



Reminiscences

By Michael Rogers

Where there smoke....!

Oh my goodness. I sensed the migraine coming on. Light-headedness, my voice speeding up, and feeling bits of pain at the back of my head foretold some headachy days ahead. I consider myself relatively lucky: my first migraine occurred when I was 51. Migraines can start at any age, say a teenager.

Think hurricane season. I have dealt with so many migraines that when this one came on in 2007, I thought I could work through it, or worse come to worse, lay down in my office with a cold compress.

There's a Yiddish saying "Man plans, God laughs." This migraine turned out to be Katrina! The smart move would have been to go home and medicate with Tylenol 3, codeine.

Two cartons stuffed with an intriguing specialized China collection arrived by FEDEX. The sender was an astute collector who wanted to swap his duplicates for top flight postal history. I was honored to be chosen because I admired him greatly. As it happened, I had an oversized envelope of exceptional Asian postal history in the safe that I was slowly adding to, with an eye to the future. This was the perfect moment.

Unfortunately, because I was in the midst of a migraine, I simply reached into the safe for the envelope without glancing at the contents to figure the value. Then I wrote a note explaining the trade and dashed the contents back by FEDEX.

Couple of days later, the collector politely asked me "Michael, isn't the material you sent me a little light?" An unsettling thought flashed through my cloudy brain that the best thing to do would to punt. My company was holding an auction next week, so could I call back afterwards?

Another situation was brewing. A consigning in multiple auctions wanted to know why his example of Ryukyu #17c had not appeared at auction yet. Could I look over his material on hand and determine when it would appear.

In 1952 the Ryukyu Islands surcharged a 2 yen definitive with 100 yen. Done locally, specialists have noted quite a few varieties. Seven are numbered in Scott. The 17c refers to one with the "O" in a wrong font, 9/9 Kai Tei character. It occurs only once in a sheet of 100.

I went straight to our safe room where we kept auction consignments. Carefully I turned over every page and looked at each card. Then I checked the auction cards of written lots yet to be entered into the computer. I looked at our past auctions in case the stamp sold and inadvertently been paid to someone else. Then I went through months of security video tapes. The whole building was wired -- no, not the bathrooms!

Well, I couldn't find it.

I had systems in place to prevent something like this from happening whether by carelessness or theft. I had jawboned with the insurance company, security professionals and other auction houses.

I needed to have a careful conversation with my describer as to whether he had seen it. I knew from experience these types of talks can quickly go south. With my head pounding away, I tabled the discussion until I felt better.

Some months before, I sat across a kitchen table, and explained line by line of our auction contract. The lady was a life long collector but oh so mistrusting. Her house was stuffed with fine and not so nice collections of the widest variety. Rather than try to buy anything, I recommended public auction, and suggested that I take but one collection as a sample. See how this one does.

I chose a mounted collection of Asian flight covers and said I would estimate it as one lot for \$1600. That meant the lot could not sell for any less than \$800. Some auctions do not have reserves. When that happens, a lot might sell cheaply, but more often than not, lots find the correct valuation in auction, whatever that might be.

I cautioned her that while she could come and attend the auction, please do not identify yourself as the seller of this lot. Some buyers get spooked.

Our next auction was on a Friday. Winter Park Stamp Shop's counter space served as a spacious viewing area the preceding Monday-Thursday. Thursday's were always the most hectic because out of town viewers arrived.

I had a great big mail bid on the Asian flight cover lot, \$2,400. That didn't do me any good unless there was a competing bid. With a \$1,600 estimate, a \$2,400 mail bid being the only bid means the lot sells for the reserve of \$800. Should another bidder step up and bid, say, \$1,000, the \$2,400 bidder wins for one bidding increment over \$1,050. I never reveal the mail/phone/email bids to anyone. Its a matter of trust.

I had an ace in the game. I knew a guy from New Jersey was flying down just to bid on the Asian flight cover lot. I had emailed scans of the collection and he sure was excited. Now with hotel and flight ex-



penses, I was pretty sure he would either be the winner or a serious bidder.

I glowed with satisfaction as the New Jersey collector poured over the collection. Our shop was so jammed, he was seated right near the front door.

Sure enough, to spoil a perfect day, in come the consignor of the flight cover collection.

Bearing a platter of gooey chocolate cookies, she said to me, "I just read the contract. My collection could sell for half the estimate!" Groaning and in a whisper I said we went over this. Then I made a big mistake. In an effort to diffuse the situation, I asked her not to identify herself to the bidder of her covers. "What bidder?" So I explained there's a guy in this room that flew down to bid on your collection. Don't approach him. Well intentioned and not understanding, she handed each viewer a cookie (no napkins!) proudly announcing that she was the consignor of the Asian flight cover lot. Sure enough, the New Jersey guy bolted from my shop. I phoned him

later, and refunded his expenses coming down.

The flight cover collection sold for \$800.

Not fifteen minutes later, I received a phone call from the Ryukyu Islands #17c consignor. An answer was needed. I began by saying that I had done everything in my power to locate the stamp but could not locate it.

As the catalog value (at the time) was \$3,500, the fair market value was \$2,000. Therefore I would send \$2,000. And I apologized.

For probably 30 seconds—it seemed an eternity—there was quiet. Then came the explanation that he never had a #17c. He made the whole thing up!

He wanted to see what would happen if a rare stamp went missing. And since I was willing to compensate him, maybe he really did have the stamp after all!

I stared at the phone in disbelief and gripped the black handle with great force. I had spent darned near two weeks search-

ing. Worse, I might have accused an employee of theft. I knew I had to get off the phone before I lost my temper, other than to say I wouldn't accept any more of his consignments.

Come Monday after the auction, I still had a problem to chew over: how to handle the discrepancy between the valuations of the specialized China collection and the envelope of Asian postal history.

I knew what to say but couldn't assemble the sentences the right way because I was still headachy.

I called my friend Ralph Weil and talked over the situation. Ralph is a very good problem solver; he listens, which is a rare quality. He is patient and kind. I always try to do the right thing. Here, I blindfolded myself.

Ralph told me to simply tell the truth: "I had a migraine and got careless."

So I made the call. Since the collector made the determination that I was "light," I accepted his valuation of the gap. The truth is always the way to go. ☒

FLOREX 2015 by The Editor

The show went smoothly with only minor speed bumps. The December weather was great. The attendance numbers were slightly off from last year, with a 3% decline in numbers—which amounted to 19 people. Overall there was a lot of activity on the bourse floor with many pleased dealers and happy collectors finding treasures. If for some odd reason you did not attend, please make sure to pencil in the dates of December 2, 3 & 4, 2016.

Many thanks have to be given to the countless members of the CFSC who stepped in to help in specific areas, from security, reception, setup & breakdown. The CFSC functions as the hosting group for the show that is sponsored by the Florida Stamp Dealers Association. This arrangement generates a great deal of synergy.

You can find all the pictures from the 2015 show and lots more information related to FLOREX, including a great deal of history. The site is kept updated constantly; WWW.FLOREXStampShow.com

