

CHAPTER 74

FOR MY FAMILY.

This is a recording which I am making on February 9th, 1975. It is a story, which is for my family only, for you, Hedy, the children, the grandchildren, and the rest of the family, and I prefer to keep it to myself for a long time. Perhaps I will let you hear the story later on, may be in a year or two, when I will have retired from my practice.

I was supposed to have died on January 19th, 1975, which is exactly three weeks ago. It was on a Sunday, and today is Sunday too. I was in great danger before many times in my life, but this here was different, it was much closer. I can say that I am lucky. A miracle had happened and I am really happy now that I can continue, that I can live a second life. It is like a brand-new game. Now I will tell you what happened.

On that day, January 19th, we had just come home from our trip to Westchester. The day before, on the 18th, we had visited Johanna and Marvin and we stayed there over night. And the next day, there was a concert, in which Lauren had participated, had played the violin. Afterwards, we went to Francis' and Vicki's home, stayed there late till about 10 o'clock or so. When we came home, it was exactly 11 o'clock. We had many things in our car, which I had first to unload and I carried them into the house through the entrance on Sullivan Place, and Hedy went into the house too. Then I had to park my car. I had to go around the block, to Bedford Avenue, Empire Boulevard, and then to Rogers Avenue, and, as I usually did it, I had to back up into my parking place next to the garage. Unfortunately, there was a car in my way, parked there, so that I had to maneuver in a different way to get into that place, and I had to back up and turn around

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a few times, till I finally had the car in the right position. I went out of the car, and outside was about to put the key into the lock for the alarm, and while I was bending down to put the key in, I saw next to me one pair of shoes on the left side, somebody standing there very close, one behind me, and one pair of shoes on my right side. I knew immediately that this was an attack by 3 people. This were not shoes only, this were people, standing close to me, and instead of changing my position, for what these people had been waiting, I swang around with my fist of the left hand and with all my force I hit this man behind me into the face. An enormous hit, and I started to shout like an animal. And all these 3 people started to run away. I don't know what happened to the man whom I had hit; he may have fallen to the ground. The other men ran away and the man to my right ran down between the many cars, which were parked there for the night, and thereby opened the way for me out of the trap, and I shouted "Police" with all my might and ran out into the street. But one of the other two men, the one who was behind me, had followed me very fast and had hit me with something on the head. I did not have my hat, had left it in the car, as it was a hat which I wanted to discard, and he hit me on the right side of the head. I was a little bit dizzy for a short moment, but I continued to run into the street, and one man ran down on Rogers Avenue toward Empire Boulevard. The other two people ran up on Rogers Avenue, crossing Sullivan Place and there they disappeared.

At that moment, a man, whom I knew very well, who worked at the Amoco gas station at the corner of Empire Boulevard, came with his car and saw and heard me shouting, and he stopped. And I told

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him fast what had happened and he drove up to the corner of Sullivan Place, but he did not see the two people anymore, and then I came up to him and I stayed with him in the street for a while and we discussed the whole event.

It is needless to say that I was terribly upset and shaken, and I felt that pain on the right side of my head. Then I went into the house. I had decided immediately not to tell Hedy anything. She was upstairs, sleeping already, and I knew that I should not tell her the story. The reason was that Hedy was all the time after me that I should give up the practice, should retire, should not stay in that neighborhood, that I was in danger there also. Also that I was attacked before already many times. Anyway, I feel that I am still strong, that work does not do me any harm and that I enjoy my work, and that I am very careful and and I will be more careful now.

The next following day, I went to the police precinct and reported the whole incident. We discussed there the difficulties I had with parking my car, but they could not give me any good advice. I knew that I will have to be more careful. When I came home and parked the car, when this incident happened, the street was empty. But these three people were hiding behind cars, so that I could not see them, when I came with my car. They knew that I was coming, had watched me many times before, and they knew what I will be doing, that I will park my car next to my garage, and that I will put the key for the alarm into the lock, and this was the game that they had decided to play, to come from two sides, between my car and the garage and surround me. When I would have straightened out after bending down to put the key

into the lock, they would have gotten me. I can imagine what would have happened to me. I don't think that I would be alive now, because they were prepared for the worst. Why do I think so? That what they did to me; they hit me on the head with something. It was not a sharp instrument, was probably a pipe covered with rubber, probably a piece of lead inside a rubber tube. But it was a terrific blow at my head. I was hit, while I was running, and therefore the blow was a little less heavy. Would that man had hit me on top of my head, when he was standing behind me, I would have fallen to the ground unconscious with a single blow. I would have been lying between the car and the garage door, and would not have been seen from the street. Even if people would have passed there, they would not have seen anything, as these three men would have hidden behind the car. They would have taken everything that I had, my wallet, which contained 190 dollars, and my gold watch, an Omega, which I had bought for \$ 500.

But, instead of surprising me, as they had planned, I surprised them. Instead of straightening up, after putting in the key, out of this position I attacked them, and for that they were not prepared and fled, and only one of them, whom I will call the executioner followed me into the street and hit me with that thing on my head.

Now about the injury: It was quite bad. It got very swollen, was a hematoma below the skin. I was worried that there might be a crack in the skull. So, I went for X-rays about three days later and the result was negative. But there was a swelling, an extremely painful swelling. It was a vein, which was injured and was bleeding under the skin, and causing the swelling. It was

so tender that I could hardly touch it with my fingers. There was one spot, more swollen, hard like bone, one bump above the right ear, and I thought it might be a fracture of the temporal bone, but it was not, as the X-rays showed. I felt then every day less pain, less and less, and now, the first time today, three weeks later, that I don't feel any pain, even if I press hard.

Now, what is the reason that I am telling the whole story? It is that I think that my children and grandchildren will have reason to be proud of me. Imagine, I am now 77, almost 78 years old, and I could fight off three people, alone. It appears now to me like a miracle that I could do it, and, perhaps, the children and grandchildren will one day tell the story about their grandfather, who fought off three bandits, who were prepared to kill ^{him} ~~me~~. I remember that as a young boy I read a story by the famous, very popular Austrian poet Peter Rosegger, whose title was: "About the grandfather, who was once sitting on a fir tree." He tells, that his grandfather was once walking at night in winter in the woods, and that he suddenly saw great many little lights, coming closer towards him. He knew right away that these lights were the eyes of wolfs, and he had just one second to climb up on a fir tree which was close to him. He heard them then growling, saw the little lights moving about. He had to stay up there all night. He knew that he had escaped certain death by climbing up the tree. My story is a horror story also and worth remembering.

It is now a few days later and I want to add a few more details. First about the 3 people. I was asked by the police, when I reported the case, whether I could give a description of these people. I could not say much as it was dark and I could only say that the one man, who was running down towards Empire Boulevard

was a very tall fellow, not heavy, rather slender. The other two whom I hardly saw when they were running up the street towards Sullivan Place were shorter, were negroes, young, very dark. The whole thing took at the most 10 seconds, not more, till I was out in the street. It was a very short episode. Second, I want to tell you, Francis, that you once were very right, when you warned me about it. I remember that I once told you that I was going out every night to buy the newspaper for the next day. Usually, I told you, that I closed my office and went out ^{the street,} into ^A, around midnight, sometimes even later, that I took my car, which was usually not yet parked in the right place. I went out quite far, to Grand Army Plaza, to buy the New York Times for the next day, and then I came home, and on the way I usually mailed my letters, and then ~~the car~~ parked my car next to the garage, which I thought was an ideal place to park the car. I remember that you told me that somebody will watch me and will notice what I was doing, and that that ~~was~~ quite a dangerous thing to do, ~~that they will find out about it and that I may be attacked by~~ somebody. You were so right. I told you that I was very careful when I come out of my office, and when I come back after I had bought the newspaper, that I looked whether there was anybody walking in the street, and that I was sure that I was safe.

But that was my mistake. These people have watched me and had seen how I did it. First of all, they knew ~~that when~~ my car was not standing next to the garage that I was out. They found out that I usually came home between 11 and 12 o'clock and that I first went to the entrance of Sullivan Place, that mother and I left the car there, that I went back into the car and that I drove around the block and parked the car next to the garage.

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So, they had watched it probably for a very long time, and on that Sunday they knew exactly what I will be doing. They saw me coming and they knew that I will go around the block and they were prepared for that attack. They were hiding behind cars, as there were a lot of cars there. There is always a space between cars and there these people were hiding. When I came around the corner, the street was empty, but they saw me and they knew what I will be doing, that I will come out of the car, and that I will put the key into the lock of the alarm, and that was the moment for which they had been waiting. One of them, the executioner, who had this weapon in his hand, was behind me and the other two positioned themselves on each side of me. The executioner waited only for the moment, after I had put the key in the lock and had straightened myself out, and in that moment he would have had an excellent chance to give me a tremendous hit with that weapon on the top of my head. I would have collapsed, may be there would have been another hit very fast, and there would not have been a chance to shout. That had to be a silent job. They only waited for me to straighten out, but that, fortunately, I did not do, and they did not have a chance to do it.

Since I had to have X-rays taken a few days later, I had to tell that X-ray man what had happened. He said at the end: "Dr. Mechner, I am proud of you, I admire you. I can not tell you how I admire you." I also told the story to another man, a patient, who lived far away in Coney Island, and he told me that these people had a special tool to hit people, a piece of lead, which plumbers use. It is about $3/4$ of an inch wide and half an inch thick and it can be bent, it never breaks, and it is very heavy and quite long. There are sticks, which are up

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to two feet long, and that this is usually the weapon that these people use. It can break a skull, he told me. It is a very heavy blow. So, that is a detail, which is of importance.

I know for sure that they did not want a hold-up, because they were afraid that I would have shouted. It had to be a silent job, they had to hit me hard, right from the beginning. I would have fallen down, would have been lying next to the car, between the car and the garage door, where I could not have been seen from the street. There were other cars, there was the hedge, I would have been lying there all night. These bandits would have later walked away, would have moved out of that area and nobody would ever have found out who the murderers were. Hedy would not have missed me, of course, she was sleeping, she would have found out the next morning that I was not in the house. May be, by that time, somebody would have found me lying there next to the car. This ^{is} one of the details that I wanted to tell you.

A few days have now passed, since I spoke the last time. I have been thinking about this case all the time. I go to bed and try to analyze the case, and when I get up, it is again the same thing; I can not get rid of thoughts about the attack. There are a few things that I can not understand. For instance: Why did these people need 3 people to carry out this job? They had such a strong weapon, this piece of lead, which would have knocked me out immediately, why did they need 3 people?

They had planned it very well, it was really a masterplan for killing. When I bent down to put the key into the lock, they all three were there, had jumped to their positions with great speed. What really saved me, was the following: I often put the key into the hole very fast, but sometimes I don't put it in the right way,

sometimes the key does not go into the hole right away, I have to move it a little bit. Sometimes I make a mistake and put the key the wrong way in, with the side of the key which has the teeth down instead of up. Anyway, it took me a little longer in this case to put the key in the hole and that gave me time to see the shoes and feet of these three men.

But I still am amazed that I acted the way I did. I am not a boxer and I don't remember for the last 60 years of my life to have hit somebody with my fist in the face. During the First World War, I had to make often fast decisions, when I was in the frontline. I was in the trenches on the Russian front and on the Italian front and there were very often serious situations, when I had to make very fast decisions.

But here, in that moment, when I saw these three people, I knew that that was my end. I knew that I was to die in the next two seconds, and that I had to do something very drastic. And that is why I used my fist and turned around without straightening out. Out of my bent position, from below, I gave that man, without seeing him, that very strong blow. I just guessed that it was the right direction, and I struck his face and shouted at the same time. I was lucky that the man who was on my right side, ran away and thereby made the way for me free, so that I could get out of the trap, first running behind him and then out into the street. But the man with the weapon in his hand ran after me and had, since I was running, not a very good chance for a strong blow, especially since I was running away from him fast and that diminished the force of the hit.

I am talking today again, it is 6 weeks after it happened.

It was on January 19th and today is March 14th. It is my birthday. Am I not lucky? Instead of people coming to my funeral in January, they will come the day after tomorrow, on Sunday, to celebrate my 78th birthday. I am really happy.

I have to add a few things to my story. This was not the whole story, which I have told till now. Today is June the 7th, 1975. I wanted to continue and add some more details to the story, another facet. In the meantime, I had a heart attack, as already mentioned, on March 29th. I had entered the hospital on the 31st of March, and it was a real coronary thrombosis. I was 6 days in intensive care and altogether 3 weeks in the hospital. I recuperated nicely. When I got out of the hospital, I was invited by Johanna and Marvin to their home and stayed there for another 2 weeks. Altogether, I was away from Brooklyn for 5 weeks.

When I came to Brooklyn, I did not want to practice right away, but I took in a few patients. It was the 7th of May and I decided then (Marvin gave me the advice) to start working, but on a limited basis. I should take patients only for 2 hours a day, and only by appointment and I followed his advice and it was really good. In the beginning there were only a few patients, but very soon I had my schedule filled. I usually was seeing then 12-14 patients, sometimes more. I worked rather fast and it did not do me any harm. I feel every day better, I feel stronger. Now I have fully recuperated, I feel just the same as before I had the heart attack, and I work without getting tired in the afternoon.

I wanted to continue my story, add another facet as I said. I didn't tell the whole thing, I didn't know what had really happened until somebody told me. I had a man in my office and I

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told him what had happened to me and after I had finished he said: "Doctor, you did not tell me the whole story, you don't know what had happened. You told me that these men wanted to kill you. Sure, yes, that is true, also that they would have taken your money and your watch. You are not realizing that they had much bigger plans than that. They wanted the keys to your house. Didn't you think of that? They would have taken the keys of your house. They knew that your wife was alone in the house and that you have the keys in your pocket. They would have gone into your house.

So, that really opened my eyes now, and I realize that they had much bigger plans. They would have gone into the house. Hedy was in bed already. They would have entered. Nobody would have seen them. And they would have gone upstairs to Hedy's bedroom and you can imagine the shock she would have had. Shock is not the right word. They would have demanded from her to get out of the bed, to give them all the money she had, they would have demanded her jewelry, and she had a big jewelry box there at that time in the bedroom. She has a safe downstairs and she has a few very valuable pieces there and she would have had to open the safe. I can not finish thinking what they would have done then. They would have killed her, I am certain, because she was a witness and they would have had to get rid of that witness.

So, that is the part of the story that I wanted to add here. How lucky we are that I had acted that way, that I hit them first, that I prevented all these tragic things.

It is understandable that this event had affected my health. That was not the last attack. About a month later, I had to fight off two young people, who had forced their way into my office, when I came home and opened the door to my office. Fortunately,

inside my office door was wide open and I could jump in and pull the door behind me. But one of them did not let me close the door completely and I had to pull hard on the door knob. It was a terrible strain and only when I suddenly opened the door and gave that fellow a kick with my foot in the groin, did he let go and they fled. That was probably more damaging to my heart than anything else. That I had from then on to keep in my coat pocket a heavy wrench and also one with a long handle in my car, which I took with me when I entered the car and when I left it, was also quite aggravating.

These were the conditions under which we had to live. And so it was obvious that I had to give up, when I had my heart attack, and that we had to get out of Brooklyn.