



ALL EARS!!

THE LITCHFIELD FUND WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

"OUR EARS SPAN ALL FIELDS"



DURING HOLLYWOOD'S Golden Age, the movie studios churned out 60 to 70 movies a month! While many became classics with the stars of the day, the vast majority were B movies – quickly made with formulaic plots & casted with actresses & actors that usually had small, supporting roles in star-laden films. The 'queen of the B's' was none other than Lucille Ball, not yet a treasured & beloved American icon. In 1948, she starred in a popular radio show, *My Favorite Husband*. CBS asked her to develop the show for a new technology, television. On January 19, 1953, Lucille Ball & this new technology brought America together when Little Ricky was born!

TECHNOLOGICAL TOGETHERNESS? On that Monday night in 1953, 72% of American televisions were tuned in to watch Lucy, already a television icon, have her baby boy! There have been many moments when television has brought America together. When President Kennedy was assassinated, America's black & white TVs were flipped on. Families gathered in 1964 to watch the *Beatles* on *The Ed Sullivan Show!* In 1969, Americans watched as Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. And on February 28, 1983, 105M Americans tuned in for the M*A*S*H finale! Even TV's technological predecessor, radio, had similar impacts. On December 8, 1941 at half past noon, America turned its collective ear to their *RCA, Zenith & Emerson* radios to listen to FDR's *Day of Infamy* speech! On November 1, 1938, 40M Americans, 33% of the Nation, tuned in for 1 minute, 56 & 3/5 seconds to hear the *Match of the Century*, when a tiny, beat-up, ugly horse & underdog, Seabiscuit, defeated Triple Crown winner War Admiral in a one-on-one grudge race, uniting the underdog Americans who were fighting their way out of the Great Depression! In the years before the war, the heavyweight champion took on all the top challengers, usually winning in a knockout! In my mom & dad's little town, if Joe Louis was fighting on the night of a dance at the coal miner's Union Hall, someone would put a radio on the back of their truck & take it to the dance. Once plugged in, they would run a wire up the hill to get a signal on the antenna & listen to the *Brown Bomber*, who won 52 of his 69 fights by knockout, clobbering his opponent. Many technological inventions & innovations were intended, or in some way helped, to bring people together. Take the earliest technology, fire! Suddenly, family & friends had a spot to gather around, providing not just the warmth from the blazing embers, but the warmth of the community, all while sharing the rewards of the hunt, barbecued & roasted. Even when our caveman friend Thuk discovered the wheel he realized uses for the wheel that would help forge community. The wheel allowed for easier travel & lighter loads as the craftsman brought his wares to the village or for Thuk to travel to see friends & family. In fact, every form of transportation – boats, coaches, trains, subways, automobiles, buses, planes & more – helped bring people closer together. Electricity provided longer hours for people to be together, in the family or at a place of business like a restaurant or shop & made our streets safer for folks to gather & have fun. Telephones gave us the opportunity, as the *Bell System* used to tell us, to reach out & touch someone, instead of waiting days or weeks for letters to exchange. Movies, radio & television became gathering points for friends & family, from those special events we mentioned earlier to every year on Super Bowl Sunday! And of course, satellite, cellular, the cloud & the internet has provided us the opportunity for constant communication, from finding breaking news in an instant to checking in quickly with a friend or relative far away. Yet every form of technology designed or helping to bring people together has in actuality driven us apart. When people travelled by boat or train, the trip took days, even weeks. People had a chance to talk, get to know each other, perhaps develop a friendship or comradery. The same was true with buses & subways, an opportunity to be among people with common interests, headed to work to earn their daily living. But today, people drive alone in their car or work from home. Those who might take the bus, subway or train to work stayed pinned to their phone unwilling, but more likely afraid, to make eye contact. Before electricity lit every room in the house, allowing mom to check a recipe site on the internet in the kitchen, dad to fall asleep on the sofa watching a college basketball game, Mary in her bedroom gossiping with her friends in a group text & Max in his bedroom playing *Halo* & listening to *Death Cab for Cutie* on his earbuds, the family gathered in one room, lit by the fireplace & oil lamps. There, they might read aloud from a now classic piece of literature or the Bible, play a game or sing together while someone played an instrument. Massive & constant communication has driven us into our individual spheres & bubbles, closing down any interplay of ideas or thoughts. So strong are these bubbles, that even the truth now angers people, breaking the surface of that bubble & causing a complete meltdown, like when ICE arrests illegal criminal aliens! But this isolation did not begin with the internet & the smartphone. Think about the evolution of the telephone! From the late 1800s in the cities through mid-20th century in rural America, everyone was excited when telephone service reached their area. But we quickly went from, "Hey, the phone is ringing, someone pick up!" to checking caller ID to see if we want to take the call, to a nonchalant, "Hey, just let it go to voicemail!" In fact, on March 10, 1876, Alexander Graham Bell famously made the first phone call, saying, "Mr. Watson. Come here. I want you!" & then on March 11, Mr. Watson slammed down the phone receiver in a huff because Graham was calling too often! In fact, the old-fashioned landline is a perfect analogy for today's technologically dependent society. If you don't like what you are hearing, slam the phone down & don't answer it when it rings. Disconnect. Ignore. Never respond. Just continue believing, feeling, thinking what you do right now. Don't grow. Don't learn. Never understand. And never forgive. Media writer Douglas Rushkoff sees this, writing, "The great paradox of technology is that it brings us closer together while pushing us further apart." Even Eric Schmidt, who oversaw *Google's* growth in the early part of this century, said, "Technology has the power to connect us—and the power to isolate us from one another." Educator & author Cal Newport, who has described the human mind in the digital world as an information hive, reminds us, "People mistake being constantly reachable for being genuinely connected." So technology can be helpful or hurtful, a blessing or a burden. But the answer is not to turn off, shut down & tune out. Society – people - need to find ways to use technology & genuinely connect in the spirit of learning, kindness & growth. And while telemarketers don't count, the next time you don't respond to a friend or family member in need of conversation or consolation, or ghost an otherwise helpful business associate, think about what Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle wrote, "Isolation is the sum total of wretchedness of man."

INDUSTRY NEWS: NextFoods (Cheribundi & GoodBelly) raised \$10M led by ECP Growth. FoodNerd raised \$7.5M led by Selva Ventures. SimplyFUEL received a minority investment from Humble Growth. In Vancouver, Maia Farms raised \$3.75M for its mushroom & mycelium-based ingredients; the round was led by Active Impact Investments, with support from Nya Planet, Ag-West Bio, PIC Investment Group & Deep Checks. Organic coconut sugar producer Big Tree Farms secured \$10M from Mirova, an affiliate of Natixis Investment Managers. Golden Waves Grain, constructing a new flour mill & commercial baking plant in Goodland, KS, received a significant strategic investment from the Foote Family of Companies. In Finland, NPHarvest raised €1.2M from Business Finland to turn waste into fertilizer. German cell faux meat Innocent Meat raised €6M led by GENIUS Venture Capital GmbH. Saga Robotics raised an undisclosed amount from Xinomavro Ventures for its vineyard robotics. MYCOPHYTO, soil biostimulants, raised €16M led by Innovacom; BNP Paribas, Deep Tech 2030, CDG Invest, Noshqa, RSI & Crédit Agricole were involved. UAE-based foodservice tech Eat App raised \$10M led by PSG Equity. Food waste platform Divert received an undisclosed investment led by Wittington Investments. Smithfield Foods will acquire Nathan's Famous for approximately \$450M. Procter & Gamble acquired Wonderbelly. Tapatio hot sauce has been acquired by PE-firm Highlander Partners for an undisclosed amount. B&G Foods will acquire the broth & stock business of Del Monte Foods & its affiliates, including the College Inn & Kitchen Basics brands, for \$110M in cash. Spreads manufacturer Crofter's Organic was acquired by PE firm Power Sustainable Lios with BMO Capital Partners, Farm Credit Canada & others involved. Charcuterie Artisans, which makes the brands of Creminelli, Daniele & Del Duca, confirmed the acquisition of La Quercia Cured Meats. Thousand Hills Lifetime Grazed, a leader in regeneratively raised, grass fed beef, acquired Organic Prairie & Mighty Organic Brands. Puratos acquired Vör Foods, which produces pistachio, hazelnut, almond, cashew & blended nut butters & fillings. Explorer Cold Brew acquired Savorista, a specialty coffee company manufacturing decaf & half-caffeinated blends. Tropical Cheese, a Hispanic dairy products producer, bought Cibao Meat Products, the maker of the Induveca & Campesino brands. Cactus snack maker Nemi, seasoning blend producer Todo Verde & powdered beverage Tuyyo, a Brandjectory member, merged under the Tuyyo Foods name. HighKey Cookies parent company Creations Foods merged with Get Real Foods, the maker of REAL Cookies. Grubhub's parent company, Wonder, acquired Claim, a restaurant rewards app. Dutch Bros agreed to acquire Clutch Coffee Bar, a drive thru chain with locations across the Carolinas. Freeze dried fruit Sow Good has seen its valuation fall & sold a significant amount of the business to an activist investor, David Lazur, for \$6M. AeroFarms may still be looking at a February closing date for its facility in Virginia. Buda Juice raised \$20M after its NYSE IPO. Lucerne Capital launched a \$500M regenerative farmland fund. Berkshire Hathaway will sell its entire 27.5% stake in Kraft Heinz; Berkshire is the largest shareholder of Kraft Heinz, whose stock fell 7.5%.

McCormick saw its stock price fall 8% as costs caused the company to miss 4th QTR earnings target; the company will raise prices. Procter & Gamble beat 2nd QTR estimates on higher prices.

Whole Foods Market will open a new store in Cheshire, Connecticut. Kroger is building a \$38M Marketplace in Crawfordsville, IN. 99 Ranch Market is opening a second Las Vegas location. Food Lion opened a South Carolina store in the Pontiac area. H Mart has plans to open its largest USA location in Fremont, CA. Hannaford will open a second store in Lewiston, Maine. Raley's will close two California stores, one under its own banner & one under the Nob Hill Foods banner. Dollar General will offer same-day delivery in rural areas through its myDG Delivery, now available at more than 17K stores. Amazon plans thousands more corporate job cuts next week to reach its goal of 30K corporate job reductions. Hy-Vee launched a health-forward private brand, 'Nothing But The Truth,' dietitian developed as a clean-label line that excludes 150+ ingredients. Malk Organics launched coconut-based creamers. Ripple will introduce protein milk. Graza will introduce a new line of mayonnaise & aioli. McKee Foods & Hudsonville Ice Cream will produce two Little Debbie snack cakes as frozen novelties - oatmeal creme pie & cosmic brownie. Kodiak Cakes launched an overnight oats offering, made with 100% whole grain oats, chia, flax & quinoa containing 20 grams of protein. Heluva Good! & Grillo's Pickles will partner on a new dip. Cheez-It gluten-free crackers are now available. Blue Bell Ice Cream will offer a protein line. Tate's will now offer a gluten-free cookie line with double chocolate chip & oatmeal raisin. Tyson has begun layoffs at its Lexington & Amarillo facilities; changes could impact 5K employees. New Horizons Baking is closing its manufacturing plant in Toledo, OH. Alpenrose Dairy will consolidate its production & close its dairy manufacturing facility in Clackamas, OR. Little Sesame opened a 23K sq. ft. facility in Maryland. Simbe launched its 4th generation Tally robot that scans more of the store faster & more quickly delivers insights into product availability, pricing & placement. The USDA announced \$100M in funding to further efforts against New World screwworm. Suzanna Kitchen in Norcross, GA, recalled due to listeria approximately 13.7K pounds of ready-to-eat grilled chicken breast fillet shipped to seven states. Recalled tuna from Tri-Union Seafoods was mistakenly shipped to Albertsons, Meijer & Giant Food, the product was pulled a year ago due to botulism. Joseph Scalzo has returned as president/chief executive officer at Simply Good Foods, succeeding Geoff Tanner. Lidl reported that Joel Rampoldt is no longer the company's USA CEO; Marco Giudici, former CEO of Lidl Romania, will step in as interim CEO. Saffron Road named president Paul Turbeville as CEO. Barry Callebaut has hired ex-Unilever exec Hein Schumacher as CEO.

MMR (Mass Market Retailers Group) named Aldi as its Grocer of the Year. Per Brick Meets Click, USA online grocery sales surged in December 32% YOY, reaching \$12.7B. From the Private Label Manufacturers Association, consumers spent just under \$283B on store-brand products last year, up 3.3% compared with 2024. From CoBank, over the past 30 years average per-capita chicken consumption has grown by 30 pounds, reaching an average of 103 pounds per person with the industry producing 47.6B pounds of chicken. A winter storm expected to reach the southeast will impact shipments of bell peppers, cabbage, celery, cucumbers, lettuces, oranges, squash, strawberries, tomatoes & watermelon.

MARKET NEWS: Markets fell early in the week as investors failed to recognize the brilliance of our President in providing for America's growth & security. The fear of tariffs on Europe's NATO allies caused markets to drop on Monday, but then a championship day in Davos brought the market soaring back, with the Russell 2000 setting records. In an amazing 24 hours the President told the globalists exactly what he thought of them, established his Board of Peace for the Middle East & secured a framework for a deal on Greenland! Markets ended slightly lower. The GDP punched in at 4.4%, well above the 3.15% 50-year average! Jobless claims were lower than expected. The PCE inflation index was flat YOY. Oil rose on Friday above \$61 per barrel as the President indicated the USA is moving Naval & Air assets to the Middle East to protect the people of Iran from their evil regime. Meanwhile, gold neared \$5000 an ounce & silver hit a record high on a combination of investors expecting rate cuts, seeking clarity on the Greenland deal & uncertainty in Iran. Consumer sentiment came in higher than expected.

SEEDS, SPROUTS, GROW, HARVEST!

THE LITCHFIELD FUND – Tom Malanga

V12issue32.01.24.26

The Litchfield Fund is a family owned & operated limited liability corporation. We do not solicit or accept investment from outside individuals or entities. Opinions contained in All Ears!! are ours & should not be considered investment advice or recommendations.