

An Introduction to this Autobiography



Over the past few years a television program, *Mad Men*, has drawn attention to the advertising industry as it existed in the early 1960s. It is called *Mad Men*, of course, because in that time period people referred to the advertising industry as “Madison Avenue,” and the truth is that it was almost exclusively a men’s club. This book is a story about one of the *real* “mad men” who ran the advertising world in those days. In fact, one of the story lines in that television series was based on the life of this man. His name was even mentioned on the TV series at one point, but the sad fact is that most people – even those working in the advertising industry – probably did not recognize his name when it was mentioned.

David Ogilvy, Bill Bernbach, Leo Burnett, and Howard Gossage are all names well known to the student of advertising. They are some of the biggest names in the history of the advertising field, and every one of them is known for his creativity. In fact, they all were copywriters, the wordsmiths who craft the message in the ads. But advertising is much more than words. It includes the art, of course, but behind the scenes are the people who study the consumer, develop the strategic plan for the advertising, decide where the ads appear, and more. Sadly, though those people are just as important to the success of an ad campaign, few of them are remembered with the reverence we reserve for that handful of copywriters.

This book is the story of one such man who, in our opinion, ranks among these greats. He did a little copywriting, but he was mostly a strategist, a deal maker, and a man of high principles. At the turn of the millennium *Advertising Age* magazine published its list of the 100 most influential advertising people of the 20th century. Emerson Foote was 80th on that list. That might not seem too bad, for an industry that employed probably millions of people during that century, but we would argue he was grossly undervalued by the magazine’s

editors. Like others in the field, we're certain those editors were more familiar with the famous copywriters.

Emerson Foote did something unheard of, at the time: he became chief executive of one of the largest and most influential ad agencies in the world, and then became chief executive of another one! He also was one of the first leaders of the modern fight against cigarette advertising, even though he had been responsible for some of the most notable cigarette ads in history when he was younger. But what really set him apart is that he reached those nosebleed heights and prominence in spite of two serious handicaps: *he stuttered, and suffered from bipolar disease.*

For anyone who struggles with either of those handicaps, this story should be inspirational. For anyone hoping to build a career in advertising, this story should be a map to success. But – and we think far more importantly – for anyone who holds the belief that advertising is a disreputable business and that people in this industry are short on ethics, this story should cure you of those notions. Although there certainly are some bottom feeders in this, as in any, industry, no rational person can read this story and believe that Emerson Foote was anything other than a class act, and as much a moral leader as a business leader.

We really cannot imagine anyone reading this book and not wishing they had known Emerson. This is an *autobiography*. It is his own words. We approached our job as editors with a light touch, because we wanted readers to know Emerson's voice, not some scotch-guarded version of his story. This came from dictated tapes that were recorded over a long period of time, so we cleaned up the punctuation, added a few conjunctions, and removed some redundancy. But we really changed very little else. Rather than risk that a more aggressive form of editing would change the story, we felt it important to let minor grammatical faux pas and occasional repetitions remain. But even more than changing the story, we wanted the story to be true to his voice.

As we read this, we could hear him speaking to us, and we wanted to be certain our own voices did not in any way intercede. As you read this, rest assured it is the story as he told it. If you are amazed by nothing else, we think you will find

this man's memory to be truly astounding. In the end, we hope you will agree with us that Emerson Foote was an incomparable Mad Man who should not be forgotten. Indeed, we feel honored to have our names linked with his, if only as editors of this book.

Emerson Foote was born in 1906, in Sheffield, Alabama, and died in Carmel, New York, on Sunday, July 5, 1992, at age 85. The story here was written by dictation 7-9 years before his death, and the unedited manuscript has been sitting on a shelf for the past quarter century. It is a story, though, that demands to be told.

We must thank the family of Emerson Foote, particularly his son, Jim, and his grandchildren, Dan and Liz, as well as Foote's daughters: Katherine and Jennifer. They have been particularly helpful in our editing process, provided most of the photographs found herein, and generally helped us to go beyond Emerson's self description. They seem to be as excited about this project as we've been. We also would like to recognize the late Loanne Burney, who was the secretary who downloaded and typed the text that Emerson Foote painstakingly recorded on audiotape. If she hadn't done that, this manuscript would have been lost to time, as the tapes no longer exist.

Neither the DraftFCB or McCann-Erickson agencies had any involvement in this book's publication. Although we approached both, they didn't seem to see the value in preserving this man's story. That's really too bad, because both should proudly hold him up as a prime example of their own history of excellence.

- Jef I. Richards & Billy I. Ross