



American Dreamer: My Story of Survival, Adventure, and Success

Robert Halmi Sr.

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On July 30, 2014, shortly after completing this autobiography, Robert Halmi, the prolific producer of television movies and miniseries, died at the age of 90. Hailed by *Variety* as “A Gulliver Among TV Movie Producers,” he had a hand in more than 200 long-form narrative television projects from 1989’s *Lonesome Dove*, starring Robert Duvall, to 2000’s “Don Quixote” starring John Lithgow. Filled with so much of the marquee talent of the past century, his life story—from fighting against the Nazis to becoming a photographer for *Life* and *Sports Illustrated* to his television work—is truly amazing.

Robert Halmi was born in Hungary to a father who served as official photographer to the Vatican and the last Habsburg court. When the Nazis invaded, he fought in the resistance, and like many of his countrymen he was captured and condemned to death. But the advancing Red Army freed him before the Germans could carry out the execution. Seeing the dangers of the expanding Soviet empire, which also took hold of his homeland in a military dictatorship, he turned heel and joined the OSS to fight the fall of the Iron Curtain. In 1951, with \$5 in his pocket and a Leica around his neck, he made his way to America. As a photographer for *Life* and *Sports Illustrated*, he again showcased his Bond-like talents for chasing adventure and cheating death by dangling from helicopters, hunting big game in Africa with dictators, blowing himself up, marooning himself on a glacier for three weeks, and even painting Marilyn Monroe’s naked body for a photo shoot. In the third act of his rollicking life, as a TV mogul, he received an astonishing 448 Emmy nods while befriending a Who’s Who of Hollywood and working with the great boldface actors of our time: Jimmy Cagney gave him his last performance. He chased George C. Scott (on a bender) through a hotel. Omar Sharif did the Twist for him. He watched Patrick Stewart nearly drown on the back of an animatronic whale, and Isabella Rossellini braved a herd of rampaging elephants for him. He has lived the American dream to the hilt. A fast-paced look back at a life always in progress, his extraordinary story reveals nearly a century of daring and boundless optimism even in the face of terrible odds. It’s a story of war, love, and ambition, the quintessential American tale of a life lived large.

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