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AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

There's Mel, There's Woody, and There's You: My Life in the Slow Lane
Bruce Kimmel
AuthorHouse
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Five Stars (out of Five)

There's a lot to like about Bruce Kimmel's zany memoir. Kimmel, a second banana actor who appeared in television shows like "Happy Days" and "The Partridge Family," never made it anywhere near as big as his Hollywood look-alike, Chevy Chase, so he decided to write and direct plays and films. In 1993, Kimmel became disenchanted with Hollywood and reinvented himself as a record producer.

This book is the story of Kimmel's television, movie and stage career. He tells it simply, candidly, and with a great deal of wit, self-deprecation and good humor.

To a large extent, the title is indicative of the irony that pervades Kimmel's all-too-typical Hollywood journey. "There's Mel, there's Woody, and there's you," is a direct quote from the corporate head of Paramount, a major Hollywood film studio. He told Kimmel after viewing his low-budget spoof, "The First Nudie Musical," that "We believe in you and think you're going to be the next thing in comedy." Kimmel, of course, was "utterly euphoric" to be perceived as keeping company with the likes of Mel Brooks and Woody Allen.

But that was about as far as it went because Paramount tried to kill the film straightaway. The reason was painfully clear: Kimmel's good friend, Cindy Williams, had agreed to take a leading role in "The First Nudie Musical," but now she was appearing in the hit television show, "Laverne and Shirley." Paramount just couldn't afford the negative publicity from the rising star.

As it turned out, Cindy herself executed a Hollywood-style power play and saved the launch of the film, at least temporarily. "The First Nudie Musical" had only a brief run before Paramount permanently shut it down.

That was perhaps Kimmel's biggest success and certainly his most stinging disappointment. But it turns out this experience was just one of many career misfortunes Kimmel had to endure. In the book, Kimmel willingly shares his other trials and tribulations, to the point where sympathetic readers may wonder how the author can wake up each day and do it all over again. It is Kimmel's charming way of handling what life throws at him that ultimately

sees the actor-writer-director through the worst of times. Indeed, Kimmel becomes an endearing character in the book for whom the reader cheers when something good happens.

As with any Hollywood memoir, *There's Mel, There's Woody, and There's You* has its share of kiss-and-tell moments, behind-the-scenes politics, and party-induced shenanigans. But through it all, Bruce Kimmel comes off as basically a nice guy who played the Hollywood game as best he could and lost more than he won.

For readers who want to get an entertaining glimpse of what happens on the backlot and behind the camera, Bruce Kimmel's memoir fits the bill.

Barry Silverstein