



R. STANTON AVERY

By all accounts, R. Stanton Avery was a gentle man. His family remembers him as down-to-earth, soft-spoken, a good listener, and unfailingly polite — traits not usually associated with the entrepreneurial personality. The inventor of the first commercially feasible self-adhesive label machine, Stan founded Avery International which, since merging with Dennison Manufacturing Company in 1990, is known as Avery Dennison. His personal philosophy of promoting individual endeavors guides the grantmaking of the family foundation he and his first wife, Dorothy Durfee Avery, founded in 1960, the Avery Foundation (later renamed the Durfee Foundation). But, above all, it is the values that he and Dorothy instilled in their children and grandchildren that give the Durfee Foundation its defining spirit today.

Despite his quiet demeanor, Stan was something of a rebel in his youth. Unlike his brother who followed their father into the ministry, Stan chose to study liberal arts at Pomona College. There, he befriended a student of Chinese ancestry. Eager for adventure, they and a group of friends took a year off from their studies to travel in China. The year was 1929 and Stan was 22 years old. The trip, which he called his introduction to the real world, left an indelible mark on his life. Along the way he encountered a revolution in progress, saw firsthand the terrible poverty of the masses, and observed the lack of civil liberties. Withstanding the hardships of travel in a country with few amenities boosted his self-confidence to handle whatever situations might come his way. It also fueled his interest in social organizations and in effective ways of motivating people to accomplish goals.

Returning to California at the beginning of the Depression, Stan paid for his last year of college by working at the Midnight Mission, a nonprofit organization that aided people living on the streets of Los Angeles and which still operates in the same location to this day. After graduation, he spent two years working for the Los Angeles County Department of Charities collecting statistics on poverty. His career in the public sector ended in 1933 when the father of a college classmate, the owner

of the Adhere Paper Company, offered him a job. The company made bumper stickers for cars driven in funeral processions and, ironically, provided the fertile soil for Stan's Yankee ingenuity to flourish.

A descendant of nine generations of New England farmers and clockmakers, Stan inherited his ancestors' restless curiosity and bent for tinkering. When he was a boy, his father taught him to operate the church's printing press and throughout his high school and college years, he earned pocket money by printing dance programs for campus socials. His experience running a printing press provided a bridge to the technology of making adhesive labels. Quick to spot flaws in the process, Stan experimented with different materials and parts, at one point rigging up a contraption operated with a motor from a washing machine. His tinkering paid off: within two years he had developed a new technology for producing self-adhesive labels. Stan recognized the potential of his invention but needed capital to start a business. His new bride, Dorothy Durfee, came to his rescue. She secured a \$50 bank loan using as collateral the Ford Model "A" she had paid for with her earnings as a school teacher, leading to a long-running family joke that Stan married Dorothy for her money. In 1935 the couple launched Kum-Kleen Adhesive Products, which they ran as co-owners and equal partners.

Stan and Dorothy began by marketing their self-adhesive labels to gift shops and department stores. As the response to their mailings grew and customers suggested new uses for the labels, the couple hired additional employees. Like many of their contemporaries who came of age during the Depression, Stan and Dorothy keenly felt the economic inequities in society and discussed ways of distributing the world's goods more fairly. When they started their business, they paid all employees the same salary, \$20 per week, regardless of their jobs and paid themselves, as owners, only slightly higher salaries.

Stan and Dorothy put their beliefs in social justice on the line after World War II when prejudice against Japanese-Americans ran deep in California. A Japanese-American they knew returned home after having fought with a Japanese-American squadron in the United States Army. Yet when he tried to find a place for his family to live, no one was willing to rent to them. When Stan and Dorothy heard about the family's plight, they invited the man and his family to live with them for a year. Russell Avery, who was just a small boy at the time, says it wasn't until he was an adult that he realized just how gutsy an act that was at the time and how like his parents it was to do something like that.

After the birth of their first child, Dorothy left the day-to-day running of the business (renamed Avery Adhesive Label Company and later Avery International) to Stan but stayed involved as an advisor and, after the business was incorporated,

served on the board of directors until her death in 1964. So caught up were they in the business, says their daughter, Judy, that her parents told of times when they stayed up all night talking about it.

Although Stan lacked formal training in chemistry and engineering, his perseverance and resourcefulness kept the company growing slowly through the Depression and into the forties. During World War II, the business climate became more favorable as applications for self-adhesive products multiplied. Stan hired his friend, Russ Smith, as general manager and under their leadership the company expanded rapidly, emerging in the 1950s as a national and international leader of self-adhesive technology. By 1961, Avery had become a publicly owned company traded over the counter, and six years later it obtained a listing on the New York Stock Exchange.

Contributing to the company's success was Stan's belief that businesses grow by encouraging their employees to grow. An inventor at heart, he understood the conditions that stimulated innovation and the satisfaction that resulted from creating something tangible in which one could take pride. To promote individual effort, he created a work environment in which talented employees could flourish. Stan admired strong, capable people who could think for themselves, and he gave them wide berth to fashion and carry out their ideas.

The evolution of Kum-Kleen Adhesive Products from a "Mom and Pop" operation to a Fortune 500 company is all the more remarkable, says Dennis Avery, given Stan's and Dorothy's backgrounds. "My parents were products of meager living, Depression years, and families with certain 19th century traits of frugality." To understand the narrow restrictions of their upbringing, says Dennis, is to "appreciate Stan and Dorothy's enormous personal growth in spite of those times."

As Stan came to terms with his entrepreneurial zeal and talent, he concluded that he could do the most good for the world as an entrepreneur. Leaving behind the politics of his youth, he left the Democratic Party in the 1960s and became a Republican in his later years. Although his political affiliations changed, his desire to contribute to society did not. Russell recalled an incident that demonstrated his father's concern. While vacationing at his home in Scotland, Stan was interviewed by a local reporter. Commenting on his philanthropic activities, the reporter wrote that Stan was giving back to the community what he had taken from it. The reporter's insinuation rankled Stan and whenever he repeated the story he would say, "I didn't take anything. I created value that wasn't there before. Avery provides jobs for 13,000 people and thousands of others in peripheral businesses."

Buoyed by his growing stature in the business community, Stan overcame his reluctance to speak in public and in the 1970s he emerged as a prominent civic leader

and philanthropist in southern California. He served on the boards of the Huntington Library, the California Institute of Technology, and the Board of Fellows of the Claremont Graduate School and University Center. In addition to making grants to the community through the Durfee Foundation, Stan was generous in his personal philanthropy. He remained a loyal supporter of the Midnight Mission where he had worked as a college student and gave substantial donations to established southern California cultural institutions such as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Music Center. In 1995, he gave \$10 million to Caltech to build Avery House, a dormitory. Stan created the dormitory to focus Caltech science students on entrepreneurship and to bring entrepreneurs as guest speakers to Avery House, having lamented that the two disciplines were isolated from one another.

Stan's remarkable curiosity and industriousness never diminished. Far into his eighties he was still tinkering, still inventing new products, still going to his office at Avery Dennison. In November 1997, he attended his last board meeting of the Durfee Foundation. He died the following month, on the eve of his 91st birthday.