

## My Favorite Things

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image credits

I DON'T REMEMBER HOW I selected this issue's theme—My Favorite Things—but I'm guessing that I had heard the song of that title somewhere and decided it would work; it would probably draw a healthy number of submissions. I do remember, however, that my earliest thoughts were about "things" as "objects"—warm woolen mittens, bright copper kettles, crisp apple strudels.

But then, the expected happened. While the topic was rolling around in my mind and the song from *The Sound of Music* came to mind from time to time, I came to realize that most of my favorite things are not objects but events, places, moments, opportunities. The object—if there is one—is a prompt; it serves to bring to mind something much bigger, much more interesting and complex.

For example, hidden away in a drawer in my dining room is a small silver spoon that was given to my parents on the occasion of my birth. It was a gift from my mother's uncle, someone I don't remember ever meeting and about whom I know very little. The handle is a carving of a baby, and my name is engraved on the bowl in beautiful cursive letters. As an object, it is quite lovely, and I clearly cherish it; after all, more than a few decades have passed since I was born, and I've carried this little item with me through several moves around the country.

Growing up as an only child far from

extended family, I never knew most of my aunts, uncles, and cousins up, down, and across the family tree. I didn't even know my grandparents; both of my grandmothers died when I was very young, one grandfather died when my mother was still a child, and the other grandfather lived in Florida—too far for us to travel. I wish I had known these people, and I also wish I had known the great-uncle who gave my parents the silver spoon. Looking at and holding the spoon brings these feelings to the surface. I'm reminded that I do have an extended family, but I never had the opportunity to be part of it. Maybe that's why I've kept the spoon all these years; it connects me to family as well as to the feelings associated with family and belonging. It doesn't seem right to sell it or give it away.

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In this issue, photographs, books, sweatshirts, quilts, lemons, cornfields, golf courses—all kinds of things labeled as favorites—serve as the starting point for stories about love, safety, personal growth, the magnificence of nature, the power of the human spirit, and the ever-present grace that guides us forward. Be sure to read Matt Dennison's poem "In Short." As for favorite things, here is how he expresses it:

*actual externals that in holding  
or beholding ease our access  
to actual internal selves.*

*Some of my favorites:*

*I like waking up slowly, gradually becoming aware of the soft light coming through the shades. I lay in bed for a while, listening to birds sing their morning songs, acorns pelting the metal roof on the woodshed, neighbors' snowblowers clearing a path down their driveways. I listen to wind, rain, the school bus going by, barking dogs. I listen to the sounds of my world, waking up slowly.*

*I like starting the day with black tea, a mix of English Breakfast and Scottish Breakfast, the latter adding quite a punch to the taste. I set the kettle on the stove, put tea leaves in my little ceramic teapot, wait for the boil, and pour the hot water over the leaves. After a few minutes, I pour the tea, noticing the color of the dark red-brown liquid in my bright white cup. That first bitter, earthy sip feels and tastes wonderful, and I do it all again at the end of the day. Like bookends, tea both starts and ends my day.*

*I like stitching.* I enjoy many types of sewing and needlecraft, but recently, I've been learning and practicing sashiko, a Japanese form of hand stitching that uses nothing more than a running stitch to make beautiful designs on cloth. Over and over again the threaded needle is pushed into the fabric, then pulled through. The rhythm of the process, the focus on making consistent and precise stitches, the feel of the fabric, and the thrill of making something with my hands—all combine to make stitching an immensely pleasurable and soothing experience. Not a day goes by without some amount of time devoted to stitching.

*I like dogs.* I like walking with them in the woods, throwing toys so they can fetch, watching them run and jump with joy. I like to rub their heads and kiss their faces. I like to look into their eyes and see that the affection and devotion I have for them is returned to me tenfold. I like to watch them grow and mature—

from puppy to adolescent, to full-grown dog in the prime of their years, and then to being a wise and noble senior—gray in the face, a bit slower in the field. I am filled with hope and anticipation when I have a puppy, enjoying every step in their training and development. As a dog ages, the hope shifts to gratitude for the years of companionship and love I was able to give them and they in return gave me.

*I like to work in my yard,* raking leaves in spring and fall, pulling weeds and pruning shrubs, clearing out fallen tree branches and brush, moving plants from here to there to fill in empty spots or alter the layout of a garden. This is when I most closely observe the changing seasons—the snow fall then melt; the ferns and wildflowers emerge, grow, then fade away; the tree leaves appear as buds then one day drop to the ground after showing off their best colors. I've seen the show many, many times, but I never tire of it.

*I like abstraction and impressionism, ambiguity and suggestion, all the shades of gray that fall between lily white and pitch black.*

*I like fog, mist, and cloudy days; nuance and subtlety.*

*I like shapes, arrangements, and geometry; color, contrast, and similarity.*

*I like to figure things out rather than have someone do it for me.*

*I like having a plan and a purpose.*

*I like a clean house, though mine often isn't.*

*I like winter, cold weather, and short days.*

*I like quiet.*

*I like to be alone.*

*I like to feel alive. ❁*