

Prompt: Lost and Found (a box has arrived on your doorstep with everything you ever lost. What would you look for first?)

by Judy Capel

The box containing all things lost in my 73 years was huge: a crate really. It couldn't go into the elevator, so it was hoisted to my 5th floor balcony. But how to get it through the balcony door into the apartment? I thought of opening it there, bringing items in one by one but what if it rained or neighbors saw me - items popping jack-in-the box fashion since the crate was bulging, actually shaking. Also, I wanted to go through everything slowly, spend the rest of my life looking through everything. What else was there left to do? The process would feel slow or fast, like life, which I never figured out how to control.

I wondered if the contents were fermenting somehow. These were the lost items of a careless person who lived as if replacements would always appear, poof, after maybe some suffering. Who knew what would be there? Things I had wanted but had eventually forgotten, moving on. I had been inattentive and wonder if this was a personal fault. I'd love to know of others, more present at life, and if you can, after reading, let me know how it's gone for you.

Eventually I took the balcony door off and shoved the container through, before coming to rest, tired, alone, curious, me, the box, the accompanying crowbar with instructions on how to use it to minimize content damage.

As I thought, with the lid off, all manner of things popped out: what you'd expect after many years: yellowed papers, abandoned backpacks, wallets, jackets left in airplanes, umbrellas, keys for locks long abandoned. Glasses, contact lenses, books, gloves, damp beach towels smelling of mildew. Even my Cuban childhood was there, the one lost in 1961 when my parents sent me to the US to live with foster parents, speaking of which, since I had lost contact with these foster parents, they were there too. Amazing. Even lost time; how was it possible? I was too busy to linger on any one thing. As I grabbed items, throwing them right, left, up, down, other things began to appear: friends dropped after a move or life change, ex-boyfriends, disoriented, looking around with blinking eyes, not knowing what was happening. Then best, my first husband, the slowest to rise up, resting sleepily at the bottom. Rather than rushing in and scaring him with a shout and a hug, I left him there to rouse naturally, a keeper (or so I hoped so no one would again ask: when did you lose your first husband?). I left him now, imagining our reunion, spending the time while he slowly awoke, cleaning up, repacking, thinking I'd send it all to the 14th Street market where all kinds of things line up the street block after block. I'd recycle, most everything perfectly

good but nothing I needed, at my age, with my old husband kept; the rest available, ready for anyone to find, buy, enjoy.

Epilogue: Did I forget something?

The last time I wrote was that day you arrived inside that huge crate. I was so happy to find you, back from that other world which I'm too much of a nonbeliever to believe in. I am still happy; in fact, delighted you're back but you have to admit we longed so much to be together again, at least I did. I had forgotten that with us, the good was not always as we remembered it. I forgot the bad and the good were about even, the scales slightly tilted to the good, yes, but not by much.

I forgot the fights, maybe squabbles, nothing major but enough to make me wonder if this was how it was supposed to be. I was young, though almost 50 at the end. I didn't know what was right or wrong. I didn't know what I was supposed to feel. And I forgot that I'd complain you didn't help enough and you'd reply you helped plenty and would do more if I told you what to do but I didn't want to tell you, I wanted you to do it as if you were me. I forgot I used to resent you weren't me. This I've learned since I got old, our assumption when younger that we know best how things are to be, forgetting we're separate humans and my way or your way, neither is necessarily the right one.

I forgot I was impatient with life. I wanted to leave New York, get a van, travel to no destination and you told me we couldn't - we had 2 children who needed stability. I forgot I resented you and, yes, them too, though I loved all of you most fiercely.