

Remnants

(Note: This was my first column for *Solo-ing Magazine*)

I have a love letter drawer in the nightstand beside my bed. It's sort of a hodge-podge —there's a note that was left at my back door along with a bottle of wine from a new suitor; two beautifully written poems from the man I was going to marry; and a colorful narrative of life in Alaska from an off-again, on-again lover that ends with a request for a loan. Missing from the drawer are the love letters and poems my former husband wrote when we were teenagers, but only because one of the poems was a little explicit. I put them in a safe place...and now I can't remember where. (Kids, if you ever find a handwritten poem that includes the line *Do you love me because I'm handsome and strong, or because my morals are wrong?* either throw it away before you read further or consider yourself warned.)

So, what do you do with the “stuff” left over from a relationship — the remnants? Not just love letters, but other things as well: photographs, jewelry, clothes, even diaries and journals? If you believe, as I do, that an object can hold an energetic “charge” from a person, place or time, is there a good reason to hold onto a memento after the relationship is over? Truly, that depends on a number of factors.

A keepsake is a physical tie to your emotional history; a part of your own life story that you can hold and touch. It's also part of the post relationship sorting-out process: *What have I gained? What have I lost? What have I learned?*

What's worth keeping?

The Value of Stuff

If you measure a possession in terms of its value to your spirit, it can make the sorting-out process a little easier. And one way to tune into your spirit is by paying attention to your body's energetic response to a prospective resolution.

I kept every card, letter, and poem from the man I loved enough to marry, and I still feel a sense of happiness and connection when I read the words he wrote to me. I also kept every gift from the man with the restless spirit—the Alaska letter, a blue jay feather and a poem he wrote that was mostly about the transcendent aspects of trout fishing, but included one brief reference to me (*You're a fox!*) — I can feel his presence in each of these mementos. And I've saved all my own writing—in journals, dream diaries, datebook notes, stories and poems—from every period of my life. For me, getting rid of the stuff about my relationships would feel like I was throwing away part of myself. So it's all there, my life in words, scattered around my

room in dresser drawers and on closet shelves. But I'm a writer; telling stories is one of the ways I sort things out. It's how I gain perspective and re-establish my equilibrium.

Reclaiming Power

Only once did I get rid of every trace of a relationship. I was young; it was a situation in which I felt betrayed, not just by the man I had been seeing, but by my own naiveté. I learned a painful lesson about not trusting my instincts and relinquishing my power to someone else. Shortly after I ended this relationship, I boxed up all of the things he had given me and dropped them off on his doorstep. I could have just given the stuff away (it was mostly books) but I wanted him to know that his presence was no longer welcome in my life in any way. I wrote him a letter telling him why I was returning his stuff. Then I was done. In this instance, returning the gifts was a way of affirming my boundaries and reclaiming my power.

I find that the older I get, however, the less stuff I want or need. I have sort of a hippie chick vibe but my true nature is mostly practical—maybe it's my Capricorn moon, maybe it's being responsible for my capricious 120-year-old house. These days, when I'm in relationship, the gifts I ask for and receive tend to be service-oriented, consumable or organic ... home

repairs, wine or dinner, a handful of wildflowers. The part of me that's not practical keeps a drawer full of poems and love letters.

This is the first of many columns presenting practical ways to deal with some of the issues that arise—both challenges *and* gifts—from being single. Resolutions is about exploring possibilities, following your dreams, and creating a life that's rich and full. In our culture, being single has an unusually visible shadow—the emphasis is on the difficulties of being unattached, with little acknowledgment of the advantages. A more balanced and accurate perspective would recognize that every kind of relationship choice, including living solo, has its own unique benefits and drawbacks. In upcoming columns, I'll be sharing more of my experiences—for the past 20 years, I've been single more often than not—but I'm interested in your stories as well. What are the aspects of single life that you find most difficult? Interesting? Rewarding? What have you gained, lost and learned?

What's worth keeping?

[sidebar]

Action Plan: Treasure, Trade or Toss?

Tips to help you deal with the remnants of a relationship

Gather. Consider gathering all your mementos into one place. This action alone can provide a feeling of comfort and progress. If you put them in a box or container of some sort, you're halfway done, even if you decide to put them away to be dealt with later.

Sort. Sometimes there's no question about what you want to keep and what you want to get rid of. Things you don't want to keep can be recycled, sold, destroyed in a wonderful fire pit blaze or returned to the giver.

Circle of Life. To release all energetic ties to a negative relationship, get rid of anything circular, such as a ring or bracelet. You may want to perform a simple cleansing ritual, such as burning sage or saying a prayer, before sending the item on its way.

Use your moods. When I'm having a bad day, I'm less sentimental and more decisive about getting rid of stuff. For other people, sorting and culling might be easier to do when they have extra positive energy. Work with your energy's expression; use it as a resource to help you follow through on difficult tasks.

Stuck? If you don't really want to keep something but feel like you should, try this: Take a few minutes to relax, breathing deeply and focusing on your body. First, imagine keeping the object. Where would you put it? Would you

enjoy knowing that it's nearby and available or would it become one more thing you have to deal with? Then imagine releasing the object, picturing different possibilities — perhaps giving it to a community organization or simply recycling it. Pay attention to your body's energetic response to each scenario and you should have a pretty good idea of which choice is right for you. This method is one of the best I've found for help in making difficult decisions.

Love object limbo. If you can't decide what to do and you don't want to backtrack, you can always place the item in limbo. (Limbo for my stuff is a box in the trunk of my car.). Revisit in three months or six months.

Girlfriend support. It may make it easier to ask a friend to be part of the process. Or, schedule a small celebration for when the sorting-out task is complete.

Use ritual. A ritual is a powerful way to commemorate significant beginnings or endings. It's also a great way to wrap things up energetically.