

SHARDS OF WISDOM

“Heard it Through the Grapevine”



Tom Hicks was big on life and in the hobby, and friends, too.

Written by Ralph Finch

One of the sad things about living long enough—I’m 83 and a half—is that you experience the passing of many wonderful people, people who did much for the hobby and the lives of all who knew them.

Tom Hicks, of Eatonton, Georgia, died August 30, 2023, at the age of 84. Tom was truly one of the great ones, and I was blessed to have known him for perhaps 50 years.

I have written about Tom and his full-of-joy wife, Mabel, many times over the years. I’ve also had many phone calls with Tom, enjoying that slow Georgian drawl of his, seeing his eyes sparkle even over the phone lines, and listening to his many stories, like...

How the well-educated and well-traveled man felt believing he was the only liberal Democrat in his entire county, or his stories about Mabel, who always made him smile...and sometimes shake his head. (Tom’s stories would make you smile; Mabel’s stories would make you burst out with laughter.)

I’ve had the pleasure of traveling with the Hicks duo many times to England as part of Jim Hagenbuch’s great trips to Europe.

We all went over with large empty suitcases, hoping to fill them with new purchases, except Tom, who bought stuff as if he had taken over a small U-Haul truck. Or even a LARGE U-Haul truck. He was amazing, and his interests were as large as his heart. He bought oars and antique fishing poles, and I repeat—We flew over! (Tom always had to pay airlines for overweight and oversize charges.)

Usually, on the last night at the hotel, as we all desperately packed to return to the States, Tom (or Mabel) would go from room to room asking if we had any extra bubble wrap or a little room in our own suitcases to take just one more thing back for Tom. Once, I think it was a large, heavy, pottery bed-warming bottle. I think he ended up giving it away.

And Mabel, Tom’s wife for 48 years? A shy, religious Southern Baptist belle. Her favorite story was to be asked where she had first met Tom, and she would flash that big and wonderful smile and say, “At a motel”! (It is a long story and completely innocent.)

My favorite—and I hope I can find the photo—was at an English Summer National Show put on by Alan Blakeman. It was often attended by Iain Gosling of Scotland, who always wore his tradi-

Mable and
Tom Hicks



tional kilts. As usual, the topic came up: What do Scots wear under their “skirts,” and Mabel inquired. “Why don’t you go over behind him and take a peek,” I suggested. So Mabel walked over and ever-so-slightly lifted up the hem of Iain’s kilt. Mabel looked over to me, but I gestured “a little bit more.” She did, then looked over with that big smile of hers.

And it was on one of the many group trips to London when Tom and Mabel suggested we (me and my “date,” Janet) go over to St. Paul’s Cathedral to visit the Whispering Gallery (designed by Sir Christopher Wren, circa 1700). It was preplanned, and everyone knew what was going to happen except Janet.

There, I sat down Janet on the very chair where I had sat alone on earlier trips to London and proposed to her. The event was witnessed by the group, including cure collectors John and Mary Wolff. (Mary had prepared by having included a supply of Kleenex for the teary-eyed attendees.)

And another Mabel story from another London trip: For those overseas excursions, I was in charge of listing a dozen or two stage productions, and when selected, I’d call the box office for seats. So... There we were in the front row of what I had expected to be a G-rated show (it was when I had seen the movie version on TV), but not so in London’s West End. The curtain went up, the music started, and almost immediately, a naked man ran on stage waving what one loosely could be described as his private parts. And he was right in front of Mabel! And Mabel? Tom later said that at the Baptist church back home, Mabel giggled and described the show. Often. But, back to Tom:

As is noted in any reference to Tom’s collecting, an attempt to list everything would fall far short of the truth. Tom had vast interests, and I probably feel safe to say Tom liked everything, from museum quality to whatever caught his roaming collecting eye.

In 2013, Tom had a professionally printed top-quality book published called Hicks’ Home and Collections. Turning the pages, showing the rooms of the “add-on” part of his 1820s home, one felt like entering a quality museum of quality items...lots of items. Once, Tom bought a collection of early furniture and it arrived in a large semi-truck!

Tom also had a heart as large as any semi-truck, and he will be missed by everyone who knew him and everyone who wished they had known him.

PS: As of Sept. 12, Mabel said: “I’m doing well, considering...and

Antique Bottle & Glass Collector

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when Tom died, he was peaceful. At the funeral, everyone seemed to love him. Tom’s bottles are here in the house and they keep me comfortable.”

We are not responsible for Typographical Errors!

Alice Seeliger, our ace magazine proofreader, asks if you have ever wondered why typographical errors creep into our FOHBC writing, no matter how diligent we are? Well...we have a specific demon to blame and his name is Titivillus, the “patron demon” of scribes. The first reference to Titivillus by name occurred in *Tractatus de Penitentia*, c.1285, by Johannes Galensis (John of Wales). Attribution has also been given to Caesarius of Heisterbach. Titivillus has also been described as collecting idle chat that occurs during church service, and mispronounced, mumbled or skipped words of the service, to take to Hell to be counted against the offenders. Now we have someone to blame for any typos you may find in our perfect magazine!



Titivillus, the “patron demon” of scribes

Collecting regrets? It’s not too late

Then again, my friend, I’ll say it clear: For some of us, it is. Confessions, by **Ralph Finch**

I’m no Frank Sinatra; in fact, I even refuse to sing in the shower, a place, I once read, makes everyone sound good. (It’s a lie.)

Decades ago, I even stopped humming along in church, fearing that if there is a god, I might suddenly be struck dead by lightning. (It didn’t happen, so... A: there is no god or B: if so, indeed, she is very forgiving.)

Does anyone know if Sinatra collected (other than women and money)?

I collect a ton of stuff. The Finch Funhouse is bursting at the seams. (We often paraphrase that famous movie line, we’re “gonna need a bigger boat,” changing it to “We’re gonna need a bigger condo.”)

But I’m sure that all of us, collectors or not, as the end is near, we can think back and... OK, after decades of collecting, seeing tens of thousands of items, and even having acquired a lot of it, is there something you’d like to change?

I have many experiences and won’t confess to all of them in case the statute of limitations has not run out on some.

But collecting regrets? I’ve had a few. Fifty-plus years of collecting, and I remember the regrets so well:

There was a time when I was a novice, and I was at my first bottle show at the old armory in Jackson, Michigan, maybe 55 years ago. There were two matching, pontiled and embossed medicines for \$400, more than I could imagine spending (then). I’ve never seen another like it since. If I ever do, at that price—or ten times more—I’d drop my cane and jump over the table to grab it.

*And now, the end is near
And so I face the final curtain
My friends, I’ll say it clear
I’ll state my case of which I’m certain
I’ve lived a life that’s full
I traveled each and every highway
But more, much more than this
I did it my way*

*Regrets, I’ve had a few
But then again, too few to mention
I did what I had to do
And saw it through without exemption
I planned each chartered course
Each careful step along the byway
But more, much more than this
I did it my way*

Frank Sinatra

Then there was the time I was at the two-day weekend antiques market on London’s Bermondsey Street. You had to take a bus—across Tower Bridge—then walk a mile to get to it. One Friday I saw a porcelain image of a young child, and on the reverse an old piece of pasted paper revealing the child’s history. Back at my hotel room, I remained captivated by it; it truly was an image of the most beautiful child I had ever seen. But I don’t collect porcelain, images of children, whatever. Still, the next day, I took the bus and walked the mile, but...it had been sold.

And ketchup? I’m labeled (lampooned?) as the “Ketchup King.” In my collection of a ton of ketchup stuff, I have about 25 labeled/embossed ketchup crocks and jugs, and I firmly state that if you spent an unlimited amount of time—and money—you’d have a hard time coming even close to matching mine. Yet, when I pass the shelves groaning under all those jugs, I groan and think...Why, oh why, didn’t I raise my bid one more time and get what would have become the best of all my ketchup jugs?

Dear reader: If you ever stop by and look around, you’ll understand that I really liked a few things that I didn’t gloat on to. Still regrets? I’ve had a few. And if I get another life to live, things will be different. And we will get a bigger condo.

