

Trashmagination Podcast 2

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. This is the second episode. I'm Carla Brown.

This episode was made in November and at this time of year, my main focus is making holiday gifts. So today, I'll talk about some of the ways I creatively reuse around the holidays. Of course I'm not going to spill the beans on any gifts I'm making this year – you'll have to find that out in the new year!

Let's start with **Trashmagination Techniques and Tools**.

One material that I creatively reuse to make holiday gifts is burlap rice bags.

Do you buy your rice in burlap bags? When I was a kid, rice came in a box. These days, I eat a lot of rice, and we buy our rice in 10 pound bags. These bags are imported from Asia. Inside the burlap bag is a thin plastic bag. If you tried to pick up that rice in just the plastic bag, it would probably split open. The purpose of the burlap bag is to keep the rice from spilling during its long journey.

You might be wondering – what gifts do I make with burlap rice bags? I lived in Nova Scotia from grade 8-11, and my parents still live there today. In Nova Scotia, there is a tradition called rug hooking, which involves cutting wool blankets and clothing into very thin strips – like about ¼ inch wide - and then using a hook to pull up little bumps of wool through holes in the burlap. This is not the same as latch hooking, which is a craft more people might be familiar with, where there are tufts of yarn that pook out from a mesh.

Burlap is the lowest quality material used to make these rugs. Most rug hooking artisans are more likely to use a nice backing material such as monk's cloth or linen because it takes a really long time to make these rugs, and you want a material that will last. But burlap does work and it used to be the standard material in days gone by.

I hook burlap rice bags into small rugs. In Nova Scotia, it's a lot easier to find wool blankets and clothing in the thrift store. In fact, there are so many rug hooking artists in Nova Scotia that the people who work in the thrift stores have learned what materials works best for hooking rugs, and they often put it in a separate bin.

Here in Virginia, people don't have as much wool clothing or blankets so it's not as easy to get plentiful supplies at my local thrift store. I still hook some rugs with wool strips because my mom often gives me wool as gifts when she visits from Canada. But in recent years, I have started to hook with strips cut from t-shirts. Most people have too many t-shirts, so it's very easy to get free t-shirts to hook – I don't even have to go to a thrift store to get hooking supplies. In fact, my previous employer at one point changed their logo, and they gave me four big boxes of t-shirts with the old logo that were just going to be tossed out. Those t-shirts were all white except the logo, so they are superb for tie-dying, which makes for really cool hooking and weaving projects.

If you have burlap rice bags but don't know how to hook rugs, I'll put links to tutorials in the show notes, available at my website trashmagination.com. There are also rug hooking guilds that you can join to learn more. It's a very inexpensive hobby because all you need to buy is a hook which can cost less than \$10.

You can see a bunch of rugs that I have made over the years as gifts by visiting trashmagination.com.

Unfortunately if you haven't started your rug, chances are high you will not finish it in time for the holidays because it is a very time consuming craft. But you could keep it in mind to start collecting your burlap rice bags and excess t-shirts for next year's gifts.

https://www.amazon.com/Textiles-MCGTD-245015-Heritage-Hook-Wood/dp/B004BP1P4K/ref=sr_1_7

Next I'll answer a **Listener Question**. Since this is my second episode, I'll make this one up and it is **"What is your favorite way to creatively reuse during the holidays?"**

My favorite creative reuse tradition is using fabric gift bags. I think these bags are superior to paper gift bags because they are less likely to rip or get crinkled up, and you can choose fabric that suits the occasion – such as bags for baby showers, or toddlers, or more sophisticated fabrics for adults. I have a large collection of upholstery samples that I got from an interior decorator that work really well for this project, but you can reuse just about any fabric.

Here are some tricks my family has figured out over the years when it comes to fabric gift bags. So part of the tradition of receiving gifts is that it takes time to open the gift. With paper-wrapped gifts, there is some drama when the person is either ripping the paper or carefully removing it. But with fabric bags, you just pull open the top and pull out the gift. Also, with little kids, if it is too easy to open the bag, they have a tendency to just open the bag before the festivities have begun. So in order to add a little more suspense into gift opening, my mom would tie a slip knot in our gift bags, so at least you had to pull on this cord to make it open.

Recently I learned about the Japanese tradition of furoshiki, which involves wrapping a gift in fabric in a way that doesn't involve any sewing. Opening a gift wrapped this way is closer to unwrapping a gift from paper – and by that I mean there is more of a process – more suspense in the unwrapping. Also many furoshiki wraps are done in a way so you have a handle to make it easy to transport the gift. I'll link to furoshiki resources in the show notes.

<http://www.treehugger.com/culture/furoshiki-youll-never-need-wrapping-paper-again.html>

<https://vimeo.com/2321507> - Recycle Now

A different challenge with fabric gift bags is that if you use stickers for your "to" and "from" labels, sometimes those labels don't stay stuck on the fabric. Then there is a gift and no one is really sure who should open it. So what our family does instead is we take old cards and we cut them into rectangles. We write the "to" and "from" on the rectangles and staple it to the bag. This becomes a more permanent tag, so each year when I'm wrapping gifts I sort the bags by the recipient and put gifts in the same bags each year for each person.

When it comes to fabric gift bags, you might find that you have to sew a few more each year. First, you give some away. Also, it's nice to have a bag that is approximately the right size for the gift – so sometimes I need to sew extra large or extra small bags. This is a great sewing project for someone with even basic sewing skills – and in fact, giving someone an assortment of fabric gift bags is a great present.

So for future podcasts, I would love to answer your question about creative reuse. Just email your question to trashmagination@gmail.com.

The next segment is a **Trashmagination Tale**.

Here's a story that illustrates how you can creatively reuse your family stories, and sometimes there are outcomes you could never ever have predicted.

So my son's second name is Andrew, and that name comes from my mother's grandfather Andrew. When my son was born, I asked my mom if she could write a paragraph about Andrew's life in my son's baby book. I guess that was just the right question to ask my mom because that small request inspired her to research and write a whole book about my great-grandfather and great-grandmother called *Andrew and Violet: The Story of My Grandparents*.

http://www.tidespoint.com/books/andrew_violet.shtml

This book means a lot to my extended family and a whole community of people in eastern Newfoundland. My mom interviewed many older people and gathered their stories in a way that had never been done before for this part of the world.

So while this was happening, I wanted to share with my children some of the stories that my mom was recovering. However, my kids were quite young but most of the stories were really sad – such as people dying in World War I or from typhoid fever. So I was looking through the drafts of the book to see if I could find any stories that would be appropriate to share with my kids. I found a few and I used to tell them the stories while we walked to school. They really enjoyed this and would ask me to repeat the stories.

So my next idea was “How could I translate some of these stories into a children’s book?” My kids were at that point mostly interested in reading comic books, so I took the stories from our walks and drew them into comic strips. I think I drew 4 or 6 stories into strips. I gave those comic strips as a gift to my Mom, my grandmother and my nephew.

Well, that was a big hit, and my mom started asking me to draw a whole bunch more comic strips. But I was too busy, so I suggested that instead I might teach her how to draw the comic strips. My mom is much better at drawing than me. The tricky part was that she had not really ever read comic strips. So the first time she tried to do this, the comic strips didn’t flow in a way that makes sense for those of us who are familiar with comic strips. The individual squares were more like a photo album. Each square was an individual moment, but it didn’t hang together as a story with a beginning, middle and end. Also, I don’t know if you have noticed this about comic strips but ideally there needs to be a surprise or something unexpected that happens – usually as a punchline of some kind.

Anyhow, we got through that part, and then there was a question of adding color to the comic strips. We would scan in the comic strips in black-and-white and then use Photoshop to add color. My mom was not comfortable with computers at all. But she was determined, and with a lot of patience from my husband particularly, she became quite savvy with Photoshop, which is a challenging piece of software.

As a side note, the comic book version of these stories was not only a hit with our kids. For people in our family and beyond who are not able to read, the comic book made the stories accessible as well – especially if they were featured in the comic strip!

My mom took that new knowledge of Photoshop and started restoring historic photos. When she was researching her book, she gathered and scanned many photos that had cracks and other issues. She became very proficient at restoring photos.

So to sum up, I think there is a lot of value in asking family members and friends for stories and other memorabilia, and building on those items to make meaningful gifts. It took the combined skills of many family members for us to progress from a baby book, to a published book, to a comic book and then restored historical photos. In the process, my Mom went from zero computer skills to skilled in a complicated piece of software, and she became a published author, and she brought together people from across a huge geographic area and many generations to gather a history that easily could have been lost. She also helped me to share my Newfoundland heritage with my children, who have always lived in the United States.

What small item from your family story can you build on? What photo, object or story could you interpret for the current generation in your family? What could you make into a book or a sketch? The creative-reuse of stories is just as vital, if not more vital, than the creative reuse of stuff.

Next let me share a **Trashmagination Quotation**.

The quote is – “Happiness is the joy we feel striving after our potential.” This quote is from the book *The Happiness Advantage* by Shawn Achor. So if happiness is about striving and not necessarily arriving, that is really important in terms of the holidays. How can the gifts we give, or the activities we do, focus on helping each person to strive for their potential? How can I give people the tools they need to go towards the place where they want to go?

So for example, right now, I have a whole bunch of Trashmagination goals, family goals, work goals and physical health goals. The best gifts would be those who help me on those journeys.

Have you ever received a gift that was a clear turning point as you were striving for your potential? The first one that leaps to my mind are my looms. One was a gift from a weaving teacher and one was made by my husband. I use these looms every day in my weaving projects. I have them in my living room because I like to be reminded every day how lucky I am to have access to these vital tools on my creative reuse journey.

So when you think about giving gifts this holiday season, what gifts would most help those you live to strive for their potential?

So that’s the end of my second Trashmagination podcast.

You can follow Trashmagination on Facebook or Instagram. On Facebook, I regularly post links to my Trashmagination artist crushes. These are artists who I admire for their use of unusual materials. You can also see photos of my creative reuse projects.

Until next time – May you see your trash as just another source of art in your life.