

ham, T. S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Photographs of Maugham, Joyce, and the late C. S. Lobrano, his favorite editor at the *New Yorker*, and a watercolor by Stuart Davis adorn the wall of his workroom. Among his favorite motion pictures are those of W. C. Fields.

Brooks Atkinson once described S. J. Perelman as "a slight, immaculately groomed gentleman with a doleful look," and another observer has called his look "owlish." Perelman wears a neat mustache and a pair of oval, steel-rimmed glasses that he picked up in Paris in 1927. In general appearance he is tweedy but dapper, as elegant in his choice of wardrobe as he is in his choice of words. While he is soft-spoken and reserved in manner, those who know him testify that he is "a full-time wit" who converses in "multiple fascinating directions." Perelman has two children, Adam and Abby Laura. Pointing out that he is not "a happy laughing kid" but a "crank," the humorist has said: "I'm highly irritable and my senses bruise easily, and when they are bruised I write."

#### References

- Cue 31:15 D 15 '62 pors  
Life 52:85+ F 9 '62 pors  
N Y Times Mag p26+ Ja 26 '69 pors  
Washington (DC) Post E p1+ O 18 '70 pors  
Twentieth Century Authors (1942; First Supplement, 1955)  
Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews 2d series (1983)  
Who's Who in America, 1970-71

#### PEROT, H(ENRY) ROSS (pə-rō')

June 27, 1930- Industrialist; philanthropist  
Address: b. Electronic Data Systems Corp., Ex-75235;

Self-made Texas multimillionaire H. Ross Perot, a paragon of the Protestant ethic, has dazzled Wall Street with his business acumen and captured headlines with his patriotic zeal in behalf of United States prisoners of war in North Vietnam. Perot's fortune is based on his near total ownership of the Electronic Data Systems Corporation, a rapidly expanding computer services company that he founded in Dallas in 1962. Through one of the sharpest underwriting deals in financial history, Perot became a billionaire within a few months of offering a small portion of E.D.S. stock to the public in September 1968. Wall Street vagaries have since reduced his resources somewhat but not his determination to spend them on projects that he believes in. Far from the stereotype of the Texas right-winger, Perot espouses an essentially nonpolitical faith in initiative, hard work, old-fashioned reverence for home, country, and religion, and a profound disdain for bureaucracy. Although his philanthropies have included large contributions to the Boy Scouts and to ghetto pub-

lic schools, he is best known for his ventures into international diplomacy to aid the American POW's, and especially for his unsuccessful attempt to fly to Hanoi in December 1969 with Christmas packages for the prisoners. In the world of finance Perot's most recent coup was his takeover of F. I. du Pont, Glore Forgan and Company, New York's third largest brokerage house.

Henry Ross Perot was born on June 27, 1930 in the east Texas city of Texarkana. His father, now deceased, was Gabriel Ross Perot, a cotton broker and part-time horse trader who kept his family living fairly comfortably in a three-bedroom red-brick house in Texarkana. "Dad's business was talked morning, noon, and night in that house," Bette Perot, the millionaire's sister and director of his private foundation, told Terence Shea of the *National Observer* (September 14, 1970). "Dad was a real trader, and Ross learned many lessons just listening. He absorbed everything."

When he was six Perot went to work for his father, breaking horses to the saddle for a dollar or two apiece. (His nose still shows the results of the falls he took.) But his real talent was for selling, whether Christmas cards, used saddles, or the *Saturday Evening Post*. At the age of twelve he worked out a deal with the circulation department of the *Texarkana Gazette* whereby he would establish a paper route in the town's black slum area and in return would earn 70 percent rather than the customary 30 percent of subscription fees collected. Setting out each morning at 3:30 on horseback, he covered twenty miles before school each day, and he was soon making \$40 a week. The circulation department tried to renege on his added percentage, but he successfully countered that effort by going directly to the owner.

As a Boy Scout, Perot rose to the rank of Eagle Scout. In school he was a mediocre student until the eleventh grade, when the teacher told him he was not as bright as his classmates and thus prodded him into earning straight A's. After high school he attended Texarkana Junior College as a pre-law student, but his real ambition was to study at the United States Naval Academy and go to sea. In 1949 he succeeded in obtaining an appointment to Annapolis.

At Annapolis Perot was only a middling student, graduating 454th in a class of 925, but his classmates voted him the best all-around midshipman and life president of the class. After receiving his commission, in June 1953, Perot boarded the destroyer USS *Sigoumey* en route to Korea, but the Korean war ended before the ship arrived. Ensign Perot's next assignment was as assistant navigator aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Leyte*. "I loved the Navy, loved the sea, loved ships," he told Fred Powledge of the *New York Times Magazine* (February 28, 1971). "But I always find that whatever I'm doing, I'm thoroughly involved in it. In the Navy, the promotion system and the seniority system and the waiting-in-line concept were just sort of incompatible with my desire to be measured and judged by what I could produce." Perot decided not to sign up for another hitch and was discharged in 1957 with the rank of lieutenant.

While serving aboard the *Leyte*, Perot had been invited by a visiting executive from the International Business Machines Corporation to look him up after his discharge. Perot did so, and obtained a job selling computers in Dallas. In his fifth year with I.B.M. he sold his year's quota in the first three weeks of January, and his initiative was rewarded with a desk job in the corporation's Dallas office. While in that job he came across Henry David Thoreau's observation, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation," and he took it as a personal warning that he must not allow his initiative and individuality to be stifled in a corporation trap. When I.B.M. offered him an administrative position in White Plains, New York, he decided to quit and strike out on his own.

While working for I.B.M., Perot had observed that companies leasing hardware from the corporation often had trouble learning how to utilize it. He decided that there was need for a service organization that would design, install, and operate electronic data processing systems for clients on a contract basis. On his thirty-second birthday, June 27, 1962, he founded Electronic Data Systems with \$1,000 in savings and with his wife, his sister, and his mother as charter directors. Determined not to go into debt buying capital equipment, he initially used a computer owned by a Dallas insurance company, buying unused time on it at wholesale rates and then selling it retail to another firm. His staff, at first consisting of himself and a secretary, was soon expanded to include two former I.B.M. salesmen and an ex-I.B.M. systems engineer. All three are now multimillionaire vice-presidents of E.D.S. The first customers serviced by E.D.S. were insurance firms, and medical insurance claims have continued to provide the bulk of the company's business.

During the 1960's, E.D.S. doubled its business annually, branch offices sprang up in major cities throughout the United States, and the number of employees grew to 1,700. When Perot decided it was time for his company to go public, in 1968, he handled the stock offering as shrewdly as he had built up the firm. First he recapitalized E.D.S. so that nearly 12,000,000 shares were in existence, each with a par value of 20¢. Of the new shares, however, he offered only 650,000 for sale, and he shopped carefully among Wall Street underwriters for the firm that would guarantee the highest price. He finally chose R. W. Presspich and Company, which brought out E.D.S. at \$16.50 a share, representing a near record price-to-earnings ratio of 118 to one. At the close of trading the first day, September 12, 1968, E.D.S. was selling at \$23 a share. Since Perot had kept more than 9,000,000 shares for himself, his net worth at sunset was over \$200,000,000. By the first week of October, E.D.S. stock was quoted at \$33, and at the height of the bull market in 1969-70 it hovered around \$150, making Perot, on paper at least, a billionaire.

In frantic over-the-counter trading on April 22, 1970, the value of E.D.S. stock dropped to \$100 a share, causing Perot a paper loss of almost half a billion dollars. But Perot has a detached attitude toward his wealth. "The day I made Eagle



H. ROSS PEROT

Scout was more important to me than the day I discovered I was a billionaire," he once told a reporter. Uninterested in a life of personal luxury and determined not to leave his children so much money as to deprive them of the same chance at personal initiative that he had, he directs his money toward projects that he considers deserving. One such is the United States government, to which he pays taxes even on the tax-exempt money he puts into the Perot Foundation, the nonprofit corporation he established in April 1969 to handle his philanthropies. Among the foundation's beneficiaries are the Dallas public school system, which is receiving \$2,500,000 over a three-year period, two-thirds of it for a ghetto elementary school, in addition to \$72,000 for a high school leadership program; the Boy Scouts of Dallas, who are receiving \$1,000,000 to help them extend their work to black and Mexican youth; and a Dallas Roman Catholic high school, which is receiving \$150,000 because Perot, a Presbyterian, heard that it was a good school.

But Perot's most publicized project has been his effort to free United States prisoners of war in North Vietnam, an effort that has cost him an estimated \$2,000,000. That crusade began in the fall of 1969, when the wives of four POW's wanting to go to Paris to ask North Vietnamese officials there for news of their husbands petitioned Perot to subsidize the trip. He did so, and the four women went to Paris, to no avail. The matter might have ended there, but the Texas philanthropist, deeply touched by the plight of the prisoners and their families, directed a team of E.D.S. experts to devise a campaign to help the prisoners.

The E.D.S. group quickly set up an organization called United We Stand, which spent \$1,000,000 on newspaper and television advertising to publicize the POW problem and to urge public support of President Nixon's Vietnam policies. (In Perot's opinion, the fastest way out of Vietnam is for United States citizens to unite behind the government.) Within a few weeks United We Stand had collected twenty-six tons of mail, food, clothes, and medicine for the Americans held in North Vietnam.

Perot chartered two planes and with his cargo set off for Hanoi in December 1969. He was never allowed to land there, despite his personal pleas to North Vietnamese diplomats in Bangkok and Vientiane and even, by telephone, to Soviet party chief Leonid Brezhnev. Nor were Perot's later attempts successful. In January 1970 he offered \$100,000,000 as ransom for the prisoners, but the offer was ignored. Three months later he flew with many prisoners' wives to Vientiane and to Paris in a vain attempt to meet with North Vietnamese officials to discuss release of the prisoners. Late in 1970 he planned another Christmas trip to Hanoi, but was foiled when the Soviet airliners he chartered canceled the flight.

Ostensibly his missions have been failures, but Perot contends that they have had the following salutary effects: they woke the American people to the plight of the prisoners; put the fate of the POW's on the agenda of the Paris peace talks; made the North Vietnamese more humane in their treatment; and increased the flow of mail to the prisoners and the number and size of the packages they are allowed to receive.

Despite his personal opinions about Vietnam policy, Perot does not condemn war protesters. "It's the ones who haven't committed themselves [on the war issue] who have given aid and comfort to the North Vietnamese," he told Christopher S. Wren of *Look* (March 24, 1970). To stimulate a sense of participatory democracy in more citizens, Perot has long cherished the idea of establishing what he calls an "electronic town hall," consisting of network television programs devoted to bipartisan discussion of national issues. Viewer opinions would be elicited, compiled by computer, and made available to legislators.

Perot's adventures in public service have inspired speculation about possible political motives on his part, but he scoffs at the suggestion that he might be interested in seeking political office. In an interview with William McAda of the *New York Sunday News* (February 22, 1970) he declared: "I would make a very bad politician. I have no patience for the red tape and inactivity." He is also regarded in some circles as an agent of the Nixon Administration. Indeed, he was a substantial contributor to the President's 1968 campaign; he allowed a number of his employees to take sabbaticals to work in the campaign; and he is an old friend of Attorney General John Mitchell. But he claims that he is a "nonextremist," aligned with neither Democrats nor Republicans, and that his United We Stand project would have backed Humphrey's policies had he been elected President. There seems to be no evidence that Perot has received any encouragement for his prisoner-of-war crusade from Washington beyond the expediting of visas and other such routine cooperation. As one administration official told Kent Biffle of *Newsweek* (April 13, 1970). "The [State] Department looks on him as a rich but eccentric uncle. One may secretly admire his eccentricity, but one doesn't want to get too close for fear of what he might do next."

An unabashed moralist of the old school, H. Ross Perot makes clear to all new E.D.S. employees that marital infidelity will mean summary dismissal. He does not insist that his employees emulate his abstinence from liquor and cigarettes, but he does require male employees to dress as he does, in conservative dark suits and white shirts, and even messenger boys must wear a tie. The byword of the company is efficiency: supervisors are trained to look for and remedy any waste of time or motion. Perot is a small, wiry man, five feet six inches tall and weighing 130 pounds, who wears his blond hair close-cropped. Modest in his tastes, he buys his suits from the rack, drives a five-year-old Lincoln, and dines on cheeseburgers as often as on steaks. Since 1956 he has been married to the former Margot Birmingham. Mr. and Mrs. Perot and their four children—three daughters and Ross Jr.—live comfortably but unostentatiously in an exclusive suburb of north Dallas. Perot regards his family as central in his life and scrupulously keeps his wife and children out of the public eye. "If I could do one thing, I would try to construct a strong family unit for every family [in the United States] on the basis of love, understanding and encouragement," the millionaire philanthropist told William McAda in the *Sunday News* interview. "All the other problems then would disappear."

#### References

- Fortune 78:168+ N '68 por
- Look 34:28+ Mr 24 '70 pors
- N Y Sunday News p136+ F 22 '70 pors
- N Y Times p41+ N 28 '69 por
- N Y Times Mag p16+ F 28 '71 pors
- Nat Observer p22 S 14 '70 por
- Newsweek 75:68+ Ap 13 '70 pors
- Who's Who in America, 1970-71

#### PLUNKETT, JIM

Dec. 5, 1947- Football player  
Address: b, New England Patriots Football Club,  
78 Lansdowne St., Boston, Mass. 02215

In the 1971 professional draft of college players the New England Patriots of the American Conference of the National Football League got the prime choice, Heisman Trophy winner Jim Plunkett, Stanford University's slinging quarterback. Plunkett led the Stanford Indians, previously a feckless, middling team, to a three-year record of 22 wins, 8 losses, and 2 ties, climaxed by victory in the Rose Bowl. In the process he established himself in third place in all-time rankings of major-college passers and set a new career mark in total offense in the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

The strapping Plunkett has an overarm delivery that makes interception difficult, and his powerful thrusts are deadly accurate up to sixty yards and effective, on occasion, up to ninety-six yards. In addition, he has speed and agility in shaking tacklers, a strong will to win, a keen eye for anticipating defensive moves, and a poise that enables him to