

**Lowe, Janet – Damn Right!**

Wiley, 2000 [Business] Grade ★★★★★

There are multiple books and papers written about the vice Chairman of Berkshire Hathaway, Charles T. Munger. When *Damn Right!* was published however there wasn't much. And whereas a lot is written about Munger as an investor, in this biography we get to know him on a more personal level from his birth to his 70s around the year 2000. Munger and his family always wanted to remain out of the public eye, causing very little information to be available about Munger before *Damn Right!*. Thus, Munger's family was not overly excited about this book from the start. Still, the author Janet Lowe told Munger that she was going to write about him with or without his consent and after a while he agreed to be cooperative. Lowe is an investment writer and author. She specializes in books about business leaders and has among others portrayed Benjamin Graham, Warren Buffett and Bill Gates.

*Damn Right!* describes how Munger was born in 1924 and grew up in Omaha. His family taught him the sound morals of Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin from an early age. His father was an Omaha judge and Munger followed in his father's footsteps by pursuing law. Early in his career he suffered from both distractive events as being forced into military service, as well as sad ones with a divorce and the tragic death of his son. It took him until his thirties to start accumulating his fortune which he built out of savings from his legal practice, invested into real estate projects. Having realized that debt is a vital ingredient to be successful in real estate investing together with it being a full-time job, he soon moved on to other interests. This involved starting an investment partnership and resigning from being a lawyer after having co-founded the law firm *Munger, Tolles and Olsen* - which is used by Berkshire to this day.

Munger ran a concentrated investment portfolio with huge success but also wild fluctuations. He frequently discussed his investment ideas with Warren Buffett who he later famously went into business with, taking the subordinate position as

vice Chairman of Berkshire Hathaway. Munger is famously known for teaching Buffett that it pays off to pay up for quality. What is not so known but explained in the book is that he himself also learnt that lesson fairly late. The company that in this regard made the strongest impression on him and Buffett was See's Candies, a high quality, premium chocolate company located in San Francisco which has been a home run for Berkshire.

Aside from getting to know some of his and Berkshire's investments in See's Candies, The Buffalo Evening News and Salomon Brothers the reader is introduced to Munger's moral compass, which is strongly influenced by Franklin - his biggest hero. Munger is of the view that honesty and hard work will take a person a long way. Morals aside, a trait he is famous for which isn't as positive though, is his manners. People who don't know him well may think he is arrogant and rude. One thing that defines Munger is that he didn't set out to become super-rich but rather financially independent enough to pursue interests within education, medicine and philanthropy and also his hobbies of architecture, travelling and fishing.

Although the book is filled with timeless quotes from both Munger and Buffett I still feel that some quotes are a bit misplaced where one subject is discussed and then followed by a quote or writing which is not really connected with the prior text disrupting the flow of the reading. However, this is more of a minor observation than a large negative. For me, a book about Munger could never be boring. I like Poor Charlie's Almanack more, which is a book I often go back to, but I still rate *Damn Right!* highly and it's a must for all Buffett & Munger fans. The part I enjoyed the most was to get more insight into Charlie Munger the person and not only his sharp quotes and wisdom, even if the book gives the reader plenty of that too.

The only thing I would ask for now is for someone to fill in the gaps of the last 20 years of the fascinating life of Charlie Munger.

Niklas Sävås, September 23, 2018