

## **How I Made 5 Million Bucks By Just Winging It.**

The un-authoritarian guide to making a dollar.

By Sheldon Goldberg [www.ClearwaterDreaming.com](http://www.ClearwaterDreaming.com)

### **How I Made 5 million bucks by just winging it**



“You got to be careful if you don’t know where you’re going, because you just might not get there” Yogi Berra

#### **Chapter 1 -The whole truth and nothing but the truth**

The story starts out a number of years ago while I was in my senior year at Harvard University. I considered myself quite fortunate to be there, so I spent most of my free time studying.

I had won an athletic scholarship; everyone back home was quite proud of me. Lettering in Football, Baseball and Basketball while in High School was considered quite the achievement. I was also a surprisingly good pool player. My best game was pocket pool.

One day, while taking a math exam, I believe it was advanced integrated and differentiated calculus, I noticed this geeky looking guy with thick telescopic eye glasses cheating off of my paper. I didn’t turn him in, but I did go up to him after the exam to see what’s up.

He thanked me for not turning him in and told me his name was something like William Henry Gates III. I was thinking what kind of dufus name was that. I actually told him, if you want to get ahead in the world you should just call yourself Bill.

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He started wining to me that if he couldn't get his grades up, he'd probably have to drop out. If he dropped out, his big shot lawyer dad from Seattle would surely make him get a job. He felt he was destined to do something big in the field of computers and didn't want to get tied down to a job. You had to feel for the guy – he looked like such a dork.

He started going on about this guy in Portland that had this operating system (?) for personal computers (?) and if I could just lend him a thousand dollars, he'd make it right with me.

I was thinking this guy seems like a pretty honest guy. I didn't really have a spare thou at the moment, but I knew of some brushes I could sell door to door that would probably raise a grand or two.

The next time I saw Bill, he told me that he was in fact dropping out. That he was headed back to Seattle and could really use the cash. He promised that if I came through for him, it would be worth a lot more later. He had a strategy to sucker IBM. I bought his story and kissed the thou goodbye.

Just last week I sold the stock he gave me for a cool \$5,000,000.

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“You can fool some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time, but you can’t fool all of the people all of the time.” Abraham Lincoln

### **Chapter 2 – Sheldon starts to come clean**

Wouldn’t that have been nice? If it had been, there wouldn’t be much left to this story.

Honestly, everything else you are about to read is absolutely true.. It all really happened and I hope you enjoy reading the story almost as much as the one that lived it.

I’ve made approximately \$5,000,000 over a period of about 25 years. That may seem like a long time, but when I made \$60,000 back in 1978, that was pretty good money. Especially, since I was living in Northern Minnesota where everything back then cost around \$5.00.

I never did too well in school. I graduated number 232 in a class of 313. I was also a bit lacking in self confidence. I grew up pretty much without a Dad and was the “middle child.” My sister was older and my brother was younger.

I was shy and sometimes considered myself a coward. For all I know, I may have been bi-polar with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder??). More than likely, I was just normal. Fortunately, kids didn’t have those things when I was growing up.

My mother frequently said I had schpilkees (official Yiddish term for ants in your pants) but that sounds worse than it is.

I ran for president of the senior class. My campaign wasn’t bad, but I really blew it at speech time. I still can’t believe I promised to have a beach party at some beach. Why were they all laughing at me?

I went on to college, dropping out of one major after another, finally ending up with a virtually worthless degree in Philosophy. It was the only major that accepted all of the other credits. And, it sounded cool at the time.

I liked Socrates; the man had insight. He always had that one killer question. Actually, he was a lot like Colombo. The Soc, Raymond Berry, Frank Robinson and Picasso were my idols.

I had no resemblance to the Robert Redford character in “The Way We Were.” He said “everything came easy to me.” Maybe so, but his character had no soul. He was glib and shallow. I had depth. I still have depth. I can be very deep

I believe everyone is good at something. I have always been very good at making up words and nicknames. I’d like to be remembered for more than that.

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I also happened to be especially good with numbers. That didn't stop me from failing calculus in college. No matter how good you are with numbers, you are not going to pass calculus without studying.

Studying is something I never did. I believe I have the largest SAT disparity in history. Do you even remember yours? I had a 718 in math and 433 in English, for a differential of 285. No studying was done for the test. I showed up; I winged it.

Though not quite as good as Rainman, my gift with numbers has saved my ass. My lucky number is 69. I am 69 inches tall and was born on the 69<sup>th</sup> day of the year. That would be March 10<sup>th</sup> or March of Dimes if you want to make sure you remember me.

I first noticed my gift in a flash card contest in the second grade; I made it to the finals against Norman Schwartz, the smartest kid in the class.

Almost like yesterday. Norman and I sitting next to each other. Each jockeying for position, covertly maneuvering to get the first look at the card. A little elbow action nobody notices. Then bam, the card is in the open. A "6" an "x" and a "7." Yea, I know this one.

Norman must have been stalling. Why didn't he answer already? This was an easy question. I couldn't believe I was faster than this guy. I froze for what seemed like 20 minutes. Still nothing from that 4 eyed fakir. I seized the moment and the rest, as they say, is history. At flashcards, I'm invincible. And he's a toad.

I also won the hopscotch tournament of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade having cheated ever so slightly. No one else noticed, but I knew it. I very slightly touched the line. I expected a bust. If the judge doesn't notice is it still a foul?

I've had some fascinating insights and brilliance sandwiched between my share of failures and self doubt. Are there really people out there that never doubt themselves? I do believe there are some that don't, that probably should. Did you immediately think of George W. Bush?

My first strategy for getting rich came as a teenager. How could I get everyone in the world to simply give me a penny? Everyone can afford a penny. I always had the same answer; they'd pay to watch me jump off the Empire State Building. I had that worthless thought countless times. Did you ever wonder where such thoughts came from? Am I the only one occupying this body?

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“Children nowadays are tyrants. They contradict their parents, gobble their food and tyrannize their teachers.” Socrates

### **Chapter 3 – At least I got something out of High School**

In high school, I made money.

I started working when I was 14. My grandparents founded a supermarket chain with some of my other older relatives. On my mother’s side of the family, everyone owned at least one grocery store.

My grandfather partnered with my grandmother’s brother and created Eddies. They were very successful. My great uncle Eddie couldn’t see the percentages in allowing the U.S. Government their piece of the action. “Why should we cut them in?” This led to a very serious fine in the early 40’s. I’m told my grandfather dug his 38 special out of his dresser and dragged his butt into the cellar. I’m glad he changed his mind.

My mother was very good looking. She had dark hair, brown eyes and a very nice figure. Men were always very attracted to her. She is now 83 and still attracts more than her fair share.

She was also a very hard worker. She was surprisingly good with numbers and made friends without effort.

On my Dad’s side, we had clothing manufacturers. My grandfather came over from Estonia and started Gold Seal clothes. He died in 1921 then my uncle Sherman took over. The word on the street is that he made a fortune during the war. Can you believe suits were rationed back then? People fought over suits. They bribed over suits. Maybe killed? Around the time I was born, another uncle decided to burn the factory down with himself in it.

I never had a chance to meet my Dad’s dad. I did get to know his mother, my “bubbie.” She also came over from Estonia. She always looked old to me. She was very nice, but always looked very, very old.

My Dad was a well known doctor. He was the official doctor for the American Maritime Union and had the largest single office of any doctor in Baltimore. His office was a converted bank at 12 E. Pratt St.

My Dad was rather sickly and wasn’t around much. He died when I was 15. I think many of my altruistic moments and my occasional disdain for the pursuit of the big buck came from him. He was very idealistic and brilliant, though hindered by quite the anti-dinero viewpoint. Did you know that bank tellers often get a green rash on their hands? They apparently lined up outside his office each morning in droves for his special salve.

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Growing up pretty much without a Dad explains my very limited parental sex education. My mother distilled it down to one sentence, “Always remember, a stiff dick has no conscience.”

I have many characteristics of both of my parents. I’ve been known to break a rule or two, but I can also feel guilty about it.

It was now the summer of 1963, school was out and John F. Kennedy had about 5 months left on planet Earth. There was a huge labor strike at all union grocery chains in Baltimore. My family’s independent chain was inundated with hungry people with money to spend. They needed help, so it was all hands on deck. My grandfather had a special assignment for me: bagger. The CEO of Starbucks started out the same way.

I was guaranteed \$3.00 a day. If I didn’t make it in tips, he’d make up the difference. At the end of day one, I was pleasantly surprised. He shelled out the whole \$3.00 and I got to keep my tips to boot. After a couple months - my first raise; a whopping 33% (\$4.00)

My grandmother was a very regal looking woman. She had 4 children and 10 grandchildren. She played the role of the Matriarch with class. She also made the best blintzes I’ve ever eaten.

My grandmother was in charge of processing the discount coupons for the grocery chain. There were about 20 stores, so the volume was quite high. There was ample room for some “extra” coupons to make their way back to the manufacturers.

Every Thursday, the newspaper would have a special food section. Back then newspapers cost around 10 cents. If there were more than \$1.00 worth of coupons, my brother and I took off on a mission to purchase 100 papers. Initially, we would cut out the coupons and my grandmother would give us the face value. (she kept the handling fee for herself)

She grew tired of our lack of pride in our work. So, we just bought the papers, she cut out the coupons and still gave us the money. (and still kept the handling fee for herself)

My brother and I had various stories we’d tell the newspaper guy – the main one was that there was a photo of us in the paper, or that someone we knew died. Not a really logical reason for needing 100 copies, but the guy was there to sell newspapers, not arm wrestle the customers. We probably could’ve told him we wanted to see if the Orioles won, or we were running for office.

Neil and I always shared the same bedroom. Our relatives were rich, but we weren’t. I always wanted to be a writer. We would stay up late creating book titles. Our favorite was I died from cancer, by Jack Ruby.

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“You see things and say why? But, I dream things that never were and I say, why not?”  
George Bernard Shaw

### **Chapter 4 – High School gets interesting**

When I was in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade the top movie of the year was the Graduate. The Israelis kicked the you know what out the Arabs and I was supposed to be preparing for college.

The newspapers in Baltimore went on strike. A friend of mine and I sweet talked his father into driving us to D.C. to buy a couple hundred Sunday papers. We came back to the famous Pimlico Hotel and sold them outside for 3 times their cost. Only one guy objected. He said he wouldn't support black marketeers. I had no idea it was so easy to get into the black market.

We lived near the Pimlico Race Track and I started hanging out there with some of my friends. I even cut school a few times to bet on the ponies. One Saturday, my mother and her date caught me there. I was just about to put a dime down on a 3-1 shot when she threatened to ground me for a month if I didn't leave right away. So I went with my second choice, a 13-1 shot named Caruna II. Caruna went wire to wire. I cashed the ticket and left the track as suggested. When my mother got home, I had the \$100 bill taped to my forehead.

I taught my brother about Las Vegas. We lived in an apartment right by our high school. My mother worked full time and was NEVER home before 5:00. She then cooked dinner and we ALWAYS ate at 6:00 on the dot.

One day, it was snowing so hard the school sent us home at 2:00. I had about 15 guys come over and we had 3 poker tables going. We (Neil) took 25 cents out of each pot. At the end of the afternoon, the house take was \$50.00, more than anybody's winnings. I gave Neil \$10.00 for collecting the quarters and not telling on me.

My dad was totally anti when it came to fraternities. He took exception to the fact that they took exception to others. In his ideal world, blackballing people was not good.

Everyone I hung out with in Junior High School joined a frat in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. My life now sucked. I began hanging out with my younger cousin and his friends.

When my brother got to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, my dad was already dead so he joined a fraternity without question. I was in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade and the fraternity made me an honorary member. I think it was part of a deal to get my brother.

Each spring, the fraternity had an anniversary dance. They always distributed a little magazine with a few roasts in it. It was usually around 10 pages, nothing too funny. That's because the editor was usually busy preparing himself for college.

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The mags were mostly filled with Billy Crystal type jokes. “Bernard doesn’t like heights, that’s why he stopped growing in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade.” Actually my favorite such line comes from Dennis the Menace. When told his legs were too short, Dennis shot back, “They both reach the ground, don’t they?” Billy Crystal should take a lesson from Don Rickles.

I decided to be the best editor the Chi Crier ever had. I worked on that thing flat out for 2 months. And it was damn good. Right here, I am offering anyone \$1000 for a 1967 Chi Crier in any condition.

My cousin was quite an artist and I directed him on what to draw. I had one sex braggart masturbating with a magnifying glass and a tweezers. Another cartoon showed the guy from the school’s “best couple” cheating on his girlfriend. For my own protection, I threw in one of myself kissing a bunch of guy’s feet, begging to get into the fraternity.

My favorite was of the school bully. He happened to be in our fraternity. You never heard of a Jewish bully? His cartoon was a big buffed body with a penis for a head.

He came up to me the minute I arrived. “Goldberg ...(yes?) ..... you got balls. You’re the only one that ever took a real shot at me in this thing.” “No problem Steve, I thought you’d like it.”

The Chi Crier was more than 100 pages, full of either fairly sick cartoons or really funny, and often sick, stories that I wrote about each guy. That project meant a lot to me. Someday, I hope to grow up and be a writer (both). Actually, getting older is inevitable, but growing up is optional.

One girl was lame enough to bring the mag to school. I was called to the vice principal’s office where I had the privilege of watching Zipper Head explode on me. He really lost control. Much worse than when I was caught cutting school at Pimlico race track.

A survey of teachers in 1955 found the biggest problems with their students were chewing gum, passing notes and throwing spit balls? Can you imagine such a survey in 2005?

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“Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up.”  
Pablo Picasso

### **Chapter 5 - Making my way through college**

In the late sixties, I was in college, the Vietnam War was the major topic of conversation and everyone I knew was taking drugs.

Fortunately, there was enough money in my Dad’s will to pay for my tuition and most of my living expenses. I always worked part time at this or that and worked full time at it in the summer.

I tried to make some extra bucks at the Atlantic City pop festival in 1969 with my friend, Jughead. We picked up 500 copies of the Quicksilver Times, an underground rag from D.C. I thought all of the hippies would want to read some anti-establishment dribble while tripping their heads off to Led Zepplin.

Sales sucked. Knowing the papers were not refundable, we got a tad desperate. “Sure the concert program is in there.” (let me know when you find it). Few were fooled. We took a bath on that one. Go figure.

My coolest college money maker was an actual job at the Concord Hotel. Back then, the Concord was the swankiest hotel in the NY Catskill Mountains. I was warned the only way you could get a job there was if you knew someone.

Being somewhat creative with the pen, I wrote this crazy letter which sounded as if I was an old friend of the family. “You probably remember me, I am that kid they called Red, though no one knew why because I didn’t have red hair.” I’ve never been called Red. As a freckled faced kid, I’ve been called Howdy Doody and The Specked Peck (thank you Duckie Mazor).

I worked in the kid’s restaurant. I told them I had plenty of experience as a waiter. (I lied on my resume). I had never even carried a tray. When I brought my first order out, with 8 dinners piled high, gravity was working against me.

I just swung the tray down on the stand and all of the dinners flew right off on the carpet. What a mess of roast beef and succotash. All the kids started laughing. I purposely fell down then told the boss that one of the kids tripped me. I did the same thing with a tray of drinks while working in the night club. Waiting tables is overrated

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Working in the kid's dining room had its advantages. The Concord had a huge kitchen with a lines for rare, medium rare, medium, etc.. The kids always ate before the adults. I would eat the staff meal before I fed the kiddies. Then I'd go into the kitchen and pick up a steak or two while the adults were still eating. We would all have a snack at midnight. I literally ate 7 meals every day I worked there and never gained a pound.

In NY, the drinking age was 18. At the Concord we seemed to have the run of the hotel. And, we had our own cabin, right on the lake. (the smaller lake).

It seems like most of my time in college was spent gambling and smoking pot. I joined a fraternity right away. It had such a weird hell week that your head was literally submerged in a bucket of shit as the last stage of initiation.

Two years after I made it through, some guy named Huge died during that hell week. I was no longer around, but I certainly believed it.

We were allowed approximately 10 hours of sleep over 6 days and 5 nights. Hell week was the first week of classes, so I'm sure that made a helluva impression on my professors.

The days were spent fulfilling demeaning and often strenuous demands. After dinner the fun started. We were lined up against the wall and forced to do calisthenics. You could only wear your underpants. They fit snugly over your head as a "party hat." There was a designated fratter that sprayed your face with a fleet enema. If you got pissed, it got a lot worse.

On initiation night, they made us jerk off into a rubber (condem, these days) while against the wall of the fraternity house (outside wall, that is). We were sternly advised that the mysterious "Fra" would examine our sperm and tell if we were virgins. If you didn't confess now and the Fra busted you, you'd be kicked out of the fraternity.

I might have been dumb to be out there, but I wasn't totally stupid. I was sure there was no way some god dammed Fra (whatever the hell that was) could tell my sexual history. I was unfortunately a virgin, but I was sticking to my story.

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“I never let my schooling interfere with my education.” Mark Twain

### Chapter 6 – Is Sheldon really a Hippie?

I didn't always think it was important to make money. And I didn't stay in that crazy fraternity very long. I spent the rest of my college days as a hippie.

I went to Woodstock and I'm proud of it. My first wife bought me a sweatshirt with that exact line emboldened on it. I believe the world is full of people that have been to Woodstock and those that haven't.

After spending 3 days in the summer sun and thunderstorms, we were due for a little R&R. The frozen hamburgers that we brought with us were putrefied after 2 days. We were both getting hungry and we were a bit tired. The music was great. Carlos Santana, you are still the man.

Jughead and I left on Sunday around 7:00PM. We had just survived the 3<sup>rd</sup> typhoon and we had had enough of Joe Cocker. We were off to Cape Cod.

We slept in a tent near Provincetown. There were mosquitoes on parade. We used 4 hour insect blaster. It kept the mosquitoes at a distance of exactly 2 feet. Close enough so you could hear them and close enough so you could see their wings flickering in the moonlight. They wouldn't break through it, but somehow they knew it would only last 4 hours. And I knew that they knew, so there was little sleep for me.

Next stop was Nantucket, a gorgeous albeit quaint island off the coast of Massachusetts. Since then, I've considered it my favorite spot on the east coast. I was told Ben Franklin was born there. I doubt he could afford a home there now.

Jughead and I took some LSD, then went to see “Where Eagles Dare” with Clint Eastwood and Richard Burton. It was a very small theatre. On the top of the marquee, in very large letters, larger than Eastwood or Burton, was FRID SATU. I never heard of that guy (or girl?). I knew it was a movie about Germans; why was a Japanese guy getting the highest billing? Was it because they were allies?

On LSD, you are often in a world of your own.. I was starting to get pretty pissed as I had no idea who the hell FRID SATU was and I started to get a bit loud about it. I was making a scene. “Who the f... is Frid Satu?” When I finally grokked it, I laughed uncontrollably for an hour. Who ever heard of a movie theatre that was only open on the weekend? I liked the name so much I made it my email address. You can always contact me at [fridsatu@hotmail.com](mailto:fridsatu@hotmail.com).

After the movie we ran into another LSD degenerate. When I asked how he was doing, his “I feel like I've been licking a pool table all night” cracked me up; my thoughts exactly.

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The funniest thing that night occurred when we were just chillin in the city square on a park bench. A guy walked out of a bar, not through the door, but through the main picture window. He walked right through the glass, fell down on the sidewalk, got up and quickly swatted the glass off of his arm and shirt. He then staggered next door into the donut shop, sat down on a stool and ordered a donut and coffee.

Less than one minute later, a cop raced over to Jughead and me and asks, “What just happened here boys?” I was a bit hesitant to recount that to a cop while tripping my head off. I let Jughead do the talking.

After getting back to school, it wasn't long before there were huge protests in the nation's capital. Our school was right up the road and we definitely wanted to get in on the act. The National Guard was called out to ruin the party at the U of Md. While I was screaming my lungs out, “pigs off campus” they started gassing us.

We all started running, but I couldn't see. Out of nowhere, a hand grabs me and this gal I met at a D.C. protest began guiding me back to the library mall. We found a spot behind some bushes; she whipped out a joint and we enjoyed watching the serious radicals set fire to the administration building. I had hoped to marry Tracy, just to be able to tell our grandkids that one.

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“Nothing endures but change.” Heraclitus

### **Chapter 7 – Travel when you are young**

In 1971, Idi Amin usurped power in Uganda. There was an unconfirmed report that 2 or 3 tribal natives may’ve been injured during the festivities. Mexico was having troubles of its own and we were still enriching the military industrial complex while “liberating” Viet Nam.

I made it through college with my shiny Philosophy degree and wasn’t ready to work. My friend’s older brother had just gotten divorced and he like needed to get some space. We met at his wife’s Volvo station wagon. “Hey man, what’s up with the bolt cutters?” He still had a key to the car, but there was a very thick chain on the steering wheel. A few minutes later we were off to sunny Mexico.

Jerry, whom I somewhat fondly referred to as Geraldine was a real character. The word is he now calls himself Andrew.

At the Mexican border inspection, this super fat Federalie with a double moustache (and chin) pulls a rifle from the back of the station wagon. At the time, there was a minor revolution in Southern Mexico, so smuggling in any weapons wasn’t smart. He should’ve stuck his hand Geraldine’s bag of brown rice. We could’ve added a little drug smuggling to the charges. The Federalie must have been in a good mood, because he fined us \$5.00 (in cash - duh) and we were headed south – rifle included.

I am normally the quintessential nice guy. But, something about Geraldine would piss me off. He kept pleading for me to slow down through the mountain passes.. Here’s my logic, “You want me to go slow and I want to go fast, that’s one vote for slow and one vote for fast. That’s a tie, so I’ll do the honors of being the tie breaker.” (it really wasn’t his car)

I consider myself to be quite the driver. Except for one accident in Utah when I just about ate it, I’m pretty aware of what is happening no matter how fast I’m going. Frankly, the faster I go, the more aware I am of what’s going on.

One of my dreams has been to be president of the U.S. Not because I always wanted to be just one step ahead of every terrorists dream. I covet the driving immunity afforded ex-presidents . My other options were to be a cop or marry one. To date, I have received approximately 25 tickets. Please give me the name of that prescient speeder who invented traffic school.

If you ever get a chance to explore Mexico when you are young, take it. First of all, there was (is?) no speed limit. Second, the weather is awesome. True, no money was made down there. But, does anybody ever make money in Mexico? (this questioned answered later)

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While south of the border, I met a beautiful brunette from southern Texas Debi Lee was tall and thin and had very small breasts. In high school, they were known as Doris and Dave. Debi Lee's accent was so thick; I don't think she understood half the things she said. Her parents were into oil. Too bad they weren't into Jews.

I got really sick; thought I was dying. We were up in the mountains by an American Art School in San Miguel Allende. (Besides a writer, I've also wanted to be an artist). I contracted some disease known to those in the business as Shigallas; some weird form of dysentery. I only ate Mexican food once. (I swear)

The pain was insane. The doctor kept shooting me in the butt with morphine. Dr. Dorviganis told Debi Lee that I was faker. To prove it, he came in one day with a huge,, very scary looking hypo and shot it directly into a vein in my arm. I didn't feel the least bit better. I started to lose it, figured I was beyond help. Turns out it was only sugar water. When I found that out, I got one more big shot in the butt and had Debi Lee drive me down to the ABC hospital in Mexico city. No more witch doctors for me.

The summer was ending, so Debi Lee went back to SMU. Geraldine and I headed west to San Blass, through GudalaHayRide. San Blass is just south of Puerto Vallarta.; both beautiful spots on the Pacific Ocean. There was a mosquito convention in town when we got there.

We decided to high tail it to California, driving straight through the Mexican desert. Our car broke down and we were forced to drink Agua Poisonada. It was brutally hot. I'm pleased we made it.

Back in the U.S, the job market had yet to turn for Philosophy majors. After all of the war protesting I did in college, it was time to join the Air Force.

The only one thing my BA did qualify me for was an officer rank in the military. So, I decided being a pilot could be cool. I took the pilot's test and flunked it cold. In order to take it again, you had to wait 6 months. I tried the naval test and flunked it worse.

The recruiter convinced me I'd have a better chance becoming a pilot if I would sign up as an enlisted guy, then retake the test. My options were starting to seem very limited. The Air Force had a nice retirement program.

Air Force basic training was fun. The hardest thing about it was not laughing. We had a drill sergeant from Mississippi. He would go "hup, two-up, three-up, four-up." I made a friend from Minnesota and he would imitate the guy at night. During our next march, we would look each at each other and start to seriously crack up. To do so would have been dumb. So, I would squeeze my hand over my nose and mouth. It was very tough. I thought my brains were going to be forced out my ears.

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By Sheldon Goldberg [www.ClearwaterDreaming.com](http://www.ClearwaterDreaming.com)

There weren't many enlisted Jews in the Air Force back then. There are probably even less now. But, in my company, there was also Lenny Goldberg. I finished all of my training and had just gotten to my first official assignment. The captain, a burly New York Italian guy with a Bronx accent says "Here's Goldberg and Goldberg. You guys should start your own accounting firm." Being quick on his feet and knowing how to impress, Lenny says, "Captain, the only thing we are going to start is trouble." How right he was.

After a few months on the job, my attention became focused on blowing this popsicle stand. I convinced a Jewish Psychiatrist to recommend my discharge. "What's a nice Jewish boy doing here anyway?" He was a draftee and got out before I did. I totally lucked out with an honorable discharge.

While driving back home to Maryland from Vandenberg AFB in California, I picked up a hitchhiker with a guitar that was headed to the Village in NY. His idol was Bob Dylan and he looked a lot like Jesus.

He chose not to use a seat belt, which didn't seem to matter. My little VW bug hydroplaned off a mountain highway in Utah and rolled 3 1/2 times down the shoulder. When I undid my seatbelt, I fell right on my head. Some glass had hit me above the eye and my face was bleeding pretty badly. Jesus was thrown in the back seat and didn't have a scratch on him. When asked if he wanted to join me in the ambulance, "I don't know, is this ambulance going east?"

There were no jobs back in Baltimore. If you are my age, you should remember the 13 year old guru, Guru Maharaji. In 1972, he invited 3500 western people in 7 jumbo jets to be his guest at his ashram in Hardwaar, India. Was pretty difficult to resist such a career opportunity. For a \$435 Air India round trip ticket, we all had free room and board or should I say free tent and curried vegetables.

I am not going to say that I learned anything spectacular, but I did permanently quit taking drugs. The high point of the trip, or should I say low point, was standing in line for three hours, then prostrating myself and kissing his mother's feet. (she was supposed to be holy also)

India was an overall pleasant experience and a great way to lose weight. I literally lost 20 pounds in 6 weeks. Rural India (and possibly urban, as well) was plumbingly challenged. There were outdoor commodes lined up in several rows. All toilet paper verboten. Be sure to use your left hand.

There also weren't any showers. You bathed by swinging on a tarzan rope and landing in the Gangees river. This was November and December and the water temperature was about 50 degrees. The river travels at a speed of approximately 20 miles per hour, so you jumped in, allowed yourself to be carried downstream and got off at one of the bridges. Kind of hygienic in a quasi-Rambo kind of way.

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We only went into town once. Little kids would dive at your feet and hold onto them and beg. They looked like they had never eaten. I later found out that some of the deformed ones were the result of a brain storm (fart) by their parents and a surgeon that specialized in making unfortunate things happen.

No money whatsoever was made on that trip, but I did acquire a much greater appreciation of the U.S. of A.

It was now time to think seriously about my career. I decided to move into the Guru's headquarter ashram in Denver and sweep the floors. I lost interest when they insisted I got a real job, turn over all of my money and throw in my car for good karma. I decided to take my chances with some other god.

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“The coldest winter I ever spent was a summer in San Francisco” Mark Twain (everyone knows that one so here is my favorite by Twain)

“When I was 14 years old I thought my dad was the dumbest man alive. By time I was 22, I was amazed at how much that man learned in the last 8 years.”

### **Chapter 8 – The City by the Bay**

In 1973, the world experienced its first oil shortage and the Exorcist was packing the theatres.

How I ended up in San Francisco would make a book in itself. Shortly after my arrival, I landed a real job; a clerk in the payroll department of the Western Pacific railroad. I had to lie a bit about my military service to get the job, but it was more just an exaggeration of the amount of time in service and slight alteration of the nature of my release. I stand by the fact that I was in the Air Force.

The WP was concerned they were losing computer programmers as fast as they could hire them. After I had been there several months, a conference of big wigs resulted in the bright idea to train someone that already had shown some measure of loyalty to the company. I apparently fit in that category. A computer aptitude test was given to all such candidates and yours truly kicked everybody's you know what. I finally impressed somebody.

The WP trained me during my spare time in the fine art of programming with punch cards. Talk about ancient technology. If you ever saw the movie “2001, A Space Odyssey”, remember the part where there was a monolith and all of the guys with long hair and long beards are ranting around a fire. Well there is a cave off to the left. If you took a good look in that cave, there were 3 guys in there programming in Cobol with punch cards. Fortunately, I wasn't one of them.

My hippie days were well past me and my ambitious side had re-awakened. I took on a part time job driving a cab on the weekend. If you have to drive a cab somewhere (and I definitely mean “if”), I highly recommend San Francisco. I did lie a bit to get the job. I didn't really know my way around the city. But I caught on fast. With my propensity toward fast driving, I was a natural.

Driving a cab at night when you are young is quite interesting. You can still easily convince yourself this is not your career.

The vast majority of customers were either tourists or gay (or both). Each of those groups have a lot of disposable income. The gays would refer to me as a “front seater.” The tourists would complain how cold it was in the summer.

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I was an exceptionally aggressive cab driver. The terror I reigned on the general driving population of the Bay Area was easily justified. I was out there making a living and they weren't. If you wonder how cabbies can be so rude, that's what the ones that think in English are thinking.

I drove part time for a few years and was in 3 accidents and was only ticketed 5 times. On one accident, I really plowed into the side of a car of Middle Eastern folks that hadn't quite made it through the light in time. My timing had given them about 2 seconds to be out the intersection once their light turned red. I am pleased that I didn't injure any of them.

The next one was similar, but I was on the receiving end.. A guy ran a red light and plowed into the side of my cab, shaking me up considerably. I was quite dazed. When I looked outside, I saw him running down the street. I found out it was a stolen car and I was the victim of a literal hit and run.

The best news about driving a cab was the cash. I would show up on a Saturday afternoon, bribe Lou, the guy with the big cigar behind the window. Then I'd bribe Mel, the surly dispatcher. If you didn't grease Lou, you didn't get a cab. If you didn't grease Mel, he couldn't hear your voice. The guys that bribed him the most got the special fares. Whenever you heard "Cab 123, you need to call your wife" you knew it meant to call Mel as someone wanted a ride to Travis AFB or Sacramento.

In the cab driving world, there are sitters and movers. The sitters would find a hotel, get in line, play cards and wait for a ride to the airport. Then, they'd get in line at the airport, play cards, and hopefully get a ride back to the city. That wasn't for me.

I never wanted to wait for anything. I was always moving. I had my little ways that I used to cut in front of other cabs. I would think to myself, it's a good thing I'm not in Hong Kong running around in a rickshaw. There is no way I'd have the balls to pull some of the avaricious maneuvers I specialized in.

In San Francisco, the second biggest night of the year is New Years Eve. Everybody wants to go out and get drunk and take a cab. The biggest cab night of the year is obviously Halloween. You didn't say "nice costume."

The only famous person I ever recognized in my cab was Truman Capote. He had such a sexy lisp, "Stanford Court, please."

I wasn't always a totally heartless aggressive speed-demon. I saved one guy from jumping off of the Golden Gate Bridge. I spent some prime time talking him out of it and drove him back to the city, gratis.

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Still in San Francisco, I met a great guy named Ron Piccioli. He also drove a cab and was looking for roommates. We both wanted to write a screenplay. And write one we did. It was about a guy that became president of the United States and began having dreams about being a Nazi war criminal. He became convinced that he had been reincarnated and started to get very paranoid. Ron and I sent the story to a director in Hollywood. He did respond nicely and recommended we took a class in screenwriting.

I also met my first wife and the mother of my 2 children while there. My monetary prospects were now starting to look up. I had 2 jobs and she was the manager of a small plastics bag factory. She was from Minnesota and her parents were pretty well off – and quite generous.

We were married in 1977 in a very nice ceremony at the Canterbury Hotel. There was lots of good food and drinks for everybody. There was even had a heart shaped bed in the bridal suite.

Recently, I ran into one of our guests. I hadn't seen this guy since the wedding. He told me that he and another gal from the wedding went for a ride up the coast afterward and he got hit with a DUI. Although I took my share of drugs in college and the Air Force, alcohol was never my thing.

About a year or so after getting married, we had our first child – a boy we named Aaron. He was definitely one of the cutest ever. I know everyone says that. Like all American boys, Aaron became enamored by Batman, Superman, Spiderman, et al. Nicknaming him Airman was a natural. I've called him that since he was about 5 years old. As a baby we called him Vishman (short for Vishman Goss)

My wife and I were definitely doing good, but not really getting anywhere big while in San Francisco. Having a child did affect my desire to make an extra dollar or two, so we took up her parents offer to move up north and get involved in the family business.

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“The best way to predict the future is to invent it.” Alan Kay

### **Chapter 9 – They Really Have Towns This Small?**

When we arrived on the scene in Walker, Minnesota it was August, 1978. Walker is located approximately 180 miles north of the twin cities. Most of the cities 1000 residents either live on a lake, a farm or have a hillside view of the largest lake in the area, Leech Lake.

Not much time later, Jim Jones would have all his followers drink poison in order to satisfy his psychosis (or at least that is what we were told). The second oil shortage would capture the nation’s attention. And, lucky for me my x-father-in-law, Frank, was the largest oil distributor in Northern Minnesota.

He was about 6 for 3 and weighed almost 250 pounds. He had a full head of prematurely white hair. When he was young he was a paratrooper and a golden gloves boxer. He had a very impressive presence and an excellent sense of humor. I’m not sure if he was aware of this, but he was often referred to as “The Godfather.” I would say that he was the first person to substantially help me out and I doubt anyone will top him.

I agreed to start working for Frank for 15K per year. After a few weeks, he assigned to me the commission he made on one gas station. The shortage hadn’t quite begun. He indicated that this station pumped about 400,000 gallons per year and he made 1 cent per gallon supplying it. That would raise my pay about \$4000 per year. Still nothing too special - \$19,000 per year.

The oil shortage began and I was in the right place at the right time. Frank made a sweet deal with Amoco which gave him what seemed like an unlimited amount of gas. He bought about 2000 old style batteries the district manager needed to get off his hands. Deals were made, money was made.

During the next year, instead of pumping 400,000 gallons, my station pumped 800,000. And, instead of making 1 cent per gallon, our margins were now 5 times that. Thus in my first year in the oil business, I made \$55,000, plus some other pretty cool perks.

Someone needed to assuage Frank’s conscience for being a hair opportunistic. And I was the right man for the right job.

My mother-in-law Lois was a very beautiful woman. She had a very nice figure and was very intelligent. She was also very good with numbers and taught me most of what I know about bookkeeping. She spearheaded the drive for a decent library in Walker and I was instrumental in having her rewarded by the Jaycees for doing same.

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Frank and Lois had a skeet and trap range on one of their lake estates. Prior to moving to Walker, the smallest city I had ever lived in was San Francisco. Becoming pretty good with a shotgun was the right thing to do. I'm not quite sure when it will come in handy, but I am starting to feel it will.

The prices of heating oil were skyrocketing and I wanted to be making even more. I started investigating energy saving devices to hopefully sell to Frank's customers. I found this gadget called the Power Pirate that was supposedly being manufactured in Atlanta. I went there to check it out. I got another speeding ticket looking for the place. Undeterred, I found the HQ of the next big thing.

The only thing I really remember about the meeting was the guy kept referring to Minneapolis as Minn-A-Napolis. I've called it that ever since.

I sent him \$7000 and was only sent a prototype. I waited another month and nothing. So, I decided to freak out and get my money back. I hounded and threatened that guy for 4 months until he finally sent me a check for \$7000. Everyone was amazed that he did.

After working for Frank for about a year, I was becoming even more ambitious. He was making a fortune and I was impressed. I tracked down another Amoco oil distributorship that was for sale right below the southern border of Frank's territory. It was a perfect property. Brainerd Oil Co. had about 1 million gallons in sales; definitely considered to be a small jobbership (oil distributor). At the time, Frank was between 25 and 30 million gallons.

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“Self promotion is a necessary evil” Yaba Sheeba

### **Chapter 10 - Sheldon owns his own Oil Company**

We completed the sale on December 31, 1979, just in time to use the sale as a major tax deduction. Brainerd is 60 miles south of Walker. That means its only 120 miles away from civilization. It's a very beautiful lake and forest town with 15,000 residents in the off season. The population substantially swells in the summer as fishermen and swimmers from all over the upper Midwest arrive to spend their summers by a lake.

My wife was now pregnant with our second child and I was finally in a real business for myself. Can I get a hoorah?

I started out with only one employee, a delivery guy. You had to have one of those. The second day I was in business he hit me up for a 25% raise, threatening to take all of the customers to one of my competitors. He knew he had me in a barrel. Like the man says, “you got to know when to hold em and know when to fold em.” My hand was kind of weak at the time. He justified it by telling me that the guy who owned Brainerd Oil before the guy that I bought it from ensured that I wouldn't last a year. He had to look out for his family, blah, blah and blah, blah. We know how to forgive, but do we every really forget?

After being in the business for a few months, my wife delivered our second child, a baby girl. We named her Alyssa. It was a name my wife and I had seen in a San Francisco newspaper and both liked the way it looked. We had never heard it pronounced and we just assumed it was a fancy dancy spelling of Alisa.

There was an actress named Alyssa Milano who pronounced her name Alissa. I just always figured she got it wrong. I only found out a couple of months ago, when my daughter was 25 years old, that Alyssa Milano was the one that was pronouncing it correctly. I'm not sure that matters as I always just call her Bee (or Clebish, or Clebonic or sometimes just Clob)

Humor me for a second here. Everyone has darling kids, but I must recount 2 quick BeeBob stories. When Bee first began to talk she couldn't pronounce “S” when it was followed by a consonant. It was actually quite amusing. We went to go skiing once in the Spring, late in the season. When we arrived, Alyssa astutely pointed out we couldn't go as there was “no no.”

I used to read to her quite a bit. There is this book that is still popular. It has all of the fruits and when you scratch them, they smell just like the fruit. As I was reading in bed, she grabs my finger, “you cratch it”, then slams the book in my face, “now mell it!”

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Someone asked her “Little girl, how old are you?” She puts up 4 fingers and says “I’m this many.” Then a second later volunteers with 3 fingers, “I used to be this many.”

Being in the oil business was quite the thrill. I sold a lot of heating oil and I sold a lot of gasoline. In January, the overnight temperatures in Brainerd were quite often 30 below zero. That’s when the money really piled in. Thirty below zero air just sucked all of the heat out of those older houses.

We had a large thermometer outside our bedroom window. Every morning, the first thing I would do was check the temperature. When I saw 30 below, I knew it would be a good day. I would go for lunch and all I’d here was “I bet you just love this.” Correct, they were. And when we had hot spells in the winter, they were also correct with “I bet you just hate this.”

I started making really good money right away. Oil was still tight and we had some very decent margins. I caught on very fast to the way the game was played.

After a couple of years, one of my main competitors wanted to sell out. I talked it over with Frank and we made a deal with them. It was quite an expansion for me. It also got very ugly. Though the owner sold, and the main driver ostensibly went to work for me, the manager had other ideas. He started his own oil distributorship and hired the driver away from me. The two of them proceeded to solicit the very customers that I substantially just paid for. Battle stations, wartime

Fortunately, the guy backing the manager was a distributor from a town only 30 miles away. My trucks could travel 30 miles and I loved newspaper advertising. A newspaper ad can be quite disruptive in a small town.

I started a fuel oil war. I reduced the prices 10 cents a gallon and put full page ads in his city’s newspaper. I destroyed the fuel market until my new local competitor’s backer stopped backing. It was exhilarating being a mini-Jr Ewing.

We had a big sit down with the president of the jobber association. His goal was to negotiate a truce. I had Frank behind me and I wasn’t budging. The other guy blinked and I wasn’t very sympathetic about it. I offered a special discount for any of his (my) customers that wanted to come back and many of them did.

In oil distribution, there’s a fuel oil side and there’s a gasoline side. In Brainerd, a town of 15,000, there were probably about 20 gas stations. It seemed that at least 25 percent of the customers watched prices constantly. If I was 1 cent above a competitor they would stay away like I was diseased. I would catch hell from them.

For 2 cents, they were ready to have me arrested. It wouldn’t matter what the wholesale cost was. Nobody ever believed our excuses and we were probably lying anyway.

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The super price conscious customers would keep it simple: If you were charging more than the next guy, you were a crook. In the oil business (and probably many other businesses) whoever sells for the lowest price sets the value of the product in the consumer's eye. Everyone else is anywhere from high, to too high, to a hoser, to a bad all around person (scumbag).

People would often complain to me that gasoline prices were fixed. They would say, just look around town, "everyone's the same price." Everyone was the same price because they didn't want to lose 25 percent of their customers for being 1 or 2 cents higher. True, approximately 75 percent of the customers were pretty loyal, as long as you weren't too far out of line.

Pump prices are mainly determined by competition. The other stations do keep you relatively honest. If it weren't for them, our prices would haven been MUCH higher.

We did our best to exercise some control of the market. It was kind of agreed upon that me and another jobber had the responsibility to inform the managers of the big chain stations, like Super America and Holiday that all the local boys were itchin to raise their prices. I would just go in and tell the manager to take a look at the street. They knew who I was and they knew what I was talking about.

Although, they were just salaried managers, somebody in their organization cared how much money the station was making and they were advised to raise the price whenever possible.

Getting the local guys to raise their prices was easy. But, if they weren't matches by all other stations within 24 hours, they would go right back down. If this sounds a bit illegal to you, you are correct.

Admittedly, I was involved in some shenanigans back then. There was one company cstore (convenience store/gas station) where the manager was quite rude whenever I recommended that he check out the "movement "on the street. His station was kind of dinky and it was only 1 block away from mine. I did some research and discovered the station was owned by a company in St. Louis. From my window, I could easily see the traffic in the station and was quite sure it was a loser for them. I decided to buy their ass out.

I sent them an offer, the lowest offer I could reasonably expect them to take and they accepted it. You should've seen that manager's face when I walked into the station and announced that I was the new owner.

Running a convenience store was a new experience. The biggest problem I had was controlling what is euphemistically referred to as shrinkage. There are 3 major sources to deal with: Customers, Vendors and Employees. (not necessarily in that order)

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After being at it for a few months, I received a hot tip that my new manager was not exactly on the same page as I. I hired a private detective to check it out. He came highly recommended. He was very sneaky looking, kind of like a weasel. He sat in his car across the street with a telescope. He did a lot of waiting and watching.

When he was ready to make his move, he went into the store and purchased an odd combination of items, something like beer, milk and tampax. When there were no other customers in the store, he had the items rung up and he paid. As he was walking out, he goes "By the way, how much is a pack of Marlboro?" He threw the exact amount on the counter and walked out. This gave the cashier the ideal time for just pocketing the cigarette money.

When the shift was over, he looked at the register tape, found his purchase, saw no cigarette purchase right after it and he knew he had the guy. Next, it was time to sweat him out.

The detective took the manager, who happened to be the cashier, into the back room. He showed him the register tape evidence and of course the guy indignantly denies everything. The detective says, "I see. Well there are 2 ways we can do this. You can insist that you haven't been stealing and we can take this evidence to the police and see what happens. Or, as I know Mr. Goldberg can be a reasonable man, you admit what you did, agree to restitution, look for another job and we can keep the police out of this."

Guess which door he chose. Unfortunately, I had 4 employees (associates, team members, whatever) at the time and he caught all of them. I had to fire the whole crew.

The manager must have been a comedian. It turns out that he had been in prison for check forgery. After he gets fired, he threatens to sue me because I investigated him. He said it was some form of discrimination. Since I never received a suit, he must have recalled the little tape recorded conversation he had with my little detective buddy in the back room.

Selling fuel oil and gasoline are not the toughest products in the world to sell, by any means. These are products people were going to buy one way or the other. My challenge was to get them to buy from me, that's all. Oh, and to get them to pay me.

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“Live Well. It’s the greatest revenge.” The Talmud

### **Chapter 11 – Sheldon gets tough**

By the mid eighties, I had completed the transition from my hippie days to a fairly aggressive business guy. I had expanded my oil company from 1 million gallons with one gas station to more than 7 million gallons and 2 stations.

I really hated when people didn’t pay me. One thing that could get me to kick the walls of my office was being stiffed. Besides the loss of money, I also took it personally. I knew the guy was paying somebody something, but he chose to stiff me.

There are three ways you can deliver oil to a person’s home. The first is very common. You deliver the oil and you bill them later. The second, you go to their home, fill the tank, and then go to the door for payment. That would be your basic COD. The third, the one that was becoming more of my favorite with a certain class of individuals: You go to their house, you get the cash, then you put oil in their tank. That would be your CIA, cash in advance.

As oil prices rose, CIA became a necessary solution to an increasing portion of the COD crowd. My driver would go to their home and insure they were there. Fill the tank, go to the door and they would hide in the basement.

You can still be safe if you don’t go CIA. As long as you don’t agree to extend any credit, the guy can be arrested for not paying the COD. It’s like eating in a restaurant and walking out without covering the check.

I had a few people arrested when their COD checked bounced and wasn’t immediately made good. Not sure you can get away with that anymore. It seemed fair to me.

I was warned early that if I were soft on credit all of the deadbeats would quickly find out and they would all soon be my customers.

I went to small claims court frequently. I’d call the police. I established a reputation: Stiffs and deadbeats beware.

I had some fun when the owner of one of my large commercial accounts declared bankruptcy. My driver had just filled up their 2000 gallon tank the day before the announcement. All of their assets were frozen by the bank and I was definitely an unsecured creditor with little chance of “being made whole.”

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I waited until dark and drove down to Diamond Water Wells. The tank was on the other side of a fence, but when I stood on the top of the truck, reaching it with the hose was easy. I was only like half trespassing. I pumped out the entire tank and took off.

The next day I read a gasoline robbery was reported at Diamond Water Wells and the owner told the reporter that he suspected the oil company. I started sweating and decided to consult a lawyer. Since I happened to be pretty good friends with the Sheriff, the lawyer and I agreed that I'd turn myself in.

I went to the Sheriff and told him what I did. He started laughing and said "You repo-d the gas – good man." I laughed with him and got out of there quickly before anyone overheard.



Sheldon should smile more

Wrong definition of deadbeat: Someone without any money. Correct definition: Someone that doesn't pay his bills. The amount of money they have is not the issue.

A few deadbeats notwithstanding, Brainerd Oil Company was quite the profitable operation. I was making over \$100,000 in the eighties in small town Minnesota.

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By the way, it was SO cold, being in the oil business was the only good reason I could see to be there. One day the temperature was negative 40 with a wind chill of negative 110. A lot of people were hurting for heat, so I was out delivering all day. My mother called concerned that the temperature was negative 110. I assured her that was the wind chill and the real temperature was only negative 40. She seemed satisfied with that and changed the subject.

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"If we don't succeed, we run the risk of failure." Dan Quayle

### **Chapter 12 – Thank God for Computers**

The early 80s were the advent of the personal computer. I had immediate interest. I bought an Apple computer and took a course in the Pascal programming language at the local junior college.

I was in my 30s by now and was by far the oldest person in the class. I really got into it. Unlike my earlier days in college, I wanted to become good at this. I asked a ton of questions. I stayed after class. I even got myself an A.

I then upgraded to an IBM XT and purchased Microsoft Pascal. I was ready to start programming my business. Of course I knew very little about business software, never having seen any.

Microsoft Pascal was so hard to use, that I was ready to give up the whole thing. I happened to be looking through Byte magazine and saw an ad for a new program called Turbo Pascal. This product sounded about 100 times better than Microsoft's and it was only \$49.95. I figured the ad wasn't totally true, but I was desperate. I bought it and it was true! Someday I will personally thank Philippe Kahn from Borland, International. Turbo Pascal launched my career in computer software.

Turbo was incredibly fast. I was (and am) basically a trial and error type of a guy. Reading manuals was never really my thing. Now, I could just write programs fast and go for it. If you made any mistakes, the editor took you right to them and told you what was wrong. That was revolutionary back then.

I could now write fast programs, but there was still the issue of lack of business software knowledge. I had a really good friend from my days in California named David Newhouse. We worked together for a while and often lunched together. We both wanted to be writers. We talked about all kinds of ideas for stories.

He now worked at an accounting software company in LA known as MCBA. I referred to him as the Colonel. Did you ever read those conspiracy books by Gary Allen? None Dare Call it Conspiracy spoke of a clandestine Colonel House that ingratiated himself to President Wilson and was somehow pulling some illicit strings. David shared no resemblance to such a person, but I liked the sound of Colonel House.

One thing I have become well known for throughout the years was creatively naming people and things. I rarely speak the king's English to my best pals. Unlike most people who nicknamed by looks, using the name "slim" for a thin guy (or fat guy), my names were all derived by sound. David was now Colonel (and still is).

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While automating Brainerd Oil's accounting, I would often call the Colonel. Though he was programming in Cobol and I in Pascal, the accounting theory was still the same.

I pretty much went nuts trying to work out the bugs when I didn't have a big clue what was going on. Besides deadbeats, the only other thing that would have me kicking the walls of my office was bugs in my software.

I had this very mousy secretary. She had some phobia about being around other people. She literally could not go into a grocery store. Can you imagine? Anyway, she smoked like a fiend and was on one of the original psych drugs; one of the precursors to Prozac.

One day, she comes into my office and with no warning whatsoever, quits. I asked why and she said "Because you are crazy." What did she know?

Undeterred, I continued fighting with my software until I finally got it to work pretty smoothly.

I then had the bright idea to market the software to other oil distributors. If it worked for me, it would work for them. That was the genius of ThoroTek, Inc. I was now in the oil business and the software business. Way cool.

I rented a booth at the next Minnesota Oil Jobbers Assn convention. This activity of having a booth at a show became one of my most major successful actions.

My first booth was kind of boring; one of those simple looking 10x10s with my computer on a cloth covered table and some kind of poster behind me. I did manage to land 3 sales at 5K a piece which was quite good back then.

Delivering was another thing. Handling tech support calls was a whole other thing. Trying to add features to keep up with the competitors was still another. Doing it all by yourself was, to paraphrase my last secretary, "NUTS."

I was quickly getting burnt out doing all of that. That's not even including running the oil company, dealing with the stiffs and deadbeats, keeping my eye on shrinkage, etc. On the positive side, I had raised myself to a whole new level of production.

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“A body in motion tends to stay in motion, unless acted upon by a force.” Sir Isaac Newton

### **Chapter 13 – Sheldon Performs at the County Fair**

Doing that show for my oil software whetted my appetite for trade show promotion. This was a great way to meet people and sell to them. Unlike going to their office or calling them on the phone, when they were usually busy, people come to a show in an interested and relaxed frame of me.

Combining that knowledge with another important tidbit I picked up over the years led me to my most successful promotion in the oil business.

That other tidbit had to do with the great discovery quoted above. I noticed early on that I just needed to get customers to my gas station or to let us fill their heating oil one time. That was the hard part. Inertia took over from there. All we then had to do was not screw it up and they would keep buying from us. It was now incumbent upon the competitors to act with a force to drive the customer in another direction. I believe in inertia marketing.

People pick a resource and tend to stay with it until driven away or pulled away. You might think they are staying because they are satisfied with the product or service. Yes, that is definitely part of it, but so is inertia. It is easier to stay with the same company than to switch.

It was time to exploit my new found talent and get more oil customers. The county fair was coming to town. It occurs every summer when wholesale fuel prices are the lowest and margins are often the best.

I decided to set up a booth and do a promotion for both my heating oil and gas stations. In my gas station I was also selling bulk oil products, like gallons of motor oil for industrial users. I was purchasing these from one of my software customers, Steve King from Anderson Fuels. We were pretty good friends so I enlisted his aid in my booth.

I came up with a spinning wheel, like the wheel of fortune. It had 25 spokes. Instead of calling it “Wheel of Fortune” I called it “Wheel A Fortune.” Pretty original, eh?

Steve was younger and cuter. I put a wig on him and called him Vanna. Of all the spokes, 24 were just discounts. Like 2 cents off on a fill of gas, \$2.00 off on an oil change, etc. But one was a silver dollar. The government had just coined Susan B. Anthony silver dollars and they were attracting attention.

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Steve and I were in rare form. I do have a somewhat funny side and even have been accused of being fairly humorous on more than one occasion. I don't think I'd make it as one of the Marx Brothers (nor would I want to), but I wouldn't have turned down a role on Seinfeld, my second favorite comedy of all time – next to Hogan's Heroes, of course.

You gotta love Colonel Klink and Shultz? I once read an interview with Werner Kemperer, the Klink actor and native of Germany. He was asked if his autograph was often sought in his native country. He said, "No, the show is not aired in Germany." (duh).

I do love understatement, irony and a little sarcasm from time to time. One of my favorites was a little repartee between Seinfeld and Kramer regarding getting a donation from some bank for something.

Kramer: It's no big deal, that's just a write-off for those people.

Jerry: A write-off? What does that mean anyway, a write-off?

Kramer: How should I know? But THEY know, and they're the ones writing it off! (duh-duh)

We drew the largest crowd of any booth. Of course 1 out of every 25 people won a dollar, but the total dollars given away was about 30 or 40. Well worth the promotion and good will.

Next to the WheelAFortune, I had a table set up to promote heating oil. Since the oil margins were good, I had a drawing offering the winner a 10 cent per gallon discount on a home heating oil fill. It had to be used within 60 days.

Did I say winner? I meant winners. I posted on the sign that there would be 100 winners. I figured that most people considered they never win anything and wouldn't bother to sign up.

There were approximately 1000 signups. Was there 1 winner? No. Was there 100 winners? No again. Then how many winners, boss? One thousand, of course. Everybody was sent a letter indicating they won the drawing and had 60 days to fill up their tank. This promotion netted Brainerd Oil 750 customers!

After the fair, one of the largest chains stores in Brainerd came to me wanting to purchase the wheel. Sorry, not for sale.

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“If I only had a little humility, I’d be perfect.” Ted Turner

### **Chapter 14 – Sheldon Gets Nowhere Fast**

Shortly after the county fair promotion, my wife and I divorced. I was bought out of the oil company by her father, Frank. She still runs the company to this day.

Aware my divorce was imminent; I took the opportunity to take my favorite son, Airman to the World Series. It was the 7<sup>th</sup> game of the 1987 series between the Minnesota Twins and St. Louis Cardinals. The home team had won each game so far and the rubber match was to be in the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome – arguably the loudest stadium in the world.

Of course we had no tickets; no problem. I guesstimated the cheapest scalped price would be around \$150 each. It had been awhile since I last patronized the black market. I was thoroughly hosed by a scalper for a Jethro Tull concert back in 1972.

With around \$350 taken out of my safe, Airman and I drove down to Minn-A-Napolis and started cruising around the stadium. What does a scalper look like these days? I wasn’t sure, but became immediately suspicious when I saw a pretty indigent looking individual holding up a sign “I need tickets.” Why did he need tickets? We pulled over to him and innocently asked if he knew where we could get some tickets to the game.

“You ain’t no POLice, are ya”

“No, I ain’t no POLice. I’m here with my son, Airman.”

He had me follow him to an alley right near the stadium. Sure he was 6 foot 2, looked mean and hungry, but we had him outnumbered.

He wanted the money first and I wanted to inspect the tickets first. Who knew if they were real tickets or if they were actually for today’s game. I wasn’t concerned where the seats were as long as they got us in to the game. I should’ve been.

The scalper agreed to let Airman hold the tickets. That worked for all 3 of us. They were exactly \$150 a piece. And they were behind a foul pole.

The divorce allowed me to keep my software company, which I took with me. It wasn’t very realistic job wise for me to stay in small town Minnesota.

I have been very fortunate as far as my kids go. I did trips with them 3 to 4 times every year. And we spoke on the phone often. My daughter and I still continue to speak on the phone 3 to 4 times every week. Airman and I do a lot of phone time, as well.

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Since my kids were never to be Bar or Bat Mitvah'd, I came up with a cooler deal. I promised them, when I was flat broke, that I would take each of them anywhere in the world they wanted to go when they were 13. I figured I had a few years to get back on my feet.

My son chose Australia. We spent 2 weeks down there doing just about everything possible. Go scuba diving on the Great Barrier Reef the next chance you get.

On the Gold Coast, we met this famous shark hunter that invited us out (for a hefty fee). Airman really wanted to go, but I chickened out, or cheaped out.

We did get to go white water rafting on the Tulle river, exotic fishing, play several rounds of golf, stayed in the best hotel in Sydney, snuck into the opera house, etc.

A few years later, my daughter chose Hawaii. We hit 4 islands in 10 days. The big island was the best. We drove to the top of the Mauna Lao, the largest volcano on earth. There was a rope barrier to discourage most people (normal people) from going up to the lip and looking down in the cauldron. What a view that was, very spooky. All you could see what a big black crater. As you looked 100 feet down, nothing but black lava. It was like being on the moon.

We almost missed our flight to Kauai. Aggressive maneuvers were called for. I had my daughter fake a limp and keep her mouth shut.. I took care of the rest. I just pointed at her and we were put right in the front of the plane.

The aggressiveness that I've picked up over the years definitely continued once we arrived on Kauai. As we drove around the gorgeous lush island's one line highway, I passed no less than 100 cars – no doubt a record that still stands today.

Leaving town from the divorce, I first spent some time in Florida, then ended up in Southern California. I made a deal with a software company down there, The Software Works, to promote my program. They already had contracts with major oil companies and PETRO (as I called it) could open up new markets for them with smaller oil companies.

The sales never amounted to anything and I spent a year or so going from one thing to another attempting to regain my good fortune.

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I sold jewelry 10 hours a day in a mall (not very successfully); sold craftmatic adjustable beds for 3 or 4 days (not very successfully). I developed a newsletter for oil distributors (not very successfully). I even tried some fundraising for charity (you guessed it, not very successfully – I lasted 2 days, tops).



Rachel had a surprise party for me

I was somewhat successful at a brief stint as an insurance adjuster, but I wasn't very fond of the work. I dealt strictly with people that had been in car accidents that were never their fault. It reminded me of how prisoners supposedly always say they're innocent.

The good news there: they had a computer in the office and I located a programmer I knew from Minnesota. He was looking for someone to do some Turbo Pascal programming. I was starting to make some half way decent money again.

I was living with Rachel, my new girlfriend. She had a sweet deal in Encino, California. Her boss had rented a mansion, paying for a year in advance then decided to move back to England. It's definitely been some brains and ambition on my part and the help of some wonderful people.

While living there, I developed a stock profit and loss tracking application for her and her boss. It was basically what I did to not have to pay rent. He made something like \$3,000,000 in one month.

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Rayban and I had a plan to buy 3 Wendy's in Southern California. Her boss was to be the finance. Turns out, he wasn't very interested. His lame excuse had something to do with our relative lack of experience working at fast food restaurants (0). It seemed like such a good deal at the time.

More good news: On New Years Eve 1990, Rachel introduced me to another person that would have a substantial beneficial role in my life. Cory owned Compuflex, a relatively small, but fast growing software company in the valley. He was a very smart guy and a very good salesman. Presently, he is the President of a public software company in Colorado.

He was a very early adopter of a new database management system known as Sybase. I became one of his software consultants (as he called us). I think engineer is more with the current times. It used to be programmer, which is really what I was. I worked there for 5 months, didn't end up getting paid much, but learned more in that period than any other in my life.

I had never dealt with the unix operating system. Nor vi, the arcane editor that goes with unix. I had no familiarity with SQL, the ubiquitous structured query language embedded in all modern relational databases. Plus I had never heard of Sybase or any of its tools. And that's for starters.

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Once I learned all of those “tools”, I was hit with several more. I did a project for Cory in a month, which normally would take an experienced programmer three months if he were familiar with the tools. The project was to hook up a high priced graphics software package known as DataViews with the Sybase database using their respective c programming language libraries. Sounds gross. C was the hardest language to learn next to machine language and I had never looked at it before. I was pretty pissed off a number of times at the computer, screaming and almost crying at one point. The program manager finally asked me to control myself.

During those 5 months, I also did a project for a bank using a computer to check branch offices at night for data. And finally, Cory got us a deal with Disney in Burbank or TheWaltDisneyCompany as they prefer.

People work really hard at Disney. They are well known for that. One of my favorite quotes came from there, “If you don’t show up on Saturday, don’t bother to come back on Sunday.” It’s a bit subtle, but apropos.

For Disney, the work was done on a MacIntosh, a machine I had little familiarity with. And with a new database called FourGen . That was the extent of what I learned in 5 months with Cory. Not much money, but a lot of know how.

Cory created a school where he trained programmers on a popular product based on Sybase, known as PowerBuilder. I missed out on that, but I did overhear Cory years later, say that I was the fastest learner of any programmer he knew. I know I have been a bit modest in this book. I always figured I was pretty smart, but I did best in conjunction with someone else. Call it a mentor, call it a friend, father-in-law or girl friend or wife. Hooking up with the right person at the right time has saved my ass more than once

I took the opportunity to write a little book during this time frame. I always liked comedy. The book was called DAD, Divorced American Dad. I showed it to a few people and the more I looked at the more I didn’t like it. It was a bit on the serious side. There really wasn’t a whole lot to laugh about in my divorce.

I’m actually not much of a joke teller and usually don’t like when people tell them, as I often don’t find them that funny. Or what is more likely the case, I’ve heard them before. Like with Seinfeld, the 2<sup>nd</sup> funniest show of all time – Jerry gets up and tells jokes and I yawn.. I like the situations and funny comments. I’ll take them any day over a canned joke.

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“Do or do not, there is no try” Yoda

### Chapter 15 - Good Guys to the Rescue

When I was married in 1977, the best man at my wedding was my big buddy Richard from my railroad days. I always call him Zurick (accent on the second syllable). Though I had moved to Minnesota, we infrequently stayed in touch.

While working on Cory’s Disney project, it looked like I was going to hit pay dirt again. Zurick had been doing some service center work for Tandy and Circuit City. He noticed that *goodguys!* an expanding San Francisco based electronics retailer had no service center. They shipped all of their work to a 3<sup>rd</sup> party.

Zurick arranged a meeting with the CEO and proceeded to convince him that *goodguys!* would eventually lose market share without their taking care of their own service work. After a few meetings, Mr. Unkefer agreed to invest a ton and open up their first service center.

Zurick needed software to make it work smoothly. Without the right software, it could easily turn into an administrative nightmare, not to mention chaos. Zurick was told by the VP of MIS (IT) there was a 5 year backlog on company software projects. So, he calls me and I’m jumped at the chance. Working for Cory was nice, but I was never going to feel rich again working for \$15-\$20 per hour.

Since I was working for Cory, I brought the project to him first. He wasn’t happy that the database was a fairly unknown one called Informix. Cory specialized in Sybase. But, he helped me write a proposal.

I still hadn’t determined whether to do the contract under Cory’s direction or to go off on my own. I had very little knowledge of big corporate applications, not mention I had never heard of Informix.

Zurich felt we could squeeze the GGs for 75K, tops. Cory and I came up with the 75K proposal, but he included in the deal that any maintenance after the contract was completed would be time and materials at a rate of \$90.00 per hour. That was fairly high back in 1990, and I was kind of pissed at him for setting the rate that high. I was afraid it was too greedy and might blow the whole deal. At that time, I was making considerably less.

I sent the proposal to Zurick and went home and discussed the situation with Rayban. Remember, she was the one that introduced me to Cory. “Forget Cory”, she said, “you can do this yourself.” So I bailed on Cory and jumped aboard the *goodguys!* gravy train.

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The MIS director was not the least bit happy about it. I was an outside contractor. That can be quite a stigma. Bart made it clear to me that I would do the 75K contract and his department would then support it. There wouldn't be any need for \$90.00 per hour maintenance fees. You have no future here.

He could've said anything and I would've taken the work. I would figure this Informix thing out for sure and feel like a mensch again. He was replaced before I was even half done.

Life was definitely looking up at this point, way up. Zurick was the golden boy with the CEOs ear. And I was his pal. Talk about benevolent benefactors.

Zurick was and still is quite the schmoozer. He was/is a wine aficionado that is deadly in a one on one over lunch or dinner.

After I completed the contract on time, other departments started to wake up and smell the issues. Here was a service center projected to generate 30 million in revenue with no software integration to the corporate financials and inventory systems. Stores would be sending tons of demo and returns for repairs with no accounting. The service center would be doing millions of dollars in warranty work and extended warranty with no connection to the corporate accounts receivable system. How were we going to bill the manufacturers for the work?

These questions were all music to my acquisitive ears. It was raining software projects. All were on a time and materials basis, no more fixed bids, just \$90.00 per hour for all the hours I could stand. I wasn't turning down any of it.

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“Golf and sex are about the only things you can enjoy without being good at.”

Jimmy Demaret

### **Chapter 16 – The GGs love a little G**

Working for *goodguys!* was a blast, especially as long as Zurick was there. His new nickname became Lightning Rod.

I was VERY fortunate to have someone on the inside. I was like a rogue in the IT department. I worked out of my home; worked whenever I wanted. Was the only one that knew my system. I never really answered to anybody. Plus I was making about 200K per year, considerably more than any other programmer.

There were always rumors of plans to get rid of me. The key was not to panic. I never did. Lightning Rod was incredible. And I did a pretty damn good programming the service center management system, or SCMS as Cory had named it in the proposal.

Richard had negotiated some excellent deals with the extended warranty company. If it weren't for ESP, the GGs would've been out of business years ago. I'm not suggesting you shouldn't add one to your next electronics purchase, but I can tell you extended warranties are a very high profit item for the retailer.

With his ESP deals, the service center was rolling in the profits. We would charge the extended warranty company our full COD rates for repairs. There would be about 5000 ESP repairs a month and we would give them zero discount.

I now had some money to invest. Rayban's brother in law had a business in need of cash and he was looking for a partner that understood software.

Greg was into police fund raising. He had a large multi-lingual telemarketing room in Los Angeles. The company would put on 2 police expositions a year. Greg's people would sell tickets to the expositions.

The police got to show off their latest cans of mace and billy clubs and the public got to write off the donations. You will love this part: by law, Greg's company is only obligated to give 15% of the donations to the police. Charity fund raising companies can keep up to 85% of your donation and give as little as 15% to the charity.

Greg quickly decided he had no need for me, and cut me out. He eventually gave me my money back. And I quickly decided only to invest in my own enterprises.

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Richard's great deals meant lots of boondoggles. The management at the Service Centers definitely liked to have fun. \$300 lunches, \$700+ dinners were fairly common. I doubt I was a guest in less than 100 such meals before the bottom fell out.

I was never much of a drinker, but I recall one Christmas dinner at Morton's in Orange County. There were 5 of us. They went through 2 bottles of \$150 wine, then 2 bottles of Chrystals champagne at \$250 per. That brings the liquid total \$800. Don't forget that Morton's has very expensive food. And, as I wasn't drinking, I was VERY hungry.

Golf was another *goodguys!* specialty. I probably played with the GGs service center execs about 25 times. And I'm not a golfer. The only bad news with golf: they were all employees, thus getting paid; I was a contractor and wasn't. Also, about every 5 rounds or so, they put the squeeze on me to foot the bill. They made a practice to never play at cheap courses.

One of the few things I remember about my Dad was that he had gotten me some golf lessons when I was around 7 years old. But, I just didn't have the temper for it. By time I was 13, I was throwing clubs left and right. One landed on a green at a country club and I got into all kinds of trouble. I thought it was best to quit.

With the GGs it was more fun, even though I was still known to get pissed on occasion.

One time I had just purchased a real nice full brim straw hat that looked kind of cool on me. I was playing at Tustin Ranch with Zurick, John and this new guy Hugh that everyone called HughBob. John and I were a team, as usual. On the third hole, I hit my second shot 4 feet away from the pin. I had a real chance at my first birdie. HughBob's second shot left him near a tree. He hits his third. It hits the tree, but ricochets off, lands on the green, hits my ball which rolls another 6 feet and he ends up being about 2 inches from the pin. I end up 3 putting for a bogie and HughBob knocks it in for a par. An amazing shot for a guy that specialized in woods and foot wedges.

To make matters worse, we drive off in our carts and the wind blows my hat right off and you'll never guess who drives right over it. I was a little hot over that one. But it was so funny, I cooled off pretty quickly. (kind of quickly)

After a couple of years, Rayban and I broke up. That gave me some time to sharpen my game.

I was playing a little G in a foursome with some guys I had just met. I asked where the girls were and they invited me to a movie group on Friday night near UCLA. Bob indicated that his girlfriend would be coming up from Orange County, but there would be plenty of other girls there, too. Sounded good.

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On Saturday, I had lunch with the guy that organized the movie group and told him that I was impressed with Bob's girlfriend and would like to find someone just like her.

Two days later Susie calls me and asks me out. "Sounds good, but what about Bob?" I barely knew the guy, but still. She said that Bob broke up with her and he wouldn't care. So I was off and running with Susie.

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“I choose a block of marble and chop off what I don’t need” Rodin (French sculptor)

### **Chapter 17 – Sheldon gets organized**

I moved into Suzette’s place in Anaheim and did my GGs work out of the townhouse. She was the founder of a private school and was very much a proponent of not being the lone ranger, but having an organization. She made a very good case for expanding my operations and I was sick of working alone in a bedroom.

I rented a small office near the GGs service center and hired someone to help me with the work. I already had way more than I could do and the idea of making money off of someone else’s work was kind of like being a legal pimp.

Zurick had a new boss that was also the IT director. Bill Curley was soon affectionately known as The Curl.

Through Zurick and the relationship he helped me create with The Curl, I began picking up projects that weren’t just service related.

I needed a new name for my new company. It was harder to come up with a decent name for the company than to keep it busy. So many tech names we researched were taken. This was several years before tech companies began using Latin names.

We finally agreed on ThoroughTek, Inc. It was supposed to convey that we are in the tech business and we did thorough work. It looked so ugly, I couldn’t stand it. I changed it to ThoroTek, Inc. I still don’t like it.

The GGs were venturing into field service. ThoroTek landed a cool project using radio communications between the service center and the trucks. I was picking up some interesting projects for ThoroTek.

We created an automated scheduler that used government census mapping coordinates to create efficient routes. The projects were challenging and now I had about 4 guys working for me whom I was making \$30 or more per hour. My top billing year for the GGs was around 500K. I was in the 300-400K range for several years. It was definitely all good.

Suzette’s influence to expand me out of the townhouse turned out to be very profitable, not to mention much more satisfying. After a few years of working alone in a house, I felt very much alone and was getting bored. Building up a group was much more fun. There were actually guys that I could lay work off on that I didn’t want to do. ThoroTek was hot and the checks were great.

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Because of the sophistication of a couple of the applications, I hired a contractor named Robert Entrican. He was quite brilliant. You would never know it looking at him. He was big and muscular like the x-weightlifter he was, and he always sported a butch haircut.

He and another programmer named Ian, whom I normally referred to as Eon, were the 2 smartest tech guys that I've ever worked with. PhilBob was a close third.

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“Call on God, but row away from the rocks.” Indian proverb

### Chapter 18 – Every Golfer must play Pebble Beach

I was left out of most of the *goodguys!* overnight boondoggles. There we 2 service centers, Richard and his boss The Curl. In golf, 5 is definitely a crowd.

Finally, the manager of the Hayward Service Center was in bad with Zurick and I was lucky enough to be his replacement.

We spent 3 days at Pebble Beach. We played 3 different courses and we each had a beautiful room overlooking the Pacific at the Inn at Spanish Bay. The GGs provided a masseuse each night and all meals except one.

To show good faith, I paid for one of the dinners in Monterey. Cigars were just starting to become popular. We finished the meal and I was pleasantly aware that I wasn't coming out too badly, somewhere in the \$500 range. When I'm buying, there's always a ballpark tally going on in my head somewhere. This was pretty reasonable for a dinner for 4 with GGs execs.

Did I mention the waiter was mumbling something about having Cubans? The IT director gets all excited and now we are looking at these big honkin cigars. I don't smoke, but they all seemed happy.

The Curl ordered 4 of them. I figured these babies were about \$10 a piece. Then The Curl says why not 4 more for our golf round tomorrow. I was thinking, “whatever.” It's just another 80 possible 100 bucks. I can afford to be generous.

If you know cigars, you know how off base I was. I get the bill, it was no longer \$500 for the dinner, it was now \$900. The cigars were \$50 each and the worse part, they really stunk. Smelled like you know what. I threw both of mine away. Probably weren't even Cubans.

Besides being aggressive, I was also getting quite competitive. I may've started out slow, the middle child and all that psychobabble, but I was getting more ambitious by the minute.

Zurick and The Curl, the 2 senior members of our group challenged John, the service center manager that was still in good, and myself. Nobody wanted to lose. John's hands were a little more tied than mine as he actually worked for these guys. When things were really close on the 17<sup>th</sup> green, Zurick wanted a mulligan (take over) for an errant putt on the green. Nobody does that.

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John was willing to go for it, but not me. I here on an all expense paid trip to Pebble Beach by my client that I was making a ton of money off of and I wasn't willing to give them a freeby on one green. I gotta laugh when I think about that. They weren't laughing at the time. But, John and I did go on to win.

This trip was the swan song for The Curl. He posted about \$12,000 to his corporate AMEX. I have a feeling it didn't go over to well back at the farm, as he was gone within a few weeks. Of course The Curl definitely landed on his feet and is at this time retired playing mega golf with a pile of cash sticking out of each pocket.

One side benefit to the trip was being on the practice green with Hewie Lewis. The first concert I ever took my kids to was in 1984: Hewie Lewis and the News does the Minnesota State Fair. Our seats were so bad, when the guy in front of us stood up, we could no longer hear the band. What I could here was my 4 year old daughter screaming "Hewie, Hewie."

So, while Hewie was practicing, I noticed him drop a tee. I picked it up and mailed it to my daughter. I believe she still has it. Whatever happened to that guy? I heard recently he was the Monday night lead in an Indian casino.

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“A rose by any other name is still a rose” Gertrude Stein

### **Chapter 19 - Who or What is HURLnET?**

In late 1994, the internet took off. Several months later, my contractor, Robert approached me with an idea about our becoming internet service providers.

By this time, ThoroTek had grown too large for the small office near the GGs service center. Suzette and I had bought a large house in Yorba Linda with a 4 car garage. Who needs a 4 car garage? We hired an unlicensed contractor to convert 2 of the bays to an office. That 20x20 office easily made room for 4 or 5 guys, plus some servers.

I initially loved the idea of being an ISP. They were popping up all over the place. The internet was hot.

AOL had a customer sign up disk that was pretty slick. You’ve probably seen dozens of them over the last 10 years.

I made our first deal with another ISP startup to create sign up software that we both would share the marketing rights to.

We started our ISP in the garage with a dedicated 56K line. That, as you may well know, is virtually zero bandwidth. It’s the bandwidth of one modem. And we were going to service lots of customers. It was a start.

What to call ourselves? That was the big question. We were 4 partners: My wife Suzette and I, Robert and Ian. As we were tossing out all kinds of names, most of which were getting very little agreement, my wife says, “You know that URL is a major acronym on the internet, What about HURL?” We all immediately loved it. It was so perverse and so us.

The biggest ISP in Southern Calif was Earthlink. They had this continually running ad with a big cake and some nonsense about the internet being a feast so one should pig out. I created an ad to juxtapose it: “Now that you are sick of pigging out, it’s time to HURL.” We never did run the ad, one of my few regrets.

Never being overly fond of the moniker, Sheldon, I chose what I considered to be the slickest email address on the internet, [s@hurl.net](mailto:s@hurl.net). People would come up to me at trade shows and go “Oh, you’re [s@hurl.net](mailto:s@hurl.net).” That be me buddy.

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I was in my 40s at the time we started HURLing. Other than my wife, everyone else was in their late teens or 20s. We were software guys. (though definitely not geeks) Running an ISP quickly became tedious. I have this picture in my mind of Robert talking to some guy for a couple of hours trying to connect him. "It's okay that you have the hourglass. That's okay. No need to swear. Let's all be patient."

We did have that cool software contract with WorldNetAccess and decided to focus on the sign up software and selling it to all the ISPs of the world.

Back then, you could get away with some occasional spam and not be considered a worthless dirtbag. Robert composed a list of 5000 ISPs and we emailed them about our hot sign up disks. I didn't think it would amount to anything. I bet him and lost. Within 20 minutes we already had 25 positive responses and only 10 negative ones. I sold a couple copies of ISP Register that same day for \$5000 each.

HURLnET was growing pretty quickly. It wasn't profitable, but it WAS growing. I financed the whole thing from GGs billings and HURL sales helped some.

Before long, the neighbors were starting to rumble about all of the cars in the driveway and on the street. My wife was getting a bit nervous about it, so we moved into nice offices about 5 miles away. The town was Placenta. (talk about names)

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“I don’t know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.” Bill Cosby

### **Chapter 20 – HURL starts to make the Bigtime**

In 1996, Bill Clinton was re-elected president and there was the first official convention for ISPs. It took place in San Francisco and was called ISPCON. It was put on by Boardwatch magazine. The mag was a must read with the electronic message boards crowd. They were the precursors to the internet craze.

I found out about it too late, but decided to go work the crowd anyway. I quickly located a small booth of a billing company from Colorado. The guy was by himself as his partner’s mother died. I talked to him about how our sign up software could work well with his billing and worked my way into his booth. He was definitely shy and I was very good at calling people over to the booth. He was quite happy to have me.

The first night I took him out to dinner as a thank you for letting me in his booth for free. The next day I drove in so many people that he bought my dinner.

From then on, HURLnET always had its own booth at ISPCON. We worked about 5 of them. Our main ways of promotion was either ISPCON or a full page ad in Boardwatch mag. Over the years we did about 8 such ads. They were a bit silly, but very effective.

When I was trying to get rich through mail order as a very young man, I studied somebody’s book on the subject. “Either put in a full page ad or stay home.” If your ad is full page, the readers can’t really tell how big your company is. They don’t know if you could’ve afforded a bigger ad or not. But, if you go with less, they figure you couldn’t afford the full pager. Full pagers were risky, but so is sex with porcupines.

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**YOU KNOW YOU NEED  
INTEGRATED REGISTRATION,  
BILLING, HELP DESK &  
CUSTOMER SELF MAINTENANCE**

**BUT DO THE CHOICES  
MAKE YOU WANT TO...**

**HURLnET has the  
low cost easy to use  
solution**

**Service Configuration  
& Billing System**

**IDEA** COMPLETE  
WEBSITE FOR  
MONTAILED  
BY JOHN P  
LOUIS  
NO PER HOUR  
FEE  
BANK ACCOUNTING  
PERIODIC  
SECURE  
SYSTEM  
SECURE  
SYSTEM  
NO DAY NIGHT  
BANK STATEMENTS

**1-800-444-HURL (4873)**

Unfortunately, we very rarely had that most favored form of advertising: word of mouth.

Our software was plagued by bugs. It used to drive me nuts. You think an errant golf shot can piss someone off. How bout people screaming at you over the phone from across the country that you screwed up their business and if you don't handle it immediately they are going to sue you. "Please calm down. I don't want to be responsible for your heart attack." I had a tendency to release software a little before its time.

Creating sign up software could only get us so far. After the people signed up, they needed to be billed every subsequent month. Sign up software was not billing software.

All of the HURLers were quite busy with ISP Register and I couldn't afford to hire anyone else at this time. No matter how much money I ever made, I almost always felt near the verge of being broke.

There were a lot of billing packages out there already, but none of them were built around internet technology. A new programming language had just arrived on the scene from Sun Microsystems. Known as JAVA, it was quickly getting all the buzz. In the software world, as well as most markets, buzz fuel sales.

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I was ready for a new challenge. I decided to learn JAVA and develop the first such billing software package. With the help of Eon and PhilBob, I did just that. It was definitely cool learning JAVA. Just like in the early days with Cory, where I was one of the first to hook up Sybase database to Dataviews, here I was one of the first to hook up JAVA with a database. Prior to our ISP Admin, JAVA was mostly used for cute graphic displays on web browsers.

ISP Admin was released and we did have some satisfied customers. Over the 4 years HURLnET was in business we sold to approximately 250 companies world wide. Notice I said sold to, not had 250 customers. We had an astounding refund percentage. Somewhere between 25 and 35 percent of the customers reefed.

There was a guy from Las Vegas that was going nuts for a refund of the \$1000 he paid us. Suzette sent him a check for \$985 as the refund policy stated that shipping would be deducted. The guy exploded over the phone, calling me all kinds of names. He was now demanding that we sent him \$15.

So, I stopped payment on our \$985 check. Boy did he go crazy after that, threatening to come to our offices and kick my ass. I never budged and he never did get his money. He had his father call up to apologize for his kid's psychotic behavior. I kept the money and waited him out.

My job was now a serious high pressure job. I was footing all of the bills. When someone reefed it was my money out the window. When I had to send Eon on site in order to prevent a guy from killing me, I paid for the plane, the room, Eon's time, etc.

I mentioned earlier that I love to create names and nicknames. For our JAVA billing program, I developed a special database search utility. It was actually somewhat revolutionary at the time and I probably should've pursued it further. I name it HURLnET's Omniscient Search Engine for Databases. I loved the acronym, HOSED. Our next ad said "Get HOSED by HURLnET." Back then, before all of the suits took over, ISPs were a fairly perverse and iconoclastic bunch.

Our next product took sophomoric acronyms a step further. First we had sign up (ISP Register), then billing (ISP Admin). Now, we allowed for customers to sign up for additional services and update their billing information by themselves through a website. This product was named Service Configuration And Billing System - better known as SCABS. "Get SCABS from HURLnET."

Many of our customers hated us. I became quite gun-shy to join any ISP discussion groups. "That HURLnET software makes me want to ...."

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At one point, we even had the FBI after us. My wife almost lost it when 2 guys in Black suites showed up at our house. Fortunately, it was not because of the quality of our software. One of my young programmers turned out to be a notorious hacker that used HURL servers to hack into the FBI. He blew from the scene when he caught wind of it. I have no idea if he was ever apprehended (caught).

I tried to improve our image by hiring a more conservative sales guy. As an upgrade from my making up goofy acronyms and speaking technical jargon, Brian would begin his pitch intoning deeply “Hello Mr ISP. How can I earn your business today?” He would then lose all credibility when they found out his last name was Bobo.

Brian didn’t last long. He was replaced by Frankenstein. And he was replaced by Kevin, who was into Wicca and claimed to be a warlock.

HURLnET was quite the ideas incubator for internet software and hip businesses. We were coming up with at least 3 a week. Ideas for more software, even ideas for a nightclub. Many of them were destined to obscurity, but it’s not only about the money, is it?

Suzette’s brother had a nice night club property in Old Town Orange that was perfect for our latest idea. In the late 90s multi-user computer games were getting very popular. Now they are all over the internet, but back then there wasn’t enough bandwidth. You could put a game on a local area network and have multi-players. But, you couldn’t do it online.

We had the best name for the club, “The Virus.” It’s still a great name for a nightclub, if it hasn’t been taken yet.

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“Even a stopped clock is right twice a day” Old Chinese Proverb

### **Chapter 21 - What's in a name?**

HURLnET was lots of fun and even more stress. I was getting desperate. I needed more billable hours by others.

I found a company that had a telephony system that needed installers out west. Because they thought we were an ISP and the guy had no idea what HURL meant, I convinced him we could do it. The only billable resource left was my wife, Suzette. She was an excellent teacher, with zero technical experience.

I figured she could BS her way around and we would talk her through on the phone. She went out to the first job and it was a total disaster. She was on the phone with Eon the entire time. I really wanted this to work as there was good money in it.

She has a pretty smart son, Austin. He was about 14 at the time, but we trained him pretty quickly. On the rest of the jobs, he took off from school and went with her. She just told the customers that he went to a private school and it was closed or that he was sick and needed to be with his mother. She did all of the smiling and he did all of the work.

HURLnET finally got invited to hook up with Microsoft. This could give us instant credibility. They were about to release a new product called MCIS (Microsoft Commercial Internet Server). Our sign up software was a perfect add in. I spent a week up at M\$HQ in Bellview, Washington getting the secret info.

One of the managers wasn't impressed with the name of my company. Thought maybe we should change it if we wanted to do business with Microsoft, if we were to be included on the Microsoft website.

I told him that people either love the name or they hate it, but they always remember it. He said, “so people always remember Microsoft and it doesn't sound like a group of college pranksters.” We didn't change the name and they did include us on their website. We never got any customers from it, but we WERE there.

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“When asked what is my secret for making a billion dollars, I always sold too soon.”  
Bernard Baruck (famous financier)

### Chapter 22 – Again with the fortuitous meetings

In 1999 tech stocks were raging. The NASDAQ was on its way to its highest ever. The millennium was about to come to an end. Just about any internet company was making a fortune and so were Y2K specialists.

But HURLnET, with its dissatisfied customers and refunds was draining me of whatever I was making from the GGs. Software can be a brutally competitive way to make a dollar.

The last time I checked, there were more than 100 companies selling billing software for ISPs. Give me a break. There was always intense pressure to keep up with the next guy.

Out of nowhere, I ran into my old friend Cory. I hadn't seen him in more than 5 years.

“Hey Cory, how's your software company doing?”

“I sold it.”

“You did? Who did you sell it to?”

“An internet holding company in Newport Beach run by one Sushil Garg”

“Great! Do you think he wants to buy another one?”

“He just may. What do you got?”

It turns out Sushil was very interested. Our office was in Anaheim and his was in Newport Beach, less than ½ hour away. I made several trips to talk with him and his main financial advisor.

They came to HURL's office and we showed them what we had. Converting to JAVA was a smart move. Our software was kind of cutting edge. (more like bleeding edge).

Sushil asked me how much I wanted for the company and it wasn't a ton. Frankly, I had been trying to sell it for the last year to various competitors. One guy offered me 60K and I was considering selling to him. I was losing approximately \$5000 per month – which was nothing in Internet dollars. But, I was the venture capitalist here and losing your own money isn't as much fun as losing someone else's.

I told Sushil the price was \$250,000 plus 8% ownership of the company. I was about 150K under water with HURL. I was really considering just closing the doors of HURLnET, as it was actually driving me crazy – not to mention my wife. But, I had all of these cool guys working there; that was definitely the best part. Instead of doing some super mind-numbing boring programming for *goodguys!*, I got to hang out with all of

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these smart young guys and had some other guys do the mind-numbing stuff. They seemed to like it much more than I. And I was making good money as their pimp.

I didn't want to give it up HURLnET. We were the wild men of the ISP software world. The internet is full of iconoclastic, anti-authoritarian cowboys. We appealed to that crowd. We joked about setting up an alter ego company, SuitAndTie.com. It could widen our appeal. I see someone else finally registered that name.

When people did business with us, they knew we didn't take ourselves too seriously. Some thought that was a good thing. Fortunately, the only definition of HURL Sushi was aware of was "to throw something."

He accepted the deal and I celebrated like it was 1999. Part of the agreement was that I remained CEO 6 months while we found a pedigreed suit to take over.

The first thing I did was get 25% raises for all of the loyal HURLers. This was such a home run. Everyone was thrilled. Cory came through for me big time.

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“Fuck em if they can’t take a joke.” Richard Nixon

### Chapter 23 - What’s in a name?

What a huge relief not footing all the bills anymore. Sushil let me work with his graphic artist to produce gorgeous business cards and an even better brochure. It was definitely like moving uptown.

A new paradigm had recently arrived on the scene. The concept of an Internet Service Provider was expanding from ISP into xSP, where the x could be Managed Service Provider or Network Service Provider or Application Service Provider, etc. They basically all took advantage of the latest internet technology in their own way.



Application Service Providers was a new concept that HURL software was well suited for. An ASP provides one or more applications on the internet. This alleviates the customer of the need to purchase the software for their local machine. You just pay as you use it or pay a monthly subscription fee. Basically, you were able to rent the software instead of own it.

The ultimate ASP would be an airline company. You don’t have to buy your own jet and maintenance crew. When you want to fly somewhere, you select a carrier and rent some space for yourself on their network.

Hotmail is an ASP that doesn’t charge for their service. Their application does not run on your computer, you just go to hotmail.com when you want to check or send email.

The new slew of ASPs will need sign up and billing software that runs on the internet – our specialty.

I told Sushil about the ASP world’s first conference in San Francisco. It cost 40K to have a booth, but there were very limited booths and I could get us one next to Microsoft and very close to Oracle. Our software wasn’t quite ready yet, but when did that stop us?

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I may have mentioned this before, but working shows is one of my specialties. This show was no different. It was even better having a classy booth. We were there to introduce ASPFlex, our red hot new software package (SCABS renamed) and also to be on the lookout for our new CEO.

I approach everyone that goes by, introduce myself, ask them about themselves, then do my best to engage them in a conversation, ultimately about whatever I am promoting.

I find people to be uncommonly friendly at trade shows. They are going around looking at products, but don't carry the brick overcoat they have in a mall. They don't seem worried that you are going to push them for a sale, right on the spot.

Conversely, this can be one of the drawbacks of a trade show. It is often hard to make firm sales. When HURL would go to ISPCON, our goal was tradeshow sales and we made them. We always sold more at the show than the cost of putting it on.

Meanwhile, Sushil's wife caught wind of our company name and she wasn't happy. Unlike Sushil, she was born in the U.S. and had seen the movie Animal House.

She enlightened Sushil on other possible definitions for the word. It was kind of interesting seeing the veins in his neck and watching the smoke come out of his ears. HURLnET was to have a new name.

Sushil and his corporate boys worked it over and came up with EROGO. You don't know what it means? Look it up in the dictionary. Surprise, surprise, it's not there. The closest word you will find is EROGENOUS. None of us liked it, but who was now paying the bills?

Actually EROGO is a Latin word which supposedly means "to disperse money." It was the word of the day on some esoteric website. So that was our new name.

We had already signed up for the ASP conference as HURLnET and all of the brochures were HURL, so the name was to be changed right afterwards.

While introducing myself to one and all, I met a consultant named Mike Arrigo. He was from Newport Beach and had flown up to San Francisco to check out the latest technology. Now that has a nice ring to it: Mike Arrigo CEO of EROGO. We had a pretty good chat and he seemed like our first real candidate to replace yours truly.

The show also brought another very fortuitous lead in Citrix Systems (CTXS). You may have never heard of them, but they are quite the big software company from Florida. Their current market cap is about 4 billion

We made it back to Orange County feeling pretty good about our performance at the show. We were no longer HURLnET – in more ways than one.

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Always the team player

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“Marriage is a great institution, but I’m not ready for an institution yet.” Mae West

### Chapter 24 - Erogo gets Arrigo

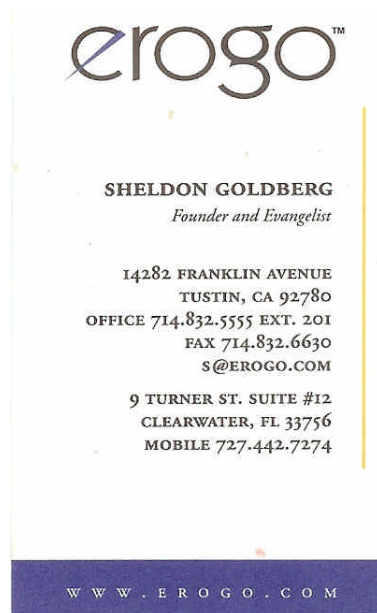
Shortly after returning from the big ASP show, I received a call from one, Mike Arrigo. Yes, the very same Mike Arrigo met a few weeks earlier.

He has a business degree from USC and experience at Borland International. (a top 20 software company and creator of Turbo Pascal) Overall, an excellent candidate to lead ~~HUR~~-EROGO into the new millennium.

Sushil and his advisor were very impressed with Mike. Everyone seemed a bit suspicious, but I felt strongly that it was going to work. I owned 8% of EROGO and that was to be my retirement.

Mike had a history of building up start-up companies and I wanted to be part of the ride. He was allowed quite the hiring spree. A multi-million dollar deal was made with EROGO’s first big client, Citrix Systems and there was no time to look back.

I was given a very sweet deal with an even sweeter title, “Founder and Evangelist.” It was just a part time gig, but worked for me as I was out of there. I was moving 2500 miles from HQ EROGO. Another divorce had me packing my bags again for Florida.



My main job was to promote EROGO’s products, something I was obviously very happy to do. Mike learned about my trade show antics and fondly named me “The Greeter.”

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I was named after some old burned out hippy that hangs out on the corner of Pacific Coast Highway and Laguna Beach waving to all of the arriving touristas. Worked for me.

At our next trade show we had a very classy booth. I forgot the name of the show, but it was in Orlando, only an hour ride from Clearwater.

The booth next to us had Buzz Aldrin sitting there autographing his new book The Return... There was quite a queue waiting for him.

A guy comes up to me and asks what's going on?

“Hey some guy went to the moon, came back and wrote a book. BFD. Now if you really want to see something come check this out .... “

With the Citrix contract, EROGO soared. Citrix loved the Arrigo/EROGO deal. They code named it OREGANO.

Mikes first order of business was to raise our prices considerably. We were selling HURL software for \$5K, sometimes up to \$15K. EROGO software was now going from anywhere from 200K to 5 million! No one had the heart to tell him what people really thought of our stuff – and he never asked.

Sushil engineered some deal with PurchasePro, a Las Vegas internet phenom that he was actually part of. This deal eventually got him into serious trouble with the SEC. The headlines read like so:

### **SEC SUES PURCHASEPRO VENDOR AND ITS PRESIDENT FOR AIDING AND ABETTING PURCHASEPRO FINANCIAL FRAUD.**

I have a vague idea of the truth of the story, but I never was privy to the details. As the founder and evangelist and living in Florida, my real role was figurehead.

Most of the development was now centered on the Citrix deal. They were intending to embed our sign up and billing stuff in some new product they were creating.

Before Citrix bailed on us, I believe there were 60 staff in California, India and Florida.

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“Money was never a big motivation for me, except as a way to keep score. The real excitement is playing the game.” Donald Trump

### Chapter 25 - Would you believe \$1000 per hour?

During the halcyon days at EROGO, I was doing my part time Evangelist thing at an average of about 15 hours a month. As my compensation was \$5000 a month, that wasn't too bad and I did little complaining.

But, I never did give up on *goodguys!* I still had 2 guys working full time on various archaic systems. After the mid 90s, the GGs were pretty much hurting most of the time. So, they never upgraded to PCs and were stuck with these old green screen unix applications.

Working on them in 1990 when I went from \$15 an hour working for Cory to \$90 working for *goodguys!* was kind of fun. But not 10 years later when Windows, Java and the internet were king and green screens were for cavemen and Y2K nerds.

This is a book about making money by just winging it and money was made.

I was making about \$40 an hour from each hour my 2 contractors were billing *goodguys!*. These guys were very hard workers, billing at least 40 hours a week. I spent about 5 hours a month helping them, of which I billed the usual \$90 per.

For that I spent approximately 5 hours a month. I'll do you the math on this one.

Evangelist	\$ 5000	15 hours
GGs my work	450	5 hours
Contractors	15400	385 contract hours * my 40 per
	-----	
Total	\$20000	20 hours



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One was simply entitled “Sheldon”, where I basically played none other than myself. The other was called “The Zillionaire” about a guy that was dreaming up crazy schemes to make tons of money. Each one sounded great and would just about work except for this one TINY fatal flaw.

In the first episode of The Zill, he has the brilliant idea to sell cattle to Japan. We are always hearing stories about how a hamburger in Japan costs \$20.00. So, The Zill rents a Jumbo Jet, packs it with 100 innocent cows, and books 400 Japanese tourists to fly back to San Francisco. It’s a no-brainer. The cows and the jumbo jet are near a break even to Japan. The real money comes on the tourists. The key is a very quick turnaround to keep the jumbo jet rental down.

After dropping the cows off, The Zill and his sidekick go in the plane to set the seats back up after the poor cows were in the plane for 15 hours. You can probably guess the little flaw there.

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“8% of nothing is still nothing.” me

### **Chapter 26 - The fit hits the shan**

EROGO was all about Citrix. Ironic things have been known to happen. My brother is a Gastroenterologist in Maryland. My nephew, Stephen, is very much into computers. When HURLneT was in its heyday, Stephen spent a few weeks with us learning internet programming.

Back home, he landed a summer job with Sequoia Software of Columbia, Maryland. My brother also invested in the startup.

One day, my brother calls excited to tell me that Citrix Systems is purchasing Sequoia. This was a great deal for Neil. Sounded like great news at the time.

Two months later, I find out from Mike Arrigo that Citrix bailed on EROGO. Their stated reason: the Sequoia purchase demanded more of their resources than anticipated. WTF?

It wasn't long before the layoffs at EROGO started to fly. You can imagine how quickly my \$5K beauty went down the tubes.

I never made it back to EROGO before they finally pulled the plug. I did hear some crazy tales of backbiting, finger pointing and the usual sinking ship stories from my old HURLers. I definitely still keep in touch with them, as well as Mike Arrigo.

I am sitting here typing away with an invitation to his wedding party that happens to be tomorrow. Unfortunately, it's in Newport Beach and I'm still here soaking up the Florida sun.

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“Shallow men believe in luck. Strong men believe in cause and effect.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

### **Chapter 27 - Sheldon hits the jackpot**

My divorce finalized, so it was again time to marry. They say three times is the charm and I've always wanted to believe in magic.

I had been married in Vegas before and felt it was the place to do it.

My last marriage had a beautiful ceremony in LA, but we had waited too long to get a license. We went to Vegas for our honeymoon and were officially married in a drive through. The lady performing the ceremony twice suggested we tip “the minister” heavily for good luck. I asked her “who was the minister she kept talking about?”

In the Spring of 2002, we had just finished bombing the hell out of Afghanistan and there was lots of debate about who we should bomb next. I had been listening to the band Creed while I worked and was anxious to see them in concert.

Their web site announced they were playing in Las Vegas on May 22<sup>nd</sup>. What a perfect time to get married. We could go to Vegas on the 21<sup>st</sup>, see Creed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and be married on my Dad's birthday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>. I could throw in the Jimmie Buffett concert on Saturday as a show of good faith to my wife.

We arrived late on Tuesday night. In order to save a few hundred, we slept the first night at Circus Circus. What a dump.

On Wednesday morning we went over to the Venetian, where we spent the rest of the trip. Now that was a hotel. The rooms are all beautiful suites. I was told all of the games were rigged in favor of the customer.

We were supposed to see Creed that night. When I got the word that it was cancelled, it was too late to back out of the whole thing. The lead singer claimed to have gotten in a car accident. I've been in several accidents and they had little effect on my singing.

Instead, we had an excellent dinner with Sara's sister and my soon to be brother-in-law. We gambled a little so we lost a little. Spent a few bucks at the Megabucks machine. The payout was \$22,000,000.

On Thursday, we were married in the afternoon in a very cool ceremony on a Gondola. The Venetian had 8 weddings that day. They have a special white gondola for weddings. Sara was incredibly beautiful! Really beautiful (and smart).

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We had a non-denominational ceremony from the former Chaplin of the Brooklyn police department. He was good, but very pushy. I think he may have been in a hurry. He allotted one half hour for each wedding.

Afterward, Sara and I went to an early show and saw Lance Burton, the magician. We had great seats, in the 6th row. He asked if anyone in the audience was celebrating. One couple said it was their anniversary. He asked the guy what he got his wife, “She got it this afternoon.” The audience went silent on that one. I’m not sure Lance liked his answer.

I was just about to call out that we were just married 4 hours ago, when someone else yelled they were on their honeymoon. “I see, you're on your honeymoon and you're here watching my magic show.”

We then had an excellent dinner at the Delmonico Steak House at the Venetian. The haughty Maitre'D wouldn't seat us without reservations, so I went over his head. That normally works on your wedding day or for 20 bucks.

My favorite desert was Pineapple Upside Down Cake. That just happened to be the restaurant’s special desert of the day. Everything went so well on Thursday. It was a magical day. If I had only won the Megabucks, it would have been a perfect.

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On Friday, Sara treated me to a helicopter ride to the Grand Canyon. I had never been in a helicopter before. It was cool, but somewhat scary. I was nervous sitting next to the door. I kept thinking it was going to open. I spent half the time figuring out how to land if I fell out.

On Saturday night, we went to see Jimmy Buffett. What a spectacle. The MGM 15,000 seat theatre was filled with drunken "Parrot Heads". Unless you'd enjoy such a moniker, I'd save my money.

But hey, we just celebrated our 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary! Actually, when people ask me how long I've been married to Sara, my response is always "Not long enough." I did hit the jackpot after all.

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“You can pick your nose and you can pick your friends, but you can’t wipe your friends all on your saddle.” Gabby Hayes

### Chapter 27 - Good Guys to the rescue

With the EROGO deal now officially in the toilet and the *goodguys!* headed toward bankruptcy, who did I have to turn to? That would again be the *goodguys!* At this point, it felt more like a wing and a PRAYER.

I was working 5 hours and my 2 contractors working 385 hours. The monthly billing to the GGs was about 30K per month. I wasn’t sure how much longer that would last. Fortunately, I was still quite adept at programming the systems I wrote. Informix is a very easy programming language.

I made an offer the IT director he couldn’t refuse. The GGs were never overly happy with the work of my 2 contractors. I wouldn’t say they were unhappy, but they always preferred my doing the work. No one could program my systems anywhere nearly as fast as I.

I knew I could get more work done in 100 hours than the 390 hours that were currently being billed.

“Okay, Jeff. I hate corporate cliché’s as much as the next guy, but here is a win-win offer you can’t refuse.”

“The good news for you, I will jettison the 2 contractors; reduce the overall billing by 50% and get more work done. The good news for me, I am raising my rate to \$150 per hour.”

I figured I could probably stand working 25 hours a week and making \$15K. This deal satisfied everyone. The contractors were getting antsy wanting to come out of the cave and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the GGs wanted to reduce expenses and I, after the EROGO debacle, couldn’t afford to retire anymore.

By this time, Zurick had been long gone from the GGs and the old days of golf and high priced lunches were coincidentally gone just as far.

I had very few buddies left. This was corporate America for them and we’re talking 12 years later. People move on. And, the GGs have been into various layoff rounds since they really hit the skids in the late 90s.

One guy that I dealt with continually, Dennis Cassidy or Denise in Sheldon parlance, loved to rib me about the PBJ. He knew I was always making a ton and we both loved Blazing Saddles. “We must protect our phony baloney jobs!” Mel Brooks protested. He was also gone. As was The Curl.

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I couldn't really complain. I got to work in my house in my bathing suit whenever I wanted and made \$15K per month for 100 hours of work. That's about 23 hours a week.

Like The Curl so astutely pointed out several years earlier when I tried to convince him of my undying loyalty . "You know you guys had me train 2 previous in house replacements and they both bailed. And, here I still am 8 or 10 years later."

"The ONLY thing that shows me is that we have been paying YOU too much."

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“He hasn’t an enemy in the world. But all of his friends hate him.” Eddie Canter

### Chapter 28 - Who the hell is COMPUSA?

We got the news around Christmas, 2003. COMPUSA, the USA computer “superstore” owned by the richest man in Mexico made an accepted offer of \$1.90 a share for *goodguys!* The same shares that sold for more than \$50.00 in the early 90s.

Something told me this wasn’t going to be a good deal for me; would probably be a tad better than the GGs going BK. I was getting incredibly bored by this point anyway. I mean there were books to write, TV offers, I heard something about a movie deal with Angelina Jolie. If they didn’t pan out, there was always public office? And, there is always the circus.

CUSA let things roll for about 6 months to get a feel for the terrain. They were probably making changes, but once Zurick left, I was always the last to know. The sales weren’t improving and it was time for them to make their move.

I was now unwittingly engaged in a game of Programmer Survivor. Over my 15 years, I’ve seen many GGs programmers come and go. I’ve even seen a couple of them die recently from the Big C.

When CUSA took over, there were 10 programmers. Two died right off the bat. Another went in September; 3 more gone in November; 2 more in January. By March it was down to me and Arthur. He wrote the Point of Sale system and I wrote Service. He was the only GGs programmer that had been with them longer than I.

Appropriately, on April fools day, 2005, almost 15 years after my 3 month contract for \$75K was supposed to end, I was finally voted off the island.

CUSA had hired some cheaper replacement players that we were training for the last 6 months. I was quite aware there was an axe with name on it. But, I’d been hearing that for most of the last 15 years.

Ironically, two weeks later my replacement found a better job and bailed. The programming manager from CUSA tells me the news, says they need me and then asks me to lower my rate. The fact that I charged \$150 per hour really seemed to piss those guys off.

I respectively declined the offer.

Someone should tell them that Carlos Slim, the richest man in Mexico is now the 4<sup>th</sup> richest man in the world? His net worth increased from 11 billion to 23 billion during 2004.

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“There is no security on this earth. There is only opportunity.”

General Douglas MacArthur

### **Chapter 29 - Life after Goodguys/COMPUSA**

What a relief it's been not to be writing docs for a system 10+ years past its prime. It was definitely hard to turn down \$150 per, but I was selling my soul in the process.

It's all just a game and some say it's kept score with money. We all instinctively know that is not true; that there's more to this life than upgrading from an Acura to a Mercedes.

But, it's always been fun playing with dollars and still is. And I still love computers and software. Recently, I developed my first website since 1997. Of course I had some help from my buddies in Nepal.

I leave you with some free advice: I'd think twice before jumping into electronics retailing. And for sure, stay away from those get rich ads on the internet and business opportunity magazines. If they don't specifically state what they are doing, you will be doing exactly what they are doing, placing ads on the internet and business opportunity magazines looking for suckers to do what you are doing. Either that or selling vitamin drinks (health industry products??)

Like everyone else in Florida, I now have a realtor's license and have been enjoying working in the red-host market.

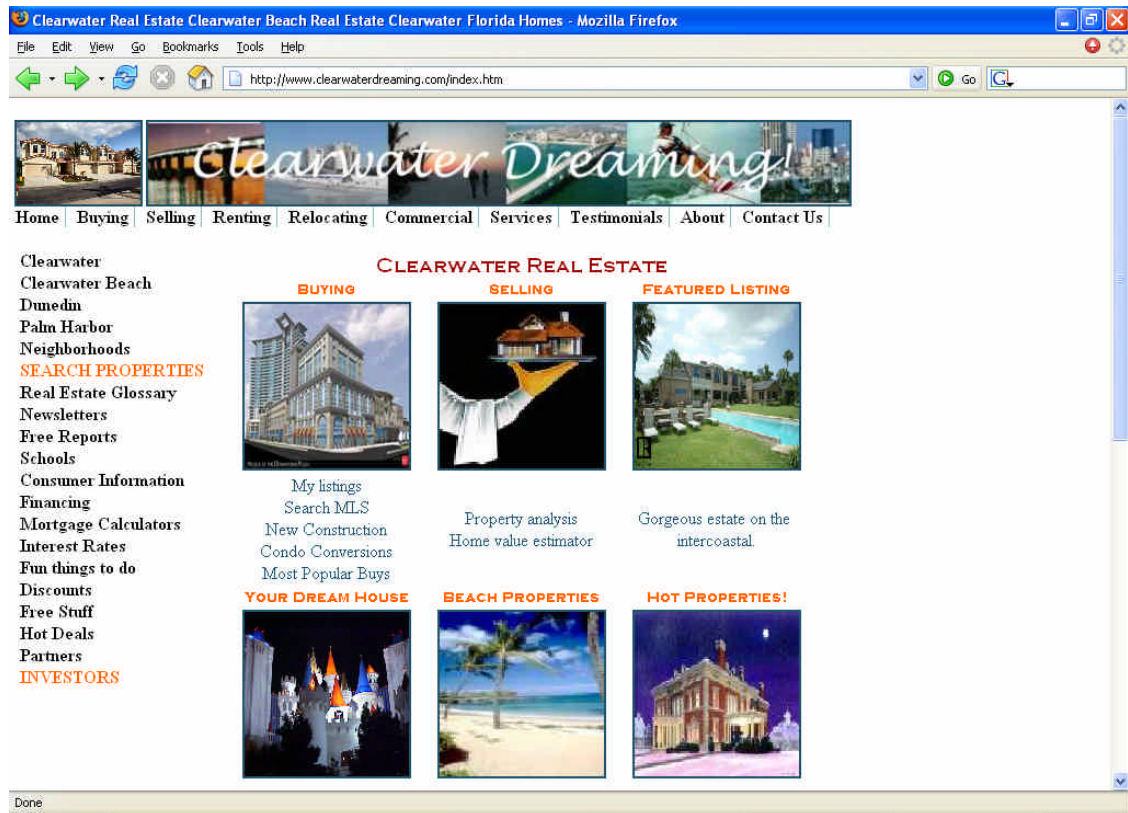
Remember Cory? It just so happens, shortly after I got my license he was interested in selling his house on the beach down here in Clearwater. You gotta love that guy. He's my good luck charm. He gave me the listing and I sold it in 48 hours with 3 offers over the list price. I now have two \$3,500,000 listings and am really getting into my latest career.

If you get a chance, check out my website, [www.ClearwaterDreaming.com](http://www.ClearwaterDreaming.com). It was really fun creating the site and keeping it created. It's also fun communicating with its visitors, so don't be a stranger. And, if you are looking for a travel deal, there are links to all of the best sites for you to compare, [www.ClearwaterDreaming.com/discounts.htm](http://www.ClearwaterDreaming.com/discounts.htm).

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I can honestly state that I never cheated on any of my wives, nor did I ever shoot up heroin, impersonate Elvis Presley, vote for anyone with the name George Bush, or lower myself to Multi-Level Marketing.

Stay tuned for my upcoming sequel, How I spent 5 Million Bucks By Just Winging it. I've winged it this far, and possibly with YOUR help, I'll make it the rest of the way.

Can you believe with all my dreaming, I've never once bought a lottery ticket? Although, I haven't seen a winning number yet that I couldn't have thought of myself.

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads 'Sheldon Goldberg'.

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