



Charlie Bush, Printer

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By Marshall White

Printer turns teen hobby into a lifetime pursuit

Charles Bush retired from his vocation and his avocation.

But at 92, Mr. Bush is still a master of a lost art who has forgotten more than most people will ever know about letterpress printing.

Junior high school in Minneapolis during the early years of the Great Depression gave Mr. Bush a choice.

"They were always trying to teach a kid a little something useful, and printing was one of the classes," he said.

His father saw an advertisement for a printing press, checked it out, and bought his son the whole shop in 1934. The shop was the beginnings of what would become the Pony X Press, his private printing company.

Starting with a bookmark that said "Lindbergh got to France without advice from the back-seat," Mr. Bush would print literally thousands of pieces.

"It was kinda nice to know you could print anything you wanted if it wasn't slanderous," he said.

After high school, Mr. Bush headed to Montana, where he became the managing editor of The Yellowstone in Wardon, Mont.

Advertising revenue was slim, so in 1936 he got on a train headed east and woke up in St. Joseph. He found an accounting job with the Strutwear Knitting Co. at 219 N. Fourth St. In 1940, Mr. Bush moved to Minnesota with Helen Schneider, who agreed to marry him. They've been married now for 66 years.

World War II saw Mr. Bush headed to Europe for three years with the Army. After the war, it was time to get on with a vocation, and numbers were a way to make a living. So Mr. Bush became an accountant, treasurer and tax man in the course of the next 20 years.

When possible, he'd get out an issue of the *Arrow Amateur*, but then the Wilson Meat Packing Co. sent him to Argentina.

"If you had a press in Argentina, the government would be suspicious," Mr. Bush said. "They'd wonder if you were trying to over-

throw the country."

In 1970, he retired and the couple came back to St. Joseph. The corner bedroom became a corner print shop called the Pony X Press with two hand presses and 20 different styles of lead type. He printed and bound several miniature books in his spare time.

In 1978, he decided to run as a write-in candidate for probate judge.

"It's better to run and lose than not to run at all," Mr. Bush said.

When the Corby Building became the world's tallest plywood skyscraper, he used his press to invite city fathers to count the knot holes. Mr. Bush was the *Knot Hole Phantom* and the *Knot Hole Gang* all rolled up in one - cajoling one and all to do something with the old building.

But his big moment came in the early 1980s from The New York Times. Following a year of arguing with a local reporter and editors on the old *St. Joseph Gazette*, Mr. Bush successfully proved that for 77 years, a printer's mistake had appeared every day in the newspaper. The masthead, which shows the name of the paper, used an I instead of a J. *The Times* and newspapers all across the country gave credit to the hobby printer, his editing skills and persistence.

Lugging the heavy type got to be too much, and at age 89 he sold his presses to another hobby printer in Illinois - keeping only his collection of metal cuts showing riders of the Pony Express.

But enjoying one of our basic rights is still something he'd recommend.

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Charlie Bush is the world's best example of a hobby printer. I know of no other man who has enjoyed printing as much as he. It was always a joy to get a letter from him. It would be festooned with old stamps, so many, in fact, that there was little room for my name and address. Upon opening the envelope, one encountered a half dozen or more of his small printed cards - most with hilarious messages. His letters were written in his large clear hand, and were full of news about his merry activities. He was a man alive! Gordon Rouze once printed a beautiful booklet of reprints of some of Charlie's best essays - a true collector's item and a real contribution to the history of amateur journalism. I last saw Charlie and Helen at the Little Rock, Arkansas, AAPA convention. He had slowed but little. He is a sterling example to all of us. The greatest honor the association seems to have given him was naming a first-night convention Chinese buffet memorial dinner after him. He is a model for all of us!

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