

Chicago. 1940. I am about to sing my
first solo in front of an audience.

I am four years old.

My father, a fundamentalist Minister, has
drafted me to sing in a Sunday service.
When I finish “God Bless America,” the
congregation erupts with cheers, applause
and shouts of “Amen!” My father wraps
me in a bear hug and growls “You are
terrific!” My mother sits at the piano,
eyes brimming with pride.

I love how it’s making me feel. And with
that my dream is born.

I want to be a singer.

Not a fighter pilot. Not a fireman.

Not even shortstop for my beloved
Chicago Cubs.

A singer.

This is the story of how my dream came
true.

ICONS, IDOLS
and IDIOTS
of HOLLYWOOD

My Adventures in America's First Boy Band



By

Bruce Belland

'26 Miles' was the first surfer hit.

~Dick Clark 1989

*The song '26 Miles' put Catalina on the map
and made the Four Preps household names.*

~NBC "Today Show

*Everybody has songs that stay in their head forever. "26 Miles"
was California, the ocean, girls—hell, it was everything I wanted
to be or do.*

~Jimmy Buffet—*A Pirate Looks at Fifty*

*Brian Wilson's school, Hawthorne High, was graced
with a touch of West Coast pop's seaside glamour
when the Four Preps came to sing at a school assembly.
They gave a witty, offhanded show which lent a charge
of inspiration to the material that Brian was developing.*

~*The Nearest Faraway Place:*

*Brian Wilson, the Beach Boys and the
Southern California Experience*

by Timothy White

Author's Note

This is my story.

But it's also the story of two other young dreamers who were every bit as driven as I was to make their mark in Hollywood.

Glen Larson and Ed Cobb.

Together—with fourth Prep Marv Ingram—we achieved worldwide fame while still in our teens.

Then they both went on to become giants in their own right and make still more show business history.

I was lucky to have them as my friends, musical brothers and partners in making my dream a reality.

It never would have happened without them.

~bb

PART ONE

In the late 1920s my father, an evangelical seminary student, marries my free-spirited mother, a gospel singer. Dirt poor but dedicated they found a small, storefront church on Chicago's Northwest side. Brief coverage here of my youth as a pint-sized Preacher's kid in a tough Chicago suburb during WWII. I recount the popular war songs, movies, film stars and hit radio shows of the WWII era—and the heartbreak of neighbors lost in combat.

My animated family banters nightly at the dinner table. Dad is strict, but never stuffy—charismatic, with an ingeniously ironic sense of humor. I admire him a lot and fear him a little because he's got a direct line to God. Mom wields good-natured sarcasm better than Groucho and I quote a few family bon mots. My mother is a blonde, 5'2" force of nature and raises me on the piano bench next to her every day singing my heart out. The Reverend begins to envision a career for me as a Gospel singer, but I'm obsessed with show business—Bing Crosby, the Mills Brothers and a distant place called Hollywood. Family conflict begins.

1946. I'm ten when my father becomes Pastor of the West Hollywood Community Church in a working-class neighborhood butted up against Beverly Hills and the Sunset Strip. We drive out to L.A. on Route 66 in a ten-year-old car and for the first time, head west along the Sunset Strip past Tinsel Town landmarks and world-famous nightclubs. I am spellbound, now in a town where dreams come true... sometimes.



Our new parsonage home is 1,200 square feet. Dad's weekly salary is \$145.00. Some funny and ironic incidents as a Midwestern preacher's family begins life in booming, sunny Southern California following WWII; Orange trees in our yard, the Helm's Bakery truck, pastel houses, the ocean.



Beverly Hills is right next door—yet a world away. Coverage of my early teens, when I deliver newspapers to countless stars “across the tracks” in Beverly Hills, leading to rich one-on-one encounters with world-famous celebrities. A life-changing tutorial from Gene Kelly and a poignant chat with aging comedy legend Jimmy Durante. Other stars I deliver to include: Lucille Ball, Jimmy Stewart, Harpo Marx, Rosalind Russell, Ralph Edwards, Zsa Zsa Gabor and Danny

Thomas. My exposure to their lavish lifestyle—like Ira Gershwin’s garden party for 100—fuels my dream.



Then some “backstage Hollywood” stories about my mid-teens, when my best friend Eddie Cobb and I climb the fence at the rear of 20th Century Fox studios and amble through sets—from a western town with gallows to a P-51 fighter plane. Lots of details about that fabled studio’s backlot



as the 50’s begin. Hollywood’s manufactured magic is all around me.



I’m 14 when, shortly after her nude calendar, newcomer Marilyn Monroe rents an apartment four blocks from my house. I recount how we horny adolescents go through all kinds of elaborate peeping Tom escapades hoping to catch a peek. We never do, but my buddy Eddie actually gets to press Marilyn’s flesh a few weeks later. A memory he’ll brag about forever... only in Hollywood.

To reinforce his evangelical plans for my career, my dad starts drafting me to sing at funerals. Some funny stuff happens, like being accompanied at 14 by a tipsy old maid organist who sips from a flask, then plays “Amazing Grace” in the key of “R.” Still, I tell myself “at least it’s singing.”

I’m a small fry and, fearing I’ll be bullied at our rowdy local junior high, I’m enrolled at Emerson in the distant affluent community of Westwood, with a student body drawn from upscale Brentwood, Westwood and Bel Air. I’m a shrimp wearing hand-me-down clothes and the school bullies immediately begin tormenting me. I come home one day feeling like a real loser, which leads to the most formative conversation I will ever have with my father.

He talks about the importance of believing in myself and my “God-given talent” and compares self-belief to a “shiny silver ball bearing down deep in your gut that is *“indestructible... Life may chip away at it sometimes, but no one can ever destroy it unless you doubt yourself and let them in.”* I will call on that ball-bearing time and again over my lifetime.

Luckily, I make a friend at Emerson. Campus heartthrob, Robert “Bob” Redford, stops the bullies and even carries my books when I’m on crutches with a broken ankle. (A funny vignette about my reflected glory when I’m befriended by the school’s coolest guy.)





Bobby Driscoll & Donald O'Connor

Coverage here of another Emerson classmate, Academy Award-winning child star Bobby Driscoll, who is mobbed from day one and finally withdraws. It's a sad cautionary tale about the downside of fame, but doesn't dampen my determination one bit.

Finally, I'm enrolled at the high school that's been my Valhalla since passing it on that first day in California.

Hollywood High.



Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland went here! So did Carole Lombard and Lana Turner, who's discovered at a soda fountain across the street. I cover her bashful answer when a talent scout asks if she'd like to be in the movies. Her coy response will become a Hollywood legend. Other famous alums include Ann Miller, Carol Burnett, James Garner and in later years, Sarah Jessica Parker, John Ritter... and MORE. Some of my classmates already work in classic films like *Carousel* and *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*. And I name a handful of my fellow students who will later reach stardom as well. Lunchtime jam sessions feature senior Nino Tempo, who will later join the legendary Wrecking Crew studio band.

A bit here about the school's team name, The Sheiks, being adopted to honor a Latin stud-muffin silent film star. Again... only in Hollywood.

Then how HHS alum Lana Turner becomes America's Queen of scandal, when her mobster, gigolo de jour is stabbed to death in her Beverly Hills mansion. Wait until you hear the line Lana's teenage daughter utters when police arrive. Some bizarre details I learned from one of the cops involved.



Hollywood High is where my lifelong friendship with Ricky Nelson begins. I describe our classroom pranks and touch on our growing friendship and his slowly developing sense of self and interest in music. Our relationship will lead to amazing adventures all covered in subsequent chapters.

It's also here at HHS, that a student talent competition in 1954 brings my dream a little closer. An ambitious pal, Glen Larson,

and I put together a four-man vocal group with two friends from the school choir and steal the show with “Sha Boom.” Glen is as manic as I am about becoming somebody. Who knew we’d end up making show business history together? But right now, we’re just two more kids who want to make a record.

Now, we get lucky and nab our two dream candidates for the Preps’ permanent lineup. We four young dreamers are now:

Bruce the driven Duracell Bunny, Lead Singer, comic and head cheerleader.

Baritone Glen Larson, the group’s glib, shrewd and aggressive spokesman. He’s handsome, wise-cracking and an ambitious striver who’ll cross swords with Ozzie Nelson—a chilling incident I recount. (Glen will ultimately go on to make television history creating shows like *Magnum P.I.*, *Knight Rider*, *The Fall Guy* and *Battlestar Galactica*.)

Our bass is 6’4” high school football hero Ed “Eddie” Cobb, whose quiet, low-key demeanor belies his fierce ambition and an innate genius for music that will ultimately land him in the *Guinness Book of World Records* twice, for writing hits like “Tainted Love” and working with Fleetwood Mac, Steely Dan and Pink Floyd.

Our top voice is mysterious, golden-throated tenor Marv Ingram, who sang with the Mitchell Boys Choir in Bing Crosby’s film *Going My Way*. Marv is an intellectual and bookish loner who can put out the most compelling tenor voice I will ever sing with, then act as loopy on stage as the rest of us (see photo)—then go back to reading a Russian novel.

So, we’re four complex go-getters which make for some interesting stories as we chase our dream. No feuds or fisticuffs, but strong egos emerging. Now we need a name. A funny story of how we come up with ours by accident. And The FOUR PREPS are born.



The school’s musical prodigy, Lincoln Mayorga, joins us as our accompanist, arranger and conductor and will be The 5th Prep for the next 13 years.

My new love affair with singing harmony intensifies. (A few quick notes here for group singers about harmony, blend, vocal technique, etc.)

Here I expand still more on each Preps’ background. We’re all from low-income families and hungry. Glen lives with his younger brother and widowed mother who works nights as a waitress. Marv Ingram, an orphan, is being raised by his disabled grandmother, a widow in her seventies. Both of Ed Cobb’s parents work full time. And then there’s my dad’s \$145 paycheck. We are driven to succeed, lighten the financial load for our families... oh yeah—and meet lots of girls.

Meanwhile, we perform for all kinds of Southern California events: sock hops, proms, beach parties... usually for little more than gas money. We do a lot of school assemblies FREE and begin to build a fan base.

But as big as our young dreams may be, none of us can imagine what the future will bring.

Some vignettes here about performing in amateur showcases around L.A. with future stars like Richie Valens, Jimmy Rodgers, Jan and Dean, Trini Lopez and the Righteous Brothers, which begins my lifelong friendship with Bill Medley. Lots of Fab 50's Pop music trivia, including our brief experiment with Doo Wop which oldies fans of the genre should enjoy.

I'm now obsessed with Top 40 music, while dad is increasingly intent on his plans for my evangelical career. To pacify him, Mom teaches me "songs of salvation" as well as current pop favorites and my repertoire soon includes "The Old Rugged Cross" and "Shrimp Boats is a Comin'."

The conflict between the patriarch's dream and mine is starting to heat up.



High School Assembly - Sitting Room Only!



All four of us have day jobs. Mine is delivering newspapers—then later on flowers—to stars like ditzy Zsa Zsa Gabor, whose obnoxious little mutt nearly costs me my... never mind. It's in the book. Zsa Zsa caps off the calamity with a \$1.00 tip.

Some fun "delivery boy" misadventures here, like getting trapped in a room with a corpse (I *do* manage to get the last laugh on him).

Around this time, I begin to sneak out after my parents go to bed and prowl the glittering Sunset Strip which is three blocks from our back door.

Colorful accounts of famous Hollywood nightclubs and prominent performers of the period. I sneak backstage at Ciro's and meet the lead singer of my idols, The Mills Brothers who lets me watch their show. Their artistry has a huge impact on me. I head home around 1:00 a.m. to find my empty bed was discovered and a sermon about "God's plan" for my life is waiting.

What I want and what he wants have clashed again. It will soon demand a heart to heart.

With our erratic work schedules, we rehearse from 12:00 midnight to two—sometimes three—in the morning. No problem. We want this. I'm the church janitor and stay up after Saturday's practice to clean.

Some coverage about how we create and polish our act and start to spontaneously develop both *serious harmony singing and boisterous comedy*. We want to be "entertainers" — not just singers.

The plot thickens when Lincoln records our show at a UCLA sorority dance. I visit all the record companies in Hollywood, trying to get someone to listen to our demo tape. No interest.



Dad's lecture about believing in myself reinforces my drive and I keep at it but just get more rejections. I'm reduced down to the ball bearing, but it's still there.

Then, through an off-handed conversation, we come to the attention of Melville Shauer, a powerful Personal Manager with clients like Les Paul and Mary Ford. Mel, a former Paramount executive becomes our well-connected, wise and beloved manager and his show business acumen makes him a running character from this point on.



Mel gets to work and in 1956 we're offered a recording contract by Capitol Records... we're still teenagers less than a year out of high school.

That's the problem, our parents need to sign the contract. At first, my father resists and the contract is in jeopardy. I recount overhearing the heated exchange when my Mother—all feisty 5'2" of her—stands up to her husband and tells him he's taught me to believe in myself and now he has no right to deny me the dream for which I've worked so hard. Dad's not a man without a soul and recognizes the sadly ironic truth in what she's said. A few anxious days pass as I watch Dad struggle with reality, then reluctantly give in and sign the contract with grave misgivings. It's obvious a definitive showdown between the two of us has become inevitable.

Once Dad signs, the court approves our contract and we're hailed in the press as the youngest group ever to sign with a major record label.



And with that we become America's first Boy Band.

A piece here about the first time we four awestruck kids enter the landmark Capitol Tower and ride the VIP Express elevator up to the elegant top floor. There we meet our producer, Voyle Gilmore, the genius who records Frank Sinatra. Our first meeting produces one of the most amazing coincidences of my lifetime. Recounting it years later, I still shake my head in disbelief. We leave that day convinced it's a lucky omen.

Lots about the Fab '50s of *Happy Days*, *American Graffiti* and Top 40 radio. Capitol promotes us as "four clean-cut kids from Hollywood High!" One columnist calls us "milk-fed and all the high school rage these days." Our fan base expands.

Now comes our terrifying audition for hard-bitten MCA agents at their imposing, Beverly Hills Headquarters.

Two new young agents there love our act and start booking us at west coast military bases for \$250.00 per night—a \$25.00 commission for them. One of those fledgling agents will go on to become one of the wealthiest men in America. And the other will be



arguably the most successful studio head in film history, involving names like Muhammed Ali, Billie Jean King and films like *E.T.*, *Jaws*, *American Graffiti* and *Animal House*. Names are dropped throughout the book.

While preparing for our initial recording session, our young MCA hotshots line up the Preps' first out-of-town nightclub engagement in San Francisco. It means dropping out of UCLA, another crushing blow for my father.

I realize the time has come for a decisive conversation. It takes place in the inner sanctum of his church office and breaks his heart... and mine watching the man who has imbued me with such strong belief in myself, accept the truth. He finally wraps me in his familiar bear hug and wishes me "God's guidance," then watches as the four-year-old who sang "God Bless America" walks out of his parental grasp for the last time. There's a poignant moment when Dad tries to make a melancholy joke as I'm leaving.

A friend's family in Oakland puts us up in their modest home. We sleep on cots in the garage and laundry room. I get the sofa.

So here we are, about to open at a top-drawer nightclub while sleeping in the garage. Nowhere to go but up.



The San Francisco engagement is our nightclub baptism of fire. We appear with Monique Van Vooren, a towering, big-bosomed Belgian chanteuse who gets some great publicity on opening night by allowing her massive left breast to pop out of her gown and perch there while she finishes her song (Dad would've had a coronary). Her stunt pays off and we sell out every show.

Stories now about the City by the Bay's rich nightlife and meeting upcoming performers like The Smothers Brothers, Shelly Berman, Pat Paulsen, Jonathan Winters and the Kingston Trio. We head back to L.A. with some rave reviews.

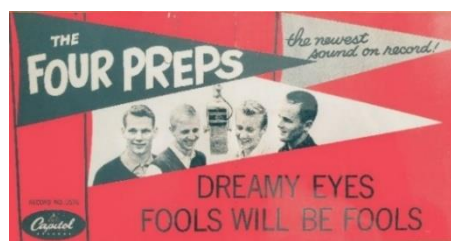
Our first Capitol release, "Dreamy Eyes," is loaded with every Doo Wop cliché imaginable as coached by the hilariously odd couple who wrote the song—a huge, buxom Amazonian redhead and her "partner," a short, fast-talking hustler. They're right out of *Guys and Dolls* and our rehearsals with them are wacky and fun to recall. Turns out... she ain't stupid! And Lincoln Mayorga is perfect for us.

Capitol's promotion goes into high gear and in the first week of its release "Dreamy Eyes" enters Billboard's Hot 100 chart at #56 *with a bullet!*—which of course indicates an unusually HOT new release.

Mel cautions: "It's just one week... let's wait and see."

But we're crazy excited and already planning how to spend the money.

"Dreamy Eyes" completely disappears from the charts the following week, never to be heard again. We now release seven straight singles experimenting with a variety of harmonic and singing styles. Some insights into our experimental—sometimes bizarre—attempts to cut a hit, while searching for our own sound. DJ's play our records, but nobody buys them.



"the newest sound on record!"?!



The Cashbox “Most Promising Vocal Group” Award delivers a badly needed morale boost.

We haven’t had a hit yet, but our polished vocals and unique high-energy comedy have caught the attention of the hierarchy at MCA who now land us an engagement that keeps the dream alive.

We’re booked into The Coconut Grove with Edgar Bergen, an Idol I’ve loved since Chicago. It’s hard to believe. We came to the Grove after our Senior prom, a little over a year ago. I cover opening night swarming with glamorous movie stars of the “Old Hollywood.” Details galore about mixing with the A-list stars of the time.



Edgar Bergen becomes one of my earliest mentors and his wisecracking little pal Charlie provides a surprise I stumble on backstage.

Charlie McCarthy’s sister Candice (aka Murphy Brown) turns out to be a Preps fan. A fun episode about four guys with growing egos, totally unsettled, meeting this poised 12-year-old. No wonder she became a star!



Our Grove performance gets encouraging reviews. The L.A. Times writes: “Bergen is billed as the star of the new Grove, but there is a quartet of fresh, funny and talented youngsters tagged *The Four Preps* who come within a whisker of copping all the marbles. It was only a year ago that they were on the other side of the footlights attending their *Hollywood High School* prom.

Mark my words, the Four Preps will go far in their chosen field of endeavor. They have all the requisites, well-blended voices and fetching personalities.”

Those long, late-night rehearsals are paying off.

A brief digression here about the colorful world of 50's nightclubs where our audiences will include a baseball Hall of Famer who almost comes to blows with me, a music-loving Chicago mobster and a world-famous Spanish matador whose hot-blooded Mexican mistress—twice my age—secretly whisks me out to her hacienda hideaway and teaches me a thing or three. No bull! (Sorry.)

Nightclubs are a heady milieu. Stories about that smoky, alcohol-driven world which we’ll be part of until college concerts come along.



Capitalizing on our Grove reviews, our champions at MCA win us a booking that moves us one more step up the ladder: A history-making TV special starring Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, Rosemary Clooney, Louie “Satchmo” Armstrong... and four flabbergasted newcomers. Now here I am with Bing on my left and Frank on my right. The thrill doubles when MCA wrangles us equal billing. You’ve got to be kidding!



Me helping Sinatra off with his raccoon coat. He never even tipped me.



Singing background for Bing Crosby. Can you imagine what the four-year-old from Chicago is feeling right now?

A couple of chapters relive a remarkable week rubbing shoulders with four musical legends and watching them function. Behind-the-scenes scuttlebutt about each star’s quirks and idiosyncrasies. And for singers, an insight into each of their vocal techniques and approach to warming up, rehearsing, etc. I detail watching laid-back crooner Crosby interact with finger-snapping Mr. Ring-a-ding-ding. They’d really connected in *High Society* and their rapport is at its peak.

Satchmo? I take a few pages to cover how amazing he was.

Rosie Clooney? Best female singer on the planet—kittenish and irresistible.

We mere mortals watch in wonder. What a week. What memories, all covered in detail.

(By the way, the show was a HIT—The Edsel wasn’t.)



Ozzie and Harriet - My 2nd family... a book in itself.

Early on in our career, the Preps join the show playing Ricky Nelson's pals and backup singers. I will ultimately be cast as Rick's college roommate. Lots of behind-the-scenes stories about this extraordinary family and its patriarch Ozzie, a rare kind of genius who teaches me so much while mounting America's seminal family sitcom. He's the first TV star to have complete control over every aspect of the show... for 14 years!

Titillating tidbits about chain-smoking, flirtatious Harriet and her early career as a hot Cotton Club bombshell before meeting Ozzie.



I confess my lustful crush on her with her amazing legs and saucy wink. We back her vocal in a dream sequence. As you can see, I'm enjoying myself.



Ozzie's people skills as a benevolent dictator are recounted in all kinds of situations, both on camera and off. Some surprises involving veteran actors.

Over four seasons I will: spend the night in jail with Ricky, arm wrestle with Mr. Peepers, dance the Charleston with Harriet Nelson, perform a ballet in drag and do a bedroom scene with...



*Mamie van Doren
A truly outstanding
actress.*



*Mamie flirting with me.
After Ozzie yells "cut" I let
her get in bed with me... if
only!*



*My drag debut. It's called
"acting!"*



*With Ricky in our hideaway bungalow, getting it together for what
will be a history-making tour.*

Lots of anecdotes as we prepare our show. It's around this time that the Preps make pop music history. We invite Ricky to watch our assembly at a local high school, then surprise him by literally dragging him out on stage to sing in front of a live audience for the first time. I describe the incredible chaos the moment the girls realize it's really HIM, go berserk and charge the stage. We manage to barely finish one song then narrowly make our escape through a hysterical mob of girls tearing at our clothes.

We all start to realize what's happening to our buddy.

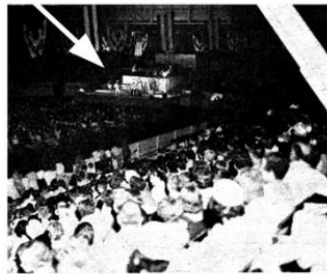
Over the years, I've read numerous accounts of that fateful day. None of them are entirely accurate, including the name of the song we sang. The book captures every moment and sets the record straight.

And the madness is just beginning.



Ed, bb, Rick, Glen, and Marv at LAX ready to take on the world.

Ozzie entrusts our care on the tour to his longtime publicist—a savvy, old-school press agent with clients like John Wayne and Bing Crosby. I describe watching his dazzling mixture of chutzpah and charm and learning. *A lot.*



A PACKED HOUSE AT COLUMBUS watching Rick and the Four Preps rock 'n roll.

Ohio state fair—our first public performance with Ricky. 35,000 screaming girls. (Upper right photo shows the enormity of the arena.) We're introduced and head out to face the crowd. It's instant insanity. The screams are so deafening, we can't hear each other or the band. It's our introduction to berserk teenybopper fan insanity, including one terrifying escape from a crazed mob of girls charging towards us in a dead-end tunnel. Police escorts are soon beefed up... way up!



Scary and exciting recollections of the Teen Idol phenomenon and Ricky's developing a barbed sense of humor. Some off-the-wall examples of "Rickwit" recalled.

Ricky makes the cover of LIFE which calls him "The Teens Top Throb!"

The Ozzie and Harriet" adventures are like no other I will ever experience... and it all feels like family to me. Years later, I learn Ozzie is terminally ill and write him a note thanking him for all he has taught me.

I treasure his response:

October 3, 1974

Dear Bruce,

Many thanks for taking time out from your busy day to send along your thoughtful note. I think the happiest part of doing our show throughout the years was our contact with all you guys. It's almost as though we were surrogate parents and the fact that I was able to leave with you some things that you now find helpful is really gratifying.

Most of all I appreciate your thoughtfulness in taking the trouble to write me about it.

Needless to say, Harriet and I were delighted to note that you are doing so well. NBC is lucky to have your talent, enthusiasm and integrity working for them.

Harriet sends her love.

As ever,

Ozzie

Ozzie dies ten months later.

The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet. A book in itself.



We play state fairs with Tennessee Ernie Ford, middle America's favorite Uncle. Grandstands are jam-packed with families out for fun. Rich memories like watching Tonto fall off his horse—and my run-in with a canine superstar with an attitude. But above all, watching this beloved, down-to-Earth star's way with “everyday folks”, like the one memorable trip when he gives a poor farmer's family an unexpected day they will never forget. Heartwarming stuff about a genuinely nice

man and the good folks who love him.

So far, we're primarily known as the group that sings backup for Crosby, Sinatra, Ernie Ford and Ricky and Harriet Nelson. It's a living, but not what we're after.

We attempt all kinds of styles looking for a hit: Power ballads, a catchy Burt Bacharach tune, Latin rhythms, Country, Doo-Wop, Folk, movie themes with orchestra and choir. I critique each attempt—with humor.

Good airplay. No sales.

Whatever song turns the trick, we want four-part harmony to be our trademark.

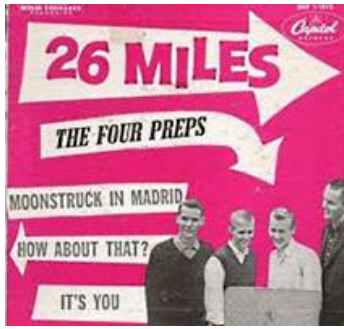
We press on as the time for Capitol to exercise their 2nd-year option or cut us loose approaches. Mel is concerned. This could all be over soon and we're scared and scrambling.



Finally, thanks to a tip from my high school friend Nancy Sinatra (it's detailed here), Capitol finally lets us release our little song about Catalina... as an obscure “B” side to a tune from an upcoming Broadway musical. (See ad.)

But a late-night DJ plays “26” and gets bombarded with phone calls. I tell how he gets word to Capitol—a one in a million longshot that works. Bless him!





Now the Tower starts promoting the hell out of our simple, singable song.

Phew! At last, we strike GOLD!

Capitol picks up our option and will be our home for the next decade. I'm often asked what the mysterious high obligato sound is on the second chorus of "26 Miles." That high-pitched musical phrase was spontaneous and elusive and we almost lose it before getting it on tape. An improbable story involving a talented teenage girl.

Most important and historic, I describe how, while trying to correct a problem with vocal balance, we pioneer an unorthodox overdub recording concept that will ultimately be incorporated by subsequent recording groups. Music historians have called it the California Sound. later employed by groups like The Beach Boys and The Eagles. An interesting story about how we stumble into audio history.

"26 Miles" I start to write it on my ukulele one day at the beach when I'm 17. Glen and I finish it and beg Capitol to let us record it for a full year. They resist until my high school friend, Nancy Sinatra, breaks the logjam with her enthusiasm. How it all happens is here. In later years, both Brian Wilson and Jimmy Buffet will cite "26" in their biographies as a major influence on their aspirations and style. The book offers both those excerpts in full.



Some "rags to riches" stories now about our wild new, free-spending lifestyle, when "four milk-fed kids" step into the fast lane. I buy a new Corvette off the showroom floor in Detroit with a huge royalty check from Capitol. A farcical tale about an obnoxious salesman who's nasty and suspicious because I look about 15. He ends up calling the Capitol Tower for verification... and the fun begins. A silly story with a bizarre payoff.

While we're still green kids living at home, we naively agree to one horrific rock and roll bus tour during which we grow up a lot. That chapter is called One Dead Junky And A Masturbating Monkey. A musician overdoses on the first day. One guy tours with an underage girlfriend he calls his "cousin." And let's not forget the zonked-out musician who travels with a perpetually-masturbating monkey.

Bizarre stuff. It's our first and last bus tour.



1 Million Airplays.

Now, a handful of diverse stories about the song's popularity around the world. And how one Christmas, I hear it sung (badly!) by four drunken Santas. And a moving remembrance of a 102-year-old fan who loved the song and asks to have it played during his final hour-a

bittersweet story with an ironic twist involving Catalina and its fabled white steamer, the SS Catalina.



NBC's Today Show proclaims: "26 Miles" has put Catalina on the map and made the Four Preps household names. Catalina will welcome a million visitors in the year ahead. The rocket has taken off.

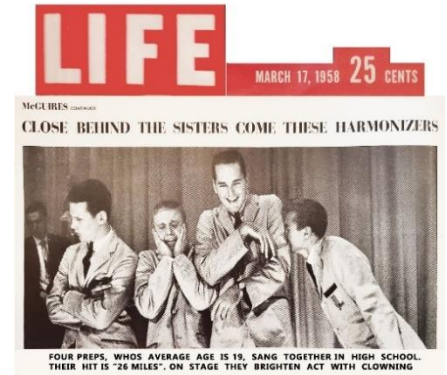


LIFE magazine...can you believe it?!

In their cover story rating "Best Selling Vocal Groups," the Preps finish a close second to the McGuires and we're referred to as "harmonizers," a label we wear proudly. Triumph number one.



And just as gratifying is the caption "The Four Preps, whose average age is 19, brighten their act with clowning." Victory number two. In other words, we're Entertainers! Thank you LIFE.



Just as our career takes off, Marv—always the odd man out—leaves to earn his college degree.

We get lucky and find Don Clarke, a gifted college music major who joins the Preps and sings on our follow-up million-seller.

Thankfully, the nucleus of Glen, Ed and me remains intact and we lose no momentum.

A year later, Don Clarke suffers a near-fatal car accident and is replaced by... Marv! Who's now a college graduate and will sing at my side for another decade. And we're back to the original foursome.

But for now, still more adventures...



Preps Debut on Ed Sullivan Show

First LIFE, then The Ed Sullivan Show.

Off-beat backstage encounters with greats like Rodgers and Hammerstein, who smart-ass Glen rattles with a wisecrack. Ironic observations of Sullivan off and on camera. He stumbles on the title of our song in his intro but we're a hit and afterward he calls us back on stage for a spontaneous interview—every performer's dream. He's now a fan.

A ludicrous recollection about one remote Sullivan broadcast from Las Vegas, when we're asked to sing outdoors atop the flat tin roof of a tool shed in the middle of a golf course... in 100-degree heat wearing tuxedos. That's when the four of us pull an outrageous pantomime stunt on the air to signal our girlfriends. It's hard to believe we were that brazen... and stupid. An absurd episode with a surprise twist and a funny double payoff.



When "26 Miles" hits, we're cast by the media as the quintessential Southern California beach/surfer band.



We do an assembly at Brian Wilson's high school that his biography recounts, "lends a spark of inspiration to Brian's work." After our show, Brian tells me the name of his band and I think, "Beach Boys? Well that's good for about six months!"

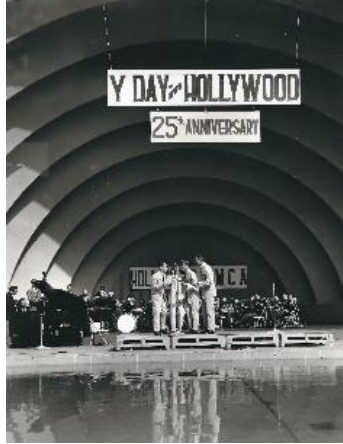
Beach Boys

"Big Man" is our second consecutive million-seller. Hooray—we're not just "one-hit wonders".

A bit here about Glen and me writing it with some insights into our creative process. The new teen expression is "big man on campus." We hijack "big man" and it works. I tell how the iconic piano intro is the result of a happy accident. It's a story involving the legendary Wrecking Crew studio band and a highlight.

"Big Man" outsells "26 Miles" worldwide and reaches #1 in the U.K. Best of all, it's featured on the merry-go-round at Griffith Park.





Soon we perform in 2 sold-out shows at the Hollywood Bowl—less than a mile from the high school where our dream began.

TEEN magazine

Donalee Reynolds(nee Ehiers)-with friends Shirley Hall, Mel & Ruth Poche's nieces-wait or the Four Preps to perform at the Hollywood Bowl.



One afternoon I'm roaring along Mulholland in my 'Vette, when a vintage Jaguar XK 140, rockets past me like I'm standing still. The driver beeps and flashes me a thumbs up. It's Steve McQueen. I can't believe the life I'm living.



After two simple, "singalong" HITS, we gamble on our next release, "Lazy Summer Night," a beautiful ballad from a Mickey Rooney movie. The stylistic departure is a gamble that pays off. We're now, considered a valid harmony group... and no longer just Capitol's "Jolly Juveniles."



Three straight HITS and we're enjoying life to the max, buying exotic cars and other toys, dating beauty queens and living our pop star fantasies every day in Southern California, which is becoming the focus of envious, snowbound easterners. I include a lot of pop culture details about the era, the Sunset Strip and early West Hollywood.



We get attention from the press at a Hollywood party by threatening to throw “America’s oldest teenager” in the pool.

Preps tossing Dick Clark in the Pool



The Four Preps are “prepping” to toss Dick Clark into swimming pool during riotous Hollywood bash, but Dick’s howls save him—this time, anyway!

Now,outrageous tales about Dick Clark and American Bandstand. Lots of goofy pranks between Dick and us in a chapter called Dirty Cue Cards, A Dead Fish In The Mail And Fake Dog Poop. Details include a personal account by Dick of one of our more outrageous pranks and his revenge... on national television!



Ozzie casts me as Annette’s date for a Kodak commercial at Disneyland. We film on every thrill ride in the park, including the Matterhorn which is not yet open to the public. Gulp! I am terrified by anything more than 10 feet off the ground and my fear isn’t helped when our car jumps off the track. Then there’s the !@#%&*&* Spinning Teacups, where I pitch my cookies and blow any chance of becoming Mr. Funicello. It’s a funny story *now*... but it still mortifies me. A classic bb screw-up.





Now comes *Gidget*—co-star billing in the classic surfer film, which is the first movie ever endorsed by Dick Clark.



In the famous luau/orgy scene, the Director hands me a sax and says “Fake it!” Hello, ball bearing!

It’s a huge break for us and a big heartbreak for me when I literally fall flat on my ass while trying to charm Sandra Dee. In another hard-to-believe episode, Glen and I cross swords with a powerful Columbia Studios bigshot who justifies the word “IDIOTS” in the book’s title. All kinds of stories about shooting this landmark film with Sandra Dee, Cliff Robertson, James Darren and a talented young cast which includes a martial arts star-to-be and the future producer of M*A*S*H. (You’ll never guess who.)

“Down by the Station” has been cited as the first Top 40 hit to feature an electric Fender bass which was played by Ray Pohlman of the Wrecking Crew. How it happens is a hoot.



“Got a Girl.” Glen and I write a satirical poke at teen idols, Fabian, Avalon, Ricky Nelson, Bobby Rydell and Elvis. Top 40 but not quite gold... silver?



The Preps are getting known for satirical material. We’re at the peak of our red-hot career when Uncle Sam calls.

1959. We are now “draft bait,” but our congressman is a fan and gets us enlisted in the (in)famous 146th Air National Guard wing at Van Nuys—known as The Hollywood Air Force

because so many guys from all branches of show biz, including Jack Nicholson, have grabbed a slot in the unit to avoid being drafted and sent overseas.

We finish an engagement in Reno the night before we have to report for basic training in Van Nuys. Bad weather grounds our plane. If we aren't there it's AWOL. We try driving home through a raging snowstorm. It's L.A. or Leavenworth. My white-knuckle account includes soaring off the icy highway into a cow pasture and Ed ending up with a 9 mm Magnum pressed against his forehead by a trembling old woman.



Our basic training in Texas involves a drill sergeant who's a full-blown sadist and refers to us as "the four maggots." He makes us remove our gas masks in the tear-gas chamber and sing "Big Man." And guess what... he sings every word along with us. Some of the book's most farcical adventures here about boot camp for four pampered "celebrities" who now lose all their hair and become *bald* maggots.

Would you believe a chapter called Fudgesicles On The Testicles? It's an absurd story.



Then, that day in the Philippines when I'm almost killed... twice. First, when our van is shot at by Communist rebels. And an account of breaking the sound barrier in an F100 F Super Sabre and having the plane explode in flames when we land. Spoiler alert—I'm rescued by a gutsy young fireman. A scary escape.



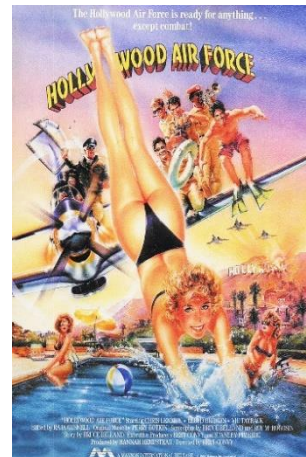
I cut to two years later in 1961, when the Preps have both a Top Ten album and hit single on the charts and JFK calls us back on full time active duty during the Berlin crisis. We're scheduled to open in Vegas and hatch an outrageous scheme to save the engagement.

We lease a 13-passenger plane and moor it adjacent to our base in Van Nuys. During the day we wear grungy fatigues and I'm assigned to *emptying and cleaning the overripe latrines* on the giant, 120 passenger transport planes. (A couple of latrine-related screwups, including one that follows me out on stage one night in Vegas. You can't make this stuff up.)

After duty hours, we race to our plane, fly to Vegas where we don expensive silk tuxedos and become stars for the evening. Next morning—back to Van Nuys and more latrines. Scantly-clad chorus girls hitch rides with us every day (Chapter title: Half Naked Ladies at Ten Thousand Feet). Our double-life adventures during this period are so outrageous and provocative, I will later turn it all into a feature film comedy called *Weekend Warriors*. Some of the book's wildest off-the-wall segments.



Weekend Warriors starring the great Lloyd Bridges and Jack Lemmon's son Chris. The film is called Hollywood Air Force around the world because movies with "Hollywood" in the title sell well abroad.



Back from the Air Force and searching for a hit album. Then, it hits us: "they brighten their act with clowning."

Our producer at Capitol loves our stage show and says "Let's show 'em you do more than just sing." He proposes a LIVE concert album featuring quality vocals and our outrageous comedy routines and impressions. (The concert almost doesn't get recorded because of a hung-over musician – a tense tale.)



Men at Work. Check out the red socks.

Everything clicks, The Four Preps on Campus goes GOLD and our career moves into Mach II just as the college concert market explodes.



Lots of odd-ball happenings in college arenas and challenging—sometimes tense—shows at West Point and Annapolis and a small, all-women's Catholic college where the Mother Superior is offended by my harmless ad-lib and refuses to pay us. Wait until you hear the line she found "unacceptable!"

We do a concert at St. John's University in Newfoundland and get snowed in at an after-concert party. The hot-buttered rum flows freely. I get plastered and nearly decapitate one of the guests. Details here.

It's the mid-sixties and our irreverent commentary about everything from Fidel Castro to cannabis makes us popular in dorms and fraternity houses across America.



158 Colleges In 42 Weeks. Now three straight years on tour. Off-beat stories about all of it.



'Four Preps' Wow College Audience

A review of our show at Penn State with my favorite photo. You could say we're "unconventional." Let's see Peter, Paul and Mary do this!

The Preps are voted "Top College Concert Attraction" in 1962, '63 and '64. We buy our own plane and average 3-4 concerts per week for months on end. Hair-raising accounts of our terrifying emergency landings and other close calls. And an insight into the cultural shift in the country. I cover our work with new comedians like Mort Sahl with whom we co-headline at the famous Club Crescendo on Sunset exactly five blocks from the parsonage of my youth. And I recount the unforgettable night in Greenwich Village, watching a fearless Lenny Bruce. I recreate some of his brilliantly inventive and edgy routines. Comedy is becoming bolder.



"The band that flies together, almost dies together?" The man on the left in the photo is our pilot Fred Garns, who saves our lives with a miraculous emergency landing... it still makes me sweat to write about it.

Further accounts of the evolving social and political attitude of college-age America and our comedy evolution to capitalize on current events and fads.

The DUNES HOTEL presents
In The Beautiful Arabian Room

The
George BURNS
and
Carol CHANNING
Show
With THE FOUR PREPS

Bill Reddie and His Orchestra

RESERVATIONS: REgent 5-3111

LAS VEGAS
Dunes
hotel and casino



Finally, VEGAS! And lessons from a comedy giant and a Broadway legend.



VEGAS! With my beloved mentor George Burns and theater great Carol Channing, who teach me what “professional” is all about.

George’s inscription says “To Bruce, I enjoyed it!”

Believe me... so did I!



Rich memories shared about being tutored by my show business Godfather. After each show, this generous man invites me into his sumptuous dressing room and patiently tutors me in everything from comedy timing (“wait one more beat”) to how to lead a happy life, as he will for a lively 100 years. Countless examples of his show biz savvy. No other Icon will have as profound an impact on me as this crusty genius with a heart of gold. One sweet story about his soft side involves my newborn daughter. Lots of Carol Channing stuff too.



Accounts of savoring the Vegas strip. The Rat Pack is right up the road.

A recap of Sin City when it first peaks in the '60s. Lots of nostalgic Vegas trivia like Liberace’s opening act being a new girl singer named Barbra Streisand. Some stories are hilarious—like my hooking up my hick First Sergeant in the National Guard with a red-hot French showgirl. The Sergeant will never be the same.

Some tales are heartbreaking,... watching a major Vegas Headliner lose his entire month's salary at the tables one drunken night.

Some funny hunks about a chorus boy who loves to sneak up behind me and stick his tongue in my ear and bare-bosomed, long-legged chorus girls flirting with us backstage. And high rolling sugar daddies who sometimes pay a showgirl a thousand to blow on their dice. Big spenders and large losers. And late-night Chinese food at the Sands with all the town's top comedians: Joey Bishop, Milton Berle, Bob Newhart, Myron Cohen, Shecky Green, Dick Shawn etc. I describe how surprising their behavior is offstage as I watch them schmooze into the wee hours night after night.

Glen, the brazen operator, wins big at the poker table and things happen to me that couldn't happen in any other City.

Our live, tongue-in-cheek recording suggests to JFK that he draft all the other singing groups into the Peace Corps leaving "More Money for You and Me." It features our group impressions and we're told by a member of his staff that "President Kennedy enjoyed it." Talk begins at MCA about a performance at the White House.



"More Money" moves up the charts, hits the Top Ten and doubles our college concert bookings. We soon sign a mammoth, six-figure guarantee with Jerry Perenchio, that former agent who used to book us for a \$25.00 commission, long before becoming a zillionaire and a Titan of big name entertainment. Mel has retired. Interesting story about our nerve-racking negotiations with this dynamic and powerful man and an increasingly confident Glen Larson.

We've all married by now, bought big homes and ranches and started families. There's no end to the goodies... cars, boats, planes, tennis courts and swimming pools. We do tours of Asia and Europe. Fun incidents including quiet man Ed's encounter with a gorgeous Fraulein that almost cancels a sold-out concert in Munich. And our musical director's date with a beautiful hostess at the club in Tokyo who turns out to be... (no matter what you suspect, you'll never guess).

Blue-collar West Hollywood may as well be on the moon.

November 22, 1963. We're on a college tour in the Midwest when JFK is assassinated.. We're shaken to the core, but the Dean of Ohio University calls and begs us to go ahead with our scheduled concert that evening.

It's a performance none of us can ever forget and I will never again experience that kind of emotional unity with an audience, or the depth of camaraderie we shared that night, burnished by all we've shared and survived over the last decade. It grips me every time I recall it.



50 years later, it will bring a letter of gratitude from a man who attended that concert as a college student and was moved by the way we “manned up” and brought us all some comfort. It was the first concert mounted by Ken Ehrlich, a young student producer who would go on to produce the Emmys and Grammys for three decades gaining him a star on Hollywood’s Walk of fame. In writing the book, I reached out to him after 59 years and asked him to recall that evening. His written response—cited here—praising our “heartfelt” performance under dire circumstances made me grateful for the millionth time to be a singer.

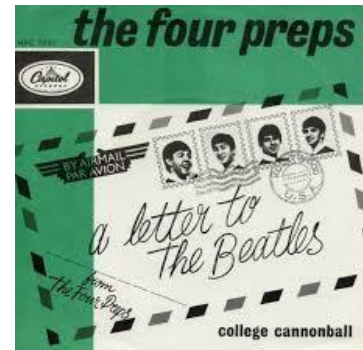
As the poet/artist B. Andreas wrote:

“There came a moment in the middle of the song, when he suddenly felt every heartbeat in the room and after that he never forgot he was part of something much bigger.”

B. Andreas



The Preps are overdue for another hit. We’ve built a reputation for poking fun at fads and trends in the news, from topless bathing suits to Mother Teresa. Then a new sensation drops another hit in our laps. We write and record “Letter to the Beatles,” a novelty song that kids the new marketing phenomenon of Beatlemania



and includes our spot-on vocal impression of the Fab Four from Liverpool.

Our background musicians are the Wrecking Crew. Some whimsical stories about famed Top 40 drummer Hal Blaine and other Crew members.



The record is rocketing up the charts with a bullet and re-energizing our career when the Beatles’ attorney threatens to sue us for defamation. Capitol panics and pulls the record off the market. It’s our last significant release.

Actually, it would have been a unique distinction—sued by the Fab Four! Geez, guys—we were just kidding.

By now, we’re starting to gradually segue into the next phases of our careers: Ed Cobb is a mega-hit songwriter and Record Producer destined for the *Guinness Book of World Records*; Glen Larson is selling TV scripts and will go on to create countless hit TV series; Marv is heavily involved in Wall Street and will become a successful Beverly Hills stockbroker.

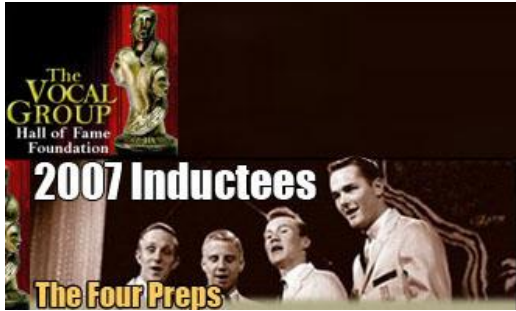
Me? I’m writing movie themes and doing voiceovers at Disney including the original *Jungle Book*, directing TV commercials, and, at one point, become a programming executive with NBC, produce over 1,200 hours of television, write a feature film comedy and two (flop!) Broadway shows. It’ll all be in the next book.

The British invasion, Motown and Capitol’s sabotaging of our “comeback-hit” marks the beginning of the end for four kids from Hollywood High who shared a dream and saw it come true.

And in 1969 when it ends, I promise myself that someday I’ll write a book about it all.

Epilogue

I include an “addendum” updating the subsequent life and career of each Prep and other key characters after we disband in 1969.



The Vocal Group Hall of Fame. It's about damn time!

Much more in the book, including one-on-one adventures with the following... in no particular order:



Rhetta, the showgirl who puts me in touch with...

Whatshisname. Chapter called, Elvis Is On Line 3...



Sammy Davis.

Some wild anecdotes ("Babe!"), including his Friar's roast that ends with the all-time raunchiest punchline...



Bobby Darin.

Cocky and colossal. Wiseguy Glen sends him a profane note before his show. Backstage afterwards, the zingers fly thick and fast. He's a brilliant showman and becomes my favorite nightclub performer...

Nat "King" Cole.

Live at the Copa in NYC. A night in musical Heaven. Walking back to our hotel after his show we pass Carnegie Hall. It's closed, but we find an unlocked door and manage to sneak out on stage and sing a few bars before being escorted out by an amused security guard. Now we can say, "We sang at Carnegie Hall... sort of."



Marlo Thomas.

I'm 16 and delivering flowers to the Thomas house. When she opens the door, her smile dazzles me. That Girl glows and I stand there speechless.

*Lawrence Welk.
We have a bare-knuckle confrontation... about a freakin' candy bar! The squarest dude with the tightest wad.*



Leon Russell.

On the other end of the hipness spectrum—one of a kind. Eccentric and brilliant.

Glen Campbell.

I recount the early days before he's a star when he and I harmonize for hours and trade wisecracks about girls. He becomes indispensable at our sessions which I cover. I'm not surprised when he becomes a superstar...and remains a friend.





*Wally Cox “Mister Peepers.”
 What a shocker on Ozzie and Harriet!
 He’s a jock in sheep’s clothing who one
 day performs a spontaneous athletic fete
 that blows us all away.*

*Kathie Lee Gifford.
 ...whose career I will start
 while producing “Name
 That Tune.”*



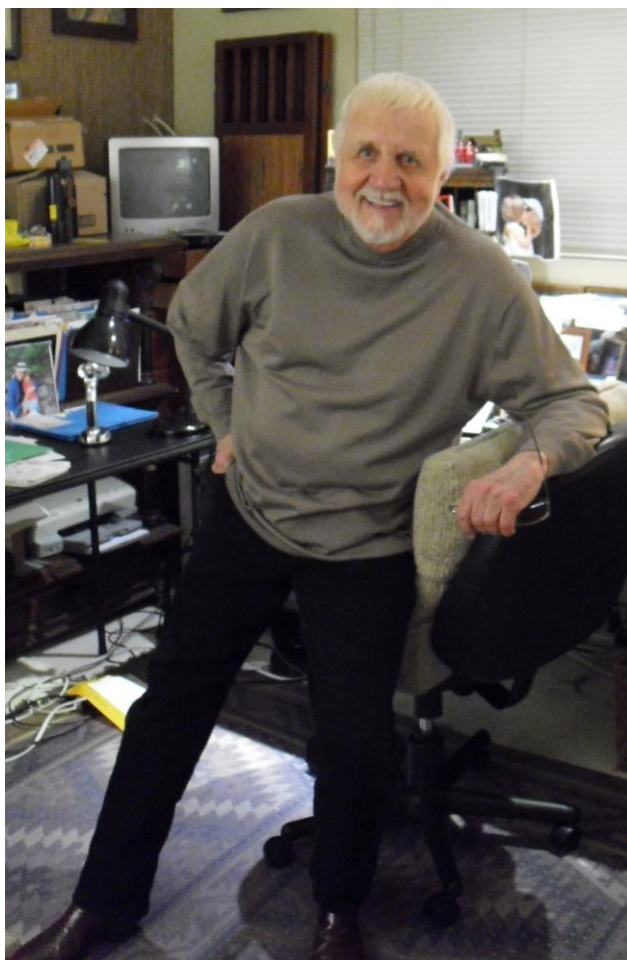
*Regis.
 ...whose career I nearly ended.
 He finally forgives me. The
 book explains.*

*Bob Hope.
 I tell how one night he “turns mud into chocolate.”*



*John Phillip Law
 (Photo from “Barbarella” with Jane Fonda.)
 He sat next to me in Algebra at HHS. Who knew?! He always wore a shirt.*

Well, that’s the story of my great ride. I hope it delivers a great read!
 Thanks for your time.
 ~bb~



BRUCE BELLAND is a multi-E Emmy nominated Entertainer, Singer, Songwriter, Recording & Concert Artist, Screenwriter, Director, former Network Executive, Public Speaker, Playwright, Producer, Voiceover Artist, Radio Host, Humorist and Author.

He grew up in West Hollywood and attended Hollywood High School and UCLA with a major in English.

Bruce and his wife, Simone Alexander, a prominent fashion designer now on the faculty of Fashion Institute of Design in Los Angeles, live in Woodland Hills, California.

“ICONS, IDOLS and IDIOTS” is his first book.

“It’s safe to say that anyone who’s ever sung along with the radio, watched television, attended a concert, or enjoyed a movie has, at some time, been touched by his talent.”

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