

Quite The COLLECTION!



TO KEEP OR THROW AWAY: THAT IS THE QUESTION

I came from a long line of throw-away-ers, not collectors. My Scottish Grandmother Boster on my mother's side was a practical pioneering woman who actually sewed the muslin covering to stretch over the ribs of a covered wagon before she and my grandfather lit out across the prairie from Missouri to homestead in Wyoming. There was no place for a "collection" hobby in a covered wagon or in the sod house they lived in once they got there. When I was a child I do remember her collecting string, which she wound into a great ball for tying bundles wrapped in paper or feed sackcloth. She also used the heavy cotton string to replace broken shoestrings, to attach to the kites she cut for us out of butcher paper, and to tie the trunk of the car down when it was full of suitcases or furniture. She taught me to play cat's cradle with it and to use it to make a big circle on the sidewalk or wood floor for playing marbles.

My mother didn't collect things either, and gave away anything she didn't need. To this day I wish she had kept the service for 12 of Eva Zeisel Town and Country dishes, which by now would have been worth a fortune. She also used what she had and was not one to "keep it for good." She used her Nobility quadruple-plate silverware, her china, her Miracle Made cookware, and her best linens. She lit candles and used real napkins on regular days, because she didn't believe there were any regular days. She didn't save things, including herself. She often said, "If I'm halfway through, I should be half used up—and if I'm not, what in the world am I saving myself for?"

Maybe from them I inherited the deep belief that "we have this moment—today," and that God's will for my life is God's will for this minute. Mother often told me while I was growing up, "Do what you know to do today and do it with everything you've got. That's God's will for your life."

If I have collected anything, it is art glass. This may have started when I was in grade school and my Grandmother Sickal, my father's Irish mother, gave me a set of very thin and delicate lime-green sherbet glasses. Since then I have collected some beautiful pieces of art glass, including a piece in sea colors Bill got when we visited the island of Murano in Venice, and two matching pieces (a heavy vase and huge platter) in all my favorite shades of yellow and gold that the gals in our Monday night Bible study got me for Christmas one year.

But really, what Bill and I have collected together over the years has been people: funny, quirky people, faithful friends, broken hearts, innocent children, the seasoned and wise, hopeful college kids, old farmers, dear widows who have survived enough pain to bend a weaker soul to the ground. Our lives have been so enriched by the folks who have crossed our path, sat at our table, ridden on our bus, been in our classes when we taught high school and college, and worked with us over the years. This collection is eternal, for only relationships will survive this life and open like a blossom into the next.

—Gloria Gaither

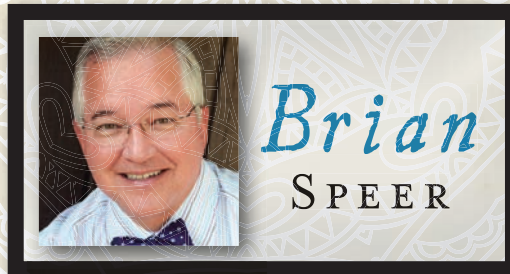
The Homecoming Friends reveal the stories behind
THE THINGS THEY LIKE TO KEEP!



Estate sales are always sad for me. Allison and I walk every day, and several times we have stumbled upon them in our neighborhood. Being the bargain shopper that she is, Allison always insists that we check them out. My emotional response is always the same: A sense of sorrow at the sight of a group of strangers picking over the remnants of a life. Things that our neighbors had collected over many years, had worked and saved for, things that had sentimental value, all are laid out on tables with ridiculously low prices on them. I went to one yesterday and bought an old Weller soldering gun like the one I had many years ago and had let slip away. It was \$2.50.

Today and tomorrow we are holding a sale at my parents' house. Marc, Joyce, Allison and I have worked hard to get to this point. We've shared tears, laughter and a houseful of memories in the process. My family moved into 5318 Anchorage Drive in Nashville in November 1960, seven months after I was born. It's the only house I remember. It has been the site of 55 Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners, as many July 4th celebrations, countless birthday meals, and innumerable family get-togethers held for no reason at all except that we love each other.

Before Mom [Faye Speer] died in October, she always said that we'd cuss her memory when we had to clean out her attic. We didn't, but it was a sight. My crib and baby bed were up there, as were books from Daddy's studies at Trevecca and Vanderbilt. My old Erector Set and Legos were there, as were sets of Hot Wheels tracks. Daddy's U.S. Army trunk was buried in insulation, and in it we found the bill from the hotel where they had spent their honeymoon on August 31, 1948. And the boxes ... boxes of all kinds, shapes, sizes. They saved boxes for some reason. We found the



boxes that Dad's hi-fi equipment came in with the postmark of April, 1963. You never know when you may need it again.

The basement was more of the same, but in greater volume. Bus parts, old sound equipment, the go-kart Daddy made for Marc, the table where Daddy counted out three different songbooks and repackaged them to sell three for a dollar. My first bicycle, the

workbench where Daddy would fix our toys, assorted tools, nuts, bolts, screws, clamps, hooks and other detritus. We filled up a 20-yard dumpster, made two trips to the dump with my trailer, and dropped off many loads at the Goodwill.

And now the estate sale. The people from the company have been great to work with. They organized everything just so, brought out card tables for small things, and put price tags on all of the items. There was Mom's punch bowl that she used for special occasions. It's lovely but none of us ever serve punch, so it's being sold. With it are 23 cups. It made me wonder, what had happened to the 24th? How did it get broken? I guess I'll never know.

We were pleasantly surprised when they brought in an appraiser who put a high price on several pieces, such as my parents' bedroom furniture. Evidently it is a special brand that is in high demand for young professionals now; everything old is new again, right? I can hear Mom saying, "That furniture is old, it can't be worth that much!" It is, and the care they showed for their kids and each other is evident in the care they took with their home and its furnishings.

The dining room table, chairs and china cabinet have been the hardest to part with. If they could talk, they would tell of the many special meals they'd seen, served with great care and love, and with very few exceptions, in an atmosphere of happiness and



Celebrating a birthday around the old dining room table



Our home on Anchorage Drive, 1960

think of Mary Tom's son's name, and he stopped in the middle of the prayer and asked her. Part of the joy. Allison sat at that table with Brock, Faye, Marc and me the first time she met my parents. She was amazed that we sat around for two hours talking, laughing, drinking coffee, and catching up with each other's lives. I think it sealed the deal between us. The old avocado-green electric skillet that Mom so lovingly made her special pepper steak in that night will be sold.

But none of us have room for the dining room furniture in our homes, so it's going to be sold today. The appraiser wants the china cabinet for his house. Other things will go to other homes and be integrated into other lives and families. I hope the love and happiness from the Speer house will go with the pieces.

Yesterday when the sale people had left, Marc and I vacuumed the floor and dusted, getting things ready for today. We saw a small table that had been around for years and took a closer look. Under the top were pencil markings the maker had drawn when it

joy. They would recall the time when Daddy made the mistake of praying for every family member by name, and couldn't

was built. We think our Granddaddy Ihrig made it. Marc wanted to keep it. Another table that always sat in the hall was in another room, and we looked at it. Under the top was the signature, Brock Speer. We never knew it was there. I took that one. If they had brought the asking price, we lessened the sale by 80 dollars, but I think the memories we gained were a good trade.

We have a buyer for the house, a young professional couple starting a family. There will once again be the sound of kids playing in the room over the garage, of dinners with family and friends ... of life. A new beginning. In this day and age, staying 55 years in the same house is a rarity. Most people

move every few years for various reasons, a change in jobs, to have something different, or to make a small profit and move on to the next place. Not my parents. Their home was a refuge from life, a place to go when they got off the road on Monday ... a sanctuary in the truest sense of the word.

The house cost \$27,000 when they had it built. I think they got their money's worth.



Brock and Brian playing Candyland



Bill GAITHER

Gloria always says that I collect characters. And looking around the Homecoming family, I've got to agree with her. When some of my old heroes were gone, I found young characters like Kevin Williams and Mark Lowry to keep me smiling. Most folks keep their collections on a shelf or in a display rack, but I enjoy driving mine around in my favorite car.

What many people don't realize is that I also have an extensive collection of gospel music memorabilia reaching back to 1948, which includes everything the Statesmen ever recorded and all the early Blackwood Brothers' music. I dare you to find someone whose gospel music collection reaches back farther than 1948!



Bill and his collection of friends!

