

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 Paul Shoecraft.]

Paul was born July 24, 1940 in Indianapolis, IN. He has a PHD in Mathematics Education from Michigan University. He developed an elementary school math program (Move it Math) that he hopes will add to his finances now that he's retired. Anyone interested can go to <http://moveitmaththesource.com/> and check it out. You never know, you just might find out (at least in math) that you're not as smart as 5th graders after all.



Paul became interested in fruit jars approximately 35 years ago. What happened was Paul's mother took him to an old dump where they lived in Globe Arizona and he discovered "purple" glass. The dump was closed in 1925 and had never been dug and the mineral deposits are so good in AZ that many of the jars were beautifully opalescent. But what

really caught his eye were SCA jars and the Arizona sun sure made them turn really dark and in an incredibly fast time period.

Up until 2003 He was just a regular collector like anyone else he supposes but when he discovered eBay it was like going to a jar show every night for him. He had the discretionary



Paul says...Go Blue!

funds at the time so he bought big and man did he go hog wild after jars. He ended up giving himself a birthday present on a daily basis. Every day for years he can remember a delivery man was knocking on his door with boxes and even more boxes. It's a safe bet to say that he ended up getting a tad carried away too because before his eBay buying spree he had a so-called paltry 700/800 jars in the collection. Incredibly when the dust settled from his buying binge he had over 5,000 jars! Now, you might say OMG, what in the world was he buying anyway but Paul says he was simply buying "pretty jars." If it had character, color, was scarce or rare, he had the knowledge to know what was what so he went after it. He was astounded at the types of jars he could buy for \$10 or \$20 a piece and best of all, he didn't have to drive 500 miles to find them.

Incidentally, Paul spent two years Down Under as a teacher at Church lands College in Perth, Western Australia. A funny thing happened though while he was sitting around in Sugarland, TX many years ago; he actually got lonely for the Never Never. It was that feeling of longing for the old Billabong, the Out-Back;



Rare improved closure MFJ jar

Bushies and the sounds of the cockies that one day convinced him that he ought to buy a jar from Down Under. When he received the first jar it hit him in just the right way. The jars were just so very different from American fruit jars. The glass was thicker, the sides much straighter, the shoulders wider and tended to be more crude than American jars. What also caught his eye was the depth of purple in the Aussie jars and just how darn deep they tended to be in that color. Of course the thickness of the glass is what actually tends to make the jars that eye popping dark sun colored amethyst purple (sca) and is surely something Paul had

to have and many other collectors out there want as well too.



Paul believes the woman must have been a lot stronger and tougher Down Under because IHO you had to be a hefty lady to lug those larger jars around and work with them on a daily basis.

In his quest to get the Best of the Best Paul fortunately made some Aussie jar friends who started picking up jars for him. He ended up buying a lot of jars directly from them and managed to get some terrific buys in the long run. Kind of reminds me of the popular expression; “being in the inner circle, priceless!” He also managed to get in on a really good auction in which someone was selling out their collection. In that auction alone he managed to get some super nice jars, i.e., dual lined Atlas Mason, Unicorn and Commonwealth which happens to be the only one known made by the Vance Roth Company.

Paul is considered an expert on Australian jars most notably by many of those very people who live and collect fruit jars in Australia. He’s terribly flattered that collectors from Down Under contact him all of the time asking questions about different jars and looking for info on whether certain jars are rare, scarce or common. And although people look to him and consider him a source of expertise in regards to Australian jars, Paul claims the real Australian fruit jar expert is an Aussie by the name of Wayne Harris who started collecting decades ago.

Rare Antifermentine fruit jar



Rare dual-lined Commonwealth jar

Paul claims Wayne has pints that are almost non-existent in Aussie jars.

According to Paul he considers the rarest Aussie jar as the dual-lined Commonwealth jar. Other very rare Aussie jars are the Antifermentine, the Improved closure Mason’s MFJ Patent Nov 30th 1858, the Mason’s VR Improved and another one-of-a-kind with Mason’s Improved embossed only on the jar.

Paul told me his best fruit jar deals came from a local Texan named Clarence who bought most of his jars in the 40’s &

50’s for next to nothing. He bought an 1858 that was almost black with amber swirls in it for \$120 that later on sold for \$1k and a couple of Crowley town lids for \$5 a piece in great shape which later on sold for \$400/500 a piece. He ended up with just astounding things and he didn’t even know he was getting a good deal on them. Back then in his mind he believed he was paying more than reasonable prices for everything.

Yet Paul still feels eBay changed everything and that there’s been a heck of a trade-off between that forum and Bottle Shows. He used to love

the Bottle Shows but now feels they have changed at least in the West from the old days. They just don't seem to be as much fun anymore and there are a lot less people than there used to be going to them. He believes most of the dealing takes place the night before the Show behind the scenes by the Sellers and just isn't right in his thinking. On the other hand with eBay you can go to a new jar show every night and he finds that amazing and best of all, everyone has a shot at the jar.

Paul does his own jar cleaning and he has cleaned approximately 500 jars to date. Unfortunately out of that large of a number a relatively small amount has bitten the dust and it pains him to even think of them. He explained to me that he has shut those jars out of his mind because it's too painful. Although he's only broken but a few \$100 jars he also hasn't seen others to replace them since. Sadly a few good jars are now



Rare improved closure VR Improved jar

history because cleaning a jar in and of itself is a risk every time it is done.

I asked Paul inquisitively why he was now selling off so many of his great jars and it turns out that after 30 years of marriage he went through a brutal divorce in 2004. Suffice it to say he said at one time he had a lot of money but that isn't the case now. The bottom line is he's selling off really great and good jars simply for cash flow purposes in an attempt to maintain the lifestyle he is accustomed to.

Actually Paul is selling his jars now with the mental understanding

that an older part of his life has passed away and a new part of his life has now begun for him. He's definitely not going to sell all of his jars and intends to remain semi-active in the hobby and be able to look at, touch and admire fruit jars for a long time. Of course with a relative fewer amount of jars grant you but fruit jars none-the-less that will remain a part of

his life. Paul claims he no longer has the attachment to jars as he once had and is selling jars he swore he would never part with and would be with him for a life time. And it doesn't seem to hurt as much as he thought it would because once the first one leaves, the next one and those thereafter are that much easier to part with. Some of us and again including this humble author can attest to the fact that once fruit jars are in your makeup it's something we can never kill or remove completely



from our being no matter how hard we try. We might be able to squelch it to a point but not for very long. It always seems to have some grip on us that will last a life time. Fruit jars will always be an integral part of what we are, how we think and what we do.

In a strange twist of sorts Paul feels extremely good that many of the rare, scarce, uncommon and hard to find Aussie jars he prized are now being repatriated back Down Under and to good homes. Some Aussies were complaining that Americans were buying all of their jars. In fact, he told me that New Zealand will not even allow fruit jars to be sold out of the country now. He happens to have one of the finest NZ collections around (on par with his Aussie jars)



and case in point is his jars are the only ones showing up for sale right now. Yet he laments the fact that there's no real knowledge of the true scarcity and historical significance of them and because of that fact they don't garner a lot of money despite many of them being almost impossible to find.

Paul's advice to newer collectors is simply to "follow your heart." Go ahead and make a "rainbow" of jars on your shelf if that's what tickles your fancy.

In talking with Paul I came away realizing that although he's a complicated person in many respects, he's also just a simple guy who like many of us other collectors jumped head long into the hobby and never looked back. Paul read at one time that there is a direct positive correlation between intellect and collecting something no matter what it is. So maybe in retrospect I can truthfully say it's within all probability that us fruit jar folk are definitely smarter than a five year old after all.



Paul's homemade purpling box during a rare snowfall in the Houston, TX area during Christmas 2004