

GROWING UP ASPEN

Adventures of the Unsupervised

WRITTEN BY:

ANDY COLLEN | CHRIS POMEROY
DEAN JACKSON | LO SEMPLE

TWIST AND TURN PRESS

GROWING UP ASPEN: ADVENTURES OF THE UNSUPERVISED

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Editing and book design by DesignWise Art

Published by Twist And Turn Press, LLC

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This book, Growing Up Aspen: Adventures of the Unsupervised is a memoir. Its stories are told from each author/contributor's current recollections of experiences that happened long ago when they were kids. Some names and characteristics may have been changed somewhat. Some events have been compressed, and much of the dialogue has been recreated.

PRINT ISBN 979-8-9878913-0-8

EBOOK ISBN 979-8-9878913-1-5

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INTRODUCTION

This collection of stories as told by four friends whose lives and experiences overlapped during Aspen's last-stand in the 70s–80s. Our stories come from the real heartbeat of what it was like growing up in Aspen. Funny how such a remote place could shape the lives of kids growing up in a world-class resort. Our parents gave us an amazing childhood, but they had no clue about what we witnessed or took part in—we were junior league spies under the influence of Aspen. This is a fresh, honest look at what went on “backstage” and how it shaped our young lives.

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FOREWARD:
GREG POSCHMAN

IT'S A REUNION OF SORTS ... FOR ALL.

Growing Up Aspen brings together 4 men who share fond memories of their childhoods in the place we love.

It is what happens when old pals get back together. The stories begin to flow ... the tales of misspent youth ... the unique taste of freedom experienced in the small mountain town—the compilation of memories is the next best thing to being here in the late 70s or mid 80s...

Try to imagine skitching on snow-covered streets, ascending the fire escapes to the rooftops, sitting at the feet of Nick and Maggie Dewolf, Patti and George Stranahan, Dr. Whit and Polly Whitcomb, Herbie and Marcie Balderson, or Sandy and Mary Lynn Munro, to name just a few. Roaming the old mine tunnels around Aspen, and hawking Bill Dunaway's Aspen Times... These stories will take you there and make you feel a part of something magical. This book and these writers give us confirmation that Aspen is indeed heaven.

When I was a kid I heard old-timers talking about how they had the best of it ... the best snow, the best town, the best life, living free in our small town. My dad and his buddies claimed they'd had the best of it in the 1950s until it "went to hell" in the late 1960s. Or maybe later if they were a bit more open-minded.

The first I heard this sort of banter, it was related to me secondhand. I was told that in the quiet years of the 1920s and early 1930s, Mr. Tidwell owned the general store at the top of the mesa on Main and 4th streets in Aspen. He grubstaked the miners through the hard times and when they went bust, died, or gave up,

he ended up with their claims. In the mid-1930s the first skiers began to arrive. When Tidwell saw them he told his family “that’s it. This place has gone to hell—we are *out* of here!” And they decamped to the tiny ghost town of Crystal, Colorado. Apparently, his collection of acquired claims made up most of what was left of the town.

In due course, the first generation of powder skiers were upset when snow grooming equipment was introduced. And those same post-war locals from the 1950s were incensed when the Hippies upset their dreams of utopia by arriving in the late 1960s.

And it goes on and on ... I can’t help but think my AHS Class of 1977 had it best ... but then along comes this group of 4 miscreants from its Class of 1985-86 who make a similar, audacious claim.

The common sentiment seems to be that Aspen is going to hell, but I think every generation agrees that the rest of the world is going to hell faster. Our love for the Aspen we knew, grows stronger with each telling.

I still argue that we are “special” here in Aspen and the Roaring Fork Valley. This unique place has attracted eccentrics, including outcasts from Eastern society, the uncomfortably wealthy, the ski bums, the intellectuals, and artists, and to some extent it still does. Our remoteness, or what is left of it in this age of accessibility, is considered to be an advantage. Those who make the herculean effort and expense of moving here, have something special going—they don’t settle for less, they avoid mediocrity, and in the best circumstances, they become passionately committed to our town. I think they may also be truly hypoxic ... we live at 8,000' and the lack of oxygen in our air tends to make one a bit high, or at least a bit irrational, which can explain our love of beauty and the passion we exhibit for political intrigue and interminable arguments. Of course, extended periods of hypoxia do permanent damage to the brain ... and it’s perhaps no coincidence that the longer one lives here, the more special one feels. This could explain our unusual sense of pride, entitlement, and ownership.

The stories in *Growing Up Aspen* will take you back to a time and place that no longer exists. Arguably the best of times and I can’t disagree. In indulging in the book, I find myself back in our

old Aspen on silly, foolhardy, daring adventures that would make any young Aspenite proud ... and make the more mature survivors weep with joyful sadness.

Some of these kids went to the Aspen Community School where they were taught to think independently, to create, and to become remarkable adults. They had the tutelage of some of Aspen's great characters—eccentrics and geniuses who became their mentors and North Stars.

I am grateful for the work that Andy, Chris, Dean, and Lo have done in these pages to preserve their memories of growing up in our town. Other generations have done it, and more will do it ... each claiming that they had the best times in Aspen... And they'll be right.

Buy the book, and share the memories of Growing Up Aspen.

ABOUT GREG POSCHMAN

Colorado's Pitkin County Commissioner of District 3



Greg was born and raised in Aspen. He graduated from Aspen High School and earned his Civil Engineering degree from the University of Colorado, minoring in business and filmmaking. Greg is a familiar face around the town of Aspen and knows the community well, having made many biographies and documentaries about local individuals and non-profits, including The

Aspen Institute, Music Festival, Challenge Aspen, and the Aspen Hall of Fame.

For his directing and camerawork, Greg won three National Emmy Awards for Camera/Cinematography and Best Direction, as well as a Gold Apple Award, two Cindy awards, ACE nomination, 1998 Fellow. Colorado Council on the Arts.

Greg's father, Harry Poschman, helped construct the first chairlift in 1946 and was in the 10th Mountain Division. He taught skiing to the troops at Camp Hale, Colorado, then fought in the major battles in the Italian Alps. Greg's mother, Jony, still lives in the valley and was an avid skier, journalist, and artist. Greg's parents started a ski lodge and his father was the sole operator of the Aspen Chamber of Commerce in the early 1950s, tasked with promoting our then-unknown ski resort.

Greg lives with his wife Maureen and twin daughters, who attend Aspen High School. He hopes his children and their friends will grow up having the incredible healthy environment and opportunities his childhood in Aspen offered.



CONTRIBUTOR:
ANDY COLLEN

ANDY CUT HIS ENTREPRENEURIAL teeth at the age of 16 by becoming Burton Snowboard's first Aspen distributor. After his college years, he discovered a culture of independent animators in Portland, Oregon, and moved there, working at Teknifilm, the local 35mm film processing lab while connecting with the local artists and studios. He freelanced for Will Vinton Studios (*Claymation, California Raisins, The PJs*), Blashfield Studio (Photo cut-out, MTV music videos), and mentored with Tom Arndt of Merlin's Hammer.

Andy met Amy Blumenstein while producing *It's About Peace*, a collaborative short film that Amy and many other local artists contributed animated scenes to. Andy and Amy soon married (at the Portland Zoo) and started their boutique studio, Happy Trails Animation. Ever the innovator, after several "nose to the grindstone" years of producing and directing commercial animation for ad agencies, Andy developed a distinct, low-cost, high-production value approach to generating Motion Comics and Motion Posters. This creative venture resulted in a stretch of work for Disney (*Tron, The Muppets*), Starz Entertainment (*Spartacus, The Crazies*), and BBC Worldwide (*Doctor Who, Torchwood*).

Andy continues to explore and innovate through digital storytelling. He finds writing truthful tales about his childhood, perspective, and work to be a total blast.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my mom, dad, and bro.

And for my nieces, nephews, and cousins!

*I would also like to acknowledge my brother-in-law
Bruce Blumenstein (Big Brother) who on many hikes
in the Oregon Cascades enjoyed sharing stories
of our childhood adventures. I learned that
sharing stories can bring us all together.*

*And this book is a big thanks to the town
that shaped who I am.*

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Whenever I'm asked, "Hey Andy, what was it like growing up in Aspen?" it's like being handed a whole roll of quarters—it's always fun to share my collection of "Aspen's Greatest Hits" with folks. Aspen in the 70s was truly outstanding. It's easy to recount all the good times, but, as with most things, there's a flip side. It's hard to have experienced such an integral place as a kid and see it change so dramatically.



Nick DeWolf's
digital/organic
fountain
©Melanie Malone
Love

WHEN IT COMES TO THE TOPIC of Aspen, we locals usually talk about new Aspen and old, comparing which one's better. Well, since I'm always interested in digital organic experiences, I wanted to create one for *Growing Up Aspen* and play with presenting a past and future experience. Like a portal, this creative merging of ideas with technology was first presented to me by Aspen's dancing fountain—a cutting-edge, experiential water feature downtown, designed by Nick DeWolf who showed me the magic of connecting art and technology.

In *Growing Up Aspen*, I reflect on the Aspen childhood that made me who I am today. My words on paper are the organic method of storytelling. The QR codes that follow are links to digital images and movie clips which, when scanned by your smartphone's camera and digital devices, turn them into a time-traveling tardis for captured emotions and moments of a time gone by. The QR Codes become Easter eggs for an *experiential* style of storytelling.

MY MOM'S BOOK, "Storm of the i: An Artobiography" was my inspiration for producing *Growing Up Aspen*. Here's a QR link to her book if you'd like to check it out; you know what they say about the "apple and the tree."



*Storm of the i:
An Artobiography
by Tina Collen
(website).*

SO LONG BEACH BOYS, HELLO JOHN DENVER AND THE NITTY GRITTY DIRT BAND

Moving from the surf-side streets of California to the Rockies of Colorado as a boy immersed me in events and adventures I could never have imagined. And I soon found out that Aspen was in the midst of change. Aspen back then had a great, supportive, supply and service dynamic with its tourist industry. The locals cherished their off-season like most sports fans relish the Super Bowl. Half the town would close down except for those places frequented by the local community.

Even though Aspen was the playground for the rich and famous, it was the mountains and the Norman Rockwell pool-hopping locals that gave Aspen its true color and unique spirit.

Aspen had its famous tourists, but it also had some local stars like Jack Nicholson, John Denver, George Hamilton, Jimmy Buffet, and later on, Kurt Russell and Goldie Hawn. Heck, Aspen was even home to Dionne Warwick for two years, back in the day.

In the 70s, true locals managed to hold the line between play and fun with respect for the valley and the land itself. The first Chart House, with its famous bottomless salads and locally sourced culinary creations started in Aspen before branching out as a chain. Locals created environmental centers like Windstar and equitable non-profits like the Aspen Institute. While it is now a private think tank for international groups, institutes like these used to go out of their way to include locals and were designed to unite local and international mindsets. Now Aspen attracts the 1%.

I've collected a group of stories from three friends I grew up with, the idea being to share how our stories played out, what it was like to be a local kid back in the day, and how the local-tourist relationships worked. We grew up during a time when an Aspen grocery clerk might've been your neighbor. Now there's no chance a clerk could afford a house anywhere in Aspen. Times are always changing, but I'd like folks to know what made Aspen so special to us.

BEFORE ASPEN

IT WAS THE SUMMER OF 1976 in Southern California—Los Angeles, to be exact. I was eleven, my brother Mark was nine, and my mom was designing and manufacturing fashion jewelry in a small office on Hollywood Blvd. The Century City law firm my dad worked for just settled a big case, which meant we had an opportunity to change our lives. My parents sat us down and talked about all our options, with “Option A” being Aspen so we could leave the big city and do the rest of our growing up in the great outdoors. Not saying we hadn’t had a few outdoor adventures in California, but Aspen, Colorado, was, at that time a much smaller, more grounded community.

My last summer camp experience in the Malibu Hills of California was unforgettable. Cottontail Ranch was a rustic place away from everything, just like the kids’ camp in the movie *Meatballs* with all kinds of crafts, mini-bikes, horses, and a great big catfish pond for fishing. As is typical of California summer camps, there were plenty of teenage counselors. I have a crystal clear memory of riding in a VW van with them, cruising down the Pacific Coast Hwy. No seats in the back—just shag carpet on the van’s floor with camp kids piled in and the sun dropping down with a nice orange glow. The windows were wide open and the salty sea air blew over me as I munched my quintessential PBnJ—you know—where the jelly and peanut butter has fused with the bread molecules from sitting in its brown paper bag for the better part of a day in a hot van, while we tried our hand at surfing and swallowing sand.

The Beach Boys “Surfer Girl” played on the radio, followed by Seals & Crofts “Summer Breeze.” I had no idea what our new life in Aspen would be like, but my 11-year-old brain believed it’d be like *The Wilderness Family* movie I’d seen last Christmas—a great adventure.



The Wilderness Family movie trailer (1 min).
©Lionsgate Entertainment Company

Every time I see the movie *Grease* I get a flashback of learning to ride my Schwinn Scrambler around Venice High where that movie was filmed.

I was one of those kids attending the very first west coast Montessori School in Santa Monica (now it’s the Sony building). Some of my fellow students were children of famous people, like Jennifer who had Cary Grant for a dad and Matthew who was the son of Robert Altman.



A scene with Venice High School in *Grease* (1 min).
©Paramount Pictures

So much of our life back then was about getting out to the beach— it was hard to imagine what it would be like being landlocked. My old neighborhood would later become part of a crazy skateboard culture called Dogtown while my brother Mark and I kicked our heels in the high altitude of one of the best ski towns in America.

EARLY DAYS OF ASPEN

MY POPS HAD LINED THINGS UP so Mark and I would arrive in Aspen just ahead of the tryouts for Little League, believing baseball would be the best way for us to get connected with the local kids. Trick was, we'd need to be able to play right away if we were going to make it on the team. Us "city boys" were about to get acclimated to the mountain way.

While our parents drove a moving truck full of all our belongings to Colorado, my brother and I stayed with our grandparents to finish out our last days of school.

Grandma Sonny was a stout, no-nonsense Jewish woman whose love was so intense, I swear my ribs are still recovering from her hugs. Grandpa Saul had a soft spot for us as well, of course, but Grandma's love was formidable. She never hesitated to take care of us. She took us and our two cousins to Disneyland twice a year without fail. We were a carload of noisy, wound-up Grandkids but she *still* got us on the rides we wanted and stuffed us with ice cream.

Grandma could not have been happy about our moving away but when the time came, she did usher Mark and I across the tarmac to the boarding stairs of the plane. It was early June of 1977 when we waved goodbye, buckled up, and flew off to our new life in Aspen, Colorado. No turning back.

My parents met us at the Grand Junction Airport and together we made the last leg of our journey seated four across in the big moving truck. Warm mesa fruit valleys changed to rugged red hills as we went up through Glenwood Canyon through dramatic

surroundings, unlike anything Los Angeles had to offer. Our ears popped as we climbed in elevation. It was like heading into the alpine heights of Heidi country.

In Glenwood Springs, Colorado, we stopped at a car dealership. While our parents picked out our new family car, Mark and I got a crash course about Glenwood's history from the rack of travel brochures. Before the miners came, the valley belonged to the Ute Indians and Aspen was originally called Ute City. Glenwood is famous for its hot springs. Doc Holiday is buried in Glenwood—he was battling tuberculosis and the hot springs were thought to be medicinal. Later I went to so many birthday parties there, Glenwood Hot Springs was like a steamy second home to me.

After an hour or so we were back on the road. Our new family vehicle was nothing like the L.A. lawyer's car my pop usually drove. Our new car was a big Chevy Blazer, a mountain vehicle with beefy tires and loads of wheel well clearance which was typical of Aspen at that time.

Before putting down "roots" we'd had a choice between Sonny & Cher's old house, or Peter Brinkman's duplex which was off Cemetery Lane by the Aspen golf course, right on the 5th tee.



The Brinkman duplex by the golf course (image).

To integrate ourselves into our new town, we went for the local footprint. Peter had built the duplex. He was a local contractor during the summer and a ski instructor in the winter. His wife, Dede, was an advertising producer and actually produced a few TV commercials in Aspen with local casting. (I graduated with their daughter, Missy, who now owns Publik Coffee in Salt Lake City, Utah.)



What's Missy up to now? (website)

At this point, Aspen's golf course was only 9 holes. The Brinkman duplex had a magnificent view of Pyramid Peak, picture framed by the slopes of Buttermilk and Highlands. This house turned out to be the right move.

In L.A. we'd lived up Laurel Canyon in the Hollywood Hills where we watched a murky layer of pollution rise and fall each day. In Aspen, we were 8000' above sea level in the expansive Rocky Mountains with a bright blue sky

and fresh mountain air. Several times double rainbows stretched across the sky, from the Brinkman house to the mountains. During the day we watched bright white thunderheads roll in and around Highlands Mountain, Pyramid Peak, and Buttermilk Mountain. At night, the sky was absolutely pitch black and filled to the brim with a crystal-clear Milky Way so dense it looked like a cloud made up of a billion stars.



"Rocky Mountain High" by John Denver (4-1/2 minute audio)
©RCA Records

In another month, just after we arrived, the sweet smell of cottonwood permeated the valley floor. All that cottonwood fluff would fill the air and pile up in drifts like snow. We called it our second snow season. A daily rain spell came and went like clockwork around three in the afternoon. Clouds would accumulate, lighten their load, and move on.

Our first induction as Aspenites happened on the second night. It was after midnight. Pop, my brother, and I were sleeping while my mom, a night owl, went on a tear to unpack so we could stop living out of boxes as soon as possible. As the story goes, she was organizing the pantry when she heard rustling sounds coming from the garage. She figured it was deer or raccoons roaming around—no big deal.

About 20 minutes later my mom was startled by a deliberate RAP-RAP-RAP! of knuckles hitting our front door followed by a woman's commanding voice. "It's the Aspen Police!" My mom opened the front door and was immediately greeted by two of Aspen's Finest and their vehicle's flashing lights.

A female officer spoke straight to the business at hand. "Ma'am, a serial killer, Ted Bundy, escaped the county courthouse. We believe he went through your garage—we *know* he stole your neighbor's car."

My mom was stunned.

"Good thing you locked your car," said the officer, lowering her flashlight. "And it's a good thing Ted was in a hurry, you're just his type. Long, dark hair that's parted in the middle."

For two whole weeks, our community traveled around in packs while Ted was on the loose. We thought we'd left that kind

of Charles Manson craziness in Los Angeles. (In years to come I'd find Aspen had its own level of crazy. And us kids? We'd see it all—backstage style.)

Ted was a sadistic psychopath—a cold-hearted killer accused of many murders in Washington, Idaho, and Oregon, but it was physical evidence from the murder he'd committed in Snowmass/Aspen that brought him down. Colorado was the first to have a solid case against him. This trial was supposed to get him locked up so they could bring the other cases out of the cold.



"Ted Bundy tales come out of the woodwork" ©The Aspen Times



The Aspen Courthouse (courthouse history website)



"Bundy's escape forever a part of Garfield County history" news article. ©The Aspen Times

The craziest part about the Ted Bundy experience was that half the town said they thought he was a clean-cut preppie dude. Many were duped until he escaped by jumping out of the second-story courthouse library window, injuring his ankle. Word was, he limped up Aspen Mountain and hid on Shadow Mountain until dark, then ran across the golf course, rifled through our garage, and took off in our neighbor's classic Cadillac. Eventually, his ankle injury hindered his driving and the police stopped him, thinking they had a drunk driver on their hands.

Ted could charm almost anyone including reporters, law officers, flight attendants, and people at the courthouse. There are stories about him referring to his leap from the courthouse as "The Great Escape," later telling a reporter he enjoyed reading an account of it (*The Aspen Times*, March 27, 2019).

During the thick of all this activity, my pops had us breaking in our new baseball mitts. It was time to start training—no time to waste worrying about Ted Bundy.

Since there was a little baseball field and basketball court for the neighborhood right next to our house, Mark, my pops, and I would put in a few hours of practice each day and spend the rest of the time unpacking and settling in.