David Anspaugh thinks for a moment and then recalls the first time he encountered Angelo Pizzo nearly 50 years ago. “There was this staircase,” he begins. “He came down and he kind of did this little toss of his hair. He was part of the new pledge class, and I just loved him from the start.”

Sitting across the room, Pizzo breaks out into a bemused grin, as if to say, “Thanks, David, I knew I could count on you to say something completely ridiculous.”

Asking about the beginnings of their relationship was not unwarranted. After so many years as friends, collaborators, and, at times, each other’s most blistering critic, Anspaugh, like Pizzo a decade before him, has abandoned California and come home to Bloomington to stay.

The two pals will forever be linked as the director and screenwriter, respectively, of Hoosiers, the monumental film about the small-town basketball team that overcame all odds to win a fabled Indiana state championship. The low-budget film earned two Academy Award nominations and almost universal glowing reviews. The American Film Institute ranks it the fourth-best sports film of all time.

The native Hoosiers went on to make Rudy, the story of a not-so-good athlete whose dream was to suit up for the vaunted University of Notre Dame Fighting Irish football team. It, too, gained widespread acclaim as an inspirational film. No less a star than Kobe Bryant has proclaimed, “That film changed my life.”

Anspaugh and Pizzo also collaborated to make The Game of Their Lives, the story of how the unheralded United States soccer team came together to beat mighty England in the 1950 World Cup.

Both men have had enviable careers outside of each other’s spheres, with a young Anspaugh arising from obscurity to win two Emmy Awards for directing episodes of Hill Street Blues, the 1981–87 television series TV Guide called the best police series of all time. Pizzo rose rapidly through the ranks at Warner Bros. Television and Time-Life Films before making his name as a screenwriter. He currently is putting the final production touches on My All American, based on the true story of Freddie Steinmark, an undersized, crowd-favorite football player who helped lead the University of Texas to the 1969 national football championship before learning that a nagging bruise on his leg was not a bruise but, rather, cancer. Pizzo wrote the screenplay and, for the first time, also directed.

As filmmakers and practitioners of storytelling, Anspaugh and Pizzo recognize all too well that their relationship is a buddy story — maybe not of cinematic proportions but of a genuine close and enduring friendship that has entered a new phase.

After nearly three decades living in Santa Monica and Ojai, California, Pizzo moved back to his hometown of Bloomington in 2004. Anspaugh — at Pizzo’s urging — came here from Los Angeles in June.
always from the Greek system. And all of a sudden, Guy Loftman, the opposite of a fraternity guy, starts running for president, and he’s got an anti-war point of view — a bigger point of view — and that’s when the shit started to hit the fan at our fraternity. He was the enemy, he represented all things evil, and David and I were supporting him. We were all about wanting to be a part of that. We wanted him to be student body president and not the Greek god who was up for it.”

Anspaugh says there was a defining moment in his transition from frat boy to the hippie type. Lt. Gen. Lewis B. Hershay, director of the Selective Service system, was scheduled to give an address on campus and the fraternities heard that the baggers were planning a protest. Remembers Anspaugh, “The fraternity decided they weren’t going to let that happen, and so they came up with this plan that spread like wildfire. They got all of their pledge classes and loaded them up with raw eggs. The plan was to circle Shoewalter Fountain, where the baggers would be, and pelt them with eggs. I mean, there were probably a hundred protesters and they were outnumbered five-to-one. So I’m watching this unfold, and I’m watching the baggers walk, and I see that one of them is a guy from my high school, a guy a year older than me. I saw him and I said to myself, ‘That’s it. I’m supposed to be with them, not on this side. I slowly backed away, and I ended up walking back to the house. I guess they did get him, but I was ashamed of myself, and I knew from that day on that things in my life had to change. And of course, a year later, everything did change. There were thousands of people in Dunn Meadow protesting the war.”

Moving on

“It was our choice to leave but also their choice not to have us,” Pizzo says. “So our choice to leave, and their choice not to have us, we both got out of the fraternity, and Sigma Nu that fled the fraternities,” says Spyridon “Strats” Stratigos, an SAE in college and friend of Anspaugh and Pizzo. “We melded into an incredible group that’s close to this day: David and I moved into a farmhouse with Harry Gonso, a star of the 1968 Rose Bowl team, Angelo moved into a house with some of my fraternity brothers.”

“It was late in the decade, the free-wheeling, psychedelic ‘60s finally arrived in the Midwest. When we had our parties, it was like the Rainbow Coalition. We had frat guys, sorority chicks, Buddhists, jocks, Communists,” says Pizzo. “It was crazy, and we all had weed and whatever anyone else wanted to do. For us, that was just natural. It was like, this is what the real world is like.”

Pizzo already had his mind on film studies and scholarships, but had no thoughts at all about writing scripts or making movies.

The seismic ‘60s

Anspaugh and Pizzo became friends as members of Sigma Nu fraternity at Indiana University. Anspaugh arrived in 1965 from Decatur, Indiana, and Pizzo, a graduate of the old University High School in Bloomington, started IU in the fall of ’66. “My dad was really from a poor Italian immigrant family — nothing remotely close to being a fraternity guy. I mean, my reason for joining a fraternity — nothing remotely close to being a fraternity really from a poor Italian immigrant family started IU in the fall of ’66. “My dad was a Vietnam vet, and he was opposed to the war. But he always walked to the beat of his own drum. It was like, ‘Where’s Crazy gone — off doing his own thing.’ There was a point when David abbreviated that name and insisted we call him David. “David’s nickname in college was ‘Crazy.’ It wasn’t so much that he was insane crazy, but he always walked to the beat of his own drum. It was like, ‘Where’s Crazy gone — off doing his own thing.’ There was a point when David abbreviated that name and insisted we call him David.

Last week we went up to Moroe Lake with some old buddies and they didn’t call him anything but Crazy.” Stratigos says, “I got a kick out of that. David just cringed.”

Pizzo will always be “Andy” to the people who grew up with him and knew him in high school and at IU. It wasn’t until he got to Los Angeles that people started calling him Angelo. “Whether people call me Andy or Angelo makes no difference to me,” he says. “It’s like hearing your given name or a nickname. It registers the same.”

"When we had our parties, it was like the Rainbow Coalition. We had frat guys, sorority chicks, Buddhists, jocks, Communists..."
The funny thing about Angelo is that he kept little index cards on every movie he ever saw, and he'd write a review or an account of the film ... and he had hundreds of them," Anspaugh says.

Times about an upcoming music festival that would become known as Woodstock. "It said three days of peace and music and it lured all of the artists and attractions, and I said, 'Holy shit, this is going to be the event of a lifetime. No way am I missing this!'" Anspaugh and Pete Poolitsan, another IU buddy, made the road trip to attend the mythical festival.

Recall Strategies. "The first report on Woodstock was that it was a rancid potpourri of mud. And we're laughing. We've been beautiful Hawaiians. Forty years later, we're wishing we were with them in Woodstock. They've got the bragging rights!"

In retrospect, Woodstock was a brief respite from the overarching discontent about the U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. Anspaugh was lucky, to speak. A back injury in high school earned him a 48 "indefensible" draft deferment. He spent five years in Aspen, became a ski instructor, and worked as a substitute teacher, waiter, and bartender.

Pizzo drew 192 in the draft lottery and was all but assured by the Bloomington draft board that his number would be called, though late. He took a film class at IU in the semester after his graduation in 1971, filed for conscientious objector status because of his opposition to the war, and landed a position with "a liberal Baptist organization of the type of church my parents went to." He traveled in upstate New York, using his major study in political science and international affairs to give "very, very neutral presentations about threats to global peace and dominance. To his surprise, the local draft board granted him conscientious-objector status ("They rejected 98 percent of all applications"), though, in all probability, he would still have to do some sort of government service for two years.

But December 31, 1971, came and went without Pizzo receiving the dreaded draft notice. When he contacted the draft board, he was informed he did not qualify for "battle" draft deferment. He spent five years in Aspen, Colorado, skiing, and the high life. Pizzo and Poolitsan took off for Hawaii, where they boarded tables, enjoyed the idyllic environment, and, as Pizzo would have it, got cast at beach bums in an episode of the television show, Hawaii Five-O.

Back on the mainland, Anspaugh happened to notice an item in The New York Times about the summer of '69 was special for many of the fraternity dropouts. Anspaugh, a year older than Pizzo, left Bloomington for Aspen, Colorado, skiing, and the high life. Pizzo and Poolitsan took off for Hawaii, where they boarded tables, enjoyed the idyllic environment, and, as Pizzo would have it, got cast at beach bums in an episode of the television show, Hawaii Five-O.

Anspaugh (above) and Pizzo (below right page), spent an afternoon on the beach reminiscing about their lives and the ups and downs of show business for writer Mike Leonard.

Anspaugh says. "I had every reason to be happy as a clam, and, for a lot of the time, I was," Anspaugh says. Increasingly, though, he was becoming moody, dark, and depressed; he entered therapy and was diagnosed with clinical depression. "I can't even tell you when it began," he says, "but it really manifested itself after Moonlight and Valentino itself after 1976. "I had every reason to be happy as a clam, and, for a lot of the time, I was," Anspaugh says. Increasingly, though, he was becoming moody, dark, and depressed; he entered therapy and was diagnosed with clinical depression. "I can't even tell you when it began," he says, "but it really manifested itself after Moonlight and Valentino itself after 1976."

Meanwhile, Pizzo wound up taking an internship he wasn't much interested in, worked hard, and found himself functioning as the right-hand man for Grant Tinker, the husband of actress Mary Tyler Moore, co-founder of MTM Enterprises, and future chairman of the board and CEO of NBC television. He also gained a friend and mentor in prolific screenwriter, producer, and Oscar-winning director James L. Brooks.

"The fact that David and Andy both ended up in the same industry probably brought them closer together than the rest of their college friends," says Statigos. "Their friendship absolutely transformed them. Pete Poolitsan and I opened The Gables (a quasi-Mediterranean restaurant across from IU's Bryan Hall) and while we had fun doing that, these guys were succeeding in a very tough, competitive business."

Life happens. Anspaugh got married in 1974 to Tamaras Kramer, a cruise line sales manager, their 14-year marriage ended in 1988. He married again in 1995 to actress Roma Downey, a native of Northern Ireland, who rose to prominence portraying Jacqueline Kennedy in the 1991 Emmy-winning mini-series A Woman Named Jackie. By the time Anspaugh and Downey married, she had become a budding television star, the compassionate Monica on the series Touched by an Angel.

"I had every reason to be happy as a clam, and, for a lot of the time, I was," Anspaugh says. Increasingly, though, he was becoming moody, dark, and depressed; he entered therapy and was diagnosed with clinical depression. "I can't even tell you when it began," he says, "but it really manifested itself after Moonlight and Valentino burned." The film, directed by Anspaugh, received poor reviews despite a cast that included...
then good. Because you can get help, you can
God, that’s me, or that’s someone I know,
point. “If someone can read this and say, my
He doesn’t mind talking about it now, up to a
just went our separate ways,” Anspaugh says.
Despite having just become parents to a
the damage to the marriage had been done.
ly entered a residential treatment center, but
with someone like that.” Anspaugh ultimate-
scared the hell out of me. It’s no fun to live
you don’t know you have it, it controls you. It
the weird thing about this disease is when
This was like the cut that wouldn’t heal. And
people get depressed and don’t want to get
out of bed, but this just wouldn’t go away.
with a grimace. “I think there are times most
Carlton spelled out his reasoning for
Gene Hackman took on the role of Coach Norman Dale in Hoosiers despite misgivings that the film might be a “career killer.” Here, Hackman (right) is listening to Anspaugh’s (center) direction for a scene. The inappropriate sweatshirt was a gift to Anspaugh for doing a workshop at that other Big Ten school.
Angelo Pizzo’s opinion on Breaking Away from Eugene, Oregon.” [Read more about
reminisces of his Indiana bona fides, potential producers didn’t see a guy who directed Hill Street Blues and Miami Vice as right for the sentimental, sports-themed, family-oriented film.
Outside funding eventually came
together, despite objections about
Anspaugh as director. The film that the
Indiana buddies wanted to make finally
got made, over strong suggestions that the
tale be updated to relate to contemporary
audiences and contemporary
conflicts. “They said kids wouldn’t be able
to relate to it and we’d need conflicts like
kids smoking dope and things like that,”
Pizzo recites with a shudder.
“I wish I could have filmed the making of Hoosiers behind the scenes with them,”
says Stratton, who served as the
basketball adviser for the film and appears on
screen as a referee. “Not only were they
close friends, but they are as honest with
each other as two people can be. It could
get hot and heavy. I can remember many a
day in their trailer where it was whew! If I
didn’t know how close these guys were, I
would not have thought they liked each
other. But they complemented each other,
and still do, in the same way. Angelo is
obviously a brilliant writer and David is an
artist, a cinematographer. I don’t think the
movie could ever have been made as well
by anyone else but those two guys.”
Anspaugh and Pizzo more famously
dressed on the set of The Grapes of Their Lives, a film with more pressures and problems than mere artistic differences between the writer and director. But any animosities from that collaboration also have passed.

Gene Hackman took on the role of Coach Norman Dale in Hoosiers despite misgivings that the film might be a “career killer.” Here, Hackman (right) is listening to Anspaugh’s (center) direction for a scene. The inappropriate sweatshirt was a gift to Anspaugh for doing a workshop at that other Big Ten school. Courtesy photo.

Bon Jovi.

Pizzo writes ‘Hoosiers’

Anspaugh had gotten to know actor Jack
Nicholson in Aspen, and it was only after
Nicholson showed interest in the small-town
Two guys now in their 60s

By 2004, Pizzo was more than ready to move back to Bloomington, his family, and friends. He was married to actress Greta Lind, a Goschen, Indiana, native, and wanted his sons, Quinn and Anthony, to have the balanced upbringing he’d had, in a strong academic environment, and in a culturally rich and community-oriented small city. Pizzo and his wife divorced in 2010 but share parenting responsibilities amicably. Today, Anthony, 20, is a sophomore at Hanover College, and Quinn, 17, is a high school junior attending the Greg Norman Champions Golf Academy in North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. For Pizzo, there was also the allure of living at ground zero for IU basketball. He’s an unabashed, ardent fan, so much so that he loves showing off the desk in his office at home — crafted from wood taken from the old Assembly Hall court (1976–95). “Three national champion teams played on that floor,” he says with raised eyebrows. Pizzo also knew he wasn’t leaving anything behind in California except temperate weather. “I probably did a lot of that schmoozing stuff at the beginning, when I really felt it was part of my job to go to those parties, to go to lunches and dinners at visible spots and important industry places,” he says. “But I came to the conclusion that after 27 years in the business, nothing ever happened to me in terms of getting a movie made, or moving forward with something creatively, because I was at the right party. No one is going to do something because you’re at the right party, and they think you’re cool and really a smart and funny guy to talk to. They do it because the material is good. And they do it because you’ve proved you can deliver.”

While Anspaugh only left Los Angeles in June, he’s far more critical of Hollywood. “I was never cut out for that town. I never intended to live there. I never had the energy or the stomach for the place, and it nauseates me,” he says. For most of the last two decades, his sole purpose in staying in LA was to be a parent to daughter, Reilly, his child with Roma Downey. “Not that there haven’t been bumps in the road, but it all worked out very well. Roma and I, and her husband, Mark Burnett, have really been partners.” When Reilly graduated from high school last spring and enrolled at Boston University, it made Pizzo’s “come back to Bloomington” offer even more appealing. Reilly, and his daughter from his first marriage, Vanessa Anspaugh, like, ‘won’t you be bored?’ Anspaugh says with a chuckle. ‘Bored? I tell them, every single day there is more going on in this place than I can get to. There’s opera and symphonic recitals and lectures and major college soccer and football and basketball... I’ve become an addict of ‘The Comedy Attic’... what I have here is what my old agent used to call ‘Upper East Side (New York City)’ problems. ‘There’s so much to do.’”

Anspaugh laughs that a haircut at a top Bloomington salon costs what he used to tip his Los Angeles hairdresser. He hopes to begin teaching directing, if that works out. Meanwhile, he’s excited to get to work on Up to the Light, a Bloomington Playwrights Project production scheduled for April 2015. He’s still “attached” to several film projects and can easily do what Pizzo has done — take on projects wherever they are, as they present themselves. “The really funny thing is that as soon as I arrived, Angelo took off to film My All-American in Texas and now he’s in LA for four months for post-production,” Anspaugh says. “I’ve hardly seen him.” That will change, and the change won’t come too soon for Anspaugh. “I hope he’ll be here during basketball season — with good seats.”

Those guys — it is a buddy story,” says longtime friend Stratigos. “Really, I think there’s a bunch of us who would say that we all have had amazing friendships. But as things have happened, with them, especially, having done what they’ve done, they’re as close as you can get.”