

Preface

*Fresh boiled peanuts, five cents a bag;
Fresh and fine, right off the vine.
If you don't have a nickel,
I can change a dime!*

When I was growing up in the steamy heat of the South during the 1930s and '40s, as one of two boys being raised by a single mother with less than a fifth-grade education, I had no inkling that we were poor. My days were so filled with the richness of friends, music, handmade toys, sports, nature, and the love of my mother that life for me was both full and fulfilling. In addition, my life was filled with the scrumptious tastes, smells, and sounds of the South—tastes like sweet, crisp watermelon savored in a clearing of the woods on a stifling July afternoon after splashing around in a swimming hole. There were smells like the aroma of freshly ground peanut butter mingled with the fragrance of newly picked cotton that left its mark everywhere, and sounds like the shunting of railroad cars on steely tracks or the desolate yet oddly comforting cry of a passing train's whistle. There in my corner of the world, green as an unripe peanut snug within its shell, I couldn't imagine having or wanting anything more.

Between 1932, when I was born in Esto, Florida, and 1947, I lived in six different cities. Because my mother continuously sought work in various cotton mills, nuclear power plants, factories, restaurants, and other establishments in order to better herself and improve things for my brother and me, we lived like nomads, moving constantly and attempting to lay roots, however temporary, wherever we could find a roof overhead to keep us dry. At one point, we even lived in a garage, which still stands today behind the restaurant in Miamisburg, Ohio, where my mother car-hopped, waited tables, and washed dishes. Although I didn't think of us as poor, certainly by today's standards and even by some standards of the period, we lived in utter poverty. And so my story is a rags-to-riches tale of sorts.

Looking back, I now marvel at the fact that we not only survived, but also that we have been able to accomplish so much. It is said that everyone has an inner question, and if there is one question that has quietly tugged at me throughout my lifetime, it has to be, "Why and how were we able to do it?" It is remarkable—indeed, some would say miraculous—that my mother was able to raise T.E. and me by herself with her limited education and skills. But it is equally remarkable that T.E. and I should each have become highly successful in our respective fields. T.E. went on to earn a doctorate in economics and to be recognized as one of the nation's foremost economists.

Likewise, I have attained some prominence in the world of accounting and financial planning. This book is the result of my attempt over the years to find an answer to my inner question. In writing it, I have resolved that several ingredients go into the making of a successful life. In my case, blessings came in the form of my mother's love, resolve, and faith; the grace of God; and the goodness of numerous individuals—especially my teachers, football coaches, and the Langdons—who served as my role models. In sharing this story, I hope to take the reader on a historical journey and to inspire others to believe that, no matter how impossible the odds might seem, dreams are attainable with hope, faith, discipline, goals, and perseverance.

Among my most vivid childhood memories is the pervasive smell and delectable taste of the boiled peanuts that were so much a part of Southern life. Before the peanuts ripen, while they are still nestled in their shells and gray in color, and with a texture similar to green peas, they are picked from the vine, scrubbed, and boiled in salt water over an open flame. How many pleasurable hours I spent indulging in these delicacies, savoring their salty flesh, I can only surmise. To be sure, I spent an equal amount of time strolling through the streets of Enterprise, Alabama, peddling bagfuls of the tasty morsels from a shoe box as I chanted my catchy little sales jingle: "Fresh boiled peanuts, five cents a bag; fresh and fine, right off the vine. If you don't have a nickel, I can change a dime!" I was young and carefree, and there was nothing so threatening that it couldn't be cured by a hug from my mother or her voice lulling me to sleep as she softly sang one of our favorite country and western songs. Sometimes, in the still of the night, the gentle, steel-drum-like timbre of raindrops plinking against the tin roof overhead was my lullaby. I desired nothing more—until my senses were awakened by football, that is.

Although I played football with my friends as a child, my real introduction to the sport came when I was in the fifth grade. My friend and mentor, Ty Tyson, invited me and my friend, Bobby Ray Knight, to a high school game. Ty was the Boy Scout assigned to my den when I was my den's Cub Scout leader, and I admired and looked up to him. When I found out that he played football for Coffee County High School in Enterprise, Alabama, I was elated. One Friday night, when he invited us to watch his team play against its bitter rival, Dothan, I was ecstatic. Without a doubt, watching that game was the greatest thrill of my life up to that point. Ty took me under his wing and became an ideal role model. Then, in September of 1947, I played organized freshman football when I entered the ninth grade at Miamisburg High School. It was then that football became a major part of my life, and it has remained so to this day. It seems as though the sport had always been beckoning me, as far back as my childhood days in Enterprise, when I would roam the aisles of old Martin's Drug Store, mesmerized by the pharmaceutical and historical artifacts that lined the shelves and walls, including the tawny, brittle-edged photographs of long-since-deceased high school football stars. As I meandered through the store, their sepia stares seemed to follow my every move, like ghosts from a spirit world luring me, an unsuspecting target, into their kingdom. Once in, I was hooked for life.

The lessons instilled in me through my participation in sports, especially football, cannot be taught from a textbook or learned in a classroom. They are the lessons that stay with you for life, that become ingrained in you as part of your character. Equally important for success, however, are academics. In Ohio, I had the unquestionably good fortune of coming into contact with some of the most influential coaches and teachers that anyone could ever hope to encounter. In partic-

ular, Lester Heistand, my homeroom teacher, and Waldo Matthews, my football coach at Miamisburg, stand out like stars in a rare galaxy. Among them, too, is Paul Hoernemann, my football coach, and Libuse Reed, my freshman English teacher, at Heidelberg College in Tiffin, Ohio. It is fair to say that I was groomed for success by my teachers and coaches. Even though I was a marginal student at best, they must have seen something in me that I didn't see or feel myself. Like master gardeners, they each took me, their seedling, into their nurturing care and gave me all I needed to grow in strength and stature, to form strong roots and to attain a position in life as solid as the majestic tree that gave the Buckeye State its nickname. One of the most beautiful of deciduous trees, the Ohio buckeye, of the genus *Aesculus* and the species *glabra*, at one time grew in abundance throughout Ohio. In the early summer, its branches bear brilliant green leaves and sprout downy, yellowish-green flowers, to which ruby-throated hummingbirds are attracted. In October, the tree gives forth its inedible fruit. A leathery, exterior bur encapsulates a shiny, mahogany brown conker, or nut, which resembles the eye of a buck.

I was among those fortunate young men who spent their high school and college years playing football in the great Buckeye State. Football not only created in me the discipline, teamwork, and indomitable spirit that I needed to succeed in life, but it also led me to the greatest friends anyone could ever hope to have. As I state in a later chapter, friendships born in the battles of football do not die easily, and mine have remained true and have grown deeper throughout my life. But I have been equally fortunate to have had in my life several remarkably strong and intelligent women—beginning with my mother—as influences. Not only did my mother wrap me in the warm cloak of Southern comfort throughout my childhood, but she was also my rock of faith, my angel whose wings carried me through life's most difficult and challenging events. It was she who inspired me and who gave me the courage to dare to dream dreams of the greatest magnitude, and then to pursue them. She, along with the other prominent women in my life, changed my life for the better in numerous ways. And so it is appropriate that this book begins with my mother's story, as it was she who, through the quiet living of her life, showed me how to live.