

IS THERE LIFE AFTER BOTTLES ?

Random thoughts on Bottles, Collecting and Bottle Collectors.

It would be foolish to pretend that we are all created equal. In reality, each of us is as different, complex and unique as the signature and fingerprint we use for positive identification in Safeway stores when cashing bad checks. Our differences seem to be determined by such diverse factors as intellect, heredity, environment, economics, geography and circumstance. We do, however, share many of the same characteristics. When people find themselves with leisure time...that is, any time not spent sleeping or feeding and clothing themselves and their loved ones (or whatever), they begin to collect. It isn't a bit difficult to imagine the dawn of civilization with the first primitive prototype of early man arranging colored pebbles on the rock ledges of his cave.

Human beings collect anything and everything ! We find collectors who specialize in Agates, Anemones, Anemometers, Air-plants and Ant colonies...Butterflys, Buttercups, Butterdishes and Butterfinger wrappers. No object, however improbable or bizarre, is unworthy as a collectible item.

However, all collections are mere accumulations of minor trivia when compared to the artifacts of the Antique Bottle Collector.

This individual finds himself at the very top of the collecting scale. He (and she) represent the ultimate refinement in the evolution of the collector, the end product of 10,000 years of civilized collecting.

They stride Godlike among their fellow men and women and are loved and respected by all. They are noble, kind, intelligent and fearless...risking life, limb and sanity by journeying to the bowels of the earth in search of their treasures.

Bottle collecting parents spare no effort in the education and moral development of their children. Each facet of early training is designed to instill a love and appreciation for the antique bottle. As infants, our children's formula was given to them in the Whitall Tatum 1898 Sanitary Nursing Bottle (Pat.No.93827). As training progressed, we discarded the conventional "potty chair" in favor of the Millville Atmospheric Seal fruit jar (Pat.1862).

Each night at bedtime the kiddies would gather 'round my easy chair in their jammies, fresh scrubbed little faces shining with wonder and anticipation as I read to them from the Good Book (Cecil Munsey's "The Illustrated Guide to Collecting Bottles"). Little Alan would say "Oh Daddy, read us the part where "...moisture will leach out the soda and lime in glass and leave behind a silicate skeleton" ! "My turn ! My turn !" his tiny sister Dee-Dee would cry. "I want to hear about how the Revenue Act taxed Bitters bottles in 1862 !!".

In times of adversity our family has always taken comfort and guidance from the Book of Munsey. Recently I experienced a period of economic setback. I was in the depths of despair and all hope seemed lost forever. My wife turned to me and said "Remember Dear, "...common medicine bottles are plentiful and not difficult to obtain; they usually range between \$1. and \$20." (Munsey 15:20). A feeling of utter peace and tranquility swept over me at the sound of those good, good words.

The bottle collector devotes every waking moment of his existence to his subject. Let me give you a few examples;...I find that all of my perspectives are bottle oriented. When shopping for clothing I try for colors such as amber, aqua, cobalt, teal blue, apple green, amethyst and puce. I have my own interpretation for words and events found in the pages of our morning newspaper, such as..."Foreign Aid"; Bottles sent to the people of countries too poor to afford adequate collections. "Acts of Terrorism"; The willful destruction of antique bottles by militant members of a third-world power. "Economic Crisis"; The closing of 5,000,000 antique shops, flea markets...(and so forth).

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"LIFE AFTER BOTTLES" Cont.

During the past few years I've found that my immediate neighbors have assumed the characteristics of different bottles. I think of the lady next door as a "pumpkinseed" while her husband appears to have an "applied top". Our newspaper boy, currently afflicted with the curse of adolescent acne, is "empontilled". His mother, a voluptuous matron in her mid-40's, is (of course) a "Brown's Celebrated Indian Herb Bitters". The house across the street from us is occupied by a "squat onion" wine bottle, the owner of an evil and detestable little dog with, what I think of as, a "kick up" bottom.

The sight of a pair of well turned female legs manages to conjure the (equally erotic) image of side-by-side Saxerac Aromatic Bitters bottles.

At times I wonder... Perhaps my obsession with antique bottles has been carried to extremes. Am I the owner of a healthy mind or has my love affair with bottles turned me into a paranoid "sickie" !?

The other night while dressing, in preparation for dinner at a downtown restaurant, Kaye asked me if the seam of her skirt was straight.

Not only did I check her seam but, to my horror, found myself looking for bubbles and mold marks !

I mean...Really now !!

Frank Baxter.