

Reminiscences

By Michael Rogers

Children Learn Early From Stamps

Today, my son Kyle is 24 years old but as a child, he demonstrated his curiosity, and like most children, he would pay close attention to what his dad was doing.

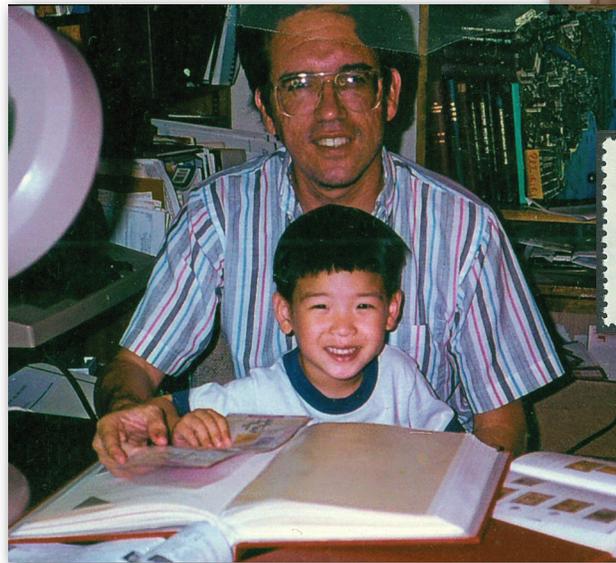
I remember his first encounter with philately. The China album pages that I'd designed for Scott Publications had just arrived, each section plastic shrink wrapped. Kyle was a toddler then, still in diapers, greeting me at the front door with his gleeful shout, gesturing for a cookie. Nice try. I timed arriving home from work with his playtime before dinner so his cookie would have to wait until after our family finished eating.

Two year olds don't know subtlety. Determination etched on his brow, Kyle made a bee-line for my home office, his little shod feet going "bop", "bop", "bop" on the wood floors. I knew he was up to no good so I followed him, and guess what? Prying his diaper to one side, he took a piddle on top of my Scott pages, at the same time triumphantly looking skyward at me. I knew then that I couldn't leave him alone with my other stamp albums.

A stamp dealer knows there's always work to be done. That said, if I didn't love it, I wouldn't be doing it. Its far more productive taking apart collections in the evening than competing in the daytime with selling.

I'd take home a collection to disassemble. Kyle would climb on my lap and watch stamps being identified. I'd ask him "Want to know about this guy?" (George Washington), and weave a story. I remember another: "Can you find this at home?" (Mommy was cooking fish for dinner.)

As he recognized numerals, Kyle called them out. The numbers became a game. Some face values were expressed in fractions (U.S. Albert Gallatin 1 1/4 cents),



some by percentages (U.S. Beat the Drum 7.9 cents). Using a calculator was not part of the process.

Conceptualizing fractions and percentages as the mirror image of each other was easy because he is bilingual, having learned Mandarin first and English thereafter. As the Mandarin word for "chicken" is "guy," the fraction 1 1/4 cents translates into 1.25 cents. We played games based first on learning how to add and subtract, then the stamps would choose the numbers we gamed with. I was ever so mindful that learning needed a "gee-whiz" element, though Kyle often pushed us along.

We have a photo of an intense Kyle doing his math calculations, sprawled on the bed, me by his side looking on and helping. I enjoyed watching him puzzling out problems. As a preschooler, I never could have done it.

Kyle has a terrific Taiwan collection. It started out as a way to appreciate his heritage. His Grandpa flew Taiwanese jets so Kyle has a fascination for Taiwan's airplane stamps. As stamps were inserted into mounts, he would stick out his tongue moistening the gummed portion and I'd place them on the Scott album page. That

way we were doing it together.

Though Kyle owns his Taiwan collection, it is here in Winter Park. He's 24 now and at graduate school furthering his applied aeronautics engineering studies. Stamps served him well: Kyle had the fun of collecting and learning from stamps that helped prepare him for school.

My own introduction to stamp collecting came when I was laid up in bed as a seven year old for three weeks, bedridden with the mumps and then measles. Upon hearing how bored I was, my uncle gave me a stamp collecting kit. I was hooked. It seemed everyone had some stamps to contribute: relatives, neighbors, teachers. Soon my birthday came and I received a larger album.

In elementary school fourth grade, American History was introduced. Whether I owned the stamp or not, my stamp album described the purpose for which every U.S. stamp was issued. I knew about Davy Crockett and the Alamo, the American Revolution, and the rousing story of how Christopher Columbus discovered America.

Who says that stamp collecting is boring? ✉