

» BY THOMAS KLASSEN

# Living in a lost and found

I can never find scissors or a pen that works. Books disappear when they're due. Yet we have enough light bulbs to start a museum

“Where is it?!” These words are the most commonly used ones in my family. Spoken with annoyance, desperation or hope, they reverberate around our home. Each week we spend hours looking for missing items.

The special moments in my household – especially in the lives of my four-year-old twins – are not new accomplishments such as learning to swim or how to spell, but screams of “I found it!” We never play hide-and-seek because we live it.

Rather than savour the end of the day with my spouse, when the twins are finally asleep, the two of us hunt for misplaced income tax forms or cancel the credit cards we can't find.

The twins – Claire and Alexander – rack up a daily stream of losses: crayons, water bottles, tape, pencil sharpeners. As for my spouse and me, items on our list of missing belongings include car keys, ID cards, money, home repair tools and eyeglasses.

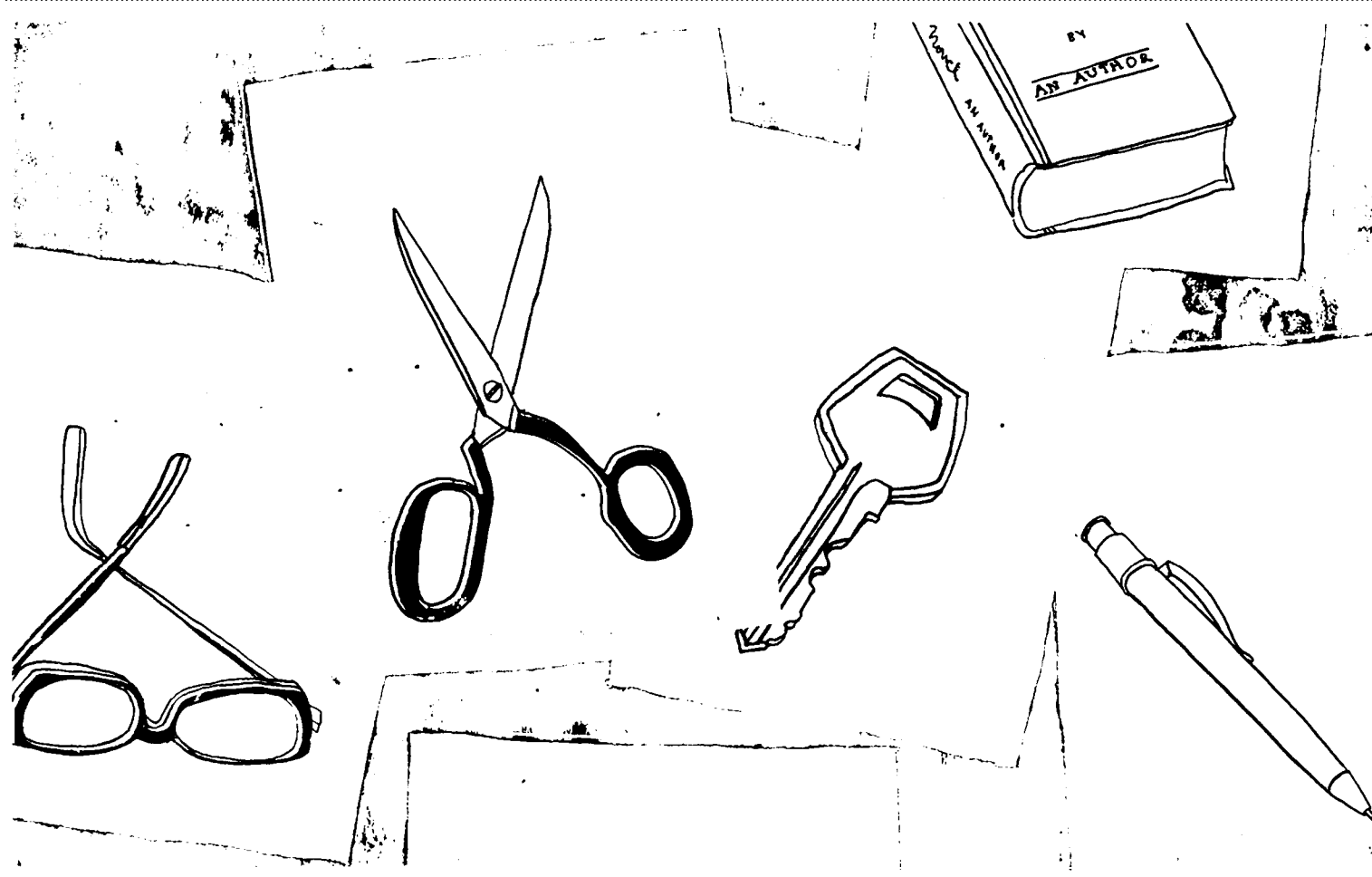
For reasons unknown, scissors, books and pens are the most often misplaced. We have two dozen pairs of scissors, of which none usually can be found. After years of frustration, last month I bought a half dozen new pairs, only to have them vanish within a few days.

The kitchen scissors are the only ones that reliably can be found, having acquired properties as sacred as religious relics. There is an unspoken agreement in our home that without these scissors, milk bags and other essential food packages could not be opened. Therefore, the scissors are invariably returned to their appointed spot in a kitchen cabinet.

Books disappear with alarming frequency, especially those brought home from school and public libraries. Oddly, the books never go missing until hours before they are due to be returned. Then a mad scramble ensues as our home becomes a crime scene, with adults on hands and knees peering under beds and behind bookcases.

In tracking down books, I've now learned the best strategy is to print out a copy of the cover page and give it to our twins. They then engage in a scavenger hunt to find the mislaid tome. Surprisingly – or perhaps not – their success rate is rather high. Claire has an uncanny ability to find things. Without her skill – which my spouse also had before becoming a mother – our family would be even more chaotic.

We have 100 pens in our house



CATHERINE LEPAGE FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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collected from banks, hotels, stores and so forth over the years. However, whenever I need a pen to take a phone message or write an important note, there is none to be found, or the only one I do locate has run out of ink.

Slowly I'm beginning to understand why things become lost so easily. It is not, as I suspected, a cosmic black hole in our backyard that sucks away our belongings. Rather, one person (say, Claire) leaves a book, or any other item, on her bookcase; later, Alexander takes it to the car; after that one parent puts it in the basement. The sequence continues with our nanny and visiting grandparents each moving the item in turn, until Claire starts it all over again.

In the end, no one can recall where the item is now, but everyone knows where it once was.

Alexander has recognized this cycle, and when looking for something he immediately yells in an indignant tone and adult voice: “Where is it? Somebody took it!”

Even as many things are lost, others appear – for example, light bulbs and computer cables.

We have a light bulb collection in our storage room that rivals that of Canadian Tire. There are bulbs from lighting fixtures we no longer own, or planned to own, along with night-lights and a variety of dimmable, daylight, soft light, fluorescent, halogen, LED, indoor and outdoor bulbs. My grandchildren will be able to start a light bulb museum.

As impressive as our light bulb collection is our stockpile of computer and related electronic equipment cables. Every few weeks we acquire some additional unneeded cable, connector or adaptor. If only these could disappear.

Batteries have a special characteristic: numerous, but never the right size. No matter how many types and sizes I purchase, invariably the one I need is not at home. And the demand for a battery is invariably immediate: “Daddy, make the train engine go. Now!”

Until recently I was at a loss about how to change my life, and that of our family, to focus on the important things like relationships. When Claire asks me to call her new best friend from junior kindergarten, I cannot lo-

cate the hard copy of the student directory from her school, which I know I placed on her bookshelf.

I recall there is an electronic copy somewhere on the desktop or the office computer or possibly still in an e-mail. Frazzled, I recollect saving a copy on the laptop, but don't know where the computer is. By the time I manage to unearth the telephone number Claire has lost all interest in calling her friend.

As I struggled with how to deal with a life of losses, the kitchen scissors provided the solution. From now on there will be only one of each item in our home and it will be sacred: one pen, one book (okay, one book per person), one credit card, one toothbrush (okay, one for the twins and one for the parents) and so on. Surely my parents and grandparents grew up like this: a simple life.

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Thomas Klassen lives in Toronto.  
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**Submissions:**  
[facts@globeandmail.com](mailto:facts@globeandmail.com)

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