Built to Last

Jaime Caliendo

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By Jaime Caliendo

“A boss is a boss, it is ever so clear. But a boss and a friend, is ever so dear,” writes Hal Edison, the 101-year old Huntsman School of Business alum who recently made a generous donation in memory of his employer and friend, Earl Stone.

Edison met Earl Stone right after high school, when he started working at Stone’s Grocery Store in Logan, Utah. They took an immediate liking to each other, and their friendship left a lasting impression on Hal. “He was a good boss. We respected each other,” says Hal, who remembers Stone as kind and patient with his employees. Stone treated them with dignity, and once he even lent Hal his car so Hal could take a girl to a dance.

Stone’s quiet generosity is still a wonder to Hal, and inspired his gift to the Huntsman School of Business in Earl Stone’s name. “He was always being asked to contribute to causes and he did so without anyone knowing,” recalls Hal. “Most of all he gave me a job, twice, once before the war and once afterwards. Jobs were hard to come by in those days, and I’m so grateful to him.”
Hal Edison was born in the Budge Hospital in Logan on August 24, 1919. Amid the economic boom of the Roaring Twenties, Hal passed an idyllic childhood in rural Hyrum, ten miles south of Logan. By the 1930s, the US was deep into the Great Depression and 12-year old Hal, who had milked cows on his grandparents’ dairy farm since his early childhood, got a job at the general store sacking potatoes into 10-pound bags to help contribute to the family finances.
The Edison family moved to Logan when Hal was 15 years old. Finances were tight, and he was determined to keep working, so every Friday after school, Hal rode the train to Hyrum where he worked in the general store until closing, slept in a cold room above the store, then worked all day Saturday and rode the bus home Saturday night. His gratitude for the opportunity to work outweighed the hardships of the job. “I made about five dollars [for 18 hours of work], and considered myself fortunate to have a job when so many others were out of work,” Hal recalls. He was grateful to find a job closer to home after high school, at Earl Stone’s store.

Economic and political turmoil erupted into World War II, and in 1942 Hal enlisted as a paratrooper in the Army, and was assigned to the 505th Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division. Nicknamed “Slats” by his army comrades for being exceptionally tall and slender, Hal’s grit and also a good bit of luck helped him survive five successful combat jumps in some of the deadliest campaigns in Italy, Holland, Belgium, and Germany. While in the Army, he also contracted malaria, nearly froze to death, and spent a month in the infirmary with a punctured lung and several broken ribs. Landmines and nearly constant enemy fire claimed the lives of many of his dearest friends, whom he has never forgotten.

Sociable by nature, Hal studied Business Administration at Utah Agricultural College following the war, where he graduated in 1947 from what would later become the Huntsman School of Business at Utah State University. By this time, Earl Stone had opened Low Cost Drug Store, and Hal was a natural fit for the manager position. He welcomed the opportunity to work with his friend again.

“Earl was carefree and fun. He never fired me though there were several occasions when he could have,” says Hal. He remembers the time a watermelon got broken, and the stock boys started an impromptu food fight in the store. “Somebody hit the spice section—the pepper, the Schilling cans. They spilled all over the place. But he didn’t get mad about that,” Hal laughs. “We had a lot of good times together,” he continues, remembering shared lunches at the Pigpen Café, listening to the jukebox, playing snooker (similar to pool), and flipping coins to see who would buy sweet buns for the group every day.

In 1951, Hal became a pharmaceuticals and medical supplies rep for McKesson & Robbins where he worked for more than 33 years, eventually covering the western half of the United States. He was well liked by his customers, and was promoted many times within the company.

“Being successful boils down to working hard, and doing your job,” says Hal. “My motto was, ‘A job worth doing is worth doing well.’ And I was lucky because I liked what I did. It was the people that made my job fun. I had a lot of friends,” he chuckles.

Still going strong, Hal plays pool every Friday, eats sweet buns and drinks half of a Coke daily, and enjoys watching the Utah Jazz. He is a voracious reader of the Smithsonian, National Geographic, the sports section in the newspaper, and anything about music history, which is a special interest of his. He can sing the lyrics of every song from 1930 to 1950.

“If you should survive to 105, look at all you’ll derive from being alive,” he sings, quoting Frank Sinatra’s “Young at Heart,” which captures the essence of this man who is determined to live to at least 105.

With more than a century of memories and life experiences to reflect upon, Edison’s thoughts turn most often to gratitude for his education, work opportunities, and to the people who made a difference in his life, like his family and Earl Stone. “Earl was A1. Best of the Best. He’s A1 in my heart,” says Hal. “I’m most proud of marrying my wife and having children. I’ve had 100 years of blessings.”

At more than 100 years old today, Hal embodies the timelessness of grit, gratitude, and graciousness. The Huntsman School of Business is proud to call this remarkable centenarian an alum. We hope to produce students who, like Hal Edison, are built to last.