

DRIVING MARILYN: *The Life and Times of Legendary Hollywood Agent Norman Brokaw* **Points of Interest**

- ❖ Norman introduced **Marilyn Monroe** to **Joe DiMaggio** and later gave the baseball hero advice about the marriage that cemented a lifelong friendship. Norman was Marilyn's de facto driver and confidant in the early days of her career.
- ❖ Many of the A-list female leading actors of their era chose Norman to represent them, including **Marilyn, Kim Novak, Natalie Wood, Loretta Young, Barbara Stanwyck** and **Susan Hayward**. It was not only because he made good deals. Kim Novak explained how "Norman spoke my language." Norman convinced Loretta Young to do television, the first big movie star to make the leap from the big screen to the little one. Others would soon follow.
- ❖ Any inquiries made about **Elvis Presley** to the agency had to go through Norman, decided **Colonel Tom Parker**. Portrayed negatively in recent films and books on Elvis, Colonel Parker's relationship with Norman and others he worked closely with tell a different story.
- ❖ Norman came from a fascinating family; his mother's side were renowned Russian dancers who performed before crowned heads of Europe and were a popular attraction in American vaudeville. Multiple tragedies struck the family during his childhood that fueled Norman's ambition to succeed. The trauma spilled over into his adult life and created challenging conditions in his personal life outside of the office.
- ❖ Norman got his start thanks to his uncle **Johnny Hyde**, the all-powerful agent who had discovered **Marilyn Monroe**. Norman was anything but a "nepo-baby," demonstrating from day one that he deserved to be there on his own merit. As a teenager, Norman paved his way to success thanks in large measure to contagious enthusiasm and heartfelt passion for his work, putting the needs of his clients first.
- ❖ Norman thought he was being demoted when his boss Abe Lastfogel transferred him out of the movie department to spearhead work on a new thing called **Television**. Norman came up with a genius idea that helped transform the emerging technology from novelty to mainstay in every American living room.
- ❖ An escaping chimpanzee was the catalyst for one of the most prolific partnerships in the history of the entertainment industry, all based on Norman's very off-the-wall hunch. From the partnership of **Danny Thomas** and **Sheldon Leonard** that Norman engineered came the most iconic television shows of the 1950s and 60s.

- ❖ Representing stellar athletes by Hollywood agencies was unheard of until Norman signed Olympic swimming hero **Mark Spitz** days after his triumph in the Munich games. Mark credits his Old English Sheepdog for sealing the deal. Within a year, Norman put deals together that set Mark up for a life of financial independence.
- ❖ Norman sat in the Oval Office in the last days of the Ford Administration and sealed the deal to become the first agent to represent a US president. It was an accomplishment that Norman saw as one of his highest achievements. **Gerald Ford** left the White House with a net worth of \$300,000. A year later, thanks to Norman, that number had grown to \$12 million.
- ❖ Norman's decades-long representation of **Bill Cosby** was held up as the gold standard for longevity and productivity. There are good reasons why Norman never knew in his lifetime the magnitude of the accusations that turned a beloved figure into a pariah.
- ❖ **Donna Summer** was deservedly at the top of her field in the 1970s and 80s. It all may not have happened had it not been for a simple little gift Norman showed up in person to give her. It was life-changing, and she never stopped expressing her profound gratitude for what Norman did for her.
- ❖ **Berry Gordy**, the man who gave the music of Motown to the world, left Detroit and came to Hollywood. There, he began a five-decade long partnership and friendship with Norman. Berry describes Norman's uncanny if not mystical ability to know what was best for his clients before they knew it themselves.
- ❖ Norman was beloved by clients and colleagues. His children saw a different side of him, emotionally less accessible, very protective but highly controlling and sometimes fear-evoking. The book is told by one of his sons (a best-selling *New York Times* author) who reconciles these disparate personalities with uplifting perspective.
- ❖ **Marlo Thomas** said it best: "He loved the business and had such awe of talent. He really had an innocence about him. I don't think I've ever met any person who rose as high as he did in any field that really retained such innocence."
- ❖ While Norman's world was far different than today's, his tale is nonetheless a timeless blueprint for crafting a purposeful and enormously fulfilled life. He was not a "what's in it for me" kind of person. Instead, he manifested everything he could have ever wanted in life by steadfastly prioritizing the needs of his clients and his company first.