

... FROM CHAPTER 4 THE NURSERY: PARTNER FOR A DAY

... We were full of good ideas when we put our heads together, but ideas don't always translate into earning a living. I was starting to realize how much my life had changed since my father's death, and I began to feel anxious about what we were going to do next.

Then early one morning Jerome drove a U-Haul up to Holdridge Farm Nursery near his family beach house in Groton, Connecticut, and returned home with a truckload of bushes and flowers. Without telling me, he had rented the parking lot of the deli around the corner from our house. "We have six weeks to sell everything," he reassured me.

Jerome unloaded the trees while I arranged the flowers in colorful rows. We put rolls of yellow and white contact paper on the deli's dumpster, and in big black letters we spelled out: THE NURSERY. We were in business.

We decided that I would do the selling and Jerome would stay home, just around the corner, with our 3-year-old and 11-month-old boys. I wished he would have come up to help more often. When a deli customer looked as if they were going to wander into the parking lot and look over our flowers, I was terrified. I would sometimes hide in the back

seat of the car just to avoid having to answer questions. I didn't know anything about plants.

A young boy, clumsy and not too bright, was working in the deli at the time. He took pity on me and used to come out and keep me company. That became the routine. Richie would come out to encourage me, and pretty soon he was the one who was collecting the money. He even brought me a grey cash box and convinced me to get a folding table to set it on.

Richie was 14, overweight and slovenly, but he was not shy, and he was always happy to help out. Richie loved counting money, and he had a talent for selling. I now had my first worker and, unbeknownst to me, "partner for a day," as my accountant explained to me years later.

We had an illustrious group of customers at THE NURSERY: Alice and Benny Goodman, Arthur "Punch" Sulzberger of *The New York Times*, Jack Paar, and many others who lived in the area. At the end of our fourth week of

business, Herb Oscar Anderson, a popular disk jockey at the time, drove into the parking lot in a big black car. He sauntered through the remaining rows of bushes, then came up to me and said, "I'll take it."

"Which ones would you like?" I asked.

"I said I'll take it," he repeated.

"Excuse me, I don't understand," I stammered.

"I'll take the rest of whatever is here. Everything. And I'll be back in an hour to pick it up."

So two weeks early, we closed The Nursery, our first enterprise. We had \$3,000 in our pocket, and we were once again unemployed.

