

Childhood Is Over, by China Martens

We went through two trunks of toys, trying to sort out what to save and what to give away but decided to let them all go: the tiny Polly Pocket house that opened up with even tinier furnishings, a refrigerator that opened to reveal microscopic groceries; bejeweled unicorn riders; purple haired dark skinned mermaids; tiny dolls with long hair in rainbow colors; animals, wolves, elephants, and other creatures; hand-made clothes, little furniture, and flowers that opened up for fairy houses. All her toys, it hurt me to let go of them. The Puerto Rican looking Police Officer Barbie (from the 1993 “Career” series) that came in a navy cop outfit—yes a cop uniform, but it looked butch and she was the prettiest Barbie I have ever seen—with a short gold and white dress as well; the Indian Barbie with the tattoos, Jasmine with her hair all in braids, although her head broke off, Aladdin and his flying rug, the tiger and a monkey. On her way to take the bus to Baltimore City Community College, my daughter tells me, “I have happy memories and that’s enough”. She insists that she doesn’t want me to hold onto any of her toys for her, that we store too much away, and we need to let go. She doesn’t want them anymore.

My mother, my mother’s mother, and I have all saved every toy we have ever had. Why do we save all our toys so? It started with my grandmother; with a salivating hunger that verged on chocoholism, sugar addiction and need for preciousness, handed down in her daughter’s lineage like thievery. Her mother didn’t have a childhood, came to a new country without a mother, and set out to give her daughters what she hadn’t had herself, which included doll babies that she loved almost as much as they did. We needed to possess these tiny things. My first baby doll I

loved him with such tenderness: Baby Michael, he had a plastic head, yawning mouth, little plastic hands and cloth body – my mother sewed him a new cloth body because I carried him around so much and he became soiled - *dirty baby* my aunt called him, my father's mother gave him to me and my mother's side of the family had no value for any thing from his side of family. Only we were the important ones. And our treasures needed to be valued and saved, forever. We put emotion into stuffing and imagination where others had less. I'm 40 years old and I can't let go of little Angie, her fuchsia mini-dress with puffy clear acetate sleeves and fuchsia polka dots long gone, the yellow lingerie I had to beg my mother to buy for my Malibu Barbie, missing, but I still have enough remnants to hold onto, a frog carved of fungus from the Black Forrest and a tiny glass kitten from Venice with glass whiskers and a glass mouse in her mouth. Everywhere we traveled we purchased a token. I was a middle class child of the 70's – Mister Bubble, The Coppertone Girl, Scooby Do, and The Jetsons numbered among my childhood friends. Because only my childhood was middle class, I'm like a Russian princess taken down; it's all in the past, the precious plastic past. I played alone. I played with toys. Childhood is over, and although my families basements and attics were always so rich—I don't think I can save everything anymore, that there is any more reason to save so many things, to save my toys and my daughter's toys, when I always made sure she had the world, and people; the ocean, and music---to keep her company.

And so our Toys“R”Us dreams are packed in a chest, with Evel Knievel and Agent 007 cars, tiny little collections of buttons, jewels, plastic flowers and sparkly things—to take to the Free Store. They have a warehouse now, and set up once a month in a different poor neighborhood,

displaying all their donated articles nicely, just like you were shopping except you can take what you want for free: they say there is enough for everyone if we all share with each other. And so we are bringing all my daughters toys there, some of her best and even some of my collection, it's a giant broken treasure box of childhood. I hope someone opens it up and gasps with pleasure, that some of the toys are adopted and loved again, as much as they once were. It is a little different when it's in a flea market or a thrift store; especially in a Free Store compared to those that are freshly shelved with commercials and a line to stand in and bell to ring if your caught stealing. People are taught not to value what they can have for free. But I remember, years back, the children sorting through our garbage and throwing it up in the air like Christmas, wild to find the buried toys that I had thrown away when we were packing to leave Baltimore and my daughter was in kindergarten. I had thrown away some of her broken toys, snuck them in the refuse since we couldn't carry it all and I knew she would object. When I put out the bags and bags of trash from our households debris that night I didn't think about the kids who played in the alley. In the morning, she looked out the window of our third floor apartment, down in horror to the snow banks of used maxi-pads and egg shells wreckage, where her former play-mates had struck gold, digging through the discarded trash to find broken plastic bows without their rubber arrows. "My toys!" she screeched. I don't think I will ever live that down.

If kids had that much fun with broken toys how much joy they will have to discover all her best ones?

It's a whole lot different when a parent cleans up before a child is ready, and you don't have to let go of everything, its great to keep collections from childhood—but today when my daughter said she wanted to let it all go, I had to learn to let go too. We hold onto too much. Everyday is a little death and how many memories do I hold onto before the museum I live in is too full? I am choosing to go a different way, then my pack rat tendencies, and it's strange but feels right. Finally this family trend that is sweeping through us all, has struck me, its last hold out packrat—purging.

rubble, wreckage, ruins, litter and discarded garbage/refuse/trash, scattered remains of something destroyed, or, in geology, large rock fragments ...