



# All The Famous People I've Met

By Peter Alan Monroe



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**Dick Clark 1959, Miami Beach, Florida**

I was only five but I knew he was famous because me and my mother watched "American Bandstand." When we were in a hotel in Miami Beach she said he was staying at our same hotel. After looking around the lobby I didn't see him He's on a show called "Bloopers and Practical Jokes" now with Ed McMahon.

2

**A Man Who Played The Captain of a Space Ship on TV  
(1960)Flushing, Queens, New York (where I watched TV)**

Every week a few kids came on the show. If you would send a card with your name and address, he might pick it out of a space helmet and you could go on. Well, he picked out my name and said it. Then said I forgot to write my address. It was exciting to have my name on TV but I was embarrassed that he told everyone (in TV land) that I forgot to put my address. I sent another card but was never picked out of the helmet again.

## 3

**Robert Alda (1962) Old Saybrook, Connecticut**

We drove from Flushing, Queens (where we lived) every year for the last two weeks of summer to Middle Beach Hotel in Old Saybrook, Connecticut. Me and my sister were the only kids, and my mother and father the second youngest. Everyone else was old (we went there to have a vacation with my grandparents).

Elsie was one of the old ladies (she was 90) and every day after lunch I would stand there watching her play Scrabble with another old lady in the game room. One day I told the other lady that she can change “zoo” to “zoom” (with her “m”). Elsie got mad and said, “well, don’t just stand there giving advice, sit down already and play.”

“I don’t really know how,” I said.

“You know enough to give advice to *her*,”

She pointed to the old lady who turned “zoo” into “zoom.”

So I sat in a chair and played. Then everyday until the end of the summer the old ladies waited for me after lunch in the game room. I wasn’t positive if she wanted me to be playing (she acted annoyed, but that was just how old ladies acted then - just watch an old movie with an old lady in it).

In the winter, a long time after our summer vacation to Middle Beach Hotel, she sent “Scribbage” (a game) to my house. My mother made me send her a thank you note. Her address was a New York City hotel (it was called Something, I can’t remember what Hotel). I could picture her in a room alone, just old people things around, no tv but maybe a radio... she died before we went back to Middle Beach the next year (she was 91).

My grandfather was already senile. He would read the paper holding it up-

side down (like just pretending to read it). One time at Middle Beach Hotel, my mother asked me to find out what time it was. I ran up from the beach, to the game room and asked my grandfather.

“One thirty,” he said.

I ran back to the beach.

“One thirty!” I told my mother. “I asked grandpa!”

“You asked grandpa, huh?”

She looked like she was thinking for a minute, then said,

“go ask someone else.”

My father would tell me the gossip about the old people - he also got trapped into playing games with them - they would always say “how nice it is having a young man like you around.”

### *Some of the gossip:*

- 1) *There was a mother and daughter there. The mother was 80 and the daughter was 60 but everyone thought she looked like the mother.*
- 2) *Another old lady couldn't hold it in and went to the bathroom on the dining room floor.*
- 3) *The owner's son got his head run over by a car and “looked like a porcupine” (the shape of it).*
- 4) *This isn't one of the “gossip things” but when I got a little older and started noticing things “wrong” with people like the porcupine son, my parents would say “that isn't a nice thing to say.”*

Anyway, the day came when Robert Alda was going to come. By the way, if you don't know who he is, he's the father of Alan Alda who was on the TV show M\*A\*S\*H. One movie that I know that Robert Alda was in was "Rhapsody In Blue." He played George Gershwin - also, Alan Alda was in Broadway shows.

They put a lot of flowers at his table in the dining room and everyone was getting excited. He got out of a Cadillac with his young second wife (she was a bombshell) and their son (not Alan Alda) who was my age. His Cadillac stood out because in the parking lot the only other car there besides my mother's 1961 Chrysler was my grandmother's 1958 Chevrolet - the old people took the train.

Before I get to the part of Robert Alda coming to Middle Beach, you have to hear about the 50 year old guy with the transistor radio shaped like a baseball:

He tried to show off with it (because it looked like a baseball - and it was a little interesting how small it was for a radio in 1962) but - I had an even smaller radio; smaller than the palm of my 9-year old hand, And sounded better (it was a Sony). The baseball-radio-guy told me his radio was better and wouldn't listen when I tried to say why mine really was.

Anyway, after Robert Alda had lunch in the dining room with all the flowers for him (and everybody looking) he went with his second wife (the bombshell) and son near the beach, and everybody sort of followed (the baseball-radio-guy too). Since, me and my sister were the only other kids, we ended up playing with his son. We played tag, and hide-and-seek. After that, the son wanted to go swimming. I didn't want to go so I stood next to Robert Alda and his second wife. I could stand even closer than the grown-ups (that were trying to follow them around) since I already played with his son. The baseball-radio guy was there too. The kid started to go far out in the water and Robert Alda got scared for him and yelled

"don't go so far."

"They all do that," the baseball-radio-guy said, smiling and trying to make

friends with Robert Alda (who was famous).

“Yeah, but I don’t like it,” Robert Alda said.

I felt like I deserved to stand next to Robert Alda and his second wife more than the baseball-radio-guy (because I was a boy and I played with his son already).

That night, Robert Alda, his second wife and son ate dinner in the dining room with more flowers, and left the next morning early in the Cadillac.

What I thought of Robert Alda: I could tell there was something different about him (his being famous) and could tell he didn’t have a good time at Middle Beach Hotel because he was too serious.

A few years later when I saw “Rhapsody In Blue” (the life story of George Gershwin) starring Robert Alda, I was surprised he smiled so much in it.

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## Georgie Jessel

“The Club” was where my grandparents, who had a lot of money, went on weekends. It was a country club with a golf course, tennis courts, and a fancy clubhouse on top of a hill. It was in Long Island and everyone was Jewish.

“The finest people in the country belong  
(he meant members) here,” said George Shapiro, my grandfather.  
My father said, “what’s so fine about car dealers?”

Actually there was one high-class member. He was the president of Emerson Radio. In 1957 he brought an Emerson color-tv to The Club. When I was there, I’d try to see shows that were in color (“Wonderful World of Disney” and “The Virginian” might have been the only ones).

My grandfather was poor (the son of a rabbi) but married my grandmother, Anne Isaacowitz, who was rich (“he just clips her coupons,” my father said). Anne’s father was a builder. One time, in 1969 when we were driving downtown, she pointed to a building and said “oh, there’s the theatre that dad built” - and it was The Fillmore East.

Every member’s car was either a Cadillac or Chrysler Imperial (sometimes a Lincoln but not as much because Henry Ford was anti-Semitic (which means he hated Jews). Weekends, they would drive up the winding road, one big new car after another. When they got to the clubhouse, at the top of the hill, a parking guy would open the passenger door and a wife would get out. Then the parking guy would go around the back of the car, get in the open door where the Jewish husband just got out, and drive it somewhere else. Sometimes he would hit the gas enough to burn some rubber. The other parking lot guys might laugh a little and a Jewish husband

might make an annoyed face. Then the parking lot guy might talk about the car. I heard parking guys say stuff like:

“Four hundred horses even moves that tub of shit.”

“You wish you had that tub of shit,” the other guy would say.

“Like shit I do. When I get that three eighty three in my Valient, I could blow the doors off that Caddy.”

“Yeah, but by the time you get that engine in your piece of shit you'll be older than that stiff that just walked by.”

“Fuck you.”

“That's right, you better fuck me cause that's all you can get.”

“You know, any of these old broads would go down on me in a second. Those old stiffes can't get it up anymore. I seen them looking at me too. They'd probably pay me to do it and I would. I could drive them so crazy they'd probably pay me everything they got.”

This might not be exactly what they'd say, if they said anything, but if they did I think they'd say something like that.

Anyway, my sister was at The Club one day without me. She was pretty so people liked her - especially the old people at The Club.

George Jessel (sometimes people would call him “Georgie” Jessel) was probably seventy years old and used to be a comedian in “Vaudeville (you have to be born, at the latest, by 1953 to have heard of him). My grandfather made a big deal of introducing him to my sister at The Club. My sister didn't know who he was. When she came home she said she didn't like him or think he was funny. “He just looked and acted like all the other old men there.” My mother and father though it was interesting that she met him (I guess he was more famous in their day).



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## The Empire State Building (1962) Flushing, Queens, New York

Kenny Plotnick was my friend who lived in the garden apartments (in Queens). If you don't know what garden apartments are, they are apartments that are attached, only two stories and have grass in front of them. We lived in a regular house, and had more money. Most of the people in the garden apartments didn't have cars. They could walk to all the shopping, and the wives, who were from Brooklyn, never had to learn driving anyway. We had three cars. (people in the houses all had garages and cars).

Anyway, since Kenny Plotnick lived in the garden apartments, he tried to show off that he was as good as the people in the houses. We used to make fun of him all the time because he was so serious. Once, in the playground, when we were all asking and telling each other what our father's job was, Kenny Plotnick said, "do you promise not to laugh?" We all promised.

"He works for an underpants company." We all laughed.

Then he tried to make up for the underpants by showing off some more.

"But he works in the Empire State Building."

We thought that was good.

One kid asked, "what floor?"

"You promise not to laugh?" We all promised.

"The fourth floor." We all laughed.

In those days, kids (in Queens, anyway) were always talking about The Empire State Building. Some used to say they jumped off it or climbed to the top from the outside. There was something about The Empire State Building in those days.

I know the Empire State Building isn't a famous person, but it is a famous building (so I put it in this story).

One more thing. We used to call Kenny Plotnick Kenny Plot*kin* to make fun of him. "When you say that, you are making fun of my father," Kenny Plotnick said (thinking that would make us stop).

"Yeah, we know, we're making fun of you and your father," someone said.

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**Carroll O'Connor (1975)**  
**The theatre district, New York, New York**

My mother loved "A Chorus Line" (the Broadway show). She already saw it but got tickets to see it again, with me, when I was on a break from college. I had photography as a hobby and took a picture of my mother outside the theatre. She was embarrassed "We look like tourists" she said.

I showed the picture to my college roommate, Art Townsend, who at that time had never been outside New Jersey, and was going to college even though his father, who was a toll collector on The New Jersey Turnpike, didn't want him to. Anyway, after looking at my mother's picture in front of "A Chorus Line" Art Townsend said my mother "looked like a sophisticate."

Carroll O'Connor was in line behind us and my mother, who loves famous people, saw him and said "Oh! It's so nice to see you." He smiled and seemed happy.

My mother, who for some reason thinks she's in show business, leaned over in the middle of the show (in a part where the dancers are trying very hard to learn their dance) and said, "Not as easy as you thought, huh?" - trying to impress me with how hard show business is.

By the way, Carroll O'Connor is famous for being "Archie Bunker" on "All in the Family" (a tv show). Now he is famous for trying to sue a drug dealer for selling drugs to his son who was a drug addict and died.

One more thing: In 1967, my friend Billy Filler had a birthday party. For the party we went to 42nd street to the movies. The movie was called "Waterhole Number 3" and it starred Caroll O'Connor. It was the first time I ever went to 42nd street and it was mostly x-rated by then. Billy Filler's mother probably thought it was the same as when she was young - no x-rated movies. An old sign (probably from her day) on the side of a building said "Feeling Low? - See a Movie Today!"

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**Robert Redford (1973) Idlewild (Kennedy) Airport**

When I got off the plane from college I gave my mother my guitar to carry to the car. After one minute she gave it back.

“I don’t want to look like a hippie mother.” She didn’t like that I looked like a hippie either. She wanted me to wear clothes with style.

“What should I look like?” I asked her after she was calling me a slob. We were already in the car driving away from the parking lot.

“I’ll pick out someone with style before we leave this parking lot,” she said. In about one minute she pointed to a guy who was far away and said:

“You should look like him.” Then she started screaming. I couldn’t understand why until we got closer and it was Robert Redford wearing a nice shirt (my mother just loves famous people).

## Jan Murray Kingston, New York (1963)

I went to Camp Woodcliff at the same time as his son. During parents visiting day everyone was saying how Jan Murray was coming. I didn't know who he was but knew he was famous. I wanted to see him visiting his son, but I forgot about him after my parents go to my bunk. Jan Murray was a comedian. When I was grown up I saw him as a guest star on "The Love Boat" and also "The Hollywood Squares."

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## A Jewish Woman Who Had a Black Baby by Mistake (1980's)

She went to a sperm bank after she couldn't find a husband, and they told her they had some seed from a smart Jewish Man. When the baby was born he was black. She started a lawsuit and got famous from a lot of newspapers and magazines (that told about it). New York Magazine, which has a lot of articles about being Jewish and Single and trying to get dates, wrote a very long article.

*My connection to this:*

I went out with a straight middle-class Jewish Woman. In the summer her parents live in a bungalow colony in The Catskills. "The Wrong Sperm Woman" lives next to them. They say she's not embarrassed or mad about having a baby that doesn't have a smart Jewish father, and turned out black and now has an ordinary life.

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**The Mills Brothers (1968)  
Madison Square Garden, New York**

My father, who never knew who any movie stars were, and whose mother called him “an absent-minded professor” had his business (which was a lamp factory) in Brooklyn. I would go there for fun and to work for extra money on school holidays. One of the times I was working in the factory, there was a Negro lady next to me (in those days you would call blacks “Negroes”) who looked like Mahalia Jackson (she was a famous Negro church singer). After I finished my factory work for that day I said something to my father about “that Mahalia Jackson woman.” The next day my father asked me if her name was really Mahalia.

“No,” I said. “I only said she was a Mahlia Jackson kind of lady. Mahalia Jackson is famous.” The trouble was, my father, who could never recognize anybody famous, and was an “absent-minded professor” called her “Mahalia.” (he said something like: “Mahlia, where is the part for that lamp”). She gave him a funny look (that’s why my father asked if that was really her name).

Here is another story about how my father thought an ordinary Negro was famous:

He took me and my friend, Steve Kantor, to watch a track meet at Madison Square Garden. There was a protest outside, by blacks, about racism. They were saying “Racism must go!” The news cameras were there and everything.

Then me, my friend Steve Kantor and my father went inside to a coffee shop where we sat next to four Negroes (in those days it was only the protesting Negroes who called themselves “black”). It was 2 husbands and 2 wives. They were dressed up and talked quietly (they might have been even quieter than they usually are be-



cause of the black protesters outside).

Wait until you hear this: My father (whose favorite singers were The Mills Brothers, asked one of the husbands:

“Are you one of The Mills Brothers?”

All the Negroes laughed just a little, and his wife looked down and said: “No, no, he’s not” My father wasn’t embarrassed (my friend Steve Kantor, who was dumb, wasn’t embarrassed either). But the reason I think my dad made that mistake, was because those Negroes weren’t like the kind who worked in his factory (like that Mahalia Jackson kind of lady), they were dressed up. And because my father was such an “absent-minded professor” he couldn’t even recognize a Mills Brother, even though it was his favorite group.

It was one a.m. when we got home, and my friend, Steve Kantor, who was tired, was going to sleep over. I turned on TV. It was the late news and showed the protest outside Madison Square Garden. Then I saw my father, me and Steve Kantor walking past the black protestors in the background.

“Hey, we’re on the tv!” I said to Steve Kantor, but he was already asleep.

The reporter was Bob Tegue, who was the only Negro reporter on in those days, and he said (I remember exactly) “Negroes protested outside Madison Square Garden tonight.” He looked down a little, sort of embarrassed, like the Negroes who weren’t The Mills Brothers, sitting next to us earlier in the coffee shop.

## Alan Wauters (1989) - a guy who used to be in the band called "The Left Bank" The East Village, New York

When I met, him he was a pot dealer in the East Village and wouldn't tell how old he was ("let's just say I won't be seeing my early 40's again," he said).

The big hit that "The Left Bank" had was in 1966 and it was "Just Walk Away Rene" (pronounced "Renay"). Alan Wauters didn't come into the group until the next year, but they were still a little famous, and he was one of their guitar players on the records and concerts.

*Some things he said about being famous to me were:*

1) *"When you get that adrenalin rush of being on stage, you never want to let it go - that's why I'm trying to get on top again," he was frustrated that he wasn't getting famous anymore.*

2) *"One time I had 2 girls at once in bed!"*

When I went to his house to get pot, he always opened the door a little, put his finger up to his lips (the "shush" sign) and then said "hurry up!" (he was always afraid of being busted. When I left, he would say (very quietly) "don't say thanks" (he was afraid the neighbors would know that if I said that, it would mean "thanks for the pot.")

Anyway, once I was inside the apartment, he might play me one of the songs he just made up to try and get famous again. One of them went:

"Oh, America, what has become of your innocence,  
Oh, America, it's not like it has been

Don't you remember when life was free, and love was in the air"

He used to sing loud, and it made me embarrassed. I was usually smoking pot, so I could relax, but then remembered there was a whole routine before leaving - putting his ear to the door, listening if anyone would see me leave, telling me not to say "thanks" (for the pot), etc.

Other things he would do was to show me about 10 years of pot stashes he saved.

"This one is Hawaiian, when I could still get it. I'm saving it for a special occasion."

"Now this, you don't see anymore, it's a real Colombian Gold," etc., etc.

His other big project was writing a book on how Jesus was a lot different than everyone thought. It had something to do with how they just found The Dead Sea Scrolls, and Jesus was a vegetarian.

"I'm in danger writing this. If they find out I'm messing with everyone's beliefs, well, forget it. I'm going to blow their minds and have to go underground."

He would write the book all night and sleep all day (I couldn't call him until about 5 in the afternoon ("it's from all those years of doing gigs that I got into this day sleeping thing.")

### *Epilogue:*

After he ripped me off a few times (the pot was the regular price but it hardly got you stoned) I stopped going to him. I think he did it on purpose, even though he gave the impression that he was into "doing the Right IKarma."

## Nik Cohn (1978) Great Neck, New York

My father was the president of a company called "Tensor." It was a big company and "The Tensor Lamp" was famous in the old days but most people forgot what they were by now. I didn't know what to do for a job, and my friend Marty wasn't making any money either. Then he said: "hey, let's work in the flea market and sell our father's stuff!"

I ended up selling reject Tensor lamps in the flea market. If Tensor made a lamp with something wrong with it, or if people sent back a broken one, Tensor would just throw them out, even though a lot of them still worked. This is what I would sell in the flea market.

Marty's father had bad shirts from Hong Kong that no one would buy from him. He kept them in the cheapest warehouse in New Jersey (because he was trying to save money). This is what Marty would sell in the flea market.

Marty was trying to be a famous writer, but he was a failure (even though he got an article about "getting stoned" in High Times Magazine. So we tried to be successes with our father's rejects. I even went to my mother's new husband, who made pens. His factory was in Brooklyn and the company was called "Chromatic Pens" ("it Writes Red, It Writes Blue - It's the One Kind of Pen That Writes Like 2!")

So I got some of his reject pens, but they would only "write like one" because one of the colors would be stuck (that's why I got it cheap for the flea market).

Then it was Sunday and me and Marty went to the flea market with our rejects. I made \$50 and was happy, and then we went to Marty's father's house in Great

Neck, and talked to his father, who, when he was a young man, came from Poland, to be a success.

"I made \$50!" I said to him.

"That's no money," he said.

Marty made only \$35, so he wouldn't even tell him, and also he couldn't even tell him about his article about "getting stoned" that he wrote in High Times Magazine, since his father was from Poland, and would be mad. But he gave us a lecture about a guy who wasn't that old, and was sort of in our young generation, who got success. His name was Nik Cohn. He wrote the story about "Saturday Night Fever." The reason Marty's father knew him, is because he not only sold reject shirts and stuff, he also was an art dealer (his friend Sid Deutsch, got out of a concentration camp, so he was very mad and wanted to make a lot of money. He told Marty's father to go in business with him and sell art). So Nik Cohn, who wrote "Saturday Night Fever" (the story that they then made the movie from) bought a painting from Marty's father and Sid Deutsch.

"To me, he is a supergenioius!" Marty's father said, because Nik Cohn made a lot of money from his story and bought an expensive painting from him. I felt bad for Marty because he couldn't even tell about his "getting stoned" story, or even about his \$35.

## Helen Hunt (1970's) Park Slope, Brooklyn, New York

Me and Marty were making a living in the flea market selling our father's reject stuff - until I met a guy named "Chuck" who told me I should start living a spiritual life.

Chuck had a lot of dogs, and a shaved head and followed a religion about people in India and said you should devote your life to the spiritual people from India. I was getting tired of working in the flea market, and was afraid I was almost becoming a businessman. I told people who bought from me, that everything was rejects, but if they spoke bad English, they wouldn't understand, and might come back the next week to tell me the blue part of the pen wouldn't write (it was like only buying a red pen "not the pen that writes like two"). So I decided to live in the spiritual life with Chuck. All I would have to do is buy him \$2000 of lights and other things so he could grow pot plants so he could live more of the spiritual life (with me living it too) without having to do what he called it: "any unrelated work."

I bought those lights, and he made me set it up in my apartment. Then we had to become vegetarians. Then we had to grow wheat grass. And then I had to keep one of his dogs to guard the pot plants I was growing in my apartment. There were 11 plants and they grew up to 6 feet. Chuck was a genius and figured out how to use the lights that were called a "solar shuttle" because they went back and forth across the room on a cable, to act just like the sun if it was going across the sky. Then there were timers that clicked on the light at 5 a.m.. Also I had to turn on the air conditioner and a dehumidifier. And when it was night, the solar shuttle went to the end of the sky and turned off. I wasn't allowed to turn any lights on after the plants were in the dark because they were in sleep and could get a shock.

The plants grew up and we sold them to Chuck's pot customers (he was a pot dealer) and made \$8,000. But those plants in my apartment made the hall of my building really smell like pot while they were growing. Then we became fruitarians (which is one thing better than vegetarians) and I got to be 94 pounds. I sort of felt good, but one day I couldn't get out of bed because I was weak. That is when I started eating tuna fish sandwiches and gained my weight back. Chuck moved to New Mexico with the money he made from growing the pot in my apartment.

This is why this part of the story is about Helen Hunt: Since Chuck was a genius, another thing he could do is play guitar. He gave Helen Hunt lessons when she was about 10 years old and lived in Brooklyn Heights.

When we were growing the pot and started to live the spiritual life he decided to get in touch with Helen Hunt's mother. He wrote her a note asking how she was. Helen Hunt's mother wrote a note back saying she is having some problems and things are "a little difficult right now" but she is "happy to hear from him."

Chuck decided to write a letter back about the spiritual life and how it could solve her problems. I read it before he sent it and knew he said too much. Some of the things he said were "If you put all your faith in Sri Auribindo (he was the boss of Chuck's religion in India) he will solve Helen Hunt's mothers' problems - and "not to worry about the worldly stuff, etc., The letter was about 20 pages long and Helen Hunt's mother never wrote back. Not even a short "thanks for the advice."

Who Helen Hunt is: She is on a TV show called "Mad about You" which is about a woman who isn't Jewish, married to a Jewish guy who is nervous. The jokes are about how they are both nervous about things because they live in New York.

Also she was in a movie called "Twister," a movie my father's old business partner from Tensor Lamps said "is the best movie ever made" (my father kicked him out of the company because he thought he was dumb). "Twister" is about Helen Hunt who keeps trying to get into the middle of a tornado with her ex-husband and a machine to try and find out how to stop tornadoes from spinning around so much so people won't get killed from them anymore.

Also, Helen Hunt just won the academy award (which makes my story better because it makes her even more famous). She won it for a movie called "As Good as it Gets" which is about her with a sick child and Jack Nicholson who is mean. Then Jack Nicholson gets nice because his next door neighbor, who is gay gets beat up and gives Jack Nicholson his dog, and then Jack Nicholson has to be nice to the dog, Helen Hunt, and Helen Hunt's sick son by the end.



## 14

**The rock group “Spirit” Boulder, Colorado (1971 & 1973)**

In high school me and my friends had a favorite group. It was “Spirit.” All of us had all their records and talked about them all the time. My friend Mike Mandel used to say “I don’t need much money or anything, I could live anywhere as long as I have my “Spirit” albums.

My friend Steve Kantor made his piano teacher show him how to play a part of a “Spirit” song. It was a big deal for a piano teacher to teach you a rock song in those days because they all hated it. Maybe they would teach you a Simon and Garfunkel song though.

The highlight of my friend Alan Schultz’s life was when he was tripping on double-barrel orange sunshine and they played the first song from a “Spirit” album called “The 12 Dreams of Dr. Sardonicus” on WPLJ (FM). He got really excited and asked:

“Do you think they might play the rest of the album!?”

Spirit broke up right after that album.

Anyway, “Spirit” was from California, and they never did any concerts in New York, so we could never see them. Finally, in a few years, after they broke up, they were going to come to my college. By the way, “Spirit” was never too famous and most people had never heard of them even though they did have one song on WPLJ FM radio in 1970 called “Nature’s Way” about how bad pollution was.

Since nobody really knew who they were, they put up posters around the college saying: “Spirit” - the rock group from California!” (the college was in New Hampshire, so it was supposed to sound interesting that a group was coming from

California even if nobody ever heard of them). They already were broken up, and nobody in the band was the same as on the records except for the drummer, Ed Cassidy.

During the concert at the college the new singer said, "Here's one of our biggest hits, an oldy but a goody." But hardly anyone ever heard of Spirit, and definitely didn't know one of their biggest hits and the singer wasn't even the one who sang it on the record. The song was called "I Got a Line on You" in case you're one of the people who heard of them.

## 14

**My Father (the inventor of the Tensor Lamp)  
Flushing, Queens, New York (1968-1980)**

It was a famous lamp in the old days, but most people don't remember it anymore. In 1959 my father took me to a store and bought a measuring cup (that is what he used to put over the bulb sort of like a lampshade). Then he went to a car parts place and bought a bulb. He attached it all to a transformer (he was the first one to make this up) and when he was finished, went into the kitchen and shut off the lights when my mother was cooking. "Watch this!" he said. My mother said "turn the light back on," because she was cooking dinner (and didn't know that my father was going to get rich and famous from this invention). But he turned on the "Tensor Lamp" instead and it was very bright. The big idea of the Tensor Lamp is (I will explain this if you are into science) that it has 2 different brightnesses (a "hi" and a "lo") but you don't have to have a special two-way bulb to make it do that, because the transformer does it.

So he put very small ads in the back of science magazines and said it is a good lamp for hobbies and sewing. People started to buy it and then a fancy store called "Hammacher Schlemmer" started selling it, and putting ads in fancier magazines. My father always was talking about "Hammacher Schlemmer" and so me and my sister kept saying "Hammacher Schlemmer, Hammacher Schlemmer" all the time (sort of like a kid's joke).

Then he started selling more lamps and my father went to Europe. When he came back he said: "My salesman in England is living better than me, we have to move to Great Neck!" (we lived in Queens).

Then he kicked out his partner (the one I told you about who liked "Twister" in the "Helen Hunt" part of this story) and got a public relations man to get him in

magazines and newspapers. He was in The New York Times a bunch of times and also "Business Week" and television.

When President Nixon's secretary erased the "famous 18 minutes of Watergate Tape by Mistake," the news asked my father if it could have been the fault of the "Tensor Lamp" on her desk. He was on television and everything.

About this same time I was down at the tennis courts and there were two men playing.

"What's wrong with your serve?" (one of the men said that).

"I have bursitis, that's what's wrong with it."

"How do you know?"

"How do I know?"

I'll tell you how I know! - Jay Monore (that is my father's name - it used to be Jerome Shapiro but I'll tell about that in another story) told me! That's how I know!"

Everybody thought my father was smart because he invented the Tensor Lamp. They kept on writing about him in The New York Times (we have a scrapbook) so that is why a man playing tennis was proud to say "Jay Monroe (who used to be Jerome Shapiro) said I have bursitis!"

My father put what is called a full page ad in The New York Times in 1970. It was a protest against The Chase Manhattan Bank. It was a protest about David Rockefeller (the bank president) being mean to Israel. The reason David Rockefeller was being mean was because he had a lot of money from Arabs in the bank. My father said in the full page ad: "David Rockefeller Should Put His Money Where His Mouth Is" and also "He is mean to Israel!" (or something).

So anyway, he got even more famous after that. When I was at the tennis courts just after, Irv Rubenstein, who knew I was the son of Jay Monroe (the inventor of The Tensor Lamp) said to me:

"I didn't know your father was such a Zionist."

"I guess he is," I said, but I didn't know what a Zionist was, so I had to ask someone, and it means somebody who likes Israel. But although my father did care about Israel, he "was just bored" said his wife (who used to be my mother's best friend, but that is another story, too) said, and he liked being in the news.

Also after the full page ad in The New York Times people started sending letters and presents to my father about how great he was. One of the presents was a Tensor Lamp with a home-made plaque on it that said: "To One of The Greatest Men: Jay Monroe." I was sent by a man named Harold Berlenstein from Brighton Beach, Brooklyn.

My father's wife (who used to be my mother's best friend before my father married her) didn't know what to do with that lamp, so she put it on the piano - on the one I used to practice. So every time before I practiced, I would see the plaque on the Tensor Lamp from Harold Berlenstein (from Brighton Beach).

One of the reasons my father started Tensor, invented The Tensor Lamp and became successful was so his parents would like him. They didn't, and even I could tell.

When Tensor was at it's biggest my father's parents used to show off at The Club about him (you remember "The Club" - where they had the Emerson Color tv in 1957) but after Tensor went broke they didn't care about him anymore.

Tensor went broke in 1980 because they started making high-intensity lamps (those are the kind of lamps Tensor's are) cheaper in Taiwan. Tensor tried staying in business - even though it cost three times as much as the high-intensity lamp

from Taiwan. Tensor tried saying it was better and was worth paying more. The way they did that, was to hang little American flag-tags from each Tensor, and in writing on that tag said: "Made in the USA by American Craftsmen." But if you ever went to the Tensor factory, you would just see Louie Torielli, the factory boss, yelling at the Negroes and Puerto Ricans who worked there (also the Mahalia Jackson Lady). But the plan was to make people think there were American Craftsmen there.

So Jay Monroe, my father, who is old now, says that it is better not to be famous. "When Tensor was at it's biggest everybody told me how great I was" he said. Now he has a little electronics business like Tensor was before he invented the Tensor Lamp.

## 15

**Ronnie Spector (1997-1998) Atlantic City, New Jersey**

She is famous for singing (the song) "Be My Baby" (number one in 1963). And also a song which was about number five called "Walking in the Rain"

I became friends with this girl, Debra Greenfield who lives downtown. I met her boyfriend, Patrick because we were both interested in photography (I was carrying a camera and he asked about it). Then I found out Debra Greenfield's brother, Jonathan, is married to Ronnie (Spector). They invited me to singing shows she'd have.

The first one I went to was Atlantic City. I was supposed to get what is called a complimentary ticket. I took the bus there, got all dressed up and went to the ticket booth (where my complimentary ticket was supposed to be). There were some Japanese Tourists who wanted to know who Ronnie Spector was. They just told them "oh, it's a Christmas show." This was almost Christmas and those young Japanese probably didn't know her number one hit she had in 1963 and almost definitely wouldn't know the number 5 song she had in 1963 "Walking in the Rain"). Also, in case you don't know, you don't have to get dressed up to see a show in Atlantic City anymore. I was the only one dressed up (except for someone's father next to me who was 80 years old).

After the show, Debra called me up and asked me how I liked it and did I get the complimentary tickets. I told her it was good (Ronnie Spector told about how she met The Beatles and John was her favorite and then sang "Imagine") but I had to pay because they couldn't find my name for the free ticket. (also she asked who I went with and I said "just myself" because that's who I do everything with).

After that, (I think because they felt guilty that I didn't get a free ticket for Atlantic City after taking the bus there) they kept asking me if I wanted "complimentary tickets" to any of her shows. I said "Yes" and got in free to another of her shows. This was at The Bottom Line and it was good and she said again how John was her favorite Beatle and sang "Imagine" again.

Debra Greenfield and her brother John (remember I told you he is Ronnie's husband) kept saying I should have come to the stage afterward and met Ronnie. Also, they said Ronnie wants to meet me and promises I will meet her someday.

This is the last famous person I have met (even though I didn't meet her yet, I count this in the story because of their promise) and if there are any more, someday I will write another story and put all the new ones in. - - - (1000)



