



Source: Joshua Partlow and Robin Wright, 'Top Iraqi officials growing restless', *Washington Post* online, 21/06/07.

Tags: [evidence](#), [death](#), [sewing/weaving](#), [home](#), [husband/wife](#)

Writer/s: [Anne Brennan](#), [Barbara Campbell](#)

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We did this exactly one year ago didn't we? Writing together but not together, you there in that part of the world tilted away from the sun, in another season, another time zone, you writing with the lights and the heating on, me writing in the heat and light of the day. And we think of the same image.

You say this:

*When you opened the door of my parents' wardrobe in our house in Canberra, my father's ties, neatly arranged on a springy wire screwed to the door's inside, would flap and dance a little. The open shelves were filled with orderly stacks of shirts and folded singlets and sweaters.*

And I am reaching back into another wardrobe, one that was built by the man who is our strongest thread, even now that the thread has been pulled.

And you say:

*At the top, out of reach, was the shelf on which my mother hid anything we were not supposed to know about: birthday or Christmas presents, usually. The way up to this shelf was to clamber up on the lower ones until a questing hand found a purchase on whatever was being sought.*

And I am finding it hard to reach the top shelf too. Not because I am a child like you. No, I am a grown woman, but this shelf was built to the scale of the man who built it and we both know how tall he was.

And you say:

*Alternatively, you could stand on the bentwood chair which usually lived in the corner of the bedroom and which served as a temporary hanging space for my father's trousers or suit jacket, both of which he would methodically empty of handkerchiefs and small change first. If you reached back far enough, your hand would encounter a small grey metal locked box, inside which were the family documents: certificates that announced births, baptisms, marriages and confirmations; my parents' passports; some letters and five or six photographs.*

And I remind you that there was no bentwood chair near this wardrobe. There was however an industrial-style, folding metal chair that he picked up from some junk store or even out on the street. It really wasn't very special and the metal was so cold, he had to make a woollen cushion for it so he could sit on it to pull his socks on.

And you want to go on with your story I know you do. You want to look at those photographs that you haven't seen in such a long time. But I'm going to hold us in this wardrobe for a while. Do you remember, it was as big as a small bedroom? It had no windows onto the outside world. It was like a cave and so cool in the summer.

And the clothes.

I have heard and read about the practice of disposing of the clothes of the recently departed. Friends and relatives will volunteer to pack everything up almost immediately and take them off to the local charity shop. The thinking is that it helps you 'move on'. I couldn't understand this thinking because...because all of his clothes were a representation of him. The sheer mass of them could almost be him. You understand all this completely. In that first week when you quietly took my laundry away to wash at your place, you brought back the things of his, unwashed.

You remember he had a limited colour range: blues, greys and blacks. When we first got together, I told him it was possible that he could wear one other colour—to match his blonde eyebrows and set off his blue eyes. We went shopping and for his first birthday in our relationship I bought him a light gold sweater. I was right. He glowed. I'm not sure he thought I was right but he was happy for me to make this change in him and he wore it often. It was the one high-key item in his wardrobe.

For nearly three years after his death I stayed in the studio/residence that we had shared for just over three years. When the time came to physically move on, to a much smaller place, back to my pre-marital city of Sydney, everything that he had acquired in the 18 years of living and working in that very big place, had to be handled, thought through, packed and distributed in a way that felt right to me. There could be no regrets. It was only in the last week of this operation, which took months of full-time labour, that finally, I could bundle up all those blue, black and grey textiles and take them to the local charity shops.

But some items had been distributed long before this point. In the first few days after his death I had given his gold sweater to his brother, his collection of earrings, none of which seemed to be paired, to his sister, his big, 'category A' tee-shirts to his nephew, his hankies to his mother, his dressing-gown to his father. Old tee-shirts were used as rags and packing materials. The last Bonds singlet was used to polish the silver tea pot. His leather Blundstone boots were buried in the holes dug for new tree plantings.

I had also read somewhere that there is a ritual whereby the coats of a dead man are distributed amongst his friends. And so I dispatched big, soft parcels to men of all shapes and sizes in Victoria, South Australia, northern New South Wales and locally in Canberra. The last one to go was a full-length grey woollen overcoat that went to our friends' very tall son who was about to step out into the world beyond high school and Canberra and travel solo to Denmark. I think he would have liked this distribution, don't you? You'll remember how much he liked to recycle things.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from stories by Anne Brennan and Barbara Campbell.*