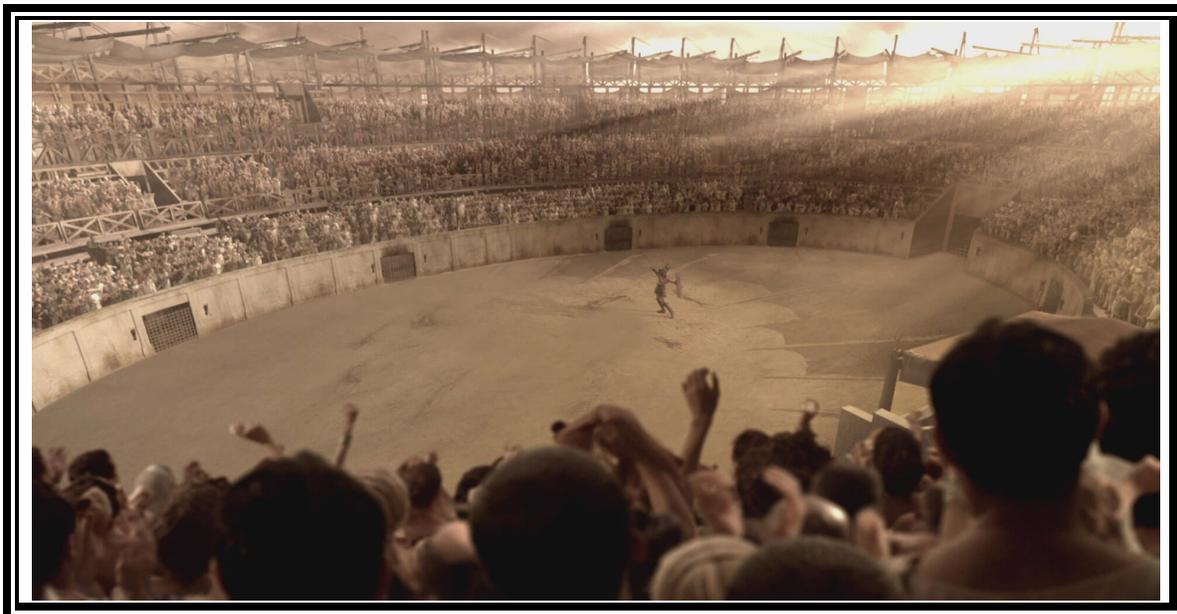


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## MAN IN THE ARENA—NEVER SAY QUIT<sup>©</sup>

Synopsis of David Michael Semas Autobiography



### Citizenship in a Republic

*“The poorest way to face life is to face it with a sneer. There are many men who feel a kind of twisted pride in cynicism . . . There is no more unhealthy being, no man less worthy of respect, than he who either really holds, or feigns to hold, an attitude of sneering disbelief toward all that is great and lofty . . . A cynical habit of thought and speech, a readiness to criticize . . . all these are marks, not . . . of superiority but of weakness. They mark the men . . . who seek, in the affection of contempt for the achievements of others, to hide from others and from themselves in their own weakness. The role is easy; there is none easier —Theodore Roosevelt, 1910*

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## **MAN IN THE ARENA: NEVER SAY QUIT**

Synopsis

by David Michael Semas

It seems like I was destined to think big. Indeed, my life conspired to push me toward the mountaintop, even when scaling such heights seemed perilous or near-impossible. My first mentor was my father. Leonard Semas, nicknamed Big Leonard and later the Colonel, was virtuous but tough as nails. He expected the best from everyone, including me, his fourth of five children. He let me learn lessons the hard way, but he always had my back, which gave me the strength I needed to venture out into the world without fear or malice.

I met my second mentor, Coach George Haines, when I joined the Santa Clara Swim Club. Coach Haines was a dashing character with good looks and an athletic swagger. His stable of world-class athletes included Mark Spitz, a future seven time world-record holder and seven gold-medal-winner in the 1972 Munich Olympics. I convinced myself I didn't have the talent to compete at such a high level, so I quit the club. Coach Haines let me go—but not before setting the record straight. I didn't lack talent, he told me; I lacked the work ethic and passion required to become a world-class swimmer. He made me promise that no matter what I did later in life, I would do my best to never give in, never give up, and never say quit.

Then in high school came Mr. Cargile's class. Each student was required to give a speech, and I chose to present a passage from Theodore Roosevelt's 1910 speech, "Citizenship in a Republic." Known as "The Man in the Arena," the passage encourages each of us to risk failure rather than play it safe. I wanted to know what it felt like to experience "the triumph of high achievement." At worst, I never wanted to be lumped in with "those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat." The words had a lingering effect on me to this very day. For the first time, I had read something that deeply impacted my life and my decision making process. Every word resonated with me, and as I stepped out into the world as a young man, I finally started taking a serious look at my life and my destiny.

As soon as I graduated from high school, I found an apartment to call my own. Then I

began to follow in my father's footsteps. I already knew much about the construction and building industry, thanks to apprenticing with my father and working each summer. But my rise to the top was nearly unprecedented. I was a construction foreman by age nineteen and leading men much older than me while overseeing ambitious projects with tight deadlines. To my father's disbelief—and without any of his help, for he frowned on nepotism of any kind—I kept thinking big, bigger, and biggest.

I was a construction superintendent at age twenty, general superintendent at twenty-one, Northern California construction manager for a national home building firm at twenty-two, Vice President of Operations at twenty-three and a President of a residential and commercial construction and real estate development company by the age of twenty-four. In 1974, at twenty-five I was appointed by the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors and to serve as a County Planning Commissioner, one of the youngest in California at the time.

As president of SEM Development Company, I was an upstart real estate developer in the San Francisco Bay Area. My newest project, Century Past, was a \$50 million entertainment complex that needed investors before it could get off the ground. I traveled from coast to coast, over the pond, and to the far reaches of the Middle East and the Pacific Rim for a year in an attempt to court potential investors, but it wasn't until I met with officials from the Central States Teamsters Pension Fund—and their notorious mobster friends—that I made any headway. Soon I found myself on a plane to the Philippines, where I was to hand-deliver letters to several high-ranking dignitaries, including President Ferdinand Marcos himself.

In exchange for my work as diplomat and courier, I was to receive the funding I needed to break ground on my project. Unfortunately, while I learned much about international relations, I never got the funding, thanks to a law passed by Congress that forced the Central States Teamsters, my would-be sponsors, to withdraw from speculative real estate financing. I did, however, learn through my military go-between that the US and the Philippines were involved in a high-stakes cover-up of a multibillion-dollar criminal drug ring and money-laundering scheme with roots in the Vietnam War. I was told the US would be forced to give up its strategic military bases in the Philippines, Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Force Base. Most found the money laundering story to be hard to believe until 1992, when during the George H.W. Bush administration the Department of Defense decommissioned the bases and turned over control to the Philippines government ending nearly a century of American military presence in the region.

After that high-stakes gamble never paid off, I ventured into other areas of business, including serving as a divisional executive vice president of Shearson/American Express in charge of construction lending and joint venture partnerships consisting of \$1 billion of REO (Real Estate Owned) assets and seventy-two projects around the United States.

Ready for my next challenge, together with two partners we acquired and then owned and operated several hotels including the 500 room Canyon Hotel and Golf Resort that was located in Palm Springs. During the same time I also provided real estate advisory services for \$800 million of real estate assets including the 1,500 room Anaheim Hilton Hotel, 1,200 room LAX Hilton Hotel, Park Wilshire high-rise condominium project in Westwood and the 928,000 square foot Beaudry Center office complex in downtown Los Angeles.

In the early 1990s I formed venture partnership with PMRealty Advisors, a subsidiary of the \$100 billion insurance and financial services conglomerate, Pacific Life, and opened offices in Newport Beach, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Taipei, Taiwan.

In 1995 I founded a metal-finishing technology and specialty chemical company called METALAST® International, Inc. The METALAST anodizing technology was used on two million driveshafts in the Grand Jeep Cherokee from 2004 to 2010. The company had R&D relationships with Apple, Boeing, General Dynamics, Honeywell, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon and a host of others. By 2004 METALAST was licensed by the United States Navy to commercialize a green chemical replacement for hex chrome, the carcinogenic chemical made famous in the award-winning film “Erin Brockovich.” In 2008 METALAST became the partner of Chemetall North America and Pratt & Whitney. METALAST was my longest-running venture, an attempt to take the reins and control my financial destiny. But it ended in heartbreak and defeat after I was hit with ill-begotten investigations by the Internal Revenue Service and the Securities and Exchange Commission and several bogus lawsuits by a former ally and investor.

After winning the frivolous six-year litigation via a court order issued by the U.S. District Court of Nevada in February 2021 I filed a major trademark infringement lawsuit against Chemetall and its parent company, BASF and another seven distributors for unlawfully using the USPTO registered METALAST® trademark since June of 2015.

As fate would have it, I finally returned to my roots in construction and real estate development. Having won and lost it all, I wasn’t ready to quit. Indeed, at age seventy-two I was ready for one more round in the arena.