

# Remembering a Friend

By Bruce Shank

Have you ever regretted anything in your life and the regret centered on what you didn't do, what you could have done and why you didn't do it? I don't know about the rest of you but I'm guilty of that kind of regret. You might ask what this is all about anyway. Well, this is simply about me dropping the ball and failing to stay in touch with someone I considered a very close friend at one time. The regret is due to the fact I can't make it right because that special person is now gone.

How many times have we heard people say, if you can count on one hand how many true friends you have then you're a rich person indeed? Well, honestly I can say I have that with all sincerity right now in my life but what about those true friends you lost contact with? Can we ever really stop remembering them? Does the passage of time erase the conversations, letters and communications we had with those people? Only if you decide it should. This one thing has been nagging me for what seems like an eternity. Why did I allow myself to drop off the face of the earth and lose contact with all of those I considered a good friend so many years ago?

Ok, so I had many excuses such as I was going through an ugly marriage and brutal divorce at the time and the Ex was so bad she made it practically impossible to do anything let alone continue life as it had been prior to all hell breaking loose. I was broke mentally, physically and financially and I had no way of keeping in contact with others let alone take care of myself. I was ashamed at how badly I had failed in life and I didn't want to be a burden on those around me. And lastly, I convinced myself that "nobody knows you when you're down and out." Which by the way is a lie of sorts because there's always someone who knows and someone who cares?

Yes, sad but true I lived for years in isolation afterwards with a so-called clear conscience but there's an old saying; "a clear conscience is often the result of a poor memory." Let's face it though, I eventually found it hard to look in the mirror and continue convincing myself in all honesty that I could pin my reclusiveness and complete silence on anything other than me. The truth unfortunately was I alone chose to run from openness and into obscurity. I chose the path that led to complete communication breakdown with all of my



**Granny Kath's Kitchen**

family and friends.

Ok, many of you reading this article so far are probably thinking yet again to themselves, what in the blippy-blip does this have to do with "fruit jars. Well, I'll tell you plainly that it has everything to do with fruit jars and the hobby too because the person I've been lamenting losing contact with was none other than the late great Vivian "Granny" Kath. I had a very close relationship with her from between late 1988 through late 1993, until as I mentioned, I fell off the face of the earth and lost all contact with everyone I knew and cared about including poor Vivian.

I was going through literally hell on a daily basis with my ex-wife and it all finally ended in a brutal divorce in February 1999. When the dust finally settled and I became focused on fruit jars and people once again in early 2000, I began trying to make contact with long lost friends and acquaintances. It wasn't until Feb of 2003 though that I found the Fruit Jar Group on Yahoo. I joined and to my delight found a few of my old friends already situated there but it was also at that time I discovered to my complete disheartenment the sad fact that my old and dear friend Vivian "Granny" Kath had passed away in 1999. I was devastated to say the least and that news has somehow haunted me to this very day. And in writing this it all finally ends here and now.

I only knew Vivian "Granny" Kath through the written word and by phone. To all of you modern gadget people in the audience (and I'm a proud member of that group too) you'd be surprised how the written word on paper has the tendency to mean a whole lot more than a casual txt message or email. It literally took time and a bit of real caring to sit down and either write or type out a long letter to a friend in those days but once done and read over and over again it stayed more indelibly into your being. Although Vivian and I never met in person, we knew each other as if we in fact had. Back in those days there was no Internet and long distance phone calls cost a premium. Yet I wrote her often and bombarded her constantly with questions and jar finds. We wrote back and forth to each other consistently on a monthly basis. I even broke down eventually and called her at least once a month, typically on



**"Ball jars were  
Vivian's specialty"**



**Antique Bottle and Glass Collector**

a Saturday despite the high phone rates so it could be a bit more personal once in awhile.

I remember talking with Vivian over the phone one day and her telling me that my incredible enthusiasm for jars as well as my zest for knowledge had caused her to have a sort of personal rebirth in the hobby. And if anyone knew her sense of humor, she made sure to mention how I had now upset the apple cart in regards to her budget. We became quite good friends and sold and traded jars with each other

on a regular basis as well as sharing valuable info and just plain ole good laughs.

I still have every letter she ever sent me as well as every jar and go-with that was graciously given to me as a gift or trader. Whenever I look at those things I am transported to a much simpler, slower and somewhat happier time and I can almost hear her raspy voice. I used to send out jar lists in the mail back then and as a matter of fact, that's really how it was done in those days. It was either that or a magazine. Well, Vivian at one time bought a goodly amount of whatever was left on one of my lists. She owed me \$100 but I didn't give a hoot because money has never meant that much to me when it came to a friend. One day though to my sheer amazement and complete surprise and out of the blue, a package arrived at the house. In it was the most beautiful quart amber Ball Perfect Mason I had ever seen at that point. And of course it was a color I didn't have either and wanted very badly. I'll never forget how in her letter accompanying the package she mentioned this was to make up for what was owed me and that she just plain didn't have the money. What struck me funny was how



John C. Fountain, Bottle News consulting editor, stands beside "Granny" Kath at the Federation Expo held in St. Louis.

she mentioned that the jar had no olive in it at least from what she could see and that it was a true amber example she hoped and in fact it was indeed. I was elated of course and that jar still sits on my shelf alongside all of my other colored BPM's.

Over the years Vivian sent me a few gifts including a Ball logo patch, an I Love fruit Jars badge, a light blue shoulder seal pint Ball the Mason, an unusual white wide mouth lid (glass holder) and two blue Ball logo mugs on one Christmas. I still have every one of those items she sent to me and it's never even crossed my mind to part with them for any reason. But the one real surprise she sent me was the complete Volume 1, #2 thru Volume 3, #2 of the AB&GC minus Volume 1, #1. I still have those magazines too and every one of them has her name and address on the mailing label. And it was typical of Vivian how she played it all down by saying how bad she felt that she couldn't locate Issue #1. And all of that came about simply because in a general conversation with her on one Saturday I mentioned I was missing the earlier years of the magazine.



**"Gifts author received from Vivian "Granny" Kath",**

Vivian was a wonderful, full of life, giving and gracious human being who I have never forgotten. She actually was my inspiration to share more with the hobby by revealing finds. I wish I could go back and change 1994 - 1999 in particular but that isn't possible. There's a valuable lesson to be learned here folks and I know I have learned it. Don't ever forget what

really matters in life are God, Family and Friends so keep them close to your heart. I'm now making the remorse work out for the positive after all these years. It was because of "Vivian's" passing that I came up with the idea of doing a series of articles about long time collectors. Then other long time collectors started to pass from the scene too which made it even more urgent for me to get things done. Suffice it to say, Vivian was the true inspiration for my new series of articles entitled "Legends of the Jar" now being published nationally.

I'm reminded how fleeting life truly is and how eventually we too will all pass from this wonderful life. So with that in mind, be the Best friend you possibly can to each and every friend you have? Go and make new friends and acquaintances especially with the old timers? If you do that you will learn a lot. Get out to as many Shows as possible and mingle with people. Don't ever let your silence be deafening and even when you think you have no more to give, when a true friend cries out to you, somehow find the strength to help them.