

# VOICE OF EXPERIENCE



# DAVE ARGABRIGHT

*In His Own Words* As told to **Lew Boyd**

DAVE ARGABRIGHT COLLECTION

- ***Born October 22, 1955, in Anderson, Indiana***
- ***Unquestionably among the nation's most popular and admired TV racing journalists, appearing on the likes of MAVTV, CBS Sports, TNN, and ESPN. He's written extensively for National Speed Sport News, Open Wheel, Road & Track, and Car and Driver. He's working on his 19th book, following up on captivating biographies of Doug Wolfgang, Jimmy Owens, Chris Economaki, Jimmy Sills, and Jack Hewitt.***

**I**n 1998 I jumped out of the corporate plane. I'd started out selling life insurance—not well. But I did begin to learn about people and build the confidence to cold call. It was painful, but important.

From there I went into very early computers and a sales job selling networks in the healthcare industry. I had a good career and kids at home, but I wearied of the pressure of those awful sales quotas. And, as I was falling to the ground, I remembered things my parents had tried to instill in me.

Dad was a World War II vet, always working hard to keep things going for us five kids; the most selfless man I have ever known. He died young but had laid a foundation for me to land on. Mom was a proud and inspiring woman who was all about overcoming tough circumstances.

One of Dad's few pleasures was watching figure-eight cars some buddies were running at Sun Valley Speedway. We went there when we could afford to. Don't know why, but I ate it up, even at three or four years old. By eight or 10 I was an authority on the roster. As soon as I was old enough, I was at the track every spare moment.

I was a happy, friendly kid. Not much drama, very few conflicts. I liked people.

Driving a race car never had any appeal. I wouldn't have been any good at it anyway, I



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don't think. I loved being on the other side of it, telling stories.

By chance in 1980 I was hired as a part-time sportswriter at the Anderson (Indiana) paper. And soon, on a very part-time basis, I took over the PR at Sun Valley—by then it was Anderson Speedway.

It all began to build. I'd send press releases to *National Speed Sport News* and began receiving encouraging little postcards from Chris Economaki. That was very cool. He taught me a lot but in a special way. For example, he announced to me, "We don't use the perpendicular pronoun here—that's 'I.' We use 'this writer.'" But he allowed me to be "I," and "myself." I appreciated that.

By 1998, when I came to a corporate crossroads, I was able to muster up the courage to go full-time into racing media—and also write a book with Brad Doty.

At that point I sat down and did a spreadsheet on what I'd have to do to get by financially. I was shocked that I still had a quota—and it was daunting. I had to take on every paying project I could get. That first year I was on the rev-chip every day and every night, cranking out articles. It was a tough way to get going, but that's what it took.

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Writing never did come easily. I've struggled to learn the craft, and it took me 10 years to overcome my fears and to find my own writing voice. Along the way I was careful to listen to people. I once heard Richard Petty say, "The easiest thing in the world is to be nice to people." Sounded to me like a good way to live.

When *Open Wheel* magazine was launched in 1981 it had a profound impact on my life. All I wanted was to write for Dick Berggren. I sent in a couple of manuscripts and asked Dick for feedback, and they came bouncing right back so covered with red ink that they were bleeding to death. Dick wasn't being mean, he was being honest.

I was devastated. Put them in a drawer, out of sight. In a few days, I read them again and could see that Dick was right: They weren't very good. I started over, and this time my first story was accepted for publication in *Open Wheel*. I don't think Dr. Dick realizes how important he's been for guys like me.

I have come to understand the significance of who, what, where, when, and why. But to me, the key story of 1963 at the Brickyard was not the number of leaders, pit stops, or wrecks. It was about Parnelli—about how he was staying in someone's little house near the track, how he woke up at 2 a.m. the night after the race, wiped his brow looking into the mirror, and asked himself, "Is that really the face that won the Indy 500?" I love stories like that, not just the stats.

I've heard racers say there is nothing like that feeling of winning. For writers, there is nothing like the feeling you get when your words move your readers emotionally. Nothing compares to that feeling. Nothing.

Writing to inform is not enough. You've got to entertain and inspire, too. It isn't easy, but that's how it must be done.

TNN reached out to me in late 1999, wondering if I'd be interested in working as a pit reporter for the World of Outlaws TV. Frankly, I needed the money, so I said yes. But I enjoyed television from the very first broadcast.

There were new skills to learn. Media has become so spontaneous. If I speak before I think things through, I can look pretty foolish. I need to take the time to process my thoughts, and that's a challenge nowadays.

So, which is more difficult, writing a book or working on television? I could probably

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teach someone how to interview in a few minutes, but it would take a lot longer to teach them to pen a book.

All this continued for me well into the 2000s. Honestly, it's never been easier to have a motorsports voice than it is today because of social media. But it's never been more difficult to get paid for your work.

It was around 2019 when I started to realize that the road had worn me out. We'd be working a racing weekend somewhere, and I found myself wishing I was at home. After hundreds of racing broadcasts and nights in motel rooms, I'd had enough. So at the end of the 2021 season it was time to step away from doing travel TV.

It's been an adjustment to having time at home again, but it is much easier if you're spending time with someone you enjoy. Life with Lisa is grand.

Getting off the road has allowed me to renew my energy for other creative projects. Some truly great individuals close to me have allowed me to help them write their life stories. I've done 18 books so far and am especially proud of the ones that came from these friendships.

A full 25 years back, Steve Kinser and I were chatting and he said, "Someday I will write a book with you." In 2023 we reconnected on the idea, and I am as excited about it as anything I've ever done. It's my job to finally uncover that secret sauce that made Steve so extraordinarily great over 30 grueling seasons. What fun!

Some years ago I walked into the TV production room in Knoxville. The guys didn't see me, and I overheard them laughing about my apparent nickname, "Mr. Rogers." Was I too soft, too gentle, too kind to be a good TV reporter?

I will admit I was hurt, but I tried to lighten things up by saying, "Good morning. Won't you be my neighbor?"

I put that one in the drawer, too, but I sometimes come back to it thinking, "You know, if I can be a little different, remembered as a calming voice of kindness and wisdom in our frenetic world, I'll take it!"

**FSW**