

Agent Locks Up Nixon

Life at the Top of the

By Adam Shaw
Washington Post

Washington

HE IS a legend in a traditionally nameless trade, a man Fortune magazine once called one of America's five "peerless princes of pitch," whom his friends used to joke about, saying, "he's immortal."

By acquiring the sole right to sell former President Richard Nixon's memoirs, Irving Paul (Swifty) Lazar, 67, may well become so.

He did it on August 31 during a "pleasant" three-hour meeting with Mr. Nixon in San Clemente to which he had been invited while in Paris.

In New York, Lazar said he is talking to "publishers of every political persuasion" about the future Nixon book ("I don't know when he'll write it, probably when the dust settles") which he said Mr. Nixon assured him will be written "the way it was."

★ ★ ★

WHILE MANY of his friends expressed surprise that Lazar would want to represent Mr. Nixon, none was surprised that the former President would want to be his client.

"Nixon went to Swifty because he's the best," said Lauren Bacall.

"The key to his career is that his company is so agreeable and his zest for life so contagious that he attracted people into his orbit, and, over a period of time his client list became so glittering that it reached a point where even an ex-president of the United States wants to be part of it," said actor Martin Gabel.

"It's perfectly all right for him to represent Nixon," chipped in lyricist Alan Jay Lerner, "but not for him to defend his morality or lack thereof."

"I've been called in by two other Presidents to advise them about their books," Lazar said. "Every President has had an opportunity to give his version of his contribution to history and it is very important that former President Nixon, who is an extremely controversial figure, have the same opportunity."

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LAZAR, WHO has been known to advise balking clients "take the money and run for the train," said that Mr. Nixon "never talked about money (although \$2 million is rumored for the book). He never asked me how many copies the book (more likely to be in two volumes) might sell. He was very aloof from the commercial aspect of it."

Scott Meredith, Spiro Agnew's agent, said he had been contacted by the White House both before and after Mr. Nixon's resignation and that money had been a major topic. Meredith said he doubted Mr. Nixon could "deal honestly and openly about his presidency right now. It's too early."

Meredith called Lazar "the grand old man in this field," and predicted failure for his newest venture.



PORTER
For Christmas



LERNER
It's all right



BACALL
Saving grace



NIXON
No money talk

LAZAR IS in New York with, he says, a signed letter from Mr. Nixon in his pocket assuring him he is the one and only agent authorized to sell the future book.

From Lazar's record, Mr. Nixon is in good hands and the most illustrious of company. Over the years, Lazar has built up a stable of clients and probably arranged more million-dollar deals than any single agent in the country.

In his time, Lazar has represented and sold the works of Ernest Hemingway, Maxwell Anderson, Moss Hart, Truman Capote, Vladimir Nabokov, Neil Simon, Theodore White, Irwin Shaw, James Jones, Edna Thurber, Françoise Sagan, George Kaufman, Richard Brooks, Alan Jay Lerner, Cole Porter and Noel Coward, among many. In some cases he was not the exclusive agent, his involvement often occurring, for example, in the sale of an already published work for stage or screen adaptation.

Book

Book World

HIS SHOW business career began by representing big bands and vaudeville acts for the Music Corporation of America in the '30s. It really took off when, as a second lieutenant in the Air Force during World War II, he brought together General "Hap" Arnold and playwright Moss Hart.

In typical Lazar fashion, he did it by wiring both that each wanted to meet the other. The meeting resulted in the show, "Winged Victory," which Lazar produced and which netted him a captaincy and the Air Force relief fund a tidy \$4 million.

Shortly thereafter Hart asked Lazar what he wanted for Christmas. "Cole Porter," said Lazar. And he had a new client.

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FIVE-FOOT-FOUR, gleamingly bald and natty in English suits, Italian shirts and monogrammed underwear, Lazar was described by Alan Lerner as having "the nerve of a one-armed paperhanger" and by Irwin Shaw as looking like "an expensive beach toy from Abercrombie and Fitch."

He has been known to pave hotel room floors with bath towels for fear of germs, and most of his friends and clients have endless "Swiftly stories."

Few of them however, have ever complained that Lazar hasn't earned every penny of his "10 per cent" or that he is anything but the most loyal of friends and generous of hosts.

For years a confirmed bachelor, Lazar married Mary Van Nuys, a model some years his junior, in 1963.

★ ★ ★

LAUREN BACALL called him a "totally loyal and devoted friend. He was terrific through Bogie's illness." She echoed an old joke that Lazar never reads the books he sells by saying, "The saving grace is that he'll never have to read Nixon's book."

She recalled a typically grand party Lazar gave in California some years back.

"It was the end of the evening. We'd all been teasing him a lot about being the 'Wash and Dry' king, and finally he had to get up and make a speech. I could see he was choking up, he was very moved because he knew we all loved him so. Finally, he rose and said, 'I made you and I can break you'."

Lazar even tells stories about himself, the most famous illustrating his belief that he never stopped believing in the value of representation with or without authorization (that is not the case at all with Mr. Nixon, he said. "We have a written understanding.").

One day, Lazar said, he met a producer who asked him, "Whom do you represent in this \$3 million deal (of 'West Side Story')?" Lazar, looking straight up above his half-rimmed glasses replied, "I represent you." He got his 10 per cent.