

LANG, Eugene (cont.)

While discussing these topics, Lang appears to pull the numbers out of the air but, in fact, he has an uncanny ability to remember the precise date of an event that took place 25 or 30 years ago.

He put that ability to work for him on at least one memorable occasion.

In an off-the-cuff remark, Lang once said he knew 1,000 people. A poker pal challenged him to prove it and the next day (when they were both able to think more clearly), he took on the wager. One thousand names of people he knew personally, written down in one- and a-half hours — was the deal. Mentally, Lang went over each street from where he lived to surrounding streets, to the downtown merchants, to the firms in town, to the schools and clubs and churches. Scotty Cameron had \$20 dollars riding on Lang's having a bigger mouth than memory.

When the 90 minutes had elapsed, Lang had over 1,100 names down on paper. Cameron picked up the phone and called three people listed on the paper to make sure they knew Lang. Cameron lost his \$20. But being the good sport he is, Lang spent the \$20 on liquor and "we got drunk," he laughs.

Although he no longer plays piano, banging the black and white ivories was a pasttime of Lang's after taking lessons from the late George Nelson Maybee, who went on to become a famous chorus master. Lang taught himself to read the orchestral scores of classical music, requiring the reader to follow 25 or more lines at a time. He still reads orchestral scores when listening to his records. Typically, Lang is the owner of 4,000 albums that range from 78s from the late 1930s to current albums.

Although music is still his first love, Lang has one other affinity that has remained constant over the years — Boston Terriers, aka bulldogs. "They haven't got a brain in their

heads and if they did, they wouldn't know where to put them," he says in his rough but affectionate way. His station wagon is identifiable by the thick wire cage that separates the back seat from the front, enabling him to travel with the two canines.

Between his dogs, music and reviews, it is surprising Lang finds time for anything else. But he also keeps busy with other community activities. Lang was first elected to the Hastings County Board of Edu-

cation in 1982. He also works four hours each Saturday for Sam the Record Man, works as a volunteer for Cablevue Four, plays poker with his cronies every Tuesday night and is involved in a host of other activities.

He has obviously remained busy since his retirement, but Lang isn't quite sure how he has come to be involved with in so much. "I had no intention of running for the school board," he says, adding, "I'd rather run for cover." The remark is half

in jest, but has a serious base. Lang did run and, like most of the bets he's entered into over the years, he won.

But despite a tendency to rise to the challenge, Lang isn't really a gambler. "He wouldn't want to play cards for a living," says his long-time, card buddy, Jack McBride. However, adds McBride, "He's got a heart of gold." Add to that a sense of fun.

Lang is a story teller. A person who loves to regale friends with tales of past antics.

For example, Lang recalls a summer Sunday in the mid-1950s, when several of his friends bet him he couldn't crawl through the storm sewer from West Moira Street to the east side of Coleman Street in five minutes. It is the kind of thing that is definitely not recommended these days, or then. But, "I never could turn down a wager," admits Lang. Consequently, "we got this bet that I couldn't go through the sewer in five minutes . . . so I got in

there, with my bare feet, there was about that much water," he says, gesturing with both hands to show about a foot of water. His speech is spiced with four letter words as he describes the journey. Because of conduit pipes criss-crossing the sewer and broken branches that had become wedged in between the sides, "you were bent over the whole time you were in there," he says. "I had to sometimes get right down on my stomach . . . oh, it was terrible," he says at the memory. When he exited the other end he knew he had won the bet, but was unable to stand upright. "They had to carry me and put me in the car," feeling somewhat "like the hunch back of Notre Dame," he says with a laugh. "So that was the sewer deal, another \$5."

Another anecdote that Lang is fond of telling with self-deprecating humor, is his attempt at roller skating down a set of steps on Front Street. It was sometime in the mid-1950s, recalls Lang. At the time, Clarence Day operated a tailor shop at the location that, some 35 years later, houses Bruno's Tailor Shop. The bet was that Lang couldn't take the 23 steps from the second floor to the first floor. Lang had never been on roller skates before. "I fell the whole 23 steps," he says.

The telephone rings. Someone is calling to say the Tabernacle Church's concert recital has been changed to choir music. Lang is not happy because he is the master of ceremonies for the event. "I'm not leading no . . . congregation of chorals," he barks. But somehow, it's clear he will. He shrugs it off. "If I don't know it, I can bluff it."

The man once tagged with the nickname "Jeep" (a nickname he detests; he prefers Josh, since his first name is Joshua) after the character in the 1930s comic strip which later became known as Popeye, is content. As he freely admits, he's had his fun. "I've gambled . . . I've drank, I'm happy."

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