

Grace in the Gray Areas

BY KAREN KULLGREN

You may laugh at the stereotypical 1950's "housewives" (and the occasional grandmother still today) who covered their sofas in plastic so they would stay pristine. But aren't we just as silly about our "good" stuff? Who doesn't have a "good" dress, "good" dishes, "good" earrings they rarely take out and enjoy?

For Christmas dinner I took out my Nana's china, painstakingly stored in padded zipper containers. Mom was so touched to see it when she arrived and reminisced about how she had not eaten off that china since she was a toddler. Despite the fact it has to be hand-washed, hand-dried and is such a fuss, I've vowed to bring it out more often.

I work from home, but as fond as I am of pajamas, I know I have to get dressed occasionally. If I'm just going to be hunched over my computer all day, I often toss on sweats whose pants have shrunk to flood length and complete the look with a misshapen velour top. I'm always saving my beautiful clothes for when I'm going out. What am I waiting for? I have enough "good" sweaters (by which I mean non-shrunken, non-pilling, non-figure-defect-highlighting) that I could wear a different one every day for weeks. I also wear less-than-perfect lingerie on a day-to-day basis and save the lacy spandex confections, for what ... a hot date with Liam Neeson?

For many women, "saving the best for later" credo accounts for clothes in the closet with tags on them a year or more after their purchase. I have tried to be bet-

ter about this. I decided a few years ago that I had so much gorgeous handcrafted costume jewelry, I wanted to see it instead of having most of it tucked away in drawers. I bought a little wooden tie rack and hung it on my bedroom wall to display my necklaces. After all, they are art, and seeing art in my personal space pleases me. I also drape some of my scarves willy-nilly across furniture so I can see them more often.

On a visit to a spa in Bali, I purchased a pretty bottle of massage oil with a tiny scroll attached to its neck. I kept it on a shelf in my bathroom to remind me of that paradise but was always saving it for a special occasion. It's been 12 years and at this point, I'm afraid to open it and find it rancid. Talk about a message in a bottle!

Using the good stuff more often would let us enjoy its provenance more—remembering the pleasures of the place we got it or the first time we used it.

I have certain books that I save for later, too. I always keep an unread humor book for travel. I'm a nervous flyer, and this is a good distraction (as though a good laugh will forestall turbulence, wind shear or pilot error). And I keep some unread spiritual reading tucked away for when I'm in a dark place and need some soul-lifting.

Another common item women hold back on is scissors. I bet every house has at least one pair of dull-blade cutters that are still in use. Why? For a special scrapbooking competition or a magazine article by an author we really like? Get out those good scissors with the sharp blades! Or turn the

bad ones into good ones again—sharpen them or toss them!

Sometimes we call things "good" for who knows what reason. Do they have an evil twin? As a little girl, my friend Dana had an Easy-Bake Oven and saved their cake mixes for special occasions. By the time she went to use them, the mixes were hard and inedible. She thinks she still holds off on using things because she's "satisfied now and might need more later."

There's another perverse spin on this, too. Dana and her partner gave her grandmother a wonderful electric fry pan, which she put on a doily in the dining room and never used. "It's too good" tends to be the province of elders, although it can sometimes be code for, "What do I need some crazy complicated gadget for when what I have is something that works perfectly well?"

After my recovery from knee surgery, I finally got to put the throw rugs back down. The braided rug in the living room has one side seriously faded and worn from years of treading on it with great love. The other side is just as it was when I bought it—vivid black with yellow stars and periwinkle patterns. Without hesitation I laid it down faded side up. I'd save the good side for company.

Truth be told, so many of our things perish before they get much use. Just what is it we're saving the "good" stuff for? Perhaps we should remember that every day is precious in our lives, and that we and now are good enough for the good stuff ... 

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