

## THE DNA OF STUFF

*by MariLu McGinnis*

DNA is a molecule which functions as a test molecule for life. When life forms reproduce, the chromosomes break apart and reform during the production of sperm and egg cells. This recombination shuffles gene copies between the two sets of chromosomes so that each set of genes a child receives is a random mix of the chromosome sets their parents got from their grandparents.

Material stuff is also parceled out and handed down through generations. It functions as a tale bearer, a life history tale and it anchors us to who we are. We can't do without DNA, but stuff makes life richer and more meaningful. My mother and my grandmother's jewelry, for example, however sparse and invaluable, tells me a story of loss and perseverance. A mourning necklace, a cameo, a severely tailored pin, gold, a locket with a picture of her mother, is all I have. Nothing extra here. These are the almost required pieces that anyone would have.

This grandmother and father homesteaded in Nebraska, Albion. They didn't prove up. My grandfather's health was poor, the boys too young. One girl, Ina, died. I have her funeral picture. Back home, in Hopkinton, Iowa, Pop 849, they, mostly the boys and my grandmother, farmed my grandfather's mother's farm. I have my grandfather's glasses, some books, a little diary, a bit of his history. We also have lots of photos. They are part of the stuff of life. Stuff tells us about our parents and their parents and uncles. It tells us that they persevered throughout life's trials and celebrated their gifts ... they bought a cherry table that has lasted 150 years. Our children did their homework on it. A rocking chair that my mother re-caned is the rocking chair my grandmother sat in to knit and crochet. I have a twig basket she made. She must have been very crafty, using everything. I knew her till I was five. This is the rocking chair I sit in to knit. It's part of my DNA stuff.