



*Portraits  
of  
Success*

*Candid Conversations  
with  
60 Over-Achievers*



*by Burt Prelutsky*



## ronald kessler

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The last time I met with Ron Kessler was many years ago. A producer and I were trying to work out a deal to adapt one of his early books into a TV movie. Unfortunately, we could not persuade any of the network executives that a movie about real-life spies would attract an audience. They were more interested in fictional wives being threatened by equally fictional husbands. Fortunately, Mr. Kessler had better things to do than wait around for those *lunkheads* to come to their senses. Instead, he went on to write a number of other books dealing with everything from the Secret Service to Laura Bush, establishing himself as one of America's finest investigative reporters.

**Q.** What did your father do for a living?

**A.** My father, Dr. Ernest Borek, was a microbiologist and professor at Columbia University; my stepfather, Dr. Myer M. Kessler, was a physicist at MIT.

**Q.** Did you consider following in either of their footsteps?

**A.** I was always interested in science but became hooked on journalism on my school paper at Belmont High School in Belmont, Massachusetts.

**Q.** Once you decided to pursue a career in journalism, did your parents encourage you?

A. Yes.

Q. What is your educational background?

A. I attended Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, for two years. I spent most of my time in the school paper and did an exposé of discrimination against black Clark students in rental housing. They started state investigations and got a lot of attention, leading to a part-time job as a reporter at the *Worcester Telegram*. I decided I would rather learn on my own by interviewing people and went full time with the paper in 1966. I went on to become a reporter at the *Boston Herald*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post*. I left the *Post* in 1985 to write books.

Q. What is the best advice you ever got, and were you smart enough to take it?

A. My mother, Minuetta Kessler, a concert pianist and composer who played at Carnegie Hall and Town Hall, always encouraged me to grab every opportunity I could and to believe I could do anything. I think I followed her advice.

Q. What is the worst advice you ever received, and were you dumb enough to take it?

A. I don't know.

Q. What book has had the greatest influence on you?

A. John Hohenberg's *The Pulitzer Prize Story*, which provides examples of excellence in journalism and the impact it can have.

Q. On the chance it's not the same book, what is your all-time favorite? And why?

A. *The People's Chronology: A Year-by-Year Record of Human Events from Prehistory to the Present* by James Trager tells you more about the world and particularly America than any book I have read.

Q. Have you any hobbies?

A. I enjoy country music and vacations in Palm Beach and Europe.

Q. You have made a career out of exposés, including *The FBI*, which led to the dismissal of its director, William Sessions. Of which exposé are you proudest?

A. At the *Washington Post*, I exposed the fact that the Daughters of the American Revolution (the DAR) had rejected Lena Ferguson, a black woman, for membership because she was African American. The stories led to her acceptance by the DAR and widespread changes in its policies to increase membership of blacks.

