

# LEGENDS OF THE JAR!

## Darrell Plank

Bruce W. Schank

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

I first met Darrell at the January 2008 Muncie, IN show. We spoke briefly but he was busy room hoping so I didn't get a chance to talk at length with him. Yet I already knew about him because his collection was Legendary to me and I'm sure many other people as well. Normally when one hears Darrell's name mentioned it's always nothing short of synonymous with the Crème de le Crème of fruit jars.

Darrell was born on Nov 4, 1956 in Kansas City, MO and also spent his childhood there until attending college. Darrell is a graduate of the University of Missouri and has a Masters degree from Purdue University. He worked at one time for Bell Labs in Chicago as a programmer and then made his way from there to Washington State working for Microsoft at Redmond in 1984 and has remained in Washington State since then. He mentioned that he lives in the "middle of nowhere" but wouldn't change that for anything. In 1997 Darrell and three of his friends



(Photo: courtesy June Lowry)

started a successful video game company called Suckerpunch which he currently devotes a good portion of his time to.

Surprisingly, Darrell first became interested in fruit jars while in Junior High School. He had a friend who collected bottles and he was interested in them too but didn't know where he would find bottles such as a Dr. Harter's Wild Cherry Bitters. His Mom canned so he took her downstairs one day and pointed to all of her jars and told her he had just assimilated them all for his collection. Well, his mother basically

said to him that that's not the way it was going to be but that he could pick out any 10 jars he wanted. After doing so he was then off to the races and what a race it has been for him. Indeed nothing short of stupendous!

Darrell's first exciting jar as a young collector was a half gallon amber Globe with a big bruise on the heel. But the fact he had an amber jar of any kind at all was just about the most exciting thing he could imagine at that time. So there is hope for the rest of us. He mentioned how he went to the 1976 Show at St. Louis with all





of the money he had saved up. It was close to \$300 and incredibly with that little money he ended up with a teal 1858 quart and a few other nice jars which he still has in the collection to this day. His collecting kind of shut down for a brief time period while going to college because money was tight and he just didn't have the free time due to his studies.

He remembers going to the Nashville, Ten. National Show in the early 90s where he bought a

Ladies Favorite which by the way just happened to be the very first jar he spent over 1k on. After that jar the next time he really started to get some "high end" examples was after he had worked for Microsoft for awhile. Shortly after they went public and his stock options vested, it was at that time Alex Kerr's collection became available. That pretty much was the incredible beginning to a never ending quest for rare and beautifully colored fruit jars.

Darrell mentioned that although he feels a Ball Jar collection of 500 jars would actually be an interesting collection, he only has enough space to accommodate a limited amount of jars. Actually the type of jars Darrell is after are ones in which a non-collector when looking at it would say, "Oh wow now that's really interesting." He told me if you're going for high end jars especially the really high end ones, then they usually tend to be great colors but still the same he is also a

huge fan of odd closed jars.

Believe this or not he bought a green B.B. Wilcox jar at one time and according to him completely sight unseen. When he opened the box and took a look at the jar he claims his jaw dropped. The jar is a color of green exactly akin to the Petal jars and Darrell feels the green Petal jars are the only jars that come in that particular color green. He feels this jar was one of the craziest jars he has picked up over the years and a favorite.

Another great jar Darrell acquired was a wonderful milk-glass swirled 1858 quart that came from the Alex Kerr collection. He claims no one really knows what the actual stories behind these milk-glass jars are but the running theory is that someone after work hours decided to make a jar out of the cap liner material as an end of the day joke or whimsy. Nonetheless the jar is rare and fantastic all at the same time no matter what the reason might be.



Now there's no doubt that Darrell pays nothing short of top dollar for his jars and that's probably true about most of them but he was lucky one time from what he told me on an eBay auction. He won a wonderful cobalt jar with a super pontil and a laid on ring that was on eBay along with two plain aqua wax sealers. The photo wasn't that good and the description too was a bit vague at best. Only at the end was it mentioned to be a cobalt blue wax sealer. So he took the chance and managed to snag that beauty for a paltry \$600 bills and considering the jar that was a real steal for him, that's for sure.

Darrell has another very interesting jar and one in which I have never seen

before until seeing his photos, a cobalt blue Hartell jar. And according to him it's the only example he's ever seen or heard of in that color. The jar came from the Al Vignon collection and he claims a fair amount of the jar has been reconstructed. There are some big chunks that have been repaired but he takes that all in stride. He always reminds people "if you want the Venus de Milo with arms then you just don't want the Venus de Milo because the only one known doesn't have any arms. Be happy with what you get." Great advice since a one-of-a-kind jar after all, is what it is.

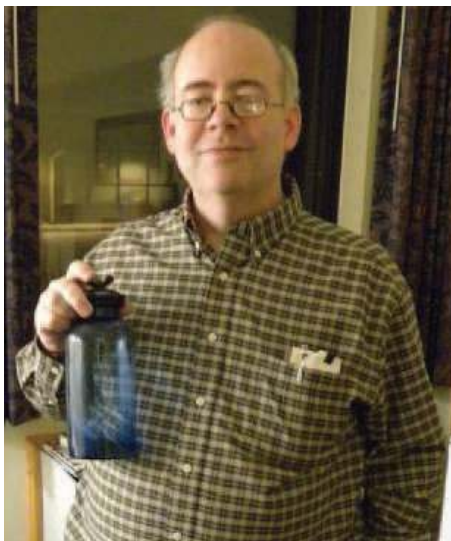
Darrell's favorite jar in the entire collection surprisingly to me happens to be his amber quart Air Tight Fruit

Jar. I asked him why and he told me there are a few reasons for this. The jar is not only beautiful and interesting but one of the most historic jars that exists. The jar just happens to be one of the earliest figural jars, one of the only amber figural jars, one of the only amber pontiled jars and from what he can figure probably the earliest amber side embossed jar as well. Put all of these

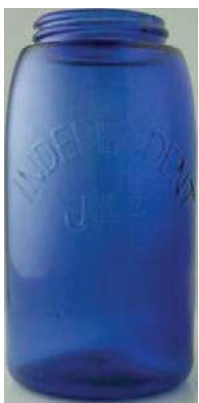


(Photo: courtesy June Lowry)





Darrell looks at his jars pretty much from a historical viewpoint and wonders often where was a certain jar he owns was during the Civil War or what kind of food did somebody put up in this jar. He claims there was a lot of really great looking fancy glass that people put on the table but that usually was in the back of the china closet and taken out once a year at Christmas or some other holiday. One of the things he loves about jars is that people actually handled them on a day to day basis and they were an integral part of their lives. He loves seeing jars that still have labels on them saying what was in them at one time too.



factors together and it takes top spot in his book and that's saying a lot considering what he owns.

At one point Darrell looked at his collection and said to himself; "Oh My Gosh I have a rather large collection, kind of by accident, of cobalt jars." With that said he doesn't think it's fair to say he has them all though. He freely admits that most likely he has probably an example of all of the well known cobalt jars out there but there are obscure cobalt product jars hardly anyone has heard of that he does not own. Still he never imagined he'd ever own the cobalt lightning or the Mason's CFJCo. Improved, Clyde NY on reverse simply because the jars were owned by people he believed would never give them up. So after acquiring those jars he had basically most of what he wanted anyway.

One of my favorite jars in Darrell's collection happens to be his cobalt streaked (striations anyone) 1858 midget. He says that fantastic and stunning midget jar came from a family in Muncie, IN. The family's story is quite remarkable at least to me anyway being a Ball jar collector. Their grandfather made the jar at the Ball Corp. plant in Muncie, IN around 1900 as a lark. They kept it in the family all of those years until finally selling it to Darrell. Now, for all of those naysayers out there who don't believe Ball made vanilla 1858 jars including midgets, this is one story if true (and there's no reason to doubt what the family claims) tends to prove the opposite. This jar would also be the one and only Ball made jar that I know of with cobalt in it too. Hmmm, I wonder if I could ever find anything good enough to trade Darrell for this jar. I seriously rather doubt I could find anything but it's a pleasant thought for me. :0)

Darrell happens to own one of the three known cobalt CFJCo midgets to exist. Interestingly enough he mentioned the story he heard of how some guy out of the blue walked into a show at one time with those same three cobalt CFJ midgets in a shoe box. Only he lamented how he's never been fortunate enough to be the guy who was actually there when people like that show up with great jars. He's also never had the fortune of finding a great or spectacular jar on a table or at some obscure antique shop for \$5.00 or less as others he knows has. He's actually had to pay for most of the jars he has in the collection although he claims some he's acquired at fairly reasonable prices or what he considers reasonable and not that they'd be reasonable to other people.

Darrell also has a tragic jar story too. He used to have a mirror that had some fixtures on it. He had some jars under the fixtures including a nice half gallon Bloeser jar. Somehow one of the fixtures came loose from either road vibration or whatever and one day bang, it fell hitting the Bloeser jar. He still has the closure but the jar itself is unfortunately history now. Sadly for some strange reason he didn't seem to learn his lesson. He put the fixture back on the mirror and as far as he was concerned it was nice and tight this time firmly believing everything was going to be okay. But sadly tragedy was to strike yet again. This time he put a nice set of three deep green colored Lightning's back under the fixture and low and behold and out of the blue that same fixture came crashing down again one day and hit



the quart jar. The half gallon and pint thankfully survived but the quart was a \$700 "hard pill to swallow" lesson for Darrell. Suffice it to say after tragedy number two he longer has any jars under that mirror.

To the rest of the fruit jar collecting world Darrell would say just enjoy what you collect at present. He believes that there's a thrill involved in every level of jars. There's no reason for anybody to feel that their collection is any less exciting then his or anyone else's collection. You've got to have the passion in you and not worry too much whether other people don't share the same passion as you do. Everyone should enjoy and be proud of their collection. He's thrilled that we have all of the collectors in the hobby and at all of the varying levels and everyone deserves praise.

In doing this interview with Darrell over the phone I came away actually quite impressed with the man. There is a whole lot more to him than meets the eye and rare fruit jars. Darrell is very laid back and down to earth but also very articulate, outgoing and personable. He's an incredibly intelligent person and extremely knowledgeable about his jars too. I would imagine he is an exceptional programmer since Math seems to be a



serious and fun hobby for him as well. He is also an accomplished musician and knows how to tickle the ivories with the best of them. Another avenue of interest for Darrell is photography and his skills are quite evident by the majority of the excellent photos accompanying this article.

In ending, I asked Darrell sort of facetiously whether there exists

a jar that can actually make his jaw drop anymore. I mean come on now folks! This guy obviously owns some of the most overwhelmingly spectacular jars that most normal and even advanced collectors have ever seen or could imagine owning. It just simply boggles this humble author's tiny noggin thinking about them. I couldn't help but wonder, isn't it just a bit all too commonplace for him now? Can any jar actually be impressive or thrilling enough? To my sheer surprise he chuckled at all of my foolish tomfoolery and said, "Oh yes absolutely!" It's obvious I'm having a hard time grasping or understanding what it's like to own fruit jars of the caliber in his collection. I'm simply coming from an outside vantage point of complete and utter normalcy talking to one of the most prodigious and prominent fruit jar collectors in the country. I have an invite from Darrell so sometime hopefully in the not too distant future I will be visiting with him and seeing those incredible jars up close and personal.

\*Addendum: Photos 1, 11 & 19 courtesy of June Lowry.\*



(Photo: courtesy June Lowry)