

ROOTS AND SPROUTS

A Baker and Smoler History

The scenes on this DVD were filmed by my father over a fifteen year period, commencing with my parents' (Jerry and Shirley) honeymoon cruise to Haiti and Cuba in 1938 and concluding with my bar mitzvah in 1953. The 1938 scenes were filmed in 8 mm black and white; everything thereafter was filmed in 16 mm. The filming in color commences with Baba and Zeda (literally, grandmother and grandfather) Nathanson, Rose's parents, reading a Yiddish newspaper. My own grandparents, Joe and Ida, and Maurice and Rose, appear in many scenes throughout the film.

The scenes of Abbey and Lenny were filmed in New York. The scene of Irwin and Sidney in uniform was presumably filmed in Rose's apartment. The beach scenes were filmed on Lake Michigan, at Michiana Shores, Indiana, near Chicago. These scenes involve members of both the Baker and Smoler families, sometimes together, as they were often guests at a small cottage my parents rented for several summers.

The Smoler Brothers picnic was filmed in Chicago. The factory inauguration was filmed in Herrin, Illinois, a severely depressed former coal-mining town in the southern part of the state.

The card playing male members of both families, including both Joe and Maurice, are playing pinochle and gin rummy, sometimes with each other. I originally thought that the dinner scenes were Passover Seders, but Anne points out that too many people are eating rolls and cake so perhaps they were birthday parties.

Sidney went off to war on the New York Central's Twentieth Century Limited, a train he boarded at the Englewood station on the south side of Chicago, which ran to New York via the Mohawk and Hudson River valleys; it was sleeker and faster than the Amtrak trains that currently serve the Chicago-New York run. The four engine Pan American Airways flying boat was filmed in Miami.

Wally in his naval officer's uniform, with his mother Ida, was filmed in Chicago (winter) and San Diego, with another scene that appears to be coastal San Francisco. Herb was filmed in Chicago and Michiana. Various people, including Sidney, Herb, Wally, Winnie, Gary, Andy, my parents, and me, were filmed near our apartment on the south side of Chicago.

The golfer at the Broadmore Hotel in Colorado Springs, in the white tee shirt and ski jump nose, is Bob Hope, a famous comedian and movie star who tirelessly entertained US military servicemen overseas during several wars and later hosted the televised movie Oscars show for many years. (His son was a classmate of mine in law school but I never met him.) I believe the second golfer is Bing Crosby, another Hollywood personality and singer who was Hope's longtime sidekick.

Some of these films were haphazardly spliced together (by me) as films. For many years they were stored in boxes and reels somewhere in the Smoler Brothers factory on Wabansia Avenue in Chicago, along with a Revere projector. Their last public showing as films was in Chip's apartment with Sidney narrating. That viewing ended rather abruptly when we noticed smoke rising from the projector. When the company wound up its affairs, the reels of film were shipped to me. I arranged them into a videotape that was put together (rather sloppily) by a kid in a video store here in Washington, who added the 1940's background music. To the extent that some scenes may be a bit out of chronological order, they can be thought of as flash backs and flash forwards. Some of you have seen the original videotape, some copies of which were distributed at that time and may still be extant.

The videotape was two hours long and heavily skewed towards my own immediate family. After Irwin's funeral last month, and after Herb's son David and his family viewed the full tape with us at Thanksgiving, I took it to a do-it-yourself video editing store in Rockville, MD, where I extracted approximately 40 minutes of footage of potentially broader interest to a variety of relatives. The store then converted that condensed version into digital and burned 30 DVD's from it, which I have now distributed to all of my cousins (and some other relatives) in the Baker and Smoler families.

We are all deeply indebted to Jerry for taking the time and effort to film this record of our families, and to preserve the films for posterity. Enjoy!

Barry Smoler
Washington, DC
December 1, 2005