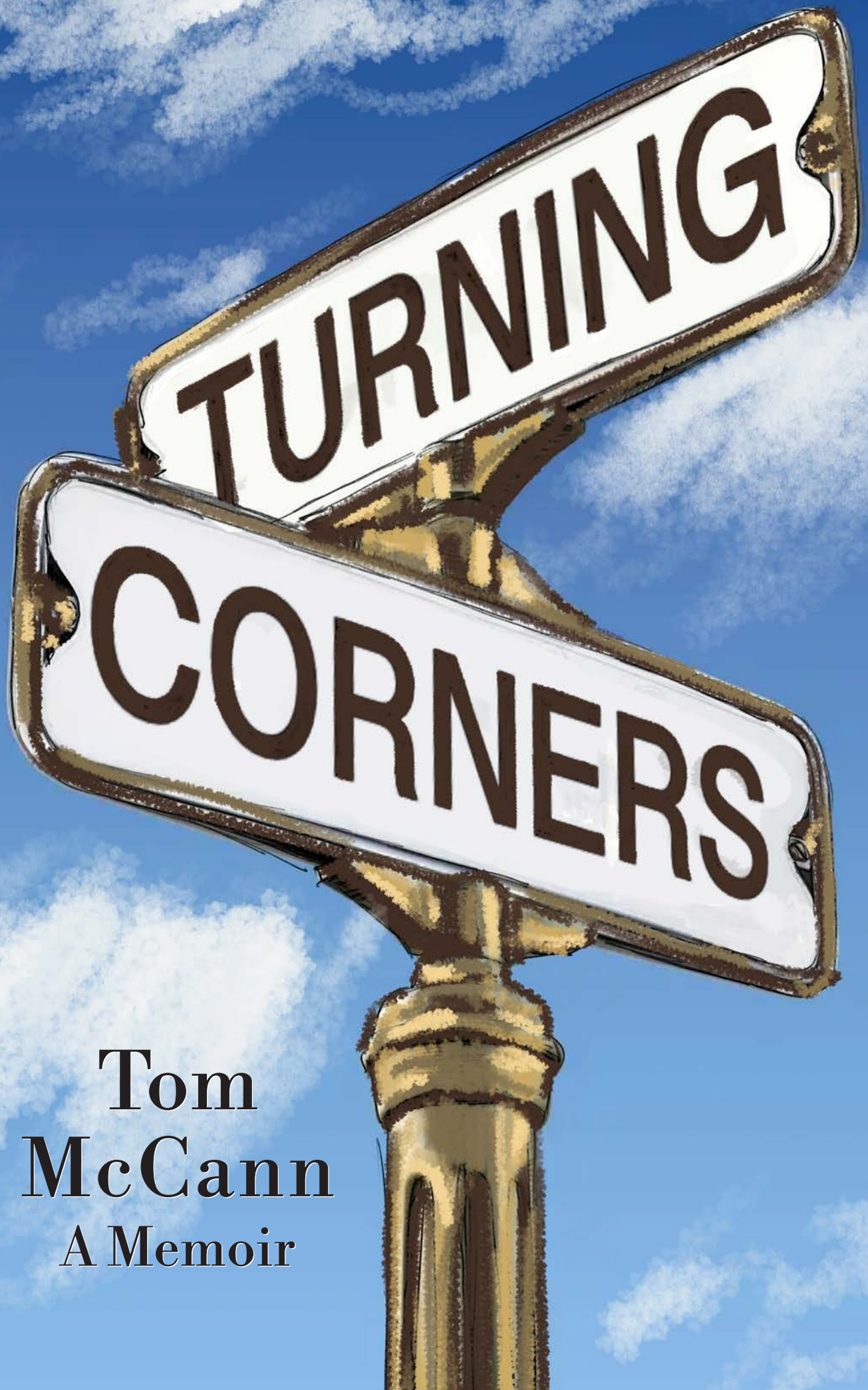




Tom
McCann
A Memoir

CONTENTS

Preface	3
Introduction, by Web Lithgow	5
Selected Comments and Reviews for Tom McCann's Other Books	6
"Katharine Hepburn on Line One"	9
ORIGINS	
My Father and Mother	12
Sister Margaret	17
When I Was a Charity Case	20
Rocco	24
Under the Boardwalk	28
Uncle Freddie	33
Drugstore Days	38
The Voice of the New York Yankees, the Voice of God	44
Most Likely to Succeed	49
UNITED FRUIT	
Starting to See the World	53
An American Company	56
Alice Widener	61
Role Models	65
The Black Eagle of Harlem	67
A New Home, A New Boss	70
The Attack	73
Telling the Story	76
MIDPOINT	
The White House Transcripts	80
The White House Goes to the "Big House"	84
The Hood Samaritan	88
Ben Spock	90
Public Relations	92
A BOSTON LIFE	
Bill Russell	96
"You certainly made our job at the White House harder."	106
Bogey, Bacall, and Me	110
Robert De Niro	113
Katharine Hepburn	115
"What If?"	124
Copyright Details and Acknowledgments	128

Preface

Half a century ago, when I was in my mid-thirties and on my third career, I did something I had wanted to do for a long time. I quit my job and wrote a book. It was a book about the first act of my career—seventeen years with the infamous United Fruit Company. I started there as a messenger/office boy at age eighteen (making \$32.50 a week) and rose to become vice president of public relations for the controversial Fortune 500 company. My job was to try to put a good face on an ugly company.

At thirty-five, I didn't want to spend the rest of my life doing that. So I quit. Two years later, I wrote a book. *An American Company: The Tragedy of United Fruit* did very well with reviewers and readers in the US and around the world, including translations in Russian and Japanese—highly unusual for a business book. The fact that I wrote a largely critical book assured that I would never again work for a major company. As one CEO said, "Anyone who writes books like this is not to be trusted." After that, I published several other books but realized I could never make the kind of a living I wanted this way, so I treated writing as a hobby. I wrote screenplays, fables, fiction, short stories, humor—everything except poetry.

Over the years, I kept notes on scraps of paper, and as I got into my eighties, several people suggested I write a memoir. I certainly had more than enough material for a memoir, and at the urging of people close to me, I started to write the story of my life. One of these people was my friend, the writer Kevin Stevens, who said he would edit what I wrote and help me get it published. So, I began it when I was close to ninety. Within a year, I had 40,000 words written.

The next year, I suffered several small strokes, damaging falls, broken bones, and declining eyesight. One of the falls resulted in a severely broken ankle that required surgery. I began to wonder: Am I going to finish my memoir? Am I going to get it published? Am I going to find an agent who wants to represent it? Is he or she going to find a publisher who would be interested in publishing a memoir written by an old man?

I also considered my age. I was ninety then. Would I live to be ninety-three or ninety-four? Even if I finished it, did I have enough time to find an agent and a publisher? The publishing process with something like this might take five or six years. I was running out of time. These thoughts stayed with me and resulted in a block. For the next year, failure to write sent me into a depression, and I could not write anything. But I had invested a lot—40,000 words, and Kevin and I had only 10,000 or 15,000 to go.

After a year, I came up with a plan. I would push to get those final chapters written and then publish the book online. I would create a website and make the book available to readers in digital form—for free. I don't need another hardcover book on my shelf.

So, here it is. There could be more to come. As I indicate in the last chapter, I remain convinced that the stories I have to tell here are going to be interesting to a lot of people. Some are entertaining. They're sometimes shocking. And maybe, above all, there are lessons to be learned from the life of a Brooklyn kid from the wrong side of the tracks who had a limited education, no money, and no connections.

About the title. Fifteen years ago, I wrote *The Tree Nobody Wanted*, the story of a Christmas with my grandmother (Nanny), the kind of Christmas poor people had that other people don't understand. At one point, my character visits the ugly, replanted, but magical Christmas tree for the last time. Here is what I wrote toward the end of the book:

Darkness comes early in winter, and it was approaching very fast. I said goodbye to our tree, perhaps for the last time, and I sensed a sadness coming from it. I reached out and gently touched a branch, the way Nanny used to do, and a piece of it came off in my hand. I put it in my coat pocket and said goodbye one more time. I turned and walked out of the Botanic Garden and across the wide street. As I reached the corner, I turned for one last look at our tree because I realized that once I turned the corner, I would no longer be able to see it. Life is many things, including a series of turning corners. One minute things are in front of you in full view, and the next instant you can no longer see what was there. All you have left is the memory.

I receive lots of letters from readers saying that those two lines were their favorites, and that "turning corners" is life. At my age now, I can see that all the corners I've turned resulted in meeting and working with new people, new projects, new adventures. So that is the title of my memoir.

I hope you enjoy it.

Tom McCann



Web Lithgow

Introduction, by Web Lithgow

There's an old tune whose refrain goes:

*So be easy and free when you're drinkin' with me.
I'm a man you don't meet every day.*

In the pages that follow you'll meet a man you don't meet every day. His name is Tom McCann.

I've known him and worked with him for a long time, so I can say that for sure. He is one of a kind. But he's filled the pages of this book not with himself but with the varied cast of extraordinary characters, some famous, some not, who have peopled his life. There are many of them.

Some are superstar personalities like Hollywood's longtime marquee star Katharine Hepburn. Their friendship started with an acrid phone call that ended with her hanging up on him. He responded by sending her a gift whose subtle subtext may have been: "Go fly a kite!" Hepburn liked his audacity, and they became fast friends. Tom has a lot to say about her. Their relationship over the years says a lot about him.

Same with basketball legend Bill Russell, who chose to skip a Boston Celtics victory parade to have a sandwich with Tom in Tom's office thirty floors above the parade. Of course, that says a lot about Russell – and, also, a lot about McCann.

The thread connecting these colorful stories is Tom's rise from a hardscrabble life in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, New York, to become a vice president in a Fortune 500 corporation, and moving on from there to found his own television production company. Tom's would be a story in itself. But he chooses to focus on the stories of others, people he came to know – and who came to know him.

In these pages you'll get to meet them all. And along the way you'll get to know Tom McCann, a man you won't meet every day.

Web Lithgow

Selected Comments and Reviews for Tom McCann's Other Books

The Tree Nobody Wanted

"I cried when I read your wonderful book."

Anita Shreve, best-selling author

"It's a charming book, even biblical, and nostalgic."

William Gibson, playwright (*The Miracle Worker, Golda, Two for the Seesaw*)

"What a stunningly beautiful story. Tom McCann is a supremely talented writer, planting words and images that have stayed rooted in my soul. Everything he described, I could see. *The Tree Nobody Wanted* will remain one of my favorite books of all time."

Mike Leonard, NBC *Today* show

"I loved *Tree*. When I started reading it, I was not prepared to find it so engrossing and moving. McCann has the storyteller's gift."

Jacques Cartier

"A wonderful story for all ages. One that constantly surprises and delights. Tom McCann is an ingenious storyteller."

John Farrell, author (*The Day without Yesterday*)

"I used to try to read A Christmas Carol every Christmas Eve, and now I have two options for all of the Christmas Eves to come. With *The Tree Nobody Wanted: A Christmas Story*, Tom McCann has written a wonderful, touching story that truly runs the gamut of emotions. This is really a heartachingly beautiful story. There aren't many books that can make you cry and smile at the same time, but *Tree* is definitely one of them."

Daniel Jolley, amazon.com top 50 reviewer

Earth Angel

"It's a beautiful yarn ... wholesome, inspiring and deeply moving. A pleasure to read."

Dr. John Silber, President Emeritus, Boston University

"As I read this tale of the gallant little fighter plane that couldn't fly, I really had a tear in my eye at the ending of this lovely feel good work."

Robin Moore, author, *The French Connection* and *The Green Berets*

“Tom McCann’s fable soars on wings of wonder to heights of joy and excitement—a corker of a read for every age and gender.”

James W. Ryan, coauthor, *Who Killed the Red Baron?*

“It’s great—the best aviation fable of our time.”

General John Haack, retired, US Air Force

An American Company

“...a remarkable tale...compelling...a very personal, very relevant, occasional even poignant tale of the humanness of a seemingly inhuman corporate world.”

The New York Times

“...hard and cool.”

Kirkus Reviews

“McCann is an excellent storyteller and this corporate history is probably as readable as any written.”

Business Week

“It’s McCann’s skill that he can make the machinations that ensued intelligible even to those of us who don’t know a bid from a debenture...it is some story.”

The Boston Globe

“*An American Company: The Tragedy of United Fruit* is a business book in a sense, but it is also a mystery, a political work, an analysis of corporate dirty tricks....McCann, spent 20 years with the United Fruit Co., and when he resigned he was vice president in charge of public relations. And knew plenty.”

San Francisco Sunday Examiner & Chronicle

“...a haunting, half-sickening melody of greed, compelling drive, conceit and corrupted values...no fiction can speak with the heavy drama and authority of one who was ‘there’...”

The Baltimore Sun

“McCann averages at least one outrage per page. What a company! What a story—corporate intrigue, corruption of governments, plotting with the CIA to foment revolutions, exploiting workers, manipulating the politicians, and the public and the press! It is what the movies would call ‘incredible — but true!’ fascinating...”

The Philadelphia Sunday Bulletin

“...a sensitive, though sometimes critical, account of the company...even non-Bostonians may feel regrets for what happened to this grand old company.”

Harvard Business Review

“...the inside story...a sad, sorry and full account.”

Parade

“...the manner of telling is lively, intimate and candid...”

Foreign Affairs



“Katharine Hepburn on Line One”

Norma appeared in my office doorway.

“Tom, Katharine Hepburn is on line one.”

It was nine o'clock on the morning of January 15, 1979. Three weeks earlier I had written to Miss Hepburn, as she liked to be called, enclosing a three-page scenario for a feature film that Bill Gibson (author of *The Miracle Worker*, *Golda's Balcony*, and other plays) and I had written with her in mind. Neither of us knew her. It was a long shot. We really didn't expect her to respond, but we hoped she might pass it on to her agent. However, we also knew she could ignore it completely or return it unopened—which is what most movie stars do when they receive something unsolicited in the mail.

Now she was calling me. I picked up the phone and said cheerfully, “Good morning, Miss Hepburn, this is Tom McCann.”

Ignoring my greeting, she said, “This is Katharine Hepburn and you, Mr. McCann, must be crazy. What made you and Mr. Gibson think that I'd be interested in playing this woman? She is everything I detest in a woman—or in a man for that matter. She's a moaner. She's a complainer. She is pathetic. She is a 'why me' kind of person. Why the hell not her! She is feeling sorry for herself, sorry because her husband died. She is feeling sorry for herself because she is lonesome. She wants people to feel sorry for her because she has an illness and because she's in pain. Because her children do not visit her more often. Well, boo-hoo. Who the hell cares?”

I was stunned. Was I really talking to Katharine Hepburn? Though I wasn't doing much talking. One of the most famous voices in the history of the movies was in my ear, delivering a blistering reaction to this scenario Bill and I had written and respectfully (I thought) sent to her. And she was only getting started. Becoming more and more upset, she let me have it. Her voice cracking, she said, “How dare you send me something like this! How dare you! What do you expect me to do with this thing?”

I started to say something. I don't remember what. The words simply would not come out. My throat was dry. She repeated: “What do you want me to do with these pages?”

I said something to the effect that I was sorry I'd upset her—and then something stupid about it being a cold day in January and I was sure it was also cold where she was, so maybe she should just throw the scenario into the fireplace. It was a dumb thing for me to say, but it was all I could think of in the moment.

“As you wish,” she said and slammed down the phone.

That was it. My first conversation with Katharine Hepburn.

I would have many more conversations with this fascinating woman, but I didn't know that at the time. My initial thought was to call Bill Gibson, but first I had to get myself under control. My face was flushed, and I was sure my blood pressure was over the red line.

I felt stupid for not seeing the main character of our scenario the way she had, and I felt that Bill or I should have known. We were wrong, and she was right. I had upset an American icon! And, yes, I felt terrible for having upset a woman in her seventies—which to me, a man in his forties, seemed old at the time.

Norma came in and asked if I wanted a cup of coffee. I joked that I needed a double Scotch. Then the phone rang. This time I picked up. It was Katharine Hepburn—again!

She got right down to business. “Listen. I just want you to know that I have enormous respect for Mr. Gibson. I think I’ve seen every one of his plays on Broadway, and of course his *Miracle Worker* with Anne Bancroft was just wonderful. Very moving. Very memorable. I also saw his *Golda* here in New York. What you two fellows wrote was well written but simply not for me. And I have to tell you that I loved your letter to me. I liked the tone. It had the upbeat tone I like in a person. I was so looking forward to reading your scenario. My expectations were very high when I started to read it, and because my expectations were high, my reaction was so negative. So I’m calling you back to say that I hope someday you’ll both bring me something I can do, now that you know what kind of characters appeal to me. That is all I have to say. Think about it and talk to Mr. Gibson. Try again. Try again. Good day, Mr. McCann.”

She hung up.

Well, quite a morning. Quite a couple of phone calls. And I remember those calls so clearly not only because of the force of Katharine’s personality but also because that day marked the beginning of a relationship that would last for twenty years—from that initial low point to close to the end of her life. We became friends. Good friends. Less than a year after the first dreadful conversation, I was at her house in Fenwick, Connecticut, having lunch. A lunch she herself made—cheese and tomato on white toast. A first lunch that lasted until nine in the evening. And for another two decades we would share events and scenes from both our lives. We talked about everything, and I got to know the real Katharine Hepburn, who was nothing like the persona you saw when she was interviewed by a Dick Cavett or Barbara Walters. She was just the opposite. We never spoke about that first phone conversation.

A couple of weeks after those first calls, after several back-and-forth notes, she asked me if perhaps I’d been named after my father, who she thought may have been a well-known New York publisher. She was thinking of the firm Coward-McCann, which had been a very active book publisher in the thirties and forties. I should say that Katharine was a bit of a snob and very interested in names, family, and lineage. She could get on her high horse at times.

She was mistaken about my dad. He worked with books, all right, not the kind of books Coward-McCann published, but the kind that could—and often did—land him in jail. . . .

ONE

ORIGINS



My Father and Mother

I was born in Liberty Hospital in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn in 1934. Not the high rent district then or now. My birth certificate, signed by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, notes that my mother was Miriam Lynch and my father was Thomas F. McCann. I don't know anything about my parents' life together before I was born. I don't know how they met, when they met, or how long they had known each other before they got married.

What I do know is that when I was born, my dad worked on a newsstand at Penn Station. His salary was twelve dollars a week for a six-day week. He told me he supplemented this meager income by being a "runner" for a Penn Station bookie, which earned him another dollar a day. It was a job that a year later landed him in jail. But he never brought much money home. He gambled most of it away; money was always a problem for our family. He also drank to excess. We lived in rented places. We never owned anything or had a car or took a vacation or had a bank account.

Yet until I was eight or nine, I thought he was a good dad and better than most fathers in our neighborhood. I didn't see much of him, but when I did, I remember the only thing I really didn't like was his breath. I didn't know what the smell was; I later discovered it was beer and whiskey and cigarettes, all of which contributed to his death. From an early age, I saw him indulge these habits first-hand. When I was four or five, he would take me into Brady's Bar and Grille, on the corner of the street where we lived, and sit me up on the bar. I didn't like it. The bar was always wet with beer, and the wetness would seep through my short pants. I was afraid people would see it and think I'd wet my pants. Even worse than the wet bar was the bathroom. A handwritten sign on the door read "Used Beer Department," which says it all. It was a foul place. I can't begin to describe the smell. I've been in a lot of dirty bathrooms all over the world, but Brady's was by far the worst.

When I was a little older, he worked for the Union News Company, which ran several restaurants in New York stations as well as ferry terminals on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River, including one in Weehawken that my dad managed. He worked afternoons and evenings seven days a week and told us he slept in his office many nights. I never had dinner with my father, though once in a while he would take me over to the Weehawken restaurant, and I'd return to Brooklyn on the subway by myself. He was fired from that job for stealing seventy-five dollars from the cash box. It was around this time I realized he was an alcoholic and a gambler. To this day, I don't know which is worse.

After that I became less tolerant of my father and cared less about him. I ignored him whenever possible. When I was twenty, he came to me and asked if I could get him a job at the company I was working at. Against my better judgment, I got him a low-level job there, and he soon got drunk and made a scene that embarrassed me. So I arranged to have him fired. Yes, I had my own father fired. It was the right thing to do.

I never knew his parents and know very little about them. In my late twenties I moved to Boston and didn't see him much. My children never knew him. He was not in their lives. When I got the news that he had cancer and had perhaps a year to live I sent him

money each week so he could continue to gamble and check the racing results each day to see if he picked a winner. I did this despite the fact that I never gamble. I hate to lose. I do not even buy a lottery ticket.

Yet when he died, he faced death well. I hope when my time comes, I handle it as well as he did. He dealt with death better than he did anything else in his life. For the year it took for him to die, knowing that he was terminally ill, he waited calmly and bravely. My sister, Mimi, told me he never asked, "Why me?" He never complained about pain or expressed any fear of death.

Perhaps he welcomed death because his life was very unhappy. He remained a gambler to the end. The last thing he did on this earth, hours before he died, was to place a bet from the hospital with his bookie. He had also been in a loveless marriage. The night before he died, my mother spoke at length about their problems. She told me things I didn't want to hear. But I think it made her feel better.

When I got the news that he'd died, I felt nothing. A couple of days later, looking down at his frail body in its coffin in a New York funeral home, I still felt nothing. At his wake, I walked up to the coffin with visitors, including his bookie, who made a point of telling me that my father's last bet "ran out of the money." I felt guilty about not feeling even the slightest bit of sadness. I started to wonder what was wrong with me that even standing in front of the body of the man who gave me life, I felt no emotion, no sorrow for a wasted life, no relief that it was over . . . not a single tear.

When the funeral home was closing for the night, I walked up to the coffin for the traditional last look of the day, and I noticed for the first time that my father's hands looked very small. They were folded across his waist, with rosary beads entwined in his fingers. I had never seen him in that position in life and certainly never saw rosary beads in his hands. His hands looked small, half the size of mine, and I suddenly remembered a moment long ago when his hands were not twice as small as mine but twice as big. When I was five years old, he took my small hand in his as we crossed Liberty Avenue, a busy Brooklyn street, with two sets of trolley tracks, heavy trucks, passenger cars, and even horse-drawn carts. I felt very safe holding my father's hand. I didn't have to look both ways. I had my hand in his, and I knew that he would do the looking for both of us.

Another memory followed, from a couple of years later when I was seven or eight and getting washed and dressed to go to school. It was cold outside. And inside. We had to boil water in large pots on the gas stove. Three pots produced only about three inches of water in the bathtub. That morning, my father came into the bathroom as I was about to put the cold cloth to my face to wash my face and neck. Without saying a word, he took the facecloth from me and held it tightly in his hand for a minute, then switched the facecloth to his other hand and held it tightly again. When he handed it back to me, it was warm.

I cried. Those memories reminded me of a time when my dad cared about me more than he cared about the things that drove us apart. So I cried, as a son should when his father dies. I know more about my mom's background. Let me start with her grandfather. His name was Lincoln Campbell, named so because he was born on April 14, 1865, the night President Lincoln was assassinated. His mother died giving birth to him. His father was so distraught over the loss of his wife that he blew his brains out that night. In those days suicide (like cancer) was considered dishonorable and a "weakness," especially

in prominent families. And the Campbells were prominent—Major Duncan Campbell had come from Scotland to the Colonies to fight in the Revolutionary War, fallen in love with Catherine Bayard, married, and then, with a lot of help from William Bayard, founded New York's first savings bank.

So the family decided to put the baby up for adoption and have nothing further to do with him. A month after he was born, Lincoln was adopted by a Brooklyn family named Green. Lincoln became Lincoln Green. Mr. Green owned a butcher shop and taught his adopted son the business at an early age.

I met my great-grandfather. In his old age he came to live with us. He told me he'd left school after he learned to read and write and was taught enough arithmetic so that he could "change money." He didn't find out he was adopted until he was sixteen, and the night Mrs. Green told him, he left and never contacted the Greens again. So much for gratitude. That coldness is a trait that I am sorry to say runs through the family to this day.

At eighteen or nineteen, Lincoln married Maria Deering, a German immigrant referred to by everyone in the family as the Duchess. Because her mother had been a lady in waiting to a German duchess, Maria affected royal ways. She was a tyrant: profane, selfish, short-tempered, and at times violent. Lincoln, on the other hand, was a quiet, easy-going loner. He was a Brooklyn butcher and certainly no duke. Together he and Maria produced seven children, many of whom the Duchess handed off to her eldest daughter, May, to raise. May was my grandmother. I always called her Nanny, and she would be a very important person in my life.

Young May worked day and night taking care of the house and raising her sisters and brothers. One morning around nine, the doorbell rang, and May, as usual, answered it. A short, stocky bald man, about thirty-five, was on the stoop. He stepped back, looked up at her and said, "You don't know me, May. But I know you. My name is Mr. Lynch, and I live up the street. I've been looking at you for the past couple of years. I am ready to get married and raise a family. I am a hard-working man. I am sober. In fact, I do not drink at all. Never did, nor do I smoke. I'm not religious, but I respect those who do follow a religion. I suppose you are Catholic, and that is all right with me. I don't care what you are as long as you are not Jewish or from that part of the world. I have a very good job. I am a master cabinetmaker. I have saved my money and have it in a secret hiding place. I do not trust banks. I will not tell you how much, but I am ready to take a wife. I want to know if you would consider becoming my wife."

I know what Mr. Lynch said word for word because Nanny told the story many times, and in the telling it never varied. She told him to come back at five o'clock and she'd give him her answer. When she told the story, she said that she was fifteen at the time, but my mother said the records revealed that she was only fourteen. Mr. Lynch came back at five, and Nanny said she would marry him. He said he was delighted and told her that the next day he was going up to Boston to build some showcases for a department store and would be back in six weeks. He asked her to find some nice rooms (what apartments were called at the time), to furnish them, and to write him a note giving him the address of their new apartment. He said they would be married the day he returned.

At that point he reached into his pocket, pulled out a fat roll of bills, and handed her \$800, an enormous amount of money at that time. That night, after everyone went to

sleep, Nanny left the house and never returned, exactly as her father had done. She stayed the night with a friend, Mrs. Miriam Mullins. Nanny would name her only daughter, my mother, Miriam. The next day she found an apartment and spent \$400 furnishing all five rooms. She returned the balance to Mr Lynch. He came back six weeks later, and they were married at City Hall.

I wish I could say they lived happily ever after. Until the day he died, Nanny addressed him as Mr. Lynch. And referred to him that way. They had nothing in common but the children they produced. Mr. Lynch was an indifferent parent, except to the eldest son, Charles, and only daughter, Miriam. Mr. Lynch was one of seven brothers, most of whom were strange and difficult men, roughnecks who grew up in violent, crime-ridden New York at the beginning of the twentieth century. Mr. Lynch was an ardent baseball fan, and his oldest boy, Charlie, became a major league player—not good enough for the Brooklyn Dodgers or the Yankees, but good enough to be signed by the Cincinnati Reds. Unfortunately, he broke his wrist in his first spring training, which in those days meant the end of his baseball career.

Miriam was another favorite, and Nanny claimed he “spoiled her.” A third child, a boy, died at age four when somebody threw a huge stone and hit him in the head. The last born of the four, my uncle Arthur, always was and always will be my hero. He was named after Dr. Arthur Lauer, Nanny’s doctor and, according to my mother, the love of Nanny’s life. He died from pneumonia at the age of forty-one, and my mother said you could hear Nanny’s wailing a block away.

Uncle Charlie became an alcoholic at an early age and died at forty-three. He always called me “peckerhead” long before I knew what a pecker was. My grandfather, Mr. Lynch, died in his early fifties, leaving Nanny a widow in her late twenties. His last words to her were, “May, you are the cleanest woman I have ever known,” words she cherished. Because she *was* meticulous about keeping her home clean.

My mother, on the other hand, was not so meticulous, and it led to conflict between her and Nanny. After her father died, my mother continued the family tradition of leaving home at a young age. She went to live with the family of her best and lifelong friend, Evelyn Wolf. The Wolfs were Jewish, and my mother became Jewish. She learned Yiddish, developed Jewish mannerisms and speech patterns, loved the food, and dated only Jewish men. She had jet black hair, a dark complexion, and a Jewish sense of humor. Miriam is a biblical Hebrew name, so all her life people thought she was a Jew. She loved that.

My mother had several phobias. I don’t know if that word had been coined in the twenties or thirties, but I know not all of them had been identified. It seems new ones are being discovered all the time. She was afraid of the dark, afraid to go out of the house, afraid of dying. She almost never rode a train, bus, or trolley. Her many phobias were very limiting, to say the least. And they placed a burden on my sister and me—me first because I was older than Mimi. But Mimi did far more for my mother than I did. And for my father as well.

From the time I was eight until I was sixteen or so, I bought all her clothes including shoes, girdles, garter belts, stockings. Outfitting her was easy: I knew her sizes and the styles she liked. Most important of all, I knew how much we could afford to pay. The Brooklyn shopkeepers knew me. I would select three or four dresses, a couple of pairs of shoes, and

so on, and take them to her “on approval.” She would pick what she wanted, and I would take the other things back to the store. If she didn’t like any of my selections, she would send me back to choose others. It was system, and it worked all those years.

My mother was always surrounded by men because she was attractive and smart, with a great sense of earthy humor. She was a good storyteller and an equally good listener. She loved me. She thought I was great. We had fun together. We made each other laugh even when there wasn’t much to laugh about. She laid down no arbitrary rules for me. She did the best she could.

Her mother, Nanny, didn’t like my mother or anything about her. They were as opposite as two people could be. Nanny woke at dawn each day, washed her hair each morning and brushed it a hundred strokes a side. She went grocery shopping, did laundry by hand, washed dishes (and actually dried them by hand), and cooked a full breakfast, lunch, and dinner. My mother did none of those things, and what made it worse was that Nanny lived with us.

My mother was a bedwetter. She claimed that her mother would take the urine-soaked panties and rub her nose in the foul-smelling cloth. Simple as that. Much as I loved her, I could see Nanny doing that. She was a strict German and strong disciplinarian and had been trapped in a loveless marriage to an older man.

All her life my mother was preoccupied with death. She frequently gave detailed instructions about what to do when she died—the coffin, the service, even what to do with her two dogs. She wanted to be laid out in high-heeled shoes and stockings even though the coffin would be closed below the waist. She gave us strict instructions as to the new dress she wanted—light blue, with a high neck and full, sheer sleeves. All her directives were carried out.

My mother did lie to me once. It was a big lie, and it changed my life. I did not find out about it until a couple of months before she died. I was angry at the time, but now I’m glad she told me. Her lie changed my life for the better.

Sister Margaret

I was thirteen in the summer of 1947 when the first sign of puberty happened: a single hair growing out of my chest, about an inch long. One Sunday I was at Rockaway Beach when Bobby Ferguson saw it and joined with a couple of other of my friends to pull it out. I was angry at first, but I said to myself, “There will be more coming.” And there were: a distinct crack in my voice, usually occurring on the first word out of my mouth; a slight growth of peach fuzz on my chin; and, of course, the inevitable pimples.

A couple of months later, I was back in St. Sylvester’s in 8B, the last grade in grammar school before high school. On the first day, I met our teacher, Sister Margaret, who was new to the school. We were her first class, and she had a tough job. She had to get us through the dreaded Regent Exams and make sure our applications for various Catholic high schools were in order.

Sister Margaret was different from the other nuns I’d had as teachers at St. Sylvester’s. I began with Sister Julia. On my very first day of school, she surveyed her thirty-five students and discovered that three of us were left-handed. She said to me, “Thomas, that will not do. We have to retrain you.”

She told me to take off my shoelace and tie it around my wrist. Then she tied my arm behind my back to my belt and put a pencil in my right hand. Try walking around like that all day every schoolday and you’ll convert from lefty to righty. In those days, some Catholics believed that left-handed people were sinister. In fact, in Latin “sinister” means both *left* and *evil*. I learned how to write with my right hand, though most other tasks I still did with my left.

For the next seven years, an assortment of nuns taught me. They came in different sizes and shapes and from different parts of the country, though most were from New York and New England. Some were good, some not so good, and some awful, both as teachers and as people interacting with young children. Some were smarter than others. Some of them hit the kids. They all wore eyeglasses and the same habit, and all of them prayed with their eyes closed and their hands clasped. Their rosary beads were anchored to a cotton cummerbund around their waists and dangled just two or three inches off the floor.

Sister Margaret was different. She was young, clear-skinned, and athletic, with blue eyes and very white teeth. She did not wear glasses. She was even-tempered and very intelligent. She was certainly the youngest nun in the school, and I was immediately attracted to her. Years later, I found out she was only nineteen, six years older than me—not that big an age gap.

In those first weeks of the school year, with an assist from my raging hormones, she became more and more attractive to me. I even found attractive the fact that her left eye was not in sync with her right (she had exotropia, which was commonly called “walleye”).

I became so attracted to Sister Margaret, I felt I had to bring it up in confession. I confessed every other week to Father O’Sullivan, who was in charge of altar boys. I was the head altar boy and served, in addition to four daily masses, at baptisms, marriages,

and funerals (the Catholic sacraments frequently described as “hatched, matched, and dispatched”).

After the first month with Sister Margaret, I confessed to Father O’Sullivan that I had some “impure thoughts” regarding her. He gave me a penance of ten Hail Marys, five Our Fathers, and five Glory Be’s, absolved me of my sins, and sent me on my way, telling me not to do it again. If the devil entered my body and made me sin again, he said, I should resist him with all my might and bless myself with holy water several times a day.

Well, my obsession with Sister Margaret didn’t go away. It got worse. A month later I was back in the confessional. This time, Father O’Sullivan doubled the penance and again told me what to do to avoid these impure thoughts. A couple of weeks later, I had to go back to him and tell him his plan wasn’t working. He got angry and said that if I were not able to overcome this sin, he would have to report me to the diocese, and they had ways of dealing with this. I knew he was talking about an exorcism, and that was the last thing I wanted, so I stopped going to confession even though the impure thoughts continued.

I sensed that Sister Margaret really wasn’t cut out to be a nun, and I fantasized that she would someday drop out of the order, I would help her overcome the shame of dropping out, and we would spend a lot of time together—maybe marrying one day.

Being a nun was a hard life. Twenty-one nuns lived in two small houses, each with three small bedrooms, two full baths, and two half baths. No washing machine. No dryer. And not enough dining room tables, so only six nuns at a time could eat their meals. There was a chapel that held all twenty-one of them in one of the houses.

The nuns were completely covered in black. They wore a wool habit, wool winter and summer, with sleeves that came down to their knuckles, so you saw very little of their hands. A bonnet concealed their hair, and their legs were completely covered by the habit. Their shoes were well worn, with a slight heel.

Sister Margaret stood out among them because of her widow’s peak—a small triangular shape of hair that stands out at the forehead. It was this widow’s peak that gave me the most trouble.

When graduation day came, I said goodbye to Sister Margaret, but I never forgot her. Nearly sixty years later Norma came into my office and said, “Eileen Fitzgerald is on the phone.” Eileen was a grammar school classmate. I picked up the phone and heard her say, in her Brooklyn accent, “Tom, guess what? Sister Margaret is living up your way.”

She gave me the address of a Catholic retirement home. I immediately called the number and Sister Margaret answered. She was then about seventy-five years old. We chatted and caught up. She told me what she had done with her life. She had stayed in her order and earned two college degrees, which set her apart from almost all the other nuns.

I brought her to lunch at the Algonquin Club. She was out of the habit, in an ugly dress that looked to be about twenty years old. She told me to call her just Marge. She looked at the menu and ordered. Then I asked her what she wanted to drink.

“What are you having?” she said.

“I usually have a Scotch with my appetizer.”

“That sounds good to me!”

And we talked and talked. About how, at the end of every academic term, the parish priests would hand out report cards while the nuns sat on little stools, making themselves

as small as possible by putting their hands inside the sleeves of the habit and bending over so that they became like a little black ball. About how the report cards were handed out in order of the smartest kid to the dumbest and how everybody snickered. We talked about how some of the nuns hit the kids with their wooden pointers. About the Jewish boy in the class—the only one in the school—and how he had to recite, every day, Catholic prayers and listen to the story of how the “Jews killed Jesus Christ.” We talked about the visit each year from the feared Sister Clarissa, head of the order. About the opposition of priests to the nuns’ desire to get out of their habits. In a compromise with the priests, she told me, the nuns had to make their dresses out of material from their habits. They were all black and all ugly. She talked about one of the girls in my class who had a crush on her, wanted to be just like Sister Margaret, and ultimately joined the order before leaving after about ten years. When she said that I almost confessed my own first crush on her.

At the end of lunch, I asked her what I could do for her. She told me that she had everything she needed. She said that she was quite happy with the living arrangement in retirement. Some of the nuns complained about the quality of the food, but she was grateful to have the food and not have to wash dishes. She mentioned that the nuns liked movies; they had a VCR and rented one or two movies a week.

On our drive back to her retirement home, we stopped at the video store the sisters liked and I set up an account in her name. The store clerk asked if there would be any limit on the account, and I said, “No limits.” Sister Margaret looked at me thoughtfully and said, “Hmm. That is the first time in my life I have ever had no limit.”

That turned out to be the best thing I could have done for her. We had a couple of other “dates” after that, and she began sending me birthday cards and emails. Sometimes, when I wanted someone to talk to, she was always there, answering the phone on the first ring. She died peacefully in her eighties. We never talked about religion or politics. She never asked if I was a practicing Catholic, never asked about my wife or family. We were just two friends. And I never did tell her that the thirteen-year-old me had such a crush on her—somehow, I think she knew.

Oh. And I should say that the widow’s peak was still there. No longer black, though. Mostly grey.



The prefect of discipline; note the heavy ring of keys.

When I Was a Charity Case

Everyone in my class was excited when I was accepted into the prestigious Prep. Sister Margaret was ecstatic—it was, so to speak, a feather in her black bonnet. My classmates congratulated me. And even the stern and distant pastor of Saint Sylvester’s, Father Smith, sought me out when I served as his altar boy to tell me how pleased he was. I had wanted to go to Regis High School, but my mother told me I’d been rejected there. (Years later she wrote to me and told me that she’d lied.) So Prep it was.

But there was a big problem. Prep was for kids with wealthy parents. Tuition was steep. There were no scholarships, so there was no way that I could go there. When word got out that I couldn’t afford it, Father Smith announced at Sunday Mass that I had been accepted and that the parish would pay the tuition. The congregation applauded. I wanted to die.

My mother was very pleased and ordered two suits for me from Mr. Mond. When I got to Prep, I discovered that the other boys bought their clothes at upscale stores like Rogers Peet or John Wanamaker or Brooks Brothers. Mr. Mond was not upscale. He was known as “the Jew”—not a pejorative term but neighborhood shorthand for the men who sold cheap clothing door-to-door: always seconds or last year’s styles. There was no credit in those days. It was strictly cash and carry. My suits were too big, garish, and out of fashion. But that was what we could barely afford.

On opening day, the incoming freshmen met in the auditorium. Once we assembled, a wooden “clapper” signaled silence. We settled down as a tall, thin priest in a long black cassock walked down the center aisle and turned and faced us. “I am the prefect of discipline,” he announced. “I am also the assistant headmaster and the prefect of athletics. There is a headmaster, but you will never meet him. In fact, you’ll probably never even see him until you graduate . . . and some of you will never graduate. I run the Prep. And for discipline, I have an assistant who helps me. Let me introduce him to you.” He reached through a slit in his cassock and took out a three-foot window sash chain, at the end of which was a large steel ring, about five inches in diameter. There were a dozen or so heavy silver skeleton keys on the ring. Slowly, he began to twirl the chain, gradually building up speed until it was circling menacingly with a loud buzzing sound. As it twirled, he moved in front of an empty chair close to where I was sitting. With a sudden movement, he let the twirling ring with its heavy keys come crashing down on the chair, leaving a deep scar in the wood. “That is my assistant, gentlemen. Pray to the Blessed Mother that you never meet him any closer than you are now. I can assure you his bite is very deep, and if it could talk, it would tell many a tale.”

If we obeyed the rules, he continued, and brought credit and honor to the Prep in

the classroom and on the playing fields, then we would have nothing to fear from him. But if we didn't. . . . After that threat, he told us that the Prep would be the most important thing in our lives for the next four years, and he would be the most important person at the Prep—more important than our parents or grandparents or anyone else who had authority over us before now. The Prep was going to make strong and successful men of us. *Catholic* men.

His speech over, he dismissed everyone to their homerooms—except for me. By name, he told me to stay in place, and after everyone left the auditorium, he stood over me, less than two feet away, smelling of cigarettes and alcohol. He took out the chain again and twirled it until it was inches from my face. I was afraid he was going to hit me accidentally, so I backed away. He ordered me not to move.

“I’m not going to hit you, you little Mick. But someday, I can tell, you’re going to do something that will give me an excuse to use this on you. You don’t belong here and I think you know it. You don’t deserve to be in the same room with these other boys. I was against letting you in. I told that bunch of do-gooder trustees not to lower our standards by letting you in. But they did. They want to bring in what they call less fortunate boys. You’re an experiment, and if it works out with you, they’ll be bringing more like you, and then the colored and the Spics who are overrunning our city. You’re a charity case, McCann. An Irish charity case. And you disgust me. Those trustees are going to find out very fast they made a mistake. Now get out of here, you little Irish son of a bitch.”

I was more than frightened. I was terrified. Nobody had ever talked like that to me before, and I never heard priests use that kind of language. In the days that followed, I could not stop trembling as I moved from classroom to classroom and saw him walking the halls and swinging his keys. The halls were narrow, and many of the students, when they saw him, would turn around and take another staircase or flatten themselves against the wall to avoid being hit. In those first days, I also sensed that the other boys were avoiding me. I wondered if some kind of word was out about me. I was different from them, certainly, even my clothes announced that, but I also felt that the other students and most of my teachers had heard I was on his hit list.

One day during my second or third week there, I was in the cafeteria, having just finished my lunch. I was sitting back on the two rear legs of the chair looking at the ceiling (tilting back on chairs has always been a habit of mine). Suddenly, I felt a searing pain in the back of my head. I fell forward and blacked out as my forehead hit the table, and I lay there unconscious for a minute or so. When I regained consciousness, I was covered in blood, and the other boys at the table were looking at me in horror. I had no idea what had happened. My first thought was that a light fixture or a heavy piece of plaster had fallen from the ceiling, but then I saw him swinging his keychain as he walked away. As I realized that he had hit me as he was passing, my pain vanished and I got up and ran toward him as fast as I could, crashing into his back and knocking him to the floor. I punched him as hard and as many times as I could while several of the boys and teachers tried to pull me off him. I pounded and pounded him. His glasses were off, his Roman collar was ripped, and he was sitting on the floor dazed, covered in his blood and mine.

I had given him a bloody nose, he had bitten through his tongue, and some of his teeth were loosened. He was helped to his feet and led from the lunchroom room while I

was taken to the nurses' room and then put into a car to be taken to a doctor a couple of blocks away, to get a two-inch gash in my scalp stitched close. I felt every stitch go in, and eighty years later I still have the scar. Sometimes when I wash my hair or run the comb through it, I can feel sensitivity there. I was not yet thirteen years old. And to this day my blood pressure rises when I think about this sick man, posing as a man of God, and what he did to children.

Nobody saw him for the next couple of weeks. He did not go to his office or say mass or walk the halls or attend athletic events. The word was that he was badly injured and had stitches in his head, but I didn't believe it. I was out of school only two days. On my first day back, I had the next four months of my life laid out for me by my homeroom teacher, Father Ford. He told me that I would be expelled, but until then I would report every day at 2:35, when school was out, to the "jug," a subbasement reserved for detention. Each day, on my desk in the jug would be a piece of paper with my assignment for the day, which had to be completed to the prefect's satisfaction before I could leave the building each night. Father Ford told me that no boy had ever struck a priest in the history of the Prep. I told him in surprising, salty language that if any priest hit me again, I would do exactly the same and hit him back.

Everything changed that day. Father Ford had always been decent to me, and here I was swearing at him. In one fell swoop I went from being an A-plus student to having an F in every subject. And I was in the jug—slang for jail but also, in this context, an acronym for *judgment under God*. The room was an old closet, about six feet by eight with a frosted glass door and a small transom that could be opened for ventilation. There were no windows. A wooden slab about two feet wide extended from wall to wall. There was no chair, so you had to stand or sit on the floor or bend over and lean on the slab. It must have once been a janitor's closet; under the wooden slab were capped-off pipes where a slop sink had been.

My assignment on my first day in the jug was on the desk: "Write a 2000-word composition on the subject of a keyhole." When I was finished, I was to take it to the prefect's office, slide the assignment under the door, and stand outside the door until the marked-up copy was slid back with additional instructions. A 2000-word composition on a keyhole? Absurd, but I did it. I described what it looked like, how many keyholes there were in an average apartment, and whatever else I could dream up. I carried it to his office and slid it under the door. I waited, and an hour later it was passed back to me under the door, marked "released." The next night was another 2000 words on the subject of a pinhead. That took me longer to do and it came back to me with two misspellings and a grammatical error noted, so I had to go back to the jug room, find the errors, correct them, and go through the whole routine again.

This went on night after night. I was writing 10,000 words a week, and after two weeks I was exhausted and angry. After a month, for the first time and only time in my life, I felt like killing someone. The subject of being expelled never came up. I think he got more pleasure out of the torture he inflicted on me than if I had been expelled. I remained in the jug for the balance of the term—three more months. I lost my after-school job at a drugstore, and I was always angry, tired, and irritable. I lost weight and got one sore throat or cold after another. On top of my anguish, my parish was always late with my tuition. My report cards went to Father Smith, who must have seen that I was failing every subject.

I was constantly hounded by the bursar's office, which really didn't matter because the teachers were failing me anyway.

Occasionally, I would see him in the halls swinging his keys. I'm sure he saw me, but he seemed to look right through me. I thought he looked thinner and paler but that could have been my imagination. Meanwhile, the jug assignments grew harder and harder. I did them and never showed any outward signs of wear and tear or anger, but I was getting worse. I suspected that he was also getting angrier and meaner as the weeks went by, and one day he made me write 2500 words about left-handedness—and I was to write it *with* my left hand. A kid was assigned to watch me and make sure I used my left hand. What he didn't know was that I started out in life left-handed but was forced to write with my right in first grade.

On the last day of school, students took their annual excursion trip to Jones Beach, but I was not included and had to report to the jug at 9 a.m. I watched as the buses pulled away. I had the school to myself. My assignment for the day was "to rake the track all day and don't leave until it is perfectly dressed." I picked up the assignment sheet, tore it in half, and slipped the two halves under the door of his office. I walked to my homeroom and opened my locker and decided that I would leave behind all the books and the ugly teal jacket that my mother had bought from Mr. Mond. There was nothing I wanted to take with me. I walked out the door and hesitated and went back to the locker and retrieved an expensive Rogers Peet tie that a friendly upperclassman had given me, as well as my prose and poetry textbook.

I walked to the main entrance, past the bursar's office where I had been hounded and humiliated so many times. I walked out the front door and never looked back. I wish I could say that I never thought about that ugly place again, but I did and do still, even more so as I grow older. That place changed me in many ways, probably some that I'm not even aware of. I walked out convinced that my school days were over at age fourteen. I had every intention of quitting high school.

But that was not in the future for me. I would continue my education, though it did take me four and a half years to graduate from high school. And I never again looked upon priests in the same way. One night about twenty years ago, I couldn't sleep, so I got up and went online. I found myself on the Prep website. I clicked on *Our Teachers*, and there he was. Remembering those horrible days, I immediately shut down the computer, but after a while I couldn't resist the urge to return and click on his name. There was a photo of him sitting behind his near empty desk. The window sash chain with its ring of skeleton keys was neatly spread on the desktop. Who took the picture, I wondered, and why? How did he ever get him to pose for it? Then I realized that he was proud to sit for that photo and pleased to show off his "assistant." How many kids had felt the sting of it and been marked for life?

I printed a copy of the photo. A year later I went back to the site, and it had been removed. Who removed it? And why? I can only guess at the answers to those questions.

Rocco

Where I grew up, if you were small, you were in trouble. There were neighborhood bullies who usually acted alone, several gangs of tough kids (some tougher than others), and assorted crazies with severe mental problems. They would rob you, beat you up, and just for the fun of it hold you down, take your pants off, and hang them from the highest point on an electricity pole. These things started when a boy was about ten and usually ended when he was about fourteen, unless he was seen as “queer” or a “fairy,” in which case the tormenting continued until he moved out of the neighborhood after high school. Many kids were forced to perform oral sex on the gang members one after another. I witnessed that once. It was a brutal rape that left the victim screaming, battered, and humiliated. I never forgot it.

Living in those neighborhoods could be brutal. There were certain streets you were not allowed to walk on without paying a five- or ten-cent toll. The leaders of those gangs were school dropouts, many of whom grew up to be hardened criminals—from thieves and drug dealers to hitmen and made men in the Mafia. The big Mafia names all started out small. John Gotti grew up a few blocks from me in the East New York section of Brooklyn, which even today is one of the murder capitals of the country. He went to Franklin K. Lane High School, which was in my district, and his headquarters were in Ozone Park.

When I was thirteen, I was five-two and weighed about a hundred and ten pounds. I remember precisely how tall I was because at the Prep I narrowly escaped being the beadle (a title given to the shortest kid in the class, who sat in the first row, first seat, and opened the classroom door when someone knocked). I missed being the beadle by a half-inch. Fortunately, I had a growth spurt and grew eight inches in the next three years, but at thirteen I was a small kid and would have been a target for neighborhood delinquents had it not been for Rocco Romanelli.

Rocco was two years older than me and a head taller. Nobody messed with Rocco. He had broad shoulders and hands like catcher’s mitts. He was very muscular and a good athlete. He also had a reputation for loving to fight at the slightest provocation—though only when provoked. He didn’t look for a fight but was always ready for one. He would take on two or three guys at a time and could do a lot of damage: I remember broken noses, teeth knocked out, and a dislocated jaw. Rocco and his friends were untouchables.

He started out as my protector, but we soon grew into friendship. He liked me, and I genuinely liked him. He was different. I have to say that it was a friendship of opposites; he was big and strong but had limited mental abilities. He could barely read and write. He simply wasn’t interested in books (not even a comic book) or radio programs. The only movie he went to was *Knute Rockne, All American*. He loved that film and never missed seeing it when it came to the Earl on Liberty Avenue. Rocco’s one dream in life was to be an All-American football player at Notre Dame. He never talked about going to the pros, I suppose because the pros in those days were nothing near what they are today. It was all college football.

I don't think Rocco ever knew, or cared, that Notre Dame was a Catholic college. He was not a Catholic, and no one in his family was—unusual for an Italian family. He had contempt for religion in general. He often asked me, "Could God build a rock bigger than she could lift?" I would start out by telling him that God was a "he." "Answer the fucking question, Tom," he would shout. I would explain to him that all the pictures of God portray him as a man, and all references to God are masculine. Once we got through the he/she business, I would explain to Rocco that, yes, God could do everything because he is God. And, yes, God could build a rock that big if he wanted to, and Rocco would immediately come back with, "Well, if God can do everything, how come she couldn't build a rock bigger than she could lift?" We would go around and around until I finally gave up.

Later in life, I told this story to John Silber, president of Boston University, who said that Rocco was way ahead of his time in raising the possibility that God was a she. I explained to John that Rocco had very poor command of the English language. He constantly made grammatical errors and had no interest in learning, but it didn't matter because he was Rocco. Rocco could be very irritating and obnoxious at times, and his ignorance often got in the way, but we remained good friends. Another friend of mine once suggested that Rocco was like Lenny in *Of Mice and Men*. I quickly corrected him, pointing out that Lenny had a mental problem and Rocco had nothing wrong with his brain. He was just ignorant and shut out anything he wasn't interested in.

Rocco was always kind and gentle with me and always went along with anything I suggested. I did help with his homework, though I am sure his teachers knew that someone else was doing it for him. I wrote his book reports and tried to help him to read and write better. He could add and subtract but not multiply or divide. But handling money did not require multiplication or division skills. Our relationship grew into a kind of brotherly love I suppose. He was a very good person underneath the very rough exterior. We spent a lot of time together. Though he was a few years older, we were in the same class because he'd been put back several times. I spent a lot of time at his house and ate there whenever I wanted: always a red sauce pasta dish with meatballs, sausage, chicken, or pork. His mother was a good cook but didn't speak a word of English, and I never saw her wearing shoes.

In the summertime, we climbed to the flat roof of his house, making sure we were upwind of the awful smell of the pigeon coop. The coop was large, roughly the size of a 9-by-12 room, built primarily of old doors, one of which was on a hinge so someone could go in and feed the birds and clean out the coop occasionally. The birds were let out almost every night for exercise, and most of them would return. There was a lot of stealing pigeons, trading, and buying and selling. A couple of years later I discovered that Mrs. Romanelli would put pigeons in her spaghetti sauce. That did it for me. From then on, I skipped the meals that contained the "chicken."

We would often go up there to cool off on hot summer nights. There were times when we would spend the whole night there. Rocco would spread out a canvas tarp, and we would lie down, out of reach of the mosquitoes, looking at the stars and the moon. Often, he would ask me to tell him a story. I would tell him something I'd made up or describe a movie that I'd seen recently. After a while he would stop asking me questions about the story, and I would look over and find him asleep.

We graduated from our separate elementary schools at the same time. I went to the

Prep, and he went to Boys High in Brooklyn, recruited for his football skills. After a year he was expelled for fighting and hitting a teacher who tried to break up the fight. Rocco swore that hitting the teacher was an accident, and that the teacher got in the way of a punch. I have a feeling he would have been thrown out for academic reasons anyway.

When I walked out the door of Prep, I was advised not to come back in September. I had no intention of returning. I was fourteen and by law had to go back to school. Rocco was sixteen and the law did not apply to him, but if he wanted to play college football he had to graduate from high school. He understood that.

I decided on John Adams in Ozone Park, Queens, because Mr. Sheppard, an award-winning teacher, was there. I talked Rocco into applying there as well, as Adams had a good football team and a legendary coach, Joe Scarlatta, an Italian-American who did not care about his players' academics. We applied together. I was accepted on probation for a year, but Rocco was turned down. At that point he enlisted for a three-year stint in the Air Force. He quickly made the Air Force football team, which was based in Okinawa. He was first string, playing both defense and offense in the same game, and racked up impressive stats, clippings, and letters from coaches and officers. He earned promotions in rank and had a spotless record as an airman and an outstanding record on the playing field. Three years later, he returned home.

He never gave up his dream of going to Notre Dame. In those days there were no copy machines, so I had his clippings and stats and letters Photostatted. I wrote a letter for Rocco to Notre Dame coach Terry Brennan, who had taken over from Frank Lahey. We included the Photostats. We didn't have to wait long. The coach wrote back and told Rocco that he was very impressed and included a ticket from New York to South Bend and fifty dollars in cash to cover any expenses along the way. The coach told him he would be at South Bend for about five days.

The letter included a short test involving a little math, literature, history, and a request for a short composition on a subject of your choice. I tried a few of the questions out on Rocco, but in the end, I took the test. It was easier. I can't tell you how excited Rocco was the day I took him to Grand Central and put him on the train. Five or six days later he returned with the news that he had been rejected not for his football skills but because the coach realized that Rocco could never make it at Notre Dame academically. At one point Coach Brennan asked him if he had completed the test himself, and Rocco told him that his friend Tom McCann had done it for him. Brennan said to tell me that I passed the test. Rocco did say that Brennan told him he might be able to help him get into another college, but he couldn't remember the details. I concluded that Brennan was just trying to let Rocco down easily and giving him some hope for the future. He must have seen Rocco's reaction on having his dream shattered.

I was wrong. It was not an idle promise. A few weeks later, Rocco got an invitation to visit a college in Pennsylvania, where he was accepted. It wasn't Notre Dame, but it was college football. He was very happy, and so was I. He was about to be enrolled and play football at a college that provided a lot of academic help to its athletes. In my mind, he would play football and then graduate and move on to other things. Rocco himself did not project much into the future. He went to Pennsylvania in late July, and a few weeks later he sent me a postcard saying, "Going good. Lost twelve pounds. Working my ass off. Feel-

ing great. Write back. Your friend forever, Rock.” The message on the card was written by someone else, but the signature was unmistakably Rocco’s.

A few weeks later, Rocco took a date to a campus dance. The story goes that a guy who had too much to drink insulted Rocco’s date. Words were exchanged. The two decided to take it outside and began trading blows. Rocco threw a punch, and the other man went down, hitting his head on the curbstone. He died before the ambulance came. The police arrested Rocco and took him to the station. The two cops and Rocco got out of the police car. Despite being cuffed, Rocco managed to hit the cop and knock him to the ground. He took the gun from the cop’s holster and ran a block away before he put the gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

Almost seventy years later, it is still painful for me to think about this and more so to write about it. As I get close to the end of my own long life, I think about Rocco and all the other friends and family who are gone. I miss them. That goes with age. But I feel the need to leave a record somewhere of them, including Rocco. They are people I loved and who loved me. None of them ever did anything great or accomplished anything that will go down in the annals of anything. But they are people who deserve to have their names and their stories recorded and read. That is why I wrote this book. Books last a long time. Memories fade.

I don’t know why Rocco did what he did that night. Perhaps he was overcome with grief for the dead young man. Was that grief enough to cause him to take his own life? Was he afraid of what might happen to him? A trial for murder perhaps? Prison? Was it because his lifelong dream of playing football for a college team ended that night? Was it any of those things? Was it all those things? Was it none of those things? I don’t know. I never will. I wish that he had been able to live out his dream. I wish that he could have had a full life and that he and I had been able to know each other all our lives and that we had been able to grow old together.

Under the Boardwalk

The title of this chapter might make you think that this is going to be another one of those “my first time” stories. It is not. It starts out that way, but it’s not.

Where I grew up in Brooklyn, in the forties and fifties, we learned about sex at an early age. I was about ten. When you’re that young, your first reaction is total surprise, followed by disgust at what you had just learned. How could men and women do stuff like that? And you looked at the people you knew and found it hard to believe.

It didn’t take long for the surprise and disgust to be replaced with a strong desire to try it yourself. Most people started out slowly in those days. I think the average person was a high school senior before they actually “did it.” Between the time you find out about it and the time you do some experimenting, there’s a lot of talk, fantasy, exaggeration, and sometimes outright lies. The fact is, it’s very preoccupying and can affect your schoolwork, mood, and ability to concentrate. And some claim it can even give you pimples.

When I was about fourteen, a freshman in high school, I decided I was going to pursue it in earnest, especially when I discovered that my friend Rocco had had sex at around that age with a much older neighborhood girl. Most of my friends carried single condoms in their wallets. After a few months it left an impression in the leather for everyone to see—which was the whole idea. Occasionally, when the wallet was taken out, the condom would fall to the ground, “accidentally on purpose” as we used to say in Brooklyn. I too started to carry one, and eventually it just disintegrated.

In addition to the difficulty of finding a willing girl, there were other concerns, number one being the fear of a pregnancy, almost always resulting in a “shotgun wedding” to someone you didn’t want to marry, thereby ruining the rest of your life. There were plenty of examples of that in our neighborhood. There was also the fear of venereal disease, chiefly syphilis and gonorrhea. Or the dreaded “crabs.”

One day in the summer of 1949, a friend of mine, Billy Chase, came to me with what sounded like a good idea. He had landed a job as a lifeguard at Rockaway Beach, and he said he knew a very attractive girl who worked in a concession at Rockaway Playland and who was a little on the wild side. She had just broken up with her boyfriend, an older guy, and was best friends with a girl Billy was dating and who worked at the same concession. Billy wanted to know if I would like to go out on a blind date with her. This could be the one, I thought, and quickly told Billy to set it up.

A couple of days later Billy told me that she was interested in meeting me and I could meet her some night after work at Rockaway Playland. We could go for a walk and maybe get a pizza and eat it on the beach. He told me that she was seventeen and that he told her that I was over seventeen because he knew she liked older guys. I wasn’t even fifteen, and I was five feet two inches tall. I didn’t think she’d believe I was sixteen, much less seventeen.

I asked Billy if he knew whether she had a lot of boyfriends. I was already beginning to feel a little concerned. I didn’t want a girl who had a lot of boyfriends.

“How the hell do I know?” he said and proceeded to lecture me along the lines that if I wanted a “goody-goody girl,” I should go to a CYO dance. He said that this girl, Josephine, liked to have a good time and a drink or two. She liked to “live a little.” I was nervous, but I told Billy to go ahead and set up the date.

She wanted to see me on the night of July 4. She told Billy to tell me to be there at nine p.m. sharp. I had to take two buses to get to Rockaway. The second bus took me down Cross Bay Boulevard and over two bridges before getting to Playland, which had an assortment of rides, games, food concessions, souvenir shops, and even a tattoo parlor. Josephine worked at Moe’s Famous Hot Dogs.

There were two counter girls at Moe’s, and I knew immediately that the one with the dark hair must be Josephine. She was not the attractive girl Billy described. She was thin, with a dark complexion and pimples on her forehead, and wore a hair net. She had on a counter girl’s uniform that was much too big for her and kept flopping open at the top, partly because her breasts weren’t large enough to fill it out.

I lit a cigarette with my Zippo lighter, trying to look as old and as cool as I could, introduced myself to her, and put out my hand. She looked at it but did not take it. Instead, she just gazed at me and asked if I wanted a hot dog and an orange drink. I didn’t, but I said I did. I put a dollar on the counter, and she gave me fifty cents change, and I immediately wondered if I should leave a tip for her. I don’t remember what I decided.

I was nervous, excited, eager, anxious, and, frankly, scared. Josephine seemed indifferent to me. She had to wait on other customers but kept coming back. And each time she did, she would say a few words, like, “Billy said you wanted to meet me,” and then she’d disappear. She’d return and say, “Billy said you were seventeen. You don’t look it to me.” She didn’t wait for a reply. Then, “Billy said you were a nice guy”; “Billy said you knew how to treat a girl and that you would not be fresh”; “Billy said he told you I was a nice girl, and I am.”

All this talk was between waiting on customers. She kept looking at me while she was serving up hot dogs and orange drinks. Finally, she came over and said, “Okay. Here’s what we’re going to do.” I swallowed hard. “You are going to come back here at eleven o’clock on the dot. That’s when I get off. I need fifteen minutes to freshen up. I’ve been sweatin’ like a friggin’ pig all day, my feet are killing me, and I’m going to wash them off in the sink out back. Better make it eleven-fifteen on the dot. We’ll go out. We’ll get a pizza, and we can eat it on the beach. There are too many people on the boardwalk tonight on account of the fireworks. At about ten-thirty, I want you to go to Slade’s Liquor Store on 96th Street and get a six-pack of Rheingold. You’ll have to show them your draft card to get the beer, or they could lose their license. You have your draft card with you, don’t you?”

“No,” I said, “I don’t have it with me. But I can get the six-pack.”

“Okay,” she said, “make sure it’s cold. I like to throw down a couple of fast cold beers to cool off, and it also gives me a buzz. Don’t you like a couple of cold ones?”

I nodded, but in fact, I had never drunk a can of beer, and I had no idea how I was going to get the beer without a draft card. I remember having a fleeting thought that I could leave then, but if I did, how would I explain it to Billy? I also felt a responsibility to Josephine. There was something about her, a sweetness underneath the toughness, and if I left, I knew she would be hurt. As I left, I realized I had almost two hours to kill—two hours

to get more nervous, more anxious, more scared.

At ten-thirty I went to Slade's and paid an older guy a dollar to buy the Rheingold for me. Eleven o'clock finally came, and at eleven-fifteen she was waiting outside. We got a pizza, and she suggested we walk down to a more deserted part of the beach.

When we got there, she reached into her canvas bag and pulled out a bed sheet for us to sit on. She apologized vaguely because it was so wrinkled and had some "food stains" on it. Of course, that last comment started me thinking, but I quickly made myself think of something more pleasant.

The first thing she did before she opened the pizza box was to tear open the cardboard-wrapped six-pack of Rheingold.

"Did you bring a church key?" she asked.

I looked at her and repeated, "Church key?"

"I figured you didn't. I always have one on me."

She reached into her bag again, got a beer-can opener, put two holes in each can, and took a couple of long gulps. (These were the days before flip-top cans.) She ate most of the pizza. I picked at one piece. I wasn't hungry. I was nervous. She opened another can and drank it, and I could see what she meant when she said she got a little buzz on.

We were on the beach about twenty minutes, not saying much, and suddenly she said, "Why don't we go under the boardwalk?"

Under the boardwalk? I thought. God, no. I'd heard lots of stories about what it was like under the boardwalk. For one thing, huge rats lived there. Another reason not to go under there was that, rather than walk a short distance to the public toilets, people would just go under the boardwalk. Of course, everyone peed in the Atlantic Ocean. Rockaway and Coney Island are crowded places. You're never more than a couple of feet away from someone else on the sand or in the water. Many times, as I waded out into deeper water, I would pass somebody and feel a warm current on my legs. It wasn't the Gulf Stream.

My cousin John actually had seen three rats sitting side by side with their heads turned upward and their mouths open. They were catching melting ice cream that flowed through the cracks of the boardwalk above after some kid had dropped his ice cream cone. It was a common sight to see rats running in and out from under the boardwalk in broad daylight. And this girl wanted me to go under the boardwalk with her.

I really wanted to leave then. I thought about saying that I felt sick—and I did—but I didn't say it. Instead, I let Josephine lead me to a hole in the cyclone fence that was supposed to keep people out, and we went under the boardwalk. She knew exactly where the hole in the fence was, and I wondered how many times she had done this.

Once again, she spread out the bed sheet, and again I wondered how many times she had done this. Then I thought again about the rats and the people who relieved themselves under there. I don't know which was worse: those thoughts or the thoughts about that bed sheet. I noticed that all around us was the glow of cigarettes, maybe a half-dozen or more, and some of them seemed pretty close.

This was not what I'd imagined it would be. I imagined something private, romantic, even beautiful. I asked Josephine if she was concerned about rats.

"Relax," she said, "they're more scared of you." And then she said, "Did you bring something? You know what I mean?"

I said, "Yes. I did."

She said, "I gotta see it."

I reached for my wallet. She struck a match. The instant she struck the match I felt—or thought I felt—something touch my elbow. It felt like something nibbling at my elbow. I immediately thought, *rat*. I dropped the wallet in the sand. At the same instant, the July Fourth midnight fireworks at Playland began with a tremendous salvo that shook the ground under us. Roman candles lit up the sky.

The combination of the real or imagined rat, the blast, and the flashes of light, which momentarily illuminated the couples around us, caused me to jump and flail around in the sand. In an instant there was sand everywhere. It was in my mouth, eyes, down my shirt, down my pants, in my hair—everywhere. I began striking matches, partly to keep the rats away if there were any around and partly to try to find my wallet. I found the sandy wallet. Then I began to look for an empty coffee cup.

"What are you doing?" she asked, sounding annoyed.

"I'm trying to find an empty coffee cup so I can go down to the water and use it to wash the sand off myself. It's everywhere."

Josephine blew out the match, and in a disgusted voice she said, "Billy told me you were a smart guy. I can't believe how dumb you are. You don't need to go down there when you have this."

She cracked open another can of Rheingold and started to pour it down my polo shirt. In an instant, she grabbed my belt buckle and pulled it toward her so she could pour the cold beer down inside my pants.

"It's a waste of a perfectly good Rheingold," she said, "but it will do the job."

It did the job all right. That was pretty much the end of the night for both of us. I told Josephine that we had to get out from under the boardwalk. I told her that I was not even seventeen, let alone eighteen. I told her that I had never done this before, and I was scared. I told her that I thought she was a very nice girl. I told her that I would take her home to Brooklyn in a taxi. And, finally, I told her that I was sorry.

Her response was a minute or two in coming. She told me that she already knew most of the things I just told her. She said she didn't think I was as old as I said and that I didn't look it, and that Billy was right about my being a nice guy.

Suddenly, I felt hungry and I asked her if we could get another pizza or a roast beef sandwich or maybe Chinese, or whatever she wanted, and go back down on the beach and eat it. That's what we did, and we watched the rest of the fireworks before hailing a taxi. The cab took us back over those two bridges, up Cross Bay Boulevard, and down Liberty Avenue to Brooklyn. It cost eight dollars, plus a tip, which was more than a week's pay for me.

Josephine was very impressed. She told me that she had never before been in a taxi. In front of her house, she told me that I could not kiss her goodnight because her Italian father was probably watching from the window and he would hit her with a strap if he saw her kiss a boy goodnight. She said she had a good time, the best she ever had, and that she hoped I would ask her out for another date before Moe's closed on Labor Day.

I walked her to her front door. We shook hands. I got back in the cab and told the driver to let me out on the corner of Liberty Avenue and Grant, a few blocks away from

where she lived, and I walked the rest of the way home. I was feeling a lot better at the end of the evening than I did at the beginning. It was good to breathe the night air. After a few minutes my thoughts turned to what I was going to tell Billy the next day, and I decided that I was going to tell him the same thing I told Josephine, that she was a nice girl and we had a good time.



My Uncle Freddie

Uncle Freddie

I've seen a black-and-white publicity photo, taken in the late 1930s, of the onetime "king" of Hollywood, Clark Gable, and the "love of his life," his wife Carole Lombard. Gable is sitting behind the wheel of his custom-built Packard convertible dressed in a snap-brim fedora, an expensive Hollywood sport coat, a forward-point collar, and a silk tie, with a pipe between clenched teeth. He has one arm on the steering wheel and the other around Carole. She is stunningly dressed. Both are looking directly into the lens of the camera.

It is a perfect picture, and every time I see it, I am reminded of the first time I saw Uncle Freddie. I was on the stoop of the building where we lived in a third-floor walkup in Brownsville when he pulled up in exactly the same kind of a car, with the most beautiful woman I had ever seen beside him. He jumped out and opened the door for her, and she stepped out, wearing the highest heels I'd seen and a dress that gently moved with every step she took.

He took her arm, led her to the stoop where I was sitting with four or five other kids, and said, "Who wants to earn a dollar for watching my car?"

A dollar in 1940 was a Clark Gable-size tip. All five of us stood up. He picked one of us and said, "Kid, I want you to stand by the car. Don't leave it, and don't let anybody climb on it or sit inside."

In those days a car like that was a target for kids to jump in, get behind the wheel, and pretend they were driving, making loud driving sounds and screeching-brake noises as they did.

That done, he said, "I'm looking for Mrs. Lynch. What floor is she on?"

"That's my nanny," I said. "Does she know you?"

"I'm your Uncle Freddie, Fred Unger, and this is my fiancée, Katherine Dowd. Your nanny was a good friend of my mother and father, and I'm sure she'll be glad to see me."

As we were going up the front steps, I got the first whiff of Katherine Dowd's perfume. This was a day of firsts for me. I led them upstairs and into the cold-water flat Nanny and I lived in. Fred Unger was right: Nanny was very happy to see him. He said they were on their way to Aqueduct Racetrack, and they could stay only a few minutes. He promised he would come back again. He reached into his breast pocket and handed Nan an envelope. He told her he wanted her to buy something for herself and me, and for Uncle Arthur. He kissed her good-bye.

They walked off. I don't think they were in the apartment more than ten minutes, and neither of them sat down. Nanny asked them to, but Aqueduct was calling, and as I learned later, Fred Unger loved the place. Before he left, Nanny asked him how the two hardware stores were doing, and he said there was only one hardware store now. He had sold the other one.

After they left, Nanny told me she had known his mother and father when she was married to Mr. Lynch, my grandfather, and living in another part of Brooklyn. Freddie's father had owned two hardware stores long before chains like TrueValue and Ace came along. The Ungers always had cars and sent Fred to an upstate college. Nanny said the college "sent him back" after a year, saying that he was not a serious student and recommending that the Ungers try to do something about his drinking habit. A short time later, Freddie's parents were killed in a car accident, and Freddie, who was then about twenty, inherited both hardware stores. He had no brothers or sisters. What Nanny didn't know the day that Freddie Unger visited was that he had sold one of the stores to pay for the swell car and his substantial gambling habit.

Months went by, and we didn't see Freddie again. One winter day when I was on my way to school, I opened the door to the vestibule leading to the outer door. Slumped over on the floor was a man, totally motionless. I first thought he was dead. But with the opening of the door, he stirred slightly. He lifted his head, and I could see that it was Fred Unger. He was in old, dirty, torn clothes. His face had dried blood on it, coming from his head and his nose. His hair was matted with blood and dirt. He had no overcoat. He smelled of urine and whiskey. I ran back upstairs to get Nanny, who came down. Together, she and I got him up three flights of stairs and into the apartment. She told me to continue on to school. She would take care of Freddie, and she would call Dr. Lauer if she felt he needed a doctor.

By the time I got home that afternoon, Nanny had moved Freddie into my room, and he was sleeping in my bed. She had cleaned Freddie up, and when his face and hair were washed and the dried blood was gone, he looked a lot better. He woke up later that night, and Nanny tried to feed him some soup and bread, but he had no interest in food. He never spoke a word, and he bore no resemblance to the energetic, smiling, handsome man that I had seen six or seven months earlier. He stayed that way for days, not eating, not talking, expressionless. He never left the apartment. He seemed to have no interest in himself or anyone else or what was going on in the world around him.

Gradually, after weeks of living like this, he began to talk to Nanny when the two of them were alone. He told her he sold the first hardware store to pay for the car, the clothes, living in the Hotel St. George in Brooklyn Heights, and the gambling—most of all, the gambling. He admitted to Nanny that he was caught in the grip of alcohol and gambling, mostly horses, but also cards, craps, anything where there was a chance of a jackpot. He told her he had lost the second store to gambling and owed money to bookies and loan sharks. It was they who had beaten him up. He said Nanny was the only one he knew who would take him in. He had no plans and no idea how he was going to pay off his debts or get out of the predicament he was in.

Now I recognize that he was very seriously depressed, but in those days, one just pulled out of one's depression or didn't. There were no drugs and certainly no talk therapy available. Nanny, with her quiet, nonjudgmental manner, was exactly what Fred Unger needed. He began to eat better, but he never left the apartment. Uncle Arthur used to come over every few days, and the two of them would talk. Uncle Arthur would always bring back issues of the *New York Mirror*, which Freddie said had the best racing pages. He studied them the way he had never studied anything at that upstate college. Uncle Arthur also kept Freddie in five-cent White Owl cigars. Freddie would slip off the paper cigar band, put it

on my finger, and say, “Someday, kid, I am going to get you a real ring with a ruby the size of a dime.”

Everyone knows December 7, 1941, was the day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, but there aren’t many people still around who remember where they were at the moment they got that news. I do. I was up in that apartment where Nanny and I, and now Uncle Freddie, lived. The three of us were gathered around our radio listening to that newscast. For the first time in months, Uncle Freddie showed some emotion. He was outraged at the news of the attack and kept assuring Nanny and me that it would be all right and that we would make “short work of those Japs.” He listened to the radio all that night and suddenly expressed interest in seeing newspapers. Pearl Harbor had a positive effect on his mental condition and a negative effect on mine. I was convinced that we were going to be overrun by hordes of Japanese soldiers invading our shores at Coney Island, Rockaway Beach, and maybe even Jones Beach on Long Island.

Soon afterward, a Western Union telegram came for Frederick Unger, informing him that he was being drafted into the United States Army and that he was to report to the Army Induction Center at Grand Central Station in Manhattan in fourteen days. A few days later, it was announced that we were also at war with Nazi Germany and Italy, but Uncle Freddie was convinced that he was “going to fight Japs in the Pacific.” The night before Freddie was to leave, we all went to bed early and agreed to get up early to say good-bye. Nanny wanted to make him a good breakfast. I was convinced he was going to die in the war. In those days, I thought everyone was going to die soon.

We got up early only to find out Freddie had already gone. Weeks went by, and we heard nothing. The weeks turned into months, and still nothing. About three months later, our bell rang and I ran down the three flights of stairs. Two men in suits were in the vestibule. Their shiny black sedan was parked in front of the house.

One of them said, “Is your mother home, sonny? We want to see her.” I explained that I didn’t have a mother, but I had Nanny, and one of them produced a badge and said they were from the FBI. I took them upstairs, and they got right to the point. They said they were looking for Frederick Unger, that he was a deserter and did not report for his army induction. Nanny told them he left the morning he was supposed to report, and we hadn’t heard from him since. They asked her if they could look around the apartment. They asked her if he left anything, any papers, or if she had any idea where he might be because he was not in the Army. They asked if he had a gun. They asked who his friends were. After they looked around, they left, but before they did, one of them read a paper to her that said that it was a serious crime to hide a deserter.

More than a year went by, and we heard nothing from Uncle Freddie or about him. For a while we thought he might have met up with those men he owed money to and might have been one of those unidentified bodies they used to find over the line in Queens, victims of gang violence. I was still sure that one way or another he was dead or going to die.

One day, more than two years after Uncle Freddie left, Mrs. King, the lady who lived on the first floor, came running up. “Mrs. Lynch,” she said, “the *Journal American* has an article about Fred. He’s a hero. You have to read it.”

Nanny took the paper, and we both began to read. The article was a full page devoted to the heroics of Lieutenant Fred Unger of Brooklyn. There were several pictures

of him: posed on a tank with a machine gun, in various uniforms—fatigues and dress uniforms—with smiling partisans. My Uncle Freddie. The story accompanying the pictures told of Freddie's infantry outfit capturing a German-occupied town in France and then losing it again to the Germans. Somehow, Freddie got trapped behind the enemy lines. He managed to break through those German lines and, in the process, did a lot of damage to a lot of German soldiers, captured one of their vehicles, threw a few hand grenades, and picked up two other American soldiers, who were also trapped.

He was wounded, and for that he got a Purple Heart, but he also got a few other medals. The biggest prize by far was the fact that he was awarded a "battlefield commission." Overnight, SFC Fred Unger was First Lieutenant Fred Unger, even skipping over the Second Lieutenant rank. Two months later, around the time the article was written, he was promoted once again, to captain. My Uncle Freddie, a captain and a hero in France.

A few weeks later, a cardboard box came addressed to me, and in it was a collection of souvenirs, including a German helmet, a Luftwaffe pilot's fur-lined hat with the ears cut out for a radio headset, a Nazi flag with blood on it (Uncle Freddie later confessed was port wine that he had intentionally spilled on the flag so he could tell me it was blood), a bayonet, a Nazi armband, some French and German money, and a wide, black leather belt that had an impressive silver buckle with a swastika on it. Thanks to Uncle Freddie, I was the most popular kid in our neighborhood.

The war ended, and Uncle Freddie came home soon after. He acted like he had a lot of money. We later found out he really didn't, but people, particularly the saloonkeepers, wouldn't let him pay for anything. They liked having him in their establishments because he told war stories, and he was an attraction.

He married a neighborhood girl, Rosalie, and opened a bar and grill called Heroes. But he started drinking and gambling once again and his bar closed after less than a year. From there, he got a job as a bus driver for the Green Bus Lines that went from City Line in the East New York section of Brooklyn to Jamaica, Queens. When I was a teenager, I would sometimes ride Uncle Freddie's bus late at night and sit in the seat behind him just to be able to talk to him. I loved to talk to him.

On one such trip I asked him about the FBI and what that was all about. He made very light of it. He admitted he might have been a couple of days late reporting to the army at Grand Central, but it was no more than a few days and he got there eventually. He never said why he was late arriving; knowing him, I suspected it was more than just a few days.

He was drunk on the bus one night, and a passenger reported him. The following week, he was driving a garbage truck for the Department of Sanitation. He held that job for ten years. Between the drinking, the gambling, the depression, the career failures, and whatever else plagued Uncle Freddie, his marriage ended in a few years.

In 1971 Nanny died, and I met Rosalie at the wake. She told me Uncle Freddie was in an old-soldiers' home in upstate New York. She visited him once a year, in the spring, and with each passing year his mind became more and more clouded. She suggested I write him a letter. When I got back to Boston, I bought the best box of cigars I could find and mailed them to him, along with a letter reminding him who I was.

Months went by, and I didn't hear anything. I didn't expect to. One day, an envelope came with an upstate New York postmark. Inside was a note, written on a small piece of pa-

per, that said, "Mr. McCann: Captain Unger wanted you to have this." It was signed, "Yours truly, his friend Sam Z."

Taped to the note was the paper band from one of the cigars I had mailed to him. And I remembered that all those many years ago Uncle Freddie would slip the band off one of his White Owls and put it on my finger, saying, "Someday, kid, I'm going to get you a real ring with a ruby, a big ruby the size of a dime."

I remembered, and Uncle Freddie did, too.



Drugstore Days

“Hey, Tomasso! I heard you was here. I heard you quit school. I heard you hit a priest. You know you go straight to hell for that,” she said.

“Can I help you with something, Santa?” I asked.

“Yeah. All’s I want is a box of Mickey Mouse mattresses.”

This was my first day behind the counter at the Lauer Pharmacy in East New York. Harold, the pharmacist in charge of the store, let me go behind the counter and wait on customers when he thought I was familiar enough with the stock so that I would look like I knew what I was doing. Santa Spinelli was my fifth or sixth customer that Saturday morning. I had no trouble with the others because they all wanted more or less the same thing: Bromo-Seltzer, Alka-Seltzer, Pepto-Bismol, or aspirin—the usual things sold on Saturday morning after a night of heavy drinking in a blue-collar neighborhood. I knew where all that stuff was, but not the “Mickey Mouse mattresses.” In fact, I had no idea what Santa was talking about.

Harold heard the exchange and came running out from the prescription area. “She wants a box of Kotex, Tom.” I went to get it and started wrapping it, feeling my face flush. In those days the subject of sanitary napkins and menstruation was an occasion for blushing for members of both sexes. While I was wrapping, Harold chatted up Santa Spinelli, the way he did with all the single women who came into the store. I finished wrapping the box of Kotex and tying it with red string and took thirty-three cents plus two cents sales tax out of the dollar she handed me.

As I gave her the change, Santa said, “Tell your friend Rocco to give me a call in exactly five days. That will be next Thursday. Don’t forget to tell him.”

“Suppose I give you a call next Thursday?” said Harold.

“You call my house, and my father will cut your liver out. He only wants me to date Italian guys and not all of them, either. Besides, you are too old . . . too funny-looking . . . and you’re Jewish.” She turned to me. “Don’t forget what I axed you to do. Tell Rocco . . . five days.”

Harold protested: “But I fought for your freedom overseas in World War II. I helped free Italy. We got rid of Mussolini. I could have gotten killed. Doesn’t that mean anything to you? Wouldn’t you like to go on a date with an ex-serviceman who is now a pharmacist and has a new Chevrolet?”

“How many times do I gotta tell you no? Even if I wanted to, what about my father? Get lost. Go find a nice Jewish girl, why don’t you?”

“I’m trying, I’m trying,” said Harold.

The next time Santa came in, she asked for a box of “manhole covers,” and I immediately knew what she meant. Every time she came in, she asked for Kotex by a different

name, and some were quite creative and funny. One day she stopped coming in for them, and in a few months Harold and I could see why.

I didn't know it then, but looking back, Harold Levine was precisely what I needed coming off the Prep and Father Hess experience. It was June 1948. I was fourteen and very much changed by the past six months. Before entering Prep, I had gotten a job at Roitman's Drugstore, but Father Hess got in the way. Mr. Roitman had to replace me. Mr. Lauer, another druggist in the neighborhood, was willing to give me a job, and I started the day after I left Prep.

Mr. Lauer knew Nanny and liked her. He had a son, Arthur, who was a doctor about Nanny's age, and in fact, he was Nanny's doctor and delivered her last baby. Nanny named the baby Arthur, much to the displeasure of her husband, Mr. Lynch. But Nanny had enough of her own German mother in her to do what she wanted. Tragically, Dr. Arthur Lauer got pneumonia and died, at forty-four, six months after little Arthur (my uncle Arthur) was born. Years later, Nanny told me that she loved Dr. Arthur Lauer, and she felt that Mr. Lynch knew it.

I liked Harold Levine immediately, and I could tell he liked me. He was also a Brooklyn boy, born and raised in the very tough Williamsburg section. He was about twelve years older than I was, which made him about twenty-six. He'd been drafted into the Army when he was nineteen.

After the war, he enrolled in the Brooklyn College of Pharmacy. In those days it was a two-year course, and graduates were awarded a Ph.G., which stood for Graduate in Pharmacy. Back then, most people called the druggist "Doctor," and druggists did do a lot of doctor things—things a druggist would get arrested for doing today.

After I'd been working at Lauer's for a few weeks, Harold said, "I have two coupons to White Castle for a bag of burgers. How about we go there tonight?"

Everyone loved White Castle hamburgers; the bag of burgers was famous. There were twenty of them for a dollar. Of course, each burger was the size of a quarter on a roll that was the size of a half-dollar. Everything was steamed, including the rolls, so they were soggy. There was a sliver of dill pickle as thin as a dime, a few pieces of steamed onion, a dollop of ketchup, and a speck of yellow mustard. But they were delicious and filling. Large Cokes were a nickel.

We closed the store at ten o'clock, got into Harold's new 1948 Chevrolet, and headed for the White Castle at Rockaway Boulevard and Liberty Avenue. Harold pulled into a space in the parking lot and went in and got our bags of burgers and Cokes. He insisted on paying for mine. I remember letting him because it would have taken me three hours to earn enough to pay for that meal. I was earning thirty-five cents an hour.

We had just opened our bags and were about to take the first bite when suddenly Harold started the car and raced into a space that had just opened up in front of the door of the White Castle. I asked him why he moved out of the space we were in. He explained that we'd have a better look at the girls going in the front door. He added that if he left the headlights on, we could get an x-ray effect from the girls who were not wearing slips under their cotton summer dresses. I don't mean to imply that Harold was weird around girls, just that he was very eager.

After a few minutes we settled into eating our way through our bags of hamburgers,

and Harold seemed to forget about the girl watching.

He told me about his Army experience. His basic training took place at Pine Camp in upstate New York in the dead of winter. He was always cold. He was placed in the infantry and was immediately sent over to Europe—to Italy, where it was still winter. He was still cold. When the Italian campaign was over, he was sent to England for some specialized glider training. He was still cold and now wet. He was in the D-Day invasion. He described those several days to me and was frank to say that he was terrified to see all the carnage around him and feared he would be next. Every dream was about death.

He requested that he be relieved and sent back behind the lines. That request went all the way up to the company commander, who berated him, refused his request, and in fact sent him out on patrols as the point man—usually the first to get hit. One day, in the height of a heavy skirmish, Harold simply couldn't take it anymore. He cracked and decided that he was going to kill himself. Then he modified that plan. He took off his boot, put his foot up on a rock, held the muzzle of his M1 rifle to a point between his ankle and his toes, and pulled the trigger. That act, witnessed by others, not only got him sent behind the lines and, ultimately, home, but it also got him a dishonorable discharge.

At this point in the story, Harold took off his shoe and sock and put his foot on the dashboard. One would think that a bullet fired from right up against the skin would make a relatively small hole going in and exiting, but just the opposite was the case. His foot reminded me of one of those soft pretzels that they used to sell from pushcarts in Brooklyn. It was all gnarled and burned, apparently from the flash coming out of the muzzle of the gun, something Harold had not considered at the time. The sole of his foot—the entire length of it from his toes to his heel—was also badly damaged. Apparently, there was some serious nerve damage because he could no longer walk with his feet parallel to each other. The right foot, the one he shot, turned outward at a 90-degree angle, and when it got to about four inches off the ground, flopped down heavily as it hit the ground. The effect was most unusual.

Harold got very quiet after he told me his story. I told him my story about Prep and the sadistic priest. Once again, we went silent. After a few minutes, Harold said, “So we are really a couple of damaged people who need to get themselves healed.”

I think we both thought about those words for a few minutes. Neither one of us said anything. Harold was the first to speak. He said, “The thing that pisses me off is that as far as I can tell, I am the only GI who went all through Italy and France and came home still a virgin.”

We both laughed. Harold Levine and Tom McCann bonded that night, but in those days, men never used that word.

I have to admit that Harold was pretty homely. He was about five-six, very thin, with oily skin, a few facial moles, and thick, horn-rimmed glasses. He was also prematurely balding. But he was a great guy with a good job, a wonderful sense of humor, a nice car, and nice clothes. He loved music, liked nice places, and had a lot of other good qualities. For some reason he could just not connect with girls.

He blamed his lack of success with women on the fact that he could not dance because of his foot. He said that not only did he step on the foot of his dancing partner, but he also regularly tripped the couple dancing next to him. Harold tried everything. He spent

weekend after weekend in the Catskills, where girls looked for guys and guys looked for girls. He drove 1,500 miles each way to Miami and back over a long weekend with the help of a pocketful of Dexedrine.

Apropos of drugs, Harold was quick to try anything new. I recall a tranquilizer called Miltown. Harold eagerly awaited the arrival of our first shipment, tried them, and pronounced that they didn't work.

Harold used to regale me with stories about his days in pharmacy school, and one I particularly liked, though just the thought of it still sends chills through me, was the one involving mercury. We all know that mercury is a heavy, shiny, silvery liquid metal. Anyone who has ever broken a mercury thermometer knows it is very difficult to pick up. Another name for mercury is quicksilver. Harold told the story of one of his professors who conducted an experiment in class one day. He lined the floor with pages of the *New York Times* and then asked for a volunteer from the class. He poured some mercury into a one-ounce shot glass and told the student volunteer to drink it on command. He assured the student that no harm would come to him.

As soon as the student downed the shot of mercury, the professor, pointer in hand, started to describe where the mercury was in the student's body moment by moment. He took his pointer and pointed to the student's esophagus, then his stomach, then zigzagged the pointer across the abdomen as the mercury made its way through the intestines, and then across the ileum and into the descending colon. "Voila!" shouted the professor as the ball of mercury exited the volunteer's pant leg and landed on the newspapers. Harold got very excited as he described how the mercury came out, about two minutes later—in one piece, exactly as it went in. Years later, of course, we found out that even small traces of mercury could be harmful to human beings.

The student volunteer for the experiment? Harold Levine.

Harold entertained me with other stories, such as the one involving Spanish fly. There's a lot of folklore about Spanish fly and its use as an aphrodisiac. In fact, it is used in animal husbandry and has other medicinal uses. We had a dark-brown bottle of it in the drugstore. It was used primarily in hair preparations. In those days it was thought that very small amounts of Spanish fly could stimulate the growth of hair in people who were balding. Vitalis, once a very popular hair tonic for men, had an advertising campaign built around its sixty-second workout. You were supposed to apply it to your hair liberally and then massage it for sixty seconds, and you would get that "all-over tingling feeling." That tingling feeling was supposedly from Spanish fly, or cantharides, stimulating the flow of blood to the scalp.

One day Harold took down the bottle of cantharides and took the stopper out and told me to put my index finger over the neck of the bottle and turn it upside down, just for five seconds. I did this, and, almost immediately, a large blister formed on my index finger. Spanish fly was a preparation made from powdered blister beetles, which apparently are found in abundance in Spain. It was this kind of fascinating knowledge and the way he told the stories that made Harold unforgettable.

Drugstores were very different in those days: The drugs were different, the stock was different, the prices were certainly different, and drugstore services were very much different. In those days the druggist, the "doctor," would look at things such as a rash or a

sore throat; take things out of eyes, from eyelashes to so-called cinders; remove warts with acid; change dressings; medicate an aching tooth with oil of cloves; weigh babies on the drugstore scale; and even splint broken fingers with adhesive tape and a tongue depressor.

Medicines, too, were a lot different in those days. For coughs, there were preparations called Brown's Mixture, Stokes' Expectorant, and a terpin hydrate elixir with codeine. There were nitroglycerine tablets for angina. There were very few things for pain. There were a lot of skin preparations: salves for rashes, cuts and bruises, creams for pimples, etc.

Most prescriptions were not simply taken from a big bottle and put into a small bottle, as they are today. A lot of prescriptions had to be compounded. It was not unusual for a doctor to write a prescription calling for perhaps four different powdered ingredients, an ounce or two of each. The pharmacist would have before him a pile of these ingredients that had to be mixed and then put into capsules. Frequently, the capsules would be filled too tightly, and we would be ten capsules short on a hundred-capsule order. My job was to open up the ninety capsules and take out a little bit from each so that we could fill the ten empty ones. It was an exacting and sometimes tedious business.

Every drugstore was individually owned in those days. There were no chains. The stock was far different from what it is now. Hairnets were a big item, as was foot soap. Most people took a bath only once a week, if then, but foot hygiene was very important, and people would wash their feet with a special foot soap every three or four days. There were basically only three brands of toothpaste, and there were three underarm deodorants, Stoppette, Veto, and Arid.

Prices were very different, too. Five Gillette Blue Blades, which were the finest money could buy, were twenty-five cents; Gillette Thin Blades, in the red box, were three for ten cents; a large can of Johnson's baby powder was forty-nine cents; condoms—Trojans or Sheiks—were three for fifty cents or a dozen for a dollar and a half. They were kept in a drawer in the back of the store, and in the four years that I worked at Lauer's I never had a customer who was not embarrassed when he purchased them. If there were any women in the store, he would let them go ahead of him and wait until they cleared out of the store before asking for the condoms. Around the time that I got into the drugstore business, home permanents became the big thing. The two biggest were Toni and Lilt.

There was not much health insurance in those days, no such thing as copays, Medicaid, or anything of the sort. Film was taken to drugstores, and it took about ten days to get your pictures back, sometimes longer.

Because of the total failure of my first year at the Prep, it took me four and a half years to graduate from high school. I worked at the drugstore for a full four years and worked from four o'clock until nine, with a half hour (unpaid) off for supper. On Saturday I worked from nine to six with a half hour (unpaid) for lunch. I started off at thirty-five cents an hour, and four years later, I was earning fifty cents an hour. That meant I always had money in my pocket, but also that I was always working. As a result, I wasn't able to participate in any high school activities or sports. But I was doing well in school, and I was getting another kind of education at the drugstore.

I learned a lot in that store from the people who were our customers. I learned a lot from Harold. Together, we did what he said we had to do that night in the car in front of the White Castle. We were both, as Harold said, "a couple of damaged people who needed

to get themselves healed.” We both did a lot of healing in those four years.

When I graduated from John Adams High School, I left Lauer’s. Harold left around the same time. We drifted apart. I don’t know why. We should not have. Harold and I were close. We were friends. Friends should stay friends forever. I think of him often and wonder why I never kept in touch with him. A few years ago I tried to find him. There are a lot of Harold Levines in the New York metropolitan area and upstate New York, and even in Connecticut. I send out a batch of letters every so often, each with a return envelope, asking, “Are you my Harold Levine?” My letter describes a bit about Harold. One came back to me recently that read, “No. I am not your Harold. Wish I were. Keep looking until find him. Good luck. Harold Levine.”

“My” Harold is no doubt long gone by now. But I still I think of him fondly.

The Voice of the New York Yankees, the Voice of God

If you were born and raised in Brooklyn, you are going to have a Brooklyn accent. There is no escaping it. For eight years in elementary school, I was taught by the Sisters of Charity of Nova Scotia, who worked very hard to erase all traces of Brooklynese from our speech. There were no “dese, dems, and dose” among St. Sylvester’s graduates, though the pronunciation of certain words—like ball, floor, radiator, or car—marked us forever as being from that storied place. Even after ninety years, I still hear it in my own voice. Others hear it, too. I hear it on television shows and movies—particularly old movies. And today there are even coaches who teach Brooklyn accents to actors.

When I left Prep and decided to enroll in John Adams, one of the reasons I chose that school was because it had a teacher who, year after year, produced students who won the all-city public speaking contest. His name was Robert Sheppard. Right from the start, I plagued my Adams grade advisor, Dorothy Laws, to get me into Mr. Sheppard’s class. It took her two years, but she finally did it.

I was very excited my first day in his class. And impressed with Mr. Sheppard, starting with the look of him. He was tall and handsome and had a perpetual tan. Physically fit and impeccably dressed. I would have said Savile Row if I’d known what that was at the time. He always wore a starched white shirt with French cuffs. I had never seen French cuffs before. A different silk tie every day with a collar bar. He spoke in a soft voice that sounded a bit British—a cross between George Plimpton and Bill Buckley. It was impossible to tell where he came from but certainly not Brooklyn or Queens. Mr. Sheppard was fifties cool.

On that first day he asked every kid in class to stand up and state his name and read a short paragraph he put up on the blackboard. He called on every kid except me. At first, I thought he passed over me by mistake. But on the second day, he passed over me again. When he failed to call on me on the third day, I had no doubt for some reason he didn’t want me in his class. He was sending me a message, and I got it.

Because of my bad experience at Prep, and my failure at every subject there, it was going to take me four and a half years to graduate. I did not want to run the risk of making it five. I took myself and my Brooklyn accent to Miss Laws’s office and begged her to get me out of Mr. Sheppard’s class. She was not happy, but she suggested two other classes, one taught by Margaret Gannon and the other by Richard Hundt. In an instant, and really without thinking, I chose Miss Gannon. I think about that day a lot because had I chosen Mr. Hundt I never would have met Joan Frese. We fell in love, and I am happy to say we have been married for seventy years, but that’s another story. That decision, made in an instant, changed my life. Throughout this book, you will read about my obsession with chance, destiny, and the actions of others, and how these things have played a part in my life. I am obsessed with the *what-ifs*. There will be more.

Mr. Sheppard would go on to become the voice of the New York Yankees for over half a century. Reggie Jackson dubbed him the Voice of God. He became a celebrity, much

sought after as a speaker, and appeared in several Hollywood films. But remembering those days in the classroom in the 1940s, I never felt kindly toward Mr. Sheppard and after fifty years I decided to write him the following letter:

Thomas P. McCann, President
Commonwealth Films, Inc
223 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts 02116

August 20, 1999

Mr. Robert Sheppard
c/o The New York Yankees
Yankee Stadium
E 161st St. & River Ave.
Bronx NY 10451

Dear Mr. Sheppard:

It's taken me 50 years to write this letter. I don't know why it's taken that long except that I've been busy.

Fifty years ago, I walked into your public speaking class at John Adams High School, spent two days there, and decided I had better get out. I came to the conclusion that I would never learn to speak like you or even like Ronald Hengen, your protege that year. Rather than be miserable for the rest of the term, or perhaps even flunk the course, I went to see my grade adviser—Miss D.B. Laws—and asked her what else she had to offer me. She suggested a dramatics class with Miss Margaret L. Gannon, so I said good-bye to Mr. Sheppard and hello to Miss Gannon.

That first day in the class I met a young blonde girl named Joan Frese, I didn't know it then, but a few years later we would get married. There have been many turning points in my life, as there are in everyone's, but by far the most significant one was my decision to leave your class. As a result of that decision. I had four fantastic children with Joan, and in 1960 she caused me to move to Boston which gave me a wonderful career. Lots of other good things have happened to me along the way.

I think of you often for really starting it all, even though you didn't know it then. I was reminded of you again just the other night when I saw a program on PBS about the Yankees and heard your voice introducing Phil Rizzuto—it took me back to those days at John Adams, and I promised myself that I would write to you before the week was out and before our time runs out. I just turned 65; you must be at least 100!

Thanks, and with all good wishes.

Cordially,
Thomas P. McCann

PS: In Act I, I had a fascinating career with the infamous United Fruit Company. I wrote a book about that experience published by Crown 25 years ago. It did very well both with reviewers and in terms of sales and was ultimately printed in about eight languages including Russian and Japanese. Here's a copy. I hope you enjoy this collection of banana war stories.

I hoped he would pick up the note of sarcasm in my letter. I never expected to get a reply, and I was very surprised when I did. His letter was very gracious, and I loved his line about how things started happening for me after I left his class!

From the desk of...

Bob Sheppard

August 28, 1999

Dear Tom,

Thank you so much for your letter. It was refreshingly different. Most former students thank me for helping them. Your success came when you left my class! God was with you.

You were fortunate to study with Miss Gammon - a perfect lady. And, of course, you were lucky to meet Joan.

My 25 years at John Adams as Speech Chairman were pleasant and productive.

New York Yankees

as I sit here in my booth
at the stadium, prior to the game
with Seattle, with your letter in
front of me, I'm filled with a
flood of memories.

I do remember Ronnie
Hengen; sorry I can't remember
meeting you. My loss!

Again, thank you for your
letter and thank you for the
book.

Please give my best to
Joan and the 4 children.

God love you.

Bob Sheppard

100 years old!

No, just the shady side
of middle age ...

However, I was still left to wonder why Mr. Sheppard didn't like me or why he didn't want me in his class. When he died at the age of ninety-nine, I read all the obituaries. Most noted that all his life he was a very strong Catholic. He was a daily communicant, which meant he attended mass and received communion every day of the year. He had a daughter who was a nun. Here, I believed, was the answer to my question.

When I applied for admission to John Adams, I was interviewed by Dean Marie Keller. I had to tell her of my problems at the Prep, including that I had hit a priest after he hit me and put a big gash in my head. She called Prep while I waited outside her office. She called me back into her office and, after giving me a long hard look, put me on probation.

I'm sure that my history was made a matter of record. Mr. Sheppard, I'm also sure, either read my record or heard about it and that was why he didn't want me in his class. It would not have mattered to him that the priest hit me first and I hit him back. Not to a daily communicant.

PS: I also learned from reading his obituaries that he was born in Richmond Hill, Queens, generally accepted to be the home of Archie Bunker of *All in the Family*. Bob Sheppard also came a long way.

Requiescat in pace, Mr. Sheppard.

Most Likely to Succeed

After being expelled from the Prep, I entered John Adams High School in 1948. It would take me four and a half years to graduate because of my experience at Prep, where I had been failed in every subject. I entered Adams on probation. I was in a bad place. I was angry and indifferent. I did not see Adams as a fresh start, and I entered with no intention of finishing high school. At fourteen, I felt like a failure. I would not graduate. My plan was to quit school at sixteen and enter whatever branch of the military would have me.

Gradually, however, I began to feel less angry at the world and everyone in it. I grew interested in learning. I began to see that the school was giving me another chance. After two years at Adams, I became focused and successful and moved beyond the pain and humiliation of Prep. Of course, I didn't make this change in a vacuum. I was lucky to have three excellent teachers—Marie Killer, Margaret Gannon, and Mary Burns—as well as a legendary, tough, profane football coach, Joe Scarlata, who I had as a teacher rather than a coach. Because I chose to work six or sometimes seven days a week after school, I didn't play football or any other sport. And it was my choice. In those days, having money in my pocket was more important to me than anything else.

I did, however, participate in other school activities. I acted in school plays and was elected president of the school's General Organization by the student body of 3,500. In my senior year, our class yearbook, *The Clipper*, noted that I was voted the student who had "Done Most for Adams" and was "Most Likely to Succeed." *The Clipper* also listed me as being headed for the Brooklyn College of Pharmacy.

A pharmacist? At the time, the BCP was my only option. I had been working at a drugstore, and the owner offered to pay my tuition there for two years, until I graduated and earned my license. I would need to continue working forty hours a week at the store during those years for an unspecified salary, and after I graduated, I would work there as a pharmacist for at least two more years. I wasn't thrilled at the prospect of being a pharmacist for the rest of my life, and I didn't see a pharmacy degree as leading to anything else. But as I said, it was my only option.

In the middle of my senior year, I saw a posting on the Adams bulletin board announcing that the United States Air Force was recruiting qualified high school seniors to earn a BS degree at an accelerated program at selected colleges. I could earn my degree in three years while, during the summer, doing eight weeks of USAF-specific training on an airbase. On completion of the program, I would be commissioned as a second lieutenant and serve for four years. I would be trained as a bombardier or navigator with the possibility of further training as a pilot. Best of all, the program carried a modest monthly stipend, which meant that Joan and I could get married.

I had always been fascinated by airplanes and the prospect of being a pilot. Remember: The Air Force was a new branch of the service, only created in the late forties and a great place for a young man to be as it grew in importance. Also, this was 1952, and the US was in the middle of the Korean War. Russian-piloted MIGS, superior to anything the

US had at the time, created wartime challenges that were exciting. I immediately applied. I passed the preliminary physical as well as a battery of tests at First Army Headquarters at Governors Island in New York Harbor near lower Manhattan. I was accepted.

Never in my life, before or since, have I felt better about myself as I did on graduation day in June 1952. I was on my way. I felt like a winner. Immediately after graduation, I reported to Governors Island for three days of additional medical exams and other written tests and interviews. On the second day, they picked up an ear condition I'd had all my life. When I was a child, I'd suffered from multiple ear infections that, combined with bad medical care, left me partly deaf in one ear, with an eardrum full of scar tissue. I was in danger of the eardrum's rupturing at high altitudes or sudden changes in pressure, so an airman's life was simply not possible.

They washed me out of the program. It's hard to describe how I felt, largely because I have refused to remember the pain of that turn of events. In a matter of days, I went from the highest high in my life to the lowest depth. But I do remember taking the ferry from Governors Island to lower Manhattan and looking down at the water of the Hudson River, hopeless and dejected and full of dark thoughts. My life seemed to me to be over. Once again, I was a failure with no prospects and no place to go. How could I face my friends and family? The ferry docked, and I walked through Battery Park, crying, sick to my stomach.

And then another turning point.

I passed through Battery Park, past the Customs House. I had to decide which way to walk. Up Broadway and into the center of Manhattan, or left on West Street, the beginning of the sequence of piers that extended along the west side of Manhattan? I chose to turn the corner onto West Street, probably because it would be less crowded and I was still an emotional mess. West Street in those days was all cobblestones, trucks, and a row of ugly green piers, except for one known as Pier 3 North River, a yellow-brick three-story building with the words United Fruit Company in gold letters across its length. I had written a term paper on Central America, so I knew a little about what the company did and the fact that it had a fleet of banana boats. I walked up to the uniformed armed guard at the front door and told him that I was interested in applying for a job with the company.

So fate works. The guard directed me to the second-floor personnel department. The lobby was something out of a Hollywood movie, panelled in a dark wood (which I would later learn was Honduran mahogany), and full of soft leather furniture and polished brass. I took the elevator, which looked made of pure gold, to the second floor. The department was empty, but I heard a voice from an adjoining office ask, "Who's there?" I followed the voice to the large private office of the director of personnel, Donald Marcus. (I found out later that I had come at lunch hour.) I introduced myself and told Mr. Marcus I'd recently graduated from John Adams and was looking for a job on one of the company's boats. He was abrupt, almost to the point of being rude, and told me that a job at sea was not going to happen. He did offer me a job as a messenger/office boy. The pay was \$1,745 a year or \$32.50 a week. The hours were long—five and a half days a week. I told him I'd just graduated, that I was a good student, that I was elected president of the school, most likely to succeed, and so on. He was not impressed. He repeated the offer. I thanked him and walked out. Two rejections in one day!

As I was leaving the building, the guard, whose name was Joe Brennan, asked me

how I made out. I told him. He invited me to join him in his small guardhouse and offered me half of his ham sandwich and a cup of coffee from his thermos. At the end of our lunch, he looked at me steadily and said, "Tom, this is a good company. You have a chance to get your foot in the door." I thought about that and a few minutes later walked back up to the second floor and told Mr. Marcus that I had changed my mind. The next day I began my employment with United Fruit. It would be my workplace for the next seventeen years.

TWO

UNITED FRUIT





The white ship docked at Pier 3 was visible from my office window.

Starting to See the World

The day after my chat with Joe Brennan, I started my job in the passenger department of United Fruit. I hated it. I ran all over New York City, picking up airline and rail tickets, getting tourist cards from the various consulates, filing, getting coffee and lunches, running errands, delivering interoffice mail to a dozen different departments, going to the post office, and even taking the boss's dirty shirts to the laundry.

The one good day in the week was Friday. The company had a fleet of a hundred and fifty ships. Most of them were freighters carrying twelve passengers, but six of them carried ninety-five passengers each. They sailed from a wide range of US ports, including one every Friday from New York. So that was an especially busy day for us in the passenger department. It was also exciting. Successful people from all walks of life took the cruises: movie stars, politicians, people whose faces I knew from their photographs in newspapers, magazines, and the infant industry of television. The cruises from New York lasted seventeen days and included exotic and interesting stops in places like Havana, Jamaica, and the Canal Zone, with a further stop in a colorful banana port in Central America before heading back to New York.

One of my interoffice mail deliveries was to the office of the port purser, a man named John Caldwell. One day, when I'd been working in the passenger department for three months or so, I delivered a piece of mail to his office. I got an idea. A chance perhaps to escape the tedium of my current post. He was alone at his desk, and I knocked and asked if I could see him for a minute. A big Irishman with a slight brogue, he was very welcoming and invited me in. I told him I was an aspiring writer and wanted to see the world—isn't that how writers got their start? Could I get a job aboard ship? (Of course, I knew that the Irish love writers.) He listened but explained that union rules did not permit nonunion employees to work on the ships, but he added that if a position opened in his office, he would let me know.

Two months later Mr. Caldwell called me and said, "Tom, this morning we took one of our chief pursers to the hospital with a burst appendix. He'll be out for at least a month. We're moving our second and third pursers up and there's a slot for a third purser in training. I can sign you on as a cadet to get around the union. Are you interested?"

Was I interested? Of course. He told me that I needed to be there by three o'clock that afternoon to get suited up in uniform and be ready to sail at four. The other pursers would explain my duties. It was already one o'clock, so I ran home, borrowed a suitcase from the man next door, threw some socks and underwear into it, and made it to Pier 3 with time to spare.

I was still only eighteen years old. I had never been south of Coney Island. That sailing, my first, was on the first Friday in December 1952, a miserable day: cold, rain, fog, and sleet, with a biting wind off the river. Our ship, the *Veragua*, backed out of her slip at Pier 3 and into the mainstream. We had just passed the Statue of Liberty, and I was on my way to the ship's lounge to take drink orders when I noticed a woman who looked like the actress Joan Crawford standing at the rail, smoking a cigarette. She wore a tightly belted tweed coat and seemed completely unaffected by the nasty weather. I stopped and politely asked if there was anything I could do for her. Looking at me coldly, she said, "Yes. You can get lost." Shocked, I backed away.

A day and a half later we were off the coast of Cape Hatteras, a spot I'd been told was always rough sailing. Half the passengers on board were on deck getting tossed around and trying hard to minimize the effects of seasickness. I saw the woman in the cloth coat at the rail, keeping her distance from the other passengers. I tried to sneak past her, but she saw me and with her index finger motioned me over. "If you still want to do something for me," she said, "you can get me a cup of coffee and a deck chair."

"Yes, ma'am," I replied.

"And get one for yourself," she added.

I explained that I was just a server, and that the crew were not permitted to fraternize with passengers. She looked at me the way Mrs. Robinson looked at Benjamin Braddock in *The Graduate*. "We are not fraternizing," she said. "Just do as I told you."

So I did. I returned with the coffee and deck chairs. She sat on one, and I sat on the other. The ship careened on the rough sea, the coffee spilled, and our chairs slid across the deck. After a while the woman said, "Do you know who I am?"

"I'm sorry. I don't."

"I'm Ann Whitman. I'm the personal secretary to Dwight Eisenhower, the man who was elected president of the United States five weeks ago. I'm sure you've heard of *him*."

I said I had.

"Oh. Are you even old enough to vote?"

Without waiting for an answer, she explained that President-elect Eisenhower had given her an order to take a two-week vacation. He thought she needed a rest. She wasn't happy about it. And she added that she didn't think she could last seventeen days on the ship. We chatted. Or she chatted and I listened. For whatever reason, this high-powered, highly stressed woman felt comfortable talking to this eighteen-year-old boy. And we would keep talking. For the next fifty years.

Our first stop was Havana. This was quite an eye-opener for an eighteen-year-old Brooklyn boy. All the passengers disembarked and stayed two nights at the Hotel Nacional, except for Ann Whitman, who remained on the ship and stayed for the most part in her stateroom. During the day, I did a lot of running around with import manifests and other business, but I was free to see the sights of the city at night.

On that first night the radio operator and the chief steward took me under their wing, and we had dinner at the hotel. The food was good and the entertainment, mostly dance music, was first rate. And there were a few comedians who as I recall were somewhat risqué. Again, that kind of entertainment was something I wasn't used to. Between acts, "Superman of Havana" came out. His only job was to stand in front of the audience in his

Superman costume and open and close his cape. He wore the Superman shirt with the big “S” and blue leggings up to his knees, but he had no underwear on. The audience was astonished.

Years later, I saw this character used in *The Godfather Part II*, when Michael Corleone realizes he has been betrayed by his brother Fredo. At that moment, the camera cuts to a brief shot of Superman opening his cape to another brief shot of the audience reacting and then back to Fredo and Michael. The scene goes by so quickly you have to watch carefully. And you still might miss it.

That was the first night in Havana. The second night was even more memorable—in fact, unforgettable. The radio operator took me to another place to eat, a waterfront dive. After our meal he led me through the kitchen and down a narrow hallway into a small “theater” that was barely larger than its single piece of scenery—a large bed with no sheets on it. There were small chairs all around the bed, all of which were occupied. The “players” arrived about five minutes after we did. By that time, we had been served rum drinks in coke bottles.

I began to get an idea of what was in store. A young man wearing candy-striped Bermuda shorts and with an ugly knife scar on his forearm, from elbow to wrist, entered, along with a woman who was older, about thirty. Both seemed bored or perhaps angry. They wasted no time in preliminaries. The stench of perspiration and smoke in that small, closed room made me feel like I was going to throw up, and I took a quick gulp from the coke bottle, gagged, stood up, and pushed my way to the door. I went outside and vomited in the gutter. A while later the radio operator came out, and we walked back to the ship. I had to carry him up the gangway.

The next morning, I met Ann Whitman on the deck. She said, “I saw you carrying your friend on board last night—or rather this morning. If you continue with this life, that will be you in ten or fifteen years.” She went on to describe the radio operator’s life perfectly—twice married and twice divorced, with children with both women, and a hopeless alcoholic likely to have an early death. “If that’s the kind of a life you want,” she said, “you’re on your way. But if you want to explore an alternative, I could introduce you to my husband, who is director of publicity and advertising for this rotten company. Let me know if you want me to do that.”

I thought about what she said, and before she got off in Kingston to fly back to New York (she had no intention of staying for the full seventeen days of the cruise), I told her I was interested in talking to her husband. Two weeks later, when I was back at work in New York, there was a message for me to call Mr. Whitman. I did; we met. He offered me a job as a clerk typist in his department. Another fateful moment. Another turning point.

An American Company

Ed Whitman was known to everyone as Whit. When I moved to his publicity and advertising department, I was nineteen years old. I'd been with United Fruit for less than a year. And I was an exception—a very young guy in a corporation of old men, a status I would constantly be reminded of over the years. When I became a vice president in 1969, I was the youngest VP in the company's history. I like to think my youth gave me a unique perspective on an aging company: I joined early enough to meet the old-timers and get to know the history of the firm, but I was there long enough—twenty years—to see it transform in ways that paralleled many changes in America itself during that time.

Businesses are a lot like people. When companies are born/founded, they are like children: fearless, open to new ideas, and willing to take risks, fall, and get up again. They are eager for adventure and above all flexible. As companies get older, they slow down, become more cautious and more set in their ways. They grow risk averse and want more comfort in their life and less work. The older they get the more rigid and tradition-bound they become. And, like people, most companies don't live to be a hundred.

In 1953, when I moved to Whit's department, United Fruit was in the cautious older phase. It was in decline both domestically and in the tropics, where it sourced its product—bananas. (The way United Fruit did business gave rise to the phrase “banana republic.”). Management was old, tired, and complacent. It was still a Fortune 500 company, but profits had begun to decline, and dividends were shrinking. The banana market was changing and so was the political environment. The company's monopoly on bananas was not so big as it once was. The market was getting more competitive. Central America was also changing, going from oxcarts to jet airplanes in a little more than a decade. Among many other changes, workers were demanding more money and better benefits. The world was changing. United Fruit was not.

But within this hidebound company, I was young enough and eager enough to learn how *I* could change. From the start I was determined to learn everything I could about United Fruit, from top to bottom. This wasn't IBM or Boeing. We were low tech, not high, so the way to get ahead was to learn as much as I could from the inside. While working, I took college courses at the NYU School of Commerce—not philosophy or literature, but subjects that would help me on the job—accounting, marketing, advertising, finance, business. I read everything I could about business, though there was very little in those days. And I funded it myself. There were no tuition refund programs in those days, but at eighteen dollars a credit I could handle the tuition. And I earned extra money on weekends working for my uncle Arthur's plumbing, floor waxing, and TV repair business.

Whit also helped. There was there no formal training program at the company, but he enabled me to spend up to three weeks at a time in other departments, including sales, freight traffic, purchasing, accounting, steamships, and pier operations. That time allowed me to learn the basics. I became a reporter for the company's in-house magazine, which gave me more experience and a few extra dollars. It also let me see the whole of the

company and how its pieces fit together. When I was eventually transferred to Boston, I became known as the young man who knew more about the company than anyone else. Of course, I loved that distinction and did everything I could to enhance and promote that reputation.

The business and financial aspects of United Fruit's operations were handled in Boston by cautious, conservative Brahmins who had substantial political clout at all levels of the federal government. The actual business of growing bananas, on the other hand, was left to swashbuckling men, mostly adventure-seekers who were tough, often flamboyant, and attracted to the romantic nature of the tropics. When the Boston men wanted to influence a political outcome, they did it quietly, covertly, behind the scenes, through personal contacts and persuasion. In the tropics, political objectives were effected through bribes, force, and even revolution. That was the way it was when I joined the company, and that was the way it was after I left.

Among the many lessons I learned from the beginning was that political outcomes were key to the company's history. That swashbuckling attitude in the tropics was a relic of a time when the company—like the US itself—did what it wanted to in Central America. United Fruit was born at the turn of the twentieth century, a time when US foreign policy south of our borders was aggressive and intrusive, marked by foreign adventures and invasions of countries throughout the hemisphere and the so-called Banana Wars in Nicaragua, Honduras, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico. And Cuba, of course. This was also the time when the Panama Canal was built, an American idea that involved taking land from Colombia by force and giving it to Panama in order to dig the canal at the narrowest point in the isthmus.

United Fruit acted in the same spirit, using its political connections to create, by whatever means necessary, conditions that benefited corporate success. It was a company shaped in the era of gunboat diplomacy, and it maintained this shape into the 1950s. It was an old-fashioned firm in many ways. The Brahmins and swashbucklers were themselves a throwback. There were few women. Most of the secretaries were male. The company boasted of promoting from within and supporting career employees, as if those practices were virtues. A man who remained in the company's employ for twenty years could expect to be kept on until retirement—no matter how incompetent or impaired he might be or become. There were almost no Blacks or Jews, Asians, or people from the Middle East. There were many more Protestants than Catholics and very few Latinos in the US. College degrees were a rarity and looked down on—to the extent that I kept my college attendance a secret, even from Whit.

This was the company I was thriving in and learning about. A company with its best years behind it. With an older, male staff that was failing to move with the times. In the late fifties, *Fortune* published an extensive piece on the company titled "The Ripe Problems of United Fruit." One of the company's top executives, the vice president in charge of tropical operations, was asked how United Fruit was going to solve its many problems. His answer? "Grow more bananas." By then I knew that growing bananas was the least of my company's problems.

I learned about United Fruit's uneasy alliance with politics within my first week in the advertising and publicity department. Our primary mission had to do with the expor-

priation of uncultivated land in Guatemala. Our task was to get the word out that a communist beachhead had been established in the Western Hemisphere and would spread to other Latin American countries if it was not contained. It posed a real threat to the United States. I believed it. This was the era of Joe McCarthy and the Rosenbergs. The Cold War was raging. And United Fruit used the political situation to its corporate advantage. There is no doubt in my mind that that our efforts had a deep impact on public opinion in the US and contributed to the overthrow of Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz, who was removed in a covert CIA operation.

Arbenz had run on a platform of agrarian reform at a time when such reform was happening in nonindustrial nations all over the world, from Central America to communist China. This reform included expropriation of 178,000 acres of land owned by United Fruit. Though Arbenz offered the company compensation, the value was far lower than its worth, so United Fruit saw the reform as an existential threat to its business. Our job in publicity was to put the best possible face on the company and the worst on the Arbenz regime. Our strategy for shaping public opinion came from Edward L. Bernays, who called himself the father of public relations. In the nineteen-twenties, Bernays had written *Propaganda*, a book illustrating how the thinking, habits, and opinions of the masses could be manipulated. It was said that it was carefully read and often quoted by Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's top propagandist, until he discovered that Bernays was a Jew.

Working in the publicity and advertising department, I had a ringside seat at this important period in American history. I completely bought the notion of a communist threat overwhelming Central America. I felt that what I was doing was patriotic. Blame it on my youth. I was nineteen and naive. Or blame it on the fact that it was the era of Senator Joe McCarthy or on the Korean War, where American soldiers were dying in the fight against a communist opponent, or on the Cold War with Russia or the federal prosecutions of communist spies like the Rosenbergs. That was the time we lived in. Those were the accepted truths of foreign policy, and I believed them and did my part to spread the word about the Guatemalan threat.

In the fifties the American press was largely conservative and pro-business, but the liberal media was on the rise. United Fruit had a bad reputation among liberals. But because Bernays had the reputation himself of being an influential liberal, he was able to use that influence to shape opinion on the left, not just about the company but, more important, about American foreign policy in Central America. For example, he persuaded *New York Times* publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger that the communist threat in Guatemala was dangerous. Sulzberger assigned a leading editor to look into the matter and made an "inspection tour" of Guatemala, where he witnessed firsthand a "communist riot." The timing of this so-called riot was extraordinary and resulted in a public relations coup for Bernays, part of an overall strategy to shape media opinion and benefit United Fruit. In addition to the *Times*, he targeted several other major newspapers, as well as magazines, the wire services, and radio and television networks.

The campaign included guided press tours of Central America to visit successful companies operating in the tropics and engage in interviews with presidents and top government officials. Whit led these trips, which were limited to a dozen or so journalists, who would fly from New York to, say, Bogota, and work their way up the isthmus from Panama

to a couple of Central America countries. These were relaxed, first-class junkets, comfortable and fun-filled experiences for up to two weeks. Everything was carefully orchestrated to produce positive press once the journalists got back to their jobs. It worked. A stream of favorable pieces resulted.

I helped handle the logistical aspects of these junkets. I saw how even very liberal publications like the *New Leader* spread the message of the communist threat and helped United Fruit maintain its hold on land and power in Central America. I also saw how the company took ads in *Latin American Report*, published by the CIA operative William Gaudet, who would exert a pernicious influence within United Fruit for the next ten years.

I watched while United Fruit influenced American policy in those countries where its bananas were grown. There is no doubt that communism played a role in Guatemalan politics and no doubt that the company's activities worked hand in glove with a CIA-run plan to overthrow the Arbenz government in a 1954 coup and stifle the land reform and other policies that would harm United Fruit's business. (Howard Hunt, a prime mover in the Watergate break-in, was one of the CIA operatives in Guatemala during that coup.) The head of the CIA at the time, Allen Dulles, was also close to the chairman of the board of United Fruit. Dulles's brother, John, was Secretary of State. This was an operation that was approved by the highest levels of our government. In order to focus attention elsewhere, the Eisenhower administration initiated an antitrust suit against the company within weeks of the overthrow of Arbenz, but it was merely a public slap on the wrist. The damage was done. Historians confirm that, seventy-five years later, Guatemala is still suffering the effects of what we helped to do in 1954.

After the overthrow of the Arbenz government, life in the public relations department slowed down considerably. But Edward Bernays and his company maintained his relationship with United Fruit, and soon I got a chance firsthand to learn how he operated.

One day Bernays asked Whit if I could be transferred to his office for approximately three months. He said he "saw something" in me and thought I had the makings of something or other and he was willing to train me in the Bernays techniques of publicity and persuasion. He told Whit that the experience could make me a more valuable employee to the United Fruit. I don't think Whit believed him, but Bernays was a hard man to say no to. The next day I started work at his office on 64th Street in Manhattan, just off Fifth Avenue.

The building was uncared for and shabbily furnished. There were worn rugs, squeaky floors, and dirty windows. The offices were dusty and dirty, and the bathrooms were filthy. The staff of four viewed me suspiciously, wondering what I was doing there. It was a strange and unhappy place. Not only did they not like me, but they did also not like each other. I was there about a month, and all I did was menial: filing, stuffing press releases in envelopes, working on large mailings, running errands. I had almost no contact with Bernays, and there were times when I felt he was avoiding me. I received none of the training or experience I was supposed to be getting.

I realized that Bernays had brought me there just to do these menial chores. I was no-cost labor. The day I realized that was the day I walked into his office and told him that I planned to return to United Fruit at the end of the week. He was very stern and told me I would go back when he told me I could go back. That he had made an agreement with my boss, and I should return to my desk. Two days later he called me on the intercom and

told me to come down to his office immediately. He was seated behind his big desk and told me to sit down. Nothing happened for three or four minutes. Suddenly, he handed me a book and said, "What have I just handed you?" I replied, "This is Mrs. Roosevelt's book. Her new book, I think." He immediately said, "That's the wrong answer. You have failed on that question. The correct answer is, 'You have handed me a book, Dr. Bernays.' I did not ask you what the title of the book was or who wrote it."

He had an honorary degree from a college and liked to be called "Doctor." Next, he said, "Let's see if you can pass a couple of other tests. How many pages are in the book?" I told him there were four hundred pages, and he said, "Very good. Now, can you tell me what is 25 percent of four hundred?" A hundred, I replied. "Very good again. You are indeed a smart one." He handed the book back to me and asked that I turn to page 100 and hand it back to him. I did as he asked. He reached into the pocket on his vest and took out a silver pen knife on a thin silver chain and cut down the spine through the binding, north to south at the 100-page mark. He did that three more times until the book was in four equal pieces in front of him.

As I wondered what he was up to, he asked his secretary to get Dean Barrett of Columbia University Journalism School on the phone. Minutes later, Dean Barrett was on the line. I listened while Bernays told him he was looking for four of his top students who would like to earn twenty dollars that weekend. All they had to do was read a hundred pages and write a two-page synopsis. The dean agreed. "Good," Bernays said to him. "My young man will bring the pages up to your office this afternoon along with the four twenty-dollar bills, and he'll return on Monday morning to pick up the eight pages that your students have written." After hanging up, Bernays turned to me, reached into his pocket, pulled out eighty dollars and told me to go to the Marine Midland Bank and get four brand new twenties. He insisted that they must be new and uncirculated. He said new money looked better and smelled better and was more memorable.

On the subway up to Columbia to deliver the package of the four pieces of the book and the four twenties, I was pondering this "lesson," the only one I'd received from the great Edward L. Bernays in all the time I'd been working in his office. I delivered the package on Friday and picked up the eight pages on Monday. Two days later he was on a TV panel show to discuss the book. Bernays was brilliant. He was by far the star of the panel. It was obvious that he was the only one who had "read" the book. He quoted from it and was able to comment on its strengths and weaknesses. The next day, he called me down to his office and asked me what I had learned. I gave him some kind of answer; I don't remember what. Once again, he told me that I had given him the wrong answer, and he was disappointed in me. He said the correct answer is that you should never do anything yourself when you can hire someone else to do it.

Well, we weren't talking about mowing the lawn. What Bernays did not realize was that I had learned a lesson all right, but not the one he thought he was teaching me. I saw that what he did was fundamentally dishonest. That he had no compunction about taking the work and opinions of four smart journalism students and claiming them as his own. His actions were a perfect illustration of dishonesty. In time I would realize that dishonesty was at the root of his so-called genius, and the way he helped shape public opinion about the fate of a country and a region—all for the sake of a corporate profits—was dishonesty practiced on a global level.



Joan and Alice at our home in Queens

Alice Widener

The United Fruit Company was a very complex operation. It sourced its product in a so-called banana republic, with all of its political problems, and shipped a highly perishable product over a long distance, doing its best throughout to stay within the boundaries of the law and dealing with various public relations problems, not the least of which was labor unions. Over the decades, hundreds of consultants, lobbyists, and fixers were on the payroll to address the challenges of this complexity, including congressmen, senators, and even White House advisers like FDR's famous adviser "Tommy the Cork" Corcoran.

Naturally, most of these connections were kept very quiet, even secret, and payments to them were often obscured. Edward Bernays was paid as much as \$100,000 a year going back to the 1930s. Often such payments were disguised as subscriptions to publications, such as CIA operative William Gaudet's *Latin American Report*, or as public service ads that the company ran in publications it hoped would portray United Fruit in a positive light.

Politics was an important reason for this secrecy. Founded in 1948, the United Nations had many left-leaning employees in the 1950s who were coming up with one scheme after another to restrict businesses like United Fruit, including the Special United Nations Fund for Economic Development (SUNFED), which had been established to support the expropriation of millions of acres of undeveloped land United Fruit had purchased in Guatemala. As I mentioned in the last chapter, I believed at the time that such expropriation posed a real political threat to the United States.

Alice Widener was a militant anti-communist who owned and wrote for *U.S.A.* magazine. She was also an expert on the United Nations. The company put her on the payroll to the tune of two thousand dollars a month. One of my jobs in the public relations department was to process bills, including two thousand dollars in subscriptions to her magazine. Mrs. Widener called me almost every month, asking me to expedite that monthly payment.

One month in the spring of 1953, she called and asked for payment that same day. I brought the payment to her house on Park Avenue. I was astonished when I arrived. I had never seen an apartment like it, a corner duplex with lots of windows. It was loaded with antiques, French Provincial furniture, and a grand piano, all tended by an attractive French maid named Henriette, who didn't speak a word of English. There were bells all over the apartment to call the maid, and she was called a lot.

Alice Widener was about fifty at the time, brilliant, articulate, attractive, and, as the saying goes, to the manor born. She invited me to sit down in her white and gold living room and offered me a glass of sherry and some exotic hors d'oeuvres. She told me a little bit about herself (very little as I later found out). The daughter of a wealthy Jewish mer-

chant in New Orleans, she had tutors as a child, went to school in France, and had to flee when Germany invaded France during the war. She married the Russian composer Nicolai Berezowsky and had two children. She had friends in high places, many of whom I would meet in time.

After sherry, Alice invited me to stay for dinner, served on fine porcelain trimmed with gold. Even the silverware was gold-plated. The food was nothing like I'd ever had before. We started with escargots and moved on to cold fruit soup, roast duck, and a compote of vegetables, not one of which I could identify. After dinner, we returned to the living room, and she asked me to tell her everything about myself. As I told her about my early life, she closed her eyes. There were times when I thought she was asleep, but if I stopped, her eyes immediately opened and she told me to continue.

When I finished, she said, "I think you have the makings of a writer. Did anyone ever tell you that? You tell stories with an economy of language, which is something I like and demand of my writers."

Then she asked me to write something for *U.S.A.* magazine. I asked her what she had in mind, and she said, "I'd like you to review a book, *The Untold Story of Panama*, by Earl Harding. It's a good book and I would like to see what you could do with it. I'll pay you twenty-five dollars, and you have two weeks to write it. No guarantee I will publish it. Deal?"

A week later, I brought her my draft of the review. She read it immediately and made very few suggestions. And so began my long and rewarding relationship with Alice Widener.

She gave me a few other assignments and spent more time editing than she did with the first piece. The only reference book on her desk was Fowler's *Modern English Usage*. She spoke at some length about what a great literary work it was and gave me a copy with entries in the index marked in red pencil—the parts she said I must read. The only two reference books on my desk today are that copy of *Fowler's* and a 1945 edition of *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. They are cherished possessions to this day.

Every Friday evening, Alice had a dinner for six or eight people, including a guest of honor. After a few months, she invited me to attend. She thought it would be interesting and would add to my social ease, as she called it. The guest of honor at the first dinner I attended was the actor Adolphe Menjou, who was very famous in the fifties. He was an ardent anti-communist and one of the great supporters of Senator Joe McCarthy and the House Unamerican Activities Committee (HUAC). The day before the dinner, Mrs. Widener told me, "Of course, you've seen Dolph's work. But I know you're going to be nervous meeting him. If you start to feel nervous around him, just remember that he puts his pants on one leg at a time." She hesitated, then added, "No, with somebody like him, you have to remember that he sits on the toilet just like everyone else."

The next night, I was sitting at table with Mr. Menjou. At one point I asked him a question, and he turned to me and said, "Young man, you have been mispronouncing my name all evening. Our hostess will tell you after I leave how to pronounce it. So, to help you this evening, you may call me Dolph, and I will call you Tom."

I was so embarrassed, I wanted to leave the table. I looked over at Alice, and she winked at me. Remembering her advice, I pictured the great Adolphe Menjou on the toi-

let. And I did that a couple of other times at other dinners, so that over the years, things got a lot easier for me, whether the guest of honor was General Leslie Groves, father of the atomic bomb, or the Danish UN diplomat Paul Bang Jensen, who kept a list of Hungarians who had testified about Russian brutality during the invasion of Hungary and was under enormous pressure to make that list available. He resisted, the pressure continued, and one day he went to the roof of the UN building and burned the list. A short time later he died by suicide. A few months later, his widow was Alice's guest of honor.

At these dinners I was able to observe the effect Alice had on the famous men she invited. She was attractive but also brilliant, and I learned that an intelligent, articulate, charismatic woman is a powerful aphrodisiac to many men. She did not want for male companionship. I was not married at the time, but Joan and I were planning to marry in a year or two and she had been part of my story when I first met Alice, who later asked me to bring Joan to dinner. Alice believed the most important decision of a man's or woman's life was who they married. I agree.

Alice could be eccentric. My job at United Fruit occasionally took me to the Pan American Union in Washington, and one time Alice suggested that we go down there together because she had some business there. She was a very nervous flyer, and I thought then, and still do, that she wanted me along to keep her company. We boarded a Lockheed Electra at LaGuardia Airport. To keep herself distracted, she brought her knitting. All of a sudden she jumped up, screamed, and announced that one of the knitting needles had slipped through a crack in the seat and she was afraid that it would interfere with the landing gear in the tail of the plane (we were sitting in the tail because she knew that, in the event of an accident, the tail was the safest place to be). She called for the stewardess, who tried to calm her. She demanded to see the captain. The copilot came back and explained that there was no tail gear on the Electra. She remained unconvinced.

As Alice helped me grow as a writer, I did my best to help her. She wrote articles on business and finance that I believed could have a much wider audience beyond U.S.A. I suggested she should try to syndicate her columns. She agreed it was a good idea and gave me the assignment. In those days, there were 1800 newspapers in the US. I picked the top two hundred and offered both of those columns to them at no charge. A dozen or so, mostly small newspapers, took me up on it. We were encouraged and moved to a second offering, suggesting that the papers, if they used the columns, send us a check at their "usual rates." (We had absolutely no idea how to charge for the columns.) We started getting checks ranging from five to twenty-five dollars per column. In about a year, Alice's columns were syndicated weekly in over a hundred papers. I was happy to do this and repay her for the help she had given me.

I wasn't the only young man she helped. Alice mentored others, including Richard Whelan, who went on to work for the *Richmond News Leader*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and Time/Life. Eventually, Dick, with whom I stayed friendly, became a speechwriter for Richard Nixon. He quit when Nixon announced Spiro Agnew as his running mate. Dick told me his quitting had nothing to do with Agnew, but with the men he called "the Hessians" around Nixon—Kissinger, Ehrlichman, and Haldeman. Later, he wrote speeches for Ronald Reagan, and his papers are in the Reagan Library.

Another of Alice's protégés was Douglas Caddy, a student at NYU, who lived at Al-

ice's apartment on East 73rd Street, in a building that also housed Frank Sinatra and the Gabor sisters. Caddy would go on to become an attorney for the Watergate burglars. In his book *Being There*, he wrote of his days of living with Alice, including those weekly dinners. He also claimed that she worked for the FBI, reporting on Communist cell activities in the New York area. And, in fact, she was very close to J. Edgar Hoover and key FBI officials in their New York office.

By this time, I had moved to Boston. I saw Alice on my visits to New York and occasionally she would come to Boston to visit one of her clients. We stayed in touch until her death in 1985. The *New York Times* carried her obituary. Her tombstone bears her name, the dates of her birth and death, and in large letters the word "PATRIOT."

Role Models

From a very young age I was looking for male role models—men who were intelligent, strong, talented, brave, and successful. Men who were “cool” as I understood the word, who sought adventure, provided for their families, and who could face difficult situations. By studying their lives, I thought I could learn something about how they did what they were able to do.

In my boyhood Brooklyn neighborhood, there were no men who were any of those things. In fact, they were just the opposite: alcoholic and unsuccessful, bad husbands and bad fathers, bad brothers and bad sons to parents who were getting ready to die in their sixties. Many were unemployed. Others had abandoned their families. Most had little education; very few of my neighborhood’s residents had gone beyond elementary school. Some went to junior high for a year, were working by the age of fifteen, and married before they were twenty. Nobody I knew went to college. Even the nuns who taught me, most of them anyway, were not college graduates.

Though the term “role model” did not exist, the nuns taught us to model our lives on the lives of our parish priests, who were said to be the closest thing in this world to Jesus Christ. As an altar boy, I was able to see priests up close, and most of them were not what the nuns had taught me.

Let me say up front that I became an altar boy not out of any religious fervor but purely for the money. I needed to make money. I liked having money. And an altar boy could make money if he knew the system, was willing to work hard, and hustled. There was no money to be earned from serving daily or Sunday mass, but a determined boy could make good money from baptisms, weddings, and funerals.

An altar boy had to be present at baptisms to hold the blessed oil and holy candle and hand the towel to the priest to dry the infant’s head after it had been doused with holy water. The baby’s godfather always gave the priest an envelope at the end of the service or handed the altar boy fifty cents, or a whole dollar if he was lucky. There were two altar boys at weddings, and the best man gave each of us fifty cents—a dollar if it was an Italian wedding. Italians were the most generous. I won’t say who were the least.

At funerals, there were four altar boys to assist with the requiem mass, the burning of the incense, and the procession down the center aisle behind the casket. It was quite an impressive sendoff, and the funeral director gave a dollar to the lead altar boy, who split it four ways.

To get on the list of altar boys for these money-making services, you had to work the six or seven o’clock masses year-round, never missing a day no matter what. So that’s what I did. I had a perfect record of serving the six a.m. mass every week, and I was rewarded. On my best week I made \$4.75, equivalent in today’s money to about fifty bucks—big money for a ten- or eleven-year-old Brooklyn boy. But it was not easy money. It was hard work. And it was an education. As I said, I saw the priests up close, and they were not what the nuns thought they were.

As an altar boy, I helped the priests get ready for the early morning masses, including helping them get dressed in their vestments. Many times, they would stagger into the sacristy hungover, often vomiting in the small sink without cleaning up after themselves. I was very familiar with the smell of alcohol on a morning breath, made worse by cigarette smoke—most of them were secret smokers, often in the sacristy. Many of them needed a bath. One in particular passed the worst smelling gas and never once said “excuse me.” We were often late coming out, and when the priests climbed the two steps up to the altar, they sometimes needed to be helped. Reading the liturgy in Latin could be challenging in their condition, and they would often mumble their way through the mass.

Many of these priests were rude, petty, and unhappy men. Many had other problems. Some had been forced into the priesthood by parents who wanted a priest in the family. They were not role models—I never found any of them to be anything like Jesus Christ, and as I got older, there was no way I was going to confess my sins to any of them.

Because the life around me offered no role models, I turned to books, which I borrowed from the Brooklyn Public Library, and the newspapers that were sold at my neighborhood candy stores: not the *New York Times* or *Herald Tribune*, but just the *Brooklyn Eagle* and tabloids like the *New York News* and *Daily Mirror*.

When I was seven my aunt Ella gave me a copy of *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* for Christmas. I read it several times. I loved that book, and Franklin became the person I looked up to the most. The man as he described himself was someone to be admired. And I admired him! For his unique intellect. His inventiveness, ambition, and charm. For his curiosity. There has never been anyone like him—I felt that way about him at age seven, and I still do.

Another person I admired was Mark Twain. I read all his works. He was someone who could create memorable characters, had a great understanding of people, and could take his readers to places and events in a way that nobody else could, then or now. I wished then and still do that I could write like Mark Twain. In my opinion nobody has come even close.



Colonel Hubert Fauntleroy
Julian

The Black Eagle of Harlem

Not all the men I looked up to were necessarily solid, law-abiding citizens. In fact, one of them was a serial bank robber born not far from where I was born in Brooklyn. Willie Sutton robbed banks for forty years, earning the nickname “the actor” because of his mastery of disguise. With each robbery he assumed a different look. Despite this skill, he was frequently caught. I liked everything about him, including the fact that the guns he carried, sometimes even a machine gun, were never loaded. “Loaded guns are dangerous,” he said. “Someone could get hurt.” He was a benign character who loved people and was generous to people in need.

Willie was a mythic figure in my neighborhood and around the country. He was sighted regularly, and people would swear they saw him in one of his disguises on a bus or in a grocery store. To me, Willie was cool. He was nonchalant about everything. It takes a special kind of person to walk into a bank, intending to rob it, knowing that there are silent alarms, bulletproof glass, steel vaults, hidden cameras . . . and armed guards ready to shoot to kill. Willie was also a great storyteller who had a way with people. He charmed everyone, even the police and his jailers. He could have been a lot of things, but robbing banks was what he chose to do in life. And he loved his profession. When he was asked why he robbed banks, he replied, “That’s where the money is.”

Another complicated character I admired was Colonel Hubert Fauntleroy Julian, who I read about in the tabloids. Julian was an internationally renowned fighter pilot and adventurer who was a native of Trinidad and had moved to Harlem in the 1920s. I was interested in flying (as I still am), and Julian appealed to me a consummate adventurer. Growing up in Brooklyn, I craved adventure and thought that flying would get me away from those streets—and who doesn’t want adventure in their life?

Colonel Julian was a soldier of fortune who made his first big mark during the war between Ethiopia and Italy in 1936. He so impressed the emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, that the emperor gave him the contract to create the first Ethiopian air force. That meant supplying the planes, arming them with bullets and bombs, and training the pilots. That job was where he made his first big money.

Julian was smart, tough, and stylish. And a great businessman. As a pilot, he was fearless and had a keen sense of theater (he once challenged the German ace Hermann Goering to an aerial duel). All those qualities appealed to me, so in Julian I found another unlikely role model. He became one of the world’s top arms dealers, providing not just weapons but also cannons, aircraft, gunboats, and even mercenary soldiers—everything necessary for a small country or a band of revolutionaries to wage war.

Little did I know as a boy that this exotic character would one day enter my life.

In the spring of 1958, when I was employed in the public relations department of United Fruit, I was on my own in the office one lunchtime when the phone rang. My boss, Ed Whitman, was in Guatemala. Everyone else was at lunch. So I answered the phone and was amazed when the caller identified himself as Colonel Hubert Julian. Was I actually talking to one of the heroes of my youth? I hadn't thought of him in years, and here I was talking to him, listening while he told me that he was known as the Black Eagle of Harlem.

Colonel Julian told me that he had called our switchboard and spoken to a "lovely lady" named Gertrude, whom he told that he wished to speak to the company president. Gertrude informed him that the president's office was in Boston and that the best place to start was with a young man in public relations named Tom McCann.

"Could you connect me, please, to Mr. McCann?" the colonel asked.

"Colonel," I said, "you are speaking to him. I'm Tom McCann. And I know who you are. It is my pleasure to speak to you."

I could tell he liked that response. He had a cultured voice and great manners. "Tom," he said—"may I call you Tom?"

"Of course."

"Well, Tom, it is a pleasure to speak to you as well. I would appreciate it if you would assist me in getting an important message to your president."

He spoke softly and slowly, with a hint of a West Indian accent. He explained that he represented some people, Americans and Cubans, who had a large amount of cash in pesos in Cuba but had a problem. The Castro administration had placed a ceiling on what people could spend in Cuba, and the new government was in the process of converting from one kind of currency to another.

I knew about this currency problem. The Batista regime, which had recently been overthrown by Fidel Castro and his fellow revolutionaries, had, at the urging of gangsters, printed enormous quantities of paper money during Batista's final months in power and hidden it in secure locations in Cuba. What the would-be profiteers did not know was that Castro was told of their plan and had a plan of its own—to switch from green currency to money printed in bright pink, rendering the profiteers' money worthless. They would not be able to convert it or spend it without explaining how they happened to have so much of it. Colonel Julian told me that the people he represented wanted to sell the green currency to United Fruit, who in turn would be able to distribute it through our weekly payrolls.

"How much money is involved?" I asked him.

He said, "A hundred and twenty million Cuban pesos."

I took a deep breath. At that time, the peso traded on par with the American dollar. He was talking about an enormous amount of cash—more than a billion dollars in today's money.

"Let me add," he continued, "that there would be a substantial discount on the transaction. My people are willing to sell at a fraction of the face value."

"How much of a discount?" I asked.

He paused. "Tom, I think you know better than to ask me a question like that. It is subject to negotiation, but I assure you, it will be substantial."

I told him I would get back to him and immediately called Boston and spoke to the president's senior assistant. Within an hour I received a call from the company president

himself, Kenneth Redmond, who had a reputation of never calling anyone. Not even Ed Whitman got a call from Mr. Redmond. He told me in three or four swift sentences to get back to Colonel Julian and tell him that the company was not interested in his proposition but that we thanked him for thinking of us. He made me write those words down and ordered me to say no more or less. He told me to wait a day to call him back so he would think that his proposal was carefully considered.

Then he grew loquacious.

“We are up to our ass in problems,” he said, “and this Guatemala thing won’t go way. The antitrust suit is a killer, and we are about to lose Cuba. Banana diseases are all over the place. There is competition from Ecuador. The economy. Shareholders. We don’t need this. Just tell him what I told you to tell him. Don’t mention any of this. What did you say your name was again?”

The next day, Colonel Julian called me before I could call him. He told me that during the night it had crossed his mind that the day he called was April Fool’s Day and perhaps I had thought his call was a hoax. I assured him that that had not been the case, that I had passed the message along to our president immediately, and that he just called me and asked me to tell him that the board had carefully considered his offer and asked me to thank him for thinking of us—but the company was not interested at this time.

Once he heard there was no interest, I knew the conversation was over. He thanked me and told me to call him if there was any change or if I was ever interested in having lunch with him in Harlem.

Ever since, I’ve wondered if my childhood hero, the Black Eagle of Harlem, was able to unload the money on some other entity or whether his contacts—whoever they were—were stuck with a hundred and twenty million Cuban pesos, the wrong color of which had made them worthless!

A New Home, A New Boss

By the end of the 1950s, it was clear to almost everyone that if United Fruit was going to survive, it would have to change. The Boston Brahmins and tropical swashbucklers who had been defining the company's tone for decades would have to give way to modern management and innovative thinking. That change happened, ironically, due to the efforts of a Brahmin—George Peabody Gardner. Gardner took over as chairman of the board in 1954, just as United Fruit's lack of vision was catching up with it. From 1957 to 1960, the company's sales dropped by \$40 million, and the share price fell from \$3.59 to under a dollar. Unlike the previous chairman, Thomas Jefferson Coolidge, Gardner was young and more contemporary in his business thinking.

Gardner disliked how United Fruit promoted career employees and made it a priority to find a new president who would hire other top executives skilled in management, research, law, and finance. In 1959 he hired Tom Sunderland, who had been vice president and general counsel of Standard Oil of Indiana. Sunderland immediately got to work on Gardner's agenda, replacing most of the top management. He was unpopular from the beginning. He was seen as impatient, rude, indecisive, and humorless. He treated everyone like a servant. I didn't think he liked me. He knew my background and was not impressed. I could sense that. Perhaps it was not so much that he didn't like me as it was that he didn't pay me much attention. I had the feeling he didn't value what I could do. Nothing I said or did seemed to interest him.

By this time, I was well established in what was now called the public relations department, under Whit. But Sunderland's arrival didn't just change the company—it had a big impact on my career and personal life. In the year that followed, 1960, Sunderland, as part of a sweeping cost-cutting exercise, virtually eliminated our department, letting go most of our twenty-eight staff. Whit and I were the only ones to survive from the New York office. Then Sunderland moved the department to Boston.

The move suited me personally. Joan and I had two little girls by then, and we weren't looking forward to raising them in New York City. But Whit wasn't happy. He didn't like a shift in the department's focus from—let's call it propaganda—to the handling of annual reports, writing shareholder letters, and coming up with creative ideas on how the company could advance its position and sell its products. Whit also had some personal problems. Within nine months of the move to Boston, he'd retired.

Whit's departure created a big problem for me. Who was going to be my new boss? I knew that Sunderland didn't like me, and the feeling was mutual. I couldn't imagine what it would be like to report to him full time. Part-time assignments for him were painful enough. But Sunderland knew that I was the only one in the company at that time who could do what he needed to have done: handling the press, writing shareholder communications, and writing speeches for him, among other tasks.

One day Sunderland summoned me to his office and said that he had a problem. Who should I and my department report to? He told me that nobody below the level of

vice president could report to him, so he was putting me and my department under a vice president in charge of several other staff and administrative functions. This was not good news. I knew the guy. He had a reputation for being very difficult to deal with, with a hair trigger. He was also Sunderland's hatchet man. His nickname was Mr. Big. There was no discussion; Sunderland had made up his mind. He said my new boss was expecting me.

Mr. Big started out by renaming me. No more Tom. I was "Mac." Now I am not a Mac. Never have been. I didn't like the name Mac, but if that's what Mr. Big wanted to call me, I would answer to it. He established the fact that he was the top dog and made it clear he knew everything about everything, including my field of public relations and communications. He was the opposite of Ed Whitman. He was loud, crude, brash, profane, and a bully. And not that bright. But he appealed to Sunderland.

I worked for Mr. Big for a year. It was not a happy time for me. Everything I did was subject to his scrutiny, and he corrected me constantly. Mostly what he suggested was of no consequence and sometimes even wrong. But I had bought a house in Boston and Joan was pregnant with our third daughter. I had few options.

Mr. Big was a macho man. He loved hunting, fishing, and camping. He claimed to be an experienced hunter who had bagged wild animals weighing thousands of pounds in Africa. I am from Brooklyn. We don't fish, hunt, or swim. We do not play golf or tennis or do sailboats. We do other things. He was relentless in trying to get me to join him on his hunting and fishing expeditions in Maine and Vermont, though I had absolutely no interest.

One day he insisted I come bird shooting with him in Vermont. I felt I could no longer say no. The first day we went out—me with a borrowed shotgun and him with his Abercrombie and Fitch outfit—the birds had all the luck. They lived. He blamed it on the noise I made and the jacket I wore. We shared a room in a motel. We had dinner that first night and went back to the room. As we were preparing for bed, he said, "Mac, what kind of underwear do you wear?" I remember thinking, *What the hell is going on here?* I stumbled around for an answer and finally told him I wore boxers. "Aha," he said. "White, I presume. I said that was right. With that he unbuckled his pants and showed me a pair of Tartan plaid boxers. "You got to get yourself some of these, Mac. The girls today love them."

That was a Saturday night. We went shooting again on Sunday, and again the birds were spared. On Monday I got a pair of Tartan plaid boxers in my office mail, with a note saying, "Good luck." I brought them home, and Joan just looked at me and asked what that was about. I told her she wouldn't believe it.

At about the six-month mark, Mr. Big and I had to attend a financial analysts' meeting at Lehman Brothers in New York. Arriving at about six p.m., we were met at the airport by a woman who Mr. Big introduced me to as Carol, his cousin who lived on Long Island. They were going to have dinner that night at the airport and I would meet him at the meeting the next morning. We met as planned. On the way back to Boston that afternoon, he told me that Carol was not his cousin but his longtime girlfriend. They were madly in love, he said, but could not get married because both of them were married and had children.

Who was this guy? I wondered. And why is he telling me these things? I was desperate to get a new boss, and fortunately, within the year, Tom Sunderland hired Jack Fox, an excellent manager who would become my boss and rescue me from Mr. Big. My life would change for the better.

But I did have a memorable follow-up with my old boss.

About a year later, on Christmas Eve morning, I got a call from Mr. Big asking me to come to his office for a Christmas drink. I arrived about noon. He had his feet on the desk, tilted back in his chair, eyes looking at the ceiling and with a satisfied look on his face. He was smoking a big cigar and was attempting to blow smoke rings. He pointed to a bottle of Dewars on his desk and told me to pour myself a drink and top off his while I was at it.

“Well,” he said, “she should be receiving it just about now.” I asked him who she was and what she was receiving. “Carol. I bought her one of those new Ford Mustangs. The dealer is going to deliver it with a six-inch red ribbon from bumper to bumper and from door to door. He’s leaving the keys and the registration on the front seat, and he’ll ring the bell and drive off. She will love it. Red is her favorite color. And she loves surprises.” He took another pull on the Dewars and another drag on the cigar. He was a happy man.

I was shocked. I didn’t know what to say. Finally, I asked, “Is she divorced?” Annoyed, he said she wasn’t. I said, “Well isn’t her husband going to wonder who gave his wife this brand-new car wrapped with a red ribbon with the keys on the seat?” Mr. Big looked at me for a long time with a strange expression on his face. He abruptly took his feet off the desk and said, “Goddamn you, Mac, you just spoiled my Christmas. You are a wet blanket. Always negative.” I told him I didn’t mean to spoil his Christmas, but what about Carol’s Christmas? I couldn’t help but wonder how Carol was going to handle that. He thought for a minute and said, “Well, I guess that’s her problem isn’t it, Mac?”

I left his office. All I could think of was how glad I was that I didn’t work for him anymore.



Eli Black and Jack Fox meeting with the company's expert on the New York Stock Exchange

The Attack

The arrival of Tom Sunderland at United Fruit moved the company into a new era. He upgraded management, had new equipment and technologies installed, put a welcome and important emphasis on marketing, and instituted new standards for quality control. We thrived. Production and profits increased, and the share price rose. And when I finally got out from under Mr. Big's control and reported to Jack Fox—one of Sunderland's excellent hires—my own situation also improved.

Yet working for Sunderland was a challenge. He had an insatiable thirst for personal publicity, and no matter how successful I was in getting United Fruit stories into the media—including a very favorable piece in *Time* magazine—he wasn't satisfied. His photo in *Time* wasn't enough: He wanted to be on the cover. I always felt that what I was doing was not quite good enough. But he was good, and by the mid-sixties the company was back earning reasonable returns. The stock was recovering, and key employees were rewarded with salary increases and stock options. The company began to make some acquisitions, including Baskin-Robbins, Foster Grant, and A&W Drive-ins.

On a personal level, I also continued to do well and was rewarded with salary increases, bonuses, and stock options. In 1969, I became the youngest vice president in the history of the company. I worked hard. Long hours. A lot of travel. A lot of stress. But I loved it and thought it would last forever. I was wrong.

It took place over half a century ago, but I remember it as if it were yesterday. September 24, 1968. Jack Fox called a meeting of the company's management committee for two o'clock. It was a routine weekly meeting, which always began with a report by the finance department of some key indicators of the business, followed by reports from production, sales, and shipping. At about three, Jack's secretary tiptoed into the boardroom and handed Jack a note. He read the note and put it down in front of him. A few seconds later he picked it up and read it again. He passed it to Herb Cornell, the company president (by this time, Sunderland had been "kicked upstairs"). Herb read it and passed it back to Jack, who slid it over to me. The note read:

Specialist office at NYSE advises that 733,000 shares of United Fruit stock sold this afternoon. Third largest transaction in NYSE history. Buyer not known. Will advise soonest.

As the saying goes, my blood ran cold. Jack adjourned the meeting, and he, Herb, and I went into his office, along with general counsel, Victor Folsom. Everyone knew something big had happened, but none of us knew exactly what and what it meant for the future. Jack said, "I have no idea what this is all about or who bought the stock, but one thing

is for sure: We have a new shareholder and he is our largest.” As he spoke, Jack’s private line rang. It was Bob Raymond, the NYSE specialist in United Fruit stock. Jack put him on speaker, and he told us that the buyer was AMK Corporation. The principal was Eli M. Black. Raymond said it was a block of shares put together very quietly over three or four months by Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenerette, a relatively young but very aggressive brokerage firm. I knew of them because my longtime secretary got a job there after she retired from United Fruit.

The others had never heard of Black or his AMK. But I had. Eight months earlier, I had been traveling from JFK to London on PanAm. It was a beautiful Boeing 707. It was a crystal-clear day and we were wheels up at precisely nine a.m. In those days, if you were in first class, you could get a drink before the plane reached its cruising altitude. I had a fresh Bloody Mary in my hand as we ascended. I was feeling good. I was also aware that I was sitting next to Benjamin Sonnenberg, a well-known public relations consultant who represented celebrities and major corporations.

I knew that Sonnenberg was involved in major acquisitions, mergers, and hostile takeovers. His fees were enormous. He was known for lavish parties at his house on Gramercy Park South, and he was an avid collector of art and antiques. He was flamboyant in his dress and mannerisms. He wanted to be noticed, and he was.

He held out his hand and said, “Ben Sonnenberg. My spies tell me you are Tom McCann. Now you tell me who you are and what you do for a living and why you’re flying to London.”

Very New York. I liked him immediately and by the end of the trip he said he liked me and offered me a job. He said I should be looking for a job because my company, United Fruit, was “in play.” I asked him what he meant. He said the company would soon be raided by “takeover artists.” I told him, in my opinion, that was impossible. I told him that our board included principals from Paine Weber, Lazard Freres, and Lehman Brothers. He scoffed at that and said some very disparaging things about all three firms. They were “out of it,” he said, and not in tune with the new corporate raiders.

“I know what I’m talking about regarding United Fruit,” he said, “You’ll see. Think about what I said. Think about my offer. Call me.”

A few months later he called me and gave me the name of Eli Black and AMK. He said a relative of Black’s had let it slip that he was lining up blocks of stock. I called Doremus, our financial PR firm in New York, and asked them to send me whatever they had on Black and AMK. They did. I read it and passed it to Jack. Nothing happened.

Just after we got the news from Bob Raymond, Jack’s secretary told us that Eli Black was on the phone. We listened on speaker. Black said he was at LaGuardia on his way to Boston. He suggested that he and Jack have dinner at eight o’clock at the Ritz Carlton. Ever cool, Jack firmly said no to dinner but agreed to meet Black at the Algonquin Club at seven. He said he’d be bringing a few of the company’s executives with him.

The events of that afternoon shocked us, but something like it was not entirely unexpected. We knew the possibility existed. But we were interested only in going our own way. After ten years of decline, the company had turned around. If there were any acquisitions, we would be the ones doing the acquiring. But you would have to be asleep, naïve, or incompetent not to know that a hostile takeover attempt was a possibility. At Jack’s direc-

tion, I had even put together a plan detailing how we would respond to an attack. I entitled it “Operation Pearl Harbor.” It called for us to issue an immediate press release saying that United Fruit Company was not interested in a merger. We would discourage any move in that direction by any company or individual, and the company would vigorously fend off any such a move. A draft press release was included in the plan. There was also a draft of a letter to shareholders telling them to stick with us and not to be fooled by any offers.

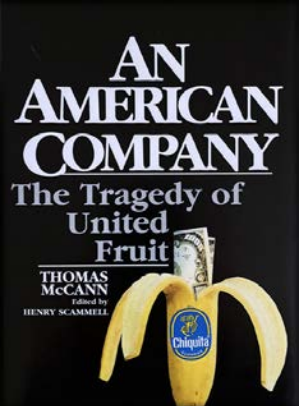
At our September meeting, I wanted to move forward with the plan. Herb disagreed and said we had to meet and hear Black out and then decide what we would do. He said that my suggestion would be viewed by Black as a hostile act and by Wall Street as an indication that the company’s management was more interested in preserving its own position than advancing the interests of the stockholders.

What we didn’t know then was that Black had to borrow all the money to buy 733,000 shares to acquire 9 percent of the stock. Nor did we know that he had to disclose to his lending bank what he planned to use the money for, or that his loan agreement stipulated that the loan would need to be repaid immediately if there was any indication that the company was opposed to a merger or takeover. If we had immediately expressed our intention to fight, the loan would have fallen due—and Black did not have the money to repay it. Chances are the stock would have taken an immediate big hit, resulting in those 733,000 shares being worth less. How much less no one knows. Just less.

The Algonquin Club meeting was tense. It was also brief—under an hour. Black tried to be cool but was nervous. He said he bought the stock because he felt it was a good investment. He said he felt the stock was undervalued, and he expected it to climb. He thought it might even increase on the news that he’d bought a big block. He said he had no intention of a takeover of the company: He was simply now the company’s largest shareholder, and he hoped the board would welcome him as a new member. His parting comment had to do with his honesty, integrity, and business acumen. He hoped that when the management group got to know him, they would find he had considerable business skills, was a creative thinker, and was someone who had valuable connections in industry and government.

None of what he said proved to be true. In the space of just a few hours, all our lives changed. It was the beginning of the end of United Fruit. The end of all our careers and the death of the company as we knew it. It was also, I believe, the beginning of the tragic end of Eli Black.

Within a year of the raid and eventual takeover of the company, most of the officers were gone, including Jack and Herb. There were major changes on the board and a lot of new faces. Eli’s group tried to run the company. They failed. They took it all apart, and they could not put it back together again. And me? My days were numbered. It was only three years since I’d been made vice president. I was not yet forty. I decided to hang in and give Black and his team a chance. Was that a mistake? Maybe. But I was still young, with many more turning points ahead of me.



Telling the Story

From the beginning of my time with United Fruit—or at least after I moved to the publicity and advertising department in 1952—I took notes and saved newspaper articles and photos and made copies of important company memos. In the beginning I stuffed these documents in my desk drawer. As the collection grew, I created a file. By the time I left the company seventeen years later, I had two five-drawer file cabinets full of corporate documents.

Even as a very young man, I knew I was witnessing history. After the Guatemala coup, I began collecting material relating to other adventures and incidents I witnessed or in which I participated, including the secret help United Fruit gave the government for the Bay of Pigs invasion (Robert Kennedy himself negotiated for the loan of two of our ships to carry men and equipment). I also had material relating to the lock-up of one of our vice presidents who was arrested on a homosexual charge in Boston before the company managed to get it erased from the police blotter, as well as correspondence with an infamous arms dealer, Colonel Herbert Fauntleroy Julian, who wanted to fence millions of dollars in Cuban pesos.

In the beginning, I didn't know what I would do with these documents, but after a few years I realized that this collection had the makings of a book that thought I might write decades after I retired from the company. After the experience of the Eli Black takeover, however, I began to think in terms of writing it sooner. I wanted to call out Black's takeover team for what they had done. I was angry, and that anger fueled the writing of a book, entitled *An American Company*, which was published in 1976.

After I left United Fruit in 1972, I began to organize my thoughts and the mass of material. I decided to dictate the manuscript to get the bulk of it down on paper and then edit it by hand, my usual practice. I dictated chapter one to my secretary. She typed it and gave it back to me. I edited it five or six times, and after a month I had the first chapter. I realized that at the rate I was going it would be years before I had a completed manuscript. So instead of editing as I went, I simply plowed ahead and told my secretary to stack up the pages and not to show them to me until the end.

When we were finished, we had almost 1,200 pages of double-spaced manuscript. I had structured the book so that it ran on three tracks. One track was the recent history of the United States. The second was the story of a young man born in tough times, with no connections, no money, and dismal prospects, who created a successful career for himself. The third track was the story of this fascinating and unique American company.

I showed the manuscript to a couple of Boston agents. Both were enthusiastic. One had worked as an editor at Houghton Mifflin and still had a good contact there. He brought it to her. She read it in one long night and the next day called him and committed to

publishing it. Two days later, she called again to say that Houghton Mifflin could never publish the book, as the president was close to George Gardner and another Boston Brahmin. She added that she had even erased the fact that the manuscript was ever logged in at Houghton Mifflin. The only other game in town was Little, Brown, whose president was also George's friend. The last thing I wanted was an injunction holding up the book. I shifted gears and decided to take it to New York, where we were successful on our first approach. Larry Freundlich at Crown, a young publishing genius, offered a substantial cash advance, contingent on some "heavy editing" and my willingness to be flexible and accept his restructuring. We were in business.

I remained concerned about legal issues, so I showed the unedited manuscript to my longtime attorney Blair Perry, a senior partner at Hale and Dorr. Blair hefted the briefcase holding 1,200 pages and said, "I can't read this on the clock because you don't have that kind of money. I'll take it on vacation next week and read on the beach at Chatham." A week later he called and said, "How much trouble are you prepared to take?" Well, whatever I needed to rather than risk lawsuits. As a result, a lot of juicy and colorful but litigious material was removed, but there was still plenty of interesting and explosive material left in.

Freundlich, meanwhile, had considered how best to edit this tome. He told me what Crown wanted to buy, and what he felt readers wanted to read—not a book about the recent history of the United States or an account of a young man who had a very interesting career, but a book about United Fruit written by an insider. A "tell-all" book. Or, at least, a "tell-a-lot" book. I abandoned the three-track structure, and we edited the book along the lines Larry suggested.

As I anticipated, *An American Company* generated some controversy and opposition. Edward Bernays tried to sully my reputation and kill the book by attempting to convince reviewers to ignore it or pan it. A couple of weeks before publication, John Kenneth Galbraith ignored the release date and wrote an extensive review that ran on page one of the *New York Review of Books*. He said it was "as bad as a book can be and still get published." United Fruit, he wrote, was an important company that deserved better treatment. He devoted a lot of space to describing the kind of a book he would have liked to have seen written—an expert book, a history book, or a textbook written by a scholar, not an episodic and anecdotal treatment written by a man who started as an office boy.

I was devastated. Crown and Larry were not. They knew that even a bad review by Galbraith meant that it was an important book and would boost library sales. I know now they were right. Happily, scores of other reviewers did not agree with him. The *New York Times* gave it two reviews, one in the daily paper and another in the book review, saying it was "a remarkable tale . . . compelling . . . very personal, very relevant." *Kirkus* called it "hard and cool." *Business Week* said, "McCann is an excellent storyteller, and this corporate history is probably as readable as any written," and the *Harvard Business Review* described it as "a sensitive though sometimes critical account of the company . . . even non-Bostonians may feel regrets for what happened to this grand old company."

In one fell swoop, I was a successful published author. Crown continued to support the book with publicity and advertising. I toured several cities and participated in the Annual Authors Night at the National Press Club in Washington. I did a lot of radio and TV as

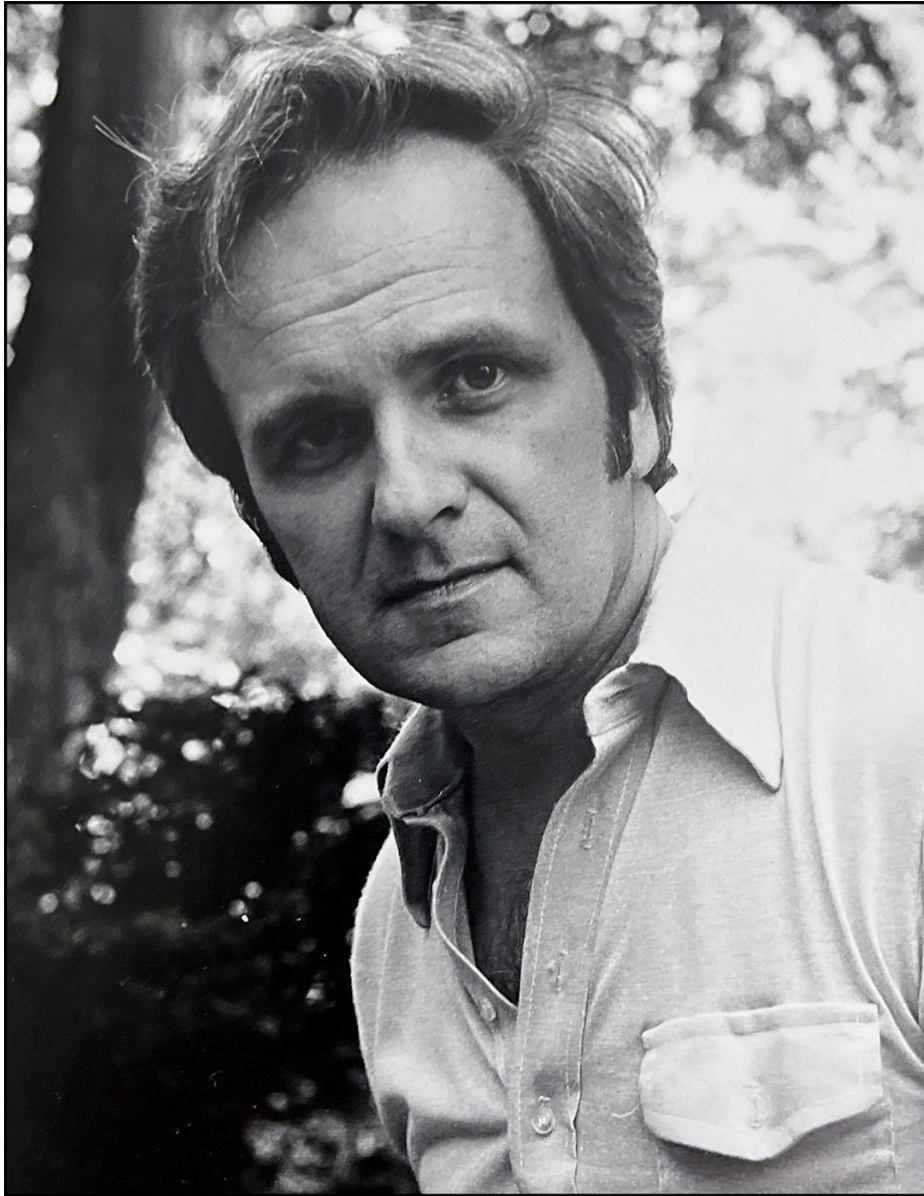
well as bookstore signings. Over the years the book went into several trade paperback editions and was published in many foreign languages, including Japanese and Russian. Most editions used the same artwork as the Crown hardcover, a half-peeled Chiquita banana with hundred-dollar bills in place of the fruit itself.

The Russian edition didn't have a dust jacket and didn't include the folio of photographs. They also shrank the overall dimensions of the book and extended the text to the left and right margins as far as they could without going off the page. Yet the Soviet publisher paid me in advance for 50,000 copies and a year later paid for another 50,000. The advance was on the skinny side, so I checked with a friend of mine who was the assistant secretary of state for cultural affairs. He advised me to take the money and not complain. He told me that that the Soviets almost never paid for a book. They just went ahead and printed it. I am still amazed that more than 100,000 Russians were interested in United Fruit.

The book changed my life. I lost friends but gained new ones. Almost fifty years later, hardly a month passes without somebody contacting me about the book. Just recently I was approached by an entertainment law firm in New York inquiring if the stage and film rights to the book were available. In the original manuscript, I opened with that fateful meeting in the president's room of the Algonquin Club on Commonwealth Avenue, where I would be a member of for fifty years, until it closed not long ago. Often at night, after my guests for the evening had gone, I would sit in that room alone and conjure up that scene that took place there so long ago. It led to the death of the company and to Eli Black's tragic death as well just a few years later. A tragedy for all.

THREE

MIDPOINT





Me in action as a producer

The White House Transcripts

I was never a fan of Richard Nixon. I paid no attention to him when he was a senator, and when he was vice president, I heard from Whit and Ann that President Eisenhower didn't like him—and that rumor rubbed off on me. I did meet his secretary, Rosemary Woods, in the late fifties when she traveled to the tropics on one of our ships. She later became infamous for likely erasing the most damning eighteen minutes of the White House tapes. As I mentioned earlier, when Nixon ran for the presidency, my friend Dick Whelan became his chief speechwriter, but he quit the night Nixon announced that Spiro Agnew would be his running mate.

At first, I paid little attention to Watergate. I felt it was a failed attempt by amateur adventurers trying to help their man get reelected. They broke into the offices of former JFK adviser and then-chairman of the Democratic National Committee Larry O'Brien, who years later told me that it was the "best thing that ever happened" to his career. To my practiced eye, the break-in was merely a PR defense by the president's team. In fact, some of its participants saw it is just those terms. John Dean described it as "drawing the wagons around the White House." After a while, however, I began to see it for what it was—a conspiracy to obstruct justice.

I fully realized its criminality when Nixon announced on national television that he was making available to the public transcripts of recorded conversations with his inner circle. Like millions of other Americans, I watched him address the nation with the transcript binders in the background. As I watched, I thought that there was probably some juicy dialogue in those tapes as well as matters of some importance, but I quickly dispelled that idea, assuming that Nixon would have sanitized the transcripts. Later that night, bits and pieces of the transcripts were quoted on the news. Hearing those words about hush money for the burglars and where it would need to come from convinced me that the transcripts were important documents—probably the most important in my lifetime.

I was also mindful of the old saying that America was not a nation of readers. Most people wouldn't read these dense transcripts. I went to bed that night and didn't sleep, thinking about how I could use my skills as a communicator to bring these transcripts to the American public. It became obvious that television was the answer. I decided I would hire actors who looked like Nixon's staff, build an Oval Office set, and reenact the transcripts verbatim. I would have to be careful not to have the actors vary one iota from the text or overdramatize it in any way.

I had one small problem: I had never produced anything for television. I had produced commercials, company films, and training films, but never anything for TV. If I'd known what was involved and how it would change my life, chances are I never would have undertaken it. But the next morning, I dived right in. I made two phone calls: first to the

brilliant Web Lithgow, my good friend who I knew would be an ideal collaborator. The second was to Jack Hoover, a retired Air Force pilot and friend who sold bonds at the First National Bank of Boston.

Web was all in immediately. He knew a good idea when he heard one. I asked Jack to give me the names of a few wealthy people I could approach to invest in a reenactment of the Nixon tapes. I needed somebody with a lot of money, but who also had a racetrack mentality—the kind of a person who would take a gamble and not mind losing. I also told Jack that the investor had to be a patriot. And not a Republican.

Jack gave me the names of five people. They were in alphabetical order, and the first one was Ronald Ansin of Leominster, Massachusetts. I immediately called Ansin and told him how I got his name and asked him not to be mad at Jack Hoover. I outlined my requirements. He told me he fit the bill and invited me to come out to his home that night. At eight p.m. Web and I pulled up to his house. At first, I thought I'd made a mistake. The house was a very ordinary suburban house, not what you would expect to be the home of a multimillionaire. I rang the bell and Ron Ansin opened the door. He was barefoot and wore a faded T-shirt and jeans.

He invited us in and gave us a can of soda, and we spent the next three hours describing the project. He told us that he wanted to wait until his wife, Betsy, came home from her League of Women Voters meeting so he could bounce the idea off her. He said she had a good feel for this kind of thing. I felt my eyes roll—was he the sort of a guy who had to ask his wife about investing in something? But we waited until eleven o'clock, when she came home. I'm glad we did. Betsy was wonderful—smart, positive, decisive. She loved the idea, and before we left that night, I had a check from Ron for \$10,000 with a promise of twenty-five or thirty more if we needed it. All we had was a handshake. Ron didn't even know how to spell my name on the check. He made it out to "Thom McAn"—the way the shoe company spells the name. (Ron was in the shoe business, among many other ventures.)

Web and I spent the next four weeks producing a thirty-minute quick and dirty pilot, which cost about \$10,000. A New York casting agency sent us a commercial actor named Harry Spillman, who looked nothing like Nixon. He had blond hair, blue eyes, and what someone described as a cute pug nose. Web went to work on his face with a black magic marker, turning his hair, eyes, bags under the eyes, jowls, and even the nose into Nixon's. We had our main character and soon found the other four principals.

After three weeks of working day and night, we emerged with a thirty-minute pilot, which I took to New York City to show to the three networks and PBS. I had connections at PBS, so I started there, showing it to Joan Ganz Cooney, the creator of Sesame Street. Joan invited former CBS vice president Michael Dann, who was then a consultant on Sesame Street, to view the pilot with us. Dann at that time was the best-known TV programmer in the world. A short, wiry man with a New York attitude bordering on rude, he was quite full of himself. He stormed into the room. When Joan tried to introduce us, he cut her short and announced that he only had five or maybe six minutes and that we should understand that he was a busy man and did not have a lot of time to waste.

Dann watched the entire thirty minutes of the pilot and didn't say anything for a couple of minutes after it ended. Finally, he said it was the most compelling and most im-

portant piece of video he'd ever seen. It was history. "I can't believe you guys from Boston did this," he said. "I want a copy of this for my grandkids." I thanked him and said we could certainly give him a copy, but what about getting it on network TV? Which network should we approach first? He said, "Are you nuts? You're never going to get this on TV. Nixon is a sitting president." I ignored his comment and persisted. How could this product be so good and not get aired? He lost patience and turned to Joan and said, "How can I make this dumb guy from Boston understand that he's got a better chance of getting *his* dick on TV than *that* Dick?"

The next day Web and I went to the three networks—ABC, NBC, and CBS—and got thrown out of one and turned down by two. At the end of the day we called WNET, the flagship station of PBS, and got turned down too. That night, in desperation, instead of going back to Boston we flew to Toronto, where we went to the office of the president of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. We got as far as his outer office. I explained to his secretary that we were two desperate men who had invested our own money as well as an investor's and we needed just fifteen minutes of her boss's time. I told her we were staying at the Hyatt and weren't leaving Toronto until we had a meeting. Our thinking was that was if CBC aired it, it would get viewed in border station cities like Buffalo, Detroit, Portland, and elsewhere and possibly get some US reviews. An hour later the secretary called our hotel room. She said that the president would give us fifteen minutes.

We went over to his office. Upset that we had strong-armed him, he didn't shake our hands. I cleared my dry throat and asked him if I could put our three-quarter-inch video cassette on his machine. He told us we had ten minutes. Like Mike Dann, he watched the entire program. When it was over, he asked us what we wanted from CBC. I told him we wanted to do a sixty-minute slicker with an improved script, better rehearsed actors, and a better set. He called in his executive vice president. Before we left that day, we had a contract and an air date four weeks away—Sunday night in August in prime time. (They preempted their most popular shows—both Mike Dann productions.) We also received a down payment.

We got the revised show to them a day under the deadline. They aired it, and it did reach a number of border-city stations. *Variety* gave it a rave review. Other great reviews followed. We were launched. Mike Wallace helped. So did David Susskind and Ed Diamond of *Newsweek*. Gradually, other stations in Boston and New York aired the program. In the next few months several PBS stations paid good money for what they could have aired for free. The show won awards and launched us in the television business in a big way, including producing a show about the Watergate cover-up trial with Boston's WGBH, which in turn led to an excellent relationship with the Dallas PBS station KERA.

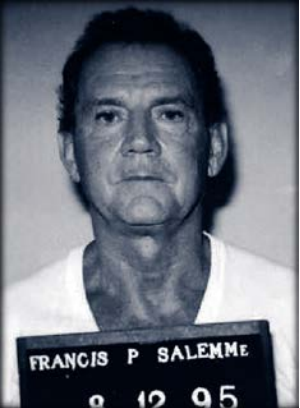
Web Lithgow coined a word to describe what we had created: "docudrama." The creators of *The Missiles of October* would later claim that their show was the first docudrama, but the calendar proved that our White House Transcripts production predated their show by several years.

This story has a few interesting postscripts. To mark the tenth anniversary of the Watergate break-in, I decided to recycle the original program. The plan was to cut it from ninety minutes to the most important sixty minutes of the transcripts. We would leave a few minutes of room for a narrator to bring it up to date. I thought it would add value

and raise interest in the program if we got John Dean to appear on camera. After a certain amount of haggling over money with his Los Angeles agent, I terminated the discussions—a tactic that worked. Dean called me within the hour and blamed his agent for screwing up and said that he wanted to do it.

Despite that rocky beginning, he came to Boston with a good attitude, ready to work hard with us. Web and I spent two busy and interesting days with him. Together, we wrote a script and taped his part on the third day. He was an interesting guy. Smart and articulate but very cautious and measured. He was very serious and never once smiled in the two days he was with us. And he wasn't great company. Meals were just meals. At one point the subject of Deep Throat came up and he told us he knew who it was. I pointed out that if he would reveal who it was on camera, it would be big news and boost the saleability of the recycled program and the prices we could get for it. He tap-danced around the subject for a few minutes and finally said that he was not ready to release the name—and when he did, he said, it would be in his next book to increase the size of his advance.

I had the feeling that he didn't know the identity of Deep Throat, but Dean did tell us the story of how he decided to speak to the special prosecutor. He said that when he realized the Nixon-Haldeman-Ehrlichman axis was planning to scapegoat him and John Mitchell for the break-in, he decided at that moment to tell everything he knew. He said he called Haldeman from Camp David where he had been sent by Nixon and Haldeman to work on his detailed report on the break-in and told Haldeman what he was going to do. Haldeman made his famous retort: "Remember, John, that once the toothpaste comes out of the tube you can never get it back in." That was the last time he spoke to Bob Haldeman. As we know, it was Dean's testimony and the smoking gun transcript that brought Nixon down.



The White House Goes to the “Big House”

During the fateful Watergate summer of 1976, three friends of mine—two of whom worked for me part-time for years—were greatly affected by the Watergate cover-up and the conspiracy to obstruct justice. Their anger was part of the reason why the three of them—all friends—walked into a bank in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and attempted to rob it. Corruption in high places is obviously no excuse to rob a bank, but their lawyers and others would be looking for answers for their actions. To this day, I wonder why they did it. None of them had ever done anything like that before. They were good, hard-working young men but bad bank robbers. A teller tripped the silent alarm, and the police came, guns blasting. One of them was killed. The other two were captured, tried, convicted, and given twelve- to fourteen-year sentences in Walpole, a notorious maximum security Massachusetts prison.

Who were they? One was Mark Frechette, an actor cast in the lead in Michelangelo Antonioni’s only American film, *Zabriskie Point*. Frechette and his costar, Daria Halprin, were on the cover of *Life* magazine when the movie was released. His partner in crime was Terry Bernhard, a concert pianist and a brilliant man of many talents. I was shocked and saddened when I heard the news. These were my friends, and I wanted to help them. But what could I do? They did the crime, and had to do the time, even though I felt the sentence was excessive.

Then I got an idea. I had an Oval Office set in storage, some props, a few Brooks Brothers suits, and the Nixon nose in my desk drawer, as well as a successful script. Why not ask Mark and Terry to mount a stage version of the *White House Transcripts* in the prison? It would be a welcome distraction from their boredom, and it might just call attention to them and their case. The irony of having cons play the roles of the president and his men would make it grist for the publicity mill—which I knew something about.

With relative ease I convinced Governor Frank Sargent that such a stage play in prison, with convicts playing the role of Nixon and his men, was a good idea. He in turn convinced his commissioner of corrections, who was less enthusiastic about it but nevertheless approved. The prison authorities weren’t happy, but there was little they could do since it was approved by the governor and their boss. But that didn’t stop them from causing me problems. What I didn’t expect was a problem from the inmates, related to the prison auditorium, the only place we could stage the production. A handful of inmate groups had it tied up seven days a week, and they were not about to give it up. I sensed that the prison officials were delighted. They didn’t want outside people coming in and mingling with the prison population, perhaps seeing things the officials didn’t want seen.

Early in the planning stage, I got a call from the prison superintendent, who told me he was having a lot of problems with Black prisoners (he used the “n” word). “You better get your lily-white ass down here right away and hear it from them,” he said. “My advice is

to forget about this crazy fucking idea of yours. Let your two bank robber friends do their time in peace.” I was there in the next hour.

The superintendent who ran the prison was not at all helpful. He had told me the first time we met that if it was up to him, he would ban all visitors from his prison. He made it clear he didn’t like me. He was big, overweight, not too smart, and mean. On his office desk he had a miniature electric chair, ten or twelve inches high. He told me it was a gift from one of the inmates in the prison he was at before he came to Massachusetts. It had a battery-operated silver metal headpiece that lit up, and he was very proud of it.

I met with the prisoners concerned in the so-called prison library, a small room with few beat-up paperbacks. There were six of them, each of whom represented a different organization or activity within the prison. They controlled the auditorium. There was a Black solidarity group, a jazz ensemble, a Black Muslim group, and two other Black organizations. On the weekends, they used the auditorium as a mosque. The superintendent turned the meeting over to me, and I began by explaining why we needed it for a full week. I told them we needed to move the set in and erect it. After that we needed to light it. We needed to rehearse, and to clean the auditorium and the bathrooms.

I didn’t appreciate it then, but I know now that men in prison have so little that when they get something, they want to hold on to it and never give it up, even temporarily. None of them was willing to give up their day, even once. I tried to explain that what we were doing would be good for the prison, that it would show people from the outside what the prison was like. I told them that inmates attending the performance could invite a guest from outside to sit with them. I said it would show the guests that inmates can be depended on to conduct themselves properly and appreciate a show like this, with its irony of having inmates play the parts of the former president and his staff. But these guys didn’t care about irony. They were unmoved by everything I said, and I knew it. Each spoke briefly. No more than a sentence. A couple just the word “no.” They were not giving up their day.

Sitting next to me was an inmate named Bill who had spent roughly fifteen of his twenty-nine years in one institution or another. He was a career criminal—a recidivist. He had served time in San Quentin for armed robbery and had been there with Charles Manson. The first time I heard the expression “dead man walking” was from Bill, describing Manson being taken from his cell in heavy chains. Manson was a very small man with a very white face flanked by four guards chanting that phrase, which echoed through the prison.

Bill would play Haldeman in the show. He was intelligent and very prison savvy. He knew a lot of people and how to get things done. He’d been very helpful to me in dealing with the prison officials. But not this day. At the other end of the room sat the superintendent, a couple of his assistants, and two guards. Near the superintendent was a man in his mid-thirties. After all groups had refused to give up their days, this man stood up and expressed his disappointment. He said it was selfish of them not to give up their day. He said that they were not thinking straight, that they were selfish. He listed all the benefits I had mentioned and went on to say that a couple of them had insulted me and owed me an apology. They sat there expressionless. They took it!

He then said that the meeting was going to be adjourned for ten minutes and that they should go outside, cool off, have a smoke, think about what I said, and talk among

themselves. Ten minutes, he said. The inmates got up and walked out of the room and two guards went with them.

Who was this guy? What department was he in? He was tough and he was really cool. He was articulate. He was talking to hard guys. Murderers, some of them. Lifers. He was dressed in light tan gabardine pants held up by an alligator belt. He had on a long-sleeve maroon gabardine shirt that looked like it was tailor-made. Unlike most men in prison, his hair was long but neatly trimmed. He was clean shaven. After the men left, he stood up and looked at his gold wristwatch. He remained standing, arms folded, looking off into space. I turned to Bill and asked who this man was and what department he was from. Bill seemed nervous. He whispered that he would tell me later.

Ten minutes later the six came back into the room. Once everyone was seated, the man who had adjourned the meeting took his seat and got right to the point. He spoke in a firm voice and said, "No speeches: Yes or no." He started with the one who had been the most adamant, the most articulate, and the most insulting. I found out later that he was a convicted cop-killer and a lifer. "I'm OK with giving up my day, Frank," he said. So the guy's name was Frank. Frank did not react and moved on the next man. He also said he was OK with it. And so it went. It was over in less than three minutes.

"Thank you, gentlemen," Frank said, "you made the right decision. This meeting is adjourned." At that point, the inmate who ran the mosque pointed at me and said that he noticed I had moved in a gold rug with the scenery. He wondered if I would leave the rug for his mosque after the production ended. Frank just looked at him. The meeting ended.

I was shocked. I had been in a lot of meetings, but never one like this. Frank walked up to me. I told him how much I appreciated what he had done and asked what department he was in. He smiled and said, "My name is Frank Salemme. I am an inmate here. I run the Italian-American club in the prison." He said he believed that what we were doing would be good for the institution and that the Italian-American club would guarantee security on the nights of our performance. There would be no catcalls or any other bad behavior. He also said that his club would cater the parties after the two performances, providing cigarettes, soft drinks, and cannolis from Boston's North End.

I later found out that Salemme was a made man, in the Mafia, and he had been convicted of planting a bomb in a Boston lawyer's car at the request of the Mafia don Raymond Patriarca. Little did I know that he would be in and out of my life for the next fifty years.

The two performances took place as planned, the first one on a Friday night, the second the following night. Mark and Terry worked very hard. Mark was the director. Terry was Nixon. I got our makeup man to come into the prison. (You can imagine the problems created by a makeup man coming into prison.) Terry wore the Nixon nose. They all were outfitted in suits, white shirts, and ties. At one point we started to run out of money. Bill went to work and won a couple of hundred dollars in an all-night poker game. He was by far the best poker player in the prison.

Over a hundred inmates attended each performance. There was not enough room for everyone to attend, so attendance was determined by a lottery. Every inmate with a ticket was able to sit with one member of his family or a friend. Almost all the inmates took advantage of that offer.

Each night forty seats or so were occupied by people we invited from the community, including the governor, Senator Ed Brooke, several congressmen, state officials, a federal judge, and freelance writers, college professors, and the media. There were no introductions. That night everyone was an ordinary citizen attending an extraordinary performance.

The media came out in force. Local and national newspapers covered it. A young Charles Osgood of CBS News came up from New York with a crew, which made it a national story. *People* magazine covered it and even managed to get videotape of the robbery to illustrate the story. There was not a single security or behavioral problem over the two nights. Frank Salemme threw a great after-performance party for the guests from the community, with soft drinks, Italian hors d'oeuvres, cigarettes, and tons of cannolis.

Checking everyone for drugs, weapons, and other contraband before they entered the prison had been a security nightmare for the prison. It took time and personnel. Visitors had to go through two traps to enter the prison. That took time. Joan had to be stripped-searched by a female guard because the metal stays in her brassiere set off the super-sensitive metal detector. And she wasn't the only one. In the morning all the inmates were accounted for. Nobody escaped and nothing was broken or stolen.

In the weeks that followed, several other prison inmates requested similar performances of the *White House Transcripts*. Those requests were denied. Terry was paroled early. Mark was denied parole and would need to wait several months for his parole hearing. He was murdered before that could happen. Frank Salemme was not the only one who remained in my life after this experience. Bill was another.



The Hood Samaritan

In the previous chapter, I mentioned that I had a “jailhouse lawyer” named Bill Wallace who played a key role in all of the things that had to be done in order to stage the White House transcript show in a prison, with two hundreds guests invited from the “outside.” After the two prison performances took place and the program was an enormous success, Bill came to me and said that if he could get a job outside and if I was willing to meet with the parole board, the chances were very good that he could be paroled. I told him that I was sure I could get him a job. It wouldn’t be a very high-paying job, but it would be a job, and certainly I would be willing to speak to the parole board on his behalf.

For the next few weeks, I tried to land a job for him among my many business contacts. I struck out every place I went. The best I could get for him was a menial job on a newspaper or loading dock or supermarket.

I soon realized that if Bill was to get a job, it would have to be something I created for him. So I began to think in those terms. One of my clients was HP Hood, a large New England dairy company. Its CEO and president was my old boss at United Fruit, Jack Fox. Jack’s job at Hood was to take the company public. He hired me to handle the financial public relations for Hood’s public stock offering.

I came up with an idea, called Jack, and set up a meeting a few days later. I took Jack over to his office window overlooking the Hood parking lot, where a hundred old milk trucks sat, most of them dirty and dented and rusting out. Months earlier, the company had stopped offering home delivery. I asked Jack for one of those trucks. Sure, he said, but he asked me what I wanted one for and pointed out that they were ready to be scrapped. I said I didn’t want one for myself, but I had an idea for a program for Hood.

I told him I wanted to put a man in the truck, who would be paid a minimum wage, work ten-hour days six days a week, looking for ways that to help people, primarily on Route 3, south of Boston. What kind of help? Jack asked. Whatever motorists needed, I said: a gallon of gas, a jump start, help fixing a flat tire. The truck could also cruise the city, helping elderly people with groceries or getting a cat out of a tree.

Jack knew a good idea when he heard one. He said to me, “I suppose you have ‘that guy’ in mind?”

I told him I did and then went on to describe the program before I told him anything about the guy in the truck. Finally, I got around to describing Bill Wallace—his intelligence, energy, street smarts, and personality. I told Jack that the truck would be repainted “The Hood Samaritan” and that Bill would be perfect for the job. I told him that Bill *was* a “hood” who had spent almost half his life in one prison or another, including the legendary San Quentin.

Jack made a quick decision: he thought it was a great idea and that Hood would do

it. With that promise, I went before the parole board on behalf of Bill, and they agreed to let him out. Jack Fox, being Jack Fox, bought a new truck for the program and equipped it with everything from a hot-start battery to gas cans and radio-telephone so Bill could call police, fire, or ambulance, if necessary.

Jack asked me to attend the next meeting of the Hood board of directors and describe the program to them. Gilbert Hood, the former CEO, was the first to speak up. He said, "Over my dead body will you put a criminal in a truck with the Hood name on it." An amazing bit of heated dialogue between Jack and Gilbert Hood followed. Jack reminded Gilbert that the function of the board was to hire and fire the president, and if the board decided to kill this worthy project, he would resign. Obviously, neither the board nor Gilbert wanted to see that happen, so they approved the program, albeit reluctantly.

The program was a success from the start and received tremendous coverage in the press, on tv and radio. Bill Wallace helped a lot of people, and after a year a second truck was added, covering the North Shore. The program began to get national publicity and in the second year, the coveted Silver Anvil was awarded by the Public Relations Society of America, to both the Hood Company and me, as the originator of the program. The Silver Anvil is the equivalent of an Academy Award.

In the next year or so, a decision was made that the Hood Company would not go public, and Jack Fox resigned from the company. A short time later, Gilbert Hood and his newly appointed president, Ed Gelsthorpe, got their way and canceled the program. We took the idea to several other potential sponsors (a newspaper, a supermarket chain, a couple of banks), but the company that showed the most enthusiasm, and the one we thought would bring more value to it, was CVS.

At the time, CVS was a relatively small chain based in Woonsocket Rhode Island, but the company had big ideas. Witness where it is today! Just as it was when Hood was its sponsor, the program became an immediate success under the sponsorship of CVS. It grew in Massachusetts, extended into Rhode Island, and then to other states.

The program is about fifty years old today. Bill Wallace left the program. (I don't want to go into why.) I lost track of him. He might be eighty years old now, if he is still living.

Looking back over my long life, I am most proud of the fact that I came up with the idea for the Samaritan Program. It has helped so many people in need. I don't think anybody knows the exact number of people it has helped. But CVS knows its value. Because if you get help on the road from someone you are never going to buy your pharmaceutical needs at any other place than CVS. This kind of a lasting, positive effect is something very rare in the business of public relations.



Dr. Benjamin Spock

Ben Spock

In 1955, not long after United Fruit's involvement in the overthrow of the Guatemalan government, I was working in the public relations department when our advertising agency alerted us to the fact that a new paperback edition of Dr. Benjamin Spock's wildly popular book on infant and childcare was going to accept selected advertising. The agency strongly recommended we take several pages of that advertising to extol the nutritional value of bananas and show parents how they could use bananas for the family, primarily in baking and desserts.

We followed up on the recommendation, and when the book was published, I received a couple of advance copies, which I stuck on my office bookshelf and forgot about. But two years later, when Joan and I welcomed our first born, Alison, into the family, I brought a copy home to our apartment in Queens. Joan read it and liked Dr. Spock's philosophy of raising children so much that we used it as we raised all four of our children over the coming years.

Nearly fifteen years later, on a snowy winter's day in 1969, I was taking the Eastern Airlines shuttle from Boston to New York. I took a window seat and watched the deicing truck getting the wings of our old plane ready for takeoff. My seatmate appeared, an elderly man who was standing in the aisle and stuffing his coat into the overhead bin. I couldn't see his face, but I did notice that he wore a wrinkled blue suit with a badly stitched repair to one of its pockets. I went back to watching the ground crew servicing the plane.

The man eventually sat down and immediately extended his hand. "Hi," he said. "Ben Spock."

"Tom McCann," I said. "And I know who you are."

By this time Benjamin Spock was more than just the author of one of the best-selling books in history. He had also become a prominent political activist, supporting a variety of left-wing causes, including civil rights and nuclear disarmament. He had been arrested several times for acts of civil disobedience, including pouring fake blood down the conning towers of nuclear submarines. And, as you would expect of someone of his political beliefs, over the past few years he'd been one of the most vocal critics of United Fruit.

We made conversation, and I mentioned that Joan and I had raised our kids on his book. After a few minutes, he said, "So, Tom, what do you do for a living? And don't tell me," he said with a chuckle, "that you're a lawyer."

"No, Doctor," I said. "I'm not a lawyer. I work for a big company here in Boston."

He peered at me and said, "I have a feeling you don't want to tell me the name of your company—most people I know would say they worked for IBM or General Motors or whatever."

“Well, you’re right, and I might as well just get this out of the way—I work for United Fruit. I’m director of public relations, and my work these days is mostly trying to put a better face on the company.”

He settled back in his seat and didn’t say anything for a couple of minutes. Finally, he turned to me and said, “You know, if we ever get off the ground, I think we’re going to find a lot of other things to talk about on this trip. So let’s agree not to talk about your job and what I think is my job.”

“OK,” I said.

“Tell me about your children and how you came to raise them on my book.”

I told him the story about the 1955 edition and how I brought the book home and how it went through a couple of moves including the move to Boston and how after four kids the book was dog-eared and covered in stains I couldn’t identify and how the binding was dried out and there were some pages missing. But that book, I told him, was like a family bible to us. He told me he was happy to hear that, and he talked about the tens of millions of copies it had sold and how many languages it had been printed in, including the millions of copies it sold in Japan. He seemed to be delighted that, as he put it, millions of “Jap kids” had been raised on Dr. Spock.

He had a keen sense of irony and was delighted that Vice President Spiro Agnew (very much an adversary of the left wing) had recently mentioned him in one of his speeches and referred to the kids who were raised on his book as “Spock-marked kids.” The phrase was coined by Bill Safire, who I had known long before he was speechwriter for the Nixon administration and a columnist for the *New York Times*. Safire had been a PR guy and the one who took the famous picture of Nixon wagging his finger at Nikita Khrushchev in 1959.

The flight finally took off, and Ben Spock and I continued our delightful conversation, with no political discussions or mentions of United Fruit. When we landed at LaGuardia, he suggested we get a cup of coffee and a doughnut, and we continued our chat at one of the high tables in the terminal before getting a cab. I asked him where he wanted to be dropped off, he gave me his address on the Upper East Side. We exchanged telephone numbers in the cab, and he said he would call me the next time he visited his son Michael in Boston.

After he got out of the cab and just before it was about to pull away, he doubled back and tapped on the window.

“Tom, don’t tell anybody that I accepted a ride paid for by United Fruit!”

A month or two later he called and invited me to meet him at Boston Children’s Museum. Ben’s son, Michael, was the museum’s director. We had a nice lunch, and he was as delightful company as he had been on the plane. I never met him after that, but Michael and I became friends. I would never forget that airplane conversation and I would never forget Ben Spock—a man of many parts, a towering intellect, and a very good physician, I’m sure, in his doctoring days. He had finished first in his class at Columbia Medical School and won gold medal for rowing in the Olympic games. And, of course, he was the man who helped Joan and me raise our four children.



Captain Kangaroo

Public Relations

Everybody has their own idea about what public relations is or isn't. At United Fruit, some of our people thought it was all about getting things in the newspapers. Others thought it was about keeping things out of the papers. Still others thought that it was about fixing speeding tickets or lining up hookers. One of our vice presidents, who was gay, was arrested for cruising the men's room of a Greyhound bus terminal. Getting him out of a police lock-up at eleven o'clock at night and erasing his name from the police blotter was seen as public relations. One of our employees killed his friend with a hammer in a drunken argument, and I was able to keep the name of the company out of the papers. When an accounting clerk robs the company of a quarter of a million dollars, it reflects poorly on the company. When that happened, we fired the guy and never reported the theft. During the Vietnam War, our refrigerated ships were carrying bodies in our holds. Not something we wanted out there, but you get the idea.

Every profession has its PR people: finance, entertainment, government. Artists, the military, legal. Medical, labor, politics. Sports and the media. It has permeated every aspect of our culture. Even prostitution has PR. In Boston, in the 1970s, Combat Zone hookers had a PR person and a lawyer on retainer.

One of my favorite PR stories happened in Panama City in the late sixties. I took Bob Keeshan, aka Captain Kangaroo, to Costa Rica and Panama. The purpose of the trip was to show his audience how bananas grow. We took the entire cast and crew, including Mr. Greenjeans, Bunny Rabbit, Grandfather Clock, and Mr. Moose. Our last stop was in Panama City, where my Panama PR man, Esteban Lopez, arranged for the captain to pilot a yacht belonging to the governor of the Canal Zone. This was several years before President Carter gave the canal to the Panamanians, so the governor was an American. The yacht was the sister ship to the presidential yacht, the Honey Fitz, and Bob said it was the biggest thrill of his life.

That night, after a nice dinner at the El Panama Hilton, Bob decided to take a walk. Not a good idea to walk the streets of Panama after dark, but Bob did what he wanted. He'd served as a marine in WWII and had been through all the major battles in the Pacific. He thought he was bulletproof. A block away from the hotel, he was approached by a young woman. He said he told her, "Not now," or something along those lines, whereupon she whipped out a business card and put it in his hand. He showed it to me the next morning at breakfast. It read:

CHIQUITA

Relaciones Publicas

The card had her phone number on the third line. Of course, *chiquita* means “young girl” in Spanish.

After breakfast Bob went to a house phone in the lobby while I checked us out. Several minutes later he returned to me laughing and said that when he was on the phone, a short guy with the biggest pistol he had ever seen pressed the gun into Bob’s ribs and said, “Your money or your life, *gordo*.” *Gordo* means fat, and Bob was certainly portly. Bob handed over his wallet, and the guy also took his Rolex and walked off. Not even being robbed bothered Bob, however. He was a great guy. Really cool.

In the early seventies, I arrived at my office one morning and saw the red light on my phone flashing, indicating a message from the receptionist on the floor above. I called her. She said there was a man to see me. He would not give her his name or why he wanted to see me. *Sotto voce*, she whispered that he was different, I told her to send him up.

The guy was about my age—early thirties—and wore a loud striped sport coat that I knew he did not get at Louis of Boston. It looked like he had slept in his clothes. Silk shirt. No tie. Gold chains around his neck. Probably not real gold. Long hair. A Mickey Mouse watch. Cowboy boots. I could smell booze—he wasn’t drunk, but I know booze when I smell it.

He got right to the point. He told me that he had flown all night on the redeye from LA just to see me. He said he chose Boston because he planned to move here. He thought he would like the people here. He saw Bostonians as conservative, educated, reasonable people. He also knew there was good medical care here. He said Boston was just the opposite of Las Vegas, where he had worked before. He was looking for a job in financial public relations. He admitted that he did not know anything about financial PR, but he was smart and he could learn and he thought I could teach him.

I asked why financial PR? Because it was the opposite of entertainment public relations, he said. He worked for one of the largest hotels in Las Vegas, and his job was to get the hotel in the papers as a place to go to see headliners, to be seen, to get good food, and to people-watch. Above all, to see a good show. His job had been to keep bad news out of the papers, from Mob ownership to suicides. But he was sick of it, he said. If he stayed in that business, he would die.

Then he told me about an incident at the hotel that was, for him, the last straw.

Two weeks ago, he said, a headlining male singer (not Sinatra or Elvis or Tony Bennett) appeared at the hotel. This guy was famous for one song in particular and for his energetic gyrations on stage. He was also known for the very large bulge in his pants, which visibly moved up and down as he performed. It was not the traditional pair of socks stuffed in a jock—this one moved with the man. It jiggled and wiggled.

On this particular night, halfway through his act, people in the front row saw something creeping out of his left pant leg. It was about two feet long. Like a whip it followed him around from one end of the stage to the other. “It was not a snake,” my visitor said. “It was a thin gold chain.” As the singer moved, another couple of feet of chain came out, and even the people in the cheap seats could see it. Laughter broke out, and the audience was not supposed to be laughing.

The headliner looked down and saw what they were laughing at. He almost tripped

on the chain, which he tried to pull back up into his pants. He needed both hands. His hand mic was no longer capturing his singing. He pulled at the chain and tried to stuff it into his jacket pocket. He couldn't do that with one hand, and more chain fell to the floor and whipped around his feet. He continued singing as best he could, but the audience had erupted. They started clapping. What a show! He finally gave up and ran off the stage. His secret was out . . . really out.

My visitor explained that the singer had a twelve-foot chain that folded over and over until it was nine inches long and very heavy. And very flexible. He hung the chain on a special hook attached to the left side of his pant leg. But that night the clip broke! What in show business is called a wardrobe malfunction.

My visitor shook his head. "My job was to keep it out of the papers. The columnists in Vegas are vicious. Thank God there were no pictures. How do you keep something like that out of the papers? You don't. But I did. I don't know how I did it, but I did. And I can't do things like that anymore. This job will kill me. I know I am going to have a heart attack or a stroke. I know it. My boss does not know I am here and I got to be back in Vegas tonight to give my two weeks' notice. Please give me a job here in Boston. Please save me."

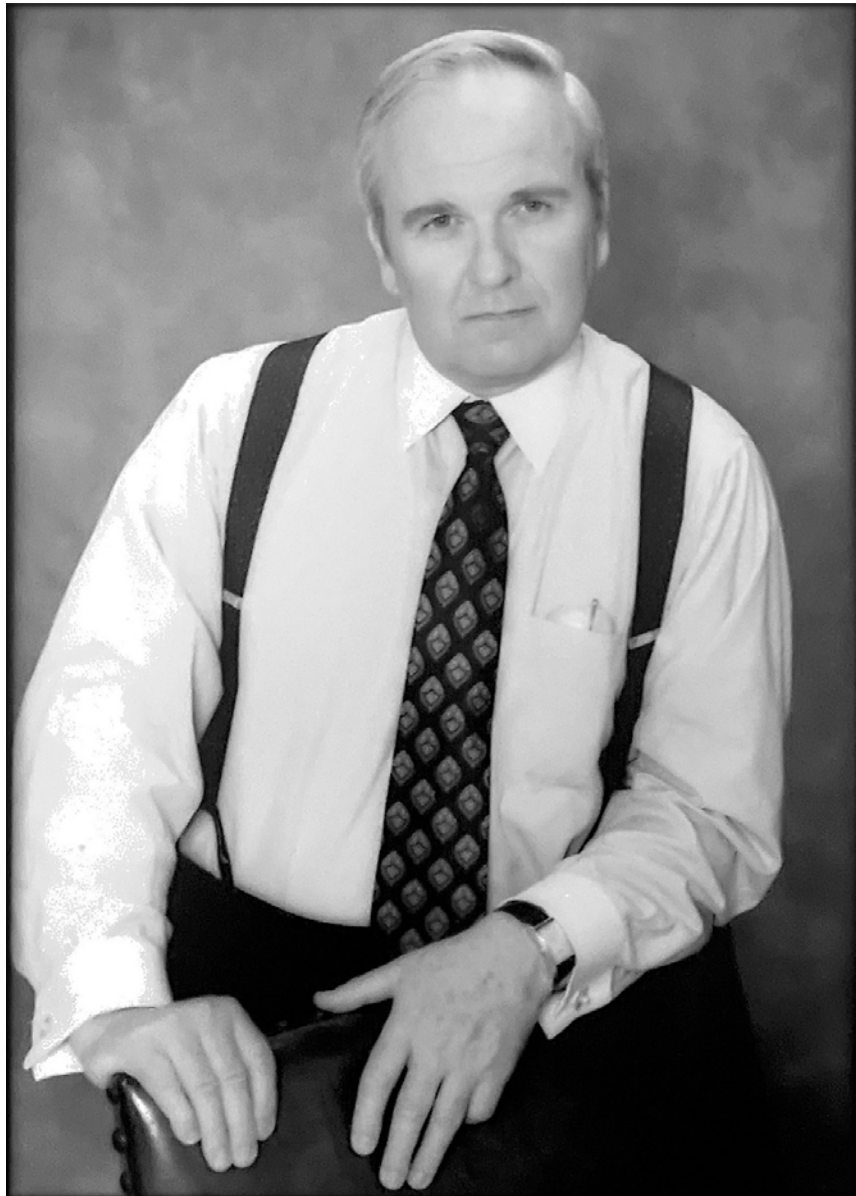
I couldn't save him, but I've often wondered what happened to him.

Over the years, my view of PR has changed. The Public Relations Society of America is a staunch defender of a profession that is not a profession. A profession has a body of knowledge, standards, rules, and ethics. Public relations is a talent or a skill. It is a business. A big business. But it is not a profession.

I expect I will hear from the PRSA, who may want to take back the two Silver Anvil awards they presented me in the sixties and seventies, their equivalent of the Oscars. I don't know what I did with the trophies, but I am sure they will erase my name from wherever they have it listed in their annals. And you know what? I'm OK with that.

FOUR

A BOSTON LIFE





Bill Russell in his prime

Bill Russell

I moved to Boston with United Fruit in 1959, and on my first day on the job I got a call from Sandy Calmas, a Brooklyn native who had set up an organization called “Brooklyn in Boston.” Twice a year, she invited Brooklyn-born people to a cocktail party at the Hotel Bradford. There was a cash bar, light hors d’oeuvres, and a five-dollar charge to cover rental of the room.

I signed up and went to the next event, which was two weeks later. Ahead of me in the line as I checked in was Red Auerbach, head coach of the Boston Celtics, who was then in the middle of his brilliant coaching career. Red was already legendary. He’d won two of what would become nine NBA championships. In 1950, he had drafted Chuck Cooper, the first Black player to play in the NBA. Red was a Brooklyn boy and a genuine character.

Red and I started talking in line and wound up spending most of the night together. We got along so well, he invited me to have dinner with him later that night at the Lenox Hotel, where he kept an apartment. The next day, he called me and asked if I would like to meet Bill Russell, the star of the team. I remember hesitating and telling him, as diplomatically as I could, why I had little or no interest in meeting Russell.

Like most people in Boston, I knew that Russell’s relationship with the press was bad. I told Red I’d heard Russell was moody and difficult (even nasty) and often accused of hating white people. He did not sign autographs, and stories circulating around him rarely had anything good to say about him except as a player.

Red interrupted me, “Tom, no. Don’t believe everything you read. Sure, he’s difficult, but he’s also exceptional, and I have a feeling you two will get along. Bill needs a friend. He’s got lots of friends in name only. But he needs a real friend.”

I agreed to meet him. We had dinner at the Lenox. Bill and I shook hands, and it was the worst handshake I’d ever experienced—weak and longer lasting than most handshakes. Later, after Bill and I became good friends, I asked him about it. He said it was intentional. He said he could tell a lot by the way someone shook his hand. Some men squeezed hard to show him how strong they were. Others couldn’t wait to let go, and Bill would tell them not to worry—the color didn’t come off with a handshake!

That first meeting, Red did most of the talking, and Russell and I mostly listened. Occasionally, Bill looked at me intently, and I guess my handshake must have been fine, because at the end of the dinner he turned to me and said, “We’re on the road for the next eight games, and I’ll be back in twelve days. Would you be interested in having a cup of coffee or maybe even lunch when I get back?”

I said I would, though I never expected to hear from him. Two weeks later I got a call, and he suggested lunch at the Bulkie, a Jewish delicatessen on Boylston Street, right across from my office. He liked the food there and he liked the owner, Papa David, who

owned a Rolls Royce and let Bill drive it on occasion. Papa met us when we arrived and seated us in an alcove close to the kitchen, at what was known as Papa's table, reserved for special guests.

I don't remember much of what we talked about. It was just a getting-to-know-you lunch. I do remember Bill telling me that he thought basketball was a child's game. That he was in the "entertainment business." It was not what he was meant to do for the rest of his life, but the money was good, and it was something he could do until he decided what to do afterwards. He also recognized that Boston was one of the most racist cities in the country.

In the weeks that followed, we saw quite a lot of each other. Little by little, Bill told me what his life was like, including examples of the racism of the time. He told me that Bob Cousy, a Celtic legend who was just a couple of years away from retirement, had been paid to sign the official basketball of the NBA. When Cousy retired, the manufacturer asked Bill to sign the same ball and offered him \$5,000. Bill asked Cousy how much he got for the endorsement, and Bob told him that it was \$10,000. That ended the discussion with the manufacturer. Bill knew that his treatment was based on his race. And he knew that treatment was in line with the racist catcalls he heard from the stands in cities throughout the NBA.

However, the Celtics paid Bill well by the standards of the time. In 1965, he became the first NBA player to be paid \$100,000. So he had money to invest. And he always had an eye out for what he thought might be good investments. All of them turned out to be wrong. He made a deal with Firestone Rubber, for example, whereby he would own a rubber plantation in Liberia named after him. That turned out to be bad investment, his first major financial loss.

Then there was Slade's, a restaurant in Roxbury he owned. One day he came to me with a sheaf of handwritten pages with hundreds of numbers on them, allegedly the restaurant's financials. One look at those numbers and I could see Slade's was a disaster. Instead of earning a profit of \$2,000 a month, which its bookkeeper claimed was the case, he discovered that the place was losing that and more each month.

Soon afterward, Bill slid into a booth at Slade's one lunchtime looking worried. One of the waitresses, Tootsie, sat down and asked him what was wrong. He told her how the place was showing a loss. How could that be? Business looked good. She told him bluntly that employees were stealing from him.

"Who's stealing from me?" he asked.

"Well, the bartenders, the cooks, the wait staff, the receiver . . . and me."

Bill was shocked. He sold Slade's at a loss a few months later. But he appreciated Tootsie's honesty and the two went on to become lifelong friends.

Bill just wasn't good with money. He lived an extravagant lifestyle beyond his means; some years, he spent almost twice his annual salary. But he was an amazing man—one of the most intelligent men I have ever known, a man of tremendous energy, with a wicked sense of humor, a preoccupation with dignity, and a capacity for great friendship. He was generous, considerate, and trusting—and often inconsiderate and distrusting.

But a great friend. The friendship we forged, almost from the beginning, was one of the strongest I've ever had. Bill felt the same way. We shared many traits. We were the exact same age—he was born three weeks ahead of me. We were both left-handed but did

some things righty. Both introverted but thrust into positions better suited to extroverts. We both married high school or college sweethearts and had children of the same age. We both lived in Boston during the eventful 1960s and were searching for what we really wanted to do in life.

Bill's life was infinitely more complicated than mine. He knew he was different. He liked to point out that he was Black, left-handed, and almost seven feet tall. Needless to say, he stood out. He did not trust most white people, and with good reason. He was a soft touch, and there were always people around who wanted something from him, whether it was an autograph, tickets to a game, or money. Knowing him was a sort of education, and I was fortunate to have had nine years of almost daily contact with him.

My friendship with Bill gave me insights into race that most white people didn't have. In the sixties there was a lot of racial unrest, with protests and riots throughout the country. One morning, Bill called me early and said he'd just had a call from the actor and former NFL star Jim Brown, who wanted him to go to New York that morning for a speech at Harlem High School about a Black economic union that Brown was promoting. Bill asked me if I would like to go down with him and from there go on to K.C. Jones's summer camp in upstate New York. I agreed.

We took the eight a.m. Eastern shuttle to New York, jumped in a cab, and told the driver we were going to Harlem High.

"Not in this cab, you're not," he said. He could get us close enough, he added, but it was a dangerous place to go. He dropped us on the outskirts of Harlem, and we walked toward the high school. As we walked, we saw a cluster of Black youth on the upcoming corner.

"Do you think we're in trouble?" I asked Bill.

"We could be."

I remember saying, "Maybe you should hold my hand."

He said, "Who's going to hold *my* hand?"

As we got closer to the corner, one guy said, "Hey, it's Big Bill Russell. Come over here, Bill."

We spent the next ten minutes chatting with this group of peaceful guys who then walked us to Harlem High. An hour and a half later, a Black cabbie took us back to the airport.

Bill could be complicated on the issue of race. In 1969, I talked United Fruit into establishing a foundation that would send outstanding basketball, soccer, baseball, and track and field athletes and coaches to five countries in Central America where we grew bananas. Red Auerbach helped me form a sports advisory committee for the foundation that included Bill and Jesse Owens, who enraged Hitler by winning three gold medals at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin.

Bill told me that Jesse was an "Uncle Tom" because he did so much business with American companies, from Ford to Swanson. I became very close to Jesse and discussed this with him at length. Jesse told me, "I don't give a damn what Bill Russell thinks of me. He didn't have the same experiences I had in Berlin. He has no idea how, when I came back, I had to find work running against racehorses and a motorcycle and traveling with Negro League baseball teams as an added attraction. How I had to go miles out of town just

to find a hotel that would accept Blacks. So I don't care what Bill Russell thinks about me."

My friendship with Bill led me to become friends with K.C. Jones, a Celtics teammate and Bill's best friend. They had both attended the University of San Francisco and represented the US in the 1956 Olympics. I got to know K.C. well just as I got to know Bill's wife, Rose, who he married right after leaving college.

To be invited to the Russell house on Christmas Eve was a memorable experience. Celtics players and close friends of the family were there, and Rose spent a lot of time selecting a different gift for each invitee. Rose was intelligent, beautiful, talented, and devoted to Bill and her children. She was a great mother, wife, and friend. Bill also got to know my family, but my friends were mostly white, and Bill was very frank about not liking white people, especially white men, based on his experience. Throughout my long friendship with Bill, he had only two other white friends in Boston—a lumber salesman at Grossman's and a man who owned a record shop.

After a while, when Red Auerbach saw how close Bill and I had become, he started asking me to talk to Bill about certain things. One summer BMW gave Bill a powerful motorcycle, which they hoped would promote US sales. After trying to talk Bill out of riding the bike, Red asked me to try. Of course, I refused. That was not what friends do. Red also suggested that I ask Bill to practice more. Can you imagine, Red told me, how much greater Bill would be if he would practice, even just a little? Again, I refused. After a while Red got the message and stopped asking me.

After setting up the foundation at United Fruit, I planned a five-city tour of Central American capitals to announce the program. My boss, Jack Fox, president of the company, agreed to come on the tour with Bill, K.C., and me. We took the company plane and hit a different capital each day, calling on the president of each country and meeting with the press and people in the sports world.

It was an interesting trip. In Honduras, where we began, the president greeted us warmly and said, "At last we have somebody tall enough to change the light bulbs!" On to another country, where the president asked us if we knew any dirty jokes. When we got to Panama, the president had been holed up in his office for two weeks. Outside his building, there were howitzers, machine guns, and sandbags up to his office window. We couldn't wait to get out of there.

In Tegucigalpa, Honduras, Bill and I had to share a hotel room. We were lucky to get it. There was something going on with the government, and the city was full of foreign press people, soldiers, and police from all over the country. Many Americans were there, trying to leave the country on one of the few flights out.

There are not many hotel rooms in Tegucigalpa to begin with, and those that are there have short mattresses to suit the locals. So Bill's feet dangled almost a foot over the end of the bed. It was the first time I had ever seen his feet. I was shocked and couldn't help commenting. I'd never seen feet like that: totally flat, spread out, with no arch and toes that were bent out of alignment. Bill was amused when I put a bright light on them for a closer look.

"Watch me wiggle my toes," he said, and it seemed to me that half of them didn't move at all. He said his flat feet were the result of years of running up and down the basketball court, playing and practicing. He agreed that with feet like that it was amazing that

he could still jump as high as he had in high school and college.

The broken toes happened at least a few times each season, but the Celtics never announced the injuries because players on opposing teams would intentionally step on his toes if they knew. He said he never lost a day because of a broken toe. After the game the trainer took care of it. He also broke a lot of fingers that had to be put in splints and taped together, sometimes on both hands. There are lots of photos of the fingers but none of the toes. He told me a podiatrist once said to him, “Bill, you have the feet of an eighty-year-old man. No, correct that. I have never seen feet like yours anywhere on anybody, and I have been doing this work for a lot of years.”

In Nicaragua, we were supposed to meet with President Somoza in the late afternoon. When we arrived, we discovered it was the night of the presidential ball, and the president said he would see us in the morning. Somoza assigned a colonel to look after us. The colonel’s idea of a pleasant evening was to take us to what he said was the best whorehouse in Managua. None of us—Bill, Jack Fox, K.C., and I—were interested, but so as not to offend the colonel, we had a drink in the reception area. A Jamaican woman, nearly as tall as Bill, and missing a front tooth, decided to make a play for him. He wasn’t interested in the slightest, and she wound up bouncing a shot glass off his million-dollar elbow and had to be removed.

The next morning, the colonel took us to President Somoza’s “ranch” on a mountain outside of Managua for breakfast. When we got there, we were surprised to see four howitzers aligned with the cardinal points of the compass. There were sandbag structures and two helicopters, one of which always had its engine running to ensure a quick getaway. Somoza was very affable. He knew Jack Fox from negotiations, and he owned a major share in every activity in the country. He regaled us with stories, from his youth in Brooklyn, military school on Long Island, and his time at West Point, to dealing with Howard Hughes.

From Nicaragua, we went on to Costa Rica. Bill had done some reading of our annual reports and learned that United Fruit was involved in the growing and refining of African palm oil. He asked if we could tour the plantation, much to the displeasure of our chief pilot. Nothing came of Bill’s fascination with African palm oil, but he was serious enough to ask me to explore the possibility of him taking a job at United Fruit to learn the business.

That Central America trip was one of many adventures I had with Bill. A lot of them had to do with cars—one of his obsessions. One summer morning, I got a call from him at 11:30 saying he was in Providence, Rhode Island, where he’d just taken possession of a new Lamborghini, which cost \$15,000 (\$150,000 in today’s money). He asked if I was free for lunch and said he would pick me up on the Huntington Avenue side of the Prudential at about noon. I figured there was no way he would get from Providence to Boston in half an hour, but I went to the appointed spot on time and there he was, waiting for me. Fifty miles in a half an hour. Do the math.

I got in. He went a couple of blocks up to Mass Ave., made a right turn and a quick left, and we were on the Mass Turnpike. When Bill drove, he didn’t like anyone to speak to him, and he usually wore driving gloves. We peeled off about a mile or two very quickly and all of a sudden there were toll booths in front of us.

He said, "We can't stop . . . we're not stopping."

We went right through the toll booths. We got off at the next exit and got away with it.

One night Bill was coming home from a game at around two a.m. On Route 128 he decided to see how fast the car would go. He had it well over 80 mph when he saw the blue light in his rear mirror. He pulled over. When the state trooper realized who was driving, he told Bill to slow down and asked him if he knew how fast he was going.

"About 90?" Bill said.

"Exactly 90."

"I was trying to see how fast my new car can go."

"OK. Are you in town this time tomorrow night?"

"Yes, I am."

"Meet me here, Bill. We'll close down an exit or two for you so you can really let it out. Then we'll have some coffee and donuts."

Sure enough, the following night, they closed down three exits in both directions, and Bill hit 115 mph. Twenty-five troopers showed up for coffee, and Bill spent about an hour and a half with them.

Bill didn't mind staying up late. And unlike many athletes of today, he was a smoker, as I was. The day the Surgeon General's report on the dangers of cigarette smoking came out, Bill and I were having lunch at the Bulkie. We talked about the report and agreed we should quit. So, that day, Bill and I agreed we would both go cold turkey.

On our way out of the restaurant, I stopped at the cigarette machine and plugged in a quarter and dime and pulled the lever for a pack of Luckies. Bill turned to me and said, "What the hell? I thought we just agreed that we are going to quit!"

"Yes, we did," I said, "but I've quit several times before, and if I wake up at two in the morning and want a cigarette, I'll know that there's an unopened pack in my top sock drawer."

Bill thought that was stupid and said so. Two weeks later, he called me.

"Guess what?" he said. "Last night, I woke up and wanted a cigarette and there wasn't anything in the house."

In those days there were no convenience stores, and by the time he woke the bars were closed. He knew he'd have had to wait until morning. But not Bill. He got in his Lamborghini and went searching for someplace that was open. After driving around for a while he wound up back at his local gas station in Reading. He got out, popped the trunk of his car, took out the tire iron, and was about to smash the station's glass door to get at the cigarette machine when he suddenly realized what he was doing. He dropped the tire iron, returned home, and finally fell asleep.

In the morning, he realized he'd left the tire iron behind. He called the gas station.

"I found it," the station owner said.

"Well, it's mine and I'll pick it up in an hour or so."

"What's it doing here, Bill?"

Bill said, "You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

Bill also loved to drive my car, a 1968 Saab. The driver's seat was positioned a little off center and gave him extra leg room. He also liked how freewheeling it was. Anytime he had to go a long distance, like K.C.'s camp up at the Canadian border, he would take my car

and leave the Lamborghini for me to drive. Not that I was pleased—I didn't enjoy its rough ride and how low it was to the road. Also, I was afraid of scratching it in the parking garage!

Driving fast gave Bill an outlet for his stress. As the best player on the best basketball team in the world, he was expected to succeed, year in, year out. That stress increased after the 1966–67 season, when the Celtics won their eighth straight NBA championship. After that season, Red Auerbach retired as head coach, and Bill was chosen to replace him—and he continued to play as well. He was the first Black head coach in NBA history.

Being a player-coach was a heavy burden. The part of the job he hated most was cutting talented kids at the beginning of each season to get the roster down to its allotted number. He agonized over this for weeks. He knew that for many of them, their dream job in the NBA would never happen, and it would affect their lives forever.

Red stayed with the Celtics as general manager, and when Bill became coach, he asked Red for an office. Red refused to give him one and instead suggested that anytime Bill wanted to make a personal phone call or open his mail, he could use Red's office and stay there as long as he wanted. I was there when that conversation took place. A few years later, when Tom Heinsohn succeeded Bill as head coach, Red gave Heinsohn his own office. That hurt.

I fault Celtics owners for neglecting their players in an important way. Most of them were underpaid at the time, and ownership and management failed to give them the financial advice they needed to handle their money and keep from making mistakes. They should have advised players on saving, investing wisely, and managing their money. Most of them had to work in the off-season selling everything from insurance to automobiles.

As a player-coach, Bill had to juggle his professional responsibility with his team friendships, formed over many years of intense competition and time together. As I've mentioned, Bill was particularly close to K.C. Jones, going back to college days, but there was also another Jones on the team that Bill was very close to—Sam Jones.

Bill had enormous respect for Sam, as a player and as a man. There was a side to Sam that amazed Bill. He told me about an incident that happened in Philadelphia, for example, that had quite an effect on Bill. The Celtics were matched with the 76ers in a crucial playoff series in Philadelphia. One night Bill returned late to his hotel from being out and there was a loud knock on his door. He opened it and there was Sam, standing in his underwear.

"Let me in, Russell," he said. He came in and said, "Bill, we've got a big game tomorrow, and you've got to be really up for it. You've got to play the best game of your life because I'm not going to be able to do anything they tell me."

"Who tells you, Sam?"

"*They* tell me. That's all you've got to know. And they tell me, if *you* win the game tomorrow, I'll win the game on Saturday when we get back to Boston."

"OK, Sam, OK. I'll do that."

Sam returned to his room in his underwear, and Bill went to sleep and forgot all about the visit. The next afternoon, as they were suiting up, Sam winked at Bill. That game, Bill set records for rebounds, block shots, assists, and even scoring. It was one of the best games of his life.

A couple of days later, the team was back in Boston. Sam winked at him again and

said, “Russell, I told you that if you won that last game, I would win this one. Watch me.”

That game, Sam was on fire. He set playoff records of his own and was the star of the game. Along with Bill and K.C., Sam was the only Celtics player to be part of the team’s eight consecutive championships from 1959 to 1967. He was known as “Mr. Clutch” for his ability to perform well when everything was on the line. Bill never did figure out who had “told” Sam who would be the stars of those two playoff games.

Bill’s first year as player-coach ended with a loss to Philadelphia in the playoffs, but the following season he brought the team back to the pinnacle when they beat the Los Angeles Lakers 4–2 in the NBA Finals. A few months later, I was home with the flu when Bill called and said he had just been named Sportsman of the Year by *Sports Illustrated*. He was very excited about this award because it said that he was more than just a basketball player.

Bill was able to invite three people to sit at the head table at the awards ceremony at the Harvard Club on Commonwealth Avenue in Boston. I told him I was sick. He said, “Listen, Jimmy Brown is coming in from LA on the redeye, you can come in from your sick bed in Walpole.” So I did. As I approached the entry of the Harvard Club, Jim Brown was getting out of a taxi. He had flown all night to be there for Bill. He was at the head table, along with K.C. and me.

The next season would also end in a championship for the Russell-coached Celtics. It had been a challenging regular season, with the Celtics finishing fourth in their division. But they managed to get through the playoff to the finals and again defeat the Lakers, their long-standing rivals. Bill was hurting. He told me at the beginning of the season that he dreaded going up and down the court thousands of times. He was thinking about retirement, even though he was under contract to play to 1970.

After the Celtics’ victory, the city of Boston erupted. The city fathers decided, for the first time, to have a parade for the Celtics. The morning of the parade, Bill called me and said, “I hope you’re not having lunch with somebody today.” I said I wasn’t, and he said, “I’ll be at your office at about 11:30 and I’ll bring the lunch.”

He came into my office with two bags of food from Bulkie. Down below, I could see the parade forming in front of the Hynes Auditorium. The parade route was up Boylston Street, which was lined with fans. Bill pulled out the leaf on my desk and opened the bags of hot pastrami sandwiches, potato salad, pickles, French fries, and soft drinks. We ate. I could see he was tense.

At one point I said, “Bill, I think you should be heading out for the parade.”

“What parade?”

“The parade that’s forming outside the window here. Twenty-eight floors below us.”

“I’m not going to any parade.”

That’s all that was said about the parade. He stayed through the lunch, and I got a call to attend an emergency management committee meeting on the floor above. When I returned from the meeting, he was still there, asleep on my couch. By the time he woke up, the parade had long since passed.

That’s when he told me he was leaving Boston for good, and he was not going to fulfill his contract to play another year. If he had delayed his retirement by just a few more months, the Celtics would have had to pay him \$50,000. He could have used the money, but he didn’t operate that way.

I knew his financial condition. He owed money. He had continued to spend more than he earned. There were problems with the IRS, and he was short of cash. He told me he was leaving—driving—the following night for LA. He was going to live with Jim Brown for a while. After thirteen years and eleven NBA championships, he was leaving town with a thousand dollars of borrowed money in his pocket, a broken marriage, kids he loved, debts, and more. Yet he remained optimistic. He was going to start a new career and a new life. He was finished with the game of basketball, which, as I mentioned before, he regarded as a child's game. He still considered himself an entertainer.

Almost everything written about Bill at the end of his career with the Celtics asked the questions: Why wasn't he at the parade? Where was he during the parade?

He was not at the parade because he did not feel that he wanted to do anything for the city of Boston. And he was with me, for lunch and most of the afternoon.

Less than four days later he called me from Jim Brown's apartment, where he had just arrived after driving almost a thousand miles a day. He stayed with Brown a week or so and then found an apartment. Books about Bill have said that he spent part of the parade day morning with Red. Years later, I asked him if he saw Red that day. He had not. If he had spent any time with Red, he would have had to tell him that he was not playing another season.

My work took me to LA on occasion, and I saw Bill several times while he was there. He had changed. At lunch or dinner in Boston, he would not look left or right, up or down. If someone came over to the table, he would just ignore them. But in LA, it was a different story. He took me to an exclusive place called the Steak Pit. You had to be "someone" to get in there, and he certainly was someone. As we waited for our food, Bill whispered, "Do you see who's sitting next to you?" I looked. It was a guy with long hair and an attractive woman with him. It was Neil Diamond. I was familiar with a couple of his songs but had never paid any attention to what he looked like. Bill said, "I knew this place would be lost on you."

Five minutes later he said, "I bet you know the guy who just walked in the door and is waiting to be seated." I turned around, and it was Rock Hudson. Bill was right. I *did* recognize him.

Bill had hoped to develop a film career in LA, but it never panned out. In 1973 he became head coach of the Seattle Supersonics (he also owned a piece of the team). Whenever I was in town Bill and I would get together and do a couple of things in the time we had allotted. One morning on a trip to Seattle, I met him for breakfast in the lobby of the hotel where I was staying. As I headed toward the dining room, he said. "No, I'm going to take you to the best breakfast in Seattle." He drove me to a Holiday Inn on the poor side of town, and the waitress, Mildred, greeted him. He knew her by name.

She said, "Are you gonna have the usual, Bill?"

"Yep, the usual."

"Six eggs over easy, two orders of bacon, one order of fries, and no bread."

"That's it!"

"Bill, honey," she said, "don't you worry about cholesterol?"

"No, Mildred, I'm taking it all with me!" he said, letting out a big laugh.

That was Bill as I like to remember him. As the years passed, our contact was less frequent. We still talked on the phone, and when Bill came to Boston we would get usually

together—and the space between us disappeared. But we saw each less and less. There was the long distance between Boston and Seattle, but health problems and other interests took a toll on our relationship. I also had the feeling his mail and his phone were being screened, but I'm not going to speculate about that. K.C. told me he felt the same way.

He was proud of his children. Bill Jr. was his first, and Bill nicknamed him Buddha because he had a fat belly as an infant. He died a few years ago. His other son, Jacob, is an artist and engineer in Seattle. His daughter, Karen, is a Harvard-trained lawyer who has kept up her father's tradition of advocating for civil rights. Bill was very proud of her. In between practicing law and reporting for CNN, she moved back to Seattle to help her dad preserve and enhance his legacy and manage his finances. His life and bank account always improved when Karen came on the scene.

The last time I saw Bill was in Hartford, Connecticut, where he was filming a show for public television with, among others, the jazz critic Stanley Crouch and the filmmaker Spike Lee. I stayed at K.C.'s house. Bob Cousy and his wife, Missie, were also there, and so was Bill's third wife, Marilyn Nault. That night, Bill was sitting at a table with Marilyn and others involved in the show. He just planted himself there and never came over to the table where his old teammates and I were seated. I spoke to Bill a few times after that, but our old magic hadn't survived the physical distances between us.

When Bill died, there was no cause of death given. There was talk of a stroke or strokes, talk of dementia, of kidney failure. According to the *Boston Globe*, the death certificate listed some sort of a breathing problem. It would be very much like Bill to request his survivors not to reveal what caused his death. My guess is that there is a written document somewhere and his fourth wife, Jeannine, is simply carrying out his wishes.

Anyway, what does it matter what he died from? It doesn't.

What matters is that Bill Russell lived, and his record is there for all to see. That's what matters.



General Alexander Haig

“You certainly made our job at the White House harder.”

On a Saturday night in September 1987, I drove from Rockport to our Boston apartment, where I changed into my tuxedo before rushing over to the Algonquin Club for a Beacon Society of Boston night. The society, formed a hundred years earlier, maintained a membership of about a hundred members and held six such events a year. Each member was expected to bring a guest or two, so that there were usually between a hundred and fifty and two hundred in attendance.

The society and its events had a colorful history and left a legacy of many good stories—not all of which are repeatable. And some of which were sad. After one event, the wife of a member called into the club at one in the morning. Her husband hadn’t returned home, and she was worried; he was always home by midnight. She had called the Boston Cab Company, which he always used, and it had no record of him. The night doorman of the club called his counterpart, who had left the club at 12:30. He had a distinct memory of putting him a cab shortly after midnight. The wife then called the Boston Police, who sent a detective to the house, interviewed the doorman, double-checked cab companies, and contacted the hospitals. No sign of the guy. So the police put out a missing persons bulletin.

All day Sunday, the man’s his family waited, searched, and worried. The Algonquin was closed on Sundays. On Monday morning a housekeeper at the club found his body in a dark corner of the reading room. He had never left the club. There was a half-empty glass of Scotch in one hand and a cigar in the other. The cigar had a six-inch ash in one piece, indicating to the police that he had died peacefully in his sleep without any kind of a struggle.

On another night, there would be no such sadness, but there would be some drama. At least for me. Keep in mind that these events were for the benefit of Boston’s most privileged. They were lavish. No expense was spared. The cocktail hour served top-shelf liquor and a lot of it. There were heavy hors d’oeuvres: oysters, shrimp, mini lamb chops, steak tartare, and plenty of Beluga caviar. Dinner usually started with turtle soup, followed by several courses of the finest food, cooked to perfection in the kitchen of our world-famous club and served by its professional staff.

The president of the society sat at the head table, beside the guest of honor and several movers and shakers from Boston’s elite. After the meal, but before coffee and dessert, a choral group from a local women’s college—the Wellesley Widows or the Wheaton Wheatones, for example—entertained the dinner guests. Then eight-inch cigars—the most expensive money could buy—were distributed as were cigar clippers, one per table. We clipped, we lit up. Even those who never smoked cigars partook, and the room quickly filled with smoke as the guest speaker was introduced. After he spoke and took a few ques-

tions, it would be close to midnight. Everyone went down to the second-floor bar and grille room for more drinks, billiards, darts, and tall stories.

It was a very male event. The speakers were prominent men, from presidents and senators to ambassadors and secretaries of state to leading sports figures. In my time as a Beacon member, a lot of military men addressed the society, including General George Patton III, son of “Old Blood and Guts,” and Charles Sweeney, who piloted the plane that dropped the atomic bomb on Nagasaki.

That night, before heading into what was left of the cocktail hour, I stopped at the third-floor bathroom. It had three urinals. The urinal closest to the door was being addressed by a man also wearing a tuxedo. I took the urinal at the other end, leaving the middle one vacant—which is what men do. What we also do is look straight ahead and stay silent. As soon as I’d positioned myself, the man at the other end said in a loud voice, “It gets harder as you get older. I mean harder to piss.”

The voice sounded familiar, but I didn’t respond. The voice then said, “How old are you?”

I told him I was a bit past fifty. He told me he was about a decade older, and that I would find that thing change once you hit sixty. Again, I thought I recognized the voice, but I could not place it.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

“Tom McCann.”

“Don’t tell me you’re the famous shoe man, because if you are, I’ll tell you that I had to wear them when I was a kid and they were absolutely the worst shoes. Cardboard soles.”

I assured him I was not that Thom McAn, and I agreed with him about the shoes because I too had worn them. I added that, on average, one person a week asked me that question, and I had thought I was going to get through this week without having to answer it. He was not amused by my attempt at humor.

All this conversation happened while we were completing our business, staring straight ahead. I finished first and went over to the sink to wash my hands. A minute or so later he came over to the second sink. We dried our hands and he turned to face me and extended his hand. It was then I discovered that I was shaking hands and looking into the face of Alexander Haig, old warhorse, adviser to presidents, former secretary of state, and one-time supreme allied commander of NATO.

He smiled and asked me what I did for a living. I told him that in act one of my career, I had worked for a big company but now I was a small business owner. He asked what my business was. I told him I’d started Commonwealth Films. He asked what kind of films we made, and I told him that the mainstay of our business was a line of legal compliance videos that helped keep corporate America in line with antitrust, environmental compliance, and product liability legislation. He asked if I was a lawyer and before I could answer he said he didn’t like lawyers. Then he asked if legal compliance videos were the only films I produced, and I told him that we did an occasional docudrama for broadcast TV and even less often a TV movie of the week. He said that he did not like television producers and did not watch television. He said above all he hated television news people.

Our conversation was edging close to a sensitive subject. Next, he asked specifically what programs I’d produced.

I decided to grab the bull by the horns. “General Haig,” I said, “I might as well ’fess up to the fact that during Watergate I was the producer of *The White House Transcripts*, a reenactment of portions of the Nixon tapes.”

His face darkened immediately, and his smile turned into a snarl. “I know exactly who you are now. As a result of what you did, the White House petitioned the Supreme Court to prohibit the release of any more of the tapes. We even went so far as to request that they make it a crime for anyone else to do what you did. To hire a bunch of actors who looked like the president and his staff. What you did made our job in the White House a lot harder, and I have a feeling that it pleases you to hear me say that. You guys disgust me.”

As he spoke, he was poking me in the shoulder with his index finger. I got defensive.

“I’m sorry about that, General,” I said, “but the program got a lot of nice letters. It won awards and got rave reviews. And Dan Rather sent me a nice letter. He was a White House correspondent.”

That was precisely the wrong thing to say. He exploded. “What makes you think I would give a shit about what TV reviewers or Dan Rather think?”

His repeated poking had begun to hurt, but what bothered me most was that he was the guest speaker for the evening, and I realized I had become the guy responsible for putting him in a very foul mood. Cooling down, I said, “General Haig, you’re making me nervous. I don’t want to be responsible for putting you in a bad mood, and I think I have.” I told him there were a couple hundred men in the next room who were eager to hear what he had to say. People who respected him for the job he did serving our country in Korea and Vietnam and as a member of several presidential administrations.

He looked at me for what seemed like a long time. Then he seemed to relax and said, “You know what, Mac, you’re right. Let’s go in and have some good food, drinks, and some fun.” I told him that would make me happy, and we left the men’s room and headed into dinner.

On the way in, I asked how he liked to be addressed, as *General*, *Mr. Secretary*, *Mr. Ambassador*, or what?

“Mac, most of my friends call me Al, and tonight we’re all friends here, so you can call me Al.”

I explained I couldn’t do that because of the way I was trained.

He looked at me and nodded. “Understood,” he said. “Me too. I could never call my superiors by their first names. Nixon told me to call him ‘Dick.’ I couldn’t. Not that he was my superior, but he was the president. Even after he resigned, I called him Mr. President.” He paused and then added, “I hope the next time we meet, you’ll be able to call *me* Mr. President. That’s what this evening is all about.

As you know, I’m running for the Republican nomination, and I understand there is a lot of money in this room tonight. I hope to leave with some of it.”

We entered the dining room, and as we were walking he asked me if I was sitting on the dais. I said I was not. I was at table number 12. He told me he’d walk me there. When we got to the table, he said, “Tom, introduce me to your friends.” The others at the table were shocked, and when he left, they wanted to know how long we’d known one another and how we’d come to be so close.

After dinner, Haig tapped on his water glass with his spoon and walked up to the po-

dium. He said how happy he was to be there and thanked everyone for coming and bringing their checkbooks. He said he was surprised that members of the fourth estate were there, so he planned to be very careful about what he said. Puzzled, the audience looked around the room. There were never any journalists at these meetings—in fact, there was a rule against it. And I certainly wasn't a member of the fourth estate, though that was the way Haig chose to see me.

He performed well. He was a very good speaker, and the audience liked warriors. He took some questions. Gave good answers. No equivocations. At the end of the Q & A session, someone asked if he would comment on his "I am in charge here" comment the day Ronald Reagan was shot.

He warmed to the question at once. "I'll tell you exactly what happened," he said. "I was at my desk at State when I got the word that the president was down and it was serious. I didn't even stop to throw on my jacket. I dashed down the stairs, not even waiting for the elevator. There was a car in front of the State Department building and I commandeered it. Never did find out who it belonged to. Drove over to the White House at breakneck speed, through lights, swerving around traffic cops. Didn't stop at the White House guard booth and went straight to the Oval Office. Calmed everyone down. Had a bunch of microphones in my face. I was answering dozens of rapid-fire questions. The cameras were rolling.

"When it was over, our friends in the fourth estate did me in. They edited that tape and focused on one-five word comment I made. They took what I said out of context. The fourth estate! God bless them! *That's* the true story of my 'I'm in charge here' comment."

The room erupted in applause for his words. Of course, those words were a lie. There had been no editing. The comment had not been taken out of context. It was a live feed. But that night he got away with his version. I might not have been the only person in the room who knew it was a lie, but none of us were going to say it was.

At the end of the evening, Haig came up to me and asked, "How did I do, Mac?"

"General," I said, "you were great." Then I told him that it was our practice to go down to the bar and grille room for a nightcap.

"I can't, Mac. I have a wife at the Ritz and better get back to her." He smiled. "Well, maybe just one."

I left him at the bar at two in the morning. He was still there, drinking Scotch and smoking cigarettes and regaling dozens of Beacon Society members with war stories from his varied career.



Bogey, Bacall, and Me

United Fruit's New York headquarters was at Pier 3 on the Hudson River, at the lowermost point in Manhattan and a football field away from the Statue of Liberty. Hector Harris Robson, an unsmiling Scotsman, was in charge of pier operations. Hector had started out in the company as an "oiler," the lowest position on the ships, but he was a tough, feared man who worked up to his senior position. He also loved movies.

The producers of *On the Waterfront*, which would star the new Hollywood sensation Marlon Brando, needed a pier location and approached Mr. Robson. They described the movie in a very positive light: socially relevant and something that would reflect well on everybody connected with it. Of course, they were lying. Hollywood producers will say anything to get a location they want. They also told Hector that filming would be minimally disruptive to pier operations—mostly on weekends—and there would be an opportunity for our longshoremen to pick up some extra money working as extras. Those were also lies. Hector gave them a tentative yes but wisely asked our labor relations man, Ed Neary, to get the script and read it.

Neary immediately smelled a rat. When he asked to see the script, the producers dragged their feet and made all kinds of excuses as to why they couldn't share it. But Neary persisted. He demanded a copy and finally got it. The next day the company said no. Anyone who has seen that film knows that the company made the right decision: It is very anti-union and full of scenes depicting working men as corrupt, violent, and criminal—just the opposite of how the producers described it. Neary later found out that they had been turned down at several other piers on both sides of the river.

It was a narrow escape, but Hector still loved movies, and a couple of years later he was approached by the producers of *Sabrina*, a romantic comedy starring Humphrey Bogart, Audrey Hepburn, and William Holden, three very hot box-office attractions. The producers wanted to film the final scene at our pier. The company agreed. In the scene, the character played by Bogart has finally realized that he is in love with Sabrina, Hepburn's character, who is leaving for Paris on a French Line ship, in despair over the love affair. But Bogart is late: the ship has sailed, and his only chance of getting to it is to jump on a waiting tugboat and dash out to the French liner, which is steaming down the river. The script has the tug moving alongside the liner so that he can board the ship by climbing up a gangway ladder. Once on deck, he meets Sabrina, they embrace, and the movie ends. Wonderful drama and pathos.

The film crew arrived early in the morning and set up, positioning the tug next to the pier. Filming was to start as soon as a scheduled French liner passed the pier about 12:30. Bogart was to step off the pier and onto the deck of the tug, across a distance of eighteen inches or so. That morning, however, the French Line baggage handlers had

called a wildcat strike, and office personnel had to load on the baggage, resulting in a delay of a couple of hours. As the tide went out, the deck of the tug went lower, and the director, Billy Wilder, realized he had to “establish” Bogart on the deck of the tug. Bogart had been drinking from his silver flask all morning, and by the time he was placed on the deck he was losing his balance and his patience. His mood was foul.

I was a reporter for the company magazine that day, and my job was to take a picture of Bogey and get him to say a few words. Because it was a Moran tugboat, and United Fruit was Moran’s best customer, I was able to get on the tug. Before it got underway, I was told I had to get off. I took my time. The atmosphere was tense. The light was failing, the shot had to happen soon, and Wilder had his hands full managing a drunken star as he negotiated a precarious leap from pier to boat. Bogey, meanwhile, was no longer keeping the flask in his breast pocket but was openly swigging from it. The flask never left his hand. And I couldn’t take a picture of Humphrey Bogart with a flask in his hand. He was having trouble standing upright on the deck, which was heaving as the tide kept going out and the wind picked up. Wilder was frantic. Finally, we got word that the French Line ship was underway from its uptown pier and would be passing where we were, a little north of the Statue of Liberty, in about ten minutes.

Things got very busy. I had loitered on deck but was told to get off immediately. I didn’t have a photo of Bogart and hadn’t spoken to him. He was alone and in a very bad mood, muttering to himself. It was now or never for me. I took a deep breath and ran up to him. I was face to face with a slight, pasty-faced man, who was famous all over the world. I said, “Mr. Bogart, I am a reporter for the company’s magazine, and I would just like to get a picture of you and maybe ask you to say a couple of words for our readers.” He turned to me and in a boozy way said, “I’d be delighted to give you a few words.” He spoke, I snapped the picture, and within sixty seconds I was back on land. The picture and a caption appeared in the company magazine.

Fast forward sixty years, when, among my many interests, I was active in Boston University’s Special Collections Archive, founded by Howard Gottlieb and built over several decades by him and his successor and executive director, Vita Paladino. The archive includes material documenting some of the biggest names in Hollywood, from Bette Davis to Fred Astaire to Gene Kelly and scores of others. The Martin Luther King archive is housed there as are the papers of many writers, artists, statesmen, journalists, and other top people in their fields. My association with this special collection has been one of the highlights of my life in Boston.

Several years ago, Vita and her board of advisers voted to bestow its Bette Davis Outstanding Actress Award to Lauren Bacall. The first recipient had been Meryl Streep. Bacall had a reputation for being somewhat difficult, but Vita was excellent at handling difficult people. She agreed to not require anything more of Bacall than saying a simple thank you when the award was presented to her by Bette Davis’s son, the noted Boston attorney Michael Merrill. Bacall had made it clear that she did not like speeches or crowds.

Immediately after the presentation, and as the reception began, Vita came to me and asked me to take Bacall to the Algonquin Club, where in an hour or so there would be a special dinner for about forty people. Vita told me that Bacall was “hungry and thirsty” and just wanted to relax until dinner time. “Try to keep her amused, Tom,” Vita said. I took

this famous actress back to the club, where there was a bit of a scene when the doorman tried to relieve her of the five-pound dog she carried around with her in a sort of sling at her bosom. The doorman lost that one.

I took Bacall up to the large function room where the dinner was to be held and asked her if she would like an appetizer. She said she wanted a shrimp cocktail and a Bombay Sapphire martini. The waitress took the order and Bacall said, "Make it a double on both." While we waited for the food and drinks to come, I told her that Vita asked me to amuse her as best I could until the group came for dinner. She looked me up and down with that trademark sultry sidelong glance and in that smoky voice said, "OK, amuse me. What do you do?"

I cleared my throat and said, "Actually, Miss Bacall, I don't do much. I can tell you what I don't do. I don't sing. I don't dance. I don't recite. But I can tell you a Bogey story."

She looked annoyed and said, "Don't bother. I've heard them all."

I said, "I guarantee you haven't heard this one. It was just him and me, and I have never told it to anyone before."

She said, "OK, if you insist. Tell me."

I told her the story of the tugboat. When I got to the part where I rushed up to Borgart and snapped a photo and asked for a couple of words, I told her what he said: "I'd be happy to give you a couple of words: Bug off kid."

She looked up at me and said, "That's not a true story."

I assured her that it was.

She said, "Bogey would never have said bug off. He would have said say *fuck off*."

I said, "Miss Bacall, that's precisely what he said. I cleaned it up for you."

"There is no need to clean it up for me," she said. "I know my guy."

She had another martini and I joined her. We got on a first-name basis with that martini—her third, my first. Eventually, we all sat down and had a nice dinner. She loved to eat. Across the table from us was the critic Rex Reed, who said at one point, "This lady and I live in the same building—the Dakota in New York—and I see her in the elevator every morning taking this little pooch of hers out for his walk." To which she replied, "To begin with I ain't no lady, and I am not taking this little guy out for a walk. I am looking for another guy!"



Bob De Niro on the day of his audition

Robert De Niro

In 1969, I had an idea for a character in either a book or a movie, based on a fictional PR man named Will Hutzler. He was a shadowy figure—a no-office, no-staff public relations genius—who commanded large fees from his top clients who had major problems or who saw, in his unique ideas, new opportunities for making money. His clients included US presidents and even whole countries. His work was legendary.

I talked with Web Lithgow about this and together we decided to write a film script. The idea was to get it independently produced. In those days, it was possible to make a relatively low-cost film, interest investors in putting money into it, make a distribution deal with an exhibitor, and get actors (even “name” actors) to work for industry scale.

It was also possible to talk to “name” directors and producers and get them to read your script. Web and I launched an effort to do a few scenes from our screenplay. Along the way, over a period of about a year and half, we either spoke to or corresponded with people in the film business and got them to read our fifty-page scenario/script. Among others, we talked to Walter Matthau, Eli Wallach, and Paul Newman.

Wallach was especially enthusiastic and offered to help us when we told him we were going to produce a few scenes from our screenplay. He offered to introduce us to members of the famed Actors Studio in New York and arrange for auditions with some of them. The actor we were most eager to land was the one who would play the leading character, Will Hutzler. We saw Hutzler as a “Whiplash Willy” type, the sleazy lawyer Matthau played in *The Fortune Cookie*.

On audition day, Web and I drove to New York City. Outside the door of the office we used for auditions, there were about twenty actors, most of whom were Walter Matthau types and dressed accordingly. The fourth or fifth actor who came in said, as soon as he crossed the threshold, “I’m not Walter Matthau, but I am an actor and I come out for everything. My name is Bob De Niro. I’m not right for this part—I know that. But someday I might be right for something else you guys are doing. I hope you will remember me.”

In his early twenties, he wore a corduroy jacket and dungarees. He drank coffee out of a paper cup. He was obviously Italian. We invited him to sit down. He told us that he was not the kind of an actor who could be a waiter, elevator operator, doorman or the like. He said that he spent all of his time, all day every day, developing his career. He said his mother was a “saint” who supported his “habit.” He explained that his habit was his acting career and that his mother believed in him. She operated a small letter shop in the Village that earned some money.

Bob showed us a small, Woolworth-type scrapbook that he said his mother put together for him, mostly children’s plays he performed in when he was in elementary school and junior high. At one point he was in a rhythm band. He didn’t even have a headshot

photo, which most actors have, but he had made himself up as the “Ratso Rizzo” character Dustin Hoffman played in *Midnight Cowboy*. He explained how he put eyebrow pencil on his teeth to indicate the rot on them and how he got it off with nail polish remover, along with some of his tooth enamel. He left us with a half-page biographical sketch of his contact information and a few off off-Broadway things he had done.

Web and I saw that he was a very serious, intelligent, hard-working, and determined young man. He was very upbeat, very sure of himself, and not at all discouraged by a business that is a meat grinder of hopes and dreams. I asked Web to take a picture of Bob, which he did. Web recently reminded me that I didn’t ask him to take pictures of any of the other auditioning actors that day. There was just something about Bob De Niro that we wanted to preserve.

As for the Hutzler story, we pursued it for the next couple of years and managed to get our script to some major studios, one of which expressed interest to the extent of having the late, great Terry Southern become a script doctor for the screenplay. It never came to be anything and we gave up after a few years and decided that television was a better target for us than making movies. But it was a memorable experience.



Katharine Hepburn

I opened this book with my memory of a never-to-be-forgotten, phone call from Katharine Hepburn more than forty years ago. It was a call that ruined my day. A call that made me angry—with her for her imperious tone, and with myself for thinking that the scenario Bill Gibson and I had written would even remotely interest her.

On that first call, it seemed to me that she went out of her way to be nasty. Yet why was I surprised? Wasn't this the Katharine Hepburn the whole world knew: spoiled, officious, arrogant? Why should she have been any different with me? Nevertheless, I still felt I should do something to apologize for making her so mad on that cold February morning. By the end of the day, I had decided to send her something—something different, something that she might never have received before.

I called the Nantucket Kite Man, a guy I'd met few years earlier who made custom kites in his shack on Nantucket Wharf. I told him I wanted him to make a kite for a special person. Who? he asked. I was reluctant to tell him, but he finally got it out of me. He said that he had a unique piece of silk from China that he'd been saving for decades, and it was already old when he bought it. It sounded like something that might appeal to Katharine Hepburn, so I commissioned the kite.

Two weeks later, it arrived: six feet tall, with a wingspan of four feet, fashioned with its beautiful fabric and complete with a couple of thousand feet of strong cord. It was indeed unique, like nothing I had seen before. I FedExed it to the Fenwick, Connecticut, house where I had sent the scenario. I included a note, though I don't remember what it said.

A few days later I got a note back from Hepburn saying, "Nobody ever gave me a kite before." She said it was "magnificent," that she had hoisted it to her dining room ceiling, and that she was going to fly it the first windy day. About a month later I received another note. The weather was improving, she wrote, "so why don't you come down here to Connecticut and help me fly this magnificent creation." I replied, saying that I was glad she liked it and wished her good luck getting it up in the air.

Another month passed, and another note arrived: "You never said anything about my invitation to come here to Fenwick and help me fly this kite on her maiden voyage." I thanked her for the invitation but said I was very busy running my business, which took all my time and attention. I had no interest in driving a few hours to meet a difficult woman who, frankly, probably had no interest in meeting me. After all, I thought, we had absolutely nothing in common.

Then out of the blue I got another note, this one asking if my father was "a well-known New York publisher." There she goes again, I thought, another example of her elitism. I told her that my father was not a successful book publisher but an unknown

and highly unsuccessful bookmaker who had been jailed for his exploits. That, I thought, would turn her off once and for all.

But that summer I had to be in Westerly, Rhode Island, for a morning meeting and started to think of her invitation. Perhaps the memory of that first phone call was fading a bit, or perhaps I thought I would get another story out of the visit to add to my collection. I called her and told her of my plans and that I could be in Fenwick by the middle of the afternoon. “Splendid,” she replied, “I’m looking forward to meeting you.” She promised me a “good lunch” and gave me explicit instructions to her house, including the detail that I should ignore the sign in front of her house, which was not for me.

I drove down as invited. The sign she referred to was a hand-painted sheet of plywood leaning against the tree next to her house, which said, in dripping white letters, *please go away*. I parked my car at the front door and rang the bell. Almost instantly, the door opened wide and I was looking at Katharine Hepburn.

She was shorter than I expected her to be—my guess was five-foot-two. She appeared to be taller in her films. She was dressed in a white turtleneck with sleeves down to her knuckles, too-long chinos, and sneakers. The only skin showing was her face, which bore the white scars of basal cell surgery. She wore no makeup. Her hair was piled high on her head in a twisted bun, her signature hairstyle, which she kept rearranging every hour or so.

She smiled warmly and put out her hand and gave me a very firm handshake. She said she was pleased I was able to make the trip and that it was a pity there was no wind—we would not be flying the kite (though she did say there would be other windy days).

I was carrying a bowl of blueberries Joan had picked that morning from our garden in Rockport, and when she saw them, she said, “I hope those are for me. Blueberries are my favorite!” She dug in. I pulled the bowl away from her, saying, “They haven’t been washed yet,” and she said, “Neither have I—hand them over.” It was a good beginning.

She showed me around her house, which she said was her “favorite place in the whole world.” The living room was full of well-worn furniture, the dining room had the kite hanging from the ceiling, and the kitchen had dirty dishes in the sink and, I noticed, a pile of raw chicken breasts laid out on a wooden board with house flies swarming around it. She led me onto a screened porch, where small tables were set up for our lunch. We were joined by Phyllis Wilbourn, Hepburn’s companion, secretary, and confidante of several decades.

The two of them left me alone for a few minutes and returned with trays of cold fruit soup, grilled cheese and tomato sandwiches on whole wheat, and potato chips and salad. Katharine Hepburn offered me a drink. “I’m a very good drink-maker—I’ve had a lot of practice—and I’ve been told I make the world’s best martini.”

I thanked her and said something to the effect that I could not drink a martini ever again.

“Why?” she said. “Have you had a problem?”

“No problem. I’ve just lost my taste for martinis.”

“Well, that’s good. You’re Irish and Irishmen—and Irish women—have a hell of a tough time with booze. I know that for a fact.”

Without thinking too much about it, I said, “That’s interesting, Miss Hepburn. So

Irish people have a special problem with booze. You mean like all Blacks have rhythm and all Jews are cheap and all Italians are in the Mafia?”

She looked at me for a few seconds, her eyes narrowing. I wondered if these were her angry eyes. But she said, “I had that coming. I deserve that. I think we’re going to get along just fine. And no martinis for you.”

When we had finished our lunch, she said, “Now I have a question for you. As you know, I’ve had a very successful career as an actress. Awards. Money. People being extra nice to me. Some flops, but not many. Lately, maybe because I’m getting older, I’ve been wondering how much of my success was due to talent and how much to luck. I’ve been very lucky all my life starting at birth. What do you think? You’ve seen my films. Talent or luck?”

Well, just then I wished I hadn’t turned down that martini. “Miss Hepburn, you really know how to put a guy on the spot.”

Her look told me just to answer the question. I told her that I’d known a lot of intelligent and talented people without luck who had gone nowhere in life. On the other hand, I also knew people with modest talent but very good luck, a combination that carried them through a successful life.

“You are one of the most gifted actresses the world has ever known,” I said, “no doubt about that. You dedicated your life to your craft. You worked hard. You have taken care of your body. You have done all of that and, as you just said, you’ve had a lot of good luck. Your success is because you have both . . . and of course you’ve been in the right place at the right time.”

That was the best I could do. I think I could have done better with more time. However, I had noticed in our conversation to that point that she would nod her head slightly if she agreed with something I’d just said. Those nods helped me to go on. When I was finished, she looked at me and said “Thank you, Mr. McCann. You said a few things that may have helped me.”

Of course, Phyllis had been listening to our exchange and now said to Katharine Hepburn, “I hope that what Mr. McCann said will put an end to that foolish question.” And then she turned to me and said, almost as if Hepburn wasn’t in the room, “You’re not the first person to be asked that question. I wish she would stop.” I had the feeling Phyllis could say anything to Katharine Hepburn.

Hepburn seemed not to hear her and said suddenly, “Why don’t we go outside. It’s such a beautiful day. Phyllis knows I have to get all creamed up when I go in the sun, so she’ll entertain you while I go upstairs and get ready.”

When Phyllis and I were alone, I asked her if Katharine Hepburn often invited strange men she didn’t know to lunch at her house.

“No,” she said. “Never. Even people she *does* know rarely get invited.”

Katharine Hepburn returned, all creamed up indeed and wearing a floppy hat and carrying a parasol. She had a collection of parasols, and the one she chose that day was the one she used in *The African Queen*. Phyllis cleared the dishes and disappeared. On the way outside, Hepburn asked, “What did you and Phyllis talk about when I was gone?”

I told her. When she said that Phyllis was correct, that she never invited strangers to lunch, I asked, “Then why me?”

She stopped walking and looked at me and said, “I had a hunch about you. I had a hunch that I would like you. And I do. Do you have hunches, Tom? And do you act on them? You must, because you are Irish and Irishmen—” She stopped in midsentence, and we both laughed as she took me to the cedar loveseat in her garden, where I would spend four of the most memorable hours of my life and would begin to get to know something of the real Katharine Hepburn.

She began by telling me the history of the house her father bought. But soon after we sat down, she started sneezing—short, almost silent sneezes one after another, a dozen or more. I asked her if I could get her a glass of water. She said no. The sneezes continued and I suggest breathing into a brown paper bag, which made her look at me as if I had two heads. Was it the sun cream she’d put on? The chocolates I’d brought? I was really starting to get worried.

Between sneezes she told me that just before I arrived, she’d been digging in her garden when she lost her balance and fell into the sunflowers. Phyllis had brushed the pollen off her shirt, but Hepburn thought there may still be some in her hair. She asked me to take my handkerchief and go through her hair and see if there was some pollen. She tilted her face toward me, and I did what she asked. Her strawberry blonde hair was thinning, and I could clearly see her scalp. I didn’t see any pollen, but as soon as I was finished, the sneezing stopped.

After that moment of unexpected grooming, she spoke at length about her family, mostly her father, an orthopedic surgeon in Hartford. She talked about the Fenwick house and how it was destroyed in the 1938 hurricane; how she rebuilt it against her father’s wishes and paid for the rebuilding. She said her father was also against her spending \$30,000 for a townhouse in Manhattan’s Turtle Bay. She talked about Howard Hughes and how they had a few dates and how one day he flew over Fenwick from an airport on Long Island and buzzed her house. She said her father didn’t like Hughes. She described him as a nice guy and not at all as eccentric as he became in later life.

She talked about her career and her favorite movies, about living in Hollywood, about her first and only marriage and how young she had been. Her husband was also “a nice guy” whom she “didn’t deserve” and whom she “set free” after a couple of years so he could live a normal life with someone who loved him and would give him children.

She talked about growing old and how few roles there were for her though she still wanted to work. She talked about finding the script for *On Golden Pond* and how she pestered the producer Joseph E. Levine to drive down to Baltimore with her to see the play. He hated it and “cursed her out” for making him drive there in a snowstorm. She tried to get it produced for years, but despite her celebrity and box office appeal, she got only refusals. As a last resort she wrote to Jane Fonda, telling her it was a very good script, and there was a part in it for her and for her father, Henry. She didn’t know the Fondas, but they were interested, and in a matter of weeks Jane Fonda had bought the rights and put together the financing. I believe Jane tells a different story of how the script came to her. Whatever the case, the rest is history—*On Golden Pond* was the second-highest-grossing movie of 1981, and Hepburn and Henry Fonda won Oscars for Best Actress and Best Actor.

On and on she talked. There were times when I felt like she didn’t even know I was there. She was looking out at the ocean. Midway into our four-hour conversation, she

mentioned Spencer Tracy and how devastated she had been when he died. She said she thought her life was over and was deeply depressed for many months. I told her I was familiar with depression and asked if she had sought help.

"I don't believe in psychiatrists," she said. "Neither did Spence and neither did my father."

Several months after Tracy's death, Hepburn's friend Ruth Gordon and her husband Garson Kanin invited her to spend a few days with them at their house on Martha's Vineyard. Phyllis packed their bags, including a bunch of scripts, which, Hepburn said, she had no intention of reading. For months she had been unable to read anything. She had trouble falling asleep on the first night and started reading the script on top of the pile. It was *The Lion in Winter*. She loved it. She woke Phyllis and told her to read it and not to make breakfast until she had read it. Phyllis loved it too.

"I loved me as Eleanor of Aquitaine," she told me. "Didn't you love me as Eleanor of Aquitaine, Tom?"

I am not misquoting her. That awkward sentence was precisely what she said, the way she described—to a stranger—this important point in her life.

She spoke of Peter O'Toole, who played Henry II. "I love Peter, I really do, but he is a little crazy and of course he drinks too much. But then again, he is Irish." She looked at me and laughed. "There I go again. Chalk it up to the habit of a lifetime."

Making *The Lion in Winter*, she said, was something she would always be grateful for because it got her out of her depression, and depression is a horrible thing that she only really understood when she experienced it.

At this point, her chauffeur approached us and asked if he would be needed in the next hour. If not, he would like to go for a swim. Once he was in the water, she took me to a small room on the first floor, which she said was his. The room smelled of oil paints. There were dozens of unframed canvasses leaning against the walls, and she started to look through them. I was concerned that he might come back and find her going through his things. She seemed to be looking for something.

After a few minutes of searching, she called to Phyllis, who was in the kitchen. "Phyllis, where is that painting of the penis? The one he showed us the other day? I can't find it."

Phyllis appeared in the doorway and said she thought he took it to the art gallery in town.

"Too bad," Hepburn said. "I wanted to show it to Tom. It doesn't look like any penis I've ever seen—I don't even know which way is up. I think it was upside down when he showed it to us."

Hepburn did and said anything she pleased—even to strangers. Her friend and biographer Scott Berg tells the story of catching her going through his suitcase. He walked in on her, and she was completely unfazed at being caught. Our four-hour conversation had many such surprises—and she would continue to surprise me throughout our friendship.

Around five o'clock, I announced I had to be going. I was perhaps a bit abrupt because she said, "Oh, I thought you would stay for dinner. May I ask why you can't stay?"

I awkwardly said I was afraid I might "wear out my welcome." That made her feel terrible, she said. Had she said anything to suggest she'd had enough of me? I assured her

that was not the case, but she had invited me for lunch and it was getting to be supper time. To be honest, I was thinking of that chicken in the kitchen with the house flies feasting on it, but I said I could stay a little longer, and if I was going to stay, I wanted to get some more comfortable clothes from the trunk of my car.

"Splendid," she said, "but you should have worn them all day. Just looking at you in that jacket and tie all afternoon was making me hot. May I ask when were you going to change into your casual clothes?"

I told her I planned to pull over to the side of the road after leaving and change into my chinos and short-sleeved shirt. She laughed. "Do that in this neighborhood and you'll get arrested for indecent exposure."

I got my change of clothes and followed her upstairs. She pointed at a room and told me I could change there.

"It's my bedroom," she said. "When you're changed, come downstairs and we'll have ourselves a real drink."

I knew then that someday I would tell the story of being invited into Katharine Hepburn's bedroom. Today is that day. I have to say it was by far the messiest bedroom I have ever seen, like a teenager's bedroom—the bed unmade, clothes strewn on the bed and chairs, the closet doors open, and pairs of sneakers all over the floor. There were combs, hairbrushes, and curlers on the windowsills; books and magazines scattered all over; a telephone on a small table next to the bed beside a photograph of Spencer Tracy. There were more than a dozen opened blue bottles and jars of Nivea cream all over the room, not one with its cap replaced.

I went downstairs, and we had a glass of wine and some cheese and crackers. A young man walked into the room and gave her a hug and kiss on the cheek and said he wanted to say goodbye because he was going back to college early the next morning. She thanked him for coming over and said that she would miss him. When he was gone, she explained that he lived across the way and she had known him from the time he was an infant. They played a lot of tennis together, and she had been able to teach him a few things so that now he was the best player on his college team. Again, I was surprised—that a young neighbor could just walk into the house of this American icon.

After dinner, when it was time for me to go, she told me precisely how to get back to Boston so that I could avoid Providence. As I was about to get in my car, she said, "Tom, I don't think I have all your numbers. All I have is your office number."

We returned to the house, and she led me to an old oak desk and pulled out two address books, one marked *East* in gold and the other *West*. She opened the East book and turned to the Ms. "Damn," she said, "not a single space for anything else." She paused and said, "I know what I'll do—I'll put your name and numbers in the inside back cover, where I have the names of all my Boston doctors." Years later, after she died, those two address books would be auctioned off, along with her other possessions.

What that first day with Katharine Hepburn taught me was that I had been wrong about her. I had based my opinions of her primarily on magazine pieces and on her interviews with Dick Cavett and Barbara Walters, but she was the opposite of the person who appeared on those programs. The real Katharine Hepburn was almost nothing like that. She had great manners, was easy to be with, interested in other people, open, and thought-

ful. She was a good listener, empathetic, even humble. Never once, from the time I rang her doorbell that day and through all the years we stayed in touch, did I ever feel I was in the presence of a great movie star. The Katharine Hepburn she chose to show the public was a person of her creation, an act. It must have been hard to be that Katharine Hepburn.

The day after I returned home from my visit to Fenwick, I wrote her a letter thanking her for the memorable visit and gradually saying that the thing I found most interesting about it was that she was nothing like what I expected. I mentioned my expectations from books and magazines and interviews. I tiptoed into the subject of how great it would be if she could write a book that showed the world something of the Katharine Hepburn I had met.

She wrote back saying that she didn't think people would be interested in that side of her. She said she didn't think she could write a book. She was not a writer; she wrote like she spoke—"in bits and pieces." She had discussed the possibility of a book with a friend and neighbor, the famous literary lion Robert Gottlieb, but nothing ever came of their discussion.

I told her "bits and pieces" was a great way of describing how she talked, and if she wrote her stories that way, her voice would come through and readers would know she had written them herself. I even suggested entitling the book *Bits and Pieces*. She continued to be unconvinced, but I never gave up. I once sent her a dozen ruled yellow pads and a dozen Dixon No. 2 pencils, because I knew that was how she made notes. My gift amused her but did not get results. She sent me the following letter:

Katharine Houghton Hepburn

IX - 25 - 1985

Dear Tom --

Actually, I'm surprised that Anne Edwards' book had anything hagiographical to say about me as I refused to see her or help her in any way. She wrote a nasty book about Viv Leigh -- not nice at all -- I've had a lot of people after me to get going on a book -- and actually I've written lots of bits and pieces -- I frankly don't know how I'd go about it -- I think probably bits and pieces -- I get thrown off because I think people expect a lot of personal personal stuff -- Bob Gottlieb is a good friend of mine -- He lives across the garden from me at Turtle Bay. I have to write on yellow pads -- I can't talk or type --

Your letter was very interesting
-- Thank you --

K. Hep --

That letter put an end to my urgings. Years later and quite apart from my efforts, at the suggestion of Gottlieb (a difficult, opinionated man) she published a memoir with Knopf entitled *Me*. That book was the opposite of what I'd suggested. It revealed none of the side of her I had come to know—the good listener who was interested in my life and what I had to say. That was the real Hepburn. I couldn't finish the book.

Hepburn often said to me, "I think people expect a lot of personal stuff, but they are never going to get it from me." And they never did. But even though she did not warm to my ideas for a memoir, she did trust my judgment enough to send me film scripts. The first came a couple of months after my first visit. She asked for my opinion, and I gave it to her. She wrote back saying she agreed with me. More scripts followed and I would give her my opinion in a couple of paragraphs. She always said thanks but rarely said whether she agreed with me.

One of the scripts had been written by a young woman who had obviously taken a college course on screenwriting. It had the required number of pages, perfect formatting, and accomplished scene descriptions. She had even included comprehensive camera directions. But the plot was awful, the characters were cardboard, and the dialogue was stilted. I found nothing encouraging to say about it and sent my comments off to her.

A week later the woman sent me the worst letter I've ever received from anyone. She wrote I was absolutely wrong about the script, and everything I said was garbage. She blamed me for getting between her and Katharine Hepburn performing in what could have been an award-winning motion picture. She wound up by saying that she was going to church on Sunday to pray to the Lord to strike me down dead, and she intended to sue me for millions.

Angry, I called Hepburn and read the letter to her and told her how upset I was. She had obviously sent the script back to this person with my letter attached. I told her that if she ever did it again, I wouldn't read another script. There was a moment of silence. Then she said, "Are you finished scolding me, Mr. McCann?" I wondered, *what happened to "Tom"?* "Listen to me," she continued, "I agreed with every word you said about that so-called script, and I wanted this woman to see that it was read by someone who is in the business and who himself has written scripts and books and someone whose opinion I value. This is a goddamn tough business and only the tough and talented survive. This woman had to be told the truth about her script."

She paused. "And as for telling me not to do something—how dare you, sir! If I want to do something, I will do it. Nobody tells Katharine Hepburn what to do. Nobody! Good-bye." She hung up the phone.

Once again, I was on the receiving end of a nasty phone conversation, though it was not the end of our relationship—within ten minutes she was back on the phone calling me Tom! She continued sending me scripts and asking for my opinion on other matters. But I learned that there was a part of Katharine Hepburn that was very unattractive. Things always had to be her way.

What more to say about this amazing woman? Much, of course, as I knew her for many years, but she was a private person, and I think she knew that I would never violate her trust. In this chapter, I have done just that—written nothing that she would object to. I am certain about that.

Phyllis died in April 1995. Hepburn's friend Scott Berg called to offer his condolences and to see how she was doing. During the conversation, he asked, "What did she die of?"

"What's the difference?" Hepburn said. She stopped breathing and she's dead. And that's that." A few weeks later—May 12, which was Hepburn's eighty-eighth birthday, a few intimate friends gathered at the small cemetery in Fenwick to bury Phyllis's ashes alongside members of the Hepburn family. It was raining, and Scott said Hepburn dropped to her knees and sobbed. He said he never heard Phyllis's name again.

Hepburn died eight years later, in June 2003, at Fenwick. The managers of her estate decided that there would be an auction of all her personal property—everything they could get their hands on and everything she ever touched. She had lived to the age of ninety-six protecting her privacy and creating an image that she presented to the world. Now, her life and possessions were being auctioned off to the highest bidders, listed in a 250-page catalog entitled "Property from the Estate of Katharine Hepburn," from the wedding dress she wore in 1928 when she married Ludlow Ogden Smith to a pair of her tennis shorts, with the notation that they were "soiled." From a sculpted bust of Spencer Tracy she had done herself to the picture of Tracy I had seen on the table next to her bed. Also listed was a picture of Hepburn, "with no makeup and her hair in rollers," packets of her correspondence, including letters from me to her, those two leather address books.

In time I got a call from the secretary of the man who bought those address books, with my name and number noted inside the back cover of one of them. The man had noted my name and told her to call me and find out if I was "someone."

"Tell him you called me and that I am 'someone,'" I told her.

I think Hepburn would have liked that response.

“What If?”

From the time I was able to think of such things, I have been obsessed—yes, I admit it—with two words: *What if*. It began when, as a boy, I wondered, “What if I had a different mother and father?” I had read in one of my mother’s magazines that the beautiful movie actress Myrna Loy and President Roosevelt were in love with each other, and I dreamed of what it might be like if they were my parents. How my life would be different and better. How I would be living in the White House, with plenty of heat in the winter and hot water when I showered. I would get to know my favorite actors and actresses and meet generals like McArthur and Eisenhower and eat off the same plates that Lincoln ate off.

As I grew older, my obsession with “what if” changed. It was no longer a fantasy, looking forward, but a philosophical musing, looking back. For example, what if I’d never had that Prep experience with that sick priest? I would likely have gone on to a Catholic college on a scholarship and not had the John Adams high school experience, which helped to heal me and restored my faith in myself—and which has had a positive effect on me to this day. Just as significantly, if I had not gone to John Adams, I would never have met Joan, my wife of seventy years, and would never have had our children—Alison, Lynn, Nancy, and Peter. I would not have been a messenger boy for a notorious banana company or moved to Boston. I would not have had the friends I made. My Prep experience led to my life.

Another way of describing what-ifs is to call them “turning points.” They are the choices you make. The accidents that happen. But also, what *doesn’t* happen. I think about all the near misses; what if those close calls had never occurred? That to me is the scary part. How much would I have missed? Our lives are shaped by chance, destiny, and the actions of others.

I often think of something my mother did when I was thirteen. She sat me down and told me I had not gotten into Regis High School in Manhattan. It was where I should have gone. It was where I really wanted to go. There would have been no tuition and no sadistic Father Hess. There would have been plenty of scholarship money to help a smart kid like me go on to a good Catholic college. I would not have been a charity case. I knew I had done well on the admission test and in my interview. I couldn’t understand why I had been rejected. Forty years later, my mother told me that I *had* been admitted, but she had felt I should go to Prep. She had lied to me. What a terrible thing for a mother to do! And yet it led to my life and so many good things. Even the bad actions of others can have a good result.

What-ifs can change the course of history. John F. Kennedy would not have been elected to the Senate and gone on to become president, for example, had it not been for the action of a man named Lloyd Waring. Very little has been written about Waring. As far as I know, nobody alive knows about his role in helping Kennedy win his Senate seat in 1954, a win that paved the way for his victory over Richard Nixon in the 1960 presidential election.

I know this story because Lloyd himself told it to me toward the end of his long life. But first, a bit about him.

He was born in Melrose, Massachusetts, in 1902. His father died when he was in his early teens, and as the eldest, he was expected to care for his brothers, sisters, and mother. I don't think he ever finished high school, and he certainly never went to college. He had to make money. At age seventeen, he applied for job at Kidder, Peabody, a Massachusetts firm of investment bankers, stock and bond brokers, and traders. Lloyd was good at math and had a keen interest in finance, but with no education, no connections, and no experience, the only role open to him was as a messenger. Even at that low level he was required to see a company doctor and submit to a physical. The examination determined that Lloyd had tuberculosis and would likely not live past the age of twenty-one. He was rejected.

Lloyd told me he had begged for the job and agreed to resign as soon as his health began to deteriorate. He even agreed to put that promise in writing. He was eighty when he told me this story. He lived to be ninety-five and swam in the Atlantic Ocean twelve months a year until he reached ninety. He did not have TB.

Yet his promise to resign had worked, and he was hired at Kidder, Peabody. After a few months somebody realized that he was capable of much more than being a messenger, and he was given a low-level desk job. From there he rose quickly. He became an analyst and was then given a couple of small accounts to manage. Those small accounts grew larger. Customers began to ask for Lloyd as word of mouth of his expertise spread. But the executives at Kidder were all Brahmins and Harvard men. Lloyd was from the wrong side of the tracks. He didn't speak like them, dress like them, or think like them. Yet he continued to advance in responsibility and salary, and in 1938, at the age of thirty-six, he became president of the Boston Security Traders Association—the youngest in its history. Fifteen years later, he became a partner. He was a superstar not only at Kidder but in the industry.

At that time, everyone who worked at Kidder, Peabody, without exception, was Republican. That was my experience. Most Boston companies and Boston social clubs were. That suited Lloyd's conservative views, and he joined the party and became very active in Massachusetts Republican politics. He was very skilled at raising money and did not mind knocking on doors to ask strangers for their votes and their money to help Republican candidates. In those days, Republicans did a lot better in Massachusetts elections than they do now. And Lloyd rose rapidly in the party. He was never interested in public office for himself—only in advancing the Republican agenda.

Yet Lloyd knew that the movers and shakers in the party, especially those running for public office, never really accepted him or his advice. They valued only his ability to raise money. Some were better at hiding their feelings than others. One who never tried to hide his feelings about Lloyd was Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., who represented Massachusetts in the US Senate. They were precisely the same age. Lloyd said that Lodge "ritzed me every chance he got." To "ritz" someone was a common term at the time. It meant to treat someone as an inferior—intellectually, socially, economically, and in every other way. A person who ritzes feels and acts superior and doesn't care if the one they are ritzing knows it.

In the late forties, Lloyd served as chairman of the Massachusetts Republican Party, and in the early fifties he was the party's finance chairman. He was treasurer of both Eisenhower presidential campaigns and, later, the New England director of Barry Goldwater's

presidential campaign. (Lloyd loved Goldwater.) He also raised funds for Richard Nixon's campaigns and was four times a delegate to Republican national conventions. He had a lot of clout in the Republican Party, and his sympathies were entirely Republican.

In 1952, Henry Cabot Lodge was in a tight race for reelection against Kennedy, then a congressman from working-class Charlestown. Lodge needed all the support he could get—he especially needed Republican party funding for the ads, leaflets, signs, and other means of getting his name into the heads of Massachusetts voters. Of course, Lloyd held the purse strings. And Lodge had ritzed Lloyd once too often. Lloyd told me that around that time there had been an incident between him and Lodge. He didn't tell me what it was, only that Lodge ritzed him "for the last time." He decided to get back at Lodge by using his influence to withhold some funds. At the crucial point in the campaign, Lodge lacked the money to match what Kennedy was spending—and JFK was well-funded, thanks to his father and other sources from within the Democratic party.

The result, as everyone knows, was that Lodge was defeated by Kennedy, who secured 51.5 percent of the vote. Joe Kennedy was elated. At long last, an Irish Catholic Democrat had humbled a scion of the WASP Boston elite. For Joe, this victory was the most satisfying of all his family's electoral triumphs. And it paved the way for JFK's 1960 presidential campaign. If Lodge he had won the Senate election, Kennedy would never have run for the presidency in 1960. The United States would never have had that young energetic, optimistic man in the White House. There would have been no tragic assassination with all its consequences for the years to come. There would have been no Lyndon Johnson presidency, and who knows what other impact.

Lloyd told me that story more than fifty years after the 1952 race, adding that it was the only time he ever helped a Democrat. As he spoke, I could see a flush on his face. After all those years, he still remembered how Lodge had treated him. The Lodge campaign had claimed at the time that the loss was due to Lodge's efforts to help Eisenhower win the Republican nomination, thereby neglecting his own campaign. But Lloyd knew better. "Lodge fought like the devil to win," he told me, "but it was me who helped him to lose that election, and I am proud of it. The fact is Kennedy was the better candidate." He went out of his way to list the Republican candidates he had helped to win over the years, including Eisenhower, Nixon, Ford, Reagan, and both Bushes. There were pictures of Lloyd and all the presidents he helped get elected on the walls of his house.

That's the story. Is it true? I certainly believe it. I know how it feels to be looked down upon. Even after half a century. And I love how the story illustrates so well how one man's what-if can shape world history.

I count myself lucky to have known Lloyd. He and I had oceanfront houses in Rockport, and when I would arrive at mine for the weekend, there would almost always be a message on my answering machine asking me to come over on Saturday or Sunday to pitch horseshoes (a Republican game he was very good at) and have a bowl of chowder. I enjoyed our visits. I liked him. But I would never have wanted to work for him. He could be tough. And stubborn.

Lloyd had an office in Gloucester with a direct line to the Kidder, Peabody office in Boston. He made daily trades involving several portfolios he managed, and he also used the office to run the affairs of the Amelia Peabody Foundation. Miss Peabody was the sole

surviving heir of Frank Everett Peabody, an early partner in the brokerage house, and Lloyd handled her financial affairs until her death in 1984. She was one high-born Brahmin who never looked down on Lloyd.

After she died, he continued to run her foundation, worth, I believe, over \$100 million. James St. Clair, a partner at the Yankee law firm Hale and Dorr in Boston, played a large and lucrative role in the foundation all his life.

Lloyd recommended St. Clair to Nixon during the Watergate crisis, and it was St. Clair who finally convinced Nixon to resign. I believe St. Clair also came up with the presidential pardon plan shortly after the resignation, but I have no proof of that.

St. Clair so valued his association with Lloyd that he came up to Rockport every month and stayed for dinner. On one such night in the eighties, I asked St. Clair if he had seen my docudrama, *White House Transcripts*. He said he had and made no further comment. Then I asked him if President Nixon had seen it. He said, "No comment—I never discuss my clients." Lastly, I asked was if he intended to write a book about his involvement in Nixon's final days—one of the greatest what-if stories in American history. His response? "I'm not the kind of a lawyer who writes books."

St. Clair had no desire to tell his story, but Lloyd's stories had helped me understand how life worked. On at least one occasion I returned the favor. One Saturday afternoon, as I was leaving Lloyd's house, he asked me to drop an envelope off at the post office. He told me it contained an alimony payment and muttered something about how angry it made him to have to write that check each month. It really bothered him.

I knew him well enough by then to say, "Lloyd, get over it. It is only money, and you are a very rich man. You were miserable when you were married to that woman, and now you're happily married. You solved the problem with money. And there are so many problems that can't be solved with all the money in the world. Like a terminal illness. So be grateful that you write that check each month."

He looked at me for a minute, then asked me to repeat what I just said. I did. He said, "You are right, my boy. I feel so much better."

After that day, he called me many times, asking me to repeat what I had told him about solving problems with money. Once he said he was having trouble remembering it, and he thought it should be written and hung on a wall. Well, I was happy to help him out in that small way. Happy to help him understand his own what-if.

Copyright Details and Acknowledgments

Copyright © 2026 Thomas Peter McCann, all rights reserved.

Published by Thomas Peter McCann.

ISBN: 979-8-234-06167-6

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to Kevin Stevens, writer, editor, and decades-long friend, for suggesting that I write a memoir. Kevin said that if I wrote the manuscript, he would do the editing. That offer from him tipped me over. It started out as a hardcover book, but by the time I recovered from some health problems I lost two years. I did the math and realized that I might not have the time left to see a hardcover, so I decided to complete the manuscript and put it out as an online book. Take a bow Kevin! Visit him at kevinstevens.net.

The cover art for *Turning Corners* was done by Traci Corbett of Cape Ann, Massachusetts. Visit her website at tracithaynecorbett.com to see examples of how good she is.

My thanks also to Michael Tallon, artist, educator, and computer genius, for designing, building, and maintaining the website. View Michael's work at tallon.de.

Nan Fornal, also a friend of many decades, did the copyediting and more. She is the best. Her website is nanfornal.com.