

JUNIOR ENTREPRENEUR

by Fred Hobbs

At age eleven if a kid today works at all outside the home (or inside for that matter), the task for a girl, likely will be babysitting. Until just a few years ago, many boys of that age would be on their bicycles tossing the daily newspaper on the neighbors' front porches. Now, the babysitting gig is still possible, but opportunities for young folks to participate in other workplace activities are severely limited. And, fewer and fewer newspapers are around for distribution in the neighborhood by boys or even by today's adult carriers.

Seventy years ago, not only were two daily newspapers flourishing here in Denver, but dozens of so-called "Little Merchants" were delivering the papers daily and collecting the subscription fees each month.

The term wasn't used back then, but because I had a unique opportunity at the sales game in the 1940s, "junior entrepreneur" seems more appropriate. Never mind that I couldn't spell "entrepreneur" and wasn't totally sure of its meaning. The fact is, I *was* one. The product was a magazine though, not a newspaper.

Confession time. I have alluded previously in these weekly writings to the fact that, at age eleven, I sold some 300-plus *Collier's* magazines each week to young GIs stationed at Lowry and Buckley air bases. But, an essay on "Your First Job" allows me the freedom to give more detail to this tale than previously allowed.

Unlike my young competitors who were forced to go door to door to "peddle their papers", I enjoyed a potential customer-base of nearly 60,000. It was essentially a captive audience because I went to the location that was both their work place and their "home" at the time.

I learned some "tricks of the trade." Make sure you show up on payday or at least a day or two after. Go on Sunday mornings when reveille wasn't sounded and many of the soldiers were allowed to lounge around for a few hours. Go bed to bed in both the barracks and in the hospital; thus, reducing the tendency of the guys to buy only one copy that would be passed around and shared. Even in the hospital, ask the nurse in the contagious or seriously ill wards to take the magazines through, collect the money and bring it to you in the hall outside. These wonderful young women actually volunteered this task and seemingly thought it was a "cute" idea.

The military men, most of them far from home, were very nice to the junior entrepreneur, willing to spend a dime for a magazine. One GI even asked that I bring him every month a copy of *Woman's Home Companion*, published by the same company that produced *Collier's* weekly.

And still another, an artist in civilian life, made periodic appointments to meet me in the recreation hall of his squadron, where he worked on a portrait of me. When he finished, he told me to take it home and give it to my mother.

And so I did. Sadly the painting was lost some time over the years, but I still remember with fondness these wartime warriors willing to give a junior entrepreneur a break and buy one of his magazines.