

He's a millionaire who spent part of his youth in Hebrew children's shelters, and shined shoes for pocket change.

An astute, but unconventional, businessman, he has amassed a small fortune building successful enterprises and rescuing marginal ones from failure.

At 68, Ken Blum can look back on a life of rich challenges and sometimes amazing accomplishments.

But he says it would all be meaningless to him without his family.

"I'll give you my definition of happiness," says Blum. "Family and friends. The rest doesn't mean anything."

His rise from Depression-era poverty to international prominence as a management expert has not always been smooth, but he has never lost faith.

little in the way of material possessions, he's not afraid of financial risk. And the values that guide him today are those that sustained him through the difficult years: hard work, family loyalty, honesty and fairness to others.

As he puts it, "I had the advantage of being poor."

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Our frustration is greater when we have much and want more than when we have nothing and want some.

Eric Hoffer,
longshoreman/philosopher

Ken Blum was born in Coney Island, N.Y., in 1926, the second of three brothers. In 1929, in the throes of the Great Depression, the boys were moved first to a foster home and then to a series of



From Wrecks to Riches

SELF-MADE
MAN
TURNS
FAILURES
INTO
FORTUNES

Story by Christine Stutz

A co-founder of United Health-Care who went on to create spin-off companies that made millions of dollars in profit, Blum is called on to invigorate ailing enterprises throughout the United States and abroad.

Last July, the Stevenson resident became chief executive officer of Rent-A-Wreck, a 24-year-old car rental firm that lost \$600,000 in fiscal 1993.

One of the first things he did was to move the corporate headquarters from Los Angeles to Owings Mills.

Within four months of taking it over, Blum had Rent-A-Wreck making money, with 1994 expected to be the first profitable year in the parent company's history.

What drives Blum, say his close friends and relatives, are his intelligence, curiosity and genuine enjoyment of people.

But what sets him apart from many other businessmen of his stature is his modest outlook.

"He's made it big in his business, but you would never know it," says longtime friend Bernard Reiss. "He was the same when he needed a buck as when he had millions."

Because Blum started out with

cottages run by the Hebrew Shelters Guardian Society.

Although the Blums' parents were living, they were financially unable to care for their sons, a situation not uncommon at the time.

The boys saw their parents on occasional Sundays, but it was not until six years later that they were welcomed back into the family home. A sister was born in 1941, while the family was living in Baltimore.

Ken, a warm and gregarious man, won't say much about his childhood, except that by the time he was 19, he had lived in 21 different places. Neither his children nor his close friends know much about that period in his life.

Ken's older brother Gene says simply: "It's part of our past, that's all."

Ken does share this memory.

thought: While living in the group homes, Gene delivered telegrams for Western Union to pick up extra cash. Ken recalls how, in the dead of winter, Gene would come into their room, his hands frozen stiff from hours of after-school bicycle deliveries.

From his coat pocket, those icy fingers would produce a few coins, an entire week's pay, and Gene would give one to each of his brothers.

It was that kind of sharing, that all-for-one-and-one-for-all attitude, that helped the Blums emerge from the experience without a trace of bitterness. He and Gene remain extremely close to this day.

And it is perhaps because of those difficult childhood years that Ken is so utterly devoted to his own family.

"He's very generous with

them," says Reiss. "The far kind of congregates at his every Sunday for breakfast. very important that he sees and that they relate to each

"I see them when the family gets together," says Arthur Harrow, a friend who lives in B Raton, Fla., where the Blums spend every winter. "We've the respect in which he's he

Harrow says Blum likes to his grandchildren — and even Harrow's grandchildren — rides in his fire-engine red, tige Cadillac convertible, w sports fins and a white inter "He delights in children," sa Harrow. "He caters to them.

While Blum certainly enjoys his membership at the Woodholme Country Club, his champagne-colored Rolls-Royce, his box seats at the opera, h