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A Recollection
From John Horn

Shooting Star Press  2016

I quit working as a commercial printer in the mid-1980s. I owned a C & P and two cabinets of Stymie and Brush for my own personal use. I wondered if there was any more letterpress equipment left in the country and on a long layover in Chicago, I found a guy named Jack Frank. I went out to Jack's warehouse and was blown away by all the letterpress equipment he had for sale. During the conversation he told me there were such a thing as "hobby printers" and if I wanted to learn more about them, I needed to contact this fellow in Indianapolis named Dave Churchman.

Arriving back home, I quickly sent a letter, this being before I tapped into the internet, to this Churchman fellow, asking all sorts of questions. In short order a long letter from Mr. Churchman arrived answering all my questions and giving me additional information about hobby printers, amateur journalism and printing history. Even though I had earned my living as a printer for almost thirty years, I began my education about these areas of printing that I never knew existed. Dave became my guide and my mentor. He introduced me to book sellers who specialized in books about printing, he lead me into the world of printing history, he directed me to the Amalgamated Printers' Association and the surprising hobby of amateur journalism. He eventually informed me that he also sold a bit of letterpress equipment.

More letter writing ensued. I would write a page of

questions, he would return a three page, type-written letter, single spaced! I never met a person so willing to share their knowledge and time so freely.

I finally decided it was time to visit Indianapolis and meet this man and see his warehouse with some printing equipment. This was a very long time ago and my brain is old and beer-fogged, but I'm very sure I was excited about my first trip to Indianapolis and the "Boutique de Junque." Dave and I became pretty good friends. Dave and I worked several deals together, Ron Ruble's and James Eckman's collections come to mind. Dave aided and abetted my burgeoning addiction of collecting more printing stuff. I wrote him many checks. We wrote many more letters to each other. All my other activity stopped when a letter from Dave arrived. I would read and reread his letter a couple of times before I returned to whatever it was that I was supposed to be doing. It wasn't unusual for him to sign his letters, "Bestus, Festus."

I know that I'm not the only person he mentored. I've often wondered how many beginning printers bought their first type, their first composing stick or their first press from Dave. His auctioning skills at the APA Wayzgoose meetings were legendary. I was told, in my early days in the APA, of Dave selling a piece of string for \$13 by supposedly saying that the string once belonged to Benjamin Franklin! It was not unusual, in the heat of an APA auction, for Dave to look

over at me and say, "You really need to take this back to Little Rock." I had no choice but to drive the bidding up.

Our correspondence slowed in the past couple of years as my collecting mania cooled somewhat. But every couple of months a letter would arrive typed or hand-written on recycled stationery in an also-recycled envelope covered with vintage postage stamps. Often included with the letter were some "fantasy" or "cinderella" postage items. These stamps or postal cards were expertly printed. To the uninformed or gullible they looked real. Printed with muted colors the way older stamps were printed, on some yellowed paper he had scrounged out of some ancient print shop, these postal items fooled a lot of experts. Dave was a good printer.

We exchanged letters just a couple of weeks before he died. I'm so very glad we had that final communication even though neither of us knew it would be our last.

David Churchman is the main reason that I've been able to amass a substantial collection of letterpress equipment and type. He was always there, informing and encouraging. Nowhere in my shop can I stand and not see something I own because of Dave. I will always be in his debt. His passing has left me with a huge sense of loss. In my eyes, he was a giant of a man and I'm honored to call him my friend.

Two hundred copies printed on a Vandercook Universal III. The type is Linotype Granjon for the text and Dave's favorite typeface, Palatino, was used on the title page. Following my mentor's example, the cover stock is something I bought at a defunct printing company auction.