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## In Search of a Pencil

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MONDAY DECEMBER 6, 2021

## In Search of a Pencil

By Megan Bullard

You know that feeling when you're on the phone and the person on the other end asks you if you have something to write with? Every time that happens to me, I'm filled with an inevitable sense of dread and panic since the one thing in life I can never seem to do is find a pen or pencil when I need it. It's as if all the writing utensils in my house conspire against me and laugh as I frantically scour my desk in search of anything that will write. Typically, I finally find something that will suffice and have only had to resort to using my 4-year-old daughter's crayons once ... maybe twice.

In April of this year, the University Archives and Special Collections received a long-anticipated donation: over 80 boxes of newspaper columns, manuscripts, ephemera\* and possessions from one of UD's most famous alumni, Erma Bombeck.

Before I began my internship in the University Archives and Special Collections, I was vaguely familiar with Bombeck's name, but I did not really know who she was or why she was famous. After a brief Google search, I realized that my mother had mentioned her newspaper column to me before and had a few of her books lying around when I was younger. I grew excited at the prospect of working on her collection from a historical perspective, but I did not expect to find her writings relatable or funny in the context of the 21st century. After all, what could I have in common with a woman born in 1927?

The answer, to my amazement, is a lot.

My first task at the archives was to read through the original newspaper clippings of Bombeck's syndicated column *At Wit's End*, published from 1965 to 1996; describe the contents of each one; and assess them for their physical condition. As I went about reading the columns and learning more about Bombeck, I had a surprising revelation: Even though the columns were written up to 56 years ago, they were still incredibly

## PREVIOUS POST

### Back on the Porch

Porch Reads, Roesch Library's popular book club-style leisure reading program, returns with a collection of edgy, spine-tingling graphic fables, and students devour it.

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## NEXT POST

### Resolve: Ensuring Inclusion

An internship in the University Archives and Special Collections kindles a commitment to ensure the inclusion of

humorous and timelessly relatable. In the columns, Bombeck talks about everyday topics like family, marriage, children, money, travel, television ... and her inability to find pens and pencils.

During the hours I spent devouring her columns, I chuckled, giggled, guffawed and, a few times, almost cried at her occasional serious piece. Her capacity to engross and engage her reader in a mere four to five paragraphs amazed me. Her sense of humor is quick, subtle, witty and razor sharp. But her true genius lies in her ability to appeal to multiple generations across multiple decades. It made me reflect that perhaps differences between generations are mostly miscommunications and that, just maybe, the world would be a better place if all of us could remember, like Bombeck jokingly reminds us, that each of us sometimes can't find a pen or pencil.

## LEARN MORE ABOUT THE BOMBECK COLLECTION

The University is planning a major exhibit about Erma Bombeck in 2024. From March 11 to July 1, 2022, visitors can get a sneak preview of the collection in a display of selected letters, photographs, clippings and artifacts. The display will be in the Stuart and Mimi Rose Gallery on the first floor of Roesch Library.

To learn more about Bombeck and the work of the University Archives and Special Collections, email [archives@udayton.edu](mailto:archives@udayton.edu).

## OTHER REFLECTIONS FROM MY ARCHIVES INTERNSHIP

- ["Resolve: Ensuring Inclusion"](#): The submission of several shelves of scrapbooks, documents, publications and keepsakes to the archives from Black Action Through Unity kindles my commitment to ensuring the inclusion of missing voices in archival collections.
- ["Bread Crumbs"](#): A research inquiry about a 1979

missing voices  
in archival  
collections.

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- **Bread Crumbs** : A research inquiry about a 1972 concert sends me and archivist Amy Rohmiller on a groovy scavenger hunt.

— *Megan Bullard graduates from Kent State University this month with a master's in library and information science. She has spent the fall semester as an intern in the University Archives and Special Collections. When she isn't doing school work, she can be found reading to her 4-year-old daughter, binge-watching cooking shows with her husband or playing board games with her family and friends (as long as they don't involve finding pens or pencils).*

\* *Ephemera* is a term used in archival work for printed materials or objects that were not intended at the time of their creation for permanent use or retention. Obviously, such items can gain importance for retention and preservation when their owner gains great prominence, as Erma Bombeck has.

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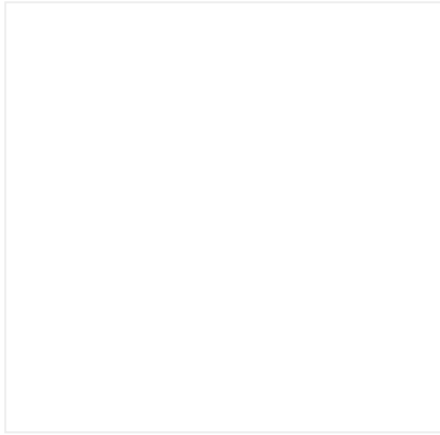
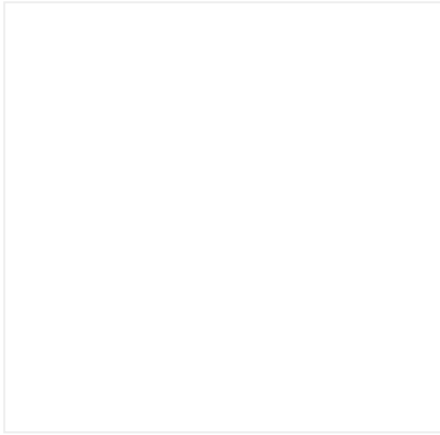
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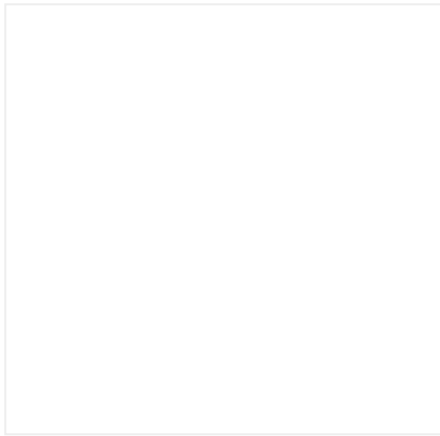
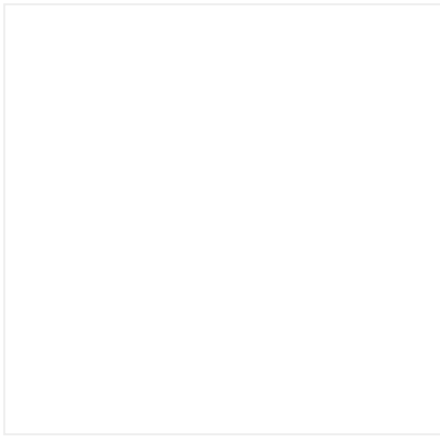


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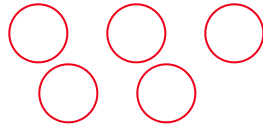
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