

POSTSCRIPT – THE CONTINUUM

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON?

I am pleased to admit that my father and I share similar DNA. In addition to his curly hair and blue eyes, I inherited his genes that compel me to robustly research matters of importance, analyze findings, draw conclusions, and meticulously report the results. That answers the question of why a good portion of my professional career was spent conducting research and designing programs. Those traits, despite my penchant for procrastination, permitted me to finalize the memoir. Truth be known, I had managed to put aside that responsibility for thirty years until such time I reached retirement.

The other reason I mention the similarity between Dad's DNA and mine is that his past behavior relegated me with the mandate to follow initiatives he put in motion. For example, he often volunteered to speak about the Holocaust at public settings. I have similarly sought to educate the public on that topic and have addressed a broad range of audiences. His other project was establishing contact with persons who abetted his escape from the Nazis. Although succeeding for the most part, his one failure haunted him for the rest of his life. Shortly after his arrival in the United States, Dad immediately attempted to find the anonymous Greek woman who had fulfilled her promise to Hennie that, "I will do whatever I can to help you when I return to America." Unfortunately, her identity was never ascertained, so my parents could never personally say "Thank you." Dad lamented over that outcome and confided that he periodically prayed for G-d to "Grant her soul everlasting peace." My father recognized that, if not for her, the pendulum of fate would have swiftly swerved in the wrong direction. So, Mrs. Whoever-You-Are, "The Reiner Family remains eternally grateful to you." I just hope you can read this from above, where I imagine you are sitting in a position of high esteem.

The Greek woman was not the only stranger with whom Dad sought to establish post-war ties. Remember Reverend Dr. David de Sola Pool, preeminent Sephardic rabbi, Spanish Portuguese Synagogue? Although I never met Rabbi Pool, I have ownership of the letter he wrote my father congratulating him on my bar mitzvah. Surely it demonstrates that my father made every effort to periodically stay connected with his benefactors. In return, many of his cohorts reciprocated the friendship with congratulatory notes or greeting cards during special occasions or the holidays. In any event, Pool's role in the sequence of events that led to my parents' immigration into America was always perceived as pivotal. Of significant importance, the rabbi passed the baton to the next person to command a critical function regarding my parents' well-being.



Enter Simon (Si) Haas Scheuer, New York businessman and Jewish philanthropist. To jar your memory, Scheuer sponsored my parents' visas and wire transferred the needed money for their boat transportation. Desiring to extend his appreciation, Kurt maintained communication with Si as well as two of his sons, Richard and James.

Although Scheuer had three additional children (Amy, Walter, and Steven), I only previously knew of

Reverend Dr. David de Sola Pool³⁴

Richard and James. For what it's worth, I actually spoke to James (former US congressman, Democrat, representing the 8th District, New York) after he once called me during a time when I was unemployed.

³⁴ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:David_de_sola_pool_portrait.jpg 242

Apparently, my father had asked James if he could help me find a federal government internship. I don't remember the details, but that idea fizzled long ago.



A good question to ask at this juncture is “Where does all this lead?” The most obvious answer, it seems, is that I am headed toward an infinite continuum of predisposed events. First, the underlying demand of my father’s memoir is that it has given me the task of promoting his narrative to a broad and diverse audience. Absent a readership, I contend that the effort he put into sharing his story “with the world” would be for naught. Second, I am faced with the challenge of walking in my father’s

Simon (Si) Haas Scheuer

footsteps, both explaining his past and educating the public about the Holocaust. Last but not least, I was inherently assigned the goal of ensuring persons affiliated with my parents’ story are bestowed deserving acknowledgment. The following events bring me closer to fulfilling those obligations:

Thanksgiving 2018 – The Intertwined family reunion

In November 2018, the children and grandchildren of the Reiner family met with the grandchildren of the Scheuer family. This extraordinary encounter occurred seventy-eight years after my parents' 1940 arrival at Ellis Island, New York. The meeting, it should be said, occurred as a consequence of the help I received from the Hebrew Union College (HUC). I should also give credit to Google Search, which instantaneously revealed that Richard (Dick) Scheuer was the HUC's past president emeritus. Armed with that information, I wrote HUC a letter, mentioning that my father's memoir, *Counting on America*, prominently mentioned Simon Scheuer, Richard's father. For purposes of credibility and to bolster my self-introduction, I attached a 1984 correspondence³⁵ written to my father (under Richard's letterhead) and signed "Dick." I also made it clear I would heartily welcome HUC's help in finding any living relatives of the Scheuer family.

To my satisfaction, the college responded in rapid order, notifying Elizabeth Scheuer, one of the grandchildren. As a consequence, another grandchild, Marian Scheuer, informed me that during 2018 Thanksgiving, one week away, her family planned to be in New York City. By sheer luck, the Reiner family also planned to celebrate the holiday in New York City. The irony that both families planned to be in the same town at the same time was not dismissed. Neither could we afford to ignore the opportunity for a potential get-together. As orchestrated, a representative contingent of the Scheuer grandchildren met with a similarly sized group of Reiners. Predictably, the Scheuers turned out to be well informed of Si's magnanimous endeavors to help refugees. However, it was the first time they personally had gathered with family members of former Jewish refugees who had directly benefited from their grandfather's humanitarian deeds. The reunion went far beyond expectations for both the Scheuers and the Reiners.



The Reiner and Scheuer Thanksgiving Family Reunion (2018)

Without question, the reunion served as a confirmation of Simon's humanitarian spirit. Though his deeds had not been forgotten, the gathering permitted a formal celebration. Certainly, the situation provided additional perspective and reflection about the importance of Mr. Scheuer's life on the lives of others. As I had hoped, the assembly permitted delivering my father's "Thank you" message to Si's descendants. Mirroring that theme, I declared, "It is entirely possible that if not for Simon Scheuer, my family would not be here today." In essence, due to their grandfather, my parents were able to continue their heritage and reconstitute their lives. To that effect, Si Scheuer gifted life to me, my siblings, and succeeding generations.

As a direct consequence of the reunion, and shortly thereafter, I learned Si had earned the disapproval of the US State Department when they

observed he was prescribing more than his share of refugee affidavits. In fact, Scheuer had underwritten so many refugees during the 1940s that the State Department insisted he stop. They argued he could not feasibly financially support all those for which he had written affidavits. Scheuer, however, was not deterred. In response, he put together a group of like-minded businessmen whose principal mandate was to help refugees and ensure they would not become a “public charge.”

Although not always practiced by fellow compatriots, Simon’s open arms policy of helping and welcoming immigrants symbolizes America’s true spirit and values.

Another reunion upshot

Despite occurring many years ago, I vividly recall overhearing a telephone conversation between my father and Richard. The substance of their dialogue long forgotten, I do remember asking, “To whom are you speaking?” In response, Dad answered, “Richard Scheuer, the son of the person who made it possible for your mother and me to come to America.” Although that communication occurred decades earlier, it was directly relevant to my motivation to meet Joan Scheuer. That possibility was realized on February 28, 2019, when I was privileged to relate the story of my parents to a twenty-five-person group of senior citizens. As might be guessed, ninety-eight-year-old Mrs. Scheuer, daughter-in-law of Simon Scheuer and wife of Richard Scheuer, was the principal recipient to whom I directed the presentation. Overall, the audience appeared very receptive and the session went rather smoothly. Importantly, my introductory meeting with Joan and closing goodbye were quite endearing and matched up to what I had anticipated.



Reiner/Scheuer Family Gathering (2/28/2019): Joan Scheuer, Front Center

Ventimiglia – walking in my parents’ footsteps

As further example of the continuum, I stumbled across a long-term correspondence between my father and Esther (Segré) Bassi, the wife of Ettore Bassi. As earlier discussed in Chapter VI, Ettore was a member of the Comasebit, an underground organization that effectively coordinated the illegal transport of my parents into France from Ventimiglia, Italy. At war’s end, Dad remained committed to finding this rescuer to whom he felt deeply indebted. As a result, he participated in a decades-long, relentless mission of searching for Mr. Bassi and his wife. However, unlike the failed pursuit of the Greek woman, his persistence met with partial success. Sometime during the early 1960s, his tenacity paid off. Esther was located in Nice, France. As a matter of averting the Nazis, the Comasebit had moved her to a secret hideout where she remained throughout the war. Unfortunately, when found, she alerted my father that both Ettore and

their son, Marco, had been murdered at Auschwitz. The murder of Ettore in 1943 further explains why the search for Dad’s missing benefactor took years to complete.

Not surprisingly, I considered visiting Ventimiglia, Italy, as I neared the final stages of the memoir. Highly intrigued by my parents’ manner of escape from that city into France, I had every reason to seriously entertain that notion. The concept was further cemented in my consciousness when I uncovered a 2015 Italian article that memorialized the heroism of Ettore and Marco Bassi. To my amazement, the city posted a plaque and named a piazza (plaza) in their honor. Then, when my wife, Cindy, overtly suggested a trip to Europe, the reality of an excursion to Italy quickly came to mind. Following her proposal, I spontaneously said, “Sure, that will be fine. As long as we stop in Ventimiglia.”



Reiner Family at the Ettore and Marco Bassi Piazza (2019). Left to Right: Reiner Family, Mayor Enrico Ioculano (book in hand), Ermanno Muratore

In May 2019, what had seemed improbable or “pie in the sky,” actually

came to fruition. Before leaving for the trip, I planned to pay my respects to the city, visit the piazza, and actively imagine my parents' experience there. In concept, retracing my parents' escape path and projecting myself back in time sounded kind of daffy. However, as the chance of doing it was genuinely possible, I said, "What the hell."

In retrospect, the visit went far beyond what I ever could have imagined. For starters, I was welcomed like a celebrity and greeted by the mayor, Enrico Ioculano. A pleasant surprise included the presence of Ermanno Muratore, the brother of Olympio Muratore, a celebrated WWII partisan and hero (I learned he had fought with the Italian resistance against Hitler). Ventimiglia also placed a plaque in Muratore's name on the building's edifice fronting the Bassi piazza (See picture, Reiner Family at Ettore and Marco Bassi Piazza).



Table Top: Ettore Bassi, Posing for his Haberdashery Sidewalk Sale

Another lovely surprise was an old bookstore and coffee shop where my family and I were taken. Barbara Pisano³⁶, Bookaffe's owner, informed us that Ettore Bassi had once employed her grandmother in his haber-

³⁶ Picture of Ettore Bassi, sitting on top of a sidewalk table in front of his haberdashery. Contributed by Barbara Pisano, Bookaffe, Ventimiglia, Italy.

dashery. In addition to being provided a scarce picture of Ettore on top of his haberdashery sidewalk table, I was treated to a cup of coffee.

Finally, I met Alice Spagola, the reporter assigned by the Italian Riviera Press to conduct an interview. Spagola published the story³⁷ of my visit and how Bassi had saved my parents. She also turned out to be a wonderful host. Ironically, Spagola lives in Bordighera, the village bracing the shoreline from where my parents embarked for their illegal excursion to France. As I peered over the Ligurian Sea into the vastness of a long-ago destination, it occurred to me that my father may have arranged this entire nostalgic episode. Familiar with the terrain from which my parents were smuggled into France, Alice insisted on taking me to that very spot. In that regard, I had the electrifying perception that the person sent to interview me was not by accident. Staring out past the shoreline, I magically transported myself, sitting with my parents on the open sea in a boat carrying us to the next venture. Apparently, my father remains engaged in absorbing me into his life and the telling of his story.



Bordighera's Rocky Shoreline (2019) – Point of Parents' Exodus to France

37 <https://www.riviera24.it/2019/05/dal-maryland-a-ventimiglia-sulle-orme-dei-suoi-genitori-ebrei-salvati-da-ettore-bassi-la-storia-di-gary-reiner-592737>