

# Mission Impossible? Accomplished!

By Bruce W. Schank

Well Folks:

Between May 22<sup>nd</sup> and June 12<sup>th</sup> 2011 I traveled nearly 2,000 miles from between Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, and Michigan. On my journey I stopped and visited with five different fruit jar people. I ended up driving back to Iowa and putting another 1,200 miles on the vehicle and that is the story here...

While at one stop in north-east Iowa, I spied an hg 234 that literally knocked my socks off. It was without a doubt the darkest example I had ever seen. Every since I have had a fascination and fixation on colored Ball jars, especially Ball MASON jars, Bob clay and I have talked extensively about whether dark HG's existed and if so where in the world are they. Let's face it, Bob at one time was THE King of Ball Jar color and I don't think anyone since then has come close. Considering the color he had in his collection and also considering all of the other major color out there (which I have seen) we both have

never encountered a truly dark 234 HG.

Well, I can report here and now that I finally found one example and it was in this out of the way, obscure collection one would hardly guess such an item would reside. And that just proves to me that if you look hard enough, you'll come across what you're looking for eventually. It just takes time, money, energy and simply doing to find the absolute rare and obscure. Since January of 2008, I have seen, touched and photographed a whole lot of rare, one-of-a-kind and incredible fruit jars and along with that many wonderfully colored Ball jars were among them. I found out early on that many fruit jar collectors who don't necessarily collect Ball jars have at least one or more and sometimes as many as a dozen extremely very good varying examples in their collections.



Ball water container

In these travels and visits I have been successful only a scarce few times at extracting a super jar from collectors but overall I have been shut out because most people just don't sell jars off of their shelves. Of course I was always given a promise of future chances when the time to let go came about but that IMO is kind of akin to when a girl tells you she just wants to be friends. In this instance however I was extremely lucky and fortunate to come away with IMHO, a rare colored HG 234 Ball MASON from this collection in Iowa.

When I started the second trip back to Iowa to get this Gem, I found on the side of the street approximately 3 miles or so from my home, a plastic Ball water container. One in which I have never seen before and although beat

up a little I felt confident upon picking that up it was a sign that my fruit jar karma was intact and still going strong. And I was right because on this same venture I also came across a very scarce aqua bead seal Rall MASON pint.

Ok, let me digress now a bit. While at this person's home in Iowa, I spied the HG in question. When I first saw the jar from behind I assumed it was an 1858. And yes that's because it's such a good color. After realizing what I was actually looking at was a 234 and the Real Deal, I was so excited it was hard to hold back my elation over the jar. Then the owner literally took the wind right out of my sails by saying the jar was one of his two favorite jars. My heart went down to my knees as I listened to him tell me how much it meant to him and

how after collecting for over 45 years it was a one-of-a-kind example because he has never seen or heard of another one. I too felt it was a superb and spectacular jar.

I did my usual thing when doing these stories...I acted as if I was not affected by all of the possessive jar talk. But between taking photos, getting story details and showing him photos of my jars on my cell phone, I must have mentioned dozens of times what a great jar it was indeed and how envious I was of him. Upon leaving I asked him (yes I'm not known for being shy and I'm not afraid to push the bubble) if he would be offended if I made an offer on the

jar. He said no go ahead so I threw out a figure.

Well, he looked at the jar then looked at me and did this two more times before looking back at the jar and without turning said he'd think about it. Oh my, the blood ran

out of my face and my heart went all the way to the floor this time and all I could think was I made way too low of an offer. Of course in my convoluted thinking and experience as well as according to my meager finances, what I offered seemed reasonable enough but obviously to him it was not enough for me to bring home the prize.

So as I trudged up the basement steps and I mean it trudge because each step felt as if my feet weighed a ton. I was down in the dumps like I had just lost a crucial playoff game (and of course who ever

remembers those who lose the Super Bowl, right?) All I could think to myself was, "Dang, what a lost opportunity and oh well, you did the best you could and after all, I can't own them all." As my mind raced about the jar, options, (hmmm, there were none) what I did wrong in life and why I didn't have more money etc., he says to me, "Bruce, you know those two Ladies Favorites I own?" So I say "Yes," and he says, "If you can find stopples for them, I'll sell you the jar."

Well, at that very moment it was if a million pounds had been lifted off of my shoulders. The clouds parted, the sun was shining and it was a new day and everything was now



Scarce aqua bead seal Rall Mason

ok in Brucie-land. And then cold hard reality hit me once again like a dead fish in the face. What in the world were the odds that I could find both a 2" and a 2 ¾" Willoughby stopple? Both of which are rare sizes of course and that just happen to be non-existent if not downright impossible to find. Yes, I'd say it was more like a zillion to one odds of locating those babies.

But after careful consideration I wasn't going to let this fact bring me down. He had opened the door even if it was only a crack I was going to get my foot in there and then the rest of my body and I'd find them by hook or crook because I wanted that jar more than anything else in the world at that point in time. I would not be denied. I couldn't let this one and only opportunity pass me by.

I started to drive away and I made numerous calls far and wide across the country. I beat those bushes while driving to Doug Leybourne's home. I had tons of time to kill (approx., 8 ½ hours) while driving and I was going to overturn every rock I could think of. I arrived at Doug's without success and eventually in our visit discovered Doug had the closures. Ooh La La I had hit pay dirt so I thought until Doug told me he wouldn't sell them because they came from Alex Kerr and he owned them for the memories. I was having such a nice visit with Doug and that I decided to worry about the closures after I left his home.

And when I was headed back to Indiana I went to work again scouring the collecting community for the seemingly impossible. I suppose if this had been prior to July 2007 when all of this fruit jar color madness actually took hold of me it would have been a different story. I didn't have near the name recognition then and I didn't have the powerful contacts in the hobby. I was alone and adrift in the fruit jar world. I was as good as on a desert island without a boat

or paddle. Yet now (today) was a different story. I'm a known personality due to my stories and depending on the circle I was going to pull the right strings to get things done and I was going to exercise every option I had within the inner circle.

And then it happened, the call that changed everything. I had finally struck pay dirt. I found a

collector who just happened to have both sizes of these impossible to find stopples. We spoke at lengths and he told me plainly that he doesn't sell those sorts of closures simply because when you find jars in the wild, 9 times out of 10 they don't have the closure and the closure is 60% or more the value of the jar. I explained to him at length the story of the incredible dark 234 hg and how without those stopples I would never own it.

And then the miracle happened...he told me that for me he would do it. He actually wanted me to attain that jar and knew how important it was for me to have it in the collection next to my other dark jars. Of



Rare Willoughby stopper variant.

Your humble Author holding the "Grail."

course I was ecstatic to say the least and on cloud nine. Naturally, the stopples came at a hefty price and I had but one more call to make in order for this seemingly "Mission Impossible" task to have a happy and meaningful conclusion. That was the acceptance by the owner of the 234 to buy those stopples at the price offered.

I called him and he was literally shocked as rightly he should have been. After all, under the circumstances the odds were against me and we both knew it. I suppose he imagined a call from me maybe six months to a year down the road in which I had a bead on possibly one of them. Who in their right mind would ever imagine I would be calling in just one day to say mission accomplished?

As I talked with him and told him what the closures would cost he seemed amicable enough to get them (Halleluia!) but he said to me, "Bruce, you know darn well that the jar is worth a hell of a lot more than what you offered me but a deal is a deal." What can I say folks, I stepped in it. My Jar Karma is alive and



well and I'm reaping the benefits. Go figure.

So I'm trying to work out details with him to have the stopples shipped and when he received them he would ship the jar and then he completely blows my mind. He simply tells me he won't ship the jar. He didn't want to even think of it getting damaged. I would have to pick it up. And by the way, while I'm on my way, pick up the stopples and deliver them to him too. I can honestly tell you that I earned this jar because I did. I was able to get the stopples and I drove

500 miles from my doorstep to deliver them and pick up the jar.

When I arrived he and his wife were very cordial and they had dinner waiting for me. It was delicious and in fact the first time I have ever tasted Long Horn steer.

Something I will have to try again for sure. While there he mentioned at least four times that I was getting the jar from him cheap. ;o) and all I could do was look at him and say, "Mission Accomplished, I earned it." When I finally left with jar in hand I was exhilarated and relieved all at the same time. I had traveled long and hard and done what quite simply was a seemingly impossible task. In the end he told me that he would have never sold that jar to anyone other than me. :o)

All I can say is 'Jar Karma' keep me going because I have more adventures to experience and great jars to acquire.



Rare colored Half Gallon Balll Mason