hemingway with a pensive expression and in another he grins jester-like in a floppy clown hat. My mom's face, his reluctant model for 76 years of marriage, peeks out at me with a dimpled smile from frames everywhere. His laptop stores thousands of images and I cannot erase a single one.

Standing in the tiny galley kitchen, I lift a wooden bowl etched by the chop-chop-chop of liver, onions, and hard-boiled eggs. I imagine the rat-a-tat tapping of her fork beating an egg for breakfast. Or the scent of her Wind Song perfume wafting over the smell of garlic sautéing in oil. I lightly run my fingers across lists, notes and forms filled with her neat cursive handwriting. Opening the clasp of her little red change purse, I discover nickels and quarters that she once held in the palm of her hand.

Little by little, I am releasing my grip on these tangible objects to clear a larger space for my parents to move out of the basement apartment and live inside of me.