

Reprint from Unravel the Gavel

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“A Farewell to Dick Withington

I DON'T THINK SO!”

By Marcia Leizure

For the past 10 or so years I've had the good fortune to get to know the remarkable Dick Withington, both as a friend and mentor. Since the news of his illness has spread throughout the antique world, I have had so many phone calls and letters of concern about the status of Dick's health.

Back in January, I picked Dick up at the airport when he returned home from Florida. He had just received the grim prognosis from his Dermatologist, that his cancer had reoccurred once again. Dick counts 14 operations since the first discovery almost 17 years ago. But after overcoming the odds so many times - this time the cancer had spread to places inaccessible by outpatient surgery under general anesthesia.

He knew it was bad. On the way home from the airport we stopped at a favorite restaurant. In response to the “How ya doin'?” Dick announced that *he had four weeks to live* and he had cancer and it was bad, etc. The next day at the diner for breakfast, it was the same thing. In response to “How are you?” Dick proceeded to tell the girls and most everyone else in the diner that he had cancer again and had four weeks to live. For me it was shock and disbelief!

The month of February into March is like a fuzzy bad dream. Dick traveled to Dartmouth Medical almost every day, a cycle of Chemo led to severe dehydration, and then hospitalization. An intestinal bug he

caught in the hospital, landed him in intensive care for most of the month. Dick was never quite sure if he would ever return to his beloved Hillsborough Center. He did come home again, but only for a few days, for the bug returned he was back in the hospital until mid April.

In nearly 60 years, Dick had never missed an auction. When his first wife died, he was up on the podium the next day. When he had a heart attack, he signed himself out of the hospital so he could be at the auction the next day. In retrospect, throughout Dick's long life, his strength and comfort have come from his auction family and friends. April 13 & 14 marked the beginning of Withington's 59th year in the auction business ...and Dick was in the hospital. This was a major event for all of us. In reality, the show would go on, for Larry Leizure has been running the business for nearly 10 years and he always makes things happen effortlessly. And for myself, I have been content to be Dick's best supporting actor and back-up auctioneer, but I knew this day would come eventually. The weather forecast was terrible – a Nor'easter was on the way – in APRIL! *What else could go wrong?* So a deep breath and I entered the Ballroom at the Holiday Inn, walked around greeting everyone – just like Dick would do. I called Dick on the cell phone and let everyone say hello to him in the hospital. What would we do without Dick?

For the past few years, our pre-auction routine has been to discuss the preview of the night before over breakfast, and try to anticipate the day ahead. A puzzling thing – before each auction, Dick always would say, “I'm Nervous.” I thought that was bizarre - *“How could Mr. Showman – Auctioneer #1, be nervous?”* But as I paced and fiddled with my watch, in a few minutes

it would be show time. I stepped up on the podium and announced that Dick would not be at the auction. Suddenly it was **my** responsibility to do “*a good Job*”, and *I was nervous!* I now understood the reason for his concern, and I guess that is what made Dick always on the top of his tradehe never stopped being “Nervous”.

In May we had the auction of Zelda Cushner’s Doll Collection, Withington’s largest doll auction in many years. This event marked Dick’s return to the podium – he was frail and his voice was a bit weak, exacerbated by the dry mouth caused by his treatments, but he sold *both days*. And the audience seemed to transmit healing energy to Dick. He seemed to get stronger before our eyes – (*Did you know that Auction Therapy is a form of Alternative Medicine*)

We had five auctions scheduled in June! Would Dick be able to attend the sales, let alone call some bids? On June 7th, the on-site sale was at an old homestead in Keene - Dick visited with everyone during the preview and at the beginning of the sale announced to the crowd that he had cancer and had four weeks to live..... Compensating for his weakened state, he developed a new “auction style”, sitting with his feet up on a table – using his cane as a pointer – running the show while shooting one-liners at the appropriate times. He was still the Bob Hope of the auction block on this classic summer auction day. After the sale, he rested in a rocker under the apple tree, exhausted but satisfied that he could persevere and complete the day. Dick was pretty good!

The next week we had another NH farmstead to sell – this place was LOADED!! There was enough stuff for a two-day sale, and our back-up auctioneer, Dick Gardner was on holiday

in England. So it was up to Dick and Me – could we do it? Yes we can!!

Dick began the sale, “I’ve got cancer in the brain and I have 4 weeks to live”, etc. etc. Then he began by selling the gun collection, then the paintings, coffee grinders, and steam engines, coins and country furnishings!!! It was a real country auction, and he ended the day in better shape than he started.

On the 21st of June, we had a Doll Auction at the Holiday Inn in Nashua. Dick Gardner was still on vacation so it was the dynamic duo again.... We sold tag-team fashion a hundred lots each, and he didn’t use a chair this time – DICK WAS BACK!

On June 29th & 30th Withington hosted the annual Live Free or Die Antique tool Auction - 600 lots to be sold both Friday & Saturday. Dick announced to the crowd that he would not be here next year, that he had only 4 weeks to live and then proceeded to stand at the podium and sell 100 lots in less than 45 minutes – interjected the appropriate “Dick-isms”, (like the one about the box being the right size to bury a cat), etc. Afterwards, I watched as Dick sat in the shade, sipping his lemonade and he seemed to savor every moment of the day. You could see his pride as he gazed over the lush landscape of Hillsborough Center, which he has preserved and protected throughout his life. In spite of the tenuous nature of his life, I think he was content in his accomplishments over the past few months, just as much as the successes of his life. .

Dick Withington is the poster child of Goal Setting. He anticipates a vacation by counting down the days And half-way through the vacation, he starts counting the days ‘till the vacation is over! Throughout his long life, he has

always had many reasons to get up in the morning.

Withington's July auction has become an annual event – with the barn decked out in the best antique finery. This year, the July 26th featured 100 lots out of Dick's house – I called it – “Part I Richard Withington Collection of Fine Antiques.” When asked if he would like to have the auction at “the Main Barn”, for old times sake, he was positive and the days leading up to the sale were full of mixed emotion - “*The tent was up in his yard!*” (This is one of Dick's favorite catch phrases – in response to a cough or sneeze.) While we were setting up the barn in anticipation of the sale, Dick would remark in passing, “I wonder if I'll even live to the sale.”

Happily, Dick did live to see the sale and share in that special day. Thursday evening, after the auction, we sat around the now empty barn, discussing the day's events. Everyone was tired yet satisfied at a successful day and Dick was talking about the *NEXT* sale at his Main Barn in September – he could take out another 100 lots out of the house and add it to a few other good consignments, and so on....

All of us at Withington Auction would like to thank you all for coming to the auction preview, for attending the auction and for your show of support. He is deeply touched by all the kind words and encouragement, for the “treatment of the mind” is just as important as the cures of modern science. With the standing ovation and the presence of so many fans, he could feel the love from you all – and he loves you right back.

Dick has returned to Hanover to have follow-up visit with the doctors, (who gave him four weeks to live). August began the seventh month since

his diagnosis and he seems to regain more of his old persona every day. Perhaps he has just another four weeks – but that will bring us to September – What a great month for an auction!

“Farewell to Dick Withington?”
“The Final Bid?” – Not Just Yet – he wouldn't want to miss his Second Funeral / Jazz Concert and the Auction of his Million-Dollar Mechanical Bank Collection - both scheduled for August of 2008! We'll keep you posted.

Editor's Note:

Dick Withington's Second Funeral:
Friday - June 20, 2008 at 6:00 p.m.
At the North Field, Hillsborough Center
Free to All!!

Mechanical Bank Auction: 165
different Mechanical Banks and 50
duplicates – Thursday - August 14, 2008
at the Withington Homestead -
Hillsborough Center

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