

## THE RALPH BARD STORY

*We persuaded Ralph Bard to give us a close-up look at his eventful career, and this lively success story is the result.*

In June 1933, close friends Pete Fortune, Memphis Nevitt, Rem Brinckerhoff and I sailed for Ireland to begin an "educational" trip around the world. There we purchased bicycles and, by fall, we had been most everywhere in Europe. Spending a month in Munich, we were intrigued with Hitler's antics, even fraternizing nightly with his bully-boys around the beer tables at the Hofbrau House. Then through Egypt, the Near East, India, China, Japan and home - back to the real world of the Depression in the spring of 1934.

Farming and ranching life appealed to me so I left Chicago to try my luck in California. In those desperate days the Bank of America was having a problem managing the many farms and orchards it had foreclosed on, and I was able to get a job with them as an irrigator in orchard country at 20c an hour. I bought a secondhand car for \$30.

Finally, after having been moved ten times, I became a foreman, overseeing 19 farms and orchards, and shared a stately old farm mansion with several other young bachelors. The house had so many rooms we never bothered to clean, just moving into another room when one got too dirty. My roommate kept a revolver under his pillow and had the disconcerting habit of blasting away at rats in the middle of the night. The outside cold water hose was our shower and the vast collection of milk bottles on the porch our bank, which we cashed in on Saturdays so we could go to the Red Lion Inn. We hired many "Okies" because they were hard-working and great with horses, which made us unpopular with some Californians, so we carried shotguns in our cars, prominently displayed.

Eventually I was sent to San Francisco to learn about marketing fruits, nuts, beans and rice. There I found my wife Nonie. She had spent the previous summer working in Japan after graduating from Stanford. In 1937, we and our new daughter moved to southern California, where I managed a division of Samuel Edwards Associates, a large farming enterprise owned by classmate Hal Edwards' family. The organization was managed by his uncle, Roger Edwards and his father, Harold Edwards, Sr. (1906). They were won-



*In Munich with Pete Fortune, summer 1933*

derful people to work for and we will always remember the beautiful groves of oranges, lemons, walnuts and almonds.

My father asked me if I would like to help rescue a difficult investment he and others had made in a tile and brick plant in Charleston, West Virginia, which was losing \$25,000 per month. So we moved east.

After observing operations for a month, I decided that I understood the business and fired the plant manager, the sales manager and several others, and took over all their jobs. All losses stopped, but my wife and family saw little of me for two years, and I became very unpopular with the C.I.O. and the United Mine Workers. At one time, two C.I.O. agents tried to push me into a hot kiln and later a miner arranged to drop a large chunk of clay on my head in our deep mine. In 1941,

with one more child, a son, we left Charleston Clay Products, leaving the company in good hands.

World War II changed all our lives. My father, Ralph A. Bard (1906) was Assistant Secretary of the Navy (later Undersecretary) and because of this I didn't want to accept a commission in the armed services, but I did want to participate. I enlisted in the Marine Corps as a private and went to boot camp at Parris Island. At 32 I was the old man of my platoon. Some way I survived and made it to Officers' Candidate School at Quantico, then Air Combat Intelligence at Quonset. After moving my family back to California, I left for the Pacific theatre - Hawaii, Guam, and the first assaults on Okinawa.

After the war, I figured it was a perfect time to be self-employed. Rawleigh Warner, Jr. (1944) and I formed our own company, Warner-Bard, and had an interesting time finding financial backing to launch people with new ideas and inventions, some good and some terrible. Rawleigh left to work in the oil business and, later, became Chairman and C.E.O. of Mobil Oil.

In Barrington Hills, outside of Chicago, we added another daughter to our family. I visited Charleston Clay Products and was surprised to find large shipments of tile going to Toronto - too far for us to ship before the war. I went to Toronto to see why, and was amazed at the enormous growth and opportunities there. Oil had been discovered in 1946, and there was a ferment of oil and mining exploration. I was fortunate to meet some of the mining, oil and banking leaders of Canada and, eventually, organized an investment company with backing from some of them and U.S. investors. Pretty exciting times!

In 1962, one of my associates, a geologist named Reese Powelson, thought that Australia was the place to invest. A trip "down under" started a company there, and over the years we became involved in vineyards, wineries, cattle, sheep, land, gold, auto trailer parks - you name it!

Reese Powelson moved to Australia to manage the company during the wild mining boom there. If Reese Powelson had lived I might have become a very wealthy man, but he suffered a major heart attack and died.

The new manager, Jack Mitchell (now Chairman), flew with Nonie and me over much of the northern "outback" from station to station, trying to put together 10 million acres for a cattle operation. (*Ed: You can see that our classmate is no piker. 10 million acres is about*

*the size of Massachusetts and Connecticut combined*). Later we did acquire a sizeable spread of land in the York Peninsula at 11c per acre. We paid aborigines \$5 for every head of cattle they delivered to us that didn't have someone's brand. When the company sold this property, Jack Mitchell and I bought 25% of it.

We sold our vineyard, winery, auto parks and oil investments, and reinvested the money in an attractive gold prospect which, I am glad to say, is doing very well. Some of our production is sold out for four years in advance at prices substantially higher than present ones.

On our last trip to Australia, October 1990, we had dinner with Sheila and Toto Walker (1933) in Sydney at their interesting house on a cliff overlooking the harbor, hearing about Toto's fascinating life and career with National Geographic (*see 1990 Summer Newsletter*).

Another classmate, Charlie Fitzmorris, and I have been involved in several interesting investments, one of which was Benner Tea Company. I brought it to his attention and that has led to many developments of which I have been a part.

Real estate has always intrigued me. For the past 35 years we have spent part of our winters in Naples, Florida and, in 1957, Harold Byron Smith (1931) and I spent a very successful winter buying properties. Restaurants are a weakness of mine. They are a lot of fun, but seldom successful. Working with a real pro from Woodside, California, we have done very well in California, Oregon, Washington and Tennessee real estate.

My original backing of Bill McGregor, an oil operator, of Edmonton, in several companies, including Numac Oil and Gas, was very profitable, and led to my widespread interest in western Canada and brought me many new friends. One of these, John Ferguson, treasurer of Numac, saw potential in real estate and started his own company, "Princeton Development" (no relation to our University but it had to be good). My old friend Harold Smith and I invested in his company. John's firm is now a major real estate development and management company in western Canada.

Over the years I have served on the boards of many businesses and institutions, including in Chicago, the Shedd Aquarium, Rush-Presbyterian St. Lukes Hospital and the Chicago Horticultural Society, which started the Chicago Botanic Gardens 25 years ago (in a swamp).

I was Chairman for eight years and it has been most rewarding for me to watch this beautiful, educational garden grow and to have participated in a major way in its development into a world-class Botanic Garden.

My life seems to be spent on the telephone, but I do escape between calls to go fishing. I have fished over the years in Norway, Iceland, New Zealand, and in Canada - Quebec, New Brunswick, Labrador and the Arctic Circle; also close to home at The Coleman Lake Club, a wonderful family fishing spot. This summer I am returning to Anacostia Island in search of the elusive salmon with Art Wood '34.

I still knock myself out trying to shoot my age in golf, and haven't given up. Sailing is also a favorite recreation. With another couple we have bare-boated in many seas - Greece, New Zealand, Honduras, Belize, the Windward and Leeward Islands of the Caribbean, the Virgins and the Bahamas.

My nephew, Tim Johnson (1973) and Harvard Busi-

ness School graduate is now part of our office. We call ourselves Bard Associates and we each do our own thing. He manages investment accounts, which he does very well, and both of us participate in entrepreneurial corporate financing. It has been fun watching another generation think and speculate.

I have been diagnosed as having two kinds of cancer but, so far, it hasn't slowed me down very much. I go to my office each day and find myself just as interested in the economy and in financial opportunities as ever. I'm even more interested in the growth and development of our three children, 9 grandchildren and 7 great-grandchildren, and above all in my wonderful wife, Nonie, who has tolerated my exploits and adventures for 56 years.

I hope to see all of you at our 60th reunion in 1993!



*An Iceland Beauty.  
Ralph would rather fish than eat.  
With a catch like this, he can do both*