

INK ON YOUR HANDS

**Sal's Newspaper Crumbles
After Corporate Takeover**

JACK CRIVALLE

Ink on Your Hands, Sal's Newspaper Crumbles after Corporate Take Over

Published by Suburban Graphics Publishing

Oak Lawn, Illinois

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Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication data

Names: Crivalle, Jack, author.

Title: Ink on your hands : Sal's newspaper crumbles after corporate takeover / Jack Crivalle.

Description: Oak Lawn, IL: Suburban Graphics Publishing, 2023.

Identifiers: ISBN: 979-8-9872158-0-7

Subjects: LCSH Crivalle, Jack--Family. | Publishers and publishing--United States--Biography. | Newspaper publishing--United States. | Chicago Metropolitan Area (Ill.)--Newspapers--History. | Consolidation and merger of corporations--Chicago--History--20th century. | Family corporations--Anecdotes. | BISAC BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Editors, Journalists, Publishers | BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Business | HISTORY / United States / 20th Century
Classification: LCC Z473 .C71 2023 | DDC 070.5/092--dc23

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Printed in the United States of America.



*I dedicate this book to my father, Salvatore, the
hardest working man I ever knew.*

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PREFACE

This is a story of a hostile corporate takeover in the print media industry, an example of the corporate takeover craze of the 1980s, a byproduct of capitalism that perpetuates the inhumane and unethical part of business.

Hostile corporate takeovers are unethical. Period. They are methodical and lies and deceit are accepted forms of the business model. Truth is put on hold for what the takeover artists call the “to enhance the value of the company doctrine.” Friends turn against friends and families, and long-standing business trusts crumble.

I experienced this firsthand in 1987. In a strange way, I appreciate the experience, however, I would never want to repeat it. I learned important lessons from it about trust and human nature. Let’s look at what I witnessed.



CHAPTER 1

MEDIA VISIONARY

Sometimes businesses and cities are blessed with a man of grand vision, ethics, and integrity. A man who rises out of the American heartland to become a hero to his community by creating jobs, opportunity, prosperity, and dignity for those he meets. A man of great focus, drive, and honesty. And yet it happens that forces can work against such a positive figure.

In 1927, my father, Salvatore Crivalle, was born into poverty in a rough part of Chicago's South Side; an Italian immigrant community where resources and opportunities were scarce.

Sal's father Vincent Crivalle was a tailor and good at his craft. Although Vincent did not have much of an education or business knowledge, he knew enough to open his small tailor shop close to the Sixty-third and Halsted garment district. His store was located near Fifty-fourth and Harvard, close to the epicenter of the shopping district, and not far from where Sal and Vince lived at Twenty-seventh and Wells.

Sal went to work for his father as soon as he was able, at about age eleven. He worked hard and did many jobs including cleaning, delivering clothes to the people in the neighborhood, and general odd jobs. Sal did not get paid for his labor but did it to help his father.

The Great Depression would soon grip the country, hitting Sal's neighborhood particularly hard. This tight-knit group of immigrants had to fend for themselves and their families the best they could. At the time, there were few social programs in place to help the public, so when people lost their jobs, life became incredibly difficult. People went hungry; they lost their homes and their life savings. This event left lasting scars on the members of the South Side community.

These scars, however, didn't stand in the way of the values Sal's family instilled in him: honesty, integrity, and a strong work ethic. And the conviction that, if practiced consistently, these values would bring him the American Dream.

This community banded together for the common good. If someone lost their job, other residents would do whatever they could and give whatever they had to help. If someone was sick, their neighbors would bring soup. If a relative or neighbor was cooking something you liked, you could just stop in for a plate of good home-cooked pasta or meatballs. Although food was scarce, people became creative culinary experts, although perhaps they did not realize it. Since the area was mostly Italian, cooks would dress up a potato dish with garlic, onions, and bell peppers. It was cheap to prepare, and it filled a person up.

One day, Sal ran into one of his friends from the neighborhood. The kid had a date that night with a girl he really liked, but he had no money. Sal gave him what little money he had without expecting payback or anything else in return.

When Sal or someone in his family gave you their word, it meant

something, and a handshake was the same as a contract. There was a genuine sense of honesty and camaraderie.

Sal often reflected on the Depression and would talk about neighbors that were even worse off than he was. Unfortunate people who were without shoes or warm clothing in the winter. Many apartments lacked heat, as the primary source of heat was coal. Regrettably, Sal's neighborhood was kind of a dirty place with black smoke billowing from the coal furnaces of homes. In winter, the snow had a black tinge to it because of the coal pollutants falling from the air. Ironically, he could see the Chicago skyline from his porch; the prosperity he envisioned was waiting for him there.

Through it all, even as a kid, Sal maintained a sense of optimism and hoped his circumstances would soon get better. He maintained his system of values and he instilled these values in me as well. In fact, I've been shocked many times by people who lied to me and then chastised me for believing them, saying I was extremely gullible. When someone tells me something, I believe it. I am not a liar, so I do not fundamentally understand the concept. If you tell someone something and give your word, it had better be the truth as far as I'm concerned.

On top of clawing his way through the Depression, Sal served his country honorably in the United States Army during World War II. He spoke Italian and even some German. He picked up these languages while growing up since they were spoken by the general population of his neighborhood. What was even more to Sal's advantage was that he learned to type at De La Salle High School. These skills helped him process prisoners of war. It was not uncommon for the Army to capture 30,000 German and Italian prisoners in a week, and they all had to be processed and documented.

As bad as the war was, Sal seemed to enjoy his service, most likely because he was not relegated to a combat role but held an office

administrative position. The Army recognized his talents and work ethic, which went a long way for Sal. The Army was a well-structured environment, which was very different from the disorderly and wild neighborhood where Sal grew up.

After completing his tour in the United States Army, Sal utilized the government education benefits of the G.I. Bill. This brilliant government program provides veterans with funds for college education, unemployment benefits, and housing. Sal attended some schooling for art and business. He was an intelligent man, a voracious reader, and was self-taught in many ways. Even though Sal did not complete a degree, the education was a boost to his potential.

Despite all his hardships growing up, Sal believed in America. He was extremely patriotic and felt that America was the greatest country on Earth, a place where a person could be anything they wanted if they worked hard and sacrificed for it. Sal believed in free enterprise and the free-market capitalism that was the foundation of America. Most important to Sal was the ability to own your own business and be your own boss. While growing up, he knew a lot of people who owned mom-and-pop companies. His father owned his own tailor shop and most of the people in his neighborhood made a living from a variety of entrepreneurial ventures. Some people made it big, and some made a living but nearly everyone Sal knew who was in business seemed to do okay.

The United States of America came out of World War II twice as rich as it was going in; by 1955, it would double again. There was a severe housing shortage, so after the war, a building boom ensued. Men and women married in record numbers and needed housing to live in and raise their families. According to the Library of Congress, in 1940, the rate of home ownership was only 43 percent. This shot up to 62 percent by 1960. Suburban growth accelerated rapidly with some

suburban areas of the county growing by 121 percent. This economic boom had never been seen before in the United States.

Multiple building contractors built large subdivisions on the outskirts of major cities, according to an article in *Construction Physics*, written by Brian Porter, sometimes selling entire tracks of homes in a single day. New businesses and factories popped up regularly. The Southwest Cook County area was no exception. Ford Motor Company built the largest factory in the world on the Southwest Side of Chicago, manufacturing airplane engines and engines for other vehicles during World War II. Peter Tucker bought the factory in 1948 to build his Tucker 48, otherwise known as the Tucker Torpedo. He had cutting-edge ideas for the car, but a Security and Exchange Commission investigation forced him out of business. Peter Tucker alludes to the possibility that the big three automakers used their influence with the government to drive him out of business. This sad saga was portrayed in a 1988 movie *Tucker: The Man and His Dream*. Harry Chaddick, a large investor in Chicago, converted the 1,258,480 square-foot factory into a mammoth shopping mall in 1965 and called it Ford City. This mall served as an anchor for other businesses in the surrounding area. After this massive mall was built, several other businesses popped up as the baby boomer generation started to shop at local stores and eat at local restaurants.

Because of this phenomenal building boom, the southwest Cook County suburban area experienced massive growth as well. Small suburban towns that bordered Chicago—like Oak Lawn, Evergreen Park, Burbank, Hometown, Chicago Ridge, Bridgeview, Hickory Hills, Palos Hills, Palos Heights, Palos Park, Crestwood, and Orland Park—were experiencing massive growth.

The baby boom was well under way and the housing expansion was a great economic boon for the area as well. When people purchased

houses, they had to buy a variety of other items to accessorize them, like furniture, refrigerators, carpeting, landscaping, and appliances.

Sal was a handsome man at about five foot nine with light brown hair and piercing blue eyes. He resembled George Reeves, Superman on the TV series, in many ways. He became stockier in his later years, but this only presented him as having a more powerful frame. Sal always wore a white shirt, suit, and tie while he was working. He was a firm believer that a well-dressed man would be seen in a more positive light by those he did business with. He was well manicured, and his hair combed just so. Sal believed that before you leave for work, you should look at yourself in the mirror and ask, "Does my appearance command respect?"

Sal opted for a career in sales. His first job was selling light bulbs for the Edison Company. It was not a well-paying job, and my father felt that the better sales opportunities were not presenting themselves. So, he took a sales job with Englewood Electric, a company that had a contract with General Electric to sell all their goods throughout Chicagoland. He worked solely on commission.

The entire concept of sales is based on commission. If you work hard and sell a lot of products, you make a lot of money because commission is based on the percentage of sales. All good salesmen love commission sales. My father worked hard and became a go-getter.

He worked tirelessly for Englewood Electric, and he sold a multitude of appliances to department stores, hardware stores, furniture stores, and niche market stores. He would sell appliances all over southwest Chicago and the suburban areas for the next fifteen years. A good salesman on commission never has to ask for a raise. If he wants more money he just works harder and longer hours.

Around the early 1960s a new management concept was developed to cheat the salesman out of his commissions. If a salesman did well, the

company would cut his sales territory in hopes that he would work hard again and sell more product in the even smaller territory. They would cut commissions and do whatever they had to do to keep all salespeople at the same level. This is a concept that is contrary to capitalism and good sales acumen. Unfortunately, it was difficult for Sal to move on at this point—he was married and had three children. He was stuck.

In 1968, General Electric decided to sell directly to the consumer and forced Sal into making a career move. He heard about a job selling advertising for a small newspaper in Oak Lawn, Illinois. It was called *The Advertiser* and was owned by a man named Ernie Howell. Howell had started the paper before the strong economic growth and population shift from the city of Chicago to the suburbs started. Ernie knew business, and he knew the newspaper business somewhat, but he knew nothing about sales and was struggling to keep the paper viable. That was before he hired Sal as his super salesman. Sal's commission would be 15 percent for every dollar of advertising he sold. With a revitalized attitude, Sal hit the street running. It was a small operation with only a few employees, so a hard worker really had an opportunity to stand out. Advertising sales, for him, would prove lucrative, rewarding, and something he enjoyed doing.

Oak Lawn was geographically perfect for him. It was situated in the southwest Cook County suburban area bordering Chicago. The area was well maintained, middle-class with a variety of parks, small strip malls, theaters, restaurants, specialty shops, and playhouses. The robust traffic flow helped businesses thrive and attracted new businesses.

Streets and boulevards were lined with well-manicured trees and shrubbery. Church steeples dotted the landscape of local towns. It was from Sal's experience that most people who frequented these churches were good hard-working middle-class people with a good sense of community. There were a multitude of philanthropic organizations

like the Chambers of Commerce, Elks Club, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Scouts organizations, and Freemasonry.

There were many family-owned businesses in the area. Sal thrived on personal relationships and made friends with his customers. He built *The Advertiser* from an eight-page paper to a sixty-page paper. Life was good, and he was happy with his success. He even helped develop more salespeople to sell in expanded geographic areas of coverage by the newspaper. The owner had never seen prosperity before, and he did not know how to handle dealing with a professional sales team. He tampered with their sales commissions, which did not sit well with the team.

Unfortunately, the time came when Ernie Howell outgrew his own intellect. He thought he was brilliant, and it was his business acumen that had brought the business from a little neighborhood newspaper to the sixty-pager it had become. The owner's new notion was, "You do all the work and I'll take all the money." It is a strange phenomenon that certain business owners have a hard time writing a large check to a commissioned person. Some business owners cannot stand to write a super salesman a check that is almost as much as his, not taking into consideration that he had earned it and that was the deal. Some business owners do not know how to cope with it. Instead of fulfilling their end of the bargain, they figure out a different scheme.

Sal, along with the other salespeople, felt that if they were going to work as hard as they did, they would make the money for themselves; they decided to start their own newspaper, and they were confident the clients would move with them. They called their newspaper the *Suburban News & Sales*—a symbolic name with the idea of providing local news with advertisements by local merchants.

They outlined several brilliant concepts to make the transformation. First, the salespeople would own stock in the company they all would sacrifice so much for. Second, they would sell stock at a bargain

price to key customers that would form the foundation of the advertising in the newspaper. It was 1971; there was no cable television, no internet, no cell phones. No quick, cheap, print direct mailers. The smaller businesses were spending over 80 percent of their advertising budget on small newspapers.

Selling stock to the key advertisers was a brilliant move. Sal was able to lock in a good advertising customer and at the same time he was getting smart business partners.



A good customer was a husband-and-wife team that owned a small store called Dairy Basket. They were nice, down-to-earth people that were deeply rooted in the area and the store they owned had been there for a long time. They advertised every week and had some good specials. Their ads drew people to read *Suburban News & Sales*.

There was also a good customer and friend of Sal's named Ed Sirles. Ed owned a large real estate sales company that had about five offices in the area. Ed was a bold businessman that knew a lot about business, plus he knew a lot of people in the local area that he also brought in to advertise and promote *Suburban News & Sales*.

Additionally, there was a friend of Sal's from his old Italian neighborhood named Samuel Simone. He owned a small string of restaurants with good fast-food chicken that people liked. He was a nice man, a weekly advertiser and helped Sal develop other customers as well as boost readership.

This was a diverse group of businesspeople and advertisers. They ran businesses that were popular in the area and their ads brought readership to *Suburban News & Sales*. Most notably, they were all good, honest middle-class people that couldn't hurt a fly or steal a nickel from anyone.