



Interview with Adam Toback on his Short Documentary, “Harv”

By Arthur Glover



So, let’s start by giving some back story to our readers of who Harv is exactly.

Adam Toback: Harv Toback is my father. He passed away at the beginning of September from Kidney failure. My Dad was an artist, gallery curator and Ad Man during the golden age of advertising on Madison Avenue throughout the 60s and 70s. During the last few years of his life, he created an art gallery at his Dialysis center, which featured the work of the patients, doctors, nurses and medical staff there. It’s hard to summarize my father briefly, but what I can say is that he was loved by everyone who knew him. Even people who had only met him once or twice. He was truly one of a kind.

What drew you to produce the project?

My father's health really started to decline significantly a few years ago, but he never stopped pursuing what he loved, and that was art. Both creating art and curating the work of other artists was his true passion. He had always wanted to have his own art gallery, and when he saw all the empty wall space at his dialysis center, I think he just knew this would be his last opportunity to fulfill that dream in earnest. My father loved encouraging others to create and show their art, and through his work at the dialysis center, I believe he was able to feel energized enough to not let his illness get the best of him. And within that, I saw there might even be a healing power to art. I believe in that now more than ever, and that's why I wanted to tell my father's story through this film.

During your time with your dad, did he give hints of things he was nostalgic for during his prime?

My father loved telling stories of his time as an Ad Man on Madison Avenue. He was a creative director for several well-known firms, and he left his mark on that industry in many ways. He was highly regarded by his peers, and earned the nickname "Two Ways Toback." It didn't matter if he disagreed with the direction one of his clients wanted to go in a campaign, he would still listen to what they wanted. But he would always show them his vision too, and that's where he got the name "Two Ways Toback."



What were some of the interesting things that you discovered while making this?

I filmed the documentary with my best friend, Stephen Tucker, during the last few months of my father's life. It was extremely challenging because I was watching my father decline while we were shooting this. But it was also the most rewarding experience of my life. I really needed to lean on Steve as my Director, because even though he knew my father and I very well, he was still able to make creative decisions that I would have never been able to. I needed that outside perspective to help bring a certain relatability to the piece, and Steve accomplished that beautifully. And through that process of collaboration, I discovered new things about my Dad that I had never known before. Harv actually passed away the morning after he watched a first cut of the film. I really think it gave him a sense of peace to see what he had accomplished in his life...enough to be comfortable with moving on. I never thought film could serve a higher purpose like that, so that is a very significant takeaway for me. I would encourage anyone to preserve the memory of their loved ones on film. It was an incredibly fulfilling thing to do.

The New Agency BOOM

Madison Avenue has always had its share of daring young men willing to risk their livelihoods and savings on opening their own shops, but today it is reaching boom proportions. And among those striking out on their own are a high percentage of admen who have built solid reputations at larger agencies, including some of advertising's most notable creative talents.

Never before, perhaps, have the three been so profitable for new, small agencies. The reasons are more and complex, not least among them the increasing demand for "creativity" from clients and, to the larger companies, the growing jockeying of product conflicts. On this and the following seven pages Madison Avenue introduces some of

the more promising new agencies that have opened this year.

The four principals of this new agency, which opened three months ago, are from West, Wair & Bartel, Sam Hayes, president of the agency, was an account supervisor and manager of the management committee, Bob Smith, associate creative director, Howard Talsch, senior art director, and Bill Nighthelm (on the right in the photograph below), account executive.

In the short space of time since they opened at 512 Madison Avenue, they have landed 11 accounts.

"There are lots of good, sound reasons why companies are showing a new interest in small, creative-oriented groups like ours," says Hayes. "Corporate mergers, new product introductions, inter-product line competition and consolidation of better marketing staffs within the advertiser companies. Most important is the latter development. More and more companies are beginning to realize that once they've gotten their own houses in order, the most vital thing their agency can do is give them the sharpest creative thinking possible."

"In essence," says Hayes, "it takes talented people who have made it and know it, and who refuse to let anything get in the way of the one reason, besides money, why they are in advertising—the charge they get out of doing outstanding advertising."

Boyer, Smith & Toback-661-6966



David, Oksner & Mitchneck-661-7400

This new agency, open less than a month, brings together three admen from a line of highly regarded shops. Bob David, president, was a management supervisor and member of the board of directors at D'Arcy, Long, Levin; Bob Oksner was copy chief at LaBalle, McCaffrey & McCull; and Marvin Mitchneck was associate creative director and member of the board of directors at Marchall. The latter two, who once worked together at Marchall, where they won a Gold Key in 1965 for their Oats King Frozen Foods campaign, are the co-creative directors of the new agency.

Among the numerous accounts the three, individually, have worked on are Quaker Oats, Consolidated Cigarettes, Benson, Puck & Puck, Cordelia, Tostitos, Pate and the introduction of Dak and Frenex. "With our package goods backgrounds we all feel at home in a grocery store," says Bob David.

Their first client is Consolidated Cigarettes (Dutch Masters, Harvestor Brands), starting the agency with a healthy \$200,000 in billings.

"All those who start new agencies," says David, "do so to create good advertising and make money. But it's the advertising they create that separates them. When you're starting an agency, people ask what your philosophy is. The advertising you create is your philosophy. That's the important thing—be able to take a product that is the same as its competitors and give it a difference."

"It's a communications difference," says Oksner, "and it's more than just ads. It's the whole atmosphere you create for a product."

The three also note that big companies today are beginning to welcome new, small agencies. "It's because they need a creative voice," says Mitchneck, "to bring creativity to their business. With

the proliferation of products resulting in product conflicts, you can expect to see a lot more new agencies coming into the business.

"Clients today also know," says David, "that by picking the right new agency they can get top admen who will work their guts out for them."

The agency, which is located at 111 Third Avenue, is set up to provide a full range of agency services to its clients. To start the agency, the three admit they took substantial risks in salary. Mitchneck also points out that, contrary to what many people may suspect, the motivation for starting a new agency is not, necessarily, dissatisfaction with the agency an adman was working for. "Personally, I liked working at Marchall," he says. "I didn't feel I had to escape. It was not that I wanted to leave that agency, but that I wanted to start this one."

How do you think the current art world could benefit from Harv's story?

I am not an expert on art or the art world, in general. Though I do feel safe enough to say that a strong segment of the art world seems very fixated on the financial side of art. My father was someone who believed in art for building community, and I would hope that this story might help shed some light on that side of the art world as well.

What do you wish that audiences will take from watching Harv?

I hope audiences will see the legacy that my father left behind as one of kindness and inclusiveness. That his desire to fulfill his own destiny was on par with helping others fulfill theirs too.

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In honor of Harv, The Harv Toback Fund for the Arts was established with the mission to raise money for Art Therapy programs for Hospitals and Medical Facilities. To watch the film and find out more info on how to donate, please visit: www.harvtobackfund.org

