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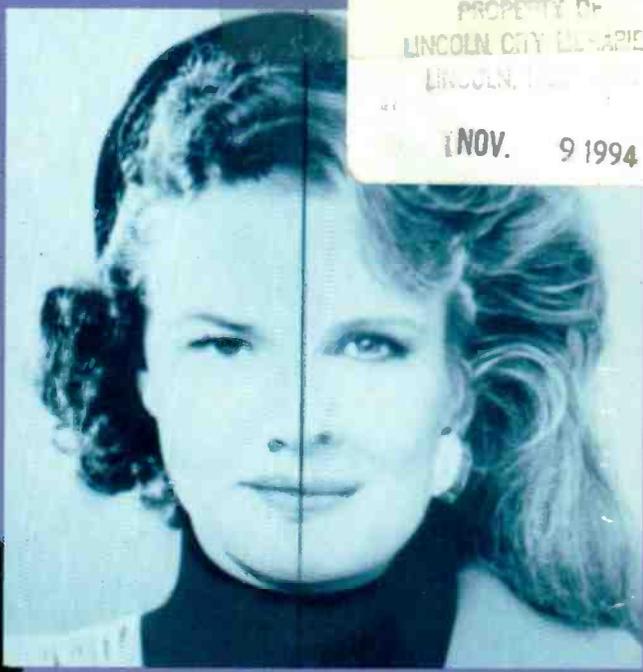
THE JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF TELEVISION ARTS

**MARGIE TO MURPHY:  
IMAGES OF WOMEN  
ON TELEVISION**

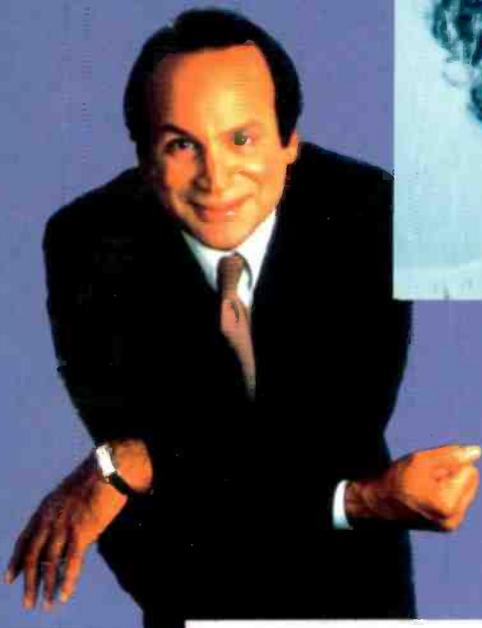
by Mary Ann Watson

**CLOSEUP:  
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Television Quarterly ISSN: 0040-2796

Television Quarterly is published quarterly by the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, 111 West 57th Street, New York, New York, 10019 (212) 586-8424.

Members of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences receive TELEVISION QUARTERLY as part of membership services. Inquiry regarding membership should be directed to the office of The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. BUSINESS ADVERTISING OFFICES: Television Quarterly, 111 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019. EDITORIAL OFFICE: Television Quarterly, same address. The subscription rates for non-members, libraries and others is \$25.00 a year and \$6.00 a copy in the United States; \$30.00 a year and \$6.00 a copy in all other countries. Special Student Subscription \$22.00. Subscription orders should be sent to TELEVISION QUARTERLY, The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, 111 West 57th Street, New York, New York, 10019. The opinions expressed herein are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of The National Academy or the members of the Editorial Board of Television Quarterly.

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# TELEVISION QUARTERLY



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TELEVISION ARTS AND SCIENCES

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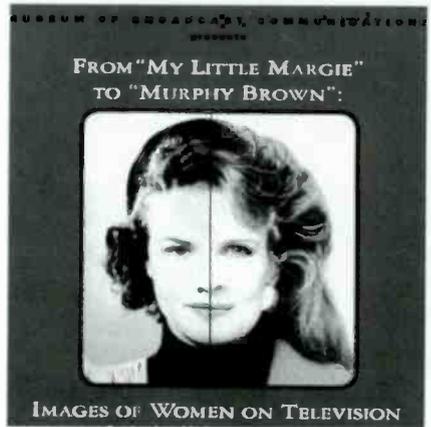
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FROM MY  
LITTLE  
MARGIE TO  
MURPHY  
BROWN:  
WOMEN'S LIVES ON  
THE SMALL SCREEN



*Last fall, the Museum of Broadcast Communications in Chicago sponsored an exhibition that focused on the images of female characters on prime-time television throughout the history of the medium. The aim was to stimulate thought and dialogue on a multi-faceted and highly debatable subject. With this same goal in mind Television Quarterly presents highlights of the five seminars that were part of the events in Chicago.*

*The retrospective, devised by curators Mary Ann Watson of Eastern Michigan University and Cary O'Dell of the Museum's archival staff, provided a forum for actresses, scholars, and journalists to discuss the intertwining of popular entertainment and social change. Does television shape or reflect? Of course there's no single and conclusive answer to the question. But there's appreciable value in asking it over and over again in different ways and in different contexts. Formal exploration—such as a museum exhibition—bestows a legitimacy on the instinctive desire to explore the connections between our own lives and those we see depicted on the small screen.*

— Richard Pack  
Editor

# IMAGES OF WOMEN

BY MARY ANN WATSON

**M**argie Albright and Murphy Brown would have been whopping good pals. You can tell by the glint in their eyes. Had they been, say, college roommates, heaven only knows to what dizzying heights they might have taken the art of practical jokery.

But they were characters created for different generations. And despite their mutual spark, they exist in our collective memory on opposite sides of a great divide. In the forty years between Margie trying to win a box top contest and Murphy becoming a single mother, two sweeping social revolutions—the civil rights movement and the women's movement—transformed America.

Because these struggles for a more fair republic coincided with the rise of the television age, the medium inadvertently became a chronicler of a culture with a shifting center of gravity.

And now, enough time has passed to be reflective about the video record of contemporary Americana, to contemplate the long view. So with this exhibit we scan four decades of prime-time programming through the lens of gender—to consider the grand scope of change in our country, as well as ponder personal and family changes using the mileposts of TV.

Some might quarrel with the proposition that fiction is a fitting gauge to measure the flow of real life. Stephanie Coontz, author of the recent book, *The Way We Never Were*, reminds us that "Contrary to popular opinion, *Leave It to Beaver* was not a documentary."

It's a point well taken. To assume that June Cleaver was a typical homemaker of her era is simply wrong. But to understand that for countless viewers the lovely woman wearing pearls and a crisp apron represented an ideal of the way things ought to be is to gain some true perspective on a certain time in our history.

Sitcoms, dramatic series, and made-for-TV movies are rich artifacts. Their value



Gale Storm in *My Little Margie*

is not that they document precisely how we lived, but how we thought about human relationships. Take *The Honeymooners*, for example, one of the classics because of the extraordinary performances. In its first run, no one expressed concern about Ralph's threats of physical violence against his wife. Today's viewers, though, while still touched by the poignancy of the Kramdens' affection for each other, wince to hear, "One of these days, Alice, one of these days, Pow! Right in the kisser!"

The general patterns of women's roles in American television are, of course, easy to trace. Storytellers, by and large, kept women in their prescribed places until women themselves started to reinvent their worlds. It's a simplification, however, to presume that all the depictions of women on one side of a time line were demeaning and that sometime in the early 1970s, new, liberated females emerged on the tube. The evolution of women's images on TV is a more complex matter.

In fact, even the venerable *I Love Lucy* finds itself in debatable terrain. Fair-minded observers can see very different messages in the same body of work. While some viewers see a subjugated, oppressed housewife living in a household run on dishonesty, fear, and distrust, others see a high-spirited woman brave enough to risk antic behavior for the chance at new possibilities in life.

This exhibition offers an opportunity for many more such debates. Visitors might be surprised to discover early TV characters who were

vibrant, self-reliant women, and perhaps discouraged when they encounter latter-day protagonists who are embarrassingly vapid.

The retrospective is built around five major themes—and five panel discussions—featuring actresses, academics, journalists, and members of the creative team who examine the topics in greater depth.

Throughout the history of television, women characters have, by far, most often been portrayed as people whose lives are lived vis-a-vis their husbands and children. So naturally, one of our subjects is the evolution of the nurturer in popular TV entertainment. "She's got a home to clean, meals to cook, dishes to wash, you two kids to look after, floors to scrub. What more does she want?", Chester Riley once asked Junior when wife Peg was unhappy on *The Life of Riley*.

It took many years, but TV wives and mothers were eventually able to say they wanted more out of life and some help in the kitchen. A common comic plot device of the 1950s and early sixties had Mom pursue an interest outside the home—such as running for city council. Dad and the kids suffered from neglect. The happy resolution was that Mom finally came to her senses and gave up the idea of trying to make a difference.

In spite of the camp appeal, there's also a sadness in watching those reruns. Television was clearly reflecting a society in which women's talent and potential—like fossil fuel—were frittered away without regret.

While yielding homemakers were legion, women of color



Candice Bergen

## IMAGES OF WOMEN

were virtually invisible on America's small screens. Theirs is a special history that demands attention. In 1963, the NAACP was fighting not only for the integration of public education and transportation, but of television programming too. An organized campaign to increase the number of dignified black characters contributed to a remarkable TV season in which Ruby Dee, Diana Sands, and Cicely Tyson were among the actresses who elevated TV drama.

It is Diahann Carroll's portrayal of *Julia* in 1968, though, that remains the landmark. A beautiful widowed nurse raising a young son was surely the stuff of heartwarming sitcom. But innocuous it wasn't.

Controversy swirled around the series from the start. In the first episode, while telephoning to arrange for a job interview, *Julia* felt obligated to explain to her potential employer, "I'm colored. I'm a Negro." Was she part of the solution or part of the problem? (The same tough yardstick would also be applied to Florida Evans, Louise Jefferson, and Claire Huxtable.) In that hard year, though, it was a question that got everyone talking about race. A quarter of a century later the answer remains elusive. But *Julia* still compels—and the glaring paucity of Asian, Hispanic, and Native American female lead characters still limits the rainbow.

Television's treatment of women on the job is another theme that readily

surfaces in a panoramic look at prime time. It's a fact of life that women work harder and longer for less. On TV it seemed to be a law of nature. Why did Sally Rogers always do the typing on *The Dick Van Dyke Show*? How come Jane Hathaway, who was obviously smarter than her boss, didn't aspire to be president of the

Commerce Bank of Beverly Hills? And why didn't Mrs. Carmichael ever tell Mr. Mooney not to use that tone of voice?

In the first fifteen years or so of television, working women were invariably unmarried and always on the lookout for a successful Mr. Right. Matrimony brought deliverance from the pressures of paid employment. True career women, those dedicated to a profession instead of a man, were depicted as emotionally unfulfilled, lonely people. Mary Tyler Moore as Mary Richards showed us that human attachments in the work-

place can be as strong and sacred as family ties.

Most women on television today, married or not, work outside their homes. A full-time stay-at-home Mom would seem pretty unrealistic in the 1990s. The vast majority of these female characters, though, enjoys a financial ease that doesn't jibe with nonfictional American life. Perhaps that's why *Roseanne* touched such a responsive chord. Her labor is the linchpin in the *Conners'* fragile economic situation. Female viewers, whether they wear a nametag on a

*In the first run of The Honeymooners, no one expressed concern about Ralph's threats of physical violence against his wife. Today's viewers, though, while still touched by the poignancy of the Kramdens' affection for each other, wince to hear "One of these days, Alice, one of these days, Pow! Right in the kisser!"*

## FROM MARGIE TO MURPHY

uniform or a navy blue power suit, strongly identify with a heroine whose life is a perpetual double shift.

The experiences of adolescence echo profoundly in adulthood. How television has presented teenage girls over the years is a fascinating case study. Scores of storylines reinforced the idea that intellect in a young woman is not a quality that is attractive to boys. Dependence, even if feigned, is more alluring.

The brilliant and aggressive Zelda Gilroy, played masterfully by Sheila James, held no interest for *Dobie Gillis*. It was Thalia Menninger, who pouted and purred, that caused his pulse to quicken. A 1990s viewer knows, of course, *Dobie* was a schmuck and *Zelda* was way too good for him. A female pre-teen of the Cold War, though, came away with an entirely different message about relationships between the sexes.

The TV teen queens of the mid-sixties, Gidget and Patty Duke, portrayed the ideal high school girl as perky, petite, and boy crazy. The package was more important than the contents. Gidget's best friend was a prototypical plain Jane without a prayer for a prom date. And Patty's academically talented identical cousin was sweet, but awfully square.

Today, the transition to womanhood is more thoughtfully rendered. Girls' rites of passage, long ignored by the medium, are now being explored by series like *Blossom*. Contemporary girls on TV dig boys and clothes too. But, at the essence, their characters are motivated by a search for internal identity.

No sooner did Betty Friedan's 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* start to crystallize the concept of feminism in mainstream American thought, than a curious genre of television sprang up. In shows like *Bewitched*, *I Dream of Jeannie*, and *My Living Doll*, women with power caused big trouble for men

who didn't want the old order upset. Plots were propelled by male attempts to control how females used their supernatural gifts. And always, the women's sneakiness fueled the high jinks. But, by episode's end, balance was restored when the gals inevitably deferred to the rightful authority of the guys.

Super female crime fighters on TV—and villainesses alike—knew that their sexuality was part and parcel of their power. So they dressed to kill. *Wonder Woman's* revealing, skin tight costume with push-up bra wasn't designed for battle comfort. Its function was to turn mortal men into putty. Sexy lady detectives and spies in spike heels, like the curvaceous *Honey West*, were in a similar category. While critics might complain about their willing accommodation of male fantasies, these ladies were hell-bent to wield power, in the words of Malcolm X, "by any means necessary."

To think the decades-long flow of television images that have washed over America has not etched our national psyche is to deny the sculpting force of a river. Entertainment programming, intentionally or otherwise, provides viewers with models for action. And so, we retrace TV history not just for nostalgia's sake, but as a pathway to a fuller understanding of life in the United States in the twilight of the twentieth century.

Varying interpretations are sure to arise whenever mass culture is being critiqued. Visitors to *"From My Little Margie to Murphy Brown: Images of Women on Television,"* though, are likely to glean the same conclusion about at least one aspect of an expansive subject—as women gained creative clout in the television industry, it's clear that female characters grew more authentic, and women's lives on the small screen more valued. ■

# "I NURTURE, THEREFORE I AM": TV'S WIVES AND MOTHERS

*The moderator for this panel was Professor Marilyn Matelski of Boston College. The participants were Barbara Billingsley, who, of course, played the paragon of motherhood, June Cleaver on *Leave It to Beaver*; Susan Clark, matriarch of an interracial household on *Webster*; Pat Crowley, whose character on *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* was a wife, mother, and playwright; Shirley Jones, the legendary leader of the Partridge Family; and Dr. Mary Larson of Northern Illinois University, who offered an analytical perspective to the proceedings:*

**MARY LARSON:** Television shapes our behavior by the way it shapes our expectations of what real-life situations will be. For example, if you've got kids who are watching a lot of *The Cosby Show* and view Claire Huxtable as the kind of a mother that moms should be, a child might go to her mother expecting to be able to bring a sticky problem and her mom will be able to handle this problem with aplomb and ease and not get hysterical when things are falling apart.

Presently, we've got an awful lot of supermoms who are able to do absolutely everything. That creates some stress in young women who are growing up thinking, "I don't know if I can do all this." And on television it's made to look pretty easy. You're not just falling apart at the end of the day tearing your hair out and missing this or that. So we could do with a little more realism.

**SHIRLEY JONES:** I used to have a lot of mothers come up to me and say, "Oh, I really hate you. My children all want to go and live with you. You're the perfect person." I used to get letters from young people saying they wanted to run away from home and come and perch on my lawn, which is really very sad. From that standpoint it was very difficult.

**MARY LARSON:** Those mothers probably should have said, "I'll bet Shirley Jones's house isn't always clean either."

**BARBARA BILLINGSLEY:** Well, I always hear that I'm their second mom. It doesn't matter what color or race they are, I'm still their second mom. I don't know whether that is a sad commentary because mom



*Sara Gilbert and Roseanne portray family life with all its stresses and strains*

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isn't living up to standard, or whether they're latchkey children that are looking at the reruns as they come home and I'm their second mom, or we're their second moms.

**SUSAN CLARK:** I had a lot of input in my character. I didn't want a mother who was traditional. I wanted a non-traditional role of someone who was loving and supportive and aware, and right there, but I also wanted a working mother because so many of the women of my generation had to work to make ends meet. You don't have to be good at cooking and housekeeping to be a good mother.

You can be a wife and a mother and not be a maid. But you can be both, that is the male fantasy that we are all of these things. And what I wanted to do, since I was a woman, I wanted to take my role models from women and appeal to women. I didn't feel it necessary as a wife and mother to appeal to men—on *Webster*, the family would have to pick up.

**SHIRLEY JONES:** I think I might have been the first single mother raising children up to that point. I had a lot of input because basically I was living Shirley Partridge at home. The kids were pretty much the same age. The writers even would sometimes come to my home over the weekend and kind of sit in. And some of the episodes were actually based on things that happened in my house.

The episode about Danny stealing, for example. Of course, all little kids steal something probably at one time or another, and my middle son had just done that, so I had to tell them the whole story, bit by bit, and they wrote the episode.

**PATRICIA CROWLEY:** Well *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* was, I think, one of the first situation comedies where the mother was a working woman. She was a successful writer and married to a professor at a university, and she didn't always keep a perfect house by any means. She never wore an apron, she kind of messed up a lot, but there was a lot of love there, a lot of fun with the kids, and a kind of mutual respect, which made it very hard for writers.

Comedy writers have to have a little bit of a problem to deal with. The house was always a problem for us, and we tried to have other little situations. We were the first ones to have a bed, and not twin beds. It was just a double bed, but after all, where did those four kids come from?

**BARBARA BILLINGSLEY:** Ward and June didn't even have a bedroom. We had a door!

**SUSAN CLARK:** We had a reaction about family values when *Webster* opened. There was a lot of bad reaction from African Americans. I had to go have an interview with the NAACP head in Los Angeles. The feeling was, "How dare white Americans assume that a child who was orphaned would not be adopted by an African-American family." And that was a very real question. And it was a big assumption. So I think that turned us, for the first three or four years, into dealing with major issues—race being one of them, religion being one

*Couldn't that just  
squelch some people,  
the way Roseanne  
speaks to her  
children? It'd kill me.*

—Barbara Billingsley  
*Leave It to Beaver*

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*Barbara Billingsley in Leave It To Beaver*

of them, child abuse, sexual molestation at school.

Maybe every five or six episodes there would be a show that had almost no laughs. The fans that were there would respond much more to those shows, because suddenly we were of different races and we were dealing with that as a reality—the reality of this child going to school and coming home and here are two white people who are his parents. Or going to school to see the teacher. It was politicized in a way that we didn't expect going in.

**BARBARA BILLINGSLEY:** When most of us did the shows, we couldn't deal with issues like that. You didn't even talk about that. There couldn't be issues of this sort. They deal with marijuana today—we dealt with Beaver smoking his father's meercaum pipe. But it was a different time. There were limits in those days.

**MARY LARSON:** One of the nice things about the series that you were all on is that there was a lot of nurturing by parents and especially mothers. The point I was trying to make about *Roseanne* is that, shows have impacts on a number of levels. Issues is certainly one level, and I think she handles controversial issues very well. The point I made about the sarcasm is that there are other levels of influence that are not so readily talked about or noticed. And when I ask my media students to start looking at programs with these other things in mind, they come back to class and say, "Wow! Now that I am looking at it this way this is a whole different way to see a program."

**BARBARA BILLINGSLEY:** Couldn't that just squelch some people, the way Roseanne speaks to her children? It'd kill me.

**MARY LARSON:** Oh, yes. I'd be devastated if my mother talked to me that way.

**PAT CROWLEY:** At the end of the day, though, it's a very loving mother and father. They (*Roseanne* and Dan Conner) love those kids, that happens to be their way and the kids understand it. ■



*Shirley Jones—The leader of the Partridge Family*

## RANGE AND SHADE: TV'S WOMEN OF COLOR

*Moderator, Dr. Gloria Abernathy Lear of the University of Illinois was joined by fellow academics Aniko Bodroghkozy of Concordia University in Montreal and Dr. Jannette Dates of Howard University. Ms. Bodroghkozy is the author of a study of the series Julia entitled "Is This What You Mean By Color TV?" and Ms. Dates is the co-editor of Split Image: African Americans in the Mass Media. The actresses on the panel included Anna Maria Horsford, who played Thelma Frye, the deacon's daughter on Amen; Esther Rolle, whose character Florida Evans was so popular on the series Maude that Norman Lear created the spin-off Good Times; and Regina Taylor who stunned critics and audiences with her poignant portrayal of Lilly Harper in I'll Fly Away.*

**JAN DATES:** The images that we've had of African-American women on television through the years are images that have been shaped by the perceptions of white—usually male—writers, producers, sponsors, and owners. Because of the prism of their eyes, what we've seen are, for the most part, people who are locked into stereotypical patterns, segregated into situation comedies, not having a presence in dramas, where there could be serious looks at serious concerns that black people have.

Comedies were the vehicles used to establish the presence of black people in this society. TV comedies picked up the thread of an already established pattern in popular culture—white superiority and black inferiority. It was a pattern designed to reinforce the social order. White people retained control and dominance.

The roles of black women were developed by white men as peripheral characters through the years. The writers and producers concentrated on making white men look good, look strong, powerful, in control—dominant. In that sense, *Julia* was a breakthrough for women of all types.

**ANIKO BODROGHKOZY:** What's interesting is the enormous amount of controversy that *Julia* generated even though it was fairly innocent comedy. The show was produced and written by Hal Kanter, a Hollywood liberal who was very moved by the civil rights movement. He actually had written for the *Beulah* show and I think in some ways he was trying to atone for the kind of representation of African Americans that he participated in putting out there.

What was really amazing was how viewers, both black and white, were taking the show very politically, even though the show was doing everything it could not to address political issues. A large



*Julia* starring Diabann Carroll was a benchmark series—highly rated and highly controversial

## IMAGES OF WOMEN

number of severely racist letters were written to the producer.

Viewers saying things like, "We see too many black people on the news, we don't want to see them on the shows too." There were also a large number of letters written by black viewers who were intervening in the show in interesting ways—wanting to write episodes for the show, volunteering to play roles in the program. It was a way for some black viewers, who knew the show was being written and produced by whites, to make the show their own, to try to improve it.

**ANNA MARIA HORSFORD:** I think every black show that comes on TV is a landmark. Unfortunately, I think most people think there is a black group—all black people are poor, all black people are ignorant, all black people have one drug addict in the family. We don't see the diversity. So when someone looks at *The Cosby Show* and says "that's not black," that's not black in your house. There are many doctors and lawyers who are married to each other. We have to accept that there's a variety of us.

**ESTHER ROLLE:** *Maude* and *Good Times* were the two shows where I felt I could make a difference. Many blacks criticized me for doing domestic roles all the time. But they were the people I was interested in, the voiceless. And I wanted to show them in a good light. And I particularly took the shows because I wanted to show you that a domestic is not stupid, is not uncaring.

At the time I took those shows, most of your black leaders were educated by domestic parents who spent their life's blood to see that their children had a better life. That's noble, and I wanted our young people to learn to applaud these people. There's nothing wrong with being a maid, there's nothing wrong with nurturing someone else's baby.

**GLORIA LEAR:** While we're on the subject of maids, let's go over to Regina and ask what kind of feedback have you gotten from your role in *I'll Fly Away*?

**REGINA TAYLOR:** Usually it's been very positive. Usually it's been from people with backgrounds similar to mine, whose parents or grandparents or aunts or someone in their community who meant a lot to them were maids. And they were saying, "This is wonderful, because you're dealing with the reality of this woman." You not only see her in the white household, in the white community, but you see her with her own life, her own mind. You see her having her own dreams.

In *I'll Fly Away* the character Lilly keeps a journal, which you hear either at the beginning or the ending of the episode. She has the mind and soul of a poet and philosopher. It's the reality that people want to see. The maid has been the backbone of the black community. She's been a foot soldier in the civil rights movement.

**GLORIA LEAR:** What kind of feedback did you get on your role in *Amen*?

**ANNA MARIA HORSFORD:** From critics we got slaughtered. But it's still very, very popular in syndication. Unfortunately, we got no feedback from the black community,



*Regina Taylor in I'll Fly Away*

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except by tuning in every week—and we stayed in the top twenty. But we didn't get much respect. We never got any awards from any black or white organization to say it was funny, to say it was realistic in terms of the black church, or community. We were just one of those shows that got by every week because millions of people turned it on. But we never heard from them. I'm assuming they liked it, because they watched.

**GLORIA LEAR:** What kind of roles would you like to have that you're not being offered or are not being written?

**ANNA MARIA HORSFORD:** The networks will produce ten pilots for sitcoms, yet there's not one black female on a movie of the week. We have a lot of the same problems that the characters played by Donna Mills and Cybill Shepherd have. How come there are no black women in TV movies? They tell you that the only black actress who can get a green light on a TV movie is Oprah Winfrey.

**ESTHER ROLLE:** The cute little ingenue or the girl that's going to take the prize, most likely isn't going to look like any one of us up here. But that happened through the ages with us. We have to recognize that the master's children come before the slave's children—and the light-skinned ones were the master's children. And they come first! And that continues today. But that's where it stems from.

**ANNA MARIA HORSFORD:** I don't agree with you, because the biggest star today is Whoopi Goldberg. We have Marsha Warfield, Nell Carter, Dawnn Lewis. It might be true in advertising, but not always in TV programs.

**REGINA TAYLOR:** I think we are typecast by our shapes and the color of our skin as far as romantic leads go.

**ANNA MARIA HORSFORD:** For a long time, I never saw romance on TV with black women, though. When you think about it, it just didn't exist. You don't see much romance with black women. (To Regina Taylor) You had a boyfriend, though.

**REGINA TAYLOR:** Yes, but I had to fight for him!

The show (*I'll Fly Away*) was for me very special. Dramas on television are rare for black people. The show itself challenged the audience to look at a period of time in our history—not through the eyes of nostalgia, but in questioning what was actually going on beneath the surface of the bobby sox, records, ponytails, and the sock hops.

What was going on when someone like Nat King Cole could come into your house on the television, but he couldn't go into a restaurant out on the road? I think this kind of questioning is seen as a very dangerous thing, and I think that might have something to do with why *I'll Fly Away* was taken off the air.

The same as *Frank's Place*. I couldn't find it. Every week I'd look through the TV book to search for the show, because it was a reality for me. I recognized it. You'd say, "I know this, this is part of my life." Black people will watch white people in dramas, and I know that we will watch ourselves. Drama with black characters can be as lucrative as anything else. So why isn't it out there? ■

## GROWING UP FEMALE: TV TEENAGERS

*Mary Ann Watson was the moderator for the session focusing on TV's treatment of female adolescence. Joining her were Elinor Donahue, the ideal teenage girl of the 1950s—Betty Anderson—the down-to-earth "Princess" of Father Knows Best; Melissa Joan Hart, star of the highest-rated show on the Nickelodeon cable network, Clarissa Explains It All; Ginny Holbert, TV critic for the Chicago Sun-Times; and Carol Weston, author of GirlTalk: All The Stuff Your Sister Never Told You.*

**MARY ANN WATSON:** Growing up female has never been easy. But in the 1990s, the pressures are greater than they've ever been. Self-esteem takes a nose-dive when girls hit adolescence. They obsess about their weight and appearance. Their self-worth is almost entirely dependent on what other people think of them.

**MELISSA JOAN HART:** Well, one of Clarissa's mottos is "Don't give in to peer pressure." She's different, a little rebellious. She painted over the wallpaper in her room. Her clothes are different. If one of her friends said, "Why are you wearing that?," she'd wear it again the next day. She doesn't care what people think about her.



*Robert Young and Elinor Donahue on  
Father Knows Best.*

**GINNY HOLBERT:** I think there are a lot of really good portrayals of teenagers on television. I think Clarissa is one. She is a very bright, fun, sure-of-herself teenager. She's a teenager who's very engaged. She works on her computer. Although the show isn't ostensibly about school, it is about intellectual curiosity.

**MELISSA JOAN HART:** I see myself more as an entertainer, but it's nice to hear that some kids consider me a role model. I get a lot of letters from girls having problems with their brothers, because Clarissa has a brother, Ferguson, who gives her trouble. It's strange but Clarissa is also big with boys; we get a lot of mail from boys.

**GINNY HOLBERT:** There's always been the myth that boys will

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not watch programs about girls. So, when a program like *Clarissa Explains It All* comes along, and they find out that boys really will tune into that program, they have to rethink all their previous assumptions. They figured boys won't watch shows with girls at the center, but girls will watch anything. Girls had to because they had no choice. Now there's just this huge proliferation of television. Nickelodeon didn't even exist. Now you just have so many more options, I think that's why we're seeing more diversity in programs.

**CAROL WESTON:** But there's a dark side to TV too—the sex, the guns, the buxom yet very skinny women, the commercials glorifying junk food, the drinking. Today teens are a mess. Forty-four percent of American girls get pregnant at least once before turning twenty. That's one million girls a year. Can we blame TV? Not really. But as a mother of two girls, I am amazed at how lurid TV has become when our nation is still so tongue-tied about contraception.

**GINNY HOLBERT:** I have a few problems with some of the shows such as *Beverly Hills 90210*. That's kind of a puzzling show because in one sense it is each week a morality play, yet the subtext of that show is very different. I think it gives girls false expectations of what it's like to be a teenager, what kind of things they should measure up to as teenagers. There's a great deal of emphasis on appearance. All sorts of things that I don't think are really healthy. It's a show I wouldn't encourage my eight- and ten-year-old girls to watch.

**MARY ANN WATSON:** Betty Anderson was a terrific teenager. She wasn't flighty, she wasn't too boy crazy, she liked school—

**ELINOR DONAHUE:** Oh, she was very good in school, very bright, forthright. She liked going out for causes. If there was an underdog, she wanted to fight for him.

**MARY ANN WATSON:** Did you envy her normalcy?

**ELINOR DONAHUE:** Yes, I think I did. It was nice to play her, to hide



*Sheila James as Zelda Gildroy on The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis shamelessly chased a disinterested Dobie (Dwayne Hickman).*

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behind her skirts if you will, sometimes. Because my personal life wasn't always as well-adjusted and as happy as that.

**MARY ANN WATSON:** Could you possibly have imagined when you played Betty that thirty-five years later a big group of people would be sitting around talking about her? Did you have any sense *Father Knows Best* would be so enduring?

**ELINOR DONAHUE:** Absolutely not. I don't think any of us had a sense of the continuation of it. It was meant to be a little television show that was taken from a very pleasant radio show starring Mr. (Robert) Young. It's been a major surprise to us that we've had this lovely outpouring of attention.

**MARY ANN WATSON:** Do you remember Betty's biggest problem?

**ELINOR DONAHUE:** Well, I don't recall exactly, but she must have had a lot of them because I do remember that my character always had to cry. I was always required to cry.

*(Mary Ann Watson summarizes an episode of Father Knows Best called "Betty, Girl Engineer," in which Betty's aspirations of becoming a civil engineer are mocked by her family and she's hounded off a surveying site by an all-male crew. The "happy ending" is that Betty realizes she was foolish to pursue a male profession and accepts a date with the young supervisor who discouraged her most aggressively.)*

*A 1990s viewer knows, of course, Dobie Gillis was a schmuck and Zelda was way too good for him.*

**MARY ANN WATSON:** This episode is literally painful to watch. What happened to Betty is not only reprehensible, today it's criminal. Of course, this kind of story wouldn't be on the air today. But are we getting the message in the 1990s that girls have all the options?

**GINNY HOLBERT:** We wouldn't see a such blatant dismissal of a girl who wanted to be an engineer today. However, you don't see the converse either. You don't see characters that just happen to be girls who happen to be very interested in science or math. There are very subtle messages to girls that persist. It's OK to be smart, but the most important thing is to be pretty.

I noticed two episodes of shows recently that had the exact same plotlines. One was *Family Matters*. It had to do with a teenage boy who didn't want to go out with a teenage girl that he considered not pretty enough because his friends would scorn him. Of course, to my eyes the girls were quite pretty, because you would never have a central character dating a girl who wasn't pretty at all. But she wore glasses, or something like that, so she wasn't considered a babe.

Essentially the message of the shows was, "Guys you shouldn't be so superficial, you should care about a woman's inner beauty." OK, fine, that's a good message. But the real message, I thought, to any young girl watching was, "Oh my God, don't let yourself be put in that position. You don't want a boy to have to be shamed into going out with you or to be embarrassed by going out with you." So it's always important to evaluate not only what the shows say, but how they make the viewers feel. ■

# SHE WORKS HARD FOR THE MONEY: WORKING WOMEN ON THE TUBE

*Dr. Dhyana Ziegler of the University of Tennessee moderated the penultimate panel of the seminar series, which was composed of Linda Kelsey, remembered fondly as the ambitious reporter, Billie Newman, on Lou Grant; David Marc, UCLA faculty member and author of Prime Time, Prime Movers; Diana Muldaur, whose many forceful TV characters include Rosalind Shays on L.A. Law and Dr. Kate Pulaski on Star Trek: The Next Generation; Susan Stewart, TV critic for the Detroit Free Press; and Dr. Carol Williams of Roosevelt University.*

**DAVID MARC:** *Opening the session with an historical overview of landmark portrayals of working women in situation comedies.*

**Susie/Private Secretary:** Ann Sothern played a secretary to a talent agent in New York. The *Susie* series ran for four years and was revamped into another show called *Private Secretary*, which ran from '58 to '61. Ann Sothern, throughout the fifties, was the model of the working woman on TV: strong female image, she got her way, she managed things, she told people the way things ought to be done. At the same time, she was romantically interested in her boss, who did not notice her.

Another female character that comes out of both these shows was played by Ann Tyrrell. In *Susie* she was known as Olive the switchboard operator, and then in *Private Secretary* as Vi, the receptionist. This was another kind of image that came up repeatedly—a slender, slight, soft-spoken, ineffectual women. Both of these working women would have preferred to be married.

**Our Miss Brooks:** High school teacher, Eve Arden, was a strong woman who got her way. But what she really wanted out of life was for Mr. Boynton, the biology teacher, to notice her, and he simply, despite the fact he was a biology teacher, had no interest.

**Oh! Susanna:** Gale Storm comes out of the home to work on a cruise ship—the original *Love Boat* perhaps. She has a sidekick, named Nugey, played by the silent-film actress ZaSu Pitts. This was very similar to the setup of *Private Secretary*: two unmarried women, essentially unhappy with their lot, having to work because they weren't married, getting their way through secret plots and plans, à la *I Love Lucy*, but not able to achieve the dream of all women, which is to be piloting the station wagon with two-point-three children.

**Love That Bob:** Another kind of female image was established by Ann B. Davis, who most people today remember as Alice, another single working woman from *The Brady Bunch*, but who during the fifties played Shultzzy, the secretary to Bob Collins, the Hollywood photographer in *Love That Bob*. His office was always full of beautiful models who he was romancing. And here was the plain secretary, who ran the whole operation, but who is never noticed by her boss and is shunted aside.

**The Dick Van Dyke Show:** With Sally Rogers, the image of the single working

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woman is pushed to new level of pathos. Sally desperately wants to get married, but she can't even get a date because she's too intelligent, too funny, too aggressive, has all the qualities that no man will tolerate. "Sally" episodes almost always end up with Sally rejected by a man for having acted too aggressively and left alone with her cat—that really pathetic image of the single woman.

**Hazel:** Shirley Booth in *Hazel*—like Ann B. Davis—runs the family, does everything necessary, but her own happiness or fulfillment is not really an issue.

**The Beverly Hillbillies:** Nancy Kulp played Miss Hathaway. Once again, the working woman can quote Shakespeare at will and has an education. She's a Vassar graduate, but is actually despised for her intelligence.

**That Girl:** *That Girl* foreshadows *Mary Tyler Moore*, but is not quite Mary Richards yet. Ann Marie, played by Marlo Thomas, is a single woman, living on her own, interested in her career as an actress. Her father, a regular character in the series, lives in the suburbs and can keep an eye on her. But perhaps more importantly, she's engaged. She has a fiance, Donald, so her sex life as a single woman in the city has been obviated. Eventually she will get married, so sex is not something you're supposed to be thinking about in the series.

**The Mary Tyler Moore Show:** It was a revolution in the sitcom. Here is Mary as the working woman in the city—no father around to tell her what to do, though perhaps Lou Grant is a father-figure advisor, which is a little different. But more importantly, she has no regular boyfriend. In the early days of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, perhaps as an homage to *That Girl*, the actor who played Donald, Ted Bessell, appeared in three episodes as Mary's boyfriend. Then she dumps him, thus setting women free forever in the sitcom.

**CAROL WILLIAMS:** For ambitious young women in the eighties, important role models were characters in the nighttime soaps: Jane Wyman's Angela Channing in *Falcon Crest*, and especially Alexis of *Dynasty*—tough, rich, and handsome women, survivor women. In the later eighties there is a growth in complex women—strong and proud but also vulnerable. In the original *L.A. Law*, in people such as Ann, Gracie, and Roxanne, you have that combination.

**DIANA MULDAUR:** I was called in by the producers of *L.A. Law* to discuss a powerful woman. A woman who was really going to run things. David Kelley, who was the writer-producer, got very excited about the idea of this new person.

I had to play Rosiland Shays as if she were myself in the same position. I did things as a lot of guys would have done them. However, being a woman doing these things was horrifying. It was sometimes very difficult in the writing to be certain she was consistent. All the other women in *L.A. Law* had great weaknesses, and she didn't seem to have any weaknesses. So they had to find them. She screwed up her daughter, she would never talk to her, she had to fall in love with her boss. So this made them feel a lot better.

**LINDA KELSEY:** When I read for *Lou Grant*, I thought, "Wow, this is a great part and I want to get this role for this episode." I went home and they called and offered me a contract to play Billie Newman as a continuing character. I didn't know I was auditioning for a continuing role. I had never wanted to do a series because I had never seen very interesting roles for women.

I always had much more fun being the guest star of an episode, because then you got to have some rare disease or something. The leading lady was often just

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pouring coffee for the leading man who got to go out and have a life. That was also the era of *Charlie's Angels*, and I didn't want to do that either—not that anybody asked me...

I didn't call Lou Grant "Mister Grant," (as Mary Richards always did in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*). I called him "Lou." It never occurred to Billie Newman to call him anything else. That was a shift.

In the second season of the series, I got married. I told my producers that I wanted to have a baby and I was going to try to do so, so they could think about it in case it happened. It didn't happen, but they wanted to have Billie Newman married. It was important that she be married.

Back then, she couldn't be a single mother like Murphy Brown. Billie dated a lot of men, she had a lot of boyfriends, and they didn't want an accidental baby to deal with and they wanted her in a relationship, so they married her.



*Marlo Thomas as Ann Marie of That Girl struck out on her own in New York City—paving the way for Mary Richards.*

**DHYANA ZIEGLER:** What shows do you think really have the most true representation of working women on television?

**SUSAN STEWART:** First of all I'm not sure that what we want when we turn on the TV set at night is authenticity. I'm a working mother and wife and when I come home and turn on the TV at ten o'clock at night, I don't want to see a drama that stars people who deal with their problems as badly as I deal with mine. I want to see people who look better, or are smarter, or at the very least, like Roseanne, are much wittier than I am.

In terms of authenticity, the women who are better portrayed are blue-collar workers rather than white-collar workers. That's because you can move the plot along and have some good dialogue while you're ironing a shirt or checking out someone at the grocery store, or doing somebody's hair. But you can't do brain surgery or argue a case before the Supreme Court and move the plot along.

*Northern Exposure* does a great job of portraying two working women, Ruth Ann who runs the little general store and Shelly the waitress. These women are always working. They're jingling the cash register and checking on the stock and serving fried eggs to male customers, usually. But nonetheless, that's a very real representation. Of course *Roseanne*, too, is a breakthrough character in so many ways. We really do see Roseanne working.

**DIANA MULDAUR:** I've always played working women. In *McCloud* I was a working woman and we were equals, we had a great relationship. I wasn't just his mistress and we didn't get married, we were equals. It was really a breakthrough, but I still had two little scenes and he had the whole show. I haven't always been tough. Alice Foley (*A Year in the Life*) was a very warm, marvelous woman. She was a doctor and had her own life.

It's very hard to bring dignity to women's roles in television, and it's just not there most of the time. It's just a matter of dignity. ■

## FEMININE WILES: EMPOWERED WOMEN, HEROIC AND EVIL

*Dr. Kate Kane of DePaul University presided over a panel that included Yvonne Craig, who played librarian Barbara Gordon and her alter ego Batgirl on the Batman series; Dr. Julie D'Acci of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who researches television from a feminist perspective; Erin Gray, Col. Wilma Deering on Buck Rogers in the 25th Century; Julie Newmar who was Rhoda the robot on My Living Doll and Catwoman on Batman; and Ronald Smith, author of Sweethearts of 60s TV.*

**JULIE D'ACCI:** The TV industry had always claimed that male viewers would not watch shows that had women as heroes, that had a woman as the primary protagonist. But as the 60s wore on and the sexual revolution heated up and as people like Helen Gurley Brown in 1962 wrote *Sex and the Single Girl*, the industry became more interested in trying to feature women in leading roles. One of the first women to break the barrier was Anne Francis in *Honey West* in 1965. The reason she was able to be the lead in a drama program was that ABC was the fledgling network at the time and was trying to go out and attract an audience that CBS and NBC were not attracting. ABC was willing to take a risk with a woman as a hero.

But the contradictions are very evident, because the industry wouldn't let her star by herself. Even ABC, which was willing to take the risk with a sexualized woman lead, decided almost at the last minute that she had to co-star with a man. So they put John Ericson with her, who played Sam Bolt against her *Honey West*. The character was originally written to be a heroine who was totally adept at martial arts, and did a lot of physical derring-do. But as the series progressed she became more of a sex object. She became more conventionalized and Sam started to do a lot of the last-minute rescues. She became the woman in distress, much more than the original concept. But, nonetheless, this program broke the barrier of having a woman as a star in a dramatic series.

**RON SMITH:** I think the 60s was the decade when women on television really took off. Elly May was stronger than Jethro and Samantha could turn her husband into a



*Diana Rigg as Emma Peel on The Avengers*

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Catwoman

frog. The two real super women of the 60s, though, were Diana Rigg as Emma Peel on *The Avengers* and Julie Newmar as Catwoman. Julie will explain herself the advantages of a feline with claws over a rodent with wings. So, I'll talk a little bit about Emma Peel.

The very name Emma Peel was a pun. M-appeal, stood for "Male Appeal," which was British slang. When the show first began, she was the one who did all the karate moves. Jonathan Steed was a lot older. It was pretty obvious that without Emma Peel, Jon Steed would be in an awful lot of trouble. She was sophisticated, educated, very smart. There was an episode of that show in which Jon Steed had to infiltrate an intellectual organization called RANSACK, a High-IQ organization, and the only way he could do that was to have Emma Peel take the test for him.

In *The Avengers*, Diana Rigg had an outfit called the "Emma Peeler," it was a jumpsuit with white stripes. And this became a fashion trend. She came to America and people said, "Gee, this is wonderful." And she said, "Yes, but you Americans still don't allow women into your restaurants wearing suits." So she was, in her own way, trying to break down some of the barriers and stereotypes.

These shows, in small ways and in big ways, had a lot of influence in their time.

**YVONNE CRAIG:** When we did the *Batman* pilot, Batgirl was supposed to be not only equal, but better than the guys. She saved them and I liked that. She was the exciting one. I played her as feisty and having a great time. Part of it was that she was in on a secret that they didn't know and she was tricking them. If I had to do Barbara Gordon again, I wouldn't have made her such a prig.

She was the most uptight girl I've ever seen. As I look back on it now I want to say to her "Loosen up!" But it's because women have advanced so. I'm so pleased to see women who are twenty-three or twenty-five have a real sense of self. Women have evolved into people who have a sense of their own space, a sense of themselves. If I were playing her at that age now, she'd be entirely different and a much more interesting person than she was.

**ERIN GRAY:** I developed my character of Wilma Deering on *Buck Rogers* according to the script that was given to me. She was a colonel, she was head of the fighters, she trained men to fight. This was set far into the future, and the way that it was presented was that I was right there with the lead scientist and it was my job to protect planet earth. Even though I had the tight suits, I didn't play on that or accentuate that. It's just what I wore. It was the right functional outfit.

I was, however, very disappointed with my character the second year. In the first season she led the men, she had very definite ideas about how a raid should be performed. Suddenly, the next year, she's always on planet earth and her role becomes very nurturing. I was no longer fighting battles or going undercover. I was no longer doing the martial arts moves.

*Everything I did was sexual. It just came from a place of pure energy.*

—Julie Newmar  
*Batman's Catwoman*

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That bothered me, and what bothered me even more was that I allowed myself as a woman not to speak up. Why? Because we had a new producer the second year, the show was in jeopardy of being canceled, and I knew my job was on the line. I learned very quickly that this was a man (the new producer) who had very traditional ideas about what roles women should play in life. I knew that my character had a chance of disappearing. So, I didn't speak up. I stayed passive. But I kept my job.



*Yvonne Craig as Batgirl*

**JULIE NEWMAR:** I played Catwoman with pure instinct. My character was in charge, but she worked from her feminine wiles. Catwoman was so much more interesting than Batman, because all he could be was good... Everything I did was sexual.

**YVONNE CRAIG:** My fan mail today comes from a lot of men who say, "I had such a crush on you." And, of course, they should. They were ten years old, it was the first time that their hormones shot up, and I was the first thing they saw in a sprayed-on costume.

I was put on the show the last season, because they wanted to appeal to over-forty males and pre-pubescent females. They were very definite about who she was meant to appeal to. I understood perfectly well how and why she would appeal to over-forty males. I did not understand that she would appeal to pre-pubescent females. Because I thought the girls were probably interested in Robin or Batman, and so they'd be hostile toward me. It turns out I was wrong, because as I meet women in their thirties now, they say "I loved it. It gave me courage to know what I could do."

**JULIE NEWMAR:** This is my favorite fan letter, because it epitomizes the Catwoman character. (Reading) "I decided to write and what I want to say is thank you for giving me my first feelings of lust." Now this is the important part—"I was only about five or six years old. I was totally in love with you."

**ERIN GRAY:** When I was doing *Buck Rogers* I would have a lot of women come up to me and say "My husband loves you." What I loved about it was I wasn't a threat to them. They liked me too.

**YVONNE CRAIG:** The producer didn't want Batgirl to do anything considered unfeminine, like punch villains. He wanted her to spin madly—and since I had a ballet background, I could do that—or kick people with balletic high kicks or skinny out from under them. It was somewhat limiting, because there are things that are far more interesting to do than kicking people. One night I was in the supermarket and a little girl came up to me and said, "Oh, Miss Craig, I'm so excited to meet you. Every time I see someone kicked in the face, I think of you." That is so awful!

None of us knew *Batman* was going to last. Adam (West) once said when we were working that he wanted to get something right because "this could be a classic." I thought, "Give me a break, they could put Gonzo behind this mask and nobody would know." Now, of course, I said to him, you were right. I was wrong. ■

## POSTSCRIPT

**W**hen the Museum of Broadcast Communications opened its exhibition on Women in Television, it did so with a session saluting three leading ladies who brought to life some of TV's early and most memorable female characters: Gale Storm of *My Little Margie* and *Oh! Susanna*; Betty White, whose volume of work includes *Life With Elizabeth*, *Date With the Angels*, *The Betty White Show*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and *The Golden Girls*; and Jane Wyatt, who will forever be remembered as Margaret Anderson on *Father Knows Best*.

The underlying theme of the Museum's program—that there is a connection between TV portrayals and real lives—came to the surface quickly and prominently as these three actresses reflected on their experiences with viewers.

"I still get letters," Gale Storm said, "as if we were still shooting ... One girl said she became a social director on a cruise ship because of *Oh! Susanna*. She just put that in her mind and that's what she became."

Betty White, of course, is recognized wherever she goes. A five-year-old in the supermarket—yet unable to articulate an R sound—points and excitedly yells, "Mommy, it's Wose!" The star recalled Grant Tinker's reaction to the pilot of *The Golden Girls*: "Those are four ladies I'd like to spend a half-hour with every week."

"That's really the rule of thumb." Betty White concurred, "if you feel like spending some time with TV characters ... Viewers feel so close to you. I don't know another business where

you contact the public like you do in television."

"I get very serious reactions to *Father Knows Best*," Jane Wyatt offered. She told the story of an eminent archaeologist who was visiting Los Angeles and said she was the only person he wanted to meet. She presumed he wanted her to serve on some advisory board or another.

Although it was inconvenient, she relented and accepted his luncheon invitation. It turned out that he was an abused child and wanted only to thank her for changing his life. Until he began watching *Father Knows Best*, he presumed his mistreatment to be the norm. But when he got to know the Andersons, Ms. Wyatt explained, "he realized there was another kind of family."

On a different occasion, Jane Wyatt was hesitantly approached by an enormously successful businessman, who confessed, "I'm embarrassed to meet you. I'm an orphan. I was brought up in an orphanage, and you're the only mother I ever had." Remembering that moment, she remarked, "I tell you it kills me."

The audiences that filled the auditorium for each of the five seminars in the following months were a mixed bag. There were, naturally, college students interested in the social impact of mass media or in women's issues. There were also baby boomers drawn to the discussion of women's images on television for nostalgic rather than academic reasons. And always there was a contingent of die-hard, autograph-seeking TV fans asking questions about minute details

from specific episodes. Each of these groups, though, found something meaningful in the examination of television's past.

Years from now, perhaps, the controversy that erupted when a lesbian character kissed Roseanne might be the subject of an award-winning dissertation in sociology. Or that episode might be remembered as a personal turning point in the wrenching decision of a young woman to disclose—or continue to hide—her homosexuality from her family. Maybe both will occur. And neither will be more important than the other, because in the final analysis, it's the way a mass medium touches individual lives that makes it a cultural force. ■

—Mary Ann Watson

Mary Ann Watson is an associate professor of telecommunication and film at Eastern Michigan University and a frequent contributor to *Television Quarterly*. She is the author of *THE EXPANDING VISTA: American Television in the Kennedy Years*, which has recently been released in paperback.

# “ QUOTE UNQUOTE ”

## One Writer's Career

*“Dennis Potter, who died June 7, aged 59, of pancreatic cancer, did make a most impressive career writing television plays—in Britain. Potter was best known for Pennies from Heaven and The Singing Detective. The latter, for my money, is the most brilliant work ever written for television, part detective story, part musical, part psychoanalysis, part rumination on writing and suffering.*

*“But Potter didn't start off writing these stellar multihour, multiform plays. He evolved into them. He was able to work up his craft to the point where he could take chances with genre-splicing because the BBC took him on when he was just out of Oxford and kept him on, writing plays of greater and lesser distinction, for more than 30 years. Potter set out to make a career in television, rather than movies or books, because he believed in the popular audience. Lucky him (and us): He found a patron that allowed him to do that.*

*“No one gets to make such a career in U.S. public broadcasting. Almost no one in America gets to make a writerly career on commercial TV, either.”*

—Todd Gitlin,  
Los Angeles Times

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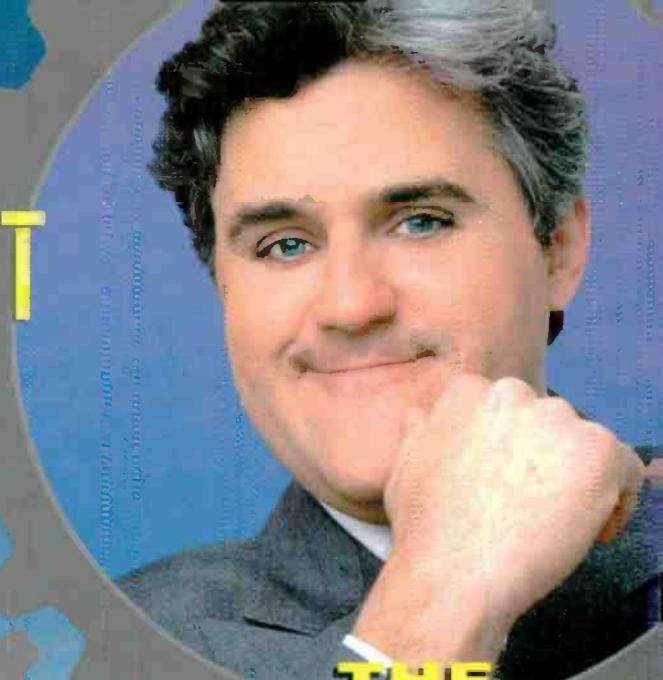
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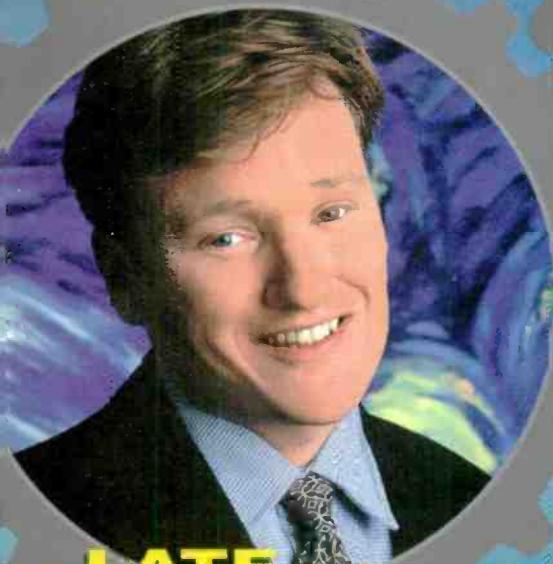


# NBC NIGHT SHIFT

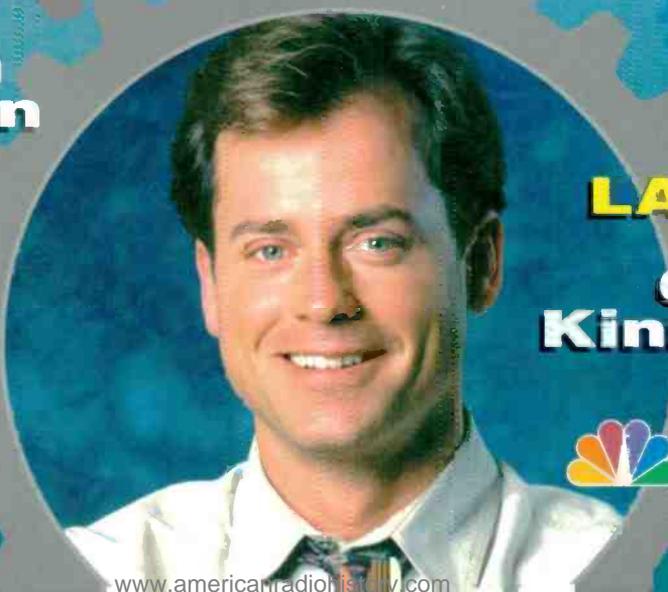
Always The  
Last Laugh!



**THE  
TONIGHT  
SHOW**  
With  
**Jay Leno**



**LATE  
NIGHT**  
With  
**Conan  
O'Brien**



**LATER**  
With  
**Greg  
Kinnear**



# CHALLENGING THE MYTHS OF MEDIA VIOLENCE

**BY ROSALIND SILVER**

*"The three networks predicted a lessening of violence in programming. Ten years later it's a hundred times worse."*  
—Sen. Thomas J. Dodd, 1964

**W**ith almost clockwork regularity, every 10 years since the introduction of television, Congress has held hearings on the impact of media violence. Repeatedly, media researchers have testified to the mounting evidence linking media portrayals of violence to aggressive behavior. At every hearing, entertainment industry executives completed the ritual by complaining that the connections could not be proved.

Coming as they did in a long hot summer of concern about escalating societal violence, the 1993 series of hearings caused more than an average amount of industry soul searching and defensiveness. The actions that may yet result remain unclear, although suggested ideas include

ratings reform, more sophisticated media monitoring systems, V-chips and other technological devices and the threat of regulation.

In the past, remedies have either not been implemented or have not lasted. Cutting back on media violence has been like swearing off junk food. Sooner or later, the commercial attractions of blood and gore were too tempting, and violent programming once again became a major part of the media menu.

Perhaps the problem lies in trying to isolate a single "solution." The delusion that there is some magic quick fix that can undo decades of decline in social mores and civic virtue—as well as broadcasting regulation and responsibility—is typical, however, of the instant-gratification culture that television has spawned.

There is no one solution to violence.

The parameters of the problem of media violence are many and complex. The resolution must also be multi-layered—and cumulative. Indeed, there is not one solution but only the search for solutions which, like any effort at systemic change can

be begun today, but will never be finished.

Yes, V-chips may be useful in some families. And the rating system could use some improvements. Self-discipline on the part of the industry is the decent thing for corporate citizens of today's media culture to do, but even that won't cure the systemic nature of violence that now haunts our national psyche.

A new resource we've not had in previous decades is the burgeoning media literacy movement. Media literacy provides the framework not just for analyzing what we see but also for understanding the role media has in our culture and taking personal and public action to challenge that role when it intrudes on the common good. Applying media literacy principles and methods to the problem of media violence opens up new possibilities for each of us to first define the situation in our own lives and secondly to learn and apply ways to change it if we wish.

Perhaps more importantly, media literacy can give us the tools to challenge the five myths of media violence, those key arguments that prop up the defense for violence in media. We hear them among respected friends, thoughtful parents, entertainment industry professionals, op-ed writers. Some of them sound logical on their face. But like other myths, they actually represent tired attempts to avoid critical thinking. They support a dangerous status quo and provide excuses for a crucial lack of responsibility for the public health crisis we are facing as a culture. It's time to end forever these worn-out myths:

### **1. I watched TV violence when I was a child and I turned out OK.**

It's true that not every babyboomer who watched early cartoons, *The Untouchables* or *Frankenstein* films grew up to be a serial killer. But media violence is different now and so is the

culture in which our children view it. Not only are depictions of violence far more graphic and gory today thanks to special effects and computer animation techniques but violence in current media serves to validate a culture that is already violent as a result of poverty, drugs, unemployment and the ready availability of guns. Further more the in-your-face attitudes of pranksters like Beavis and Butt-head present not just violent behavior but cynical attitudes about the meaning of life, the value of community and the dignity of the human person.

Of far more consequence, perhaps, than worrying about whether children will become serial killers are the three other effects of media violence that recent researchers have identified: feeling fearful (the victim effect); turning their backs on those in need (bystander effect); and having an increasing appetite for violence all their lives.

### **2. Violence in the media just reflects violence in society.**

Yes, art reflects life. Producers of news-magazine and reality shows, movies of the week and theatrical films carefully monitor the news for real-life stories that might make dramatic programming. Unfortunately, they are convinced—with justification—that violence succeeds better than other programming in capturing viewers' attention.

But in fact TV and films depict much more violence than exists in real life. No one experiences the kind of routine violence (five acts of violence per hour in prime time; 25 or more in children's shows) that is depicted on TV every day. This sensational violence has a leading effect on society. Ever more violent programming and films contribute to escalating amounts of violence in society. This real-life violence is then reprocessed by media producers into new, more violent programs. It's time to stop this cycle of violence.

### **3. Decisions about viewing violence should be up to the parents.**

In this century, the mass media have come to rival parents, school and religion as the most influential institution in children's lives. In fact, one study indicates that teenagers are more likely to believe the media than their parents when the two disagree. Most parents try to insure that outside influences—teachers, friends, relatives—are positive influences on their children. But the stream of media that flows into the average household is overwhelming.

Those who are parents today have a daunting task. Unlike parents of the past, they must acquire new media management techniques to protect their children from harm along with media literacy skills that will teach the next generation self-discipline, critical evaluation and self-awareness. But parents today also have a right to expect society to support their child-rearing efforts with a healthy physical, intellectual, spiritual and cultural environment.

### **4. Violence is a natural part of drama. Somehow Shakespeare always comes up at this point.**

Yes, he was a great playwright, but the best of his plays retain their impact because their violent climates are accompanied by skillful character development and what media scholar Brian Stonehill calls "a sense of the preciousness and fragility of life." Conversely, Stonehill notes, much of today's mass media crime fare "makes us feel that life is cheap and disposable."

What drama does require is not so much violence as *conflict*, which is best when viewers can relate it to the circumstances of their own lives. Violence is not the only way to solve conflict in even the best of dramas.

### **5. Media producers should be free to create any images they want.** After all, that's what the U.S.

Constitution provides. The political and artistic freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment is indeed a resource to treasure. But it was never intended to completely eliminate all forms of social control over expression. Long ago jurists decided that free speech did not protect the right "to shout fire in a crowded theater."

Movie and television producers must be able to create what they envision. But because we live in a systematically violent culture, it seems irresponsible for the creative community to allow their imaginations unbridled rein, put the images out there and walk away, saying: "I'm an artist so I have no responsibility for how many images affect society."

We do need to be cautious in how we interpret this principle in regard to popular media. But while we wait for judicial wheels to grind slowly, media literacy education in schools and churches and community centers can shape public opinion to influence the media marketplace without the need for Congressional or other government regulation.

With these myths exploded we can begin the task of building a new, less violent culture.

With our society in crisis, it's no time to sit on the sidelines. We must break the cycle of blame and accusation on this issue. If there is to be a future for any of us, we must create a culture where our children can grow up safe, healthy and whole. But we can't do it waiting for someone else. If we want there to be "peace on earth,"—as well as an end to media violence—we must also remember the second line of the song: "so let it begin with me." ■

Rosalind Silver is the former editor of *Media & Values*, the magazine of the Center for Media Values, in which this article originally appeared. She is a freelance writer in Los Angeles. Barbara Osborn also contributed to this story.

# MICHAEL J. FUCHS OF HBO: "I'M NOT A WILD MAN ANYMORE!"

Chairman and CEO of HBO, Michael Fuchs plays hardball in the competitive pay-cable movie field. Not everybody loves him ... but he is universally respected. Here, in a chat with TVQ's special correspondent he reveals some secrets which enabled HBO in 1993 to post its largest gain in 12 years ... at the same time as it won Emmys and Aces galore with superb original programming.

## BY ARTHUR UNGER

**N**OW: My recollection of an interview with Michael Fuchs twelve years earlier fills me with trepidation as I enter HBO's impressive granite-sheathed building at the corner of 42nd Street and Avenue of the Americas in New York City. The art deco decor of the stripped-down lobby is an interesting—and rather exciting—taste choice, I think.

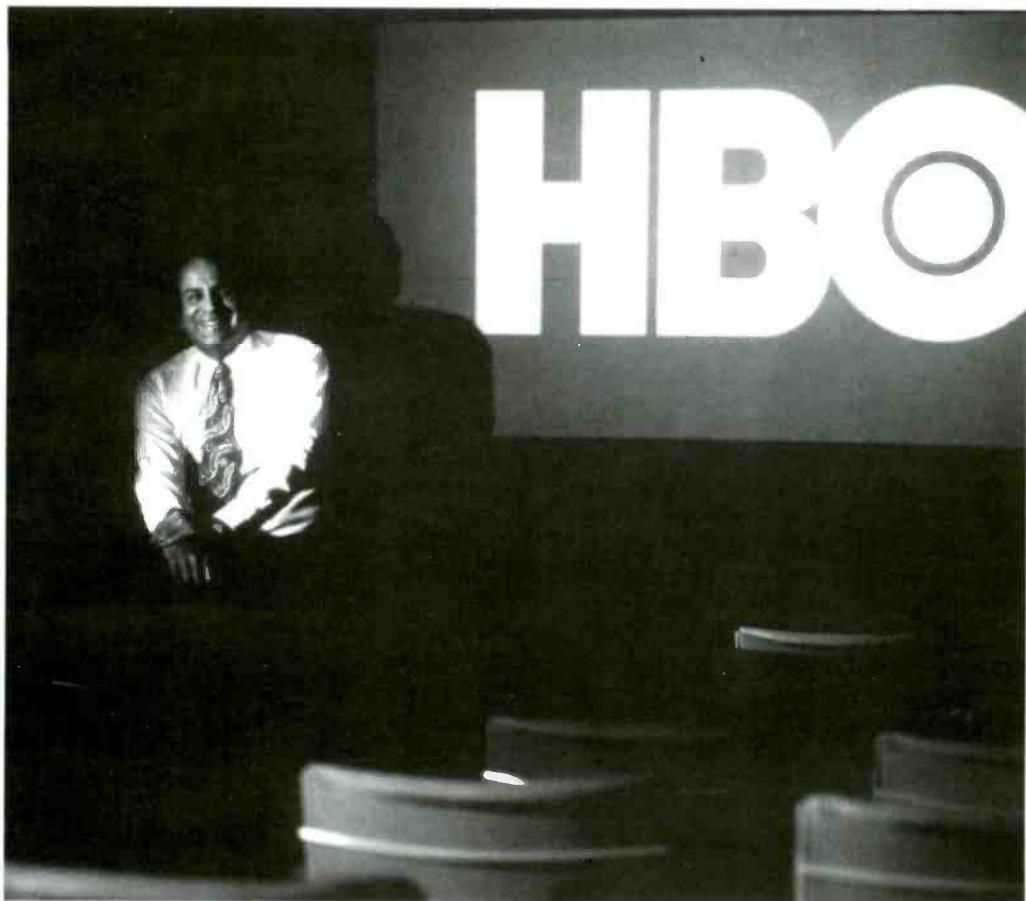
*THEN: I was the TV critic of The Christian Science Monitor 12 years ago and HBO was a new somewhat questionable entity on the cable scene. So I had arranged to talk to*

*Fuchs who already had a reputation as a tough, decisive leader. I was intrigued by the fact that HBO was airing so many second-rate horror films whose only interest was their cult-directors ... without any awareness or at least open recognition of this. I said so to Michael Fuchs in the middle of our interview.*

*He looked at me with disdain. "You critics are the only ones who really care about such things," he said in effect. "We don't program for you; we give audiences what we believe they will like."*

*"Or what you can manage to get?" I asked a bit nervously because Fuchs was an overpowering personality. He didn't deign to answer.*

*When I wrote up the interview I*



*pointed out that as head of HBO Michael Fuchs was destined to be one of cable's most important tastemakers. So future viewers had better beware, I warned.*

*Fuchs didn't like the piece. He never actually told me so but the press-relations person with whom I dealt told me Fuchs was furious and considered me a hatchetman. In fact at the next HBO press affair, I was chatting with the PR man when Fuchs entered the room. "Bye-bye, Arthur" the publicist said, moving away rapidly. "I don't want Fuchs to see me being friendly to you."*

**NOW:** Fuchs has actually become a major American tastemaker. HBO has grown phenomenally and has proven

to be in the forefront of tasteful mass viewing with subscribers in 18 million homes. Its ratings are going up swiftly, mainly because of the popularity of its superb original movies ... although good commercial films from the major studios are still in short supply.

HBO in 1993 won 17 Emmys (more than any of the networks) and a grand total of 34 Ace cable awards! Fuchs's organization was responsible last year for such superb and often daring original programs as *Barbarians At The Gate*, *Citizen Cohen*, *Stalin*, *And The Band Played On*, *The Larry Sanders Show* and its most innovative work, *The Positively True Adventures of the Alleged Texas Cheerleader-Murdering Mom*. Most of these were

either too hot for the movie studios or network television to handle ... or came to HBO because of Fuchs's reputation for being decisive, open to boldness, innovation, creativity.

As Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of HBO which is a division of Time Warner Entertainment Company, Fuchs is actively involved in a wide assortment of ventures. Among the subsidiary operations: HBO Ventures, HBO Downtown Productions, HBO Independent Productions, HBO Ole, HBO Asia, HBO Hungary, EKO (Turkish Channel), TV 1000 (Scandinavian channel), 1A (German channel), NYV, HBO Video, Time Warner Sports, TVKO, Tropix, Citadel, Anglia TV, ITEL, Entertainment News Service, Comedy Central, E!, BET, Visitor Information Network, Savoy Pictures, Crystal Dynamics, Sega Channel.

I walk into the glass-and-granite building which was an old structure which HBO had gutted to make way for its deco design. The office partitions and fixtures are in tune with the period look but not Fuchs' huge corner office, conservatively furnished with a comfortable rust ultrasuede sofa and chair. What hits me first is the huge photo on the far wall of Bobby Kennedy walking his dog on the beach.

On the large traditional desk is a framed photo of Fuchs' father. On top of the 27-inch TV screen sits a photo of his dog. Other pictures around the room— Fuchs with Fidel Castro; Fuchs' baby godson; Bryant Park from an HBO window; a gag shot of Fuchs in an Arab headdress. Other items in the room— a bowl of fresh flowers, a NY baseball cap, a copy of *Zagat's Restaurant Guide* a recent shot of Fuchs with Billy Crystal and Robin Williams at the Ace Award ceremony.

On the sofa is a pillow on which is embroidered what may actually be Michael Fuchs' personal motto: "Oh, God, give me a bastard with talent!"

It was a slushy morning and I was not surprised to see Fuchs relaxing in

an easy chair, casually attired in cowboy boots, loose corduroys and a sweater vest. He smiled, greeted me so warmly that I was instantly reassured either that he didn't remember me (most likely) or that if he did remember, he had forgiven. What I was not aware of till the interview progressed a bit further was that Michael Fuchs has changed a great deal. Success has made him softer, warmer, now so self-assured that he doesn't seem to need to prove his toughness. His role as a tastemaker has, on the whole, proven to be a boon to cable TV.

But make no mistake about it— Michael Fuchs is still demanding and hard-driving. A few years ago, he told *The New York Times*: "I accept the fact that people find me arrogant. I think it's a matter of style. I like to give it back to people. I'm a pusher."

Now, in response to my suggestion that he seems to have mellowed out he says unapologetically: "I don't think I'm out of gas. I'm just not a wild man anymore."

*What follows is the interview. There has been some tightening and change in chronology but basically all of the answers are reprinted here verbatim:*

**UNGER:** *What role do you see HBO playing in the information superhighway?*

**FUCHS:** I don't know what the information superhighway is going to be. I think there are going to be significant changes over the next five, six, seven years. And I had this rather visual image, almost, of the superhighway as if it's the American highway system and on the side of the road there are certain well-known brands, that are always going to do well. And I think HBO is that kind of brand. Whatever happens out there, I think the credibility and reputation and brand identity that we've built up will work with the consumer. I don't believe that we will do away with brands in this digital, switched-on-demand world. I don't

think that's what the consumer wants at the end of the day. And also, I think that HBO historically has been a very smart, adaptive, flexible, innovative kind of company. Whatever is coming down the road, I think we'll be as prepared as anybody.

**UNGER:** *What do you think is the most immediate crisis coming down the road?*

**FUCHS:** Well, I don't think any of us know what potentially an on-demand world is going to be like. Theoretically, you can have whatever you want whenever you want it. I don't believe we all believe that, but I believe that's quite a bit down the road. It is my job to look down the road and not get ambushed, but I'm not feeling threatened. I have felt historically at HBO many times under more pressure and facing more crisis than right now. And we have been a company that has lived through a lot in our 21-year history. We were born when this revolution started. In fact, we probably gave birth to the revolution, so we have been through every phase and every aspect. We have been in the middle of it and caused some of it. So, we know how to handle it.

**UNGER:** *When did you first come to HBO?*

**FUCHS:** I came here in 1976. HBO was born in '72. HBO is 21; I've been here 17 years.

**UNGER:** *Let's talk a little bit about you personally. According to my research, you joined HBO in 1976, grew up in the Bronx.*

**FUCHS:** I didn't really grow up in the Bronx. I was born in the Bronx, then moved to Mt. Vernon, which is Westchester, when I was five or six years old.

**UNGER:** *You have a political science degree from Union College and a law degree from NYU Law School. And you were then an enter-*

*tainment lawyer at William Morris.*

**FUCHS:** No, I practiced law for three or four years in a big Park Avenue law firm and then I was in a little entertainment law firm, and then I went to William Morris in '74.

**UNGER:** *How did you make the switch from practicing law to HBO?*

**FUCHS:** You know, once you go into entertainment law, you're a little step out of traditional law. You become more of a negotiator and a business affairs person. So I made the transition into William Morris as a business affairs person.

**UNGER:** *Do you feel that a law background has been a positive factor in your career at HBO?*

**FUCHS:** I think it has. I wasn't so enthusiastic about being a lawyer, but when I came to HBO in '76, this place was a bit of a mess, and lawyers are taught to be problem-solvers. And that came in very handy when I got to HBO, because my first couple of years here was really problem-solving. We were writing the rules and building a business. I think that kind of training and that kind of attention to detail and whatever it is you learn as a lawyer came in very handy.

**UNGER:** *So, what were the first problems that you had at HBO?*

**FUCHS:** Obviously, the early problem was whether we had business or not. I mean, it was really struggling the first three or four years. When I came to HBO, we had about 600,000 or 700,000 subscribers, and we were not at break-even. So that was the real problem.

I was hired to do original programming. It was called "special programming" back then. No one knew what HBO was, and the question was really what could you do that wasn't being done on television already, particularly from such a tiny, little vantage point. How would you get anything that was viewed of value to the

consumer? You could play movies and sports events, but what kind of entertainment could you do that the networks hadn't done that would allow you to use that as an added feature? We knew back then, that we couldn't depend on movies totally. We had to build another attribute. So, we were very consistent. Some of the early tenets of HBO remain with us today, and one of those was we wanted to give people what they couldn't get on commercial television.

We did stand-up comedians in nightclubs where people paid to go into nightclubs. Stand-up comedy was not being done on television and certainly some of those things that the comedians did could not be done on commercial television. In the beginning, in my first year, we would do two shows a month. We would do a big extravaganza—a music show, a Bette Midler, a Folies Bergere, a burlesque show, a big music show—Gladys Knight and Ray Charles—and we would do a stand-up. We had two series going called *On Location* the comedy series, and *Standing Room Only*, the big extravaganza.

In that first year, we had a \$3 million budget to do 24 shows. That was a lot of money for us. We were fighting for nickels, which was fun. The first show I did at HBO was Steve Martin. We paid him \$25,000. I came in at the end of the year, spent \$2,400,000 and I had never worked in a big corporation. And I thought, "God, to do all of this!" And we had enormous success that first year. Our shows were getting big ratings, and they really took off. And we were successful in attracting talent. That was the most difficult thing, but we were successful. I thought that I would get some, like, grateful ceremony in front of the Time-Life Building when I turned back 20% of my budget and I had performed! But I didn't realize what big corporations were like.

That money disappeared into the numbers. When I came back for

budget money the next year, they said, "look how good you did last year." So, I learned my way through a corporation shortly after that. But those early years, quite honestly, we did some of the most exciting shows we'd ever done—real, pure performance shows.

**UNGER:** *Why do you think that happened? Why do you say now that those were some of the most exciting or successful ones? Is it something about the early days of an organization?*

**FUCHS:** Well, we do much more ambitious, much bigger, much more impactful programming now. But when we were starting many of those performers who are now major stars were beginning their careers. So we had almost any performer who has amounted to anything... from Streisand to Michael Jackson. We ran Bill Cosby's concert movie ad nauseum.

**UNGER:** *And in the early days, was there competition? Was Showtime in existence then?*

**FUCHS:** Yes, they were in existence. But we had a jump start on them.

**UNGER:** *But you were competing for films mostly?*

**FUCHS:** We were also competing for special stuff. I remember in the early days, one of the first acts that they ever really took away from us was Gallagher, who has remained a staple.

Yeah, we were in competition with them, but, you know, quite honestly, HBO cut the ground in pay television. I can think back to some of the shows that were done by these performers. I honestly believe that they were some of the finest performance shows they've ever done. The performance show Steve Martin did for us (he's never really done a performance show since) belongs in a time capsule. And I remember we did a show with Diana

Ross in Caesar's Palace that is as fabulous and as beautiful a show of that nature as you could see. And we've done some great Bette Midler shows.

I'm just focussing on performers on early shows because you mentioned the early days, because obviously HBO is better known now for a lot of things: boxing, movies, comedy series. But I go back to my early days where I had a real emotional attachment. I still get excited about a new, hot performer. You know, there are certain people who are HBO kind of performers. Dennis Miller is a kind of HBO performer. Robin, Billy, Whoopee, and Bette too because they do our kind of material—their irreverence, their attitude gets showcased better on pay TV. You can see the full genius of these people without censorship, without commercials, without homogenization of programming.

**UNGER:** *One of the problems for HBO has always been the churn—the number of people who cancel out each year and the number of people who come back or start again. Has that figure changed a great deal over the years?*

**FUCHS:** No, it doesn't change a lot. I mean, it's a constant part of our business. The cable business happens to have a population that moves more than the national average, so a lot of that churn is where someone moves houses. They disconnect HBO and in the new home, they pick up HBO. It's a disconnect and a connect, so, the numbers are rather gigantic, and it is a big transactional business.

But we've never really figured out how clean the numbers are because, for instance, if you're a subscriber and you have HBO and then you decide to take on Cinemax, sometimes the cable operator reports that as a disconnect HBO and a connect HBO Cinemax. So, churn is a constant in our business. It's what forces us to spend \$150 million a year in marketing and to

focus very much on retention. Part of the reason for original programming was for retention. Get people hooked on series, get people hooked on specials.

**UNGER:** *I've heard that your churn rate is 60%. Is that accurate?*

**FUCHS:** On an annual basis, it's probably close to 60% because it's between 4% and 5% a month. But again, that really sounds bigger than it is although it is a major factor in our business.

**UNGER:** *What is the basic arrangement that HBO has with the local systems? Is there a general breakdown of fees that everybody conforms to or is it individual?*

**FUCHS:** The operator sells HBO. The system decides what the retail price is. We charge them a wholesale fee for HBO. It varies from customer to customer really depending on their size. Obviously, the bigger volume of customers delivered to HBO, the better deal that you get. We call that "volume discounts."

**UNGER:** *Do you see any role for HBO in interactive TV?*

**FUCHS:** Sure. But I couldn't spell out right now what that's going to be. You know, there are a couple of different theories on interactive TV. One of the more popular theories is that TV is a passive activity. People want to come home and slump down in front of the television and not get too interactively involved.

I guess it depends on what you define as interactive. I love the fact that shopping channels are called "interactive" and I've been ordering pizza on the telephone for 20 years. That's about as much interactivity as happens on the shopping channels. So, I guess we have to define what interactivity really means. I'm not dying to have the consumer pick the ending of our movies. I don't think that's really what people want. If the

screenwriter can't do a better job than every person sitting at home, then I don't know why we're paying screenwriters so much money.

**UNGER:** *Do you foresee a time when HBO might be running advertisements?*

**FUCHS:** Yes. But it's not that attractive an alternative to us because we're not that big, so on a national basis, we don't deliver any kind of interesting numbers. And we don't have such unique demographics. The other thing is qualitatively, the beauty of HBO is that it's not interrupted and that we do the most provocative, uncensored, uninfluenced kind of program. And I tell you something: our consumers know that. When we look at research on the documentaries, they view our documentaries with more credibility than your network documentaries because they know there are no advertising checks and balances.

**UNGER:** *And you think a lot of your subscribers subscribe because of the fact that the movies are not interrupted?*

**FUCHS:** Oh, I don't think there's any doubt about that. That goes back to the early days of pay-TV. In this cluttered environment, we are one of the only channels that has a consistent rhythm. We are what we are. I think it makes a tremendous difference. Why would you watch a movie on commercial television or on basic cable, if you could watch it on pay-TV? Movies are not meant to have hemorrhoid commercials in the middle.

**UNGER:** *Actually, some time ago John Cheever did a script for PBS—an original—and he wrote in commercials because he felt that they were an integral part of television. And so he wrote progressive commercials. They had a story line of their own. Actually, it's what's been happening in those Taster's Choice commercials recently. Now, that I've mentioned PBS, it has*

*always made a stand against commercials. However, now they are slipping in commercials under different names like enhanced acknowledgements, but they're there. Do you think that's hurting PBS as it would hurt HBO?*

**FUCHS:** Well, I'm not sure that's what's hurting PBS. I think PBS, because of what's happened in cable television, has a bit of an identity crisis. A lot of what used to be the exclusive territory of PBS is now covered on cable. And I think that PBS is doing a re-evaluation of what it should do and what it should be. Quite honestly, I've always thought it's not my job to organize PBS, but I think it should really go back to being educational television. And maybe this country should invest some real money—since television is such a pervasive and powerful influence in this country—into building an educational network that could make a difference. We're hearing that kids don't read as much. They look to the screen. *Sesame Street* certainly served the function and was successful. And if you could take that and multiply it in a sense, educationally, all the way up through adults.

If you could work on literacy in this country on television where it's less painful for people—some people probably don't want to even admit that they are not literate and if they could do it alone, at home, on television and learn that way, it would probably be easier for them.

**UNGER:** *Do you think HBO has any public service responsibility?*

**FUCHS:** Well, technically, officially, I don't think we do have a public service responsibility even by law. We built our own network. We're not leasing or using the nation's airwaves. But as a television programmer, as a businessman, as a corporate CEO, I think we do have a responsibility, particularly since we are aware how powerful our voices are and the impressions that we make.

**UNGER:** *Well, since you mentioned that literacy aspect—might HBO move into that area? Or, perhaps Project Knowledge might possibly be doing it already.*

**FUCHS:** No, Project Knowledge tapes programming that HBO does—family programming, documentaries—and makes sure that it is integrated into schools with study guides. And what we do is we try simply to expand the outreach of the audience for those kinds of programs.

**UNGER:** *That's a strong public service.*

**FUCHS:** Well, we do a lot of that. We are an entertainment channel so giving classes in literacy is not the way we would do it. We would deal with literacy from a dramatic point of view as an object lesson. You know, I would say that it's ironic that we merged with Warner Bros. When we started doing movies on HBO, at our first press conference, I got up and said: "We want to do socially relevant movies." And I pointed to the Warner Bros. movies of the '40s. And the example I gave, ironically, was *Fugitive From A Chain Gang*, which changed chain gang laws. We then went on, several years later, and did a remake of *Fugitive From A Chain Gang* called *The Man Who Broke A Thousand Chains*.

I sent a note several years ago to HBO people and said, "Let us be the new Dickens." And by that I meant that we should take realistic looks—as Dickens did in his time—at contemporary life.

So, we have done an awful lot of programming that takes a look at the underclass and the problems in this country and I think that we have succeeded in doing something which I think is the greatest challenge in this business: we have taken socially relevant subjects that are usually viewed by people as medicine and put them into compelling, entertaining formats.

**UNGER:** Would you say, *And The Band Played On* fits into that category?

**FUCHS:** Yeah. Which has been, I would add, commercially successful.

**UNGER:** *Are there other areas, special social or problem areas that you plan to go into in the next year or so? I know that there's in development a film based on the Smith book about William Paley and one about Walt Disney.*

**FUCHS:** HBO has done over time a number of biographies. We seem to like that form. Everyone from Stalin to Mandela to Sacharov. We went through a phase where we did all what we considered to be the heroes—Sacharov, Mandela, Edward R. Murrow—and then went into a sort of, you know, the devil approach where we did Stalin and Roy Cohn and Jackie Presser.

It wasn't that we thought all of these people were heroes—they obviously weren't in our eyes—but they gave us a window into certain happenings in America and certain events at their time. And Paley, we started to look at before Sally Bedell Smith wrote the book because we thought HBO as opposed to all the other networks could give an objective look at the history of television. We decided that the way to look at the history of television is through probably the most important figure in the history of television—Paley—and then the book came out.

**UNGER:** *How do those specials shows evolve? Do they start with you and go out to production companies? Do production companies come to you?*

**FUCHS:** It's different on each show. Some ideas are brought into us. We originate a lot of the ideas ourselves. You know, we have a very good fix on what it is we want to do. So, a lot of the origination and a lot of the stuff is

made under our supervision, but occasionally someone walks in and has a great idea. I should say more than occasionally.

**UNGER:** *I've read many clips about you, and over and over again comes the opinion that you're a great programmer, that you're an idea man and that you have a recognition of what makes for good programming. So, obviously, you've got that reputation as a programmer originating ideas. But you once said that you did "one for the critics and one for the mass audience" and try to get a balance that way.*

**FUCHS:** Well, I don't think it really works that way. But every program that we make at HBO, we go in knowing where we're headed when we make the decision to make the program. We have an expectation for that program. We do sometimes make programs that we say: "This is not going to light up the sky from a ratings point of view, but it is a unique special. It's going to get a lot of attention." It may be a good show for the critics to see or a good show in terms of getting off the television pages and into the news pages. And sometimes we surprise ourselves. Sometimes we go in and we do a show and we say: "This isn't going to be a real ratings getter" and then it sparks a lot of controversy and notice and attention.

So, in a sense we're premeditated, and what we have done at HBO because of our economic structure is we have, I think, perfected the concept that less is more. And by that, I mean it isn't the volume of programming we do, it is the impact of the programming we do that's most important.

It doesn't do us any good to make a piece of crap. First of all, we don't get to sell that to an advertiser. We don't get to defray our costs. We probably don't add any subscribers because it's just bad money. Every film we make must register with at least some of our consumers, or add to HBO's reputation

or HBO's image. Our subscribers have an expectation that we will do certain kinds of programming. If there is a hot comedian or if there's a big fight, or if there's a controversial subject we'll do it. So, we're into image-enhancing with each program. I'm not saying everything we do is a breakthrough, but quite honestly, just about everything we do does not very easily end up on other channels.

**UNGER:** *In addition, you've said: "We don't do any kind of programming we can't do better than anybody else."*

**FUCHS:** That's true, too. Maybe because this company has had so much continuity—in a sense they've had a person—me—here for 17 years who's been in charge of its programming, and we have a team that's been here a long time. Some of those early rules that we wrote for ourselves such as that, we stick to. The easiest way to sell a program at HBO is to come in and say: "This can't go anywhere else." What used to happen in the old days was everyone would get rejected somewhere with something and then come to us. Now they come to us first because they sort of know what HBO does.

**UNGER:** *Holly Hunter when she accepted her Emmy for Texas Cheerleader said about HBO: "It's less comprising, more provocative and less mainstream than anybody else".*

**FUCHS:** Yeah, but I don't want people to think that we are an arts channel.

**UNGER:** *Barbarians at the Gate is another offbeat example.*

**FUCHS:** That's not a movie that had gangbuster ratings, but it was a very, very successful movie to us.

When I talked about less is more, here's a good numerical example. In 1993, there were probably in excess of 250 television movies made—cable, network. We made ten. We got four out of the five Emmy nominations.

Now, no one in the history of this business has ever had that kind of record. A commercial network pumps out 50 "made-fors." A lot of people think they're mostly schlock. But they get audience and they get paid for by advertisers and it keeps the machine going. We don't have that same philosophy... or that same economic structure.

**UNGER:** *Isn't it true that your decisions on the whole are not by committee, that within HBO you exert much more of an individual influence than, say, executives in movie studios?*

**FUCHS:** Each studio is a different operation, but it's very different here. I would say I exert a very strong directional influence. All of us have been together a long time. We're not shy; there's no mystery about what we like to do here. We have a very consistent philosophy and we've been here together so long, that the people who head up the different departments have a lot of authority in their own right. So, it isn't like I'm sitting there and saying, "yes, no, do this, do that."

**UNGER:** *Is it true though that a producer can come to you and get a quick "yes."*

**FUCHS:** I think we're pretty quick here. And I'm particularly quick. When I get a real flash on something, I have proven over time that it usually works pretty well. I don't get those kinds of flashes that often. I have given large series commitments. I had a 45-minute meeting with Jim Henson many years ago and gave the commitment for *Fraggle Rock*. Gary Shanley got a very fast commitment here. But that's only when I have this feeling that we're dealing with something that borders on genius.

**UNGER:** *Your genius?*

**FUCHS:** No. The producer's genius. My genius is a steady consistent plodding genius that's there day to day. That's a joke! But the one wrestling

match I've had with the programming people here at HBO that has succeeded is that I have convinced them over the last however many years that less is more. I say to the programmers: "Listen, it isn't how much you make, it's how good you make it." And 1993 was a year when that philosophy came home to roost, where maybe the movie people would like to make 20 movies instead of 10 movies, but what they made got them such acclaim, and enhanced our reputation and their individual reputations. As television programmers, in the television world right now, HBO is in a league by itself. That has nothing to do with volume. That has to do with quality and consistency.

**UNGER:** *Do you ever envision HBO going into news?*

**FUCHS:** No. Absolutely not. Again, why do something that someone else can do as well or better? We're not going to be CNN. I've been asked that question hundreds of times in my career and I have a very fast "no." There's no reason for us to ever be in the news business.

**UNGER:** *Might HBO go into the cable shopping business?*

**FUCHS:** Listen, it depends on the nature of interactive television. I can see an HBO with partially some kind of interactivity, if we were able to offer merchandise that is connected to our programming and that it was just a matter of hitting certain buttons on your remote control—that's something that we would consider.

I don't find from the business creativity point of view that shopping is interesting. I think there has been a tremendous amount of hot air blown into shopping and I think we know some of the reasons for that in hindsight, but I'm not as fascinated by it. If it's a money-making kind of ancillary technology—push this button and get a T-shirt from *Barbarians at the Gate*—fine. I don't think I want to see

a lot of wrist models with jewelry on HBO.

**UNGER:** *This may sound far out—do you ever foresee the day people on welfare would be given credits for HBO?*

**FUCHS:** Let's not focus on HBO ...

**UNGER:** *Cable, then.*

**FUCHS:** There is a lot of conversation about haves and have-nots in the information era. I think that is a bit of an issue. I don't know if it's going to be analogous to food coupons, but I think it is something that is of concern. I don't know what the answer is for that. Listen, cable is a business.

**UNGER:** *You've said the industry is embarking on an investment campaign. What will that cover?*

**FUCHS:** Everything. Including building these switch digital networks. What Time Warner is doing in Orlando is one market amongst all of their markets that they will do throughout their cable systems eventually. So, that's a very expensive undertaking.

**UNGER:** *What research do you do in programming and in sales?*

**FUCHS:** We do a lot of market research. We watch the consumers very carefully in terms of their appetites.

**UNGER:** *What is the HBO market, basically? To whom do you appeal most?*

**FUCHS:** I would say that we are slightly more upscale, slightly better educated. We are probably ideally 29 to 50-something. There is a heavier percentage of families in HBO homes than there are in the national average. Interestingly enough, we have a disproportionate amount of African-Americans, a higher percentage of subscribers than the national population average. We have a tremendous

amount of loyalty from the African-American community. We do a lot of significant black programming—Roc and Martin at Fox. And we are launching a rather strong campaign into the Hispanic areas in this country, where we have probably been the trailblazer, so, there is no area that we do not pay attention to. HBO is extraordinarily popular in the inner cities in this country.

**UNGER:** *That brings up the question of violence. How do you feel about the criticism of the amount of violence on cable vs. network? And what do you think should be done about it?*

**FUCHS:** We are in the middle of finalizing the cable's response to Washington.

**UNGER:** *Have you been involved in that?*

**FUCHS:** Yes, I have been involved. I would answer this in two ways: Number one, I am disappointed that the Government's response to the issue of violence, which I think is enormously important and a very fundamental problem in this country, is to first attack the media. I don't believe that we are the source of the problem, and it seems in this country that some of our problems are—at least in the short-term basis—insoluble, so there's a frustration, so they go after the media. The media, they insist, causes everything. I read that in Colombia, South America, they ban violence from television as if it was the cause of problems. So, I say, "If television in Colombia is what's causing the problems down there, they got some awfully powerful television."

I'm disappointed that our politicians very often go for the path of least resistance, which often is the media. On the other hand, I have to say that I think the amount of violence, the nature of the violence, the fact that much of the violence that is dramatized or portrayed which does not show the consequences of violence,

does lead to a desensitizing. What many people don't understand is the reason for the violence is not that programmers sit around and say, "Okay, on Tuesday night, let's get a shot of violence in here."

The talent is stretched thin. It is easier to write a ten-page car chase or fight scene than it is to write snappy dialogue. So, when you look at the old movies that were written so well fights were one punch or two punches, and not chairs being thrown, people being thrown out of windows and getting up and coming back in for more. That's bad craft and laziness.

Now, consumers enjoy that. There's a vicariousness to it. Unfortunately, we have a condition in this country where too many of our citizens and too many of our youth are living in an environment where it is not stable enough or balanced enough, where things like this have undue influence.

**UNGER:** *Do you think it's true that there's more violence on cable than there is on network television?*

**FUCHS:** No, I don't believe that's the case. Clearly, pay television, for instance, has a lot of the theatrical motion pictures which do contain a lot of violence. We don't ask for it; that's what we get. But pay television is something that is easily eliminated from the house. We lose a lot of business because people don't want R-rated movies in their house. We once started a channel called "Festival" to appeal to the people who didn't take HBO because they didn't like that content. So, the problem in this country is that parents are not able to supervise their kids when they're watching television, and we are focusing this violence issue on children.

**UNGER:** *What happened to Festival?*

**FUCHS:** It was just not successful. It is very difficult to market to a small percentage of your audience when your marketing has to cover the whole

group. So, it was a marketing nightmare in expense in trying to build a niche a la carte pay service. It was impossible.

But clearly, monitoring television at home is not like when I was a kid when my parents actually monitored my television viewing and told me what hours I could watch and what I could watch. And the punishment was always, "You can't watch television."

If the parent is not at home at 3:30 PM when the child comes home from school and they are able to code their television, so that they can't see certain channels or certain things, I think that's the answer. I don't believe in legislation. I don't want the Government getting into this. I don't mind the Government jawboning responsibly. But I think the cable industry has been very responsible in its response.

**UNGER:** *And is coming up with its own rating system?*

**FUCHS:** Yeah. You can't do a technological solution without a rating system. The two go hand in hand. You can't code without a rating system. And there's going to be some difference in the rating system between pay and basic. But, you know, people from the network world have called me and they are upset with cable leading the charge here and they say: "Listen, we've been through this 20 years ago."

I say that I think this is a little bit different. First of all the political wind is blowing so strong. Violence has become—according to the recent newspapers—as important an issue in this country as economics. We are seeing this epidemic of violence and it is being linked to the portrayal of violence and it has hit a level of concern where politicians are friction free; they can't lose. Violence does not have a constituency. I think a lot of people—in the television world are now looking at the things that are

submitted that contain violence in a different way. I think that's fine. But I hope this doesn't chill out ability to deal with violence as an issue.

I am concerned that Janet Reno said, "I don't watch television." If you're going to legislate this area or jawbone television maybe you ought to do some homework.

**UNGER:** *Does what HBO has done reflect your personal tastes? Are you trying to choose things that other people will like or choose things that you like yourself?*

**FUCHS:** If it happens to be something I like, I wouldn't do it just because I like it. I like reality-based programs. I don't think there's enough of it done. I think fact is more fascinating than fiction. I like biographies, but whatever we ended up liking to do also happened to be something that no one else was doing. I am a professional programmer. I've been at it a long time, so my personal tastes are always tempered by the reality of the marketplace. I don't jam in things that I think that I would like. It happens to be that I've been lucky or fortunate or whatever in that much of what I've sincerely liked has worked for us. But, maybe we promote what I like a little harder.

**UNGER:** *How about your personal life? Do you have hobbies and are they reflected in the programming?*

**FUCHS:** No. I like tennis and we've covered Wimbledon, but that was here before I got here. I like to read. I think HBO has an eclectic taste in terms of what it does, and I would say that I would characterize myself as that, too. I'm not a very research intensive person. I don't research everything. I trust my instincts, but I noticed some research at HBO that indicated the viewers sort of like stories about heroes—a man against the system—which temperamentally happens to be something that I like. So, we began to do movies about heroes.

**UNGER:** *Early in HBO's history, there was trouble getting movies—getting studios to sell you films, mainly because they felt that HBO was in direct competition with Hollywood. Is that true any more?*

**FUCHS:** No. We are now an established part of the food chain.

**UNGER:** *But you compete with other pay systems?*

**FUCHS:** Yes, we do. We survived the advent of the home video business. But, you know, Hollywood has always been very smart with this sequential distribution where every new media that's come in, they've plugged in. Instead of one replacing the other, they've been able to join in. If you look before pay television, there was theatrical and commercial TV. Now there is theatrical home video—which is bigger than everything—pay-per-view, pay-TV, basic cable, commercial. So they've been able to just keep feeding the pot. What's most remarkable, is they've also pretty much spent most of that money in production.

**UNGER:** *Might it be that the next step for you would be to head a movie studio?*

**FUCHS:** I dunno. I'm not sure that that's something that I want to do. Maybe eventually.

**UNGER:** *What would be the next step for you?*

**FUCHS:** I don't know. I like Time Warner. I like HBO. I'm probably capable of doing other things, I'm sure. I like the corporate business side of things more than I expected to. And I'll tell you something, I'm spoiled in that HBO has allowed me to be proud of what we make. And in almost any other situation, because of the commercial realities, I wouldn't be as proud of most of the stuff.

You know, I happen to think my skills are transferable. I can recognize a popcorn movie, but I have to say for

the sake of our business and HBO's reputation and its niche in this increasingly competitive world of television, this identity and this approach has worked very well for it.

**UNGER:** *If you had complete freedom without regard for viewers, or for stockholders or for corporate bosses, what would you do with HBO? Are there things you would like to do that you cross off your list because of the reality of economics?*

**FUCHS:** You know something? I've had as close as you can get to complete freedom. I wish we were making a lot more money and there are certainly things that I would experiment with and you can always spend money on something. Maybe I'd be more competitive in the sports world. But I like the fact that we are very disciplined and that we measure what we do and we're careful about what we do. The only limitation we've had is the fact that we have to make a fair amount of money. We have to draw a bottom line and sometimes, I think, maybe we should invest a little more in other aspects of our business, not necessarily programming.

**UNGER:** *Has working at HBO affected your personal life? I know you have an apartment in Greenwich Village and a house in the suburbs. Do you have a family?*

**FUCHS:** No. I'm not married. But I'm not married to HBO as some people would like to think.

**UNGER:** *Would you say you were happy, content, satisfied?*

**FUCHS:** On one level, yes. On the other level, I am quite restless. I'm a permanently restless kind of person and I look for challenges. I like to think that there are other hurdles out there. I like to think that there are other challenges, other things that are as exciting as what the last 17 years have been.

I would say that I'm a very critical

person. I like things to be done correctly. We tolerate mistakes around here, but I have a higher expectation for HBO—its performance, its people. HBO is a little bit of magic, and people that are here—and they know this—are fortunate to be here. Everyone is well taken care of here and well-regarded. We do a very good job and we're proud of what we do—and there's a price for that. And that price is that we have to excel.

**UNGER:** *By the way, I once asked that question of Beverly Sills. I said, "Everybody thinks you're such a happy person." And she said, "Happy is not the word. Cheerful is the word." There's a big difference between those two.*

**FUCHS:** I would not say that I'm a cheerful person, but I happened to talk to Beverly yesterday. Beverly's had tremendous family health problems. But she remains a cheerful person. She really is. I wish I could be so everlastingly cheerful.

**UNGER:** *Here are comments about Michael Fuchs that appeared in articles over the past ten years. Can you comment on them? "He makes money by making waves."*

**FUCHS:** Well, it doesn't mean that I make money personally by making waves. HBO makes money by making waves. We do controversial programming. Yeah, we make waves. I think it's good to have waves.

**UNGER:** *"Decisive."*

**FUCHS:** I'm a decisive person.

**UNGER:** *"Demanding."*

**FUCHS:** Yes.

**UNGER:** *"Contentious."*

**FUCHS:** There's probably some truth to that.

**UNGER:** *"A pusher."*

**FUCHS:** Yes. Why not?

**UNGER:** "Arrogant."

**FUCHS:** No, I wouldn't say that. Anyone who says that about me is totally inaccurate. "Arrogant" is a complicated concept. It's an overused adjective so I don't know what it means all the time. I mean, I think people who are arrogant are putting up a front in a way. So, I don't feel that it's necessary for me to do that, but I think some of the things that are attributed to arrogance, which is a little bit of cockiness, a little bit of aggressiveness are true. I'm a little bit "out there." I'm not someone who hides my thoughts. Sometimes, that gets interpreted that way.

**UNGER:** *Well, this next one is along those lines. "Not enough of a cheerleader and backscratcher."*

**FUCHS:** I think that is probably the most valid criticism that I have made of myself. We have our year-end things here. I have more than once acknowledged to the HBO people that that is a problem with me. I'm tough on myself and it gets translated to other people.

**UNGER:** "Harsh."

**FUCHS:** Sometimes.

**UNGER:** "Takes chances." *And that could be a positive or a negative.*

**FUCHS:** Yes, I'd like to think so. I think I'm, on the other hand, a sort of practical, responsible kind of person. I know that this isn't my own company. HBO has a consistency of performance. I take chances but within a reasonable framework. I like to take chances but I understand that we/I am operating in not such a wide corridor ... and we cannot afford great mistakes.

**UNGER:** "Willing to give inexperienced filmmakers a shot."

**FUCHS:** We have done that. We always make it a point to tell people that we do different kinds of programming so you can't use the same people all the time. We've developed some of

our own talent, yes.

**UNGER:** "Gives experienced people a career boost sometimes."

**FUCHS:** We have but that is because we've done some exceptional projects here and it's rare that you get a boost from a television show. But I'll take an example ... I think director Michael Ritchie got a boost from *Julia*. He got a chance to show what he could do with good material.

**UNGER:** "The best boss I ever had but not necessarily the nicest."

**FUCHS:** I think that is a compliment. I think I'm a good boss but I'm not sure that I specialize in nice. But despite that people feel that they are working for somebody good at what he does and that's good for them, too.

**UNGER:** "Not a bean counter."

**FUCHS:** No, I am not; that's quite accurate.

**UNGER:** "He has the best job around. Doesn't answer to anyone. He's his own boss."

**FUCHS:** I've heard that said a number of times. I don't think I'm the only one here who falls in that category. I think I have a terrific job.

**UNGER:** "Workaholic."

**FUCHS:** That has to come from somebody who doesn't understand me. I am not a workaholic. A workaholic is somebody who isn't happy away from his work. I work when I have to work. But I am pleased to be away from the work sometimes, too. I would say I have a well-rounded life.

**UNGER:** "Plays hard ball."

**FUCHS:** Lets go back to the baseball analogy. When you run a company this size in this kind of business, if you can't play hardball or if you can't hit the fast ones and if you can't throw close you don't get to be the head of the class. So hardball for me is characteristic at this stage of the game.

**UNGER:** "Golden gut of a programmer combined with the really superb business instincts."

**FUCHS:** You have to be a businessman and you have to be creative. If you combine the two you're a few steps ahead of the rest of the other people.

**UNGER:** "Loyal and demands extreme loyalty from subordinates."

**FUCHS:** I don't demand anything more than I give. It's a two-way street. I expect loyalty also from the people I work for, not just the people who work for me.

**UNGER:** "Mellowed out."

**FUCHS:** I'm clearly mellower than I used to be. People forget that HBO was born in almost an environment of warfare ... so we were warriors. Now things have changed. We are a much more established company; we have accomplished a lot. We're older ... both the company and me. I don't

think I'm out of gas; but I'm not a wild man anymore.

**UNGER:** *Anything you feel I've left out?*

**FUCHS:** Let's go back to what I am most proud of. One of the things that I am most proud of is the organization I have built here. I think we have an exceptional bunch of people. It has a unique culture. It has tremendous continuity. You know in this business we don't have permanent assets. What we have is people and their abilities. I think that is something HBO has a terrific reputation for. ■

In 17 years of covering television for *The Christian Science Monitor* Arthur Unger has won national recognition as one of the medium's most influential critics. He is also known for his revealing interviews with TV, stage and movie personalities. In addition to functioning now as *TVQ's* Special Correspondent, he is preparing a book of memoirs and organizing more than 1200 audio tapes of interviews.

## TAKE THE LOCAL

What's going on with local live television at stations throughout the country? Surprisingly, a recent survey conducted by Mitchell E. Shapiro and Paul Steinle of the School of Communication at the University of Miami, found that local production is flourishing.

Eighty-one per cent of a national, random-selected sample of stations produced local original programming—other than news—in 1994.

In the next issue of *Television Quarterly*, an article by Paul Steinle reports in depth on the survey and documents trends in local production. Active producers of original local programming also discuss their strategies and their plans for the future, as competition from cable and other sources intensifies.

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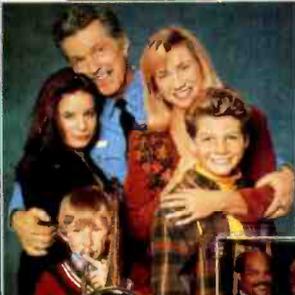
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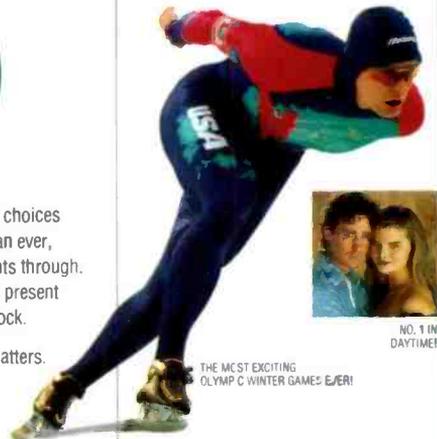
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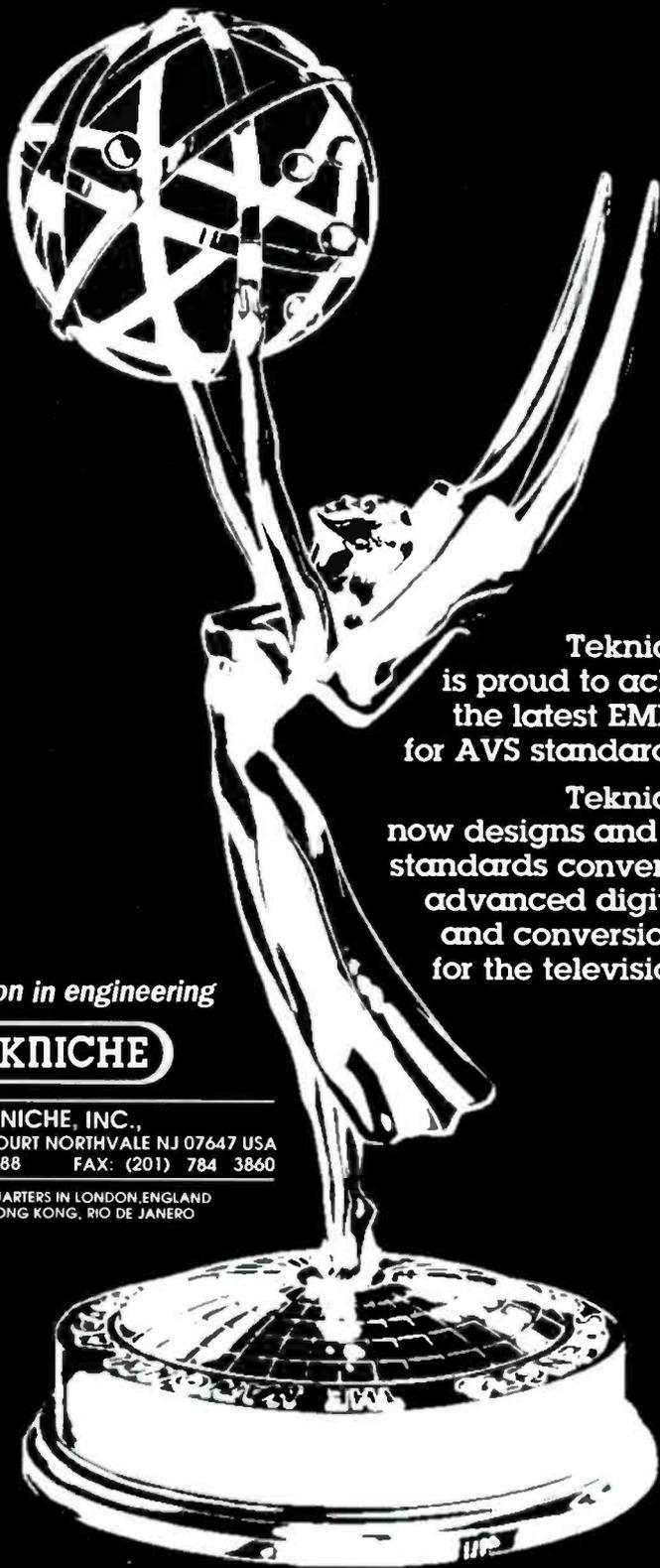
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# AN INVITATION

*Television Quarterly* is looking for articles. We welcome contributions from readers who have something to say and know how to say it. Some of our pieces come from professional writers; others from professionals in the broadcast media who want to write about what they know best — their own field of expertise, whether it's programming, news, production, or management.

We especially want articles which deal with television's role in our complex society, and also its relationship to the new technology.

We feel too, that one of our functions can be to add to the developing history of television, particularly as told by individuals who have contributed to shaping the medium. We believe such historical articles can be valuable for much more than nostalgia since they can illuminate present and future television.

We are formally called a journal, but although some of our pieces have come from the academic community TVQ might better be described as a specialized magazine (we don't go in for complex footnotes, nor do we have peer review of contributions). But we don't consider our audience a narrow one; we like to describe ourselves as a publication for concerned professionals — writers, actors, scholars, performers, directors, technicians, producers and executives.

If you send an article, please observe the basics: typed, double-spaced, 2 copies and a return self-addressed envelope. If you have an idea and want to sound us out before you write an article, send along a few descriptive paragraphs.

Address your article or presentation to:

Richard M. Pack

Editor

*Television Quarterly*

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New York, New York 10019

# POLAND TO PERU, ADVENTURES IN PRIVATIZATION, OR HOW TO WORK IN EMERGING TV MARKETS

An American advertising and marketing expert learns some hard FAX of Life when she negotiates a seminar "Humor in Commercials" in a former Eastern Bloc Country. But for a new generation of professionals there the future looks bright and prosperous.

**BY JUNE COLBERT**

**W**orking overseas is a heaven and a hell. Contrary to what you might expect, language is not the big difficulty. Being tri-lingual, with the ear of a parakeet and the heart of a ham, I usually express myself quite easily. If I can't speak it, I ACT it. If I can't pronounce it with pristine clarity—what's so terrible? I mis-pronounce it with a lot of "gesture." And

somehow I'm always understood very well. . . . whether one-on-one, or by an audience of a thousand.

Actually, language doesn't have to be a big hang-up for anyone. If you aren't fluent or even a hambone, hire yourself an interpreter who is conversant with some of the jargon of your particular business, and get used to watching the arch of their brows.

What you really have to be careful about when negotiating a loving overseas relationship is—do you truly understand each other's "intentions"? I'm talking honorable proposals here.

You'd be amazed how many overseas suitors, individual entrepreneurs and large companies alike, prefer to "try a relationship on for size" while you devote countless hours of valuable time and your phone, Fax, and tape edit bills SKYROCKET. You'd be astounded how ground rules set verbally and in writing, keep changing, like mercury scooting across the floor into far corners of a large room. As for agreements which begin with great order and understanding, they can start to convolute in a twinkling but no one mentions the melamorphosis until it's over.

The initial contact for my Polish TV workshop was made during a NATAS trustee trip to Prague and Poland in 1993. Someone asked if anyone in our group was expert in advertising and marketing and was given my name. We spoke briefly, and I followed up aggressively when I returned to the States—structuring content and devising a format which intrigued them: A 5 day workshop for Polish business, advertising and TV professionals. "How to Create Television Commercials to Win"—how to win attention, win market share, win shelf space, win consumers away from the competition, and incidentally, win awards. In just five days, I will cover a multitude of techniques and creative marketing expertise these very bright people whose country has never been in privatization before, need to master in order to compete successfully in local and world markets.

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*"Dear June, thank you for mapping out and organizing all things for your Seminar here in Poland. The sponsors will be Krakow Television Channel 2.*

*Director Krzysztof Jasinski has approved project and is giving space and equipment. Together with Crackfilm, a documentary producer and organizer of Krakow's new local "International Festival" where you would be proposed to be a jury member. And my Elite Expeditions. We are equally responsible for your expenses and fee*

*requirement, which is accepted. Mrs. Katarzyna Fia whom you met in Krakow is coordinating all technical organization. Remember, the majority of people attending your seminar—television writers, directors, art direc-*

*tors, producers, clients and many people interested in Advertising, Television and Movies, speak only Polish. So you must prepare for continuous translation.*

*Do you agree to FEBRUARY 1994, as good month? We rely on your experience. I will take care of all travel logistics. A big promotion for your program is guaranteed by TV as well as other media as soon as we put all your content into the program. Best wishes, Stanislaw Malec."*

A clear, concise and sane beginning. Instantly, I am lulled into honeymoon euphoria. Unfortunately, unraveling will commence almost immediately, but I am newly affianced and oblivious.

I begin to devote large quantities of time, working straight through Christmas into New Years, screening myriad reels of commercials from the U.S. and all over the world. Finally, I select 150 spots to illustrate and amplify the various sessions I have structured. I apprise the Polish contingent of my progress through Mr. Malec, the only one who speaks English. Fax and letters fly between New York and



Poland, like swallows.

*December, 1993 Fax From Krakow:*

*"Place for Seminar is now big Bagatelle Theater"*

Great! Now I can begin finalizing the content for all five days. It's a whale of a lot of material—10 sessions, both morning and afternoon with the focus on all aspects of the creative process, the professional and technical "How To's" of creating commercials (or programming) that can compete and win.

Another happy Fax—my seminar will be capped on Saturday night by a gala Polish awards ceremony. We're off to the races!

Now I begin final "scripting" for the five days. This script is not for the translator. I write it for my own purposes, memorize it, and then put it aside. My translators are never given speeches to read. Instead, he/she is expected to follow my dialogue verbatim and translate on the spot as I talk. I have always worked this way; it's harder but more fluid and infinitely more interesting for the audience.

I use a traveling mike, not a stationary one, since I often leave the podium to cross the stage and act out some piece of business. When I'm in a country in which I'm relatively fluent in the language, like French or Spanish, I also keep a translator by my side, to help with colloquialisms as I talk back and forth with the audience.

It's now less than a month to touch down. Preparation has been massive,

but I'm pleased with it and so is everyone else. But I still have not begun the costly process of assembling, editing and transferring the selected commercials to Betacam/SP/Pal, the TV system used in Eastern Europe. While Faxes continue to waft in from Poland with technical information and reassurance all conditions are accepted, I still have not received my signed copy of the written agreement. It's only two paragraphs long, not exactly a Magna Carta.

As for my prepaid air ticket...

*January 14, 1994 Fax from Warsaw:*

*"Your ticket is held at LOT in New York".*

Not! And while I agreed to defer my fee until I got to Poland, I stipulated an advance international bank transfer had to be made to my New York

account to cover technical expenses. It never arrives. Going contrary to the brilliant advice I perpetually give others, I pay both the editors and studios out of my own pocket. I also write a check to the phone company to cover overseas communication. Fortunately, I make it a habit to Fax faraway places in the middle of the night when rates are really low. So it's not quite the national debt. Almost.

After a week of total silence, there is a veritable Fax flurry. First Fax: my seminar originally scheduled for two hundred participants with an agreed upon fee, has become a seminar for seventy people with fee "postponed". No mention of bank transfer. I am aghast.

*Dealing with former Eastern Bloc countries is an experience like no other in the world. I presume this is the result of their having functioned under an entirely different system of government and ethic which makes for extraordinary "surprises."*

Second Fax arrives: A reversal! My workshop is now for a THOUSAND professionals including clients. No word on money. Have I for the first time in a long career, fallen to all I warn against?

The fact is, dealing with former Eastern Bloc countries is an experience like no other in the world. I presume this is the result of their having functioned under an entirely different system of government and ethic which makes for extraordinary "surprises."

January 20, 1994 Fax from Warsaw:

*"Dear June. They are heavy clouds hanging over our Seminar in Krakow. I just finished unpleasant talk with Mrs. Katarzyna Fia, who reluctantly neglected the whole and did underestimate her possibilities. Also, she tells me the Director of Television Station is probably to be removed and withdraws his support without explanation. Crackfilm the other sponsor decides only to be interested in Polish International Festival. So please shortly stop all cost involving actions. P.S. I don't know if in this situation you will still be interested to come for Festival only and be jury member? I never expected such a bad surprise from Krakow Television. Stanislaw."*

Before I had a chance to fax back something sterling, another communique arrived.

February 1, 1994 Fax from Warsaw:

*"Dear June, I have just spoken with Crackfilm Deputy Director Mr. Piotr Wasilewski. He confirms he will send you tickets and invitations but kindly asks you make presentation at their Crackfilm Festival using one of your seminar topics. For example: "Humor in Advertising" an hour-and-half, and illustrate with some reels. Mr. Laszlo Wilk and Mr. Wasilewski will call you. Best wishes, Stanislaw"*

February 3 Fax from a new player:

*"Dear Miss Colbert. I shall be pleased to meet you personally in Krakow, and I think seminars discussed with you before this time will be held probably in the near future. We will reimburse you for your flight ticket after your arrival and, of course, provide you with accommodation. I like very much your idea of a presentation on Humor in Advertising illustrated with film. You should bring your NTSC-VHS cassette and it will be transferred onto Betacam SP Pal in our studio. Piotr Wasilewski"*

I've always been told, if they hand you lemons, make lemonade. I decide to accept. I assemble my work, get LOT to fly me at a special rate and Fax Stanislaw my arrival time in Warsaw. He meets the plane with a bouquet, handsome and gracious, a tall man in his late 40's, wearing a trench coat, a leather jacket and plaid cap. Later, he introduces me to his wife, who is a judge of the city court, buys me dinner arranges our tickets and next day shepherds me on the three hour train ride to Krakow.

This lovely old city was practically untouched in World War II, unlike Warsaw which was flattened to rubble. We cab from train to hotel, and walk around the corner to the Bagatelle Theater where the Festival is being held. The place is packed. There is a large balcony with a bar restaurant above the main lobby. Young Polish-speaking professionals tablehop and network, the energy level is high, the air thick with smoke.

These are the country's new young creative generation: TV, film and advertising writers, directors, producers and executives, attractive and ambitious—on their way up!

No one is there to welcome or otherwise acknowledge guest speakers. I am asked to get in a long line to have my picture taken for a badge. Laszlo

Wilk, Crackfilm's president, big, burly and bearded, elbows his way through the crowd trailed by an unsmiling Piotr Wasilewsky, his associate. We are introduced. They speak only Polish. A secretary must have written their cozy letters. I present my NTSC reel as their FAX stipulated. "... transfer to Betacam SP Pal in our own studio."

There is only one problem. They have no studio or equipment to do such a transfer. A man from the BBC and I must have our tapes hand carried on the train back to Warsaw to the only machine that transfers from NTSC.

We return to the hotel where the desk clerk informs me Crackfilm has indicated I will be paying my own bill. Stanislaw informs them they are mistaken. Krzysztof Jasinski, who was supposedly "removed" by the government, glides by looking chipper in a grey ponytail; he is a Festival Polish judge. It's twilight zone '94.

The next two days I polish (no pun intended) my presentation and mill around attending sessions, none in English. Stanislaw has nipped off to Spain for a quick check on an exhibit. Charles Sciberras, Managing Director of the Cannes LIONS Advertising Festival, screens his awards. Clio's reel of awards was shipped over, and runs without comment. A third award reel is shown by a lady from New York. Audience is sparse.

The screening in which I'm most interested is for Polish Commercial contenders. I chat with Kot Przybora from Grey Advertising, Warszawa, an outpost of the American agency. He and his partner have two entries, a delightful food commercial and one for cosmetics. Excellent casting, good

concepts, and imaginative computer graphics. I'm impressed. Later at the Saturday night awards ceremony, both win.

When it comes to my session "Humor in Advertising" the room starts only half full, ten minutes later it's jammed. The audience is clapping and laughing. I'm discussing, "acting out," showing numerous commercials that illustrate various techniques—Wendy's Russian fashion show classic; a psychographic Pepsi/Coke beach spot; a Japanese product demo with mechanical monkey; an Auckland, New Zealand mnemonic for paving brick.

Frank Perdue and Sam Scali gave me several of his classic commercials like "Red Ear Muffs." Sam's Executive Assistant, Marcie Cohn, added current winners including "Stripper." I show them to great applause—an example of an unusual corporate President as pitchman, whose campaign has run almost 20 years.

I act out a live elephant Tonka toy commercial, then a Scholl's foot deodorant for smelly feet. At one point, a man in the audience calls out in perfect English, "You are very funny but your interpreter isn't getting it."

At the end, I encourage people to take chances as individual entrepreneurs. I tell them I met Satchi and Satchi when they started in a London office the size of a closet.

In the lobby I am besieged with questions. People from agencies like Young & Rubicam/ Poland, are down from Warsaw. Young marketing directors from banks and breweries are in from around Krakow. A woman comes up and hugs me with tears in her eyes.

*At an embassy reception there was a mix of Polish and Americans who are making small fortunes overnight, introducing ice machines, self-service laundries and pizza to go!*

"You give me big hope".

The next time I see Wilk and Wasilewsky they are all smiles. We have to have a big meeting. We must sign a contract. The Krakow adventure is not a disaster after all.

Exactly how does one arrange to work in Thailand, or The Netherlands, Hungary or The Balkans, Poland or The Czech Republic, Egypt, Israel, South America, or ANY points north/east /south or /west, and still keep your sanity and just, incidentally, earn a living? It can be done, but you have to have the temperament for it. And you must ask the hard questions.

For myself, from Peru to Poland and a great many places in-between—Hong Kong, Johannesburg, Tokyo, Hamburg, London, Bogota, Brussels, Buenos Aires, Sydney—you name it, I've probably worked there. While there are some disappointments, there is mostly an infinite amount of unexpected pleasure, challenge, friendship—and—sometimes, opportunity to learn from surprising talents in other countries.

**W**hen I first started working overseas, it was as Partner/Creative Director and later President of Interpublic's Chicago Group, a special unit formed by the renowned advertising genius, Marion Harper, Chairman and CEO of the Interpublic Group of Companies which he built out of McCann Erickson. We were troubleshooters for Interpublic worldwide. We were like fire-horses. Clang the bell, and out we charged—to save a slipping account, to create a new product, design a new package, or pitch a new client in Texas or Tokyo. I was on a plane every week of my life, anywhere in the world.

Today, the temper of the times is increasingly global. The international game is easier to get into, harder to win. Distances are shorter. Competi-

tion is keener. Players are greener. Opportunities are vast, but every caveat known to man still applies.

There are many reasons emerging television markets need the assistance of professionals, like you and me. In many of these countries, techniques and services we take for granted are totally new. At a reception in Warsaw at the American Embassy hosted by Chargé d'Affaires Michael Hornblow, there was a mix of Poles and Americans who are making small fortunes overnight, introducing ice machines, self-service laundries. Chinese takeout and pizza to go! Most of them are just getting into the world of privatization and need marketing expertise.

As for Polish writers, art directors, designers, actors, producers, directors, camera and technical experts: many are wildly talented. But few of them know how to create to sell—whether it's a program or a product. For example, they are not experienced using such things as product demos, or devising proofs of excellence. Under the former system of government, you didn't have to "sell" things, be competitive, create demand. It wasn't necessary to make a program or product appealing and memorable. Now a whole new system and attitude is emerging.

With the help and involvement of markets like ours and people like us, former Eastern Bloc countries are fast learning techniques for becoming competitive. Add to this, the multiple acquisitions made by Lauder's Central European Media Enterprises, in Prague, Budapest, and Berlin, as well as the emergence of Channel 2, Krakow, as a high profile production studio since Stephen Spielberg filmed *Schindler's List*, and the future looks bright indeed.

I didn't see as much Polish programming as I'd planned; the Olympics were on. I did, however, attend one interesting meeting at Channel 2 Warsaw last October with Maciej

Domanski's staff. Someone asked about the status of children's programming and we were told it was only on at night! Had they never considered Saturday morning I asked? "Oh, no, no . . . Children's programs are designed—to put them to sleep". Now THAT'S an opportunity! . . .

Today one of Poland's most popular programs is *Northern Exposure*. In one year it has become the most watched show on Poland's second channel out pulling the evening news. Irena Groblewska, a Warsaw publicist, who founded a fan club for the CBS show, says: "This series has drawn people from the cab driver to university professor."

And according to Dean W. Murphy, a *Los Angeles Times* correspondent in Poland, American TV programs and movies account for more than 80 per cent of the entertainment programs on the two national channels.

It's not surprising every major advertising conglomerate has formed local alliances in both Krakow and Warsaw. However, inside the door with the important international sign, you often find 3 squirrels on a treadmill running the engine. These new corporate creatures, plus a whole new breed of entrepreneurs have a real thirst for creative and marketing expertise in advertising and programming.

**S**ometimes I'm asked how I can feel comfortable working in so many different countries. I think it's because the only communication I believe in, crosses all borders. The commercials I personally create can be understood irregardless of language. I even considered this imperative when I was a fledgling writer at Young and Rubicam. In today's world, it's the new reality. But very tough to do: in less than one minute, you must get a person's attention, explain what you're selling, prove why it's better and get him/her

to try it! My own additional standard, the one I use for selecting commercials to show? You must be able to understand the concept, even if I turn off the sound!

I have great impatience with commercials whose product identity remains a deep dark secret throughout. As for the quick-cut-crazies that lead nowhere except to kudos for the art director—they're an insult to the client who foots the bill. And those ponderous blocks of copy that crawl silently endlessly up your television screen . . . give me a break. The device was effective when the first creatives did it, not anymore.

My next big overseas seminar is in Peru. Already, it's had some tough sledding. One partner was removed. An avalanche closed a thoroughfare. The "Shining Path" terrorists reared up against foreigners like myself.

Latest Fax from President/CEO Roberto Beaumont Franowsky in Lima:

*"June, there are suddenly a few more small problems. Do not feel worries. We proceed like the little porcupines you tell me about . . . very carefully".*

As I said, you've got to have the temperament for it. ■

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When she is not globe trotting on assignments abroad, June Colbert lives and works in New York City and throughout the United States as a writer and producer, and as a partner in a marketing and advertising firm. Currently, she is preparing a series of documentary films for a Manhattan based Medical Rehabilitation Center.

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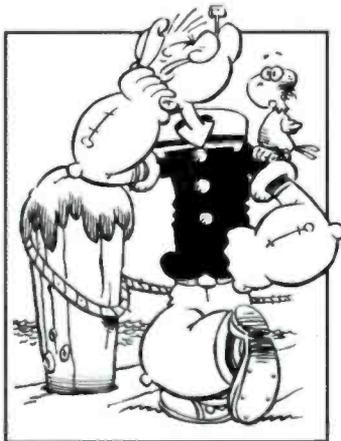
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# FOR THE FORTY NINTH STATE, A NEW KIND OF TELEVISION

Jeanie Greene's *Heartbeat Alaska* is not a sitcom, but the exposure is really Northern and authentic. From a storefront studio with second-hand equipment she broadcasts her popular program to Indians, Aleuts, Eskimos and other native Americans in remote villages with names like Shishmaref, Koyakok, Arctic Village and Mary's Igloo. Her amateur correspondents use their own camcorders.

**BY BERT BRILLER**

—ANCHORAGE

**I**n a world where ethnic conflict is raging—where issues of “blood” have produced appalling rivers of blood—can television project an ethnic group's image without stirring up hate, can it build a people's pride without increasing prejudice? A unique, Native American-owned-and-staffed program, *Heartbeat Alaska*, is making a big impact not only in the 49th State with its very diverse population, but also in the Lower 48, Canada, Greenland and across ten time zones. Its success provides valuable input for evaluating television's treatment of Native Americans—and

other minorities—at a time when some Americans advocate “the salad bowl not the melting pot” principle.

At the heart of *Heartbeat* is Jeanie Greene, a 43-year-old Inupiat Native Alaskan, who created the show, produces, directs, edits and anchors it. For Native Alaskans, the half-hour Sunday night program is an absolute must-see. If it is cancelled, the phones ring in an angry chorus. As one viewer complained, “I waited all week for a program with our kind of people in it, and instead I got baseball.”

I found Jeanie Greene in the storefront shop she's turned into a TV studio, next to a hairdresser's shop a couple of miles from downtown Anchorage. First, I asked why *Northern Exposure*, which is such a solid hit in the rest of the U.S., doesn't cut much

ice with Native Alaskans.

"Exposure is a joke," Greene says, "I zapped it when it showed tacos as part of native diet." *Heartbeat's* exposure is definitely Northern, but it's authentic—dedicated to showing the real Alaska through the eyes, ears and voices of the many ethnic groups whose ancestors crossed the Bering Straits thousands of years ago.

Greene, trained at the University of Alaska as an actress with a minor in anthropology, is articulate, dynamic, intense. Apologetically, she warns, "Don't let me bulldoze you, but I've got so much to say." And much of her energy comes from resentment at how Native Alaskans have been and are being mistreated. "In order to understand where I come from, you've got to understand what I've gone through." And that includes hearing television executives call her "that aboriginal" and other racial epithets.

But, she says, "I don't have any hatred. They did me a favor. They made me tough-skinned. I'm half white and I'm as proud of that half as I am of my Inupiat heritage."

**T**he roots of *Heartbeat*, she relates, grew from the failure of Alaskan television to show Native Alaskans, except in negative situations. With her anthropology background, she tried to get a story on the air about Native Americans in Bethel, singing in their Russian Orthodox Church hymns lost in the Soviet Union. It was turned down "because natives are unintelligible." So she started a campaign to get native news on a local station. Armed with letters from the elders of several native villages, she got a deal to do three-to-

*There are three native groups—Indians who speak five different languages, Eskimos with four languages, and Aleuts with one of their own.*

five-minute segments of native news twice weekly on ABC's Anchorage affiliate, KIMO (from Eskimo), whose 6 PM newscasts used to be picked up by the Rural Alaska Television Network.

RATNet, as it's called, takes a selection of shows from Anchorage commercial and public stations and cable and beams them by satellite, microwave and mini-transmitters to over 240 communities in the vast wilderness (but not urban Anchorage, Juneau and Fairbanks). The 14-member RAT council, which represents the audience and chooses the programs, loved Greene's segments.

To compress the story of her struggle against resistance to airing native news on commercial channels—although 17,000 of Anchorage's 250,000 population are Native—Greene finally decided to package a weekly half-hour native TV magazine program on her own. Managerial types gloomily forecast failure, but Greene says, "Telling me No is giving me permission to succeed."

Alaska—"The Last Frontier"—thrives on a Can-Do philosophy, relishes tackling formidable challenges, and Greene in 1992 began producing *Heartbeat* by herself in her cramped Anchorage apartment, moving out the dining room table to make space for her second-hand equipment. It was a "Mom and pep" operation. But she was soon joined by John Dimmick, an Inupiat cousin, a young sometime oil worker who serves as cameraman and keeps the vintage equipment working.

After surviving a full year in her apartment, the show finally was firm enough to set up her storefront studio on Fairbanks Street. The location allows her to get closer to some of her



audience. Enthusiastic viewers often wander in asking how they can help the show.

Today *Heartbeat* has broad, if patchwork, distribution blanketing Alaska on RATNet, cable and tape; aired by Television Northern Canada across the continent; by KNR-TV Greenland; the Navajo Nation channel in Window Rock, Arizona, and picked up by various PBS stations via Tel-Star. Still, Greene worries about paying the rent.

She dreams of upgrading her equipment—two studio cameras, two field cameras and 3/4 inch videotape and editing machines. Nevertheless, this self-taught do-it-all does complicated dissolves and moving inserts, without aiming for glitz and glamour. *Heartbeat's* strong features include videotape footage sent in by vidicam amateurs from the Arctic wastes, the tundra, the isolated outposts which get mail (weather permitting) twice a year.

The "home movies" come from remote places with names like Shishmaref and Koyakok, Coldfoot and Kwigillingok, Arctic Village and

*Jeanie Greene on the set of Heartbeat Alaska. Her audience reaches beyond Alaska.*

Mary's Igloo, but they're authentic. Gary Fife, reporter for KSKA, Public Radio in Anchorage, who does a five-minute segment of Native American news on each *Heartbeat*, says, "If Jeanie came to a tribal event with a professional crew, people would all straighten up and behave or show off. The amateurs' tapes give a natural, honest, refreshing picture of their lives."

Fife sees the program as giving natives a hand in gaining control of their own lives. His news segment surveys what is happening with native groups all over North and South America—and even Siberia.

"We're trying to tie things all together," he adds. "Natives have many common problems. If one group is solving a problem, others may learn from it. We're sharing views and showing many different sets of values—what works for the Sioux on the plains of South Dakota may not work for the Cherokee in the hills of Oklahoma. We're trying to give a

picture of a reality television never showed before. We have to have our own vehicle, because nobody knows the complexities of our situation as we do."

Greene is convinced the program can reach beyond the Americas: "There's no reason our global village can't expand to include the Maoris of New Zealand." Because natives and Russians in Siberia were tuning in to *Heartbeat's* satellite transmission, a Russian journalist, Alex Lubosh, recently came here to interview Greene. Their discussions, which included a report on U.S.-Russian cooperation in counting the bowhead whale population, were carried on *Heartbeat* in both languages.

Her core concept is that natives should own their own lives and culture. She is very sensitive to what she feels is "the bootlegging of native culture."

"People from the outside are writing books, imitating native arts and crafts, telling our stories," she says. "In the name of documentation they are even robbing graves. It's all done with the best of intentions, by people who are not devious, but who are nevertheless making money from it. It's vital for us to own our own story."

She recognizes the complexity of the issues, especially in terms of each artist's right to interpret the world in his own way. Handing me a two-inch-thick scrapbook, she points out that she has played women of other races, Shakespeare's Cleopatra, Jonson's Duchess of Malfi. "Much depends on the artist's intentions and the individual situation," she says. Clippings show she also ran a dinner theater, did TV commercials, was the presenter on a local real estate program.

*"I am not the authority on native life. The authority is the person who lives in the bush, who has to walk on the ground of the village. We edit their stories, but they are their stories."*

Natives object to being made "pets," even by social scientists. Greene tells me of an anthropologist who, true to type, grew possessive of the group she studied, the Yupiks. She'd cross her arms over her bosom and glowingly exclaim, "My Yupiks, my Yupiks." Amused, one native asked, "Why does she call her breasts 'yupiks'?" Greene comments, "Native humor."

Fife, of Muscogee Creek and Cherokee parentage and a member of the Wolf clan, hails from Tulsa, Oklahoma. He says, "We natives are Americans' pet minority. But mostly we're dealt with in terms of 'The Poor Indian', the Indian as Victim, the tragedies of the Trail of Tears and Wounded Knee. We're not shown as contemporary U.S. citizens. We're presented as happy dancers or dysfunctional drunks. An NBC documentary turned a whole tribe of Indians into a bunch of drunks—and won a Peabody Award for it!"

Prejudice against Native Americans stems from ignorance of history, Fife declares. "*Heartbeat* doesn't do the Sucker Story: a crying native child, a beautiful landscape, barbed wire and a dead sheep," he says. "Broadcasters occasionally cover colorful ceremonies, but they ignore the bread-and-butter issues, the economic matters that are so important."

"Jeanie seeks out positive events. When *Heartbeat* shows a graduation ceremony, with kindergartners and high schoolers getting diplomas," Fife continues, "it touches everybody, as you were touched, and the scenes of natives' academic progress have an uplifting impact."

Natives are resentful of people from outside who think they know the land

and its people. Michael Crichton recently told of a writer who visited an Eskimo village in the bush and was asked how long he'd stay. Before he could reply, another Eskimo answered for him: "One day, newspaper story. Two days, magazine story. Five days, book."

**I**n the immense expanse of Alaska, twice the size of Texas, there are three native groups: Indians who speak some five different languages, Eskimos with four languages, and Aleuts with their own. Although one might not understand the other's language, they are interested in each other. Greene points out that she is very careful to call each group, not by the name used by anthropologists or journalists, but by the name the group calls itself: "Checking names for authenticity is one reason I have a \$1000-a-month phone bill."

"I am not the authority on native life," Greene stresses. "The authority is the person who lives in the bush, who has to walk on the ground of the village. We air their stories, but they are *their* stories. I use my skill as an editor, but with great respect for the people and their culture. They teach me constantly."

She emphasizes that *Heartbreak* is not the "Jeanie Greene Show." Now that it is attracting national attention, friends warn her about competition. Her answer: "If God wants to develop 20 more shows, am I going to tell Him no? The day this becomes the 'Jeanie Greene Show' is the day I lose it."

A typical show, one of six I watched, opened with shots of natives, a spirit mask, spectacular Alaskan scenery, backed by a rock song speaking of a heartbeat "loud as thunder" and proclaiming that "revolution is in the air." Greene showed clips of a local parade, with herself on a float, then introduced Fife's native news report.

This segment included stories on proposals for improving Alaska's na-

tive health care system; a meeting in Virginia of indigenous women setting up an international network; negotiations between the Mexican government and the Zapatista rebels; the Pequot Indians of Connecticut giving a \$2,000,000 grant to the Special Olympics to be held at Yale next year; expansion of a Native Americans academic honor society; legal wrangling between the state of Nebraska and natives on repatriation of tribal skeletal remains and artifacts; and a Minnesota law barring the use of Indians' names on beer labels.

The programs are all broadcast in English, although occasionally there are passages in one of the native languages.

A major trend in the news Fife covers is economic growth under native self-determination. "We're calling our own shots more," he points out, "with native governments and corporations exercising more muscle under the treaties that give us sovereignty. Locally tribes are paving roads, building clinics, providing scholarships. On our lands, whether it's gaming, hunting, or access, if outsiders do business with us we have the right to tax them just as we'd be taxed in their jurisdiction."

On the same broadcast, Greene introduced a segment on how natives hunt and fish for subsistence on the North Slope. She followed with tapes of a fish-cutting contest (with the half-moon ulu knife) and a beaver-skinning contest in another village where the elders demonstrated traditional techniques to youngsters.

This program like many of her others, boldly tackled the thorny issue of alcoholism. Although natives make up only 16% of Alaska's population, they are 35% of prison inmates—most incarcerated for drinking or drug-related crimes. To fight alcoholism, Sobriety Potlatches were held in 9 of the state's 11 prisons, linking sobriety to traditional rituals and family, community and spiritual values. Greene present-

ed tape clips from several prisons, including a "stake dance" in which the staked enemy is alcohol.

Even before that telecast Greene received warm responses from prisoners. The Native Culture Club of the Palmer Correctional facility wrote, "Quyaanakpak [Thanks, in Inupiat] . . . It really is a blessing for all of us in the institution to be touched and warmed by your program . . . Many of the brothers would like a copy of the shows you have done on their home towns." Acknowledging the seriousness of natives' alcoholism, Greene's point of view is, "Don't blame others. Look in the mirror. Stop carrying the burden of the six-pack on your back. We're going to cure ourselves, heal ourselves, empower ourselves."

Another program reported on the torching of a one-room schoolhouse and other buildings in a remote community by a drunk discharged employee. The scenes of damage and the comments of villagers underlined the devastating effects of alcohol. One man said, compassionately, in jail the arsonist will get a chance to think about what he's done, to feel the sorrow of it, to learn that he did it under the influence of alcohol.

Greene tells me that as she edits the tape coming in, she's often moved to tears or to laughter. One example of native humor was a dance by an elder enacting rituals of the hunt, concluding with rubbing his stomach after the meal and finally fluttering his hand behind his backside in a gesture of relief. It was earthy humor that probably wouldn't have made it past network censors.

To outsiders, native stoicism seems to be passivity. I asked about a story in which teens were listening without visible reaction to a teacher stressing native self-respect.

Greene explains, "Their seeming dispirited, detached, passive is a symptom of the oppression by Western culture. But you can't say the Tlingits, who battled the Russians, are

passive. One of the strongest qualities of the Yupiks is their humbleness and ability to work together. Some hunting people trained their youths to sit straight-out in their kayaks for hours, to silently read the waves, to be master hunters. Along comes the shotgun. Pow! That defines displacement—technology taking away many aspects of the old life."

"Western culture is telling natives they're less than human," Greene stresses. "But natives have a fabulous ability to listen. They don't have to talk-talk-talk-talk. They allow others to be themselves. Have you ever been in a group of people who can handle silence without feeling awkward or having to fill the anxious moment of silence? Natives don't have the talking compulsion of Westerners."

**I**n oversimplified terms, Native Americans have seen some of their old ways of life destroyed by the introduction of modern technology, but they have not been prepared for the new style of life, nor is there enough opportunity for them in an industrialized economy in recession. Moreover, cultural disruption is being played out in a society that segregated and debased natives.

*Heartbeat* gets into these sensitive areas. It covered the anniversary of Elizabeth Peratrovich, the Tlingit Indian woman who led the fight to pass an anti-discrimination law. Greene also devoted a special program to a film produced by the National Conference of Christians and Jews debunking myths and misunderstandings of Native Americans spread by the media. This presented testimony from eight Native Americans, including Gary Fife and Wilma Mankiller, principal chief of the Cherokee nation.

Panelists called for a new study of history, an end to the vacuum of information about indigenous peoples, recognition that natives are not just a race but part of political entities

having rights and treaty relations with the U.S. They stressed that the press should "take natives out of the shadows" and give them fuller coverage, because they've been on this land much longer than 500 years and can look at environmental and social problems from a more meaningful point of view—that we humans are part of this world, not dominating it.

The fight to counter media stereotypes, Fife tells me, is growing and minority journalists are joining hands. In July the Native American Journalists Association, on whose board Fife serves, met with three other associations, of Black, Hispanic and Asian journalists.

In addition to the technology of industrial society invading the Arctic areas isolated by mountains, glaciers and enormous distances, a strong channel of contagion is television. Villagers are exposed to sitcoms and police dramas, CNN and MTV, commercials for Clairol and Nikes.

"People in the bush can't relate to the willowy blonde beside the Cadillac, nor can they afford the luxuries," Greene says, "Regular TV, which is so pervasive, is a foreign land to them. But they respond to *Heartbeat*. They see Indians and Eskimos and people like themselves. They see a different kind of beauty. The never-never-land of television, which seemed so impossible, is now attainable to them."

Yet the influence of pop culture is felt. Musically, rock has made headway. Frequently *Heartbeat* includes a music video. An Indian group, Red Thunder, features two sexy male singers who perform with passion and

zeal. Their militant lyrics underline change and the consciousness of being native.

**M**any outsiders try to stereotype natives, want them to be their fantasy of "native," Greene says. "They think if we have a snowmobile or a telephone we're less 'native.' But my Inupiat ancestry is not diminished because I drive a car, have a fax and call-forward."

She believes natives learn best by seeing demonstrations, and programs include reports that show the elders' skills, such as whale hunting or basket weaving. In this respect *Heartbeat* is becoming an archive of Native

Alaskan culture. One program showed a native making an Eskimo drum. Some traditional materials were used, but new aluminum screws were incorporated, because they last longer. "That doesn't make the drums less authentic," Greene argues. "The sound and the song come from the heart and soul, not from the walrus skin."

The natives' warm relationship with their children is evident in segments on many *Heartbeat* programs.

Two included cooking segments in which a father is helped by his six-year-old daughter. Eskimo halibut pie is not Julia Child's gourmet cuisine, and measurements are ignored, but as Greene says, "If you need exact quantities, you're in trouble" and the overall effect was charming.

*Heartbeat* gets some underwriting from Coca Cola, Alaska Trading Co., and Native Regional Corporations such as Cook Inlet Region, Chugash

*"Natives have a fabulous ability to listen. They don't have to talk, talk, talk. Have you ever been in a group of people who can handle silence without feeling awkward or having to fill the anxious moments of silence?"*

Alaska Corp. and the North Slope Borough, who are credited on the air with opening billboards. Spots can be bought on commercial stations that broadcast her show. These replace some of the public service announcements.

When prospective sponsors ask for Nielsen ratings, Greene replies, "Just get a map of Alaska. Pick any one of 240 villages out there. Put in a call and ask the operator to speak to anyone. The operator will ask for a name. Tell her, any name with an A or a B. and When I get on the line, whoever answers will say, 'Hi, Jeanie Greene, we watch your show all the time.'"

Because they now have *Heartbeat* as a benchmark, natives are more critical of commercial television. When an Anchorage station did a slanted piece on drunk natives, a large number of angry viewers called Greene. She told them, "Don't complain to me; call the news director at that station. But I will try to do something to show the other side of the story."

Greene told me why she calls her production company One Sky. "I was being interviewed by a white journalist," she relates, "and as her fearful eyes looked into my fearful eyes, I felt she feared what she thought I knew. And I feared what I thought she did not know. Racial fear comes from ignorance. To be able to continue, I looked for some common ground—and thanked her for sharing her sky with me. And later I wrote a poem, One Sky.

"Ultimately, we all share the earth as human beings, with all our differences and colors, different needs and ways. We need each other and need to share. Bottom line."

We'll see more of Jeanie Greene. Alaska's Governor Walter J. Hickel recently wrote her, "Your show fills a tremendous need in broadcasting not only for Alaska's Native residents but for many other Native American groups, as well as for others around

the globe.

"Your dream for a Native American cable channel is a reachable goal and we want to encourage you in making it happen . . . Just keep your positive focus, and we know you'll succeed."

After showing me a tape of a Native bowhead whale hunt, Greene led me to the set area where a hunter's spirit mask hangs as part of the backdrop. "The inner circle represents the earth, the outer, the heavens," she explains. "Around it are harpoons, whale flippers, seal slippers, feathers, walrus hide. The hunter's mouth is open, calling and thanking the animals and the environment with which he lives in one-ness and communication. It's a strong symbol—and I hope a symbol of its ties between native peoples and *Heartbeat Alaska*."

"I won't stop," she continues forcefully, "We've got a lot of myths to eradicate. We won't be the victims who are mired in a tragic past. Do I have hope for the natives? Absolutely. I think native peoples eventually are going to heal the world. I hope and pray that we can get to the rest of the world in time—if only by having people watch how we live and being inspired by how we work with nature." ■

**Bert Briller has had an extensive career as a media critic. His experience includes serving as a member of the executive committee of ABC Television and as executive editor of the Television Information Office of the NAB. Earlier, he was a reporter and critic for *Variety*.**

# SCHINDLER'S LIST AND SCHINDLER: THE MOVIE AND THE DOCUMENTARY.

**BY DAN KLUGHERZ**

**T**wo films based on a similar subject—Oscar Schindler, the enigmatic character who rescued more than a thousand Jews during the Holocaust—invite comparison. One is *Schindler's List*, the Oscar-winning movie directed by Stephen Spielberg and the other is *Schindler*, a British documentary produced, written and directed by Jon Blair in 1983 for Thames Television and not shown on television here in the United States until early this year when it was broadcast on fifty stations, including public as well as commercial outlets. The two productions, totally different in method, illustrate the fundamental difference between the feature film and the documentary.

In watching a feature film,

no matter how documentary its style, the audience receives the story in what Coleridge called a state of *suspended disbelief*. Like a child whose mother says, "I'm going to tell you a story", the audience, having paid its money and hoping to be entertained, settles comfortably, submits; the mind becomes receptive; disbelief doesn't operate.

The documentary asks a different response. On the screen is reality. Examine it, test it for what you feel is true or false. The audience is mentally active, putting what they see and hear to a critical test—something like a jury listening to a witness. The documentary must have an authenticity beyond what is required in a fiction motion picture.

A comparison of the two films should note that the audience for the Blair documentary is relatively miniscule while the Spielberg



*Oscar Schindler*

movie will be seen by millions. Its effectiveness as education makes it an extraordinary film. There has been nothing like it to tell young people and coming generations about the Holocaust.

What one brings to *Schindler's List* is important to take into account in judging it. Those with any personal experience of the Holocaust might find the Spielberg feature overwhelming—a painful or unbearable recollection. This audience may be caught up in it as though it were a documentary; they are unlikely to question what is presented on the screen.

A much larger audience—the general moviegoing audience—is absorbed by the Spielberg film because it conforms to a successful entertainment formula. There is an empathetic identification with the victims. They are rescued by a hero from impossible situations. There is pell-mell action, cruelty and shootings. In the end they are saved. The resolution satisfies.

**P**owerful as *Schindler's List* has been to most critics and audiences, there are those who feel dissatisfied with its impression of the Holocaust. Theirs is a disbelieving response; what they know about the Holocaust has seeped into their bones and, when in their minds they think of Holocaust suffering, it is on a level unlike the fictional film portrayal. They see too little of the plight of victims, of their degradation, of the struggle to endure, of the pain and agony of survival. For them the film does not adequately reflect the reality.

*Powerful as the Schindler's List film has been to most critics and audiences, there are those who feel dissatisfied with its impression of the Holocaust. When in their minds they think of Holocaust suffering, it is on a level unlike the fictional film portrayal.*

The color sequence that closes the movie is in the documentary spirit. The many who were rescued file by

Schindler's grave, each to place a stone thereon, following the Jewish tradition of honoring the dead. One examines the truth of this scene: of the millions of Jews who died, those we are seeing on the screen survived. We are seeing actuality.

Spielberg has followed the basic facts of the Schindler story, a story that lends itself to making a film about the Holocaust palatable. With the rescue as the absorbing core of the movie, the full depth of Holocaust horror is kept from the audi-

ence. Though there is an abundance of Nazi cruelty and violence, other realities are made non-horrendous.

The cattle cars do not appear to be what they are: instruments of death. The barracks give no hint of the human misery that was pervasive there. The dread "showers", rumored among the victims to be prelude to death by gas, turn out to be real showers. For those who are not knowledgeable, probably most of the current movie audience and certainly the audience of the future, Auschwitz as a place where millions died in the gas chambers, is hardly felt. Thus as an educative document, *Schindler's List* has decided limitations. It would have been impossible for Spielberg to have gone any further in portraying realities without undermining the production of a commercial film. As it is, it went far enough to keep away some, with an awareness of the Holocaust, who were not ready to go to the movies to undergo a painful experience.

The limitations of Spielberg's film are felt especially by those steeped in personal accounts of the Holocaust, an extensive and imposing literature including, for example, Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* and *The Drowned and the Saved* to name but one of many authors. Reading such accounts, what makes them so powerful and involving is the endless question: How would it have been for me—in the camps, in the cattle cars, in the cold nights outside for the body count, how would I have endured?

With the powerful empathy thrust upon one to feel what had gone on for those in the grip of the Nazis, any fictionalizing is hard to take; nothing needs to be made up since so much has been written that is raw experience. With this bias, I found no inducement even to read Thomas Keneally's book *Schindler's List* since its very first page showed how much the author would be using his imagination:

"Watch the pavement, Herr Schindler," said the chauffeur. "It's as icy as a widow's heart."

This is not to enter into criticism of what many consider an important and worthy work of fiction, well-researched and highly readable. It is only to confess a tendency to resist the devices of fiction when the subject is the Holocaust.

The strong, well-made documentary, *Schindler*, has the ring of truth throughout. Its unfamiliar newsreel footage gives a vivid impression of Nazi persecution and the on-camera statements of Schindler's survivors put one as close as possible to their experience.

All the highlights of the Schindler story are here. There is enough in the newsreel and other archival footage to

present a realistic image of Nazi oppression. Much is conveyed by actual film scenes such as: the old woman whose head is brutishly raised by the handle of a Nazi officer's whip; Jews being rushed out of their homes into the street; working under Nazi guards; a roundup, with victims forced to leave their homes and climb into trucks to be carted away.

**T**here are even a few images of Schindler himself, with spare narration spoken by Dirk Bogarde, about Schindler's charm, vanity, how he enjoyed being entertaining, his 17 foot sportscar. The comments from survivors themselves provide the on-the-spot record of the Schindler story while giving the authentic feeling of what it was like to be a Nazi victim. Their experiences are similar to what is dramatically enacted in Spielberg's feature film. Again, depending of one's background, one may be moved by the survivor's

accounts in the documentary or the visualizations in the movie—conceivably by both.

In the Thames documentary, a Polish survivor, Mojesz Pantirer describes how, after an escape of one young prisoner from the camp, he and others were lined up and as a warning, Amon Goeth shot every other boy on the spot. Pantirer

tells about unloading a truck of its dead for burial. One boy was still alive. Pantirer begged a guard for a "gnadige" shot, a "kindness", so the boy would not be buried alive.

"It's a 'schade', a shame to waste a bullet on the schmutzig Jude" is the guard's reaction. Pantirer goes on: "We had to pour gasoline over them and we kept on burning them".

*Depending on one's background, one may be moved by the serious accounts in the documentary or the visualization in the film — conceivably by both.*

Goeth's mistress, whose emphysema causes her to labor to get her words out (an interview that contributes a subtle morbid tone) offers a chilling defense of Goeth. "He killed Jews, naturally... but he didn't like to do it."

One follows the dramatic account of the Jewish women whose cattle car was scheduled by Schindler to be sent to his factory but was misdirected to Auschwitz where they are told by inmates, "You don't need your possessions. You're not going to live another day". Eventually, through Schindler's uncanny influence, they are back under his protection and are reassured by him, "You are safe now."

This moving documentary provides the audience with a dramatic depiction of the event without the feature film's sacrifice of authenticity in dealing with the same material.

The sacrifice may not trouble most viewers, but it does if you agree with the perception of Primo Levi, the author and Auschwitz survivor. He writes, in *The Drowned and the Saved* of "the gap that exists and grows wider every year between things as they were (in the camps) and things as they are represented by the current imagination fed by approximative books, films and myths. It slides fatally toward simplification and stereotype, a trend against which I would like to erect a dike ... It is the task of the historian to bridge this gap, which widens as we get farther away from events under examination."

Both *Schindler's List* and *Schindler* the television film, have their strengths and their limitations. In the

feature film, events are funneled through the sensibilities of a master of the entertainment film who has taken a seemingly unlikely subject for a Hollywood movie and turned it into a commercially successful and historically important motion picture. When the two films are seen in conjunction with each other, however, one senses how hopeless it is for the enacted film to reflect the authenticity that is achieved in the documentary through reports by concentration camp inmates, witnesses to history.

But audiences love movies that tell a story, particularly when told by a master like Spielberg, and they are not much concerned with historical truth. Throughout the world people will see and be impressed by *Schindler's List*, while it is the fate of *Schindler*, as it is of most documentaries, to be seen by a few. ■

Dan Klugherz recently has retired from a career as a writer, director and producer of documentary films. His last film was *The "Real" Julia* on the life of Muriel Gardiner, who helped Jews and anti-Fascists escape from Vienna in the late 1930s. His documentaries have been seen on CBS, PBS, The Learning Channel, Westinghouse Broadcasting and on the classic Intertel series.

## THE SCHINDLER STORY

We plan to run selected comments on this article in our next issue.

Please keep your thoughts to no more than five hundred words, addressed to:

Editor, *Television Quarterly*, 111 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019.

Enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope.

# INVENTING INSTANT TV TRADITIONS: GEORGE STEVENS, JR., HONORING JUST ABOUT EVERYBODY IN SIGHT

**BY RICHARD KROLIK**

**W**e have our Emmys, out Oscars, our Tonys and Obies and Grammys and Aces, each devoted to the current year's winners and losers in their respective fields of endeavor. They are all by now television's annual traditions.

But sneaking up on the most venerable of them are some television traditions that have been created by a man who takes a longer view of recognizing talent. He is George Stevens, Jr.,

better known in Washington and Hollywood than in the network TV arena. But he has created and produced for two decades annual television specials that pay tribute to the lifetime achievement—stress “lifetime”—of men and women in motion pictures, sports and the performing arts, and doing it with showmanship and style.

The Stevens every-year productions include

- *The American Film Institute Salute*, which rotates among the three major networks, since 1973;
- *The Kennedy Center Honors*, on

CBS since 1978;

• *The Great Ones*, (sports legends) on NBC since just last year, but clearly destined for tradition treatment, and just as a bonus, *Christmas in Washington*, every December on NBC.

**W**hile all this annual producing was going on, Stevens found time to write and produce two major made-for-TV films, each of which won an Emmy: *Separate But Equal*, tracing the life and contributions of Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, and *The Murder of Mary Phagan*, based on a turn-of-the-century crime. He also wrote, produced and directed a loving two-hour film tribute to his father, *George Stevens: A Filmmaker's Journey*.

Do these varied credits make George Stevens a motion picture creator or a television producer? In his words:

"I think what film and television have in common is that telling stories with pictures and sound and music utilize the same techniques and skills. Eventually, everything that is made with moving images is meant to be seen on your living room screen, whether it's *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Jurassic Park* or the *Kennedy Center Honors*.

"For me, it's all story-telling, whether it's a motion picture story or a television event. We design the *Kennedy Center Honors* to move people and touch people, in the same way I would if I were working on a film. One of the most important elements of the *Honors* are the short biographical films. As an integral part of the program, we show those films on a motion picture screen, in the dark.

"Those films bring everyone in the audience, there in the Concert Hall or watching the taped program at home, to the same point in understanding the honorees—and from that, the feelings flow.

They see a young black kid in

Harlem who decided he wants to be the Jackie Robinson of dance. He becomes a great international ballet dancer, and on the day that Martin Luther King is shot, he decides he wants to make a difference in the world. He builds the Dance Theater of Harlem with young kids—well, that's a movie. And then you put on the stage these dancers from age five to thirty and you see Arthur Mitchell's purpose, taking these kids from the streets and giving them a purpose."

The man who presides over these enterprises got his start in the movie business and early black-and-white television. Son of the famous movie director whose dozens of films include *Shane*, *A Place In The Sun*, *Giant*, *Woman Of The Year*. George Jr. came to the business early on, after Occidental College and the between-wars Air Force, assisting his dad and learning the trade. He also got some early hands-on experience in the small-screen medium, apprenticing to Jack Webb on *Dragnet* and *Pete Kelly's Blues* and directing episodes of *Peter Gunn*, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, and *Phillip Marlowe*.

In 1960, 28-year-old George Jr. was working with his father on *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, preparing to go to Europe to direct second unit shooting, when he learned of an impending meeting in Hollywood of the titans of the motion picture industry, then Sam Goldwyn, Darryl Zanuck, the Warner brothers et al., and Edward R. Murrow, titan of broadcast news, appointed by President-elect Kennedy to head up the United States Information Agency. Logically enough, Murrow wanted to establish relations with the movie establishment which produced the American pictures seen around the world.

Somehow word reached Murrow that he should be talking not only to the Old Guard of the industry, but to the new young Turks like Dick Zanuck, Paul Newman, Sam Goldwyn Junior—and maybe even the son of George

Stevens. The next day, Murrow asked young George to meet with him at Sam Goldwyn's house on a Sunday afternoon. It was there, with the click of croquet balls as background, that Ed Murrow invited George Stevens Jr. to join USIA and take charge of its motion picture and television activities.

Should Stevens honor his commitment to his father on *Greatest Story*, or join the New Frontier in the unfamiliar Washington setting? Father's reaction: "You've got to do it, or you'll always wonder what it would have been like." Which cinched it, and USIA had a new film and TV boss.

**I**t was a heady time. Murrow was an innovative leader, ready to shake things up at the bureaucracy. Stevens got his OK to cancel contracts with the old line newsreel companies, which had been providing the documentary material that USIA sent out to 121 countries for viewing in movie theaters and on newborn foreign television stations, and for developing homegrown filmmakers.

They had a studio in the Old Post Office building in Washington, then and now a landmark on Pennsylvania Avenue. Among the workers there were Don Mischer, still associated with Stevens as director and co-producer of some of his annual television specials; Bob Squier, who went on to become a leading Democratic candidate-handler and regular commentator on the *Today* show and Bruce Herschensohn, perennial conservative candidate for office in California.

It was Herschensohn who produced the most notable USIA film, *John F. Kennedy: Years of Lightning, Day of Drums*, their first full-length documentary. Prior to that film, USIA was prohibited by law from showing its product in the U.S., but *Years* was given special dispensation and attracted rave reviews around the

world.

On Stevens' watch at USIA there also were four Motion Picture Academy nominations, and one Oscar for *Nine From Little Rock*, the story of the first black students admitted to an all-white school in Arkansas.

For a time, during Stevens' tenure in the motion picture and television sphere of USIA, then-NBC White House correspondent John Chancellor had been persuaded by President Johnson ("You mean to tell me if I can send boys over to Vietnam, I can't get you to go down to Independence Avenue?") to run another of the USIA divisions, *The Voice of America*. Directors Chancellor and Stevens, two anti-bureaucrats, used to take lunch together in downtown Washington to commiserate about their frustrations. Chancellor dubbed those meetings The Four M's—Many Martini Mixed Media lunches.

After five years, Stevens was ready for new worlds to conquer. He found them in a combination of his new and old loves, public service and motion pictures.

In the mid-sixties, Stevens had been appointed to the Planning Committee for the Kennedy Center, which put him squarely in the midst of the arts scene in Washington. At the same time, legislation creating the National Endowment for the Arts was being debated in Congress. Stevens saw that film was not—horrors!—included as an Art. So he did what any citizen seeking redress of his grievances should do, he lobbied. Senator Hubert Humphrey and others were sympathetic and managed to correct the omission. So in keeping with the guidelines of the NEA bill, the Johnson Administration created The American Film Institute, a nonprofit, nongovernment corporation, and appointed George Stevens Jr. to be its Founding Director.

The story of the AFI's development stands alone, and has only indirect bearing on this television tale. Suffice

is to say, that in its 25-year existence, AFI has "rescued" more than 14,000 classic American films and stored them in the Library of Congress; set up a comprehensive film bibliography for students; established a theater in Washington's Kennedy Center, and took over a Beverly Hills estate to create The AFI Center For Advanced Film Studies.

To jumpstart national recognition of AFI, Stevens dreamed up the AFI's *Life Achievement Award*, combined it with a gala dinner studded with movie stars, and sold the whole package to CBS in 1973. It didn't hurt that Jack Schneider, then head of the CBS Broadcast Group, was an original trustee. Schneider recalls booking then-President Nixon for the first *Salute*, which turned out to be good news, for the prestige it added, and bad news, for the hostilities that developed between the Secret Service and the hustled-around movie stars. But, Schneider adds, they've now gotten used to each other and get along, as the *Kennedy Center Honors* weekends demonstrate.

The first of Stevens' television tradition-in-the-making productions was the AFI Salute to "that individual whose talent has in a fundamental way contributed to the filmmaking art; whose accomplishments have been acknowledged by scholars, critics, professional peers and the general public, and whose work has stood the test of time." The AFI's Board of Trustees votes for each year's honoree; those trustees and the rest of the Hollywood elite pay a thousand bucks a ticket to attend the dinner and presentation, and the event is televised on all three networks in rotation.

This entire procedure, structure and production had its origin when the

year-old AFI was given a grant to produce a film about the great director John Ford. Stevens produced *Directed by John Ford*; the director was Peter Bogdanovich.

"It was an illustration of how fascinating the examination of a great career can be," Stevens recalls. "We screened it at the Directors Guild on Sunset Boulevard. Ford, William Wyler, Fred Zinneman and my father were there. I remember my father saying that sitting in the same room with Jack Ford and seeing

the span of his work laid out before you in two hours was thrilling."

The first *Lifetime Achievement Award* went to John Ford, followed by such other master directors as Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock, Frank Capra, John Huston, Billy Wilder and David Lean. Interspersed over the twenty years of *Salutes* have also been the *ne plus ultra* stars: James Cagney, Bette Davis, Henry Fonda, Fred Astaire, Jimmy Stewart, etc. etc. The 1994 salutee was Jack Nicholson.

**T**he pattern that George Stevens established back in 1973 at these events became the model of the *Kennedy Center Honors* and the sports heroes show, *The Great Ones*. An instantly-recognizable MC sets the tone and the content of the show; Gregory Peck played that role for a number of *Salutes*, Walter Cronkite filled the bill for the past ten years at the Kennedy Center, and Tom Brokaw presided over the first sports tributes.

Each program includes film and still pictures of the honoree's childhood, film clips of his or her productions, (or triumphs, in the case of the sports stars), tributes from peers and audience shots of celebrities. For the

*"I begin with a principle: respect for the audience. I believe the audience is ready for beauty, quality and intelligence on the screen."*

*Kennedy Center Honors*, add production numbers from Broadway shows, ballets or other performances of the performing arts.

After five years, the *AFI Salutes* were a going concern when George Stevens turned his attention back East and attacked the problem of financing the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Honoring legends of the motion picture industry for their lifetime achievements had worked so well, why not broaden the scope of those honors to more of the performing arts, and in the process raise money for the Kennedy Center? Why not, indeed.

For his filmmakers' salutes, Stevens had no need to seek basic advice—the film industry was home to him. To make the best television show out of the expanded concept, he reached out to the best in the television business and came up with a lucky choice: Nick Vanoff, highly successful producer of musical variety shows like *Hollywood Palace*, the *Julie Andrews Show* and countless specials. Vanoff had come a long way, Horatio Alger-style, from holding cuecards for Perry Como and helping Bill Harbach produce the original *Tonight* show with Steve Allen, to owning the Columbia Gower Street studios and a post-production company and producing Broadway shows. Before he died in 1991, Vanoff had co-produced every Kennedy Center Honors show, with Harbach contributing to a number of them. Both of them gave their expert services, pro bono.

Today Don Mischer is the co-producer of the *Kennedy Center Honors*, twenty years after working for Stevens at the USIA. Mischer has directed many *Honors* shows and a slew of specials over the years.

Each year, the Artists Committee for the *Kennedy Center Honors* nominates musicians, singers, actors, dancers, playwrights and screen writers to be honored. There are 120 members of the Artists' Committee; when their

nominations are tabulated, five achievers in their fields are chosen. Looking over the fifteen years of Honors recipients, it is hard to think of a name that should have been there and wasn't. Even Katherine Hepburn, notoriously difficult to pin down for what she saw as a self-serving appearance, capitulated in 1990.

**T**he first year, 1978, Marian Anderson, Fred Astaire, George Balanchine, Richard Rogers and Arthur Rubenstein were the honorees; in 1993, for the first time a television star was included—Johnny Carson. Sitting in the Presidential Box with him in December were conductor Georg Solti, dance company pioneer Arthur Mitchell, gospel singer Marion Williams and composer Steven Sondheim. Over the years, honorees have run the gamut from Ella Fitzgerald to Beverly Sills, from Benny Goodman to Eugene Ormandy, from Lucille Ball to Helen Hayes.

Steven's calls *The Kennedy Center Honors* "a scary success." Ticket prices were \$250 in the '70s. When Bonita Wrathner and other friends of President Reagan came on the Board, they saw the potential windfall for the ever-needy Kennedy Center and gradually raised the ticket prices to their current astronomical height of \$1500 (and you can't get one.) The Center now receives about \$2 million from each *Honors* performance.

The show itself combines film and live elements that sometimes seem impossible to get together on that stage at that hour. The "most nervous year," according to Stevens, was a few years ago when he and Nick Vanoff scheduled an appearance by the Red Army Chorus. The Chorus had an unbreakable commitment to perform in Detroit that Sunday afternoon; the curtain would ring down there at 4:15. The Russians spoke only Russian. They were to join Gregory Peck, Desmond Tutu, Sidney Poitier and the

U.S. Navy Chorus onstage in Washington starting at 8.

Somehow, by frantic interpreters, chartered jet and motorcycle escorts, it all came together. "The Lord always smiles on *The Kennedy Center Honors*," says Stevens.

The Sunday night show on the stage of the handsome Kennedy Center Opera House, with multiple cameras taping it, is only part of the package that participants unwrap. On Saturday night there is a black-tie dinner at the State Department for the five honorees, attended by a rare mix of politicians, movie stars and prominent Washingtonians. On Sunday, the West Coast and New York visitors and honorees attend a reception at the White House; the President and First Lady come across town with them to the Honors show.

There is a dinner in the Great Hall of the Kennedy Center after the program, with dancing to two renowned orchestras, one of them usually being Count Basie. The audience, which includes Administration and Congressional leaders and their corporate hosts, is very much part of the show. Reaction shots throughout the telecast dwell on the faces everyone knows, just as they do in the *AFI Salutes* and *The Great Ones*.

Each December from Washington, Stevens produces two totally different specials. The other is called, understandably enough, *Christmas In Washington*. It originates in the magnificent National Building Museum and features choruses, choirs and individual singers as well as the President of the United States.

Conceived by Stevens as kind of a "Nice Christmas card to the nation—a beautiful Christmas concert that families could enjoy," it is directed by a multi-Emy winner, Dwight Hemion. The audience is invited by NBC, which carries the program during the Christmas holidays. Past shows have starred Julio Iglesias, Natalie Cole, Diahann Carroll and Pat Boone. There

is a charitable aspect here, too, comparable to the dollars donated to the AFI by *Salute* and to the Kennedy Center by the *Honors*; a substantial sum is given to Children's Hospital in Washington.

Not long ago, the fourth instant annual tradition was suggested to George Stevens by his 24-year-old son Michael. "Why not honor legends of sports as well as movies and performing arts, Dad?" he may have worded it, and Dad saw the possibilities. What it turned out to be was *The Great Ones*, a rousing, emotional show.

Taped in yet another arena large enough to hold a thousand-fan audience, this time Washington's famous Constitution Hall, its premiere last June honored Arnold Palmer, Wilma Rudolph, Karim Abdul Jabbar—and Mohammed Ali, who brought down the house when he said to his medal's presenter, "If I'd known there was this much interest, I might make a comeback!"

The MC of *The Great Ones* was Tom Brokaw, who said "For the first time, George Stevens has taken this national fascination with our folk heroes and given them the find of recognition they can't get anywhere else. Over the years, George Stevens has brought his own innate sense of elegance and taste and sense of the important to the small screen in a variety of programs."

**H**is old lunching pal John Chancellor sums up Stevens this way: "George combines the cinematic skill of a great movie director with the social graces of a veteran diplomat and the organizing ability of an infantry commander."

The Stevens television-cum-film-making empire consists of an office in Georgetown overlooking the Francis Scott Key Bridge on the Potomac. He has no permanent staff, though Sara Lukinson comes aboard in August of

each year to oversee research on the Kennedy Center honorees, Catherine Shields works on the *AFI Salutes*, and free-lance associates and editors come and go. In addition to his Georgetown office, where the actual putting-together of the shows' elements happens, Stevens works out of an office in the Kennedy Center where there is hardly room on the walls for plaques and lucite souvenirs of his prestigious productions.

It's hard to pigeonhole George Stevens, Jr., as filmmaker, television producer, writer or promoter. When he was invited by Edmund Morris to participate in a conference of historians, he realized that maybe that was one of his job descriptions, too.

His thoughts about the near and distant future? "I enjoy traveling in both the film and television worlds, and I don't think there are too many people lucky enough to do that. I've chosen to live in Washington, and living in a different place from everybody else in the business causes me to do different kind of work."

Stevens describes his philosophy of programming this way. "I begin with a principle: respect for the audience. I believe the audience is ready for beauty, quality and intelligence on the screen. I try to leave things between the lines for the audience to discover and hope that the discovery will move them or make them laugh." ■

Richard Krolik is a Washington, D. C. journalist and a former television program executive and producer with NBC and Time Life.

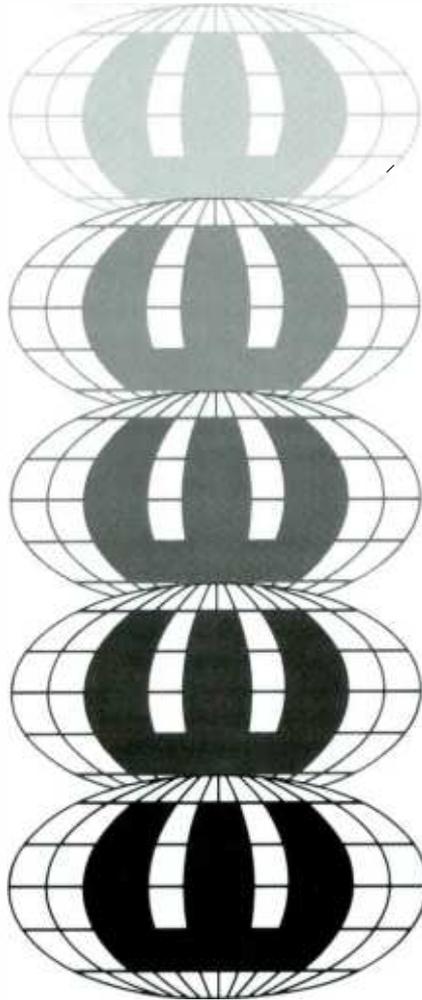
## REPLAY

### From Princess Adelaide to Princess Di

*"As with our colleges, so with a hundred 'modern improvements', there is an illusion about them; there is not always a positive advance. The devil goes on exacting compound interest to the last for his early share and numerous succeeding investments in them. Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which detract our attention from serious things. They are but improved means to an unimproved end, an end which it was already too easy to arrive at—as railroads lead to Boston or New York.*

*"We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate . . . We are eager to tunnel under the Atlantic and bring the old world some weeks nearer to the new; but perchance the first news that will leak through into the broad, flapping American ear will be that the Princess Adelaide has the whooping cough."*

—Henry David Thoreau  
Walden, 1854



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# BROADCASTING, BULLETS AND BALLOTS

Television and radio leaders from the new nations of the old Soviet Union discover that building new democratic systems of communications is tough and complex. At the Carter Center in Atlanta, and abroad, they meet regularly with American colleagues to explore ways to cover elections, minorities, ethnic conflicts— everything from programming concepts to barter deals.

**BY SARAH OATES**

**W**hen Eduard Sagalaev, president of TV 6 in Russia, arrived at a meeting of broadcasting leaders at The Carter Center of Emory University in Atlanta last November, he carried with him spent gun cartridges he had picked up from his office floor in Moscow.

Sagalaev, who is co-chair with former President Jimmy Carter of the Commission on Radio and Television Policy, recalled how shaken he had been to see his workplace, located across from the Russian White House, littered with the debris of battle when he came to work on October 3.

"It prompted me to think seriously about how difficult it is to kill a totalitarian system and create democracy," he told his colleagues on the commission.

The month after reactionary forces

stormed central television studios in Russia as part of the battle between President Yeltsin and parliament, broadcasting leaders from the former Soviet Union and the United States met at the Carter Center to continue to discuss how to improve telecommunications. There have been enormous changes in broadcasting systems in the former Soviet Union in recent years, changes that have kept pace—and sometimes outstripped—massive political shifts. At the same time, the Commission on Radio and Television Policy has been working to improve broadcasting around the globe, particularly the challenges faced in those new independent states.

"Television is the heartbeat of democracy, the people's opportunity to judge for themselves the performance of government," says Jimmy Carter.

When changes in the Soviet Union started making history in the 1980s under Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet leaders decided to use the mass media to prepare society for change. The officials backed the introduction

of new television and radio programs, lively announcers and a flood of news and information to replace the staid broadcasts of an earlier era.

Halfway around the world, researchers at The Carter Center felt the same insistent tug of historic change as they watched live Soviet programs through a satellite link in Atlanta. The scope of Soviet telecommunications was then shifting on almost a weekly basis as journalists pushed the limits of *glasnost*, the new Soviet policy that encouraged a wider range of news coverage. It was the march of new images on the screen, including some critical coverage of the Afghan war by Soviet journalists, that led President Carter to weigh the importance of a global project to develop telecommunications policy. After talks with Gorbachev, the Commission on Radio and Television Policy was formed in 1990 to provide a forum for leaders in U.S. and Soviet television and radio to meet, exchange views and discuss policy.

There has been a great deal of change around the world since the Commission was formed. In 1991, a failed coup ushered in the end of the Soviet era and 15 new nations inherited the Soviet television and radio systems. Instead of discussions between representatives from two countries, Commission members from the 15 New Independent States and the United States now exchange views.

This unique group has grappled with many of the most sensitive issues of journalism, including fair coverage of ethnic minorities, balanced reporting on elections and drawing the line between financial sponsorship and freedom of the press. From those debates—sometimes waged fiercely among communications professionals from the same part of the world—the commission has drafted resolutions and developed projects to foster global education on television and radio policy.



*President Carter and Dr. Ellen Mickiewicz announcing the publication of **Television and Elections**, a guidebook outlining policy options for telecommunications in December 1992.*

The Commission does not search for a single policy or plan, says Dr. Ellen Mickiewicz, a Duke University professor specializing in the communications of the New Independent States and director of the Commission. Instead, Commission members pool their knowledge and experience from vastly different systems to conceive of a range of policy approaches. For example, when the Commission discussed the delicate problems of covering ethnic conflict—whether it is in Azerbaijan or East-Central Los Angeles—commissioners agreed it was important not to ignore the event for fear of worsening the situation. Rather, the group recommended that broadcast coverage of such events include a careful explanation of the different positions, a forum for representatives from all sides of the conflict, an avoidance of extremist spokespeople and a careful separation of commentary from news coverage.

Although the commissioners work with a range of broadcasting systems in vastly different countries, certain issues such as coverage of elections, reporting on ethnic unrest and financial autonomy remain vitally important for all involved. Their experience shows that broadcasters around the globe

struggle with similar dilemmas, including challenges such as financial backers seeking to influence programming, extremist political candidates who demand equal coverage, and accusations from both sides in an ethnic conflict that coverage was biased and unfair.

"These are basically unsolvable problems and tensions in political and economic life. What is important is to recognize them and try to address the interests of the public," says Dr. Mickiewicz. This year, she became the first American to be honored by the 120,000-member Journalists Union of Russia during its annual Press Day and was presented in January with an award at the Kremlin's Palace of Congresses for the Commission's "services to promote democratic media."

Just as in the United States, television is now the major player in the media market in the former Soviet Union. Telecommunications projects completed during Soviet rule opened vast territories to television and radio, and the penetration of the electronic media should soar as digital technology and other innovations increase the scope of broadcasting. Even now, in part because of skyrocketing newsprint costs, over 80 percent of the population of the New Independent States depends on television as the primary source of news and information.

The Commission on Radio and Television Policy meets twice a year. A working group of media practitioners

and specialists from many nations gathers each spring to identify and discuss important issues. In the fall, there is a broader discussion with the entire Commission, which creates a set of policy suggestions at the meeting. The full Commission meetings alternate between sites in the former Soviet Union and in the United States. This fall, the Commission meets in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Its co-chairs are President Carter and Sagalaev, president of both the Federation of Journalists' Unions and Moscow Independent Broadcasting Corp. (TV 6). One of the first private television networks in the former Soviet Union, The Moscow Independent Broadcasting Corp. is a partner with Turner Broadcasting System Inc.

The Commission is a joint initiative of The Carter Center of Emory University and the De Witt Wallace Center for Communications and Journalism of Duke University in Durham, N.C. The Commission receives substantial financial support from the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation, with its working group sessions each Spring co-

sponsored by the Aspen Institute's Communications and Society Program.

"This Commission started its work when *glasnost* had just appeared in the Soviet Union and it served as kind of an accelerator for the *glasnost* process in this country," explains Sagalaev, who was a popular television personality as well as a pioneer-

*There are always surprises at the meeting as people who have spent decades working in broadcasting examine how they run their operations. When the Commission discussed coverage of elections, American members fiercely disagreed with each other about a recommendation to follow the European model and give free air time for campaign advertising.*

ing head of youth and news programming in the Soviet Union. "In other words, it helped to stop the Cold War and the ideological war."

The organization continued in a vital role after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Commissioners from the former Soviet republics met and exchanged views at a time when there were few organized links among the successor states. During the difficult period, the Commission was able to make concrete suggestions about the important problems of covering elections and widespread ethnic tensions.

"It was the breakup of the culture—human and economic and informational," Sagalaev says. "Certain elements that could stop the further breakup were necessary to create democracy and civilized structures that could replace the totalitarian system."

"Our Commission managed to overcome those obstacles and to organize a kind of a dialogue between such important mass media as radio and television and consequently to organize a dialogue between viewers and listeners," Sagalaev adds. "The Commission became a factor to make peace and maintain the general information sphere."

Members from both the United States and the New Independent States benefit from discussions as they listen to the experiences of other countries and often reassess their own situations. The 1993 meeting focused on the changing economic relations arising from democratization, privatization and new technologies, with the discussion ranging from the philosophical to the highly practical.

In large part, the discussion centered on the challenges of fledgling stations under new ownership developing where one central government had long exerted strong control. With hundreds of stations and dozens of networks emerging from the old system, some serious problems have

become apparent, among them aging equipment, the need to balance budgets, developing advertising policies and attracting steady advertising revenue in difficult economic climates.

Although these countries are at different stages of development, they face similar problems in telecommunications. The Commission identified four critical areas for work: financing public service programming; strategies for modernizing video production and delivery equipment; improving the quality of programming; and disseminating information about economic reform and free market systems.

Broadcast leaders from the New Independent States stressed that there is a pressing need for equipment. Even information about critical equipment—its cost, maintenance and compatibility with existing systems—is scarce. In response, the Commission developed recommendations that the financing of the infrastructure and management of broadcasting receive a high priority for international aid, as high as that of constructing roads or power plants. Without adequate



*Eduard Sagalaev*

equipment, the emerging broadcasting industry in the New Independent States will find it difficult to survive.

"Everything else is theoretical unless we solve this problem," says Tatyana Bolshakova, Commission member and executive director of the Moscow-based International Association of Radio and Television.

The commission hopes to facilitate programs to provide material assistance or programming that struggling stations can get through barter. The commission also suggested that states in the former Soviet Union use the newer digital technology. Although such systems may be more expensive initially, they would have greater capability and be more cost-effective in the long run.

State-of-the-art equipment may aid development, but the coverage itself remains the more critical element. Even if the technique is simple, the message can be quite clear. For example, President Carter points out that in the United States, the most widely seen television pictures were amateur tapes of the Rodney King beating. While broadcasting production resources may have suffered in recent economic and political strife in the former Soviet Union, Commission members say that their highly trained staff and large viewerships are excellent assets to attract investment from the West.

"We have enormous riches—our audience and our personnel," says commission member Nugzar Popkhadze, who is vice president of TV 6 in

Moscow and vice chairman of the Confederation of Journalists' Unions.

Other proposals drafted at the 1993 meeting included encouraging grants to stations in the former Soviet Union to make or purchase quality programming. Some of the more specific suggestions included the idea of discouraging piracy by using a consortium of American program suppliers to provide a package of programming at no charge for two years to reward stations that do not use pirated material. In addition, broadcasters in the New Independent States should recognize the special need to educate the public about the economic issues during the movement to privatization and market economies. Included among the suggestions were the showing of documentary programs on businesses; featuring business experts on talk shows; and using economic themes on entertainment programs.

The 1994 Commission meeting will look at ways to guarantee the independence of radio and television around the globe, whether the systems are state-owned, private, commercial or publicly owned. The discussion will involve some of the vital questions in developing systems, such as what to do with state telecommunications assets and how to resist governmental pressure on programming.

There are many difficult questions in this area, such as whether the media's role is that of a state watchdog or state supporter. Viewers around the globe are raising concerns about community values, issues of

*The 1992 meeting centered around the coverage of ethnic conflict as ethnic tension flared into violence across the former Soviet Union—and Los Angeles. Participants from around the globe asked the same questions: Is there a way to cover ethnic conflict without fueling violence and hatred?*

violence, and the possibility of limiting certain types of broadcasts.

There are always surprises at the meetings as people here or overseas who have spent decades working in broadcasting re-examine how they run their operations. When the commissioners discussed coverage of elections, American members fiercely disagreed with each other about a recommendation to follow the European model and give free air time for campaign advertising. The Commission developed three general recommendations for television and radio systems to foster democratic elections: give voters the information they need to make informed decisions; keep journalists free from government and business pressures; and give candidates fair access to television.

At each fall meeting, the commissioners compile a report that includes the pros and cons of their recommendations. The report from the 1991 meeting on election coverage became the central theme of a guidebook *Television and Elections*, written by Dr. Mickiewicz and Charles Firestone of the Aspen Institute. That guidebook includes examples of how television systems around the world deal with the challenges of election coverage, including equal time for candidates and paid political advertising.

It is clear that this guidebook has had some influential readers, including Russian President Boris Yeltsin. In 1993, President Yeltsin cited the guidelines in this book when he decreed a media and elections law that guaranteed parliamentary candidates equal access to television. In addition, officials in Latvia and Lithuania used the book in

their development of electoral campaign coverage.

*Television and Elections* has been published in Belarusan, Hungarian, Russian and Ukrainian. Work also is under way on editions in Armenian, Georgian, Kazakh and Lithuanian.

A second guidebook, *Television/ Radio News and Minorities*, based on the Commission meeting held in Kazakhstan in 1992, was published in English in May of this year. The Russian language edition will be published soon.

**W**hile the 1991 meeting focused on elections, the 1992 meeting centered around the coverage of ethnic conflict as ethnic tension flared into violence across the former Soviet Union—and in California. Participants from around the globe asked the same question: Is there a way to cover ethnic conflict without fueling violence and hatred? Although there was some concern about the negative effects of drawing attention to conflict, there was strong agreement among commissioners that the television public must be informed about issues of ethnic conflict and tension.

"Especially in times of crisis, citizens need to know the truth," Jimmy Carter said at the 1992 meeting.

Many of the ideas generated at these meetings have produced more than

talk or reports; they have been translated into projects. In the same meeting room in which the Soviet Union was dissolved at the end of 1991, commissioners agreed in 1992 that there was a need for a television company to pool resources in the New Independ-



*Bobozhon Ikrobov of Tajikistan TV and Jimmy Carter in Atlanta. Carpet portrait was the gift of the Prime Minister of Tajikistan.*

dent States. A company called Mir (which means both "peace" and "world" in Russian) was formed last year among nine of the former Soviet republics and is headed by commission member Gadilbek Shalakhmetov; it is the first independent multi-national broadcast network serving the former Soviet Union. Shalakhmetov, who started his television career as a television reporter in 1963, is the former head of the Kazakhstan State Television network.

The new television company is funded by contributions from its founding countries and is granted airtime on Russia's Channel 1 (Ostankino), which covers the vast territory of the former Soviet Union. The Mir network was launched June 20, 1993, by a program aired on Ostankino and currently broadcasts three hours a week. According to Shalakhmedov, Mir is particularly concerned with the principle of "profound respect for the history and culture" for all peoples and puts a priority on the coverage of official information from its members as well as coverage of major cultural events and international competitions.

There have been several other projects inspired by the interaction at Commission meetings. Members helped draft a charter of media independence for new stations to uphold standards of operation, oversight and compliance. It has been adopted by a group of independent stations in the former Soviet Union.

During a meeting in the Central Asian nation of Kazakhstan, President

Nursultan Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan and President Carter concluded an agreement for training television specialists, including minorities, from Kazakhstan. United States participants in the project include ABC, CBS and NBC bureaus in Moscow as well as the CNN International Professionals Program in Atlanta.

In addition, the Commission's first Visiting Media Policy Fellows from the former Soviet Union spent three weeks

this year in the United States at Duke University, The Carter Center and CNN. They returned home with a host of new ideas and projects that they hope to implement in their broadcast organizations in Armenia, Belarus and Russia.

In the future, the Commission plans to widen distribution of its guidebooks to share its policy suggestions with as broad an audience as possible. In addition, it would like to foster direct ties, ranging from production to broadcast projects, between communications companies in the United States and the former Soviet Union. As part of that effort, the Commission invited leading

telecommunications experts from the U.S. to meet with commissioners at the 1993 meeting.

"Through the Commission, communications with a future partner in the former Soviet Union can be easier," Mickiewicz says, pointing out that both public and private systems are represented on the Commission. At the last meeting, representatives of United States companies and

*"Television and radio have the unique capacity to speak to the diversities within countries, but that powerful capacity carries a responsibility: How can the media systems of ethnically mixed states integrate all groups within their arena, and how can individuals from diverse cultures find a way to communicate with each other."*

*—Jimmy Carter*

Commission members met both as a group and privately to discuss future projects together. More than 50 business people interested in media and related ventures in the region also attended a business market forum at the Carter Center.

Radio and television companies of the former Soviet Union plan to play a greater role in the world information arena, Sagalaev states. In addition, there is the need to strengthen the independence of the mass media. The systems could benefit from professional training, technical help and further financial partnership with enterprises in other countries.

"The Commission has been of great help in ushering in a new era in telecommunications in the former Soviet Union that is a far cry from the coverage dictated by the Communist Party," Sagalaev adds. "It allowed us in just a short period of time to leave

that whole life behind—we had to give up what we had before and become a part of the civilized world." ■

**Sarah Oates, a former journalist, is working on her doctoral degree in political science at Emory University in Atlanta. Oates, who is specializing in the study of communications in the former Soviet Union, has worked with the Commission on Radio and Television Policy since 1992.**

**CO-CHAIRS:**

Jimmy Carter  
Eduard Sagalaev

39th President of the United States  
President, Moscow Independent Broadcasting Corporation  
Chairman, Confederation of Journalists' Unions

**Members from the United States**

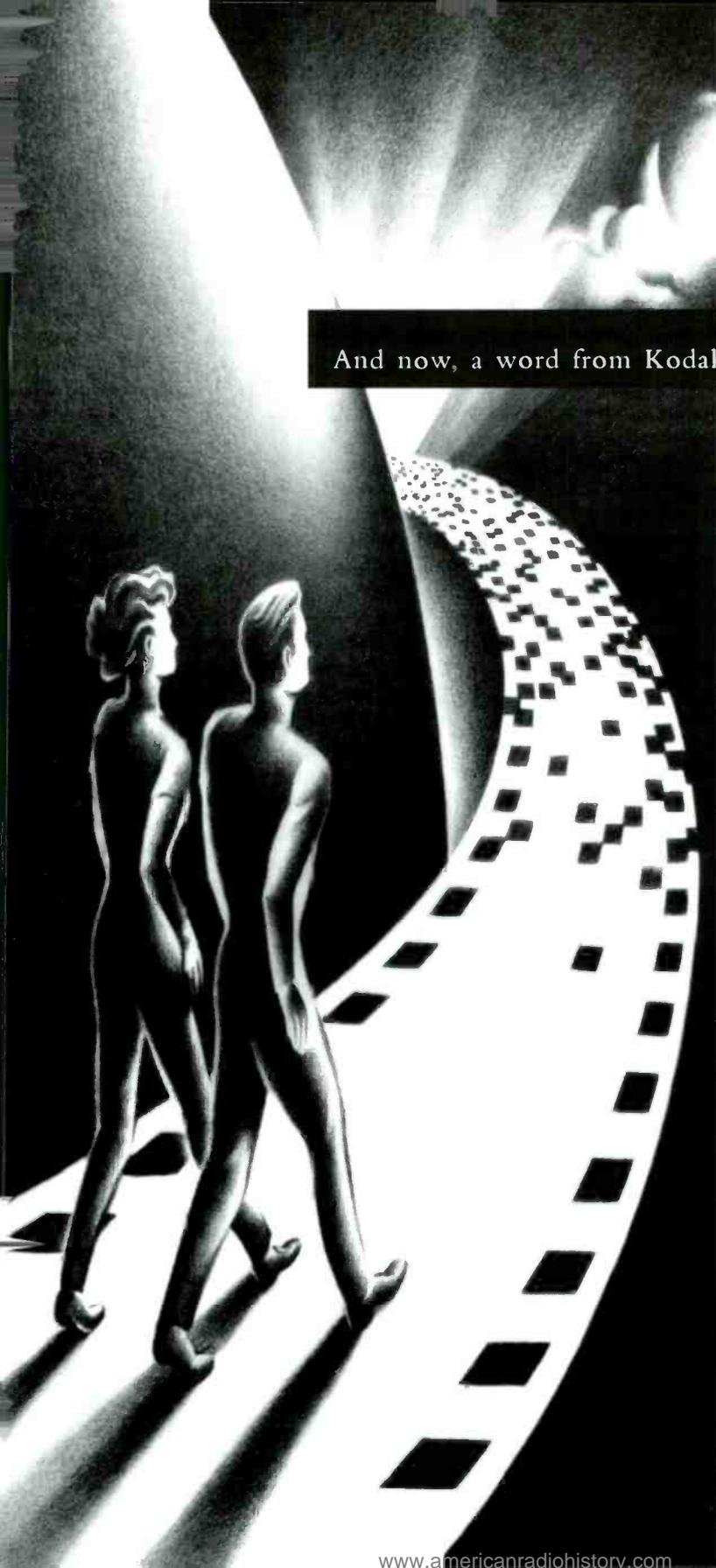
Roone Arledge	President, ABC News
Ervin Duggan	President, Public Broadcasting Service
Reed Hundt	Chairman, Federal Communications Commission
Tom Johnson	President, Cable News Network (CNN)
Andrew Lack	President, NBC News
Edward Markey	Member, United States Congress
Ellen Mickiewicz	Fellow, The Carter Center Director, DeWitt Wallace Center for Communications and Journalism
James R. Shepley	Professor of Public Policy, Duke University
Eric Ober	President, CBS News
Preston Padden	President, Distribution, Fox Broadcasting
Monroe Price	Professor, Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law
Anthony Riddle	Chair, Alliance For Community Media
Alfred Sikes	President, New Media and Technology, Hearst Corporation Former Chairman, FCC
Ted Stevens	Member, United States Congress
Al Swift	Member, United States Congress
Daniel Yankelovich	Chairman, Daniel Yankelovich Group, Inc. (DYG, Inc.) President, The Public Agenda Foundation

### **Members from the New Independent States**

Tigran Akopyan	Chairman, State Board of Radio and Television for the Republic of Armenia
Tatyana Bolshakova	Executive Director, International Association of Radio and Television (MART)
Mikhail Fedotov	President, Russian Copyright Society
Boris Grushin	President, Vox Populi, Public Opinion Research Center
Vitaly Ignatenko	General Director, Information and Telegraph Agency of Russia (ITAR-TASS)
Bobojon Ikromov	Chairman, State Television and Radio Broadcasting Committee of Tajikistan
Vakhtang Khundadze	General Director, Television and Radio Broadcasting Service of the Republic of Georgia
Aleksandr Kopeyka	Member, Commission for Draft Legislation for the President of Russia
Bella Kurkova	Chair, St. Petersburg Television and Radio Company (Channel 5) Deputy Chair, Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company
Babek Mamedov	Chairman, State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company of the Azerbaijan Republic
Aygar Misan	General Director, Russian Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (Moskova)
Sherkhan Murtaza	Chairman, Kazakh Television and Radio Broadcasting Company
Nikolai Okhmakevich	President, State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company of Ukraine
Kadyr Omurkulov	Director, State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company of the Republic of Kyrgystan
Annageldy Orazdurdyev	Chairman, National Television and Radio Broadcasting Company of Turkmenistan
Mikhail Poltoranin	Director, Russian Federal Information Center
Nugzar Popkhadze	Vice President, Moscow Independent Broadcasting Corporation
Oleg Poptsov	Chairman, Russian Federation Television and Radio Company
Imands Rakins	General Director, Latvian Television
Gadilbek Shalakhmetov	Chairman, Intergovernmental Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (Mir)
Hagi Shein	General Director, Television Company of Estonia
Aleksey Simonov	Chairman of the Board, Glasnost Defense Foundation Co-chairman, Provisional Committee for Television and Radio Licensing Secretary, Union of Cinematographers
Sergei Stankevich	Advisor to Russian President Boris N. Yeltsin
Aleksandr Stolyarov	Chairman, National Television and Radio Broadcasting Company of the Republic of Belarus
Laymonas Tapinas	General Director, Lithuanian Television
Mikhail Taratuta	San Francisco Bureau Chief, Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (Ostankino)
Adrian Usaty	General Director, National Radio and Television of Moldova
Shavkat Yakhyaev	Chairman, State Television and Radio Company of the Republic of Uzbekistan
Alexander Yakovlev	President, Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Co. (Ostankino)
Anatoly Yezhelev	President, Telemark Television and Radio Corp. Chairman, St. Petersburg Union of Journalists
Tatyana Zaslavskaya	President, Russian Center for Public Opinion Research Member, Academy of Sciences of Russia
Yassen Zassoursky	Dean, Department of Journalism, Moscow State University Professor, Journalism and Literature, Moscow State University
Leonid Zolotarevsky	Director, Center for International Relations, Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (Ostankino)

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Ivo Mathe	General Director, Czech Television



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# REVIEW & COMMENT

## THE HOUSE THAT ROONE BUILT

BY JIM SNYDER

### **The Inside Story of ABC News**

by Marc Gunther

Little Brown and Company: New York

**T**his is one of the most extensive examinations to date of the remarkable career of Roone Arledge at ABC. In his 25 years at ABC Sports he wrote the book on how to televise sports of all kinds and changed the viewing habits of millions. As head of ABC News since 1977 he has served longer than any network news president in history. He also has led ABC News to number one. It wasn't easy, and it took longer than he expected, and there was more trial and error than he would have liked, but the *ABC World News Tonight* is now accepted as the nation's most

popular evening news program. When the big stories break, ABC News specials usually attract the largest audiences.

It took an enormous amount of maneuvering and agonizing but Arledge's creation of *20/20*, *Nightline*, *David Brinkley's Washington*, *Prime Time Live*, *Turning Point* and *Day One* has brought millions in additional revenue for Capital Cities/ABC and in savings on the cost of prime-time programming.

This book appears when American broadcasting is awash in predictions about how soon the super information highway will arrive and how devastating it will be to the commercial networks and their news divisions. Some see a turning away from the traditional media by millions of Americans who will prefer to sit at their home computers and devise their own news programs. These predictions feed off the disenchantment of the American people with some of the media and the political system which

they see as ignoring their major concerns.

Marc Gunther, however, ignores all that to concentrate on the Arledge experience at ABC, his brilliant producing, his profound effect on the network news competition, his development of a cast of news stars—and how the new management of Cap Cities/ABC that took over in 1986 apparently decided he was as inefficient as he was creative and so moved to curb his power.

The story of Arledge's defeat in his battle with the tough-minded management is the best-told story in the book. Gunther writes a balanced account. Cap Cities management was right in demanding more modern management and budget control at ABC News and Sports. There was merit in the Arledge argument that not much needed fixing in his division; that he and his program had made, and were making, handsome profits, \$50 million a year at *20/20* for example.

Shortly after their takeover in 1986, Cap Cities management stripped Arledge of his presidency of ABC sports. In October, 1991, when then CEO Dan Burke forced on Arledge lawyer Stephen Weiswasser as executive vice president of ABC News, Arledge's 14 years of absolute power at ABC News ended and ABC News was no longer his fiefdom. When Burke made the move, he was armed with comments from ABC News executives Paul Friedman and Bob Murphy that Arledge was "inaccessible and unwilling to delegate". Peter Jennings told Burke Arledge was "a great leader but an inattentive manager". Arledge, now 63, survived the painful "restructuring" that Weiswasser supervised and now has a \$3 million contract that carries him into 1996, but ABC News is now structured to run without him. While struggling with Weiswasser, Arledge described the situation as "Kafkaesque." Weiswasser, who came from a big time Washington law firm, not a television sta-

tion or network news operation, disagreed with Arledge that high-priced talent was needed to host new magazine shows.

"It is not necessary", he said, "to go after other people's high-priced talent." Such tales spark sympathy for Arledge from any broadcast journalist turned executive who is viewed with suspicion by the managers above him because he was not raised among balance sheets.

**T**his book was Gunther's idea. Arledge, says Gunther, did not agree to be interviewed until Gunther was well along on interviews with a list of 160 other people, mostly ABC News staffers. Arledge then granted eight interviews, many over lunch and none less than two hours, Gunther reports.

Gunther emerged from the experience with a high regard for Arledge. He says Arledge will "go down in the history of broadcasting as a giant." However, newspaper reporter Gunther dutifully compiles a long list of the Arledge shortcomings. It moves from arrogance, poor administrative skills, and massive ego through cruel detachment, bad judgments on personnel, failure to stay focused, and relentless grabbing of credit for the good and adroit dodging of blame for the bad. After all those years in power Arledge, reports Gunther, was viewed by ABC News staffers "with admiration, respect, fear and occasional loathing."

Gunther also interviewed many of the ABC News star correspondents and producers. Given that many of his interview subjects are highly paid, battle-scarred veterans of the network news wars, including years of fending off attack-dog print critics of TV news, Gunther must have been exposed to much carefully crafted comment. His experiences could be compared to fighting your way through several battalions of Washington spin doctors.

One veteran of several years

service at ABC News told me he found the book interesting for a few chapters but then had to put it down. "I got tired of all that spinning," he said. Other ABC folk gave the book high marks for accuracy.

Given Arledge's successful talent raids, innovative programming and world-class competitiveness, he often loomed large to the other networks. But he did spend many years playing catch-up and so had to have been influenced for good and bad by the people and strategies of his competition. Gunther does tell the story of Arledge's courting of Dan Rather which led to a huge pay raise for Rather when he decided to stay put at CBS and Tom Brokaw who became even more valuable in NBC's eyes because of Arledge's interest in him. However, it is strange that Gunther evidently did almost no interviewing at CBS, NBC or CNN. The book is flawed because Gunther sees so much of his story through the prism Arledge and/or ABC News.

Some of Gunther's praise of the Arledge career doubtless would bring argument in certain non-ABC circles in American broadcasting. For example, he ranks Arledge's impact on network news with that of William S. Paley and Edward R. Murrow. And he makes such judgments as "It was because of Arledge, more than any one else, that viewers came to expect television to bring them live, immediate coverage of major news events as they happened anywhere in the world." Gunther also relays Arledge's put-down of those who ran ABC News before him a disservice to a lot of fine reporters, editors and executives.

When he took over ABC News in 1977, Arledge called it a "graveyard." He has deprecated his predecessor Bill Sheehan as "pleasant but dull and lifeless." In a radio interview this spring on WJR Detroit, when asked about Gunther's book, Sheehan said "I cannot accept the idea that ABC News was born in 1977."

The record shows Arledge owes a lot to Sheehan, who ran ABC News from 1974 to 1977, and to Elmer Lower, who starting building the modern ABC in 1962. Sheehan was a distinguished radio broadcaster and news director at WJR, then an ABC correspondent in London, before he spent 11 years as Lower's assistant until Lower retired in 1974. Lower came to ABC from NBC News, where he was general manager of the top-ranked organization. As Gunther reports, despite budget restrictions Arledge never had to endure, Lower and Sheehan built a professional competitive news organization with many outstanding people who were later to be crucial to Arledge's success.

Early in his book Gunther notes that Arledge has not produced much of a written record of his thoughts and experiences. Strangely, despite those long interviews with Gunther, there is a shortage of quotes from Arledge, although you get the picture of the struggle between Arledge and Cap Cities management and his intense efforts to lure big name talent as well as to manage the sometimes unmanageable stars he already had—such as Barbara Walters. However, there is nothing on the valuable thoughts Arledge must have on the challenges and problems now facing networks and network news coverage, or the future of ABC News and broadcast news in general. This book does not bring us enough of what Arledge himself has to say.

Gunther closes with a nagging thought about the future of ABC News. "Creative people need a special brand of leadership. And nowhere on the horizon was there another leader like Roone Arledge." ■

**Jim Snyder is a retired vice president of news for the Post Newsweek Stations. He has spent 43 years in broadcast news as a writer, reporter, producer, news executive and an often confounded observer.**

# A PIONEER BROADCASTER REMINISCES

BY FRITZ JACOBI

## **The Best Seat in the House: The Golden Years of Radio and Television**

by Pat Weaver, with Thomas M. Coffey  
Alfred A. Knopf; New York

**I**n June of 1949 Pat Weaver joined NBC as vice-president in charge of television and director of a still-new television network. Exactly a year later I joined NBC as a senior writer in the press department. Despite the fact that I was several floors and countless echelons below Weaver, he had managed in one year to generate the kind of novelty and excitement that not only captivated a growing television audience but also made my job an endless entertainment.

He had launched *Your Show of Shows*, with Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca; *Broadway Open House*, with Jerry Lester, Morey Amsterdam and the remarkably endowed Dagmar; and *The Comedy Hour*, (later *The Colgate Comedy Hour*)—but that's another story) with Jimmy Durante, among other brilliant strokes of early programming. And of course there was also Milton Berle.

To come were such gutsy innovations as *Today*, *The Home Show* and *Tonight*; Fred Coe's *Television Playhouse*, *Robert Montgomery Presents* and *Kraft Television Theater*. Pat Weaver exerted a seminal and salutary influence on the development of television. Even without the wisdom of hindsight, those of us who were neophytes in this boisterously burgeoning new medium realized that Pat Weaver was an energizing force and a dynamic leader.

So it was with genuinely pleasur-

able anticipation that I picked up his new book, *The Best Seat in the House: The Golden Years of Radio and Television*. It pains me to report that reading these reminiscences is, with certain notable exceptions, a disappointment and an anticlimax.

What I find so baffling about this book is that Weaver was a radio writer before he became a vastly successful producer and advertising man. And for a writer, even with the help of his collaborator, Thomas M. Coffey, who has written 10 other books, including biographies of Generals Hap Arnold and Curtis LeMay, Pat Weaver's recollections are superficial, cliché-filled, lightweight and surprisingly shallow. The writing is bland, colorless and often ungrammatical. The vocabulary is limited. In short, the book has little personality and is therefore totally unrepresentative of its author, an articulate and ebullient man who deserves better from his collaborator.

**D**espite these carpings, there are some high points. One must admire Weaver's delightful candor when he writes about General Sarnoff, the Chairman of RCA, the owner of NBC, hardly one of his favorite people; his portrait of George Washington Hill, the legendary head of the American Tobacco Company, where Weaver served as advertising manager; his genuine dismay over the fact that advertising agencies were producing all the radio shows, with the networks serving simply as conduits (an attitude he later brought successfully to bear in television); his assessment of Edward Little, Chief Executive Officer of Colgate, at the time Weaver was organizing "The Comedy Hour," which Little insisted be called "The Colgate Comedy Hour."

"There was no possible arrangement that would make life with Little comfortable," Weaver writes. "In addi-

tion to being irascible, he was also ignorant. He may have know, all there was to know about soap and tooth-paste, but he knew nothing about show business. I remember him once asking me, 'Who is this Abbot N. Costello you are talking about?'

But it is for Sarnoff that Weaver reserves his most stinging vitriol. For example, when a reporter asked Weaver if Sarnoff had approved the deal that would have made NBC a major stockholder in Disney, Weaver replied "Why should a rat buy a mouse?"

When Weaver joined NBC he "had not yet discussed the job in detail with General Sarnoff, the real boss. Some of the minor details, including stock options and membership on the board of directors, were actually not so minor. We agreed to them only orally, which was my mistake, as I learned later . . . Sarnoff's love of publicity, legendary at RCA and NBC, impinged on me personally for the first time when I was quoted someplace about the technical advances that were needed—satellites, for example—before television could reach its full potential. He quickly informed me that any hardware or other technical developments at RCA were his province, and he would make all announcements about them."

Weaver also hilariously portrays George Washington Hill in meetings with his cowed executives. And for World War II veterans there is an interesting story about the slogan, "Lucky Strike Green Has Gone to War."

"In those days," Weaver writes, "there was a lot of talk about doing without items that would be needed for the war effort. I don't think green pigment was one of those items, but that sly fox George Washington Hill had obviously decided that he, too, preferred [industrial designer Raymond] Loewy's white package, and he was using the war-shortage theme to get rid of the green and, in

the process, garner some free publicity for his product."

And there is the occasional amusing anecdote, like the time Weaver was producing the Fred Allen radio program and expelled two men from the control booth because they were conversing noisily; Weaver was unaware that one was Deke Aylesworth, president of NBC, and the other was Lee Bristol, president of Bristol-Myers, the program's sponsor. Fans of Weaver's daughter, originally named Susan Alexandra, will be edified to learn that she changed her name to Sigourney after a character in a Scott Fitzgerald story.

These exceptional sections aside, however, Weaver and his collaborator seem incapable, for example, of evoking the personality of a Fred Allen, despite (or maybe because of?) Pat's long personal friendship and professional affiliation with the comedian. Where are all the wonderful Allen lines, like "In California they ought to give the oranges the vote and hang the people on trees"? When Weaver refers to agents as "treacherous and duplicitous" he missed an opportunity to quote Allen on the same subject: "You could put all the sincerity in Hollywood into the navel of a flea and still have room left over for six caraway seeds and an agent's heart." And when Weaver writes about Allen's loathing of television he could have described the television skit in which Allen is discovered watching a blank screen at 3:00 a.m.

"But Mr. Allen," says an actor impersonating a vice-president (another of Allen's *bêtes-noirs*), "there's nothing on television at three in the morning." "I know," Allen replies happily. "It's wonderful." All of this is missing and Allen comes through as a cipher, which, of course, he was anything but.

While I'm in a carping mood, how could Weaver have mentioned *Victory at Sea* without referring to its fascinating inclusion of captured German and Japanese film footage and to its

magnificent original score written by Richard Rodgers, orchestrated by Robert Russell Bennett and performed by the NBC Symphony? How could he mention *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and Fred Coe without referring to the NBC Opera Theater, Peter Herman Adler and the durable and ever-ingenious Kirk Browning? Furthermore, there is no index, a serious lack in a book of this kind.

**T**hen there is the matter of English. Where was the editor—where, indeed, was collaborator Coffey—when Weaver wrote “We sought out promising comedians whom we felt might make it big on television”? “I was still frustrated by my inability to facilitate some of my ideas.” (he means “implement”).

Were both editor and collaborator looking the other way when Weaver tacked on a Postscript, in which he covers in five pages the nearly 40 years since he left NBC? Rushed, slapdash and dense, written almost like a diary, this section should probably have been called “Afterthought.” Weaver writes that he shared office space with Joe Dine and Allan Kalmus. As *The New Yorker* magazine’s famed first editor, Harold Ross, would have scribbled in the margin of a galley proof, “Who they?” I happen to know that Kalmus and the late Joe Dine were two former NBC Press Department executives who launched their own public-relations firm, but without this description the reference is meaningless to any reader younger than 72. On the following page Weaver writes that “Henry Kaiser . . . persuaded me to accept a consultancy with him. Among other things, I oversaw *Maverick*, the big western hit show of the late fifties and early sixties.” Who he and what his relationship to *Maverick*”

Weaver can be justifiably proud of his many impressive achievements in broadcasting. After all, when he

joined NBC in 1949 the network was far behind CBS, both in radio and television, “and it was not in control of its own destiny.” He writes, “Since it had been producing few, if any, shows of its own, it was at the mercy of the advertising agencies and had to take whatever they offered. In my first three and a half years, I had turned that around. We now produced and owned nearly all of our programs, and we had so many hits that we had surpassed CBS and began to show sizable profits . . . A measure of the immediate success of *Tonight* was the fact that it made money for us from its first night on the air. *Today*, *Home* and *Tonight* together brought in \$14 million in 1954—a huge sum for those days.”

When television was in its infancy, everyone assumed that the agencies would own television programs, just as they already owned radio programs, with the networks simply providing the time slots. “Though I already had strong reservations about this system, it didn’t seem to bother anyone else, especially the other agency people,” he says. “Only the networks, it seems to me, were in a position to help television fulfill its promise. They were governed by the profit motive, to be sure, but that didn’t necessarily disqualify them. The profit motive governs most of us, giving us the incentive to compete.”

His friend Bill Paley seemed to share his philosophy as far as radio was concerned but when Weaver proposed that CBS form a television production company and own its own TV programs, Paley “listened to me politely without showing any interest in my proposal. In 1949, Paley still seemed only minimally aware of television.”

During my first few weeks as a feature writer in the NBC Press Department I met (and fled in terror from) Tallulah Bankhead, who presided over *The Big Show*, one the

final manifestations of network radio; brought to life Howdy Doody's puppet Princess Summerfall Winterspring because the producer, Roger Muir, had hired a former Copacabana chorine for the part and I was, through the magic of NBC's publicity machinery, able to make her famous overnight; explained to the viewing public how technicians made it snow on television; observed Sid Caesar, Howard Morris, Carl Reiner and Imogene Coca in rehearsal; interviewed Jerry Lester's monumental Dagmar; and rode on a private train from New York to Houston, Texas, with press agents from U.S. Steel, its advertising agency, B.B.D.&O., and the Theater Guild for an out-of-town broadcast of *Theater Guild on the Air*, the other final manifestation of network radio (the dining car never stopped serving steaks or whiskey). It was a heady time in broadcasting. There was excitement in the air.

Pat Weaver generated most of this excitement. He was one of the first giants of television programming. After more than four decades the *Today* and *Tonight* shows are still with us. His contributions to broadcasting, both radio and television—he started *Monitor* on NBC radio, too—are vast and abiding. But the definitive biography adequately describing these contributions is still to be written. ■

Fresh from the cloistered editorial corridors of Random House and *The New Yorker*, Fritz Jacobi was abruptly thrust into a world inhabited by Tallulah Bankhead, Sid Caesar, Imogene Coca, Bob and Ray, Jerry Lester, Milton Berle and Jimmy Durante. Nearly 45 years later he remembers all of this with a mixture of disbelief and joy, since he spent his later years in the soberer atmospheres of public television and academe.

## VIEWPOINT

### Information Please

*"Information Highway" is an unfortunate metaphor for the emerging telecommunications system. Like the Holy Roman Empire, which was neither holy nor Roman nor an Empire, it will not be a highway, nor will it be dedicated to information. On a highway, traffic moves (at best) in only two directions, but communications saturates a multidimensional universe. The number of potential contact points is almost infinite, since they include all the people now alive and all those who have left their traces behind them from the past.*

*"The phrase 'information highway' comes from the vocabulary of technicians preoccupied with mechanics rather than the substance of communication."*

—Leo Bogart

*"Highway to the Stars  
or Road to Nowhere?"*

*Media Studies Journal, Winter 1994*

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To the editor:

Jack Kuney's article on "Broadcasting and the Pulpit" in the last Television Quarterly was a fine tribute to the people who worked in that special area of television and radio.

There was, though, an oversight: prior to 1960 when the ABC Television Network inaugurated the Directions series, the network had not been without an ecumenical series dealing with religion in our daily lives. Beginning in 1954, ABC-TV carried for five years a distinguished public affairs series which I produced, featuring one of the nation's outstanding religious leaders, a truly original and creative thinker, The Very Reverend James A. Pike, Dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City.

Entitled Dean Pike (1954-55-56), the series title was later changed to Bishop Pike when he was elected Bishop of California (1957-58). Dean Pike originated live from the Cathedral grounds in New York City, and Bishop Pike originated weekly from ABC-TV's Hollywood studios. Although the Rt. Rev. Dr. James A. Pike was an Episcopalian, his guests included illustrious national and international scholars, theologians, religious and lay leaders of all persuasions.

The series won a number of awards for its programs on brotherhood and interdenominational understanding.

—Sincerely

Wiley F. Hance,  
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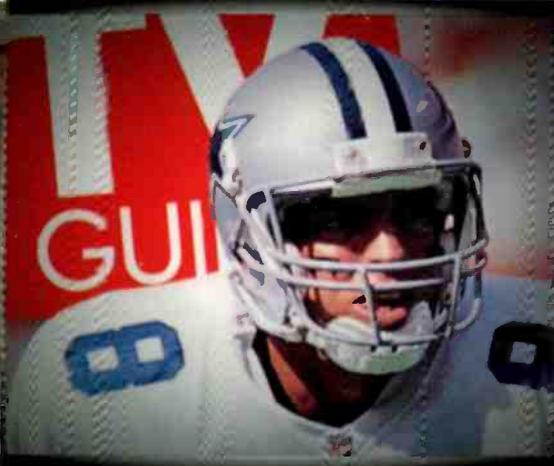
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