

# *Memories with Few Regrets*



*Jerry Capa*

*At age 14 sculpting a medallion of Lincoln in 1939*

## STILL IN MY MEMORY

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## THE UNINVITED

As a teenager - I cannot remember a Sunday without a wedding at our Church - usually with at least 12 bridesmaids. Two doors from the Church was the Caputo Photo Studio. Caputo's photos were special. He could manipulate layers of negatives to include Jesus blessing the newlyweds. For a bit more money he added angels looking down at them. Across the street was the Half-Moon Restaurant - with an immense Banquet Hall above it. The immediate family spent hours in the Photo Studio - and encouraged the guests, including the bridesmaids, to make merry at the hall while waiting for them. In every Italian family or extended family there is a slack-jawed male who resembles a gorilla or pre-historic man with limited or no brain power. He is usually placed at the Hall door to collect invitations. This proved a definite advantage to me and my 3 or 4 buddies. We would dress in what was usually our only suit - purchased a year or so before for our confirmation ceremony. Most of us had suddenly grown taller - which necessitated our learning to walk a bit differently - raised shoulders to lengthen the sleeves - our pants pulled down a few inches to close the gap a bit between ankles and knees. We would wait for a party of guests to enter - and entered with them as they handed their invitations to the confused ticket-taker. We then walked to the bridesmaids table and kissed as many as we could - leading to believe we had met them before at a family function. At the far end of the hall a table was set up with a variety of sandwiches, an array of salads, cakes, desserts, two small kegs of beer - one at each end of the table - and bottles of wine, too. We boys would take a table close to the exit - in case we were discovered and had to make a fast getaway. Those were great evenings - we left with full bellies and a bit tipsy - and we got to kiss the girls again good bye.

Years later I made a nostalgic visit to the old neighborhood. The church was now mostly empty on Sunday afternoons. The Caputo Photo Studio was now a shoe store. The Half-moon Restaurant had new owners and was now the Full-moon Restaurant - the hall upstairs - a bowling alley - and I learned that one of our buddies married one of the bridesmaids in a simple City Hall ceremony.

Jerry Capa



## MY CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH INGRID BERGMAN

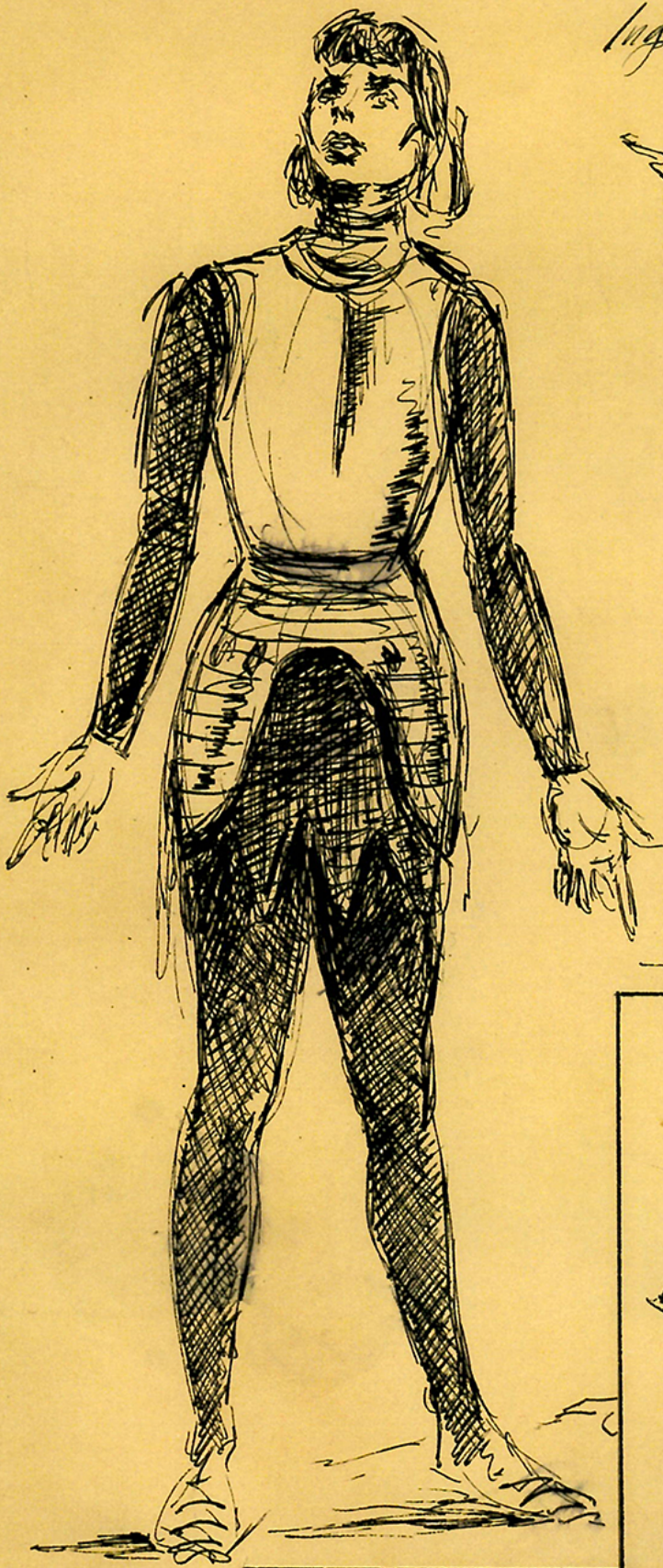
Like 100 million other men, at age 21, I was in love with Ingrid Bergman. I attended a matinee performance of "Joan of Lorraine" on Broadway - starring Ingrid. That same day I made sketches of her while still fresh in my mind. OVER →

A few weeks later I attended a matinee performance of "Draper and Adler" at the Mecca Theatre and sat in the mezzanine next to an exit. During intermission the lights went on and the audience looked in my direction and applauded loudly. Two rows in front of me was Ingrid, her daughter Pia and a nanny. I went into semi-shock. When the lights dimmed and the show continued, I noticed Ingrid reaching for her coat and speaking to the nanny. I bolted from my seat and into the dark hallway and peeped through the heavy red velvet curtain. Ingrid bolted from her seat towards the exit and me. I stepped back then bolted forward as if to enter. We collided in the dark hallway. I grabbed her to keep her from falling backwards. She grabbed me to keep from falling. We swayed back and forth as we held on to each other. I asked her if she was alright. She said yes. I asked her again. She said yes, yes, yes. We rocked back and forth for a long, long time in what I made sure was a tight embrace.

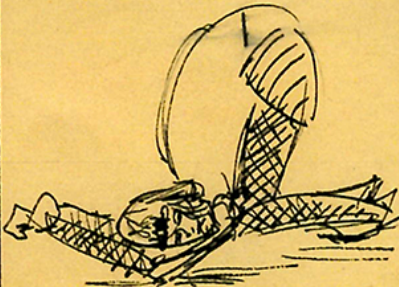
It was one of the highlights of my life.

Jerry Capa

Ingrid Bergman in *Queen of Sheba*



J. C. 46



Alvin  
Theatre

## MASSAGING ZA ZA GABORS BACK

In April of 1951, my then date Betty and I attended an Art Students League Masked Ball held at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. We went formal and were standing next to some celebrities... Paulette Goddard, Dorothy Kilgallen, the Gabor mother and her 3 daughters, etc. The ballroom had no stage - daughter Za Za, who was wearing a gown with a V cut exposing her back, suddenly stepped onto a chair to see who would be selected winner (most original costume). Like all of us, Za Za had had a few drinks and was quite wobbly. I was sure she would fall from the chair so I extended my arm and held my hand on her back. Her swaying back and forth, side to side, up and down, caused my hand to move all over her back. She suddenly turned to me and said: "OOOH! DOT FEELZZ ZO GOOT!" After about 10 minutes of "massaging" her back - I helped her off the chair. The affair over, the celebrities quickly left. The waiter handed me a huge bill for the champagne and drinks they consumed. I told him we were not members of that party. Last seen, the waiter, sweating, ran through the crowd trying to locate them - as Betty and I ran to the door and made a quick exit.

Derry Cape

## A DAY WITH JOAN FONTAINE

In the 1970's, when I worked as a freelance art director for several New York advertising agencies, I had occasion to spend a day with actress Joan Fontaine in her apartment on W. 57<sup>th</sup> St. in New York. The agency's client was a company that had done work for European royalty restoring precious antiques... replating silver and gold items... and the like. The advertisements involved still photos to be shown in newspapers, magazines, brochure mailings etc. Joan Fontaine was asked to take part - and agreed.

I suggested a background set somewhat resembling the interior of an ancient castle. Renting scenic props from theaters or opera houses was not uncommon - although expensive. When Joan Fontaine was informed of our plan, she said:

"That sounds like my apartment!" When we visited her apartment she did indeed have a very large dining room decorated much like a movie set - a massive gray stone fireplace to the high ceiling - an 800 lb. chandelier with light bulbs resembling candles, a Durcan Fieff table, etc. The Agency accountant, assistants, photography crew and I showed up one morning. Ms. Fontaine was alone in the apartment. I sketched a general picture for the photographer to follow, positioned Joan, then looked in the camera eyepiece, then stepped back and said: "Joan, I'm afraid we are going to have to lower the chandelier 6 inches". Within a second after her eyes popped open, she said: "I think the fireplace should be moved 2 ft. to the left."



We had a good laugh and it appeared that she and I bonded very quickly.

As we were all about to leave, Joan approached me and asked "Could you stay a little longer? I would like to show you something." I said "With pleasure." When we were finally alone, she entered a room and came out holding 3 or 4 small paintings. She had taken up painting as a hobby and wanted my opinion of her work. I, of course, was encouraging. She was pleased. She was partial to Impressionism and it was obvious she was a museum goer. Our conversation went on for quite some time. She then invited me into her living room, which was quite different from her dining room... elegant - mostly white with black accents. We continued our conversation as I rested my arm on the mantle of the all white fireplace. She then looked a bit dejected. Suddenly she said "you do know that's my Oscar at your elbow." I said "Yes, I see it." It was obvious she wanted me to make a guess about it - and was disappointed that I said nothing. I could not remember what movie she won the Oscar for - so said nothing. I felt badly as I struggled to remember.

But it's possible she forgave me. When I left, she gave me a warm, lingering embrace.

Jerry Capa

Joan Fontaine won the Oscar in 1942  
The movie: Suspicion

"SORRY, CHAMP"

During my brother-in-law's first New York visit, walking up Broadway, we passed "Dempsey's". Jack Dempsey was my brother-in-law's idol. Although times were lean, I offered to buy him a drink. We entered the Bar-Restaurant. Dempsey was standing near the entrance with a photographer—who asked us if we wanted a photograph taken with Jack Dempsey. I asked him how much. He said \$4.75. I told him I would have to pass, sorry. We had a drink, which I could hardly afford—and walked out. Years later, walking along Madison Ave., I passed a Campbell Funeral Home. I suddenly remembered that Jack Dempsey's death was reported a few days before—and that he could be viewed at the Campbell Funeral Home on Madison Ave. I entered the Funeral Home. It was empty except for Jack. I approached the coffin, knelt, said a prayer—and whispered "Jack, I'm sorry I couldn't afford the \$4.75."

And walked out with a heavy heart.

Jerry Capa

## WESTERN HOSPITALITY

When I was 20, and traveling home from a trip west and into Mexico, our train made a morning stop in a picturesque desert some miles outside of Cedar City. From the train window could be seen orange-tinted mountains in the distance and cactus plants in all shapes and sizes. I asked the conductor if there was enough time to get off the train to stretch our legs and take in the scenery. He said we would be there for about 20 minutes. Within 10 minutes the train left... too fast for me to jump back on. The lone stationmaster was surprised to see me, and said the next train would be stopping by the same time next day - his job being meeting the train every morning - for what business I did not know - not asked. I asked him if he could suggest something I could do until then. He said he would telegraph ahead so my luggage could be dropped off at the next stop - so I would be able to pick it up there. He told me that on his way home, he passed an area where western movies were filmed - with buildings that were fake, one-dimensional painted sets - with one building that was an actual hotel - where cast and crew stayed overnight when necessary. He told me that his sister worked there as a chambermaid - and that a movie was being made but was not sure if it had been finished and the movie crowd gone.

I said I would take my chances and sleep in the lobby if necessary - if he was willing to drop me off - then pick me up in the morning on his way to work. He said he would be happy to do that.

We stopped at the fake Western town and found the movie had been finished and the movie people gone - but his sister was cleaning and making up beds. When I was introduced to her, she said she had just finished making up actress Peggy Anne Gardner's bed - and my sleeping there would be no problem. I asked if there was any place I could hire a horse to explore the area a bit. She said 2 miles up the road her son had a farm and owned some horses he and his children ride, and she was sure he would oblige. Her brother, the stationmaster, would drive by the farm, drop me off - continue another mile where his sister lived - drop her off - then continue to his home - a short distance away. Her son and family were very kind to me - said he would saddle up a horse for me - and when I returned - would drive me back to the hotel. In the morning, the stationmaster would pick up his sister, drop her off at the hotel where he would pick me up - then to his job - with me, in time for me to make my train.

A horse was saddled up for me and we headed for the picturesque, jagged mountains ahead some

four miles. I planned to ride until the sun threw its purple shadows - and would be careful to memorize the twisting and turning paths that I had given free rein to the horse. The scenery was breathtaking. As dusk was approaching, I decided to head back.

The horse would not obey - thrusting his head forward with each pull on the reins. Having once had a similar experience, I realized he had manipulated the bit in his mouth - dislodging it so that I no longer had control. When dusk came, I was in a dilemma.

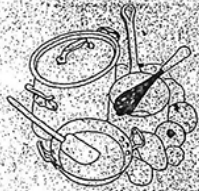
If I dismounted and tried to lead him - he might bolt and leave me stranded... and by now I had forgotten the twists and turns of the path back - anyway - I could not think of a solution - at the same time imagining all the negative possibilities that were sure to happen. Suddenly, I either saw or imagined a silhouette of the farmhouse in the far distance - and at that moment the horse suddenly quickened his pace - until we reached the farm.

When I told the farmer about my adventure, he said the horse had done that before - but always returns - because he knows when its feeding time. The rest of my trip back home to the Bronx was uneventful.

Henry Capra

JERRY and JULIA

One evening, while watching Julia Child on television attempting to remove the shell from a cooked lobster with a metal-cutting shears, as the lobster slid all over the table - I was moved to write - instructing her how to do this easily in 3 simple steps. She had the courtesy to reply:



FROM JULIA CHILD'S KITCHEN  
Trois Gourmandes Productions, Inc.  
70 Seaview, Montecito Shores  
Santa Barbara, California 93108

February 5, 1987

Dear Mr. Capa,

What a wonderful idea and so beautifully illustrated on how to open lobsters. I shall certainly try it out as soon as I can get a hold of a good eastern lobster.

Many thanks and all good wishes.

PS: Help we have here for the next 3 months are the spiny langostine type - too tough to squeeze!

Julia Child

This reply proved my ignorance of lobsters. I had only known about Maine lobsters. It also proved what a classy lady she was.

Jerry Capa

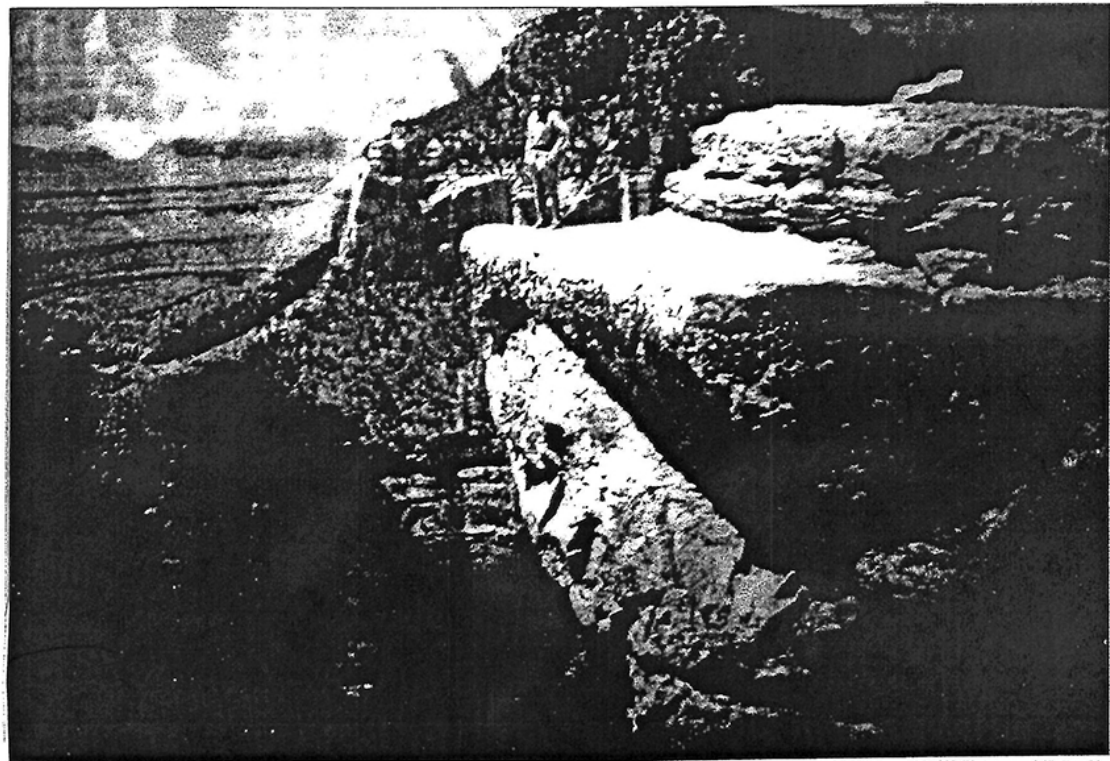
## POISON POINT

Returning from a trip to Mexico, I decided to spend some time at the Grand Canyon. Having been told that the most spectacular view was at a rock formation shaped much like an anvil - its point jutting out over a valley of incredible beauty a mile below - and was known as Poison Point (One drop and you're dead). It was fenced off, I was told, because of frequent gusty winds. A sign indicated it was off limits to visitors. I decided I must take in this view. I asked a charming lady who was standing by the fence, if she would snap a picture if I ventured onto the rock. She said "yes... but please be careful". I climbed over the 4 ft. fence and walked towards the point. Suddenly there was a gust of wind - causing my jacket to act as a sail and me to wobble and lose my balance. I dropped to my knees, quickly removed my jacket and flung it behind me - where the wind deposited it on a rock some 15 ft. behind me. I stood and signaled the lady to snap the picture. When I climbed the gate to exit... an angry guard was there telling me he could have me arrested. After lecturing me, we eventually had a friendly conversation.

Some 40 years later, my wife, myself and children traveled to Utah to attend a relative's wedding. While there, we rented a Motor Home and

toured parts of the West - including the Grand Canyon. While showing the family Poison Point, I asked a gentleman if he would snap a picture of me on the rocks. He said that he happened to be a lawyer - and would not want to be a party to a suicide. I told him that I was not serious - and as we spoke - my teenage son put his leg over the fence and said he must see the view from the Point. I suddenly found my voice rising and said "Have I raised an idiot?!" "Don't you dare do something as stupid as that!"

Jerry Capa



JERRY CAPA ON POISON POINT - Grand Canyon



## A WOULD-BE BEGGAR

One wintry Saturday, when I was 12 years old, I ventured into Manhattan with 50¢ in my pocket, which was left from the dollar I earned shoveling snow. The train fare was 5¢. On Broadway I treated myself to a slice of pizza for 5¢. I turned onto seedy Times Square, where I stopped at Hubert's Flea Museum to read the billboard outside. For the 50¢ entrance fee, one could see, under a glass case, fleas fully dressed in colorful clothing - plus, on a raised platform, notorious Jack Johnson, black prizefighter, where you could shake his hand. He was now an old man. I wanted very badly to see Jack Johnson - with the hope that he would smile. If he did not, I would then tell him a joke - so that I could see if he really had a full set of gold teeth. The museum was to close for the season shortly. I realized that I had to add 15¢ to my 40¢ to enter - and have train fare to get home. I decided I would walk to the corner and hold my cap out - along with several other beggars standing there. When I reached the corner, I froze. I was too proud - and ashamed - and turned back. I was determined to <sup>see</sup> Jack Johnson the next year. That next year, he left his home in North Carolina in his old battered car - for his next season at the museum - fell asleep at the wheel - hit a tree and was killed.

I always regretted being too proud to beg... for at least that one time

Joey Capa

GETTING A KICK OUT OF IT

In 1985, Betty and I visited Hawaii. I had read about the Island of Molokai - an island populated mostly by Lepers. Years ago, when they were considered untouchables, they were loaded onto ships, taken to the island's rocky shores and thrown overboard. Those who were able to swim settled on the island. I decided to visit there. Betty stayed behind. A tour company's 10 passenger airplane landed on a strip built on top of a mountain. We were to descend by mule down a winding, narrow path carved out of the mountain's outside edge. Our guide gave us a form to fill and sign - absolving the company from responsibility for mishaps. The guide was obliged to mention that there were some fatalities in the past. 7 passengers refused to sign and were flown back. The 4 of us mounted our mules for the descent down on what was called the Kalawapapa Trail - the guide first and me third. Some 10 minutes into the descent, my mule attempted to pass the mule ahead of me. There was not enough room to pass. I reached out and held onto shrubs growing out of the mountain side - as my mule continued to attempt to pass. Finally the mule ahead of me kicked with his rear legs - hitting my shins. The guide, hearing my loud groan, turned and looked - then let out a volley of curses. He said that my mule

(Packy) always follows behind him - and somehow did not realize that the mule in front of me had somehow sneaked in front of Packy - and said the 2 mules had a long history of feuding. He also said it was impossible to change positions on the path... much too dangerous.

For most of the 2 miles descending, I spent my time unsuccessfully trying to avoid the mules kicks while Packy kept attempting to pass as I held on to shrubs along the the mountainside. When we reached bottom, we were greeted by the Lepers. They seemed like a happy lot and in much better shape than I was. We visited the grave of Fr. Damien, a priest who chose to live among them - giving spiritual guidance - and eventually succumbing to the disease.

Ascending the mountain - Packy resumed his regular place behind the guide and appeared pleased. But, for a few weeks, I walked with a funny gait.

I was given a certificate (see attached) which I framed. Betty suggested I hang it on the wall next to her College Diploma. I've given it some thought. I'm not sure it's such a great idea.

Larry Casper

# Order of the Alii Mule Skinners of Molokai



Be it known that Jerry Capa was a member of  
this expedition on the Kalaupapa trail of Molokai, Hawaii,  
and having faced the obstacles, precipices and hazards of this treacherous trail  
and endured the vicissitudes of the narrow passage between rim and destination while  
bearing the caprices of this long-eared mount named Packy  
is now an acknowledged member of the renowned Alii Mule Skinners of Molokai  
and is endowed with all the rights and privileges that are bestowed upon the  
members of this select and accomplished fraternity.

In testimony whereof and by authority vested in me, I do  
confer upon this rider the Order of Alii Mule Skinner of Molokai

*Fred S. S. S.*

Master Guide



Issued this 24th day of October, 1985

