

# Ball Jars Great IOWA Adventure!

By Bruce Wayne Schank

There seems to be so many coincidences that occur in one's life (mine especially) that at various times it makes one wonder if that's what they actually are? Are they really coincidences or could there be some external heavenly force manipulating everything happening in your life? Is there such a thing as "Jar Karma" or any karma at all for that matter?



I honestly can't say one way or the other but whatever it is or whatever we want to call it, I'm seemingly on some eternally fixed guided track that has taken me in the last three years to places I would never have dreamed of before it all started. Yessiree, I've been on one wild ride for over three years now and I'm hoping it doesn't stop anytime soon. If someone had told me this is what I was to expect in 2007, I would have laughed at them and said it wasn't possible, no way!

Way back in January 2008 I met a collector by the name of Chuck Erb. He happens to be from Iowa, and we exchanged friendly hellos, and I managed to pass through his room and spy his wonderful colored Globes, Lightning's and Ball Perfect Mason jars as anyone would during room hopping at the Winter Muncie jar show. By January 2009, I knew him much better, and by then knew he was the semi-famous *amberjars4erb* character I've seen in auctions

and the like. Another collector friend and I hung out quite a bit at that show with Chuck, and I remember we were deeply involved in splitting hairs concerning colors, and of course colors about Ball jars naturally.

At January 2010 Winter Muncie, Chuck and I really got to know each other even better. We actually partied together this time and engaged in many nights of laughing, frivolity and one particular night karaoke in Joe Coulson's and my room along with other friends at the Signature Inn. A blast I will not forget anytime soon I tell you. It started on Wednesday, and didn't stop until Sunday, and I was in rare form.

At Winter Muncie 2011 I naturally gravitated to Chuck's room. He shared it with Jon Black, formerly of Iowa, now residing in Oregon, and Bill Brown of Iowa, both great guys. I had a really good time doing the Muncie thing with them all. It was at that time I asked Chuck if I could visit with him in Iowa, do a story and see Iowa from an Iowan's point of view. I mentioned that I would swing over to visit with Jim O'Connor of Iowa City on the way back, and get his story too. Of course he said he'd be delighted if I came by anytime.



## Ball Corp - Danville, Illinois Plant



Well, I took him up on his offer this past February 2011. It would be a trip I was looking forward to plus it would be my first time driving through Illinois and actually being in Iowa. I called Chuck and Jim and made plans about a week and a half ahead of time. There was a nice break in the weather, and I was going to take advantage of it. Besides, I really have nothing else to do being unemployed, so exploring new frontiers and taking part in new experiences was logical to me, and something fun to do.

It was only three days after my calls to Chuck and Jim that I received an email from a guy about a rare "Ball" jar. All I can tell you simply is this; I receive a ton of email all of the time sounding the same, and it's always about dirt common fruit jars, so I really don't even bother looking or answering anymore. Plus, when it was about something decent, after I made a reasonable offer, the party would drop off of the face of the earth and never get back to me. It was obvious to me they used my quote as a professional opinion and marketed the merchandise elsewhere.

I'm not sure what made me take the time to actually look at the pictures sent with this particular email, but I decided to because he seemed so emphatic that he had a "rare" jar. I looked at the photos and couldn't believe my eyes. It was an amber quart Tudor Rose fruit jar in seemingly perfect condition. I emailed him back asking specifics, and he told me that he

found it in an attic of an old house he was working on along with 11 other quart jars. I asked about them and they turned out to be common Ball and CFJ jars. Not knowing anything about jars, and since it was with a bunch of other Ball jars, he naturally thought it was one too.

He said he was asking around for price quotes, and would I give him one if I was interested in the jar. I emailed him back my concerns how I never get whatever I give a dollar figures for and frown on it now. He insisted I make him an offer, so I specifically mentioned that if my offer was robust, I'd appreciate it if he'd sell the jar to me. Well, I made him what I felt was a very good strong offer, and I received an email back saying, "SOLD!!!!!!" The Adventure was on.



River Boat Casino on the Mississippi in Ft. Madison, Iowa

He emailed me his phone number, and immediately I noticed it looked familiar. His exchange was one that I remembered calling, and it turned out to be the same exchange as Jim O'Connor's. I was flabbergasted, and so we made arrangements. I would pick up the jar, because even though I had to drive somewhat out of my way, he was in Iowa, Keokuk to be exact, and I would go there to pick it up on my way to Chuck's.

First of all, my mind was racing about the unbelievable sheer coincidence of this happening, and happening right when I was going to Iowa the following week. By the way, Keokuk is just a short drive north of historic Fort Madison, Iowa right on the Mississippi. I was fascinated by the history I saw on my drive, and when I crossed the Illinois border from Indiana on I74 I spied a huge Ball building, so I stopped and took a photo with my cell phone. It wasn't until after the trip that I did a little investigating and found out it was the Danville, IL plant. Kewl to say the least, and an extra bonus I didn't expect.

I drove and drove and although monotonous it wasn't all that bad, because I was so



excited about getting the jar. I finally hooked up with him after 6 ½ hours on the road at the only antique mall in Keokuk. We exchanged cash for jar after I looked it over very carefully, and yes, it was perfect in every way. He was elated and so was I, because this was one of "The" Best 1858 fruit jars you could possibly find bar none. I mean I was used to

finding good Ball jars but an 1858, Wow! And, I already had a few buyers lined up. Fruit Jar Karma I suppose? Naw it couldn't possibly be, could it?

I called Chuck, and he asked about the jar, because he was very intrigued and surprised by my good fortune also, and he couldn't wait to see the jar himself. After all, he was *amberjars4erb*. His mindset is all about amber, and he has amber jars all over the place. I didn't arrive to Chuck's home until 6:45 P.M. that night after a three hour plus drive from the

original rendezvous, and I was tired but in great spirits. I showed him the jar, and he was all excited for me, and he really liked the jar too. We discussed the odds of all of this happening as they did.

The first thing I mentioned was that I had a gift for him. I brought with me a very nicely framed print entitled "The Good Things" by C. Don Ensor. Chuck was very appreciative, and said he knew a perfect place to put it. I asked



A section of Chuck's "Man Cave" and where he hung my picture, top right in the grouping of four.

Chuck naturally if I could see his

Typical road in southern Iowa near Amber Acres.

famous amber Globe jars, and all he could say was he didn't have any around. I looked at him kind of in disbelief, and asked if I could walk downstairs, because I didn't see any upstairs. In the basement there were a teaser amount of jars (2 to be exact), and that was it. He explained to me that all of his jars, antiques and other items were now over at "Amber Acres." I breathed a sigh of relief and focused on the food that was about to be served; Chuck's famous Iowa sausage balls, shredded potatoes and cheese casserole and a vegetable medley. I was hungry, the food was delicious, and I figured we could talk over supper about his jars and "Amber Acres."

As Chuck described his new place, which happens to be located in the middle of nowhere in central southern Iowa 17 miles north of the Missouri border, I really got excited about going there. It sounded so beautiful, wild and free. He showed me a DVD he made of the entire building process, and I was amazed at how wonderful it looked. He showed photos of the animals that have come onto his property



including wild turkey, gigantic white tailed deer, birds of every kind and bob cats. The place was a regular national geographic destination, and I couldn't wait to get there the next morning.

He then played a DVD he took of the very first Muncie Bottle Show in January 1999. It was so fascinating watching it and seeing how young everyone looked, including Jerry McCann, Phil Smith, Jeff Harper, Jim Sears, Norm Barnett and so many more people. The prices fetched for jars and odd lots at the auction were kind of surprising to me too for 1999. What a wonderful slice of history Chuck preserved for posterity sake. I have to give him credit for taking the time to do things like that, because not everyone wants to do that sort of thing. Yet without it those times would only be in people's memories. We went to bed because the morning would be coming early, and there were plenty of things to do, see and experience.

Chuck and I left early for Amber Acres and on the way he took me through the town he was born and grew up in, Garden Grove, Iowa. It was typical of so many very small out of the way



mid-western towns one sees on their way across many of the Plains States off of the main highways and by-ways with a few exceptions. The tiny outdoor jail in the town was quite remarkable, and I just had to get a photo of it. Many homes in the town were burned down, and others were run down. Chuck mentioned that the county we were in was the poorest in Iowa, and that he grew up poor.

A nice old Iron Bridge just down the road from Amber Acres.

We left Garden Grove and made a bee-line over to Amber Acres, and I studied the landscape and how open it was and how many of the roads were only dirt roads. I especially liked the iron bridge that was on the dirt road just a short distant from Amber Acres. It was just a short minute or so over the iron bridge when we arrived at our destination, and I was a bit overwhelmed by it all. What a place Chuck has and out in the middle of such a wonderful rustic area of the State. I was a bit envious to say the least, but I was really happy for him. I can't remember the last time I had been anywhere as remote as we were in Iowa. Ahhhh, Peace and tranquility for real...



comes up the yard to feed on the copious amounts of corn Chuck throws out in the back. While there we saw wild turkeys and many beautiful birds. Chuck showed me photos of deer so large that one side of the rack had 16 points. It was a bit unbelievable except, oops there were the photos. He even had a bob-cat on the property at one time, and what a beautiful animal and one in which I have never seen in the wild.



Back of the Amber Acres Homestead.

Amber Acres is pretty phenomenal in my humble opinion. The detail that Chuck and Gladys put into it all is clearly seen everywhere you look. They left nothing to chance, and I was impressed and even a bit overwhelmed by it all. I think anyone who has been there cannot help but come away astounded. The smartly styled home nestled on the edge of 14 ½ acres of prime Iowa real-estate is a huge 5,000 sq. ft. ranch built on a massive concrete foundation with radiant heat built right into it. Every detail concerning the home to the smallest nook and cranny was well thought out and a real sight to behold. The back of the home has a 108 foot deck going the entire length of the home. There is a small hill falling off to a stream behind the home and every animal that one can imagine

I was so enthralled by it all and enjoyed myself so much that life seemed for that far too short of a time period just a little slice of heaven. I was truly at peace there. Amber Acres also gave me a wonderful idea of what I can do on a much smaller scale of course one day after I leave central Indiana. It's nice where I live, but it doesn't come close to the serenity I experienced while there.



The Amber Acres Homestead.

Nicely colored jars over a window in the Man Cave



Chuck was very excited about showing me around the place and I was just as excited to see it all. I finally got to see Chuck's jars, and although he doesn't have a huge collection, what he does have is very nice and extremely desirable. I've never seen as many amber Globes in one place at one time before. Of course Chuck is a huge Globe fruit jar fan, and Amber is his thing. After all, his aka is **AmberJars4Erb**. So Amber Acres is the perfect name for his place. His "Man Cave" hide-away, a part of Amber Acres is truly incredible. I can only guess, but I figure it's approx. 1,800 sq. ft. It comes complete with a beautiful fireplace living room area, fantastic kitchen with large built-in LCD screen TV, a middle island in which to watch it, a retro 1950's dinner area and a scaled down but true to life movie theater that seats 8 people extremely comfortably. I could have easily been happy for the rest of my life just staying in the Man Cave section, and forgetting about the rest of the chaos in the world.



An incredible line-up of amber Globe pints Chuck let me assemble.

Super line-up of Globe pints.



As I looked over the place I of course mentioned there was empty shelf space and why no jars? He mentioned that area was reserved for Christmas, and I said, "That's too far away, let's put jars there now." So he pulled out a box full of amber pint Globes, and I unwrapped all of



them just like a bright eyed little kid. I stacked them up one after another on a shelf with a mirror behind them, and it looked so good I had to take a close-up of them all. On the opposite side of the room I put the remainder on a beautiful antique desk. Incredibly, Chuck had another container with just as many amber pints in it packed away for another future resting place.

Later that evening he grilled two fabulously tasty filet mignons wrapped in bacon that he had hand cut himself along with a baked potato. This was even more than I expected, and it would get even better as time went on as I would soon find out. Later we watched a great movie in the theater and then a 50's doo-wop concert DVD. I took time to smoke a cigar out back at one point and relish the woods and the quiet. I'm not sure what I did to deserve such fantastic treatment, but it was obvious to me that Chuck was one heck of a great host, and just a pretty super nice guy.

Bill Brown & Chuck Erb next to Bill's nicely colored jars.



Backtracking a bit here, but during the ride over to Amber Acres, Chuck also took me to Bill Brown's home which is also out in the middle of nowhere in south central Iowa. Bill owns 40 beautiful prime acres loaded with huge white tail deer too. He's a very avid bow hunter, and he definitely takes advantage of it all. He showed me sets of massive antlers he had found on his property. His wife Linda hunts too, and she had a beautiful albino stuffed coon in the basement that she had shot while out hunting on her own one day. Linda is obviously a tough little lady despite her small demure appearance.

I was very pleasantly surprised when Bill took me to his basement. He had two extremely long hallway shelves full of jars from the floor to the ceiling. No outrageously rare jars, but he did have some really nice crude, super colored and tough to find jars. I was soon to find out that this was only the tip of the ice-berg shall we say. He reminded me how at Muncie we spoke



Bill Brown's House of Glass.

about the fact he had some wooden boxes that he was interested in selling me. I said yes, "Where are they" so he promptly took me to his Jar Building. After he had his new home built on the property, he turned the smaller older home into a literal den of glass with fruit jars, bottles, boxes, antiques and other miscellaneous items. It's filled to the brim and overflowing and a truly amazing sight to behold. When I walked in I was overwhelmed with all of the stuff in there. I spied the boxes on a table, and we took a tour of the place. Before all was said and done, I



Every part of the House of Glass was like this.

bought every wooden box from him, and a few assorted Ball jars with very nice amber swirls and striations in them. I was very pleased about it all, actually elated, and it was yet another extra added bonus I didn't expect whatsoever.

While in Bill's home I saw a fabulous half gallon Ball Mason with great amber swirls throughout the jar and asked if he would sell it. The answer was no, but I offered what I felt was an extremely strong price for the jar. He was surprised, but I still didn't leave with it. Chuck and I left to go back to Amber Acres, and I was riding high! It didn't get any better than this nor did it?

The wonderful jars I went home with from Bill.



The next morning Chuck and I were having a cup of coffee and talking when the phone rang. It was Bill, and Chuck said he wanted to know if the offer I made for the half gallon yesterday was still good. I said, "Of course, but he would have to bring it over." Bill said, "I'll be there within the hour." He showed up with Linda and the jar, and they both hung out for awhile. Chuck made fresh shrimp with cocktail sauce, and we all had a good time talking and snacking. Did I mention already whether it could get any better? Well it did, and I thought about pinching myself to make sure this was real. Chuck also gifted me with a wonderful original piece of Ball history. A paper with an original signature of F.C. Ball, but it was from the Muncie Belt Railway Company and dated Oct 2 '95. I was elated to say the least.

Chuck and I then went to John Wayne's birth



Your humble author at the Duke's Home.

Most of the wooden Boxes I went home with.



place home as well as to the Roseman Bridge. A unique bridge built in 1883 that was filmed in the movie The Covered Bridges of Madison

County, and I really enjoyed seeing John Wayne's childhood home. I am a western movie buff, and he is one of my favorite western actors, plus we just happen to have the exact same birthday in common.



After hanging there for awhile taking photos, Chuck drove around the corner and low and behold there was a wonderful bronze statue of the Duke, which he didn't

remember being there. We took more photos there too, and one of my suggestions was for us to climb up and have our photos taken at the same level as the Duke, which Chuck had no problem accommodating me. You get an actual feel for the size of the statue when standing right next to it. That was a real sweet extra bonus for me.

Roseman Bridge built 1883.

Then we made a bee-line over to the covered bridge, and that was also very enjoyable and rewarding as well. What a spectacular piece of history, and the construction was just superb. I really love history, and I appreciate the old days even though I wasn't a part of it all. They just don't make bridges like that anymore, and that is a real shame. Everywhere, all over every available space on all of the wood, boards, you name it, people have signed their names, written poems, love letters and the like who have visited the bridge. I did not participate in that, but I suppose I should have. At one point I asked Chuck to act like a 12 year old and climb up on the beam, and he did of course, and I took a great photo of it. Hey, what's the use of living if you can't have fun?



everywhere, as well as oodles of very nice antiques. He's a very eclectic collector and has bottle openers, whiskeys, jars, beers, weather vanes and so much more. He has a small but incredible jar collection, and he is one of those off of the radar collectors. He also has about a dozen Ball jars, and everyone a dynamite colored jar. And he promised to put my name in them! He also took me to his son's home who too has fabulous jars. That just goes to show you that there are so many great jars out there in people's collections that hardly anyone knows about just waiting to be discovered. And I'm hoping to be the *Discoverer*. Both Chuck and Jim will be in a future Legends of the Jar Article with many more photos and exciting stories. I can hardly wait for the next adventure!

Chuck hamming it up.



Chuck and I eventually made our way back to his home in Carlisle, where we would spend the night and have a great pork roast supper before my leaving the next morning. I left Chuck's the next day, and made my way to Jim O'Connor's in Iowa City to get his story before heading the long way home to Indiana.

It took two hours of fast driving to get to Jim's home. He showed me around, and I was shocked at the fabulous fruit jars he owned. There were rare amber and green jars



A tiny sampling of Jim O'Connor's great colored jars.

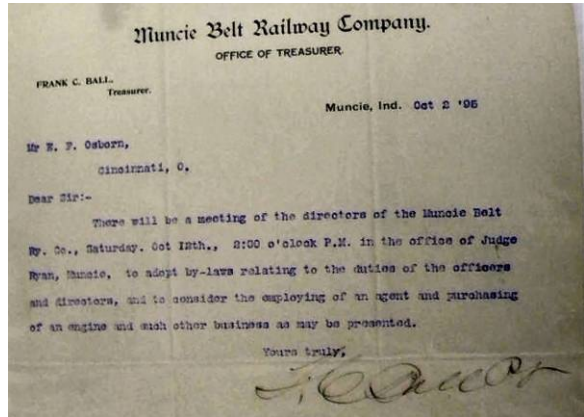
Yours truly with the Rare Amber Tudor Rose.



Amber Tudor Rose left compared to two Globe jars.



Wonderful historic paper Chuck gifted to me.



Some of Jim O'Connor's beautifully colored insulators.

A truly Exceptional Box I bought from Bill Brown.

