

Just an Old Microscope

By

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I recently had the rare privilege of helping a retired (from a formal position at the university kind of retired) scientist friend and his wife downsize. They were packing up their two-story, plus a full basement home, and moving into a one-story, three-bedroom abode.

I say this was a rare privilege, as I got to see what fifty years of gathering scientific treasures looked like. One large basement room was a laboratory, as was almost the entire upstairs. I also walked away with many of those treasures. Some of the treasures went to the high-school science classroom that I will retire from at the end of May, and some came home with me.

I have a lovely piece of red quartz, along with other mineral samples. I have some beautiful books, and some that are just delightful to read. Anyone up for some Alexander McCall Smith?

Yet the best treasure of all was almost not a treasure. As we were sorting through things, I hefted one of those impossibly heavy wooden boxes to the work surface where my friend was seated. I did not need to be told that this was yet another one

of many microscopes. He opened the box, and pulled out a beautiful, albeit old, black microscope with brass fittings. As he examined the various lenses and the scope itself, I could almost see the unspoken memories that came to his mind. Some questioning on my part revealed that this was a microscope that he had as a very young scientist. If I am not mistaken, this was the microscope that kindled his interest in all things unseen by the naked eye.

I asked him what he wanted to do with it. He looked at it for a bit, and then gruffly said to set it aside for the garage sale. I dutifully put it in that pile, and we went on with our sorting. After I left for the day, I got to thinking. It bothered me that such a treasure was going to be sold on the cheap and would probably wind up in the hands of someone who really didn't care too much about it. It would probably be hocked on eBay for more than the garage sale buyer paid.

I emailed my friend that night. I told him that I should have at least one of my friend and mentor's microscopes. (Not that I hadn't been gifted some nice ones already for my classroom, one or two of which will find their way home with me at the end of the year.) The next time I went over to help pack and sort treasures it had been set aside for me.

This is a light microscope, with a mirror as a light source. (These microscopes strike terror in the hearts of

teachers today. You can bet some practical jokester would probably use the mirror for ill gain!) The manufacturer is Bausch and Lomb Optical Company, Rochester NY, USA. The patent is January 5, 1915. The objective lenses that are currently on the microscope are a 4 mm, a 9 mm and a 16 mm, with a 10x eye piece. There are additional lenses in a pull-out drawer in that impossibly heavy wooden case, along with a blue filter.

Does the microscope still work? Absolutely. It needs a good cleaning, but for the little bit I messed with it, I found it to be in sound working condition.

I imagine, when the time comes I will have nieces and nephews who won't see the value of an old piece of junk, and it will once again find its way to a garage sale. But for now, the old microscope is safe and appreciated. And once in a while, it will be pulled out to examine something, just for fun.

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