

ME AND WARREN BUFFET

By Bill Seaton

I recently read an interview some columnist did with Warren Buffet.

Amazing that he started on his first billion by buying a stock at age 11.

My story's similar only in that I, too, started earning early. I'm older, but still a few hundred million short of making the *Fortune* 500 list. And hoping to be able to live out a retirement that doesn't include regular helpings of Alpo.

I began my quest for the devil greenbacks by taking on the task of selling magazines at age 10. Iowa City's distributor, Mr. Rosen, would load my canvas shoulder bag with issues of *Look*, *Life*, *Liberty*, *Saturday Evening Post* and *Women's Home Companion* and off I would go, to ring doorbells, listing slightly to my starboard-side.

I won a pair of boxing gloves for highest sales one quarter. I used the prize to punch out the frustration of not winning a new bike on my younger brother. We had no training, but we'd watched Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson on Movie-Tone newsreels and would stand slugging with these 16-ounce "pillows" until one of us got a headache.

Times were tough in the Depression '30s as everyone knows. I took on a paper route at age 12, occasionally sending my round-faced, big-eyed 10-year-old brother, who was willing carrion, to collect at the door of difficult customers, while I hid in the bushes.

My route grew to 45 homes, the last residence being down a long, steep hill and across the river bridge. I feel guilty admitting it, but I would sometimes bribe little “Buddy” to deliver that last one on winter days, while I waited in a warm filling station.

My brother soon caught on, and I struggled to make money in my teens alone, after our parents divorced. Summers, I unloaded freight cars at our giant Quaker Oats cereal mill, worked on the “section gang” for the Milwaukee Railroad and engaged in a few weeks of back-breaking construction work at our new airport.

My brother and I both went off to the Navy at the close of WWII. He became an electronics whiz and a spy, or something, with the State Department. I was hired by the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* after graduating from the Great Lakes Journalism School. The paper let me to write sports some nights – and my love for reporting and writing began.

After I married a Virginia princess I met during service in the Navy Department, we wound up moving 11 times our first 12 years of wedlock in post-war America. Finally getting it right, we have now dwelt in the same home 48 years under the San Diego airport’s flight pattern. An alarm clock is never necessary, as we are vibrated to the edge of our mattress at 6:32 each morning by the first 747 jet roaring overhead.

We drive a five-year-old Honda, which has less than 30,000 miles, because we’ve failed to capitalize on our freedom in retirement to travel, other than an occasional cruise to Alaska or Mexico. Or to see my brother, who left a mountain home in North Carolina, buying retirement digs among the hillbillies in the beautiful, peaceful Ozarks.

Lovae, my child bride, and I otherwise stay home - content to have noisy Italian-like, festive big-meal, hilarity-filled family gatherings with hugging and kissing from our four grown off-spring and grandkids, most of whom live near us.

Looking back at a rewarding journalism and public relations career, I would say it perhaps peaked in stress and excitement when California's governor picked me for the start-up lottery team. During those incident-filled years, I handed twenty-some stunned citizens multi-million-dollar checks so they could continue with their destructive gambling habits. Not one ever so-much-as bought me a drink.

During earlier fast-paced years in the theme park business with the Zoo and SeaWorld, I had the added fun of working with, or meeting, over 100 celebrities and stars – from Brooke Shields, Jimmy Stewart, Perry Como and Dean Martin to Dinah Shore, the Fonz, Ann Jillian and Captain Kangaroo. Not one of them bought me a drink.

I have published two prize-winning memoirs and optioned two screenplays to Hollywood, (where the real gold still lies.) I have appeared on *Hollywood Squares* and run a leg of the Olympic torch relays. I have encamped at the foot of East Africa's Mt. Kilimanjaro in Ernest Hemmingway's shadow and been chased on safari by a mad rhino.

Now I look back in amazement at the start of a career I began by selling classified ads to local furniture and appliance merchants, who blamed me when sales were low. Three years later, I bought my first car, a used '39 Chevy, which threw a rod and stranded me on my way to D.C., where I would become a Pentagon reporter for *Navy Times* newspaper and, later, PR man for the National Association of Realtors.

As I flick through the album of photos depicting every stage of our 60-year marriage, I am reminded of the real “riches” of our event-filled life – good health, true love and a close-knit family to call on when we have plumbing problems.

All of that, and in the past decade, the opportunity to write my books and screenplays, so “I wouldn’t die with my music still in me.”

Bill Seaton is the author of *Humorous Letters from the Edge* and *My Seven Years in Captivity*.

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