

THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

Once a Collector, Always a Collector

As a child growing up in Toledo, Ohio, Dr. Stanford T. Shulman became fascinated with collecting postage stamps because they combined his interest in history and geography.

"One of the best ways to learn history and geography is from stamps from around the world," said Dr. Shulman, chief of the division of infectious diseases at Children's Memorial Hospital, Chicago. Postage stamps "are colorful, they all tell a story, and you can learn a whole lot from them."

During medical school and early in his career, he kept his stamp collection "kind of stashed in the closet." But 35 years ago, as his infectious diseases career started to blossom at the University of Florida in Gainesville, he revived interest in his childhood hobby and began collecting stamps with medical themes.

Today, he boasts a collection of about 3,000 medically themed stamps, and he writes a stamp column in *Pediatric Annals* to match whatever theme the journal tackles in a particular month, be it cardiology or infectious diseases. "If we have an issue devoted to psychiatric problems that kids can have, the hardest thing is to find psychiatric-themed stamps," said Dr. Shulman, who is also a professor of pediatric infectious diseases at Northwestern University in Chicago. "There are two or three stamps that depict Sigmund Freud, but not much else. I'm always on the lookout for more stamps of that kind."

His collection includes stamps of all shapes and sizes from all corners of the globe. The first medically themed stamps date back to about 1860, he said. More than 150 stamps have been issued by various countries to honor Louis Pasteur, the French chemist considered to be one of the founders of microbiology. About 100 stamps have honored Sir Alexander Fleming, who discovered penicillin, including a souvenir sheet that shows a Petri dish, a child receiving a penicillin shot, and World War I soldiers being carried off the battlefield. Before penicillin was introduced, "many of these soldiers would die of the infectious complications in their wounds," Dr. Shulman noted.

Other stamps have honored medical luminaries such as nursing pioneer Florence Nightingale; Dr. Virginia Apgar, who developed the Apgar score; and Dr. Edward L. Trudeau, who devoted his career to researching and treating tuberculosis. "The full spectrum of topics is pretty broad," Dr. Shulman said.

Part of his collection includes stamps issued by the Kingdom of Hawaii in the 1800s, and he used some of them to mark the impact of measles on that region in a medical journal article (*Pediatr. Infect. Dis. J.* 2009;28:728-33). "In 1824, the king and queen of Hawaii, who were both in their 20s, traveled to London to meet with the king in an effort to forge an alliance," Dr. Shulman said. "About 10 days after they arrived in London, they came down



Dr. Stanford T. Shulman has collected about 3,000 medically themed stamps.

with measles and died of the disease there. While these are not in and of themselves medical stamps, they portray individuals—mostly from the royal family in Hawaii—who also were sick or died from the measles. I've used these stamps to illustrate this medical history example."

Other stamps in his collection highlight drug abuse prevention, physical fitness, and AIDS. "Dozens of countries have issued AIDS stamps," he said. "There are some from developing countries that use stamps to get the message out as to how one can prevent the spread of AIDS. Some depict condoms and blood transfusions."

To keep up with new stamp releases, Dr. Shulman subscribes to newspapers and magazines for philatelists and attends shows. He also is a member of the American Topical Association, a group of stamp collectors who have a specific area of interest. "Within that association, there's a medical subjects group," he said. "It's mostly people from America, but there are people from all over the world. A publication related to medical-themed stamps comes out once every 2 months."

A sense of the chase keeps Dr. Shulman engaged in his avocation. "If you're a

stamp collector, you always have something you're chasing down, trying to locate a nice-looking copy of a particular stamp, and trying to find someone who has it and will sell it to you at a reasonable price," he said. "There's a calming aspect associated with examining your stamp collection, studying the stamps, and putting them into an album properly."

Intrigued by U.S. Coins

Like many of his fellow 7th graders who grew up in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, N.Y., in the early 1960s, Dr. Lawrence Brown was active in sports—especially softball and basketball—but he also grew intrigued with collecting U.S. coins after being exposed to the hobby by a classmate.

"My mother seems to think that part of it had to do with that fact that I was among the more frugal of her children; I could keep the coin in my pocket, No. 1," recalled Dr. Brown, who practices in public health at Cornell University, New York. "No. 2, the art of collecting early [in life] is probably what motivated me. I learned that there were different years of different coins, and I learned that different mints made different coins: Philadelphia, Denver, and San Francisco."

If he obtained paper money he would convert it into coins at the grocery store or at the bank. "At that time, you would commonly see a buffalo nickel or a Mercury dime," said Dr. Brown, who is also senior vice president at the Addiction Research and Treatment Corporation in Brooklyn. "It amazed me that there were so many different topical reasons for our coinage, unlike now, when all of our coins are due to deceased presidents, which I think is a major mistake. I don't disagree with history; I'm a history buff. But we lose some of our artistic display when we focus just on people and not on other artistic subjects."

Early on, one of the favorite coins he obtained was a 1909 penny designed by sculptor Victor D. Brenner. Known as the VDB Lincoln, the front of the coin features the head of Lincoln while the back features a coat of arms. "I was overwhelmed, because that was like a needle in a haystack," Dr. Brown said. "It wasn't in the best condition, but to find it was amazing."

In the early 1970s, he purchased a subscription to a U.S. Mint publication, which enabled him to buy proof sets and mint sets each year. His devotion to collecting

waned during medical school and during a military tour of service in Vietnam, but it was rekindled in 2000 when he learned that the American Numismatic Association was staging its annual meeting nearby, and he decided to attend.

"There are different ways to collect coins," he explained. "You can collect a particular denomination, such as a penny; you can collect within a single denomination by year, or by year and mint mark: Philadelphia, Denver, or San Francisco."

The goal of his current collection, known as the Erasmus Hall Collection in a nod to his Brooklyn high school, is to assemble complete sets of modern coins by year and by mint mark. Modern is defined as any coin minted after 1960. "I focus on getting at least one type of a coin and add to the full completeness of a set," said Dr. Brown, who spends about 1 hour each evening on his hobby. "Then, I will work to improve the quality of the coin. In coin collecting, that's called a grade: how robust is the strike by the U.S. mint, how much wear is on the coin, and a number of other factors such as luster."

Dr. Brown displayed the Erasmus Hall proof set (1968-present) at the 2007 American United Numismatists convention. (Proof coins from the U.S. Mint are struck twice while circulated coins are struck once.) At the time, the proof set comprised 361 coins, but it has since grown to 382 coins. Overall, Dr. Brown estimates that he owns more than 1,000 coins.

"It provides a sense of the value of history," he said of his coin collecting hobby. "Why was this coin produced in this design at that time? Who were the stakeholders involved in the decision making? It also gives us a sense of beauty looking at the design of coins. Artistically, how have they evolved over time? With new technology, we do see some differences."

Coins also shed a light on the state of the economy when they were produced. For example, he said, prior to 1960, "the silver coins—the dime, the quarter, and the half-dollar—had a higher percent of silver. When there is a demand for these precious metals, it tends to result in the federal government reducing the content ... in the circulating coinage."

He added that the U.S. Mint's 50-State Quarters Program, a 10-year initiative that ended in 2008, "increased the number of coin collectors in the United States, because every person wanted to get every state in the union," Dr. Brown said. "It also helped teach young children what the key symbols are for each state." ■



Dr. Shulman's collection of medically themed stamps includes depictions of Louis Pasteur, a stamp sheet commemorating the 50th anniversary of penicillin's discovery, and a colorful rendition of the human immunodeficiency virus.

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The purpose of "The Rest of Your Life" is to celebrate the interests and passions of physicians outside of medicine. If you have an idea for this column or would like to tell your story, send an e-mail to d.brunk@elsevier.com.