Full Disclosure

Henry Victor Beauregard, the eminent Ohio-born media mogul and philanthropist, has passed away at the age of 87. Beauregard owned the Beauregard Group, which included newspapers, magazines, radio stations, and television networks. He presided over several major children’s charities, including Beauregard’s Boys, his organization dedicated to liberating and rehabilitating child soldiers in Sierra Leone. According to family members, the cause of death was heart failure.

Beauregard is survived by two ex-wives, Gloria Fitzpatrick and Eunice Randolph Cleary, as well as his daughter Caroline, the well-known teen magazine advice columnist and media personality. In the interest of full disclosure, it should be added that the author of this obituary was not unacquainted with Beauregard. In the late 1950s, I drew cartoons for the *New London Herald*, the first publication Beauregard came to own and operate. Ten years after that, I contributed a three-part series on Napa Valley vintners to Beauregard’s lifestyle magazine *Beau*, and another decade later, several features to his monthly travel journal *Regard*.

The only son of a carpenter and a first grade teacher, Beauregard was born in London, Ohio. He attended East London High and graduated close to but not quite at the top of his class. After high school, he joined the Army and served in World War II, where he dug trenches in Normandy and crossed the Apennines with the 10th U.S. Mounted Division. In 1945, he pinched a Beretta off an Italian corpse and wiped a misting of Italian blood off the handle with the sleeve of his winter jacket. He took the gun home, had it professionally polished, and then placed it in an ornate silver lock-box lined with pale pink felt.

After the war, Beauregard registered for classes at Denison, and in the summers, he helped his hard-working father with his many renovation projects back home in London. In 1950, he graduated with a degree in economics and promptly began hammering away at a legacy, much as he and his father hammered away at the roofs of well-appointed London houses.

After a foray into London-area real estate – a dilapidated dry goods store he and his father fixed up and sold – Beauregard moved to Syracuse, NY to attend journalism school. He completed only his first year. His primary interest was business, not writing or editing. He headed home, a fiancé in tow – Mrs. Fitzpatrick, then Ms. Porter, a pretty dark-haired second-year theater student from Rochester who’d been so taken with the dashing veteran that she’d seen fit to abandon Syracuse and resume her studies at London Community College. Back in London, Beauregard used the considerable profits from the dry goods store transaction to join two other local businessmen in purchasing *The New London Herald*. At the age of 28, Beauregard owned a newspaper, albeit one with a circulation of less than 7,000.

Full disclosure: When Beauregard was hurtling through his one and only year in the school’s journalism program, I was also a student at Syracuse, a 16-year-old first-year undergraduate, the soon-to-be arts editor of *The Daily Orange*. While we were never friends or even associates then, Beauregard’s status was high; word of it trickled down. That is, while he never won notoriety for his accomplishments at Syracuse or even the promise, burnished by classroom discussions he sparked or papers he wrote, that he would eventually make great strides in journalism, he did earn a reputation for being the kind of young man who was profoundly keen on earning a reputation. It’s often said that sometimes that kind of man, regardless of what else he lacks, is a man worth sticking by.

When I graduated from Syracuse, I headed west, but not too far. I played clarinet in a Pittsburgh jazz band. I coached junior high school basketball in Erie. I canvassed Cleveland for Lausche’s Senate campaign. In 1957, I wound up in London, looking for work. While Beauregard and I had never met, an underling, perhaps, I imagined, on recommendation from Beauregard, hired me on as a part-time cartoonist. And so I drew – stick-bodied send-ups of public figures no one liked – and wondered when I might behold the boss – by reputation, an extremely tall, pug-nosed man with rapidly thinning hair and an ominously steady gait.

Beauregard’s business interests went much further than a former dry goods store and a newspaper in the town of London. He flipped more real estate and snapped up other small newspapers too, setting his sights higher. Over the years, he purchased radio and television stations, first in Ohio, and later in neighboring states, and then sped on to the coasts. Once he was able, he went for bigger fish, gobbling conglomerates in the same opportunistic way in which he’d once taken a shine to the old dry goods store. He was dogged and yet there was a casual inevitability to the whole enterprise. He low-balled competitors on ad prices, aggressively sullied the integrity of anyone who stood in his path, and saw circulation and viewership skyrocket as he shifted the focus of his outlets to the salacious and grim. Decades before such programming became commonplace, T.V. shows about car chases with bad endings, notorious prisons, and Hollywood scandals dominated his networks. The initial flower in his cap, his first hands-on achievement, a game show of sorts, was *Where’s Mom? Where’s Dad?*, a hidden-camera program about kindergartners attempting to accomplish adult tasks without adult guidance – for example, going to the grocery with a memorized list, fixing a flat, or receiving bad news from the police. Most episodes ended with a child sobbing, her watery eyes burrowing past a tiny camera installed on a bystander’s lapel. Beauregard made millions.

In less than half a decade, his business interests had expanded throughout the Midwest and even to New York and California. Although Beauregard and his wife had several years prior installed themselves in the largest, most opulent London house the young mogul could find, Beauregard moved to New York in the mid-1960s, leaving his wife behind in London. Always soda cracker-thin, Ms. Fitzpatrick, then Beauregard, suffered from a litany of health complaints that had made pregnancy an impossibility. Despite this, they had adopted no children. She was lonely in London, but Beauregard wouldn’t bring her to New York for fear she’d wilt under the endless procession of parties and events he felt compelled to flog himself through. He rented a flat in Midtown. He lived on pastrami sandwiches and dirty martinis. He fell asleep in a tuxedo most nights. He kept his wedding band in an ivory box next to his toothbrush in the bare bathroom and dated freely. He returned to London every few weeks, and then every few months, and then he stopped returning at all.

Full disclosure: During this transitional phase of Beauregard’s life, he and I once shared a bench in the men's locker room of the Vanderbilt YMCA. I had moved to the city a few years before Beauregard, leaving Philadelphia, where I’d taught history at a boarding school and written a bit for the *Inquirer*. I wondered if he'd recognize me from the tiny photo that once adorned the masthead of his first newspaper, but he did not, or at least he gave no indication that he did. Gargantuan in person, Beauregard was beaded with water from the shower, what little hair he still had plastered like some great silly bird’s down along his shiny crown. A white towel was wrapped around his waist. He was peering down at *The New York Times* business section as he slid out of his shower slippers, pursing his lips, his eyes luminous and Barbicide-blue behind his wire-framed glasses.

I stopped to use the bathroom on the way out, and Beauregard settled into the stall next to me. I was very sure it was Beauregard. I heard the rustle of paper and a grunt as he shifted his hindquarters onto the toilet seat. The towel must have been hanging from a hook on the door, because a column of water steadily speckled the tile floor. Under Beauregard, the seat creaked, loose. Just as I flushed my toilet and swung open the door of the stall to leave, a voice, presumably his, began singing that old Monotones song, a hit from 1961.

*I wonder, wonder*, *wonder who,* he sang, his voice flat yet sonorous in the bathroom with high ceilings. *Who wrote the book of love?*

I rinsed my hands quickly and left without drying them.

In 1968, the divorce was finalized, and two years later, Beauregard remarried, this time to Eunice Cleary, daughter of Manhattan lawyer Reginald Cleary, one of Beauregard’s acquaintances in New York high society. The courtship had been swift; Ms. Cleary was ten years younger than Beauregard, a vivacious, sprightly redhead, no more than five feet tall. She favored glitter, the color green, and five-inch heels.

Within months of their marriage, the new Ms. Beauregard was pregnant with Caroline. The couple lived in the penthouse of a brick building on 50th St., half a block from 1st Avenue. By now Beauregard owned 24 newspapers, a national television network, 17 radio stations, four magazines, three publishing companies, and a movie production house. Caroline would be his only child.

Full Disclosure: Nearly 18 years later, I taught Caroline Beauregard composition at NYU where I had been installed for almost five years as a guest lecturer. She wrote about fathers frequently, regardless of what prompt I assigned. She teased the theme out of anything. Glenn Beachum’s “Diary of an Old Hand,” was not a wanderer’s rumination on prairie life in the very early 1900s, but a poison dart sent from the wheat fields of South Dakota straight to the heart of the father who’d disappeared before he was born, the purported object of the author’s searching, both by horse-drawn wagon and by pen. Mary Josephine Peck’s *Feeling* *Minnesota* was not a collection of poems about the poet’s circle of bohemian cohorts in late 1960s St. Paul, but a 193-page elegy for the memory of the sad, sick father who had abused her.

In personal narratives, Caroline discussed her own father candidly. She used many exclamation points and occasionally supplemented her writing with unflattering cartoons. He was terrible, incompetent, and absent. According to Caroline, he drank Tanqueray like Gatorade and slapped her mother into a quivering, red-faced heap whenever her giddiness wore on him. Throughout her middle and high school years, he missed every tennis match she played because he was busy having affairs with the floppy-breasted blonde tramps he employed as secretaries. He hurled a wine glass at her dog when it defecated on the kitchen floor. He never tipped waiters or doormen. He ate in a slovenly fashion, a napkin stuffed into his collar. It billowed out over his tie like a spotty cloud. He scraped anything green off to one side of his plate and wolfed down steaks, chops, and rosy slices of roast beef. It made Caroline nauseous. She became more of a vegetarian with each bite she saw him take.

I asked Caroline to come to my office one morning. My office then was a nook in the basement of a student union annex, a building I couldn’t find again if I had to. She sat across from me, semi-obscured by a stack of student papers, her nose as flat as her father’s – the nose of a boxer, I imagined. Her hair was red though, like her mother’s, and her lips a charming pink squiggle dashed between two cheeks as pale and soft as marshmallows. Glaring, she sat in the wooden chair next to my desk. I explained that I had known her father many years earlier.

“My father is gonna suck cocks in hell,” she replied, lisping in obvious imitation of an old movie actress.

After graduation, she changed her last name to Cleary and started “Tart-to-Tart,” an advice column for *Slip*, a fledgling magazine aimed at an audience of idiosyncratic young women. Girls wrote in to complain about their overbearing and insensitive fathers, and Caroline channeled her personal vitriol into ferocious broadsides on their behalf. While she really only wrote about her own father, Caroline’s brand of commentary quickly gained fans. She developed a following she has since nurtured with several books, a short-lived daytime talk show, and frequent appearances on VH1’s *Pop-Up Video*. While it lasted, *Slip* was as successful as its most famous writer, which came as no surprise. Her father was the magazine’s publisher.

Full disclosure: One December night in the early 1990s, I was taking a walk down Ludlow St. I’d moved to a place in the area several years earlier. As I stopped to let my three-year-old Yorkie Crispin sniff at a Coke can half-shrouded in a heap of brown newspaper, a female voice crusted over with wine and cigarettes brayed from across an alley.

“Frank!”

Startled, I spun around and squinted through the dark. Crispin tugged at the Coke can. Punk music was coming from the same direction as the yell, a tumble of cymbal crashes, hoarse grunts, and buzzing guitars. There was a neon sign oozing down a stone staircase. I looked and there she was: Caroline Cleary, radiant though her face was frosted white with makeup and her hair now more pink than red. A steel bar poked out desperately through a hole in the center of her lower lip.

“Mr. Frank,” she said, almost slipping on a bit of ice as she sprinted toward me. “If it isn’t my fav’rite professshher,” she cackled, clinging to my jacket, pulling me down toward the snowy sidewalk. Struggling to support Caroline and maintain my own balance, I could manage no dignity, not even a word in response. Nuzzling at my shaking legs with his small wet nose, Crispin panted and danced in circles around us. I collapsed on the pavement, and Caroline sprawled on top of me, impossibly heavy for someone so small.

“Let’s go ice skating, bub. It’s a beautiful morning.”

She smashed her mouth into mine and the steel bar glanced off my teeth while Crispin rested his paws on my face, covering my eyes.

Full disclosure: On vacation with the new Mrs. Beauregard, Beauregard was out of town the morning I left his penthouse on 50th St. Eunice had abandoned the marriage years earlier, but Caroline kept a key. Caroline, Crispin, and I were there all week, and the last night of our residency, Caroline and I drank three bottles of Perrier-Jouet from Beauregard’s refrigerator and ate Vietnamese take-out in the living room. I used chopsticks, much to Caroline’s amusement, and dripped several archipelagos of fish sauce across the thick white carpet. Caroline laughed when Crispin lapped at the fish sauce gamely and made a funny doggy face. Caroline smoked cigarettes, one after another, sending black tufts of ash spiraling haphazardly around the room, and the three of us watched Jerry Lewis movies on Beauregard’s van-sized television and howled until four in the morning.

Caroline and I screwed twice that last night, once on the black leather couch in the living room, and again in the bathroom. Afterwards, under the shower head, I knelt uncomfortably on the tile warmed by soapy water and burrowed my mouth and tongue between Caroline’s legs until my face went numb. Caroline yelled and slapped the back of my head. With Crispin squeezed between us, we fell asleep in the spare bedroom, splayed horizontally along the mattress uncovered by sheets or blankets.

At noon, I dressed and left with Crispin. By the door, there was a heap of change in a square gold-colored dish, and I reached in as I turned the knob to exit. I took a handful, leaving the pennies behind, and stuffed the quarters, dimes, and nickels into my pants pocket. Trying to be discrete, I tucked Crispin under my arm and staggered down the stairs to the ground floor to dodge the doorman, the coins shaking like maracas with each waddle.

Full disclosure: Two years ago, Beauregard and I participated in a one-and-a-half-minute conversation about college basketball. We were at the Beringer House, a dazzling townhouse in the Village where advertising executive Sheldon Beringer often hosted events – a few hundred people, no more. There was an open bar. A hot young band was earning 20 grand for diddling away up on the landing overlooking the ballroom. I wished I’d brought my clarinet.

And then Caroline appeared.

“Hi, Frank,” she said. Her lips were gray now, with no metal stabbed through them, just a ragged little hole where the bar had once pierced. Her hair the color of dried ivy cascaded down one side of her head. As if watering a plant, Caroline giggled and carefully spilled half her Heineken down my right pants leg.

Dabbing with a handful of paper towels, I saw Beauregard leaning against the bar. He was a little hunched, curling like a parenthesis around his dirty martini, but still impressive, almost virile for all the wrinkles. He had no hair at all and, above the crowd, his head was a sheer white disco ball swiveling from side to side, conversation to conversation. Shorter men surrounded him, something he was used to. I ordered a Tanqueray with tonic. I couldn’t hear over the din but I could almost read his lips.

Beauregard appeared to be saying something important to two shaggy-haired copywriters, gesticulating vigorously with one massive hand while the other clutched his glass. His fingers were withered bratwursts, and it was a miracle he didn’t break the stem in two just by holding it.

I moved closer to hear one of the shaggy-haired men agree: “He has no discipline. He takes 35 shots a game, most of them contested, makes 10, racks up turnovers, and they still call him a star. He ought to trust his teammates.”

The other shaggy-haired man nodded, presumably another basketball sage. Prince, the player they were discussing, was an undersized spark plug from Baltimore, a freshman at Ohio State doing a brief tour of duty before the big leagues. Ohio State was ranked #12 in the nation, but was falling fast thanks to recent losses to upstarts Central Michigan and Binghamton. Prince scored 29.3 points a game, often more when his team was losing. He hurled his 150-pound frame into the lane again and again, bouncing off big bodies, reeling from hard-swung elbows. He was fearless, a playground warrior with a first step like a .45. He vaulted over kids a foot taller than him. When he was fouled especially violently, he sneered as he rose from the gym floor to shoot his free throws, pounding his narrow chest with one tense little fist.

I surprised myself and interrupted with an avalanche of coach-talk.

“Prince isn’t the problem,” I said. “It’s the program. They’ve surrounded him with players who have no confidence and little competence. He passes, they don’t finish. He penetrates, distributes the ball, they miss shots. They wring their hands and lose faith. He can’t count on anyone but himself.”

“Then change the attitude,” said the other shaggy-haired man, “ and maybe they’d feel better and then play better.”

“If they had half his heart,” I replied.

“So it’s about motivation?”

“Heart is like quickness,” I said.

“Or height?”

“I’m not sure you can teach either,” I said.

Beauregard chuckled broadly and slashed a straw through his martini, chasing the olive. Caroline stood eight feet behind her father, but he didn’t notice. Caroline held her left fist to her face and tucked her thumb under her upper lip. She pretended to huff and puff into her thumb as if blowing up a balloon. Wavering, her middle finger rose slowly until it was fully erect, defiant, pointed at her father and me. Caroline winked and then placed her right hand over her chest and stood very still, eyes closed. Beauregard speared the olive and swallowed it without chewing. His head swung above mine. A disco ball, the moon, a pale piñata.

“You know, I’m not sure we’ve met,” he said, talking to no one in particular. “I’m Vic Beauregard.”