

# ZACK BAER INTERVIEW

By Jeff Mihalik

It's my pleasure to introduce Zack Baer. Zack is a collector, researcher, bat biologist, and just an all-around interesting and cool dude! I was very fortunate to have met Zack and his wife Katie, as several months after our meeting, I was looking for a new job and Zack hooked me up with his company and it has been a great friendship and working relationship ever since.



Zack (and his wife before she had their first child) is always running around the country searching and studying bats, so this limits the time he can spend digging and looking for historical items and researching their roots. However, he finds the time (usually 4:00 am in the morning after being up all night in some cave or near a bat roosting structure) to do his Internet research into his favorite items, dug or found antique bottles.

I asked Zack a few questions just so you all can get to know him better. Following this is his first detailed research article which I know you will enjoy.

**Jeff: Can you tell me when and how you got into collecting bottles?**

Zack: As a child, say around 7, my grandfather used to bring me home old bottles from auctions that he would go to. I had a corner cupboard in my bedroom that I would keep all of my treasured possessions in and at least three of the shelves were dedicated to bottles. As I got older, I started going to auctions myself looking for old bottles. My dad and I even dug a few dumps, though we never found anything very interesting. As time went on I started to get into other hobbies and eventually the bottles

were packed away. Then in 2015, while in New York for work, I came across a yard sale of an old-time bottle digger and his son. They had a few bottles for sale and after talking to them a while he invited me over to his house to look though (and buy) some of his common bottles. This rekindled the bottle collecting fever and through a series of strange events (which involved moving back to my home state of Pennsylvania and meeting the local bottle club president Russell Crupe at an auction) I met Jeff Mihalik. He brought me into the privy digging community and now here I am.

**Jeff: What are your favorite bottles and why?**

Zack: I really like collecting pontiled medicine bottles, particularly worm medication vials. Most likely because these were the first pontiled bottles in my collection, but also because I feel they are generally underrated and undervalued. It is possible to buy a one of a kind medicine bottle for a few hundred dollars (or less) where as a one of a kind flask or bitters bottle from the same time period would cost 10 to 100 times that number.

**Jeff: Do you have any other collecting interests?**

Zack: I collect just about anything that falls into the old, strange and weird categories. If I have never seen something before there is a good chance it is coming home with me.

I also really enjoy researching bottles. Knowing the history behind a bottle allows me to better appreciate it. For me, this transforms a bottle from an old piece of glass that looks good on a shelf into a part of history that I can hold in my hand.

**Jeff: Can you tell me some about your background and family?**

Zack: My wife Kate and I met while studying wildlife biology in college and she helped me land my first job which led me to my current career as a bat biologist. Together, Kate and I traveled the eastern United States catching bats and visiting every antique and junk shop we could find. Eventually, she couldn't say no to marrying me and this past August we had a baby boy named Forest.

**Jeff: Does your wife collect bottles or have interest in collecting?**

Zack: Kate collects poison bottles and mid-century modern paraphernalia. She is also what you would call an enabler. She is always encouraging me to "buy that bottle" or "work on your bottle research". Without her encouragement I wouldn't have been able to complete my article.

**Jeff: Your thoughts on the future of this hobby?**

Zack: I am hopeful that the younger generations will come to realize the importance of history and bottle collecting. It might seem like an uphill battle at times but I think seasoned collectors sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm will draw people in to where they catch the collecting bug.

That's what got me into bottles anyway.

