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# Dad taught me the art of negotiating when I was just a kid

Buying, fixing up, and selling small boats with Dad helped me learn skills I still use today.



**By Bill Cummings**

MAY 24, 2018

Father-son bonding often involves a baseball and glove or a bicycle and training wheels. In my case, it involved the *Boston Sunday Globe* classifieds and used boats that had seen better days.

America was just barely out of the Great Depression as I started first grade, in 1942. My sister, our parents, and I lived in a one-bedroom apartment above a taxi stand and a liquor store on Salem Street in Medford. Mom and Dad slept in the living room.

With homeownership the family aspiration, Dad, a housepainter, always sought opportunities to work overtime. And I followed his lead. While other kids were playing sports, I was finding ways to earn money. My first entrepreneurial venture, at age 6, was peddling bottles of soda to construction workers from my little red wagon. By junior high, I had talked my way into the Ford motor plant in Somerville (at what's now Assembly Square) to sell ice cream to line workers. My solo enterprises taught me a lot about how businesses work and how people think. And they prepared me for a joint venture with my dad when I was around 14.

In the 1950s, the newspaper was the main forum for advertising items for sale. The *Sunday Globe* often featured more than 100 pages of classified ads. That section arrived in stores on Saturday. I strolled down Salem Street to Kitsis Pharmacy around noon every Saturday to buy just the classifieds section. If Mrs. Kitsis thought I was a bit off because of my curious purchasing habits, she never said so.

At home, my father and I carefully combed hundreds of small-type ads for used boats, circling good prospects. Then I made the initial phone calls, knowing that getting a jump on Sunday readers would work to our advantage. "Just make sure to tell them you don't have much money," my father said. "You buy low, and you sell high. But you have to do both."

