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Peter Lawford: The Man Who Kept the Secrets

James Spada

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This New York Times best seller tells the glamorous, scandalous, and tragic story of a handsome, sophisticated Englishman who became a bobby-sox idol, a lover of Ava Gardner and Lana Turner, a Kennedy in-law, a member of Sinatra's Rat Pack, and an intimate confidante of Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor.

Peter Lawford: The Man Who Kept the Secrets Details

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From Reader Review Peter Lawford: The Man Who Kept the Secrets for online ebook

Straker says

Solid biography of a pathetic figure. Lawford spent his entire life surrounded by sharks (his mother, Louis B. Mayer, the Kennedys, Frank Sinatra) who wanted him to be more than he was or could ever be. As the disappointments and failures mounted, he turned to alcohol, drugs, and squalid sex to ease the pain. A journey through the darkest side of show business and politics, culminating in a sad death that could easily be seen as suicide committed over a period of years.

Louise says

Spada has pieced this all together for us. It's a mammoth effort. Its lack of footnotes can be mostly excused because the narrative holds together and has power.

In summary: an inconvenient but necessary child to his mother becomes a necessary and inconvenient inlaw.

Lawford's childhood and family stories are astounding. This history includes sexual abuse, an inherited tendency to addiction and emotional highs and lows. Your heart goes out to Peter as a little boy. The cards are stacked against him, but there surely must have been a hand he could play to win.

Sir Sydney is sympathetic for his bravery. "Lady" Lawford has nothing going for her but the title she connived. These Victorian relics lived high and fell far. The Lady and the Sir have no marketable skills nor any disposition to acquire them. They need their 16 year old son to park cars... and succeed in a once disdained acting (working) career. The Lawfords save face and receive largess from others of their class by claiming their assets were frozen in war time Britain.

Peter saves them from the abyss. Polish, persistence, war and good looks bring him movie roles and connections. He marries American royalty, but the family is IRISH and "Lady" is no lady in this regard. This re-elevation is no bed of roses for Peter. He is useful (and may have been critical) for the Kennedys. Through the Kennedys he becomes useful to his former friend Sinatra. Through Sinatra and Monroe he became inconvenient to everyone, and the divorce makes him totally unnecessary to anyone.

The rest is history, in which Lawford, who has so many starring roles, may not even get a credit.

He doesn't keep all secrets, he sells Elizabeth Taylor's for \$15K. Does he really know who killed JFK and MM, or does he just think he knows?

I came to this book because I read the bio of his son, "Symptoms of Withdrawal". Peter sees Chris very little, and his sisters even less. Spada makes us ache for Peter, but he did not break the cycle.

This is a compelling and thought provoking book. It hits you on many levels. When you finish it, you feel you need a few days to absorb all you've read.

Candi says

I am beginning this book today

I have had it for a very long time-but just now have the time to read

YHZ says

Well researched and written.

Katherine Basto says

Peter Lawford was a man who certainly had secrets. Poor Peter! Abused as a child, drug and alcohol addled towards the end of his life, he tried his hardest to please the Kennedys, Frank Sinatra and ended up pleasing no one. He ultimately ended up being rejected by both. Regardless of all his attempts to make things better, he ended up being ostracized by those he cared about.

This is a well written and thorough page turner filled with gossip details from Marilyn Monroe(why didn't Peter go to her house that fateful night when she didn't answer the phone?) to his relations with Jack Kennedy, providing women for the President.

It seemed he carried guilt during his life and buried it over with kinky sex, drugs and alcohol. Toward the end of his life, he married women young enough to be his daughter. It was amazing his four children still thought so highly of him since he was an absentee father, only around if he needed money for drugs.

Peter Lawford was a talented actor that had too much thrust on him too soon. Perhaps being a child actor contributed to the damage. His mother, Lady Lawson was a controlling nut case.

James Spada does a phenomenal job bring the story of Peter Lawford to life! The addition of Milt Ebbons's comments, Peter's life long manager added much authenticity and texture to the book! I loved it!

Yourfiendmrjones says

The most brutal of the books about Sinatra's Rat Pack is this biography of Peter Lawford. Brother-in-law to JFK, MGM contract player and, for awhile, a member of Frank Sinatra's own personal roundtable, Lawford was privy to some of the major points in mid-fifties pop culture history. This is also one of the books that Shawn Levy's "Rat Pack Confidential: Frank, Dean, Sammy, Peter, Joey and the Last Great Show Biz Party" lifted so freely from. If you've read that one, trust me, pick up the Lawford book and the following-

Dino- Living High in The Dirty Business of Dreams by Nick Tosches

Yes I Can: The Story of Sammy Davis, Jr. by Sammy Davis Jr., Burt Boyar, Jane Boyar

His Way: An Unauthorized Biography Of Frank Sinatra by Kitty Kelley

My Lucky Stars: A Hollywood Memoir by Shirley Maclaine

and even Levy's own, superior-

King of Comedy: The Life and Art of Jerry Lewis by Shawn Levy

This is where Levy got most of his material for the Rat Pack book.

Dee says

Peter Lawford was handsome and world-famous. He had money, celebrity friends and married into the Kennedy family but, by the end of the book, I felt such sadness for him.

His mother was indifferent and/or cruel to him... his friendships ended with tragedy - he felt tremendous guilt over the death of Marilyn Monroe and was devastated when JFK was assassinated. Frank Sinatra treated him terribly and may have even had him blackballed in the entertainment industry.

By the end of the 1960s, Lawford was nearly broke and suffered from the effects of alcoholism and heavy drug usage. Most of his friends had left him and his "new" friends - other druggies and/or dealers - took advantage of him.

The book itself was well-written and sources were included.

Lance says

This was an interesting biography of a man who was at the center of the Hollywood tempest in the 1960s. Not only was Lawford a member of the Rat Pack, but he also married into the Kennedy family and was close friends with Marilyn Monroe. The subtitle of this book is *The Man Who Kept The Secrets* because he never talked much about what he knew, (and the evidence shows he knew quite a bit). Even though this isn't a tell-all biography, it still proves quite interesting.

Brooklyn Tayla says

I must say while this was long winded at some parts, it was never truly boring. What it was - heartbreaking, poignant, powerful and eye opening. I learnt lots about Lawford and I don't think I shall see him the same after this in his movies. Still adore him though. :P

Karla says

Far more interesting than I was expecting. All I knew of Lawford was an amazingly drunken performance (alongside an equally pickled Jack Palance) in the Charlie's Angels ripoff "Angels' Revenge." The MST3K crew rightfully skewered both the movie and Lawford, so this was more of a curiosity piece. I ended up reading this in a few sittings, as his Hollywood career and paling around with the Kennedys and Sinatra got him both as much influence as misery. He was a reasonably decent guy that, I felt, wanted to be a big player, but didn't have the wits to handle it well. At least, that's the impression I got after finishing the book.

And I've gone back and watched some of his early Hollywood stuff. He was pretty charismatic and charming, and a good, light actor. A shame he crawled inside a bottle.

Beverly Bendiks says

I found this as fascinating as any work of fiction. What a life!

E Wilson says

This book was very interesting not only with the story of Lawford's life, but the surrounding social scene. Starting from his birth, when it was acceptable for the upper class of England to have affairs and mistresses it was a scandal for someone to divorce. Lawford's parents left England and traveled throughout the world to avoid being ostracized. Mrs Lawford was extremely class conscious and reportedly got pregnant with Peter in order to compel Sir Sydney Lawford to marry her and make her Lady Lawford. Peter became a cosmopolitan at an early age. He grew up to be a classy debonair man.

The Lawfords settled in South Florida and when Sir Sydney lost his fortune, Peter had to go to work as the sole support of the family. He worked as a parking valet and got in trouble for eating lunch with his black co-workers.

When the US joined World War II, Peter was 4F due to a horrible accident when he was younger and almost lost his right arm. This gave him the opportunity to fulfill his dream to be an actor since many of Hollywood's male stars had gone into the service. He moved to California and began his acting career. There's lots of juicy gossip about the Hollywood scene during this era.

He doesn't have a reputation as a great actor but he was young, handsome, and had that worldly sophistication about him. He became a popular movie idol.

Peter seemed very down to earth during his early career. He enjoyed exercising and hanging out with the surfing community at the beach. He was a good friend to his everyday crowd as well as to the acting community. Many people comment on what a good friend Peter Lawford could be. Peter had some sexual hang-ups and always liked to drink. When he became a member of Frank Sinatra's Rat Pack he became more popular and more hedonistic.

Lawford's marriage to Pat Kennedy did not seem to be a good move. They were not very

compatible. Peter relished the status of being a brother-in-law of the president. He gladly pimped Hollywood beauties including his friend, Marilyn Monroe for the president.

The later portion of the book was very depressing. After his divorce from Pat, Marilyn Monroe's death and his fallout with Frank Sinatra he seemed to lose his identity. He got into the hippy drug scene and along with his drinking he became less and less able to find work. He still wanted to live the lavish life style and that along with the cost of drugs kept him constantly in debt. He dated women half his age and married several of them. His kinky sexual request ran off some of them . When one looks back at the early Peter Lawford , one has to think "what a terrible waste".

Robert Barone says

I never knew much about Peter Lawford but still decided to read this book. A truly well researched book with tons of insight to the Hollywood scene. Side stories about Frank Sinatra, Marilyn Monroe and the Kennedys really added to the story !!

Maureen O'Donnell says

Very well researched and written

Kendra says

Interesting account of Peter Lawford's life. I'd gotten some glimpses from another biography on The Rat Pack, but this book goes even deeper and reveals more. I haven't yet gotten to the part of his life where he pals up with Sinatra and marries into the Kennedy clan...I'm sure it will get even more interesting.
