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SHOW BUSINESS

Motion picture historians and critics, amateur and professional alike, generally agree that 1939 was the golden year of that art form (see Appendix 1), and after I concluded my caddying career at the end of August that year, I entered "show business" as the relief usher at the STRAND Theater, one of three first-run movie houses in Marshalltown, Iowa, population 18,000. The event was serendipitous because of my my life-long love affair with motion pictures, going back to my earliest memories. I vividly recall being taken to silent films, such as the 1928 [actually 1929] version of "The Four Feathers", starring Clive Brook and William Powell, and to the very earliest "talkies", including "The Bridge of San Luis Rey" and "The Jazz Singer", both of which I saw in Denver when I was five years old.

September of 1939 is memorable for other reasons, too. On the first day of that month, Hitler's Wehrmacht invaded Poland, and upon his refusal to withdraw, France and the United Kingdom declared war on Germany, commencing the Second World War. Down at Iowa City, the State University was fielding its most notable, if not its best, football team, captained by Nile Kinnick, who was to die as a naval aviator in the war. (See Appendix 2.) And last but not, to me at that time, least, I had grown from a 5' 4" underage high school junior to a 5' 9" senior in Marshalltown High School.

In those pre-World War II years, movies (or "shows" in Iowa parlance) indisputably were the chief source of entertainment in Middle America, rivalled, but not seriously, only by radio and ballroom

dancing. An example of their importance to our lives was the fact that my father took me out of school for a half day to take me to the matinee of "Gone with the Wind", because we could not afford the evening road show prices demanded by David O. Selznick.

In that period, first run houses ran continuous shows on weekends and holidays but on weekdays were closed from about 5:30 to 6:45 p.m. Prices were twenty-six cents for matinees and until 6:00 p.m. on weekends and thirty-six cents evenings. Children under twelve or who looked that young paid ten cents at all times.

Main Street was graced by three first-run houses, the CAPITOL, STRAND and CASINO Theaters, with seating capacities of about 1000, 800 and 900, respectively, and it was not uncommon on Friday and Saturday nights for all three to fill to capacity for both evening screenings.

In addition we also had the FAMILY Theater, affectionately called "The Shooting Gallery" by theater employees, because of its peculiar long and narrow auditorium in which only "cowboy shows" were exhibited. Prices here were cheaper: sisteen cents for matinees and twenty-one cents at night. This old house, badly deteriorated by age and neglect brought on by the Depression, was inhabited not only by patrons, but also by other fauna with varying numbers of legs, and new ushers were indoctrinated by telling them to inform complaining customers that the shoe shine furnished by the rats was a complimentary part of the ticket price.

The CASINO was locally owned by an early version of show business's "Odd Couple", namely Sam Horowitz, uncle of today's TV personality, David Horowitz, and his partner, Roman Catholic Mike Roskopf, who, in my mother's words, was decidedly "odd". The building that housed the CASINO is located on the south side of Main Street, midway between Second and Third Avenues, and it is the only 1939 vintage theater building still in existence in Marshalltown, although its use as a theater ceased many years ago.

The FAMILY was originally built by a man named Charlie Dunsmoor, who named it the "LEGION". Charlie made a good living from this modest beginning, but in the late 1920s, after visiting Southern California, he decided that his wife and he were destined for bigger things, so he sold the LEGION to Don Thornburg and built the "CAPITOL". He also bought an expensive convertible; a great dane with

an imitation jewel collar; and a face lift and hair bleaching for his wife, who doubled as ticket seller, or "cashier" in theater jargon.

Situated just across the alley from the site of the present ORPHEUM Theater, the CAPITOL was an impressive, 1920s-style movie house, done in Hollywood Moorish style, featuring stucco interior, grilled false windows and midnight blue ceiling complete with moving clouds and twinkling stars. The foyer was thickly carpeted and furnished with quality Spanish-style side chairs and library table, while a four foot crystal chandelier hung from the twenty foot high ceiling. Unfortunately, Charlie's timing was lousy, and while Thornburg made a decent living through the Depression showing "oaters" at the LEGION, which he renamed the FAMILY, Dunsmoor, saddled with a big mortgage, went bankrupt and lost his dream house.

By the time of my entry into show business, the CAPITOL, STRAND and FAMILY had all been acquired by a mysterious little Jewish man from Chicago named Mort H. Singer, who owned fourteen theaters in the midwest and had some kind of undefined connection with the Radio-Keith-Orpheum, better known as the RKO, Circuit. I say mysterious, because no one knew anything about him: who he was, where he came from, how

he acquired his theater holdings. We did know that his semi-annual visits were treated as if Moses had just come down off the mount.

All three theaters were managed by a well-groomed, good looking, 27 year-old Chicagoan named Milt Troehler, known to the ushers under their breath as "Captain Bligh". As a boy, he had worked up from usher to assistant manager at the RKO Palace in Chicago, in those days one of the premier vaudeville houses in the land, and he had many interesting, and occasionally lurid, stories about the famous stars who had learned their trade doing live shows between movie showings.

Troehler officed in the CAPITOL, but he visited the other two houses three or four times daily, arriving as a whirlwind to check on the state of business and physical running of the theaters, the latter including such matters as lighting and temperature of the auditoria, freshness of the air (more on that later), quality and sound level of the picture being projected, cleanliness of the lobbies and rest rooms and grooming of the doormen and ushers, among other matters too numerous to detail,

and to paraphrase Humphrey Bogart in "The Treasure of the Sierra Madre", "If everything ain't just right, and maybe even if it is, I'm going to raise hell!"

Local young men Wendell Brown and Bob Simmons nominally were assistant managers, but because Troehler, being a classic Type "A" personality, left precious little managing to them, their duties consisted principally of handling and banking receipts, accounting for tickets and making up the weekly payroll, Wendell for the STRAND and FAMILY and Bob for the CAPITOL. They also served as masters of ceremony on the stages of their respective theaters on Bank Night and Wahoo night, the latter a movie theater version of bingo, supervising the drawing of numbers and passing out prize money to winning patrons.

At this moment in history, Eddie Sayre was doorman at the STRAND, aided and abetted by Ralph Miller as first and Glen Fields as second ushers, while at the FAMILY, Don Maulsby and Art Wood held the fort against the weekly Indian attacks. Jimmy Lloyd was doorman at the CAPITOL, and I believe the ushers were Russ Presnall and Bob Perisho, but I'm not sure about the last two; they may have come along a year later. Cashiers were Ann Tilton at the CAPITOL; Vivian Ziegler at the STRAND; and Mary Bendlage at the FAMILY. Projector operators were Orvie Jenkins, who also was chief of the local for the International Alliance of Theater and Stage Employees, a powerful trade union, and Bill Martens at the CAPITOL, and Orvie's brother, Joe, and Webb Kendall at the STRAND. The FAMILY projectors were operated alternately by these men during their off hours from the

STRAND and CAPITOL. Russ Johnson was custodian at the CAPITOL, while his older brother, Wilmer, handled the STRAND and FAMILY. Roger Bothell, who since age twelve had ushered or taken tickets in every Marshalltown theater, worked at the CASINO, joined there later by Roy Asher and my sister's future brother-in-law, Armon Reynolds.

Eddie Sayre and I had been playmates as children, and when he asked if I would be interested in working at the theater, I quickly agreed. After introduction to, and a brief interview with, Troehler, I was hired. No money was to change hands in this arrangement; my compensation for working as an usher from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. each Saturday and Sunday while Eddie went to supper was free entry to all three Singer theaters for myself and date (a hollow gratuity at that time, since I had never had a date) for all five changes of shows, and since the CAPITOL And STRAND showed double bills in the

midweek, this totaled seven features a week! This was an eminently satisfactory arrangement, since nearly all my ready cash up to that time had gone for movie tickets.

Eddie took me down in the basement of the CAPITOL, and there, hanging on an iron pipe rack, were about twenty castoff uniforms from the PALACE, some in excellent condition. All were the same colors: black trousers and powder blue tops. One or two of the tops were below the knee length, with gold fringed epaulettes (a twin of which was incongruously worn by 6' 4" Don Maulsby at the Shooting Gallery, looking as if he were the Grand Duke of Russia); a couple were cut as double breasted suit jackets, to be worn with a white shirt and tie; and the remainder were waist length, with military style choker collars. After we found trousers and a short jacket that fit me, we took them to a dry cleaner, and I was instructed to pick them up later in the week and report to work the next Saturday.

On the appointed day and hour, I proudly appeared with my newly cleaned uniform, and Eddie escorted me down the left aisle, through the door under the red lighted "EXIT" sign next to the pipe organ console, and up a torturous flight of narrow stairs to a loft situated to the left of and above the tiny stage fronting the screen. This room, measuring about twelve feet long by six feet at the wide end and three feet at the narrow, served as the dressing room for the ushers and doorman.

Across the stage, a mirror-image loft housed the pipes and percussion instruments of the now collectors item Wurlitzer pipe organ, expertly played by a local musician named Paul Reed over radio station KFJB for fifteen minutes every weekday evening before the show started.

During the next few months, I served my four hours a week

ushering patrons down the first, or second, if they preferred, aisle, while Ralph Miller took tickets and Eddie had his supper break, all the while enjoying every program change at the CAPITOL and STRAND. At sixteen I considered myself too old to see the FAMILY's cowboy shows, although today at sixty-eight, I thoroughly enjoy them on TV.

Late that Fall, I acquired a severe case of athletes foot from the high school locker room, exacerbated by a home remedy I found in that highly qualified medical journal, the Reader's Digest, and from early December until about the middle of January, I was under a doctor's care and could

not wear shoes because of heavy bandages. Troehler exhibited his better side during this period by refusing my offer to work in oversize house slippers, allowing me to continue seeing free movies and holding my job open until I again was able to work.

After undergoing kill-or-cure X-ray therapy on my feet, I was able to get back into shoes in January and resume my job, and, in the following month, I began reaping dividends on the other part of my compensation by escorting dates to our theaters. By that time, I also was accepted as one of the "theater gang" and was extended reciprocity to the CASINO the same as if I were a full-time employee, and this really broadened my entertainment, since all Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and 20th Century-Fox films were shown exclusively at that theater. Singer had the remainder of the market, consisting of Warner Brothers; RKO; Paramount; Columbia; Samuel Goldwyn; Universal; Disney; Republic; and some obscure studios such as Mascot; PRC; Monogram, and one or two others whose names now elude me.

In June, after high school graduation, I worked for a few weeks as a stoop laborer in the vegetable fields of Marshall Canning Company, where I earned thirty cents an hour for ten hour days, six days a week, chopping weeds, cutting dill for the pickle works and picking tomatoes, and it is a testament to the employment market of those years that I got the job only because my brother-in-law was general manager of my employer's Texas operations.

In July my father was seriously injured in a railroad accident and was off work for three months, without pay or workers compensation, and this, coupled with my lack of a career goal and my very clear sense that I and the rest of the United States soon were to play a part in the war, turned me away from planned junior college and back to the smell of pine scented disinfectant and carbon-arc lamps of the projectors. About the end of August, I heard that Jimmy Lloyd had resigned as doorman at the Capitol, and I applied to Troehler for the job and was hired immediately. I remember that the first feature I worked as doorman was "His Girl Friday", with Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell, a remake

of Charles Mac Arthur's and Ben Hecht's "The Front Page”, now shown weekly on one or another cable TV channel.

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A word here about salaries. A few months before I started work, Orvie had tried to organize the doormen and ushers into the IATSE, in a move to try to get their wages increased, but someone "ratted" to Troehler, and after threats to fire all the ushers and doormen, the movement collapsed, a precursor of Ronald Reagan and the air traffic controllers. Considering their miserly wages, even for those days, it is small wonder that the boys tried to organize. Contrasted to Troehler's then princely salary of seventy dollars per week, Brown earned twenty-five, Simmons seventeen-fifty, and the doormen ten, while the ushers earned twenty cents an hour. Since the doormen worked six and one-half days a week, for a total of about fifty-six hours, their pay amounted to about seventeen cents an hour, with no overtime pay. However, they were allowed reasonable stealing privileges from the candy machine, without protest from management, and after a popcorn machine was installed in the STRAND lobby in 1941, all hands were granted a free five cent bag of popcorn per week, with unlimited rights to the "old maids", as Iowans called unpopped but browned kernels. We also received free passes for our parents once or twice a week.

One unlettered in show business might conjecture that a doorman's duties commenced and ended with tearing patron's tickets in half, a task the boys with stronger hands performed with manly pride by using only one hand – are you listening, Presnall and Miller? Far from the truth! We also were environment engineers, controlling air quality and temperature in the auditorium, within the limits of 1940 technology; adjusting lighting to suit the picture being exhibited; monitoring the screen for picture quality and sound level and notifying the operator by buzzer signals when adjustments were called for (one up, two down, three screen); clearing the lobby and foyer of litter; keeping the grease kettle for the popcorn machine filled from the barrel of solidified palm oil (what is this "cholesteral"?) stored at the foot of the dressing room stair; and making and selling popcorn during weekday matinees.

Last nights of programs were especially busy. Old lobby advertising had to be removed and packed for shipment back to the advertising company, while new stills and posters were inserted in the shadow boxes in their place. In fair weather or foul, the metal letters displaying the bill on the marquee had to be removed and replaced by the new bill, the doorman hanging on for dear life to a rickety fourteen-foot stepladder with one hand and replacing the foot high letters with the other. And finally, after the operator had rewound the last reel, we carried the forty or fifty pound can of film down the stairs and out to the

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street, where it was left behind the cashier's kiosk to be picked up by truck later in the night.

In the middle of an Iowa blizzard, and in the truest tradition of Charles Laughton's Captain Bligh, Troehler stormed (no pun intended) into the CAPITOL one December night in 1940 demanding to know why a light bulb was out in the vertical sign displaying the theater name above the canopy. I dutifully put on my jacket, cap and gloves, obtained a 100 watt light bulb from the storeroom, and ascended to the second floor, out through an opened window to the top of the canopy and to the foot of the sign, which extended to the top of the third floor. Naturally the dead bulb was in the letter "C", which meant I had to climb to the top of the iron, ten-inch wide ladder affixed to the side of the sign, open the gate housing the opaque glass letter, remove the dead bulb, fish the new one from my jacket and screw it in, and close the letter gate, all in single-digit temperature, with a twenty-mile an hour wind and a driving snowstorm. It all, reminds me of Roger Bothell's story about the circus roustabout who complained about all the elephant dung he had to shovel, and when the bartender asked why he didn't quit, he exclaimed, "What! And leave show business!

Back to the matter of air quality. Heating in those days of coal-fired furnaces and steam radiators was no problem, and all theaters were equipped with large fans to bring fresh air in from the alley on an as-needed basis. Cooling, however, was another matter. While the STRAND was equipped with a very primitive form of mechanical refrigeration, the CAPITOL and FAMILY relied solely on simply bringing in more air from the alley, and on sultry Iowa summer nights, this was not an entirely satisfactory arrangement.

Pre-War Americans tended to require very little excuse to "dress up", and for attendance at a weekend evening movie, men's suits and ties and ladies' hats were de rigueur. Now when you put one thousand people wrapped in several layers of clothing, elbow to elbow, in one room, a formidable amount of heat is generated, especially by the young boys who were planning where to take their dates to park after the show, and attempting to dissipate this amount of thermal energy by blowing 95-degree alley air into the auditorium was an exercise in futility. People entering the theater looking as if they were ready to grace a fashion magazine exited looking as if they had just gone three falls to a finish with "Strangler" Lewis.

Another matter that entered into air quality was the fact that most pre-War Americans did not bathe daily, and when body scent combined with highly humid heat, the smell rivaled being downwind from Swift & Co. As is commonly known, humans adjust to gradually worsening odors, and

consequently the ushers and doormen were not always aware of the problem. Enter Troehler, nostrils adjusted to the fresh air of the street and with olfactory nerves of a bloodhound, demanding immediate remedial action. "Immediate remedial action" in these cases consisted of the doorman or usher dashing to the fan, located under the stage in the CAPITOL and at the foot of the single aisle under the screen at the FAMILY and, utilizing a large "FLIT" gun, spraying copious amounts of pine spray into the blades of the fan. While this process had no effect whatsoever on the quality of the air, it did deaden the olfactory nerves of the patrons, as well as Troehler's, so that complaints were minimized. Occasionally, when ushers became too zealous with the FLIT gun, customers sitting near the fan would come out into the foyer wiping their eyes with handkerchiefs and complaining of impaired vision.

Troehler one day came up with the idea of cooling the air by evaporation, so Simmons and I spent several hours building a frame to fit the alley door under the stage through which air entered, which, when covered with chicken wire and cheese cloth, would be placed in the open door, with a jury-rigged hose turned on to spray water on the cheese cloth. No one had explained to Troehler that evaporative coolers work only in the desert, and when we placed this contraption in operation that night, in 95 degree, 95 per cent humidity weather, it nearly rained inside the CAPITOL. People came out wiping water droplets from their eyelashes.

Some of the sights of that year stick out in my memory: soldiers up and down Main Street celebrating their departure the night the Iowa National Guard was mobilized into federal service, becoming part of the 34th Division, which fought at the Kasserine Pass in North Africa and through the Italian Campaign; the day Wallace Beery came to town for the world premiere of his latest film, "Twenty Mule Team", celebrating the reopening of the old legit house, the ODEON, as a 900 seat movie theater; world famous sleight-of-hand magician, T. Nelson ("Tommy") Downs, retired and living at the Stoddart Hotel with his elderly fox terrier, walking his dog past Andy Bowman's pool hall to his nightly seat on the front porch of the Elks Club.

Several personnel changes took place about this time. Eddie got a job at Fisher Governor, now Fisher Controls, and his place as doorman at the STRAND was taken by Ralph Miller. Don Maulsby had married (just in time) and gotten a better job, so Art took his place, and Ralph Hoggatt became usher at the FAMILY. Glen Fields left to take a lifetime job at the Times-Republican newspaper, and Burton

Haglan, Brown's brother-in-law, started as usher at the STRAND. Across the street, Roger Bothell moved from the CASINO to the ODEON, which Horowitz and Roskopf also owned. Hoggatt moved to the STRAND shortly thereafter, and Jackie Clemens took his place

at the FAMILY. Art Wood tells and dramatizes the story of Hoggatt's first day at the FAMILY – according to Art, Ralph was bowing to the blue collar and farmer patrons of the Shooting Gallery, some with visible and smellable barnyard manure on their overshoes, as if they were the monarchy of England. Fifty years and three wars later, Ralph still treats everyone with uncommon grace.

Contrasted to today's 50-person police force, Marshalltown's finest in 1940 consisted of the chief, Harold Block, and about ten other men, who worked 12 hour days, six days a week. To obtain a few minutes of respite from the heat or cold, depending on the season, and to dispel their boredom from long hours in the relatively crime-free environment of small towns in those years, most of our officers would drop in the theaters and spend a few minutes standing in the foyer watching whatever was playing at the moment, and the ushers and doormen consequently got to know them on a first name basis. Among these were our lifelong family friend, Verne Winters; Miller's brother-in-law, Delos Dooley; NFL-sized Glen Gooding and Sim Smith; Charley Pfeiffer; rookie officers Herb Buerkens, who gracefully accepted our nicknaming him "Trigger", and Orville Coulter; all of whom could be counted on to back us up on the rare occasions we had trouble with a patron or gate crasher. I particularly remember the night Bob Bowman and three of his high school cronies broke in the rear of the CAPITOL, took seats near the front, and, when asked to leave, feigned innocence. I returned to the foyer just as Gooding entered the theater, and upon my request he accompanied me back to the miscreants. The looks on the faces of the boys were unforgettable when they looked up at 260-pound Glen in all his uniformed officer harness, and since real authority in this form was not flaunted by that generation, they sheepishly got up and departed without a word being spoken.

One of Troehler's many ironclad rules prohibited off duty personnel from hanging around the foyer and visiting with those on duty. Fourteen year-old Jackie Clemens bounced into the STRAND one day, and after he had ignored my tactful suggestion that he depart before Troehler showed up ("Get the hell out of here, Jackie".), I quietly borrowed handcuffs from Glen, who was watching the picture at that moment, and cuffed Jackie to the brass rail near the ticket chopper. As if pre-ordained, Troehler immediately sailed through the swinging, glass-paned lobby doors, open overcoat tails flying behind, and up the lobby to the chopper. After greeting Glen and inquiring of me about

business volume, he turned to Jackie, who was desperately hiding his cuffed hand behind him, and snapped, "What are you doing here?", while huge Glen was shaking hard enough from stifled laughter to set off the Richter scale at Cal Tech. Jackie made some lame excuse, and Troehler ordered him to go into the auditorium to watch the show or else make himself scarce.

Troehler then directed his attention to his usual check of the house, and when he turned back, Jackie was still there, of course, but getting paler by the second. By this time, Glen had nearly strangled, and when Troehler dashed up the stairs to the office and projection booth, I hastily obtained Glen's key and uncuffed Jackie, who recorded a 40-yard dash record time going down the lobby and out the doors.

Occasionally we would not have enough short subjects at one or another of our theaters, and ushers would run, or "bike", in theater jargon, a reel of some cartoon or comedy from another theater to fill out the program. One Saturday night in January of 1941, I felt the need for a breath of air, so I put Russ Presnall on the door and biked a can of film to the STRAND myself. En route back to the CAPITOL, I met Troehler, of course, and after he finished dressing me down right in the middle of Saturday night Main Street for not sending an usher, I resigned on the spot. After two or three months of idleness, punctuated by rabbit hunting expeditions with Art Wood; a free trip on my father's railroad pass to visit my sister in Texas, accompanied by Russ Presnall; and efforts to get my mother to let me join the navy, I finally got another job as a stevedore in Gamble's Warehouse, earning ninety-five dollars a month. As soon as I received my first paycheck, I bought a 1931 Model A sport coupe, with rumble seat, and a few weeks later, after I discovered it used more oil than gas, traded it in on a 1934 Chevrolet coupe. In the meantime, Gamble moved me from rousting freight, a hard job I somehow perversely enjoyed, to working at the packing counter, boxing merchandise eight hours a day, and "boring" fails to describe this new assignment. I therefore was ripe for rebellion when one day in midsummer the manager whacked me across the shins with his broom, because I was not sweeping the floor to his satisfaction, and I promptly tossed my broom to the floor and walked out.

That night I ran into Ralph Miller on Main Street, and when he heard that I again was unemployed, he suggested I apply for the job as doorman at the STRAND, a job he was about to vacate, because he had been promoted to assistant manager to replace Wendell Brown, who had resigned. When I expressed doubts that Troehler would entertain such a notion, Ralph promised to intervene and get

back to me, and he called the next day to tell me to go see Troehler. Troehler hired me immediately, without making mention of the circumstances of my previous departure, and neither of us thereafter ever referred to the matter. Troehler once again had displayed his better nature.

For the next dozen months, I was back in show business and enjoying one of the happiest, most carefree times of my life. Outside of work, my only responsibilities were paying

off my car loan and contributing three dollars a week to my mother for board. Singer, in what must have been a temporary loss of reason, had granted pay raises to the floor personnel, so that doormen now earned fourteen dollars a week, with all day Monday off, while ushers pay went up to, I believe, thirty cents an hour.

With Ralph Hoggatt and Burt Haglan as ushers and Bob Simmons as assistant manager, an amicable work force, I worked and appreciated such films as "Fantasia", Citizen Kane", "Sergeant York", "Kings Row", "The Shanghai Gesture", "Buck Privates", "The Little Foxes" and the frothy, but tuneful "The Fleet's In", while after work, the theater gang would congregate for midnight snacks and rehashing the shows and events of the day.

The STRAND was situated mid-block, on the north side of Main, between First and Second Avenues, with the FAMILY just two doors west, while our favorite hangout, the "Lillie Mae" candy store and sandwich shop was just two more doors to the west. We also patronized the "Pure Food", or "Poor Food", as we called it, cafe across the street, and occasionally the "Maid-Rite" and "Stones" under the viaduct, down by the vinegar works.

On occasions when we could afford it, we would chip in for gas and put fifty cents worth in the car and go cruising. That Chevy never knew more than fifty cents worth of gas at a time, during the year I owned it, and since it had no gas gauge, we pushed it to a service station on many nights when it ran dry. Some evenings we would have two, three or occasionally four cars in our caravans, the others driven by various combinations of Ralph Miller, Roger Bothell, Russ Presnall and Armon Reynolds. Our favorite pastime in icy weather was to race, if you could use that term with reference to our vintage cars, down triple-width Eleventh Street, in front of the high school, simultaneously crank the steering wheel to the limit and slam on the brakes, and see how many spins we could

achieve on the ice. Most of the time, however, we just drove sedately around town and talked about 1) shows and 2) girls.

On some evenings, when everyone was broke, Armon and one or another of us would sneak into the Reynolds' garage and push his Dad's '37 Ford down the drive and a half-block down the street, out of Mr. Reynolds' earshot, where it could be started safely. I saw Mr. Reynolds, then 86 years old, in 1970, and when I told him this story, he laughed and exclaimed, "I always wondered why that car suddenly started using so much gas".

During the fall and winter of that year, Presnall, Perisho, Hoggatt and I assaulted Central Iowa wildlife by embarking on hunting forays nearly every Saturday morning. Rabbits,

crows, pheasants (in season), owls, dump rats; everything that moved was shot at, often at ridiculously long ranges. Factors favoring the wildlife included our marksmanship, our single-shot shotguns, and our general lack of funds for shotgun shells. Plans were carefully laid on Friday nights at the Lillie Mae, usually resulting in Russ picking up Bob and me picking up Ralph. Each week I would enjoin Ralph to be ready at 5:30 a.m., on pain of being left behind, but each Saturday morning when I drew up in front of the Hoggatt home, the house invariably would be pitch dark. After getting Hoggatt awake and hunting for two or three hours, we would adjourn barely in time to get back to town for a bite of dinner (at noon in those days) before opening the theaters for the matinees. Fortunately for the critters, the war turned our bloodlusts elsewhere, where we all got our fill.

The ushers frequently had dates who would come to the first evening show and then stay over until ten, when the ushers got off work. After a nickel coke and ten cent sandwich, the date would be escorted home, and the usher, usually after being thrown out by the date's father, would return to the theater and await the end of the last show, when all would repair to the Lillie Mae.

Doormen were somewhat handicapped in romance efforts by having only Monday night off, and by having to work until 11:30 on all other nights. It was difficult for a girl living at home to get permission to stay out until midnight, and dates only on Monday nights inhibited serious romances. However, late in 1941, Miller and I became acquainted with two girls from nearby towns who

roomed in Marshalltown and attended the business college, and this enlivened our love lives for a few weeks.

One evening after work, Miller, the two girls and I were parked across from Anson School eating Maid-Rites, when Dooley, Miller's brother-in-law, and Verne Winters coasted up in a police car and turned the spotlight into the windows of Miller's Hudson Super 6. When Dooley, ignoring Ralph's shrill protests, ordered us out of the car and began throwing the seats out on the sidewalk, ostensibly searching for some sort of damning evidence, the girls were ready to terminate the new friendship on the spot, and only when Verne and I finally broke up in laughter did they realize that they had been the subjects of a form of bucolic practical joke.

Greek-born Peter Merkuris, co-owner of the Lillie Mae, often paused at our booth to visit, and occasionally I could get him to tell of his experiences as an infantryman fighting the Austro-Hungarian invaders in the First World War. When I was in basic training at Fort Riley, Kansas, he thoughtfully sent me a two-pound box of Lillie Mae

chocolates. He was a lovely man, generous of his time in community service and proud of his American citizenship, passing away just last year at age ninety-five.

On a warm Sunday afternoon in December, we were playing the latest Abbott and Costello effort, I think "In the Navy", to a packed house, while the long lobby was filled with patrons awaiting the second showing, when someone dashed in and told us that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, Hickam Field and Schofield Barracks, and while no details were available, it was known that American casualties numbered in the thousands. After telephoning Troehler, Simmons instructed Webb Kendall to halt the movie and me to turn up the house lights, following which, he ascended the small stage and announced the news to the audience. After a few minutes of buzzing conversation among the audience, the house lights were turned back down and the feature resumed, but audience reaction to Abbott and Costello's clowning was very subdued thereafter.

From that time on, conversations at our post-show coffee sessions were dominated by war news and our individual plans and expectations for military service. Early in the summer of '42 (would that make a good movie title, or what!), I decided to enlist, my decision eased by the knowledge that my love life was going nowhere; and after my mother and father agreed to give their permission, I

informed Troehler that I would be leaving early in July. After briefly trying to dissuade me, he shook my hand and told me he was sorry to see me go.

One last word about Troehler. It may appear as if I have been picking on him in this narrative, but my comments have been made from the perspective of an eighteen or nineteen year-old at the time. In retrospect I came to admire his knowledge of show business and his ability to run a theater properly, given the technology and economics of the time, contrasted to today's sloppily run movie houses, and I recognize that his disciplinary measures were necessitated by our free-wheeling, teenage ways. He must have felt some affection for me, for he sometimes took me with him on business trips to Des Moines, introduced me to Chinese food, and let me virtually dictate his choice of new suits, when I got him out of pinstripes and into tweeds, and in 1946, he came to our house and asked me to accompany him to Minneapolis as assistant manager of the PALACE theater, which by then he was managing.

After a brief trip with my father to my brother's home in Wisconsin for a few days fishing, I sold my Chevy, paid off my debts, and with four dollars surplus, made the rounds of the theaters on the night of July 9 to bid my friends goodbye. In a rush of patriotic fervor, three of my erstwhile girlfriends (in my dreams) kissed me goodbye, but

not at the same time nor with each other’s knowledge. I was the first of the theater gang to enter military service.

The theater gang had a remarkable war record. Burt served on a destroyer on convoy duty in the North Atlantic and later in the Pacific; Jackie was on the battleship Washington in several Pacific battles; Roger was in the ground component of the 70th Fighter Squadron, the P-38 outfit that shot down Yamamoto, was overseas three years and in seven invasions; Art was in the famous 36th Infantry Division, commemorated by a monument on the grounds of the Texas State Capitol, and was at and in the furious Rapido River battle in Italy; Russ was in the navy, but I do not know about his assignments; Bob Perisho was an aerial gunner on a B-24 in the 15th Air Force in Italy; Roy Asher was in the navy in the Pacific and retired as a full commander; Armon was a B-17 pilot in the 15th Air Force; and Ralph Miller was a first sergeant in a 155 Long Tom artillery unit in France and Germany. Ralph Hoggatt was a B-24 pilot in the 8th Air Force in England, and after being called back to active duty during the Korean War, remained as a career officer; at age 42 flying 204 missions as a dive

bomber pilot in Vietnam, and retiring after 37 years service as Marshalltown's most decorated military man. Operator Orvie Jenkins, our good friend but at age 36 too old for the theater gang, was a navy combat photographer and had a two-page spread of his photos published in Life magazine.

In this post-Vietnam era of cynicism, it must seem as if we all were very naive (or "corny", as we would have put it), but while Hays Office censored movies were hardly realistic, they carried a weighty message of idealism, and partly because of that, we believed in Douglas Mac Arthur's "duty, honor, country".

On my frequent visits back to Marshalltown, I walk down Main Street, past the CASINO, the vacant lot where the ODEON burned to the ground, and the sites where the CAPITOL, STRAND, FAMILY and Lillie Mae once stood, and I hear the flight crews in "Twelve O'Clock High" singing "The Whiffenpoof Song":

We are poor little lambs,
Who have lost our way,
Baa, baa, baa....

(Fade to black, to the strains of a Max Steiner theme....)

By: Vahl Vladyka

December, 1991

APPENDIX 1

NOTABLE 1939 FILMS

GUNGA DIN
GOODBYE MR. CHIPS
WUTHERING HEIGHTS
OF MICE AND MEN
MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON
DARK VICTORY
GONE WITH THE WIND
BEAU GESTE
DESTRY RIDES AGAIN
THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME
JESSE JAMES
YOUNG MR. LINCOLN

UNION PACIFIC

DRUMS ALONG THE MOHAWK

STAGECOACH

THE WIZARD OF OZ

Also, one of my all-time favorites:

The Four Feathers (British version)

APPENDIX 2

The following is taken from an encyclopedia of college football in the Austin, Texas public library.

KINNICK, Nile Clark Jr.

Born in Omaha, Nebraska; Phi Beta Kappa; Heisman Trophy; Maxwell Award; Walter Camp Memorial Trophy and Silver Football 1939. Consensus All-American 1939. Killed on June 2, 1943, when his navy fighter plane crashed into the Gulf of Paria, Venezuela.

As a Big Ten gridiron star with the University of Iowa, Kinnick beat out Joe DiMaggio to become the athlete of the year in 1939. He played 402 out of a possible 420 minutes, the full 60 minutes in six straight games, and brought his team 107 out of the 135 points they scored in 1939. He also was the NCAA leader in kickoff returns. Elected to the National Football Hall of Fame.