

Memories of Glass Part 1

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I remember the sight of red, green and blue broken glass on a late afternoon walk with my parents along the south arm of the Fraser River. From the 1950's up until the late 1990's the river had been a dumping ground of car parts, firewood, pottery and glass. I had to carefully wander over the iron-soaked mud and sand to avoid tripping over semi-submerged cinder blocks and springs to find the coloured glass. I recall as the light began to dim, I could see the tide rise and hear the sound of the glass tinkling like a wind chime in the waves of a tugboat's wake. These walks brought to me an array of memories about coloured glass.

Red and Purple glass was most prized to me. I remember my mother telling me a story about when she was a child. She and her brothers grew up in Vancouver in the 1950's-1960's. Many of the houses of that era had glass shards embedded in the stucco. The kids would pry the loose glass off their house and would save the pieces in little drawstring bags. In their imagination these were a hoard of gems and treasures. Red glass was the most difficult to find and so it was prized above all other colours. Eventually, their dad, my Grandfather, gave them a lecture for defacing the stucco on the house and because if you played near it, the glass could really scrap up an arm or leg. The lesson that was learned from the lecture, if you want to remove glass gems be sporadic and selective in your removal so that no one notices.

Green and Brown glass reminded me of old glass fishing floats. These air filled globes, wrapped up in their yellow macramé ropes, could be at one time found calmly bobbing by their owner's boat in the muddy river brine. Metaphorically, a crystal ball, fish once gazed into; however, the outcome of their lives was easy to predict. Today you see the floats in antique shops or a fishing museum. Look up, there they are, in the old fishing shack, hanging high on burlap strings, near the aged-opaqued glass window. This sphere has exchanged atmospheres, from muddy river water to a room where each dust particle seems to be in suspended animation and then en masse they stream forward in the light. The floats catch the rays in their transparent bubbly facets and colour, other than sunlight, is reflected onto the room's pitch blackened wooden beams.

Blue and Clear glass reminded me of old medicine bottles or pop bottles from the pre- 1950's. A recent memory for me was when I found a 100 year old glass bottle. Many years ago, there was an old fishing pier at the Pt. Robert's beach, an area where the sea flows near the arm of the Fraser. Over time the pier rotted away and now only the posts remain for Cormorants to sit on. On the day I was visiting the beach, the tide was out. In the gravel, at the base of one these pier posts, I found wrapped up in thick green seaweed an old clear glass water bottle. Decades ago the bottle had been tossed over the pier into the sea. Somehow, through the multitude of storms, the cycle of growing and decaying seaweed had preserved the bottle undamaged. The only change was a subtle sand blasting

that gave the glass a light blue opaquing. What was even more impressive was that the embossed words on the bottle were still clearly visible. After doing some research, I discovered the original company that produced the bottle was no longer in business. It was now owned by CocaCola. To conclude my research, I contacted by email the local Watcom County Museum in Washington State which was near where the original factory used to be and offered them the bottle. I knew that if I kept it, it would only get lost or broken. The museum's conservation team was extremely grateful for the donation of this bottle. In their collection they had no specimen like it. It was valuable to them. This event made me glad that this glass bottle now had purpose and a story that could be shared with others.

Memories like these remind me that glass is an amazing substance. It can be trash to me or a thing of beauty to someone else. I can recycle it, ignore it or with it create a multitude of art forms.

There down by the Fraser River, I was finding treasure. At that moment, the daily cares and concerns didn't matter to me. I was finding colourful glass and each bright piece was a visual memory that held a positive way to remember that day.