

Our experts tell you . . .

HOW TO MAKE GREAT GIFTS OUT OF OLD MEMORIES

BY DENNIS McCAFFERTY

A RATTY OLD BASEBALL discovered in an attic? Not worth much.

That same ratty old baseball refurbished and displayed on a plaque that says this was the ball your son, Robbie Jr., now 38, hurled when he pitched a no-hitter in the state high school playoffs? Priceless.



Our panel of experts, clockwise from top left: Hilary Billings, Ginger Reeder, Allana Baroni and Robyn Freedman Spizman

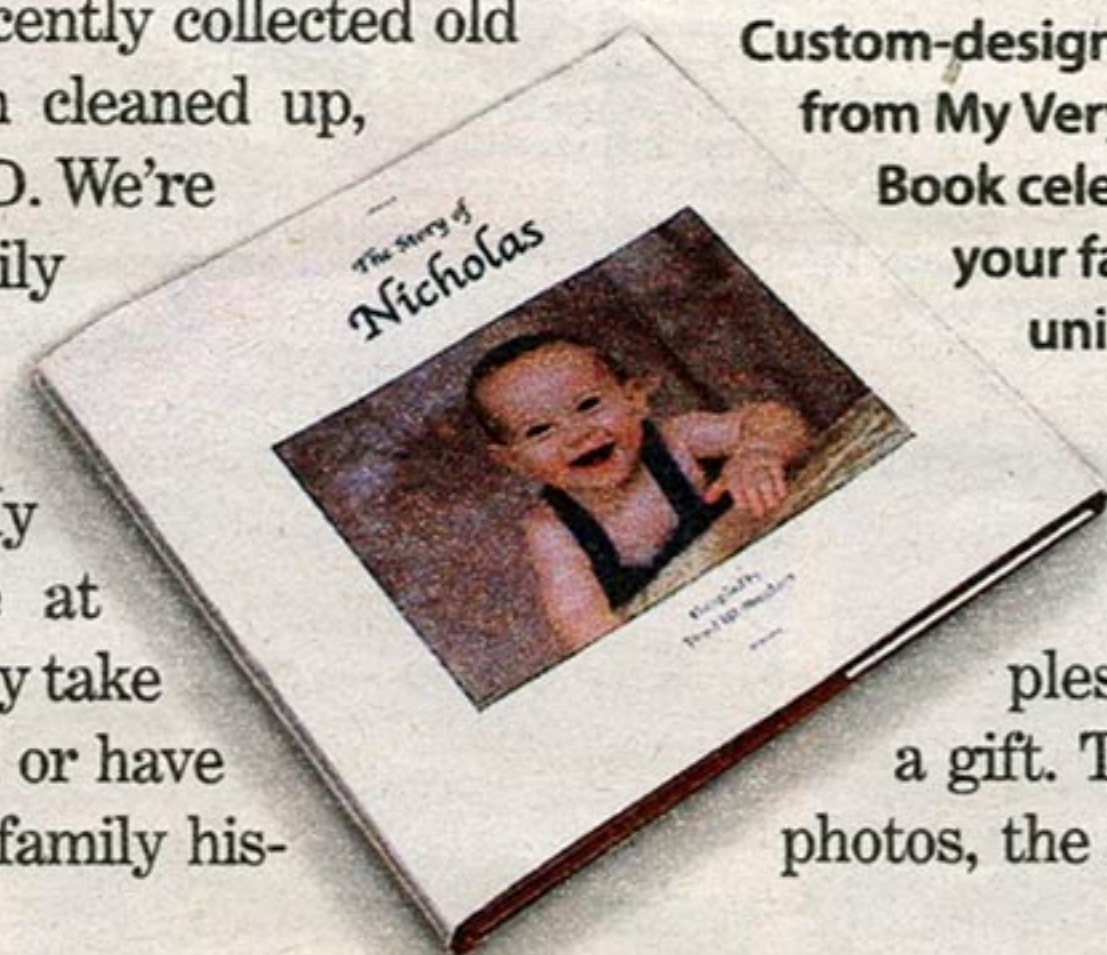
When it comes to holiday gift giving, a lot of “old” things are emerging as new again. Family home movies, love letters and other sentimental items are getting dusted off and recast in the form of DVDs, CDs, quilts and mounted displays.

To enlighten readers about this heartfelt gift-giving trend, USA WEEKEND Magazine once again turned to its panel of experts: online shopping entrepreneur Hilary Billings of RedEnvelope, Neiman Marcus holiday catalog queen Ginger Reeder, celebrity shopper Allana Baroni and Robyn Freedman Spizman, “gift guru” and author of a new guide, *The Giftionary* (ST. MARTIN'S GRIFFIN, \$12.95).

Q: What are the most intriguing “old is new again” holiday gifts you’re seeing? Are we talking about home movies?

Billings: Absolutely. We recently collected old family movies and got them cleaned up, edited and transferred to DVD. We’re giving this to all of our family members now.

Spizman: It can be photos, too. I like an outfit called My Very Special Book [online at myveryspecialbook.com]. They take pictures that you have taken, or have permission to use, and your family his-



Custom-designed books from My Very Special Book celebrate your family's unique story.

to be good with a needle to do this. I’m taking all of my dad’s favorite big-band songs — ones I remember him playing at home — and burning them onto CDs to give this holiday season.

Baroni: I’m finding that celebrity couples like to “package” their wedding day in a gift. They’ll take the marriage certificate, old photos, the garter, the wedding program and other

tory and put it all into one beautiful hardcover book. They do more than just compile it all; they help you create a customized book about your family or any subject you choose. The book becomes a keepsake.

But you can do your own repackaged sentimental gift as well. I have a friend who would never get rid of any shirt he owned, whether it was a jersey from his soccer team or a black T-shirt he bought at a rock concert. So his mom is taking the shirts and making a quilt out of them.

Reeder: I’ve discovered that sort of gift giving, too! I have a friend who made a blanket out of his grandfather’s old ties. The grandfather was so delighted — he was known for his ties and could remember special events where he wore each one. But you don’t have

Modern technology gives new meaning to those dusty family heirlooms in the attic.

items, then present it in a nice shadowbox frame. They usually inscribe a message like “I’d do it all over again.”

Q: How can you place a value on such a homemade gift? What if you come across as a creative cheapskate?

Spizman: That doesn’t usually enter into the equation. Many recipients can see that these gifts are from the heart and place value on the creativity and energy it took to present the gift. But if you are really hung up on spending money, there are options.

When a husband gives an artful display of old love letters, for example, he could include a nice piece of new jewelry with it. That will resolve the “Did I spend enough?” conflict quite nicely.

Q: How do you deal with issues of frailty? Some of these sentimental memories can crumble with the lightest touch.

Billings: Tell me about it! Many of those films were old and brittle. It’s best to do your research and deal with professionals who know how to handle these items. We consulted with chat groups on the Internet to find the right company, and we ended up sending the film out with lots of extra padding to a Colorado company, which transferred it onto DVD for us.

Q: Is there a danger of this kind of gift embarrassing the recipient instead of thrilling him or her?

Reeder: Definitely. I still have my old diaries around and some love letters, and I’m glad that my daughter is reading them now that she’s at a similar age in her life. But I certainly don’t want her restoring those in any way or putting them on display. Some things should be kept personal, after all.

Q: What if the item you want to use isn’t of great value? What if it is, in fact, just junk?

Spizman: That’s an important point. You need to make sure the concept focuses on an item that’s still sentimental. Just because an item is still being kept somewhere around the house doesn’t mean it has that value. Make sure the gift will excite the recipient — as opposed to just you — by asking the recipient’s parents, siblings or spouse if they think he’ll like it. **W**

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