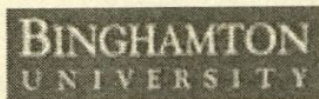


AN EXHIBIT PLANNED AND REALIZED BY
ANTHROPOLOGY 476
IN COLLABORATION WITH THE
BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM



State University of New York

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

**Location: Fine Arts Building 179
(Permanent Collection, Nancy Powell Gallery)**

**Opening: Thursday, November 30, 2006 4 – 6 pm
From November 30 through January 22 2007**

Hours:

Tuesday – Saturday 12:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Thursday 12:00 pm – 7:00 pm

Also by appointment

Closed: Sunday, Monday and Holidays

Acknowledgments:

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Contributors to the exhibit:

Alexandra Arnone	Katrina Hedeem	Vanessa Pak
Amy Atchinson	William Herman	Siobhan Phillips
April Beisaw	Daniel Huizinga	Jennifer Shtutman
Reinhard Bernbeck	Linda Jackson	Elizabeth So
Lauren Brady	Leila Joyce	Michelle Spaziani
Michelle Cheng	Jessica Kaminski	Yekaterina Sulima
Hui Chi	Christina Kincaid	Steven Torem
Jillian Cohen	Laura Kochman	Jessica Torres
Thomas Daley	Naomi-Watsala Lazarus	Ming Tseng
Kelly Derrick	Sung Lee	Michelle Usewicz
Meghan Devito	Lap Kwan Lo	Leighana Waight
Emily Fried	Kara Montgomery	Trisha Wensel
Marcia Friedman	Joelle Neustadter	Almut Wiedenmann
Stacy Gardener	Man Ng	Jayoon Yi
Amy Goldsmith		Jane Zagami

OBSOLESCENCE IN DAILY LIFE

Appliance Replacement?

In the mid twentieth century, changes in the roles of women contributed to pressure to create new household tools that led to the obsolescence of many others. At the time, women had been integrated into the workforce when husbands went off to fight in World War II. New, presumably time-saving technology was created to lure women back into the domestic sphere.

Ironically, the promotion of household items that were supposed to ease women's chores would often actually increase workload. In order to convince women that a new household object was in their interest, advertisements and moral treatises described a world of lurking diseases if houses were not extremely clean, of social difficulties if children were not always dressed neatly, of loss of a husband's love if the dinner wasn't served in the "right" fashion. All these threats could be averted by buying new appliances from dispose-alls to washing machines.

Obsolescence in households is a complex issue. Consumers can sacrifice convenience and maintain traditional kitchen tools to slow the speed of replacing appliances. However, your old refrigerator may use so much energy that replacing it with a new one contributes to a reduction in global warming. On the other hand, that old, perfectly functioning appliance, if dumped, would most likely end up polluting the groundwater.

Obsolescence in Your Pocket

Obsolescence is a process that impacts all aspects of our lives, including the things we keep in our very own back pockets or purses. Though many citizens do probably not reflect on obsolescence, it certainly shapes our lives.

Imagine your car breaks down one afternoon, and instead of driving home you are forced to take the subway. Walking through the station, you reach for your wallet to purchase a fare. Out of singles, you grudgingly hand the attendant your lucky \$2

bill and ask for a token. He gives you a confused stare before explaining that tokens were replaced with Metrocards years ago, and that your \$2 bill has no place in his cash drawer. After obtaining a paper fare card with your credit card and riding the subway to your stop, you decide to slip into your neighborhood pub before walking home. The bouncer asks for ID but all you have is your temporary paper license, which allows you to drive while you wait for the permanent one with your picture to arrive but does not get you into the pub. Denied entry you walk home, meandering through littered streets.

The obsolescence of everyday items we carry in our wallets and purses is driven by convenience and disposability, not unlike most forms of obsolescence. The American way of life became centered on convenience and disposability in the 1950s and 60s.

Learning to be a Digital Dumper

Is there a way out of our obsession with new and "improved" things? The obvious alternative to shopping constantly for something novel is to keep our possessions until they break or are worn out. The unfortunate difficulty is that the digital industry is inventive enough to produce a "networked" technology where many different items such as film cameras, computers, and play stations are hooked up together. A small change in the network connections, such as the introduction of USB, renders almost all past electronic objects obsolete at once.

On the individual level, retaining items until they are superseded may make us feel outdated. Ads feed us with the idea that we need to fit in and keep up materially with our friends and neighbors. But wouldn't we stick out from the crowd in a positive way if we were to live without a cell phone, computer, and car? Could our life be more relaxing and pleasurable?

There is always opposition to obsolescence on moral grounds. Parents

object to the exposure of their children to the latest video games, technologically advanced toys, and computer-generated movies. They are afraid that their children will have difficulties adjusting to what they think of as the "real world." But wouldn't children be better able to cope with their virtual reality if they were exposed to it from early on, adapting at the same time to what appears to us an insane speed of innovation?

Through examination of the pressures that hasten obsolescence and the reasons people offer when fighting them, we can begin to understand why obsolescence happens in the first place. The market desires the most technologically advanced, stylistically appealing item. Will these changes ever reach an end? Is it not part of our basic economic system that these processes be spun endlessly, faster and faster, until collective vertigo sets in?

Out of Fashion

Fashion can both construct and communicate a consumer's identity. It is a vehicle for political and social statements and a means to express cultural traditions and personal moods. Fashion is also part of a planned process of stylistic obsolescence.

The "fashion cycle" is the process of introduction, rise, culmination and decline of styles. The rhythm or pace of this cycle varies, but the clothing industry is notable for having the highest turnover rate without functional improvement. Fashion houses come out with new designs quarterly – as opposed to other industries such as automobile producers, which produce yearly "updates."

The nature of a capitalist society requires many commodities, from cars to computers, to be planned into obsolescence. In order to keep up a market of new buyers, objects for sale must be continuously reinvented, and buyers must be programmed to desire these new designs. Advertisements, fashion journals and, more subtly, clothing in films convince consumers of the necessity to be "up to date". For young consumers, the desire for acceptance through assimilation and conformity is a commonly used "hook."

For adults, "classic" or "retro" looks mix older styles with new ideas. This plays into their longing for the past while living in the present.

Jean Baudrillard argues that fashion has no reference to the present but is chiefly, and fundamentally, a citation of the past in new materials. Fashion is a constant resurrection, always retro in advance. For example, styles that are sold now are revisions of those from the sixties and seventies. Commenting on the cyclical obsolescence of fashion, Baudrillard states, "beyond this death, every form has always the chance of a second existence".

Old Songs and New Tunes

Pop culture is particularly prone to processes of obsolescence. The entertainment industry works on both the products themselves, such as movies, computer games, or music, and on the technical means by which they are displayed. The result, an intricate process of obsolescence of technological items and art styles, is a recent phenomenon. For example, classical music is still played with instruments that date back centuries, whereas synthesizers have seen a rapid rate of innovation and obsolescence since the 1960s. The styles of music, however, have changed in both the classical and pop culture realms.

New technologies in television, film and for the internet are not only made desirable through advertisement, they themselves, once acquired, are used to tell us why we need to purchase other objects, from other entertainment products such as DVDs, to perfumes and sports articles. They provide a constant reminder and external justification to spend money on things we do not necessarily need.

Why do we need what is "hip" and "cool"? Is it because we feel old and out-of-date by owning items that are no longer fashionable? Each fad and technological advance builds on what came before it, presumably making it "better." Consumers who acquire these items soon desire more.

Ruins of Consumption

Obsolescence leads to waste, waste leads to pollution, and pollution leads to the environmental crises we face today and in the future. In an immediate sense, a throwaway culture may add convenience and ease to our lives. However, the long-term effects of such disposability will manifest themselves in unpredictable ways unless we can decrease our production of waste and reuse the old waste we have already created.

The U.S. now consumes 35% of the world's resources, despite having only 5% of the world's population. The next generations will not thank us for the devastating "gift" of a thoughtless, apathetic culture of consumerism steeped in innovation and obsolescence.

Ecologically inclined groups advocate a simpler lifestyle based on re-use and re-cycling of objects. If these became common convictions, our society would produce less waste, and would also be less dependent on often minor, pointless "technological innovations" that are mere selling strategies. However, a radical re-thinking of our economic system would be needed. Instead of improvements whose goal is an increase in effectiveness, we should strive for innovations that save resources. We might even have to abandon altogether the idea of constant innovations in all productive sectors and opt for a slower life.

There is a need for all of us to understand obsolescence as it shapes our lives. Though obsolescence is an inevitable process, we need to learn to counter its most harmful effects.

Innovation and Heirloom

The process of becoming obsolete is invariably connected to innovations. Whether it is a furniture design, digital technology, a word, or even a profession, the item that has run its course is replaced by something more recent.

But why do we have endless desires for new objects? It may seem at first glance obvious that one should prefer the new to

the used. But what about that jewelry inherited from your grandmother? We prefer the old over the new in specific spheres – such as when objects are attached to loved ones. Indeed, the new cannot replace such heirlooms at all.

Although the realm of heirlooms occupies only a tiny place in our object world, this sphere can be much larger in non-Western societies. In such cultures, technological innovations that we find attractive and advantageous can be simply useless. Clothing fashions are futile in societies where shapes and colors of garments remain stable. The long white robe worn Arab men is such a case. An absence of innovation and thus of processes of obsolescence should therefore not be equated with a lack of creativity.

The obsession with innovation in material culture has spread with industrialization. In addition, cycles of innovation and obsolescence are becoming ever shorter. This creates stark distinctions between those who can afford constant new additions to their lives and those who are less privileged.

Dark Sides of Obsolescence

- Humans may at some point no longer be able to adapt psychologically to the rapid cycles of innovation and obsolescence.
- We often do not have the financial means to acquire the latest designs of cars, clothes, computer software, etc.
- We may not even have the time to be well-informed about the availability of innovations or how to use them.
- Corporations and shareholders profit from a situation in which private households carry a huge debt in order to be "up to date".
- Many of the "innovations" are in no way improvements. They are sold as such, and the industries bank on people's general habit of wanting the "latest," a term that has become synonymous with "best" even

though the opposite may be the case.

- Obsolete items clutter up our environment to the point where whole industries are needed to deal with the trash.

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Luck

Roy Jenson was walking to his store when he saw a gold watch lying on the road. Slipping it into his pocket, he decided he would sell the watch to make some extra cash. Roy continued his walk, whistling happily as he thought about how lucky he was.

At the end of the day, Roy grabbed his coat and started towards the store's exit. Just then a ragged looking old man rushed inside. Cringing, Roy managed to choke out, "c-can I help you?" Without responding, the old man grabbed a bottle of water, dropped a bill on the counter, and ran out the door. Roy stared at the unusual currency, a \$2 bill. He couldn't remember the last time he saw one. This sure was a lucky day.

Roy pocketed the bill, locked up, and headed home. In the dark alley behind his store he heard an unfamiliar flapping sound. The noise seemed to come from behind him and Roy nervously began to run. Looking backward while running forward, Roy stumbled over a trashcan and fell onto the cold hard ground. Stunned and groaning, he started to push himself up when he felt something squirming in his pants pocket. Fearing it was some form of vermin, Roy cried out, jumped up, and pulled the offender from his pocket. It was the \$2 bill.

Dazed and confused, he threw the bill on the ground and started running as fast as he could. The flapping sounds returned. The noise was definitely behind him this time and it grew louder and louder as he ran. Two bright lights appeared in his path. Closing his eyes, Roy screamed for help but lost his balance. As he fell backwards, something landed on his face and everything went black.

The cause of Roy Jenson's death still remains mystery. He was found with an expensive gold watch in his jacket pocket, so robbery was ruled out. Roy had no known enemies and he was in excellent health for his age. The only evidence at the scene was

a \$2 bill stuck to his face, the removal of which took part of his eyelids off.

H.C.

The Most Valuable Two-Dollar Bill

When I was little, my whole family would get together to celebrate Passover. I cannot say that I enjoyed the lengthy ritual, especially sitting quietly at the dinner table waiting to be served. But what I did love was when Papa would hide the afikoman, a special piece of matzah that is wrapped up and hidden for the children to find. The lucky one who found this little treasure would be the recipient of a special prize. It was always a brand new two-dollar bill. As the youngest child, my chances of winning were never very good. My luck did not change until my older siblings had both gone off to college.

When the time came to leave for college myself, I began the difficult process of deciding what to take with me. I opened my old keepsake box. I had decorated the small tin many years ago and the "Hello Kitty" stickers all over it were beginning to turn yellow. Reminiscing as I looked through the place where I store my most cherished possessions --old Valentine's Day cards, friendship bracelets, a couple of shells, a yellow shiny stone -- I come across the only two-dollar bill I ever won for finding the afikoman.

Every year that I had lost the contest to my brother or sister, I had dreamed of how I would have spent my prize, probably on candy. But this two-dollar bill was one I would never spend. My prize was much more valuable to me than anything it could buy because it was from the last Passover with Papa. A few days after our celebration, Papa passed away unexpectedly. I found the afikoman but lost my family.

L.K.



Two-Dollar Bill (1862 - present)

Linen and cotton with synthetic fibers evenly spread; green with red serial tinting; 6.13" X 2.63"

Purpose: Financial transactions

Replaced by: Two \$1 bills

Found by: Hui Chi and Laura Kochman

Location: Bank

Warren's Comfort

"What's that Grandpa?" Andrew asked, pointing at the antique leather case positioned prominently atop the china cabinet. Andrew had been forever curious to discover what this secret item was and, more importantly, why it was stored out of his reach. He gathered all his courage to ask only after deciding that scaling the cabinet was not an option.

"That's a projector, a gift from my parents when I graduated from college."

Andrew tried not to let his frustration show. "Why do you keep it all the way up there?"

"You see, Andrew, this projector is very dear to me," Warren explained.

Uninterested in the boring story, but intrigued by the object, Andrew wanted to see the projector and begged his Grandfather to retrieve and open the mysterious case.

Warren brought it down from its perch and began to set it up. "Projectors used to be as important as flat screen televisions are today," Warren said in an attempt to educate his young grandson. Andrew didn't believe him.

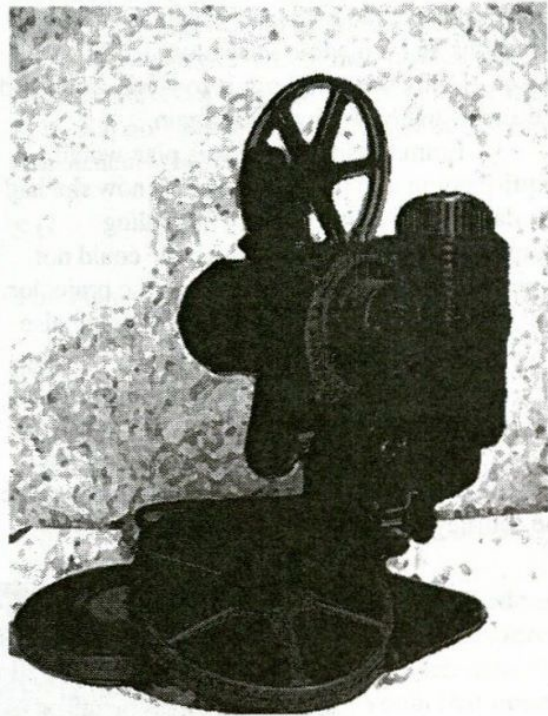
After what seemed like an eternity to Andrew, Warren's favorite film of Niagara Falls began rolling. Warren watched the flimsy picture sequence on the white wall, tears welling up in his eyes. The machine no longer fascinated young Andrew. He was unimpressed by the lack of sound and the quality of the picture produced after so much work.

Andrew then noticed the effect the images were having on his grandfather. He was again filled with disbelief and wonder. "The picture is so blurry! Why are you crying?"

"Well Andrew, your Grandmother and I met at Niagara Falls forty years ago. We made this film when we returned there for our honeymoon." Warren paused, then continued. "When Grandma was dying of cancer, she told me to watch this film to remember the wonderful days we had together."

Andrew also missed Grandma and suddenly realized the value of the old projector. He thought for a moment, gave his grandfather a hug and said "Grandpa, I think your projector is better than a flat screen TV."

M.S.



8mm Film Projector (ca. 1950)

Metal exterior and glass, metal and electronic interior components; brown in color;

8" x 13" x 7"

Purpose: Visual communication

Replaced by: Video cassette recorders (VCRs)

Found by: Daniel Huizinga and Michelle Spaziani

Location: A High School which had no use for it

Scenes of the Past

Mrs. Emma Greenhill placed a wedding portrait on her husband's casket as it was lowered into the rocky upstate New York soil. She recalled how handsome he had looked in his uniform that day. This same thought had gone through her head many times before when turning out the lamp that sat next to the picture she now watched descend into the earth.

The house seemed so empty and quiet without Ernie. She missed the buzz of his tools as he worked on his many projects in the

basement. But most of all she missed his had taken a toll on his lanky legs.

Several months after the funeral, Emma thought about the home movies she and her husband had made when they were first married. The films and projector were stored in Ernie's closet. If only she could get it to work, she could see Ernie and his funny walk again.

Emma hesitated for this plan would require going into that closet. Until now she had not dared to open it for fear of recalling memories with which she knew she could not cope. But maybe if she focused on the projector. Just get the projector and leave everything else alone, she told herself.

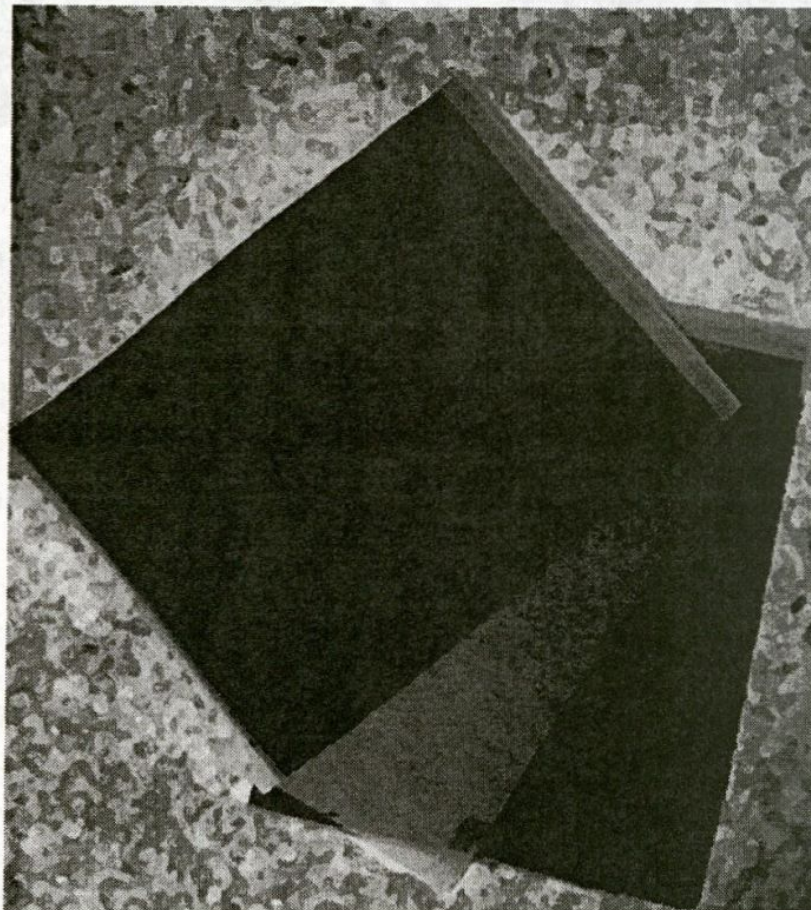
Collecting all the bravery she could muster, Emma opened the door and quickly pulled out the heavy old projector. A rush of pride and excitement came over her as she made the journey to the living room. She set her

awkward, stiff walk. Years of military service treasure on a table and examined the complicated machine. It was then that she remembered she did not know how to make the thing work. Emma broke down in tears.

The next day, she called her daughter, Jean, and explained her predicament. Jean assured her mother that there was a simple solution. "Mom, I'll come over and pick up the films. I'll have them turned into VHS tapes that we can watch on the TV."

A few days later mother and daughter sat in front of the television, laughing at Ernie's funny walk. The old projector was forgotten, but watching Ernie became a holiday ritual, one that allowed Jean's children to enjoy the grandfather they would never meet.

D.H.



Carbon Paper (1870s - present)

Paper coated with mixture of carbon black and a solvent; black and white; 8.5" x 11"

Purpose: Creating copies of documents

Replaced by: No Carbon Required (NCR) paper

Found by: Stacy Gardener and William Herman

The Expendable Copier

I didn't regret marrying young until my husband, Cal, died in a freak motorcycle accident. It was the early 70s and at age twenty-three I was widowed, unemployed, and without a college education. Desperate, I turned to the classified section of the local paper. There were not many jobs but I applied for them all.

I was offered only one position, that of a copy typist at a small business. I knew how to use a typewriter, and it was probably the only skill I possessed. Back then making copies of documents wasn't a simple task. I used several layers of carbon paper in between sheets of typing paper to make up to six blurry versions of the same document. If I were to make one mistake, every copy would have it.

Mistakes were not entirely bad. They ensured a certain amount of job security, as my tasks took a little longer to complete than might have been necessary. I developed a hidden joy in this proliferation of errors, a joy that I was not entirely proud of. My constantly aching hands, smeared with carbon black, were my punishment.

It was not long until photocopiers started to become more common in offices. I began to fantasize about how easy life would be if the company could muster up enough money to buy such an incredible piece of machinery.

One hot summer day, I thought I was hallucinating when I saw the machine I knew only from ads situated proudly where my typewriter used to be. It was the photocopier that I must have summoned into existence.

As I neared the coveted copier, I was whisked off into my boss's office. I assumed he wanted to discuss a training schedule so I could use this state of the art machine. I was wrong.

My boss looked me in the eye and said, "Claudia, we decided that typing copies is too slow and costly for us. There are just too many mistakes. The new photocopier will save us a lot of time and money. Unfortunately, we no longer have use for a copy typist. We're going to have to let you go." It was then that my true punishment was realized.

S.G.

The Pioneers

I used to make copies for a living but now I'm a fossil sandwiched between tons of the black-on-white "schist and slate" of postmodernity. You can still use me but I'm not very efficient. If you need something small, like a receipt, I'm your guy. But don't ask me to copy anything more than once or you won't be satisfied with the result.

When my ancestors were first made in 1806 their intended purpose was much different than it is today. Ralph Wedgwood invented them to help the blind write. Using a quill that needed to be repeatedly dipped in ink was difficult for the blind, but with this new invention they could use a metal stylus instead.

Our potential was realized in the 1820s, as the Associated Press used us for document duplication. We were put to work in offices around the world. Our heyday lasted until an evil spirit invented the photocopy machine. It really messed things up for us. Now most of us are retired and deserve respect for our past contributions.

W.H.

The Search

Megan entered the antique show to find something specific for Nana Katherine's 90th birthday. From the time Megan was little, she remembered Nana's love for ironing. It was therapeutic and relaxing, but it was more. Ironing was a family tradition, one her mother had passed down to her when she was only ten years old.

Her mother explained, "This was my mother's iron, one of the first of its kind." She then showed her how to use the heavy black cast-iron iron. They heated it on the coal-burning stove and used potholder mittens hold the iron while moving it over father's pants.

Nana's home had recently been sold, and Nana moved into an assisted-living facility. In the move her mother's rusty iron was lost. Megan knew Nana was grief-stricken about losing that iron, even though she had long ago switched to an electric one.

Megan wished to repay Nana's continual kindness and mend her broken heart by finding a similar antique to replace the iron. She carefully perused an antique show until she spied a table laden with old books, a porcelain dog, and - an antique iron! It even looked like Nana's treasured iron.

At the birthday party, Megan was filled with an aura of pride and anticipation, but she waited until she and Nana were alone to reveal her gift. Nana was touched by Megan's excitement and opened the box to discover the old iron. But her reaction was not what Megan had expected.

Nana Katherine looked solemnly at her granddaughter and said, "I appreciate your kindness dear, but understand, my iron was special only because of its heritage. This iron is not mine, nor our family's iron. My iron, Megan, is irreplaceable."

Megan was crushed. "But Nana, isn't it the thought that counts?"

After a slight pause, both women smiled and chuckled.

A.A.

Prized Possession

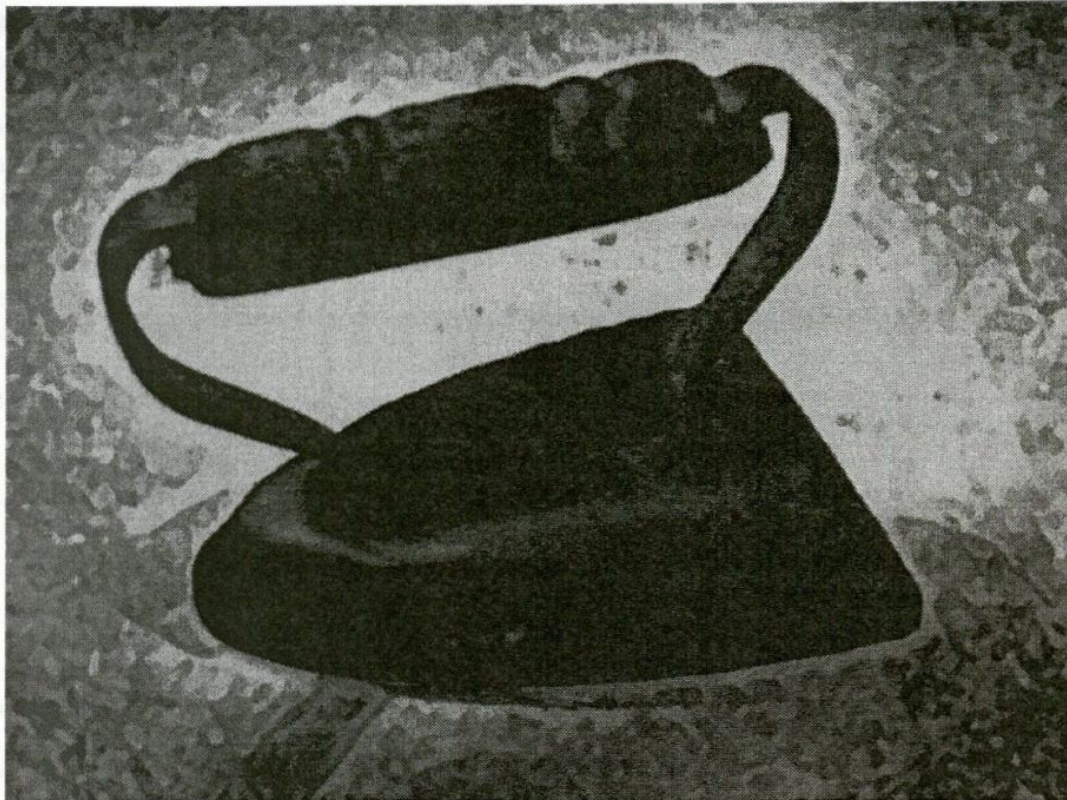
My great-aunt Matilda often told stories of deserted traditions, to remind the family of its heritage. During Christmas time Matilda would tell us about Three Kings Day, a part of the Christian faith lost in today's society. On that eve of that special day, she and her eight siblings would leave gifts of cigarettes, rum, cookies and mints under their beds, in hope that the next morning they would find gifts from the Three Wise Men in return.

Last Christmas, Matilda brought out an old cast-iron iron that had been left by the Three Wise Men. Even though she felt cheated by her present, she had hoped for a doll, she decided to make the best of it. Matilda began her own small business, charging neighbors and family one peso per article of clothing ironed. To advertise her business, Matilda ensured that her own clothes were always properly starched and pressed. Although wrinkled clothes never had seemed to matter to her friends before, everyone now wanted to look as nice as Matilda.

"Nowadays," said great-aunt Matilda, "it seems like people don't appreciate what they have."

Matilda used her old iron until the day she died. She had tried electric models many times but felt they did not produce the same quality results as her trusty one. I inherited this heirloom but must admit that it is now just one of the many superfluous decorations on my basement fire mantle.

L.W.



Iron (ca. 1850)

Cast iron; dark brown and black in color; 5" X 3" X 6"; weight 3.5Lbs

Purpose: Press wrinkles out of fabric

Replaced by: Steam iron

Found by: Leighana Waight and Alexandra Arnone

Location: Fireplace mantel in basement of residence

Scripted by Hand

I sat there on the shelf,
Forgotten, folded inside myself.
Etched on my face, the hopes and dreams of a
Nation,
Now my message can hardly be read. Should I
suffer such indignation?

The Art of my centuries old tattoo is
cursive.
As generations pass, they're not sure what-it-is.
The loops and curves are part of the old style,
That the children learned, but forgot it in a short
while.

Word processing sent my marks into
obsolescence,
But its style is static, no aura, without essence.
Written cursive, scripted by each hand is a
unique sight,

Singular, novel and personal, an Art in its own
right.

Unfolded and caressed, a new sensation,
They return to me to recall the founding of their
Nation.

Traced by two fingers, a large and a small,
Proudly the Mother had not forgotten at all.
She traced my marks one by one,
Gently guiding daughter's finger, lovingly
making it fun.

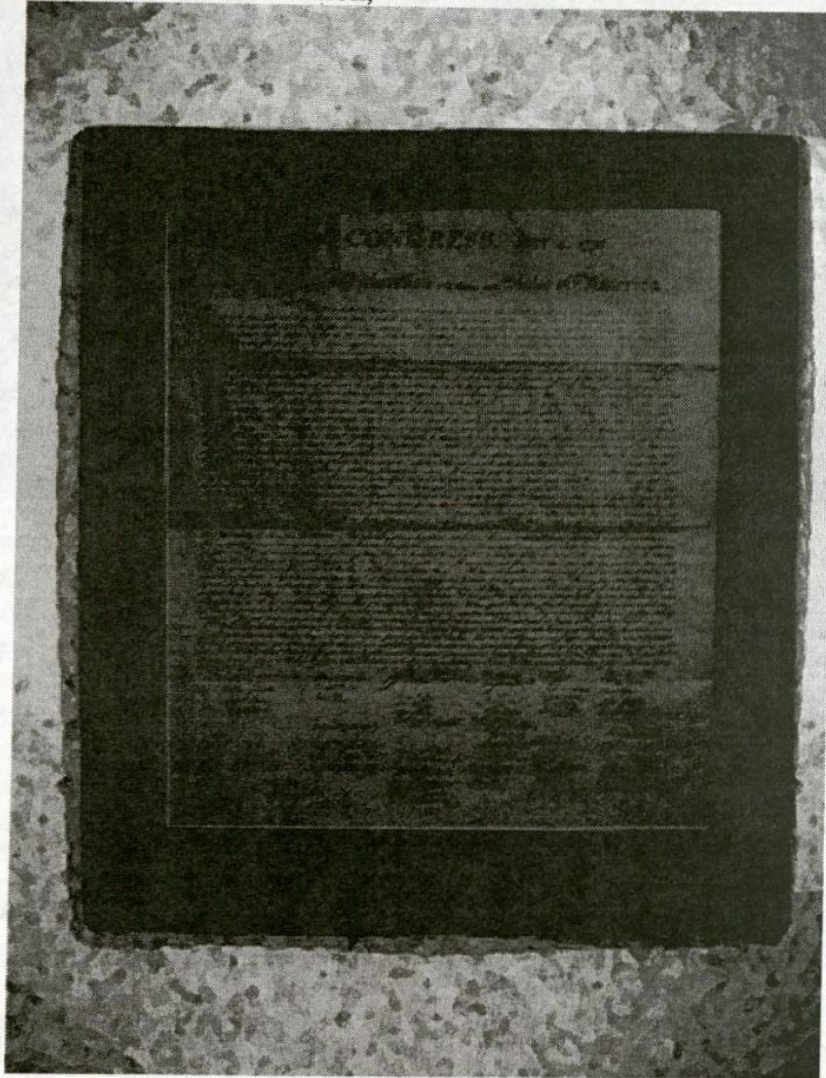
Mother continued with a story and as it
was told,
Many kinds of writing from days of old,
Had been lost, forgotten, now needing
translation,
Daughter lamented, "If we forget, what happens
to records of our nation?"

Mother asked her daughter to recall the
intriguing script,
The drawings and marks on the ancient Egyptian
crypt.

Those marks were a language once
known by quite a few,
Some centuries later, marks survived, but the
meaning no one knew.
It took a find that created a worldwide sensation,

The Rosetta Stone was the key to the translation.
My eaves dropping faded as I pondered
my state,
Were my marks to be obsolete? Was this my
fate?

L.J.



Cursive Writing (1600s - present)

Paper and ink; tan and brown in color; 15.25" X 13.06"

Purpose: Document preparation and professional or sophisticated correspondence

Replaced by: Typing

Found by: Linda Jackson and Thomas Daley

Location: Closet shelf of a residence

“He Likes It! Hey, Mikey!”

My little cousin Mikey can be described fully in one word – brat. He is the most annoying 6-year-old you will ever meet. So when my aunt asks me to watch him, you can barely imagine the sinking feeling I get in my stomach. The most irritating part about Mikey is his non-stop nagging. I can tell you a hundred different excruciating anecdotes, but I’ll stick with the most recent.

Yesterday, we were watching a cartoon and one of the characters started writing a letter.

“Tom, what’s he writing?”

“A letter,” I grumble, sensing another exasperating inquisition episode.

“No,” he says, “what kind of writing is that?”

“Uh, cursive,” I continue.

“What’s that?”

I answered without thinking. “I don’t know, a form of writing old people use.”

“Can you write it?” I sense the irritability in his voice.

“Yeah, so?”

“You’re not *that* old!”

“Actually...,” I catch myself before retorting with one of my usual sarcasms.

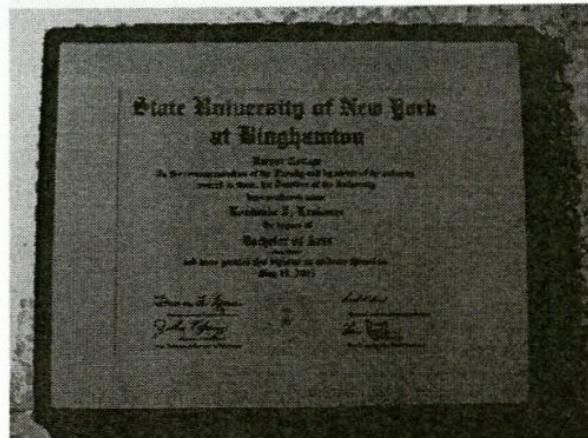
Then I realized that I never really thought about how infrequently I use cursive writing until that very moment. For the first time in our extensive history of arguments and annoying chatter, I actually tried to calmly explain something to Mikey.

“Cursive was used for things like writing letters. People don’t really write letters anymore. They use e-mail or type them on a computer before sending them through the postal system.”

After my quick rant on the present state of cursive writing, he was quiet, and quiet isn’t a concept Mikey knows very well. I decided to let him be as I continued to slouch on the recliner, soaking in the brief serenity of silence.

“Tom, what did people use before cursive?”

T.D.



Undergraduate Diploma (2006)

*Paper and ink; White watermarked paper with gold embossing and black type;
8.5" X 11"*

Purpose: Signify educational accomplishment

Replaced by: Masters Degree

Found by: Christina Kincaid and Steven Torem

Location: Hanging on wall in unused basement office

A Mother's Sacrifice

When I was accepted into Binghamton University, my parents were thrilled. Doris, my mother, was a lunch lady at East Franklin Elementary School and my father, Peter, worked as a carrier for the United States Postal Service.

Long ago, I asked my mother why she didn't go to college. My question seemed to make her uncomfortable as she mumbled something about priorities, and asked if I had finished my homework. It wasn't until I looked through my parents' wedding album that I understood what she meant. The album contained many pictures of my mother, much younger and nicely dressed but with a round belly obvious under her white gown.

As the first from my family to enter college, I felt pressure to succeed and redeem myself for my prenatal offense. Twenty-two years after the shotgun wedding, I graduated. Armed and ready with my diploma, I dove into the job market, sure to get the kind of position my parents had dreamed of for me. Something with reasonable pay, security and prestige. What I found was that instead of being a sought after candidate I was just part of the herd of graduates. We all had similarly framed ceremonial documentation that attested to some level of bought wisdom but said little about our innate intelligence.

Jobless, and discouraged, I gave up my dreams and moved back home. I now work in the café at a Barnes and Noble. The job is not too bad; I have plenty of time to reflect on life while making lattes. I have accepted the fact that after four years of studying, instead of the opportunities my parents had desired for themselves and me, all I've acquired is debt. But I take some solace in the continued company of books; maybe someday I'll actually take advantage of my employee discount and get back to reading.

C.K.

The Dispensable Degree

"I just don't get it, Ben. You go to school and work your butt off for four long years and when you're finally done, you end up working as a cashier in the supermarket? What's the use of waking up early, spending long nights in the library studying, and thousands of dollars on tuition, if in the end you can't even get a well paying job?"

"I don't know, Mike. It's true, my dad and his father were both very successful and neither one even went to college. Things sure have changed. Our parents were lucky; they could get away with that. Even my older sister had it better. She went to college, graduated with a Bachelor's Degree, and could get a job doing pretty much anything she wanted. College grads were highly sought after by employers, not the other way around. Just because I was born last, my résumé is useless unless I have a Masters!"

"I guess that's because *everyone* goes to college now!"

"You're right. Actually, I read an online article just a few days ago that said that the number of college graduates is growing steadily each year! There's just no competitiveness in having a Bachelor's Degree anymore, it's an archaic standard of qualification, not the mark of achievement. Instead of graduating and getting my life started, I have to work as a cashier while I apply for graduate school. I can't believe I have to go back to school."

"Then again, maybe you should just work on a career in the supermarket, Ben. There's a good chance that by the time you get a Master's, it won't be much use either."

"Thanks Mike, now I'm really depressed!"

S.T.

Not For Sale

Tokyo's flea market is always crowded with people trying to buy and sell merchandise. Today is one of those rare afternoons when the urban folk are relaxed and idle, enjoying the sun, a walk in the market, and good company.

An obvious exception to the joyful crowd is a young skinny girl in shabby cloths. Her name is Tomoko and she is standing by small booth, decorated only by colorful signs that markers advertise the prices of her merchandise; 'handmade 300 yen' and 'vintage lot - 1000 yen for 10 pieces'. It is already five o'clock, and it doesn't look like she is selling much of anything today.

While Tomoko smirks at the rude people sauntering by her booth without showing any interest, she does not notice a chic girl of approximately the same age who slips in and quietly begins to browse the dress rack. A tap on the shoulder startles Tomoko.

"I'm sorry, but I was just wondering how much this dress is?"

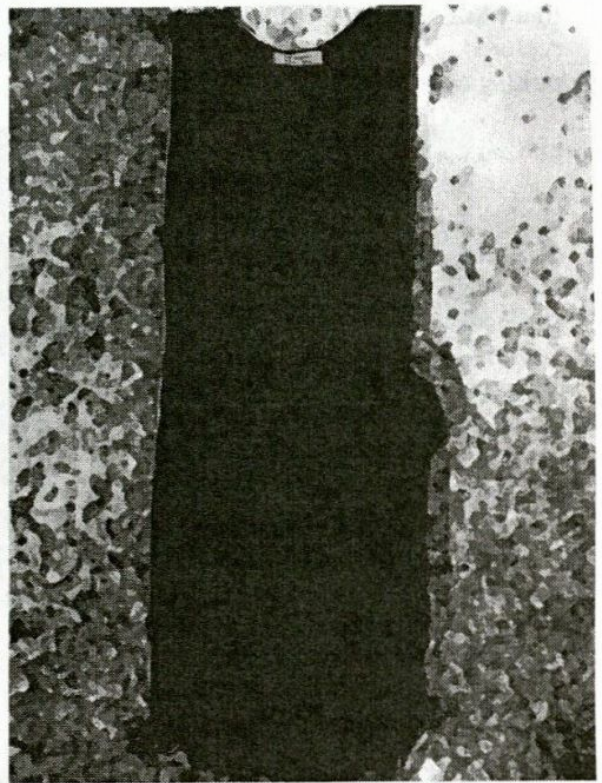
The vendor looks at both her customer and the dress. It is the red dress, the only personal item in the entire booth. The others have been picked up at the Salvation Army, obtained from neighbors, or collected in junkyards. The red dress, however, is hers. It had been her mother's when she was young, and now it is Tomoko's.

"It's 50,000 yen," Tomoko says bluntly, surprising herself with the outrageous price she just announced. "It's real vintage, 1920s pattern and all. It's really old," she adds, hoping that the girl would just walk away.

The shopper appears rich, which concerns Tomoko and she holds her breath. The shopper hesitates, but then walks away.

The day grows dark, and the booths close down for the day. Tomoko counts the money in her cash drawer. She made barely 4000 yen today but she smiles. What is important is that she managed to hold onto that dress, just like every other Sunday.

J.Y.



Dress (ca. 1920)

Polyester and spandex; burgundy and black in color; 11.5' X 12.5" X 34.5";

Skirt Width 41"

Purpose: Attire

Replaced by: Feminine silhouette form fitting evening dress

Found by: Jennifer Shtutman and Jayoon Yi

One of a Kind

When I was little, mother and I used visit my grandmother every Sunday. We always entered Granny's house through the back door, which lead to the kitchen where cookies and coffee awaited us. As much as I loved Granny, the visits seemed more like a chore than an exciting outing since I always believed I had something better to do.

However, one particular Sunday our visit was quite unusual. We entered the kitchen but were not greeted by the usual smell of freshly baked goods. There was not even a fresh pot of coffee brewing. Concerned, we wandered upstairs to find that Granny's bedroom had turned into a Hollywood show room! The

furniture was covered with fabrics and costumes that I had never seen before, and could not have pictured in my wildest dreams. Granny's leg was poking out of her closet as she rummaged about.

"Grandma? What is going on? Are you putting on a play?"

"No Darling," she responded, "these clothes are from my younger days. I have decided to have a garage sale this weekend."

I stood there in amazement, mesmerized at the array of colors and unique designs as Granny told us of her life as a young woman, attending parties in beautiful dresses and evening gowns. One dress struck me as particularly attractive. It was of a flapper style, red with black accents, sleek and flowing, perfect for a girl who loved to go out.

My eyes were fixated on this dress, its unique pattern and fabric made it beautiful yet it seemed so out of date. Granny must have noticed my interest; she emerged from the closet, dusted the dress off, and handed it to me. I ran into the bathroom and tried it on. It fit perfectly.

"Granny, I love it!"

"It's yours," she responded. "It may not be fashionable, but it is one of a kind!"

J.S.

A Hard Day at Work

The quarterly analysis is due tomorrow and I am very tense. I am most worried about how many disks it is going to take to save all the data and my presentation. Five? Ten? Hopefully no more!

What if I lose one? What if one breaks, leaving me with a gap in this crucial report? Trying not to obsess, I do my best to finish. It is already late, my eyes are dry and my head hurts.

Saving my files is taking forever. I put my head down while I wait. Mysteriously, someone I have never seen in the office appears and offers me what he calls a "memory stick."

"Try it... it will change your life!! The work days you know are over!" He takes my old floppies and dissolves into thin air.

I read the instructions on the small package. "Just plug the stick into the computer." Excited, I try to comply with the instructions but

cannot find a port that fits my new device. I try to force the flat plug into the round socket on my machine, but fail. I look for my disks but they are all gone! What to do? What to do?

"Are you okay?" I hear a strange voice. "Are you okay?"

I lift my head from the desk. Am I okay? No I am not okay! I must have fallen asleep! I have to get back to work or I'll miss my deadline for sure.

S.L.

Whatever Happened to Floppy Whoppy

My father, a businessman, spent his nights writing budgets and memos when I was a child. Sitting on his lap while he worked was often the only time we spent together. I would watch Daddy type on the big computer, the warmth of his chest and the hum of the machine eventually lulling me to sleep. He would keep working with me snoring in his lap, until Mom whisked me off to bed.

After he returned from long business trips I would be determined to stay awake for as long as possible. Asking Daddy a million questions, I am sure I tried his patience. One day Daddy showed me something new. It was large, square, black, and bendy. He told me that this "floppy disk," as he called it, was magic. Inside the disk fit all of his work. All he had to do was put the disk in the computer, push a button and mysteriously, the papers would be inside. I called the disk "Floppy Whoppy" and got a thrill out of seeing my dad make it disappear in the computer every night. Once it came out of its house, I would shake it and ask, "Are you sure they're all in here?"

Years later, I asked Dad what ever happened to Floppy Whoppy. He looked up at me perplexed. At last, a wave of recognition rushed over his face. He smiled then replied: "I don't want to disappoint you, but Floppy Whoppy is long gone, thrown out into the trash."

K.M.



5.25 inch Floppy Disk (1970s – 1980s)

Plastic disk coated with magnetic iron oxide; black in color; 5.25" X 5.25" X 0.06"

Purpose: Information storage

Replaced by: 3.5 inch Floppy Disks

Found by: Sung Lee and Kara Montgomery

Location: Storage box in basement of a residence

Unappreciated Undergarment

April 4th, 1992

Dearest Diary,

I am so excited! Tomorrow is my 14th birthday and I am having a slumber party with cake and presents! I am super excited about receiving presents from people my own age, especially after the horrible gift Grandmum Thompson sent me yesterday.

Airmailed from Brighton, England in a shiny pink box was what I thought would be *the* most fabulous of presents. We had talked on the phone and she promised to send me something "grown-up." No more fuzzy-bunny slippers!

But, when I opened the box I found something that looked a lot like a strappy-white cotton-training bra! If that was what it was supposed to be, it sure was not my size. Disappointed, I tossed the gift onto the kitchen table and headed out to the mall with Jane and Sally. What a let down!

When I got home Mom was inspecting Grandmum's gift. I never saw her so flushed and giddy! She called it a garter belt; a contraption is intended to hold up stockings! Now I have several pairs of stockings that do the holding up all on their own! Really, you would think Grandmum never got out of the house!

Mom thinks the garter belt is just delightful as she used to wear one too as a young lady. She is insisting I give it a try, though she doesn't wear hers anymore! But really, what's the point, as I simply can't be seen in it.

I can't wait to see what Grandmum sends me next year... I'll save some space in the back of my sock drawer for it!

Off to bed...

J.K.

Temporary Trends

All the advice Claire received about what to expect when coming to America did not

prepare her for the culture shock she experienced upon her arrival to Lincoln Middle School. Although Claire had received good marks in her English classes back in France, judging by the puzzled expressions on her classmates' faces when she spoke she still had a lot to learn. Desperate, she wondered whether she would ever fit in.

One afternoon, after gym class, she overheard one classmate ask another, "Where is that girl from again? France? What's with those cotton things she wears with the hooks?"

"Oh, my grandma had those, they're called garter belts. Nobody wears those ugly things anymore!" giggled the second girl. They broke out into laughter, Claire into tears. She just had to go shopping for new clothes so she could fit in.

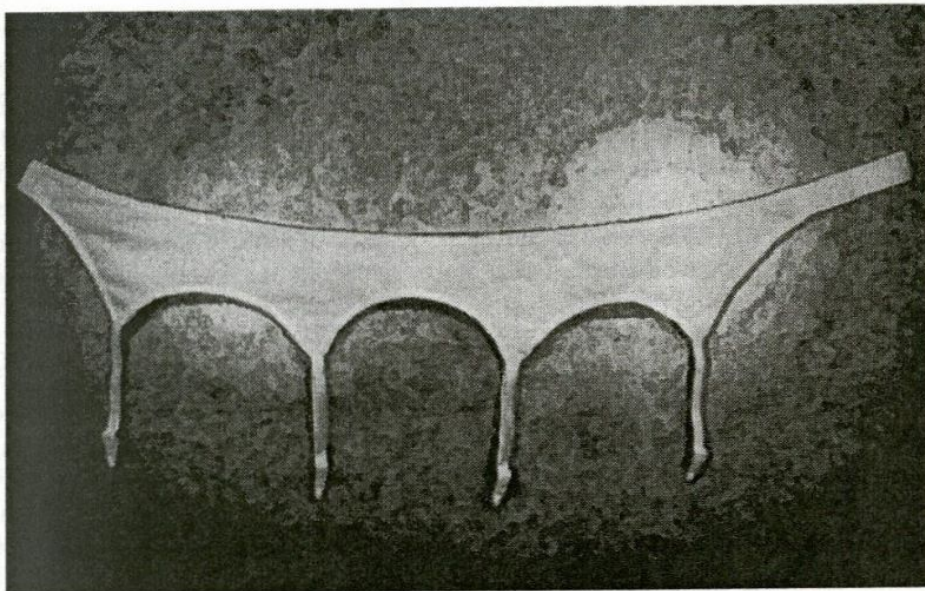
Claire didn't fit in, not until she was in high school. Having improved upon her English and met new friends, she was fairing better now. While picking out prom gowns with her friends, one of them pulled a small garment from her purse.

"Look what I'll be wearing!" Anne said excitedly.

Claire's face turned red. Her head was flooded with memories of shame from middle school. But her friends now seemed to think that garter belts were cool. Anne's was different from the ones Claire used to wear in France; this one had a sexy red color with bows and ruffles. Everyone wanted a garter belt like Anne's.

Claire reluctantly admitted that she used to a garter belt in France and that she still had a few pairs in her closet that the girls could borrow. Even though Claire's were plain white, her friends found it delightful that they were authentically Parisian.

J.T.



Garter Belt (ca. 1950)

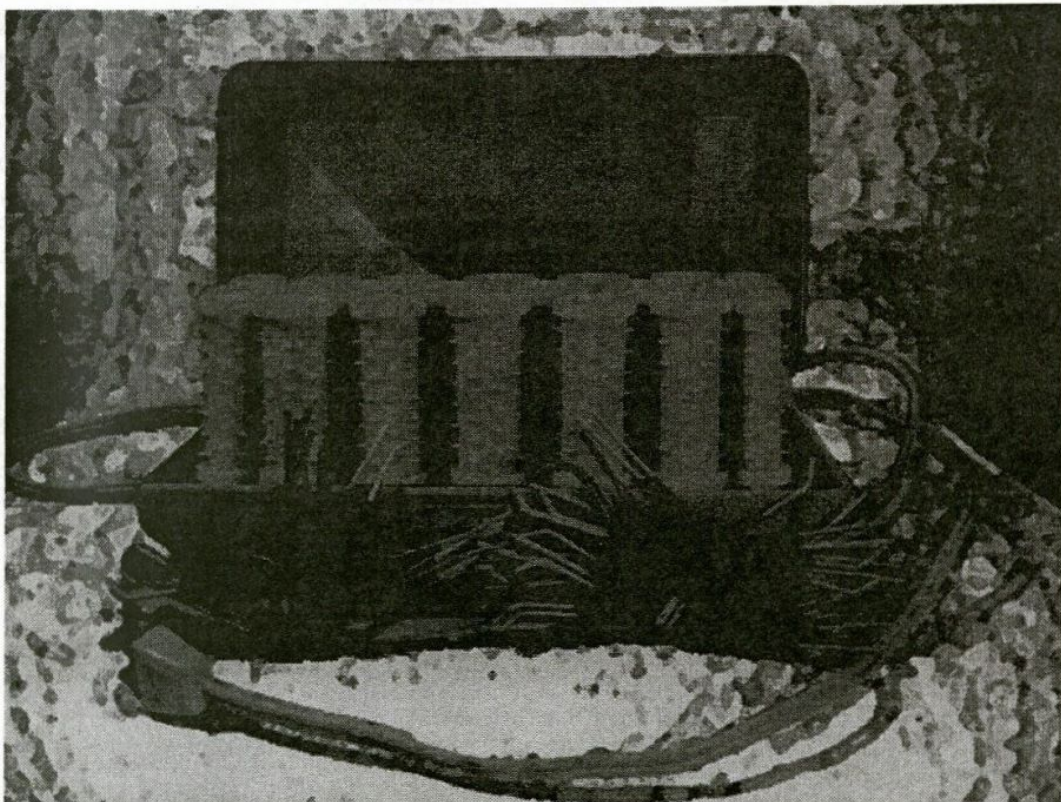
Cotton; white in color; 20" X 10"

Purpose: To prevent garters and stockings from slipping

Replaced by: Elastic pantyhose

Found by: Jessica Kaminski and Jessica Torres

Location: Dresser drawer in a residence



Electric Hair Curlers (ca. 1970s)

Metal and plastic; largely white and beige in color; 9" X 4.25" X 4.75"

Purpose: Hair styling

Replaced by: Curling irons

Found by: Michelle Usewicz and Joelle Neustadter

Location: Shelf in linen closet

Burning Nightmare

My bed looked so inviting. Set to the right temperature and softness, I rarely fail to fall asleep as soon as my head hits the pillow. Yet today I couldn't sleep. After the long day I had, all I wanted was to rest. The field trip to the museum, the shuttle ride over the cityscape, dinner in the underwater pavilion, it was fun but exhausting.

My mind kept wandering over all of the weird things I had seen at the museum. The cars, turntables, garter belts, and even electric hair curlers. I seemed to be stuck on the hair curlers. They were such a simple yet dangerous way to style hair. I roll over, trying to get rid of the image of the curlers heating in their plastic box. It wouldn't go away...

"Hey Kari, hold still! Will ya? I need to finish putting the curlers in your hair. They are finally hot! We all need to make sacrifices for our beauty!"

"Mom? What are you doing? Get those curlers out of my hair! You're going to burn all my hair off!"

"Oh don't be silly honey. A little burnt hair is nothing when you have the latest styles! Now dear, you need to sleep with them on, so you can get the full effect."

My mother straps me down to the bed, rendering me immobile.

"No mom! No!" I scream but she just smiles at me with my slowly singeing hair.

I struggle and fall out of the bed, onto the floor. Confused, I look around. No straps, or restraints; just my blankets still wrapped tightly around my legs. No curlers, no burning, but I touch my head – just to be sure. What a nightmare!

M.U.

Mother's Stubborn Hair Curlers

My mother admonishes me, "Never throw anything away" as she sifts through her bedroom-sized closet filled with clothes, some from the 70s. Seventeen and obsessed with the latest trends and fashions, I just now realize how stubborn Mom actually is about ignoring the latest style.

Our venture into the closet is to find an outfit for Mom to wear to a gala. She is searching while I await the need to serve as a fashion consultant. Flipping through a current "Vogue" magazine, I look my part. Reading an article about hairstyles, I learn that tight set curls are out; loose-flowing and long-wavy curls are the new trend.

Concerned, I look up and notice the secure hot electric rollers in my mother's hair, turning her scalp red only to give her those tight curls. "Mom, please read this article! Why do you insist on using curlers that are painful, just to give yourself a hairstyle that is out of fashion?"

The stubborn woman that she is, Mom replies, "I like to use things that I am familiar with. Why do I need to spend money on new curlers, when I have these reliable ones?"

I show my mother the article, explaining how a curling iron takes less time, doesn't hurt, and will give her a much younger look. She ignores me. I grab my curling iron from the bathroom to demonstrate how to use it on my own hair. "That's nice honey," she says.

Not sure if I've made a difference, I return to my magazine. Mom seems to have gone through every outfit in the closet. She holds up the two main contenders for her gala attire. By her selections it is clear, Mom is clueless when it comes to fashion.

J.N.

Allegory of a Token

All things in life come to pass, Billy Bullseye thinks in his plastic cover that has become his home for the past 15 years. He begins to reminisce about the good old days.

Billy is from the 5th generation of NYC subway tokens. Like the other generations before him, he arrived within the turnstile of the 42nd street subway station exuding an aura of excitement, imperishability, and blissful ignorance. This particular turnstile was renowned, for on the very top latch resided the Great Donald Diamond Jubilee of the 3rd generation tokens. Donald had sat there for years, as if he owned the turnstile. The 4th generation would always tilt sideways as they entered, to pay Donald respect. But Billy, and the other younger tokens, treated Donald as an ancient relic that should have been long gone.

One day Billy and his friends decided to end Donald's reign. Upon entering, each tried its hardest to land on the latch and knock Donald off. Each attempt failed, but Billy came closest. As Billy fell down into the token pile, he caught a glimpse of Donald's face. It was not the confident smirk Billy expected to see; instead Donald seemed filled with unease and desperation.

Donald called down to the token pile, "I'm delighted to know that there will always be new tokens that will try to take my place, but I must warn you, you'll regret it if you ever succeed."

Billy finally understood that Donald was anxious to be replaced. It was all too painful being up there year after year all alone, watching family and friends pass by. Billy felt sorry for Donald but decided he would never again try to replace him on that latch.

M.T.

Residents of the Dusty Dungeon

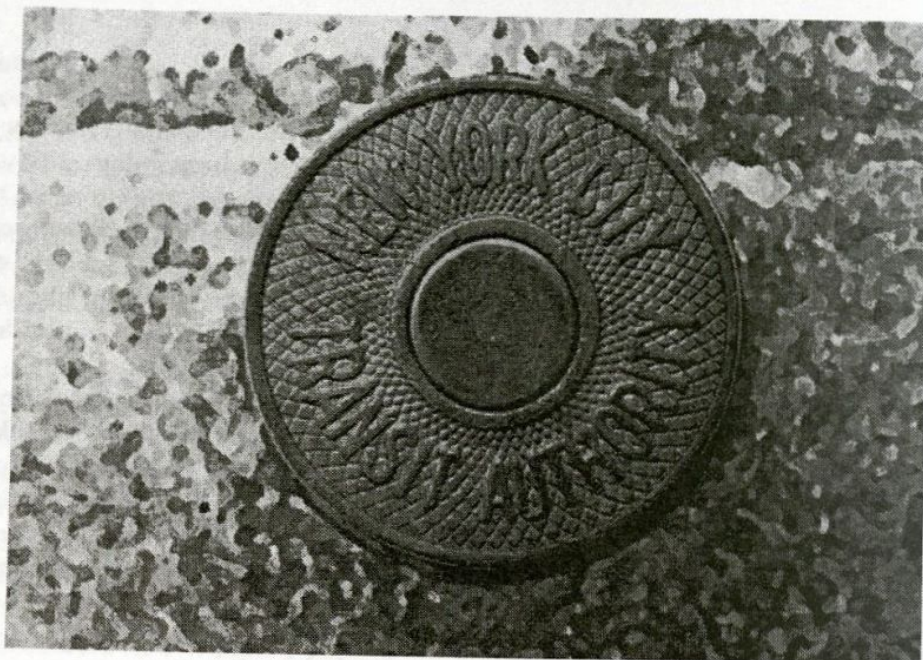
I have been sitting quietly in this dark, filthy, old wooden drawer for the past eleven years. It feels as if it has been forever since I last saw daylight even though the tap-tap of keypunching, the ringing of phones, and the clunk of opening and closing of drawers can be heard.

My drawer does not get much attention. Here I sit with my dusty old buddies. There's the "New Kids on the Block" cassette and the Mickey Mouse stickers and pencils that were here when I arrived. The "Vacation to Bahamas" photo album is the most recent addition to the group, but even he hasn't been touched in years. I am starting to believe that no one remembers we are here.

Please do not be mistaken. I am not worthless. I once served millions of subway riders in the most dynamic city of the world, meeting people from all walks of life. I have been in sweaty, smelly and greasy hands, but I have also inhaled the sweetest perfume. I have been alone quite often, but I have also spent time with thousands of my brothers and sisters.

I was dropped in this forsaken drawer in 1995 when a new set of tokens was minted and my kind became obsolete. Oh, how I long to be able to serve people again, to help them make their ways to meet each other. Even if I cannot be used to gain access to the subway, why couldn't I have been left out in the sunshine, on a windowsill or better yet in a grassy park? Why must I be imprisoned in this dark dungeon?

V.P.



New York City Subway Token (1953 – 2003)

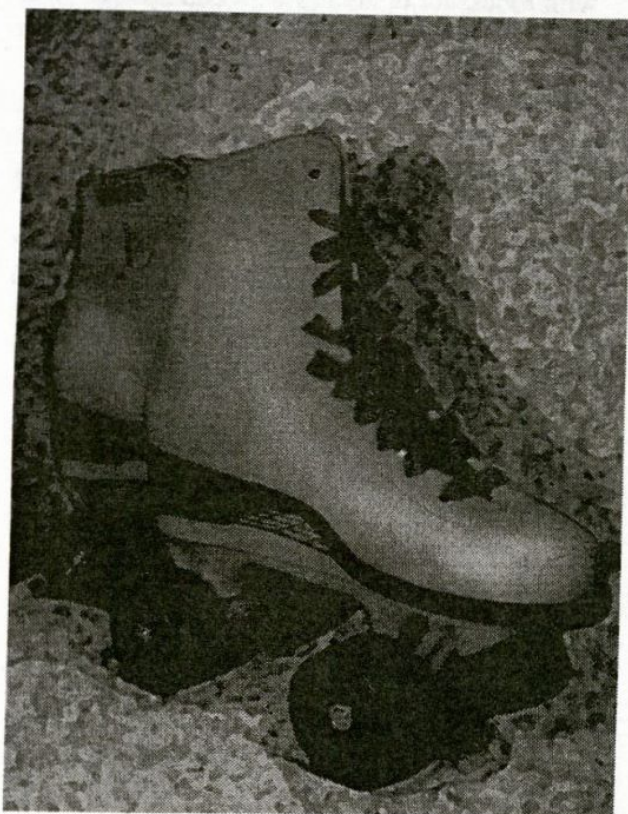
Brass; golden yellow in color with grey core; 22mm (diameter) x 1mm (depth)

Purpose: Subway fare

Replaced by: Metrocard

Found by: Wing-chi Pak and Ming Tseng

Location: Desk drawer of a residence



Roller Skates (1863 – present)

Leather, urethane, and aluminum composition; white and purple in color;

8" X 4" X 12"

Purpose: Leisure activity

Replaced by: Roller blades

Found by: Trisha Wensel and Emily Fried

Location: Salvation Army, Binghamton, NY

Lost and Found

Emily was a scrawny little girl with long brown hair. She waited all year for her favorite holiday, Hanukkah. She particularly loved receiving eight gifts, one each night and each better than the last. The sequence usually started with pajamas, then clothes, a doll, a hat, a movie, a puzzle, and a board game. The eighth gift was always something different, but always something special.

On this eighth evening, Emily eagerly awaited her final gift. When it was finally handed to her, she ripped apart the wrapping paper to discover a pair of white leather roller-skates with purple laces and wheels. Emily thought her skates were beautiful and went right out to give them a try. For the next few days, Emily spent all of her time outside of school cruising the streets in her roller-skates, feeling like the queen of the neighborhood. Then the snow came and Emily was forced to put her skates away.

On the first warm sunny day of spring, Emily searched for her roller-skates. She could not find them anywhere. An investigatory team, including her parents and siblings, swept the house for any sign of the skates but none was found. Emily cried, and mourned for weeks over her lost skates.

Years later Emily's mother packed up her daughter's belongings. Emily had graduated from the Police Academy and moved into her own home. Her parents, eager to reclaim space in their house, offered to bring her some of her old things. In Emily's closet they discovered old dolls, hats, movies, and games. At the bottom of the closet was the pair of long lost roller-skates. Emily's parents laughed, remembering the organized search of the whole house that failed to turn up the lost skates. Maybe Emily should reconsider becoming a police detective?

E.F.

Pink Slips

Dear Mr. Armstrong,

I regret to inform you that, on January 15th of this year, the Richardson Ball Bearing and Skate Company will be closing the doors of its Middletown roller skate plant due to the rise in popularity of the in-line skate, and the successes of our main competitor, Rollerblade Inc.

Our family-oriented products sell quite well, and we are proud of our 67 years of service to American families. However, a business subsists on sharp calculations, and the making of roller skates has become unprofitable. Our research and development team believes that we must focus on the production of rolling shoes for children in order to stabilize the company's bottom line. Our new rolling shoe factory is being constructed in Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

It is an unfortunate time for all of our dedicated employees in Middletown; many pink slips are due to arrive at the end of next month, among them yours. There are, however, new opportunities in Pakistan or at Rollerblade Inc., where I hope many of our excellent workers will find new work. Please refer yourself to Randy Dunbar, Head of Personnel at Rollerblade, Inc.

In closing, I would like to say that it has been my sincerest pleasure in working with you. I wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors.

Sincerely,

Brian McNeil, District Manager

T.W.

Still Useful

Frantically searching through his PalmPilot, Mike became more nervous with each second as he could not find his professor's number. "I know I have it somewhere! I remember writing it down!"

"What are you looking for? Why do you look so flustered?" Chrissy asked.

"I need to get in touch with this old college professor for a letter of recommendation, but I can't find his number."

"Have you checked your PalmPilot? Isn't that where you keep your contact list?"

"Chrissy! Of course I checked it! It's not in there!"

"What about your Rolodex? Didn't you use that for awhile?"

"Don't be crazy. That old thing was never useful," Mike replied.

"Mike, I think you've forgotten how much you relied on it in college," Chrissy urged. "The Rolodex is probably in the basement with all the other junk from the move."

"Ok, fine," he responded begrudgingly.

After searching through a mountain of boxes, he found the tattered, old carton labeled "OFFICE STUFF, 1993." It was filled with used papers, pens, a slide-rule from his mother, and the Rolodex! Flipping through the contact cards, Mike flashed back to his carefree days at college.

There was a card for Tim, his old friend who had died two years after college in a horrible car accident. Ahhh, Miriam's address! The gorgeous girl with long black hair, clever and fun to be around, his secret love who insisted on dating that nasty longhaired guy Doug. How different his life would have been if he married Miriam and could still hang out with Tim on the weekends!

"What are you doing down there?" Chrissy called from upstairs. Mike frowns and

continues his search, stopping at the contact card he needed. "Prof. Reinhard Bernbeck, (607) 555-1234." "One problem solved," he thought. J.C.

Childhood Toy

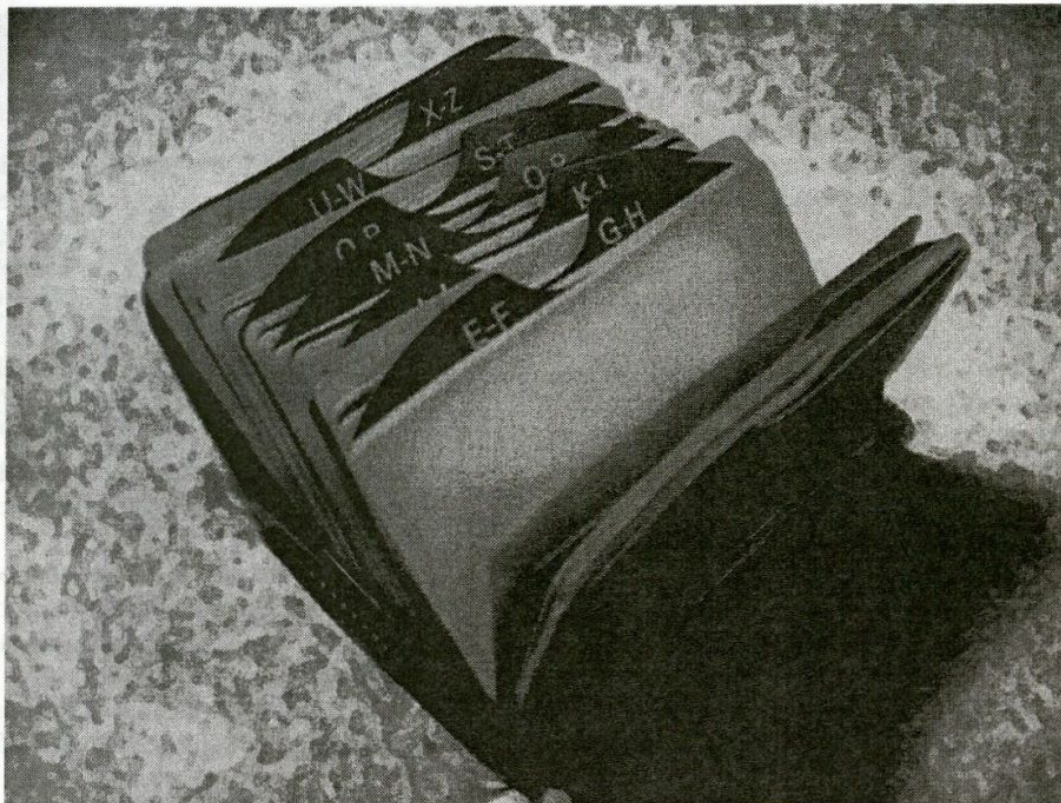
Dad always hated when I played "office" with the things on his desk. I loved to sit in the big leather chair, legs dangling in an attempt to reach the wooden floor below. I would play with the phone for hours on end, as if it were my miniature piano of dial tones and beeps. Then there was the Rolodex. Oh, the Rolodex!

For some reason, the Rolodex was my favorite childhood toy, more treasured than the Barbie dolls or my "My Little Ponies" collection. Somehow, nothing compared to the shiny plastic Rolodex with its smooth lid and small cards I could shuffle through like a flipbook. The handwritten numbers and addresses blurred together as I perused Dad's listings of colleagues and friends at light speed. On a few occasions I took the Rolodex to my room, trying to keep it for myself, but the response was always the same: "No, Daddy needs his Rolodex."

On my 21st birthday, I walked into my room and found a neatly wrapped present sitting on my bed. I immediately tore the wrapping paper off, and what did I find but the same damn Rolodex I cherished as a kid! Dad thought his joke was hilarious. "This is what I get for my 21st birthday?" I thought. "What on earth would I do with a stupid Rolodex? I keep contact information in my cell phone and it would take forever for me to write all that stuff down on the stupid little cards."

"Very funny, Dad. Now where is my real present?" I demanded.

K.H.



Rolodex (ca. 2003)

Metal with white paper; black in color; 4" X 4.5" X 2"

Purpose: Storage of names and contact information

Replaced by: Palm Pilot

Found by: Katrina Hedeem and Jillian Cohen

Location: Storage box in basement of a residence

Tools of an Artist

As a good father, I wanted to make sure that my daughter's desk was filled with crayons, markers, pencils, erasers, sharpeners and whatever else my little artist needed. Her favorite toolkit was a drawing set I bought for her when she started 1st grade. It contained an array of colored pencils, a mini sharpener, and a bright white eraser.

Lizzy broke the point of the first colored pencil she used. I think she did it on purpose. She always enjoyed the process of personalizing her pencils by sharpening them. In this set the green pencil seemed to break the easiest, while the blue one never needed sharpening.

When the drawing set consisted mainly of short, but colorful, pencils remnants, I purchased a fresh set for Lizzy. She didn't seem to care for her new pencils and switched to using crayons for her drawings. When I asked her if there was something wrong with the pencils Lizzy said there was. She could not understand why the new green pencil was just as durable as the blue one. In fact all her pencils were very durable and they rarely needed sharpening.

"Dad, I think the new pencils are defective."

Y.K.

Trusty Old Sharpener

As implied by the names our clever classmates gave us, Bill and I were nerds. I was

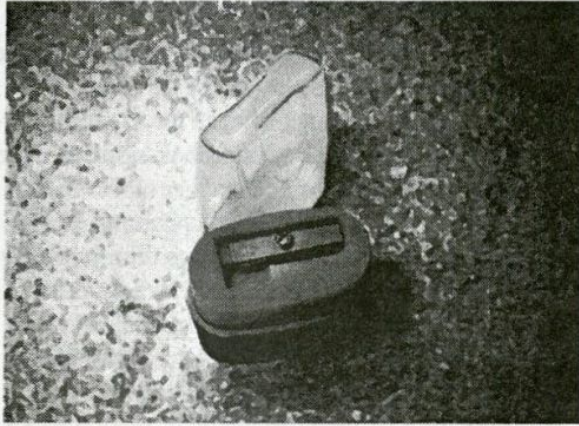
"Mrs. Dictionary," and Bill's quite uncreative nickname was "Mr. Dictionary." Although most kids considered being a nerd a burden, I enjoyed it.

To me, nothing was more exciting than getting new school supplies at the beginning of the year. It was better than Christmas! I loved the crisp orderliness of the new notebooks and matching folders, and the smell of newly sharpened pencils. One year, I even got a brand new pencil sharpener. I felt so cool because it wasn't a typical pencil sharpener; it had a little top to catch all the shavings so that they didn't get all over my desk. With all my pencils sharpened and ready to go, I felt like the smartest kid in class.

In middle school we were forced to use pens instead of pencils, but they didn't have the same feel. I made the switch, only because it was required. It wasn't until we took standardized tests that I could resurrect my ritual of preparing a set of sharpened pencils for my schoolwork.

On the day of the SAT's I insisted on carrying my old sharpener with me and I felt like Mrs. Dictionary again. I think that sharpener made a real difference in my performance. My proof is this: Bill had a much more difficult time with the test than I did, and he was using a mechanical pencil.

L.B.



Mechanical Pencil Sharpener (ca. 1990)

Metal sharpening edge with clear plastic case; green in color; 2.5" X 1" X 3"

Purpose: Leisure activity

Replaced by: Mechanical pencils which do not require sharpening

Found by: Yekaterina Sulima and Lauren Brady

Location: Desk drawer

Tamagotchi Virtual Pet (ca. 1996)

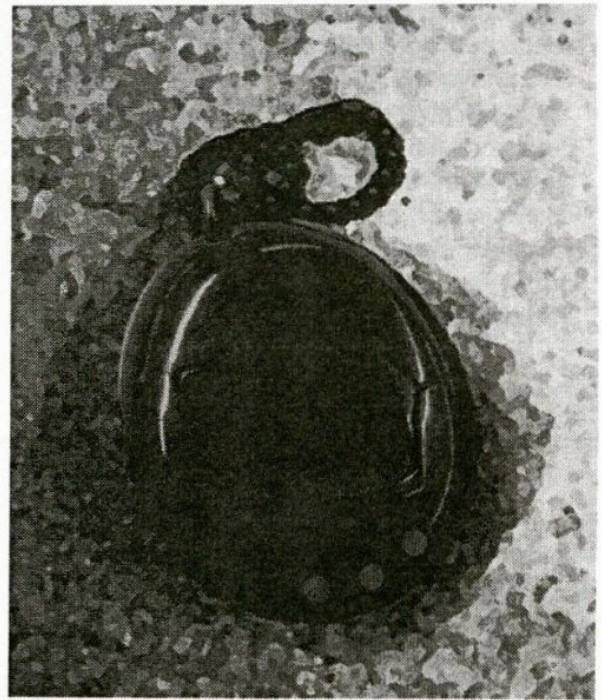
Metal and electronic interior components with plastic exterior; ; purple in color; 1" X 2" X 0.75"

Purpose: Recreation

Replaced by: More sophisticated portable entertainment

Found by: Jane Zagami and Michelle Cheng

Location: Drawer of unused objects in a bedroom



Growing Up and Growing Old

When I was a child I always wanted to wear my mother's high heels and make-up. It was not just that I looked dashing with rouge all over my lips, and face, it was a right of passage; as was taking responsibility for my actions. Or so my mother would tell me when I was punished for messing with her things.

When Tamagotchis came on the toy scene I thought it was the perfect way to show Mom I was growing-up. The digital pet would give me the responsibility of caring for something. I only was eleven but my little virtual dog needed constant attention.

Taking care of my new pet was fun for a few days, but the Tamagotchi was just a passing fancy for me. I became annoyed at the beeping and complaining of the little dog encased in a plastic egg. Not wanting my mother to know that I was shrugging my responsibilities, I changed my pet's electronic clock so that it would not require attention when I had better things to do, like talk on the phone.

The next holiday season I saw a commercial for *The Sims* computer game. I was sure I could take care of an entire virtual family. Even though *The Sims* was an even bigger responsibility, I did not mind. After all, I was not irresponsible; I was just bored with my Tamagotchi and ready for a new challenge.

J.Z.

The Victorious Corporate Machine

On a brisk September morning when the Power Rangers and Spice Girls still ruled the world, a new school year began for my ten-year-old daughter, Vanessa. Her school supplies were packed in a new backpack and her closet full of new clothes. For Vanessa, the upcoming year was an opportunity to spend more time with her friends. For me, it meant my free time would be taken up by PTA meetings and bake sales.

I could hear the school bus down the block. It was on-time, 3:15 P.M. I expect Vanessa to burst through the door, recounting tales of her exciting day at school. Instead of a chipper, smiling face, a tear-stained frowning one appears. Apparently, we underestimated the importance of one particular item for school: a Tamagotchi. It was an electronic contraption, meant as a virtual pet, requiring the owner's constant care and attention. The digitized cute animals encased in colorful key chains were expensive but quite popular and all the girls in the class had one, except Vanessa.

My husband and I chose not to squander money on this useless object of corporate profit raking. We tried to convince our daughter that she did not need to conform to every passing fad. But all this meant little to Vanessa, who was left to endure teasing and alienation.

The next day, Vanessa arrived home with a smile on her face. Her best friend had received a new Tamagotchi and gave her old one to Vanessa. I guess it is better to be slightly behind the times than disconnected altogether!

M.C.

Tea Strainer of the Heart

Nancy Marquee paws through the drawer seeking a whisk, but coming instead across a Victorian tea strainer bought by her fiancée at a shabby flea market. He thought it was charming, but she views it as another useless trinket, destined for the junk drawer. Holding the strainer up to the bright florescent lights, recently installed in her country home, she could not see that a loving young suitor had bought the heart shaped strainer for the beautiful Florence Pergola, almost one hundred years ago. Instead, Nancy shakes her head and wonders why she would use such a thing when it is so easy to make tea by simply dropping a bag into a mug of water and popping it in the microwave.

The tea strainer was originally purchased on a crisp autumn Sunday in New York City. The enchanting Florence Pergola strolls down an avenue, her hair tightly wound, her skin radiantly fair. She is clasping the arm of her suitor, a young Alton Benjamin, neatly dressed with his strong bone structure accentuated by a high collar. The couple passes many shop windows, displaying the wares. One such window causes Florence to stop abruptly. There it was, the shining sterling silver tea strainer with a beautiful wooden handle. Florence is taken aback and gasps slightly, as if viewing her engagement ring for the first time. Alton appreciates the small object and its effect on his fair companion. Without hesitation he purchases the tea strainer for her. Florence cherishes her beloved Alton and the lovely tea strainer, and recalls that crisp autumn day with every cup of tea.

Florence and Alton lived a long and happy life together. Upon their death, relatives fail to see the symbolism, beauty, or usefulness of the strainer and pawn the handsome piece for something much more valuable, cold hard cash. While doing her spring-cleaning, Nancy Marquee comes to the same conclusion and decides to sell the tea strainer. It passes through several hands before it reaches an expert in antiques. Realizing its historic value, the strainer lands in a small history museum where passers-by briefly consider it before shaking their heads

and appreciating the simplicity of making tea in the microwave.

A.A.

The Art of Drinking Tea

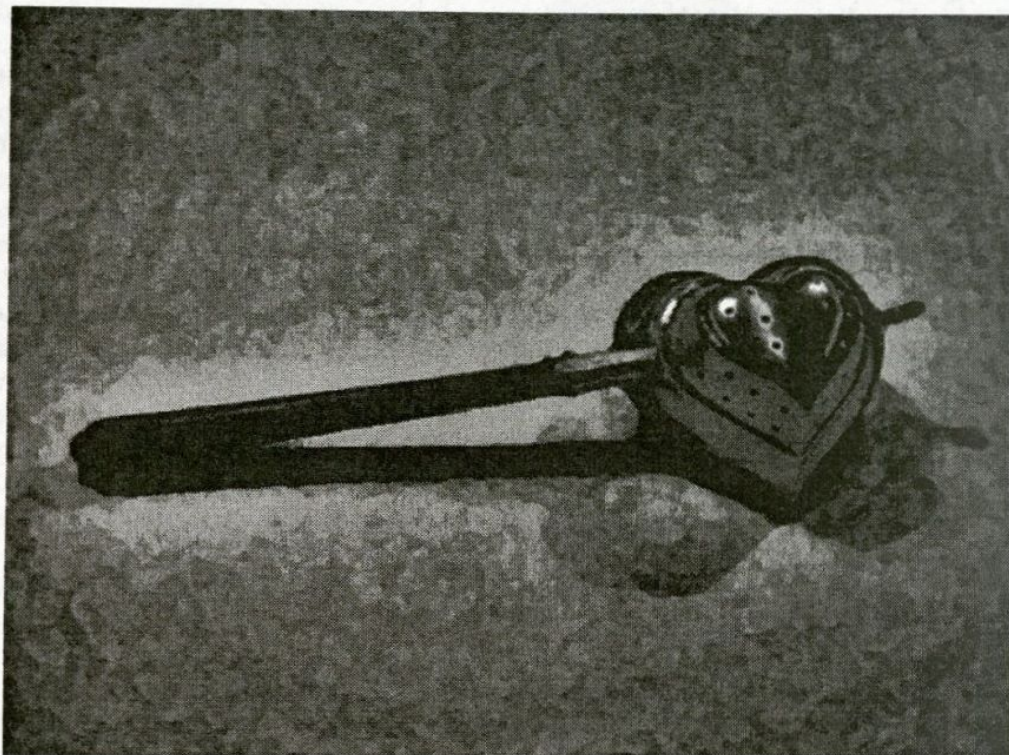
My aunt Leigh is an intriguing woman. A walking encyclopedia and an avid collector of useless objects, she always has fascinating facts to add to any conversation.

One particularly dreary winter's day, I ventured out to visit Leigh. In her small Manhattan apartment. I feel dwarfed by the mountains of clutter. She offers me a warm drink and opens a cabinet overflowing with teas, many labeled in indecipherable languages. The look on my face must have conveyed my amazement as my aunt began to narrate her experience discovering tea in Turkey, her tone suggesting that she longed for her youthful days of adventure.

She prepared a tray on which she balanced an old china set and a tea strainer. The strainer did not look Turkish; it was shiny and somewhat gaudy, with much more of a European flair to it. I admired the strainer and asked where she acquired it. "My mother passed it on to me, but it was originally owned by your great-great grandmother, Blanche. She came from Ireland to New York, and this was among the few possessions she brought with her," Leigh explained.

The loose Turkish tea prepared with the shiny Irish strainer tasted wonderful. That is until I got to the bottom of the cup. The soggy tea litter that passed through the strainer now created an unpleasant taste in my mouth. I felt nauseated. Leigh smiled and insisted, "You should not rush so much. Drinking tea is meant to be a slow process. It is an experience. The slightly bitter aftertaste is as important as the feel of the gradually cooling cup in your hand. If you drink slowly, the litter stays at the bottom. If you rush it, you pay the price. That is what is lost with modern tea bags, the art of drinking tea."

S.P.



Tea Strainer (ca. 1890s)

Sterling silver and wood; silver and brown in color; 6.5" X 2" X 1.25"

Purpose: Tea preparation

Replaced by: Tea bags

Found by: Siobhan Phillips and Amy Atchinson

Location: Drawer in kitchen of a residence

Pages of Wisdom

Bill Marion, General History teacher and educator extraordinaire, claimed his job was to make us think -- whether we liked it or not. He loved to ask questions about things he knew we had never considered. Bill never tired of the sea of quizzically frowned faces.

One particular Monday we entered the classroom to find an object on each desk. The scratched surface of my desk held an old anthropology textbook. A shadowed figure of a man holding a spear dominated the cover. The vegetation around his ankles was as dark as the figure itself. Behind the man, the sun was setting in a gloriously 1970s color palette: garish oranges, reds, yellows, and just the hint of a bright blue.

"Take these things home," Bill said, "and tomorrow, be ready to tell me why your object is important."

I poured through the book that night, my very left wing sensibilities horrified at its patronizing tone. The next day I raised my hand. "This is wrong," I said. "This book is not important, just look at the way it talks about people!"

Bill smiled and let me rant.

"It's condescending. It's useless; it's unimportant and useless!"

When I finished, Bill disagreed. "I think we can still learn something from this book. It is a reminder of where we have been and how far we have come, how far we still have to go."

Eight years later I graduated college with a degree in Anthropology. After the ceremony, my mother handed me a package. It was from Bill Marion. Puzzled, I unwrapped it to find the textbook with its garish sunset and shadowy figure. On the inside cover, in Bill's characteristic scrawl was the dedication: *Because it reminds us where we've been, and how far there still is to go.*

L.J.

Politically Incorrect

To conclude our month long study of the struggle for African American equality in this country, each student in Ms. Putt's third grade class was assigned to prepare a one-page report on a related topic of their choice. Having spent the last month learning about the topic, I couldn't wait to write the best report ever.

Immediately after dinner I marched into the living room and scanned the shelves to find the right book for my paper. I pried open a dusty old textbook with a sunset cover and began to read. Fascinated, I spent all night reading and writing the paper, using a flashlight under the covers. I couldn't wait for the next day, when I would blow all of my classmates out of the water.

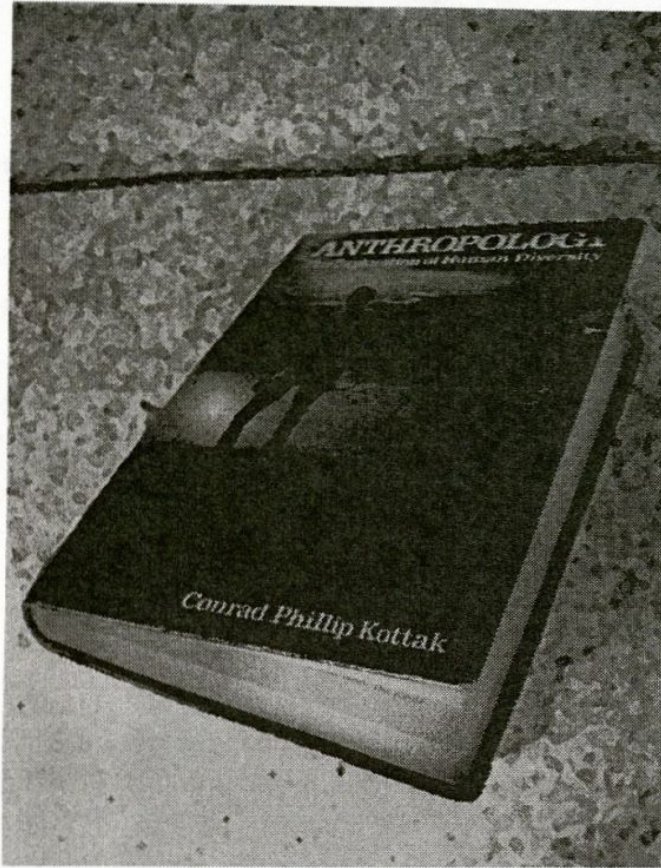
When it came time to present our papers, my hand was first in the air. Ms. Putt smiled and called me to the front of the class. I proudly walked up to the chalkboard, turned to face my classmates, and began to read.

"Black Rights in America, by Marcia Friedman." So far, so good I thought. "In 1870, the Constitution gave all colored men born in the United States the right to vote, which is why Negroes can vote now. Even afterwards though, the Negro continued to be treated unfairly by whites, especially in the South."

I paused to look up, expecting to see jealousy on the faces of my classmates and respect on that of my teacher. To my surprise, Ms. Putt's jaw practically hit the ground as one of my classmates began to cry.

That night Ms. Putt came to see my parents' at the house. She was extremely concerned, and so were Mom and Dad. They spent the weekend tossing out their old college books.

M.F.



Textbook (ca. 1970)

Paper; cover largely orange and black with ivory pages; 10" x 7.5" x 1.25"

Purpose: Education

Replaced by: Later editions

Found by: Marcia Friedman and Leila Joyce

Location: Shelf in a private house

Tin Can (2006)

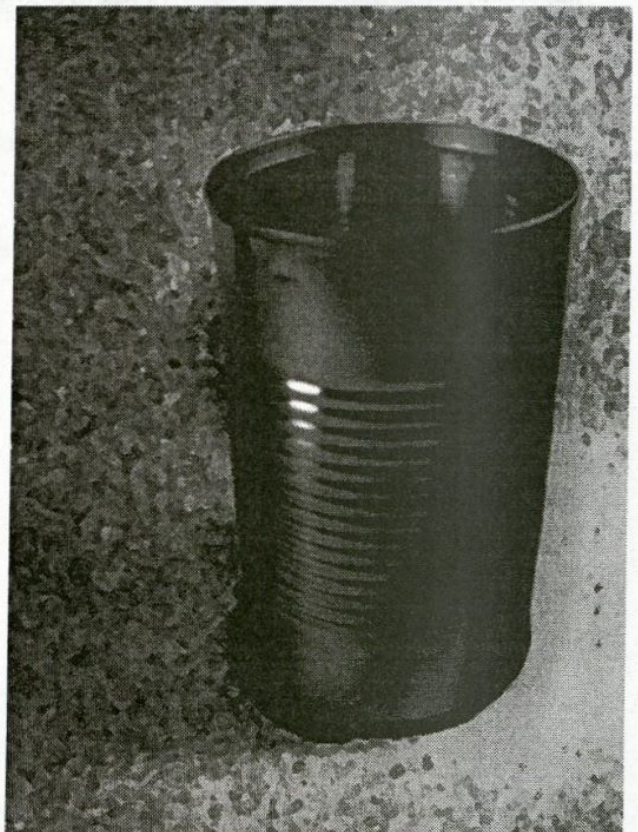
Metal; silver in color; 5" X 3" X 3"

Purpose: Single use food storage

Replaced by: New tin can

Found by: Naomi Lazarus and Man Ng

Location: Wal-Mart



Sweet Temptation

The smell of fresh milk toffee being made brought Nangi and me rushing into the kitchen. Lolo was standing over the stove, intently stirring the sweet bubbling mixture that was emanating the delectable aroma. As we approached, Lolo instinctively drew her free arm out, barring us from getting too close to the stove. Intent on satisfying our taste buds, Nangi and I began scooping the remnants of the milky substance from the mixing bowl with our fingers, and with childish ravenousness, licked them until they were wiped clean. Mission accomplished.

We now looked for our next diversion, and there, partly hidden from view behind a large bowl, was an opened can of condensed milk. We both reached to grab it, and after some shoving and pulling, set the can between us and proceeded to poke our little fingers in, to taste the sweetened milk.

Suddenly, Nangi lent out a squeal as she held out her fore finger. It was bleeding. I stood there, helpless and paralyzed by my sister's sudden outburst. Then I saw the now empty tin can on the table. Rolled on its side, the jagged edges of its lid glistened and I realized what had happened. There was the culprit! Full of vengeful anger, I grabbed the tin can and gave it a kick.

The next day, Nangi and I played in the backyard, the horrific events of the previous day already forgotten. Seeing Lolo come in with the groceries, we rushed into the kitchen, tipping the bag of produce from its resting place on the stool. Then, a familiar object caught my eye as it shimmered from under the stool. It was a new can of condensed milk. Instinctively I grabbed Nangi and lead her away. I don't like condensed milk anymore!

N.L.

A Tin Can Story

Day 1

The furnace roars, the hammers beat. In a world that is totally new to me, I, along with hundreds of others just like me, am told that we are here to serve humanity. As we pass along on a streaming belt, food rains on each and every one of us until we are full. We are given colorful

clothes and a cap to wear. "Good luck, you will need it", said one machine. I wonder what it means.

Day 3

Now I know what the machine meant. We are placed into a tiny room where everyone is tightly packed. The roof folds shut on us and everything becomes dark. All of a sudden, an earthquake seems to start. As we violently bump into each other, I think to myself, "Am I going to die here? Will I make it in one piece"? Thankfully I survive the trip.

Day 5

Once we arrive, we are lined up on a stage where we can show how beautiful we are. A man walks by and carefully looks at us.

"Pick me," said one can.

"No pick me instead," said another.

The man comes closer and picks a can up, "This one has a dent on it. It won't do".

After some time, I am chosen. With no time to say goodbye, I wonder what will happen to everyone else.

Day 17

My cap removed and what's inside me was poured out. As the man carries me toward the recycling bin, I realize that I am about to be thrown out.

"Please don't throw me away, please keep me," I shout in my loudest voice. "If you recycle me, I won't be the same!"

He looks at me again and says, "Humm, I have no use for you. Or do I?"

Day 35

I find a new purpose in a museum exhibition. I guess I am the most beautiful can after all.

M.N.

The Music of Memories

I love going to visit my Grandpa Ben. He's always full of stories from his youth. It's great to see how tied to the past he is, but sometimes I don't understand why he doesn't give in to progress.

One Tuesday after school, I walked in to Grandpa's house and was greeted by a familiar sound: Louis Armstrong records playing on the old turntable. That particular record was so worn from use that it was hard for me to discern music from static. I laughed and walked over to Grandpa's recliner.

"Grandpa, you've had that old record player for as long as I can remember. Don't you think it's time you should get rid of it?"

"Why?" he asked. "It still works fine."

"It might work but it sounds terrible. All of your favorite records are on CD's now, and they have been digitally remastered. It would sound like Louis was right here playing in your living room!"

"But I don't want it to sound like he's in my living room. I like the way his music sounds on my turntable."

I just stood there, unable to comprehend his lack of enthusiasm for better technology. Did I not explain myself well enough?

"You see," he continued, "sometimes what's new is not what's best. When I put on my records, they take me right back to the best days of my life. I don't listen just for the music. I also listen for the pops and other static noises. This old turntable plays the sounds from my past. I can't get that from a CD player."

M.D.

All that Jazz

Down at the old Jazz cafe, Danny silently longs for Maria's return. Although it has been 7 years since Maria last stepped foot in this lonesome cellar, Danny cannot forget her beautiful smile and gracefulness on the dance floor.

This cafe was once the neighborhood retreat from reality. Danny spun the records that filled the spaces within the crowd with laughter, smiles, cheers and dance. Anyone who stepped into this paradise world, of men in beautiful suits and ladies in flowing dresses, never wanted to leave.

It was Maria's cafe. She had hired Danny as a temporary disc jockey when she was unable to find a live jazz band to play on such a small stage. People from the neighborhood didn't mind the shortcomings of Maria's little cellar. Regular customers would bring their Jazz records and share their music and dancing techniques. Danny enjoyed the company and never seemed to get tired of working. Those were the best days of his life.

A few years had passed and Maria's discontent with the lack of stage space for a live band had grown. Aware of her problem and wanting Maria's business to flourish, the regulars presented Maria with a more spacious alternative location for her cafe. With tears in her eyes, she thanked her friends and began the process of relocating her cafe to the new space. In the move, Maria abandoned most of the worn out items in the old Jazz club, including Danny.

L.L.



Dual 1219 Turntable (ca. 1970)

Plastic, metal, and wood composition; Brown faux wood patterning/black;
16.5" X 14.5" X 6"

Purpose: Play music off of vinyl LP's

Replaced by: Tape and CD players

Found by: Lap Lo and Meghan Devito

Location: "Junk room" of a house

Not so Hip

My grandmother, Doris, has always been fairly hip. She never fell into the rut of keeping the same old hairstyle and she even has a modern home full of new appliances, including one of those matching washing machine and dryer sets that save water and energy.

One, day, Doris asked me if I could help her with her laundry, presumably loading and unloading the washer. I was surprised when she directed me to the small laundry basket in her room and asked me to sort through everything, separating whites, colors, and delicates. I did as requested and began to load some laundry in the machine.

"No," she said, "grab the washboard and basin."

I was certainly not prepared for this task. The washboard was not only old fashioned, it an antique! A wedding gift to her mother in 1928, the washboard had been passed down to her. I sat down next to the new washer and figured that the washboard must be easy to use or else Doris would have done away with it long ago.

I was soon soaked, with the washboard in one hand, a basin full of soapy water at my feet, and a silk slip freshly laundered. Or so I thought. I guess I was not scrubbing hard enough. "The clothes are delicate, but not that delicate," Doris advised.

I scrubbed until she was satisfied that the slip was clean, and moved on to the next article. I worked for almost an hour and a half and by the end of the day my arms were tired and sore. I finally asked my grandmother why she didn't just throw everything into the washing machine on a gentle cycle.

"I like to remind myself of the value of clean clothes. And boy does it keep my arms in great shape!"

K.D.

No Means Around It

It is a beautiful Saturday morning yet Isabel Dunkin, a wife and a mother of six stares out the window, wishing to be relaxing in the sun. Instead, she will likely spend the entire day doing household chores. It is laundry day and she is bound for the washboard.

Isabel stares listlessly at the endless pile of dirty clothing that has accumulated over the past three weeks. She pulls out the overused washboard, which seems so tiny compared to the mountain of clothing, and begins the laborious, monotonous process of scrubbing up and down. The day is almost over when Isabel is finally done. Is there time to relax? She looks up at the standing clock and moans. Time to cook dinner.

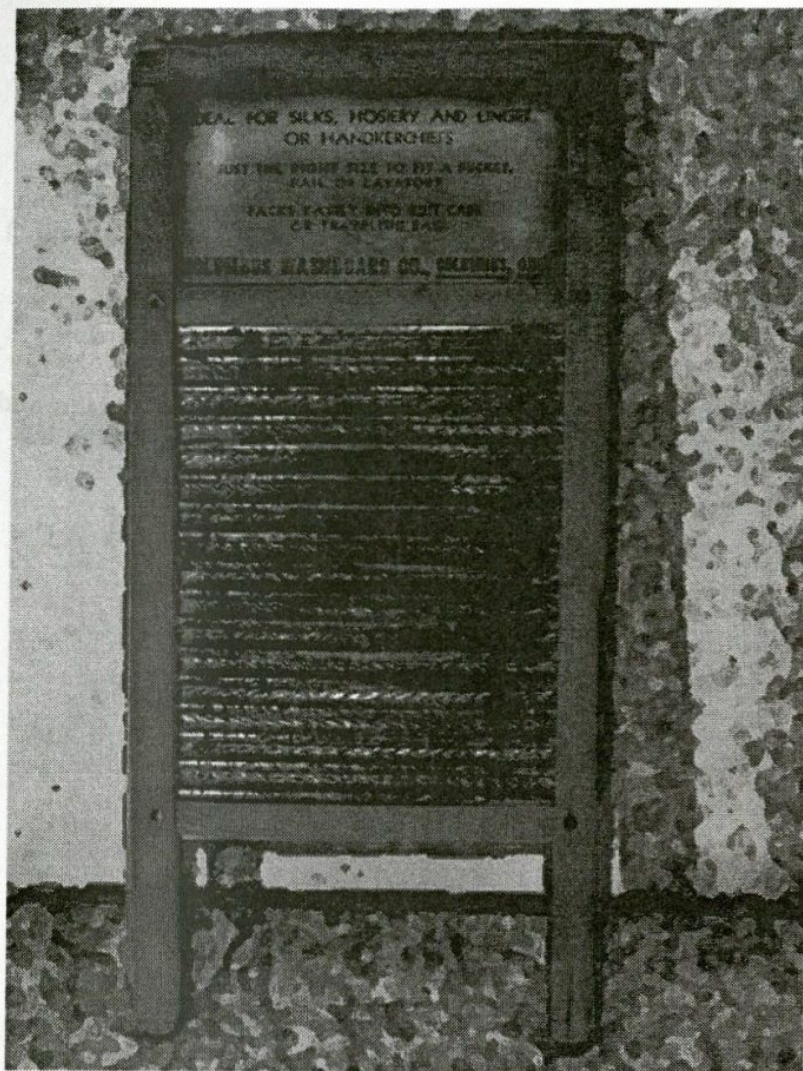
Isabel goes through each day tired, sad, and overworked. "I am constantly cooking, cleaning, and Oh! The laundry! Don't get me started with that!" she snaps at her husband, George. He wonders how he can help his dear wife.

A voice resonates from the radio. "Want an easier, faster way to do laundry? Well, throw away those washboards and buy the new WASHING MACHINE!" George heads out to buy Isabel the wonder machine.

Now, a load of laundry is done in less than an hour! Is there time to relax? Not really. With this ease of the washing machine, the children are less mindful about keeping their clothes clean. The pile of laundry amasses faster than ever before, causing Isabel to tend to it more often. Separate, load, unload, fold, put away. The laundry is never done. Plus the electricity and water bills have skyrocketed to the point that the Dunkin family can no longer afford their yearly weeklong vacation in the sun.

A loud buzzing sound is heard and Isabel must stop staring out the window. Time to put the wash in the dryer.

E.S.



Washboard (ca. 1930)

Wood and galvanized tin; light brown and tarnished silver in color; 18" x 8" x 1".

Purpose: Laundering clothes by hand, particularly delicates.

Replaced by: The washing machine

Found by: Elizabeth So and Kelly Derrick

Location: Basement laundry room of a residence

Waiting for the Next

"KAAREEN!" My well intentioned, but overbearing mother yells up the stairs in an attempt to make me move faster. She is always loud and annoyingly punctual. I am going to take my road test, not perform surgery. It can wait one more minute.

The car ride to the DMV is stressful. Mother keeps telling me to relax and not worry which has the opposite effect. We arrive and have to wait for 20 minutes! Mom chatters away at me while I think, "It's alright. Once I pass the road test I can drive alone. A quiet car ride? What a concept!"

My road test begins. I pull out of the parking space and all is quiet. "How am I doing?" I ask. No response. "Am I doing ok?" "Turn left here, please."

I follow my examiner's directions and continue my attempt at conversation "I used to work over there." No response. "I am hoping to get a job at the mall. That's what I need my license for." Silence.

After what seems like an eternity of silently following orders, we are back at the

DMV. "Okay, just ease up to the curb and it's done."

Once out of the car, mother asks me how I did. "I am not sure. He was so quiet."

The examiner approaches and silently hands me a slip of paper and points to a waiting line for licenses. I am so excited that I call out "I passed. I passed."

The line was long and slow moving but I passed the time talking on the phone to my friends. I just had to share the news.

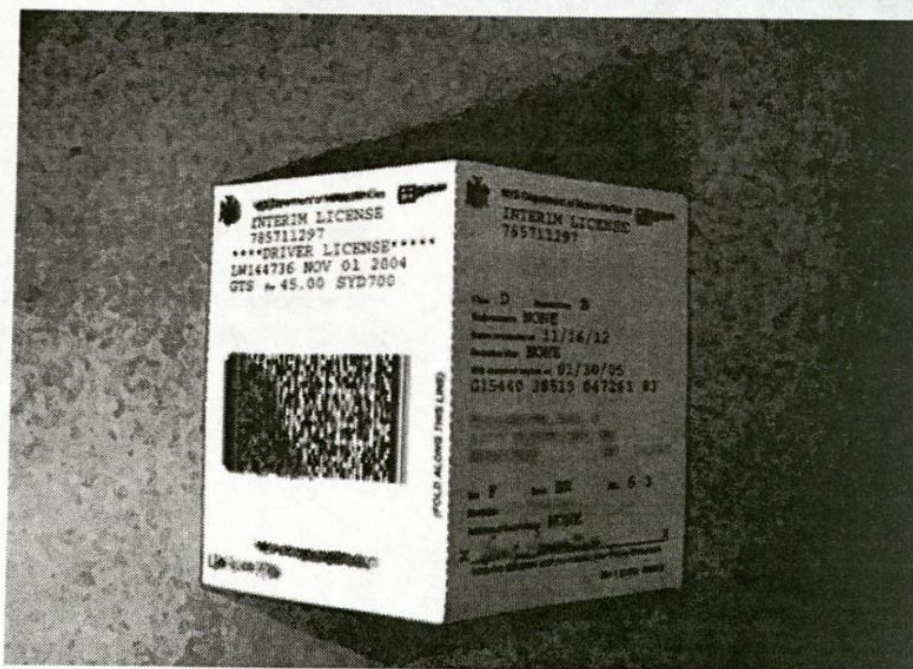
I finally arrive at the head of the line and the attendant hands me a temporary license, the real one will be mailed to me. "But how long does that take?" I demanded.

The woman frowned as she repeated, "Two weeks."

"Two weeks? Two weeks!" I tried to explain why I needed it before then but the attendant ignored my complaint.

"Next" was all she said.

A.G.



Interim License (2001)

Black ink printed on white paper; black and white in color with light blue stamping; 5.5" x 4"

Purpose: Authorize operation of motor vehicles

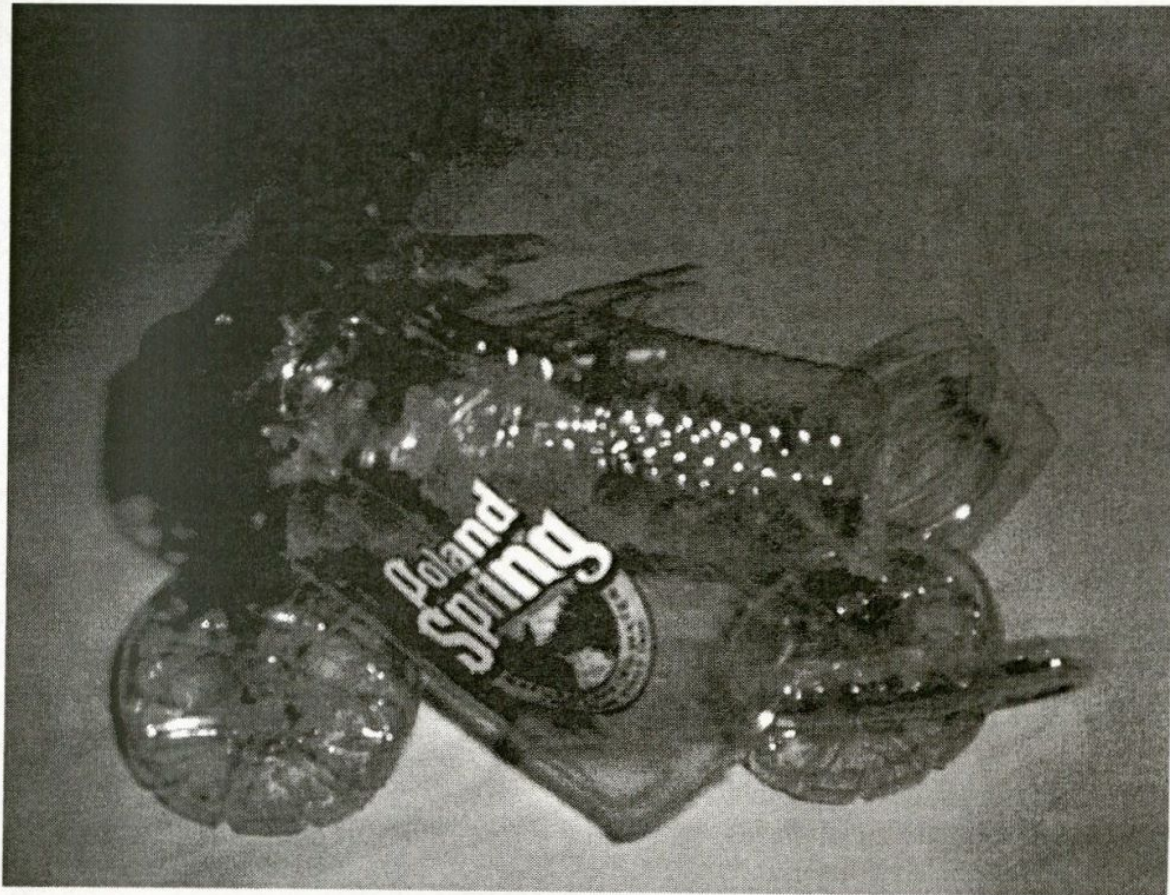
Replaced by: Permanent license

Found by: Amy Goldsmith and Almut Wiedenmann

Location: Envelope of personal records

Bricolage

Obsolete items can serve new functions. Artwork created from waste materials reminds us that what counts as trash has always depended on who does the counting.



Sculpture by Ming Tseng

Notes



Figure 1 (continued)

The figure shows a series of black and white photographs of a person's face, arranged in a grid. The person is wearing a dark cap and a light-colored shirt. The photographs are taken from different angles and distances, showing the person's face in various poses. The background is a plain, light color.

