

A Signpost on the Road I Traveled

Edward Kennedy

IN THE year 1943, by the grace of God and the passage of time, I was in high school. My parents began to express the feeling that a boy of twelve years, with an abundance of energy, should contribute to the family income. Motivated by my parents' point of view, I set out to seek employment.

This was one time in my life when good fortune smiled in my behalf. Only three days had elapsed since I began my search for suitable employment when I saw a sign in the window of the local newspaper office, "Apprentice Wanted!"

I realized that the advantage which I had gained by seeing the sign first might vanish with the next boy who came along the street. I decided it was necessary to make application within the hour. With my hair combed, my ears cleaned, and my shoes shined—which I soon discovered was wasted effort—I attempted to present myself to Mr. Henson, the owner.

The occasion differed from the job interviews which we rehearsed at school. None of those behind-closed-doors formalities were in evidence. When I entered the shop, I asked to see Mr. Henson about the job he was offering. The thin, cadaverous man behind the desk turned toward the back shop and yelled "Hey, George! Some kid out here wants that job!" A reply came thundering back: "I'm busy! Tell him if he's willin' to work hard for four bucks a week, come in Monday after school!" This outburst completed the session, and with a meek "Thank you," I accepted the situation. I had walked several blocks toward home before I realized that nothing had been said about learning the printing trade, which was supposed to be the primary advantage in this job.

During the weeks that followed, however, my duties and privileges were outlined in detail. I started by cleaning the presses, sweeping the floor, and scraping brass rule. As time passed, and George's confidence in my abilities increased, I was gradually advanced to jobs of increased responsibility. The first advancement was feeding the little Chandler & Price, which was in the back corner of the shop. The next week George requested my presence at the big Miehle in the front window. The wealth of King Solomon could not have replaced my delight when George told me to climb up on the six-foot stool. I proudly shoved newsprint into the gaping jaws of the monster until the edition run was complete.

As I grew more familiar with the routine of the shop, it became my duty to do the work alone in the back shop on many occasions. George was always apologetic about his absences. He would say, "I'm sorry I didn't get to help with the work yesterday, but I meet so many mixed up people that it takes all my time straightenin' 'em out."

Another reason for his absence from duty was a bottle in the shop. I cannot recall seeing George inebriated at any time. However, a few potions of cheer usually brought on philosophical lectures and very little production. On one particular occasion, I noticed that George was making trips to the rest room at regular intervals. This was a definite indication that the "work-stopper" was concealed within the confines of that two-foot by four-foot enclosure. I decided to confirm my suspicion by looking for myself. It is quite a task to conceal a sixteen-ounce bottle in an area of eight square feet, but George had applied his best efforts. It was not under the sink, and it was not behind the toilet. This baffled me temporarily. I considered the possibilities briefly. Then I lifted the lid on the toilet tank. There was "Old Grandad" bobbing in the cool water.

I remember also a time when George was in debt. The Springfield Paper Company, of Springfield, Missouri, had sent a statement to George each month for several months. I suppose its patience was wearing a bit thin. On this occasion, the statement was accompanied by a rather ill-tempered letter. George accepted this indignity without a word. A few days later, he produced a reply which he had prepared. The letter read:

Dear Sirs,

It is necessary for me to explain my bookkeeping system so you can better understand our situation down here.

We have a nail behind the front door. When a bill comes in, we just put it on the nail. When we get in some cash, we just reach under and pull off the bill next to the door.

It is my pleasure to inform you that your bill is now second from the wood.

Sincerely,

George T. Henson"

When I left that little Ozark community in 1947, I had mastered the mechanics of printing to the extent that George was capable of teaching them. Future experience proved that my knowledge of the subject was far from complete. However, as I look back, I feel that George taught me far more about printers than about printing.

The many things I can remember will always endear the "Current Local" and its owner to me. It is hard to overlook the number of boys who have received their start in life from George, or the number of people on his payroll who just could not hold a job in other shops. I remember also the money George would loan to the

parasitic characters of the community. He knew it would never be returned to him, not in cash, anyway.

As I review my apprenticeship under George from time to time, I am amazed at the amount of his philosophy of life which has become a part of me. His influence has gone out in many directions from his little community in the form of partially trained printers and partially developed philosophies.

Point Blank Observation

John Roberts

THE small black pit made a deep impression upon my mind. I thought of its great power and its ability to do great destruction. I wondered about its attributes and came to the conclusion that there were none. The opening had a radius of only a quarter of an inch, but it was sufficient to snuff out life. Peering down the hole, I could see the grooves that lined its inside. When I thought that just a flick of the finger could make me an immortal, sweat dripped from my brow. . . . Not everyone can be fortunate enough to have the end of a loaded gun barrel stare him in the face.

Footprints in the Sand

Jean E. Rees

ON THIS still, cold, misty morning, while strolling down the beach, I see a figure, who stands dressed entirely in black, surrounded by the glistening gray sand. Only the slapping, lapping of the hungry, salty sea can be heard, each wave trying to outdo the other in order to overtake the stooped, desolate man. The man seems conscious only of the song the sea sings. He soon loses even this contact as he becomes more and more engrossed in thought—a thought which seems as if it will shatter into little pieces and never give him peace of mind from the grief he bears. He feels that if he could be by himself for a while his grief would be cast aside, setting him free once again.