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### Objects as a Personal History

The summers spent at my grandparents houses were never overwhelmingly exciting, or even mildly exhilarating, but I could always find a way to entertain myself by spending hours looking through old boxes down in the basement. Even at the young age of six I remember the excitement that could be felt discovering an old toy from my dad's childhood or photographs of my mom when she was in high school. Buried deep in the boxes were stories and memories that were neatly packed away and hidden from our world, only to be brought back to life in my hands decades later. I have always been a visual learner, and for that reason I have always valued the objects people use in their lives as a tool to learn about them.

The objects people use every day, like shoes or pencils, and the way they interacts with those objects can say a lot about them - whether it is the wearing down of specific parts of the object or the lack there of, every detail of the object has a story attached to it. The objects people do not use daily, but instead keep for sentimental value also tell a great deal about them - sometimes even more than objects they interact with. Two everyday objects that I believe tell a vivid story of my life and personality are my shoes and desk chair, and one sentimental object that does this is a glass fishing bobber given to me by my grandmother.

If someone were to pick up one of my shoes, at first glance they might notice it's integrity and appearance has been altered. Actually, more realistically, they might say, "Gee, this guy could really use a new pair of shoes." But all those changes that have occurred while I wear my

shoes hold a lot of information about me and the way I behave. For instance, the back of the heel on both my right and left shoe has been worn down to the point where almost half of the original heel is missing. Physically, the new surface that is created shows exactly the angle at which my heel touches the ground when I walk. It is the most accurate description of my stride that can be observed without actually watching me walk. Contextually, the amount of heel that is missing can lead one to assume that I walk very quickly, because only a great deal of force could cause that much deterioration - wow, I guess that means I must really be confident and determined, always aware of where I want to go. There are also stains and scuffs on the top of my shoes that each hold a specific story. For example, the green spot on my right toe is from when I decided to mow my entire lawn with a weed-eater because the mower was out of gas - definitely not the smartest decision I've made, but a part of my history nonetheless. Yes, these shoes really do act as an encyclopedia of the previous three years of my life.

My desk chair acts as a similar encyclopedia of my life as a high school student. There is a gradual wearing down of the bottom of the rear legs on the chair from when I used to rock backward with my feet up on the desk, and there is a substantial chip on the top of the backrest from when I got just a little bit too comfortable one day and fell backwards. There are three spots on the bottom of the seat of the chair where I used to scratch my nails while writing English papers, and holes right near those spots where I tried to make my pen stick in the wood instead of doing physics homework. You could almost say that chair serves as the chapter titled "Procrastination" in the book of my life. Thank goodness my new desk chair is made of metal - much less revealing.

The Japanese glass bobber my grandmother gave me tells a much more specific and singular story - as many of the more sentimental objects in people's lives do - but it distinguishes itself by being a particularly important story. The glass orb that sits on my shelf next to my little

library was given to me on my thirteenth birthday by my grandmother on my mom's side of the family. All throughout my childhood we had a very close relationship, and we would spend much of our time together reading - rather, me listening and she reading. There was one book in particular that I loved most of all, and in it there was this glass bobber that a boy finds on the beach. I grew up learning about these things - what their purpose was and how hard it is to find them nowadays, all the while imagining how exciting it would be to really find one and hold it in my hands like the kid in the story. Well, my grandmother, being the expert thrifter that she was, managed to find one. She waited until one day that we took a trip to the Oregon coast together to give it to me. Within eyesight, she hid it in the sand and told me this was the perfect place to go scavenging for glass bobbers. Needless to say I was ecstatic when I found it half buried in the sand, and I'll never forget that day. It wasn't until I was older, after she passed away, that I was told the trouble she went through to hide it. The bobber now serves as a reminder of the person my grandma was. That small orb possesses the spirit of an entire life, at least through my eyes - that is how powerful one object can be.

The football helmet that my father used when he was a child tells a great deal about him. It is so beat up and tattered compared to the helmets that his brothers had worn, it is clear that he was more aggressive and involved in the game. The way he played, even as a child, really spoke about the kind of person he is - a coach of collegiate athletes and a headstrong competitor. The dents left by my father on the other children's helmets would suggest the same thing.

It is amazing to me that every other person on this planet also has many objects that are unique to them and serve as a biography of their own lives. For instance, a recent study of the waste produced by countries in Europe shows that the amount of trash produced yearly since 2004 has almost doubled (*Environmental statistics and accounts in Europe*, 9). This could mean

that the everyday objects in people's lives are becoming too disposable, or are now becoming outdated too quickly. The broader study of objects people in a country use can also be very informational. Perhaps the number of everyday objects that are available to us now is causing a careless attitude toward reusing and recycling.

The objects people use in their everyday life obviously play an important role, but what about in their afterlife? Since the beginning of man, we have found that burial sites hold many objects along with the bodies of the deceased. Whether it be King Tut who was buried with thousands of pieces of golden jewelry, or Reuben John Smith from Massachusetts who was found buried with his reclining chair, history shows that people like to be surrounded by the objects they came to know and love in their lifetime. There are a few reasons this tradition carries on, but the main reason has to do with religion. The one or two objects that you are buried with, according to some, follow you into the afterlife - so, you better choose something good. It really is as beautiful as it is scary that mankind can develop such strong bonds with inanimate objects.

Ever since I was a child I have found that observation of objects people use is extremely revealing. Not only is it interesting and exciting, but it can also teach us much more than words can, in some cases. There is a personal touch, an intimacy, almost, to the close observation of objects in people's lives, and I will always love exploring those resources.

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