



Up Front

The Bard and the Broad.
By C.J. Hadley

My home was in a big and filthy coal and steel town housing a couple of million consumptives. During those times and World War II, most of our fellow Brits died coughing. My dad often rode his bicycle across cobblestone streets to get to work at Imperial Chemical Industries as a clerk. His handwriting was beautiful and there were no machines for paperwork. On really bad days, he rode the double-decker yellow-and-blue bus.

My dad's knees were bad from playing rough rugby in his youth and he wasn't accepted in the Army during that war so he worked as a fireman at night. He and his buddies even came to our rented, guinea-a-month semi-detached after a German incendiary crashed through our roof and landed in the living room. Dad put that bomb in his bike basket and took it to work the next morning to show his mates, until his boss yelled: "You bloody idiot, Bert, that bomb hasn't exploded! It's still live!"

My mother worked at Chance Brothers' glass factory. But I was lucky. My uncle, George Shakespeare, ran "Shakespeare's Fruits and Vegetables" in Bournville, a 30-minute bus ride from home. Long before dawn each morning Uncle George (our only relative who owned a vehicle) took his little truck downtown Birmingham to buy his goods from New Street's produce market. (Birmingham's Covent Garden.) When he got back to Bournville, he unfolded his store into the street, put up his canvas covering, dragged out boxes of fruit and veggies and arranged them in attractive layers to encourage passersby to buy his agriculture. He packed up the whole thing every night then hit "repeat."

On Saturdays, from about age 13, I was his assistant. It was almost always cold and raining. No place in that stand was ever warm enough and bronchitis was more common than spuds. Knowing that I was violently opposed to onions, whenever a woman approached who might buy such a dreaded veggie, Uncle George would say, "Now, Caroline, be a good girl, go to the back of the shop until Mrs. Copperfield has gone."

During my time at Kings Norton Grammar School for Girls in Bournville, which lay next to Cadbury's chocolate factory, I was forced to study William Shakespeare's "Henry V." I didn't understand a word of it but old Shakespeare's

home was only 17 miles away in Stratford-upon-Avon and I thought perhaps we were related so I rode my blue bike out there as often as I could. I loitered outside Ann Hathaway's cottage (she was "The Bard's" wife) or leaned against the bricks that house the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. I imagined the actors inside, dressed in period costumes, and thought if I stood there long

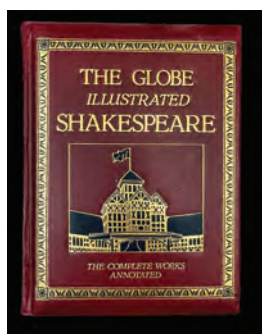
enough someone would invite me in and I might learn something by osmosis. That never happened but a young man in white, wearing a boater, sometimes offered me a short ride on his punt because I showed up alone so often and he felt sorry for me. I still have a photo of a

punter in my RANGE office.

In this issue, RANGE contributor Chris Conrad dragged me back to Shakespeare (see page 38) and shares the fact that mountain man Jim Bridger was a much better and brighter Shakespeare fan than I was. I did buy "The Globe Illustrated Shakespeare" (his complete works) many decades ago and it is a treasured part of my library.

Who knew? Life is extraordinary and there seems to be a reason for everything. I started my work life in agriculture by accident—and am thrilled to have something in common with Jim Bridger—and I am ending my work life in agriculture, producing RANGE for decades as an advocate for farmers and ranchers to try to help keep them "out there."

What could be better? I think my lovely Uncle George Shakespeare—who introduced me to pomegranates and celery and protected me from women who liked onions—would be pleased. ■



This gorgeous book, available online, was printed in Italy.

► *Pomegranates often appear in art. This is "Madonna of the Pomegranate" (with baby Jesus) by Sandro Botticelli in 1487.*

► *A River Avon punter offers a quiet ride.*

