

ASIA Reader's digest

MOST
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&
MOST
READ

SAVING THE PANDA

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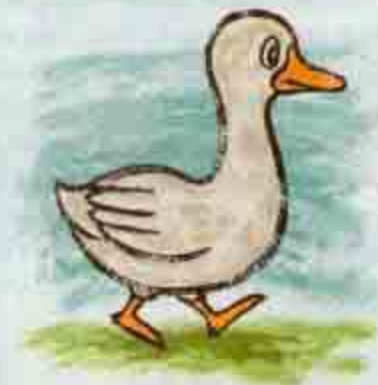
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Box Full of Memories

Buttons and baubles recall a neighbour's well-lived life

BY KAREN
GRISSINGER

"GOING, GOING, GONE - for \$3 to bidder No. 43, the lady in the last row, white hat." The auctioneer rattled off my auction number and location as I bought the memories of a lifetime, packed into a 1950s biscuit tin.

I gave the biscuit tin a shake and heard the rattle of buttons hit the cover. I took a peek and saw hundreds of buttons, badges and other trinkets glittering in the sunlight. Replacing the cover, I turned my attention to the auctioneer. As I listened to his cadence, my eye caught the movement of a swing on the front verandah. A petite lady with thinning hair watched the happenings in her garden, her eyes wandering through the crowd, trying to find the faces of her neighbours and friends.

Carrying an armload of purchases to my car later, I chatted with her about the large gathering and the

prices her things were bringing. Her eyes reflected sorrow at the passage of time and the loss of her independence. She would be moving to a progressive nursing home in town after the sale.

I showed her the tin box full of buttons I was carrying, and she looked up, tears glistening in her eyes. I asked if she minded if I sat with her for a while. She slid over on her swing to give me room. Her eyes fell to the box, and I removed the cover so we could view the contents. Her gnarled hands lifted a handful of buttons before slowly dropping them

back into the container. Her tiny fist closed around a delicate pearl button now yellow with age.

She smiled as she told me about the birth of her first child and the special pearl-buttoned christening outfit that would be worn by five more babies before time wore it thin. I put my hand into the box and pulled out a large, dark brass military button that appeared to be from World War II. "From my first husband's uniform," she said. "It's one of the few things I had to remind me of him when he didn't return home alive."

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