

Washburne Marine Products in Fact and Fiction

My company name was a catch-all umbrella for my assorted ventures, including several kayak and canoe carts, assorted short-lived kayak widgets, kayak books, and tidal current publications. Since I had no idea what other directions I might go in, it seemed properly amorphous and united only by the saltwater element. It also gave the sometimes useful impression of being a much more substantial company.

That worked. Somehow, Washburne Marine Products got on a calling list which alleged that I owned a large fleet of logging trucks.



I got three sales calls over a few weeks from different firms offering products for my trucks. I cleared up what I really was and the futility of trying to sell me anything, but I expected more of them. So I prepared a little revenge. What follows was a real conversation, and one of my proudest achievements.

A boisterous southerner called. Probably envisioning me with my boots on my grimy cluttered desk in my office surrounded by fly-specked log-truck pinup calendars, he opened by establishing manly rapport with “How ‘bout them Seahawks!” and other football babble. This falling flat, he got to the point.

“Randel, I’ve got a deal on (solvent or something) that will blow you away. It ships six drums to the pallet. How many pallets do you think you could use?”

“Use for what?”

“For your trucks.”

“I don’t have any trucks.”

“But...”

“This is a ballet school.”

“What...you’re kidding!”

“No I’m not kidding. Do you have something against ballet?”

“Well, no...” Choking and coughing. “But... ‘Marine Products’?”

“Our products are young men and women coming out of the Marine Corps who wish to retrain themselves as professional ballet dancers. Our current class is preparing for their final revue. It’s open to the public here in Seattle, and you should come. It’s called Semper Follies.”

Thus stretched to ludicrous limits, I came clean. The salesman was anxious to end our conversation, vowing never to call again.

My log trucks never received another cold call. Just as well.