Alumni

In The Lion's Den

A private tour of the collection of Roaree enthusiast Michael Garrett '66CC, '69LAW, '70BUS

By
Julia Rothman
|
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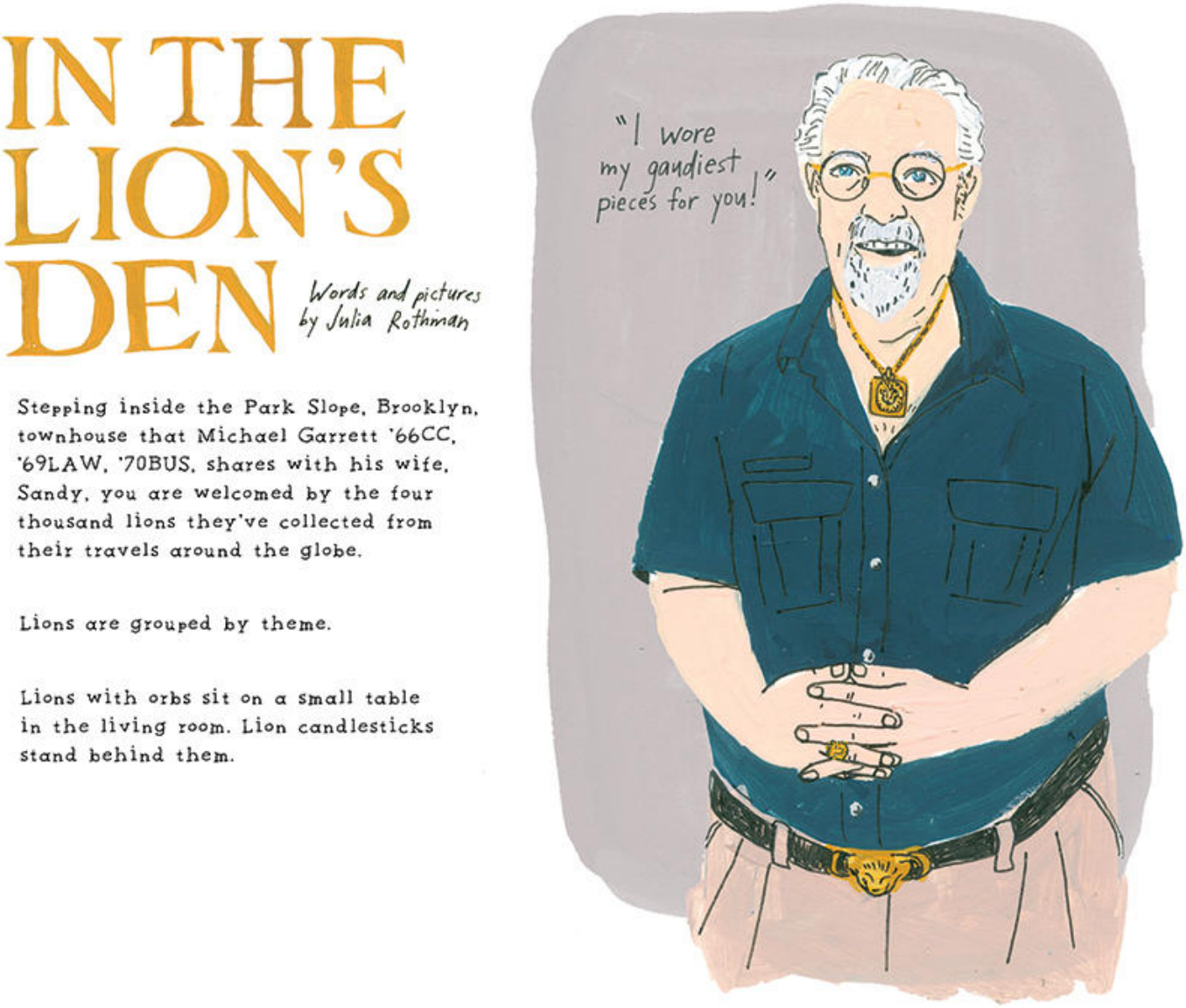

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"The paw on the orb symbolizes domination of the world."

Lions are also grouped by color.

Lions are embroidered on footstools.

"Sandy stitched this one for us with our initials!"

Lions embellish dozens of ties.

"I wore suits for forty years in my legal career. So I tried to wear a lion tie every day. Some are silly, but others are exquisite. There's Hermès and Ferragamo and Liberty of London..."

"There are two reactions people have to a collection this size. They're either fascinated by it or they think I'm nuts."

Garrett's obsession started with a lion costume. When he arrived on campus his freshman year, he went to a sports orientation. At the time, women weren't allowed on the field, and all the cheerleaders were men. "I remember seeing these wild guys with large cardboard megaphones doing gymnastics and having a great time. I wanted to join in." As a sophomore, he became captain of the cheerleading team, which meant he got to wear the lion suit.

The costume was heavy cloth and covered in fur, seven feet tall with internal supports on the shoulders. There was a mesh section in the mouth to see out of. The Broadway costume shop that made it sewed a wine sack into the right arm so when Garrett waved to the crowd, he could take a sip.

"I met President Kennedy in that lion suit!"

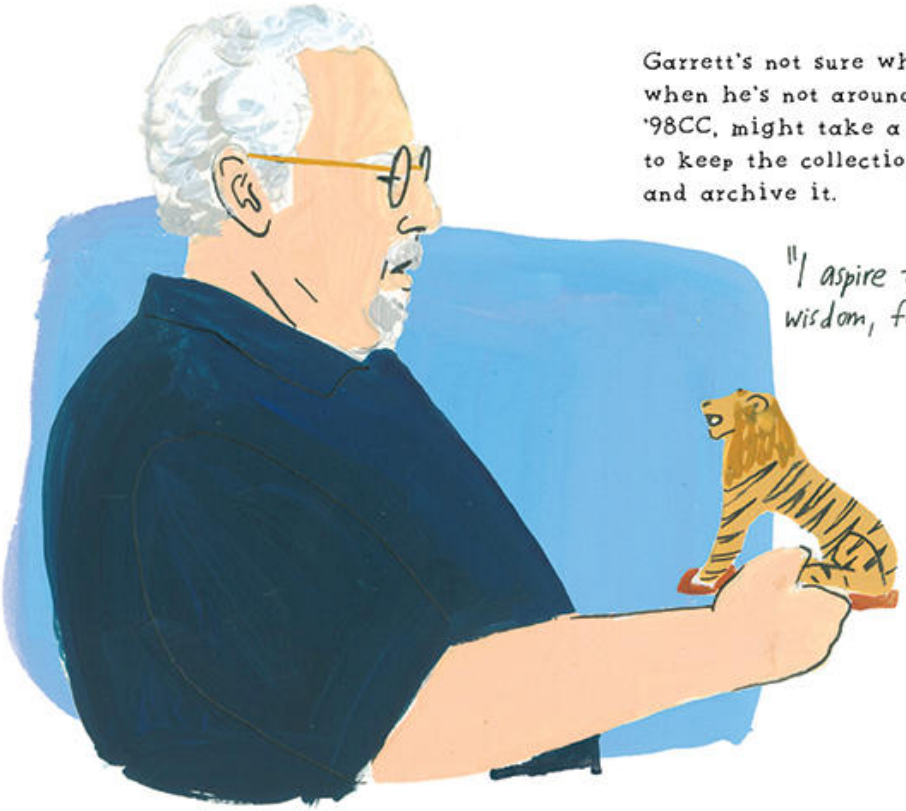
Covering the walls of the stairway to the second floor are tons of framed images — from 18th-century bookplates to magazine covers to circus advertisements. The artwork depicts lions in a myriad of styles.

Everything is a story!

"I bought this woodcarving on the beach in Jamaica. The Rastafarians didn't have change, so they offered me hash instead."

"I found this in Turkey. I don't know who this guy is, but it had a great lion, so I had to have it."

"These are match safes. Before they invented safety matches, matches would explode, so you kept your matches in a closed metal safe."



Garrett's not sure what will happen to his collection when he's not around anymore. His son, Justin Garrett '98CC, might take a few lions, but Garrett is hoping to keep the collection together. He plans to photograph and archive it.

"I aspire to be a lion – to exude strength, wisdom, fortitude, and courage."

Garrett says most people are afraid to really dive into things, to really make a commitment. He's been in his house for forty-eight years. He's been married fifty-one years. He's been a lion-obsessed alumnus for even longer. He's never questioned his commitments. ♛

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