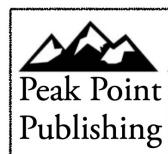


# IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE

*My Life as a Doctor of Vision*

Daniel Spitzberg, M.D.



Carmel, Indiana

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•DEDICATION•

*To the memory of my beloved parents,  
Dorothy and Albert E. Spitzberg*

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“THE WORLD ONLY EXISTS IN YOUR EYES. YOU CAN MAKE IT AS BIG OR AS SMALL AS YOU WANT.”

—F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

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- My wife, Susanne McAlister
- My daughters, Laura Carafiol and Julie Graziano
- My friend, Michael Maurer
- My friend, David Brandes
- My editor and collaborator, Peter Weisz

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- JoAnn Myers, my personal assistant.
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- Emma's daughter, Chris Gurka, who has managed our home since 1994. Chris was indispensable when my wives, Marilyn and Lana, became ill. She was always available for me and more importantly was of invaluable assistance with their home medical care.

## •AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION•

### Why I Wrote This Book

Benjamin Franklin once quipped “There are more old drunkards than doctors.” Despite being the latter, I have somehow managed to reach my eighties in good health and relatively sound mind. But I would not call myself your typical M.D. One who practices for 40 to 50 years and then retires to a life of chasing little white balls down the fairway. Not for me. In fact, I was thinking of calling this book “How I Flunked Retirement.” Although I am no longer a practicing ophthalmologist, I still enjoy a full-time career that fills my days with productive activity.

Unlike other professionals, we doctors do not prepare for retirement during the course of our careers and hence, we experience a difficult transition when the time comes. The problem is that most physicians, at the conclusion of their careers, find themselves unmoored and adrift without much purpose in their lives.

It is that quest for meaning that has kept me, at this stage of my life, from falling into the routine of endless days of golf followed by Netflix nights. Not my idea of a meaningful retirement.

I wrote this book for the same reasons that I continue working. To provide my life with meaning, purpose and direction. As I have observed, those who do so at this stage enjoy longer, healthier and happier lives. I strongly recommend it.

I’ve also observed that it’s not a good idea to build your retirement life around your kids and grandkids. They have their own lives and that’s the way it should be. I am, however, very devoted to my grandkids as you’ll discover in the pages of this book and it is for their benefit, and for the benefit of the generations yet to come, that I undertook this project. It’s my hope that this book will inspire them to do great things with their lives. It’s important for them to understand that bounty comes from hard work fueled by a passion for your career. If you love what you do, success will follow.

This book is also directed to anyone interested in reading about a life filled with opportunity and adventure. By learning about how my life played out so far—from a small-town Indiana upbringing through a rewarding medical career up to my current work with the nation’s largest medical insurer—perhaps you, too, would be prompted to look back and examine the way your own life has developed and, who knows, maybe decide to write your own memoirs. I have been

advised that leaving a literary legacy of my life story is the most valuable asset that I may bestow to my heirs.

And so, as an ophthalmologist, looking back upon my life in 20/20 hindsight, I find myself both thankful and amazed. Grateful for the many opportunities I have enjoyed and for the wealth of friends and loving family members with whom I've traveled along life's journey. And amazed. Amazed at how quickly it all went by. As they say: "In the Blink of an Eye."

—Daniel Spitzberg, MD  
Carmel, Indiana  
September, 2023

## •FOREWORD•

by Michael Maurer

Biographies and particularly stories of Indiana Hoosiers have always fascinated me. In elementary school, I read **FIFTY FAMOUS AMERICANS** by Orville V. Webster III (JBG Publishing, 128 pp.). I still have that volume in my library. That's why I wrote two biography books, **19 STARS OF INDIANA: EXCEPTIONAL HOOSIER MEN** (IBJ Media, 2010, 232 pp.), and **19 STARS OF INDIANA: EXCEPTIONAL HOOSIER WOMEN** (Indiana University Press in association with IBJ Media, 2009, 233 pp.). The women's biography book benefited from the contribution of Peter Weisz, the co-author of this entertaining memoir. He wrote the chapters on exceptional women, Sharon Rivenbark, Jane Blaffer Owen and Patricia R. Miller. His clever story telling brought these extraordinary women to life.

Daniel Spitzberg could easily have been one of those profiled in the men's biography book. I met Dan in the late 1950's when he would drive his hot yellow convertible down from Fort Wayne to romance our Indianapolis ladies. In the 1970's, when Dan joined the ophthalmology practice of Michael Lashmet, I was privileged to represent them as their corporate attorney.

People used to say that doctors checked their business brains at the door of medical school. Based upon my experience representing physicians over a twenty-year career as a practicing attorney, I can attest to that fact—in most cases. Dan was an exception. His commanding intelligence enjoys a broad range. Not only did he understand the business advice he sought from me but his stimulating insights were often of benefit to me in turn. His strong business savvy, street smarts and common sense were a welcome interlude in my practice of representing physicians.

Dan is in the midst of his second career. His first was an ophthalmology practice that is ongoing and the second as Chief Medical Officer and Indiana's Medicaid Medical Director for United Healthcare. I would add that he has been engaged in a third career, simultaneously with the two I just listed, personal investing, an activity for which he has demonstrated serious talent and capable skills—particularly for one whose medical education did not allow for electives in accounting, real estate, business and finance. No doubt, Dan would have been a successful businessman and entrepreneur had he chosen to pursue that career path instead of ophthalmology.

Today, as an octogenarian, Dan demonstrates remarkable energy and sense of adventure. He's hard to keep up with, even by men half his age. His recent trip to Alaska did not consist of sitting on a deck chair on a large cruise ship, but rising at 6:00 a.m. each morning to board a small plane to frigid wilderness stream and wading throughout many blustery days of catching salmon and rainbow trout.

Dan has earned a remarkable reputation not only in his field, but as a public servant and philanthropist demonstrating his embrace of the Hoosier values that he espouses and lives by. Those values are reflected in his two daughters, Laura Spitzberg Carafiol and Julie Spitzberg Graziano whose children adore and respect their "Papa."

It is fortunate for our community and Dan's vast circle of friends, that many years ago he chose to join an ophthalmology practice in central Indiana, rather than opting to remain in his hometown of Fort Wayne where an easier opportunity to enter ophthalmology awaited him.

"Unique" is a strong and often misused word. It is an apt description of Dan Spitzberg, however. It is a pleasure to reflect on the life of this extraordinary man, his intelligence, and "Gaudium vitae" I appreciate his friendship.

I congratulate Dan on his choice of Peter Weisz to assist on **IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE**. I have read about a dozen Weisz efforts and always look forward to the next Peter Weisz biography. **IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE** benefits from the Weisz's skillful collaboration. His clever presentations are laced with humor and insight. He digs into the lives of his subjects and produces nuggets to the delight of his readers. It is difficult for biographers to competently describe the achievements of their subjects while not compromising their modesty which, in Dan's case, is an essential quality. Weisz has navigated those shoals well.

I understand from the Prologue that this project was created primarily for the benefit of Dan's progeny. I hope that it will also be read by many others. After reading his highly engaging and entertaining memoir, you will thank Dan for sharing his memories in this meaningful manner. There is indeed much to learn and enjoy here.

—Michael S. Maurer  
Carmel, Indiana  
October, 2023

## •PROLOGUE•

“It is the set of the sails, not the direction of the wind that determines which way we will go.”

—*Jim Rohn, motivational speaker & author*

Published a century ago and considered the seminal work that launched the science of Sociology, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* by Robert and Helen Lynd, examined the daily life of a typical midwestern small town. The community they selected to focus upon was, in fact, Muncie, Indiana, the home of Ball State University. There, on the campus of this All-American college in this All-American town, one may today find a modest plaque mounted next to the door to the student radio station. The plaque recognizes one of Ball State’s more illustrious graduates and benefactors, former late-night talk show host, David Letterman. It contains a quote that reads: “Dedicated to all C students, before and after me.” Although in my case, I was in Middle School and a bit further north up the road in Fort Wayne, Indiana...that C student was me.

The fact that I was far from being an academic star at Forest Park Elementary School did not seem to bother my father all that much. Albert Spitzberg was a mechanical engineer who left most of the child-rearing responsibilities to his strong-willed wife, my mother, who bore the same name as Letterman’s mom, Dorothy. There was, however, a strong male influence in my life at the time in the persona of my uncle, Harold Leopold. Uncle Harold was my mother’s brother and a successful Cleveland pharmacist. We were very close because I felt I could discuss things with him whenever he visited us in Fort Wayne. Things that most boys going through puberty were interested in and things that I could not possibly discuss with my parents.

It was Uncle Harold whom I credit with providing me with my earliest sense of direction in life. He was genuinely interested in my future. He understood that the last thing I aspired to in life was to become an engineer like my dad.

“Danny-boy,” I recall him advising me, “you should think about going to pharmacy school. That way, when you get out, you could come to work for me.” I found the idea appealing and carried it with me as I entered high school.

It was a few years later that Uncle Harold again helped me to navigate the course of my career when he suggested that I should first attempt to enroll in medical school.

“Medical school is harder to get into,” he advised, “so if you don’t make it, you can go to pharmacy school and then come to work for me.” Harold had, by this time, relocated to Miami where he was developing a chain of drug stores. He explained that he could use a bright young man like me in his budding business. But, when I discussed this course with my high school guidance counselor, her response was cool to say the least.

“Listen, Daniel,” she told me confidentially, “you can go into whatever field you choose and be successful...except for medicine. We just don’t think you’re qualified to be a doctor.” I was infuriated. How dare she tell me such a thing?! Her words landed on me heavily and I took them to be a challenge. A challenge to which I knew I could rise. My first step was a redoubling of my academic energies. I made up my mind that I would no longer be Letterman’s C student and I’m pleased to state that with one exception, I became a straight-A scholar. That exception was English Composition, a subject that no matter how hard I tried over three semesters, I was unable to earn higher than a C. That literary deficiency partially explains why I sought out assistance when it came to writing this book.

Another powerful motivating force in my life during those years was none other than my own mother, Dorothy. Should I ever bring home an A minus grade, her reaction was always the same: “Couldn’t you have tried a bit harder and gotten an A?”

I remember clearly the day I came home from high school and was greeted by my mother with these startling words:

“Tomorrow, don’t come home when you’re done with school.”

“Hunh?” I said. “Why not?”

“Because you need to report for work at Rogers Market,” she replied, matter-of-factly. “I got you a job as a carry-out boy at 82 cents an hour. Here’s your apron.”

“Uh...well, I’m not sure if I want to do that,” I mumbled.

“I wasn’t asking what you wanted to do,” she retorted. “You don’t have any say in this. You’re going to work and that’s it.” And that’s what I did for the next two years.

And then, one evening during my senior year, when I returned home after work, my mother greeted me with these words:

“You’re no longer working at Rogers Market. I got you a new job at the Mary Jane shoe store downtown. You’re going to work as a salesman and make one dollar an hour. You start Saturday. Here’s your shoehorn.”

Once again, there was no discussion and the following Saturday, after turning in my apron, there I was. Helping ladies try on their patent-letter pointed pumps for eight dollars a day.

My mother's demeanor at such moments was never mean-spirited nor confrontational. She believed that she was simply doing her job as a responsible parent by instilling within me what used to be known as the Protestant work ethic—even though we were not Protestants. My mother had married at age 18 and the couple had very little in the way of money. My 20-year old father was taking night school classes in order to qualify as an engineer while my mother took menial jobs to supplement their income. Their hardscrabble success was due entirely to the sweat of their own labors. In hindsight, I am deeply grateful to her for instilling these key values into me. I know that I owe whatever success I may have achieved in life to her interventions. I recognize that they came from a place of love.

In addition to my mother, and in addition to a misguided guidance counselor, and in addition to my wonderful Uncle Harold, there was one additional individual who perhaps had an even more profound influence on the course of my life. That being my eighth grade homeroom teacher, Mr. Schultz.

Fred Schultz was the Forest Park teacher that nobody wanted. He was known to be very tough. This was driven home to me on the day that he dismissed our class after the final period with these words:

“Class dismissed. You’re all released to go home except for you, Mr. Spitzberg. You stay where you are.” Gulp!

“I need to have a word with you,” Mr. Schultz said approaching my desk. “I know that you’ve got a good head on your shoulders, Dan, but your grades stink. I want to know why.”

He explained that I was to remain after school and complete all my homework there in the classroom. He would then review my work and make sure that it had all been done properly. We did this often and soon my grades began to improve. Since he lived near our home and since we would finish up when it was time for him to leave, he would many times walk me home from school. Our chats during those walks always were focused on my future in high school, college and beyond.

Looking back I have to say that Mr. Schultz’s taking an interest in me was the singular turnaround moment of my youth. It launched me on a path that eventually delivered me to a wonderful professional career and, in a certain way, enabled me to enjoy all the blessings of a loving family. It’s odd to consider that such important inflection points in a person’s life happen so quickly. It takes years of retrospection to appreciate their significance. You might say they happen “in the blink of an eye.”

**NOTE:** I don't know if this book will ever end up on the shelves of the Forest Park Elementary school library but if so, I would like it somehow noted ( á la Letterman) that it is "Dedicated to all the students, before me and after me, who went from being a C to an A student."

# CHAPTER ONE

## From Whence I Came

“Know from where you come and to where you are going.”

—*Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers)*, 3:1

The backseat belonged to me. My parents were the co-captains of the car—the king and queen of the road—but the broad backseat of the big Oldsmobile was all mine. I could stack my comic books in the rear window well and devour each one as I filled the long hours and lonely miles of our monthly four-hour drive from our Fort Wayne, Indiana home all the way to Cleveland, Ohio. My older sister — and I do mean older. I was 12 years her junior—did not come along for these monthly Cleveland pilgrimages, so I was able to hold dominion over the entire backseat all by myself. Cleveland was home to the only grandparent I knew. Rose Leopold, my mom’s invalid mother. Rose had suffered a debilitating stroke and was bedridden.

“Even though she can’t say so,” I recall my mother, Dorothy, invariably pointing out, “our visits really help to cheer up Momma.” The stroke had rendered her speechless, but the twinkle in her eyes still glitters among my childhood memories.

Even though my age had just recently reached double digits, I already was old enough to sense the positive air of postwar prosperity. It was in evidence all around us as the big Olds 98 barreled down the country highways, whizzing by endless fields of corn and alfalfa. America’s abundance on display was fully tangible as we rolled across the nation’s heartland.

Aside from my Grandma Rose, who had been born in 1880 as Rosa Karban in what is today the Czech Republic, I knew none of my other three grandparents. My Grandma Rose and her family had arrived to New York harbor when she was but five years old. She grew up and married my future grandfather, Charles, and settled in Cleveland.

I have no memories of my father’s mother, Bessie, and only a fleeting one of my paternal grandfather, Louis Spitzberg. I evidently met him in a nursing home when I was four years old. I see him in my mind’s eye today as a tall, silver-haired gentleman. Actually, no one in my family is over 5 foot 10. I guess everyone looks tall when you’re four years old. According to immigration documents, my grandfather Louis was born somewhere in Russia and arrived to the US amid the first wave of Jewish immigration from the Pale of Settlement in the 1890s.

Unlike his two brothers who changed their last names from Spitzberg to Shaw in an effort to more fully Americanize themselves, my father, Albert, who was born in Brooklyn, New York, opted not to do so and steadfastly remained a Spitzberg. The name is indicative of where my father's family roots are planted. During the European Enlightenment, Jews were required to adopt "Christian" surnames. Many opted for names that described their professions like "Goldman" and "Weiner," while others adopted the name of a prominent landmark identified with their home communities. In our case, some unsung ancestor may have chosen the latter. The name Spitzberg suggests that our family may have emerged from the tiny university town of Tübingen, not far from Stuttgart, Germany. Tübingen is home to the Spitzberg Nature Preserve, named after nearby Spitzberg Mountain. The word Spitzberg means "pointed peak" in German.

However, it is far more likely that our family originated on the Norwegian island of Spitzbergen, located in the Greenland Sea, deep within the Arctic Circle. The island is part of the Svalbard archipelago which, during the 19th century, was part of Czarist Russia. Although people say I look Italian, according to the DNA code analysis provided by **23 and Me**, I am a 100% Russian Ashkenazi Jew.

I once asked one of my uncles, Harry Shaw, who owned an automotive repair shop in Cleveland, how he and his brother, Julie, a tavern owner, selected the name "Shaw." He claimed it was his mother, Bessie's, maiden name. I did a bit of digging and was unable to find Bessie's actual birth name, but I'll bet it wasn't Shaw. It was probably changed to that from Schoenbrun or Sharansky. But dad stuck with Spitzberg and I'm glad that he did.

If any one of the three brothers, Albert, Harry, or Julie, had good reason to change his name because Spitzberg sounded a bit "too Jewish," it would have been my father. While Julie and Harry were self-employed, dad worked for big corporations like International Harvester, White Motors, and Bowser which, frankly, weren't the most welcoming places in those days when it came to hiring minorities. Nevertheless, dad remained a Spitzberg and this made us something of the outliers of the Shaw family.

I recall, years later, attending the funeral of my cousin Trevor Fink at the home of my Aunt Sarah in Cleveland. Sarah was one of my father's sisters and her son, Trevor, had been a bachelor boating enthusiast. My Uncle Julie Shaw's son Melvin, was among the multitude of Shaws in attendance at the funeral and it was Melvin's wife who sought me out to warmly shake my hand.

"You're Dan, aren't you?" She said with a broad smile. "Dan Spitzberg. I always wanted to meet a real Spitzberg."

The question of changing my name had come up when I was in college, receiving career guidance from my uncle, Harold Leopold (as recounted in the Prologue). He surprised me with the following bit of advice:

“I think you ought to change your name, Dan. Sounding too Jewish is not going help your career.”

“You want me to change my name to Daniel Shaw?” I responded reluctantly.

“No, no. Forget Shaw. Your new name should be (get ready for it) Montague Stone,” he proclaimed, slowly spreading the name across an imaginary movie marquee with his outstretched hand.

I wisely did not follow Uncle Harold’s advice, but from time to time when making a restaurant reservation, for example, I would use the name Dan Shaw to avoid having to spell out Spitzberg. I eventually, however, decided that I needed to be secure in my own identity and nowadays say, in my best James Bond voice: “Table for 5 at 7 pm, please. The name is Spitzberg. Daniel Spitzberg.”

As mentioned in the Prologue, my father Albert Spitzberg, worked as a mechanical engineer. In Cleveland he was employed by the White Trucking Company and in 1939, Albert, along with mother and sister, relocated to Ft. Wayne, Indiana where he took a job with International Harvester. IH, as it was known, was a major manufacturer of agricultural and construction equipment. The company had a monumental importance to the building of rural communities across America until its demise in the mid-1980s. Fort Wayne was the home of IH’s heavy-duty truck division and it was early in my father’s career there that two major events came along. The first was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that plunged our nation into World War Two. The second was me.

I entered the world as one of the few Jewish babies born at Fort Wayne’s St. Joseph’s Hospital on December 29, 1940 during the last year of America’s innocence prior to Pearl Harbor.

My father stayed at International Harvester for 17 years till switching over to the Bowser Pump Company located on East Creighton Street. He worked there until his retirement.

Sylvanus Freeloove Bowser is not a name that jumps to mind when someone mentions the titans of the early automotive industry like Ford, Fisher and Firestone. But Fort Wayne native, S.F. Bowser, invented one of the most essential advances in automotive history: the gasoline pump. He founded his eponymous company in 1885 to dispense kerosene and ten years later

introduced the “Self-Measuring Gasoline Storage Pump.” It was a runaway hit with motorists who soon dubbed it a “Filling Station,” a term still in use today. In parts of Europe, a gasoline pump is still known as a Bowser.

While working at Bowser in the mid 1960s, my father developed a filtration system for jet fuel. When the U.S. Air Force learned of his invention, they wished to deploy the technology at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. Dad was hired to oversee the operation and this involved him living on the base five days a week for several months. Doing so required that he obtain a security clearance from the FBI who asked him for his birth certificate. When told he did not have one, the FBI conducted a search of New York City records and located it in the a building that had survived the 23rd Street fire of 1966 where thousands of municipal birth and death records had been stored. This find resulted in two unexpected consequences. One having to do with his name and the other with his age.

“I see from your birth certificate, Mr. Spitzberg,” he was advised by an FBI agent, “that it does not list your middle name.”

“That’s because my parents were very poor,” he quipped, “and they could not afford to give me one.” The FBI agent insisted that he come up with at least a middle initial. He decided on the letter E (perhaps in honor of my older sister Eleanor) and from then on, he was officially known as Albert E. Spitzberg (see the photo of his nameplate in the Photo Section).

He also happily learned from the birth certificate that he was actually a year younger than he thought he was. He believed himself to have been born in 1907, but his birth year of 1908 showed that he was only 54, and not 55.

I don’t believe that I truly appreciated, until later life, what a powerful influence my parents were on me.

While my father was an accomplished mechanical engineer, he also knew how to take maximum advantage of his free time. Far from the somber serious image assigned to engineers, Albert loved to play the piano and he would make frequent jokes about his profession. For example:

A mechanical engineer, an electrical engineer, and a civil engineer were having a theological debate about the nature of God.

“God has to be mechanical engineer,” declared the first. “Just look at the human body. The entire muscular-skeletal system uses levers and pulleys and other mechanical devices.”

“You’re mistaken,” said the second. “The human body provides evidence that God is an electrical engineer. Just look at the brain and the central nervous system. It all operates on electrical energy.”

“You’re both wrong,” the civil engineer chimed in. “God is definitely a civil engineer.. Just look at the human groin. Who else would place a waste disposal system in the middle of a public recreation area?”

Whenever my mother was looking for my dad during non-working hours, she knew that he could be found at Fort Wayne’s public tennis courts. As he got older, he gravitated more towards golf. Albert also enjoyed taking the family to one of the recreational lakes in the area. Similar to the many Catskill Cottage Communities, where New York Jewish families would spend the hot summer months, a number of Fort Wayne Jews owned cottages at nearby Lake Wawasee as well as at Lake James near Angola. Among them were friends of my parents who often invited us along for a weekend at the beach.

My parents’ closest friends were the Kwatnezes, Sam and Mabel. For many years, Sam drove a Hostess truck, delivering Twinkies, Cupcakes and DingDongs to area grocers. At a certain point Sam and Mabel decided to launch a vending machine business. They handled machines that dispensed mostly candy and cigarettes. This was ironic since, unlike my dad, Sam was not a smoker. I recall one day when Sam and Mabel were visiting that the men were sitting and chatting out on our front porch. Thinking myself mature enough to join the conversation, I leaned against the railing and offered up my two cents worth. Things were going smoothly and I worked up the *“chutzpah”* to ask my dad if I could have a puff on the cigarette he was smoking. Sam enthusiastically grabbed the lit Lucky and shoved it into my mouth.

“Now draw a real big breath,” he instructed, “and inhale real deep.”

I did as instructed and promptly fell backwards over the rail onto the ground, choking desperately. Sam looked down and made his point clearly.

“See? That’s what you get by being a smoker. Don’t be a DingDong like your dad and just forget about cigarettes.” I never smoked again.

In contrast to my dad’s freewheeling ways, my mother, Dorothy, was a highly focused and thrifty woman. Upon moving to Fort Wayne from Cleveland she discovered that her new hometown had very limited public transportation. So, she convinced my father to take her out for a driving lesson. On returning home, the front tire scraped the curb and that was it. Until her dying day at age 92, my mother never again drove a car. Even though it took her an hour to do

so, she would regularly walk downtown to do her shopping rather than shell out ten cents for bus fare.

Although she had worked as an executive secretary back in Cleveland, upon reaching Fort Wayne and finding herself now the mother of both an infant and a teenager, she became a devoted homemaker.

As mentioned in the Prologue, my mother was fond of keeping me busy by finding me gainful employment. This actually began when I was twelve and she presented me with my marching orders.

“On Wednesday, you won’t be coming home after school. You will ride your bike downtown to Sam and Mabel’s vending machine warehouse. They have agreed to hire you to help them fill orders.”

“Will I get paid?” was my first question.

“They can’t pay you much,” she replied, “but if you see any candy that has already been opened, you can eat it.”

I did as I was told and began working at the warehouse. In very short order I began to detest the smell of chocolate. To this day, I rarely eat chocolate due that unpleasant experience.

Looking back, I am eternally grateful to Sam Kwatnez for insuring that I never became addicted to either tobacco or chocolate.

In terms of my own friends, I was fortunate to grow up in the Middle American community of Fort Wayne. It exposed me to classmates and buddies from a diverse background of ethnicities and religions. Unlike Jewish kids growing up in New York at the time, my circle of friends was not as insular, allowing me to learn about cultures and customs other than my own. At this point, most families from our small Jewish community had moved from the old neighborhood to the Southside of Fort Wayne. Hence, only a few of my friends were Jewish. My Christian friends knew that I was Jewish, but they nevertheless would frequently ask me to join them on Sundays to attend their Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Catholic Church services. And I usually accepted.

My closest friend, in those days belonged to the American Baptist Church. Mike Schwanz lived next door in a big frame house along with his parents and grandparents. Mike and I were one month apart in age and each summer his family rented a cottage at Lake James and invited me to come along. Before my first visit, Mike’s dad informed my parents that on Sundays at the lake the family would be attending services at a local Baptist Church.

“If you prefer,” my parents were told, “Dan can stay at the cottage while we go to church.” My mom and dad asked me what I wished to do. I replied that I wanted to go along with Mike’s family to church.

Upon my return home, my parents, who had seldom set foot inside a church, asked me what I thought about the Baptist services.

“There’s really not much difference between what they do and what we do at the synagogue,” I replied. “They read from a book. They sing songs and prayers. They listen to a sermon, somebody asks for donations and then they all have lunch. Pretty much the same deal all over.”

Over the years I attended baptisms, weddings, funerals and the like at all of these area churches and never gave it a second thought or felt uncomfortable in any way. As I look back, I feel these experiences made me appreciate all people no matter their faith or background. It was a great influence on my life over the years.

The only episode of antisemitism I recall during this period happened when I was nine years old. And it happened like this:

As I was walking home from Forest Park Elementary School, a kid going along on the other side of the street looked at me and shouted: “Hey, Jew Boy!” I shrugged it off at first, but after a week of this, I was getting annoyed and I finally told my parents about it. My dad reached out and reported the matter to the school principal who called me into his office.

“Do you know this boy?” asked the principal.

“No, sir, I don’t,” I answered, “But he must go to this school, because I see him walking home from here everyday.”

“Would you meet me by the front door tomorrow, thirty minutes before classes start?” he asked. I said that I would. The following morning the principal and I stood beneath the stone steps as the students filed into the school building. I was able to see each face clearly and had no trouble identifying the offender.

Well, as Jason Aldean proclaims in a country song that has become very popular as this book is being written, you can’t “Try That In A Small Town.” Once the boy was identified, we learned that his father worked as a mechanical engineer at International Harvester. And his dad’s boss was my dad!

The “Jew Boy” epithets immediately came to a halt and a few years later I asked my dad if he had fired the kid’s father. I was somewhat surprised by what he told me:

“No, I didn’t fire him. After all, it wouldn’t be right to do that on account of what his son did. I did not remove him, but I had a long discussion with him. I pointed out that his son had obviously learned such bad behavior at home and that it was the man’s responsibility to bring his son up properly. The fellow apologized and told me it would never happen again.” And it never did. Looking back, I remain extremely proud of the way my father handled that situation.

As mentioned, my few Jewish friends at the time lived on Fort Wayne’s more affluent Southside. Closest among them was Peter Rothberg who was born exactly one week before me. There was something else we shared as well. Our Bar Mitzvah. Like all Jewish boys upon reaching the age of 12, Peter and I began preparing for our tradition’s rite of passage. An event that would, upon reaching age 13, bestow upon us full recognition and responsibility as members of the Jewish people. It would also bestow upon us an outpouring of loot in the form of Bar Mitzvah gifts from friends and family. But nothing came without a price and we were required to study to be able to chant our respective Torah portions before the entire congregation. This presented something of problem since there really was no established facility in our small community to teach us the necessary Hebrew text. So, we consulted with our rabbi.

Rabbi Frederic Doppelt, a native of Austria-Hungary, had been the spiritual leader of Congregation Achduth Vesholom (our synagogue) since 1942. It was his innovative idea that Peter and I would celebrate our Bar Mitzvahs on the same day in a dual ceremony. A sort of “double-Berg” Bar Mitzvah (Roth and Spitz). It was, in 1953—and as far as I can tell—the first such Dual Bar Mitzvah in the country. Maybe in the history of the Jewish people. Rabbi Doppelt attempted to enlist the services of a local Israeli engineer to give us Hebrew lessons, but the man was too busy to make any time for us. So, the rabbi provided us with English transliterations of the Hebrew scripture that we both memorized and then parroted during the service without having any idea of what we were actually saying.

Rabbi Doppelt was ordained at Hebrew Union College, the seminary of the Reform branch of Judaism, located in Cincinnati, Ohio. He was a gifted orator and his dedication to humanitarian causes like civil rights was almost legendary. During the war he had served on the Fort Wayne Interracial Committee where he succeeded in integrating the Army’s USO facility. He was the author of several theological books including *Dialogue With God* (1948) and *A Guide for Reform Jews* (1957).

In addition to praying, Rabbi Doppelt also enjoyed playing. Playing the stock market. It was a few years after my Bar Mitzvah that I rode my Schwinn bike downtown and happened to peek through the plate glass window of the Thompson McKinnon stock brokerage office. There was

my rabbi, assiduously poring over a paper strip emanating from a glass-domed machine. Rabbi Doppelt spotted me through the glass and motioned for me to come inside and join him. He explained that the machine was a ticker-tape device and delivered up-to-the-minute price quotes at which stocks on the New York Stock Exchange were being traded.

Evidently, and much to the chagrin of many of his congregants, Rabbi Doppelt was in the habit of taking leave of the synagogue for two to three hours each day. But, instead of making the rounds of the sick and hospitalized, or tending to his other pastoral duties, the rabbi preferred to spend his time at the altar of the brokerage parlor. After explaining how the ticker tape worked, Rabbi Doppelt invited me to sit next to him in the first row of chairs to watch the trading on the “big board” that reported the activities of the commodities, futures, and other markets. He gave me my first lesson in investing when he instructed me to look up Chapter 13, Verse 11 in the Book of Proverbs. I did so and it read:

“Dishonest money dwindleth away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow.”

This advice, along with more such investment wisdom delivered by Rabbi Doppelt, has served me well over the years. You might say that under his tutelage I learned much more about profits than I did about Prophets.

I also learned something even more important thanks to my friendship with my Bar Mitzvah-mate, Peter Rothberg. Peter’s father, Dr. Maurice Rothberg, was the city’s leading ophthalmologist. He had a highly unique practice for the time. His spectacular offices featured multiple exam rooms and whereas other practices were single doctor operations, Dr. Rothberg oversaw a team of top practitioners and was capable of seeing many more patients and generating far more revenue.

As I visited Peter’s luxurious upscale home on Old Mill Road and noted the other trappings of the family’s wealth, I could clearly see the benefits of being a successful ophthalmologist. The family’s financial profile was enhanced by the fact that his uncle Saul, Maurice’s brother, was perhaps the most prominent attorney in Fort Wayne and often provided Maurice with attractive investment opportunities.

Naturally, when years later, I was required to make decisions about my own professional career, my thinking was influenced by what I witnessed through my friendship with Peter Rothberg. But, as I learned a bit later, there was a dark side to paradise.

Dr. Maurice Rothberg was a non-stop workaholic. While some hard-charging Jewish doctors are on the job 24/6—taking off one day for the Sabbath, Dr. Rothberg was a full-blown 24/7. He and his wife, Josephine, maintained separate bedrooms so that when he received an emergency

call in the middle of the night to come perform an urgent eye surgery—as he frequently did—she would not be disturbed.

In 1972, nine months after completing my residency, I was just starting out in private practice in Indianapolis with my partner, Dr. Michael Lashmet, when I received a fateful phone call. It was from Peter’s uncle, attorney Saul Rothberg.

“Dan, it’s my brother, Maurice,” he said solemnly. “He was found lying dead in his office last night. The man simply worked himself to death.” It took a while to absorb the shock, but after accepting my condolences and promising to extend them to Peter, Saul went on.

“Maurice is gone. We want you to come back to Fort Wayne and take over the practice. It won’t cost you a cent and we’ll give you a part ownership of the building. What do you say?”

This was a momentous decision that would direct the future course of my profession and my life. I was being offered a free ticket to take over a highly lucrative medical practice. This was not a decision to be determined lightly. Fortunately, I had great support at the time and, in 20/20 hindsight, I’m able to see clearly that I made the right decision.

I will reveal that decision, and my reasons for making it, in an upcoming chapter.

As for my Bar Mitzvah buddy, Peter Rothberg, we remained good friends in high school, even though he went to South Side High and I was at North Side. He later attended Cranbrook Prep School in Bloomfield, Michigan and then went on to Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. After receiving his degree in architecture from the University of Illinois, Peter went on to pursue a successful career as an architect in Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio. In 1997, at age 57, he was diagnosed with atypical Alzheimer’s disease. Peter, with the stalwart support of his wife, Mary Bittelmeyer, fought the disease bravely for more than a decade till his death in April of 2009.

Another seminal influence on my life during those formative years was my sister, Eleanor. Though she was twelve years older than me, I was nevertheless very close to my big sister, whom I called Ele (*pronounced Ellie*). Given the age disparity, I always assumed that I was a mistake or an “Uh-Oh!” baby. I viewed Ele as the perfect blending of my two parents. She was a living combination of Albert and Dorothy Spitzberg, sharing characteristics inherited from both. This point is best illustrated by her personal philosophy, that I also adopted thanks to her guidance. It was: “Take hold of life, but have fun along the way.” I will tell you more about my sister’s amazing life in a later chapter.

## •CHAPTER TWO•

### High School Confidential

“High School is closer to the core of the American experience than anything else I can think of.”

—*Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.*  
*noted author and fellow Indianapolis resident*

Rogers Markets was one of those traditional, family-owned businesses that constituted the “core of the American experience”...or at least the Midwest American experience. As mentioned in the Prologue, it was to this core—at 3105 N. Anthony Street—that I was dispatched by my mother as soon as I was able to obtain a work permit (age 15 and a half). My primary role was what in super market parlance is today known as a Front End Associate—which is a glorified name for a “bag boy.” Although I was not aware of it at the time, this was an entry level profession I would eventually share with David Letterman who was also mentioned in this book’s Prologue. I fondly recall the time that David brought his old boss, Sid Maurer, owner of Atlas Supermarket in Indianapolis, onto his late night talk show where they demonstrated the proper way to fill a paper grocery bag.

At Sid Maurer’s funeral in 2000, Dave Letterman eulogized his former boss with these words: “He had a lot of trust in me. This when I was at an age when nobody trusted me to do anything right.”

This was likewise true in my case. After some months on the job, store owner, Bill Rogers, entrusted me to begin handling cash and this really helped to boost my self-esteem. I was paid 82 cents per hour and after one month I knew every customer by name. Most of my day was spent helping to carry customers’ purchases out to their cars. While tipping was not permitted, this did not deter some customers who flagrantly disregarded the sanction and would give us a fifteen cent gratuity or occasionally an entire quarter. We “front-end associates” soon learned who these free-spending “whales” were and scrambled to be designated as their “carry-out coordinator.”

Rogers Markets was eventually sold off to various corporate concerns. My store wound up as a Krogers which was convenient because they only had to add the letter “K” to the store’s signage when they took over.

After doing my time at Rogers, I was moved along my career path to the Mary Jane Shoe Store in downtown Fort Wayne. While the name of the store referred to the Mary Jane shoe that was the girls' version of the boys' line of Buster Brown shoes (Mary Jane was Buster Brown's best friend in the comic strip funnies), our store, just like our major competitor, Baker's Shoes, sold adult ladies' footwear as well.

I was paid \$1.00 per hour plus I received a seven percent commission on each pair I sold. The most expensive shoe in the store's inventory sold for \$7.99. So my highest commission came to a whopping 56 cents. But, it was big enough to incentivize me to do all I could to convince every customer that she could not leave the premises without purchasing at least one pair. While I never used high-pressure sales techniques (after all, who is going to be pressured by a high school kid), the quest for commission did drive me to engage in some innovative methods.

For example, if the customer said that the shoe she was trying on was too big, I would inform her that I had a slightly smaller size in the back. I would then take the original shoes, pull back the insole and insert a liner. This would result in making the shoe fit more snugly. If, on the other hand, she complained that the shoes were too tight, I retreated to the back and employed my trusty broom handle to stretch the leather, as I had been instructed by the store manager, and then re-presented the same pair as a more roomy version..

If you've ever seen the movie "Hoosiers," you're aware that Indiana in those days, was home to the most popular and passionate high school basketball program in the nation. As the movie portrayed, the annual state basketball championship gave small town high schools the opportunity to compete with their big city counterparts on a level basketball court. During my freshman year at North Side High, our school got caught up in basketball fever as our team, in the year following the "Miracle of Milan" depicted in "Hoosiers," made it all the way to the final four championship competition in the state capital.

Fort Wayne, at that time, was home to three public high schools. North Side and South Side located in the town's suburbs, and Central High in the inner city. Racial desegregation had not yet been ordered by the courts and hence both North Side and South Side were all white while Central High was all black. For cultural reasons that I won't go into here, Central High perennially had the best-performing basketball team in town. But, North Side's coach Jim Hinga, decided to upgrade the school's basketball program by recruiting two top players from Central.

One was Henry Chapman, considered today one of the top players in that golden era of what was known as Hoosier Hysteria. An era that was populated with the likes of Hall-of-Famers Oscar Robertson and Dick Barnett. During his days at North Side, Chapman broke the Allen

County scoring record. He also broke down barriers for the city's black community. He was a multi-sport athlete who shined as a member of the school's cross-country and track teams. He joined the North Side varsity basketball team in his Sophomore season along with teammate Charlie Lyons. They together broke the color barrier by being the first black athletes to play varsity basketball for North Side High.

Chapman (41) and Lyons (40) were welcomed on the team as brothers. Brothers who delivered my high school for the first and only time to the state championships where they unfortunately lost to Dick Barnett's team, state champions, Gary Roosevelt.

Of course, as much as I loved the game, at 5 ft. 8 in., I was never going to make the team. This fact perhaps contributed to my somewhat limited career as a teenage Romeo. My most sanguine memory in that department involved a very alluring classmate by the name of Barbee. I finally worked up the nerve to ask Barbee out on a date. Her response was direct.

"I can't. I can't go out with you."

"Uh, okay," I said trying to sound understanding, "but why not?"

"Cause you're Jewish," she replied as if the answer were as plain as the nose on my face.

Believe it or not, I ran into Barbee again a half century later at our 50th High School Reunion. She came over and I introduced her to my wife, Lana (You'll meet Lana in a future chapter). After the introductory pleasantries, it was evident that Barbee had had a few when she leaned in close and whispered to us both.

"I made a big f\*cking mistake." and she teetered off.

Lana commented: "That lady was all over you. What did she mean about making a mistake?" I explained about how she had rejected my advances back in high school because of her ingrained antisemitism.

"I guess she could see that I've been pretty successful and so she figures she could have put up with a Jew given the benefits she would have enjoyed."

There was a particular episode during those years that stands out in my memory because it led to a romantic connection that I'll describe in a future chapter. It went like this.

It was a chilly Friday night during the winter of my junior year that found me sitting around a poker table with my buddies in our basement. My dad came down and asked why I wasn't at the NFTY (pronounced Nifty) convention at the synagogue. NFTY stood for North American Federation of Temple Youth. It was the national youth group of the Reform Judaism movement and there was a regional retreat or convention going on at our synagogue. Jewish teens from all

over Indiana and Ohio had descended upon Fort Wayne for a weekend of socializing with a bit of religious activity thrown in. My father was, at the time, the president of the congregation and I knew very well that I was expected to be there...but, I preferred to play poker. I tried to weasel out of it.

“Dad,” I said as I shuffled the cards, “I think you’ve got the wrong date. It’s next weekend.” He wasn’t having any of my bluff.

“It’s this weekend, Dan,” he stated firmly, “ and you’ve got two choices. Either you head over there right now or you’re grounded for two weeks.”

“Last hand,” I responded. “Everybody ante a quarter.”

That night turned out to be one filled with adventure and romantic opportunity. I will share what happened in an upcoming chapter.

While I liked playing poker and I loved watching basketball games, the sport that I truly enjoyed the most in high school—because I was not merely a spectator—was baseball. I had played Little League in elementary school and managed to make the cut for Pony League in high school. One of the reasons I was found attractive by the powers that be in that league was that I’m a southpaw and although I do a lot of things with my right hand, when on the mound, I pitched with my left. Although I was not particularly great, this distinction did make me unique and a rather scarce commodity. I was considered Fort Wayne’s version of New York Yankees’ southpaw pitcher, Whitey Ford.

Speaking of the Yankees, nearby Bluffton native, Everett Scott, Sr., had played for the Yankees in the 1920’s and at this time his son, Everett Scott, Jr., owned a sporting goods store in Fort Wayne called Scott’s. The store sponsored our team and, as the backs of our uniforms proclaimed, we were known as Scott’s Yankees.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, my best buddy in elementary school was my next-door-neighbor, Mike Schwanz. I’m happy to say that the friendship endured through high school and beyond. This friendship helped me find summer employment after my term at Mary Jane’s Shoe Emporium had run its course.

Mike’s father had died when Mike was a youngster and he was living with his step-dad, Luther Hallett, next door to us in the city’s blue collar north side neighborhood. While you might assume that as an engineer at Bowser Pump, my father could have gotten me a summer job there, that was not the case. Unfortunately, they had a company policy that prohibited the hiring of family members by company executives. So, that was out. But, my dad was able to hire Mike

who, thanks to having been given that leg up, ultimately became a skilled mechanical engineer. He always credited my dad for his own success in that profession.

By way of reciprocation, Mike's stepfather, Luther Hallett—who was then serving as the city's deputy mayor—helped me land a summer job with the city. That first summer, before my senior year, was spent mostly working as an errand boy, delivering contracts from one municipal office to another. I was not too happy about this sort of grunt work and by the time my stint had ended, I had decided I would not be doing this again the following summer. Fortunately, after graduation, greener pastures lay ahead.