

A Love Letter to Linens

by Vicki Holder

During a recent freeze, I grabbed an old mat and wrapped it around an outside pipe to prevent it from bursting. I secured it with a bungee cord, and as I expected, the rug performed perfectly. After the danger had passed, I removed it and carried it inside to be washed and stored.

It is just an old chenille bathmat, a mid-century throwback from my mom's linen closet that made its way into mine along with traces of memories from times gone by. The mat had long since lost its original color from hundreds of washings and was frayed in a few places. In the middle was a small hole that dictated relegation to the rag bag, but somehow, I could not bring myself to send it there.

It reminded me of my childhood, a middle-class home with too few bedrooms to accommodate the seven of us, a gas heater that was turned off every night, and floors always too cold for small feet. We shared one bathroom, and I remember this rug as a welcome landing pad as we took turns filing through the chilly bathroom while getting ready for school. If you were lucky enough to be the first one in, the rug was dry and fluffy enough to hug your toes just right.

We ate simple meals prepared by my grandmother, and we used, re-used and repaired everything we had. Our clothes were patched and passed down to smaller children. Our socks and mittens were darned many times before they were determined to be not fit to wear any longer. Boys' jeans were bought a mile long and folded into cuffs to be let out gradually as legs grew longer. It was a time of save-to-buy and to repurpose everything possible. Yet we never felt deprived. It was just life as we knew it.

So, as I looked at this old bathmat I had repurposed, I celebrated its usefulness for so many years. I wondered briefly what color it might once have been. It might have been green, as that was my mom's favorite color, but the off-white shade it had faded into made me think of memories worn smooth by time and love, becoming as comforting as a lifelong

friend. So many things drift in and out of a life so quickly, but this old bathmat had been through it all and remained by my side. I felt my mom's warm hugs and heard her laughter woven into the worn threads. I felt her determination to take care of us even when times were hard. I remembered how she taught us to be grateful for the small things that held us together.

It was much more than just a bathmat. It represented perseverance and grit, home and family. In its threads were reminders of how we learned to make the best of things and carry on.

I gave the bathmat a good wash and dry and put it in the sewing basket so I could darn the hole, just like my grandmother and mom would have done. I am sure they would be pleased to know that I still remember how to do that.

It might end up in the rag bag one day but today is not that day.

Vicki Holder is a retired project manager who never wanted to be anything other than a writer. She began writing poetry as a child and has continued to write short stories and personal essays throughout her life. In retirement, has finally found time to devote time to her love of writing and to continue her family legacy of sharing stories and observations. Her published stories showcase finding the extraordinary in everyday life and applying joy and gratitude in small but meaningful ways. She lives in the Sam Houston National Forest in Texas and spends her free time with her wonderful and supportive husband, John, her two children, and her grandchildren.