

## CHAPTER 8: SO YOU WANNA BE A WISE GUY

I learned a lot from those early years at Mayflower Securities and First Jersey Securities. Now, eight years later in 1981, I was rich, young, and considered by many to be the smartest guy in the penny stock game. I had no Partners, and I owned the most successful over-the-counter stock brokerage firm in the country.

One morning, I remember being really busy when my cousin, Big John, came to see me. I was a little annoyed and short with him.

“John, I wish you would have called me to tell me you were coming,” I said. “I really don’t have any fucking time right now.”

“Well my man, this is one time that you have to make time,” Big John said. “There’s someone outside who wants to talk to you.”

“Well, tell him to come in, but I don’t have a lot of time right now.”

“The guy won’t fucking come in. You have to go out. He said, ‘If you like doing what the fuck you do every day, you better come outside now.’”

“This better be fucking important,” I said, giving Big John a look. “Who the fuck is out there? And why the fuck can’t they come in?”

I went to the door, pushing it open as hard as I could—just to show whoever was out there how mad I was. When I saw who was out there, I did a Jackie Gleason imitation—humina, humina, humina.

Holy shit. It was him. Red stepped out of the car.

“Let’s take a walk,” he said.

I just about shit my pants. Here was the Wise Guy, the fucking gangster, who saved my ass with Big Jim, and now we’re walking in a shopping center together.

He wrapped his arm around mine and pulled me closer to him as we walked.

“I’ve been keeping a close watch on you,” Red told me. “I’ve watched some of your deals and the people you’re doing them with. I can help you with some people, like Tommy Quinn’s guys.”

I wondered how he knew about Tommy Quinn, and I was sure he was referring to Matty the Horse.

“You’re a smart kid,” Red continued. “You keep your nose clean. People

like you. Now these people you do business with will fear you too. You'll have all of my protection. No one will fuck with you, and if they do, then I take care of it. That's my job.

"You have money, but you don't have power. With me, you'll have more money and all the power you could ever dream of. You will own all of these jerk-offs."

I knew with Red's power behind me, I could take over all the penny stock deals. We could be huge. I knew that everyone who wanted a deal done would need to come through me, or they would deal with Red.

"Think about it," Red said. "I'll be in touch in a couple of days."

It was pretty clear to me Red was making his move.

"I'm only gonna say this once. You're getting bigger. There are people taking notice of what you've done. Some guys may want to move in on you. They'll try to take and take from you, but with me, I will be your partner. I will make sure no jerk-offs come around. It won't take long for everyone to know you own the Street.

Red was sharp. He was even referring to Wall Street now as the Street, and we will share it together.

"Think about it."

Think about it. That's what the man said. Do I really want to be partners with the Wise Guys? Is that what I'm supposed to think about? I did think about it quite a bit. I mean, how could you not think about it? I heard stories about people getting mixed up with the mob. Once they get you, they don't let go.

I thought about what Red said about the power I could have and all the control it could bring me on Wall Street. Oh yeah, I thought about it. I had a lot of questions for Red, and I anxiously awaited his phone call. I was on some ego trip back then. Could you blame me? I wasn't even thirty and I was a millionaire. I owned houses, cars, and jewelry. I had a great business, and now I'm going into a partnership with the Wise Guys. With Red's help, I would own the whole over-the-counter penny stock market. We would get paid from everyone wanting to do business, or else.

A couple of days later, my secretary told me someone was on the phone. She said they wouldn't give their name to her.

"I'm supposed to tell you it's your friend," She said.

My heart started racing. I knew it was Red. I answered the phone.

"Do you know who this is?" Red asked me.

"Yes," I said.

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“Meet me in Pine Brook in a half hour at the new Italian restaurant, Bella Vita. I’m already waiting, so leave now.”

The phone went dead.

Leave now. I never just jump. What did I know back then? I finished some things around the office, and then I left. I walked in and Red looked at his watch. I told Red I was busy and had to finish a few things before leaving. I could tell he wasn’t happy that it took me so long to get there, but he never said anything else about it. I sat down at his table, and we both ordered coffee.

“So, how’s the business going?” Red asked, pulling a Kent 100 from its pack and lighting it. “Anyone giving you any trouble? Anyone owe you anything?”

“Things are going good,” I said. “The only guy that owes me money right now is Peter Aiello.”

Red took a sip of his coffee.

“Who’s Peter Aiello?” he asked.

“There’s nothing we can do about him. He’s with the Chin.”

I was so naïve back then that I didn’t even know the Chin was the Boss of the Genovese crime family—the same family Red belonged to and the same family I was a proposed member of.

“How do you know that name?” Red asked, putting his coffee down.

I told Red the story of when I took Dwyer Wedvick from Peter a few years ago. I told him about Johnny Fats and the sit down on Mulberry Street in New York.

“How much money does Peter owe you?” Red asked.

“I did a deal with Peter. I figure he owes me about four hundred thousand dollars,” I said. “But Peter said he got screwed and didn’t have the money to pay me.”

Red never said another word about Peter.

“You need to listen to me now,” he said. “You need to pay attention to the things I tell you. You better not fucking lie to me—ever. I want to know what deals you’re doing ahead of time, because if anyone wants to make a beef, I can say I knew about the deal.”

I thought Red was a cool guy. I liked the way he talked to me. He was super intelligent, and I could tell he liked me too.

“Well, I don’t know what can be talked about. Is there such a thing as a bad question?” I asked him.

“You can ask me anything,” Red said. “How else are you going to know if you don’t ask?”

“I don’t want to be disrespectful, but you’re an older guy. What do I do if something happens to you? I trust you, but I don’t know these other people.”

“They’re all the same, including you now. If something were to happen to me, someone else will take my place. My crew is made up of mostly older guys like me—real nice fellas. The strength comes straight from the top. The Boss has the strength, and everyone under him shares it. That’s why it’s a family. So even if you are a low-level guy in the family, you have the strength of the whole family, straight from the Boss on down.”

Including you now, I thought. That’s what he said. Holy fuck, I think he just said I’m in.

Red was a high-ranking member in the Genovese Crime Family. He had a reputation, and even Wise Guys feared him. If Red wanted you dead, you were dead. Red just finished doing ten years for extorting some guy named Saperstein. Saperstein was trading options overseas and Red backed him with some money. He tried to screw Red out of the money. A guy in the crew, an enforcer for Red named Lenny Macalusso, caught up with Saperstein. It was in a hotel in NYC. He held him out the window by his feet. That was his first warning for Saperstein to pay what he owed Red. Eventually, Saperstein went to the cops. He filed charges against Red. Red was convicted and sent to jail, and Saperstein died of rat poisoning.

After that day, Red would call, and I would go to meet him. The first few meetings were at different places. I was always late. I remember this one time, Red looked at his watch when I walked in. He was pissed. I learned quickly why people feared him.

“Don’t you ever keep me fucking waiting again, do you understand me?” Red warned.

Red was serious, and I knew it. He had had it with my excuses and the, “I’m a busy guy,” story. We agreed that Pals Cabin in West Orange would be our regular meeting place unless Red changed it.

Red started schooling me about Wise Guys. We would spend hours together talking, all the time I was learning more and more about how they work and how they think. He taught me what I could do and what I couldn’t do. I listened very carefully to everything Red was telling me. I was learning how to be a Wise Guy. I was being schooled by the best.

I was Red’s guy. He was grooming me, and he was going to make sure I could do no wrong. I was like a son to Red, and Red was like a father to me. I loved Red, and I loved our meetings. Red would talk to me and tell me stories about himself and people he knew. Stories about real life gangsters and some of the things they did.

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One story in particular scared the crap out of me. I'll never forget it. It was about a guy that ratted on some of Red's friends. For revenge, Red and another man kidnapped this guy. They took him to an old house in the basement and beat the shit out of him. Then they tied him to a table and ripped his shirt open.

"This is what we do to rats," Red told the guy.

They had a big live rat that they didn't feed. It was hungry and they scared it. They picked the rat up and put it on the guy's stomach. They taped a bowl over the rat and put heat on the bowl. As the bowl got hotter, the scared rat had one way to escape—to chew his way out.

I never asked Red what happened to that guy. I just came to my own conclusions. Red told me he was going to start to introduce me around to some of "our friends." He wanted people to get to know me. He let everyone know I was to be treated with respect. I was now in the crew, and Red told me that he was going to move me up fast.

"We need a guy like you," Red told me. "I never want you to get in trouble, and you have to stay legitimate. That means stay clean, and make sure you don't get fucked up. "

With my friend Red as my sponsor, I was becoming a Wise Guy.