

# THE FEDERATION SHOW

## AN ADVENTURE

by Steven Libbey



Steven R. Libbey

**I** love going treasure hunting adventures with my children. We go up the river looking for arrowheads and whatever else we can turn up. Driving to Lexington with two cameramen from iNET made me appreciate how truly gracious, responsible and mature my four, six and eight year old are. The trip reminded me how much I really love and appreciate my new and old bottle friends as well.

The trip started at 3am in the iNET parking lot. We hit the freeway with the self-described, "Little Fat Man Child," eating a homemade, "carb free" burrito and explaining how he can't seem to lose weight no matter what he does so he is on a carb free diet. His, "carb free," burrito was made of three giant taco shells and inside that was four thousand calories of porridge-like stew mixed with sour cream and cheese. Fortunately for his diet, a good portion rolled down over his chin as he ate the "carb free" burrito because it was wider than his swollen "man child" mouth and like a dog holding a broom in mouth, mid stick, trying to get through a door, he could not figure out how to get it through the gateway other than just pushing harder. Amusing, IF, I didn't have to clean up his mess four times on the trip. I

tried to explain to him that with any semblance of etiquette he would be a lot more of a, "little fat man child" so, in a way, he really is on a diet. I'm pretty sure he didn't 'get it'.

I digress, we made great time to Chicago. Suddenly, as we were driving, at seemingly the same speed as traffic, approximately 80MPH, red and blue lights flashed up behind. I got pulled over... DAMNIT I thought, come on God, please don't let this trip I had been so anticipating as a great bottle adventure, be a bummer. The officer came up to my window and asked me, "Do you know how fast you were going" and "Can I please see your license?" I had forgot my license and said, "No I'm sorry I really wasn't paying attention to my speed." He rolled his eyes and said, "You have a pile of cash and your credit card but no license?" (He saw everything in my pockets as I looked for my license) I told him we were on our way to film a bottle show and I just forgot it in my rush to get out the door.

Disgusted he went back to his car. I thought great, two or three tickets. He returned to the passenger side and gave me a... WARNING. I was like holy crap, thanks man! And THANK YOU, THANK YOU, GOD! He did ask the, "Little fat man child" if he threw up. I said no, he was eating a "carb free" burrito. The officer said, I see. (Not really but that made you smile, right?)

Most of the rest of the drive was quiet other than "Little fat man child" snoring. Indiana was not even slightly interesting on the interstate other than a giant wind mill farm I reached just as the sun was coming up. As we rolled into Kentucky the landscape morphed from flat farmland to beautiful rolling hills. Truly an uplifting change after two hundred flat miles. Kentucky is beautiful I thought, this IS going to be a great bottle adventure.

We stopped at Cracker Barrel for lunch. The, "Little fat man child" woke up to complain about not being able to sleep at all. I told him he is the only insomniac I know who snores hundreds of miles at a time. He was shocked to hear he was snoring. "Ra ra ra really, I didn't even think I fell asleep." We got in to eat and the two camera men stepped up to show how important and special they are. They observed an older group of dinners praying before dinner and stared mocking them. Flash forward... Neither of them are employed by my company any more.

We finally arrived in beautiful Lexington. Man, do I wish we had that kind of old architecture in Milwaukee. Why do we tear down those beautiful structures? Checked in at the hotel and walked the venue to see what was up. I had just missed the annual members' meeting. I started to see people I recognized from the magazines and websites but who I had never met. How cool this is, I thought.

Friday evening was the banquet. I saw a member of the old Milwaukee Bottle Club who looked like he had just taken a bite of a poop doughnut as he ran and hid when he saw me at the pre-banquette reception. He was one of the people who pushed me into supporting our new club. I would have thanked him if he wasn't still angry. Quick aside: I recommend all bottle people love collecting, love fellow collectors and love life, because it all can end any time. Smile and have fun!

So then there was the banquet. We sat next to super cool people. The, "Little fat man child" could not wait for the amazing Ferdinand to get through the awards to start eating. Go figure. The two camera men were able to control their contempt for Christianity through the pre-meal prayer. Not sure they heard it through the chewing though. Leanne Peace, our table mate, won the Best Formal Bottle Hat contest. She truly was a gracious southern bell. A joy to meet. Such a nice happy lady and so excited to win a beautiful ribbed decanter/bottle. The WA&AC club won three more awards for our table including BEST website. With our goal of creating a resource, like none other for collectors, the best website award really is appreciated. It has been a lot of work and participation from many club members to make it happen. Thank you all!

After the banquet was the bottle contest. The camera guys didn't want to watch any more bottle stuff so we went for a walk in the neighborhood looking for a place to get a bourbon. Before the banquet we watched a presentation on everything about the 'incredibly delicious' Kentucky beverage, we decided to try it. We ended up at the bar in the hotel. In spite of all of its 'incredible properties and delicacies,' bourbon is not for me. I struggled retching to choke it down. We walked down to the downstairs bar to see if there was something going on. There was no one other than three bar tenders, including one pretty weird one. One of the camera guys hit it off with the weird dude. Their conversation about cartoons and the weird bar tender scaring a young girl who thought he was going to abduct her made me want to pull a, "Little fat man child" and throw up burrito. I left to see if there were any of my new bottle friends in the main bar on my way back to the room. "Little fat man child" couldn't handle the sexual tension laden conversation any more than I could and came upstairs too.

Sick and tired, literally, I bought the, "Little fat man child" and myself a drink intending to sedate myself toward sleep... Still feeling like crap and hoping for a likeminded friend I bought an older gentleman a drink too. I assumed he was there for the show because everyone in the lounge area seemed to be collectors or bottle people. He turned out to be Dennis Fox, one of the most exciting things that happened at the show. We started talking about bottle hunting. I told him I scuba dive for them and that started Dennis telling the most incredible and awesome



**Whiskey and Bourbon bottle authorities Dennis Fox (left) from American Bottle Auctions and David Jackson from Greensboro, North Carolina.**

stories anyone has ever told in relation to bottle hunting. Yes, we all have awesome stories BUT I could write his into a script that would make an incredible adventure movie. Going to South America, buying boats, finding gold AND Bryant's ladies leg bitters bottles. Wrecked ships that had tried to get from the east coast to the west coast by going around South America in the 1850s. Everything from the people to the things they found... Just awesome. Literally, five drinks later I went to bed truly glad that I came to the show. No matter what happened from there I had a fascinating time and enough fun to make the trip memorable and worthwhile.

The next morning was show setup and the presentations. I caught pieces of three different presentations. They were all awesome. I haven't learned so much about bottles in a weekend since the first bottle show I attended.

I was presenting on the Virtual Museum project with Federation President Ferdinand Meyer. Having never met Ferdinand other than through email, and a couple of times on the phone it was pretty cool to realize the big dog is just one of us, a great collector who is truly excited about the hobby and a genuinely nice person. Ferdinand is the human push who will either make the Virtual Museum happen or it will not happen. Ferdinand planned to review the project and update the membership in his piece. I was to simply fill in and follow up. Ferdinand has a vision, is a great speaker and did a great job. Anyone not excited about the Virtual Museum after seeing his presentation is just not interested in seeing bottles or sharing information. It was awesome and an honor to be part of it as a member of our fledgling little club.

Next was setup. It was a major disappointment with all of that wonderful glass being set out to see virtually nothing from Wisconsin. Bill Mitchell was there with a bunch of the kind of glass that is high quality and beautiful but not super rare or in ideal condition. Nothing for me. Still, it was great to see Bill



who I haven't seen since he stopped running the Madison show. I was just getting into collecting back then. I literally had the flu the week before the show. I still wasn't feeling so great. I took the camera men to dinner and then for a drink at the martini bar across the street from the Hyatt. The little neighborhood restaurant had decent food but maybe one of the best deserts I have ever had. It was awesome. I had a soda at the martini bar because I just wasn't feeling so great. I left the two camera 'men' when two young ladies walked in and sat near us. They camera men said they were too afraid to talk to the girls. I don't think it mattered.

The next day was show day! We were filming bottles. It was crazy. We filmed incredible rarities including a cobalt pontiled calabash flask, an incredible pontiled one of a kind teal quart ink from New York, a dozen incredible colored and rare bitters AND Ferdinand Meyer's Bryant's Cone Bitters. Of all non-Wisconsin bottles I have seen on the web or in print the Bryant's Cone Bitters is singularly the one bottle I found most fascinating. Ferdinand simply handed it to me and said take care of it or something like that. I could hardly hear him because the blood was pounding in my ears as he handed it over. I walked a good three hundred feet, (At Least) over the rock solid concrete from his table to the booth where we were filming just looking at the bottle in amazement. It truly is beautiful and so unusual. It is archived forever on our website [www.wisantique.com](http://www.wisantique.com). It will be in the virtual museum when it is done, of course. I have to say thank you Ferdinand



**Ferdinand Meyer V holding an Old Schems Bitters and Wigwam Tonic figural barrel and the iconic Bryant's Stomach Bitters cone.**



**Ribbon cutting ceremony for the FOHBC 2014 National Antique Bottle Show**

for letting me handle what could not be replaced and for graciously telling the story. Truly, it is singularly the highlight of my year in bottles.

Walking the show I found a shot glass from Weiss Brothers to go with my Knickerbocker Bitters lithograph at Steve Ketchum's table so that was cool... Something to take home. Walking back to my booth I saw Jeff, Froggy, Burkhardt

looking at a ladies leg bitters bottle... That came out from a box under a table... I heard him say four or five hundred, if you can find a collector who wants it in this condition... While, I was right there and I wanted it, BAD... It is in far better condition than the other one I own of this mold variety of Knickerbocker Bitters Milwaukee. I asked to see it and asked if he wanted to sell. Of course he didn't at that price. I said this is an important bottle to me. Can I show you something? He said sure. I got our club brochure and showed him my lithograph, a picture of a Weiss Brothers Ladies Leg on it and then pointed at my shirt and said see the W? I had this designed based on the lithograph I own from that company. We agreed on a price and I got one for the collection. THAT is always the bottom line on a show being great for me... Something for the collection. [See picture top of Post]

The show ended, we packed up said good bye to new friends and drove back home. The drive home was slow with horrible traffic and a sleepless yet snoring, "Little fat man child." Still, I was hauling treasure.

It was a GREAT experience. The show was super well run.

Security was awesome. It was neat to be out of town on a bottle adventure and meeting so many incredible bottle people and seeing glass I have never and will never see again was awesome. I highly recommend collectors experience The Federation Show at least once and as often as you can.

