

ALLAN SUGAR THE CV

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ALAN SUGAR

The CV

PAN BOOKS

Lord Sugar – Curriculum Vitae

Alan Michael Sugar – Born 24th March 1947

1957 (aged 10)

- Asked by headmaster Mr Kershaw of Northwold Road Primary School (Clapton) to host parents and visiting dignitaries and talk them through an Open Day display of pupils' work.

1957 – 1958: Enterprise activities

- [Collected free fabric remnants from local garment workshops and sold them to rag-and-bone merchants.](#)
- Collected empty Lemonade, Tizer and Cola bottles and redeemed the 1d deposit per bottle from the local sweet shop.
- Built a replica Guy Fawkes and collected 'pennies for the guy'. Used proceeds to buy fireworks for Bonfire Night party at nearby ex-bomb-site.

1959 – 1963: Schooling

- Having spotted me during the Northwold Road school Open Day in 1957 (see above), headmaster Mr Harris of Joseph Priestley School in Hackney convinced my parents to send me to his school, which was soon to be merged with Upton House School to form an advanced comprehensive, Brooke House School in Clapton.
- 1960 – Persuaded deputy headmaster to invest in a printing machine in order to publish monthly school magazine. Printed magazines and sold them to the parents of pupils in local council flat estates.
- 1962 – Member of a 5-man Senior Science Society charged with distributing to students the news on breakthroughs in science.
- 1962 – Given small part as Curio in school production of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night (having been upstaged at audition for the lead rôle of Orsino), Performed in this play to parents and visiting dignitaries in school theatre (largest flagship theatre in the borough).
- 1962 – Completed and passed GCE O Levels in Engineering, Technical Drawing, Chemistry, Physics, History (1763-1914), Mathematics and Applied Mathematics.

1959 – 1963: Enterprise activities

- Carried out a newspaper round Mondays to Fridays delivering to local council estate.
- Worked in a greengrocer's shop on Saturdays. Pre-boiled beetroots for sale and prepared front-of-shop and potato displays.
- Recognised a better use for empty drinks bottles by making and selling my own ginger beer (using a ginger beer plant given to me by a neighbour).
- [1962 – Worked in a chemist/photographic shop in Walthamstow on Saturdays and school holidays in exchange for photographic film and development paper. Hit upon the 'easy sell' idea of photographing the children and grandchildren of council estate neighbours. Converted third bedroom of parents' council flat into a makeshift darkroom to develop film and print these photos. Obtained a rubber stamp to imprint my name/phone number on the rear of each photo.](#)
- [Collected discarded 35mm film cartridges \(empty after development\) from rear of chemist's in Walthamstow. Purchased bulk quantities of Ilford FP3 film \(surplus to movie studio requirements\) from an army surplus store in Hackney and, in my makeshift darkroom, cut the film into one yard lengths \(approx 36 exposures\) and loaded into the cartridges. Sold the films to school mates and others, undercutting the photographic stores by 50%.](#)

1963 – 1967: Early career

- 1963 – Failed the aptitude test to be a trainee programmer at both IBM Wigmore St and ICL Putney.
- 1963 – Left school (against headmaster's wishes) to join the Ministry of Education and Science (in Curzon Street) as a Clerical Officer in the statistics department. Worked on the Plowden Report on Junior Education, coding survey sheets to IBM punch cards.
- 1963 – Opened my first bank account with Lloyds Bank in Berkley Square. The Ministry moved from Curzon Street to Richmond Terrace (opposite Downing Street) where I worked for 6 months.
- [1964 – Left the Ministry to join Richard Thomas & Baldwin Iron & Steel Manufacturers in Gower Street in statistics department, monitoring the output of daily production from their plant in Redbourn in Wales.](#)
- 1964 – Passed my driving test and sought a job that came 'with wheels'. Joined Robuck Electrical (owner Mr Sam Korobuck) – manufacturers of Tape recorders and record players – as a sales rep' for the London area calling on radio and TV shops. Became top salesman within 6 months and asked for the same rate of commission on sales I made to small retailers as on sales to the Currys chain group. This was turned down and I resigned on principle.

- Joined R Henson & Co., an electrical wholesaler, where I sold the goods and, in some cases, identified and bought the goods, delivered them and collected the money.
- [1966 – Got engaged to Ann \(now my wife\) and was earning £20 per week net of tax. To try and obtain the deposit for a house, I asked for a rise and was turned down. I resigned at the end of the week and decided to do for myself what I was doing for my employer.](#)
- [1966 – The following Monday I took £100 from my post office savings account, bought a £1 National Insurance stamp, a second-hand mini van for £50 and third party fire and theft car insurance for £8. With the balance I drove to Tottenham Court Road and bought some car aerials. I made my first trade sale as Alan Sugar Trading to P W Thackston, a radio shop in East India Dock Road in Poplar. I set myself a target of making £60 per week – I had achieved it by Wednesday!](#)

1967 – 1980:

- 1967 – I attained skills, first hand, in bookkeeping and accounting, credit control, banking systems, import and export requirements, lorry loading, electronic design and engineering, running production lines, purchasing, advertising, setting up factories and hiring staff. I suffered the pains of small-business cash flow and bad debts, thereby gaining a greater understanding of the lack of honesty and integrity of those I met and dealt with. I learnt that honesty, integrity (particularly with the bank) and being straightforward (even if sometimes a little too bluntly) is the best policy in business.
- 1967 – Trading from my parents' flat in Hackney, I observed an opportunity to acquire, from Radio and TV dealers, second-hand TV sets taken by them in part-exchange for new TVs. I stored the second-hand TVs in my makeshift darkroom and engaged my friend, a TV engineer, to fix them where necessary. Once fixed, I advertised them in Exchange & Mart and sold them, one by one, from my bedroom. As my mother was not happy having strange people coming and going from the flat, I invested in my first business premises – a store room in Rushmore Road Clapton. I contacted my old boss Sam Korobuck and bought from him returned faulty record players, which were also stored at Rushmore Road. My friend repaired these too so that they were fit for sale.
- [1968 – On 28th April, Ann and I were married and we moved to my first house in Redbridge Essex.](#)
- 1968 – On 8th December 1968, formed the limited company A.M.S. Trading (General Importers) Ltd. I stored my stock in trade at home, but had it stolen during a break-in. This made me decide to take my first commercial premises: 388 St John's Street, Clerkenwell in London. My first employee (who looked after the office and answered the calls) was my father, whom I paid £20 per week. Previously he had spent a lifetime in uncertain employment in East London garment factories – his average pay at the time was £13 per week.

- 1970 – Invested in injection moulding tool to make record player dust covers for the then hi-fi audio boom. Was previously wholesaling them at 21 shillings (the cost to me was 18 shillings from a vacuum forming company). My method of injection moulding would give me a finished part cost of 4 shillings enabling me to sell them for 16 shillings, making a 400% margin and undercutting the vacuum former. Thus I started to make ‘real’ money. Observed that the stereo amplifiers market was a growing market.
- 1972 – Opened my first factory with 15 employees at Great Sutton Street, Clerkenwell. Changed the name of company to A.M.S. Trading (Amstrad) Ltd., producing stereo amplifiers under the ‘Amstrad’ brand. Employed my ex-employer Sam Korobuck to run the production line as his company Robuk had gone bankrupt.
- 1973 – Moved to bigger factory at Ridley Road, Dalston to make full range of amplifiers, tuners and loudspeakers.
- 1975 – Moved again to larger factory at Garman Road, Tottenham. Started to import tape decks and was first company to enter the CB (Citizens’ Band) radio market.
- 1976 – Qualified as a Private Airplane Pilot in both practical and written examinations.
- 1977 – Bought the cabinet making company Fircastle Ltd from the liquidator. The company (renamed Amstrad) in Southend Essex, was bought with all plant and machinery to expand loudspeaker production.
- 1979 – Moved to larger cabinet works at Eastwood Industrial Estate, Southend to produce Amstrad stereo tower system rack units. Turned down a bid from Laskys who offered me £2m to acquire 75% of the company. Met with Kleinwort Benson to discuss the possibility of floating the company to the London Stock Exchange.

1979 – 1990:

- Gained experience of City meetings, the production of prospectuses and circulars to share holders, corporate governance and yellow book requirements, stock market analysts’ meetings, litigation, television advertising, accepting hospitality to lunches and dinners with the Prime Minister, Prince of Wales, Her Majesty the Queen and Prince Philip. Gained experience of dealing with the media, charitable work, the importance of liability insurance, employment liability laws, the need for protection of patents and intellectual property. Entered the Real Estate market.
- 1979 – Engaged with Kleinwort Benson, Touche Ross and Herbert Smith, gaining first hand experience in numerous drafting meetings regarding the flotation of the company.
- 1980 – On 10th April renamed the company Amstrad Plc and floated it on the London Stock Market. Sold 25% of its shares for £2m – a better deal than selling 75% to Laskys for £2m.

- 1984 – Moved headquarters of the company to Brentwood Essex and built a new 400,000 sq ft factory in Shoeburyness Essex for production of hi-fi racked tower systems.
- 1984 – Launched first Amstrad Computer, the CPC464. Opened subsidiaries in Paris and Hong Kong.
- 1984 – Awarded Guardian Young Businessman of the Year at the Mansion House ceremony.
- 1985 – Launched the Amstrad word processor PCW8256.
- [1985 – Bought the rights to Sinclair Computers from Clive Sinclair \(to prevent his company being placed in liquidation by Barclays Bank\).](#)
- 1985 – Set up Amsprop Ltd, a real estate company owning commercial properties, as a diversification from too much dependence on the electronics industry.
- 1986 – Launched Amstrad IBM compatible computer PC1512. Agreed terms with Managing Director of IBM UK for a licence to produce compatibles (not the same man who failed to hire me in 1963!). Agreed terms with Bill Gates for Microsoft MSDOS licence.
- 1986 – Launched advertising and designed the PC1512 campaign with the slogan, ‘Compatible with you know who – Priced as only we know how’.
- 1986 – Invited to private lunch for 6 guests with the Queen and Prince Philip
- 1986 – Formation of The Alan Sugar Charitable Foundation.
- 1987 – Opened subsidiaries in Madrid, Brussels, Frankfurt, Sydney, Dallas and Milan. Achieved 30% of total European market for PCs.
- 1988 – Led government’s Single European Market advertising campaign for DTI.
- [1988 – Engaged with Rupert Murdoch for the launch of Sky Television by undertaking to produce the equipment needed to receive the service, thus offering British consumers \(for £199\) the opportunity to view 16 new TV channels. Hitherto there had been only 4 terrestrial channels available.](#)
- 1988 – Honoured by City of London University as a Doctor of Science.
- 1989 – Launched satellite receivers for the European Astra footprint, covering Germany.

1990 – 1999:

- Gained experience in the world of professional football, high level litigation, speaking events at the Oxford Union, Cambridge Union and other universities and schools, as well as to the business community. Was responsible for exposing corruption in the football industry and was engaged to write for several national newspapers on various topics.
- 1991 – Rescued Tottenham Hotspur Football Club to avoid bankruptcy.
- [1993 – Engaged in high profile court action where football corruption was core to the proceedings. Introduced the phrases ‘bung’ and ‘Carlos Kickaball’ into common usage in respect of football corruption and the influx of foreign players.](#)
- 1994 – Acquired Viglen Computers Ltd, suppliers to schools and universities as well as to government departments.
- 1995 – Acquired Dancall Radio, a mobile phone manufacturer in Denmark for £6m, and made further investment of £10m for new designs, plant and equipment.
- 1996 – Launched the first dual-band mobile phone at Hanover Fair to the amazement of the then market leaders Ericsson and Nokia.
- 1996 – Involved in litigation against American Hard Disc Drive manufacturers to recover damages suffered by Amstrad due to defective drives.
- 1997 – On my 50th birthday (24th March), sold Dancall to Bosch Germany for US\$150m, Dancall having been purchased just 2 years before at £6m.
- 1997 – Amstrad Plc, by way of a Scheme of Arrangement, was broken up with substantiation amount of cash returned to shareholders, and new shares issued to shareholders in ex-subsiidiaries Viglen Plc and Betacom Plc (which changed its name to Amstrad) as well as entitlement to any proceeds of litigation with the Hard Disc Drive manufacturers.
- 1998 – At the request of Gordon Brown, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, embarked on series of visits to schools and universities to conduct Q&A sessions on enterprise.
- 1999 – Victory decision in the High Court with US\$150m damages awarded to Amstrad from the Hard Disc Drive manufacturers.
- 1999 – Invited to tea at The White House by US President Bill Clinton and the First Lady.

2000 – 2009:

- Gained experience in participating in television programmes, further engagement in writing for newspapers including own column in the Daily Mirror. Continued visits and Q&A sessions on enterprise.
- 2000 – Was honoured by her Majesty the Queen with a Knighthood.
- 2001 – Sold part of my interest in Tottenham Hotspur FC and resigned from the Board as Chairman and Director.
- [2005 – Appeared in the first series of ‘The Apprentice’ and won BAFTA award.](#)
- 2005 – Honoured by Brunel University as a Doctor of Science.
- 2006 – ‘The Apprentice’ won most of the awards granted to TV shows (except ITV national TV awards – no surprise as ‘The Apprentice’ is a BBC show),
- 2007 – Sold Amstrad Plc (formerly Betacom) to BSkyB for £135m.
- 2008 – Appointed to Government Business Council by Prime Minister Gordon Brown.
- 2009 – Led government’s Apprenticeship advertising campaign and four roadshow seminars.
- 2009 – Appointed by Prime Minister Gordon Brown as Enterprise Champion to advise government on small business and enterprise.
- [2009 – On 20th July, took my seat in the House of Lords as Alan Baron Sugar of Clapton in the London Borough of Hackney.](#)

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1959 – 1963: Enterprise activities

I had loads of enterprises on the go. Next to Woolmer House there was a rag-and-bone merchant who would go round collecting items such as old iron and other metal, clothing and material. He'd pay scrap value for the stuff. In his yard was a sign saying, 'Wool 5s per lb [five shillings per pound of weight], cotton 1s 6d per pound [one shilling and sixpence], brass and copper 2d per pound [tuppence].' Playing out in the street when I was eleven, I noticed people taking items in and getting money in exchange and I wondered if I could get hold of any stuff, so that I too could make some money. It was during one of my other ventures – car-cleaning – that I found something.

In the back streets of Clapton, some of the big Victorian houses were converted into small garment factories with rooms full of machinists. These factories would sub-contract for bigger manufacturers using 'outdoor workers' (the old name for sub-contractors). One day, while cleaning the factory boss's car, I saw in the front garden some open sacks of material trimmings, ready for the dustman to take away. When I went inside to collect my 1s 6d, I asked the boss what was in these sacks and he explained they were remnants of the material used to make the clothes. I asked him if I could take some and he said I could, but looked puzzled.

'What are you going to do with them?' he asked.

'Don't worry, leave it to me,' I replied. The sacks were bigger than I was, so I went back to the flats and borrowed a pram. I loaded on two sacks and took them round to the rag-and-bone man.

Here was my first experience of getting 'legged over'. Unbeknown to me, the sacks contained gold dust as far as the scrap merchant was concerned, as the material was wool. This bloke took one look at this eleven-year-old and said, 'What you've got in those sacks is rubbish.' He weighed the stuff on his scales and said, 'I'll give you half a crown [2s 6d] for the lot.' I took it. Naïve – stupid, you might say – but half a crown was a lot of money in those days.

The next week, after cleaning the boss's car, I asked him what kind of material was in those sacks. When he told me it was wool, I was furious – I should have got at least £1 10s for two sacks of wool. I took a scrap of the material to the rag-and-bone man and confronted him. 'I've just been told this is wool – you told me it was rubbish. I want some more money or I want the two sacks back,' I yelled at him angrily. I won't tell you what he said to me. He slung two shillings at me and told me to clear off.

'I can get loads more of this stuff and I'm going to find another rag-and bone man to sell it to!'

He just laughed and virtually threw me out.

Another side of me came out now. I was wound up and angry. I wasn't frightened to speak up, but short of grabbing hold of him or kicking him, what could I do? He was a grown man and I was an eleven-year-old shnip. I went back home and told my mum and dad what had happened. They laughed, then my father asked, 'How much did you get in the end?'

'Four and six.' A sudden look of fear came over his face at the realisation that his eleven-year-old son had made 4s 6d.

'Where did you get this stuff from?' he said.

'I told you – from the factory down the road.'

'They let you take it? You sure you didn't take it without asking?'

'No. The boss gave it to me. He wanted to get rid of it. Normally the dustman takes it away.'

'Are you sure?'

I couldn't believe it. Instead of being complimented, I was being interrogated as if I'd done something wrong! It was a strange attitude, but one I'd become increasingly familiar with in later years. Many's the time I'd have to play down the success of my business activities because my father could not believe that someone so young could make so much money. To put things into perspective, his take-home pay at the time was £8 for working a forty hour week. How could an eleven-year-old boy go out and make 4s 6d in just a couple of hours? Basically, I'd spotted some stuff in one place and seen another place to sell it. And what's more, I really enjoyed doing it.

[Back to The CV](#)

1959 – 1963: Enterprise activities

While my social life was non-existent, I still kept busy with work and my hobbies. Sometimes they combined, as with the Saturday job I took in a chemist's in Walthamstow High Street market. Having found that I enjoyed science and engineering at school (in contrast to some of the more boring subjects such as history and the arts), I thought pharmacy might be the way to go, and naïvely I figured I would learn about it on the job. The shop was owned by a very nice man called Michael Allen. When I told him I aspired to be a pharmacist, he taught me as much as he possibly could about drugs and that sort of stuff.

I spent most of my time in the front of the shop selling cough syrups and lozenges. Here I was, a young kid, being asked by punters what cough syrup they should take. Mr Allen taught me to ask if it was a chesty cough or a dry cough. For chesty, you got a bottle of Benylin; for dry, you got a bottle of Pholcodine Linctus.

Mr Allen was a bit of a boffin who knew all the technical pharmaceutical stuff, but in my opinion lacked a bit of business savvy. I introduced one of my marketing ideas to him and his staff. When asked by the customer for a bottle of, say, Milk of Magnesia, if you were to reply, 'Small or large?' most punters would say, 'Small.' Much better to ask, 'Do you want the small 1s 6d one or the extra-value 2s 6d one?' I applied this to lots of things in the shop, ranging from Old Spice aftershave to cough syrup, and it worked nine times out of ten.

There were exceptions to this rule. Packets of Durex, for example, came in both economy and bulk packs, but I wasn't going to ask a strapping six-foot-tall punter if he wanted the small pack – it could have been taken the wrong way.

Now, here's a bit of trivia you may find as surprising as I did: a large number of married women would buy contraceptives as part of their weekly shop, on behalf of their lazy husbands. At first, as a young lad of fifteen, I was a bit embarrassed when a woman asked me for them, but after a while it was like water off a duck's back. However, when it came to Tampax or sanitary towels, I certainly wasn't going to try my 'small or extra-value' scam. Instead, it was a case of: 'They're over there, madam, help yourself.' That was where I drew the line. After all, there was a limit on how far you'd go for the boss!

It was at Mr Allen's shop that I also developed my interest in photography, which was sparked by the cameras, film and developing paper he sold. I couldn't afford a good camera, but I soon picked up tips on which model was the most economic to buy. This information was going to be useful because another sideline I had in mind was to become a photographer. While I scraped together the money to buy a Halina camera, I was already working out what to say to my parents. I had visions of my father shaking his head in disapproval when I brought it home. 'Another waste of money,' he'd say, while my mother would shrug her shoulders and ask, 'How much was that?' All this despite the fact that I was paying for it myself!

It *was* difficult for me to justify laying out £12 for a camera when the old man got £8 for doing a week's work, so I tried to save his pride with answers such as, 'I'm paying off for it to Mr Allen,' which, to be fair, I did do when it came to my next camera – the Yashica, a poor man's Rolleiflex.

Not only did I buy the camera, but I also invested in an enlarger, a lens and developing equipment. Mum and Dad couldn't understand how I'd managed to buy them and the situation wasn't helped by my brother-in-law, Harold Regal, who said, 'This is very expensive stuff, Alan. How have you managed to afford all this?' I didn't need him winding the old man up.

My father was such a worrier. I swear he thought that one day there'd be a policeman knocking at our door – I don't know why. He just couldn't accept what this

young lad was up to. My only criticism of him would be that he didn't support me in any of these activities and always seemed to think there was something wrong. I wouldn't say the same about my mother though; she was quite supportive.

Once I'd got the equipment and converted my dad's workshop (the spare bedroom) into a darkroom by putting a blanket across the window and shutting the door, I set about finding customers. It struck me that many of our neighbours had kids and grandchildren, so I decided to knock on people's doors and ask them if they'd like me to photograph the children on a 'no obligation' basis – a no-brainer, as you can imagine. 'Sure,' they invariably replied. I took the precaution of writing 'PROOF' on the corner of the photos in biro and presented them to the parents and grandparents who, of course, loved them.

'What's this word "proof"?' they would say. 'Can't I have one without that on it?'

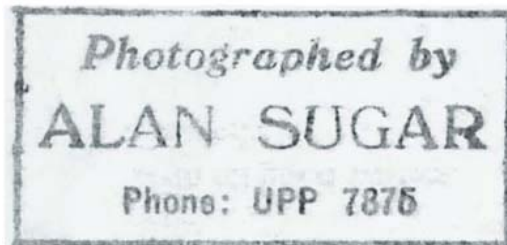
'Well, that's a rough example. If you want a final, good-quality one, I'll print you off a large one for half a crown.'

That was it! I was at the races. It was pictures of children and grandchildren for the next few months.

While on the subject of photography, one of the young lads I'd seen around was soon to be Bar Mitzvah'd and, as his mum and dad couldn't afford much, I offered to take the Bar Mitzvah photographs.

Bloody hell, what a risk that was! When I got to the venue, I found myself taking pictures of adults and doing group photos. Only then did it dawn on me: these people are expecting memorable photographs, pictures they'll frame and treasure for the rest of their lives. I thought to myself, 'What have I done? What am I doing here?' Thankfully, it came off quite well in the end. I can't remember what I charged but I certainly undercut the professional photographer.

Based on that event, I decided to professionalise myself. I went to a local printer's, Austin Press, who made me a rubber stamp: '*Photographed by* ALAN SUGAR – Phone: UPP 7875'. Even as I tell this story, I can see my mum smiling and shrugging her shoulders and my dad still shaking his head.



The stamp I used when I set up as a 'professional' photographer.

[Back to The CV](#)

1959 – 1963: Enterprise activities

At school, photography was becoming a fashionable hobby and we had a photographic society whose members included one of the more financially fortunate pupils, a posh kid who used to hold court. His dad owned a shop and everybody looked up to him as if his shit didn't stink.

When I showed my photographs, he'd sneer at them and look down on me as a second-class photographer. On one occasion, I showed him some negatives I'd developed myself. He observed some smear marks on them and announced haughtily, in front of the society, 'Oh, Sugar, it seems that you dry your negatives by farting on them.' You can imagine the laughter.

My next scheme wiped the smile off his face, in more ways than one. At that time, he used to be the supplier of photographic materials to the kids and the teachers. Now, at the rear of Mr Allen's shop there was a small film-processing factory. I'd occasionally go and see how the developing process worked and noticed that they discarded the empty 35mm cartridge cases. I wondered what could be done with these seemingly useless items, but at the time nothing came to mind. Until one day I went into the ex-army shop on Chatsworth Road in Hackney. Ex-army stores originally sold second-hand uniforms, boots and other surplus army supplies, but the availability of this stuff diminished in the post-war years, so they extended their stock to *anything* surplus. I went to buy a pair of army boots (a fashion statement at that time) and noticed some large, round cans that looked like something you would store film in – the type of film you'd see on a cinema projector. I asked the fellow what was in the cans and he told me he'd bought a job lot of unexposed Ilford FP3 film, as used by film studios for the making of black-and-white movies. FP3 was also sold in photographic stores as black-and-white transparency film for around 5s 1d for a 20-exposure roll and 6s 10d for a 36-exposure roll. Now here I was in the ex-army store, with reels and reels of this stuff, each reel with hundreds of yards of film on it, the very same film you could buy in the photographic shops, but in bulk. The vision of the empty 35mm cartridges came out of my memory bank and I asked the man how much he wanted for a reel.

'What are you going to do with it?' he asked. 'Who do you think you are – Hitchcock?'

'Never mind that, mate, how much for a reel?' I persisted.

He was bright, because before he gave a price, he wanted to know what I had in mind for it, in case he was missing a trick. There must have been fifty cans there, so who knows how much he paid for them. I bet he bought them for the scrap value of the metal cans.

'How much do you want to pay?' he said.

I looked at the can. The label indicated 500 yards of film inside. I knew from watching the process at the development factory that a 36-exposure film, out of its cartridge, was about two yards long. If I sold the film to the punters and undercut the shops by, say, 50 per cent, it would mean that I'd have to charge about three bob for a 36-exposure film. I quickly worked out that 250 x 3s came to £37 10s.

'I'll give you five quid for one can,' I said. After a bit of haggling, the bloke accepted. He was intrigued about what I was going to do with it. Now I had to set up a production line. Although I'd converted my dad's workshop into a darkroom, there was still light coming around the edges of the blanket over the window and around the door frame. This was good enough for developing prints on photographic paper, but not good enough for playing with unexposed film.

My second darkroom was my bed. Under the bedcovers, I'd open the developing tank, take the undeveloped exposed film out of its cartridge, thread the film on to the tank spool and then put the lid on the tank, ready for the developer fluid to be poured in. I went back under the covers for this bulk film operation. With a pair of scissors and the wooden yardstick my dad used for tailoring, I measured off and cut the film into two-yard lengths from the bulk reel. The whole operation was risky because if any light got in, I could expose the whole spool and that'd be a fiver down the drain. Once cut, I loaded the film into one of the discarded empty 35mm cartridges. I tried to be selective and take only those that had an original Ilford FP3 label on them, but I had to accept what was available. If I loaded the film into a cartridge with an FP3 label, it would be an easier sell; if I had to use an empty Kodak cartridge, you can imagine it would take a bit of explaining as to why the film inside was FP3.

In those days there were no inkjet printers or photocopiers to run off labels. Instead, I got some kid at school to use the library typewriter to type out 'ILFORD FP3 36 EXP' over and over on a sheet of A4 paper, cut the words out and glue them on to the non-Ilford cartridges using LePages glue. In exchange, I gave him some film, so he was happy as Larry.

Word spread like wildfire at school: 'Hey, Sugar's got 36 EXP FP3 for three bob!' At first, I had to overcome the suspicion that they'd fallen off the back of a lorry, a rumour put about by the posh tosser. That was easy to dispel because when you looked at the end product you could see it wasn't packaged in the same way as retail film. I was soon getting orders from the kids, the kids' parents and the teachers. Like all products, it was accepted with scepticism at first, but eventually they realised it was okay. In fact, my generous length of two yards gave them forty-odd exposures.

The posh tosser didn't give up. After his suggestion that the stuff was nicked had backfired, he then said the film was out-of-date and thus inferior. I killed that one off by offering a money-back guarantee.

This exercise had a twofold benefit. Firstly, I made some money and saw how cutting prices generates sales. But I also learned a valuable lesson about what happens when someone encroaches upon the territory of the so-called elite, be it disturbing their business or upsetting what they perceive to be their special rights. They go into arsehole mode and use rather sneaky and spiteful tactics.

[Back to The CV](#)

1963 – 1967: Early career

I started looking for another job and saw a promising newspaper advert for a trainee cost accountant with a statistics background. The firm was Richard Thomas & Baldwins, an iron and steel manufacturer located on the corner of Gower Street and Euston Road.

The first obstacle I had to overcome was telling my father I was leaving my Civil Service job. His mentality was that you didn't leave your job. You worked for a company and you got 'grandfathered in' – for ever. He wasn't happy that I was flipping jobs so quickly, but I brought him round by explaining that I'd now attained experience in statistics which, if I got this new job, would eventually allow me to become a qualified cost accountant.

I did get the job and the pay was a bit more, about £10 or £11 a week. I was planted in a small office with ten much older men, all of whom were either qualified or trying to qualify as cost accountants. These guys ended up doing me the biggest favour of my life, as I'll explain shortly.

The function of this department was to produce a weekly report on the output of the factory in Wales for the directors. My job was to get the daily output figures from the blast furnace and put this information into a format which would become part of the directors' report. Each day, a chap called Alun, who had a strong Welsh accent, used to phone me from the factory and read me the output figures.

The lads in the department warmed to me because I was forever messing around and telling a few jokes here and there. One of the things I did was put on a Welsh accent whenever I spoke to Alun at the plant. One day he called up and said, 'Hello, is that you, Alan?'

I replied in a Welsh accent, 'Yes, it is me, Alun – this is also Alan.'

'Where has that Welsh accent come from?' he asked.

I explained to him that when in Rome, you do as the Romans. I said it was to show my devotion to the firm, and that having dealt with so many Welsh people within the company, a bit of the accent had rubbed off on me. Anyway, I told him not to let it bother him and to carry on giving me the daily figures.

He was obviously a bit thick. 'Righto, Alan,' he said. 'Are you ready?'

'Yes.'

'Pig iron, 17.4 tons.'

'Righto, Alun. Pig iron, 17.4 tons.'

'Sinter, 2.6 tons.'

'Righto, 2.6 tons, sinter. Thank you, Alun,' I said. 'I'll speak to you tomorrow.'

'Hang on, don't you want to hear about the slag?'

I waited a moment, raised my voice and said, 'Alun, I'm fed up listening to you moan about your wife.'

As the words came out of my mouth, I knew I was in trouble.

He went bloody mad. 'How dare you talk about my wife like that? I'll have you know I've been married to Glynis for eight years. She's a wonderful lady. You have no right to call her that. Admittedly, we have no children at the moment . . .' and he carried on ranting and raving. 'I'm going to complain about you, speaking in a Welsh accent and insulting my wife . . .'

'It's a joke, it's a joke . . .'

'You London spivs, you're all the bloody same. You don't know what life is like down here in Wales . . .'

'Okay, son, okay, don't worry, speak to you tomorrow, see you.'

My little joke flew around the office. Unfortunately, it didn't take long for word to get back to the powers that be and I was bang in trouble. I was told that the chief accountant had received a complaint and I was to report to his office the next morning.

I prepared a little speech overnight explaining that it was just a joke and that we East End boys, well, we make jokes like this. It wasn't meant in any nasty way; it's just what we chirpy chappies do.

I knocked on the boss's door at nine o'clock and he told me to come in. It was a bit like standing in front of your dad and knowing he's going to tell you off for doing something naughty, but realising that he's struggling not to laugh. Such was the demeanour of Mr Jones, the chief accountant, and I suppose I must have picked up on this. The nervous feeling in my stomach subsided and I felt a bit more relaxed.

He said to me, 'Mr Sugar, I've had a complaint from the plant.'

Blow me down, I did it again. In the corner of his room was a large rubber plant. I pointed to it and said, 'Haven't you been watering it, sir?'

He was not amused and launched into a tirade. 'To get on in this firm, you have to stop being a joker. This is a serious business. You've upset one of the people down in the plant. You've got to understand that these people are different from Londoners. They take things very seriously down there and you've insulted the gentleman and his wife.'

'I'm very sorry,' I answered. 'What would you like me to do? All I can do is apologise. I'll write him a note; I'll do anything you want me to do.'

'Well, if you write him a note, we'll call the matter closed. But I don't want to hear any more complaints about you.'

The other guys in the office were eager to know what had happened. When I told them about the plant joke, they all put their heads in their hands. 'You didn't! You didn't say that, did you? You're a bloody nutter!'

[Back to The CV](#)

1963 – 1967: Early career

Finally, I popped the question. It wasn't really a blunt 'Will you marry me?' It was more of a discussion between us along the lines of 'I suppose we should get married then.' Both of us were completely committed to each other and I guess getting married and spending the rest of our lives together was something we both felt was inevitable.

We were both quite shy at the time and there was a kind of embarrassment and difficulty between us in getting it out in the open. There was certainly no going down on one knee, with a rose, in a restaurant. In fact we were going over the Stratford flyover in the minivan at the time – can you imagine? Now you must *really* be asking what the hell she saw in me.

I don't recall Ann's response being one of great enthusiasm. I think she said, 'Well, I suppose so.' Maybe my character was already starting to rub off on her!

[Back to The CV](#)

1963 – 1967: Early career

One Friday night, I came home and I said to the family, ‘I’m going to start working for myself. I told Henson today that I’m leaving.’

Henson wasn’t actually upset. He said, ‘Fair enough, if you want to go, it’s up to you. What are you going to do?’

I said, ‘I might work for myself.’

‘Fine,’ he said. ‘But let me tell you, you haven’t got very good contacts.’ Always full of encouragement.

My father looked at me as if I were mad. ‘What do you mean, *you’re going to work for yourself?* Who is going to pay you on Friday?’

That was an expression I’ll never forget, and it really sums up his whole outlook on work and life: ‘Who is going to pay you on Friday?’

I told him that I was going to pay myself on Friday.

Fortunately, Daphne, Shirley and the two Harolds were there at the time. Being of a different generation from my mum and dad, they were smiling enthusiastically, really encouraging me. I tried to reassure my dad that the profitability of my sidelines *proved* I had nothing to lose by going it alone – and I think it sunk in.

‘So what are you going to do?’

‘Well, I’m going to get down to the Post Office and take out a hundred pounds. I’ve seen a second-hand minivan in the garage over the road for fifty quid. I’ve already made enquiries and found out that it’s eight pounds for third party, fire and theft insurance. And with the rest of the money, I’m going to buy a bit of gear to sell and get on my way.’

Shirley’s Harold pointed out to me that I needed to get a National Insurance card and buy a National Insurance stamp once a week. That was another item on my list of chores.

The following day, I sprang into action. I withdrew £100 from my Post Office account, bought the van and took out the insurance.

And then, a really nice thought from Shirley. I received a telegram on Monday, which was unusual. Normally people sent them if they were congratulating someone on a wedding or needed to relay important news, such as a death. Shirley’s telegram said, ‘GOOD LUCK ALAN IN YOUR NEW BUSINESS.’ It’s a pity I didn’t keep it.

I set off in the minivan to Percy Street, just off Tottenham Court Road, and walked into the premises of the first supplier to A M S Trading Company, my new company. Many of the big importers in the marketplace used to name their companies after themselves, but I thought Sugar Trading wouldn’t have gone down too well, so I decided upon A M S Trading, which stood for Alan Michael Sugar.

[Back to The CV](#)

1967 – 1980:



My wedding day. A memorable and wonderful occasion, but I couldn't wait for it to be over!

[Back to The CV](#)

1979 – 1990:

‘So, what do you want, Stanley? What have you schlaped me over here for? I’m busy. I’ve got no time for tea.’

‘Calm down, Alan. I just thought it would be nice for us to touch base.’

‘Yeah, okay, Stanley, forget all that touching base stuff and tell me what you want.’

‘Oh, you are terrible, you really are terrible, Alan. All right, well, look, let me tell you this – this Clive Sinclair fellow is going bust.’

I was shocked, but seconds after digesting the statement I remembered hearing rumours that he was running out of money fast and I’d seen a front page story in the *Mirror* about how the mogul Robert Maxwell was going to rescue Sinclair.

‘Right, okay . . .’ I said cautiously.

‘Well, we sell hundreds of thousands of his products and we’ve been approached by Price Waterhouse to see whether we would take over his company to get him out of trouble. Now as you know, Alan, we are retailers. We’re not interested in this, so I’m giving you the heads-up. You need to jump in quickly and see if you can sort a deal out.’

Wow! Now that *was* interesting. It actually took the wind out of my sails.

First of all, I couldn’t help feeling some satisfaction that my arch-competitor was going down the pan. I know it’s not a nice thing to say, but I’m being honest. Secondly, the acquisition of the Sinclair brand would be a massive coup for Amstrad.

After further discussion with Mark and Stanley, the story became clearer. The truth of the matter was that the man at Price Waterhouse had *not* suggested that Dixons buy the company, but had actually asked for an introduction to me, knowing that I was also a supplier to Dixons.

Dixons quite selfishly realised that if Sinclair went bust, they would be stuffed in two ways. One, they would lose a lot of business because they were selling hundreds of thousands of Sinclair Spectrums; and two, they would have no after-sales service path for the millions of Sinclair units they’d put into the marketplace.

From Stanley’s suite in the Mandarin Hotel, we called London to speak to the guy at Price Waterhouse. From what I could gather, Sinclair was in dire financial straits. Barclays Bank had a debenture over the company and by 31 March 1986 either Sinclair had to cough up the money they owed them or they were going to force them into administration.

Clive Sinclair at that time was a national treasure and the guy at Price Waterhouse explained to me that there were deep political connotations here. They could not allow Sinclair to go into bankruptcy – it would be deemed a disaster for the flag-bearer of the British computer industry to go under. So many songs had been sung about his enterprises and Barclays Bank would be seen to be the people that shot Bambi’s mum. It’s true to say that if Clive Sinclair, who by then had been knighted, wasn’t as famous or popular as he was, the company would have simply been slung into liquidation and no one would have heard any more about it.

I agreed to call the guy from Price Waterhouse back in a couple of hours as I didn’t want to discuss my business affairs in front of Stanley and Mark. On my second call with the chap, it became clear to me there was a deal to be done. I discussed this with Bob Watkins, who was very excited at the prospect and understood what a blockbusting event this would be.

Now, here is where I defied all business logic. With no deal done, I decided there and then – before meeting Clive Sinclair or discussing numbers with banks – that I was going to buy the Sinclair business one way or another.

[Back to The CV](#)

1979 – 1990:

‘Alan, I’ve got Rupert Murdoch on the phone,’ my secretary Frances said. ‘Can I put him through?’

‘Nah, not really. Tell him I’m not in – do the usual,’ I said.

About five minutes later, she walked into my office and asked, ‘Do you know who Rupert Murdoch is?’

‘No, who is he?’

‘He’s the man who owns the *Sun* and *The Times*. He’s the man who had that trouble down in Wapping with the strikes and all that.’

It suddenly dawned on me that I hadn’t bothered to pick up the phone to speak to one of the world’s biggest media moguls. I was totally cocooned in my own little world – I knew everybody’s names in the electronics business, but I couldn’t tell you the names of any government ministers, pop stars or other celebrities.

‘Okay, Frances, get him on the phone straightaway.’

Rupert told me that my company had been recommended to him and he wanted to come and talk to me about the possibility of launching a satellite TV service in England. He’d heard that at one stage Amstrad had joined Granada and Virgin in a consortium to bid for the right to put up a satellite TV service known as BSB. He was right – we *had* done that. However, when I got the measure of some of the people in this consortium, and their lack of ideas, I decided I was no longer going to play. Richard Branson followed shortly afterwards.

Murdoch’s idea was to broadcast sixteen additional TV channels in the UK via a satellite launched by the company Astra. In those days, only four television channels existed: BBC1, BBC2, ITV and Channel 4. When I heard his idea, I knew immediately it would be a great consumer product – the punters would go bananas for an extra sixteen channels if it could be done cheaply.

We agreed to meet and Rupert was driven from Wapping all the way to my headquarters in Brentwood. To be fair, he told me straightaway that he had done the rounds – he’d gone to the likes of Sony, Philips and even GEC, but no one was prepared to make any decisions unless he was willing to lay out a lot of money for development.

Lord Weinstock, the chairman of GEC, told him, ‘Go and see Sugar, he’s the man who can bring a consumer electronics product to the market faster than anyone else. In fact, while Sony and Philips are still thinking about it, he will have them in the market for you.’ Those are the very words Rupert told me he’d heard from Lord Weinstock.

The proposition I put to him was this: ‘If you, Mr Murdoch, provide sixteen channels of additional television, including movie channels, news and sports, I will find a way of making satellite receiving equipment so that it can be sold in places like Dixons for a hundred and ninety-nine quid.’ It was my opinion that if we could achieve this, the whole thing would work. In fact, I told Rupert I was so confident about this that he didn’t need to underwrite any orders. If he would agree to press the button on renting the space on the satellite and putting up the sixteen channels, I would be prepared to start development and production at my own risk. There was no official agreement, just a handshake. His transmission date was February 1989 – *my* job was to make sure that we had equipment in the marketplace by then.

It was now June 1988, so we had eight months to do it. Rupert called a press conference and asked me to attend. It was a massive bash held in the BAFTA auditorium in Piccadilly. After promising to launch Sky Television by February 1989, he turned to the audience and said, ‘And this man here is going to make the equipment to receive the

broadcasts – and it's going to be available for a hundred and ninety-nine quid! The proposition is, ladies and gentlemen, sixteen more channels of television for a hundred and ninety-nine quid.'

I started to feel a bit nervous, sitting there in front of the world's media, smiling as if to say, 'Yes, that's right.' Little did Rupert know that we didn't have a bleedin' clue how to make them yet – it was just my gut instinct that we could do it. I didn't realise what I'd let myself in for.

[Back to The CV](#)

1990 – 1999:

The acquisition of Klinsmann, Dumitrescu and Popescu seemed to have kick-started a new revolution of foreign players joining the Premier League. In the past, players came from the local community, trained in the youth academies and had a real allegiance to the club. I reminded the meeting about this and how we were now being flooded by foreigners coming here for the money, simply because we were the richest league around. We were now attracting these Carlos Kickaballs who had no history with our clubs and would go anywhere for money. The Carlos Kickaball remark got more laughter. To this day it is quoted and remains in the football dictionary.

[Back to The CV](#)

2000 – 2009:

Meanwhile, the first series had been nominated for a BAFTA, the most prestigious of television awards. The ceremony was held on 7 May and I turned up that night at the Great Room at the Grosvenor House Hotel to find it jam-packed full of TV celebrities and stars. It was a massive event. I went with Ann and, not knowing anyone and feeling a bit shy, we tried to hang back in the reception area for a while until they called people to the tables. Eventually, Daisy Goodwin got hold of us, walked us through the main dining area and started introducing me to people. Gordon Ramsay came up and shook my hand, telling me how wonderful the show was. I met Bruce Forsyth, Jack Dee and loads of others. I didn't understand, in TV terms, what a breakthrough *The Apprentice* had been. Only now did I realise, walking through this grand hall and seeing people looking at me or coming to talk to me, that it was a massively popular show.

We won the BAFTA award for 'Best Feature' that night. Peter Moore dragged me up on to the stage in front of all these people and for once I was dumbstruck. I just hung behind him and let him do the talking. There was a press call for me to have my picture taken with the award and there, queuing up in the press room, was David Jason, the great actor from *Only Fools and Horses*. He shook my hand, telling me what a great programme it was and how he'd enjoyed watching it. I told him, never mind all that, it was an honour for *me* to meet *him* and said how he had entertained me over the years as Del Boy and Inspector Frost. Meeting him was a highlight of the evening.

Ricky Gervais was sitting on another table and waved at me. He was hot at the time with his show *The Office*. I went over to shake his hand and he said, 'I don't know why I waved at you because I don't know you. I guess it was just to say well done.'

You can imagine how a moment like this could *really* go to your head, how it could make you want more and more fame. But in a way, this was no different to having a smash-hit Amstrad product – it was great to be congratulated for my success but, like a hit product, I knew it wouldn't go on for ever. My feet were firmly on the ground and I had no delusions that I was some great TV celebrity.

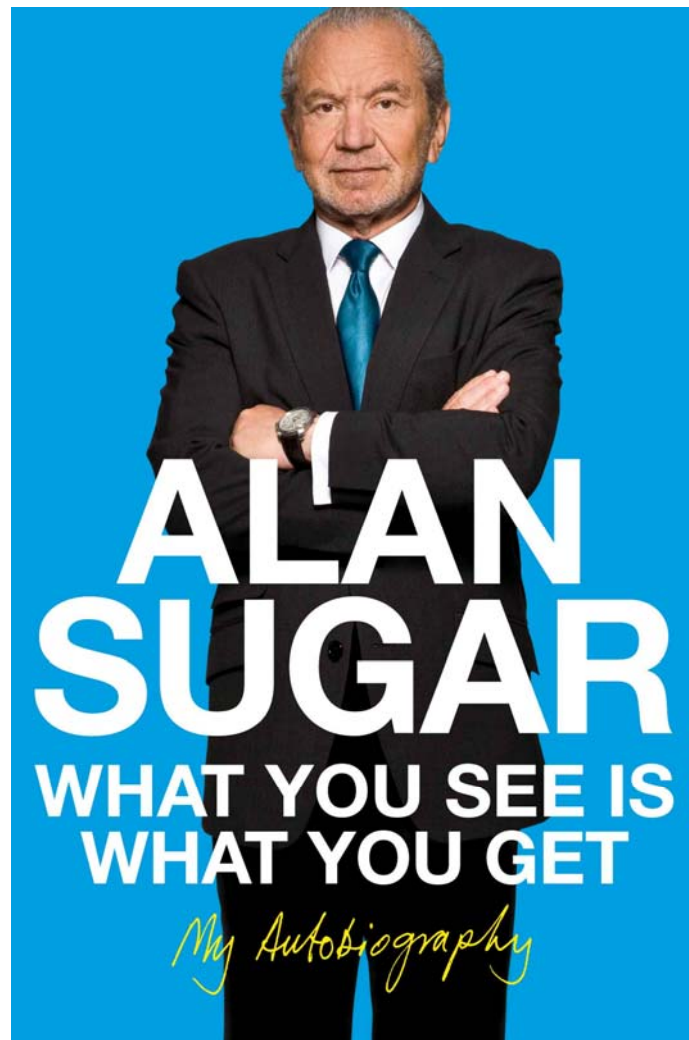
[Back to The CV](#)

2000 – 2009:



It was a great honour to be made Lord Sugar of Clapton. Ann, of course, was already a lady.

These extracts are taken from Alan Sugar's autobiography, *What You See is What you Get*.



The ebook is available from the [Kindle Store](#), [Waterstones.com](#) and the [iBookstore](#).



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