

Recently I have been trying to sort through all the greetings cards that I have stashed away in various places in the house. It was a trip down memory lane. Some of the cards going back to when I was very young. A silver "key to the door" from people I worked with when I was 21, the age when we were free, I'm not sure what we had freedom from but it was supposed to be a time when we made our own decisions, we were no longer under our parents control, that is if we were still living at home, which many of us were in those days, the late '50's and early swinging sixties.

I came across other birthday cards from my children and husband, others celebrating special birthdays like 50 and sixty and even older. Some from folk I can hardly remember but they weren't thrown out as the picture was a really good one of horses or sheep, boats, or something else I particularly like. Cards that were sent from my girls when they were very young and had written a message in their wayward handwriting, some for Mother's Day or Mothering Sunday as my Mother-in-law always reminded us. These all brought back memories, so they couldn't be despatched either. There were many that my grandchildren sent me, also in their own writing or sometimes a picture they had drawn and coloured in, they too were put on the 'keep' pile.

Then I found cards that were remembering special occasions, our engagement, wedding, wedding anniversaries, Ruby and so on; cards when my parents died. Messages congratulating us on the birth of our children, a few when our grandchildren were born, Ben's transplant. Cards when I had been unwell wishing me a speedy recovery. Large ones with all the signatures of my work colleagues when I left my job at St. John's College. Cards and postcards sent to me by my mum who died in the '70's, I remember her writing so well, it is as if no time at all had elapsed since she last wrote to me. Other family and friends long gone who had remembered a celebratory occasion, they too have stayed with me.

I had decided when I began this task that I would be ruthless and throw away all the cards that didn't mean much to me. However, how could I possibly despatch to the fire so many memories, some of which I had forgotten and here was a reminder through the names or the occasion. To know that many people, some just acquaintances, others very close to me, had been thinking of me at the times of great importance in my life was very humbling. All these memories, tucked away in my mind as well as in the plastic bags and boxes, with the exception of a handful, all back in their places, neatly stored in the cupboards and drawers; they now remain just as they had been before I lifted them out but I am richer for being reminded of friends and family, many whom I no longer see, but who have meant so much to me during my lifetime.