

Low-Tech Memory Sticks

Through the years, I've used peanut butter jars, flower vases, and even a beer mug to store pencils. These days my son's ceramic dinosaur holds the honor.

I never took my pencil container seriously until reading, *Spark Joy* by Marie Kondo, an illustrated master class on the art of organizing and tidying up. www.tidyingup.com

After following the author's instructions, I rolled and stored my socks like sushi rolls and folded t-shirts into Japanese origami pillows. I kept only those items that sparked joy. The pencil jar was next to be tidied. I scattered the pencils over my desktop and examined each one.

I chucked three pencils with hospital names. Who wants to reminisce about bunion surgery or a recent colonoscopy?

Needy mechanical pencils required tubes of refillable lead. Their slick plastic bodies stood arrogantly next to their ordinary hardworking cousins with scratched and teeth-dented wood. They sneered at eraser heads rubbed to odd angles. The mechanicals poked fun at the elderly that had gone bald and wore eraser wigs like SNL's Coneheads. They had to go.

Yes, I still use pencils in this technological age. I'm addicted to the buttery soft graphite of Berol Turquoise and Kimberly 6B drawing pencils. They beg me to doodle.

No. 2 pencils are my go-to industrious list-makers.

There are several pencils—I call them memory sticks—the old-fashioned kind. They will never be introduced to my pencil sharpener.

The black and red souvenirs from China represent university students. I helped them improve their English. In return, they showed me the sights of Shanghai.

Sleek black pencils from Bangkok spark Thai food joy—my favorite cuisine.

One sapphire pencil from Germany reminds me of my Swedish cousin and her German husband. Between strolls on the beaches of the Baltic Sea, I proofread their cookbook of authentic Nordic dishes, *Food from Scandinavia*.

Two metallic purple pencils shine like a set of new braces. The orthodontist's name, the one who straightened my children's teeth, is stamped in brilliant white.

The Orange County Library System brings back days of driving kids to Orlando for carloads of books that enriched our homeschooling life.

I picked up a memento from the University of Central Florida when I registered my youngest daughter for college. Where have the years gone?

A bouquet of bright red Paper Mates nestles near two turquoise animal prints and a pink Barbie pencil. A colorful pencil from FAO Schwarz toy store belonged to my middle daughter who won a Family Fun magazine contest—a weekend in New York City—all expenses paid. Talk about sparks of joy! www.parents.com/familyfun-magazine

One day, a smooth unlabeled maple-colored pencil appeared in my pencil cup. When writer's block threatens I make up stories how it got there.

A Mickey Mouse pencil topper proudly watches over the entire eclectic pencil family.

I rolled the last pencil, navy blue and white, between my fingers. It never fails to trigger the memory of a surreal phone call. The date was September 11, 2001. My oldest daughter was a volunteer at our local library. "Turn on the television," she said. I stopped washing dishes and sat on the edge of the coffee table holding a mixing bowl and damp kitchen towel. I watched as a plane flew into one of the Twin Towers.

Could this pencil ever spark joy? Should I toss it?

No. And no.

With or without that pencil, I will never forget the victims or the strength and resilience of the citizens of the United States. I slid the proud memory stick back into the cup.