

*Originally published by Little Brown in 1989 to rave reviews,  
The Gilded Leaf is back in print, published by iUniverse*

# **THE GILDED LEAF**

## *Triumph, Tragedy, and Tobacco*

Three Generations of the R.J. Reynolds family and fortune

by Tom Shachtman and Patrick Reynolds

"Fascinating ... Illuminating ... stunning detail."

*Chicago Tribune*

"Fascinating insight into the evolution of a family over three generations that is simply a good read ... panoramic sweep, bitter irony and tragic touches."

*Detroit Free Press*

"Fascinating insider's view of three generations of the R. J. Reynolds tobacco family ...compelling."

*Richmond Times-Dispatch*

"An altogether fascinating story [that] quickly builds speed and interest and becomes an absorbing story of fortune and misfortune."

*Washington Post Book World*

"Readers of this captivating account may need to remind themselves that it is not fiction. There are colorful characters, a family rising from humble beginnings to attain fabulous wealth and power, scandal and tragedy wrought by excess -- and an irony-laden finale."

*Publishers Weekly*

"A courageous and worthwhile book. More than an entertainment, it documents the danger of parents who confuse money with love."

*New York Times Book Review*

# The Gilded Leaf

## Triumph, Tragedy, and Tobacco – Three Generations of the R.J. Reynolds Family and Fortune

by Tom Shachtman and Patrick Reynolds

**“Fiction doesn’t get any better than this,” wrote the *Washington Times* of the Reynolds family story, “It’s the kind of true-life story Hollywood scriptwriters dream about -- murder, mayhem, messy divorces, titillating escapades of a tobacco dynasty, souls bared to the tabloids, racing through life in the fast lane...The Reynolds family makes TV’s ‘*Dynasty*’ look downright hokey.”**

This true story of the rise and the decline of one of the great American families is brought vividly to life in *THE GILDED LEAF: Triumph, Tragedy, and Tobacco*, co-authored by Patrick Reynolds, the grandson of R.J. Reynolds.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, two brothers set off from a modest Virginia tobacco plantation to seek their fortunes. Both started off by manufacturing chewing tobacco. But while the older brother, the pious prohibitionist Abram, diversified into other fields and left a son who founded Reynolds Metals, the younger brother, the dashing and mildly scandalous R. J., built a huge fortune on Camel cigarettes. While R. J.’s success assured the financial security of his children, his death from cancer in 1918 left his sons in the care of family retainers, without the love and direction they needed to handle their newfound fortunes.

The lives of R. J.’s sons, Smith and Dick, were marked by continuous scandal. Shortly after a disastrous shotgun wedding to linens heiress Anne Cannon, Smith became involved with Libby Holman, a notorious actress whose allure was enhanced to many by her bisexuality and constant flirtation. Eventually winning her over, Smith divorced Anne to embark on a marriage even more doomed than his first. Less than one year later he was dead of a gunshot wound in the head, at the age of twenty. His wife and a close male friend (who may have been sexually involved with Libby) claimed it had been suicide, despite a wealth of evidence to the contrary. Both were indicted for first-degree murder, but the case was ultimately dropped, and what happened the night of July 5, 1932 is still unknown.

In the meantime, Dick used part of his fortune to finance three major U.S. airlines – Piedmont, Eastern, and Delta – and elect two presidents, Franklyn Roosevelt and Harry Truman. But he was known principally for his scandalous personal life – characterized by infidelity, chicanery, suspicion, eccentricity and alcohol. His first three marriages ended in violent drunken brawls. Determined not to let the family millions contaminate the lives of his six sons, as they had Smith’s and his own, he disinherited them all.

At last, wracked with emphysema, Dick fled to Switzerland with his fourth wife and died in a cloud of mystery, only 36 hours before she gave birth to a daughter of highly dubious paternity.

THE GILDED LEAF examines the divergent paths of two of Dick’s six sons: Zach, a motorcycle fanatic who ravaged his body with drugs and kept a coffin in a secret chamber in his home, and whose ultimate death in the crash of a small plane may have been suicide; and Patrick, the author, whose transformation from jet-setting actor to one of America’s principal anti-tobacco spokesmen brings the story to a redemptive -- and ironic – close

Based on personal papers, letters, recently opened files and eight years of in-depth interviews and research, THE GILDED LEAF is a real-life multigenerational saga that, in the words of actor Larry Hagman, “makes Dallas look like a bowl of warm mild toast!”

THE GILDED LEAF:  
Triumph, Tragedy, and Tobacco

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# About the Authors

## Tom Shachtman

Critically acclaimed author **Tom Shachtman** has written more than two dozen books and many television documentaries. The Economist called his *AROUND THE BLOCK: THE BUSINESS OF A NEIGHBORHOOD* (1997) “a near-classic,” The New Yorker, “A grand idea, splendidly executed.”

His *ABSOLUTE ZERO AND THE CONQUEST OF COLD* (1999) was hailed by The New York Times as written “with passion and clarity,” and by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution as “an absolute delight.”

Publisher’s Weekly gave a starred review to *RUMSPRINGA: TO BE OR NOT TO BE AMISH* (2006), saying, “Shachtman is a sensitive and nimble chronicler ... he uses the Amish *rumspringa* experience as a foil for understanding American adolescence, and identity formation in general... This is not only one of the most absorbing books ever written about the Plain People, but a perceptive snapshot of the larger culture in which they live and move.” Library Journal said, “A fascinating and near-unprecedented glimpse into the inner lives of Amish society... Sensitive addresses the unique position of the Amish and the challenges they face. Highly recommended.”

For more details or to contact Tom Shachtman, see his website, [www.TomShachtman.com](http://www.TomShachtman.com)

## Patrick Reynolds

A grandson of R.J. Reynolds, **Patrick Reynolds’** advocacy work, motivational talks to youth and appearances in the national press have made him a well known and respected champion of a smoke-free society. In 1989, Mr. Reynolds founded the Foundation for a Smokefree America and in 1994, the website, [Tobaccofree.org](http://Tobaccofree.org). The nonprofit group’s mission is to motivate youth to stay tobacco-free, and empower smokers to quit successfully.

An educational video of a live talk he gave to 1,000 ninth graders was purchased by over 10,000 schools and health departments. Russell Henke, an evaluator of Health Education Materials for Montgomery County, Maryland Public Schools called it “the best and most up-to-date video on the topic of teen and adult tobacco use. It has no weaknesses. In my opinion, after viewing many similar videos, it is the best video available.” School Library Journal said, “Amusing and effective takeoffs of popular cigarette ads... This production, with its humor and varied format, is a powerful reminder of all the reasons to avoid tobacco, and a useful resource for drug/tobacco education programs in middle and high schools.”

In June, 2007, Mr. Reynolds released a version of the video on DVD for families, *A Talk With Your Kids About Smoking*. It is available on Amazon.com or at [www.Tobaccofree.org](http://www.Tobaccofree.org)

Mr. Reynolds is a sought-after speaker at colleges, middle schools and high schools, and his motivational talks are often sponsored by hospitals and corporations as a community outreach. He

continues his volunteer advocacy work for the tobaccofree cause, and has appeared on Oprah, The Today Show, CNN, Good Morning America, Larry King, Fox News, CNBC, Fox News Channel and MSNBC. He has been profiled by ABC, CBS and NBC Evening News, and by many of the world's leading dailies and radio networks.

For more information or to contact Patrick Reynolds, please visit [www.Tobaccofree.org](http://www.Tobaccofree.org).

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IN DOWNLOADABLE, HIGH RESOLUTION FILES,  
PLEASE SEE THE ONLINE PRESS KIT AT

[www.tobaccofree.org/book](http://www.tobaccofree.org/book)

Journalists may call for a review copy.

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