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THE
STORY
OF
William J.
Nieder Korn



THE
STORY
OF
**William J.
Niederkorn**



Prepared for the
Ozaukee County Historical Society
and the W. J. Niederkorn Library
Port Washington, Wisconsin
In collaboration with Charles Larson
Judge of Ozaukee County, Branch No. 1
State of Wisconsin

Published under the Supervision of
Reverend E. J. O'Donnell, S.J.

August 8, 1967

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY PRESS
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

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*To Myra
With all my love
Bill
Aug 8 - 1967*

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THE
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OF
**William J.
Niederkorn**



THOSE who know Bill Niederkorn might appropriately say, that "he warmed both hands before the fire of life and yet is not ready to depart."

He did not go into any lonely deserts, or trackless forests, or appalling jungles to establish a reputation for himself. He has lived his life without great adventures. In fact, when he approaches a slight hill on the golf course, he immediately calls for the golf cart. Nevertheless, he is a frontiersman in

the real meaning of that term. He has always loved—and still loves—the happiness of travel, sport, conversation, adventure, or what you will. He considers life as an asset and considers it good fortune to have been born.

It may seem incongruous that a man who looks forward eagerly to a vacation in Florida should, at the same time, look forward eagerly to work. Yet for him work is man's greatest blessing. He enjoys work more than vacations. As he advanced from childhood to youth, from youth to middle age, from middle age to the autumn years of his life, he grew happier because he lived intelligently. Gifted in mind and body, he left the comfortable plains and highways of his youth to climb through difficult obstacles to the top of the mountain. There, in maturity, he thought about the problems of business and about the problems of life and about the meaning of life itself; and he vowed that his work and his ideas and his ideals would serve not only his own ambitions but also the happiness, security and well-being of others.

Perhaps no one is a more common target for criticism than the hustler and booster, whose motto is "bigger and better business." We may dismiss this criticism in the case of Bill Niederkorn because, through his "boosting and hustling", all of us have benefited. Because of him we have today better schools, better theatres, better libraries, better churches, better orchestras, better art museums—and better communities. Because of him the days of golden dreams have not perished. Because of the example which he has set for us all, we can look forward to a future rich in promise and to a life supremely worth living.

I

Early Days

THE LUXEMBURGER IS HIS OWN MAN

The story of William Niederkorn might very well begin in that never-never land out of a 19th century operetta, a romantic world of soft green hills and towering castles—a fairy land populated by gentle folk: the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg. For it was from this tiny, bucolic nation squeezed in among corners of France, Belgium and Germany and with its fierce sense of identity, integrity and independence that Great Grandmother Anna, Grandmother Barbara, and Grandfather Nicolaus Niederkorn emigrated to the United States in the early 1840s to take up life anew in the pastoral, peaceful countryside near Port Washington, Wisconsin. It is possible they came from the town of Niedercorn, which today has a population of 5,000.

William Niederkorn never roamed the soft green hills of his forefathers. He never climbed the historic hilltops of Luxemburg to look over breathtaking forests, nor wandered along the network of tunnels in the capital city, nor visited cathedrals, castles, palaces, and various small chapels as his forebears did. But something of this beautiful land which he never knew, something of the spirit of Anna, Barbara, and Nic-

olaus Niederkorn, who lie buried in the Port Washington cemetery, somehow became a part of him. That spirit is well expressed in the words: "Luxemburg has its own distinctive character; the Luxemburger is his own man."

So, far from the deep valleys and steep crags and meandering rivers of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg, yet bound to her by family ties, William was born of Mathias and Katherine Niederkorn on August 8, 1887 on the family farm several miles north of Port Washington, Wisconsin.

W.J.N.: "Back in 1900, if somebody had said to me, 'Bill, you'll head up a company worth \$18½-million'—I would have said, 'Impossible.'"

He knew adversity at a very early age. When he was just a boy of three, his father met an accidental death in the discharge of his duties. His mother was forced to sell the farm and move to Port Washington.

A modest brick house on Woodruff street became home for Katherine Niederkorn, her two sons and three daugh-

ters. Its close proximity to St. Mary's church and parochial school was to have a marked influence on William's early life. The nuns at St. Mary's, the School Sisters of Notre Dame, were his teachers during the six years of his formal education. His respect and affection for this teaching order has never waned.

In those early, trying years the main source of support for the family was William's older brother John, fifteen years of age at the time. He worked at Barth's factory, a manufacturing concern, memories of which linger as an important factor in the lives of the Niederkorn family. While funds were severely limited, Katherine's strength and moral fiber saw the family through these grim days. Her confidence was contagious and is reflected in the record of her children.

THE BOY IS FATHER TO THE MAN

For William, St. Mary's church and school were the center of interest and activity. When he was about seven, he was chosen to serve as an altar boy, the only boy in the parish available for this duty, and for several years the church was his domain. He was inspired by Father Charles M. Grobschmidt, the pastor, to set his sights on the priesthood. Full of expectation, he made preparations to enter a seminary at Columbus, Ohio.

Necessity, however, ruled otherwise. William's brother John had married and moved to Milwaukee. There was no money available for the education of a prospective priest. What is more, there was a void in the family's income which had to be filled.

Katherine Niederkorn made a hard decision. She determined that "Willie,"

as she called him, would have to be the family's bread-winner.

Thus, at age thirteen, he became a clerk-delivery boy at Boerner Brothers department store in Port Washington. His weekly wage was \$3.00.

William became an alert, hard-working employee at the store, which was one of the city's largest and busiest retail establishments. As he advanced, he acquired merchandising knowledge. He was a good salesman, brimming with confidence and highly regarded by his employers. Old-timers in Port Washington, including his wife Myra, still recall his ability to sell more provisions than they had come to buy. They considered it a recognition of their high standing in the community—and of their pocket-books—whenever this young merchant asked them to purchase more than they could afford.

W.J.N.: "I hope the mention of my starting pay doesn't make the wrong impression. Those were happy years. I grew. And I learned. And I earned more money. I have memories of many good times at Boerner Brothers."

At age twenty, William took a long look at his situation. He had spent seven years on his first and only job, working from seven o'clock in the morning until nine at night and also on Sunday mornings. While he liked his work, he felt the future at Boerner Brothers was circumscribed. He knew that finding a better position in the competitive business world would require more knowledge of financing and cost accounting than he presently possessed. He would

have to acquire a better grasp of management skills and business administration techniques than he could hope to learn at Boerner Brothers.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

He therefore resigned from his job to enroll at Hoffman Business College in Milwaukee, a school that offered the curriculum he wanted. While completing the crowded six-month course, he lived with his older brother John in Milwaukee at Third and Harmon streets. John, a man still remembered affectionately by all who knew him, was a police officer, who was eventually to become a special investigator for the district attorney of Milwaukee and lieutenant of detectives on the Milwaukee force.

After completing the business college course, William returned to Port Washington. Seven years of daily contact with his fellow-townsmen in a retail store were not to be wasted. He had developed strong friendships in this community. A regular left-fielder on Port Washington's team in the Lake Shore Baseball League, coach of a girls' basketball team, and a bowler with a 195 average on the crude alleys of the day, he was a valued friend and well-known figure in his home town.

W.J.N.: "The most important magnet that brought me home to Port Washington in 1907 was the knowledge that my mother and sisters needed me."

At the time William decided to build his future at Port Washington, the

Niederkorn household comprised his mother and his sisters, Celia and Clara. It was a warmly devoted family, with a strong sense of shared responsibility. Both Celia, the eldest, and Clara, the youngest, worked and contributed their earnings to the support of the family until they were married. In the meantime their dear sister Rose had passed away at the age of sixteen.

William's first job after his return to Port Washington was with Turner Manufacturing Company, makers of gasoline engines for operating farm machinery, where he became a book-keeper.

At first glance, the duties of a book-keeper would seem routine and unimportant to a man of action and imagination. However, this position was a stepping-stone for greater challenges and opportunities.

In addition to the business course which he had previously taken, he now entered upon a correspondence course with the Alexander Hamilton Institute, which gave him an excellent background for his future business activities.

W.J.N.: "The name Simplicity came into my life when I worked at Turner because Simplicity was the company's engine brand name."

William had great confidence in the performance values of the Turner Simplicity gasoline engine line. Accordingly, he proposed a plan of action to increase sales throughout the midwest and parts of Canada. The proposal was accepted; with the blessing of Leland

Turner, company president, he became sales manager. The year was 1911. He was twenty-four years of age.

The company's sales increased steadily. Then came World War I and the need for greater food production.

These were times of significant opportunity for Turner. The company had the "know-how" required to produce a farm tractor and gasoline engine. It had an effective dealer organization. It had everything except the capital needed to finance expansion and production.

Port Washington bankers were unable to manage a loan of the size required. Milwaukee bankers were simply not interested. So to William, who during his six years with Turner had assumed greater responsibility for company policy, was assigned the task of finding someone who would provide the necessary underwriting.

W.J.N.: "One day, I visited the Dun & Bradstreet people in Milwaukee to ask about sources of money for our expansion. One of the men said that Francis Bloodgood, Jr., a prominent attorney, was known for investing in companies and ideas that impressed him."

This tip was all that William needed. He immediately called on Mr. Bloodgood at his office, the law firm of Bloodgood, Kemper & Bloodgood in Milwaukee. He came prepared with much more than a good sales talk. He had succeeded, in fact, in obtaining from a Canadian dealer an order for a large quantity of

Turner farm tractors and a certified check for \$10,000 as a deposit.

This show of confidence in the potentialities of the Turner product impressed Mr. Bloodgood. He invited William to his home. Before the day came to an end, Mr. Bloodgood had committed himself to the venture with a check for \$10,000. In the months that followed, he was to invest \$185,000 in Turner Manufacturing Company.

On the strength of Mr. Bloodgood's support, William engaged the services of two enterprising stock salesmen from Milwaukee, Mr. Krupp and Mr. Stern, who had a field day selling preferred stock in Turner to farmers in the Port Washington area. William had insisted with Messrs. Krupp and Stern that under no circumstances were they to misrepresent in any way to prospective buyers the true facts with respect to Turner, which, in fact, was fighting for its life.

From the records still available, it would appear that William's admonition went largely unheeded. In an approach to a client, Mr. Krupp would one day re-enforce Mr. Stern's remarks and on the next day Mr. Stern would augment Mr. Krupp's remarks.

A typical interview with a Port Washington client would go something like this:

Mr. Krupp: "We would like you to consider investing in the Turner Manufacturing Company."

Mr. Stern: "I think we should inform Farmer X that because of the great demand for Turner stock, we have only a limited number of stock assignments to offer."

Farmer X: "Do you think it would be possible for me to buy *any* stock at all in Turner?"

Another typical example of the Krupp and Stern technique is also revealed by the records. On one occasion Mr. Krupp is reported to have asserted to a prospective client that Turner Manufacturing Company could *demand* \$200,000 from any bank in Milwaukee. When challenged concerning this statement by the Wisconsin Railroad Commission, the State agency concerned, Mr. Stern replied that Mr. Krupp had indeed spoken the truth. "Mr. Krupp only said we could *demand* \$200,000," said Mr. Stern. "He did not say we could *get* it."

FROM SUCCESS TO FAILURE

Turner tractors were a tremendous success and the company prospered. This success, however, created a serious situation. In order to meet orders from the field, the company contracted for large inventories of engines, steel and other materials, all purchased at the

high prices of the sellers' market which then prevailed.

The war's end in 1918 brought a shock to Turner Manufacturing Company. Materials which had once been hard to obtain were suddenly readily available. Prices dropped 50 per cent almost overnight. Saddled with costly inventories, the company faced disaster. There were no government price controls to supply protection. The dollar loss for Turner came to approximately \$750,000. Like many other tractor companies at that time, Turner went into receivership with heavy losses to Mr. Turner, Mr. Bloodgood and the other stockholders.

W.J.N.: "This was surely a low point for me—to have to participate in the liquidation of a company I had worked so hard to help build."

II

Simplicity Manufacturing Company

SIMPLICITY MANUFACTURING COMPANY IS BORN

One day in 1920, during the unhappy liquidation proceedings of Turner Manufacturing Company, William was approached by a man with an idea, Nels A. Nelson, an inventor. Nelson had developed a portable cylinder boring and grinding machine for reconditioning automobile and truck engines. Due to the lack of engine technology in those days, there was a definite need for a machine of this kind. William recognized the potentialities immediately. He purchased the rights to the invention on a royalty basis.

What remained was to find capital with which to start operations.

Bill Niederkorn was blessed with great enthusiasm and an ample supply of self-confidence. He also had other qualities, among them one most needed now: intestinal fortitude. Hardly another man would have dared to approach Francis Bloodgood for financial help so soon after the failure of the Turner venture. But that is exactly what he did.

SECOND CHANCE

When they met in Milwaukee, Mr. Bloodgood was in no mood to risk more

of his money, and said so. One costly investment in Port Washington was enough for him. He summed up his feelings to Bill in these words: "You just cost me \$185,000 in the Turner Company. But I admire your courage and your confidence in your ability to make a success of this new venture. For every \$1,000 you invest in the new company to be organized, I will invest \$10,000!"

Thus Bill Niederkorn started Simplicity Manufacturing Company with \$11,000. Ten cylinder boring and grinding machines were produced by a local manufacturer. The machines were sold to service stations to test the demand for these products. When they proved successful, more machines were manufactured and sold during 1920 and 1921.

In 1922 the Simplicity Manufacturing Company was organized with a capital of \$50,000. Bill Niederkorn, who had become general manager, secretary and treasurer of the company, executed an assignment entered into previously with Nels A. Nelson covering the latter's invention of a boring and grinding machine.

In the course of the next six months, Mr. Bloodgood invested additional money, and at the time of his death in 1936 he had increased his invest-

ment considerably. Unfortunately, he did not live to benefit from all of the growth and success of Simplicity, a circumstance deeply regretted by Bill.

Going back to the beginning of Simplicity, the company leased a three story building with railroad siding on the west side of town. This was the site on which Bill Niederkorn and Simplicity were to make industrial history.

W.J.N.: "Our business prospered. The market for portable cylinder boring and grinding machines consisted of service stations all over the country."

The Simplicity name became well known to service station and garage operators throughout the United States. The demand for products needed in engine overhaul led to the introduction of Simplicity piston grinders, valve grinders and rebabbiting equipment. It became necessary for the company to expand.

Land adjacent to the plant was purchased. The building itself was enlarged in the first of many expansion programs that followed.

THE DEPRESSION

Despite the success which Simplicity enjoyed in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Bill Niederkorn, like other businessmen of the time, faced difficult problems. In 1929 depression struck the

United States and the world. It also affected the financial future of Simplicity. Bill, who at this time was president and general manager of the company, would often say during those dark days: "My eyebrows are turning gray just trying to meet the payrolls." However, the plant kept operating and the men kept working.

Then, in 1936, when the automobile manufacturers in Detroit decided to rebuild worn-out engines and sell these directly to car and truck owners, the market for reconditioning equipment made by Simplicity and sold to service stations became obsolete. The company had a top-notch production team but no product to sell. The critical task was to find another field in which the company could apply the available skills at a profit.

The search for another profitable market was happily found in 1937 when Montgomery Ward and Company wanted to know if Simplicity could and would undertake production of two-wheel walking garden tractors. Bill Niederkorn saw the opportunity. Two garden tractor models were developed and soon Simplicity tractors were being sold through Montgomery Ward's mail order operation and retail outlets.

The new tractors were an instant success. Later Simplicity developed a variety of powered products for lawn and garden service. In addition to manufacturing these for resale under Ward's trade name, the company began marketing lawn and garden equipment to dealers throughout the United States under the Simplicity trade name. A sales organization was developed to establish a network of dealers. The company was on its way in a new and exciting direction.

WORLD WAR II

World War II temporarily halted Simplicity's progress. Because of government restrictions the company was permitted to produce only a limited number of garden tractors during the war years, 1941-1945. Some product more directly related to the war effort than garden tractors would have to be developed to satisfy the War Production Board. Fortunately, this board had given a priority to electric fence controllers. With that rare foresight which marked his entire business career, Bill Niederkorn had only a year before—in 1941—purchased the rights to manufacture on a royalty basis an electric fence controller conceived by Stanley Klumb, an ingenious fellow from Milwaukee, who had discovered that charging wire fencing on farms by controlled electricity was more effective than battery-charged units then being marketed.

It is believed that Mr. Klumb, who also played a violin when he was not inventing, experimented extensively on cows, pigs and other farm animals, and found that his fence charger gave the beasts a never-to-be-forgotten shock, while the batteries gave them only a gentle charge that did not prevent them from coming back for more. The farmers were soon to find out the same truth.

Thus it was that, through Stanley Klumb's inventiveness and Bill Niederkorn's foresight, Simplicity Manufacturing Company went into war production. The demand for electric fence controllers grew, and as it grew so did Simplicity's volume of output. The product was sold through Montgomery Ward and Company mail order houses and a Simplicity dealer organization. Simplicity met the test of World War II. Had the war gone on for 20 years more,

there is no telling how many cattle, hogs, and sheep might have become disaffected toward Bill Niederkorn and Stanley Klumb.

During the World War II period, Simplicity also produced large shipments of external surface grinders for H. Leach Machinery Company of Providence, Rhode Island, which manufactured materials required by the War Production Board. Bill Niederkorn cannot quite recall at this late date what these materials were, but he thinks they were bullets.

The World War II period was in many ways an era of great stress and anxiety for Bill and his associates. This fact is borne out by a serious question put to Bill during this time by a representative of the War Production Board, who was endeavoring to establish wartime prices for Simplicity products.

"Where were you—I mean where were your tractors selling—in 1929?" asked the government man.

Bill gave a classic reply: "Where was I in 1929? Why, I don't even know where I was *last night*."

When World War II ended in 1945, Simplicity discontinued the manufacture of electric fence controllers, external surface grinders, and sub-contract machine work for government contractors in order to resume the manufacture and marketing of its stable product, lawn and garden equipment.

W.J.N.: "When I was a young boy, my mother said to me: 'Willie, if you go to church on Sundays and stay away from bad companions, you will be a wonderful boy.'"



Bill Niederkorn,
in his twenties



Early portraits of sisters Rose (left) who passed away
at 16, Clara (center) and Celia



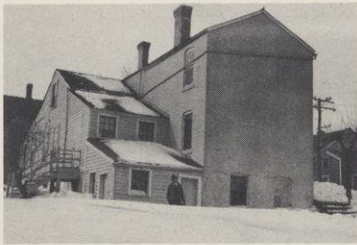
Brother John
during the
Spanish-American
War, 1898



Mother (right) and Celia



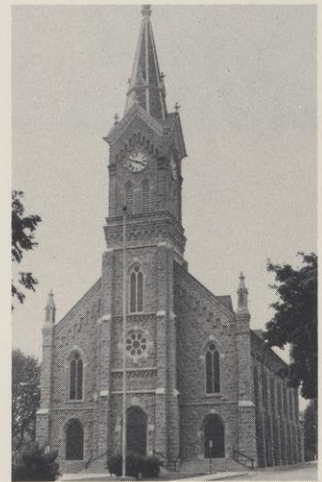
Myra Larson at 24,
off to her first job
at the Milwaukee
Free Press



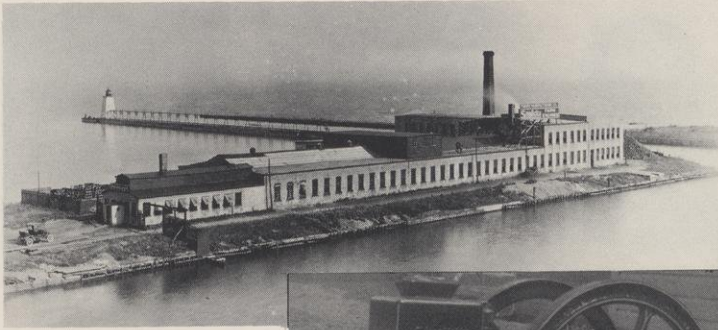
Family home on
Woodruff street, Port
Washington



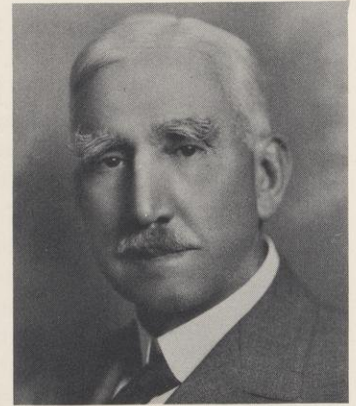
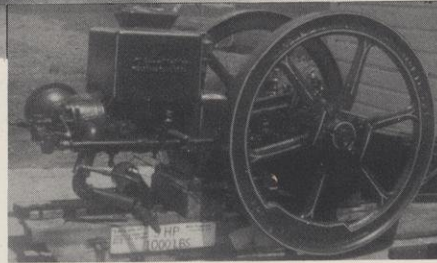
John (left) and Bill



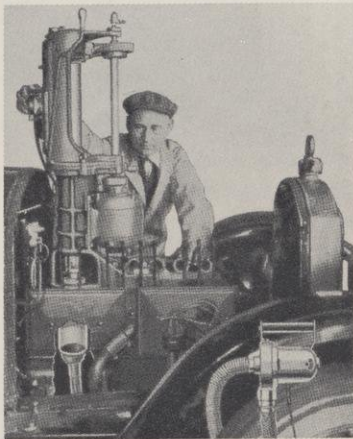
St. Mary's church,
Port Washington



Turner Manufacturing Company in 1914, and the Simplicity gasoline engine



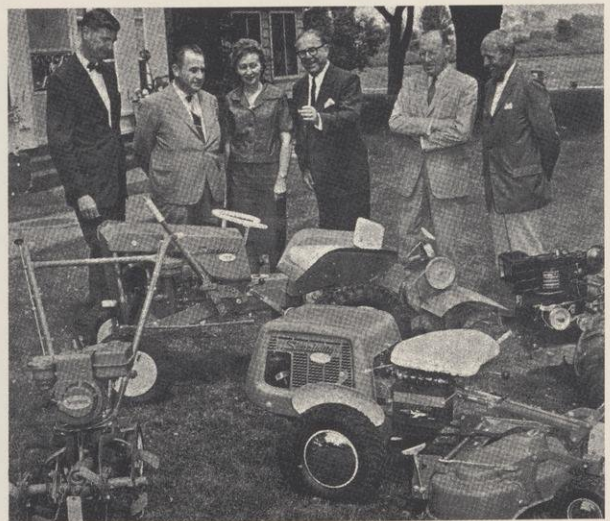
Francis Bloodgood, Jr., counselor and friend — a major investor in the early days of Turner and Simplicity



Simplicity Manufacturing Company's first product, a cylinder boring and grinding machine



Bill (standing) and associates mark Simplicity's 25th anniversary in 1946



A part of the current Simplicity line proudly displayed

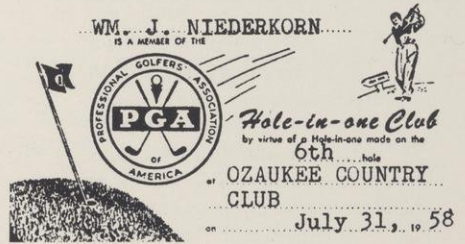
Father Joseph Brasky and Bill Niederkorn brought home the Knights of Columbus Bowling Tournament gold medal in 1933



A "foursome" at La Gorce Country Club, Miami Beach (left to right) Billy Sixty, Milwaukee, Fred Hessick, Miami Beach, Frank Woodside, Milwaukee and Bill Niederkorn



Bill pledges a toast to Myra



A golfer's dream come true



A hearty welcome awaits all their friends at the Niederkorn home at 409 West Grand Avenue, Port Washington

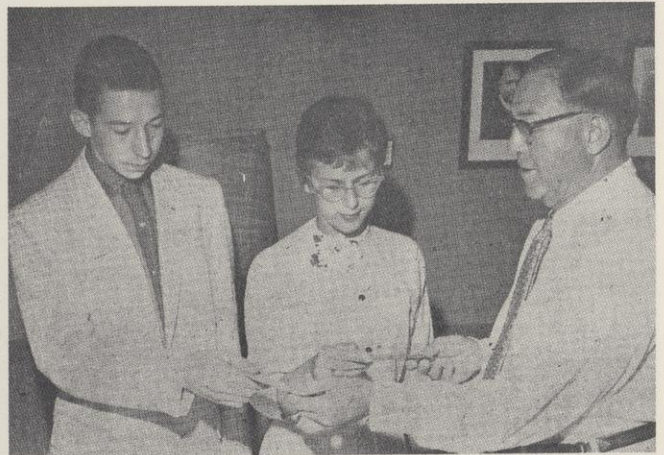


Bill (center) presents a Simplicity tractor and attachments to John Gillespie, director of Camp Rawhide, a group foster home for boys at New London, Wisconsin, as Bart Starr (right) quarterback for the Green Bay Packers and sports advisor to Camp Rawhide looks on approvingly



In 1953 Bill provided 300 desks for his parish school, and here with Father Peter Hildebrand, pastor of St. Mary's church, Port Washington, he examines one of them

Sister Mary Godfrieda at the chapel organ Bill gave to the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother at St. Alphonsus Hospital, Port Washington



In 1959 Bill established a \$20,000 scholarship fund for Port Washington high school students. First \$500 checks are presented to Richard Molling (left) and Miss Clarice Ritzman (center)



8/11/54

Mr. William Niederkorn

Dear Uncle Willie,

The loveliest and most carefree day of all the summer has come and gone, but the sweet memories of it will linger long, especially your presence and the pleasure of having you on the picture with the "Wonder-Boy" and all the Sisters. All of us, from the first to the last, had a most enjoyable time. The rides and steering on the "Wonder-Boy" was the outstanding enjoyment.

The snap in which you were caught speaking to me, was taken when you were telling us about your good Mother and the wonder-boy. May she continue to inspire her wonder-boy!

Be assured of our daily remembrance of your intentions in our prayers. May God love and bless you!

Gratefully,
Sister Mary Patricia & Community

Each year "Uncle Willie" entertains the School Sisters of Notre Dame at the Niederkorn Lodge, Port Washington, Wisconsin



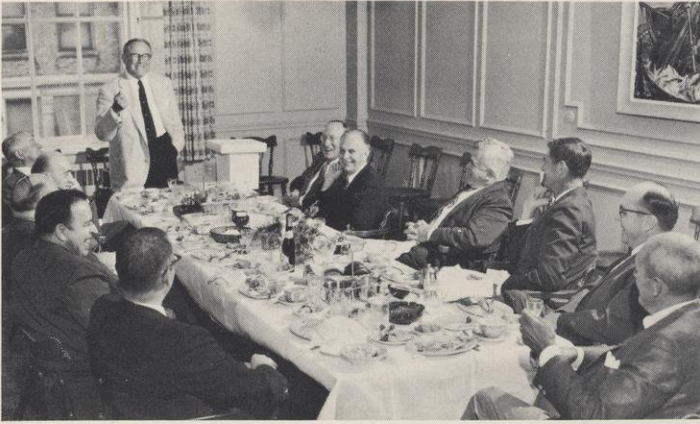
Bill (standing, second from right) hosts the Rotary Club at the Niederkorn Lodge, located a mile west of Port Washington



Helping to complete a \$450,000 remodeling project at the Ozaukee Country Club, Bill presents a check for \$35,000 to David Harris, president. Myra Niederkorn proudly displays the plaque naming W.J.N. as "Sachem of Ozaukee" and Life Membership No. 1, in the Ozaukee Country Club



Port Washington's W. J. Niederkorn Library, completed in 1961



On his 75th birthday anniversary Bill sparks a gathering of his associates, recounting experiences of days past



Bill carves as old friend Charles Coughlin (left) offers encouragement.

Class of Service This is a 7-line message unless so defined other- wise as indicated on the proper symbol.	WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM <small>W. F. HAMBRELL, President</small>	SYMBOLS DC=Day Letter NL=Night Letter L=International LT=Letter Telegram
The flag line shows in the dot line on domestic telegrams in STANDARD TIME or zone of origin. Time of receipt in STANDARD TIME or zone of destination.		
PW5 PD BDA PD=PORT WASHINGTON WIS AUG 8 1962=		
'W J NIEDERKORN= SIMPLICITY MFG CO= PORT WASHINGTON WIS=		
'UNCLE WILLIE=-		
WE WISH YOU THE BEST OF EVERYTHING ON YOUR 75TH BIRTHDAY AND MAY YOU HAVE MANY MANY MORE AS PRESIDENT OF SIMPLICITY= THE SIMPLICITY MEMBERS OF LOCAL 1430=		
THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE		

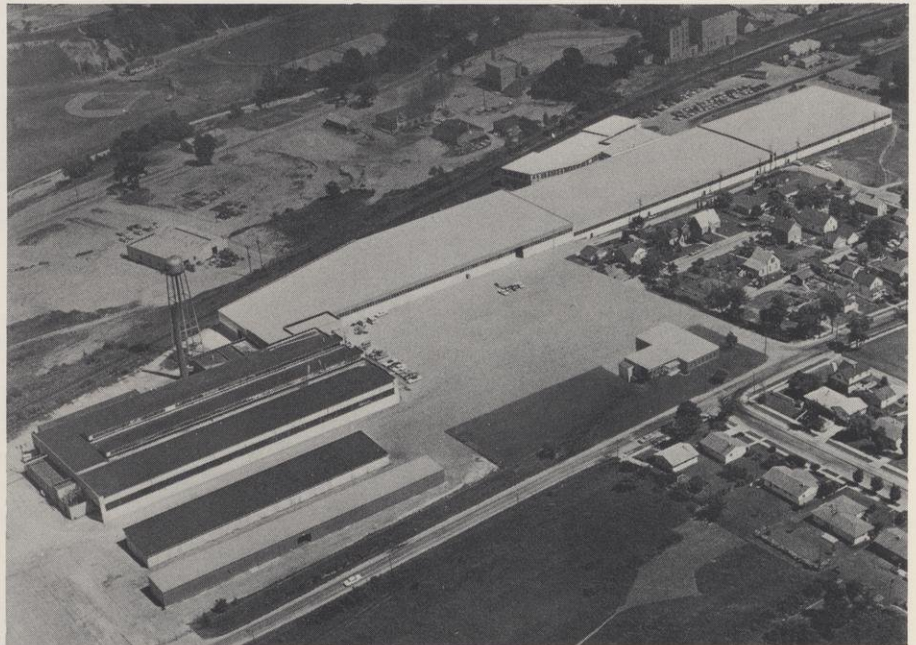
"Uncle Willie" fondly remembered by Simplicity employees on his "75th"



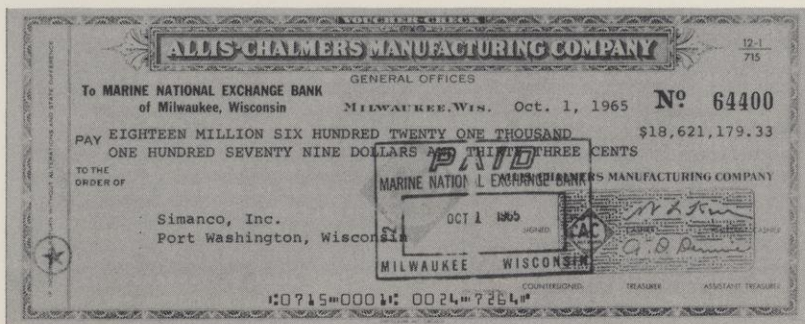
Relaxation at home in Miami Beach, Florida



Power equipment for every season rolls off Simplicity assembly lines



Simplicity has expanded to more than 330,000 square feet of manufacturing space at Port Washington, Wisconsin



In 1965 stockholders accepted an offer to purchase Simplicity by Allis-Chalmers Manufacturing Company for \$18,621,179

During the immediate post-World War II years, the Simplicity product line expanded with the changing way of life in America. Prior to 1941 the walking tractor was the acceptable and desirable means of getting the lawn and garden job done. Following the war Americans began to enjoy more prosperity and more leisure time. Simplicity research and engineering experts, sensing the changing mood of the market, began to develop riding equipment—tractors, lawn mowers, rotary tillers, snow throwers—and a variety of attachments to set the pace of leadership in this expanding market.

WONDER BOY

Competing on the basis of quality and performance, Simplicity soon became Number One in lawn and garden power equipment, so that by 1958 the company could boast products unique in their field. These new, economical, versatile, and convenient riding units became immediate favorites with thousands of customers throughout the United States; and Bill Niederkorn, recalling his mother's words when he was a child, named one of these units, the riding lawnmower, "Wonder-Boy".

The Simplicity products developed during this period were spontaneously and overwhelmingly accepted by the public. "Landlord," "Broadmoor," "Wonder-Boy," "R o t i c u l," "Sno-Away," and "Model W" have become household words in communities large and small everywhere. At this writing, in 1967, Simplicity products are available in all parts of the country and the demand for them is at an all-time high.

The success of Simplicity is attributable to sound leadership and enlighten-

ed management policies, coupled with keen appreciation of consumer needs. These elements have characterized the company's performance from the beginning.

SIMPLICITY EMPLOYEES' TRUST FUND

When the profitability of Simplicity became apparent, the company established a plan for sharing the company's good fortune with its employees. Company management wanted the men who made the products to share in the profits above and beyond their wages, which compared favorably with other area industries. Therefore the Simplicity profit-sharing trust was established in 1942. As of December 31, 1966 the company had contributed a total of \$3,848,518 to the Simplicity Employees' Trust Fund. No contributions to the fund are made by the employees.

Simplicity employees became members of the A.F.L.-C.I.O. Machinists Union in 1944. All union contracts from 1944 to 1965 were negotiated by Bill Niederkorn.

A point of particular pride for Bill is the fact that not in all of Simplicity's history has employment ever been interrupted for any reason. The company's industrial relations have always been most pleasant. Bill is affectionately known by his employees as "Uncle Willie."

His philosophy with respect to employment has always been and is to this day a simple one: "I am for the working man. The employees want to work, and I want them to work. None of us want any work stoppages at Simplicity."

It is interesting to note that present employees with 5 years of service number 117; those with 10 years of service,

38; those with 15 years of service, 38; those with 25 years of service, 37; those with 30 years of service, 29; those with 35 years of service, 4; and those with 40 years of service, 4.

One of Simplicity's most loyal, trustworthy and dependable employees deserves special mention. She is Loretta (Michels) Fullmer, who served as Bill Niederkorn's private secretary from 1924 to 1965.

A TRIBUTE TO THE EMPLOYEES OF SIMPLICITY

When corporate life flourishes, as the life of Simplicity Manufacturing Company has done for 45 years, Bill Niederkorn knows that it could do so only because management recognizes that each and every individual in the company has a consciousness of belonging and a consciousness of responsibility toward the entire enterprise. When responsibility on the part of employees grows, as it has done at Simplicity for almost half a century, the whole corporate effort succeeds.

Bill would be the first to acknowledge the employees' contribution to the advancement of the company over the years. He would also be the first to give grateful human expression to the men and women of Simplicity who, in union and trust and service, have borne the heat and burden of the years to build a better company and thereby to become themselves psychologically and spiritually richer.

DEALERS' DAYS

Not to be overlooked in this account of Simplicity's phenomenal success are the annual Dealers' Days gatherings which have been held for the past 16 years at the Niederkorn Lodge and 40-acre proving ground, on the outskirts of Port Washington, where all Simplicity products are tested. Dealers from 38 states come together here in the fall of the year to learn more about the company's goals and plans, to establish personal relationships with officers of the company, to gain greater insights and greater internal cohesion, stability and efficiency.

The moving force behind these meetings, which are attended by as many as 500 of the 1,800 Simplicity dealers and their wives, as well as key factory personnel and sales representatives, is Bill Niederkorn, constantly stimulating, encouraging, counseling and engaging all in the exciting process of coordinating and promoting the objectives of the company in matters of every kind that pertain to the good of the company and the good of the individuals who constitute the Simplicity dealerships. The wives of the dealers look forward each year to the shiny \$20 and \$50 bills which he offers personally as prizes to the lucky ladies. The men are rigorously excluded from the drawing for reasons well known to all. It is Bill's firm belief that the wives of the dealers contribute immeasurably to the success of the total Simplicity enterprise.

III

Myra Larson Niederkorn

Back in his days at Boerner Brothers, Bill, the good-looking boy with an appealing personality, was attracted by a pretty girl of fourteen, who was annoyed by the teasing of nineteen-year-old "Willie", as she shopped for groceries at the store.

This young lady was Myra Larson, daughter of good Norwegian parents, whose father was an esteemed Port Washington schoolmaster.

After elementary school Myra devoted herself seriously to typing and other business subjects to enable her to qualify for a position as stenographer in some company. Her diligence served her well. When she applied for her first job, she was promptly accepted and became secretary to the business manager of the Milwaukee Free Press. After this newspaper went out of business, she applied at Downing Box Company in Milwaukee and became the first secretary to Mr. A. C. Downing, founder and president of the firm, whom she served with great efficiency for 13 years.

W.J.N.: "In 1928, I made the best deal of my life. I asked Myra Larson to be my wife. She accepted. It was a decision neither of us has ever had reason to regret."

Myra, who was by now a business woman in her own right and not a little fourteen-year-old shopper at Boerner Brothers store, met Bill Niederkorn occasionally on her weekend visits to her parents in Port Washington. The encounters between them at the store were long forgotten. They became engaged and on June 23, 1928, they were married.

It is a truism that there is no aspiration which any man entertains, no achievement he hopes to accomplish, no honorable ambition he seeks to gratify, which is not directly related to either or both a mother and a wife. From his mother Bill Niederkorn derived the courage to fight the battles of life and from his wife Myra he derived the precious approval of a home of his own and all the hope, warmth, love, comfort, and inspiration which every man needs to do good for others and honor for himself. It is not an exaggeration to say that Bill Niederkorn would not be the man he is today were it not for Myra.

Years before their wedding, Bill had acquired a desirable homesite at 409 West Grand Avenue and within a year of their marriage he built a comfortable home. Except for a winter residence at Miami Beach, "409" has been home for the Niederkorns all of their married life. Its doors are always open to welcome countless friends.

IV

A Man for all Seasons

Throughout his active business career, Bill recognized the importance of relaxation in man's life. He worked hard and, when he played, he played hard too. Twice a week he bowled in organized bowling leagues. Each year he looked forward to the Wisconsin Knights of Columbus bowling tournament. In 1933 he toppled 664 pins in the doubles event, bringing home the gold medal with his capable partner, Father Joseph Brasky, who bowled 563, for a team total of 1227. Bill is a charter member of the Knights of Columbus, Council 2035, which was organized in 1919. In 1966 he had the distinction of being named an honorary member of the Knights of Columbus.

In his thirties Bill learned to play golf, a game he came to enjoy more than any other sport. While not a champion golfer, he consistently scored in the low eighties as a young and middle-aged man. Golf was to play a more important part in his later life, when he became a member and a director of Ozaukee Country Club and a member of La Gorce Country Club at Miami Beach, Florida. In the winter months he now plays three times a week at La Gorce, and in summer and fall he plays at Ozaukee. His score is currently in the nineties. In 1960 he shot a hole-in-one on the Number 6 Green (180 yards) at Ozaukee, using a Number 2 iron.

His other recreational interests include several card games at which he became expert. Older people around Port Washington will recall his profi-

ciency at skat, an exceedingly popular game in the first thirty years of the century. When bridge became the popular game, he took it up and was soon a formidable player.

Many old friendships are actively enjoyed by Bill as a member of the Milwaukee Athletic Club and of the Yacht Club and Bal Harbour Club in Miami Beach. His participation in many diversified recreational activities point to his love of life, his desire to be with people, his competitive spirit. His interests came to cover almost all of the better known sports, from major league baseball to pocket billiards. He has been a loyal booster of the Green Bay Packer football team for many years. For as long as the Braves baseball team were in Milwaukee, he was an avid fan and generous supporter.

At the end of the day, Bill enjoys the company and conviviality of his wife and friends. He is an excellent host, unequalled in generosity, graciousness and good taste. His favorite cocktail is martini made with House of Lords gin and Noilly-Pratt vermouth (2-7/8 to 1) and twist of oil of lemon. Invariably he drinks imported Niersteiner Kurfürft and Schloss Johannesberger Spätlese Rhine wines with his dinner. On occasion he has an after-dinner libation, which is usually mint bowl made with imported creme de menthe and a float of VSOP brandy, served over a cube of ice in an old-fashion glass. His brand of scotch is Chivas-Regal, 12-years old.

V

Sharing the Fruits of Toil

During his lifetime, Bill made it a point to support good and worthy causes.

Earlier in this biography reference was made to his respect and affection for the School Sisters of Notre Dame, his boyhood teachers at St. Mary's school in Port Washington. As an adult, he answered their needs in ways that ranged from supplying 300 new school desks for the children to donating 39 new uniforms for the marching band at St. Mary's school, Port Washington and 21 new uniforms for the marching band at St. Mary's school, Lake Church, Wisconsin.

Today Bill attends services in St. Mary's church, the same church in which he was an altar boy 72 years ago. The passage of time has brought numerous changes to the old edifice. Several of these improvements were implemented by him. The steeple bells, for example, were rung manually for generations. They no longer do. Thanks to an extraordinary contribution by him in 1953, huge bells are now activated by an electronic timing device. In 1965 he provided the entire furnishings for the new St. Mary's rectory, and when a second parish, St. Peter's congregation, was established in Port Washington in 1964 he gave generously to this parish too, as

well as to the congregation's building fund for a new school.

In 1940, St. Alphonsus Hospital, operated by the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, was constructed in Port Washington with his enthusiastic and visible support. His contributions to this hospital were significant and frequent, ranging from the gift of an organ for the chapel in 1950 to furnishing 13 hospital rooms with electrically-operated beds in 1960.

When the Benedictine Fathers undertook the building of Claremont Priory in Cedarburg in 1966, they were able to complete construction, thanks in large part to help they received from Bill Niederkorn. Another beneficiary in recent years has been the Ozaukee County Historical Foundation.

Bill's philanthropic interests have not been confined to Catholic institutions. In 1958, for example, and again in 1967, he made substantial contributions to all five Protestant parishes in Port Washington: St. John's Lutheran church, Frieden's United Church of Christ, Christ the King Lutheran church, and Grand Avenue Evangelical United Brethren church. He also offered a helping hand to Advent Lutheran church in Cedarburg.

Bill expressed his faith in youth in a concrete way by establishing a trust fund to provide two \$500.00 scholarships each year, for 20 years, for Port Washington High School graduates. The Port Washington Rotary Club Scholarship Foundation, organized in 1965, is the beneficiary of his vigorous financial support.

Moreover, his interest in education extends beyond the local scene, as evidenced by sizeable gifts to Marquette University and St. John's School for the Deaf, Milwaukee; the Sisters of Notre Dame Mother House, Mequon; Campion Jesuit High School, Prairie du Chien; St. Bede's Priory, Eau Claire; and the neurological clinic of St. Colletta's School, Jefferson, Wisconsin.

In the summer of 1966, he donated a ten horse-power Simplicity riding tractor with rotary mower, rotary snow thrower and dump cart attachments to Camp Rawhide, New London, Wisconsin, a summer camp for neglected or dependent boys on the banks of the Wolf River in Waupaca county.

Since Bill and Myra were not blessed with children of their own, they decided to share with their 38 nieces and nephews some of the material benefits which God had given them during their happy married life. No benefaction which they have made during their lifetime has given them greater joy.

W. J. NIEDERKORN LIBRARY

A public library had been established in Port Washington prior to 1865. For generations, the facility occupied cramped, inadequate quarters, first in a commercial building, later in the county court house basement, still later in the basement of the community hall,

and finally in a school building. In 1959, the library board was faced with the problem of moving again. The school needed more space. The board challenged the community. Would the citizens subsidize construction of a public library building of adequate size on a desirable site? At the public forum which followed, Bill Niederkorn professed strong interest in the project. He offered help, both financial and personal. The extent and effectiveness of his assistance is documented by the fact that Port Washington's modern, ideally located public library was named, "W. J. Niederkorn Library."

OZAUKEE SACHEM

Bill Niederkorn's sense of duty and service is apparent in his association with Ozaukee Country Club. From the outset in 1923, when he became a member, he has been actively interested in the club's progress and stability. It was not long before he became a director, and during several stormy years he was a steadying influence in establishing the club on a sound financial basis. Most recently, in 1966, a remodeling project was stalled. His gift to the club put the project back on the track and today the "Niederkorn Room" is testimony to his substantial help.

In gratitude the board of directors of the club presented him with a life membership in 1966 and conferred upon him the title "Ozaukee Sachem," a rare distinction for a white man, especially a Luxemburger.

FRIEND OF THE VETERANS

Many will recall the tremendous housing shortages that followed World

War II. Port Washington tackled the problem by establishing a Veterans' Housing Authority and named Bill Niederkorn as its chairman. It was the purpose of the authority to build moderately-priced, one-family homes to be sold at cost to veterans of the recent war. Bill employed the same methods in building homes as he did in producing Simplicity tractors. He knew how to get things done. In less than scheduled time 32 modern homes were completed and occupied by 32 veterans and their families. Today, this orderly, well-planned sub-division stands as a monument to him and his colleagues in the housing authority.

CENTENNIALS

Port Washington observed the centennial of its founding in 1935. It was inevitable that Bill would be appointed chairman of the week-long commemoration, which is remembered as the most spectacular civic celebration in the history of the community. Lake Park was the center of festivities enjoyed by thousands of people—more than had ever been in Port Washington at one time before. It is small wonder that he was asked to perform the same leadership role at the community's 125th anniversary in 1960.

W.J.N.: "Belonging to Rotary has always given me great satisfaction."

There's the good fellowship, of course. But even more important is the opportunity to be of service."

Bill had belonged to the Port Washington Rotary Club for six years when he became its president in 1935. A charter member, he considered his membership a privilege. As in every responsibility he undertook, he performed as president with a high sense of duty. Thus, he became active in Rotary's expansion program and resolved that Port Washington's chapter would sponsor a second club in Ozaukee county. A group of leading citizens in the Thiensville-Mequon area was soon organized as a part of Rotary. Bill had the pleasure of presiding at the presentation of the new charter.

Worthwhile community activities of all kinds have always enjoyed his support. For instance, Port Washington is part of the Milwaukee Blood Bank. Bill gave lively support to the program and made it a policy to permit Simplicity employees to take part in it during working hours without loss of pay. Year after year, the men and women of Simplicity account for one-third of all the blood donated in Port Washington.

The Hospital Area Planning Committee of Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Waukesha and Washington counties counts Bill as one of its members. Since February, 1960 he has been a director of Port Washington State Bank.

VI

A Public Trust

From the time of its organization, Simplicity had remained privately owned. Stockholders were few. The business had grown at an extremely healthy rate, and it became increasingly apparent that large-scale expansion would be needed to satisfy the ever-increasing demand for Simplicity products.

As he approached his 75th birthday, Bill realized that he was no longer a young man. He had no children to carry on in his place. A large block of Simplicity stock, which was the principal asset of his estate, would present obvious problems. He felt it would be best to sell a portion of his common stock in order to diversify his investments and to establish a market price for his holdings in the company.

W.J.N.: "1960 was an important year for Simplicity and for myself. It was the year we became a publicly owned company."

In January, 1960, arrangements were made with A. C. Allyn & Company, investment brokers, to offer 80 per cent of

owners' common stock to the public at \$10.50 per share. The stock offering was promptly purchased by the public. This was a natural response to an outstanding record. The company had operated at a profit for 25 consecutive years and paid substantial dividends during that period.

BANNER YEAR

Each of the five years that followed the public offering of stock brought greater sales and increased profits. Simplicity stock rose in value. All who invested benefited. The banner year was 1965. During this year the sales were nearly \$20,000,000. Net earnings were \$1,839,129. Sales had increased 20 per cent over the previous year and earnings on sales had increased 41.6 per cent. No Port Washington company had ever approached this rate of success. That year, 405 employees accounted for a payroll of \$3,500,000. The importance of Simplicity to community well-being was widely acknowledged.

The company's progress was a tribute to teamwork within the Simplicity organization under the dynamic leadership of Bill Niederkorn.

W.J.N.: "A number of large companies expressed interest in buying Simplicity. Only one would agree to my conditions in regard to Port Washington. This one was Allis-Chalmers—and that is why it is now Simplicity's parent company."

Simplicity had been supplying riding tractors to Allis-Chalmers Manufacturing Company for resale under the Allis-Chalmers trade mark since 1961. Company officers were well acquainted with the Allis-Chalmers management and valued their friendship and business integrity. They were convinced that the "Simplicity Team" could rise to even greater heights backed by the resources of this large corporation.

In the spring of 1965 Bill had many lengthy discussions with Allis-Chalmers management and in July of that year Allis-Chalmers made a firm offer to purchase the assets of Simplicity. Allis-Chalmers also agreed to continue Simplicity's operations in Port Washington and to supply the Simplicity dealer

organization with all products under the trade name "Simplicity".

After negotiations had been completed, Bill and his associates could inform the company's 3,331 stockholders that Allis-Chalmers had offered to purchase Simplicity Manufacturing Company for \$18,621,179 in cash. The purchase price represented \$32.00 per share of common stock, more than three times the price of the stock first offered five and a half years before. The offer was approved, and the transaction was consummated October 1, 1965.

It was a poignant moment. As Bill Niederkorn put it: "My co-workers and I were very sad when we signed the documents completing the sale by which Allis-Chalmers acquired our nice little company that we started forty-three years ago. We felt better later when we were presented with a check totaling \$18,621,179, six times the total capital investment. We were also pleased to know that Simplicity would continue in Port Washington, the city that has always meant so much to me and to all the Simplicity team."

Epilogue

The story of William J. Niederkorn is one of affirming faith. It demonstrates the infinite potentialities for accomplishment that exist in America, where adversity can be turned to success by a man of superior ability and character. His story also demonstrates the potentialities of success itself, when applied by a man who, in the words of John Ruskin . . . *"having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others."*

*W.J.N.: "I have had a good life.
I hope to continue to work and to be
useful to Simplicity and
to the world around me.
"If you want to know the secret of
whatever success I have accomplished,
I can only say
there is no secret. My formula for
getting ahead is available
to anyone.
"It consists in willingness
to work and to work hard . . . To have
confidence in yourself . . .
to be fair and honest in all your
endeavors . . . to do the right thing . . .*

*to maintain the good will and
respect of business associates
. . . to care about people and to
recognize that success gives you the
opportunity to help others."*

This is the story of a man bursting with vitality—a man who is very much alive, a man whose range of interests is wide and whose zest and curiosity are not dulled by the "grey ultimate decrepitude of war and civil strife and disaster and whose life is cherished, strengthened and fed with the aid of joy."

To such a man this book is dedicated—to one who, in weighing the values of human existence, struck out boldly to achieve a full and free life and to fulfill his vocation and mission toward God and his fellowmen. He learned the great lesson that the acid test of activity is the genuine good of one's fellows. He yearned for nothing more ardently than to serve the good of his neighbor ever more generously and effectively. And in so doing he saw the light that enabled him to measure up to his supreme destiny. For in God and in those made in God's image and likeness he found the key to the true meaning of life and of all human history.

