

CHAPTER 4

Drunk Reporters and Self Control

The most important spectacular if not also the important Congressional investigation in those days was headed by North Dakota Senator Gerald Nye. Later I got to know him. It was an investigation of the munitions industry, of "the merchants of death." Nye, a Republican, was able to persuade the Senate that our munitions industry was creating wars abroad for profit. The woman who became my wife was on that committee's staff, its editor's assistant and indexer.

The du Ponts began as among the first munitions makers in the country when they emigrated from France. As the country grew they grew and with growth they sold more munitions abroad. Later they grew to be among the very largest in chemicals.

Perhaps the most famous American called to testify before the Nye committee was J. Pierpont Morgan, the fabled New York City financier. Morgan and others like him financed the munitions business and trade.

Morgan had the fabulous Ivy Lee, first of those most spectacular in his new field, handle his public relations. To take the attention away from what Morgan would be asked and what he said in response, Lee actually got a midget woman to go to that hearing room and sit on Morgan's lap. That made a picture that was published all around the world! It had the effect of humanizing the stuffed shirt financier and it diminished the impact of his testimony in the news treatment of it.

Then came Pierre du Pont's turn to testify. He had no Ivy Lee, but then his concern was local, Delaware.

Grey-haired Charlie Grey, who had a loping stride and usually a cigar in his mouth and who had

married my grammar school geography teacher, knew what to do when Pierre testified. Charlie knew Pierre would not want Delawareans to know what he had had to admit in his testimony, even what he asked.

Charlie was the morning paper managing editor. He was also the de facto editor because that nice old dodderer, who was intermittently senile, did nothing but write the editorial when he did not get of his staff, including me, to write them for him. I do not remember him ever even suggesting a topic when he asked me to write an editorial.

Charlie called the copy boy, Don Hutcheson over and gave him a dollar bill. Donald Hutcheson was a year younger than I He was also the State tennis champ. Later he became a *News* reporter. On World War II he was a master sergeant in an Army intelligence unit. In remembering the 50th anniversary of VE day the paper interviewed him for its June 5, 1994 issue. He was then 79 and retired for five years. Describing the chaos and confusion of the time his unit was anchored offshore waiting to land on Omaha beach he recalled that "all you could see were explosions, ships overturned...and in the air, nothing but planes." When they went ashore next day "We went around the cliffs the Rangers had climbed...set up headquarters...dead were lying all over the place. ...We were trying to set up camp and some guy on the edge of the cliff, in a thicket, sat up. I was scared to death. I almost shot him. Then he asked, 'What time is it?' It was famed correspondent Ernie Pyle. That was nearly my claim to fame. I almost shot Ernie Pyle," Hutcheson said. (Pyle was killed by the Japanese during the battle for Okinawa.) "Pyle mentioned me in his autobiography," Hutcheson said.

"Boy," he said, "high school kids are getting the effects of drugs by drinking cokes with aspirin in them. Go out and drink all you can and then come back so I can see how drunk you are."

In those days all drug stores had soda fountains. Cokes were a nickel.

When Don returned he was not drunk or doped up. He had at least a half-gallon of coke in him, many aspirins, and he was ready to quit if he had another mouthful to swallow- and said so.

He didn't. Charlie was satisfied. He began his round of telephone calls in which he heralded the coming ruin of the State's youth from imbibing coke and aspirin.

He began with the governor, Clayton Douglas Buck, who was married to a du Pont. Before Grey had finished sounding his alarms about the dissolute younger generation and the great menace their degeneration was to the State he had doomsday quotes from, among others, all of whom I now do not remember, the heads of State, county, and city boards of education, at least one high school principal and innumerable clergymen.

When the paper appeared it had the largest, blackest "banner" headline, across the top of the front page. Most of the stories forecast the coming ruin and the less horrible potential of all the other imagined evils infesting so many of the high school generation along with preachments of how to deal with it and all the urgency thereof.

To the parents and grandparents of the representedly dissolute high school generation those who had never taken in a coke, there was great and genuine concern. Naturally!

Their beloved young ones were going to hell on kicks that cost a dime or less.

What a wringing of hands, calling of preachers, the principle, teachers and others in the high school, and close friends, what a deeply troubled city Wilmington became once the morning paper was read!

It was a superspectacular horror story. The city and the state were, at least on the influence level, horrified, as the second-day attention to the fiction established.

Also somehow squeezed onto the front page was a very brief item on the hearing. It was not

from the Associated Press, which covered the munitions hearings quite adequately. In all likelihood it was written by Grey. Under a tiny, modest headline this very brief story told the state in its only daily morning paper that Pierre du Pont had appeared before the Senate committee the day before and had imparted his exceptional wisdom and knowledge of chemical manufacturing to the Senators and their audience, both hanging breathless on each of Pierre's so memorable words.

Most Delawareans never did learn of the fortune made by the State's largest and wealthiest corporation from the promoted deaths of so many throughout the world.

There were personal scandals involving du Ponts that never made the state's only daily papers both of which Pierre then owned. One of which I have only limited personal knowledge was a lawsuit filed in Wilmington by a Hawaiian woman, non-native, practitioner of the world's oldest profession, who was suing one the innumerable younger du Ponts who had married her.

I was told that when the Philadelphia *Record* carried a report on the trial in its "bulldog," its earliest, edition that story disappeared from the paper before the final edition and was never reported in it again. The informal account is the paper's owner, J. David Stern's wife was the sister of the owners of a large department store. Almost as soon as that bulldog edition was out her brothers heard from the banks that provided their credit, as Stern did from his bank, and that was the end of those stories.

I was on the fringe of another and different youthful du Pont scandal. One young man, a University of Virginia undergraduate, suddenly tired of the halls of ivy and opted for the tall masts and billowing sails of a boat to which he had access, if not ownership. With a friend he set sail from some Atlantic or Chesapeake Bay mooring for Bermuda. They never got there. Miraculously, quite some time later, they were seen and rescued by a passing large vessel.

It happens that he and I, part-time each, shared a girlfriend, a fine young woman named Mary,

from a solid Irish working class family.

What Mary was told happened after his rescue and return home is what this young du Pont told her. His mother, a strapping woman, had a bathtub filled with cold water waiting when he opened the front door. She forced him into it, expecting from prior experience he would need to sober up some, and then, sitting on the edge of that tub, she flailed his bare backside with a durable hair brush.

Grey's handling the Pierre du Pont munitions committee appearance gave me a real insight into news control and an awareness of the fact that in any society, regardless of its political structure, there are special interests to be served and those whose duties include serving those interests.

During my short period on the *News* I was the kid who handled mostly small potatoes stories. There were a few that were controversial. One led to an international incident.

Newark, then the state's second largest town, was as close to the *News* office as much of Philadelphia was to its center-city newspaper offices. The University was there, I covered Newark most of the time, and the two controversial stories I can recall were Newark stories. The *News* fed one to the Associated Press. That the story getting distributed around the world is what made it the cause of a real international incident. Diplomatic protests, even striped-pants visitors from Washington.

Bill Cunningham was Newark's chief of its small police force. He also was a street cop and a motorcycle cop. Once when riding his bike he chased a really fancy car that was speeding.

When he took after it in his motorcycle the driver also speeded up. For some reason he left the main highway. Main? In those days a major highway was paved and traffic went both ways on it, one lane each way. Off these "main" roads many were unpaved. On one of these unpaved roads, which that day was quite muddy, Cunningham finally caught up to that miscreant and, covered with mud, his uniform of which he was so proud thoroughly coated with it, he gave that driver a ticket. He wanted to

make an arrest but when he learned what the record he made of that incident did not disclose, he contented himself with merely issuing a speeding ticket. That is what put tiny Newark on the map and in the news when I learned about it.

Cunningham had ticketed the protesting British Ambassador!

The story I wrote treated it as a humorous incident.

But the ambassador didn't when he saw it in the papers.

And he had "diplomatic immunity."

He protested to the State Department and it complained to the town of Newark and to the papers.

Everybody there just laughed. "Diplomatic immunity" meant little outside of Washington.

It was all pro forma anyway. There was nothing the paper could have done had it wanted to and nothing the State Department could have asked of it. The story was truthful and it had gone all over the country and throughout England.

The other really controversial story led to a demand that I be fired. It was also my first experience with editors standing up for their reporters in a serious controversy.

Walter Hullihen was then the stuffed-shirt, self-important president of the University of Delaware. He was also imaginative. That small university then had an enrollment of about 600 men, that small. The women's college was separate, although on the same campus, and it was a medieval relic. Hullihen was not imaginative with the women. They had bed checks at 10:00 p.m. and had to sign out if they were not going to be on that campus at 7:00 p.m. One of my high school classmates who forgot to sign out to be off campus after 7:00 had dinner with her parents less than a half mile from her dorm. Her father was a bank president. But for not signing out to have dinner with her parents

Betty Craig was restricted to campus for six or eight weeks!

Hullihen had instituted what I believe was the country's first foreign study plan. Our students who wanted to could spend a year of their college in France at a French college or university.

It was successful and popular. Encouraged, Hullihen then instituted a foreign study plan with Germany.

That was in about 1933. Germany was then Hitler Germany.

In a speech before some group that was important to him Hullihen was not content to report that Delaware students could expand their horizons with a year of study in Germany. He extended his remarks to include praise of Hitler for what he had done and was doing and then went farther in making clearly anti-Semitic comments.

When I learned of that speech I reported it accurately.

It was a page-one story and it caused an immediate sensation.

One evening, probably the evening of the day the story appeared, Carl Wise signaled to me to come to his desk.

"Son," he said, "Hullihen is downstairs breathing fire and brimstone. Go to the men's room and stay there until I get you."

I wasn't there very long. It seemed longer than it was. I divided my time between observing the behavior of cockroaches that then infested all newspaper of which I knew, and wondering what would happen to me.

Nothing did.

Apparently Hullihen had phoned first and raised all the hell he could think of in his personal complaints and then left.

Carl smiled when he freed me from my temporary mens room captivity.

"What happened?" I asked him.

"Nothing," Carl responded. "I asked him is there was any inaccuracy in your story and could he show me none."

That was my first experience with complaints, vigorous complaints, about truthful writing, the old saw, "the truth hurts."

But as I also learned, all editors are not like Charlie Grey, who gave up no trouble as long as we did our jobs well and was mild in his remonstrations when we didn't, or as honest and straightforward as Carl Wise, and as tolerant and fatherly as he was with me.

Carl's opposite number on the sister evening paper wanted it believed that he was a character from the then popular Ben Hecht-Charles McCarthy novel just made into a movie, "The Front Page." That was about the time the movies first brought us voices.

I wasn't working for a week or so because in an accident I had cut all the fingers on my right hand deeply enough for all of them to require stitches that had not yet been removed. Then a serious hurricane struck. All communications south of Wilmington were out. Although I did not immediately think of it, that meant that Washington did not have what might become an important communications need.

My only interest was in reporting the news of the hurricane.

It was hours before anyone on the morning paper was due in the office. They did not begin to come in until about 2:00 p.m. With nobody to ask, on my own I decided to see what stories I could get through fellow radio amateurs. Closest to the office, in the event Wilmington's phones went down, was Howard Layton. His station was W3AIS. His was an all-code operation and with the heavy electrical

interference from the storm Morse code was much more comprehensible than voice. It consisted of a simple sound that was of short or longer durations, dots and dashes as they were called. Most good operators could send and receive 25 words every minute, some more.

Radio was still fairly primitive in those days.

Howard's "shack," which was hardly that, but all "hams" as amateurs were called and called themselves, referred to their stations as in a "shack." Howard's was in the rear-most room on the third floor of a fine house.

He tuned the best daytime band, noting what he received, letter by letter, face grim, earphones snug for greater comprehension, there was that much interference, and went from signal to signal.

The two kinds of interference, natural and man made, were abbreviated as "QRM" and "QRN." There was much of both that day, but the QRM, from the storm, was very bad.

Shaking his head in frustration from time to time over this interference and the weakness of most of the signals he picked up, suddenly Howard's mien changed. He was very intent and the letters he wrote on his pad were written carefully. With a nod of his head toward the pad he confirmed that he had what we were looking for, a report on that storm.

Recollection after more than 60 years may not be entirely dependable but my recollection is that there were gaps in what he wrote on his pad, coming from the weakness of the signal and the QRM and QRN. I read over his right shoulder and I got excited!

When he had a sheet complete he tore it off, handed it to me, and I phoned the paper. The day side was on and it was well before the presses rolled.

I asked for and got the *Evening Journal's* city editor, Harris Samonisky. I explained the situation and told him I'd have to fill in some of the gaps. I suppose I indicated where I did that. By the

time I read him the first page of Howard's writing he told me to hold so he could turn me over to a stenographer. She came on the line and slowly but excitedly I dictated to her the text as Howard took it down, letter by letter, and what I improvised for the gaps.

I was also excited because just before Howard got this live one he had been reached by the Navy's then most powerful radio station, NAA, in Arlington, Virginia, part of what would have been the District of Columbia when the republic was founded and established its capital there, if Virginia had not reneged on its agreement. The Navy gave Howard and me both temporary commissions so we could act with authority in emergency relief work. And Howard did give me messages to phone to the Philadelphia Navy Yard later that day.

Imagine! A kid too young to vote with a Navy commission! I had rank enough to have commanded a small vessel in wartime. That rank in the army would have been captain and as a captain I could have commanded a full company in battle.

But it meant nothing other than temporary exhilaration. I never had to invoke it.

All the few calls I made when Howard passed me his handwritten messages went through without any hitches. There were probably all to the Philadelphia Navy Yard.

My one and only military commission lasted only a few hours and it meant nothing in any event!

It would have been nice, though, if NAA could have sent those silver bars by radio!

So, excited, more excited than a more experienced reporter would probably have been, I read the story of combined authorship to the *Journal*. I looked forward to seeing it on the front pages that evening.

The papers' offices then were but two blocks away by air, three walking. When Howard got hungry supper time I got soaking wet going to the office. The morning paper staff had been working for

several hours then. I went immediately to Carl Wise. I told him what I had been doing and of the story I'd read to Samonisky. He looked puzzled. I knew why when he showed me the *Journal*.

The story I'd dictated was not on the front page!

"Inside?" I asked.

Carl shook his head and, puzzled, he turned to Grey, whose desk was only a short distance away. They sat back-to-back.

Grey also was puzzled. He did not try to explain anything but he did praise me for my initiative and for that success.

I went back to W3AIS and we did storm relief work, no real story, until Howard pooped out, and for the next two days I went from amateur to amateur until communications were restored.

As I remember it, that story I filled in was a dramatic, first-person account sent by a "ham" in Berlin, Maryland on its Eastern shore, near Salisbury. I am pretty clear that it referred to seeing a house go floating down a nearby river. It may have been the home of the writer. I am not now clear on it. But it certainly was an excellent report: dramatic, graphic- well written. Exciting, tragic, with real "human interest" in it.

Before long Samonisky was not seen in the office. When it was talked about all we knew is that he had gone to New York, to work for Ivy Lee.

Later that year the Pulitzer Prizes were announced. The award for local reporting went to the story I had phones to the *Journal* to Samonisky! That was the one time I saw Charlie Grey really angry. What he and probably Carl knew before the Pulitzer awards were announced is that the story that had not appeared in the *Journal* had been on the Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin's* front page.

I then also learned from the fit-to-tie managing editor that the prize-winning reporter, a man

named Pruitt or Truitt, had been our Delmarva correspondent as well as that of the *Bulletin*, a not uncommon arrangement.

So, the *Bulletin* got the Pulitzer Prize that our paper should and would have been awarded if Samonisky had played it straight.

As it was explained to me, when the stenographer typed the story I read to her up, instead of rushing it into his own paper Samonisky phoned it to the *Bulletin*, expecting to be paid for it.

He would have been had our correspondent not also been the *Bulletin's*.

Grey was also outraged because, he said, I should have shared in that Pulitzer. Without me the story would not have been reported anywhere and I also did fill in some of the unavoidable gaps in it.

There was not much Grey could do. He could not in the morning paper condemn it's sister evening paper. But he did write a story about how I'd made it all possible. And he put it on the front page, below the fold, in about the middle and at the bottom. It was two columns wide and was I ever proud!

Grey also told me that Samonisky had been fired over it and that he belonged in p.r. work, not journalism.

I've heard of Pulitzers not being awarded as they were voted by the designated committees for each of the various categories. That happened to my friend Les Payne, then minority affairs reporter for Long Island's *Newsday*, later its national editor.

He had shared one Pulitzer with that paper's crew of reporters who traced heroin from the Turkish poppy fields into New York arms, a very dangerous series for the reporters.

Les followed with an exceptional accomplishment for a black man, touring and reporting on the racial strife in South Africa when that strife was at its most murderous height. He went where blacks

were prohibited, he got information for a series of important stories and he got out. He wrote an excellent series of first-person reports on that truly dangerous situation. His was also a very hazardous and adventurous exploit. The entire Pulitzer committee on foreign reporting voted Les that year's award. It was unanimous.

But above that committee the award was taken from a black man and given to a white reporter.

The entire committee protested and its protest was widely reported, including by the Associated Press.

But I've never heard of an award due one paper being given to another or that, as was true of the story I had handled. But the recipient, based on all that could be known to the award committee, had earned that award.

Learning! I wonder if there is a better place for young people to learn about life as it really is than on a small-town newspaper.

About honesty, personal and professional responsibility, temptation, and about graft, too.

Because these were significant factors in the work to which I later devoted the largest single part of my professional life, I'd best confess.

Unless at the time I confessed, perhaps bragged, to my fellow- well, I can't say "newshounds," the word of the day, because in that small-town paper we really were not that. There wasn't much investigating to do or sinister secrets to dig out. If there had been there was not a great likelihood of their being published anyway, as we all know.

Once I did fail to resist temptation and I did accept petty graft. Shame on me!

One night I was on the police beat. The police station was in the basement of City Hall. That was about three blocks east of the paper office. The cops brought in a man I knew by reputation was a

bootlegger. That was in the days before Prohibition was repealed by FDR.

While in the formality of recording his arrest he gave me a quizzical look, raised his eyebrows and instinctively, without conscious thought, I nodded my head.

When newspapers, at least in those days and for some years thereafter, had more stories set in type than they could use that was called "over-up." There was almost always some over-up and thus stories the papers could not use.

My cop-out.

That bootlegger's arrest was not reported. And he was able to continue his bootlegging so that he could raise the money he'd need to pay his lawyer. If he was not already fairly prosperous, as most bootleggers who stayed out of jail were, compared to others.

For some time thereafter Young John Barleycorn got his booze uncut and free.

"Cut" referred to diluting illegally imported whiskey with other substances of alcoholic content. Down-and-out boozers of that era drank anything with alcohol in it, frequently bay rum.

I did not in that time of temptation give any thought at all to what was wrong with my making that unspoken deal and living up to it. When I was older and it came to mind I did. It was petty and it was very wrong.

That was a time when I had what was called politely "a drinking problem." In less evasive terms, I drank too much. Sometimes much too much. But as a young man I could hold it- and still function. I had no accidents driving and got into no trouble over the stories I wrote. I cannot honestly say that I missed no stories.

There were three weeks when I never really sobered up entirely.

The favorite of our few drinking places was a bootleg joint only two blocks north of the

vehicular entrance to the police station.

A fine and cultured black man, with a Ph.D. in chemistry, Leon Fisher, who had a successful chemical business, also ran a rather good watering place with excellent black entertainers who then could not get better bookings. He had a brother who reportedly was a successful artist in New York City.

When I worked Sunday nights and finished in time I'd usually wander over to the Club de Leon and instead of sitting at a table stood at the bar and sipped drinks with Leon while we listened to the radio broadcasts of the Minneapolis symphony and engaged in friendly chitchat for that hour. The radio was above and behind the bar.

One memorable Sunday, however, the smallest of us, almost tiny Wentworth Emerson Wilson, son of a clergyman and an authentic Civil War buff and scholar, saw Leon and me at peace with the world at the bar and, without any advance notice and pretty drunk, he charged the length of that long room, hitting me in the middle of the back. He almost toppled the bar. There was some damage signalled by the sound of breaking glass.

Leon accepted it all without complaint and with good humor and a smile.

One of the games we played when a group of us sat at a table with Emmy a bit drunk, whether or not I was- and somehow we always sat facing each other- began when I'd take my glasses off and stroke my chin. That infuriated Emmy and he'd make a fist and hit me on the chin. It never hurt and we all laughed, including Emmy.

When liquor was legal we often drank at the Presto cafe. It was only a three block walk from the office and the food was quite decent. Tom Tarabicos worked nights seven days a week, his brother, who I hardly knew, worked days.

When I had no money, Tom ran the tab for me. Paydays I took the check to him, he cashed it, taking what I owed him. There were often small entries not for food and drink.

When Tom, who was fatherly with me, believed I'd had too much he called that to my attention by spinning a dinner plate on the tile floor. The slower it went the more it got my attention. He'd then call a cab, give the driver my address, and I left. Cabs there were only a quarter. Tom never asked me if I had one. He put it on my tab.

From Tom when business was slack in the wee hours and we sat and talked I got what I never got from my parents. They not once mentioned the anti-Semitic pogroms they had fled, never mentioned any relatives who did not survive them or illnesses. From Tom I learned much about what impelled people to come here. He had lived through it.

Tom had fought in a war with Turkey, I suppose after Turkey invaded Greece. In those days horses and swords were still used in combat. From a slash by a mounted Turk Tom had a scar from the corner of his mouth on the left side of his face to his ear, a long broad curved scar. The surgery was not cosmetic. Tom was full of stories about the suffering of the average Greek from that war with its larger neighbor. He gave me an idea of the degree to which war was hell for those not in the fighting armies, too.

The youngest of Tom's five children was a sickly boy. Tom, or at least so he said, believed the climate in Greece would be better for him and, with World War II impending, moved his family back to his place of birth, the country he loved.

We were such good friends when from our ages we could have been father and son, Tom added to the handshakes and hugs with which we parted a warm telegram from the ship.

There was one time, however, that excess drinking was embarrassing when I sobered up,

although those incidents, one at least, made me laugh while it was happening.

Johnny Hill was my favorite of the staff. He was a warm and jovial man a few years older than I. He married my fellow student who was an excellent pianist, Vivian Ely. After they were married Vivian gave piano lessons.

One bitter cold winter day, with heavy snow frozen on the ground, a day Johnny was off and I had all my stories ready to write, Vivian asked him to go to a cabin they had at the Delaware Canoe Club Colony near a place called Smalley's Dam, on the Christiana River only a short drive south of Wilmington.

It then was really an idyllic spot, where the river ran primeval. The club had only a dozen members, one of whom lived there year round. Perhaps his was an adjoining property. It was so close to civilization that on a pleasant summer's early morning, when we retreated to it with a bottle or two to chat, fish or listen to classical music on a fine experimental phonograph Johnny had latched onto somehow, with that music and the music of nature we could also hear main-highway traffic.

Johnny's father, Tom Hill, had finally lost out on the *New York Times* from his chronic alcoholism. He became such a problem the family would not let him live with them any more. Old Tom was the typical friendly drunk. I never saw him angry, remember no complaint he ever made.

When Johnny picked me up on his trip to bring back firewood for the upstairs party Vivian was having after her student's recital of that night ended, he had Tommy with him.

Our first stop was at Johnny's favorite bootlegger. He got a gallon of what that man had made himself, peach brandy. Delaware had fine peaches and that guy knew what to do with them. After we had used that gallon a bit while loading the firewood into the trunk of the car, Johnny thought it would be a good idea if we warmed up a bit before braving the chill of the car until after its heater warmed up.

So we stopped off at the cabin of the club's one live-in member or near neighbor. We gathered around his old wood-burning kitchen stove to warm up. Our host thought we should warm up on the inside, too. He served some of his supply of that same peach brandy. It was quite some time before Johnny remembered that he was to deliver that firewood and neither of us remembered that I had stories to write.

I sat in the front with Johnny because Tom was past talking. He was really out if it!

Both of us were pretty drunk, Johnny and I talked and sang while we drove to Wilmington. Because his father had been banished from the family home, Johnny had rented a room for him from a dignified lady who rented rooms, Mrs. Martinez. It was in a mixed working-class neighborhood, once a fine neighborhood of well-built homes, on a main street. Her house was three storeys high. Tommy's room was on the top floor.

When we pulled up to Mrs. Martinez's door on the south side of Fourth Street, between Monroe and Adams, with Tommy supported by the firewood on the back seat, where we had piled what would not fit in the trunk, Tommy could not move. Literally. I had heard the phrase "a stiff" but I'd thought it was only a figure of speech. Tommy was quite literally stiff.

We worked him out of the seat with his body fixed in the seated position. We crossed hands under him, carried him into the house that way and, with some difficulty, started to carry him up the stairs. Those stairs were not as wide as three bodies. Apparently it must have been a noisy operation because at about the time we laid Tommy on his bed Mrs. Martinez appeared, indignant and saying so loudly and forcefully. When she began flailing away at us with her broom, Johnny beat me to the stairs. We were both laughing as though it was what it was not, funny. Mrs. Martinez got close enough to hit me on the back and the top of the head with the straight end of her broom. It did not hurt but between

the laughing and the exertion I could no longer hold anything down. Her stairs were a slippery mess by the time I joined Johnny at his car.

He said he was sure he'd have to get his father another room in the morning and as we drove to his home he remembered that Vivian had that recital and we had to be very quiet as we carried the firewood up to their third floor.

We were, too, for quite a few trips.

That house's stairs were winders. There were three short flights between each floor, the flights turning at right angles at the end of each section of them.

We had almost finished carrying that firewood up without any noise at all, or at least we so believe, when suddenly a real live monkey jumped at my face and onto my head.

That ended the quiet of our operation as the wood I was carrying clattered down those wooden stairs.

I did not know that Johnny and Vivian had a pet monkey.

A strange man and both of us carrying the firewood scared the monkey. As he ran around he saw the window in the room with the fireplace was opened a bit to keep it from getting too hot.

As so many homes in the fine area did, that one had a porch with a galvanized steel roof that ended at the wall above the second storey level. The monkey fled onto that roof, into the bitter cold.

Unafraid or too drunk to be Johnny slowly opened the window wide enough to go onto that sloping, slippery roof cooing and talking to the frightened monkey all the time. Unlike what I later learned about monkeys, that one did not flee. Johnny got it back into the house and closed the window while the wife and mother, outraged and indignant, looked on.

Again I fled, to the office. It was only six blocks- six very cold blocks- away.

Before we'd gotten too drunk, Johnny had cautioned me to use his desk and his typewriter because a building post more than a foot wide partly blocked Carl Wise's view.

Carl did keep looking at me. Perhaps he could also smell me. But in silence I wrote those stories, put them on Carl's desk, when he sort of studied me again, and started to leave by the side door that opened onto an alley rather than risk being seen on the street when I emerged in the sad state in which I was.

Halfway down those stairs the door to the press room was open. I saw a sturdy steel table used in wrapping and labelling papers in quantity, and I decided that rather than risk whatever might lie ahead if I left in the condition in which I had already suffered two disgraces, I'd take a little nap. I spread out on that table, hat and overcoat on, and fell asleep.

I had a dim awareness of it when the presses started to roll. Presses have a high decibel level but it was not high enough to keep me from sleeping without any interruption until after all the papers had been dispatched and the press room was once again still and empty.

With the hangover came remorse and shame.

Johnny had a new room to find for his father, who'd been invited to leave a rather large number of them.

I now don't remember whether I dared facing Vivian to apologize to her or Johnny counselled me against facing her and his mother, both at the same time.

I do remember clearly that from that night's experiences, that shameful and embarrassing behavior, I decided to "reform." And I did.

The legislature was going into special session. That meant more work for all of us because a reporter would be sent to help the regular man covering Dover, the State capital.

I vowed to myself that for the duration of that special session I would pour every drop the boys did not take from the bottle, without taking a drop myself. That special session lasted about three months. For three months I did not have a drop.

And since then I have been able to take it or leave.

When thereafter I did get drunk, it was by accident, not intent and it was infrequent. It has not happened in several decades.

Now I am a sipper. I've given up my favorite, corn whiskey. Too strong for me now.

During and for a short while after World War II, when we lived in Virginia, which rationed alcoholic beverages, my wife's monthly quota I used for bonded bourbon, for our guests.

Mine went for the product with the most honest labelling I remember.

Mine went for "Singin' Sam" corn whiskey. The label read, "The corn whiskey in this bottle is warranted not to be over 30 days old."

I could easily fill several large chapters with corn whiskey stories, where and by whom and how it was made, how it was bootlegged- once inside a jail, for the sheriff, for the man who sent it to me and for me- and its merits and nicknames, but that has nothing to do with what I learned while working for the *News* that helped prepare me for my work on the JFK assassination and its investigations. So not here.

I do return to my last drunk on corn whiskey, how I was garbed when all my clothing had gotten soaking wet while fishing on Norris Lake, Tennessee, while engaged in what I go into later.

There was one departure from traditional news writing standards that I did get away with. Probably Carl Wise or Charlie Grey felt as I then did. In a supposedly straight news story, with no

editorializing or other comment, I intended and delivered an insult to a then famous man.

Lowell Thomas was the first really great celebrity in radio news.

Whatever he may have been in his personal life his accounts of which were aired nationally with some regularity- whether or not with complete and impartial fidelity- he was a network star- when he was the main speaker at the annual convention of the Delaware State Teachers' Association. I was sent to cover it. His pontifications, his self-glorifications, his long-winded tales that did nothing to inform the State's teachers of anything other than how vitally important Lowell Thomas said he was in his rise from rags to riches. It was too much for me.

My insult was the literal truth. I believe I can recall my exact words. They were:

"In the main speech of the day Lowell Thomas compared Abraham Lincoln favorably with Lowell Thomas."

Carl must have shown that to Charlie Grey and they must have chuckled over it together to indulge the departure of their brash kid from traditional journalistic standards and practices.

During the years of my appearances on radio and TV talk and news shows I never emulated Lowell Thomas, the first of our seven p.m. network stars and prize properties, with such personal stuff.

That one was easy to learn and no problem to practice.

Once in a while I remembered it to jibe at and mimic some of the self-conceived Lowell Thomases who laced the airways with their self-glorification for which there was no basis in their writing or in accomplishments, which were largely empty boasts.