

By Way of Introduction

Greetings, dear reader!

We are Carolyn and Joel Senter from Cincinnati and, in addition to being the "landlords" of this Web site, we are the proprietors of a small mail-order house called Classic Specialties, through which we offer for sale "...various and sundry items appertaining to Mr. Sherlock Holmes and his times."

You can imagine what difficulties we encounter at social gatherings when the inevitable question — "So, what do you do?" — comes up.

For us, such a conversation might go like this: "Hi, pleased to meet you.

My name is Joe Doaks," says the recently-met stranger.

"Joel Senter, and this is my wife, Carolyn. Nice to meet you, too."

For some reason, it seems to be very important in our culture to establish other people's roles in the world as soon as possible after meeting a person.

Hence, the next line in the conversation often goes something like, "I manufacture grommets for refrigerator drip pans and Bengal tiger muzzles.

What do *you* do?"

We usually look at each other, with some apprehension, and then one of us tentatively announces, "Well, we're in the mail order business," hoping against hope that this will

be a sufficient revelation and end the interrogation.

But it rarely forestalls the next question: "Oh, what do you sell?"

After a moment's hesitation: "Sherlock Holmes stuff," we say, often in unison.

Now, at this point, our conversation partner generally makes one of three responses, i.e., (1) "Uh, yeah, right," after which he (she) turns away and wanders off to engage in conversation with more rational people; or (2) "Great, Marge (George) and I have been thinking about relocating and maybe you can help us out since you are in the selling homes business, and all..."; or (3) after momentarily looking around to see if there might be a socially graceful way to escape these lunatics (and finding none):

"What an unusual occupation. However did you *get into that* business?"

As a matter of fact, we often get this #3 question even from our friends and customers who are sophisticated enough so as not to ask, "Was Sherlock Holmes a real person or a fictional character?" (We understand that the proper answer to this question is "Yes.")

We always begin with, "Well, it was more or less of an accident; we never actually intended to do it."

Then the explanation comes: It all began with a sweater.

Joel had been a Sherlock Holmes fan since his high school days when he was introduced to "The Red-Headed League" through an English literature book.

(Carolyn says that her interest in Holmes didn't start in high school because she went to a college preparatory program and they never did anything interesting!)

Carolyn had been both an amateur and professional knitter for many years, so one year she made a Sherlock Holmes sweater for Joel.

The sweater had silhouettes of Holmes and Watson, a replica of Mr. Holmes signature, a "speckled band" around the waist, a string of dancing men (which no one has yet deciphered), and assorted other "Sherlockiana" either knitted, or appliquéd, onto the sweater. In 1987, we attended the Friends of Old Time Radio convention in Newark, New Jersey.

There we met a fellow Sherlockian named Bill Nadel.

He learned of the sweater and asked Carolyn if she would make one for him.

She said, in essence, "No, I spent months on that sweater and now I know better than to undertake such a project again."

However, because Bill is such a nice guy, Carolyn later decided to see if Bill would be pleased with a much simpler garment, so she made a scarf and sent it to him.

Subsequently, Bill (now Bill Nadel, BSI) wore the scarf to some Sherlockian functions.

As a result, some other folks in the New York area contacted Carolyn to ask if she would make scarves for them, too.

She complied and made a few scarves, mostly for Bill's New York area compatriots.

The scarves were well received.

Eventually, it occurred to Joel and I that Sherlockians elsewhere might like to have some of these scarves, so we created a "line" of scarves with Sherlockian motifs, including the *Speckled Band* scarf, the *Empty House* scarf, the *Sign of the Four* scarf, and others.

We bought an ad in the *Baker Street Journal* and sent out an advertising mailer to a few clubs and scions.

There were a few responses, so we expanded our product "line" to include such things as a "battle at Reichenbach sweater jacket" and a "*Speckled Band* bell rope."

Even though we were never swamped with orders, there was sufficient interest to render the required work more than we could handle by ourselves.

At about the time the work load started to become unmanageable, some creators of other Sherlockian products (lapel pins, books, monographs, art work, etc.) started to become aware of our existence

and contacted us to see if we could help them market their items, too. Very slowly, and very selectively, we began to market such articles for others.

Even though we do still create many items ourselves (e.g., wearing apparel, a Sherlock Holmes decorative banner, the famous "John Bennett Shawls" awarded at Minneapolis last year, a hand-carved deerstalker, a new book, etc.), we focus more on the marketing aspect, and our contact with Sherlockians and their products continues to grow even now.

This is not only a pleasure for us, but, we think, an advantage to the global Sherlockian Community.

You see, as "brokers" for all matter of items, we have created a conduit of communication among Sherlockians all over the world.

Now people who would never have known each other are not only aware of each other's products, but more importantly, they are aware of each other! Joel has had articles published in a Japanese journal; a woman in Vermont is donating a unique painting of Mr. Holmes to the Sherlock Holmes' Practical Preservationists' library in St. Louis; small-run and privately-published Sherlockian books appear not only on the pages of our publications but on the shelves of a few specialty book stores; a Canadian author has had the opportunity to have his work distributed as a "book on tape"; lapel pins from

England and Spain wind up in Japan and California; and on and on. Consequently, we think of our Classic Specialties organization as more than a purely commercial enterprise.

We feel we have created communication channels among Sherlockians which would not otherwise have existed! So that's pretty much the story.

We hope that this answers any questions you might have had and that we haven't bored you with more information than you really needed.

We did want to say, however, thanks to Bill Nadel, BSI. Very sincerely yours, Carolyn and Joel Senter Classic Specialties

PS: As long as this Web site exists, we plan to include a new feature article of interest to Sherlockians every month or so.

We personally wrote this first article as a vehicle of introduction (both for us, personally, and our enterprise) directed mostly to our new CyberFriends.

In the future, we hope to be able to offer articles authored by other Sherlockians from all around the world.

If you have a short article which you think might be of interest to other Sherlock Holmes fans, we would be pleased to consider it for inclusion in this Web site.