

Little League Wunderkammer

by Terry Ownby

Growing up during the 1960s in Florida was typical for any kid of that era, provided they were White. By 1964 (the same year Little League Baseball was granted its Charter of Federal Incorporation by the U.S. Congress) I was in the 4th grade and actively playing on a local Little League team in Titusville. Within this *Wunderkammer* are my baseball cap, glove, bat, and team photo. I was N° 4 on the Orioles and our team was sponsored by Shaffer's Hardware. My first season was spent out in center field and by my second season, I played the infield, 1st base and shortstop. Of course, there were no girls on our teams back then, and all of my teammates and opponents alike, were White. Yet from my perspective as a 4th grader, all was normal with this arrangement.

Other items in this *Wunderkammer* include mementos from other elementary school years as well. The old banker's cheque from Brevard National Bank of Titusville for 28c was sent to me years after the account was closed. This account was part of a 1st grade homework assignment to teach us financial responsibility. Within this collection appear groups of pocketknives, beginning with the small green one as a gift from my father when I was in 3rd grade. The small specimen case houses my "surfer crosses" and other Maltese

crosses; one from my uncle who was a U.S. Marine. Last, the Mexican-style wallet with Aztec sundial and the postcard are remnants of my father's many travels out West when he worked on experimental military aircraft and missiles during the 1950s. Lastly, the specimen case containing the small colorful plastic airplanes were toys that I had collected as well as one from my uncle he had during WWII.

As a 4th grader depicted within this *Little League Wunderkammer*, I had no concept of race, racism, or racial stereotyping, let alone that I was going to segregated public schools. It was just the way things were then. Often I look back on that age of innocence with a sense of wonder and it makes me contemplate how and why my parents dealt with these issues with an overall silence in our home.

Scouting Wunderkammer

All my buddies at school were Scouts; so naturally, I became a Scout as well. It was the normal thing to do in elementary school during the 1960s. It was American. However, now looking back in retrospect, it was also all White. No Blacks, Asians, Latinos, or *Indians* allowed!

I joined the Cub Scouts during the 3rd grade in 1963, which is depicted in this *Wunderkammer* by the merit badge

record chart of the same year. My first year in scouting was in "pack" #312 and "den" #3, and our "den mother" was Mrs. Bullard. I earned my first badge as a "Bobcat". By the time I became a "Wolf" and a "Bear", my own mother had become the den mother. Needless to say, once that happened, many of our scouting activities were influenced by my desires and my pressures on Mom. Sadly, my father never took much interest in my Scouting activities. I continued on through Cub Scouts until about 6th grade, when I joined a "Webelos" den, which was an intermediary step between Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. I never made it into the ranks of the Boy Scouts because after 7th grade, my father's job kept us moving too much from state to state. We left Titusville, Florida for Saint Louis, Missouri, where Dad's job in aerospace was headquartered. Later that year we moved again out to Santa Maria, California. By then I was in 8th grade and I was caught up in the "hippie" phenomenon and of course the Boy Scouts were not cool and it certainly represented the "Establishment"!

Other aspects of this *Wunderkammer* include various collections that were so typical of that era. These include rather innocuous artifacts such as stamps, arrowheads, and rocks. However now, looking back at the arrowhead collection, which was gathered through swapping, buying, and digging, I'm bothered by the lack of respect shown for the native citizens

of this country. But as so typical throughout the 1960s and preceding decades, Euro-Americans had effectively rendered Native Americans invisible, both in our mass media culture and physically by relocating them onto inhospitable reservations. Also, when looking at this image I see my fascination with Native American culture through simple childhood items such as the *totem pole* neckerchief slide, the souvenir tomahawk from the Smokey Mountains, and the ubiquitous "cowboy" bolo tie.

The last item of interest in this *Wunderkammer* is the family snapshot when I was 12 standing next to my father with a stringer of trout. My mother snapped this picture in 1966 when our family went camping from Florida to Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. Of course, on this trip, I collected more Western artifacts contributing more to my gaze toward Native American culture.

Space -Age Wunderkammer

The whole reason our family moved to Florida in 1960 was because of my father's job, which was in the aerospace industry. The U.S. race for space is the theme of this *Wunderkammer*. During the late 1950s the Soviet Union had successfully launched *Sputnik*, the first satellite to orbit

the earth. This technological feat by the "Commiss" helped seal this nation's xenophobia, which had been fueled by *McCarthyism* during the years preceding my birth. All this Communist witch-hunt had set into motion the activities with my father's job that took our family from Missouri to New Mexico (White Sands Missile Range) and on to Cape Canaveral and Titusville, Florida. There we would stay for the next 7 years while Dad helped to launch America's original seven astronauts that had the "right stuff".

Dad worked every day with all seven astronauts: Alan Shephard, Virgil "Gus" Grissom, John Glenn, Gordon Cooper, Walter Schirra, Jr., Donald Slayton, Scott Carpenter. These space pioneers were all part of the Mercury and Gemini space programs, which is where my Dad worked daily, training these men to use their radar, radio, and communication gear in their space capsules. Relics and artifacts from my father's first-hand experience are what contribute to this *Wunderkammer*. The black-and-white glossy photos were given to my Dad during his work with the space program. The rocket launch photos depict the very first U.S. manned launch with Alan Shephard's *Freedom 7* sitting atop a *Redstone* rocket, followed by John Glenn's *Friendship 7* on top of an *Atlas* rocket booster. The 8x10 glossy photo in the center depicts one of the teams with Gordon Cooper (*Faith 7*), John Glenn

(*Friendship 7*), and Gus Grissom (later killed in *Apollo 1* fire) kneeling in the front row, while my father is standing at the end of the back row, far left.

The specimen case holds my father's launch-pad access badges, while the grade school papers from 1965 reflect my intense interest in space exploration. In the center of the composition is a stamped envelope that is post-marked "FIRST DAY OF ISSUE" commemorating *Project Mercury* and dated February 02, 1962. The post cards are from my father to me when he was working on *experimental* military aircraft in California during the mid-1950s just prior to his switching over to the manned space program. Not related to space travel at all are childhood trinkets that my classmates and I collected and swapped at school during the 1960s. They can be seen in the small specimen case to the left and they were known as *Rat Finks*. These curious toys were a holdover from the *Rat Fink* cartoons of the 1950s and part of the hot-rod car culture out in California.

Hippie Wunderkammer

Coming of age in the late 1960s was an interesting affair. By the summer of 1968 we left my childhood home of Florida for the sunny West Coast...*California Dream'n* and I

wish they all could be California girls played over in my mind making that trip out West. Surfboards, long hair, psychedelic rock, and love beads (the love beads I picked up at a head shop in the famous Height-Ashbury district of San Francisco the year following the *Summer of Love*), all became my focus of attention. Strawberry Alarm Clock's one-hit-wonder, *Incense and Peppermints* was still rocking the chart when I arrived in sunny Santa Maria.

Junior high school in California came as a big shock, after having grown up in the South with all segregated elementary schools. Here for the first time I encountered teenagers of other colors. People I had never really considered. This was my first introduction to Asians and Latinos. Of course being a typical teenager I learned the local slang and derogatory terms for these "other" classmates. Regardless of an Asian American's origin, my teenage pals referred to all of them as *Chinks*, while Latinos were known as *spics*, *wetbacks*, or *Chicanos*. Although Chicano became popular during the 1960s as a result of political activism (the *Chicano Movement* and political activist César Chavez), my new friends managed to use it as a pejorative term.

I remember sitting in a mandatory Spanish class with my first dark skinned teacher, Mr. Sanchez, hating every minute

of listening to this torturous babble. I didn't hate him, I remember being ambivalent about him being Latino, what I hated was that my classmates all seemed to already understand the Spanish language and I didn't. I struggled with English, let alone a *foreign* language!

This *Wunderkammer* consists of divergent artifacts. On one hand, there's the cool, hippie paraphernalia of love beads, music, and my rock-n-roll guitar picks (yes, I had long hair and played guitar in a rock band!). Yet simultaneously, elements of my Southern upbringing appear in the form of the belt-buckle, the *Jack Daniel's Tennessee Whiskey* label, and the family vacation snapshot on my uncle's boat, with his *Confederate* battle flag centered in the shot. Such dialectical forces at play in this *Wunderkammer*! These artifacts belie or contradict my wanted appearance of being hip and in the groove, while living on the west coast. A dichotomy of sorts. Underneath the hippie veneer I constructed for myself during the late 1960s and into the early 1970s, a product of Southern racist culture resided.

Grad School Wunderkammer

Pipes, cigars, and tobacco were items of fascination during my graduate school days and are the primary focus in this *Wunderkammer*. Growing up in the South during the 1960s certainly influenced my thinking about smoking. My father and his father smoked. All my relatives from Tennessee to Florida smoked, mostly cigarettes, which I only tried in passing. My favorite uncle in Tennessee smoked cigars and I remember that smell very well. But what I most remember from my childhood days and what I think finally helped take me down the smoking path during grad school was the aroma of fine tobacco from a pipe.

Many times during my childhood during the late 1950s, before we moved to Florida, I remember trips to Tennessee to see grandma and my cousins and along the way I'd see tobacco barns in Kentucky with their doors open, airing the dry, brown, leathery leaves. Sometimes along the way there would be Black sharecroppers working the tobacco fields and as a child I would think about how little had changed since their ancestors' days of slavery prior to the Civil War. As a teenager, I went to Kentucky one winter with my best friend to his grandparents farm. They were tobacco farmers. The old man handed me a long, twisted plug of tobacco he had cured and insisted I take a "chew"...only to laugh himself to tears

watching me turn green from biting and accidentally swallowing that evil substance!

In this *Wunderkammer*, the large specimen case holds several matchbooks that my father collected on his many travels out West as a military contractor. They date mostly from the 1950s and a few from the early 1960s. Often times he would drive out, along the famous *Route 66* and some of this matchbooks come from motels along that byway. One specimen case holds some of my pipes from grad school. I think back then there was this romantic notion that puffing a pipe while wearing a corduroy sport jacket with patched sleeves gave a scholarly and academic air to one's persona. Sometimes back then, I enjoyed smoking a good blend of tobacco and drinking a good brandy or cognac from a fine snifter.

On the other hand, for a more rugged appeal, especially during my military exploits, the cigar was preferred. During training maneuvers many of us soldiers would smoke cigars, thinking it would help keep the mosquitoes at bay. The black leather pouch in the lower portion of this *Wunderkammer* was used to keep a ready supply of pipes, tobacco, and cigars. Other items shown here include a pack of British cigarettes my father picked up during his travels to the Portuguese islands of Azores. Also included here are two of my father's old lighters, which he used back in the 1960s. Even though I

came to my senses several years ago and stopped smoking the pipes and cigars, I still enjoy stopping at a fine tobacco shop and walking into the humidor to inhale deeply the aroma of many past memories.

Military Wunderkammer

This *Wunderkammer* poses a dichotomy in my life. Serving in the military was the furthest thing from my mind during my teenage years, when I was trying so hard to play the role of *hippie*. During high school, many of my friends were drafted into the Army and found themselves being sent off to *Vietnam*, a proposition I didn't like at all. My senior year I dodged the draft bullet when my lottery number came in higher than the cut-off for that draft round. Even though I appeared to be "anti-establishment" my deep ancestral roots of military service to America eventually pulled me to duty (my Ownby ancestors served in every conflict since the *American Revolution*).

Depicted in this *Wunderkammer* are military artifacts that chronicle my journeys and adventures, which spanned over 22 years. At first glance, the mix of Air Force, Navy, and Army paraphernalia may be confusing, but I served in all three branches, received honorable discharges from each and

eventually retired as an Army Master Sergeant (E-8). In 1975, just 3 1/2 months after the fall of Saigon, I enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, hoping to be a photographer. Instead, they decided I would be a nuclear missile technician and sent me to Montana's *Minute Man III* missile fields. My time in the Air Force was certainly one of personal growth, especially since all my supervisors were Black. This challenged the racist thinking of my Southern youth and my thinking began to lean towards more inclusion.

After my discharge from active duty in 1980, I entered the photography program at *Missouri State University*. Simultaneously, a friend wrangled me into joining the Naval Reserve with him, with hopes of sailing the Mediterranean Sea. Instead, I spent my summer in dry-dock at San Diego's *32nd Street Naval Station*. Eventually I sailed large portions of the Pacific Ocean with tours of duty ranging from *Nicaragua* to *Hawaii*.

Eventually, through job moves in my civilian life, I joined the Army National Guard, where I would spend the remaining 10 years of my career. I served in both the Wisconsin and Minnesota Army National Guards. This experience was some of the best and most rewarding. I was chief photojournalist for a mobile *public affairs detachment* and accomplished missions at the Pentagon, *Gettysburg National Battle Field*, and the

ski slopes of Vermont. But most gratifying were my two tours of duty in Panama, with one taking part in "mop-up" missions after *Operation Just Cause*. We were scheduled to deploy to Iraq during the *Persian Gulf War*, commonly called *Operation Desert Storm*, but the war ended so quickly we received stand-down orders and didn't deploy. Eventually, I found myself serving in the infantry, managing public affairs for the 32nd Separate Infantry Brigade and the 34th Infantry Division. I was on a fast-track for the rank of Sergeant Major, but while on a training mission I ruptured a disc in my back, eventually forcing me to retire from something for which I had a deep love and commitment. Thus, I salute all those who proudly serve our nation by wearing one of its military uniforms.

Farming Wunderkammer

About 3 years before I retired from the Army National Guard and while I was still the senior food photographer for *The Swiss Colony*, I purchased a 60-acre parcel of land about 13 miles out of town. It lay on a ridge just north of the village of Albany, Wisconsin and was incredibly beautiful. After much thought, I named it *Six Pines Farm*, as my family coat-of-arms contains 6 pinecones on the crest.

When I first began working the land, I wasn't sure what I would eventually raise there. I already had 20 acres rented to another farmer and he rotated cash crops of corn and soybean. At one point, I had considered starting a holiday tree farm, but decided the long wait for harvest and trends in the marketplace was too risky. Finally, after about a year, it became clear that the property was ideally situated for a wine vineyard and I pursued that notion with extreme gusto. Once I started teaching myself and working in the vineyard, I realized how natural it came to me. Often times as I worked long hours pruning and tying the vines I would think that maybe I had done this in a previous life...possibly in France.

This *Wunderkammer* has 3 specimen cases, each containing items from my farming days. The large case holds my *hitch pin* from my tractor, which was an old, 1948 *Farmall H*. In the left-hand corner of the *Wunderkammer* is a toy model of that same tractor. In the opposite corner is a snapshot of myself on the tractor pulling a tree planter, with which I planted 4,200 pine trees in one day. The small case holds various keys to the farm and I carried these with me every day. Of significance is the last case at the top center, which holds my *ponytail*. When I retired from the Army, I immediately when

back to my *hippie* roots and grew the ponytail, a goatee, and had my ear pierced! Mid-life crises I suppose.

The vice president of my area at my day-job always called me a *gentleman farmer*, but regardless, I loved every minute of it and all aspects that came with the lifestyle. I served the township as the secretary for the *Land Use Committee* and joined the local farmers co-op. Many of my farm neighbors were intrigued with my vineyard operation and would come help me dig holes for the trellis system. Often I would head into the village at lunchtime for a hearty plate of roast beef and gravy at the *Edgewater Café*, overlooking the *Sugar River*.

Going out to work on that farm was a meditative stress reliever and I could spend hours in the vineyard and not realize how long I had been working. During the summer months I would pitch a tent and just stay there for 2 or 3 days at a time. My life's pace slowed to match Nature's cycle and often I think it was the object in my life that kept me sane, compared to my stressful day-job work environment. But after 6 great years and 2 grueling back surgeries, I finally gave it up in order to pursue my lifelong calling to be a college photography professor. My first full-time faculty position took me from beautiful Wisconsin to the majestic *Front Range* of Colorado.

Artist Wunderkammer

Art has played a significant role in my life, going back to my childhood days in Florida. Around the time I was in the 5th grade, I had an art project at school and we had to work with pastels. For my homework, I remember using those pastels to draw a large elephant ear (*Colocasia*) plant my mom had in the living room. I fell in love with the process of working the pastels on the paper and creating an image that somewhat resembled the real thing. By summer of that year, I moved on to oil paints and canvas boards and was painting ocean scenes. During a parent-teacher conference, my teacher recommended to my parents the possibility of sending me to an art academy. But, my father would have none of the art stuff, his son was going to do "man's" work when he grew up!

Thankfully, I was headstrong and determined to keep art in my life. I continued painting and drawing through my high school years and during my early 20s I discovered photography as an art form. As an undergraduate I studied fine art photography, but in my program I had several drawing and art appreciation and history courses. After grad school and headlong into my photography career, I continued to find creative release through my art, specifically in my drawing and painting. Several semesters were spent in life drawing

classes at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. While there I also took watercolor classes and immediately enjoyed that medium. It's still one of my favorites.

During my years in Wisconsin I turned more and more to drawing and watercolors as my creative outlet. At the end of the day in my commercial photography studio, I had no desire to be creative with a camera. However, the graphite, charcoal, watercolors and ink all gave me creative satisfaction. My job had become so high-stressed I needed my art to maintain my sanity!

In this *Wunderkammer* are various artifacts and tools used in my painting and drawing. As with my Farming *Wunderkammer*, one specimen case appears again and that's the one with my ponytail. This period of my life overlapped when I retired from the military. When I was farming I grew wine grapes in my vineyard and here you can see its influence on my watercolor painting in my field journal, which depicts a single leaf from one of my vines. During this portion of my life, I took on rather eclectic characteristics, including my personalized jewelry. The necklace I crafted from natural beads I obtained in Panama, while the silver Celtic trinity knot honors my Welsh ancestors. Interestingly, one interpretation of the Celtic trinity is its representation of the goddess Brigit, whose three aspects included art,

healing, and metalsmithing. I guess she gave me her first characteristic! Maybe my eclecticism harkens back to my hippie days!

However, as with the other *Wunderkammers*, social concerns still arise. Reflecting back to my segregated elementary school when I first discovered my love for art and continuing well beyond my graduate days, other artists encountered during these time were all one color: White. This raises questions in my mind regarding issues of privilege between the dominant and the *Others* of our society. How far have we really progressed?

Professor Wunderkammer

The journey to this *Wunderkammer* has taken more decades than I care to remember. Over half a century, give or take a few years, to be kind of exact. But this is where I'm at today, doing something dreams are made of and what I love to do...teaching my profession of photography at the university. If you've taken time to read the previous story panels for the other *Wunderkammers*, then you've probably noticed that my journey has certainly not been boring! Photography is my passion and it's allowed me to experience life in a way that's far from dull. Fine art, photojournalism, advertising, and

food photography have all been passports to other realms, literally and metaphorically.

Denotatively in this *Wunderkammer* are objects relating to my central aspect as a photography professor: Camera, images, awards, class records and so forth. Some items reflect my pursuit of the PhD at Colorado State University, while one specimen case houses my “daily necessities”, also known as *medications!* How my commercial images as a professional photographer relate to my mass audiences via mass media comes through in the textbooks displayed here. Lastly, the small specimen case holds the creative inspiration of this body of work I call *Wunderkammer*: Tazo organic chi tea pouch with label. To learn more of that story, you’ll have to read about it on my blog.

So, the objects contained within the frame are literal denotations of my professional and academic life. But when combined, all the *Wunderkammers* connote my journey of enculturation and my acceptance of diversity on numerous levels. Growing up in a racist South during the 1960s seemed normal enough. It’s what it was back then, which doesn’t make it right, it simply was. I won’t lie, it had an effect on me and by the time I reached the years depicted in the *Military Wunderkammer*, I was rather prejudiced, if not racist. But, a number of factors have intervened in my life over the ensuing

years. First I suppose was the fact that from the beginning of my military career I had African American supervisors, all of whom helped me to grow into the person I am today. Living in culturally diverse areas outside of the South certainly had an impact. Madison, Wisconsin—the liberal bastion of the North—certainly affected my viewpoint. But so did Colorado, where I had numerous Hispanic friends that exposed me to a different culture. But probably the most significant factor in my journey was a doctorate course on diversity, which really opened my eyes to my place of privilege as a member of the dominant society. Through that course and my position as a professor encountering students from around the globe and different racial and ethnic backgrounds, I have experienced major transformations. Am I perfect? Certainly not. But the journey continues and more *Wunderkammers* lie ahead on this trek waiting to be experienced and filled.