



PASSION

You gotta have it
or you gotta get it

I have measured out my life in coffee spoons.
—T. S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

Bainbridge Island, Winslow, Washington
Across the Puget Sound from Seattle
5:55 A.M.

Jack Hartman rolls over and turns off the alarm five minutes before its scheduled 6 A.M. wake-up call. For years he has set an alarm only as a stop-gap against the unlikely chance that he might sleep too long. Life is too much fun and too short

~ Beans ~

to sleep through it. When he was a flight attendant for Continental Airlines, Jack never missed a flight. In fact, he was almost always the first crewmember to arrive for each day's airborne adventure. Even though his "stewing" days are long past, Jack is often still the first one up and the first to arrive.

Without much thought, he performs his morning ablutions—a quick shower and brushing of teeth. Then he moves into the kitchen for his morning cup of coffee, a ritual familiar to most of us yet one that for Jack Hartman is entirely different. Jack's morning cup comes not from a Mr. Coffee or a spoon of instant in water boiled up in the microwave. Jack's first tiny cup of the day is espresso—thick, aromatic, and flavorful. A powerful elixir of caffeine, flavor, and love made with his highly polished stainless steel King Coffee Espresso machine—just a baby step below the famous La Marzocco model he uses all day long to satisfy the caffeine cravings of hundreds of customers at his Seattle business, The El Espresso.



~ Beans ~

Jack Hartman is known to many people as the King of Coffee, the man who made the espresso cart a common, everyday experience where thousands of Seattleites go every day to purchase their not-so-everyday cup of coffee. Every morning for twenty years, Jack has risen early and peddled his ten-speed Bianchi to work, *pulling* cups of espresso for the people of downtown Seattle. And every morning for the last twelve years, he has preceded that journey with thirty minutes of meditation.

Meditation is one of the ways in which Jack Hartman has simplified his life, using familiar phrases to screen out the cares of the world and bring peace to his being in preparation for facing a day filled with constant work and hundreds of customers. Making and keeping his life simple is one of his goals.

This morning, Dianne joins Jack at 6:45 for a quick good-morning and an espresso before she and her friends take off for a post-dawn rowing session in Puget Sound. Dianne Hartman has been Jack's partner in life as well as in business for those same twenty years. In true storybook

~ Beans ~

fashion, Jack and Dianne met in mid-flight, in the galley of a DC-10, where they were both flight attendants preparing morning coffee for their passengers. The attraction was instant and natural, like cream and coffee. After several years in the air, Jack and Dianne decided to tie the knot and plant their feet on the ground when Jack bought a coffee-cart business called The El Espresso in downtown Seattle in 1980. Dianne likes to say that she's been serving coffee to people for thirty-five years: the first fourteen at thirty-five thousand feet and the next twenty-one at thirty-five feet above sea level in downtown Seattle.

For the last year or so, Dianne has been able to stay home or go rowing with friends or whatever she feels like because she has retired from the espresso business after twenty years as Jack's partner in the El. Though retired, she can't resist coming in several days a week to help out.

After Dianne's departure, Jack begins to pack up the El's famous chocolate chip cookies he baked last night. The cookies have become favorites of his customers, who would surely let

~ Beans ~



him know their disappointment should he not have them available that day. Jack likes to say he's created a monster, but it's a monster that indicates how much his customers like him and the way he does business.

It's a good monster to have.

Jack loads the cookies into his bike trailer and heads out on the four-mile journey through the hills of Bainbridge Island to the ferry dock.

Along the way, the twists and turns and ups and downs of the road make Jack think of the twists and turns and ups and downs of life that have placed him on a bucolic island across the Sound from Seattle, riding a bicycle on his way to the business he has created as much out of need as out of planning. Jack Hartman is one of those people who needed to start his own business to take full advantage of his passions in life—passion for coffee, for conversation, and for creating community. Jobs that fulfill those needs don't

~ Beans ~

exist many places so it's often up to people like Jack to create them for themselves.

In 1979, Continental decided to pull out of its Seattle hub. As a result of Continental's decision to downsize, Jack and Dianne had a decision to make, too. If they wanted to keep their jobs as flight attendants, they would have to move to another city. If they didn't want to move, they would have to find new careers. It was a difficult decision because they loved how they made their living. But their love for Seattle turned out to be stronger than their love of flying. Besides, it wasn't the flying they loved so much as it was the people, the passengers. Now, all they had to do was find a people-centered job that would satisfy their passions.

As he heads down the hill to the Bainbridge Island ferry dock, Jack recalls his first entrepreneurial attempt following his time in the air—a floating bar called the Martini Barge in Lake Washington. He and some friends started the business mostly for something to do. And while it was modestly successful, Jack knew it wasn't a

~ Beans ~

career. As he sold drinks to customers, he found that he loved being in business for himself. And although he loved making people happy, he knew something was wrong. Eventually he discovered what that something was—he was selling a product he wasn't passionate about. He knew he needed to make another change.

Years earlier, Jack had frequented a little place called Cafe Allegro in the University District, and he still remembered the joys of well-brewed, well-pulled coffee. He recalled how energized he'd feel after each cup. His time in the air had centered quite a bit around coffee, too. He knew from both those experiences that a good cup of coffee could go a long way toward making people feel good, toward getting them ready to take on the rest of the day.



So when the opportunity to purchase an established pushcart business called The El Espresso arose, Jack and Dianne raised the \$5,000 capital it required and eagerly went into business for themselves.

~ Beans ~



The first section of Jack's daily bicycle journey ends as he arrives at the dock. His four-mile jaunt has energized him like a well-pulled espresso—blood is flowing to his brain and ideas are coming rapidly. He loads his gear aboard the ferry, secures it, and heads to the upper deck for the beautiful thirty-minute journey across Puget Sound.

As the ferry pulls away, the calming slap of water on the hull brings him back to thoughts of his journey through life with The El Espresso.

For the first three years of the business, Jack and Dianne devoted themselves to learning all they could about coffee. They applied the same passion they had in the air to creating and delivering the perfect cup of coffee. Soon, every cup they made was pulled with a passion that made it the best it could be. They soon discovered, however, that no matter how much passion they had for what they were doing, unless their clientele had a similar passion for coffee, they weren't going to stay in business for long. So

~ Beans ~

rather than wait for their customers to develop that passion on their own, Jack and Dianne began to *create* it.

“Generating passion in your customers begins with teaching it every day,” Jack always used to say. He’d said it to himself, to Dianne, to his employees, to anyone who would listen. And as much as he likes to talk, he realizes, that probably adds up to quite a few people.

“When you totally love what you make, it’s just natural that your customers will love it, too,” Jack had often thought as well. One of the first things he did to make people passionate about The El Espresso was to make every cup a double shot and sell it as a single. Jack thought that would be a good way to make his coffee twice as good as everybody else’s. And it worked, he recalls, noticing that the ferry is already halfway to Seattle.

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As the ferry docks, the presence of Seattle’s skyline looming over him makes Jack think about the

~ Beans ~

reality he's been hiding from—things are not perfect at The El Espresso. His business does have some problems—with cash flow and with employees. These problems have begun to threaten his passion.

Additionally, the economy in general is down. Most of his loyal customers are still just that—loyal. But one of Seattle's largest employers, a dot-com with offices in the building next door to the El's countertop, has moved hundreds of employees, most of them loyal El customers, into new offices several miles away. And that has had a drastic impact on his business in two ways.

First, the top line has taken a deep hit. It will be difficult to replace hundreds of daily customers. Jack is certain it's theoretically possible to rebuild his customer base but he's unsure whether he has either the time or the heart for it anymore. Second, his employees are worried about



~ Beans ~

their future. (Hey, he's worried about his *own* future!) And when employees are worried, the customers soon know. Most pressingly, a key employee, George Guthrie, a man who's been pulling coffee with him for eight years and someone Jack thinks the customers absolutely love, is showing signs of burnout. And that means Jack is going to have to have a heart-to-heart with George very soon. And, as much as he knows that's the right thing to do, he also knows it's going to be emotionally difficult for both of them. And that's not the part of the job he enjoys.

After much discussion with his best friend and partner, Dianne, Jack has decided to hire a business consultant to help him analyze the situation and devise new ways to build things up again. His great fear in this regard is that the recommendation might be to expand the business to meet increased competition from the chain coffee shops, as a previous consultant had suggested, with disastrous results. That's something he's definitely not interested in. For Jack Hartman, bigger is not better—it's just bigger.

~ Beans ~

At this moment, however, he has to get his bike up Spring Hill and prepare himself to deal with the new day, a ten o'clock meeting with what he has come to think of as his last resort—consultant Carol Wisdom—*and* do his best to overcome the funk he finds himself immersed in on this partly sunny day in Seattle