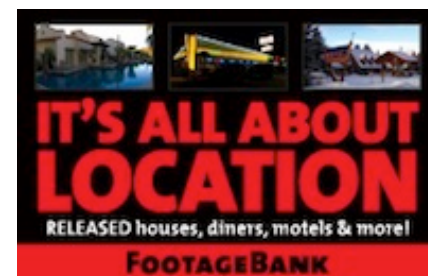




## Stanley Dyrector Then and Now: Interview With The Author Of Shedding Light On The Hollywood Blacklist

By **Mende Smith**

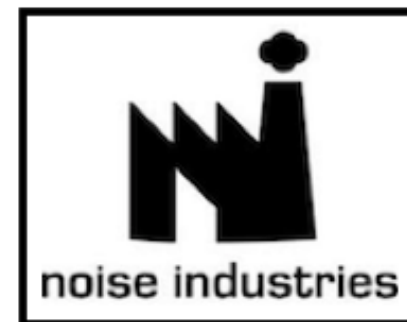
Surrounded by sunbeams through sitting room windows and the sum of his Hollywood years, author Stanley Dyrector has a unique view of the world. For more than 50 years, he has made the Hollywood Hills his home.





Dyrector is more than just an actor, producer, writer, and interviewer. He is also the go-to guy for the stories of the second wave of blacklisted writers stifled by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). At first glance, he is a charismatic man wearing a knowing grin. Introductory banter aside, this man has met people. This man has seen things.

"I came to Hollywood when I got out of the Navy," Dyrector says. "And I





wanted to be a big movie star. I looked the part, and I had no common sense. But acting is what I wanted to do." Brooklyn by boat, California by land, discharged at the tender age of 21 by the U.S Navy, he and his buddy Steve Hays set off at last for Hollywood. After months practicing monologues from Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* and *Golden Boy* alone on the decks of his ship between the California shore and Japan, Dyrector says he was getting

"ready to rumble."

He's thankful for surviving what he calls "the school of hard knocks" with big plans to carry him from the dysfunctional family that left his mother institutionalized, matching the dreams of the skinny 12-year-old kid left to fend for himself on the mean streets of Brownsville, Brooklyn.

"It was a real Hollywood beginning," Dyrector smiles. "I was what you would call 'lean and not mean' in my dress whites I walked the boulevard. Stars under my feet. Then somebody stopped me in the middle of the street saying, 'Hey, you're a good-looking kid. You ought to be in the movies.' "

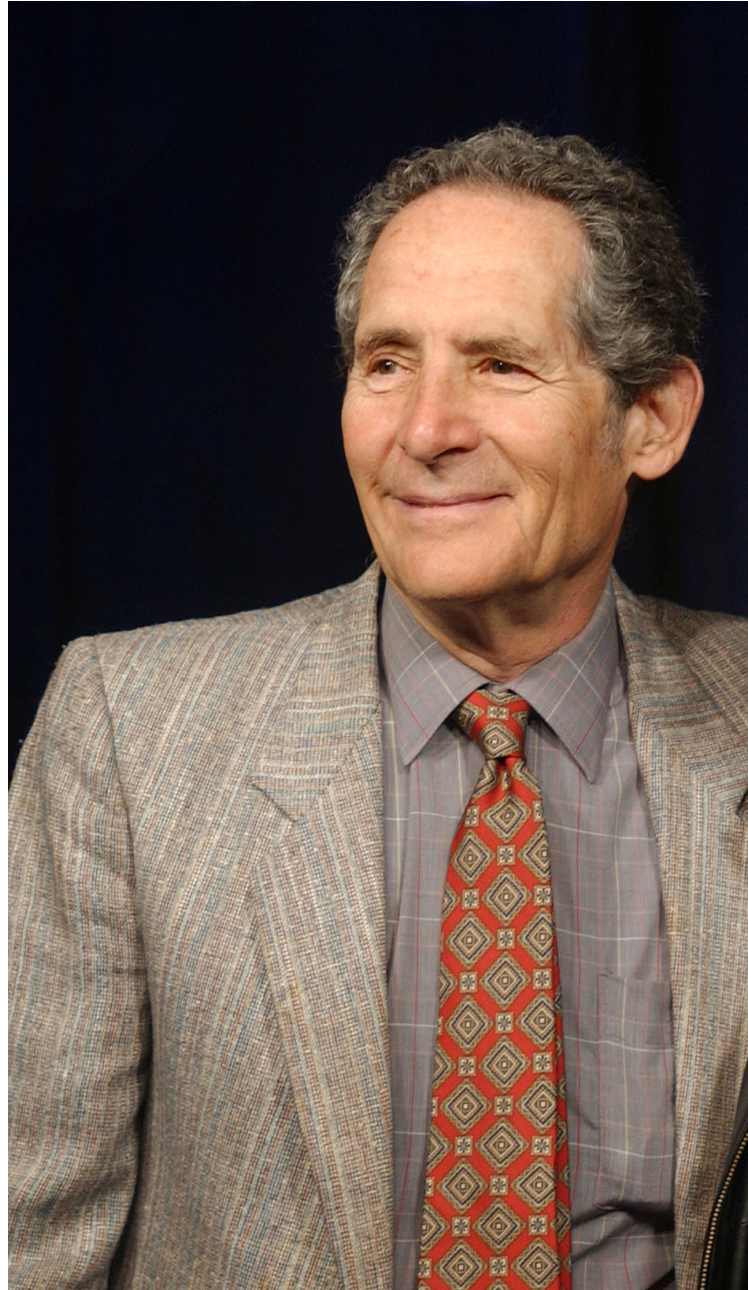




Dyrector's enthusiasm was met with mixed approval when he found a place studying at The Hollywood School of Drama and Repertory Theater with actor Dan O'Herlihy (once nominated for an Academy Award for Robinson Crusoe) to be more of a challenge than he had hoped. His agent could not do more to promote the young actor, as he had not done too much for his portfolio. Nevertheless, Dyrector's agent always seemed to compliment his efforts, and said he possessed what he called a "plaintive quality."

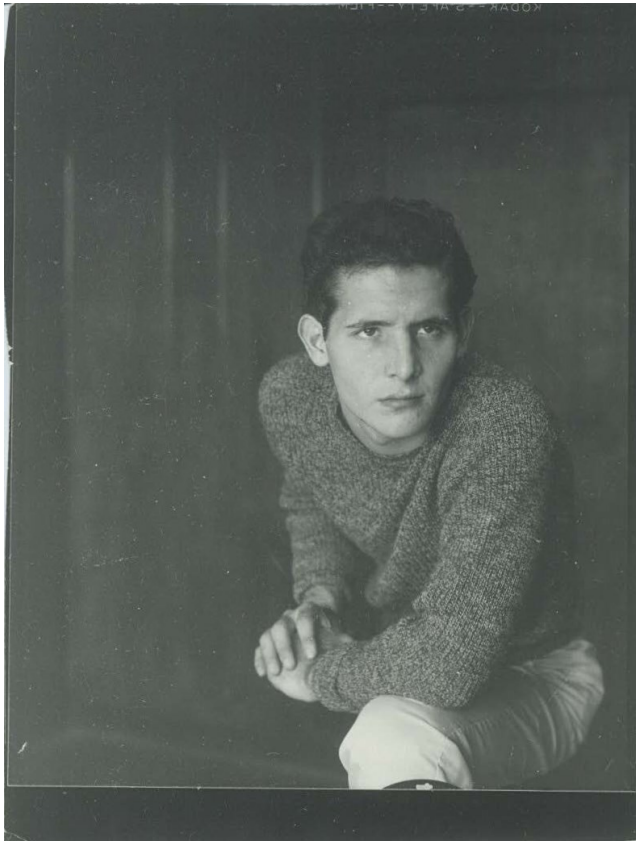
One of Dyrector's fondest memories was the night an aspiring young actress, Judy Rose, invited him to the Oscars.

Dyrector muses that immediately after the red carpet event, he had to dress



down into his station dungarees and pump gas at Beverly Boulevard and Alvarado Street. “We went to the Oscars in a limousine; first time ever for me. Judy’s mother, Helen Rose, had been up for an Oscar for costume design, and she did not win. The evening was amazing for me anyway, and right after I had to work my night job. When the clock struck 11:30, I had to go to work for my shift. I was not having drinks and what have you. I was sober as a judge. When customers came in to fill up that night I said I had just been to the Oscars, I was there an hour ago, and here I was pumping gas.”

Dyrector recalls how reading scenes at O’Herlihy’s school led him to the film Drag Strip Riot. Many other small parts would follow and sum up his professional screen-acting career.



“Television and film chose me,” Dyrector says, “I came out here and right away I made connections. I was a particular ‘type’—like a John Garfield type—I didn’t have his talent, but I had his eagerness.”

Stan was cast in roles in films and series-TV, work such as his first movie, *Dragstrip Riot* where he was featured as Cliff and in the TV series *MSquad* he costarred opposite Lee Marvin, in an episode called *Robbers Roost*. In his role as Little Elk in a series called *Buckskin*, Dyrector recalls he was the “token Indian.” “It should have been an

even playing field for actors at that time. Native Americans should have been able to play lawyers or what have you, but unfortunately, they did not.”

Dyrector said he switched up his career when he “realized” that his beauty was vanishing at a young age. “I was passed up for parts I had tested for in some pretty big roles because I did not know how to use my instrument—my method. It was natural for me to shift gears. There had always been a small voice in my head, like a whisper, that I should be a writer; there were just too many other

voices and stronger influences that muted that whisper. It took awhile for me to hear it again.”



Dyrector found his place behind the typewriter in the mid-1970s, and for the next few years that followed, he collaborated with working screenwriters and began writing plays. “Being a playwright was tough. It was really tough, but rewarding in the sense that I was able to hear people speak my

words.” Dyrector’s decision to become a cable talk-show host came after he settled down, got married, and began writing radio shows.

Of his talk show, Dyrector says, he had a good voice for television, and it was good to start interviewing fellow actors and writers; people in the business that he loved: Hollywood actors, writers, and directors were interviewed on his own TV show, called Senior Prom.





“The first guest was Theo Wilson, a headline reporter for the New York Daily news. She was a tabloid writer—she wrote about criminal trials.” Dyrector had met Theo through his wife, Joyce. He interviewed her about the role she played writing stories about the trials of Jack Ruby, Sam Sheppard, John De Lorean, Sirhan Sirhan, Charles Manson, and Patty Hearst.

During that time, Dyrector’s wife had known others on the women’s



committee of the Writer's Guild of America who had been blacklisted. Dyrektor needed guests for his show, and soon realized there seemed to be more and more of these members willing to tell their stories.

They met in residences, rented studios, and even panel-style settings in local libraries. Dyrektor could see the interviews were “shedding light” on an industry in turmoil—histories yet to be revealed.

His first book, called *Shedding Light on the Hollywood Blacklist*, offers a firsthand perspective from 12 men and women who lived through one of the darkest times in the American entertainment industry.

“For the ones who did not want to ‘rat’ on their friends and colleagues, they just did not work again. Many of them left the country.” Dyrektor says. Recalling how Sterling Hayden, actor and author, named friends Bob Lees and Abraham Polonsky as communists, he later wrote that Hayden had felt like a coward. The book is full of uncomfortable exchanges between friends and once-partners. A testimony to the choice between life as factotum or failure.

“These people, both women and men, had lived through hell. Had to leave the country because they had been ousted from the business by the HUAC. I got to know blacklisted writers and actors at various times. I came to befriend them, and they were forthright with their stories.” Dyrektor says.



Dyrector reminds us it is important to remember that America was different then. It was a time in our history that the Communist and the Socialist parties shared the voting ballot.

HUAC was created by the House of Representatives in 1938 to investigate alleged disloyalty and subversive activities on the part of private citizens,

public employees, and those organizations suspected of having communist ties. The subjects in Dyrector's book not only testified; their disclosure frightened motion-picture studio executives and paralyzed the industry.

"Over 300 people lost homes, jobs, good names, some committed suicide—all that kind of stuff—and the worst part was, most of the goals of the Communist party were for positive social changes," Dyrector says. "Rights for blacks, for women, for better wages for all minorities, which I would think is very idealistic."

The "witch hunt" did not really begin in Hollywood until 1947, following a nine-day hearing set to expose alleged communist propaganda and influence in the Hollywood motion-picture industry. After conviction on contempt of Congress charges for refusal to answer some questions posed by committee members, "The Hollywood Ten" was blacklisted by the A-group of studio executives,

acting under the aegis of the Motion Picture Association of America.



On June 22, 1950, a pamphlet called Red



Channels arrived, focusing on the field of broadcasting. It named more than 150 entertainment-industry professionals still

working in Hollywood. That was the “second wave” that Dyrektor talks about; the wave rendering most of those named along with a host of other artists interviewed in Dyrektor’s *Shedding Light*, blindsided by the industry they trusted with their life’s work. Those named, now banished from employment in much of the entertainment field.

When the trade papers announced the firing of the artists—in what has become known as the Waldorf Statement—a number of the subjects of Dyrektor’s book were also named under the context “Red Fascists and their sympathizers.”

*Shedding Light* interviews reflect back to the late 1930s and into the 1940s, when his guests admit to signing petitions promoting liberal ideals, and joining

the Committee for the First Amendment, which led to blacklisting. Others in the business who merely associated with these members, their own names never put on the blacklist, like the late Charlie Chaplin, also found it extremely difficult to find work.

“There is definitely still more of these stories to tell,” Dyrektor says, “I may one day do these interviews—I have been approached—on a professional showcase level, where actors would read the parts of the guests, and it would be a stage performance. I also would like to see this done as a documentary following the lives of the people I have interviewed.”

Besides those who went to prison for their affiliations, the dozen interviewees in Dyrektor’s *Shedding Light* talk very freely about those years, making his book a must-have record for industry historians. He said he still has a vision and enjoys a writing life. He is doing at last what he was meant to do in Hollywood.

Dyrektor admits he is not a historian, but considers his book an excellent reference for those who would delve into it. Dyrektor’s hours spent at Writer’s Guild Workshop have brought him much happiness. Now that he has one book under his belt, he says, he is set to lobby for the next one.

When asked about the highs and lows of the entertainment business, Dyrektor



takes pause before saying “it was all worth it.” Where he lacked the “internal” aspect for the craft, he says, he had the energy to act. Giving advice to young actors, today he says, “Keep your day job until you find your place in the business, then be prepared to quit everything else and live the part of your most creative, working self.”

He will be participating in the upcoming Hollywood Heritage Event Authors’ Book signing @ the Barn at noon on Saturday, December 7. Event will feature brief readings and offer gift wrapping for books sold.

***Shedding Light on the Hollywood Blacklist*** can be purchased locally in Los Angeles at Samuel French Bookstore, Chevalier Books in Larchmont Village, and Skylight Books on Vermont Avenue in Hollywood. The book is also available on Amazon and iTunes.



To learn more about Stan visit his website and to watch episodes of The Stanley Dyrector Show, [click here](#).

In a previous version of this article, there was an error implying Theo Wilson was blacklisted, which was incorrect.

Our apologies.

#### Add comment

---

Name (required)

E-mail (required, but will not display)

Website

1000 symbols left

1000 symbols left

☐ Notify me of follow-up comments



↻ Refresh

Send

JComments



Back To Top

Advertise

Become a Writer

Newsletter Sign Up

Masthead

List & Sell

Make Contact

Get Involved

Story Suggestion Box

Reap The Benefits

ASK ?S

THIS ISSU

FONE IT IN! CELL PHONE FILM FESTIVAL

Archive