



## Alaska Goes South

by Benjamin J. Stein

### *Father's Day*

**M**y pal Stone and I were walking down a hot street in Sandpoint, Idaho. His two children, 14 and 10, ran in front of us and played with my son, 7. "I have some health problems," he said. "I have a lump in my abdomen. I have a lump on the back of my neck."

"Well, you have some savings. Go see a doctor."

"No," he said. "I don't want to get into that whole world of doctors and hospitals. Too expensive. I think my kids would rather have the money when they're 21 than have me."

"Are you insane? Are you crazy? Your father died when you were eight. What do you think it would have meant to you if he had survived until you were 48?"

"It would have meant my whole life," he said. "My whole life."

"Well, what do you think you mean to your kids?"

Stone paused for a long minute.

"You're right," he said. "I was just talking crazy before. Just trying to sound tough. Of course I have to stay alive for them. A father has to stay alive for his kids if he can."

As we walked farther through town and then across the Long Bridge that traverses a narrow, magnificent neck of Lake Pend'Oreille, I thought of a note I have in my file drawer at home in Malibu. It's a carbon of a letter I sent to the Woodward & Lothrop department store's "Best Father Contest." I'm not sure of the year, but the letter attests that it's mailed with a three-cent stamp, so it has to

be at least forty years ago, when I was no more than ten. "My father is great because he never just tells me to do things. When there is something to be done, he says, 'Come on, Benjy. We will do it together,' and we do. He reads to me and tells me about World War II, and I love him." That's what my entry says.

When I was in law school, I became a student radical and a major demonstrator against the Vietnam war. My father was the chairman of President Nixon's Council of Economic Advisers as I posed outside shouting "One-two-three-four, we don't want your filthy war." He never once criticized me. He and my mother regularly housed me and my cohorts when we came to town to demonstrate. We shouted our revolutionary slogans with sandwiches my mother and father had made for us in our pockets.

A few years later, when the war was over and I had a miraculous access of

good sense, I worked at the White House with my father. We were there together, I as speechwriter, all through that horrible last Watergate year. He did his work and I did mine in that doom-laden atmosphere, doing it together, as one might say, and it got done.

When I left my wife, when I moved to New York, when I came here to the fleshpot to become a Hollywood gypsy, when my wife and I got back together, he never criticized, never told me I was wrong to do anything. When Joan Rivers sued me, he offered to help me pay my legal fees indefinitely. (It wasn't necessary. The suit was a publicity stunt that was soon dropped.)

He has almost never told me to do any specific thing except by the example of his life. "Live prudently," is the strongest admonition he ever says to me, when—for example—I am contemplating buying a large farm I will never use. Otherwise he teaches by this example:

Herbert Stein was born the son of a Russian Jewish immigrant father and a "Yankee" second-generation Jewish mother. His family never had much money. His father was a cavalryman in the U.S. Army, a mechanic and toolmaker at Ford Motor when Ford did not have Jews. He was unemployed during most of the Great Depression. His mother worked as a clerk at a department store to support the family while my grandfather tried to start a series of small businesses that went nowhere. On days when he had little to do, he sometimes took my father to baseball games. Other days, he went to stockbrokers' offices and watched the prices move across the ticker—little imagining that his son would some day



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have the power to move those prices by the words he used.

Neither of my father's parents had gone to college. My father graduated *summa cum laude* from Williams. He went to compulsory chapel every day and never regretted it. He still sings the first verses of the Doxology when he's feeling low. He had graduate training at the University of Chicago. He has worked in the Navy, the War Production Board, the FDIC, the Committee for Economic Development, Brookings, the White House, the American Enterprise Institute, been a director of a bank and a very large metals company. He has written important works on fiscal policy and the role of government. He's now comfortable on a scale his father could not have contemplated, mostly by thrifty living and cautious investments.

But that's not the example that moves me and teaches me what I want my son to learn: In all my life, I have never seen my father do anything he thought was ethically questionable. Not ever. I have never seen him do anything he thought was even remotely questionable (or even disagreeable) for money. I have never known him to tell a lie. He almost never discusses money, except in terms of the federal budget. I have never known him to turn down a friend who needed help of any kind.

I have never known a more loyal man. If someone is kind to him, my father will stay with that man through thick and thin. It's not just coincidence that he and my mother were sitting directly behind Julie and David Eisenhower at Richard Nixon's funeral last year.

He's been married to my mother for fifty-eight years. I have never seen him even look, and I mean not even *look*, at another woman. They still hold hands as they mosey out of the Cosmos Club after Sunday Brunch. They sit together and watch "Murder, She Wrote" with religious fervor, explaining its twists and turns to each other.

When I wanted to be an author, Michael Korda at Simon & Schuster would only take my first book if my father's name was on it as co-author. "Come on," he said, "we'll do it together." Whenever I have any question or problem about economics or finance, he drops whatever he's doing to help me with it. When I was afraid to get a computer, he said, "I'll show you how it

works. We'll do it together." Once, when my boss at a large newspaper made fun of my work, my father said, "You don't have to take that from anyone. I never have, and you don't have to either. We'll work it out. You're not all alone in this."

I have terrible insomnia on many nights. I sometimes lie in bed, listening to the halyards on the boats in the marina in Sandpoint, or watching the stars above Broad Beach in Malibu, or feeling my building shake from some Chicano's super bass speakers on his car, and I think of what it has meant to me to have a father who could send me to any college, who could do any homework problem. What has it meant to me to have a father who got me every summer job, who helped me get jobs even after law school, whose name opened doors as a writer?

It's amazing to me that my father—without a father in a position to help—got as far as he has, while I have just blithely absorbed a father who can do almost any earthly thing for me.

God help the fathers who don't know how much they mean to their sons. God help the children whose fathers do not

know what it means to be a father. As for me, I've been very lucky.

Friday

I was picked up this morning at the crack of dawn—well, 8 a.m.—by a driver and a limo to take me to a set in far down Orange County. I am to play one of two humans in an interactive CD-ROM event called "Toonstruck." It's about the wanderings and fantasies of a cartoonist played by the very talented Christopher Lloyd. I play his mean-spirited, curmudgeonly boss. I got to yell and scream and rant and rave. That was fun. Then the producers showed me around the rooms where the artists for the CD-ROM—which will take about eight hours to play—were working on their renderings. Wow. Hard work. I got to do the easy part.

Then, lunch. Shrimp scampi. Yummy. I could not stop eating. This is a great way to earn a living. Every part of it is great: The fun Englishmen who put the idea together. The incredibly polite way they direct the action: "Could you do it a bit nastier? Maybe put a bit more curl of the

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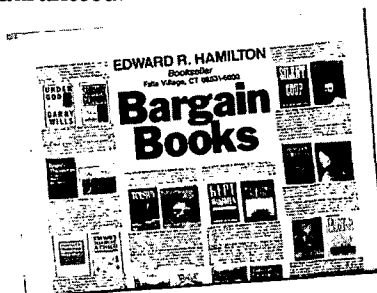
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lip into it?" All in a deferential tone, as if I were doing them a favor by being here. On the way back to my condo, the limo lost its air-conditioning. The driver apologized so many times I thought I would throw up. "Stop it," I said. "Don't you have any idea of how much better this is than being in depositions?"

*Sunday*

**H**ow does the expression go? "Speak of the devil and he appears?" Hmmm.

I'm in my basement, in my Milken archive, with two lawyers from the state of Florida, Department of Insurance. I'm an expert witness in a lawsuit against little players like Merrill Lynch and Coopers & Lybrand and a few former owner-managers of a large insurer out of Jacksonville, Florida. The defendants—so the state of Florida says, and I think they're right—engaged in a highly complex scheme to defraud policyholders and the state of Florida out of about \$400 million. The scheme hinged on phony valuations of Drexel junk bonds. That's where I come in. To talk about Drexel junk.

Anyway, we're down in my basement, going through my files, pushing rat's nests and spider webs, and talking about what we've found. The lawyers for Florida are exhausted. They've been struggling with this case for months, maybe years. They're gaunt. Frazzled. One of them told me he hardly ever saw his family any longer. The other one has had a cold for months. I am so glad I am not them.

This was on my mind after the exhausted lawyers left and I came into town to dine with my son. He was watching a TV ad about taking classes to be a construction worker.

Sitting in his tiny chair, holding his stuffed dog, he said, "That's what I want to do, Daddy. Be a construction worker."

"I don't think so, my boy," I answered.

"Why not? I want to work those big backhoes and cranes."

"I think it's very hard work and dangerous. I liked your idea of being a sport fisherman much better."

"Daddy," Tommy said, "how much do construction workers get paid?"

"I'm not sure. I think maybe from say ten to forty dollars an hour, but I'm not really an expert."

"How much do sport fishermen get paid?"

"That depends on what fish they catch and how much business they have taking people out fishing. I would prefer you not do that, either, come to think of it."

I put Tommy in the car and headed for McDonald's. "Daddy," he asked. "What job pays the most per hour? I want a job that pays enough so that I can just work a few hours a day and then spend the rest of my time in a pet shop."

Tommy ate his cheeseburger while I nibbled (well, more than nibbled) at his French fries.

I pondered his question. "The best paid job per hour is probably movie star or professional athlete. Maybe music star."

"Then I want to be a professional soccer player," he said.

"No, because, to be brutally frank, my lad, you are far too undisciplined to be a soccer star."

"Then a movie star."

"No, because you can try to do that, but you can't be sure of succeeding. It's a gamble and if you fail, you wait on tables."

Tommy chewed and thought. "Well," he asked, "what job pays the most that's also a job where it's not a gamble?"

"Well, my laddy boy, I don't want you to think about that. You are seven, and you do not really need to know. Your job now is to learn and to play."

"But I want to know what's the best job," he whined. "Please."

"Actor."

"But that's a gamble. You said so."

"All right. Job that pays by far the most: investment banker, especially in mergers and acquisitions."

"What do they do?"

"Well, if some rich company wants to buy another big company, the investment bankers figure out how to do it and raise the money. Like getting a very, very large loan on a house, only it's to buy a whole company, like Ford or Sony."

"Okay," Tommy said. "Then I'll do that. I'll do that part of the day, and be a sport fisherman part of the day and a construction worker."

"Let's discuss it again when you're 21," I said.

"But I want to know right now what I have to know to be an investment banker," he demanded.

"Well, you have to be mean and tough. You will work with very, very aggressive, difficult people. You have to put up with long hours and brutal competition. You usually have to be good at math. You have to be away from your family a lot. It's a very hard job."

In the car on the way back, Tommy asked, "Are there any good jobs that are really fun?"

"Being your father," I said.

"Real jobs."

"Doing voice work is probably the best job in the world," I said. "The best."

"Not being a lawyer like Mommy?"

*Monday*

**W**ell, speak of the devil, once again. Here I am in depositions in the lavishly furnished offices of a major firm called Rogers & Wells. The "Rogers" of the title was RN's secretary of state briefly, and I went to law school with his daughter.

But this is not about the old school tie. Far from it. I'm being deposed by a very, very clever fellow named Charlie Lembke who works for the ex-wife of one of the defendants in the case of the failed insurer, Guarantee Security Life. We're in a big conference room. Rogers & Wells, God love 'em, have laid on little snacks and juices, and there is a fairly convivial atmosphere.

The lawyers for the state of Florida are seated near me. I can just feel how tired they are. They are making me nervous, just because they obviously have worked so hard. Wow, I hope I never have to work that hard.

This Lembke fellow is clever indeed. I can tell he's trying to get me to say things that would exculpate his client. He's also trying to get me to say things that would make it appear that the state of Florida was somehow to blame for the failure of Guarantee Security Life. My challenge is to give a full, truthful answer, phrasing it intelligently enough so that even a very adroit lawyer will not be able to use it against the state of Florida.

Frankly, that's not at all hard to do, since the state of Florida has such a powerful case. My main problem is getting distracted by the very palpable exhaustion of the lawyers for the state of Florida. Someone in Tallahassee ought to be paying attention to how hard these guys work.

The day went by very quickly. Really, once I got it in my head that I was being questioned by a super-smart guy and that all he wanted was to find out what I would say at trial, and possibly embarrass me a little bit and take a tiny jab at my friends from Florida, I felt fine. I have had some depositions where the questioner obviously wanted me to *kill myself* before the day was done. This was not that kind of deposition.

When it was over, I went home and lay down next to my dog for an hour. God Bless Animals. They are so good for us unworthy humans. What would I do without my Ginger Bear? She has stepped seamlessly into my life. I'm surrounded by photos and mementos—old collars, old leashes—of Trixie. But Ginger lies down next to me and gets dog hairs on my collar. That's living.

*Saturday*

**W**hat a horrible day. A nightmare day from hell. A lost child. The worst of terrors.

Tommy and I arrived bright and early at the Alaska Airlines terminal at LAX for our journey. It was mobbed. Alaska shares space with TWA, and the place was like a movie set of the Place de la Concorde during the French Revolution. People carrying huge straw bags, live animals, speaking a million different tongues of mankind.

Tommy and I checked in and passed a monitor that said our flight would be delayed for forty minutes. That meant we would miss our connection in Portland to Spokane. (Alaska, in an excess of pure idiocy, has discontinued nonstops to Spokane.) We went through the metal detectors. I paused at a pay phone to call the airline and change our connection. Tommy went to a newspaper/toy/snack stand a few feet away. "Don't wander off," I said to him. "I'll be right here."

I called Alaska. Kept on hold for TEN MINUTES. Then I spoke to a moron reservationist who said that we would have to each pay \$35 to change our flights.

"I don't think that's the deal when we have to change because you've made us miss our connection," I said.

"Oh, yes it is, Benjamin," the young woman on the other end of the phone said.

"No. Not when it's your fault," I said. "Fix it, please."

Another ten minutes later, she came back on to say it was fixed, with no apology at all.

I strolled into the toy section. No Tommy. Snack section. No Tommy. No Tommy at all. PANIC!!! I called the newsstand manager. She called the air-

port police. NO ANSWER at the freaking police phone at the second busiest airport in America. So much for your FAA dollars.

I ran down to the gate we usually leave from. No Tommy. But a mass of dangerous-looking passengers, any one of whom could have snatched him, God forbid.

I ran from gate to gate. No Tommy.

Then I thought of the Board Room, the no-frills lounge that Alaska runs for



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frequent passengers. Tommy and I often go there.

As I ran, and I mean ran, up the steps, I thought, "If he's gone, I want to die right now. Just heart attack right now. How can people ever face their sons dying in wartime?"

I ran around a corner. "How could you, Benjy, have been so stupid as to let him out of your sight even for a second?"

Then another corner. There he was. Blithely carrying his fishing rod, eating pretzels, coming out the door of the Board Room.

I hugged him, yelled at him, hugged him, yelled at him, and then was so crazed I went into the men's room to be sick.

I went back to the newsstand. The staff had been concerned. But no police ever answered the call or showed up. For some reason, the bumper sticker occurred to me, "Next time you need help, ask a hippie."

The day was far from over. In Portland, we learned our plane was late. It was also overfilled with young parents with babes on their laps. They needed the seats we were supposed to occupy. Tommy and I were separated. But he was right behind me. Pulling my hair. Telling everyone how much gray hair I have. (A lot more than I did this morning.)

On the flight from Portland to Spokane, the air-conditioning was not working. It was hot and fetid. The lavatory was not working. It was not smelling nice. What has happened to Alaska Airlines? They used to be the best airline on earth. Now, they're barely creeping along. What happened?

In Spokane, all of the baggage came down—except mine. No suitcase for Ben Stein, very, very frequent traveler Stein. Instead, a sweet woman told me that I might get my bag tonight or I might get it tomorrow.

"But it has all of my clothes in it," I said. "Everything."

"Well, the woman who delivers lost bags is very overworked. If you could make her notice your bag and you . . ."

"I get it," I said. "I'll pay a hundred dollars to her if she gets it to me in Sandpoint by 10 p.m."

The pretty woman smiled. "I guarantee it'll get there," she said.

On the way up to Sandpoint, I stopped in Hayden Lake. It's the h.q. of some wackos called the Aryan Nation, or something like that. But it also has a very good McDonald's where they always say "Bueller, Bueller" to me, so I like them. I got a cheeseburger and promptly dropped a huge gob of ketchup on my one and only shirt. It looked as if I'd been shot in the chest.

I went a few miles down the road to my favorite store, K-Mart, and replaced my wardrobe at bargain prices. God, I love that store. I wish there were one near me.

The weather was perfect. The sky was clear. There was low humidity. Tommy was in a great mood. Because I'd yelled at him, I let him punch me a few times, and he enjoyed that a lot. But look at what Alaska did to me, a good customer. Why?

*Tuesday*

Well, this is the wages of Alaska. I'm in the Bonner General Hospital in Sandpoint. Last night, I had severe throat pain. Then an incredibly painful cough. Like a flamethrower was going down my esophagus. Then more pain in my chest. Then a trip to the emergency room. A jolly doctor had me X-rayed, and then showed me a line on the X-ray of my chest. "This is your viral pneumonia," he said. "I recommend a lot of rest."

"Could I have gotten this from stress and being all cramped up on a flight from Portland to Spokane?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered. "There's a lot of pneumonia going around in the Northwest, and you could have gotten it in a poorly ventilated cabin."

"Oh, boy," I thought. "I am going to write a very angry letter."

*Monday*

I am back in L.A., sitting at Morton's with my pal, Barron Thomas. On one side of me is a table led by someone I have come to admire in a grudging way. His name is Tom Spiegel. Until a few years ago, he was chairman of a huge Drexel-controlled S&L named Columbia Savings. I was one of the people who pointed out that in conjunction with Michael Robert Milken—b. July 4, 1946,

Van Nuys, California—Tom Spiegel was behaving very badly towards the depositors, stockholders, and FSLIC. The S&L failed. Spiegel and others paid a huge settlement. Then Spiegel was charged with fifty-five felony counts. He had a great lawyer and beat them all.

The reason I kind of like him is that he's always very friendly to me even so. I admire that a lot. Forgive and forget, I say, about most things.

As I was talking to Barron about economics, I walked a woman with a toothy smile. Anita Hill. Ugh. Pam Morton, the manager of Morton's, came over and whispered to me, "I love her. She's great."

"Yeah," I said to Barron. "If you like out of control liars."

A few minutes later, another guy, this one really fabulous, Ron Meyer, walked in. Ron was deputy head of the powerful agency, Creative Artists, until lately. I have known him fifteen years. Today, he was made chairman of MCA, a big studio that owns Universal. He stopped at our table and I congratulated him. He came from nowhere, did not even finish high school, was in the Marines, and is just a heck of a guy.

Now that I think of it, a number of the people I admire most in life were Marines. Larry Lissitzyn, a brilliant lawyer in Hartford, Connecticut. John R. Coyne, Jr., Nixon soul mate, best friend, and a killer writer. John Keker, a big Democrat, but a great guy and a friend of almost thirty years. I also greatly admire Peter M. Flanagan, Navy pilot in World War II, my incredible father-in-law and his brother, both Silver Star winners, the bravest guys you would ever want to meet, and the most unassuming. I start to cry when I think of how lucky I am to live in the land of the free and the home of the brave. My father and grandfather, mother and grandmother, always taught me to offer thanks to God first of all for being in America and then for being an American. There's nothing I ever did to deserve such a prize.

"Happiness," says my brilliant producer friend, Ricardo Mestres, partner of the genius John Hughes, "is not a lap dog. It cannot be taught to lie down or fetch. It has a mind of its own." Yes, that's so. But waking up heir to the freedom of a North Idaho lake is a good start. □

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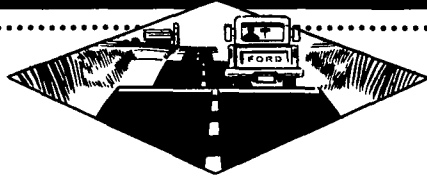
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## Democrat Power Couples

by Rebecca Borders

After Newt Gingrich's wife Marianne obtained a job as vice president of the Israel Export Development Company, Democrats were in an uproar. Clinton political consultant Paul Begala said, "When someone who was a city planner in Ohio gets hired as an expert in Middle East trade it raises eyebrows. It's laughable." But was it as laughable as a car salesman becoming an ambassador?

Sidney Williams, a former professional football player, was appointed ambassador to the Bahamas by Bill Clinton in 1994. Williams met with only mild opposition during his confirmation with the then-Democratic controlled Senate, even though, as one congressional aide told the *Los Angeles Times*, "The best justification that he has for being ambassador is that he traveled to the Bahamas on vacation." No one lobbied harder for Williams than California Rep. Maxine Waters. In a letter to White House senior adviser Bruce Lindsey, she wrote: "This letter is to alert you of my support of Sidney Williams for the position of Ambassador to the Commonwealth of the Bahamas. Sidney's public relations and diplomatic skills have been well honed over the years." It was not until the fourth paragraph of her letter that Waters acknowledged that she happens to be married to Williams. Her husband's nomination, of course, was a clear payoff to Waters for her early and crucial support of the 1992 Clinton campaign.

Still, Waters has her own sense of integrity. When Newt Gingrich was installed as Speaker in January, she was one of a handful of members who refused

to stand when he entered the House chamber. "From time to time I give myself permission to exercise some integrity with respect to my feelings," she said. "I was not feeling any sense of pleasure or joy." Rep. Pat Schroeder (D-Colo.) has a lot in common with Waters. For instance, she responded to Newt and the Contract With America by parading around the Capitol with a "sold" banner. And, wouldn't you know it, she secured a prime political appointment for her husband in the Department of Agriculture. When it comes to cashing in on political careers; Democratic couples, it seems, have a lot to teach Mr. & Mrs. Gingrich.

James W. Schroeder was appointed by President Clinton as a deputy undersecretary for farm and foreign agricultural services. Schroeder now oversees international trade and development programs. Before joining the administration, he worked as an international trade attorney in the Washington office of Whitman and Ransom, a New York-based law firm. Whitman and Ransom has represented a number of Japanese interests, including the Japan External Trade Relations Organization and the city of Osaka. Schroeder will have made some profitable business connections by the time the Clinton Administration is over. Who has been "sold," Congresswoman Schroeder?

Two North Dakota couples are major players in Washington. When the state's two Democratic U.S. senators, Byron Dorgan and Kent Conrad, worked hand-in-hand to defeat the Balanced Budget Amendment in February, they gained national media attention with their last minute posturing and deal-making.

Working behind the scenes in the drama was Sen. Dorgan's chief of staff, Lucy Calautti, who happens to be married to

Sen. Conrad. "She's really something," Joseph Dill, editor of the Fargo Forum newspapers, told the *Hill* newspaper. "She's a power. She's definitely the brains behind Conrad. She got him elected, and she ran Dorgan's campaign when he was elected to Congress. She's married to one senator and chief of staff to another."

Sen. Dorgan's wife, Kimberly Olson Dorgan, is a registered Washington lobbyist. Mrs. Dorgan's clients include the Children's Television Workshop, the National Captioning Institute, and America's public television stations.

In 1992, the year he was elected to the Senate, Dorgan wrote on his financial disclosure form that "by agreement, [my wife] does not contact me, my office or those serving with me on committee in Congress in any work she does."

Yet on May 9, Dorgan, along with Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Tex.), introduced the Television Violence Report Card Act of 1995. The legislation, if passed, would provide for the secretary of commerce to award grants to universities to assess television violence. The assessments, according to the legislative announcement press release, will "describe and categorize the nature and extent of violence in the program and identify the sponsor and sponsors of the programs covered under the assessment."

Presumably, programs produced by the Children's Television Workshop would rank as the most non-violent and therefore gain valuable publicity and enormous goodwill under such an arrangement. Good work, Mrs. Dorgan.

Tom Daschle of South Dakota is the Senate Democratic leader. He is married to Linda Hall Daschle, a former registered lobbyist for the American Association of Airport Executives, a trade association that rep-

*Rebecca Borders is the author of Beyond the Hill: A Directory of Congress from 1984 to 1993, Where Have All the Members Gone? (University Press of America).*