

Enjoying some relics of our past

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?Antiquities are history defaced, or some remnants of history which have casually escaped the shipwreck of time.?

? Francis Bacon

I do love antiquities.

While many of us dart about our business in this fast-paced world we've created, I am often drawn to the past, to our humble beginnings.

We have generated a fondness for lost remnants of history, whether they are classic cars, Hollywood posters, pieces or art or tiny rocks from our distant ancestors. We've coined words like ?nostalgia, reminisce??and ?blast from the past??to refer to times when life was simpler, perhaps more enjoyable.

There has been a resurgence in such bits of our history through modern ?reality TV? through shows about pawn shops, car and antique restoration. People will go to great lengths to bring the past to life.

And what's wrong with that?

My wife often criticizes me for my penchant for the past. I?listen to songs from my youth ? the 1970s and ?80s. I love muscle cars of the same era. I?remember when going to the movies or on a date didn't break the bank.

Lately, I've found a passion for humankind's early beginnings, through some well known civilizations like the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and Mayans. From around 1,000 BC through the early centuries after Christ, our species made some pretty exciting history. And thanks to some dedicated historians, archeologists and philanthropic organizations, we can enjoy stories, depictions and artifacts of these distant civilizations. Why do we care about such things?

Well basically, it's where we call came from.

Not in the literal sense mind you, but if you know a little about genealogy, our roots go way, way back, to the very beginnings of humankind.

That, in itself, is not only fascinating, but really cool.

We are all products of the past.

For Father's Day, my family bought me a couple of magazines, compilations of secrets of the ancient world and the Mayan empire. I was thrilled.

I?could read about that stuff for hours on end and never tire about such tales of ingenuity, conquest, architectural prowess, beliefs and the proverbial rise and fall of such cultures. Fascinating.

Most of us, from our elementary school years, know all about the pyramids, Pharoahs, chariots and the like of the Egyptians. They have been the subject of countless books, movies and TV series. Same goes for the ancient Greeks and Romans. It seems we can't get enough of fanciful tales about Greek?Gods and Roman soldiers.

Since I'm a bit of an eBay addict, I've scanned the site for months, looking for genuine artifacts from such time periods. There are thousands!

Of course, you have to do your homework and ensure that what you are buying is indeed, authentic, from the time period specified.

There are a lot of fake artifacts on the market. While it can be difficult, giant online sites like eBay try to monitor and police its users, to ensure people aren't routinely taken advantage of. Buyers need to look up the sellers and review their track record and other buyers' feedback, to see if they're satisfied with their purchases. Buyers need to ask questions.

My first purchase was a handful of Greek/Scythian arrowheads, from roughly 400 BC. Really cool. They made the rounds at my kids' schools when they were studying ancient history. Definitely neat show-and-tell items.

I then purchased a handful of Egyptian mummy beads, tiny faience beads that were used in decorative jewellery. They date back to 500 BC. They're tiny but also cool. They must have made literally millions of these things, because they're easy to find.

I then purchased a four-inch-long Persian bronze arrowhead dated at 1,000 BC. It's reportedly from the famous Axel Guttman collection. Quite a nice piece; it almost doesn't look that old at all. The seller claims it was found in the water; hence its remarkable state of preservation.

My wife remains unconvinced. Anyone can whip up a chunk of old bronze, add some patina and voila, an instant collectible!

I suppose there's always some risk, but that's why I tend to limit my purchases to the \$20 to \$60 range. That way, I haven't invested a fortune.

My most recent acquisition is a pre-Columbian pottery face from Mexico, circa 250 AD. That would be in the early stages of the Mayan civilization's presence in central America. A nice looking piece.

I've been looking at old Greek and Roman coins for years, but again, my limited budget has meant I'm more of a window shopper than an active buyer. But for under \$100 you can find some very nice coins. I currently have a coin mounted in a pendant that I wear, but my ultimate goal is to find a better quality replacement, something with a chariot and horses on it!

What some skeptics may not realize is these cultures existed for thousands of years. They weren't distracted by modern conveniences, so they applied themselves to making items needed for daily living - pottery, sculptures, weapons and jewellery.

As far as arrowheads are concerned, the world is littered with them. From hunting tools used by our Neanderthal ancestors to armies during the Crusades, millions of these things were made, used and lost. Just think about a legion of archers, 5,000-strong, letting loose with a few volleys during a battle. That's tens of thousands of arrows that never hit any target, but ended up in the ground.

We're still in the early stages of exploring the jungles of Central America and who knows what treasures await.

To me, there's nothing like holding a tiny piece of history in your hands and pondering the plight of our ancestors.