

THE SINGING MAN AND HIS THREE HOBBIES

I'm going to talk this evening about a relaxed, easy-going, golden-toned baritone, Bing Crosby. In the course of this talk I'll recite verses from his songs. You will all thank God that I will not sing them but feel free to hum along if you want. So let's take a stroll down Bing Crosby's memory lane.

Bing's home adjoined the famous Pebble Beach golf course, the most famous public course in the United States. He played there often carrying his respectful 2 stroke handicap, not bad for anybody but great for a song man.

Let's pause here, at the Pebble Beach Golf Course, actually named the Pebble Beach Golf Links, There the green fee is \$575, plus \$45 for a cart and \$140 for a single carrying caddy. Expensive? Yes. However, Pebble Beach is in fact a public course where anyone can have lunch indoors or out at the swank clubhouse. You can play without being a member and without a membership fee.

Bing treasured the 18th hole. Its fairway meanders close to the Pacific Ocean which crashes over rocks rolling eponymous

pebbles up onto the shore. This par five 18th is one of the most beautiful in the entire golf world. Bing may have been seen jauntily walking the fairway humming or softly singing a favorite tune Like

“When Irish eyes are smiling
Sure, tis like the morn in spring”

or

Oh Danny Boy, the pipes ,the pipes are calling
from glen to glen and down the mountainside
But come you back when summer’s in the meadow
Oh Danny Boy, Oh Danny Boy, I love you so.”

At Pebble Beach the par three 7th hole will etch your memory. This iconic, diminutive hole is only 106 yards long, known as the single best hole in all of golf. You have to hit your tee shot down hill, down hill to a mesmerizing green 40 feet below. The stunning beauty of the green surrounded by the crashing waves of the Pacific Ocean urges you to pause. You don’t want to continue, you just want to stand quietly being a part of the beauty.

Jack Nicklaus said “If I had to choose one golf course before I die it would be the Pebble Beech Golf Links.”

So onward with Bing Crosby who was disappointed that he was not drafted after the attack on Pearl Harbor. He was 38 years old with children. However, on January 29th 1942 he received a request from General Douglas MacArthur, via short wave, to bring his Crosby Show to the men on Corregidor, in the Philippines. He went where he sang after song appropriately "The Caissons Go Rolling Along."

Remember those lyrics:

"Over hill, over dale
As we hit the dusty trail
And the caissons go rolling along
In and out hear them shout
Counter march and right about
And the caissons go rolling along
Then its hi hi hee
In the field artillery
Shout out your numbers loud and strong
For wherever you go
You will always know
That the caisson go rolling along."

Bing participated in 70 performances for the armed services raising countless sums from the sale of War Bonds.

This singing man, over five decades, stacked up a plethora of awards. He was twice nominated for an Oscar as the best actor. He won the Oscar as the boyish Roman collared priest Father O'Malley in *Going My Way*. His other nomination for best actor was in *The Bell's of St. Mary's* where again he played Father O'Malley. This film also starred the beloved Ingrid Bergman. Bing joined the best of the best actors which included Marlon Brando, Gary Cooper, Spencer Tracy.

Bing tops the list in Oscars won for four songs *Sweet Leilani* in 1936, *White Christmas* in 1937, *Singing in the Rain* in 1942 and *Cool, Cool, Cool in the Evening* in 1944. He won the Grammy Hall of Fame award in 2002, 2004 and 2006. He won the Cecile B. DeMille Golden Globe award in 1960.

This singing three hobby man was one of the most popular entertainers in all of show business. He appeared in nearly one hundred films and sold over 500 million recordings. This enchanted multi-talented performer earned the love of millions of people.

In Bing's second hobby, Thoroughbred Horse racing he bought outstanding race horses . He sold several horses to Howell Howard whose son Lindsey partnered with Crosby at Binglin Stables in California. Howell Howard owned the famous triple crown winner War Admiral, sired by Man of War.

Remember that memorable match race between War Admiral and Seabiscuit at Pimlico just outside of Baltimore in 1938. Bing, watched Seabiscuit run just behind, then neck and neck, with War Admiral right up to the finish. The photo would show that Seabiscuit had won, had conquered the famous triple crown winner making War Admiral the Rear Admiral.

The third hobby had Bing casting a fly line to Salmon in Alaska or Marlin fishing in the Baja Peninsula He also flew into small lakes in Canada for trout fishing, catching rainbows and those gorgeous gold and silver spotted brown trout. My own favorite when fly fishing.

Writers have credited Crosby with helping John F. Kennedy become President of the United States. Recall in the 1928 presidential election that Herbert Hoover defeated Al Smith probably because Smith was a Catholic. Subsequently when JFK ran for President it seemed okay for him to be Catholic because

of the notoriety of so many Catholic movie stars such as Spencer Tracy, James Cagney, Maureen O'Hara, and of course Bing himself.

An incident occurred which, had it ended differently, may have impeded Kennedy from winning the election against Richard Nixon. JFK was requested by his sister Pat Lawford to stay as a guest in the house of Frank Sinatra, known then as the leader of the Rat Pack.

Jack Kennedy's much respected brother Bobby, raised holy hell because of Sinatra's well known associations with so many mafia criminals. Bobby was at the time furiously fighting organized crime. He told his brother JFK that if he was a guest at Sinatra's house he would become known as or associated with nefarious mafia types.

JFK asked his brother Bobby "who are these mafia guys?" Bobby responded to Jack, "People like, 3 fingers Brown Luchese, Jake, greasy thumb Guzik, Bugsy Siegel, and going back farther Meyer Lansky, Joe Adonis, Frank Costello and the old gang leader Al Capone. You cannot be President if you allow your name to be associated that bunch of criminals."

Bing Crosby had a home nearby. JFK went there rather than Sinatra's house.. Bing set aside a special room for Jack Kennedy

with its own private entrance. Who was a guest at exactly the same time ? Who was that guest?

Aha! the guest for the weekend, non other than, surprise, or no surprise, Marilyn Monroe. Rumors abounded that Marilyn and Jack had shared his bed room. The incident resulted in the often heard rumor that Jack Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe were coupleing together. Bobby Kennedy may have remarked “Bedding Marilyn trumps hanging out with Bugsy Siegel or three fingers Brown, safer and more fun.”

Bing Crosby, the crooner, sang his way to popularity. His most poplar song White Christmas, written by Irving Berlin, was introduced in the film Holiday Inn. Crosby’s softening voice sang the tunes:

I’m Dreaming of a While Christmas

Just like the ones I used to know

Where the tree tops glisten and children listen

To hear sleigh bells in the snow

I’m dreaming of a white Christmas With every Christmas Card I write.

May your days be merry and bright

And may all your Christmases be white.

This simple song and simple words rested in the minds of all of the many soldiers overseas in World War II. While hearing the song they envisioned they were at home, thus the enormous popularity.

The actual movie *White Christmas* featured Danny Kaye and Rosemary Clooney along with Bing Crosby. And the words,

“I’ll be home for Christmas

You can plan on me

Please have snow and missile toe and presents under the tree.”

During a long and fruitful career Bing sang many, many hit songs.

McNamara’s Band:

“Oh, the drums go bang and and the cymbals clang and the horns they blare away,

McCarthy pumps the the old bassoon while I the pipes do play...”

or

“Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative. Latch on to the affirmative, Don’t mess with Mr. in Between.”

High Society’s movie cast guaranteed its success. Cole Porter brought the music with stars Bing Crosby, Grace Kelly, Frank Sinatra and Louis Armstrong. Bing had stars alongside him in countless movies, Fred Astaire, Dorothy Lamour, Jane Wyman,

Bob Hope many times, William Holden, Barry Fitzgerald, Sammy Davis Jr. , Dean Martin.

Bing Crosby had just finished a round of golf in Spain in 1977. He said to his player companions “Nice round of golf fellas”, his final words. He died right then of a sudden unexpected heart attack.

So goodbye my friend Bing Crosby, you were versatile in musicals, drama, romantic comedies, and even a western, “Stagecoach”

While my personal love remains with opera, Beverly Sills, Luciano Pavarotti, Renee Fleming, songs like Danny Boy, Singing in the Rain or White Christmas... . they stand me up, straight and tall9 and..., I LISTEN.

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