



Hank & Jim: The Fifty-Year Friendship of Henry Fonda and James Stewart

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New York Times bestselling author Scott Eyman tells the story of the remarkable friendship of two Hollywood legends who, though different in many ways, maintained a close friendship that endured all of life's twists and turns.

Henry Fonda and James Stewart were two of the biggest stars in Hollywood for forty years. They became friends and then roommates as stage actors in New York, and when they began making films in Hollywood, they roomed together again. Between them they made such memorable films as *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Mister Roberts*, *Twelve Angry Men*, and *On Golden Pond*; and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Destry Rides Again*, *The Philadelphia Story*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Vertigo*, and *Rear Window*.

They got along famously, with a shared interest in elaborate practical jokes and model airplanes, among other things. Fonda was a liberal Democrat, Stewart a conservative Republican, but after one memorable blow-up over politics, they agreed never to discuss that subject again. Fonda was a ladies' man who was married five times; Stewart remained married to the same woman for forty-five years. Both men volunteered during World War II and were decorated for their service. When Stewart returned home, still unmarried, he once again moved in with Fonda, his wife, and his two children, Jane and Peter, who knew him as Uncle Jimmy.

For *Hank and Jim*, biographer and film historian Scott Eyman spoke with Fonda's widow and children as well as three of Stewart's children, plus actors and directors who had worked with the men—in addition to doing extensive archival research to get the full details of their time together. This is not another Hollywood story, but a fascinating portrait of an extraordinary friendship that lasted through war, marriages, children, careers, and everything else.

Hank & Jim: The Fifty-Year Friendship of Henry Fonda and James Stewart Details

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From Reader Review Hank & Jim: The Fifty-Year Friendship of Henry Fonda and James Stewart for online ebook

Natalie says

First of all, I very seldom read nonfiction so I probably rated this lower than someone who loves to read nonfiction.

This book was mentioned on TCM - I think the host mentioned it when he did an intro to Rope (an amazingly directed movie with incredible acting by Stewart, but a less than stellar plot) and I was interested to pick it up. I think I knew going in that Hank and Jimmy were friends but I was interested to learn more about it.

They were true friends in every sense of the word. Friends that could just pick up right where they left off after not seeing each other for months. I also liked that they enjoyed practical jokes. The book didn't go much into the huge fight they had over politics that almost cost them their friendship, and I would have liked to learn more about that.

There was some humor, but a lot of sadness. Also, Fonda was a lot more shuttered of a person than Stewart. But when he gave Jimmy the painting he had done in memory of Pie, Stewart's horse he rode in all his westerns, I will admit my heart melted. That was just so sweet.

Dana Stabenow says

An amiable amble through the lives and friendship of Henry Fonda and Jimmy Stewart, with brief informative asides about the economic boom of the 1920's, the Depression, World War II and the evolution of the Hollywood business model as seen through their experiences. Fonda's inability to process his own feelings except on stage and screen and the effect the loss of Stewart's stepson in Vietnam has on him achieve real poignance.

JoAnne McMaster (Any Good Book) says

If anyone knows classic films at all, then these two actors' names will be right up there with John Wayne, Humphrey Bogart, Spencer Tracy and Cary Grant. While their films, for the most part, of all these actors were very different, their onscreen presence was palpable. There was no mistaking that you were in the presence of a great actor when you sat down to watch.

I have always known that Fonda and Stewart were best friends - anyone who claims to be a classic film buff would know this. And, I must say, I knew quite a bit about their professional lives, and their personal, as far as marriages. I also knew that they both served in World War II, Fonda in the Navy and Stewart in the Army Air Corps. However, Mr. Eyman has gone far deeper into their pasts.

He begins right where they do - from birth; and tells us of their very different upbringing in life. He goes on from there to their early life on the stage, and their eventual move to Hollywood. But their lives take very different turns. Hank was married five times - he was wound too tightly most times to make a marriage stick;

his emotions stayed beneath the surface and were rarely exposed; Jimmy was married once, when he was 41 - Gloria was the love of his life and the marriage was a happy one.

Their careers took different turns, also: Hank preferred stage to screen; Jimmy stayed in Hollywood and made many memorable films (and a few he probably wished he hadn't). But the films Hank made were, for the most part, memorable also, and I am sure everyone has that particular film of both of them that stays with you and you will watch over and over. I love Hank's films *The Mad Miss Manton*, *Mister Roberts*, and *The Rounders* (not a spectacular film, but very funny). For Jimmy's films, I love *The Shop Around the Corner*, *Rear Window*, and *The Rare Breed*.

It is obvious that Mr. Eyman has done extensive research on his subjects. The book is neither cloying nor filled with Hollywood gossip; it gives us an honest and well-written biography about two remarkable men, the like of which will never be seen again.

While I've read other biographies of Fonda and Stewart, I believe that Mr. Eyman's is the best by far. While I am sure there are those who like only one or the other, I consider myself a true classic fan, and while I may not like an actor personally, I can watch their body of work and appreciate it for what it is.

While this book points out that Hank wasn't the best father in the world, he also changed as he got older, and his loyalty to his friends was always unwavering. Perhaps because they never expected anything from him, knowing he didn't offer up as much of himself. Jimmy, on the other hand, seems more open and giving to both family and friends.

They were there for each other through triumphs and tragedies; through good times and bad; and never allowed their personal politics or personal demons stand in the way of their enduring friendship. One can only hope for a friendship in their life as strong as the one between these two.

I am grateful for this book, for giving us the insight into two remarkable men who became extraordinary actors and had an exceptional friendship. Highly recommended.

Lori says

This is a pretty good biography. I think that Scott Eyman keeps it fair and not go to mudslinging gossip. Like most biographies he uses interviews, and articles about the actors to write this book. I like both of the actors and have read before that Henry Fonda and James Stewart were friends for fifty years. They met in New York and were roommates. This book takes them from that time up to each of their deaths. He writes of their friendship but also their careers over the years. Other friends they had. Their marriages James Stewart had one marriage while Henry Fonda had five. This book covers quite a bit about their lives. Nice read. if someone is a fan of the actors.

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

As a BIG fan of Henry Fonda was I eager to read this book. I liked the idea of the book that it's a book about Hank and Jim, two very different men who became friends when they were young actors and stayed friends throughout their lives.

It was fascinating reading about how they started out in the theater, their lives before they become famous, dating women, marriages (Jim one time while Hank 5), WW2 and how they were decorated for their services, the high and low of their careers. And, of course, the twilight of their lives, when they started to lose good friends who passed away, and when they both got older and finally when Hank passed away and Jim had to go one without his best friend.

It's a fabulous book, and I loved how the friendship between the men lasted all through their lives, despite the difference for instance when it came to politics. Their shared love for model airplanes was charming to read about. I also found the chapter about WW2 absolutely fascinating to read. So many Hollywood stars that fought during the war and it was interesting to learn that they both were more than figureheads that they actually did fight. And, that they didn't talk much about it later in life. Jim's children, for instance, had no idea what their father had done in the war, more than that he had been a soldier.

Then we have their personal life. Hank's marriages all failed until the very last one (Shirlee, who he was married to until his death) while Jim found the right woman, Gloria, who he was married to until her death. Hank's first marriage ended when his wife committed suicide and after that came a string of marriages that didn't work out at all while Jim was in his 40s when he finally found the right woman to marry. It's interesting btw how Margaret Sullivan came to play a big part in both their lives, Hank marrying her, then divorcing since they could not live together, while Jim had a crush on her that lasted several years.

It was a difficult birth, and Gloria stayed in the hospital for several weeks. Her release from the hospital provided her with one of her favorite stories about her dreamy husband. Jim went to get the car to pick her up, but sometime between leaving the hospital and getting in the car, he forgot that he was supposed to pick her up. Instead, he started driving home. Gloria knew her man. After twenty minutes of waiting, she told the nurse that he had forgotten about her. The nurse didn't think such a thing was possible, but Gloria knew better. She told the nurse to take her and the babies upstairs. She would wait for the absentminded actor to remember what he had forgotten. On the way back home, Jim stopped at a photography studio to pick up some pictures. When the photographer asked after Gloria, Jim suddenly realized what he had done and ran for a phone. He'd be right there, he told her.

I want to thank G.P. Putnam's Sons for providing me with a free copy through NetGalley for an honest review!

Katy Noyes says

Behind the scenes of 'old Hollywood' with some favourite actors

Intriguing stuff, once it gets going. Henry Fonda and James Stewart, two actors I admire greatly, in some of my all-time favourite Hollywood films. I never knew their relationship off the screen, and I was keen to learn about their lives, their craft, their friendship.

Told from both their perspectives, we learn about each in turn - how they grew up and into the acting 'scene',

how they met, the initial struggles breaking into films, and then the successes they both achieved, their family lives, their war-time experiences, their later lives and ageing.

Many of their friends and colleagues, I had never heard of, and many of their films I have not seen, I wanted more detail on my favourites of course, but it really was fascinating learning of their different approaches to a role, how each achieved success in a different way and their oh-so-different personalities and beliefs.

My eyes widened in a few places with some 'revelations' that the author brings up. I wasn't very interested in their World War Two lives, but their later status as revered actors and descriptions of their acting world did hold my attention. The look at two old men still friends and still able to communicate friendship with few words, but more vegetable products - it was quite tender and moving.

Definitely one for lovers of the silver screen, I've since put two of Fonda's films on my 'to watch' list.

The writing is fairly standard for a biography, it entertains (some naughty words here and there, with the intention of amusing the reader - it did), it informs, the pace is a little slow at times (the war years for me), but fills out the detail you're after. A very full portrait indeed, and one not afraid to show their darker side, their flaws. An honest portrait of two film icons.

With thanks to Netgalley for the advance reading copy.

John Smiley says

A very enjoyable read---I love to read books about artists, geniuses, legends---and these two guys were all of those.

The acting profession fascinates me.

What I got most out of the book was the way these 2 guys aged---Henry Fonda was looking for ore acting work while dying of cancer. Jimmy spent the last 3 years of his life depressed that all of his friends (and wife) died.

I'd rather go down kicking and fighting like Henry.

To Jimmy, I would say get some young friends and develop those relationships.

John Yingling says

I feel that I am fairly well versed on Old Hollywood and its stars, so I was pleasantly surprised to discover how close a friendship James Stewart and Henry Fonda had for so many years. It's a generally honest look at both men and their lives off and on screen. I'm glad the author devoted a fair amount of the book discussing both men's military careers. Their service during World War II made me respect them even more. I knew something about Mr. Stewart's time as a bomber pilot, but I didn't know just how valuable Mr. Fonda's service to his country was. I don't agree with some of the movie reviews of the authors, but overall this is a very enlightening and entertaining look at two of the true giants of movie history.

Mollie says

I enjoyed this book very much although it seemed to me that the author picked a favorite. Mr. Stewart, despite some youthful character lapses, comes out the perhaps not better but easier of the two gentlemen. Still, the thought of each of them having a true friend in a business where I don't think that is often possible, warms my heart. Mr. Stewart was godfather to Mr. Fonda's Jane and Peter, and Jane speaks of him with true affection here. Yeah it's kind of lightweight and different from my usual reading, but I found it delightful.

Raquel says

Renowned film historian Scott Eyman explores the lifelong friendship between two Hollywood legends: Henry Fonda and James Stewart.

I have mixed feelings about this one. The subject matter is fascinating but the book kind of fell flat to me. Well-researched, well-organized and the transitions were smooth. Something was lacking though.

My full review here: <http://www.outofthepastblog.com/2018/...>

Donna Davis says

Fans of Henry Fonda and Jimmy Stewart will want to read this biography, written by the author that recently wrote a biography of John Wayne. I was invited to read and review by Net Galley and Simon and Schuster, and so I read it free in exchange for this honest review. It's for sale now.

The book is well crafted, and multiple aspects contribute to its success. The first is the unglamorous but essential research. Eyman used extensive interviews with both actors' families as well as directors and other actors that had worked with them. The second is the thoughtful analysis. Eyman's insights are intelligent and fairly measured, never becoming prurient, gossipy, or mawkish. The third is his friendly, congenial narrative, peppered with telling anecdotes that keep the pages turning. It's well organized and doesn't rely on photographs to tell the story.

These actors belonged to my parents' generation, and so for a long time I was not much interested in them. More recently, though, I've found it's interesting to see their craft, their lives, and their work as creatures of the time in which their careers blossomed, and as part of American entertainment history.

The truth is that I never cared much for Henry Fonda. The only one of his movies I saw in the theater was *On Golden Pond*, and the harsh way he spoke to his daughter on the screen—who was also his daughter in real life, Jane—was so brutal that I never wanted to see anything more that he'd done, apart from the occasional old movie I ran across on television. Learning later that he was more or less the same father to her in real life didn't help much. Eyman is unsparing as he describes this aspect of the Fonda family, but he also points to the mellower man he became later in life, and to the tremendous loyalty he showed his friends, Stewart foremost among them.

I was more interested in Jimmy Stewart, who left a more timeless body of work. *Harvey* is a film I loved enough to search out and watch in turn with each of my children. Of course, at Christmas time I am inclined to pull out *It's a Wonderful Life*, although none of my kids would watch it with me more than once. There

was such heart in his roles.

Because I like Stewart's work, I had already read one biography fairly recently. Robert Matzen's *Mission: Jimmy Stewart and the Fight for Europe* dealt well with his war years as well as the early years of his life, and so I didn't enjoy the first half of Eyman's book—which covered the same ground again—as I did the second half, which I found both comforting in places as well as mesmerizing. The second part also has more quotes by his children, who weren't around for much of the stars' earlier lives. And I came away with renewed respect for Jane Fonda, who had a harder road than I had previously understood.

Now I have half a dozen movie titles I want to watch, or watch again; that's a sure sign of a strong biography. And it makes me think warmly of my own longstanding friends, some of whom I've known and loved almost as long as the 50 years that Hank and Jim were friends.

Recommended to fans of Fonda and Stewart, and to those that love good biographies; this would also make a nice Christmas gift for older relatives.

Scott Southard says

There are many things I was expecting with this book and hoping for.

First, I was hoping for a double biography, learning about both men, Henry Fonda and James Stewart. Learning about what made these men who they are, what made them tick. Second, I hoped to learn about their experiences in Hollywood (for example, working with Hitchcock, classic movies, etc.). Their friendship and misadventures were probably third of my list. Still, wasn't I promised all this?

Little did I expect I would really not get any of my boxes checked.

When it comes to biographies, there is nothing too in-depth here. It feels like a collection of general quotes from other sources, written closer to the style of a TV Guide article than a Ron Chernow biography. Also, there is a lot of repetition, as if the author was worried we forgot something he said. Even in war time, there are only hints of their experience (a lot later of them stating they don't want to talk about it). How do you make their adventures and experiences in WWII boring? And why not research and share some specific adventures that puts us there with them? It takes a skill to make war heroes boring, but that is the case here. What is generally a harrowing and life-changing experience is breezed over. There was this war, you know...

Probably the most disappointing is how little we dive into their experiences in Hollywood. The author also has this weird knack for acting as a judge and jury around their films. He will say rather flippantly "So and so made three films, two were good and one was bad." Why was it bad? Why were they good? And who made that decision. Critics? Finances? The author? You would expect at least a description of the movie, the reaction, but he rarely does this. He just wants you to roll with it. Trust me, I know what is good and what is bad. Sigh.

Also, Hitchcock worked with both men. Do we meet Hitchcock? Get to know what it was like working with him. It is rare that anyone considers Hitchcock a "blip on a radar," but that is the case here. For some reason he is not important.

In some ways, it feels like the first draft of a greater book to come. Something bigger, more bold. This is a skim of that book. Right now, I couldn't even tell you the name of Stewart's wife and I just finished the book. How is that possible? You walk away with almost the shrug, "They were just these two guys, you know."

Personally, I don't think Hank and Jim were ever just two ordinary guys.

Dick Reynolds says

First, a confession. I've been a fan of Henry Fonda and James Stewart for many years. I've not seen them perform on the stage but I've seen many of their movies. The big surprise for me was learning that they had been close friends for fifty years, starting with being roommates and stage actors in New York as young men.

Stewart had been a pilot before the start of WWII and it was the right thing for him to be drafted into the Army Air Corps. (The U. S. Air Force would be formed after the war.) He rose in the officer ranks while being a pilot of B-24s, a difficult aircraft to master, and later as a wing commander with the rank of colonel. Right after the war ended he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, a medal second only to the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Fonda joined the Navy and participated in several battles in the South Pacific on several ships and in units as an operations officer, earning the Bronze Star among other medals. After the war he performed on stage and film in the title role of Mr. Roberts. He proudly wore his own Navy hat in every performance.

These two fellows were different in many respects. Fonda married five times but Stewart only once to Gloria McLean who already had two sons. Jimmy Stewart and Gloria would soon have twin daughters of their own. When Hank and Jim were together, they never talked about acting or politics. Instead, they liked to pursue outdoor activities such as flying planes, making and flying huge kites, and playing elaborate practical jokes on other prominent targets in the film industry. When not working on his acting craft Fonda liked to paint an even did needlecraft. Stewart liked to grow fruits and vegetables and often showed up at Fonda's house with a basketful of produce. Fonda reciprocated with honey made from his own bees.

Fonda made many movies and most were met with critical acclaim. His last movie, *On Golden Pond* with Katharine Hepburn and his daughter Jane, won him an Oscar shortly before he passed away. Stewart's films were usually a bit more upbeat such as *The Glenn Miller Story*, *Strategic Air Command* and the perennially popular *It's A Wonderful Life* which we'll be able to watch again on TV very soon.

When the Viet Nam war started, Jimmy Stewart's stepson, Ron McLean, joined the Marine Corps and went to OCS. I have a clipping from the Quantico base newspaper showing Ron being commissioned a Second Lieutenant by Lieutenant General Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller. General Puller's son was also being commissioned and is in the photo along with Mrs. Puller, and Jimmy and Gloria Stewart looking on proudly. (I was also stationed at Quantico then.) Below this same clipping I have a newspaper photo of the burial ceremony many months later when First Lieutenant Ron McClean was laid to rest at a Glendale, CA cemetery with the entire Stewart family in attendance. He was killed in action during combat operations in Vietnam.

Henry Fonda didn't approve of daughter Jane's overtures to North Vietnam but didn't try to stop her. Jimmy Stewart once went on a strong vocal tirade about the war in Vietnam, condemning those who dodged the draft and the higher level politicians who lacked the will to win the war. I tend to think that Stewart didn't care much at all for Jane Fonda's actions but probably never shared his views on that issue with Hank.

The book gives the reader some excellent insights into how Fonda and Stewart approached the craft of acting on both stage and in film. It also gives some fascinating details about many personalities of the entertainment business during this period.

Jim says

Scott Eyman has done us a favor with the writing of his book *Hank and Jim: The Fifty-Year Friendship of Henry Fonda and James Stewart* (Simon Schuster, 2017).

First, he has chronicled through interviews with their family members and friends and archival sources, that two individuals, especially two well-known celebrities who hold well-defined and differencing political perspectives, can be friends, work together, raise their families together, still care and support one another when one is riding the crest of success and the other is not, and do so over the course of fifty years!

Second, Eyman has given us a very human view of two public men who were celebrities in their hey-day and, for a while after, who were also very private men, troubled at times, and two men who, even though they were becoming leading men in the motion picture industry, entered military service and served America during World War 2.

What a gift for us is Hank and Jim: The Fifty-Year Friendship of Henry Fonda and James Stewart! Thank you Scott Eyman!

Well researched and written from a sympathetic and yet honest point of view, Eyman chronicles the rise and the decline of Fonda and Stewart's careers and lives in a manner which drew this reader/reviewer in. He goes behind the scenes of stardom and gets into the personal lives of both men, in an altering narrative as the story develops.

And the stories told are priceless...

for they reveal two men who enjoyed one another's company...

and who delighted in the everyday things of life...

This reviewer's interest was caught and held by two things Fonda and Stewart loved: model planes and cats!

The story of the model Martin Bomber that they bought as a Christmas present for themselves in New York resonated with this reviewer who built model plans, plastic not balsa wood as theirs was, as a kid. As did their love of cats, including a group of feral cats that grew to over 30 despite their best efforts to domesticate them. With their LA rental house AND yard becoming flea infested the two decided to get rid of the cats by digging a hole in the fence of their next-door neighbor...an actress named Greta Garbo, with disastrous results, (and who eventually moved).

And as Eyman tells their stories, he also speaks of their films, with the mind and perspective of the art and movie critic that he is, talking about their performances and which films were their best and which were not. (It reminded me of Carl Rollyson's biography on Dana Andrews, Hollywood Engima, written several years ago.)

Hank and Jim.

It is great biography...and a fresh telling of Hollywood history in its golden years.

It is a great biography...of two well-known stars and their trials and successes on screen and in real life.

I rated this biography five stars on Goodreads.

Note: I received a e-copy of this book from the publisher via Net Galley in exchange for a review. I was not required to write a positive review.

(One last thing...my favorite films in which Fonda and Stewart starred both have airplanes in them... for Fonda it was Midway and for Stewart it was Strategic Air Command.)

Colleen says

My grandmother hated Jimmy Stewart--his voice drove her up the wall--and she could only take a few minutes of any movie with him before demanding it be turned off. Frankly, his voice never bugged me, but did learn 3 rather interesting (to me) facts about Jimmy's voice:

- 1) He would deliberately ham up the stuttering, much like any star of his day (Davis's mannerisms, Crawford's masochism, Garland with song, etc.), he knew his idiosyncrasies were what his audience grew to expect but
- 2) It was absolutely revolutionary at the time, and part of how he became famous SO quick, and that his mumbling/stammering was just what Brando and Pacino and others did later and got lauded for praise and
- 3) Stewart was always kind of miffed at how hard it was to pull off that sincerity that would have made others look foolish (invisible rabbit, angels, trying to get a Boy Scout weekend retreat put into a bill) and how he never really got credit for making natural look so easy.

Fonda is another one whose voice I can instantly conjure up in my head, and I read pretty much every quote in the book said by its subjects with their own words. I also didn't know Henry Fonda's middle name was Jayne. I didn't know Marlon Brando's alcoholic homemaker mother caught sight of a young Henry Fonda crossing the street and decided he needed to be an actor, which is how he stumbled into acting. And I didn't know just how entwined Fonda and Jimmy Stewart's lives were--they really were platonic soul mates.

Book focuses almost entirely on the friendship, which easily fills the book--so if you were hoping to read a lot about their films or a book slanted more towards professional lives, then this is not that book. Both families participated with the author (Fonda's children and widow) and Jimmy Stewart's children, so it's inherently a friendly book towards its subjects. It can't really conceal Fonda's monstrous behavior with his second's wife suicide, or how both men treated some women pretty coldly in their bachelor days. And there's a reference to a homophobic slur that Fonda reportedly uttered towards Charles Laughton and the "Well damn.." at the revelation that Jimmy Stewart might have been racist.

It's a perfect duo to write about. Henry Fonda was extremely liberal. Jimmy Stewart was a die-hard Republican (though I wonder if he would still be one--since by old age he had mellowed out enough that he liked Bill Clinton, but was still startled/amused when he accidentally hung up on the president since that was a first for him). Henry was the intense loner with a string of failed marriages who longed for stage and chafed under Hollywood. Jimmy was the happy father and husband and a cheerful studio contract player who loved LB Mayer and defended the MGM system until the end. Jane Fonda went to Vietnam, and so did Jimmy Stewart's stepson that he raised, who died there (and thought it touching that Stewart, even though a big supporter of Vietnam War, would never let anyone say a bad word about his goddaughter in his presence).

They were members of a touring company--one that included fresh faced Josh Logan and Margaret Sullavan--and quickly became roommates as struggling actors in NYC, and mutually became obsessed in building a giant model aircraft. Their move to Hollywood (Fonda beat Stewart there by a few months) was almost entirely preoccupied with getting the giant balsa wood model there safely. The plan to move the plane was Stewart's stress for the transcontinental move--Fonda made his way west, with a baby kitten in his pocket, that he fed with a moistened napkin. Yes, many of the moments of their friendship/lives are as cute as some of their famous cinematic scenes.

Part of the reason they became friends seems like mutual interest in things like planes and giant kites and same sense of humor. Thought it also interesting that when Orson Welles moved to Hollywood, he at first thought it might be one of those "roommate" situations like Cary Grant and Randolph Scott, until he met both of them, and realized it was platonic. Since they did live together for it seems most of their single life--even when Stewart came back from WWII, he moved into Jane & Peter's playhouse in the backyard (which in Fonda fashion was swarming with cats--his flock reaching a record high of 37 at one point).

The two men's WW2 service takes up the middle of the book, for good reason--since they both enlisted (Stewart before Pearl Harbor even--something LB Mayer wasn't happy about and Fonda insisted on going even though as family man and past the mandatory age could have easily gotten out like Wayne and others). Both saw war--Fonda in the Pacific in the Navy, diving into downed kamikaze planes to retrieve intelligence; Stewart as a real life flying Steve Trevor, flying 19 missions as lead bomber, rising to the rank of brigadier general by the end of his career, the highest of any actor. Stewart refused to talk about his time in the airforce and refused to make WW2 films after the war. But their war time trauma was another thing that bound the two men together, since the trademark of their friendship was they could pick their friendship no matter the absences.

So it's a good, pretty sweet, comprehensive book on Stewart & Fonda, packed full of personal trivia. Stewart only eating white colored food (battered sole and vichyssoise for dinner every night, washed down with glass of milk, followed by vanilla ice cream) as his disgusting diet. The adorable love affair between Stewart and his horse Pie (which is the horse featured in all his movies--the horse lived for 30 years and Stewart made sure it was buried with a headstone) and how Fonda painted a photorealistic painting of Pie to give to Stewart when the horse was in ill-health. How both men hated hunting and were not heavy drinkers (which explains now that I think about it, how rarely you hear of Fonda or Stewart in the carousing circles of like Gable or Flynn or Bogart). These were the guys painting model sets or doing needlepoint and embroidering furniture or getting into beekeeping or jazz.

It's not a perfect book. As like everyone (and reams of telegrams, letters, and diary entries) make clear, it was never entirely a duo, but a fucked up love triangle with Margaret Sullavan. It might have been a better book if it was more apparent in this and included Margaret more entirely within--especially since Brooke Hayward also cooperated with this book. There are parts that are either padded slightly or typical conceit (I don't know why authors feel the need to include multiple paragraphs about how much a can of soup was going for in the circular that day or how much a super-deluxe 5000 phonograph player was on sale for). I just assume they spent a lot of time in the stacks, getting mesmerized by microfilm and get really into the advertisements and feel the need to work it into the book. I get the allure personally, but kind of hate it in all the same. So...this would have been stronger if all those times were cut out, and like a chapter or two just on Margaret Sullavan was inserted in, rather than her flitting in and out of each man's life to bedevil them (and I raised an eyebrow here and there on some of the wording in the book).

Quibbles aside, if you like Jimmy Stewart or Henry Fonda, excellent window into both men with this book.
