

So what if he can't spell? He'll get a secretary

By DENNIS ROSENBLUM

A couple months back someone in the office distributed copies of a spelling test to the assembled motley crew of journalists. Everyone offered a copy — various writers and editors — was only too willing to give it a try. Except one.

The executive editor politely declined to take the test, saying he'd be embarrassed.

I only mention this here to show that even the worst spellers in town can get to be respectable members of society.

Which brings us to the recent hubbub over some nameless law school grad who doesn't know how to spell "defendant" and recently became part of a large number of people who failed the last Michigan bar exam.

"If they did that to me after three years, I'd be up on top of (Wayne State) Mackenzie Hall with a gun," says my friend the law student.

"What's that got to do with knowin' the law? They aren't gonna be spelling anyway; they're gonna have their secretary do it."

In case you blanked the bad news from your mind, 43 percent of the 463 law grads who took the state bar exam in January failed it. That's a new record.

Some folks are charging that the state board which administers the test decided to make it tougher than normal to hold down the number of lawyers competing for business. The board members deny this, and say this was the worst bunch of tests they've ever seen.

MY OWN FEELING is that the gods of the educational system haven't done their fair share.

A few years back I had a part-time campus job correcting papers for a business administration professor. The class was a senior level course in business communications.

I went into the assignment with the thought of helping out my peers in their struggle against the tyranny of the university oppressor.

But when I started reading some of the illiterate

papers, I changed my mind. Was I going to take responsibility for letting these people out into the world with the same sheepskin I'd earned by keeping a well-thumbed Webster's at my side? Hell, no.

I'VE NEVER HAD much trouble with spelling (I took second place in my fifth grade spelling bee because I hyphenated "picnic"), but I still find it a bit hard to comprehend not knowing how to spell "defendant" after three years of school.

If all the people in the world who have to write can be divided between those who are naturally good spellers and those who are lousy spellers, then keep a dictionary handy to look things up, those who ask somebody else how to spell things, and those who just don't care.

It sounds to me like a law grad who can't spell "defendant" is one of those who doesn't care much. And I don't want him for a lawyer.

And what about the executive editor, a fellow who is getting up in the years but still writes on occasion?

How do you spell "defendant," Tom? "Well, it starts with a 'd' and ends with a 't,'" he says. "Isn't that enough?"

I guess so. His secretary can spell just fine. My friend the law student rests his case.

The writer is a reporter for the Observer.



The Stroller Memorial Day memories

By W.W. EDGAR

Every year when Memorial Day rolls around The Stroller likes nothing better than to lean back in his easy chair, close his eyes, and live in memory for a few moments with the Old Colonel.

The Old Colonel happens to be The Stroller's grandfather and many were the good times we enjoyed together back in the little town in the Pennsylvania Dutch Country.

None of the great moments equalled those of the annual Memorial Day period when the town turned out en masse to pay tribute to those who gave their lives on the battlefield in the war between the states, now known in the pages of history as the Civil War.

You see the Old Colonel was what he termed a foot soldier in the great conflict and he always considered the infantry the highest and most important part of Gen. U.S. Grant's army.

WHEN MEMORIAL DAY arrived each year he was up bright and early, dressed in his uniform of the Grand Army of the Republic, and strutted down to the main corner of the tiny business section to let the townspeople

know that he was ready to do his part.

AS THE COMMANDER, the Old Colonel was the grand marshal and had to ride astride a horse as the parade headed up the street and turned onto the bridge.

For years, Capt. Joseph Matchett had been the commander and had the privilege of riding the horse. But this morning when the Old Colonel arrived at the stables to get his horse he was told that the white horse belonged to Capt. Matchett and that he would have to take the black bay-belly that was anything but attractive.

That was the start of what proved to be a bad day in the Old Colonel's life. His usual smile was missing when the parade headed up the street. But as they were turning to get onto the bridge he looked back and saw Capt. Matchett and his horse stumble. Not a bit shaken he turned and thumbed his nose at the former commander as if to say "So there!"

Things went along all right when he left his 'bay-belly' long enough to drop the flowers in the river. He did it with unusual grace.

And the Old Colonel handled the services at the little chapel masterfully. The huge gathering was impressed with the program he presented and the placing of a flower on each of the graves in the veterans' plot.

He seemed proud when he introduced The Stroller to deliver the Gettysburg address and the Old Colonel was at the height of his pleasure as the services ran off smoothly — until just a few minutes before the close.

Then, with only a few minutes warning, dark clouds appeared over head, lightning flashed and we were driven back into the small chapel as the rains descended.

Suddenly, there came flash of lightning and a loud crack as if it had hit the spire on the chapel.

The lightning struck. But it hit the soldier's monument and of all things, it caused a crack in the marble right through the Old Colonel's name.

To the day he died, he kept asking, "why did it have to crack through my name?" He always felt it was the result of a curse put on him by his old rival — Capt. Matchett — and not an act of God.



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