



TradeMark

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Remembering a good friend and missing twin

<https://www.storiesspace.com/stories/memoirs/trademark.aspx>

I would like to relate to you a little story. As some of you know, if you've read my profile, I did at one time do Civil War reenacting. Shortly after I started, I met another reenactor whose name was Neil. The irony behind this meeting was that we were nearly identical. This attribute we used to full advantage during our years of reenacting. I was a member of the unit who was part of The Iron Brigade from Indiana, while Neil was loosely associated with the unit from Illinois. Even if his unit wasn't at an event, he often attended events we were at just so that he could play. You see Neil played the Fife. He would march at the head of the column playing music as we march off. To illustrate how much we looked alike, about two years after our first encounter, The Iron Brigade Association held a small informal meeting during the national Gettysburg event. It was just to discuss future events and when the elections would be held for the next year. During the meeting, the commander approached me in front of the rest of the battalion. He asked me to start a Drum and Fife Corp for The Iron Brigade. The members of my unit and some of the others in The Iron Brigade knew he had made a mistake and were trying to control their laughter. The conversation went something like this: "I want you to start a Drum and Fife unit for The Iron Brigade". "Who me?" "Yes, you're the Fifer". "You mean Neil?" "Yes, can you do it?" "Why don't you ask him?" "That's what I'm doing. Can you form a unit?" "You want Neil to form a drum and Fife band, right?" It wasn't long before you realized his mistake because most of the battalion was laughing so hard by now. We played on this little miss-identity at almost every event that we attended together. Some reenactors would either create a persona or research a member that was in their unit so that they can speak to the public as that person in the period. Neil and I took it one step further. Somehow we decided to put on a different persona, that of the Smith Brothers. They were the ones that had all the little cough drop packages you can find in drugstores nowadays. In actuality, they started their business shortly after the war. Since the images on the packages of the cough drops showed two bearded men, it was easy to adopt them as our new identities. We went as far as bringing large bags of cough drops and hiding them in our haversack's. We would then walk to the camps passing them out as samples for the business we were going to start after the war. If you are familiar with the packages, under the images of the two bearded man are the words trade and mark under each of the brothers. The Smith Brothers were the first to trademark their product. So Neil took the name Trade, and I assumed the name Mark. "Hello! I'm Trade and this is Mark". "Here you go boys, we'll be selling these after the

war". "They should be available in your local apothecary". "This war ain't going to last forever boys". "They'll take care of your cough. And some say, they help the rheumatism and arthritis". Generally at the end of an event, after spectators had left, things would get a little more relaxed in camp. After we had all eaten our dinner and probably had a frosty beverage or two, most reenactors would sit or lie by the fire, joke around and chat. Neil and I would continue being in first person. Carrying on our new persona's around the campfire. We would sit and regale to each other on the happenings back home and what was going on. Frequently just reading from a blank sheet of paper as if we just received a letter. Some of the conversations we had might have gone like this: "Got another letter from Ma today". "Yeah what does she say this time?" "Pa nearly set the barn on fire". "How he do that?" "Apparently he was hiding his still in there and the fire got out of control". "What happened then?" "Well he was able put the fire out, but in all the commotion he spilled the mash". "So he lost all his corn and sugar then?" "That's not the worst of it". "What else happened?" "The mash ran under the wall of the barn and into the pigsty". "I bet those hogs loved that?" "Ma said they had the happiest hogs in the county, but she's afraid it might taint the meat". "I'll bet Pa can't wait to butcher them hogs to see if it helps the flavor?" "Got another letter today". "Any thing good happening back home?" "Ma heard from Seth the other the day". "What's that no good brother of ours up to now?" "Well he had to run off again. Went into hiding. Something about one of the horses he borrowed". "You mean they're after him for horse stealing again?" "Yep, but he claims it's a case of mistaken identity". "Every time he wandered to town, he seemed to come back on a different horse". "Ma wrote to me today". "What's new on the homestead now?" "She and aunt Sarah aren't speaking anymore". "What she got her feathers all ruffled for now?" "She seems to think it was her recipe that were using for our cough drops?" "Hell. We couldn't use that recipe it tasted like kerosene!" "Yes, but tell that to aunt Sarah". "We had another mail call today and you missed it". "Did we get anything?" "Ma sends her regards. She had news about our sister Abigail". "Abigail certainly is the prettiest girl in the county. She draws boys to her like bees to honey". "She wrote to tell us that our sister was in the family way again". "Doesn't that make the second?" "No, I think it's the third. She had the one before we left, and I told you about the little redheaded girl didn't ?" "I remember now. She had that little black haired boy just before we left. Ma always thought it was from that drummer fella stayed in the barn on that rainy night". "Yep, she thought the little girl came from that red haired Ferguson boy down the road. Remember we used to go down and skinny dip in their pond?" "Yeah, I never knew a girl like to skinny dip so much". And so we went on for 15 or 20 minutes or so just inventing this tale as if it were news from home. Each of us coming up with a new line or story, with the other trying to top him. The scene much like the actual Civil War soldiers would've done during the war. Generally the rest of the reenactors in our camp would quiet down and just sit and listen to us spin our yarns. Eventually more musicians joined other units and Neil was finally able to form a proper Drum and Fife Corp. During this time, I was still an enlisted man in our company. Being of different ranks now, the other reenactors could tell us apart. However, that all changed one day. It seems I missed a meeting and I was elected as the Sgt. Major for The Iron Brigade. As luck would have it, Neil's rank as the head of the band was also Sgt. Major. So for the next two years we we continued our little charade. At one

event on Saturday before the spectators came to the event, we swapped places. So at 8:30 in the morning I answered musicians call while Neil went to form the battalion. Now I can't carry a tune in a bucket, let alone play the Fife. Neil knew nothing about assembling the Battalion even if his life depended on it. It didn't take long for our silly ruse to be discovered and we were quickly sent back to where we should have been. We have both moved on in our lives for various reasons. I do miss his friendship and the pranks we pulled. I don't miss the hard ground we slept on or the wool on a ninety degree day. I guess that's what fond memories are for, just the good things.