

# From Harvest Breads to Financial Literacy Wealth ‘Teacher’

Longtime PR Executive Burns Teaches the Affluent Some Tips



*Deborah Pratt Burns, founder of Burns Communications and longtime public relations executive for such firms as Earle Palmer Brown Public Relations and Creative Partners, has now started a wealth accelerator business called Literacy to Legacy Mentors. A quote from the actress Audrey Hepburn is on the wall in Burns' HAYVN Coworking office in Greenwich. It reads, "Nothing is impossible; the word itself says 'I'm possible.'"*

DARIEN, March 24, 2025 – Deborah Pratt Burns of Fairfield got the entrepreneurial bug when she was a 16-year-old living with her mother in Locust Valley on Long Island. Her mother gave her such an education in all things business that she created her own business. “It was called Deborah’s Harvest Breads,” Burns told the Fairfield County Business Journal. “I sold them at school. They were dessert breads – like zucchini, carrot, lemon. People were just buying them like crazy. “My mother said you are in school and your business is exploding. What do we want to do here? Do you want to rent a commercial kitchen? Are you taking this seriously? And I said, “Mom, I enjoy baking and I am having fun. This is not going to be my career.”

At the age of 64, Burns realized what she is doing now as founder and managing principal of Burns Communications, her business advisory and brand strategy agency, launched in 2007, and founder of Literacy to Legacy Mentors wealth accelerator education and prosperity mentoring business founded in 2021, is rooted in her 16-year-old self who sold specialty breads in school and the teen who helped her friends’ parents with their wills, estates, and finances. This was all while she aspired to be a journalist and poet.

## **Her Mom Taught Her Well**

All of it had to do with her mother, Charlotte “Lottie” Johnson, who taught her the basics of business and gave her the confidence she needed.

Since her father Wendell “Clint” Johnson died when she was only three years old, Deborah and her late sister, Wendy Burger,

were raised by her mother and Scottish grandparents, Violet and Douglas. By the time Deborah was seven, her sister was out of the house and had started her own life.

That time spent alone with her mother was the first turning point in Deborah’s life.

While she spent most of her early years in Locust Valley, Burns was attracted to life in Connecticut – the Gold Coast in particular. That was because many of her friends she grew up with wound up moving to towns like Greenwich, New Canaan, and Darien.

“Because of where we lived in Locust Valley on Long Island, across from Greenwich,” she said.

When Deborah graduated from CW Post College | Long Island University in 1985 with a Bachelor’s degree in journalism at her mother’s request to be closer to home after she studied at University of Connecticut, she felt the pull to move to Fairfield County to be near those friends.

“I initially moved to Fairfield before I got married,” Burns said. “I met a gentleman when I was 22 and he was 33. Keeping in mind, my sister was 11 years older than me, that made sense since I was growing up with an older generation. His name was Lansing Burns, and we were married 11 years later.”

## **The Start of a PR Career**

Her career as a communications and public relations specialist started at a Greenwich communications firm in 1988. That job as an account executive at Kerr Kelly put her on the road to running her own firm in 2007. Another turning point in her life was

in 1991 when she met Frederick Thompson, former president of Earle Palmer Brown Public Relations and founder and managing partner/ public relations at Creative Partners.

“I actually met Deb some years before founding Creative Partners,” Thompson told the Fairfield County Business Journal. “I had just purchased a Greenwich communications agency called Kerr Kelly, after leaving a senior post with a large New York PR firm.” He remembers bringing several clients with him and changing the name of the firm to Kerr Kelly Thompson (KKT). “At that time, Deb was a young account executive and soon became an important account service asset to the firm as we began to grow,” Thompson said.

Then KKT was purchased by the much larger Earle Palmer Brown and then some Swiss investors bought EPB.

“When EPB sold to the Swiss, I left to join the Jane Goodall Institute, and relocated to Washington, D.C.,” he recalled. “But Deb remained at EPB, again holding down the fort and continuing her role as a key member of the agency’s account service team.”

Around the time of the dotcom bubble burst in 2000, the Swiss investors divested themselves of EPB and put various pieces of the company on the block. “I, along with a long-time business partner, purchased EPB’s PR division, renaming it Creative Partners,” Thompson said. “Deb was a key attraction of the deal, remaining an important member of the firm’s account service capabilities.”

She became managing principal of Creative Partners Public Relations Division in 2002.

After five years, Thompson decided to rejoin the firm and he and Burns resumed their working partnership on such clients as U.S. Trust, Whirlpool, Nikon, IBM, Thule, Savage Arms, C.C. Filson, National Realty, Rolls-Royce and Bentley Motor Cars, Citibank, and Becks Beer, Creative Partners would grow to become a \$10 million firm, according to Thompson.

Her work with U.S. Trust helped her make it to the next level as an accomplished executive and communicator, according to Thompson.

“This was a huge win for us as we were competing against the largest New York firms,” Thompson said. “I remember prior to the pitch, I approached Deb about working on the business and potentially taking the lead on the account.” He remembers her being worried about her lack of Wall Street knowledge being a possible issue.

“The U.S. Trust president told me after the pitch that he had endured a number of presentations delivered by boring, plodding financial executives, each of whom was convinced that the

key to growth in the Connecticut market was ‘not to rock the boat,’” Thompson said.

“This was exactly the strategy he did not want to pursue, having convinced his board that winning in the highly competitive Connecticut market would require some risk-taking and innovation, and positioning the firm as a dynamic change agent. This was the approach we took, and the approach Deb communicated that day, resulting in applause at the conclusion of our presentation.”

U.S. Trust was the founding client of Creative Partners PR Division, and Burns’s relationship continued for another five years.

Not too long after her success with the U.S. Trust account, Burns was offered the COO position at Creative Partners, but she turned them down. As her husband taught English at Staples High School in Westport, she wanted to start her own PR agency and join him in raising their daughter, Audrey.

In 2007 Burns Communications was born out of offices in Southport. She has amassed such clients as Rockefeller & Co., Inc., Connecticut Green Bank, and Dog Gone Smart Pet Products.

### **Literacy to Legacy Mentors**

But then following Covid in 2021, she had a hankering to add to her offerings and create Literacy to Legacy Mentors, a company designed to “educate, inspire and motivate people to master financial lives.” Based out of HAYVN Coworking in Darien and Greenwich, Burns launched her Wealth Accelerator Education Series for Gen Zs, Millennials, and 50+ executives and entrepreneurs, designed to build their money confidence and accelerate their wealth using behavioral economics-based personal finance principles.

“One of my dear friends, who was a stock trader on Wall Street, called me one day and said you really need to be teaching behavioral personal finance – now more than ever,” Burns said. “He really put me on the spot.

“He said, what is the name of the company? What is the mission? I’m telling you, it flowed right out of me! He said go to your trademark attorney and put it all in writing. From that moment, that was divine intervention.”

She came up with Literacy to Legacy Mentors – A Pratt Prosperity company to honor her Pratt family lineage.

And just like that, Deborah Burns has come full circle from her days as a teenager teaching personal finance to her affluent neighbors in Locust Valley, New York.

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