

# An Unknown Hero

by Ronn Carlentine, SR/WA

It would be misleading to give the impression that only selected individuals deserve recognition. Most folks are good at minding their own business. Yet, many of us face the same challenges in business day after day. For that reason, it seems worthwhile to draw out an average person and thus do honor to that individual whose name will never appear in the books of history.

## *The Lion*

The president of IRWA never heard of this person. The region chairs in the Northeast never heard of this person. A new member in the local chapter never heard of this person either. He is an individual who hardly ever won a sweepstakes, drawing, lottery or poker hand. What he did win was a lifetime sentence to the right-of-way profession—working for a public agency to solve all of the problems in the world. But this is typical of many professionals who confront the same duties and responsibilities of being on the front-line. I choose this unknown member because, as it happens, I know his story particularly well.

He was twenty years of age when he began in the right-of-way profession. He was grand-fathered into a professional association named "American Right of Way Association." He had no money but the confidence of a lion. He would work long hard days and nights to complete his journey to the top. The pot of gold at the end of his rainbow was the satisfaction in a work well done and a pat on the back to those staff members for successfully completing their project. This right-of-way agent was not afraid of work. The pay was small in those early days. However, in the business world that was considered "big money." Half of the monthly pay

went to support his family and what remained was his reward for 30 days of hard labor at 10 hours a day. His boss at the time was no better than the worst of them.

Years went on, and he heard about a job with a larger public agency. It appealed to his nature, and he bought a new car and started the new job. The pursuits of commitment, career, and challenge were all traits of his. Financing was always a problem in those years. Cash was a commodity most professionals talked about but never saw in abundance for this agent, even when it came to selling woolen underwear at Coney Island, he could do no wrong. With his dedication to the profession it was no wonder other people admired his ability and followed in his footsteps.

## *The Teddy Bear*

After a couple of years, he paid a visit to a town in which he would choose to stay and work until retirement. Pals of this time glanced in admiration at him for his hard work and his strong affiliation to the professional association. Sure he had the bulldog breed in him. The kind of bulldog that would not stop walking in the middle of a snow storm. On the other hand, he had the sensitivity of a large teddy bear. When after-work hours came, and the office staff descended upon him, everyone would go to his house to test the food and drink, and the patience of his wonderful wife. Strangely enough, this continued on, week after week, and didn't ruin this old timer, nor did it drive him crazy. Others who have stayed on weren't so lucky.

Anyway, by now he had a nice bankroll and, because it was fashionable to retire when one could, he held a garage sale, at which his wife was the cashier,

sold his house, and went to live on the coastal bluff of retirement-ville. With his talents, intellect and understanding of all aspects of the right-of-way profession, there were numerous business opportunities to induce him back to work after retirement. However, there is just one thing wrong with handling right-of-way problems day after day, they do not wear well.

## *The Mentor*

His office staff and the local chapter recognized the contributions he made to the right-of-way profession and presented him with many plaques and awards for his service. He is living a long life because he belongs to a hearty breed. He was in a hospital bed just once, and he told the doctor to make the best of it because he wasn't coming in again in his lifetime. He was quite the mentor—the rugged individualist—the kind that blazed the trail. The trail that many followed because of his strong commitment to family, work and the Association. Such a strong commitment drove those around him to do the same. Even in retirement, he continues to get up at 5:30 in the morning and disturb the peace of the community with his fishing stories. He has done it all his life, and no one can stop him.

I was not going to identify this unknown member; I've almost changed my mind. I'll tell this much about him: he gave me my first right-of-way job; he inspired and motivated me to become an active member of the Association. □

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*Ronn Carlentine, SR/WA is an International Membership Committee Representative and a member of IRWA Chapter 47. He is employed by the county of Santa Barbara, Calif.*