



Perspectives

BY BILL RIEDEL

All in a Day's Work

I OFTEN FEEL SORRY for the many people who never find a job they love or even enjoy. It must be miserable to wake up and hate to go to work every day.

The variety of jobs a sign painter can do is endless. When I first started in business, by the end of many a day I would have lettered a truck, an airplane, a boat and maybe an office door too. Wall signs, windows, show cards, storefronts, monograms on Cadillacs were also part of the mix and it was all good.

When a picture was incorporated, that made my day, especially if it was going far away. One job like this was an oil painting of a wine importer's building that went to their headquarters in Germany.

This painting had to have some changes and additions from the original photograph. A tree was covering the entrance, which had to be moved over and a top added where the original tree had been broken off. Their sign (raised letters and logo) had to be centered (we did not install it originally!). One side along the front was bare of shrubs, so I painted a whole line of them.

The owners later had shrubs planted exactly the way I had painted them.

Another overseas project was a bunch of silk-screened signs for an oil pipeline in Saudi Arabia. This was a big job with many small signs. We couldn't just send them through the mail; we had to employ the services of an exporter. The nicest part of the job was that we got paid before the signs were shipped.

The farthest signs we made were for ITT — three signs that went to an island off the coast of Antarctica. These were to keep anyone from landing on the island because it is a sanctuary for wildlife.

And, talk about the chance to be creative. We had to make an Easter basket big enough to hold two young ladies,

and be pushed by another in a shopping mall. This was a welcome challenge; we love to do something different. The same company, the Triple-S Blue Stamp Company, owned by Grand Union supermarkets, had many interesting jobs like that. Another was a cardboard, life-size *wishing well*. I made a model and showed them how it could be set up and broken down to re-use. They told me they had gone to three advertising agencies and none could come up with what they wanted. They were surprised that it was done on the first try.

There were other unexpected challenges too. Back in the days when all cabin cruisers had mahogany transoms, the average boat sported gold leaf lettering. On one occasion I had a transom to do at a boat yard first thing in the morning.

All was going well; it was a nice day and the gold size was lettered quite quickly.

As I cleaned my brush and waited for the size to set, a breeze came up and a dust devil passed directly in front of the freshly lettered transom. The entire name and port were covered with fine white sand.

My first thought was that it would have to be cleaned off and I would have to start over, but time was something I didn't have a lot of.

Under closer inspection, it looked as if the grains of sand had become embedded in the size. I thought, as long as the sand was embedded, I could lay the gold leaf as soon as it was set enough.

I held my breath and proceeded with extreme caution. Was I worried? You bet. I was between jobs and didn't have time to do the job completely over.

When the excess gold was wiped away, the letters looked like a beaded reflector. By the time the lettering was outlined,

other boat owners came over and asked if I could do their boats the same way.

I had to tell them that Mother Nature was responsible and that it probably would never happen again. I tried later to duplicate the effect, but without success.

As crazy and wild as it sounds, it really happened; it was a case to make you believe in your guardian angel.

On another job, sometime in the early '60s, I was in the city of Englewood, N.J. lettering a glass entrance door from the inside. The door led to a stairway that had offices on the second floor. It was a beautiful spring morning and all was going well.

In the distance a fire alarm was sounding throughout the city. I wondered where the fire was and what could be burning...

The next sound was the fire trucks with their sirens and they were getting closer.

Still very much concentrating on the reverse glass door lettering (that was going well, by the way) the door swung in and now I was pinned between the door and wall.

It seems the alarm was for the same office I was lettering, and the firemen all went up the stairs while I had to desperately try to keep the paint from spilling from the pallet and keep myself from smearing the lettering, or the brush from smearing the glass. It was also not easy to keep my body from coming in contact with the wet lettering.

It happened so fast, there was no time to think about it, only react.

And the fire? It all turned out fine.

It was a false alarm.

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