

Professor STORIES

by *Burton Blatt, EdD*

POMP AND POMPOSITIVITY

I met Arthur Parker during my first year of graduate school. We were both graduate assistants, he in the English Department and I in Education. There was something about him that drew us together, maybe the fact that we were both from the big city, or maybe because we each knew that neither of us was born to the university life. In any event, we became sort of friends for the time we were together in graduate school.

Because Arthur missed the "big war," he remained eligible for the draft, and when Korea heated up he was called into the army after his third year of graduate school. So, by the time he finished his military obligation and returned to graduate school to complete his work, I had been a professor for three or four years at a small New England college.

One day I was in the college president's office talking with him about a new program I was anxious to develop. I was rambling on when he suddenly turned and cut me off in mid-sentence with, "Hey, you two fellows were at the same university. Albert. Albert Barker." President Hilton was famous for getting names all wrong and confusing not only himself but other people when it came to connecting acquaintances. No, I didn't know any Albert Barker while at the university. The president insisted I did know him, because Barker acknowledged our acquaintanceship during their recent interview. And furthermore, Barker would be joining us soon as an assistant professor in the program. I left his office that afternoon unsettled on two accounts, disappointed that we didn't get very far in discussing the new program, and puzzled about this man who supposedly knew me.

On the short ride home, it struck me. Of course, Arthur Parker! Art was coming to the college. What wonderful news.

Early the next morning, I went back to the president's office and checked with Genevieve, the president's secretary. Sure enough, Albert Barker was my Arthur Parker. I got Art's address and wrote him a long letter, telling him all about the college and telling him how eager we were to see him again. I heard nothing. Well, that didn't surprise me. Art Parker wasn't someone to answer a friend's letter.

A new semester began and I looked around for Art Parker. Although the college was no University of Minnesota, it was not an easy place to find people you were looking for. So it was back to Genevieve for Art's phone number. After dinner that evening, I dialed his home.

"Dr. Arthur Parker speaking."

"Art. How are you? It's me."

It was a mortifying experience. At first, it dimly came back to him that we had been classmates at the university. Yes, he was now certain that he remembered me. But no, he wouldn't have time to meet with me. You see, he was director of the freshman English program, which was very important, and all-time consuming. I was hurt, and embarrassed. And that's the way it was for about a week. One day, I was walking across campus, and as I turned toward my destination I saw Art Parker running towards me. He didn't stop when he got to me, but engulfed me with hugs. And, "why hadn't we seen each other?" A complete turnaround! Could it be that Art Parker had learned that I, too, had something important to do? And that I was chairman of the college's Promotions Committee? Whatever his reasons, Art made it clear that he wanted to resume our old friendship. And for whatever reasons I had, or for whatever defect in my character, I was immediately agreeable. In a day or two it was as if we were back at the university.

(Continued to page 37)

My last dealing with Art Parker was about six months later. He had decided he wasn't getting very far at our college and, indeed, the school was pretty small potatoes for him. So he resigned and took a position as executive director of a private foundation in Cleveland. Would I be interested in buying his cap and gown? Since I didn't own my own, and since hardly a professor in our college owned his own, I was interested if the price was right. The price was \$20, about 10% of what Art had actually paid for the robe, cap and hood which he ordered not two weeks after joining our faculty. I felt guilty about the low purchase price, but Art seemed tickled to be rid of a uniform which he'd not now need to wear and which if he had kept, might have been a reminder of his impetuosity and ignorance. You see, until he came to our campus, Art didn't know that everyone with a PhD was at least an assistant professor. And when he left, he hadn't yet learned—and I neglected to teach him—that everyone was in charge of something at our little college, and that maybe even the fellow who swept the gym had a title that sounded almost as impressive as his. Art came in like the Pope and left like a curate. But the difference was that, when he left, he believed that he was the only curate and that everyone else was at least a bishop. Pomp is good for a university, but pomposity can do you in. It can even cause you to sell your valuable goods for a cut-rate price.

HYPE

It was a depressing Sunday morning in 1968 when Lew Kane read the lead article in the *Boston Globe* praising the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health for its campaign on behalf of children. Why hadn't he heard about "The Year of the Child"? It was only by the sheerest unexpected good luck, when the state's "campaign" was uncovered as a do-nothing plot created by the PR people in the department that he forgave himself for missing out on what might have been a profitable trip on a 14 carat bandwagon. To be sure, as things turned out, Lew was better off for not having hopped on "The Year of the Child" crusade, since the only thing it got was bad

publicity. But hindsight aside, his cynicism informed him that the idea of a special year set aside for children was much more than a run-of-the-mill new vogue; it was genuine inspiration. Consequently, he filed the idea and the state's abortion in back of his good memory for such things, and he went on with his then important work.

Lew's labor in life was to get involved with the right movement just before it became popular, ride it for all it was worth to him, and get off before the last stop at Failure Station. You see, Lew Kane was so experienced and so expert in the "Movement" business that he knew that virtually all bandwagons break down, all trains to Utopia are derailed, and the relationship of hype to reality is nearly always coincidental, whatever it is. And so, this otherwise distinguished professor of education at Boston's only university named for the city was among the first to use the slogan "All of the Schools for All of the People All of the Time," when he was in his community schools' phase. And he was among the first in Massachusetts to support a Right to Read program, that is until he joined Ivan Illych's movement for the Right Not to Read. And he was a pioneer in Open Schools, until he saw a better opportunity in Structured Learning. And, of course, he led the way for special classes for the handicapped, until he saw the light of mainstreaming. And who could forget Lew Kane's orations on behalf of humanizing the schools? Certainly everyone still remembers his subsequent pleas on behalf of the Back to the Basics tidal wave that swept the country.

Almost to the day, and certainly to the week, it was ten years later when Lew Kane spotted the article in the *Sunday Times* proclaiming that, on January 1, the International Year of the Child will inaugurate programs in 120 countries which will focus on the needs of the 500,000,000 malnourished children living in the third world and the millions of others who suffer from such urban diseases as delinquency and alienation. Lew wasn't surprised that here was his second chance at getting in on the "child" game. He knew that nothing changes, not the problems, not the needs, not even the slogans. And from his experiences as one of the leading practitioners of hype, Lew now felt a certain sensation which warned him that the coming year could not only be special for children but for Lew himself if he found a way to make it look as if he was leading the parade. He felt that, with luck, this could be the year Lew Kane went international. ●