

# TOM HURST

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN

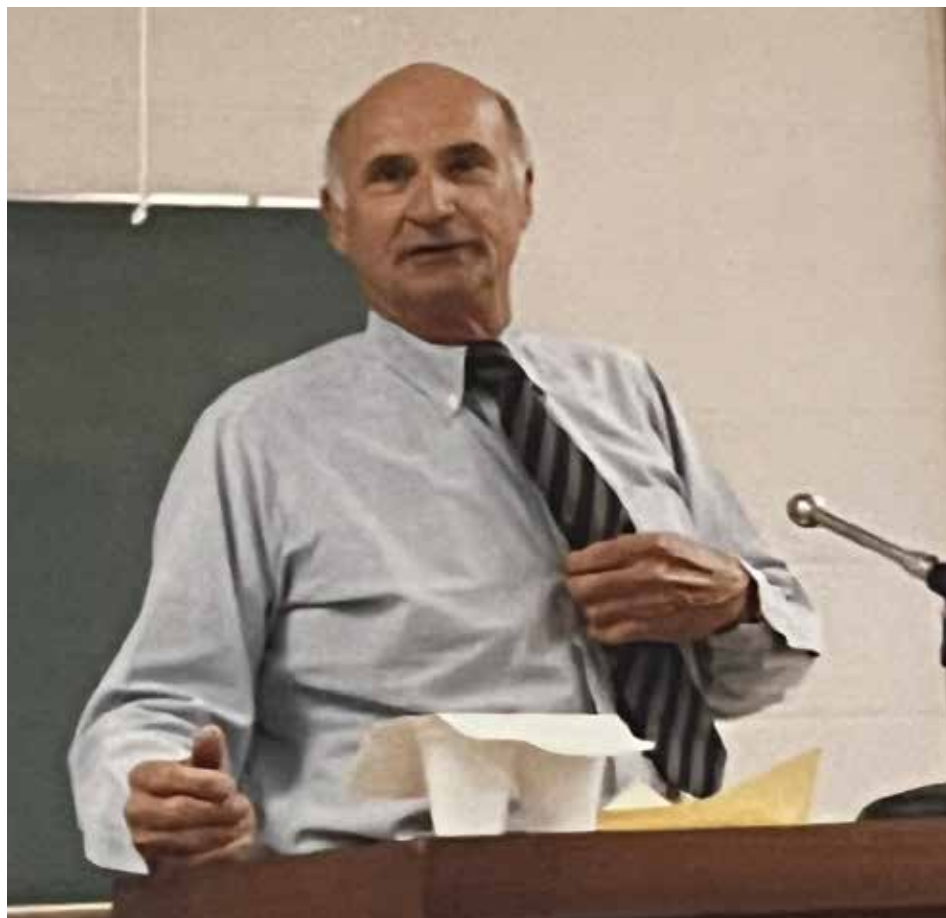
**T**om Hurst was born on November 28, 1924, a member of “The Greatest Generation”

as coined by newsman Tom Brokaw to describe the age group that came of age during the Great Depression who fought in World War II and sired the Baby Boom. A native of Baltimore, Hurst indeed joined the U.S. Navy during WWII after attending City College. During the war, he served aboard a ship that was torpedoed and survived.

Hurst returned to civilian life and started a career in the local beverage business that became one of legend. He worked his way up from a warehouse and loading dock employee to President of The Kronheim Company before his retirement in 1990. Along the way, he gave many industry professionals their start and continued to inspire them throughout their careers.

Among them is Bruce Wills, former National Sales Director for Boordy Vineyards among other impressive titles. Wills in an interview described Hurst, who passed away on November 5, 2023 less than a month shy of his 99th birthday, as “larger than life. [He was] very insightful; would always ask meaningful questions, personally and professional; and would always leave you with not an answer, but a thought process to solve your own problem.”

Wills, who was hired by Hurst in 1979, continued, “The big takeaway for me that I have used in my life was the importance of ‘mastering the fundamentals.’ Master the fundamentals and success will follow. Take pride



in hard work and accomplishments and learn from experience. He was definitely a coach and a very important friend.”

Another former Kronheim staffer heavily influenced by Hurst was Jim Anderson, who described his former mentor as a “combination of Winston Churchill and Teddy Roosevelt. A man of character and intense drive.”

Anderson remembered one especially inspiring memory of a time when Hurst was recovering from a leg injury and required a

cane to help him walk. There was a particular “monthly book” meeting when he limped to the podium, surveyed his staff, threw his cane across the room, and exclaimed, “We have NO time for weakness! Let’s go!” Anderson recalled, “I think our numbers were down or something that quarter. Almost 40 years later, I still remember that moment.”

Pat Coleman was also given his start at Kronheim by Hurst. But it took patience and determination before he was officially

brought into the fold. "After about 10 phone conversations with him telling me The Kronheim Company had no openings, he agreed to see me," Coleman recalled. "I was ushered into his office where he looked at me, shook my hand, and said, 'Who are you, and why are you in my office?' A few weeks later, I was offered a temporary sales position covering for one of their senior reps who was going on leave for medical reasons. He told me, 'If you don't f\*\*\* this up, we may offer you a regular position.'" A Kronheim career ensued.

Like Wills, Coleman said that Hurst was a master not at coming up with solutions, but at giving his employees the tools to come up with answers on their own: "I don't remember Tom ever telling me or anyone specifically how to fix a problem or do something. He would ask probing questions, and you would leave with at least the beginnings of a solution."

Another Kronheim colleague, Fred Calleri, also expressed admiration for Hurst's ascen-

dancy from warehouse helper to the Presidency. But he particularly marveled at Hurst spearheading the acquisition of Jim Beam. It might have even been Hurst's greatest professional accomplishment during his time at the helm, "When Jim Beam Brands purchased National Distillers in the early 1980s, it was a major shock to the Maryland/Washington markets," Calleri said. Indeed, Kronheim had been a distributor of National's brands for decades and, at the time, was 40 percent of Kronheim's volume.

Calleri said, "Tom put some management people [on it] and directed them in a major presentation to Beam Brands in Chicago. The staggering task was to convince Beam Brands to bring their flagship brand – Jim Beam – to Kronheim, which later became our largest single brand. We grew the brand every year thereafter in sales volume and solidified Kronheim's relationship with Beam Brands for years."

Of course, it's hard to sum up a man, any

man, in just one tribute article working with a word limit. Just ask those journalists who recently wrote feature obituaries for people like actor Andre Braugher or former NASCAR champion Cale Yarborough. Bruce Wills was kind enough to provide me with some personal notes that Tom Hurst had written out around the time of his 94th birthday. He spoke of many things in those notes – his harsh upbringing, the years he considered "wasted" as an undergraduate at George Washington University, and his rise up the corporate ladder at Kronheim.

While I never met the man, I found these words of his personally inspiring and I close with them: "A large portion of the labor I did at Kronheim was to simply have an unbeatable passion to OUTWORK anyone that got in my way. Not necessarily working smarter, just willing to do things they wouldn't. . . . I became valuable and was needed. Why did that happen? I really think it was a combination of risk taking and that work ethic!" ■

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