**“Seaweed can be found in many fluoridated toothpastes”**

An interview with dentist and toothpaste collector Dr Val Kolpakov

Dentist Dr Val Kolpakov has an unusual hobby: He collects toothpaste. His collection is currently recognised as the largest in the world by the Guinness World Records Committee. Born in Russia, Dr Kolpakov moved to the US in 1993 to work as a researcher at the University of Michigan. For the past nine years he has been in practice at his own dental offices in Saginaw (Michigan) and Alpharetta (Georgia). Dr Kolpakov spoke to Yvonne Bachmann, DTF, about his collecting passion, radioactive collectibles and seaweed in our toothpaste.

Yvonne Bachmann: When did you get the idea to start collecting toothpaste?

Dr Val Kolpakov: It was 2002 and I was browsing the Internet. This was when I found some information on Carsten Gutzeit, a man from Germany who collected toothpaste. His collection stood at roughly 500 tubes. This was when I realised what a wonderful hobby collecting toothpaste would be for a dental professional. Imagine the opportunities it offers to learn about other variations of your profession. With this in mind, I decided to start my own collection of toothpaste.

The most difficult part of collecting toothpaste is keeping track of all the samples I get. I estimate that I have 2,000 samples. However, I cannot tell you the exact number at this time. I have more than 1,700 tubes counted and entered into my database, but there are several big boxes with more samples waiting for their turn.

What are the most interesting items in your collection?

I would consider one item to be the oldest, most rare, and most expensive: a silver English Antique Georgian toothpowder box from 1801. This was a time when toothpaste had not yet been invented and toothpowders were used instead. I paid over US$ 1,500 for it. The oldest toothpaste I have is dated 1808 and made by Colgate.

My favourite kinds of toothpaste are alcohol flavoured. These range from whiskey, like scotch, rye, bourbon, to red wine, amaretto, champagne and many more. Another passion of mine is chocolate-flavoured toothpaste. I have a set of pure chocolate cream tubes of toothpaste with chocolate flavouring as well. Speaking of unusual flavours, the Breath Palette Company tops them all. They came up with 51 flavours, including some of the oddest kinds such as Green Tea, Pumpkin Pudding, and Indian Curry.

Do you usually buy two samples—one to try and one to keep?

No, I normally just get one sample. I already spend a lot of money on my toothpaste collection and doubling the amount would be too much. Often, it is not even possible in the case of old tubes—which are rare finds to begin with. If I am tempted to try a toothpaste that I have in my collection, I just open the only sample I have. My old toothpastes are so dried up, that I don’t think anything is left of the toothpaste. I also like to try them in their mouth.

How many items do you have in your collection?

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Do you know any other people who collect toothpaste or dental equipment?

I keep in touch with Carsten Gutzeit from Germany, whose collection inspired me. We have exchanged some toothpaste tubes. Since I started my collection, I have been contacted by several people who have small collections of toothpaste. Some of them have donated their entire collections to me. There is also a good collection of toothpowder tins at my alma mater, the University of Michigan dental school. They also have a very good collection of various vintage dental items.

What do you estimate the value of your collection to be?

I have spent close to US$ 20,000 on all my samples. Considering all the work and time I have spent on my collection over the last nine years, I would estimate it at US$ 50,000. But at this time, I have no intention of selling it. It is my hobby, my passion, the way for me to attract people’s attention to my dental practice and spread information about this wonderful topic.

Are toothpastes generally the same? Is toothpaste bought in Japan any different from toothpaste bought in Italy?

In Italy, toothpastes are basically the same. However, there are local differences in flavour and some ingredients. Oriental toothpastes often contain ingredients like balsam, salt or gingern. Japan is well-known for its “high-tech” toothpastes that rebuild enamel, re-mineralise teeth and halt the development of caries.

Dr Kolpakov has collected 2,000 samples of toothpaste. (D TFI/Photo Dr. Kolpakov)

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Do you collect any other unusual items?

I have a small collection of denture containers—holders of different shapes in which edentulous people place their dentures for the night. I also have a collection of dental movie props, including some fake teeth that actors put over their own teeth to look like vampires, or homeless people with rotten teeth.

Do you hold a Guinness World Record?

I’ve considered applying to the Guinness World Records for a long time, but just can’t seem to find the time. Recently, I was contacted by an English journalist who interviewed me and wrote a story about my collection for an English newspaper. Someone at the Guinness World Records Committee came across the article and e-mailed me, suggesting I apply for a record. I submitted my application, but as there was no current record involving toothpaste tubes, they had to review whether they could open a new category. Finally, it was approved.

Now I have to submit evidence that I possess all this toothpaste. The evidence must include pictures, a detailed list of all my toothpaste, publications, and statements from witnesses, I do not actually hold this record yet, as was mistakenly reported in the media, but I hope to in the near future.

Thank you very much for this interview.

Yvonne Bachmann: W hen do you get your collection?

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