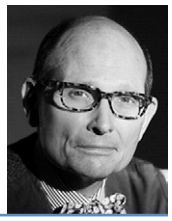

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Ein Heldenleben: A Life in Neurosurgery

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There are many exciting and noble professions, but the gravity and concept of a life in neurosurgery is clearly in its own category of elite status. It is a life of involvement with the dramatic events of life and death and a terrible gray area in between, where lives are disrupted and emotional pain is intense. It is, by any measure, an extraordinary calling.

This is a brief and somewhat fragmented story of a life in neurosurgery—my life.

BEGINNINGS

New Haven is a smallish Connecticut town rooted deep in American colonialism and uniquely blessed by the presence of Yale University within its limits. It is a physically beautiful setting on Long Island sound, multicultural but predominantly Italian in its inhabitants' cultural origins. I was born just before the Second World War. My father, Dominic, a machinist and fine craftsman, was a devoted husband and exemplary father. Intelligent and diligent, he at times worked as many as three jobs to maintain the upward mobility of the family. Our paternal ancestors were from Amalfi, Italy. Sailors for generations, with the advent of steam, they left Italy for Argentina in the early twentieth century, but an Atlantic storm and damaged ship brought them to Ellis Island in New York. My mother, Ann Lawrence, was a nurse. Multifaceted in talents, she was a mother who challenged her children to excel and left no stone unturned to provide an intellectually fertile environment directed to music, art painting, and sports. The Lorenz family, Austrian in origin, had originally migrated to Mahoney City, Pennsylvania, where my grandfather worked in coal mines; later, with my grandmother, they migrated to New Haven.

My original home was a two-family edifice with a chicken coop, set in a "collision" area for Italians, Blacks, and Hispanics, in what might be termed a somewhat less than desirable part of town. The atmosphere within the family was clearly upwardly mobile, with progress in both education and socioeconomic status expected and driven home emphatically each day. Progress and change were expected on all fronts, with hard work, perseverance, and sustained goal orientation at the base of the behavioral pattern. Honesty and a firm moral grounding in Catholicism were stressed. As the oldest of three siblings, I was expected to be a "pathfinder," setting the pace for my young brother and sister. I was immersed in the piano, painting, the public library, films, and sports at an early age—interests that would be life threads.

EDUCATION

When I was four, we moved to Westville, a largely middle class part of town; first into an apartment and later into a three-family house in a predominantly second generation Irish culture. Our move was impaired by the prejudice and bigotry that existed at the time in relation to our Italian surname (after WWII). The Lorenz name was changed to Lawrence, and this was used to allow initial entry into the area. Due to the style of my parents and a supportive group of Irish friends, I hardly felt a ripple.

After a brief period in public school, I transferred to Saint Aidans Elementary, a parochial school established by our parish church where discipline and religion were emphasized. The nuns, predominantly Boston Irish in origin, affected a peculiar brand of education—effective, with strong points of order and a fundamental sense of respect for classes but overtones of anger and prejudice. I was one of only two Italians in the class and was constantly reminded of it—in less than flattering terms. Even at the age of ten I found this curious and reveled in the multicultural attitude of my parents, who stressed the dramatic beauty of differences among racial and cultural groups. Problematically, the Sisters of Notre Dame insisted that all should set their course to

Key words
- Education
- Training

Abbreviations and Acronyms
AANS: American Association of Neurological Surgeons
JPL: Jet Propulsion Laboratory
SSB(N): submarine ship ballistic nuclear
USC: University of Southern California


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cut a path to Catholic secondary education. At the age of twelve, I decided that things would be different for me. Hopkins Grammar was secondary school for boys, a preparatory school that offered an enhanced opportunity for an elite college or university education. I had been introduced to it through a summer camp where counselors were either faculty members or students at Hopkins. I visited the campus—like an old English boarding school in the film "Tom Brown's School Days." It was for me! Largely comprising students who were children of professionals and Yale faculty members, it offered a unique experience. Founded in 1660, it was steeped in the tradition of American Colonial times and insisted on honing individuals in all respects, mind and body: art, culture, music, history, classics, language, etc. It was an elite and invigorating environment, and my acceptance there was a major turning point in my life, giving me the opportunity to develop and grow and to have a chance to be accepted at Yale College. As a good but not exceptional student and much better than average athlete, I was accepted by early action decision at the College. Their decision was no doubt further influenced by my New Haven residence, Italian surname, and some strange endorsement by Hopkins Headmaster F. Allen Sherk, a former Yale man. Mr. Sherk, a strict Puritan, presided over a no nonsense, zero tolerance environment. Perhaps he was taken with my effort or application to tasks, or my emerging romanticism and idealism.

I entered Yale at 16, from a class of 40. I suddenly was consumed in a class of 1000—I was overwhelmed!

As a freshman, I survived academically and even made the Dean's Honor List due to my Hopkins grounding. I had initially entered with ideas of a career in architecture. (I was a moderately gifted painter and sculptor and had won a number of local prizes.) However, the introductory course challenged my discipline in that chaotic Yale environment. Coming from a family heavily engaged in the medical profession as nurses, I felt some indirect pressure to consider that course, but initially I resisted.

During my sophomore year, my academics suffered and I was required to meet with Henry Chauncey, Dean of students for the College—I thought it was over. After a long discussion, Dean Chauncey arranged for me to work, as part of my scholarship requirement, at the Medical School in, of all places, the Harvey Cushing Historical Library (**Figure 1**)!

My supervisor was Madelyn Stanton, the deceased Cushing's former secretary after he had returned to Yale from his time at Harvard. She was proper and stern! I would descend into the "stacks" three afternoons a week, instructed to catalogue the Cushing collection books on three-by-five–inch cards. However, I spent time infatuated with the "ancient" tomes on medical history and Cushing's neurosurgical collection in multiple languages. Few cards were completed, and I felt Miss Stanton's wrath! But I found a direction—another turning point. In those stacks, I decided that I would try to enter a course in medicine.

Unfortunately, I was distracted by sports involvement and social interactions. My grades, although satisfactory, were hardly of medical school candidate caliber. By March of my senior year, I had had been rejected by all but one of the medical schools to which I applied, and that was the Boston University School of Medicine. I was called for an interview late in March and was taken by its intimacy, warmth, and academic flavor—only 80 students per class and associated with the then-magnificent Boston City Hospital! And Boston! In spite of welling enthusiasm and very congenial interviews, I remained guarded, even pessimistic.

After finishing my time at the Cushing library, because of a secondary interest in Oceanography, I was assigned as a work student to the Bingham Oceanographic Laboratory—a fabulous place and opportunity. There I worked for Evelyn Hutchinson, the first woman to earn a Ph.D. from Cambridge, and came into contact with the niece of John Fulton, the renowned neurophysiologist, who introduced me to many of the elements of his character. Fulton was the Chairman of Physiology at the Medical School and an exceptional neurophysiologist. He was probably one of the foremost individuals in his field in the past 100 years and a founder of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons as well as the *Journal of Neurosurgery*.

Figure 1. Cushing Historical Library, Yale School of Medicine, New Haven, Connecticut.

Under the direction of Fulton's niece, I learned to do hypophysectomies in 3-inch Keli fish to determine the affect of seasonal change on gross weight. Many other interesting activities consumed my interest there, and I decided to work at the lab during the summer before my senior year. I was relatively well known as an earnest work student.

Two days after the interviews at Boston University Medical School, the laboratory's director, Daniel Merriman, stopped me (I didn't

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