

A little more about... Sho-Card Press

I have mostly good memories of my time at Sho-Card Press in Harwichport. I started part-time employment during my junior year of high school. I worked after school, weekends and during the summer. Up to that time, the owner Art worked the shop on his own. He bought it from the previous owner as a retirement business. The little business kind of grew on its own by word of mouth by the primary customer... other printers.

The printing equipment may have been outdated but in the 60's into the 70's it was an economical way to produce an order of 50 or 100 - 14" x 22" posters (*most common size*) or bumper stickers. Smaller printing companies couldn't handle the size and the larger printing companies needed more volume to offer a reasonable price. A printer could advertise that they did posters and send the order to Sho-Card Press and with a quick turnaround get the order back within a week. The posters were primarily of upcoming events in the communities. And you add up all the communities and you get lots of orders.



You didn't spend much time discussing an order with a customer, the printer sending the order did. He would complete the order form and mail it Sho-Card Press. Most of the customers were from New York and New Jersey. Each day we would open the orders and place them in the production line up for optimum results. The next morning, we would package each order for shipping and drive up the road to the post office's loading dock with 10 or more outgoing boxes. We were considered the local post office's best customer.

Art was probably in his late seventies and his little printing business to keep busy during his retirement was keeping him busier than he wanted to be. During my senior year in high school, Art asked if I would consider taking over his business. I was interested but also knew that I was registered with the draft and my number was such that I would be called upon to serve in the army once I graduated high school in 1967. Instead of waiting to be drafted, I went to each military recruiter to discuss my best direction. The U.S. Coast Guard gave me the best opportunity. I enlisted in a special aviation program to enter the Coast Guard for 2 years active

duty with an additional 4 years of active reserves. My reserve duty station was only a short drive away. I asked Art if he would wait 2 years. He said he would.

I kept in touch with Art and on a few days while on leave I would visit, and we seemed to be on track. He hired another young man while I was away. Jonathan Page was still in high school, and he took to the printing as I did and after a while received the same offer to take over the business.

The day came that I was back on Cape Cod and returned to my room at my parents' home in Harwich. In September of 1969, after a little discussion with Art, Jon, and myself, I returned to Sho-Card Press with the understanding that I would take over the business with Jon continuing his employment. I would pay Art in installments each month for a period of years until the business was truly mine.

I was only twenty years old at the time which put me in a position that required a person over 21 years of age to sign various documents. I asked my father to be that person. I never really asked my father for anything. We weren't very close, primarily due to not agreeing on much of anything. It wasn't just because I was young and knew everything.

Art was trying to get used to truly being retired. He would drop by the shop and would see some of the little changes I made and was not happy. I started to increase the business and with that made changes that would increase productivity.

As the business increased, my time spent on invoicing customers for work completed and other administrative duties kept me from poster production. I was preparing to hire a bookkeeper when my mother, who was a bookkeeper for a small heating oil business, stated that she would take care of the invoicing. She would come down after she finished her job at Walker Oil. I would get a call that she was tired and would try to come the next day. That happened on a regular basis. After a few weeks, with invoicing backing up, I told my mother in the kindness way possible that she already had her regular job and she worked hard and didn't need the burden of coming into town to the shop. I told her that I hired a bookkeeper to assist. WHAT!! She called my father and in an elevated conversation told him that his son fired his own mother. My father reinforced the fact that HIS name was on the agreement, so he was in charge not me. He stated that he would take the business from me if I didn't do as told. He knew very little of the business.

I remember him being pleased that I produce “America Love or Leave it” bumper stickers for a customer and asked if he could have one. I didn’t tell him another customer had “America Change it or Loose it” made. We were in the height of the Viet Nam war and protests were increasing across the country. I remember another customer requesting posters for an upcoming play at an Eastham Playhouse. The play was about the unnecessary war in Viet Nam and along with the important information of where and when the play would take place, the poster had an image of the Statue of Liberty with an American flag upside down over her mouth, “Liberty needs help”.



The playhouse needed the posters quickly so after I finished the order that evening, I brought them home and would drop them off at the playhouse the following morning. Instead of leaving them in my Jeep I put them in the garage. In the morning I found them in the trash can, torn to shreds. My bad for bringing them into my father’s house. I returned to the shop, redid the order, and got to the playhouse that afternoon.

So, I continue with Art not being happy and checking on me on a regular basis and with parents aggravated with their son. Mother didn’t mind not coming to the shop to do bookkeeping, but she did seem to enjoy being the victim.

Despite these distractions, I continued to produce posters and took pride in all aspects of this business.

In March 1970, nearly 6 months after I took on Sho-Card Press, the U.S. Postal Service went on strike. It started in New York but move quickly across the nation. As stated, Sho-Card Press’s business was 90% mail order with most of that being in New York and New Jersey. Most of the printed material produced was time sensitive with date of event. The actual strike only lasted for eight days but the movement of mail was slowed for weeks. This had a great impact on Sho-Card Press.



Art continued to be nervous about a business that he clearly still owned. I would return from a dinner break and get back to composing a poster to find Art at the

shop dictating what I needed to do or not do. He started to make incredible accusations about stealing things from the shop and selling it on the street to buy drugs. Art would share these stories with my father which made my strained relationship deteriorate even further. By this time, I turned 21 years of age and wanted to transfer the *lease to purchase agreement* in my name. Art and my father didn't agree. They both felt the need to control.

I reevaluated my position. When I was in the U.S. Coast Guard and thinking of getting back to Massachusetts to take on my own business, I knew it would be a lot of hard work. I never thought I would be dealing with what came about. I enjoyed my time in the Coast Guard and I was good at it. I would have been promoted once again if I elected to stay on active duty beyond my 2-year obligation, but I wanted to fulfill the other commitment I made. The one I made to Art.

Even though the mail strike was an unwelcomed event it was just a bump and easily overcome. Art and my father were another issue. My discussions with them seemed to be getting more difficult as the days went on. I decided to end the agreement which seemed to be welcomed by Art and my father.

Art sold the business outright to another retiree. Sho-Card Press continued for several years before it was closed for good.

I understood when I took on the business that the antiquated equipment would be replaced by new technology someday. In fact, I was looking forward to that day. I was twenty and was looking to make a career of this craft and make the appropriate adjustments to ensure success. The retirees had a different vision.

It is interesting as you look back in life and see the various paths you have traveled. I took on some various jobs after Sho-Card Press. Not in printing, I never returned to printing but have some fond memories of those days. I have no regrets, for even though it didn't last very long, lessons were learned. It took a few more years before I returned to what I learned in the U.S. Coast Guard and became an aircraft mechanic. That path and subsequent trails has been a wonderful journey for over 50 years, and I will always remember ***“Life is a JOURNEY, not a destination”***

The journey continues