

Out with the Old, In with the New

Written by Gayle Nobel

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Blog-a-thon Day 13

As I mentioned a few posts ago, I am on a purging mission this month, getting rid of 10 items per day. Sometimes they are tiny such as broken stuff lingering in drawers. I am also realistically looking at my clothes and jewelry and cleaning out cupboards or parts of closets, just a little at a time. I've already made a few runs to the local donation centers.

The first 13 days have been easy and most days I spend less than 5 minutes gathering up items to trash or donate. I've been on a definite roll and have been releasing things without blinking an eye.

Today I blinked.

I've been slowly going through Kyle's therapy room/workout room closet over the last week or so. We have a large collection of pictures from past attempts at PEC's and picture schedules and calendars. One of my former volunteers even organized them by category at one time. I have been digging deep and questioning why I am keeping things. It suddenly occurred to me that there was no reason to keep these pictures.

We have recently started giving Kyle picture choices again but Tammy has taken all the photographs from the most realistic view possible and mounted them. They are current and probably the clearest we have ever had. Though Kyle did not have success in the past making choices from pictures, he has grown so much in his twenties, we thought it might be a good idea to give it another try. A fresh start with new and improved photographs.

Before getting rid of our old collection of pictures, I asked Tammy to go through them to see if there was anything she thought we might be able to use again. I was so overwhelmed just looking at the piles, I was not in the mood to sift through them myself.

Today Kyle wasn't feeling well and Tammy had time to begin looking through the pictures. Other than a few people pics she set aside, she saw nothing there to reuse.

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The pictures were all laying out in their categorized zip lock bags ready for me to trash. But now I felt weird about it. Slightly emotional even. These were pictures of stuff Kyle no longer had, ate, or used. Why would I hesitate before throwing them away? I'm trying to declutter, right?

The pictures were kind of a representation of many phases of Kyle's life, of our life. I felt a little sad about all the things we tried, most of which didn't work out. We worked hard to make those pictures. Most were taken before everyone had a digital camera. We had to take the pictures, not knowing right away if they were a good representation. I usually ended up bringing them to the copy store to be resized. Large, small, tiny, huge- we tried everything. And then there was the necessary laminating and cutting and velcroing. We made a big time and money investment in these pictures over the years.

So what was this emotional attachment to these pictures about? There were memories embedded in them. Sort of. They were just of stuff, not of people. I had this feeling of wanting to hang on, that I "shouldn't" throw them away. They took me back to the time when the kids were little. Suddenly, I was nostalgic for those days, almost wishing to turn back the clock, but not. How would we do it differently if we had another chance at Kyle's childhood? Wistful silly thoughts.

I knew I didn't have to discard the pictures if I really wanted to keep them. I felt the pull of reluctance, but finally decided it was time to let them go.

We bought Kyle a new chair today. Shortly after we carried his new rocker/recliner into his bedroom, I filled the recycle trash with twenty years worth of pictures. Two empty shelves in the closet are now waiting to be dusted. Sometimes letting go is bittersweet.