



HPB RICHARDSON, TX
STORE #008
Volume 4, Sept. 1995
NEWSLETTER

**HALF
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Random Reminiscences

Over the past few months we've had flashers, a laying on of hands in the religion section and a new coffee bar put in.

Thankfully the Audio versus Distribution war continues even though Kyle, has moved into hardback pricing. In a generous move Bill P. has agreed to extend his wrath into the hardback pricing area and still keep up the flow of venom towards the audio department. Of course the alliance between Jay, the new head audioboy and his old mentor Kyle, may prove to be overwhelming adversaries if the rest of the hardback pricers join the bloody fray.

From an applicant about what books he reads.

"Scott Brown, he does Dilbert!"

Then there was the time a largish woman asked Bill P. to tie her shoes since she couldn't bend over far enough. Although startled, Bill willingly kneeled and tied her shoes, which if you know Bill you realize is a difficult task for him on his own feet.

The Richardson crew is now at a monstrous 15 people and our growing number lives in harmony excepting the audio vs. distribution conflict (which some conspiracy buffs may see as a clever devise concocted by management to keep the troops fighting between themselves rather than finding fault with their esteemed leaders).

Only twice so far when asked which translation was needed for greek classics have the young students stipulated they need the "English translation"

Editor's Note: Due to mechanical problems, busy schedules and overall laziness the Richardson HPB Newsletter switches from a seasonal printing schedule to "whenever we get the time and energy" format. So this edition which should have come out last spring and labeled Spring 1995 is now, as you can see Sept. 1995 (There were hopes it would be named August 1995, but the previously mentioned problems continued to prevail).



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Steve Leach's Interview

A candid conversation with the manager at our Flagship Store in Dallas. Questions by David Rush of store #008.

dr: How long have you worked here?

sl: Going on ten years.

dr: Did you start here or was that at Mockingbird?

sl: I started at Mockingbird but I've been with 01 the whole time. Ken and I started right as we were moving over here. We were there while they were keeping it going to get this ready and we helped get this ready.

dr: So who hired you?

sl: Jan and Boots, and in fact they interviewed me the day before the company halloween party and they invited me to the party. But I couldn't go because I had a small child to take for trick or treat.

dr: did you see an ad in the paper for the job?

sl: Yes, I saw the ad and I was at a dead end in my musical career. I had to support a family and get a bunch of shows we were trying to produce and it was taking all our money. And I didn't have any insurance since I had been a musician for 15 years and I was trying to get out of the smokey bar scene. I hired on here for 2 reasons, one was to get insurance and the other was that I loved used bookstores. I had been going to half

price books and other places for ages and its my favorite thing to do, so I figured I could tolerate it, and I loved from the start. I finally found my niche here, that I hadn't found anywhere else, not in college, playing music and what not. And when I got here I kind of knew I would be here forever.

dr: Do you remember anything about your interview?

sl: No, it was just real easy going. Both Jan and Boots were in on the interview, they were real friendly and they seemed to be like what I pictured the place to be, and I took to the place immediately. Jan knew that I'd been in music and so he started training me to price records and within the first year I became the main audio pricer. I really got into that but after a while I started pricing nostalgia.

dr: when did you start you climb into management?

sl: I think it was '88, when Ken and I were made co-assistant managers after Jan moved upstairs and Boots became manager. It was a real good time to develop for me as there was more and more responsibility as Boots was broadening her perspective and was being asked to do more on the chain level.

dr: But before Half Price books you were concentrating on music? That was your career?

sl: Yes, it was just a series of bad decisions that got me there. I had gotten a degree in marketing, which I hated. It was in the early or mid 70s and I was panicked about the

recession and my dad was a CPA and I was heavily influenced to go into something real solid instead of something I liked. So I got a degree in Business, hated it. Worked in the business world a few months, got sick of it, went back to graduate school to get a degree in comparative literature.

dr: What was your job right out of college?

sl: I was an insurance claims adjustor. I was in Abilene, Texas and in an office of thirty people I was the only single person. Single in a dry city in a garage apartment owned by a couple of fundamentalist who wouldn't allow liquor or visitors was really frustrating. I wasn't a businessman anyway and that got me running in the opposite direction as fast as I could. Happily I've never had to go back.

So I went back to school for one semester, loved it did great. Then this little band I was in on the side really took off, and we went on the road and just never stopped, so I never got my graduate degree and played music and was real lucky for a long time and got lots of gigs and stayed busy and got paid. I heard all these horror stories from musician friends, getting stiffed and beatup with beer bottles, it was relatively sane compared to that. But then it started to wane in the 80s and in the disco years all the live clubs started turning to musak so it was harder to find gigs and I just got frustrated with that whole end of it and decided to get out. Now I just do it for fun.

dr: What kind of music?

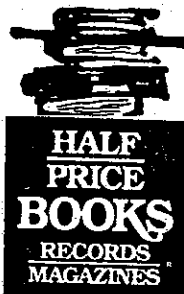
sl: Mostly pop of different kinds. For a while I was in to 60s, I was right on the beginning edge of the 60s nostalgia craze.

dr: So now you could be part of the 70s nostalgia craze.

sl: No thanks. Its nice to remember , not participate.

dr: You said you've always had an interest in books and book stores. Have you always been that way or did that come from something?

sl: I don't know where I got it. No one else in my family was overly interested in literature or reading or music for that matter. I was an avid reader from the time I could read. I always went to the library and all through college my work was in



libraries, I worked in the SMU library the entire time I was at SMU, I worked at the library in Austin. My wife was a librarian, her mother works for the main library downtown, her father worked for library systems and here sister works here now for the Dallas Public Library. So we're all book people, our house is full of books and there is no room for furniture.

dr: You developed this on your own? You weren't guided by anybody?

sl: No, it was kind of self pursued I guess. I remember when I saw the movie *Dead Poets Society* the theme of that seemed to be a mentor that would bring these people some bigger concept of life, I remember feeling when I saw the movie that I wish I had had somebody like that. Because I didn't really have an inspiring professor and my family wouldn't really encourage me to get into that to much. So I don't know where it came from, but its never gone, and being in this place just fuels the fire all the time because i'll see stuff that i constantly interested in and I'll check it out.

dr: What did you read growing up?

sl: Other than Ray Bradbury hardly any sci-fi. I read a lot of mysteries, all the Hardy Boys, all Sherlock Holmes, then I went to Perry Mason. I loved Perry Mason books but the old lady at the Richardson Library wouldn't let me check them out because they were to racy, I'd have to get my mom to check them out for me.

dr: You went to college at SMU ?

sl: Yes, I had about four or five majors I was considering including English, and German until I read a statistic the highest number of suicides among college students were foreign language students.

Then I was briefly in Broadcast/Film Arts where I got to be an usher at the first USA film festival when it was at SMU. But when I transferred to UT I lost so many hours that I had to choose new major, so I chose Business.

At that point I probably should have taken a year or two off to travel or "find myself", but I didn't and I was really desperate for some reason to do it in four years, and I've regretted it since.

dr: What do you read now?

sl: I go through phases. I usually read fiction, but I'm not into any particular genre. i like a lot of southern writers, Faulkner, I've read everything by Walker Percy. I read short stories, I like Flannery O'Conner, Eudora Welty. Right now I'm in a non-fiction phase and I haven't read a novel in two or three months. I've read *Of Saints and Sinners* by Lawrence Wright, he's kind of an agnostic who is searching. I guess the common thread to most of what I read is where people are not sure what they believe and are trying to figure it out, like Walker Percy and Graham Greene, the lapsed Catholic. I not a Catholic, just a lapsed.

I've been reading *The Fifties* by David Halberstein, I read a lot of books on race relations, I just read *Two Nations, Separate, Hostile & Unequal* by Hacker, a great book. And another called *The Sweeter the Juice* about a woman whose mother and brothers and sisters all pass for white and she chose not to, and the daughter tries to track down here aunts and uncles who are not passing as whites.

dr: What's the relationship between the store and the Amelia Earhart School?

sl: It started with the Ken Gjmere "I have a dream" program, which was taking a class of kids and promising them a college education

if they made it through High School, and the kids were from that school. When Ken Gjmere retired they needed somebody to take his place on their advisory committee and I went because I was interested and that was seven years ago. I've gotten more involved every year, its a wonderful place, there is a lot of incredible odds against them but there is an enthusiastic staff. Now I'm doing several things over there and tutoring.

dr: Helping these kids to learn to read will obviously help them in the work place, but do you think they will get something more out of literacy?

sl: I hope so. I'm tutoring a kid now who loves football but doesn't

necessarily love to read. I've been bringing him football books so at least he'll start. I've heard writers say to parent who are worried about their kids reading comic books or horror novels not to worry about what they are reading. Just be happy that they are reading, because they will find better things to read as they go along and just in the habit of reading. And it is vital to this country to be able to read and it is sure helpful to like to read because there is so much out there to help these people and I feel real happy to be in the business of selling books.

dr: I can't explain why I like to read so I wonder how you convince these people that they are missing out on something.

sl: One of the good things about this particular program, they don't refer to you as tutors, they refer to you as a mentor. What you are doing is representing an older person who knows how to read and is moderately successful and is a good influence. You don't really have to articulate why, just read with them. Of coarse being with Half Price Books you get the kids over here to look around the store. I think what they are missing is that kind of influence at home or outside school and just being around people who like to read makes them think about it, and hopefully that catches on and they start reading.

dr: Have things changed at the store?

sl: Yes, just in the past couple of years. I think the competition is one thing and it dovetails into the concern the company has now for customer service. When I started here this company was best as far as what it did for employees, really employee friendly. It didn't used to be so great with customers, we wouldn't give money back unless they had a gun pointed at you.

Phone shopping and all that was out of the question. Somewhere along the line two or three years ago a lot of people started deciding that it was not just important, but necessary to increase customer service. We have more obstacles in doing some things than a new bookstore could do easily with a computer, but we just don't have a choice. Its made it more challenging to keep the store neat a well organized and try and keep everybody friendly all the time but still not be machines.

dr: We "have to" do things this way, is it better?

sl: I think it is better because part of the challenge is keeping the identity of Half Price Books, some people use the word quirky as a pejorative, but I think it is to our benefit to be a little bit different than everybody else.

dr: Any good Buy stories?

sl: One long time customer who died put in his will that he wanted Half Price Books to make an offer on all his records and books. So I went there with another guy and we were going through his stuff, wonderful stuff and most of it he bought from us over the years. We were in his apartment packing it all up and the phone rang, there was no one else around so I finally picked it up and the person on the other end thought I was the guy. I didn't tell him his friend had died, I referred him to the apartment manager.

dr: How about any really weird employees?

sl: My favorite is the guy who had several identities. He had a resume about two pages long and had several doctorals. I probably shouldn't go into it too much. He had been working here a while and he had applied for a job upstairs because he knew computers. We hadn't checked his references when he started here, but they started

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checking all of his college references and couldn't find him in these universities. It came to a showdown and instead of confessing he went into elaborate story about how he was in the witness protection program and gave us the name of a special agent with the state department. Eventually got a letter on state department stationery from this special agent vouching for this guy. The letter-head on this stationery looked a lot like the computer label this guy had used in his section. So I called the state department and there was a guy by that name there that was on vacation but he spelt his name differently and he was out of the country when I got this letter.

dr: Can you see yourself doing anything else?

sl: No. I love the company, I was fortunate enough to stay here and mentors were Jan and Boots and they've always been in close proximity if I have any heavy philosophical questions or moral judgements. As far as retail goes I can't imagine selling produce or car parts and this environment doesn't seem like retail. And because I love books so much I don't ever feel guilty doing what Ken Gjemre said about Zales "selling things to people they couldn't afford and didn't need". I think what we do here is a good thing and despite the turnover over the years I still feel real familial with all the people working here now, and that's another thing were really trying to create family kind of environment with our staff. Dysfunctional, but a family none the less.

Mini Quiz

1. Name novelists who have also directed movies.

2. Why do some people think Trevanian is Robert Ludlem?

3. What black author has the most bestsellers?

4. Identify these books

a. "Once upon a time there was a moo-cow."

b. "The hairy paws of the Chamco brothers hung suspended above the broad keys of the laser -bash game. The cliffs of Char's eyebones drew down over his yellow orbs as he looked up in mystery. Terl could not have produced a more profound effect had he thrown a meat-girl naked into the middle of the room.

c. "I never knew orgs could cry!"

d. "The reason I did was because she knew quite a lot about the theater and plays and literature and all that stuff. If somebody knows quite a lot about those things, it takes quite a while to find out whether they're really stupid or not.

e. "...and I'll chase him round Good Hope, and round perdition's flames before I give him up."

f. "I thought of all those knots and koshkas mewing for moloko and getting none, not any more from their starry forella of a mistress. That was everything. I'd done the lot, now. And me still only fifteen."

g. "I would prefer not to."

5. What Star Trek movie used which of the above quotes?

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Book Blurbs

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Etc.

Saint John of God, the patron Saint of Booksellers and alcoholics.

"...he one day chanced to hear a stirring sermon by the traveling preacher John of Avila, and went suddenly spectacularly mad, right there in church. Visiting the asylum, John of Avila recognized the symptoms of lunacy as a form of penance, and urged the guilt-crazed bookseller to undertake a career of charitable works."

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Collectibles?

Louie tells us that when he was working at one of the Fort Worth stores that he had a customer who collected the Little Golden Book series and she told him that the books that DID NOT have Big Bird on the back cover were more valuable than those that did.

Unfortunately we have yet bring in customers who buy them as collectibles (at least we don't think so), still, it gives you something to think about as you sort through them.

BOOKS

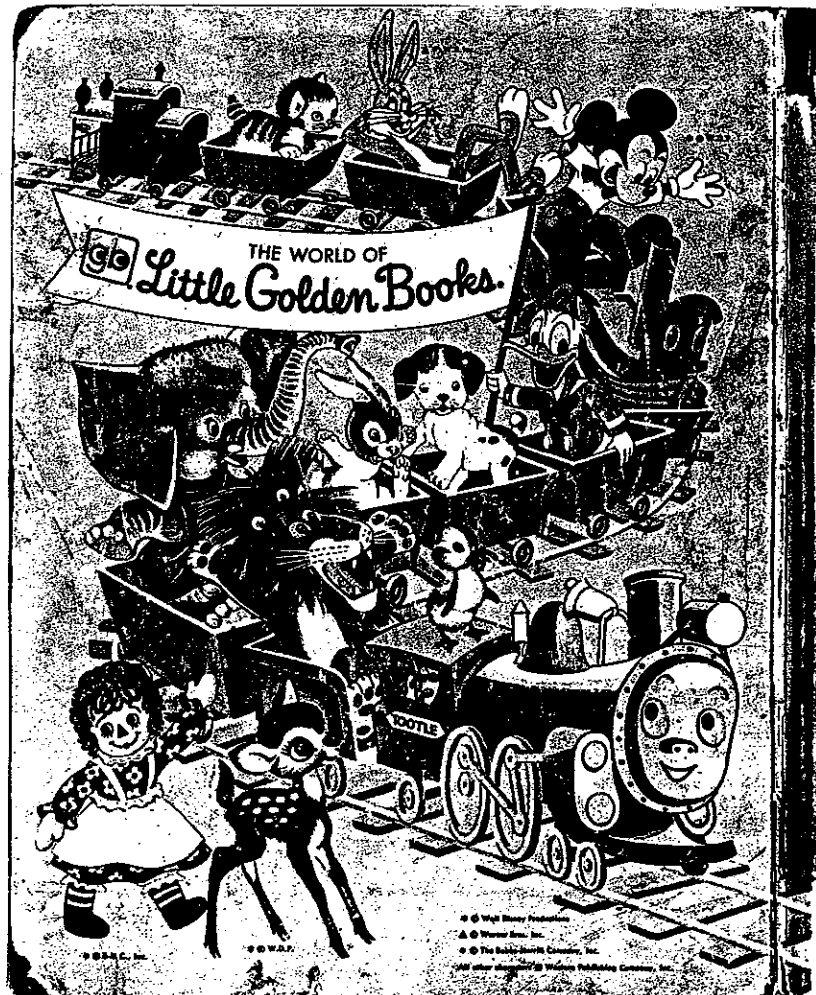
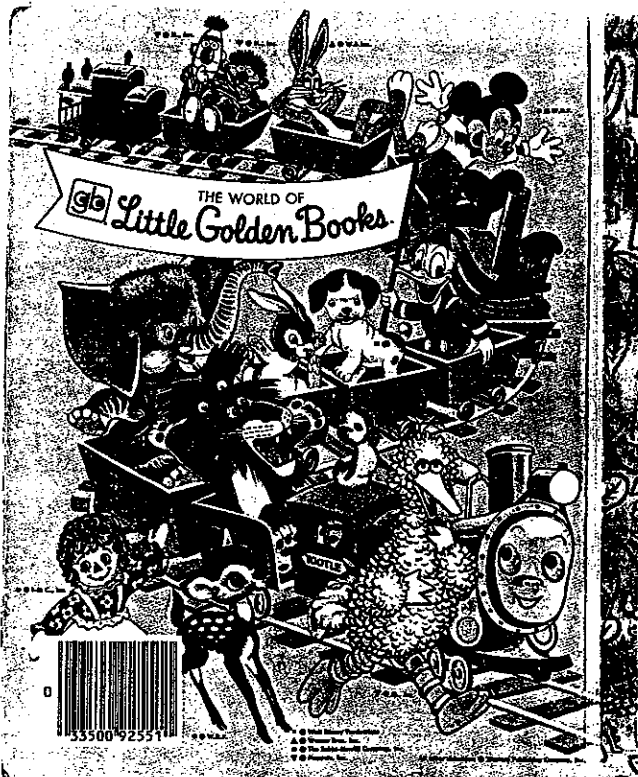
The sign said, "For each 10 minutes in this room you are expected to make a purchase." Needless to say, we didn't linger long. Saw some comic books for ½ price, but that was the only thing worth mentioning, except for other clever sign proclaiming, "Shoplifters prosecuted, shot or both." Exit, stage left. \$

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We heard about the poor guy who was so bright he could do two things at once: he could read writing. But we didn't have to be a genius to figure out that 50% discounts on used books doesn't necessarily mean we'll get a 50% credit on books we brought in. "Credit is figured by the book here," the clerk told us. Good, we won't have to get dressed up next time. We found the trade-ins and personnel more to our liking at the Abrams shop, but the converted A & P on McKinney had the largest selection. Check directory for Dallas area location nearest you and at 3306 Fairfield in Fort Worth. CK

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