In people’s lives, there are circumstances that lead them to their current place in the world, unfolding like a scene in a movie. Some people subconsciously seek the approval of peers or a parent to achieve goals, while others are motivated by the great fulfillment that comes from helping others.

For most, it is a mysterious mixture of these behind-the-scenes elements that direct us as we navigate through life. But, for the young Tim Hendrick, he just wanted to wear nice suits.

“I was managing a flower shop when a gentleman wearing a really nice suit came in, so I asked him what he did. He said ‘advertising.’ And I thought, ‘that’s it for me.’”

To be fair, this is the simplified version of how Hendrick launched into the advertising world. After receiving his undergraduate degree in psychology, he realized that he no longer wanted to pursue a career as a therapist. His love of business drew him into the world of advertising.

That formative incident in the flower shop is straight out of the pages of a Hollywood movie script. It’s a scene we’ve all seen before: the son of the blue-collar worker working at a retail store has a chance encounter with the “millionaire” and this single event changes the protagonist’s life course. It sure changed Hendrick’s.

If his life was indeed a Hollywood movie, the next scene would show Hendrick as an ambitious young man in his early twenties, delivering mail and schlepping art boards at Erwin, Wasey & Company. He would roll slide projectors to and from conference rooms as the agency was pitching to companies like Carnation, Gallo, Gulf Oil and Yamaha motorcycles.

“I had never seen such a large table, everyone was wearing really nice suits and seemed very important,” says Hendrick. “I was in charge of the 16mm projector, but didn’t thread the take-up reel correctly. So at the end of the film, I looked down at my feet and there was the entire film piled on the floor. Then they asked to see it again. I thought, ‘That’s it. I’m done. I would surely be fired.’ But, I held my breath, attached the lead to reel and it worked!”

He remained employed and continued gathering opportunities to see the advertising business from the inside. It wasn’t long before he worked his way up to manage client accounts and began to work with “Creative” to build campaigns and advertising strategies for companies like Avis Rental Car, Peugeot, and Alfa Romeo. Through hard work and a desire to continue to learn, Hendrick began to reap some of the perks notorious to the ad business.

“I had the best car stereo systems. I even had this huge mobile telephone that took up the entire center console of my car, but no one to call since I was the only one with one [a car phone],” says Hendrick with a chuckle, recalling some experiences the advertising business brought his way.

Hendrick remembers being backstage with Ringo Starr and George Harrison, “having a normal conversation.” He had the opportunity to fly in a corporate jet to a private museum to view a Faberge Egg collection. Hendrick modestly adds, “I have been to parties at the Playboy Mansion many times” making a point to explain he was, “at the Mansion, not the club.”
Behind it all, Hendrick learned very early that this was a job, a career. Although wining and dining clients was fun and exciting, at the end of the meal he would still have to return to the office to work. The perks of the job were great and the suits were nice, but it was Hendrick’s passion for his work and the business that kept him motivated.

Hendrick is not the Don Draper character out of AMC’s Mad Men. He is not a thrill seeker or “bad boy.” He is someone who is really passionate about the advertising industry and took his job seriously. Seeing the ad campaigns, print ads, and media spots come to reality were the type of thrills that keep Hendrick going in a business where ad people change companies as frequently as every three years.

Hendrick himself has had his share of job changes, transfers, and lay-offs reading like a survey course in Advertising History 101, including companies like BBDO and Bozel. He even found himself right in the middle of the dot.com boom with a new company called Netscape, “that had this new World Wide Web technology that none of us really understood or could have predicted its influence.”

“Everything was booming in Silicon Valley,” Hendrick says, “We were turning away business either because we didn’t like the viability of a company’s business plan or we just didn’t have the time to do the work.”

Fast forward to the movie montage of a well-dressed Hendrick laughing and meeting clients, flying with his wife to
“IT'S THE ONLY INDUSTRY WHERE THE PRODUCT GOES HOME IN THE ELEVATOR. BECAUSE THE ‘CREATIVES’ GO HOME EVERY DAY.”

private homes for dinners and pitching ideas to 3Com, Applied Material, and other Silicon Valley tech companies. But unlike Don Draper, Hendrick has the rare gift of foresight. At one point during the boom, he recalls telling his wife, "this is all great but it can’t last.”

And now with tenure at San Jose State, he is a little surprised that he is a professor. “I would have never thought I would be here and teaching. But I never expected some of the clients that had called to give us their business. We did the work, but I never saw it coming. You never do.” Just like in his career, Hendrick acknowledges that a willingness to learn and grow has kept him afloat. Coupled with his ability to adapt, Hendrick continues his love for the “business.” Now, expressed in a new way.

The movie has changed scenes again, this time showing an older, wiser Hendrick sharing his knowledge for the advertising industry with his SJSU students. Hendrick has traded in the fancy suits and ties for a more casual professor’s attire. As he declares, it’s “a new wardrobe for a new phase of life.”

He remains connected with the industry through the AFF and colleagues. The days of the nice suits and schmoozing with clients might be over, but Hendrick’s love of the advertising industry is not.

Bringing up a new generation in the ad business is exciting for Hendrick. “When I see their creativity and some of the work that the students are doing, that is really rewarding,” says Hendrick. “But most of all, [it’s] their passion. Some of them really have it, and in this business you need a strong passion to survive.”

According to Hendrick, one out of 15 pitches are accepted. “There are times when you have to tell Creative that their idea, that they have spent weeks on and probably stayed up all night to finish gets rejected,” says Hendrick. “You need a passion to keep you going. The moment you lose your passion for the business is the moment you need to get out.”

It’s easy for Hendrick to encourage his students to be passionate about advertising, because it’s something he’s always been. “I have been fortunate enough to get up everyday and do what I enjoy,” says Hendrick. “I tell my students the first day of class, ‘Show me the passion.’ When you do what you love, that’s success.”

the advertising department, just as the Silicon Valley advertising scene was starting to dry up.

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