

"Richard Kirshenbaum is Long G'Island's Don Draper."
—James Patterson

MADBOY

Beyond *Mad Men*: Tales From the
Mad, Mad World of Advertising

RICHARD KIRSHENBAUM



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To Lucas,

From one madboy to another.

Do what you love and love what you do.

love,

Daddy

To Alterna-Dad,

To the original Mad Man.

*A son could not have been luckier
to have a man like you as a father.*

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INTRODUCTION

By Jerry Della Femina

RICHARD KIRSHENBAUM ALMOST KILLED ME.

I was driving my car on New York's Henry Hudson Parkway on a rainy October morning in 1981 when I looked up and saw an outdoor billboard for Kenneth Cole shoes.

The headline, to get people to take part in the upcoming election, was just three letters: VOT.

The picture above it was George H.W. Bush's spelling-challenged Vice President, Dan Quayle.

The billboard was so funny, so fast, so perfect, I kept staring at it while I was driving 70 miles an hour, and I drifted into the next lane.

The driver whose car I had turned toward frantically honked his horn. I jammed on the brakes and my car skidded around and was now facing ongoing traffic.

Two cars driving behind me came within a whisker of slamming into me. I remember screaming out for my mother. When I finally turned the car in the right direction, I thought to myself, "I've got to meet the guy who wrote that poster."

Meeting Richie Kirshenbaum was love at first sight. He has the exuberance and the "please love me" energy of a puppy in a pet-shop window.

I once took Richie to the Four Seasons restaurant. It was his first time there. I gave him some big-brother advice.

"This is where you must come for lunch when you get a new account and it has been announced that morning in the *New York Times*, so all the important people in The Grill Room can see and celebrate with you."

Then I added, "This is where you must come on the day it is announced in the *New York Times* that you lost an account. That's to show the bastards you don't care."

During the course of our lunch, Richie told me the size of his new agency's billings three times.

Each time he told me a different number. Each number was lower than the last.

"He's starting to trust me," I thought.

* * * *

I would like to think Richie and I are very similar as advertising writers. We have humor and a "baby boy" shtick, and a "we're going to make you smile and charm you and all you have to do is look at our ad" mentality.

Once, many years ago, I went for a job at an agency called DeGarmo. The older man who was creative director called a friend of mine and screamed, "I will never hire him—he writes like a

Italian street-corner wise guy.”

He was right. My street corner was Avenue U and West 7th Street in Brooklyn.

I’m sure that if that same gentleman had seen Richie Kirshenbaum’s copy portfolio 25 years later, he would have said, “I will never hire that guy—he writes like a Five Towns Jewish Long Island wise guy.”

* * * *

The top three best-selling books on advertising can be summed up thusly:

In 1961, Rosser Reeves wrote a great book called *Reality in Advertising*. This was your basic “how advertising should be done” book.

In 1963, the great David Ogilvy wrote *Confessions of an Advertising Man*, which was basically “how I did it” book.

In 1969, I wrote *From Those Wonderful Folks Who Gave You Pearl Harbor*. Since I hadn’t yet done it and I didn’t really know how to do it, my book was a “isn’t advertising a fun thing to do for living” book.

In 2011, with *Madboy*, Richie Kirshenbaum puts it all together in one great book on advertising. How it should be done. How he did it. And isn’t it great fun.

Madboy is a terrific book, and I’m sure it will make an outstanding movie or television series.

Here’s what I love about this book: If you’re the parent of a teenager who’s having problems at school and hints that he or she wants to do something “creative,” buy him or her a copy of *Madboy* and I guarantee this book will teach more about life and business than four years at any Ivy League college.

This is not just another “and then I wrote...” advertising book by another agency chairman. Richie writes about what it takes to lead and motivate people. He writes about dealing with clients, dealing with parents, dealing with marriage, dealing with life.

Want to know the horrors of a Hennessy Cognac shoot with a model who refuses to come out of her trailer because she has to be photographed wearing nothing but a wispy piece of silk and she’s cold? What do you do after three hours when she says she won’t come out of the trailer unless all the participants in the commercial—client, agency personnel, photographer—strip down naked, too?

Wondering what it’s like to direct Andy Warhol in a commercial for a client who had never heard of Andy Warhol?

What happens when Richie tries to talk Miss America Phyllis George into starting a commercial with the words, “I’m here to show America something they’ve never seen before—my breasts”?

Then read on....

* * * *

It wasn't all just fun and games, though. There was great work for Kenneth Cole, Snapple, Target, Hennessy, and so many others. Some great products succeeded because Richie is so much more than just an advertising writer.

He has the eye of an art director, the ear of a musician, an uncanny fashion sense, and no one in the history of the advertising business has ever had a keener awareness of pop culture. All this from a sweet Jewish prince from Long Island. Go figure.

If my advertising generation owned the 1960s and 1970s and early 1980s, Richie Kirshenbaum owns the late 80s, the 90s, right on to tomorrow.

Imagine *Mad Men* with computers and the Internet.

OK, Richie is no Don Draper in looks, but he's a helluva lot better creative guy.

* * * *

When I finished *Madboy* I thought of Murray.

Murray was a grizzled old art director who got into the advertising business pre-*Mad Men* in the 1940s.

He was a "good old days" guy.

Here we were in 1961, a creative department filled with young kids a generation removed from the original *Mad Men*, enjoying our role in the new advertising creative revolution.

And Murray would shout, "You guys missed the good old days!"

I guess doing ads with doctors selling Camel cigarettes must have been loads of fun for Murray.

It's clear that Richie had his own "good old days" to write about.

But I don't want to be like Murray.

OK, Richie, I admit it. Your "good old days" sound like a lot more fun and make for better reading than my "good old days."

PROLOGUE

ONE OF THE BEST THINGS about being in the ad business is no two days are alike. That's because no two clients are the same, nor are the problems and the solutions. Which means that you can always walk up and expect the unexpected and, as I like to say, get to be a "jack of all trades, master of *some*." That said, there is the unexpected and the *unbelievable*. And there have been a number of days since founding our advertising agency, Kirshenbaum Bond + Partners (kbp), twenty-four years ago that I can honestly say have fallen into the latter category.

I mean, how many people can say that they've gone to the office and have had Paris Hilton and their secretary (during *The Simple Life*) and had to ask Nicole Richie to make room at the Xerox machine when she was xeroxing her brassiere? Who else can say they appeared on the cover of *Wired* magazine with not only the legendary George Lois but the Pillsbury Doughboy? Or that they were an extra in a Joan Jett video that is now a VH1 Classic? (I am dating myself.) Or opened an office in Ed McMahon's LA house?

When I first entered the ad business in my early twenties, there were pretty much two kinds of agencies: boutique print agencies and those that focused mostly on TV commercials for larger clients (like car companies). There was little thought of bridging them. Until I, at twenty-six, and Jon Bond, at twenty-nine, started kbp. We didn't set out to build that bridge, much less a new concept of advertising. It never occurred to us that there were rules or protocols to follow. We just operated on instinct and our gut.

Perhaps, in retrospect, doing the unconventional, the unexpected, was actually the impetus that led to the unbelievable. After all, in the early days of its inception, kbp became known for breakthrough advertising because it led by inventing and surprising the industry with not only one of the first integrated structures (offering design, public relations, direct mail, interactive services, etc.) but it offered even more. It was one of the first agencies to create under-the-radar and 360-degree marketing solutions (we even wrote a book about this, which is still used as a blueprint for marketing in many universities). We were the first agency to unexpectedly invent street-stenciling, the first agency to invent advertising on fruit, the first agency to invent the pop-up retail store, and one of the first to create brand content—an actual TV show *for* felines (i.e., cats), which provided entertainment for them. It can be argued that we created or at the very least influenced reality TV by having brands we represented—not just products but the real people behind them—filmed and marketed in real time. All this, unusual and unexpected.

Yes, unexpected might have been lecturing at the Harvard Business School (I could never have gotten in there). But unbelievable is going to Sony headquarters and eating popcorn while they are screening Morgan Spurlock's new movie (out in April 2011), which I am actually in. I was watching

myself as *myself* on the big screen. Unexpected is growing up to shoot campaigns with supermodel movie stars, icons like Robert Kennedy Jr. and Muhammad Ali. Unbelievable was being a model myself (for Paul Stuart). Unexpected is being the precursor to advertising and branding via social media—YouTube, Facebook, Twitter—by coproducing creative work that engaged consumers in real dialogue, in real time. Unbelievable is founding a Jamaican rum with Chris Blackwell, founder of Island Records, and having a celebration launch with the prime minister. I’ve helped cofound two digital and direct-mail marketing companies in this arena, producing huge results.

After all these years, still not knowing what the day or the phone will bring, I have only started to fully embrace the unbelievable or the unexpected and even the ridiculous (try being one of *U.S. Weekly’s* Fashion Police). No one told me that when I started out in the ad biz my job would encompass not just being a copywriter, but part actor, orator, art director, private equity guy, creative director, human resources director, model (literally), TV producer, and reality TV personality with my own show, interviewing creatives at lunch—who had any other time? I didn’t realize that there were *that* many facets or expectations to being a successful ad Mad Man.

The company my partner and I founded twenty-four years ago is now part of a public company whose other units are tangential to ours, with more than five hundred employees (we started with two), close to a billion dollars in billing, with seven businesses and offices in three countries. I still marvel at the unexpected. As I write this, I am staring out at Central Park from my new Fifth Avenue duplex. (Ridiculous? You bet.) I look toward the boat pond and remember something else unforgettable and unbelievable—not that long ago I was crashing on my sister’s sofa and answering phones working for *free* as a receptionist to get experience at an ad agency. I was brown-bagging lunch in the park, looking at the buildings on Fifth Avenue—including the one I now live in—with awe.

A bit unbelievable? Wait ’til I tell you the rest. . . .

The Competitive Landscape

CHAPTER ONE

MY LONG G'ISLAND ACCENT

MINE IS NOT EXACTLY a rags-to-riches story, but more like a *rag-trade-to-riches* story.

I'm not going to lie and tell you I walked three miles to school or didn't have enough to eat. In fact, memories of my family are all about eating Long Island Jewish style, which meant you had Chinese food at China Jade in Hewlett every Sunday night, and relatives plied you with every conceivable calorie while they pinched your cheeks and told you that you were too thin. And if anyone knows anyone who lives in or around the Five Towns, they will wax poetic about the seven-layer chocolate cake from Wall's Bake Shop, the Hawaiian chicken from Woodro Koshers Deli, the summer snack bar (a scoop of tuna with lemon and a Coke) at the Westbury Beach Club in Atlantic Beach, and all the buffets causing groans at bar mitzvahs, weddings, and sweet sixteens. After all, what's an affair without a good pig in a blanket and a mini eggroll? The food was really a subtext for a personality and style—a sense of sixties' and seventies' affluence and opulence, which was culturally distinct and imbued with flavor and humor. It bridged the gap between the *Goodbye, Columbus* years and the introduction of nouvelle cuisine (i.e., stuffed derma versus the tuna roll) where people ate with abandon, and if someone mentioned anorexia nervosa, they most likely thought it was an opera.

These days, whether someone's living in a penthouse on Park Avenue or the Grand Manor in Greenwich, I can always spot a refugee from the Five Towns (pronounced "foive" towns). The accent, however subtle and redesigned it may be, is a dead giveaway. Every once in a while, I'll be talking to people with airs, and it suddenly slips out. They'll say "like" too much or ask for a glass of "wattal" or they'll carry over the hard "g" when they say "Long G'Island." As in, "Dahling, we winter in Sait Moritz and summer in Southampton. I just adore Long G'Island." (Which, by the way, is still a better pronunciation than Long Goyland.) However, one of the first great lessons I ever learned about being creative is that if you don't embrace who you are and bring your own accent or flavor to your work, you can never truly be creative, authentic, or original. And that's one of the things that I love about my accent. I own it.

The Kirshenbaum family was somewhat of a mix of intelligentsia and high and low oddballs. (My father and his brother actually grew up spelling the last name differently. They have the "c" in Kirsch and we don't. And no one thought this was odd.) It's really no coincidence I went into the advertising business. Now that I think of it, you would have, too, particularly if you had a grandfather like mine. Grandpa Harry looms large in my childhood memories because he was indeed *very* large. A very large man with very large opinions. The New York City policeman loved his family and friends foremost, but his brands were not so much a distant second.



Brandpa in his prime

BRANDPA

My entire childhood was a dictated list of my grandfather's brand preferences that are permanent etched in my mind. His brands were not only a code of how to enjoy life but how to actually live life and dissension was not discussed or tolerated. You were either in Brandpa's world, or you weren't. And no one wanted to be banished to brand Siberia. It went something like this: A real man always had an Anheuser-Busch beer waiting in the fridge with a tall glass frosting in the freezer. Van Heusen made the best shirts, lest there be a crease, and you always made a Windsor knot with a Countess Mara tie. Plaid and seersucker were "for suckers," or for men who weren't "dag," or couldn't flaunt like Frank, Sammy, and Dean—his heroes. Boxers *only*—never would briefs have been considered and the Izod alligator was a good friend. A real man only smoked unfiltered Camels or Marlboro, wore English Leather, and shaved with a Schick razor. Cadillacs were the "ne plus ultra." A Buick was a good second choice with a Chevy coming in third for affordability. For a man who had something like twenty-eight cars in twenty-three years, I never heard the words Lincoln, Dodge, and Ford uttered. They only existed for "the others," whoever "they" were.

Brandpa spoke like a character out of *Guys and Dolls*, with a burning cigarette dangling permanently from his lip. He called women dames. He totally bought into stereotypes, which affected his *brandscape*. "Eyetalians made the best semolina bread." You were allowed to drink a German beer like a Becks (because we won the war and his brother Bucky liberated a camp). The Pollack (pronounced po-lax) knew mustard (Kosciusko the grainy best). Those damn French were "good for nuttin'" because he didn't drink wine ("wine is for pussies"). Entenmann's made the best coffee crumb cake. You only used half and half in your coffee because the best part of waking up was Folger in your cup or Maxwell House. And if we didn't have Temp Tee whipped cream cheese in the fridge for his his bagels with lox, sliced, with red onion and tomato (a good kike meal), you might as well have declared yourself a commie.

Each room at Brandpa's house had to have at least three to five Sony Trinitrons ("the best color picture") all going at the same time, like an electronics store. Lawrence Welk was a "real gentleman" and *The Jackie Gleason Show* was "filmed right over there on the Causeway!" He would always elbo

me when the June Taylor Dancers came on. How sweet it is! Bugs Bunny was funny; you could talk about anything else. And Miami Beach, where he retired when he was fifty, was the land of Milk of Magnesia, honey, and coconut patties. When he was ninety, he took me aside and gave me his lifelong secret: “Every night take a shot of Johnnie Walker. It’s good for you *down there*.” He kept a bottle at the bottom of his closet for a handy swig. He looked me coldly in the eye with this fact.

During school holidays, my parents would ship me and my sister, Susan, off to Florida on Delta—the only good airline—because of the orange juice and the fluffy egg-and-cheese omelet breakfast. Once settled in the sunshine state, Brandpa would sit across from me during breakfast in his white ribbed Hanes wife beater and stubble (like the Jewish Marlon Brando) with a belt ominously on his lap, so I would be encouraged to finish my Quaker Oats oatmeal (“it’ll put hair on your chest”) and down his elixir of life, Tropicana orange juice, perhaps the greatest brand in Brandpa’s brand cavalcade. If you didn’t start the day with Tropicana, you might as well not get out of bed. My grandmother Elsie and her sisters Lily, Celie, and perhaps cousin Honey would all line themselves up on their identical lounge chairs with their coiffed bouffant hairdos (clouds of Aqua Net or Adorn spray kept them in place) at the Raleigh Pool (voted “most beautiful pool in Florida”) and slather me in either Johnson’s baby oil and iodine for color or Sea & Ski for protection (“or you’ll turn into a lobster”).



Does it get any more '60s Miami? Honey, Celia, Lily, and Grandma Elsie

I was always unsure about why Brandpa was so fastidious about his brands until he told me that at age seven he was put to work by his father, Big Grandpa, shoveling coal into the 180-degree furnace of a tenement building on the Lower East Side. Big Grandpa was the building super and, to hear Grandpa tell it, he slept next to the boiler and lived on onion sandwiches on hard black bread. (I love my Quaker Oats oatmeal and my Tropicana even more after visualizing the image.)

Grandpa’s black-and-white attitudes about brands and people sometimes served as cautionary tales. There were a lot of “don’ts.” Once when I was seven years old, Brandpa took me to the Boom Boom Room at the Fontainebleau (his cultural equivalent of visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art). I was ordered to “steer clear of that little old Jewish man” dressed exactly like Brandpa (i.e. white shoes, white belt, and light blue poly Izod button-down acrylic sweater, walking a dog outside the hotel).

“That’s Meyer Lansky,” my grandfather mentioned, as if at seven, I would know who Meyer Lansky was. “Grandpa,” I asked looking up at the looming figure. “Why should I steer clear of him?”

“You’ll understand when you’re older.” He shook the ashes from his Marlboro, his four-carat sapphire-and-diamond pinkie ring glittering in the dusk. “On the other hand,” Grandpa said, “he can be half bad if he’s driving a Caddy!”

* * * *

For Grandpa, the sun rose and set on his wife, my grandmother Elsie, who matched Grandpa’s brawn with her womanly graces and because her pointy-toed, silk *peau de soie* shoes matched her oversized handbag (very “the Queen Mother”). Not to mention she had “the coin” and provided for all Grandpa’s brand needs beyond what his pensions from being a NYC police officer and working for New York Life covered. He had the brawn and Grandma had the “class and the dough.” He once gambled away a brownstone of hers for a dollar! Gramps may have stocked up on Camels, but Grandma only smoked Larks. This took on significance. On their fiftieth wedding anniversary, when we asked Grandpa what his golden anniversary gift to Grandma was, he promptly answered “a case of Larks,” with Grandma proudly beaming in the background. They were out of Central Casting for the Jewish version of *Streetcar Named Desire*. He was not exactly PC and was a confident equal opportunity hater. She was sociable and loved everyone.

Grandma Elsie (when I was an adult, someone told me her real name was Agnes—go figure) grew up on the right side of the tracks. Her father owned a very successful button company called Acme Buttons Company at the turn of the century on Lower Broadway. His office was not so far from my own future office, in the Flatiron Building. He was considered creative by producing not only buttons but decorative glass and enamel buttons. The one picture of him eerily looks like me with his blond hair. (His Victorian wife and twelve children do not equate.) When he died, Grandma and Aunt Lily opened their own lingerie store with some of their inheritance, called The Lillian Shop. It was next to the moving pictures and sold silk stockings to women even though there were not even sidewalks yet to walk on.



Grandma Elsie and her sister Lily in front of their store

My aunt Lily and uncle Ira lived below my grandparents (like on *I Love Lucy*, and to tell you the truth they looked exactly like Fred and Ethel Mertz, except they didn't have a vaudeville act). When I discovered that my grandfather had actually dated Lily first, it was something of a shock. The only reason I could get about why he left her for my grandmother had something vaguely to do with her having "problems *down there*," but more importantly because he was dismayed that she didn't buy Bumblebee white tuna in oil. (Hence trading her in for my grandmother avoided a historic mismatch.)

To hear Brandpa tell it, he fell in love with Grandma at first sight after seeing her dance the Charleston in a black silk dress (and after dumping poor Aunt Lily). Since he was considered matinee idol good-looking, but lower class, Grandma did what any self-respecting flapper of that era did who most likely wanted some action. She eloped with him. They got married in the rabbi's study (when she needed a veil, Grandpa characteristically yanked the curtains off the wall in a fit of passion, to the rabbi's chagrin), and then they both went back to living in their parents' houses until someone's parent changed their mind or died.

Once married, they were forced to be separated for vast amounts of time. Since Grandpa had the night shift for years, Grandma never went out socially with him and even took her own vacations. She was more independent than many women of her era and would crank up their Model T and take my mother and my aunt Jackie to Florida in the 1930s before there was even a highway system. My other aunt Lily (I had two) flew in her own plane, or so I'm told, to meet them and Grandma, and she and all her sisters went to the beach, smoked, and went to the beauty parlor. Each wore Pucci-style flowered housedresses and identical bouffant hairdos with little spit curls, except for my aunt Celie, who reminded me of Mae West with her platinum waves. She was a widow whose husband had been mistakenly killed by the coppers in what always felt like a film noir moment, when relatives tried to brush it under the carpet in our presence.

All in all, I never ever heard Grandma say a word against Brandpa. I'm not sure how she handled him. For their entire marriage, he was constantly fixing up an apartment or house and then selling it at a loss and would move the entire family on a whim or would come home with a new car or TV set (the way someone would buy a new pair of trousers). The only time I ever saw Grandma upset was when she and Grandpa went to see the movie *Midnight Cowboy*. She came home, took a tranquilizer, smoked a Lark, and went to bed on her Sealy Posturepedic (the only mattress worth sleeping on). She obviously could deal with Brandpa, but a male prostitute and Dustin Hoffman—that wasn't something she was prepared for.

I remember my grandmother always telling me that I was the apple of her eye. I loved her laugh and hearing her chat on the phone (which was always attached to her ear). She also had her telephone therapy sessions in the kitchen with her psychiatrist, Dr. Rath, who I called The Gripes of Wrath. When I decided to become engaged to my wife, Dana, I called her up on the phone for advice and said, "Grandma, how do you *know*?" I heard her take a drag on her Lark and say, "Darling, you never *know*

but better to be married three or four times than never at all. So why not give it a *whirl!*” Unlike many couples today who call it quits, I still remember their fiftieth wedding anniversary at the Rascals House. Brandpa was upset because we were staying so far *away* (the Doral! Ten blocks from where they lived).

Brandpa may have looked like Marlon Brando, but I was also the only male child in a family of women who had imposing busts and more imposing personalities. So gender stereotypes had little effect on me. I always got along well with women, and this would greatly impact my career. Before I get there, I need to tell you about my sister, and most of all, about my parents.

* * * *

In traditional Jewish households, the mother has special status and the girls, *not the boys*, often tend to get things first (especially if they are older). Given that I grew up with a sister, four girl first cousins, a myriad of female second cousins, and Grandma’s “sister/aunt posse,” I’m well trained. My sister Susan, has an Auntie Mame quality about her: vivacious and fun. I adore her, even though she had a competitive advantage growing up.

When I was in college, my parents told me (and my sister) that I was going to get a Volkswagen Rabbit (again, dating myself) that they had used as a station car to take to school. The whole summer I cleaned, waxed, and polished that car. Susan, who is two and a half years older than me, was leaving for college the day before I was and was catching a ride with one of her friends. Or so I thought. The next day, I couldn’t believe my eyes as I saw Susan make a mad dash into the VW and quickly pull out of the driveway, waving and crying, saying “I feel so bad” as she put her foot on the gas and *gunned* it. I still see myself running down the street after her and the car—which got so many parking tickets, was impounded a few months later in Ohio.

When Susan graduated college, she tried her hand at many things—teaching, real estate—and was conflicted when she decided to go into the advertising headhunting business. She started as a headhunter working for and becoming a partner with my original headhunter firm where Jay Weingarten and Lori Greenberg worked. At first, I felt she was taking my Volkswagen again, and we agreed not to work together. Today Greenberg Kirshenbaum (a nice *Gentile* firm) is one of the top three well-regarded creative headhunting firms in the business, and I regularly go to Susan for candidates and advice. Her divining rod for talent is by far the best in the biz. But speaking of Gentiles, I can’t tell you how many times I’ve heard non-Jewish women tell me they want me to find them a Jewish husband. At my friend Randy’s recent wedding, the rabbi said (to laughs) before he was to break the glass under the chuppah that this is the last time Randy would ever put his foot down. Not so far from the truth.

My mother, Marilyn, had a biting wit and wore the pantsuits in the family. Literally. She always

reminded people of the title character of the TV show *Maude*, in her pantsuits and scarves. At my grandparents' fiftieth, I remember that she had a hard time getting into her plaid Texan pantsuit with its requisite seventies' silk blouse and bow. She went into a rage because the zipper didn't work, but I knew she was under *brand pressure* every time she visited Brandpa. Marilyn was also very strong-willed herself, however. She was not one to suffer fools lightly, and she had a sophisticated intelligence. She actually went back to graduate school at a Catholic college, Molloy, in Rockville Centre because she related so strongly to the nuns' sense of discipline. She was a bit out of place in a community populated by "the housewives of Long Island," I think. She was more bookish and eschewed makeup and jewelry. She venerated literature. My father tells my favorite story about her. My mother had her first office job in the 1940s in the city. When her flamboyant boss didn't want her to hear something private, he conversed with his partner in French—until one day, when he was talking about my mother, she answered him back in French. They immediately became fast friends.



Marilyn (a.k.a. Maude) in the 1950s

My father, Stanley Ira, ran a textile company with my uncle called Windjammer Knits. He was both very silly and full of integrity. Stanley Ira was always a bit of an iconoclast and way ahead of his time. He stood on his head in a yoga pose and juiced carrots from a Braun juicer. He did yoga before everyone else. Imagine growing up in a house where your father was always standing on his head or doing the "sun and moon." The Braun juicer was always going at full speed on liquefy, and I was forced to drink copious amounts of carrot juice and eat Tiger's Milk bars from the natural food store in Hewlett. Once he wore a paste-on earring at a Passover seder and told everyone he thought the government should legalize marijuana, to my uncle's intense chagrin. That is my father to the hilt.

ALTERNA-DAD

I've often thought of Stanley Ira as "Alterna-Dad." In the late sixties, people were having Mad Men martinis for cocktail hour; Stan the Man was drinking his carrot juice. He drove a foreign car instead of an American one (a 1961 Volvo that looked like an armadillo). Other fathers had *Sports Illustrated* delivered; he had French *Elle!* Other fathers spent the day in front of the box watching the game coaching their sons' Little League games. I was in Greenwich Village bookstores and eating stuff

grape leaves from the now defunct but wonderful Delphi restaurant in Tribeca, while Dad was reading aloud passages from *The Good Earth*.



Alterna-Dad, Stanley Ira K.

Stanley Ira always did things first. He was first to shop and cook (a woman's job) and always saw the best chefs in Europe were men. That said, my most intense gestational memory of my father taking me to my favorite restaurant, R. Gross, in the Garment Center. In those days, it was a daiquiri restaurant on Broadway, and all the moguls came there to eat there. The stretch limos would drop off Sol or Irving; either thin, tan, weathered men in big black-framed glasses (à la Lew Wasserman) or big, rotund fellows who wheezed their way through the revolving door. They came for the world's best cheese and kasha blintzes and potato pancakes. These pancakes—the size of saucers, fried to a golden brown and served with snowdrifts of sour cream and tart applesauce—were slammed down in front of you by the rudest, but greatest, waitstaff this side of Riga.

Stanley Ira was one of the first people I knew who collected photography and thought it was "art." I witnessed firsthand how conventional people at the time could not understand how a "reproduced" photo could be in the same league as a painting or sculpture, and he took major shit for it. My father never wavered on his opinion, though. He took us to the Whitney and galleries in New York to look at Man Ray and Jacques-Henri Lartigue. He loved George Tice and Edward Weston before they ever had major museum shows. While we spent a great deal of time at the Met and the Museum of Modern Art, my father also loved American painting, and I remember the skillful color of the Milton Avery show. I became a member of the photography committee at the Whitney in the thirties because I understand and appreciate my father's aesthetics. And I have brought that understanding of the impact photography can make into my work, from the very beginning.

Overall, Alterna-Dad's perceptions and way of thinking have always had a huge effect on me. Once when I was sixteen and Brandpa was reviewing my scrawny frame in a bathing suit, he shook his head wistfully. "Well, ya didn't get my body, but at least ya got your fadder's brains!" I wasn't sure what I was supposed to make of that but Stanley Ira's different way of thinking paved the way for some of my seemingly effortless, but often remarked "Bold Moves." Indeed, I employ Alterna-Dad's way of thinking to most business-related issues today. It's not challenging the status quo for the sake

of challenging—it's asking why or why not when most people are just accepting of everything the way that it is. Kbp was founded on such thinking, which has manifested itself in such creative ways. Why do we need to actually show a product in an ad (we didn't in our first ad, for Kenneth Cole)? Why advertising limited to the written page (we put ads on fruit for Snapple)? Why don't advertising agencies advertise (more on this and all of the above later . . .)? Why, why, why?

None of this is to say that that my father wasn't a conventional dad, too. He yearned for conventional things as well, but he was and is an unconventional thinker relative to his peer group and generation. "A company job? Why would anyone want to work for (some putz) when you could be your own boss?" said Stanley Ira. Alterna-Dad knew that as conventionally comfortable as it would have felt for *me* to have gone into textiles, it would have been a mistake. The Garment Center was in its last glory days, and he predicted that the great textile mills of the South would close and all textile production would eventually move offshore to Asia. He was right and did nothing to encourage me to go into the rag trade. Perhaps it would have been easier, but less satisfying, if I had a family real estate business to go into, or if Daddy or Grandpa were the "salami kings of the Northeast." But although I had all the trimmings and Stan could claim inventing knit Ultrasuede, a life working at the family factory and a membership to Seawane (the country club I affectionately dubbed *seawhine*) was not the cards for yours truly. What's more, the typical thought of going to typical med school didn't sound quite appealing, either. This said, I was distantly related to a very successful dermatologist who built one of the first modern mansions in Hewlett Harbor. My mother affectionately dubbed it the "pimp palace." I could neither boast an interest in pustules or the legal system or manipulating numbers, therefore abrogating the Jewish trinity: doctor, lawyer, and accountant.

But, of course, before career directions came into any true focus there would be college, and before college there were all sorts of childhood regimens—and perks. And they, too, made their mark on my way of navigating the world. For some reason, my parents saw my lack of interest in the mundane as a celebrated elitist trait (yah) and rewarded me by sending me on an eight-week bus tour of Europe, with forty other spoiled and indulged sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds. I, of course, chose the five-star hotel tour, which they agreed to do because in my house five stars would mean better accommodations (read: food). So I waltzed over the continent staying in villa-style rooms at swish places like the Marbella Club, and buying suede and leather products in Florence and sandals in Capri. The lack of interest among the other kids (mostly from Beverly Hills, Miami, and Long Island) to see or appreciate any of the major cultural sites of Europe was highlighted by one girl (I dated her) who wouldn't get off the bus to see the Eiffel Tower. She would only disembark for food or a Louis Vuitton store within walking distance.

When I returned, it was time (well past time) for me to start getting serious about applying to colleges and think about potential career choices. So what does the supremely sensitive, creative, oriented, directionless child do? Well, if he's living off the LIE, the obvious thing to do was to have

his parents pay to go to a college/career counselor who would supposedly match potential colleges with potential careers. Kind of like a pay-for-play crystal ball.

After my parents sent in the check, the day of the highly anticipated visit arrived. It started with a test that felt like the SAT I had recently taken for college, where I filled in boxes with a lead pencil. But these questions were not SAT ones. “Do you prefer to make a macramé plant holder or choose wood?” was one of them.

A woman with a lacquered beehive and one of those 1970s half-eaten ceramic apples hanging from a rawhide string evaluated my answers and interests. Afterward, my mother and I were summoned into her small gray cubicle, where we waited with bated breath to hear what career path we should take after graduating from the appropriate college. The evaluator reviewed my test scores with a sour look. “Well, given you have no interest in typical things *other* young men seem to like—like sports, medicine, mathematics, or becoming a judge—it appears to me that . . .”

“Yes.” We leaned forward as if listening to the oracle from Delphi.

“You might want to . . . well, there’s an art school in Sarasota—no, I mean the other coast of Florida—that was endowed by the Ringling family . . . for the arts.” She coughed.

“The Ringling Brothers?! I paid for this exam, and you’re suggesting my son run away and join the circus?” My mother sat, protectively clutching her Pierre Deux quilted bag to her chest as if it were a bulletproof vest. She had just been shot.

“It’s very prestigious in some circles. Look, it’s not like this one’s going to go to Carnegie Mellon.” She munched on a dry piece of celery. Deflated, we thanked her. And I stood thinking that while a flaming hoop and a trapeze seemed novel, it really didn’t cut it for me. “What, you don’t like the performing arts?” she asked, registering the look on my face as she looked up from her soggy turkey sandwich. “Well, hon, if all else fails you can always go into advertising.”

She laughed.

CHAPTER TWO

BOY FRIDAY BECOMES ADBOY

SILENCE CAN BE DEAFENING. ESPECIALLY when your mother is on the other end of the phone.

“You’re making how much?” Her voice flat-lined.

“Well, that’s just it. I did get the job . . . the only thing is, it’s not really a job yet, more like job/internship/competition.”

“Are you getting paid or not?”

“Well, it’s for free until she decides to hire me or the other guy, Mom.”

If a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it, did it fall? And if your mother doesn’t answer you was she angry or on the other end of the phone at all? Finally, I heard breathing. “Perhaps the circuit option would have been more profitable, but if this makes you happy. . . .” It is a given that my debut into the workforce was neither prestigious nor profitable. Yet I was so excited, I felt like I was walking on air. “Walking on air,” you might ask, “to be working for free?” Working as a boy Friday and in competition for a job that would pay the princely sum of nine thousand dollars per annum should I be lucky enough to get it.

My mother’s stony silence and chilly reception to my news were not only about the pay. Marilyn (a.k.a. Maude) thought a college degree at a “private university not a state school, mind you” meant something. What it didn’t mean was “working for free, and on the phones.” I also had to readjust my thinking. After our wonderful session with the college and career counselor, I had achieved a small triumph by gaining admission to the prestigious S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, and so visions of training programs at firms like Ogilvy & Mather and requisite starting salaries danced in my head. But none had materialized. In all honesty, I’d gamed the system a bit to get in. If my memory serves me correctly, first I entered the school of retailing and then I declared Newhouse my dual major, since I wasn’t able to gain admission first off to the prestigious communications school. As the old saying goes, “If they don’t let you in through the door, go in through the window.” Clearly, retailing was better than the big top, but it was largely a creation populated by Long Island and New Jersey princesses who had money but needed career direction. As in “OK, Stacey or Mindy, you’re not too bright, the only thing you’re interested in is shopping and guys, sooooo the school of retailing is just for you!” I was in one class where the professor actually held up a garment and said, “This . . . is a miniskirt!” to an enthralled group of girls who oohed and aahed and took copious notes, as if recording a lecture on Darwin.

I’d also joined the fraternity ZBT (called Zionist Bankers Trust behind our backs by the other fraternities). It was a clearinghouse for the rich and spoiled sons of the South Shore and North Shore with some Star Island, Miami, thrown in for good measure. Nearly everyone had a family business

go into. The pecking order was determined by the size of your allowance and what kind of car you drove. Like the luxury car dealership on Northern Boulevard in Great Neck, the ZBT parking lot was overflowing with BMWs and Mazda RX-7s and 280Zs, either in black or red (it was the eighties after all). I barely gained admission with my black Subaru, so I was low on the pecking order. I was also considered somewhat of an oddball because I was in Newhouse, wrote for the school paper (“he must be really smart”), and was considering a career in something creative (hence undecipherable) that was *not* going to be the rag trade or real estate.

After graduation, I was sitting in the land of unemployment (the deck in my backyard) when I defined my creative career. My father brought out a glass of freshly squeezed carrot juice and a copy of the *Wall Street Journal*. I promptly poured the carrot juice into the flowerbeds behind me, but I quickly devoured the front-page article about a new advertising agency and its founder, Lois Korey. There was one of those wonderful line drawings, which endeared me to her immediately. The piece also included a profile of her early years writing for the show of shows—Ernie Kovacs—with Woody Allen as her writing partner.

Mentioning Woody Allen to anyone on Long Island is akin to the faithful mentioning the Pope. So that tasty tidbit from Lois’s résumé got me thinking. Within fifteen minutes, I had written a comedic monologue about what it was like to be unemployed, and it had two endings in which Lois would control my fate. Version One ended with her not hiring me, and I led a life in leather underwear. In Version Two, she did hire me and I lived a lifetime in bliss. “You can’t send a woman like that something like this!” my mother intoned, sounding and looking quite like Maude in her pantsuit and scarf as she walked into the kitchen with dramatic flair. I took that as a good sign and promptly walked my monologue to the corner mailbox, sending it on its merry way.

Now here’s the rub. Twenty-five years later, I still cannot comprehend nor understand nor believe that the letter was actually mailed and delivered in twenty-four hours. But I swear (sweaaar!—and that’s with a full Long G’Island accent). I sweaaar, it got there overnight. The very next day, I was sitting on the deck in the same laconic position, with my trusty blue reflector and baby oil for a good summer burn (sweaaar), dumping another glass of carrot juice into the flowerbeds, when Marilyn (a.k.a. Maude) opened up the screen door and said, “She’s on the phone.”

“Who’s she?” I said, thinking it was my childhood stalker, Nora Lapidus, whose brothers always threatened to beat me up unless I danced with her to “Stairway to Heaven” at Camp Naticook’s prom every summer. I shrugged.

“It’s not Noora!” my mother intoned, having screened a million phone calls from the infatuated. “It’s Lois Korey. She wants to talk to you *now*.”

I really do not know what I was thinking when I chose my one gray interview suit, gray leather disco pumps, and a fake but flashy Canal Street Patek Philippe watch set off against my feathered Barry Gibb mop. All topped off with my very Nancy-looking black portfolio case with its weak supp

of handwritten and drawn ads. Now there is a great divide between those of us who entered the workforce BC and those of us who came later. That's Before Computers, guys. And while I'm still considered relatively young in the ad biz in my forties, I had a hand-drawn portfolio back then. Compared to the computer-generated realism of today's student books, I might as well have been wearing a stovepipe hat and talking about the Battle at Gettysburg. That said, I thought I was the bomb.

Anyway, Lois Korey and her partner, Allen Kay, had gone out on their own after working for larger agencies, and they'd hung out their shingle in an imposing townhouse on Seventy-fifth Street between Fifth and Madison avenues. It certainly wasn't a conventional place to start a business, but true to Lois's flair and sense of style, it was luxurious and made an immediate impression. I fell in love with Lois the moment her secretary ushered me into her office, which was a grand beaux-arts living room with two partners' desks facing each other under the window.

"So you're the one that wrote the letter?" she said dryly. "Allen, he's the boy who wrote the letter. Funny." Lois rose from her desk. She was an attractive, well-put-together woman with blond coiffed hair, and a warm, pretty smile. Bronx-bred, she was a successful, worldly woman and had perfected that expensive Manhattan uptown style (you know; sufficiently understated in an overstated kind of way). From her collapsible ivory bifocals to her Chanel cap-toe shoes, she smelled like a million, and it was Fracas all the way. She linked my arm and walked me through the office. "So how would you like to learn how to write copy?"

"I'd love to," I gushed.

"Well, since we've just started out, we cannot afford to pay you. But if you would like to work for me for the summer, I will teach you, and at the end of the summer I'll decide."

"Decide what?"

"Decide who gets the job. We already have one other intern for the summer," she said as she led me down the stairs to meet my competition. My bubble burst when I met Jim Grace. I joked, "As the Grace Building?" He nodded.

Jim was sitting at an upright artist's desk when he looked up at me. His classic blond hair and blue eyes were complemented by his Harvard pedigree. Of course, I thought the fix was in, especially when I found out his great-grandfather had been mayor of New York. But we would become fast friends, and we were supportive of each other instead of competitive. After a polite but forced introduction, Lois escorted me back upstairs to have Allen take a look at my portfolio. I sat there as he flipped quickly through my book and kept uttering, "This has to pass my who-gives-a-shit test. Who gives a shit, who gives a shit . . ." he said, looking at my work with barely a glance at me.

"Allen, don't be mean. He's cute and funny." I sat there watching them as Lois was finishing a letter to a client. "Allen, what's that other word, you know, for native?"

"Indigenous," I offered.

“You’re hired.” She smiled. “For the summer.”

As I look back, the summer had a golden patina. I crashed at my sister’s apartment and slept on the pull-out gray-flannel deco sofa she’d gotten at the Bloomingdale’s clearance center.

There’s something about starting at the very bottom that I highly recommend to the young and entitled. You get to feel good about your abilities and the payoff from doing motivated work, not from what you have, where you live, or what your last name is. I was also in the first generation of men to work for the first generation of female executives. When I first started on the phones, I felt a bit weird. But within a day or two, I was happily pouring coffee for clients, bringing in Lois’s dry cleaning, rolling rugs, and relishing in the joy of writing copy and having Lois critique it. Luckily for me, one of my first assignments was a print campaign for El Al Airlines (not a big stretch for me). Lois loved my headline, “Why is this flight different than all other flights?” (For the Gentiles in the room, the line “why is this night different than all other nights” is a famous Passover seder question.) Lois also had me write copy for radio ads. My radio commercial for the Virgin Airways debut, “Food, wine, and an English virgin for only 169 dollars,” was an instant hit, and it ran immediately.

Lois gave generously of her time and explained to me that good copy is not how people write grammatically, but how people speak. And she taught me the importance of bringing my voice and tone into my writing. Lois showed me some of the well-known work she and Allen had created: the famous Xerox campaign that used monks to highlight the benefits of Xerox’s new quiet machine, and her hysterical commercial featuring Dr. Joyce Brothers’s mother for Goodman’s egg noodles. The one brought Lois’s own comedic flair to life. And many nights, I would drop off packages at her glamorous apartment on Park Avenue and Eightieth Street. (Years later, in a weird twist, I would rent the apartment a floor below Lois’s in the same building while I was renovating my own apartment. Given she had sadly passed on years before, I actually thought she had directed me there.)

Every day was fresh and exciting. Each lunchtime, I would take my brown bag sandwich to the park and sit by the sailboat pond, looking up at the buildings peeking over the trees in the park and asking myself who lived there. The mansions of Hewlett Harbor were still impressive, but there was a whole new level of sophistication and taste here in the city. New York was fabulous, dangerous, and decadent in the early eighties. And while I was working the phones by day, I was meeting up with my college friends by night, getting into the (then) novel nightclubs—Studio 54 and Area. Jim also took me to have lunch in the venerable Fifth Avenue building he grew up in, and the staff welcomed him with, “Master Grace, it’s so good to see you.” We lunched in the building’s private dining room where we were served sandwiches (with no crust) by white-gloved waiters, all of which reminded me of an Edith Wharton novel. I regaled him with stories about R. Gross and felt sorry for him. Although he had grown up in something like a twenty-seven-room full-floor apartment, the food on Fifth Avenue sucked! I didn’t dream that a few years later I would have my own agency, that Jim would become one of my first employees, and that I would be living on Fifth Avenue myself, overlooking the

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