

HOLLYWOOD VIRGIN



*BREAKING
INTO AND OUT OF
SHOW BUSINESS*

JASON FELTS

FOREWORD BY SIR RICHARD BRANSON

Praise for *Hollywood Virgin*

"I've always believed in the power of storytelling, with honesty and authenticity. *Hollywood Virgin*, along with its unique soundtrack, provides an inspiring and uplifting experience. I can't wait for y'all to meet the Jason I know and love."

—**Jessica Simpson**
singer, fashion designer

"*Hollywood Virgin* is a masterclass in resilience, offering an unfiltered look at an industry that many aspire to. A must-read Hollywood love/hate letter for anyone desiring a little peek behind the curtain."

—**Christopher Gialanella**
publisher of *LOS ANGELES MAGAZINE*

"*Hollywood Virgin* is the unlikely success story of Jason Felts, who made all of his dreams come true and learned a lot of lessons in the process. I'm so proud of everything Jason has accomplished. But most of all, I'm proud to call him my friend."

—**Sir Richard Branson**
from the Foreword

"Felts captivates, detailing a (not always first-class) journey filled with aspiration, struggle, self-awareness, and super success. A masterclass in perseverance and authenticity in an industry that often lacks both. A must-read for anyone looking to blaze their own trail and keep it real."

—**Lance Bass**
singer of N'SYNC

"A look back at the surreal life of one of my closest friends. His memoir made me laugh and cry. Hollywood chewed him up, but didn't spit him out."

—**Ashlee Simpson-Ross**
singer, songwriter, and actress

“*Hollywood Virgin* is filled with laughs and a behind-the scenes account of life working for one of the most iconic brands of our time.”

—**Brian Kelly**
The Points Guy

“An executive’s well-written account of his journey through filmland, of which I had a small window into; never losing sight of the wonder and optimism that makes moviemaking exciting.”

—**Oliver Stone**
director, screenwriter, producer, and author

“If you want to learn how to build, and how to lead, Jason Felts knows. *Hollywood Virgin* shows how dreams happen. FYI, this book will help you to ‘Focus Your Ideas.’”

—**will.i.am, singer**
songwriter, producer, and entrepreneur

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WILEY

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You hold in your hands one of the last books to not be written by AI. Hopefully, that's not true. But know that, despite some name changes, everything in here is true and was written by a real person with a real sense of humor, in a real bathrobe. So, in that spirit, this book is dedicated to you, dear reader, and artificial bots everywhere, who only wish they could be like us.

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Prologue

MY ENTIRE LIFE has been shaped by music. When I was little, the sounds of classic rock and Motown hits filled every room of our house. Road trips with my family included not just the radio but the entire evolution of music technology from 8-tracks to cassette tapes, compact discs, and MP3. Despite where the music was coming from, it would always include quizzing by my dad—*Quick . . . name this artist!* After school, I was glued to MTV, and in high school I went through the requisite era of loving pop songs and most singles on Casey Kasem's *Top 40*. Every significant moment in my life is marked by a particular song or band I was into or heard at that time. Eventually, I ended up developing my own tastes and favorite genres, which are wide-ranging. There isn't much music I *don't* like.

So it's no wonder I ended up working for one of the most iconic music brands in the world and then running music festivals. But more on that later. For now, all you need to know is that at the end of each chapter is a music cue to a song that correlates, to me, with that precise time in my life. I listened to these exact songs, in this order, as I wrote the book. From start to finish, they are a musical accompaniment to this book, and my entire life. I challenge you to figure out exactly who each song is dedicated to from my story. Regardless, I hope you'll use

them to enhance your reading experience and take a journey with me that I never in a million years imagined I'd go on. I'm so grateful for every minute and wouldn't change a thing. So, as I sit here in this bathrobe, typing these last words, I invite you to hear the story of how I lost my virginity, in every way, in Hollywood.

The following QR codes will take you to the music cue listed at the end of each chapter. Each song either conveys how I was feeling at that point in my life OR is dedicated to someone from that chapter. I will leave it to you, and with any luck you will know.



Apple Music



Spotify

Foreword

by Sir Richard Branson

ALMOST 20 YEARS AGO, I was at my home on Necker Island for what was going to be a wonderful celebration week. I've always made it a habit to invite old and new friends alike to come spend time on Necker and discuss the next big ideas, innovations, and movements. That particular week included a few accomplished entrepreneurs and a few kids (20- and 30-something-year-olds) who were making moves in the entertainment industry. One of them was a tall, scrawny, blonde-haired bloke named Jason Felts. I've always said that one of the most underrated keys to success is keeping it fun. One of the first things I noticed and immediately liked about Jason was that this kid sure knew how to have fun.

As my friendship with him grew in the coming months and years, I've learned that he really epitomizes the adage, "Work hard, play hard." While we had a ton of fun, it also was clear to me that Jason had ambition and big dreams. So, of course, he would be invited back. One evening, on another trip to Necker, I put him on the spot in the middle of a dinner with more than 20 other guests. Around the huge, alligator-shaped table sat some prominent founders in technology and other industries. Jason was substantially younger and earlier in their career

than most of the other dinner guests. As all the other accomplished guests spent the majority of dinner sharing their recent achievements, awards, and pitched various ideas, I turned to the attentive (but quiet) young man adjacent to me and proclaimed, “Jason, why don’t you get up” (motioning him with my hand to hop from his chair) “Go on . . . introduce yourself . . . tell us what you’re up to.” He looked a little taken aback but stood up with a smile and began talking. But the table was just too big and not everyone could hear him.

Again, with the motion of my hand, now as I shoved the glassware to the sides, “Go on, get up on the table. A little louder so everyone can hear,” I suggested, springing attention onto him, as I am known to do. If he was nervous, he didn’t show it. Without flinching he jumped up and began walking the table like a runway. What intrigued me was that he didn’t just talk about what he’d accomplished in his career so far, but the future he envisioned within entertainment and how he dared to be different in such an ego-driven industry. Later when I apologized for casting the spotlight onto him, he told me that he didn’t think anyone around that table would be very impressed by his career, considering who the other guests were and what they had accomplished. He was much more interested in talking about what was possible in the future than what had happened in the past. We had that in common.

It was on that trip to Necker that I shared my story of Virgin Records, and we floated the idea of building out a Virgin production company. That was when I learned a second value Jason and I share: if you aren’t sure how to accomplish something, just say yes and figure out how later. When I asked Jason to email me and Gordon McCallum a business plan to see if this could work, I later learned that he immediately went home and Googled “how to write a business plan.” I maybe knew he wasn’t totally sure what he was doing. But I felt sure I’d found a partner who could figure out the “how.” And have fun along the way. You really can’t ask for more in a friend and business partner.

You’ll have to read on to learn about all the ups and downs of Jason’s life thus far and his Hollywood career. Together we’ve sat in the Lincoln bedroom of the White House, sipped fireside martinis with President Obama, had our fair share of Hobie cat races, walked movie premiere red carpets, fundraised with purpose for Virgin Unite, and laughed our

asses off along the way. I'm so proud of everything Jason has accomplished. But most of all, I'm proud to call him my friend.

Hollywood Virgin is the unlikely success story of a small-town, Southern boy who made all of his dreams come true and learned a lot of lessons in the process. I happen to believe that his success is not mostly due to his talent or work ethic, though he has those in spades. No, I believe the biggest driver of Jason's success is his instinct to always do what is right. He's a person of integrity. That's the kind of person one should most want to be around. I'm honored to be a part of his story, be called his mentor, and excited for you to dive into these entertaining and enlightening pages. Like me, Jason certainly didn't learn by following the rules. He learned by doing, failing, getting up, and trying again. He trusted his gut and put other people first. If a secret to life exists, I'd say it's that.

PART



Ready, Set, Action

1

Peaches

“PEACHES!” DOC BAKER barked. “Get in here!”

By Peaches, he meant me. Doc Baker started calling me that during the first week of my tenure as the high school football team’s trainer, when I was just a freshman. I didn’t like the nickname, honestly. And I didn’t quite understand it. Later in life I realized there was something obvious about me that I didn’t see yet. I suppose, looking back, I was a “light in the loafers” teenage boy in the heart of rural Texas in the 1990s, working in the most macho setting imaginable. It was everything you’re probably thinking – muscular boys who look more like men throwing each other around every day and being led by actual men who cursed and talked about women with a strong Southern drawl. I was different, a fish out of water. I guess . . . I was Peaches.

I didn’t even care that much about sports; I preferred music. This was due in large part to my father’s constant practice of educating me on not only who performed a certain Motown song but also the story behind the song. It was a trivia game we often played, and still do even to this day. But when we had moved from Memphis, Tennessee, to Rowlett, Texas, the year before, the band teacher wouldn’t let me play alto saxophone anymore. I loved it, but apparently Lakeview Centennial High School had enough alto sax players. They wanted me to play tenor sax, which is a long, gigantic instrument, much bigger

than the alto I loved. I was about 115 pounds (soaking wet) and wasn't strong enough to manhandle it, so I passed.

I was devastated and looking for something else to do in my new town at my new school when Doc Baker mentioned that they needed football trainers. He was my health teacher, and not even a doctor, but that's what we all called him anyway. I had no idea what being a trainer entailed, I just knew enough to know that high school football in Texas is A THING. It truly was the TV show *Friday Night Lights* come to life. I was intrigued. Brokenhearted by my saxophone rejection, and following a short, boring stint in FFA (Future Farmers of America), I figured maybe becoming a part of the cool thing would help.

During my first tour of the facilities, I realized that being a trainer, in a lot of ways, meant being in charge. I was responsible for making sure the players got what they needed to play their best. They were led by Coach Watkins, who at the time was the winningest high school football coach in Texas history, which meant the place was a well-oiled machine with a lot of high expectations. Trainers were organized and attentive. They were responsible for ensuring the players operated at the highest level because they had the support behind them, whatever that meant. I remember thinking on that first day, *these are the people who really make it happen on Friday night*. They were leaders, not followers. And that was a feeling I aspired to.

I was psyched about the opportunity to become a trainer, until Doc broke the news that all the positions had been quickly filled, but I could work for the hardware room, reporting directly to Coach Watkins. That's where all the players go to get their chin straps adjusted, helmets fitted, jerseys tailored, and so on. I wasn't exactly thrilled by this – it didn't seem nearly as exciting as being a trainer, who ensured players were mentally and physically prepared to win. Teammates, parents, and spectators alike all expected a strong team, and trainers were vital to that.

So was the hardware guy, but I didn't see it that way yet. It was lower down the food chain and much less glamorous than the role of a trainer. But I came to enjoy it. I ran that hardware room. And the players loved me. They felt like I was the one truly taking care of them because I had to care about the seemingly smaller things – if their mouthguard fit right or their shoes were too tight. I did my job well and gained respect. The hardware room was where I was that day

when Doc Baker yelled my name. Well, the name he and the entire team called me, anyway.

"Peaches! Get in here!" he hollered as I walked to his office. "You're up."

"What?" I replied.

"There's an open trainer position and you're taking it. You're going to learn how to wrap ankles and do electrotherapy. We practice every day, and two-a-days in summer. Games on Fridays, during season. You need to be at all of it," he replied. "Tell your parents you won't make any family vacation this year."

I was ready, and nervous, but also a little relieved. The training room was farther from the showers than the hardware room. I was already having a hard enough time not walking by more than I needed to. My confused 14-year-old brain had no idea what was even happening. As far as I knew, I had no interest in anyone. I didn't know the term for it at the time, but I considered myself to be asexual. I wasn't interested in girls, but being interested in boys was something I couldn't conceptualize. In my conservative, smaller town, Southern Baptist world, men married women. End of story. I didn't want to marry a woman, so I must want to be married to no one. That's all I could understand at the time. My curiosity to compare my skinny, hairless body to naked, hairier, muscular boys would be easier kept at bay if I were farther from the showers. Plus, now I had some real responsibility, and I've always liked that.

At school, that was my identity: football trainer. But at home, I was doing one of two things – either researching anything related to entertainment or watching recorded copies of *Entertainment Tonight*. With the invention of the DVD on the horizon, videocassette recorders were lower in price, and I managed to buy one with my babysitting money. For \$109, at Circuit City, it was my first purchase with my own money. I also had signed up for something called Columbia House, which was a music and video subscription program. For 1¢ and then the low, low price of \$19/month they'd send you six videos a month. I built up my own little movie collection by also buying blank tapes to record and watch *Entertainment Tonight*, *Star Search*, and other shows that gave me a peek into Hollywood, a world very far from my own existence. To me, Hollywood had everything. Movie stars! Money! Culture! Beautiful people!