

Introduction

In so many ways Wesley H. Bacon (1922-2001) was an ordinary, and even unremarkable man. Modest. Quiet. Retiring. Gentle. Maddeningly deliberate. Usually deferential. He might grumble in private over minor annoyances, but his public disposition was always sunny. Like most people, he preferred to go along amiably in life without making waves. Aside from chain-smoking, so common in the culture in which he came of age, he had no extreme habits. He indulged in no extravagances. Material objects meant nothing to him.

His father abandoned him for good when he was four-years-old. He grew up in the Depression, an only child, but fortunately he was nurtured by a large extended working-class family. His mother remarried, but his stepfather was distant and withdrawn by nature. His public school education reached the 9th grade at best. The greater part of his life was focused on his work and providing for his family, his wife and three children.

Sounds pretty dull so far.

So why a book about Wesley H. Bacon, *The Wesley H. Bacon Reader*?

Because somehow this small and modest man, who started out in life with no particular advantages, possessed a singular intellectual spark that glowed all the way through a lifetime of study. His drive, curiosity, and powers of concentration led to his expertise, accomplishment, and insight in varied professions and out-of-the-ordinary pursuits. His travels, experiences, and deep studies transformed him into an enlightened global citizen. Despite his “Mr. Ordinary” exterior, he positively radiated his remarkable spark to those “fellow travelers” receptive to the

signal. As his son, I was tuned in to his signal as far back as I can remember. Those not tuned in to his frequency were either baffled or oblivious (... which he found amusing).

The aim of the book is to explore the origins of Wesley H. Bacon's intellectual spark, prompted somewhat by the age-old "nature or nurture" question. But like lightning in a bottle, his "spark" defies pure definition. So we may have to be satisfied with the writings he left behind, and the overviews of his fascinating careers interspersed with his commentary.

So what's going to make this good reading?

His careers were not butcher, baker, and candlestick-maker careers. The fields he chose to pursue in life were, in his time at least, the stuff of boyhood dreams. When he was a boy in the 1920s and 1930s, his companion was broadcast radio. He listened to all the crooning vocalists and jazz artists of the day. He was mesmerized by radio serials featuring the dramatized adventures of daring aviators, mysterious magicians, and storm-tossed sailors. The youth pulp fiction of the time delivered more of the same. When he went to the movies, along with the usual western feature films were multi-episode "cliffhanger" serials like *The Radio Detective*, *The Return of Chandu*, and *Tailspin Tommy*.

But while most of us eventually forget about becoming a big-league ballplayer or circus lion-tamer, Wesley H. Bacon strode forth in life to live his own real-world adventures while checking off his bucket-list of boyhood dreams. He was a virtuoso Morse code telegrapher as a teenager. He became a wizard of radio technology, leading to a decade of global travels at sea as a shipboard telegrapher in the U.S. Navy during WWII, and as a radio officer on merchant vessels after the war. A few years later, pursuing a lifelong interest in flying airplanes, he immersed himself into a 37-year career in commercial aviation. Always pressing forward in deep study, he became an elegant sleight-of-hand magician, a Houdini-like escape artist, a Wild-West six-gun twirler, a hypnotic baritone vocalist, an erstwhile short story writer, a student of philosophy and mysticism, ... and Dad.

This volume compiles Wesley H. Bacon's memoirs of his years at sea, his short stories, performance scripts, and other assorted writings discovered after his death in Tavares, Fla. on January 27, 2001. The assorted writings include letters, observations, advice, promotional copywriting, notes to himself, mystical aphorisms, and even scripts for hypnotic suggestion. Also included are a biographical sketch and profiles of his careers in radio, aviation, and performance. These sketches, written by the compiler, are informed by W. H. Bacon's collection of annotated books, memorabilia, magic and telegraphy paraphernalia, song lists, and voluminous notes. The sketches are illustrated with photos from the compiler's family collection. *The Wesley H. Bacon Reader* concludes with a chapter on the "nature or nurture" question, including the story of the secret "cold call" visit to meet his deadbeat father by two of his children in 1977 – an encounter that opened the floodgates of a previously unknown family history.

Wesley H. Bacon was most definitely a man of words. And, yes, he knew he had a voice to deliver them, modulated with nuance. His was a masculine voice to die for, a low but mellifluous bass-baritone. Hypnotic. Soothing. Calm. Comforting. Welcoming. In close conversation it was a relaxing low hum. On stage it was different. It could project not only in volume, but also in warmth, confidence, or authority, as needed. As you read through the selections in the *Wesley H. Bacon Reader*, may you hear his voice, feel his passion, sense his remarkable spark, and soak up his wisdom. Happy reading.

– **Reginald W. Bacon**
Newburyport, Mass.
June 14, 2015

*Dedicated to the family:
Past, present, and future generations unborn;
and to all seekers of "the spark" who may be
amused, enlightened, or inspired by the man's example.*
