CHAPTER 5
Learning a New World in the New World

My next writing, as distinguished from the writing that is part of editing, began about a decade after my stint on the *News*.

In between I'd left the *News* and Wilmington in the hope of making more money to help meet the family's needs after my father died.

I was able at the least to meet the mortgage payments and my mother was able to keep the house and educate my younger sister.

My experience on the *News* and as a youthful writer syndicated from time to time by the Philadelphia *Ledger*'s Sunday section, did not impress The Washington *Post*.

The cockroaches in its old building on the north side of E Street, Northwest closer to 14th than to 13th Street, before long to be replaced with a parking garage, were as plentiful as those at the *News* but they showed no Washington superiority over them.

At the Department of Agriculture, with an assist from patronage I'd been able to get, I was promised the first opening in the information office. I had some experience in reporting news of agriculture and agricultural science covering the University of Delaware's agriculture department and the Agricultural Extension Service. As a supposed stop-gap that satisfied the Democratic Party of Delaware, I was given a "temporary" clerical job in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. I was one of those menial clerks who were important in seeing to it that the farmers who had practiced birth control with their lustful pigs and avoided planting corn in the volume of previous years got their checks on time.

That was, despite the ridicule of it, a good, really a vitally necessary way of preventing some of the numerous farm foreclosures, in some instances starvation, of keeping farm families together and helping them survive the disasters of the Great Depression.

That may not have been the best way to accomplish those necessary objectives but it was probably the most daring innovation FDR believed he could get enacted.

There was no real food surplus. The surplus was in what could be sold, what people could pay for, not in what was needed. For all the increased production from improved methods of farming, there would have been no domestic surplus if all who needed food got what they needed, and if any effort had been made to feed the starving of the world there would have been an acute shortage.

It was many years before the government established a program of giving agricultural surpluses to those in urgent need of that food, especially to hungry school children.

I was really impressed by FDR, by a man of wealth with an obvious concern for those in dire straits. I did not miss a single one of what were called his "fireside chats."

Of all the wonderful words so many of which were written for him by his personal and political friend, Judge Sam Rosenman, "we have nothing to fear but fear itself" influences me most of all in my later years.

It was without any qualm or apprehension that later I went alone and unarmed in places in New Orleans where Jim Garrison's lawyers and the police on his staff would not go except in pairs and then when both were armed.

And nothing ever happened, either. FDR was right.

It did not take long for the wealthy and the corporations to see how much money they could

make by regulating the association of sows with boars and the like. Before long much of the tax money that was supposedly to save the family farms and families lined the pockets of the already wealthy and the corporations as both bought up farm acreage.

Among the unemployed who poured into Washington for any job at all or to help FDR beat the Depression or both were many PhDs who welcomed even clerical employment until they could do better.

One of those who worked with me when I worked in the since built showplace was the Old Post Office Building, on the south side of Pennsylvania Avenue between 12 and 13 Streets was a former Jack Dempsey sparring partner. Myers was no longer young enough for that work that he had enjoyed so much.

He knew which eating places in that part of Washington had the best ham. Its cost was nominal and I enjoyed an occasional splurge. Myers really did find what was the best ham.

Much of our time on the evening shift- and we worked three rotating shifts- we spent in responding to the screams of women when bats flew into their offices. We did not often catch any, if ever, but we did get the bats to leave and the calmed women to return to their typewriters.

Worthwhile as that clerical work was to those whose needs were at least partly filled as a result, whose survival was made possible by it, it was also boring. It got to be too much after I'd spent a few months in another building, a since razed apartment of modest size on the south side of Independence Avenue, Northwest, just west of 7th and across from some Smithsonian buildings. Fine new federal buildings now grace that entire area.

The only Ph.D. I remember from that building was a black man named Taylor. He was our

regular, night-time security guard. With his Ph.D. he got $1260 for an entire year. I was a bit better off, getting $1440 a year, that is $30 a week. Of that I sent about a third home.

The difference of less than four dollars a week was nonetheless a very significant difference. In terms of the food that four dollars then would buy. Or the part of the rent it would pay.

How else was it then? What to remember, but not to want to relive?

Most of the black women who worked in that Old Post Office Building were under three glass roofs in its hollow center, two at the top and one immediately over the area in which they worked. They worked in the noisiest area, running the ever-clattering IBM punchcard machines. They were further separated from any air by being partitioned off from the rest of that glass-covered area that had no air in any event.

In the heat of summer days those who worked in the bottom of that hollow area, whites outside that IBM area, passed out often.

Save that there was no Jim Crow on the trolleys and buses, blacks were officially and by legislation discriminated against in the nation's capital.

Except in government cafeterias they were not permitted to eat in white restaurants.

When I dined with black friends, it was usually at a fine black restaurant, Harrison's, on U Street, Northwest, on the north side in the middle of a block somewhere near Sixth Street.

Wilmington was below the Mason-Dixon line, just barely. The schools, restaurants and places of entertainment were segregated. Blacks were not allowed in white movies. They were permitted in the only legitimate theater, in the Hotel du Pont, but only in the uppermost gallery, called "peanut heaven."

Until well after World War II there were regular scandals, scandals at least to those opposed to and those the victims of discrimination, when black ambassadors to this country and to the United Nations, could not get food on the main highways, including that between New York and Washington.

The only black employees I remember from my years in the then only Senate Office Building, since renamed after the respected leader of Southern conservative of his day, Richard Brevard Russell, were the nighttime custodial staff.

One with whom I developed a friendly relationship after I caught him stealing the bourbon with which I kept going during long periods of no sleep was a preacher named Hill. He had to work to supplement his scant salary, if he got one. He was a janitor, the only kind of work he could get as a black in those years.

I had an old-fashioned roll-top desk that I rarely closed and in which I used all the many cubby holes. My office was under the stairs in the corner nearest the Supreme Court Building, Room 103. Our files were in Room 135, at the diagonally opposite end of the first floor that was underground at my end. the main offices were in Rooms 247C and 249, in the northeast corner of the floor above mine halfway between these two ground floor offices, mine and the one with the files. There was a street-level entrance at that northeast corner of the building.

About two or three o'clock one morning when I was staggering around to Room 135 with galleys of a report under my left arm, many pencils of different colors in that hand, I had one of the fancy Senate glasses in my right hand. Just as I got to that exit corner of the building, the committee's boss, Robert Wohlforth, who had worked late for him, was just getting off the elevator to leave by that exit.

His greeting was, "What do you have in that glass?"

"Bourbon," I replied, "Want a drink?"

"No!" he exclaimed, with real indignation. "Don't you know that's against the law?"

My spontaneous reply was "It may be against the law but it sure is great for the Constitution. And if you want this damned report out correct and on time you'd see to it that I do not run out."

I never heard another word about my drinking on the job. That drinking was restricted to a sip straight, and from the bottle, when I was getting too drowsy. It was a temporary pickup and many a night I kept going with those temporary pickups.

No report was ever late and there was not a single complaint any about my work on them.

Late one night when I had to return for something I'd forgotten when I left for the Government Printing Office. When I opened the door there was the Reverend Evans with my bottle in his hands.

I knew the level was going down even when I was not using it but I'd no idea who was nipping it, sometimes a bit heavily.

The poor man was embarrassed. He just stood there and looked at me.

My salary was much better, although not all that good. I was then on the payroll of the Farm Security Administration. My job there was the executive or administrative assistant to its director.. But I was loaned to the Senate. I was getting $3200 a year then and still sending money home from each check. So, the bonded bourbon I used to keep going those long nights was an extravagance.

I also was embarrassed when I caught Reverend Evans stealing my booze. But I could understand that he, too, needed a wee drap from time to time, preacher in the daytime that he was and janitor at night.

"Reverend Evans," I said, "we've got to work out an arrangement because you are hitting it

harder than I can really afford. Take a nip whenever you really need one but you've got to stop hitting it as hard as you do."

He smiled, a bit sheepishly at first and them broadly, he took my hand when I offered it, and we had a deal.

Thereafter he never violated the ground rules between us.

Drinking was illegal in the Senate Office Building as Wohlforth had said?

Hell, no! Once when I was so overworked and so far behind I'd borrowed a good ol' boy proofreader from the Government Printing Office, an amiable man named Jeff Burnett. He was a competent proofreader. But before long his work was sloppy and inaccurate. He also developed watery, bleary eyes many days after lunch. Only after lunch. One day it was obvious he was drunk, very drunk. Before calling his wife I got one of the staff to take him in a cab to the Riggs Turkish baths then in the basement of the Albee Building across from the main Treasury building on its east side. When I questioned Jeff the most improbable story that turned out to be true emerged.

One day he'd been on an elevator with the Vice President of the United States, the Texas swizzler John Nance Garner. Garner invited him to the office of the Vice President of the United States for a drink and it got to be a regular after-lunch when Garner was in town.

Senatorial drinking was no secret. Garner's was a bit out of the ordinary in those days after repeal, when it was legal to buy and sell alcoholic beverages. But like me, Garner fancied corn whiskey, real corn whiskey. It was unbecoming for the vice president of the United States to offer anything like my later Singin' Sam. At least once a week his liveried chauffeur, who looked like Central Casting in Hollywood would approve for a gangster's gunslinger, drove the vice president's official car

over to somewhere in West Virginia. Its closest northeast corner was not a long drive and it was mountainous, good for hiding stills. When he left the building he had a wicker picnic basket on each arm, covered with linen Senate napkins. He looked exactly the same way when he returned but he did not carry the baskets as high. The gallon jugs under those napkins when left were full on his return, with what was then best known as White Mule. It was moonshine, colorless, illegal, bootleg corn whiskey as fancied in the West Virginia mountains that began only a little more than an hour's drive from Washington.

When I needed more shelf space for galley proof, stenographic transcripts of hearings and bound volumes of them and a few other things for which no space remained in or on my desk and the tables I had, I asked the Senate carpenter shop if it could provide a set of shelves the maximum width of which I gave it after measuring the space I had for them in Room 103. The foreman, who did his best to keep everybody happy, no matter how unimportant or low the rank in that rank-conscious building, seemed to be a bit hesitant when he told me he had just that size in a set of mahogany shelves. He also told me it had a blemish that might be embarrassing.

"What's wrong with them?" I asked him. "Wobbly?"

"No," he replied, "They are quite sturdy. Not used much. Not that long since we made them."

"What would embarrass me about fairly new mahogany shelves?" I asked him.

"We made them for Garner," is all he said. Then I knew, knowing of Garner's drinking and his never hiding those gallons of White Mule.

"You mean rings on them?!" I asked.

Relieved, he said that was the defect. I asked him how soon I could have them. They filled the

one place I had for the shelves I needed almost instantly. the only delay was so they could be wiped off.

In fact, every time one of those many rings was visible and I was asked about it, it became a talking piece.

In that much less complicated period of our political life most of the Members were pretty democratic and some were gregarious, if few were to the degree the conservative Garner was or as open and as free with their whiskey.

When I had seen a small item in the papers saying that the Senate had approved an investigation proposed in a resolution offered by Wisconsin Senator Robert M. LaFollete, Jr. pursuant to which there would be an investigation of the violation of civil liberties and the right of labor to organize, brash and young as I was, with my only labor experience limited to memberships in the American Newspaper Guild and the government employees union, I went to LaFollete's office as soon as I could. He was not there but the member of his staff who interviewed me. Dave Persinger, satisfied with what I though was inadequate experience for a job at the Senate, asked me if I'd be willing to work for the committee if it borrowed me from the Agriculture Department and that department kept me on its payroll and I got my checks from it.

I grabbed it!

The committee had to "borrow" virtually all its employees because the money appropriated for two years of investigation was only $50,000. Even in those days, in 1936, that was a very small appropriation. But it was the most the leadership could hope to get passed.

First, like the few others then there, most of them also borrowed from executive agencies, I familiarized myself with the information the committee had. I spent days reading and took reading matter home with me.

The most surprising thing was that the potentially most interesting and useful records the committee had gotten had been torn up by hand. No Watergate-era shredding machines existed then. Committee investigators had served a duces tecum subpoena on the Philadelphia office of a labor-spy outfit that called itself "The Railway Audit and Inspection Company." Anticipating that the embarrassing files would be destroyed those investigators made a deal with the building's janitor for him to save all the waste from RA&I's office. When I first saw stacks of what looked like oversized confetti from a distance they were on a long table in the large Senate caucus room famed for so many spectacular hearings in it. The Senate was in recess, no hearings any time soon, so whenever any of us had any free time we went to the Caucus Room and worked on the long tables for the press, trying to reconstruct what we could of all those shredded records.

Scotch tape was then a new product. It then was available only in three-inch rolls, an inch wide, in round, flat, metal containers of two halves each a little larger in diameter than the rolls of tape. For years those containers were the most common ash trays in many offices, government and private.

The tape then had no dispenser. We had to cut or tear the tape. Using it was a bit awkward, but it worked.

When any of us, from the very few secretaries to the lawyers, had a free moment we spent it at those caucus room green felt surfaced tables tediously putting the shredded records back together. We managed to reconstitute a large number of those RA&I records.

Before my assignment out of town ended my time with those RA&I records I was somewhat familiar with them and just about all that had been reconstituted had been typed, with as many carbon copies as could be read in those days so long before the first photocopying machines were invented.

I was sent to Cleveland to investigate a suspected labor-spy outfit and then to Akron to serve a subpoena on the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company and to learn, in general, all I could in both cities.

I began to get into trouble soon after reaching Cleveland when I learned that the National Labor Relations Board regional director, Ralph Lind, like many NLRB people also working for the committee, had completed his "investigation" of the Burns detective agency in less than a morning! That agency had a long anti-labor record.

From what I knew Burns had been doing in Cleveland, "investigating" it in less than one morning, was impossible. I so told the committee's administrative head, Robert Wohlforth, as soon as I could.

My main assignment in Cleveland was to investigate what like RA&I disguised itself with its name. A pillar of local society, patron of the arts and trustee of Case University, J.H. Smith, a dignified looking man who smiled except when he had real cause not to, along with other business interests had what he called "The Corporations Auxiliary Company." His "auxiliary" service was supplying labor spies. Like the others, he did not have them on his payroll. He had a staff of recruiters. They "hooked" the spies.

His largest and most important client was the Chrysler Corporation, the automobile manufacturing company.

My continuing education, every job a learning experience in one way or another for the future,

took a large and astounding leap forward soon after CA's bookkeeper, also a native Philadelphian named Bretler, tumbled to the fact that I had doped his coded entries out.

Soon Smith, who much resembled the famous banker of that era, Bernard Baruch, was standing beside me when I was poring over his ledgers. His smile clearly was forced and hard, but he smiled.

He soon gave me to understand that I could have a bright and a prosperous future working for Chrysler, by whom he had been told and authorized to tell me of the great respect it had for the abilities I had already displayed.

My response was an unpremeditated, as spontaneous and immediate as when that nabbed bootlegger made the similar proposal that I had accepted.

Without telling Smith, pillar of Cleveland fiance, cultural life and society that the was that I considered him a no-good scurvy S.O.B. I told him that the appeal of much better pay and a long career in the auto industry was not as great to me as much as working for the United States Senate, particularly because, and he read me clearly, I anticipated that some of the hearings already scheduled promised to be so exciting- and so very informative about so many people.

He knew I was saying, "And you included."

Within a year or so Lind was a lawyer for employers organization, as was another NLRB regional director I met two years later.

He was Philip G. Philips and he also went to work for a better paying anti-labor employers organization.

The last time I saw Phil we were both Walter Reed Hospital patients in its reconditioning section. Before I was advanced to its rehabilitation center Phil, then a captain, killed himself.

In Akron my speeded-up education in the grim realities of the world in which we live and from which I had been sheltered continued. I had my first experience in doing wrong when it seems to be right and then turns out to be right but done in the wrong way. In terms of objective accomplished, whether or not in terms of the law, it became a big success for which I was almost fired!

When I went to serve the Senate's subpoena on Paul W. Litchfield, head of the vast Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., he kept me waiting in an outer office for what I considered an inordinate and insulting amount of time. Insulting to the Senate, which I represented, not a personal insult. When I was finally ushered into that august presence lo! there was still another with the Smith appearance, a dignified looking man who looked like everyone's favorite grandfather. Except in the hard set of his face.

He sat grimly behind his beautiful large desk, flanked by a pair of his lawyers.

When there was not even a gesture of civility I could not resist saying, "Mr. Litchfield, I have a love letter for you from the United States Senate."

I was sure his lawyers would explain that "duces tecum" on the subpoena, if he did not already know, meant "and bring with you" the records described in it, so I said nothing else about the subpoena.

Instead, without another word, I just turned and left.

While awaiting further instructions I went off on my own. I still wonder whether what I did was right or wrong. It seemed right so I did it. I was without the specific authority to do it.

I had tumbled to a new twist in keeping wages, including for skilled work, at what was usually little more than a starvation level. It was so-called "citizens' committees." No hint in anything at all anti-labor in their names. All those names suggested various kinds of good citizenship, civic concerns, even boosterism. Some like that in Akron, were titled to seem to be like chambers of commerce. They were

not. They were active in turning public opinion against working people and their organizations. As the committee's investigations following my Akron adventure established, leadership was provided, along with the many seemingly independent newspaper columns by big-name writers, by such prestigious industry groups as The National Association of Manufacturers and the American Iron and Steel Institute.

The first of the literary whores whose names surfaced as in the pay of the wealthy vested interest while pretending to be an independent journalist was George Sokolsky.

One morning I walked over to a building near the downtown hotel in which I was staying, went to its second floor, entered the offices of the so-called Greater Akron Association, and asked to see Edgar A. Browse, a lawyer who was its managing director.

He did not even pretend friendliness. I introduced myself and told him I was there to get copies of their public statements, their sources, their preparation and distribution, and of their income and expenditures in connection therewith.

Browse was aghast.

"Why that's the Russian way!" he growled, intending the gross insult and meaning that the august United States Senate was a tool of Moscow.

"Well, Mr. Browse," I told him with calm and slowly, "Maybe you would prefer the American way to the Russian way. I can come back with a duces tecum subpoena and as you know that will require you to truck all these file drawers to the Senate Office Building. Is it at all possible that you might prefer the Russian way? It means that all you have to do is copy the records I describe and deliver them to us. It does not require you to deliver them in person and it does not require you to

testify at a public hearing.

Browse lost no time in opting for what he had called "The Russian Way" and the committee was soon off and running on one of the most informative aspects of its historical and influential hearings, hearings that meant almost immediate changes in corporate labor policies and with some attitudes toward those who worked for them. It meant the end of bloody commercialized strike-breaking and to at least a large degree of the labor-spying that resulted, among other things, in hurt to many families.

Once when I was walking back to my hotel in Akron a reporter for its *Beacon-Journal*, Bob Jackson, caught up with me. He and his paper among others had been kept informed by those unseen and unknown to me about my comings and goings.

I was not authorized to speak for the committee and I never did. I tried to explain to him what the committee's responsibilities were, what the Senate had charged it with doing and how it was doing that. I had no secrets and could not have given him any if I had wanted to. The first hearing had not yet been held. When his story appeared I knew it would mean trouble for me. It was not long in coming.

Whatever I was doing, it was some time after the paper appeared before I saw Jackson's piece. By the time I was back at the hotel there was a terse message from Washington to return as soon as possible. Before I got that message the word had gotten back to Akron again and to the rubber workers' union, at least to its president, Sherman Dalrymple, and to his general counsel, Garnet Patterson. They knew of my recall. Whether or not as a matter of union business, Patterson said he'd like to keep me company.

I knew very well that he would not ordinarily take a Friday night overnight sleeper for business in Washington when he could not do any business for two days after getting there. But I was not

suspicious and I was glad for company and for commiseration.

It was several years before I learned that Patterson, too, had gone to work lawyering for an anti-labor group that paid much more money than unions could.

The only clear recollection of how I was greeted that Saturday morning is of fatherly questioning by the National Labor Relations Board's remarkable Morman, Heber Blankenhorn. Blank was, as much as anyone, responsible for the committee's creation. He had headed an interchurch inquiry into how working people were being treated a few years earlier. Mistreated, really. There had been some real massacres.

The respected, really almost revered Blank, as everyone called and referred to him, questioned me as he took us walking through the Senate Office Building corridors.

When he learned all he wanted to know he patted me on the back and said, "Don't worry."

Apparently he saw to it that I did not have at least that worry, of being fired in disgrace.

Instead I was given the seeming impossible job of doing what I knew nothing about, preparing the "brief" for the Tuesday morning hearing on RA&I.

Without even a change in clothing or a place to sleep!

In my absence the three young men with whom I lived found us better accommodations. They moved my things and not expecting my unexpected return had left no message for me. When by accident I did learn I hurried to bathe and change. I could and did shave in the office when nobody else was there.

What was called the "brief" was paperclipped into a legal-size file folder. On the right when opened were the questions the Senators were to ask the witness and on the left the documents in

support of that line of questioning.

That was all I knew. Scared at first, really intimidated, I finally decided that if I prepared it as I would have a news story that would work.

It did. The hearing was a big success. It was informative and it got a good press.

After that hearing I was made the committee's editor. I sat at the witness table across from the court reporter. the witness faced between us to the podium on which the Senators sat, flanked by the administrative head and the general counsel. I also had a copy of the brief and as each exhibit was introduces into evidence, I marked it as evidence and handed it first to the witness and then to the court reporter.

What sticks most in my mind from that first hearing has nothing to do with the hearing. It was startling and unhidden reportorial misconduct by one of the best known by-line reporters, Joe Alsop, then a Washington correspondent of the famous New York *Herald-Tribune*. Alsop had been to hearings before. He knew there were never enough copies when copies could be made only by typing them. Alsop was always early. He grabbed the seat at the press table closest to me. He then could and did pocket the copy of any record I handed him for the use of all at the press table.

Alsop did not take, which is to say steal, all the exhibits. He kept only those he might want to quote at greater length or one that his notes did not include when the pertinent passages were read aloud in the questioning.

Without clubbing him there was nothing the other reporters could do except delay writing their stories so they could examine the exhibits in the committee's offices. In practice mine. I know of no other reporter who did anything like that.

He got to be pretty famous and very respected and respectable.

With four copies for the podium, one for the official evidence and one for the press table, the legibility of carbon copies was exhausted.

In any event the committee was well launched, and my amateur brief turned out to be professional. My Akron troubles were behind me and out of mind because there was no room in it with all else I had to do and learn how to do so fast.

My hours as editor were terrible because I made them terrible. I was determined that not even a typographical error got into print with the Senate's imprint on it.

It was some time before I realized that I was getting special favors and attention, including at the GPO. It began with the Senate's fine printing clerk, Guy Ives. He stretched what he could authorize. Not knowing what was allowed I acted as if nothing was not allowed. With him and with the fine old men who headed the GPO's night shift in the end there was little that was not authorized.

(The main responsibility of the GPO's night shift seemed to be getting the Congressional Record out overnight and accurate. the Congressional Record is a verbatim transcript of everything that is said, of everything that happens, in the session of both of the House of the Congress. The sessions of either House could and did last into the early morning hours. Probably any issue ended at midnight, with what followed in the sessions of the House thereafter perhaps being the beginning of the issue of the day that began at midnight. I now do not remember. But even if that were the case, getting all those words set in type, printed, bound and delivered by the early beginning of the next working day was an exceptional performance that required an exceptional effort. That GPO night shift made it all appear to be as easy and as natural as breathing. Doing it and doing it that way had become a tradition, and a fine tradition,

long before I was ever at the GPO. It was expected, it was the responsibility of that night shift, and they just did it. No matter what the problems were. And, of course, the official short-hand reporters of each House had to transcribe their shorthand notes and then they had to reach the typesetters. It was just the most impressive display of doing the seemingly impossible and having it seem to require no unusual effort at all. They were an exceptional crew of the most dedicated public servants, that night shift. And all that I had any connection with, mostly the men in charge, always had time for the youngster who wanted to do the best job he could, they always found a way to do it and always got it done.)

Before long, at the GPO on Capitol Hill and a few other places, I had the reputation of turning out the Senate's best committee publications, hearings and reports.

Later I realized that not all the extras I was able to get were not from my brashness in asking for all I wanted, not for me personally but for the committee. It was from the liking of older men for a diligent, hard-working, never self-seeking youngster in an oldster's job- and doing it well.

I feel the same way about younger people going on 60 years later. Joe Cottler was only the first of many older men from whom I learned much because they wanted me to.

In many ways of which I then had no inkling like so many of the learning experiences that when we live them we do not recognize as learning experiences, they later were helpful, often important, to be drawn upon.