

LEGENDS OF THE JAR!

[Editor's Note: This article is a result of long time collector and author Bruce W. Schank reaching out to long time collector Jeff Harper.]

I became familiar with Jeff soon after I became a member of the Fruit-Jar discussion Group on Yahoo in Feb 2003. Eventually I realized that he was quite the serious collector and had already amassed a considerable Ball Jar collection. We interacted via email and eventually I ended up selling and trading with him. Finally in Jan 2008 I met both him and his lovely wife Mary at the Muncie show.

Jeff was born in 1952 in Muncie Indiana and was raised there also. He went to Brown University in Providence Rhode Island. Jeff is a Senior Implementation Specialist for a company based out of Pittsburgh, PA which is a subsidiary of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center that writes software for community mental



health centers. His main duties are to help new customers get up and running, do data-base conversions and any customization that might be required.

After college Jeff went around to antique stores and by the time he and Mary wed he already had about 12 jars. He was also getting samples



because he was a Ball share holder and he received the stock as a gift from his mother who had received the stock from her father, all Ball family related. So Jeff is a Ball Corp shareholder.

While growing up and when he was about 8 or 9 years old, Jeff was responsible for watching over and watering the cucumber patch. The family would make pickles and can them and in Ball fruit jars of course. Yes, Jeff sure enjoyed eating those bread & butter pickles made from

the cucumbers he had grown and nurtured and best of all lovingly canned in plain ordinary Ball fruit jars.

Jeff's Great-Grandfather incredibly just happened to be F.C. Ball. You know, one of the founding Ball Brothers of the Ball Corp famous for fruit jars around the world. F.C. Ball served as the first company president, and remained in that capacity for 63 years. F.C. Ball had five children one of whom was Margaret which was Jeff's Grandmother and whom was his mother's mother. So F.C. Ball was actually his maternal, maternal great-grandfather. Neither Jeff nor his parents ever worked for Ball Corp but his grandparents did. His grandfather, Fred Petty was in charge of all of Ball "packer" jar product line and later became the comptroller of the



company until he died of a heart attack at age 51. His grandmother was a Director for 30 – 40 years for Ball Brothers later Ball Corp. and eventually retired when she turned 70.

Mary claims credit for actually applying the spark in order to get Jeff into collecting and then trying to get one of every Ball jar made (not a simple feat mind you.) She used the logic of his incredible lineage as a contributing factor as well as the fact he already had some pretty ball jars in his possession. Jeff thought that made good enough sense and pursued it. About 20 years ago Mary found a flyer from Dick Roller advertising the Standard Fruit Jar Reference. So for Christmas that year she bought it as a gift for him. Jeff's copy just happens to be exactly as





mine; one of six copies made from what was left over bug infested material and not a hard cover original. So upon getting it Jeff noticed how many Ball jars there were and so he started looking in earnest for them.

At around that same time he began going to Shows and attended one of the

last Indy Shows in which he claims the weather was pretty darn bad. When Jeff's daughter Katie was graduating High School and looking for a college he ingeniously combined weekends in which they visited colleges she was interested in on weekends in which bottle shows were going on at the same time. When they went to Bucknell University he went to the York Show which just so happened to be the first time he spent more than \$250 for a single jar (a PAT' APLD' FOR quart with rusty but original lid and metal closure.)

When they went to Vanderbilt he was able to attend the National in Nashville, TN. He remembers how fortunate it turned out that he was able to do both at the same time and how it all worked out so perfectly. It was at this 1996 National



when he acquired the first of his Porcelain Lined BBGMCo jars.

One of Mary's best jar finds was when she went into her favorite resale consignment shop called the Guild Shop. About 20 years ago while visiting there she found a nice little blue ½ pint teen series BPM for the sweet little price of \$4.50 which even back then was dirt cheap. :0)



Jeff remembers finding a very scarce desirable Ball jar once through an ad he placed in the Antique Bottle & Glass Collector. According to him, your dues to the FOHBC covered a couple of 50/60 word free ads and he always put in an ad for rare Ball Jars. Approximately 8 or 9 years ago he received a response to his ad by someone from Buffalo. The guy told Jeff that he

had this jar that said Ball Fruit Jar on it and he also knew the jar listed at 3k in the RB which was #7 at the time. He had a daughter who lived in Katy, TX which was 40 miles away and mentioned if Jeff was interested he would send it to her and he could take a look at it. The guy wanted 3.3k for it which was a strong price and Jeff remembers someone at a Muncie show at that time telling him he should be able



to find an example for 2.5k which of course never happened. So Jeff and Mary went and looked at it, liked what they saw and bought it.

At another time in response to his ad he was approached by someone who had a clear Qt La Abeja (which translates to "The Bee") which Jeff bought and is now extremely happy to own that jar. Two examples of this jar are known to exist. It seems Jeff's ad brought him more than a few good jars because he was able to acquire a yellow green pint bead seal Ball THE Mason from his ad too. Looks like these finds are proof positive that advertising pays off and in a big way sometimes.



For people who enjoy collecting Ball jars no matter what type inexpensive to the most expensive they may be, Jeff has a very nice thorough collection that only a relatively few people can rival. He has some of the rarest Ball jars known in the hobby as well as many "seemingly" common jars that just can't be

found or seen in the average person's collection. He enjoys collecting certain genre's and goes to extremes such as having a seven (7) jar Ball Standard set in which the embossing progressively goes from higher to lower on the jar all the way towards the heel. Although his ultimate goal is to have an example of every known ball jar listed in the Red Book or for that matter not listed as well, he doesn't necessarily want nor desire complete sets of the same jar. Jeff has approximately 600-650 jars on display in his home in just about every room and wherever you can put a shelf or set a jar. He also has an extensive and wonderful box collection as well as a phenomenal amount of go-withs of many hard to find and highly sought after ball related items including oodles of Ball paper stuffs such as Blue Books, Posters, photos and more. His lid collection is possibly the largest I have ever seen and superb in every respect. And what he has in a special display that he built himself are only part of them because he has many more on jars scattered throughout his home that are in the collection.





with all of the jars being there. Well before you know it that was a done deal and Jeff jokingly told me he would possibly now have to go after more colored jars considering he'll have so much more room to display them properly. Oops as I swallowed hard, I have a big mouth... :0)

He has over 700+ jars in boxes in his garage and with the completion of their fantastic, absolutely beautiful and massive log cabin lake home they now have plenty of room to eventually display their entire collection. Jeff told me doesn't personally put a premium on color thus he doesn't have a tremendous amount of color in the collection overall but what he does have is extremely nice indeed.

On day two of my visit with Jeff and Mary they drove me to their lake home and I must say I was floored to say the least. What a spectacular vacation home it is and I just loved it. A contractor showed up to give a quote for some work. Before long he was also quoting new shelving for the walls so I piped in about how nice it would be for them to have shelves built into the casing of some really large extra long front windows on the second floor. I mentioned something of the nature of a "stained" glass look

My weekend visit with Jeff and Mary was a dual purpose because I not only wanted to get this story but I also did a cash trade with Jeff. I'm not sure how it came about but Jeff knew I owned an RB #195. That is a jar quite literally at the top of his most wanted list and he has been pursuing it for quite some time now. So I flew to Houston with jar in hand. Normally I wouldn't have let go of a jar of that magnitude but tough economic times dictated other-wise and I was glad that the jar went to a very good new home and a real ancestor of the family who made it approximately 125 years ago in Buffalo, NY.





Jeff would say to new collectors to buy what you like which is what a lot of long time collectors would say as well but he would also add to that don't regret it if your tastes change. You bought what you liked at the time and if you're not interested in it now you can always sell it or store it. When you buy certain jars and the book says \$5, \$10, \$20 but all you can get them for is double then that's what they're worth no matter what the book quotes. Jeff has over the years acquired a goodly portion of his jars from eBay but he says you have to make a decision based on what you're paying for the jar including shipping which adds a considerable amount of money to a cheaper jar. EBay obviously is a good place to find jars if you can't travel but there in many instances you will pay more for a jar on that forum then if you found it



on a shelf or at a show. But for those who only have that option then that is the way to go.

Jeff's biggest surprise is the sky rocketing upward value of colored jars in general. Colored jars that sold nine or ten years ago are probably 4 or 5 times the value now and rising. Other jars have not risen to those levels. Of course rare jars are a totally different animal and they rise in value due to their rarity and desirability period. He doesn't understand why but the number revamping and additions Doug accomplished from RB7 to RB8 changed things on the Ball front. Jeff credits Doug with making Ball Jars more interesting to many people because they perceived the amount of time he spent on the revamp as proof Ball jars were worth collecting. Ball jars are currently highly sought after by many newer collectors.



If Jeff has any regrets it would be that he hasn't bid high enough on many items he really wanted over the years. He's lost out on a lot of good pieces because someone else put a higher value on them than he did but in recent years that has changed dramatically. He has really jumped head long into the bidding wars with the goal to win on good stuff and whoever bids against him has real competition to deal with indeed.



As a Ball jar collector myself, I was quite pleased to be with Jeff and share stories and see all of the incredible items he has amassed over the years. I personally do not have the room, means or desire to collect the amount of items Jeff has amassed already. His eventual pursuit will put him most likely in the 1600+ category not including go-withs. It's a safe bet with the

collections and collectors currently opting out that it won't be long till Jeff is "The Premier Ball Jar Collector" in the country and deservedly so. Suffice it to say, it would take a lot longer than a weekend visit to get a better grasp of everything in Jeff's collection. I really got a kick out of the cobalt Ball Perfake Mason made by Jim Del Grado.



God has truly blessed both Jeff and Mary and rightly so. It's evident in everything they have, do, think and project about their lives. They are without a doubt very warm, friendly and extremely giving people. The kind of people that anyone would be honored to associate with and have as friends. They are fantastic hosts and are reaping the hard work they have accomplished all of their lives and living life to its fullest. I was treated so well by them that I actually felt a bit guilty about it all. I didn't expect it and I tried to refuse it but they insisted on giving me a large dose of warm Texas hospitality and they succeeded in the biggest way. And isn't everything about Texas supposed to be larger than life anyway?

Jeff and Mary have given me an open invitation to come back again and next time with my better half. I will most undoubtedly take them up on their offer.

