

COMFORT THE AFFLICTED, AFFLICT THE COMFORTABLE

Dedicated To Carl Ally



The TV series *Mad Men* set in the 1960's, has been an invitation for many of us to remember. This is about Carl Ally, the agency that fired clients and often thought that advertising deserved a life of its own. These memories are dedicated to Carl.

WHERE THE RUBBER MEETS THE SKY

The Carl Ally Agency's first new business pitch was to Volvo. It made sense. Carl's advertising background was Detroit and he spoke auto. I remember his eye-rolling critique of a rival campaign: "That's where the rubber meets the sky."

The meeting with Volvo was last minute and in the rush to have something to show, the Ally team got the client's name wrong. The entire presentation, ads, storyboards and patter, were addressed to Vulva. Apparently everyone had a good laugh, or the client's English matched Ally's Swedish and that's how, by talking dirty, the agency won its first account.



In a few months, Ally became the hot new shop by successfully launching Volvo in America as the first car using safety as the reason to buy.

THE GOLDEN RULE

At Ally, Dick Raboy, later my partner in an agency of our own, was my favorite copywriter. He especially enjoyed writing about money. His first ad for an Ally financial client is still timely: “Want to make a small fortune? Start with a large one and invest it yourself.”



Dick even re-interpreted the Golden Rule and posted it on his office wall: “The Golden Rule. He who has the Gold makes the rules.” In his heart of hearts I think Dick wanted to be Carl. Carl made the rules. And that was how I got my job at Ally.

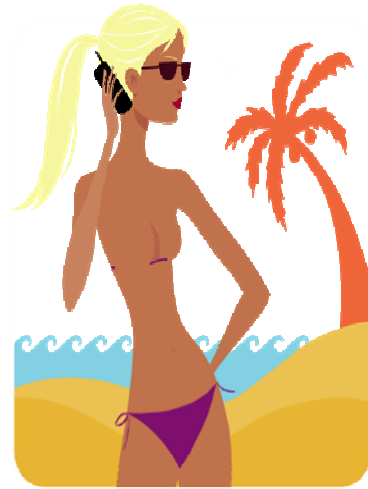
In the elevator on my way up to the Ally offices for an interview, I talked to a short, plump, rumped man who took a liking to me. “Where you going” he asked. “I have an interview at Ally” I replied, proudly. “That’s me.” He said. “Come.” He held out his hand. “I’ll walk you in and get you hired.” And he did.

AFFLICT THE COMFORTABLE

Ally’s approach was to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” It was more than a slogan. Carl didn’t often afflict the comfortable in media, but when he did, it was legend.

I remember a lengthy Playboy presentation stressing the magazine's original fiction. When it was over Carl turned to Hefner and said, for all to hear, "Take the tits out Heff and see what happens."

Carl loved cars, women and flying. He loved his people and tried to attract the best. The agency operated on a four day week for a year, primarily as a way of attracting people. And it worked. The ambitious ones would build a reputation at Ally and then go out and start their own agency. Carl didn't seem to mind.



VROOM, VROOM!!

Ralph Ammirati, art director and Marty Puris, copywriter (soon to be Ammirati and Puris) were assigned to the key Fiat account which had replaced Volvo at Ally. But both dreamed of the beautiful sister brand, Ferrari.

I recall Ralph returning to the office after a visit to Ferrari headquarters in Maranello where he had met Il Commendatore Ferrari himself. Ralph was blasé about the meeting, but was wearing a black Italian raincoat draped over his shoulders and driving gloves.

IT MAKES THEM WORK LATE

As in Mad Men, who was doing who was the hottest non-agenda item at the weekly Ally status meeting. Carl didn't discourage it. I met my wife Elaine at Ally. She was my secretary. When our relationship became serious, I told Carl because I wanted him to hear it from me. He smiled. "I like it when my people fool around. It makes them work late."

An Ally client meeting was always unpredictable, especially when it featured Carl. I remember one scheduled in Akron. I got a message to meet Carl at the East side boat basin which was within walking distance of the agency.

When I got there I found him and a helicopter. Carl was taking a helicopter lesson by flying me to Newark Airport where the plane he would then fly to Akron was waiting. He made up by letting me pilot the plane home. His encouraging advice, as he pretended to doze in the co-pilot's seat, was "Don't worry. Most planes like to fly." I almost believed him.

If Carl had asked to meet him at the top of Kilimanjaro at 6 AM on January 13, I think I would have been there.

Erwin Ephron

