

For Review only

History is more than facts and figures, people and places, wars and politics, deaths and disasters. Stories are never fixed in stone; they continue to morph and evolve with every retelling.

Author Simon Maier casts himself in the role of a hotelier who has worked in different cities around the world over the last sixty years. Wry, witty and sharp, history is told through a refreshing point of view. As the narrator chronicles key events of the 20th and 21st centuries, he provides details of the atmosphere, and recounts tales from people on the ground, along with sketches of the mood and beliefs of the time. Such details infuse the biggest and most important occasions of modern times with insight, precision and warmth.

This book is a fascinating mix of fact and fiction; of what did happen and what might have happened. History is scattered with many great changes; some planned, most sudden; some shocking, others happy. We see the front view of the occasion, the announcement, the television footage, the moment in lights. We see the stage that is put before us — but what about behind the scenes? What insights can we find on the other side of history?



Simon Maier is a communications expert and has worked with corporations around the world. He uses storytelling as a consultancy tool to help senior executives and staff change their mindsets. He has maintained a lifelong interest in history and is fascinated by what goes on behind the world's big news stories. In this book, he explores what might have been the scenarios underneath what we are told. If all the world's a stage then what goes on backstage is as important as what we see.

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SIMON MAIER

THE OTHER SIDE OF HISTORY

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This book is for my brother, Michael.

**“All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts, ...”**

From *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene VII,
William Shakespeare

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A NOTE

Subject: Thank you!

Hi Sarah,

Just got back to London from NY via a few days in Venice (my favourite city) and I wanted to drop you a quick mail to thank you very much for helping make my visit to the New York office so enjoyable. Obviously I had a great time with my grandfather and he always speaks volumes about you. I was really touched and the food — so much! And all delicious. Thanks too for sorting out flights and everything else. Really appreciated.

I also wanted to thank you for sending the notes that Gramps had given me which I'd left behind — always doing that — plus the photographs. The package beat me home. He's very lucky to have you as a PA! But I think he knows that.

Not sure if I mentioned this to you — or if he did, but I said to him that I'd like to make what he told me into a book. If I

can. I think I told you that I've been writing a fair bit for several magazines now, as well as some websites, and that's all going very well. The stuff that he talked about — where he'd been in the world over the last sixty years, what he'd seen, the history that he'd witnessed — all the moments in his life when he'd been part of (or had been close to) events that have made it into the news and the history books. His memory was super good when we talked and, even though he referred to his notebooks and his photos, he was razor-sharp and could recall whole chunks of stuff.

He told me about lots of famous and less famous people. He's always been fascinated by what people do and the kindnesses that they afford him and others. And then he's shocked to the core by the horrors that people can perpetrate and the terrible things those people do in their thirst for power or wealth, or because of hate or prejudice.

You know that his stories are amazing and I know he talks to you about these things. So, once I've written something I'd be really pleased if you'd read it through.

I've got some meetings with people in a couple of months in NY and I'll be staying for around a week, so I'll let Gramps and you know as soon as I've got dates.

See you very soon Sarah and, again, thanks. I had a wonderful afternoon and that was in part down to you.

Best

THE START

Hello, hello! Come in... Thank you, Sarah. Of course you remember Sarah? Sure, you do. Come in, come in. So good to see you. Well, now, it *has* been some time! Of course it has... yes, far too long. Come... Sit down... Yes, absolutely. Sarah, no more calls for a while please... thank you. Yes, yes... of course I won't forget... you'll let us know when the car's here.

Goodness me. A very long time. You've grown, but then grandparents always say that I suppose... You know, time isn't a straight line from A to Z. It curves, it goes down cul-de-sacs. It takes us in many directions. Where opportunity ventures, we must grab it. Sometimes it will be the wrong way — and sometimes the decision will be right in every sense — and the results can be truly wonderful.

It *is* good to see you. So good... Of course, of course — help yourself... How's your mother? I haven't seen her for some time, y'know. Last time was in London. England always takes me back to

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when I was small. A long time ago... but I do visit... of course it's a shame that you and I haven't had a chance to catch up recently. A grandfather should spend time with his grandson... But you've been there and I've been here, and we've both been here and there.

How're the women in your life? You have that lovely girlfriend — Susan? Shelley, OK. Ah right. Well, that's how it goes. You know something about literature of course. Jane Austen wrote at the start of *Pride and Prejudice* that "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." Well, I believe that certainly... but don't be in too much of a hurry. Have some fun... You are? Good.

What time is your flight? That's fine then... we have plenty of time. I wanted to have this time together. We could walk or stay here... It's very wet outside and humid, so perhaps let's stay here. You asked on the phone about some of the things that I'd been doing since we last met. Well, I thought about that a lot too — and, if you have the appetite, and the patience — I'd like to tell you about a few things that I've thought about. But not just since we last met. I was considering famous moments in history. Important moments. Someone asked me not that long ago if I'd ever found my job boring and she wondered if I would have preferred something more interesting. More challenging, she suggested. Challenging and interesting, sure. Boring, never.

I've been very fortunate to have been there at notable moments in time — and those moments are forever etched in my mind... remarkable moments in history, but from another point of view.

Mine. Seeing things from where I was. From where I happened to be. And defined by the people I was with at the time. Most definitely that. At every moment in time when something of importance has ever happened, there's always another story of what happened — behind the scenes. A lot of my experience has been behind the scenes or offstage. We don't always hear those stories. And in many ways that's a good thing because then one isn't on stage, as it were, in the direct line of fire. So sometimes — in fact, often — it's good to be away from the main action. You understand?

Yes, of course you can, dear boy. Please, help yourself — they're for you...

So that's what I want to talk to you about... if you will allow it... moments in history where important things happened, were happening or were about to happen, in or close to where I was at the time. Chance? Fortune? Luck? Happenstance? I guess so. All of those. Serendipity too. I believe in that. We seek things and sometimes things seek us. We're there, even if we don't ask to be. And sometimes we sure as merry hell don't want to be.

Where to start... where to even begin... Well, you know I started out in hotels when I was fifteen, nearly sixteen. My mother, your great-grandmother,



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was furious. I'd been well-educated, mostly in Britain, then in the States. But one day I just took off. There was no poverty-stricken upbringing, although my folks weren't at all wealthy. There was no abuse, no deep-rooted problem, no pain. I loved my parents and they me. I just wanted to go see things. I've just got the urge to go. To go off and explore! Not the smartest move, not initially anyway. And my poor folks — they were worried sick, of course. But they did forgive me eventually — and I did OK. And they knew that.

Let me tell you first a little about hotels. I've been in them all my working life — as you know of course. Everyone, or nearly everyone, in the world has stayed in at least one hotel or some accommodation away from home. People *like* staying in hotels, no matter what they say — even the jaded philanderers or spoilt professionals who are used to five-star hotels and business class air travel. I don't really know why — even after all these years. Maybe it's the anonymity, the “do what you want” feeling, the regular hot water (usually), the little bottles of shampoo, the miniature drinks, the convenience, the crisp sheets, sometimes the pillows, the sex, the love (they don't always go together of course), the wanting to be somewhere else or someone else... and people behave differently in hotels than they do at home. The fact that many often choose to behave badly is what makes them so interesting — the hotels, that is, not necessarily the people.

Well, now. Let's see. You have enough to drink? OK, good. So, Salvador Dalí was completely nuts when he stayed at Hotel Le Meurice in Paris, apparently bringing in animals and half-

naked women, and then drawing on the walls. Got your attention now? I'm not certain if all that's true, but you get the picture or certainly *a* picture. Well, you can bet he wasn't doing all that in his own house. Which highlights another reason why people often have no respect for hotel rooms: someone else will clean it all up and there is a distinct pleasure in finding your hotel room all spick and span when you return in the evening after a busy day working or being a tourist.

Of course, it isn't the fault of the hotels that unusual events sometimes take place within their walls. In fact, it's usually a compliment. The better the hotel, the more shocking and juicy the scandal. Top hotels attract the rich and famous, and they drink too much, they take many substances up their noses — and generally behave badly. Sometimes more than badly. These occurrences, if they become public, usually raise a hotel's profile, often making it legendary. I know that applies to many American hotels, particularly those in New York... my home town. And yours, of course.

Some hotels embrace these events as part of their folklore. The Beverly Hills Hotel on Sunset Boulevard with its pink stucco is home to dozens of odd Hollywood tales. This hotel seems rather proud that Mariah Carey allegedly went through her breakdown there. Or that the billionaire Howard Hughes rented bungalows over long periods of time. He paid as much as \$350,000 a year (more than two million dollars in today's money) to rent three bungalows: one for his wife, one for his bodyguards and one for himself. Hughes was highly reclusive and rumour

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has it that when he ordered his roast beef sandwiches, he would ask them to be left in the fork of a tree in the garden so he could fetch them unseen.

Then there's The Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables, Miami, that opened in 1926 as a fashionable establishment attracting the likes of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor and Cornelius Vanderbilt. During the Second World War, it was converted into an army hospital — and ghosts of dead soldiers supposedly still haunt the building. Who knows? But one ghost is more enduring than others — that of Al Capone. The gangster stayed there at the height of his notoriety and the top floor Everglades Suite is known as the Al Capone Suite. In true mobster style, the suite has rotating walls that reveal gambling tables and a secret stairway for quick getaways. These walls have been sealed off though, so guests have to take the hotel's word for it that they do exist. I suppose I could tell you whether they do or don't, but I'm not going to... Sure, you can laugh. The ominous sounding 13th floor was once a speakeasy. One Capone crony, Fats Walsh I think it was, met his sticky end there. Some guests swear the elevator will occasionally stop on the 13th floor without the button being pushed. Stories like that are good for business.

The Carlyle Hotel in New York City has had its fair share of drama too. Princess Diana stayed at the hotel whenever she was in town. Woody Allen used to play clarinet for the jazz band in the café there nearly every Monday. John F. Kennedy Jr. ate breakfast there just before his last fateful flight — and actually the Carlyle is

best known as the haunt of the elder Kennedys. Family patriarch Joe Kennedy maintained a suite at the hotel and his son, JFK, stayed at The Carlyle so often that it was dubbed the New York White House. His suite was never rented unless the hotel checked with him or his people first. The Carlyle is where Kennedy wound up after his legendary 45th birthday party at Madison Square Garden. To this day, there are persistent rumours about a series of hotel tunnels, which some say were used to usher women in and out of the hotel for both Kennedy *père et fils* (especially, it's claimed, Marilyn Monroe).

Its equal in Washington D.C. would be the Watergate Complex, which contains a hotel, apartments and offices. It is one of the city's most exclusive addresses, yet its very name is synonymous with the word "scandal". During the 1972 presidential campaign, its office compound was the site of the Democratic National Committee's headquarters, and it was bugged to monitor the opposition's campaign strategies. A burglary at the DNC office resulted in an FBI investigation which uncovered the bugging devices and that these illegal activities were carried out with President Richard Nixon's complicity. Nixon resigned in disgrace two years later. They made a movie about it — you seen it? Well, more than 20 years after that, the Watergate was again attached to scandal when it was revealed that Monica Lewinsky was living there. You know about her, right?

The St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco — now that has seen its fair share of scandalous events too. On Labour Day in 1921, silent film star Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle and his friend Fred Fishbach

were partying in Suites 1219-1221. You won't know of Arbuckle I guess, but he was a big star back in the twenties. A young starlet named Virginia Rappe also attended the party — she died of internal injuries four days later. Arbuckle was accused of injuring her during a sexual assault, although he was tried three times and never convicted (two hung juries and an acquittal). The trial ended his career though, due in large part to William Randolph Hearst's inflammatory coverage of the trials. Newspapers hug scandals, don't they?

In 1950, the 64-year-old entertainer Al Jolson died in the same hotel shortly after a card game in a penthouse suite. In 1975, The St. Francis was also the location where deranged would-be assassin Sarah Jane Moore fired a shot at then President Gerald Ford. I reckon that nowadays very few guests mention Arbuckle or Ford. They will have more people asking if the hotel still washes coins or if J. Lo is staying there... Yes, here's an interesting thing... during the thirties and forties, the hotel employed people to literally wash coins so that ladies' white gloves wouldn't get dirty! For the record, the hotel might still do this upon special request. Now that's one way to launder money. OK, OK... I know.

Few hotel names carry the weight of the Waldorf Astoria in New York. We've been there several times — remember? Course you do. Established in 1893 by William Astor, this hotel became the world's largest and tallest hotel back in the thirties. By 1955, Hollywood's darling, Marilyn Monroe, had moved in full-time there with her then husband, Arthur Miller. In addition to its star-

studded clientele, the hotel is also known for its food. Legend has it the hotel is the birthplace of the Waldorf Salad and 24-hour room service. You do? You want one now? No... personally I'm not that keen.

Where next? Well, walking down the grand staircase and into The Carlton Hotel New York's lobby is like taking a leap back in time. Back in 1904, the Beaux Arts building, then known as The Hotel Seville, is — or certainly was — one of the most opulent hotels in the States. Guests can pull up a stool at the same bar where Frank Sinatra used to listen to live music. Then there's the New York Hilton Midtown. In 1964, the penthouse suite was the home base for The Beatles whilst they were in town. Years later, John Lennon wrote *Imagine* there on hotel stationery. The press conference following the first cellphone call was held at the hotel in 1973 — and in 1998 the property introduced swipe cards that would eventually replace traditional room keys. They were one of the first hotels to do that. Clever. Although in those early days they didn't always work.

The Plaza in South Central Park is the setting for several chapters in *The Great Gatsby* and most notably it features in the movie, *Home Alone 2*. Sometimes celebrities check into hotels and stay put. New York's Hotel Elysée played home from home host to Marlon Brando, Maria Callas, Joe DiMaggio and Tennessee Williams. Many of Jack Kerouac's famous travel novels weren't written on the road. *The Subterraneans* and *Tristessa* were written while Kerouac was staying at The Marlton in Greenwich Village.

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Lots of actors stayed there like Mickey Rourke and Maggie Smith. Lenny Bruce more or less lived there.

Hotels have been the settings of many memorable movies, from Alfred Hitchcock's *To Catch A Thief*, to Sofia Coppola's Tokyo tale *Lost in Translation* and onwards to Wes Anderson's fictional and so, so wonderful *Grand Budapest Hotel*. You haven't? Well you absolutely must. It's a superb movie and, if you like gothic tales set in middle Europe, this is perfect. Beautifully shot and cleverly framed. You've seen Hitchcock's *Psycho* and *The Bates Motel*? And there's the Overlook Hotel in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*.

San Diego's Brooklyn Hotel was built in the mid-1880s to accommodate a growing number of visitors and travellers — following the lengthening line of the transcontinental railroad. Wyatt Earp, the notorious lawman of the American West, arrived in San Diego in, what was it, 1886 I think. Yes, you're right — always been good with dates. Always kept diaries too. You know that. All of this stuff's in my diaries... Well now, Earp and his wife, Josephine, lived at The Brooklyn Hotel for nearly seven years. He may have been a famous gunman, but he spent a lot of time

speculating in the local real-estate boom — opened gambling halls and saloons and the like. Read up on him. An interesting character and an interesting life.

The American writer Ernest Hemingway made



his first visit to Cuba in the twenties and lived there on and off throughout the thirties, staying at the Hotel Ambos Mundos. He particularly enjoyed Room 511's balcony view of Old Havana and in this room he began to write *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. The room is a shrine to Hemingway and you can still see his Remington typewriter and his bill from the hotel's bar — not that small I might add. One day please visit Cuba. It's a remarkable country and the music is fabulous. I remember your grandmother and I stayed in Santiago in Cuba, oh way back — some great times: the annual carnival brings fabulous costumes, excitement and great music to the town. Another place I loved in Cuba was Baracoa. A 500-year old bayside, riverside, beachside, mountainside village — it's been inhabited by indigenous Taino people who've been there for thousands of years. It genuinely is like a paradise. Ecologically perfect, absolutely beautiful and unique like nothing else in the world. The people are warm, simple, humble and hospitable... well now, that was quite a long time ago.

Agatha Christie wrote several mysteries set in hotels, including *Evil Under the Sun* and *At Bertram's Hotel*. One of her own favourite hotels was Istanbul's Pera Palace. Her then husband, Max Mallowan, was an archaeologist and the couple stayed at the Pera during his travels to excavations in the Middle East. Christie sat in room 411 and wrote *Murder on the Orient Express*.

Then there's Raffles Hotel in Singapore and that's famous for its colonial style, its museum and Victorian-style theatre. It's also a fantastic landmark. Sir Stamford Raffles was modern Singapore's

founder back in 1819. The hotel's famous for the Singapore Sling... Oh you have? Want one now? Sure? The bartender who created this nectar was a guy called Ngiam Tong Boon. What? Oh I guess around 1910 or thereabouts. It was also the setting for Ryū Murakami's novel and film *Raffles Hotel*, which was filmed on location.

Most cities of the world and some towns have wonderful hotels, not because of their fame, but because they're just good quality hotels. And so many hotels hide secrets because they had a small part to play in history, not always facing the lights but offstage or, sometimes of course, part of the stage. I guess that most hotels allow anyone to be anonymous — more or less — and maybe that's why the hidden parts of historical moments can be found in or near hotels. Plus of course the convenience — bedrooms, meeting rooms, conference rooms, restaurants, coffee shops, places to meet, quiet places to plan, to plot and to placate... to conspire too. To hide. To love... To lose oneself.

But the key thing is that all hotels are points in and of history. History of some kind. Well, history of all kinds of course. But I'm referring to history that we all consider very important in one way or another. Key historical moments. The hotels act as a backdrop — a stage set. It's theatre. Sure, the scene changes — as do the “performances”, the actors, the extras, the props and the scripts that are sometimes misplaced...

More sandwiches? Cake? OK then. Let me give you a sample of my experiences observing history from the backstage, or watching from the sides...

*Buenos Aires,
August 1951*

DON'T CRY FOR ME ARGENTINA:

EVA PERÓN'S LAST BROADCAST

It was in 1951 and one of my first jobs was in Buenos Aires. I spoke English mostly, of course, but I had a talent for languages and could switch easily. Guests like that. I was never condescending or rude. The hotel manager in New York — who liked me and my abilities to make customers feel at home — gave me the chance to go to South America where his brother worked at a sister hotel in Argentina's capital city. I hadn't travelled much — only Britain and the U.S., so this was a big journey. And don't forget Buenos Aires was the Paris of the 1950s. Well, Paris was the Paris of the 1950s, but the rich and famous liked Buenos Aires for the shops, the culture and the hotels. There may have been other reasons of course, perhaps relating to the end of the world war. You understand?

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In August 1951, I was working as a bellhop — and I have to tell you my uniform was wonderful! A red cap set at a jaunty angle and red trousers with a blue tunic top and yellow scarf! Here look on the wall. There. No, that one. You've seen it before. That's me — standing next to the woman with her arm round my shoulder. See? Smart huh? Well... the noise in the streets in those days. The vibrant air. The cars. The people. The smells — the flowers, the perfumes and a hundred different aftershaves. The money.

In March of that year in the United States, there was the trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for conspiracy to commit espionage. That same year saw United Artists releasing a sci-fi film called *The Man from Planet X*. Terrible. Armistice negotiations in Kaesong set off the beginning of the end of Korean War. King Abdullah I of Jordan was assassinated. Iran and Britain signed a big oil deal. Ted Kennedy was apparently caught cheating in an exam and had to leave Harvard. Yes, JFK's older brother. Winston Churchill was elected Prime Minister of the United Kingdom for a second term. India considered Kashmir as its territory, but held only half of it. Pakistan and China held the other parts. Pakistan claimed the part that India held, Jammu-Kashmir, because the majority of the people there were Muslim. *The Catcher in the Rye* was published. You haven't? Well, you damn well should. All these things had consequences, but then everything does of course. Everything does.

The hotel in which I worked was large and first class. It was expensive even then and the clientele had money. Loads of it. All cash. No credit cards in those days. Movies were shown in-house

— in a theatre downstairs, but most people listened to the radio.

It was a hot day even that early in the morning. A man came into the hotel lobby and beckoned me over. That wasn't unusual. It was my job to be beckoned over, to run errands, to give messages. My Spanish was fluent you know. Less good now, alas. The man said, "My name is General José Domingo Molina Gómez. In a moment an important lady will come in and there will be much fuss unless we are very careful."

The general (although I had to take his word for it because he was dressed in a sharp brown suit, crisp white shirt and blue tie, no uniform) lowered his sunglasses. "She may be disguised," he said quietly, "and you will take her to room 301. 301. Everything is arranged. You will not talk to her. There will be two men nearby. They are her guards. If anyone stops you, they will deal with the problem, but you must keep going, from here to the elevator to the third floor and then to the room. Here is the key."

The man held the key up in the air as if it were the Holy Grail. "Once at the room," he growled leaning in towards me, "you will open the door and let the woman in. Then give her the key and leave. Just leave. Here." He put the key in my left hand and clasped my fingers around it. He peered even closer at me. "I am told," he said slowly, "I am told that you are a smart young man. American yes?" I nodded. "You will talk to nobody about this mission. This I ask of you. Nobody. Do you understand?" I nodded and said that I did understand. He gave me a long look, still holding my hand clasping the room key.

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The man made to move off, but suddenly turned, walked back to me and said, “You don’t speak to this woman. You speak to *nobody* about this.” And then he smiled and drew his hand across his throat. It’s the kind of thing people do in bad movies. But he really did it and it frightened me as it was designed to do. I’d like to say that he had a gold tooth and a scar down his cheek, but he didn’t. Then he left.

I stared after the man for a while, then looked round to see who was in the vicinity. There was no one. It was still early in the morning and there were perhaps a few guests strolling towards breakfast. Just people walking about, nobody taking notice of anything. I went about my business — and thought about the man, the woman, the room and the key — which I was still clutching in my hand.

As I was saying, Argentina was a wealthy place, for the rich certainly. There were violent gangs — the *barra bravas* they were called, but they were more into football villainy. There were other underworld gangs, mafia-like, some trading in drugs, others focusing on blackmail and prostitution. I didn’t know if I was being set up for some reason — or maybe I was part of something that would cause my imminent arrest — or worse! Should I report the matter to my boss, a kindly man who had been very good to me? I made up my mind and was just about to leave the lobby to go my manager’s office when two men came into the hotel and between them was a beautiful woman wearing a light blue skirt, with a matching jacket, white blouse, white shoes and sunglasses.

The three people moved quickly and straight for me. I stood still, terrified and one of the men indicated that I should lead the way — and fast! I quickly went to the elevators and we got in. There was one of our elevator guys, as smartly dressed as I — and he knew me of course. He looked from one person to another and thankfully had enough sense not to say or ask anything. I told him which floor we needed and he pulled the gates closed and pressed the button. Nobody spoke. I tried to smile at the lady, but she was wearing sunglasses and anyway just looked at the floor. The men were wearing sunglasses too — even more like a bad spy movie. They stood facing me. One of them had cut himself shaving and had a bit of tissue paper stuck just above his lip.

Well, we arrived at the third floor and I led them to the allocated room, unlocked the door and let one of the men in; the other one and the woman were left with me. The man came out, nodded to the other guy and the woman who then walked in. I handed the key to one man as the woman whispered something to the other. He nodded and turned to me and spoke to me in Spanish. He didn’t smile, took off his sunglasses and looked straight into my eyes. “This lady will be collected in one hour by two other men. My friend here will stay outside the door to the room until then. She wants you to stay for a few moments in case she needs anything from the hotel. If she wants coffee, you get it. A sandwich, that’s you. But you don’t speak unless she speaks to you. You understand this? OK?”

I nodded. Then the man smiled and I could see that he had a

gold tooth (no really!), like a gangster or a character out of James Bond's world. He gave me a hundred dollar note. American. I shook my head, but his smile slipped and he stepped forward. I took the money. It was a lot of money for me. I turned to the room and the door was now shut. The guard sat on a chair and ignored me. Gold Tooth walked off, lighting a cigarette as he went. I paced the floor and hoped fervently that one of the managers wouldn't see me. I was also worried that I would be missed in the lobby. The hotel was run as a tight ship. Suddenly my own manager came round the corner and he was walking along the corridor right towards me. I froze. He got closer and, as he passed, he smiled and patted my shoulder. Then he walked on, nodding towards the guard who nodded back! Nothing happened. I had no clue what was going on or who the lady was, but I was certainly reassured that my manager was seemingly OK with everything. Unless he'd lost his marbles.

The room door suddenly opened and the lady looked out. She wasn't wearing her sunglasses now. She beckoned me over and I dutifully went. She smiled at me and her smile was contagious. She ushered me into the room. I looked at the guard but he didn't seem bothered. The room was tidy. She'd been sitting at the desk and there were papers with handwriting all over the desk and some on the floor.

"You are American?" she asked in Spanish. I nodded. "I don't like Americans as a rule," she said, "but I want to know what an outsider thinks. Follow the people... What's your name?" I told her.

"*Quiero que leas algo por favor.* I want you to read something,

please," she said, "And tell me, as an impartial American, what you think." She looked hard at me. "But the truth. I only want the truth." She stared a little more at me and then handed me a sheet of paper. "Sit down, please," she said. "Take off your hat." I sat, took off my hat and read:

"My beloved *descamisados* (a term of pride, originally meaning 'the shirtless ones'): Today is a day of many emotions for me. With all my soul I wanted to be with you and Perón on this glorious day... I have only one valuable thing and I have it in my heart. It burns my soul, it hurts my body and smarts my nerves. This is the love for this people. If the people asked me for my life, I would be happy to give it — because a life of one *descamisado* is worth more than my entire life.

"I have made, my friends, the irrevocable decision to renounce the honour which the workers and the people have bestowed upon me. I cannot accept. I must reject it. My frailty will not allow it. I cannot allow it. My husband, Perón, is the one who must lead you. That my people may say, when this wonderful chapter of history is written and surely dedicated to Perón, that at the side of Perón, there was a woman who was dedicated to bringing to the President, the hopes of the people. There is a woman alongside General Perón who took to him the hopes and needs of the people to satisfy them, and her name is Evita. But she cannot... I cannot serve you..."

I looked up. I knew a little about Eva Perón. I started to say something, blushing bright red.

"It's very... strong, powerful, señora. But I am no expert. I am

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not a politician and I am not... not one of your people. But it is... very, very strong. Is it a speech?" I felt very stupid not being able to offer much more than that. But hey, I was very young and in those days not a little awkward.

"It is a radio broadcast," said Eva Perón. "My notes... I must finish it now... *¿Entiendes la emoción?* Do you understand the emotion in it?"

"Yes, señora, I do... I... do." Just then there was a firm knock on the door and the guard came in and spoke in fast Spanish. Eva Perón nodded and took my hand, shook it and thanked me, indicating that I should go, which of course I did. And that was that.

I went downstairs and saw my manager. He walked me to the edge of the lobby and said, "You know, she starts her morning very early in her office at the Secretaria de Trabajo y Previsión and the first part of her day lasts until four in the afternoon. At five she's back and continues to work until dawn with only a few short breaks. She is loved by the people... and... she is very ill." Just then two new men rushed in and spoke to my manager who nodded and went off with the men towards the elevator.

Well, I heard the radio broadcast that Eva Duarte de Perón made on August 31, 1951 — the radio address known as the *Renunciamento*. With a faltering, almost broken voice, she declined irrevocably the honour of the vice presidency and hinted that her time as the country's chief Peronista was near its end. It was unquestionable that you could truly feel Evita's presence through her voice. She declared her one true ambition — hang on a

moment, I've got my diary here — let me read this: "That my people may say, when this wonderful chapter of history is written and surely dedicated to Perón, that at the side of Perón, there was a woman who was dedicated to bringing to the President, the hopes of the people." She had I guess that special gift that some great people have of making you feel as if they are talking only to you and you alone.

In 1952, shortly before her death from cancer at the very young age of 33, Eva Perón was given the title of Spiritual Leader of the Nation by the Argentine Congress. She had a state funeral, something generally reserved for heads of state. I was there. I wasn't sure what to feel. I didn't necessarily side with her politics — or actually anyone's politics in those days — but I had seen and read a little of her passion and what she really felt in her heart. Immediately after her death, the government suspended all official activities for two days and ordered all flags flown at half-mast for ten days. It seemed, however, that these things fell short of reflecting popular grief. The crowd outside the presidential residence, where Evita died, grew dense, congesting the streets for ten blocks in all directions. They say something like three million people attended her funeral. The streets of Buenos Aires overflowed with huge piles of flowers. Within a day of her death, all florists in Buenos Aires had run out of flowers.



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*Memphis,
August 1953*

SNAKE HIPS:

ELVIS PRESLEY CUTS HIS FIRST RECORD

Look, these sandwiches are for you. Let's get more tea. Or something else? It's still raining... No, we have plenty of time.

Anyway, that was Eva Perón. Let's see... where next? Memphis, 1953 and I was working at the Peabody Hotel in Union Avenue... yessir — seeing the world and loving it! Peabody history dates back to 1869, when the original Peabody Hotel opened on the corner of Main and Monroe, and immediately became the social and business hub of Memphis. Well, in 1925 a newer, grander Peabody was built at Union and 2nd Street — continuing the legacy of the South's Grand Hotel. Here's a thing. It was in 1933 when ducks were originally put in the hotel's lobby fountain, setting up a tradition that continued with the March of the Peabody Ducks. Still there.

I liked Memphis. Still do. There were a few recording studios near the hotel and also close to where I lived then — in a boarding house run by a wonderfully full-of-life widow called Agnes Daley. She had bleached hair and was as wide as she was tall. Embarrassed as I am now to say it, she tried to seduce me on more than one occasion. Ha. Don't look at me like that. As it was, nothing happened...

It was July and the afternoon was warm and humid. Few people about. I was walking home. Sun Studio was also in Union Avenue... 706 Union Avenue... It's a recording studio and you could usually hear some guitar and country and western stuff floating down the street from one or other of the studios — Carl Perkins was popular, as was Johnny Cash. Sun Records was a small record label mostly promoting Memphis blues and country songs. They also ran a recording service for artists or anyone who came off the streets to record a song for a fee of \$3.98 which, even in those days, wasn't a lot. My friend at the hotel used to dare me to go in and record something, but he knew as well as do you that I can't much hold a note let alone a whole song. No, nice of you to say, but we both know that it simply ain't so!

Well, so... you could walk in and make a two-sided record. I have to say that I was often tempted, but never did it. Anyways, as I walked by there on that late afternoon, I saw a guy looking through the Sun Records window. As I passed, he turned and smiled. I smiled back. Then he said, "Sir, ma apologies, but do you know what tahn these people open up in the mornin'?"

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I said that I didn't, but guessed that it wouldn't be too early and told him. He looked a little crestfallen.

I asked, "Forgive me for asking, but are you going to record something?"

"Nah," he said and looked at the floor chewing his lip. "Thought ah would but, ah dunno."

"Can you sing?" I asked.

"Well, folks say ah caint, but ah think sure ah cain."

"Well, maybe you should do it anyway. Only four dollars."

"Yeah, I know. Mebee. Hey, do *you* sing?"

I laughed and told him no. He didn't laugh back.

"Ah reckon all folks can sing if they wants to. Jest needs to believe a little."

"Do you go to school round here?"

"Just graduated from Humes High."

"Did you sing there?"

"Sure did... and at church on Sundays."

"Has anyone told you that you have a good voice?"

"Some." He jerked a thumb at Sun Records. "Hopin' to get a chance here."

"Well, I hope you do OK. Maybe I'll buy your records one day. What's your name?"

Well, Elvis chose *My Happiness* and *That's When Your Heartaches Begin* to sing for his first record. Amazingly, both tracks and his follow-up recording in July 1954 of *I'll Never Stand In Your Way / It Wouldn't Be The Same (Without You)* survived and are available

on CD to this day. I have them somewhere...

The next late afternoon, as usual I walked past Sun Records and, out of curiosity, went in asked the receptionist if a Mr. Presley had been in that day. She said that he had and asked if I was a friend of his. I said I wasn't really, but had met him the day before. Apparently she had asked what kind of singer he was to which Elvis had replied, "Ah sing all kinds." When she pressed him on what singer he sounded like, he answered, "Ah don't sound like nobody." After he had recorded, Sun boss Sam Phillips asked Marion, the receptionist, to note down the young man's name, which she did along with her own commentary: "Good ballad singer. Hold."

Well, not so long after that, Presley failed an audition for a local vocal quartet, the Songfellows. He explained to his father, "They told me ah couldn't sing." Songfellow member, Jim Hamill, later said that Elvis was turned down because he didn't demonstrate an ear for harmony. Extraordinary how these things work out. Elvis began working for the Crown Electric Company as a truck driver. After playing a few local gigs with him, his friend Ronnie Smith suggested that he contact Eddie Bond, leader of Smith's band, which had an opening for a vocalist. Bond allegedly rejected him after a tryout, advising Elvis to stick to truck driving "because you're never ain't gonna make it as a singer."

Then Sam Phillips received a song from Nashville music publisher Sam Wortham, the same person who had delivered *Just Walking In The Rain*, Sun Record's first big hit record by The Prisonaires. Phillips heard something in this new song, but he

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couldn't find the singer on the demo, so he finally decided that it just might fit the young man about whom Marion kept reminding him. The song was called *Without You*, an OK but unexceptional ballad. The date was June 26, 1954. Marion phoned Elvis asking if he could come down to the studio. Elvis later said that he ran all the way. I can imagine him doing just that! But, try as he did, he just couldn't get the song right. This could have been the final rejection, the ultimate disappointment, the last straw, if not for Sam's belief in raw talent and his desire to uncover it. Elvis did record one song for his mother's birthday called *My Happiness* but that was more or less it. Sam had this real feeling that the boy had something though and invited Elvis to sing everything he knew. Sam talked about it with Scotty Moore, guitarist in the group The Starlite Ranglers. Sam told Scotty to check Elvis out and gave him Elvis' phone number. The rest as they say is more or less history I guess.

You know... Sam Phillips was an interesting guy. He'd been thinking more and more that the key to a new sound in popular music lay in the connection between the races, you know black and white and in what they had in common far more than what kept them apart. There were always going to be unpleasant white people,



he knew, but far more to the point was the spiritual connection that he had always known to exist between black people and white folks — the cultural heritage that they all shared. He had begun to talk increasingly to Marion about finding someone, and it had to be a white man, because the wall that he had run into with his recordings practically proved that in the racial climate then, someone black was unlikely able to bridge the gap.

One song continued to haunt Sam, a plaintive ballad called *Without You* that the song publisher Red Wortham had given him. There was something about it — for all of its sentimentality, there was a quality of vulnerability, and he thought that he'd like to have someone come in and give it a try. The only one who came to mind was a kid who had stopped by the previous summer and for \$4 cut a “personal” record for his mom.

Well, the “kid” had come in to cut another “personal” around six months or so after the first. And after that he evidently stopped by from time to time to talk with Marion. Sam was well aware of that fact because Marion did keep talking about him. Sam didn't really know, but when Marion brought up his name for what seemed like the thousandth time, he thought, well, hell, why not? The boy had the same yearning quality in his voice, attached to the kind of fervour that you might be more inclined to assign to gospel music. Sam had no idea of the boy's full potential, but there was no question, he was different. So he had Marion call him.

Elvis Presley came into the studio. He was 19 years old, a good-looking boy — long sideburns, greased hair combed in a ducktail

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at the back that he kept patting down. But what struck Sam most was the genuine humility — humility mixed with determination. He was, Sam thought, one of the most introverted people who had ever come into the studio, but for that reason one of the bravest, too. He reminded Sam of many of the great early blues singers and that “his insecurity was so markedly like that of a black person.”

Presley’s first single was *That’s All Right* — and it’s the song that made his name overnight really. Not long afterwards, the record company RCA Victor acquired his contract in a deal arranged by Colonel Tom Parker who managed the singer for more than two decades. Presley’s first RCA single, *Heartbreak Hotel* was released in January 1956 and became a number-one hit in the United States.

Memphis was a happy home to a diverse musical scene: gospel, blues, hillbilly, country, boogie and western swing. Not sure either you or I know fully what they are, but still. Taking advantage of this range of talent, there were no style limitations at the label. In one form or another Sun recorded them all. While I was in Memphis I did keep up with the people at Sun Records, not least because the music was mostly good, but also because I got on well with Marion Keisker who was great and obviously so proud of her “find”. She passed away in December 1989.

Sun Records? Yeah, that’s still going. The company is in business now running as Sun Entertainment Corporation. The music of many Sun Records musicians helped lay part of the foundation of late 20th century rock ‘n’ roll and influenced many younger musicians, including The Beatles. In 2001, Paul

McCartney appeared on a tribute album called *Good Rockin’ Tonight: The Legacy of Sun Records*. Look over there — it’s a copy of the famous photograph of Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash and Jerry Lee Lewis grouped round Elvis Presley at the piano, the night when the four joined in an impromptu jam at Sun Record’s one-room sound studio, December 4, 1956. You should go to Memphis one time — for more than Elvis Presley.

*Catskill Mountains,
July 1969*

LIGHT SIDE OF THE MOON:

THE FIRST MOON LANDING

I like to think that we all play a part, advertently or inadvertently, in history. Well, we undoubtedly do. Let me read something to you. On May 25, 1961, President John F. Kennedy spoke to Congress and famously said, “I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to Earth. No single space project in this period will be more impressive to mankind or more important in the long-range exploration of space; and none will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish.” Well, at the time I think he had absolutely no idea whatsoever if it could be done or, if it could, then whether it could be done by the end of the decade.

In 1969, I was working in New York State — the Catskill Mountains. Beautiful, green hills and valleys, waterfalls and lakes. Haven’t been there in an age and I suppose that it’s all a little overbuilt, overdeveloped these days. Anyway, I had one of my first deep love affairs there back in ’69. Oh I know I shouldn’t tell you, but I guess it doesn’t matter now. The Catskills were where many upper middle class folks left in the summer for the cooler parts of the state. The summer vacation. The husbands would usually stay in town, in New York, and join their families at the weekends. Many kids were sent to camp in the Catskills. Some places encouraged mothers to be with kids. The mothers entertained themselves during the day and the kids “did” camp. Some families took off to the Catskills for a couple of months. I enjoyed my time there and the customers were demanding, yes, but always left huge tips if you did things right — and if you made a fuss of their kids. Which I did. Even the terrible ones. Many of the mothers were a bit bored I think. But I had a ball. And I fell in love. Or lust.

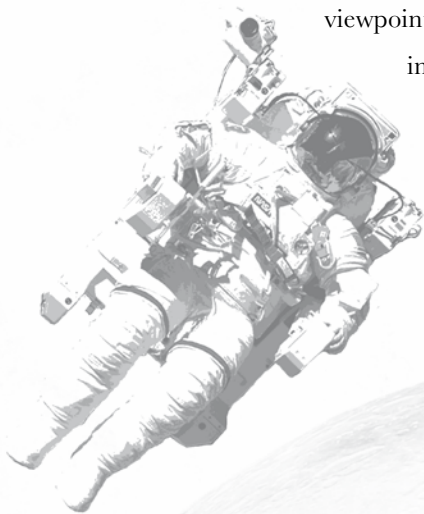
There were lots of new things happening at that time in the world: the first Led Zeppelin album came out and later in the year another, *Led Zeppelin II*. They still stand the test of time. Nixon became president, The Beatles gave their last live performance from a roof as I’ve just told you — and later in the year photographer Iain Macmillan took their photo on a zebra crossing on Abbey Road in London. The Concorde took off for the first time commercially and there was that awful Chappaquiddick incident where Mary Jo Kopechne died in a submerged car driven by Ted Kennedy. There

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was the Woodstock Festival — my gosh — Country Joe and The Fish, The Who, Jimi Hendrix... All amazing and brand new.

But something special happened on July 16 that I will never forget, standing in a hotel bar, with a lady guest's arm round my waist, all of us watching the TV. Glued — albeit me feeling not a little nervous about the lady's arm, but relishing the thought of the lady. Far too much information — you're quite right. Apollo 11 with Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins onboard lifted off toward the first landing on the Moon. On July 20, in the same bar and now having confessed unwavering something to a married woman, we all watched Apollo 11 "The Eagle" landing on the lunar surface. An estimated 500 million people worldwide watched in awe as Neil Armstrong took his historic first steps on the Moon, the largest television audience for a live broadcast ever — at that time. Can you imagine that? 500 million. In those days, that was just super huge.

There was end-to-end news coverage with interviews, viewpoints, dramatic diagrams. One interview with a specialist in particular interested me over the following days with his clear explanations and pleasant demeanour. He wasn't smug or self-satisfied.



George Mueller was the career space engineer who doggedly helped fulfill President Kennedy's vision of sending an American astronaut to the moon and back before the end of the decade. Dr. Mueller wrote in *The New York Times* on July 21, 1969, the day after Neil Armstrong took his giant leap for mankind, "This day man's oldest dream is made a reality — this day the ancient bonds tying him to the Earth have been broken." Three days later, with the Apollo 11 astronauts safely returned, Dr. Mueller declared, "Today at 11:49 a.m. Houston time, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, we conclusively proved that man is no longer bound to the limits of the planet on which for so long he has lived."

He met JFK's deadline for a Moon landing — and, by the way, beating the Soviet Union in the space race of the decade — by daringly revamping testing procedures and by consolidating control over separate NASA centres in Alabama, Florida and Texas. He also pushed for the Skylab space station to test telescopes and other instruments and the effects of weightlessness, and urged the development of a reusable space shuttle. Like so many of that age, he was a visionary.

Dr. Mueller saw the space engineering potential in not only getting to the Moon but maybe beyond, and he grasped the scientific value of what might be discovered there. He also performed a promotional role, publicising the application of those advances to public health and other everyday purposes. "The stimulus of the space program has already produced more new knowledge and

innovations in all aspects of our lives than any previous endeavour, even including a major war,” he wrote.

In 1971, Richard Nixon awarded Dr. Mueller the National Medal of Science for “his many individual contributions” to the Apollo system. And John Logsdon, professor emeritus at The George Washington University’s Space Policy Institute, said in an email, “Without his tough-minded management of the Apollo program, it is doubtful that NASA could have achieved President Kennedy’s goal of a lunar landing before this decade was out.”

Mueller was born in St. Louis in 1918. His father, Edwin, became an electrician and superintendent of a motor repair shop. His mother was a secretary. He had a boyhood keenness for model airplanes — you used to build those, didn’t you? Well, George was keen. And model planes pointed him in the direction of aeronautical engineering, but the subject wasn’t taught at the college his family could afford, the Missouri School of Mines and Metallurgy (now Missouri University of Science and Technology). So, he enrolled in mechanical engineering, then switched to electrical engineering and graduated in 1939. He received a master’s degree from Purdue University, worked on microwave tubes, television and radar at Bell Laboratories and taught at Ohio State University while completing his doctorate in physics. Clever guy. He was vice president of Space Technology Laboratories in Los Angeles and while there he was hired by James Webb, NASA’s key administrator, to lead the Apollo and Gemini initiatives through the Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston (now the Johnson Space Center),



the Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama and the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. Not bad?

Dr. Mueller’s reputation was so rock solid that he survived the repercussions from an explosive fire that killed three astronauts in their spacecraft on a launch pad in 1967. He was also able to persuade the rocket inventor Wernher von Braun to embrace an expedited “all-up” testing of a completed spacecraft instead of a more prolonged process of testing individual components and rocket stages one by one. Before Dr. Mueller launched Apollo 8 to orbit the moon in 1968, the rocket that lifted it into space had flown only twice. That doesn’t sound like shocking news to you now maybe, but it sure was shocking news back then. But it shows what faith people had in this guy.

“I spent about four months that summer looking at every possible way that it could fail and convinced myself that it wasn’t going to fail,” he told the Smithsonian Institution’s *Air & Space* magazine in 2011. “Yet too many people involved in spaceflight believe in trying to achieve absolute safety,” he said. “If you designed your program to be absolutely safe, you’d also be sure

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Simon Maier is a communications expert and has worked with corporations around the world. He uses storytelling as a consultancy tool to help senior executives and staff change their mindsets. He has maintained a lifelong interest in history and is fascinated by what goes on behind the world's big news stories. In this book, he explores what might have been the scenarios underneath what we are told. If all the world's a stage then what goes on backstage is as important as what we see.