

# WHEN PIGS FLY

*How a Fast-Food CEO Used  
His Wits to Save His Bacon*

MULTI-FRANCHISE RESTAURANT OPERATOR  
**DOUG AUGUSTINE**  
WITH JOYCE BEVERLY

## **WHEN PIGS FLY: How a Fast-Food CEO Used His Wits to Save His Bacon**

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This book is a memoir. I have made a good-faith effort to convey the truth and essence of what happened. Dialogue, especially in scenes from the distant past, represents what was spoken based on my recollections.

For information on quantity purchases, interviews, or other inquiries, reach the author through the website, [dougaugustine.com](http://dougaugustine.com).

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# PROLOGUE

*“All of our dances will end someday . . .”*

— JOHN P. WEISS

## OCTOBER 2000

I’m not the only guy who ever ran out of money in Vegas.

In the Paris Hotel, a sky-blue ceiling cast the perpetual optimism of a cloudless day. Ordinary cares of life were as far away as reality. In a building straddled by a replica of the Eiffel Tower, was anything real?

I was enjoying myself at a nationwide convention of Taco Bell franchisees with my mother and grandparents. Our delegation represented Georgia-Texas Enterprises, founded by my parents in 1988. We operated seven Taco Bells in the Atlanta market at the time. Business was on our minds, but we were also having a good time simply being together. I hadn’t felt this happy in a long time.

Midway through the weeklong conference, we chatted over coffee with other franchisees between sessions. Easily a thousand owner/operators like

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us were at this annual event. It was fun reconnecting with friends we had met at meetings like these over the years. The national gatherings served triple duty as a strategic planning retreat, family reunion, and well-deserved break. These hardworking entrepreneurs, who seldom blocked out a vacation day on the calendar, enjoyed comparing metrics and challenges.

“How’s sales?” “How are food costs?” “What are you doing about staffing?”

Any of these questions was a guaranteed conversation starter.

We also looked forward to the company’s big reveals. The upcoming year’s marketing calendar and new commercial campaigns always generated a big buzz.

My break ended abruptly when my Blackberry rang. A lump rose in my throat when I saw the number. Charles, our CFO, would not be checking in to see if we were having fun. He had a problem on his hands back home. Otherwise, he wouldn’t be calling. Feeling the tension humming over two thousand miles of airwaves, I reluctantly answered.

“Hey, Charles, what’s up?”

“Dude, we can’t make payroll,” he said.

They must pump pure oxygen into the atmosphere of Vegas hotels. The whole place is a magic act. Otherwise, how do people remain upright, even cheerfully applauding, while thousands of dollars disappear? What else prevented me from having to sit down right there on the floor of the crowded room?

“I don’t know what to tell you right now,” I said. “I’ll call you back.”

I hung up, thoughts racing through my mind, all lightheartedness forgotten. *How would we get through this?* If there’s one thing I know, it’s that when you don’t pay people, they don’t show up. We were done.

“What’s wrong?” my mom asked.

Brittle from grief and years of entrepreneurial trauma, her eyes filled with fear. Shock trumped my instinct to protect her.

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“We don’t have money for payroll.”

She began to cry. I wanted to cry too.

Huddled with my family, I spoke out loud my first thought:

“Grandpap, can I borrow some money?”

My instinct was to turn to my strongest supporters. From opening day, my mother’s father had been the biggest cheerleader of this business. He and Grandmother were endlessly encouraging.

“How much do you need, son?”

“Probably somewhere around a hundred grand.”

“I would be happy to loan you a hundred thousand dollars, Doug, but can you pay me back?”

The question deserved an honest answer.

“Grandpap, I can’t sit here today and tell you as a man that I can pay you back. I can’t guarantee you that. Right now, I don’t know what I can do.”

“Then I can’t give you the money. I don’t want to see you pour more resources into a black hole.”

Oh, the irony of hearing those words in Vegas, where money falls into an endless void twenty-four hours a day. I didn’t blame him, though. If I were him, I wouldn’t loan me the money either.

Who gives a hundred G’s to a twenty-eight-year-old who’s spent three years running an exhausting race against the crisis and chaos of a group of underperforming fast-food restaurants? Finally, catastrophe had caught up with me. How the heck was I supposed to handle this? Men twice my age would fall apart over this news.

Grandpap was right. Like the guy losing borrowed money all night at the roulette table, I was in a hole. A deep one.

“God,” I prayed, “please let this be the bottom.”



PART ONE

*Base Camp*



*Six-(almost seven)-year-old me with Bart Starr*

## CHAPTER ONE

# Foundations

*“If you don’t ask, the answer is always no.”*

— JEFF TWEEDY

**I WAS SIX YEARS OLD, TWO MONTHS SHY OF SEVEN**, when my father, Eugene James Augustine, introduced me to one of the loves of his life.

It was 1978, and we were living in Detroit. The Green Bay Packers played the Detroit Lions at Pontiac Silverdome on Sunday, September 3. Somehow, my dad found out where the Packers were staying and made plans to put us in their path. On Friday night before the game, we headed to the hotel to stake out a position in the lobby.

Of all the facts I could tell you about my dad, none would be truer than this: he loved the Green Bay Packers. A native of Wisconsin, he had grown up barely a hundred miles from Lambeau Field, when it was still

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known as City Stadium. When Vince Lombardi became head coach, my father was fifteen years old.

I think he saw it as a parental and patriotic duty to convert me from my allegiance to the Dallas Cowboys. Born in Fort Worth, I cut my teeth thirty miles from Texas Stadium. While I certainly had a soft spot for the Packers, like my dad, I was loyal to my roots. So much so that I thought I should wear my Cowboys shirt for our stakeout, but he helped me see the strategic wisdom in swagging for the Packers that night.

I don't know who was more excited. Nearly thirty years separated our ages, but my dad and I were both kids on Cloud Nine. Armed with a pen and printed notepad, "From the desk of Gene Augustine," my little-kid enthusiasm was Dad's key card for accessing heroes he'd followed for years. His obvious pleasure gave me more pleasure, too.

My father knew many of our prospects by sight, but I watched in general for men who looked like football players, the giants of the day. As the team members slowly made their way down for a meeting, I approached the stream of massive men dressed in coats and ties.

"Excuse me, sir, may I have your autograph?"

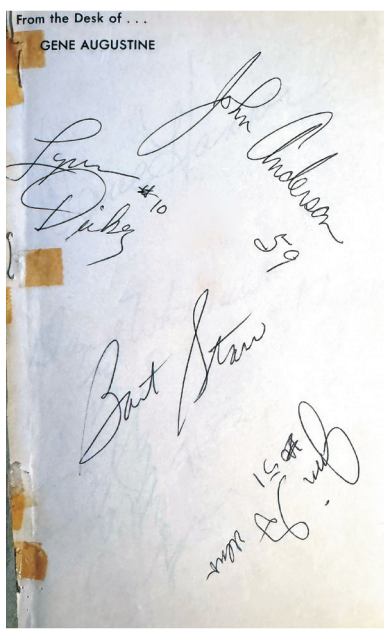
Sometimes, they'd be alone. Other times, two or three emerged at once. In every case, these athletes were kind to the tow-headed boy in the lobby. Some asked my name and wrote notes, "To Doug." Players penned jersey numbers under signatures ranging from clear-as-day to barely legible.

The pint-sized kid in the Packers shirt must have been irresistible because, after a good two hours in the lobby, I came home with twenty signatures representing nearly half the team. A carefully bound home-made autograph book, fourteen pages of signatures, photos, and even a sketch by my dad, who was a pretty good amateur artist, preserved one of the most memorable highlights of my childhood.

Head coach Bart Starr anchors the first page. He also took time for

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a photo, the Super Bowl ring on his right hand weighing so heavy on my shoulder that my arm sagged.



Quarterbacks Lynn Dickey, #10, and David Whitehurst, #17, also posed for pictures. John Anderson, #59, who logged 146 games in his career with Green Bay, also signed the first page.

As the years went by, our shared love of football strengthened, as did my understanding of the valuable lesson I learned from my dad that night: if you show up and ask someone for something, there is a good chance you will get it.



My father grew up in Wausau, Wisconsin, where his father, a raging alcoholic, made a meager living in a paper mill. The family was dirt poor.

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They bathed once a week in a washtub. My dad's first bike was a girls' model, a hand-me-down from his sister.

A pretty good athlete, Dad played baseball in high school, where his father embarrassed him by showing up for games drunk. His mother was tough, really tough, the way the wife of an alcoholic has to be. The disease and dysfunction left their mark on the family. With no real father figure or role model, my dad knew what he did not want to be. Everything else he had to figure out for himself.

Besides a fierce, lifelong loyalty to the Packers, three character traits followed my father from his Wisconsin childhood: a love of working with his hands, a gritty determination to make something of himself, and the courage to leave behind an impoverished childhood in search of a better life. That journey began in the Navy.

Dad met my mother while he was serving as a dental technician at the Naval Air Station in Key West, Florida. Jane Anne Squires, the oldest of eight, lived with her devoted Catholic family in Miami. Mutual friends introduced them on a blind date. When her father saw that the relationship was getting serious, he told my dad, "If you're going to marry my daughter, you have to go to college."

Later, when my father followed Mom's family to Texas, Grandpap helped pay Dad's way through the University of Texas at Arlington. Remarkably, my father paid him back, even though Grandpap never asked him to. It's the kind of person he was, the kind of people they both were—honest men of integrity.

My parents struggled to start a family. After six years of marriage, they adopted my older sister, Lisa. Almost immediately, Mom became pregnant, and I was born eleven months later. It was like having twins, my mother says. Four years after I came along, my sister Jennifer was another happy surprise.

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After my younger sister was born, Dad's career moved our family eleven hundred miles northeast from Fort Worth to Detroit, where he worked for Olsonite, a company that made toilet seats. "Tops for bottoms," that's what my father said. "I sell tops for bottoms."

At Olsonite, Dad often traveled to one of the company's manufacturing plants, Royal Molded, located in Newnan, Georgia. He fell in love with the town, the climate, and the people.

"If you ever retire," he told the vice president there, "I want your job. I think I'd like it here."

Dad was recruited away from Olsonite by Gott Corporation, a startup company that made the ubiquitous orange coolers you see on the sidelines of athletic events. This time, we moved eight hundred miles southwest from Michigan to Arkansas City, Kansas, situated right on the border of Oklahoma, about an hour south of Wichita. We lived there from the time I was in second grade through my freshman year in high school.

Having three kids in five years, my parents' strategy for maintaining order was "divide and conquer." My father raised me. Mom, a school-teacher, raised my sisters. It might not have been an official arrangement, but it was what they did. Dad was the disciplinarian. Mom was the caregiver, organizer, and educator, both by nature and by training. They agreed on the fundamentals of life and parenting, if not the approach.

"God, family, work," my father would say. "You've got to have these priorities, and they've got to be in that order."

Educated in Catholic schools, my mother loved teaching and thrived in the classroom. She loved being with children, and they loved her. This remained true all her life. Mom set aside her career when she and my father started a family but returned when my youngest sister went to kindergarten. Mom made sure we had the kind of education she'd been brought up with by teaching in the Catholic school we attended in Kansas.

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Mom taught second grade in the morning, kindergarten in the afternoon, and catechism classes for kids who attended public schools. Her responsibilities included bringing students through first communion and reconciliation, as well as her duties in the classroom. We never missed Mass before school in the morning or on Sundays when we attended together as a family.

We were exceptionally close to our parish priest in Kansas, Father Kevin Trayers, who famously showed up most Friday nights with pizza. He was a great friend and mentor, and everyone in the family loved him.

A gifted salesman, Dad provided an excellent income for our family, but it meant he wasn't home a lot. When he was home, he stayed busy with projects around the house, always juggling several at once. I never saw him sitting still. For instance, while building a successful sales career in Michigan, he finished all the interior carpentry in our home, which he had purchased unfinished. After dinner in the evenings, until eight or nine o'clock at night, he tackled home improvements. He continued on weekends, all day long, except for when we went to church. He was always doing stuff.

Whether he was framing a room, building a table, or completing other projects or chores, he had me close by, watching. Hours and hours of my childhood were spent watching my father work. And while he worked, he talked to me.

"Measure twice, cut once, Doug," he might say. Or "If a job is worth doing, it's worth doing right."

He was meticulous, methodical, and precise but also creative—impressively so. When we moved to Kansas, he bought a house with an unfinished basement, which he completed himself, putting my bedroom down there. I saw him build it from scratch. I didn't have a lot of say in

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what he was doing. Sometimes, he would ask me for a tool or to bring him some other item, but other than that, my role was to observe and learn. While he worked, he would tell me what he was thinking.

“Hey, I’m going to build some shelves over here for your books and stuff.” “I’m placing your closet here.” I’m putting insulation over these concrete walls to keep your room warmer in the winter.” Comments like that were more informational than up for discussion.

He must have consulted me on the décor, however, because my dad, the die-hard Packers fan, decorated my room in Dallas Cowboys colors. I’ll never forget it. One wall was navy blue. The other three were finished with gray and blue striped wallpaper. There was no HGTV. He didn’t look at a picture in a magazine. He just had a vision for what it could be, and he did it.

A perfectionist, he taught me that details matter and to take pride in my work. He talked to me all the time about working hard. His expectations were high. He wanted things done right. Every project was like a puzzle, and I loved watching him put it together. I loved seeing him create something out of nothing.

Gradually, my father taught me to take care of stuff around our home, too. He was a hands-on teacher, demonstrating more than he explained. He showed me how to do a chore—one lesson was usually all he ever gave—and then I became responsible for that task. For example, he kept his vehicle spotlessly clean and taught me his section-by-section system for washing a car. I learned to focus on one area, like the front driver’s side door, cleaning just that part of the car really well, then washing it off and moving on to the next section. One by one. Until it was done.

After a careful tutorial, he said, “All right, Doug, you’re going to wash our cars. This is your job.”

He taught me to mow the lawn by breaking it down in sections, too. I learned to focus on bite-sized chunks of a task rather than getting

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overwhelmed by the whole job. Once he showed me how to cut the grass, from then on, he expected it to be done without any nagging.

He showed me how to clean the pool, giving careful instructions about water chemistry, then said, “Okay, Doug, you’re going to clean the pool every week. And you can’t mess this up because you’ve got to keep the chemicals and stuff balanced.”

By the time I was ten years old, I was expected to complete these and other chores before my father came home for dinner. Dad wasn’t the kind of guy who would say, “Great job, Doug! You did an excellent job washing the cars.” He wasn’t big on praise or compliments, but he didn’t have to be. I knew when my work was good because he had shown me what excellence looked like.

I took my time and mimicked his processes. I wanted to please him. More than anything, I wanted his approval. I wanted to make him proud. My biggest fear was letting him down.



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Dad worked his way up to vice president of sales at Gott. Because it was a startup, the leadership team was offered stock instead of high salaries. As a result, my father accumulated a tremendous amount of stock in the company.

In 1987, Gott Corporation sold itself to Rubbermaid. The new ownership team gave Dad a choice—he could continue to work for the company but not as a vice president, or he could leave with two shares of Rubbermaid stock for every one share of Gott stock that he owned. Dad took the stock and returned to work for Olsonite, which deployed him to the one-hundred-fifty-year-old Southern town he'd fallen in love with years earlier. This time, we relocated nine hundred miles east to a town thirty miles south of Atlanta.

I was fifteen years old when we unloaded the U-Haul in Newnan, and I was not happy about the move. This was before I discovered what it meant to live in the Southeastern Conference. When I learned this, I was mad as hell.

I had grown into my love of football in Kansas, where, as a freshman, I was my high school's starting quarterback. It never occurred to me that star status would not follow me to the quarterback position at Newnan High School. It turns out football is as serious as business gets in the South, and Newnan was an incubator for the National Football League.

No fewer than six NFL players hail from Newnan or one of the other small towns in Coweta County. People like Karsten Mario Bailey, wide receiver for the Seattle Seahawks; Keith Brooking, linebacker for the Atlanta Falcons, Dallas Cowboys, and Denver Broncos; Calvin Johnson Jr., a.k.a. Megatron, wide receiver for the Detroit Lions; John Martin Keith, safety for the San Francisco 49ers; William Lutz, placekicker for the New Orleans Saints and the Denver Broncos; Alec Ogletree, linebacker for the St. Louis Rams and the New York Giants; Michael Cheever, center for the Jacksonville Jaguars; and Vernon Strickland, a

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linebacker who walked on at Georgia Tech and went on to the NFL. Some of these guys are younger than me, but the wheels of the program that carried them to success were rolling fast by the time I arrived in Newnan.

For that matter, baseball was a major sport in my new hometown too. An equal number of Major League Baseball players are also from this new and strange place. Far from being a star, I wasn't big enough, fast enough, or strong enough to stand out anymore. I was literally out of my league.

Having grown up in Catholic schools, the education system itself was another huge adjustment for me. There were no parochial schools in Coweta County. Furthermore, five hundred kids were in my class, which, to me, felt enormous.

In Kansas, I was the cat's meow—super popular, a great athlete, the clichéd big fish in a small pond. When we moved to Newnan, I lost all my friends and connections. I was a fish out of water and a very small one in a huge ocean. For a couple of years after our move, I was seriously depressed.

“Boys, we've got to get bigger. We've got to get faster. We've got to get stronger.”

The booming voice and Southern accent of Newnan High School Coach Max Bass are vivid memories of my first experiences in our new hometown. Coach Bass was a big guy in a land of big guys, and I was the scrawny new kid. “Bigger. Faster. Stronger.” Coach Bass had these words on repeat.

“Doug, you can accomplish anything you set your mind to if you're willing to work hard,” Dad always told me. “Never take no for an answer.”

I'm an optimist. I believe in everyone's ability to improve, but I'm also a realist, and looking around, it was clear to me that I was never going to be big enough, fast enough, or strong enough to play on this field. Despite

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the odds, I headed to the weight room to gain some strength and be as competitive as I could be in this new world.

I couldn't afford a gym membership, and my parents would not pay for one for me, so I pestered the owner of the Newnan Racquetball and Health Club to give me a job cleaning bathrooms and wiping down equipment. Eventually, my persistence paid off. I became a gym rat, working on Sunday afternoons and a couple of times during the school week for \$2.85 an hour and a membership.

On Sundays, the owner assigned me to work upstairs to make sure no one on the second floor was dropping weights, which he was petrified would crash through the floor. This is where I met Bobby Burgess, the guy who introduced me to a whole new world.

It was his shirt that first got my attention. The front read "Coffee's Gym" with a picture of a bodybuilder and a squat bar. The back said, "Grow or Die."

"That's the coolest shirt in the world," I said. "Where'd you get that?"

He grunted.

Bobby, I learned, was a man of very few words. It was never easy to get information from him.

"Olympic weightlifting gym," he said.

"Tell me more about Olympic weightlifting."

He side-eyed my 150-pound build.

"It's hard," Bobby said. "Not for sissies."

Challenge accepted. For six months straight, I drove that guy crazy, accosting him as soon as he came into the gym.

"I want to know more," I would say to him. "I want to know what you're doing."

Gradually, Bobby started showing me some of the Olympic lifts, and I began trying to do them. Often described as gymnastics with weights, Olympic weightlifting requires you to be fast, agile, flexible, and

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absolutely fearless. Once you get the bar in the air, you literally throw it down. The problem was that not only was dropping weights prohibited where I worked, but it was also my job to make sure people didn't do this. If you wanted to see the owner of the gym come flying up the stairs with his hair on fire, just drop a weight. He'd come running, ready to beat the you-know-what out of whoever was responsible. So there I was, trying to execute lifts without getting in trouble or fired.

Finally, Bobby agreed to take me to meet Ben Green.

"Before we both get kicked out of this place," he said.

From the exterior, the single-car-garage-turned-gym behind Ben's house gave up few secrets, but when I stepped inside, I knew I had found my place in this new world. Ben had been lifting weights since he was a teenager. In the mid-'80s, he won the World Masters title in the 40–44 age group. He also coached several lifters who represented the USA in the Olympics, including Michael Jacques (1988) and Bryan Jacob (1992 and 1996).

Ben and I hit it off immediately. He demonstrated a few Olympic lifts, and I fell in love with the sport. From then on, I was either working at the gym or lifting weights. I thrived on seeing how much more I could lift, doing the same thing every day and improving incrementally, a theme that stuck with me.

John Coffee, a pioneer coach of female Olympic weightlifters, drove down from his gym in Marietta once a week to work with Robin Byrd, who lived in Newnan. Robin competed in the Olympics in 2000.

Ben's gym turned out to be a fraternity of misfits, a Wild West of weightlifting. Everyone there was eccentric and, in some cases, flat-out weird, but no one judged you. As different as we all were, we got along well and were respected all over the country for how we competed. It was

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all about encouraging each other to lift a shit-ton of weight overhead. We lifted on a platform flanked by park benches where others observed and cheered. A squat rack hugged the back wall. If one of us got hurt, we wrapped the affected body part in an Ace bandage and kept lifting.

“Wrap the dog shit out of it and come on,” Ben would say.

I thrived in this no-wimp zone.

As often as possible, I went to Ben’s hidden world, where I lifted as much as two hundred and seventy-five pounds overhead and then threw the weights down on the ground as hard as I could. I felt like such a badass.

My efforts weren’t enough to land me on the football team, but the sport helped me find my way out of the darkness. I was furious with my parents, who had no idea how depressed I was. I was mad about moving. I didn’t have many friends, and I had completely lost my identity. Instead of losing myself in drugs and alcohol, or who knows what, weightlifting became my coping mechanism, my escape. Weights were an outlet for my anger, which, after thousands of slams to the ground, I was finally able to release.

Through Ben and the training, I progressed to the point that I could squat over four hundred pounds, more than twice my body weight. Ultimately, I ranked in the top ten nationally among high school athletes in my weight division—165 pounds—for the Clean and Jerk, one of two Olympic lifts.

Ben Green remains one of the greatest influences in my life. The discipline he taught gave me a structure, routine, and process. More importantly, I learned how to deal with change and discomfort. It shaped who I am in ways I couldn’t understand at the time.

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While I was busy mastering a new sport and my new environs, my parents took their entrepreneurial pursuits to another level. The gig economy has nothing on my father. He always looked for opportunities outside of his primary job.

In Kansas, when Dad traveled extensively for Gott, he was frustrated by the lack of dry cleaning facilities in the town where we lived. He was very particular about his appearance. Looking successful was important to him. Therefore, he took his clothes to be cleaned professionally, which meant driving an hour each way to dry cleaners in Wichita, where the fastest turnaround time was three days. This ridiculous inconvenience drove him crazy, so he talked a friend into building a shopping center, where he rented space and fixed his problem by becoming a franchisee of Comet Cleaners, which specialized in one-hour service. He went from making two round trips to Wichita, spending four hours on the road, and waiting three days for his dry cleaning to having his clothes cleaned nearly instantly.

Mom, to be fair, was along for the ride and not necessarily all that happy about it. When the dry cleaners opened, managing day-to-day operations fell to her. She'd open the cleaners before going to school in the mornings. In the afternoons, after teaching all day, she was back at the cleaners to close. Eventually, she gave up teaching second grade in the mornings.

When we left Kansas in 1987, Mom was adamant.

“We’re not taking the dry cleaners with us.”

Once he had a taste of owning his own business, though, my father was ready for more. Not long after we moved to Newnan, Dad saw an ad in the Atlanta newspaper about Taco Bell franchising. He had never heard of Taco Bell, had never eaten an item on the menu—my father was a meat and potatoes guy—but he was intrigued.

“Have you lost your mind?” my mother said when he told her about it. “We don’t know anything about the food business! Absolutely no way. We’re not doing it.”



