

The Wallace Street Journal

By David Bond

Mucking Out

Wallace, Idaho – Thanks to a few very great friends, we got my parents' storage locker in Spokane mucked out on Sunday. It was snowing as we left Wallace, and blowing icy cold up on Spokane's South Hill.

I guess this is where you take the measure of a life. There is your past, packed neatly into boxes or stacked neatly as furniture.

There was the high chair I sat upon as a pup; there was the lobster bib signed by Barbara Feldon, who played the role of Agent 99 on the 1960s TV series *Get Smart*, who happened to be eating dinner at Philadelphia's Old Original Bookbinders restaurant same time as we were in the winter of 1968. Talk about a gob-smacked, star-struck teenager . . .

But I got her autograph: "To Dave, a real Tiger," Agent 99 wrote on my bib. And she was very nice and just as drop-dead beautiful as my teenage libido imagined her to be. It's good to have that artifact back, if for nothing else than to assure myself it really happened.

I also ripped off an ashtray from Bookbinders, and I'd like to find the guy who ripped it off from me.

My beloved mother died a year ago last October, and my father is fading away in a nursing home in Anchorage these days. But I now have pictures of them, from back when they were the handsomest of couples, and me as a squalling child in my mother's arms, maybe 6 months old, waiting to go on his first airplane ride.

When you sift through this kind of stuff, the temporary nature of life starts screaming in your ear. In another decade or two, God willing, my kids will have to go through this same process. There are memories that will break your heart in your recollection of them.

And there's also a ton of junk, but too nice to throw out, so you leave it to your kids so they can leave it to theirs.

My own kids won't have as many jumbled emotions as I do right now, because I left them when they were still young, unable to handle the responsibilities of fatherhood and marriage. But hopefully some nice trinkets will fall their way.

When your parents fall away, you get a glimpse of your own, inevitable abyss. As some wiseacre once said, we don't get out of this alive. Hopefully, when the abyss looks back up at you, it's marginally benign.

At the end of Sunday, I was overwhelmed by grief, but more-so by gratitude. I was adopted by two people who very obviously loved each other when they were college kids at Berkeley, and later in their dotage when all they could summon was a mutual grumping about all the losers who were sharing their space at the nursing home.

I marvel at what my mother gave up, as a Phi Beta Kappa from the University of California with a degree in geography and could read Latin, or what my father, who survived Cal-Tech and a freshman chemistry's class taught by Linus Pauling, and later got a masters in science degree and was one hell of an airplane pilot, what they gave up just to kick three kids out of a nest.

As I paw through their stuff, now mine, someday to be cast to the wind, I still marvel. And I still grieve. Then the lesson comes: Grief is just a reminder of the blessing you had and still have.

*David Bond, a freelance writer, author, long-time newspaperman and ne'er-do-well, may be reached at [999silver@gmail.com](mailto:999silver@gmail.com)*