

An Abundance of Free Padlocks

By Liz Gibbons

As a child we always had plenty of free padlocks thanks to my Dad's students. As I have written before, my father was a biology professor at Purdue University. Adjacent to his classroom/lab was a room probably ten feet by twelve feet. Its perimeter was lined with banks of cubby hole sized lockers plus an additional row of two banks of lockers down the middle back to back to allow for wide aisles. The students kept their lab book, #4 drawing pencils, and standardized pads of Purdue lab paper in their locker. The locker was secured with a padlock that the student provided. At the end of each semester a few students did not clean out their lockers. My Dad wrote down the serial numbers of the padlocks and then wrote a letter to the padlock companies requesting the combinations. Shortly replies would arrive with the combinations. I wonder if companies would be that accommodating today. My dad was then able to empty the lockers. He always had a drawer full of padlocks for us to choose from if we needed one plus ample pads of paper for us to draw on.

When I was about ten or eleven years old I decided I wanted something with a lock on it to keep my treasures in. I don't exactly remember what those treasures were, other than a diary that I did not want my brother to read. I also had some money that I wanted to keep in a safe place. My Dad said he could make me a box and would put a hasp on it so that it could be locked using a padlock. Soon I had a wooden box that was probably twelve to fourteen inches square on each side. He shellacked it inside and out, so it looked nicely finished. It was a prized possession, and I felt so special having this locking box to safely hold all my precious stuff.