

"A glorious book . . . Kirk Douglas is a wonderful writer and a courageous one, which should surprise no one. Courage has been his battle cry all his life." —Steven Spielberg

I AM SPARTACUS!

MAKING A FILM, BREAKING THE BLACKLIST

KIRK DOUGLAS



With a Foreword by
GEORGE CLOONEY



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FOREWORD

THERE'S ONE CONSTANT THAT YOU can find to define a person's character.

It's not how you perform when things are easy; it's how you handle yourself when it's tough.

Everyone can be fearless and forthright when the stakes are low . . . but when it's your livelihood or even your life on the line, or your family's or your friends' . . . that's when you understand the kind of mettle you're made of.

Kirk Douglas' mettle is made of pretty stern stuff. Unlike so many characters we see in movies he didn't necessarily start out championing a cause. His path to glory rests more at the feet of characters like Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. He hadn't sought out the fight . . . it found him . . . and like Atticus, he did what he knew he had to . . . what was right.

It's hard to imagine now what the weight of McCarthyism meant to so many. It's difficult to picture loyal Americans pulled before Senate subcommittees and being asked to name their friends or go to jail. Being tried in public without the ability to face the charges brought against you . . . a lot of very good people buckled under that weight.

The ones who didn't suffer, long after McCarthy was holding hearings . . . for that matter long after he was even alive.

Dalton Trumbo was one of the most respected writers in Hollywood . . . and continued to write under pen names for years after going to jail for refusing to incriminate his coworkers.

In December 2011, his name was placed where it always should have been . . . as a credited writer on the film *Roman Holiday*.

But long before December 2011, Kirk Douglas stepped out of the dark and, as the producer and star of Stanley Kubrick's *Spartacus*, gave Dalton Trumbo screen credit for the first time since he was brought before the House Un-American Activities Committee.

I guess it sounds small now. A screenwriter getting credit for a film he actually wrote . . . but in the history books, it's marked as the moment that the Hollywood blacklist ended.

Kirk Douglas is many things. A movie star. An actor. A producer. But he is, first and foremost, a man of extraordinary character. The kind that's formed when the stakes are high. The kind we always look for at our darkest hour.

GEORGE CLOONEY

INTRODUCTION

What you learn about yourself with the passing of time can't be taught. It can only be experienced. You can never "know then what you know now."

When I look back at Spartacus today—more than fifty years after the fact—I'm amazed that it ever happened at all. Everything was against us—the McCarthy-era politics, competition with another picture, everything.

I am 95 years old. When I was born, Woodrow Wilson was in the White House. I've lived through sixteen presidents, two World Wars, the Great Depression, and a score of political crises from Teapot Dome to Watergate to Bill Clinton's impeachment for being publicly serviced in the White House.

As I write these words, America is more deeply divided than at any point in my lifetime. From its inception, our country has experienced many divisive periods. Of course, the most serious division occurred with the Civil War. More than half a million people were killed and it almost brought about the dissolution of the United States. Yet somehow we've always survived.

What I want to tell you about in this book is what it was like to make the film Spartacus during another divisive period in our nation's history. The '50s were a time of fear and paranoia. The Communists were the enemy then. Terrorists are the enemy now. The names change, yet the fear remains. That fear is still inflamed by politicians and exploited by the media. They profit by keeping us afraid.

The first president I ever voted for was Franklin Roosevelt. He said, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself."

I am not a political activist. When I produced Spartacus in 1959, I was trying to make the best movie I could make, not a political statement. I brought together a cast of some of the finest actors ever to appear on-screen: Laurence Olivier, Charles Laughton, Peter Ustinov, Jean Simmons, and Tony Curtis. I hired a talented young director I knew. At the time, he was still largely unknown to the general public. His name was Stanley Kubrick.

Let others judge the movie. I believe it stands on its own merits. I am proud of it.

When I talk to my grandchildren about the making of Spartacus, it seems to them like a fantastical tale from a faraway time—the 1950s. They're right. It was a long time ago. Yet in a world where one man in Tunisia can set off events that topple the government of Egypt, the story of Spartacus is as important today as it was fifty years ago—and two thousand years ago.

A revolutionary spirit is circling the globe. Is it contagious? We are surprised when we see leaderless crowds of people gathering in American cities, speaking with one voice, challenging the power structure that seems impregnable. That was what Spartacus did. And tens of thousands led their voices to his. Together, they were all Spartacus.

I was a young man when I made this film. I've often said that if I had been a little bit older, I might never have taken it on at all. I certainly don't think that I would have hired Dalton Trumbo to write it under his own name. He was a lightning rod for the country's divisiveness. After almost a year in jail for his political views, he was still on the studios' blacklist—the "Do Not Hire" rule that had been in place for more than a decade.

Some people these days still try to justify the blacklist. They say it was necessary to protect America. They say that the only people who were hurt by it were our enemies.

They are lying. Innocent men, women, and children saw their lives ruined by this national disgrace.

I know. I was there. I watched it happen.

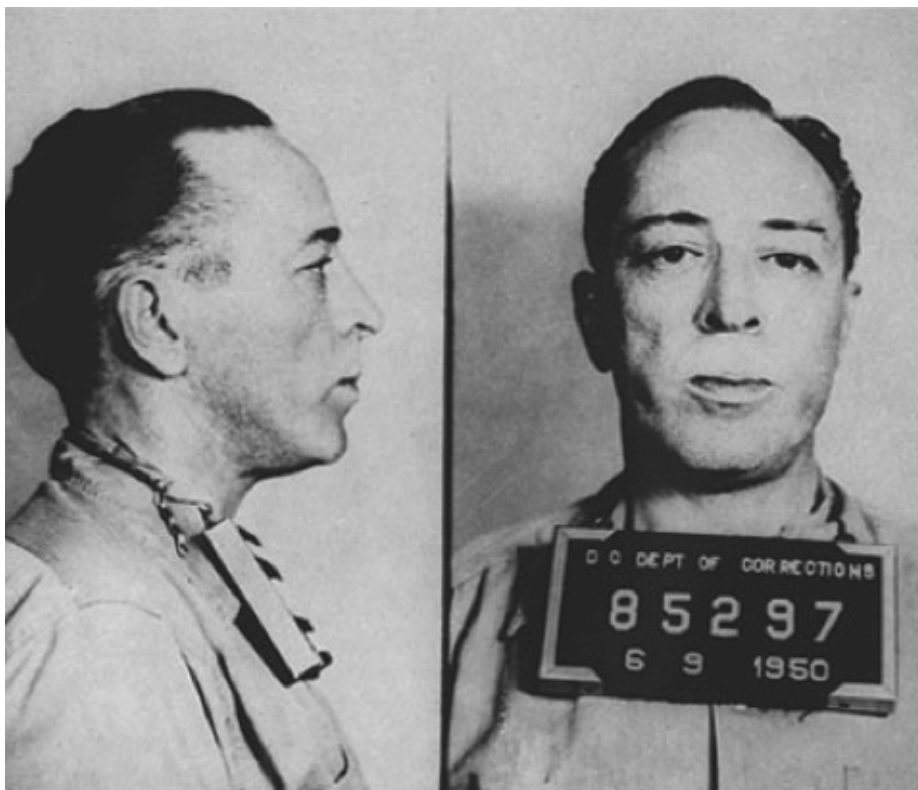
Now I will tell you about it. And about Spartacus—the movie we made in the midst of all this madness.

*KIRK DOUGLAS
JANUARY 1, 2001*



Bettmann/CORE

Dalton Trumbo was the highest paid screenwriter in Hollywood when he was called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1947.



Three years later, he was on his way to federal prison for contempt of Congress.

CHAPTER ONE

“In every city and province, lists of the disloyal have been compiled.”

—Laurence Olivier as Marcus Crassus

IN THE CAUCUS ROOM OF the old House Office Building, the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) was gaveled to order by Congressman J. Parnell Thomas, Republican of New Jersey. It was Tuesday, October 28, 1947. Ten men, motion picture writers and directors, had been called before the Committee to testify about their current and prior political affiliations.

Nine of them were screenwriters: Dalton Trumbo, Albert Maltz, Ring Lardner Jr., Lester Cole, Alvah Bessie, Herbert Biberman, John Howard Lawson, Samuel Ornitz, and Adrian Scott. One was a director—Edward Dmytryk.

These men—the so-called “Unfriendly Ten”—viewed the HUAC investigation *itself* as an un-American violation of their First Amendment rights of free speech and free association, and they intended to say so publicly.

The first witness on that cold October day was Dalton Trumbo. He raised his right hand and was asked if he would swear “to give the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God.”

Trumbo replied, “I do.” Yet it quickly became apparent to fair-minded Americans that the only “truth” desired by the Committee (which included an unknown freshman congressman named Richard M. Nixon) was anything—whether true or not—that confirmed their predetermined verdict of the ten men: *guilty*.

Seated directly behind Trumbo in the crowded chamber were members of the Committee for the First Amendment, a Hollywood group created to provide support for the subpoenaed witnesses.

The delegation of film stars that flew to Washington, D.C., on a private plane provided by Howard Hughes, included Humphrey Bogart and his young wife, Lauren Bacall, as well as Gene Kelly, Danny Kaye, John Garfield, and John Huston.

I knew Lauren Bacall from New York. I first met her on a cold winter day in 1940 when we were both struggling students at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. She was only sixteen years old, just entering the Academy. I was a senior, an “older man” of twenty-three. She was Betty Joan Perske back then. She’s still Betty to me now.

Bacall, with a take-no-prisoners honesty that defines her to this day, bluntly described in her autobiography what she saw playing out in front of her in that room:

When witnesses such as . . . Dalton Trumbo . . . were asked “Are you a member of the Communist Party?” and refused to answer, they were exercising their rights as defined in the Bill of Rights. They wouldn’t answer whether they were members of the Screen Writers’ Guild either. Political affiliation was not the business of the Committee . . . and Thomas was gavel happy. I couldn’t believe what was going on—that jerk sitting up there with his title had the power to put these men in jail!

J. Parnell Thomas threw down the gauntlet to every witness who came before his committee thundering:

The Chairman: Are you or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?!

Mr. Trumbo: I believe I have the right to be confronted with any evidence which supports this question.

What the arrogant Chairman hadn’t expected was a witness as verbally agile and combative as Dalton Trumbo:

The Chairman: Oh. Well you would?

Mr. Trumbo: Yes.

The Chairman: Well you will, pretty soon. [Pounding gavel] The witness is excused. Impossible!

Mr. Trumbo: This is the beginning . . .

The Chairman: [Pounding gavel] Just a minute!

Mr. Trumbo: . . . of an American concentration camp for writers!

The Chairman: This is typical Communist tactics! This is typical Communist tactics! [Pounding gavel]

That officious bastard Thomas whacked his gavel and Dalton Trumbo was dragged away.

But those hearings were no joke. Dalton Trumbo and the other Unfriendly Ten literally lost their freedom. They would all be sent to jail for contempt of Congress.

At this point in my life, I was still an up-and-coming young actor. Along with millions of Americans, I listened to highlights of the hearings on the radio. Still a new medium, television didn’t cover them. Just a month earlier, I had actually bought my first small set to watch the World Series the first time it was ever broadcast on TV. Jackie Robinson’s Brooklyn Dodgers were playing the New York Yankees. Even on my tiny screen, I couldn’t help but be impressed by the grace and talent of this game-changing Negro rookie.

Two years later, Jackie Robinson was also called before the House Committee on Un-American

Activities to testify about his association with controversial singer Paul Robeson. Of course, he had none. The only connection they had was that they were both *black*, which was enough for J. Parnes and Thomas. It was the era of guilt by association.

I wasn't subpoenaed as a witness, or asked to join with Bacall, Bogart, and the others, because I wasn't a big enough "name" to matter to the newspapers.

At the time, I'd still only made one picture—*The Strange Love of Martha Ivers*.

My memory of that time has a different title: *The Strange Life of Kirk Douglas*. Fresh off the train from New York, I arrived in Hollywood in 1945 with very little awareness of the political controversies that were just starting to affect the movie business. I knew nothing about the first round of HUAC hearings held during the war, while I was overseas in the navy. Nor was I aware that both Robert Rossen, the screenwriter of *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers*, as well as Lewis Milestone, its director, held strong political views that would later get them both in trouble.

Hell, at this point, all I knew was that I was coming out to Hollywood to star in a movie. This is how little anyone told me before I left New York: I thought I'd been cast as the romantic lead in the picture, opposite Barbara Stanwyck.

When I got off the train in Los Angeles, I was promptly informed by the studio rep that Mr. Van Heflin would be playing that part, not me. I had been cast in the third lead. All across the country, I had been studying for the wrong part.

On my first day of shooting, Paramount sent a limousine to pick me up and bring me to the set. I was flabbergasted. That was a big thrill for me. But when the driver pulled up to those big gates on Melrose Avenue, I was stunned to see angry picketers outside.

It was only at that moment that I learned there was a labor strike going on at the studio. This was the latest (and it would turn out to be the last) in a series of strikes involving the major studios and the left-wing Conference of Studio Unions. The unions asked the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) to support the strike. But SAG, led by its president, George Murphy, and executive committee members Ronald Reagan and George Montgomery, refused to cooperate. They encouraged actors to cross the picket lines.

No one had bothered to tell me about any of this before I got out there. It wasn't until later that I learned what the strike was even about—protecting benefits for the set dressers.

One of those picketing outside Paramount was Robert Rossen. The driver pointed him out to me—"That's Bob Rossen, the writer."

I looked down at the script sitting next to me on the seat—Rossen's name was on the cover. The first time I ever laid eyes on him, he was carrying a protest sign.

Inside the studio, I got the next shock. My director, Lewis "Milly" Milestone, wasn't even on the set. As a show of support for the strikers, he was spending the day in Oblath's restaurant across the

street. A substitute “director” would handle that day’s shooting.

The first motion picture of my career and the director was literally out to lunch. Welcome to Hollywood, Kirk.

Things were so intense that the producer, Hal Wallis, decided I should sleep at the studio, rather than risk being locked out. I slept in my dressing room for the next several nights, until the strike was resolved.

All politics aside, my life would have been much healthier if that director, Lewis Milestone, had never come back. He was a nice guy, but he believed that actors should always do exactly what they were told.

“So, Kirk, in this scene, I think that you should be smoking a cigarette.”

“But, Mr. Milestone, I don’t smoke.”

“That’s okay, kid, you’ll learn.”

I shut up and did what I was told. Right after we finished the scene, I raced to my dressing room and threw up. Unfortunately, that was the only time I got sick from smoking. Milestone was right, *did* learn. Two packs a day for forty years. Thanks, Milly.

The film turned out all right, although Miss Stanwyck ignored me for the first two weeks of shooting. I got good notices as the third lead, and she eventually told me I’d done a good job. I told *her* that her compliment came “too late.” I was a cocky kid.

Two years later, both Milestone and Rossen were subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee, at the same time that the Unfriendly Ten appeared. Lewis Milestone fled to Paris. Robert Rossen admitted his membership in the Communist Party.

Both were blacklisted.

I didn’t know it then, but my first movie was written by a card-carrying Communist. Looking back on it now, I couldn’t care less.

I’ve always wondered what would have happened if I had arrived in Hollywood even five years earlier. Would I have been caught up in the middle of those fights? And if I had, would I have even had a career?

Of course, many people in Hollywood cooperated fully with the HUAC investigations. Ronald Reagan was a friendly witness. So were other actors like Gary Cooper, Robert Montgomery, George Murphy, and Adolphe Menjou.

Menjou told the Committee, “I am a witch hunter if the witches are Communists. I am a Russian baiter. I would like to see them all back in Russia.”

Funny thing about Adolphe Menjou: a decade later, when I hired him for a part in *Paths of Glory*, he was more than happy to take a paycheck from Bryna, my production company. I guess nobody told him that it was named after my Russian mother.

The country was deeply frightened and divided, much as it is today. Anti-Semitism was still a big factor. The name “Kirk Douglas” got me work as an actor. The name I was born with—“Issa Danielovitch”—wouldn’t have gotten me through the door. Racial prejudice was still the accepted norm. Even though Jackie Robinson had broken the color barrier in baseball, President Truman’s decision to integrate the military was still a year away.

But more than anything, it was the growing hysteria about Communism—the “Red Scare”—that shadowed life all across America. To many, it was seen as a real threat. Others believed it as just more fearmongering. But it was never far from our minds.

The same year that I arrived in Hollywood—1945—Gerald L. K. Smith, the religious demagogue and founder of the America First Party, began publicly attacking the “alien-minded Russian Jews in Hollywood.”

Cynically, Smith combined anti-Semitism with fear of Communism into one package. Anyone who was Jewish, anyone who was Russian, was a traitor.

Did he mean me? I was a Jew of Russian heritage. My parents emigrated from Belarus. But they never saw themselves as anything but Americans. My mother, who could not read or write in English, taught me to love this country as much as she did. “America,” she would say, her voice filled with amazement. “Such a wonderful country!”

I had enlisted in the navy after Pearl Harbor and served in the Pacific with pride. Now here was this vicious anti-Semite, Smith, essentially questioning my loyalty, as well as the patriotism of anyone in Hollywood who was of Jewish or Russian descent.

One month after Dalton Trumbo (who, for the record, was *not* Jewish) appeared before the House Un-American Activities Committee, a group of four dozen top motion picture executives and distributors met privately for two days at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

When their closed-door meetings were over, these great and powerful men issued what came to be known as the “Waldorf Statement.” This was the beginning of the Hollywood blacklist. Its key provision declared:

Members of the Association of Motion Picture Producers deplore the action of the 10 Hollywood men who have been cited for contempt by the House of Representatives. We will forthwith discharge or suspend without compensation those in our employ, and we will not re-employ any of the 10 until such time as he is acquitted or has purged himself of contempt and declares under oath that he is not a Communist.

Wow. I need to take a moment here and come up for some air. As I look back on these words more than sixty years later, I feel anger, revulsion, and a deep sadness.

Of the Unfriendly Ten, six were Jewish. I’m sorry to say that most of the men who issued the

Waldorf Statement were also Jewish.

How could Jews, who themselves had been the victims of thousands of years of persecution including the most horrific example of fear and genocide the world has ever known—the Holocaust in Europe—justify perpetuating a similar climate of fear in America?

The answer is found in the question itself. Fear breeds fear. These men—people like Jack Warner, Louis B. Mayer, and Harry Cohn—were terrified their great power would be taken away from them in a heartbeat if their loyalty to America was ever called into question.

So they became superpatriots. And to prove themselves right-minded, they were more than willing to sacrifice the lives of others, even their fellow Jews. They were like the Vichy government in France, collaborators who held on to their influence and position at the expense of their fellow countrymen.

Hollywood had gone crazy. The witch hunts that Adolphe Menjou had stupidly encouraged were spreading like raging wildfires all across the country. Like most Americans, I watched it happen and felt helpless to stop it.

Fredric March, speaking on the national radio broadcast “Hollywood Fights Back,” saw the handwriting on the wall:

Who do you think they're really after? Who's next? Is it your minister who will be told what he can say in his pulpit? Is it your children's school teacher who will be told what she can say in classrooms? Is it your children themselves? Is it you, who will have to look around nervously before you can say what is on your minds? Who are they after? They're after more than Hollywood. This reaches into every American city and town.

Freddie March got it right. He could see the storm coming. Maybe that's why I chose him to play the president of the United States when I produced *Seven Days in May*.

In the years that followed those hearings, thousands of lives were ruined. Careers were ended with the stroke of a pen, and not just in Hollywood.

Almost three years after the HUAC hearings, in 1950, the Supreme Court refused to hear the appeals of Dalton Trumbo and the other Unfriendly Ten. Their convictions for contempt of Congress were allowed to stand. Dalton began serving ten months in the federal penitentiary in Ashland, Kentucky. His wife and three young children were left without a husband or father to provide for them.

At the same time, in a twist that no screenwriter would have dared to invent, that pompous and arrogant Committee Chairman J. Parnell Thomas was convicted of padding his payroll with phony jobs. He then pocketed the money himself. His defense was essentially that “everybody did it.”

That didn't fly with the judge, who sent the now-former Chairman to a federal penitentiary in Danbury, Connecticut. It was also the place where two members of the Unfriendly Ten, Lester Co

and Ring Lardner Jr., were serving their sentences for contempt of Congress. Ironically, they found themselves in prison with the same man who'd put them there.

I often wonder what they said to the once-mighty congressman when they passed him in the prison cafeteria—"Pass the gavel, please"?

Justice may be blind, but sometimes she has a terrific sense of humor.

An obscure Republican senator from Wisconsin, Joseph R. McCarthy, quickly thrust himself into the vacuum left by the imprisonment of J. Parnell Thomas. He began by lying about how he had numerous "lists" of Communists who had infiltrated all walks of American life.

More and more people I knew, including my friend Carl Foreman, the screenwriter, were caught up in a situation that continued to grow uglier and more threatening. We started to call "McCarthyism"—a new word that the language didn't need.

Like me, Carl was also the son of Russian-Jewish immigrants. He was a brilliant writer. Carl wrote the scripts for two of the pictures that really established me as an actor, *Champion* and *You Are Man with a Horn*. (His daughter, Amanda Foreman, is also a tremendous writer. I wish he could have lived to see her success.)

The film for which Carl is most remembered now is *High Noon*. He not only wrote the original screenplay, but coproduced it as well.

In 1951, right in the middle of shooting *High Noon*, Carl was subpoenaed to testify before HUAAC. His refusal to name names meant that his career in America was effectively over. He fled to England before he could suffer the same fate as Trumbo and the others. He made it out of the country just before the State Department revoked his passport.

Hedda Hopper, the hate-mongering gossip maven, viciously attacked Carl Foreman, writing in her column that she hoped "he would never be hired here again."

Even the liberal producer Stanley Kramer, one of Carl's closest friends and his business partner, removed Carl's coproducer credit from *High Noon*. He was afraid of what their continued association might cost him in the future.

A few years later, I looked up Carl when I was in London.

We talked for a few minutes, but I sensed something was wrong.

Finally, he said, "It's okay, Kirk."

I had no idea what he was talking about.

"What's okay, Carl?"

"It's okay if you don't want to have lunch with me. I understand."

Jesus, I thought. *This is what happens to a guy who thinks all his friends have turned on him.*

"Carl, it's me. Kirk. Cut the bullshit. Where do you want to go to lunch?"

I've never forgotten that brief encounter with Carl Foreman. It still reminds me of all the pain

caused by the blacklist. Friends turned on friends. Marriages fell apart. Carl's did. He became a man without a country.

In an interview with the American Film Institute years later, Carl wrote these poignant words:

During the so-called McCarthy period . . . my problem was that I felt very alone. I wasn't on anybody's side. I was not a member of the Communist Party at that time, so I didn't want to stand with them, but obviously it was unthinkable for me to be an informer. I knew I was dead; I just wanted to die well.

Some did die.

Philip Loeb was a drama instructor during my student days in New York. He was a fine teacher; I took several classes from him. Phil's own career, in the new medium of television, was just getting started when they came after him.

In June of 1950, a publication called *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television* listed Philip Loeb as a Communist. He strongly denied it, but his protest of innocence didn't matter to General Foods, the sponsor of his television program. They insisted the network fire him. It did.

He never got work in television again. Solely responsible for the care of his mentally troubled son, he could no longer support him. Phil sank into a deep depression. He overdosed on sleeping pills in 1955.

One reader wrote to the *New York Times* declaring that "Philip Loeb died of a sickness called the blacklist." Although the *Times* printed the letter, shortly after the editors made their own position crystal clear: "We would not knowingly employ a Communist party member in the news or editorial departments . . . because we would not trust his ability to report the news objectively or to comment on it honestly."

Ironically, the same month that Phil Loeb was first blacklisted—June 1950—similar events played out in the lives of two other men.

They didn't know each other, and I didn't know either of them. Not yet.

They were Dalton Trumbo and a novelist named Howard Fast.

Howard Fast was one of the most successful historical novelists in America. His books included *The Unvanquished*, *Citizen Tom Paine*, and *Freedom Road*. At this point in his life, Fast was also an unapologetic Communist.

Early in 1950, Fast was called to Washington, D.C., to testify before HUAC (now chaired by Democrat, John Wood of Georgia). The issue was Fast's past support for an anti-Franco group, the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee. Wood and HUAC wanted the names of all their donors. Fast refused to give them up. (One of those he protected was Eleanor Roosevelt.)

Like Dalton Trumbo, Fast was cited for contempt of Congress. He received a three-month sentence and was sent to a federal prison camp in West Virginia. He began serving his term on June 1, 1950.

It was a tough place, but it had a library. And as he later wrote in his memoir *Being Red*, Fast used it:

. . . there in prison I began to think of Spartacus, the slave . . . I read every scrap and thread of information that I could find in that small prison library. I read whatever there was about Rome—precious little . . . I found the story of Spartacus—and became convinced that there was a way to tell it so that it could at least approximate the truth.

Only two hundred miles away from where Howard Fast was confined, Dalton Trumbo was serving his own contempt sentence in Ashland, Kentucky.

His “name” became Federal Prisoner #7551.

Trumbo never made any apologies for himself or for his actions. After his release he wrote this to a friend:

. . . show me the man who informs on friends who have harmed no one, and who thereafter earns money he could not have earned before, and I will show you not a decent citizen, not a patriot, but a miserable scoundrel who will, if new pressures arise and the price is right, betray not just his friends but his country itself.

What happened to Dalton Trumbo and Howard Fast that summer set in motion a sequence of events that would profoundly change my life.

But I didn't know it then.



Globe Photo

My family was very lucky. I was never blacklisted.

CHAPTER TWO

“Good luck, and may fortune smile upon . . . most of you.”

—Peter Ustinov as Lentulus Batiatus

IN THE SUMMER OF 1950, both Dalton Trumbo and Howard Fast were languishing in dank prison cells thousands of miles from their homes and families. Each man had to be wondering what the future had in store for him.

The fear that caused their imprisonment was still on the rise. Another round of congressional hearings aimed at Hollywood was already being planned. But, looking back on it with some distance—and I’m almost ashamed to admit it—my own life couldn’t have been much better. I was untouched by the blacklist and, frankly, I wasn’t thinking a lot about it. The world was in turmoil—a hot war in Korea, a cold war with the Soviets, suspicion and division in America—yet I was lucky. None of that was affecting me.

The big events happening in my life were all on the home front. I was thirty-three years old and married to a beautiful girl named Diana Dill, another of my classmates from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. She was so beautiful that she had appeared on the cover of *Life*. Somehow I got hold of a copy of the magazine while I was in the navy. I showed it to my shipmates and told them I was going to marry her.

I did and we had two wonderful boys, Michael and Joel. (Our marriage didn’t survive, but our family did. Diana and I remain good friends. My wife, Anne, calls her “our ex-wife.”)

By 1950, believe it or not, I was a bona fide movie star. I had played everything from a boxer to a police detective to a trumpet player. *Champion*, my eighth film, had been released in 1949. It earned me my first Academy Award nomination for Best Actor. Even the tough *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther had positive things to say about me: “Kirk Douglas does a good, aggressive job . . .”

And the money! My God. I was making more money than I’d ever dreamed of. My six sisters and I grew up during the Depression era. Our family struggled every day for bread and borscht. My mother struggled every day with my father.

Home was Amsterdam, New York, a small city north of Albany. When I was growing up, it was known primarily for carpet making. If you didn’t have a job at one of the two big carpet companies—Bigelow-Sanford or Mohawk Mills—you had a hard time getting by. My father worked as a ragman, riding up and down the streets of Amsterdam collecting rags and scrap metal for resale. What money he did make often went to the saloons instead of to our family.

Now I was earning more in one year—in one *picture*—than my father made in his entire life.

In Kentucky, Dalton Trumbo was earning only prison wages.

Just a few years earlier, he had been Hollywood's highest-paid screenwriter at \$75,000 a picture.

Although he was no longer pitching projects to Howard Hawks or Victor Fleming, his eloquent voice was still being heard, at least by those who cared to listen.

During his many months alone in that tiny cell, he wrote poignantly about his confinement. His writing was as candid as ever. This letter was sent to his wife, Cleo:

Two days hence will be our thirteenth wedding anniversary and I have been lying here on my bunk, thinking about it . . . more and more I realize that when I emerge from here, I must make the choice of what kind of writer I want to be. I think it would be better for all of us if I returned to writing novels, with the occasional foray into theater. It will probably take years to recover from the blow dealt by the blacklist.

Sadly, he was proven right.

Howard Fast was released from prison on August 29, 1950. Never a heavy man, he was now twenty-eight pounds lighter. Like Dalton Trumbo, Fast had been thinking a lot about his writing career. But unlike Trumbo, never for an instant did he consider changing it.

He had always been a novelist. He was determined to remain one.

Fast spent the next nine months writing what he hoped would become his magnum opus—a novel he called *Spartacus*. Plunging himself into the research, he made an extensive study of slavery and the methods of imprisonment practiced in ancient Rome.

He did this even as his own freedom as an American citizen was being systematically reduced and restricted. All in the name of keeping America “safe.”

Even when Fast finished serving his sentence and was technically a “free man,” his political views still cost him. He was banned from speaking on college campuses. He was under constant surveillance. J. Edgar Hoover took a personal interest in his activities—Fast's FBI file grew to over eleven hundred pages.

When he wanted to travel to Italy to do primary research on the life of Spartacus, Fast was denied a passport. It would be ten years until he was able to obtain one.

Despite all these obstacles, Howard Fast finished *Spartacus* in June of 1951.

Writing the book was the easy part. Selling it was not. The blacklist had found its way into the publishing business as well.

Fast sent *Spartacus* to Little, Brown, the respected New England literary house that had published three of his previous books. After reading the manuscript, the editor was excited and eager to take it on, but a few weeks later, he called Fast back to say the house was passing. Fast soon found out why. As it happened, an FBI agent had been sent to Boston to meet with the president of Little, Brown.

Privately, he had “advised” him not to publish *anything* written by Howard Fast. If he did, the age went on to say, action would be taken against his company. These instructions, the Little, Brown executive was told, came directly from J. Edgar Hoover.

Six more publishing houses turned *Spartacus* down. Fast was left with no alternative but to publish it himself. He and his wife turned their New York City basement into a shipping room and within four months they had printed and sold forty-eight thousand hardcover copies of *Spartacus*. Out of his basement!

The “unbiased” critics ridiculed the book as poorly written, even though Fast’s other books were highly praised and had sold millions of copies around the world. The *New York Times* writer couldn’t figure out why Fast even bothered to write it, since “every schoolboy knows by now that Roman civilization began to suffer from dry rot long before the advent of the Caesars.”

Replying to that critic in *Being Red* many years after the fact, Fast wrote:

It would be a safe bet to say that before the appearance of my book and the film that Kirk Douglas made from it ten years later, not one schoolboy in ten thousand had ever heard of Spartacus.

While Howard Fast was shipping copies of *Spartacus* out of his basement, Dalton Trumbo was finally released from the federal penitentiary in Kentucky. Almost immediately he took Cleo and the three children and moved to Mexico.

I heard about this in the same way we all did, in hushed tones and whispered conversations.

“Did you hear about Dalton Trumbo?”

“Yeah, Mexico, I think.”

“That poor bastard.”

“Those poor kids.”

“I hear Eddie Dmytryk is cooperating now.”

“Well, what would *you* do if you were him?”

That was a question I didn’t have to answer, except for myself. No one was questioning my patriotism or keeping me from finding work. What *would* I have done if that had suddenly changed? Although Diana and I were, by this point, divorced, I was still responsible for two young children. Would I give up my career on principle? Go to jail?

Eddie Dmytryk did. At least it started out that way.

Like Dalton Trumbo, Dmytryk, an Oscar-nominated director whose nickname was “Mr. RKO” was one of the original Unfriendly Ten. He had also refused to cooperate with HUAC. And he, too, was jailed for contempt of Congress in the same West Virginia penitentiary as Howard Fast.

On September 9, 1950, five days after his forty-second birthday, and after having spent months

prison, Dmytryk finally had enough. The warden witnessed his statement:

. . . in view of the troubled state of current world affairs I find myself in the presence of an even greater duty and that is . . . to make it perfectly clear that I am not now nor was at the time of the hearings . . . a member of the Communist Party . . . and that I recognize the United States of America as the only country to which I owe allegiance and loyalty.

Despite renouncing his views, he wasn't released until December. Eddie Dmytryk returned to California a chastened man. He *had* been a Communist once, but he had no use for them anymore. Eddie's attorney was Bartley Crum, a liberal Republican who later committed suicide because he, too, became tainted as a Commie sympathizer. Even Republicans weren't safe from this guilt-by-association madness.

Crum believed that the best way to get Dmytryk off the blacklist was by returning him to the scene of his "crime." So on April 25, 1951, Eddie Dmytryk once again testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee. This time he identified twenty-six people as having been members of the Communist Party.

One of those he named was a writer named Arnold Manoff, whose wife, a twenty-three-year-old actress named Lee Grant, had made her film debut a month earlier in a picture called *Detective Story*. I was the lead. She had a small part; she played a shoplifter.

Lee was only a kid, a beautiful young girl with extraordinary talent and a big future. You could see it. She was so good that she earned a Best Supporting Actress nomination for her very first film role.

But because Eddie Dmytryk named her husband, Lee Grant was blacklisted before her film career even had a chance to begin. Of course, she refused to testify about the man to whom she was married and it took years before anyone would hire her for another picture.

One day, Charlie Feldman—the top man at Famous Artists Agency—called and asked me for a favor. This was a first for me. Before I hit it big with *Champion*, Charlie often kept me waiting for hours when we had an appointment. I'd be told he was too busy—come back another time.

So when your agent calls and asks *you* for a favor, it's one of those moments when you look at the phone in your hand like you've never seen it before. You think to yourself, *How did it come to this?*

"Kirk, I need you to do me a favor."

"Name it, Charlie."

"You know that director Eddie Dmytryk? He's a client of ours and I'm trying to put a deal together for him with Harry Cohn at Columbia. It's not going to be easy . . . I'm pulling a lot of strings. I think we can get it for him, but it's gonna take some time."

I was silent. I had played a fighter. I could see a punch coming.

Feldman threw it. “Can you help him find something, Kirk? He needs work *now*. He’s got a new wife and a young family. His ex-wife took him for everything in the divorce and this whole Communist thing . . .”

“Done. Have him call me.”

“You mean it?!”

“Of course I mean it. I’ve got a lot of scripts that need reading. I can use the help.”

Charlie exhaled. “Thanks, Kirk. But you know . . .”

“Know what?”

“There are a lot of people still pissed off at him. I wouldn’t want you to get caught up in any of that.”

“Charlie, I’m a big boy. You’ve already sold me the car—now stop kicking the tires. Have him call me.”

Eddie Dmytryk came to work for me. He helped me with scripts. I took him out to dinner, to football games, to social gatherings. I wasn’t afraid to be seen with him in public.

Eventually, he got a movie and then Stanley Kramer signed him to a multipicture deal. (Yes, the same Stanley Kramer who bailed out on Carl Foreman. Maybe he was feeling guilty.)

After that I never heard from Eddie. Not even a postcard.

Fast-forward to 1953. I’m in Israel making *The Juggler* for . . . Stanley Kramer. He can’t wait for me to meet our director. Yeah, you guessed it. His name was Eddie.

The funny part is that Dmytryk never told Stanley that we’d met before. The job, the dinners, the games—all that had apparently slipped his mind in only a few years. So who was *I* to bring it up?

That was sixty years ago. If I knew then that he had named names, I’m not sure I would have given Eddie Dmytryk anything more than a swift kick in the ass. It’s one thing to protect your family or even yourself. That I can understand. But ruining other people’s lives just to get your old job back?

Orson Welles put it best: “Friend informed on friend not to save their lives, but to save the swimming pools.”

While I was in Tel Aviv shooting *The Juggler* for the now-employable Eddie Dmytryk, Dalton Trumbo was still living in Mexico City. He was part of a colony of other blacklisted writers that included Ring Lardner Jr. and Albert Maltz.

Trumbo was reduced to writing stories for women’s magazines under his wife’s maiden name. One editor wrote back, impressed, saying that “she” had real talent and should consider writing as a career. Years later, Dalton could finally joke with me about that story.

You need to understand one essential truth about Dalton Trumbo: he *needed* to write. It was integral to his nature as breathing, maybe more. This is a man who exercised by walking around h

pool while chain-smoking.

Even while on the blacklist, Dalton continued to smoke, drink, and churn out stories and screenplays at an astonishing rate. None of them, however, could safely bear the name “Trumbo.” So he invented as many as a dozen other names for his work, which was then “fronted” for him by sympathetic friends.

One of those friends, the writer Ian McLellan Hunter, shopped around an original story of Trumbo’s, a romantic comedy about a princess who falls in love with a reporter. I still didn’t know Trumbo at this point, but I’d just finished shooting *Detective Story* with William Wyler who told me that this script—the title was *Roman Holiday*—had come to him after Frank Capra passed on directing it.

“Why did Capra pass?” I asked Willy. “It sounds like a great story and you’d get to shoot it in Rome.”

I had never been to Europe, but my close friend and business adviser, Sam Norton, was encouraging me to make movies out of the country. There were apparently tax breaks you could get by living abroad for long stretches.

Wyller had heard this too, but business wasn’t what was on his mind. It was politics.

“Capra passed because he smelled a Red,” replied Willy. “He thinks this story was written by some guy on the blacklist and he wants no part of it.” He ran his hand through his thick black hair and stared off into the middle distance. Finally, he spoke again; his tone had turned pensive.

“It’s starting up again, Kirk. You saw what happened with Eddie Dmytryk.”

Wyller was one of the most successful, respected directors in the history of the business. He had been one of the founders of the Committee for the First Amendment. He wasn’t afraid of anybody. Yet here he was thinking about whether doing a picture about a princess and a reporter might get him in trouble with the United States Congress.

This was insanity. Before I could say that, Wyler sent a chill up my spine, “I hear that Gadg might cooperate too.”

“Gadg” was Elia Kazan. The following year Kazan named eight names, including the playwright Clifford Odets. Wyler was on a plane to Rome almost immediately after that, having concluded that there was more to be gained by leaving the country during this new round of inquisitions.

A few months later, I began my own odyssey abroad. I did *The Juggler* in Israel, *Act of Love* in Paris, and *Ulysses* in Rome. Sam Norton was wrong. There were no tax benefits from working abroad but I didn’t know that then. Nor would I have cared.

I was head over heels in love with a twenty-year-old Italian actress named Pier Angeli. Or so I thought. We got engaged soon after we met.

She was all that I thought about, morning, noon, and night. (Only later did I discover that while Pier might have been thinking about me in the morning, she was also thinking about several other men

in the afternoon and evening.)

Who was it who said that life is what happens to you when you're busy making other plans?

I *did* meet the love of my life in Europe. But it wasn't Pier Angeli.

Her name was Anne Buydens. She was born in Germany and grew up in Belgium and Switzerland. We met in Paris while I was shooting *Act of Love*, and we were married in the United States on May 29, 1954. I have never loved anyone more than I do Anne. In fact, she *is* my life. She saved it in more ways than I can count and continues to do so every day.

When Anne and I returned to the United States, the political climate was starting to shift back from the near hysteria that had gripped the country when I'd left. Senator Joe McCarthy's wild accusations of Communist infiltration had begun to backfire. He took on the United States Army in nationally televised hearings, which finally revealed him for the vicious demagogue that he was.

Even newlyweds like Anne and me watched on TV. We sat mesmerized when, on June 9, 1954, the army's chief counsel, Joseph Welch, looked straight at McCarthy and asked him: "Have you no sense of decency, sir? At long last, have you left no sense of decency?"

Finally, the American people realized that he did not. For the first time that summer, a majority told the Gallup poll they disapproved of the senator from Wisconsin. His colleagues, now free of the fear that one of them could be his next target, voted overwhelmingly to condemn him in December. He remained in the Senate, a broken man.

President Eisenhower coined the term "McCarthy-wasm" to describe the long-awaited end of the evil man's crusade of terror and intimidation. But the blacklist survived—Hollywood hell-bent on persecuting itself.

January 1, 1955. The New Year dawned with great promise. After spending most of the last two years traveling the world, I was finally back in the United States. I woke up that morning with my beautiful new wife at my side. We had bought a home on San Ysidro Drive in Beverly Hills—a small place more like a bachelor pad, with barely enough room for Michael and Joel when they came from New York. Anne and I would quickly start looking for a bigger place, with an eye to expanding our family in the near future.

We didn't have long to wait. Anne soon told me that we'd be expecting our first child in November.

My family was starting to grow. The country was coming to its senses.

I decided to take a chance on something that I'd been wanting to do for a long time. I would finally become my own boss.

The studio system was weakening. Independent producers like Stanley Kramer and the Mirisch brothers were developing pictures and then getting studios like United Artists to finance them. Now some actors were doing the same thing, cutting out the middlemen and developing their own projects.

Before I had much time to consider the risks, I was one of them.

My friend Burt Lancaster paved the way, with his partner Harold Hecht. By a stroke of luck Hecht-Lancaster hired a television writer named Paddy Chayevsky to write a small picture about a lonely, unattractive butcher named Marty. It won an Oscar for Ernie Borgnine and was named the Best Picture of 1955. Before he knew it, Burt was no longer just a movie star—he was making *other* people into stars.

I made my decision. I started my own production company. The name was easy. I called it “Bryna,” my mother’s original Russian name.

When she heard what the company would be called, Ma, who could barely read or write a word of English, wrote me this note (almost certainly with the help of one of my sisters):

God bless you my son. Mother.

I will leave that note to my grandchildren. It will help them understand the miracles that this simple woman witnessed in her lifetime.

I interviewed a lot of people to come work for me at my new company. The first one I hired was a young producer named Eddie Lewis. He made me an offer that I couldn’t refuse: “Kirk, I want the job. I’ll work for you for free.”

The first Bryna production was a western called *Indian Fighter*. I would star in it, along with a new film actor named Walter Matthau. Matthau was a trained stage actor, very successful on Broadway.

We got on well. Like me, Walter was the son of Russian immigrants. There we were, two Jewish cowboys from New York riding horses together on a wilderness trail in Oregon.

This is how good an actor Walter was. His first two pictures were westerns and he *hated* horses. He was afraid of them. Every time Walter got up on a horse, he’d start cursing . . . in Yiddish. “Goddamn, mamzer! You worthless piece of drek, you should be in a glue factory!”

But on film, he was as convincing as Tom Mix. Brilliant actor, funny guy.

We were shooting the picture on location in Oregon. I’d already cast my ex-wife, Diana, for an important supporting role. But we still needed an exotic beauty for the part of the Indian maiden, my character’s romantic interest.

While my staff was scrambling to find just the right girl, Anne was at home looking through *Vogue*. She saw a picture of a model, a beautiful young Italian girl named Elsa Martinelli. Anne showed me the magazine. “Don’t you think she would make a fantastic Indian girl?”

I tracked down Elsa in New York City. She could barely speak English and, more to the point, she didn’t believe it was *me* on the phone.

In order to convince her that I was me, she insisted that I sing her the song from *20,000 Leagues*

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