An American Dream

THE LEVIN FAMILY CHRONICLES

By John Appleyard
The Levin Chronicles: An American Dream was prepared for the family by John Appleyard and members of the staff of the John Appleyard Agency, Inc. using a variety of videotaped memories, interviews, and information taken from a variety of family and public records of their times, plus data supplied by resources in Lithuania; Butte, Montana; and histories dealing with Alaska and the Klondike gold strike.

Special thanks are noted to the Pensacola Historical Preservation Board, the Pensacola Historical Society, and others who made photo or art materials available.

May 1999
This story of the Levin family
is dedicated to our parents,
to whom we all owe so much.

David, Herman, Fred, Stanley and Allen
Preface

A Century of Progress
The Levin Family Chronicles

When does a family suddenly stop, take stock, and begin to prepare an account of the lives of its members? Why should it do so? Who may be interested in such a story? Does such a tale have a future?

In the last quarter of the 20th century a great many families began to seek answers to such questions. Is “a family history” really worthwhile? Who may read it...today...tomorrow? Will there be value in such a chronicle for those who will come later...twenty-five...fifty...one hundred years from now? Others ask: if there is value, and if I don’t start the process, who will?

Early in 1998 the five Levin brothers, all natives of Pensacola, all past fifty years of age, addressed those questions, and determined that the end of the century, the end of a millennium, was a good time to assemble their thoughts and memories, trace known facts about ancestors, and record all for their own enjoyment and for the guidance of those who will come...some day. The process itself was relaxed, for there was no publication date, no deadline which must be met. Instead, research became a form of repeating exercises which the brothers and their families had enjoyed in the past, when they sat down together to listen to stories told by older family members. There were inquiries, too, made of persons who had known their parents and of more remote members of both sides of their family. There were probes into remote places, where earlier generations had lived and worked, and where they had passed through the screening of immigration. To no one’s surprise, the more the brothers learned, the more there was to discover.

When at length the account was completed, all agreed that this might well be just the first step. After all, some sequences in the story, especially the early ones, left significant voids...with many questions yet to be answered. Will it ever be possible to dig through past barriers and discover more about the men and women who lived, worked and died in northeastern Europe, many years ago? Perhaps. Perhaps not. In any case, these pages will provide background to be enjoyed by interested persons living now, and those yet to join this world. The latter will rejoice in the many accomplishments that are recorded here. Perhaps, after the reading, some may be inspired to dig deeper, or at least to update the narrative by listing their own stories.
The Levin brothers and their father, Abe. Many in Pensacola have agreed that few families better typified the American dream than the Levins, whose grandfather arrived as an immigrant just a century ago.

Chapter 1
Setting the Stage to Look Back

The month of January 1999, was seen by some as the pinnacle of a century-long series of events in the lives of several generations of Pensacola's Levin family. On two mornings, just eleven days apart, the family's reputation was catapulted to new heights. Multiple news media carried the pair of stories far and wide, for the events involved were deservedly national (or even international) in scope. At the heart of the activities stood one of five Levin Brothers - Fredric - whose exploits and honors had generated the celebrations. However, portions of the news involved Levin brothers other than Fredric, which made the announcements all the more special. Also of note: while the two events were close together, they were totally unrelated in their origins.

Event Number One began at noon on January 11. The scene was set in the bayfront Skopelos restaurant, where 140 of the community's leaders had gathered for a fine luncheon and then a program unmatched in the city's more than 400-year history.

Speakers included former Florida Governor Reubin O'D. Askew; Dr. John Lombardi, President of the University of Florida; and Dr. Richard Matasar, Dean of the University of Florida School of Law. The focus of the program and the several presentations was that Fred Levin was announcing a gift to the law school of $10 million, the largest such contribution in the more than one-hundred-year history of the university. Dr. Lombardi even unveiled an orange and blue sign which announced that, henceforth, the law school's name would become the Fredric G. Levin College of Law. Dr. Lombardi also told the audience that the $10 million would be matched by state funds, enabling the law school to rise to new standards academically. More endowed professorships now would be possible, including one to be named for Fred Levin's older brother, David, founder of the Pensacola firm of Levin, Middlebrooks, and others.

The applause from the gathered political figures, university alumni, friends and law partners was deafening! The Levins already
had been generous to their alma mater; however, this gift and its size was unprecedented.

How did the generous gesture come to pass? How could the Pensacola trial lawyer announce in one day the aid to his university and then reveal a second contribution of $2 million to a growing family-related foundation to underwrite assistance to agencies aiding the poor and disadvantaged? After all, very few Americans, even in the lush times of the late 1990s, could or would make gifts of that size.

The answer had come from Levin’s part in a gigantic legal battle which had caused the nation’s tobacco companies to agree to pay more than $13 billion to the State of Florida over a protracted period of time as compensation for the state’s cost of caring for tobacco-induced illnesses covered by the Medicaid program. A dozen firms of attorneys would share a quarter of the award. Fred Levin, as a confidant of then Governor Lawton Chiles, had been an engineer of the legal and legislative strategy which made the settlement come to pass.

Now the initial payments towards Levin’s compensation had arrived, making it possible for him to exercise his generosity.

All of that story, on its own merits, was carried to widespread audiences.

But then, in the course of the January 11 presentations, Levin also made public the opening statements related to the family’s huge second January event. In attendance at the Skopelos gathering was Koby A. Koomson, Ambassador to the United States from the Republic of Ghana. Stated in short that day: On January 22, Levin would become a chief in the Akuapem Traditional Area of Ghana and was to receive the prestigious Akuapem Award. Henceforth, Levin would have a tribal title; Nana Ofori Agyeman I. The tribal induction ceremonies would be held in an appropriate setting at the United Nations in New York City.

The press made only modest use of that information on January 11. But the following week those events, with international overtones, did come to pass. Fred Levin, his wife and children, his brothers and their spouses, plus almost all members of the Levin, Middlebrooks law firm winged to New York City and were present for a ceremony which drew scores of high-level attendees at the United Nations. Next morning the event rated half a page plus headlines in the tabloid New York Daily News.

Thus by the evening of January 22, 1999, the Levin family had been involved in two momentous activities in less than two weeks. Photographs, a high profile biographical account of prior Fred Levin successes as a trial lawyer; both of these had become major news. It was all so unique, so rewarding, so different.

But...how did all of this come about? Who were - are - the Levins? Where did they come from? What other tales have been recorded about the several brothers, their parents, and others within their family fellowship?

Perhaps the best way to answer those multiple questions is to turn back the pages of the calendar to see how it all began and progressed, when, and where, and how.
Fred Levin at his investiture as a tribal chief for the African nation of Ghana. That event, staged in the United Nations headquarters, helped set the scene for a recital of the Levin family chronicles.
Chapter II
Max Levin’s Journeys

In 1949 a group of Pensacola business leaders convened to begin planning an event which they hoped would become an annual celebration and historical observance, to promote understanding of the city’s life under a series of national flags. The Fiesta, which held its first observance the following year, encouraged a deeper study of local history, and from this came a unique discovery and understanding, which was recorded more or less like this:

Many of the Gulf Coast region’s principal events began with some action far away, an action which, by one device or another, then triggered happenings in Florida’s Panhandle. That same statement might be used to begin the saga of the Levin family. By the end of the 20th century, that family’s third, fourth and fifth generations had become a part of, or were shaping, a host of significant local events. Their origins, however, had been far away, in a time when the world looked upon people, religions, civil rights, education and good works in a light far different than would be observed in the United States in times approaching the year 2000.

The story began in Lithuania, a tiny state on the Baltic Sea which prior to 1900 had been under the rule of the Russian Czars. The Lithuanian people had enjoyed a remarkable history. At one time (in the 16th century) the country had been united with Poland to become the largest state in all of Europe. Lithuanian armed forces had rushed to Vienna in the early 1550s to halt the invasion of the Turkish ruler Suleiman, who was attempting to carry Islam from east to west across the continent.

![Map of Lithuania](image)

Lithuania, birthplace of Max Levin, is the southernmost of the three Baltic countries. Lithuania was often a pawn in European disputes, and was in turmoil when Max Levin fled.

It was just prior to this time that a substantial Jewish population had begun settlement in both Poland and Lithuania. There may have been some earlier Jewish settlement there, coming when Jews were expelled from Palestine in 70 AD and 119 AD. However, much more significant migration came in waves beginning in 1290, when
Edward I expelled all Jews from England. Similar expulsions had come in France in the following century, from Spain in 1492, and then, from Germany, at about that same time. Turkey, Poland and Lithuania, and to a lesser degree Russia, had provided havens for those in flight. Later, there were similar movements, in both directions. Then, in the 1880s, pressures were applied against Jews in several European nations, making Jewish residents of all economic classes scapegoats when government economic or civil programs failed. It was in that period that many Jews fled to the United States, settling in New York City, Chicago, and in the South. Some joined family members who had come to the South from Germany following failed revolutions there in 1848.

Lithuania, which by the 1890s had become a largely fishing and agricultural economy, had been much reduced in size and had few significant cities. The Russian nobility controlled much of the economy, and many Jews lived in rural areas, working small plots of land, or surviving as shopkeepers. Few had access to higher education or the professions. In 1894 Nicholas II had succeeded his father, Alexander III, as Russia’s Czar, and Nicholas had immediately begun seeking alliances to protect his country against what he feared was the onset of new foreign military alliances. Russia was considered the protector of the Slavic people. The Slavs had an ongoing fear of neighbors, east and west. These included Turkey, Austria-Hungary, a now united and increasingly powerful Germany, and...in the far East, Japan. Nicholas entered into a formal alliance with France, and with his cousin now in charge of the country’s military, elected to establish military conscription of all young men. It was that action which triggered the first steps in the movement of the Levin family to the Gulf Coast.

The circumstances of the Levin ancestors in Lithuania may never be known. Only tiny fragments of information were recorded in the United States, and often they generated more questions than answers. However, this much can be stated with some confidence:

Into the 1880s and 1890s, the family lived and worked in a rural area. The breadwinner’s occupation is uncertain, but was probably in agriculture. The family included three sons and one daughter. When the youngest son, Max, was just three, the father died. How? Why? There are no answers. Into the 1890s, the older children felt the cold chill of the Czar’s outreach breathing upon them, and they appear to have left home to seek their own way.

Around 1890 Max had grown to age thirteen and one half, and now the Russian army’s call for conscripts reached into Lithuania. Young Max, probably with his mother’s blessing, chose to flee rather than serve. We can only imagine what the parting must have been like. How did she carry on her life? Where did she go? What did she do? This story cannot say. It is almost certain, however, that mother and son never saw one another again.

Confirming those findings was a 1998 comment by Ausra Semanskiene, of the Lithuanian Embassy in Washington.

“Thousands of Lithuanians as well as Lithuanian Jews and people of other nationalities left Europe in search of economic advantages. European economies were disturbed by overproduction of agricultural products and commodities. Lithuanian Jews of that time
were mainly involved in small businesses, crafts and trade, the segments of the economy which suffered a lot from the general decline of the crisis caused purchasing power of the population. Many of those affected by the crisis chose to leave the country with centuries-long Lithuanian Jewish history for the United States - the country of new economic possibility.”

Young Max fled south into Germany. Now, free from the Russian grasp, he obtained a post as a cook’s helper in a lumber camp. Apparently, he was no great success at this, for the only surviving tale from that adventure was one in which he mishandled the cooking of rice and ended up with the meal spilled over the cook shack’s floor. It is believed that Max remained in Germany approximately two years, earning money for his move to the United States.

From Germany, flight took Max west, first to England, then to the port of Baltimore. We can only imagine him using his wits, obtaining a steerage passage on some inexpensive tramp steamer and making the crossing. There appears to have been an older brother already in the United States. In all probability, he helped guide his younger brother into this new land. Later that brother located in Seattle, where he prospered as a hops farmer.

Family legend has it that prior to this time the name had been Weber, or Webber. How this came to be Levin is difficult to deduce. There are many stories of how customs officials, unable to understand or translate what immigrants were trying to say in name pronunciation, simply wrote on the necessary documents what the inspectors thought the person said. Perhaps that was what happened to Max Weber. Max somehow had a sponsor in Baltimore who had helped him obtain his passage and who might upon arrival be responsible for him. Some have said that perhaps that person (if indeed he did exist) may have been named Levin...and so had his name transferred. However, it is certain that Max, now nearing the age of eighteen, left the Baltimore area, carrying the Levin name. And he was on his way to becoming an American.
Chapter III

Montana, the Klondike and the East

It is unfortunate that there are no firm records to confirm what happened to young Max Levin next. What he did at first in Baltimore is not known. How he made his next major move also is hidden by time, and the where-why-when must be assembled by utilizing what little is known of what Levin did.

How Max made his initial contacts in the United States remains clouded in history. And how he met his bride-to-be is unknown. However, it appears that Rachel had been married before, and by rare coincidence to a man named Levin. Did that name somehow influence the name Max took as an American? Again, that is uncertain. One story common to those times was that immigrants coming from Europe had heard that American authorities were leery about bringing too many “foreign families” into the United States, and that as a result some of the arrivals adopted names of families already present in the country. Was that a factor? We don’t know.

However, it is reasonably certain that Max and Rachel were married prior to his departure to the West, and that they arrived on the Montana frontier as man and wife.

Living as he had in rural Lithuania, and then in the forest regions of Germany, it is reasonable to project that Levin became knowledgeable in the work of the trapper. Late in the century, skins and hides retained a good market almost everywhere, and it was a trade which appealed to many who lived in remote areas, or who had little opportunity for more sophisticated training.

Fur trapping and trading in the 1890s continued to be a viable business in parts of the American West. By assembling the small bits of information known, it is possible to place young Levin in Butte, Montana, in about 1894. There our version of his story places him as a fur-and-skins trader. However, that version may not have been correct.

Butte by then was a growing city. Its 1885 population had been 15,000, with the majority of the employed working in the rapidly expanding copper mines, in copper smelters, in the community’s infrastructure and transportation, or in the hide and skins traffic. In just over a decade - by 1894-95 - the city had become more cosmopolitan. It had hotels, a hospital, a school system with over twenty structures. There were twenty-eight churches and the original Utah & Northern Railroad had by then become part of the Oregon Short Line System, and was connected to the Northern Pacific and other roads at nearby junctions. There were paved streets, electricity, and what the city’s promoters described as “a most healthful climate.” Large public buildings had begun to dot the landscape, most of them with handsome spires or clock towers. A streetcar system was being installed across much of the city, and as one historian recorded: “Where once the humble shacks of the early settlers stood, there now
remains but an occasional grim ruin, like a mocking skull, to conjure up the humanities of former days.”

Max Levin had arrived in this period of transition, and he appears to have prospered, along with many other late pioneers. Where did the family live in those early times? What did they do?

Records are absent, made all but impossible to trace because a huge fire destroyed the Butte area’s courthouse early in the 20th century. Birth records of the Levin’s first children also were destroyed.

What is certain is that his business was proving successful. Stories which circulated through the family stated that by 1898-99 Max Levin had approximately $6,000 in the bank. He was doing very well when what was seemingly a new and greater opportunity appeared. This was the great gold strike in the Klondikes, part of which was in Alaska.

Alaska had been purchased by the United States from Russia in 1867 for $2 million, less than two cents per acre. The vast area had been all but unpopulated, but portions of it had been explored in part early in the 1860s by naturalist Robert Kennicott. Kennicott was working for the International Telegraph Company, in search of a route to run the telegraph from the American West Coast to St. Petersburg, Russia. Kennicott’s enthusiastic reports and exhibits, sent back to his sponsors, the federal government and the Smithsonian Institution, provided much of the information which encouraged Secretary of State William Seward to proceed with the purchase. From 1867 forward there had been modest American investment and development, but little of significance occurred in “Seward’s Folly” until 1897. Then, this report was recorded by a contemporary historian:

“The country was stirred during the summer of 1897 by the reports, which proved well founded, of the discovery of enormous deposits of gold on the Yukon River in Alaska. Two-score veteran miners went into the region the previous fall, not one of whom possessed more than his outfit and a few hundred dollars. When they came out, each brought $5,000 to $90,000, while many left behind them claims valued at $20,000 to $1,000,000, which were to be worked by their partners. Naturally it was believed at first that these reports were exaggerated, but the display of the gold itself by the returning miners removed all doubt of the amazing richness of the new find.

“A company of these fortunate individuals reached Seattle July 17, direct from St. Michael’s, at the mouth of the Yukon, where they had been at work in the Klondike placer-mining districts, from which more than $1,500,000 in gold was taken the previous winter. The party brought back one and one-half tons of gold in nugget and dust, worth in round numbers $1,000,000.

“The Klondike is a river flowing into the Yukon, in the Northwest Territory. The distance is fifty miles by river from Forty Mile, on the Alaska boundary, to the scene of the latest finds, and about forty miles in a direct line. The town of Dawson City, beautifully situated on the Yukon, near the mouth of the Klondike, promised to become the mining center of the Northwest territory. The creeks comprising the bonanza districts are Bonanza, Eldorado, Victoria, Adams, McCormack, Reddy Bulion, Gulch, Bear, Baker, and Chee-
Chaw-Ka. The Main Fork, Hunker, and Gold Bottom creeks are in the Hunker District.

"Dr. W. H. Dall, one of the curators of the National Museum, Washington, made this statement: 'I have no doubt that the facts as told by the press are in the main strictly correct. The Klondike gold-fields, however, are not in Alaskan territory. They are in British provinces, in what is known as the Northwest Territories. The Klondike River, which has been on the map for about twenty years, but not under that name, branches from the Yukon River not far from the boundary between Canada and Alaska.'

"Steamers run from Sitka there and from Seattle and Tacoma. The distance from the head of Chilkoot Inlet to the Klondike is about 500 miles. To reach there it is necessary to cross the coast mountains and the chain of lakes and short streams which form the headwaters of the Yukon River. It is on these streams that the gold is found.

"It is a country in which it is very hard to find food, as there is practically no game. Before the whites went into the region there were not more than 300 natives. They have hard work to support themselves on account of the scarcity of game.

"The thermometer sometimes goes down to 68 degrees below zero in January to February. The cold, however, is not so intense as may be imagined, and 68 degrees there could not be compared with the same here.

"There are two routes to the field, one which I have mentioned before, from Chilkoot Inlet over the mountains. The other is up the Yukon River, which is about 1,500 miles in length, or three times as far as the other. Flat-bottomed steamers run from St. Michael's up the Yukon. The return trip from the fields is much easier, and had been taken by the miners who have made their piles and recently returned to the United States with them by way of Seattle.

"The Pacific Coast Steamship Company runs steamers every four days from Seattle. The manner in which supplies can be transported over the mountains is by mules, taking time and expense. As I remarked before, it is a country in which there is practically no sustenance, and food must be taken to the gold fields."

Max Levin got "gold fever." Little is known of how he proceeded, or when, or even if his young wife accompanied him; perhaps she did, perhaps not. The pair would have traveled via one of the reported routes, and pursued their fortune amidst the many hardships. It appears that they arrived well after the first announcements of the strike, and from that moment encountered bad luck. Levin had apparently been a farmer, perhaps a fur trapper, surely a fur and skins trader. But his experience in surface mining was all but nil. His adventure was a total failure. Again, piecing together assumptions with a few known facts, it appears that he may have departed Butte for the Klondike at age 21, in 1899, and returned two years later, at twenty-three. Another of the legends passed down through the generations was that young Levin had used his $6,000 savings from his Butte operations as his grub stake, and that he had returned to the United States and to Butte a sadder and poorer man. He seems to have lost all his money, and to have returned, along with other unsuccessful miners, on board a vessel chartered by the United States
government to transport such men back to the mainland. Again, piece-meal accounts put him back in Butte, and in his former trade, about 1901. Here he settled down to business once more.

Within two years the Levin’s first son, named Nathan, was born. Then came a sister, Dora. In 1907 the twins, Bessie and Abe, arrived in the world. Once again family legend says that all of these children were born using the services of a midwife. All may have seemed to be going well, but then tragedy struck. Young Nathan became ill, and his case was mis-diagnosed. The appendicitis from which he suffered was not properly treated, and he died, probably of a ruptured appendix.

Information available does not spell out how or where the Levins had sought health care. It may have been that they did not take advantage of some of what was available. A historical sketch of Butte in that era has a photograph of a large and handsome hospital building. However, the city overview does not describe the depth of medical skills present. For whatever reason, Nathan died. The parents were distraught.

These were sad times for the family. Nathan’s death had cast a pall over life in the Butte area, and Rachel in particular felt that it was not safe to remain in a place where health care seemed less than sophisticated. Then, too, her family was in Virginia. She may have been homesick…but that is conjecture. The twins, Abe and Bessie, were just over a year old, and their mother’s concerns for her young children were surely evident. The move was made. The year was either 1908 or 1909.

By now Max Levin had recouped a portion of his Klondike losses. His family made the long trip safely, and after careful analysis of their situation, a decision was made to make a radical change in the breadwinner’s career. Possibly with his father-in-law’s assistance, Max accepted an opportunity which would provide both a roof over their heads and a place of business. A building, purchased for $4,000, made it possible for Max Levin to enter the grocery business. The Levins moved in and made Huntersville, Virginia their home. Huntersville was a modest community close to Norfolk. The move was a good one. Rachael felt very close to her parents and siblings; the grocery business was a reasonable success, and was something in which many family members might play a role.

Baltimore at the turn of the 19th century was a seaport with an unruly reputation. There were many places of entertainment with unique names and designs.

Max and Rachel Levin, taken in their later Baltimore years.
Chapter IV
Abe Levin’s Childhood

Abe Levin’s recollections shed little light on his own activities as a child. However, one story illustrates how his own character was molded. He told of the event this way:

“I had just begun school and was well—maybe six years old. One day a little girl in the classroom came up to me and for some reason wrapped her arms around me and kissed me. The teacher was nearby and saw this, especially when I pulled back and kicked the girl right in the shins! The girl began to cry and the teacher came over to comfort her. As part of the comforting, she turned to me and said: ‘Now Abe, look what you’ve done! You apologize, right now!’ I stared right at the lady and said: ‘No, I won’t.’ The teacher repeated her order, and again I refused to apologize. Now the teacher marched to her desk and got out one of those old twelve inch rulers we all used to have. She marched back to me, took my hand and said, ‘If you don’t apologize, I’m going to smack your hand. Now, will you?’ I said no once more. And sure enough, she smacked me good, two or three times. Then she stopped and said: ‘All right...now will you apologize?’ Again, I refused...and she hit me again. Well, this went on through three or four more smackings...and in the end the teacher just gave up. By now the girl had stopped crying, and the teacher just shrugged her shoulders and said something like, ‘Abe Levin, you’re a bad, bad boy!’ And...well...I can only say that this girl never kissed me again.”

On a second occasion a student (possibly the same little girl) approached Abe and, perhaps to get even, stuck the sharp point of a lead pencil into his cheek. By late afternoon, when Abe returned home, the cheek was badly swollen. His mother took one look and scolded him in Yiddish, believing that he had done the unacceptable and placed a large piece of candy in his mouth. Abe denied the charge, and tried to explain. Even his explanation didn’t hit home at first. But finally a physician’s help was required to ease the swelling and the pain.

When he completed the primary grades, Abe, like siblings who would follow, entered a local high school. He opted for a commercial course, one where he would learn some typing and bookkeeping and what he called “administrative courses” along with the conventional academic basic subjects.

“We had a good school, and I got a good education,” he said later. “The teachers were mostly women, and they were all very anxious to have us learn. My parents were anxious, too, and made sure I did my lessons at home.”

By now the Levin family was complete. It included an older sister, Dora, the twins Abe and Bessie plus Harry and Bennie. Another young son had died at 15 months.

As soon as they were old enough to be helpful, Abe, his brothers, and sisters were given tasks in the store. It was this groundwork that set the stage for a number of things Abe would do later. By the
time he had reached fourteen or fifteen, Abe also gained a duty he both liked and worried about. By then the family had a horse named Blusie which pulled a vehicle in which groceries might be delivered. There were many families nearby who were paid by the week and would always buy their supplies late in the afternoon on paydays.

"Sometimes they bought a lot of things, and it became my job to carry these people and their purchases back to their homes," Abe said. "I was very young, but as the oldest boy, I was given the job of transporter. Now...most of those folks lived a good ways away. To go to their homes, we had to drive past a cemetery. That was fine, too...except that sometimes we had to drive by at night.

"Now, I won't say how this happened, or if someone played tricks on those folks, but there were several occasions when we'd be going by at night and something would seem to rise up out in the cemetery, something that looked like...could have been...maybe...a ghost! Well, I'll tell you that more than once those folks just piled out of the horse and buggy and ran for home...leaving me in their dust! I never have forgotten that. And I never solved the mystery either."

There were two other episodes which became ingrained in Abe's memory. One was his early enjoyment of motion pictures.

"I loved to go to the movies, and Saturday afternoon was a kid's time in those days. You know, there was the feature, often a cowboy picture or some kind of horror film, and there was a comedy and a cartoon, a newscast and...well...other things like coming attractions. A movie cost ten cents for kids, and I always hoped that my father would let me go. I had a little saved on the side, but I wouldn't rob my own bank. If Papa didn't come up with the ten cents, I stayed home...but most of the time he did.

"Another family practice which taught me a good lesson was that each week my mother and father tried to make certain that they put $10 in the local building and loan. They were building security. Sometimes they had to scrape pretty hard to do that, but they usually could...and did. All of the children witnessed the talk between the parents on the need to save. We were impressed."

At one time in his teens, Abe faced a health crisis.

"I developed what they called inflammatory arthritis," he said. "This threatened my ability to walk, and even my life. The doctor put me to bed at home, and provided what medicines they had at that time. Week after week I was a bed patient.

"But then a miracle occurred...or at least I thought it was. Our house and store caught on fire. The smoke came pouring up the stairs, and there I was in bed, supposedly not able to walk. Well, that signal got me up in a hurry! I pulled on my pants and went down the stairs and outside. The fire wasn't too bad...but suddenly I was OK. I could walk. The doctor couldn't believe it, but...there I was."

Abe's boyhood had included the years of the first World War. His parents had settled into Huntersville as good solid citizens, doing their part in the local temple and helping with good causes. Abe remembered:

"The temple had a big congregation. On religious holidays there would be 500-600 people at services, and, of course, in those days they separated men and women. I had my bar mitzvah in those
days, and as I finished school, I felt that I was ready to start out on my own. I guess I was a typical kid of the mid-1920s. These were lush times, and I had heard about people making big money down in Florida. The land boom was on, and a good many from our area had been to Florida and had stories to tell about it. I wanted to go, and finally Papa said OK. I had saved a little money (I was paid about $5 a week for my work in the store), and he bought me a round trip ticket on the train all the way to Ft. Lauderdale. It was August 1925, and I just knew I was going to make my fortune. I was alone...on my own.”

To show his determination he promptly cashed in his return ticket. There would be no going back.

*The Miami of the late 1920s had begun its move to become a major city. Much of South Florida had boomed during the 1920s.*
Chapter V  
Life in South Florida

The Ft. Lauderdale area may have been booming, but housing for itinerants was in short supply. At first Abe found a place in a garage which he shared with seven others. Rent was $10 per week. Food was taken at a boarding house where he purchased a meal ticket which the owner punched after each meal.  

“One Sunday I slept in because I had worked late,” he recalled. “I skipped breakfast, but got to the table for lunch. I ate well, and when I gave my ticket to be punched, the lady in charge punched the ticket twice. ‘Hey,’ I said, ‘I just ate one meal.’ But she came right back: ‘I’m wise to you young guys. You skip breakfast but then come for dinner and eat enough for a lumberjack. I lose that way. No, I charge what’s fair.’ Well...what could I do? She was right.”

Abe had enjoyed considerable experience in his father’s grocery store, and so he sought work in a market. There were several chain stores there, including a Piggly-Wiggly, and in short order Abe had made friends with a young man who leased a department from the manager. This was in produce. Another friend leased the meat department. Abe got a job in produce, making $25 a week...which at the moment seemed like a fortune. Then the store manager discovered that Abe could type and do office work, and he was offered even more money to do such work for the store. Those days in late 1925 must have been a job seeker’s paradise, for there were more opportunities than bright young workers. Now Abe learned of an even better chance in Hollywood, Florida, and so moved there. Once again he did well immediately, and quickly proved to his employer that he was a man of value.

“This store, like most others, sold a lot of commodities in bulk,” Abe said. “That meant that they bought sugar, flour, beans and that sort of thing in 100 pound sacks. Then the store had to break the materials down into saleable containers...you know...ten pounds, maybe twenty-five. That took time because the materials had to be weighed and packed and sealed as the customers waited. I saw that the store was doing this, and that this produced traffic jams. I found that on one busy day the store took in $1,250. I figured that they lost that much business because they couldn’t put the customers through.

“So I asked the manager to let me try something. I came in early and prepackaged a whole lot of things, the things people asked for most. When the traffic began there were no more delays. The customers just went right on through. That day the store’s volume rose to $2,700. The manager was sold, and I got a raise.”

It was then that Abe’s new friend, a man named Greenburg, leased the produce department in a Hollywood Piggly-Wiggly. He asked Abe to join him. One morning the butcher didn’t show up and the manager, desperate for help, asked Abe if he could cut meat. Abe never hesitated.

“I made some odd cuts of meat, but I got by,” he said.

“Greenburg and I were friends, and we were both young and
trying to make money,” Abe said. Abe Levin had learned early the value of promotions in the grocery business, and now he had a stake in finding and using them. On one occasion he learned of a citrus grower who had a huge surplus of grapefruit. The man wanted to dispose of the fruit at almost any price, so it wouldn’t be wasted. Abe made him an offer for the lot, then the store advertised grapefruit for one cent each! People came and, of course, bought other items, too.

On another occasion Abe learned of a grower who had a surplus of fresh strawberries. The man wanted seventy-five cents a quart…and had 200 boxes to sell. Abe took them all. He quickly found another store where a friend was willing to purchase 100 of the boxes for a $1 each. Then, Abe put the balance on sale in his own store for $1.25 per quart.

“I was learning, and in little deals like that I began to put money in the bank. It wasn’t long before I had over $2,500, and I was carrying most of it around in a big roll, to impress people.”

It was during this period that Abe met Rose Lefkowitz. Rose was part of a large Jewish family. The father, Max, had immigrated from Poland. He was a shoemaker by trade, and had served four years in the Polish army before coming to Fall River, Massachusetts. When he reached America, Max and his wife, Anna, already had four children: Sam, Louis, Abe and Herman. (Shortly after their arrival, Louis would become part of the American Expeditionary Force in France, where he suffered terrible disfigurement from an enemy gas attack.) Three other sons, Morris, Harry and Pete, arrived a few years later.

After a time in Massachusetts they lived briefly in Danville, Virginia, where Rose was born. Next the Lefkowitz family relocated to North Carolina. They were vacationing in Florida, and they were present in the Sunshine State, when Abe Levin met Rose. Both were young, and while Abe later described several incidents in their courtship, he never did relate how the couple actually met, though in all probability her brother, Morris introduced them. However, once their relationship drew a bit closer this event took place:

“Rose had a cousin whom she admired, and when I invited her to go to the movies with me she insisted that the cousin come along, too. I agreed. (Later I figured out that he was asked along to sort of look me over.)

“Well, after the picture was over I asked if she’d like something to drink, and she said she would, a Coca-Cola. The cousin wanted orange juice, which cost a dime. I had only fifteen cents in my pocket, so I ordered water! Then, and I can’t believe this, but I just sat there. I couldn’t talk, and I didn’t drink. I don’t know that I made much of an impression.”

However, Rose’s brother, Morris, took a liking to Abe. The two got along well, and Morris became Abe’s champion within the Lefkowitz family.

Finally, the time came when Abe was ready to pop the question. He had told his parents about Rose, and that he planned to ask her to marry him. By now, too, he had splurged and used some of his savings to purchase a used Model-T Ford.

“We were in the car, parked when I asked her,” he said grin-
ning. “I had put on my best appearance, too. I was wearing a brand new $16.95 double breasted-suit...and thought I looked pretty sharp. Happily, she said yes!

“Later, somebody made up a story that if she had said no, I planned to walk right out into the ocean, for we were parked near it. But, you know, I’d never have done that. After all, it was a new suit.”

Late in 1927, with marriage in the offing, Abe made a trip home to see his family. He made the trip in his car. As he drove north, his future brother-in-law, Pete, was a passenger as far as Greensboro. Pete was about to become involved in business there. Several of Rose’s brothers would enter the jewelry business in various parts of North Carolina.

When he reached home and related his adventures, Abe told his parents and siblings one story about how he had impressed his future father-in-law.

“Mr. Max was very big in the temple there, and he had accepted the challenge to raise money for the Yeshiva. We had been at a gathering where Max was literally going person-to-person for this purpose, and he was getting, oh, fifty cents or at most a dollar from people. Well, when he came to me, I pulled out this big roll of bills I’d accumulated, and I peeled off a $5 bill. I figured this would show him that I was someone of substance. Did it work? I don’t know...but he never opposed the marriage.”

Abe’s parents listened to all of these stories, and smiled at Abe’s enthusiasm for his future bride. However, they cautioned:

“Take your time...don’t hurry...you’re young...you’ve got lots of time.”

Abe did wait...but not too long.

Another topic that the Levin family enjoyed reliving during that visit was the family’s reaction a year earlier when they had heard reports of the great hurricane which had devastated South Florida.

The Levens had heard about the homes destroyed, the utilities down, and especially the shortage of water. Now, a year later, they got a good laugh over Max’s action of getting a five-gallon container and filling it with water. He literally was going to get on a train and take the water South. However, his wife stepped in and wouldn’t let him.

“Things were bad, but not that bad,” Abe said with a smile.

Abe and Rose had planned their wedding for early 1928, but by mid-1927, things had made an economic downturn in South Florida, making their future uncertain.

“The great land bubble just popped,” Abe explained. “Things just suddenly went belly-up. I knew one man who had come south from Brooklyn with $500,000 and lost it all. Land values just plummeted. Several friends pitched in to buy that man a coach ticket back home.

“However, others got out just in time. A man from California who shopped at our store had bragged that he was going to make $100,000 and then go home. He did... just in time.”

In just about every line of work, things turned sour. Abe still had his job, and when even the grocery business deteriorated, the store manager where Abe had worked came to him and offered him a
lease of the whole grocery department for a year for just one dollar.

"I considered it, but with the way things were going, even that didn't sound too good," he said. "I had been making as much as $350 per week, but now...well...those days seemed to be gone."

It was in the midst of all of this that Rose and Abe set their date to marry. They obtained their license in Broward County, then appeared before a rabbi in Miami. Rose's brothers, Harry and Morris, were attendants and witnesses. The deed was done. The date was February 5, 1928.

If Abe Levin had gained excellent business experience during his brief role in Florida's first land boom, he also had become wise enough to know when to seek his fortune elsewhere. By February 1928, when he and Rose were married, the opportunities for making a decent living in South Florida seemed to be evaporating. South Florida shops were closing in droves, banks were failing, and twenty-year-old high school graduates were hardly in demand.

"We had a council, and decided it was time to get out, to go somewhere that wasn't so tied to real estate promotion," he declared later.

The council appears to have included his wife of one month, his new brother-in-law, Morris, and Rose's parents, Max and Anna Lefkowitz. Morris, often the innovator, had gained experience in the pawn shop business, and had been giving Abe "lessons." Morris also had opened a small men's clothing store which, in early 1928, had inventory but was doing poorly. As the quartet planned, Morris had his antenna up looking for opportunities. One he spotted early was a pawn shop that was for sale in Corpus Christi, Texas. A second was a similar shop offered in Pensacola. The asking price there was $3,000. It was decided that Morris would close out his affairs and accompany his parents to Pensacola, to look things over. Rose and Abe, meanwhile, would remain behind to close out his grocery store obligations. Abe's hard earned $2,500 by now had been invested in the Texas oil boom, and he was about to see that money "go with the wind." However, he still had a few hundred dollars in the bank, and collectively they possessed Morris's pawn shop and clothing store inventories. The South Florida period had ended, a new era was about to begin.

A Pensacola scene downtown in the late 1920s.
Chapter VI
Abe and Rose and Pensacola

The street car was Pensacola's most popular transportation mode in the 1920s. Frequently the cars were moving billboards, too.

In Pensacola, Morris and Max discovered that the available shop offered what they termed “a salted inventory.” The asking price was far too high. They crossed off that opportunity. Then, corresponding and talking by phone with Abe, they decided that the family would open a new business, occupying a vacant store owned by a Mrs. Moskowitz, a sister to clothier Harry Ordon, whose own shop was next door. A deal was worked out. As this took place, Abe finalized arrangements to ship the family’s two inventories north.

While this was in progress, however, Mrs. Moskowitz learned that her new tenant was not to be solely a pawn shop. She wanted no competitor in men’s wear next to her brother’s store. She declared the lease arrangement to be “off.”

Just about that time Abe and Rose, who was now pregnant with their first child, arrived. They came riding in a 1925 Studebaker which Abe had purchased, trading his Model-T Ford as part of his equity.

“The car sold originally for $2,700,” Abe recalled. “I didn’t pay anything like that for it. Remember, the real estate bust had deflated automobile values, too. I got the car real cheap...and it was a fine automobile.”

The pair arrived and discovered the brouhaha with Mrs. Moskowitz. Meanwhile, Morris had contacted attorney Edwin Holsberry, who advised that Max, Abe and Morris had a solid suit against the store owner, who had broken their lease without valid reason.

“I said no to that,” Abe recalled. “I wasn’t going to be a man who arrived in the city and for my first act sued somebody. No thanks.”

And so they looked elsewhere, finally choosing a small shop at 128 South Palafox Street.

What kind of city did the newcomers find?

Pensacola and Escambia County were in the midst of the downsizing which by 1928 was affecting the great lumbering boom which had supported population growth and created great fortunes over the past half century. The virgin yellow pine forests were all but gone, as were most of the lumber mills. The turpentine and rosin businesses still flourished, and the port was active, though the days
of the annual arrival of hundreds of sailing vessels to carry lumber and timber to Europe had gone. There were substantial coal exports, and some agricultural shipments, too. Warehouses owned and operated by the Louisville & Nashville Railroad continued to do a good business. However, the hurricane of 1926 had done considerable waterfront damage.

The year of the Levins’ arrival - 1928 - saw three major economic events encourage optimism. One was the decision of the St. Louis & San Francisco Railroad to extend its system to the Pensacola waterfront, giving the community a direct shipping line to the northwest and the plains states. The second event was the opening of a new manufacturing plant to produce building board. This was a joint venture between Newport Industries and the Armstrong Cork Company of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. That plant would become operational the following year. A third significant action was the successful sale of a private bond issue to finance a two-lane bridge across Pensacola Bay. This, old-timers agreed, would open up the Santa Rosa Peninsula and Santa Rosa Island to developments of all kinds.

In 1928 the city’s population stood just below 30,000. There was a commission form of city government in place (three years later this would shift to the council manager system). There were several prominent wholesale companies serving local grocers and livery stables, The Lewis Bear Company, Kugleman and Kugleman and the Lurton Company were large-scale shippers out of the port. Their exports were usually aboard the steamship Tarpon, which made a weekly round trip to serve small coastal towns to the east...Camp Walton, St. Andrews, Panama City, Apalachicola, Port St. Joe and Carabelle. Two railroads already offered routes north, to join the east-west L&N mainline; and east, to meet a second line passing on to Jacksonville. The east-west trackage passed through a series of small farm-to-market towns. However, tiny Gulf towns had only the Tarpon to transport goods and passengers. Federal highways 90 and 98 would not go into service until 1936.

The city’s downtown had just seen the opening of a motion picture palace, built by magnate Julien Saenger. The Hotel San Carlos dominated upper Palafox Street, and the companion Blount and Brent Buildings were the headquarters for most medical offices and many small office-oriented businesses. The eleven-story American National Building remained Florida’s tallest structure. The major churches and Temple Beth-El were all above Garden Street. There was professional baseball, a new Pensacola High School, and a street car system which carried passengers for a nickel across much of the city. Bayou Texar seemed miles away. Bayou Chico contained a shipyard which in 1928 stood idle. The naval training station was turning forth aviators at a modest rate, and had about 600 civilian and 500 military personnel. Its activities had been scaled back after the end of World War I. The fishing industry continued to flourish, with the Warren and Saunders Companies operating substantial fleets.

Downtown, these were the principal businesses along Palafox Street which Abe Levin and his wife might have viewed as they prepared to open their shop.
Palafox Street South from Romana
100  Central Pharmacy
101  Meyer Shoe Co.
102-4  Isidor Silverman - dry goods
103  Sol Cahn & Co. - grocery
105  Watson's - dry goods
106  Vacant
106½  F. G. Renshaw - physician
107  Escambia Clothing Co.
108  John DeLustra - barber
108½  M. E. White - tailor
109  Vacant
110  C. G. Carmiris - restaurant
111  Wilson-Bear Realty
112  Falk's - ladies wear
113-15  La Mode Ladies Wear
114  M & O Clothing Store
116  Albert Klein - jeweler
116½  The Foto Shop - photography
117  Forchheimer's Inc. - shoes
117½  Vacant
118  Saenger Theatre
119-21  P. L. Pierce - real estate
       Pensacola Realty Board
120  H. L. Olensky - clothiers
122  Jake Stone - cigars
123  Pensacola Clothes Store
124  Fit-Rite Shoe Store
125  Singer Sewing Machine Co.
       The Piano Shop
126  Bob's Sandwich Shop
127  A. Henry White & Brother - clothiers
128  Vacant
130  W. U. Tel Co.

Intendencia Street
200  Realty Corp of Pensacola
       Fisher Realty Agency
201-3  Leader Store - clothiers
204  C. B. Collins (c) - barber
204 ½  I. D. Kendrick - dentist
       C. T. Cottrell - photography
       M. E. Morey - lawyer
       T. G. Yates - optician
205  Hargis Pharmacy
206  Lee Ins. Agency
       R. E. L. Daniel - real estate
       R. B. Howard - real estate
       D. S. Oppenheimer - real estate
207  Postal Tel-Cable Co.
208  M. L. Roch & Sons - restaurant
209-11  Vacant

When Abe Levin opened the L&L Pawn Shop, the commercial fishing fleet was an active part of Pensacola's economic scene.

Fishermen, who often lived hand-to-mouth were good customers of the pawn shop.
Dixie Shoe Stores
East Hill Greenery
Hamilton Russell - drugs
Citizens & Peoples National Bank
The Child Restaurant
S. H. Bell - meats
Vacant
Vendome Hotel
E. J. McCloskey
Miller's - shoe repair
Palace Barber Shop

Federal Building & Post Office
Rooms:
201-2 U.S. District Court clerk
203-5 U.S. District Attorney
206 U.S. Marshall
209 U.S. Prohibition Agts.
211-12 U.S. District Court
U.S. Comrns
301-2 U.S. Forest Service
303 U.S. Internal Revenue Service
305 U.S. Coast Guard
306 U.S. Customs
U.S. Dept of Agriculture (Federal Horticultural Board)
311 U.S. Immigration Office

American National Bank
Lobby: Mrs. Maude Miller - cigars
Rooms in American National Bank:
201 Christian Science Reading Room
201-4 Peninsular Casualty Co.
205 J. W. Lamar - insurance adjuster
206-8 Gulf Beach Amusement Corp
Escambia Gulf Beach Hotel Corp.
West End Land Co.
Gulf View Heights Co.
Treasure Hill Park Co.
209 R. G. Dun & Co.
210 Building Superintendent's Office
211 Vacant
212 Vacant

The Brent Block, was rebuilt after the 1905 fire and was considered the hub of the downtown business area when the L&L Pawn Shop opened nearby.
The Levin’s store site offered reasonable space, and there was good foot traffic. There were barber shops nearby, where many men still went daily for their shaves. There were restaurants, too, and these drew good crowds, especially at noon. Abe moved in, prepared his stock, and had a sign made and affixed to the store front. THE L&L PAWN SHOP (for Levin and Lefkowitz) was in business.

Abe quickly established a rigorous routine. He walked downtown and opened his shop at 7 a.m., and closed for the day twelve hours later. Rose carried his lunch to the store. There was no closing or leaving, for there was no one to relieve him. A few months after the opening Abe added another line of goods...luggage...leather goods. From the first this was a success. Then, within months, fortune smiled in an unexpected way. Abe recalled:

"There were several men’s clothing stores downtown, and one of them caught fire. It was a bad fire, but not a disaster. I guess the owner had insurance. In any event, I made him an offer and bought all of his salvageable stock for $350. Some of it was ruined, of course, but much of it could be salvaged, and sold at discount. I made a nice bundle on that. Things were looking up."

Then came the Depression.

"Very few people were in the stock market, so we didn’t pay a whole lot of attention to Black Tuesday or whatever they called it," he remembered. "In fact, there were some brief recoveries in the market, and Pensacola wasn’t like a lot of cities, where small banks went under very quickly. Our banks were conservative, and they were strong. That gave all of us confidence. Of course, they also became even more conservative as the months passed. They had to be. And that turned out to be good for me."

However, by 1931 local people were becoming very concerned, very uncomfortable about economic conditions. There was a ray of optimism when the new bay bridge opened in June of 1931; however, at first there was a toll to be paid, and dollars were now in short supply. The automobile business itself was already in decline. Pensacola had only a few miles of paved streets, and there were no paved highways as yet going anywhere. As money tightened up, folks stayed at home and listened to the one radio station, WCOA. They read the two newspapers, bought carefully out of the Sears catalog, and learned to entertain themselves with card games, the new board games, and such things as singing around the family piano.

"The economy might have been tight, but I really believe that families came together more in those times," Abe recalled. Rose remembered that she owned just one good dress.

Once the Depression became a reality in Pensacola, Abe Levin’s pawn shop took on a new role for many in the community. Into 1931 several local manufacturers (Newport Industries, Armstrong Cork Company, American Creosote Company) continued to operate reasonably well. But by the end of that year the downturn had struck just about everyone. Stores along Palafox and Garden Streets found traffic slow. On one business day Abe’s shop was open for twelve hours and it took in thirty-five cents. Small businesses in such fields as insurance, real estate and auto services retracted or closed. Hundreds lost their jobs, and by the spring of 1932, the city was being overrun by large numbers of families who had lived on the land as
share croppers, primarily in South Alabama. These men and women came, hoping for work, or some form of assistance. They found little of either. Many put together shanties from old packing boxes or metal road signs. The shacks were located on lots on the east and west sides of town, and such places soon were given the wry name of Hooverville.

That spring the Community Chest closed. Its volunteers could not raise sufficient funds for the half dozen agencies which had been supported in that way. Red Cross, Salvation Army, YMCA and Catholic Social Services struggled on, aided in a small way by funds which passed through a commission established by the city and county. Federal dollars were channeled into this mechanism; the commission leaders included wholesaler Max Bear, Carl Weis, John McCormack and industrialists.

By the end of 1932, many of the community’s people were doing without, some painfully so. When a breadwinner’s cash flow slowed or ended and he was not yet able to gain some form of relief, there were few alternatives. Savings were used up first, then there might be help from relatives who were better off. Finally, the family would resort to selling or pawning precious possessions which had exchangeable worth. That was when Abe Levin’s business became a center of assistance. In one recollection he said:

“We tried to be as helpful as we were able, and fortunately I had built some reserves during our first few years in business. We made the loans, with faith that somehow we might get the money back.”

One of the principal items pawned was gold jewelry, especially rings and pocket watches. As Abe explained it, he had a scale balance which would carefully weigh the object to the pennyweight, gaining as close as possible the true amount of gold in ounces.

“This wasn’t always easy,” he explained, “for some of those big watch cases were not of solid gold. To give them stability the watch makers sometimes inserted a thin sheet of metal, and of course we couldn’t see that. Then there was the watch movement itself. I learned to estimate its weight, but sometimes, with the borrower’s permission, of course, we actually removed the movement so the gold weight might be more exact.”

The pawned items theoretically had a time limit for retrieval, but in those days there was a lot of sentiment involved in certain articles. Then, too, who would buy jewelry or even practical household items at that time. These were not days when many families were adding to their lifestyle.

Once Abe had collected a significant weight of gold which had gone well past the redemption date, he would sell the precious metal. The sale was always to the United States mint in New Orleans. The gold would be mailed via insured post to the mint, and Abe would be paid on the going rate for the precious metal as of the date it was received.

“That was in the days when gold was valued at below the traditional $35 per ounce. However, our loans always took value into consideration, so we made out reasonably well. As my father had often said about his grocery store: ‘We made a living, we paid our bills, and we always put a little aside.’ That’s the way it was for
our store in the Depression."

Another item which surfaced in those mid-Depression days was the slot machine. Abe described that venture this way:

“One local family owned many of the machines, and they would lease them out to places where there was good traffic. The store owner would receive a percentage of the net earnings. The machines? Well, you could play for a nickle on most of them, though there were some that took a dime. I put one in our store, and it did quite well. It made us a little extra money each month. However, I had a concern about having a gambling device in our place. Not that I was against gambling. No, I don’t think I was ever a hypocrite. I’ve been known to play a hand of cards myself. But...well...one incident finally made me pull the plug.

“This came one day when a little old lady came into the shop to pawn a family treasure. I don’t even remember what it was, but it was nice. I know that because I made her a pawn loan of $10 on it. Then she surprised me. She asked me to give her all of the money in change. Fortunately, I had been to the bank that morning and had a lot of nickels in the drawer.

“Well, this lady then turned around and began to play the machine. She put in nickel after nickel. She would win once in a while, and that kept her going. But minute after minute she paid in the nickels until they were all gone! I couldn’t believe it! She had pawned a family heirloom and then thrown away every cent. And I suspect she really needed that money for food.

“That afternoon I called the owner to take out the machine. I didn’t want to make money that way.”

The Depression produced other stories, too. Often there were substantial merchants whose business had declined or suffered reverses. Occasionally they needed cash, perhaps to pay for arriving merchandise, or to meet a payroll. At this time the city had three banks; The First Bank & Trust Company, which the Malone family controlled; the American National Bank in its eleven-story tower not far from the Levin shop; and the Citizens & Peoples National Bank, with J. Simpson Reese as its president. There also were two savings and loans associations, but they were not involved in business loans, only home or property transactions.

If a business man needing a tide-over went to his bank, he might get help, or he might not. If the man’s credit was growing thin...if he already owed a considerable sum, the loan officer might refuse the request. There were many stories that told of small businesses failing in this period for just such a reason.

It was in situations like this, that Abe Levin became - well - something of a banker.

“What I did was what they call ‘swapping checks,’” he said many years later. “If a man I trusted came to me with a request like that, and if I was able, I would write him a check for the amount he needed. The amounts were not large, a few hundred dollars at most.

“Then, the borrower would write me his check for the same amount. Now...get this: my check was good, his was not. I could not have cashed his on that day. I would hold the check until the borrower came to me and said; ‘OK, Abe, the money’s in the bank. You can cash the check now. Oh...and I do thank you!’” At that point, I
would cash the check and put the money back in the shop’s account.”

Did he charge interest on such check-swaps?

“Not once,” he said. “It was a privilege to help friends. They were good people just having a difficult time. We all were, for that matter. And...well...they always made good. I could give you some names you would remember...but...that probably wouldn’t be the thing to do.”

One of the things which helped boost Levin’s reserves came about through an Act of Congress which passed in 1931 but did not actually put money into circulation until more than eighteen months later. This was called the Veterans Compensation Act, though most labeled it the World War I Bonus. The act provided for small payments to men who had served in the great war, and for most the money came at the very opportune time. Abe Levin recalled:

“A lot of those men had come to me earlier to borrow on items that were dear to them, you know, keepsakes, fine jewelry, maybe the watch their father had willed to them. They couldn’t redeem the items for a while, but when they got their bonuses, they came in droves. We thus had money in the bank, with a profit on loans that had been due for a long time. This helped a lot.”

Those were fascinating years for the small business man like Abe Levin. With the advent of the Franklin Roosevelt Administration that Congress passed into law, a host of what became known as the Alphabet Agencies...programs designed to put some people into temporary jobs, to establish new standards for the planting of farm crops, a minimum wage for covered employment, new controls on banks, and on the stock exchanges. Levin recalled:

“The country had been standing still. It needed to do something to give people a pay check of some kind. The PWA and WPA and CCC did some good things. And they provided hope.”

As such agencies came into being, some of them assisted with maintenance of the cultural arts. Pensacola had very little to boast of in that field in those days, but here was some seed money that boosted such entertainment. Dr. Nathan Rubin was one who helped encourage small concerts and even presentations of music from phonograph records. Levin remembered:

“We had a good many requests for loans on musical instruments.”
By his own admission, Abe Levin was a risk-taker. That held true in his business ventures, and it was a natural holdover into other things, too. He discovered early that rolling the dice was an adventure. So was playing gin rummy. Betting could offer its challenges, and a wager on a baseball or football game was not to be ignored. A number of stories emerged from such habits, tales often repeated by later generations.

The Jewish Progress Club and the Elks Club both became sites for a bit of friendly gambling. Usually the stakes were not large. Such games were played behind closed doors, and while there were always local ordinances against such practices, the police force turned a blind eye to the games. One night, in 1934, Abe found himself at the Elks Club along with several others who were in the gambling mood. Out came the dice, and the contest was on. Somehow the often lucky Abe Levin was not having a good night. Pass after pass was rolled, and time after time he lost. This was not an affair where large stacks of greenbacks lay on the table. The players simply kept track of winnings or losings. Abe’s negative total crept up...and up...and up...and when the evening ended, he was on the downside by $563! Arrangements were made to settle the account through business transactions.

It isn’t clear whether Abe told Rose of his experience that night, or the next morning...but tell her he did. How did she react? How would any homemaker have reacted during the Depression years, when a dollar was a dollar. However, there was proof that Abe did confess. The following day he was at Peanut George Petrellis’ pool room when a friend stopped by to chat, as often happened. The visitor had heard about the dice game, and in an offhand way said: “Well, losing was bad...but I’ll bet you didn’t tell your wife. That would have been a disaster.”

“Oh, but I did,” Abe replied.

The visitor doubted that, and so a friendly argument ensured. Finally, the visitor said: “I just don’t believe it...I’ll bet a dollar you didn’t.”

“You got a bet!” Abe replied, and promptly dialed his home telephone number. When Rose answered Abe said: “So-and-so’s here and doesn’t believe I told you about losing the money. Tell him!”

Rose did...and the man paid off. Later Abe grinned and told another friend:

“You see, I really only lost $562. I got one back on the second bet.”

The L&L sign hung over 128 South Palafox Street until 1934, when the move was made up the street to #108. The rent there was $125 per month, and the building afforded more space. Almost from the start, that location became something of a downtown meeting place.

“The business community was all together in those days,” Abe remembered. “We all were having troubles. When federal programs like WPA and NRA began, some thought that the Depression would soon be over, but that wasn’t the case. Instead, we had ups and downs.”

Downtown looked different in those days, too. For example,
street cars were taken off the system in 1933, and were replaced by buses. Diagonal parking was on both sides of Palafox Street, and there were tin roof-like protectors over the sidewalk in front of most stores, to keep the sun and rain off the pedestrians. Those were days when the 10 cent stores like Woolworths and Kress’s had lunch counters. Harrell’s drug store and Walgreens did too, and of course, such facilities were segregated. All of these would act as meeting places. Some of the shops along the street sold special produce or even live food. For example, many homemakers purchased live chickens or gophers which were kept in pens within easy view of the passersby.

Abe’s shop had its exchange counter and merchandise displays, and to the rear, the shop was divided by a counter which had a special use. It was possible to sit at this counter and eat lunch or more especially, this was the place where Abe and his visitors often played gin rummy. He recalled:

“Remember, these were days when business often was slow. And so a couple of men might come in and start a game. Often I was involved myself. After a while it became the practice for others to come and watch, and to wager on the outcomes. In fact, there were even times when the store seemed crowded, not with customers but with gin rummy spectators.

“I know it may seem odd, but in the mid-to-late 1930s the spectators even included members of the police force. Sure, betting on card games was illegal, as was other gambling. The city had ordinances against it. But heck, no one worried about that. Even the police chief would come by to watch. Some of the regulars were Joe Williams, I. Silverman, Clyde Johnson (who had been a policeman and now ran a nightclub), optometrist Larry Marini, Maxie Lipschitz, and many others.”

The gin rummy games attracted out-of-towners, too. In those days many salesmen came to Pensacola, and Abe’s shop had regular traffic, especially men dealing in luggage, leather goods, and jewelry. Some of them would budget time just to play against Abe.

From this, Fred Levin remembered: “Many of my daddy’s cronies would come and sit behind my dad and bet with him.”

“It was like a real sporting event,” David recalled.

“But then, about the time we got into the war, things tightened up.” Abe said, “I guess this may have been the result of the navy growing here. Then the police came to me - very nicely, you understand - and suggested that we find a way to make our little games less public. And we did.”

Abe Levin’s gin rummy play endeared him to many, yet he had other interests in gambling, too, though not in ways one might think. Braden Ball, local newspaper publisher and a longtime friend of Levin’s, added this commentary:

“In the 1930s and ’40s, gambling was widespread around the city. There were games every day, and while the police knew about them, they made little effort to put them out of business, at least at first. The same was true for prostitution. Well, one of the regular games was played every afternoon on the second floor of a building on the corner of Romana and Jefferson. The building later became a bus terminal, and then the site was used for the city parking garage.
People of all sorts played, and many others just went to watch. These weren’t big stake games, ’cause few people had much money to bet with. I know that I went, as did most of the people working at the News Journal.

“Abe Levin showed up there regularly. Now, I emphasize, I never saw him play a dime’s worth. But, he always had some money in his pocket. And what he would do is be prepared to lend something to the player whose luck had run out, and his money, too. Sometimes such a player would return to the game. Maybe he would win, maybe he wouldn’t. Anyway, Abe would help him.

“And there were cases I saw, too, where Abe would just give the guy a quarter, enough to get him home on the streetcar (or later the bus) or perhaps a cab if the fellow didn’t live far away. Abe was always a friend to the gambler.

“In the late 1940s the city employed a Public Safety Director, a man named Gene Forsyth, who was a former FBI man. Gene’s mission was to clean up gambling...and he tried. He would pull raids at the known sites and take all the players off to jail, and they would be fined. But...Gene didn’t succeed. The games continued. Did Abe ever get pinched in a raid? I never heard of it if he did.”

It was in the same period when members of the Jewish community began to have grave concerns over the stories that were originating in Germany. Some local families had relatives there, and it appeared that it was becoming increasingly difficult to be able to bring German Jews out. However, the Levin clan had no intimate concerns.

“No, we had no relatives there,” Abe declared. “We worried along with the others, but thankfully our people were not in Germany.”

It was in 1936 that the Levin family made another major move. They elected to purchase the building at 108 South Palafox Street.

“It was Son Kahn who urged me to do it,” Abe remembered. “He found out that the owners were considering selling, and the price seemed fair - $10,000. Philip Goldenberg, Sam’s father, was interested in becoming my partner, and so we made an offer. Between us, we put up $5,000, and I had the mortgage payments to make. It worked out fine. Actually, I paid off the whole thing the next year, and the building was ours.”

As the 1930s wound down, the city and country began to change. War clouds were darkening the picture, but preparedness created jobs. The Naval Air Station grew rapidly, and there was talk of building auxiliary fields as well. Capt. A. C. Read was the commandant. The city had gotten its first commercial air service in 1937, and two years later had widened Garden Street from “A” to “O” Streets. The Pace family and others helped establish the Florida Pulp & Paper Company. By now, WCOA was broadcasting network radio, including the world series games. In 1938 the Community Chest reopened.

Many years later, David Levin would comment upon those times.

“I was very young through the Depression years, but I can still remember how well our family lived. Our home was full, for the family was large, but we had so many things going for us. We even
had servants! There was a maid and even a butler at times. Nobody else we knew had anything like that. I don’t know whether we kids appreciated all of this at the time, but looking back, our daddy produced wonders, coming out of that little pawn shop.”

The Levin family household was large, even at the beginning, for both Max and Anna Lefkowitz became part of the family from the beginning in Pensacola, and periodically there were brothers or sisters-in-law, and then grandmother Levin, too. The first family residence downtown soon gave way to a larger house at 416 North Baylen Street. A third location was farther north, at 115 West Blount Street. Then, about 1938, Abe and Rose built the home they had always wanted, in the next block, at 15 West Blount Street. All of the brothers recalled those days with warmth.

Grade school events sometimes have a way of becoming indelibly etched in memory. Fred Levin had one which related to the second or third grade, a time when little boys can be very impressionable. He remembered:

“Our teacher had some sort of phobia, or maybe she was part of some sect which shared the belief that the world was coming to an end. She spoke of this for several days, leading up to an actual date on which the event was to occur. That day, pointing I guess, to some evening hour, she declared that today will be the end! That afternoon I went home in tears, crying out to my mother and telling her what the teacher had said. It took some doing on mama’s part to quiet my fears.”

David Levin made these comments:

“I’m not sure how my father did all this, especially considering the time he lived in, but he was a workaholic. He worked day and night, ultimately at several businesses, and so he provided very well for his family. I’m not speaking now about just a nice house. From early in the thirties, there were three people who worked for the family, almost full time. Willie Davis was the gardener, the butler, the chauffeur...Willie did just about anything one might think of around the house.

“Then there was Daisy Durant. She was what I guess you’d call a maid. Daisy was very good at many things, and when we boys were little, she looked after us a lot. I remember one story about Daisy that’s a classic. The P. K. Yonge School was on Palafox Street, just a few hundred feet from our house, and once I was old enough to be in school, my brother Fred felt that he should be, too. Fred was about three when this happened. It was in the afternoon, and Daisy was at work on something and told Willie Davis to watch out for Fred. Well, Willie got distracted, and suddenly Fred was gone! Willie started to hunt, and then Daisy discovered that Fred was nowhere to be seen. Palafox was a busy street, and Daisy became frantic. She ran all over looking, and others in the family did, too. I don’t know what possessed them to go as far as the school, but there was Fred, sitting on the front steps, all by himself. They were mighty glad to see him in good shape, but then Daisy asked why he was there, Fred just said ‘I wanted to go to school too!’

“Well, that little incident set off a chain reaction. Daisy rushed back to the house, and I believe she picked up a butcher knife and started after Willie. ‘I’ll kill him if I catch him,’ she screamed, and
then everybody had to calm down poor Daisy. It’s funny to talk about now, but for a little while, no one in the family was amused.”

The third person who worked with the family over many years was Willie Mae Davis who was ostensibly the cook, though she did many other things, too.

Their was a happy home, with a close-knit, loving family.

All of the Levin brothers looked back upon their childhood with one voice:

“You couldn’t ask for more than we had together,” said David, the eldest son, who was born in 1928. “We weren’t a feely, touchy family, but we held one another with definite respect. Oh, we teased one another a lot, but that was our way of showing love. We grew up in very hard economic times, but hardly anyone knew it. When I was three or four, I started school in Miss Elsie’s Kindergarten. Miss Elsie was Elsie Wagenheim, and for more than a generation, her North Hill school was the place every pre-school child wanted to go. Why did I begin there so young? I always have told friends that it was because I was so noisy around the house that the others wanted to get rid of me, at least for a few hours every day. But Miss Elsie was wonderful. We all felt that way.”

The brothers all agreed on family structure, too. Again David was the spokesman, though Fred made similar comments.

“My daddy worked...oh, my, how he worked. At first, after he opened his shop, he went from sunup to sundown. Later, when things got better organized and there was help, the hours were a little shorter. But all of us realized that with our father, business was business, and that carried a priority. We respected that, and appreciated that he was doing this because he loved his family.

“On the other hand, our mother ran the home. She was a wonderful manager and she was a superb cook. All of us agreed that there never was a cook to equal her. Today - well - today I can still close my eyes and savor the aroma or the flavors of some of the dishes she prepared. Her cooking was not just for us. Our mother had real feelings for others. If someone she knew was ill, or had suffered a loss of some kind, she was always there, delivering some special dish that would help with the healing.

“One story I remember so well involved Dr. Allen Ames. Dr. Ames was our family physician, and his home was not far away from ours, on Baylen Street. He was a fine, kind man, and he had brought each of us into the world. We all loved him, for we knew he would go out of his way to do things for us. Well, it was about 1950 when tragedy struck him. His wife and daughter were driving in the mountains and were in a terrible automobile wreck. Both were killed instantly. The daughter was the doctor’s only child. You can imagine what a blow this was. Mother was at his door with food almost at once. She stayed there, to be a comfort, and I know that she was. She was that way in the synagogue, too. When there was a need, our mother was there. She was the kind of mother dreams are made of.”

Fred Levin provided similar illustrations of his mother’s character.

“The White family lived diagonally behind us. They had a son in World War II, and one day word came that he had been killed. That news had a tremendous effect on the neighborhood. My mother
did all she could to soften the blow.

"Then - and this was all the time - she would take food to the elderly Jewish people in town. I remember so well going with her as she drove up to Mrs. Rosenblum's home, right behind the YMCA, to bring something to her. Mrs. Anna Rosenblum had two sons, David and Sam, who later developed Sam's Style Shop. I remember my mother sitting with Mrs. Rosenblum, the two of them crying over the news that President Franklin Roosevelt was dead."

In other ways, Rose commanded total respect, and, as David recalled, she loved to holler! "Mama could make her voice heard, especially if she was getting after one of us for doing something wrong. Then she would shout, and if we still didn't turn-to properly, she would say; 'Wait 'til your father gets home! Wait and see what he does then!'

"Well, our father would always come home, and the wrong-doer would be in dread, hoping that mama might have forgotten their run-in. But she never did. Instead, as soon as our father was in the house she would begin, 'And do you know what David did today?' after which she would bring it out, chapter and verse. Sometimes Daddy would speak slowly and threateningly, giving fair warning of what would happen if the infraction should be repeated. But other times, he would stand back and begin to take off his belt, the preliminary to a good spanking.

"But then Mama would step in and become our defender. 'Don't do that!' she would cry. And, of course, our father would draw back, but only after a stern warning to the offender. I often wondered if they hadn't rehearsed that routine sometimes over the years. Our mother was the disciplinarian but was our defender, too."

Abe Levin seldom minded recalling the past, and he even enjoyed telling tales about himself. Because of this there were a few items that became family classics, stories that the boys took pleasure in detailing.

One, based in 1937, involved the birth of son Fred. It was March 28, and Rose began labor. Meanwhile, Abe had gone to the Jewish Progress Club for a game of gin rummy. He didn’t appear concerned about Rose’s timing. Besides, as the evening wore on, Abe was doing something he seldom did: he was losing. Rose called once, and Abe replied that he would be “right along.” But he didn’t come. She called again. Same result. On the third call Abe finally gave in, drove home and picked up his wife. As they arrived at the hospital on 12th Avenue at about 11:45 p.m., Rose told her husband, “keep riding around the block until twelve o’clock so we won’t be charged for today by the hospital.” True story? Maybe.

Another tale which took place much later developed around a birthday celebration in which Abe was to be honored at the synagogue. He had been president of the congregation for twelve, maybe thirteen years, and had done many things for the good of that body. The family always attended the Friday night services there, and would go to Sunday School, too. The sons all had their bar mitzvahs there. (Originally the synagogue was on Barcelona Street, before relocating to 9th Avenue.) In short, Abe was well regarded, and he was to be honored.

However, this ceremony wasn’t to intrude upon Abe’s busi-
ness schedule, and so he was to drive separately to the festivities. Something came up. Abe was late. And so he began racing across town, perhaps a bit above the speed limit. When he reached the corner of Texar and 12th Avenue he swung the wheel, perhaps skid-ded, and then plowed into the vacant lot there, ending up flush against a tree. Only then did his car come to a stop. Those living nearby heard the crash and called the police, and a patrol car promptly arrived on the scene.

Now, it must be understood that virtually every policeman in Pensacola knew Abe Levin well. He was their friend. He supported their causes. From chief to rookie they respected him...but when the police heard Abe’s story...and that he was to receive an award, they elected to play a practical joke on him, perhaps getting even for one or two he had played on them.

Abe was hustled to the police station. The patrolmen and desk sergeant gathered around, howling with laughter as they worked up a fictional “drunk driving” charge. All Abe could do was grin and bear it. He knew how things stood. Meanwhile, back at the synagogue, people stalled...and stalled. When Abe finally arrived and the story came out, some elders thought the tale was very funny. Mama Rose did not.

One of the joys for the Levin clan in the 1940s was the Sunday afternoon motor rides.

“We would all pile in the car, and the first contest came between the boys, for there was a sort of wedge seat behind the rear seat of the car, and we all wanted that position. It meant a race to see who would get there first,” Stanley remembered.

The drives took the family to several favored places. Some Sundays they went to old Floridatown. Or, they might drive out to Warrington, to see Jack Swit, one of Abe’s employees. Most of the roads were unpaved, but it was always fun to pull the car up to the gas pump and watch the attendant fill the glass measuring container at the top before gravity feed filled the tank. Sometimes the afternoon ride might be concluded with a stop for a treat at an ice cream store.

Over the years Abe Levin became involved in all sorts of additional business ventures. One, entered in company with S. Silverman, Shirley Touart, Irving Greenhut and Fred Greenhut, was a bowling alley on the corner of Jordan and Palafox Streets. They called this FAST LANES. (The FAST came from a combination of the letters of the first names of the men.) The bowling center became popular, and Stanley and his brothers spent many hours there as pin boys or doing other chores. “We were glad to do it,” Stanley remembered. “Our father taught us a lot of lessons through the jobs he’d created.”

A second business was opened on Romana Street, between Palafox and Jefferson. This was a uniform store which Abe named A. M. ROSS & COMPANY (where the name came from has been lost in history). The shop did well, with Marc Aaronson as the manager. But then Marc died. Times were changing in the military and the uniforms market. It was decided to close the store.

Once World War II was concluded, Abe Levin found his fields of interest expanding in a number of ways. One of the first came in
a partnership with County Commissioner Frank Parise who obviously knew his way around politically, and could see a new opportunity blossoming as post-war traffic began to build on Pensacola Beach. There had been a casino on the beach from the days in 1931 when bridges connected the mainland to the Santa Rosa peninsula and island. Now, Abe and Parise, with assistance from Island Authority Manager Jack Cowley, joined forces to operate a series of concessions. These included “the tavern,” the hot dog stand, rental of beach umbrellas, and the sale of snow cones. At this time Joe Williams operated the casino, and downtown merchant Bob Jarrett owned the long fishing pier which extended into the Gulf.

“As we grew older, all of the boys played parts in the concessions,” Fred Levin said. “After David graduated from Duke, he ran the tavern, and during vacations I ran the snow cone operation. We had several employees, especially in the tavern, and most of our employees were black people. The customer traffic varied with the days, of course, and there were always special jobs that had to be done. After each day, and especially on weekend days, there had to be time for cleanup; and since we were serving food, we had to be sure we complied with Health Department rules. Daddy worked there sometimes himself, but he had other concessions to worry about, too.”

Again recalling their times at the beach, David Levin noted that operating the concessions was a seasonal venture, with heavy emphasis in the tourist months.

“Actually, the word ‘tourist’ wasn’t too appropriate in those early days,” he recalled. “Right after the war there weren’t many people who had discovered Pensacola Beach. There were hardly any tourist accommodations, either. Daddy and Mr. Silverman joined forces about that time and built the Sun Ray Cottages, and they were among the first of the little concrete block of accommodations out there. Dad had those cottages for a long time. He finally sold them to Mr. Silverman.”

One tale which David recalled involved some Coast Guard sailors who were stationed at the Island’s life saving center and, one evening, decided to have a little outing.

“They had enjoyed a few beers, then they came down and beached their boat and walked up to the tavern. For some reason they decided they wanted to play rough. One of them had a Bowie knife or something like that, and he began throwing it into the wooden floor. They became abusive to some of the patrons, too. So...I called Sheriff Kendrick, who came over quickly. By chance, he had Commissioner Frank Parise with him. Frank was not a tall man, but he was tough, and nobody pushed him around. When the two arrived, Sheriff Kendrick went up to the guy who seemed to be the leader of the troublemakers and asked him nicely to sit down and be quiet. The sheriff didn’t want any trouble. The fellow simply tossed his knife again. Then Frank stood up and picked up a Coca-Cola bottle. He didn’t extend much above this guy’s shoulder, but they squared off verbally, and Frank told the coast guardsman that if he didn’t sit down and behave himself, he’d ‘knock his block off!’ Well...that was something...but you know...the man did just that. However, that didn’t quiet the others. So...the sheriff, with help from a deputy or two, rounded up the whole group and hauled them off to jail. I tell
you I was impressed!”

Added Fred: “Frank could be tough, but our Daddy wasn’t afraid of anyone. He considered himself to be the bouncer at the tavern.”

It was about this time that John C. Pace and other investors built and began to operate the dog track at Millview. Immediately, Abe saw an opportunity and applied for the franchise to operate the concessions there too. Pace gave him the contract and Abe began by hiring Everett Murphy as manager and so began a second profession. The racing dates for the track were limited at first, but they gradually increased, thus there was plenty to do there. Once again Abe hired people to operate the various services, while he himself was there. Fred recalled what his father’s schedule was like:

“My daddy would be at the pawn shop at seven in the morning, and would be there until after six. He’d go home then, have supper, and drive out to Millview. The races would end at, oh, ten-thirty on the average night. Then there would be cleanup to do, papers and records to complete, thus he wouldn’t get home ‘til late. We boys had jobs there at times, too. The concessions were quite an operation.”

Ultimately the Pace Group sold the track, but Abe Levin retained the concessions. Then came a second sale. Again Abe held fast. Finally, the Carney family purchased the track, and this turned out to be even better!

“Daddy and the Carneys got on famously,” Fred remembered. “They were big wheeler-dealers, with all sorts of large investments in other cities. As time passed, they gave our daddy an opportunity to have a little piece here, a little piece there, so that he, too, had interests spread out. Those weren’t huge things, but they surely were very nice to have.”

Abe continued to hold and run the concessions until the Carney group sold the track. By then, Abe Levin was growing older, and not having the nightly operation was probably a blessing.

There was a second side to the dog track concessions, too. They provided Abe with contacts with a great many people, people who worked there and “the regulars” who bet at the track night after night.
“They just knew our papa and they liked him. He would do them favors, and they reciprocated,” David said. “Then, too, there were times that he would help someone who had lost all his money out there. He would cash a small check to see the person through. Or, he might not cash the check. He would size the person up and say: ‘Haven’t you lost enough? You can’t beat the system. Go home. Your family needs that money.’ Yes...our daddy was a complex man.”

Long before retirement, and while he had both downtown and dog track obligations, Abe Levin developed some routines that contributed to his being a happy man. One was his meeting daily for coffee. Each morning at ten o’clock he would join Nathan Kahn, Jim Estes, Francis Taylor, Bill Davenport and Bob Kramer and perhaps others for a round of coffee and conversation. The Child Restaurant was their usual place, so long as that emporium survived. The men had their special table, and the list of topics was broad and hot. They all loved it! When it came time to pay the check, they had a ritual. One man would volunteer to be the letter “W.” Then, a second man, probably across the table would say that he was perhaps “C.” Then they would pass clockwise around the table to D, E, F...and so on until at last someone became “W.” He was the bill payer. Because there were different numbers each day, and a different letter was chosen to begin the play, it wasn’t easy to figure out who was going to win or lose.

A second similar routine held for years of Saturday mornings. Here some of the same men would gather for breakfast. For many years the Coffee Cup was their rendezvous, though later they moved to the Dainty Dell, and then Childs. Here was an hour of good food and good fellowship. Here, too, Abe had a ritual. For some reason, he volunteered to “pick up the check” if the first Saturday of the month occurred on the first day of the month. That sounded like fun...and generous. But then, Nathan Kahn began to slyly invite a number of others to breakfast when the two “firsts” were about to
occur. Abe grinned and bore it...and kept on paying.

Once the Levin brothers were grown and had their own homes, a new form of family cohesion came to be. This came on Sunday mornings. Now the whole family...including wives and then grandchildren, would gather at Abe’s home for a huge breakfast which always included fried mullet, grits and biscuits...plus “the extras.” Here would be the sharing of the week’s events, and discussion of family affairs. At about ten o’clock a second stage would begin. Fred would drive the children to Sunday School, Abe would go alone to the cemetery, where he paid a visit to his son’s and then his wife’s grave.

“We seldom deviated from that routine,” Fred said.

Abe Levin sustained that amazing pace until 1991, when he knew that age was slipping up on him.

“My daddy always had a remarkable mind,” David said. “He could calculate in his head with lightning speed, and his ability to think through transactions, or make good business judgements, was truly remarkable. But, after 1990 he knew that he should stop. And he did. He closed the pawn shop and sold the building to Dr. Norman Haines, who worked with Bill Greenhut to transform the stores into what became the Civil War Soldiers Museum. Part of this building had been Papa’s store. However, Daddy maintained his parking place behind the store, and this enabled him to begin a new routine.

Now, each working day, he would drive downtown about ten o’clock, park and go to the Levin legal firm’s offices, which then were in Seville Tower. There he would sit in one of the offices, perhaps observing what one son or the other might be doing, or taking a quiet place around the table to watch a conference in progress. Often, once those deliberations had ended, he might quietly offer “practical legal advice” to one of his sons. Frequently his experience added valuable insights.

“He never gave up!” Fred observed.

The daily routine usually included lunch with one of the sons, then a return to the office, where he would just be part of what was going on. At three o’clock he would return to his home, but perhaps four nights per week he would have dinner at David’s house. On other days a maid named Mary Williams was his cook.

When death came to Abe Levin in 1995, he was 88 years old, and he left behind a family legacy which few men could equal. He left also a legion of friends, and a business career which set a fine example for the Pensacola community.

“He was some kind of father, I’ll tell you!” his eldest son averred.

Looking back over time, the Levin family had enjoyed a life in which the sun seemed to shine everyday. The family prospered, the children were bright and moved progressively through school. Family members enjoyed a unique, special sort of relationship with one another. Each son recalled the respect which each displayed towards the others. Then had come a terrible blow.

The year was 1958. Martin, who had been born in 1941, had always been an excellent athlete. He was a competitive swimmer, good-looking, outgoing. Then he began to feel - well - bad. He visited Dr. Charles Kahn, who provided a thorough examination, in-
cluding laboratory tests. When the test results were returned by the laboratory at Sacred Heart Hospital, Dr. Kahn advised David, who in turn privately advised Abe that Martin had leukemia. Marilyn, Fred’s bride-to-be, and Fred, who was home from the university on Spring Break, were at the Levin house. Marilyn was a nursing student, and by chance had a nursing textbook beside her. Without realizing the true story, she used her student’s knowledge and turned to the index and then began to read what the text said. David knew. He leaped up, wrenched the book from her hands and threw it down. The commotion reached Rose’s ears. Quickly, she understood! With little comment she went into the hall and dialed Dr. Allen Ames, her longtime family physician. What did this diagnosis mean? As quietly, as gently as he could, he explained. The news was devastating to them all. David said later, “That was the longest completely sleepless night of my life.”

But the Levins did not give up. Immediately they began seeking out medical resources across the country. Where was progressive research in progress against the disease? Where might one find hope? One answer was that during World War II the family had had personal visits with a Dr. Bierman, a cancer specialist affiliated with the famed City of Hope Hospital in California. A call was made, and an appointment was set. Martin was hurried to the treatment center. Chemotherapy was begun.

Martin Levin passed through the treatment cycle and with cortisone injections had a brief period of remission. The family began the trip home. At this stage of his life, Martin longed to visit Las Vegas. Noted David later:

“For some reason he had it in his mind that he wanted to gamble there. Of course, at sixteen he was far below the legal age for play, and as we walked into the casino he was wearing a baseball cap to hide his now totally bald head. Martin sat down opposite a blackjack dealer, and at once the man challenged Martin’s age. Martin just grinned and took off his cap.

“Did you ever see a bald man who was under twenty-one?” he demanded, grinning. The man looked at him, sighed, and dealt a hand. Martin played. Did he win? Who remembers? All anyone did remember was the spirit he displayed, knowing as he did that he was going to die.

Martin’s remaining days were limited. On Saturday evening, September 27, he became very ill, and the family summoned an ambulance to their home. David rode with Martin to Sacred Heart Hospital, where the youth was admitted. The Catholic Sisters there were very concerned, and asked if there was anything special he would like. Martin turned to David and said that he’d really like a chocolate milk shake. The sister gave the keys to the galley to David, who went downstairs and prepared a thick shake. Martin downed every sip. Within a few hours, he slipped into a coma from which he never revived.

Abe, Rose and the rest of the family hovered at the boy’s bedside through the next forty-eight hours. On September 29, 1958, Martin Levin died.

“That was a terrible moment for our family,” both David and Fred recalled forty years later. “It hit both our mother and father -
well - in ways that are impossible to describe. It was as though our mother couldn’t smile anymore. Oh, her personality, and her desire to help others, remained intact. But...her own health slowly declined. She had several health problems which in some ways she ignored. She died in 1977. She never got over Martin’s death. For that matter, neither did any of us. You just don’t ever have a full recovery from something like that.”

_Abe Levin in his pose with the ever-present cigar._

_One of Abe’s longstanding buddies was lumberman Jimmy (Gator) Estes._
On March 27, 1979, a large number of friends gathered at the Seville Inn for an Abe Levin Breakfast, honoring his years of service to the United Way. These photos were taken at that event.

The guests present Abe with an award plaque. Among the presenters were Lewis Bear (standing) and W. D. Pollak.

Jake Horton (r) and Judge Winston Arnow were part of the festivities.

David, Fred and Allen were among those who enjoyed the 1930 Packard in which Abe was chauffeured to the event.

In keeping with the fun, four good friends dressed as 1930s gangsters. They were Wallace King, Bill Pollak, Jamie Gingles and Bob Pulley.
Abe is front and center at the synagogue groundbreaking ceremony.

This was the Levin quarters on the east side, at 1800 East La Rua Street.
Chapter VII

David Levin, the Eldest Son

As the new generation of Levin children moved ahead, David, the eldest, set the pace. His progress through the primary grades and high school made him eligible for university training at between fifteen and sixteen. He had skipped several grades, and was acknowledged as being “very bright.” At the next stage of his life, that proved to be both a blessing and a curse. Many years later he expressed his thoughts this way:

“I went through those years very quickly, thus I was only sixteen when I graduated from high school,” he remembered. “That was good and bad. It was good because I had a head start on life, but bad because I was much younger than my classmates. I was too small to be part of varsity sports, and I missed out on other things, too. However, early on, my parents had gotten me interested in music. They started me on the clarinet, but that instrument didn’t have much class in my eyes. I wanted to play the trumpet. So, I switched. And I did rather well. When I went to college at Duke, I played in the marching band.”

Another aspect of David’s life was his interest in music beyond playing trumpet in the band. David also mastered the guitar. Not only that, his skills as a vocalist were considerable. Noted his brother Stanley:

“When he was younger, David could imitate many of the leading country music stars, and people just loved to hear him sing! He has a fine voice, and we enjoyed gathering around as he played and we all sang. He could really handle that guitar, too. One time, people at Pensacola Beach staged a talent contest, and David entered. One of the other contestants was Julius LaRosa, who was here in the Navy at that time. LaRosa, of course, went on to big time TV stardom as a vocalist. At any rate, in this contest David came out the winner. He was good.”

Later, however, David tired of the guitar and gave his instrument to one of his nephews when that boy needed to pursue a high school program.

As he remembers his decision on higher education, David said:

“I had heard a good bit about the University of Florida, through high school friends and a few others, and much of what I had heard dissuaded me from going there. Some called UF a party school, and said that you couldn’t get a quality education there. I was encouraged to go to a school where the training was top drawer. I considered several, and then applied to Duke, in Durham, North Carolina. I was accepted.”

Now, there are thousands who love Duke, with its Gothic-style buildings and broad grassy quadrangles. But David and Duke did not find harmony together.

“I never did feel at home there,” he said. “First of all, Duke was a rich man’s school. Even though we were still at war with the
Japanese, a lot of the students had their own cars. They came from very wealthy families...you know...the Reynolds, the Dukes, the Lorillards...tobacco people and others like them.

"Then, at Duke there were no fraternity houses. All of the students lived in dormitories, and the fraternities each had their own Chapter Room in one house or another. This was where they congregated, held meetings, had a radio and games tables and so on. There were several fraternities, but I quickly discovered that only one admitted Jewish students. This was my first experience with that kind of discrimination, and at age sixteen that was hard to accept. I made some friends right away, but not too many. One of the boys I met early, P. J. Thomas, was not Jewish, and when he discovered that the fraternity he had joined had a segregationist policy, he quit there and came over to the house I lived in. That was OK, but I still had that odd feeling about Duke.

"There were some exceptions that I do remember. One especially great fellow was named Freddie Folger. Freddie was the quarterback on a fairly successful Duke football team. He was a great guy and was my friend."

Duke's faculty also seemed aloof to David. Professors were reserved and did not invite students to their homes or into informal sessions. As the years passed, David soared through his classes, making average grades and getting a good education. But all of that time seemed a sort of setback, for he continued to be younger than many classmates. He recalled:

"There was one Christmas, shortly before I was scheduled to graduate in January of 1949, when I decided that it didn't make sense to spend the money to come home for Christmas. Also I needed to prepare for exams, so I stayed on campus. I guess there may have been fifteen or twenty others who did this, but I'll tell you that was one lonely week! It snowed hard. I could think of what was going on at home, and I was homesick, big time. However, that too passed."

When he finished his formal coursework and examinations, David headed home without waiting for the formal graduation. "I just told them to mail my diploma to me," he said. "I was glad to be through with Duke."

During his university years, there had been no planning ahead for what David might do next. The war was over, Korea was yet to come, and by now there were countless opportunities in a business world which was still retooling after the production dislocations of the great war. David didn't know what he wanted to do, except that he was certain that he didn't want to follow his father into the pawn shop.

It was at that time, before his next educational decision was reached, that he spent a number of summer months working in "the tavern" at Pensacola Beach. David recalled:

"I worked there, and then so did my Uncle Benny. Benny was a great guy, but he had several problems. He liked to drink too much, and he thought that he was tough, you know, a fighter. Often that's a bad combination. There were times when Benny didn't come out too well."

Then, one afternoon David was riding with his parents in the family car. The subject of what would come next for him arose, and
Rose suggested additional college work, David replied:

"Look, I’ve been to school now for sixteen years. I’m tired of school."

Then Rose added: “Some people say that being a lawyer is good. There will always be a need for good lawyers.” David wasn’t so sure, but within the next few days other relatives chimed in on the same chord. He considered. Abe pushed a little, too. Finally David agreed, and made the necessary arrangements to enroll in the law school at the University of Florida.

“What a difference that campus made!” he said later. “I could hardly believe what was happening to me. This was different from what I’d experienced at Duke. Florida’s law school operated on the honor system. The faculty was open and friendly. At exam times there were no proctors marching up and down the aisles watching you. You could even take the exam and work on it in the library. To me, Florida was all a university should be, while Duke had seemed almost like a prison. I loved Florida!”

David said that it took him about half a semester to figure out the routines of the law school. After that his studies were a breeze! He graduated with honors, second in his class in 1952. He missed the top position by a fraction of a grade point. That was Step Two in the career building process. Now came the real thing.

However, by then the war in Korea was in full swing, and David knew that he faced the draft very soon.

“I was glad of that,” he said later. “I had been surrounded late in the game at Duke by people who were on the GI Bill. They were war veterans and proud of what they had done. I felt left out. I didn’t want that to happen a second time.” When he reached home, he was advised that in perhaps two months he would be called to the colors. Even so, he didn’t want to sit by idly…just waiting.

At this time John Lewis Reese was the Escambia County Solicitor, responsible for prosecuting all criminal cases except capital ones. Reese operated alone, and had a great backlog of work. He approached David and asked if he would join him, if only for the two months. The salary would be $250 per month.

“I was glad for the opportunity, and I had a wonderful experience,” David reported. “Mr. Reese was a true professional, and working in that environment gave me an insight into the parts of law that took me beyond the law books. It was great.”

The draft schedule proved accurate. David was enlisted, and became an airman basic in the enlisted ranks. He took basic training at Lackland Air Force Base, then was assigned briefly to Castle Air Force Base in California. He learned the role of an enlisted man which, even in the Air Force, was no bed of roses.

“I didn’t realize what differences there could be until I was given a commission. I was a full fledged lawyer, and the judge advocates service needed attorneys. I was made an officer, a first lieutenant. Very briefly I served at other domestic bases, including one all the way out in Mountain Home, Idaho. Then we were readied for overseas duty.”

At this point David did something that some others might have called odd.

“I knew that my mother and father weren’t too keen on me
going overseas into a combat area. They had heard stories, you know? Well, I knew that Daddy was a good friend of Congressman Sikes, and that it wouldn’t be beyond Abe to ask Sikes to pull some strings and keep me stateside. So I called home and ordered my dad to keep hands off. He did.”

Once the orders came for overseas service, there was time for a final furlough. By now David had bought a used car, and he and several friends from Florida drove straight through from Idaho to conserve precious hours.

“That was one heck of a drive,” he said later. “We took turns driving, and we stopped only for food and gas at rest stops. We made it, but we were tired.”

David departed for Korea from the port of Pittsburgh, California, in November 1952, to begin a year of overseas duty.

“I worked as a lawyer, and had the experience,” he recalled. “I also made a close friend of the man who became our commanding officer. In fact, we keep in touch to this day (in 1998). My former CO was ninety-one years old recently.”

As his time overseas came to a close, there was some fancy footwork for David and several others with similar periods of active service. The active fighting had ceased in Korea, and all felt that they had done their parts and were anxious to get on with their lives. David followed the discharge schedules closely. He was sent to an air base near Minneapolis, spent seven months and from there was separated from the service.

“All of this had been interesting,” he summarized. “I had met some well-known people, like baseball star Ted Williams. I had seen some of the world. Now it was time to get on with my life. I came home, made some contacts, and - with my work with Mr. Reese as a sort of reference - made a start.”

For a short time he was an associate with the firm of Robinson, Roark & Hopkins, in the Kennedy Building.

A year later he opened his own law office, stating in a small newspaper advertisement that he was offering services in Family Law. His office was in the Florida National Bank Building, then a popular location for several legal firms. His first cases were a mixture of military court martials and jury trials in DUI, murder, rape, plus a few civil cases.

“I was very lucky in opening my practice,” he avowed. “My father had so many friends, and some turned to me when they needed help. Then, too, I had a college roommate named Art Richardson who had come to Pensacola and taken a job with the News Journal. Art was a pal, and he used his skills in getting my name in the paper in some favorable situations. You know, those first weeks in practice can be terrifying, for you never know if a single client is going to open your door. But, I was lucky. Things proceeded very smartly.”

David still has many news clippings of accounts of his early victories.

Looking back, David drew some parallels between practice in the 1950s and what had become state-of-the-art more than forty years later:

“Perhaps what I have now is a feeling that comes with years,” he said, “but it seems to me that there was greater honor, a greater
sense of respect among attorneys then. There was an aura of friendship, too. Men took lunches together and they were good as their bond on materials they presented. Lawyers then felt that being part of this profession was very special, and they did honor to their work.”

David considered Herbert Latham, who at that time was associated with J. McHenry Jones, as his closest friend in the profession, though he also felt close to John Moreno Coe, J. B. Hopkins, Buddy Caro and Montrose Edrehi. At that time the firms of Fisher and Hepner, Beggs-Lane, and Watson and Brown were among the community’s leaders.

“A number of those lawyers had a sort of ritual which they observed when they were not actively in the courthouse,” David remembered. “Mornings they would assemble at The Child Restaurant for coffee, and many of the day’s happenings were discussed there. Friendships were cemented, too. I didn’t take time out too often for the coffee hour, but I was part of a group that ate lunch almost every day at a table at the rear. Jack Papador was the son-in-law of the owner, and he was a great host to the lawyers.”

Not long after opening his office, David was joined by an associate. His name was Henry Barksdale, and Henry also had spent time with John L. Reese in the solicitor’s office. Henry wanted to try private law practice, and so he and David presented a united front. However, this association ended when Barksdale got “the political bug.” Henry felt that he could best John Reese in an election for the solicitor’s post. He ran, and he won. For a time David was alone in practice again.

As these things were occurring, Levin renewed a friendship which dated from high school years. Involved was Reubin O’Donovan Askew, a young attorney who had become a Pensacolian early in life when his mother had moved the family to Northwest Florida. Askew had completed law school at Florida, and in 1957 was working for the county solicitor as a prosecutor. He and David had faced one another across the courtroom on several occasions, and had become friends on the outside. Levin now sought an associate, and invited Askew to join him in the Florida National Bank Building offices. Askew accepted. Thus the Levin firm doubled in size. Shortly thereafter, the pair elected to relocate their offices to the Professional Office Building, at Government Street and Baylen.

Meanwhile, David had taken another step in life. In 1958 he and Joyce Lindy of Mobile had married. The ceremony was held in the Spring Hill Avenue Temple in Mobile. Joyce was a University of Alabama graduate and had been teaching in Mobile kindergartens when she and David met on a blind date. Their first home was an apartment at 18th Avenue and La Rua Street, but David soon purchased a house at 2211 Whaley Avenue, facing Bayou Texar, for his family. Shortly thereafter, their only daughter, Lisa was born. Tragically, Lisa suffered several birth defects that included an imperfection in a heart valve that almost at once required pediatric surgery. This was to be done at the Shands Hospital in Gainesville.

“I think this had to be one of the most difficult periods in my life,” David said many years later. “Lisa was so small, so tiny, so vulnerable, and Joyce’s health, too, was already becoming fragile. My mother stepped in to help, and she was magnificent! Because
our trip was so long and so necessary, we chartered a plane to fly to Gainesville. Mama came, holding little Lisa as we flew. This was a great sacrifice, for Mama hated to fly. She was afraid of it. But she flew this time. When we were there and the medical care began, Mama stayed up all night long, holding and rocking Lisa. Mama was absolutely wonderful. No one could have done more or been more helpful.”

Happily, the medical services were successful, and Lisa made an excellent recovery.

Such would not be the case for Joyce. David summarized: “It was very sad, really Joyce continued to have serious medical problems. I guess it's honest to say that our family life never did come together after that. Poor Joyce felt guilty. She felt that this was ruining my life, and at last she urged that we get a divorce. It was a very difficult choice. The decree became final in 1985. I subsequently established arrangements to care for her medical bills, her living expenses and even took out a large insurance policy to protect her should I die before her. That, I’m afraid, was another of the truly sad experiences in my life.”

Joyce ultimately died in December of 1995.

David had a second marriage, too. This was to the former Sue Williams, who also had an earlier marriage, to a physician. Sadly, the union of David and Sue did not become a happy one.

“We didn’t get along, that was about it,” David said. “It was best that we go our separate ways, and we did. There’s not much more to say about that.”

Meanwhile, the law firm was prospering, and was becoming very well known. Part of this came about through some of Fred Levin’s activities, for he had begun to specialize in personal injury cases, some of which made big headlines. The story will detail more of those experiences in another chapter. David too began to practice in personal injury matters, with a number of cases and awards that helped make the Levin firm nationally respected. He also became recognized as a specialist in matrimonial law.

One major corporate adjustment took place in 1973 when the Levin firm, in company with Shell, Fleming & Davis, purchased the Florida National Bank Building. They renovated the offices, and turned the structure into a first-class office facility. By now Florida National, a statewide banking firm, had erected a new facility at Garden and Jefferson Streets, thus the eleven-story tower had become available.

“The purchase was a good move for all of us, and we were able to grow into it,” David remembered. “However, at a later date, the Internal Revenue Service made the firm divest itself of our interest in the structure because the investment had included funds from our profit-sharing program.”

As the 1960s passed there were many additional highlights for David, and for the firm.

“Reubin Askew had become like one of our family,” David remembered. “He became very close to our father, and the associations were mutually beneficial. Beginning in the late 1950s, Reubin chose to enter politics. He served several terms in the Florida House of Representatives, and then two in the Senate. Then, in 1969, he
decided he would make a run for the governorship. As he prepared for this, of course, he asked advice from a lot of people, including Abe. Abe brought down the house at the synagogue one night when he said: ‘I now know that Reubin is really like one of my sons. He asked my advice about running, and I told him I didn’t think it was such a good idea. But of course he went ahead. You see, he is like my boys. They don’t listen to me either.’”

Askew won the race, and became the governor for eight years, beginning in January of 1971. In the governor’s early months, the press editorialized that David had influenced Askew to veto legislation which would have made divorce easier. “Not so!” David declared.

Shortly after his move into the statehouse, Governor Askew recognized that he needed a personal attorney, and for this he turned to David. David remembered:

“I was very flattered, of course, but I couldn’t do that full-time. I told Reubin that the governor’s attorney’s income wouldn’t be enough to even cover Joyce’s medical bills. But I did make a bargain with him. I agreed to come to Tallahassee each weekend and work with the governor from Sunday evening through Wednesday. Then I would hurry back to Pensacola to concentrate on my practice. We did that for - well - a good many months. I helped Reubin get over that first legal hurdle.”

Meanwhile, with Askew’s departure and the normal growth of the law firm, there was a need for additional members in the firm. One who came on board then was former federal judge D. L. Middlebrooks. David said:

“D. L. was a very able attorney and had been a fine judge. He had begun his local practice years before with the Beggs & Lane firm, then had been called to the judiciary. But after a while he wearied of that routine and wanted to return to private practice. He called, we talked, and subsequently he became a partner. He was with us for the rest of his life, making a fine contribution.”

Another who came into the firm later, in 1984, was former circuit judge Harold B. Crosby. Crosby also had been the first president of the University of West Florida, and had served in high-level roles throughout the Florida university system. David said:

“Crosby was a very bright, very incisive man, and his relationship with us was what is termed ‘of counsel.’ When he was a law student at Florida in the 1940s, Harold’s notes were so good, and were so popular, that they were placed in available form. ‘Crosby notes’ were a bible on campus for many years. In fact, they may still be.”

Through the passing years David Levin never lost his ties or his feelings for the University of Florida.

“I went to just about all of the football games, and games in other sports, too, when I could. I supported the school, and as my interest developed, I kept an eye out in Northwest Florida for top talent. Over the years my brothers and I encouraged many fine football players to go to Gainesville. There was Bill Richbourg, David Mann and a host of others. Later, I think I can honestly say that I helped discover Emmitt Smith when he was playing football for Escambia High School. I encouraged Emmitt to look at Florida, and
even though he was being sought by many other schools, I think some of us helped him see the advantages of playing for the state university. In any event, Emmett’s success is now history.”

The Emmitt Smith success story was only one of many which David Levin helped to engineer through the years. He became a confidant of coaches Ray Graves, Charlie Pell and Doug Dickey, and when there was need for a wholesale renovation to many of the university’s athletic facilities, David helped with the financial asking among the alumni. One of the early gatherings for this purpose was held in Pensacola, and in the newspaper account which encouraged attendance, David noted that Coach Pell would be present, and that graduates were urged to come, and “to bring plenty of money!” The event, and the campaign, were very successful.

The following year, David was inducted in the university’s Athletic Hall of Fame as recognition for his many services. Others inducted included former football and basketball greats, and David’s comment was, “Here I was, honored with all of those who did so much for the Gators, and I never even put on a uniform.”

Later still, Levin was made part of Blue Key, the university’s honorary fraternity. In one of the publicity photos, Levin was shown with Coach Dickey, David Mann and Walter (Buzz) Ritchie, who would later become a member of the Florida House of Representatives.

In 1995, David and Fred Levin, together with Leff Mabie, donated a three-and-one-half mile strip of Gulf frontage to the University of Florida Law School. The property was appraised at $1 million.

Levin developed a long roster of civic interests and achievements, too. He chaired the United Jewish Appeal. He served as president of the American Cancer Society and was active in the Scenic Hills Country Club. There were many others, too, but as this was written, his mind always turned back to his links to the university.

“I have loved to follow the kids we helped to recruit. Because of that success, they gave me another award. They made me what they call A Bull Gator. With the years, I traveled a lot to watch key contests. We went to watch Steve Spurrier when the Gators played Northwestern in Evanston, and I was in the stands when we beat Bear Bryant on his home field. Now that was an achievement!”

David Levin, with University of Florida football coach Steve Spurrier.
Perhaps the pinnacle of David Levin’s civic services came as a result of his relationship with Governor Askew. The year was 1972, just after congressional and state legislation had begun to place public focus on the environment and the need to clean up the air and waters. Governor Askew appointed Levin as the state’s Director of Pollution Control.

“That was a major task, and we took on some very difficult challenges,” David said. “You know, the first years in all of that were the most difficult because many powerful companies and communities, and even the military services, had just gone on forever with waste materials and discharges, doing what they pleased. As a result, many places in Florida were a mess!”

One of the early targets was in Levin’s own backyard.

“The industries that had come here in the 1950s, and the Navy, too, and several local communities, were dumping things into the bay that were destroying wildlife. As I took on that job, I created a two-part challenge for myself. I said that I wanted to live long enough to see the bay recover, and then I wanted to see Florida win the Southeastern Conference football championship. Well...I did both.”

Along the way as Levin and the pollution control board went head to head with major forces in the state, a major newspaper in Jacksonville ran a story which headlined The Five Most Powerful Men in Florida, and named David Levin as one of this quintet.

“That was quite a compliment,” he admitted later. “I’d never thought of things that way, but...well...in those times, maybe that was right. We had the authority to do some difficult, expensive things...and we did them.”

The role of environmental policeman was not a popular one in many circles, for to do the job properly, Levin’s team, working cooperatively with federal agencies, had to do many things that became politically and socially unpopular. Getty Oil was denied permits to drill off Florida’s shores. Both Tampa and Palm Beach were ordered to stop further growth-producing activities until air and water problems were solved. Fish kills brought edicts for changes in effluent processes. St. Regis Paper Company was faced with the need to spend more than $30 million for air scrubbers. Several utility companies were denied construction permits until some of their practices were improved. Builders protested, local governments and some news media howled, predicting “chaos and depression,” but Levin’s department stood firm.

“I found myself as a key speaker in places like the Florida Chamber of Commerce annual meeting, and before public bodies in Jacksonville and surrounding the Everglades,” David said. “Many places in Florida had been allowed to become almost like sewers. They had to be cleaned up, or the waters would die. We were accused of encouraging and paying ‘bounty hunters’ who provided information on what violators of the law were doing. Well, maybe we did that, but it all helped. I’m proud of what was done to help clean up the state. Think of what things would have been like today if those changes hadn’t been made.”

With the passage of time, David’s professional success continued. He continued to practice with a heavy case load, though he no longer pursued many personal injury cases for his own action.
"I’ve had a good many big ones in my time, and I’m proud of what we were able to do to help people. For example, there was a case in Santa Rosa County where a negligent driver handling a cement delivery truck ran over a little girl, with terrible results. We succeeded in getting a $2.5 million settlement, which was truly deserved."

As he neared his seventieth birthday, David Levin looked back with a practiced eye at a life filled with accomplishments and adventures.

"I’ve been lucky," he began. "First of all, I started out with a lot going for me, from my parents, from their friends, and from people around me, in the synagogue, and, of course, at the university. And my parents taught me the value of work. I wouldn’t take anything for my experiences in the uniform shop, in the concessions, and in the pawn shop. And because I was the oldest son, I was ‘The Big Brother’ with special duties. That’s why I was so close to Martin.

"For one thing, I’ve enjoyed politics all my life. A lot of my first cases as a lawyer had a little politics involved, and I’ve kept a scrap book that has a lot of pages that are growing yellow now but tell the stories of time after time when I went before a jury and won.

"Then, of course, knowing and working with Reubin has been a joy. He has been a good friend, of course, but he also has been a real leader. He has been a politician in the best sense. Through him I got to work with others, men like his first lieutenant governor, Tom Adams, and then the local officials with whom I dealt in the pollution control phase."

In the 1980s Askew became an adjunct professor at UWF and frequently visited with the Levins. David also visited with Reubin and Donna Lou in their mountain retreat near Asheville, North Carolina.

All of this did not go unnoticed. At one point David and Fred were recognized by Town & Country magazine as "two of the best lawyers in America." David has been recognized in the Who’s Who in the South and Southwest, Who’s Who in the South, and by a separate organization, The Who’s Who Publications Board. Through the many years of his professional life, David served as chairman of the regional campaign for the American Cancer Society, and he is a member of the Florida Chapter of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. He was approved to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1969.

David had shown interest in other areas, too. He has long been a supporter of the work of the Audubon Society, and has been given awards for his good works, especially during his time as pollution control czar. He received the Jaycee’s Good Government Award in 1972. An active correspondent, Levin’s scrapbooks are filled with letters and cards acknowledging his kindness and good works, some from grateful clients, others from the heads of organizations he had supported, such as the United Jewish Appeal.

One of his more recent efforts was produced jointly with brothers Fred and Allen. As a trio they responded with a gift of $100,000 to International Jewish Relief’s appeal to help transport Jews under anti-Semitic pressure from the former Soviet Union to Israel.

“There are literally thousands of such people in the former
Soviet Union today,” David said. “No one knows how or when tight restrictions will be placed on them, making relief possible. This isn’t anything new. One hundred fifty years ago, Britain’s Baron Rothschild and David Herzl put up money in the same way to help make that same move, only today, the people travel on chartered planes rather than on foot. Those early settlers were among the first of the new wave that made modern Israel possible.”

The Levin firm has a broad program of good works in the local community, too, largely managed by the firm’s office director Capt. “Flack” Logan. United Way is one regular recipient; the firm also is a sponsor of the Lincoln Park Elementary School.

At this stage in his life, what’s ahead for David Levin?

“I’m like my father in that,” he said. “Remember, even when he closed out his shop and had given up his concessions work, he loved to come to our office. He wanted to stay involved, to be active. I’m that way. I love practicing law. I like what I do. Maybe it’s because I’ve had a good run of success, though I’ll admit that I still remember some of the losses. One in particular still rankles! We were acting on behalf of a group who were the original shareholders in the Liberty Mutual National Life Insurance Company. These folks had held the shares for years, but there had been some stock changes, splits and the like. Since these men and women had not come forth to acknowledge the changes, the company declared that they were no longer valid shareholders. It was a very strange position, and we surely had right on our side. But - and this happens - the verdict went against us. I’ve never forgotten the case, or the lessons it taught.”

Beyond the law and public service, Levin enjoys his home and some simple habits.

“Soon after I’d bought the house from Dr. Al Kennedy’s estate (and this was after Stanley had lived there for a time), I knew that the older building had to come down. It was a mess, with many things wrong with it. That was why Dr. Kennedy had built a new house for his wife, before both of them died. Well, anyway, I built this nice new house facing the water, and I still enjoy it a lot. I have facilities to work out every day, and a great view. I enjoy a lot of television, and good reading, especially newspapers and periodicals. I’ve traveled a little...Alaska, Israel, Vegas...but there’s still a whole lot to see. But traveling alone’s not that great. If I found the right traveling companion, well, who knows? And would I marry again? Who knows? Maybe...but I’m in no hurry.”

Like his brothers, David is still a supporting member of the synagogue, but he is not as involved as his parents had been throughout their lifetimes.

“I look back at some little things, and they make me wonder about tomorrow,” he said. “For example, the day I turned fifty, a lot of my friends swarmed around me wearing T-shirts that said ‘David’s 50 Today’...or something like that. Why do I remember that? I don’t know...but those milestones make you think. And seventy? That’s old!”

With the passage of time, Lisa became an excellent student. She loved to draw, and many of her bits of art, drawn for her dad, are part of David’s scrapbook collection. So are many photos of Lisa...and even her first baby tooth! She attended the Pensacola School of Lib-
eral Arts, then Washington High School, where she earned high academic marks. During her school years, Lisa played volleyball, was in numerous activities in language clubs and publications. Then, she entered the University of West Florida, graduating from there with honors in April 1984.

Soon thereafter Lisa married a naval officer, Lt. William Morgan Davidson, from South Carolina. Davidson was moving forward rapidly in his career. He had had an action role aboard the USS America in that carrier’s retaliatory bombing of Libya, and was being groomed as one of the Navy’s “Top Guns.” But then, tragically, he was killed in the crash of an F-14 jet, in 1987. The accident left Lisa a widow, which she remained as this account was prepared. Following her husband’s death, Lisa made her residence on Pensacola Beach, and as of 1998, she had opened a small business dealing in cosmetics.

As the years pass, David is an increasingly proud parent.

“In so many ways Lisa and I have become even closer. Because her mother was ill much of the time, Lisa needed special care. At one time we literally moved in with my parents, and my mother became especially close to my daughter. I suspect that this has many memories for Lisa, too. The death of her husband was a tragedy for her, but she proved strong, and she has done well. Surely, she has been - no - she is wonderful to me. She does so many things for me that I appreciate. Looking back, those, too, are wonderful memories.”

And as he should be, David also is very proud of his son, Richard.

Richard was born in 1965, attended local schools, then for a time gave serious thought to a life’s work. The law didn’t have appeal, and so he became an Emergency Medical Services technician, riding the ambulance, caring for the sick and those involved in trauma. Slowly, Richard’s interest in medicine grew. In 1996 he graduated from the College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific, and then began post-graduate studies and residency requirements, the latter in Flint, Michigan.

Where will he practice? That was still undecided as this story was completed. However, one other key decision had been made. Richard will be married in mid-1999. Another link in the Levin Chronicles was being forged.

Looking ahead David, as the senior Levin brother, spends considerable time viewing his past, and his future.

“A lot of people ask me what I’m going to do...you know...if I’m going to retire, travel abroad a lot, take on big new civic responsibilities. The answers to those questions are generally negative. I’m alone a lot, you see. Maybe I’d have interest in some of those things if there were someone to do them with. Now, each morning I’m up early and work out for an hour. Then, after breakfast, I get to the office by 9:00 or 9:30. Then it’s work. I hope to continue practicing law. I love it. But I’m afraid I have no great desire to be a leader in the arts or in local civic projects. And I’m not a leader in the synagogue. You know, that was one area where all of us disappointed our parents. They were so active; we’re not. Oh, I attend on the high holidays, but I’m afraid I just don’t go many other times.”
One thing David does enjoy is participating in the law firm’s programs on BLAB TV’s Law Line show.

“That’s fun,” he says, “and I think it helps people. The one thing I don’t like about it is the timing. The show airs at 7:00 at night, and after a day at the office that means getting home well after 8:00. At seventy...well...I get a little tired.”

David continues a close interest in the University of Florida programs and sports, though he doesn’t travel to Gainesville as much as he once did. And he has no part in local civic clubs.

“When I was young, I was in the Jaycees, and that was fun. I met people and did some interesting things. But then, as I grew older and became more involved in the firm, I just felt that there wasn’t time. I was never a Rotarian or Lion. I doubt that I ever will be.”

And so the days flow by. As his brothers do, David spends time reminiscing about his boyhood, and about his parents.

“They were wonderful,” he sighs. “My father, oh he was smart! He had more smarts in his little finger than I do in my whole body. He worked so hard; he did so much that was good.

“And my mother? Well, there was never anyone quite like her. She did so much for others. Her cooking! Oh...if she could just come back and cook us one more of her great meals! No one could have been born to better parents.”

Richard Levin, medical student.

Richard Levin receives his degree from the College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific.
Chapter VIII
The Chapter on Herman

Since there were five Levin brothers whose stories were to be incorporated in a family history, it is not unusual to find that these mature, successful men marched to somewhat different beats. That surely is evident throughout this volume. However, Herman Levin’s drummer wished to use not only a different tempo but a different timbre as well in the cadence of his life. How is this segment different from the others? It appears in the first person, from beginning to end. If the style in these pages is at odds with the others, well - it should be. Meet Herman Levin, Ph.D., professional man, scholar.

A brief Vitae is in order. I am the second son of Abe and Rose Levin. I was born in Pensacola, Florida on April 23, 1932. It was, presumably, a difficult birth; my mother was told that she was not going to be able to have any additional children. She underwent medical procedures, and, as is obvious with the birth of four additional siblings, the procedures were successful. I must have been four when I started kindergarten at Ms. Elsie Waggenheim’s; by five I was in first grade private school at Ms. Bunn’s; by six I was in the second grade at P. K. Yonge Elementary School. After graduating the eighth grade, I went to A. V. Clubbs, then to Pensacola High School from which I graduated in 1949. At seventeen, I was off to Emory in Atlanta and was admitted into dental school two years later. Within four and a half months I realized that, due to my lack of manual dexterity, this was no place for me to be. I transferred to Louisiana State University in 1952, and in 1953, I had my Bachelors Degree in Psychology. In 1953 to 1954, I went to Columbia University in New York City. There I obtained my Masters Degree in Psychology. From there I went to the University of Florida in 1955 and in 1958 I got my Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology. Prior to getting my Ph.D., I had a pre-doctoral internship at Gulfport, Mississippi. A post-doctoral internship followed at St. Petersburg, Florida. After that I spent two years as a staff psychologist in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Subsequently I was a supervisory clinical psychologist at Saint Elizabeth’s Hospital in Washington, DC. There were two of us who had the inside track for the position as head of the entire psychology department at the hospital, a position which is one of high prestige. I didn’t particularly care for the rat race. I missed Florida. I obtained a position as Chief Psychologist at the Adult Psychiatric Clinic in West Palm Beach. This began in 1965 and lasted until 1969. At that point in time I went into private practice having at various times offices in Delray Beach, Boca Raton, West Palm Beach, and now in Stuart. Along the way I have been a consulting psychologist with police departments, the juvenile court, and psychiatric hospitals. At the present time, although an independent practitioner, I have the designation of Chief Psychologist at Savannahs Hospital.

My personality is basically reserved. I can in no way be considered gregarious or outgoing. I am reasonably sensitive in both the good and bad sense of that word. In general, I am basically a “care-
taker” which I’m sure influenced my choice of professions. My interests are artistic, literary, and intellectual. My primary concerns are my work and my home. A job, or profession, is to me a means to an end of taking care of my family. My family is all important to me and I spend a good deal of what time I have away from work involved personally with my wife Pamela and daughter Deanna, (that is, prior to her leaving home for college). Since I am getting close to retirement, I am trying to develop an interest in matters financial in order to be able to invest properly to insure a comfortable retirement for my wife and me (and to assist my daughter in her transition from academia to her professional life); but I’m not sure just how much of a talent I have in that direction.

Now for the difficult part, the attempt to recollect memories of events long past in regards to growing up as a member of the Levin household. Except for a few interspersed situations, the most recent memory is 50 years old. Given the fact that so much has occurred over that period of time, memories are hazy, personal distortions may well have occurred. Here are the memories in no particular order of importance.

Basically, my first memory was sitting on the lap of Willie Mae, our black maid/housekeeper/cook, crying after the birth of my next younger brother Frederic. She comforted me and said I was still very much loved by her, my parents, and indeed, I had not been displaced by this new arrival.

This brings up ideas in regards to my relationship with the various maids we had. They were obviously much more than servants. They were friends, surrogate mothers, confidantes - much as Bernice, the black portrayed in Member of the Wedding.

I remember little of my brother David who was three-and-a-half years older than I (but because he was one year more advanced that I academically, there was in reality a four-and-a-half-year age gap). I do remember us sharing the same bedroom. The most salient memory, however, is of him starring in Tom Sawyer in elementary school on the stage which as best I can remember of Pensacola High School or the Saenger Theatre. I was both proud and envious of the attention which was accorded him.

Then there was Uncle Benny and the teasing. I must have been ten at the time. Although my brothers remember him fondly, I myself remember his teasing could well become unbearable. At one point I grabbed a butcher knife and chased him around the house thinking all the time that “I’m only 10, they’ll never put me in the electric chair if I kill him.” To generalize this episode to other situations in the family in which teasing was rampant; teasing, obviously, was not as innocuous as it’s been made to sound in the reports of my other brothers.

My social life, when I was growing up, centered around a group of Jewish boys and girls; I think there were three or four boys and perhaps eight girls. It was warm; it was protected; it was like an extended family. For the most part my interaction with the non-Jewish community was minimal. One of the boys from this group, Mack Solomon, 50 years later, still remains a close friend.

I was five years older than Frederic, seven years older than Stanley, nine years older than Martin, and twelve years older than
Allen. As so often with the second child in a large family, I assumed a caretaking role.

My contacts with my father were brief. He was busy working horrendous hours making a living. I couldn’t stand the pawn shop. Although the two of us probably are most alike physically, and quite a bit alike temperamentally, our interests and what we valued were quite divergent. On either side of me were sons who gratified his needs and expectations much more than I. Despite this, he is the one person to whom I’m most indebted. Throughout my life, when I have been in greatest need, somehow or other he was aware and came to the rescue. This was again highlighted at the time of his death when he saw to it that, through his will, I could retire in reasonable financial comfort. To him I will be eternally grateful.

I was much closer to my mother. If I’m not mistaken, I’m the only one who saw the pain, tension and frustration behind the yelling, the tears and the oft overly assertive behavior. She took over responsibility for her biological family when she was quite young. Her mother, to the best of my recollection, became ill and my mother did the cooking and the cleaning, probably before she was ten, certainly before she was 12 years of age. From the time she married my father, there was a progression of relatives into the household, both from her side of the family and my father’s side of the family. Her mother and father, uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews all seemed to flow in and out of the household with a great degree of regularity. My father’s brother Benny, and my father’s mother lived with us for years at a time. In addition, there were several friends who lived with us. There were six sons to be birthed and reared; there was the cooking; there were all other kinds of additional demands. When she turned to her husband for support, she would feel that he was unavailable and this would in turn produce a good deal of anguish and a display of emotion. This, however, was far from all there was to my mother. She took care of everybody from her immediate family, to the extended family, to the members of the synagogue who were in need, to the Sisters of Catholic Charity, to itinerant rabbis (one was even black in the deep South, in the late thirties or early forties and he was seated at the family dinner table with the rest of the family), to opera stars

The Levin brothers assembled at Allen’s home for this photo.
who would only eat Kosher (Jan Peer was at our house). You name it. If there was someone in need, my mother was there. Then there was the event that drastically changed her life - that was the death of my brother Martin. She was one generation removed from the Schtetel. She believed that others in the community envied her six sons, wished her ill, and somehow or other brought bad luck onto her. She never really trusted again. There was yet another side of my mother. This was most obviously seen on her visits to me prior to and after my marriage. She was quiet; she was calm; she smiled; she sang; she cooked; she enjoyed herself. The pressures were not there and she was able to relax and be herself. My wife’s memories of my mother include her Southern accent, her gentility, her picking out “extremely sexy” negligees and nightgowns for my wife as part of Pamela’s trousseau, our going to a newly established bagel factory and my mother’s utter enjoyment of getting hot bagels right out of the oven; my mother and Pamela’s mother Anne’s camaraderie and their pleasure as they unpacked our wedding gifts and arranged our first apartment for us while we were on our honeymoon; my mother sending down anything which she thought we might be able to use (including toilet paper when there was a shortage); her utter delight with our daughter Deanna; (when she first held Deanna she remarked, “She looks just like one of mine.”) her delight with the first birthday party that she had which was given at our house when she was in her sixties; the trip to Burt Reynolds’s ranch where she got a glimpse of Dinah Shore. All of this obviously indicates an entirely different side of my mother than what is commonly expressed in descriptions of her. Four other memories and then I’ll get off this topic. Two of them occurred when my mother had her first stroke that left her debilitated. The first was when she and I were going to the hospital when it became apparent to me that the headache was more than “just a headache.” The hospital turned us away without even a thorough examination much less any form of treatment. The second memory, which also occurred at this time, was her playing with my two- or three-year old daughter a game, “Where’s Spot?” when she was experiencing horrendous headaches. She couldn’t speak but basically pointed with her toes so her granddaughter Deanna could find the hidden animal. This was one of the instances which showed

![Image](image_url)

*The happy couple Herman and Pamela at center, with David and Joyce at left, and Fred and Marilyn at right.*
the great love which was mutually felt between my mother and my
daughter Deanna. A third instance is personified by the beatific look
on my mother’s face after her stroke while she was in her wheelchair
with Deanna’s hand in hers at my brother Allen’s wedding. (I have
a picture which records that event.) The last memory was my visiting
my mother at the hospital right prior to her death. I had to get back to
South Florida. I told her goodbye, I kissed her, a tear rolled down her
cheek.

Later, while walking on the beach after having dictated this
narrative, several other anecdotes in regards to my mother occurred
to me. One occurred while she was traveling through the deep South
in the thirties, possibly early forties, with her black maid who was
acting as a nanny for the children. She stopped in a restaurant. The
maid was seated at the table. The proprietor came over and said he
did not serve blacks. My mother, in no uncertain terms, let him know
that if he was too good to serve to blacks, she was too good to eat in
his establishment and ceremoniously left the restaurant.

For several weeks I was with my mother in California while
my brother Martin was dying. Basically, it was she that bore a good
deal of the burden involved with the situation out there and dealing
with the emotions one has to deal with under the circumstances.
Having been in a similar situation (the outcome, however, was not so
tragic) and knowing my emotional response, there was a core emo-
tional strength there that few people have.

Then there was Rose’s Beach, the little quietwater beach on
the Sound. She would take two or three of her children, occasionally
a maid, occasionally a friend. In the water she was in her element.
Again, the pressures of the day dissolved. She was able to relax. She
was able to play. An added activity was looking for, finding and
scooping up soft shell crabs with a net. Her laughter and joy were
something to behold.

Bottom line is that my mother was far more than the stereo-
typical “Jewish Mother.”

Those are the salient memories which I can readily call to
mind about my biological family excluding one, or should I say ex-
cept for numerous memories centering around one particular indi-
vidual. That individual is my brother Allen who has kept in constant
touch; has informed me of the goings on in the family; has shown me
warmth and love, care and concern, and consideration. I want to let
him know how much I appreciate what he (and his wife Teri) have
done and how much I love him for the person he is.

For the period of time between the time I got my doctorate in
1958 and the time I met my wife Pamela at a friend’s wedding in
1970, little will or need to be said about my social and personal life.
(I want to keep my marriage intact!)

I wasn’t supposed to go to the friend’s wedding. I replaced
my brother Frederic who managed to have an excuse for not going. I
was 38, my wife to be was 23, gorgeous and in a dark pink mini
dress. I flipped. Her mother had predicted that she would meet a
tall, dark, much older professional man with glasses and it would be
love at first sight. (My description of our first meeting sounds juve-
nile and superficial but this was only for openers.) We went out that
night. I kissed her fingertips. Those fingertips must have contained
a very potent aphrodisiac - I was hooked. We left the wedding. We danced. We laughed. We kissed goodnight. I drove her to her sister’s home. She told me that was where she was staying (although I later found out that she was staying in a hotel). There were telephone calls. We began to date despite the fact that I lived in Boca and she lived in South Miami, and my good common sense told me that I was much too old for her. Soon I was driving down to Miami several times a week. We were in love. I proposed in January or February of 1971. We were engaged. We got married. The pictures taken at the reception of me, were such as to indicate my sheer joy. I’ve never seen a happier bridegroom. We honeymooned in Mexico, survived the turistas and returned to our beachfront apartment in Boca. It is now six days shy of our 27th anniversary. We’re still very much in love. There have been the ups and downs over the 27 years of marriage - the hopes fulfilled; the disappointments; the pleasures; the travels; the successes; the failures; the problems with health; the joys and worries that accompany having an only child. But as I sit here today overlooking the Atlantic from my 16th-floor apartment, I am well aware that I love her as much today as I did when we first met, and judging from what she says and does, the feelings are reciprocated. It will never cease to amaze me that given the age and other differences, the marriage could be such a good one.

Speaking of my wife, a brief rundown of some of my thoughts about her. When I met her, she was a third grade school teacher. She later got her Masters of Fine Arts from Florida Atlantic. This was in the area of theatre. In addition to raising our daughter Deanna, keeping a home, cooking (deliciously) and being involved with the Jewish community, she has also taught speech at the community college for well over ten years. She has run her own little theatre (not only choosing and directing the plays, but also training the actors and running the business end of the enterprise). She traveled to Israel, tutored high school in English and assisted in the absorption of Ethiopian Jewish children into Israeli culture. She is a Holocaust scholar. She studied at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. She has presented at na-
tional and international conferences both in regards to the Holocaust and also women’s issues and, as I dictate this narrative, she is involved in teaching clients public speaking as part of her present business endeavor.

Last, but certainly not least, is my daughter Deanna. I have to be extremely careful in what I say here because I have a tendency to become overly effusive and it embarrasses her. To be succinct, I am very proud of the young professional that she has become, as well as very proud about the human being she is. She has returned to Pensacola, has her Masters degree in Early Elementary Education and is in the process of hunting for her first full-time job. When I hear about her teaching skills, her ability to handle young children, communicate warmth, understanding and appreciation and at the same time maintaining their respect - these do a father proud. In addition, the fact that she is having such a good and happy life and is considering a second Masters degree working with the visually impaired, delight me to an extreme degree.

There are many fond memories that I have of Deanna in addition to the fond memories of the interaction between her and my mother. Among these are included: my wife’s fondness for chocolate malts while Deanna was in utero; Deanna’s bright-eyed alertness very soon after her birth; her extensive vocabulary at age one; swinging her in the park by the intracoastal as a small baby; her making her desires not be left alone in her crib quite emphatic; a little later my lying on the floor by her bunk bed, holding her hand as she went to sleep; trips to Disney, Sanibel and Captiva; driving her 15 miles each way to a laboratory school in Boca Raton with her sleeping in the back seat; our having rather lengthy homework sessions; her in the back yard fishing with the neighborhood children; her pets (which in addition to a poodle included a hamster, two ducks, and a hermit crab); her adventurous spirit as characterized by her studying a semester in Israel while still in high school and her spending six months in Israel when in college working on a kibbutz; her enthusiasm in showing me and her mother (when we as a family went to Israel) the archeological sites including the ones on which she herself had worked uncovering ancient artifacts; and last, but not least, her scuba diving trip to the Red Sea with the little side trip to Egypt which was, of course, withheld from me until she returned to the

Mama Rose, seated center, with her five sisters-in-law.
United States.

To summarize and conclude, I’ve spent my life getting an education, searching for security and taking care of the three women in my life whom I have loved. At this point, I am in a period of transition. My profession, because of managed care, appears to be being phased out. It certainly isn’t that lucrative any longer. Also, because of the restrictions placed on the interactions with the patients, a lot of intense satisfaction I experienced doing psychotherapy is no longer there. Retirement presents itself as a distinct probability if I were not afraid of going crazy with inactivity. At this point in time there is a possibility that the one Levin boy who “got away” will be returning to Pensacola within the next few years to live out the remainder of his existence close to his original home and his biological family.
Chapter IX

Fred Levin, Success After Success

Fred was the third son coming along the education path; he studied at P. K. Yonge School. The year he entered seventh grade the family moved once more, this time purchasing the Garmany home at 18th Avenue and La Rua. “We had always had a big household, but our home on Blount Street had seemed just fine,” Fred recalled, “but then I remember that the new house on La Rua was the biggest house I’d ever seen. Many years later I went back by there and realized that the building was only about one-sixth the size of the home I had later obtained for myself.”

Fred moved from P. K. Yonge to Clubbs Junior High School on 12th Avenue. Those years initiated a new chapter in his life.

“I was a pretty good athlete,” he declared, “and I suspect that it was this period that gave me a lifelong interest in sports. I was the star of my sandlot baseball team, and then I played on a YMCA basketball team. I did well there, too. However, I was no speedster. In fact, I discovered after a while that I was really quite slow. I led the baseball league in hitting, and I was an acknowledged star on the Y basketball team, but I knew that I could not make it as a high school athlete. That was a psychological blow, but - well - you can’t manufacture speed. There’ve been lots of guys who had certain skills but ran too long in one place. That was me.”

However, those early days in sports brought another form of benefit. Fred told that story this way.

“Over the years there had been some clippings in the News Journal when I had hit home runs, led the league in batting or helped lead the YMCA team to a championship. When my father died, he still had those timeworn clippings in his wallet. He had never come to see me play in any sport, but he had kept those clippings. That said something, didn’t it?”

High school at PHS was another adventure for Fred. He recalled:

“Up to that point most of my close friends had been Jewish boys. Gene Rosenbaum was my closest friend. However, in high school I branched out somewhat. In all honesty, I became a partier. I almost never studied but I made reasonable grades, and apparently I was well liked. Pensacola High had a boys’ fraternity that had been around for a long time. It was called Travaris, and it was one of those cliquish things that appealed to the Big Men on Campus...you know, the elite. These were the boys from well-to-do families, the high school jocks, or the guys who made out well with the women. There was a second fraternity, too, called The Rebels. That’s where the Also-Rans usually ended up. Through much of my later high school years my closest friend became David Cobb, and David was in The Rebels. As my junior year proceeded I was elected to The Rebels. I was about to join when - surprisingly - I was also elected to Travaris. Decisions...decisions. Travaris was the elite...and ego develops when one is very young. I had already said that I would become a Rebel...but now I changed my mind. I wanted to be among the Elite...the BMOCs.”
“I will tell you that I have regretted that decision all my life. Many times I have thought about how much my decision must have hurt David Cobb. I just couldn’t resist the opportunity to be with ‘those classy guys,’ the ones who seemed to attract the best looking women. Also, I was the first Jew to ever be elected to that fraternity. However, I don’t think that made much of an impact on me at that moment. I did what I did. It was a mistake. I learned from that mistake.”

Travis brought Fred into a circle of new friends. One was Ronnie Williams, who was PHS’s star quarterback and who later became a junior college All-American. Ronnie also was Florida’s 100-yard sprint champion. Fred claimed no academic honors. (“I was a B+ student most of the time without working very hard.”) He also admitted that the high school years were among the happiest of his life, for with his new friends he partied hard.

“During summer vacations Travis even had a beach house and so we lived high. It was great,” he admitted. “I didn’t seem to have a care in the world.” Those were the so-called Scoggins Years, when Pensacola High’s football team performed heroics on the field, and when the basketball team also did very well. PHS was the only public high school within the city, thus public attention (including newspaper coverage) focused on its doings. No wonder the student elite had fun.

Many of those Travis friends accompanied Fred Levin as he entered the University of Florida in the fall of 1954. This was a great experience, but there was a sobering side to it, too. Years later Fred and David shared views on what it was like to enter the state university after World War II, with its politics and its social status. Fred noted:

“This was the first time I really recognized anti-Semitism,” he began. “In Pensacola we knew that we could not join the country club, or enjoy a few other social activities, but our family never noticed, and I doubt that other Jewish families did.”

At that David added:

“We were aware, of course, of the system of segregation. You couldn’t help but notice. After all, there were signs in most public places which spelled out who and where people of color were welcome, or would be admitted. But, somehow that was just the way things were. Somehow we didn’t equate what was happening to black people to any form of social restriction on us, because we were Jewish.”

Fred agreed. “In our own family, our mother took care of the black people who worked for us. She actually bought homes for Miss Willie and Mr. Jerry. Why, to this day I’m paying a pension to the family maid, Bertha, and along with most of my brothers, we are continuing Miss Mary’s pay. (She was working for my father at the time of his death.)”

Gainesville brought some new lessons. On this subject Fred continued the story of his 1954 experiences:

“I went along with the other Pensacola guys during fraternity rush. I went to the Sigma Chi and SAE houses. But when it came time for the fraternities to extend bids, my buddies had to take me aside and explain that Jews were not admitted to either of those fra-
ternities. They were all Protestant, all white. That was a blow.

"I can still remember thinking at the time that if it had been one of my friends I would have taken a stand. I would have said: 'If my Jewish friend can't come, then I'm not coming!" However, no one took such a stand.

"I suspect that this felt like some sort of payback to me for having turned my back on The Rebels at PHS and instead joining Travars.'"

Fred joined the Jewish fraternity (Pi Lambda Phi) and quickly made two lifelong friends, Fred Vigodsky and Jack Graff. Fred Vigodsky also played Cupid for Fred Levin, for Vigodsky knew a beautiful little Jewish girl from West Palm Beach. Her name was Marilyn Kapner. Marilyn had not yet enrolled at the university (that would be two years later), but she was there a good bit, and since the boy/girl ratio on campus was about ten to one, she was in great demand as a date. Fred found himself fortunate when he could wangle one date every four or five weeks. Marilyn was also semi-engaged to a non-Jewish boy from West Palm, a youth whom Fred promptly named Tweety Bird. Marilyn and Fred hit it off well, for she felt that he was a safe date. After all, her parents wanted her to meet some nice Jewish boys at the university, and her interest in Tweety Bird was - well - platonic. Fred was gentle and persistent. It was in 1957 that they became "pinned," and were truly engaged the following summer. They married June 14, 1959.

The marriage was in Pensacola, at B'Nai Israel Synagogue, and the reception took place at a hall on the city's west side. Fred remembered:

"Nowadays it seems odd to have the wedding in the groom's hometown rather than the bride's, but there were good reasons. By now we had decided that after I finished law school, we would live in Pensacola for a while. Marilyn wanted to meet new people here, and there were only modest ties to her home city. Besides, my parents really wanted the wedding to be here, and I did, too. Mama cooked up everything in sight for those events that required food, and I had about fifteen guys whom I'd grown up with in the wedding party. It was a great affair."

Aside from his romantic episodes, Fred admitted that his four years on the Gainesville campus were a ball! He noted:

"I had roomed with Fred Vigodsky, Jack Graff, Chuck Ruffner (who became a Miami tax lawyer), and Stanley Hammerschmidt." Fred noted wryly that Stanley was not very bright, but later he became a multi-multi-millionaire in Miami. However, he died in his early fifties of heart failure. In later years Graff became one of Fred's law partners, and Vigodsky became a business partner. Both men became dear friends.

After graduation, Fred made an obvious choice. Big Brother David was functioning successfully in the law. Fred was determined to follow suit. It was 1958. Hallmark legal cases in Arkansas and Alabama had begun to reshape social customs throughout the South, but that beginning was just becoming a tiny wedge in the door at the University of Florida when Fred completed extra course work in summer school to be eligible for his advanced study. Fred's memories of that first day in law school remained vivid, even forty years later:
Fred and Marilyn Levin (l) stood with Reubin Askew and his wife, Donna, shortly after Askew was inaugurated as Florida's governor. The year was 1971.

“As we sat in our opening assembly, we were addressed by Dean Fenn, whose remarks were more of a challenge than a welcome. I can almost restate what he said, word for word. It went like this: ‘Look to your left and to your right. Study those faces. If you and your class are average, neither of those guys will be here when you graduate.’ That was not a happy thought. And, as things turned out, he was right. About seventy percent of the class I started with were not there when graduation time came. Frankly, the dean scared me to death! I had never worked very hard in school. I had gotten reasonable grades, but not because I knew how to study, or put in long, hard hours.

“As we entered the auditorium that first day we faced a situation that had never existed at this university. On one side of the room sat the 350 white students who had qualified for study. Across the aisle sat one lone black enrollee, a student named George Stark. George sat alone, except for several U.S. Marshalls who were there to protect him. There was a lot of staring back and forth, and then, almost as though someone had given a signal, the white students performed what they called The Shuffle. That meant rubbing their shoes back and forth on the floor, in unison. I learned later that this was a treatment sometimes given to men in prison who were being ostracized. Only that day the shuffle was a sign of resentment directed at Stark. George sat there and took it all. He was neatly dressed in a suit and tie; most of the rest us were not so well attired.

“This was all new to me. Our family had not come face to face with segregation in Pensacola. We had black servants and we all worked with black employees. I watched George Stark, and I could not help but feel sorry for him.

“Then, not too long after that opening day, but when our work
was far enough along for the faculty to begin to judge us, I heard from home. My brother Martin was critically ill with cancer. My parents wanted me to hurry home. I went to the dean and asked permission to take a few days leave.

“The dean sent for a copy of my grades and looked at them, then at me. Finally, he said something like: ‘Of course, go...and you might as well stay there. With your grades, there’s no way you’re going to make it through law school.’”

Fred hurried to Pensacola only to find that his brother had died. Fred was with his family through the difficult days of Martin’s burial. Then he returned to Gainesville. Now he began a program of study that was unlike anything he had ever undertaken. Much of the time he studied in the library. He attended no sports events, and he turned away from fraternity and most social affairs. The routine paid off. By the end of the first year, he was Number One in his class, and he also received the top legal writing award (The Gertrude Brick Award) and the Harrison Top Freshman Award. Only then would he ease off just a little. There were two legal fraternities on the Florida campus, and one, Phi Alpha Delta, accepted Jewish students. Fred joined.

“The great majority of students who went to the University of Florida Law School had graduated from the University of Florida. So we knew each other and they knew that I was far from a good student. Every time I would ask a question in class, they would shuffle me the same way they had George Stark. The reason they were shuffling me is because they thought I was so stupid.”

However, that sort of thing ended once the first semester grades were posted and the awards were made known. Fred remembered:

“All of a sudden, there was a tremendous change of attitude. Now, when I asked a question, there wasn’t any more shuffling. Now those guys were listening and writing. One day, in the library, I got up and sat down with George Stark. I told him to let me know if he needed my help.”

Looking back, those events helped produce a character trait that never changed. Now Fred Levin had learned to work with the underdog, to champion the little man, to help the fellow who was down on his luck.

Another of the law school happenings in that first year related once again to Dean Fenn. The dean had several areas of specialization, one of which centered about the legal area known as Future Interests. The dean taught this course. It was a study generally saved for the final term, for it was one of the most feared of all law school classes, many didn’t graduate because of failing it.

Fred became involved because Dean Fenn not only taught Future Interests, but he also taught Legal Writing, and he was given a case on the rule against perpetuities to do a case comment. Fred believes to this day that he gave him that case, not because he thought Fred was smart enough to handle it, but because he thought Fred was stupid enough to screw it up. However, Fred worked hard and really did a fabulous job. His case comment was published in the University of Florida Law Review and from that moment on, Dean Fenn looked at him in a totally different light. For the rest of Fred’s career
in law school, Dean Fenn would refer practicing attorneys who were concerned with the rule against perpetuities to come talk to Levin.

Once his law school diploma was in hand, Fred moved with Marilyn and his daughter Marci, renting an apartment across La Rua Street from Abe and Rose.

“We had part of a two-story, four-apartment building,” he recalled, “and shortly after we moved in, my college friend Jack Graff arrived to join the law firm. He and his wife rented half the second floor, while we had the other half. The building, incidentally, was owned by Marie McLcoid, whose children were Papa Don Schroeder and Brenda Frenkel, both of whom would play parts in my life.”

Fred graduated at the top of his class, and now his plans called for the gaining of perhaps a year of experience in his brother’s firm and then post-graduate study in tax law in New York City.

Fred remembered:

“I guess I was sitting on top of the world. I had a wonderful wife, and a daughter, a profession in which I felt comfortable and secure. I knew I would be going into the law firm founded by my brother David, and where his close friend and Florida’s future governor, Reubin O’Donovan Askew was a partner. Actually, my intention was to practice there for just a short time, and then go to New York University to study tax law. The last thing in the world I expected to do was become a trial lawyer. The thought of getting up in front of people to speak, or to argue a case, made me feel scared to death. But then...things didn’t work out as I thought they might.”

**Success as a Trial Lawyer**

The script changed in 1962 when a lady named Angeliki Theodore sought an appointment with Fred and explained her problem. Mrs. Theodore’s home was on Scenic Highway and had burned. Her insurance company would not pay what she felt was a fair restoration settlement of $22,000. The insurance company offered instead just $16,000. To Levin, this case appeared to be a classic David & Goliath affair, the underdog against the Big Guy. He took the case.

Fred began by reading everything he could lay his hands on which involved “How to Sue an Insurance Company.” Then initially he requested a trial before a judge rather than a jury.

“I was in mortal fear of standing up in front of a group of people,” he told newsmen later. Then he repeated: “The last thing I ever wanted to do was trial work.”

Levin’s legal opponent was respected attorney Bert Lane, who had built a solid reputation as one of the best defense lawyers in the area if not in the entire South. As Fred Levin noted later:

“Here I was, just a kid, and scared to death, going up against a giant with a great courtroom record. But, I shook off that feeling, and worked day and night in preparation. Then I changed tactics. I filed for a notice of intent for a jury trial in Federal Court. As things turned out, that decision was the turning point in my career.”

The trial made newspaper headlines, especially when Mrs. Theodore was awarded not $22,000, but $50,000.

The following three decades would produce a host of addi-
tional victories, more than a score of them with awards in excess of $1,000,000. Many of those cases were landmarks. All of them helped to create a mystique for the Levin firm.

The early years of married life had their ups and downs for Fred. Living across the street from his parents, he encouraged the young family to take many meals with Abe and Rose. “That was great since Mama was a great cook,” Fred said, “but looking back on that time, I can see how this might not have been a popular thing with Marilyn. After all, cooking is a part of homemaking, and as our second and third children (Debbie and Martin) arrived, family meals together should have become more a part of our routine.”

So should Fred’s time with his family.

“I’ll admit that I was not a good parent,” he said. “I guess that I was my father’s son. He had held three jobs and been involved with other business ventures, too. I never thought much about that in those days, but as some guy once said, the acorn falls close to the tree. Like father like son.”

It was in 1963 that two of Fred’s more enduring memories developed. These were days when racial integration was moving more swiftly into the South. Fred still recalled his contacts with such things at the University of Florida, and now he was faced with another close-to-home situation. This began when a young black attorney named Charlie Wilson began practice locally. Fred felt that the man had skill and deserved to be part of the Society of the Bar. He proceeded to place Wilson’s name in nomination. Almost at once, representatives from other legal firms made quiet contacts, suggesting that this nomination was “not in good taste, not in our culture here,” suggesting that the nomination be withdrawn. Fred didn’t budge. Then calls began to come to Marilyn. One caller asked, “How would you feel if that man’s wife were seated next to you at our next bar society luncheon?” Marilyn, to her credit, replied that such would be just fine.

The nomination came to a vote, and Wilson was not approved. Later he would be called to join the giant Jim Walter Corporation in Tampa and become that giant firm’s general counsel and vice president. Wilson never did gain approval by the local bar group.

The Wilson affair had a second outreach for Fred Levin.

In those days the local bar society elected new directors in groups of five each year, and the protocol was to include in these additions one attorney with less than five years in the society. The nominating committee met and called Fred, asking if he would allow his name to be put forward. He agreed. Later he said:

“You know, things like that are usually cut and dried, but not this time. When election night came and the committee’s report was read, a man, not part of the committee, rose and asked to place another name in nomination, against me. The chairman used Roberts Rules and asked both candidates to leave the room. That night there were, I believe, 110 persons present who were eligible to vote, and six of them were from our firm. When we came back in and the results were read I had lost, 105 to 5! That was my first and last contest for office. Not even all of my associates had voted for me!”

Those early years were a time of habit formation. Fred was a member of his own generation, continuing activities which had sur-
faced during his free-wheeling high school days and had been encouraged by the lifestyle of the University of Florida’s undergraduate years.

“We partied a lot then,” he admitted, “and that did not exactly develop a work ethic. That problem I overcame later. But the smoking, and the enjoyment of alcohol, well, they just kept on. When I began law practice, I was a heavy smoker. I don’t know how many I used a day, but it was a lot, and it was even more in times of stress. That wasn’t good.”

However, Levin did take a page from some of his own legal cases. He recognized the value of regular physical check-ups, and in his mid-twenties he sought such services from Dr. Jack Fleming, a Pensacola cardiologist. One of those examinations brought on a crisis of its own. Levin remembered:

“I don’t know to this day why he ordered it, but Jack said that he felt I should have a sigmoidoscope. That’s a colonic experience that usually isn’t done until a person’s in his forties or beyond. But - well - Dr. Fleming said he thought I ought to have it.

“The test revealed colonic polyps, and of course polyps can be bad news. Often they can develop into cancerous tumors with time. Dr. Fleming suggested that I have surgery to remove them.

“I was certain that I had cancer. I just knew it. When I went in for the surgery I expected the worst. Fortunately, that wasn’t the case...but the whole episode just told me to begin to change some of my habits. And I did.”

Did Fred stop smoking then? No. In his own words:

“Over the next thirty years, I’ve stopped and restarted more times than I can count. Sometimes I would be a non-smoker for a year...other times for just a few weeks. Later in life, I did really quit...except that on special occasions, I’ll still light up again, but not as a habit. I can hear, I can read, I’ve been through the anti-smoking litigation. I’m not going to commit suicide with tobacco. But, well, once in a while...”

Kimberly, the Levin’s fourth child, was born in 1969, and now the family was complete. Those were heady times for many reasons, some of which emerged outside the legal practice. By now the practice had grown significantly, with men such as Jack Graff and Reubin Askew having become partners. Askew’s political career had begun in the 1950s, and all of the Levin family firm members had been his backers as the future governor passed through terms in the House and then in the Florida Senate. Things were rolling!

It was then that the Levins and others became involved in a business venture that raised some eyebrows. They entered the food and entertainment business.

The Restaurant Business

The move began in an odd way. For years Chick’s Barbeque, at the Pace and Palafox intersection, had been a community favorite. Ray Cranford had been the host, aided by his wife and by her father, who had been the original Chick. But then the Cranfords moved apart, and a divorce followed. David Levin, who by this time was acknowledged as one of the area’s premier divorce attorneys, repre-
sented the wife. With the final decree, Ray Cranford gained ownership of the restaurant, and began operating it along with her father and other Cranford family members. That should have been a good and profitable arrangement. It wasn't. Things were turning sour, and Mrs. Cranford needed cash. She turned to David Levin, who consulted with his brother Fred, and accountant Bill McAbee. The trio agreed to purchase a part of the business, and with their skills helped turn the restaurant's cash flow problem around. There also appeared to be opportunities for expansion. But how? And with whom as manager?

By a stroke of fortune, Fred's Florida roommate, Fred Vigodsky called from South Carolina. Fred's career had run into a ditch. He needed a job. Fred Levin's suggestion: "Come join us, but first go to Florida State University's School of Restaurant Management and take some short courses that will add some needed skills." Vigodsky did, and within months he was in Pensacola, assuming the manager's role at Chick's.

Now things began to roll! The partners could visualize a change in the area's eating and entertainment needs. The Levin presence at Chick's added a new clientele, and use of advertising helped, too. Then came what appeared to be a social opportunity. The old, fabled Carpenter's Restaurant in Warrington became available. This spot had been popular with the Navy and with many local residents for years, and its owners wanted to sell out. The Levin team acquired the property, and shortly thereafter, made several changes. One of these was to lease portions of the building to former football star and coach Kay Stevenson, who opened what he called the Quarterback Club.

The second move was to lease the once successful Pier Lounge, and then the Sky Lark Club, on Garden Street west of Pace. The Sky Lark had been a property owned by restauranteur Jim Marks for many years. The club had its ups and downs, but the Levins and Vigodsky felt the Sky Lark had a potential for them. Fred Vigodsky was to manage this too. Shortly thereafter the team opted to open another Sky Lark Club, in Mobile. The original Chick's was enlarged, and Chick's Steak House was opened on Gregory Street.

Taken as a whole, this variety of properties was by now big business, but, as Fred Levin recalled, it was not necessarily a successful enterprise.

"Most people don't realize how difficult the restaurant business really is," he said. "There are continuous personnel problems, and as we progressed, there was more competition, too. This was the time when fast food outlets began to pop up everywhere. McDonald's was growing, and Jim Marks was opening Kentucky Fried Chicken Stores almost every six months. There were others, too, and we all finally concluded that we were putting a lot of time and energy into the food business with little profit. Yes, we could eat and drink on the house, and that was nice, but beyond that we weren't going anywhere.

"It was at this time that Sam Rosenbloum, who owned Sam's Style Shop, told us that he was interested in selling out. Fred Vigodsky's original career had been in dresses, and he felt that Sam's offered a real opportunity, with less effort and risk. And so, piece by
piece, we got out of the restaurant and club field. We made out all right, but it was no success story.

“Our story of the times in the clothing business, and my brother Allen’s involvement, is covered in Allen’s Adventures. I won’t repeat that information here.”

However, there were two codies to the food service stories. One was to note that the Levins had placed Papa Don Schroeder, son of Fred’s onetime landlady, as the manager of the Sky Lark Club.

The second involved a piece of furniture. Carpenter’s Bar had been something of a legend during World War II. The massive piece of furniture had been a place where naval aviation greats literally leaned for support, and where many began a custom of carving their names in the wood. Adm. Bull Halsey was one, and there were many other great fliers.

During the course of the Levin ownership of the Carpenter’s property, Fred Vigodsky, unmindful of the furnishings’ history, disposed of the bar and “modernized.” Many years later, as the National Museum of Naval Aviation began to design exhibits, some of its creators, including Capt. Bob Rasmussen, recalled the bar and its names. They came to the Levins and asked if they might obtain the historic item. But Fred couldn’t remember what he had done with it! The bar was gone...probably forever. (On a brighter note, as the museum designers began developing a wartime Pensacola street scene for the second floor, they placed as part of the scene a likeness of Abe Levin’s Palafox Street Pawn Shop, which had been a source of help for many a flight student in difficult times. As this account was written, the pawn shop’s likeness was still in place.)

As years passed, portions of Fred Levin’s business life changed. Reubin Askew had become Florida’s governor in 1971, heavily backed in the 1970 campaign by the Levin firm’s members. With Askew in the governor’s office, many throughout the state looked to the firm as a place of influence.

“People somehow thought we were political gurus,” Fred said. “They wanted contacts, they asked for our influence. That really wasn’t the case at all. Reubin did make David the environmental czar, but the rest of us were surely not king makers.” Through Askew’s first term, the Levins enjoyed many Tallahassee contacts, and as is told in David Levin’s account, the firm did provide legal services to the governor. But a major political influence? No.

Then came an episode in early 1976 that Fred Levin declares he will never forget. Governor Askew continued to make frequent visits to Pensacola, for ceremonial events and to maintain friendships. On this occasion he had come to the Levin firm’s offices and was talking with Fred and others when a conference call came for him. There were two parties on the line. One was Lady Bird Johnson, widow of former president Lyndon Johnson. The other was Robert Strauss, who then was national chairman of the Democratic party. By 1976, Askew’s image was such that he was regarded as a bright young Liberal figure within that party...and a man with a clean record, without political or personal blemishes. Mrs. Johnson and Strauss were calling to ask if Askew would consider accepting the Presidential nomination of that party!

“Reubin was talking on a phone across the room, and I could
hear his end of what was said,” Fred Levin said. “They talked for a long time, and obviously they were assuring Reubin that the nomination could be his if he would accept. He would be running against President Gerald Ford, who had succeeded Richard Nixon in 1974.

“But Reubin felt that he had an obligation to his state, and I guess that he just didn’t feel comfortable in seeking the higher office,” Fred continued. “At any rate he said no. We talked a lot about the conversation later, and for me it was fascinating to be a party to hearing what might have been. Of course, when Reubin turned them down, the party leaders turned to Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter. So you see, if Reubin had said yes…what might have been…”

During all of these critical years, the Fred Levin children were in their formative times.

“I have to admit that I was a poor father in many ways,” he admitted. “I was at work all of the time, and on the road a lot. I was seldom at home, seldom with the kids. Marilyn raised the children, and to her credit, she was defensive of what I did. She would always tell the kids that I was working for them, making good things happen for them. I know now that I made a mistake there. No, I made several mistakes. I should have been there for them. Happily, all four turned out very well indeed, in every way. But the credit for that all goes to Marilyn, not to me.”

Ultimately all four of the children obtained their college degrees, and three of the four obtained advanced degrees, in law or business administration. On that subject Fred enjoys displaying a photo that was taken during his children’s college years. Together are his three older children and himself. Each of the children stands beside a handsome Mercedes-Benz convertible. “I like to think that picture shows off some of the results of the long hours I put in,” Fred said. “I guess it does…but sporty cars are still no substitute for being there.”

As the children passed through their college years, obtaining seven degrees, Fred was present at only one graduation ceremony.

It was in 1977 that another milestone was passed, one that developed almost by accident. Fred recalled the events this way:

“In those days I was working myself very hard, trying to be certain that preparation for my cases was absolutely top flight. That meant being at the office at all hours, something which was good for my career but surely not good for family life.

“One Saturday afternoon I was alone in our office in the Seville Tower when the phone rang. The caller was a man with whom I’d traded call attempts, and he was following up. This man was the stepfather of a young boy named Chad Tolan. The man said that he’d been trying to talk with several lawyers for days, and that most of those he’d tried either wouldn’t take time to discuss the case with him, or they just ignored the calls altogether.”

“You really answer your phone; that’s great,” the gentleman had said.

The two-year-old Chad Tolan had been given a prescription by the family physician for a 50 milligram suppository. The pharmacy at K-Mart had filled it as 500 milligrams. The results were devastating, leaving the infant with severe brain damage which could never be repaired.
No...the above was not an auto dealer’s sales promotion. Instead, it shows members of Fred Levin’s family with their Mercedes. From left to right, daughter Marci, Fred, Martin and Debby. The fourth daughter, Kimberly, wasn’t old enough to drive at that point.

Discussions followed with the Tolans, and Fred accepted the case. The jury sided wholeheartedly with Fred’s position, and awarded the family and child $2,015,000, the largest personal injury award made to that time in Florida. Overnight, Fred’s reputation soared, and he and the firm became known throughout Florida. Fred Levin had further improved his ability to analyze a case, develop sound arguments and make them appear valid before a jury.

“This also made a point about relationships,” he added. “I’ve told that story to a lot of people, and to all of my associates. I always respond to my calls. It’s plain courtesy, and it makes good professional sense. If I hadn’t done so in the Tolan case, we probably wouldn’t have become involved.”

It was in the late 1960s that David and Fred Levin became involved in several real estate transactions which would affect the residences of family members for many years. There were two houses involved, both on Menendez Drive. These had been the property of Dr. Alpheus T. Kennedy, and as waterfront property they were acquired for exceptionally low figures. Fred’s purchase, for example, was for $85,000. Later he would note that after a few years just the land would have been worth twice that figure. One of the houses was razed. Meanwhile, Abe and Rose had purchased another house in Menendez Drive, a block away.

It was at this location that the custom of the Levin Sunday breakfasts was born. All of the brothers detailed those happenings. Said Fred:

“We all loved our mother’s cooking, and we had, through a sort of tradition, developed a liking for fried mullet, grits, biscuits and those other things that make up a true Southern meal. We would all meet at our parents’ home on Sunday, and we would eat and talk. We would tease one another mercilessly, and as the children grew older and grandchildren came along, they became part of the fun, too. On one occasion, not long before our father’s death, we even did some video work, to record some of Daddy’s early experiences, and the family history. When Daddy died, the picture changed. I gave the house to the four children, and they in turn sold it to Marci and her husband. Marci maintained the Sunday tradition...though later these became dinner gatherings.”
Politics, Childers and Gulf Power Company

It was in the 1970s that another fascinating turn came in Fred’s political road. However, the beginning had come somewhat earlier. In the early 1970s a young educator named W. D. Childers had unseated State Representative Gordon Wells. Later Childers opposed and defeated State Senator John Broxson, and thus cemented for himself a strong position in Florida’s state politics. Childers entered the senate replacing Reubin Askew as state senator, and for ideological reasons, the new senator and Fred Levin usually found themselves on opposite sides of key issues. Also on the opposite side was Panama City’s political强人 Dempsey Barron. It was in this era that Pensacola’s behind-the-scenes politics and civic affairs found a new key figure. He was Jake Horton, who in time would rise to be senior vice president of Gulf Power Company. Horton was an integral part of the power company’s lobbying position in Tallahassee, and in time he and Childers became very close. Horton in turn would become a backer of many local civic causes, and he was identified as a behind-the-scenes political power. Levin and Childers had little in common; Levin and Horton were friends, but worked only occasionally with one another civically. In the 1970s, after a time in office, Robert F. Ellis was relieved as president of Gulf Power, and Ed Addison succeeded him. Horton worked closely with both men. Pieces were falling into place for one of the area’s unique political struggles.

In 1980 a public property transaction took place after which Childers was accused of using his office to turn a profit on a sale to the state. His political opponents howled for blood, and a state grand jury was assembled. For the first time in his career, Childers appeared to be in trouble. His friend Dempsey Barron urged Childers to engage Fred Levin as counsel. Under the circumstances this seemed an unusual marriage, but Childers accepted the advice. As the hearings began, it was possible that the jury’s findings might end Childers’ career. However, Fred’s deft handling of the materials generated a far different result. As a first step he urged his client to take a lie detector test...to give credibility to the defense statements. Childers agreed. When all of the information had been presented and digested, jury members issued what is termed A Bill of Presentment, which, instead of being critical to the senator, rendered him high praise! He left the battlefield with his armor shining more brightly than ever! Commented Fred:

“That presentation created a new relationship between W. D. Levin and the senator, a relationship that was to continue for many years. The senator, in turn, became a mentor to Levin, helping him navigate the political landscape of Florida.”

Allen, standing, David, left, and Fred help Abe celebrate his 85th birthday at the Angus.
Childers and me. We became close friends, and we remain so.”

The event also generated a new era with the power company. About this time death came to Bert Lane, Levin’s early opponent in the courts, and long the general counsel for Gulf Power. Ed Addison, having witnessed Levin’s performance on behalf of Childers, and with urging from Jake Horton, sought to have Levin succeed to Lane’s role. However, some company directors had other feelings.

“Some of them couldn’t see having a personal injury lawyer as their general counsel,” Levin said. “They didn’t see such a placement as a good fit. There may have been some personality things in there, too...but...in any event, I did not get the appointment. In one sense, that was disappointing, for being counsel to the number one utility is always a prize for a law firm. However...

“In a relatively short period Ed Addison was named president of the Southern Company and moved up to Atlanta. Now Ed had more control over appointments, and before long, when circumstances were appropriate, I got the call. I became the power company’s attorney. However, that, too, had some ups and downs. The case of Jake Horton and his mysterious death is...well...a story unto itself.”

That incident will take its place in the proper sequence in the Levin story. At this point it’s appropriate to mention some of Fred Levin’s other courtroom triumphs.

**Big Awards of Fred Levin’s**

Perhaps the best remembered contest had its origins on an early November evening in 1977. At that moment a Louisville & Nashville freight train crept through the area en route to the east. There were scores of cars carrying routine industrial materials, but sixteen were filled with toxic anhydrous ammonia, a common item for the carrier. As the train rounded a curve in the Gull Point area, darkness had just fallen and all seemed routine. But then a derailment occurred. Two engines and thirty-five cars left the track, jackknifing and piling the cars on top of one another. Two of the ammonia bearing cars ruptured, sending a cloud of the deadly gas across the sloping ground and towards the home of Dr. Jon Thorshov, who was present, along with his wife and two small children. Sensing the danger, Dr. Thorshov raced from the house and climbed into the family’s pickup truck. However, the engine would not start. Now the Thorshovs leaped from the vehicle and the parents attempted to carry the children to a point of safety. They never made it. When firemen found the quartet almost a half an hour later the father was dead and the others unconscious. As days passed Llyod Thorshov died, too. The two children suffered severe eye and lung damage. Both faced blindness. Thus began Fred Levin’s involvement in what newscasters dubbed The Great Florida Train Fight. In the courtroom, Levin once again came face-to-face with Bert Lane, long a defender of the railroad. In this case Fred was paired with firm partners D. L. Middlebrooks and Daniel Scarritt.

Preparation for the case included a lengthy probe of recent operating affairs of the L&N, which had suffered a series of derailments and property damage incidents, locally and across its broad system. The research also showed that the Gull Point derailment had
injured forty-six other persons, had forced nearly 1,000 persons from their homes, and had resulted in an estimated $724,000 in property damage.

The fifteen-day trial was heard in Escambia County’s Circuit Court, and when the results were in, the survivors were awarded punitive damages of $10 million, plus compensatory damages of $8 million. The verdict was one of the highest ever in Florida at that time, and the largest wrongful death verdict of a husband and the largest verdict for a wrongful death of a wife in the country at that time, and, in Levin’s view, came to that level partly because rail officials were arrogant. “They came in and testified that the track was perfect and that they had done everything right. Their attitude was that they make no mistakes. This did not sit well with this jury.”

That attitude did not make friends with community leaders, either. City of Pensacola safety personnel now enforced a slowdown on trains passing through. Relationships with the L&N remained strained for some time. The Great Florida Train Fight put the Levin firm in the first rank of regional attorneys. More such cases were in the offing. Chronologically, these were highlights:

Four years later came a case in which the firm represented the estate of Pamela Denise Williams against National Rental Car Systems and the Allstate Insurance Company. Involved was the death of a 19-year-old black lady who was killed when her rented vehicle proved faulty. The award was $1,002,043, which was settled for $915,000. Once again Fred Levin led the firm’s team.

In February 1983, Levin directed a legal team which represented David Gillette, a 20-year-old University of West Florida student who became partially paralyzed from the neck down when he was injured as a passenger in a car struck by another automobile. The defendants were National Rental System, Inc., the Travelers Indemnity Company, and others. The initial verdict provided a judgment of $13,000,000 for the plaintiff and his parents. Following the verdict in March 1983, the plaintiff’s agreed to a settlement with Travelers for a $5.6 million plus interest at 12 percent until the termination was reached of a second bad faith case against the Hartford Insurance Company, which had been the insurer for another defendant in the case. Ultimately the courts ruled against Hartford. With interest and court awarded attorneys’ fees, the judgement against Hartford came to over $22 million!

Four months later a circuit court jury awarded $3.5 million to the parents of 13-year-old Derrick White, who was killed in an automobile accident. Defendants here were the Stone’s Super Service Company and their insurer, the Travelers. In this instance it was proven that the accident occurred because of an improperly mounted tire which had been serviced by the Stone organization. In this case Levin was paired with Daniel Scarritt in the firm’s presentations.

The following year two $1 million-plus suits were won. In the first, Levin’s firm obtained a $1,010,000 judgement for Terry and Joyce Darcangelo for injuries they suffered in a local automobile accident. Months later a six-member jury awarded plaintiff Helen Caldwell $1,000,000 for injuries she sustained in a head-on auto collision. However, while that jury was still out, a settlement for $750,000 had been agreed to.
The following year Fred Levin and his associates presented a suit on behalf of Susan Renea Neese, who had been widowed in the death of her husband of just six weeks. Neese had died in 1981 after touching a wire fence that had been electrically charged by wires from a downed power pole owned by the Escambia River Electric Cooperative. The incident occurred while Neese and friends were hunting in the McDavid area. The six-person jury awarded $3.3 million to the widow and $1,000,000 to the parents of the deceased.

Another case of note was the almost $50 million verdict against Southeast Toyota. This case involved the wealthiest man in Florida, Jim Moran. During the discovery phase, Mr. Moran was being questioned on deposition by Levin and commented that if Fred won the case, Moran would let him use his yacht for a week. Moran was a man of his word and invited Levin to have the use of his yacht The Gallant Lady, for several days in the Bahamas. Moran flew Fred, plus Fred Vigodsky, Allen Levin, Herman Levin, and Mac Seelig and his son Jason to the site. The Seeligs owned A. C. Coin and Slot which operated all of the slot machines in Atlantic City. They were also the International Power Boat Racing Champions. Years later, Moran added another “Gallant Lady” to his fleet. The one Fred’s friends had been on in the Bahamas was 136 feet. The new one was 175 feet and had been selected as the International Yacht of the Year for 1996. On a second occasion Moran flew Fred and some friends in his private jet to Martinique. On that trip, Fred Vigodsky and his wife Brenda, Allen and Teri Levin, and Fred were included.

The Orange State Life Insurance Company

It was early in Reubin Askew’s first term as governor when Fred was introduced to a successful insurance agent named Bill Whalen. The introduction came through outgoing Insurance Commissioner Broward Williams, whom Fred had known briefly. Whalen’s employer company was based in South Florida, and he had become very successful in selling a Medicare supplement, an item popular with thousands of older Floridians.

Whalen had an idea. He felt that his present company was not proceeding aggressively enough, and that a great market was present for exploitation by a company with a good product and strong marketing. Was Fred interested? Indeed he was, and before long the Orange State Life Insurance Company, domiciled in Largo, Florida, came into being. There was no shortage of quality directors for the new firm, and two of the men who would prove outstanding were Charles Rutenberg, brother of successful home builder Arthur Rutenberg, and Charles’s accountant, Fred Fisher. Both Rutenberg and Fisher then were part of the management team of U.S. Homes, also based in Florida. Rutenberg was chairman of the board of that New York stock exchange company.

Orange State took off, and before long, it was approved for participation in thirty-five states. It was, Fred recalled, surprisingly successful.

However, there was one drawback.

“I was chairman of the board,” Levin recalled, “but I’ll tell you honestly that most of us running the company really knew little
about the management of a growing insurance firm. We grew, and we were lucky."

Then came an upset. Fisher, working through several other directors, organized a coup which removed Ruttenberg as Chairman of the Board of U.S. Home.

"This was really back stage politics," Levin said, "for Fisher was supposed to be Ruttenberg's best friend, as well as his accountant in their primary business. But, Charles was out at U.S. Homes, and as a result, he removed Fisher from the board of Orange Life. With more maneuvering, Ruttenberg brought in a man named Barry Alpert. Now, Alpert knew the insurance business well, and he also knew the national marketplace. In a relatively short time, Orange State was acquired by a firm in New York State. We were out of the business, and all did quite well on the transaction. I will admit that we were fortunate. Of course, Alpert knew his business and deserved a lot of credit. He came at just the right time, for we had all discovered that Whalen had serious personal problems."

Overall, Fisher made a great deal of money off of those several measures. In fact, at a later date he made an extremely generous gift to the business school of the University of Florida. Today the school of accounting is know as the Fisher School of Accounting.

One final sidebar note to that story: several other Pensacolians had become stockholders in Orange State; they also profited from the transactions.

**BLAB**

Another adventure of an entirely different nature surfaced later in the 1970s and, because of its success, was still a large factor in the Levin story as this account was prepared. The story of BLAB (Basic Local Audience Broadcasts) emerged through trial and error, innovation, and more than a little good luck and good timing.

Some background:

The early 1980s were days in which the American professions (law, medicine, dentistry, architecture) still had taboos against advertising. In fact, most older attorneys felt that advertising and general marketing was nothing but huckstering, and was below their professional standards. Several of the senior members of the Levin firm, including David and D. L. Middlebrooks, felt this way. Fred disagreed, but he felt himself outvoted at that point.

It was at this time that Fred made one of his periodic trips to Las Vegas to try his hand at gambling.

"I did this periodically," he said. "I always set my limit of losses, so that I wouldn't go overboard. On this particular trip I didn't do well. In fact, I was out of the game a full day early, and was killing time until my flight back. As I did so, I was watching a television talk show, one of those afternoon 'nothing broadcasts' that are often totally useless. But this time they happened to be talking about the emergence of what they called 'talk radio,' where most of a station's format was conversation or input from persons with a particular bent or axe to grind. I listened.

"As I did so, I wondered what would happen if a community started a local talk-television station. What if lawyers took time on
such a show and just talked about the law, law suits, the problems that people have understanding the law...things like that.

"I took the idea back and discussed it with D. L., Jeff Mabie and my brother David. They listened carefully, and agreed that such a show would be different, and could be termed educational, not advertising. I was making progress towards good communications!"

However, at this point Fred’s ideas were just that...ideas, with no place to go in local broadcasting.

At this time cable television had just come on the scene, and Larry Lewis, local manager for Cox Cable Company, was having trouble fleshing out the several channels that were available to his company to bring into subscriber homes. Fred discussed his talk-TV idea with Lewis. Shortly thereafter, the conversations broadened, and this time a participant was State Senator W. D. Childers. Childers’ interest came from a different direction. He was still smarting from what he deemed unfair newspaper criticism of his business actions, something he blamed for his recent call before a grand jury. Childers felt that a local talk-televison station would be good for political figures as well as professionals, and for people selling other things.

Larry Lewis, having thought the matter through, formally proposed that such a station be created. He would make a channel available. Again, Fred Levin brought the proposal to his law partners, suggesting that the firm agree to take three nights per week and due one hour broadcasts. Fred suggested that three different partners be involved, thus sharing the burden of preparation and air time. The show would be partly presentation, partly response to viewer calls. Added community research revealed that veteran sports interest figure Ronnie Joyce was willing to do an hour’s show on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. UWF professor Frank Biasco was anxious to try one hour per night of general community interest materials. Jerry Kirksey was a local politico and was operating a cemetery. This group came together on a format, with limited broadcast hours. Larry Lewis helped plan technical aspects, and Kirksey agreed to manage the station.

Next came the need to find a suitable studio.

Just before this time, Gulf Power Company officials had come to the conclusion that their operations would benefit from a television production center where closed circuit materials and specialty training items might be prepared. They negotiated for use of an office building which had been erected by the now-defunct American Creosote Company, near the Pensacola Yacht Club. Gulf had equipped this building with cameras, a production console and other broadcast needs. However, the building lacked the ability to send a signal. Lewis provided the answer to this need, using a microwave to connect the Gulf studio with the Cox Cable transmitting station on West Jordan Street.

The first evening broadcast took place in February 1984. The new BLAB station was to have several owners, including David and Fred Levin, Childers, Kirksey and Jeff Mabie, a partner in the law firm. From the first, there was reasonable viewership, but obtaining advertising support was difficult. Broadcasts continued, but bills mounted. Before long the station owed Gulf Power alone more than $60,000.
The reversal came out of another failure-and-turnaround. The story of the Sam’s Style Shop saga appears in Allen Levin’s adventures, and that story was just coming to its climax as BLAB’s financial difficulties reached a serious level. However, the close-out of the Sam’s venture released Fred Vigodsky for a new managerial effort. Vigodsky replaced Kirksey at BLAB’s helm.

Now, innovations of several kinds helped spur viewer interest, and this promoted advertising and other broadcast time sales. Clients now willingly made BLAB a part of their advertising schedules, for as Fred Levin predicted, this form of local communication fit several modes. It was a learning channel; it was a place where viewers could see friends and people they knew voicing ideas, information and opinions.

At an appropriate time, the station was shifted from the original studio to the Cox Cable center. This helped trim costs and offered some sharing of staffing. Within just a few years, the stockholders were sufficiently bullish to open a second station to serve Mobile. Then came other BLABs, in New Orleans, Richmond, and Sarasota. In time, some of these were sold. The Pensacola stockholders retained shares of others. Concluded Fred:

“Like talk radio, this form of TV came when the time was right. Now, we’re able to send a signal from our Pensacola studio to eastern Alabama and all the way to Destin. We’re seen by a lot of people. And, of course, we’re served by the cable companies in those same areas. Our law firm continues to support the station with five hours a week of news broadcasts, plus some replays in early morning broadcast hours. The station was operating twenty-four hours per day as of mid-1998.”

In still another move, several of the BLAB stockholders joined other investors to purchase the former J. C. Penney building on South Palafox Street. The building was totally remodeled, part of it to be used as new BLAB studios and offices, other segments to be leased to professional firms.

“That gave the station a quality location and a quality appearance,” Levin said.

What might have happened had Fred Levin not lost his gambling stake that week in Las Vegas? Perhaps he would never have been stimulated by the afternoon talk show, and BLAB’s birth might never have come. However, lose he did...and the result is history.

CNN Radio and Poppa Don

The television station has not been Fred’s sole venture into broadcasting. A second one, currently called CNN Radio, came into being through an odd route, that went like this.

Early in their marriage, Fred and Marilyn had lived in an apartment whose owner had a son who, over the years, became known on the airwaves as Poppa Don Schroeder. Fred and Don knew one another through that contact, and later Poppa Don had become part of the restaurant operation in which Fred, Allen and Fred Vigodsky and others had ventured. Now, somewhat later, Poppa Don approached Fred with another totally different opportunity.

“I’ve bought a contemporary Christian radio station that has
a great future,” he began, “and I need a partner. How about it?”...or
words to that effect.
Fred listened carefully, looked at the station’s business plan,
and agreed to become a twenty-five percent owner.
“A good many people thought it was a great joke, me being
part owner of a Christian broadcast outlet, but I saw nothing wrong
with that,” Fred called.
Christian radio had local competition and a limited audience,
thus the station struggled until a new opportunity surfaced. This was
based upon the popularity of television’s CNN Headline News. That
network, too, saw opportunities to expand horizontally with little pro-
duction cost. They were offering their off-the-air signal to AM radio
stations, thus allowing radio listeners, especially those listening in
their vehicles, to keep current on news happenings.
The Poppa Don-Fred Levin station thus switched to CNN,
and, in mid-1998, that operation was doing quite well.
“One of the nicest parts of this operation is that we don’t
have to worry about a lot of on-air talent,” Fred concluded.

The Roy Jones, Jr., Saga

Still another capsule, shared by Fred and Stanley, began with
the televising of the championship boxing matches at the 1988 Olympic
Games in Korea. Thousands of Pensacolians were glued to their
sets for that event, for young Roy Jones, Jr., had been given broad
publicity, and his prior televised battles from Korea had shown him
to be a strong contender. As Fred recalled that event:
“We were surprised that the fight went the full three rounds.
The Korean was being battered from start to finish. All of us were
beginning to celebrate the outcome...and then the official decision
was given! Jones had lost! We couldn’t believe it. Neither could the
American sporting world. That decision put a black mark on the
Olympic events...but it did something positive, too. It showed all of
us that Roy Jones was a great fighter, and probably would have a
superior professional career.”
Up to this time, Stanley Levin was already involved with Roy
Jones, Jr. The boxer had begun his development at the Pensacola
Boys’ Club, where Stanley was on the board of directors. The club
was struggling financially, and Stanley had provided several forms
of assistance. In the process he got to know and watch Roy Jones,
Jr., and the boxer’s father, too. Stanley was impressed.

Following the summer Olympics, Roy Jones, Sr. came to visit
Fred Levin. Father and son had a strong relationship, and the senior
Jones was determined to manage his son’s budding professional ca-
er. To this point the father made all of the decisions. This was a
strong, motivated family. Roy Jones, Jr. had enjoyed a puritan-type
upbringing. His personal habits were clean and strong, and family
members were certain that a bright future loomed. The question was
how best to proceed? Roy Jones, Sr. knew a good bit about boxing;
however, in negotiating contracts and dealing with the fight game’s
big time promoters he might be a lost sheep.
“I was flattered,” Fred said, “but I had to admit that I knew all
but nothing about boxing. I conferred with Stanley, and we agreed to

82
accept this challenge jointly. By this time there were contracts being offered to the Jones by several of the nationally known promoters, men like Don King, Bob Arum, and the Duvas. They didn’t hesitate to tell the Jones that no one in modern times had reached a championship level, with the big television money, without such representation. That was the league we were to play in. But, we had confidence in what we could do as well as negotiators, too. As all turned out, Roy Jones, Jr. did become a champion without such aid, and Stanley and I were named boxing’s co-managers of the year for 1995.”

Fred’s memories of those days followed like this:

“Roy Jones, Sr. was a Vietnam veteran and a man who knew and appreciated key values. He was also a very stubborn man, often not willing to change positions when compromise might have made sense. His attitude was ‘...his way or the highway...’ The elder Jones was a fine boxing trainer, one of the best. He had prepared his son, and he also was trainer for a number of other successful fighters.”

The first professional fight was in the spring of 1989, and from that first night the road was uphill. Jones proved to be every bit the fighter he had illustrated as an amateur. In fight after fight he downed his opponents, and with successive wins he moved up the ladder towards a champion’s belt. Then came the family split.

Through the first four-plus years of his son’s professional career, Roy Jones, Sr. had maintained his position in the loop. However, the family relationships were fraying. The father’s somewhat autocratic manner began to wear on his son. Roy Jr., who was and is single, lived next door to his family. He had a dog which was a strong companion. One day the dog became agitated and bit Roy’s sister. The father, furious, killed the dog! Roy, Jr. could not be consoled. He turned to Fred and Stanley with this message, “You’re in charge. My father is out of it!”

At that point a new trainer was engaged. His name, Alton Merkerson, rang a bell with many in boxing, for he had trained the Olympic boxers.

Next came a deal through Bob Arum for Roy Jones, Jr. to fight for the WBC championship in his weight class, held then by James Toney. The bout was to be in November 1994, in Las Vegas. It was to be televised over HBO. The press played up the rivalry, with Toney deriding Jones.

That night the fight wasn’t close. As Fred Levin put it, “Roy destroyed him! They went twelve rounds, and there was no knockout, but there was no doubt about who won. Toney was badly beaten.”

Now came the really big time. Recalled Fred, “That victory paved the way for negotiating a contract with HBO on Roy’s behalf. I was very proud of the outcome. That contract was the largest ever sealed with HBO for a non-heavyweight fighter. Now Roy was really in the big time.”

From that point forward Roy Jones, Jr.’s career continued almost totally uninterrupted. The only blemish came in a championship defense fight against Montell Griffin. In this bout the referee declared that Roy had thrown a punch when the opponent was already down, and therefore Roy was disqualified. Technically the fight had been going Roy’s way, all the way. But, the referee’s voice counted. Now Roy Jones, Jr. had to overcome that tough decision.
And he did.

Fred’s memory of what occurred next remains vivid:

“The next morning I was on the phone to the World Boxing Council, one of the ten sanctioning bodies that create world titles. I told them that Roy wanted and deserved a re-match very quickly, and they agreed. The bout was held in a casino in Connecticut and was aired over HBO. It was one of those lightning fights. Roy knocked him cold in the first round! Roy was the WBC champion again.”

There have been other fights since then, including one against former light heavyweight champion Virgil Hill. Here Roy was fighting slightly above his usual weight range, and the battle ended several rounds in when a Jones body punch literally broke several of Hill’s ribs. Sports writers declared that they could hear the ribs “pop” as they sat at ringside. That was a most unusual knockout, for few men suffer broken bones to the body that way.

Other portions of the Roy Jones, Jr. relationship to the Levins will appear in Stanley’s accounts, for in many ways Stanley’s involvement took a different route from Fred’s. However, Fred added these observations, “In working with Roy we entered a field we had never explored, and never would have otherwise. For example, we came to know the former great heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali. Ali came to Pensacola and appeared with Roy before a huge audience of high school students assembled at the Civic Center. The idea was to tell a great success story, and to emphasize to the kids how important clean living and sportsmanship are in a successful life. Ali stayed at my house the night before that assembly. The governor of Florida, Lawton Chiles, was there that night, too. I’m proud of that event.”

Fred also had some personal observations on Roy Jones, Jr. “He’s a superior young man. At age twenty-nine he still has several good years of fighting before him. He’s already won five world championships, and he may take others, in heavier classes. He could do it, I’m sure, for many agree that, pound for pound, Roy Jones, Jr. may be the best fighter the modern world has ever seen. One of the things that stands as his support is his lifestyle. He’s single, he isn’t a playboy or a carouser. He’s a personable young man, and while others in boxing have tried to make this a racist sport, Roy will have none of that. He gets along wonderfully with everyone, especially young people. We see him spending hours with young boys signing autographs, and telling them about how to become a good athlete. He loves to play basketball, and he’s an outdoorsman, too. He likes to hunt and fish, and to be in the country, fooling with horses and other farm animals. He’s what I call a real role model. HBO has already employed him as a color commentator for other fights. They see what I see.”

Going beyond Fred Levin’s relationship with Roy Jones, Jr. is another professional story related to boxing. Fred began recounting that saga this way:

“When Stanley and I began working with Roy, I knew very little about boxing. I had been a fan for a long time, but I knew nothing about the inner workings of the sport other than what I read in the papers or sports magazines. Once I began to move inside, I discovered that there has been a rotten side to boxing. It’s been a
corrupt sport. What I learned, in a nutshell, went like this:

“There are four major boxing federations - the WBC (World Boxing Council), the WBA (World Boxing Association), the WBO (World Boxing Organization), and the IBF (International Boxing Federation). Each organization creates its own championships and also ranks contenders for each weight class, usually, one through ten. There are rules concerning when and how often a champion must defend his title, and the ‘who’ he will fight becomes an arbitrary decision reached largely through the influence of big time promoters like Don King, whose story has been carried in not-too-favorable terms in many publications. In other words, promoters, who have fighters in their stables, can largely dictate the rankings, and the rankings determine who gets to fight for the big purses...and in what kinds of locations.’

One example of the corruption:

“By the mid-1990s, boxing authorities everywhere had pretty much come to agree that Roy Jones, Jr. was, pound for pound, the finest fighter in the world. He held one championship belt, and his performances were all outstanding. But...none of the other three boxing commissions even ranked Roy Jones! Now...that makes no sense at all. And, of course, I wasn’t the only one to recognize this. By the mid-90s even the Congress of the United States was aware that something was wrong.”

Senator John McCain, the war-hero senator from Arizona, became interested in this problem and organized hearings. Fred Levin appeared as a witness before the Senate Commerce Committee and helped identify the core of the problems. Promoters such as King had become so close to the ranking boards that they almost literally could stack the decks in favor of the men in their own stables.

“I was privileged to be able to help draft a bill now before the Congress that can clean up much of this mess,” Levin said. “Senator McCain, who could well be a future presidential candidate, seized the initiative on this, and I believe that legislation will bring the fight game back to respectability. I hope so for Roy’s sake, and for the sake of other young fighters who deserve to perform in an honest profession. My work with Roy has been one hell of a ride, and I’ve enjoyed it. But what I feel most pleased about is being able to make a difference in boxing’s upper levels. That was one place where being a lawyer really made a difference.”
As all of this was proceeding - Roy's successful fights, his championship, the HBO contracts, the legislative involvement - Fred and Stanley were also part of another parallel move, the creation of the Square Ring Corporation. It came about this way:

As Roy Jones' success became obvious, other quality fighters approached Fred and Stanley, asking for similar help in management and training. To a limited degree, the pair agreed to help, and to organize the operation, they created what became known as the Square Ring Corporation. Stanley was to manage contracts and do the promotions; Fred was to be the negotiator. Square Ring acquired a fine old residence on Pensacola's North Hill (the building was originally the home of financier F. C. Brent, and later served as the Elk's Club). The building was renovated to become a gym, offices, training rooms, to provide food services, and with bedrooms for fighters.

"We became promoters of fighters," Fred said. "It became a separate business. And as this story is prepared, this has become a very successful operation."

The Howard Hughes Caper

Another chapter in Fred's life (and that of other firm members, too) revolved around the presence of partner Leff Mabie, who had joined the firm in the late 1960s. Mabie, all agreed, was a solid hard-nosed, tough lawyer, who won countless cases because of his skill at preparation and his courtroom style. Added Fred Levin, "Leff was a superior partner, but he also had a knack of getting into crazy deals. He was a prankster. He loved jokes. Actually, he came to Pensacola to go into partnership with J. B. Hopkins, and they became well known for some of the stunts they played on each other. For example, at one time one gave the other a chimpanzee. When they went to a bar association convention they took the chimp with them, dressed it in a suit and tie, and booked a room at the hotel for it. When they tried to check in, the act produced one of the really memorable events in association history."

Mabie also had a way of nosing out sidebar deals that, for one reason or another, didn't work out too well.

"I'm afraid he cost me some money," Fred said, "but that came back on one real success story. This involved the estate of the legendary billionaire Howard Hughes."

That story went something like this. When Hughes died in the 1970s his estate was not well documented, though it was very, very large. Hughes' personal life had seen some wild swings, thus as work proceeded on sorting out estate details, two young people surfaced in Alabama who claimed to be the billionaire's adopted children.

One day Mabie received a call from an attorney friend who had been asked to represent the young brother and sister. In the call, the lawyer said that he needed assistance. Would Mabie and his firm help? This could be a major case. The affair was a long shot, but the firm chose to proceed. After months of difficult hearings Mabie and the others obtained a favorable ruling in what was termed "Equitable Adoption," and that ruling gave the plaintiffs nine and one half percent of the Hughes estate. From that amount, several Levin firm
participants received sums, ranging from one half of one percent for Mabie, to one quarter of one percent for Fred and one quarter of one percent for the balance of the firm.

“That was an amazing case,” Fred remembered. “We found ourselves in some unusual territory legally, but we came out very well, as did those two young heirs.”

In retrospect, Fred compared the Hughes result with other of Mabie’s non-successes. “This made up for some instances where we ended up with bad paintings and other art, and some other things that weren’t profitable.”

Tragically, Mabie died at age 72, in 1996.

**The Great Tobacco Settlement**

Fred’s index of success stories has included several which made major headlines. Nineteen ninety-seven and ninety-eight generated one with the largest of type face headlines. It involved the public’s war against the tobacco industry.

Fred’s involvement began in 1993. Over ten years before 1993, he had been invited into The Inner Circle of Advocates, a premier, elite group of 100 of the nation’s most successful trial lawyers. At the end of the summer of 1993, the group’s convention was being held at a resort in British Columbia, and one evening, during the social hour, Fred was standing aside, enjoying the resort’s outstanding view. He had a cocktail in one hand, and was smoking a cigarette in the other, a habit he held since high school days. At that moment a fellow member approached and began a conversation, relating his own experiences on behalf of the State of Mississippi, which was attempting to gain reimbursement from the tobacco industry to cover the state’s Medicaid costs for treating health care cases where the patients suffered because of smoking. The man told of what had occurred to date. He outlined the strategy of that group of local Mississippi lawyers. Would Fred be interested in becoming involved in this case? The attorneys had already conducted numerous focus groups, and they believed that they had gained a portfolio of valuable evidence to support their position.

Fred’s experience in accident-injury-industrial health cases told him that this strategy would fail.

“I had learned that if a health insurance company paid bills in, say, an accident case, it could in turn sue the person or company that caused the accident. There was a legal defense called subrogation which enabled the defendants to require that the plaintiff step into the victim’s shoes and be subject to those very same defenses available against the victim. The tobacco companies had countered such suits for years. In fact, more than 1,000 such cases had been tried, and to date the tobacco companies had not lost a single one!

“I thought about this case and quickly said to myself: ‘The state is talking about proceeding in a single case, when probably there had been 100,000 such cases, many of which could be used as a defense because there was no real medical proof that tobacco had been the root cause of the illness or death. In addition, there were scores of different brands of cigarette that had been on the market over the years, and the tobacco formulas, too. No...suing through an
individual case victim to gain an overall cause verdict wasn’t going to work.”

Time passed. Then, one day in 1993, Fred was struck by a thunderbolt of an idea. What if a state had a statute which permitted it to sue a potential life-threatening product group directly, rather than through the mechanism of a case-individual? To his knowledge, no state had such a statute. Fred contacted Senator W. D. Childers and explained his idea. W. D. was intrigued. Fred then gathered available data which disclosed not individual case costs but the state’s total outlays for Medicaid in tobacco related cases. The amount of potential recovery dollars appeared staggering...in the billions of dollars. Next, the concept was taken quietly to Governor Lawton Chiles, who also became very interested. He brought Attorney General Butterworth into the picture.

“All of this had to be done very quietly,” Fred said later, “because if the tobacco industry and its super-powerful lobby realized what we were planning, they might well have stopped us cold in the legislature. But - they didn’t. I authored the Third Party Medicaid Liability Recovery Act. Actually, this was a modest rewriting of an earlier piece of legislation. It was a short bill...four pages...and it went through the legislature and was signed into law. Only then did the tobacco interests begin to realize what had happened. Quickly, their goal became to repeal the act as quickly as possible. They tried, but when the Governor’s veto power prevailed, the act was law.”

Now came another critical stage, putting together a team to make the act work for the State of Florida. However, by now Fred Levin had become the target of the tobacco interests. Having him as the point guard in trying such a case might be inadvisable. Thus a new Florida strategy evolved.

Levin volunteered to assemble what became known as The Dream Team, a consortium of eleven top-flight legal firms from throughout the state. Their role was to assemble a host of data covering several years, illustrating the true state of what tobacco can do and had done to the health of Florida’s users. The Dream Team members were engaged by the state. In the agreement, these firms were to bear the full cost of preparation and trial and the state’s officers agreed that they would share by receiving twenty-five percent of any award. The firms’ costs ranged in millions of dollars.

At the appropriate time in 1997, the case was settled...and the result was an eleven billion dollar award!

Governor Chiles commented that this became the most significant piece of legislation he had ever signed. Professor Daynard of Northwestern University Law School, one of the nation’s highest authorities on such legislation, called the Florida Law “the most important piece of health care legislation ever passed.”

With the victory and threat of statutes being passed similar to Florida’s, the other states began to negotiate Medicaid reimbursement settlements with the tobacco industry. In the United States Congress, a similar piece of legislation was introduced.

However, there were some aftershocks to this story.

Once it became apparent that The Dream Team firms would receive huge amounts for their services, state officials began to backpedal. One circuit judge declared that the proposed fee award
was “unconscionable.” However, when tempers cooled the matter went to arbitration. As Fred reviewed it:

“Those eleven firms would receive enough money to enable them to live like the sultans in oil rich emirates! By mid-1998 the state had already received its first annual settlement...of $1 billion.”

And Fred Levin?
He was not a part of the Dream Team settlement, or the case itself. However, as he put it:

“Those firms are remembering me with some very nice referrals. All’s well that ends well. And our firm and I will participate in the settlement, receiving about $300 million over some fifteen years.”

The first element of that settlement arrived in the Levin, Middlebrooks offices in December 1998. It was for $25 million.

By coincidence, the University of Florida Law School had recently inaugurated a major capital funds campaign to help pay for a new, major structure on its campus, and to provide funding for top level future faculty. It was that campaign that brought Dr. Richard Matasar, Dean of the law school, to the Levin offices that month. The two discussed the prior generosity of the Levin brothers on behalf of the law school. Now they were asking counsel on how or where to proceed in trying to obtain additional large funding. Dean Matasar commented that in the university’s plans it would be possible to name a new building on campus for the donor of some $6 million. They might name the entire law school for $10 million. At that moment these statements might have seemed to be made in jest. But they were not, really. Fred, now in possession of a huge sum which he might distribute, at least in part, took the comments very seriously.

“Let me think about this for a bit,” he told the pair. “Maybe, just maybe, I’ll go for the whole $10 million.”

That decision required study of the tax implications, and Fred’s desire to do other worthy things for his community, for his family and his law partners. However, the pieces fell into place quickly. Within hours, Fred Levin advised the law school leaders that he would contribute the $10 million. However, he attached some provisions.

“I said that the gift would be contingent upon the law school increasing its part in the “advanced studies” program which had been established there in the name of former Governor Reubin Askew, and that a senior professorship be named for my brother, David. Then, sort of in fun, I asked that the two seats that my brother Stanley occupies at Gator home football games be provided with some sort of special backing. Stanley has a chronic back problem, and sitting in one place for an extended period is painful. Dr. Matasar laughed and said that he would personally be the carpenter and upholsterer of those seats, and that he would check them out before game time, every game.”

And that’s how the table was set for the announcement ceremony described in this book’s first pages. More than fifty community leaders, friends of the university and law school, law firm associates and others attended the luncheon at Skopelos Restaurant. It was then that details of the Levin gift to the university were made public. Reubin Askew acted as the master of ceremonies. Dr. Lombardi and Dr. Matasar expressed their thanks and presented the
law school’s plans for use of the contribution. Both stressed that the gift would have a double impact since it would be equaled by state matching funds. Then Fred spoke.

Part of his comments detailed his own story, and expressed his gratitude for those events and people that had made his own success possible. He devoted several minutes to the story of the Levin brothers and their children at the university, and what the university and its law school had meant to them. In part, he said:

“Dr. Lombardi has noted that this was to be the second largest individual gift to a law school in the history of our country. That’s fine. My hope joins his, that the University of Florida Law School will, in the next century, grow from its present stature of a great law school to one which is recognized by legal authorities everywhere as outstanding! Florida deserves that.”

There were many reactions to Fred Levin’s gift. Most were statements of praise and thanks. E. Dixie Begg, one of Florida’s most distinguished attorneys, then almost to his 91st birthday, called Levin and commented on Fred’s success as an attorney, and on the meaning of the additional funding for the law school, which also was Begg’s alma mater. Other men and women of the law, locally and across the state, had similar reactions. However, there were a few sour notes. One South Florida lawyer said that the law school had sold its name to the highest bidder. When he heard that comment, Fred sighed and said:

“I guess that’s the way things always are. One can’t satisfy everyone. After all, the naming process was the school’s suggestion. I didn’t seek it. I just wanted to play my part as I was able.”

And so things proceeded.

As part of his distribution of the tobacco settlement for 1998, Fred also made a $2 million contribution to the recently established Levin-Papantonio Foundation. This foundation has set its sights on providing assistance to children in need.

He had one other comment:

“I had been hooked as a smoker as a kid. I had tried to quit countless times, and I think that I have - now. However, I see this case as me sort of getting even for the addiction. For smoking is an addiction. You know, our statistics showed that some 400,000 people die in this country every year from smoking-related illnesses. And an average of 3,000 young kids begin smoking each day. Their future illness potential and liability is huge. If we helped put a stop to this, or even slowed it down, then we’ve done something that was very worthwhile. And the companies involved? They have been shown to have dealt dishonestly with the public. These sums they must pay are large, but they’ll survive - unfortunately. The American tobacco market won’t go away, whatever we do. And the international market is growing like a weed. If we did anything to slow this terrible thing... well... I’m proud of that.”

Then, there was still another medical related case that had a close family tie.

In 1958, when Martin died, the cause of the death was identified as leukemia. Martin had suffered from acne, and his physician had prescribed a strong antibiotic as a cure. When the boy developed leukemia his mother felt that - perhaps - the strong medication had
produced the cancer. This possibility had been discussed within the family many times, but, of course, there had been no proof.

Then, in the mid-1960s, a woman called Fred seeking legal advice. Her son had died of aplastic anemia, but previously had been treated for a totally different cause with a drug called Chloromycetin, produced by the Parke-Davis Company of Detroit. The woman revealed that she had heard of a somewhat similar case where the drug had been involved in a fatality.

Fred was fascinated by the case and accepted it. Here was another instance where indepth research would be needed, and the studies provided some challenging details. Chloromycetin had a primary target disease in which it was highly effective. That disease was Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. Chloromycetin was a very powerful antibiotic, and - Levin discovered - Parke-Davis was spending approximately $6 million per year promoting the product to physicians, through medically related publications such as the New England Journal of Medicine, and MD. The drug, the ads suggested, was good for many things. It was, the ad copy claimed, "a miracle antibiotic."

But research disclosed a disturbing figure: approximately one in every 1,000 people per year who had taken that drug died! Some five million persons per year were being prescribed to use Chloromycetin. The death rate was - Levin reasoned, very high indeed.

As his studies continued, Fred suddenly remembered, and asked himself:

"Didn't my brother Martin take that drug to combat his acne? I think he did. Now I've got a personal stake in this case."

When the case went to trial, Fred asked the judge to allow the jury to determine punitive damages. Never before in the history of this country had punitive damages been allowed against a drug company for producing prescription medicines. The drug company argued that if the case went to the jury on punitive damages, that their exposure would be so great throughout the country that they would have to withdraw the drug from the market in the United States. The case went to the jury on punitive damages, but the jury did not award those type damages. The amount of the award was not a serious blow to Parke-Davis, but the fact that punitive damages could have been awarded and may very likely be allowed in other cases throughout the country was a serious blow. Shortly thereafter, Chloromycetin was removed from the market in this country. The only way the drug can be used in the United States is in a hospital setting.

"All things considered," Fred reminisced, "there are some 5,000 people per year now who are walking around - alive - because they were not given that drug. In the years since the case was tried more lives have been spared in the U.S.A. than were lost by our country in Vietnam and Korea combined!

"I often lecture to law school classes and at seminars, and I frequently refer to this case to illustrate that beyond wins and losses, large awards and small, there is a human purpose in the practice of law. The smoking-tobacco case was one proof, the Chloromycetin end result was another. I'm very proud to have played a part in such affairs."

As time passed, a number of unique opportunities have floated
by Fred Levin, some of which he's accepted, others he has not. Among the more exotic ones was his development of the Penthouse Triton. The Penthouse was on top of a condominium being developed by First Mutual of Pensacola. E. W. Hopkins, President of First Mutual, convinced Fred to buy the shell of the Penthouse.

Next Fred invited decorating guru Art Mullen to employ his artistic touches to the apartment, and Mullen literally outdid himself. Every person who crossed the unit's threshold was struck by the Star Wars appearance of every room, every detail.

"It was outstanding," Fred recalled, "and I guess I moved forward with it because I was being encouraged a little by W. D. Childers and Jake Horton, both of whom could see the apartment as an ideal place to hold conferences with political big wigs and others. Of course, they were right."

This was a time somewhat after the exit of Reubin Askew from the Governor's mansion, but it was still a time when many in the political arena felt that the Levin brothers had some magic touch in getting men and women elected. As a result, gatherings of the high and mighty began to develop at the Triton. Sometimes the personages came for a brief discussion, at other times they became Fred's guest for several days.

"We played host to Gary Hart and Jeremiah Denton, among others," he said, "and when you look at those names, you can see that we ran the gamut in our range from liberal to conservative. Even Bob Hope and his wife were our guests for a week. They thought the place was fabulous, which it was."

Several clients used the apartment to advantage, including Gulf Power Company, whose management circulated in high political circles. To maintain the unit was no bargain. Monthly utility and maintenance charges were at least $1,000, and Fred maintained both a full-time butler and chef on the premises. "We served good food and good wines to whomever was there. The place was first class. But...after a time I began to ask myself why was I doing all of this. It was costly."

One of the dignitaries who had been introduced to the suite and who had been a guest was named Mike Adkinson. Adkinson had been a local man but had moved to Texas and had made a great deal of money there. In 1986 he returned to the Gulf area, about the time that Destin was just beginning to boom. Adkinson purchased 18,000 acres of area property, planning to wheel and deal.
One night, as he was returning to Destin from Texas, Adkinson had an accommodation booked at the nearby Hilton. He arrived shortly after midnight only to discover that there had been a snafu...and he had no room. The tycoon was very angry. Turning to an aide, he said something like:

“I don’t know where we’ll sleep tonight, but I’ve had enough of this foolishness. Remember that condo we stayed in one time? OK...go buy it!”

And he did. With that Fred Levin departed the Destin condo scene...but the memory, and the color photos in the expensive brochure describing the property, live on.

The House

A second property involved what in 1998 Fred could only describe as Home Sweet Home. This story began in 1986 Fred was driving back and forth across the bay bridge to Santa Rosa Island on a regular basis when he seized another real estate opportunity. This was his purchase of a magnificent home on the shore of the Santa Rosa Sound, in Gulf Breeze. These were the details:

“As I drove, I spotted this building going up on the south shore of the Gulf Breeze area. At first I thought it must be a motel, but then I reasoned that no one could get a permit to build commercially in that location. Then, through my friend Dean Baird, I found that what I had seen was a single-family dwelling being built for a condominium developer named Tom Underwood, who had been making a great deal of money.”

Not long after that, the Congress passed and President Reagan signed a new tax law which emasculated many of the tax benefits which had fostered the national boom in condos. Underwood was trapped, like many other developers. Excess condo inventory skyrocketed. Bank notes went unpaid, bankruptcy threatened many. Underwood was hit like the rest. Seeking to protect his financial flank on his expensive home, he quickly made a few stabs at interior finishing, then moved in, to qualify for Homestead Exemption under Florida law. However, such moves did not stem Underwood’s losses. Now Baird approached Fred, suggesting that the Underwood house might be available on favorable terms. Fred considered. The site was superb, and the house might well be completed and resold to advantage. He met with Underwood; the pair bargained, and Fred made the purchase, which included an adjoining waterfront lot. But then, what Levin discovered inside the house was surprising.

“The Underwood family had made a quick pass to make the building liveable,” he recalled, “but there weren’t any major appliances, and much of the interior finishing one might have expected had yet to be done. The interior layout itself was a surprise. The Underwoods had three sons who loved basketball, thus one end of the building had literally been built as a basketball court, two stories high to permit arching shots! Let’s put it this way: getting the place in a position to be saleable was a challenge.”

Again Levin called upon decorator Art Mullen to provide professional touches, and Mullen did. Contractors converted the basketball court area into bedrooms, and throughout the proper ameni-
ties were installed. A dock was built...and on, and on...and on. “All of this was interesting and exciting,” Fred admitted, “but then we reached a point where I realized that we had built so much that we had probably priced the building out of the existing market. That’s when Marilyn and I decided that we would move in, at least for a time. And we did.”

It didn’t take long for the Pensacola social community to become aware of the excitement that was incorporated in the new Levin home! Groups shily asked if the home might be used as the site for a fundraiser, an organizational meeting, a very special party. Often the Levins said yes. The Salvation Army’s 1992 Financial Campaign hosted an event there at which Dallas Cowboys star Emmitt Smith was a speaker. Political meetings were conducted there, and, all things considered, the house became both private home and showplace.

“We like it,” Fred said, “because the location, with its great view, is terrific, and Marilyn enjoys supervising a house like this. It’s just - well - different.”

That’s where things stood in early August 1995. For two days, weather forecasters predicted that Hurricane Erin was a threat to the Pensacola area, and they were right. In the early stages of the storm, much of the region lost electric power, but the Levin’s Gulf Breeze home did not. Phone calls went out, urging other family members to take advantage of the situation. Several did. Brother Allen and his wife arrived. So did Fred Vigodsky and his wife. And Papa Abe came, too. By suppertime the gathering had become a small family reunion, and the others talked Abe into preparing one of his kitchen specialties, salami and eggs. They had a feast!

“That night we sat around and talked, far into the night,” Fred said. “The storm was still there, and my Dad was in a fine fettle, remembering things out of his past. I guess it was midnight when we retired.”

Early the next morning, the house’s smoke alarm sounded. Fred leaped up and began hurrying from room to room.

“I was sure the house had caught fire, perhaps from some electrical malfunction,” he said. “Then, as I ran about, I went into the room where my father was. I called to him, but he didn’t move. Then, suddenly, I knew. I went to the bed and touched him. Yes, Papa was dead. He had passed away quietly in his sleep.”

The fire alarm was false. What caused the malfunction was never discovered.

Following Jewish custom, Abe Levin was buried the following day. Rabbi Winnegradr gave one eulogy, Reubin Askew the other.

“I know my father would have liked what they said,” Fred added.

A family generation had passed on.

Two months later, Hurricane Opal smashed across the area. Erin had done little damage to the Levin house, but Opal was different. The Levin’s dock was swept away, and there was structural damage to several parts of the house.

“Fixing and repairing have taken up a lot of time,” Fred said. “In fact, in 1999 we’re still working. The dock had to be completely rebuilt, there was roof damage, and well...the storm made me realize
that we have a staff of eleven people working on this house - all the time. That number includes a contractor, an electrician, grounds people and a lot more. Yes, this is a great house, but it doesn’t come cheap.”

What is the property worth, in 1999 terms?
“Dunno,” Fred says, “but I can say this. Tom Benson, who owns the New Orleans Saints and a lot of other big things, recently purchased four lots (which were approximately the same size as my property) adjoining us and paid $2 million for them, and that was just for the land. Beyond that, maybe I don’t want to know the worth.”

With all of that, the Levins are largely homebodies.
“We support many, many things, in the arts, cultural events, good will needs,” Fred said, “but, Marilyn doesn’t care much for going out to such events, so we don’t. We enjoy our home, our children, and good television. As part owner of BLAB, I like to stay current in what’s being aired elsewhere.”

Is Fred a joiner, a club member? No.
Beyond day to day experiences, the Levins travel a fair amount, and in recent years that has included trips to sites where Roy Jones, Jr. was fighting. “Marilyn enjoys the fights, and, of course, I love ‘em,” Fred beams. “She likes staying at the casinos, too, and on those trips she will almost always devote one evening to playing blackjack, at which she’s very good, by the way.”

The Levins have two boats, both Magnums, one fifty feet long, the other seventy. The larger vessel was undergoing remodeling in 1998. One of the eleven household employees is captain of the boat.

“We use the boat a good bit,” Fred says. “We’ll take evening cruises on the bay, sometimes with friends. It’s nice to be able to do that.” The Levins also enjoy cookouts with friends and family.

The Levins also have developed an interest in fine art, some of which hangs in the law firm offices.

Levin has become a well publicized author, too. He has a lengthy list of articles that have appeared in leading law journals, and his book, Effective Opening Statements: The Attorney’s Master Key To Courtroom Victory, has gone through five printings following its introduction in 1983.

In the arena of politics, do the Levins remain active?
“That’s a funny question!” Fred says. “During Reubin’s terms as governor, people came to think of the brothers as king makers, believing that we really knew how to plan and run campaigns. As a result we were - and still are - contacted by a lot of aspirants. But we really are not in that business. Oh, we talk with lots of folks, but I can’t remember when we were actively involved the last time. However, one interesting case did involve Congressman Joe Scarborough. I didn’t know Joe, but suddenly he began to appear as a sort of talk show host on BLAB. He was a brash young 28-year-old lawyer at that time, and the programs were not legal, and they weren’t political either. I became fascinated with what he was doing, and why. Then one day he came for a visit, and told me he planned to run for the Congress, some day. He asked what I thought of that. I showed my political acumen by telling him he was nuts! Well, you know the story from that point on. When Earl Hutto retired, Joe ran against a
strong field, and he won. So much for the Levin influence."

The proudest part of Fred Levin’s life, of course, lies in the success of his four children. He says: “I repeat, their mother raised them all, any credit due is due to her influence. I hide behind the facade of being a workaholic, which has truth in it. But, believe me, as I look at the four kids and what they’ve done - yes - I’m proud. I should be.”

The first born of the quartet was Marci, who came into the world April 1, 1960, while Fred was a law school student. “We were living in student housing at the university when she arrived,” Fred recalled. “And as I look back, I can only call those very good days. I felt that we had a sense of direction, and we did. Things moved along well.”

Marci attended school in an era when there was much debate over the quality of Escambia County’s public schools, thus Marci attended the Pensacola Academy of Arts & Science, where she became president of the student body. Her bachelor’s degree was taken at Tulane University, and this was followed by a degree from the University of Florida Law School. It was there that she met Ross Goodman, also a law student, who would become her husband. Upon graduation, Ross accepted a clerkship with a federal judge in Tampa; Marci joined the staff of the prosecuting attorney serving the Tampa-St. Petersburg area. Both enjoyed excellent beginnings in their profession.

Once the preliminaries were completed, the couple moved to Pensacola where Ross moved into private practice and Marci became established with the local prosecuting attorney’s service. Both careers have prospered; today he is with the Levin firm, and she is chief prosecutor for juvenile affairs. The couple has two children, Jacqueline and Brenton.

“Marci and Ross live in what I like to call the old family house, the one I had purchased from the estate of Dr. Kennedy, on Menendez Drive,” Fred said. “When Marilyn and I moved to Gulf Breeze, I left the Menendez Drive house to our four children, and Marci and Ross bought out the interests of her siblings.”

The second born of Fred and Marilyn’s children was Debra, born September 20, 1962. Debra completed her primary schooling at Washington High School, then took a business degree from Tulane. Later she attended the University of Texas before transferring to the University of Florida where she was graduated with a master’s degree in business administration. It was at Florida that she met law student Mark Dreyer, who went on to complete his professional degree at the Stetson University School of Law. Shortly thereafter, they were married.

The family’s next stop was in Panama City, where Mark became part of a local law firm, and Debra became a teacher. The couple had one son, Jake. Unfortunately, this marriage ended in divorce. However, the parting was an amicable one, and Debra elected to remain in Panama City, where she became an instructor in computer science at Gulf Coast Community College. “Little Jake is growing up to be a fine boy,” grandfather Fred allowed.

Fred’s only son, Martin, was the third child to arrive, joining the family December 11, 1964.
“Martin had an unusual youth,” Fred commented. “He was a fine athlete, a very personable kid, but (and I can say this because I was one too) he was a bit on the wild side at times.” Martin attended the Liberal Arts Academy through the ninth grade and then, at his own urging, transferred to Washington High.

“Early on Martin, was not the most high-powered student,” Fred said, “but at Washington he did very well indeed. And he was a sports star, too. He wasn’t big, but he became an All-State goalie in soccer, and then academically he came on very strong. He ultimately was vice president, then president of the student body. He would have been valedictorian; however, for that honor they considered grades through all four high school years. Being at Liberal Arts one year spoiled that opportunity, and Martin really regretted that.”

Going beyond the posted grades, however, Martin did not do well on his SAT score.

“That statistic was low, maybe even below 1,000,” Fred remembered, “and that worried us, for Martin wanted to go to Stanford, and normally one doesn’t waltz in there with anything but the highest scores. But, Martin’s overall showing got him in. And you know what? He graduated at Palo Alto with high honors. We were proud!”

Next Martin moved on to the University of Florida Law School, where he graduated first in his class. Martin then worked briefly as a clerk for a federal judge in Miami, after which he returned to Pensacola to join the Levin firm. What he has done there is recorded briefly in the book’s final chapter.

Martin married shortly after his return to Pensacola; his wife, Terri, is a school teacher. As yet this family has no children.

“They do have a very handsome bayou front home that keeps both of them active in their spare moments,” Fred added.

The fourth of Fred and Marilyn’s children is Kimberly, born March 3, 1969. Kimberly’s educational pattern differed somewhat from her brother and sisters. She began her college work in Gainesville. Noted her father:

“When Marci was at Florida, I bought a condo there, and in succession, all of my children lived there, sometimes with a little overlap. That was where Kimberly lived during her three years at Florida. Once she left there I sold the property.”

Kimberly did what no other Levin had done to that point; she left Gainesville and entered Florida State University for her final year. It was there that she met and married Gary Brielmayer, who was a student in the FSU school of hotel and restaurant management. Once the pair were graduated, Gary began his career working with hospitality industry firms such as Hyatt, Hilton and others. Ultimately he became part of the staff at Sandestin, and has enjoyed a rapidly rising career. The Brielmayers live in Destin, and have two children, Tyler and Alexandra.

“All four of the kids have done so well, and I believe they’re happy,” Fred allowed, “including Debra, with her divorce. Each is doing what he or she wants to do, and they are doing it well.”

Having children in Destin and Panama City makes it difficult for Fred to gather them all into the Levin family ritual of Sundays together. But…they do come close.

“Marci has taken this on, and she does it so well,” Fred says.
“We have dinner together each Sunday, and the out-of-towners come as they can. My brothers and their family members are there, too. Then, we also concentrate family gatherings on Thanksgivings, Christmases, and on religious holidays. We aren’t exactly like we were when mamma and pappa were with us, but we try hard to maintain the tradition. That’s important.”

All of the Levin brothers have enjoyed productive careers, and they have become involved with men and women of note, some on a national scale. But David, Allen and Stanley all comment on the contacts with “the rich and famous” that Fred has developed. Fred, however, shrugs off any pride in this, saying “These contacts, exciting and pleasant as they have been, were the result of good luck and the fact that one thing just leads to another. It’s all part of a giant loop. I’ve been lucky.”

One example has been his growing friendship with internationally renowned artist LeRoy Neiman. Art devotees recognize Neiman’s name and works, for he has become one of this century’s most prolific artists, specializing in scenes and portraiture illustrating figures in sports and entertainment. His studies abroad widened his fame, and Fred’s first contact with the artist emerged as Roy Jones’ career flowered. Fred described that beginning this way:

“Roy was doing so well, and I felt that the time had come to have a fine piece of art of him,” he began. “I had heard of LeRoy Neiman, but he didn’t know me from Adam’s house cat. Even so, I made a phone call and got him on the line. Our conversation went nowhere until I got through to him about my relationship to Roy Jones. Neiman knew all about Roy, for he follows major sports, including boxing, very closely. After a lot of negotiating, he agreed to do a piece, but wanted Roy to come to New York, so that the artist might study what Roy really looked like. I knew that wasn’t going to fly, but Neiman finally agreed to look at a series of photographs. I sent those off. He called back and said - OK - he would do it.

“The next contact we had was a report that the painting was done. That came just as Roy was about to fight in Atlantic City, so I arranged to have Neiman meet us at the Trump Plaza, at a party where several sports figures were present, Emmitt Smith, Kenny Stabler among them. That’s when the painting was unveiled for the first time. It was great!”
Thus a great friendship was born. Fred immediately commissioned other paintings and Neiman began his visits to Pensacola. Their contacts went back and forth between the Big Apple and the First Place City; meals were shared, and an enduring friendship blossomed. Somewhat later Neiman appeared with some of his works in a showing at the Pensacola Museum of Art, which the then-director Dr. Carol Malt orchestrated. Fred continued:

“I have a number of Neiman’s paintings, oils and water colors, plus some crayon sketches he made of the family. I’m very proud of how this relationship developed...and, of course, it all started because along the way I had gotten into the boxing business. LeRoy Neiman’s friendship is part of that loop.”

Another emerging friendship came about in a somewhat similar manner. It involves a man named Terdema “T” Ussery. Fred explained:

“T is an African-American who is very bright, very sharp, and is one of the truly great emerging behind-the-scenes figures in sports. He’s Ivy League, with an MBA and law degrees. Once he was in the business world, he joined a top-flight West Coast law firm. One of that firm’s clients was the Continental Basketball League. A few years ago there was a disastrous commercial plane crash in Iowa, and, by chance just about the whole management of the CBA was killed. The survivors knew T and had worked with him. With other leadership wiped out, they proposed that T become the commissioner of the league. He accepted.

“Not long afterwards he broadened his work by becoming president of Nike Sports Management which involved signing great athletes to sponsorships with Nike products. That’s how I met him. T wanted to have Roy Jones as one of the Nike team. In short order we became good friends, back and forth with one another. I’m maybe 25 years older than T, and I guess he sort of looks at me as a senior advisor. In any event...as time passed, we found that we shared some important common interests. His own scope widened, and he became president of the Dallas Mavericks basketball team in the NBA. The team is owned by Ross Perot, Jr., and this gave T an ever wider background. Then, he shared my dream of cleaning up boxing as a sport, and we began to discuss hopes of creating a World Boxing League which would set standards for the sport, worldwide. That’s what we’re working on now.

“During the time that I was representing a number of different boxers, I was contacted by a number of people from the country of Ghana who represented a World Champion named Ike Quartey. One thing led to another, and I began representing Ike. As a result of this, I met a number of people including Godwin Asifo, Fred Asifo, and Seth Asah, who are all brothers and come from the royal family of Ghana. They were so pleased with my representation of Ike and having read my background in regard to people of color, they made a recommendation that I be appointed a Chief in Ghana.”

Fred admitted frankly that he had no idea of the scope or seriousness of what was being proposed. He told his brothers and others:

“Well, I thought this was one of those nice honors like being made a colonel in the Florida Highway Patrol or a Kentucky Colo-
nel. You know, those things are given out as little kudos, with a nice certificate to frame and put on the wall. That’s what I thought at first; then I discovered I was dead wrong!”

As the correspondence flowed in preparation for the award ceremonies, Fred did considerable homework on Ghana itself, and learned that it is among the most advanced of the African nations.

“Ghana has very strong ties to the United States, and even to the world,” he said. “For example, the present elected head of the United Nations is from Ghana. Its international language is English, and it is the only nation on that continent with a public education system. A great many Ghanians come to the United States for their upper level education, and there are almost 300,000 living in this country now, many of them in the professions. My role in the future as a chief will be part ceremonial, but part practical, too. I will assist the government of the country and others in some of their tourism contacts, and in certain kinds of economic development. For example, like Quartey, who has been part of our boxing team for some time, hopes to establish several Kentucky Fried Chicken outlets in his home country. We’re trying to assist with that.”

The tribal ceremony making Levin a chief was conducted in New York City at the home of the United Nations on January 22, 1999. (This will be followed eight months later by a form of tribal baptism in Ghana, when Levin will make his first visit to that country.)

In preparation for the United Nations event, Levin flew to New York, accompanied by his immediate family, his grandchildren, and virtually all of the Levin firm members and their spouses. “I didn’t actually count our party,” he admitted, “but we had between fifty and sixty people from Pensacola.”

The Friday activities began with a reception at the UN, after which attendees entered one of the formal meeting rooms of the familiar structure. Others in the audience included a number of Fred’s associates from the world of boxing, and Seth Abraham, president of HBO, the television network.

Participants in the ceremonies included the Paramount Chief of the Akwapem Traditional Anza, the Ghanian Ambassador to the United States, and the Ghanian Ambassador to the United Nations. Levin appeared first in tribal dress; Godwin Asifo served as master of ceremonies.

First the paramount chief conducted the swearing in ceremony, after which Levin, regarbed in chief’s attire, stood to hear details of the formal award, presented to the audience by His Excellency Koby Koomson, Ambassador of Ghana to the United States. In that presentation the ambassador affirmed that only two others from outside the African nation had ever been so honored. They were Shirley Temple Black, who once served as U.S. Ambassador to Ghana, and Congresswoman Barbara Lee. Also participating in the ceremonies at the U.N. was Congressman William Jefferson of Louisiana who, as the current head of the Black Congressional Caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives, continued with the ceremonies by presenting Levin with a resolution from the black caucus. An under chief provided other ceremonial details.

Once the ceremonies were concluded, the audience and par-
At the United Nations headquarters in New York City, Fred was installed as a tribal chief of Ghana.

ticipants retired to another area for a concluding reception. Later, Fred Levin commented:

"In all my life I've never seen a more well-defined, seriously approached event. The people of Ghana regard this position of chief very seriously, and my associates from Pensacola agreed that it was truly very significant for me and for our family and firm to have been so honored."

How often will Chief Fred Levin (Nana Ofori Agyeman I, his tribal title) return to Ghana?

"I'm not certain, but I suspect that it may be quite often. One other point that was impressive to us all is that this title is hereditary. At my death, it passes to my son, Martin, and then, assuming he has a son, the title will continue to move forward."

As with the linkage to new associates in Ghana, the boxing loop has enabled Fred to have close friends with leaders of major hotels and casinos in Las Vegas...with the Trumps and the MGM's of the world.

"Fascinating? You bet it is...having contacts like that," he added. "A log of my business day's telephone calls is really pretty amazing. Sometimes I can hardly believe it. But...well...as I said, a lot of what has happened to me is pure good luck."

The loop goes even farther.

In pursuit of the World Boxing League dream, Fred has become a confidante of Warren Flagg, the chief FBI agent assigned to the broad role of cleaning up boxing.

"It isn't just guys like me who want to see things changed in the ring," he says. "The FBI, the U.S. Senate...lots of others...we all
Following the tribal installation ceremony, Fred goes hand-to-hand with Ghana native Ike Quartey. World Welterweight Champion.

know that this has to change. Warren’s a great guy, a dedicated man. He’s the sort that will help get the job done.”

*****

Looking to the future, where will all of this go? Like his brothers, Fred Levin has become something of a philosopher as the years have passed. Being a philosopher requires some honest soul searching. One afternoon, in the midst of such meditations, his thoughts ran this way:

“All along the way I’ve been so fortunate, so lucky. I’ve been in all kinds of business ventures that - well - at times seemed ready to bomb out. But somehow, they never really crashed. They had happy endings. They built relationships, too. But, on the down side, I’ve been so busy all these years that I haven’t done some of the things I know I should have done. Now...well...I have to consider what others think of me. When our firm had an image study done, I was amazed that 100% of those interviewed knew who I was. That’s amazing. But...that knowledge did not come from a whole shopping list of good deeds I’ve done. The image resulted from news stories about court cases, from appearances on Law Line, from headlines. That’s great, but as I grow older, I’ve come to believe that each of us has to do something more than just work, make money and be known. Oh, I’m proud of my work in tobacco and boxing, but those are national issues, not local. Now...well, I’m working with a member of our firm, Mike Papantonio, to create what we call the Levin-Papantonio Foundation. We’re trying to set aside some resources and to do good things for good causes. I can’t tell you where this is going or how fast...but we’ve started. I hope I can become more involved in that sort of thing. I can see already that my children will be. I think their generation sees community involvement more clearly than ours did.
Beyond that?
"I just don’t know," he concluded. “I guess I’m still worried about the fact that I’ve had life so good this time around. What will happen when Judgement Day comes? Will I get a different kind of ticket then? Yes...I worry about that.”

Noted for his contributions to boxing reform, Fred was surrounded by former world champions in a meeting at Fred's Pensacola home. Included in the group are Jake LaMotta, Emil Griffith, Gil Clancy and Jerry Cooney.
Chapter X

Stanley’s Story

The fourth of the Levin sons was Stanley, born November 18, 1938. Stanley’s early years were spent in the home on West Blount Street, and at the proper time he entered Miss Elsie’s Kindergarten. In Stanley’s memory those were grand years, protected years, in which mother, father, brothers, an uncle and, for a time, a grandparent dwelled together.

“I know things were unusual for us,” Stanley said many years later. “There’s no other way to say it: we were protected. One of our maids, Daisy, really helped bring me up. We lacked for very little. We were given opportunities that most other kids didn’t have.”

In time the family moved to its East La Rua home. Meanwhile, Stanley had entered public schools through P. K. Yonge and had begun to enjoy some of those little lessons which childhood can provide. In one instance he repeated his tale:

“My brother Fred and I loved to play ‘army’! My folks built a special place for our games out in the back yard at 15 West Blount. Close by was a small house occupied by Uncle Benny. Our play house was a screened-in affair, with beach sand poured on the concrete floor. Here Fred and I would play by the hour with our iron soldiers, our tanks and airplanes. We were collectors, you see. On birthdays and other occasions, people knew that items like this added to our collection would be prized gifts.”

One story related to how they almost added prize soldiers...but didn’t quite get them.

It was summer, and both Fred and Stanley were scheduled to attend a boys camp in New York State. Rose was to be their shep-
herd on the train trip north, which was quite long. When the trio arrived in New York City, a stop en route to the Camp Winnipeg, in upper state New York, they were scheduled to spend the day and night in the city, at a large metropolitan hotel. The arrival in the station had been at an unusual hour, too early for breakfast on the train, and so the Levins hurried to the hotel to check in, eat, and prepare for a big day.

One problem.
Stanley did not feel well.
"I was just queasy," he remembered. "You know, all through my boyhood I loved to eat. My mother used to say that if she put food in front of me - almost any kind of food - it was gone in an instant. She used to say that as a child I would say, 'I loves food!'"

However, now he was hungry, and his stomach was upset. He remembered:
"I felt, though, that all would be OK once we got into our room and I had a chance to lie down for a moment. When we walked into that huge hotel lobby, with its beautiful furniture, magnificent chandeliers and people everywhere, I knew I had to work hard to stay in control. By the minute, I felt worse...but if only we could get up to our room..."

But they couldn’t. Rooms were still being vacated by the previous night’s clientele, and the clerk advised Rose that this was going to take time...considerable time. Stanley became slightly green, his eyes glazed over. Now he knew he just couldn’t hold back any longer. But...he surely didn’t want to mess up the floor by upchucking all over that lobby. However...after another moment, the time had come. What did he do? He grabbed the back of Fred’s shirt, pulled his collar down, and let it fly!

Fred couldn’t believe it! But then, the smell and all got to him, too. In just a few seconds he was sick, very sick. For Fred there was no collar available. The lobby became his target.

Moments later a haggard room clerk suddenly discovered that he did have a room for the Levins after all. However...it was too late.

Within an hour or so, things were getting back to normal, and the Levin trio was ready to see some sights. One of the first objectives was a department store where Rose believed they might add to the boys’ military collection. Into the store they marched, and sure enough, there was a display of toy soldiers to bring joy to the hearts of such as Fred and Stanley. Carefully, weighing each possibility with care, the boys made their choices, and then all three Levins advanced upon the sales clerk to pay for their purchases.

Here we must insert a truth about one trait shared by all of the Levins, including Abe and Rose. All possessed a remarkable ability to function arithmetically in their heads. Such a skill no doubt made Abe a superior gin rummy player. For Rose this skill enabled her to perform magic with household purchases and accounts. The sons inherited those abilities.

On this morning the Levins placed their purchased items on the counter, and the clerk produced a total. But then she had to apply the New York sales tax, and here the poor woman became befuddled. Her numbers skills were poor at best. Rose produced the proper figure mentally in an instant and told the clerk what it was. But no,
the lady insisted that her instructions were always to compute such a
total herself. She figured, she added, she subtracted, but somehow
things just wouldn’t come out right. Rose insisted that she had the
proper number, adding that the Levins had other things to do. The
interchange became heated, then loud, the woman finally wailing
that she must call for the manager to help. By now a small crowd had
gathered and was watching. The high pitched dialogue between the
two women could be heard clear across the department. Finally, Fred
backed into the crowd and piped up:

“Who’s that crazy lady? Why’s she making so much noise?”

The bystanders howled! The clerk reddened. Fred repeated
his question. Still there was no resolution in sight. Finally, Rose
pushed the purchases back across the counter and shouted, “You keep
the stuff, we don’t want it!” And with that the Levins made a power-
ful exit...but without the new regiment of iron infantry.

Back to the hotel they walked, Rose was very, very upset.
When they reached the room, Rose’s final shred of patience had
snapped. She seized young Fred, turned him over her knee and
administered a spanking, all the time with him repeating “Who’s that
crazy lady!”

The boys camp was a popular place for other Pensacolians,
too, and both Gene and Joe Rosenbaum were among those attending
that summer. Camp life was fun-filled from start to finish, but there
were highs and lows, too. One unforgettable story involved Field
Days.

Field Days were filled with competitive sports, some indi-
vidual, some team. By his own admission, Stanley was not a sought-
after athlete at that point.

“I was barely ten-years-old, and my love of food had told on
me. I was the proverbial five-by-five. Imagine, at that age I weighed
about 150 pounds! Naturally I was about as fleet as a turtle.”

For one relay race, the boys were assigned to teams, and on
Stanley’s team was Gene Rosenbaum, who was a genuine flash. He
could run! Gene also didn’t like to lose. This race was run as a relay,
and Gene was to follow Stanley. The first boys took off, one by one,
and the race was fairly close as it neared Stanley’s turn. Gene stood
just in back of Stanley, to be closer.

One thing that Gene had learned in Pensacola was that Stanley
was deathly afraid of snakes. No...he was petrified of them! Where
Gene found a snake at this critical time is not known to this day, but
find one he did. And just as the lead runner came flashing towards
Stan, Gene tapped him on the shoulder and showed him the reptile.
Stanley gulped, and as the other runner’s hand slapped his, he took
off.

Running opposite were two boys who should have left Stanley
in their dust. No, he didn’t beat them, but they didn’t whip him
badly, either. When Gene Rosenbaum took off on the final leg, he
had plenty of opportunity to make up lost ground and win the race.
The snake had done its job. The next summer, the Pensacola contin-
gent (Fred, Stanley, Gene and Joe Rosenbaum) attended a camp in
North Georgia called Camp Blue Star.

An event that summer developed around the second heavy-
weight boxing match between Billy Conn and Joe Louis. Louis was
well beyond his prime now, and many thought he could be beaten. Also, a rumor had started that Conn was Jewish (actually he was as Irish as they come) and this camp was primarily for Jewish boys. Many backed Conn. In the days prior to the fight, interest climbed high, with lots of betting...at the one cent and five cent level. Stanley was betting on Louis. However, Stanley had a little extra pocket money his mother had given him, and with this he got into a negotiation with one of the camp counselors. Ultimately their bet was for $5...which in 1946 was a lot of money.

The fight was not much of a contest. Louis won, and so Stanley began collecting his wagers. Going from boy to boy, he picked up loose change. Then he turned to the counselor. The older boy refused to pay, and dared Stanley to try and collect. A shouting match rose higher and higher, and the counselor ended up by slapping Stanley, and sending him to bed...without his supper. That was not a wise move.

Stanley went as ordered, but while others were eating, he slipped to the counselors area and removed the straight razor which the older boy used. Then Stanley settled into his bed...and waited.

Lights out came. All of the other boys sacked in and were soon asleep. Not Stanley Levin. Now he slipped from his bed and quietly tip-toed to where the counselor was in dreamland. With one swift movement Stanley was on the boys chest, and the 150 pounds proved very effective in holding the older person down. Out came the razor and Stanley began to shave him. It was an effective way to make the point.

"Now will you pay?" Stanley demanded.

Much shaken, the older boy begged relief and agreed to make good on the wager. The rumpus naturally wakened many, and next morning the camp’s leaders stepped into the picture. Learning all the facts, camp officials discharged the counselor. Then they transferred Stanley from his current cabin to what was termed “Out of the Way.” This was a cabin removed from others, where boys were sent who had violated discipline. This cabin was like a homecoming, for already several of the other Pensacola boys had been sent there. To Stanley, this was great! This cabin was near the rifle range, and already he was anxious to become an expert marksman. The one big positive he took from camp that summer was a mastery of target shooting. He became very good at it.

As those early years passed, Stanley transferred from P. K. Yonge School to N. B. Cook when the family’s home was moved to the east side. Next he entered A. V. Clubbs Junior High School, on 12th Avenue.

"I guess I was a pretty good student all the way," he recalled. "I liked school, and particularly I liked everything that had to do with mathematics. The natural abilities of my parents transferred, I guess. At any rate, I worked hard at my school work. I had a weight problem, and that kept me out of many other things, sports included. For example, at one time I was five feet eight inches tall and weighed 250 pounds. I was like a bowling ball. But some of the things our family required made up for school activities."

Like his brothers, Stanley was put to work in some of the enterprises Abe controlled on the beach and at the dog track. "When
I was just seven or eight I worked in the stands selling snow cones and ice cream, and renting umbrellas,’’ he said. “My mother and dad believed in teaching all of us to work. Those lessons taught us to handle money, and the value of money. Along the way, I began to save valuable coins, and one day at the beach a customer paid for a cone with a nearly-mint 1919 silver quarter. Because I had been studying such things, I recognized that I had a treasure. Believe me, that twenty-five cents went into my collection, and it’s still there.”

Abe also didn’t hesitate to deal out some of the not-too-pleasant jobs in his business to his sons. Stanley remembered cleaning the grease trap at the Dog Track food service, and loading the drink boxes. Thinking back, he recognized that his father was teaching some lessons.

“Often I would hear my father talking to other employees who might object to the dirty assignments. My Daddy wouldn’t hesitate to say ‘My sons did that job!’ That usually made the employee shut up and get busy.”

Stanley (and his brothers, too) remember still another lesson their father tried to teach them. As they moved towards their university days, he would say to them something like: “You’ve got a good life, and while you’re in school, I’ll pay for what you do, what you need. You’ve gotten used to the good life, and that’s fine. But I want you to get that education and move into some work that will let you lead that good life on your own.”

Stanley would repeat, over and over, that his parents tried to instill in their sons something akin to the Golden Rule. They taught that every person has value, that each one should be dealt with fairly. “Your good name is worth everything,” Abe would say. “I don’t ever want to find a situation where someone could say that I or my family treated them dishonestly or unfairly. Your reputation lives long after you. I may not leave you a penny, but you will have a good name!”

At Pensacola High School, Stanley found life fun, and his classes a challenge but always with a successful result.

“Early on I became a member of one of the high school fraternities. Ours was called the Rogues, not the same one Fred was in, you see. Our group’s name was well chosen. We were the jokesters, pranksters, and we had lots of fun. Who was there? Oh, Jimmy Jones, Jim Pallas, John Golson, Manning Hitt, Tony Lankford, Jon MacBeth, et al. Yes...those were good years. After the 9th grade, my shape began to change. I think I grew six inches in one year, to six foot two. I still weighed 210 pounds, too, something that would lead to other physical problems later, but I no longer was kidded about being Mr. Five by Five.

In his final year Stanley breezed through his courses, ending the year with A’s and one B.

“I was really upset about that B, because it came in a snap course called Business Math. This was one of those obvious courses teaching people how to make change, keep the checkbook, that sort of thing. I had known such things for years. When I got the grade, I went to see the teacher and asked why, she sort of fumbled around, then said, ‘Why, you missed too many classes.’ Big deal. I still had the B. I never forgot that.”

Then it was time to consider college. Actually, there was
never any decision making. Stanley was to be a Gator as his older brothers had been.

**School Days Learning Experiences**

Several of Stanley’s junior high experiences would remain memories for a lifetime, and would also be hallmarks in building his character. One involved his seventh grade teacher Ruby Greenhut, who taught English and mathematics. Stanley remembered:

“To that point, I had enjoyed school and had gotten by without much effort. But Mrs. Greenhut changed all that. She was one of those teachers who sized up each student’s capabilities, and made each one work right up to the maximum. I know she did that for me. She rode me hard! And you know what? When I left the seventh grade, I had mastered English grammar to the point where I never really had to learn anything else about it. The same was true with math. She helped me build a foundation. That kind of teacher is rare, I’ve found. She cared! And she prepared her students for their futures. Our bond was so great that I made her godmother of my son.”

A second experience came in the ninth grade and involved Mr. Talmadge, who taught history. One day Mr. Talmadge had to leave the room during class, and as all classes will, this group began to cut up. To this day Stanley can’t remember exactly what he did that was out of line, but there was something, and it was still in progress when Talmadge returned. The classroom roar quickly ceased, and the teacher began identifying the rule breakers. When he questioned Stanley, the latter steadfastly denied any wrongdoing. Over and over the questions were put, and each time Stanley came forth with a denial.

“One thing my father taught me was to tell the truth and not waiver,” he declared. “It’s the same with telling an untruth. If a person lies, he’s going to be trapped because one lie leads to another. Tell the truth! If you’re in a difficult position, stand fast. Well, that day I stood fast, even though I knew I was lying. Obviously I had only applied half the lesson my father had imparted.”

The end result was that Stanley was given many afternoons of detention...staying after school. Even so, he stood fast. Then, one afternoon, while riding his bike home, he passed the intersection of 16th Avenue and Jackson Street. He had no idea that Mr. Talmadge lived there, but there was the teacher, out in his yard, at work. Stanley stopped, and the two talked. They didn’t discuss the classroom incident or the detention...they just talked. Minute by minute a friendship blossomed. “We bonded, that’s what it was, we bonded,” Stanley said. “From that time on, I learned many good things from that teacher. Moreover, from the afternoons of detention I learned the importance of my father’s message.”

During the junior high years, Stanley still was a roly-poly boy, much overweight, and short. Still, among his seventh to ninth grade friends and neighbors, he was the leader. Those boys developed what Stanley later referred to as their “Rat Pack.” They did things together. And they frequently got into mischief. As the leader, Stanley created some of their plans. When they moved about, they
often even pulled him in a coaster wagon!

But one idea turned out badly.

This was a time when motion pictures were featuring “the Mob” and many unsavory characters. Several films had dealt with “the protection racket.” Now Stanley’s Rat Pack decided that they would have such a deal for themselves. The homemakers of the neighborhood needed their protection, they declared, and house by house they began going to the women, “demanding” fees of five and ten cents a week to “protect their home.” Many of the ladies thought that this was funny, even cute. But one woman, Mrs. Schecter, wouldn’t go along.

Well, that just wouldn’t do! And so the pack decided on some form of retaliation. Again, it was probably one of the films that inspired what they did. Surely it wasn’t the boys’ idea. What happened went like this.

In those days Abe Levin received luggage from manufacturers packed in excelsior-like cushions. The material was light, flexible and flammable. Stanley told Abe that the boys were starting a project, and having a lot of packing material would be helpful. Abe jammed his car with one load...and Stanley asked for even more. Abe brought more. Then, on a quiet evening when Mrs. Schecter was out, Stanley and his gang took the material to the Schecter home, which had a screened in porch. The door was open. They jammed the packing material inside...and lighted it. Then they took off!

Did they realize the possible consequences?

“I don’t think we even thought we might do serious damage,” Stanley recalled. “We were playing a game.”

Fortunately, the fire did not consume the house or even do serious damage, but there was some, and when police were called, the Rat Pack was identified. A policeman telephoned the Levin home. By chance, Stanley was home alone. The police ordered him to come to the Schecter home. Stanley hung up and quickly placed a call to the Progress Club, where he knew Abe might be engaged in a gin rummy game. Abe was there. Stanley began to tell half the story...but then remembered his father’s oft-said injunction to tell the truth.

“What shall I do?” Stanley pleaded.

“Stay home. Don’t go!” Abe ordered. Stanley hung up.

Moments later the police called again. Once more Stanley called his father, and the order was the same. A third time this happened, and finally Stanley caved in. He went to the Schecters’ house and the details of his role came out. Then he went home. When Abe returned he learned what had happened in full detail.

“Right then I got the worst spanking I ever got!” Stanley remembered. “My father wasn’t punishing me so much for the prank as he was for disobeying him. Oh...my...he was angry!”

Later it cost Abe about $400 dollars to repair the damage caused by the fire. Oh...and after that, the Rat Pack confined itself to less hazardous actions.

Through the junior high and high school years, Stanley learned the same lessons his brothers did about honesty, fairness, and getting along with others.

“My parents placed great emphasis on religion,” Stanley recalled, “and they made certain that we knew right from wrong. And
another thing they did: they made sure we blended with others. We celebrated Hanukkah and we celebrated Christmas, too. Our parents didn’t want the Levins to stand out in a negative way. I don’t think we ever did.”

“We didn’t date much,” he recalled. “In fact, I remember one time when one member, Jimmy Jones, elected to have a ‘date’ to take a girl to church. The rest of the Rogues showed up at her house ahead of time. When Jimmy arrived to pick up the girl, we all put on a sort of Animal House drill, perched in trees, on the lawn, and in other spots, making the whole affair seem ridiculous.”

Stanley, unlike David, was not a musician. Neither was he an athlete. With his fellow Rogues, he reveled in wearing the black jacket with skull and crossbones art across the back. His grades were good, so good in fact that he was named to the National Honor Society. Even here, there was a twist. Stanley remembered:

“Mrs. Partridge, who was Honor Society sponsor, told me privately that she had a hard time getting me in because the Rogues had an image of doing bad things. Actually, the image was not earned. We didn’t do that much.”

Stanley was part of the Spanish Club, and he enjoyed other basic school activities, too. By the eleventh grade, his mind was beginning to focus on the future.

“Already I knew that I would go to college, and based on what David had done, and what Fred had begun, I knew I would go to the University of Florida. By then my goal was to have the grades to get in. And I got them. When I graduated a year later my academic record was very good.”

Another thing which influenced Stanley’s thinking at that time was a film called The Young Philadelphians. The story line of that movie dealt with the exciting life of a young tax attorney. Stanley felt that this might be a good career for him.

The Gainesville Years

Stanley arrived in Gainesville in the fall of 1956 to begin his college life. Like Fred, he joined Pi Lambda Phi fraternity, though he did not choose to live in the house. Another who arrived at Florida a year later was Jon MacBeth, a Pensacola boy who had been a star football player at Pensacola High. Even though Jon and his high school team had done well, he was relatively small for a college back and was not much sought after by college scouts. That is, he was not until the Florida All-Star Football Game. In that contest, Jon’s star rose...high! Many Southeastern Conference schools now were after him, and ultimately he accepted a University of Florida scholarship. Jon and Stanley had been friends all through high school. In fact, they were close friends.

“Jon was a super guy,” Stanley recalled, “and we were as close as two friends could get. However, he had a few small problems. Jon was no student. He got by in high school because he was a football whiz, and that was the case at Florida, too. Then, Jon could not handle liquor. He went wild with a little too much.

“Jon had another passion, too. He had two younger sisters, very pretty girls, and to him they were everything. Woe unto the guy
who said something off color or derogatory to or about either of those girls. Jon carried their pictures in his wallet, and well, to him they were special.”

When Jon arrived in Gainesville he joined the Pi Lambda Phi fraternity. He would live in the athletic dormitory.

Jon hadn’t been on campus long, when, one night during Spring frolics, Stanley received a call at the Levin house. All hell had broken loose at the Pi Lam house, and the calling brother begged Stanley to hurry there. Stanley had seen such rages before, and his experience was that the problem could be addressed by simply slapping Jon on the back...in a hearty manner. Stanley provided that advice, and the caller proceeded to try the method. Moments later he called back. Back slapping hadn’t worked. In fact, the “brother” had been slapped about pretty well himself. “Please come!” the boy begged.

Stanley was not drunk, but he was not cold sober, either. Nevertheless...he jumped in his car and raced to the fraternity house.

Jon had gone crazy, the boy claimed.

As he entered, he could hear what sounded like a giant animal roaring. The sounds came from an upper floor, and quickly Stanley raced up there. When he arrived, he found MacBeth standing in the hallway, with other brothers peering out of their respective rooms. When MacBeth looked towards a specific room, the door would be slammed shut. As he approached his friend, Stanley realized that Jon had been drinking...a lot.

Working very carefully, Stanley drew Mac into an unoccupied room. There he tried to calm his friend, discovering in the course of time that the problem had begun when one of the brothers had made an inappropriate remark about one of Mac’s sisters. Stanley’s calming efforts had little effect. As they stood there, Mac spotted a stack of 45 rpm phonograph records, lying on a nearby table. Taking the records two or three at a time, the football star began biting huge chunks from the plastic, spitting out the chewed remains.

About that time another brother, a boy from Miami named Harold Clapper, entered the house and began coming up the stairs. Clapper was carrying a hamburger and a milkshake, the latter in a large pasteboard cup. MacBeth stepped out, and Clapper proceeded to pass on the landing. That was not the thing to do. MacBeth seized the boy by the neck with one hand and lifted him off the floor. With his other hand, MacBeth grabbed the milk shake and jammed the gooey mess on top of Clapper’s head. Then he dropped the terrified youth to the floor.

Meanwhile, Stanley used every trick he knew to calm MacBeth. Mac wouldn’t be calmed. Instead, he seized Stanley by the shirt front with one hand and raised the 210 pound Levin off the floor!

At that point, one of the brothers entered the room, carrying several bottles of spirits. Somehow the boys got Mac to take another sip...and then another...and then another. Finally he passed out. Only then did the incident end.

“Jon was a great guy, very bright, but with poor study habits,” Stanley remembered. “All through school, there were ways for test results to be made available to athletes, but Jon would not even
memorize the simplest of these. Instead, he would write the A, B, C answers on his handkerchief and take that with him to class. But...he was some kind of player...and he somehow carried on.”

Later Mac had a brief trial with the Pittsburgh Steelers, but his smaller size was against him. He did not make it with the pros.

However, that didn’t end his story. By no means. Now MacBeth got his study habits under control, returned to school, made up the many classes in which he had hardly worked, and then went on to become a Ph.D., a full professor teaching anatomy plus kinesiology, at Middle Tennessee State University. Thus the story had run full circle.

Going back to the day when Stanley arrived at Florida, he was assigned to a dormitory and, on that afternoon, was sitting in the lobby, getting acquainted with his new roommates. As he did so, along came three other students who can only be described as “cool.” The three were from Miami Beach, wore sunglasses, flashy clothes and one even carried a cane. The trio were looking for suckers.

“Anybody here play gin rummy?” one asked.

Now, looking back in the Levin heritage, Fred and Stanley had spent countless hours looking over their father’s shoulder as he played gin rummy with some of the world’s experts. They knew the game. They had great heads for numbers, and for memorizing combinations. Stanley looked up at the questioner.

“Is that something like poker?” he asked innocently.

“Yeah...yeah...like poker...almost just like it!” the one boy responded. Obviously, the three had found a mark.

Within a few minutes a game had started, and Stanley played his role like a champion. He never let on that he had the slightest idea of the game’s rules or procedures...he just systematically began to win. The others couldn’t believe what was happening. This chump was beating them. By now, they were playing for real money...big money.

“I don’t remember how much I ended up winning that day, but it was a lot,” Stanley recalled. “Of course they owed me the money, and to their credit they paid, or tried to. Later, one of them was arrested for breaking into a dorm to steal money, and blamed this on his debt to me!”

Later, school officials learned of Stanley’s gambling incident. He was called before the ethics council and was placed on probation. This one event was a prelude to another family incident which would have much wider consequences.

Fred was several years ahead of Stanley at the university, and by his senior year had been joined by Fred Vigodsky and several others in renting an off-campus house. Now in his sophomore year, Stanley joined them. This was a fine arrangement...and soon the house became a center for a very special campus activity...gambling.

“Fred was a super gambler. So was Fred Vigodsky and some of the others. Only Ed Sears, a football player and one of the dearest friends I ever had who also lived there, was not part of the game. He just didn’t gamble,” Stanley recalled.

What sorts of games were played? Just about anything: gin rummy, poker, blackjack, and bridge. Fred was good at them all, and others had their specialities. Who came to play? An amazing list of
campus people, including faculty members.

"I'll tell you, big money flowed," Stanley remembered. "Our people were all very good, and week after week the dollars rolled in. In fact, we had to keep a calendar to remember to ask our father for college expense money. He would have become suspicious of what was going on if we hadn't."

Some of the professors had compulsive gambling habits, and a few began to fall into serious debt. Week after week the house prospered...and then something happened that no one had counted on. Of course, word of "the house" had spread a good bit, but there was no official reaction until one man, with a significant debt, had tried to cash a bad check. He claimed this was to make payment to the house in cash. Police caught him, and in his confession, the whole story unfolded. Now college officials stepped in. The residents of the house were called before what was called the Disciplinary Committee, composed of the deans of all of the colleges. At first the whole group was called in together. As they were, one woman, a dean, asked:

"Which of you are the Levin brothers?" Stanley and Fred acknowledged their name.

"Well," the dean continued, "I consider you all such skilled professional gamblers that when you deal with students, it's almost like stealing."

The Committee's actions were to begin by calling in each house resident separately. The investigators were trying to pin down who really headed the operation. Obviously, there were going to be some penalties dished out; all of the boys except Stanley were seniors, and were on the verge of graduation. Fred worked out a strategy, but at the outset, it was unknown to Stanley. Stanley swore there was no leader. As each of the others were questioned, they testified that Stanley was the leader! When the Committee acted, Stanley was suspended from school for a full semester. The others were reprimanded (and the gambling was closed down).

"I guess that made sense," Stanley said later. "After all, the others were about to finish, and I wasn't. I went back later and all was well."

Ed Sears, who had become one of Stanley's closest friends, remained that way. That semester Ed was also back in Pensacola and they began hosting parties for high-school-age young people. These outings were staged on the beach, and were affairs where couples would assemble on dates, sometimes as many as 100 of them present.

"In one sense these parties were good, because everyone was together, and Ed, the big football star, helped keep order. But then, we also provided something which we called Purple Passion. This was a drink made by mixing 180 proof grain alcohol, gin, vodka, grape and grapefruit juices, plus 7-Up for sparkle. It was potent, and it had a purple color. The alcohol probably wasn't too good an idea, but it was one of the things that brought the crowds together."

One night, after one of the parties, Ed and Stanley went into the casino. A few moments later, Stanley walked outside and came near a young man who was sitting on the wall which outlined the property. The fellow had obviously been drinking, and his mood was surly. He mouthed off to Stanley, who mouthed back. At that
moment the youth pulled a knife. Stanley backed away, and walked to the nearby parking lot, where his Buick was parked. Going into the trunk, he drew forth a tire iron, then returned to where the knife handler was sitting. The two stared at one another when, out of the darkness, Ed appeared, carrying a long piece of a two-by-four.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you, Buddy,” he said softly.

Stanley looked around, and there, behind him was a second man, with a long knife in his hand. This fellow had been sneaking quietly behind Stanley, with the blade upraised. At that point the original youth told the second boy to “back off.”

With Ed still holding the large board, the first boy apologized.

“I’m sorry, and I’m glad you came along. My brother thinks he’s my protector. I’m afraid he might have killed you. He gets violent sometimes.”

Ed Sears was a great friend, and a star player for Florida. He was handsome, bright, and pursued by many beautiful women. As he graduated Sears was serious about (and was pursued by) a girl from Jacksonville, from a very wealthy family. At this same time Sears was offered an opportunity with the Chicago Bears. He received a contract, but then suffered a leg injury. The Bears continued his $500 per week to sit on the bench, but the girl wanted Ed back in Gainesville. Sears left the team, but he and the girl later broke up. Ed later married, but this marriage ended in divorce, Ed’s career never prospered, and sadly he died quite young.

Throughout their individual accounts, all of the Levin brothers emphasized that while today the Levin family is close-knit, and always ready to support one another, those feelings didn’t always exist. Their father and mother taught countless lessons by example which ultimately paid dividends in bonding; yet from their early years, the boys developed competition, rivalries, teasing, and sometimes outright opposition. This was particularly true between Fred and Stanley, perhaps because of their age proximity. Stanley told these stories:

From his earliest years, Stanley was interested in firearms. Perhaps he was influenced by motion pictures, or maybe the feeling developed because he saw so many guns in the pawn shop where, at times, as many as 1,000 might be there awaiting recall. In any event, the feeling grew...and grew...until one day, when his father was away, the urge became overwhelming.

Even in those early years, the boys were often assigned tasks in the pawn shop, thus on one afternoon, Stanley was there and walked alone into the gun storage. There he spotted a handsome chrome-plated .32 caliber revolver. “That’s for me,” he decided, and when time came to leave for home, he concealed the weapon about his person.

But then, inside the Blount Street house, he panicked! “What’ll I do with it?” he asked himself. “What if Daddy finds out?”

Frantically, the boy looked about for a hiding place, and then he remembered: outside the front of the house stood a large fir tree, a sort of Christmas tree with low, large, drooping branches that hung to the ground. Stanley hid the gun under the tree. Somewhat relieved, he reentered the house.

Several days passed, and then Abe returned. That day, as fate
would have it, the owner of the .32 caliber pistol came to the pawn shop to redeem his merchandise. Abe went to the storage area...but, of course, the gun was missing. Flustered, he asked the customer to be patient until the next day. Abe knew that somehow that gun had gotten to his home. No one else would have taken it.

Home he went, and an inquiry began. Everyone pleaded innocent to any knowledge of the missing gun, and so Abe ordered a search. Stanley innocently suggested that they extend the search outside, and, turning to Fred, suggested: “Do you suppose someone might have put it under that tree?”

Fred went to look, and of course found the gun. Watching all of this, Stanley shouted: “Fred’s got the gun!”

The finger of guilt was pointed at Fred, who could only protest his innocence. But he knew how that gun had gotten there! And he remembered! A rivalry was born. But then a second incident allowed Fred to even the score, though this came later, when both boys were at Pensacola High School. In those years (1954-56) several boys began to gamble, playing gin rummy and poker, and surprisingly the amount of money that began to float in those games grew quite large...from $4-6,000. Both of the Levin boys were involved.

“There weren’t many of us playing,” Stanley recalled, “and the winnings seemed to drift back and forth. One day I would have $3,000, then next day $5. But...we all loved to play, and we did, at school, at night, weekends, at lots of places.”

As his sons grew older and stayed out later at night, Abe became the typical concerned father. He wanted to know that his boys had returned home safely, and so as the hour grew late, he would station himself in a rocking chair and just wait.

One night the brothers card game went on very late. In fact, it was after six in morning when Fred and Stanley entered the front door. However, both had agreed on a story to tell their father. Did Abe know about the ongoing gambling? Absolutely! Not much could take place with his family in Pensacola that escaped him. But, in any event, they weren’t about to admit that their game had been the cause of the late arrival. As they neared home, both boys agreed that their story would be that on a visit to Gulf Beach Highway with friends there had been a flat tire, no spare, and no help along the road. As they entered, Abe asked the obvious question, and Stanley told the story.

Abe was doubtful. He asked Fred: “Is that where you really were?”

Fred, with a grin, replied: “Aw, no...Stanley and I’ve been out on Gulf Beach Highway gambling.”

Abe turned to Stanley: “So you lied to me!” Stanley was caught. And, for the moment, the rivalry was even...one to one...at least.

How long did this sibling rivalry continue? For years.

“There were all sorts of little things and incidents. We just played tricks on one another,” Stanley declared. “And it didn’t stop until boxing entered our lives. Then, as we began to work with Roy Jones, Jr., we became a team. Suddenly, the old kidding stopped, and I believe that was so because each of us appreciated what the
other was doing in this very important project. We’re still very different people, but we work together. I, for one, appreciate what Fred is, how smart he is, and what a terrific job he does in his professional work. Some people are critical of some of the fees that work produces, but I know he deserves every dollar he brings in.”

As the boys grew older in high school, the time came when each got his driver’s license.

“Our parents treated driving as a privilege, and they made sure we treated the privilege with respect,” Stanley remembered. “Being able to drive carried with it some obligations. All of us were impressed over the years by our mother’s willingness to help people who were sick or injured. Every Friday, on the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath, she would have food prepared for such people, and when we were able to drive, it became our job to deliver the food. And I don’t mean just a plate or two! Each Friday we had a regular route to drive.”

There was a similar effort at the Christmas season, and for this Abe was involved. Stanley remembered:

“Because of his food service operations at the dog track and the beach, our daddy had good contacts with several of the packing house outlets, places like Armour’s and Swift’s. What he would do is get special prices on hams and turkeys, and then we would deliver them to places that helped the needy. One, in particular, I’ll never forget. One place we always remembered was the Sisters at the Catholic Charities. My father remembered their wonderful work during the Depression, so we always carried lots of food to them, at their place on Government Street. However, Abe always gave us special instructions on this delivery. We had to wait until the Sisters actually opened the wrappings on one ham! That way Abe felt that they would use the meat themselves. If they didn’t open it in front of us, they’d probably give the ham to some family...and Abe didn’t want that. This was one time when they were going to eat well themselves. The sisters always laughed at this, but we all did as we were told.”

Once the suspension from the university ended, Stanley was back at the books, but without the house, and without the gambling. Well...almost without. Ed Sears now lived in the Sigma Alpha Epsilon house, and one of his brothers there was a boy named Peyton Ellis, who considered himself a superior gin player. Ellis begged Ed to arrange a game...and then games...with Stanley, and finally the pair played. Again, Stanley’s skilled prevailed, and he won...big time. But now, remembering those lessons of the past, the losses were forgiven.

At this time Stanley’s friendship with Jon MacBeth ripened even more. The two were - well - all but inseparable, and as Levin remembered, they had fun...lots of fun...and their share of scrapes, too. Stanley now moved into body building as well as serious studies, but there were many opportunities for partying.

“Jon was a great athlete, and in good shape. But after we’d been out on a big night, we would go to the stadium and literally run the steps to sweat out the impurities our evening had produced. I did the steps, too...but nothing like Jon did. These were good times.”

Stanley completed undergraduate study in 1960.
Law School

Law school for Stanley was a new challenge.

"The professors quickly discovered that I was David and Fred's younger brother, and that set a standard for me. I had to study very hard that first year."

In law school Stanley became close to five other young men who, collectively, led the class. They were brighter and were identified as leaders. The professors there were using the Socratic teaching method, and students adapted to the practice of the professor often answering a question with an appropriate question in class exercises. At first this process posed a problem for Stanley and the Holy Five, but not for long. They began the practice of feeding questions off of one another. The technique became a style, and the whole class appeared to profit.

In that first year, the time came for invitations to the two fraternities long established for law students. One was Phi Delta Phi, which never accepted Jewish members, and the other Phi Alpha Delta, accepted Jewish students.

All five of Stanley's classroom buddies were invited to Phi Delta Phi, but Stanley was not. Those five went to the brothers and said something like: "Either Stanley Levin is given a bid, too...or all of us stay out!" That caused a law school stir! And the fraternity conceded. Stanley Levin became the first Jewish member of that fraternity.

Another factor made Stanley a strong part of his group. He could type. Somehow he had mastered his own typing style and could whip out the words in masterly fashion...a skill which became critical in the preparation of law students' notes.

"Your class notes are absolutely critical to success in law school," Stanley recalled. "Having those notes, in good order, meant life and death when examination time came, and the only thing that really mattered was your result on the exam. I've always given thanks for being able to type well that year."

All this time Stanley continued to room with Jon MacBeth, and it was now that a significant case arose in the annals of Florida sports. MacBeth played both ways, fullback on offense, linebacker in defense. Into the season two men, one a student, the other from New York, came to MacBeth and offered him two bribes. One was for $2,000, to make just a few simple misplays that would allow Florida State to beat Florida. The second offer was for $1,000, for introductions to several key basketball players so that similar offers could be made to the court men.

MacBeth came to Stanley asking advice: "What should I do? I turned them down cold, of course, but...should I tell the authorities?"

Stanley thought the matter through carefully, then told his friend:

"You've got to tell the authorities. If you don't and they're caught, they'll try to implicate you some way and you'll be an accessory. Go and tell them right now."
MacBeth did. The student was expelled and the New Yorker ultimately went to prison. Stanley had done his best friend the best kind of favor...and had given solid advice.

The balance of law school went easily, as did the final examinations. Stanley graduated in 1963. Through his last year two years of law school, he had been impressed by the teachings of two well-published professors, Dick Stephens and Jack Freeland, whose speciality was tax law. The men had contacts in the nation’s capital, and between Stanley’s second and third years of law school, they arranged for him to be included in a very exclusive student group that would spend the summer in Washington in an orientation which might lead to a career in government. Stanley went.

“I tell you, that was impressive,” he said later. “I heard President Kennedy, I heard and saw other luminaries, and at one point, I was ready to sign a lifetime contract in government service.

“But then they also sent us for some looks at specific departments, and one place they sent me was the IRS. There I was coupled with a man who worked in a tiny cubicle where he had been working for some time. That man, very bright as he was, dealt day after day with incidents related to one very small fragment of tax law. Right then I could see the future...Stanley Levin in a cubicle with no window and no air...and plenty of boredom. That wasn’t my style.”

The New York Experience

Stanley put Washington behind him and chose instead to go to New York University for special study in tax law. Several of his University of Florida classmates were from New York, thus from Stanley’s very arrival he had friends in the right places, and they took over. On one of the first evenings in the Big Apple, Stanley was invited to a party at a nurse’s apartment where, obviously, there were many very lovely, very appealing young ladies.

“Parties at Florida had been a way of life,” Stanley said later, “but they were tame stuff compared to New York. That first evening I was quickly introduced to a beautiful girl, and after we’d been talking for just a few minutes she said something like:

‘I suppose you’re here for a little action. Well, I’m kept and not available, but I’ll introduce you to those two over there. They’re available.’ And she made the introductions.

“Well, it’s hard to believe what happened next. The girl from my original conversation soon broke up with her ‘friend,’ and she and one of her female friends were in need of accommodations. I had an apartment. We talked, and they moved in. Surprisingly, this was the strangest boy-girl arrangement you can imagine. We weren’t lovers...we were great friends. This was strictly platonic. As our arrangement developed, I paid the rent, one girl, an airline hostess, paid the utility bills, the other was responsible for the food...and she was a great cook.

“Just a few weeks later, one of my NYU classmates, a Georgia boy named Jacques, heard about my little apartment deal. Jacques was married and homesick. I had told him about how well I was faring, and he hinted that he would love a good meal. I called and asked if we could feed one more that night...and the answer was yes.
As he and I walked in the door, the two girls descended on me. One
took off my coat, the other my tie. They pushed me into a chair and
one hustled in with my slippers. For the next few minutes, I was
made to look like the world’s greatest lover. Jacques couldn’t be-
lieve what he saw...and back on campus, he spread the story. I had a
reputation as a ladies’ man from a purely platonic situation. Now
this wasn’t a setup. The girls just did it...just one time.”

A second New York City highlight began when Professor
Freeland was invited to appear as a lecturer at NYU, where he and
Stanley renewed their association. Stanley’s new roommates had
good friends who owned and operated a very special bar on 50th
Street, run by Papa and Mama Squeri and their son Johnny. Freeland
was there to enjoy some of the fun.

“It was almost like the TV show Cheers,” Stanley said. “The
place attracted real characters, many of whom came there very regu-
larly. For example, there was a woman whom we nicknamed Marian
the Librarian. (She was a proofreader for the Encyclopedia
Britannica.) She would sit demurely, nursing a drink at the bar, and
the unknowing would think that she was strictly a loner. But then,
she would wait for some man alone, to come and get a little drunk.
Often he would end up in Marian’s bed.

“Then there was Phoebe, whom we all called the Mystery
Woman. Phoebe had a strange accent, and she wore very expensive
jewels. Each piece of jewelry was matched hand to hand, by an iden-
tical twin. Phoebe dressed oddly, too. One night I brought a date to
the bar, another airline stewardess, and somehow we got Phoebe into
our conversation. Some others joined in. Phoebe had on a sun dress
that was oddly shaped, and one guy jokingly said that he bet she’d
padded her bra. Phoebe didn’t bat an eye. With one swish she’d
undone the ties on the dress...and she proved that there was no pad-
ding and no bra. I tell you, she was something else.”

Others who came to the Squeri’s were members of the family
influential with the New York Mets. On opening day in 1964, sev-
eral from the bar occupied the family box seats in Shea Stadium.
Some of those same folks had gone as a group to watch as Mayor
Wagner officially opened the World’s Fair. Said Stanley: “I’ll never
forget that day. The Fair had some outstanding art displays, includ-

![Image: The "regulars" pose at Squeri's Restaurant, 1965. While studying in New York, Stanley became like one of the family at the unusual eatery.](image)
ing the *Pieta*. That exhibit was so popular that they didn’t let viewers stand and look. You had to go by on a sort of moving sidewalk. I went back and forth on that sidewalk I’ll bet ten times...to look...and look...and look.”

Stanley and John Squeri remain good friends to this day.

Of all of Stanley’s New York memories (and they were legion), most seem to center about Squeri’s Restaurant and Lounge, the family and its very special clientele. At one point a man named Roman, who was head of the Canadian News Service in the United States, and who had watched Stanley’s enjoyment of the city, commented:

“I’ll tell you, in your two years here, you’ve seen more of New York than most who live here in a lifetime!”

Stanley agreed, and continued to relate his adventures, great and small. “The Squeri’s place was what I’d call ‘little known.’ It was a little off the beaten path, and it wasn’t one of those nightspots where every visitor to the city feels he has to go. No, it was a place where sports celebrities, stage people, and leading lights of all kinds would come, feeling that it was almost ‘like home.’ They just felt good there.

“For example, I was there one night when the King of Sakkim showed up with his entourage. Now, Sakkim is not exactly a household name, but the king was one of those men who had all kinds of money and loved to travel and spend it. Well, he arrived, and Papa Squeri sort of rearranged things so that the royal visitors seemed to have much of the place to themselves. I got to meet the king, and that was pretty special.”

Stanley met baseball great Lou Burdette and a host of other sports figures, for it seemed that, besides the “regulars,” there would be noteworthy guests every night.

Mama and Papa Squeri were pretty special, too. Papa had come from Bodogna, in Northern Italy, and was a squat, very powerful man. Nobody fooled around with Papa! He told a story about his youth that illustrated why. In his home village, there was a large boulder which held a prominent spot. The boulder was a challenge to the strength and manhood of young men, and many had tried to lift it. This was a little like someone trying to remove Excalibur from the rock! No one had succeeded...until Papa Squeri tried...and lifted it neatly off the ground. That made him a legend. After that and some other feats in New York, no one doubted that he had done as he claimed. He had some other memorable elements about him, too. He often wore loose fitting shirts, and if the conversation lagged, he might open the front of the shirt and show - and claim - that his strength came from the fact that he had two nipples on each side of his chest.

Mama Squeri was literally that to many of her patrons...a mother. She surely was to Stanley. Frequently, as an evening ended, she would approach him with long slabs of Italian bread stuffed with sliced beef, turkey and other edibles. “She was like my mother. She was just wonderful!” he beamed later.

The list of Squeri customers went on and on. One who came down regularly from Connecticut was Frank Farley, son of the Post Master General in the Franklin Roosevelt administrations. Farley
was a Yale alumnus, and very proud of the fact. He also was an antique car collector. Often, after several rounds had been downed, Farley would bring out his wallet and display photos of his beautiful vintage cars...and then, for no good reason, throw back his head and bellow: “Bulldogs! Bulldogs! Bow-Wow-Wow - Eli, Yale”...an old Yale song.

Another unforgettable was Eddie, the stuttering Irish bartender. Eddie was a character of the first order, the kind of barkeeper who could listen to a person’s tales of woe and always seem sympathetic. He spoke little, largely because, with his stuttering problem, he had trouble getting out a sentence. But one time when he did do so was a classic.

After what had obviously been a very hard night, Eddie staggered into Squeri’s at lunchtime and blurted out: “I woke up and I couldn’t remember where I was. It was terrible! Then, when I looked around, there was a woman beside me. And...oh my God...it was Marian the Librarian.” The whole place broke up!

One night, two rather rugged looking men entered the bar and began to toss down a few. This came just as Johnny Squeri, who often minded the bar, began to feel ill and asked Stanley if he would mind stepping behind the bar to help out...for just a few minutes.

“I’ll have to admit that this was surely not my thing. I didn’t know beans about mixing anything but a few basics but, of course, I agreed,” Stanley said. “At this point, one of the two newcomers asked for something...and I couldn’t make it. We had words and this guy became abusive.

“At that time I was really in very good shape. I worked out almost everyday and my weight had me at about 230 pounds. I wasn’t about to take too much off of this guy. And he invited a confrontation. I muttered ‘Enough’s enough!’

“There was very little space at the end of the bar where I had to exit...and that was lucky. I started out, but just then Johnny Squeri stepped in, carrying a blackjack. Happily, no punches were thrown, and the two men stepped away.

“Minutes later I learned that one of those two men was former boxing great Jimmy Archer, brother of former World Champion Joey Archer. Jimmy also was a well-known, successful man in the ring. I thought I was big and tough, but if we’d gotten into an open area, he’d probably have given me a good going-over. My advantages would have been my size and the lack of maneuvering space”

Many years later, at the event where Stanley and Fred were named boxing’s 1995 Co-managers of the Year by the Boxing Writers Association of America, Stanley once again met Jimmy Archer. “We had quite a reunion, and some good laughs about our meeting in New York. In fact, I’ve seen Archer several times since then,” Stanley said.

During the summer vacation of Stanley’s first New York year, he elected to come home and to sublet the apartment to a young couple expecting a baby. When he returned, the baby was late and the parents-to-be had nowhere to turn. That evening in Squeri’s, Stanley disclosed his problem to Johnny, who promptly introduced Levin to a patron Stanley had not met before. This was Fred Cincotti. As it turned out, Cincotti had contacts with several of the big New York
Mafia families because his uncle had once represented some of them as an attorney. Cincotti was an Assistant Attorney General for the State of New York. F.C., as Stanley came to call him, was a big man in town, and he had several apartments which were used for various purposes. He quickly offered one to Stanley. When they arrived at the location, Stanley found the place fully stocked with food, and appointed with a stereo and other forms of entertainment.

Fred’s uncle had been a big time Mafia lawyer, and when the uncle died, he had left Fred a fortune which the latter had invested wisely...F.C. and Stanley quickly became close friends, and began to circulate throughout New York.

Several years later, Stanley’s friend Allen Rosenbloum came to New York for his wedding. Allen was marrying a young lady from a very wealthy family, and as Stanley recalled, “She had been brought up in such a way as to get anything she wanted, and often she would ask for almost the impossible. Somehow, in the course of a conversation when Stanley was present, she told Allen that she wanted their wedding party to go to the Copacabana, and to have the first balcony (the prime location), because on that night Sammy Davis, Jr. was ending a long run at the club.

“I did something that wasn’t smart,” Stanley admitted. “I told her that my friend F.C. had contacts at the club, and that maybe he could make arrangements. I contacted F.C. and, sure enough, through some very special wire pulling, he got the balcony. I should go farther. F.C. had ways of operating that amazed me. As a small example, if we drove up to a place, he never looked for a normal parking place. He would just park in front and walk in. Just left his attorney’s badge on the dashboard, and it sure worked.

“Well, when we went to the club that day to try and make arrangements, there was already a line of people outside, seeking reservations. F.C. parked (as usual) right in front, then bypassed the line, going to a back entrance. We breezed right in, saw the right man, and that’s how we made the reservations.”

However, the event did not have a happy ending. The bride, who obviously could change her mind in a heartbeat, decided at the last minute that she didn’t want to go to the Copa...and so there was Stanley (and F.C.), waiting for the party. When it was obvious that they weren’t coming, Stanley called to Squeri’s, rounded up a few of the regulars, and occupied some of the seats to see Sammy Davis.

“Of course, I was stuck for a very large bill,” Stanley remembered. “It took a while to work that out.”

Good things always do end, and in 1966, Stanley completed his tax law work and returned to Pensacola, to begin his law career. He joined the Levin firm...at $75 per week.

**A Career In Law**

“There wasn’t a real market for tax law practice then,” he said, “and so I was put on any kind of cases that came along, mostly in estate planning and probate work. I moved in with my parents, thus living expenses were small. But I had one great extravagance. I went to the Turner brothers at Pensacola Buggy Works and worked out a deal for an annual lease of a new, bright Corvette...for $150 a
month...everything included except the fuel. They maintained the
car, washed it...did everything just right. I felt like a king riding
down the streets of Pensacola!”

Stanley had several living changes in the years ahead. The
first involved his move to the A. T. Kennedy house at 3632 Menendez
Drive. David had purchased the house and wanted it lived in. Stanley
moved in...again rent free. The first night in the house began a series
of events which Stanley still talks about, and is totally serious in
what he says.

“But - I do believe in the power of the mind and the energy it
possesses. I also believe that energy can continue after one’s death,
especially if the death came violently.

“The first night in that house I just felt uneasy...maybe the
word is ‘weird.’ Not that anything happened. It didn’t. But...well...I
just had this odd feeling. At that point I did not know anything about
Dr. Kennedy, the prior owner. I did not know that he was a man with
a strong sense of humor. I didn’t know either that he had ended his
life by hanging himself in the master bedroom shower in that house.
Was the feeling I had there strong? Oh, yes! So much so that I left
the house and spent the night with my parents.”

Shortly, some odd things began to happen, at times a hanging
lamp would suddenly sway back and forth, for no reason. Then,
various water faucets would turn on...again, with no one near them.
This went on for some months, but Stanley simply thought about the
events with no response.

Then, one weekend, Stanley’s friend Lamar Hicks called from
New Orleans. Lamar had rounded up eight girls who wanted to party.
Could they come and stay with Stanley? Why not! And so the girls
and Lamar showed up. As they sat in the front room, Stanley, who
by now knew all about Dr. Kennedy’s demise, told his ghost stories.
One of the girls scoffed: “Go on...you’re just scaring us...to get us to
spend the night in bed with you!” She said.

At that very moment, every faucet in the house turned on!
Water ran in the kitchen, the bath, the laundry room. No one was
near the outlets...they just turned on.

The whole group spent the night huddled together in a bed-
room. “I think to this day that Lamar thought that I had somehow
pulled a stunt on them...but I didn’t...I swear it!” Stanley said.

Many years later, Stanley reminisced about the Kennedy
House, and his adventures there.

“I never felt threatened, with all of the creepy things that hap-
pened. As I reasoned things out, and learned of what a sense of
humor Dr. Kennedy had, I just figured he was playing jokes on me.
He was getting his laughs. And you know, after that night when
Lamar and the girls were there, we had no more ‘ghostly events.’
That was the end. I guess Dr. Kennedy felt that he had made his
point and just signed off.”

In the months ahead, Stanley’s residence changed twice. First
he spent a few months in the English Cove apartments fronting Santa
Rosa Sound. Then he moved to Mrs. Warren’s apartments at 12th
Avenue and Lakeview. “This was a nice arrangement, and conve-
nient,” he said.

It was then that he met Mary Kathleen Byerley Mathis.
Kathy was a war widow, with a young daughter. Her husband had been killed in the military, and she came to the Levin firm for legal advice about wills. By chance, Stanley became her counsel.

"I'll tell you that when she entered the office, my heart stood still!" he said. "She was a gorgeous woman, in every way. We started to work, and as things ended up, I provided the services with no fee."

Kathy lived in Shalimar, and Stanley found reasons to visit her there. In addition to the mother, Stanley became smitten by the tiny daughter, named Wendellyn. Stanley even began to baby-sit when Kathy went out on dates with other men.

"I know that sounds crazy," he said, "but Wendy and I became good friends. We would go shopping together, and I would tell her stories." In any event, the whole contact developed evenly, if slowly. But then Stanley and Mary Kathleen began to date...seriously. They were married in August of 1973.

The wedding was a small one, conducted in the bride's home. It was a modest gathering. The large gathering came at the reception some weeks later which was held at the Eglin Air Force Base Officer's Club. During those months prior to the nuptials, Kathy had been taking some courses in psychology at the University of West Florida, and her professor was Dr. Bill Mikulas. In the course of her courtship with Stanley, Kathy had come to think that he could perform social miracles, so she asked if he might get the professor to come to the wedding reception. Taking up the challenge, Stanley called the professor with an invitation he felt might pique the professor's interest. The conversation went something like, "You don't know me, but you can make me a hero." Stanley then went on to explain the situation, and the invitation was accepted. Bill and his wife Benita came to the wedding reception, thus beginning a friendship which Stanley contends has been one of the highlights of his life. "Bill and Benita have been very special. They are the best friends I have. I could write a book about my friendship with Bill and Benita and the impact they have had on my life in everything from my role as a father to virtually every other aspect of my life. The relationship among the three of us is such that we are always truthful with one another, even to the point that persons who don't understand the depth of the friend-

At their wedding reception, Stanley and Kathy posed with Abe and Rose Levin and Kathy's daughter.
ship might think that such candor reflects a lack of caring. Everyone should have a Bill and Benita in their life.”

The honeymoon trip was to Bermuda, and the young couple took Wendy with them so that it was a family honeymoon.

The couple then settled into an apartment on the corner of 12th Avenue and Lakeview, but not for long. In 1976, Stanley bought the home at 222 Bayou Boulevard from his law partner and friend Jack Graff who was retiring from the practice of law.

Stanley recalled: “I felt that we were getting off to a good start. For my part, I changed my lifestyle drastically. Gone was the big time partying. Now I was a home-body. We developed a nice, if modest, social life and things started out well. However, shortly after the marriage, I had an experience which unfortunately sounded a warning. The father and stepmother (Paul and Myrtle Mathis) of Kathy’s first husband, Judson, lived in the Wright community near Ft. Walton Beach. The Mathis family had, from the moment I met them, accepted me as part of their family, and we became very close. One evening we had my father and the Mathises over to our home on Bayou Boulevard for supper. Towards the end of that evening, Grandpa Mathis took me aside and very quietly had me promise him that when I left Kathy, I would make certain that Wendy was taken care of. This wasn’t if I should leave her, but when. Grandpa Mathis was obviously already aware of a problem Kathy had that I had yet to see or acknowledge.”

On July 29, 1977, an event occurred which Stanley says was unequivocally the highlight of his life. On that day Benjamin Lee Sherrod Levin was born. His was a Lamaze birth, and Stanley said later: “When I first saw his face, it was as though God said to me, ‘you think you know what love is? Here take a look.’ It did nothing to denigrate the love I felt for my wife, my parents, my brothers or my friends...it was just totally different from anything I could ever have imagined.”

The complex name structure was a combination of family names, some going back several generations. The name Benjamin came from Stanley’s paternal Uncle Benny’s name; Lee came from the middle name of Stanley’s friend Bill Mikulas; and Sherrod came from the last name of the mother of Kathy’s stepfather Wendell Byerley. Immediately after leaving the delivery room, Stanley ordered a dozen long stemmed roses to be delivered to his wife at Baptist Hospital and then, moments later, changed his mind and called back to Mrs. Ransley, at Sleepy Hollow Forest to up the order to five dozen! “When you stepped off the elevator on the fifth floor of the hospital, you could smell those roses everywhere,” he said.

Young Sherrod became the light of Stanley’s life. Here was what it was all about. Along with Wendy it appeared that this should be a perfect household.

It wasn’t. For soon, slowly, steadily, evidence of Kathy having a serious drinking problem became apparent. After a time it was obvious: she was an alcoholic. Problems arose. The disruptions became chronic. Stanley was in despair.

“I tried so many things,” he declared, “but I learned. One thing about an alcoholic who is not in recovery is that they will never acknowledge that they have a problem. Yet, month by month the
consumption of gin and vodka increased, and the household, especially the children, began to suffer.”

“I stood it as long as I could,” Stanley said, “and then I left. I told her that I would give her just about everything we owned, except I must have every weekend, every holiday and most of every summer with Sherrod. In the divorce settlement that was worked out. She moved to Ft. Walton Beach, with the children. Under the agreement, I would pickup Sherrod from school each Friday afternoon, so we would be together all weekend.

“Then, one Friday, Sherrod’s teacher, a Mrs. Maulshagen, stopped me and said we must talk. This year, she said, Sherrod had missed 129 days of school, and he was falling terribly behind because of this. And...well...she was afraid his self-esteem was beginning to suffer.”

That was the signal for what Stanley called “the war.”

“I was determined to get full custody of Sherrod, and hired the man I felt would (except for my brother David who felt he was too close to the situation) be the best counsel for this, Rick Scherling, one of my law partners. He advised that this would be a long, difficult, expensive process even though he would charge me no fee. Proving alcoholism was not easy. He was right. We hired private investigators, traced Kathy’s movements, and finally we had photos and facts that confirmed her excessive consumption of liquor and other bad habits. With this information and the testimony of experts on alcoholism to take before the court, the battle was won...and Sherrod came to live with me.

“That was when I really became a total parent! I became father and mother. I was already having back problems by then, and often sleeping was difficult. Yet I would, without fail, be up at six o’clock to fix a hot breakfast, pack a lunch and do those other things a parent needs to do. Although it was not always easy, it was a wonderful experience. Our home on Bayou Boulevard became like a weekend, holiday and summer camp for five to fifteen of Sherrod’s friends. I had more real time with most of Sherrod’s friends than their own parents did. In fact, one of the greatest compliments of my life came about as a result of this time. In early 1998, one of those friends who was by then a parent himself called me just to tell me that he himself was a fantastic father, and he thanked me for teaching him how to do so.”

Things continued to go downhill for Kathy. Finally, when Wendy was fourteen, she took the initiative and joined Stanley and Sherrod in Pensacola, but Wendy too was restless. She enrolled at Linden Hall, a quality girls finishing school in Pennsylvania. Later she attended Wellesley University, near Boston.

Kathy, meanwhile, drifted to various places in Florida. As this account is drawn, she is living near Orlando.

Sherrod, in turn, enjoyed a quality boyhood. He enjoyed the many things a Pensacola boy is supposed to enjoy. He attended Cordova Park Elementary School, and the Creative Learning Center before his four years at Washington High.

“We’ve always had a great relationship,” Stanley said. “We communicate well, and I have tried to impart to Sherrod some of the things my father emphasized with me. My father had always empha-
sized truth, honesty and fair dealing. It was important that Sherrod learn those lessons. I made the point with Sherrod that we must always level with one another. I promised him I would always tell him the truth and I expected the same from him. No half truths, no lies. I told him that if he were making value judgments about what I could or could not deal with, then I really could never trust anything he said because I had no way of knowing if any particular situation were one in which he had decided that I couldn’t handle the truth. I gave him the option of telling me, at any time, that he did not want to talk about any particular subject and that I would immediately drop the topic of discussion. This negated any reason he would ever have not to tell me the truth.

“One of my favorite memories as a parent ties in with the lesson on truth. As a parent I realized I had a unique opportunity to ‘make magic’ for my children while they were young. Wendy had fantasized about finding a pirate treasure chest when she was about six- or seven-years-old. In an effort to make this fantasy come alive for her, I went out and bought a fairly good sized toy box shaped like a treasure chest which I filled with beach balls, dolls, chocolate candy wrapped in tinfoil to look like coins, etc. I buried that chest on top of a sand dune which I made certain Wendy ‘found’ on a Sunday morning treasure chest search. Sherrod likewise had a fantasy when he was young, but his was of finding gold. When Sherrod was about 10- or 11-years-old and I was going to take him and one of his friends to visit my friend Jack Graff’s home in the Virginia mountains, I had my jeweler friend Albert Klein, Jr, take some gold watch cases which my father gave me and pound them into two gold nuggets. Jack was aware of my intentions, and, as fate would have it, it had rained the day we drove up to Virginia and Jack had photographed with his Polaroid camera the actual end of a rainbow on a pool in the river which you could see from the porch of his home. To me it was amazing because I had never seen the actual end of a rainbow. This, naturally, stirred the gold fever in Sherrod and his friend Hayden Porter who was on this trip with us. In the middle of the night, Jack Graff and I carefully placed the gold nuggets in that pool on the river where the rainbow had ended. The next morning, bright and early, Jack and I had the boys worked up about the end of the rainbow in that pool, and the boys did ‘find’ gold. I will never forget the look on Sherrod’s face when he stared at the gold nugget in his hand. To get back to the point of this and how ‘truth’ enters into it, one evening in 1994 Sherrod came to my bedroom and asked me if he had, in fact, found gold. I told him that he had ‘found’ gold, but I admitted to him that I had planted it in the river. Sherrod stayed angry with me for several days even though I explained to him that I just wanted to make magic for him while it was still possible. After those several days, he came to me, hugged me, kissed me and thanked me for having made that magic for him.

“Insofar as my desires for Sherrod, and I have told him this on many occasions, I want him to live so that he will be happy...but he must be responsible. I don’t want him becoming a lawyer or anything else to please me or anyone else other than himself.”

As Sherrod’s high school days neared an end, the father-son team reached a decision for the next plateau. Already, Sherrod was a
strong Gator, but he also didn’t want to leave his dad for school...at least not right away. The plan they worked out went like this: Sherrod’s first college year would be at the University of West Florida, and he would continue to live at home. The second year, he would continue at UWF, but have his own apartment. The third year he would head for Gainesville and the University of Florida. Midway in the second year, things were going just fine as planned, but then Sherrod became enamored with a local girl and that changed the plan. Sherrod’s plan now is to graduate from UWF and then attend law school as a Gator.

However, Sherrod’s half-sister, Wendy, had proceeded down a path that was less smooth.

“She had some tough times,” Stanley stated, “in part because of the culture and the way young people seemed to react, and partly because of a dysfunctional family. While she was at Wellsley, she came under the influence of a professor who encouraged her to become part of the Sikh culture, an Indian religion. She even changed her name to Amret Seva. She became a cultist, and our lines of communication just broke down. Then she married a Jewish boy, but that didn’t last. Recently, however, we’ve begun to talk again, regularly, and I pray that she’s coming out of her problems.”

Shortly after his marriage to Kathy, Stanley became involved with his most unusual court case.

“I’m not a trial lawyer, never wanted to be,” he said, “but circumstances put me there.”

The story began because of Stanley’s interest in recruiting football talent for the University of Florida. His searches had sent several quality players to Gainesville. Then, out of the blue, one of those West Florida boys and a second player from Jacksonville were accused of murder. The local boy contacted Stanley, pleading for help.

“I knew this boy was a quality young man, and when I heard the details of the case, I was sure he was innocent,” Stanley said. “So I contacted a classmate of mine in Gainesville, a man named Selig Goldin, who already had become well known as a successful defense lawyer. We talked, and Selig agreed to take the case without fee...with one proviso. I had to be at his side in the courtroom. The reason? By that time, Reubin Askew was governor, and Selig felt that it wouldn’t hurt to have a former Askew partner sitting in plain view, helping to defend this young man.”

The trial proceeded, and Selig used Stanley to perfection.

“He told me to just sit there and look smart,” Stanley said. “Every once in a while, Selig would get up and come to me, bend down and whisper something like, ‘What’ll we have for lunch today?’ in my ear. I was supposed to look like I was thinking about some deep response, and then I would whisper back. In that whole trial, I never actually did a thing...but Selig’s strategies worked. The boys were innocent, and they were acquitted. To this day, I like to joke and say I have a 100 percent record of acquittals in criminal cases... which is true!”

Stanley also was involved in two high-stakes trials working with one of the trial attorneys in the firm, Jim Green. One was a case involving a trust of which Stanley’s client was a beneficiary and was
being cheated by a stepmother and a trust officer. Stanley and Jim recovered for the trust a sum in excess of $1 million.

The other case involved a lady who left two sons surviving at her death. Just prior to the lady’s death, the older son had taken her to his lawyer and had tricked her into signing a will leaving everything she had to himself. The end result in that case was that the younger brother (Stanley’s client) received his share of the estate which totaled in excess of $400,000.

*****

Through the years of domestic turmoil, Stanley continued his legal practice in its same mode.

“It was funny,” he said, “At first I had found the law exciting, and every case was a challenge, no matter how simple. Then, well, things became a little hum-drum, and some of the flavor just disappeared. But then came boxing! That turned things around.”

The year was 1984. One morning Stanley received a call from Mary Wesley, wife of an old friend, Alton Wesley. Among her many civic interests, Mrs. Wesley felt close to the Boys Club, a small organization with modest United Way backing. The club’s goal was to provide a home-away-from-home opportunity for inner city boys, to give them social experiences of a positive character.

“But there’s a problem now,” Mary said. “Recently the club began to include boxing in its program, and for some reason that may disqualify the club’s United Way support. Would you be willing to become a Boys Club board member? Maybe you could help.”

Stanley started to say no, but then he reflected at that point he had some free time, and as the parent of a growing boy he recognized the need for the kinds of things a Boy Club might provide. Stanley agreed to at least attend a few meetings, to test the water.

“I saw what they were trying to do, and I was hooked! So much so, in fact, I was given the award for 1987 as the Outstanding Member of the Board of Directors of the Boys Club of Escambia County, Florida.” he said later.

The boxing program was truly struggling. The small board had obtained the use of a former residence on the corner of Guillemond and Gonzalez Streets, had fixed it up a bit, and it was serving as a boxing gym. The building was in poor condition, and even lacked utilities.

At one of the first meetings Stanley attended, he met Roy Jones, Sr. “Big Roy, as I came to know him, was the boxing trainer for those boys who wished to be active in that sport,” Stanley said, “and when this man came and spoke, I had to listen. I could see that he was a good man, a very proud man, and it hurt him to humble himself by begging the board to find the small number of dollars the sport needed. That day he said something like this: ‘We’re doing all that we can without money. When we go on a trip, we have this old van that runs but not much more. We’ve fixed it up, and it’s safe, but we still have to fill the fuel tank. For food we make sandwiches, and if we have to stay overnight for matches, we sleep ten to the room. We don’t need much, but we need a little. If we don’t get some help, the boxing will fold, and something that is very good for these inner
city kids will go by the board. Please...help us!"

“Well, I was impressed! I talked to Big Roy, and I agreed to help. At that time my lifestyle had been trimmed down. I didn’t have big expenses, and I could afford to help...and I did. It wasn’t much...maybe a $100 or a little more each month. This way, the Boys Club also saved its United Way funding.

“As I contributed, I began to go watch the workouts. I didn’t know anything about boxing, but I was learning. I also saw that Big Roy was an excellent coach and trainer. The boys respected him. And their results were good, too. I began to do some of the chores around the gym.

“After a time the club had to vacate the Guillemard-Gonzalez building. Shirley Cronley, another board member, and I found a substitute site. This building had been the headquarters for the Pensacola Water Department, and Jim Reeves had bought it. His daughter and son-in-law were fixing it up, and would live in half the structure. They were willing to lease the other half to the club, and so the boxers moved in. Now I began to go there to watch. Step by step the boys began to accept me as part of their group. That was when and how I came to know Little Roy, Roy Jones, Jr.

“Looking into his eyes, I saw something that I had never seen before,” Stanley remembered, “and we would talk, as I did with the others, but he was reserved, at first.

“Then, one night after training, some of the boys began to play the old game that some call Paper, Scissors, Rock. One of the players began to innovate, adding all sorts of other weapons to the mix...pistols, rifles, rockets, tanks and planes, the common cold and the AIDS virus (both of the last two being explained as there being no cure for them.)

“I watched, and got caught up in the fun myself,” Stanley said. “Little Roy was there, too, watching. Then, the next day, I was back at the gym and was talking with someone. Quietly, Little Roy came up behind me and put his knees behind mine and gave me the old knee punch. I looked around, and he was staring at me with a big grin on his face. I knew that he was in essence telling me that he trusted me, and I measured that moment as the beginning of my real friendship with him.”

The years passed into 1988, and step by step Roy Jones, Jr. - Little Roy - moved up the boxing ladder. He made the United States Olympic team, then suffered the unbelievable decision in Seoul, Korea. Even so, the boxing world recognized that a new champion was in the making. It was shortly thereafter that Big Roy came to Stanley and asked if he and Fred would consider becoming the promotional team for Little Roy. Big Roy said at the time:

“I know promoters. They’re all alike. You can’t tell one from the other, and they’re all a pack of thieves.”

To take over the management of a fighter was something totally foreign to the Levin brothers, but they agreed to proceed. Said Stanley:

“This was not a venture that was going to support itself. It would require money. That’s when we created the promotion company, and called it Square Ring. I became the president, and Fred and I went to the bank to borrow the initial capital. (I will tell you
that it was Fred’s good credit that got us the loan.) As Square Ring, we could promote our own fights...and that’s what we proceeded to do. That’s the way Little Roy’s professional career was launched. Big Roy was the trainer. Quite honestly, as negotiations were required, it was Fred’s moxie that got the job done. With his negotiation talent and Little Roy’s boxing skills, plus my uncountable hours learning about the world of boxing, things began to happen.”

Portions of this story also appear in the account provided by Fred, and not all specifics are in agreement...but then...different people remember things in different ways. Stanley recounted the early days of the Jones saga this way.

“Behind the scenes, Big Roy controlled his son, and what was happening to the son. We would have planning meetings, and Little Roy would not be included. At first that didn’t seem too serious to me, but then other factors began to creep in. I recall one in particular. A fight was arranged in Madison Square Garden, and Roy’s purse was $100,000. Without consulting his son, Big Roy had invited half a dozen of his friends to make the trip, expenses paid. Then he came to me as the Square Ring president, the one who actually holds the money, and told me to give each of those men $500, for spending money. I rebelled, telling Big Roy that I felt this was wrong. This was Little Roy’s money. We shouldn’t be spending it without his approval. Big Roy overruled me.”

Other similar incidents followed. Big Roy was - is - a very able man, but he’s also very stubborn, according to Stanley. And, Little Roy has inherited some of that trait, too. Finally, as the “unusual incidents” continued, Stanley sat down with Little Roy, saying something like this:

“Roy, you’ve got to start attending these planning meetings. Decisions are being made that affect your career, and your bank account.”

But Little Roy responded:

“If I come, my father and I will get into a war...no...you represent me.”

Stanley responded that he would try to begin some new tactics, stalling the making of decisions within the meetings until the facts had been placed before Little Roy. And so things continued for a time. However, tensions continued to rise. Finally, the issue came to a head. One version says that Big Roy’s killing of Little Roy’s dog was the final straw. Stanley says that this incident was window dressing for public consumption. His account of what occurred went like this:

“We had reached a point that Little Roy told me he was going to leave Big Roy. So, one night I arranged for Big Roy and I to have a talk. We were in a bar on North Davis Highway, and as the course of the conversation zeroed in on the specifics, I said: ‘Roy, you’ve got to begin to treat your son like a man. He is a man with the heart of a champion and you’re continuing to treat him like a little boy. That’s bad for both of you. Treat him as a man, treat him with respect. If he let you break him the way you are trying, then he would not be the champion you and I both know he really is.’ Well, Big Roy would not budge. He said that he knew how to deal with his son, and so I went a step further: ‘If you don’t give ground, Little Roy
and you are going to split, and if you do, I’ll go with him.’ Big Roy listened, and said something like: ‘Maybe...but if that happens, I’ll know you’re there to protect his interests.’ ”

I responded: “You’re my friend, but Roy’s like a son to me.”

The break came, and father and son moved apart. Little Roy moved into Stanley’s home, and, sadly, a breach opened between father, son, and Stanley. Levin said:

“I’m very sorry to say that since that night Big Roy has said only two words to me. I don’t think he believed what I was saying to him about the way things were with Little Roy. I know he thinks I’m an S.O.B...but what could I do? Little Roy was leaving his father unless his father let him control his own career.”

It was at this time that Fred’s negotiating magic moved into high gear. He faced off with promoter Bob Arum and arranged a contract for three critical fights, one of which was to be a world title bout. Arum filled that agreement to the letter. In December 1992, Roy defeated Percy Harris. Next came a bout in Las Vegas where he beat Glenn Wolfe. In May of 1993 came the title contest against Bernard Hopkins. Roy won easily.

Fred sat at the negotiating table once more with Arum, this time for another three fights, one of which was to have a purse of $850,000, the others for over $1 million each. But this time, Arum began to crawlfish, to try to change the contract by paying Little Roy less money than the contract provided. There were delays, then proposed fight changes. Fred threatened suit. Finally, after further negotiations, it was agreed that Roy would fight James Toney, a bout which Arum and others on the inside were sure Toney would win. The fight was held, and Toney was battered. Now the boxing world truly appreciated Little Roy’s talent.

“We had truly arrived,” Stanley glowed. “Roy Jones, Jr. now was rising to the top of his profession. And Square Ring Promotions was attracting additional young, very able fighters.”

In 1994 Stanley received the Rocky Marciano “Manager of the Year” award. The following year Fred and Stanley were declared to be Boxing Co-managers of the Year by the Boxing Writers Association of America. Sports writers from all over produced highly favorable accounts of what was occurring for Jones and his managers. Meanwhile, Fred had begun to work in a separate area related to boxing. His account of dishonesty within the field appears in another chapter, along with his work with Senator John McCain.

Next Stanley added still another highlight of those early Roy Jones, Jr. years.

“Our dad had always enjoyed boxing, and from the first, he was part of our party when we would go to Roy’s fights. He got to know Roy well, and the two would tease one another, and joke. Abe kiddingly told Roy that he was surely glad he had taught the fighter how to use the left hook...and that if Roy wished, he would also teach him how to use his right. However, that was open to financial negotiations. Roy gave our dad as good as he took. It was fun to watch.

“Now there’s a sort of sidebar story to all of that. Our father had always been the hardest man in the world to give something to. Birthdays, Father’s Day...whatever...if we bought him something he would invariably say: ‘Take it back. Get your money back and we’ll
split it! That way we are both better off.’ Well, after one of Roy’s fights, we had some great pictures made, and for Daddy’s birthday Roy autographed one to him, saying: ‘To Abe: Thanks for the left. Now I need to learn the right!’ Well, when my dad opened that picture and saw the inscription, his face lit up like I’d never seen before. While Daddy lived, that photo stood on a table filled with pictures of my mother.”

Little Roy remained part of Stanley’s household for more than a year. When he moved to a more permanent site, another pair of men came on the scene who would have a role in this same story.

Rod Voss had been Stanley’s friend for some time. When Rod divorced, he was at loose ends, and Stanley invited him to move in for a time. Rod did. Then, one day he asked Stanley if he might bring his friend, Richard Pope, over for a visit...and he did. Richard proved to be a blessing. He was a master in the martial arts, so skilled that he had repeatedly been invited to Japan to teach by the Grand Master of Yoshukai, at his school of karate. Richard’s parents were divorced; he apparently needed a father figure Sherrod definitely needed an older brother in his life, and he and Richard hit it off immediately. When Rod remarried and left the Levin household, Stanley invited Richard to move in as an older son for Stanley and a brother for Sherrod. “That proved to be a godsend on a number of accounts,” Stanley said.

Right off the bat Richard and Sherrod became close. In fact, as Stanley viewed it, this was almost like having a great older brother added for Sherrod overnight.

“In fact, I give Richard credit for keeping Sherrod from being spoiled,” Levin says. “When Richard saw something happening that I was doing that might be inappropriate, he would take action, or even call me and help get me straightened out. What a difference that made. Additionally, Richard was the ideal older son I needed. Not only did he look out for me, but I knew Sherrod was fine so long as he was with Richard. Interestingly, Richard and Roy Jones, Jr. had been friends from years past and had a healthy mutual respect for each others talents.”

Recently, Richard Pope married and moved with his bride to a home near the University of West Florida. However, his relationships with the Levins and Roy Jones, Jr. continued.

“I’m the president of Square Ring,” Stanley noted, “but I’m a micro-manager...and that’s not good. As the program grows, its management needs to become broader. I hope that one day Richard may become the president, with my role settling back into the things I’m best qualified to do.

“I really can’t say enough about Richard, because he’s been such a good influence on a number of people, myself included,” Stanley continued. “He’s a truly caring person.

“What does Richard do as a career these days? Several things, actually, which illustrates his energy level. First off, in addition to working for Square Ring, he operates a small company that cleans carpets, called Happy Bear. Then, along the way, he’s acquired several rental properties, and has a not-insubstantial income from them. He’s an Air Force Reserve security policeman, a martial arts instructor, a realtor and manages Little Roy’s burgeoning economic empire.
He has a lot going.”

Richard’s marriage, too, appears to have been a blessing.
“His has a wonderful young wife,” Stanley affirmed.
“Yes,” Stanley added, “Richard’s become very interested in boxing and in Square Ring. He’s knowledgeable, and he is tough-minded. He is doing a fine job there now.”

The need to be tough-minded and to understand the background of boxing is no small challenge in itself. Again Stanley continued, in a sense confirming some of his brother Fred’s comments:

“When Fred and I agreed to help Roy, we were both interested in boxing, but we were babes in the woods. We really had no idea of what went on behind the scenes. So, over these ten-twelve years, I’ve done a lot of homework. There’s literature by the library-full, and the stories one can get from old timers are worth their weight in gold. A lot of what comes out sounds like a series of movie scripts...going back to the 1930s.

“Fred talked about his efforts with Senator McCain, to clean up the boxing world. I’d like to expound on some of the specifics we discovered.

“For example, back prior to the 1950s, the Mob controlled boxing. They picked the fighters, brought them along, arranged who would fight whom, and they made millions gambling. Actually, that was easy. They would carefully generate exposure for fighters, and raise their reputations. Then they would set up fights which were rigged. They knew in which round a fight would be won or lost, and they then bet heavily that way. They couldn’t lose. And they treated the fighters like dirt. A fighter played their game, or he was out. They set the cards, they set the places. If a fighter protested, he just didn’t get any more good paydays. His career was over.

“But then the Mob was eased out as Federal government pressure was exerted. They moved out in say, the 1950s or early ’60s. That’s when the big time promoters, the Don Kings of the boxing world, took over. Now they made the arrangements, and brought along the fighters they chose. And when television came into the picture, the promoters were able to wield their power through dealings with the television networks. Now the promoters called virtually all the shots. I won’t say that they rigged fights the way others before them had done, but they had control. They had the power.

“And the way they have treated the boxers themselves has been a disgrace! Let me cite an example...although I won’t use real names for obvious reasons. Negotiations were in progress through Square Ring for a fight between Roy Jones, Jr. and a fighter in the stable of this big promoter. The deal was set, and the amount to be paid to this contender was to be $400,000. But then the promoter came back and said: ‘I want this written in two contracts...one specifically to the fighter, for $125,000, the other to me for $275,000.’ We protested, and insisted on one contract only for the full amount. If the promoter wanted a second arrangement, he would have to make that on his own. He opted for one contract with him for $400,000. When it was all over, the fighter, who of course lost, received roughly only $50,000...and the promoter walked off with the rest. Stanley and Fred vowed to try and turn such things around, and, in their words, they have, at least, made a start.
“Others in the game don’t like Square Ring at all,” Stanley says, “in part because of what we stand for, and partly because we say what we mean. These others have a hard time dealing with someone who tells the truth and stands behind what he says. I have often said we are the most deceptive people in boxing because we told the truth, which is something totally alien to that culture. My brother had a particularly hard time attempting to deal with the boxing world because he has been used to dealing with people in the law who feared him enough that they would not lie to him.”

Stanley rolled out that scenario this way:

“Professional boxing has a great appeal to people who gamble, and, in particular, the high rollers, the ones who play to win big in the casinos. They are the casino target. At any big fight you’ll find the first few rows at ringside occupied by people who are obviously big gamblers, plus the casino’s executives and their friends. The casino operators know that those who were attracted by the fight will play their games...and usually lose far more than enough to offset the fight costs. Then, too, there are some under-the-table deals that get so complicated that no one other than the parties involved know what they actually are.”

It is the combination of promoter control of fighters and the rating or ranking systems in the four large boxing federations that are under study and attack now in the Congress. Noting Fred’s involvement there, Stanley commented:

“Once upon a time it might have been conceivable that the big money involved here might have successfully lobbied enough people in Washington to stop such reforms as Senator McCain is trying to execute. But now? Well, I believe that the American people are coming to demand a cleanup. What Congressman is going to risk being tied to something that can be put in the news spotlight and look so bad? No...I believe that better times are coming. And as Fred says, it makes both of us feel good to believe that we had a part in making boxing better, for the sport, and for the men who fight. For, you know, I’ve learned a lot about fighters. By and large they are good people. They care, and they try to give back part of what they take. They hate the dishonesty, and being pushed around as many have been. They deserve better.”

Roy Jones, Jr. is one of those trying to make the sport cleaner, better.

“Roy wants to give back. He’s come out of a little organization like the Boys Club, and he’s seen what a helping hand means,” Stanley continued. “In a very few years he’s become a polished lectern speaker. He accepts a lot of invitations to talk with young men, and to urge them to follow the right road. He’s used his money to support good causes.”

When his fighting days are over, where will Roy Jones, Jr. be financially? Stanley predicted:

“He’s been very careful with his earnings, and he has solid, conservative help with his investing. I can’t predict numbers, but unless the world falls apart, Roy will be a very wealthy young man, and I believe he’ll continue helping others.”

Roy remains actively behind the Square Ring group. As a promotional team Square Ring is small, helping six perhaps eight
fighters at a time, but those who come there are doing well. Young Derrick Gainer is one example. “Derrick’s going to be a champion,” Stanley predicted.

One other factor remains a constant in Stanley Levin’s life — pain.

This ongoing concern had its origins in the summer when he grew several inches in three months.

“Dr. Fletcher Eyster explained my problem this way,” Stanley said. “In that period of rapid growth, portions of my spine literally splintered, and after time the voids filled with bone. This cuts off the normal passages for nerves to pass through and when that happens nerve endings become irritated, and that generates pain, a lot of it.”

Dr. Eyster provided Stanley’s first corrective surgery in 1974; additional operations were done in 1991, 1993 and 1995, each in a different spinal area, each seeking to open the way for nerve passage.

Has the process worked?

“Only partially,” Stanley admits. “I have pain all the time, and one sort of gets used to that. Your threshold of pain resistance rises, so that what I feel today would be intolerable to someone who was suddenly facing such pain for the first time. I wear a neck brace much of the time, and I have to limit a lot of things I’d like to do…exercise, travel and socializing with family and friends. But, well, what other choice is there? The worst comes on some nights when sleep doesn’t come, and then it’s like lying there listening to a dripping faucet. The pain multiplies…and…well…there you are. That makes for some very long nights. I deal with it partially because I realize many people have it a lot worse then I do. All in all, God has been very good to me.”

****

Looking back in time, Stanley had many thoughts about his brother, Martin.

“All of us felt the same way when he became ill, and especially so when he died,” Stanley said. “Martin was - well - somewhat different from the rest of us. He was very bright, and, in personality, I always felt that he was like our Uncle Benny. He liked to have fun. Martin was a charmer. He had a great smile, and he could make a new friend in a minute. In fact, he was one of those characters who could say bad things to someone and make them like it. I don’t know how he did that, but he did.”

Stanley went on this way:

“Martin was strong, a good athlete, and very bright, but in high school, friends were more important to him than grades. He was like most of the Levin brothers; he didn’t hit the books too hard.”

Like the other brothers, Martin learned to gamble when he was young, and he would sometimes attend sessions where both he and Stanley played.

As Martin’s illness progressed, both Fred and Stanley were on the University of Florida campus. When word of Martin’s imminent death came by phone, Fred, his fiancee Marilyn, and Stanley, piled into Stanley’s car to hurry home.

“I had a big 1955 Buick at the time,” Stanley said. “It was a
An American Dream: The Levin Family Chronicles

fast car and, of course, we wanted to get home as quickly as we could. We were on the Panama City cutoff, going about 100 when a highway patrolman pulled us over. I told him why we were speeding, and he used his radio to check my story. When he got the word, he let us go with no ticket, but he warned me to slow down. "If you don’t, your family’s liable to have more than one funeral," he said.

Added Stanley many years later:

"None of us ever forgot Martin, or what his death meant to us all. It was a tragic thing. It made a terrible impact on our parents."

*****

As he concluded recounting his life’s highlights, Stanley sat back and gazed into the distance for a moment. Then he added:

"And tomorrow? Who knows. I’ve met most of my goals, and now I live to watch my son grow. I want to see him mature, to begin a career, to have a family. I’d like to watch grandchildren come along and develop.

"Otherwise? Well, I hope to be a part of Square Ring for a time, for this has been truly exciting, and very different. If my back will permit it, I’d like to attend a good many more Gator sporting events. I still love to watch the Gators play! Beyond that? Well...I’m very satisfied with the way life has treated me. I’d like to have a chance to do some good things for people and the community, and such things will come, especially if the door’s open.

"Beyond that? Well, I still enjoy watching our law firm at work. The number of lawyers here now amazes me, as does the variety of work we do. Several days each week the firm brings in lunch for those who’d like to eat here. People begin to gather in the fourth floor conference room at noon, and folks come and go. They chit-chat, they discuss cases, they help one another keep up-to-date on people and events. Just watching and listening’s a learning experience. Yes...this has been a great place to work. Just as Pensacola is a great place to live.

"God has blessed me. I have, and have had, a wonderful family and more friends than anyone deserves. What a blessing!"
Chapter XI

Allen's Adventures

Like his older brothers, Allen grew up in the county’s public school system, including Pensacola High. The grade school years? There were few highlights. However, into high school, Fred and the others had established a pattern. Allen recalled:

“I wasn’t a great student, though I wasn’t a bad student either. The friends I palled around with weren’t great students either. My closest buddy through high school was Stanley Wolfe, who unfortunately died very young, at about age 40. Otherwise, life at PHS was one grand party. Yes, we drank. Yes, we smoked. Yes, we had parties all the time. We did what even today I would label as ‘crazy things.’ There were parties at the beach, parties at our house, parties at other places, too. I never showed an inclination for sports, for music, or for being in plays, even though the school was doing some very good things back then.

“One thing that rings true even to this day is that my brothers and I grew up feeling that our family was well-off. There were maids, there was a cook. There was a man who was a combination chauffeur and yard man. Even though our parents were very straight forward in the way they lived, we boys were not taught to do the basic things one ought to do around the house. For example, when I took off my clothes at night, I dropped them on the floor. Someone else picked them up. I never even learned how to make a bed. If I was hungry when I came home from school, one of the maids, named Mary, would fix me something like a salami sandwich and vegetarian beans. She fixed it...I never learned how to do even that. That’s the way we grew up...an open, loving family, with more money than many others, though surely we were not what one would call rich. Our dad worked very hard, we had odd jobs, we lived well.”

As a result of that kind of upbringing, Allen didn’t want to leave home to go off to college.

“My father insisted that I do what my brothers had done, and that was go off to Gainesville. My mother insisted, too. I was almost in tears over this. I guess I was literally scared to go. I wanted to go to PJC. You see, I’d never been away from home. When other kids went off to summer camp, I would plead with my mother not to make me go! So I didn’t go. The lessons others learned through those experiences, I never had. When the time came for my dad and Stanley Wolfe to put me on the train to Gainesville, I was already homesick. I didn’t want to go.”

However, once he became acclimated and had made a few new friends, college days brightened for Allen, as they had for his brothers.

“I started out badly as a student, but then things picked up,” he remembered. “Once more, life on campus was one long party. I had plenty of preparation for that. By the fourth year I was getting to know the ropes, partying with my friends and loving it. However, I did have to spend five years getting through the four-year course.”
At that point father Abe insisted that Allen repeat the experiences of other sons. He wanted his youngest to be a lawyer, too. Mother Rose insisted also. Thus Allen took his LSAT examinations and passed them. He was accepted into law school, and in the fall of 1967 began his course work. By now the United States was involved in Vietnam. There had been serious reverses there, and during that summer, student anti-draft riots broke out. There also had been the dramatic confrontation outside the hall in Chicago where the Democratic Party’s convention was being held. The war was unpopular, and entering law school at that moment provided a draft deferment.

“I was like a lot of my classmates,” Allen recalled. “I surely wasn’t a draft dodger, but I was a willing draft avoider. A lot of us were.”

Allen hated law school!

“It just wasn’t me,” he said. “My head wasn’t cut out for that kind of thing. All through my life, then and even now, I was not a reader. I didn’t like intense study, or the kind of memory which law demands. In one month, I knew that I was heading for disaster.”

Then, after Allen had been in course for just four weeks, Uncle Sam canceled deferments for graduate students.

“I quickly called my dad and had a long talk with him,” Allen said. “I explained how I felt, and showed him how I might be pulled out of class at any minute since that was now the law. I even promised that I would go back to law school later, a promise I knew in my heart I would never keep.”

Allen came home. He had no idea of what he might do next, but just as he arrived, a teachers strike began across the local public school system. However, school officials refused to simply close down the classrooms. Parents who qualified now volunteered to teach, and the school board was anxious to hire anyone else with a degree. Allen remembered:

“My dad and my brothers had friends at the school board, and they got me an interview there. Then there was an interview with Sydney Nelson, principal at Escambia High School. He offered me a position as a teacher in DCT - Diversified Cooperative Training - a plan where students went to school half days and worked in planned employment the other half. Mr. Nelson and I hit it off well, and so there I was.”

Allen was only slightly older than most of his students, and their relationships proved very good. The strike ended, but not Allen’s employment.

“I sort of laughed at my situation then,” he admitted. “I was both a draft avoider and also a scab in the eyes of teacher unionists. But I didn’t care. I liked teaching, and I stayed there for three years. It was a fine experience.”

But then an unplanned incident derailed that career. It began this way, as Allen remembered it.

“From way back when, perhaps because of my dad’s gin rummy habit or even Fred’s card playing, I developed a love of gambling. To that point, in 1971, I had never done more than penny things, but now I began to feel almost an addiction to gambling, everything from playing in a weekly poker game with other teachers to the World Series pool. One day, one of the guys asked: ‘Who wants
to go to Las Vegas?’ I replied that I’d love to go, but that I surely didn’t have the money for that sort of thing. The fellow replied: ‘You don’t understand...it’s free! They’ll fly you out there, pay for the hotel, even your food. I know you like to drink...and they’ll pay for that too.’ I still looked dubious, and then the guy added: ‘All you have to pay for is your gambling, and you don’t really have to do much of that. What you do is go down to the bank here and get a line of credit for $1,000. Then you go to the casino in Vegas and get some chips. Then you play, but just a little. You win a little, or you lose a little. They won’t know how much. Then, when you’re ready to leave, you cash in the chips. That’s it. You have a great time and the Casino pays for it!’

Allen was hooked! He arranged the line of credit, and off he went. On the charter flight to Las Vegas, he and his companions enjoyed all manner of hospitality. And when he checked in at the Flamingo Hotel and Casino, he was already on a roll. What happened next?

“I don’t think that I drew a sober breath for the three days I was there,” he admitted later. “And one other thing I hadn’t counted on was the fact that all of the other people on this junket from Pensacola knew my dad. That turned out to be a disaster. You see, I couldn’t play ‘just a little bit.’ In short order, I had blown the $1,000 from the line of credit, and then these other Pensacolians insisted on lending me more betting money. They gave me $6,000. When we got back on that plane, I was out $7,000!

“All the way back to Pensacola I was depressed. What would I do? I had just blown a full year’s salary as a teacher...and those nice folks expected to be repaid. When I got home, I made a clean breast of the whole affair to my dad. Of course, he was a gambler. He understood the fever. He loaned me the $7,000. It was a long time before I could pay him back, but I did, with the proceeds from the sale of a small piece of property. But oh, my...what a lesson!”

That experience forced Allen to counsel with himself. He loved to gamble. But as a gambler, he saw that he was a loser. He couldn’t sustain the habit on a teacher’s income. What occurred next was one of those incidents in family life that can have good points and bad points.

Allen’s older brother Fred and his friend Fred Vigodsky had become part owners of a bar called the Pier Lounge. The management of the lounge was poor, and the owners wanted out. They offered Allen a deal. They would allow him to take over the establishment, giving them a note for the payment for their interest. Allen agreed. He said later:

“You know, it doesn’t make sense to have a drunk in charge of a lounge, and I have to admit that by 1971, I was a drunk. Not an alcoholic, you understand, for I wasn’t addicted. But I had the habit.”

The Pier Lounge had four bars, three inside, one outside, and this setup required several bartenders. On weekends, especially if the weather was good, all of the bars would be open...and that was good. What was bad was that by 10:00 on many nights, Allen had passed out in the lounge’s office. Even a cursory audit would show that the bartenders were making more money that he was! Things were bad, getting worse, and Allen’s brothers could see this. Elder
brother David intervened.

David wisely recognized that a major change of scenery was desirable, indeed, was necessary to clear the air for his brother. By now, Allen had begun living with Dian Tietjen. She was a social worker, and while the pair shared many common interests, her lifestyle and personal goals were not doing much to reposition Allen's deteriorating lifestyle.

Nineteen seventy-one was the year in which Reubin Askew, David and Fred's onetime law partner, took office as governor of Florida. The men had remained very close, and so David and Fred turned to the new governor with an appeal. It is difficult to recreate the precise language involved, but Allen, not being gentle with himself, suggested that they might have said: "We've got a drunk on our hands. He ain't real bright, but anything you could do to help him out by giving him a job would be deeply appreciated."

Reubin had enjoyed a very long relationship with David and Fred, and with Abe and Rose, too. There were some family stories that related to Askew's political career, which had begun with several terms in the state legislature, followed by two more in the Florida senate, prior to his campaign for the state house. There was love and affection among them all. Askew took the request and ran with it. Allen reported the next actions this way:

"I became the assistant to the chairman of the Board of Business Regulation for the State of Florida. I went to work for a gentleman named Richey Pallet, who was a lawyer turned banker. He was a great fellow, and immediately took me under his wing."

With Dian living with him, Allen moved to Tallahassee and during the next six months worked through each of the departments under business regulation's review, beginning with Hotels and Restaurants, and then the others, which incidentally included Parimutuel Wagering. It was a pleasant job, with little stress. Again Allen recalled:

"We got to go to all of the new specialty business openings. For example, I inspected Walt Disney World before it ever opened, and, naturally, as state inspectors we were treated very nicely everywhere we went. When a race track opened, we would get special treatment. Actually, some of those openings were almost like special events for me! What did I really contribute to the state in all of this? Not much. I was collecting about $11,000 a year, which was considerably more than my pay as a teacher. But - I was probably worth about $2,000."

The next step was to Miami. Pallet asked Allen to move to South Florida to assist with the work of the Board of Business Regulation there. He went. Dian went with him, and with each relocation, she continued her social work. The Miami trek lasted six months, the same as the Tallahassee assignment. By now a year had passed since Allen's departure from Pensacola. He was homesick and wanted to return. So did she. It was then that another opportunity opened back home. By now Allen's lifestyle seemed to have become more stable. The couple returned to Northwest Florida.

These were interesting times, in Pensacola and in the nation as a whole. The 1972 elections were a prelude to the Watergate scandals. The world was in shock by the murder of several Israeli ath-
letes at the summer Olympic games. The planet was on the verge of the energy crisis which was the forerunner of a great wave of inflation. Under Adm. Malcolm Cagle, the Navy was focusing more training activities in Pensacola; and the Hygeia Coca-Cola Bottling Company was building a new production center and general offices on Davis Highway. Nearby, ground was broken for a medical campus which would house West Florida Regional Medical Center and the Medical Center Clinic. Downtown, work was well advanced on the first structure in the Governmental Center Complex. The land acquisition for the complex forced several activities to relocate, including the American Red Cross headquarters. The University of West Florida’s basketball team represented the United States in the late-year South African Olympics. On Pensacola Beach there were new stirrings as the visitor traffic began to enlarge with each passing summer. It was onto this stage that Allen Levin moved to begin a new career.

Technically, this was not a fresh start. Some years before, Fred Levin, Fred Vigodsky and several others had entered the food service business. One site was a beachfront barbeque; others were in the city, with a variety of formats. The name Chick’s Barbeque was used. Allen’s initial experience came when he became a short-order cook for the beach barbeque. This was a summer vacation position, and many years later, he revived memories which went like this:

“One summer I was the only person in the barbeque operation, and during the Fourth of July week, I worked 101 hours! That may sound impossible, but it was so. Remember, too, that this meant working behind the barbeque pit, with no air conditioning. Talk about making money! I was being paid $1.10 per hour, with no overtime. After the deduction of taxes, I took home less that $100. So much for gaining experience!”

The other food service outlets opened by Vigodsky, Fred Levin and others were barbeque/meat places. This investment team also was beginning ownership and operation of a women’s apparel shop in downtown Pensacola. This began with the purchase of Sam’s Style Shop, a landmark downtown Palafox business which had been founded years before by Sam Rosenbloum and then later run by his brother, Dave. All of this coming together at one time made Vigodsky and Fred Levin short of trustworthy management, and so they offered Allen an opportunity. He would be allowed to buy a piece of the restaurants, and would run them for the group. The offer arrived as Allen was dreaming of returning home from Miami. He and Dian leaped at the chance!

The new assignment was just the opposite of the free-wheeling position Allen had enjoyed with the state. Now he was responsible for a restaurant which operated twenty-four hours a day, seven days per week, every minute except Christmas Day. There were inventory problems, price fluctuations brought on by the energy crisis, personnel shortages...just about every managerial nightmare that a man might encounter. It wasn’t an easy job, but the business did reasonably well. For months, Allen was a steak and barbeque specialist. Then came another fork in his career path.

Fred Vigodsky’s management of Sam’s Style Shop had been nothing short of a genius. Business thrived. As an expansion, he
opened a companion store in Mobile. Again, all went well. Then he and his partners chose to open a second local shop, this one to be in Cordova Mall. Now Fred V. needed help. This need generated a major partner conference. They agreed that the best strategy was to sell the restaurants and to let Allen buy a small share in the clothing outlet. All parties agreed, and the transactions were executed. The restaurant sale made everyone happy. Now things moved fast.

Allen detailed the next happenings like this:

“I went into the women’s apparel business, and that’s where I spent the next eight years. With Fred Vigodsky’s skillful leadership, our three stores mushroomed to fifty! We gambled, we took risks, but things paid off...at first.

“But then things suddenly got tough. Interest rates late in the 1970s went out of sight, and we were highly leveraged. All of our operating money was borrowed, and it was floating with prime. (Even today some people will remember when even certificates of deposit were earning thirteen percent. Our situation was a disaster.) In one year the enterprise went from earnings in excess of $1,000,000 to a loss of an equal amount. In twelve months, we went from being geniuses to business idiots!”

The only option open to the investors was to accept Chapter 11 bankruptcy. However, in the long term, the group was able to sell what was remaining after the Chapter 11 and to make a sizeable profit on the stores. The unprofitable units were disposed of, and the enterprise was scaled down to nineteen stores. Month after month, the principals plugged away; ultimately, every local merchant and vendor that had done business with the stores was paid back, including interest on money through the bankruptcy period. It was one of the most successful Chapter 11 examples of that time.

However, when all was completed, Allen Levin had completed an eight-year merchandising career, but now he was looking for a new green pasture...again.

During the restaurant and clothing store adventures, Allen and Dian had married. That was not the basis for a happy story. Their lifestyle continued to be up-and-down; however, his original habits did not return in full scale at that point. In 1980, with Chick’s Barbeques a memory, and Sam’s a closed chapter, Allen turned himself to what would become his life’s true work: real estate development.

Actually, he had dabbled in properties a bit in prior years. Now, working with a group, 30 to 35 acres were acquired along the Intercoastal Waterway on Pensacola Beach. As he relived it later:

“This is the first thing I’d ever built. The project was a sixteen-story condominium which we called Tristan Towers. We designed, built and sold the building, with the intention to have a second tower, too. Actually, things went very well from the start. We pre-sold most of the units. The clients had made large down payments or had formally closed on their buys when the recession of 1982-83 began. In addition, shortly after our property purchase, our group was able to sell off several smaller parcels of the property, making a pretty good profit. Since, prior to the recession, things continued to look good, our group (and this was mostly family) acquired the option rights to 40 acres on the eastern end of Pensacola.
Beach. We now held that option, and we had sold out of the Tristan Towers. However, by late 1983 and into 1984 ‘condo’ had become a dirty word in the industry. That was true here and elsewhere. Many people lost fortunes, and developers could hardly give condo units away. We had broken even on the Tower and had made some money on the balance of the first purchase...but by then we were riding in neutral.”

“Neutral” would not have been the word to apply to Allen’s marriage. With the passage of time, it had gone into reverse, and he was reacting to those happenings. Both he and Dian were drinking heavily, and their marriage was disintegrating. He made this comment a decade later:

“I don’t know why, but by this time, I had become a fatalist. I felt certain that I would not live a long life. In fact, the more I drank and caroused about I was sure I wouldn’t go much beyond 40. My relationship with Dian was such that neither of us seemed to care. Finally, we reached a mutual decision. We divorced. That was a good move, but it didn’t solve my emotional problems.”

In the course of those many years two other adventures of that era stand out in Allen’s story. In the first, he became the father of a son born out of wedlock. At that time, the child’s birth mother chose to place the child for adoption, and for many years, Allen had no contact with the boy. But then, in 1997, a letter arrived! The young man (whose name had become Andrew Rothfeder) had been twice married and by now had a son, age 10. Shortly thereafter, there were twins, a boy and a girl, Austin and Cassidy. Andrew then was employed by an Atlanta real estate trust and was doing quite well. Thus began a unique reunion with a long lost son and unexpected grandchildren.

The second incident was not a happy one, but its outfall had some positive results. This occurred in 1978, in the midst of Allen’s years of heavy drinking, while he was still married to Dian. One night he had been following his alcoholic routine and was driving home, traveling north on Scenic Highway. Admittedly, his mind was an alcoholic blur. He attempted to pass a car, then came head to head with an oncoming vehicle. The cars collided, and both headed into ditches. By a miracle, Allen’s car did not careen down the high cliff, which was on his right. But his car did slam into a ditch. His head struck the windshield, causing a concussion. Allen woke up hours later in a hospital with family members at his bedside. The other driver suffered a broken leg, but no more serious injuries.

“I was very, very lucky,” Allen recalled. “Days later, I went to the crash site and looked at it carefully, thinking about what might have been. I resolved then to change my habits, and I did, for about six months. But then, with my life still in general turmoil, I slipped back to what I had been doing. I was in that mental trough when the Tristan Towers episode came to a close, and my divorce was finalized.”

Another year passed. By now, with real estate development still at low ebb, Allen was uncertain of his future. He had saved some money from his prior ventures, and so he lived off that, and began to seek a new opportunity. In the course of that search, he took office space in a building from which Dean Baird was operating some
mini warehouses along Fairfield Drive. It was there that he met Teri.

Teri was originally from southern Indiana, and she had a young son named Evan. As they saw one another in the office, Allen and Teri developed a friendship, and this warmed as they shared some real estate work on other projects. Still, there was nothing big, nothing happening in his business. Thus, Allen, with Teri and Evan, did what millions of others have thought of doing: they took off to see America! He described those next weeks this way:

“We bought a minivan and just took off! We had no plan, we just headed cross country. Teri’s parents were living in Arizona and so we went there, seeing Texas as we went. Then we saw the Grand Canyon, and moved into Utah to see Bryce Canyon and Zion National Park. That’s beautiful country, and Evan was old enough now to be able to walk with us, for we did a lot of hiking. Evan and I had really taken to each other, so this was both a vacation and a real getting-acquainted trip. We went to Oregon and saw the Columbia River Gorge, then turned north to Seattle, to western Canada including Vancouver, and finally down across the Canadian Rockies. We stopped at beautiful Lake Louise, and also saw Lake Moraine. Then we started back. We toured through Montana, stopping at Butte where I tried - not successfully - to find details about my grandfather’s short time there. We saw Yellowstone, Jackson Hole, and as a last real stop, we visited Indiana where members of Teri’s family lived. When we got back to Pensacola, we had put over 8,000 miles on the van’s odometer. It had taken weeks to do this, but it was one of the most memorable experiences of my life...and theirs, too.”

![The Allen Levins...l-r: Allen, Teri and Evan.](image)

However, with their return to Northwest Florida, not much had changed in the project market. Allen still owned his share of the Pensacola Beach option, but at that moment there was nothing to be done there. However, a short-term opportunity did surface.

This was not in Pensacola but at Largo, Florida, in partnership with a friend named Michael Moses and his family. The project was to complete construction, furnishing and marketing of a congregate-living facility. Allen summarized that saga this way:

“We found a very small apartment near the project and then we worked, all day, and every night. Michael and his family worked that way, too. You have to do that when you’re opening a small business like that, on a shoestring. Even young Evan helped. He played checkers with some of the older folks as they became occu-
pants. He even waited on tables in the dining room. He was great!”

After seven months, the facility was fully occupied. Michael Moses stayed on to operate the business. Ultimately, he succeeded in selling the center. That was not without some difficulties over the intervening years, but by 1997, Allen felt that the time and modest investment had paid off.

“Teri and I had married in November 1987, and this was the smartest thing I ever did in my life. She and Evan have been everything to me. She gave me lots of confidence. She became my strength. Now I could control my craving for alcohol, and my lust for gambling. She had done so many wonderful things for me! And in the course of time, I formally adopted Evan.”

Allen, Teri and Evan returned to Pensacola in 1989 and entered in to a partnership with David Brannen. Many will remember this as the time when savings and loan and banking scandals were rocking the nation, and when the RTC and FDIC were forced to repossess and then sell off many distressed properties. Pensacola was not an exception to this financial chaos. Allen and David Brannen attempted several such acquisitions, but at first they did not succeed. Then came a turnaround for them. They were able to purchase on sealed bids, what had been called the Palm Beach Club. This was the last development on the Ft. Pickens Road going west. What happened next Allen described this way:

“This, ironically, was a piece of property that I had sold sometime earlier to a developer who had begun to build eighty-four condominiums there. However, he had gone out of business before the units were totally completed. Then the bank involved with the loan went under, and the FDIC ended up with the property. David and I were the successful bidders.

“However, the Palm Beach Club at that point was in poor condition. There were structural problems, and before any turnaround could begin, there was much work to do. We did it and, luckily for us, we were ready to begin pre-selling just as the condo market began to turnaround. The market had been at ground zero for almost nine years, but now people were ready to buy. There was a pent up demand. We sold units for between $75,000 and $85,000, and by the time we were finished, some of the buyers were reselling them for between $125,000 and $145,000. This was one of those happy win-win situations. Since the timing was so good, and the outcomes, too, David and I made something of a name for ourselves in this market.”

By now, with his life well stabilized, Allen found many things changing for the better. Beginning with the 1990s, Allen Levin’s career was obviously focused on land and project development, most of it centered on Pensacola Beach, which had begun a new cycle of success. A bit of background may be helpful in appreciating what he has done, and how things were set in motion.

Santa Rosa Island had originally been federal government property, but then had been transferred to Escambia County for development as a recreation area. To the east a similar relationship came into being for Santa Rosa County. At first, the island saw only informal visitor traffic. The casino, at which Abe Levin had operated concessions, had been constructed in 1931. Shortly after World War II, the first small groups of cottages, such as Abe Levin’s Sun
Ray group, had been built. Escambia County commissioners had created a development body to manage and promote the island, thus the Santa Rosa Island Authority came into being. By the early 1950s, that authority was struggling to attract out-of-area visitors, and to encourage people to lease beach properties, through 99-year agreements. At first there were few takers. Even into the 1960s, with special developments like the Sabine Bay dredging, things moved slowly.

However, by the late 1960s, traffic was growing, and it was then that Congressman Robert L. F. Sikes, in conjunction with Congressman William Colmer of Mississippi, pushed through federal legislation which reserved miles of the beach for permanent public use. In that same period, the county’s officials set aside a significant acreage for future development by the University of West Florida.

Then came the true building surge! Tristan Towers was but one of the actions which encouraged a different kind of island use. Local and out-of-state developers came into the picture. It was in this climate that Allen Levin’s list of projects mushroomed. More or less in sequence they included:

San DeLuna was a forty-five-lot, upper-scale-single, family subdivision, with fifteen lots on the water. These lots presold rapidly. The associates were David Brannen and David Leatherwood.

Then Allen was a participant in arranging the financing for the Clarion Suites project. Clarion included townhouse suites which were individually owned.

After that, again with Brannen, Allen developed a small subdivision called Tristan Villas, next to Tristan Towers.

The next very large venture, again attempted with Brannen and Leatherwood, was the 181-unit Hampton Inn, facing Pensacola Beach. This was a highly successful enterprise, and the hotel quickly became an attractive part of local tourism. Brannen acquired Allen’s interest in 1997.

Later came a project in which Robert Rinke and others were partners with Allen. Rinke originated the Emerald Isle project, which was a 128-unit high-rise facing the Gulf. This project sold out quickly.

“This had to be one of our most enjoyable and successful activities,” Allen said later.

At this point, Allen turned to what would be considered his largest-ever challenge. This would be the development to use the properties obtained under option more than a decade before, located at the eastern end of beach development. Called Portofino, this project would involve forty acres of land, on the north side of the Navarre Road (later renamed J. Earle Bowden Road).

This development did not come easily. The plan called for five twenty-one-story towers to hold over 800 condominium units. The plans were painstakingly drafted, and Allen proceeded through a maze of legal requirements. By 1998, such projects were almost certain to face opposition from environmental groups, and on Santa Rosa Island this would include many who objected to injecting high numbers of new residents. There were engineering requirements, too, the need to reconfigure small areas of land, and a demand to make all of the towers’ elements conform to rules and regulations of the State of Florida, Escambia County, and the Santa Rosa Island
Authority. As months passed, Allen employed an army of specialists
to respond to questions and to make modest design changes. It was a
long, costly process.

"From the beginning," he recalled, "we tried to recognize what
the objections might be, and to design to accommodate them. For
example, the towers will have underground parking so that the forty
acres would not be covered by a layer of blacktop. Of course, this
project, when completed, will be a bonanza for the authorities, for it
will generate large ongoing tax revenues. Even so, there have been
new hurdles to pass over at each step of the way. I guess that's just
what one must expect in our time."

Now that he has passed the magic mark of age 50, what does
Allen Levin see in his future? Will there be any more grand projects...
more towers...more hotels?"

"I doubt that I'll look in that direction," he said. "After all,
it's going to take a number of years to bring this present undertaking
to a conclusion, and to do all of the things usually associated with the
windup of something of that magnitude.

"Of course, there are going to be some much smaller opportu-
nities that will surface. There always are, especially in an area like
the island, where the future still is in question. If these come along...
well...we'll always be willing to look and to listen."

Beyond that, Allen is looking at life through new, different
glasses.

"Up until a few years ago, my whole life was sort of unstruc-
tured. I had to regroup, to become a new person, and my wife has
helped me do that. Now...well...I've already begun involvement in
some worthwhile things. I'm a board member of the Cultural Cen-
ter, and at the Sacred Heart Hospital. My wife is on the Escambia
County Planning Board, the Pace Center Board and the American
Red Cross Board. We're enjoying those things. And Teri and I are
going to do a lot more traveling. Our first trip out west opened a
whole vista to me. There are national parks to see in this great coun-
try, and we're going to do that. And you know what? I've never
been to Europe...not once. We're going to do that, too, though we
haven't made a plan for Europe yet. Where will we go first? I don't
know. Our grandfather's heritage lay in an area that might have inter-
est for one visit. Maybe. I don't know yet."

Unlike his brothers, Allen feels no great ties to the University
of Florida.

"I just don't," he says. "My time there was valuable, but not
in the same sense that theirs was."

Instead, there are other things, other targets.

"For one thing, my wife and I are going to take computer
lessons. They talk about how many people are using the computer
for this and that. I'm computer ignorant. I'm going to correct that. (I
hope)."

Beyond that?

"Several of my friends tell me that diving is great! Life is
awfully good, and has been very good to me," he concluded. "I just
want to be sure that when they write my obituary, there will be things
in that text that would have made my parents proud."
Chapter XII

Levin...Beginning Final Chapter

Thus the Levin Chronicles come to the end of the 20th century. And what a century that has been for this family! The saga has moved from the times of an immigrant Lithuanian youth to a decade in which family members have been headline makers in the law, in sports, in construction and in a host of community good works, many of which are seldom if ever known by the public at large. All of this could only happen in these United States.

As he gazed out of his sixth-story window in the legal firm’s downtown office building, David Levin could look out upon the city’s changing waterfront, and could also see properties whose future were then undetermined. One afternoon he allowed his mind to wander, and to speculate:

“So much has changed,” he began. “When our daddy opened his little shop, Pensacola was just a village, really. At that moment the county had only one real industry, a small military operation, and the little saw mills were phasing out. That was seventy years ago. Abe Levin lived to see this become a modern metropolitan city. He saw the population more than triple. He saw downtown change, well, maybe three times. He saw a new skyline appear. The street cars disappeared and automobiles came on strong. Sports? Well, we’ve talked about that, but local sports are so different today. Daddy liked that, and we do, too.”

Then, staring to the west, he continued:

“And all of us, all of the boys, have grown up to see this waterfront change. I guess we can all say that Pensacola’s leaders have had some trouble making up their minds what the waterfront should be, you know, a park, a port, an industrial way, a marina? I don’t know what it will become. I do know that we have one of the prettiest bodies of water in the country at our front door. We need to take care of it.”

Becoming more personal, he reminisced:

“I often wonder what I might have done differently. I’ve had a good life, and my mother was surely right when she nudged me towards taking law. I’ve known and worked with great people, like my friend Reubin. I’ve been involved in things that were exciting. And I’ve helped people in my practice. What more can a man ask for in life?”

Stanley voiced a similar feeling.

“I have said this before and I’ll say it again. I’ve been blessed in having a son who has been the absolute light of my life. I wouldn’t change anything in my life if that would change one single hair on his head. I’ve been one of the most fortunate guys in the world in having been born of wonderful parents. What a background they gave us all! They taught us how to live, how to love, and to be respectful of our fellow man. I hope we have all lived by that code. I’ve tried. All of the Levin sons have had some bad habits. We pretty much all like to gamble, and some of us have had our share of
domestic difficulties. When I read the advance text of this book, I asked myself if we were all being honest in what we said, and what we told about. By and large, I think we were. After all, the purpose of telling our story is really to give those who come after us an account of what took place. We all wish we had listened to our parents more carefully when they talked about their childhoods. We didn’t. Most boys don’t do so when they have the chance. As a result, we’re sketchy about our ancestors but...this volume is a start.

“Tomorrow? I hope I’ll have a chance to do some more good things involving boxing, and involving the University of Florida. Beyond that? Well, I just don’t know. Thanks to the economic success of the law firm and mostly thanks to Fred and the tobacco litigation, I have begun to scale back my law practice. Retirement soon is a strong probability. I was blessed in my single parenthood as it allowed me to be intimately involved in almost every aspect of Sherrod’s childhood. Now I look forward to enjoying his move into adulthood. Semi-retirement, or retirement, will leave me free to really get to know my son as a man.

“Perhaps...just perhaps...after we finish this book, David, Herman, Fred, Allen and myself will all sit down together and do a better job of thinking about the future, and what it will mean to the Levins. You know, up till now, we really haven’t done that.”

Fred Levin sat in his office, his chair and desk below two large framed montages of magazine covers and stories that have recorded some of his exploits. As on many days, his attire was informal. The blue open neck-sport shirt gave an impression far different from what a first-time visitor to the firm might have expected. He was relaxed, but the pile of correspondence resting before him suggested that this would be an active day.

“I’m glad we took time to look back at things,” he said. “Just taking stock of the basics, it’s more than forty years ago that David founded the law firm. He’s still a key player, and the others of us have been fortunate; he laid the foundation, we’ve helped put up the walls.”

With that, Levin reached into a desk drawer and drew out a blue-covered brochure which detailed the Levin law firm and its scope.

“I often kid David about the size of the firm today, compared to the little office he and Henry Barksdale occupied in the beginning. Did he dream we would grow so large? I doubt it. Today, well there are twenty-six attorneys, and the staff, including paralegals, investigators, secretaries, computer specialists, and a host of able backup people, is over 150. We fill three floors of this building...and we keep growing.”

Of course, the firm has undergone many changes, in style, in management techniques, supervision, as well as pure numbers.

At first David, was chief of operations. However, as years passed, he wished to be free of administrative responsibilities and so he passed that mantle to Fred, who commented on progress this way:

“I wish I could say that we have always been a carefully organized, smooth-running legal machine, but that wouldn’t be true. David, and then I, tended to fly by the seats of our pants. Long range plans? No way. Job descriptions, internal security, cost controls, proper billing? No, that wasn’t us. However, as time passed we
knew that we needed such practices and better management.

"Then, and I think it was in 1990 or '91, my friend Dick Appleyard called one day and said that Pensacola was going to lose a quality citizen if someone didn’t come up with a job for Flack Logan. Flack had become well known locally as the final skipper of the USS Lexington, and as that ship was decommissioned, he ended his naval career. I told Dick that I didn’t see anything at our place for Flack, but...I agreed to talk and listen. When we met, I was impressed. And it was then that I called our partners together, and we discussed the prospect of employing a real manager. We agreed to give the concept a try, and we employed Flack. That was one of the smartest moves the firm has ever made."

Logan took over this role knowing nothing about the legal profession or what would be required to manage such an operation. But - he was a rapid learner! Quickly, the firm took on new systems and practices. One early development resulted from knowledge that earlier the firm had suffered two cases of internal embezzlement. Flack went to work to find suitable cross controls. Budgets were formalized, accounting practices were upgraded.

"In short, Flack made a great difference to us," Fred added.

Meanwhile, soon after Logan’s arrival, Fred’s son Martin completed his law school training and clerkship. He came home and joined the Levin firm. Fred noted years later:

"Martin got where he did at Stanford and in law school by being a very organized human being, and someone who works very, very hard and long. When he entered our firm, he hit the ground running, and from the first did extremely well.

"Through those years, even with Flack as our manager, I had continued in the title of president. I’ll admit that with Flack’s arrival, I probably became less involved in detail. That's the way I wanted it. One day Flack asked me for a meeting. I had no idea what he wanted, and he bowled me over with his suggestion. He said something like: 'Fred, I think it’s time you were promoted to chairman of the board, and the firm should appoint Martin as president."

"I couldn’t believe what he was saying, but when Flack spelled out why he made the suggestion, it made sense. Martin was young, energetic, and his training had given him insights into many things our firm should have been doing but was not. As Flack spoke, I listened, and I had to admit that what he was saying made sense. I ventured that some of the older, senior partners might not take to this idea, but I agreed to place the plan before them. I was right...several men didn’t like the plan, but when it was all over, there was agreement, and Martin became president of the firm.

"That was several years ago, and I’ll admit that this was another of the all-time smart moves we’ve made, in every way. Now we’re leaner, better organized, and we know where we’re going. No more seat-of-the-pants stuff. And Martin loves it! He was born for this level of activity.”

Next Fred Levin passed across the desk one page of an article from Florida Trend magazine which had featured his activities.

"I know it’s being a little immodest, but - well - look at that one paragraph, the one that lists awards and honors.” (That paragraph reported that Fred Levin has been listed in Who’s Who In Ameri-
can Law, Who's Who In Finance & Industry, Men And Women Of Distinction, Men Of Achievement, and Notable Americans. Another sentence said that he had been listed in every edition of Best Lawyers In America.) “That’s all very nice, and I know it made Daddy proud. But to me, awards and honors are just frosting on the cake. The things I’m proudest about are that I’ve been able to put some wrongs to right, things such as the boxing mess, and some legal cases where justice was done and where hazards and bad conditions were turned around. The other thing I’m pleased about, at this point, is that my children are happy and doing well. Once again, our father watched his sons and their progress to the end of his life, and I think he was proud of what he and mama had produced. I hope I’ll end my days with that same feeling. I believe I will.”

And the future for Fred Levin?

“A lot of looking ahead involves looking back, I guess,” Levin said. “At my age, 61, I think a lot like my brothers. I’ve developed security, my children are grown, and there are so many opportunities out there. Do I have a goal of retiring at some point, to concentrate on relaxing and travel? No, that’s not my style. I believe it is honest to say that - with the exception of the day my daddy died - I have been at my desk every single day, three hundred and sixty-five days per year, year after year after year. I don’t make excuses for that. I love what I do...and I expect to keep doing it, so long as I’m able. Beyond that, I’m not much of a traveler, and Marilyn’s health makes most trips uncomfortable for her. So...I’ll be involved with the law, one way or another.”

One of Fred’s associates brought to light an event which may help explain in part the drive that keeps Fred Levin in the saddle.

“This was back a few years ago,” the man said. “The local newspaper was making plans for a blitz to sell more advertising space, especially to professional firms. As a basis for their work, the News Journal people engaged a survey firm which made an effort to develop demographic statistics on professional firms. As the surveyors went about the local business community, they asked this question: If you had to have a lawyer; what local attorney would you hire? Amazingly, almost one-third of all respondents said: Fred Levin. The next highest percentage, earned by another attorney, was just two percent.

“What was the reason for that,” Levin pondered. “Well, it probably came about because of several things. First of all, a lot of people had seen me on our BLAB television shows. Others had heard of me through news stories surrounding our work with Roy Jones, Jr.

“However, that newspaper study came back to something my brother David was told by another lawyer, back in 1955. That lawyer was Herbert (Shackey) Latham, who advised David early in his practice to concentrate on recognition. Latham said: ‘Look, if you have a fight with your wife, or your car’s stolen and the event’s reported in the press, it doesn’t make much difference what they say about you. People won’t remember the what. You want them to remember the who. I’ve done that. So...after awhile, if one concentrates on doing mostly right things, and if people believe what they see and hear, well, what else can be said?’ ”

One other illustration from 1998 made the point.
At the height of the tobacco controversy, the television news program 20-20 invited a number of involved lawyers to participate in an analysis show. Fred appeared with a number of others. Afterward, he said: "I could have just been heard and answered questions, and few viewers would have remembered my tobacco-related stories. I knew that many of those interviewed might have similar contributions. So, instead of just responding to questions, I also pulled out a cigarette and began our conversation by lighting-up on camera. Now, this was primarily a fight against smoking...and here was a leading attorney blowing smoke at millions in Viewer Land."

That was typical Levin. Do something that will make people remember you. Fred had remembered what David had said about Herbert Latham and being seen in a positive way.
Levins at Abe's 80th Birthday at New World Landing