Big Brown
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The Untold Story of UPS
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This book is dedicated to
my UPS partners everywhere:
past, present, and future.

A percentage of every book sold
will go to the Casey Eye Institute
(named after James and George Casey)
in Portland, Oregon.
UPS was half a century old in 1957. In June of that year, I was a seventeen-year-old Californian right out of high school and had already secured morning employment. Still, I complained to a neighbor who always wore a brown uniform that I needed an afternoon job too.

"Why don’t you go down to U.P.?" he said.

"Union Pacific?" I queried.

"No, United Parcel. They always need guys to load and unload in the afternoons."

So in June, I became a UPSer, even though I wouldn’t be eighteen until July. “Close enough,” they said, and I was assigned to load the Arcadia trailer at the old 9th Street Sort in downtown Los Angeles, starting at $1.62 an hour. After a contractual increase and a promotion to router (sorter), I made $2.05 an hour. This was excellent pay at the time, and among my friends, I was the first to break the $2 barrier, making way more than any of them.

In August, the company gave us free cake and pamphlets commemorating the company’s fiftieth anniversary. In December we moved into the new state-of-the-art Olympic facility next door, where men in suits were always around checking things out. Another UPSer gave me the heads-up that one of them was company founder Jim Casey.

I sorted for UPS and attended a community college, but quit the company in January 1958, after which I entered the U.S. Army. As soon as I returned to Los Angeles in late 1960, I headed for UPS. By then I was twenty-one, and they hired me as a seasonal
driver. On January 17, 1961, I was called back to join Hollywood Center as a regular UPS driver.

From the very beginning, I had heard stories about the company’s tireless founder, the guy who’d been pointed out to me a couple of years before. He was a living legend. Jim Casey, the son of Irish immigrants, working from the age of eleven to support a family of five. In 1907, in a basement beneath a Seattle saloon, he conceived the American Messenger Company, which eventually became United Parcel Service.

I drove for five years and two weeks, just barely enough time to get my gold UPS watch for five years’ safe driving. In 1966, I entered management and began to edit the local company publication. All the stories I’d heard about the company’s origins and history took on new clarity as I met and got closer to the great men who were leading UPS into new territories and increasingly better service, great men including Jim Casey. Though retired and living in New York, he was still a presence. After I got promoted to the region staff, I was fortunate enough to meet him on numerous occasions. His unwavering insistence on strong values kept UPS and its employees on course.

Much later, when I was finishing my career at UPS in the 1990s, books about big American companies and legendary American entrepreneurs were coming out in droves. Yet the story of our incredible company remained untold. UPS—Big Brown—was by then well known and yet a mystery.

I never planned to do a book on UPS, though in my retirement I had written two books on Baja California. A friend, Shirley Miller, who had been married to Jim Casey’s nephew, suggested back in 1999 that of anyone, I should be the person to write the UPS story. I mulled it over and realized that the company’s centennial loomed in the distance. It’s been on my mind ever since, even though I wrote a book about Palm Springs in the meantime.

It happened one step at a time, getting acquainted with Paul Casey and other members of the family and convincing them of my honorable objectives and purpose. It meant trips to Seattle, Wash-
ington, and to Candelaria and Goldfield in Nevada. Even in Ireland, I looked up the Casey family ancestral home.

I reestablished contact with numerous UPS retirees through e-mail. I dug up all my old annual reports, old company publications, and any piece of paper that had brown on it. I learned to research on the Internet and delighted in several “ah-ha” moments. As my manuscript shifted from a primarily historical narrative to a more all-encompassing story, I talked to drivers and current managers.

Big Brown: The Untold Story of UPS will be the first business biography written regarding this elusive yet highly successful corporation. I’m proud of these pages—an epic snapshot of American business and culture over the past hundred years—as I’m proud of having worked for such a great company.

You’ll read how United Parcel Service grew on the heels of the robber barons and the Wild West gold rush euphoria, by providing delivery service for department stores, then how it evolved into a common carrier. Led by determined men, the company expanded into new cities and states against the background of the Roaring Twenties, the Depression, and the rise of the labor movement. The book shows how the delivery business became “Big Brown” as it burgeoned across our continent through World War II, the postwar suburban years, and the civil rights unrest.

Today, UPS grapples with the need to conserve energy sources. It works to alleviate environmental problems. It maximizes the use of technology in its now-global presence with stunning innovations in package sorting, interstate commerce, and finally, international commerce with its customs brokering, freight forwarding, and supply-chain solutions. UPS no longer just delivers; it now enables global commerce. And Jim Casey remains the center of the UPS universe.

The rise of corporatism, reflected in present lobbyist influence, has pulled the shipping giant into Washington, D.C., in its drive to maintain what has always been the company’s most pressing agenda—outstanding service for its customers. UPS’s commitment to keep Americans working with insourcing, its largely employee-owned stock, and the means by which UPS’s century-old business
model continues to perform in today’s global economy are just a few of the book’s fascinating themes.

As I put the finishing touches on this book—which actually represents a lifetime of work, not just for me, but for all UPSers—Jim Casey’s dream of excellence and unstoppable determination enriches the spirit that now serves nearly 8 million people daily. UPS still upholds Casey’s decades-old corporate values to the tune of huge profits, $3.87 billion last year. How could the reading public respond other than marvel over how this occurred? How could the example of UPS’s cautious and continual rise not enormously benefit other businesspeople? Marveling and enormous benefit are my hopes behind Big Brown.

Note: A lot of the background research for Big Brown: The Untold UPS Story is available for interested readers. Several supplemental stories about UPS are printed on the author’s Web site. For this more detailed accounting and more historical information, please go to www.gregniemann.com.
THE CULT OF THE UPS DRIVER

In every community of America and in more than two hundred countries abroad, brown-garbed drivers in brown vehicles delivering brown packages are a welcome feature of everyday life. They represent the public face of a company that has changed the world, delivery by delivery, for a hundred years.

UPS drivers are strong. They’re dependable. They’re polite. They’re determined. And they nearly always bear an object of desire! No wonder UPS drivers capture our imagination. They meet expectations more than 10,000 times a minute, every day, worldwide. Talk about delivering the goods!

In a world of dashed hopes and diminishing returns, these dutiful UPS drivers are refreshing anomalies. Some would say they are anachronisms. Diligence, dedication, job commitment, and politeness? Hardly the stuff we experience in most service industries today. Yet these old-fashioned values support UPS’s impressive century-old success and by no small measure inspire the UPS drivers’ cult status.

The Mystique

The drivers, a majority of whom are male, all aged at least twenty-one, are charming but elusive. An irresistible combination. The UPS driver mystique takes effect swiftly. There’s the eye contact. The good manners. Maybe the driver gives your pet a treat. Maybe he even endears himself to your children. Then whoosh. After the fleeting exchange, you stand there, holding the package,
remembering the sincerity and consideration . . . and efficient vigor. Therein lies the UPS mystique.

Moving at a clip can be a UPS driver’s best protection. This I know from personal experience. Back when I was a young driver in Hollywood, running off packages all day, I was in the best shape I’d ever been in but was so busy I hardly noticed when people paid attention to me. However, it didn’t take me long to figure out that a good-looking administrator in the Capital Records building had a crush on me. When I came in, her coworkers always called her up front to accept, even though it wasn’t her job to sign for packages. They were trying to maximize her contact with me. I was flattered, but didn’t have time for more than a polite and brief exchange. Plus I was already married. A couple of years later, I ran into her at a UPS company picnic. We chatted and she introduced me to her new husband—another UPS driver! Apparently she caught one for herself.

A crush on a UPS delivery driver certainly isn’t hopeless. Several of my fellow drivers met women on their routes whom they eventually married, and many young UPS drivers will tell you of meeting members of the opposite sex during the working day. The Wall Street Journal recently ran a story featuring a female runner who ordered new sneakers every week, delivered by UPS, just so she’d be afforded more contact with her brown-collared love target—contact which ultimately resulted in marriage. Another article, this one in the Seattle Post Intelligencer, reported that a UPS driver, on his rounds, asked an attractive woman, “Is there anything to pick up today?”

“No.”

“Then, how about you?” he rejoined in a greeting that led to marriage.

Infatuation can be a two-way street. My route in the Hollywood Hills years ago had its fair share of attractions. As an example, movie star Ava Gardner’s sister lived there, but she rarely received UPS deliveries herself. When her address did get packages, all from numerous top retail stores, I knew that her glamorous sister was vis-
iting. Ava lived in Spain at the time but loved to shop when she came to town. Even in harsh daylight, sans makeup, she was incredibly pretty, with the most seductive eyes. I was smitten with this world-class beauty but she maintained a polite aloofness.

Also in the Hollywood Hills, Jan Sterling, a beautiful and popular actress of the time, came to the door in a slinky dress. Taking the package, she said, “Oh I’m glad you’re here.” Then she swiveled on her heels and motioned to the zipper of her gown. I did the gentlemanly thing, zipped her up with shaky hands, and continued on my way. UPSers are trained, after all, to provide service.

Mystique aside, UPS drivers have an enterprise behind them that is a lot more compelling than any love fantasy, though to be sure some of them are quite inventive, such as the Internet blog entry featuring an improvised berth of cushion crating and bubble-wrap. I’ve come to feel that the cult of the UPS driver is actually infatuation with something much bigger than individual drivers or even all the drivers together. It is a cult of UPS’s unrelenting commitment to success.

**The Rigor**

The demands of the job leave no time for socializing. Other truckers and deliverymen may accept a cup of coffee or engage in chitchat. But an urban UPS driver must make approximately two hundred delivery stops in a scheduled day—and make them in a brisk, fast-paced fashion, because beginning the same time daily, thirty or so pickup stops are waiting. The pressure is on to finish, deliver, and unload everything so the package car (never called a truck by UPS) is empty to receive new pickups. This means that even the most appealing customers are outcompeted by commitments, quotas, punctuality, and performance measurements.

Drivers have a lot of autonomy, but at their back is a Byzantine system that evolved over a hundred years along lines conceived by the extremely disciplined and fastidious company founder, Jim Casey. A wiry little man, Casey began at the bottom. He speedily
delivered messages and packages in turn-of-the-century Seattle on foot. Casey learned about efficiency by doing. Today, optimizing this connection between body and task is the responsibility of UPS’s cadre of efficiency experts, most of whom were also drivers. They are just as tireless and never stop honing delivery into a fine art.

From the company’s very beginning, UPS has continually improved and refined its methods. Ergonomics professionals analyze and optimize every juncture between work and human being. Anatomy, physiology, and psychology come together to make the task fit the human and the human fit the task, harming neither the human nor the delivery. Add to that beneficial working postures, maximizing power while minimizing excessive force, nutrition, and diminishing vibration and other adverse exposures. Talk about fitness training!

Every motion at UPS is timed, measured, and refined to its ergonomic best, always balancing physical work rate with workload. Engineers, industrial designers, computer specialists, physicians, health and safety practitioners, and trainers strive to decrease stress, errors, and other debilitations. All movements at UPS are subject to efficiency modifications and institutionalized. As the old maxim among what are now many hundreds of UPS industrial engineers goes, “In God we trust; everything else we measure.” As a result, UPSers turn out better than machines.

Driver training is designed to establish a cognitive match between the trainee and the tasks. Drivers are instructed to park as close to the point of delivery as possible. To minimize accidents, especially backing accidents, the simple rule “Don’t Back” is part of their training. Leaving the vehicle, they are expected to grab the keys with their right hand, use the hand rail with their left hand, and then walk at a brisk pace. Upon return they are instructed to hold their keys on their right pinky finger, grab the hand rail with the right hand, enter their package car, buckle their seat with the left hand and insert the ignition key with their right . . . at each stop. It’s that precise. The seconds saved become minutes over the day. Since every minute counts when a driver is trying to finish on
time, and a few minutes each day mean big dollars, these methods have lasted.

Not just economy of motion and efficiency are quantified. The drivers are measured on safety too. They are gauged by numerous indices—from individual (years of safe driving without a preventable vehicle accident) to group (1,000 collective days of accident-free driving) to district and company-wide (accidents per 100,000 driver hours, and so on). To help reduce accidents, safety committees exist at all levels.

Activities are not just improved and monitored but celebrated. A man who years later became my dispatcher, driver Ray McCue, received the company’s first gold watch for five years of safe driving. That was back in 1928. Today, individual safe drivers are still honored annually, and in 2006 there were more than 4,000 active drivers who had driven for twenty-five years or more without an avoidable accident. And eighty-seven of them had over thirty-five years, topped by a Kentucky district feeder driver, Ron Sowder, who had forty-three years without an accident! Today’s UPS drivers log more than two billion miles per year and average less than one accident for every million miles driven.

To outsiders the UPS regime has always seemed excessive. In 1947, writer Philip Hamburger described a company so strict that UPS regulations “could easily be mistaken for the house rules of a Tibetan monastery.” This rigor, in effect, disciplines the men and women to resist temptation. It also reflects the kind of management that supports those 92,000 UPS drivers.

**The Brawn**

UPS maintains a commendable female hiring quota. More on this in Chapter Eight. Still, more men apply for driver positions and the majority of the drivers are men.

Why so many men? The extreme physical demands of the job—moving hundreds of packages daily, weighing up to 150 pounds each—tend to attract men. And not just any men. Drivers don’t
just happen. Usually, UPS novices sweat and heave their way into
driver positions via other strenuous entry-level package-handling
jobs, such as unloading, preloading, and sorting, most often starting
out part time. The long waiting list for driving—up to four or five
years—and the exertion these hopefuls do in the meantime sepa-
rate the wanna-bes from the chosen.

Package handling in the hubs is hard and punishing. It is not for
everyone. Recruiters even show videos of package handling to
prospects to prepare them. Some handlers quit early on, some even
on the first day after experiencing how difficult it really is. Yet, with
practice and supervision, they learn how to maneuver more and
more weight, which helps prepare them to become drivers.

For those who stick it out, this interlude is a kind of boot camp,
indoctrinating employees with UPS’s unique corporate culture and
expectations, all the while luring them with the considerable bunch
of UPS carrots: excellent pay, great health insurance, education
leave, tuition assistance, generous vacation allotments, and (since
the company went public) the employee stock purchase plan. Reg-
ular follow-up with supervisors and the fine example of senior em-
ployees combine to inspire (or for some—repel) devotion. By the
time employees have moved a few mountains of cardboard-clad
merchandise, they have either caught the UPS commitment or
they haven’t. If they have, that seed of UPS perseverance will
spread through their systems until they too “bleed brown blood.”

Finally, prospective drivers get to the head of the waiting list.
There, they undergo an additional grueling training program that is
so effective that government agencies and other companies use it as
a model. The indoctrination includes twenty hours of computer-
based classroom training and on-road supervisor training, which in-
corporates “Space and Visibility” training from day one. Following
that, they have thirty working days to prove themselves, as a super-
visor carefully scrutinizes their performance in three safety-evaluation
rides. If they can’t meet the demands, they must return to the other
job and wait as long as six months before reapplying. This process can
be more competitive than law school!
The Goods

People have always bought more than they could carry, and a hundred years ago they had no cars to help them out. Hence, when Jim Casey and his partners began their delivery service, it served only department stores, and the UPS role was to complete the stores’ retail transactions.

Today department stores compete with eBay and other online commerce. Many shopping excursions take place in the Internet ether and are de-peopled. More and more, UPS drivers are shoppers’ only human contact. The drivers’ relationship with the packages is again, as it was in the early twentieth century, the closing event in the retail experience.

Back in the 1950s a long-time UPS employee in Los Angeles named Homer Hunt won a slogan contest with his entry “Every Parcel a Guest of Honor.” Hokey though this phrase may be, it has endured because it describes the accommodations and services each driver provides during his time with the parcel. UPSers took it to heart.

Every parcel is different and in some way unique. Drivers get to know a package by shape, size, and even odor—as when the distinctive smell from cosmetics permeates a carton—and to associate it with a certain customer. Pulling up to an upholstery shop, a driver might instinctively grab the wrapped roll of fabric, maybe not even checking the label until walking to the shop. Merchandise delivered reflects the route itself. In Hollywood, as an example, I regularly picked up or delivered all kinds of things related to the movie business, including the Academy Awards Oscar statuettes themselves. Drivers can learn a lot about their consignees based on their incoming merchandise. For example, if a company starts receiving more C.O.D. packages than before, it’s often a good sign that its owner is having financial difficulties.

The 3.75 billion packages UPS delivered worldwide in 2005 represented a substantial section of the world’s economy and included a little of everything, from contents obviously critical to those seemingly mundane. The packages have contained time-sensitive
serums and other medicines, live animals, firearms, college students’ clothing, and junior’s baseball cards; the list is endless. With such a large market resting on their efficiency, UPS drivers work to stay comfortable with their cargo. It’s a big part of their job.

The Uniform

“There’s something about a man in uniform,” people say. What is that something? Reliability. Strength. Respect. Safety. These are qualities most people associate with heroes.

When UPS first issued complete uniforms back in the early 1920s most people in uniform were in the military, law enforcement, and medical professions, and uniforms sent a message of assurance. The 1923 UPS driver uniform consisted of shirt and tie, long jacket and cap. The brown color of UPS apparel, first featured in 1925, and of the package cars, was an intentional understatement, designed in deference to UPS’s more flashy customers and as a way to project humility, one of Jim Casey’s most strongly held values. Sure, brown didn’t show dirt, but Casey was also very strict about grooming. UPS washes and mends the uniforms as needed. The bland color was about maintaining a sense of respectful humility.

During World War II, the Korean War, and up into the 1960s, uniformed men traded in authority and popularity, and UPS trousers were still long. When I was a driver, we had to wear thick long pants all year long, even when the temperature inside those package cars would soar over 120 degrees.

In those days the uniform included a captain’s hat, with a shiny dark bill and the UPS badge on the peak. It was the kind of headgear worn by fire and police officers and Air Force pilots, rather weighty and uncomfortable after a while. We were obliged to wear them all day, too, or risk getting a pink demerit slip.

Then suddenly the counterculture happened. Young people, protesting against the Vietnam War, segregation, and government authority, looked at uniformed personnel not with respect but with
suspicion, adopting a generational style that emphasized individualism and informality. While they had no direct influence on corporate decision making, emerging cultural trends that valued comfort over formality began to find their way into corporate America.

UPS driver bow ties went by the wayside in the early 1950s, yet still had to be worn in several Midwest and East Coast locations through the next decade. By the time I became a manager in 1966, no one on the West Coast wore a bow tie; nonetheless, whenever I photographed a driver for national use I had to show him in a bow tie, so I carried a black clip-on tie in my camera case. The UPS headgear was the final point of contention. The hat eventually became optional in 1972—which all but ensured its demise.

Then, by the 1980s, focus group discussions, group meetings, one-on-one “Talk, Listen and Act” sessions, exit interviews, and other ongoing UPS communications revealed that drivers would like to wear shorts! It was time for UPS to rethink the haberdashery.

After years of resisting change, the company yielded to the drivers and the famous UPS shorts came into being. In its usual methodical manner, the company selected a few test locations—Sacramento, Tucson, and Hawaii—and supplied some of the drivers with shorts. As a member of management, I interviewed the drivers of one Tucson center who were wearing the “experimental shorts” and learned that they not only loved them, they were fending off questions from the other Tucson drivers, who kept asking when the change would include everyone. Our reports confirmed what was suspected and was already set in motion: the drivers would wear shorts. By then, however, I was stuck in a suit and tie every day.

The new uniform recast the UPS driver from a tired, traditional service worker image to one a bit spiffier and more up-beat. Shorts. Polyester. Built-in collar stays. Reinforced stitching, pocket-within-a-pocket for a pen, glued-on gold crest, long shirttails that would stay tucked in. Drivers, whose whole day is an aerobic workout, sometimes roll up their sleeves and wear shorts whether by sleet or by snow or by hail . . . and gratefully.
Many customers have commented that the shorts and the legs that fill them have made driver ogling that much more gratifying. Competition between UPS and FedEx extends to their uniforms. Many drivers and the public too find FedEx’s fashion sense a bit flashier than Big Brown’s. Still, it’s all in what you’re after. So what if FedEx drivers have ten mix-n-match options? UPS drivers deliver one-third again as many packages every day, and they generally make more money and enjoy better benefits.

Even though the UPS uniform is, by any measure, staid, UPS cultivates good relations with fashion designers in any way it can. UPS cosponsors the annual New York Fashion Week, selecting ten designers to incorporate UPS brown into their collections. Among the inspirations in 2006, svelte models sported thigh-high boots and safari-inspired hot-pant jumpsuits for the gals, and macho work boots and sleeveless shirts for the guys.

Unlike Army-Navy surplus, UPS uniforms are a tightly controlled commodity. The uniform belongs to UPS. Shirts, shorts, even logo-embroidered socks are allocated—five outfits, one for every workday. UPS washes and presses the shirts and shorts, and reclaims the uniforms for replacement when they wear out.

Management guards these items closely because the brown UPS wardrobe has become synonymous with service. They don’t risk a uniform’s misuse. Selling used uniforms on eBay is against company policy. Worn-out uniforms must be destroyed. Even the American flag, subject of legislation, doesn’t have this kind of protection, maybe because the American flag isn’t a pass-card to every business and household.

When UPS uniforms are missing, or presumed missing, UPS goes after them like a pack of hounds. A blogger named Darren Barefoot found a shirt at a thrift store and featured it on his Web site. UPS attorneys contacted him immediately and he handed over the shirt. Sometimes errant UPS uniforms set off a national alert. In 2003 a false claim was made that UPS uniforms, valued at $32,000, were missing. What would happen if people posing as trusted UPS
drivers gained access to you and your household or business for shady reasons? Sure. Terrorists might want to pose as UPS drivers. After a period of media mayhem, UPS spokespeople debunked the claim. UPS does not condone the sale of its uniforms and continues to investigate any reports of their unauthorized use.

In some instances UPS has allowed law enforcement agencies the use of uniforms, usually with a UPS loss-prevention manager nearby. Say, for example, that acting on a tip or information from another source, the agency has learned that a package contains illegal drugs. Drug enforcement officials in UPS uniform make the delivery and nab the suspect attempting to sign for them. This scenario, and others like it, has happened throughout the country on numerous occasions.

The Service

Jim Casey made sure that service was the fulcrum on which all business decisions swing. If longevity and economics are any measure, the company founder’s decision was dead on. “Our real, primary objective is to serve—to render perfect service to our stores and their customers. If we keep that objective constantly in mind, our reward in money can be beyond our fondest dreams,” Casey said.

How did the company achieve high service levels in all areas of its operation? The company has high standards and is continually making higher ones. Unrelenting problem solving, innovative technology, new services, and choreographed delivery procedures: all grease the wheels of UPS operation.

Even one package not delivered? That’s a service failure. Drivers often find themselves going out of the way to provide utmost service, even if it means incurring extra costs to get one package delivered on time. Management meets regularly with employees to discuss service, to work as a team to solve problems, even with the involvement of hourly employees. Employee groups constantly dissect any service failure at regular Service Involvement Meetings.
The meetings are also a forum for recognizing exceptional service stories.

As a result of all this teamwork, monastic-style though it may be, the sum of UPS is greater than the parts. Cult or no cult, no one individual dominates. UPS drivers work as superheroes work, tirelessly and seamlessly. They not only hear but understand and emulate the company mantra intoned by Jim Casey, “Service—the sum of many little things done well.” Which raises the question: Who was this guy Casey?
THE GREATEST AMERICAN CAPITALIST YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF

You don’t have to be a famous “somebody” to create a global empire. James Emmett Casey, known to everyone as “Jim,” moved through his long life as reliably and inconspicuously as a plain brown UPS package car travels between pickups and deliveries. Certainly not with the fanfare we associate with today’s high-profile corporate commanders. So what if he lacked charisma? Puffery wasn’t necessary to his enterprise because Jim Casey had a profitable approach. UPS’s ever-increasing sphere of service depended on a code of ethics as rigorous as a military academy, with some of the best management the world has ever known.

Unflagging Concentration

Casey’s definition of good management didn’t draw attention to himself, but instead focused on getting results through other people. It all came down to that. “Good management is taking a sincere interest in the welfare of the people you work with,” he’d counsel. “It is the ability to make individuals feel that you and they are the company—not merely employees of it.” This vision—his vision of a delivery company made of people—grew in a hundred years from a few foot messengers to a global fleet of tens of thousands of package cars and jet airliners.

Jim Casey was a shy man, anything but flashy. He was diminutive in stature, with sharp features, a long face, and piercing eyes. Fastidious in his person, he was always impeccably groomed and seldom wore anything but an understated dark suit, carefully pressed
and of the finest quality. In his day, he could walk down any street in America in his well-polished Oxfords and never be recognized as a master of industry, despite his ever-expanding wealth and influence. A stranger observing Jim Casey might have thought: *This is not a man to be watched. Rather, it is a man who is watching.*

Jim Casey watched the streets carefully. He watched movement. He watched what people sold and what people bought. He was an eternal puzzle solver, his mind constantly preoccupied by every sensory detail involving his core business, packages. He gravitated to them, mesmerized by how they were wrapped and how they were delivered.

The 1972 UPS National Conference, at a resort hotel on San Diego Bay, gives a sense of his singular obsession. During one of my walks between the dining room and conference meeting rooms, I heard someone call out to me. I peered curiously down a short path that ended at the rear door of one of the hotel exits. There, half-hidden in the bushes, was Jim, all on his own, gesturing down at a stack of packages. It was evident that hotel employees had prepared them for Post Office pickup.

“Say, what do you suppose these packages are here for?” the master motivator asked me “I should think we should be delivering these packages!” (Meaning UPS and not the U.S. Postal Service.)

“I don’t know,” I told him, “but I’ll find out.” I was just there as support for the conference, but I knew I had to do something. While he slowly walked back to the meeting (by then he was eighty years old), I wasted no time in notifying our top customer service people, who put the wheels in motion.

The next day, I told him, “Jim, I’m told UPS will be delivering hotel packages from now on. Thanks to you,” I added. What a businessman, I thought. How many of us, top management included, walked past those packages without even noticing them!

An autodidact, he never tired of learning. To keep up on the trends, he read, he listened to the radio, he asked questions. Inquisitive and alert, he didn’t hesitate to put himself in situations from which he could learn.