

Salesman

by Jerry Ratch

A salesman, a born salesman like my brother, is always and only involved in the Moment, and it is the sale itself that is at the heart of the moment, and my brother Harris was really at the top of his form as a salesman. It can probably best be said, therefore, that the Great Harris Robinson, as he came to be known, literally lived only for the moment, like a butterfly that was already yellow with August.

Though he was trained as a chemical engineer, Harris had the ability to be a giant among salesmen. And how he sold my mother on things! Of course, he could convince and cajole my father into things too, and my father, Otto — this was a man who seemed next to impossible to move off a dime. But my brother sure could move him; I would watch him doing it. Once in a blue moon, I admit, he even managed to sell me on some project of his.

To tell the whole truth of it, I think Harris could sell the fake leather off the back of a Gideon bible out of a bedside drawer at Motel Six, if he put his mind to it. I'm not overstating the case here. I know this was so, because one day I watched him demand and collect a one dollar bill for his parking space at a meter outside a popular restaurant in North Berkeley — just to see if it could be done — since these Yuppie types there were so impatient to get into Chez Panisse. Harris simply out-waited them, hanging around outside his car door and picking slowly at his teeth, massaging his gums — until he managed to extract a dollar out of one of the men. With that, he obliged with a grand sweep of his arm and drove off waving the dollar bill out the car window like a cheesy flag.

The only reason I myself ever went to school out in California was because the Great Harris moved to Los Angeles with his first wife Beryl and their daughter Terri, to take a job. Once there, he immediately started selling us on the great dream of California, paving the way for the rest of our family to leave Chicago behind. It was down in L.A. really that Harris became a salesman,

and a very good salesman at that. Then he moved up to Northern California following after another engineering job, but by that time he was already bent on making his legendary real estate deals — and this was what led to his great fall.

