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## THE JEWELRY BOX

June 17th, 2012 | Story by: [Connie Marshall](#)



One of my earliest memories is lying beneath the piano while my father played songs from the American songbook. It was there that the melodies and lyrics to such standards as "Autumn Leaves," "Stardust," and "Laura" took hold inside of me and formed an early appreciation of music from that era. My next memory is standing atop my father's shoes, my arms clutching his knees while we "danced" around the living room to albums of Glenn Miller, Oscar Peterson and Pee Wee Hunt.

My father was a Professor of Mechanical Engineering and later the Associate Dean of the College of Engineering at Rochester Institute of Technology. His side of the basement was a child's wonderland filled with a huge drafting table and two wooden work benches where my brother and I spent hours creating things from the myriad of treasures that he collected. Attached to a peg board were Gerber baby food jars that contained an assortment of nails, screws, beads, rocks and fossils. Way before recycling was popular, he was saving plastic bottle tops, tin cans, and more under the premise that you never knew when you could use it. One of the benefits of having this wonderful collection at hand was that we had all the materials necessary for top-notch school projects. One year my father and I built a volcano complete with lava in that workshop. My father believed in re-using objects, which is how I received my favorite gift ever – a hand-made jewelry box.

I don't remember how old I was when I lifted the gilded box from its bed of tissue paper on Christmas morning, but I was probably around eight. My Dad had embellished a carved wooden cigar box with gold paint and a decoupage photo of a kitten amid flowers cut from the pages of a Miles Kimball catalog. I only discovered this 30 years later when the back side of the page began to faintly bleed through the photo revealing the magazine logo and notes on a music staff. At that time, those were all the dearest things in the world to me, and my father knew it. In my eyes, it was, and remains, a masterpiece, not only of his handiwork, but of his love. Over the years, the contents of the box have evolved from beaded chokers to wedding pearls, to my children's baby teeth. But it has always remained the home of my most cherished belongings including memories of my father.