

Journal-in-the-Box

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by Ryan Newhouse

Long-distance relationships are hard, especially the good ones. During our long-distance engagement, which has spread across several states, my fiancée and I started sending each other packages to serve as a collective journal of our separate lives during the development of our relationship.

There are so many small and wonderful things in one's life that define a person; knowing which ones to put in a box and send away is an arduous task. I took to making audio tapes. I would record a poem, or a birdsong, perhaps, or part of a professor's lecture, or the silence at night outside my window. I even read a favorite book once, chapter by chapter, over a series of tapes. Most of the tapes, however, were filled with me talking about ordinary, daily occurrences—reactions, reflections, and feelings. It was a way for me to offer myself to someone in another place, living another life. And through the exchange of these boxes we were, somehow, included in each other's "foreign" lives. We were together.

My fiancée took great care in decorating her boxes with magazine clippings, ticket stubs, and photographs, all of which reflected her new life in Chicago. As she struggled with and learned to appreciate her new life in the big city, I was with her on the journey, seeing it unfold around the corners of a cardboard box. My fiancée and I have kept the contents of our packages as a journal of who we were during those times and as a testament to how we developed our relationship.

In the midst of packing tape, postage stamps, and bubble wrap we balanced our individual lives with the relationship that brought us together. The boxes we've sent, and continue to send, carry the story of us. And one day, if we're lucky, we will be able to share that story with our children. ●



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