

Wrapping up and rolling on

Gayle Nichol - September 2020

It started innocently enough when my barbecue caught fire.

Not in the expected manner, where the flames charbroil meat to a state of deliciousness. But rather in the way of... hmmm, I don't think those flames are supposed to be shooting out the bottom like that, or melting that hose, or approaching that tank of propane!

With the crisis averted I handed my brother a credit card and asked him to go buy me a barbecue, since he's always pretty excited about the capabilities of his own outside grill and he owns a truck that can haul it back to my house.

Instead, he waves the card away and says he thinks my parents have a new one that's never been used. He'll check.

My parents are at that place in life where stuff, things, collections and belongings, hold less and less value than time, memories and experiences. So the barbecue was brought home to me where it flames responsibly in designated areas only.

That little adventure got me thinking about my own boxes of treasures and keepsakes, packed away in boxes and totes in a spare room that spills over with tangled Christmas wrappings and hats from the height of fashion circa 1987.

It was time to take off the lid of my own time capsule and make some decisions to travel light in life or to carry a personal history known to none.

I really tumbled down the rabbit hole in an afternoon, wondering which of my niece and nephews would show up to pick through the debris of Aunt Gayle's life. Childless, and essentially unconnected, I guess it would fall to family to toss the bits and bobs of my life into giant garbage bags and leave them by the side of the road.

It was sad to think of them rattling the box that once contained a Christmas gift from my grandmother, and now stores all the marbles I played competitively for on the elementary school grounds of Emily Carr Public School. Brimming with aggies and cat's eyes and swirling coloured crocks, I remember the feel of the powdery dirt when we kicked out a marble pit in the playground soil before patting down the playing field.

These aren't just marbles.

They are touchstones of a child's life. Links to where I started, experiences and people who shaped who I became. I learned about fair play, poor sports, losing – not always gracefully – working to get better, victory, defeat.

After my death, when the contents of my life are being tossed aside, no one will know what that small box of marbles accomplished in my life. How they were prized. How they were treasured enough to want to carry them into my adult life. How they are a symbol of innocence and fun and freedom and competition and fair play and friendships and rivalries.

With no one to share that history, it is just a box of marbles.

A history that deserves a chance.

So, I took the box outside, kicked a whole in the dirt and played a practice round. Then another. Then another. And with each round I remembered the kids that shared my world then. Sometimes they have names. Sometimes just faces. Some of them I still know and meet with on occasion to share a meal and catch up. They are the early landscape on the picture that became my life.

After the third round, I picked up my marbles, held them with good energy and positive intention, I put them back in the box that came from my Grandma, and I put them in the donation box.

I suppose they may end up in a landfill. Or in the backsplash of some super creative home decorator. Or maybe in the pudgy hands of some little soul who is just starting to learn life's lessons while kicking out a marble pit on the playground.

I hope they are a treasured gift again.

At the same time, I lifted the burden from the few loyal souls who will come behind me to sweep up after my time on earth. They will not have to worry about what to do with Aunt Gayle's box of marbles.

Deciding what to do with 36 books celebrating the marriage and royal tours of Prince Charles and Princess Diana it entirely up to them.

