

## Chapter 1

### **The Cycle of Life: My Family Heritage**

On a beautiful spring day in 1967 in Salem County, New Jersey two events occurred: we gained and lost a member of the Szymborski family.

As I was preparing for my entrée into the world, my paternal grandfather, for whom I was named, was suffering from Mesothelioma cancer in the hospital room directly below the room in which I was being birthed.

Upon my arrival, my father raced to my grandfather's room and joyfully announced to him that his first grandson, Leo Gregory Szymborski IV has arrived! My grandfather's response was simply, "Boy, boy, boy!"

Those were the last words he spoke as the next day he passed away.

As family history gets handed down, this story gave me great comfort and pride knowing that my grandfather's last thoughts were of me. I cannot begin to understand how my parents dealt with both the joy of my birth and the grief of my grandfather's death simultaneously. All families have their stories and in the re-telling of this day over the years, my mother always said that spirit of my grandfather arose and connected with me, as he was in the room directly below me.

This specific family story has come to be truer than we all realized at the time. You see, my Grandfather was much more than a plumber, he was an entrepreneur, just like I would become.

With all that happened at the time of birth, there was even more. I came into this world with my own health issues. In my first three years of life, I was constantly ill and had pneumonia and bronchitis several times. I just about lived at the hospital in an oxygen tent during that time; my Mom said I was like the Boy in the Plastic Bubble. I remember my family coming to see me through the plastic walls and I still remember my sister Cindy, who was four years older than me, putting her hand up to the plastic to meet mine. The doctor made a diagnosis that removing my tonsils would help with my condition. It was right after that operation when I started to have a normal life.

I am a third-generation plumber and pipefitter by trade. My grandfather, who passed at my birth, had New Jersey plumbing license #002—he was an original and a trail blazer in the industry. Throughout his long career, he worked in many chemical plants as a Master Plumber and pipefitter. Over the ensuing decades, my father and I would work in many of those same toxic places, some of which are considered the deadliest in the country as the pipe insulation was loaded with asbestos, the chief cause of mesothelioma.

Growing up I worked with my Dad doing all the family's handiwork—everything from plumbing to fixing the family car. What was odd was I excelled at technical information and self-learning through technical manuals but could not sit down to read a book. I was frustrated with school as I could not focus my attention to get

**Excerpt from the book:** *Leo Szymborski: The Journey of Water Doctors Recommend*--Chapter 1

through the first page of a book without losing interest. I thought it was a curse and the reason I had so much trouble learning in school.

At 17, I was done with school and began full-time plumbing and heating employment with my father, following in the Szymborski tradition and like my father and his father, became a plumber as well.

My Dad and I did not play ball or really do any type of sports, we just worked together. Some of my best memories I have with my Dad was working side-by-side with him and learning from him.

We worked primarily in South Jersey, where many of the homes were supplied by well water. There were numerous chemical plants in that area whose emissions resulted in an abundance of acid rain. These chemicals acidified the well water to the point that it ate into the copper pipes, causing pinhole leaks and created blue-green stains in the sinks and bathtubs. That was a particular problem for us because it was quickly ruining the pipes we installed in the homes.

As I shared earlier, I had a knack for learning and understanding technical aspects of things and could come up with a solution to a plumbing, mechanical or pipe issue quickly. It became characteristic of my Dad, when he needed my help to overcome an obstacle in our work, would say, "Okay, Boy Genius, go and find a way to fix this". And no matter what the problem was, I pretty much could come up with the right solution.

### Overcoming Plumbing Obstacles and New Challenges

To carry out my plumbing commission and expand my knowledge, I attended a water treatment course in Philadelphia. I learned that many plumbers were adding crushed marble to help raise the pH (potential hydrogen) in the well water and that the municipal water utility companies were using lye and bicarbonates to address the problem of the eroding pipes. Armed with this knowledge, we began to use the acid neutralizers then available to address the problem.

However, we found that there still were difficulties adjusting the water to the optimal pH, add to that additional issues such as the accumulation of lime scale. Some wells produced water with a pH as low as 5.0, and the crushed marble would only raise it to 6.0, still acidic enough to seriously bite into the copper pipes. After further research, I discovered that by adding other minerals like magnesium oxide as well as other alkaline substances we could consistently achieve a neutral to slightly alkaline pH of 7.0 to 7.5. That is how we were able to overcome our water acid obstacle in South Jersey.

As with most conundrums, the solution of one problem gives rise to another related problem. It was no different for us in our quest for good quality water. We found that our acid neutralizers deposited considerable lime scale in the plumbing and made the water hard. To handle those undesirable effects we installed water softeners, which worked well for the scaling and hardness but were criticized for jeopardizing the health of those with heart disease by putting too much sodium into the water. Back to the drawing board. To overcome this new challenge, we incorporated the reverse osmosis drinking system into the processing configuration.

Success! We created a tri-system integration of acid neutralization, water softening, and reverse osmosis into our work product.

We celebrated this success and at the same time received a diagnosis: the reason for my problems learning in school was due to Dyslexia. I am so grateful for my Dad at this time because he helped me to look at this differently: Instead of this Dyslexia being an obstacle, I was able to discover it could be my superpower to self-learn and create, to build and have no fear of working on any projects. I knew if others could do these things, I could as well. I am so thankful that my Dad kept telling me this over and over till it stuck in my head. Even so, at the time, I had no idea I would be able to advance myself past just being a technician working for someone else.

I had the drive and willpower to try becoming a business owner in my 20s. It was not easy since I had no understanding of business nor had I taken any classes on it in school. But I was great at math and could add up what it took to get ahead and I worked hard to make sure I got there. Later, I learned that I did not need to know everything, I just needed to surround myself with people who had skills I didn't possess and with whom there was mutual support and trust.

And this is how at age 20 I found myself in the water purification business.

### My Own Family—the Early Years

At 25, I had my first son, Leo Gregory Szymborski V. He was such a great inspiration to me! He came into this world with his own health issues, though. When we brought him home from the hospital, within a few days, he was turning yellow from Jaundice. His bilirubin was really high, about 50, and they wanted to do a blood transfusion. Of course I immediately offered my blood. At this time, during the 1990's, HIV/AIDs were rampant. The hospital refused to accept my blood as it wasn't tested and requested me to sign a disclaimer that said my son could have a chance of getting AIDS from the transfusion. They said he could have other complications from the transfusion and may lose his hearing.

I was not willing to let them take such a chance with my precious boy. I immediately contacted doctors that I knew and trusted. They responded at once and recommended to first try photo light therapy, as it was the least invasive therapy. Then, if there was no change in the first few hours, to proceed with the transfusion. Well, after two hours of the photo light therapy, his bilirubin came down to 29 points, that's about a 20 point drop—the therapy was working! After 48 hours he was normal, with no transfusion.

This was an affirmation to always dig deeper: I was learning how to not just give in to the traditional medical 'system', that I should always ask questions and find alternate solutions whenever possible.

At this time in my life, I really started to buckle down to be the best Dad I could be. Just 3 years later my second son, Dean Thomas Szymborski, came into our life. I also used photo light therapy on him as well, just in case, and he was fine. Dean was the most inquisitive of my sons. If I was building a table, he would be right there with me with tools in his hand trying to help. What a wonderful family, two sons! I was so happy with my boys. They followed me everywhere and climbed all over me and made me so proud as they grew.

Then a most wonderful surprise for our family. Within a year of my second son, we were blessed with a girl, Nadine, arriving in this world strong and beautiful. After she was born, a family friend bought her a wind up

**Excerpt from the book:** *Leo Szymborski: The Journey of Water Doctors Recommend--Chapter 1*

mobile that hung over her bassinet and it played the tune 'You are My Sunshine, My Only Sunshine', a song that has significant meaning for me, as time would tell.

I must of have wound it up thousands of times for her and so the song stuck in my head. One day, my father and I were working in a basement installing a water system and I was humming that song, 'You are My Sunshine'. My Dad asked me why I was humming that tune. I said I wasn't sure. My Dad said my grandfather would sing that song to all the kids in our family, it was his favorite song. Nadine is my Sunshine for sure.

At this time, I was 30 years young and well on my way to building a wonderful life for my family.

### Family Transitions

I have a brother Steven, ten years my junior, who started working alongside me when he was about 17 years old. Just like when my father taught me, I had to only show him once and he picked it up fast. He worked with me in New Jersey for several years and then again in Florida for several more. Steven is good brother and hard worker but like most brothers, we did not always see eye to eye.

Having a family business is bittersweet or a better term is a 'doubled edged sword'. It's not easy working with family and working together every day can cause great animosity between family members, even now. It's not easy to wear so many hats from being a boss, Dad, husband, brother, son, nephew and even a friend. I always said it would be easier just working with strangers.

But then, there came a time where I found out family is the glue and it sticks together through the hard times and the good. Even our outside employees eventually become part of the pH Prescription™ family. It's not hard to be part of our family--just be loyal and fair and our office and warehouse is a great place to be. I enjoy what I do, and I believe because I enjoy it so much, my team does too.

The wheel of life turns and in 2013 my own father, Leo Szymborski III, passed away from complications, mostly derived from Mesothelioma, deep in his lungs, just like my grandfather. The day my Dad passed was sudden. But, as luck would have it, I happened to be just down the road from the hospital that the ambulance brought him to. I was meeting with a client discussing water treatment system options. During the meeting, my phone rang and I ignored it the first few times. The next time it rang, I instinctually knew something was wrong, and I answered the call. It was my wife telling me to get to the hospital immediately as something happened to my Dad. I felt like the wind was knocked out of me, I was so scared.

Normally I am about an hour away from my Dad's home. But today, at this time, receiving this call, I was just 10 minutes from him. Friends tell me that the Universe makes no mistakes, there was a reason I was so close to that hospital on that day at that time. I arrived at the hospital and was greeted by a nurse who stopped me to tell me my Dad had passed, so I would not freak out when I walked into his room. My Mom was standing next to him crying when I walked in. I put my arms around her and she looked up at me, and asked me how I got here so fast then, collapsed into my arms. She said I was her rock, but I knew she was mine. This was the most painful day for me and my family as well.

When my Mom and I got back to her house that night, my Mom was getting lots of calls from our family asking how she was doing. I needed some air, so I stepped out on the back porch to catch my breath since I have not even had a Moment to reflect on what just happened.

I heard some faint music wafting through the air from the neighbor behind my Mom's home. I could hear a song, I took a deep breath as the notes and words registered--- it was **You are my Sunshine** and when it was over, it played again. My eyes welled up with tears, in my heart I knew my father was with me. Tears of joy flowed down my face...

After my Dad passed away, I realized that he really was a great father to me. But after thinking deeper, I realized how much more my mother was there for me and what awesome Mom she was, and how much she did so much for us all. She was the glue that held it all together.

Love you Mom!