

In Search Of Buried Treasure

We didn't go looking for treasure. In fact, we were going for a walk.

I suppose that in most jurisdictions, what we found would not qualify as treasure. Certainly our find won't meet the standards of England's Treasure Act of 1996, an Act of Parliament written so as to legally oblige finders of objects defined as "treasure" to report their booty to the local coroner.

So what is treasure?

It comes from the Greek, *thesaurus*, the root of our cognate, meaning "a treasury of words."

As a poet, of course, I love this link between wealth and words—at least in the etymological sense if not in financial terms.

But most of us tend to think of treasure in terms of its dictionary definition: "a concentration of riches, often one which is considered lost or forgotten until being rediscovered."

The English went so far as to legally define treasure as:

- All coins from the same hoard. A hoard is defined as two or more coins, as long as they are at least 300 years old when found. If they contain less than 10% gold or silver there must be at least 10 in the hoard for it to qualify.
- Two or more prehistoric base metal objects in association with one another
- Any individual (non-coin) find that is at least 300 years old and contains at least 10% gold or silver.
- Associated finds: any object of any material found in the same place as (or which had previously been together with) another object which is deemed treasure.
- Objects substantially made from gold or silver but are less than 300 years old, that have been deliberately hidden with the intention of recovery and whose owners or heirs are unknown.

Yep. Our treasure didn't fit the British definition. In fact it doesn't fit anyone's definition, I'm willing to gander.

Treasure Hunt in the Woods

But after three steps into the evergreen shade,
he drops to his knees and begins to furrow.

It's here, mama, he says. Let's dig.

I pick up a knobby spruce twig and poke absently at dirt,
hoping we can start walking again.

No, mama, like this. With your hands.

I pretend I don't hear.

He takes my hands in his own, forces them down.

Fine sand runs through my fingers,
old spruce needles swim in it like unstrung commas.

Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

Word Woman

I settle in, sifting and digging up dirt. Making piles.
No mama, deeper than that, he says,
scratching his with his nails into the hardpan.

I dig deeper, past my desire to keep my hands clean.
Past whatever I had set out to do. Treasure is cold
and filled with crooked things that slip through fingers.

The dictionary suggests that the verb *treasure* implies that we “accumulate and store away, as for future use.” But what I learned on that otherly-fated walk was the opposite. That the treasure is in the moment. It’s in the letting go. Of the future. Of our own plans. Of our expectations.

I agree with the dictionary. Whatever treasure might be, it has something to do with rediscovery. And as all treasure hunters know, the clues are everywhere. We just need to be willing to notice. And to see beneath the tarnish of our expectation.

And to hope selfishly that maybe next time, the treasure looks a little bit more like what we thought it did. Long walk, anyone?

Poet and presenter Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer lives near Telluride, Colorado. Visit her at www.word-woman.com.