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GG's CORRECTIONS
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Cross-eyed Great Dane
Gary Gladstone ©2021

Dad's ethics are impeccable. He's right up there with the Lone Ranger and George Washington, who was reported having said, "I cannot tell a lie." Dad has always been a "do the right thing" kind of guy.

Looking back, I discover some surprising exceptions to this upright posture.

Dad is so honest, he will pick up a nickel that has fallen to the street when a stranger pulls a hankie out of his pocket, and chase the man the full length of the block to return it.

When I was 12, I saw him do this.

Now I face a similar situation that is my first ethical dilemma.

After paying Dennis, the railroad newsstand man, ten cents for the latest issue of Action Comics featuring Superman, I turn and walk a few feet and open the comic. A trapped silver dime rolls down the fold and onto my shoe. The dime must have been lost when a commuter was rushing to catch a train while paying for his newspaper. Dennis isn't looking.

I want that dime, real bad,

but the thought of Dad chasing a stranger to return a nickel, floats into my head. I think, "Dennis is poor. I'm sort of rich." I look again and Dennis is busy chattering with a customer so the dime goes into my pocket.

Guilt simmers for a week before I finally decide to return the dime to Dennis. Days later, at the newsstand again, I browse through the current issue of Sheena Queen Of The Jungle, to see if her sleek leopard leotard was as tight as it was in the previous issue. I slip Sheena back to the rack and hand the dime to Dennis as if I just found it.

Dennis doesn't like browsers, but today, he smiles and says "Thanks."

Surprisingly Dad, a man with such an upright ethical posture,
has a job in advertising, a business where total honesty is sometimes set aside
so the marketing message shines through.

On Dad's accounts, retouchers smooth the bulging seams that weren't supposed
to show on a model wearing a Lovable bra. The Old Hickory Bourbon bottle
needs extra hidden lights and retouching to make it glow

and seem ^{more} appealing.

less like A bottle of Wood P...

I learn that reshaping the truth, to make a valuable point, isn't lying,
it's marketing.

In 1947, I'm twelve years-old when New York's first licensed television station,
named the DuMont Network, moves into a rented studio space inside
Wannamaker's Department Store in lower Manhattan. DuMont is offering free air-
time to advertising agencies if they will create and produce live commercials to
be aired between the station's regular broadcasts.

This is designed to show potential advertisers
the power of television to sell things.

There aren't many television sets in the New York metropolitan area but Dad
says DuMont is smart to offer free time to enable the agencies to get their feet
wet in the new medium.

The Wanamaker studio has only one camera and everything goes out live.
Videotape hasn't been invented yet. If a close-up is needed or the live scene
needs to be changed to a different angle, the director calls through the
cameraman's headset, "Go to grey," and a grey cardboard is moved in front of the
lens creating a short blackout while the cameraman quickly swings the camera to
another position where the card is removed. It creates a visual dead zone but it's
the only "fade" device available.

An announcer narrates copy into a microphone on the set while actors walk and
talk in real-time under lights that are so hot that flowers wilt, ice cream melts and
actors drip copious amounts of sweat. Even standing in a winter snow scene
wearing fur-collared parkas, actors' faces look like
they are in a steam bath.

Dad takes the bait and produces two commercials, one for the Loft Candy
Company, which sells boxed sets of fancy chocolates, and another for "Rival"
Dog Food. For Loft Candy. Mom and my sister, Gale and I are asked to play the
typical family waiting for Dad to come home from work.

We all represent cheap talent because, naturally, we do it for free. Television is
so unknown in our crowd, that our appearance merits
little excitement among our friends.

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There is no rehearsal. The scene starts live, showing Mom, Gale and I working on a jigsaw puzzle on the floor of our fake living room. We are the typical family, moving pieces of the puzzle while

Mom frets about Dad being late and spoiling her dinner.

Of course, we are all wearing our very best clothes.

Mom is sporting her best jewelry, pearls on a brown cashmere sweater.

I'm wearing a wool tweed sport jacket with a shirt and necktie, bought for the occasion. Gale is in her best party dress with white socks and Mary Jane shoes.

We are baking in the unbelievable heat of 50 low-hanging, scorching-hot lights. Dad walks through the fake front door, takes off his hat and opens a box of Loft Candy, which he presents to mom.

Gale and I have been told to act excited at seeing Dad and run and grab some chocolates. I dip my hand into the box and literally snatch a fistful of melted chocolate soup that runs between my fingers. I try to hide the demolished product and jam my hand into the pocket of my jacket making a long dark streak of melted chocolates for the viewing audience to see. Thinking fast, I start licking my fingers and say "Yum, yum!"

By the time we are walking back to our car, Dad is silent but Mom, Gale and I are all laughing. By the time we get to the car, the cold night air has hardened the chocolate and glued my pocket shut.

Four days later, Dad writes and will produce a commercial for "Rival" Dog Food, scheduled to go on air at six thirty in the evening when everyone is home. The live ad requires a hungry dog to charge towards two bowls of dog food. One is labeled "Brand X," and the other "Rival".

I'm invited to sit with Dad in the control room. This is very exciting.

A big Great Dane named Fido has been hired and is starved for two days to make sure he's very hungry.

I see him positioned at the edge of the set on a leash. There will be no second chances since this is all live and a one-shot deal.

From the control room, I watch as the "Brand X" bowl is set 18 inches away from the bowl marked "Rival". It's close enough so both bowls appear in the same shot. Brand X has been heavily impregnated with household ammonia to be sure that Fido doesn't like it. The "Rival" has been loaded with chunks of fresh liver.

The idea is that the hungry Great Dane, when let loose, will run to the closer food, Brand X.

On arrival, he will be repelled by the ammonia and go for the other bowl. The concealed liver in the "Rival" will help the dog make the right choice. All this cheating is from a man who chases strangers to return a nickel.

There is no rehearsal but everyone is convinced that this plan is foolproof. The announcer stands with his script at a microphone just off camera. The dog is ready offstage. I can hear him grunting and clawing to get at the food.

The announcer starts reading.

“Rival is the food all dogs prefer.”

He continues reading for a few more seconds until he reaches the cue line, “Let’s watch and see what Fido prefers.”

The camera is pointed at the two bowls of food and, as the announcer continues to read his copy, the giant starved dog is released and lurches into the picture and makes a beeline for the first bowl. He’s slobbering with hunger and, as he’s about to plunge his mouth into the ammonia spiked food, he stops and makes a wrinkle-nosed face and pulls his head away.

Dad whispers to the director, “Perfect! Look at that reaction!” The announcer continues reading as the dog smells the liver, charges to the Rival bowl and throws his whole mouth into the mound of “Rival”.

Dad is giggling.

The dog gulps down the “Rival” so fast that he finishes eating the before the announcer gets to the next cue line. Fido is finished ahead of the announcer and just stares into the camera, eyes glistening, licking his chops. Dad says “Wonderful, wonderful, look at that happy face! He’s licking his chops. This is great! Keep the camera close on the dog’s expression!” As the announcer gets to his last line, “So, be sure you get a supply of “Rival” today” the Great Dane’s face suddenly looks surprised.

His eyes begin to cross slightly and his head starts bobbing. Then, looking directly into the camera, Fido projectile vomits a torrent of chunky food right at the viewing audience. Everyone is stunned. Nobody speaks.

The director screams “Go to grey!”

Thousands of viewers have just seen a healthy dog’s spectacular rejection the client’s product.

In the car on the way home, Dad is quiet and pensive for a long time. Finally, he begins to chuckle faintly and says, “This would be just awful if it wasn’t so damned funny. The dog actually went cross-eyed before he puked up that meal.

Now I have a sick dog, one sick client and thousands of sick viewers. Jesus, when things get this bad, sometimes the only thing you can salvage is a good laugh.”

I admire Dad for being able to climb out of such a hole without having to shout, “Go to grey.”

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