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Sweet Assorted: 121 Takes from a Tin Box

Jim Christy
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For nearly forty years, Jim Christy had been tossing odds and ends—the memorabilia of his peripatetic life—into an old tin box that had at one time held a "Sweet Assorted" selection of Peek, Frean & Co.-brand cookies. The once shiny cream yellow and royal blue box, of British origin, was a castoff item lying in a vacant lot until the day Christy, then a young man on his way home from work, claimed it for his own. Over the years, it became the repository for the 121 items that inspired the anecdotes contained in *Sweet Assorted: 121 Takes from a Tin Box*.

From the mundane (airline boarding passes, match packs, and articles clipped from newspapers) to the outlandish (old photographs of wildly eccentric characters and mementos of Christy's encounters with the rich, famous, and infamous denizens of his vast and numerous travels), each item had a story behind it.

As with our own memories, some of Christy's are bright and vivid, like his description of a woman known as "Miss Sweden." "She was pleasantly pudgy, wore harem pants, loads of jewelry, veils, leis and a halter top emblazoned with the legend 'Sweden Social Democrat,'" he wrote. As with all of the items he describes, a photo of the odd character is included.

Several descriptions are vague, despite the presence of the triggering object; but even those that escape total recall serve to inspire his lively, and often somewhat cynical, commentaries as does his take on a small plastic soldier: "In a hurry to / be a hero, or / a statistic."

Readers will learn of his ambush and capture by guerrillas in South Africa; and his encounter with an eccentric inventor who claimed to have built a spacecraft capable of reaching the moon—his "orbital propulsion spaceship" turned out to be something that looked like an old, tarnished propane tank, about ten feet long, lying in his backyard.

Especially enjoyable are Christy's musings on a night spent listening to a band, typed on now-brittle yellow pages in the wee hours of a morning thirty-five years ago after consuming twelve vodkas. He wrote, "The drummer and the bass player tonight are modern cats with long, styled hair and moustaches, flowered shirts. But the piano player is a skeletal throwback to 1949. He looks like every gaunt junkie hipster of that long-gone era. He's hunched over the keys with eyes closed muttering phrases to himself and … the audacity of it .. .actually stealing the show."

As Christy shares his travels through the landscapes of his capacious and inquiring mind to unearth treasures from his past, he offers readers a glimpse into the life of a free and nonconforming spirit. More than that, his brief, intriguing tales encourage readers to examine the bits and pieces that weave together the colorful tapestries of their own lives.

Jim Christy is a writer, internationally exhibiting artist and traveler whose voyages have taken him from the Yukon to the Amazon and from Greenland to Cambodia. Raised in inner-city Philadelphia, he moved to Toronto at age twenty-three and, without regret, became a Canadian citizen. He is the author of more than twenty books, including novels, short stories, travel and biography, and numerous articles, including international war coverage.
KRISTINE MORRIS (March 26, 2013)

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