

The Most Interesting People I've Met

By GEOFFREY BOCCA

BOTH THE GOOD and the bad are among the people who interest me most. But all of them have something in common: toughness, resilience.

The weak, the fragile, I am ashamed to say, have never moved me. Rascality amuses me when it is carried out with sufficient devil-may-care. Energy fascinates me. Independence attracts me.

With no particular order in mind, I begin with the most superb, dy-



Rosalind Russell

namic personality in show business, ROSALIND RUSSELL.

I particularly recall one evening with Roz in, of all places, Hutchinson, Kans., where she, Bill Holden, and Joshua Logan were on location for the movie, "Picnic." The tornado season was at its height, the sky was the color of lint, there was no air to breathe, and tempers were at explosion point. With a sort of drink-for-tomorrow-we-die attitude, we decided to have a champagne-and-caviar party for the whole company. It turned out lively. Bill Holden made a lot of noise, then went unsteadily to bed. I made a lot of noise and, unsteadily, stayed around.

But the star of the evening was Rosalind Russell. She sang the entire score of "Wonderful Town," in which she starred on Broadway. She danced, doing high kicks with an incredible litheness. She went into a stream of very funny jokes. She became briefly serious to talk about politics. She became bored and started to sing again. Then she acted some of the tragic scenes from "Mourning Becomes Electra."

One by one, the other members of the company drifted to bed—but not Roz. At two in the morning she was still singing, still dancing, still laughing raucously, still telling stories, and doing everything well. It was the most remarkable piece of sustained animal energy and sheer brilliance I have ever seen.

From Roz to as extreme an opposite as one can imagine: ALFRED DE MARIGNY, who in 1943 was charged with the murder of his father-in-law, Sir Harry Oakes.

Sir Harry, a gold-mining millionaire, had been butchered to death and his body set aflame in his home in the Bahamas. De Marigny, who had been considered something of a playboy, had secretly married Oakes' daughter Nancy. There were furious quarrels between Oakes and de Marigny. But, apart from that, there was no evidence against de Marigny; indeed, his case was airtight.

All the same, he was kept in prison for three months before the trial, tried, acquitted, and then deported—a scandalous injustice. No one else was ever tried for the crime, and it remains technically unsolved.

His wife, who stood by him during the trial, left him. He moved from place to place, from job to job. He settled in Cuba; but after Castro made life impossible for foreigners,



Alfred de Marigny

he had to move again. He asked me if I could find him a place near my own villa on the French Riviera, and I said I could. He is now remarried and has two small sons.

What I admire about Fred de Marigny is his psychological strength. All the other persons involved in the fantastic Oakes drama were made

bitter and unhappy by it. But he—the one person who suffered most—is a happy man. He realizes he has to live the rest of his life with the murder, and he accepts it.

He is preparing for the day when he must tell his own children about his past. "Sometimes my wife and I watch tv shows with the kids," he told me, "and often there is a situation in which the hero is put in prison. We point out to the children that innocent people do go to prison sometimes." De Marigny's philosophy of life is summed up in a quotation: "Man is an apprentice, and pain is his master, and no one understands who has not suffered."

Another man who has always fascinated me is IAN FLEMING. He can do so many things better than write thrillers. He is a wit, a leading authority on rare books, a six-handi-



Ian Fleming

cap golfer, a manic gambler who can play poker like a ringer. When he writes about general subjects, he does so on a noticeably higher intellectual level than when he writes about his thug-hero, James Bond.

Fleming lives among a small circle of friends who spend long evenings insulting each other freely. "What a dreary fellow your James Bond is," says his friend Noel Coward. "The trouble with you, Ian," says another, "is that you put up a smoke screen of energy to hide your laziness."

Fleming puts another cigarette in his long holder and says, "The trouble with you fellows is you haven't the wit to recognize a genuine original like myself. There are not many of us left."

In his 54 years, he has been a stockbroker, foreign correspondent

in Moscow, and foreign manager of a big English newspaper chain. To me, the most interesting period of his life was during the war, when he rose to the rank of commander in the Royal Navy—very rare for a hostilities-only sailor.

After D-Day he ran what was jocularly known as Fleming's Private Navy, a band of sailors—most of them peacetime professors, golfers, and assorted eccentrics—who moved ahead of advancing Allied troops to capture German documents and ciphers. Casualties were heavy.

The most impressive part of Ian's contribution is that he remained in London directing the venture. He is an instinctive adventurer and romantic, and he must have longed to be in the fight. But he knew that someone had to make the grim decisions at the Admiralty, so he did. It's often harder to decide to do than to die.

Movie stars, I regret to tell you, are rarely very intelligent. Roz Russell is very much an exception to the rule—and so is SOPHIA LOREN.

She is a girl from the slums of Naples who, at 27, made herself not only a great star but a great lady, a girl who also taught herself to speak English and French (and she is amusing in both).

I was sitting with Sophia some time ago on the set of a film she was making in Pisa. "You know, Sophia," I said like a fathead, "a movie star has an easy life. The last time we saw each other you were making 'Boy on a Dolphin,' and we were sit-



Sophia Loren

ting around just like this."

Sophia turned her fantastic green eyes on me, and I thought I detected a mischievous gleam, but she said