

My Two Shortest Careers

by Dennis Payton Knight

Of all my jobs, I think the best was when I was a town crier. I had myself a pair of shiny black boots, white britches, a red and gold robe, a tricorne hat, and a handbell. If my get-up didn't get their attention, I would clang my bell and announce my presence. Oyez! Oyez! Hear Ye! Hear Ye!

I would give announcements, pronounce edicts and legal declarations. I would conclude with a resounding "God save the Queen" and hang the official paper on the door post of the local pub. Hence, I had posted the notice, and, by that very verb, newspapers like the Denver Post got their name.

My gig as a town crier didn't actually start out as news reporting. It began by patrolling the neighborhood after curfew, damping down remaining fires, and arresting drunkards and miscreants whom I would place in stocks where, in the light of day, I would pronounce their transgressions. Eventually I went to public hangings to cry out details of the offense as the offender dangled. That was when crying was put in my job title. Oyez, Oyez, Oyez.

Then television came along. They hired their own batch of handsomer, hairier criers and it was kaputs for me. When I applied for chimney sweeping jobs, human resources said they needed someone to clean chimneys, not plug them. They offered to send me to weight watchers and I looked elsewhere.

I wasn't taken to driving logs down rivers or herding sheep. Ice cutting wasn't for me, dock work seemed too rough, and gandy dancing seemed too strenuous. The interesting ad for a resurrectionist turned out to be digging up dead bodies.

Finally, I became a knocker-upper. I would go around the neighborhood with a knocker on the end of a long stick rapping against upstairs bedroom windows to awaken my customers in the morning. No vocal skills required.

In my training, I was taught persistence and timeliness, and studied the techniques of a legendary knocker-upper named Mary Smith who used a pea shooter to knocker-up denizens in their bedrooms on the upper floors of London dwellings. She must have found some hard, noisy English peas, because the soft ones I got in America wouldn't knocker anyone up.

Knocker-apping wasn't popular work. Charles Dickens made that point in *Great Expectations* when his character Mr. Wopsle lost his temper over being knocked-up, even though he had personally ordered the service. I, however, was unfazed by profanity and fast enough to dodge boots.

It was steady work that came to an end all too soon. Because I'm not an early bird myself, I hired my own knocker-upper, also a sleepy head. That is how in one unfortunate morning I lost my entire customer base. They wouldn't accept my explanation that I, too, had a knocker-upper and my knocker-upper had a knocker-upper, but my knocker-upper's knocker-upper didn't knock my knocker-upper up. He stayed in bed and so did I.

