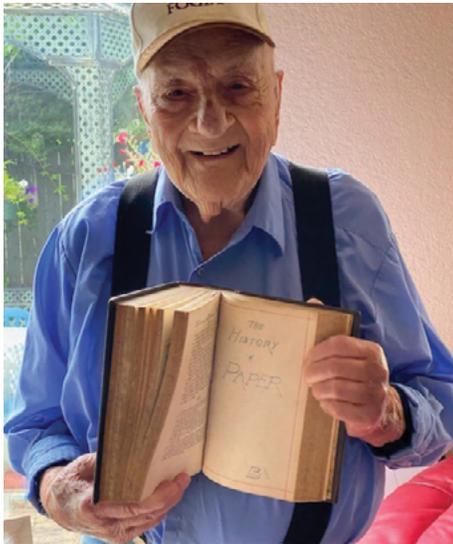


GPO's Longest-Living Employee Says the Agency Saved His Life



Former GPO Bookbinder Bernie Berman, who is 101 years old, holds up a book he bound during his time at GPO.

When he was a senior in high school, Bernie Berman (now 101 years old) took a test in Washington, D.C. for an apprenticeship at the Government Printing Office. For three years, he heard nothing back. When he graduated from high school in 1936 in the height of the Great Depression, he began working odd jobs such as selling sandwiches to factory workers. He worked 6.5 days a week for \$7–\$8 per week. His family's once thriving real estate and mortgage business, like many others, had collapsed after the stock market crash of 1929. Finally, in 1938, GPO contacted Berman to see if he was still interested in the apprenticeship that he had applied for three years earlier. Berman accepted and moved from Philadelphia to live with his uncle who had a home in Northwest D.C.

And so, Berman joined the GPO apprenticeship class of 1938, a small class of only 50 trainees. (For comparison's sake, the previous year's class had 100).

"It was quite intense," says Berman of the apprenticeship program. "They crammed in training on all the various departments, including maintenance, proofreading, printing, and binding, in just six months. My proclivity was for bookbinding. I always liked to work with my hands."

When his apprenticeship was over, Berman was hired as a GPO Bookbinder making \$15 a week, working five days a

week on the day shift.

"GPO saved my life," says Berman. "It gave me a good paying job in the height of the Great Depression. Plus, working there, I became an expert in the printing machines that I needed to be familiar with for my work in the Navy. That printing knowledge really helped me excel in the Navy."

The day after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Berman enlisted in the Navy. He was sworn into the Navy in 1942 at the Anacostia Naval Base and was told to report to the Communications Division.

"I walked in the door and there in front of me was all the equipment — bindery equipment, printing presses, stitchers, collators, folders, cutters — that I had worked on at GPO," says Berman. "I ended up teaching the equipment to a lot of men and women in the Navy because I was familiar with it from my years at GPO."

When he was first inducted, the Navy didn't have a printer classification. Thanks to his expertise in GPO's printing equipment, Berman was eventually promoted to First Class Printer, a title the Navy created for him.

"Whenever the Department of the Navy needed military codes, we made them," says Berman. "Then in 1943, the Navy decided to open up a printing plant

in Australia. They selected me to get it up and running. They gave me a big barn and sent all the equipment from D.C. We ran three shifts, seven days a week. I didn't know what an honor it was at the time."

He returned to the United States in July of 1945 and began working at GPO again, this time working night shifts on the cutting machines.

Berman says that while at GPO, he particularly enjoyed the intricacy of marbling. He recalls making two books complete with ostrich skin, gilded edges, and marbled insides for Speaker Samuel Rayburn when he became the new speaker of the house. The books, which included congratulatory messages to the new Speaker, took about two weeks to complete.

While at GPO, Berman also rebound 150-year-old books from the Library of Congress so the books were preserved, bound 40 Congressional Record books per week, and cut many postcards for the Post Office. At the time, post cards were just two cents.

Another GPO job that stands out in his mind? Making wallets and coin purses for First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Berman says of his work for the First Lady, "it made me feel quite important."

Berman continued working at GPO until 1954, when he made the move out west to California.

Today, he lives in Springfield, Oregon where he volunteers for Meals on Wheels.

"I drive two days a week and the people I drive for are all much younger than I am," says Berman. "I am thankful for my good fortune."

At 101 years old, he is very much with the times, texting on his iPhone, emailing, and using Google. At the encouragement of his grandkids, he is currently writing an autobiography. He has three daughters, eight grandchildren, 20 great-grandchildren, and four great-great-grandchildren. Berman says his three secrets to longevity are good genes, not allowing stress to bother him, and having phenomenal people in his life.

"I do not allow stress or worry in my life," says Berman. "I just take it one day at a time. I can do anything I did when I was 18 years old, except a little slower."



While he was an apprentice, Berman wrote a column for the Apprentice Newspaper, *The AGPO*. His column was called the *Bindery Bull-iten*.