

Something Smells Here...

And Adam Koch swears that it's not him.

Detroit bottle club member **Ralph Finch** picks up the scent and tracks down the guilty culprits...



[A]

So many years ago, there were smart-alecks in the hobby (are there any now?) who liked to play jokes on other collectors.

In one 1977 Detroit bottle club newsletter, there was a photo of member Rod Wing's newborn granddaughter, Tiffany, with her "milk bottle," an amber Indian Queen with a nipple attached!

[A] (At that time, Rod was the king of lightning rod balls.)

And here is my favorite prank that the Detroit club pulled off:

A super-rare cobalt Pierre Teller soda was found by a member, John Brookner, but—it was missing the top. Still, a bottle worth having, even in that condition. And back then was a man whose name became part of the hobby lexicon: Don Spangler of Dayton, Ohio. If a bottle was chipped, cracked, whatever—even missing a top—Don, a glass-repairing artist, could work magic on the item and bring a "dead soldier" back to life. And from that era on, any such bottle was described as "Spanglerized."

So Brookner's bottle was sent off to Don with the request to make a cobalt mouth to this great item. (FYI: Teller was in a variety of businesses and mineral waters from around 1848 to 1857.)

The then-current Detroit club president intercepted the request and asked Don to make a minor change. He also requested that the repaired bottle be returned to him in order to present it to Brookner at a club meeting.

When Brookner unwrapped the bottle, seeing his shocked face was worth the cost and effort. There was his su-



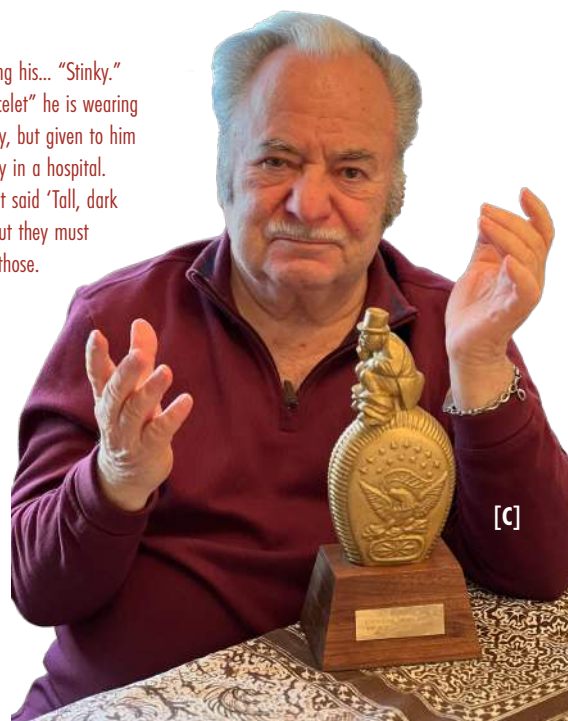
[B]

Your author, holding his... "Stinky." And, fyi: The "bracelet" he is wearing is not out of vanity, but given to him after a serious stay in a hospital. "I wanted one that said 'Tall, dark and handsome,' but they must have been out of those.

Mine simply says: 'Difficult Airway.'

Borrrrring."

— Photo by Janet Finch



[C]

per-rare cobalt bottle with...a Coke-bottle mouth! [B] Later, Don repaired the bottle with a correct period mouth.

Now we turn to—ta-daa—an award presented in 1985 at Louisville's "Kentuckiana Bottle and Outhouse Society Show," carrying on the side the odious word: Stinky. It was an impressive creation, with the figure of a man sitting on top of the mouth of an eagle/eagle flask. And the man had his pants pulled down! [C] (That's a moving image that will be hard to wipe out of your memory.)

And a related "Stinky" story, about which Akron, Ohio's Adam Koch reveals: "The Ohio Bottle Club has had a long history of very successful bottle shows. During the early years, displays were a big part of our shows. At our very first show in 1969, Judge Edmund Blaske and Dick Watson were our display judges.

"The 1982 show chairpersons were Ted and Hazel Krist, and Doc Ford was the club president. At the show banquet, Doc Ford was emcee, introducing the speaker and presenting awards."

Adam continues..."Previous to the show, I made arrangements with cartoon artist (and club member) Bob Villamagna to draw a caricature of Doc sitting on a flask, pants down.

"Bob did not hand me the rolled-up drawing until minutes before I made the presentation to Doc. I was unaware that Bob contacted Doc, and they pulled a fast one on me. To my surprise, when I unrolled the scroll, it was me sitting on the flask! Everyone, including me, got a big laugh out of it," Adam admits. [D]

Regarding the "artwork,"? Artist Bob Villamagna, from his

“cramped West Virginia studio,” remembers: “I don’t recall the whole story here, but I do know that someone asked me to create the caricature of Adam and use the logo of the great Louisville Antique Bottle Club as the vehicle for the illustration.

“The Louisville logo, as you know, shows an impish character, pants down, doing his ‘business’ into the flask. It was a fun piece for me as I not only got to work Adam’s face into the flask but also work up his name as the embossing.

“I hope you are able to, as Paul Harvey used to say, get to ‘the rest of the story’.”

I asked the “Bitters-baron” of Ohio, Ted Krist, who “goes back awhile” but only comments:

“As for your ‘crappy’ award, there’s something about it that just doesn’t pass the smell test. Hope you find your answer.” – Ted and Hazel Krist.

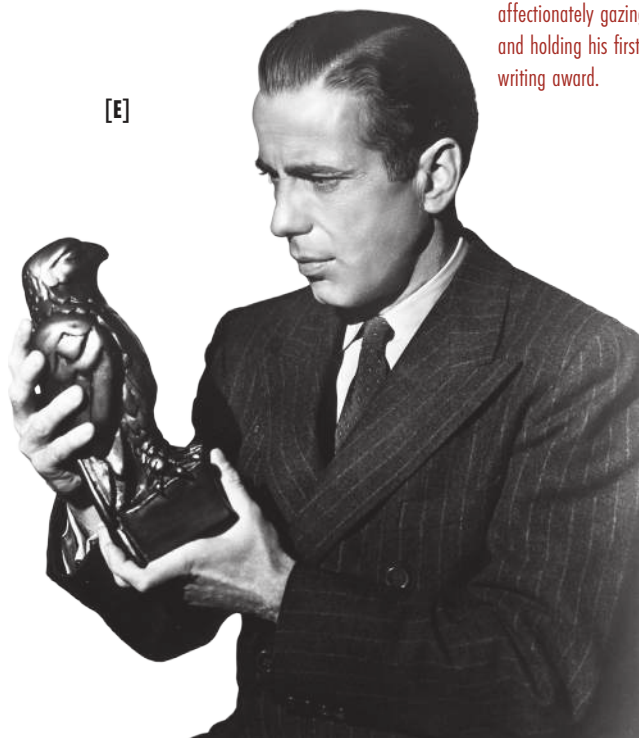
So, will the ‘Stinky Award’ become the glass hobby’s “MacGuffin” (a term courtesy of the *Maltese Falcon*, the 1941 film noir written and directed by John Huston, where the falcon is used as a “MacGuffin.” [E] It’s a term indicating an object, device, or event that is necessary to the plot and the motivation of the characters yet is irrelevant in itself. The term was adopted by Alfred Hitchcock in many of his films and extended to a similar device in other fictional works, including this report. The *Holy Grail of Arthurian* legend has been cited as an early example of a MacGuffin.

Will I ever know how I ended up with Stinky? Will we ever learn what the No. 1 (or No. 2) thing a person has to do to earn it? Will the answers just...pass into the dust of time?

Is my face flush with embarrassment?

A younger Ralph Finch affectionately gazing and holding his first writing award.

[E]



Adam Koch holding a Bob Villamagna illustration.

[D]



FYI: The Teller ten-pin was dug by John Brookner, who worked on the construction crew that dug the foundation of Detroit’s now-famous Renaissance (aka RenCen buildings), which just happened to be near the site of the mid-1800s Teller’s Sarsaparilla and Lemon Mineral Water company at 199 Jefferson Ave. The pontiled Teller’s Mineral Waters come in various shapes and colors, with the cobalt “ten-pin” the rarest. (In 2013, a cobalt 10 pin, once owned by the late Ron Binek, is said to have sold for about \$3,000.)

Brookner, a bottle collector who actually (and legally) worked at the RenCen site after hours found the mint cobalt “Teller’s Mineral Water / Detroit.” Back in the 1970s, when the Detroit club was hot and covered the Detroit area from the river on out, a building didn’t go up—or down—without one of our members scouting it out.

For example: When the now 20-story Blue Cross Blue Shield building was just an empty lot, on May 27, 1973, Rod Wing, Nat and Mildred Champlin and others were there armed with shovels, looking for—and finding—so many great bottles. Within an area of only a few blocks, the city revealed Cronk and Norris sodas, Kling and Stroh beers, or Fisher Electric Railway insulators. “Dr. Owens European Life Bitters” were coming up in the early ‘70s, and many rare cures and other bitters came from the excavated city, too.

The great bottles have changed hands many times. The great stories, too.

FYI2: Why the great digging in Detroit? Digging back in our history, the site that was to become the city of Detroit was established on July 24, 1701, by Antoine de la mothe Cadillac, a French military leader. It was incorporated as a city in 1815 and spent the decades leading up to the Civil War as the final U.S. stop on the Underground Railroad. The area also was earning a reputation for, among other things, the manufacturing of cigars and kitchen ranges. Great cars and a not-so-great football team came later.

