

I am writing this column on Monday, November 9th. The subject is near and dear to my heart. For the past two weeks I have struggled with my emotions and to get to a place where I could just sit down and starting banging the keys. My subject is a friend of over 39 years and this morning his daughter told me that he had chosen to be moved into hospice. The light came on and the column just started to flow. For selfish reasons I wanted to get it written and emailed to her this afternoon so that she could read it to her dad tonight.

In 1976 just after INTERPHIL I placed a phone order for an item that was in a net price sale that I had received in the mail. While I don't even remember the item I do know that the small purchase ignited a friendship that has grown and survived for over 39 years.

At the time my friend was a part-time dealer like myself. He spent his days working in a foundry for the Bethlehem Steel Company. His nights and weekends were spent with family and working on stamps. I had the pleasure of working in the steel mills during the summers while going to the University of Illinois. The foundry was a brutal place even if just for the summer let alone for an entire working career. My experience is no doubt a factor in the foundation of friendship. He went on to retire, become a full-time dealer, and then build a successful philatelic auction house.

Our paths continued to cross, and in 1977 he went bow hunting in Colorado where unbeknownst to him he suffered a mild heart attack. Driving back he got as far as York, Nebraska before seeking out a hospital. Upon his return to Allentown, Pennsylvania he recounted the experience to me over the phone. I sent him a book on heart health and he said that it changed his life.

Over the years we went on to do many deals involving philatelic material. However, he was an extremely tough negotiator, no doubt from the hard scrabble life of working in the mills. But in the end we always found a way to reach a consensus. I was fortunate to handle the sale of his Fifteen-cent Large Bank Note collection.

Even while working as a full time professional in the stamp business he found a way to build several gold medal exhibits. Each exhibit was built in secrecy in order to avoid competition or be run up at auction.

Three of his exhibits resulted in books. The first was on the 15c large bank note issues, followed by a book on Confederate adversity covers and finally the standard work on New York Foreign Mails. There was also

a book on Union patriotic covers which illustrated his collection. The last two books have become acknowledged standards in the philatelic world.

After I retired from the "real world" in 1990 to pursue philately full-time he was always there on the phone to give me advice and to mentor me. Our relationship grew over the years. Once he retired from the auction business he continued to dabble.

He asked if he could work with me at Washington 2006. That was the pinnacle. I was so impressed at how he handled customers and got along with my son Adam. To this day Adam asks about him.

About two months ago he lost his wife Adie. Just prior to her passing we spent a lot of time on the phone. Shortly after her death he called to tell me he had stage four lung cancer and that he had at most seven months to live. I had known for about a year he was fighting something, I just didn't know what. Many of us are at the point in our lives where we are sending out more sympathy cards than we are sending birthday cards. When you realize that you are on the clock with someone your whole outlook changes. For the past several weeks get well cards, emails and phone calls have become the number one priority each day.

Our last phone conversation was a little over a week ago. I didn't even realize it would be the last time as I had planned to call the next day. The next day, the next day and the next day after that all went to voice mail.

I have been able to talk to his daughter and all she can say is the he is in his rapid decline. So the earthly aspect of our friendship is about to end. However, Bill Weiss will remain one of my best friends ever.

Godspeed my friend.

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