

LIVING A LIFE  
THAT MATTERS:

*from Nazi Nightmare  
to American Dream*

*by*

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## *"The American Dream"*

was something so ridiculous, as me deciding to go uranium prospecting!

What did I know about uranium? Or prospecting? Nothing. But I was determined to find out. And what I found out was that uranium is a radioactive chemical element that is necessary for nuclear power. In 1945, the United States used the newly invented atom bomb to end World War II by bombing the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is used in science, space exploration, medicine and nuclear power plants that provide electricity for homes, businesses and industry. And since the nuclear industry was just beginning to emerge in the 1950s, it was all very exciting. Everyone thought that nuclear energy would be bigger than electricity, and since uranium was essential to nuclear power, the international race to find uranium was on—there were fortunes to be made!

And so there began a mad frenzy all over the western United States. People seemed to go crazy just like during the California Gold Rush in the mid-1800s. Imagine, going prospecting in the 1950s! Today, no one who hadn't seen it would believe it. And one of the places that this race was particularly popular was around a little town called Rosemont near Lancaster, California, only two hours' drive from Los Angeles.

Well, at that time I had two buddies who loved hunting for just about anything, and they often invited me to go along. I'd always declined because I couldn't stand the violence, but this time, they weren't hunting with guns, so I accepted their invitation. This would be a real American adventure!

Since prospecting, just like driving a truck, was an unusual activity for a young, religious Jewish man, I decided to discuss it first with my father-in-law. Much

to my surprise, he said, "Okay, so maybe it's foolish, but if you really want to do it, go ahead. Maybe you'll learn something; just be careful." I realized that this adventure was totally out of his world, but since he didn't try to talk me out of it, I knew he wouldn't be disappointed in me if I went ahead with it—even if I failed. And of course, I'd be very careful. So my adventure in uranium mining began.

The first thing we needed to do was to get outfitted with the right clothes and equipment. My buddies already had the clothes and guns, but I had to go shopping! I didn't want or need a shotgun, and certainly didn't plan to use it, but I wanted to fit in with my friends, so I bought one. Since I didn't plan to shoot anything, I didn't bother doing any target practice. Looking back, it's interesting to me now to realize that this would be the first time since my training with the Zionist group after the war that I'd be handling any kind of weapon. And this one was much different than the old German Luger that we had all practiced on.

One of the guys had a pick-up truck, which was all we needed at first. Later we rented a trailer that included a power source for the big drills we would be using once we started mining. We chipped in and bought a large, very fancy tent at Sears, along with all the other essentials we thought we'd need. I even bought something called a *Scintillator*, which was an extremely expensive and highly sensitive version of a *Geiger Counter*,\* the device typically used by miners to detect the presence of uranium in the ground. The *Scintillator*, which unlike the *Geiger Counter*

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\* The *Geiger Counter* was invented in 1908 and named for one of its inventors, Hans Geiger. It's interesting to note that during the 1950s, the Las Vegas area was famous for its nuclear testing, and today, 60 years later, the use of nearby Yucca Mountain to store nuclear waste is still a source of national controversy.

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didn't make any noise, had a gauge that could indicate the presence of uranium from inside a car or even in an airplane! And it had a compass that pointed out the direction of the uranium's location.

Once we were equipped and at least looking as if we knew what we were doing, we headed out. We didn't have a particular location in mind; we just drove inland until the Scintillator started registering uranium. And we ended up in Rosemont, California. When the Scintillator indicated that we were in the midst of a lot of uranium, we looked at each other excitedly, turned off the road, got out of the truck and started using the smaller Geiger Counter. Its loud, rhythmic clicking noises strongly indicated that we were in the middle of a deposit that stretched at least a three-quarter-square-mile area surrounding where we stood. We started walking around in further concentric circles, following the Geiger Counter to try to figure out just how big the deposit was. We couldn't believe what was happening – the Geiger Counter seemed to be going crazy – indicating that there was uranium everywhere! You can imagine the dreams of riches that filled our heads!

We ended up circling all around the mountain. Three grown men following this crazy Geiger Counter and already planning the gifts we would buy for our wives – who had laughed at our plan to get rich! Turns out that the whole huge mountain was "hot"! Meaning that it was filled with uranium – and that we definitely were going to be rich! We had to circle the entire area and "stake it out" to make a claim, which would legally entitle us to mine uranium within the perimeter of our claim. To do this, we created what we called monuments – big piles of boulders and rocks, around a quarter of a mile apart, on the top of which we placed a can that contained a description of our claim. Then we had to race to the County Registrar's Office to

register the claim. While we were staking our claim at one end, however, someone else was doing the same thing at the other end! You can imagine the frustration we felt when we found out about each other! Fortunately, when we met to discuss the situation, we were able to prove that we had gotten there first, so the claim was ours.

The next weekend we rented a trailer that included a power source. Now we needed to get serious and find a place to create a base camp. After doing a careful search, we found just the place between two protective mountains. This was where we pitched the big tent. Now the real work would begin: We had to start digging. Our plan was to come back every weekend, pitch the tent and continue digging until we struck it rich! And that's just what we did. Every weekend for five weeks we went through the same process of packing our equipment and supplies, waving goodbye to our laughing wives, driving out to the site, pitching our tent, finding a likely spot, and finally, digging. This mountain was so solid, however, that even with our powerful sledge hammers, it took two hours of strenuous digging to fill one little bucket! Such pitiful results from such difficult work! We soon started using power-drills to create holes for the dynamite sticks with which we could blast tunnels into the mountainside. I never could have dreamed as a slave laborer back in Durnhau's horrific rock quarry that one day I'd be doing similar physical labor. This time, however, it was voluntary – it was an adventure. And my friends, family and I would be the ones to benefit from the results!

Despite the back-breaking labor, we refused to give up because we could just feel that the uranium was there – all we had to do was find the vein! So we kept trying – digging over and over again. Well, several weeks after we'd begun, we pitched the tent as usual and laid out our sleeping bags.

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That night, totally exhausted after our hard day's digging, we immediately fell asleep. In the middle of the night, there came a sudden terrible howling and a brutal wind seemed to attack us. It felt like a train was coming right through our tent, destroying everything in its path. Within minutes, our beautiful Sears tent was ripped to shreds around us. The two-by-four that supported the ceiling became a pile of splinters. And there I was, hopping around like a crazed bunny trying to hold up another support beam—and in my sleeping bag because in my rush to get out of it, I'd jammed the zipper. Well, when it was finally over, we looked at each other in shock that we'd survived and also with humor because we were each completely covered in black dust. Desperately needing to shower and get some sleep, we quickly cleaned up some of the damage, loaded our stuff in the truck and trailer, and took off toward the nearest town to find a hotel for the night.

On the way to the hotel, we stopped at a drive-in for hamburgers and Cokes. In talking to some of the other customers there, we learned that our safe, calm camping spot between the two mountains was actually a well-known and very dangerous wind-tunnel! It had never occurred to us to research the location in advance. Our problems continued when we got into town and found out that there was only one motel. And it was a real dump. And it only had one room available. And in that room there was only one lumpy bed. But we were so beaten up and tired that we didn't care—we just wanted to shower and sleep. That didn't seem to be too much to ask.

When we'd unloaded our equipment and dragged it all up to our room, one of the guys suddenly turned to me and asked, "What did you do with the detonator caps?" I told him that I hadn't done anything with the caps; I'd never

touched them. Once again we all looked at each other in shock – detonator caps could be very dangerous! We raced back to the truck and searched every inch. The detonators were not there. We tried to mentally retrace our steps and realized with frustration that when we'd gathered up and thrown all the food wrappings in the garbage, we must have also thrown away the detonators. We were so terrified that they would somehow detonate and hurt someone that we postponed the shower and sleep and headed back to the drive-in. And just in case the detonators had somehow dropped out of the truck and were laying somewhere along the road, one of us drove slowly while the other two walked, carefully looking for the caps. Can you imagine what we must have looked like? We were lucky not to have been arrested. And we were really lucky because much to our surprise, we did find the detonators! So exhausted, filthy, and by this time, somewhat dazed, but excited by the prospect of a shower and sleep, we once again headed for the motel.

Having just barely dragged ourselves up the stairs, I was grateful when my kind friends told me to go ahead and be first to use the communal bathroom and shower, which was located down the hall from our room. I quickly scraped off my destroyed clothes and reached for the faucet. Would you be surprised to learn that when I turned it on, there was no water? Nothing. I banged and twisted and probably used some colorful language, but nothing worked. So I gave up and returned to our room where there was a little sink. Unfortunately, the only thing that came out was black, oily mud. Just disgusting. You should have seen us. Three grown, sleep-deprived men who had been battered and bruised and now couldn't even clean themselves up. So we dusted ourselves off as much as possible and then

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just dropped on the bed. And passed out. But we would not be having pleasant dreams that night.

In the middle of what was left of the night, one of the guys started grabbing us like a madman and screaming, "What's going on?" Bright lights flashed through the window and the bed was actually moving – rolling across the wooden floor. Nothing made any sense. Was it an earthquake? Martians? We tried to grab our belongings and get out of the building before it collapsed on us, but with everything moving, it was hard to stand up. Then, just as suddenly as it had begun, the noise and vibrating stopped. We looked out of the window and were stunned to see train tracks not ten feet away from us!

Once again we went to bed, almost afraid to sleep. But we must have lost consciousness because we almost leaped up to the ceiling when deafening pounding noises roared through the room. This time, however, it wasn't the wind hurtling through our tent or a train right outside our window. This time it was the motel's old steam radiators. Apparently when the manager turned the heat on in the early morning, the rush of steam hitting air pockets in the pipes caused the ear-drum blasting racket. At this point it felt as if we were in some really bad movie. Since by then it was morning, we gave up on sleep and drove home. Needless to say, this adventure provided Jean and the girls with lots of opportunities to have fun at Daddy's expense!

Despite our challenges, however, we three stalwart prospectors were not daunted! Once we'd recuperated, we decided to take the shredded tent back to Sears to see if they would make good on its guarantee. Much to our surprise and delight, Sears replaced the tent! Over the next couple weekends, we excavated an enormous hole. Upon our arrival one early morning, when we looked into the hole, we were horrified to see that it had become the residence



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of hundreds and hundreds of slithering rattlesnakes. Fortunately, the other guys, who were life-long hunters, had rifles and shotguns which they didn't hesitate to use on the snakes. Not wanting any part of this mayhem, I took a little walk until it was over.

Well, our work finally paid off when we found some rocks that registered high uranium content. We rushed one to the government Assayer's office to test samples to see what percent of it was uranium. We weren't afraid to handle it because we'd been told uranium wasn't dangerous until it was processed. And of course we wore heavy-duty gloves.

We left our precious rock with the Assayer and eagerly went back a week later for the report. We were so excited about how our lives would change once we'd become millionaires! Much to our disappointment, however, it turned out that we hadn't hit a vein. In fact, even though the mountain was filled with uranium, it wasn't in veins. In fact, it permeated the whole area. And much to our disappointment, we learned that it would require a ton of this kind of rock to be processed down to one ounce of uranium. We'd have to harvest tons of it and then pay to have it transported all the way to Washington State where it would be processed down into small amounts of usable uranium.

So our adventure in mining was over. Disappointing and exhausting as it was, however, I did not regret the attempt. I have found throughout my life that it's necessary to take risks in order to achieve anything. And although sometimes the risk isn't immediately worth it, the lessons learned always come in handy later in life. The main lesson that I learned from this American adventure was to stick with real estate!

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