



"THE NEWSPAPERMAN

MUST BITE THE DOG..."

by F. KENNETH BEIRN

**"Newspaper Men Must Bite The Dog
... To Win The Fight For
The American Advertising Dollar" ...**

by F. KENNETH BEIRN

This address was delivered by F. Kenneth Beirn, President of Biow-Beirn-Toigo, Inc., one of the "Top Ten" American advertising agencies, before the New York Chapter, American Association of Newspaper Representatives, at the Yale Club, New York City, January 13, 1955.

First let me explain why the advertising profession owes the newspaper profession—the publishers, editors, reporters and the national advertising representatives, the full truth.

Some years ago, shortly before the late Albert D. Lasker, a real giant among advertising men, died, he told James Webb Young, himself no mean advertising man, something of great interest. Mr. Lasker said that there were only three things of major importance that had ever happened in the history of our business.

They were:

1. **"Commission System."** First and foremost, when Mr. Francis Wayland Ayer, of Philadelphia, made his original contract with a newspaper and with a number of newspapers, whereby the commission system of compensation for an advertising agency came into being. As Mr. Lasker said, that made advertising into a business.

2. **"Importance of Copy."** His second step, he felt, was when he himself, Mr. Lasker, hired a great copy writer by the name of John Kennedy, paid him the largest sum that far in the history of the advertising business — and dramatized copy, as the most important element in the advertising business.

3. "*Sex in Advertising.*" The third great step was when J. Walter Thompson introduced sex into advertising, in their ads headed: "The Skin You Love To Touch."

Of these three steps, as Mr. Lasker saw them, it is the first and most important one that calls for utter and blunt frankness at this time—in the hope that such frankness may prove of real value; in the hope that, if these observations have merit, they might be given serious consideration by the publishers and editors of our nation's newspapers.

For, I feel that we of the advertising profession do indeed owe it, never to forget that it was the newspaper profession that permitted advertising to go into business—and it was the newspaper business that had the vision to start something new.

When Mr. F. W. Ayer suggested that the only practical way of handling agency compensation was through the system which is still in effect today, so successfully, it was the newspapers of America who said "*yes*"—and the advertising profession, must never forget that.

Advertising Revolution

Accordingly, with that preface and motive, let us look at the present state of affairs where the American advertising dollar is involved.

Fundamentally, there has been a revolution in the field of advertising. It started with the advent of the radio. Granted, that the advent of a new medium tends to expand the sum total spent, nevertheless, this meant that the advertising dollar had to some extent, to be split up to provide for a new medium. Then, when newspaper publishers coupled this problem with the steadily rising cost of production of a newspaper, it became a serious matter.

But radio came—and has remained.

And, now television, with its scientists, its

research, and its "progressive dynamism," its preparations for color—cause a further demand on that same advertising dollar.

The Unemotional Dollar

That advertising dollar is quite an unemotional object; so is the man who spends that advertising dollar. He knows only one thing—results.

The history of American journalism does not move him very much, when he cuts up his advertising dollar. The fact that newspapers are the fundamental of all freedoms is something he uses in speeches before patriotic groups—but he still asks one question of his advertising agencies: "*Where will I get the greatest impact for my money? Where will I reach the most customers for the least cost?*"

And, he is being conditioned very carefully to think more and more about television (and even radio). These two media are using every means possible to promote themselves and to use new methods in everything they do—since they have no past methods on which to rely. They are doing a real promotional job for themselves.

Take a look at the newspapers' greatest competitor, television. They televise hearings in the Senate—and have the whole nation watching. Ed. Murrow takes his camera into the homes of famous people. His network (CBS) brings its correspondents to America from all over the world for a round table discussion of world affairs. The newspaper "*scoop*" has become almost a thing of the past. You never hear an "*Extra*" on the street any more. On every side, newspapermen deplore this situation.

To me as an outside observer (who "*never* was a newspaperman once myself") I think it is time that the newspapers of America took stock of

themselves—and got rid of this complacent attitude.

Where TV Fails

The newspaper is a very important part of our American life. It is the core of our freedom. It is as important with breakfast as eggs and toast. Everyone knows that the printed word makes a lasting impression on the mind. *And, to be realistic, who ever heard of wrapping a fish in a television set?*

But, seriously, what is the newspaper doing to fight these new, modern competitors for that important advertising dollar. Is the newspaper keeping up with television in creating new things—aggressive dynamic methods—and showing greater leadership?

In leadership of the newspaper lies the answer. In new and progressive ideas that will take the American newspaper a step forward, to newer and better things, will lie the solution.

One dare not just be angry or despondent about the fact that science has brought forth new media to challenge the once singular place of the newspaper and magazine in the field of advertising. And I say this despite the fact that a large number of newspapers did rather well in 1954.

The question is—what should be done about this broad problem.

Turn back a few years in the field of journalism and see what *used* to happen. Every young man who had any adventure or literary ability in his soul, wanted to be a newspaper man. There was keen competition amongst newspapers. There *was* excitement—something new every day. *In those days the word, "scoop," did not mean a grocer's utensil!*

The "Good Old Days"

Think back, for a moment, of the legends about the famous newspaper days in San Fran-

cisco. Some of the greatest writers in American literary history; some of the great artists and cartoonists came out of the battles there, for creating more reader interest.

Then, think of the famous and legendary newspaper days in Chicago. Newspaper history was made by such great characters as Ben Hecht, Charlie MacArthur, Westbrook Pegler, J. P. McEvoy, Walter Howey—and so many others.

The play, "*The Front Page*" was not just a play—it was a slice out of highly competitive American newspaper life. It was true!

And think back right here in New York, not so many years ago. Newspapers fought each other for the news—to be *first*; to be *best*; they fought for reader interest—and *the public gained*. The newspaperman was youth's idol of adventure and excitement.

"Newspaper Guy" of Old

It recalls to mind a verse written by the late Edwin Meade Robinson. "Ted" Robinson wrote:

"Some day I'll pass by the Great Gates of Gold,

"And see a man pass through unquestioned and bold.

"'A Saint?' I'll ask, and old Peter'll reply:

"No, he carries a pass—he's a newspaper guy!"

But what about today? The youngster who now wants to write or who wants adventure, tries to get a job in radio or television. It is a more lucrative field, even from the start. These media, thus, are gathering to themselves the best young creative men of today—the men capable of fighting for news; of creating new ways and means of getting greater reader interest—the new William Randolph Hearsts, the new Joseph Pulitzers, the new Hechts and

MacArthurs, the Peglers, the Walter Howes, the McEvoyes, the Adolph Ochses and the Bennetts, Reids, Roy Howards, and others of tomorrow.

This is a most serious problem. Manpower alone solves all problems. Young manpower means that one is preparing for tomorrow. Somehow, the newspapers *must* meet this competition—and they must meet it *fast*—to regain that fine group of creative young men who will find the way to fight back.

Why don't newspapers have more "scoops" today? Why do not people realize how much the newspaper means to their community? What great crusades which really meant something to the people, devoid of special pleading interest, have been carried out—as in the good old days—to reawaken that old sense of close personal relationship that people used to have and should have towards their own community newspapers?

The "Great New Days"

The age of mechanization has, in some ways been a tragedy, in my opinion, for the newspaper. It has become a remote, impersonal thing—with the comic strip attracting more readership than the news itself.

Who today tries anything new — as did Captain Joe Patterson, when he built the New York Daily News into America's biggest selling newspaper? Who charts trains and rushes to any scene of news—as the publishers all used to do?

Where is that great check on government; on corruption;—all the things that used to be? Of course there are some—but it no longer is the backbone of the business. It is wrong, in a way, to think of "good old days." It gets one nowhere! Better, I believe, to think of the "great new days ahead." Then, something will be done!

The chairman of Biow-Beirn-Toigo, Inc. is a man named Milton Biow. I have worked for, and with him for a number of years. If I would sum up his unique approach toward life, I would call him: "*The Man Who Forgot Yesterday*," which means he has a keen awareness of the fact that the rewards go to those who offer something fresh and new and non-traditional every day.

If he has a secret, it is just that—that plus plain hard work. Perhaps this philosophy fits our problem here today. It is about time that American journalism too, "*forgot yesterday*" and started to push forward again aggressively and with pioneering daring, as they used to do. Let the "*scoop*" come back into its own.

Bite The Dog!

I submit that the general public have merely reflected the attitude which the newspapers themselves, as a general rule, have adopted for themselves. (People in a strange way, reflect one's own views about oneself—or about one's business.) People seem generally to accept newspapers today as something static, unchanging — dependent entirely on the news that *somebody else* makes. They look on television as something entirely new—something exciting. And the advertising dollar is affected by that public point of view.

In a book by Frank M. O'Brien, entitled "*The Story of the Sun*," published back in 1918, he quoted John B. Bogart, who was City Editor of the New York Sun, from 1873 to 1890 as saying something that all of us know and too often forget:

"When a dog bites a man, that is not news, because it happens so often, but if a man bites a dog, that is news!"

Another great newspaperman, by the name of Winston Churchill, (he does some work on the side, too), said, back in 1898: "*It is*

better to be making the news than taking it; to be an actor rather than a critic."

What does this really mean? Perhaps it means that the newspapers themselves ought to go back to what made them great—*making the news; making new ways of getting the news—creating the news.* A former newspaperman, who became quite famous in his youth, explained how he did it.

He said: "*News is wherever you find it—and understand it. I got my scoops by watching where all the other reporters went. Then—I went the other way. So when I found a story, I was always alone. That is all there is to getting a scoop.*"

There used to be many new things in the newspaper world—but not for many years.

Winchell Made It Up!

It took a hooper, not a journalist, to bring something new into journalism, many years ago. He was a vaudeville dancer—with a burning ambition to be a new type of newspaperman, and he sells papers—and he sells commodities on television and on radio. I mean Walter Winchell.

Frankly I don't even know him. But what has come along since Walter Winchell satisfied that burning ambition and created a new school of journalism? Many writers have adapted the Winchell style and method and creativeness to fit their own needs but no matter how you slice it, Winchell made it up!

Winchell brought something new to the newspapers. Some daring editor was willing to take a chance—and that resulted in reader interest. How can Winchell get his many scoops? If *he* can do it—a whole new generation of young newspapermen should be inspired to think up new ways and means of exciting newspaper interest, as he did.

Some newspapers run Winchell and some do not. Some people like him—and some do not. But, I believe, as one, that journalists should give recognition to the man who had the daring and the guts to bring *something new* to the profession *which sold papers*—because that is what it is all about.

Talking strictly from this business angle, perhaps somebody might talk to the men who decide who wins the Pulitzer Prizes and get them to do something that Joseph Pulitzer might have done—if he were here. Because that great old newspaperman wanted to do something new every day, and did until the day he died.

I think he might have given Winchell a Pulitzer Prize or special citation for his newspaper scoops, but more for having created something new! Of course what he's done does not fit the "old pattern," but the old pattern is what is destructive, in my humble opinion. It is tomorrow—not yesterday's tradition—that will bring success in America.

"Extra!!!" Now Silent

Today, on a newspaper, it is usually the columnist who attracts the reader; or the news that comes over the Associated Press, or the United Press, or the International News Service. The local excitement does not exist anymore. That exciting sound of the boy yelling "*extra*" is now silent! The great newspaperman-to-be does not go to work on the newspaper. He goes to the radio station or the television station. It is a tragedy for journalism.

Take for instance, the editorial page. On the television and radio, opinions are more and more freely given. (Look at such programs as "Meet The Press," "See It Now," "American Forum" to name a few.) People are interested in opinions. They are controversial. But, in the daily newspaper, you have to turn over

page after page and fight to find the editorials. And, in general it remains a tradition to make the editorial as erudite and therefore as difficult to read as possible for the general public—instead of making it as easy to read, as possible. It is true, of course, that some newspapers, do a fine job, but they are in the minority.

There was another great old newspaper man named Arthur Brisbane who foresaw all of this a long time ago. He placed his editorials on the *front page*—(one way to be sure they register). Mr. Brisbane often said that a newspaper, like an individual, should have character. And, he often said, character does not alone come out of reporting what *other* people do. It comes out of stating what one *thinks*.

And, Arthur Brisbane built circulation, because he made editorials into news! Is this age of journalistic giants gone forever? Certainly I realize that there are some newspapers and some magazines today which still operate this way. Their circulation figures and their advertising figures reflect their modern daring, their new pioneering spirit—their desire to do something new, every day, every week, every year.

Shackled by "Yesterday"

But, at the conventions of the newspaper publishers, one rarely hears an indictment of themselves; one rarely hears a plea "*to set our houses in order*," and to go forward to newer and better things. And in case I've emphasized the editorial side too much, I'd like to add that all other departments of newspapers need the same careful scrutiny.

One tragically can see some newspapers gradually dying before our eyes—because they have refused to shake off the shackles of "yesterday"; the shackles of complacency.

I believe it is time that the newspapers bit the dog!

By what right does an advertising man say all this? Because, first, the advertisers will be the ones who gain—and the public, the consumers, will gain most.

Never before has America possessed the production potential that it has today. Never before has the consumer carried more spendable money in his pocket. Never before has the manufacturer been more aggressive in his desire to **expand**.

Newspapers Must Fight!

There remains only one gap—the gap between the man who produces and the man who buys. That gap can only be bridged by greater public interest in the various media of advertising—of which I would like to see the newspaper fight every day to re-assert its predominant position once more — become greater and greater—and win more of that advertising dollar.

When that happens, (and I believe it will), television, with its brilliant research and its scientists, will find some new ways to try to beat the newspapers. And, in this growing competition for that advertising dollar, in the finest tradition of free enterprise in America, we will get something *new*—as America has always done in the past.

Old News—But It's Still New

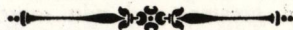
In conclusion, let me suggest that you remind your publishers and your editors of a little bit of American news which may be pertinent today. I refer to a news event which took place off the coast of England, near a place known as Flamborough Head. An American Naval officer by the name of John Paul Jones, in command of an American Naval vessel named "The Bonhomme Richard," on that fateful day of September 23, 1779, was engaged in battle at sea by a British frigate

called "The Serapis"; a far bigger warship, with many more guns. As the first blows were exchanged, the American vessel was badly hit and looked as if it would sink. Many of the crew were killed.

The British commander, seeing this condition, grabbed his megaphone and yelled over, demanding that John Paul Jones surrender.

And John Paul Jones answered in a historic statement. He said: "*Surrender? I have not yet begun to fight!*" Let me presume to paraphrase that for American newspapers, as one of the reading public, who believe that America's newspapers must "*bite the dog.*"

I hope that every American newspaper, like John Paul Jones, will start to say: "*Surrender? —We have not yet begun to bite!*"



F. KENNETH BEIRN

F. Kenneth Beirn, as President of Biow-Beirn-Toigo, Inc., of which Milton H. Biow is Chairman, and John Toigo is Executive Vice-President, heads one of the country's top 10 advertising agencies.

He was born in Kansas City, Mo., July 30, 1910, and his family gradually migrated eastward, as is reflected in the history of his schooling. His high school education began in Buffalo, New York and was completed in Mamaroneck, in New York's Westchester County.

Attending Yale University, Mr. Beirn was advertising manager of the "Yale News." He graduated in 1932 receiving a B.A. degree and prepared to enter the business world.

However, he sidestepped business and spent 6 months as a deck hand, sailing around the world.

His craving for adventure satiated, Mr. Beirn set out on the career which today finds him at the head of one of the nation's leading advertising agencies.

In 1940 he was married to the former Mary Jane Russell. The Beirn family, which includes two sons and a daughter, resides in New York City.

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