



Name: F. William Free

Years: August 28, 1928- January 1, 2003

Residence: Millbrook, NY

Brief Biography: Forest William Free was born in 1928 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he grew up.

At the age of 22, he got his first job in advertising as a junior art director for N. W. Ayer & Son, an agency located in Philadelphia. Following that stint Free went to work for J. Walter Thompson in their London branch and then later for Foote, Cone & Belding, which brought him and his career to New York City. He eventually found his niche in the advertising world when he was hired by the Marschalk Company in 1959. He was promoted to creative director shortly after arriving and eventually worked his way up to president of the agency. His first big account for them was for the soft drink brands under Coca-Cola: Sprite, Tab and Fresca. The Fresca campaign became one of the works he was most noted for. He advertised their product as having "the frosty taste of a blizzard" and the day after the ad first ran, an actual blizzard hit the city of New York. Proving that he was indeed a brilliant 'Ad Man' Free sensed the opportunity for publicity. He had himself photographed outside in the blizzard holding a bottle of Fresca.

He then took out a full-page newspaper advertisement the next day, running the picture alongside a headline that read “We’re sorry.” While working at Marschalk, Free met his wife, Marcella Jones-Free, a young copywriter. Together they opened up their own shop in 1969, F. William Free & Company. With this new company Free began to take more liberties in his advertising and produced several ads that were considered controversial, especially amongst women’s groups. In 1970 he ran an ad for Silva Thins Cigarettes that read “Cigarettes are like girls, the best ones are thin and rich”. The National Organization for Women was outraged and started a boycott of the brand in response. In an equally controversial move, Free published an ad in 1971 for National Airlines that read “I’m Cheryl – Fly Me”, with an attractive young stewardess pictured. The National Organization for Women was once again up in arms over a Free creation and picketed outside his office in retaliation. Despite the protests National saw a huge increase in sales and decided to keep Free on the account. So, in 1972 he published more ads of the same theme, including another one with ‘Cheryl’, which now read “Millions of people flew me last year.” Despite their mixed reviews, Free’s ads proved effective in reaching the target and in attracting the nation’s attention. In the late 70’s Free found his marriage collapsing, eventually ending in divorce. After which Free decided to sell their agency to Lawrence & Charles, the new agency which became known as Lawrence, Charles & Free, was where Free spent the rest of his career in the ad industry. F. William Free resided for most of his adult life in Millbrook, New York. In addition to writing ads Free also owned restaurants and bred race horses. He passed away in 2003 after battling lung cancer.

References:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/08/business/f-william-free-74-ad-man-behind-fly-me.html>

<http://www.statemaster.com/encyclopedia/F.-William-Free>