



THE BUTTON BOX

Diane Roberson Douiyssi

MY MOTHER'S BUTTON BOX is a dented, beige tin stamped with sable-colored roses. Both of my daughters loved to run their hands through the buttons, skimming the surface delicately or digging two-fisted through them. Ripe with possibilities, it was a pirate's shimmering box of treasure, filled with jewels and gold coins, or it was an ocean, rolling with waves and hiding schools of exotic fish.

They'd open their hands and then let the buttons run and spill through their fingers. Buttons clacked onto the floor, rolling crazily across the linoleum. The girls laughed wildly, running to catch them before they disappeared.

The buttons inside were pulled from old clothes. Some were handed down by my mother's mother or her mother. Others came from yard sales or sewing project extras. Bright colored buttons from old aprons and fancy

dressess mix with sturdy metal buttons from work shirts. There are many white buttons, ones of cotton and clouds, and those with shades of past decades. Simple, utilitarian buttons hide the rare ones, like a brass jacket button or an iridescent genie-green square.

I pick up a plum-colored button. "That's from a skirt I made when you were in junior high. Do you remember?" my mother asks. A burgundy brushed-corduroy skirt comes into focus. I felt so grown up wearing it. There are others, like a button from my white-eyelet first communion dress. I wore a crown of fabric daisies and, after the ceremony, rode my bike up and down the block, my auburn hair blowing in the wind. I see a bulky magenta button from the cardigan my daughter wore when first learning to ice skate. A

sculpted, dainty black button from one of my grandmother's dresses whispers of elegance and youth, an echo of her life before I knew her.

There are pearl buttons too. Shimmery, they speak of my hometown's history. In the early 1900s, residents clammed up and down the Mississippi, dragging the muddy bottom for oysters. Broken shells with empty hole punches still turn up in gardens and gravel

driveways there. Raw and elegant, pearl buttons are weightier, hinting of a quality from a more substantial time.

The other day, I saw buttons for sale in a craft store. The cards hung neat and expensive, perfectly manufactured, and ready for someone to buy. When I mentioned this to my mother, she said, "Why on earth would anyone buy buttons?"

She's right, I think. In past generations, women darned socks and patched jeans. People wore shirts until the collars frayed. Then they detached the collars, flipped them over, and reattached them to mend

the shirt for further wear. When a piece of clothing was finally too worn out to repair, they'd save any buttons and cut it up for rags.

I don't have a mending basket, and I don't darn socks either. But I do sew on buttons.

My mother taught me how to thread a needle and carefully push it through fabric, looping tightly up and down through the holes until I fastened it securely. And so, in some small honor of that legacy, I've begun to save buttons too. Someday, I hope my collection will hold as much as her button box does, becoming a caretaker of family stories and imagination, a treasure of creativity and endless possibilities. ♡



image credits