

WordCraft Posting

Fiction Workshop

Inspiration: The Box

Assignment: You find a box under a bed. Whose is it? What's in it?

Grandmother's Box

Diane watched her grandmother open the heavy lid of the blanket chest, take out the box, sit on the bed, close her eyes and put something in and take something out. The little girl had often asked what was in the box. Her grandmother's answer was always the same, "I put in all that I don't need and take out what I do." As she grew up, Diane wondered about her grandmother's needs and the box. Miss Ruby, as the townspeople called her, lived in a rural Florida panhandle town and led a starkly simple life. Yet she never seemed to lack anything.

Diane went away to college, married a successful man, had two daughters, and traveled a long way from that small, sleepy town. She wrote many letters to her grandmother to share her life and many travels. All her life as she fell asleep, Diane would think of her grandmother and hold her close in her heart. Maybe that's why she collected so many boxes and filled them with mementos from her travels and lots of jewelry. Her daughters grew up and went away, her husband left to find himself, and she was surrounded only by boxes overflowing with now meaningless stuff.

Diane moved to South Florida to begin a different kind of life alone. She finished her doctorate and began teaching. Now in her fifties, Diane began driving the long miles north and then east each month to help her aunt take care of her ailing grandmother. She would listen as many visitors came to visit the now bedridden Miss Ruby. Diane had never realized how her grandmother's life had touched so many.

Her grandmother's white hair, blue eyes, and sweet smile were still home to Diane. Diane slept in the same room with her as they had done when she was a little girl. Her grandmother still had the box but didn't take it out every night any more. As they whispered at night from their separate beds, her grandmother told her she had taken all she needed from the box and wanted Diane to have it one day.

Miss Ruby's funeral procession of cars and pickup trucks stretched longer than the town had ever seen. Diane sat between her dad and daughters under the small green canopy at the grave. Even as the pastor talked, she could hear the clusters of people murmuring, "Miss Ruby, Miss Ruby, Miss Ruby" mingled with both strangled sobs and gentle laughter. After the service, the family and many friends returned to her aunt's home for the traditional meal provided by the ladies of the church—hams, fried chicken, fresh garden vegetables, Cool Whip salads, cornbread, pies, cakes, and sweet tea.

After everyone had gone, Diane could not help but think of the box. Where was it now? What was in it? She asked her aunt if she could get the box from the blanket chest. "Of course you can. It's yours. She said so many times. You know what's in it don't you?" Diane was surprised. "No, I don't. I really don't." Her aunt just stood there shaking her head. "Well, you must be the one she thought needed it most. Go find it and we'll talk if you want."

Diane found the blanket chest in the now empty room where her grandmother had died. Even now Diane could feel her grandmother's love in the warm, but fading sunlight. Carefully she lifted the lid and found the box under the quilts. With trembling hands, she opened

it and smelled the clean citrus smell of her grandmother. She felt all around. It was empty. How could it hold all her grandmother didn't need and give her everything she did?

Of course! Diane knew in a flash and realized she had known all her life. The box held her grandmother's prayers.

By Linda Andrews