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Keep and Remember

By Cantor Sharon Citrin Goldstein



Chanukah is coming and with it comes the annual tradition of lighting the menorah. Who doesn't love the wonderful ritual of lighting the Chanukah lights? Each step involved in kindling the *chanukiyah* has its own special significance. We count the number of nights, choose the colored candles, light the *shamash*, spread the flame to the other candles, recite the blessing, and sing Chanukah songs while watching the flickering candles dance gaily in a darkened room.

There is comfort in repeating this holiday ritual year after year. It allows us to remember with fondness Chanukahs of the past. We can summon up the faces and voices of past generations gathering around the menorah and recall the people we loved who have passed.

I do not light the sixth Chanukah candle. In its place is a yahrzeit candle for my mother who died ten years ago on the sixth night of Chanukah. You could say that Chanukah, for me, is bittersweet.

This Chanukah, in particular, will release a flood of memories as my brother and I continue going through boxes of family memorabilia that were recently removed from storage. We are the beneficiaries of both our father's collectibles and remnants of our mother's things that he had packed away and stored after her death.

It's a difficult procedure that we try to accomplish lovingly and respectfully. As we examine each item, we remember its purpose and remark on its significance in our parents' lives. The process evokes so many memories, but also teaches us so many things about them we never knew. We find diplomas and certificates for honors and achievements that fill us with admiration. We read with curious delight yearbook inscriptions that expose high school secrets. We're awed by my mother's art portfolios that reveal the promise of an exceptional artist and are dismayed upon discovering cartons of light bulbs of every description from my father's electrical engineering career. We're overwhelmed by countless slides of European travels and collections of postcards. We peer at photo albums, pictures of unnamed people, newspaper clippings, journals of vacations, and original poetry and writings.

How much we can learn about people from the things they keep! Keepsakes capture for posterity life's defining moments. Our parents' treasured mementos survived moves from house to house where they were stored and preserved for future generations. Now, the fate of these once-precious relics of our loved ones' lives is in our hands. My brother and I must decide which stuff to keep and which to discard. After all, we each have our own memorabilia stored away in boxes!

I'm touched that my parents kept my old Baby Ben alarm clock that I used to wind up every night before going to sleep. Perhaps it will come in handy during the next power outage. They even kept the Vidal Sassoon hair blower that I left in my bathroom cabinet when I went away to college. You never know when you may need a spare hair blower! And how can I possibly get rid of my mother's mirrored vanity that fascinated me as a little girl with its display of perfume bottles and lipsticks?

On this first Chanukah without my father and mother, perhaps I'll value these curious keepsakes as Chanukah gifts bequeathed from my parents. I can actually see them smile and nod approvingly of this idea.

May their memory be a source of blessing and comfort.

Cantor Sharon Citrin Goldstein serves Beth El Synagogue in Woodbury, Connecticut.