



Always On Sunday: An Inside View of Ed Sullivan, the Beatles, Elvis, Sinatra & Ed's Other Guests

Michael David Harris

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The Beatles, Ed Sullivan and the Author

Ed first learns I have written a book when I hand him a finished manuscript. Naively, I imagine he'll be flattered, but when he reads it, he blows his stack and stops speaking to me. He's furious. I am revealing more about him, more backstage gossip and more details about the inner workings of the show than he wants made public.

Fortunately for me and for Always On Sunday, Ed simmers down eventually and decides my unauthorized biography is "magnificent." He promotes it in his newspaper column, in interviews and in joint television appearances with me. Ed helps turn the book he initially hated into a national bestseller.

During my 11 years on the Sullivan show, no one created more excitement than the Beatles. February 7, 1964: Kennedy Airport. Their first trip to the United States. The screaming fans! The haircuts! The sassy answers! Welcome to New York! The entire country focuses on this place and these young men. Including me. I am meeting their plane. A CBS public relations executive for years. Now the network's press representative on "The Ed Sullivan Show."

Ed was warned not to sign the Beatles: "You're crazy! No British group has ever made it big in this country." A month before they arrive, they are still unknown in America. Every reporter I contact turns down my invitation to go with me to JFK.

Two weeks later, "I Want To Hold Your Hand" rockets to the top of the charts. Beatlemania crosses the Atlantic, and I am besieged by thousands of ticket requests. Reporters plead to join me at JFK.

On February 14, I greet the Beatles again, this time in Miami for a second Sullivan show. I do my best to stay out of the way but, thanks to paparazzi determined to cash in on every shot of the Fab Four, I appear in photos published around the world (including the NY Post). In the captions I am called a Beatle, a case of mistaken identity I still laugh about with my wife, best-selling novelist Ruth Harris.

When I return to New York, Ed searches for me backstage. One stagehand is impressed. "Ed must really like you," he says. "You've only worked for him for four years, and he already knows your name."

Ed And The Celebrities Who Loved Him -- Or Not!

Why did Frank Sinatra take out an ad saying, "Ed, you're sick, sick, sick."?
You'll find out in Always On Sunday.

Why did Mary Tyler Moore sue "The Ed Sullivan Show"?
You'll find out in Always On Sunday.

Why did CBS cancel Bob Dylan's appearance on "The Ed Sullivan Show" -- against Ed's wishes?
You'll find out in Always On Sunday.

Elvis' fans kissed him where? Ed was stunned when Elvis explained. What did Elvis say?
You'll find out in Always On Sunday

Reviewers Rave!

"One of the most intriguing show business books to come along in a long time. It's great, very well written and tells it like it is. I knew Sullivan for years and consider Harris' book an accurate sketch of a complex man. Well done!"

-- Chicago Sun Times

"Honestly told ...with remarkable frankness and genuine inside knowledge. In the field of show business biographies, Always On Sunday has secured a place on the shelf reserved for the very best."

-- Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

"Always On Sunday: An Inside View..... And it is inside! The book is studded with backstage gossip about showbiz greats.

Always On Sunday: An Inside View of Ed Sullivan, the Beatles, Elvis, Sinatra & Ed's Other Guests Details

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From Reader Review Always On Sunday: An Inside View of Ed Sullivan, the Beatles, Elvis, Sinatra & Ed's Other Guests for online ebook

William O. says

A wonderful book allowing one to be transported back in time reliving what entertainment was like in the medium of radio and television in the mid-twentieth century. Those that grew up during this time will appreciate the contribution Ed Sullivan made in publicizing the great musical and comedic acts of this time.

Al says

Ed Sullivan's variety show was an American institution, running Sunday nights for twenty-three years, from the dawn of television in 1948 until 1971. Even relatively young readers have probably seen clips of Sullivan introducing Elvis Presley, the Beatles, or saying, "We've got a really big shew." "Always on Sunday" gives us a broad view of Sullivan, who turns out much more complex than I would have guessed. Some stories you might have heard for years are debunked - not all of Elvis' appearance were from the waist up for example. Although the book focuses on the period from the debut of "The Toast of the Town" (the original name of the show) until the late-60s, when the book was originally published, it gives a decent overview of his life prior to the show and insight into what made Sullivan tick. For example, he was an early supporter of equal rights and booked appearances by stars regardless of race when that was uncommon.

One part of the book I found interesting was Sullivan's reaction to television critics. Many of his reviews were negative and he was prone to react with a scathing letter in response. Many of these were long while others were succinct. One rather pointed response to syndicated columnist Harriet Van Horne read only: "Dear Miss Van Horne, You bitch. Sincerely, Ed Sullivan."

I did wonder how many people would actually be interested in learning more about Sullivan. I'm no spring chicken and was a month shy of becoming a teen when the show went off the air. Although I didn't watch "The Ed Sullivan Show" as a kid (blame it on overly religious parents who banned Sunday television watching) I was still well aware of Sullivan and his place in pop culture. When I asked my twenty-something daughter if she knew who Sullivan was she said: "Yes I do. He had a variety type show with musical guests, some of which included Elvis, the Beatles, and the Doors." She'd be disappointed; the book doesn't mention the appearance by The Doors (this would have happened after the original publication of the book) but it seems Sullivan's legacy is still known among younger generations. Anyone interested in pop culture history or the early days of television should find "Always on Sunday" an enlightening and entertaining read.

****Originally written for "Books and Pals" book blog.****

Carl says

One of the things I try to do is make myself read various genres of literature that I do not normally read. Thus, I found Michael David Harris' biographical novel "Always On Sunday: An Inside View of Ed

Sullivan” offered as a special on Amazon for my Kindle. Growing up in the 50’s and 60’s, I remembered many nights watching Ed Sullivan in my family’s living room with the whole family gathered around. Yes, I watched Elvis (only shown from the waist up) and later, with a group of high school friends, we all watched The Beatles famous appearance on Sullivan’s “really big show”! I found this book informative, interesting, and it rekindled many memories from my youth. It also gave me a lot more information from behind the scenes as feuds with Steve Allen, Jack Parr, and many others.

So, if you interested in the following from the publisher, this book could be for you:

Why did Frank Sinatra take out an ad saying, "Ed, you're sick, sick, sick."?

Why did Mary Tyler Moore sue "The Ed Sullivan Show"?

Why did CBS cancel Bob Dylan's appearance on "The Ed Sullivan Show" -- against Ed's wishes?

You'll find out the answers to these and many other questions in “Always On Sunday.”

Certainly this is one of the more intriguing show business books to come along in a long time. If behind the scenes gossip from a long time staff member of the show is your cup of tea, then this one is for you. “Always On Sunday” is loaded with backstage gossip about showbiz greats. The book is interesting and informative. It is a bit awkwardly written as it jumps around at times rather than being done in a simple straight forward time line. It jumped around in time so much that it got pretty confusing, and it wasn't really well written. However, it is loaded with nostalgia and if it was a piece of your past, then you should read it!

Pamela Tracy says

There was a lot to like about this book. My take away is a deep respect for one aspect of Ed Sullivan. It being that he cared what the whole family watched more than he cared that sensationalism raised rating. I wish we still have shows with actors who cared.

Still, this book gets a 2 for execution - paragraphs missing, names changed but maybe that was paragraphs missing and me getting dropped into a new section before the old section finished.

I didn't need the rave reviews.

I didn't need dirt, either, but I'd have like more depth.

Shelley says

Biography of Ed Sullivan and his show, which went on air in 1948. Written by a staffer, I should have guessed from the summary about how Ed hated the book at first but came around, that it was going to be pretty fawning. It jumped around in time so much that it got pretty confusing, and it wasn't really well written. But there were definitely lots of super interesting bits scattered around.

I hadn't realized that he was a newspaper writer, which is why he was hired, or that he kept writing his column for \$200 a week even late into the 60s. I also hadn't realized his show premiered in 1948, which is pretty incredible. All the critics hated him through the 50s, when they finally gave in because clearly the public disagreed.

There was a very interesting story about a Broadway playwright, Josh Lucas, who only went on to win the Pulitzer for his play after being in a sanatorium after a nervous breakdown, and how when he talked about it on the Sullivan show, it made real impacts on peoples lives because the public trusted anyone Sullivan-sponsored. A mother got custody of her children back after a hospital stay, and many local foundations got thousands more than usual in donations.

Also, the feuds section was unintentionally hilarious. Jack Paar was so full of himself. (Yes, it was skewed against him, but they used a ton of quotes from his show.) There was also a line about how Ed was the mots mimicked man in America - and LBJ and Bobby Kennedy were runners up, but they were new to the public stage and would bow out long before Ed did. This was published in 1968. I'm guessing the publishers cringed really really hard a few months later.

Marley says

My parents got a TV early on--like 1948 early on, so I watched a lot of Ed Sullivan over the decades. I knew he was a sports and "gossip" writer and that he was very important to the establishment of TV as a genuine medium. I had no idea what a really decent guy he was or that he'd been a champion of black entertainment in TV. Sullivan was a true showman who knew what the people liked and gave it to them. I had no idea that Toast of the Town covered so much territory from acrobats, monkeys to the Beatles to show-long bios of various public figures. The Josh Loan show had important, lasting effects on the sosia treatment of the mentally ill.

This book is basically a non-stop list of Sullivan anecdotes--hundreds of them. Some I knew, most I didn't. Of particular interest to me was the Sullivan-Jack Paar dispute that garnered front page headlines. Cheesh! Why did somebody waste their time making a film about the Leno-Letterman dispute when this was the real stuff? I've always been a huge fan of Paar, but he was a wuss and crybaby. Sullivan came out the gentleman.

I'd love to see a full-length bio of Ed Sullivan. Maybe there is one; I'll have to look. BTW, as others have noted, the editing in the Kindle version is bad, especially Chapter 5.

George says

NOSTALGIA APLENTY.

"The show premiered as 'The Toast of the Town' at 9:00 o'clock, on Sunday, June 20, 1948..."

From as early as 1949, on a six-inch diameter, round-screen, television set, Ed Sullivan's 'Toast of the Town' and Milton Berle's 'Texico Star Theater' were primary soundtracks of my youth. With the mention of names like Walter Winchell, Jimmy Durante, Dick Haymes, Frankie Fountain, Arthur Godfrey and Julius LaRosa; Michael Harris's gossipy insider memoir of Ed Sullivan's glory days, ALWAYS ON SUNDAY: An Inside View of Ed Sullivan, The Beatles, Elvis, Sinatra... and Ed's Other Guests, drips with nostalgia.

Unfortunately, like another book by Harris that I've read, ALWAYS ON SUNDAY, suffers severely in the narrative, editing and collating areas. at one point, I'm pretty sure, two separate stories were so cut-and-pasted into one another as to render the narrative incomprehensible.

Recommendation: You had to have been there; else you might do better to search out other, better, narratives of the period.

NOOKbook edition, 422 pages

Lori says

Learned a bit about Ed Sullivan. There are chapters about his life. And Many chapters about the Ed Sullivan show. Hoping this would be a bit better but pretty informational for someone who would like to read something about Ed Sullivan good or not always good.

Gigi Ann says

My Thoughts...

This is what I call a vintage book. The © is 1968, 46 years ago. Ed Sullivan's Sunday night show was on TV for some 20 years, "Always On Sunday." I remember watching a lot of these shows. Way back then we had three (3) channels to choose from, and if the wind was blowing right, I could also watch a PBS channel.

The book had a lot of back stage stories about the live acts, and some of the super stars of that time-period.

Why did Frank Sinatra take out an ad saying, "Ed, you're sick, sick, sick."? Why did Mary Tyler Moore sue "The Ed Sullivan Show"? Why did CBS cancel Bob Dylan's appearance, against Ed's wishes? Elvis' fans kissed him where? Ed was stunned when Elvis explained. What did Elvis say? You can find out in "Always On Sunday."

Even though I rather enjoyed reading this book, I'm sure a lot of young readers will say, "Who Is Ed Sullivan?" or will only recognize him because of The Beatles and Elvis' appearances on his show all those many years ago. Ed introduced a lot of young talent that later became famous. But now probably no one but the older generation remembers. If you would like to see some of the talent he introduced to the world, go to youtube, under Ed Sullivan, and you will find a lot of laughs from 50 years ago, when the humor was clean, because Ed wouldn't have it any other way. He wanted a show that the whole family could watch together on Sunday evenings.

This book is a part of my Nook library and I enjoyed it enough to award it 3 "Always On Sunday" Stars.

Maura says

I had expectations from the cover blurb that this would have lots of interesting behind-the-scenes stories about the "shew" and the performers. Alas not. It's much more of a general biography of the man, and not particularly compelling. Although there are anecdotes, they don't get fleshed out enough to support the statement they are associated with. The author obviously liked Ed Sullivan very much, and tells many little

stories about Ed's good but unsung deeds. He doesn't sugar-coat it, though; he also relates stories to illustrate some of Ed's failings (hot temper, impulsiveness) but overall Sullivan is portrayed as a good guy and devoted family man.

This was an e-book version and there are some sections that were mixed up so badly that it was impossible to read, paragraphs all jumbled, sentences incomplete and perhaps chapters mixed up.

Jennifer says

Although this book is nostalgic for someone who grew up in this era, it is not well written. I felt like I was reading a combination old social column and gossip column from yesteryear. Example: "The Sullivans' bedroom has a French feel. The colors are muted -- off-white with touches of blue and green. The den, which used to be their daughter Betty's room, has Chinese chests with a red lacquer finish." There were a lot of these moments in this book. The book was originally published in 1968. It is not ageless.

Judy says

This book has a lot of editing problems but I enjoyed most of the content anyway. I remember The Ed Sullivan Show as a kid (my parents let my sister and me stay up to watch The Beatles) so I was hoping for some good dirt. There is a lot of interesting, backstage information but I wanted more. You will find out a lot about Ed Sullivan - his childhood, careers and relationships with family, friends, staff and colleagues. I love the tidbits about the acts on his Sunday night show. But, somehow I wanted more. This is a good read if you are in to TV trivia, nostalgia and old shows. There could have been more meat on the pages but it is a decent read if you are a child of the '60s and '60s TV like me!

Dan Matthews says

The book's premise is interesting and it certainly has lots of anecdotes. It is somewhat "gossipy" and light on biographical info, whether Sullivan or any other of the many personalities in the story. I rated the book down one star (they all start with a three star potential) because the time frame in the story is fragmented. Even in the chapters, which are written about people, events or some of Mr. Sullivan's complexities, serpentine forward and then backward and then forward again along the timeline. The good news is that I did learn a couple of things and the brief info regarding the Beatles appearance for three shows was interesting.

Darlene says

I wish I could have given this a better review but I read the e-book version. Apparently publishers have eliminated an entire set of editors because some pages were a mass of confusion, others had absurd typos. It looked unprofessional and certainly unworthy of a major publisher. It was, unfortunately, distracting. The behind-the-scenes look at Sullivan, the way in which the show was produced and his many public feuds are fascinating and certainly put that part of show business history into perspective. There is also a nice, if abbreviated glimpse into his marriage and family.

Jill says

Ed Sullivan came into our homes on Sunday night from 1948 through 1971, spanning the childhood of millions of baby boomers. In fact, no one older than a baby boomer (1946-1964) can even remember him, though they might have heard of his impact as the master of television entertainment for such a long time. In my home filled with 9 baby boomer children, after Sunday dinner and Sunday baths we all lined up in front of the television console and watched the Wonderful World of Disney and The Ed Sullivan Show. Sullivan brought us a huge variety of wholesome family entertainment. He actually resisted for a long time having Elvis Presley on his show due to the sexual overtones of Elvis' wildly gyrating hips.

This biography, written by an insider from his staff before Sullivan died in 1974, tells the story of his career in journalism and the early days of television. Though Sullivan had no particular skill as an entertainer himself, he had an uncanny ability to spot acts that would appeal to the American masses and was considered a master showman. He also supervised every detail of the show, from the selection and payment for the performers, to the sequence and lengths of the acts, to the introduction of each performer as well as his friends in the audience at each live show.

The book gives us an insider view into Sullivan's feuds with other entertainers, and the insight into his personal life as well. For instance, he never owned a home, always lived in hotels and always ate out. He was considered in his heyday as television's most influential performer. Bob Hope said of Sullivan "...he was on television two years before it was invented." Bing Crosby quoted "While he doesn't sing, dance or tell jokes, he does them equally well." He liked plain talk and straightforwardness, had no agent, and believed in "open big and keep it clean". Ed said "I simply give people the opportunity to prove themselves".

Of course, Sullivan is most well known for bringing The Beatles to the U.S. but he also helped to popularize Elvis Presley, The Supremes, The Dave Clark Five, The Beach Boys, The Jackson 5, Janis Joplin, The Rolling Stones, The Mamas & the Papas, The Lovin' Spoonful, Herman's Hermits, The Doors, The Supremes, Pearl Bailey and countless others.

The biography is a well written and informative overview of how Sullivan worked and what made his show click with American audiences. With the highly fragmented broadcast environment that we live in now, there will never be another Ed Sullivan who brought so many people together every Sunday night for 23 years.
