

“Family Gifts”

Throughout our lives, we receive many gifts from our family. Some are a simple birthday present or a word of advice, but others are family heirlooms that have been passed from generation to generation. I'm lucky to say that I'm from a family whose history is recorded extensively, with art and stories that rival museums. Yet I find myself now shifting through the expansive collection of heirlooms, and being told that it is mine. I recognize that these items are gifts, and many of these heirlooms remain close to my heart. But not everything that comes my way feels like a gift; many carry with them a legacy that cannot be ignored. There is a sadness and heaviness that is entwined into some of these gifts: I find two of the same enamel pin and realize that it was given by my mother to her mother as a gift, then passed back to my mom. Now, both pins are mine. A small enamel pin carries far more weight than I thought possible. But where can I put it down? Is it not mine, baggage and all? I recognize that I'm lucky these heirlooms are still in our family, yet I can't help but feel overwhelmed by the emotions that are handed to me alongside the objects. Still, I keep the heirlooms, painful as they may be, because it's part of who I am and part of a larger story where I'm only one chapter.

There are also things your family gives you that you don't want. Not just a sweater you don't like, but a litany of illness and predispositions. I would not call these gifts, but they are passed down in families and unable to shake. The diseases carry their own story and legacy, just like the enamel pins. Even though we may only think of them in a negative light, they are part of the story of one's family and heritage. The cancer that took my grandmother and mother was likely given to me as well. I can't ignore it or get rid of it, I simply must accept it, baggage and all. There is no affinity for sickness in my heart, but there is an understanding that this is something I possess *along* with the gifts I hold close to me. So I take the old clothing, well-loved books, and pieces of rusted jewelry, but also accept this body, the genes within it, and the difficulties that lie ahead. They are all gifts, passed down to me. Even though I may not want them all, they are part of me and a part of my family history.