

LEGENDS OF THE JAR

By Bruce Schank

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

I'm not sure how it came about that I was given the incredible opportunity to go over to Dan & Judy Corker's home to view their collection but I am thanking my lucky fruit star jar that I did.

I've heard stories about Dan's collection and I saw some of his fantastic jars on display at the August 2008 York National Expo but I was in no way prepared for what was awaiting me when I finally entered the beautiful, modern and elegantly laid out Corker home.

Their home is arrayed with the most fantastic collection of advertising tins and many with the original frames. In every nook and cranny in the house there is something historical to look at and behold including the bathrooms but there is nothing pell-mell about this home whatsoever because everything, yes everything is just so neat, tidy and perfectly in its place. Yep, just a treasure trove of one wonderful historical piece



after another and another and that doesn't even include the fruit jars.

I was like a giddy little kid having just traveled in a time machine to some fantastic destination. Dan has what I would call a fruit jar hall of fame in which two sides of a large room has custom backlit shelves full of incredible

arrays of historical fruit jars on one side and on the other side the most spectacular colored midget collection I have ever seen in my life. And then to top it off, there's another shelf caddy cornered to the other two with yet more spectacular stuff. All of the historic jars are in alpha numeric order and the vast majority of them have rare original closures.

Dan was born in Richmond, VA in 1945 and was raised in the Richmond area. All Dan can tell me was that he is a survivor of the "School of Hard Knocks." Dan and Judy moved to their current location in Mechanicsville around 1985 and have remained there since. Dan designed the home they currently live in and he did a fabulous job. Dan became interested in fruit jars a little over thirty years ago. His uncle died and he went to an auction at the home. They bought a bunch of jars there because Judy wanted them for canisters. When they brought them home and set them up on the counter Dan told Judy, "We can't use these jars for canisters because they're all embossed differently." That was the initial trigger of what is now a never ending journey for Dan.





Dan also had some friends who bought a house that was built in 1720. They had a root cellar that was full of jars and Dan and Judy went there to help them clean out the house and the root cellar. They had a book on fruit jars which just happened to be "Fruit Jars: A Collectors Manual by Julian Harrison Toulouse." So he borrowed that book and read it. He ended up keeping some of the jars from the root cellar and the fascination for collecting fruit jars became even more intense.



Dan remembered doing a Syracuse N.Y. Show around the year 2000 when it snowed in April. When he went for setup on Sunday morning, a nice little wooden horse caught his eye. Judy just happens to collect children's toys so Dan went



over to look at it but there was no price on the item yet. So he made his rounds around the hall looking for other stuff and he probably went back to that table five or six times. The last time he went back the dealer finally had a price of \$60.00 on it. The dealer was still setting up his table and as Dan looked back and



around to one side of the table he saw this little Hero jar. Well, he couldn't believe what he saw and did a double take on it. So he went and looked at it and thought the price said \$800.00 but when looking closer, \$80.00 was actually on the sticker. At that price he figured it must be damaged or something so he took the lid off and looked it over very carefully



but the jar was perfect. "Hmmm, he thought for a minute; what should I do, I'm a dealer doing setup so do I ask the other dealer if he can do better?" Yep, he did just that; he asked the dealer if he could do better on the jar and the dealer said, "That's a nice little jar, I'd have to get \$70.00 for it." Naturally Dan bought it and went over to his table and started looking through the Red Book to see if the jar was listed. It wasn't listed so at that point he knew he had a pretty good buy. As he was talking to someone at his table he realized he forgot all about the wooden horse that started this whole incident in the first place and had to go back to get it. He asked the dealer what was the best he'd do and the dealer said \$35.00 so he was able to get that too for a good price as well.

In another story Dan remembers getting his ¼ pint THE GEM at the York Show some 18 or 20 years ago. On the way up to York it was raining around





D.C. and some lady flew by them and spun out causing a five car pileup. He happened to be the last car involved in the accident and asked the officer if he could leave because he only had a split in

his bumper insert and didn't want any money for it. The officer told him he had to stay until the report was done. That took approx., 1 hour before they were on their way again to York. Upon arriving at York, Jim Mitchell grabbed Dan and told him he better get over there because someone was selling a bunch of fruit jars. As Dan looked, it was four deep at the table and when he got into position to see he realized just about everything was gone. He thought to himself, "dang that accident cost me a lot."

It was just about that time that the lady dealer at the table showed Bob Rhineberger a ½ pint Woodbury Improved. Bob was looking at it and Dan saw him take the lid off of the jar and how it had a "mule bite" out of the lip. Bob put the lid back on and Dan asked if he could look at the jar. Well after looking at it he told Bob he'd be interested in the jar if he wasn't going to buy it. Bob looked the jar over again and said he was going to take it. Bill Grove's wife was the lady showing the jar and Dan for some reason had the foresight to ask her if she had any more little jars like that one? And she replied, "Yes I have another one and it's better than this one." So he said "I'll take that one." So she reached into her purse and pulled



out a ¼ pint THE GEM. Dan held it in the air and looked at it and the crowd came back. He asked the price and she wanted \$450 for the jar. He held it up a little longer so everyone could marvel at it and then put it down and said I'll take it.

Norm Barnett had a few jars over the years that Dan happened to fall in love with the first time he saw them. Dan told me he admired Norm's jars for many years whenever he visited with him. He asked Norm once that if he ever decided to sell them to please give him a shot at them. Talking to Norm at one of the Shows in 2000/2001 Norm told Dan he thought he was finally going to sell some





of his jars and to make a list of what jars he wanted. So while at the Muncie Show one day he went up to the display and made his list. It wasn't until two years later that Norm finally got back to him because it took Norm that long to come up with a price for the jars.

Dan told me quite a long story about probably his favorite jar in the collection. It's a spectacular original milk glass 1858 midget and the only known example.

A little over 25 years ago Dan was reading an article by Alice Creswick in one of the bottle magazines about a lady from Harrisonburg, Va. that showed up at that show with a milk glass midget. So he called Alice and told her he was interested in the jar and whether she had the lady's phone number which she did. He called the lady but she seemed upset that he was calling her. Dan told her that we're all friends in the hobby and that he was interested in the jar but he would like to see the jar even if she wasn't willing to sell it. So she said OK, you can come up and see it. Dan took



Judy and his two kids and went there one afternoon and while he was in the living room talking to her, the lady's husband was in the kitchen with Judy and the two kids feeding them milk and cookies. In talking with Mrs. Hicks, Dan found out she had a son who lived in Richmond. After looking at the jar he told her he was going home to think about it and that he was going to make her an offer. Dan said, "If you want to sell it for that offer you can if not then that's fine too."

So he discussed it with Judy and they decided to offer her \$2,500 for the jar. He called her and made the offer and the lady said she'd think about it. Dan called her back sometime after that and the lady didn't think she could sell it for that. At that point he made her another offer and said he'd go as high as \$3,000 for the jar. So the lady told Dan to send her a letter or note and she'd put it with the jar and if she decided anything she'd let him know. So Dan sent her a note and didn't call her again for two years. He happened to be going to Muncie one year

and he called her back and told her "I'd certainly like to have that jar if you'd sell it to me. I'll give you \$4,000 now for the jar" but she told Dan she wasn't interested in selling it anymore.

Dan didn't contact her again for approximately 20 some years. Dan went to a show in Nashville, Tenn. one year to buy one of his CFJ midgets in green. He bought the midget but only after Jon Vanderschouw from Florida ran him up on it. Jon went over and congratulated Dan who said he appreciated it and that he also appreciated him running him up on it too. They both laughed and Jon asked Dan if he ever managed to get the milk glass midget? "No, he didn't get the jar and he hadn't talked to her in 20 some years he imagined."



On the way home from Tennessee Judy and Dan talked about it and Dan decided to call the lady when they got home. About a month went by before he found the lady's name and number in his filing system. He called and a different lady answered the phone. He asked if Ms. Hicks was there and that lady said yes but she wouldn't be talking to anyone because she had Alzheimer's. Dan of course expressed how sorry he was about that but also asked if her son still lived in Richmond and if she had his





number. The lady had the number and gave it to him. Dan called the son and told him he was interested in the jar. The son said the next time he was up there he'd see if he could find it and he'd let Dan know one way or another.

About a month went by and the son finally called and said he couldn't find it but believed his daughter had the jar. His daughter lived in Lexington, Va. and he'd go see her and ask about the jar. The son called Dan back and said his daughter did have the jar and he had gotten it and that his daughter had been using it to store coffee beans in it. Dan told him when he got back to Richmond he'd like to see the jar again and that he and his wife could come over to see his collection. In the meantime the son had called a "glass lady" in Richmond about the jar. She couldn't tell the son anything about the jar but she called Tom Cox who told her he didn't know anything about it but to call Dan because he probably would know. So the "glass lady" calls Dan and asks him if he knows anything about a fruit jar that was milk glass and in which she believed was called a midget. Dan told her they made the jar in reproduction and it isn't worth

much but if it was original it was worth a lot. Dan told her he didn't know of but one original and that it was found in Harrisonburg, Va. The "glass lady" told Dan she was sure it was an original and Dan told her then it would be worth \$3,000 if original.

The "glass lady" then carried that info back to Mr. Hicks who had the jar. He called Dan and they set a time to come over and he brought the jar. Dan showed him his collection and Mr. Hicks just left. He didn't even mention whether he would sell it and neither did Dan. So Dan told Judy after Mr. Hicks left that "the son was going to be as difficult as his dang mother to deal with. I don't believe I'll ever get that jar."

About a year went by and Mr. Hicks called Dan to tell him that his mother had passed away and Dan of course told him how sorry he was to hear that. Mr. Hicks mentioned he was settling her estate and needed to sell the jar. Dan was at work and the son asked him if he would still be willing to give the \$3,000 he had originally offered. Dan being his usual self told him he'd think about it and call him back. He looked at the clock and said "I'll give it 45 minutes" but after 30 minutes Dan just couldn't take it anymore. So he called Mr. Hicks and said, yes he'd take the jar for the \$3,000 offer. Mr. Hicks told him to come over that evening to pick it up.

Dan came home and told Judy let's eat supper quickly because we're going over to get the milk glass midget. Judy of course was very happy that he was finally going to get it. Just as they sat

down at the table to eat supper the phone rang. It was Mr. Hicks and he told Dan there wouldn't be a need for him to come over tonight because they couldn't find the jar now. He told him, "It was sitting up on the mantel and I don't know what happened to it but when I find it I will call back." Dan's heart dropped to his knees as he explained to Judy what had happened. Then to Dan's delight ten minutes later Mr. Hicks calls back yet again to tell him they found it. His daughter had put it behind a picture when decorating for Christmas and his wife remembered where it was and if it wasn't too late to come over and get it. The rest is history...

Now, let's hope Dan never manages to misplace this jar ever either.

Dan has some advice for beginning collectors: if you don't have a lot of money he still believes there are a lot



of nice jars you can afford to buy. "Don't try to collect sets of HG, quart and pint unless you have unlimited space. Decide what you want to collect and then collect those. When you go to a show don't buy five and six jars. Everyone

wants to buy more than one because it's fun collecting but just buy one good jar. Put all of the money you have at the show together and buy the best jar you can for that amount of money. As time goes on you'll have a nice collection and





as time goes on you'll also have more money to spend. Just remember to only buy one good jar and don't go crazy at auctions either." Dan also told me the person that helped him the most in the

fruit jar hobby was Norm Barnett.

Dan and Judy Corker are wonderful people and fantastic hosts. I had such a good time while I was at their home and I don't know if I can ever repay them for their kindness and generosity. Staying at their home was more like being at a "fruit jar Bed & Breakfast" and just my style of living too!

In ending I'd like to say that in just a relatively short time frame I have already had the unbelievable honor and pleasure of seeing some of the Best of the Best fruit jar collections in the country. And being only human of course I tend to get a tad skeptical in a strange sense just thinking to myself that it can't possibly get any better than what I've already



experienced but believe me when I tell you it can. I mean come on now, haven't I already gone to "Jar 7th heaven" and back? Well I'm here to tell you folks that the yellow brick road just keeps on taking me to more and more fantastic destinations.

What superlative adjective can I pull out of my hat on this visit; hmmm, all I can think of is superkala fragalistic expe alidocious! ;o)

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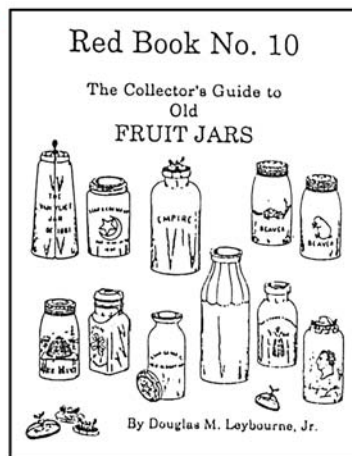
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