For my Book-in-a-box project, I read Winter Passing by Cindy McCormack Martinuesen. This novel is a historical fiction that is set in present day California and Austria as well as Austria during World War II. When Darby, an avid photographer, comes home to care for her dying grandmother, she receives a mysterious request from her grandmother, “Give Tatianna back her name.” When Darby asks her family about Tatianna, no one has heard their grandmother mention her name. As it is her grandmother’s dying wish, Darby travels to Austria to learn about her family’s history. There begins a complex plot that includes mystery, romance, genealogy, faith and danger.

I have chosen the following items to represent the themes of Winter Passing.

The first object I feel represents the novel is an embroidered cross. Darby’s grandmother’s faith is strong and has allowed her to have a fulfilling life despite Examples of her grandmother’s faith continue to guide Darby through difficult finding about her family’s past, long after her grandmother’s death. Throughout the book, Darby examines her own life and faith.

The second item I have included is a birthday card that my own grandmother gave me. It says, “Having a granddaughter is seeing the future and knowing it will be beautiful and good. It is always brought so much joy to have you for a granddaughter.” This birthday card also represents the very close bond could have been written into the story because Darby and her grandmother were very close. The grandmother was the one the Darby turned to, with whom she could share her true feelings. The family secrets made it difficult to discus with her mom/daughter. They discussed life, possible beaus, love and their faith. (Read p. 16, 26 and 29.)

Thirdly, I chose a blue tile to represent the stolen treasures of the Jewish people. During WWII, priceless artifacts that were stolen and hidden by Hitler. It has been documented that people have died protecting and stealing art and jewels. In this novel, “The Lange Inheritance” has been sought since the end of the WWII. As Austrians realize that Darby, the granddaughter of Celia, is travelling Austria, they assume she knows where the brooch and tiles are. Her life is in danger and she has no idea. A recent blockbuster movie, “The Monuments Men,” is based on 80% accurate stories of soldiers retrieving the stolen treasures from WWII. (Director George Clooney)

Fourthly, I have chosen a camera to represent Darby’s love of the world around her. She is a successful businesswoman with her own photography studio. She puts her career on hold to fulfill her he impact of her grandmother’s death and mysterious past has a profound effect on her. For example, her first visit to the beautiful land of Austria, she wore her camera around her neck, but didn’t take one picture. This is very odd as her friend said, “I can’t wait to see your pictures that I know you developed as soon as you got home!” (p.211) She also takes her grandmother’s advice to heart, “Darby, you need to stop hiding behind your camera and really see the world.” P.218. Also, I believe that the author made the main character a photographer to allow Darby to be observant and inquisitive. This makes the story believable because Darby becomes a great detective.

The final object I have chosen is a Canadian passport. As Canadians, today, we may not fully appreciate the importance of a passport because the freedoms we have are freely given and expected. During World War II, with the final solution of Hitler, Jewish people were in search of a passport/birth certificate to prove they were not Jewish. Papers were falsified and identities changed if one had money and trusted contacts. A Jewish passport meant that a person was identified as one who no longer belonged to their own country. One who lost all rights and was sent to death camps. There is a fictional example of the power of the right passport in my novel, however, it will spoil the plot to reveal it now.

This is a very moving novel that I would recommend to anyone who has an interest in WWII. Many elements are firmly based on historical facts. This novel first exposed me to the Holocaust and made me question why I hadn’t learned more about WWII during my school years. Its effect is evident on me as I have read this novel three times during the last 20 years.