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## The Accidental Millionaires

*A dark horse, which had never been thought of, rushed past the grandstand in sweeping triumph – Benjamin Disraeli*

Tyler and Cameron Winklevoss. Not exactly household names, but neither is Mark Zuckerberg. Messrs. Winklevoss and Mr. Zuckerberg are three people at the center of a cultural phenomenon detailed in an interesting book, The Accidental Billionaires, by Ben Mezrich, and a new movie “The Social Network”, directed by David Fincher. Zuckerberg is the creator of one of the most dominant social networking tools ever created – Facebook. For those like me who have only a scant working knowledge of this site, it allows users to establish a “page” on it and invite “friends” to view the page. The page can be used to post pictures or videos, to “chat” – communicate in real time with others on the site, to invite friends to events, to play games with others, to locate people, and to do what my eldest daughter Kate describes as “social research” (check to see if someone is a “creeper”).

These three gentlemen all traversed the ivy laden paths of Harvard University at the same time. The Winklevoss brothers are the quintessential cool kids – good looking, athletic, popular, while Zuckerberg is the consummate nerd. The brothers had an idea, to create a site exclusive to Harvard students for the purpose of “hooking up” (an accurately descriptive term for hoped for encounters with the opposite sex). The Winklevosses had the kernel of an idea, but no means to carry it out. Enter Mr. Zuckerberg. Mark, a prolific writer of “code”, provided the knowhow to execute on the idea. The story turns, as it usually does with young males, after an encounter with the fairer sex. After being dumped by his girlfriend, Mark returned to his dorm room distraught and set about venting his frustration on the Harvard University website. Interest in his rant by other students managed to overload and crash the site. He gained near cult status on campus after the incident and his notoriety caught the attention of the Winklevosses. You can guess how this played out without reading the book or seeing the movie. The desperately socially inept brainiac is enlisted by the jocks to help them (if you do my homework, I’ll let you hang out with me).

While working on the “ConnectU” website for the brothers, Mark had a revelation. There was clearly interest in affairs of the heart, but maybe there was even a broader audience for more platonic social connections. Facebook was born. He worked on his new site, while at the same time continued to develop the site for the brothers, but after a short time recognized that he had stumbled onto something far more relevant to a much larger audience than just a bunch of wealthy preppies trying to make a “connection”. In short order he dumped work on the brothers’ site and poured all of his efforts into developing what has become the electronic version of a slumber party to anyone under the age of 30.

The story though takes a sad but predictable turn. The brothers, recognizing that the train had left the station without them, sued Mark for “stealing” their idea. They settled with Facebook for a cool \$65 million in 2008. In its most recent edition, Forbes magazine estimates that Mark is currently worth \$6.9 billion. Unsurprisingly, the brothers are back at the trough again in an attempt to extort more money from this runaway money machine.

The stark contrast between the American Dream and the mentality of privilege could not be better illustrated. A creative guy takes the genesis of an idea, refines it, works hard and turns it into something that has mass appeal. After the finished product meets with resounding financial success the feeding frenzy begins. Those left behind believe they are entitled to the spoils because of an inflated sense of value of their input. Ideas are raw material, like grains of sand, almost infinite but truly valuable only after a process is introduced (heat) that transforms that material to something more useful (glass). The brothers have ground out about all of their granule’s worth.

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