

'WAS THAT A NAME I DROPPED?' IS ENJOYABLE

By Tommy Garrett

BEVERLY HILLS—"Was That a Name I Dropped?" is the most riveting book I've encountered over the past several weeks. In a very intense and hyper-intelligent story, Paul Brogan details his life growing up as a gay man in a small town in the Northeast. The author also writes about battling such intense depression that he attempted suicide.

His book is a cautionary tale of what happens when a young, brilliant man arrives in Hollywood to succeed in a tough industry, only to be blessed and honored by the presence of dear friends, who managed to see the good in him. Those friends happen to be some of the most successful women in Hollywood.

The tome is filled with what seems like unbelievable, but very truthful anecdotal information including very exciting stories of encountering many celebrities. The moral of his story is to believe in yourself, trust your instincts, surround yourself with the best of friends and good people and not be afraid to reach for the stars.

The Aberdeen Bay publication was released in April, but it's a story that should be on the shelves of everyone who loves Hollywood history. Doris Day, Eileen Fulton (who is affectionately referred to as "Diva" in this wonderful book), Elizabeth Taylor and Katharine Hepburn.

The reclusive Doris Day said in part about the au-

thor, "Paul Brogan is such an old and dear friend."

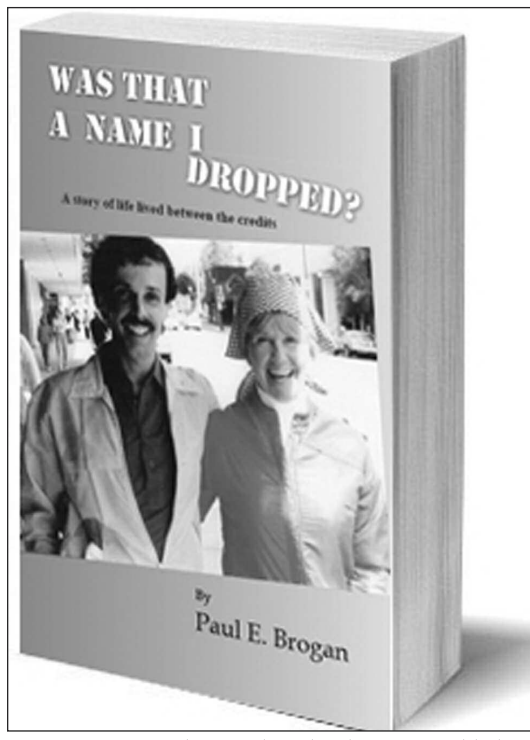
While Katharine Hepburn said in 1994, "Paul is fascinating and a good friend."

In 1995, Bel Air violet-eyed beauty Dame Elizabeth Taylor said of Brogan, "All of us who can count on Paul as a friend are blessed by his warmth, generosity and kindness."

What is not hidden in this book is the author's intense respect and loyalty to those in the entertainment business and his private life who were kind and good to him. You realize when you read this wonderful biography that he offers a level of respect, admiration and honesty to his famous friends, who most of all need those things from him.

Perhaps it was being raised by two very loving, strong and supportive parents in Concord, N.H. that gave the young boy the courage to leave the picturesque Norman Rockwell-like region and arrive in Los Angeles —where dreams often become nightmares. That 3,000-mile trek from New Hampshire to Hollywood was paved with stones, each one a mountain to climb for the handsome writer. But he was determined, and he did make it in Hollywood!

Brogan has one thing to look back on from his decades of pain and suffering. He enjoyed every positive experience he had with his many brushes with fame, but he grew from every adversity he encoun-



Book cover by: Aberdeen Bay Publishing

tered. He chronicles a story that is beautiful even though he often faced brutality but did so with dignity. Reading his life story leaves one weeping with admiration, not pity.

Brogan never gossips, snipes or tells secrets from the many dinner parties he once attended. The book tells even more genuine stories of his own experiences with people that most readers will never have the opportunity to know on a personal level, but know from film and television.

I rarely vouch an author I review, just the book itself. However, Brogan and I have known all of the same people for almost the same amount of time, and I can say that he's not only telling

very truthful stories and situations about his life, his family and friends, but he does so with integrity.

There are few gay men who have encountered true Hollywood and survived. There are even fewer who are still beloved by the iconic stars and famous actors and actresses that he has been friends with all of these years. Brogan is a rare gem on the planet, and his book "Was That a Name I Dropped?" is even more rare. It is a must-read, an incredible journey and the fastest and most enticing 532 pages I have enjoyed in years.

"Was That a Name I Dropped?" is available on Amazon and at booksellers around the nation.

NIGHT SCHOOL 33: DOOMSDAY

By Grady Miller

SUN VALLEY—After dismissing students early, much to their delight, Jason headed for the Doomsday Summit. As power was saved and janitorial staff cut, a growing darkness hugged the ceilings of the open air halls. A dark so dark that Jason could barely see his shoes, so he clung to the walkways.

Jason was the moth drawn to the light. He entered the library where the meeting had first been scheduled (he hadn't read the third revised memo, alas) and there stood Suzanne, flooded in light.

"May I help you sir?" a production grunt blocked his path. It was weird to expect a meeting and then walk into a movie set. Weirder still to see his ex-wife on it.

"He's O.K.," Suzanne told the grunt.

"Yes, Miss Katselas," the grunt said.

"So it's Miss Katselas," Jason said.

"Jason, don't feel bad," Suzanne said. "I know it seems like I have everything I wanted and that you wish you had."

"I'm not envious," Jason said. His mouth was grinning, his eyes were crying.

"If you knew what we've been through today, you wouldn't envy me: 5:30 a.m. call time. They've been feeding us pages at the last minute," Suzanne said.

"Where's Kit?" Jason asked. "My roommate picked her up from school," Suzanne said.

"Oh," Jason said, and tortured himself with the thought that he had forgotten to lock the door to Suzanne's apartment.

"Did you remember to lock the apartment?" Suzanne

asked. "Excuse me, Suzy," Jason said quickly. "I really must go to a meeting."

"You called me Suzy!" Suzanne said.

Suzanne saw only his retreating back.

The prolonged silences of the grim meeting were punctuated by a director's cry of action and girls hysterically giggling in the library—take after take—and shushed by a librarian. Mr. Leonard, Jason's partner at San Anselmo, walked in late. On his way to his chair on the raised platform, where I the Jefferson High School band sat he paused, standing at the decrepit piano and played a sassy flourish and belted out a Brooklyn baritone: "Guadalajara, Guadalajara...! Guadalajara, Guadalajara...!"

"Wow, you can really play, Mr. Leonard," exclaimed Principal Cloud.

"I can fake it," Mr. Leonard said.

"Let's begin," Roxie said. "There's good news and bad news. You can see what is happening downtown. Adult ed only occupies a small corner of the floor that used to be a hive humming with activity. You look out on a sea of empty desks. You know a family is suffering behind every empty desk. You could roll a bowling ball across the carpet and never hit somebody's ankle. Makes you wanna cry."

"Was that the good news or the bad news?" said Mr. Perlmutter.

"That's the good news," said Roxie. A few chuckles turned into a roar of laughter. Roxie continued:

"We already have the slips for



Principal Foote's Desk.

Photo by Jocelyn Holt

summer and fall assignments. We did the best we could."

Jason looked at the paper he was handed, his expression unchanging.

At Jason's side, Mr. Leonard gaped at the paper. He looked around furtively, balled up the paper and slipped away. Janet Gilmore was teary, her eyes crushed sapphire. Jason's actor kicked in and he turned up the wattage on a smile directed at her:

"You just see, Janet. Tomorrow this will all clear up," Jason said.

"A positive development is we won't depend so much on attendance," Roxie kept speaking. "Now the stress will be on the state exam, which will give us benchmarks (i.e. cashola). It doesn't mean stop counting heads. It means do what you do best: keep engaging the students and keep 'em coming."

The meeting adjourned. Principal Cloud avoided questions and slipped away without ever removing her sunglasses.

Afterward, the teachers yearned to hug and huddle in the chill darkness. They were crushed. They groped for connection, but no one was going to Big Jakes tonight! they were waiting for payday and each was left with words strangled and the regret of not having hugged.

The school-wide intercom crackled to life. Roxie's voice resounded in the darkness. "Will the plant manager please turn on some lights so the teachers can see their way back to their cars? Over and out." There was a pause, followed by the invariable post script: "Excuse the interruption; we're not sure if the PA system was switched on, if you heard the previous message. Please disregard this message."

Teachers who walked in total darkness were, for a fleeting moment, able to summon a chuckle. Bless Roxie Cloud. There is change; some things never change.

(to be continued)

LEGEND ESTHER WILLIAMS, EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Tommy Garrett

BEVERLY HILLS—Born in Los Angeles 90 years ago today, Esther Williams is the fifth child of Lou and Bula Williams. "This one's for laughs," her mother said. Esther Williams grew up swimming in playground pools and surfing at local beaches. Young Esther got her first job at 8 years old counting towels at an Inglewood pool, the one her mother campaigned to have built for the neighborhood, earning an hour of swimming for each 100 towels counted. By age 14, she won a municipal swimming championship and was taken on at Los Angeles Athletic Club by the city's leading women's coach, Aileen Allen, who helped Esther develop her style. She won the Women's Outdoor Nationals in the 100 meter freestyle, added further crowns in the 100 and 50 meter breaststroke events, and swam the anchor lap for the team that cut nine seconds for the world medley relay record.

By age 16, she represented the powerful Los Angeles Athletic Club swim team and had earned three national championships in both the breaststroke and freestyle. Esther was not only fast, but she was beautiful! The sports writer's favorite aqua-belle won three berths on the U.S. Olympic team headed for Helsinki, Finland in May 1940 when World War II intervened, canceling the games along with her hopes for the gold and international fame. Williams decided to go pro and switched from breaking pool records to breaking records at the box office.

Still, she was attracting attention in other ways. In 1940 newspaper sports reporting, swimmers were frequently lined up for cheesecake photos, flashing big smiles and lots of leg. With her stunning good looks and tall, muscular frame, Esther was a standout! MGM executives spotted her as Johnny Weissmuller's costar in Billy Rose's "San Francisco Aquacade." It didn't take long for legendary showman Billy Rose to notice the photogenic champion. Rose needed a female

lead to star opposite Olympian and screen star Johnny Weissmuller in his "San Francisco Aquacade" review. He invited Williams up for an audition and, so the story goes, Weissmuller himself picked her out of a casting call of 75 hopefuls. Her performing career had begun. Possessing the quintessential combination of glamour and athleticism, Esther Williams swam her way to stardom in such timeless motion pictures as "Bathing Beauty," "Neptune's Daughter," and "Million Dollar Mermaid." Throughout her illustrious film career, she swam more than 1,250 miles in 25 aquamusicals for MGM and continually proved that she was a champion in the pool and at the box office. A champion, an American dream, her name is synonymous with swimming. Her biography reads like a treatment for a film in which only someone like Esther Williams could star.

"The Aquacade" was a true spectacle - a Broadway musical in swimsuits complete with hundreds of swimmers, divers, singing and special effects. Williams starred as Aqua-belle Number One, performing choreographed duet swims with Aquadonis Number One (Weissmuller). In a memo to his publicity department, Rose explained that, "I want to pivot everything around Williams. It is up to us to make this girl known up and down the coast."

MGM executives who saw her in the "Aquacade" agreed. After a year of being hounded by the studio, they offered Williams a screen test - paired with none other than Clark Gable. Gable liked her, the studio liked her, and she was signed to a contract with Louis B. Mayer in October 1941. She made her screen debut alongside Mickey Rooney in "Andy Hardy's Double Life" in which she gave the popular hero his first kiss - underwater. As Williams explains, "The popular Andy Hardy series movies were MGM's tests for its promising stars such as Judy Garland, Lana Turner and Don-

na Reed. If you didn't make it in those pictures, you were never heard from again." By her third film, "Bathing Beauty," Esther was a full-fledged star.

The audience response to the athletic All-American girl was phenomenal, and the studio put Williams' career into high gear. For over a decade, Esther reigned in a new Hollywood genre created just for her: The aquamusical. Midway through filming "Mr. Coed" with Red Skelton, they changed the name of the movie to "Bathing Beauty" and made Esther Williams the star, demoting Skelton to supporting lead.

"Bathing Beauty" was Hollywood's first swimming movie, and it created a new genre that was perfectly suited to Esther's beauty and athletic skills. A special 90-foot square, 20-foot deep pool was built at Stage 30 on the MGM lot, complete with hydraulic lifts, hidden air hoses and special camera cranes for overhead shots. Over the years, MGM concocted dozens of pretenses for getting her in water, calling on the great Busby Berkeley to design some of the more lavish production numbers to show off Esther's assets. "No one had ever done a swimming movie before," Williams tells Canyon News, "so we just made it up as we went along. I ad-libbed all my own underwater movements." It worked. As a matter of fact, the picture "Bathing Beauty" was the most successful film of 1944. Especially notable are the spectacular sequences in "Million Dollar Mermaid," complete the Annette Kellerman story with fountains, flames and smoke, and "Easy to Love," for which she learned to water-ski.

During the mid '40s, the MGM musicals were the most popular form of entertainment in the world. By the tail end of World War II, Williams was a pin-up favorite with returning GIs. Meanwhile, MGM's publicity mill kept churning out headlines and photo opportunities - she once counted 14 magazines on a local

newsstand featuring her picture on the cover. Esther Williams was America's sweetheart for more than 18 years, appearing in 26 movies from the early 1940s to the end of the 1950s, all but the last few for MGM. By 1953, the foreign press voted Esther the most popular actress in 50 countries. Along with international stardom, she must be credited for part of the U.S. boom in swim athletics and the sales of swimming pools and swimsuits.

Although she had a few dry-land roles in such films as "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," it was the lavish water spectacles that made her a top box-office draw and that became her cinematic trademark. Like ice skater Sonja Henie before her, Williams was one of the few female athletes to successfully cross over to widespread entertainment success. Her movie career played a major role in the promotion of competitive and synchronized swimming, which she is credited with popularizing. To millions of fledgling water ballerinas, she is the personification of synchronized swimming, a sport that reached world-class status in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games.

Moviemaking was exhausting work. Williams estimates that she swam more than 1,000 collective miles while making her movies and was in the water so many hours each day that she took naps with her legs on the pool deck and her head floating in the water. Yet Esther found time to marry three times during her movie career (last to Fernando Lamas). Esther has three children (Benjamin, Kimball and Susan) from her second marriage to radio singer Ben Gage. She is presently married to Edward Bell, a former actor and producer. "I don't know to this day how I managed to fit into those bathing suits when I was pregnant," Williams shares with Canyon News, "but I did." She still refers to each child by the movie she was making before they were born.

"There I was, diving off platforms with Ben in 'Neptune's Daughter,' going underwater in silver lame with Kim in 'Pagan Love Song' and learning how to water ski with Susie in 'Easy to Love,' and somehow I stayed a size 10 through it all."

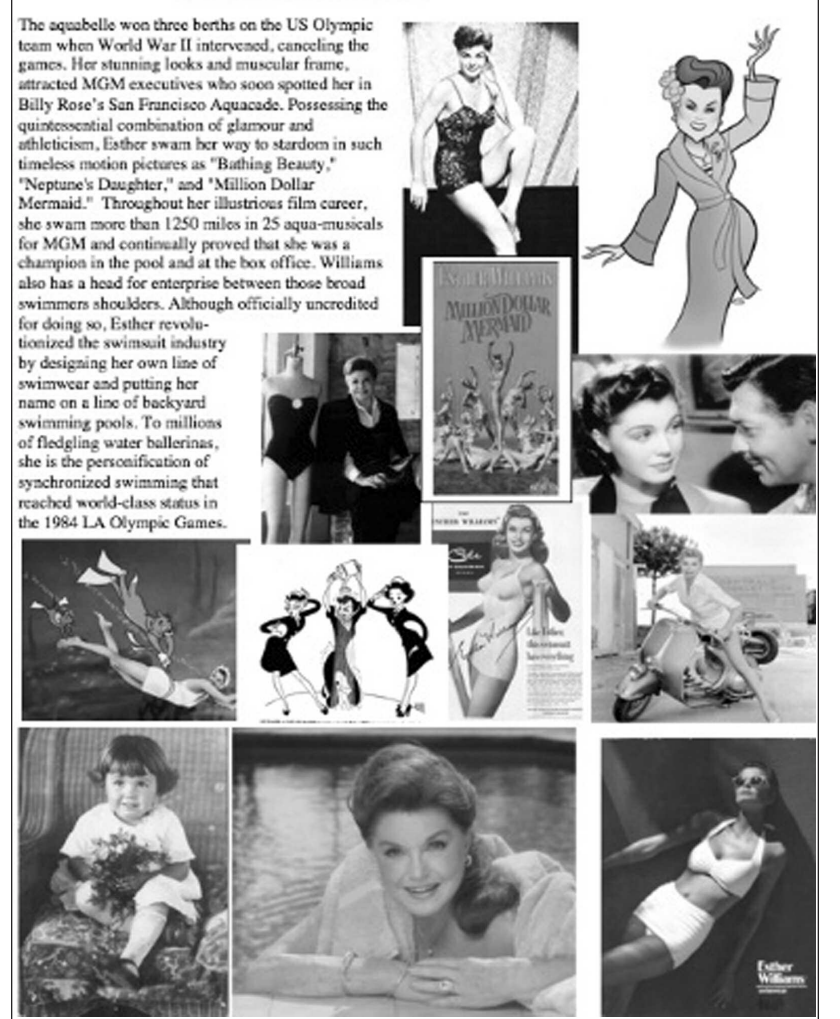
Williams has proven a head for enterprise between those broad swimmer's shoulders. "I got into business because I knew those musicals couldn't go on forever. In fact, I was doing some department store modeling at the time, and I told my bosses to hold my job. This movie-making thing wouldn't last. I mean, how many swimming movies could they make?"

When someone came to her with the idea of putting her name on a line of backyard swimming pools, she agreed. Twenty-five years later, Esther Williams is the most well-known name in both the above and in-ground pool business today. Her affordable Esther Williams's backyard swimming pools and spas keep millions of Americans cool and healthy during the hot summer months.

Although officially uncredited for doing so, Esther revolutionized the swimsuit industry. During the time she was rapidly becoming the most famous swimmer in the world and the star of the only aquatic-themed musicals, the effects of WWII had greatly limited the availability of fabrics. The bathing suit industry was limping along with suits made of shirred cotton and lingerie satin, which was very fragile when stretched, and other equally un-swimmable and unflattering fabric. Lycra/Spandex had not yet been invented and the only stretchable material was latex thread, which was not available due to the war. Working with her noted costume designer, Irene, on the wardrobe for "Bathing Beauty," Esther decided swimsuits needed to stretch in order to be beautiful. Determined to get what they needed, they located and convinced a textile firm to incorporate latex into fabric. The result was a hot pink

ESTHER WILLIAMS

The aquabelle won three berths on the US Olympic team when World War II intervened, canceling the games. Her stunning looks and muscular frame, attracted MGM executives who soon spotted her in Billy Rose's San Francisco Aquacade. Possessing the quintessential combination of glamour and athleticism, Esther swam her way to stardom in such timeless motion pictures as "Bathing Beauty," "Neptune's Daughter," and "Million Dollar Mermaid." Throughout her illustrious film career, she swam more than 1250 miles in 25 aquamusicals for MGM and continually proved that she was a champion in the pool and at the box office. Williams also has a head for enterprise between those broad swimmer's shoulders. Although officially uncredited for doing so, Esther revolutionized the swimsuit industry by designing her own line of swimwear and putting her name on a line of backyard swimming pools. To millions of fledgling water ballerinas, she is the personification of synchronized swimming that reached world-class status in the 1984 LA Olympic Games.



satin latex used to fashion the now legendary suit from the movie. Esther continued her involvement with designing swimwear in all 25 of her subsequent films. Women everywhere no longer settle for traditional clumsy suits and demanded suits like those they saw on Esther Williams. They wanted glamour and refinement. The industry had to respond, changing the look of swimwear forever. Esther continues to design beautiful swimwear with her Esther Williams Swimsuit Collection, reflecting the glamour and styles so uniquely a part of Hollywood's legendary swim star and based on the retrospective look of her full-cut movie swimsuit designs. There's also a line of fitness swimsuits in the works. "I'm reading my mail carefully," she says. "Somebody has to give a little thought to the woman who has nursed a baby and I want to apply my knowledge of what feels good in the water for that woman. I think there's a void in the market right now for that kind of swimsuit." In addition,

her instructional videotapes teach parents how to keep their babies safe, and her aqua-aerobic equipment keeps us all fit and healthy year-round.

Her appearances at openings and benefits usually cause a sensation. "When I go to business conventions for my products, it sometimes takes me over four hours to sign all the autographs and pose for pictures," Esther tells Canyon News. "Everyone wants a photo for their store, and I never turn anyone down, no matter how long it takes."

Williams has had a full life, as an athlete, movie star, mother, businesswoman, spokesperson and an inspiration to millions. But the one thing that binds it all together - the one thing that keeps her going - is her connection to water and to swimming. "I think the joy that showed through in my swimming movies comes from my lifelong love of the water," said Esther. "No matter what I was doing, the best I felt all day was when I was swimming."

Then there's her relationship with her children, all three of whom she taught to swim soon after birth. That's part of her philosophy about the magic of water. "One of the reasons I gave them this gift of swimming so early in their lives was because I loved having them with me in the water. And when I saw them take to it, it was a shared joy that we had in common," said the icon.

Esther Williams remains America's favorite swimming star. Her fans continue to honor her work. Asked if she still swims, actress Esther Williams concluded with laughter, saying, "You know, I always get asked that. Yes, I still swim. It's the only sport you can do from your first bath to your last without hurting yourself." For more information about Esther Williams or to view or purchase items in her swimwear collection, visit her website at Estherwilliams.com. Thanks to the iconic MGM mermaid for this interview a day before her 90th birthday. Many more, Miss Williams.