

# Everyday items emit heartache at broken-relationships museum

By **CHRISTOPHER WEBER**  
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — After her husband asked for a divorce, Amber Clisura gave back her engagement ring, kicked him out of the house and tossed everything that reminded her of the ruined marriage. Except for one item: a polished steel barbecue smoker that her future ex-husband had fashioned for her from an old oil drum.

"It sat there on the patio and rusted and rusted, and it became a sad symbol of the relationship," Clisura said.

The four-legged smoker had been a treasured handmade gift, but eventually Clisura couldn't bear to look at it. She considered giving it to a neighbor or selling it for scrap but then read about a call for submissions at the new Los Angeles branch of the Museum of Broken Relationships.

## Touring collection

The original museum opened in Zagreb, Croatia, in 2010 after growing out of a touring collection that crisscrossed Europe, Asia and the U.S. On display in Zagreb are artifacts from failed unions, most of them mundane under ordinary circumstances. A single stiletto heel. A wine opener. A worn old Snoopy doll.

But when isolated in a glass case or hanging on a white wall and accompanied by a caption, the objects become imbued with heartache or regret. Or freedom.

In Los Angeles, there's a blue chiffon top a woman wore to a cafe where her husband told her he was leaving. An envelope of leaves mailed from Canada to San Diego so a long-distance paramour could experience changing seasons in Southern California. A jar of pickles purchased for a first love who, the donor explained, "stopped texting before I could give it to him."

After some deliberation, Clisura, a textile artist and fashion designer from L.A., decided to donate the smoker and drove it to the museum's warehouse. "A woman met me down-



AP Photos/Chris Carlson

**Amber Clisura poses for a picture next to the meat smoker she donated to the new Museum of Broken Relationships Wednesday in Los Angeles. The Museum of Broken Relationships displays artifacts from failed unions, most of them mundane under ordinary circumstances. It began in Zagreb, Croatia, in 2010 and then expanded.**



**LEFT: An envelope of leaves mailed from Canada to San Diego so a long-distance paramour could experience changing seasons in Southern California is displayed at the Los Angeles branch of the Museum of Broken Relationships Wednesday 2016 in Los Angeles. RIGHT: A jar of pickles purchased for a first love is displayed at the new Museum of Broken Relationships Wednesday in Los Angeles. Museum visitors pay \$18 admission.**

stairs, and as I was handing it over, I burst into tears," Clisura said, laughing now. "It felt like a weight was lifted." The museum representative offered to give her a hug.

## 'Broken dreams'

Employees have embraced their share of brokenhearted donors eager for closure, said director Alexis Hyde at the museum's location on Holly-

wood Boulevard, a thoroughfare that, she noted, has been called the "boulevard of broken dreams."

Hyde has been known to brush away her own tears as she opens boxes containing donations.

"It's cathartic the way a good, sad movie is cathartic," she said. "On some level, you know this person's moving on, and they've survived."

Hyde pointed out not all the fizzled unions represented in the 3,500-square-foot museum were romantic. One donor had an irreparable relationship with her father. Another split from a church. A California woman who donated a Texas license plate said she separated from the Lone Star State.

"My broken relationship was with myself," said Andree Vermeulen, whose donated

items are the museum's most talked about. The actress sent in a pair of breast implants she had removed after ending a toxic relationship with a man who made disparaging comments about her body.

Vermeulen, who lives in Los Angeles, said the implants "never felt right," and since they've been out, she has "reached a place where I feel very grounded and confident."

An outpouring of support on social media gave her further confidence to use the experience as fodder during storytelling performances in which she discusses body image and standards of beauty.

Vermeulen said the donation, now displayed in a glass case in the LA museum's main room, symbolized the final chapter of the relationship, and her scars "mark a story and a time in my life that taught me a lot about myself."

## 2,000 items

More than 2,000 items comprise the museum's two brick-and-mortar collections and touring shows, which have made stops in San Francisco, Helsinki, Finland and Hamburg, Germany. A show in Seoul, South Korea, featured a donated Jeep that had to be taken apart and brought in by crane. Donations arrive so regularly that the LA site hopes to continually cycle in new items to keep the exhibit fresh.

Donors are anonymous or identified only by first name. They generally write just a few sentences as a backstory, but some items, including a simple green coffee mug at the LA site, come with explanations that go on for hundreds of words.

The caption accompanying a group of old cassette tapes reads: "The music made me dream."

Pieces are displayed across six exhibition rooms in the ground-floor location that lures tourists who stroll Hollywood Boulevard. Visitors pay \$18 admission and are encouraged to pop into a private "confessional," where they can write about their own breakups.

Olinka Vistica and Drazen Grubisic, the Croatian artists who conceived the original exhibition on a whim, are shocked by its staying power.

Hyde isn't. "It's so resonant," she said. "The audience is so large for it."

Clisura admitted she hadn't yet been to the museum to see the old rusted smoker.

"I wasn't sure I was ready," she said. But she's since changed her mind and is planning a trip with her new boyfriend.

# German minister wants to prohibit names such as 'vegetarian schnitzel'

Associated Press

BERLIN — Germany's agriculture minister has leapt to the defense of meat lovers, calling for a ban on names such as "vegetarian schnitzel" for meat-substitute products, which he said were misleading consumers.

Among the "wurst" offenders is "vegan curry sausage," a meat-free take on a heavily spiced pork dish born of post-World War II necessity and now considered a delicacy in Berlin — though largely unknown outside Germany.

"These terms are completely misleading and unsettle consumers," Agriculture Minister Christian Schmidt told Germany's Bild daily.

"I favor them being banned in the interest of clear consumer labeling," he was quoted as saying.

Schmidt has already contacted the European Union's executive branch to discuss extending rules that govern the use of the terms "milk"



Daniel Karmann/dpa via AP

**A 'vegetarian Currywurst' is presented in Bamberg, Germany.**

and "cheese" to apply to meat as well, his spokesman said Wednesday.

"He considers names such as vegan curry sausage and so forth to be misleading to consumers," Jens Urban told reporters. "Clarity and truth, transparency for consumers, those are the measures that should apply for the labeling of all products, always and forever."

Asked whether the measures could also affect beef-steak tomatoes, Urban said that the ministry wasn't aware

of any "consumer confusion" about such products.

In the interview with Bild, Schmidt — a member of the conservative, Bavaria-based Christian Social Union — also reiterated a call for schools to serve pork. Asked whether it was right for them to leave pork off the menu out of consideration for Muslims, he said that "we should not restrict the choice for the majority of society for reasons of ease or cost."

He argued that growing cultural diversity should lead to more choice, not less.

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