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Bill McBride: Largest Collection in the World of Darth Vader Items

The Force is with Bill!

By Danica Low

Bill McBride lives in northern Culpeper with his wife, his German shepherd, and his toys.

The Fauquier High School graduate (class of 1990) is soon to be declared by the Guinness Book of World Records as the title holder for the largest Darth Vader memorabilia collection in the world. McBride was the tiny age of six when his obsession with Darth Vader began. I bet he never dreamed he would be able to turn it into a career and a world record title.

The largest collection

McBride gives me – and my 11 year old son and his friend – a tour of his vast collection that occupies several rooms in his single family home in Virginia suburbia. He says, “You are seeing one 20th of everything today.”

His would-be dining room and one upstairs bedroom is floor-to-ceiling covered in Darth Vader items. He dares us to name a household item that he doesn't have in Darth Vader paraphernalia. We try, and we fail. A toaster! A fly swatter! A car? How about a couch! Yup, he has something of the sort in a Darth Vader variety of every item we suggest.

His collection is vast. Meticulous. Powerful. Intimidating. Much like the dark lord himself.

The most original

I am amazed, and the 11 year olds' mouths are dropped open in awe as McBride unveils his most treasured collectible: the original prop Darth Vader helmet from Star Wars™ Episode IV, *A New Hope*. The incredible find came to McBride through a trade deal with a colleague earlier this year, and was originally used as a touring costume for Lucas films promotions following the release of the epic picture.

Your chance

Fauquier residents will get their chance to view McBride's collection at The Culpeper State Theatre in September. McBride says: “What began as an ask (to The Culpeper State Theatre) to exhibit some Star Wars™ paraphernalia, turned into a much larger scale movie showing and collectible trading event for the region – and we are very excited.” (The Culpeper State Theatre is located along Main Street, just 15 miles south of Remington.)

The theatre will show two screenings of *Plastic Galaxy*, which, according to the film Website, “is a documentary that explores the groundbreaking and breathtaking world of Star Wars toys.” The event will host official Star Wars™ collectors from all over the world, and McBride will personally assess and

price memorabilia brought in by attendees. Do you have a Star Wars item you think may be worth its weight in gold?

Fans go wild

What exactly is the draw to Star Wars memorabilia? Star Wars seems to pull people in, have an electrifying and life changing impact, and once you're in, it's never letting go. Collectors pay up to tens of millions of dollars for the rarest finds. McBride says while most collectors pull from the entire Star Wars collection, he has always been enamored with Darth Vader, specifically.

McBride is one of a kind

McBride says, "What differentiates me from a lot of other collectors is that I collect the high-end, original concept, one of a kind items." By one of a kind, he's referring to items like the original casting mold that Kenner (toy manufacturer) used to create the first plastic Darth Vader five inch figurines, complete with expandable light saber. Or the original prototype in the box, pre-distribution, 12 inch Darth Vader action doll that Kenner never actually put on the shelves. How about the gloves that Darth Vader wore in *The Empire Strikes Back*? Yes, he has them all. Wow.

As we stare at the original Lucas films story boards for *The Empire Strikes Back*, and I try to grasp that footnotes are possibly handwritten by George Lucas himself, McBride shares why he has affinity for Darth Vader. It is in this story clip – where Darth Vader is looking out at the open galaxy and the Death Star is edged in the corner of the still scene – that McBride says we see a side of the dark giant that is human, possibly even humane. McBride seems to have developed a kinship with the character and his complexities.

With a 15 year career in aerospace, Bill McBride is a scuba diver and weight lifter. He is part of the Washington D.C. Metro Area Star Wars Collecting Club and the International Star Wars Collectors Club. He is currently transitioning into making collectibles his livelihood.