

By James Collins

The massive presses were roaring. The smell of printing ink filled the air, as did the powder from the large sheets of newsprint spinning on huge rollers feeding paper into the presses. The noise was deafening and it permeated the area from the ground floor up to the sixth floor of the 20-story building. The New York Herald Tribune was printing its early morning edition.

Maurice Collins, a.k.a. Morris, was a supervisor for the shift coming into the lobby. It included elevator operators, maintenance people and the security staff. Morris, a very hands on manager, made sure he looked at each person as they arrived up close and personal and did a quick evaluation as to their ability to do their job. The press noises in the lobby were slightly subdued but still graded on everyone's nerves. Vibrations caused by the sound were a massive distraction.

A security guard, arrayed in full uniform including overcoat, hat, and strapped on pistol, walked warily into the lobby up to Morris to officially log in. The smell of alcohol reeked from this man and his unsteady gait attested to the fact that he was inebriated. Morris did not have to be too close to realize that Denny was drunk and could not do his job this night.

“Denny, you been at it again and you're drunk. Go downstairs logout put the pistol back in the locker, come back here to check out and go home.” Denny, without a word, shrugged his shoulders, turned around and went out the back door.

Fifteen minutes later, Denny had not reappeared and Morris decided he had to investigate what happened. He told Pat the elevator man, “You're temporarily in charge until I get back.”

As Morris entered the locker room downstairs, he saw Denny's gun lying on the floor and Denny lying face down next to it.

“Ah you poor dumb drunk, you couldn't even get to the locker before passing out.”

Morris first secured the pistol and put it in his pocket. Then he went over to Denny and rolled him over, planning to pick him up and get him to a couch. As he rolled Denny over, the bloodstain on Denny's chest appeared and Morris realized Denny had shot himself. He grabbed the phone and dialed 911. Then he hit the security alarm, which alerted everyone in the building that there was a problem. People flowed into the area. The night nurse attended to Denny's wound as they waited for the EMTs. Two mounted patrolman, who parked their horses in the garage during lunchtime were immediately available and were the first police on the scene. Within 20 minutes the detectives appeared.

They started taking statements from everyone. When they found out Morris was the first one to find the injured man, he got their undivided attention.

“Morris, according to your statement you found him lying face down on the floor with the pistol off to the side. Where is the pistol now? It’s not visible any place.”

Reaching into his pocket Morris extracted the revolver, handed over to the detective and said, “Here it is. I picked it up to secure it before I knew Denny was shot.”

The fact that Morris had the gun in his pocket changed everything. He was now the prime suspect of an attempted murder and the detective advised him of that fact. The two mounted patrolman who knew Morris well, because they brought their horses there every night for several years told him, “Morris you are in real trouble right now. You better get the owners of the paper involved.”

The Reid family politically connected and known to every politician in New York City, owned the Herald Tribune. Morris had been their head of security for 29 years and had saved many members of the paper from assassin attempts. The night manager of the paper had already contacted them and since they lived in Westchester County they were there in less than 20 minutes.

When the members of this powerful family arrived, the whole tone of the event changed. Mrs. Reid walked into the room, told everyone who she was, and asked, “Who is in charge here?”

“Mrs. Reid, I’m chief detective Connolly from this precinct and I’m in charge of the investigation of this attempted murder.”

“Detective, I’ve known Morris for 29 years and he has been head of our security detail that entire time. He has never done a single thing, which would indicate that he would be capable of attempted murder. I want you to contact the police Commissioner of the city of New York and I want him here within the hour. I know him personally as I as do I know the mayor and the governor. This newspaper is a very powerful machine and I am sure you do not want to be the target of our exposés if we believe that incompetence exhibited in this investigation.”

Within a half hour, the heads of major departments in the city in New York appeared in the New York Tribune locker room. After much discussion, the charges against Morris were dropped based on the pressure brought by the Reid family and Morris was allowed to go home.

The next day Denny revived at the hospital and gave statements indicating that he had taken the gun out of his pocket intending to put it in the locker when he dropped it and it fired. The case was formerly closed and any charges or questions vanished. The company

then sent Denny to AA on a regular basis to help him with his drinking problem. This event is still a story in the Collins family.

THE END