

Time IN A Bottle

PRESERVE MEMORIES IN OLD JARS

by Melody M. Nuñez

These fun and easy memory jars were originally presented in the June/July 2005 issue of *Somerset Memories* (formerly *Legacy*).

For years my world was flat and acid-free. A scrapbooking addict through and through, I saved anything and everything for my beloved scrapbooks — provided it was flat. Sure flat allowed me to save coins, stitches from my husband's outpatient surgery, and even tiny beaded baby bracelets I made for my twin nieces to tell them apart. But something was missing. I was traveling to places, some near and some far, and wasn't capturing everything I wanted between the pages of my scrapbook. I longed for dimension — to save shells and seedpods and handfuls of sand! I finally found my solution, in a vessel as simple as a de-labeled pasta jar.

I love nature, collecting things and uncluttered presentation. All these elements come together in what I've come to call Memory Jars. Gathered mementos too bulky for scrapbooks can be gathered into a glass jar, not only capturing your memories but also creating striking display pieces that can be used for home décor.

My memory jars sit on a shelf above the worktable in my studio. I love taking a moment here and there to reflect on each trip or day, and I also love that I can compare the sands of Newport Beach, Catalina Island, North Carolina, and Monterey with just one glance. I'm an artist who finds great beauty in the details, and these jars allow me to enjoy the details from a moment in my life — details I can't store dimensionally in my scrapbook but are cherished nonetheless.

Another of my loves is using something in a new way and making use of something that might otherwise be thrown out. That's why my jars are mostly pasta jars with the label soaked off. The 27.7-ounce size works well for me, though a memory jar's size, shape and origin are certainly up to the individual. Since I made my first memory jar, I've started collecting unique jars from the thrift store, looking for pieces with both an interesting shape and a reasonable price. While I love the uniformity of the pasta jars, I'm also attracted to these more elusive and unique shapes. Luckily for me, there are no rules, and I can mix and match if I so choose — so can you! Whether you choose pasta jars, canning jars, antiques, or colorful bottles you purchase new from a store, you're sure to find something that suits you, your needs and aesthetic.

One of the best things about memory jars is that virtually anyone can put one together — no artistic talent required. They're a great project for scrapbookers and non-scrapbookers alike. Scrapbookers can enhance their memory preservation with this 3-D method and allow themselves to be lumpy. Non-scrapbookers can make a memory jar instead of a scrapbook layout. This method of memory preservation is so versatile and easy that it may become your newest family tradition! ♦♦





Palm Desert
Palm Springs
January 2002

Monterey
March 2004

Big Bear
Lake
November
2002

READER CHALLENGE

So easy a child can do it ... and one did! Little Lucy is all of 4 years old. She's the daughter of our consulting scrapbook editor, Sinee Gallagher, of Villa Park, California. When we asked Lucy to create a couple memory jars, she came up with her own playful versions. She filled the jars with objects from a trip to an Arabian horse farm (complete with hay and a wrapper from a carrot she fed to the horses) and a trip to the Colorado River, where she found twigs from a tree that had swept through the area. Now it's your turn! No matter what your age, gather your memories in a jar and share them with us. We'll publish as many as we can in a future issue of *Legacy*. For more details on how to submit your artwork to us, please see the Submission Guidelines.

Jar Content

Another wonderful thing about memory jars is that virtually anything goes. The majority of my memory jars contain strictly "natural" elements – sand, shells, tree bark, acorns, rocks, and the like. However, my recent jars are a bit more diverse. A visit to the beach on Valentine's Day resulted in a jar filled with rocks, shells, and a plastic toy horse found along the path. A trip to Monterey, where I was born but had not been to since I was 6 months old, yielded a jar with beautiful granite-based sand, rocks, driftwood, a postcard picture of the coast, a flattened souvenir penny, and a copy of my birth certificate tucked into a glassine envelope. After my recent trip to Ireland I "composed" a memory jar featuring slate from County Kerry, shells and rocks from the shore near the Shannon Ferry, limestone from the Burren in County Clare, Irish coins, a prayer card and medal from St. Patrick's Cathedral, and other keepsakes. Sure, some of the flatter items can be included in my scrapbook and probably will be. Knowing I'd be creating a jar in honor of my journey, I made sure to collect enough coins for my book *and* a jar!

You might also consider including ticket stubs, postage stamps, journaling or lists relating to your trip, matchbooks, a paper umbrella from a tropical drink, a beaded necklace (Mardi Gras!), or subway tokens.

Preparing the Jar

If you like the idea of being frugal and uniform, pasta jars may be just the thing for you. To remove the label, soak the jar well in warm water and scrub off any remaining residue. Wash and dry the jar and lid, then set the glass part aside. I'd recommend covering the often-garish lid with paint, fabric, or something else that appeals to you. I sprayed my lids with black or gray spray paint, preferring a neutral color because so much visual stimulation would come from the jar's contents. Consider gluing an item on the top of the jar, such as a shell or stone.

Labeling

Labeling a memory jar is almost like cataloging evidence or finds on an archeological dig. The label does not have to be fancy or elaborate, but it should tell at a glance where and when the contents were gathered. I display my jars chronologically, so the "when" is especially important.

To label my jars, I've used manila tags from the office supply store, coupled with a fine-point permanent marker. You might consider using plastic label-maker tape, rub-on letters, or computer-generating your text. Your tag can be made of paper, metal, leather, or anything else you can dream up. Why not acetate, for the ultimate in visual subtlety?

Display

A collection of memory jars is a wonderful thing to have on display in your studio/arts and crafts area or in a high-traffic area of your home. A windowsill, a mantle, a bookshelf, a wall-mounted shelf, along the counter in a bathroom – all these places are perfect for your collection. If you live in an earthquake-prone area (I live in California!) consider using a product like museum wax to anchor your jars to their resting place. They'll need to be above arms reach if you have little ones, and plastic jars can be used if your children would like to start making memory jars of their own.

As humans we seem to have a need to document our journey through life, especially as the years pass and we realize how quickly they move on by. Photos, journals, scrapbooks and other forms of self-expression do just that — document or capture snippets of our lives. Memory jars are another way of recording your life, your journey. All you need is an inexpensive container and your imagination, and you, too, can freeze a cherished moment in time. ♡

Melody M. Nuñez is a mixed-media artist, photographer and writer. She lives in Irvine, California. Visit www.melodynuñez.com to see more of Melody's work. For more details on how to submit your artwork to us, please see the Sample Instructions.