

Branding YOU and **BREAKING** THE BANK

Chapter 2

Larger than Life

My father never fired up a computer or logged on to the Internet prior to his death in 1996. He wasn't a fan of television (except watching golf:–) and absolutely hated hype advertising and media. But Percy Beneteau **was** a master of Branding Himself.



Depending on your age, you may or may not recognize the woman in the photo to your left with my recently deceased father. Back when television was in it's infancy, Dorothy Collins had a wonderful showbiz career, thanks in large part to the help my dad gave her (she was local). She was co-hosting the Arthur Godfrey Show at the time this photo was taken.

His funeral was one of the largest this city has ever seen. I witnessed for myself the impact that one person could have on **so** many people. It wasn't a surprise to anyone in my family to see the crowds for 3 endless days flowing in and out of the funeral home. But it was the stories, the **real** stories of **how** this singular human being touched countless lives that convinced all of us that he was indeed a Star!

My father's deep passion was music. He tickled the ivories (played piano if you're much younger than me:–) solo and in bands (he played with Danny Thomas and actually helped Dorothy Collins get her start) at all the local hot spots during the depression, thirties and early World War II years. He served in the army but they kept him "home" so he could entertain the new soldiers at boot camp. He also performed in live radio shows and "cut" 78's (phonograph records) in the infamous CKLW Radio Studios.

It wasn't so much that he was a good musician; it was **how** he made music that mattered. His vibrant personality shone through his performances and infected the hotel patrons night after night. My father brought genuine joy to his listeners and his "tip jar" was always overflowing (are you getting the picture?).

Then, on Sunday mornings, after just a few hours sleep, he would get up to play pipe organ and lead the choir at all the Sunday masses at a large Catholic church. Sixty some years of

bringing joy to people through music! He performed on the Saturday night at a hotel restaurant, and Sunday mass the next morning, right up until he passed away in 1996 at the age of 83!

If you're beginning to see the sheer amount of people he impacted over his lifetime with just his music, consider this story as just beginning.

My father was convinced that without knowing a single thing about drycleaning, he was well known enough to start this highly technical business. So, in 1939 he set up shop, hired the necessary skilled people and guess what his "job" was? Close, if you said playing the piano in the customer area, but it was the Public Relations Department!

He already had a built-in customer base with the thousands of people who got to know him through his music but he drove the company truck all across the county drumming up (sorry, couldn't resist:-) new business. It wasn't long at all that the cleaners was flourishing. Amazing for a brand new enterprise. And he began making thousands more friends with his new customers.

To the day he died, my father could not "spot" a stain out of a garment, press a dress or fix a broken down machine. He didn't have to know anything more than being the powerful magnet he was! But throughout his business life he kept attracting.

He joined not only the Chamber of Commerce (eventually serving as president) and the Better Business Bureau, but he helped establish the local drycleaners association which eventually went province-wide where he served at all positions until taking his turn as president. And what did he do at every convention? Yes, this time he played the piano. Always the life of the party!

My father also joined the Lion's Club in its' first year of existence and eventually became local president. Missed only a handful of meetings in forty some years. Guess what he did at each and every meeting? Ok, you've already taken note:-)

But most important, he was one of the proverbial "5%" in the club that performed the community service work. In our community, that was working with blind people through the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB). Each Monday for years he drove "his people" to special events the club would sponsor in a beautiful apartment complex he was instrumental in building. And he worked tirelessly at bingos and other fundraising events.

I can add The United Way, church committees and of course his favorite activity, his private golf club (where he passed away while playing golf in the company of his best friends) to the list. But you definitely get the picture. Here was a man who through just "being himself" – warm, giving, talented, energetic, hard-working and fun-loving managed to become a Local Celebrity, impacting literally tens of thousands of people. And because of this, he built not only a financially sound business and music career, but more importantly, a very successful life!

So much so that in 1994 Percy Beneteau received from Pope John Paul II the highest civilian award given by the Vatican, the Benemerenti Medal.

A few months after his death, my father's good friends set up a permanent music scholarship at the University of Windsor in his name. A public ceremony was held in which the music elite of this area performed. I was honored to have delivered the eulogy to the packed audience at what was a magical 3-hour event. His name now lives on and

continues to help people spread even more joy through music!

Percy Beneteau was **Larger than Life**. Although he might not have admitted to this, his success in life came because he Branded Himself!

"The legacy of heroes is the memory of a great name and the inheritance of a great example."

Benjamin Disraeli

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