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Dean's Executive Leadership Series - Pepperdine University / DELS 2007-2008

Transcript of Presentation by Steve Lopez, *L.A. Times* columnist – Part 1

About DELS: The Dean's Executive Leadership Series at the [Graziadio School of Business and Management](#) features in-depth audio or video interviews with today's top business practitioners and thought leaders. [Listen](#) or [subscribe](#) to the podcast to hear their views and insight on the current challenges and opportunities facing the business community.

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The Graziadio School of Business and Management at Pepperdine University proudly presents the Dean's Executive Leadership Series. This podcast invites top business practitioners and thought leaders to share their view on the real world of business.

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Dean Linda Livingstone: Well, good evening everyone. Welcome to the last of our Dean's Executive Leadership Series speakers for this year. It has been an amazing year. We've had some wonderful speakers. We started in the fall in Orange County with Deborah Platt Majoras, who's the chair of the Federal Trade Commission or she was at that time. She's actually back in the private sector right now. We had Bruce Rosenblum, the president of Warner Brothers Television; Andy Bird, the president of Walt Disney International and Bob Eckert of Mattel, which was fascinating given all that they've been dealing with recently. We went to northern California for the first time and had Bob Simpson, the president and COO of Jelly Belly Candy Company. I am sorry that all of you in southern California did not get to enjoy

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the Jelly Beans. And, as a matter of fact, I actually still have some in my cabinet at home, we got so many that evening. And then tonight we close out our series with what will be a wonderful evening as Steve Lopez, a columnist with the *L.A. Times*, and I will provide more of an introduction of him in just a few minutes.

I wanted to give you a few updates on some things going on in the school before I do that introduction. We are already in the process of planning for next year's Dean's Executive Leadership Series. It's going to be a wonderful and special series. We will start on October 14th with Katherine Karlic, who is the executive vice-president and chief investment officer of GE Asset Management Fixed Income, so that's a mouthful, but it will be fascinating and a wonderful way to kick off the year from the finance side of the world. I also want to give a special word of appreciation to Farmer's Insurance Group. They have been sponsoring this series for the last two years and so we certainly appreciate that and couldn't do this series and many of the other things we do without supportive organizations like Farmers Insurance Group.

Just a couple of things going on in the school. One of our kind of our last major events for the summer, on June 10th, at the Center Club in Costa Mesa, our Graziadio alumni network in Orange County will be hosting an event called Trends in Digital Media. We expect a really great turnout. There's going to be a panel there of some really amazing people in the digital media area so if that's something you're interested in and you can make it to Orange County on June 10th, we would love to have you there. Also, just a couple of things. We've been working on some new degree programs so, as an introduction to one of those, I have a quiz for you. It wouldn't be appropriate to come on a college campus without taking a quiz now, would it? <laughter> Especially those of you who've been out for awhile. We want you to sort of keep your brains refreshed on this.

So I have a quiz for you. I'm going to read a quote and then I'm going to give you some names of people, one of whom actually this quote is attributed to. So I'm going to see how well we do on this quiz tonight so I'll read the quote, I'll give you the four names then I'm going to have you raise your hand and tell me which one you think actually said this. So here's the quote: "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other." Now, your choices for the answer, don't you like that this is multiple choice? It's much easier. You have a 25% chance of getting this correct. Steve Jobs, John F. Kennedy, Colin Powell, or Warren Buffet. So the quote again, "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other." How many of you think Steve Jobs said that? Okay. Interesting. John F. Kennedy? Okay. A few of you. Colin Powell? Okay. And Warren Buffet? So Warren Buffet wins the day but John F. Kennedy quote, okay? Isn't that interesting?

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So of course here, where we talk about developing value-centered leaders, we think a lot about how leadership and learning fit together and, as part of that, we're always looking for sort of new ways and new opportunities of finding out how we educate people more effectively. One of the things that we have done is created a new degree program, a master of science in management and leadership. This is designed for people who are fully employed. It will be offered at our Orange County and west Los Angeles campuses beginning next year so it is a one-year program but a 15-month program. So if you know of people that you think might really be interested in that, it really focuses on kind of the soft side of management and leadership skills. We're really excited about it as a tremendous opportunity to sort of blend that leadership and learning in some very interesting ways.

Along with that, we're also rolling out next year some programs for what we call pre-experienced students, students who do not have work experience, which is a group we haven't always focused on a lot in the business school. We're rolling out a Master of Science in applied finance and a Master of Science in global business that will be here on the Malibu campus as part of our full-time MBA programs again designed for students that don't have work experience and really sort of hones their skills from undergraduate and then sends them out into the workplace. And then the final degree that we're really excited about is a joint degree with Seaver College's undergraduate business division and it's a joint five-year degree. It will be a BS/MBA and that program will actually kick off in January of next year so we're really kind of in the middle of recruiting for that. So lots of really exciting new things going on in the school. If any of those programs sound like something that might be of interest to people that you know, we'd love to hear about that as well as certainly wanting to continue to channel good prospects into the various MBA programs that offer that are still sort of the core of what we provide in the business school.

So as we kind of conclude our Dean's Executive Leadership Series this year, you can see there's a lot of new things going on for next year so we're very excited about kind of closing out this academic year and beginning next year. A wonderful way to close it out is with our guest tonight, Steve Lopez. Mr. Lopez joined the staff of the *L.A. Times* in May of 2001, after four years of Time Inc. He actually started there doing a lot of work for *Sports Illustrated* and *Time Magazine* and various other publications. Prior to that, he was a columnist at the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. He's originally in northern California. Actually, he did his first journalism work as a student at San Jose State on the student newspaper there. He's won many journalism awards for his writing, including the H.L. Mencken Writing Award, the Ernie Pile Award for human interest writing and a National Headliner Award for column writing.

In addition to being a columnist, many of you are aware he's also a novelist and writer. He's written three fiction novels and one of non-fiction that many of you purchased and had signed tonight, *The Soloist: A Lost Dream and Unlikely Friendship and the Redemptive Power of Music*, just release in April. Again, as

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many of you are aware, there is actually a movie being made from this book and Robert Downey Jr. stars as Steve Lopez and then Jamie Foxx will be starring as Mr. Nathaniel Ayers, who's the musician that's featured in the book. Interestingly, as I was doing a little background work on Mr. Lopez, it was kind of interesting to read what people had to say about him. Here were some of the descriptors that were used - these are the ones that I can actually quote in public that were used to describe him. <laughter> He's a classic newspaper guy; he's acerbic, he's provocative, witty, sarcastic and straight shooting and one of my favorites was an article that was written about the movie that's coming out and it talked about a film celebrating idealism, moral courage and redemption whose hero was a newspaper columnist. This person thought it was sort of an interesting hero and concluded the article by saying, "But it's a columnist that is celebrated as a newspaper man who makes a difference in people's lives." So it's a real pleasure to have Mr. Lopez with us tonight to share some of that, his experiences and how that has impacted people's lives. So welcome me in joining Mr. Steve Lopez.[sic]

<applause>

Steve Lopez: Can you hear me? Does that work? So you're thinking this is the business and management school, right? And this is the Dean's Executive Leadership Series. What is Steve Lopez doing here? <laughter> And I, unfortunately, cannot answer that question. <laughter> I came here to try to find out what they were thinking and I'm still not sure. So before I continue, though, I need to find out where those hecklers are. I met a couple students earlier who said they were coming here tonight as hecklers. I just want to know where-- which direction to look in. <laughter> I don't see them. Maybe they didn't come. Are you here? Raise your hand. <laughter> There's one of them right there. <laughter>

I think that I could talk about a number of different things but maybe, since many of you bought this book called *The Soloist*, I'll start by talking a little bit about where that book came from and it's a way to talk about what I do for a living and to talk, too, about the policy issues, if you want to get into that. Let's see, I'm going to talk for, what, a half hour and then we're going to have some questions? So let me see what time that is up there. Quarter to seven. So here's the deal. The book is about a gentleman by the name of Nathaniel Anthony Ayers and here's how I met him. A lot of people think that I met this guy living on the streets and, out of the goodness of my heart, I thought that I should help him. The truth is an entirely different matter. I saw this guy out there and I was not thinking about him, I was thinking only of myself and the deadline looming, another column due soon, the clock ticking. This is my life. A clock ticking all the time. You got to get to the next column, you got to figure out what it is. So, out of desperation, that's where this column came from. Anybody who saw the paper today and read my column knows what I'm talking about when I say that the clock is always ticking and many of the columns are just acts of desperation.

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I will be honest. I took a long <laughter> I took a long weekend and I come in this morning thinking, okay, the one column that I know I could write needs a couple more days of work so what am I going to do? So I used a gimmick. I reached into the box under my desk, which has unopened mail, and those of you tonight who told me, "You didn't answer my call, you didn't answer my email, you didn't answer my letter," everything is collected. It's in that box or it's in my in basket. I hope to get to it eventually but I thought, okay, here's the column today. I closed my eyes and reached into that box and grab a letter and, whatever it is, that's going to be the column. So I pulled out this letter and it's from a woman living in Sherman Oaks saying that a utility box was installed on a pole outside her house and it makes noise and she would like to be rid of this thing. <laughter> Do you think that's a column? I mean, could that work as a column? Well, it had to work as a column. <laughter> If you've read it, then you may have reached the conclusion that it was not column material. <laughter> But I'm always under the gun and you don't get to say, on the day when the column is due, "I couldn't think of anything. I couldn't pull it off."

So, on the day that I met Nathaniel, I was actually checking out another column. I was in downtown Los Angeles at Pershing Square because I had gotten a tip about the cost of repairing the escalators at the MTA stops and somebody had sent me some records indicating that it was in the hundreds of thousands of dollars monthly and that, every time it rained, the escalator shut down. And I thought, okay, maybe that's a column. In a city that needs to encourage more use of public transit, it would be nice if the escalators would work. And all that you need in Los Angeles is even just a forecast of rain <laughter> and the escalators stop. <laughter> So somebody was making a fortune off of this and I'm thinking, who do they know at the MTA? Do they know maybe somebody on the board of supes? Or the MTA board? I want to know who's got this repair contract and what the deal is.

So I was over there looking into that because that's what I do. I go snooping around, scratching at windows, looking for material. And, while I was there checking it out, I heard music. And it was pretty nice music so I turned and what do I see but, across the street, there's a guy standing with a violin just fiddling away and the music sounded pretty good. I knew next to nothing about classical music but I knew that it was classical music and, as I stepped in closer to see what was up, I realized that the violin was missing two strings and I noticed also that the guy is standing next to a shopping cart that appeared to contain all of his belongings. So I'm thinking, all right, is this a column? What do you think? Does that sound like a column? It had potential, right? It had potential so I looked a little closer and realized he didn't have a hat out. He didn't have the violin case open. He was not playing for money, which made me all the more curious. I found that quite mysterious. He was in a place near Pershing Square where there are a lot of folks on the street walking to and from work or going to lunch. So I'm thinking, why is this guy playing a violin and he's not expecting to get any money and where are the other two strings?

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And, as I moved in closer, I saw that the violin was kind of beat up. He had carved the name Stevie Wonder into it. It looked like it had been pulled from a dumpster and I introduced myself and he looked up at me, startled, and jumped back. And I thought, okay, this may not be a column today. It looks like there are some issues here and it's going to take some time to get to know him but I did ask him why he chose to play in that particular spot. And he looked over and pointed and he said, "There is the Beethoven statue. I play here for inspiration." So now this has really got some potential as a column, wouldn't you think? And I took my notes and I went back and I don't know what column I found that day. I did something else.

I went back looking for Nathaniel and a couple times I couldn't find him and then I did find him and I told him that I wanted to write about him for the *L.A. Times*. He said, "Well, why write about me?" I said, "Well, you must have an interesting story and I'd like to know more about how you ended up here with a violin that's missing two strings and I'd like to get you the two strings." And he said, "Oh, no, I couldn't let you do that." I said, "Well, why not?" And he said, "I can't cover that. I wouldn't be able to pay for it." I said, "Well, it'd just be my gift to you." And he says, "Oh, no, thank you but..." I said, "Well, you clearly love to play. How do you intend to get the other two strings?" He said, "I don't know because that's my whole goal is to get the two strings and to try to get back in shape. I used to play better. I'm just trying to get back where I was."

So I would see him and stop and talk to him and, each time I talked, he was warmer and more welcoming and he gave up a little bit more of his story and then, one day, I noticed he had scratched some names on the sidewalk with a rock that he used as a piece of chalk and I asked who those people were. He said, "Those were my classmates at Julliard." And I said, "Nathaniel, you went to the Julliard School for the Performing Arts in New York City?" And he said, "Yeah." And I said, "That's one of the elite schools in the world and here you are playing this two-stringed violin. What happened?" And he said, "Well, it's a long story." I asked him who I could talk to and where he learned how to play and he said, "Well, you can call Mr. Harry Barnoff, he's with the Cleveland Orchestra." I said, "Well, I wouldn't know how to get Mr. Barnoff. Is he still there?" He said, "Oh, no, he's probably retired." And I said, "Well, I'll see if I can figure out how to contact him." And Nathaniel, who had not seen Harry in about 30 years, said, "Just call 2-1-6-4-4-2-8-5-3-1."

So I wrote that down, I went back to my office, I called the number, somebody picked up and said, "Barnoff residence." And I said, "Is there a Harry Barnoff there from the Cleveland Orchestra?" And a young woman said, "Just a minute." Guy gets on the phone, "Harry Barnoff speaking." I said, "Does the name Nathaniel Anthony Ayers mean anything to you?" And he said, "Why, yes, it sure does. What about it?" I said, "He's playing a two-stringed violin in downtown Los Angeles." And Harry started to cry.

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And I said, "What's the deal?" And he said, "He was one of the most promising students I ever had in all my years. He was a wonderful young man and he had a terrific future and it all fell apart for him and I'm glad to hear that he's alive but I'm just so sad to hear that it's come to this. Do you know where he stays? Where does he live?" I said, "Well, he lives on Skid Row. He sleeps on the pavement and that's his life but I'll see if I can figure out how to help him."

So I wrote the first column and people responded in a way that I had not expected at all. The emails just poured in and it was for days after the column had run and I'd been doing this for well over 30 years and never had anybody respond the way they did to this story. Linda and I were talking about this earlier. They saw this story of second chances and human connections and they saw the power of music to sustain somebody, music is therapy, art as, you know, a way to find peace, a way to find yourself. They started to send strings and money for strings and sheet music and instruments. My desk at the *L.A. Times* was surrounded by boxes. People had gone to their attics, to their closets and pulled out violins, dusted them off, and sent them to Nathaniel in my care at the *L.A. Times*. One guy threw the violin into a chain saw box, <laughter> which was a little scary to receive. <laughter> And then a bigger box arrives as tall as I am and somebody sent a cello because I had mentioned that Nathaniel liked to play the cello as well.

And so I had all of these instruments and all of these good intentions and I was just so struck by the generosity of readers and I took the instruments, some of the instruments out to Nathaniel without really thinking about it. He saw them and he said, "Well, I can't take them," you know? "I can't pay for them." I said, "They are from fellow musicians. They're not expecting you to pay for them. They want to help a fellow musician. These are donations to the cause. They've read this story that I wrote about you and they want to help. I think that you, you know, don't make trouble for me. I don't want to have to send them back. They don't want to get them back. Just take these instruments." And he looked at me as if he couldn't believe that any of this was happening.

And, by this time, it was clear to me that Nathaniel had had a breakdown that he suffered in his third year at Julliard. He was diagnosed with schizophrenia and so here's this, I mean, Nathaniel's days are about trying to figure out what's real and what's imagined and here's this grey-bearded columnist coming out onto the street carrying violins and cellos saying, "Here, my readers want you to have these." He looked at me as if I had fallen out of the clouds and he was reluctant but he said, "Well, okay." So he took the instruments and I realized very quickly that I had created one heck of a problem. Why not just paint a big bull's eye on his back? The guy is living on the streets of downtown L.A. and I've just given him these instruments and I said, "You're going to have to leave the instruments with me each day but you can come to the *Times* and get them and come out on the street and play them as long as you want and then

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just give them back to me. I can't have you out here with these things. You're going to get killed and it's going to be on me and I can't have that." He says, "Oh, no, no. You don't have to worry about that. I'm not going to let anybody get these things." And I said, "No, no, I've just got to put my foot down."

So I made a connection with Lamp Community. This is a mental health agency in downtown L.A. that deals with the most chronic and difficult cases of mental illness. I called them and asked if they could come and meet Nathaniel and, at the time, knowing next to nothing about mental illness, they came and they watched him and he played some music and they looked at him and I'm whispering, "Okay, what can you do?" And they said, "Well, you know, this is going to be a difficult process." And I said, "Well, yeah, but what does he have?" "What do you mean, what does he have?" I said, "What's the diagnosis? Come on, doctor, tell me what he's got, let's get some medicine, let's get this thing moving. I got to get onto the next column." <laughter>

And that's what it is, really, in my line of work as a generalist, as a columnist. You just keep moving. You move onto the next one before anyone realizes that, on that last one, you had no idea what you were talking about. Just keep them guessing, keep moving. So they said, "This could take quite a while." And I said, "I don't have much patience" and they said, "You're going to need quite a bit of patience to get through this." And Nathaniel did not like the idea that we came up with, which was that Lamp Community would keep all of these instruments, and I thought, what a great way to get him introduced to that and he could make a connection and get the help that he needs. And he said, "Mm-mm, I'm not going over there." And I said, "Well, I can't let you have them" so I took all the instruments, put them over at Lamp and waited for him to go there and he didn't. And the next day he didn't and the next day he didn't and the next week he didn't. And he had told me, "I'm not going over there. I'm not going through all of that nonsense, all those people on the street. Not going to do it." And I was frustrated, didn't know what to do. Meanwhile, all of these emails are still coming in. "What a lovely column about Nathaniel. How's he doing now?" Well, he's not doing much better than he was when I met him and maybe he's not even doing that well because now I'm worried about him. That's Nathaniel calling me. I hate to do that to him but...

Audience: Answer it.

Steve Lopez: <answers his cell phone> Mr. Ayers? It's Mr. Lopez. Well, you would know that, you called me. How are you? Mr. Ayers, I am at Pepperdine University talking about how we met. Would you like to say hello to everybody at Pepperdine? Okay. Hold on. Okay. Here they are. Say hello.

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Nathaniel Ayers: Hello everyone.

Audience: Hello.

Steve Lopez: Can you hear them?

Nathaniel Ayers: What was that?

Steve Lopez: They all said hello to you. I'm talking about how we met and about your musical talent. Did you play anything today?

Nathaniel Ayers: Yeah, I was playing my clarinet I came by through you and my trumpet that I came by through you and my violin, which needs an A string.

Steve Lopez: I'll get you the A string. Listen, I saw you playing the violin in the Second Street tunnel this morning.

Nathaniel Ayers: You did?

Steve Lopez: Yeah.

Nathaniel Ayers: Oh, that's amazing. Where's pepper time?

Steve Lopez: Pepper <laughter> Pepperdine is in Malibu.

Nathaniel Ayers: Is it a bunch of people?

Steve Lopez: There's a bunch of people right here listening to this, yes. You remember you and I went and you played music at Palisades Park looking out on the ocean when your sister was here?

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Nathaniel Ayers: Yeah.

Steve Lopez: It's just up the road from there.

Nathaniel Ayers: Oh, yeah. Is it a group of journalists?

Steve Lopez: No, it is not journalists. There are a couple of journalists-- it's people who wanted to hear the story of how I met you and the impact that you had on my life.

Nathaniel Ayers: Oh, sort of like a fellowship meeting?

Steve Lopez: <laughter> You might call it a fellowship meeting.

Nathaniel Ayers: Is it a banquet or meeting, people eating?

Steve Lopez: It's not quite a banquet but I'll tell you what. They probably would have been much happier here if you had been the speaker rather than me. <laughter>

Nathaniel Ayers: Oh, that's not very...

Steve Lopez: Because...

Nathaniel Ayers: That's very kind of you to say.

Steve Lopez: Mr. Ayers...

Nathaniel Ayers: Hello?

Steve Lopez: Yeah, Mr. Ayers, I'm going to call you a little bit later but I've got to go now and finish this speech.

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Nathaniel Ayers: Okay.

Steve Lopez: But I'm going to get you- you want an A string for the cello or the violin?

Nathaniel Ayers: Violin.

Steve Lopez: Okay. I'll call you in the morning.

Nathaniel Ayers: Okay.

Steve Lopez: Thanks, pal.

Nathaniel Ayers: Okay.

<applause>

Steve Lopez: I've been upstaged but it's not the-- <laughter> and let me tell you, it is not the first time it's happened. <laughter> I hate to jump ahead but let me jump ahead and tell you. I'll go back and fill in some of the blanks but when they were filming the movie, it's a DreamWorks movie and they asked how Nathaniel would be about doing a making of video. You know, when you see those-- it's not a trailer but it's a little 15-minute, the making of whatever movie? And they asked if Nathaniel and I could go and be interviewed for that and I told them, I said, "Look, I never know how he's going to be, what kind of mood." You just heard him in a very good mood but you can get him the exact opposite and I said, "I can't guarantee what we'll have but we'll give it a try." I said, "I don't know how he's going to respond to sitting in a chair with a camera light on and answering questions." So they said, "All right, if it doesn't work, it doesn't work."

So we went and this was on the set of the movie. We sat in these two chairs and the interviewer was a guy named Craig. Nathaniel calls everybody Mister or Miss or Missus so it was Mr. Craig to him and Mr. Craig, I told him, I said, "Look, just don't ask us tough questions if they're directed at Nathaniel and you're just going to have to wing it but try to keep it low key and we'll see how it goes." So Mr. Craig says, "Mr. Ayers, I'd like to ask you the first question. Can you tell us why it is that you're particularly interested in

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Beethoven?" And I look over at Nathaniel, not sure what we're going to get, and Nathaniel says, "Now, Mr. Craig, that is an excellent question and I've got to tell you that, from the beginning of my days as a musician, I looked up to and respected Beethoven because he wrote for orchestra. I am an orchestral musician. That's what I wanted to be. I wanted to be in an orchestra and Beethoven wrote for orchestra. Now, let's take Beethoven's Third Symphony." He reaches over, grabs his cello, and starts playing and, you know, Craig is looking at me. The producer and the director are looking at me, like, you know? He had, like, a talk show persona. <laughter>

And he had completely taken over and then Mr. Craig asked me a question. I got maybe three words out <laughter> and Nathaniel was like this, "You know, Craig, I was just thinking, when I came upon that statue in downtown Los Angeles, I have to tell you, I was flabbergasted. Who had the inspiration to put such a great man in the center of downtown Los Angeles to inspire the masses? It was inspired, Mr. Craig. I don't know who did it. I have to tell you that I thought that I had come upon a god and it has changed my life." So you never know quite what you're going to get with him. <laughter> I feel a little guilty about putting him on the speaker phone but, well, I wanted you to hear him because he's just such a wonderful guy. So where was I in this story that I have to wrap up in about ten minutes? Where was I?

Audience member: <inaudible>

Steve Lopez: Oh, so I took all the instruments over to Lamp and then I get a call one day-- guess who's in the courtyard playing music? He's putting on a concert. I go over there and there's Nathaniel playing the cello, playing the violin, and it was beautiful and he had an audience and it was just quite wonderful. I said, "That's beautiful, I'm so happy we've made this connection. Now we're going to get this matter addressed and I can move on, return to my life." I got in the car, I went back to work and I got a phone call from Lamp, "Nathaniel tried to leave with the instruments. We caught him at the door." <laughter> The next time Nathaniel went back, he made it out with the instruments. He'd pulled off the heist and now here he was on the streets of Skid Row with I don't even remember how many violins and a cello or two.

And I was scared to death. I asked him if he would move indoors and he had no interest. I asked him if he would consider treatment and he had no interest. And, as I learned more about mental illness and what he had been through, it began to make sense. Nathaniel went to Julliard in the late '60s and early '70s. A classmate of his went onto some success. His name is Yo-Yo Ma. They were in the same orchestra together. In his third year, Nathaniel had trouble focusing, was hearing voices and he crashed and burned. The career went off a cliff. What's really tragic is to go through the transcripts as I did. I went to New York and looked through his file and to see the comments from the jurors who went to each

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of his auditions so that his scholarship would be renewed. They talk about his amazing talent, this gift, you must renew his scholarship, bring him back next year. He had quite a promising career and would probably be in one of the great orchestras of the world today if not for being diagnosed with schizophrenia and the time since then, what it is, 35 years, have been quite difficult for him, in and out of treatment, on the streets, pushing a shopping cart.

He went to Julliard on upright bass. That's what he played because he picked it up in Cleveland, in public school, back when we had music classes. Do you remember that? Don't age yourselves like that. That was... <laughter> And when his eighth grade band teacher couldn't teach him anymore, he said, "I know a guy in the Cleveland Orchestra who can help you." It was Harry Barnoff. Barnoff encouraged Nathaniel to stick with it. He got a scholarship to Ohio University and still was not satisfied because Mr. Barnoff had gone to Julliard and Nathaniel, in his first year at Ohio, bought a student standby ticket. Does anybody remember standby tickets? Flew to New York for an audition and nailed it and was told, "Please, as soon as your semester is done, go to the Aspen Music Festival, you'll be studying and performing there. You'll meet your new classmates. You will meet some of your teachers and then you'll enroll in Julliard in the fall. You'll be on full scholarship."

So this is the man who's now wandering Skid Row 30-some years later with these instruments and I'm scared to death and I decided I better see what he's up against. So I went out and spent a night with him on Skid Row. This was the night when he was no longer just a column, when I became determined to do something, whatever it took, to get him off the streets. He began that evening crushing cockroaches to clear us a space to sleep, this gentleman that you just heard here on the phone, and he kicked them into the gutter and the scene around us that night was almost indescribable. I'll do my best but-- dozens of people.

People stark raving mad, people selling drugs, counting the money in the middle of the street, prostitutes—there are prostitutes living in port-a-potties and working out of the port-a-potties. There are sirens, there are tents going up. This is the scene. Nathaniel walks to the curb and recited, in a perfect Shakespearean accent, on this stage, the Hamlet soliloquy. I don't know where it came from and, when I asked him, he said, "Oh, we had acting at John Hay High School in Cleveland and everybody did a little bit of Shakespeare." So we're sitting there as he's unloading his cart and getting ready to go to sleep and I looked at these windows where people were living and I said, "Wouldn't you like to be in there?" And he said, "No, Mr. Lopez, I don't want to be cooped up. I've got my instruments out here. This is home to me. I'm okay." And I said, "But if you lived indoors, you'd have more time to play, you'd have a safe place for your instruments."

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He said, "No, I don't need to think about that," he said, "But I do look up in there and I think to myself that Beethoven and Mozart worked in rooms like that into the night. They lived and breathed, as humans do, and they created something that lasted for centuries. Is that an inspiration to you, Mr. Lopez? Do you think about writers the way I think about musicians?" And I said, "Not enough." He then says the Our Father and he goes into his cart and the last thing he gets before going to sleep, two sticks. On one he had written Beethoven and on the other he had written Brahms and I said, "What are you going to do with those?" And he said, "When the rats come out of the sewers, I scare them away with the sticks. So you just tap Beethoven and you tap Brahms and the rats scatter." I'm standing there with my notebook, I'm trying to figure out how you begin to write this story and I've had so many moments like that with Nathaniel.

I've had difficult moments where he's in a rage, where it's as if another person rises up in him, and it's very hard to be around him. It's exhausting but I know that that's not Nathaniel. I know that, through no fault of his own, he was hit with this thing that hits one in 100 people and does not discriminate—rich, poor, black, white, it hits people, changes their life and everybody who loves them forever. And Nathaniel looked at me and said, "I hope you rest well, Mr. Lopez. I hope the whole world rests well. Good night." And he went to sleep. And when I wrote that column, I got a call from the music center, which led to a call from the L.A. Philharmonic, inviting Nathaniel to a concert at Disney Hall. And he said, "I can't go up there, Mr. Lopez. That's great. I would love to see it but I can't go up there. I don't want people to have to pay good money to see great music and have to sit next to me. I live on the streets and I just don't want to subject them to that." So I called Adam Crane, who is the publicist at the L.A. Phil and also a cellist and I said, "Here's the situation. Can we attend a rehearsal?" And he said, "Why would you rather come to a rehearsal than a concert?" And I said, "Well, can we?" And he said, "Yes." So we went up and it was another of those great moments.

Nathaniel goes up the hill and he gets mellower and mellower as we get within view of it. He says, "Disney Hall looks like an iron butterfly." And I said, "You know, because you've gotten me so interested in classical music, I'm going next month to see Itzhak Pearlman with the National Symphony," and he said, "Oh, he is molten lava on violin." <laughter> And we got up and he ran his hand over the performance board, the names Beethoven and Mozart. We walked inside. Adam Crane gave him the VIP tour. We were escorted to our seats. Nathaniel, through Beethoven's Third, told me, "It's called the Eroica, Mr. Lopez. You'll note the interplay between the first and second violin sections." He has become my tutor. And, when it was done, he leaned forward, we're alone at Disney Hall, and he says, "Bravo." And then, because he always has an instrument or two with him, I didn't even notice that he was carrying the violin, he takes the violin, walks up behind the stage, opens it and starts to play at Disney Hall.

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Couple of musicians came out, Peter Schneider, a cellist; Ben Huang, another cellist; introduced themselves and Peter said, "You know, Mr. Ayers, you're an inspiration." He said, "You just have-- I'm just so impressed with you. I've been reading about you. You have such courage. I'm so impressed." And Nathaniel said, "You're impressed with me? You're in the Los Angeles Philharmonic. You guys just played that flawlessly." And he said, "Yeah, but look at what you've accomplished." When Nathaniel started to make some progress and looked like he was maybe going to come in off the streets, Lamp held a room open for him and I tried and I tried and I tried. I tried everything. I tried even to take violin lessons from Nathaniel in that room <laughter> to get him comfortable with it. It almost drove me insane. And Peter Schneider, who had offered to give him lessons, agreed to give him the lessons in that room and it was the thing that made it happen.

After a few times in that room, I was out looking for Nathaniel one night, couldn't find him and was worried to death because Ernest Adams, who slept over in the Second Street tunnel, had been beaten nearly to death by those kids who saw a bum fights video and went through downtown L.A. with baseball bats. When I heard the news, I thought it was Nathaniel and, when I couldn't find him on the street, I was scared to death. Looked all over for him, called Lamp the next day and said, "I got a problem, I can't find Nathaniel" and they said, "He's right here." And I said, "Well, do you know where he spent the night?" and they said, "Yup, he slept in his apartment." Nathaniel's been in that apartment every day for about two and a half years. He has a little music studio that we've been able to build for him with proceeds from the book, from the movie.

DreamWorks has just made a very generous donation. They're going to be building a much bigger studio. Nathaniel is going to be the artist in residence and his goal is to become a music therapist, to have people who are youngsters or with mental health issues find peace and purpose in music. And we don't know how long it might take to get him there, he still resists the kind of treatment that he needs to get significantly better but we're working on it. This all began with that chance encounter on the street and you think about it and about how many times you pass right past somebody like that. You don't give much consideration to what put them on the street, where they came from, what the story is. It's very easy to think that somebody who's out there has made a moral judgment, a choice to be there. They lack the initiative. They just gave up. But I've been out on those streets and Nathaniel's story is one of thousands.

And one day when I went to Lamp to get him, because we go to concerts regularly and to ball games, he likes to come to my house to play music, my daughter was two and a half I think when she first met Nathaniel and he played the violin, the cello, and the piano at our house and she thought this was magic. To see live music for the first time and not just hear it but see it right in front of you with these beautiful

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instruments and to feel it coming up through the floorboards and into your body, she thought this was magic. She was just amazed. It prompted me to go back and get a guitar that I used to play so that I could try to impress my daughter as much as Nathaniel does. <laughter> Nathaniel is not a big fan of my guitar playing, I can tell you that. <laughter> We played once at Pershing Square, the two of us together, and people would come up to us and they would look at him first and I think, okay, maybe, maybe this duo could work and then they would look at me and listen a little closer and walk away. <laughter> Nathaniel, after awhile, walked away. <laughter>

One day at Lamp, he was wearing a t-shirt and it said Yo-Yo Ma, Disney Hall and a concert date. And I said, "What's up?" and he said, "Yo-Yo Ma's coming to town." He said, "Do you think we can get tickets?" I said, "With you, yes. We will call Adam and we'll be escorted to our seats. You're a VIP at Disney Hall." So we went to see the concert. Nathaniel was very excited. He wore a necktie, he wore his best clothes, he had gone to the laundry that day, got everything, you know, as clean and pressed as he could get it. We saw the concert and one of the amazing things about Nathaniel, one of the things that I find so inspirational and so admirable and I just cannot believe this but there is no regret. There's no pity. There's no self-pity. He doesn't look at those musicians on the stage and think, "Woe is me. I should be there." He looks at them and thinks, "Goodness, they play flawlessly. That's wonderful. What an amazing thing." And he looked at Yo-Yo Ma that same way and we went back stage after the performance. Ben Huang, the assistant principle cellist, is close to Yo-Yo Ma and he made this happen for us.

We go back stage and Nathaniel's looking in the mirror and he's fixing his tie and he's nervous and Yo-Yo Ma walks in and here are these two guys in this room who came off that same launching pad 35 years ago and you think of the paths, I mean, you think like this, and I thought, you know, who's achieved more and who's happier? And the answer, you know, is pretty obvious. Yo-Yo Ma has achieved international fame but think about it. Nathaniel, to get through each and every day, has to figure out which voices and which images are real. And he works through that and sometimes it's ugly and nasty. He argues with people. He threatens people. They threaten him back. I'm always worried to death that he's going to get into a fight. But each day, he finds music. And when he finds it, the world stops spinning and, for him, he looks at sheet music and the notes are in the same places they've been in since Beethoven and Mozart put them there and it's an anchor. It's peace. It's sanity. He disappears into the music, his eyes close.

A couple weeks ago, we went to Disney Hall, *60 Minutes* is doing a story on this to be released when the movie comes out in November, and Nathaniel played with the principle pianist of the L.A. Phil and none of knew what to expect because he hadn't been with a pianist in 35 years. *60 Minutes* had the room set up and I've got my fingers crossed. They had two cameras on tracks and then a handheld camera and I

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didn't know if Nathaniel was going to feel like he was in over his head and be overwhelmed. And the pianist starts and Nathaniel jumps in on cello and it was gorgeous. It was just gorgeous. And I was with Ben Huang, Peter Schneider and Robert Gupta, the 20-year-old violinist in the L.A. Phil who has become Nathaniel's latest teacher and they all said they were not aware that he was that good, that, you know, with an accompanist laying down that map for him, he just exceeded everyone's expectations. And there he was with his eyes closed and his head back, fiddling away. It was beautiful. The Schubert Arpeggio, the Bach prayer, the Ulgar Cello Concerto, I mean, a few misses here and there, a couple of pitch problems at times but, for the most part, just gorgeous, just gorgeous.

And here he is in this room with Yo-Yo Ma and Yo-Yo Ma walks over to him, shakes his hand and said, "You and I are brothers." He says, "Nathaniel, anybody who loves music as much as you do is a friend of mine. We are brothers in music." He put his arms around Nathaniel and hugged him and handed Nathaniel his cello. He said, "I've got to go meet some other people. Take this and play around with it. I'll be back in a few minutes." This is what my life has been like in the last three and a half years since I met Nathaniel, who calls at 7:00 a.m. and usually right at 7:00 p.m. to say hello, to check in, and the call usually begins, "Hello, Mr. Lopez, how is Mrs. Lopez? How are Jeffrey and Andrew Lopez? How is Caroline Lopez? I hope everyone has had a blessed day. I was wondering if we were still on..." for the concert, such and such a date, are we going to this Dodger game, to the Laker game. It's been a wild ride and so many rewards have come my way.

People congratulate me for what I've done for Nathaniel and I have to stop them and say, "I can't even begin to tell you how much this guy has done for me." The soul searching, just finding myself in a situation where I'm, you know, coming up with new definitions for success, for happiness. It's all be so moving and it's happened at a time when the newspaper industry has been in turmoil and I had my own doubts about whether I wanted to stay in it because I thought, you know, I've had a pretty good run for 35 years and maybe it's time to go and do something else. And I was so inspired by the people who helped Nathaniel that I wanted to do something like that and Darrell Steinberg, the state senator who is the godfather of prop 63, the mental health services act, called and said, "We need a media director to tell people what prop 63 is all about. Are you interested?" And I thought seriously about it. It's only Nathaniel who could have made me think about going into the mental health field and, in the end, it was only Nathaniel who explained to me why I couldn't do such a thing.

I told him, you know, "I so envy your passion. You're a rare bird. So many people go through this life and never find the passion. You've got it. You had it before Julliard, you've held onto it living on the streets, you've held onto it chasing rats with a stick, you've kept this and I admire it and I want a new passion for myself." And he was the one who taught me that I have my own passion and we thought back on that

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day when he looked up in the windows and said, "Do you think about writers the way I think about musicians?" And I said, "Not enough." And it's Nathaniel who kept me in this business because, as he explained it, I tell stories. I won't be happy doing anything else. That's what I love to do so if he were here tonight, he would be playing violin or cello for you right now and I want to thank you on his behalf.

<applause>

End

