

THE MAN

BEHIND THE NOSE

LARRY BOZO HARMON

WITH THOMAS SCOTT MCKENZIE

CANNIBALS AND STUPENDOUS TALES

ASSASSINS, ASTRONAUTS,



CUT ALONG THE DOTTED LINE

EXCLUSIVE EXCERPT from....

***THE MAN BEHIND THE NOSE:
Assassins, Astronauts, Cannibals and Other Stupendous Tales***

Did you hear the one about when Bozo the Clown ran for President and two assassination attempts were made on his life?

How about the time Bozo flew into the perilous jungles of New Guinea to see if he could not just survive but actually bond with dangerous cannibal tribes?

Well then, you must know about the time his size 83 AAA shoes saved him from being swallowed whole by a giant, murderous python in Thailand, right?

Then I guess you might not know as much as you think about the world's most famous clown. Sure, you know the giant shoes, the red bulbous nose, the big ruby smile, and the twin shocks of red yak-hair bursting from the sides of his head. And obviously you know the many clowns inspired by him, from Ronald McDonald to Krusty the Clown.

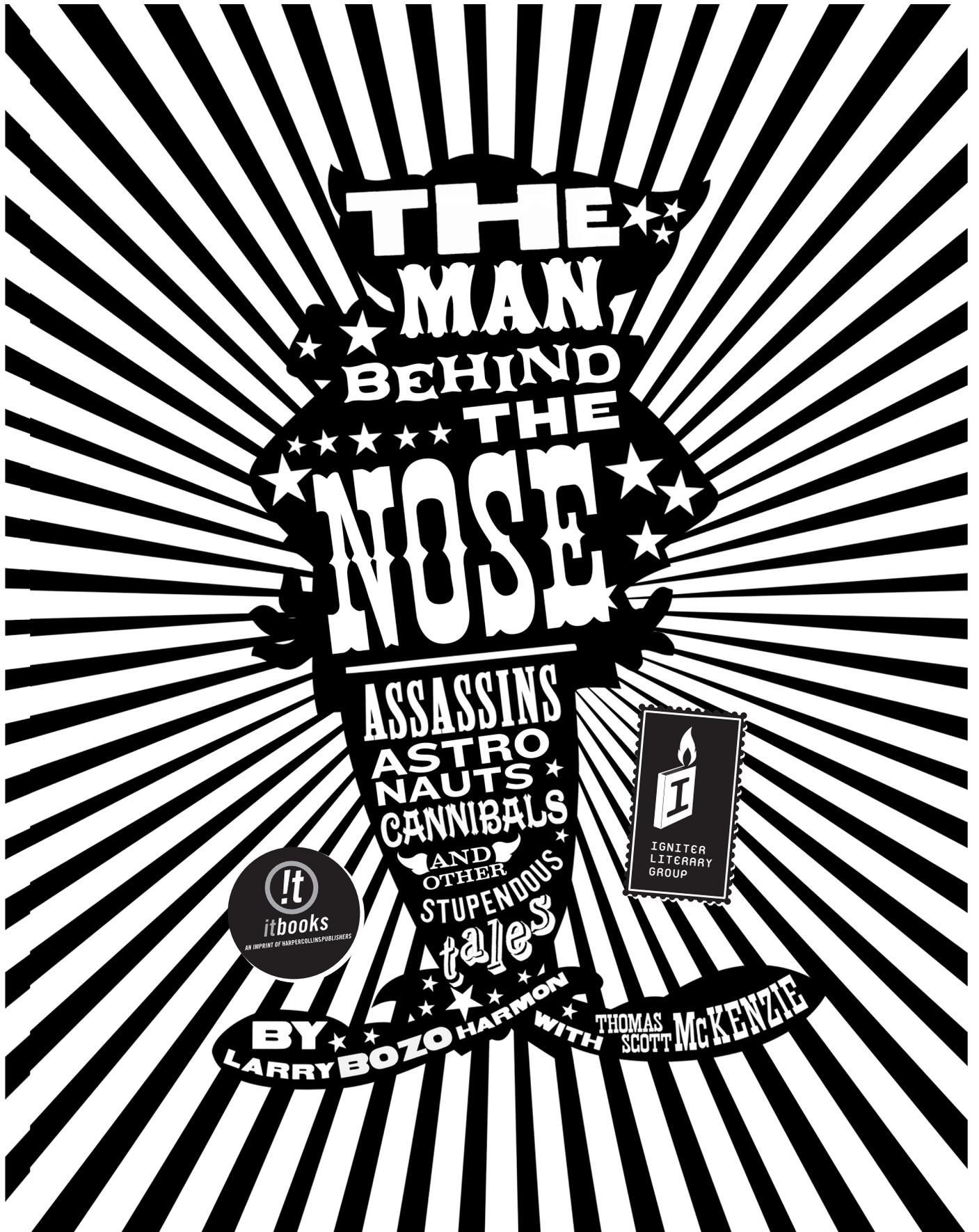
So perhaps it's time you learned about Bozo, and the man behind the nose. Because the wild, inspirational stories in this book are all true. As real as the nose on your face.

In this unputdownable book, which Harmon completed just before his death at age eighty-three, are far more incredible stories of astronauts, cannibals, celebrities, assassins, and deep-sea divers—all encountered in full Bozo regalia, and with photos to prove it.

Not only is Harmon's life by turns incredible and hilarious, it's also an inspirational testament to the power of one man's positive attitude, dedication, and work ethic—and how he changed the world.

COMING TO BOOK STORES ON AUGUST 17, 2010 from Igniter Books


IGNITER



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ASSASSINS
ASTRO
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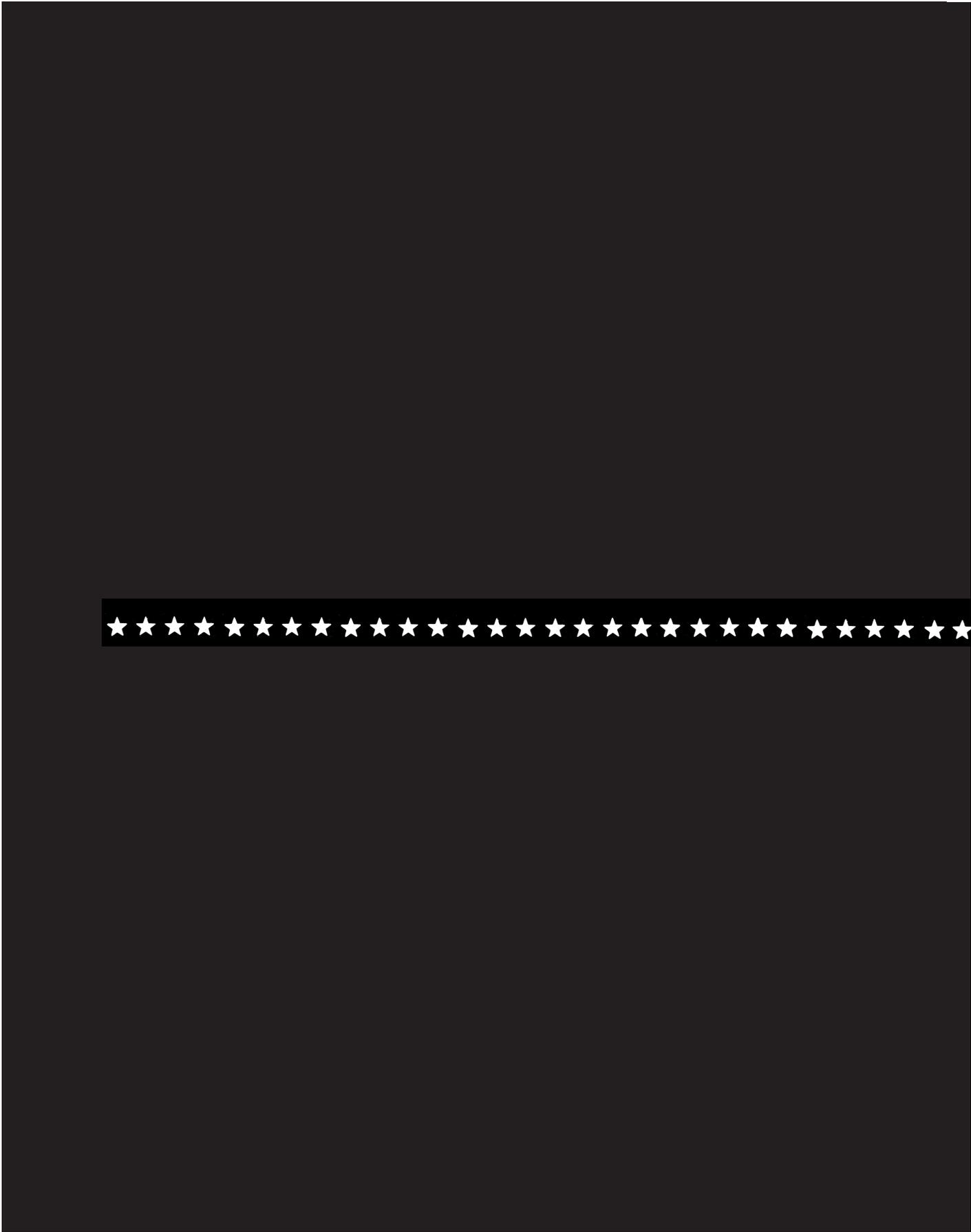
BY LARRY BOZO HARMON WITH THOMAS MCKENZIE





EVENT	— TIMELINE—	DATE
LARRY HARMON BORN.....		1925
BECOMES FRESHMAN DRUM MAJOR AT CLEVELAND HEIGHTS HIGH SCHOOL.....		1939
INDUCTION INTO U.S. ARMY.....		1943
DISCHARGE FROM U.S. ARMY.....		1945
MOVES TO HOLLYWOOD, CA.....		1946
WORKS ON <i>Royal Wedding</i> , <i>The Red Badge of Courage</i> , AND OTHER FILMS.....		1950
RECORDS BOZO PILOT <i>Pinky Talks Back</i>		1952
PLAYS LEADING ROLE ON <i>Commander Comet</i> TELEVISION SHOW.....	EARLY-TO-MID	1950s
PURCHASES AND REIMAGINES BOZO CHARACTER.....	MID-TO-LATE	1950s
FIRST <i>Bozo Show</i> AIRS ON KTLA IN LA, CA.....		1959
TRAINS WILLARD SCOTT AS BOZO FOR WRC IN WASHINGTON, DC.....		1959
PRODUCES <i>Popeye the Sailor</i> CARTOONS.....		1960
PURCHASES LAUREL AND HARDY CHARACTERS.....		1961
TRAVELS TO NEW GUINEA.....		1963
TRAINS IN ZERO GRAVITY.....		1969
TRAINS AS FIREMAN.....		1969
TRAINS AS DEEP SEA DIVER.....		1969
STRUGGLES WITH BELLIGERENT REPTILE.....	EARLY	1970s
WORKS ON <i>The New Scooby-Doo Movies</i>		1972
PRODUCES <i>It's Good to Be Alive</i> , DIRECTED BY MICHAEL LANDON.....		1974
PORTRAYS A STAN LAUREL IMPERSONATOR ON TELEVISION'S <i>Matt Houston</i> DRAMA.....		1983
THROWS FIRST PITCH AT CLEVELAND INDIANS GAME.....		1984
RUNS FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.....		1984
IS HONORED AT ROSE BOWL PARADE.....		1996
RECEIVES OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT AWARD FROM THE ACADEMY OF TELEVISION ARTS & SCIENCES.....		1996
RELEASES <i>Get Down With the Clown</i> AUDIO CD FEATURING WILLIAM SHATNER.....		2003
LARRY HARMON PASSES AWAY.....		2008







"You go be a doctor all right. But a doctor of laughter."

AL JOLSON

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
AND THE U.S. CALVARY IN

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
THE MOVING PICTURE

THAT CAME

TO LIFE PART III

45

THROUGHOUT MY TIME AT CLEVELAND HEIGHTS HIGH, I ALWAYS BEGGED MR. RUSH TO USE MUSIC FROM **JOHN PHILIP SOUSA** IN PERFORMANCES. SINCE THAT NIGHT WHEN "THE INVINCIBLE EAGLE MARCH" INSPIRED ME TO KEEP PUSHING IN MY QUEST TO BECOME **DRUM MAJOR**, I HAD BECOME COMPLETELY ENGROSSED WITH HIS MARCHES.

Whenever our band played "The Washington Post" or "The Stars and Stripes Forever," I experienced a surge of excitement and power. Sousa's marches made me feel like a confident general leading an army of talented musicians in a celebration of inspirational music.

During that time, Mr. Rush and I worked closely together. We became great friends and he was a tremendous inspiration for my musical career. He also shared my love of the University of Southern California. Although he was well respected by bandleaders in the Midwest, he wanted to get a job at USC. Whether he was a professor, part of the music department, bandleader—it didn't matter to him. He just had a dream that, coincidentally, involved the same institution that would soon figure so prominently in my own aspirations.

As I matured, however, going to medical school began to seem more and more realistic to me than entertaining. Although I loved

performing and drumming as a hobby, I realized what a long shot it was to become any kind of success in show business. Playing the lottery is a more practical career plan than playing Hollywood. So medicine, at least at that point, had become the path for me.

But like so many other men of the day, I had to put my higher education goals on hold during World War II. I vividly recall sitting with my parents in the living room and listening when President Roosevelt came on the radio to tell the country that Pearl Harbor had been attacked.

As the war effort ramped up and the draft kicked in, I watched more and more of my friends go off to the military. My high school marching band wanted to send these brave young men off with a tribute as a way to inspire them and thank them for what they were doing. So we accompanied the draftees down to the train station to perform and honor them. I led hundreds, maybe thousands of men down a parade route that would be the last they saw of Cleveland for a while—and for some, forever.

Eventually, when my time came to serve, it was during some of the bitterest fighting of the war, when the Nazis and the Japanese were on the move, and I wasn't completely convinced that I wouldn't end up being cannon fodder somewhere in Europe or the South Pacific.

I was supposed to go into the Air Force and work with the military band. But there was a mistake in the paperwork and instead I was sent to Fort Riley, Kansas, to train with the Army's horse cavalry (*Fig. 4A*). Who would have ever dreamed we still used horses in combat in World War II? Nothing seemed like a worse way to evade machine guns and mortar fire than riding five feet in the air on the back of a four-legged, thousand-pound animal. What a crazy idea. That's a surefire way to get blown to bits all over the South Pacific, I thought.



Fig. 4A

A friendly military chaplain offered to help and requested that I be assigned as his assistant. But as petrified as I was, I declined the offer.

"There's a war going on and if my country needs me on horseback, then I'll do it," I said.

"You realize the mortality rates for cavalry, right?" he warned. "Think about what you're doing, Larry."

But I knew I had to do my duty for the country whose principles of liberty and freedom I owed my life and happiness to. On the day my group was to depart, I didn't put on my band uniform. This time, I just wore my gray wool suit, which seemed to fit the gravity of the situation. Then I put on my drum major hat and met my bandmates at our usual spot. We gathered the other young soldiers and struck up the band.

We marched down the street, performing Sousa's "The Gladiator" and "The U.S. Field Artillery." Families and well-wishers lined the sidewalks, waving. Some women were crying, and men kept their handkerchiefs at the ready. Children darted in and out of the forest of adult legs, trying to get a good view of the parade. Everyone tried to put on a brave face. We were all scared to death but proud to be serving our country. In today's fractured times,

everyone has their own agenda, but back then, we were united and focused on fighting the good fight.

The band reached the train station near Terminal Tower and all the soldiers boarded as we wrapped up "Stars and Stripes Forever." I took off my drum major hat, handed it to the person next to me, stepped to the boarding platform, and turned to face the crowd.

I saw my parents standing to the right. Mom was wearing her favorite blue dress and Dad had on his most formal navy blue suit. My beloved marching band was lined up in front of me. I waved to them all one last time and stepped on to the train, bound for the induction center in Columbus. No longer a drum major, I was now a soldier.

I took my training seriously at Fort Riley because I fully expected to put those skills to use in combat. I loved working with the horses; they were such strong and interesting creatures. But I wasn't looking forward to trotting around on one while the bullets flew. At that time, the cavalry was transitioning from using horses exclusively to mechanized strategies. Most of us would not end up playing jockey with a machine gun, but I wasn't sure that trudging through the field on foot was a much better option.

When I told the man who met me at the base that I had a music background, he assigned me to bugler duty, even though I knew nothing about blowing a horn. So each night I stole a few minutes on the obstacle course after everyone was finished for the day to squawk some blasts out of the bugle. Eventually, I managed to get something remotely resembling "Reveille" and "Taps."

During breaks in my training, I tried to keep up with the rest of my music and entertainment skills. Over the wartime years, something like 125,000 soldiers trained at Fort Riley. Actor Mickey Rooney, fashion designer Oleg Cassini, and heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis even spent time in those same barracks.



I managed to become the drum major of a marching band that performed when dignitaries and politicians visited. In that environment, the regimented, highly structured music of John Philip Sousa was tremendously appreciated, so I took every opportunity to perform it. Not only did the soldiers like Sousa's compositions, but I also felt like I was paying the great musician a fitting tribute. He had played such an important role in inspiring me to achieve my dreams. I felt somehow connected to him, as if I were an evangelist trying to spread the gospel of Sousa.

I also played in a couple jazz and swing outfits with other grunts, and also developed some stand-up comedy routines. If just one solitary soldier was looking for entertainment, I was there to provide it.

One day, a sergeant who worked with the marching band pulled me aside and asked me to perform in a show for the troops.

"Sure. I'd love to!" I replied.

"This is going to be a major production," he said. "Lots of bigwigs are coming in from Washington. We'll have a couple of high-ranking generals here. And they're bringing in some famous performers as well."

He didn't have to sell me. If I could get on a stage and under a spotlight, I didn't need any more incentive. But what he said next gave me goose bumps. "And Al Jolson is coming to sing! He's doing a bunch of shows overseas and stopping here on the way."

I'm sure medical professionals would dispute this claim, but I swear that if I shut my eyes for more than five minutes over the next four weeks, I don't remember it. I was too obsessed with perfecting my act and scheming a way to meet Jolson to bother with something as trivial as snoozing or rest.

Finally, the night of the show arrived. I was scheduled to go on about an hour before Mr. Jolson would take the stage. I was



listed on the bill as leading a small jazz combo. We had a drummer, a bass player, a cool dude from the Bronx on saxophone, and a trombonist with an overbite so bad that I never understood how he was able to get both lips into the mouthpiece. I was to conduct and lead the group, but my drum kit was set up on the side and I would join in on a couple numbers.

At least, that's what was printed on the bill.

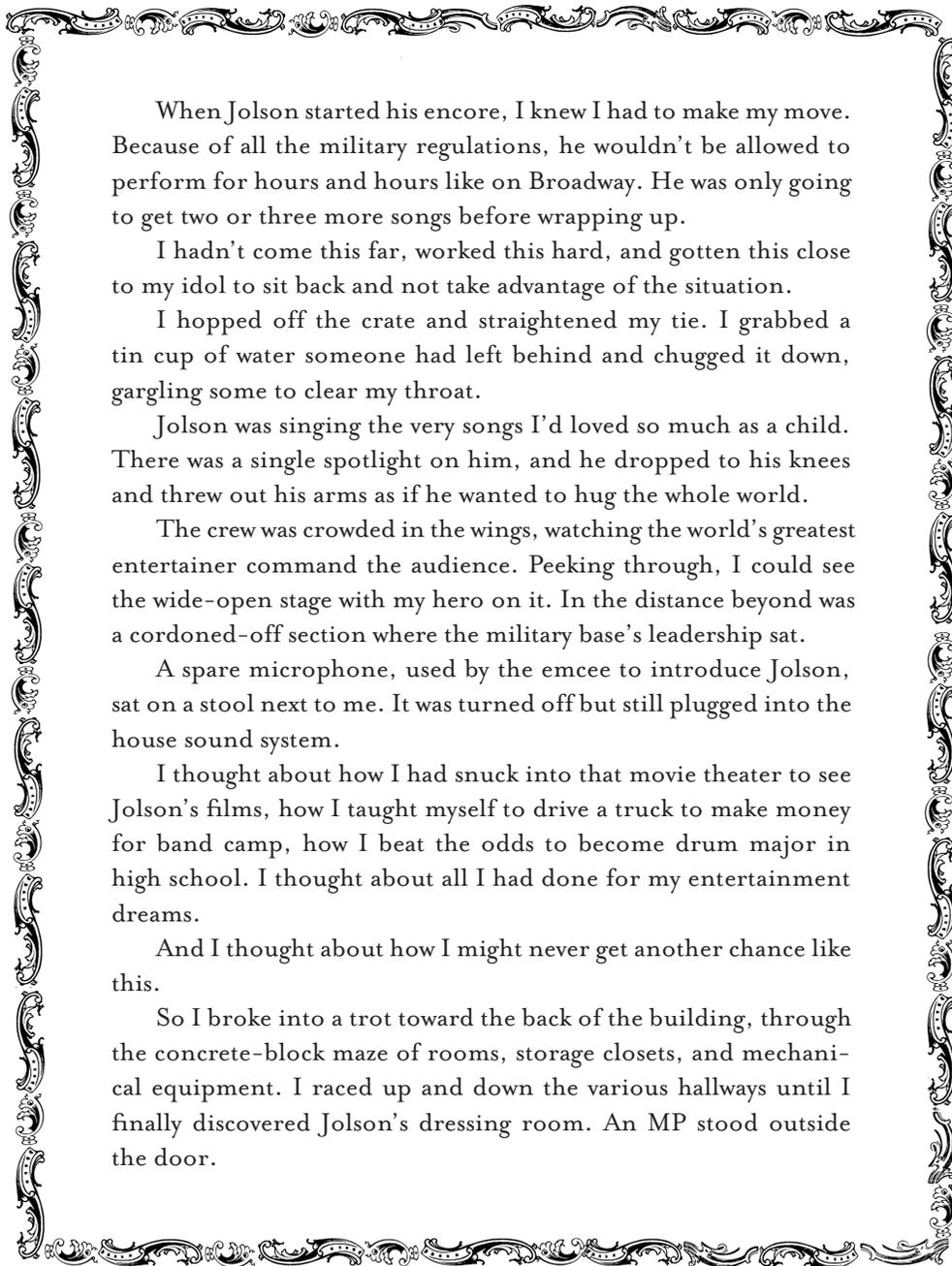
But I had no intention of simply standing there and conducting the group. No sir, I wasn't going to miss this opportunity. My plan was to turn our thirty-minute set into my own variety show.

Onstage with the combo, instead of just standing there waving my hand, I danced around and twirled my baton. In between songs, I told jokes that broke up the crowd. During one particularly fast tune, I dashed over to my drum set and played a rhythm on the hi-hat cymbal with my left hand while still conducting the band with my right.

I worked myself into such a whirlwind of shtick that the whole performance was over before I knew it.

The crowd roared in appreciation and I felt the sweat running down my back and under my arms as I waved to all the soldiers in the audience. Someone handed me a towel and people patted me on the back as we made our way backstage. The guys all wanted to grab a beer, cool down, and enjoy the rest of the evening. But I wasn't going to budge from my spot in the wings on the side of the stage.

When Al Jolson strolled into the spotlight, I sat on a crate and watched the performance with the same intensity as when I studied *The Jazz Singer* all those years earlier. I observed the way he leaned back and stretched his arms out wide. I noticed how far he raised his eyebrows and how big he smiled to the crowd. Everything was done to exaggerate his movements, so he could connect with the audience, even the soldiers way in back.



When Jolson started his encore, I knew I had to make my move. Because of all the military regulations, he wouldn't be allowed to perform for hours and hours like on Broadway. He was only going to get two or three more songs before wrapping up.

I hadn't come this far, worked this hard, and gotten this close to my idol to sit back and not take advantage of the situation.

I hopped off the crate and straightened my tie. I grabbed a tin cup of water someone had left behind and chugged it down, gargling some to clear my throat.

Jolson was singing the very songs I'd loved so much as a child. There was a single spotlight on him, and he dropped to his knees and threw out his arms as if he wanted to hug the whole world.

The crew was crowded in the wings, watching the world's greatest entertainer command the audience. Peeking through, I could see the wide-open stage with my hero on it. In the distance beyond was a cordoned-off section where the military base's leadership sat.

A spare microphone, used by the emcee to introduce Jolson, sat on a stool next to me. It was turned off but still plugged into the house sound system.

I thought about how I had snuck into that movie theater to see Jolson's films, how I taught myself to drive a truck to make money for band camp, how I beat the odds to become drum major in high school. I thought about all I had done for my entertainment dreams.

And I thought about how I might never get another chance like this.

So I broke into a trot toward the back of the building, through the concrete-block maze of rooms, storage closets, and mechanical equipment. I raced up and down the various hallways until I finally discovered Jolson's dressing room. An MP stood outside the door.



The building was rumbling with applause from the show. I knew Jolson's act was over. He would be taking his bows and heading back here any minute.

"Hey, some drunk private is around the corner, with no shirt on, waving a bottle of Jack Daniel's around and cursing like an oil rigger!" I told the military guard. "What is Mr. Jolson going to think of our base when he sees a lamebrain like that?"

The MP ran off to find the fictional drunk and I quietly opened the dressing room door and slipped inside. It was just a simple white cinder-block room, with a green couch on one side, several metal chairs, and a table along the wall. An empty clothes rack stood near the door. It smelled like bleach, and the harsh overhead lights revealed streaks on the floor where it had been recently mopped.

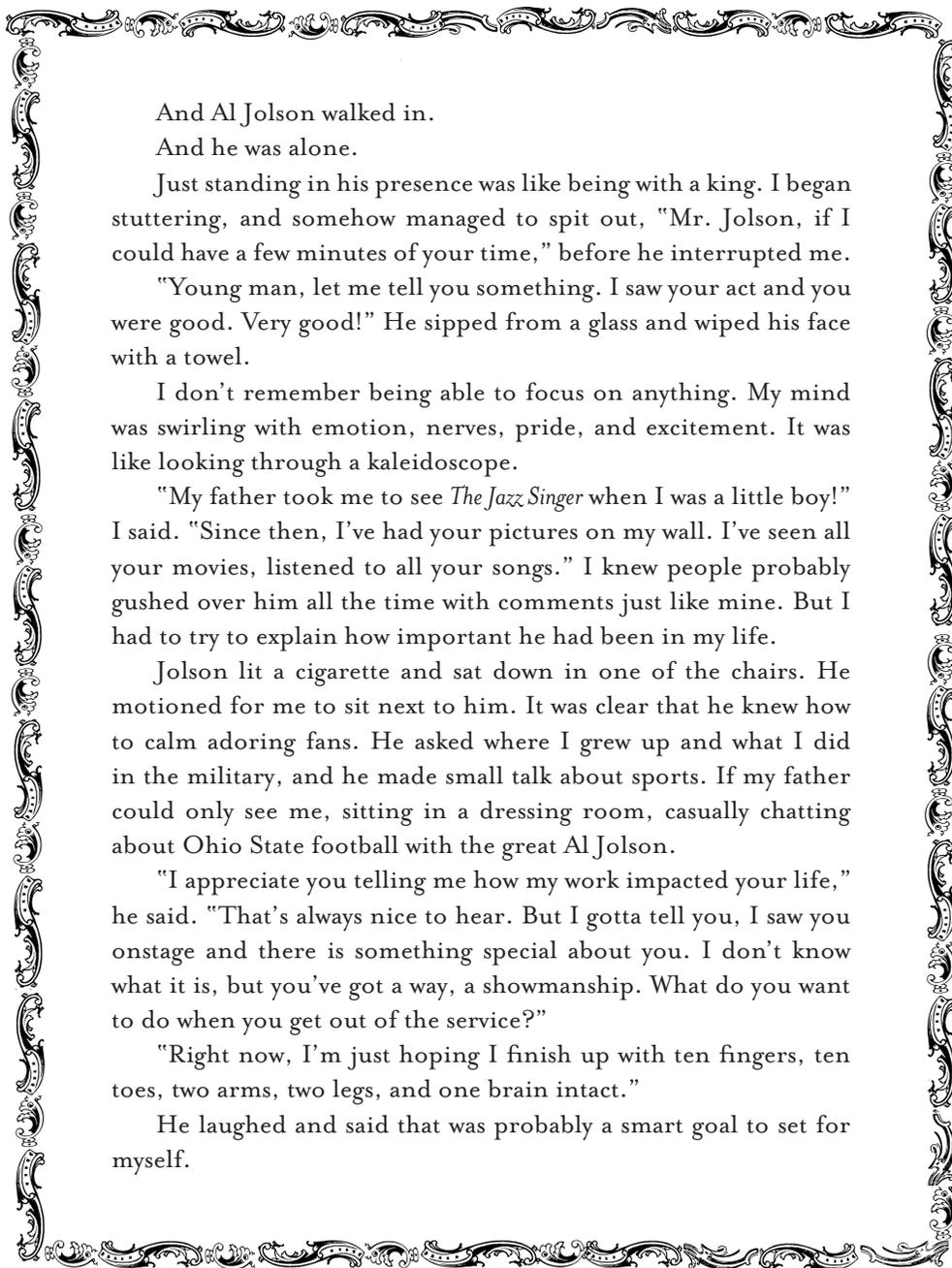
I may have had butterflies prior to the performance that evening, but now, in Jolson's dressing room, I had a belfry full of bats flapping in my stomach.

I tried to think of some excuse, some story I might use to get me out of trouble if anyone from the base came in with Jolson and found me here. I'd be looking at weeks of KP duty (*Fig. 4B*) at the very least. Maybe I could say I got lost. Maybe I could say that I was told to come here. Maybe . . .

And then the door opened.



Fig. 4B



And Al Jolson walked in.

And he was alone.

Just standing in his presence was like being with a king. I began stuttering, and somehow managed to spit out, "Mr. Jolson, if I could have a few minutes of your time," before he interrupted me.

"Young man, let me tell you something. I saw your act and you were good. Very good!" He sipped from a glass and wiped his face with a towel.

I don't remember being able to focus on anything. My mind was swirling with emotion, nerves, pride, and excitement. It was like looking through a kaleidoscope.

"My father took me to see *The Jazz Singer* when I was a little boy!" I said. "Since then, I've had your pictures on my wall. I've seen all your movies, listened to all your songs." I knew people probably gushed over him all the time with comments just like mine. But I had to try to explain how important he had been in my life.

Jolson lit a cigarette and sat down in one of the chairs. He motioned for me to sit next to him. It was clear that he knew how to calm adoring fans. He asked where I grew up and what I did in the military, and he made small talk about sports. If my father could only see me, sitting in a dressing room, casually chatting about Ohio State football with the great Al Jolson.

"I appreciate you telling me how my work impacted your life," he said. "That's always nice to hear. But I gotta tell you, I saw you onstage and there is something special about you. I don't know what it is, but you've got a way, a showmanship. What do you want to do when you get out of the service?"

"Right now, I'm just hoping I finish up with ten fingers, ten toes, two arms, two legs, and one brain intact."

He laughed and said that was probably a smart goal to set for myself.



“But afterward, what do you want to do with your life?”

“Well, after I’m discharged, I aim to go to college. I did real well in high school, particularly in the sciences. And I like to help people. So I’m going to be a doctor.”

Being a soldier was enough of a risk. If I made it out of the war alive, I figured I’d do the safe thing for a change, and open a nice family practice and take it easy.

He raised his eyes to the ceiling, clenched his jaw a bit, and hummed. Finally, he said, “Being a doctor is very respectable, and sure, you’ll help people. But I feel like you need to have a bigger reach. As a doctor, you’ll touch hundreds, maybe thousands of people. But you should think about reaching even more.”

There was a knock on the door and a man wearing a fedora cocked back on his head leaned in to tell Jolson that his car had arrived.

“Good luck to you, son,” he said. “Be safe and I wish you all the best out there.”

“Thank you so much for your time, Mr. Jolson. I’ll remember these moments forever and ever!” And he walked out of the room. I sat back down in the chair and let my mind soak in all the details of what had just happened. Then I dashed back to my bunk and wrote a letter to my parents, recounting every second of meeting the legendary jazz singer.

After that, life returned to normal on the base. The entertainment factory inside my head shut down, so I finally got some sleep and refocused on my training. The next few months passed unremarkably—until I was asked to perform at another event.

And Al Jolson would be headlining the bill again.

I was given a worse slot this time. I would be onstage hours and hours before Jolson. He probably wouldn’t even be in the building during my performance. I still pushed myself to practice so I could excel, do even better than last time, and prove myself. But I wasn’t



as anxious and nervous as before because there wasn't any realistic chance of connecting with Jolson.

I went out and gave it my all, just like before. The crowd laughed at my jokes, rippled with the rhythm of our music, and applauded loudly when we were done. I was more relaxed during this performance, and confident that I had topped myself.

During Jolson's act, I sat in the front row and watched him hold the entire audience in the palm of his hands as he sang all his greatest hits.

After the show, I was standing in the parking lot, chatting with a tuba player and a juggler. The backstage door opened and Al Jolson walked out with a couple men. I felt a surge of excitement, but I considered myself lucky to have gotten advice from him once and didn't want to press things. So I decided not to bother him.

However, he saw me and walked over.

"So you still want to be a doctor?" he asked.

"Mr. Jolson, how in the world do you remember that? I wasn't even going to say hello today because I know you're busy. And you were so gracious to me last time."

"Oh, I remember you all right. You've gotten better since that first show. Your act tonight was something else!"

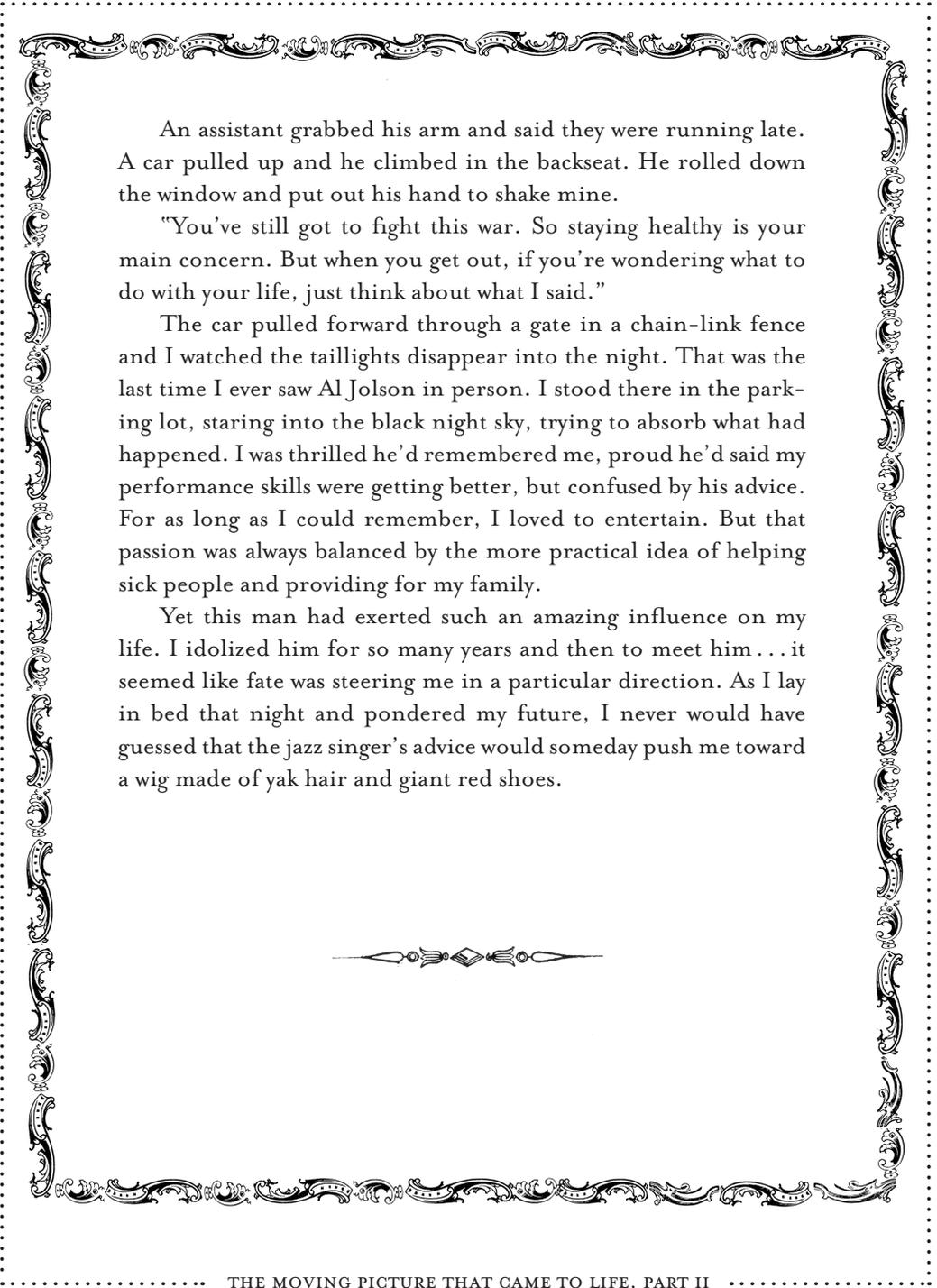
"You saw it?" I asked.

"Absolutely! While I watched you onstage, I figured out what was puzzling me before. You shouldn't be a doctor. You're going to do what I did. I told everyone, 'You ain't heard nothing yet!' and that's what you gotta do."

"So medicine isn't the right choice for me, Mr. Jolson?"

"Call me Jolie. When you meet me twice, you can call me Jolie, not Mr. Jolson. And here's the thing, I want you to think about this: You go be a doctor all right, but a doctor of laughter! Because, as far as you're concerned, they ain't seen nothing yet!"





An assistant grabbed his arm and said they were running late. A car pulled up and he climbed in the backseat. He rolled down the window and put out his hand to shake mine.

"You've still got to fight this war. So staying healthy is your main concern. But when you get out, if you're wondering what to do with your life, just think about what I said."

The car pulled forward through a gate in a chain-link fence and I watched the taillights disappear into the night. That was the last time I ever saw Al Jolson in person. I stood there in the parking lot, staring into the black night sky, trying to absorb what had happened. I was thrilled he'd remembered me, proud he'd said my performance skills were getting better, but confused by his advice. For as long as I could remember, I loved to entertain. But that passion was always balanced by the more practical idea of helping sick people and providing for my family.



Yet this man had exerted such an amazing influence on my life. I idolized him for so many years and then to meet him . . . it seemed like fate was steering me in a particular direction. As I lay in bed that night and pondered my future, I never would have guessed that the jazz singer's advice would someday push me toward a wig made of yak hair and giant red shoes.

