



## Forwarding “Stuff” to the Future

**S**canning and digitizing—I’ve been doing quite a bit of it recently. Reducing bulky and deteriorating physical stuff, where possible, to data which can easily be stored and shared. I have a lot of stuff—and I’m not alone. A friend since junior high school is trying to unload his accumulated stuff. He offered me some. I declined (except for a few tools!).

In the past (especially at moving time) friends have commented that I have way too much stuff, and I should get rid of it. Yeah, yeah, some stuff should be trashed or donated to the used stuff people. I’ve been doing that.

But then there’s other stuff—stuff that’s been handed down from parents, grandparents, great grandparents and great-great grandparents—a few antiques and keepsakes, but more importantly gobs of photo albums, letters and artifacts of family and professional history.

On top of that, my father was a cartoonist of some note, and he left behind business records and correspondence of his work dating back to the 1920s. His biographer and other researchers over the years have relied on me to find and scan journals, correspondence, photos and artwork that would have been completely lost if my mother and I hadn’t preserved and semi-organized them. A fellow cartoonist visited my studio recently. As he surveyed the loaded shelves, he commented, “Gosh! This is like a museum!” This is to say nothing of thousands of my own photos, artworks, books and memorabilia, in addition to those of my wife.

When I was young and thought I was too busy, it seemed like there would be plenty of time later to get all this stuff in order—making it accessible to future generations. Suddenly, I’m not so young and I’m busier than ever. Stuff is sitting in our living room, as I tackle it a little at a time. Beyond that, a major university is interested in taking my father’s archives—but I need to catalog them first! Other materials I will pass on to family members.

Gloomily, one biblically literate friend commented that it’s all going to burn—so why

even bother? She quoted 2 Peter 3:10—“*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.*”

Point taken. Everything we see, touch and hear lasts only a short time when compared with eternity. That helps keep physical things in perspective, doesn’t it? But can we really use this passage as a proof-text that we should flippantly disregard the gifts that have been handed down to us?

Yet a common theme of modern Evangelical Christianity has been that the end is just around the corner, and therefore stewardship and preservation of historical artifacts (and even the planet!) for future generations is a pointless pursuit. That’s just a shame.

No one knows exactly how or when such an end and the return of Christ will occur—and Christian interpretations vary widely. Yet Christians of other traditions take a longer view and have been involved in the preservation of art, literature and culture for millennia. We can thank tens of thousands of dedicated ancient scribes, medieval monks, copyists, printers and librarians for the preservation of Scripture over the millennia, as well as myriad other works of literature, history and art.

*You might say that responsible Christ-followers live fully in the present while conserving the past and contributing to the future.*

I have a collector friend who realized a few years ago that he and his wife don’t really “own” their art. They are just temporary custodians of the works—which reminded me of 1 Corinthians 7:31. I like the Berean Literal Bible’s rendering of this passage “...and those using the world, as not using it as their own. For the present form of this world is passing away.”

Since at any given time the “form of the world” (including our physical selves) is always passing away, we ought to take care to see to it that our stuff of value gets forwarded to the future. Those in the future will thank you! □

—Monte Wolverton