



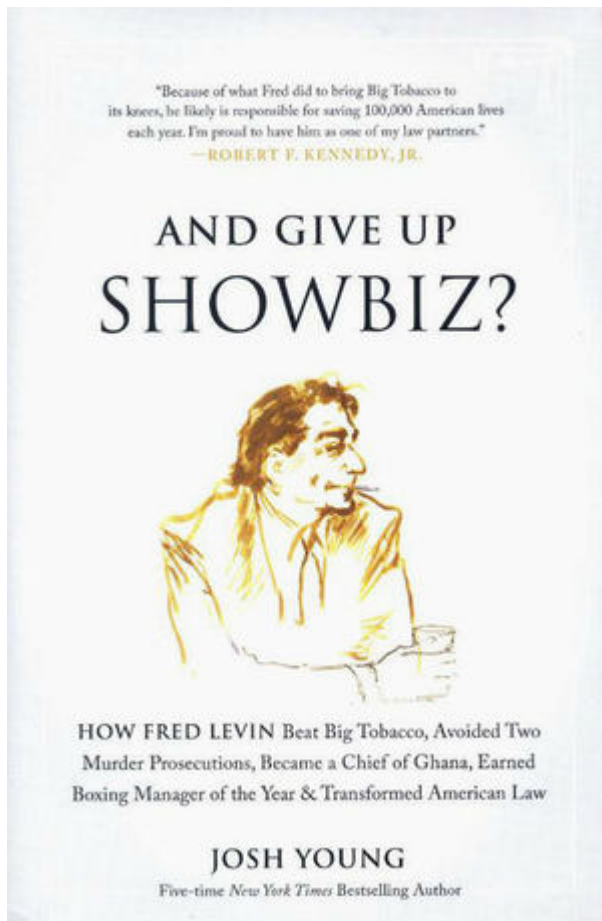
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DAILY NEWS

'And Give Up Showbiz?' is immensely entertaining

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"And Give Up Showbiz? How Fred Levin Beat Big Tobacco, Avoided Two Murder Prosecutions, Became a Chief of Ghana, Earned Boxing Manager of the Year, and Transformed American Law," by Josh Young. Dallas: BenBella Books, 2014. 236 pages, \$24.95.



"Trial lawyers are mavericks," Josh Young asserts at the beginning of "And Give Up Showbiz? How Fred Levin Beat Big Tobacco, Avoided Two Murder Prosecutions, Became a Chief of Ghana, Earned Boxing Manager of the Year, and Transformed American Law," which chronicles the life and exploits of the controversial attorney from Florida. "They are self-assured. They are flamboyant. They are vilified in life and immortalized in movies."

Levin is arguably all of those things, although he is perhaps best known for "Fred's Law," which made it much easier for the state of Florida to recover Medicare expenditures for patients diagnosed with cancer linked to tobacco use.

Young is an exceptionally prolific and wide-ranging writer who has co-authored seven previous best-sellers including "Erasing Death: The Science that is Rewriting the Boundaries between Life and Death" with Sam Parnia, "The Link: Uncovering Our Earliest Ancestor" with Colin Tudge and "Make Your Own Rules: A Renegade Guide to Unconventional Success" with Wayne Rogers. His articles have been featured in Entertainment

Weekly, Life, Esquire, the New York Times and New Republic.

I had heard of Levin before taking on this assignment, but I was clueless as to the tremendous impact he has had on the American judicial system. With each new chapter I read came a heightened awareness of both his influence as well as his controversial reputation. Levin is one of those memorable characters you either love or hate; it is challenging to find someone knowledgeable of his accomplishments who is ambivalent about him.

What interests me most in a book like this are the underlying motivations that seem to drive someone like Levin. Toward this end, Young goes to great lengths to provide a number of anecdotes and other episodes from his subject's long career that assist the reader in getting a better sense of not only what Levin has accomplished, but what keeps him moving forward, even at the

relatively advanced age of 77. Apparently he is still active in the law firm bearing his name, routinely working seven days a week to serve the interests of his clients.

One chapter I found especially intriguing was “Bending the Rules to the Breaking Point.” Here, Young provides a concise yet remarkably detailed account of Levin’s childhood and upbringing. Levin’s drive later in life can be traced directly to his formative years in northern Florida. For example: “The Levins were an anomaly in Pensacola because they were Jewish. This outsider status would follow Fred through his career, but rather than hamper him, it became a motivational force for him to take on the insiders. The city was, as it is today, Bible Belt territory. Fred grew up attending Hebrew school, having a Bar Mitzvah, attending Friday night services and Sunday school, and celebrating all Jewish holidays.”

One aspect of Young’s prose I found particularly endearing is the extent to which he goes into detail in his storytelling. Although the various chapters are each focused on a well-defined episode in Levin’s life, they are nonetheless peppered with little nuggets outlining peripheral events that serve to animate the material in an interesting and seductive manner. For example, in “From Barbeque to BLAB-TV: Birth of an Entrepreneur,” which is devoted to one of Levin’s many business ventures, he describes the relationship the lawyer had with Joe Scarborough, the former Florida congressman and current host of MSNBC’s “Morning Joe.” Many readers may not know that after leaving Washington, Scarborough joined Levin’s law practice.

In characteristic manner, Young purposefully includes several tidbits to help set the context for the principal narrative: “Scarborough publicly announced that he was resigning in order to spend more time with his children, but Fred always wondered if Scarborough had reached a point where he no longer could politically support the extreme conservative movement, given that Scarborough’s true ideology seemed to Fred much more moderate or even liberal-leaning. Fred points out that Scarborough had two pieces of artwork hanging on his wall in his office at the Levin firm. One was of Robert F. Kennedy and the other was of Martin Luther King Jr.”

Those interested in an engaging and comprehensive profile of one of the most colorful attorneys in American history will not be disappointed with Young’s lively and energetic account of Levin’s lengthy career. One of the most revealing passages, at least to me, was found in the “Epilogue.” In this concluding chapter, Young provides a glimpse into Levin’s current status as an elder statesman within the legal profession. As always, it is the personal insights I find infinitely more fascinating than the professional triumphs.

“Fred has admittedly mellowed somewhat,” Young concludes. “He’s 77 years old at the time of this writing. His wife of 50-plus years has died, and he has no interest in remarrying. He has no real hobbies, and he doesn’t like to travel. He’s not really interested in gambling anymore, rarely drinks and never smokes. Most nights, he comes home from the office by 6 p.m., sits down with a friend or two for dinner, and then retires to his room early to watch reality television and read the *National Enquirer*.”

I found “And Give Up Showbiz?” to be immensely entertaining. Then again, I love reading about quirky, original, one-of-a-kind, free-thinkers like Levin. If you agree that truth really is stranger than fiction, you’ll definitely want to pick up a copy of what will no doubt be Young’s eighth bestseller. You won’t be disappointed.

— *Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*