

**WHAT  
MADE**

**ME  
WHO**

**I  
AM**

**BERNIE  
SWAIN**

FOUNDER OF  
WASHINGTON SPEAKERS BUREAU

FEATURING

TERRY

BRADSHAW

MADELEINE

ALBRIGHT

DORIS

KEARNS

GOODWIN

DAVE BARRY

LOU HOLTZ

CONDOLEEZZA

RICE

TOM BROKAW

COLIN

POWELL

TONY BLAIR

AND

MANY

OTHERS

## Praise for **What Made Me Who I Am**

“When a legend of an industry writes a book, you take notice. Bernie Swain, founder of the nation’s top lecture agency, recounts the watershed moments of a number of well-known clients. *What Made Me Who I Am* is an insightful guide to what has empowered a generation of leaders. It’s also full of fresh, moving stories that will help you navigate your life and challenges—no matter where or who you are.”

—AMY CUDDY, Harvard Business School professor  
and *New York Times* bestselling author of *Presence*

“Imagine having a backstage pass to the most interesting stages of the past three decades. Bernie Swain didn’t just have that seat; he built the stage. In this inspiring book, he convinced many of the great leaders of our time to share the key turning points in their lives. It’s like 34 autobiographies in one volume—full of delightful stories, surprising insights, and practical wisdom.”

—ADAM GRANT, Wharton professor  
and *New York Times* bestselling author of *Originals* and *Give and Take*

“Bernie Swain’s *What Made Me Who I Am* is a treasure. By revealing the core motivations of some of our most powerful leaders, the book challenges all of us to push back our own frontiers and become better versions of ourselves. Prepare to be surprised, inspired, and—most of all—changed.”

—DANIEL H. PINK, *New York Times* bestselling author  
of *Drive*, *A Whole New Mind*, and *To Sell Is Human*

“Rarely do we get intimate profiles of so many outstanding leaders as we do in *What Made Me Who I Am*. Author Bernie Swain, a legend in the speaking world, reveals his clients’ most personal leadership struggles alongside his own. Leaders at every level will see themselves in his frank, true-to-life tales about risk, tough times, and resilience. You’ll also get some powerful inspiration and practical advice that could make a real difference for the rest of your life.”

—STEPHEN M. R. COVEY, *New York Times* bestselling author  
of *The Speed of Trust* and *Smart Trust*

“The stories in *What Made Me Who I Am* are both heartfelt and inspiring. The trust and confidence these famous names have in Bernie Swain is obvious on every page because they reveal to him intimate details of their lives that give real insight into how they became who they are today. Plus it is a fast and fun read.”

—MAUREEN ORTH, Award-winning journalist  
and special correspondent for *Vanity Fair*

“History is composed of the stories we tell; their turning points often have the power to inspire. From the personal trials of some of today’s most iconic leaders, Bernie Swain has created an inspiring gem.”

—KEN BURNS, Renowned filmmaker, including *Civil War* and *Baseball*

“Everyone starts somewhere, and some of the most successful people of our times started in circumstances that were light years away from the lofty peaks they reached. Bernie Swain’s book shares the stories of some of the successful individuals with whom he’s worked—and the pivotal moments that proved life changing. You’ll look at the events in your *own* life differently after reading about the lives of these leaders.”

—DEBORAH NORVILLE, Anchor of *Inside Edition*  
and *New York Times* bestselling author of *Thank You Power*

“We all have moments when we decide our fate—when we face down a problem, for example, or take a big risk. *What Made Me Who I Am* focuses on those inflection points for 34 notable people. You learn what has made all the difference in each of their lives and how these influences continue to drive them forward. This is an important book with great meaning for the rising generation.”

—EUGENE ROBINSON, Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist  
for the *Washington Post* and MSNBC analyst

“I love *What Made Me Who I Am* simply because Bernie Swain understands what moves people. You’ll see yourself in every story, and you’ll be inspired to take charge of your problems and opportunities in fresh, new ways.”

—KATIE COURIC, Award-winning journalist  
and *New York Times* bestselling author

“Bernie Swain’s book *What Made Me Who I Am* wisely states that all of us must appreciate the evolution of our lives and seize those teachable moments. Bernie has met many remarkable men and women with lessons to teach. In this book, he shares them with us.”

—CHARLIE ROSE, Emmy-award winning journalist

“I’ve always believed that the most effective leaders are as generous as they are ambitious. They are at their best when they bring about the best in everyone they encounter. This book confirms that belief. In a true act of generosity, Bernie Swain has persuaded many of the remarkable thinkers, statesmen, and executives with whom he has worked to share the secrets of their success. The stories are larger than life, but their lessons may change *your* life. *What Made Me Who I Am* will help make you what you hope to become.”

—WILLIAM C. TAYLOR, *Fast Company* cofounder  
and *New York Times* bestselling author including *Simply Brilliant*

“Every human life is unique and unrepeatable. What we do and what we become in our lives has everything to do with whether we discover our personal talents and passions and have the determination to pursue them. What does that take and what happens when we do? In this compelling collection of powerful stories, Bernie Swain explores these fundamental questions through the lives of 34 extraordinary people in many different fields. No matter who you are, or what stage of life you’ve reached, you’ll find *What Made Me Who I Am* is a treasure trove of insights and experiences on leadership, life, and achievement.”

—SIR KEN ROBINSON, *New York Times* bestselling author  
of *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*

“Bernie Swain—who has worked with US presidents, executives, and public figures for 35 years—gives us a rare look at the private moments that have helped determine the achievements of some of today’s most compelling leaders. *What Made Me Who I Am* will remind you of the tremendous power of human potential, and that we are all in the people business.”

—JOHN WREN, President and CEO, Omnicom Group

“Here’s the truth in *What Made Me Who I Am*: Your future is in your hands—regardless of your circumstances. Get a copy. You’ll be newly motivated to have more of a positive influence, get ahead, and expand your role in the world.”

—DAN SCHAWBEL, Partner at Future Workplace  
and author including the *New York Times* bestseller *Promote Yourself*

“Great people are sometimes born and sometimes made. But either way, great people are those who take charge of their potential. Bernie Swain’s insightful book delivers first-hand accounts of how 34 of this generation’s stars did just that—facing down problems, taking on risk, and persevering through tough challenges. *What Made Me Who I Am* is a terrific read for anyone who wants to make the most of what they have, and become all they can be.”

—JACK AND SUZY WELCH, Business leaders  
and *New York Times* bestselling authors including *The Real-Life MBA*

“Behind every president, CEO, Hollywood actor, or successful entrepreneur you’ll find a person who’s rarely talked about. Don’t be surprised if that person’s name is Bernie Swain. In his remarkable book *What Made Me Who I Am*, Swain shares a fascinating insight into some of the world’s most admired individuals and how they in turn shaped equally remarkable individuals. *What Made Me Who I Am* is a must-read for anyone who aspires to reach for the stars—and have fun at the same time.”

—MARTIN LINDSTROM, *New York Times* bestselling author  
of *Buyology* and *Small Data*

“Bernie Swain has a compelling personal story and an incredibly unique vantage point on life. This book gathers it all together in powerful short profiles; read them and be inspired, entertained, and delighted.”

—RORY VADEN, *New York Times* bestselling author  
of *Take the Stairs* and *Procrastinate on Purpose*

“Bernie Swain has written a deeply insightful book, capturing the moments that turned ordinary people into today’s heroes. *What Made Me Who I Am* is to be treasured.”

—MARSHALL GOLDSMITH, *New York Times* bestselling author  
including *Triggers*

“Everyone carries with them a lasting lesson that defines them. Bernie Swain has done a masterful job capturing the moments that have become lasting lessons for so many of today’s greatest leaders.”

—LUKE RUSSERT, Correspondent, NBC News

“Bernie Swain has created the perfect book for every bedside. When he called his friends of many years and asked them to tell their personal stories, they responded with warm, revealing tales—stories that are charming, often humorous, and inspiring. No wonder Bernie’s clients are favorites of audiences all over the world.”

—DAVID GERGEN, Political analyst, advisor to four US presidents,  
and Harvard Kennedy School professor

“The most unexpected moment can change your life, but only if you’re paying attention. Bernie’s terrific new book captures the real-life turning points of productive heroes—each one his friend. Who grabbed the opportunity, got competitive, and leaped forward? Learn from the best in *What Made Me Who I Am*.”

—BARBARA CORCORAN, Shark investor on ABC’s *Shark Tank*,  
and *New York Times* bestselling author

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A POST HILL PRESS AND SAVIO REPUBLIC BOOK

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*To my wife, Paula,  
the turning point and love of my life,  
and my children,  
Timothy, Michael, and Kelley,  
who inspired me  
since the day they were born.*

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## INTRODUCTION

# A PREPOSTEROUS IDEA

In the lives of truly successful and accomplished people, you will often find a turning point. It may be a person in their life, a moment in time, or an unexpected event. It may be more intangible, such as the expectations set by others, or something that totally surprises you. But success and accomplishment don't happen in a vacuum; they rise from experiences that have a profound and lasting influence.

When you ask these successful and accomplished individuals about their turning points and listen carefully, you will often hear truly enlightening and inspirational stories—stories that can serve as a shining beacon of light to us all.

I learned this over a period of twenty-five years while founding and building our business, the Washington Speakers Bureau. We represented some of the biggest names in world leadership—among them, three of the past four presidents of the United States, the last four prime ministers of Great Britain, five secretaries of state, countless government and military leaders, journalists, authors, and sports legends. Throughout the course of my career, we shared much time and many experiences together. In our conversations, those we represented spoke often of the powerful influences and defining moments in their lives. These were the turning points they experienced that

they rarely talked about in their speeches and appearances, stories that caused me to reconsider my own life and reflect on what I was hearing.

I credit Alex Haley, the author of *Roots* and one of the most compelling people that we've had the privilege to represent, for helping me to see that all these stories should be a book—this book. One day in the late eighties, Alex showed up at our office unannounced. He was like that—even though he was at the height of his fame and one of the best-known writers in the country, he would just walk into our offices and sit with us for an hour or more, talking and sharing stories.

On this occasion, Alex repeated one of his favorite sayings: “When an old person dies, it’s like a library burning.” That pithy phrase stuck with me, and as the days and months passed, I began to understand what he was telling me. Each life—the ones recounted here, the millions that go uncelebrated—is defined by experiences that have volumes to teach us. Each life is a storehouse of wisdom and knowledge, its own library, stuffed to the rafters.

I wrote this book for two reasons: To share with you a collection of stories that have inspired me for many years and taught me something about life, the stories of a compelling and eclectic group of my friends who were guided by their powerful influences and defining moments. And, by my recounting these stories, to give you a better picture and understanding of your own life, and the importance of your turning points in the process.

Many names will be familiar. You’ve read about them, seen them at press conferences, on news broadcasts, on playing fields. You probably know what they’ve accomplished and why they’re famous. CNN and Wikipedia can tell you. The stories they shared with me and I recall in this book reveal something more personal and relevant—what makes us who we are.

My front row seat to the worldwide lecture circuit has provided me with a lifetime of insight and inspiration. It began and unfolded like the stories in this book. I was in my early thirties and just

months away from becoming the athletic director at George Washington University when a friend's half serious note spurred my wife, Paula, and me to abandon our careers and risk our family's future on a preposterous idea. Our friend Harry Rhoads had sent us an article from *Fortune* magazine, entitled "Speech is Golden on the Lecture Circuit," about the Harry Walker Agency in New York, then the world's largest lecture agency. In the article, Henry Kissinger was quoted as asking Walker why he should sign with his company instead of with one of his competitors. Walker's response: "We don't have any competitors."

Harry taped a note to the page. It read: "No competitors?" Paula took the note as an invitation and a challenge. I thought she was kidding. Weeks later, Paula's simple but passionate argument—that every life, even ours, needs a great if totally unpredictable and crazy adventure—prevailed and I gave in. With no experience or real plan (but with a one-year-old baby), we quit our jobs, ended our careers, and started a lecture agency with Harry.

Our first office was, quite literally, a closet. It held the office supplies for Chuck Hagel—who would become US secretary of defense—and his business partner (and our friend) Bill Collins. The three of us shared two small desks and two telephones. When Chuck and Bill's staff needed stationery supplies, they walked into our closet/office. When we needed to leave our office, even to use the restroom, we sometimes had to wait until one of Chuck's meetings was over.

For months, we sat in our closet hoping that someone would call us. But no one ever did. As it turned out, Harry Walker's claim of "no competitors" was a strategic boast, a way of separating himself from other agencies. There were dozens of lecture agencies up and down the East Coast representing all kinds of famous people. We were clueless. There was, after all, no Internet in 1980 to save us from our decisions.

Sitting in our closet late at night, I would often close my eyes, shake my head, and ask myself, "What have we done?"

A year later, little had changed. Harry Walker and the other big agencies still controlled the industry. Most of the famous speakers remained under written contracts with those agencies. Our office was still a closet, and we didn't represent anyone. Only one thing had changed. We had spent all our savings on supplies, rent, mailing lists, brochures, and direct mailings that had little or no effect, and we were out of money.

Then, just as we were about to close our closet door, we got our first exclusive speaker—Steve Bell, anchorman for ABC's *Good Morning America*. I had helped Steve get access to the GWU swimming pool for a news story years before, and he had just left his old agency. When he called us, we were so excited and anxious that we simply sealed the deal with a quick handshake and no paperwork. "If someone is unhappy with us," I justified after the handshake, "what good will it be holding him to a signed piece of paper?"

This questionable decision turned out to be a "defining moment" strategy for our new little company. Word spread in the small, news-driven town of Washington. Knowing they could walk out on us at any time, a surprising number of speakers, mostly Washington journalists (including Hugh Sidey, Carl Rowan, Robert Novak, and Mark Shields) gave us a chance. Knowing we could lose them at any time, we worked hard to keep our clients happy.

For the next seven years, we did what many start-ups must do to succeed. We arrived to work every day at dawn, we didn't leave the office until late at night, we obsessed about every small detail, and we learned from our mistakes. There were no vacations; we often worked seven days a week. We were driven, always thinking, planning, and rethinking, but most importantly, we were networking intensely and building relationships.

Thankfully, it started to pay off. We added another impressive list of speakers, which is what most distinguishes one agency from another, among them Peter Jennings, Art Buchwald, Charles Kuralt, David Brinkley, George Will, Lou Holtz, Jim Valvano, and Terry

Bradshaw. We eventually moved to new offices, got health insurance (just in time for the birth of our three-month-premature, two-pound baby girl), and hired what was the start of a very talented staff and team of agents that would fully develop in the decade to follow. For the first time, we could favorably compare our success recruiting talent (speakers) and booking events against much of our competition. I'm not sure Harry Walker took much notice of us, but in just seven productive and foundation-making years, our reputation in the industry and roster of speakers was strong.

The big turning point came in 1988, when we received an invitation to the White House. Ronald Reagan would be leaving office in a few months, and he was looking for an agency to book and manage his speaking engagements. We got invited to interview.

There were dozens of agencies in the running, including large East Coast companies that specialized in politicians and Hollywood agencies that Reagan knew from his acting career. The president's staff conducted the initial interviews, and although we knew the field of potential agencies was being narrowed, we remained totally in the dark. Unlike almost every other thing going on in Washington, there were no rumors to shed light on their thinking. All we knew was that the top two choices of the staff would be presented to the president and First Lady, and they would make the final decision.

I don't think anyone in Washington, or elsewhere for that matter, thought we would be the agency selected to represent Ronald Reagan, and yet we were optimistic. There's a confidence you get over time when you build something of your own and, after years of surviving the early days and then thriving on later challenges, we were confident. But that optimism was challenged when we heard nothing for two months, not a word. Then out of the blue, my secretary buzzed me in the office: "Fred Ryan is on the phone for you." Fred was Reagan's chief of staff and now publisher of the *Washington Post*. I held my breath and took the call, braced for bad news. Fred got right to the point: "Bernie, President and Mrs. Reagan have selected you to



represent them.” It was that simple, and yet breathtaking. Trying not to sound too excited or unprofessional, I thanked him, assured him that we would do a good job, and hung up the phone.

Superstitious and worried that the decision was somehow a mistake, we refused to ask how it all happened. But then one day in our office, I blurted out the question to Fred Ryan. “You actually came in second; Harry Walker was first,” he said. Time stood still and I barely heard the next few sentences. “But, it was the president himself who chose you. He liked that you, Paula, and Harry were starting up a new business, and he wanted to give you a chance.”

I sat in my office that day thinking how totally amazing it was that a president would trust his legacy to a fledgling agency and a small, inexperienced group of people. But, as the years passed, I came to understand why it made perfect sense. Reagan was, at heart, a small-town boy who believed in entrepreneurship and the little guy. Like the people whose stories are in this book, he was guided by and true to the powerful influences and defining moments that formed and shaped his life.

With the president’s decision, our lives were to change like we’d never imagined. Twenty-one months later, Margaret Thatcher, at the recommendation of President Reagan, asked us to represent her without meeting us. Then, General Norman Schwarzkopf called us from his bunker near the end of the Gulf War. Over time, we were representing George H. W. Bush, Colin Powell, Madeleine Albright, Tony Blair, Condoleezza Rice, Rudy Giuliani, Bob Gates, and so many others. The roster of clients we would eventually represent, it was said, became the greatest in history since the very first agency, the Redpath Bureau, represented Mark Twain, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Susan B. Anthony, Frederick Douglass, and other notables of the post-Civil War era.

If you’d told me in my twenties that I would play a part, even this small part, in the lives of presidents, prime ministers, and great achievers of all kinds, I might have questioned your sanity. But it

was real, and not only did we represent these famous individuals as clients, we soon got to know them and, over time, earned their trust and friendship (the key to our success). In this book, I'll share with you what my conversations with my friends taught me: the powerful influences and defining moments, the turning points in our lives, don't just change us, but they can make us stronger and wiser, and contribute greatly to our character and accomplishment.

The storytellers whose journeys I will recount and narrate in this book stand as an assembly of individuals who defined their generation. Here, they share the moments that defined them. Bob Woodward finds his passion for investigative journalism while working as a janitor. Condoleezza Rice's life path is set by her grandfather's controversial decision over a hundred years ago. Tony Blair's journey to becoming prime minister is almost derailed by Mick Jagger. Robert Reich's childhood friend's death sends him on a life mission to change the world.

These stories, about extraordinary people who often started from humble and modest beginnings, will surprise you. Some may even move you. My genuine hope is that you will see yourself in many of these stories and they will inspire you to recognize and learn from the turning points in your life. They did that for me.

# MADELEINE ALBRIGHT

*Before Madeleine Albright was confirmed as the first female US secretary of state, there were many people who thought a woman wouldn't be able to negotiate with Arab countries. But she told me once that she actually had more trouble with American men. She had been around Washington for a while, and many of the men in her circle knew her either as a friend of their wives or someone they'd sat next to at a dinner party. Some of them had a hard time, she recalled, making the leap from carpool mom to secretary of state.*

*It wasn't what I expected, but the defining moments and influences that Madeleine shared with me over the years centered on the theme of parent/child relationships and how they shape us. As she talked about her life, it reconfirmed what has crossed my mind many times—that we grow up, become our own person, and still, for many of us, the powerful urge to make our parents happy remains.*

.... My English elementary school awarded honor points—for grades, sports, behavior, and community service. Whenever I got a point, I would come home and tell my parents and they were thrilled. So I started telling them I'd won points when I hadn't. Of course, each point had to have a story behind it. One day, I came home and claimed that I'd pulled a teacher out of a rosebush and been awarded multiple points for my bravery and dexterity. Then I upped the ante by claiming that I'd won so many points that the school was going to award me its ultimate accolade, the Egyptian Cup.

The cup, of course, was another figment of my parent-pleasing imagination. My father, who I suspect was on to me by this time, kept asking me when I would be bringing home the vaunted Egyptian Cup. Cornered, I switched directions. I was soon losing points, unfairly of course, for minor infractions. I was being singled out, bullied. Why, one teacher had even made me sit on needles. That was the last straw for my mother, who announced she was going to march down to the school in the morning and demand that this mistreatment ceases immediately. At that point, I had no choice but to come clean. From then on, whenever I said something fishy, my father would ask, "So, where's the Egyptian Cup?"

## DAVE BARRY

*Sometimes, the joke is on the jokester. In 1988, the Miami Herald played a prank on humorist Dave Barry, the author and nationally syndicated columnist. On his way to Key West with his eight-year-old son Rob, Barry got a call from his editor asking him to drop by the office to discuss a story. When he arrived, he found everyone gathered in the newsroom for the announcement that he had won the Pulitzer Prize. Noticing the disappointment on his son's face because their trip together would be cancelled, Dave whispered in Rob's ear, "I'll buy you a Nintendo game." Rob immediately jumped into the arms of his father as someone took a picture. The next day it ran on the front page of the Herald with everyone commenting on how excited the boy had been for his father. The joke was, Barry would recall, that young Rob was just in the throes of Nintendo fever.*

*I've always wondered how people with distinctive personalities, in Dave's case those who make us laugh, got to be that way. In recalling the powerful influences in his life, Dave tells his secret: humor, like our individual differences in the way we think, feel, and behave, comes in great part from the strong and sometimes profound impressions made on us when we are very young.*

.... At school, I used humor to make myself popular. It didn't always work, especially with the teachers. I was a wiseass and, if there was a particularly uptight teacher, I was likely to mouth off. I spent my share of time in detention. What can I say? I was this dweeby little guy and being funny helped me win acceptance. In fact, I was elected class clown of Pleasantville High School's class of 1965. That's my earliest major achievement in the field of humor.

Mom's humor masked some pain. She was a troubled person, unhappy in many ways, and she saw a psychiatrist later in life. But she never lost her sense of humor. In 1984, my father died after a long struggle with heart disease. He was a much-loved Presbyterian minister and social worker in New York City. After the service, my brothers, sister, and I went to the cemetery with Mom, who was carrying Dad's ashes in a cardboard box. We placed them in the hole that had been dug and said a few words. We all cried. Then, as we were leaving, Mom read a nearby gravestone: "So that's why we don't see him around anymore." All of a sudden we were all laughing and crying at the same time.

# LOU HOLTZ

*When you see Lou Holtz for the first time, you might think he doesn't look much like a football coach. He is slender, wears glasses, and he talks with a slight lisp. But I've learned as many have that first impressions can fool you. Lou is a master motivator. He is the only coach in college history to have taken six different college football teams, all with losing records when he arrived at the school, to a bowl game by the second year and the only coach to take four different college teams to a top twenty ranking.*

*Since we first became friends in 1984, I have been guided by the defining moments and powerful influences in Lou's life that he has shared with me. Whether you love sports or have no interest, Lou's message totally transcends athletics: adversity is part of every life; the real question is what we are going to do about it.*

.... It was a tumultuous first year at South Carolina. My wife Beth had her second major surgery for throat cancer and they gave her a 10 percent chance to live. I am glad to say that she is fine now. My son, Skip, currently the football coach at Louisiana Tech, went into a coma because of a virus the week we played Georgia and we almost lost him. My mother died the Friday before we played Florida.

I was on an airplane for four days recruiting when we landed at Lady Island, Beaufort, South Carolina, to meet assistant coach Charlie Strong and talk to a recruit. There wasn't a refueling station at Lady Island and the pilot said, "Coach, while you visit Darnel Washington, we are going to fly eleven miles to Hilton Head to get gas and we will be right back. Leave your suitcase and hanging bag on the plane."

Charlie and I visited Darnel and returned to the airport. There was no sign of the plane. We found a guy who was preparing to take off in a single-engine plane and explained the situation. He said, "I got a report of a crash, and I'm heading out to search for it." It was our plane; during that eleven-mile flight, the plane crashed. One school pilot was killed instantly and the other was seriously injured and later died. We lost every game we played that year, going 0–11.



## CONDOLEEZZA RICE

*Many in Washington know that Condi Rice planned early in life to pursue a career in music. An excellent pianist, she first played on stage at the age of fifteen with the Denver Symphony. She has since played at numerous public and diplomatic events, including for Queen Elizabeth II, and performed with such great musicians as cellist Yo-Yo Ma. Many historians will tell you that Thomas Jefferson, who played the violin, was the only other secretary of state to be as talented a musician.*

*As previous stories in the book reveal, there are any number of powerful influences and defining moments that can change our lives. Condi's story reminds us that some lives are changed by events that occur even before we are born.*

.... John Wesley Rice, my grandfather, was admitted to Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Stillman was founded by Presbyterians in 1875; its original mission was "the training of colored men for the ministry." In the days before he went there, Grandfather Rice spent many hours picking cotton, but he only earned enough to cover his freshman tuition. The school told him he couldn't return for his sophomore year. They also told him that if he agreed to study for the ministry he would be eligible for a scholarship. That's how my grandfather became a Presbyterian minister.

After graduation, John met my grandmother, who was from Baton Rouge and was half Creole. They were a dynamic couple who founded several schools and churches in Alabama and Mississippi before settling in Louisiana, where my father and his sister were born.

The Rice family was dedicated to education. My father vividly remembered the day, during the Great Depression, when my grandfather came home with nine leather-bound, gold-embossed books. They were the works of Victor Hugo, William Shakespeare, and other literary giants. My grandmother asked him how much he'd paid for them. When he answered ninety dollars—a huge sum at the time—she told him to take them back. He said he'd arranged to pay for them on time. She still insisted he return them. Despite the drama, the books stayed. My grandfather believed in having books in the home, and, more importantly, he believed in having his children read them.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Bernie Swain** is co-founder and Chairman of Washington Speakers Bureau.

Swain grew up in Arlington, VA. His high school athletic director inspired him to pursue a career in college athletics; he earned his undergraduate and master's degrees from George Washington University, where he met his wife, Paula.

Swain subsequently joined the University's athletic department, and he and Paula started a family.

Swain spent the next five years preparing to take over the job of Athletic Director. But just as his boss was ready to retire and promote him, Swain abruptly quit to join Paula and friend Harry Rhoads to start a lecture agency—without experience, without a plan, and without a single client.

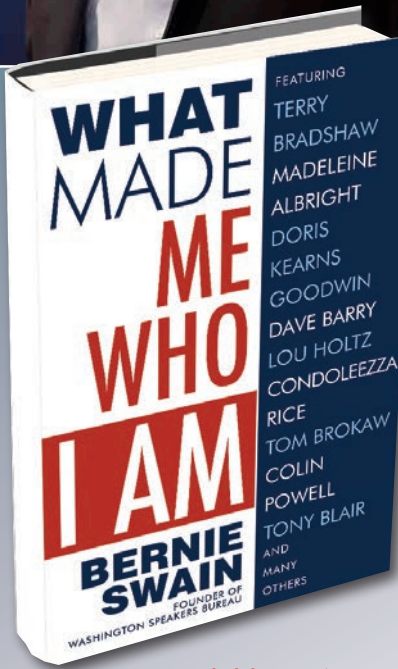
What happened next is a classic American success story.

The three co-founders started Washington Speakers Bureau from a small supply closet belonging to Chuck Hagel, who would later become Secretary of Defense. One rocky year later, just as their savings was running out, Swain secured their first speaker and hastily sealed the deal with a handshake. This gesture became WSB's defining moment: The trio recruited more speakers. Word spread that a new lecture agency was in town—and was growing fast on the strength of its handshake. Indeed, eight short years later, their roster

## A LEGEND IN THE LECTURE INDUSTRY

# Bernie Swain

- Founder, Washington Speakers Bureau
  - Today's foremost authority on the lecture industry
  - Author, *What Made Me Who I Am*



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**Starting a business is a wonderfully naïve venture.** Only a handful survive—and a fortunate few of those have something special to say about leadership.

Bernie Swain is one of those fortunate people. He quit his job in 1980 to start a lecture agency. By the end of the first rocky year, Bernie's first revenues trickled in. In haste, he signed his first few speakers on a handshake; that soon became a hallmark of trust that characterized his amazing agency. Years later, his roster of speakers would be the greatest in history since America's first agency represented the post-Civil War the likes of Mark Twain, Susan B. Anthony, and Frederick Douglass.

Bernie has since represented 3 former US Presidents, 5 Secretaries of State, 4 prime ministers of Great Britain, American and world leaders, business and economic visionaries, authors, media personalities, and sports legends. To this day, the agency—Washington Speakers Bureau—signs every speaker on the strength of a handshake.

Bernie's book, *What Made Me Who I Am*, tells the story of how, with no experience, he built his agency into the largest and most respected in the world. The book also features first-hand accounts of the powerful influences and defining moments in the lives of 34 of his speakers from Doris Kearns Goodwin to Colin Powell, Terry Bradshaw to Tom Brokaw, and Tony Blair to Dave Barry. This assembly of leaders, who define their generation, use real-life examples to teach us about character, accomplishment, and success. Readers everywhere will benefit from Bernie's inspiring, practical collection of stories.

## KEYNOTE

### ON CHARACTER & ACCOMPLISHMENT: *What Made Me Who I Am*

Ordinary people achieve extraordinary things when they persevere. Bernie Swain has had the good fortune of working with hundreds of the world's greatest leaders. We know their public accomplishments. Bernie knows their private struggles. In the process, he has come to understand that the difference between "ordinary" and "extraordinary" is most often how we react to the turning points in our lives. Audiences expect to walk away with practical advice and positive inspiration that could make a real difference in their lives.

### CATEGORIES

Personal leadership, Biography/Memoir, Entrepreneurship, Inspiration

### AUDIENCE

Anyone interested in personal leadership, and in reaching their full potential

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"*What Made Me Who I Am* wisely states that all of us must seize our teachable moments."

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Emmy award-winning journalist

"I love this book. You'll see yourself in every story."

- KATIE COURIC  
Award-winning journalist

"Bernie Swain has created an inspiring gem."

- KEN BURNS  
Renowned documentary filmmaker

"Learn from the best in *What Made Me Who I Am*."

- BARBARA CORCORAN  
Shark investor on ABC's *Shark Tank*

"Prepare to be surprised,  
inspired, and—most of all—changed."

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