RING LARDNER, JR.

I'd Hate Myself in the Morning

a memoir

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Besides marriage, children, and career, my principal activities in the years before the United States entered World War II involved left-wing politics, mostly of the Communist Party kind. By the time Budd and I began working together on *A Star Is Born*, he had already joined the Party's recently-organized Hollywood branch. After I wrote a letter to *Time* magazine, using Selznick International stationery to express a Stalinist view of the Stalin–Trotsky conflict, Budd was reproached for not having reported so likely a candidate and instructed to recruit me—a task that took all of five minutes. I thus became one of about two dozen party members in Hollywood. (Five years later, the count was well over two hundred.) About half of us were screenwriters, the rest actors, directors, script readers, and office workers.

Being a communist was time-consuming. I attended events of one sort or another four or five nights a week. There were separate organizational and educational gatherings of my branch, and "fraction" meetings of Communists and close sympathizers within the Screen Writers Guild. Meanwhile, as a representative of the younger writers, I had been elected to the guild's executive board, which had all-too-frequent meetings of its own. In addition, there were the various Guild committees and similar groups like the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, the Motion Picture Artists Committee for Spanish Democracy and, during the war years, the Hollywood Writers Mobilization and Russian War Relief. Silvia practically had to join the party so that we could see each other. Luckily, without any organized study, she had reached some pretty negative conclusions about the capitalist system and the inequities of American life. She was not a difficult convert.

Communists, like everybody else in the prewar years, had a lot to say about what was happening in Europe. But the subject matter of our official get-togethers was mostly local, centering on the organizational mechanics of the three "talent guilds"—writers, actors and directors—and our attempts to unionize such co-workers as readers, publicists, and secretaries. While there was room for a certain amount of playful banter ("If the comrade means me by that Bolshevist criticism, I'll ask him to step outside"), our discussions tended to be boring and repetitious. It might have been interesting to be part of a foreign-financed conspiracy to undermine American institutions and steal precious American secrets for the Russians, but we never seemed to get around to anything like that.

As for the Soviet Union, while we viewed it sympathetically as an experiment, no one I knew wanted to see the same formula applied in our own country—not the dictatorship, or the repression of dissidents, or the phony elections, or the subordination of the arts to propaganda. America, we were convinced, would become socialist with all its freedoms intact, which Russia had never had. With such a vision, the Hollywood party grew until we qualified to become what was known as a "section." That called for a membership meeting to elect a governing body (a section committee) with a full-time functionary (the section organizer) and to divide the members into a new set of branches, each with its own organizer, educational director, and secretary-treasurer.

Where to hold such a meeting was a problem, for it was assumed even then that to be publicly identified as a party member could mean the end of one's career in the movie business. Fortunately, a screenwriter named Martin Berkeley, who specialized in animal films (I have always maintained that he couldn't write human dialogue), stepped into the breach. Berkeley's house, which he offered

to the party, was located in a sparsely settled canyon and yet equipped with a large living room and ample parking space. Our host either kept notes or had an outstanding memory. When he turned out to be an informer and testified fifteen years later before H.U.A.C., he named a record total of one hundred sixty-one people as either having been present that day or having joined the party afterward. His list was accurate on the whole, but in naming those at the meeting, he added Dashiell Hammett and Lillian Hellman, who were not there. I was and knew them well. They were clearly sympathetic to the Soviet Union and the Party, but whether they joined or not, I never knew.

That was because the Hollywood section had a special policy for celebrities. We always faced the likelihood that there was at least one informer in our midst, and what greater triumph could an informer experience than turning over a famous name or two? So the few of them who were recruited met separately in a small group with a couple of our most steadfast section leaders. Dorothy Parker and Alan Campbell had joined, I knew, because Budd had recruited them and I had been privy to the process. But I never saw either of them at what was strictly a party gathering.

With the intensification of the Spanish Civil War and the consolidation of Nazi power in Germany, the Party in Hollywood gained in numbers and influence. Relations between Party members and those who called themselves liberals or progressives were harmonious for the simple reason that we took the same positions on the major issues of the day. Our arguments, mostly friendly in those years, were over minor points. One cause on which there was general agreement was the rebellion against the legally elected government in Spain. During the final year of that conflict, I grew emotionally even closer to the anti-fascist cause as a result of my brother Jim's part in it. In Hollywood as in the rest of the country, the left-liberal amity lasted

up until August 1939, when the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact and the outbreak of World War II split the coalition down the middle. From that moment until Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union two years later, to remain a Communist you had to believe the following:

1. That in the Munich Pact of 1938, the ruling forces of Britain and France had sold out Czechoslovakia and abandoned the policy of collective security with the purpose of turning Hitler against their real enemy, the Soviet Union.
2. That to forestall this plot, the Soviets had had no choice but to make a purely tactical deal with Germany, enabling them to strengthen their borders and build up their military power.
3. That their occupation of eastern Poland and southeastern Finland were not aggrandizing acts but necessary defensive moves against Germany.
4. That the best interests of the United States lay in neutrality.

I had subscribed to and articulated all these positions; and my liberal friends had listened respectfully, as had I to their counter-arguments. Now, however, the question was whether to support or oppose the war, and the debate was not so amicable. More people left the Party than joined it during these embattled years, yet the new recruits included my friend Dalton Trumbo, author of the stirring antiwar novel *Johnny Got His Gun*. Trumbo had resisted my previous recruitment efforts because of his strong pacifist sentiments; it was the Party's antiwar stand that won him over. Subsequently, the events of 1941—the German invasion of the USSR and the attack on Pearl Harbor—were so flagrant he found his pacifism no longer tenable.

Trumbo, as almost everyone called him, was a tremendously appealing character, and I regarded it as a privilege to be his friend. Brought up in Grand Junction, Colorado, he had moved with his wid-

owed mother to Los Angeles in the early years of the Depression. He worked in a bakery for a time, became a journalist, and published a novel (*Eclipse*) before breaking into the movie business as a reader and writer, at sixty dollars a week. Like Ben Hecht, he was renowned for his speed and had turned to the movies (and away from what he considered his more serious work as a novelist) in part to satisfy a large appetite for money; like Hecht too, he wrote some fine pictures, including *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* (a war movie singularly free of the heroics and hokum that sometimes characterized the genre) and *Our Vines Have Tender Grapes*, a story of farm life that, in its low-keyed simplicity, represented the direction in which many of us hoped see to Hollywood go after the war. By 1946, Trumbo's salary was three thousand dollars a week or seventy-five thousand a script, whichever he chose. Either way, he spent every bit of it, largely on improvements and additions to a dilapidated house he had purchased in the remote and inaccessible wilds of Ventura County. When the blacklist hit, Trumbo was forced to sell the place, and he had to do masses of undercover work at vastly lower prices just to get by. When he returned to the top rank of Hollywood writers in the 1960s, he also returned to his grandiose spending habits.

The party, the Screen Writers Guild, and the various Hollywood organizations devoted to the fight against fascism became the anchors of our social life in the prewar years; and when the guild won its battle against the Screen Playwrights, some of us served as missionaries or consultants to other categories of movie workers. I was assigned, for example, to advise a group at Warner Brothers who were trying to form a readers' guild. That was how I met Alice Goldberg, the extremely bright and attractive daughter of a Russian-born photographer—and how she met Ian Hunter. He was still boarding with Silvia and me, having moved with us from an apartment on Vista Del Mar to a house on Franklin Avenue, formerly occupied by Bette Davis. The

readers held a meeting there, and later we had Alice over for dinner. After that, her evening visits seemed to continue without further action on Sylvia's or my part, and soon we became used to having her under our roof in the morning as well. By a happy coincidence, Ian and Alice began to make plans for cohabitation and matrimony around the time of the birth of our son Peter. When Ian moved out, his room became Peter's nursery.

By introducing Ian to Alice, I not only helped him land a wife but laid the groundwork for his entry into the Communist Party, of which she was already a member. I played a more direct role in recruiting Trumbo and his friend Hugo Butler, and the four of us and our wives gradually became fast friends who took each other's hospitality for granted. When Ian and Alice acquired a home and some professional security, we learned that they were both exceptional cooks who seemed to think nothing of having a dozen of us over for something like suckling pig or roast beef and Yorkshire pudding.

Politics drew me closer to some friends, and away from others. In 1940, Budd Schulberg gave me the manuscript of his Hollywood novel, *What Makes Sammy Run?* He was worried that its harsh treatment of a Jewish producer on the make might be construed as anti-Semitic. I was one of three readers—Maurice Rapf and Scott Fitzgerald were the others—who reassured him on this score. But later on, Budd accepted an invitation to discuss the matter with two of the more notable ideologues in the Hollywood branch of the party, John Howard Lawson and V.J. Jerome, from whom he got a harsher reaction. When the novel was published the following year, the *Daily Worker* ran a favorable review and then, a few weeks later, a critical one by the same author, who had evidently been chastised by party functionaries. The second time around, he found a number of serious faults with the book, including its failure to adequately acknowledge the party's role in building the Screen Writers Guild.

Heavy-handed criticism of this sort was fairly common in the party, and some people ignored it without suffering any harm. For Budd, however, the experience was apparently an epiphany, inspiring feelings of kinship with the Russian writers and artists persecuted under Stalin and leading him away from the movement into which he had recruited me just a few years earlier. A decade later, he testified before H.U.A.C. and, not content to clarify his own polical thinking, heaped praise on the committee and named names, which had become the inevitable, unavoidable bottom line of all such attempts to establish one's patriotic bona fides.

The German invasion of the Soviet Union put us Reds back in tune with the liberals. Mike and I were finishing the screenplay of *Woman of the Year* at the time, and the news had a salutary effect on my relations with Kate Hepburn. She was an able and dedicated proponent of the anti-Nazi cause, and our script conferences had often been preceded by arguments (respectful, in our case) about the latest developments in the war. On the day of the news that Germany had launched a massive attack on Soviet positions, we were pleased to discover that we suddenly saw the world the same way.

When Japan bombed our fleet and Germany declared war on America, the unity of purpose between Communists and liberals in the movie business solidified further. Together we forged the Hollywood Writers Mobilization, which put writers of war-related movies in touch with units of the armed forces or the administration in Washington, and coordinated the activities of writers volunteering to produce war propaganda. By then, the only obvious difference between us and the noncommunists was that we tended to devote more time and effort to the same causes.

With a wife and two children to support, I was in no danger of being drafted, but anxious to play a part in the war. So I was pleased to be invited to join the newly-formed Office of Strategic Services

(O.S.S.), the precursor of the Central Intelligence Agency, and to recommend other writers for its visual presentation unit. One of my nominees, Ian Hunter, was accepted. Just before our departure a telegram instructed me to await further word, while he was to come ahead. As it happened, a security check with the Federal Bureau of Investigation under the deranged leadership of J. Edgar Hoover, had found me listed as a "premature anti-Fascist"—the first time I or anyone I knew had heard of the term.

At what point, in Mr. Hoover's view, was anti-fascism not premature? Probably only at the moment we were at war. If the words were simply code for "communist," what harm could a communist screenwriter do to a wartime program that included selling the American people on the virtues of our Russian ally? This was, after all, the period in which the Roosevelt administration persuaded Warners and M.G.M., two studios previously noted for the Red-baiting behavior of their bosses, to produce *Mission to Moscow* and *Song of Russia* respectively, in order to establish that Russians were human beings. It has only become clear in recent years that FDR, for all his strengths, was simply afraid to challenge the entrenched power of the fanatical Hoover.

In the following months, I was approached by someone in the Marine Corps to join a film unit in the Pacific and then a telegram from the Office of War Information asked how quickly I could join director William Wyler in Moscow to work on a movie about the war effort there. In both cases, the invitations were rescinded after security checks. Finally, early in 1943, still anxious to find a wartime role, I enlisted for a trial term of ninety days in the training film program of the Army Signal Corps. This time there was no rejection.

After a brief indoctrination session in Queens (where the Signal Corps had taken over one of the old Astoria studios), I was sent to Camp Hood in Texas to write a film about America's new secret weapon, the tank destroyer. This large mobile gun was supposed to

move so quickly and with such agility that it would decimate the tanks in Hitler's vaunted panzer divisions. It was good movie material and what we shot had more visual interest than most training films. Unfortunately, just as the film was ready to be shown, tank destroyers were employed for the first time in combat in North Africa, and failed so miserably that both the weapon and the film had to be suppressed.

Next, I was sent to the Cooks and Bakers School at Camp Lee, Virginia to write a short film called *Emergency Rations in the Combat Zone*. I was engaged in a debate with a couple of officers about the best visual way to present an unappealing item called a C-Ration when my wife phoned me from California to report that I was co-winner of an Academy Oscar for *Woman of the Year*. (In those days there wasn't even national radio coverage of the event.) Amid the congratulations that followed, my point about how to depict the C-ration was conceded.

Just as my trial term with the Signal Corps was expiring, I received an offer to work with Otto Preminger at Twentieth-Century Fox on a movie based upon the published diary of former American Ambassador to Germany, William E. Dodd, and his daughter Martha's book *Through Embassy Eyes*. To dramatize the rise of the Nazi Party and the Reichstag fire trial seemed to me potentially a far more significant contribution to the Allied cause than any training film I could possibly do, so I took the job on the spot.

I got along famously with Otto, a native of Austria whom old-time movie fans will remember as the prison camp commandant in Billy Wilder's prisoner-of-war movie *Stalag 17*. Otto's knowledge of matters Germanic enabled him to contribute a good deal to my research, which went speedily. What eventually threw the project behind schedule was his practice of shooting one movie while preparing another. Inevitably, problems with the current project took precedence over the future one, and he would draft the writer of the latter to help him out with the former—in this case, that early film noir

Laura. His problem was that Clifton Webb disliked most of the dialogue his gossip-columnist character had been given. Otto persuaded me to redo a line here another line there, and finally to rewrite Webb's entire part, all while receiving a salary for the Dodd story. I would run into this sort of thing with Otto again.

By the time I returned to and completed the screenplay about Nazism, it already had one count against it. Fox had just completed a costly film biography of Woodrow Wilson. Darryl Zanuck, who ran the studio at the time (and for many years to come), praised the movie to the skies after a screening; to underscore the extent of his admiration, in fact, he let it be known that if *Wilson* didn't show a profit, he would never again make a movie about history or public affairs. *Wilson* was a box-office disaster and Zanuck stuck to his word. He went out of his way, however, to express his satisfaction with my script, circulating it among his producers as a model of superior screenwriting and even offering me a contract with a raise in salary, which I declined.

Instead, I accepted an offer to do a film version of the play *Tomorrow the World* by my friends James Gow and Arnaud d'Usseau. It wasn't a particularly challenging job, since I was able to use whole segments of the original with only minor embellishments, but I felt that any way of helping spread a message about the horrors of Nazism was a wartime contribution. The play was about a twelve-year-old boy raised in the Nazi youth corps and then re-educated in democratic principles by an American uncle, portrayed in the movie by Fredric March.

My next assignment was equally on the nose. In 1945, which was also the year Silvia and I were divorced, and I was rejected by the armed services for an asthmatic condition that vanished almost immediately afterward, I was asked by the legendary but all too real studio head Samuel Goldwyn to read a novel called *Earth and High Heaven* by Gwethalyn Graham. It was a love story, set in Montreal, about the effects of anti-Semitism on an upper-class young gentile

woman and an upwardly mobile young Jew. Goldwyn had bought the property at the instigation of his non-Jewish wife, Frances. Her husband was, to say the least, ambivalent: while he wanted credit for making the first American movie on anti-Semitism, he belonged to the old guard of film moguls who were so sensitive about being Jewish that they scarcely allowed Jews or Jewishness to exist in their movies. Mike Kanin and I had run into this attitude during the making of *Woman of the Year.* We had written a scene in which the Hepburn character displayed her talents as a linguist: At a party with many foreign diplomats present, she was to speak to several different guests in their own languages, among them Yiddish. That's what it said in the script. But Louis B. Mayer ruled from on high that Kate could speak Chinese, Arabic, anything we chose *except* Yiddish, and no amount of argument from anyone concerned could shake him from that edict. To the best of our ability to read his thoughts, Mayer apparently feared that an industry with a high percentage of Jews in its leadership might be accused of trying to make their culture acceptable by associating it with a glamorous star.

So it was a big step for Goldwyn to consider such a movie, even if he made a point—a repeated point—of telling me to emphasize the entertainment values of the story and avoid any suggestion of "propaganda." Bearing those words in mind, I wrote a detailed outline, and he approved it before departing on a wartime mission to the Soviet Union—a trip connected, I believe, with the movie *North Star*, which Lillian Hellman had written for him. By the time he returned, I had a first draft screenplay ready to submit. Given my own sense of him, fortified by advice from old Goldwyn hands, I had made every effort to keep the tone of the scenes as light as possible and to avoid anything that looked or sounded faintly like a pro-tolerance message. But the raison d'être of the story was prejudice—there was no escaping that fact. There was no plot development that

did not spring from it. It was the theme of the novel that Mr. Goldwyn had bought and was paying me to adapt.

When I was summoned to his office to discuss the script, his opening words were, to say the least, discouraging. "Lardner," he began with an accusatory look, "you have defrauded and betrayed me." Defrauded, he proceeded to explain, because my screenplay was not what I had promised in the treatment. The few examples he cited were enough for me to see the hopelessness of the situation. The impossible dream in his head was a story in which some people were badly treated but not by anybody in particular, and others spoke out against intolerance without offending anyone who believed in it. After demonstrating to my own satisfaction, if not his, that the screenplay followed the treatment closely enough so that the charge of fraud was absurd, I asked him about the second part of his accusation. How had I betrayed him?

In an aggrieved tone he replied that one of the reasons he had hired me for the job—just one of the reasons—was the fact that I was a gentile. "You have betrayed me," he said grandly, "by writing like a Jew."

("How did you do the script?" my friend Gordon Kahn asked later. "From the righthand to the lefthand side of the page?")

In the wake of this apparently definitive conference, I began to assemble my personal belongings and prepare to leave the studio for good. I was interrupted by a knock on my door. It was Frances Goldwyn, who explained, with great trepidation, that she had never before visited a writer's office or in any way sought to interfere in Sam's business. She wanted me to know, however, how important this picture was to her. Sam, she assured me, was so knotted up inside about it that he shouldn't be held responsible for anything he might have said to me. By the time she left, I had agreed to continue working on the screenplay and, even more remarkably, to waive my salary voluntarily until I had persuaded Mr. Goldwyn that I could give him the kind of movie we all wanted but he was so nervous about.

It took another two weeks and several more highly-charged conversations with Goldwyn to make me concede that the goal would never be realized and abandon the project once and for all. At intervals over the next couple of years, however, I would see trade paper items about Goldwyn hiring yet another writer for *Earth and High Heaven*. I think there were seven in all, none of whom came up with an adaptation that satisfied him. His story editor told me that when Daryl Zanuck released *Gentlemen's Agreement*, in which Gregory Peck pretends to be Jewish in order to write an exposé of anti-Semitism, Goldwyn was indignant. Zanuck, he complained, had stolen his idea.

Later that year, a new film company teamed me up with my brother John, who had spent the war as a correspondent in Europe and the Pacific, to write a movie about Willie and Joe, the G.I.s in cartoonist Bill Mauldin's book *Up Front*. By the time we finished our first draft, the war was over and the producers backed off, claiming that no one could be sure what kind of movies would be popular in the postwar world. (A few years later, another company made a very different sort of movie from the same book.)

Tomorrow the World was released in the final summer of the war. Given the passions of the moment, its basic idea turned out to be controversial indeed. The Hollywood Writers Mobilization held a premiere for the movie and a "town meeting" to discuss it. In the film, as in the play, a Nazi-trained boy is reeducated to embrace American democratic principles. There is nothing inherently evil, the story makes clear, in the German or Japanese people—no biological predisposition to be racists or warmongers.

This may sound like an unobjectionable premise. But a great many people at that meeting did object, heatedly. Ruth McKenney, author of *My Sister Eileen* and well known for her leftist views, declared that the German people should be treated according to the principle of "an eye for an eye." The boy in the movie, she insisted, was beyond redemption: "His soul has been poisoned forever," she said. Her comments received a good deal of applause in a predominantly liberal audience. Clearly, America was not going to have an easy time getting over its own wartime hate propaganda.

The reason I had agreed to work on the movie was that I considered all theories about races or nations being superior or inferior, vicious and dangerous. When my turn to speak came, I recalled how all the countries now regarded as among the more civilized had, on certain past occasions, acted barbarously toward peoples they viewed as unworthy of respect: the British in East Africa and India, the Spanish in Latin America, the French in Indochina, the Belgians in the Congo, the Americans toward their so-called Indians and their African captives.

I did one more war movie called *Cloak and Dagger* about a nuclear physicist who goes undercover for the O.S.S. in Italy to check up on the Nazi atomic-weapons program. The star, Gary Cooper, had an admirably detached perspective on his abilities. "Keep my dialogue simple," he entreated me. "If I have to say any technical scientific stuff, nobody's going to believe I'm real."

By the time I came on the project, a script had already been completed by two other writers. But the director, Fritz Lang, didn't like it one bit, so my job was to do a complete rewrite on the quick. Fritz was very respectful of writers in general, and I enjoyed working with him. But he had very exacting standards of professional morality. I remember mentioning a writer, John Wexley, who had worked with him on an earlier film.

"He is a dishonest man," Fritz immediately declared. Although I wasn't particularly fond of Wexley, I knew of nothing to call his integrity into question, so I asked Fritz what he meant. "He's thoroughly dishonest," he replied. "When we worked on the script for *Hangmen Also Die*, I told him it had to be shortened by twenty pages, and he came

back with a script that was twenty pages shorter; but I found that only ten pages in actual length had been cut. The rest was by his instructing his secretary to put more lines on a page!" This was a fairly common writer's offense and not exactly a crime. But Fritz was very indignant about it.

During the war, it seemed appropriate to most American Communists when the National Committee, led by Earl Browder, announced the "dissolution" of the party and the formation of a broader, more democratic Communist Political Association (C.P.A.). The change seemed only to bring the nomenclature in line with reality: Our political activities, by then, were virtually identical to those of our liberal friends. To me it had a special significance. It seemed to fit with a growing good feeling I was beginning to experience as an Allied victory appeared inevitable. That victory had been won by the two great powers in the world, one democratic, one Communist, who had found a way of working together for shared ideals, and who both realized—or so I believed—that the introduction of atomic weapons made future wars unthinkable. For all the problems that remained in the world, the defeat of fascism, with its outdated racist and nationalist myths, was the defeat of unreason. In ten or twenty years, maybe thirty at the outside, I imagined, it would be unthinkable for one people to assault another because of their national origin, for any human to regard another human as belonging to an inferior race, or for anyone of moderate intelligence and a smattering of education to question evolution or believe that God created the world a few millennia ago.

The C.P.A. had a short life. Before the end of the war, a dissenting minority in the Party, led by William Z. Foster, was fortified into a majority by a letter from Jacques Duclos, a French Communist leader, denouncing Browder's move and its theoretical foundations. Anti-Communists interpreted this as an order—we, as a strong suggestion—from the Communist International to the American Party to

shape up. The hostility toward the Soviet Union already surfacing in the highest reaches of the American government made Browder's appraisal look shaky, in any case. Roosevelt had died, and Truman's record did not make him a promising successor. When Germany invaded Russia, he had publicly expressed the hope that they destroy each other. Now he was flaunting the atomic bomb as an American secret and taking his foreign policy cues from former wartime British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, whose own electorate had recently repudiated him in favor of the Labor Party.

Almost no one had anticipated how quickly the tide would turn to rightist reaction and a cold war. In 1946, there was a series of major strikes to which corporate America responded with equal or greater militancy. Elections that year produced the first Republican Congress since 1928. There was a Truman Doctrine to guard southeastern Europe from the Russians, a Truman loyalty program, and the conversion of H.U.A.C. from a temporary to a permanent body featuring (in addition to Chairman Thomas) John Rankin of Mississippi, a ranting white supremacist and anti-Semite, and Richard Nixon, his smoother California counterpart, who was careful to express his race prejudices only in private.

I was losing what remained of my illusions about Stalin and his "socialist state," yet it still seemed to me then that the Soviet leaders were more serious than ours about wanting peaceful relations. Ideological considerations aside, they had a persuasive, practical reason to be afraid of a war in which the other side had a monopoly on nuclear weapons; whereas a number of people in the West, in America in particular, thought we should threaten to or actually bomb them into submission while we had the superior power to do so.

As for the party to which I belonged, the question of converting America to socialism wasn't exactly on the agenda. In my own mind, the need to avoid another war and abolish nuclear weapons—to pre-

serve the planet—had become more important than the particular political or economic systems we embraced. Yet I shared a growing awareness that American Communists and the left generally were going to be under attack. Already, leaders of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee were facing prison sentences for Contempt of Congress because they had refused to turn over their records to H.U.A.C. In Hollywood, political differences were sharpened by an acrimonious labor dispute which began as a jurisdictional quarrel between the reactionary International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (I.A.T.S.E.) and the progressive Conference of Studio Unions (C.S.U.), both of which belonged to the American Federation of Labor. When A.F.L. President William Green decided the issue in favor of the C.S.U., the I.A.T.S.E. and the movie studios ignored him, forcing the C.S.U. into what turned out to be a suicidal strike.

Communists and liberals who supported the strike were also in the main members of the Hollywood Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions (with its hard-to-swallow acronym H.I.C.C.A.S.P.), which ended up backing Henry Wallace and the Progressive Party against both Truman and Dewey in the 1948 election. In the Screen Actors Guild, the most conspicuous sympathizers with the strikers were Katharine Hepburn, Edward G. Robinson, Alexander Knox, Howard da Silva, John Garfield, Karen Morley, Paul Henreid, and Franchot Tone. The militants on the other side also had their political arm, called the Motion Picture Artists for the Preservation of American Ideals. Among the leaders of that organization were Walt Disney, Ronald Reagan, George Murphy, Adolphe Menjou, Roy Brewer of I.A.T.S.E., and the directors Sam Wood, Victor Fleming, and King Vidor. The Screen Writers Guild was split on the strike, and in 1947 progressives suffered a serious setback in Guild elections, the main question at stake being whether to require executive board members to sign "loyalty" affidavits swearing they were not Communists.

During the final year of the war in Europe, when my brother David was killed in Germany, I went to New York out of concern for my mother, who had just suffered her third tragic loss in eleven years. But I was also worried about David's wife, Frances, and their two babies. I was making a good deal of money and wanted to contribute what I could to their support. I discovered, however, that Frances was quite capable of combining motherhood with two regular radio shows and occasional theater jobs. I also found that she shared my political views and was starting to actively promote them as a way of continuing the struggle David had been writing about. Silvia and I were already leading quite separate lives. Over the next two years I made several trips to New York, and, in between, Frances and I developed a relationship by mail that became personal. In September 1946, she boarded a transcontinental train with Katie and Joe. As one of them put it, "We're going to Canyonfornia to marry Uncle Bill."

While we were on our honeymoon, I spoke by phone to a friend who warned me that a California version of H.U.A.C. had begun issuing subpoenas. I managed to duck that invitation by prolonging our trip. But soon enough, the main body in Washington announced its intention to investigate the movie business, commencing with a set of closed hearings in Los Angeles in the spring of 1947. Frances and I had just found a new home in Santa Monica, with a tennis court out back. We were getting ready to move out of a rented house nearby when a deputy United States marshal appeared at the door, and handed me a bright pink document bearing J. Parnell Thomas's signature: "By authority of the House of Representatives of the Congress of the United States of America," it said, I was "commanded to appear before the Un-American Activities Committee . . . in their chamber in the city of Washington . . . and not to depart without leave of such committee. Herein fail not . . ."