

Bud Wyman

My father was a salesman. He had titles such as Director of Marketing, Vice President of Marketing, even President and Chairman of Wyman Marketing, Inc., but he was a salesman. Mostly he sold floor covering products: rugs, carpeting, carpet tiles, rug underlay, but like all salesman, his primary product was himself. If they like me, they'll buy my product was his strategy.

His personal sales skills were such that, over the course of his life, he sold three extraordinary young women in their twenties on the idea of marrying him. He was a charmer, a good-looking, well-dressed Bon Vivant with a million-dollar smile.

He was smart. The son and grandson of tax lawyers who went to Harvard, he not only resisted the seductive siren lure of tax law, he resisted Harvard. Growing up in Newton, Mass., he didn't want to go to school in his own backyard, and so he matriculated at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, ME. When his best friend Parker Pitts tried to follow suit, Parker's father insisted he go to Harvard instead, telling his son that when you tell people you graduated from Bowdoin, no one will have heard of it.

He was a reader. He majored in philosophy and kept up over the years with fiction and non-fiction. He was devoted to current events, subscribing to the NY Times, the Daily News, Time, The Week, The Economist and The New Yorker even when he could no longer read any more than the headlines.

He had a great sense of humor. He loved to laugh and he loved to make others laugh. He was a clever, witty guy, and he appreciated wit in others. He loved cleverness and an artful turn of phrase, and he collected witticisms and bon mots.

Like any good salesman -- and unlike yours truly -- he remembered jokes. Sometimes, particularly under the influence of his fourth or fifth adult beverage, he would fail to remember that he had already told a particular joke. If you have only heard one time the jokes whose punch lines are "Those Fokkers were Messerschmitts" and "Thank you for flying Lufthansa," you have never been at a party with my father.

My father's parents divorced when he was a toddler, and my father was raised by his mother and older sister. I leave it to the armchair psychiatrists to connect this with my father's lifelong need for female approval and discomfort with female authority. Whatever its origins, for most of his life my father had a remarkable disinterest in his extended family.

When Bud was 45, his second wife Bonnie discovered -- behind his dresser or in the back of a closet -- a cache of letters to Bud from his mother, several of them unopened. A devoted family person, Bonnie was horrified and immediately arranged an expedition to see Bud's sister and mother at their Mamaroneck home. That was the last time to my knowledge that Bud saw either of them.

In his later years, Bud embraced the role of paterfamilias and delighted in welcoming children and grandchildren to his various homes in the Berkshires. Most of the family had spring birthdays (Bud's 95th would have been yesterday) so we would have a Wyman Family Birthday Weekend convocation over Memorial Day up in the Berkshires, complete with souvenir T-shirts.

When I was young, I was determined not to be like my dad. As I grew older, I would be frustrated and baffled to see myself unconsciously replicating his locutions and behaviors. Now I feel differently. Just as my father came to accept his position as head of the family, I have come to accept my being in so many ways a chip off the old block. I too am a salesman

whose primary product is myself. I am proud to be Bud Wyman's son. That Fokker was one hell of a Messerschmitt.