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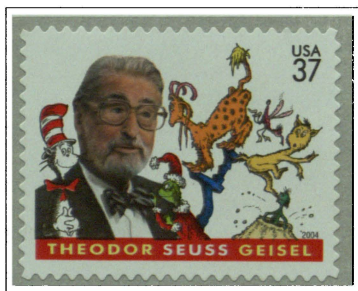
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The Beginnings of Dr. Seuss

AN INFORMAL REMINISCENCE

by Theodor Seuss Geisel

PUBLISHED IN COMMEMORATION
OF THE ONE-HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY
OF HIS BIRTH · MARCH 2, 1904–2004



Edited by Edward Connery Lathem
together with an introduction
by President James Wright

HANOVER · NEW HAMPSHIRE
Dartmouth College

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U. S. Postal Service commemorative
Theodor Seuss Geisel stamp
issued March 2, 2004
at La Jolla, California

“Dr. Seuss” signature reproduced
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Introduction

IT IS WITH particular delight that I welcome readers to *The Beginnings of Dr. Seuss*. At Dartmouth we take special pride in this extraordinary genius who graduated from the College in 1925. Theodor Seuss Geisel — Dr. Seuss — brought joy to millions.

Ted Geisel came to Dartmouth uncertain as to his path in life. Happily, however, he discovered and began developing here a rare talent to engage and entertain, to enlighten and instruct — a talent that would in subsequent years serve to enchant a broad range of readers through his wonderful drawings and inspired stories.

It was at Dartmouth, as he reveals in the pages that follow, that he “discovered the excitement of ‘marrying’ words to pictures.” He said:

“I began to get it through my skull that words and pictures were Yin and Yang. I began thinking that words and pictures, married, might possibly produce a progeny more interesting than either parent.”

And, with typical modesty, he went on to say: “It took me almost a quarter of a century to find the

proper way to get my words and pictures married. At Dartmouth I couldn't even get them engaged."

In recognition of his great accomplishments and in testimony to our pride in "the distinction of a loyal son," the College awarded Mr. Geisel an honorary degree in June 1955. In 2000, I had the personal, as well as official, pleasure of bestowing an honorary doctorate upon Audrey Stone Geisel. In the citation, I said to her:

"Mr. Geisel himself made abundantly clear your important role in encouraging and enhancing his creativity. You sustained him in the most profoundly productive interval of his long career."

I went on to speak of her exercise of "effective stewardship over the Seuss legacy" and of the munificence of her actions in support of education, literacy programs, and health care. And the citation ended:

"Now, on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the graduation of your late husband's class, his College believes — a conviction we are confident both Dr. Seuss and Dr. Theodor Geisel would enthusiastically share — that you, madam, their partner, also eminently deserve to bear, with them, the distinction of doctoral title, as well as membership in the Dartmouth

fellowship, by our bestowing upon you the degree Doctor of Humane Letters.”

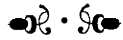
This volume contains Theodor Geisel’s own reflections on his early career — from high school through the publication in 1937 of *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, his first of what were to be many immensely successful books. The text is drawn from tape recordings made in 1975, just in advance of the fiftieth reunion of the Class of 1925, which occasion featured a major Geisel/Seuss exhibition that was mounted in Baker Library.

The volume is now issued in tribute to Theodor Seuss Geisel as part of Dartmouth’s celebration of his centennial — at the close of the year that has marked the one hundredth anniversary of his birth. Its existence owes much to the vision and editorial skills of Edward Lathem, Bezaleel Woodward Fellow and Counselor to the President, Dean of Libraries and Librarian of the College, Emeritus. He has brought many volumes to publication during a distinguished career — but few perhaps so satisfying to him as this one, because of his long friendship with Mr. Geisel.

J. W.

December 2004

The Beginnings
of Dr. Seuss



AN INFORMAL
REMINISCENCE

“**Dr. Seuss**” is of course a pseudonym, one known to millions upon millions of adults and children alike, in the United States and throughout the world.

It derives from the middle name of author-artist Theodor Seuss Geisel (Dartmouth 1925), and any telling of the story of “Dr. Seuss” must involve a tracing, also, of the career of Theodor Geisel himself.

Both born and raised in Springfield, Massachusetts, he attended Springfield’s Central High School, where among his special extracurricular concerns was the student newspaper, the *Central Recorder*, for which he did articles, verse, humorous squibs, and occasional cartoons, as well as serving as one of the paper’s editors.

At the conclusion of his high school years he, along with a large number of others from Central High, entered Dartmouth, apparently because of the influence of Edwin A. Smith, a 1917 graduate of the College. —

☛ “The reason so many kids went to Dartmouth at that particular time from the Springfield high school was probably Red Smith, a young English teacher who, rather than being just an English teacher, was one of the gang — a real stimulating guy who probably was responsible for my starting to write.

“I think many kids were excited by this fellow. (His family ran a candy factory in White River Junction, Vermont. I remember that.) And I think when time came to go to college we all said, ‘Let’s go where Red Smith went.’”

Accordingly, in the autumn of 1921, Geisel headed for Hanover, some hundred and thirty miles up the Connecticut River from Springfield.

And what was to prove, as viewed in retrospect, especially a stimulus to him at Dartmouth? —

☛ “Well, my big inspiration for writing there was Ben Pressey [W. Benfield Pressey of the Department of English]. He was important to me in college as Smith was in high school.

“He seemed to like the stuff I wrote. He was very informal, and he had little seminars at his house (plus a very beautiful wife, who served us cocoa). In between sips of cocoa, we students read our trash aloud.

“He’s the only person I took any creative writing courses from ever, anywhere, and he was very kind and encouraging.

“I remember being in a big argument at one of Ben’s seminars. I maintained that subject matter wasn’t as important as method. (I don’t believe that at all now.)

“To prove my point, I did a book review of the Boston & Maine Railroad timetable. As I remember, nobody in the class thought it was funny — except Ben and me.”

From the outset at Dartmouth, Freshman Geisel gravitated toward association with the humor magazine, *Jack-o-Lantern*. —

☛ “That was an extension of my activities in high school — and a lot less dangerous than doing somersaults off the ski jump. I think I had something in *Jack-o-Lantern* within a couple of months after I got to college.”

Jack-o-Lantern proved increasingly an object of Geisel’s attentions throughout his four years in Hanover, and at the end of his junior year he became editor-in-chief. —

☛ “Another guy who was a great encouragement was Norman Maclean. He was the editor preceding me. He found that I was a workhorse, so we used to write practically the whole thing ourselves every month.

“Norman, at the same time, was writing a novel. And the further he got involved with his novel, the less time he had for his *Jack-o-Lantern*. So,

pretty soon I was essentially writing the whole thing myself.

“One night Norman finished the novel and went out to celebrate. While he was out celebrating, his boarding house burned down and his novel burned up. Unlike Thomas Carlyle, I don’t think he ever rewrote it.”

The general practice of *Jack-o-Lantern* was that its literary content appeared unsigned, a circumstance that renders it impossible to compile today a comprehensive listing of Geisel’s writings for its pages. The author himself has only vague recollections of what he in fact wrote for the publication, although he does remember that certain contributions were written jointly with Maclean, including ones that came about in a singular fashion. —

☞ “Norman and I had a rather peculiar method of creating literary gems. Hunched behind his typewriter, he would bang out a line of words.

“Sometimes he’d tell me what he’d written, sometimes not. But, then, he’d always say, ‘The next line’s yours.’ And, always, I’d supply it.

“This may have made for rough reading. But it was great sport writing.”

The art work included in *Jack-o-Lantern* was, unlike its “lit,” usually signed, and the magazine’s issues of 1921–1925 are liberally sprinkled with cartoons bearing explicit evidence of having come from Ted Geisel’s pen.

The 1920s were seemingly “the era of the pun,” and many of the individual cartoons are found to have involved puns or currently popular expressions.

Going back, now, over the pages of *Jacko* for his undergraduate years, Geisel is rather stern in his judgment of the cartoons that were included, and particularly of those he himself drew.

In summing up his assessment he says:

☛ “You have to look at these things in the perspective of fifty years ago. These things may have been considered funny then, I hope — but today I sort of wonder.

“The best I can say about the *Jacko* of this era is that they were doing just as badly on the Harvard *Lampoon*, the Yale *Record*, and the Columbia *Jester*.”

During his student days Geisel also went into print from time to time in another campus publication, *The Dartmouth*, “America’s Oldest College Newspaper.”—

☛ “Whit Campbell was editor of *The Daily Dartmouth* at the time. I filled-in occasionally and did a few journalistic squibs with him.

“Almost every night I’d be working in the *Jack-o-Lantern* office, and while waiting for Whit’s morning paper, across the hall, to go to press, we used to play a bit of poker.

“Once in a while, if one of Whit’s news stories turned sour, we’d put our royal-straight flushes face down on the table, rewrite the story together, and then pick up our royal-straight flushes again — and sometimes raise each other as much as a quarter.

“This did little to affect the history of journalism in America. But it did cement the strongest personal friendship I made at Dartmouth.”

There were two especially noteworthy aspects of the extensive work Geisel did for Dartmouth’s humor magazine.

The first of these emerged during his junior year, and he identifies it as having been in his undergraduate period “the only clue to my future life.” It involved a technique of presentation, the approach to a form for combining humorous writing and zany drawings. —

☛ “This was the year I discovered the excitement of ‘marrying’ words to pictures.

“I began to get it through my skull that words and pictures were Yin and Yang. I began thinking that words and pictures, married, might possibly produce a progeny more interesting than either parent.

“It took me almost a quarter of a century to find the proper way to get my words and pictures married. At Dartmouth I couldn’t even get them engaged.”

The other particularly significant feature of Geisel’s *Jack-o-Lantern* career relates to the spring of 1925, when apparently he first used the signature “Seuss.” The circumstances that surrounded his employment of the later-famous pseudonym, he outlines as follows. —

☛ “The night before Easter of my senior year there were ten of us gathered in my room at the Randall Club. We had a pint of gin for ten people, so that proves nobody was *really* drinking.

“But Pa Randall, who hated merriment, called Chief Rood, the chief of police, and he himself in person raided us.

“We all had to go before the dean, Craven

Laycock, and we were all put on probation for defying the laws of Prohibition, and especially on Easter Evening.”

The disciplinary action imposed by Dean Laycock meant that the editor-in-chief of *Jack-o-Lantern* was relieved forthwith of his official responsibilities for running the magazine. There existed, however, the practical necessity of helping to bring out its succeeding numbers during the remainder of the academic year.

Articles and jokes presented no problem, since they normally appeared anonymously; thus, anything the deposed editor might do in that area could be completely invisible as to its source.

Cartoons, on the other hand, usually being signed contributions, did present a dilemma; and it was a dilemma Theodor Seuss Geisel resolved by publishing some of his cartoons entirely without signature and by attributing others of them to fictitious sources.

The final four *Jacko* issues in the spring of 1925 contained, accordingly, a number of Geisel cartoons anonymously inserted or carrying utterly fanciful cognomens (such as “L. Burbank,” “Thos. Mott

Osborne '27," and "D. G. Rossetti '25"), and two cartoons, in the number of April twenty-second, had affixed to them his own middle name (in one case "Seuss" alone and in the other "T. Seuss"). —

☛ "To what extent this corny subterfuge fooled the dean, I never found out. But that's how 'Seuss' first came to be used as my signature. The 'Dr.' was added later on."

In June of 1925, Ted Geisel finished his undergraduate course at Dartmouth and prepared to embark upon a further academic adventure. It was one he had ardently desired to pursue, but it proved, in the end, to have a slightly different route of approach than he had anticipated. —

☛ "I remember my father writing me and asking, 'What are you going to do after you graduate?'

"I wrote back, 'Don't you worry about me, I'm going to win a thing called the "Campbell Fellowship in English Literature" and I'm going to Oxford.'

"He read the letter rather hurriedly. The editor of the *Springfield Union* lived across the street from us (that was Maurice Sherman; he was also a Dartmouth man), and my father ran across the street and said: 'Hey, what do you know? Ted won a fellowship

called the "Campbell Fellowship" and he's going to Oxford?

"So, Maurice Sherman, being a staunch Dartmouth man, ran my picture in the paper (I think it was on the front page): 'GEISEL WINS FELLOWSHIP TO GO TO OXFORD.' And everybody called up my father and congratulated him.

"Well, it so happened that that year they found *nobody* in the College worthy of giving the Campbell Fellowship to. So, my father, to save face with Maurice Sherman and others, had to dig up the money to send me to Oxford, anyway."

In the autumn of 1925, Geisel entered Oxford as a member of Lincoln College. —

☛ "My tutor was A. J. Carlyle, the nephew of the great, frightening Thomas Carlyle. I was surprised to see him alive. He was surprised to see me in any form.

"He was the oldest man I've ever seen riding a bicycle. I was the only man he'd ever seen who never ever should have come to Oxford.

"This brilliant scholar had taken 'Firsts' in every School in Oxford, excepting medicine, without studying. Every year, up to his eighties, he went up for a different 'First,' just for the hell of it.

“Patiently, he had me write essays and listened to me read them, in the usual manner of the Oxford tutorial system. But he realized I was getting stultified in English Schools.

“I was bogged down with old High German and Gothic and stuff of that sort, in which I have no interest whatsoever — and I don’t think anybody really should.

“Well, he was a great historian, and he quickly discovered that I didn’t know *any* history. Somehow or other I got through high school and Dartmouth without taking one history course.

“He very correctly told me I was ignorant, and he was the man who suggested that I do what I finally did: just travel around Europe with a bundle of high school history books and visit the places I was reading about — go to the museums and look at pictures and read as I went. That’s what I finally did.”

As an example of one factor contributing to the stultifying atmosphere he encountered at Oxford, he still has vivid memories of a don at the university who had produced a variorum edition of Shakespeare and who was chiefly interested in punctuational differences in Shakespearean texts. —

☛ “That was the man who really drove me out of Oxford. I’ll never forget his two-hour lecture on the punctuation of *King Lear*.

“He had dug up all of the old folios, as far back as he could go. Some had more semi-colons than commas. Some had more commas than periods. Some had no punctuation at all.

“For the first hour and a half he talked about the first two pages in *King Lear*, lamenting the fact that modern people would never comprehend the true essence of Shakespeare, because it’s punctuated badly these days.

“It got unbelievable. I got up, went back to my room, and started packing.”

A notebook used by Geisel during his time at Oxford has survived among his papers. —

☛ “I think this demonstrates that I wasn’t very interested in the subtle niceties and complexities of English literature. As you go through the notebook, there’s a growing incidence of flying cows and strange beasts. And, finally, at the last page of the notebook there are no notes on English literature at all. There are just strange beasts.”

This period, despite its academic frustrations,

was not, however, without its diversions and recreations — one such having been, actually, an outgrowth of Miltonic studies. —

•§ “While I was at Oxford I illustrated a great hunk of *Paradise Lost*.

“With the imagery of *Paradise Lost*, Milton’s sense of humor failed him in a couple of places. I remember one line, ‘Thither came the angel Uriel, sliding down a sunbeam.’

“I illustrated that: Uriel had a long, locomotive oil can and was greasing the sunbeam as he descended, to lessen the friction on his coccyx. And I worked a lot on Adam and Eve.

“Blackwell, the great bookseller and publisher, was right around the corner from Lincoln, and I remember I had the crust to go in there and ask them to commission me to do the whole thing.

“Somebody took it into a back room and then came back with it very promptly and said, ‘This isn’t quite the Blackwell type of humor.’

“So, I was thrown out. But I got my revenge years later.

“I went to Oxford about twenty years later. I went past Blackwell’s and found the whole window

full of my books. It had apparently *become* ‘the Blackwell type of humor.’”

Clearly, the most important circumstance associated with Ted Geisel’s interval at the University of Oxford was his meeting there a young lady from New Jersey named Helen Palmer.

A graduate of Wellesley College, Miss Palmer had in the autumn of 1924 entered upon studies at Oxford to complete her preparations for becoming a schoolteacher back home in America. —

☞ “She was a gal who was sitting next to me when I was doing this notebook, and she was the one who said, ‘You’re not very interested in the lectures.’ She ‘picked me up’ by looking over and saying, ‘I think that’s a very good flying cow.’

“It was she who finally convinced me that flying cows were a better future than tracing long and short E through Anglo Saxon.

“She was the one who convinced me that I wasn’t for pedagogy at all.

“On the other hand, *she* did complete the English Schools that year; took her degree in English Lit. This enabled her to get a job teaching English in the States. This enabled us to get married.”

Upon quitting Oxford, Geisel did engage briefly in one final scholastic interlude, this time in Paris. —

☛ “At Oxford I went to a lecture (I was very interested in Jonathan Swift) by the great Emil Legouis. Although he was a Frenchman, he was the greatest Swift authority in the world at that time.

“He talked to me at the end of the lecture and began selling me on going to study with him at the Sorbonne. And, after I left Oxford, I did so.

“I registered at the Sorbonne, and I went over to his house to find out exactly what he wanted me to do.

“He said, ‘I have a most interesting assignment which should only take you about two years to complete.’ He said that nobody had ever discovered anything that Jonathan Swift wrote from the age of sixteen and a half to seventeen.

“He said I should devote two years to finding out whether he *had* written anything. If he had, I could analyze what he wrote as my D.Phil. thesis. Unfortunately, if he hadn’t written anything, I wouldn’t get my doctorate.

“I remember leaving his charming home and walking straight to the American Express Company

and booking myself a passage on a cattle boat to Corsica.

“There I proceeded to paint donkeys for a month. Then, I proceeded with Carlyle’s idea and began living all around the Continent, reading history books, going to museums, and drawing pictures.

“I remember a long period in which I drew nothing but gargoyles. They were easier than Mona Lisas.”

And what of those months of junketing?—

☞ “While floating around Europe trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life, I decided at one point that I would be the Great American Novelist. And so I sat down and wrote the Great American Novel.

“It turned out to be not so great, so I boiled it down in the Great American Short Story. It wasn’t very great in that form either.

“Two years later I boiled it down once more and sold it as a two-line joke to *Judge*.”

Home once again in Springfield, Geisel lived with his parents and began submitting cartoons to national magazines.—

☞ “I was trying to become self-sufficient — and my

father was hoping I'd become self-sufficient and get out of the house, because I was working at his desk."

Finally, a submission to *The Saturday Evening Post* was accepted. It was a cartoon depicting two tourists on a camel, and it appeared in the magazine's issue for July 16, 1927.

The drawing was signed simply "Seuss" by its draftsman-humorist, resurrecting the pseudonym he had used in the Dartmouth *Jack-o-Lantern* two years earlier. —

☞§ "The main reason that I picked 'Seuss' professionally is that I still thought I was one day going to write the Great American Novel. I was saving my real name for that — and it looks like I still am."

Actually, the *Post* in publishing his cartoon accorded "Seuss" no pseudonymity whatsoever, for it supplied the identification "Drawn by Theodor Seuss Geisel" in a byline of type, right along the edge of the drawing itself. —

☞§ "When the *Post* paid me twenty-five bucks for that picture, I informed my parents that my future success was assured; I would quickly make my fame and fortune in *The Saturday Evening Post*.

"It didn't quite work out that way. It took

thirty-seven years before they bought a second Seuss: an article in 1964 called 'If At First You Don't Succeed — Quit!'"

But success during the summer of 1927 in placing something with *The Saturday Evening Post* was a cause for great elation — and, moreover, for a decision on the cartoonist's part to leave Springfield.—

☞§ “Bubbling over with self-assurance, I told my parents they no longer had to feed or clothe me.

“I had a thousand dollars saved up from the *Jack-o-Lantern* (in those days college magazines made a profit), and with this I jumped onto the New York, New Haven, & Hartford Railroad; and I invaded the Big City, where I knew that all the editors would be waiting to buy my wares.”

In New York, Geisel moved in with an artist friend from his Dartmouth undergraduate days, John C. Rose, who had a one-room studio in Greenwich Village, upstairs over Don Dickerman's night club called the “Pirates Den.”—

☞§ “The last thing we used to do at night was to stand on chairs and, with canes we'd bought for that purpose, play polo with the rats, and try to drive

them out, so they wouldn't nibble us while we slept. God! what a place.

"And I wasn't selling any wares. I tried to do sophisticated things for *Vanity Fair*; I tried unsophisticated things for the *Daily Mirror*.

"I wasn't getting anywhere at all, until John suddenly said one day, 'There's a guy called "Beef Vernon," of my class at Dartmouth, who has just landed a job as a salesman to sell advertising for *Judge*.

"His job won't last long, because nobody buys any advertising in *Judge*. But maybe, before Beef gets fired, we can con him into introducing you to Norman Anthony, the editor."

The result of the Geisel-Anthony meeting was the offer of a job as a staff writer-artist for the humor magazine, at a salary of seventy-five dollars per week — enough encouragement to cause Ted Geisel and Helen Palmer (who had been teaching during the year since the completion of her Oxford studies) to marry. The wedding took place at Westfield, New Jersey, on November 29, 1927. —

☛ "We got married on the strength of that. Then,

the magazine went semi-bust the next week, and my salary went down to fifty dollars.

“And the *next* week they instituted another fiscal policy (I was getting a little bit worried by this time) in which they dispensed with money entirely and paid contributors with due bills. Due bills?

“*Judge* had practically no advertising. And the advertisers it attracted seldom paid for the ads with money; they paid the magazine with due bills. And that’s what we, the artists and writers, ended up with in lieu of salary.

“For instance: a hundred dollars; the only way for me to get the hundred dollars was to go down to the Hotel Traymore in Atlantic City and move into a hundred-dollar suite.

“So, Helen and I spent many weeks of our first married year in sumptuous suites in Atlantic City — where we didn’t want to be at all.

“Under the due-bill system I got paid once, believe it or not, in a hundred cartons of Barbasol shaving cream. Another time I got paid in thirteen gross of Little Gem nail clippers.

“Looking back on it, it wasn’t really so bad, be-

cause I didn't have to balance any checkbooks — or file any income tax.

“How can you file an income tax when you're being paid in cases of White Rock soda?”

And where did the newlywed Geisels set up housekeeping in New York? —

☛ “Oh, we went to a place across from a stable in Hell's Kitchen, on 18th Street.

“Horses frequently died in the stable, and they'd drag them out and leave them in the street, where they'd be picked up by Sanitation two or three days later.

“That's where I learned to carry a 'loaded' cane. It was about a three-block walk to the subway. If you weren't carrying a weapon of some sort, you'd be sure to get mugged.

“So, Helen and I worked harder than ever to get out of this place. And we finally managed to move north, to 79th Street and West End Avenue. There there were many fewer dead horses.”

“Seuss” work in *Judge* consisted not only of cartoons. —

☛ “I was writing some crazy stories, as well. It was

a combination, about fifty-fifty; the articles always tied in with drawings.”

Among these combination pieces, extending the type of thing he had begun doing as an undergraduate at Dartmouth, Geisel produced for *Judge* a succession of regular contributions signed in a way that brought his pseudonym into the final form of its evolution.—

☛ “I started to do a feature called ‘Boids and Beasties.’ It was a mock-zoological thing, and I put the ‘Dr.’ on the ‘Seuss’ to make me sound more professorial.”

At first the self-bestowed “Dr.” was accompanied by “Theophrastus” or “Theo.” in by-lines and as a signature for drawings, but with the passage of time “Dr. Seuss” was settled on as the standard form of his identification.

“Dr. Seuss” soon found his way into other magazines of the day, besides *Judge*, including *Liberty*, *College Humor*, and *Life*. He even teamed up, at one point, with humorist Corey Ford in a collaboration for *Vanity Fair* that was, in the end, to be abandoned out of pure frustration.—

☛ “I illustrated some stories for Corey Ford in

Vanity Fair, but I gave that up because it got a little ludicrous. The art director of *Vanity Fair* was more concerned with style than content.

“The last thing I did with Corey was a spoof on political cartooning in the 1890s — a Boss Tweed type thing.

“The art director laid the thing out before I did the drawings, and he insisted that my average picture was to be nine inches wide and three-quarters of an inch high. This caused Boss Tweed and me to roll over in our graves.

“Corey and I remained good friends, but we didn’t work together after that.”

An occurrence early in Geisel’s period of association with *Judge* was to have a particular impact on his subsequent career. —

☛ “I’d been working for *Judge* about four months when I drew this accidental cartoon which changed my whole life. It was an insecticide gag.

“It was a picture of a knight who had gone to bed. He had stacked his armor beside the bed. There was this covered canopy over the bed, and a tremendous dragon was sort of nuzzling him.

“He looked up and said, ‘Darn it all, another

Dragon. And just after I'd sprayed the whole castle with. . . ?

"With what? I wondered.

"There were two well-known insecticides. One was Flit and one was Fly Tox. So, I tossed a coin. It came up heads, for Flit.

"So, the caption read, ' . . . another Dragon. And just after I'd sprayed the whole castle with Flit!'

"Here's where luck came in.

"Very few people ever bought *Judge*. It was continually in bankruptcy – and everybody else was bankrupt, too.

"But one day the wife of Lincoln L. Cleaves, who was the account executive on Flit at the McCann-Erikson advertising agency, failed to get an appointment at her favorite hairdresser and went to a second-rate hairdresser's, where they had second-rate magazines around.

"She opened *Judge* while waiting to get her hair dressed, and she found this picture. She ripped it out of the magazine, put it in her reticule, took it home, bearded her husband with it, and said, 'Lincoln, you've got to hire this young man; it's the best Flit ad I've ever seen.'

“He said, ‘Go away.’ He said, ‘You’re my wife, and you’re to have nothing to do with my business.’

“So, she pestered him for about two weeks, and finally he said, ‘All right, I’ll have him in, and I’ll buy one picture.’

“He had me in. I drew one picture – which I captioned ‘Quick, Henry, the Flit!’ – and it was published.

“Then, they hired me to do two more – and seventeen years later I was still doing them.

“The only good thing Adolph Hitler did in starting World War II was that he enabled me to join the Army and finally stop drawing ‘Quick, Henry, the Flit!’

“I’d drawn them by the millions – newspaper ads, magazine ads, booklets, window displays, twenty-four-sheet posters, even ‘Quick, Henry, the Flit!’ animated cartoons. Flit was pouring out of my ears and beginning to itch me.”

The Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, the manufacturers of Flit, had another product with which Geisel was to become concerned, in an ad campaign that led to something of a naval career for “Dr. Seuss”.—

☛ “They had a product called ‘Esso Marine,’ a lubricating oil for boats, and they didn’t have a lot of money to spend on advertising.

“They decided to see what we could do with public relations. So, Harry Bruno, a great PR man, Ted Cook and Verne Carrier of Esso, and I cooked up the Seuss Navy.

“Starting small at one of the New York motor-boat shows, we printed up a few diplomas, and we took about fifteen prominent people into membership — Vincent Astor and sailors like that, who had tremendous yachts — so we could photograph them at the boat show receiving their certificates.

“We waited to see what happened. Well, Astor and Guy Lombardo and a few other celebrities hung these things in their yachts. And very soon everyone who had a putt-putt wanted to join the Seuss Navy.

“The next year we started giving annual banquets at the Biltmore. It was cheaper to give a party for a few thousand people, furnishing all the booze, than it was to advertise in full-page ads.

“And it was successful because we never mentioned the product at all. Reporters would cover the

party, and they would write our commercials for us. So, we would end up with national coverage about, 'The Seuss Navy met. . . .' And, then, they would have to explain it, by talking about Esso Marine.

"At the time war was declared, in 1941, we had the biggest navy in the world. We commissioned the whole Standard Oil fleet, and we also had, for example, the *Queen Mary* and most of the ships of the U.S. lines.

"Then, an interesting thing happened. I left to join the Army. And somebody said: 'Thank God, Geisel's gone, he was wasting a great opportunity. He wasn't *selling* the product. We have Seuss Navy hats, and we have Seuss Navy glasses and Seuss Navy flags.' He said, 'These things should carry advertising on them.'

"They put advertising on them, and the Navy promptly died. The fun had gone out of it, and the Seuss Navy sank."

Concurrently with his advertising and promotional activity relating to Flit and Esso Marine, "Dr. Seuss" continued to contribute to the humor magazines; but he was not entirely free. —

☛ “My contract with the Standard Oil Company was an exclusive one and forbade me from doing an awful lot of stuff.

“Flit being seasonal, its ad campaign was only run during the summer months. I’d get my year’s work done in about three months, and I had all this spare time and nothing to do.

“They let me work for magazines, because I’d already established that. But it crimped future expansion into other things.”

Restless to explore new avenues of activity, Geisel ultimately hit upon the notion of preparing a volume for children. —

☛ “I would like to say I went into children’s-book work because of my great understanding of children. I went in because it wasn’t excluded by my Standard Oil contract.”

Another evident cause for his focusing on the possibility of doing books at some point was a commission he received to provide “Dr. Seuss” illustrations for an anthology of amusing gaffes unconsciously and innocently perpetrated by school children, a work by Alexander Abingdon that styled itself as “compiled from classrooms and examination papers.” —

☛ “The book was originally published in England, where it was called *Schoolboy Howlers*. Some smart person at Viking Press in New York (I think it was Marshall Best) brought out a reprint of the English edition, under the title *Boners*.

“Whereupon hundreds of teachers in the U.S.A. began sending in boners from *their* examination papers. And the Boner Business boomed.”

Boners and its sequel, *More Boners*, were both published in 1931. —

☛ “That was a big Depression year. And although by Depression standards I was adequately paid a flat fee for illustrating these best sellers, I was money-worried. The two books were booming and I was not.

“This is the point when I first began to realize that if I hoped to succeed in the book world, I’d have to write, as well as draw.”

The actual coming into being of a book of his own, the first of what was to be so substantial and celebrated a series of volumes written and illustrated by “Dr. Seuss,” derived from a curious stimulus and through decidedly unusual means. —

☛ “I was on a long, stormy crossing of the Atlantic, and it was too rough to go out on deck.

Everybody in the ship just sat in the bar for a week, listening to the engines turn over: da-da-ta-ta, da-da-ta-ta, da-da-ta-ta. . . .

“To keep from going nuts, I began reciting silly words to the rhythm of the engines. Out of nowhere I found myself saying, ‘And that is a story that no one can beat; and to think that I saw it on Mulberry Street.’

“When I finally got off the ship, this refrain kept going through my head. I couldn’t shake it. To therapeutize myself I added more words in the same rhythm.

“Six months later I found I had a book on my hands, called *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*. So, what to do with it?

“I submitted it to twenty-seven publishers. It was turned down by all twenty-seven. The main reason they all gave was there was nothing similar on the market, so of course it wouldn’t sell.

“After the twenty-seventh publisher had turned it down, I was taking the book home to my apartment, to burn it in the incinerator, and I bumped into Mike McClintock (Marshall McClintock, Dartmouth 1926) coming down Madison Avenue.

“He said, ‘What’s that under your arm?’

“I said, ‘That’s a book that no one will publish. I’m lugging it home to burn.’

“Then, I asked Mike, ‘What are *you* doing?’

“He said, ‘This morning I was appointed juvenile editor of Vanguard Press, and we happen to be standing in front of my office; would you like to come inside?’

“So, we went inside, and he looked at the book and he took me to the president of Vanguard Press. Twenty minutes later we were signing contracts.

“That’s one of the reasons I believe in luck. If I’d been going down the other side of Madison Avenue, I would be in the dry-cleaning business today.”

And what reception did the public accord *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, when the book was released in 1937? —

☛ “In those days children’s books didn’t sell very well, and it became a bestseller at ten thousand copies, believe it or not. (Today, at Beginner Books, if we’re bringing out a *doubtful* book, we print twenty thousand copies.)

“But, we were in the Depression era, and *Mulberry Street* cost a dollar — which was then a lot of money.

“I remember what a big day it was in my life when Mike McClintock called up and announced: ‘I just sold a thousand copies of your book to Marshall Field. Congratulations! You are an author.’”

In addition to favorable sales, the comment of one particular reviewer was especially significant in encouraging the fledgling author of children’s books toward further effort in this new-to-him field. —

☛ “Clifton Fadiman, I think, was partially responsible for my going on in children’s books. He wrote a review for *The New Yorker*, a one-sentence review.

“He said, ‘They say it’s for children, but better get a copy for yourself and marvel at the good Dr. Seuss’s impossible pictures and the moral tale of the little boy who exaggerated not wisely but too well.’

“I remember that impressed me very much: If the great Kip Fadiman likes it, I’ll have to do another.”

Another he did do (*The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*, in 1938) and then another and another and another — to the point that there have been to date nearly fifty volumes of his authorship, in addition to widely acclaimed motion pictures and animated

specials for television. Besides this, Theodor Seuss Geisel presides over and gives editorial direction to a major publishing enterprise, Beginner Books, a division of Random House.

In 1955 Ted Geisel returned to Dartmouth in order that his alma mater might, fondly and proudly, bestow upon him an honorary degree. President John Sloan Dickey's citation on that occasion proclaimed:

“Creator and fancier of fanciful beasts; your affinity for flying elephants and man-eating mosquitoes makes us rejoice you were not around to be Director of Admissions on Mr. Noah's ark. But our rejoicing in your career is far more positive: as author and artist you single-handedly have stood as St. George between a generation of exhausted parents and the demon dragon of unexhausted children on a rainy day. There was an inimitable wriggle in your work long before you became a producer of motion pictures and animated cartoons; and, as always with the best of humor, behind the fun there has been intelligence, kindness, and a feel for humankind. An Academy Award-winner and holder of the Legion of Merit for war film work, you have stood these many

years in the academic shadow of your learned friend Dr. Seuss; and because we are sure the time has come when the good doctor would want you to walk by his side as a full equal, and because your College delights to acknowledge the distinction of a loyal son, Dartmouth confers on you her Doctorate of Humane Letters.”





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