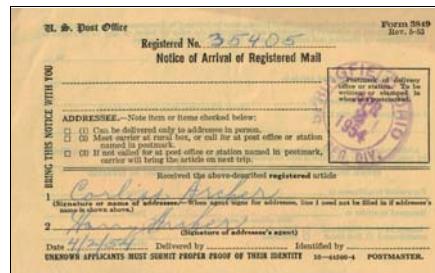


Special Delivery

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Downsizing at a certain age after retirement, one considers leftovers from youthful pursuits. I was a stamp collector. I didn't want to relive that activity, so my wife inspected masses of stuff and donated most of it to charity. She found an odd item: a letter from Dexter Franklin to Corliss Archer in an envelope with a special-delivery stamp postmarked 2 April 1954 but never opened, with a notice of arrival. She asked, was that a *special stamp*?



No, but it certainly reflected a *special event* in that year. I had been drafted into the cast of my ninth-grade class play, *Meet Corliss Archer*, at Hayward Junior High School in Springfield, Ohio. The previous semester, my English teacher, Mrs. Berger, had taught me to orate by dressing me as Abraham Lincoln—she thought that artificially bearded I'd resemble him—and having me re-enact his Gettysburg Address for a school assembly. *Corliss* should teach me even more tricks that I'd need later in life. The play was based on a book and popular radio/TV serials about teenagers. Mrs. Berger cast me as Corliss's father Harry, like Lincoln a lawyer.

In the play, Corliss's boyfriend Dexter invites her to their school prom by sending her a special-delivery letter. We needed a prop, an authentic letter. My father provided it. He was the dead-letter clerk at the post office, who processed all undeliverable mail. He put a blank sheet in an envelope with an address like that in the play, and sent it registered to Corliss with a special delivery stamp. That address did not exist in Springfield, so of course the letter eventually came back to him at the post office! He provided it for the play.



Acting in junior-high school certainly taught me delivery techniques that I used throughout my career as a professor, and something else very special: how to handle acute public embarrassment. Not just as Lincoln, but as Harry Archer. At the end of the play, I had to kiss Mrs. Archer, with a flamboyant swooping gesture, front and center. A *special delivery* for Mrs. Archer, too!