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Field Methods in Ethnography

October 8th, 2014

Archival Collection

The family artifact that I chose to add to the collection is my wife's old pitcher and basin that she got from her grandmother, Margaret Elizabeth Bradley. The basin is a deep bowl with the sides flowering out and around the bowl. The edges represent the flower's pattern of the flowing petals. The flower design on the raised edges, highlight the flower design in the white porcelain. In the inner part of the bowl there are approximately fifteen arches raised around the lower base coming up, repeating itself around the inner bowl. The flower picture is also in the inner part of the basin in four of the arches. In the bottom basin, there are rises to "hold" the pitcher in place to help lock the pitcher securely so to avoid accidents. On the bowls side, the outside, on both sides (opposite of each other) is the pattern of two white flowers with pinkish antennae around the center of the flowers yellow pollen. The flowers are still on their branches, brown, with green foliage connected to the branches along with the flowers. The pitcher's bottom, or base, flows up like an old corset slowly curving back in slightly and then tapering off into the spout on one side and the handle on the other side. The top of the pitcher reminds me of an open mouth with a tongue hanging out to try to allow the water to flow from the pitcher like a waterfall. The top of the corset area and the top of the pitcher have a raised pattern around each area looking like the water cresting and slowly moving down. Even the handle looks like the flow of water connecting to the top of the pitcher and ending at where the end of the corset ends.

The pitcher and the basin are porcelain with a dingy, smoke brown all over from lack of



cleaning.



In my interview with Kristel Nichole Brown, I was able to gather more information about the artifact that I was not aware. The artifact is from her great grandmother that received it as a gift from her husband (she thinks). From there it passed to her grandmother, who gave it to Kristel. While listening to Kristel talk and her eye contact, I seen the pain from her grandmother passing and the happiness she remembers from days past. From going through all the grandmother's "keeps" and hours spent looking through photos, items and objects that Margaret "pack-ratted", Kristel talks at times in a hollow tone and gets a faraway gaze. She reflects on how we use the artifact today. When asked if her grandmother would have an issue with how we use the basin and pitcher as a "catch all" on top of our refrigerator; she replied, "Nope. Probably needs to be dusted more".



This archival collection brought back sweet memories of Margaret and gave me a realization of how different my wife and I really are. Where she is trying to keep a hold of her past with oral stories, memories, artifacts, and other items/objects, I do not share her connection to the past.

The items given to me do not add value to my existence or hold meaning to me. The reflection of this thought makes me wonder why me, as a person, has become this way. The only result I can come up with is the “Nurture” aspect of our lives. My raising was not as enjoyable as hers was.

Interview with Kristel Nichole Brown; about her grandmother's pitcher and bowl. Interviewed October 2, 2014.

Q. How long have you had the artifact?

A. Hmm... about 12 years.

Q. Where did you get the artifact from?

A. My granny.

Q. Which one of your grandmothers?

A. Margaret Elizabeth Bradley.

Q. Is this your mother's mom or your dad's?

A. My momma's mommy. It belonged to my great grandmother.

Q. Do you know where she got it from?

A. If I am not mistaken it was a present from her husband.

Q. What do you use it for today?

A. Decorative and a "catch all".

Q. A "catch all"?

A. "Catch all", a store stuff.

Description of the basin and pitcher. (Pictures included)

Basin: It is shaped like a deep bowl with the sides flowering out and around the bowl. The edges are designed to represent the flower's pattern of the flowing petals. The flower design on the

edges is raised to highlight the flower design in the white porcelain. In the inner part of the bowl there are approximately 15 arch patterns around the lower base coming up, repeating itself around the inner bowl. In the bottom of the basin there are rises to “hold” the pitcher in place to help from accidents. Also on the bowls side that is able to be seen from the outside, on both sides (opposite of each other) is the pattern of two white flowers with pinkish antennae around the center of the flowers yellow pollen. The flowers are still on their branches with the green foliage connected to the branches along with the flowers.

Q. Why do you keep it on top of the refrigerator?

A. It’s protected, from a 4 year old.

Q. Do you know if the pattern had any significance?

A. No. It is just during that time it was a popular pattern. Not just that but like hardware, fabrics.

Q. Was there any ceremony when your mom gave you the item?

A. No.

Q. Do you remember the day when you got the item? Explain in details.

A. Um.. it was just a day that me and grandma was spending together. Going through her thousands of “keeps”. And she knowed I always liked it. She wanted me to have something that was just beyond one generation. I used to sit and go through her stuff all the time. She would have stuff put away from times that are long forgotten.

Pitcher: The bottom of the pitcher flows up like an old corset slowly curving back in slightly and then tapering off into the spout on one side and the handle on the other side. The top of the pitcher reminds me of an open mouth with a tongue hanging out to try to allow the water to flow

from the pitcher like a waterfall. The top of the corset area and the top of the pitcher have a raised pattern around each area looking like the water cresting and slowly moving down. Even the handle is made to look like the flow of water connecting to the top of the pitch and ending at where the end of the corset ends.

Where everybody says I get my pack-ratted from. (Her voice gets lower and seems to wonder along with a smile almost nostalgic).

Q. You used the word “keeps”. What does it mean?

A. Ahhh... she had everything. Things from her past. Showed me what her mommy and her looked like when she was little. Was like a time capsule in every drawer.

Q. You also used the word pack rat'en. What does that mean?

A. It is what momma used to call her cause she used to have a lot of things. Pa was bad on calling her.

Q. I take it you were really close to your grandmother?

A. Very (with sadden look). I can still walk in her house and tell you about stuff that nobodies knows about. (Heavy sigh)

Thoughts and Reflections:

When talking at beginning about her granny it reminds me of how less of time I got to spend getting to know her before she passed.

I didn't know the artifact was her great grandmothers.

When she talks about it being a gift from the husband it makes me think about how todays times and how the value of marriage has eroded.

Catch all is not even a start. Everything gets thrown in it and around it. In the bowl and in the pitcher.

I didn't know if the pattern meant anything about her family so I had to ask not only for this piece but for my knowledge.

When she talks about her time going through her Grandmothers stuff it reminds me of the many times when we visited Margaret and she would pull the stuff out and look at the stuff with her.

This time was before the birth of Leiam. If remember right

Q. Do you think your grandmother would have an issue with the way you are using the item?

A. Nope. Probably needs to be dusted more.

Q. Do you know what the main function it was used for originally?

A. Water basin and bowl. Wash hands and things like that. There have been many houses that they used to live in that didn't have running water so they would store things.

Q. And what did your grandmother use it for?

A. I can't necessarily remember her using it as a water basin so mostly decorative and stuff like that. Mammy and them, we grew up in houses with no water and pa made her a system with the new gutter piping and stuff like that where she could catch rainwater in whiskey barrels. She didn't have to haul as much from the creek. She do laundry and she passed away when he was less than six months.

Still amazed at not only my wife's accent and vocabulary but mine also. I have also used these terms.

Hated to ask about the closeness with her mother but had to ask for this observation.

I didn't know about the cooler temperatures and how it is different with porcelain.

washing bowls would usually keep things cooler because of it being porcelain.

Q. Do you know what the flower is on the basin and pitcher?

A. I don't know. She always called them Mermaid flowers.

Vocabulary:

Catch all- An item or place that is usually in the house where people put items that are used on a daily basis and of various items/objects.

Keeps- Can be used for any item or object. Possession of the item

Pack Ratted- Used for a person who keeps a lot of stuff (usually items or objects that have sentimental value for the person).



