

# CAPE COD TIMES

**James E. Carroll Contributing writer**

Published 2:00 a.m. ET Aug. 25, 2017 | Updated 2:28 p.m. ET Aug. 25, 2017

Three months ago I sold the house we had called home for the past 15 years and moved to the Cape.

The three boys had all grown now; the youngest was in this third year of medical school and living in Connecticut. The new house needed renovations, so our belongings that would fit in the new house had to be put into storage. When the renovations were finally completed, it was time to move out of the storage units.

Friends had told me to downsize, get rid of as much as you could before the move. I did, or thought I did. But after the movers placed the furniture in the house, the boxes remained. There were so many that it seemed like I didn't throw anything out. What is in all those boxes I kept asking myself?

Boxes, boxes and more boxes. I attacked them with a protocol that was methodical and efficient, I thought. I cut them open, put them on a counter, unwrapped the items and decided where the contents would go. I set goals – 10 to 12 boxes a day. When I passed my daily goal, I gave myself a high-five. Unpacking is serious work. While the mechanics are the same, it's not like you're opening a special present or gift. You're working, but there is still some amazement when you open a box and unwrap its contents – saying out loud “why did I save this?”

When all the boxes in the house were finally unpacked, I tackled the garage. A wall of boxes there had prevented me from putting the cars in the garage. Imagine everything that you do not store inside the house – grills, beach toys, tools, paints, bug sprays, garden tools, hoses, sporting equipment, brooms. All hidden in boxes of different sizes. Slowly I made progress, the box wall got smaller each day.

It was a rainy, humid Saturday morning in mid-August when I went into the garage to finish unpacking. Nothing would stop me from getting the cars into the garage now. I went about my work until I came upon one box.

It was a box labeled Christmas items. My late mother's Christmas items. Christmas has always been a big holiday in my family. But as my parents grew older, the big tree was replaced by a smaller tree and the decorations became less and less. I stood in my garage looking at a box holding the only decorations my mother had saved. There were not many, but each item was individually wrapped and labeled with my mother's handwriting.

I unwrapped each one remembering where she put it out during the holidays. I picked up a Santa's workshop music box with Santa sitting on his bench surrounded by elves making toys. I turned the key on the bottom to see if it still played any tune. It chimed out “we wish you a Merry Christmas...”

As the tears welled up, I thought all that unpacking finally rewarded me with something you could not put in a box. Memories.

*Jim Carroll recently relocated to East Falmouth. He says his career as a lawyer talking to jurors taught him the importance of speaking from the heart.*