

# MIKE O'MALLEY 1940-2010

## The Amazing Mr. O'Malley

Every hobby should be so lucky as to have such a wonderful representative as Mike

By Ralph Finch

I am way older than I ever expected to be ... but there is a price I pay for that "achievement." I must say farewell to friends and relatives not so fortunate.

The old bottle hobby has lost two major members: Norman Barnett and Jan Rutland in late October. The target ball hobby also has lost two important members: Tom McCandless in August, and now:

**Mike O'Malley of Pleasant Hill, Missouri.**

On Nov. 5, I received this note from a friend: "I didn't know if you had heard, but Mike O'Malley lost his battle with cancer yesterday morning. ... He will be missed."

I knew it was coming, but that doesn't make it any easier.

On July 25, I had received this terrible e-mail from Mike himself:

"Ralph: I am sending you basically the same e-mail I just sent to John Hargreaves. I did not bid on anything in part two of Peter's auction.

"I have not said anything about it to anyone in the target ball community. My target ball collecting is about over. I recently spent six weeks in the hospital with a blood clot and internal bleeding. After running more tests than I can count, they have determined I have cancer and are giving me six months to live. It has been a great hobby and I have met many wonderful people through it. It has been one of the highlights of my senior years. Do keep in touch, I am going to be around for some time yet. — Regards, Mike O"

And despite his bleak situation, Mike was thoughtful enough to send this upbeat note the next day:

"Congratulations; Janet must indeed be a lovely lady. Any woman that would commit to your schedule and habits 24-7 may qualify for sainthood.

"I know a lot of target ball collectors. Let's be honest here, Ralph. Would you want your sister to marry one of us? My best to the both of you. Janet, your husband once told me: 'You have to be crazy to be a target ball collector.' He is right, of course. You be careful out there. Ya hear?

"Regards and my wishes for a long and happy marriage. — Mike O"

On July 30, Mike added:

"... It is like I said, I sent it to only three people who have been very kind to me helping me in the hobby of target ball collecting. John asked me what I had bid on in the last Frobouck auction and mentioned we had not been keeping in touch much lately. I realized I needed to tell the people I correspond with on a regular basis. It dawned on me I have been a little reclusive and not making people crazy with my e-mails

like I normally did. I had no desire for anyone to think it came from any type of animosity on my part or a lack of smart-ass things to say. — Regards, Mike O"

Mike had vast interests in life, but I know him from only one area: Glass target balls. He literally lived — and died — for target balls.

On Oct. 1 — with little more than a month to live — Mike purchased his last target ball; he couldn't resist the appeal of the



**Mike O'Malley was full of life, especially when he could show off — and talk about — target balls, as he did here at an antique gun show.**

beautiful Paris ball.

On Nov. 5, Mike's wife, Marijo, e-mailed: "Mike passed away yesterday morning here at the house. It was the end of a long struggle for him ... when he was told he had cancer last March, he prayed that if God didn't cure him that he would at least see it through with dignity and grace — which of course, he did."

People responded to the news in an expected manner: shock, sadness, disappointment ... and anger.

"I am mad as hell," said a New England friend of Mike's. "This is a (crappy) way to hear that a friend has died. I learned of it on eBay, and that's just wrong!" (One day after Mike died, and five days before his funeral, Mike's target balls began being offered on eBay.)

Jeff Hooper of Port Angeles, Washington: "He was a very passionate man when it came to target balls and life in general. I will miss his enthusiasm for the hobby. I met Mike and (son) Sean back at the FOHBC national in Reno a few years back, and the sparkle in his eyes when he talked about target balls was a true sign that he really enjoyed the hobby. Always asking questions with that huge grin on his face. What

he has done for the hobby in the few years he collected target balls is immeasurable. Whether talking to him on the phone or through e-mail, he was full of information, yet always yearning to find out more about this great hobby of ours.

"I will always remember him as Mr. Bogardus, as he was always looking for all the variants of the Bogardus balls and seemed to focus on them. I always wanted to stop in and see him on my travels across the country and now that will never happen; I truly regret not doing so in my previous travels. Our hobby has lost a great man and he will be greatly missed by all. It has been a pleasure and honor to have known Mike."

Kitten Ferrell of Austin, Texas: "Mike was one of the most friendly, honest and straight-shooting collectors that I have known. He was quick to share his knowledge, his thoughts, and to show items from his collection to further the hobby of target balls. He was 'Mister Target Ball.'

"I would always look for his distinctive table at the Kansas City Gun Show and looked forward to seeing him and what new items he may have acquired. He was always welcoming in a big way with a hearty hello and offering his wisdom to anyone who would show interest in the target balls he had on display. His enthusiasm was contagious and he brought so very much into the target ball collecting world with his willingness to share with others.

"I believe he 'upped the ante' on all things Bogardus because of his voracious pursuit and research of the Bogardus balls. The target ball collecting world is a small one and to lose someone of Mike's wisdom is a mighty blow. My sympathies and prayers go out to his family."

Peter Frobouck of Pittsburgh: "I think that I am the one who Mike first talked to concerning target balls. I considered him a good friend, I spent a weekend at his house duck hunting, had a great time. He will surely be missed as a friend and contributor to this hobby. My sympathies to his family."

Randy Davis of Kansas City, Missouri: "I would be happy and honored to tell a little about Mr. O'Malley. I have known of Mike O'Malley for some 15 or so years.

"For those years, he and his close trapshooting friends would always attend the Missouri State and Fall Handicap Trapshoots, although you could usually find him in the club house enjoying a good game of pitch.

"But it was only five years ago that I really got to know Mike. I received a call one afternoon from him; someone had told him I collected target balls. I remember saying, 'No, I'm not a target ball collector, but I do like things related to the history of trapshooting.' Then he asks, 'Do you have any target balls?' I said I do own a few balls, and he asks if they are for sale. They were not, yet it wasn't long before I was trading an extra Bogardus for a seven-ring ball.

"You never forget the people you meet who are like Mike O'Malley. He was a big man with a big heart. He will be missed as a collector and a good friend of many. ... Mr. Mike O'Malley, thanks for the memories."

Jeff Wichmann of American Bottle Auctions: "Mike O'Malley was that guy who would see you were uncomfortable

at a party and come over and introduce you to his friends. He made sure that if you were making a deal, how important it was to him that it was fair. He understood life, understood what was important and treated other people like he wanted to be treated.

"He didn't really care what people thought of him; of course, everyone liked him, but that was because he cared so much about others.

"I heard he could be a bit ornery, but I never saw that.

"Mike was an artist, and if you saw his website you could see the meticulous sense of color and aesthetics he had.

"I didn't talk to Mike a lot, but I will still miss him. I am proud to say I called him my friend."

Dave Monahan of South Carolina: "I was just informed that our good friend Mike O'Malley had passed away ... As it was put to me, 'Well, I guess the Lord needed him worse than we did.'

"I got to somewhat know Mike when he was working with Kenny Ray Estes on the memorial for 'Tobe' Cohron. What a very sincere and nice fellow Mike was.

"Would you please send my condolences to his family for me, as I don't \*know how to get in touch with any of them."

Kenny Ray Estes, museum director for the Trapshooting Hall of Fame: "I was so fortunate to have met Mike; that would never have taken place if you hadn't mentioned in On Target! that he was from Pleasant Hill, Missouri.

"Mike played a major part in my dream to recognize an old-time trap shooter by placing a headstone on his unmarked grave. I still remember how excited he was to have been asked to help. My immediate thought was that this guy is as crazy about our history as I am.

"After many e-mails and phone conversations I finally met Mike when he stopped at the Grand American Handicap on his way back home, a couple of years ago. While we discussed the Tobe Cohron Headstone Project, Mike's attention was on the targets I brought from the Trapshooting Hall of Fame to display for those interested. He had never seen an American target with three vents on the topside and wanted a picture of it.

"We talked for about three hours that day and before Mike departed he sent his wife Marijo on an errand. She came back and handed me a small box with my name on it. I looked at Mike, and he said, 'Well, open it.' Inside the bubble-wrap was an amber Bogardus target ball. You see, I had mentioned to Mike that I was saving up for my first ball and that I only was interested in owning two, a Bogardus and a Paine. I said, wow, that's nice, and he said he brought it for me. I thanked him and told him I didn't have enough money to pay for it in total but I could give him \$250 now and when I make the final payment, he could send the ball to me. He said if I was going to pay for it, he wouldn't let me have it. I told him that if he's giving it to me, then I couldn't accept it as I hadn't done anything to deserve such a gift. Besides, we only just met and he really didn't know much about me. Mike reminded me that we just chatted for three hours and that

we both knew enough of each other.

“He told me that he already knew that I was going to take that ball all around and show it off to others and generate interest in our history. That, to him, was well worth the investment he had in this Bogardus target ball. I recall the tears running down my face. I was truly touched by this man’s kindness.

“Mike was correct, because I don’t know how many people I’ve shown my Bogardus to, but it is many, I assure you.

“Mike and Marijo knew of the travel expenses I incurred when I flew into Kansas City for the headstone dedication, and they took me into their home so I didn’t have to pay for a motel room.

“When the Missouri Trap Shooters Association asked me to present Tobe Cohron for induction into their Hall of Fame, Mike and Marijo advised me that I was staying in the spare bedroom of the condo they rented for the Missouri State Shoot.

“I often referred to Mike as my Big Brother, because he was always looking out for me. I was saddened to learn of Mike’s passing, but thankful that he did not suffer. My sadness gave way to the thought of how fortunate I was to have been given the privilege of meeting this man. We’ve lost one of the best people you’ll ever meet. Rest in peace, Big Brother, I’ll never forget you.”

Bob, Alex and Austin Barbour of Shawnee, Kansas: The phone rang in the late afternoon. The voice on the other end was an individual my son Alex and I had met at the last bottle show: “Bob, this is Mike O’Malley. I’m ready to learn all you know about antique glass. How does your weekend look? I’ll bring a few of my target balls over for you to look at.”

I replied that Saturday worked for me and we set a time to meet.

I had never paid much attention to target balls. They had slipped under my radar for the 30 years I had been collecting glass. But like any collectible, the less you know about something, the less appealing that item is.

I wondered what I could teach a target ball collector about antique glass. Little did I know that Mike was very eager to learn anything and everything I knew about glass.

Mike arrived at the appointed time with his usual smile from ear to ear — and a briefcase full of target balls. I asked, “What’s in the briefcase?”

Mike replied: “Just a few of my Bogardus balls, but we will get to those later. First, I want to know everything you know about antique glass.”

We talked for about an hour about my collection. The usual questions about how I got started collecting, categories I collected past and present, my favorite pieces, English vs. American glass and on and on. Mike was so hungry to add to his working knowledge of the hobby that his enthusiasm began to rub off on me. Here was a person I had just met and yet Mike made me feel as if we had been friends for years.

Most collectors love to share their collections and knowledge with anyone who is willing to sit, listen and observe. The problem is finding people in your area who share those same interests.

Mike asked: “You have two sons, Alex and Austin?”

I replied, “Alex you met at the show and Austin is his younger brother.”

“And they both collect antique glass?” Mike asked. I answered: “Alex collects sample bottles and poisons and Austin collects bottles with lots of embossing.”

Mike then said: “I brought along something for the boys.” He opened his briefcase and brought out two target balls. “These are German balls, part of a small horde I ran across and I thought the boys might enjoy them.”

With stunned disbelief I said, “I can’t take these, Mike.”

And with his typical candor he explained, “Let the boys have them, who knows, maybe they will start collecting target balls.”

Jokingly, I said, “That’s all they need, another category to collect.”

I reluctantly accepted the balls and set them aside, and asked: “What else do you have in that briefcase of yours?”

Mike proceeded to take out ball after ball, explaining rarity, embossing and values of his Bogardus target balls. Mike was proud of his target ball collection, but he was especially fond of his Bogardus balls. After seeing just a small part of his Bogardus collection, I knew why Mike was such an avid collector. Unknowingly, Mike had planted the seed for three future target ball collectors. Myself and my two sons have now amassed three small target ball collections and, Mike O’Malley, you are solely responsible. Thanks so very much for everything you shared with the boys and me. I know you are looking down at us and smiling, knowing that you will always live on in our memories.

Mike touched many people with his knowledge, generosity and kindness. All of those he touched are better people for having known Mike. We will miss Mike O’Malley. God Bless you and your family.

Ralph, I could have written several more pages with some great stories, but maybe another time. I’m sure there are others who will share their stories.

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The author personally will miss Mike on so many levels: the wacky e-mails and phone calls, his great website, his many, many contributions to this newsletter, and his incredible enthusiasm for life in general, but especially for target balls.

“He often said he was disappointed that he found them too late,” said wife Marijo. “He wished he had started collecting earlier because he enjoyed them so much.”

Among Mike’s many credits is being the driving force to purchase and dedicate an impressive headstone for the previously unmarked grave of ca. 1900 black shooter Tobias Cohron.