

PREFACE

(Portland, Oregon)

It was a dark and stormy night. Well, almost. It was dark and stormy all right, but a glance at my watch revealed that it was only 2:15pm. Heavy rain was pouring down from an angry, dark gray sky. At this moment, I made the one (and only, I hope) mistake of my Postal Carrier career. The date was November 19th, 1991, and as I was shuffling through some mail while walking along a sidewalk, I inadvertently brushed an envelope out of my mailbag. It fell carelessly to the ground. Time slowed down for what seemed an eternity. To my horror, the envelope fell face down smack in the middle of a deep puddle. As I flung out my hand to retrieve it, I only made matters worse by clumsily pushing it deeper into the puddle before I could remove it completely. The entire envelope and the letter inside were thoroughly soaked. Unfortunately, the recipient's address had smeared into an ink mess (must've been addressed with an inferior marker) and was completely illegible. However, the *return* address was a pre-printed label... and the ink on that label did not smear at all. It read:

The Snodgrass Observatory
Wallace and Virgillian Snodgrass
P.O. Box 150
Ashland, Oregon 97520

Wallace and Virgillian Snodgrass. *Wallace and Virgillian*. Suddenly, something clicked. I remembered those guys! I went through the same school system as they did! And there was not a chance in Hades that *this* Wally and Virgil was not the *right* Wally and Virgil. And seeing "The Snodgrass Observatory" on the label only clinched it. Throughout junior high and high school, Wallace and Virgillian were always talking about having a building of their own in which to observe... soil.

Wally and Virgil were quite different from the rest of us. In junior high, they began drifting apart from the crowd, spending a lot of time alone... together. And an interesting thing about their close friendship is that although they shared the same last name, they weren't even related.

To tell you the truth, I always felt compassion for those guys. They were "outcasts," but they were good guys. They were eccentric and misunderstood, but I don't think they ever intentionally hurt

anyone. And, since I was a complete dunce when it came to science, both Wally and Virgil helped me in my science courses through the years. Without their help, I'm not sure if I would have passed some of those courses.

I didn't recall Wallace ever having any major skirmishes with any of the other boys in school, but Virgil was a different story. That guy was picked on quite a bit. Keep in mind that this was the early 80's. There weren't a bunch of "anti-bullying" measures in place, so if you were picked on and didn't fight back... well, you were the easiest target. Having an odd name like "Virgillian" certainly didn't help matters.

There was a certain incident I remembered all too well. One day during recess in the distance, I overheard a bunch of guys taunting poor Virgil. I walked around the corner of the junior high building, and saw several boys pushing Virgil around. They were clearly making fun of Virgil (yet again) for his love for soil. They even grabbed him and were shoving his face in the dirt. I felt like I should do something, but I just wasn't courageous enough. And I wish it were all about the fear of my own physical harm. But it wasn't. Ashamedly, it was much more about appearing "uncool" by helping out an outcast. The shame I felt for not helping Virgil weighed on me for a long time after that.

There was something very peculiar about that incident, though. After a while of getting his face shoved in the dirt, Virgil's cries became quieter and quieter. And, after the sobbing stopped completely, I could swear... to this day... that I saw a smile on Virgil's face. But the boys were still rubbing his face in the ground.

After my mail route that stormy day in 1991, I went home feeling sad and guilty. I talked with my wife about the dropped letter and the memories it stirred inside of me. We both agreed that it would be best to put the incident to rest altogether.

But it was easier said than done. From that point on, whenever I'd be on my route, images of Wallace and Virgillian kept fleeting across my mind. I thought that eventually, those images would die down or go away completely. After a week and a half, though, the situation remained the same. I knew that I had to redeem myself.

Since I kept the Snodgrass envelope back at my house, I finally decided to make amends and do the right thing. After a little bit of research, I found a phone number for Wally. When I called his listed

number to explain the situation, *Virgil* answered the phone. Not only that, but he answered with, “Snodgrass Observatory. This is Virgil. How may I provide you with excellent customer service?” (Sounds like corporate-mandated customer service lingo. I hope it doesn’t catch on.)

To make a long story short, I reintroduced myself. He remembered me, and he was excited to hear from a former classmate who had never given him grief for his eccentricities. Suddenly, Wally picked up another phone (at the Observatory, I imagine) and we all started chatting away like old friends. I explained the dropped envelope incident to them, and fortunately, they were not too upset about it. They told me that they were seeking some kind of societal interest in their research, and had sent a letter to ten soil organizations throughout the United States. The envelope that I had dropped was one of those ten. As I found out later, only one of the nine letters that had actually reached its destination got a response. The Snodgrasses were quite saddened by this fact, but said that they would press on with their research. I wondered to myself: If the dropped letter had reached its intended location, might they have received *another* response? Could that extra response have amounted to a “gold mine” of interest and support?

Then it hit me. Maybe I could help to get their research out into the public by other means. Truth be told, I felt that I owed it to them, not only due to my postal faux pas, but also due to the gnawing feeling that I never properly reciprocated all of their help in those science courses in school. And I still felt that I should have done something — *anything* — to stop all of Virgil's abuse in junior high and high school.

After a very long conversation, I convinced the Snodgrasses to start sending their research to me. Since I really didn’t know much about soil, I couldn’t evaluate the validity of their research on my own. But I figured that if I somehow gathered enough of that research, I might be able to get their work published for the whole world to see. And that would be a great day of redemption for all of us.

Wally and Virgil were surprisingly hesitant at first, citing that they were very careful about “revealing the secrets of groundbreaking (their pun, not mine) soil research” to the general public. They brought up concerns of plagiarism and a lack of monetary compensation for their hard work. But finally, the Snodgrasses relented, and decided that it would really be in their best interest to release their research to the public.

Contacts used in this book include the Snodgrasses' parents, a few workers at the Observatory, former teachers and colleagues, and other contacts in the community. Pre-Observatory letters and journals have also been submitted by the Snodgrass parents (both pairs).

Many of the terms and vernacular used by the Snodgrasses in this book are esoteric in nature and cannot be found in any dictionary, encyclopedia, or science book. A glossary is included as an appendix to the book.

Fifteen years have passed since that fateful stormy day in November. Believe it or not, it has taken that long to gather all of the Snodgrass writings and place them--- as coherently as possible, in the most appropriate order as possible-- in a book suitable for publication.

Every attempt has been made to present the Snodgrasses' texts and anecdotes in their original unabashed form, as Wally and Virgil would have it no other way. Of course, being a proud member of a Postal Carrier team, I wouldn't have it any other way, either. Again, since science, for the most part, still remains an absolute mystery to me, I cannot judge the validity of the Snodgrasses' research. That job is yours. And, when you think about it, that's really what this book is all about.

Now, submitted for your perusal and edification, is page after page of the Snodgrasses' peculiar writings, gathered and transcribed with the dedicated precision of a Postal Carrier... *down to the letter*.

That pun is mine.

--Glenn R. Coxfield
February, 2007

P.S. Just in case you were wondering, the "ZIP" in "zip code" stands for "Zone Improvement Program". People have asked me that question so many times, I'm a little tired of repeating myself. So there it is in print.

P.P.S. To view a copy of the actual letter that I dropped, turn to page 116.

OBSERVATORY MISSION STATEMENT

We, Wallace and Virgillian Snodgrass, Boris Viesbierlick, Phleufington P. Phlargerlnarf, Jim Smith, and our many Snodworkers and Soil Associates, will, with all sincere diligence and perspicacity, dedicate ourselves to the pursuit of both normal and paranormal soils throughout the universe, never ceasing in our drive to develop and divulge fruitful soil research for the sake of any and many. In doing so, we will wear many hats (excluding Bolshevik hats) and think outside the box (even outside the solar system at times), while practicing strong communication (not too strong; cuss is not tolerated) and holding to the notion that there is no "i" in the word "team". We will proactively keep our eyes on the bottom line, while establishing synergy among departmental colleagues and coworkers. We will not speak of problems, but of solutions, regardless of working conditions, for there is no time to waste when the soils beckon.