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How To Dispose Of Children's Crafts Without Crushing Their Souls

BY JOSEPH WILSON

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Our family does a lot of crafts, something I've written about a few times in the past.

(You can read about some of our projects here

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/buy-nothing-parenting>), here

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/play/view/how-to-help-your-kids-turn-old-tshirt-into-their-own-no-sew-mask>) and here

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/drywall-projects-with-daughters>).)

But my reporting from the home front has been a little less than honest. There's a missing third act to the drama of creation happening at our dining room table. I'm speaking, of course, of that moment when you realize you don't have the space in your home, nor the resolve, aesthetically speaking, to keep all those crafts.

If it were up to my wife, the very last step in doing any painting, beadwork or paper maché, would be to place the objet d'art directly in the trash. But I go too far the other direction. I try to find a rationale to keep gnarled globs of macaroni well past their best-before date. So we compromised, and I would keep my favorites in a bin on top of the piano and we would toss the rest in the recycling bin. The problem was that as we wheeled our blue bin to the curb, our children would, without fail, look over just as the wind liberated a sheet from a long-filled colouring book.

Susan Goldberg writes about the pressures to make every moment of life magical for kids. She's not having any of it. Read that here (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/im-not-here-to-make-life-magical-for-my-children>).

“Hey!” they’d yell. “That’s mine! Why are you throwing it out?”

“Well, we have a lot of your art, we need to recycle some of it,” I’d say, guiltily.

“But this is my favorite!”

“Really? Your favorite thing you’ve ever made?”

“Yes.”

“OK, go give it to your mother.”

And so it ended up in the recycling bin again after they went to bed. We clearly needed a better solution.

Our children needed to learn how to part with their creations without feeling like we didn’t value them. There are now three boxes on top of the piano and everything they make during the school year goes in it. In June, we give them a scrapbook with a limited number of pages and they have to choose that many pieces to keep: everything else goes in the recycling.

“I want to keep everything,” they say.

“You can’t,” we say. “There isn’t room. Just keep the stuff that is special to you. The stuff that brings back good memories.”

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They eventually got pretty good at culling their work. Most of the time they don’t even recognize it as theirs. Once a box fell over and it took days for them to decide which artwork belonged to which child. When the scrapbooks are full, the covers are decorated with names and dates and placed on the shelf in the basement.

If they’re feeling nostalgic (not, as I’ve come to realize, an emotion with which children are as familiar as their grown parents), they can flip through the pages. My wife and I have one scrapbook each on that same shelf from our childhoods and sometimes the kids get a kick out of looking at the artwork we made when we were their age.

There is one obvious weakness with our box-to-scrapbook system, which is that three-dimensional creations don't fit very well into scrapbooks. *Papier-maché* masks, macaroni art, origami animals, boxes made into apartment buildings (I'm literally just looking around our living room to write this sentence), all remain stubbornly unboxed.

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So a little while ago we decided that if something had gone for a few weeks without being played with we would suggest that the child who made it take a picture for the scrapbook. The actual object would then be tossed. The children love setting up the perfect snapshot of their work, using my phone to capture the perfect angle, comparing lighting effects and the way that extra layer of sparkles just pop. We never print those photos out; they're forgotten as soon as I reclaim my phone. I delete all but one just in case they do want to revisit their artistic glory days, but the photos get digitally archived, mostly never to be seen again. So we're keeping the clutter in our house to a manageable level these days without destroying the egos of our children. The photos folder on my Google Drive, however, is another story.

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