

One Person's Junk ...

Vintage sofa

White kitchen table with 4 white vinyl kitchen chairs - Retro

Weightlifting equipment

Golf clubs and such

Antique wooden skis

Ping pong table

Fishing and boating items

Vintage queen bed

Several bikes including a unicycle

Books

Records

Sony Walkman new in box

Vintage electronics including camera collection and movie cameras

Toys and games

Dishes

Pots and pans

Small kitchen appliances

Lots of usual household goods

Goodyear blimp memorabilia

These were just some of the things included in the Craigslist ad for Dad's estate sale this past weekend. Did you notice the multiple uses of "old" words like "antique," "vintage," and "retro" sprinkled throughout? Colin, the experienced guy organizing the sale, has a feel for what people are looking for and apparently "retro" and mid-century modern are hot right now. That bodes well for us!

But I'm not gonna lie; it was kind of weird to see the remnants of our family's decades of lived experience listed in such a matter of fact and dispassionate way.

I mean, this household contained Goodyear blimp memorabilia because Dad's entire career was with Goodyear aerospace. The aerospace part of the company was bought out a couple of times during his tenure but his office remained in the same Akron building near the blimp hangar. That hangar hosted family Christmas parties for the company's employees back in the day. The inside, sans blimp, was enormous and I'm not sure I've been in anything as big or bigger since. I remember working the garden at our little Hartville lot one summer day and hearing a far-off rumbly drone that seemed to be getting closer. Dad stopped hoeing, cocked his ear upward, and remarked, "That sounds like a blimp." [How many people would even know what a blimp sounds like??] As if on cue, the

Goodyear blimp appeared over the treetops, low enough to feel like a potential close-encounters-of-the-third-kind experience that might result in us being beamed up inside of it. My whole body felt the rumbly drone vibrations. It was exhilarating! To this day, I feel a sense of pride every time I'm watching a sporting event and the Goodyear blimp is shown.

Craigslist obviously can't convey that the included games were an integral part of the family's Friday night lifestyle, especially prior to 1976 when a TV was finally purchased. Friday nights were Game Night, when popcorn was popped and we not only enjoyed a variety of amusements from Parker Brothers, Hasbro, and Mattel, but also were treated to a tall glass of pop, the only time during the week it was allowed. Oh, how I looked forward to that weekly delight! And who could appreciate, just reading the ad, the *countless* hours of eating, talking, laughing, doing homework, playing games, icing cookies, paying bills, catching up on email—just to name a few—that had taken place around that white kitchen table while sitting on the retro white vinyl chairs?

Everything in our Craigslist ad was brimming with history, experiences, emotions ... *life*. And yet, after culling through what remained in the house, none of us felt the need to bring them into our own homes. We didn't necessarily consider them junk, but we were ready for someone else to treasure them and use them to make their own memories.

When I first talked with Colin, while in the midst of going through the many drawers, closets, boxes, and bags in Dad's house, he had urged me not to throw anything away. "You'd be amazed at what some people find desirable," he assured me. Later, when he swung by the house to get his first glimpse of what he'd be dealing with, he glanced down at a cardboard filing box in the driveway with Dad's old notes from his college engineering courses. It had somehow gotten left behind when the other carloads of paper were taken to the recycling bins and had been rained on several times so was pretty waterlogged. "Too bad," Colin muttered. "Somebody might have been interested in those." "Someone might be interested in a total stranger's 60-year-old notes from college?!" "You'd be surprised. One person's junk ..." I *was* surprised, to say the least. But not wanting to deprive anyone of the joy of reading through a total stranger's college course notes, I pulled the box back into the garage, turned it on its side to air it out better, and left it for Colin to put in the sale. Can't wait to see if it sells (and for how much!).

I alerted two of my own, local, college buddies to the sale and they swung by. Kevin is an engineer himself so I thought he might appreciate some of Dad's old things (although, probably not his college notes!). While there, Fred, the other friend, texted me:

"We counted 11 freestanding electric motors (not counting the ones that were attached to things) and at least 6 grease guns. Your dad certainly enjoyed his life. 😊"

That he did, as evidenced by some of the *other* things included in the Craigslist ad:

Oliver machinery planer
Craftsman band saw
Craftsman lathes
Craftsman table saw
Craftsman drill press
Craftsman grinding wheel
Delta sander
Minori enlarger
Many more power tools and hand tools
Lots of hardware

I texted Fred back: “And needed Mom to ensure that he didn’t spend himself—and the entire family—into the poorhouse!”

This was a struggle for dear old Mom for much of their marriage. But she can’t claim to have not been warned. While cleaning out the house, I came upon a box of handwritten letters they’d sent to each other while dating. The lid of the box clearly stated, in all caps: BURN. Once I realized what they were, I chose to honor those wishes without snooping. But one letter mysteriously slipped out and was found a day or so later. Not realizing it was part of the love letter collection, I opened it and read it. It was written by Dad near Christmas in 1961, a year and a half before they got married. Among other things, he shared, “While Christmas shopping, I’ve been looking over the various power tools. Someday I want to get some good ones because I like to build things and you can’t do good work with cheap tools so I want to be sure when I buy.”

He did eventually stock up on lots of good tools, and among the many things he used those tools for were several beautiful made-from-scratch wooden tables and two enormous stereo speakers that were major pieces of furniture in the living room until just a couple of months ago. None of those pieces was put in the sale because family members wanted to hold on to them for sentimental reasons (and because they’re gorgeous and really well made—definitely *not* junk!). I, myself, passed on these items because I simply don’t have room for them in my little condo unit, nor did I have an easy way of transporting them from Ohio to Baltimore.

But the second-to-last day of my most recent trip to Ohio, I spotted something that I was definitely interested in, something totally retro that I could easily fit into my purse. Its size and location—fastened to the side of the laundry chute bin in the furnace room of the basement (a room not frequently entered)—made it easy to miss. Plus, it had been such a fixture there for so many decades, it naturally blended into its environs, making it almost invisible. What could this mystery item possibly be? The old, metal, hand cranked, pencil sharpener.

The modern version, of course, is electric but I find these too big, heavy, and cumbersome. Plus, I've already got too many things requiring an outlet in my office and the mess of wires they all create is unruly enough as it is. I've also purchased numerous portable plastic sharpeners over the years and they always disappoint. To put it bluntly, they're crap! Much too frequently, just as they've *almost* gotten sharp enough, the pencil lead has broken and I've had to start from scratch. I think this is because there's no mechanism in place to hold the pencil steady and straight. Rather, the hand holding the pencil has to do the work of rotating and pushing it in. Each time the pencil is released, so that the wrist can swivel back to the starting position, it shifts downward and prevents a consistent straight shot in. I've had whole boxes of colored pencils to sharpen before beginning an art project and this method has usually left my fingers that are doing all the work with the start of blisters and the pencils over sharpened to little more than nubs due to all the extra breakage. But those old-fashioned sharpeners have a rotating disc of varying-sized holes so you can set it to the proper circumference of the pencil you're sharpening, ensuring that it will be held securely and straightly. The grip on the handle spins around as the sharpener is cranked, allowing the fingers to stay put and not rub on anything that might cause blisters. It's clearly a far superior design. So, give me one of those old timey, low tech, permanently located, hand cranked, pencil sharpeners any day!

I couldn't wait to get back home and screw it into the side of my bookshelf. And then I quickly found a pencil that needed sharpened. Oooohh ... there's just nothing like the visceral vibration felt throughout the entire body while cranking that handle and hearing the g-g-g-r-r-r-r-r-i-i-i-i-n-n-n-ding innards hungrily chewing away at the pencil wood and lead. I'm not gonna lie: I find it VERY satisfying (and not unlike my blimp experience)!

The sharpener is easily visible from the chair I spend the most time in while working in my office and I basically brush it with my arm every time I go in or out of the kitchen. And every time I look at it, I smile. Who knew that a vintage pencil sharpener could bring someone such joy?



Well, I shouldn't be surprised. Afterall, Colin had prepped me: One person's junk ...