



## Ace Fogarty

If there was only one word I could use to describe myself, it would be lucky! I was lucky to have been born with a healthy body and mind, lucky to have been born in the greatest country in the world and lucky to have been born after the Great Depression and World War II. Most of all, I was lucky to have had wonderful parents who taught me the importance of ethics, hard work, self-reliance and education. Yes, Ace is my birth certificate name, not a nickname. I am very

proud of the name given to me by my Grandfather Stacy, who was one of the early pioneers of aviation. He named his son Ace and since I was his first grandson, he wanted me to have the name also.

One of my most treasured honors was being voted the Most Talented Notable by my classmates. I'm still not sure I deserved it because there were so many talented and gifted students at Sarasota High School. I still remember when a group of students came in to my classroom, talked to the teacher and mentioned my name. My first thought was that something was wrong. When we stepped outside they said "Congratulations you've been nominated for Most Likely to Succeed and Most Talented. Which would you like to run for? I was stunned! When I heard the names of the other nominees I said, "I wouldn't stand a chance." They said, "You don't have to run." After thinking about it, I decided that it was an honor just to have my name on the list.

I grew up on a farm in Bradenton in a two room house with an outhouse and went to a tiny school called Prospect Elementary complete with an outhouse. My Mother found a way to enroll me in Bayhaven Elementary in Sarasota that did not have an outhouse. What a relief! She read that the best schools in Florida were in Sarasota, which is why she drove two round trips each day. Eventually we moved to Sarasota. Yeah! I knew my parents could never afford to send me to college. Luckily, I discovered two contests that made it possible.

I cannot write my biography without mentioning those two contests, both of which had a profound influence on my career and my entire life! The Soap Box Derby and the Fisher body Craftsman's Guild were sponsored by General Motors and were the two biggest international scholarship competitions in the world. In the Derby, a boy bought a kit that contained four wheels and two axles. The entire car including steering, breaking and

suspension systems had to be entirely built by the boy. In the Guild, a boy bought a kit that contained only four wheels. He had to design and build a scale model dream car of the future. I became totally obsessed with both competitions. I would often be building both cars at the same time, applying the same 40 coats of lacquer, wet sanding with an emery cloth between each coat and buffing with five grades of jewelers polish to achieve a mirror like finish. This was crucial for aerodynamic laminar flow on the racer and aesthetics on the model car.

Both my grandfathers were instrumental helping me in these efforts. My Grandfather Stacy was a true genius! He graduated with a degree in physics and an associate's degree in cosmology. He was an inventor, spoke several languages, played piano, French horn and tuba and could build anything! The Wright brothers recruited him and he spent most of his life working for them. During the great depression he retired, built a camper and made an arduous journey from Dayton Ohio to Bradenton, Florida with his wife and four girls. He spent endless hours with me discussing science and engineering crucial for my racer. My Grandfather Fogarty was a true entrepreneur, as were most of the Fogarty's who were among the first pioneers in Florida. They settled on the Bradenton River and started building 62 foot scooters in 1836 before Florida became the 27<sup>th</sup> state in 1845. My grandfather started Fogarty Brothers Moving with a horse and cart and gradually grew the business to include affiliated offices in most US cities. Luckily for me, he could get on the phone and order exotic woods and materials that were essential to the suspension system on my racer.

When I was nine years old our family drove to Dayton, Ohio to visit my mother's relatives and see the Soap Box Derby finals in Akron. We sat among 77,000 screaming fans and I was hooked! I couldn't wait to get home and build my first race car. I had previously built my first model car. Both first cars were crude, but I proved to myself that I could do it even though I was too young to enter the competitions.

I built seven Derby racers over seven years, each one incorporated better science and engineering and each one was faster than the one before. I came in second place in 1957 in the Florida West Coast Derby and second again in 1958. I was devastated since I had only one year left of eligibility. However, losing year after year was a "blessing in disguise". None of my racers were fast enough to win a scholarship in the world finals.

I built eight model cars, each one more creative and beautiful than the previous one. In 1958 and 1959 I won first place in the State of Florida, but to go to the world finals I had to win Florida and Georgia. Again, what seemed devastating at the time was another "blessing in disguise". None of my model cars were good enough to win a scholarship.

I was extremely lucky to keep losing over and over again because you can only go to the world finals once. My breakthrough in the Derby came in my last year of eligibility when I invented a very complex suspension system. It completely eliminated caster and camber and put precisely even pressure on all eight sets of bearings (two sets of bearings per wheel) at all times down the 1000 foot race track. My "ultimate suspension" also eliminated toe in and toe out at all time during the race and maintained perfect alignment.

In 1957 and 1958 I began to hear rumors that German scientists had developed a suspension system that allowed the race car to move forward on a level surface when the boy jumped up and down. It's perfectly legal for scientists to invent part or all the boy's racer, as long as the boy builds the entire car without any help. I learned in 1960 that the German national champ had this suspension system and had clocked the fastest time ever recorded in Germany. In the seventh race of the day I faced off against this German "supercar" and as I suspected he jumped five times before getting into his tuck position and immediately jumped out to a noticeable lead. If I lost this race, no scholarship! I got lucky and passed him just before the finish line in a near photo finish!

Derby press headquarters reported, "Then came the blistering finals with Townsend. Tampa's champ held a better time average as he entered the final race with Townsend. The Tampa champ came within a 'whisperer' of winning the 1959 world Soapbox Derby championship Sunday. Fogarty was nipped in a thrilling final duel with Townsend, the new king from Anderson Indiana." Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon both came over to congratulate me after congratulating the new champ. I really wanted to meet my heroes, the stars of Bonanza, who surrounded the champ, but they never came over.

In 1960 I placed second in the world finals of the Guild's model care contest out of 630,000 entries from eight countries. As I walked up to the podium to receive my trophy, the announcer said, "The previous year Ace Fogarty won second place in the Soap Box Derby which makes him the only student ever to win scholarships in both contests." As I walked back to the banquet table, two GM executives came up, gave me their business cards and said, "There may be a job waiting for you at GM when you finish college." On the flight back to Sarasota I realized that I forgot to ask them a crucial question; what is the best school in the U.S. to study industrial design? I wrote a letter to both and quickly got a response. Both executives said Pratt Institute was their number one choice and that the majority of their designers and engineers were graduates of Pratt.

In a wonderful book about the Guild by John Jacobus titled *The Great General Motors Talent Search*, John states, "from 1930 to 1968 millions of boys fascinated by cars joined the Fisher Body Craftsmans Guild. Approximately 600,000 each year making the Guild second only in

size to the Boy Scouts of America. The process of early identification of talent is well established. Can you imagine a concert violinist who was not receiving training by the time they were 10 years old? Same with most sports. The crème de la crème some as young as 11 or 12 were pampered courted and wooed by top GM executives. So sought after were they and so rare a talent that top GM executives corresponded with the top winners throughout their college years to ensure that they were on General Motors payroll when they graduated.

The guildsman magazine wrote, "16 year old wins \$8,000 in university scholarships. A junior in high school this fall, Ace Fogarty can begin to plan for college without concern about the rising cost of college tuition. He is the first youth in the history of either competition to win awards in both. Ace tells how he built his winning cars which paid high dividends for him. – Editor." At the beginning of my senior year I got a letter from General Motors asking me if I would like a letter of recommendation from them to Pratt Institute. Absolutely!

At the end of my freshman year at Pratt Institute the Sarasota Herald Tribune reported, "Ace Fogarty now majoring in industrial design at Pratt Institute has recently been awarded a scholarship by Ford Motor Company styling. Fogarty was given a \$1,200 Dean's scholarship for further study. During that year he was included on the Dean's list for the entire period, with the additional honor of having the highest grade index of the freshman class." I expected to do well in industrial design because I had essentially been studying that field since I was nine years old. The Derby is all about science and engineering. The Guild is all about creativity and aesthetics. These are the four essentials for industrial design. What stunned me was to have had the best GPS score out of 416 freshmen students in 14 degree programs. I received a letter from the Dean at Pratt congratulating me on my high GPA, but advising me that I could no longer "pyramid" scholarships. I could accept the honor of the scholarship, but not the financial reward.

I was proud to send my college records to General Motors at the end of my freshman year and asked if they could offer me any summer employment? They responded by saying, "We're sorry that we cannot offer you anything in styling. However, you have enough math and science to easily qualify for our apprenticeship program in engineering. Would you be interested?" Would I! General Motors engineering was part of the largest and most beautiful, state-of-the-art tech center in the world. During the summer we'd take a lunch out to the lakes and eat under the weeping willow trees, feed the swans, watch the water powered Alexander Calder mobile and watch the latest experimental show cars drive around.

The first year at Pratt was the luckiest and happiest year of my life! There was an amazing girl in my classes, but only for the first year, what luck! She was beautiful, smart, good at everything and bubbly. In fact her nickname was Bonnie Bubbles, my nickname was Face Ogarty. I consciously looked for one exceptional person in every endeavor to draw inspiration from, Bonnie was my inspiration. We came from very different backgrounds but shared the same ethics and values. I was introverted. She was extroverted. I was always too serious about everything. She could be serious, but also lighthearted, witty, fun to be with and bubbly. I want to learn those wonderful qualities and made it a point of getting to know her. We became friends and soon we were helping each other with homework assignments. Science was always my favorite subject so I could help her in classes like organic chemistry, materials and structure and production methods. She helped me in classes like political institutions, law and business practices. I finally got the courage to ask her out on a date and soon Bonnie Bubbles and Face Ogarty were going steady. After the end of the first year I wanted to propose, but I couldn't find the courage. Fortunately she could and she did and we were engaged! This was the luckiest and happiest day of my life and I'm grateful every single day for the most remarkable person I've ever known, my partner, my best friend, my wife.

At the end of our four years at Pratt, Bonnie and I graduated and got married. Then we packed my little Corvair, took a two day honeymoon on Cape Cod and drove to Detroit. I felt extremely lucky. I had my dream diploma from Pratt, my dream job at General Motors styling, and my dream girl sitting by my side! My boss at General Motors was Chuck Jordan, first place winner in the Guild in 1947. The majority of stylists were Pratt graduates and had also completed in the Guild. I had been designing cars since I was nine years old and fully expected to hit the ground running! Big surprise! I was humbled at the extraordinary artistry and of the designers. The stylists were designing long sloping windshields. However at that time styling was a division of engineering, so if engineering dictated a 47 degree front windshield, that's what it was going to be. GM was also very political. Everyone was trying to climb the corporate ladder. So when I received a surprise letter from Illinois Institute of Technology offering a full tuition fellowship for a masters degree program. I jumped at the chance. My game plan was to go back to GM and work in the marketing department to develop a fuller knowledge of the entire auto industry.

Life is full of unexpected surprises! After my first year at IIT, I needed a summer job. Fellowships and scholarships are wonderful, but they don't pay the rent. I applied for summer job at nine industrial design firms and they all said no. I decided to apply for a job at Marvin Glass and Associates and they hired me. I thought that inventing toys for the summer sounded like fun. I thought that toys were only invented by the big companies like Mattel and Hasbro. This was the biggest independent toy invention company in the world

by far. It had over 100 employees, over 50 model makers, full time patent attorneys and electronic experts. "Marvin Glass was the reigning genius of toys", according to Life Magazine. Some of his earliest hits were "Yackety-Yack Talking Teeth", "Busy Bitty Chickie" and "Ricochet Rifle". Life magazine said, "The toy business is a savagely competitive jungle when even the fittest can't survive unless their gamblers luck holds out." Marvin Glass wanted me to start immediately and my first assignment was to create line extensions for "Light Brite" since it had become a huge hit. That night I did about a dozen thumbnail sketches of ideas and presented them to the creator of "Light Brite". He loved three of the ideas and told me to pick model makers and have the prototypes ready the next week. We sold two of the models to Hasbro and they were manufactured. The inventor of "Light Brite" was one of the five partners and probably the most creative and prolific toy inventor in the world. I was extremely flattered when he invited me to sit in with the partners three times a week for brainstorming sessions. To my complete surprise I discovered that I had a talent that I never knew about. I could come up with ideas as fast as the other partners I could also come up with electro mechanical and electronic inventions and apply these devices to every category of toys. This was the most fun, creative, fast paced and exciting work I had ever done!

At the end of the summer I told Marvin that I had three credits to finish my Masters degree at IIT. He responded. "You don't need a Masters degree and I'm not letting you leave. You have three inventions being developed right now that I need to show next week." Then he said, "What if I double your salary?" The money was a secondary decision. The big question was, was I willing to forget about my Masters degree? I had planned to build my future at General Motors. Was I willing to forget about that? My decision was to give toy invention a little more time and forget about the Masters degree. General Motors wanted me back and I felt confident I could go back to them in the future

A few months later, I invented two toys that Marvin liked so much he called Hasbro and set up a meeting in New York the following week. I pitched both products to Merrill Hassenfeld, the President and CEO of Hasbro, and he bought both items on the spot. I listened intently at the negotiations of licensing and patent rights, advances and royalties. After two years at Marvin's I was the inventor and co inventor of over 60 products and I told Bonnie that we should start our own company! I began putting together a little machine shop in our two bedroom apartment.

After three years, I was willing to give up my future with General Motors and start my own company. When I met with Marvin Glass I told him I had accepted a job at a big industrial design firm downtown, which was true because I was under a one-year non competition

clause in my contract. Marvin was predictably furious and said we were going to make you a partner. If I had known I was going to make partnership, I probably would have stayed. However, had I stayed, I probably would have been killed! A few years after I left, one of the inventors went “postal”. He shot the president and then went from room to room shooting the partners and designers. I was lucky again.

If you’ve ever watched “Shark Tank, “Mr. Wonderful has often said, “I know the toy business and it’s a brutal business!” Our first meeting told us just how brutal it was going to be! We drove down to Cincinnati to pitch about six products to a company called Kenner. Our meeting was set up with the vice president who rushed in to the conference room and asked how long it would take. I said, “No longer than 30 minutes.” He responded, “I’ll give you 15 minutes.” After we rushed through our presentation, he said. “You wasted your time, but even worse you wasted my time.” As we drove back to Chicago, we remembered what our law professor had said the first day of class. He wrote in huge letters on the blackboard, “Never work on speculation!” However, I also remembered the lessons of the Derby and the Guild. I succeeded because I failed over and over again!

I was accustomed to the red carpet treatment from toy companies when I worked for Marvin. He had a huge track record of hits! We had a huge track record of rejections! After three years of saving every dollar we could and three years of inventing and building hundreds of toys and making hundreds of pitches to about 35 companies, we were broke. This was a total disaster! Should I go crawling back to GM? Should Bonnie and I go back to our industrial design firms in Chicago? But wait, I’m supposed to be lucky. How could I turn this disaster into a success story?

After enduring the brutally cold winters in Chicago and Detroit, I longed for beautiful sunny Sarasota. I called an inventor in New York City who had an office within walking distance to the Toy Center at 200 Fifth Avenue and had constant access to all the major toy companies. I said that Bonnie and I wanted to move to Florida and spend all of our time inventing toys. Was he interested in selling our inventions? He flew out to Chicago and came to our apartment. We showed him dozens of prototypes and he agreed to represent us. After we put the deal in writing, he started selling our toy inventions that we could not sell because he had a track record. We were on our way to Sarasota and a fresh start! Bonnie’s mother wrote a wonderful poem that accurately described our lifestyle for decades to come.

“Hurry, hurry, hurry there’s work to do. Hurry, hurry, hurry the deadlines due. Hurry, hurry, hurry we’re almost through. Hurry, hurry, hurry we must start anew.”

After working for several years with the New York Inventor, we found out that we had made a deal with the devil. He was selling our products around the world and not paying us. We wound up in a lawsuit that took over three years. It was physically, emotionally and financially

draining. We ultimately won the lawsuit, but the attorneys got most of the money. We gradually started having a number of hit toys and the companies started to welcome us. As we started to build a track record of success most of the companies wanted to come down to Florida anytime we called. Over the course of our long career, we have been granted many patents and have licensed our inventions to all the major toy companies. We have created and developed hundreds of concepts and well over 150 have been sold. Some of our toys have been in the marketplace for over 20 years. Nine of our toys have been named to the annual top 10 best selling toys listed by "Toy and Hobby World" magazine. Our longest selling toy, "Gloworm" is a bedtime soft night light for infants and preschoolers designed as a cute cuddly worm. When its tummy is pressed, the face lights up with a big smile and six soothing lullabies play.

"Gloworm" has been sold around the world for the past 33 years and has become a classic infant/preschool Hasbro toy. An extension of "Gloworm" called "Glo Friends" evolved into a line of toys that included small glow-in-the-dark vinyl characters, soft night lights, vehicles and play environments. The "Glo Friends" characters also became a Saturday morning cartoon show and an animated television movie called "Glo Friends Save Christmas" starring the voices of Sally Struthers and Carol O'Connor. We have also worked in the area of interactive electronic toys. These toys talk, light up and move in response to a child touching or talking to them. Our inventions were incorporated into the likenesses of Nemo from the movie "Finding Nemo", Sully from "Monsters Inc.", Barney from the "Barney the Purple Dinosaur" television show and Ernie from the television show Sesame Street. Our proudest moment is the toy industry came in 2000 when Bonnie and I were among the first 6 toy inventors inducted into Hasbro's Toy Inventors Hall of Fame.

Reflecting back on our lives, Bonnie and I feel lucky and grateful for many things. None more important than our wonderful daughter, Debra, who is our greatest blessing. She is very accomplished in her own right with a law degree and a passion for music. She created a band and has toured the U.S. and Europe. She's produced three albums and is working on a fourth. Needless to say, we are very proud. Next year Bonnie and I will celebrate our fiftieth wedding anniversary. Our life has been a long and incredibly rewarding one, filled with loving family and great friends. We were lucky on so many levels including being able to live in beautiful sunny Sarasota.