

# My Father, Lazar Emanuel

BY STEVEN EMANUEL

My father Lazar Emanuel had an extraordinary life.

He was born in 1924 to Sephardic Jewish parents who had recently emigrated to New York from a town near Salonika. Salonika is today, of course, part of Greece, but was then under Turkish dominion. The language on which my father was raised was Ladino, essentially Spanish as it was spoken in 1492 when the Jews were expelled from Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella.

My dad was born and raised poor. He, his brother, his parents, his mother's sister, and the sister's daughter, all lived together in a 1-bedroom 1-bathroom apartment in the Bronx. And the one bathroom was not always available for humans, because my grandmother sometimes kept chickens in the bathtub. By the time my dad was in high school, the family was still so poor that my dad had just a single white shirt, which my grandmother washed every school night.

Lazar was always a brilliant student. He skipped two years of middle schooling, and then graduated from Dewitt Clinton High School in the Bronx in 1940, after having just barely turned 16. He was the valedictorian of the largest graduating class that Clinton ever had, over a thousand students. He then headed off to NYU, from which he hadn't quite graduated when he was drafted in 1943. Because of his great talent for foreign languages, he was sent to the Army's Japanese Language Training Center at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. There, he met the great love of his life, my mother Judy, whom he married in late 1944 when he was 20 and she was still 19. Their incredibly close marriage lasted until his death 67 years later, a pretty good run.

At the end of the war, in fall 1945, Lazar headed off with Judy to Harvard Law School. At Harvard, despite the GI bill, my parents struggled to make ends meet – he had a part time job teaching French at a local girls private school, and my mom took in laundry at the Harvard Coop. My dad was disappointed not to make the Harvard Law Review, but his proudest accomplishment was an “A” in Labor Law from a very young Archibald Cox, later of Watergate Saturday Night Massacre fame.

After graduating from HLS in 1948, my dad started a New York City law firm with two friends, Marvin Cowan and Sidney Liebowitz. The firm was known as Cowan, Liebowitz and Emanuel; it today endures (indeed prospers) as Cowan, Liebowitz & Latman, with about 50 lawyers, most of whom practice Intellectual Property.

During the 1950s and 60s, my mom and dad adopted a total of five children. I was the oldest, born in 1950, followed by my twin sisters Leslie and Carole who were four years younger. Number 4 was a wonderful boy named Johnnie, who my parents knew before the adoption was a “blue baby” with a heart defect that would need to be corrected by surgery. Tragically, Johnnie died on the operating table at age 6. Undaunted, my parents then adopted David, who is 15 years my junior, and who turned out to be their wonderful caregiver during their later years. Adopting and raising five children from four different sets of birth parents is the kind of experience that teaches you to value human diversity, and not to expect that your children will or should be mini-replicas of yourself. My parents learned that lesson instinctively and instantly.

My dad enjoyed his years practicing law at Cowan Liebowitz, but he was not cut out to do that for the bulk of his career – he was too restless and entrepreneurial.

During the 1950s, he had represented several radio station owners, and by the early 60s he left the law firm to enter the radio business as a principal. Backed by private investors, he formed Communications Industries Corp, with which he acquired at one time or another 13 radio stations and one TV station, in markets like Newcastle PA, Youngstown OH and Poughkeepsie NY.

His last, biggest acquisition, was WJRZ, an AM station that he moved from Newark to Hackensack NJ in the mid-1960s in order to improve its signal coverage of the New York City market. New York City was then, as it is today, a tough radio market with dozens of competitors. To stand out, he needed to do something special.

That something special turned out to be country music – this most popular music type was featured on radio dials everywhere in America except New York Metro, and my dad became the man who brought Country to the big city. It was a tough go – as I was reminded just the other night by the lyrics of a New Year’s Eve Country song on a TV show broadcast from Los Angeles (I may be mangling the line slightly), “But when you find your way to New York City, they’ve never even heard of Conway Twitty.” (If *you* haven’t heard of Conway Twitty, he was a major country and western star of the 1960s and 70s.) But WJRZ prospered with the country format, and my dad was able to sell it on behalf of his investors to a large national broadcaster in 1969 for an impressive sum.

The sale of the final radio station led to my dad’s next business adventure. The station had a printing press and some pre-press equipment, which the new buyers didn’t want. He set the equipment up in the Teaneck NJ attic of a friend’s detached garage. This coincided with the end of my sophomore year at college, so I became a one-employee print shop, selling printing to local merchants by day, and running the presses at night. Apparently I must have made the printing industry look easy (which it wasn’t, and isn’t), because my dad decided to acquire a small local printer and turn it into a significant business, Garden State Press, in Teaneck. I’m not sure how well dad’s being in the printing business worked for him, but it worked great for me. I followed dad to Harvard Law School in 1974, and began publishing the Emanuel Law Outlines study aids from my dorm room. Dad did all the printing, and as the business grew, he ran the law outline business operations as an adjunct to the printing company, while I finished law school and practiced law for a couple of years. Eventually, in 1987, after the law outline publishing business continued to expand, he closed the printing business and came to work for me full-time.

He served as my right-hand man until we sold the business to the international publisher Wolters-Kluwer in 2001. His greatest single contribution to the business was to work out our 1995 acquisition of the *Law in a Flash* legal-flash-card publishing business, which was (however improbable it may seem to those of you who went to law school a while ago) a highly-lucrative seven-figure business.

Following the 2001 sale of the publishing business, my dad embarked on his final two business ventures, both in publishing. One was the co-ownership of a company called Highlands Company that owns and sells a proprietary abilities test, whose function is to help people figure out what their natural talents are. That business continues today under the able leadership of Kim Mumola, who had helped my dad run the business for the last 10 years.

The other business was, of course, the *NYPRR* newsletter. With my dad as publisher and Roy Simon of Hofstra Law School as Chief Editorial Advisor and monthly contributor, NYPRR produced monthly issues from April 1998 through November 2011, a total of 163 issues in all. The newsletter was the great business passion of my dad’s later years. Even when he was hospitalized in the fall of 2011 at Westchester Medical Center for the subdural hematoma that would soon kill him, he was attentive to the details of the final issue, proofing and tweaking the marketing copy for the upcoming issue.

Several adjectives describe Lazar. One, of course, is “brilliant.” He was deeply knowledgeable

on a wide variety of topics, from literature to politics to business and economics. Any lawyer who read any of his *NYPRR* articles knows the penetrating analysis, and deep passion, he brought to issues of the lawyer's professional responsibilities.

Another term that comes to mind is "hardworking." In the 1950s, his law partner Marvin Cowan used to say that "Lazar will become the first lawyer in Manhattan to earn \$1 million a year, billed at \$7 an hour." Well into his 80s, at a time when nearly all his law school classmates had retired, he was not only running the two publishing businesses, but was still representing private clients in important matters.

The final, and most central, adjective I would use to describe him is "loving." And I don't just mean loving of family. He was that, of course: I've never known a man as devoted to his wife, his children, and his extended family as my dad; every day of his life until the end, he put out an intense effort to help every family member in every way he could. But my dad's capacity for love and caring extended to virtually everyone he knew. Friends, customers, suppliers, every employee of any of the businesses he ran – all of them could count on him to ask, "So how *are* you?" and know that he really wanted to know, and would help in any way he could. Plus, you knew you could confide in him about anything. You could take as much time as you wanted, and he wouldn't fidget or tell you to hurry up. After he heard all the details (including ones he would extract under lawyerly cross-examination), you would get great advice, delivered in a non-judgmental way and coupled with great compassion. As his nephew said to me recently, "You could talk to him about anything, and when he was listening to you, you felt that nobody else in the world existed."

We will all miss him forever.

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*Steven Emanuel, a lawyer by training, is the founder and principal author of the Emanuel Law Outlines series of law-school study aids, now published by Wolters Kluwer Law & Business.*

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