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# What Memento Do You Want to Be Remembered By?

Wall Street Journal readers take a sentimental and symbolic journey through their belongings

By [Demetria Gallegos](#) [Follow](#)

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What possessions do you hope your children and grandchildren will keep to remember you by? And what does that thing say about your life, your personality, your accomplishments and who you really are?

This was an exercise undertaken by WSJ contributor Robbie Shell, [in a thought-provoking essay](#) that detailed the seven objects that she says tell *her* story.

The article sparked so many conversations that we thought it worthwhile to ask WSJ readers to take part. So we asked: *“What possession or memento would you most like to see treasured by the next generation, and to be remembered by? What does it say about the person you are?”*

Here is a sampling of what they said.

## Living history

I hope my sons come to appreciate my collection of books on American history: biographies of most of the presidents and many of the key figures in the country’s founding; and histories of the Civil War, World War I, World War II and the Vietnam War.



It sounds silly, but I have a plastic cereal/soup-sized bowl that I've had since I was a child. My Polish working-class parents scrimped and saved every dime. The bowl was actually a margarine bowl that my mother converted.



Mike Kosciusko with the bowl he has had since he was a child. PHOTO: MIKE KOSCIUSKO

It was among my necessities when I went to college, and I've kept it ever since. I am 59 years old now. It's in my kitchen cabinet and I still use it!

The bowl is a symbol of the sacrifices my parents made so my brother and I could go to college and have a better life. It's a reminder of their work ethic and strong values. It's also a reminder that while there's nothing wrong with having nice things, one can make do with a lot less and that there are more important things in life.

- **Mike Kosciusko, Manhasset, N.Y.**

## Family chronicle

I started writing a family newspaper when I was 9 years old. Handwritten on a single page, using a format my fourth-grade teacher had taught us, this was to inform this teacher and an aunt of a coming interstate move. I had so much fun writing it that I did it again at Christmas to tell about the trip to see grandparents and the deep snow. Now, 47 years later, I have published 140 editions chronicling my adolescence, college,

career, marriage, children's births and their milestones. Also, some losses...such as both my parents and that great fourth-grade teacher who recently passed and had become a lifelong pen pal.

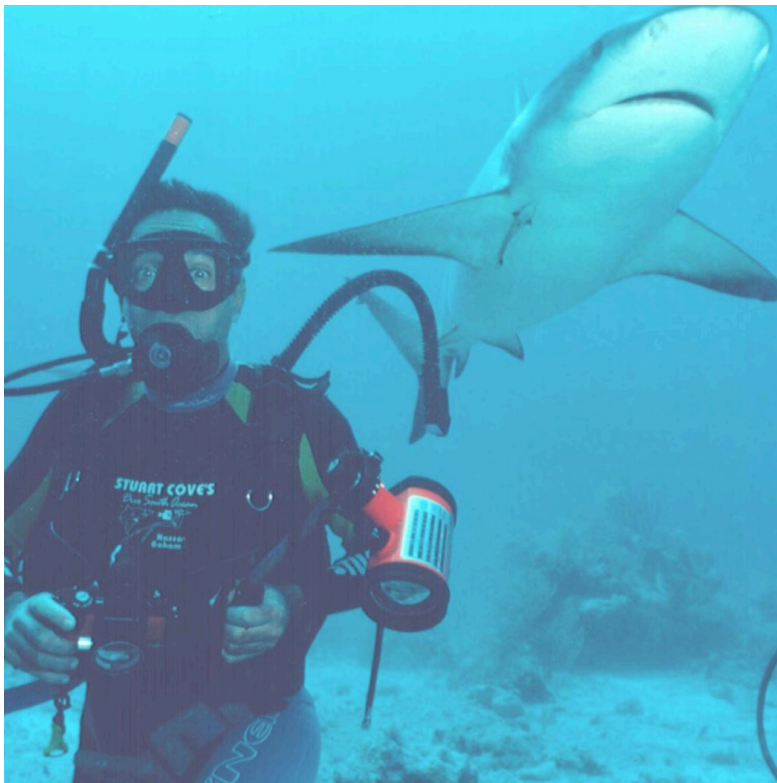
Four years ago I scanned all of the pre-electronic versions and compiled them all into a huge book.

Most people I know have no records from their early years, and only a smattering of photos from the pre-digital era. If I died tomorrow and left my children only this book, it would be a priceless treasure.

- **Bob MacLeod, Orlando, Fla.**

### **A man of action**

Two things of mine I hope my children will keep are framed photos of me. In one, I am hanging off the side of a mountain. The other is of me diving in the Bahamas with a shark appearing over my shoulder.



One of the two images Norman Linton wants his heirs to remember him by. PHOTO: NORMAN LINTON

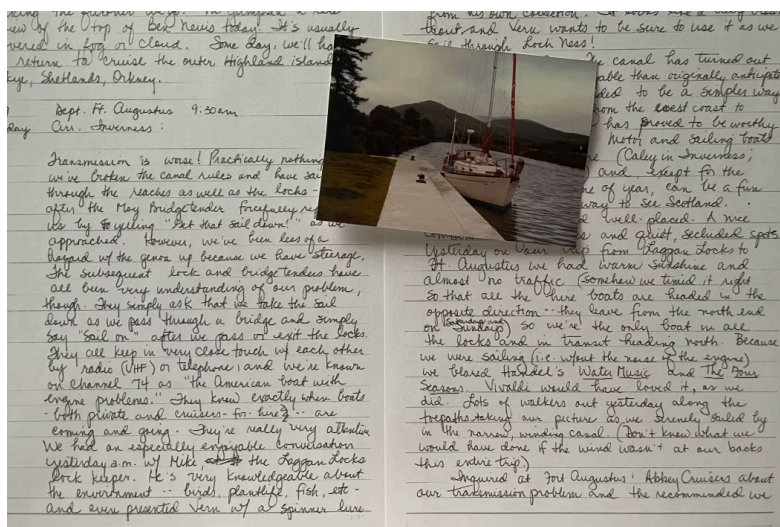
These are the images of their father I would like them to remember. Both are of me in intense sporting situations. I would want my children and grandchildren to

remember that their dad/granddad was a fit and healthy person when he was younger who enjoyed high-adrenaline sports. I would hope this would inspire them to never back away from a challenge.

- **Norman Linton, *Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands***

## Sailing across the ocean

I have a travel log from the early 1990s when my husband and I (in our mid-30s at the time) quit our jobs, sold our house and belongings, and moved aboard a 38-foot sailboat. We traveled over 35,000 miles to 26 countries, including two trans-Atlantic crossings.



The 1990s travel log of K. Carlson and her husband. PHOTO: K. CARLSON

The journal is a bit tedious at times, but is also full of interesting and sometimes humorous stories about the difficulties we faced and how we overcame them, the various cultures we encountered, and the kindness of people we met along the way.

I'd hope the journal would spark the adventurous spirit in future generations, help them understand that there is kindness everywhere no matter where you live or what language you speak, and give them a sense of what it was like living and traveling this way—before the time of the internet, cellphones and GPS.

- **K. Carlson, *Chicago***



A clock that traveled with the ancestors of Dianna Rienstra when they emigrated to America. PHOTO: MARK RIENSTRA

## **A proud immigrant**

I have a wall clock that is more than 150 years old and is the only item I know was on the ship with my great-grandparents and their children when they emigrated to the U.S. from Den Helder, the Netherlands, in 1905. The clock had been a wedding present to them when they were married in the 1880s. It's a reminder of a family that left everything to emigrate to the U.S.

Here's what the clock says about me: I love the fact that all my grandparents were immigrants, and that they came to the U.S. for a better life. I am living that life and am thankful for their desire and courage to do so.

- **Dianna Rienstra, Lansdale, Pa.**



Bob Rowden's wedding ring. PHOTO: BOB ROWDEN

## Eternity ring

My most important memento is probably my wedding ring. I am so proud to be the husband of such a wonderful woman. It wasn't like she didn't have a lot of other choices. Twenty-seven years and she hasn't thrown me out yet.

- **Bob Rowden**, *Folsom, Calif.*

## Early payday

I would nominate an uncashed check for \$35 that was received in 1974. It was payment for a freelance ad written for a cable company in Maine. It's a keepsake that reminds me that everyone needs to start somehow. I went on to a very successful ad career. What does this say about me? I dream, I plan, I act, I become, I save. We should recall humble beginnings.

- **John Bowman**, *Marple Township, Pa.*

## A love of music

It takes up a lot of room, but I hope there will always be a home in our family for my 120-year-old Mason & Hamlin piano. My father bought it in the 1950s and would play it every day. When I first started piano lessons at 5, my feet didn't touch the floor. I inherited it when my parents downsized.

We had it refinished and discovered it wasn't ebony-colored but actually ribbon mahogany. The refinisher begged to repair one nick but I declined because it's a reminder of my youth. My dad would get me up at 5:30 every morning to practice for an hour before I went to school. I would curl my hair with one hand while I practiced with the other. One day I dropped the curling iron and it chipped off a tiny corner of the piano case. I didn't confess to my dad until I was married and out of the house. Such a storied instrument!

All of our children play various instruments and seem to enjoy it when I play. The piano is a physical link between my parents, my husband and myself, and our children, and the shared love of music across the generations.

- **Suzette Wheeler**, *The Woodlands, Texas*

## **Symbol of liberty**

I take pride in the fact that both grandfathers served their country when called to do so after Pearl Harbor. My paternal grandfather was an Episcopal priest and chaplain, and when he was stationed in Italy, he made a hand-carved walking stick.

I've had it mounted in a golf-club display case. It represents the fight for liberty against fascism and the call to service. I hope it will convey to my son, 16, and daughter, 14, that we believe in self-sacrifice and honor the past.

- **Tom Hall**, *Yorktown, Va.*

## **Worldview**

I have this massive classroom globe, probably from the early 1970s. The Soviet Union is prominent and several African countries have the old names. It was about to be tossed during a school renovation. It lacked the usual serial number and label identifying it as state property. Colleagues thought I would like it and brought it to my office.



This globe belonging to Tim Wynes has stories to tell. PHOTO: TIM WYNES

My children have always had an interest in geography and world cultures. What the globe represents to me, and what I hope I have passed down to my children, is that the world changes constantly, so get out there and experience it.

- **Tim Wynes, *Moline, Ill.***

## **Enduring tools**

There's something very special to me about using the same tools that have passed through the hands of my father and his father. The stories I share about my father teaching me how to use them are so meaningful. It isn't just about using an old hammer; it's about carrying forward his wisdom, care and values.



These tools have been in the Groom family for several generations. PHOTO: KEN GROOM

The same thing applies to my mother's cooking and baking tools. I have videos of my mother making delicious, beautiful apple strudel while explaining how and why she did certain things. You can see her aged, wrinkled hands carving up each apple with a paring knife, stretching the dough, spreading the apples, cinnamon and butter. Knowing the love she put into each one is precious.

- **Ken Groom, Chicago**

## Diaries reveal all

I adore and am close with my four granddaughters and one grandson (ages 2-13). I hope that they will read the diaries I kept, starting at age 8, much of which are embarrassing when I reread them today. I hope they see that the grandma they look up to and try to emulate went through some crazy times in life: marriage, divorce, remarriage, career changes (going to law school at age 36 as a single mom), incredible happiness, incredible sorrow. I believe the diaries show introspection, self-reflection and the ability to work out problems by writing about them.



The diaries that Diane Green-Kelly started keeping when she was 8 years old. PHOTO: DIANE GREEN-KELLY

I hope that reading the words that describe my innermost thoughts will help them face their own challenges and realize that they are not alone in their own crazy times, and that mistakes, regrets and risk-takings are experiences that can lead to good things, a lot of learning, and self-love, because of the good and despite the bad. I want them to know that they can grow up to become the person they want to be.

- Diane Green-Kelly, *Naples, Fla.*

## Keeping family close

One possibility would be my Le Creuset Dutch oven. I grew up helping my mom around the kitchen and cooking became a big hobby for me once I moved out of the house after college. I come from a large Italian family so cooking for others and spending time together over a meal was and is a large part of my life.



For Michael Morabito, this Dutch oven emphasizes the importance of family meals. PHOTO: MICHAEL MORABITO

Should I be lucky enough to start my own family at some point, I'd hope that same sense of familial community and tradition gets passed on, in part due to my contribution. We only get one life and those relationships that often form around breaking bread are what make life worth living.

- **Michael Morabito**, *New York*

## **The wind in my face**

My 2013 Harley-Davidson Heritage Softail Classic motorcycle is a work of art from a time when craftsmen built instant classics by hand. I bought it new, and paid cash. When I can no longer ride, it is the possession I intend to give to my son-in-law, and then for him to give to one of my grandsons when the time is right so they can experience the freedom of the open road, too.



Karl Higgins wants his children to experience the freedom of the open road on his Harley-Davidson.  
PHOTO: KARL HIGGINS

The bike has beautiful sunburst orange and root-beer paint. The saddlebags are real leather adorned with bright metal studs. Shiny chrome is almost everywhere on the bike including many aftermarket pieces I've added to it.

Riding the bike and keeping it meticulously clean and bright gives me a sense of freedom, pride and deep enjoyment on twisty, curvy roads with the wind in my face. I want the children to know and love that feeling, and to appreciate an artistic and mechanical masterpiece.

- **Karl Higgins**, *Fallbrook, Calif.*

## Remembrance of service

My 9/11 helmet and gloves. I was a volunteer firefighter who headed to the World Trade Center site with my own gear on Sept. 12.

I spent much of my time below the surface. We were asked to drop into holes to search for victims, or anything that might lead to a victim. First responders were all over the place, removing what objects could be removed and, of course, there were the bucket brigades.



The helmet and gloves that Michael A. Kling wore at Ground Zero. PHOTO: MICHAEL A. KLING

The enormity of the situation is what struck me the most and will always. My time at the site was limited as we were there only the first week, but the memories endure after 40 years as a volunteer firefighter.

This kind of service was especially needed at that time in our country and continues to be needed today. I am still passionate about it. I have always tried to lead by example, which may be why my daughter is now a fire-department division chief and my son is an emergency-room doctor.

- **Michael A. Kling**, *Hilton Head Island, S.C.*

## **It isn't about things**

I don't want any possession or memento to be treasured by the next generation nor do I want to be remembered. That's hubris.

All I want to leave the next generation is knowledge and wisdom so they don't make the same mistakes I did. And I do that by being a teacher. Knowledge and wisdom are the greatest treasures we can leave the next generation so they can use that as a foundation if they so desire.

- **Tim McManus**, *Haskell, N.J.*

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*By Michael A. Pollock*

April 10, 2025 at 3:00 PM ET

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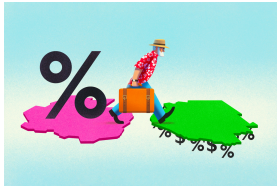


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