

Souvenir of Everywhere

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I am building a world map out of plates, spoons, wall hangings, corkscrews, postcards, badges, erasers, mugs, notebooks, pencils, hats, tea towels, shirts, ornaments, thimbles, socks, jewellery, vases, bags, tissue box holders, prints, paperweights, door knockers, fake tattoos, cushions, rulers, rattles, rocks, shells, pencil cases, handkerchiefs, dried flowers, knick knacks, masks, fridge magnets, belts, books, slides, toys, luck charms, chocolates, key rings, tablecloths, wallets, moneyboxes, bells, doilies, mascots – any object intended to commemorate a place.

I spend my time at op shops, flea markets, garage sales, car boot sales, church fetes, second-hand dealers, junk stores. I look through dumpsters, search piles of discarded objects along with grizzly men who make off with broken stereos and TVs with looks of triumph. I can only suspect they are building things too, mechanical monsters out of old stereos with compound eyes made of television screens. They ignore me; they know I pose no threat to their plans. We are after very different things.

The objects I rescue are amnesiac. Removed from their place of origin and no longer the trigger for reminiscence, they are cast adrift.

What is a souvenir without its memories? Think of them new on the shelf, waiting to be given personal meaning. Then bought and thus dispersed, and eventually discarded. The ones that I find are doubly melancholy. They mourn their lost memories, and in them I sense the fate of my own belongings to become nothing but plates, spoons, wall hangings, corkscrews, postcards. Just things, outliving my influence.

I want to revivify them. To make a world out of fragments of other people's travel, to buy every lost souvenir I can find and put them together. To stick memories to them, return them to wholeness amongst my World of Things, my Souvenir of Everywhere.

In the window of St Lawrence's op shop on Monday 24th October, 2005:

A melamine plate picturing Tasmania.

A pair of teaspoons from Mandurah, WA.

Wooden clogs from Amsterdam.

A glass mug from Coolgardie picturing a cartoon of a swagman panning for gold.

A painted tile mounted on cork from the Algarve, Portugal.

A plate picturing a cartoon Scotsman and the words "Frae Bonny Scotland".

A set of coasters from Hawaii.

A California commemorative plate.

A shell with googly eyes glued onto it and the words "The Rocks, Sydney".

Miniature oak barrel containing tiny wine bottles from Funchal, Madeira.

A melamine plate picturing Tasmania:

Forest and the afternoon the car broke down. Three hours by the side of the road, no one drives past, it's cold and looking into the trees it seems entirely possible that they hide long extinct creatures, hide murder victims, hide treasure chests, hide anything.

Started the day in the gift shop whilst he smoked against the bonnet of the hire car, eyes faraway.

- What you thinking about?

- Nothing. You ready to go?

- I bought a plate.

- Fantastic.

The aim will be to collect one of these plates for every state in Australia, starting now.¹ Hopefully the rest will bring better luck. Spin the plate in circles on the bonnet of the car whilst waiting, waiting, waiting.

A couple of German backpackers in a van become saviours. Payphone, call to the hire car company, it gets sorted out and the story is trimmed down to the long wait and how slow and old worldly everything was and nothing about the terrifying forest or the stiff detente where neither said anything for at least an hour.

Moving house again, too much stuff and the Tasmania trip buried under more glamorous travel, never a good story anyway, pretty dull really, cars break down all the time, everyone's been to Tasmania and if they haven't they don't care. Why keep evidence?

Reclaimed for four dollars. Joining two ceramic ashtrays in the shape of Tasmania, postcards, set of plastic cups, "Tassie Devil" t-shirt.

¹ 10,000 Tasmania plates manufactured, used as ashtrays, dishes to hold cufflinks etc. Strangest uses include buried in garden with dead goldfish bound to it by cling wrap, a tray to hold prescription pills in the 'drug room' at a party.

A pair of teaspoons from Mandurah, WA.

Glovebox contains maps of everywhere else - a map of Far North Queensland for Christ's sake. She stops at the tourist information centre and gets stuck in the adjacent gift shop. Gift shops always get her, tester bottles of lavender hand cream, peacock feathers, porcelain ornaments, the women behind the counter who she always imagines are stuffed with pot pourri.

A couple of teaspoons for mum, for the collection, the one she has to tiptoe past otherwise the uneven boards set the spoons swinging and it's like a giant wind chime, or an alarm: *She's Leaving The House*. But the crackly mauve gift shop bag falls out of her car in Busselton and Julia finds it, delighted, she loves free stuff and dad says sure, keep 'em ya odd duck.

Julia never takes them out of their containers, clear plastic boxes with cheap hinges that threaten to come apart (she imagines they're actually the most delicate glass). They remain in the corner of Julie's treasure box² until she grows up and forgets where they came from and why she would have kept such a thing? She donates them to the kitchen but no one knows if it is possible to use commemorative spoons like ordinary spoons. Were they safe? Were they like those Franklin Mint plates that are poisonous to eat from? Best get rid of them.

Reclaimed for two dollars each: Joining spoons from sixty two other locations both within Australia and overseas, a souvenir envelope from Mandurah with an illustration of kangaroo paw in the top left corner and the words "Greetings From Mandurah" in cursive.

Wooden Clogs from Amsterdam

Yes, he's been smoking it, in fact it was the first thing he did when he got there. Later, in the souvenir shop, he looks at the clogs hanging from the ceiling and immediately craves bananas. He goes in search of them and in this way discovers the city, the pigeon coloured buildings, businesswomen on bicycles, sex streets, tall stemmed flowers bending over the pavement, bumbag tourists, tall blonde men with serious expressions, cheap Indian restaurants with neon flash.

No bananas! He doesn't know where bananas would grow around here, it is a

² Cicada shells, various lengths of ribbon, lucky shiny 50c coin, business cards, pictures of cats cut out of the pet rescue newsletter, plastic pearls, tiny book with Bible verses inside, fridge magnet numerals.

city of grey and green, he sees nothing yellow anywhere, laughs to himself that yellow no longer exists. The Dutch are so calm and he is sure he looks like a twit laughing alone on the street. He ducks into the nearest shop, which sells souvenirs and looks exactly like the one he was in earlier that day.

- Can I help you? (clipped, polite)

He buys some clogs because he failed to find bananas, even though he finds ornamental objects annoyingly useless. They make their way to the bottom of his backpack and stowaway back home with him, they are the last thing he unpacks and the memory of his gawky stoned walk through Amsterdam embarrasses him so much he gets rid of the clogs straight away.

Reclaimed for six dollars: Joining wooden tulips, pincushion in the shape of a boot, a mug, a statuette of Anne Frank, a postcard of Rembrandtplein.

A Glass mug from Coolgardie picturing a cartoon of a swagman panning for gold.

Roadhouse bacon and eggs and the bitter stink of coffee. Trying not to feel nauseous, the travel sickness medication has some kind of amphetamines in it, but pills are just medicine, never taken drugs in her life wouldn't even know what they feel like so the lightheadedness and driving too fast must just be that way *because*.

A thermos of peppermint tea from her cosy Perth kitchen and nothing to drink it from. She searches through the car to no avail. Too shy to ask the roadhouse for a take away cup, she buys the ugly glass mug (cheapest) and tries not to look at the cartoon on it. It's a man from an Aussie Dictionary, a Dad joke book. She imagines him climbing off the glass and scampering around, saying "Cor, look at that!" at everything, his little pipe stinking up the car, trying to climb up her leg as she's driving, making her swerve and cut a path through the spiky Nullabor shrubs until she reaches the ocean cliffs, scrapes to a halt, and throws him into the sea below.

The peppermint tea calms her down, the taste of thermos reminds her that she's on holidays and should be enjoying herself. She is enjoying herself, isn't she?

Reclaimed for two dollars: Joining "I crossed the Nullabor" certificate, Kalgoorlie teatowel, stubby holder from the Nullabor roadhouse.

A painted tile mounted on cork from the Algarve, Portugal

Every shop sold the same pottery, lace, cork, the same cockerel repeated endlessly on every possible item of kitchenware. She liked the idea of souvenirs up until now, but seeing so many of the same objects in so many of the same shops, nothing seemed good enough to buy. She tried to argue with herself that although here there was an endless supply of these objects, once she bought it and took it home it would take on special meaning. That these souvenir shops were full of empty objects waiting to be claimed and filled with memories, after which they became more than just a cockerel bottle stopper, they became a whole experience. That every time she used the cockerel bottle stopper she would be thrown back into the glary heat of a Portuguese summer.

The objects in the shop, primary colour bright, were nothing like the colours outside, faded by the relentless sun. She wanted to souvenir that sun, the feeling of cobblestones underfoot, how the buildings crumbled at the edges like sugar cubes and the slow way the light leaked from the sky in the evening. A cockerel bottle stopper would not help her remember this³.

She bought the tile and cork picture for kitsch value, imagining it being made twenty years ago, which suited the Portuguese towns she visited, many of which seem to have just clicked over into 1971. She hadn't been to the Algarve yet. She intended to but never made it that far. She stayed in Lisbon to eat egg tarts by the harbour and read "Ripening Seed" by Colette because she couldn't stand the thought of another erratically driven Rede Expressos bus full of nattering old ladies.

The tile becomes a souvenir of all the things she didn't get to do, which, a few months after returning home, gives her a terrible sense of loss.

Reclaimed for three dollars: Joining "Portugal" woven purse, postcards of the Ponte 25 de Abril bridge in Lisbon, small decorative cockerel plate.

A plate picturing a cartoon Scotsman and the words "Frae Bonny Scotland"

Sick of trailing around after his parents, meeting relatives, the cold, sheep, "wee lad", his dad drunk and singalongs to The Corries keeping him awake. He doesn't have much to say to his cousins. They like different sports and aren't allowed computer games.

His mum racks up a trailer load of souvenirs, so many that they have to pay extra

³ Number of cockerel bottle stoppers in Australia - 942. Number used regularly - 6.

to take them back on the plane.

- Andrew do you think this spoon set for Bernie?

- Yeah.

- Or the table linen?

- Yeah.

- Look at this chart of different tartans? Where are we? Oh we're not on here, I'll just ask the man...

She gives him money to buy a souvenir, and he chooses the plate because it is the most vulgar thing in the store, the winking Scotsman wearing nothing under his kilt.

- Oh Andrew that's a horrible thing.

When he gets back home everyone wants to know if he saw the Loch Ness monster and he says yeah sure, we camped by the side of the lake and one night, whilst everyone was asleep, I heard a noise and quietly got out of the tent and the surface of the lake moved and then its head popped right out, only ten metres away.

Reclaimed for three dollars: Joining fold out postcard set of Edinburgh, miniature bagpipes, "Flowers of Scotland" paperweight, "You too can speak Scottish" mug.

A Set of Coasters From Hawaii

They never thought they would hate sugar. Sugar in everything! It was the first story they told when they returned, before the volcanoes, before the weird resort where the very old lady played the piano every night with her eyes shut and a tear running down her cheek.

Sugar bread and no real milk, they imitated waitresses saying "creamer", lasciviously bulging out the middle of the word so anyone hearing the story automatically pictured a tight blue uniform zipped taut over large breasts, frizzy hair and pink lipstick. These people had seen too many American films.

- It was just like America. Well, what I imagine America to be like.

Everyone had a lot of questions about Hawaii, because no one had been somewhere like that before. Everyone went to Europe or Asia. The consensus: why bother with America when America is everywhere?

- Every souvenir we bought had to have a girl in a bikini on it. We're going to make a shrine.

The coasters go missing at a party. One of their very good friends, the least

person they would have suspected, thought the coasters were perfect to send to curious_alice, whom he desperately wanted to impress. Her list of likes included "souvenir coasters from the US"⁴.

But she found him creepy and couldn't look at the coasters, unable to stop herself imagining him fantasising about her. She thought he was weird-looking in the photo he sent and she likes her friends to be good looking.⁵

Reclaimed for two dollars: Joining Hawaii muumuu, volcano snowdome, felt banner, ukulele painted with palm trees and girls in bikinis.

A California memorial plate

From LAX, direct to Randy's Donuts.

Within an hour of getting off the plane she's having her photo taken in front of the giant donut and eating something called a bearclaw, which is heavy with grease and sugar.

- Kelly can we go on a tour of big things?
- There's a dinosaur park somewhere nearby.
- Yeah, that kind of thing.
- Sure, if the car makes it.

The car doesn't make it, even to the closeby dinosaurs. So she only gets one photo with a big thing, the donut, which is disappointing because she could picture how cool all the photos would have looked on her lounge room wall.⁶ Kelly's parents rescue them, but not the car.

- You said you'd pay for it yourself honey.

Kelly's *mom* is into things. Everywhere in the house there's some porcelain creature staring. There's a doll with a fluffy skirt to hide the toilet rolls. A spoon rest. An object for every eventuality.

Including a cupboard full of souvenirs of California, for guests. Kelly says its old stock she bought cheaply, so she's not really being that generous.

⁴ Bare feet, silent films, blood oranges, souvenir coasters from the US, fringes, staying up all night, post punk, lost pet posters, crochet, casio pop, pin-up girls...

⁵ Am I really that shallow?

⁶ Along with: Giant Swatch, Gone with the Wind block mounted movie poster, postcard reproductions of Magritte paintings.

Reclaimed for two dollars: Joining California T-shirt, Universal Studios fridge magnets, California walnut coin bank.

A shell with googly eyes glued onto it and the words "The Rocks, Sydney".

Kelly's tiny handbag has nothing but a ten-dollar note in it, *but when I grow up I'll have all sorts of keys and cards and makeup.* She seriously contemplates the little things section of the gift shop.

Mum complains that she's never had to pay so much for a can of drink in her life. Older sister Jodi rolls her eyes, so embarrassing. She knows it's obvious they're from the country, their clothes are too baggy and they stare too much at everything, they talk about how you can really "feel the history" in The Rocks. She only needs to hold on three more years then she can flee and keep her new city-bred friends in stitches with stories that confirm country folk as backward.⁷

Kelly wants to say *look at all the cool stuff! The dolls house furniture: mini kitchen equipment, little rolling pin and recipe book and mixing bowl!* She can anticipate the scowl.

The shell is her favourite, she loves shells, because they live so far away from the sea. She's seen *Storm Boy* over and over, fancies living as a beachcomber in a shack, stringy hair, swimming as natural as walking.

Three years on, after Jodi leaves, Kelly changes. The shell's embarrassing, gets palmed off on a little kid relative one Christmas and she feels a tiny bit lighter, free of her past life, moving towards the next.

Reclaimed for two dollars: Joining erasers, The Bounty in a bottle, ruler featuring various Sydney scenes, "New York Paris London The Rocks" T-Shirt, "Shells of the East Coast" display box.

Miniature oak barrel containing tiny wine bottles from Funchal, Madeira.

Lunch was ugly black fish that looked as if they'd been plucked from the River Styx.

Local delicacy.

How dare she judge another culture's food? She's meant to be absorbing all this with wonder. It tasted good and it doesn't mean she's sold her soul to the underworld.

⁷ Except for me though, I was different.

Will she make a joke about it? No, stay quiet instead.

C'mon it'll be fun.

The whole island in miniature: Madeira Theme Park. She shouldn't say yes to things so readily. Ten euro gone just like that, and immediately a mascot in a fluffy suit pounces on her, arm latches around her shoulders, a photographer clicks some shots and says they'll be available for purchase at the exit.

Cheer up!

In the "Viagem Fantástica" simulator ride, she closes her eyes and thinks about the waiter from the restaurant carrying black fish on a red platter. She would leave the table and stroll around the corner, and he would follow her, they would kiss in a doorway, he would turn into a black scabbard fish and ingest her, swim down a drain and spit her out into the ocean.

Woah!

A terrible sensation of falling – on screen, the honeymoon couple starring in the simulation have dived into the sea.

"Obrigado prestando atenção..."

What's he saying?

He's saying check under the seat to see if you're a winner.

She's a winner.

Reclaimed for free. "Who would want such an odd thing?" It is the first object for Madeira.

Yes, I know the world is endless and I may never stop building.

And the world is full of lost objects it is impossible to save.

And other people's memories are even more slippery than my own.

And it is impossible to know on what path these objects have traveled towards me.

But as a cartographer, I strive to give shape to the unknown.

And construct a map for a territory I long to understand

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