

Reminiscences

By Michael Rogers



Me and the Declaration of Independence

Mid 1973 brought a big change in my life. After knocking around for a year after college graduation, I found myself in Winter Park, Florida, working for John McDaniel in his second floor office overlooking trendy Park Avenue. John had a three room suite: a bright and orderly showroom beyond which customers could not pass, John's private office and another room for the clerical staff who processed orders and the mail sales.

Wooden cabinets snaked their way through the showroom, separating customers from staff. On top were displays under glass, of a width that if I were to stretch my string bean arm toward a customer sitting across from me and his arm outstretched towards mine, we might not touch. And I'm a six footer!

Customers were impressed seeing staff beyond the counters filling orders or working on stock. At the same time, staff sitting at a desk kept an eye on what was going on at the counter, in case anyone needed help.

John had his private office, venturing into the showroom as needed or when friends arrived. My desk was in the showroom, at the rear left. Bob Womack toiled at a rear right desk. I relished my position as the first staff member to greet customers, taking the view that everyone who entered was a friend.

One morning a scruffy looking guy came in with some paper goods for sale. Sitting at the counter, I looked them over, noting since none were stamps or stamp related—what he had was out of my knowledge range. John was on an appointment so I couldn't ask him. The guy left disappointed, so I figured that was that.

Perhaps 90 minutes later, in came two police department detectives. The story

now was that I'd pocketed the Declaration of Independence from the guy who had been in earlier when he was showing me what he had for sale.

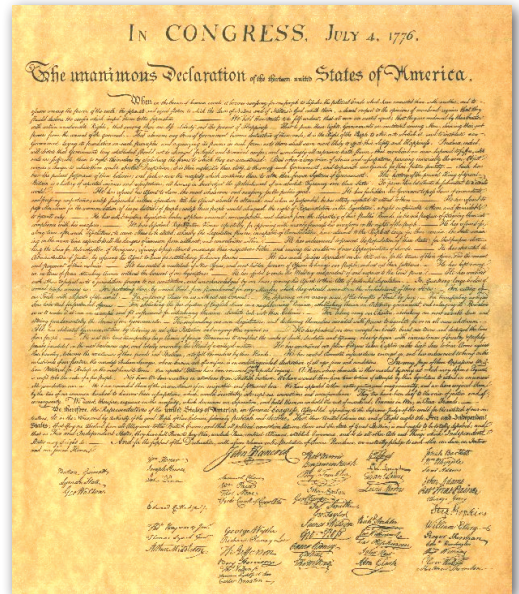
I denied it of course, saying there was a witness to this. John's employee Bob Womack had seen everything and we discussed it in passing afterwards. Furthermore, if you look at the width of the counter, it was impossible for the document to pass unseen from him to me. Why didn't the guy see me take it if this was his prize possession?

So where did this scruffy guy get such an important U.S. document? An inheritance, perhaps? Nope! He purchased a picture frame from K-Mart and the Declaration of Independence was stuffed in between the portrait and the backing!

Well, the detectives wanted me to come down to the Police Station for a lie detector test. Yup, I know it wasn't admissible. But those detectives sure were intimidating. I was raised to respect law enforcement. Uncle Sam Welgus was career NYPD and I could hear my mom...

So I went and took the test. After all, I'd done nothing wrong. Then one of the detectives told me in front of ten or twelve officers that the test showed I was lying. Now how was that possible? I started to swirl and faint with emotion. Then everyone started laughing and I was told it was a joke! They had nothing to do that afternoon. I became the patsy in a long line of stupid. Bob grabbed my arm back to hustle me out of the building before I could say or do something I'd regret.

When John returned to the office, he was dismayed. The next day, he paid a visit to his friend the Chief of Police. Thinking of that conversation brings a smile to my face after all these years. Back then, there was also a sigh of relief. ☐



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