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You Gotta Go To School For That?

by **Jerry Seay** (Rookie Librarian, College of Charleston Libraries)

Just the other day my dear little sister, Kathy, asked me why I got into this profession. Now, I know the three of you out there who are regular readers of this column are asking, "Golly, Jerry, does everybody always ask why you got into this profession?" Actually not everybody. Just those who wish to become famous (or infamous) by appearing in this column. Besides, my sister likes the press.

So she asks me. "Jerry, why a librarian. What's the deal?"

The look of blank shock on my face I'm sure told her that she had indeed asked a most obvious question. We refer to such questions in the business as "stupid questions."

"My dear little sister," I said, emphasizing my many years of experience and wisdom, "I joined up for the adventure, of course."

"Adventure?" says she.

"Indeed," says I. And then I proceeded to tell her my James J. Kilpatrick story.

Now, for those of you who have been living in a book truck for the last thirty years, James J. Kilpatrick is a well know columnist. For me, though, he will forever be that "Point counter Point" guy on the news program "60 Minutes" many years (gee, I am getting old) ago. I can still see him stabbing his finger in the air and telling Shana exactly why everything she believed and said was dead wrong and what right did she have saying those stupid things anyway. James said it with logic and finesse and conviction and loud. You could tell he really meant it too. What a guy! It was as good as watching the Andy Rooney segment today.

Anyway, to make this story even longer, this great adventure story began many years ago when I was but a lad and had been at the library only a

few months. Life was fresh and free and I was trying to figure out what this library thing was all about. Little did I know that I was about to get a lesson in acquisitions.

One early morning as I wandered aimlessly through technical services Katina asked me if I wanted to do her a quick simple favor since I was not doing anything. Of course these were the days before I understood that one should always look like one is searching desperately for that final solution to cold fusion or a quick cancer cure even if one is really doing nothing but looking for a pencil sharpener that does not grind your pencil into burnt sawdust. And one should never volunteer for a "quick, simple project." So, naturally, I did.

It seems that a certain famous guy was donating some of his own books to the library if only we would come and get them. But, we had to get them right now, that morning. Katina and I were the chosen ones.



"It's James J. Kilpatrick," Katina explained to me. "You know that newspaper columnist. He just moved to Charleston."

My pulse raced. "You mean THE James J. Kilpatrick? He moved to Charleston?" My mind filled with visions of James and Shana battling it out on Sunday nights. And now, after all these years, I was about to go to his house!

Katina and I got into her car and starting maneuvering the narrow streets of downtown Charleston to James J. Kilpatrick's mansion. Of course the first thing I said was, "Gee, Katina, why is your entire dashboard lying in the floorboard." I noticed it right off.

continued on page 53

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You Gotta Go To School

continued from page 44

"Oh," she said, waving her hand casually as if everyone keeps the guts of their dashboard in the floor of their car, "that's just the air conditioner they're working on. I really hate when they do that. Don't you?"

Indeed.

We pulled up to this house on the street. I was expecting a huge mansion set way back from the street with an iron gate and maybe a couple of guards. Instead, I find that Mr. Kilpatrick lives in a house with no yard. No one came out to greet us or check our ID's or anything. The back yard, though, did have an iron fence around it, and we headed for the gate. As Katina and I walked up the drive, I must admit I was feeling a bit giddy. I could imagine James J. Kilpatrick storming out of his door in his house robe, munching a cigar, waving a newspaper in his hand and yelling something like why the hell were we in his driveway.

But, he didn't. I was beginning to wonder how we had got this far without being stopped by guards or something. It was quiet . . . too quiet.

Katina led the way as we pushed open the iron gate to the pool area behind the house. Well, I did expect he would have a pool. What self-respecting celebrity would not? What I did not expect was that thing in his pool. There was this mechanical-bug-looking thing that was making its way around the bottom of the pool like it was on automatic pilot. I guess it was sucking up scum. It was the fanciest most automatic scum sucker I had ever seen. What this thing was really doing and how it made its way into this story is beyond me.

Katina approached the back door and rang the doorbell. I stood back and waited for my childhood legend to open the door. What could I possibly say to him? "Golly, Mr. Kilpatrick, loved the way you yelled at Shana. Would you please sign my newspaper?" And then it happened.

Suddenly, from around the corner of

the house bounded a miniature collie. You guessed it. It was James J. Kilpatrick's dog. It ran up to me, jumped up and down and started licking my hands as I bent down to pet it.

I could hardly believe it. I was petting James J. Kilpatrick's dog. This was incredible! This dog had probably, only hours before, jumped on James Kilpatrick himself. Mr. Kilpatrick had surely written hundreds of searing words as this very dog lay at his feet. I was in awe. The dog was all paws. Katina was mad because no one would answer the door.

After a few minutes, the dog ran off and Katina got tired of ringing the doorbell. We decided to go bang on the windows of the pool house to rouse anyone who might be asleep in there. I think it was Katina's idea.

After a few good bangs, a lady who said she was Mr. Kilpatrick's secretary came to the door. She said she was working in the back room and did not hear us come in. I wondered where James J. was but was too embarrassed to ask. She might think I was just one of those crazy columnist groupies scamming for a piece of celebrity type-writer ribbon or a used white out bottle. I had just petted the guy's dog. What else could I ask for?

The secretary gave us three big boxes of books and we lugged them back to the car. We pulled away from James Kilpatrick's house, pool, dog and secretary and headed back to academia.

My sister stared at me. "You petted James J. Kilpatrick's dog?"

I brushed it off. "Oh, it was not as exciting as it sounds. But, I did get to scope out his back yard pretty well. It's mostly pool."

"But, you never got an autograph or anything." She sounded as disappointed as I.

"Unfortunately not. Funny thing about celebrities, though. The closer you live to them or the longer you know them the less you think of them as a celebrity and more like regular folks."

"Really?"

"Well, maybe with the possible ex-

ception of Madonna."

Yea, I guess pretty soon I'll see James Kilpatrick as just a regular Joe guy. A fellow Charlestonian. And if I happen to see him on the beach someday I won't even mention Shana. Just ask him about the weather or his dog.

You'll have to excuse me now. I have to go get an autograph from that famous writer Katina Alexis before she turns into just a regular Joe. That would, indeed, be tragic.☹

Under The Microscope

continued from page 29

other day that the Library of Congress has a new show opening with items on loan from the Vatican Library, items like illuminated manuscripts thousands of years old. They have tried to create an atmosphere like the library in Alexandria. This is the first show in a series to salute the great libraries of the world. That is so important. What would happen if something happened to, for instance, the Library of Congress? Libraries are the lifeblood, the DNA of humanity. They contain what we have all thought — and that is our treasure. Most writers wouldn't be writing today if it weren't for libraries. Good writers are also voracious readers.

ATG: What do you think of libraries today?

CMF: The addition of computerized libraries has changed the feel of libraries. It was comforting to pull out the big card catalog drawers. The University of Kansas library looked like a cathedral but they were changing over to computers. I still went to the card catalog instead of the computer until I realized I was missing a lot of things. Old habits.

Still, librarians have a love of books that doesn't carry over to the hard old computer terminal. I don't want the computer to dehumanize the library.

ATG: Connie May, it's all pretty eloquent. For us collection development and acquisitions librarians out there, undergoing a crisis of conscience, there may be a point to our existence, when we talk to a writer like you. Thank you.☹