

# ADOPTING LIBERTY

THE STEPHAN KINSELLA STORY



ALAN D. BERGMAN

# **ADOPTING LIBERTY**

## *The Stephan Kinsella Story*

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Alan D. Bergman



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*Stephan dedicates this book to  
Patsy and Norman Kinsella  
and Gail Doiron*



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## Adopting Liberty

# FOREWORD

I'VE PUBLISHED A GREAT DEAL in the last few decades—books on law proper and libertarian and legal theory, scholarly articles in journals, and so on. If you asked me, I might at first say that I prefer to write about law and intellectual topics and not about myself.

But this is not quite true. On occasion I have found it appropriate to discuss my life, my personal views; my history and experience in my career, in America, in the world over the last few decades, and in the intellectual libertarian movement. This has often been in response to questions from interviewers or younger libertarians.<sup>1</sup>

As the following pages will detail, I've been fortunate to have lived a happy, successful and interesting life. As I am approaching 60, I find some people are occasionally interested in my story and views. So, when my financial advisers, Scott Tiras and Crystal Garrett of Tiras Wealth Management offered to have Alan Bergman prepare a short biography for me, I thought, why not? I can leave the writing to someone else for a change.

This biography covers my history, family, childhood, education, career, marriage, and more. In addition, given the important role libertarianism has played in my life, I also made a point to discuss, if only fairly briefly, some of my history and

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, “How I Became A Libertarian” and “On the Logic of Libertarianism and Why Intellectual Property Doesn’t Exist,” both in my book *Legal Foundations of a Free Society* (Houston, Texas: Papinian Press, 2023; [www.stephankinsella.com/lffs](http://www.stephankinsella.com/lffs)) and other interviews and articles collected at [www.stephankinsella.com/publications](http://www.stephankinsella.com/publications).

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experience in libertarianism that some may find of interest as well. In this, I was inspired in part by a recent book by libertarian law professor Randy Barnett, *A Life for Liberty: The Making of an American Originalist* (2024), which is an interesting blend of memoir and discussion of his career and legal and libertarian views and work.

Alan extracted many details from me as well as many close family, friends, and colleagues and has done an excellent job putting all this together. I hope my family and posterity, and any others out there who happen to be interested in my work, will enjoy and profit from this more personal slice of my life.

Stephan Kinsella  
Houston, Texas  
March, 2025

## FOREWORD—UNCUT

Note: Below is my original Foreword, which I redacted and simplified at Alan's suggestion, to avoid anticipating or "spoiling" details recounted in the text. However, as it includes some thoughts not ultimately included in the final book, I have decided to include it here. —SK

I'VE PUBLISHED A GREAT DEAL in the last few decades—books on law proper and libertarian and legal theory, scholarly articles in journals, and so on. If you asked me, I might at first say that I prefer to write about law and intellectual topics and not about myself.

But this is not quite true. On occasion I have found it appropriate to discuss my life, my personal views; my history and experience in my career, in America, in the world over the last few decades, and in the intellectual libertarian movement. This has often been in response to questions from interviewers or younger libertarians.<sup>1</sup>

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This biography covers my history, family, childhood, education, career, marriage, and more. In addition, given the important role libertarianism has played in my life, I also made a point to discuss, if only fairly briefly, some of my history and experience in libertarianism that some may find of interest as well. In this, I was inspired in part by a recent book by libertarian law professor Randy Barnett, *A Life for Liberty: The Making of an American Originalist* (2024), which is an interesting blend of memoir and discussion of his career and legal and libertarian views and work.



It is only in recent years that I have begun to look back on, to reflect on, and to see a picture of how my life developed. When I was young I was experiencing so much change and growth and adapting to each new thing that came along, trying to keep moving forward, developing, and progressing. Now I have more perspective on my life and foundations and with this comes a greater awareness of the arc of my life, and hopefully some wisdom. There is a reason younger people are sometimes interested in what their elders have to say.

My story may seem boring to some, as it is prosaic and “normal” in many ways—nothing really special, nothing “great,” other than some modest successes and flourishing. For me, this is good enough, and it’s probably more than most people are fortunate enough to achieve. Before diving into Alan’s text, a few personal ruminations and observations.

I have always been happy and optimistic, and have tried to appreciate how fortunate I have been—to have been born at the time I was, in America, in modern times (it seems like modern times to me, though of course this is a bit

myopic), with health, and to wonderful parents. As I wrote in the Acknowledgments to my 2023 book on libertarian theory, “I am grateful to my birth mother, Gail Doiron McGehee, for blessing me with my adoptive parents; to my mom for taking me to the library as much as I wanted; to my dad for driving me to school so far away in another parish for so many years; and to Mrs. Reinhardt, a librarian at Catholic High School in Baton Rouge, for recommending that I read *The Fountainhead*.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, I am glad I was adopted and very grateful to Gail, even though it was hard on her, as the pages below recount.

I had a happy childhood, and have always felt confident that I could do whatever I set my mind to. Although I was initially small and a late bloomer, and did have some occasional problems with bullies, I loved school and my childhood. I am so glad my parents put me in St. George and later Catholic High, even though the commute was difficult for both me and my dad, and it was more expensive than the local public schools. I excelled in school which gave me confidence and laid foundations that have permeated my life.

I was very fortunate also to meet and marry my wife, Cindy DeLaney. I do not know how it happened that we found each other; I think we may have each found the only other person in the State of Louisiana who was the right fit for each other. Because I was used to succeeding and good things happening to me for all my life, I perhaps took for granted, for many years, decades even, how fortunate I was to find and marry her, to build careers, life, and family together. But over the years I am more and more surprised at how well it worked out and how much I simply took all this for granted. I literally love and appreciate her and our life together more with every passing year.

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<sup>2</sup> Kinsella, *Legal Foundations of a Free Society*, pp. xxix–xxx.

Though I turned from engineering to law, I do not regret my initial path in engineering; it provided a good foundation that served me well in both my vocation—law—and in my avocation—my intellectual, libertarian, and scholarly interests.<sup>3</sup> I have sometimes wondered if I should have applied to Harvard or something more ambitious, for undergrad or law school, or become a theoretical physicist to try to solve thorny physics problems no one else seems to be able to solve. Or perhaps I should have specialized in international arbitration instead of patent law, or become a law professor. I don't know. But I really regret nothing, and doubt I have the mental firepower to really have become the world's greatest physicist. I'm confident and sometimes cocky, but not delusional. I think I chose the right fields that are just stimulating and difficult enough for me that I could excel at and also enjoy them and find them challenging and interesting—in my vocation, first in oil & gas law and then in intellectual property law as a practicing attorney; and, in my avocation, in writing and developing libertarian legal and political theory. Of course, it is the latter that is my greatest love and passion, although I do really love law itself, both the practice and the institution and legal theory, just as I loved engineering and math and science. I've always loved learning, and excelling at these things.

I also treasure the fact that I've developed so many different groups of friends and networks over the decades, from various phases and aspects of my life. There is my family, including also for forty years my wife and her family; and also including my birth family for the last thirty years, especially my sister Crystal and our brother Rusty. Then my

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<sup>3</sup> On career vs. calling, see Stephan Kinsella, "[Career Advice by North](https://stephankinsella.com/2009/08/career-advice-by-north/)," *StephanKinsella.com* (Aug. 2009; <https://stephankinsella.com/2009/08/career-advice-by-north/>); *idem*, "On the Logic of Libertarianism and Why Intellectual Property Doesn't Exist," text at n.2.

close childhood friends, such as John Caffarel and John Wax, and my high school teacher Brother Harold Harris. And then college friends, such as my former roommate Fernando Munoz and engineering friends like Ben Favrot and Chris LeBlanc and several others. And then there are legal friends, from my days in Houston and Philly, such as my late friend Lori Marlatt, Susan Stanton, Cory Fein, Jim Goolsby, and Leslie Ashby, from my days at Jackson Walker, and my old Jackson Walker bosses Lanny Yeates and Bill Norvell;<sup>4</sup> and from Philly, patent lawyer friends like Tony Diehl, Steve Mendelsohn, and Rob Rosenthal. From law school and grad school in London, friends such as LSU Law friends Paul Comeaux and Tony Tramontana and King's College London friends Danesh Sarooshi and Bas de Regt.

And finally, from my various interaction with the Mises Institute and other libertarian groups and circles, many close and some *very* close friends such as Hans-Hermann Hoppe, Guido Hülsmann, Jeff Tucker, Jack Criss, Doug French, Lee Iglody, Jeff Barr, Vijay Boyapati, Juan Carpio, Greg and Joy Morin, Carl and Karen Bowen, Gene Epstein, and countless others too numerous to name. (I would normally say I know I am omitting many people, but my purpose here is not to thank people or be comprehensive; many others are mentioned in the Acknowledgements to my 2023 book *Legal Foundations of a Free Society*.) All have profoundly and immeasurably enriched my life.

When I look back on the sweep of this, I'm astounded by it. It is an amazing blessing. I do not know whether it is somewhat strange or rare to have so many multiple, meaningful, yet disparate and separate friend circles like this, or whether it is common, but I certainly

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<sup>4</sup> I recently reconnected with Bill and recorded a discussion with him for my podcast, "[KOL454 | Interview with my Patent Mentor, Bill Norvell, about Patent Law and Our Days Together](#)," *Kinsella on Liberty Podcast* (March 10, 2025).



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value and appreciate mine. Maybe it just worked out that way.



Alan extracted many details from me as well as many close family, friends, and colleagues and has done an excellent job putting all this together. The following pages flesh out many of the history, events, and details that I alluded to above. I hope my family and posterity, and any others out there who happen to be interested in my work, will enjoy and profit from this more personal slice of my life.

Stephan Kinsella  
Houston, Texas  
December, 2024

## CHAPTER 1

### *Roots*

“They saw that I was bookish and smart and wanted me to attend a good school. It was the strategic choice my parents made for me. I was always a bit surprised that my brother and sister left St. George to attend the local public schools,” Stephan explained.

Having Stephan attend St. George Elementary was a bit of a logistical challenge for his parents, who drove him the roughly 15 miles back and forth between their home in Ascension Parish, Louisiana, and the Baton Rouge school each day.

Enrolling Stephan there also pushed the in-parish-only eligibility rules for attending St. George. Steph said, “My dad and other dads implored the priest, and he finally relented, saying, ‘Well, the school needs repainting,’ so all these dads from Ascension Parish agreed to sandblast and repaint the whole school on weekends, using their own and their employers’ equipment. They made a deal that allowed us into the school.” It was a laborious price of admission that sheds light on the lengths some parents would go to secure what they perceived to be the best educational opportunities for their children.

The alternative was to attend the local public and Catholic schools, a less than appealing option. This occurred around 1970 when busing and forced school integration began. Many questions were raised about the impact this would have on the schools in the Ascension Parish area as the community grappled with the implications of desegregation efforts.

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Stephan described himself as somewhat of an outsider at St. George and later at Catholic High School in Baton Rouge. He stated that this status was attributed not only to living beyond the school district area but also to his stature. “I was always small and short, but I was also strong. I was occasionally bullied, partly because I was small, and an outsider, but I would always fight back.”

Commuting for roughly half an hour each way negatively impacted Steph’s ability to form friendships with fellow students—and at home in Ascension Parish. “Most of the kids perhaps didn’t even know I was from another parish,” he said. “It’s just that I didn’t show up to events and parties and school functions as much as they did, so I was simply more absent.”

It prohibited his participation in athletics, too, like track and other school sports. Nevertheless, Stephan felt that he was far more stimulated academically than he would have been at the local schools. He was grateful for his parents’ dedication to, and effort in, securing him a presumably stronger education.

Steph’s father, Norman, said that as early as the third grade, he and Steph’s mother, Patsy, were made aware of just how intelligent their eldest child was. “We had asked Stephan’s elementary school principal and teacher about his IQ and they never replied with a number or definitive answer, except to say that it was extremely high,” Norman shared.

Expanding on Stephan’s school years, Norman said that the only trouble Steph ever caused in school had boredom as the root cause. “He sometimes distracted other kids just because he was looking for some sort of stimulation in the classroom. For the one semester we briefly put him in the local public school, the principal advised us to return him to private school because Steph needed more of an intellectual challenge.”

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In a bit of self-appraisal, Steph said he was looked at as “more geeky” than the other kids, probably because of his interest in philosophy and science and similar subjects. There were a few forays into trying the local schools, but they always proved to be a poor fit for Steph as he found himself way ahead of his classmates in the curriculum.

Commenting on this, Steph said, “Between being adopted, my size—I was a late-bloomer—not living within the school district, and bullying—I think this all combined to make me conscious of and opposed to injustice and maltreatment of the weak. I believe this made me receptive later on to individualist and libertarian ideas, like those of author and philosopher Ayn Rand.” Norman said that when Steph was bullied, he dealt with it himself rather than complaining to his parents.

Norman also talked about Steph’s wicked sense of humor and wry take on life. He said that although Steph was very small, he was tough—tough enough to play right in the middle of the defensive line as nose guard in eighth grade football. In one game late in the season, he guarded two Black players who each outweighed Steph by at least 35 lbs. He came home at game’s end telling Norman that he felt like the filling in an Oreo cookie. After another game, he came off the field somewhat bloodied and Norman asked him if he was alright. Steph’s reply: “I’m fine because I have them thinking that this is their blood.”

Norman mentioned that while in school, Steph was the recipient of the President’s Award for Physical Fitness, and theorized that this probably helped him with his self-esteem during his formative years. “Steph was tough physically and tough mentally, as well,” Norman said. Stephan recounted how he was proud, at the time, that he was the only boy in the class to receive this award.



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Patsy Vanette Kinsella and Norman Joseph Kinsella adopted Stephan in 1965 when he was about one-month old. Having given up on being able to conceive after a series of miscarriages, Stephan's adoption was followed by the adoption of two more children: Michael Kyle Kinsella, born in 1967, and Sheila Kaye Kinsella, born in 1970.

Patsy was born in 1940 in Galvez, Louisiana. Her parents were Violet "Pep" Ficklin Rodgers and Bill Rodgers. Of German origin, Patsy was a dedicated homemaker revered for her abilities in the kitchen. She worked first as a telephone operator (a bygone vocation) and later as a teaching assistant at St. Amant High School. She and Norman were strong supporters of the tennis program at St. Amant, and even opened their home court for students to practice on. Stephan painted a picture of his mom as a country girl, attractive and sweet. She and Norman married in 1960 and lived in Ascension Parish, Louisiana, and a few other towns in Louisiana based on Norman's career.

Norman, like his wife, was also a Louisiana native. Born in New Orleans in 1938, Norman's mother, Theda Cason Kinsella, was part Cherokee, and his father, Peter Joseph Kinsella, was of Irish origin. (Norman and his father's middle name, Joseph, was chosen for Stephan and Cindy's son Ethan's middle name as well.) After graduating from Louisiana State University with a degree in Forestry, Norman found employment with the Louisiana Department of Transportation in the management of roadside vegetation. After retiring from that position, he also had several careers in related fields. Stephan described him as a gregarious soul with a big personality. He loved tennis, an affection he passed on to Steph. Norman also volunteered to give tennis lessons at his home court to the students at St. Amant.

On the religious front, Stephan said his mom was brought up as Protestant, while his father was born into the Catholic faith. It was

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somewhat unheard of, but not quite scandalous, in the early 1960s in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and surrounding areas for Catholics and Protestants to marry one another. Raised Catholic, Stephan was very sincere about his faith and even served as an altar boy. His family went to mass every Sunday and to confession ahead of time, and refused to take communion if mass had been missed until after there had been a confession.

He was fascinated by theology and philosophy and the discussions he had with his religious teachers at St. George and later Catholic High, such as his St. George religious teacher, Jim Owens. "I remember Mr. Owens in communion would not say 'Amen' when receiving the host, as is customary but would loudly and boldly say 'YES!' I loved Mr. Owens," Steph said. "Interestingly, even though Louisiana was conservative, and this was the 1970s, I was taught that evolution was real, that the Old Testament narratives could be viewed non-literally, and to value reason and philosophy. Mr. Owens would give us various fun theological problems, philosophical issues, and brain teasers. One involved a puzzle of a guy in some strange land needing to know whether it was safe to cross a bridge. All he knew was that there were two tribes, the Alphas and the Betas, and the Alphas always told the truth and the Betas always lied, and he finds a native by a bridge and can only ask him one question to determine whether it is safe to cross the bridge. So, the question he asks: 'If you were a member of the other tribe, and I asked you if this bridge was safe, what would your answer be?' Then you reverse it."

Stephan continued, "Another problem was whether there is a way for three cities to connect to three other cities without roads crossing. Everyone in the class tried but could not find a way and concluded that it was impossible; Mr. Owens said, 'But can you prove it's impossible?' Of course no one could."

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This was perhaps seventh or eighth grade. But that stayed with Stephan. Around 12 years later, when he was in grad school for his MSEE degree, which he was taking during his second year of law school, he took a graduate level math course in graph theory and realized he could finally rigorously prove why it was impossible to connect the two sets of cities without the roads crossing. He wrote Mr. Owens, who was by now the principal of St. George, a letter with the proof. One of Steph's friends later told him that years later he was visiting St. George, and Mr. Owens had Stephan's letter to him tacked to the corkboard behind him.

In any case, due to his inquisitive nature, Stephan finally became skeptical and gave up church attendance and religious observance in his mid-teens. To some degree, this coincided with his discovery of Ayn Rand and her philosophy and his own unanswered theological questions. One question that bedeviled him, for example, was how can there be an eternal hell, an infinite punishment for the finite amount of evil that someone could commit in their life? His doubt expanded beyond the doctrine of hell into doubting Jesus, Christianity, and even the existence of God. When he stopped going to church it upset his parents, but they did not push back.

Reminiscing about his youth, Stephan said, "I was raised in rural Louisiana, and to me, everything I saw was normal. I was close to all my grandparents, and our life was comfortable and good. Not exposed to much of the outside world, I assumed that Mardi Gras was probably a national holiday, lasting an entire week throughout the country. I didn't realize my assumption was mistaken until I moved out of state. There was a provincial lifestyle for folks in our rural enclave, and strong family bonds were often fostered. My parents were great."

Norman said that his son was typically preoccupied and completely focused on whatever was of interest to him. Norman

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shared one example, “We were in the midst of putting in a swimming pool at the house, which involved extensive construction. Steph came into the house one day and looked out back and asked, ‘When did we get the swimming pool?’” Norman summarized, “He was always thinking way beyond whatever we were thinking about.”

Talking about Stephan’s relationship with his brother Michael, two years younger than Steph, Norman said, “They were the best of friends besides being brothers. They were amazingly compatible. They played together and depended on each other. It was so nice for my wife and I to witness that.”

“Steph was a good kid growing up. We had no real curfew for him, but expected him home at a reasonable time. He may have had a few drinks now and then, but there were never any DUIs or breaking the law,” Norman recalled. He laughingly added, “I’m not saying that he didn’t get drunk. I just didn’t see it.”

Norman continued, “We were extremely lucky that both our boys had good principles and consistently tried to do the right thing.” When reminded that the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree, Norman responded, “I’d like to think I had some positive influence on them and I hope I did. I tried to lead by example. Their mother and I were very lucky and privileged to have them as our sons.”

Stephan was born to Frona Gail Doiron, a single, teenage woman who gave him the name Farrell Wayne Doiron at birth. He eventually learned that her rationale behind that distinctive name was to aid her in identifying him if she ever sought him later in life. He was born on October 1, 1965, at a hospital in Donaldsonville, Louisiana. During her pregnancy, Gail had moved from her home in Zachary, Louisiana, to live with her older sister, Carolyn.

To some extent, Stephan’s adoption story underscores the evolving nature of adoption practices; in his case, it was set against

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the backdrop of the mid-20th century. Stephan opined that today, many women who give up children for adoption look for legal access to them and try to keep that door open, even though they are no longer their legal parents.

Steph vividly remembers when he first learned he was adopted. “When I was four or five years old, Dad and I were sitting on the grass in the front yard near the septic tank that Dad had just repaired, when he initiated a conversation about my adoption. Dad gently explained that he and Mom couldn’t have children naturally, and they wanted me. He also gave me a popular adoption book, *The Chosen Baby*, that explained the significance of adoption and somewhat normalized it. I still remember it fondly to this day. The news wasn’t a shock or some revelation as it would be to someone who learns about this later, but rather a natural part of growing up. I also had the sense that my parents were somewhat sensitive about this. They reacted strongly to any pejorative comment from one of my cousins or anyone else—which was very rare in any case.”

Summing up his overview of being adopted, Steph said, “I was never uncomfortable with it; it was just part of my personal story. It was never traumatizing nor was it an issue with other kids.”

Oddly, his parents must have known his birth name from his original birth certificate as in the final decree of adoption, dated June 28, 1966. His name was legally changed from Farell Wayne Doiron to Norman Stephan Kinsella. Over the years, Steph had access to these documents, so he could have sought out his birth mother if he chose to. “I never wanted to. I was not even curious. I had a good life, and I was happy, and I had no desire to stir up drama or upset my parents,” Stephan said. Decades later, Stephan’s birth mother pierced the veil of secrecy that Norman and Patsy had desired. Stephan stated, “My younger siblings would sometimes talk about finding their ‘real parents,’ but it never interested me. So

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it was somewhat ironic that I was the one who was found by my birth mother and sister.”

Typically, adoptions in that era in Louisiana were secretive and closed. The adoptive parents had the option of preventing the birth mother from knowing who the child ended up with, keeping her permanently from making contact with the child.

Years later, Gail, who had regretted the adoption decision from the beginning, had somehow managed to procure a copy of Steph’s driver’s license with his new name. Steph assumed at the time that Gail might have had to resort to nefarious means to get his name from some Louisiana state agency or other source. Gail was that desperate to establish contact.

Steph was nearing 30, married, and residing in Philadelphia when he received a telephone call from his dad. Norman explained that he had gotten a call from Gail’s husband, who said that Gail and her daughter Crystal, who was 10 years younger than Stephan, had been looking for him for years. Steph further explained, “My dad asked how I wanted to proceed. My first concern was preventing some weird invasion into my and my wife’s lives, since I did not really know anything about my birth mother. My other concern was not wanting to upset my parents.”

“I did have some feelings, though, about meeting the woman who did the right thing by giving me up for adoption. I wanted to be kind to her. I asked Dad to tell Crystal I would speak with Gail in a few weeks. I wanted to wait until my 30th birthday had passed, to try to reduce the emotional impact this would have on Gail. I didn’t want a big scene. Since Gail had said she had found me just before my 30th birthday and had planned to give up if she hadn’t found me by then, I figured the date would be a big deal to her and finding me would be seen as some kind of sign or miraculous. I figured she might break down if she talked to me

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before or around my birthday, so I delayed it a few weeks to minimize the chance of drama.”

Steph continued, “Gail and I arranged a Saturday morning to talk, and we spent three hours on the phone. She was crying and told me that I sounded just like my birth father. The dynamic on the call was like I was the parent, and she was the child. I was trying to soothe and comfort her, reassure her.”

Steph agreed to meet with Gail in person during his upcoming visit to Louisiana for Christmas. In the meantime, he asked his parents to meet with Gail and Crystal at their home in Prairieville. This gave his parents a chance to feel in control and be gracious and kind to Gail, instead of feeling threatened. At that meeting they shared stories and gave Gail photographs to take with her.

Stephan’s wife, Cindy, was supportive but nervous about the upcoming meeting at Christmastime and a bit concerned about the unknown to come. They decided that for this first meeting, Steph would go alone. He drove to Gail’s home in Zachary so that she could at last reunite with him. Steph filled in those details. “I showed up, and there were about 30 or so people in the house. I thought to myself, wow, they have a large family. Little did I know what was going on. The long-lost son had returned, and he was on display!” Steph said. Various family members and friends—cousins, aunts, uncles, and so on—came into the kitchen where I was perched on a stool, on display, introduced themselves, hugged me, and cried. It was very intense and emotional for many of them, and I really did not like it, but I felt I owed it to Gail to put up with it. When everyone cleared out of the house later in the evening, Gail wept and hugged me. I let her hug me for a long time. I believe it was very cathartic for her. I figured it meant a lot to her and I owed it to her.”

Stephan learned from Gail that his birth father was A.G. Kirby, who was from a somewhat wealthy Baton Rouge family. He had

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abandoned her after she got pregnant, probably under pressure from his family. Gail's own family rejected her, too. This was 1965, after all, in conservative Louisiana. She moved in with her older sister, Carolyn, who was more supportive. Keeping the baby was not an option, and either was abortion. Carolyn, at the time, lived in Donaldsonville, which is why Steph was born at the hospital there. (It is also where he almost died in a bad construction accident when he was 18...more on this later.)

One interesting twist occurred several months after Norman and Patsy had adopted Stephan. By this time, Gail regretted her decision and was trying to find any way to undo the adoption and get her son back. She discovered a mistake in the adoption paperwork and brought it to the attention of the state adoption agency. The agency inexplicably called Stephan's parents, telling them that the birth mother had identified a mistake in the documents and that the simplest solution would be for them to return their baby to the birth mother and adopt another baby. "My parents immediately hired an attorney. The lawyer successfully stopped it, and perhaps this is what made them overly protective and worried about the adoption process for me and my siblings, later," Steph said. He did not learn about this incident until his dad told him about it years later, after Gail had found him.

Gail visited Stephan from time to time in Houston, and after he and Cindy had Ethan, in 2003. By this time, her daughter Crystal was also living in Houston was becoming increasingly closer to Steph and Cindy. Gail was thrilled to meet her first grandchild. In fact, one of the things she was happy about when she met Steph in 1995 was that he had not yet had children, so she had not already become a grandmother without even knowing it.

Gail was employed at Sam's Club in Baton Rouge and had previously been co-owner of a restaurant in Zachary. She had later married Jim McGehee, with whom she had two children: Crystal,



## **The Stephan Kinsella Story**

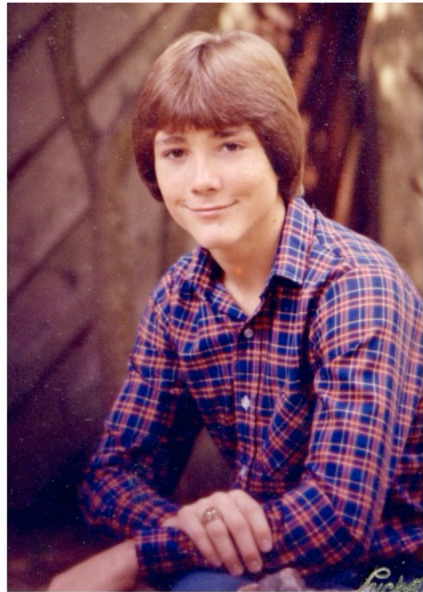
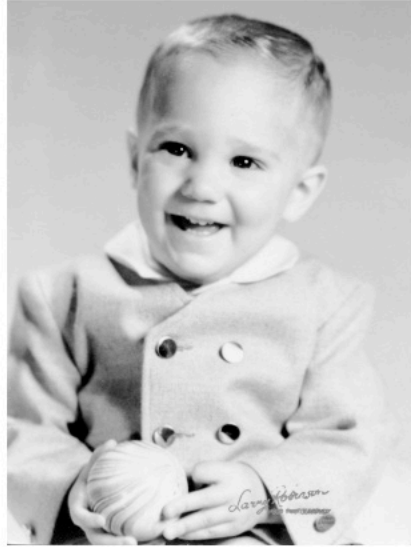
and her younger brother, Rusty, who resides in Zachary to this day. Stephan and Crystal have been very close over the last 30 years. In fact, after Gail unexpectedly died of heart failure at age 59 in early 2006, about 10 years after they had met, Crystal accompanied Steph on a trip to Paris and then to Bodrum, Turkey (more about that later). She now resides in Montgomery, Texas, with her husband, Jim Schonian.

Initially, Rusty, who was only about 14 or so when Gail finally found Stephan, was somewhat hostile and upset about his mother looking for her long-lost first son, but in recent years he and Stephan have also developed a nice relationship. Stephan, Cindy, and Ethan are all very close to Crystal and her husband Jim. Stephan's brother, Michael, was also close to Crystal, as well as Rusty, until his recent passing in 2024, as are other members of Steph's family, including his dad and his brother and sister-in-law, John and Tricia DeLaney.

Patsy, Stephan's mother, passed away peacefully on May 13, 2022, at age 82. She is interred at the Ficklin Family Cemetery in Galvez in Prairieville, Louisiana. Two years after Patsy's passing, Norman married Kathleen Deane Janis, a family friend. She is an 82-year-old widow and neighbor that Steph has known since he was five-years-old.

Stephan's brother, Michael Kyle Kinsella, whom he called Mike or Mikey or Mickel-Pickel, had most recently lived in Sonoma, California, with his partner, Matt Woebecke. Mike unexpectedly passed away in his sleep on July 6, 2024, at age 57. He was the Director of U.S. Commercial Card Sales at the Bank of the West/BNP Paribas Group at the time of his passing. Steph's sister, Sheila Kaye Kinsella, Lives in Kosse, Texas, with her family.

## Adopting Liberty



*Evolving through his youth: Top left - one-year-old Stephan seems to be looking ahead towards the future (1966); top right - dressed in his finest outerwear (1969); bottom left - a teenage Steph in his St. George School shirt (1979); and bottom right - around the time of high school graduation (1983).*

## The Stephan Kinsella Story



*Hanging with his bro: Top left - Stephan and Mike outside the family's Ascension Parish house (1969); top right - by the campfire at a park in Mississippi with Mom and Mike (1971); bottom - a roadside rest on the way to Colorado (1971).*



## Adopting Liberty



*Top left - Steph closely guarding the Kinsella house and standing watch over sister Sheila (1974); top right - Steph, Sheila, and Mike share a moment with Mom at home (1970); bottom - Norman, Steph, and Sheila enjoying the pristine scenery in Colorado (1978).*

## The Stephan Kinsella Story



*Wheels and more wheels. Top - The Ascension Parish version of the junior Hells Angels, Stephan at left (1977); bottom - taking Grandma Pep Rodgers for a ride (1983).*



## Adopting Liberty



*Top - Norman pitches a tent for a family camping trip (1986); bottom - attending a high school prom with Jose Smith and good friend John Caffarel and his date (1982).*

## The Stephan Kinsella Story



*Top left - The late Patsy Kinsella was a beautiful woman, inside and out, as this photo at 19-years-old shows (1959); top right - a very candid shot of Norman in the ultimate DIY moment (1985); bottom - Patsy and Norman are all smiles here at home (1985). Steph felt tremendously fortunate to have been adopted by them.*

## CHAPTER 2

### *Leaving Louisiana*

When the time rolled around to consider post-high school options, Stephan said Louisiana State University (LSU) was the only school he applied to (in addition to a Tulane application that he didn't seriously pursue). "It didn't even occur to me that I could attend other colleges. Having done well on both the SAT and ACT and being named a National Merit finalist, I had the qualifications to attend numerous colleges. I assumed LSU was the only school my father was willing to pay for, and it was known for its engineering department, a profession he wanted me to pursue. Enrolling at LSU fully aligned with his expectations. I was good at math and the sciences and I figured engineering was a good field. I suppose I went there by default," Stephan explained. He ended up getting scholarships that paid for much of college, which at the time was not expensive anyway.

Steph said, "I decided to study electrical engineering (EE) at LSU because I knew it was difficult and challenging, and I liked computers and tinkering, and wasn't daunted by it. It was a practical major which would make me employable after graduating."

During his freshman year at LSU, Stephan roomed with three others he had previously known from back home: John Caffarel, a St. George and Catholic High School friend, and Fernando Muñoz and Mike Brock from Ascension Parish. (Steph also lived on



## **The Stephan Kinsella Story**

campus in Kirby Smith dormitory one semester, rooming with Michael, but for the remainder of his LSU years, through the end of law school, he lived at home with his parents.) Fernando had known Cindy since elementary school at St. Theresa and Mike Brock was dating Cindy, who would later become Stephan's wife. For a while, Stephan dated Cindy's roommate and friend, Jesse Meyers. The four of them sometimes double-dated. Another time, when Cindy's cousin Cindy Brown was visiting from Colorado, Cindy set Stephan up on a double-date with her and Cindy and Mike.

Cindy was smart and had aspirations to be an engineer or businessperson like her father, John E. Delaney, so she enrolled in engineering at LSU—civil engineering at first, later switching to electrical engineering. She thought engineering might be difficult, but was determined to do it even though her father was skeptical. Steph opined that Cindy's father viewed his daughter as more of the cheerleader type and did little to encourage her pursuit of engineering. She was committed to her studies, in part, perhaps, out of a desire to prove her father wrong or in defiance of his negativity. She once told him to keep his negative opinions to himself, and continued on her own path, undeterred. Her initial goal had been to pursue electrical engineering but, perhaps due to her father's pessimism, decided to start in civil engineering since she thought it might be a bit less difficult. But she soon switched her major to electrical engineering, the same field Steph was studying.

Following his freshman year, Stephan landed summer employment in construction at a chemical company called Agrico in Donaldsonville, Louisiana. He was actually hired by a subcontractor to do refractory work, which is hard, gritty labor. This was Star Enterprises, owned by his neighbor, Wesley McLane (his son, Rusty, was for years good friends with Steph's brother,

## **Adopting Liberty**

Michael). On the third day on the job, a Sunday, Steph had a terrible fall towards the end of working a 12-hour shift. He was moving and stacking 100 lb. bags of Gunitite (a mixture of concrete) within a structure when he fell four stories through a gaping hole in the floor. Knocked unconscious, he was airlifted to a nearby hospital, where surgery was immediately performed. His injuries were severe, including a broken neck and badly lacerated and fractured skull. Steph's resilience was a key component of his recovery, and he was released from the hospital a week or two after the accident. He received a modest settlement after his dad insisted on pursuing litigation. He spent that summer in a neck and back brace, recovering.

Coincidentally, Cindy was also involved in a very serious accident just a year or so earlier. Her then-boyfriend, Jerry Meek, lost control of the van he was driving, and the vehicle flipped over. In that pre-seatbelt era, Cindy was ejected, and Jerry suffered permanent brain damage. Incredibly, Cindy walked away from the crash unscathed. Stephan said, "Cindy always believed that it was karma that we both survived near-death experiences, and perhaps God was telling us we should have a child who may one day save the universe!"

Returning to Steph's accident, he had a date scheduled that evening with his girlfriend, Trish Miller. Initially, she was miffed that he stood her up, but she soon learned he had been in an accident. Realizing the gravity of the situation, she decided his excuse was legit. The couple had a fairly serious relationship until her family moved to Texas for Trish's father's job transfer. Of Trish's departure, Steph said, "It was sad and hard for me, but what could I do? I was too young to propose marriage, so I had to accept it. For many years, decades even, I had nightmares about the breakup. I was deeply in love with that girl, though in retrospect, it

## **The Stephan Kinsella Story**

was probably not a fully adult love. It was more like an intense, youthful but earnest puppy-love.”

Back at LSU, Steph thoroughly loved studying electrical engineering but began discovering other intellectual outlets, such as writing editorials for the student newspaper on various political and economic topics. “Engineering just wasn’t enough for me, and I needed more to satisfy my intellectual curiosity,” Steph admitted. And, although he was earning good grades, he didn’t have the incentive to work harder for straight A’s. “I was enjoying video games and reading novels and books about economics too much to put more effort into my studies,” he said. “I was happy with a 3.7 average or whatever,” he added.

Steph’s fourth year of engineering at LSU in 1987 saw him interviewing and receiving job offers and interest from several companies. These ranged from being on call to jump on a helicopter and troubleshoot off-shore oil rigs for Schlumberger to working on the F-16 fighter jet for General Dynamics, to working for the National Security Agency (NSA). “I remember my first offer was for \$28,000, which was considered good money in those days,” Stephan recalled. However, he said, “I wasn’t feeling engineering deep in my bones, and I was becoming attracted to other disciplines.”

Rather than join the workforce at that juncture, Steph elected to attend graduate school. After all, Cindy was still finishing up her BSEE; she had two or so more years to go, and he didn’t want to leave her. He remained at LSU and chose a year-and-a-half electrical engineering master’s degree program which consisted of 36 hours of graduate-level courses.

About one year into the MSEE program, Steph was struck with the urge to attend law school. In part, this resulted from a conversation he had at dinner with Cindy and her father, who had just attended a high school reunion. He mentioned a friend who

## **Adopting Liberty**

was a successful orthopedic surgeon who worked three days a week on athletes and earned \$350k annually. Cindy asked Stephan, “Why don’t you do something like that?” He replied that he did not have the pre-med prerequisite courses. She then said, “Well you like to argue and write, why not go to law school?” So, he decided to look into it.

He shared the backstory of what came next: “I walked across the LSU campus the next day to the law school and requested an appointment with the school chancellor. I believe it was Howard L’Enfant, the interim chancellor. I was definitely surprised to learn that he was available right then and there, and willing to meet with me without an appointment. I asked him if I could attend law school without having a pre-law undergraduate degree. He replied, ‘You can, but you may have a hard time because engineers traditionally don’t do well in law school.’ So, I took the LSAT, did well, and put my electrical engineering master’s program on hold and enrolled in law school. I did quite well that first year and I felt like I was on fire. I was pumped up, charged. After the first year I asked the law school chancellor for special permission to continue with my master’s program concurrently with my law courses. Since my first-year grades had been excellent, he agreed. I did my second year of law school full-time, along with a limited electrical engineering course load. I ended up with my master’s degree in electrical engineering in 1990 and my law degree in 1991. Ronald Reagan spoke at the 1990 graduation, which was fun.”

He clerked for two firms during law school summer breaks, one clerkship located in Baton Rouge, at Kantrow, Spaht, Weaver & Blitzer, and one in Houston, at Vinson & Elkins, because he and Cindy were not sure where they wanted to live. An unforgettable piece of the Houston clerkship was being loaned out for two weeks as a press escort at the G7 Economic Summit held at the George R. Brown Convention Center and Rice University. “I distinctly

## **The Stephan Kinsella Story**

remember standing there right by President George H.W. Bush, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. Secret Service agents all around, great food. It was totally crazy. What an experience,” Steph said.

What came next was not in Stephan’s original playbook, but it ended up working out well for him. He had received and accepted an offer from a Houston law firm, Jackson Walker, to practice oil and gas law. However, a legal recession was hitting the country at the time. Late in his senior year in law school, Stephan received a call from a Jackson Walker partner informing him that an excess number of first-year associates were due to come in, but there was not enough work to keep them fully occupied. Rather than rescind the job offer, they gave him the opportunity to defer starting work for a year in exchange for partial salary.

Steph and a friend, Paul Comeaux, who had the same offer from the same firm, saw this as an opportunity, not a setback. Steph explained, “I thought attending school for a year and getting an LL.M would make me more employable. I was reluctant to leave Cindy, but she encouraged me to go for it as it was a unique opportunity. Paul and I applied to four law schools in London, and we both enrolled at King’s College London, where I earned a master’s in international business law in 1992. Three consecutive years—three degrees! I was backpacking all over Europe. Living abroad and getting paid for it... an absolute blast.”

In February of 1992, Steph officially began his legal career as an associate at Jackson Walker in Houston in their oil and gas or energy department. Cindy and Steph eventually moved in together in that city, and Louisiana was now long behind him.



## Adopting Liberty



*Top - Stephan soldering on a part-time job while a student in the LSU undergraduate Electrical Engineering Program (1986); bottom - taking a road trip with a group of EE buddies, Steph at left (1986).*

## The Stephan Kinsella Story



*Top - Steph's wry sense of humor on display via his friend Tony Tramontano's sign at law school graduation (1991); bottom - with graduate school(s) officially behind him, Steph was ready to set forth into the so-called real world (1991).*

## Adopting Liberty



*Top - As a part of his Vinson & Elkins clerkship, Steph was on loan to the G7 Economic Summit, an unbelievable experience (1991); bottom - with his former LSU EE friends at George's Pub in Baton Rouge (1991).*



## CHAPTER 3

### *Cindy and Michael!*

*“Brothers are playmates in the beginning and best friends for life.”* —source unknown

Not only was Michael a wonderful brother to Stephan for so many years in so many important ways, but he also played a pivotal role in bringing Stephan and Cindy together.

Traveling back to high school days, Cindy would come to the Kinsellas’ Ascension Parish house to hone her tennis skills on the family’s court, often under Steph’s dad’s tutelage. Michael and Cindy met in high school and became close friends, hanging out and partying together, even though they were two grades apart. Somehow, Michael had this innate feeling that Steph and Cindy would hit it off. “Michael would regularly make comments to me like, ‘Stephan, there’s this really cute girl coming to the house now and then. You should take your nose out of the books and flirt with her or something,’” Steph said. “However, I stayed within my books and I ignored everything else.”

Fast forward just a few years to LSU, where both Steph and Cindy were enrolled as undergraduates. As previously mentioned, their paths crossed again when Steph’s roommate, Mike Brock, dated Cindy while Steph simultaneously dated her roommate. But, as good fortune would have it (for Steph), Mike Brock’s and Cindy’s relationship soon ended.

## **Adopting Liberty**

About the same time that Cindy became untethered from Brock, she switched majors from civil to electrical engineering. Steph opined that Cindy saw the study of engineering as a means to an end: a vehicle for securing well-paid employment. He felt, too, that conquering electrical engineering was a way to prove to her father that she was intellectually capable of handling challenging coursework. Steph stated, "That major was fun, and I enjoyed all the concepts involved. Cindy didn't, but she was determined to master it and graduate."

Academics became the perfect excuse for them to hang out together, though Steph was soon hankering to take it to the next level. He described Cindy as funny and intelligent, and confessed, "Although we were just friends, I found myself becoming more and more attracted to this girl." He added, "I wasn't shy, and if a girl told me no, that rejection wouldn't come close to ruining my month! I was willing to try, and to be persistent."

He continued the tale about the start of their courtship. "I remember it was a Thursday afternoon, and we had just come out of a class. I approached her and asked her to go to a movie the following evening. I expected her to say no and had already decided to keep pestering her until her response changed. So I asked for the date even though I had already scheduled a date for Friday night with another girl, Tammy Weeden, just to get the first ask out of the way. That's how sure I was she would turn me down. Cindy said, 'Fine, let's go to a movie.'"

"Shocked, I responded, 'Oh, well... I have another date that night.' She stared at me like I was a total idiot and asked me why I had asked her out given that I had plans. I replied, 'Well, I expected you to say no.' Cindy wasn't offended, and she probably thought it was amusing. So, I went out with Tammy Weeden, but that was our last date."

## **The Stephan Kinsella Story**

Cindy had sometimes dated the football player types, but Stephan was a bit different. “I think she was amused and interested in my humor and somewhat intense and eclectic intellectual interests, maybe even a bit impressed by them. I believe she liked that I was interested in all these ideas and had so much intellectual confidence and a sense of humor. And by how nice I was to her,” Stephan explained. “When we started dating, we became very close in a short time, but then we had already been good friends at this point for a couple of years.”

Steph’s assessment was that Cindy’s mother and father, while good parents, were not as affectionate as his, and she and her mother’s relationship became strained in her teenage years as her parents’ marriage began to deteriorate. He hypothesized that perhaps his close family ties were a piece of Cindy’s attraction to him and something she herself longed for. She quickly became very close to Steph’s family.

Her father liked Stephan because he was studying engineering, and he begrudgingly started respecting Cindy for studying such a challenging subject, too. He had previously written off his daughter as flight attendant material, capable of little beyond that. In fact, showing her perseverance, in the final year of her program, she split her time between classes and an apprenticeship at a nearby engineering firm. Cindy busted her butt in her electrical engineering studies. She graduated in 1989 when Steph was enrolled in law school.

There were a couple of breakups early in their relationship, each instigated by Cindy, but they always managed to find their way back to each other. During one of those hiatuses, Steph and his former girlfriend, Trish, reconnected. When Stephan later told Cindy about this, she became upset. “She accused me of having lied when I had previously said I was over Trish. I think she was partly right. I was not over Trish completely. It took many, many

## **Adopting Liberty**

years for that to completely wane. But it was so clear to me that Cindy was my life love, the person I was meant to be with,” Steph explained.

Cindy’s initial exposure to engineering and the business world began with her dad, who would sometimes take her on business trips throughout the U.S. and around the world. He was a highly successful and intelligent chemical engineer. Steph opined that Cindy may have viewed engineering as a path to leaving Louisiana and living somewhere and doing something exciting and lucrative.

Cindy was always a hard worker, ambitious and driven, with her eye focused on the end goal, on success. After graduating, she landed a job with Barnard and Burk, consulting engineers in Baton Rouge, where she had been working part-time during her last years of college. After some time with them, she was recruited by a headhunter to work as an instrumentation engineer with Arco Chemical in Houston, in 1991. This plan seemed perfect since Stephan was also headed to that city to begin work with Jackson Walker. However, as we learned earlier, Steph’s job was deferred for a year, which he spent studying in London. Cindy moved to Houston solo, taking with her Muffy, the cocker spaniel Stephan had given her as a graduation present in 1989.

Working in engineering, she often found herself the lone female among a preponderance of male colleagues. However, it was easy for her to don a hardhat and Nomex coveralls and work alongside them in the field troubleshooting a problem. With a laugh, Steph said Cindy would sometimes refer to her blue-collar coworkers affectionately as “scratch, dip, and spit” types. He added that she always commanded respect and won over the guys she worked with.

Outside of her professional life, Cindy has also been involved in the not-for-profit world. She solicited Steph’s Aunt Gwen Williams, Norman’s cousin, to sponsor her for membership in the

## **The Stephan Kinsella Story**

Junior League, the women's volunteer organization aimed at improving communities and giving back to society. Initially, she joined the Baton Rouge chapter, then transferred her membership to Houston upon moving there.

Steph describes his wife as someone who has developed higher standards and has consistently worked hard to achieve what she has. She has little tolerance for any people or situations that make life less bearable. "She loves her friends and close family dearly, and me and especially our son," Steph stated.

The couple dated for a long time, seven or eight years, before marching down the aisle. This was partly due to Cindy's practicality—she did not believe students should be married; that they should wait until they had both graduated and had *jay-oh-bees*. Steph said that his parents loved Cindy. Of course, she and Michael were already close. Steph got along well with Cindy's parents, as well. However, for some odd reason, her somewhat quirky father misunderstood Steph's name to be Kevin the first time they met, which became a nickname that stuck for a mere 33 years (her father passed away in 2018).

They became husband and wife in 1993, marrying in Baton Rouge. Steph said it was a wonderful wedding, with very little held back from the celebration. The bill was footed largely by Cindy's father, with the balance made up by Steph's parents and the couple themselves. Brother Michael served as the best man. The other groomsmen were Steph's childhood best friends, John Caffarel and John Wax (a trio of good friends in elementary and high school), Cindy's brother, John R. DeLaney, and Steph's law school and Jackson Walker friend, Paul Comeaux. Cindy's maid of honor was her best friend, Carla Myers, who had also worked with her at Barnard and Burk; her bridesmaids also included her sister, Amy, Denise Depew, and two high school friends.

## **Adopting Liberty**

Stephan had to carefully avoid revealing his nonreligious views when meeting with Reverend Weathey, who married the couple at the Broadmoor United Methodist Church. The reception was held at the Country Club of Louisiana, where Cindy's dad resided. Present at the wedding were Steph's paternal grandmother, Theda Kinsella, and his maternal grandmother, Pep Rodgers. Cindy loved and was close to both of them.

Steph described what came next for the newlywed couple. "That night, a limo whisked us to New Orleans as we were going to take a five-day cruise the next day to some of the local islands. We stayed at the Royal Sonesta Hotel, and many of our family and friends met us there that night or the next day, when we visited the New Orleans Aquarium before boarding our cruise ship. I recall being nervous about taking off work for a wedding and honeymoon so early into my new job, worried my boss would force me to cancel the wedding and stay there to complete some job, but that didn't occur." He added that their honeymoon cruise was less than ideal, and Cindy felt seasick much of the time, which soured her on the idea of cruises.

Returning to Stephan's best man at the wedding, he said that he and Michael were such different people, yet such a strong bond existed between them. Steph shared some of those differences and painted a portrait of Michael. "He knew what he wanted, and he pursued it. A lot like Cindy! For example, at LSU, Michael wanted to join a fraternity, a cost that our father refused to absorb. So, to attain membership in the frat and subsequently pay for it, Michael proposed that he would join the National Guard, which would foot his LSU tuition cost. He asked Dad if he would then cover the fraternity costs, which was precisely what occurred. Upon graduating, Michael then enlisted in the National Guard, which was perhaps an unusual environment, at the time, for someone who knew he was gay," Steph explained.

## **The Stephan Kinsella Story**

He continued, “In fact, Michael was reluctant to come out to me probably because he felt that my views were too conservative to accept that lifestyle—he didn’t understand I was not a conservative, I was a libertarian. Cindy had known about it many years before I did, but was sworn to secrecy. I even once mentioned to her that Michael seemed to have a lot of gay friends,” Steph said.

“On the cusp of leaving for grad school in 1991, he came into my bedroom while I was reading a book and informed me about his sexuality. Not exactly shocked, I replied, ‘Oh, of course. That explains everything,’” Steph remembered.

Michael had several long-term relationships with men in various parts of the U.S. and the world until he met Matt some 15 years ago. Living in the Bay Area of California, the couple had a vast network of friends nearby and worldwide. Steph said of his brother, “He was gregarious, tremendously friendly, and an all-around good guy.” He died in his sleep of heart failure.

Quoting verbatim from the eulogy he delivered at Michael’s funeral, Steph wrote, “We lived on other sides of the country and sometimes other sides of the world, but I always thought we would get old together, sort of how married couples hope they will. I figured he would outlive me and Cindy would have him in my place. But it was not to be. I’ll miss him so much.”



## Adopting Liberty



*Top left - She may have been missing a tooth or two, but Cindy was still an extremely cute six-year-old (1971); top right - as a member of the St. Amant High School cheerleading squad (1982); bottom left - posing with Michael, Sheila, and Stephan (1989); bottom right - on a date with Steph (1990).*



## The Stephan Kinsella Story



*The big day - May 29, 1993. The ceremony was held at the Broadmoor United Methodist Church in Baton Rouge.*



## Adopting Liberty



*Left - Three generations of the Kinsella family. The reception was held at the Country Club of Louisiana.*





## The Stephan Kinsella Story



*Top - A lovesick Stephan sends a message to Cindy from Greece (1991); bottom - Michael and Cindy at the Virginia Cup Soccer Tournament (1997).*

## Adopting Liberty



*Top - Michael and Steph share a moment within the natural beauty of Telluride, Colorado (2010); bottom - Gillette Conner, Michael, Norman, Patsy, Cindy, Stephan, Ethan, and Matt Woebecke at Pat and Norman's 50th anniversary party, in Houston (2010).*

## CHAPTER 4

### *Ethan!*

Stephan had envisioned a future that included marriage to Cindy and starting a family. “I loved kids and just assumed that this is what you did,” Stephan explained about his anticipation of starting a family one day after marrying. “I loved playing with her nieces, Laura and Emily Turner,” he said.

Steph continued, “I started mentioning things to Cindy about having children, and she replied, ‘Listen, I don’t know if I ever want to have kids. I’m not going to promise children.’ I initially rolled with it, but eventually it started worrying me.” When queried what he thought was behind Cindy’s hesitation, Steph identified three possibilities: first, that it could interfere with her career; secondly, perhaps a fear of physically giving birth; and, lastly, avoidance of going down the path that some of her friends took who got married right out of high school. Cindy had greater ambitions she wanted to pursue.

Stephan grappled with this dilemma and recalled, “In London, I spent a good deal of time thinking about this, even discussing with friends whether I was making the right choice continuing with Cindy. Ultimately, I decided that I couldn’t bear the thought of breaking up with her, and I would rather have her and no kids, than not have her.”

They got married, and their careers flourished, in Houston, then in Philadelphia, and then back in Houston. However, at age 36, one

## **Adopting Liberty**

of Cindy's gynecological exams revealed cervical cancer, a diagnosis that she and Steph were obviously distraught over. They had plans to meet the doctor a few weeks later to learn how advanced the cancer was. It was a time of great stress leading up to the appointment. But upon meeting with the doctor, they found out from him that the pathologist had simply made a terrible mistake; it was a false alarm. Steph opined, "I think that experience was transformative, a wake-up call for Cindy. She said, 'I'm 36, and my clock is ticking. I just had a scare which made me think I wouldn't be able to have kids.'"

He continued, "We were walking the poodles one day soon after that when she suddenly announced, 'I think we should try to have a kid,' which came as a great surprise for me. I was overjoyed. We had no problems conceiving; Cindy got pregnant almost immediately. She had a fairly easy pregnancy, and Ethan arrived when we were both 37."

"In retrospect, we both wish that we had had two kids, but the truth is that we got started too late, and Cindy didn't want to push our luck. Age 37 was already kind of late to be having a baby," Steph added. They drove Steph's parents nuts by swearing them to secrecy about Cindy's pregnancy until she and Steph felt it was the right time to share the news with others. Norman and Patsy were so happy but bursting at the seams, wanting to tell the world.

In utero, near the end of the pregnancy, Ethan had done a complete flip to become a footling breech baby, so the obstetrician scheduled cesarean birth. Since it was a scheduled delivery, Steph and Cindy's families all came in from Louisiana to be present for the birth. Ethan was born in The Women's Hospital of Texas in Houston on the morning of July 31, 2003.

Steph said that even though he and Cindy were not "hippie-dippy parents," they found value in making Ethan's baby food themselves at home, staying away from the supermarket-sold

## **The Stephan Kinsella Story**

brands. And because Stephan's job was at that point less high-pressure than Cindy's, he took Ethan to music lessons (with the other moms), baby swimming lessons, and other assorted activities to keep Ethan stimulated. "I also taught him how to read at just 18 months, to my great surprise. I used a blend of the Montessori Method and the Glenn Doman method, which is based on teaching words using flashcards. I would walk the dog with Ethan in the Baby Bjorn carrier on my chest, and point out objects like rock and car, and teach him how to pronounce them phonetically. By age two, he was reading pretty fluently, including the complicated Latinate names of dinosaurs, which he was fascinated by," Steph said.

The couple hired a nanny, Felicia Bolatiwa, an immigrant from Nigeria who was with the family for nearly 18 years. Felicia had had two back-to-back sets of twins, and thus specialized in being a nanny for parents with twins. One of Cindy and Steph's friends, Danette Zdansky (who also worked at Shell with Cindy and had moved to Philadelphia for a while when they were there), had just had twins herself and was in a group of moms with twins. One of them had hired Felicia and loved her but her tenure was nearing its end. Steph and Cindy interviewed her, and while Cindy was upstairs Steph offered her the job on the spot. It was the only nanny they ever interviewed. She loved working for them because Cindy was so organized, detailed, and knew what she wanted, and they treated her like part of the family.

In addition to caring for Ethan during the week, Felicia would often come to their house to babysit on weekends when they had a function to attend. As Ethan became older and more self-dependent, Felicia's role transitioned into taking care of household chores. Stephan shared that Felicia loved helping raise Ethan and still comes to visit him when he is home from college.



## **Adopting Liberty**

When asked whether he and Cindy ever considered adoption for a second child, Steph replied that Cindy felt she may have been unable to treat an adopted child as equally as Ethan, so did not want to go that route. “We just stuck with one child, and we have been a really tight-knit triad through these years,” Stephan concluded.

Answering a follow-up question as to what his greatest joy was in parenting Ethan, Steph replied, “I think doing a good job and doing it right. Like everyone else, we tried not to make the mistakes that we felt our parents made with us. We’re very open with Ethan and non-judgmental. We’ve taught him to be kind and gave him independence. We enjoyed it and also tried to avoid the rat race.”

Steph said that there was never any physical or negative discipline, like punitive “time-outs,” in their household. He and Cindy subscribed to the Montessori approach of positive discipline, which provides strategies to prepare the social-emotional environment that helps children find a sense of belonging and significance in their community. Laughingly, Stephan added that, in order to ensure Ethan was accepted at their preferred school (the Post Oak School), he had read so many books on the Montessori philosophy that he was often better versed about Montessori than many of the school’s own administrators.

Steph stated that Montessori and the Post Oak School were a great fit for Ethan, and he thrived there. He was enrolled there through seventh grade when he then transferred to St. John’s School, an elite, private school that was extremely difficult to gain admission to. Ethan aced his interview and admission test and began there in eighth grade. In addition to his academic load, Ethan worked on the school newspaper and made solid friendships among his fellow students.



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Helping to paint a portrait of his son, Steph said, “It’s been great watching him mature, and I just love being a father to him. We’ve traveled to many parts of the world together. He has become a really good 21-year-old man, and we’ll see where his life’s journey takes him.”

Ethan is currently a senior at Carleton College, a leading liberal arts college in Minnesota. He works at the campus radio station as a DJ and has been learning to play piano and guitar, and is now learning German. Steph listed architecture, art history, literature, urban planning, and philosophy among Ethan’s diverse interests. He mentioned that Ethan could do well in law, but he does not yet seem as interested in law as his dad was. Rounding out the description of his son, Steph said that Ethan is an individualist with a good grasp of libertarianism, and they’ll sometimes engage in hours-long debates about politics, philosophy, and other subjects. “These discussions sometimes take place around the dinner table, and Cindy will finally leave the room and leave us to it,” Steph said with a grin.

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*Top - Norman meets his grandson, Ethan, for the very first time (2003); bottom - Ethan, at three months old, hanging out with his parents and great-grandma, Maw Maw (2003).*

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*Top - Communing with nature in Banff National Park in the Canadian Rockies (2010); bottom - enjoying a Florida vacation at Rosemary Beach.*



## Adopting Liberty



*Top - Cindy and Ethan share a moment at Carleton College (2023);  
bottom - Stephan and Ethan visit Vienna (2024).*

## CHAPTER 5

# *Space City and the City of Brotherly Love*

After so many years of education, it was now time for Stephan to enter the so-called “real world.” As previously mentioned, several job offers came his way before law school, but these were in the electrical engineering space—one was for a position with General Dynamics, and another was at Schlumberger. Stephan politely responded with thanks but no thanks.

After completing law school and earning his LL.M. in London, Steph’s professional journey began as an associate with Jackson Walker in Houston. He initially joined the firm’s oil and gas practice group. Steph explained why he was a good fit for this particular practice area: “I was originally hired to do Texas and Louisiana oil and gas law. In Texas, you need lawyers who understand the unique Louisiana system, which is the Spanish law and French-based Napoleonic legal code. With my LSU legal education, that knowledge was my entree and what made me attractive to the firm. That, plus my boss, Lanier (Lanny) Yeates, another LSU grad, was impressed by my engineering background.”

In early 1992, he began working with the firm’s energy clients and quickly found that it was intellectually stimulating work. He elaborated, “It was property rights and contracts and was fairly

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sophisticated, and it crossed the civil law system with the common law system.” The work demanded long hours, sometimes all-nighters, but Steph said he never minded any of that and embraced the challenges. He viewed it all as part of the on-the-job educational experience. “I loved learning. I loved being competent. I loved being part of a professional community,” he concluded.

(An interesting sidenote is that Steph’s thorough knowledge of Louisiana law and its corresponding language was the impetus for him turning it all into a 1994 law review article and later a book, *The Louisiana Civil Law Dictionary*, published in 2011.)

“I was delivering speeches, actively seeking further exposure among clients and the other partners, and doing what I had to do to get my name out there. You got the sense that if you wanted to make partner in seven years, at a certain point, you would need to be significant enough to achieve that,” Steph explained. “I thought that the one way for me to do that would be publishing, such as articles on oil and gas law, and speaking at legal conferences. I didn’t have the Blue Blood or Harvard connections some others had,” he added.

In addition to writing and speaking on legal matters, he began to publish more academic articles on political and libertarian topics. Steph admitted that, fearing he might harm his career by being too outspoken on such matters, he toned down and moderated his public rhetoric and political viewpoints, demonstrating a nuanced approach to his professional visibility.

One year or so into his job, Cindy informed Steph that she had an offer to advance her career with Arco Chemical but it would require relocating to the firm’s Philadelphia headquarters. She was looking to move out of Arco’s engineering ranks and into more of a management role. Steph’s response was, “I loved oil and gas law, but that practice area didn’t exist in Philadelphia. However, given my electrical engineering degree and the intellectual property (IP)

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field's growth potential, everyone kept telling me I should become a patent attorney."

Steph carefully explained what transpired next in a path that was decidedly less than straightforward. "There was only one patent attorney in Jackson Walker's Houston office. He was an eccentric man named Bill Norvell, with a reputation for being somewhat of a jerk. Ironically, we eventually became friends. I hoped to split my time between the IP section and the energy department while continuing to practice oil and gas law. Further, I was looking for the firm to pay for me to take the Patent Bar to make it possible to get an offer with a Philadelphia law firm.

Bill was a floor above me, and I called him one day to introduce myself and my background and express my interest in IP law. He promptly hung up on me. I called him back, with the same exact result. Undeterred, I next sent him via interoffice mail my resume and a trademark appeals brief I had prepared during my summer clerkship at Vinson & Elkins two years earlier. Even though he had been dismissive, I wasn't giving up. He later told me that he was shocked that an associate would have the audacity to do this, and he simply dumped my CV in the trash."

However, a bit of serendipity intervened. Later that day, Norvell needed to write a brief about a trademark matter, and he recalled that Stephan's brief dealt with roughly the same issue. He retrieved Steph's brief from the trash can and borrowed some of its content for his own brief. Norvell called Steph and inquired whether he was still interested in IP law. The answer was a resounding yes.

But it was a slippery slope to navigate as Steph did not want to upset or anger Lanny Yeates, the attorney he reported to in the energy group. Norvell said he would smooth things over with Yeates, which he did, and proceeded to take Steph under his wing to teach him the intricacies of patent law. Norvell gave his blessing



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for Steph to take a week off to take a patent bar review course at the University of Houston and the firm agreed to pay for the course as well. Unbeknownst to his colleagues at Jackson Walker, Steph had flown several times to Philadelphia to interview for a position in IP law in the City of Brotherly Love.

Interestingly, Steph explained that when it came to patent law, the big firms were not necessarily seeking graduates of Ivy League schools. More important were the types of undergraduate degrees that an attorney had—the firms wanted someone with the right technical undergraduate degree. Steph laughingly stated, “My engineering degree was my parlay into White Shoe law firm territory!” An offer came from Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis, an old-line firm, which he joined in the spring of 1994. His departure from Jackson Walker was totally amicable, marking the next chapter in his professional journey.

A sidebar to this job change was the need to explore housing options in the Philadelphia area. Schnader generously paid for Stephan to do a weekend reconnaissance to find a suitable residence for him and Cindy. He explained, “I spent one day looking in Center City, in the middle of Philadelphia. Because I was from Louisiana and Houston, I was accustomed to big, open spaces, large apartments, and plenty of parking, so Center City and the apartment options were overwhelming and had me freaked out. The following day, I went to nearby Chester County, where I found Windermere Court, a brand-new apartment complex with plenty of space, and I signed the lease on the spot. My wife came to regret that I made that rather hasty decision and did not opt for Center City, which she felt might have been more appropriate for a young couple with no kids. However, this way she had a convenient, two-mile commute to Arco, and I took the train into the city every day, which was also an easy, low-stress commute. About a year later, we bought a gorgeous house, brand new construction, in Newtown

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Square, in Delaware County. It even had a basement, something we're not accustomed to in the South."

Steph took the Pennsylvania bar exam, easily passing it. He found the work at Schnader stimulating and enjoyable and did quite well as an associate there. After a couple years, his boss, Bill Murray, who was the co-head of the IP department, approached Steph and his colleague, Rob Rosenthal, about decamping to another firm (literally across the street). Murray explained that he was going to Duane Morris LLP and that all three had been invited to join the firm. Steph said, "Schnader was aware that Rob and I would be poached, so they put the hard press on us so we would not leave the firm. I figured that if I could get a raise out of the move and stay with my boss and his clients, then it would be a good move for me." Steph pivoted and joined Duane Morris as an associate during the summer of 1997.

One memorable anecdote Stephan shared, harking back to his Philadelphia days, occurred on October 3, 1995, when the jury acquitted O.J. Simpson in the murder of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown. Steph was in a conference room with his fellow Schnader employees, watching television as the judge announced the verdict. He said he was flabbergasted by the apparently polarized reaction among the Schnader folks. The Black employees cheered and clapped, while the white employees watched in stunned silence. He added that he understood the Black employees' frustration with the police, but could not really fathom their denial of reality by cheering a flawed verdict.

Although it was quality, productive time spent for Steph in the Duane Morris IP department in Philadelphia, and he admired the firm's culture (based on the Quaker "consensus model"), it also became apparent that a move back to Houston was imminent. Arco Chemical's gasoline additive (MTBE) business was in trouble because of a change in EPA regulations and Cindy saw the writing

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on the wall. She believed Arco Chemical would go under. She was offered a position as a gasoline components trader at Koch Industries, an offer she gladly accepted, which brought them back to the city they loved. Steph strategized on how he should proceed. He invited Bill out to lunch, and explained that the couple was returning to Houston and that he did not want to quit, but instead would love to open a Duane Morris office in that city. The firm agreed, and Houston became their new outpost, with Steph running that office.

So, in 1998, Steph subleased space from another law firm in downtown Houston, in the Chase Tower. Initially as the lone Duane Morris employee there, he continued to handle Bill's clients and also started to bring new clients on board from the Houston area. One of the client companies that Steph brought to the firm was Applied Optoelectronics Inc. (AOI), a Houston-based manufacturer of semiconductor lasers. In recognition of his success on the firm's behalf, Duane Morris promoted Steph to partner in 2000.

Towards the end of 2000, Steph was approached by Dr. Thompson Lin, founder of AOI, about migrating over to the client side. Specifically, he wanted Steph to join as General Counsel, handling the company's patent work and general legal work. This was before the Dot Com bust, and Thompson used the prospect of Steph earning millions of dollars via stock options to help lure him over. The company was a start-up at that juncture, leasing space on the campus of the University of Houston, and Steph was one of their first full-time hires. They eventually moved to their own facility in the Sugarland suburb.

When queried why he left the law firm side, Steph candidly shared his reasoning and motivations. His frustration with the law firm's requirement to bill, and keep track of, a large number of hours each month was a major factor. He was also not happy

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working with the new partner Duane Morris had hired, and was tiring of the routine of writing patent applications. He had also become very skeptical of the patent system and wanted to broaden his experience. The move came with a pay cut, albeit one that was supposed to be compensated for by the aforementioned stock options. Interestingly, Steph said he felt a professional camaraderie and enjoyed the collaboration of being a crucial part of the in-house team. It was refreshingly different from the transactional environment he was accustomed to as an attorney at a law firm. As part of his onboarding, Stephan went to AOI's Sugar Land, Texas, facility, where he was given an overview of quantum physics and laser engineering. This crash course was designed to help him handle the technical side of his future job responsibilities.

Steph said with a chuckle that there were certain annoying constraints working at a start-up despite the firm's growth. "They could find the funds for a \$700k MTBE machine for the engineers down the hall, but they turned off the lights in the bathrooms to save money. The controller couldn't stop the big costs, so he focused on the little costs," he stated. His on-staff tenure at AOI lasted 11 years, and he has continued as an outside legal consultant to the firm.

But AOI has also been a family affair for the Kinsella clan. Over 10 years ago, AOI went public and eventually Cindy was asked to join its board. She was a logical choice for this position, as a successful businessperson with an engineering background who was also based locally. She has been an AOI board member since 2021.

Steph has always welcomed stimulating activities that extended beyond the walls of traditional business, and one of those has been the classroom. In 1998, he was asked by a friend, Paul Katz, to take over teaching a class in Computer Law at the South Texas College of Law. This subject was akin to what we today know as

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Internet Law. One of Steph's fellow instructors there was Mark Gilbreth, another patent attorney, who became a good friend and subsequently introduced Steph to Thompson Lin of AOI.

After leaving AOI as a full-time employee, Stephan opened his own solo practice, representing a number of clients, including AOI. Over time, he reduced this workload and has been mostly retired for several years now, only doing occasional work for his old employer.

Incidentally, proving his entrepreneurial prowess, Steph has also generated revenue for himself via his publishing ventures, from editing to authoring. More about this particular arena is to come.

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*Top - Mr. Kinsella's office at Jackson Walker in Houston (1992);  
bottom - reuniting with Lanny Yeates, Steph's first boss (2001).*



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*Top - a gallant Steph carries Cindy over the threshold of their first house (Philadelphia, 1995); bottom - attempting to walk Muffy in something southerners are unaccustomed to—snow (Philadelphia, 1995).*



## CHAPTER 6

### *On the Lecture Circuit*

“It is a political philosophy that’s like classical liberalism on steroids. This means that most libertarians view man as an individual and believe in certain human rights and that the government or the state is the biggest threat to those rights. Consequently, the state has to be completely eliminated or severely restricted by a constitution or other limits on its power.” This was the explanation that Stephan provided to paint a broad overview of libertarianism, the political philosophy that he has embraced as his own.

Steph began filling in more of the philosophy’s building blocks. “Among libertarians, there are minarchists, those who believe in a so-called small night-watchman state, where the functions of the state are very limited and minimal. At the more extreme end, there are anarchist libertarians, or anarcho-capitalists, who view the state as a violent, criminal gang that is the opposite of a free and open society. The breakdown between the two groups was probably historically 80 percent minarchist and 20 percent anarchist, at least in the beginning,” Steph explained.

Harking back to what first drew him to libertarianism, he said, “I was just a kid from Louisiana fascinated by science and culture and philosophy and lots of other things. I didn’t hold any political views at all. When I was in high school, there was a local librarian who noticed I was a voracious reader and began making book

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recommendations to me. Among the writers she urged me to read was Ayn Rand, author of *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. I also read most of the books listed in *The Fountainhead's* appendix." He was immediately hooked. He also surmised he might have initially been attracted to libertarianism's focus on justice and the victim due to his experience being bullied while young.

Steph shed more light on the subject: "Libertarianism is a much bigger phenomenon today than it was 40 years ago. Back then, it was more of an offshoot of Ayn Rand and her philosophy of Objectivism. She held certain views on religion, reason, politics, and individualism, which got many of the early libertarians going. So, we were a tiny but hyper-intellectual group. We read her books, economic theory, etc. Rand was also a notorious atheist, and many libertarians adopted her views and disbelief in the existence of God."

He said that libertarianism today is at least 10-fold more popular than it was in its earlier days. Certain factors, like greater interest in Austrian Economic theory (which emphasizes methodological individualism and methodological subjectivism), and the popularity of U.S. representative Ron Paul from Texas (the Libertarian Party candidate for president in 1988 and a Republican candidate in 2008 and 2012), can account for at least part of that surge. These have all brought libertarian ideas to the mainstream; and the U.S. has been the base, but this philosophy continues to spread internationally, too, Steph opined. He added that young libertarians today are perhaps less well-read than their older counterparts, but also more radical and anarchist-leaning.

"As I read and understood more about libertarianism, I wrote more about it, too—not just an occasional op-ed for the student newspaper, but pieces I felt could make an advancement or contribution within the field. Part of my motivation was to engage

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with others who embraced and were fascinated by this philosophy,” Steph explained.

In high school and later in college, his interest in libertarianism and related fields like politics, history, philosophy, and Austrian economics only grew. This interest eventually influenced his choice to go to law school since he felt too constricted by the confines of pure engineering. Law seemed more suitable to his intellectual talents and interests and more complementary to his libertarian and political interests than was engineering.

After law school, Steph eventually began to write scholarly articles. His first significant article, which made an original argument for individual rights, appeared in the interdisciplinary journal *Reason Papers* in 1992. Ever since then, Steph’s been writing and publishing. As a patent attorney, he has also—perhaps paradoxically—been writing about why the patent and the IP system should be abolished. Early on, he said he approached this topic tentatively because he feared career consequences, but over time he felt more comfortable expressing his unadorned views.

His more ambitious writing projects have been a host of books on libertarian and legal topics: *Legal Foundations of Free Society*; *Against Intellectual Property*; *International Investment, Political Risk and Dispute Resolution*; *Protecting Foreign Investment Under International Law*; and the aforementioned *Louisiana Civil Law Dictionary*. In 2009, he launched an online annual journal called *Libertarian Papers*, which he edited and published for 10 years.

Steph stated that today, he is one of the leading thinkers on IP policy issues from a free-market perspective. “I’ve become known throughout the world as Mr. Anti-IP, and I’ve achieved this weird reputation,” he concluded.

“I really enjoy helping to clarify libertarian thought, to add to it, to help advance it. I can’t help but being somewhat of an activist but really, I view myself as part of what Albert Jay Nock calls ‘The

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Remnant’—helping preserve, and advance, the ideas of liberty and freedom for when humanity, or future scholars, are finally ready for them or need them.” In addition to intellectual property, he has written notable pieces extending or advancing libertarian legal theory in a number of areas, from anarchism to decentralized legal systems, contract theory, causation, and justice, rights, and punishment theory. In 2023 he published what he views as his *magnum opus*—to date—the over 700-page *Legal Foundations of Free Society*, an updated selection of his contributions to libertarian theory published over almost 30 years, from 1994 to 2023.

His publications have made him a very influential libertarian thinker. As one of the world’s most prominent libertarian thinkers, his mentor Hans-Hermann Hoppe, wrote in the Foreword to his book,

“more than 40 years after the first publication of Rothbard’s *Ethics of Liberty* and characterized by much practical disappointment and increasing theoretical confusion, the publication of Stephan Kinsella’s present work must be considered a most welcome sign of renewed hope and new, refreshing intellectual inspiration. Indeed, with this work, that has been in the making for more than two decades, Kinsella has produced no less than an intellectual landmark, establishing himself as the leading legal theorist and the foremost libertarian thinker of his generation. While following in Rothbard’s footsteps, Kinsella’s work does not merely rehash what has been said or written before. Rather, having absorbed as well all of the relevant literature that has appeared during the last few decades since Rothbard’s passing, Kinsella in the following offers some fresh perspectives and an innovative approach to the age-old quest for justice, and he adds several highly

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significant refinements and improvements and some centrally important new insights to the theories of personhood, property and contract, most famously some radical criticism and rejection of the idea of “intellectual property” and “intellectual property rights.”

Henceforth, then, all essential studies in the philosophy of law and the field of legal theory will have to take full account of the theories and criticisms expounded by Kinsella.”

After law school, he also began to attend various conferences, often those of the Mises Institute, where he eventually became a Senior Fellow. He gradually made many connections and lifelong friends from all over the world, the most influential being Hans-Hermann Hoppe, a German philosopher and Austrian economist and influential libertarian theorist, who was a colleague and protege of sorts of Murray Rothbard, one of the primary intellectual figures of modern libertarianism. Steph had been bowled over and influenced by Hoppe’s writing in law school. He ended up publishing some favorable book reviews of Hoppe’s work, which lead to him meeting Hoppe and others associated with the Mises Institute in 1994. In 2006 he helped Hoppe start the Property and Freedom Society (PFS), based in Bodrum, Turkey. Steph is still involved with the PFS and usually attends its Annual Meeting every September.

Interestingly, Steph has rejected occasional offers of paid positions within the think tank world. This is because of his unwillingness to be beholden to or put himself under the control of any single organization or those who control it. He prefers independence instead so that he can follow his ideas wherever they lead him. Instead, he self-funded his avocation and interests with his successful and somewhat complementary legal career, to maintain independence.

The lecture circuit has sought Steph as a conference speaker, lecturer and panelist for many years. From regular appearances at the Mises Institute in Auburn, Alabama, to the PFS Conference in Bodrum, Turkey, he is a perennial favorite as a compelling and respected speaker at these meetings.

Steph said that he really enjoys contributing to the development of libertarian theory and feels like he has managed to succeed in this field as a respected intellectual without having to become a professor or work for a think tank. He noted with pride that people from all over the world who contact him often call him “Dr. Kinsella,” just assuming he is a Ph.D.

Steph resisted joining the Libertarian Party, the more activist side of the movement, for decades. He has been more interested in intellectual activism than electoral—though he has voted Libertarian ever since 1988—but finally joined the Libertarian Party in 2018, and currently serves on its Judicial Committee. He continues to be involved with the PFS and to speak at numerous other forums, universities, and conferences. As always, he has a number of articles and future book projects in the works.



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*Top - Steph at Mises Brasil in São Paulo (2017); middle - speaking at the Property and Freedom Society Conference in Turkey (2006); bottom - as a panelist, center, at that same meeting seven years later (2013).*

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*Top - Appearing as a guest on John Stossel's TV news show (2015);  
bottom - a sampling of the books that Steph has authored.*

## CHAPTER 7

### *Friends and Family*

It was once said that “true happiness consists not in the multitude of friends, but in the worth and choice.” Yet Stephan is a soul who has mastered both an abundance of friendships, and their depth and quality. How many of us can count among our current friends those who were on our journey decades ago through elementary school? Steph has nurtured and maintained those relationships, along with many others.

His tapestry of friendships originates across a breadth of time and places. He shared his perspective on how he achieved this. “I think I’ve always been the one to keep relationships up. Everyone has circles of friendships if they’re lucky. I have numerous friends and family members who are important to me, all from different groups, or ‘phyles’ as science-fiction writer Neal Stephenson and speculator Doug Casey refer to ‘groups of people that get together with others, bound by whatever is important to them.’ All relationships are unique, but those from a given phyle tend to have certain things in common,” he explained.

The roots of Steph’s oldest friends can be traced either to the classrooms of St. George Elementary School or to his immediate neighborhood, where they played after-school and weekend football games. “My first best friend was John Caffarel, going back to first grade and continuing through LSU and beyond. My father often dropped me off at John’s house in the morning, and John’s

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mother, Miss Wanda, would feed me a second breakfast, before we took the bus to school. Later, in high school, ninth grade I believe, I had my first job working after school at the superette near John's house," Steph said. "The arrival of our classmate John Wax at St. George a few years later completed our close-knit trio for many years," he added. Those three are still close friends.

Steph also counts Brother Harold Harris as a foundational relationship and good friend from his high school days. Initially serving as Steph's high school geometry teacher, the friendship evolved beyond the typical student-teacher relationship. He would often visit Steph's family in Prairieville, and later spoke at Steph and Cindy's wedding. They remain close to this day.

The transition to LSU opened new chapters in Stephan's story of friendships, and he especially found camaraderie with fellow engineering students, namely Ben Favort, Chris LeBlanc, Chris Simoneaux, and several others. Interestingly, because Cindy was an electrical engineering student, too, her circle of friends intersected with these same individuals. Time spent together ranged from engineering field trips to weekend beer blasts, strengthening the bonds between this group of comrades.

Law school was the next conduit for supplying new friends, and Stephan found good buddies in Tony Tramontana and Paul Comeaux. They emerged not just as classmates but as partners in backpacking across the European landscape. Paul again became Steph's fellow student during their year studying in London. Friendships now had international roots as Steph befriended law students from various parts of Europe, including especially Australian Danesh Sarooshi, now a law professor at Oxford, and Bas de Regt, a Dutch attorney.

The transition from student life to professional life was fertile ground for making good friends. The Jackson Walker crowd in Houston became much more than office colleagues and included

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Lori Marlatt, Corey Fine, Susan Stanton, Leslie Ashby, and Jim Goolsby. His career path leading him to Philadelphia corresponded with a new group of friends, mostly patent attorneys. Tony Diehl and Steve Mendelsohn were Steph's best buds in the City of Brotherly Love. Each new city brought an enrichment and enhancement to his personal life. His circle of friends continued to expand.

Tony Diehl described his early history with Steph. "We met when we were both young associates in the IP Department of Schnader Harrison in Philadelphia." Back in those days, Tony described Steph like this: "He was the hub of our community and our social life, if you could call it that. We were doing the most mind-numbing work you could imagine, and if not for Stephan, we would not have interacted very much. He brought us together and organized ways to enjoy life outside of the office, humanizing our lives back then. Steph was interested in what people had to say, and was a great listener, and made a real difference for all of us."

Tony added an amusing anecdote about accompanying Steph to the Porcupine Freedom Festival, or PorcFest for short. This was many years after their Schnader Harrison days, in 2021. The festival is an annual event held at a campground in Lancaster, New Hampshire, a tiny town along the Connecticut River. "It is like a small-scale Burning Man populated by libertarian nerds and weirdos, and Steph is like a god to these people. It is a colorful event for sure," Tony said with a chuckle.

Also, through the workplace, Steph stated that he made meaningful friendships with some of the team members at AOI, the laser company where he was employed for a decade as general counsel.

The realm of libertarian thought marked another rich chapter in Stephan's expanding world of friendships. His first libertarian conference, the John Randolph Club meeting held in Crystal City,



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Virginia, in October 1994, exposed him not just to a towering figure of the movement, the late Murray Rothbard, but others, too, who have been friends now for decades. This group included, most notably, Hans-Hermann Hoppe, a German-American academic, who became a mentor and great friend to Steph.

On a shuttle bus from the Atlanta airport to a Mises Institute meeting in Auburn, Alabama, the following Spring in 1995, Steph happened to sit next to a young scholar named Jörg Guido Hülsmann, who also became a close friend, and a student and fellow protege of Hans. Their hour-plus conversation on the way to the conference demonstrated their similar intellectual interests and blossomed into mutual respect and friendship that still endures. They have attended numerous conferences together over the years and keep in touch regularly despite living on different continents (Guido resides in France). Steph laughingly said that he and Guido have been like Hans's surrogate children, a testament to the alignment of their philosophical beliefs. In fact, Guido and Steph edited and published two separate *festschrifts*, collections of essays written in honor of Hans, in 2009 and 2024. Steph reported additional friendships were made via this conduit, "but have been too many to mention."

Another friendship emanating from a shared set of beliefs has been with Jeff Tucker, who was with the Mises Institute for many years until 2011. In about 1998, Jeff first came into contact with Steph. Jeff explained the genesis of their relationship. "I was working at a think tank focused on economics and issues of human liberty. I had never met Stephan, but he wrote an article on intellectual property for our journal. I read it and found myself mortified because it seemed obsessive about a viewpoint I didn't think mattered much. However, I began to notice that he was asking questions that almost no one else was asking, let alone answering. Inexorably, I was drawn to him and to some literature

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that was consistent with his thesis. Like Stephan, I got the bug and became his apostle and amplifier.”

Finally, sometime in the early 2000s, the two had their initial face-to-face, which occurred at the Mises Institute in Auburn. “We became fast friends and partners in this work. We have since traveled together, hung out, and spent so many hours talking only about intellectual property. We’ve lived and breathed the same air for years,” Jeff explained.

His sense of awe seemed to grow as he addressed Steph’s unique genius. “He is the very first intellectual in history to fully solve the problem of what property is and what it is not. I think generations will go by before he is recognized for this. He is a monster intellectual who has the discipline to focus on what he really knows—and in a good way. He always has a burning desire to get to the bottom of the issue that’s important to him,” Jeff stated. He concluded by saying, “If Stephan is your friend, he will be your friend for life and always stick by you.”

Far from the canyons of philosophical and political friendships, Steph and Cindy were exceptionally close to another Houston couple until a divorce threw a monkey wrench into the situation. Cindy had met Misty and Mush (short for Mushahid) Khan in 1991 through her employment at Arco Chemical, where they all worked as engineers, shortly after she moved to Houston and while Stephan was still studying in London. The four became increasingly closer; at the Khans’ wedding Steph served as best man, for Mush, while Cindy was the matron of honor for Misty. For 15 years, the two couples were inseparable, sharing annual Rosemary Beach, Florida vacations, international travel to places like Prague and Capri, along with the milestones of their growing families.

They became Steph and Cindy’s dearest friends. Misty said that Steph even became close to her mom, Jackie, and they still meet on

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occasion for lunch. “He will help her out from time to time when she requires some kind of assistance, and my mom just adores him,” she added.

Misty even accompanied Steph to the annual PFS Conference held in Turkey at his invitation, in June, 2010. Misty said that it was a wonderful trip, and Steph was “like a rock star there” among the attendees. On a funny side note, Cindy, who had opted to skip the conference, urged Misty to go, telling her to say “You’re me” if anyone inquires!

The fraying of Misty and Mush’s marriage eventually became apparent and they divorced. Looking back, Steph said in a voice tinged with regret, “It was really sad how it played out. Mush and I were such good friends, but it wasn’t possible to maintain it after the divorce, and Mush went his own way and developed new friends.” Misty candidly said just how supportive both Steph and Cindy were following her divorce. “I was very grateful for how they were there for me and how they so thoughtfully included my mom and me so often,” she stated.

Steph explained that he and Cindy were tremendously close to his brother Michael, and later his partner Matt Woebecke, and her brother John and his wife Tricia, with whom they have extremely close bonds.

Reflecting on his diverse friendship circles, Steph developed a thoughtful philosophy that balanced pragmatism with genuinely connecting with people. “You have to know when to let go, and when to call it quits on a friendship that no longer feels mutually beneficial. Sometimes, letting go is the healthiest course. I try to regularly keep in touch with the friends that I value. Further, I don’t expect my normal friends to be libertarian and understand that piece of my life or vice-versa. My libertarian friends satisfy my need to have an intellectual outlet, and it amazes me that I have assembled this group since I’m not an academic.”

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On the family front, Stephan's half-sister, Crystal, said she was 18-years-old when she first learned of his existence. The startling news was delivered to Crystal by their mother in the office of the family's small seafood restaurant in Zachary, Louisiana. "The symptoms I experienced after learning this were similar to how one feels upon losing someone. I went through anger, a feeling of betrayal, and incredible sadness," Crystal candidly stated. She continued, "Once the anger started to subside, I had a million questions for our mother, and the anger began transitioning to excitement. My brother, Rusty, could not accept that news until roughly six years ago. At first, he took it really hard and went in a different direction than I did," Crystal opined.

An interesting piece of this puzzle was a visit to the restaurant by then-Louisiana Governor Edwin Edwards. Their mother, Gail, pulled him aside and beseeched him to use his resources to help locate the son she had given up for adoption. Within weeks, Gail received an envelope in the mail with a list of male births in Louisiana on October 1, 1965—some 200-300 names in all with a Louisiana driver's license. "My mom and I sat in a room each day after work and called every name that we could match a phone number to," Crystal explained. Upon using a third-party to further the investigation, they learned that he had probably been an LSU student. Crystal said that she and Gail went to the LSU campus and began perusing yearbook photos. However, in one of the high jinks pranks of his youth, Steph had switched his picture with that of a friend at registration. This became a confusing roadblock in their search, as Gail did not see any resemblance in the photos to herself or Steph's birth father.

Gail's husband finally called Norman and explained that she had been looking for Stephan and had finally identified him. When Norman called Steph to tell him, Steph's first thought was for his parents; he did not want to upset them. This was shortly before his

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30th birthday—the date by which Gail had vowed to stop looking if she had not found Steph by then—and he wanted to wait a few weeks before talking to Gail. He asked Norman if he and Pat would invite Gail to their house in the meantime, to satisfy Gail’s curiosity about the family that had raised her son, and to put his parents at ease since they would be in control. So, Norman invited them to dinner; Crystal and Gail ended up coming. “They were incredibly gracious and nice to us, and it was a great meeting,” Crystal said.

Those early days after making contact with Stephan held special memories and were a time of discovery for both of them. Crystal explained, “Steph was living in Philadelphia, and we would call each other, sometimes talking for six or seven hours at a time, just to get to know each other. We finally met at Christmas-time at my mom’s house, when all the cousins, aunts, and uncles were there, to meet him, too.”

The relationship deepened after they both ended up residing in Texas. “Once Stephan moved back to Houston, and I had moved there for work, we would meet up and go to dinner often. He bought this charming 1940s-style home right behind his house, and I told him I wanted to live there. I moved out of my apartment and spent the next year living there. It was the best. I spent such quality time with Stephan, Cindy, and Ethan, and we did so much together,” Crystal said.

Steph had planned to attend the inaugural meeting of the libertarian PFS in Turkey in May 2006, and he invited Crystal to attend. Making it even more special for Crystal, Steph extended the trip to Paris for a few days. “He took me under his wing like a big brother, and it was great,” she enthusiastically reported.

Cindy’s first encounter with her future husband stood in sharp contrast to Crystal’s initial meeting. Cindy was at the Kinsella residence for tennis team practice on the family’s home court when



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she took a bathroom break. En route to the restroom, she encountered Steph sitting on the living room floor reading a book. The television was on in the background. "I said hello to him, and he didn't even look up. He completely ignored me," she said with a smile. She fondly recalled Steph in those high school days, saying, "I could always hear him coming. He drove this ridiculous Ford Futura that he had modified with these gigantic speakers in the rear seat. He blasted music out the windows, like the group Rush. I would think to myself, what a weird, eccentric guy. He was a nerd!"

She continued, "I became closer and closer to Steph's brother, Michael. Our high school friendship continued at LSU, and his and Steph's grandmothers used to say that they could see me ending up with Michael."

As fellow electrical engineering students, their paths crossed frequently in the classroom. "He was very, very bright, and I've always been attracted to the smartest man in the room. One of my highest priorities was smartness, and he was definitely that. Sometimes, we would plan to meet, and he would show up dripping sweat, which was the result of passionate arguing at a student debate site on campus," she stated. As Steph stated earlier in this narrative, his first date invitation to Cindy conflicted with a date he had already scheduled because he expected Cindy to turn him down. They surmounted that social hiccup and began dating. "I found him interesting, fascinating even. He was nice, funny, so smart, and came from a good family, but he was a little shorter than me," Cindy said with a twinkle in her eye.

When Steph received an employment deferment offer from his law firm and considered graduate school in London, Cindy showed remarkable maturity and sensibility in her response. Steph had a deep concern about the relationship fully rekindling after the pending separation. "I said there are two reasons you should go.

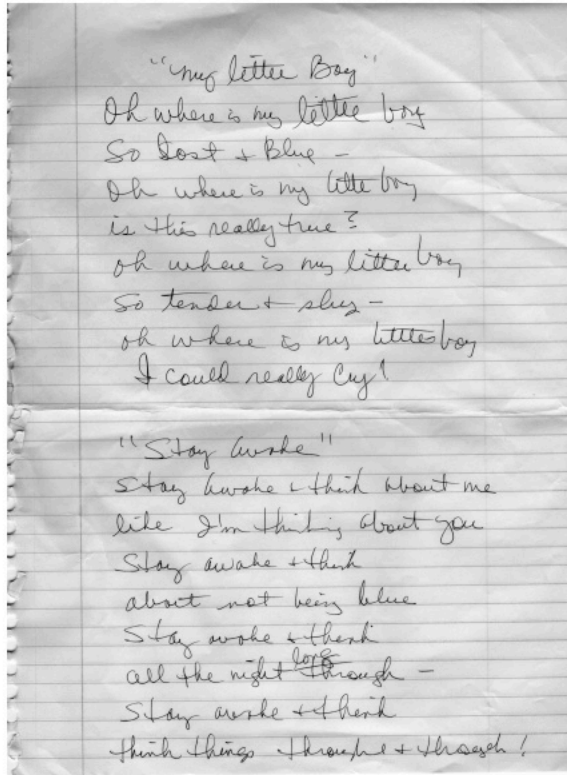
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One, if you and I are going to end up together, we should be able to survive a year of you living abroad. Secondly, it's a wonderful opportunity for you to see the world and actually challenge yourself intellectually," she explained.

Their faith (especially Cindy's more concrete faith) in their connection proved well-founded. After a year apart, they reunited in the States, became engaged, and began their journey together as husband and wife, later welcoming their son Ethan into their lives.

The partnership between them has successfully transitioned and evolved with life's changes. When Cindy's employment first sent her globe-trotting, Steph stepped up to tend to Ethan's and the household's needs. As Stephan has since mostly retired from law, he continues supporting Cindy and her myriad work activities, as well as keep the household running smoothly in their new River Oaks, Houston home. Looking into the future, a vacation home in a pristine mountain locale is also a real possibility for the family.

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Top - A pair of poems, two of many composed by Gail during the years she searched for Stephan; bottom - the day they finally met (1995).

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*Top - left to right, Jim Schonian, Cindy Littlefield, Rusty McGehee, Crystal Schonian, Cindy Kinsella, and Stephan at Crystal's 50th birthday party (2024); bottom - at Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin, Tony Tramontana, Paul Comeaux, and Steph (1990).*



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*Top - left to right, Jackie Hibbler, Zach Khan, Misty Khan, Seth Khan, Mush Khan, Cindy Kinsella, Ethan Kinsella, and Steph at Rosemary Beach, Florida (2009); bottom - Mush Khan, Misty Khan, Michael Kinsella, Stephan, Cindy Kinsella and Robert van Houtum on Capri, Italy (2000).*

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*Top - left to right, Carl Bowen, Joy Morin, Greg Morin, Stephan, Juan Carpio in Bariloche, Argentina (2024); bottom - with libertarian friends, including Guido Hulsmann (upper left), Steph, Hans Hoppe (third from right), Walter Block (fourth from right) at the International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences, Seoul, Korea (2000).*



## CHAPTER 8

### *Looking Back and Ahead*

Steph thought momentarily and then explained what he viewed as the ideal model for familial success. “I think the typical American trajectory is an arc, that at its best, is a generational climb. My great-grandparents laid the foundation, and my grandparents achieved a little more than they did. My parents did even better than their parents and were the first generation of the family to attend college, and their kids, my generation, did better still. Each generation lifted up the next.

“If you’re fortunate enough to have good parents, as I was, they will instill you with strong values. They gave us love and support and did what parents were supposed to do. Cindy and I are conscious of learning from our parents’ good examples and wanting to improve where we can. Cindy is full of warmth and affection, even more so than what she experienced with her parents. She has created a nurturing and loving environment for Ethan. As I got older, I became more appreciative of what my parents did for me,” Steph concluded. He added, “I’m so grateful that I was adopted by wonderful parents, and I’m also grateful to my birth mother for giving me up for adoption.”

When queried whether there were any particular pearls of wisdom that he would like to pass on to Ethan, Steph replied that he believes those have all been integrated into the way that he and

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Cindy have raised Ethan. Steph stated that teaching by example was the *modus operandi* in the Kinsella household.

One of the maxims that Steph would sometimes hear in his youth from his father, Norman, was that it was of paramount importance to be happy in your job, which trumped salary. Ironically, when Steph informed Norman that he took a pay cut when transitioning from a law firm to in-house counsel at AOI, Norman was shocked and asked, “Are you sure you know what you’re doing?” Steph responded that he was taking a pay cut for a more gratifying work experience, as Norman had advised him. Norman replied, “But that’s a lot of money!” “Apparently, he never really meant it,” Steph said with a hearty chuckle.

In returning to parenting and providing guidance, Steph explained that he has never told his son what type of woman to marry. “But, I think Ethan witnessing a healthy, loving, mutually supportive marriage was an excellent role model to set for him. We have established a blueprint for him to follow, and I’m hoping that he makes wise choices,” he stated.

On the career front, Steph also opined that he can provide Ethan with the benefit of his hindsight. “I’m glad I went to law school, but perhaps international arbitration, instead of patent law, would have been a better fit for me. International arbitration is a field where my skills and interests could have flourished. I believe I would have excelled there, finding it fascinating and potentially crafting a more substantial and enjoyable career trajectory,” Steph said.

Taking it a step further, Steph said, “I really enjoyed law school, but my experience was far from universal. A lot of my classmates disliked it, and many lawyers seem to be unhappy with their career choices. (I’m not.) I am more than happy to share the insights that I’ve learned professionally and help others chart their course.”

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Looking at the bigger picture, Steph cited the dedication he included in his 2023 book, *Legal Foundations of a Free Society*. It reads, “To Ethan and his generation in hopes that they and their descendants live in a freer world.” He expounded upon that: “We’ve achieved a really good life, but I would like my son to have an even better life. It may be difficult for him to achieve that, in part because the success Cindy and I, and especially Cindy, have achieved. As a libertarian, I have this deeply held hope that we won’t have a dystopian Mad Max world filled with all sorts of catastrophes. It would be wonderful if Ethan could inherit a freer and richer world offering more opportunity for all.”

When queried about giving back and charitable efforts, Steph spoke of the large amounts of time and funds he has donated to libertarian causes. “What I view as my charitable activity are my donations to fighting for liberty, for example, contributing to the Mises Institute, a not-for-profit organization. To me, the most important things in the world are liberty and freedom, and the best way to achieve those is by developing and spreading the word about economic freedom. My primary sympathy and the aim of my compassion are fueled by my belief that the poor will benefit the most from a free world,” he concluded.

He has also considered teaching as an adjunct professor at a local law school, which he enjoyed when he did this for a couple of years in 1998-99. Steph also has plans to prepare lectures and courses on legal philosophy and libertarian theory which can be offered to interested students of liberty around the world.

Closing out this narrative, Stephan said that he is looking to flourish in his next phase ahead, the golden years. “I am content with my life’s journey, and I am thankful it isn’t over yet. It’s only in the last century or so that humanity has escaped the struggle of a hand-to-mouth existence, and I feel fortunate to have been a part of the escape from that. We have a unique experience being alive

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now. If you're born in a free country like the United States, in modern times, you're already so fortunate and should find a way to take advantage. There's nothing wrong with being aware of that. I am humbled, grateful, and especially lucky to have Cindy and Ethan in my life. They are the true measure of my wealth," he confidently declared.

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*Top - A family visit to London (2023); bottom - Stephan burning the midnight oil in his Houston home-office (2025).*





*Adopting Liberty: The Stephan Kinsella Story*, by Alan D. Bergman, is a brief biography of Stephan Kinsella, focusing on his family, upbringing, education, and career. A libertarian writer and retired patent attorney in Houston, Stephan was General Counsel for Applied Optoelectronics, Inc., a partner with Duane Morris, and adjunct law professor at South Texas College of Law; LL.M., King's College London; JD, Paul M. Hebert Law Center, LSU; BSEE and MSEE, LSU. His publications include *Legal Foundations of a Free Society* (Papinian Press, 2023), *Against Intellectual Property* (Mises Institute, 2008) and *International Investment, Political Risk, and Dispute Resolution: A Practitioner's Guide* (2d ed., Oxford University Press, 2020).



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