MEN OF LETTERS LONGTIME REPAIRMAN STAYS TRUE TO TYPE

ONE morning in the middle of last century, Paul Schweitzer's father told him, "Tomorrow, you'll come to work with me."

Paul, just off a three-year stint in the Navy, agreed to join his father, but with a caveat: "I'm only going to do this until I figure out what I'm going to be when I grow up."

That was in 1959. Today, Paul is still running the business his late father founded in 1932, the Gramercy Typewriter Co.

Ink may not have been in Paul's blood, but the transition was natural. In addition to running the Manhattan shop, his father did repairs in the basement of their home in Midwood, Brooklyn, and by age 10, Paul was cleaning typewriters and spooling ribbons.

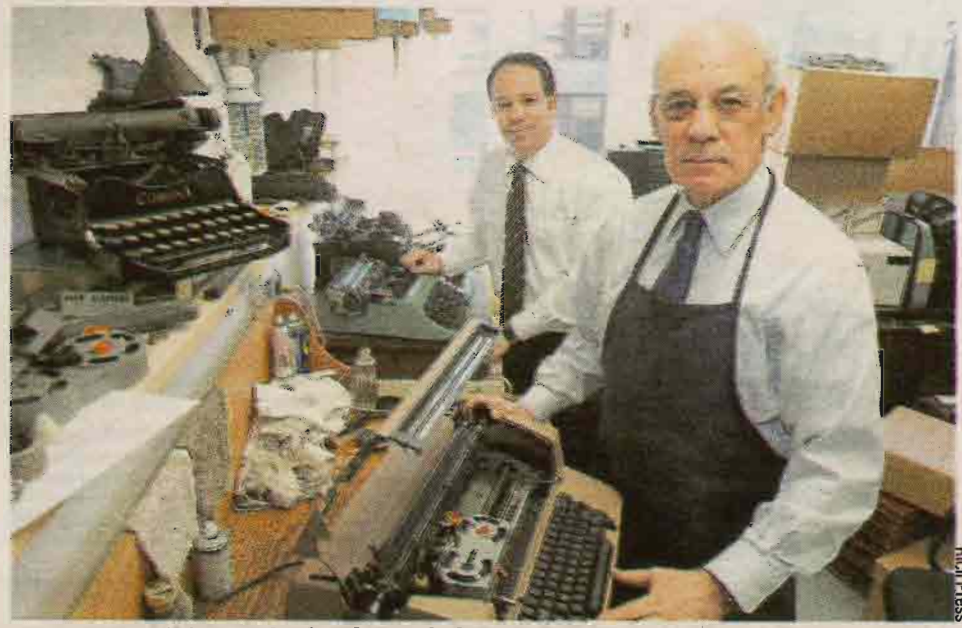
Schweitzer took over the shop when his father retired in 1962. At that time, the telephone directory had six pages listing typewriter repair shops. "There could have been easily 50 companies in the city," he says.

The first big shift came in the 1960s, when electronic models took over. But it was the computer era that sounded the death knell. Sales went first, and repairs inevitably dried up, says Schweitzer. "Slowly but surely, the businesses closed."

Today, despite the name, only a fraction of Gramercy's business is typewriters; the rest is fax machines and printers. Schweitzer has two workers who do those, but nobody wants to learn typewriter repair.

"There's going to be nobody after my generation," says Schweitzer, who's tall and soft-spoken, with the slight stoop of someone who's spent his career bent over machines.

Already, old machines from around the country get shipped to the office on Fifth Avenue where Gramercy recently moved after decades in the nearby Flatiron Building. Mostly what they want is a good cleaning (which they get in a box-shaped chemical bath, its lid dark with age) and a tuneup: parts adjusted, keys aligned, ribbons replaced.



Rich Press

A KEY PROFESSION: Paul Schweitzer's father started Gramercy Typewriter Co. in 1932.

Along with old-timers, clients include younger people drawn to the antiquated machines. Among them is Wendy Krabbe, an artist who lugged in a 1930s model on a recent afternoon. Schweitzer leaned over it to assess the damage, his movements quick and sure. He quoted a price and she broke into a smile.

"Fantastic," she said. "I'm excited."

William James, a retired stage manager, came in looking for a used machine he needed to redo his Rolodex. Schweitzer produced a vintage Olivetti, and James beamed.

"That's what I had! An Olivetti," he said, bending down to test it. "Perfect. Perfect."

That, Schweitzer says, is what gives him joy. People "love their typewriters," he says.

But while there's no typewriter he can't fix, he can't actually use them. "I've never learned how to type," he admits.

It's not urgent. After all this time, Schweitzer says, "I'm still trying to figure out what I'm going to be." — *Seánan Forbes*