

At 70, this celebrated French entertainer



“WHAT A LIFE I’VE LIVED!”



by Maurice Chevalier

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A FEW DAYS AGO, a journalist joined me for lunch. I thought we had a very enjoyable and enlightening discussion—till I read in his story a few days later that I was a lonely old man.

If you can call 70 old—and I don’t—he may be correct on that point. And certainly there are times at my age when a man *wants* to be a little lonesome, to reminisce, to get prepared for where everyone goes.

But I’m *not* a lonely old man. On the contrary, I’m a very happy man who has had a rich, wonderful life—and still has.

So please, don’t feel sorry for me. I wouldn’t want to trade places with anyone!

Besides, I still carry on the love affair of my life—my work. And I’ll keep at it till I read three times in the paper that I bore people, or till I get tired of it. I don’t think there’s much chance of the latter; I wouldn’t know how to get along without my work.

I quit school when I was only 10. My father was a painter who drank heavily and left my mother when I was barely eight. I didn’t know what ever became of him. At first I heard from him occasionally, and when I could afford it, I offered to help him financially. He never embarrassed me by accepting my help.

I started out as an engraver’s apprentice, but in short order became a carpenter’s assistant, a doll painter, and a pen maker. One day I persuaded my older brother Paul that we should become circus acrobats. But I broke so many bones that I went back to the carpenter’s bench.

Early in life I had discovered an ability to attract a crowd whenever I sang, so I cajoled myself an audition at the Casino des Tourelles and got my first singing job—at 12 francs a week. That was a few days before my 12th birthday.

My fortunes improved slowly. I began to tour the “cafe circuit” of the Paris suburbs, where I became known as “Le Petit Chevalier.” But my big break came when I was 17 and singing at the Eldorado Theatre. The fabulous music-hall queen, Mistinguett, saw me and insisted I join her act at the Folies Bergere.

I don’t think any woman could do more for a man than Mistinguett did for me. She deserves credit for some of my success and much of my happiness. I have never admired anyone more.



In 1909, Maurice Chevalier appeared with Mistinguett—and a doomed topper.