

CASCADE DINNER

October 15, 1971

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"THE BEN MAIDENBURG I KNOW"

Some 42 years ago, I received a job application from our honored guest who was then working on the Des Moines Register-Tribune.

It seems that Ben -- a tall, athletic youth of <sup>19</sup>~~21~~ -- was making \$20 a week, thought he was worth more but couldn't get a raise from "Stuffy" Walters who in 1944 joined me at the Chicago Daily News and later became executive editor of the Knight Newspapers. As Ben and I know so well, "Stuffy" was always a tough man with a buck.

As Ben recalls it, I wired "How much?" I think the generous offer I made was about \$27.50 a week. After some interval, since he had made several other applications, he accepted and I telegraphed "Come on."

Ben can tell you the story of his arrival in Akron, how I was "in China" or some other remote place and he didn't know anyone in

Akron or even how to find the Beacon Journal building -- then on East Market Street.

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In those days, Ben was a feisty, loud talking individual with tons of energy and a generally combative attitude. Some may say he hasn't changed much.

In days to come, Ben joined the American Newspaper Guild with whom I negotiated contracts. Since Ben was not given to reasoned comment, nor susceptible to my blandishments, one day he took to desk pounding in my office.

Well, I guess you can imagine my reaction. I didn't intend to be pushed around since I wasn't any oldster, either.

But instinctively, I liked and admired Ben's spunk and contrived to get him on management's side. Ben worked on virtually every job in the newsroom, never watched the clock, or ever muffed an assignment.

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In 1937, when we acquired the Miami Herald, I found things there in complete disarray. A run-down plant, a crooked managing editor, a business manager named Harper who majored in Bourbon of the same name -- and a newsroom filled with characters who did justice to that famous newspaper novel, "The Front Page."

So what to do? Well, I thought of Ben, the doughty George Patton of the newspaper business. So back to Western Union and a telegram: "Would he come?"

The answer was "Hell, yes."

Well Ben "stirred 'em up" in Miami, then a wide open gambling town with a full complement of Damon Runyon types and fast-buck business operators.

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Next stop, Detroit. I needed Ben once again and he came as Sunday editor, still brimming with enthusiasm and energy. One

day, after I had returned from my London war assignment, Ben stopped by and said he had joined the Air Force. "Why in hell did you do that?" I asked. "Well," he spouted, "if the Jews don't help win this war, we will have no place to live and we won't deserve one, either."

That's our Ben!

Some time later, after Ben had served in the South Pacific, volunteered for invasion missions not in his line of duty, contracted malaria and had some close calls with the Japs, I once again needed him in Detroit. So I managed to get a cablegram to him offering Ben a position as managing editor. The answer, disappointing as it was, came quickly.

It read: "Job not finished here."

That's our Ben!

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One fine day when the shooting was over, Ben came home, small-waisted, trim and about 70 pounds lighter than when he departed for the wars.

By that time, I was spending most of my time in Chicago with the Daily News. And there were more troubles as we were engaged in a hotly competitive newspaper fight with the Tribune, Marshall Field's newly established Chicago Sun, Hearst's American and the tabloid Times.

There were no openings in the newsroom, then dominated by "Stuffy" Walters, the man who wouldn't give Ben a raise in Des Moines. But we needed a good promotion manager and Ben took the job.

Mention Walter Schwimmer - radio news.

Meanwhile, the late Lynn Holcomb had become managing editor of the Beacon Journal. When Lynn died following a long illness, I again thought of Ben who was on vacation in his beloved Marion, Indiana.

I called him and said: "How would you like to be the executive

editor of the Beacon Journal?" Without hesitation, Ben snapped:

"Well, I wouldn't ask you for it."

I then explained that he had been boasting for years about what a great newspaperman he was, and perhaps it was time to find out whether he was really that good, or just another ~~second-string~~ member of the taxi squad.

His reply: "I'll take it!"

That's our Ben!

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The rest of the story is well known to all of you and the community. Other than spearheading most of the good projects which have made Akron a better city, Ben serves as a director of Knight Newspapers, secretary of the Knight Foundation and publisher of the Beacon Journal.

Since others have spoken and will speak of Ben's notable

accomplishments, I shall not repeat them tonight except to say that the other day following announcement that the new Federal building seemed finally to be on the track, Ben reminded me that he had been working on this project since 1949.

That's our persistent Ben!

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And now, a word or two about Ben, the Man.

Some people think of Ben Maidenburg as the gruff, out-spoken person who brings up unpleasant subjects when others in a civic meeting whisper to each other: "Why do we have to talk about that?"

Others, I suspect, resent Ben's forthrightness and direct approach to civic crises, labor negotiations and racial problems. But none, I dare say, would question his complete honesty and integrity -- his devotion to the task at hand and his abiding love for Akron.

More than any other person, Ben has been most responsible

for bringing new industries to this area -- the result of the original Area Development Committee, the Citizens for Progress and now the Area Progress Board.

But what many people don't know is that Ben Maidenburg is also a warm and compassionate person, unselfish in his thoughts and considerate of human frailties.

Ben has known personal tragedy and along with his gracious wife Jeanne, met it with strength and fortitude.

Ben is a patriot, not in the flag waving sense, but with a tremendous devotion to his country in both war and peace.

Ben is a man of courage who does not run for cover when his home is bombed, nor when he finds himself trying to reason with an angry mob.

To me, Ben has always been a great man to have at your side --



the kind of man you would choose to be in the next foxhole under enemy  
fire.

He has my affection, complete respect and enduring admiration.

And that, ladies and gentlemen -- as I see it -- is Ben, the Man.

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