

A patron's poem honors a carrier's friendship



Dad's Letters

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A mistake, is what they said
You never had TB.
You needn't stay abed
Go play and run, run free

A lung spot; fever mild
TB the doctors said
Unto the little child
Eighteen months in bed

Age four he mustn't run
Just dream and think and hope
To move and play for fun
No friend to help him cope

A window by the day cot
Looked out through glass and screen
Until the summer's afterthought
Unveiled the glassless scene

Window, Mom and Mailman
Whose visits made the day
Because the lively Postman
Brought many things to say

He would come by window late
"Hello and here's your mail"
Sometimes from Mom's true mate
Overseas in war's travail

Uniform and cap he wore
From railroad then to us
As home he came from war
To stay with hope and promise

New doctors were consulted
Dad thought it was the best
The prognosis was adjusted
After examining the chest

Go run and play they said
You never had TB
You will not need the bed
Thank Dad you now are free

A letter carrier's daily talks with a young, apparently ailing child left an impression that fostered a lifelong admiration for letter carriers. Many years later, the memory inspired the now-grown man to write a poem about the experience.

In May, Dr. Ralph Smith of Charleston, WV, approached his letter carrier, Charleston Branch 351 Treasurer **Greg Busby**, with a poem that described Smith's childhood memories. Smith and his wife, Teresa, long had been friendly with Busby, but his poem explained just how important letter carriers were to him.

"He felt a special connection to the Postal Service," Busby said, "He had to lie in bed as a child, and the only interaction he had [besides his mother] was with a letter carrier."

Smith describes in his poem "Dad's Letters," which he wrote last year, his experience at age 4. His doctor had diagnosed him with tuberculosis (TB) after seeing a strange spot on the youngster's lung in X-ray images. The doctor ordered him to rest in bed day and night for 18 months—an ordeal for a 4-year-old. His father was serving overseas in World War II, so his mother cared for him alone at their home in Charleston.

"Every morning, she carried me to a bed in the living room next to a window," Smith said. It was summertime, and the window was open because there

was no air conditioning. Other than his mother, Smith's only companion was their letter carrier. "The postman would



Greg Busby

come to the window and talk to me," Smith said. The chats helped the young child, who had been an active youngster, get through each day confined to bed.

"I was too young to remember his name," he said, "but I can still see his face now."

When his father returned home from the war, he took young Ralph to the Cleveland Clinic, hoping to improve his medical care. The doctors at the clinic determined that he did not, in fact, have TB. The symptoms, including a mysterious fever, went away without further treatment, and Smith never learned the cause of his illness.

But the experience of interacting daily with his carrier stuck with the restless child. "I wanted to be active," Smith said, "so I think that's what led to my overachievement."

By "overachievement," Smith means his service as an air surgeon in the West Virginia Air National Guard, where he retired as a brigadier general; his medical degree and years of practice in child and adolescent psychiatry (he is still practicing at age 79); and two master's degrees, one in business administration and the other in communications.

Memories of his father, who died in 1998, the daily visits from his letter carrier, and his father's return from the war and their visit to the clinic, prompted him to write the poem about his lasting connection to the Postal Service.

"When I see a mail person, I get goose bumps," he said. "They're still some of my favorite people in the world." **PR**



Dr. Ralph Smith