Frank Nathan, CLU® The Huebner-Hollywood Connection

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FAME AND FORTUNE ARE certainly no strangers to Hollywood. The swirl of entertainment and the world of movie production attracted countless hopefuls in search of meaningful careers. Stars rose and fell, legends were born, but not all of them revolved around the silver screen or the television screen. Frank Nathan, CLU®, became a blockbuster there and brought the level of professionalism in the insurance industry into sharper focus during his years in Beverly Hills.

Selling came naturally to Frank. He grew up at the side of his hard-working father, an honest and successful clothing retailer in West Virginia. When Frank enrolled in the Wharton School’s College of Business and Finance in 1922, he was planning a career in merchandising. He soon realized that to be successful, he needed to learn as much as he could about insurance, a product no merchant could afford to be without. For the next four years, he enrolled in every insurance course offered, including fire insurance, casualty insurance and life insurance. It became a sub-major of his business studies. His lucky star was a charismatic young professor who mesmerized his students with his dynamism and his knowledge. His name was Solomon Huebner, the “father of insurance” and founder of The American College of Life Underwriters.

Following his graduation from Wharton in 1926, Frank went into the investment business and was thriving as a securities salesman. Then came one financial market crash after another, followed by a lengthy bout with pneumonia for young Frank. By the time he was well enough to return to work, all his clients were either broke or they had, out of necessity, found another broker. In 1931, he steered away from the risky securities arena and focused on the insurance business. Insurance had a guaranteed return, and Frank wanted to sell a product that he felt good about, a product that would help people and not let them down.

Frank’s father did not feel so good about his son’s decision, and seemed disappointed that, with his prestigious Wharton education, Frank would choose to become an insurance salesman—a choice that for many was one of desperation after failure at another profession. Frank reassured his father, “I’m going to use all that education I had. It’s not going to be thrown away; I’m going to become a professional.” Just three months later, in the midst of the Depression, Frank made a big sale on a single premium annuity. He placed a check for $318,000 in front of his father, an amount larger than any his father had seen in his lifetime as a successful merchant. In the years that followed, Frank continued to educate his father and others on the noble profession in which he was involved.

When Frank first met his wife, Elinor, he had to convince her, too, about the professionalism of the insurance man. Frank took her to an insurance convention on their honeymoon, and she quickly realized what professionals they were and the amount of knowledge required to be successful. As she learned more about the insurance business, she became a strong advocate. Elinor had enjoyed a career of her own in the entertainment industry. For twenty years she was the voice of Ruby on the Amos and Andy radio show. Like Frank, she had a strong work ethic, a commitment to education and a desire to give back to society. As their family grew, she gave up her career in broadcasting and
became active in the Parent Teachers Association, the Beverly Hills Library and other community interests. She continued to offer encouragement to Frank and support his endeavors whole-heartedly, always at his side for annual conventions for the next four decades. Frank always did his best to live up to her high expectations and acknowledged the significant part she played in his success.

Since many in their Beverly Hills community were involved in the entertainment business, Frank made numerous contacts there. Among Frank’s more notable clients was actor Robert Young, known for his role as Jim Anderson on the popular TV series *Father Knows Best*. While the show was still in development, the writers had to decide on a suitable occupation for the fictional sitcom dad. He had to be intelligent and well-respected in his community, caring, friendly and approachable. His schedule had to be flexible enough to adapt to the changing demands of the script. His house and car were to reflect an air of financial success. He had to be someone like … his own insurance agent, Frank Nathan! So it was decided that Robert Young would portray Jim Anderson, an insurance agent, and Frank Nathan served as the prototype. Indirectly, Frank played a role in raising awareness of professionalism in the insurance industry among the TV-viewing American public.

During his 60-year career at New York Life, Frank broke record after record in sales, often toppling his own high scores. He made national headlines in 1963 when he sold a $7 million policy, the largest ever sold at the time. In 1974, he sold a $10 million policy on the life of a woman, setting another precedent. In his 80s, he sold a $12 million key man policy, breaking his own previous record. He claimed that he did not sell a product or a service, rather a solution to a client’s need. He believed strongly that an ongoing education was critical to his ability to identify and address those client needs. He saw himself as an educator first and a salesman second. He found that once he taught a potential client about insurance and what it could do for his specific situation, it was easy to make the sale. He took his CLU® pledge very seriously and always acted in the best interest of his clients. Another key to his success was excellent customer service. If you “smother the client with service” he believed, they will have no reason to consider anyone else for their financial planning needs. Of course, Frank Nathan had a wealth of knowledge and kept current with the dynamics of insurance, investments, taxes and estate planning, as well as how these factors might affect each client.

It was not star power that propelled Frank Nathan to the top. It was the power of a solid education combined with honesty, professionalism and plain old hard work. Frank Nathan carried the lessons he learned from Solomon Huebner forward throughout his distinguished career and beyond. Always willing to share his expertise, Frank Nathan wrote, lectured, mentored and offered guidance at every opportunity. Though Frank passed away on September 30, 2002, he continues to inspire as a shining example of a true professional and adds a sparkle of glamour to the insurance industry.

Special thanks to Marjorie Fletcher for her October 18, 1977, Oral History Interview with Frank Nathan, CLU and Elinor Nathan, conducted at The American College, and Tom O’Hanlon, author of *The Company You Keep: 150 Years with New York Life*, for their tremendous resources.

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-Frank Nathan