



AN ATTIC'S *Memories*

This mom is itching to create a place to hold her family's history.

written and photographed by
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I FONDLY REMEMBER the attic of my childhood.

A set of wooden stairs led into a hot, cedar-smelling expanse. The steps were cluttered with cleaning supplies. I recall an ironing board hung on the wall.

But once the risers dissolved into a sea of plywood boards, the everyday faded with them. The space — lit by sunlight streaming through tall dormer windows and shaped by a steeply sloped ceiling — was pure magic.

There were finely made dresses from the 1920s hung on a metal rack. Tiny chests of my grandmother's costume jewelry. Keepsakes from my mother's early life in Panama. There were boxes and boxes of Christmas decorations. My two siblings and I each had a section to store whatever we'd shoveled out of our rooms when ordered to clean them. This rambling open room held the history of my grandparents, my mom and dad, my two sisters and me.

Sitting on the dusty floor, peering into an unmarked box felt like sifting through the archeological sands of my own people.

It's an experience my children have never had.

We have an attic — with screened vents and steep sides and itchy insulation and no floor. But the only way to get to it is to push open a small panel while standing atop a ladder in a tiny bathroom. I know this only because every so often we peek inside to make sure no squirrels or bats or mice took up residence there.

Which felt okay until about a year ago.

That's when my baby started middle school and my oldest began making plans for college and I realized I needed a place to put everything they were done with but I was not.

All those teeny T-shirts from their elementary school festivals. And necklaces made of dyed noodles. All the plaster holding their hands at a fraction of the size they are now. The picture books we read so many times we can still recite them from memory.

There are the sports trophies and crafty picture frames. That nativity set made from toilet paper tubes. First shoes. Doll-sized sunglasses. And that dinosaur

costume all three kids wore for Halloween. There's no room in my kids' lives for that. But how can I carry all those memories to the curb?

Instead, their childhood flotsam is tucked into already full closets, stacked high in our rodent-ridden garage, pushed into dark corners in the basement. Anywhere there is an opening, I shove a box into it.

Trust me, there is no magic in that.

Partly, I am in this pickle because I once believed we all simply had too much stuff. I held firm that everyone should acquire less and give away what we didn't need anymore. Memories should be saved in books and curated into well-labeled boxes. Photos should be edited, sorted and digitally stored.

Which I still kind of believe. It's just that, having walked with my kids through all these years and so many stages, I can now appreciate the allure of holding an object in my hands in a way I couldn't fathom before.

As a girl, I loved discovering the artifacts of my family because it made me feel close to my people even when I didn't know their stories.

As a mom, I hold onto things to remember the stories that were mine but no longer are.

Picking up that soft pink blanket unleashes a wash of

memories: how uncertain I felt as I swaddled my infant, how desperate I was to comfort my sick baby, how my heart melted as I watched my toddler pretend to care for her own baby.

If I were to let the blanket go, I'm afraid the memories would disappear with it.

My children are too old now to revel in the game of attic discovery I once cherished. But maybe in the not-so-distant future, I'll build my attic and I'll gather all of our family treasures in one place. And someday my grandchildren can venture into the dusty light and poke through a plastic tote and wonder: Did people used to wear this? Who made that crazy drawing? What kind of Matchbox car is this?

Maybe they'll have the patience to hear me tell too long a tale about their father or their aunt or their great-grandmother. Maybe they'll even remember it and when they hold the toy or book or blanket, they'll know why I chose to save it.

That would be the best of all worlds. We keep the things to share the stories to make the history live on.

Perhaps that's the primal urge that's got me pinning for a set of fold-down stairs, an unfinished floor, a bare bulb.

Maybe that is the power of an attic. ☆

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