

# My Cup of Tea



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TODAY'S SUBJECT: Growing the Organization

**R**ECRUITING new members for organizations such as AAPA and NAPA is no longer a simple job. There is a much wider range of activities to choose from now than there was sixty years ago and students, in particular, often choose either an athletic pastime or one that requires little in the way of mental exercise. Creative writing is likely to be far down on the list of things to do for fun during leisure time. Television is much less demanding than writing essays, poems, and short stories. Publishing is a mystery that young people have little incentive to investigate. Grammar is one of those exceedingly boring subjects that most students shun and therefore never adequately learn. If amateur journalism is going to survive, we must find ways to awaken those creative talents that have been squashed by overkill from television, films, and far-out sports.

There seems to be a general recognition among our educators that reading skills are essential to success in learning and this has led to greater emphasis on reading in elementary classrooms. This may well be a vital first step on the road to reviving interest in literary skills. Anyone who reads comprehensively is certain to pick up some degree of skill in using our language and in developing appreciation for the subtle differences of style among writers. Parents and grandparents have excellent opportunities to promote reading, and also to maintain a reasonable ratio of time spent watching television to time spent in the

many other activities that kids encounter. The special qualities of reading should be given equal emphasis to participation in sports and physical development. A proper balance will never exist without careful guidance by parents and teachers.

Another essential part of early training is learning to construct sentences that properly express thoughts. With some of the systems of study today, this can be a questionable area which requires special attention by parents in supervising homework. One excellent way for a child to practice good sentence structure is to write letters to friends and relatives. Letter writing has largely fallen into disuse with the advent of e-mail and instant messaging, neither of which require a lot of expertise in language skills.

In earlier times, our English classes included more attention to composition. This took the form of book reports, and essays of various lengths, and gave invaluable practice in writing, both creative and reportorial. There seems to be less emphasis given to composition today.

What does all this have to do with recruiting? Unless we find a way to generate renewed interest in the written word, there will eventually be no one to recruit. Teaching an early appreciation for proper use of the language, including the tools of punctuation is vital to our effort, and that means beginning in grade school and continuing through high school. Many of our best known amateur journalists today joined an amateur press group while still in high school. We can easily draw from that source again, but in order to do so, we have to compete with a multitude of less demanding hobbies, and we must provide our young students with the skills that would create interest in amateur journalism.

Before computers became commonplace, there was greater fascination with printing presses and other means of producing documents in quantity. Skilled printers were a special breed who earned the respect of all by their marvelous expertise in producing works of beauty. Their expertise however, came after years of experience. Those in our ranks who prefer letterpress printing are especially valuable because of their knowledge and ability. They are also our most valuable asset in attracting young people to letterpress printing. That will not be easy in this time of

computers and electronic printers. Nevertheless, there will always be something compelling about printing presses just as there is still something that draws us to steam locomotives. With apologies to the printer who labors at his trade, let's call it romance.

Home computers have made it possible for almost everyone to publish. With such capabilities at hand, it remains only for us to create sufficient interest in our hobby to bring new members into the fold. Therein lies our immediate challenge—creating interest. There are two sides to this challenge: (1) to create interest among people outside the club groups, and (2) to create interest among members themselves. In order to attract outsiders, the insiders must be motivated to find ways of illustrating journalistic values and the rewards of achievement within the individual and the group. How do we begin to do that?

Perhaps the best forum in existence today is the World Wide Web. Both AAPA and NAPA already have official websites and the people to maintain and enhance those sites. Why not make a dedicated effort on those sites to encourage visitors to inquire about any and all aspects of amateur journalism that might be of interest to them? In addition to trial memberships, supply sample bundles or selected publications along with explanations of various printing methods and styles. Our present websites are well done; but perhaps at least one page could be dedicated solely to recruiting new members.

Within both AAPA and NAPA are people whose careers far exceed the norm in excitement and depth of living. The opportunity to meet and converse with these remarkable people is a privilege that humbles me and would be an undeniable enticement for me if I were not already in the club. To this end, would it be acceptable to post a very short bio of members who do not object?

The time to begin an active recruiting campaign is now. The time to work toward better schooling for our youngsters is now. The time to make a special effort to expose those youngsters to literature is now. I hope that amateur journalism as I know it will be here long after I am gone ... but with every passing year the issue is more in doubt. I hope that everyone will think about this and will contribute suggestions for recruiting new members. #