

## **PREFACE**

The first president of the United States who I ever saw in person was Dwight Eisenhower. He was in an open car, driving to Theodore Roosevelt's old house on Sagamore Hill near Oyster Bay, New York on the north shore of Long Island where I grew up. It was June 14, 1953, and I was eight years old, standing by the roadside with my father, waving an American flag at the president as he drove past. Little did I know on that day that my future would have me working in the White House for two presidents. All that I knew then was that I saw the leader of my country in person. He was a real hero in battle and in politics, and I was thrilled.

President Eisenhower was making this trip to dedicate Theodore Roosevelt's house as a national shrine. I was not at the dedication, but I have read the speech that Eisenhower gave in which he spoke about Roosevelt's extraordinary leadership. "We look up and study the actions of leaders, to see what were the problems facing them; how did they analyze them; how did they reach their decisions; what did they do," Eisenhower told the gathered. "One of the men who was a favorite for study in my generation was Theodore Roosevelt."

Eisenhower went on to explain that, in Roosevelt, he saw "a man who understood his fellow human beings. He understood those things for which they yearned and which they deserved under the principles in which he believed." He praised Roosevelt some more and, at the end of his speech, he offered a prescription: "If each of us could dedicate himself to attempt to emulate Theodore Roosevelt in his consideration for what we so futilely call 'the common man' for want of a better word—that if we could emulate the devotion of that American citizen to all citizens, if we could have his courage in carrying through, his wisdom in seeing what was right and adhering to the right, then I am quite certain that not only will Sagamore Hill and this house stand as a great monument, but each of us in his own way will build a little monument to America."

Eisenhower had been part of what author and journalist Tom Brokaw called the "greatest generation" of Americans, those who took up the cause of liberty and justice with the willingness to sacrifice their lives in the name of it as they fought the Nazis and the fascist peril

in Europe and the Pacific. He was part of that generation who made today's world, even with all its problems and challenges, possible.

I served in the military, as well, spending a year in quite a bit of combat in Vietnam. I also served two presidents, Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, while I was an employee in the White House, and all told I have met nine presidents. These events in my life would have certainly surprised—and probably scared the wits out of—my eight-year-old self, waving at President Eisenhower on that warm June day in 1953. I have been graced by an interesting life, which has also been a great surprise because there were a couple of times when I didn't think an interesting life, or any kind of life at all, would happen for me.

On my journey in this life, I have seen and learned a lot. My purpose in writing this book is to share my story with those who were also counted out, so you might find a way to count yourself in. That said, this is not only a book about being counted out and finding a way to be counted in, but also a book about how I learned to become someone who was responsible for the success of others as I made my way—making more than a few mistakes—to now. It's the story of how I became me. Which I never thought would happen.

I didn't start out with some grand vision bouncing around in my head. Honestly, my primary quest in life was to get a job and just to be employable. I had no notion of becoming any kind of leader when I began my journey even though I did become one, many times over, on many different fronts.

At first in my life there was no leadership: I was dyslexic, I could not read and could not spell and so I had a tough time trying to make the grade in school. But I kept going and then a leader stepped up when a teacher took action on my behalf. I was given direction and valued, and I gladly accepted it. And on it went, from my time in sports to my time in the academic world to combat in the military to service in the White House and the Department of State and to the billion-dollar world of corporate life as a CEO. I rose rank by rank and job by job, rising to the level at which good leadership was asked of me and which was also supported in me, until I became a leader myself.

So, my journey in this book is not one of judgment, but of perspective, and not one of self-congratulation but of amazement. It's my view of what I saw and heard and did. The history is my own because I am not a historian. However, that said, my story—quite a lot of it,

actually—clearly intersects with American history.

It was at the White House that I first understood what a presidential decision means. General Alexander Haig, the Chief of Staff to President Richard Nixon, used to say, “A president makes four major decisions a year. And they are big ones.” I have made decisions, too—and, while they are nowhere as big as those a president must make, they all changed my life in profound ways, and I will tell you about them as we go. Ultimately, I know that I began my journey as part of the “wall sitter’s union,” which is an expression I also learned while working in the White House. It refers to the aides who sit at the edge of the room in chairs lined against the wall in those big meetings with the principal whom they serve sitting at the Big Table. Which is another way of saying that, while I got into the room, I never had a real place at that table where decisions were made.

Although I got to watch and listen and learn, I did not land at the Big Table until I became a CEO myself, and then I had to deal with boards that required me to explain why I had made the decisions that I made. And to see if I could make them listen or, better yet, agree with my decisions. They were not always readily agreeable, to put it mildly.

My perspective on my life has given me pause to reflect, which is what drives my journey to seek out those qualities that reveal the best and, sometimes, the worst in us. In telling my story, we will see what I was thinking when I made my decisions and what other people were thinking of me and how the clash of the two, even within me as I wrestled with my own conscience and even counted myself out. I forged my journey that was not always easy—but usually surprising.

So, I invite you to come with me on my journey through my life and, along the way, explore what I have been lucky to see up close: the good, and the not so good, and what we can learn from these points to make our country, our world, and ourselves better.

## **Chapter 1**

*“If you pass the helicopter test, you get a helicopter.”*

It was June of 1973, and I was 32,000 feet above the United States on Air Force One, thinking of an expression I had learned in the Army about how you get a helicopter. You get a helicopter by passing the helicopter test. What this expression means is that, if you train and then pass a certain test on helicopter proficiency, you’ll be a licensed pilot and get to fly choppers. I needed to pass that test because I needed a job.

I was up there in the sky and heading west—not on a helicopter and not exactly on Air Force One, either—because President Richard Nixon was not on the jet, and only when the president is on board does it become Air Force One. In fact, I was the only passenger (I think, although David Hoopes, special assistant to the president whom I would get to know better later, and his family might have snuck on at the tail end) because I was on my way to San Clemente, California to see President Nixon’s Chief of Staff General Alexander Haig at the “Western White House.” I was going to San Clemente for a job interview. I had just graduated cum laude from Harvard College, which is itself a highly unlikely story I will get into later, and a Harvard friend had connected me to General Haig. My friend thought I might be of some use to the new chief of staff, and so I was flying west to see if the general agreed.

I was on Air Force One because the leader of the USSR, Leonid Brezhnev, had been flown back to Washington D.C. on it after meeting with Nixon in California. The jet was returning to the Marine Corps Air Station in El Toro, California (today known as Lake Forest), and they offered me a ride. I flew down to Washington from Boston, and a White House limousine drove me to Andrews Air Force Base, and I boarded the president’s plane.

As I flew over the country, staring out the window of Special Air Mission 27000, as it was known when not carrying the president, I was thinking that I was about to enter a world that I could only have dreamt of once upon a time—or would have been awestruck by as did when I waved a flag by the side of the road as a boy. As you will see, that dream was an awfully big one. I had also experienced a pretty turbulent route to get on this jet, in the First Lady’s

section, no less, and I marveled at how this had come to be.

The Air Force steward asked me if I would like something to eat, and so I ordered a sandwich. The steward brought it to my seat before telling me the cost: “That will be \$1.68, please.” I was not a member of the White House mess, and there was no free lunch on this Air Force jet. So, I paid for my lunch and ate it, thinking that maybe the next time I was on this plane, if that day ever came, I would not have to pay for my lunch because I would be part of the team.

I landed at El Toro, the Marine base. A Marine driver met me and drove me to the San Clemente Inn. I was about to begin a new chapter in my life. I would be introduced to the White House leadership during the time of Watergate and later to the Department of State as the assistant deputy secretary of state where I was dispatched around the world on State Department business. This eventually led to my work for major American companies and, eventually, as a chairman and CEO myself. Of course, I had no idea of that then. And I would not have even dared to imagine it.

So, as I looked down on the landscape passing beneath me, I thought, if it worked, I would have an opportunity to serve my country again. Then I asked myself: how the hell did I get here?

Well, it all began in June of 1965 when I was asked to leave college after my sophomore year. 1965 was a significant year. In Selma, Alabama, Martin Luther King, Jr. led Civil Rights demonstrators on a march pushing the passage of the Voting Rights Act, and *The Sound of Music* had just come out in the movie theaters as did *Help!* by the Beatles on our radios. Help is what I needed as I thought my life was a failure and my career prospects greatly diminished. I would never be able to just “get by”. However, I would do more than just get by, which I am so grateful for--and still shocked by. In fact, it was much more than I could have ever imagined.