Readers Respond to Request for Stories

Sent in by Michael C. Mauro, LS
Culpeper, Virginia

Since I survey for VDOT, we mostly work along the highways and on this particular day it was I-64 in Louisa County, Virginia. The next thing I know, we look up and a van load of prisoners stop and get out to cut brush, which was exactly what I was doing when they arrived. We all had hard hats and vests on and sort of looked alike. Well, I started getting closer to the group and one of the prisoners looked at me and said, “How many years do you have to go?” I could not refuse and answered, “30”, and he said “hoooooweeeee - I only gots two.”

Needless to say, I laughed all the way back to the office and shared that one with many fellow coworkers.

Sent in by Ken Johnson, L.S.
Concordia, Kansas

Here is a story that I have cherished and remembered for over thirty five years, working my way up from hired rear chainman to owner of a small surveying firm.

It begins shortly after starting work for the firm in which I am now a principal and partner. One of my mentors (and at that time partners, in a small three man surveying and engineering firm in rural Kansas) and I, were working on small parcel rural survey. We had searched for several section corner monuments using a magnetic locator and known corner reference ties, and had recovered two out of the four we needed. My mentor, a man in his late fifties, had a saying, “If you have exhausted all of the easy ways to find a monument, then the next step is to get out the shovel and pick and start digging”. Read More

At that time, being new to the profession, I always assumed this meant another two- to-four hour session of back breaking work to locate some stone or piece of stone in the middle of the road that we seem to rarely find. So I exclaimed to him, “What’s the use digging, we never find anything?” I always thought to myself, “what good county maintenance person would allow there to be a stone in the roadway.” Little did I know the significance of those stones at that time. We began to excavate.

My mentor and I had been digging for about 2 hours and we had a five foot by five foot hole, two feet deep and I had just taken a break to get a drink. (Did I mention that it was July in Kansas, about 102° outside with no shade). I was on the way back to the hole from the vehicle, while my partner was cleaning out the loose soil in the excavated hole. He stands up and looks to me and says, “Why don’t you dig out another six to eight inches and we will see what the soil looks like.” (I learned to read soil composition, as well as learned how to use a shovel.) I climbed into the hole, took hold of the sharpshooter shovel and proceeded to attack the soil in the bottom of the hole. I had made maybe one
or two stabs, when I hit the top of large limestone rock with the full force of my stab. With my arm reverberating from the blow, it begins to dawn on me that my mentor is sitting against the other side of the hole snickering under his breath. Then it comes to me that he had already found the top of the stone and had covered it with a little bit of dirt waiting for me to find it. I turned to my mentor and said in a loud retort, “You turkey !!!” At that moment he breaks out in laughter and exclaims, “well, you said we never find anything. Well, today you did !” Over the next thirty plus years, my mentor and friend repeated that story to whomever would listen. My mentor passed away two years ago, at the graceful age of 92. At his family gathering the day before the funeral one of his sons told me that this story was one of the last stories his father told to a group of friends. Not only did it have an impact upon me, and changed the way I conducted field research and how I have taught those working for me, it has also provided great humorous relief, and brought great visual memories to others. He is missed and remembered.