



Indiana University alumni Angelo Pizzo (left) and David Anspaugh were friends long before each pursued careers in film and television. Their first project together was the sleeper hit, *Hoosiers*, which enabled them to use their innate understanding of Indiana natives and their love for basketball.



# Buddies

Filmmakers **Angelo Pizzo** and **David Anspaugh**

Back in Bloomington  
*Where It All Began*

BY Mike Leonard • PHOTOGRAPHY BY Shannon Zahnle

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.



(above) Friendships that remain intact to this day were formed at Indiana University. (front row) Spyridon “Strats” Stratigos, Jade Butcher, Bruce Earhardt, Pete Poolitsan, and Mike McConnell. (back row) Angelo Pizzo, Mike Snyder, Eric Stolberg, and David Anspaugh. Courtesy photo (opposite page) Boys will be boys.

### 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 was girls and parties. That was pretty much the motivating factor,” Pizzo says.

At the time Pizzo and Anspaugh joined, fraternity parties were still strictly booze affairs, but the anti-war movement and the

availability of marijuana and other illegal drugs had begun creating fissures in the brotherhood. Pizzo remembers, “I got pulled aside by the president of the fraternity and told, ‘I just want you to know that word got back to me that you were at a party and everybody there was smoking marijuana. I didn’t hear that you were doing it, but I heard you were at that party.’

“I said, ‘Well, I was there,’ and he said, ‘That is unacceptable and you will be removed from the household if you continue to attend these types of parties.’ I’m thinking, ‘Who are you, my fucking dad? Don’t you understand there is a whole movement — a

whole way — coming that’s going to drown your ass, and you are going to have no idea what’s going to hit you, things are changing so fast.”

Counter-culture types were already present on the IU campus. “We called them the baggers,” says Pizzo. “They wore old Army fatigues, and they carried their books around in green satchels. I can’t speak for the sororities, but the fraternities hated the baggers.

“You have to remember this, too. The Greeks ran the campus; the president of the Panhellenic council was always a big deal and the president of the student body was

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 bagger 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. Hershey, 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 fraternities decided they weren’t going to let that happen, and so they came up with this plan that spread like wildfire. They got

[Sigma Alpha Epsilon] and Sigma Nus 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, but 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.

***‘When we had our parties, it was like the Rainbow Coalition. We had frat guys, sorority chicks, Buddhists, jocks, Communists...’***

all of their pledge classes and loaded them up with raw eggs. The plan was to circle Showalter 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 see that one of them is a guy from my high school, a guy a year older than me. I saw him and 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 egg them, 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.

Anspaugh, Pizzo, and others moved out of the fraternity houses and distanced themselves from them in various ways. “For whatever reason, it was a group of SAEs

Anspaugh, on the other hand, embraced the visual imagery he learned from his father, a professional photographer, and creative endeavors generally. “David started making films in '68 and '69, and I think I’m in just about every one of them,” Stratigos says. “David always had an artistic bent.

“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 drummer. It was like, ‘Where’s Crazy? He’s gone — off doing his own thing.’ There was a point when David abhorred that name and insisted we call him David.

“Last week we went up to Morse Lake with some old buddies and they didn’t call him anything but Crazy,” Stratigos laughs. “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.”





## Good times and early success

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 Stratigos took off for Hawaii, where they bused tables, enjoyed the idyllic environment, and, as fate would have it, got cast as 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*

Anspaugh (above) and Pizzo (opposite page), spent an afternoon at Pizzo's home reminiscing about their lives and the ups and downs of show business for writer Mike Leonard.

***'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 listed 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 mythic festival.

Recalls Stratigos, "The first report on Woodstock was that it was a rainy quagmire of mud. And we're laughing. We're in beautiful Hawaii. 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, so to speak. A back injury in high school earned him a 4F "ineligible for battle" 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 few film classes 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 nonviolence. 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, a woman told him, "You are a very lucky man." The board's quota was filled just a few spots before his number would have been called.

Envious of Anspaugh's life in Aspen, Pizzo packed up and headed west to join him. By this time, Pizzo knew he

wanted to attend graduate school and had his sights set on the lauded film school at the University of Southern California (USC). Hitting the movie houses and catching art films in Aspen turned out to be more than recreation for the IU pals. "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 — they were succinct and analytical — and he had hundreds of them," Anspaugh says. "He had such a gift for understanding story and structure in a way that I never did, which is why I never could write."

Three years after Pizzo enrolled at USC, Anspaugh arrived to study film production. By then, Pizzo was working on his doctoral thesis in the history, theory, and criticism department of the film school. Pizzo moved methodically through his course of study, with plans to become a professor. Anspaugh, on the other hand, made a sudden and unexpected splash. "There was this graduate class in film production where the legend was that George Lucas was the last student to ever get an A, and wouldn't you bloody know it, I got an A and suddenly, people start coming to me and asking, 'Could you look at my film?' and 'Could you edit my film?'" Anspaugh recalls. "I started to believe that maybe there is something going on here, so I took my first directing class, and it changed my life."

The professor emphasized that the directing class would focus on the necessary skill of understanding acting and the focus on acting would make sense to the students later. The professor said he also taught an acting class that was far more in-depth than the directing class, and Anspaugh immediately began attending that class as well. "It gave me the foundation for later on, so when I finally got my opportunity to direct something, I was light-years ahead of my contemporaries," he says. Hence, his meteoric rise to work with writer and producer Steven Bochco on *Hill Street Blues*, and subsequent work on *St. Elsewhere* and *Miami Vice*.

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 Stratigos. "We kind of lived vicariously through 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, those guys were succeeding in a very tough, competitive business."

## Life happens

Anspaugh got married in 1974 to Tamara 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 miniseries



Having just completed shooting *My All American* in Texas, Pizzo was in town spending a few days with his sons and catching up with his old pal before heading to LA for post-production.

*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* bombed." The film, directed by Anspaugh, received poor reviews despite a cast that included



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

Gwyneth Paltrow, Elizabeth Perkins, Whoopi Goldberg, Kathleen Turner, and rocker Jon Bon Jovi.

“It sent me into a tailspin,” Anspaugh says with a grimace. “I think there are times most people get depressed and don’t want to get out of bed, but this just wouldn’t go away. This was like the cut that wouldn’t heal. And the weird thing about this disease is when you don’t know you have it, it controls you. It scared the hell out of me. It’s no fun to live with someone like that.” Anspaugh ultimately entered a residential treatment center, but the damage to the marriage had been done. Despite having just become parents to a daughter, Reilly, “Roma felt it was better if we just went our separate ways,” Anspaugh says. He doesn’t mind talking about it now, up to a point. “If someone can read this and say, my God, that’s me, or that’s someone I know, then good. Because you can get help, you can

learn about it. You can learn from it. I think I came out of it a better director, a better dad, and a better friend.”

### Pizzo writes ‘Hoosiers’

Pizzo’s career advanced to where he was vice president of development for Time-Life Films, a position in which he spent a good deal of time listening to people pitch project ideas. It inspired him to pitch his own, especially after the success of *Breaking Away*, set in Bloomington. He liked the film, but felt it didn’t really reflect his hometown and that its characters “could have come from Eugene, Oregon.” [Read more about Angelo Pizzo’s opinion on *Breaking Away* at [magbloom.com/breakingaway](http://magbloom.com/breakingaway).]

He’d always wanted to write a screenplay based on the high school basketball team from tiny Milan, Indiana, that won the 1954 state championship. “The idea was to really

capture the essence and the soul of what Indiana was about, and that is the people — the community structure and how they interacted,” he says.

Pizzo completed a draft and showed it to a colleague who was a producer. He got the worst possible feedback: “There is not a single scene or character that shows any originality,” his colleague told him. Crushed, Pizzo pulled the screenplay back — but he did show it to Anspaugh during a vacation to Mexico.

Remembers Anspaugh, “I saw the movie (in the script), I saw the whole thing, and it made me cry. It made me laugh. I totally got it, and I wanted to make the movie.”

Pizzo resisted. “I told David, ‘I don’t care what you think. The script sucks.’”

Anspaugh had gotten to know actor Jack Nicholson in Aspen, and it was only after Nicholson showed interest in the small-town



“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,” relates Spyridon “Strats” Stratigos, their close friend since college. Courtesy photo

basketball story that others began to see value in it as well.

“I couldn’t imagine anyone other than David to direct it,” says Pizzo. But others weren’t so sure. Despite 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.

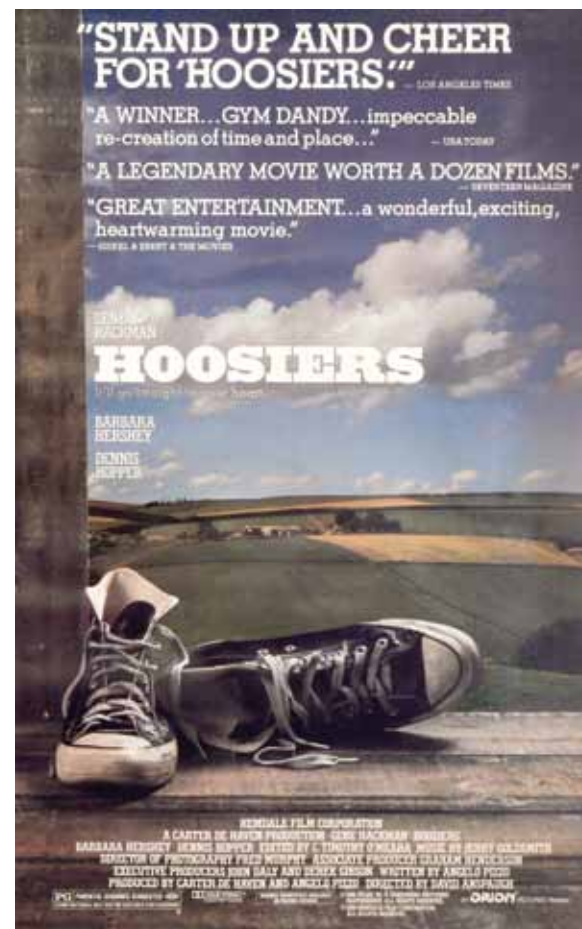
Outside funding eventually came together, despite objections about Anspaugh as director. The film that the Indiana buddies wanted to make finally got made, over strong suggestions that the storyline be updated to relate to contemporary audiences and contemporary conflicts. “They said kids wouldn’t be able to relate to it and we’d need conflicts like kids smoking dope and things like that,” Pizzo recalls with a shudder.

“I wish I could have filmed the making of *Hoosiers* behind the scenes with them,” says Stratigos, who served as the basketball adviser for the film and appears on screen as a referee. “Not only were they best 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 so well by anyone else but those two guys.”

Anspaugh and Pizzo more famously battled on the set of *The Game 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.



(above) Pizzo, left, and Anspaugh, right, pose with the inspiration for their 1993 film — Daniel “Rudy” Ruettiger.



(left) The poster of the 1986 film, *Hoosiers*, written by Angelo Pizzo and directed by David Anspaugh.

Pizzo (left) and Anspaugh took a stroll through their old stomping grounds, pausing for a moment in front of the Indiana Memorial Union.

## 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 Goshen, 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

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 symphony and 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 *Ugly Lies the Bone*, 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 barely 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. Whenever there's a crisis in our lives, and we've all had some degree of crisis, we're there for each other. That's been a constant for 48 years." ✨

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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, where 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 37 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."

are both a two-hour flight away, in Boston and New York, respectively.

Last August, Anspaugh flew to Massachusetts for Vanessa's wedding, and stunned everyone by singing a duet with Reilly, a "Broadway quality" singer. He'd never sung anything anywhere — not even in the shower, he insists — but seized upon the Everly Brothers' song, "Devoted to You," and learned it well enough to "mist up" Vanessa.

There was yet another reason for Anspaugh to move to Bloomington. His sister and brother-in-law, Jane and Jay Jorgensen, recently moved here from Fort Wayne. As a couple, they are sponsors of the Jorgensen Guest Filmmaker Lecture Series, a component of the IU Cinema that has brought filmmakers and film stars — including Meryl Streep, Roger Corman, Werner Herzog, John Sayles, Peter Bogdanovich, and Kevin Kline — to Bloomington.

"My LA friends were pretty skeptical about me coming to Bloomington. They were

