



And then Herbert Foster, looking drab and hunted, picked his way through the crowd, with the expression of a holy man in Babylon

# The Foster Portfolio

My business is handling other people's money, and I have a great respect for money.  
But how could I help a man like Herbert Foster, who had such an odd feeling about it?

By **KURT VONNEGUT, JR.**

lists of securities, and relay our experts' suggestions for ways of making their portfolios—or bonanzas or piles—thrive and increase. I can speak of tens of thousands of dollars without a catch in my throat, and look at a list of securities worth more than a hundred thousand with no more fuss than a judicious "Mmmmm, uh-huh."

Since I don't have a portfolio, my job is a little like being a hungry delivery boy for a candy store. But I never really felt that way about it until Herbert Foster asked me to have a look at his finances.

He called one evening to say a friend had recommended me, and could I come out to talk business. I washed, shaved, dusted my shoes, put on my uniform, and made my grave arrival by cab.

People in my business—and maybe people in general—have an unsavory habit of sizing up a man's house, car and suit, and estimating his annual income. Herbert Foster was thirty-five hundred a year, or I'd never seen it. Understand, I have nothing against people in moderate circumstances, other than the crucial fact that I can't make any money off them. It made me a little sore that Foster would take my time, when the most he had to play around with, I guessed, was no more than a few hundred dollars. Say it was a thousand: my take would be a dollar or two at best.

ANYWAY, there I was in the Fosters' jerry-built postwar colonial with expansion attic, the kind of house that has a prewar car in the one-car garage. They had taken up a local furniture store on its offer of three rooms of furniture, including ash trays, a humidor and pictures for the wall, all for \$199.99. Hell, I was there, and I figured I might as well go through with having a look at his pathetic problem.

"Nice place you have here, Mr. Foster," I said. "And this is your charming wife?"

A skinny, shrewish-looking woman smiled up at me vacuously. She wore a faded housecoat figured with a fox-hunting scene. The print was at war with the slip cover of the chair, and I had to squint to separate her features from the clash about her. "A pleasure, Mrs. Foster," I said. She was surrounded by underwear and socks to be mended, and Herbert said her name was Alma, which seemed entirely possible.

"And this is the young master," I said. "Bright little chap. Believe he favors his father." The two-year-old wiped his grubby hands on my trousers, snuffled, and padded off toward the piano. He stationed himself at the upper end of the keyboard, and hammered on the highest note for one minute, then two, then three.

"Musical—like his father," Alma said.

"You play, do you, Mr. Foster?"

"Classical," Herbert said. I took my first good look at him. He was lightly built, with the round, freckled face and big teeth I usually associate with a show-off or wise guy. It was hard to believe that he had settled for so plain a wife, or that he could be as fond of family life as he seemed. It may have been that I only imagined a look of quiet desperation in his eyes.

"Shouldn't you be getting on to your meeting, dear?" Herbert said.

"It was called off at the last minute."

"Now, about your portfolio—" I began.

Herbert looked rattled. "How's that?"

"Your portfolio—your securities."

"Yes, well, I think we'd better talk in the bedroom. It's quieter in there."

Alma put down her sewing. "What securities?"

"The bonds, dear. The government bonds."

"Now, Herbert, you're not going to cash them in."

"No, Alma, just want to talk them over."

"I see," I said tentatively. "Uh—approximately how much in government bonds?"

"Three hundred and fifty dollars," Alma said proudly.

"Well," I said, "I don't see any need for going into the bedroom to talk. My advice, and I give it free, is to hang on to your nest egg until it matures. And now, if you'll let me phone a cab—"

"Please," Herbert said, standing in the bedroom door, "there are a couple of other things I'd like to discuss."

"What?" Alma said.

"Oh, long-range investment planning," Herbert said vaguely.

"We could use a little short-range planning for next month's grocery bill."

"Please," Herbert said to me again.

I shrugged and followed him into the bedroom. He closed the door behind me. I sat on the edge of the bed and watched him open a little door in the wall, which bared the pipes servicing the bathroom. He slid his arm up into the wall, grunted, and pulled down an envelope.

"Oho," I said apathetically, "so that's where we've got the bonds, eh? Very clever. You needn't have gone to that trouble, Mr. Foster. I have an idea what government bonds look like."

"Alma," he called.

"Yes, Herbert."

"Will you start some coffee for us?"

"I don't drink coffee at night," I said.

"We have some from dinner," Alma said.

"I can't sleep if I touch it after supper," I said.

"Fresh—we want some fresh," Herbert said.

The chair springs creaked, and her reluctant footsteps faded into the kitchen.

"Here," said Herbert, putting the envelope in my lap. "I don't know anything about this business, and I guess I ought to have professional help."

All right, so I'd give the poor guy a professional talk about his three hundred and fifty dollars in government bonds. "They're the most conservative investment you can make. They haven't the growth characteristics of many securities, and the return isn't great, but they're very safe. By all means hang onto them." I stood up. "And now, if you'll let me call a cab—"

"You haven't looked at them."

I sighed, and untwisted the red string holding the envelope shut. Nothing would do but that I admire the things. The bonds and a list of securities slid into my lap. I riffled through the bonds quickly, and then read the list slowly.

"Well?"

I put the list down on the faded bedspread. I composed myself. "Ummmm, uh-huh," I said. "Do you mind telling me where the securities listed here came from?"

"Grandfather left them to me two years ago. The lawyers who handled the estate have them. They sent me that list."

"Do you know what these stocks are worth?"

"They were appraised when I inherited them."

He told me the figure, and, to my bewilderment, he looked sheepish, even a little unhappy about it.

"They've gone up a little since then."

"How much?"

"On today's market—maybe they're worth seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars, Mr. Foster. Sir."

His expression didn't change. My news moved him about as much as if I'd told him it'd been a chilly winter. He raised his eyebrows as Alma's footsteps came back into the living room. "Shhhh!"

"She doesn't know?"

"Lord, no!" He seemed to have surprised himself with his vehemence. "I mean the time isn't ripe."

"If you'll let me have this list of securities, I'll have our New York office give you a complete analysis and recommendations," I whispered. "May I call you Herbert, sir?"

MY CLIENT, Herbert Foster, hadn't had a new suit in three years; he had never owned more than one pair of shoes at a time. He worried about payments on his secondhand car, and ate tuna and cheese instead of meat, because meat was too expensive. His wife made her own clothes, and those of Herbert, Jr., and the curtains and slip covers—all cut from the same bargain bolt. The Fosters were going through hell, trying to choose between new tires or retreads for the car; and television was something they had to go two doors down the street to watch. Determinedly, they kept within the small salary Herbert made as a bookkeeper for a wholesale grocery house.

God knows it's no disgrace to live that way, which is better than the way I live, but it was pretty disturbing to watch, knowing Herbert had an income, after taxes, of perhaps twenty thousand a year.

I had our securities analysts look over Foster's holdings, and report on the stocks' growth possibilities, prospective earnings, the effects of war and peace, inflation and deflation, and so on. The report ran to twenty pages, a record for any of my clients. Usually, the reports (*Continued on page 72*)



I'M a salesman of good advice for rich people. I'm a contact man for an investment counseling firm. It's a living, but not a whale of a one—or at least not now, when I'm just starting out. To qualify for the job, I had to buy a Homburg, a navy-blue overcoat, a double-breasted banker's-gray suit, black shoes, a regimental-stripe tie, half a dozen white shirts, half a dozen pairs of black socks and gray gloves.

When I call on a client, I come by cab, and I am sleek and clean and foursquare. I carry myself as though I've made a quiet killing on the stock market, and am calling on him more as a public service than anything else. When I arrive in clean wool, with crackling certificates and confidential stock analyses in crisp Manila folders, the reaction—ideally and usually—is the same accorded a minister or physician. I am in charge, and everything is going to be just fine.

I deal mostly with old ladies—the meek, who by dint of cast-iron constitutions have inherited sizable portions of the earth. I thumb through the clients'

ILLUSTRATED BY ALBERT DORNE

# POP GINGLE-

## *Hong Kong Host*

A salty ex-gob from Wisconsin, stranded in strange territory 15 years ago, wound up running an international hangout (American style) that's famed all over the Far East

By BILL STAPLETON

### Hong Kong

**E**DWARD FRANCIS GINGLE, Esq., ex-United States Navy chief steward, admits he's quite a distance from Junction City, Wisconsin, these days; but he takes a philosopher's long view of the fact.

Discharged after 30 years' service, Pop Gingle (everybody pronounces it "jingle") was paid off in Hong Kong Harbor aboard the destroyer tender USS Blackhawk in 1936. Tucked in his pocket as he went ashore was a 23-jewel platinum watch given to him by the crew of the ship and it's still his proudest possession.

The presentation of the watch immediately preceded a shore-based celebration of such caliber that old-time residents of Hong Kong began dating subsequent local events from that evening.

The morning after, ex-Chief Gingle woke up and made some rather startling discoveries, in addition to the realization that he had the grandfather of all hang-overs. First, he was still in Hong Kong. Second, he had lost a round-the-world ticket that was to get him back to Wisconsin. And third, he found a receipted bill of sale in one pocket that certified he was the new owner of the 60-room Palace Hotel in Kowloon.

Characteristically, Pop set out to "get the damn' hotel organized" and incidentally to begin a reputation that has spread the name of his bar and restaurant at 70 Nathan Road to the four corners of the world and earned him the fitting description of "a real Far East character."

If you stop any ricksha boy or taxi driver in this tropical community and shout no more than "Gingle's!" at him, he will shortly deposit you at the door of the international hangout, where the flavor of excellent American home cooking mixes with the spice of well-mellowed companionship among world travelers.

Pop gets a tremendous kick out of the idea that his name has become a byword in such places as Tokyo, Singapore, Calcutta, the Fiji's and even barren Shemya in the Aleutians.

Pilots, particularly, have him in high regard, since Pop has been known to stake many a "grounded" airman until things picked up again.

They tell you, "Listen, buddy, if you ever wind up out here and you're stuck for dough, a square meal or some transportation, don't let it panic you. Look up the old man."

The softball team off the United States Far Eastern Fleet's headquarters' ship, USS Eldorado, will be a long time forgetting their visit to Gingle's in 1946.

Not only did Pop rattle his 300 pounds around as official bat boy for the lads while they played teams from the Hong Kong garrison, but he gained near immortality when he produced cold beer for all hands at every game.

A famous picture of Pop in his bat boy uniform decorates the back bar and he's prouder of that

than he is of knowing the team's top boss, Vice-Admiral Oscar Badger.

"Knew him when he was a damn' ensign," he recalls.

Among other top brass that Pop remembers personally is Vice-Admiral M. E. Miles, a good friend and Gingle's commanding officer when he served on destroyer convoy duty during the first crossing of the A.E.F. to Europe in World War I. Gingle was a chief aboard the USS MacDougal.

His past service in the "cans" of the fleet is reflected today in the overwhelming receptions he lays on for destroyermen who make liberty in Hong Kong.

Pop's comfortable establishment in Kowloon is as American as a short-order drive-in on U.S. 1. The walls are undecorated, except for a picture of Custer's Last Stand, and a juke box in a corner of the room is loaded with the latest in Stateside hillbilly and swing records.

"Listen, boy," he rumbles from the depths of his massive frame, "I'm content to stay out here. Where else in this screwball world can I sit at a crossroads like this, meet all kinds of interesting people every day and get the chance to shoot the breeze with the kind of characters you see around this joint?"

"A lot of guys want to stick around the house or go sit on a porch somewhere when they get to my age, but I wouldn't trade this deal for anything back in the States."

Pop folded his latest copy of a naval reserve publication into a comfortable fly-swatting hold and yelled in Cantonese for another cold beer.

"I can talk to my mother once a month on the transpacific telephone and so I'm always in touch with home." (Mrs. Gingle is eighty-seven years old and lives in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.)

Born on August 17, 1884, Pop reached for his first cold beer in Milwaukee when he was seventeen years old and joined the Coast Guard almost simultaneously. He transferred over to the Navy at the beginning of the first World War. After the war, he shipped out of San Francisco with the Pacific fleet.

His favorite enlistment covered the period of service on the upper Yangtze River in China on the American gunboat USS Helena.

"I was hanging around Canton the day in 1924 when the Nationalist forces drove back a bunch of Communists who'd burned half the city. In those days they were shooting wooden bullets at each other," Pop said, an old excitement alive in his eyes.

His original stake in the colony's business life, the Palace Hotel, was blasted flat by the United States Fourteenth Air Force when the Japanese occupied Hong Kong during World War II. The Japs had been using the hotel for a military headquarters and somebody tipped off the American bombers.

Pop was interned in Stanley Camp, the wartime prison for colony families which was set up by the Japs near Victoria not far from Hong Kong proper. During the three years and eight months he spent there, he saw some other interests go down the drain, too. Gingle's Dixie Kitchen and Gingle's Little Spot, both experiments in hamburger and coffee counters for a startled British colonial trade, were confiscated and later wrecked.

Pop's Chinese wife, Susie, put the show back on the road after they were released from internment and their present establishment, on one of Kowloon's busiest streets, is a tribute to her managing of business matters. Mabel, their young daughter, actually runs the place while Pop gathers with old cronies from Navy days.

His unabated saltiness occasionally riles a customer. For example, a British customer who had ordered a dozen oysters demanded the shells after he finished his meal. Not understanding what to him was an odd request, Pop simply shouted: "I suppose if you ordered a cup of coffee, you'd want the cup and saucer, too, huh?"

The Englishman explained he intended giving the shells to his chickens.

The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who had just returned to Hong Kong after nine months' service in Korea, mobbed the restaurant on their return. Pop broke out Australian T-bone steaks for all the soldiers who could crowd into the restaurant. Plus free cold beer, "until it ran outta their ears."

Pop regards the British Hong Kong garrison soldiers as his personal household troops. Most of them make his place a regular stopping place on their days off duty.

Pop waited anxiously for the Middlesex regiment to get back from Korea. "That's my regiment," he'd say, "and I'm going to feed them some real good old American cooking when they get back. I'll cut the steaks myself." He did, too.

Is a bouncer ever necessary when occasional groups clash in the bar?

Pop rapidly banged a beefy fist twice on the wooden table, once on the arm of his chair and twice again on the head of a nearby diner.

"I never need a bouncer," he snorted.

But Pop's place has class. Just as many families and business executives go to Gingle's for good food and a chance to relax as military personnel of all nations. And the kids in the neighborhood are always sure of a handout at Gingle's. Three-year-old Anthony Flursheim, a recovering polio victim, comes in daily to show Pop how much his walking has improved.

Pop Gingle, honorary member of the commercial air-line pilots' Buzzards Club and a Kentucky Colonel by decree of ex-Governor (now Senator) Earle C. Clements, sits at his world crossroads and tries to be a good friend to man. THE END

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