

## **Tradeshow Tales: Just Another T- Shirt**

### Chapter 1

#### **How did I get myself into this?**

I have been involved in the business of tradeshows in one form or another for over thirty years. I had a company for a number of years, sold out to a larger company and then worked for some of the largest exhibit houses in the USA. As an exhibit house owner and I am capitalized on what I learned from my experiences. I find myself relating stories to friends and associates many of a whimsical nature, some not so funny but interesting to those who do not know the nature of the business...the fun and the heartbreak. After hearing them tell me on many occasion that I should write a book I did just that. I know nothing about writing, but I do know about tradeshows.

Look up the word tradeshow in the dictionary...it's not there. I do know they exist, I've seen them, I've been there and I have plenty of "T" shirts. There is no "Operation Blue Book" or cover-up, they are real. You see some strange sights at tradeshows, but not ETs.

Just going to a tradeshow and/or convention once or twice a year doesn't make you a veteran. You have to come up through the trenches and the pitfalls, pay \$5.00 for a hot-dog and \$3.50 for a soda (small) at the convention center concession stand, if you can find a pizza place open at midnight, order pizza cause you missed dinner, the union hassles and squabbles. Installing an exhibit in a place like Chicago in January or sometimes even Atlanta when it's as cold in the hall as it is outside... try to find a cup of coffee at 7:30 AM.

If the concession stand is open, a small coffee will cost you ~~\$1.00~~-\$1.50.

(No Starbuck's at this time).

You are told the heat will not be turned on until the last day of installation, maybe. You could be in Miami or Phoenix where it might be 103° in the hall and 105° outside. But we do it because we love it. *Right?*

Right.

## Chapter 2

### **In the beginning.**

In 1968, after being discharged from the Navy and discharging myself from my first wife, I returned to St. Louis, Missouri to start a new career. The Navy was a good experience, Vietnam, foreign ports of call, it was interesting, but not what I wanted to do the rest of my life. At this point I really didn't know.

For the first year I bounced around from doing estimating for a piping contractor, to art director for a computer company. I even owned a custom picture framing shop and art gallery for a while; until the retail industry took a nose dive in 1972-73. This is when I went to work briefly for Pinkerton. Doing surveillance of a meat packing plant in East St. Louis at 2:00 in the morning wasn't my idea of a good health risk. Finally I was drafting (B.C. before CAD) for a company that built truck bodies. The latter job led me to go to work for a major motivation and motion picture company, Communico, as a technical assistant. This is where it all started. While on a trip to the truck plant in West Plains, Missouri, the Communico photographer that was going to take pictures of the new trucks, told me I should go apply for a position at Communico. I applied. They gave me a tour. I knew this was what I wanted to do from now on, or at least something that resembled it. You know the old saying, " The

smell of the crowd and the roar of the grease paint,” or was it...

anyway I had fallen in love with this industry called show-biz.

I didn't care what the job called for I wanted to be involved.

## Chapter 3

### **Hollywood here I come.**

I was hired on the spot. I remember in 1974, while working in Hollywood doing some set construction on a film shoot for Toyota (this was before video tape was used so extensively) We worked for a month with Jim Backus, Arte Johnson and Avery Schreiber. This was exciting, building sets for celebrities and getting to know them on a working level. After a while there was a mutual respect and the celebrity/peon atmosphere diminished. We were treated as professionals too.

I remember the first day we went to the studio to see the sound stage and meet with the client and studio owner. Carthay Studios is where all of the Lone Ranger stage shots were filmed. When we arrived, the studio was still being used by another production house. They were shooting a scene from one of the "Old Maytag Repairman Commercials" starring Jesse White. It was late in the day and I guess Jesse was tired. The scene called for a local restaurant dishwasher to come rushing in shouting "Is this the Maytag Repair Shop, is this the Maytag Repair Shop?", Jesse threw up his hands and said "No it's a Whore House"...**Cut, cut** shouted the director.

Everyone laughed including a tired looking Jesse White, they quit for the day and we also left.

For a month I enjoyed everything the job called for.

My wife Elaine and son Todd came out to visit me and they also experienced this side of show business. Friendships do last; two or three years later, Arte and Avery (while doing "A Funny Thing Happened On the Way to the Forum" at the Muny Opera) came to visit me and my staff in St. Louis. I have corresponded with the owner of the studio for many years now. Jim Backus has since passed away. I did receive a card from Henny, his wife, thanking us for our friendship. Jim was a true professional, his timing was remarkable. The studio is now closed. I still have cherished memories and pictures to remember that once in a life-time experience.

The job with Communico lasted a year or so until I first heard a term that for lack of another word, meant downsizing, back then it was simply the ax, the cut back or the "F" word...**FIRED**. Well, not really. It wasn't so bad, I was among thirty people including VPs and other execs. The only problem I had with this whole situation was I had a wife who liked to pay her bills on time and a little boy who had to have food and clothing [and as they get older, it hasn't changed, they come to the table to continue eating].

It's funny how things happen, but just a week or two before we were given the corporate heave-hoe, a friend of mine who worked for a local television station, asked me if I would come to the station to meet the news director, of course I said yes.

## Chapter 4

### **Breaking into television.**

The news director asked me if I could design and fabricate a news set..."**Yes I can**, when do you want it?" He gave me the deadlines and I went home to try to figure out how I would accomplish this undertaking.

I knew I had the ability to do it. I had to have a plan. First I designed the set. The news director liked it, with only minor changes. I was excited. They paid me the up front money that I needed. I hired some friends and relatives, all with carpentry experience and we started to build our first news set for KTVI an ABC affiliate in St. Louis. I forgot to tell you, my first shop was my garage, 500 square feet. The news set was twenty feet in diameter and the back wall sections stood eleven feet tall not counting the aluminum lighting frame which sat on this...the garage was your typical eight to nine foot tall residential garage. We constructed the modules and then took them outside and stood them up, remarkably they stood up fine and were square. The twenty foot diameter platform did have to be fabricated at another location because it was constructed in two sections and delivered on a flat bed. The only other hardship we had was the weather. St. Louis in January and February can be brutal

and working in a small garage we had to keep the doors down or freeze. We did finish the job on time and actually made a little profit. This job led to building a set for KSDK (NBC which got an Emmy for Design and Lighting) also in St. Louis. The night of the Emmy Awards, we sat at a table full of celebrities, TV and sports. Here I am with all of these famous people and my set gets the Emmy. Among those at our table was Lou Brock of the baseball Cardinals. Meeting Lou was the highlight of the evening.

We built three more sets, two for an independent station in Indianapolis, KTTV and another for an ABC station in Peoria, Illinois, KRAU.

The profits from the first set (KTVI) bought enough tools to set me up in business.

As I said before, the first set was built entirely in my two car garage (500 square feet]. It was really tight. Tight actually does not describe it. Some of the pieces of the set would not even stand up in the garage. We had to take them outside to see if they were going to even work. Did I mention, we built the set in January/February with snow on the ground, working day and night. Sometimes the temperature in the garage would get up to 30°. Have you ever tried to laminate a cabinet in below freezing weather. We managed to complete the job and on time.

## Chapter 5

### **Things are looking up.**

Other jobs started to come my way, other news sets, tradeshow displays, some interior design work so I decided it was time to INCORPORATE. We did, I bought a building and we got busy.

The motivation company, Communico, hired my company, now called Designall, Inc., to set up shows around the country for them.

I picked up some large accounts in St. Louis, doing tradeshows and building exhibits.

I traveled a lot and personally supervised 25 to 30 shows a year. There were times when we would be on the road for 35 to 40 days at a time.

I remember a time when I had a crew doing a show in Tampa [for Detroit Diesel Allison] and I left for San Francisco on the day they left Tampa. They were on their way to Monterey, California to do a show for Wells Fargo. They beat me to California. We did our show in San Francisco for IBM and went down to Monterey to help them. We then went back to San Francisco to do another show.

We left San Francisco and headed back to St. Louis. We drove through a blizzard for three days. It took about four days to get back to St. Louis. I had to get back home because my wife was going to buy a house without my blessing.

## Chapter 6

### **Nice to meet you, Mr.Forsythe.**

It is now around 1979 and three boys later and still in the business of tradeshows. My next business meeting finds me in Houston, Texas doing a show for T. Cooke Productions out of St. Louis. We built a stage setting for Weed Eater and hauled it in our truck to Houston. The show was in the Westin Oaks Hotel. The set included a large back drop and screen for rear projection. The sets were in the Weed Eater colors with large yellow letters. The set up went well. The talent was John Forsythe who was quite down to earth. On the first day of rehearsal we all took an afternoon break and some of us headed for the men's room. I just happened to be standing on the left side of one of the producers and Mr. Forsythe came in and stood in the stall on the right. For some reason the producer thought it was time for introductions..."Mr. Forsythe, Jay Nall, Jay this is John Forsythe". We looked at each other, I shrugged, said nice to meet you, pardon me if I don't shake your hand right now. We all laughed. I will say one thing, I always thought John Forsythe was taller, he is actually about my height, 5' 10".

When the show closed, we loaded up our truck and headed back to St. Louis.

## Chapter 7

### **The Good Samaritan**

We took I-10 to 55 near Baton Rouge , that was the plan. It was usually quicker. Not this time. Old Murphy decided it was time to show his ugly ahead again. A few miles just outside Lake Charles, Louisiana the axle on the truck broke. It is now 1:30 AM. we are on one of those low bridges that cross the swamps. Not many cars passing, so we decided to try to get some sleep until daybreak. Around 3:00 AM, a few trucks started to pass. I got on the CB (this was B.C., before cellulars) and started with the “Good Buddy” routine. It wasn’t long before a rig pulled up and asked if we were the ones on the radio. **Yes we are!!!!**

The truck driver said his name was Cecil Reese, he and his family lived in Houston. He was hauling a load of mattresses to Baton Rouge. He also said he knew where there was a garage that would open up about 6:00 AM. We arrived before they were open. We ate breakfast at a little “greasy spoon cafe” near the garage. He bought. I told him there weren’t many guys like him around.

At 6:00, we went to the garage, he told them to be nice to me and fix my truck. Incidentally, I forgot to mention, Cecil was about 6' 4" and weighed about 250 pounds, but he was one of the nicest good Samaritans I have ever encountered.

He wished me luck, I tried to offer him something for his trouble, he said thanks was enough and would expect me to do the same for someone else.

I paid the mechanics, \$150.00, which could easily have been more. By the way, the sign in front of the garage read "Shadetree Mechanics". I can say I've been there. They did a good job. I drove that truck another 40,000 miles before I traded sold it.

## Chapter 8

### **Another tale from New Orleans**

Speaking of Louisiana, I worked as technical supervisor for Steenhoven Productions at NATPE [National Association of Television Program Executives]. I supervised the installation of the Kingworld and Camelot exhibits. Kingworld Productions produce TV shows like Oprah Winfrey, Wheel of Fortune, Jeopardy and other shows. This is probably my favorite show probably because of all the celebrities and the really great looking exhibits. I remember one NATPE in particular, 1991, the Gulf War broke out. Everyone had at least one monitor turned to CNN.

I met a lot of TV and motion picture celebrities. I remember working with Pat and Vanna. I mentioned to Pat that I remember the show when a gay contestant won the big money and his boy friend ran up on stage and was hugging him...Pat said he had never been at a loss for words until that happened. Another time was when a man kept wanting to buy a vowel, an "L". Pat kept saying no a vowel, the man said an "L" again. Oh well...you had to be there.

I would like to relate to you probably the shortest story in this little history of tradeshow nonsense. It involves me and two of my tradeshow cronies, Al and Bill. This story also takes place in New Orleans while we were attending the Federation of American Hospitals. We decided that this particular evening we would go to Pat O'Brien's, famous for their rum drinks called Hurricanes. I had never tried a Hurricane before until this evening. One tasted like another and another. No one told me why I should not have more than a couple... five or six later, walking back to the room was a blur. The three of us looked like a TeePee walking down Bourbon Street. Moral: One maybe two Hurricanes is good advise.

## Chapter 9

### **What's a nice lady like you...?**

As fate would elect, some of my first customers were involved in the medical field and I would soon be involved in doing hospital shows...the AHA, SEHA, NEHA, MAHC, AWA and other acronyms.

Some of my fondest memories are of a couple that I met back in the late 70's, early 80's, Marvin and Barbara Detwiler. We had some of the best times no matter where we were. I will never forget the time when Barbara, (in her late forties at the time, a lovely blonde lady, always dressed to the nines) was standing in the lobby of a hotel in Atlantic City waiting for Marvin to go to dinner. Picture a pretty blonde, red dress maybe pacing the lobby you get the idea...well security mistakes her for, how should I put this, a lady of the evening and asks her to leave, whereupon Barbara proceeds to tell him which elevator shaft he can jump into and that she is a guest and is waiting for her husband. Marvin arrives and straightens out the security guard. This is the same couple that I went to dinner with many, many times. One night we were in one of those famous

Boston cabs who broadsides another cab. Fortunately it was right next to the pier where our restaurant was. We exited the cab, I laid \$10 on the seat while the cabby was arguing with the other driver. Don't know the outcome. We walked away.

We let Marvin make the dinner reservations. He usually made them under a assumed name that sometimes began with Dr. and I recall one time he made reservations and when we arrived he couldn't remember what name he used. He made some excuse and looked at the register and said in his wonderful Philadelphia accent, "That's me right there, Zimmerman " or something like that. I don't think we fooled the host , but he was amused and gave us a table.

After dinner we saw some other friends who were attending the show and also had been eating at the same restaurant. We hailed two cabs and someone casually said, "Race you back to the hotel". That was the wrong thing to say. Our cab drivers, being competitive chaps took us seriously and did race back to the hotel and at one time reached speeds of about 60 or so. In Boston no one noticed. I'm not sure if I remember who won the race. It was my first white knuckle cab ride.

## Chapter 10

### **Fire, fire...yeah so what!**

I can't remember a trip to Boston when we didn't have a fire drill or an actual fire. One night Al Bledsoe, I mentioned Al earlier, who was staying on the same floor that I was, heard the fire alarm. We found the nearest fire exit and started walking down; nine floors. We reached the fire exit and it was locked. Fortunately there was no fire so we trekked back up the nine floors and returned to our rooms. The next year, the J. B. Hynes Auditorium that is adjacent to the hotel, where our show was, did burn. The next year we sat up displays in the parking garage.

One year, you'll remember, the year when Ronald Reagan was shot. I was standing near the RCA display, they were displaying TVs for use in hospitals, at the same time they were broadcasting the news about the shooting. What a coincidence, that same night, all of those TVs and some VCRs were stolen from that booth. Later they were found hidden near the area where the security guards hang out and later they caught a guard stashing a VCR behind a curtain. Who can you trust?

## Chapter 11

### **Nantucket, Moby Dick and a fear of flying.**

The last year that I attended the New England Hospital Assembly, I think it was 1983, I went two days early and met with another old tradeshow groupie and we went to Nantucket. We left Boston in a DC3 tail dragger. We switched to a twelve passenger Cessna in Hyannis. I sat in the co-pilots seat, my friend Bill sat behind me, there was a young lady directly behind the pilot and eight more passengers. The pilot boarded, he was not more than 5' 4".

He proceeded to pore over his flight instruction book very intently. The young lady sitting behind him was also very intent on watching him. I couldn't pass up the chance, so with my best poker face, I whispered to her, "It's his first flight, but as long as he has that book we're okay." He grinned at me without her noticing. She had white knuckles the entire trip.

We landed at Nantucket Memorial Airport the one you see pictured on the TV show "Wings". Guess what, the inside of the airport looks exactly nothing like the one on TV. But you knew that. I would recommend a trip to Nantucket to anyone, it was delightful. It was

like stepping back into time. We stayed at the Jared Coffin House, named after a whaling magnate. I expected to see Herman Melville walking down the street. This is where he was influenced to write "Moby Dick". He actually lived in a little house next to the hotel, which is now a curio shop. Another interesting sight was two drug stores side by side, both still had soda fountains with marble tops and all of the things you would expect to see. The glass apothecary jars with the colored liquid in them. Did you ever wonder what that stuff was for?

The streets were cobblestone with only narrow concrete strips at the corners for the elderly to walk on. All of the buildings were right out of the past. All new buildings must have that early Americana architecture. Clapboard and cedar shake.

We ate dinner in the hotel restaurant and met the Clerk of the Magistrate Court. She and her husband showed us around the island. It was interesting. Their hobby was making gravestone rubbings. Some date back to the 1600's. They also explained to us that Nantucket produces all of their own electricity and there are only two ways to get on the island, by boat and by air. They also said that they have brown-outs regularly. Well, I guess this was the night for one, because when we returned to our hotel there were candles on the front desk to light our way to our rooms.

## Chapter 12

### **Men in Black or Hi! Ya! *Gang?***

I remember another time in Boston when my friend Bill and I decided we wanted to have pizza at a little joint we had been to on previous trip, so we hailed a cab and told him what we thought was the correct name of the restaurant, a family style place, checkered table cloth, picnic bench type seating, you know the type. The cab driver drops us off at a restaurant with a similar name, but not the right one. We decide to walk around to see if we might find it ourselves. The part of town we were in was predominantly controlled by a great group of guys that drive big black limos and eat Italian food. We walked a few blocks and came across an incident let's call it. Two of these gentlemen were having a conversation with a young lady on one corner and a limo was parked across the street. As we started to cross the street, a limo pulled in front of us and stopped. The dark window slowly came down and one of those guys in the shiny suits asked if we were lost...his voice was a cross between the Godfather and Neville Brand. We told him we were looking for a particular restaurant. He gave us directions. We were only three

blocks from the place we were looking for , unfortunately it was not open anymore. This meant we had to walk back by the men in black. We saw them again, we shrugged our shoulders as if to say, " sorry we are intruding again and we won't be staying long."

We went back to the restaurant where the cabby dropped us off the first time. We dined there. It turned out, that this restaurant, Villa Francesca's is on the list of top ten Italian restaurants in the country. We had a great meal, talked about our experience and still do when we see each other.

## Chapter 13

### **AWNE**

#### **(Acronyms! Who needs em?)**

Those of you that are familiar with tradeshow know that almost every show is known by an *acronym*. Before I got into this business, I didn't know what an acronym was. To make an acronym you simply take the first letter of each word in the name of a trade show and it actually makes a word of it's own, like National Home Health Care Exposition or NHHCE, but now they have changed that into MEDTRADE, but I'll touch on that later. There are other acronyms like; AHA, NEHA, MAHC, NATPE, COMDEX, CES, ISA, OTC many, many more which I had to learn PDQ if I wanted to M.I.I.T.B.(Make It In This Business).

Behind every show, there are associations and management companies that are responsible for these shows like the EDPA, SEMCO, ESCA, IAAM, HCEA, IEA and the TSB. Now they are getting even fancier and giving them numbers too...like E3 and TS2 (as if letters weren't enough).

## Chapter 14

### **Why four out of five tradeshow managers take aspirin.**

At every show there are the UNIONS, I suppose they are necessary and I do respect them, but give me a break, in some cities there are too many.

In one town that comes to mind (a town where cows are famous for kicking over lanterns) there are at least five unions on the show floor that are usually handled by two in other cities...there are the crate bringer outers and crate openers, the crate bringer outers lift the equipment from the crates and sit it on the floor or in the booth. The crate openers remove the lids from the crates. Then, there are the wall puter togetherers not to be confused with the guys that lay down the carpet and hang drapery (they are called decorators). If you are a wall puter togetherer, you have to stop if you have a light box in the wall. An electrician must install the light box, but only if it is electrical. If it is not electrical, you have to get the guy that hangs the drapery to come and hang it because then it has become a sign and falls under his jurisdiction. Are you confused? After the sign is

hung, the wall puter togetherers can proceed with...oh you get the picture. Productivity goes out the window.

An then there is the "Big Apple" where they might break you legs if you don't tip, but that's another story.

By the way, don't get caught plugging in your own electrical in this town, you will end up with shorts (I don't mean electrical shorts) they will cut the cords too short to reach the outlet and then...the electricians will have to come undo your shorts to the tune of about \$75 per hour.

You can see now why I love this business so.

## Chapter 15

### **Words, words and more words.**

Nomenclature, now there is a big word for you...know what it means? I bet you think a wing-nut is a person that really likes fried chicken...no a **wing-nut** is a wing shaped nut that screws on to a bolt that can hold your display or crate together. In tradeshow-biz it would be things like **installation and dismantle** (setting up an exhibit and taking it down), **crates** (what your exhibit is packed in to ship to the tradeshow), **drayage** [all of the stuff that you ship to the show that the freight people charge you \$25 per hundred pounds to move in to your space], **duct tape** and **Velcro** are probably the two most famous tradeshow condiments as well as **visqueen** and **duvateen**. **Carpet, pipe & drape, light boxes and graphics** are all names used in this business and there are hundreds more.

Do you remember the first time you had to go set-up or supervise your first display? First you locate your space, depending on the size of your exhibit, you find your crates sitting there waiting for you...MAYBE. Sometimes you find only your space and then you search for the freight desk which, depending where your space is, is

located in the farthest reaches of the convention hall. You make your way there and inquire as to when you might expect to see your freight. The freight desk person looks at you like you have two heads and tells you “sometime before the show starts”, gee, that’s reassuring, the show starts tomorrow... well as you know, miracles do happen and by the time you get back to your booth space, your freight is arriving, who’d a thunk it?

## Chapter 16

### **THE LABOR!**

Now you have crates and no one to open them and assemble the display. What you need are wall puter togetherers. It's almost 8:30AM, you ordered them for 8:00AM...wait a minute, there are four persons meandering toward you. You hope it's your crew and a motley crew they are. One guy is tall (skinny as a rail), sporting a tattoo (depending on which way you read it, it says either WOW or MOM), shoulder length hair, a mustache & beard, a T-shirt that reads "Grateful Dead World Tour", jeans with the knees missing and a ball cap (backwards). He introduces himself as "Slim" (makes sense). The second gentleman is just the opposite; middle aged, hasn't missed many meals, big grin, a bushy red hair and beard, slightly balding and yes they call him "Red". The third guy isn't a guy it's a young lady that you wouldn't want to tangle with or tango with, which ever, but if she can help get the display up, she's okay in your book, she says her name is Mel (you don't ask what Mel is short for), and finally the fourth person is a man everyone, you are told, calls him "Pop". Fits him, he is probably ready to retire, he is a

nice old fellow and you are glad he came, he makes you feel comfortable. All of your help is either carrying or pulling a tool box along with their Igloo cooler, some big, some small.

## Chapter 17

### **Time flies when you're having fun.**

You finally get the carpet laid, a few walls up and you are told it is break time. Boy, how time flies. Anyway, they start to wander off in different directions some open their little coolers and have their little break stuff; Twinkies, Oreos, apples, Perrier, drinks from old thermos bottles and little brown bags; you know, the stuff you wished you had brought with you, [except for those little brown bags], what's up with those little brown bags?

The ones that drifted off finally make it back after their 20 minute 10 minute break.

After lunch and another break, 4:30 rolls around and you break the crew, say "thanks a lot, see you tomorrow for another work break, on me."

The next day your crew shows up except for "Pop". You are informed Pop wouldn't be coming in, he was sick, maybe in the hospital...anyway another person showed up in his place. Mel's friend, Sue, now there is a name that needs no explanation.

The display is finished and wiped down and show-ready. You release the crew and tell them you will see them when it's time to dismantle. (We say "On the Down", that's tradeshow talk.)

The crew is gone and you stand back to admire your handy work. As your eyes inspect the walls, the graphics, the signs, the furniture, the big 15 foot tower with the big lighted revolving corporate logo, and there standing out like a zit on a teenagers nose is a big greasy hand print and you realize the crew is gone and you don't have a ladder and the show starts the next morning at 9:00AM. Don't worry it will be taken care of, it always is.

## Chapter 18

### **Gravity, duct tape or Velcro...that is the question?**

Murphy's Law. Remember old Murphy? One time at a business meeting in Scottsdale, we were setting up a stage at a business meeting for International Harvester. I instructed one of my stagehands to hang a gatorboard sign (which was 48" in diameter but only weighed 5 or 6 pounds) by using a piece of wire and simply making a hole in the back, it would hang on the drapery pole behind the speakers podium...simple, a no-brainer. I hung the same logo sign on the opposite side of the stage the same way I thought. What I didn't know was the stage hand just taped the wire to the back of the sign with good ole' duct tape. It stuck all day and all night. The next day after the A/C was turned on in the room (there was a vent right above the big sign, the one behind the speakers podium) the tape started to let go, unbeknownst to me. Guest followed guest and entertainer followed entertainer and then the guest speaker spoke. Half way through his monologue, as if in slow motion, the big round sign fell, straight down and by landing on it's edge made a noise as

if it weighed 100 pounds. The speaker being the pro that he was never missed a beat and just said “Gee, that’s interesting, I wonder what other surprises they have in store for me or maybe that was to wake some of you up, I hope I am not that boring”.

Anyway, the stage hand disappeared and I sank into my chair.

I remember another time in 1985 when old Murph showed his ugly head. I was in San Antonio for the RTNDA (Radio and Television News Directors Association). We arrived at the convention center to find a lot of activity. I noticed some very interesting water falls just outside the center. The water was cascading over the sides of the walk ways and down onto the Riverwalk below. Since I had not been to San Antonio before I assumed it was part of the scenery...NOT. As we got closer to the convention center, we noticed the water was coming from the doors of the center. Some time during the night a large water main broke and flooded the floor. Some of the exhibitors had already begun setting up the day before and had to dismantle their displays and get new carpet and wait for the floor to be dried and start over again. We couldn’t start until late that night. We did get set up and the show went well. Just another day in the life of a tradeshow junkie.

## Chapter 19

### **Why me Lord?**

I do think old Murphy out did himself in 1995 when I was supervising the installation of displays for GES at the Super Show in Atlanta. I am not sure why things started to go wrong, but I do remember someone saying something about one of the unions be “Ticked Off” (or words to that effect) about something. I don’t know if it was just coincidence or at that point things just didn’t seem to get better. I remember one incidence in particular. We had finished setting up about ten, 10’ metal rental displays. We set about five or six before lunch. Simple, went just as planned. I finished inspecting the display belonging to a nice little oriental gentleman and found everything in order. He said he was going to his car to get his product. When I returned from lunch, the little oriental man searched me out and came running up to me, he was frantic. He proceeded to tell me that his display was missing. Impossible I said, I inspected it myself. You’ve heard the statement “It didn’t walk off by itself”, well it didn’t, two guys put the entire display on two dollies and pushed it to

another booth space. We scrambled and found enough pieces to make the little guy happy again.

Things like this happened all during set-up, for five days. Trucks would back up to the dock with what we thought were displays to assemble...when we got there the cupboard was bare. The trucks were empty, why, we don't know. We found graphics hidden in halls and passageways that we needed but didn't find until we had already reordered. Full trucks were later found parked in the lot with things we were missing.

All of these inconveniences were topped off by temperatures which dipped to 9° and an ice storm and blizzard which prevented us from getting to our hotels...so we worked. Some of us worked for 24 to 48 hours straight. It was tiring but we had no choice, cause we love it, along with gangrene, ptomaine and dysentery.

When the show finally opened, I was still working on one exhibit, 15' up a ladder 3 hours into the show. This was an experience I would not soon forget.

## Chapter 20

**Round and round she goes, when she drops know one knows or a *sign* from above.**

Another incident happened to me and another friend (a client at the time) of mine, Pat Manning at MEDTRADE. It was the last day of installation. The sign riggers insisted that they assemble the large rotating sign (18' X 18' X 4') that we have always done in the past. This year the rules changed. I instructed them that all bolts must be tightened or the motor would back off and the sign might fall. They assembled it and it was hung from the ceiling. It was not powered up for another two or three hours later, about 3:00 PM. It rotated for about two hours. Pat and I had finished for the day and decided it was time to turn off the lights and arcade machines. I proceeded to the sports bar and Pat to the office. I had walked no more that four feet passed and under the hanging sign when I heard a loud crashing sound. I turned around and four feet from where Pat and I were standing, was the large, 250 pound sign. If Pat and I had stopped under the sign for a fraction of a second longer, I wouldn't be writing this literary masterpiece. Show management and the contractor showed up quickly and fingers started pointing. I

immediately brought to their attention that the sign was hung by their people according to their rules. Fingers stopped pointing, the report was made, they repaired and re-hung the sign with my supervision.

The show was a success and we got best of show and most important we are alive to do another show.

## Chapter 21

### **Canada Oh Canada**

Do you remember the first time you went to a foreign country? I do. Well it wasn't really a foreign country, it was Canada. We went to Montreal to do the AHA, American Hospital Association convention. I knew it was going to be a memorable trip because as our plane touched down, we immediately took off again at quite a steep angle...a small plane taxied right into our path.

We checked into our hotel, The Sheraton Mount Royal. It was royal all right, a royal pain. When I got to my room, I did the usual stuff like, put away toiletries, clothes, turn on the TV and sit down on the bed. This was my first mistake. What I didn't know was that the bed was either broken, was missing a leg or whatever, anyway it was slanted at about a 30° angle, too much to sleep on. It wasn't fixed until the next day. I slept on the floor the first night. When the house maintenance man arrived he asked if I had slept on the bed, I of course said I did but I strapped myself in. He laughed. They brought me a new bed.

Let me tell you about the closet. Imagine the corner of the room with a door mounted across it at a 45° angle, that was my closet, a three sided closet. You had to be there.

It was the first day of set up, I sent in the necessary paperwork for labor, electrical and all the other forms needed for the show, I requested that the exhibit was not to be set up until I arrived. I thought Canada was an English speaking country. I forgot, this was Montreal, they speak French, or at least they prefer French, anyway the booth was well underway when we arrived. The tower was completed and most of the walls. This was wonderful, a great surprise. Only one thing was wrong, the entire booth was backwards, it was facing a wall. I'm glad I could not speak French at this point because I would have probably said something that would have gotten me into trouble. We proceeded to take the display down and reassemble it. We made pretty good progress on the next go-around, after all, this was the second time they had set-up my display.

Considering the problems we had at first, the show went well and we enjoyed a little sight seeing.

## Chapter 22

### **How about Chinese?**

One night we debated as to what type of food we would like to have. My friend Bob wanted steak and I wanted Chinese. While going through the little pamphlet in my room, the one with the list of restaurants, I ran across a restaurant called [are you ready for this?] “The Montreal Steak House-Silvery Moon Cafe”. Yep, you guessed it, the place was divided into two styles, one side was kind of western looking and the other wasn’t. No, the only thing that was oriental about it was the one or two waiters we noticed. We sat on the western side and asked for both menus. Bob ordered steak and I ordered “*abalone with chicken bits*”, that sounded good, I had not eaten abalone since I lived in California years ago. We waited and finally our orders came. Bob’s steak and my “abalone.” Laying over the top of this large plate of rice and steamed veggies was about six pieces of light colored meat. I picked up one piece, mouth watering...I put the whole piece in my mouth...m-m-m-m it tasted just like chicken, hey! this is chicken, where is the abalone? The

chicken and veggies were good, but I expected abalone. Bob and I agreed that I should mention my disappointment to the manager. I waved him over and proceeded to tell him that I wasn't complaining, but I expected abalone and not chicken. I said I couldn't find abalone. At this time the manager called for the chef [cook, whatever] to come to the table. In Chinese he said, (I don't know what he said) where's the abalone? He and the cook have these large spoons in each hand and are going through my plate like you would toss a salad. My plate looks like a twister hit it. All of a sudden the cook gets this smile on his face like a prospector finding gold, he takes his spoon and lays three tiny pieces of what I guessed is abalone about the size of corn. I looked at it and I looked at Bob who is trying to keep a straight face. The cook looks at the manager and the manager says to me, there, there is abalone. I reminded him that the menu said abalone with chicken bits, not chicken with abalone bits. The manager said in a very quiet tone and with a very serious look on his face, "abalone vely, vely expensive". I said oh, I see, that explains it, I mean that explains it. Bob at this point can no longer hold back the laughter and I too am about ready to bust a gut. I thanked the manager and complemented him on his economics lesson [place tongue in cheek here]. We paid our bill and chalked this one up to a memorable experience.

## Chapter 23

### **Thanks for the Mammories!**

The following day my wife came to Montreal to spend a few days and fly back with us. One afternoon the three of us decided to take a walk in downtown Montreal. My wife had never been out of her hometown, let alone take a trip out of the country, she was trying to take it all in. Just as we were stepping off a curb, Bob and I notice a cute little oriental jogger coming toward us; little sneakers, little shorts, little tube top and just as she jumped off the little curb the tube top slipped down around her waist. She didn't miss a beat, she had it back up in place before you could say "little boobs". It happened so fast, before I could say "hey look at that" it was over. I saw it, Bob saw it, but my wife didn't, I don't think she believed us anyway.

We grabbed lunch at a McDonald's [Big Mac's \$5.00] and then took a sightseeing trip on the St. Lawrence. I would say the trip to Montreal was like being in France, a chilly experience.

There are more chapters to add and I will be doing that on a monthly basis. I still have to relate my escapades in Germany, Houston, San Diego, Atlanta, Houston some more, the Caribbean and ...

I am just about half way through this side of my career. I not only still involved in tradeshows, but I am doing other things including being with my family and especially my grandkids more often. By the way, retirement is not what it is cracked up to be ...no one told me it was hard work.

If you will sign my guest book I would enjoy hearing from you.