

THE BARBER WHO GAVE JOHN DILLINGER HIS LAST SHAVE & HAIRCUT

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I thought people might be interested in this story in view of the recent interest in the John Dillinger movie with Johnny Depp. I am now 80 years old and thought this information might be lost if I did not write it down. Read it and see whether or not you believe my dad gave "John Dillinger" his last shave and haircut and identified his body in the Cook County Morgue.

My dad Michael Schmidt III (The Barber) gave John Dillinger (Public Enemy #1) his last shave and haircut and identified his body at the Cook County Morgue. At the time of the John Dillinger killing by the FBI on Sunday evening July 22, 1934, I was nearly 5 years old. We lived on North Burling street in a basement flat which is in the Lincoln Park neighborhood. Burling street was near his barbershop and the Biograph Theatre where John Dillinger was shot.

This area has been updated considerably because of the expansion of De Paul University and it's nearness to downtown Chicago and Lincoln Park. It is

now a very exclusive, expensive and updated neighborhood with mainly young people. It looks similar to some of the updated parts of San Francisco where they attempt to keep the original architecture.



Figure 1. Dad and Mom in 1929.

My dad immigrated from Bencecu de Sus, Roumania in 1923, a village in Austro-Hungarian-Banat in Timiss County Romania. This village is 30 km from the city of Timischora, Romania where *Anna Sage (the Lady in Red)* was deported to by the FBI and arrived on May 14, 1936. At the age of 14 he became a barber in Romania. He spoke German, Romanian and Hungarian. In Chicago he learned English by reading the funny papers (comic strips) and speaking to his customers.

In Romania he extracted (pulled) teeth and said he bled people using a swinging razor blade that strapped to the wrist. At the time Barber's were considered professionals and highly respected in Romania because of these treatments. The red stripe on the old fashioned barber pole is for blood relating to this treatment. I myself had a tough time believing the bled portion of this statement because this remedy is so old.

He migrated to this country the year his father passed away in 1923 via the SS Manchuria ship, which according to the manifest departed from Hamburg, Germany. He boarded the ship in Portugal and paid for his passage by barbering.

My mother returned to the United States as an American Citizen in 1925 at the age of sixteen from the village of Blumenthal, Romania by reentering the US via Ellis Island. The village was 9 km from my dad's village. She worked as a maid and baby sitter for a banker family on the south side of Chicago. They were married in 1929.

Mom knew Anna Sage, who lived at 2420 North Halsted Street, and said: "She was her hair dresser". Anna's beauty parlor was located

at Fullerton and Orchard Streets. The FBI strictly indicates that she associated with the mob, was a madam and an illegal prostitute. It appeared that she had both an honest and illegal income when she lived on Halsted street. She died in Romania in 1947 with liver failure and was never able to set foot on US soil again.

Site Locations. My dad's barber shop (Figure 2) was located at 2366 N. Lincoln Avenue several shops down from the stone



Figure 2. Dad's barber shop on left.

laced building on the SW corner of Lincoln Avenue where Lincoln, Halsted and Fullerton intersect. It had cast iron posts on the front. He owned the shop from 1926 to 1951 for 25 years.

Klee Brothers clothier occupied the front of the two story stone laced building (Figures 3 and 4). The owner provided high quality suits

free of charge to the Chicago Cubs and then paid my dad to give them a free haircut and shave. I had Cub player signed baseballs.

Dad frequently had coffee and food directly across the street on Lincoln Avenue at The Seminary Restaurant. The Old Seminary School was located at the De Paul site. *John Dillinger was also known to eat at this restaurant after his face lift.* It was there at least until the 1970's. This white stone faced building is still standing (left hand side of Figure 4).

The front was occupied by a bank where my dad obtained his change and dollar bills in the morning. The Children's Memorial Hospital is located directly behind this site.

This corner is located ½ block from the Biograph Theater at 2433 North Lincoln Avenue (Figure 5) which is now designated a Chicago Landmark and is on the Registry of Historic Places.

Stories About Baseball From the Barbershop. The Hall of Fame pitcher *Grover Cleveland Alexander* frequently had shaves and haircuts at the barbershop. He was the winningest pitcher in National League history (3rd overall in baseball). When he returned

from WWI he had shell shock. My dad said: "The only time he



Figure 3. Lincoln Avenue side of stone laced building.



Figure 4. Across the street on the left is where *Seminary Restaurant* was located.



Figure 5. Biograph Theatre.



1. Home location 1934
2. Barber Shop
3. Anna Sage location
4. Biograph Theatre
5. Saint Valentines Day Massacre site
6. Home location 1929

Figure 6. Site locations. Oz Park was made in the 70's by leveling buildings.

could win a ball game was when he was drunk".

The man who rented the backroom of the barbershop for his printing press was at Cubs Park when *Babe Ruth* pointed to center field in the famous New York Yankees game. He sat in the bleachers where the big gamblers were and made a \$200 bet with the man next to him that the *Babe* would hit a home run to center field. He said: "All he could see was \$ cash register signs as the ball flew to the bleachers".

This was a lot of money during the depression. During hard times my mother worked at Elston Laundry

for 11 cents per hour which resulted in an income of about 220 dollars per year. A loaf of bread cost 11 cents. This led me to believe that he was printing counterfeit money on his press to meet his gambling expenses.

Dad and Mom Encounters. Dad gave fugitive Dillinger shaves and haircuts while the FBI was searching for him. There was a \$10,000 reward for information leading to Dillinger's capture. He talked about John Dillinger's scars, straightened dimple, and how he would come in for a hot towel shave. He said he rubbed his face to soothe the tightness. That felt very good to him. He was sometimes accompanied by Anna Sage's son Steve who was 23 at this time. Steve served honorably in the service during world war II.

Dad claimed that John Dillinger had his face lift from a pharmacist who was a doctor from Hungary that couldn't obtain his license in this country. His pharmacy was located near the corner of Lincoln, Halsted and Fullerton. The FBI states the name of the doctor that lifted Dillinger's face was Wilhein Loeser.

My dad's porter Bob, who was a black family man and very good

friend of the family, would shine his shoes. He was a World War I veteran. After the killing, people would come in and say how bad Dillinger was. Bob would respond by saying: "I don't care what they say, he was a great guy and great tipper".

My folks were returning the evening of the John Dillinger FBI killing (Sunday, July 22, 1934) from a weekend party with his German-Romanian friends at a cottage (Figure 7) located in Lake Como, Wisconsin on 427 Robin Road. It was called "Happy Hollow" where they had great times on week ends. They threw horseshoes, played pinochle and drank beer while the women mainly cooked. Some walked to the lake and fished. All families and children slept on old iron beds in the 2nd floor attic.



Figure 7. Becker cottage in Lake Como, Wisconsin.

We drove by the Biograph Theatre on the evening of the Dillinger killing. I was in the car with them but don't remember the incident. According to my folks, the place was completely lit up and everyone was very excited. My dad stopped the car and said: "What's going on". Spectators said that John Dillinger has just been killed in the alley by the FBI (Figure 8). He was pronounced dead upon arrival at Alexian Brothers hospital at 10:50 PM.



Figure 8. Alley where Dillinger was shot by FBI.

The next morning a detective who was canvassing the neighborhood for Dillinger information stopped by my dad's barber shop and asked if he recognized the individual in the picture. Dad said: "Yes, I've been giving him haircut's and shave's, who in the hell is he". The detective said: "It's John Dillinger, come with me, we want you to identify the body at the Cook

County Morgue”. This is where he was embalmed.

I think my dad had an inkling it was John Dillinger but didn’t want to admit to it. He was fearful of the gangs, didn’t want to get involved, and always said you can’t trust City Hall. He was driven in the detectives car to the morgue to identify the body.

At the morgue they rolled out his body to be identified on a slab. My



Figure 9. Building across the street from Biograph where FBI agents hung out.

dad first looked at his bare chest and identified him, and then said: "That's the man I've been shaving". They next rolled him over. My dad said: "You could tell he had been shot in the back because the bullet holes were much larger in front".

The next day an article in the Chicago Tribune stated John Dillinger had a neatly trimmed

mustache. That was the best compliment my dad could receive. John Dillinger was 31 years old and my dad was 32 at the time of the killing.

He also claimed a sightseeing bus occasionally stopped at the barber shop. The driver would say that’s Dillinger’s barber. He would then step to the window and give a big smile with razor in hand.

My dad was driven in a cop car to the see dead men at the Saint Valentine’s Day killing on Clark Street. The first year of my life we lived on Howe street which was two blocks from Burling Street further south (Figure 10). The three flat on Howe street was located near the 1929 Saint Valentine’s Day Killing location on 2122 North Clark Street.



Figure 10. Updated typical three flat building on Howe Street.

My dad was driven in a cop car to view the dead men at the 1929 Saint Valentines Day massacre site.

He happened to be getting coffee at the Seminary Restaurant (Figure 11) across the street from his barber shop and was walking out as a cop car stopped on the corner of Lincoln, Halsted and Fullerton for a stop sign. My dad said: "What's going on". The Cop who knew my dad said: "They were going to the



Figure 11. Seminary Restaurant was located in this building on Lincoln Avenue across the Street from the Barber Shop.

killing on Clark Street, hop on the running board". This occurred because my dad had cop friends and gave them free haircuts during the depression.

We lived in the basement flat of a Howe apartment (Figure 10). It was an odd coincidence that the man in

the 3rd floor flat was in charge of the Clark Street garage where the Valentine killing occurred. The Capone mob hung out here. He was called "Babe" and was very tall, fat and heavy.

Other Interesting and Humorous Events

I include these stories because 1) I think they are humorous, 2) they express the frantic mood of people who lived in Lincoln Park area during the early gangster depression years and 3) because of the impact the Dillinger tale had on my life in latter years.

The Apparent Shooting of My Mother on Howe Street. My mother recalled a funny incident when she was feeding me in the kitchen. As she sat there she thought she heard a shot and felt liquid running down her back which she thought was blood. She thought she had been shot. What really happened was my folks had made homemade beer (bootleg style) and the bottle exploded. She was over sensitized because of the Valentine Day killings. Capone and other gangs hung out in the neighborhood. This reflected the frantic mood of people in the Lincoln Park area during this era.

My Dad's 1st Cousin Encounter with a Gangster. My dad's 1st cousin Margaret (Schmidt) Schaefer lived in the Orchard - Burling street vicinity during the depression years of the early 30's were everyone was becoming suspicious of the criminal gangs. She was about five feet tall, very heavy, fat and strong. In her home she had a boarder who lived in one of her bedroom's to help make ends meet. She was somewhat suspicious of him because he would come and go at odd hours and she thought he might be a member of a criminal gang.

One day she noted that when she was cleaning and he was gone, that the lid was ajar in his bedroom ceiling which opened to a small storage area above. Being curious, she climbed a wobbly five foot ladder to see why it was open. Upon reaching near the top she saw a sub-machine gun. She became extremely nervous. The wobbly ladder gave way as she reached up and left her dangling back and forth from the ceiling. Being heavy and short she dropped with a loud plop on the bed as it collapsed. She heard her boarder open the front door She began to frantically make the bed. She somehow closed the lid back in the ceiling before he entered. She had a

tough time sleeping that evening. Several day's latter she asked him to leave.

Acceptance By My Wife's Father. When I first courted my wife Nancy Jane (Corcoran) Schmidt, I would pick her up at her house in Wilmette, Illinois. This was the fall of 1956. It was love at first sight. As we became more and more serious I told her about my dad's John Dillinger story.

She thought the story was fishy, contacted the New Grier library in Chicago and said she wanted information about stories of John Dillinger. While she was out of the house her father received a phone call from the library saying that they have the article about "*John Dillinger's Bullet Ridden Body*". At this point he became suspicious of my background since my complexion was oriented toward the Italian Sicilian Mafia types. That evening, when I arrived to pick up Nancy to go on a date, he was rather quiet, and looked at me in a suspicious manner. It took several days before he began to speak normally with me.

I was glad I finally passed muster and was allowed to be a good suitor. In those day's parents had a great deal of influence on who their

daughter was going to marry. We have been happily married for 52 years

PURDUE 50th Anniversary Comradeship. At the 50th anniversary in 2001 of my graduation from Purdue University at West Lafayette, Indiana my wife and I sat at a table with eight people who we had never known or met before. To break the ice one of the individuals, who was a mechanical engineering alumni, said: "He was the son of John Dillinger's Photographer". He told his story and I told mine. This broke the ice. Every one then began recalling their stories. One person was from Indianapolis and talked about his grave. We had such a wonderful time and found we all had a lot in common.

The engineer said he had a newspaper story showing the picture his father took with Dillinger's arm around the Sheriff at the Crown Point, Indiana jail in his mother's attic. He lived in Connecticut and mailed it to my home in California.

Breaking the Ice With My Boss. I worked for 35 years as an engineer with General Dynamics in the Aerospace business. I learned how to survive by developing a

specialty and unique ideas which I could sell not only to my own division but to other divisions within the corporation and to the government. During my later years with the corporation the contract funding became sizable and I would have my name on them which caused me to control the funding. As time went on my boss became rather dismayed because he wanted to have control of the funding. He happened to be from the East Coast and was from a Sicilian family. I could tell that we were on a collision course because of this. He invited me out to lunch and I thought this was it.

At the luncheon he said: "You know in my family when we make a deal we keep it". He sounded like Marlin Brando in the movie "On the Waterfront". Having the Chicago Dillinger background, I responded with: "I know, and I also know that if you don't keep the deal they throw you over the boat with concrete overshoes". He began to laugh hilariously. This broke the ice. I then said: "Do you know who I am, I am the son of John Dillinger's Barber". We both then laughed. From that day on we became the best of friends and got along fabulously. When I meet new people and I want to have fun I now introduce myself by saying:

“Did you know **I am the son of John Dillinger’s Barber**”. This is my legacy.

It is interesting to note that I, Michael Adam Schmidt IV, was born October 28, 1929 on Black Tuesday, the worst day of the stock market crash during the depression. My dad said: “That was the worst day of his life”. I don’t know if it was because of my being born or his having lost all his money in the stock market.