

# Freedom After the Sharks



**Geoff Hudson-Searle**

Edited by Alison Kittrell

# *Freedom* After the Sharks

Geoff Hudson-Searle



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## CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Prologue	xi
1: A Child is Born	1
2: Combining a Family	11
3: On His Own	21
4: Launching a Career	35
5: A Lesson in Love	47
6: A Lesson in Loss	59
7: The Start of a Dream	71
8: A Hard Lesson	83
9: Building a Dream	99
10: Launching a Company	113
11: Finding a Path	127
Epilogue	143
About PMI	149
About Geoffrey Hudson-Searle	153



Geoffrey's skills and self-motivation gave him the drive, determination and tenacity to continue a journey through hardship to reach self-fulfillment and, ultimately, success. His book describes the life journey of a young man's heart and his desire to turn his dreams and vision into a business success.

"Freedom after the Sharks" shows how, even in a declining economy, a business can survive and even succeed. It covers some real-life experiences and offers some suggestions for dealing with problems and issues. It provides a guide to finding your way in the business world.

The book is suited to entrepreneurs who might not be sure of the path to take or who want to benefit from other people's mistakes and failures. Other audiences include middle management or junior executives who are looking for a fascinating life story of courage, drive and inspiration, as well as graduates and college students, who will find information that will help prepare them for their careers.



# Prologue





Each of us is, to some extent or other, a reflection of the experiences of our lives. However, whether and how we succeed is determined at least in part by how we cope with those experiences and what we learn from them. This is the story of a man who, despite a difficult family life and professional setbacks, developed the determination, drive and skills to create a successful business and a happy life.



CHAPTER ONE

*A Child is Born*



*“Every child begins the world again.”*

– Henry David Thoreau

The family into which Geoffrey was born on 6 February 1967 in Winchester in the Hampshire Hills was already deeply damaged. The marriage of his parents, Serge and Kathleen, had been troubled virtually from the start, partly as a result of their very different upbringings.

Serge's mother, Annette, had been born in Katowice, Poland, in 1908, but she had spent much of her life in Paris. It was there that she met Serge's father, George. George, who was one of nine brothers, started his working life with the biscuit company Huntley & Palmers. He came to run their operations in England before being sent in the 1920s to set up and manage the firm's first French factory, located near Paris.

As World War II began to loom, George – who had always been a planner – bought a house in England. The young couple and their son, Serge, moved into that home when the war forced them to flee Paris in 1944.

George and Annette raised Serge with strong family values; they encouraged him to be ethical, moral and just, and to treat people the way he expected to be treated. They were able to provide a comfortable life for their son, and although he trained to be a dentist, he eventually decided to go into the business of retail management of a shoe store. His parents had hoped that Serge would become a professional such as a dentist, and they had provided him with every opportunity to follow that course, but they supported him in his decision to move into retail. Ultimately, their main hope was for their son to be happy.

## FREEDOM AFTER THE SHARKS

Kathleen did not have such a loving and stable home life. She grew up in the Kennington district in London. Her father was away serving with the army. Her mother enjoyed romancing soldiers on leave, and she was not interested in raising her daughter. Eventually Kathleen was sent away to Lincolnshire to live with a couple. When the couple separated, the mother did not want to keep the child. So Kathleen – rejected first by her natural mother and then by her adopted mother – finally found a home with her adopted father.

The rejection and the deprivation took their toll on Kathleen. She grew up to be distrustful of people, and she was often angry and resentful about the unhappiness and difficulties she had suffered. But she also was very beautiful, and Serge fell in love with her and asked her to marry him only a few weeks after their first date.

Annette and George were not happy with the match. They knew their son could be impulsive – they had watched him give up a career in dentistry for one in retail. They recognized the problems in Kathleen's personality, and they believed that she was taking advantage of Serge's good nature, his love for her and his wealth. They offered Serge money and international travel if he would not marry Kathleen, but he angrily rejected their offer and went ahead with his plans.

He was not even deterred when he discovered that Kathleen was having an affair with another man while she was seeing him. Serge was determined that his love could make the marriage work, and he married Kathleen on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1949 – which was Annette and George's wedding anniversary.

The couple had a son, Stephen, who was eight years old when Geoffrey was born. Since they already had a boy, Serge

and Kathleen wanted their second child to be a girl; they even had decided on the name Jennifer for their baby. They were not prepared for a boy, and they were disappointed to have another son.

After the baby was born, Serge went to his parents' house to bring them the news. His mother greeted him at the door with her usual huge smile and offer of tea and cake. Serge told her that he had news to share with both her and his father, so Annette called George in from the garden, where he was tending his tomato plants. George came inside, washed up and joined his wife, son and grandson, Stephen.

Naturally, George and Annette inquired after Kathleen, and Serge told them that he had come from the hospital, where Kathleen had just delivered a healthy baby boy. The grandparents were thrilled, but they sensed that Serge was not completely excited and happy with the news.

Finally, Serge explained that he and Kathleen had really wanted a girl. They had decorated the nursery in pink, and they had chosen the name Jennifer. George and Annette were surprised at Serge's reaction. They pointed out that the most important thing is to have a healthy child, regardless of gender.

Eventually, Serge saw the wisdom of what they were saying, but he was still a little uncertain about the name. Finally, he said, "You know, Geoff Hurst scored a hat trick last year in the England vs. Germany World Cup final. Perhaps we can call him Geoff."

Annette and George did not think much of naming their new grandson after a football player. Instead, they suggested the more formal Geoffrey as a good compromise, and Serge agreed. But when the time came to bring the baby home from



## FREEDOM AFTER THE SHARKS

the hospital, Serge knew he had to handle the issue of the name very carefully. Kathleen would not like it if she thought that Serge and his parents had conspired to choose a name without her – and Kathleen could be very emotional and easily angered.

Serge and Kathleen lived in a small town called Andover, near the home of Annette and George, who wanted to live close to their son and his family and to be part of their lives. As Serge drove toward Andover, he got more and more nervous, even clipping a curb on the road. Kathleen noticed that something was amiss, and she asked her husband what was wrong.

When he was within a few miles of home, Serge told Kathleen that he had gone to his parents' house to tell them the happy news of the baby's birth. Kathleen reminded him that the baby was a boy, not the girl they had wanted and expected. But Serge replied that they should be happy to have a healthy child.

Then he added, "I was watching a sports news interview with Geoff Hurst — you know, the man who scored three goals for England last year in the England vs. Germany final. He has become not just a sportsman, but a legend. Even the Queen wants to meet him. And I have been thinking. I know we wanted a girl and spent nine months selecting the name Jennifer, but perhaps we could use the name Geoff or Geoffrey."

Kathleen assumed immediately that her husband and his parents had chosen the name for the son she had just delivered, and she was angry about that. She said, "So Serge, you mean that your bloody mother thinks it's wonderful that

I have conceived a child and she has named the child — without me — Geoff or Geoffrey?”

Serge protested that it was he and not his parents who had decided on the name. “Kathleen, although we wanted a girl, we have brought a beautiful child into the world together, and we must have gratitude for this gift,” he said. “I like the name, and this should not be dismissed.”

Kathleen was furious, and she accused Serge of not thinking for himself and not being able to stand up to his parents. Finally, she said, “You can have your child and your chosen name. I should never have married you. Being married to you is like being married to the devil and his family.”

When they arrived at their home, both Serge and Kathleen managed to put on a good face as they introduced their new son to his brother and to George and Annette, who were taking care of Stephen. But the smiling faces only covered up the deep unhappiness in Serge and Kathleen’s marriage. Serious problems remained, even as the parents put Geoffrey into his new pink clothes and laid him down to sleep in his pink cot in his pink room.

Several months passed, but the tension between Serge and Kathleen and between Kathleen and her in-laws continued to grow. When Geoffrey was baptised in the local Catholic Church, Annette took control of naming the godmother and godfather. She decided on herself and George — a decision that was not pleasing to Kathleen.

Kathleen felt increasingly isolated by what she perceived as her difficult marriage and the constant influence of Annette and George on her husband. She had difficulty coping with both her active eight-year-old son, Stephen, and the new baby,

## FREEDOM AFTER THE SHARKS

Geoffrey. She felt she had lost control of her life. But rather than seek support or help, she became increasingly argumentative – and she needed to be right in all of these arguments.

Because of the responsibilities of her home life, she could not get a part-time job or meet new people through a class or other activity, and she could not get out of the house for a cup of coffee or lunch with her friends. She had never been very much interested in keeping house and taking care of children; she wanted to travel and go out to nice restaurants and enjoy herself. So she became more and more unhappy. She fought with Serge, reminding him of the promises he had made when he asked her to marry him and declaring that he had not kept those promises. Serge, who believed that her anger and unhappiness stemmed from her difficult childhood and the fact that she had never had a good role model to show her how to be a proper wife and mother, was continually making excuses for her argumentative behaviour and her outbursts.

One day when Geoffrey was a few months old and Kathleen was feeling particularly trapped, she decided to put the baby in his pram and go for a walk. She thought it would be a good way to get out of the house for a little while and to be alone with her thoughts. Serge, who was trying to be solicitous of his wife's needs, offered to go along. They could walk by the river together, just the two of them, he suggested.

Kathleen, however, was not interested in a little romantic stroll. She exploded, saying, "Serge, you are always interfering in my life. I despise you. I have sacrificed everything, and for what? I am living a life of an inmate in prison. I will never forgive you – why don't you go live with your mother?"

Serge's efforts to defuse the situation only made things worse. Finally, he broke down in tears, saying, "I only wanted us to take a walk together, Kathleen."

Kathleen, who was now out of control with anger, opened the door of the house and screamed, "This is what I think of you and your pathetic life." She pushed the pram outside and began to sprint down the long drive, finally taking her hands off the handle of the pram.

With baby Geoffrey asleep inside, the pram headed toward the gates of the property and the busy road outside the gates. Geoffrey woke up and began to cry, and Serge began to run after the pram. Kathleen stood watching in horror as her baby headed for the road, and Stephen, thinking the whole thing was a game, ran after his father and brother.

A few minutes earlier, Annette and George had parked on the road and were walking toward the gate, stopping to admire Serge's roses and herbs. Suddenly they saw the pram hurtling toward them, followed by Serge and Stephen. Annette screamed, and George threw himself at the pram to keep it from going onto the road. He stopped the pram, but Geoffrey fell out onto the concrete, bruising himself.

Annette was appalled and furious. "You are incompetent parents," she yelled at Serge and Kathleen. Then she turned to her son.

"I am surprised at you, Serge. You have no idea how to look after your newly born child. You never wanted him in the first place, and now you want to kill him," she said. "Geoffrey deserves better — he deserves a loving family."

Then she made a pronouncement that would change the course of Geoffrey's life: "As godparents to Geoffrey, we have

## FREEDOM AFTER THE SHARKS

an obligation to ensure he is looked after in proper hands. I am disgusted with you; this is not how we brought you up. We will not tolerate the treatment that Geoffrey is now enduring.”

Turning to her husband, she said, “George, please take the pram. Geoffrey is coming with us.”

Serge pleaded with her, explaining that the incident had been an accident, prompted by Kathleen’s emotional outburst. He reminded his mother that Geoffrey was his and Kathleen’s son, and he threatened to take her to court if she left with the child.

But Annette was unmoved. As far as she was concerned, Geoffrey was in grave danger in Serge’s home. She did not think that Kathleen was a fit mother, and she did not think that Serge had control of his wife or his household. She had George put the baby in the car, and they started to drive off.

Serge ran desperately after the car, asking his parents to come back with his son. But George and Annette did not stop, and eventually the car began to move faster than Serge could run. Finally, he sank to the pavement, stunned and in tears.

