

Objects We Keep: Mom's Button Canister

Only a sewer knows how valuable a canister of mismatched, lost buttons might be.

Only a sewer knows one lost button can dismantle an article of clothing or yet salvage another garment by having the just right button on hand.

Only a sewer knows another opportunity to make something might come along.



A button canister is really a symbol of hope, faith in the future to be a creator or fixer again.

My mom had an old canister she kept buttons in. Lost buttons, found buttons, extra buttons from packets attached to new garments, extra buttons when she might have bought a four-pack of buttons but only needed three buttons. Lots of buttons. All those buttons. Each button has a story, can't you imagine it when you put your hand in a canister of buttons and can pull out a fistful of

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buttons and look at the colors and shapes? Can you see a handful of buttons? What shirt did this button come from? What dress? Was it an everyday garment or a special occasion piece? The buttons in the canister had history.

A button, one button could live a lot of lives if you were a button living in the canister that belonged to a skilled sewer like my mom.

One time a tablecloth became irreparably damaged, no problem, that fabric became a valence in another room.

One time I had to have the just so dress for a school event, there was no pattern for my imagined dress. No problem, my mom made the pattern then made the dress.

One time my mom made me a matching pant and jacket set. I wore the set in a school picture in grade school. How many buttons that little jacket had.

When mom passed and we cleaned out the house, my sister and I saw the canister. Neither one of us moved or spoke for a moment, the button canister felt sacred, a part of mom. Nothing to be

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discarded although without mom, I see now a dented fake silver canister, it's lost its spark
without the sewer, without our mom.

But I shipped the canister from Boston to Chicago anyway. My sister kept the buttons because
she can sew. I kept the canister to hold the memories of mom. Every time I glimpse the canister,
I see my mom. Visions tucked into my memory that don't seem to be anywhere in actual photos.
To throw out the canister, I'd be afraid those images in my head would get lost or vaporize.

Why we keep things.