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## Commentary

Paul Martin Lester

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## Commentary

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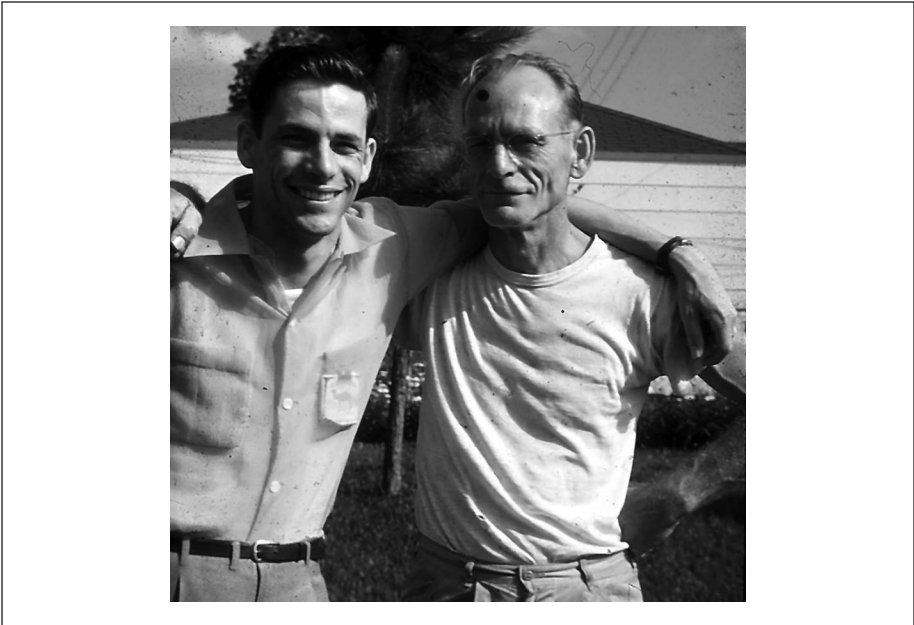
Fred Beard's monograph was a pleasure to read for at least four reasons.

First, it brought back memories of my grandfather and father. Back in the 1950s, my grandfather, Tom Lester Sr. was the Oil Editor for the *Houston Chronicle*. When I was probably fifteen years old, we had a serious talk in his home office. He told me that part of his job for the newspaper was to review new gasoline blends from oil companies. After he received notice of a new formula, he would drive to a refinery and get his car filled up and then write about the fuel as if it were a dish introduced at a fancy restaurant. Framed on a wall of his office was a column he wrote that concentrated on a new gas from Exxon, known at the time as Enco, Esso, or Humble depending on where you lived. The company already had a tiger as their mascot, but my grandfather wrote that its gasoline was like "having a tiger in your tank." Exxon obviously liked the line and used it for their slogan. He pointed to the column and said with a tinge of frustration, "And would you believe it, they never gave me a dime." Not surprisingly, he never received credit for his catchy line either. If you go to the part of Exxon's website devoted to the company's history, the entry for 1959 reveals that the slogan, "Put a tiger in your tank," was written by an anonymous "advertising copywriter in Chicago" ([http://www.exxonmobil.com/Corporate/history/about\\_who\\_history\\_alt.aspx](http://www.exxonmobil.com/Corporate/history/about_who_history_alt.aspx)).

Not to worry, my grandpop lives on (as we all will) because of the web.

Strangely, his recipe for fruitcake is still the favorite among those interested in making it (<http://blog.chron.com/bayoucityhistory/2010/12/the-return-of-tom-lesters-fruitcake-recipe/>). Funny thing. Every December, he would mail my family in Dallas a carefully packed cake inside a round red tin box, and every year, my father took the dessert out of its rum-soaked container and carried it with a bit of ceremony out to the backyard, as my mom and brother followed close behind. He then gave it to me, and I tried to kick it over the back fence. Instead, it broke into pieces to the delight of our German Shepherd dog, Jason. We all hated fruitcake, but none of us could tell my grandpop.

Second, my father, Tom Lester Jr., was an advertising copywriter for the *Dallas Times Herald*. At that time, the afternoon newspaper (long ago, sadly, a casualty of the competition for readers with the *Dallas Morning News*) had an advertising department that produced special sections on any number of subjects. My dad would write glowing tributes of products to accompany the photographs. He once proudly exclaimed to me what he thought was one of his finest tag lines for a product, "What's brand new and millions of years old?" When I went blank, he laughed loudly and said, "Peat moss." He taught me that with enough passion you could get excited at just about anything.



**Figure 1.** The editor's father and grandfather pose for a snapshot in Houston, Texas, in 1957.

Courtesy of the Lester family.

Third, Beard's piece required little in the way of editing. I was surprised that the most time-consuming aspect of being the editor of *Monographs* is that job. Well, duh. Thankfully, that was not the case this time.

Last, I learned in great detail the history of comparative advertising summed up by the "Mad Man" S. O. Landry quoted in the monograph, "Business is a fight and advertising is a part of the fight."

What I did not expect, and perhaps could be elaborated in further research (Beard does briefly mention it), was the connection I made between sometimes tentative and other times aggressive company executives confronting each other's brands with less than favorable comparisons, and the 2012 political campaigns. Substitute "comparison advertising" with "attack ads," "advertising" with "politics," and "franchisees" with "PACs," and you will see what I mean. For example, "comparative advertising was effective early on because of its novelty," "might encourage attention, but that it was the wrong kind of attention," "failed to focus on salient benefits," "can cause confusion over which advertiser was actually the sponsor of the ad," "are frequently not believable," "reflect negatively on the veracity of advertising as an institution," and "franchisees . . . created their own comparative ads . . . when they wanted a more aggressive approach."

In the end, one misses Apple guru Steve Jobs even more after he revealed that the point of the “Mac vs. PC” campaign featuring human stand-ins for the two types of computers was “not to be mean, but for the guys to like each other.”

Substitute “guys” with “political adversaries.” As heard by comedian and impressionist Dana Carvey doing George H. W. Bush, “Ain’t gonna happen.”

Paul Martin Lester  
*Editor-in-Chief*