



Photo by Thomas Michael Allenman

SHLOMO EPLBOIM

the color of money

BY JORDAN DAVID OVIT

While his buddies basked in the Mediterranean sun frolicking on Tel Aviv's beautiful beach and playing Israeli racketball, Shlomo Eplboim did not join in. What he saw when he looked at the blue ocean, the beige sand and the yellow sun was the color of money. At a young age, Eplboim (eppel-boy-m) saw the hustle and bustle of the Tel Aviv shore not so much as a recreational hot spot, but as a money-making opportunity. The enterprising Israeli would load up his car with watermelons, halve them, and then sell them on the beach. When this idea proved fruitful, he expanded his product line and began to sell T-shirts imprinted with designer logos—although he did not swear to their authenticity.

Although Eplboim, born in Chulon, Tel Aviv, did make time to kick around the soccer ball as a kid, he spent most of his youth using his head. He was only 13 when he started to read the newspapers every day. The Sports page and Finance page were in the same section, and he found himself devouring the business news. "I wanted to understand why people had power and money and my family didn't," Eplboim shares.

With fascination, he would read about Israel's wealthiest people and learn how they had made it. "Because my family was poor, I always had an obsession with money," he says. As a young child, he took to heart the Israeli expression which translated as, "One should hide one's pennies under the tiles"—and so he did. Every time his

could advance him.

With that promise in mind, Eplboim graduated with a CPA from an Israeli college of business and administration and then left for California, where he stayed with his older brother and his family. "For me, America was the land of dreams where, if you really work hard, you could achieve anything," he says.

And so when he got to America, with an accounting degree in hand, he worked very hard—in plumbing. After work and on weekends, he attended accounting classes at UCLA to familiarize himself with the accounting terminology used in the United States. Eventually, he secured a job with a very small company and was basically doing bookkeeping and office work. But that was not what he had come to America for.

Eplboim specialized in financial planning. He did so well that he was asked to write a financial column educating people how to invest their money. His philosophy is to keep things simple so people can understand. His father, who had always criticized the use of highfalutin language, had often told him, "If you speak to me like I'm stupid, I'll understand like a genius." And so, with that in mind, Eplboim takes very difficult investing strategies and makes them palpable.

"If you educate a person and are honest and explain to them the risks and rewards involved in any investment, chances are they will do business with you," Eplboim says. "But you also have to be creative and show them how one and one can make three—they can make it two all on their own.

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mother would walk into his room she would say that it felt like the tiles were loose. (Perhaps "piggy" banks were not the most kosher place to save Holy Land currency.)

Although Eplboim was the youngest of three siblings, he was always very independent, had his own mind and was never cowed by elders. "I was a pain in the neck to everyone," he says with a laugh. "I always had my own opinions." His father, a Russian immigrant who fought in the War of Independence, was an Eged bus driver, his mother, a saleswoman. His father was always regretful that he himself had never speculated as did his other friends while the country was being built. Although he worked very hard throughout his life, he was never able to afford luxuries for his family, often barely necessities. He thus made Shlomo promise him that he would take chances in life and take risks that

With his broken English, he called dozens of firms trying to get a better position. By chance, he reached a brokerage firm who had a Hebrew-speaking partner. They hired him and there he learned the tricks of the brokerage business. After getting his brokerage license and working for the firm for only 10 months, he got a call from Prudential Securities, where he ended up working for three years. Ironically, the renowned firm that at one time didn't return his phone calls, awarded Eplboim with The Key to the Firm Award, a national award bestowed upon the best trainee.

Eplboim's quick, savvy mind began earning him a very good name. It was not long before Paine Webber plucked him away and offered him a job on Beverly Hill's Rodeo Drive to work with their private client group. The bonus that came with that job bought him his first home.

They don't need me for that."

He must be doing something right because today, Eplboim, 32, has his own business, the brokerage firm of Eplboim Poutre & Co., on Beverly Hills' famous Wilshire Boulevard. It is a boutique brokerage firm with securities offered through the NASD/SIPC and manages more than \$100 million in institutional and individual clients' assets around the world.

What makes this brokerage house different from all others is that it launched a very unusual, but promising, mutual fund. It is called the Blue & White Fund, inspired by the colors of the Israeli flag and the resourcefulness of the Jewish State. The Blue & White Fund is one of only a handful of United States-registered funds comprised exclusively of publicly traded Israeli stocks, primarily in the fields of telecommunications, software and programming, pharmaceuticals



Photo by Thomas Michael Allaman

and computer networks.

Eplboim says that people don't realize how many of the products they use every day include Israeli technology, pointing out that the small country holds the third-highest number of

defense industry. For example, Checkpoint, the firewall technology, is still paying royalties to the defense industry. He points out that the country's exports have grown nearly 700 percent to \$29 billion. "We don't

planting trees there. We have enough trees in Israel; we can send you a few. What we need is for people to invest in the country. Charity is not the solution for the next generation of Israelis," Eplboim maintains, "but when people invest in Israeli companies, they are giving people jobs, helping the economy, helping the country advance itself in the international marketplace and investing in the country's future." The Blue & White Fund provides the perfect opportunity to do that.

Today, Shlomo Eplboim, with three kids of his own and a beautiful wife, says that he has made more money than all his friends put together, but not quite from selling watermelons. Unfortunately, his father never lived to see that his son did indeed take chances and they all paid off. Nonetheless, when Eplboim bought himself a Porsche, his entire family laid on a guilt trip, saying, "Don't forget where you came from." Subsequently, he returned it. [Replays](#)

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patents globally. He says that almost every cell phone, handheld machine, bank machine and computer contains Israeli technology. He explains that much of the innovativeness is an outgrowth of the R&D of the country's

have oil pumps in Israel, we invest in our people," he says, pointing out that the country has more engineers per capita than any place on earth."

If people really want to help Israel, Eplboim says, "They should stop