

## He made Orville's shoes shine

By Dale Huffman  
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Let's add another interesting chapter in the personal stories about Orville Wright and the folks still living in our city who had an opportunity to meet him.

As the community celebrates the invention of flight that is the legacy of Orville and his brother, Wilbur, there are those among us who can say that along the way they had a chance to be up close and personal with Orville who lived until 1948.

But, as John Wohlslagel, 86, of Centerville points out, not too close and not too personal.

For a period of three years when he was a teenager, John was the young man who shined Orville's shoes on almost a daily basis.

"I lived on what we called the West Side in Dayton as a child and it was a great place to grow up," John said. "Our family had a home at 1230 W. Second between North Broadway and Williams and I was able to get a part-time job. I worked at a tailor and dry cleaning shop located at 1211 W. Third St. I did odd jobs there, which included shining shoes."

John continued, "Orville Wright's office and work shop was just around the corner at 15 N. Broadway and French Lane."

He said he would often see Orville arriving at work at about 9 a.m. and that sometimes he would have a nephew with him.

"About 3:30 p.m. in the afternoon, Orville usually came in for a shoe shine. He was always dressed immaculately. After he got seated up on the shoe shine stand I would roll up his pant cuffs above his ankles to keep the soap from getting on his pants. In the cold of winter, I noticed that he would be wearing his long underwear tucked in his socks just like mine were."

John said he always tried to do the best he could at every job he did, including shining shoes. He also tried to bring some fun to each chore.

"At first I would try to whip the shoe shine rag around playing a kind of 'tune' when I shined Orville's shoes," he said. "Thought it might get me a nice tip."

It didn't work, he said. "I sensed that Orville was not impressed with my efforts to play a 'tune.' I got so I could read him like a book. His attitude was - 'get on with it and don't play around.' He was a no-nonsense guy."

According to John, Orville was very particular about his shine. "He always looked carefully all over his shoes to see if they were shined properly. He checked to see if there were dull spots. Then when he got down from the stand I would brush his clothes with a whisk broom."

John said, "He was never a real friendly guy. I don't remember that he smiled or talked much. But we got along in our understated way, and the important thing was, he always came back."

As a teenager shining shoes, John said he just knew that Orville was a special man who had earned a place in world history. Meeting him, John feels, could have been the inspiration that led to his career.

For 35 years, John worked successfully designing engines for airplanes at Wright-Patterson Air Force base.

During his life, John accomplished something wonderful that Orville missed out on. He married his Roosevelt High School sweetheart, Mary, and they have shared 65 years together.

And still to this day, John Wohlsigel says he remains in awe of the distinguished man in the three-piece suit who quietly watched as he flipped a cloth on his shoes all those years ago.

Oh, by the way. The shoe shine in those days cost a dime.

Orville always tipped John a nickel.

Dale Huffman, aka Capt. Flight, wants story ideas. This column is for you. Have a story about your child? Have you seen the works of a good Samaritan? Do you want to share a special day or event coming up? E-mail Dale at [dhuffman@DaytonDailyNews.com](mailto:dhuffman@DaytonDailyNews.com) or write to him at 45 S. Ludlow St., Dayton, OH 45402. Fax: 225-2489. Phone: 225-2272.

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