

The Most Interesting People I've Met

As reporter, war correspondent, and author, Quentin Reynolds has met saints, scholars, and scoundrels — persons nobody could ever forget; who were the most fascinating? Here's his pick with intimate insights into each

Humphrey Bogart

Humphrey Bogart was a man not many people really knew. He lived in Hollywood most of his adult life but never became part of it. He was a devoted husband to Betty (Lauren) Bacall and a wonderful father to their two children. His whole life centered around these three and a few close friends who made his big house their headquarters.

In his earlier days, Bogey's trips to New York were occasionally highlighted in the gossip columns. He was an enthusiastic member of the "dawn patrol"; an avowed enemy of sleep, he'd stay in a night club as long as there was a waiter left to bring him his favorite drink. He had a biting wit and he enjoyed needling friend or stranger. This got him into occasional night-club embroglios which were always well-publicized. A large part of the public undoubtedly thought of him as a lusty, carefree playboy.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Bogart was not a product of Hollywood but of Andover and the New York stage. He had a complete dedication toward acting, and Hollywood directors found him a joy to work with.

After work, he usually took either his director or his costar home with him and rehearsed the



next day's action for hours. When he wasn't working, it was quite different. Around 5 o'clock, Frank Sinatra, Judy Garland, Spencer Tracy, agent Paul Lazar, restaurateur Mike Romanoff, and a few others besides myself would drop in. We would argue amicably about everything from baseball to politics. The two youngsters, Stephen and Leslie, often would drown us out with the blast of the television set as they watched the Westerns. Bogey would merely shrug and say, "This hour belongs to them. They'll disappear at 6:30."

Bogey owned a boat, and it was one of his passions. He had a fine professional captain who made a first-rate sailor out of him. Bogey belonged to several West Coast yacht clubs. One day he docked his boat at one of them and took his captain into the club for a drink. When they had finished, the club secretary drew him aside and said stiffly, "Mr. Bogart, this bar is for members and their guests. We do not allow professional sailors in here."

By some mighty effort, Bogey controlled his temper and said, "Then you can do without me. I hereby resign from your lousy club, and I'll get every friend of mine to resign, too."

Bogey never preached liberalism and tolerance; he practiced them.

Bogey died the hard way—from cancer. He never admitted even to Betty that he knew he was going to die. To the very end, he maintained an air of cheerfulness, making things easier for his family and friends. When the end came, his doctor said to Betty: "Your husband was the most courageous man I've ever met."

Winston Churchill

Once during the war, I did a B.B.C. broadcast in London, and two days later I was amazed to receive a fan letter from Winston Churchill. The next week, Mrs. Churchill phoned and invited me to dinner at Chequers, the estate loaned to prime ministers of England during their term of office.

I had met Churchill only twice before at large dinners, but 10 minutes after my arrival at Chequers I felt almost as though I had known the family for years. This was during a crucial period, before America entered the war,



but the Prime Minister was relaxed, exuding charm and confidence; one would never have known that his country was in a virtual state of siege.

Before dinner, we assembled in the large, high-ceilinged living room for drinks. Daughter Mary, then 18, presided over the bar. In addition to myself, Harry Hopkins, Robert E. Sherwood, and Commander Thompson, the Prime Minister's aide, were there.

It was a cozy family dinner, and Churchill's conversation was much like a chameleon on a rock. It darted back into antiquity; it touched on Greece, and that reminded him of a canto from "Don Juan"; and he spoke of Byron who reminded him of Kipling.

"Ah, there was a singer of songs but, of course, there was only one, I mean Shakespeare. Do you remember Hamlet's soliloquy?"

Now Winston Churchill, the actor, took over. He stood up and recited the long soliloquy; he was Hamlet, and not a word in the long passage did he miss.

The main course was served. "It's lamb," Mrs. Churchill said. He tasted it and frowned. "Lamb! It's mutton! Really, Clemmy, can't you do better?"

Handsome Clementine Churchill answered, smiling, "Remember, Winston, there's a war on."

After dinner we had port and the remarkable Churchillian cigars. Bob Sherwood bemoaned the fact that the war had not produced one great poet.

"But the last war produced one, Rupert Brooke," Churchill said. "Do you remember 'The Fish'?"

"In a cool curving world he lies
And ripples with dark ecstasies."

He then switched and asked us mischievously if we could identify a stanza of a poem. He gave it to us, but we all looked blank. He roared with laughter because none of us could recall the lines from the American writer Bret Harte.

When I left, the Prime Minister walked to the door with me. "It's been nice having you," he said. "You must come again. Good night."

The car pulled away. I looked back just for a moment. The Prime Minister had forgotten the blackout. He stood there in the doorway, and the dim light from the hall silhouetted him—sturdy, rocklike, immovable. His cigar stuck in his mouth at a jaunty angle. He waved once and grinned.