

TACOMA

Daily Index

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OF TACOMA

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IN LATE-1960, a thin, dark-haired, 36-year-old outdoor advertising salesman named Marshall Skidmore found his career at a dead end. He had left a comfortable job in Pierce County government -- where he worked for 11 years at the county clerk's office -- for a higher salary and a new opportunity. Unfortunately, he had to admit he lacked a salesman's personality.

Although the advertising job paid well, he was bored and uninspired.

It was around this time that Victor J. Hedberg, an acquaintance from the county clerk's office, approached Marshall with a job opportunity: partnership in a small legal newspaper called the *Tacoma Daily Index*. The newspaper, originally founded in 1890 as the *Daily Court and Commercial Index*, published legal notices and business news. It had passed through the hands of only a few owners: Hedberg and his business partner, J. D. Ogden, bought the paper in 1931 when then-owner H. H. Johnson, who owned the paper for 17 years, passed away. Before that, R. B. Whitaker, the paper's original publisher, owned the *Index* for 24 years.

Though the paper enjoyed a modestly profitable client base of attorneys and businesses (who turned to the *Index* to publish legal notices, new business announcements, property sales, and other court-related information), and contracts with the City of Tacoma and Pierce County to publish information, the job offer spooked Skidmore. He and his new wife Frances (or "Fran," as friends call her) were newlyweds and new homeowners, and wanted to raise a family. The venture would require an investment from Skidmore, a cut in pay, and a level of uncertainty as to whether the paper would continue to operate.

"I don't know if we can afford it," Marshall told Hedberg. "I'll have to talk to my wife about it."

That evening, Marshall and Frances discussed the opportunity. Although Frances was equally nervous, she urged Skidmore to take a risk. "I know that your job is not all that you would like," she told him. "Why don't we try this?"

Tacoma's Record Keeper

A bold headline in the paper announced the news: 'Tacoma Daily Index Has New Staff Member.' It was a life-changing decision for Skidmore, who eventually bought out Hedberg's interest in the paper. No one owned the paper longer than Skidmore, and he went on to own the paper for 37 years before selling the *Index* to a small-newspaper company and retiring in 1997.

On July 23, one month ago today, Skidmore passed away after a short battle with pancreatic cancer. He was 83 years old.

After his death, Skidmore's daughter, Marsha Perry, e-mailed the *Index* with the news. "It keeps coming up that he was the owner/publisher/editor of the *Tacoma Daily Index*," wrote Perry, 44, who lives in University Place. "[A]nd of course this got me to thinking about our old family business, which he worked

so hard at almost by himself. Our whole family worked at the paper one time or another, and there I got to see my dad's work ethic. He was good to his employees and very fair. He was so concerned that he get the paper out everyday, no matter what the challenges. I'm glad to see that the paper is still in existence because it shows me how he worked at something that has had longevity."

SKIDMORE WASN'T AN attorney. Nor did he have a background in publishing or journalism. Born and raised in Tacoma, he was so obsessed with battleships and the sea that in 1941, at the age of 17, he enlisted in the United States Navy. He served for almost three years during World War II.

"He always loved boats, everything about them, and even joined the Navy," says Perry, chuckling. "But he couldn't swim." She recalled this curious fact about her father during a recent interview with her and her mother, Frances, at the same

Tacoma native Marshall B. Skidmore, with his son Rob, in October of 1989, outside the Tacoma Daily Index's office on Pacific Avenue in downtown Tacoma. Skidmore, who owned the city's legal newspaper for 37 years, passed away on July 23. (PHOTO COURTESY SKIDMORE FAMILY)

home the Skidmores purchased nearly 50 years ago.

After the War, he returned to Tacoma and looked for work. While others were using the GI Bill to earn college degrees, Skidmore was eager to enter the professional world. He earned his General Equivalency Degree and worked various jobs in Tacoma, before landing at the County Clerk's office in 1948.

While Marshall worked at the County Clerk's office, Frances was living in Spokane, Wash., and working as a social worker assisting children and parents with the process of adoption. She moved to California to attend UC Berkeley and earn her Master's Degree. But one year into the program, she changed her mind.

She applied for jobs in three different cities -- one of which included Tacoma. When she interviewed for a case worker position at the Department of Social and Human Services in Tacoma, she was offered a job on the spot.

At work, she befriended a woman involved in a group that enjoyed waterskiing on American Lake. Marshall piloted one of the boats -- though, again, he didn't swim -- and met Frances on one of the outings. "I wasn't sure about him," she now recalls. "But I quickly found out he was a straight shooter." They married on Jan. 30, 1959. In the early-1960s, shortly after Marshall bought the paper and the Skidmores moved into their new home, the couple welcomed Marsha and Rob into their lives.

WHEN MARSHALL CONTINUED ON
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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1 **DECIDED** to invest in the *Index*, Frances's salary went toward the house

payment. It was up to Marshall to earn money working at the paper to help with everyday expenses.

His experience at the county clerk's office came in handy at the *Index*.

"New attorneys would come in wanting to file probate and so forth, and they would say, 'I don't know what to do here, Marshall. Would you tell me what to do?'" Frances recalls. "Marshall would say, 'I won't tell you what to do. But I will tell you what I've found a lot of attorneys do that works.'" When *Index* owner Hedberg would visit the county clerk's office, he was struck by Skidmore's knowledge. When his business partner, J. D. Ogden grew ill and unable to work in the late-1960s, Hedberg decided to approach Skidmore with the offer to co-own the paper.

Now at the *Index*, Skidmore tapped the knowledge he acquired working at the county-city building. "As soon as he got into it, he said, 'This is what I like,'" adds Frances. It spoke to his meticulous work ethic, which helped turn the paper's finances around. With Ogden ill and dying at home, Hedberg had fallen behind in billing. Skidmore started tallying the invoices and sending them out to clients. When checks started rolling in, Hedberg said, "Boy, how come we're making so much money?" Marshall replied, "Well, I know you haven't had a chance to bill. Coming in new, I have that chance."

Though he co-owned the newspaper, Skidmore didn't let the title swell his head. Driving to the newspaper's Pacific Avenue storefront each day in a yellow 1963 Ford Falcon (which the Skidmore family still owns today), he answered phones, folded and delivered newspapers, and ran errands downtown.

In 1969, Hedberg, 71, also became ill. It was increasingly difficult for him to co-manage the newspaper and make it into the office. The business partnership dictated that Hedberg's son, Robert, who was on the payroll but worked part-time, would take over his father's ownership stake. Robert, however, had little interest in the paper, according to Skidmore's family. Skidmore offered to buy out the Hedberg family's ownership share.

"I think Bob knew Marshall liked him," says Frances. "I think he listened to him. Bob told Marshall, 'I'll think about it.' I think Bob was scared because he had never run a business.

"Bob was a good man," adds Frances. "But he was not a business person."

(Efforts to contact the Hedberg family for this story were unsuccessful. According to the Skidmores, Robert passed away, and the family lost contact with the Hedbergs).

On Jan. 1, 1973, the Skidmores -- including Marshall as president, his brother, Robert, as vice-president, and Frances as secretary -- secured complete ownership of the *Index*.

Hedberg passed away Jan. 20, 1973.

BEGINNING IN THE late-1970s, and continuing into the late-1980s, the Skidmores' two children, Marsha and Rob, started to show up at the office after school to help fold papers and spend time with their dad. Marshall was so involved with the newspaper -- the accuracy of its information, that it reach subscribers and news boxes without fail -- he took only one vacation during the 37 years he owned the *Index*.

"That was just his nature," says Robert Skidmore, Marshall's brother, a retired federal judge who now lives in Lakewood. "Of course, that's one of the disadvantages of working for yourself. You're always afraid to leave."

Skidmore also hired staff to help with some of the daily operations. He worked with administrators at Stadium High School to find students who might be available to work after school. One student who started to work at the *Index* was Tom Stenger, who now serves on Tacoma City Council.

"After the newspaper sheets were cut, it was my responsibility to fold all these sheets, put addresses on them, and take them down to the post office," says Councilmember Stenger, who earned five dollars per day working afternoons at the paper. According to Stenger, the job was passed down to him from two other Stadium High School students who had already graduated. Stenger held the job for two years, beginning his junior year at Stadium High School in 1974. "I can't imagine having a better first employer. Marshall had a wonderful disposition, and we would talk politics all the time. He was also a Navy buff, and we would talk about old battleships from World War II."

The newspaper moved to three locations under Marshall's ownership: a storefront on Pacific Avenue, which the *Index* shared with Johnson-Cox printers; a space on Court C, which it shared with R-4 Printing; and another Pacific Avenue storefront -- this time with Reprographics (formerly R-4).

Current *Index* staffer Al Nemecek was around for most of those moves. Nemecek was hired at the *Index* in 1973, after a friend of the family referred him to Marshall. Marshall was looking for someone to pick up documents at City Hall and the County-City Building for publication in the newspaper, prepare memorandums and affidavits, and stock the *Index* news boxes. "I think maybe they were a little apprehensive because of my age," recalls Nemecek, who was 24 years old at the time. "I was a little bit younger, and I think they were looking for someone who was a little more mature. I had a pretty good work ethic, and I wanted them to know from the onset that I could do the job."

Over the years, Nemecek and Marshall grew close. "We talked quite a bit," he recalls. "I worked with him one-on-one at least a couple hours every day. We got to know each other. He was really a caring and decent guy."

The *Index* ran smoothly for decades under Marshall's direction, providing a comfortable, steady income for the Skidmore family. Still, there were lean years. In 1992, the City of Tacoma awarded its contract to publish information to an upstart newspaper located on the Hilltop. While *Northwest Dispatch* underbid the *Index*, it had a hard time matching Skidmore's knack for consistency and meticulousness. "My husband took no pay," recalls Frances. "We didn't have enough money coming in to pay our bills. We were getting way behind." The City awarded the contract to *Northwest Dispatch* for two years, but eventually awarded it back to the *Index*.

IN 1989, MARSHALL turned 65 years old. It was an age when most people start to consider retirement. The idea was not lost on Marshall, who hoped to keep the newspaper in the family.

But a couple of factors would lead to Marshall's decision to sell the paper and finally retire.

First, Marsha and Rob were interested in careers outside the newspaper. "I think Dad was really kind of hoping that Rob or I would take it," says Marsha.

Rob gave it an honest try. A family picture taken in October 1989 shows a 25-year-old Rob -- wearing a striped short-sleeved shirt, pleated slacks, and belt -- standing next to his suit-clad father outside the *Index*'s office. Rob had recently graduated college, and lived in Seattle with his wife, commuting to Tacoma to learn his father's trade.

"But it was not his cup of tea," says Frances.

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Remembering Marshall B. Skidmore

For more than 48 years, Frances Skidmore was married to Marshall B. Skidmore -- a Tacoma native, World War II Veteran, and former owner of the Tacoma Daily Index. Marshall passed away on July 23. Here, Frances recalls some memories of Marshall and his connection to the newspaper.

ON MARSHALL'S DECISION TO INVEST IN THE INDEX

Victor Hedberg was in business with J.D. Ogden at that time. Mr. Hedberg called Marshall and said, 'Mr. Ogden is ill and bedridden. He cannot work at the *Index*. You know so much about the legal things. I know you're not an attorney, but you know so much about legal things having worked at the county clerk's office. What would you think about coming and buying into the business with me?' Marshall was working for outdoor advertising. He was bored. He had a good job, but he was not thoroughly sold on that kind of work. He did not feel that was something that interested him. He said, 'You know, I'll talk with my wife about it.' Boy, we just bought our house in December of 1960. This is 1961. I don't know if we could

financially afford it. Marshall said, 'My wife is a social worker, and I don't know whether we can hack it.' He came home, and I said, 'I don't know if we can hack it, either. But I know that your present job is not all that you would like. Why don't we try it?'"

ON MEETING MARSHALL FOR THE FIRST TIME

I went to work as a caseworker, and the first person I met was a girl who had lived with her mother just a few blocks away from me, on North Yakima. She had a lovely home there. We met some other people that liked to waterski. I loved to waterski. They said, 'Why don't you come waterskiing?' We went waterskiing all over the place. We had a good time. It happened that Marshall didn't swim, but he was in the group. He would run one boat, and somebody else would run another boat. He pursued me. I wasn't sure about him. But I found that he was a straight shooter, and I married him. I came to Tacoma in 1955. I married Marshall on Jan. 30, 1959. So we had a lot of waterskiing in between.

Tacoma resident Jerry Ogden was a close friend of Marshall for nearly 50 years. He met Marshall at a local tennis club, and the pair played tennis for decades. Marshall would meet Ogden regularly for tennis in the evenings and on weekends, and for coffee and conversation at a Tully's downtown.

ON HIS LONG FRIENDSHIP WITH MARSHALL

I used to come down [to the *Index* office], and we would go to coffee a couple times a week. Even after he retired, we continued that. He knew a lot of people. He had old friends from way back. The tennis community knew him well. At his funeral, all the pallbearers were tennis players. The one thing that was evident was how high of an integrity he had. He was loyal to his friends, and his word was good. He was just that kind of a guy. We had different political views, but we remained friends because we respected each other's integrities.

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Instead, Rob had wanted to be a minister. Eventually, he moved to New York to attend seminary school.

"I did definitely consider [owning the paper]," says Rob, during a phone interview from his home in Ashland, Ore., where he is a reverend at St. Gabriel Orthodox Church. "My sense is that he was hoping that I would continue it. If I had kept with it, he would have reduced his workload and transferred it over to me. But he was also very supportive of my decision."

Second, publishing technology had changed -- a development to which Marshall didn't adapt.

"We had gone from linotype machines," Rob explains. "Lead was melted, the newspaper was set. The technology had really developed. He would have had to update all of that, and he simply didn't have the energy to do it. He could barely use our touch-tone phone."

"He was old school," says long-time friend Jerry Ogden (no relation to earlier business partner J.D. Ogden). Ogden was Marshall's tennis buddy for decades. The pair would meet regularly for tennis in the evenings and on weekends, and for coffee and conversation at a Tully's downtown. "He wasn't computer-oriented, and I don't think he could have really altered the paper to computers."

In 1997, Marshall decided to sell the newspaper and retire.

Marshall's family says he never regretted selling the paper. After nearly 40 years of working

Although hesitant at first, Tacoma native Marshall B. Skidmore was encouraged by his wife, Frances, to invest in the Tacoma Daily Index in 1960. "As soon as he got into it, he said, 'This is what I like,'" recalls Frances. Marshall retired in 1997, having owned the newspaper longer than anyone else in its then 107-year history.

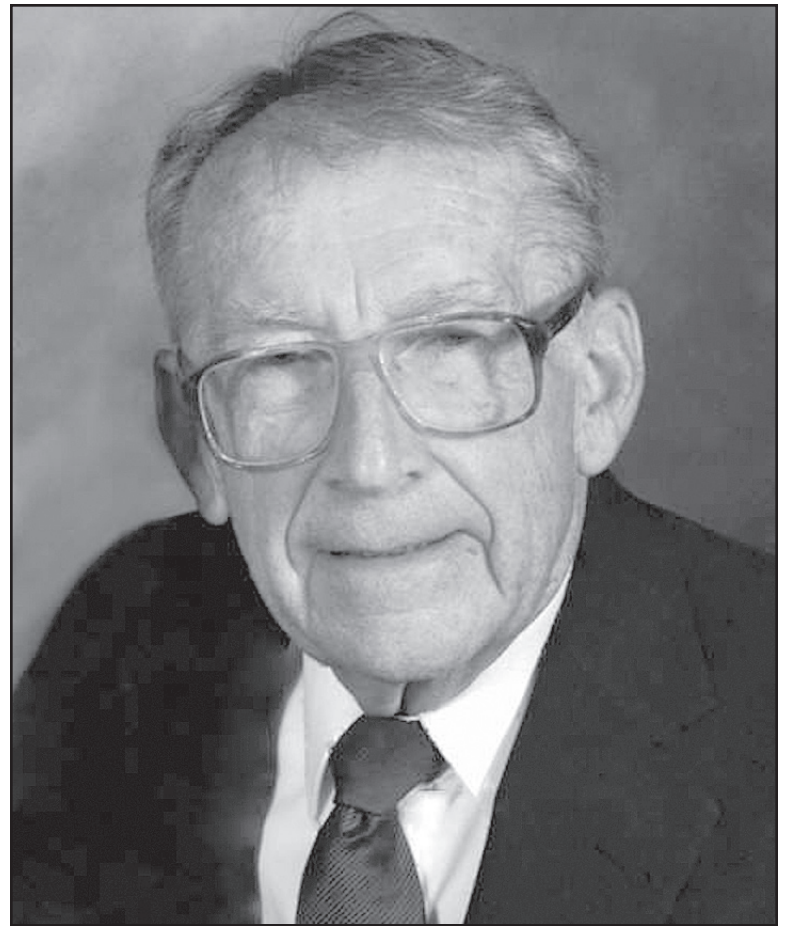
(PHOTO COURTESY SKIDMORE FAMILY)

with only one vacation, he and Frances started to take small trips. He also improved his tennis game, and was a regular at the Lakewood Racquet Club. He played right up to his death in July. He also built and collected model battleships, and read books on military aviation. These things fill a room in the Skidmore home.

On July 28, a service was held for Marshall at the Garden Chapel at Mountain View Funeral Home. He was laid to rest at Mountain View Memorial Park.

Ogden, 70, was a pallbearer at Marshall's funeral. He considered Marshall one of his best friends. "The one thing that was evident about Marshall was how high an integrity he had," says Ogden. "He was loyal to his friends, and his word was good. He was just that kind of a guy. We had different political views, but we remained friends because we respected each other's integrities."

"I think he had a real sense of pride," adds Marshall's son, Rob. "He had basically gotten to that



position in life after a lot of hard work. He was a self-made man in that respect. He did a great job of very responsibly holding down that position. It was a paper that had an important place in the community, and he had a concrete role. I think he had a lot of pride in that."