

I Married a Mad Man

A Chicago ad legend inspired countless memorable campaigns, my own unbelievable love story, and, decades later, a hit leading man.

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In the 1960s, Draper Daniels was something of a legendary character in American advertising. As the creative head of Leo Burnett in Chicago in the 1950s, he had fathered the Marlboro Man campaign, among others, and become known as one of the top idea men in the business. He was also a bit of a maverick.

Matthew Weiner, the producer of the television show *Mad Men* (and previously producer and writer for *The Sopranos*), acknowledged that he based his protagonist Don Draper in part on Draper Daniels, whom he called “one of the great copy guys.” Weiner’s show, which takes place at the fictional Sterling Cooper ad agency on Madison Avenue, draws from the golden age of American advertising. Some of its depictions are quite accurate—yes, there was a lot of drinking and smoking back then, and a lot of chauvinism; some aren’t so accurate. I know this, because I worked with Draper Daniels in the ad biz for many years. We did several mergers together, the longest of which lasted from 1967 until his death in 1983. That merger is my favorite Draper Daniels story.

I was introduced to Draper in 1965 by Vivian Hill, a stylish woman who dressed in Chanel suits and high heels and wore the most gorgeous South Seas pearls I’d ever seen. Vivian was a headhunter, whose specialty was bringing corporations together. We used to have lunch every two or three weeks, sharing news and gossip about the ad business. It was over one of these lunches that she mentioned to me that Draper Daniels might be interested in



The author and her future husband in 1965 PHOTO: COURTESY OF MYRA JANCO DANIELS

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buying our company. Draper was executive vice president of Compton Advertising in Chicago at the time—but rumor had it that he wasn't happy there, and wanted his own outfit.

Our company, Roche, Rickerd, Henri, Hurst, Inc., had been created with the merger of Chicago's two oldest ad firms. At 38, I was executive vice president—the first woman to have held that position for either firm. Our company was growing but we were in need of a top-notch creative person. When Vivian told me about Draper Daniels, I thought he might be the ticket. I also figured I could learn a lot about the business by working with him.

Vivian called Draper Daniels to say that I was interested and he agreed to come in the next afternoon. He was a tall, distinguished-looking man, in his early 50s, with Copenhagen blue eyes and a riveting presence. When he walked into the office at Roche, Rickerd, Henri, Hurst, heads turned. “Is that Draper Daniels?” people whispered.

The first thing he said when he came into my office was, “Miss Janco, I'm so glad to meet you. Now, tell me: What do you think is the best advertising in America right now and why?” I gave him a careful response, and he then asked me a series of personal questions, which I reluctantly answered, until our meeting began to feel more like an interrogation than a business meeting.

Finally, I said, “Mr. Daniels, you came here to investigate a business and you haven't asked one question about that business.”

“But if I buy a business I'm also buying the head of the company to run it,” he replied.

So he kept asking questions. What really interested Draper Daniels, I began to realize, was not net assets, but vision. He was more concerned about what the agency could be rather than what it was or had been. And he wanted to hear my ideas about how we could stand out above the other agencies.

At about ten o'clock that night—he had come into the office at 5:15—Draper Daniels said, “Miss Janco, you must be hungry. Do you want to go get a hamburger?” We walked down to a restaurant in the Wrigley Building on Michigan Avenue, had a couple of hamburgers, talked a little more, and then he told me that he wanted to buy the business. He also said

that he wanted me to stay. I told him I couldn't do that—I was planning to move to New York. “But I'll stay long enough for you to feel comfortable running the company,” I told him.

The next day, Dan—which is what he called himself—phoned Vivian. He wanted to make the deal. I said, “Would you like your lawyer and finance man to come and meet with me and my finance man?” He said, “No. It's not necessary. You have an honest face. Whatever you want for the business will be fine.”

So he came back to the office and ended up writing a personal check for the business—paying two and a half times its face value. I kept my stock in the company, which was 24.5 percent, and Draper Daniels bought everything else. He wanted to come in as CEO and wanted me to serve as COO and president, which meant I would oversee the hands-on operation of the company. He also wanted a new board of directors.

The next day we held a press conference, to announce that Draper Daniels was taking over the company. The most memorable part of it was that he introduced me as “Myrna Junco.” George Lazarus, who was then a business editor at the *Chicago Tribune*, leaned over to me at that point and said, “Myra, how well do you know this fellow?” I later learned that his favorite bird was the dark-eyed junco and his favorite actress was Myrna Loy, so maybe that had something to do with it. At any rate, it was one of many unexpected moments from Draper Daniels.

The company grew and changed. We landed pieces of several major accounts—Colgate-Palmolive, Swift, Maytag, Consolidated Foods. It was an exciting time; the advertising business was going through a revolution and getting lots of attention—shifting from the tired, straight-ahead hawking of products to innovative, thoughtful, surprising campaigns. When the John Hancock building opened in 1970, we took over the 25th and 27th floors—a nice, comfortable workspace with a splendid view of Chicago.

In effect, Dan was the creative director of the company and I was the marketing director. All of the finance and account people reported to me. It was a good fit. We hired several of the best creative minds in the business to work for us: men like Ernie Evers, who had done

the Dial In, Dial Out campaign for Dial and was head of creative at Foote, Cone & Belding, and John Matthews, who had created Tony the Tiger.

I learned a lot from Draper Daniels. He wasn't a great businessman, but he was a brilliant wordsmith and conceptualist, who taught me to state my ideas clearly and concisely, as if I was talking to one person. That was his philosophy: Advertising should talk to one person at a time. We worked on a number of memorable campaigns together, including Motorola car radios, Freeman shoes, Derby Tamales, and many others.

Dan enjoyed work, but he also knew how to have fun—more than I did. He would often be off swimming or playing handball by six o'clock, while I would still be in the office sometimes until eleven or midnight. He had a boyish, mischievous sense of humor; often, it was hard to tell when he was serious and when he was joking.

One day, after he had been with us for about two years, Dan came into my office with a card in his hand. By this time, the firm had been through several buyouts and mergers and I had a funny feeling that he was about to tell me of another one. I asked, "Are you going to sell me with the next merger?"

"Not exactly," he said.

He showed me the card. On one side, he had written out his own best character traits. Then he turned it over. On the other side he had written out mine. Mine were better than his, so I knew he wanted something. I thought, What in the world has got into him?

"I've been thinking about this for nine months, Myra," he said, "and I think we would make a great team."

I said, "I think we are a great team. Think of what we've accomplished so far this year."

He said, "I'm talking about a different sort of merger."

"Oh."

"Yes, I've decided I'd like to marry you."

I lost my voice for a moment, because I had never thought of the man that way before—and had no idea he had thought of me that way. Dan was twelve and a half years older than I and had been married before. I was against divorce in those days. But more importantly, I was happy with my life. I told him that.

“All right,” he said. “Let’s talk about it again tomorrow.” And then he walked out whistling—which, to me, was one of the most maddening things anyone can do, particularly under the circumstances.

My assistant said, “Did you get another account? Mr. Daniels seems very happy.”

I went home early and called Len, my fiancé, back in Washington. I told him what Dan had just said.

Len laughed. He knew Draper Daniels. “Come on,” he said. “He’s pulling your leg.”

The next day I wrote out a note and had it placed on Dan’s desk. “Merger accepted in fifteen years,” it said. “Today, let’s get some new business.”

Well, Dan came down from his office on the double, carrying a Peacock jewelers ring box. “Don’t be ridiculous,” I said. “Put that in the safe. I couldn’t even think about marrying someone without a year’s courtship.”

“All right,” he said. “We’ll count today as day one, then.” And he put out his hand and we shook, as if sealing a business proposition.

We went out to dinner that night, and it was the first time I really got to know Dan as a person. He was very funny and charismatic, but also much more down-to-earth than I had thought. Dan hailed from a Quaker family in a small upstate New York town and never forgot his roots. His father had been a civil engineer; his mother had been a teacher in a one-room school. Draper was his mother’s family name, but he thought it made him sound like a sissy so he had adopted the name Dan. His mother called him “D.” When he was a boy, Dan’s family struggled to pay the bills; years later, after he became the highest-paid

advertising man in the country, he bought his mother a fabulous diamond ring and told her that it was the ring his father would have bought her if he could have afforded it.

Dan was a restless man who loved nothing more than giving birth to an idea. Ironically, he had been behind the best-known cigarette campaign in the country, but then left the ad business in 1962 for a year to join the Kennedy Administration because he didn't feel good about promoting a product linked to lung cancer.

I learned a lot about Dan that night and saw sides of him I hadn't known before. When Len realized that Dan was serious, a few days later, he flew right out to see me. I asked him for a year's sabbatical. He was furious.

Dan and I had a mutual friend at the time who was a medical doctor, and one day she invited us over to her house for a Sunday brunch. She insisted that we not eat anything before we came over, which seemed odd. The first thing she did when we arrived at her apartment was to say she wanted to take blood samples. This made me mad. "Dan, we've got a year to think about whether we want to have a blood test," I said. But for some reason, I went along with it.

At the time I was living in an apartment hotel downtown. Dan was in town, too, and we saw each other in the evenings, often for dinner. One night a few months after this Sunday brunch, I mentioned to him that I was planning to go to an art exhibition on Saturday; Dan said he wanted to come with me.

I remember telling him that same night how much I enjoyed living by myself. It's so nice to not always have to worry about what another person is doing or thinking, I told him. "Mmm-hmm," he said.

The next day, August 19, 1967, he picked me up to go to an Edna Arnow pottery show. On the way, he asked if he could stop for a minute at the courthouse. I told him okay; I would wait in the car while he went inside and conducted his business. He said, "No, I can't leave you alone in the car in this neighborhood. Won't you just come along?" So I did, and we got off on a floor with a sign that read "Marriage Licenses." I had assumed for some reason that he was at the courthouse for a fishing license.

“Myra,” he said, “I’m not getting any younger and I think we should get a license.”

“But we have a year.”

He just looked at me. I went up to the clerk at the counter and said, “We’re not getting married. We have a year to wait. If we got a license, this wouldn’t be published, would it?” The clerk said, “If you request that it not be published, no, it won’t.” So that’s what we did. But it didn’t matter: There was a large room across the hall where marriages were performed and Dan said to me, “Myra, let’s go ahead and do it.” I couldn’t speak. But the next thing I knew, we had done it. We were married. And I started to cry.

On Monday, Dan called a meeting at the office. Nobody in our company knew of the engagement—or had any idea that we were seeing each other. Dan called all the employees together—there were about 65—and announced that there had been another merger. Then he said, “Myra and I were married this weekend.”

Our staff was a little shell-shocked. A headline in the newspaper the next day read: “Another Merger at Draper Daniels.”

About two weeks later, we honeymooned in the Bahamas, which was where Dan taught me how to fish and I caught my first big wahoo. Looking back now, I realize I never regretted marrying him, even though I resisted pretty strongly at first. I think it shows that sometimes we don’t know what’s best for ourselves. I had been so work-oriented and had resisted so strongly that Dan saw no choice but to come after me. I’m grateful that he did.

We lived a good life. We had a nice apartment in Chicago and bought a farm 97 miles away, near Ronald Reagan’s hometown of Dixon. If you walked around the square back then, everybody, it seemed, looked like Ronald Reagan.

Years later, in Florida, after Dan lost his battle with cancer, I was cleaning out his old highboy chest and I found two rolls of nickels in a drawer. I had no idea what they were doing there—but I thought immediately of Vivian Hill, the woman who had introduced us back in 1965. I remembered how Vivian used to keep these rolls of nickels lined up in the

crevices of her desk drawer and would often make bets with people. She'd say things like, "I'll bet you two rolls of nickels that Procter & Gamble is going to move from this agency to that agency." I was still in touch with her so I rang her up and said, "Vivian, the strangest thing happened. I opened up the drawer to Dan's old highboy and I found two rolls of nickels, like the kind I would sometimes win from you." And she started laughing.

I said, "Why are you laughing?"

"Didn't he ever tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

So Vivian told me a little story about Dan, a story that I didn't know: The morning after I had met Dan in 1965—the night we talked for five hours, then went out for hamburgers at the Wrigley Building—he had gone to visit Vivian and said that he wanted to buy the company. I knew that part, but I didn't know the rest of it. He also told her, "Vivian, just for your information, within two years that woman is going to be Mrs. Daniels." She bet him two rolls of nickels that he was wrong. The day after we were married, in 1967, she paid off the bet.

Dan kept the nickels.

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