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## Papa Abel Remembers -- The Tale of A Band of Booksellers, Fasicle 2: Ready, Set, Go!

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proved, in revised form, to become pioneering works in their respective fields and

catapult their authors into the forefront of their disciplines: **Sonia Alvarez**, *Engendering Democracy in Brazil* (1990), **Charles Beitz**, *Political Theory and International Relations* (1979), **Miguel Centeno**'s *Democracy within Reason* (1994), **Susan Eckstein**'s *The Poverty of Revolution* (1977), **Jean Bethke Elshstain**'s *Public Man, Private Woman* (1981), **Peter Evans**'s *Dependent Development* (1979), **Helen Milner**'s *Resisting Protectionism* (1988), **Susan Moller Okin**'s *Women and Western Political Thought* (1979), and **Iris Marion Young**'s *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), **Alvarez** and **Eckstein** have both served as president of the **Latin American Studies Association**, **Centeno** is director of the **Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies**, **Beitz** and **Milner** also teach at **Princeton**, **Evans** is Professor of Sociology at **UC-Berkeley**, and before their recent untimely deaths **Okin** and **Young** were on the faculty, respectively, of **Stanford** and **Chicago**. One wonders what would have happened with their careers if they had not published such influential first books. I wonder the same for another person whose revised dissertation I published at **Princeton** in 1984: **Condoleezza Rice**. Would she be where she is today without that important first book, which helped her get tenure at **Stanford** where she later became provost?

Are you convinced? Then we need to tackle this problem together. No one group — libraries, presses, or promotion-and-tenure committees — can solve this problem on their own. It requires a collective approach because it is a dysfunction that arises from individual units of the university making their own “rational” decisions that are, when combined, irrational for the system as a whole. We need to think systematically more! 🐿

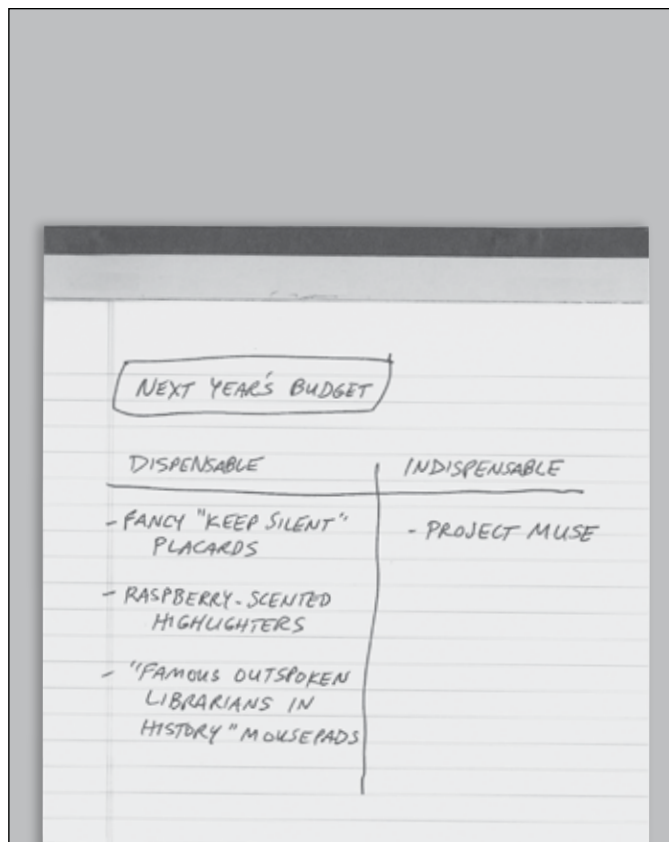
## Papa Abel Remembers — The Tale of A Band of Booksellers, Fasicle 2: Ready, Set, Go!

by **Richard Abel** (Aged Independent Learner) <rabel@easystreet.com>

**S**o, in 1948, I was off to the **University of California, Berkeley** for graduate study in Medieval and Renaissance English history. By way of preparation for an academic career as a professor of history I was expected to undertake the customary graduate TA assignments. The first to which I was assigned in my second year in graduate school was a class in a then required “History and Government of the United States,” a rehash of a high-school civics course — and pitched at about the same level. About half the students were taking the class for the second or more times, which led me to the resolve to get them all through the class so no more taxpayers’ money need be spent on such elementary subject matter for these students. I don’t know if the half of that class that I, in turn, flunked had their grades recast by the Dean but I learned the valuable lesson that I possessed not the patience to deal with a bunch of unmotivated undergraduates. Farewell to an academic career. So the 1949-50 academic year closed on a note of utterly wrecked professorial expectations and with no certain way forward.

What was I to do to support my wife, new daughter, and myself? I called my **Reed** thesis advisor to seek his counsel. As good fortune would have it the then student manager of the **Reed Coop** had, it was thought, made an absolute shambles of the place. A week or two later a new career had been cast — entirely without intention, as is so commonly the case of those who wind up in the book-trade. As soon as **UC** classes were completed the move back to Portland was made.

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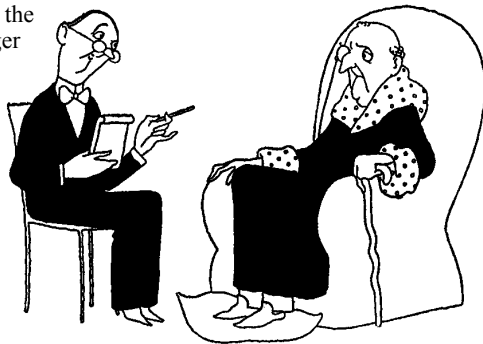
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And indeed what I found was an outfit that had been a growing and prospering scholarly trade bookstore was a shambles. The first summer was spent attempting to recover cash from an absolutely chaotic inventory — automobile tires and batteries, second-hand typewriters; a miscellany of camping and hiking gear; a handful of shop-worn books, suitable only for a sales table; etc. But my best efforts were insufficient to provide the inventory financing needed to open the **Coop** with the legitimately expected textbooks and school supplies in the Fall. So resort had to be made to borrowing funds from the College. And almost as discouraging, the general, retail bookstore had to be rebuilt from the ground up again.

The notion that the student-owned **Coop** could continue to be run by a continually changing sequence of students lacking any steady and continuous idea of or program for a sound and growing undergraduate college bookstore had been abused to near-death in only two years. From its earliest days there had been a tradition at **Reed** that students could conduct their own affairs in a responsible and adult manner. That tradition took a severe kick in the teeth in the case of the still immature college bookstore. Whatever the past that could not be undone, I turned, following the opening of classes in Fall with student needs for textbooks and school supplies satisfied, to the job of rebuilding a scholarly, college bookstore.

By virtue of having completed four intellectually rigorous years at **Reed** followed by two at **Berkeley**, all based upon close and intensive reading, discussion, and debate of and about the traditional canon of the classic writings of the West I was much better prepared to assemble a broader inventory of books for the students initially, and in due time for the faculty as my certitude with respect to the bona fides of contemporary writer/scholars and financial resources grew.

But all of this was a hard slog made difficult by the exhaustion of the financial where-with-all needed to support a sterling scholarly inventory that had been accumulated prior to the two-year debacle noted above. The inventory-building and -buying pattern initially adopted was a throwback to that used while I was the undergraduate manager of the **Coop**. That pattern involved always having in stock the genuine monuments of Western learning, varying in quantity with the unfolding of classes in the course of the academic year, to-



gether with a smattering of some of the works less frequently dealt with in the conferences. Bit by piece available financial resources were re-accumulated and the inventory of general scholarly books grew in parallel measure. In all of this inventory-building it had to be kept in mind that the students need buy none of the general books as the library stocked reserve copies in quantities to meet course/conference requirements. (Save in the case of a limited number of science courses for which the purchase of a textbook by the students was expected.)

Over the next four to five years the general, scholarly book selection had been gradually restored, and sales continued on a cheering upward trend. After about three years I had accumulated the financial resources to take a fling at stocking more obscure titles not directly associated with class/conference content. The students, particularly those notable by their tendency to pursue independent studies, quite warmly received the addition of this new class of writings/writers.

Reflecting upon this reception of this freewheeling class of books I came to the opinion that one of the objectives of a genuinely constructive, college bookstore should be assistance in encouraging/helping students form a firm foundation of holdings for personal libraries which would provide intellectual and ethical nourishment for a lifetime. To this end I turned to the faculty seeking their help in providing bibliographies (author/title only in most cases as I could and would dig out the relevant publisher information). Some responded in a most helpful way — virtually every department contained at least one professor who was eager to support this initiative. Needless to say these faculty bibliographical suggestions tended to focus on the recent literature of their field, particularly those in the sciences. Meanwhile I was pursuing other sources and resources to assist in augmenting the book inventory. Soon the **Coop** was enjoying yet larger sales and inventory management had become a growing problem in addition to a satisfying exploration of the world of knowledge.

This exercise left me with three indelible operating concepts that served me in good stead over the succeeding years. The first was the extraordinary utility of good bibliographies in the management of collections of books, whether in a bookstore, a personal library, or an institutional library. I became an inveterate devotee/user of bibliographies and in due time a compiler thereof.

The second was the enormous problems associated with the organization of knowledge when the volumes of knowledge pass beyond

some remarkably small numbers. This conclusion led to a continuing interest in the various systems of organization of knowledge that various persons have developed over the years. These difficulties range from problems so simple as the categories by and in which books should be shelved to guide the buyer/user in a bookstore to the enormously complex problem of the cataloging of the huge collections of books accumulated by such gigantic book operations as some of the national libraries, as well as some academic/research libraries, those giant catalogs again structured to guide the user in using the collection. (Unfortunately, the structuring of the World Wide Web has failed to deal with this problem of the organization of knowledge, among others, leading to the frustrating hodge-podge of simple information presently characterizing that venture.)

The third concept learned as inventory and restocking systems emerged was to keep systems as simple as possible. This concept was to serve admirably in devising and implementing the approval system and in flow-charting computer applications for programming staffs to support that system and the associated standing order and cataloging systems.

Additional space was acquired to house a growing inventory. The **Coop** and the College once again possessed a bookstore capable of providing the students with good, sound, college, working libraries and the foundation of a lifetime library, if they wished. Quite unplanned, a growing number of Portland residents began to show up as the inventory was very much oriented to serious books of substance not then commonly available in the city stores. This development provided yet more financial strength and incentives to continue to broaden the reach of the inventory, and particularly in the sciences to support staff of the growing regional electronics industry. By the mid-1950s the **Coop** had become one of its model general retail bookstores for the **National Association of College Stores**, which was seeking to stimulate college stores to become intellectual centers for life-long learning.

Then, as unplanned, I received a call from the **Portland Public Library** advising that the **Coop** was stocking books the **Library** was having difficulty acquiring and would the **Coop** be willing to fulfill orders for such books. Within a matter of weeks a similar call was received from the **University of Oregon Library**. The **Coop** was looking at an entirely new and unexpected venue. Some substantial adjustment in horizons was clearly in the cards

On that note this chapter of this tale of a band of booksellers must be brought to a close. 🐾