

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE.....?

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I wanted to be a bus driver!

My dad set up a steering wheel contraption (using the front wheel and axle from an Irish-Mail) for me, and I would spend hours mentally running the No. 27 South Cumminsville route through the streets of Cincinnati. I knew every street name (drivers used to call out the streets so riders knew when their stop was coming up), every turn and every stop. I even had a lever to operate the non-existent doors. And I carried on conversation with imaginary riders and other drivers; even offered transfers and change from a changer.

Man, what an imagination!

But we know people who as youngsters had other "dreams"-- firefighter, nurse, teacher, football/baseball player, etc. My personal ambition changed from bus driver to bank teller (like my dad) to accountant to... architect! Nobody I remember (except Ed Norton) ever dreamed of being a sewer worker, garbage man, or... a spec writer!

Funny thing, all this is pretty much true still! Bus drivers are now folks who need a job and find some attraction in the job, but I don't think many kids "dream" of that work. Oh, the firefighter is still a "biggie" among boys, along with police officer, and Marine (even with the war). Girls have many of the same dreams from years past, but have added lawyer, company owner, school principal, firefighter, police officer and other higher ambitions to their radar scopes. Architect and engineer have been added to the female list, even as have carpenter, electrician, and other trade work.

But spec writer still seems to elude the list for either group.

This, of course, directly reflects the lack of familiarity with the work of the design professions, and the staff positions involved. The design professions are not all that well known throughout the general population and so their work and their workers since (?) exist in a shadowy fringe-- rather remote and well hidden.

Well, again things have not changed all that much over the years. Specifications were part of the Louis Sullivan office when Frank Lloyd Wright worked there. But who wrote them? Chances are, not Wright. Since that era every architectural and engineering office has had a spec writing function "imbedded" in the staff profile and physically remote to the mainstream work.

Offices and staffs have changed, moved forward, been refined, have taken new direction, evolved and certainly have acquired new skills, levels of expertise, equipment and techniques. It takes a good amount of time and experienced insight to view and equate today's professional office with those in the '50s, the '30s, and with Sullivan's. But, you know, the fundamental work effort is exactly the same! Procedures, methods, and work products may look different and may come about in differing ways, but they are very much the same as in the early days.

This includes specifications, most certainly. But the basic direction and determination of the specification writer has NOT changed one iota—it is the very same in level of effort, and desire to create the best possible product and project. Spec writers now are outside hires more often and are not promoted "up from the ranks" as in the past; many are not firm principals as they were in the past. Year by year the writers are changing in many ways--why, there are even a very high number of excellent female writers!

But the sub-profession of specification writing is still wanting. It is wanting for the dream of the youngster; the desire to be. Many come to spec writing by default or by happenstance--few by direct

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dedicated effort. But we must face one truism--chances of some tow-headed boy, or some dainty little girl "dreaming" of being a spec writer is all but non-existent. Not happening.

Now that gives us the impetus to seek out other sources. And the best of those, it appears, is within the professional curricula of colleges and perhaps in architectural and engineering orientation programs in secondary and junior high schools.

We need to plant seeds, now, so we can harvest the best in years to come. We need to keep this process going and not stop.

"Next stop--Beamer Street; Beamer!"