

Numberplate

by Matt Potter

My mother was never the happiest of people.

She turned to me one day, rubbish and other detritus piled high around her in the garage and said, "I want to give you this." It was a numberplate from a car. Just one.

I did not recognise the numbers, but took it gracefully and wondered aloud why she wanted me to have it.

"It has great sentimental value to me," she said, eyes misting. It was clearly painful for her to talk about, so I let it slide.

After she died, clearing out her safe deposit box at the local bank, I found more numberplates. There were ten, all polished and shining, just one each, not both to complete a set, and of different vintages. I had no idea she had ever collected them.

And with them was a brief letter, on which was written, *To be opened in the event of my death, Marion Slipkowiecz*, in her familiar scrawl.

My life has not been the best, often miserable, she had written on the paper. *But whenever I had a nice time, I would take the numberplate off a nearby car, as a memento. Perhaps you could track down the owners and give them back. They are the milestones of my life.*

Of course I kept them. They hang above my desk, alphabetised and descending. I have no idea which happy moments they marked in my mother's life, but despite their minimum cheer, they oddly connect us.

