



Editorial

The Plight of Hobbies

The hobby's collectors have dwindled from a high of 4,000+ in the 1980s to some 1,003 currently.

That's a pretty drastic downturn! But, this is hardly news to anyone who's been in the hobby for at least a little while, and it's 'normal' for anyone who's been in the hobby for the last 15 years. The good news (!) is that it's not us (as collectors); it's *them!* (society in general)

I've heard for years from various collectors in other hobbies that membership was going down, but for this editorial I've done some research to see if hobbies, as such, are actually in decline [*I mean, what if I just naturally hang around with dissidents?*]. Well, the plight of hobbies isn't a myth; it's a fact. Indeed, it's happened so fast that it's a phenomenon!...All within one generation!

Judging from the dates of the sources I came across, things started becoming obvious around 1997, and since then it's become 'official'.

The reasons given for such a change in leisure habits vary in specifics, but a drastic change in people's life styles basically covers it all. As life has become more hectic and fast-paced, fewer and fewer people are willing or able to slow down and find room for a hobby, especially the younger people. Technology, while not the whole answer, certainly has to be part of it. People are traveling more, are much more involved with electronics, and 'gadgets' in general.

Here are a few of the comments I came across from others...

"If there has been a decline in computers as a hobby, it's because of the decline of hobbies in general. A hobby takes commitment. For this short attention span generation, all our kicks must be turnkey." (PCMag Mobile, Oct 20, 2003)

"It seems the real trend is the decline of HOBBIES." (rcuniverse.com, March 29, 2006)

"The decline of hobbies parallels the decline of leisure: there's just no time. We don't bring home model cars; we bring home file folders. ("Elegy for the hobby," NY Times.com, May 25, 1997)

"...I think the decline of hobbies like ham radio has done the engineering community enormous damage." (duntemann.com, August, 2002)

I can see the change just in my own students over these last 15 years. I always used to have students who were stamp and coin collectors, for example; no more. Students *used* to order regularly from the monthly Scholastic advertisements that are given out in the classroom; no more--there are fewer and fewer 'readers', and fewer and fewer students who are willing (or even able) to sit still long enough to read anything more than a basic paragraph.

Viewing the problem from a different perspective, or at least one that hasn't been mentioned yet, I suspect what has really changed here is that we've moved away from being individuals and become

much, *much* more socially involved, thanks to technology. “Social networking”...*that’s* what it’s all about to the generation coming up...via e-mail, cell phones, texting, Utube, Facebook, Twitter. There are a number of people I know whom I probably wouldn’t even recognize if they didn’t have their hands holding their cell phones to their ears!

‘Hobbies’, almost by definition, are *individual* activities...*solitary* activities. Even though the hobbyist may end up joining clubs, attending get-togethers, etc., the latter is not the goal; it’s merely a byproduct, a means to an end. In social networking, that *is* the end!

So, there definitely seems to be a clash of values here. Some might say that there have always been such transitions as the younger generation supplants the older generation. True, but it’s also correct that not all such changes are for the better.

In any event, the heyday of hobbies seems to be (as with *all* heydays) a thing of the past. Just how bad things are going to get can’t be assessed yet because the ‘hobby generation’ is still with us (that’s you and I, for the most part). But, once we’ve moved on to that big convention in the sky, only the social networking generation will be left. Then, if this trend continues, the lone, forlorn hobbyist will someday be looked upon as some sort of kooky, social oddball. [*Oh, wait a minute...We’re already somewhat looked upon as kooky, social oddballs!*]

Thus, for the most part, it’s the [*pardon me*] outgoing generation that is the collectors; as that generation inexorably diminishes, so do the hobbies. But, not *all* hobbies!!

There seem to be a few hobbies, at least, that actually *benefit* from the changing of the generations in that they draw their members from the older generation, no matter what the values of that generation happen to be. Gardening, for example. That tends to appeal to more people *after* they retire...and Americans spend more on gardening than any other hobby [*just thought I’d throw that in*].

Now, the same might be said of our own hobby. Matchcover collecting certainly appeals to the ‘more mature’, but, unfortunately, in much more minute numbers. Because, as you can readily see in individual clubs memberships, the outgoing veterans of the hobby are just not being replaced by new novices in anything that even comes close to balanced numbers. Hence, our own hobby, as well as most others, continues to suffer from declining numbers.

For us, the worst blow of all was the anti-smoking campaigns that have virtually extinguished matchbooks being given away by businesses. That’s how most veterans got started in the hobby in by-gone years—bringing back all those colorful matchbooks from locations while on vacations with their parents—Doesn’t happen any more. There are still literally hundreds of millions of matchbooks/matchcovers to be collected by the collector—but that initial hobby stimulus of seeing them so readily available everywhere you went is gone.

In any event, whatever the future holds for collectors and other hobbyists, we can take some solace in the fact that were all suffering together! And, I, personally, take solace (although some would disagree) in that collecting *is* an individual hobby, and, while the dwindling hobby numbers are sad, it’s going to have a minimal effect, at best, on my own collecting....because by the time the last of the hobby’s current veterans passes away, I’ll be gone myself—so, perhaps in a goofy sort of way, it all balances out in the end!

[*Is that like a Zen philosophy or something?*]