

He realized that if he could only get a bicycle manufacturer to back him he could increase his income by selling new bicycles. So he went to Columbus, Ohio, and talked with George C. Erland, one of America's four leading bicycle manufacturers. Erland was a kind and shrewd businessman who for the rest of his life could cherish his first impression of an enthusiastic, well-built youngster, still in his teens, who talked with the persuasion of a seasoned businessman.

"I want to build a showroom for bicycles in Indianapolis, Mr. Erland," Carl said, "a place where we can show every make of wheel." Erland asked questions. He was impressed by the way Carl was making racing pay dividends to a repair shop that was supporting four people—Carl, his mother and two brothers. Erland said, "I'll take a chance on you, boy."

Under Erland's guarantee, Carl rented the best display location in Indianapolis. Erland shipped bicycles to fill the new display room—not one or two, as another manufacturer might have done, but a whole carload of glittering new wheels. At the end of the first month Carl owed the Erland company fifty thousand dollars.

If the new salesroom failed, it was Erland who would be left "holding the bag." For Carl was still a minor, and he could not be held responsible by law, but in his own mind he was a man of business and of honor, and on both terms, he was on a spot. He went back to Columbus to talk over the situation. After paying his train fare, he had one fifty-cent piece left. But he handed Erland a note. "This is for fifty thousand dollars; it's to straighten up my account." The boy did not know that Erland had a contract with his bankers that loaned him money on his customers' notes, and that such notes were as good as cash—except that in his case, since he was a minor, his note was worth—exactly nothing. Carl only knew Erland gave him the chance he wanted by taking his note. He would not forget to be grateful. Now, at nineteen, he owned the finest bicycle shop in all of Indiana. Its glittering display windows looked out on Pennsylvania Street, the city's busiest thoroughfare. He proceeded to make it and himself known around the world.