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COLLECTOR'S NEWS

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Editorial

As we're now in the midst of the festive season, it seemed like a good idea to re-run a short story I wrote back in 1989 and published in the Collectors News of that winter. Jones is a fictional antiques dealer I created just for fun and this Christmas adventure was the first of several. Looking back now on how things were it is like we were in a different world then and a different type of antiques business too.

The change since those halcyon days has been fundamental and far reaching. Imagine a world without GST, computers, free trade and no U.S. terrorist scares to keep all our southern neighbours away. We didn't worry too much about holding on to stock then because operating costs were reasonable and there was always a good chance of moving it along to our regular, repeat clientele. We could also spend time dispensing constant free advice to persons with property disposal problems making many free house calls. We also stocked all manner of odds and ends like decanter stoppers, misc. silver flatware and china to fill in sets, old keys for clocks and cabinets and the list goes on.

All these nostalgic thoughts have come to the fore recently with our impending move away from South Granville. Who would have thought that the neighbourhood would have turned into an avenue for boring ubiquitous chain stores whose huge profit margins can absorb the ever rising rents and property taxes? It looks like wherever we go our space will be smaller so that the focus of our business will be different. The next time I put pen to paper for another episode of Jones it will have to involve how he's dealt with the computer age which will probably involve a lot of personal input from me on that one!

Best wishes to all and you'll hear from me again in the New Year!

SHARP'S THE WORD – A CHRISTMAS STORY



'Twas a month before Christmas and Jones, the antique dealer, was feeling decidedly glum as he surveyed the half-open cardboard boxes on the floor behind his desk. He had needed more stock in a hurry for the Christmas trade and this was the result of his morning's buying endeavours. Viewed under the bright lights of his shop, some of the things bought under gloomy conditions and in haste looked really quite pathetic. Two figurines had haircracks on their bodies and some crystal had chips and he was only on the second box.

"Never buy in basements" was his friend and colleague, Tony Davis' number one rule in how to make a start on your first million in the antique business. Another one was "Don't believe everything people tell you". These two commandments of the trade according to T.D. preoccupied Jones heavily at that moment as he poked amongst his haul from the old lady's basement. To distract himself from what was shaping up to be a minor disaster he poured himself a coffee and hunted for a cigarette. The latter he blithely lit up in contravention of the city's no smoking ban in retail establishments and tried to figure out whether he was going to come out ahead on this transaction or not. As his little grey cells tackled percentages, he failed to look around as the shop door opened. It was only when brisk footsteps echoed down the length of the shop did he glance around to see who it was. As he did so, he nearly choked on the cup of coffee he had just brought to his lips, for bearing down on him was Miss Dolores Sharp clutching a bulky plastic Safeway bag in her bony hand.

Miss Sharp was the current bane of Jones' existence. The names changed but the personalities rarely ever did. This lady had recently retired from her job at a department store and to punish the antiques world she had developed a passion to find out more about her late mother's things. Jones' incidental role in this grand scheme of things was that of a sounding board. This would have been okay if Jones had been able to buy anything on which to turn a profit and Miss Sharp didn't have the extremely irritating habit of insisting on being correct about something she had little practical knowledge of. So this was not turning out to be his morning, but being the man of mettle that he was, he steeled himself remembering the old Chinese proverb "He who cannot smile shouldn't run shop". Something remotely resembling a smile creased Jones' countenance as he greeted his unwelcome visitor.

"Good morning, Mr. Jones" said Miss Sharp as she plonked herself into the client's chair across from Jones' desk. "I've found a silver entrée tray amongst mother's things – how much will you give me for it?" So saying the Safeway bag was deposited in front of Jones' jaded vision. He unwrapped the top from the bottom both of which were swaddled in many layers of tissue. When the treasure was finally revealed in all its highly polished glory, Smith turned the tray upside down and found the E.P.N.S. stamp in a flash.

“It’s not sterling silver, Miss Sharp but plate.”

Miss Sharp jerked to attention in her chair as if stung by a bee. “Impossible” she trumpeted “Mother told me it was sterling silver many times, as her mother had told her.”

“Take a look at it yourself” Jones replied pushing the tray across the desk, “if it was sterling it would say so or have assay marks. This has neither, just the silverplate stamp.”

Miss Sharp’s face looked like she was bearing the brunt of being the first to hear of the fall of Rome to the barbarians or some other calamitous event. Her lips twitched as she manfully tried to regain her composure. Still she was made of stern stuff and uttered another famous warrior’s parting words “I Shall Return” as she gathered her effects together and briskly left on her mission to unravel the mystery of the entrée tray. As she left the shop and began to cross the street she could not get the idea out of her head that Jones could be right and Mother wrong. So obsessed was she with this idea that she was totally oblivious to her surroundings, as was the man sitting with the phone in his right hand, who should have known much better.

As the front door closed behind Miss Sharp, Jones, not for the first time, tried to rationalize his methods of obtaining goods for his shop. You had to go out on house calls even though nine out of ten were a waste of time and you had to encourage them to bring things into the shop even though the results were often similar. He consoled himself with the thought that the law of averages should pay off once in a while with something exciting and eminently saleable. His blood pressure was slowly dropping to a medically more acceptable level when there was a shrieking of brakes down the street. This was followed by a tremendous thump as metal and plastic crumpled under the impact of what was obviously a severe collision. Jones’ jangled nerves didn’t need that extra jolt to their elasticity with the predictable result that the Royal Doulton figure he had in his hand landed up on the floor.

He decided to sit for a moment, take in a deep breath and assess the damage. He gingerly picked the figure up, his anxiety transferred from to whatever carnage had happened outside to possible destruction inside. He shut out the sound of many sirens on the street – accidents were now an everyday occurrence on the busy thoroughfare – and concentrated on the figure. He cursed under his breath as saw that ‘Pretty Lady’ was no longer pretty, she had been dismembered at the arm. There went his haul for the morning because ‘Pretty Lady’ had been the star attraction for which he had paid star rates; the supporting cast of bric-a-brac was just that: unmemorable. Macaroni and cheese was looking like a distinct possibility for Christmas dinner if things kept up at this rate and, remembering Miss Sharp’s parting words, he could no doubt count on another visit from her in the not too distant future. Some holiday season to look forward to.

Over the next couple of weeks things didn’t improve too much. Nothing exciting was bought and Tony Davis came in and when he learned what happened, the inevitable phrase sprung to his lips “Don’t buy in basements”. The only bright spot was that Miss Sharp hadn’t been in to bug him; he found out why on the Wednesday before Christmas.

With the 25th a mere five days off, business had been picking up considerably and Jones was delighted to see a steady trickle of small china, silver and bric-a-brac leave the shop destined for Santa Claus. He was in the middle of one such sale when there was a knocking on the back door. He had to ignore the unknown visitor for a couple of minutes until he had concluded the sale and bade the purchaser “Merry Christmas”. When he reached the back door he found standing outside, a middle-aged lady with a cheerful, ruddy face, framed by a profusion of prematurely grey hair. She was short and stout in stature and

had a red overcoat on under which black boots protruded. It was impossible not to feel friendly towards her and Jones gave her a big smile.

“You must be Mr. Jones. I’ve got a parcel for you in the car which is too heavy and awkward for me to lift.” Jones excused himself for a minute, locked the front door and put on his jacket for it was bitterly cold with a hint of snow in the air. He followed the lady to the back of her car and as she lifted the rear hatch he saw a large, oblong parcel tied up in brown paper and string with his name on it.

“I suppose this is a sort of Christmas present for you Mr. Jones. Miss Sharp didn’t drive and about three weeks ago she called me over to help her take this picture out of the basement and to put it into my car. Then I was supposed to drop it off to you. I got the impression she never really liked it and after her Mother passed away in 1970, she just stuck it out of sight.” At the mention of that **name** Jones viewed the parcel with the utmost suspicion and not a degree of hostility. What was that woman fobbing off on him now? He had hoped for a reprieve until the New Year at least. The lady in the red coat seemed oblivious to Jones’ glowering expression.

“So, I was passing your way today and thought I would drop it off to clear out the car. I’m sure she would have wanted you to have it. There are no surviving relations and I suppose the estate will wind up with the city anyway.” She added, by way of explanation “we were neighbors, you know. Now you take it away because I’ve got other deliveries today!”

As he struggled to get what seemed to be a very heavy picture out of the car, Jones also struggled to find the right words.

“You mean Miss Sharp is no longer with us?” was his incredulous response as he heaved the awkward brute out onto the ground thinking “Good Lord, she’s giving me as much trouble in death as she had in life. I’m going to get a hernia lifting this thing around.”

“You didn’t know?” the lady in red said solicitously “run over by a car, she was far from here. Don’t you read the newspapers? It was in the Times about three weeks ago.” Jones, whose newspaper reading was mainly confined to the classifieds, shook his head. “Well, I hope you got something that’s going to make some money for you. You’ve probably earned it knowing our Miss Sharp.” And with that telling parting sentence, the lady in red hopped into her car and drove off into the gathering dusk. Jones watched her go and stood there until she was well out of sight, and muttering to himself, “Well, I never” struggled with the parcel back into the shop and left it propped up against a filing cabinet. There the picture stood unopened until after closing on Christmas Eve.

Jones was pouring himself a small sherry to celebrate the end of the Christmas selling season when his eye alighted on the parcel. He decided to open it as it was in a manner of speaking a present – a very well deserved one – and it was Christmas on the morrow. He had very little expectations, for as the lady in red had said it was out of the basement. He cut the string at the back and slowly tore off the wrapping paper to reveal, surprisingly, the art dealership stamp of a now long deceased local dealer who had a reputation for selling fairly decent paintings. It was seeing that name or the sherry, or a combination of both, that raised his spirits a little and he wrenched off the last of the thick brown paper with some vigour. He then turned the picture around to face himself.

When he saw the colourful image of children playing on sunlit sands he started to smile, then he began chuckling and finally laughed out aloud when he bent down to look at the signature which was barely discernable underneath the glass. He propped up the oil painting so that it faced his desk and then turned his chair around to face it. As he sat down he was still laughing to himself. “The silly old biddy” he thought “she was so convinced she knew everything and nothing she brought me was worth much and now this.” He suddenly felt a desire for something stronger to drink. There was still half a bottle of ‘clients’ Scotch left and he poured himself a hefty slug into a coffee cup. As the fiery spirits bit into his empty stomach, he pondered on the game that is the antiques business.

Ten years ago he would have told Miss Sharp the painting was worth little – her mother must have bought it for the similarity in name – pictures have been bought for all kinds of reasons. And now it was worth a couple of years salary to him if the market didn’t turn downward before he could get it to London.

Jones mentally congratulated himself that he had got through another year and 1990 was beginning to look pretty good thanks to the two Sharps: Dorothea and Dolores. And, of course, Mumsie for the one and only thing she ever bought that turned out right. Another celebratory scotch was in order. Jones downed it in double quick time and then he lightheartedly stumbled off into the winter’s night for hearth and home.

*For those of you not cognizant with the volatile art market, the English artist Dorothea Sharp (1875 – 1955) has been a darling of the art market during the eighties after languishing in obscurity since her death. In the sixties and the seventies her prolific works sold for very little – sometimes under a hundred dollars – now much of it is in the tens of thousands.

An update on 2006 prices for Dorothea Sharp. After going off the boil a bit in the 1990s, there has been a resurgence of interest and prices in post-impressionistic art with the result that as in 1989 Dorothea Sharp is now riding high again. Jones didn’t hang onto his painting but did alright in the art bull market of 1990.



A fun item - a solid brass duck. Probably bought from McMordies in the heyday of the brass craze in the late 70s. \$95. It stand nearly 10" high.

A large Royal Dux Polar Bear. Approx. 12" high. Czechoslovakia. c.1950+ \$595



A Moorcroft 'Orchid' VASE from England. Blue initials and painted and impressed marks. 6" high. c.1940s. \$595

A Moorcroft 'clematis' VASE from England. 7.5" high. Blue initials and painted and impressed marks. c.1940s \$650.





'Cowichan River, Vancouver Island' by Arthur Burchett (exh.1880-1913). An oil PAINTING on canvas. 20" x 30". Signed and dated (1921) and inscribed. Burchett exhibited at the RA, RI and other British institutions and presumerably painted this on a trip to Canada. \$2,200.

A Salmon Trophy given in Chinook, Wash. on Sept.2, 1956, The fish caught weighed 36lbs 12.5 oz.! 14.5" high. \$295.

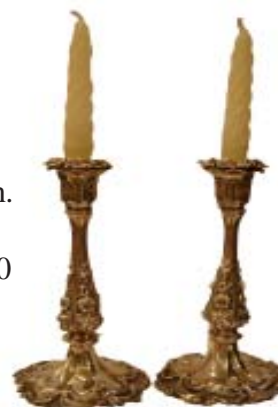


A magnificent Porcelain LION on a stand. This was #32 of 250 issued back in the 1970s by the Renaissance Design Studio Ltd. in England. It is of impressive size 13" x 18". \$1,200

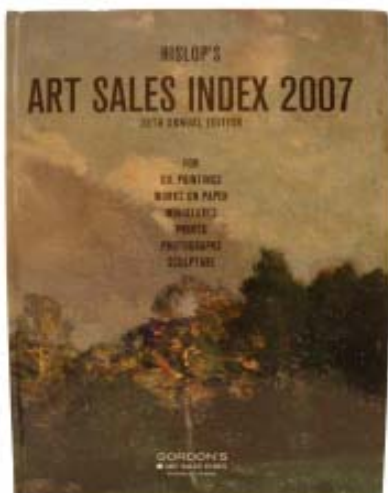


A Rosenthal New Years (?) PLATE from Germany. Dated 1912. 8" diameter. \$175

A pair of Silverplate on Copper CANDLE-STICKS of ornate design. Maker Forbes, USA & 19th cent. 9.5" high. \$450



The latest Hislop. Its heavy at 2352 pages. \$259



The enlarged and revised Meican Hallmark Book. 288pp. \$32

Tony's 2007 Canadian Art Sales Index Book. 176pp. and still \$45

