

THE SAND STORM

By John F. Hall

This story reaches back into the almost forgotten memory of my teenage years. Few young adults have ever seen, or even know what a Linotype machine is or even what it can do. Few people have been in a sand storm, or even know the positive thing that a sand storm can do. My story begins in the summer of 1962. My brother, Charles J. Hall



Jr., asked me to come with him to California. I was 16 years old at the time. I was able to help him drive because, I received a restricted Florida driver's license when I turned 15. That license required an adult to be with me in the car, at all times, When I was driving, until till I turned 16. My nickname at that time was "Doc." I have no memory of who gave me that nickname. For what ever reason, my brother liked my nickname, and I started to call him "Doc." He had the nickname of "David," but he never like to be called by that name.

At the time, Doc had only a few dollars and a used 1953 Mercury. His plan was to drive slowly down the highway, and I was to look out at the shoulder of the road. When I spotted a discarded soft drink bottle, I was to tell him to pull over. I would get out of the car, and pick up the bottle, and put it in the trunk of his car. At that time, soft drinks were only in bottles, and not in aluminum cans like they are today. The price of a gallon of gas was \$.25 cents. The deposit on the glass soda bottle was \$.05 cents. Doc's intended to redeem the soda bottles at a grocery store, once his car trunk was full. So I began to pick discarded soda bottles, all the way from Orlando, Florida to Pensacola, Florida. When we arrived in Pensacola, the manager of the first grocery store told Doc, "You did not purchase them here, and I will not redeem them here." So, it seemed like we were stuck with a bunch of discarded soft drink bottles in the truck of Doc's car.

We slept in Doc's car that night, and used the restroom at a nearby service station, the next morning. We used nearly all of Doc's money to pay for breakfast, at the local "choke and puke" restaurant. Across the street from the restaurant was a printing shop. Doc walked inside and asked if they needed any part-time help. The owner said: "As a matter of fact, I do. One of my printer's is going on a two-week vacation." The owner asked Doc if he could operate a Linotype machine. Doc said that he could. The owner gave him something to type. I was amazed by Doc's ability to read print upside down and backwards. Doc was fast, real fast. The owner told him that he had the job for two weeks. Doc asked him if he would hire me to melt the used lead type set, to make the lead ingots, and to clean up the shop. The owner would not pay me much, but it allowed Doc to rapidly eliminate the owner's backlog of printing jobs.

The man at the grocery store, once he realized that Doc was working at the print shop, allowed him to redeem all the glass soda bottles that Doc had in the trunk of his car. After two weeks of working long hours, Doc had taken care of the backlog. What the owner also did for Doc was to allow him to use him for a reference. We were going to California so that Doc could find a Linotype job. Doc had a friend in San Antonio, Texas. He invited Doc and me to stay a few days at his house. A shower and a couch felt good.

One night, the Texas friend, his wife, and Doc went to a night club. I had to babysit their two year old girl. She was very quiet and well mannered. She never talked and she just looked at me. I was glad when Doc got back. I did not have to change any diapers. The next day, we were back on the road again. Doc was making good time, when his car just quit "in the middle of nowhere," Arizona. Somehow, the metal rod that operates the car's outside fuel broke in half. We pushed the car onto the shoulder of the road. Doc got under the car and removed the fuel pump. There was a house about a quarter of a mile down the road. So Doc carried the fuel pump to the house. Doc had a tool box, but he needed a shop to fix the broken fuel rod.

We walked to the house and Doc knocked on the door. A man opened the door, and Doc asked him if he had a small bit and a hand-held drill. The man said he did and we followed him to his garage. He had a table with a small vise. Doc asked him if he had any long, but narrow diameter nails. The man had a coffee can with odd size nails. Doc picked out the one he wanted. He put one half of the broken fuel pump rod in the vice. He drilled down in the center of the rod about one half inch. He did the same thing to the other half of the rod. He cut off both ends of the borrowed nail to make a one-inch nail rod. He put the nail rod into the hole that he drilled into one half of the broken fuel pump rod. He pushed the two fuel pump rod together. He used black electrician's tape where the pump rod came together. Doc offered to pay the man for the use of his vice and hand drill. The man said that was not necessary, as he learned something new that day.

Doc got back under his car and reattached the fuel pump. The repair worked and lasted as long as Doc owned the car. Doc drove into the city of Los Angeles, California. The smog in that city was terrible and it burned my eyes. Doc purchased a newspaper and looked into the help wanted ads for Linotype operators. He found one needing a Linotype operator in a city called Desert Hot Springs. He called the number and they asked him to come in for an interview. We began the drive towards that city in the desert. Along the way, we picked up a hitchhiker. Things were looking up when Doc's car ran out of fuel. Doc had spent all of his money to get to California, and now we were stranded on the side of the road. We said goodbye to the hitchhiker, and he started to walk away.

I looked behind us and saw an extremely large sand storm, rapidly coming our way. Doc called out to the hitchhiker to come back to the car. Doc told the hitchhiker that he needed his help. He would use the storm's winds to push his car down the road. He told me to get out the blanket in the back seat. He told the hitchhiker to hold one end of the blanket, and I would hold the other end of the blanket over the top of the car. I was to sit half way out of car door, and hold up one end of the blanket, and the hitchhiker would do the same thing on the other side of the car. But first, we all had to push the car back onto the highway, and then push the car as fast as we could. Doc told us to use our tee shirts to cover our nose and eyes. We all jumped inside the car, as Doc steered, and I sat halfway out the car door. I held one side of the blanket, and the hitchhiker held the other side of the blanket, over the top of the car. The sand storm hit with a vengeance with winds over 70 miles an hour.

I would estimate that our sail car was being pushed along at about 20 miles an hour. There was a service station about two miles down the road. Doc pulled into the station. I



I guess the station attendant thought we were nuts. Doc told him that we had no money, and he needed to be interviewed for a job in Desert Hot Springs. The attendant accepted the car's spare tire and all of Doc's tools as collateral for several gallons of gas. Doc told him that he would redeem the tire and tools as soon as he received his first week's pay. Doc was hired, but they had no need for me. Ottmar Mergenthaler invented the Linotype machine in 1884. Thomas Edison described the Linotype machine as the "eighth wonder of the world."

Pictured: Ottmar Mergenthaler.

Doc rented a one-room efficiency that had a stove, a refrigerator and a radio. It seemed like the wind blew all the time. Desert Hot Springs is located in the Sonora Desert in Arizona, and California. After living there for more than 40 days, I told Doc that I decided to go back to Florida. I planned to get parental permission to enlist in the Army and become a paratrooper. Doc took me to a bus station and he paid for some of my bus fare. Major newspapers retired Linotype and similar "hot metal" typesetting machines during the 1970s and the 1980s. They replaced them with phototypesetting equipment, and later with computerized typesetting and page composition systems.

I remember watching Doc operate a Linotype machine in the printing shop in Pensacola, Florida. What I remember most about that machine was the clicking, clicking, clicking sound as the hot lead slugs fell into place. The final product did a lot more than put type in order. Sitting at the keyboard on the machine, Doc would type out the letters and the spaces. This would release a mold of each letter, called matrices, from the storage magazine on the top of the Linotype machine. Once one line was completed, the machine would pour liquid metal into the mold and cast brand new type that was all connected in a line called a slug. This is allegedly where the name "Linotype" came from because it created line o' type. The term "hot-type" came to refer to any machine that cast fresh type on demand from the hot metal. It cast in hot metal as a complete line rather than individual characters. What I did, when I worked with Doc, was to re-melt the slugs, once the printing on paper was completed.



I lost contact with Doc after I went into the Army. He contacted me when he heard that I was getting married. I told him that my wife, Paula and I would be taking a belated honeymoon to Miami, Florida, at the end of my Army enlistment in 1965. Doc told me that he would meet me in Miami. One of the things that I did, with my cheap 35mm camera, was to take lots of pictures of places and people. I took a picture of Doc with Paula and Doc's best friend, Ron. In 1967, Doc was killed in a hit and run car accident. It was crushing, to my soul, to

lose a brother who was only 29 years old. Sixty one years ago, Doc used a sand storm, to take him where he needed to go. I'll end this story with a scripture that everyone can use to help them reach their final destination: "Everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will acknowledge before my Father in Heaven." Matthew 10:32.

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