

Sons In The Shadow

Surviving The Family Business As An SOB*

*Son Of The Boss

With Commentary by John B. Babcock

Former CEO and Executive VP of Park Communications, Inc.

Copyright © 2012 Roy H. Park, Jr.

• • •

“Congratulations on a splendid book. We're never done with our study of people and Park has written a great one.” – **P.J. O'Rourke**, Author, Peterborough, NH

“The book spoke to me because of its universality. I believe that history will remark it as unique.” - **John Siegfried**, retired attorney, Cleveland, OH

We readers can all reflect on it and see ourselves in it, and better understand the elusiveness of finding the truth in human relationships.” – **Roger O'Neil**, London, England

“If character is forged on the anvil of adversity, Roy H. Park, Jr.'s story of compassion and accomplishment is especially compelling.” – **Roger Sibley**, Executive Director, Franziska Racker Centers, Ithaca, NY

“The book was a trip through self awareness.” – **Dr. Frank Sparks**, New Canaan, CT

“When I read *Sons in the Shadow* I could not put the book down.” **Louis S. Gimbel, 4th**, Greenwich, CT

“*Sons in the Shadow* is a wonderful book, written with a very daring sense of honesty. Very moving and enjoyable read!” – **Roger Fernandez**, Glendale, CA

• • •

For My Wife, Mother, Children and Grandchildren,
and the Father who inspired this work.

And to my good friend and co-author, John B. Babcock, who died on April 12, 2008, just before this book was published. He dedicated this work to his late wife, Nancy, and daughters, Susan, Nancy and Jeanne.

Roy H. Park, Jr.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: HEARSAY AND HISTORY

CHAPTER 2: BRANCHING OUT

CHAPTER 3: THE DUNCAN HINES CONNECTION

CHAPTER 4: WHERE I CAME IN

CHAPTER 5: TO FRESH WOODS AND PASTURES NEW

CHAPTER 6: A SECOND CHANCE

CHAPTER 7: REVERSE JUDGMENT— MY FIRST TWENTY-ONE YEARS

CHAPTER 8: THE GUIDEBOOKS END

CHAPTER 9: GRADUATING INTO LIFE

CHAPTER 10: MADISON AVENUE HERE I COME

CHAPTER 11: RETURN TO NEW YORK

CHAPTER 12: ONE-ON-ONE

CHAPTER 13: BUILDING A BUSINESS EMPIRE

CHAPTER 14: THE BIG DESK

CHAPTER 15: THE “ITHACA TRAP”

CHAPTER 16: BACK TO ITHACA

CHAPTER 17: WORK AND MANAGEMENT STYLE

CHAPTER 18: THE BOSS AND THE SOB

CHAPTER 19: THE CIVIC SOLDIER

CHAPTER 20: A HELPING HAND?

CHAPTER 21: THROUGH OTHERS’ EYES

CHAPTER 22: RETURN TO THE FOURTH ESTATE

CHAPTER 23: DEFINING HIS OWN LEGACY

CHAPTER 24: FOUR FINAL WORDS

CHAPTER 25: DARKENING OUR SHADOWS

CHAPTER 26: GOING PUBLIC

CHAPTER 27: FORBES AND FALLOUT

CHAPTER 28: NEVER SELL—NEVER?

CHAPTER 29: IN RETROSPECT

CHAPTER 30: AFTERMATH

CHAPTER 31: A NEW BEGINNING

EPILOGUE

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX E

APPENDIX F

[APPENDIX G](#)
[APPENDIX H](#)
[APPENDIX I](#)
[APPENDIX J](#)
[APPENDIX K](#)
[NOTES AND REFERENCES](#)

[\(Back to Contents\)](#)

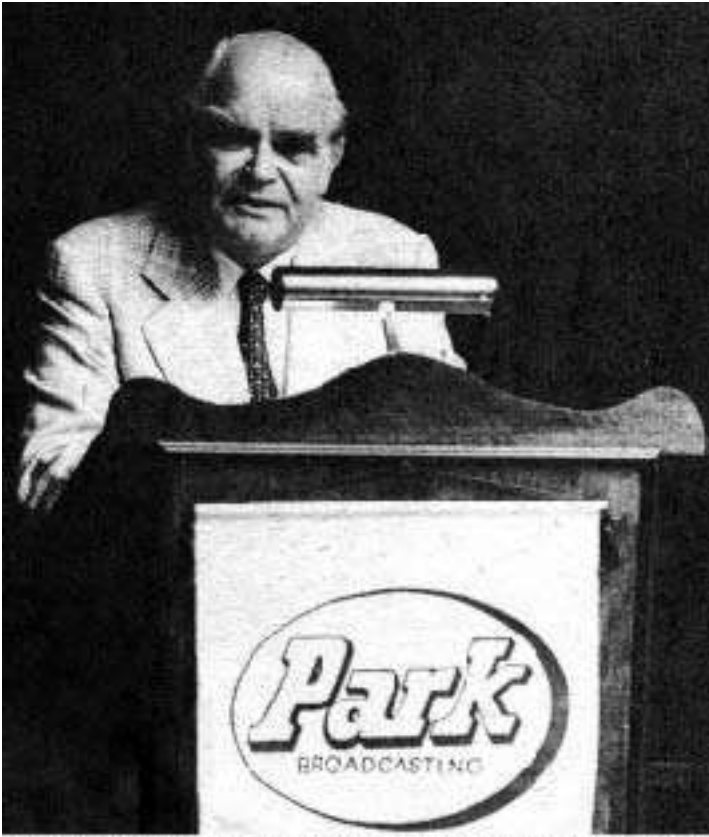
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our deepest thanks to: James O'Shea Wade, independent editor and former senior executive with seven major publishing companies, for his professionalism and perseverance; life-long friends of the Park family Dr. Richard R. Cole, former dean of The University of North Carolina School of Journalism and Mass Communication and the late Professor Emeritus William B. Ward of Cornell University's Department of Communication Arts, for their painstaking time and personal input; and Bonnie Angelo, longtime correspondent and former Washington reporter and bureau chief in London and New York for Time magazine and author of First Mothers and First Families, for her support and interest.

Also to the late Sam Johnson of S.C. Johnson, one of the most successful family businesses in the country, who worked with two Park generations on behalf of Cornell University's Johnson Graduate School of Management, and was the first to suggest this book be written; to Dr. Bryant Mangum, professor of American Literature at Virginia Commonwealth University for his knowledge and insight; and to our attorneys with Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice, PLLC, and Clifton & Singer, LLP, in North Carolina; and Troy & Troy, P.C., True & Walsh, LLP, and Williamson Clune & Stevens in New York state for their legal advice.

As well as, to former and current employees of Park Outdoor Advertising, the small but dedicated staff of Triad Foundation and former employees of my father throughout his four careers who contributed their thoughts and anecdotes to this work. And to my backup fact-checker, Steve Magacs, and Michelle Hemingway, who retyped every page of this book over and over for the last seven years without ever complaining.

Finally, to my wife, Tetlow, for her patience, and to my mother, Dorothy D. Park, for ably surviving her partnership with her quintessential and hyperactive spouse. God bless you all. And from all of us who worked on it, we hope you enjoy the story.



Roy H. Park giving his annual "State of Our Union" talk to Park television, radio and newspaper managers in Ithaca, NY, in 1979. Although he owned some 20 newspapers at the time, the name change to Park Communications did not take place until the company went public in 1983.

[\(Back to Contents\)](#)

PREFACE

On the trail of another man, the biographer must put up with finding himself at every turn: any biography uneasily shelters an autobiography within it.

—Paul Murray Kendall Tolstoy said all happy families resemble one another; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. This also can apply to family businesses, and if you're thinking of working in the family business, think twice. Those of you who are may already know why.

This is the story of an SOB in a family-owned enterprise. Not my father. Me, the Son of the Boss. It's also told by another son who worked closest to Roy Hampton Park—John B. Babcock, the son of the man who gave my father his first big break. With the exception of my mother, no

one knew more about my father on a personal and social level and in a one-on-one working relationship than Johnnie Babcock and me. Both of us being sons of self-made men, we think it represents thousands of others living or working in the shadows of powerful fathers.

For Babcock, it was stressful to be second-in-command to a Forbes 400 workaholic for almost two decades and to meet the high expectations demanded. As he points out, his own father enjoyed significant fame—but Johnnie never worked for him. He worked for my father—and lived a personal version of “the strenuous life.”

For me, as the son of a self-made entrepreneur, I learned you can survive reasonably well if you maintain your independence. It’s another scenario when you become an SOB. I had a normal childhood, a good education, and a strong and respectable independent career going when I decided to accept my father’s invitation to work for him. That’s when the going really got tough.

In 1942, Johnnie’s father, H.E. Babcock, an entrepreneur who founded the largest farm cooperative in the nation, hired my father. My father, in turn, hired Johnnie to work for him for a few years in the late ’40s, and later to rejoin him in 1964. When I came to work for my father in 1971, I reported to Johnnie. Neither of us could have fully anticipated what “life with father” would be like. As his longest-lasting employee, Johnnie resigned in 1981 after nineteen years. I lasted seventeen, and after negotiating the purchase of the outdoor divisions from my father in 1988, (which I had been hired by him to run), I brought Johnnie back as a director of Park Outdoor.

The experience of being the offspring of self-made entrepreneurs may be familiar to sons and daughters of driven fathers across the nation, whether they work for them or not. What I saw of my father as I grew up and the insights I acquired while working for him, combined with Johnnie’s view from the top, make a story we think is worth telling. It may even provide comfort for other SOBs.

[\(Back to Contents\)](#)

INTRODUCTION

IN THE BEGINNING

They’re tearing down the street where I grew up, Like pouring brandy in a Dixie cup. They’re paving concrete on a part of me, No trial for killing off a memory. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust Can you find the Milky Way? Long Tall Sally and Tin Pan Alley Have seen their dying day. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust It’ll never be the same. But we’re all forgiving, We’re only living, To leave the way we came.

—From the song “Ashes to Ashes” by Dennis Lambert and Brian Potter

I first heard these words in the song from The Fifth Dimension in 1973. As far as I know, all the places where I lived growing up in Raleigh, Ithaca, Lawrenceville, Chapel Hill, Queens, Port Chester and Charlotte are still there. All except one. Possibly the house I rented for a year in Perrine, Florida, may have been destroyed by hurricane Hugo. But SW 184th Terrace is still there.

But now in my later years, I feel the concrete of my past beginning to pave over me, and there’s much to remember. Some of those memories may or may not be of value to others. But they are of value to me. So while I can, I remember. There are many misconceptions about my father, wrong rumors I hear to this day. So I felt the need for a son’s account, neither a tribute nor a condemnation, to set the record straight. He was a great man, though frequently hurtful to me, and it was instructive to take a journey down the hard road he took to build an estate worth close to a billion dollars—and realize his version of the American dream.

That dream probably didn’t include being ranked in the top 140 of the Forbes 400 richest Americans in 1993 when he died.

Pretty good for someone who came off a farm to put himself through college, and whose first full-time job after graduation paid \$100 a month.

Though not particularly notable in today’s terms, back in 1993, only 15 percent of the Forbes 400 were billionaires, compared to some 88 percent in 2005. The October 8, 2007 25th Anniversary issue of the Forbes 400 pointed out, “One billion dollars is no longer enough. The price of admission [now] is \$1.3 billion.” In my father’s case, building this kind of wealth in sixty-two years from a starting salary of \$1,200 a year is nothing to scoff at. And neither is a billion. A billion minutes ago, Jesus was alive, a billion hours ago our ancestors were in the Stone Age, and a billion days ago nothing walked the earth on two legs, let alone had human dreams. Like a father, or a son.

“Any biography uneasily shelters an autobiography within it,” Paul Kendall said, and shortly after I started writing this book about my father, I realized it was going to include a lot about me and his closest business associate, Johnnie Babcock. Because that was the only way my father’s story, with the knowledge and anecdotes we bring to it, can be told.

My father didn’t make his fortune through computer genius, promotion or ascension in a company, performance bonuses, family inheritance, an invention, the stock market or options, or through a dot-com. Instead he made it the slow, hard way, doggedly passing through four careers to achieve success. He started as a writer, editor and publisher, moved on to advertising and public relations, then into food marketing and franchising,

and finally, into broadcasting media which expanded into print through newspaper publishing, taking him full circle to his beginnings.

In an article in the fall 1979 issue of *Wachovia Magazine* Catherine Walker observed that he possessed “a special blend of talents including business acumen, a keen perception of ideas that sell, a razor-sharp memory and the persistence and drive to make it all work. In short, he is an entrepreneur of the first order and of the old school—an all too rare individual in American business today.”

My father was an avid researcher, as am I. There were hundreds of articles written about him during his various careers, and as a journalist, and his son, I have read them all to sort out the truth. I have interviewed his remaining associates, and the research has been not only exhaustive, but exhausting. “It has been said that writing comes more easily if you have something to say,” according to novelist Sholem Asch, and I hope I do. And to get to the truth and assemble the facts has been a long, time-consuming ordeal.

Oscar Wilde said, “Every great man has his disciples—and it is always Judas who writes the biography.” I am no Judas, but I will tell the truth about my father, even when it is painful, and praise him when praise is due.

It was not an easy task being the son of an entrepreneurial father like mine, but I managed to survive in his shadow, absorb the best lessons to be learned from the way he ran a business and directed his life, and reject the worst. I have also learned from my own experience running a business that you can still accomplish your goals by trusting your associates and employees.

In the process I learned what it should be like to be a father to your children, and although I, too, was a workaholic while my kids were growing up, I tried to take time when I could, mostly later in life, to let them know I loved them, that I cared. I have also tried hard to avoid making the same mistakes my father made with me.

My father was manipulative and controlling and he knew how to use charm to his advantage, but there was good mixed in with the bad in our relationship, and I have come away awed by my new discoveries about this straight-out-of-Horatio-Alger self-made man. The bottom line was always important to him. My bottom line is that I respect him more in death than I did in life.

Life is short, and I wish I could bring him back to tell him, for the first time, how much I miss him. But I can't, and though there was a time for many years when I thought we might not be meeting in the hereafter, I now feel that we will be together in the same place, at some time, again.

It is said that every man has a story, and it is through that story that we can live on. If the story may also be worth something to others, then that is the premise and the promise of this book.



My father in 1915. Earnest and determined even at the tender age of five.

[\(Back to Contents\)](#)

CHAPTER 1: HEARSAY AND HISTORY

I want to know what it says, the sea. What it is that it keeps on saying.
—Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (1848)

To quote J.D. Salinger's narrator, Holden Caulfield, in the famous opening statement of the 1951 coming-of-age classic, *The Catcher in the Rye*, "If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap," and here Caulfield's quote ends with, "but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth."

Well, I feel like going into it. And I differ from Caulfield in that my childhood wasn't lousy; it was what came later that was. I started dictating my memories of my family relationship at the turn of the century in the summer of 2000 while on vacation on the Gulf of Mexico in Boca Grande, FL. I wasn't then, and still am not, into computers. Although everyone who works with me is computer literate from laptops to BlackBerrys and iPhones, I still use a Dictaphone. I feel that thoughts can be transmitted quicker through voice than through fingers on a keyboard. So dictating memories instead of vacation reading, I continued later the same year from the edge of the Atlantic Ocean in Pine Knoll Shores, NC. Those vast,

relentlessly sighing, giving and taking seas that command three-fourths of our planet seemed to call to me and demand introspection, and once started, I found it hard to stop.

I was born on July 23, the beginning of Leo, in Rex Hospital in Raleigh to North Carolina parents in the Chinese Zodiac Year of the Tiger, 1938. As a Republican, as was my father before me, I find it ironic that the house that was my home for the first years of my life has become the Democratic headquarters in Raleigh. I don't remember much about the early years I lived in Raleigh. My memories really begin at age four, when my entire family moved to Ithaca, NY.

When I say the entire family, this included my father, my mother, my mother's mother, and my mother's grandmother. After my father and mother were married, he moved into her house. It was the middle of the Great Depression and times were tough enough to make ends meet for him to live in a house with his mother-in-law and grandmother-in-law, along with his wife. So I guess turnabout was fair play when he brought all of them with him when he moved to Ithaca.

After a short stay at the Ithaca Hotel, we crammed ourselves into a three-bedroom apartment in Belleayre, a building near Cornell University. My sister was not yet born, and I shared one of the bedrooms with "Muddie," my great-grandmother. (She was a dear soul, but the main thing that I remember about her was that she snored.)

BEFORE MY TIME

Where I was born and where and how I have lived is unimportant. It is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest.

—Georgia O'Keefe

My father was born in Dobson, North Carolina, on September 15, 1910. The youngest of four children and the second son of Laura Frances (Stone) and I. Arthur Park, Roy H. Park started life on a prosperous farm in Surry County near the Virginia border northwest of Winston-Salem, NC. This was unfortunate, since he detested farm life from an early age. I have heard that he did everything he could to avoid the labors involved with farming, even taking up reading the Bible before he reached his teens. This put him under the protection of his mother, the daughter of a Baptist preacher, and he was able to avoid much of the work in which his father and older brother were engaged that was required on a farm. Whenever his father commented on his absence in the field, his mother would tell her husband to leave their son alone because he was studying the "Good Book," and that was more important than pitching hay or shoveling manure.



My Grandparents on my father's side, Laura Frances and I. Arthur Park with some of their grandchildren (not including my sister or me) in the mid-1970's on grandmother Park's eighty-third birthday.

He was, therefore, highly motivated to leave farm life as soon as he could. It was said that he came down with pneumonia in December of his first year of high school and at age thirteen, spent the rest of the year in bed with what his doctor diagnosed as rheumatic fever. His mother, a former schoolteacher, believed that an idle mind was the devil's workshop, so she kept him busy with lessons sent from school. He returned to Dobson High School in the Surry County seat, some fourteen miles north of Elkin, the next fall. He took a test to see if he could rejoin his classmates and did so well that the school allowed him to skip a grade.

In high school he also delivered newspapers, and worked as a county correspondent for three weekly newspapers. His hustling drive, coupled with skipping a grade, enabled him to graduate from high school in 1926 at age sixteen. That same year, he headed "down east" to get a higher education, with the idea that he might become a physician. He first applied to Duke University, took the entrance exam, and was offered a scholarship.

But Duke lost a potential medical student when my father's brother, who by this time was a student at North Carolina State College in Raleigh, drove over to Durham to see him one day. He was driving a fairly new Chevrolet Roadster, and told my father if he transferred to State, he'd let him drive the car every now and then. So as one of the youngest students

to attend NC State, at age sixteen he enrolled to study business and journalism, and worked, while attending classes, to put himself through.

“My father was a farmer, but my oldest brother graduated from State and my two sisters went to Woman’s College [now The University of North Carolina at Greensboro],” my father recalled. “I knew that if I needed help from my family, it was there. But I always felt that if you could maintain your independence, you could take great pride in it.” I was later to learn the truth in that.

There is one thing many people don’t know about the journalism courses in which my father enrolled at NC State. I found it in my files among the many copies of my father’s talks and speeches, some with his notes or alternate comments scribbled along the margins in his awful handwriting. It was part of his acceptance speech when he was inducted into the North Carolina Journalism Hall of Fame in 1990.

Stretching things just a bit, he called The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill his alma mater, saying in a speech he gave many years after graduating that, “Of course I am a graduate of North Carolina State...but when I began college, this School of Journalism was on its campus over in Raleigh...and didn’t move to Chapel Hill until after my senior year. “Although a coincidence, not a trade, when about the same time the Engineering School was moved from Chapel Hill to the Raleigh campus, my father went on to say: “It was the kind of trade that makes both parties winners....I don’t have to tell you that The University of North Carolina School of Journalism is among the best known journalism schools in the country...and I am proud to consider myself an alumnus of this School of Journalism.” My father concluded his speech saying, “In fact, my son, Roy H. Park, Jr., and his son, Roy H. Park III, are both graduates of this School of Journalism.” (In 1990 the president of The University of North Carolina, C.D. Spangler, Jr., wrote him a letter saying, “I am proud that two great universities within UNC can lay claim to you. Your comments about the Engineering School at UNC-Chapel Hill and the Journalism School at North Carolina State University convince me that I would benefit from a brush up on the history of the switch.”)

Geography aside, at North Carolina State in 1926, even the \$150 yearly tuition and \$16.50 a month for food was a lot of money for someone who didn’t have any, and I suspect that’s when my father’s real work ethic began. Although I share my father’s passion to work hard, he was as true a workaholic as ever existed.

In his junior year, he was out driving with his friends one evening in the early spring and he ran into a parked car. He decided that rather than go home for the Easter break, he would get a job to pay to fix the car. I suspect that this reflected his penchant for work, and his decision not to spend the break at home also kept him off the farm.

One of the ways he earned a few bucks, along with a fellow student with the unusual and unlikely moniker of “Pea Vine” Reynolds, was to sell magazine subscriptions. My father said many times the woman of the house would not come to the front door, but would call down from an upstairs window or porch to ask what they wanted when the door bell rang. My father’s answer was “COD, lady,” which would bring the prospect down to the front door. When they discovered a delivery was not being made, Pops would meekly say that COD meant, “come on down,” and then go into his routine about being a poor student working his way through college by selling magazines. Most of the time it worked.

Reynolds, at age seventy-nine, said in a telephone interview from his Lumberton, NC, home, “Roy’s got what you might call a broad view of the future. An’ he figgers things better ’n any man I ever seen.” Both Reynolds and Park must have done some fancy “figgering” because Reynolds says of their magazine hustling, “I started in [college] with two hundred dollars. I paid all the tuition myself, all the costs and finished with a new car, two thousand dollars in cash, and that was in the middle of the Depression.” Pea Vine and Park went their separate ways after graduation in 1931, but kept in touch, and years later he would come back into my father’s life.

Because my father had worked as a reporter for the campus publication the Technician since his freshman year, he was able to find a part-time job as an office boy with the Associated Press in Raleigh. He operated a mimeograph machine, stuffed envelopes, and ran errands for \$4.50 per week, attending classes until noon and working afternoons for the AP.

He also wrote fillers for area newspapers (at 10¢ a column inch), and kept pestering the Raleigh bureau chief, W. Joynes McFarland, to “let me write some real stories.” After he threatened to go home to Surry County “because I couldn’t live in Raleigh on four dollars and fifty cents per week,” McFarland found a spot for him on the AP staff.

Working with the Governor’s Office, Raleigh newspaper publishers, the college extension editor, and others, his wages grew along with his responsibilities, including correspondence for two northwestern North Carolina newspapers. Another of his duties was covering executions by electrocution at Central Prison. “Nobody liked doing that,” he said, “so we’d get ourselves a Coke with some ammonia in it before we went to the prison. And sometimes we’d put in something a little stronger. I thought it was very foolish at that time to sit there with a clock and see how long they struggled,” he recalled. “It was pretty bad. It gave me nightmares.”

By 1930, at age nineteen, my father had earned enough credits to graduate, and was making a stately \$18 per week at the AP.

He said the money was not as important as contacts with the influential people he got to know, but it helped pay for school. And these contacts were to prove helpful as graduation approached.

But he decided to enroll in graduate studies so he could serve as the Technician's elected editor-in-chief. Jobs were scarce, and the position paid a salary of \$37.50 a month plus one-fourth of the profits. "This, plus freelancing for out-of-town newspapers, paid better than the few dollars a week I would have received as a newspaper reporter in those days," he said.

I don't want to leave the impression that my father's college life was all work and no play, since he did take time to relax and have fun. He said he had two old cars. "That was so I'd be sure one was always running. I'd park them on a hill so I'd be sure I could get them started. One was a Willys-Overland—that was the fancy town car," he said.

In 1931, my father was honored by his senior classmates as "best writer." As one of 311 in his June graduating class, with a minor in journalism, he was among 37 to receive a BS in Business Administration from NC State. His college annual, *Agromeck*, predicted that he would be "a lord in the fourth estate." It was an oddly accurate prediction for a college annual, but in forty years it came true.

But back then it was the beginning of the Depression and jobs were scarce. Planning ahead, my father had been reading the want ads long before he graduated. As they say on the farm, timing has a lot to do with the outcome of a rain dance, and it makes sense to go after a job when one opens up that you might be able to get.

A TOUGH INTERVIEW

One day he saw a blind ad for a public relations job in the *Raleigh News & Observer*. It was signed Box 731, which was located in Raleigh's historic Century Station. Instead of mailing in his application, he hand-delivered his response to the postmaster in a colored envelope to make it stand out, then stationed himself in front of the box the next morning to wait for the person who came to pick up the mail.

Eventually a man came in to open the box, and my father eased over to introduce himself, pointed to the pink (sometimes he said it was blue) envelope, and asked if the owner of the box would kindly read his application first. The man turned out to be H.B. (Red) Trader, the secretary to Uria Benton Blalock, head of the Farmers Cooperative Exchange as well as the North Carolina Cotton Growers Association, one of the largest cotton marketing associations in the South.

Before the day was out, my father was able to call on his earlier contacts from the Governor's Office to the president of NC State to ask them to make calls on his behalf. Before the sun went down, Blalock had

received telephone calls endorsing him from O. Max Gardner, governor of North Carolina; Josephus Daniels, publisher of the News & Observer; John Park, publisher of the Raleigh Times; the NC State president; and three other influential local men. This made it difficult for Blalock to avoid asking my father to meet with him. As my father later told an interviewer, “My letter got a favorable response. Anticipating that it would, I had bought myself a white cotton suit and showed up for the interview wearing it.”

The job was director of public relations, which involved editing and publishing a newsletter, the Carolina Cooperator, for co-op members, and my father felt it was a perfect match. But the job offer was not immediately forthcoming.

At their meeting, Blalock said, “Look at all these letters. I’ve got letters from people with a lot more experience than you have. I’m going to hire another candidate, but I wanted to tell you that I was impressed by your initiative. If you keep going like this, maybe one of these days you’ll amount to something.” My father replied that he wanted to amount to something then, and Blalock did not immediately turn him down.

Instead, he took my father, who was still a student, along with him on a business trip to Kannapolis, NC. It was hot in Blalock’s Lincoln limousine, and they would occasionally stop for a cold drink along the way. My father said Blalock would ask him to call the office and tell them to sell so many pounds of cotton, or buy so many. He’d write it all down and call it in, but thought it was one hell of a poor company to work for if they were spending money buying futures on this and that, with a fellow like him telling them what to buy. My father soon guessed, however, that Blalock was just finding out how many mistakes he would make. A few days later, Blalock called my father into his office to repeat the bad news. He told him, “You’re a pretty smart and resourceful young man, but you’re too young. You ought to stay in touch, and after you learn something about journalism maybe we’ll have a place for you.”

But my father didn’t give up. He told Blalock he’d saved some money and said, “I know I can do this job. I’ll bring my own typewriter if you’ll give me a place to put it and a lamp. You don’t even have to give me an office. And I’ll work for free for three months. If you don’t ask me to stay, I’ll come by and thank you for the experience I got and go on my way.” “We’re a large organization and can’t do that,” Blalock told him. But then he thought for a moment and asked my father what he figured the job should pay. My father replied, “I think it’s worth two hundred and fifty dollars a month.”

To which Blalock said, “You’re the damndest young fellow I have ever seen. I’ll give you a hundred dollars a month.” My father responded, “You talked me into it.”

Thus began my father's first business career, thirty days before his graduation. When he reported for work, his direct boss at Carolina Cotton was M.G. "Manley" Mann. My father credits him as one of the two people who gave him a role model for success, the other being his future partner Duncan Hines, who was internationally famous as an arbiter of taste. A tough taskmaster, Mann was another workaholic who expected work to be on time and done right. My father said Mann was good at business, but he liked him because he said he was also a dreamer, and that was something they both had in common. My father always felt it was OK to have dreams, as long as you were able to work hard enough to put a foundation under them. And he was good at that.



Mann to Man at Carolina Cotton in 1931. My father's boss in his first job, "Manley" Mann, was another workaholic who Pops credits as one of the two role models that shaped his life.

As director of public relations, my father stayed with the Cotton Association for eleven years in public relations, advertising and speech writing. He impressed his employees and their growing number of customers with his flair for creative editing and his skills in public relations and sales promotion. There was a lot of money in cotton in those days, and one of the more remarkable things he did was figure out a way to enhance the public image of cotton garments. As the traditional fabric of work clothing, being tough and comfortable, it was favored by the working class, and looked down upon by the socially elite and those who wanted to be. My father figured that if he could change that image he could substantially broaden the market.

He came up with the idea of holding Cotton Balls, highly publicized statewide affairs, which included parades and formal dances attended by the daughters of some of North Carolina's most prominent families. The promotion included "Maids of Cotton," young women dressed in all-

cotton gowns. Park arranged for the manufacture of special gowns for the women and tuxedos for their escorts, and all in attendance wore cotton.

Including the lady who would become my mother, Dorothy Goodwin Dent.

MEETING MY MOTHER

Victory—a matter of staying power.

—Elbert Hubbard

A great many people thought that the first Cotton Ball was where he met my mother, but it wasn't. He met her earlier on a blind date.

My mother attended Peace and Meredith Colleges in Raleigh. My father first met her shortly after he graduated, while she was still a junior at Meredith. She was three years younger than he was. They met on a double blind date set up by her cousin—and my father was not intended to be her date. Yet somehow, my mother recalled, people got switched around, and he ended up in the backseat of the car with her. I suspect he had planned it that way all along.

My mother said she didn't really care for him from the start. She had seen him before the date as a student standing on the corner near her house, wearing a baseball cap and hitchhiking to school. I'm sure he had also seen her and had prevailed on her cousin to set things up with the girl he wanted to meet. Although this beautiful and effervescent young woman from Raleigh may have been a social level or two above him, he had already set his sights on her and began his courtship in earnest.

My mother loved to dance, and on their first date, she found out he couldn't. That was one negative. He wanted to sit out the entire dance in a secluded part of the combination basketball court and auditorium that had temporarily been converted into a ballroom, drinking Cokes and talking. My mother felt he was full of himself and quite pushy. Two more negatives. In fact, she said he told her on this first date that he intended to marry her.

He even embarrassed her when he was master of ceremonies at a dance she later attended, this time with another date. My father was with a woman who enjoyed drinking, and he had evidently enjoyed drinking along with her. My mother said he fell off the stage and landed flat on his face at one point while trying to introduce the next piece the band was preparing to play.

With all those negatives, he had to outfox his competitors, and he made a point of finding out who they were. Meredith was just down Hillsborough Street from NC State and its all-girl enrollment was an obvious target for the men at State, particularly the fraternity boys. Since my father had a car, one of his tricks, when he found out who the others

were she was dating, was to pull up in front of their fraternities with her in the car and tell her that he had to run in and see somebody.

My mother said she wanted to crouch down on the floorboards until he came out of each house, and she suspected there was no one in there he needed to see, or even knew. But leaving her in his car in full view of the fraternity brothers on the porch each time was a clever way of staking his claim.

“Boy was he persistent,” my mother remembered. He combined his strategy of eliminating his competition with a keen anticipation of what my mother liked and wanted. He showered her with baby chicks dyed purple and rabbits at Easter, and on special occasions, with other live creatures he knew she loved. He bought a Pomeranian for one of her birthdays and prevailed on his secretary to store it in her bathtub for the week before the date arrived. The secretary told my mother she couldn’t sleep the entire period with the dog yipping in the bathtub, but my father had charmed her into it.



My father and mother in 1937, before I came along to spice up their life

After my mother graduated from college, he continued his relentless pursuit, turning everyone who knew her into a sup porter. She said her grandparents’ cook and yardman loved him and told her what a dynamic go-getter he was. One could almost believe he paid them off. So using one strategy or another, he drove all other suitors away, and I think by default she accepted his proposal of marriage. His persistence won out and on October 3, 1936, they were married.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

