



Citizen Cain

By Glenn Miller

Life is funny, full of twists and turns. Many times we are going along minding our own business until fate intervenes. A case in point is the protagonist of arguably the most critically acclaimed movie in history, *Citizen Kane*. Charles Foster Kane, a son of a poor gold miner in Colorado, had his life turned upside down when his father struck it rich. He was sent east to become the pupil of a financial guru. Had not fate intervened, young Mr. Kane might have finished his boyhood in Colorado, riding his sled and later becoming a ski instructor.

Of course, *Citizen Kane* is fiction. The hero of this story, Jack Cain, has had a career in baseball that could have been scripted in Hollywood. Jack was a Portland guy, graduating from Grant High School in 1961. After graduation he operated a couple of service stations that were very successful and he wed Mary, his partner in life and business.

As Jack has often stated, he had successful gas stations but he hated to turn the key in the lock to open them up. He needed a change, so he and Mary were looking for a totally different business to invest in. They almost bought a sporting goods store in Hillsboro. Nah. One day Jack was perusing the business classifieds and noticed that the Class A baseball team in Walla Walla was for sale. Eureka!

Before plunging in, Jack introduced himself to Dave Hirsch, the flamboyant general manager of the Portland Beavers. Dave was notable for smoking an outrageously large cigar while handing out \$100 bills to Willie Stargell for hitting bombs out of Civic Stadium. The Pirates were in town to play the Beavers in an exhibition game. One of the blasts Willie hit landed in the balcony of the MAC club, a feat that has approached legendary status. Ask any baseball fan in town; they were there.

Jack asked Dave for advice as to what questions to ask the Walla Walla owner, and Dave graciously assented. After a quick tutorial from Dave, it was off to Walla Walla.

They met the owner and found his asking price for the team was \$400,000, an outrageous sum. Jack and Mary decided that was too much. Since they were there anyway, they decided to stay and watch a ball game. The Walla Walla opponent was Bend. Jack remarked to Mary, "Wouldn't it be nice if Bend was for sale?" A guy seated in front of them overheard their conversation, turned around and said that he heard the Bend team had some financial problems and *was* for sale.

Kismet. Jack and Mary had scheduled a vacation in Bend. While there, he introduced himself to the Bend ballclub's owner and asked him if the club was for sale. He answered that "Everything's for sale if the price is right." Jack and Mary mortgaged everything to raise enough cash to buy the team. It was a gutsy move considering they had two teenagers and a grade-schooler.

The Cain's Bend teams were affiliated with the Phillies, Angels, and Rockies. The operation had an apple pie kind of feel. His kids sold tickets and manned concessions. Other young people were concessionaires, ushers, etc. Jack rode the riding lawn mower in the off season and he and Mary ran the day-to-day affairs of the club. They played in a little jewel of a ball park in Bend's heart.

They stayed 14 years. The first game in the Colorado organization's history was played in Bend, two years before the big league team took the field. Ten players on that team played in the big leagues. They would probably be there today if fate hadn't intervened once again.

Joe Buzas moved the Portland Beavers to Salt Lake City in 1993. Jack filed for the rights to Portland hoping to move the Bend club here. The PCL wouldn't relinquish the rights, saying there would be a PCL club here in 1995. Portland had no pro baseball in 1994, and guess what? The PCL couldn't get anyone to operate a franchise and had to relinquish its rights to the Portland territory anyway.

Jack moved the Bend Rockies to Portland in 1995. The club drew 20,000 people on opening day, a number that the previous operators in Portland could only dream of. Jack and Mary enjoyed much success in Portland. At one time the team had the record for total attendance in short season Class A ball. The fans didn't care that Portland was in the lowest minor league classification; it was *baseball*.

The saga continues. A group, Portland Family Entertainment, was formed with the goal of returning PCL baseball to Portland. They would buy out Jack and Mary and also purchase the Portland Timbers. If the city of Portland ponied up the money to refurbish Civic Stadium, PFE would pay off the debt to do so and run the Beavers and Timbers operations. Jack and Mary sold in 2000, thinking that it would be a good thing for Portland to have Class AAA ball. It was time to retire.

PFE sank like the Titanic. Amid a sea of red ink, the PCL repossessed the team in January, 2004. The league assumed ownership and asked Jack to run the team. So much for retirement. After a year or so, the league found an owner who bought the team and Jack became a minority owner. The club was resold; the Cains are no longer financially involved. Jack, however, still works as a consultant to the current franchise.

That's the story of our Citizen Cain. Sometimes, "truth is stranger than fiction".