LOIS. AND SUPERMAN.

George Lois. The one, the only; prodigy, enfant terrible, founder of agencies, creator of legends. And now, more than 30 years after founding the first agency to bear his name, this son of a Greek florist continues to attack his life and craft with the energy and enthusiasm of a young Zorba -- and the strength and talent of a Pratt-trained Clark Kent. Here, from a recent conversation, are insights into a genuine advertising superhero.

On luck:

"From the start, I've been lucky. Lucky to be the son of a Greek -- my father was Harry George Lois, I'm George Harry Lois; in the Greek tradition. Lucky to be a New Yorker so I could go to the High School of Music and Art up on 135th Street. Lucky to work for Bill Golden at CBS, with Herb Lubalin and Reba Sochis, then with Bob Gage and Helmut Krone at Doyle Dane Bernbach. Lucky to have met Fred Papert, Julian Koenig, Ron Holland, Jim Callaway, Bill Pits, Ted Vera and all of the others I've worked with. Lucky to have great clients who like what I do, and want what I do. Lucky to have met my true love on my first day at Pratt and lucky to have spent the last 43 years with her. Is there anything I'd change about my life? Not a thing -- how can you be luckier than to say that?"

On the early years:

"At Pratt, a teaching genius named Herschel Levit told me I was wasting my time in classes; that I should be in advertising. He sent me to the legendary Reba Sochis who hired me as an artist at $35 a week. A few months later, I eloped with Rosemary Lewandowski. Not long afterward, the draft board sent their greetings and an invitation to visit Korea, where I took a shrimp pie and came back to be discharged as a private E-2 -- just the way I went in. When I returned to Rosie and New York, Reba Sochis steered me to Bill Golden and CBS. After two years in that haven, I decided to begin my advertising career. Bill was appalled: 'What about talking about? It's a cesspool out there.' He was right, of course. But I went forth anyway, worked at Lennen & Newell; then for Herb Lubalin at Sudler & Hennessy; finally, two great years at The World's First Creative Advertising Agency, Doyle Dane Bernbach."

advertising establishment thought that was crazy. By the late '60s, I was doing half the creative work at my agency -- but hated the other half. That led to my vision of the Advertising Agency of the Future. I saw PKL spawning new creative agencies, the first of which would be an agency with me and two young Irishmen, Ron Holland and Jim Callaway. The idea went to the board, and, when they turned it down, I quit and started Lois Holland Callaway. What a move! From an agency with 250 people, I moved to a shop with a staff of four, in one room. But we grew quickly, as did my third agency, the first with just the Greek kid's name on the door. Why did I keep staring agencies? Because I was going to keep doing it until I got it right -- and I finally did just that with Lois/USA."

On advertising:

"Back in prehistoric days, before World War II, there wasn't a shortage of facile writers. But the blend of visual and verbal imagery was rare. The power of art was brought to advertising by Paul Rand who inspired young guys like Bob Gage, Lou Dorfsman, Gene Fedicco and me. We brought the alchemy of art to advertising -- the essential element if you want audacious ads that can bowl you over. When I was an art director with Doyle Dane Bernbach, a client once asked me what I did at the agency. 'I make one million dollars look like 10 million.' Bill Bernbach and Ned Doyle loved that answer. But isn't that what any agency should be about?"

On where to work:

"If you have talent, it's important to find the right place to work. That may not be easy. But you can't settle for anything less. So keep searching until you find a place where people want -- and respect -- what you do. It's got to be tougher because a lot of clients, especially the young ones, have been trained to think advertising is science. If advertising is a science, I'm a girl. The business is about talent and ideas and the art of selling. And there's nothing in the world more fun than selling, than changing people's minds."

On the 1% solution:

"Eighty-five percent of all advertising is invisible. It's there but no one sees it. Then 14% of all advertising is terrible. It's ugly, stupid, patronizing and demeaning -- and you see it, even though you hate it. The remaining 1% is the great stuff, the advertising characterized by The Big Idea. The big idea can go further than you can imagine. It can save a business, start an enterprise, spark a revolution, turn an industry -- or the world -- upside down. If you're faced with an ad that doesn't have an idea, an idea that can be expressed in one sentence, save your money."

On The Wall Street Journal:

"The Wall Street Journal is on my desk at 6:15 in the morning. It's a publication I just have to read every day before I start working. I don't know what I'm looking for, and I don't know how it will be used. But that early morning reading is the fuel that fires my imagination. As for advertising -- I really love seeing my ads in The Journal. The ads I've had in The Journal have always looked the best. That's partly a matter of production. But the real difference is the environment. It's simply the best. Tasteful, understated, quiet -- so great advertising can make the noise. If I go to bed at night knowing one of my full-page ads will be in The Journal the next morning, I'm insomniac with anticipation. When I put a great ad in The Journal, it leaps off the page, and I own the world! When you're
Agency, Doyle Dane Bernbach -- working for the great Bill Bernbach and alongside people like Helmut Krone, Julian Koenig, Mary Wells and Phyllis Robinson."

On the three Lois agencies:

"My first store began with a young writer named Freddy Papert who was hot to start an agency. He recruited me and Julian Koenig and, in January of 1960, we became Papert Koenig Lois, The World's Second Creative Advertising Agency. A big success from the start, going from zip to $18 million in a blink -- Doyle Dane Bernbach and Ogilvy had taken 10 years to grow as much. We were the first agency to go public, back when the great work; a place where your talent is nourished and encouraged, not smothered. When you find that place, then it's up to you. No matter what the assignment, you have to always try to do work you'll be proud of. The object is to find the big idea, to make advertising that people talk about, advertising that floors the world, changes minds -- and makes things happen."

On advertising design in the '90s:

"Old-timers talk about what a great business advertising used to be -- and what a lousy business it is today. Yeah, advertising was great in the sixties, but I tell you, advertising today is great. It may be

in The Journal, you reach a fantastic audience. And when you consider the great environment, and a page that's just a little bigger, and the quality of reproduction; well, that should be enough to get anyone excited. I've told clients to give me six full pages in The Journal, and I'll make their business go up 20%. That's power. That's The Journal. And that's the place to put your big idea."