

Phil the Postage Stamp by Randall Priest

Chapter 11 THE LAWNMOWER

On the ground I lay, face down in the grass. In the distance I hear some noise. As the sound gets closer and louder, my ears are filled with more noise than I can stand. Then, all of a sudden a gust of wind blows me into the air and away I go!

Floating in the air and flipping over and over, soon I land back on the grass but this time it is face up and on my side. Looking across the grass as far as I can see, in the distance something yellow, this may be the cause of the noise. Just then I am distracted from the noise in the distance by some crunching sounds very close to me. To my left, where the crunching is getting closer, I see a young boy walking toward me. I see his foot come very close to me and then he is out of view. The crunching keeps getting harder and harder to here.

Now back to the yellow noise maker, which is now coming in my direction. The noise is so loud that I think my ears will break. The yellow noise maker then turns away from me and goes in another direction. Then the shower of grass pieces fall on me, some of them stick to my face.

I hear the crunching sound again, but this time it is behind me. As it gets closer, I am waiting for a foot to smash me into the ground; but I am lifted up from the ground.

The grass pieces are brushed from my face and I can see that it is the young boy who passed by not long ago, who has me in his hand.

I am taken into the house. Boy was I glad to get off of the grass and away from all of that noise.

Being placed in to a box I find that I am not alone. To my surprise I notice many others just like me except for one thing. The faces and words are something that I have not seen before. As I try to get a view of just where I am and who is in here with me, then I spot a welcome site. It is someone that I have not seen in a long time. I call out to him, 'Ray is that you?' But I get no answer, I try again and this time he answers with a 'what are you doing here?'

For the next hour or so we get caught up on what's been going on in our lives. I am so busy talking to Ray that I almost forgot to ask him about the others in the box with us.

So Ray tells me that some of these people come from other countries. Looking around it is clear that there is much to find out about my new friends.

Ray takes the lead, as he has been here a while, in telling me about some of the people I am meeting for the first time. We talked and visited until the sun went down and the lights went out. Boy I did need a rest after my day in the grass, and meeting an old friend, and many new friends.

The next few days I spend listening to my new friends and also telling some stories of my own.

My knowledge of the world is getting more and more widespread. I am learning about countries and places that I have never heard of. Boy is this fun.

I will tell you some of their stories, but first let Ray tell you a story that I have not heard before.

To be continued.....

Reminiscences

By Michael Rogers

I had a plan. Just as I'd acquired the fabulous Bateman China accumulation in 1982 (which would transform me into a China dealer), I sure needed that jump-start of superior knowledge. There I was surrounded by 28 massive cartons of the specialized material rarely encountered, intertwined with modern new issues and postal history. It was unsettling to say the least and I knew my own limitations

J. Millard Williams was the premier China dealer of the day. Author, editor and publisher of numerous articles and handbooks with a spotless reputation, Jake was much admired. Audacious as it seems now, I considered a partnership, marrying his acumen with my inventory. The New York ASDA show was fast approaching and I knew he'd be there. My plan had an outline, but I had not worked out the details.

No sooner had I said that I'd purchased Bateman, but that Jake got all red faced and annoyed with me. "Grrrrr" went the tiger! I was mystified as to the cause of such a reaction. Not for 19 years did I receive an explanation until Jake was sitting in my living room, having concluded the paperwork on the sale of his personal China collection to my company.

It was a misunderstanding. Given that Art Bateman was the China Stamp Society's sales director, and Jake the #1 dealer, he thought he'd get an opportunity to bid. He didn't realize family friends solicited bids. Local dealer, national dealer, me. For whatever reason, the friends didn't reach out for a China specialist. Bateman had a whole lot besides China/Asia.

So here Jake and I were, chatting away, friends finally. He's incredibly knowledgeable, and I'm proud to know him.

Returning to Winter Park after the ASDA show, I leased office space one building over for the China/Asia company I envisioned. An immensely talented fellow from Jacksonville named Willy Dow, who could write up postal history, came my way. Willy would commute

back and forth, a few days with me, then take Amtrak to his beautiful red-haired wife, Ursulla.

Steven Frumkin came to visit, representing George Alevizos' Public Auction. Later on, I met George. If you can locate George's November 8-10, 1983, public auction, I'll point out which of the really nice postal history lots came from me. I remember assuring George that I'd never hold my own auctions as I'm too shy.... Well! I got over that!

Winter Park is a suburb of Orlando, in the north central area of Florida. As a most attractive area to retire to, it was a blessing finding qualified philatelists to work with me. Joseph Sousa, formally the executive director of the old Society of Philatelic Americans (SPA), Bob Womack, an early staffer at the Philatelic Foundation, William McP. Jones, expert on Cuba, were my mentors. I quickly picked up the habit of saying "we" instead of "I" because the staff then, as now, carried me. Awesome!

Miming "Pat" Herst, I deconstructed a 1912 Chinese tobacco tax stamp, replacing inscriptions with my name across the top in an arc and "Chinese Philately" across the bottom, to serve as my logo. I imprinted T-shirts for give-aways, anything to spread the word.

Pricelists accompanied by monographs followed. As with the stamp shop, they were frequent and to the point. China, Offices in China, Treaty Ports, First Flights, PRC, Ryukyu Islands, etc. At the stamp shop, we had developed a U.S. pricelist of almost every stamp mint and used that we carried from 1893 to date, a handy 32-page list issued biannually, given out free.

So at the China company we envisioned listing almost every stamp mint and used. First numbered by Scott, later Ma catalogue numbers were added. I'd worked as a teenager in NYC filling orders on stockcards, carefully noting in pencil fulfillment. I wanted that old-time experience again.



Opportunities beckoned. The PRC government had set up bookstores in key U.S. cities after President Nixon's visit to China. They had a stamp department! When the bookstores were closed, the inventory found its way to my company. Imagine everything in post office condition. Large quantities including 12 Mei Lan Fang S/S (Scott 628) which at the time retailed for \$150 VFNH each.

During 1984-5 I was buying in Hong Kong damaged examples of PRC's 1968 "Whole China is Red" (Scott 999A), all postally used, at prices ranging from \$150-\$250 each. I believe I handled 11 or 12 of them. Netted a \$100 profit each selling them damaged.

We didn't have the wealth of English language information about Chinese philately in those days. I kept on finding material not listed in Scott like varieties, unusual cancellations and postal history. I didn't want to guess the correct value. So Joe Cartafalsa and I began writing mail sales in mid-1984.

A remarkable coincidence occurred, Joe Sousa retired for health reasons and James Kerr signed on. Jim had served together with Joe during the Korean War. Jim was a world renowned expert in Korean Philately. He wrote "Korean Kingdom and Empire Philatelic Catalog and Handbook." His contacts brought excellent material to Winter Park. Jim Kerr and I became as inseparable as father and son. ✉