

# LEONARD & MARSHALL



*Wanting to believe...*

Michael Friedlander

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*When a friend asked me the other day where he might find an investor for a project he was developing, it reminded me of a true story—one I could never have made up. I asked him if he had tried the detox unit of the Cedar Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles. When he smiled, I told him this true story, with only the names being changed to protect the innocent...*

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## LEONARD & MARSHALL

By Michael Friedlander

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### LEONARD

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It was 11:30pm when the phone rang. I knew it was Leonard. The previous four evenings he had called at exactly the same time. Each time, he was drunk and the message was the same: he was about to raise the money we needed to fund the next stage of our mining project. Each time, he was incoherent and rambling. Each time, I would say something encouraging and he would thank me. Each time, I knew he wouldn't remember a thing either of us had said. And he never did.

This time, though, it was different. He said there was something I *really* needed to know. After a deep sigh, he slurred that he was an alcoholic—and he thought I should know. But there was more, he whispered: he was also gay—and, again, he just wanted me to know. I was quite proud of myself. I had just managed to suppress an enormous roar of laughter...

I had known about Leonard's drinking for over three years. The first clue came during our very first trip together to Utah. Before we had boarded an early morning flight at Los Angeles, I had seen him gulp down three or four scotches. At the time, he explained that flying made him nervous. The next day, during a five-hour period—long after our plane had landed, I saw

him consume enough beer, scotch, and wine to make a college freshman proud. Either he was celebrating the successful landing of our previous day's flight or he was readying himself for the flight back three days later.

As I then witnessed his daily binges with no looming flights on his schedule, I decided never again to schedule an afternoon meeting with him. Not only was he even more incoherent in the afternoons, I could never be sure how he would find his way to or from a meeting. If I dropped him off somewhere during the late afternoon, there was the threat we might never see him again.

So, still smiling, I wondered how I should respond to his most recent late night revelations. I decided to come clean. I told him I'd known about his drinking problem for a while now. And, as for him being gay, I admitted I'd long suspected this, but that I really couldn't care less—as long as he understood that I wasn't gay. *He said he couldn't believe it.* I didn't know what he didn't believe—that I knew he was a gay alcoholic, or that I wasn't gay. Before I could ask, he told me that he had something else to share. I couldn't wait. I suppressed an audible groan. Silence descended on us as I waited for his latest revelation.

At last he broke the silence. He whispered that he was also addicted to the prescription drugs he had been taking for his back pain. What could I possibly say?

I had long suspected a drug addition. There had been too many clues. Maybe it was his sometimes-empty eyes that seemed unable to focus. Maybe it was his sometimes-apparent disorientation. Maybe it was his growing incoherence. Maybe it was the grin.

He ended the call saying that he'd decided to enter a detox unit at the Cedar Sinai Hospital here in Los Angeles. He asked what I thought. I told him I thought this made all the sense in the world and I encouraged him to finish the program—no matter how long it might take. What I didn't have the heart to tell him was another bigger worry I had. It was about the present location of his brain.

I had long suspected that his brain had relocated itself to a darker place in his body—a place with limited oxygen where the sun didn't shine. I



thought this explained why he was seemingly unable to understand or remember anything. I thought this might also explain why, every time he felt it necessary to speak (which sadly happened all of the time), what spewed forth from his mouth had the same odor as the odor that was typically released from what I suspected was the new location of his brain after a healthy portion of beans. I was growing increasingly certain his brain was now comfortably located up his rear end. I wondered whether the detox unit at Cedar Sinai could help him return it to where it used to be. Hope springs eternal...

I've tried to remember how I met Leonard. I recall he was trying to raise money from one of my law clients. Some years earlier, he had acquired the rights to 64 sections of Utah mining property on which there were apparently traces of micro-fine gold and platinum. Each section was a square mile. Some experts had told him that these sections couldn't be mined in a single lifetime. Despite this, I remember that my client was underwhelmed by Leonard and had decided to pass on the opportunity.

A year or so later, Leonard's partner in this project approached me again. Paul was very smart with oodles of charm. He was also Leonard's closest friend. Like me, was a business lawyer. Unlike me, he was on his way to prison. Later, I would laugh out loud as he told me about the amazing contacts he hoped to make while in "Camp Fed." That was the time of the junk bond lunacy, so Paul had some high-powered company to look forward to meeting at the Lompoc federal minimum-security facility.

So, what did Paul want of me? He asked me to help with the project while he was "away." He asked me to become their partner. He flattered me outrageously—and I frankly enjoyed the lunacy of the situation. As I sat back and listened, Paul told me that he understood that the deal he was offering me might seem too good to be true. If I was satisfied about value of the properties, he said, and if I agreed to help, I would receive a full one third share in the project and would have full and complete control of every aspect of the business. He said he knew



Leonard couldn't handle this in his absence and he begged me to consider it seriously. Before making any decision, he asked that I should at least visit the properties with him and take samples of the ore myself. I could then send them to labs of my choice for analysis. *What was there to lose other than a weekend?* I said I'd think about it.

A couple of days later, I was golfing with some buddies and told them this story. They were all doctors. Enough said. They all immediately "wanted in." They said they'd never forgive me if this was real and if I didn't include them. I thought they were joking, but they weren't. They wanted to come with me to Utah to check this out. I could only smile. I told Paul that my buddies and I would spend the next weekend with him in Utah. The doctors couldn't wait...

We found a geologist through the Bureau of Land Management in Salt Lake City and, together, we all visited the property. With the geologist's guidance, I decided where to dig the samples, which I dug myself. I then packed the samples into envelopes myself, which I sealed and addressed to the different labs I'd chosen. I also dropped them into the US Mail boxes myself. Those samples never left my sight from the moment they left the ground until they were dropped into the mail. The LAPD could have taken lessons from me. Not even OJ's dream team could have challenged the chain of custody of those samples. Now, all that remained was to wait for the results...

The results received from the labs were almost identical. *They were all off the charts.* In every single sample, there were approximately the same trace amounts of gold and platinum. My golfing buddies thought they had died and gone to heaven. My wife started looking for multi-million dollar beach properties to help us save taxes. She's so very practical and thoughtful.

I was now faced with a decision: In the blue corner were my prospective partners: an alcoholic gay nut and his felon partner. In the white corner were the lab results suggesting possible wealth beyond my wildest imagination or comprehension—and my golfing buddies. I looked into each corner again and again. I looked at my prospective partners and then looked

at the lab results. I looked again at the lab results—and then looked again at my prospective partners—and then again at the lab results. Greed overcame me: I agreed to Paul's proposal. I would try to make us all a fortune...

All that stood between us and that fortune, however, was one slight practical problem: we would have to find a mining process that could extract the micro-fine traces of gold and platinum from the clay of Utah's soil. Until we could find that process, we couldn't begin the production process that would make us a fortune...

So, with bags packed Leonard checked himself into the Cedar Sinai detox unit for a two-week stint.

Much to my consternation, I received a call the very next evening at around 11:30pm. Leonard sounded both triumphant and euphoric. He was telling me he thought he could raise money for the next stage of our project very soon. As I groaned and scratched my head, I couldn't believe my ears. *I asked him where he was.* He ignored me and kept talking. He had just met someone who was enormously wealthy. This person, he said, DEFINITELY wants to invest in our project. Did I want his name? I ignored the question and again asked him where he was. He was in the detox unit.

What could I possibly say? I was apologetic. I slapped my forehead as I offered him a contrite apology: "How could I possibly have overlooked such an obvious place to find an investor—the detox unit at the Cedar Sinai Hospital?" He saw no humor in this. He did graciously accept my apology, though.

The cuckoo's nest was apparently alive and well and doing fine at Cedar Sinai detox unit. Almost as an afterthought, Leonard told me that his prospective investor was anxious to talk to me. His name was Marshall, but I didn't bother to check that particular piece of data into my memory bank.

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MARSHALL

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One morning about a week later, my secretary buzzed to let me know that a Mr. Marshall McLean was on the phone. My mind was blank. I had no idea who he was. I picked up the phone.

The caller announced himself and waited for some sign of recognition from me. None came. He then explained that he had met Leonard in a detox unit at the Cedar Sinai Hospital. Magically, the fog lifted. Again, I said nothing. I was determined not to make this easy for him. Without stopping for breath, he told me his wife had just left him and that he had drunk himself into a stupor—which is why he had found himself at the detox unit. Again, I said nothing—although I must admit to wondering why he was sharing his domestic woes with me...

I later learned that this was not the first time he had been in that particular detox program. It was also not the first time that this particular wife had left him. And she was not the first wife who had opted to escape. I also learned that he had spent some time in jail because he loved to drive while blind drunk.

He was still talking. He was telling me that he had called to interview me. He claimed he had already spoken to my partners, Leonard and Paul and announced that he would not invest in our project unless he was satisfied with this interview. He apologized for the intense pressure he knew this would put on me, but he told me not to worry. I was debating whether I should break the news to him now or later. Should I tell him that, based on just this brief chat, I wouldn't want him as my partner under any conceivable circumstances? Or should I wait? I decided to wait...

He was still talking. He was saying that he thought Leonard was nuts—and indiscreet. *Again, I wondered why he was he telling me this.* And if wasn't apparently crazy about Leonard, he clearly didn't like Paul at all. *Again, why he was he telling me this?*

His beef with Paul was simple: Paul was driving Leonard to Phoenix for a meeting with some mining folks the next week. At that meeting, the Phoenix group would demonstrate how their mining process could extract gold and platinum from our ore. Marshall wanted to drive there with Leonard and Paul, but,





much to Marshall's chagrin, Paul wanted some quiet time with Leonard alone. He wanted to see whether the detox had worked. He also wanted to see if Leonard's brain had somehow magically managed to relocate itself to a place closer to his ears. Paul thought a drive to Phoenix alone with Leonard might provide some answers.

I told Marshall that there was actually nothing sinister about Paul's position. After all, I explained, it was Paul's first opportunity to spend any time alone with Leonard after his graduation from the detox program. "Oh," breezed a relieved Marshall, "why hadn't Paul explained it as clearly?" All that was clear, I was thinking, was that I was plunging with increasing speed down that rabbit hole into the depths of Wonderland.

Marshall again interrupted my thoughts. I heard him talking about our mining project. He was plunging into a dissertation of public offerings and offshore entities (neither of which were in our plans) when I interrupted him. I thought I should explain my personal approach to our project. I apologized in advance if my explanation appeared overly-simplistic: "If in fact there was gold in our ore, as the surveys seemed to suggest," I explained, "the only question was whether there was a commercially viable extraction process to recover it." Until then, I explained, we couldn't get into production. How could we build a production plant, I argued, without knowing the production process that the plant would be running? The logic seemed pretty sound to me, but this was greeted with a stony silence.

Suddenly, without warning, he became almost giddily euphoric. He said he was REALLY happy to have spoken with me and that talking to me was like a "breath of fresh air." He said he would like to meet me. Clearly, our plunge together down Alice's rabbit hole would continue unabated at warp speed...



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#### DISCHARGE FROM THE UNIT

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Leonard and Marshall were discharged from detox at the same time. For reasons I didn't initially quite understand, Marshall moved into Leonard's apartment. Leonard was an unemployed former engineering technician

who lived on disability in a tiny one-bedroom apartment in West Hollywood. Marshall, on the other hand, was a multi-millionaire who apparently lived nowhere. Although he could afford the best hotels in Beverly Hills, he chose instead to share Leonard's dingy digs. I couldn't help but wonder about their sleeping arrangements, but this was really none of my business.

A few days after their discharge, Paul called. The Phoenix group had cancelled their demonstration. There had been a technical problem with a screen they were using to pass chemicals through our ore samples. They had assured Paul this represented no great problem. Within a week, replacement screens would be available, installed and tested.

Leonard was distraught. Without ever speaking to the technical folks in Phoenix, he found it necessary to provide Marshall with a detailed technical explanation of why the screen was unable to withstand the particular chemicals. Needless to say, the explanation was off-the-wall. Understandably, Marshall concluded that the technical folks in Phoenix didn't know what they were doing—and I couldn't blame him. It never occurred to him that Leonard had never even spoken with the folks in Phoenix. He assumed that Leonard's explanation was their explanation. Marshall wanted to meet immediately—and urgently.

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#### THE MEETING

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The meeting was scheduled for 11:00 am the next day in my Century City office. Paul declined the invitation to join us, which would have been my preference too. Leonard announced he would pick Marshall up and would come to my office together.

Leonard was a man of habit and limited means. Whenever he came to my office, instead of parking in the building, which would have cost him \$10, he would always park in the shopping center with its 3 hours of free parking. And he would then watch the time carefully. He knew that if he stayed within the 3-hour limit, the price was right, but, if he overstayed his 3-hour limit, this could cost him an arm and leg. I didn't blame him. He

used to visit with me quite regularly and those \$10 parking fees could add up quite quickly. And, anyway, the walk was probably good for him. Under normal circumstances, the walk to my office was only a mild 15-minute slightly-uphill stroll.

They breezed into my office an hour late. The reason became apparent the moment I laid my eyes on Marshall. Brandishing a battered cane, a red-faced sweating Marshall literally limped into the office. It seemed he had pretty much lost the complete use of his right leg. For him, that mild 15-minute slightly-uphill stroll had apparently turned into something more like an excruciating forced march through a deep swamp from one Japanese prison camp to another.

Leonard was annoyed. He apologized profusely for his friend making him late. It had never ever occurred to him to drop off Marshall at the office on his way to the shopping center parking lot. His brain was apparently still working as we had always come to expect it to work from its new location where the sun didn't shine.



Once they put aside the niceties of the apologies and introductions, Marshall sat on one side of the conference table. Leonard positioned himself at the head of the table. I sat across from Marshall. He looked businesslike wearing a dark suit and cowboy boots. Leonard, however, looked as if he was en route to Maui resplendent in a floral loose shirt.

Despite their physical differences, they were remarkably similar. While Leonard was short and Marshall tall, each had the same florid complexion. Each was grossly overweight. Each hated to listen and each loved to talk. The result was two people often talking at the same time—totally oblivious to what the other was saying. It lent truth to the maxim that it is very difficult to listen with your mouth open.

As I watched them at the conference table, I became totally fascinated and intrigued at how this might play out. These two unattractive and unappetizing people began to mesmerize me. Despite Marshall's reference to his former wives, he had to be gay. It could be his only attraction to Leon-

ard. As for Leonard, it seemed to me that he was totally besotted with Marshall.

A few minutes into the meeting, they decided to order lunch and wanted it delivered to the office. How people order take-out food has always given me a sense of their approach to life. For example, who would order hot food from an unknown restaurant that might be miles away? The answer: Leonard and Marshall. While I opted for a relatively safe chicken salad, they both ordered spicy shrimp, which arrived in a super-soggy state. Undaunted, they both attacked it with a vigor and passion that suggested neither had eaten for weeks.

Over the years, I had programmed myself not to look at Leonard when he ate. More than once, he had reduced me to nausea. Looking at Marshall dive into his food, I saw something else they had in common. Watching them eat together was a mesmerizing and nauseating experience. They each used a combination of utensils and their fingers. Their food dripped everywhere—their faces, shirts, sleeves, and pants. They used suction to try to recapture lost food. Their mouths were always open, allowing a clear view of how well they had chewed their food as well as their chewing techniques. When food stuck in their teeth, they would remove it with their fingers, inspect it and eat it again. Marshall's tie bore evidence of hearty meals other than spicy shrimp. Leonard's Hawaii shirt camouflaged the remains of other meals...



In a very few moments, their plates were almost empty. As they realized their meals were pretty much done, they both shifted their attention to my plate overflowing with crisp chicken salad. As their gaze became more fixed on my food and as they increasingly asked me how it was, I nonchalantly tossed what was left in the garbage to their ultimate dismay and horror. Life is sometimes full of these small unexpected and delightful pleasures...

They were talking again. I tried to concentrate, but they were again talking at the same time. They were arguing about why the Phoenix screens had not stood up to the process. Marshall's position was that the Phoenix

group had no idea what they were doing. Leonard, summoning up his one-year pre-college chemistry background, attempted to explain. Marshall was dismissive.

I tried to end the squabble. I suggested we should either call the Phoenix group to get the scoop from them first-hand and ask them to answer Marshall's questions, or we should move to another subject. And, just when I thought nothing could surprise me, they agreed—opting to move to another subject. After all, who really wanted to speak to the technical folks in Phoenix?

Out of the blue, Marshall began to tell me why he didn't like Paul. He said he was unhappy that he was a convicted felon. Considering what I later learned about Marshall's own criminal record, I can now only marvel at the man's chutzpah. I tried to bring him back on track. I reminded him that the sole issue was for us to find a commercially viable mining process to extract precious metals from our ore. He responded by asking me why we weren't in production. I took a deep breath. Without identifying a production process, I patiently repeated, we couldn't build a commercial production facility. He then became hostile and abusive. He said we didn't know what we were doing. He asked why we weren't in production. He hadn't heard a word I'd just said.

I decided to change gears. I smiled and said that he was really quite lucky that we didn't know what we were doing. He looked confused. I explained: "If we had any idea of what we were doing, Marshall, we would all already be rich and we wouldn't need you and your obvious expertise." I thought I'd stroke him. As I paused for breath, he leaped in. "But what I can't understand," he hissed, "is why you aren't in production." I blinked - or was it a twitch? I'd had enough. I told him the meeting was over.

Leonard suddenly came to life. This was all I needed to complete a thoroughly miserable few hours. Before he could say a word, however, Marshall announced he had an idea. He said he wanted to go to our Utah property with his company geologist to take samples. If these proved out, he said, he was prepared to give us the money to go into production. Would we allow

him to go? I was tempted to ask him what production process he would want us to pump his money into, but I bit my tongue.

My mind miraculously cleared. I was experiencing an epiphany. The utter desolation of our mining property flashed before me—as did the thought of Marshall’s bad leg. Then Leonard’s lunchtime drinking binges flashed before me. Suddenly, I knew with an absolute certainty there was light at the end of this particular tunnel.

Turning to Marshall, I said: “Absolutely, Marshall, what a great idea! Perhaps Leonard can show you the more remote parts of the property where we obtained our best results. Without him, you’d never find it.” *And I would keep the best for last:* “And why don’t you plan your visit to those more remote areas late in the afternoon so that you might be able to catch the breathtakingly beautiful sunsets?”

Marshall became quite almost giddy with excitement. “Great idea,” he exclaimed. Turning to Leonard, he said: “This will be great!” To my utter dismay and horror, Leonard said: “I’m not going.” Initially, my mind went numb, until I realized Leonard was pulling Marshall’s chain. He told us he would go.

They left my office, happy and still insulting each other. Marshall had obviously forgotten about the walk that lay ahead of him. Leonard had obviously lost track of time. The three hours free parking deadline had long expired. Leonard faced a \$35 parking fee that I knew he didn’t have. I wondered if Marshall was carrying any cash...



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#### POSTSCRIPT

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**L**eonard and Marshall never took that trip to Utah. When next I saw Leonard, he was happy and full of the joy of spring. I never again asked him about Marshall, figuring he’d tell me when he was ready. He never did...

## ABOUT MICHAEL FRIEDLANDER...



**F**or over 30 years as a business attorney and corporate executive, Michael has structured and negotiated business agreements around the world. Both as an attorney and later as CEO of an international music company and CEO of an international architectural design firm, he has crossed paths with some weird and wonderful characters. He is now putting together a book of short stories about some of his stranger experiences. *Leonard and Marshall* is his first short story.

Michael has recently written *Detecting the Scam: Nelson Mandela's Gift*, in which he offers an intriguing and distinctive perspective on the recent high-profile scams by studying them through the lens of Nelson Mandela's life, skills, and moral authority.

In his book, he describes the scam as a negotiating duel between the scammer and his mark. As he looks at Mandela's life and his historic negotiations to end apartheid, he extracts 10 Powers of Negotiation and illustrates how they can be used not just to detect scams, but in any type of negotiation. He emphasizes the need for a moral compass and the courage to follow it. Using his own Duck School of Common Sense, he raises some provocative questions about the high-profile scams and failure of our finest and brightest to do the right thing.

Michael received a law degree in South Africa and then studied at the Sorbonne in Paris and at the McGill Law School in Montreal. He is a member of the California Bar.