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Big Little Man

Staff Writers

You don't have to be a giant to do legendary things.

During my first 18 months as a columnist for *Quick Printing*, I shared stories with you about renowned figures Gutenberg and John Wayne, entertainers Tim McGraw and Howie Mandel, and an author admired by four generations, Dr. Seuss. Whenever readers send emails commenting on the latest article, they invariably ask how I find a way to blend unrelated stories into meaningful ideas for printers. What can I say? Paul Harvey was a big influence on me as an aspiring journalist.

David Letterman use to have a recurring segment on his show called "*Brush with Greatness*," in which a few audience members would share tales about their close encounters with the rich and famous. It was always entertaining to see how such innocent moments lasted in the minds of these wannabes, as if the icon would immediately recall it upon a second meeting. "Say, Angelina, do you remember when you smiled at me leaving that restaurant in 1997?" (Letterman may still do this; I just can't stay awake long enough to watch!)

A couple of decades ago I had a brush with greatness that—like those on *Late Night*—remains clear to me today. It was one of those rare moments when I happened to be in the right place at the right time...as a well known local celebrity appeared.

Here's the ressssst of the story.

Call Him Rooster

Billy grew up in Dallas, 30 miles from my hometown of Fort Worth. He was part of my father's generation, and moved away many years before I was born. Frankly, I'd never heard of him before I went away to college. Like me, he attended the University of Texas. Unlike me, he played an integral role on the Longhorns football team.

Rooming with future All America quarterback and NFL Hall of Famer Bobby Layne, Billy became a collegiate legend when he climbed a tall hickory tree one day to get down a stuck rooster. The fowl pecked, Billy let go of a branch and fell to the ground, breaking his arm. However, Billy held on to the bird, and from that day forward UT players, and everyone he would ever meet, called him Rooster.

He never got into games, but was always willing to lend a hand to help more skilled teammates. He often could be found carrying five-gallon water buckets during practice. You might say he originated the term "WIT"—Whatever It Takes.

His Big Chance

With World War II in full force, players across the country were called into active military service, and many colleges suspended their decimated football programs.

Of course, here in the Lone Star state, football ranks third behind God and Mother in priorities. So Texas kept playing—albeit scheduling games against Randolph Field and Corpus Christi NAS—while somehow avoiding Michigan and Notre Dame.

In 1943, when gridiron glory didn't get much better than the Southwest Conference, Texas was in the midst of putting a 46-7 whuppin' on TCU, and coach Dana X. Bible decided to let Rooster experience the thrill of athletic competition. Rooster hurried onto the field following a couple of late Longhorns touchdowns and promptly drop kicked the extra points.

The next week, against bitter rival Texas A&M, he did it again, and Texas won the league title.

Fading Glory?

Like so many college athletes, Rooster might have faded from memory...except he had other plans. He remained in Austin, married his high school sweetheart, and went to work selling sporting goods.

In 1969, he opened the first of four retail stores—where thousands of students, fans, Little League coaches, and their kids would purchase equipment and memorabilia. Rooster was often there to greet them.

Over the years, he also befriended UT coaches and athletes, a famous country singer named Willie, numerous politicians,

and a Johnson and two Bushes who lived in the White House.

When Rooster died at age 84 in January, UT media relations veteran Bill Little, who's been on campus since the early 1960s, wrote: "You could make a case that Rooster Andrews touched more people, with the things he did and with his heart, than anybody in the history of Texas Longhorns athletics."

Added track coach Bubba Thornton: "He's one of our real treasures. The number of lives he's influenced in a positive way is staggering. What a wonderful life he lived."

Meeting a Legend

One day in 1989, when I was producing a network football telecast in Austin, Little took the announcers and me to lunch in the athletic dining hall. Sitting with my back to the door, I heard him say, "There's Rooster." I jumped up, turned around, and for the only time in my life, shook hands with one of my alma mater's legends.

At that moment I also learned something I never knew.

You see, Rooster Andrews—the man who lettered in football and baseball, the man who gave so much to so many for so long, the man who stood bigger than life around Austin for 65 years—was only five feet tall.

Take It to Heart

I write these articles with the intention you'll take away something that will make you a more successful printer. This month, my wish is you'll take away something else.

You don't have to be a giant to do legendary things. You do have to be willing to climb a tree, carry a water bucket, and give more than you take.

Rooster showed us how to be successful in life. What will be your legacy?

David Handler is the founder of Success Handler, LLC, and previously served as a senior executive at ICED. Since 2003, he's led clients in the quick printing industry to explore their professional and personal dreams. David's boyhood hero was James Street, quarterback of UT's 1969 National Championship team. In David's bedroom drawer is a burnt orange #16 jersey purchased at Rooster Andrews Sporting Goods years ago. To connect with the hero inside of you, send an email to coach@successhandler.com [mailto:coach@successhandler.com] or visit www.successhandler.com [http://www.successhandler.com].