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We all have something in our lives that while not obviously valuable, is displayed as though it were a precious and irreplaceable artifact. Inquire about the object's provenance and you'll likely be treated to a lively anecdote about how it came into your host's possession. Keep digging, and you might even crack the code of what the thing *really* means.

Taking Things Seriously is a wonder cabinet of seventy-five unlikely thingamajigs that have been invested with significance and transformed into totems, talismans, charms, relics, and fetishes: scraps of movie posters scavenged from the streets of New York by *Low Life* author Luc Sante; the World War I helmet that inoculated social critic Thomas Frank against jingoism; the trash-picked, robot-shaped hairdo machine described by its owner as a chick magnet; the bagelburned by actor Christopher Walken, moonlighting as a short-order cook. The owners of these objects convey their excitement in short, often poignant essays that invite readers to participate in the enjoyable act of interpreting things. You'll never look at the bric-a-brac on your shelves the same way again.

Taking Things Seriously: 75 Objects with Unexpected Significance Details

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Author : Joshua Glenn , Carol Hayes

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From Reader Review Taking Things Seriously: 75 Objects with Unexpected Significance for online ebook

Jimmy says

a beautifully designed book about quirky objects and people's relationships to them. the essays were a bit short for me...most of them only 3 or four paragraphs long (is that even called an essay?). and, i wish there were a bio section for the writers...but at least the editors seemed to take careful consideration as to not select objects in banal categories (i.e. my childhood toy, something my mom/dad/girlfriend/boyfriend gave me, my first _____, etc.).

Ross McLean says

I love trying to figure out the stories behind objects.

I once saw a nice pair of nice black women's heels sitting in a neat pair on the side of the road, by a fenced-in soccer field. About a week later I saw the same pair of heels, still in a neat pair, but on the other side of the fence. Now, the entrance was all the way on the other side of the field, so someone had to have picked them up, walked all the way around the field, placed them down on the other side, and then presumably walked all the way back out again. I've wondered why ever since.

I once spent an evening drinking with a man carrying a plastic banana with two sets of bite marks in it. He had just quit his job at an Army & Navy store in a bit of a rough neighbourhood (Army & Navy being a Canadian department store chain). It was a depressing and miserable job that he was happy to be rid of. The banana had been part of an in-store display. It was the second set of bite marks that perplexed him. He could imagine someone mistaking it for a real banana and taking a bite out of the side, although even then it seemed strange that they wouldn't attempt to peel it first. However, you'd think the biter would have then realized their mistake and cast the banana aside. Yet, they went in for a second bite. It felt like a perfect encapsulation of the job so he kept it as a souvenir.

This book is a collection of objects and stories much like these. It has joined the upper echelon of my fun coffee table books, along with my stack of teen magazines from 1964 and my book of taxidermy art.

Lizzie says

We got this book as a gift because my husband's cousin has an essay in it but that's not the only reason I liked it (though of course Rex's piece is great.) It's a collection of short essays on objects that are significant to their owners. Some are profound, some amusing. One of them (a description of a glass jar) perfectly expressed how I feel about certain objects in my life - the beautiful shape of the jar's sides, its perfect distance from screw threads to top.

Andy says

Editorial Reviews

New York Times Book Review:

"Short essays about treasured possessions, by artists, designers, writers and performers. The cartoonist and musician recalls playing with an assortment of rubber animals as a boy, 'acting out battles, domestic scenes, everything.' But the star was always Sunshine, above: 'one special little yellow pig.'" (August 5, 2007)

Scrubbles.net:

"...the project is beautifully executed in boxy paperback form. This would make a good gift for everyone's favorite oddball." (9/16/07)

SwissMiss blog:

"It has been a while since a book has mesmerized me this much! One of my new favorites!" (9/15/07)

Ephemera Blog:

"Taking Things Seriously is good fun. And it'd make an excellent stocking stuffer for your favorite ephemera lover this upcoming holiday season." (9/17/07)

Dwell.com:

"For those who've reached their saturation point with over-designed objects devoid of meaning, Joshua Glenn's new book is a celebration of mundane objects that were never intended to mean anything, but took on a life of their own. From a soda bottle that inspired a comic strip to a hairdo machine that's a ladies magnet, each object comes with the story of why one person can't let it go. Deftly designed by Carol Hayes, the paperback serves as a cabinet of curiosities.<http://www.dwell.com/products/books>" (September 2007)

Domy Books blog:

"Subtitled *75 Objects With Unexpected Significance*, *Taking Things Seriously* examines the personal significance of a range of objects, from small to large. Each of the contributors was asked to write a short essay on some object in their living space that held a deep relevance to their lives. What results is a collective Wunderkammer. From bear-shaped lamps to car headlamp knobs, these objects are talismans against evil, items of meditation and tokens of love, or even hate. There is something of the uncanny in each of these objects, as if they glow with an aura of importance. I found myself wanting the bear lamp, for instance. Each of these things, despite being inanimate, hold power over their owners. <http://www.domystore.com/blog/>" (September 2007)

Fiveandahalf.net:

"Taking Things Seriously is a process, an experience in looking and interpreting, reminding us to take a good look at all the ordinary things around and to realize that they are each far more just that.<http://www.fiveandahalf.net/blog/2007...>" (9/17/07)

Scrubbles blog:

"...the project is beautifully executed in boxy paperback form. This would make a good gift for everyone's favorite oddball.<http://www.scrubbles.net/2007/09/16/b...>" (9/17/07)

SwissMiss blog:

"It has been a while since a book has mesmerized me this much! One of my new

favorites!<http://swissmiss.typepad.com/weblog/2...>" (9/15/07)

ephemera blog:

"Taking Things Seriously is good fun. And it'd make an excellent stocking stuffer for your favorite ephemera lover this upcoming holiday season.<http://ephemera.typepad.com/ephemera/...>" (9/17/07)

designnotes blog:

"A book like Taking Things Seriously could have gone badly pretty quickly. Invite a bunch of people you know to submit a story about an object that inspires you. Ask enough people and soon enough you have a book. If youre into name dropping it gets to a point where you dont follow the stories as much as seeing who was and wasnt invited. The thing with this book is that it really doesnt feel like that. The objects and stories come off genuinely, not as a contrived look at how clever I am etc. story example. [...] it will make you look around your own surroundings and make you ask yourself what inspires you?<http://designnotes.info/?p=1118>" (9/5/07)

murketing.com:

"In all, sounds like a thoughtful take on on material culture (which is, of course, my beat, so Im a little biased about why I think this project is such a good idea) by an interesting bunch of contributors including Paul Lukas, Thomas Frank, and Luc Sante. I was also pleased to learn recently about Glenns Brainiac blog on the Boston Globe site, where hes got a post listing all contributors and a running account of praise received.<http://www.murketing.com/journal/?p=752>" (September 2007)

NYmag.com Daily Intel:

"Food, even of the most exalted kind, is rarely long for this world. Occasionally, some baron of gastronomy will announce that the floorboards in his new restaurant were salvaged from the original automat, or some credulous soul will make the News of the Weird by seeing the Virgin Mary in a grilled cheese sandwich. But food and cooking objects tend toward the ephemeral. Which is one reason we are so enjoying Taking Things Seriously, a new collection of essays about particular treasures.<http://nymag.com/daily/food/2007/09/n...>" (9/16/07)

bookbyitscover.com:

"Thank you Princeton Architectural Press for sending over this book yesterday! It is a new favorite. [...] You will enjoy this book and if not for the nice matte pictures and great often funny writing, then for how well designed it is. How beautiful is that cover?! Pick up a copy here.<http://www.book-by-its-cover.com/othe...>" (9/7/07)

Boston Phoenix:

"...the books have become personally significant objects.....aesthetically pleasing, from its thick, smooth paper to the artful snapshots of each object..." (9/28/07)

The Must List, Entertainment Weekly:

"The Must List #9. Proving one man's trash is another's treasure, this collection of photos and essays shows how the unlikeliest of things can provide inspiration." (October 26, 2007)

Canadian Interiors:

"delightfully offbeat and entertaining... All of the objects--captured by various photographers, including Hayes--are evocative, as are the stories behind them." (October 1, 2007)

StepInside Design:

"In an age when we're obsessed with the design, provenance, and value of every objects around us, these 75 short essays and photographs honor those magical, mysterious items that wiggle their way into our lives, and somehow into our hearts.....eclectic group of creatives who eloquently describe their little pieces of Nothing Special--and why they mean everything to them." (December 2007)

Dwell:

"In the right place at the right time, even the most useless object can attain life-changing significance. This delightful, often hilarious new book gives us 75 such examples of such things taken seriously ... quotidian items imbued with highly personal emotional power." (January 2008)

artburger:

"This lovely little book from Princeton Architectural Press helped us understand that, in fact, our inexplicable attachment to a dirty white plush duck and the rhinestone horseshoe ring given to us by a boy named Seth in eighth grade is just part of the human drive and capacity to invest inanimate objects with meaning. Our tschotchkes are no different from the ones so gorgeously shot for this book, the treasured objects of writers, artists, and other deep types." (September 2007)

Boston's Weekly Dig:

"...a visual and literary curio cabinet, a scattershot collection of 75 objects with unexpected significance." (9/19/07)

Uppercase:

"Is it possible to be in love with a book? Yes. Taking Things Seriously: 75 Objects with Unexpected Significance is the object of my affections...all the entries are equally well-written, humourous, insightful and quirky. This book is something to treasure." (October 2007)

Boston Globe:

"As the old sayings go, art is in the eye of the beholder and one person's junk is another person's treasure. Taking Things Seriously is a fun, off-center collection of objects and stories that will have you looking at the objects around you with fresh eyes and strange questions, like Would Christopher Walken autograph my burned bagel? or Is it a good thing to get military ordnance for your birthday?" (10/17/2007)

Bookofjoe.com:

"...a series of 75 very well written, entertaining two-or-three-paragraph long essays by as many different people, most of whose names I didn't recognize, about objects that acquired significance in their lives, often via strange and inexplicable series of events." (10/31/2007)

New England Antiques Journal:

"Taking Things Seriously is a wonder cabinet of 75 unlikely thingamajigs that have been invested with significance and transformed into totems, talismans, charms, relics, and fetishes...The owners of these objects convey their excitement in short, often poignant essays that invite readers to participate in the enjoyable act of interpreting things. You'll never look at the bric-a-brac on your shelves the same way again." (November 2007)

I.D.:

"Glenn and Hayes smartly highlighted the bizarre and unlikely, creating a visual cabinet of curiosity consisting of 75 treasured objects submitted by outside contributors, along with the stories behind each of them. In an era when everyone blogs about what they had for breakfast, we've all seen enough of other people's manias, but artifacts like writer John F. Kelly's moldy bagel once burnt by Chistopher Walken,

cartoonist Mark Newgarden's Mickey Mouse bubble-bath bottle, or artist Kristine Cortese's rock wrapped in a pie tin might be just weird enough to become our own obsessions." (November 2007)

Time Out Chicago:

"It's a fun read that inspires serious questions about how our own stuff gives our lives and relationships meaning." (11/22/07)

Nylon:

"The book is a touching read, proving that mundane objects, like lives, often have surprising stories to tell." (January 2008)

Priceless, Los Angeles Times Book Review:

"a wonderfully eccentric collection of things and thought-provoking essays that underscore French philosopher Bruno Latous challenge to regard objects as more than merely matters of fact but, Glenn writes in his introduction, as an association, a network, a gathering of meaning and ideas." — Kristina Lindgren (September 9, 2007)

Metropolis:

"a collection of the crazy junk-pile finds, creepy childhood mementos, and sundry souvenirs that have accrued meaning in their owners lives..... The soul wanted what it wanted." (December, 2007)

Jen says

Some really poignant, mundane objects belonging to creative individuals. I rather liked the tin of hairpins a writer kept as a token of his passionate affair with another woman. Stuff like that just makes you smile at the wonders of life, all its angst, happiness and sheer surrealism!

In says

This is great fun! Little objects of questionable worth except to their owners found or obtained in interesting ways. Reading it made me think of the objects that I have that fit this bill.

Spencer says

princeton architectural press! 75 diff. authors. In my youth I loved looking through my fathers curio box. Its my earliest experience with things that I thought had some talismanic power. I loved the smell and look and feel of his pocketknife, scout badges, and compass. Maybe those things have "expected significance" and therefore wouldn't have made it in the book. But I like other peoples little things that have been loved. however, I don't care much for clutter myself and can't really be bothered to save any of that rubbish.

Jaye says

Most of the book gets 4 stars.

The story/essay about the turtle gets nothing.
I don't think it even belongs in the book.

The guy thought making little kids cry was funny?
He tells the story to family, the little kid cries.
He tells it again to another family, the kid cries.
You'd think by now he'd think it might be inappropriate
for little kids.
No. Another little kid has to cry.
Who knows how many times he's chuckled through telling
this story,dragging the turtle tail around.

Benjamin Chandler says

This is a charming little book that April introduced to me. Each page presents someone's precious object, usually something quite esoteric—like an old toy, an antique, or a bit of obsolete machinery. The owner of the object writes a small essay about their relationship with the thing. Sometimes it's funny; usually it's touching.

Kristen says

Well, the key to having a revered object is to only have one. Those in the book with collections are far less poignant. For the most part well written (edited), it is a quick read that makes you glad you don't have a piece junk as a talisman (until you realize you actually do have a piece of junk as a talisman...)

Elizabeth says

This was a lovely collection with a surprisingly smart introduction. The titular "things" range in size and scope, united only by the fact they would appear as useless junk to all but their owners. Each thing is accompanied by a short article by its owner, illuminating its significance. In most cases, the meaning of the objects is connected with the context in which it was purchased or discovered. Often, other people are evoked by the object (a gift from someone, the person who the owner was with when they discovered it). In any case, the objects become tantalizingly real and charged with significance that would never be evident by merely looking at them. It is this element of the volume that emerges most compelling. Over and over again, the essays expose that an object's meaning is never inherent. Rather, it is entirely inscribed by the circumstances surrounding its acquisition, discovery, or owner's whims. Sounds like fodder for a dissertation to me.

Karen says

Anne gave me this fun little book. I am going to pass it along to Roger and Teddy next. All lovers of funny objects would enjoy reading this book on the bus or subway.

I think the "Jig Saw Jr." was the funniest.

reed says

This book is so gorgeous. Beautiful, simple, charming design. Also, it's a good read. A collection of photos of random objects along with the stories of how they entered their owners lives. I couldn't put it down.

Carly Laird says

Lovely, quirky little book. Glenn has collected a wonderful arrangement of objects and stories to go along with them that give the pages the life of a hundred human lives, each as unique as the objects they've come to love. It makes me think about the value we place in little, seemingly arbitrary things and the stories we create for ourselves to imbue even the smallest moments of our lives with rich meaning.

Gary says

This book was a mixed bag. I really enjoyed the introduction with talks of the psychology of objects and the meanings we give them—I look forward to reading more about that.

The book itself was full of quick blurbs about random objects. Fun and interesting to an extent, but full of ups and downs.

Ironically, not a book I'd hold on to.
