

Write If You Get Work

by Lynne Belluscio

I first met Stuart Bolger in 1974 while I was photographing the construction of the brick bake oven in MacKay house at Genesee Country Museum. He was the Director of the Museum ... a man of few words ... unassuming ... a little illusive.

A few months later I became a volunteer at the Museum, cleaning iron artifacts and scraping painted furniture. Occasionally I'd run into Stuart. The picture was taken on a day that he was laying brick along the walk to the bookstore, his springer spaniel close by. I asked him if he was doing penance. (It seemed he was always trying to avoid confrontations with Jack Wehle, Chairman of the Board of Genesee Brewery and founder of the Museum.) Stuart, looked up and said he got satisfaction from laying bricks.

I discovered we both followed the St. Louis Cardinals -- he because he grew up in Elmira, a Cardinal's farm team and I grew up in Rochester, the triple A club. I rode with him once to Letchworth Park to look for evidence of a jack bed in the Jemison log cabin. Stuart had to remove papers, books, tools and house parts from the front seat before I could get into the car.

Everyone seemed to have a story to tell about Stuart. He would drink two-day old coffee. He seemed to collect speeding tickets like fly paper. The office was always trying to keep track of him and gave him a pager -- actually lots of pagers and he "lost" them all. I noticed another curious habit. While I was talking

to him, he would say, "Whom ... had ... which.." It seemed random, until I realized that he was correcting my grammar. For a while I found it difficult to carry on a conversation with him ... always waiting for the correction. Either my grammar improved or he gave up, I was never really sure.

I worked at Genesee Country Museum until the fall of 1988. During that time I cooked over the open hearth, made cheese, churned butter, made baskets, and coordinated some special events. I don't remember if he told me directly, or whether it was the way he described the projects, but it was important to do historical research. I compiled files on cheese making. I gathered original recipes and sought out heirloom vegetables. I spent a couple of months compiling files on the Burns' log cabin.

I loved doing the research. The history was right there for the taking. All you had to do was find it. It was exhilarating and challenging. When I told Stuart I found a photograph of the evergreen arch at the firemen's parade in Geneseo, he had an arch built for the Firemen's Muster. When I found an illustration for the speaker's podium for the Fourth of July, he made sure we had a replica. I told him about the Tent of Wonders for the Agricultural Fair, and he made it happen. And when we fielded the Slab City Sluggers, Stuart agreed to be our first referee and went with us to the old Red Wing Stadium on Norton Street for an exhibition game.

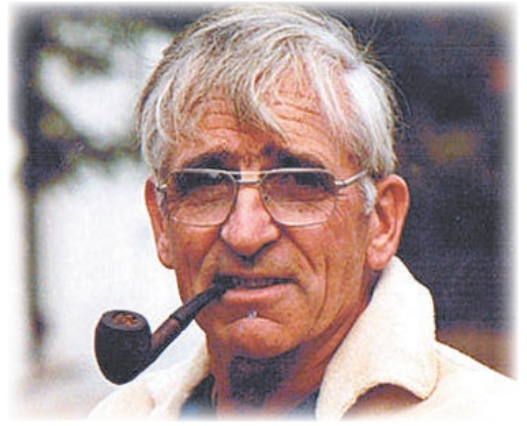
When I started doing special events, I was faced with a dilemma. I had to write articles for the Museum's newsletter. Stuart crafted wonderful stories with wit and a sense of history. So it was with a great deal of trepidation that

I wrote my first article. I don't even remember what it was about. I suspect it was about the Fourth of July since that was the first event that I put together.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that as part of the Fourth of July preparations, I had read 19th Century newspaper accounts and was intrigued with the "Thirteen Traditional Toasts." They were usually political in nature and although they reflected the period of the time, they seemed to transcend the decades and have relevance to the present. I had to compose the toasts for the Fourth of July in 1979, including the one Stuart would give: "To the United States Military - The Army, the Navy and the Marines. Let us remember the supreme sacrifices made in pursuant of their duties. Let us preserve unnullified the inheritance they have purchased for us. May the tardy pace of national gratitude, quickened by the spur of public opinion yet overtake us." Stuart was a Marine. His birthday was one day short of Independence Day.

Stuart had a way of parting. He would usually say to me, "Write if you get work." So when I left Genesee Country Museum in 1988, those were his parting words to me. I never thought that it was a directive. So I came to the LeRoy Historical Society and immersed myself in the wonderful history that encompasses this community.

In the spring of 1989 a couple of kids from the Wolcott Street School began stopping by LeRoy House after school. They "discovered" a Civil War sword that belonged to Myron Pierson. We walked over to the Soldiers' Monument to find his name. I



thought it would make a neat story for the *Pennysaver*. I didn't realize that writing articles would soon become a weekly project.

After a couple of years I learned that Stuart was reading my articles. Annie Bates, who worked at Genesee Country Museum, and received the *Pennysaver*, would take them to Stuart. On one hand I was flattered. On the other hand I imagined Stuart reading and saying "Whom ... had ... which." Occasionally I would receive a phone call. He usually wanted to know more about what I had written. Stuart rarely identified himself, he would just start talking, assuming you knew who he was. Although I do remember being in his office when he called someone and obviously had forgotten who (or is that whom) he called. "Stuart here. Who's this?"

I saw Stuart twice this last year. The years were catching up with him, but his wit and charm were still there. He mentioned that he missed getting my articles. So I asked Ruth Harvie to save them and every few weeks put them in the mail to my friend Stuart. The last time I saw Stuart was in his office. The classical music was playing on the radio. Every flat surface was an alluvial fan of books and papers. We laughed and talked about the old days. I told him about my projects. He was interested in my articles about the limestone buildings and the quarries. He asked about my kids. As we parted, I said, "Write if you get work." He smiled.

Stuart died May 9. It's hard knowing he's not there to read what I have written. He was a person who should have lived forever.

