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“I have my grandfather’s stopwatch. He used it when he was an Olympic official during the 1976 games. When I first discovered my passion for running, he gave it to me to time my laps during practice. I used it only once. I didn’t want it to time me. I wanted it to fuel me.”

We all have an object that we value. Some of them are objects that we carry with us all the time; some are items that are too big to keep with us or too precious to risk losing. I want to give these objects a voice in our chaotic human world. Inspired by the objects in our lives, *what we carry* was created to help us each take a moment to pause and reflect on the meaning of our own objects and the ways in which they connect us to others.

Twenty-first century American culture has become increasingly materialistic and focused on the monetary value of personal belongings. Let us emphasize the often forgotten emotional value of what we carry, and encourage people to stop and think about their most cherished belongings and the histories behind them. It is these irreplaceable objects that enhance our lives, help us to define who we are as individuals, and connect us to others. Many of these objects have taken a journey through time, passing through the hands of many different people. The history that is embedded in every object enriches it, strengthening the bond between the object and the person to whom it belongs. All of these objects, like your grandfather’s stopwatch, or an amusement park token from your childhood, have stories to tell.

Gary Hustwit is one artist whose work is related to objects in our every day lives. In his description of his film *Objectified*, Hustwit writes, “Why do I salivate over a shiny new piece of technology, or obsess over a 50-year-old plywood chair? What does all the stuff I accumulate say about me, and do I really need any of it in the first place?” I am most interested in the latter part of this statement. A lot of the things that we own we have because they are useful. But what happens when the object becomes obsolete – for example, a record player, rotary telephone, typewriter, or film camera? Do we keep these items because they are still useful and we have not yet replaced them with the more

convenient, modern model? Or do we keep these items, useless, in our purses and on our coffee tables, because they remind us of the part of our lives that was left behind with each object?

In his description, Hustwit defines the term “object” in two ways. “One is ‘to be treated with the status of a mere object.’ But the other is ‘something abstract expressed in a concrete form,’ as in the way a sculpture objectifies an artist’s thoughts. It’s the act of transforming creative thought into a tangible object [...]” I have begun to think of objects in terms of the second definition; “something abstract expressed in a concrete form.” I believe that the objects we acquire and keep with us say a lot about us, revealing pieces of who we are as people.

Over the course of the year I asked people to tell me the stories of their most precious objects. I collected images of these objects and their stories from over fifty people. As I read through each story, I was honored to have each story shared with me, and I felt as though I had made a connection, however small, with the person who shared their story with me. I felt like I had a tiny glimpse into the life of another person, and I wanted to create a way for the stories I was collecting, as well as this feeling, to be shared with others.

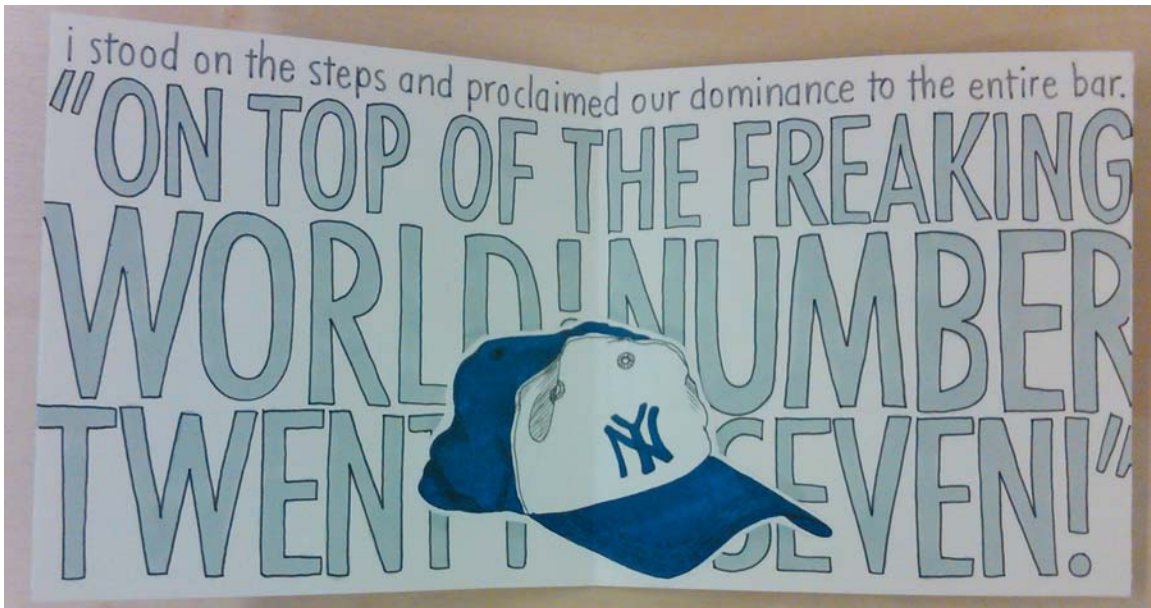
During my collection process, I discovered FOUND Magazine. I was inspired to learn that others shared my fascination with people and their objects. On their website, they say, “We collect FOUND stuff: love letters, birthday cards, kids' homework, to-do lists, ticket stubs, poetry on napkins, telephone bills, doodles - anything that gives a glimpse into someone else’s life.” I was caught by the last part of their description. From here I knew that whatever I created to house these objects and their stories needed to evoke a feeling of mystery and intimacy.

Though I agree with Gary Hustwit’s point about transforming creative thought into a tangible object that also has a utilitarian purpose, in my case, I would find it more useful to see what kind of creative thought I can pull from these objects. I am interested in how I can get their owners to think more carefully about why they carry each object and how they interact with them on a daily basis. I am also curious to see how these objects can act as a way to bridge gaps between people, allowing for someone else to begin to understand someone in a way they may not have previously as a result of a small

glimpse into their life through their interaction and connection with each object.

I chose seventeen of the most interesting stories and designed a book devoted to them. All of the art and design work in the book is hand-done, with the exception of the introduction page and dust jacket. I wanted each object to be an entry point into someone else's life, to get people to think about what they might be carrying that is of significance to them. I chose to omit any information besides the object and its history (for example, names, ages, professions) to leave each story open for the possible connection between itself and the viewer. Besides being an appropriate way to present text and image in conjunction with each other, I knew that I could use the structure and format of a book to give each object its own space within the pages, allowing the reader to open up a tiny world with the turn of every page.

I wanted to distill each story down to its emotional essence, and I knew that the layout of the text would be just as important as the words themselves. I developed layouts for each object that enhanced the story and illustration of the object, in an effort to create the same emotional response for the viewer as each object does for its owner. For example, one of the objects is a Yankees hat. The story is one of pride and excitement, and I wanted my type and layout to evoke that feeling in the viewer.



The book is only a small glimpse into the world of objects that I have collected,

and I am in the process of creating a website that will function as a gallery for each story and as a way for individuals to share their personal histories with the world. I want it to have an intimate feeling similar to the book, allowing for the glimpse into each story to be separate and unique.

By asking people to share the contents of their pockets and purses, I have uncovered interesting histories behind each item through the stories that the owner shared with me. Many of the stories behind the objects have never been verbalized or shared with another person. It is in these cases especially that I hope to foster a new understanding of why each object is significant and how it can be an interpersonal connector.

I want people to think more carefully about what they carry. The purpose of my project is to get people to think more deeply about why they carry what they carry, how it came into their possession, why it is important to them, and how it plays a role in their personal history. Not all of the physical objects are unique, but the histories behind them and emotions tied to them are what make each object so rich. These objects, stories, and the people with which they connect us are what build the personal history of each individual. So, what's in your pocket? Your purse? Your living room? Take a moment to pause. Find your objects, spend some time with them, and listen carefully.

Works Cited

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