

Growing Up

Growing up on a farm in west central Illinois, my backyard seemed endless.

And it pretty much was--given that the nearest "ANYTHING" was ten or fifteen miles down the road.

But the upside of being stuck out in the middle of nowhere is that it forces you to learn pretty quickly how to make things work and solve most problems.

By the time high school had ended I was more than ready to escape small town life and see what college had to offer.

Along the way I discovered I had a real talent for design and an interest in advertising.

And I found myself filled with dreams of doing the sort of work that defined the Golden Age of Advertising Creativity--Volkswagen, Avis, Alka-Seltzer, and Samsonite.

Soon after college I made my way to Chicago where I found a series of jobs at ad agencies until finally, I landed a job in the big leagues--at Foote Cohn & Belding. Where I worked on accounts like Kraft Foods, Diners Club International, and Pearle Vision Express.

Somewhere between work, and more work came the break to St Louis at D'Arcy, Masius, Benton & Bowles and the chance to work on some of the biggest names in packaged goods. It was there that I became accustomed to hitting home runs in the major leagues of advertising.

Until one day, in 1994, I saw some damn help wanted ad in Adweek--written by some creative director out of New York--who had moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma--with the goal of making it the next Minneapolis--and was looking in general for people with proven talent and a burning desire to do the sort of work that shows up in CA-Annuals every year--and in particular for a right hand man with some serious art talent.

So I answered the ad--and found a wild-eyed but articulate guy in Tulsa with a track record for getting work into CA--and a dream to turn an ad agency named Littlefield into the next Fallon--with the kind of national creative reputation it takes to convince clients in big cities--like Chicago and Minneapolis to come south with their accounts. So--I jumped at the chance to do really great work and build a really great shop.

Well, we were pulling it off—dominating the local creative awards shows—pulling in Chicago clients (like WGN) and going up against Chicago agencies like JWT and Dallas shops like Richards for internationally known clients like LearJet.

As a result I took a headhunter's call—and went for the job the recruiter was trying to fill in Boston, working at Bronner Slotherberg Humphery.

And I landed it, along with a window office high up in the Prudential Building, overlooking Boston harbor—and a salary that was double what I'd been making in Tulsa. The challenge came when the wife and kids decided to stay in Tulsa. Returning to Littlefield wasn't an option—they had moved on and so had I. There really wasn't another ad agency in the area that seemed like a good fit for someone with my experience, ambitions and salary history.

So my only choice—in order to be close to my kids at least some of the time, was to make Tulsa my home base and then venture out from there—to places like Miami and New Orleans to ply my trade.

Until finally, one night, looking out over the levee from the window of a hotel in the French Quarter, watching for an incoming, pre-Katrina hurricane to blow in, I decided I needed to be in Tulsa raising my kids—even if it meant putting that burning desire and talent on the shelf and accepting the fact that for a few years at least, family had to come first.

Even if it meant every morning, driving by a forty-foot tall statue of a 1940's-era oil worker that looked suspiciously like it was made out of paper maché by elementary school students. Even it meant the only way I could make a living was by actually teaching to those same students.

Which brings us to today.

After 16 years of teaching—all the way up to the college level—my kids are certainly far enough along that most species would have pitched them from the nest years ago.

And I'm ready to pick up with where I left off—doing great work—in any media.

Ready to do a car commercial as memorable as Bernbach's "What kind of car does the snow plow driver **DRIVE** to the snow plow?"

Or a print ad as memorable as Oglivy's "At 60mph, the loudest noise in this Rolls Royce is the clock."

Or something in a media that Bill and David never even imagined.

Tweet, tweet?