



## H A M

**H**AM was my father, James Miller Hamon, who was born in 1908 and who died in 1994. I do not know who first called him Ham, but this was the only name I heard him called all his life. Everyone knew him as Ham. I never heard my mother call him anything else. He spent his entire life in the outer Bluegrass region of Kentucky, a beautiful, gently rolling, verdant natural region. He worked for the Kentucky Utilities Company, an electrical power company for over 50 years, starting as a meter reader who went from house to house in Danville, Kentucky. He was promoted and become a member of a line crew that maintained high power transmission lines in the Central District. He eventually became foreman of the crew which set heavy, long creosote-treated power poles and strung heavy wires and kept them functioning. When I was a kid, he would often be called out late at night in all kinds of weather, usually after a storm, and have to work all night, walking the lines through rough country, looking for breaks and restoring connections so electrical service would be maintained. His work was incredibly hard. To climb the tall poles, he

wore sharply spiked devices strapped to his feet and ankles, and a heavy, wide leather utility belt which went around the pole so he could lean back and work on the wires with both hands free.

New workers joined his crew regularly, and one of his most important tasks was to train them in the dangerous, exacting skills they needed to use. One who joined the crew late my dad's career was a black man. There is nothing remarkable about that fact today, but it was then. Central Kentucky had a minuscule black population. There were no black children in the public schools which maintained strict segregation practices. There was a small black public school in Danville, and I knew of another, larger one in Lexington. A centuries old, inherited cultural prejudice existed in the South in those times. There were white people and there were N-----s – a term used by everyone, so it seemed natural and not pejorative. I grew up in this culture accepting that there were whites and N-----s, and heard the term used without malice. I did not go to school with blacks, even in graduate school. There were no black students in

segregated southern colleges and universities as late as the mid-1960s.

But society changed radically and people became more culturally and socially aware of the long unquestioned accepted evils of discrimination. My dad did not dislike any man, and certainly not black people, but if you had heard him talk, he came across as the biggest bigot and red-neck racist in existence. He referred to them as "this N---r," or "that N---r," which caused me to cringe in embarrassment. I wondered how the black new lineman would fare in my dad's crew.

My dad finally retired and came home and happily vegetated and fished every day for many years before senility set in and he died. There was a large crowd of neighbors and friends in the funeral home for the barbaric ritual of visitation. As I was standing there, a lone black man came in and stood before the coffin. I went up and spoke to him, asking how he knew my dad. He was, of course, the black lineman who had worked for many years with my dad's crew. He had tears in his eyes, and told me in a hushed voice, "I loved that man. He taught me everything I know. Every day he went out of his way to protect me and encourage me to stand up to the bad-mouth treatment I got from some other workmen." His testimonial stunned me. I had never seen this side of my dad and I admired him more at that moment than I ever had in my life. I listened to his account of a number

of short, funny anecdotes about my dad for some minutes, and then he turned again to the coffin and said, "Good bye, Ham. Thanks for everything," and walked out into the night. I hope I can eventually become half as good a man as Ham, my dad was.



*E-Whippoorwill Comment* is the personal journal of J. Hill Hamon, of Frankfort, Kentucky. It was created using Microsoft Word, and offered to friends on the Internet as are more and more publications in the world today. Old prejudices against new methods die slowly and with difficulty, yet the acceptance of computers by AAPA members has occurred in a record-short time compared with the grudging acceptance of offset printing in the face of the precipitous decline of traditional letterpress technology.

I am much impressed by the e-journal writings of David Griffin, who has been a member for a decade but who was essentially unknown until he began e-publishing his sprightly *Windswept Journal*. He has inspired friends to write and publish in the true spirit of AJ. He recruits them for membership in the AAPA, which appears to me to be enjoying a renaissance of interest in writing and publishing through e-journals. Suddenly everyone with a computer is a potential publisher. Join in the fun and keep your mind alive by writing and publishing for your friends in the American Amateur Press Association.