



the “long arm of the law.” (Unless they collect original Picassos and vie with James Bond.) Still, Customs officials placed Michael Behiel under investigation at the Canadian border, suspecting him of participating in “potential illegal activities.” “I was trying to bring slot cards into Canada,” he said, “and they thought I was part of some International identity-stealing crime ring (The cards often have names other than your own on them).”

Move to Saskatchewan

Trouble with the government aside, living in Regina, Saskatchewan, creates a unique advantage, according to Michael. “Sometimes living in a rather remote area can be beneficial,” he said. “This area is so isolated, and I am the only person from my collector’s club (CCGTCC) that resides here.” As a result, Michael has extraordinary access to a huge untapped market allowing him to trade with others that cannot access these remote areas. “When I started collecting, I thought I might get 100 or so chips added to my collection by advertising that I had access to these 20 or so casinos. Within one week, I had already increased my collection by over 125 chips!!!”

Interrogate Grandpa

Michael has had other lucky breaks, as well. When he was just starting out, he was advised by experienced collectors to “talk up”

his new hobby. They told him, “You never know when a friend or relative might have a piece or a connection that could be useful.” But because “Casinos are a fairly new idea in Canada,” Michael said, “I never thought I would be fortunate enough to encounter this happening.” He was wrong.

During a visit with his grandparents on their farm, Michael was talking with his grandfather in his craft shop where he makes wooden crafts. Michael said, “Being a thrifty man, my grandfather utilizes whatever he can find that works best for what he needs. As we were talking, he reached for his glue spreader and my eyes almost popped out of my head. What he was using for a glue spreader was a Las Vegas Casino Slot card from about 20 years ago! When I asked him about it, he explained that it was merely an old card he found lying around the house from their trip to Las Vegas 20 years prior, and that there were several more in the drawer if I wanted them. When all was said and done, the four cards he handed over to me sold for \$300 U.S., and sent him and my grandmother on a great bus-trip casino junket. He was so excited he could hardly finish his crafts!”

Humiliate Yourself

Now that Michael is an established collector, it is his turn to dispense advice. “The best advice I can give novice collectors is to

utilize and join The Casino Collectors and Gaming Token Collectors Club which is located online at <http://www.thechipboard.com>. This is the largest and best group of international casino collectors that exists with more than 5,500 registered members and probably another 2,000-3,000 non-registered users. It is full of great people who love the hobby and are always glad to help out with advice and information.

“Also, never be afraid to ask people if they want to trade. When I first started collecting, I asked a collector (it was one of my first trades and I was not totally aware of how the value of chips worked) if he would trade me a \$100 value chip for a common \$1 current issue casino chip. Thankfully they were kind enough to explain to me the whole system, and after my embarrassment subsided, we worked out an alternate deal.”

Collecting is like gambling; you listen and learn, follow your gut, and hope for a lucky break. Michael Behiel’s collecting journey has been a bit unorthodox, but now he has collecting partners all over the continent, more than a thousand pieces, and some great collecting stories to pass on. I’d say he hit the jackpot! •



Are you a passionate collector? Send your story to: A Passionate Collector, c/o Antiques & Collecting Magazine, 1006 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60605.