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And We Weren't There

Otto Rapp, Pergamon, and Robert Maxwell:

A Nostalgic Recollection

By *Nat Bodian*, Publisher's Marketing Consultant

Volume 3, Number 2 of *Against the Grain* carried two items which brought both sorrow and nostalgic reflection. I refer on the one hand to the passing of my dear friend Otto Rapp and the beautiful tribute by Oliver Sitea of Oliver's Books.

The other item was the news about the buyout of Pergamon by Elsevier. I had for eight years been head of all marketing and promotion at Elsevier (1963-1971) and for all of those years and many since then had spent many days and evenings with Otto Rapp when we were fellow exhibitors at numerous scientific and library meetings. Otto and I shared two things in common, a love of books and of marketing, and we had many discussions on our favorite subjects. From these discussions came a number of case histories I subsequently used in my books on book marketing and direct mail promotion of books.

Now about the news that Pergamon was bought out by Elsevier. It reminded me of a time in 1970-71 when Pergamon tried to make an Elsevier acquisition and failed. That acquisition was me. Let me explain. After a scientific meeting where Otto and I spent some time together, he telephoned me at the Elsevier office in New York. He said there was an opening at Pergamon's Elmsford New York headquarters for a book marketer—that he'd spoken to Mr. Maxwell about me and that Maxwell showed great interest in my coming to Pergamon.

Otto then asked me to mail him

an up-to-date resume and the salary I would want to leave Elsevier for Pergamon.

I provided both. Otto subsequently told me he'd passed the information on to Maxwell and he was now very interested. Would I come to Elmsford one day when Maxwell was next in the U.S.

I said "No," I wouldn't cheat on Elsevier by taking a working day off, but would gladly meet Maxwell in New York City any day either after working hours or close to the end of my normal workday.

A date was set up for a meeting with Maxwell in the Park Avenue offices of Maxwell's New York City attorney — a locale very close to Elsevier's 52 Vanderbilt Avenue quarters, for 5 P.M.

When I arrived at Maxwell's attorney's office, Otto was waiting for me in the hallway at the elevators. He ushered me into what appeared to be a board room. It had a long table holding about 15 or more chairs, about seven or eight of them occupied by various members of the Pergamon sales and marketing staff who had apparently come down from Elmsford for the occasion.

I was seated at the far end of the long table. The chair at the opposite end was empty. We all sat quietly for five or so minutes. Suddenly, the legendary Robert Maxwell strode into the room, a paper in one hand. He did not sit down. Looking at the paper, which apparently was my resume, he

read aloud a summary of my publishing experience, with all eyes focused on him. At the conclusion of his reading, he turned his eyes toward me and asked if I had anything to add. I replied "No." He then eyed his seated employees and asked if anyone had any questions to ask me. None — only silence.

Maxwell then turned to me again, his eyes focused on mine, and spoke: "You are hired. You will start (at Pergamon) on ___ (he mentioned a date about 15 or so days in the future), and your salary will be ___ (a figure several thousand dollars lower than what I had asked for.)

He then turned and walked out of the room.

The following morning, I telephoned Otto. I told him I'd purposely stated a salary figure sufficiently high enough to justify a move from Elsevier to Pergamon, and that I would not consider the move for a dollar less. I was therefore turning down Maxwell's offer.

So my move from Elsevier to Pergamon never materialized. But now, some 20 years later, Elsevier has Pergamon. And as I read about Robert Maxwell's recent acquisition of *The New York Daily News*, I could not help but recall a time when a Maxwell visit to New York City failed to provide an acquisition he sought. ☞