



## When Anything Was Possible

by Dave Korzon

**A** couple of years ago, during an amiable drive to no place special, my father told me in a matter-of-fact way that as a young man he wanted to open a hamburger restaurant, a chain of them actually. This idea had come to him back in the fifties when McDonald's was on the cusp of exploding exponentially through the magic of franchising and although White Castle had been around for four decades, the industry still had a frontier atmosphere where new pioneers were seeking their piece of the American hamburger dream. But my father? This was not unlike the family priest admitting that his missed calling in life was to become

a pit boss in Atlantic City. I never would have put my father and the food service industry together, and more than this, I never would have pegged him as a budding Ray Kroc, the man who turned McDonald's into the colossus we all know and love and occasionally sue. My father was born in 1931 on the kitchen counter of the house he grew up in. One could make an argument that this entrance into the world meant he *was* destined to work with food in some capacity, but I'm inclined to say it was just a case of bad timing and living too far from the local hospital.

He's not a risk taker, my father, but I think down deep he always wanted to be one, someone who walked the high wire instead of the person who sold the tickets.

To inspire his sons he once cut out a newspaper headline, I'm guessing from the sports section of the local paper, which read, "No Guts, No Glory." He placed the headline in a small picture frame and put it on top of the TV in our family den. It's the way he wanted my brother and I to behave in life, I suppose, a couple of rough-and-ready, anything goes, don't take no for an answer young bucks. And doesn't every father hope he has sons like these? My father wanted to be the fellow at the neighborhood party who when asked about his boys could sigh and roll his eyes in mock distress and say, "I've got a couple of fearless characters there. A coupla real wild cards."

"No Guts" remained on the top of three or four different TVs in that den all through my childhood, and it had turned a worn yellow by the time I was ready to go off and flunk out of college. My father meant well, but it would have been far more effective for him to install his adopted slogan in a different room in our house from the room where he watched reruns of *Barney Miller* and fell asleep exhausted by seven o'clock most evenings. To associate him with a saying like "No Guts, No Glory" is as foreign a concept to me as his hamburger restaurant idea.

**S**o what happened? The idea for my father's hamburger place, the inspiration for it at least, was *there* at one point. It was the '50s and he was home from the army after serving

overseas, and doesn't every great American male success story from this part of the century begin with, "Well I'd just gotten out of the service . . ."? There wasn't a family to tie him down as of yet, no real weight of responsibility. Why didn't he go for it? He was living in a time where everything and anything was possible. Eisenhower years.

What happened was my father became what he needed to become: a good foot soldier who went into business with his older brother and in the process gave up the idea of being the

man on the high wire. And it hurts me to know that he gave up (or never started) on something that he wanted for himself. It frightens me too. Inspired ideas that tantalize us, taunt us in some cases, can be dangerous things, leaving behind their own insidious shrapnel (would've, should've, could've) and I think there was a reason why my father

waited well into his seventies to let me in on this notion from his past. It's all comfortably out of his hands now. He's lived his life and provided well for his family. This took its own kind of guts, I think, and brought with it, in an understated way, its own glory. Truth is, the sign on the TV in the den used to needle me, a gesture from a man who expected a swagger from his kids that he couldn't pull off himself. Or maybe, just maybe, it was all that he could offer under the circumstances of a life marked by a road not taken.

**I**do take the liberty now and then to fantasize about his fast-food empire where I play the role of the deservedly expectant prince. And in my dreams we are not being sued for using animal fat to cook French fries and budding filmmakers aren't gorging themselves on our food to save society from itself. No, Dad, I'm pleased to report that it's a happy place the way I have it in my mind. It would have been a sweetheart and it would have been yours, all of it. It's tile and glass and brick, your place, and it gleams with happy faces and milkshake machines. It's a good place, this seed from which your empire would've sprung. I hope you don't mind, just this once, that I didn't leave your idea where it rightfully belongs: safe in your yesterdays. ☺

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