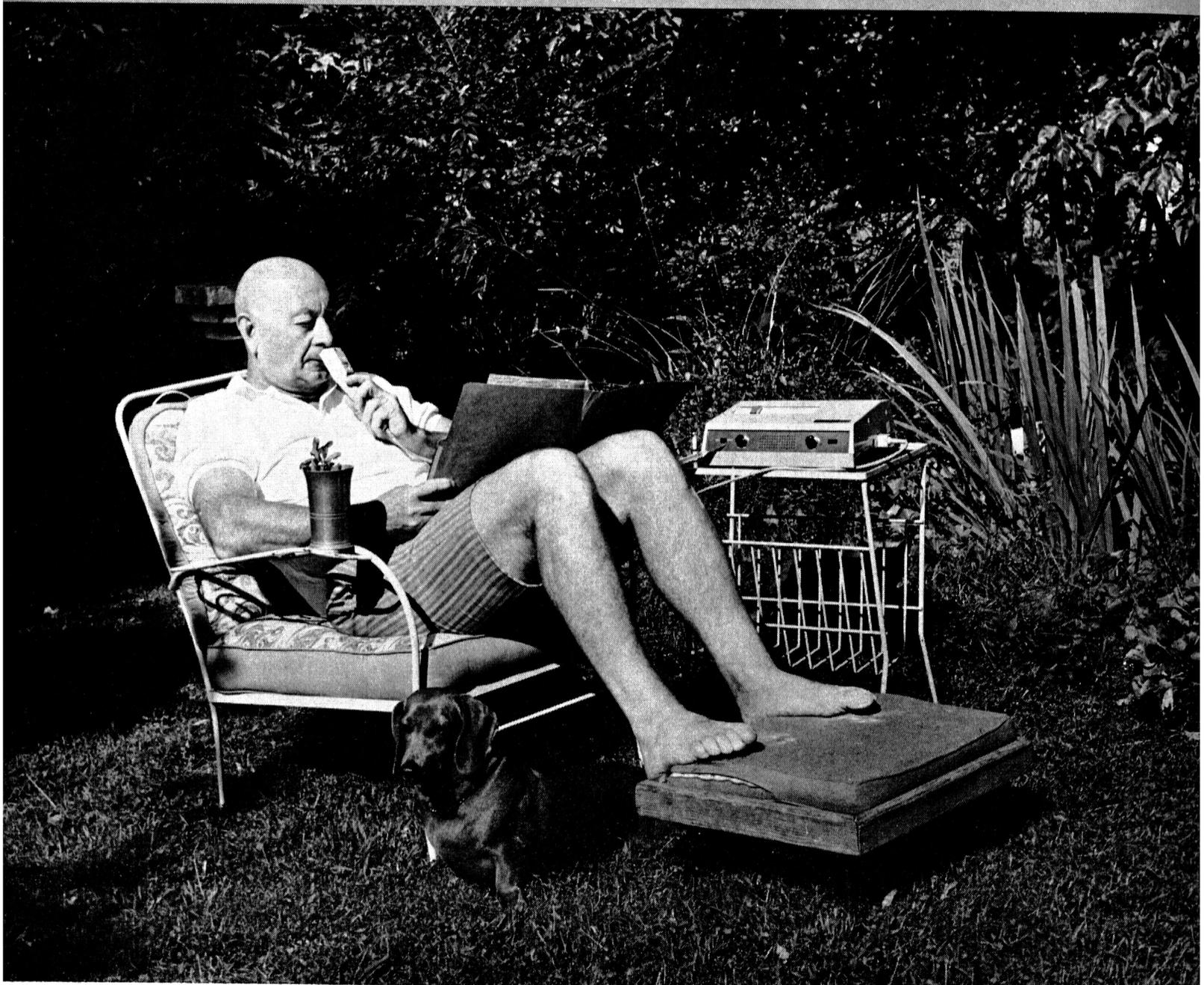


Booton Herndon— His Times, Trials, and Triumphs



THE FIRST STRING QUARTET he ever heard in person was the Budapest Quartet and he reviewed its performance for a New Orleans newspaper. The first time he ever saw an opera (it was the Metropolitan) he was in it—carrying a spear—and he wrote a piece about that. In World War II he was in the Normandy invasion and eventually wound up running a hotel in Germany.

Such things happen to Booton Herndon all the time, or they used to. They made good copy, too, for writing has been his business since he left M.U. in 1937. The momentum of his adventures on the campus carried over in his travels for a number of years, but in the last decade or so “Boo” Herndon has been pretty much settled down in Charlottesville, Virginia, as an established free-lance writer. He is responsible for a dozen books and is at work on two or three more, for one of which he has two million words available.

Recalling his days at Missouri, Herndon says:

“I went out there at 17, and straight from a very proper prep school. And I think I over-reacted. I was considered, I suspect, an odd ball. I went for four years but never graduated, as a few escapades curtailed the time spent in school.”

He planned to live on an island in the Caribbean and got as far as New Orleans. There he met the late Clarke Salmon (*Journalism*, 1909), and told him he was a graduate of J-School even though he had never been in the building. Salmon, managing editor of the *Item*, now extinct, told the 21-year-old Herndon he could come to work on the paper as a reporter—at no pay. It was a month before he actually got on the payroll, at \$18 a week. This happened when he landed five by-line stories on one page, circled them and handed them to the managing editor.

“I WAS THE BOY WONDER,” Boo says. “Fortunately, I was prematurely bald, so when I went out to interview people I didn’t look as callow as I was. One day I interviewed, and wrote stories about, Vladimir Golschmann, Tony Galento, J. Edgar Hoover, and a Nobel prize winner in physics whose name I’ve forgotten.” It was in these early days as a fledgling reporter that he wrote reviews of the Budapest Quartet and the opera.

He looks back on his war experience as a comedy of errors. “I was earnest and eager and I really did want to be a hero and I used to run the obstacle

course on Sunday.” He wound up on Utah Beach in the Normandy invasion, opening up boxes of medical supplies. Later, by claiming he could speak French, he was made a hotel manager in Germany.

The only job he could get after the war was on the copy desk of a Virginia paper at \$52.50 a week. He soon abandoned this work and headed for New York and a crack at magazine writing.

“At that time the grateful government was paying me \$20 a week,” Herndon says, “and I had a lot of friends in New York who fed and housed me. I don’t know any other way to crack the magazine market. I used to see them come and go; they couldn’t stick it out. Thanks to my friends, I did.” One of his friends was Walter Howey, a legendary figure in journalism, who was editor of the *American Weekly* at that time. The assignment editor gave him an idea to work on, and a five-year association with the *Weekly* resulted. Frequently he could bang out enough copy in two days to keep him going for two weeks while he aimed at other magazines.

“I hit all at once; articles in *Collier’s* and *Saturday Evening Post* the same week. Big exposé in *Redbook* led to a senate investigation of housing conditions around army camps. I got beaten up on an assignment in South Carolina. I was telling the editor about it by long distance—I was battered and bloody—when he suddenly broke in and said, ‘I gotta go now, Boo—Winchell’s coming on and I want to see if we made it.’ We did.”

IN 1950 HE WENT home to Charlottesville and in a sense had to start all over again, with his income dropping \$12,000 the first year, “but it gradually worked out all right.” Like all writers, he would be discovered by one magazine or another, have a hot romance for a while, then repeat the process with somebody else.

One of his first half-dozen jobs for *Collier’s* was a piece on Bergdorf Goodman. “I became one of the leading 225-pound experts in haute couture, and also promoted a mink coat for my wife. This led to a book, Bergdorf’s on the Plaza (Knopf), which had fair success. I reinjured my bad back just before I started writing this book, and had to write it flat on my back by means of a tape recorder. This was a blessing as I learned, the hard way, how to dictate. Thanks to this, I’ve been able to knock out 12,000-word pieces for the smaller men’s

Surrounded by comforts and conveniences and guarded by his faithful dachshund, Author Booton Herndon continues to produce a steady flow of articles and books.

BOOTON HERNDON

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magazines in a couple of days for \$600 to \$750.

"The book on Bergdorf's taught me how to write books. There's no secret. All you do is research the material thoroughly and organize it before you begin writing."

BOO HERNDON has taken on an unusually wide range of subjects, which points up the freedom of the free-lance writer. He didn't find a great deal of difference between researching, for example, high fashion and football, religion and income tax. For two of his books, "The Seventh Day" (story of the Seventh Day Adventists) and "Young Men Can Change the World" (The Jaycee Story), he had to travel across the country. (He thinks he may be the only writer to get stuck in a blizzard in the middle of a New Mexico desert in a rented car.) The advance on these two books brought in a total of \$11,000, including partial repayment of expenses, "and I was hurting for a time, but today, five or six years later, they are paying off in bountiful measure."

HE ESTIMATES the Adventist book has sold half a million copies; it is in reprint now. "I get only a dime a copy, but I don't care; it's wonderful to be read," Boo says. Under a separate arrangement with the Jaycees he gets a royalty of fifty cents a copy and the book has just had another printing of 60,000. His comment on this: "Once again I'd be happy with less, for the gratitude expressed to me by members of the organization is the greatest reward of all." He speaks at meetings of both the Adventists and the Jaycees, and being a genuine Virginia ham, he enjoys it.

The name Booton Herndon doesn't appear on all the books he writes. He is a highly successful "ghost." His reputation was firmly established a few years ago when he got out a book for "The World's No. 1 Impossible Man" after a previous ghost had refused to work with him. Since then he has been called on repeatedly by the inner circle of New York publishers to repair manuscripts "burned up" by others. Naturally, he would prefer to write under his own name. He is proud that he can ignore his own feelings, no matter who he is working with or on what subject. Oftentimes he works with people who are far apart from his own philosophy, "and I don't think they have any idea how I feel about anything."

IN HIS RESEARCH on the life story of Captain Eddie Rickenbacker he has amassed two million words, from which he must winnow 180,000. He has

just completed a book for Mortimer M. Caplin, former Commissioner of Internal Revenue, which required a complete research into almost every phase of operation of this agency.

Other books turned out by Herndon include "Over the Hump" (General William H. Tunner)—"a damn good book which tells the true story of the Himalayan Airlift, the Berlin Airlift, and the development of the Military Air Transport Service." It was published by Duell, Sloan and Pearce in 1964. In the same year appeared "The Sweetest Music This Side of Heaven" (The Guy Lombardo Story), McGraw-Hill; "The Humor of JFK," Gold Medal Books; "How to Exercise Without Moving a Muscle," Pocket Books. He wrote "Football's Greatest Quarterbacks," published by Bartholomew House in 1961. Earlier publications include "Praised and Damned," and "On Wings of Faith."

Boo Herndon has some definite thoughts on the writing game.

"Free-lance writing is a dying field," he says, "and the few of us who write about anything for anybody are practically extinct. I wouldn't advise anybody to go into it, and if he insisted, I wouldn't know how to tell him HOW to go into it.

"I'VE WRITTEN some short stories and three unpublished novels, but of late I have turned to non-fiction entirely. Writing fiction is for the young and the brave. You've got to hit with a big smash or you're dead, just like the magazine market. Most fiction today is written by English teachers. They've got all that juicy security and can afford to put in a few hours a day on something that may wind up in a quarterly at ten bucks a page."

Herndon was married while a student at M.U. to Jane Donnelly of Kansas City, who died several years later. About fifteen years ago he married the former Bernadette Dorrity of New York. They have three children.

Dr. Metcalf Adds New Title

Dr. V. Alonzo Metcalf, assistant to the Chancellor of the University of Missouri, Columbia, has been appointed coordinator of international programs and studies on the Columbia campus. Chancellor John W. Schwada said the appointment recognizes the growing involvement of the Columbia campus in international and Peace Corps programs. It also formalizes duties which Dr. Metcalf has been performing for some time in an unofficial capacity. His office will also serve as an informational center on international programs being carried on within single divisions. Dr. Metcalf is associate professor of agricultural economics.