

THIS IS
Norman Brokenshire

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An Unvarnished Self-Portrait

by
NORMAN BROKESHIRE

DAVID MCKAY COMPANY, INC.
New York

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
VAN REES PRESS • NEW YORK

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

WHEN they said, "You must write your story," it seemed a simple thing. Much later I was to learn that it was a long, hard task if the book was to be of any value.

At the fantastic moment of its completion I am assailed by the suspicion that, having labored, I may have brought forth a mouse. Time will prove or disprove my fear. But, regardless, I must here record my thanks to a few, among the many, who stood by me during confinement.

For strength that came with thoughts of my mother and her recollections. For invaluable details—dates, places, incidents—brought forth through the endless research of my wife, who, through the years, kept notes in the strangest places. To real friends and neighbors, like Carl Eklund and Mattie Rosenhaus, whose deep, unwavering faith helped pull me through in moments of crisis. For the unquestioning loyalty of my secretary. And for the encouragement and technical collaboration of Janet Mabie—without all these and more, my story would never have been born.

NORMAN BROKENSHERE

New York
November 10, 1953

A section of illustrations will be found following page 56.

FOREWORD

FOR various reasons I found this a most absorbing story. To begin with, it is the objective and completely candid self-portrait of an able man. The full force of his personality is revealed by the almost incredible manner in which he repeatedly did everything to destroy his career. Yet despite all his failures and ineptitudes, his deep sincerity and native genius enabled him to make the most astonishing series of recurrent comebacks.

With skill Mr. Brokenshire traces the history of his long struggle with alcoholism, graphically portraying the tragic deterioration of a notable career. Perhaps the effectiveness of the book is due to the fact that Mr. Brokenshire does not follow the usual procedure of engaging in a combined scientific and philosophical dissertation concerning the malady of alcoholism.

He simply, yet dramatically, tells his life story. And in the telling we see a fine personality in a mounting conflict. Ultimately he strikes bottom. Indeed, he seems to have struck several bottoms, or perhaps the same bottom several times. But again we note that strong resiliency that brought him back to success. This is a most astounding recital of ups and downs and ultimate victory. It is an excellently written, exciting story.

I hope this book may find its way to every alcoholic. Eunice, the patient, understanding wife, may well be a profound

example and source of encouragement to every wife, husband, or parent who needs wisdom in handling his or her alcoholic.

Faith in the Higher Power (God) and the enormously effective help of understanding friends, together with his own search for an answer, eventually achieved a solution of Mr. Brokenshire's drinking problem. His treatment of the spiritual rebirth that brought victory over his hitherto undefeatable weakness is impressively and even movingly done.

Another aspect of the book that is most interesting and important is the comprehensive history of radio broadcasting, which is given in detail. To one who lived through those years it recaptures a fascinating past.

The author's descriptions of a boy's bewildering experiences of early life are done with remarkable psychological insight.

As one who has often listened with pleasure to this famed voice of radio, I take pleasure in introducing you to an interesting personality.

By the grace of God—

this is Norman Brokenshire.

NORMAN VINCENT PEALE

THIS IS
Norman Brokenshire

ONE

A THOUSAND happy incidents are not included in these pages for the reason that the surging movement of the important experiences made them side eddies. Many grotesque, ugly things that happened to me are likewise not written here, either because they would serve no purpose now, or because they are but half-remembered.

I come from a wonderful strain of hardy men and women; in the branches of the family tree you will find such names as Anglin, Jones, Goudy. Britishers they were, and Welshmen, but mostly Canadians, pioneers who came from the old country to build the new; theirs is our national story, in miniature.

Mother and Father met in church. Most of my immediate ancestors were church people. Mother sang in the choir, Father was studying for the ministry; what probably sets them aside from any other couple that fell in love, married, and had five children is the fact that they both played the cornet. This harmony of purpose led Mother and Father in the bloom of their youth on a world-wide tour of service. Heading a section of Salvation Army work took them and their cornets to London. Then Father was sent out as one of the early missionary-teachers, and my two older brothers, Lawrence and Melvin, both were born in Japan, one in Tokyo, the other in Yokohama.

Around the globe again to Manitoba, the wilderness of western Canada. Father by now was ordained and preached

the Gospel to the few who, come the Sabbath, could meet on those giant plains. For a year or two he would stay in one place but always find a reason then to move on. There would be the ambition for the next academic degree, there would be sheer wanderlust. He was a restless, I now think unhappy, soul, irritably communicating to his children reflections of an inner turmoil.

When the third child was expected, Mother left Dad to his further wanderings and trekked clear across Canada to be with her family. But the relatives in Kingston, Ontario, were too busy to entertain a pregnant wayfarer, bouncing in with two children aged five and seven, a trunk, and three worn-out suitcases, so she left everything there but her children and went on to her father, a rapids-runner-missionary, up in Nipissing County, in northern Ontario near Hudson's Bay. That's how come I, Norman Ernest Brokenshire, was born in 1898 in a place called Murcheson, with the aid of an Indian midwife. You can find Murcheson on a very large and detailed map, but only Grandpa Jones knew why anybody would deliberately go to such a place.

When my dad finally got around to taking a look at me, they tell me I was sitting on the floor, minding my own business; that when this great hulk of a man made a lunge at me, waving his huge hands and shouting at me, baby-talk fashion, "So this is my son!" I yowled in fear. It got me off to a bad start with him, and I was afraid of my dad through all the years I was at home.

Mother, on the contrary, was firm but gentle, tolerant but quietly insistent. I always admired her because of her great patience and strength.

In spite of a large and voluble family there was in me, throughout all my childhood years, a deep aloneness, hard even for me to understand. When my brother Wilbur was born seven years later, in Buffalo, New York, the family was absorbed in a new pastorate in Sloan, and an epidemic of scarlet fever; all I can remember is being compelled to take care of the baby for weeks. All in all our life was so full of church work, money worries, changes, and moving that "home," as millions of happy kids know it, passed me by.

But a kid is not unlike a dog, which will always find something to do or, when it cannot, will sleep. And so I have deep-running recollections of childhood, scattered, hazy, yet very real.

I remember sitting in a blackheart cherry tree in Port Dalhousie, Ontario, caring nothing for the passage of time while I ate big, delicious, juicy cherries, dreaming dreams. It was dinnertime when they found me, but I could eat no dinner.

I remember the long three-mile walks to the little red schoolhouse in Port Britain, sometimes with other kids, kicking up the dust, but mostly wandering the long miles alone because I had to be there a little early to light the fire in cold weather; and every day after school I had to sweep up before I could go home. You see, Dad was the teacher for the eighteen pupils. I guess keeping the place warm and clean was part of his job, too; but I didn't mind having to do it; it made me more important than the other kids.

I remember the sharp pain of the day Dad said we had to shoot Sport. Sport was a water spaniel who had got so old that he'd foul himself. But Sport was my closest friend. . . .

I remember the day I knew I wouldn't have to go to school because the snow was so heavy, the wind so strong during the night, that both doors were solidly blocked by the drifts; and I remember the fun of tunneling our way out of the house. In those days Ontario winters were tough. Planks were nailed on fence tops; when the drifts were too deep and the sun began to melt the crust, you could walk the plank.

During the real winter months we'd get into bed as is, kick off our shoes, and undress under the blankets slowly, piece by piece, as things warmed up; we pushed our clothes down by our feet and left them there so we could dress the same way, piece by piece. We didn't have "warmed, circulating, controlled air" in Ontario.

I remember trolling in Black Lake and fighting with a twenty-four-pound muskellunge; and I remember it then on the table, whole and stuffed. And I remember being beaten with the harness trace because I hadn't Paris-greened the potato plants properly. Besides the welts and the tears my

heart was broken. I *had* done the job, only I had made the mixture too thin; the bugs had loved it.

I remember painting my first bike bright red, and I remember sneaking under a fence to steal ripe St. Lawrence apples.

I remember being shipped off to live with Grandpa Jones for a reason that escapes me, but the stay there was a real part of my education. By this time as a minister he was superannuated, and he was too old any longer to be a rapids runner. So he operated a bicycle and revolver repair shop, on Princess Street in Kingston, Ontario. They called him "Moccasin Jones," which was a big comedown from Cornelius Ansley Jones. He had learned to enjoy wearing moccasins in the Indian country, and he wore them weekdays and Sundays. His long flowing beard, he said, was so that he didn't have to bother with neckties. It was from Grandpa Jones that I learned patience, accuracy, and the ability to use tools. His work was of the best because he loved it for itself instead of for the returns.

And I remember the saddest moment in my life, when I had to leave Grandpa Jones to go to a new home that had been set up in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I cried all the way to Rouses Point.

Soon, however, interest revived, because now I was going to American schools. I had grown up, yet there were many things to learn, new mischief to get into.

Very late the night before Christmas in 1910, Mother came to my bedside and shook me gently by the shoulder. "Son," she said quietly, "you had better run for the doctor." I had got used to the idea that Mother was going to be "sick" sometime. Now the time had come, and I ran like the wind. The night was clear and crystal-cold; the sidewalks had a thin coating of ice, and I fell down twice.

Back at the house a lot of things happened in rapid succession; and then a few minutes after midnight I had a baby sister. I was the one who said, in a loud, strained voice, "Her name has to be Carol because this is Christmas Day," and I

felt proud and important when Papa and Mother said it was a fine idea.

I hung over the baby, driving off anyone who tried to do for her. When I thought she could distinguish me from the others, it seemed my heart would burst like a balloon. When she curled a finger around mine, I felt like crying. When she first smiled, Mother explained, "Sometimes it is gas on her stomach," but I knew it was a smile for me. Then she learned to laugh, then she laughed when I laughed, and we laughed together.

I was to live in a great many houses; some I can still see, in almost documentary detail; others are faint blurs of memory. I will never forget one house in Cambridge because in the parlor of that house I became acquainted with death.

My sister Carol lived only two years. They had put her in a coffin, and she lay there in the dimly lit room. There were a great many flowers. Carol's face was very clean; it had color, but it looked waxy, and when I touched it, it felt waxy and was very cold. After I touched her, I went out of the house. I did not speak to anyone; I went to a movie. I did not come back till long after dark. I felt my way and made no noise. I looked in the parlor. Carol and her coffin were gone. I would never see her again. Now I felt glad; I didn't want to see her again, like that.

In the morning I could feel Papa and Mother studying me, feel their wanting to ask me why I had not been at my sister's funeral. But for once they held themselves back from asking; the subject was never mentioned.

Life went on. I spent more time with the kids across the street; I didn't have any real feeling for them; yet they were human beings, and you could stay close to them while you wandered through a lonely world.

I began picking up bits of mental and moral soot as all youngsters do at certain ages. My brother Melvin disclosed some disturbing answers to peculiar things about which a very young man wonders once in awhile. In me the boy was caught in the process of becoming a man. It was to be a long, anxious process, full of pain and brooding; from the time of

Carol's death everything seemed a lot harder to me, more serious.

As I jolted along to graduation from grammar school, I discovered that there was a very special kind of high school in Cambridge, Rindge Technical High School, and I was determined to go to it. I thought that there I wouldn't have to waste time over ridiculous subjects like Latin and French, which didn't interest me at all. At Rindge I could work with my hands; my bent for mechanical things could be trained and developed.

In the midst of my anticipation a big obstacle loomed. We were going to move again; as usual Papa's limit for staying in one place had been reached.

Apparently seeing, not so much something on which my heart was set, but a kind of education that I could readily turn into gainful occupation, Papa said I could stay in Cambridge and enter Rindge. He and Mother and the rest were off to Hallowell, Maine, to his new charge.

Mother made arrangements for me to live with the Campbell family. My brother Lawrence, attending Harvard, could keep an eye on me. To pay my board Papa arranged with a grocery store to give me a job on Saturdays, as combination clerk and delivery boy. I could also pick up two dollars now and then singing in church choirs, as I did for awhile in fashionable Trinity Church on Copley Square, Boston.

I was so elated at my new prospects that I hardly said good-bye to the folks. In the fall, at Rindge, I could learn carpentry, wrought ironwork—I could prepare myself for any number of trades! My spirits soared.

TWO

FOR THE first time in my life I could hardly wait each morning to get to school. All the rebellion and foolishness of my grammar-school days were forgotten at Rindge. School was exciting, a paradise of long rows of workbenches, fitted with planing stops and vises; there was a tool crib, and all you had to do to get any tool was ask; there they were, sharp, shiny, and properly adjusted.

Throughout that year it was my ambition and my pleasure to beat everyone else in the class. The first project was an oak, mission-style footstool with doweled joints and a padded leather top. Later I presented it to Mother and was to notice forty years later that it was still beside her favorite chair at home in Kingston, Ontario, a bit dingy and well worn, but still in constant use. Maybe I had a right to be as proud as I was of that first accomplishment at Rindge.

Occasionally I dropped Mother a post card from Cambridge, but I was pretty preoccupied in school, and I doubt if she ever really understood how happy I was there.

All too soon my wonderful year at Rindge was over. I left the Campbells, and off I went to Hallowell, to get acquainted with new people, live in a new house, and go to a new school.

My first sight of Hallowell, Maine, from the window of the train stays with me as though it were yesterday. To the left the town dropped away to the Kennebec River; to the right—you had to bow your head to see anything—it looked as though

someone had taken the usual pattern of houses and streets and tilted it to a forty-five-degree angle. Amongst those up-and-down streets I was to experience a great deal: my first romance, my first serious trouble, losing a brother, learning about war.

Life in a minister's family differs from life in other families. To begin with, the minister's family is expected to rank with the angels, sinless and incorruptible. The slightest prank of a minister's child looms with headline importance in the community. John Donne says, "No man is an island to himself. . . ." I don't think John Donne was acquainted with many ministers' families; in the eyes of the community the minister's family is very much an island to itself.

It is the minister whom the house-to-house salesmen first seek out; if the leading citizen is known to patronize them, the rest of the town can be expected to follow.

The stream of callers is never ending. Wayfarers needing help, young people in love, neighbor boys begging the minister to intercede with their parents over minor peccadilloes, parishioners troubled by sin, sickness, and death—these causes keep the front doorbell shiny; playmates, deliveries, and bill collectors use the back.

Every waking hour in our house it was "Georgina, where's that book on the Four Gospels?" "Mamma, where's my ball?" "Mamma, I gotta hole in my pants." "Georgina, these socks aren't mates." "Mamma, can I go out and play now?" "Georgina, when did I last preach on Hosea?" "Mamma, where's my white shirt? When do we eat?"

Mother was not only chief cook, bottle-washer, and button-sewer-on; she was church organist, diplomat, social service worker, study-group leader, head of the Christian Endeavor Society and the King's Daughters, baker of pies for the church food sale, and witness at every wedding in the manse. But all tasks were secondary to keeping the dominie on an even keel. He was the genius, the Grand Mogul; it was he who must be kept in trim, no matter what. The children mustn't annoy him with games or racket; the dog mustn't bark when he was working on a sermon. When answers were needed, Mother must have them. The situation made for plenty of tension.

In the new school the boys didn't take to me. It may have been the resounding name, Norman Ernest Brokenshire. They took derisive measures. First, combining my initials, my name began coming out "Nebie." It slid into "Eben." Evidently that was too sane; shortly, to my enraged surprise, I was "Ebenezer Rosebud."

On my side, it seemed to me a dirty little school, the boys real hayseeds. No doubt the root of their prejudice against me was that I wasn't much like them. Anyway, they decided to "initiate" me.

Grabbed by several of the older boys while in the toilet one recess, I was backed up to a post in the center of the room, and my arms pinioned behind it, my shirt was pulled up, my belt shoved down, and a wet and soapy hairbrush was applied with great roughness to my belly button. After a good scrubbing I was left to button myself up, nurse my raw skin, and suffer in silence the rest of the day.

I outgrew the malevolence of my schoolmates. The school outgrew the dingy building and moved into City Hall. As time went on my own relations with Hallowell brightened.

I began to develop a social side. Three girls came into my life; the Harvey girls, three daughters of the "Maine Lumber King," were neighbors and became chums. In their parlor, to the music of their enormous victrola, Althea, Roberta, and Dorothy taught me to dance. They scanned my personal appearance and manners critically, advising me to begin taking some pride in them. What they said made sense, and for the first time I thought about such things, doubtless the more so because I now met my first love.

I missed Rindge and the inspiration of working with tools and materials. My course of studies at Hallowell High was going only so-so—but Cecelia, Cecelia was beautiful! So gay, the most popular girl in the school, the belle of Hallowell! Cecelia answered some of my notes, and I ceased to worry about schoolwork because my days and nights were filled with mooning over Cecelia.

Feverishly I entered into the tremendous competition for her attention. My reward was permission to call on her Wednesday evenings. To watch her smile, to hold her hand,

to sit close by while she played the piano and sang in a sweet, unsteady soprano—these were hours so immense in my life that I scarcely knew whether I was on my head or my heels. Others in her life? There must be, since Wednesday was only one day out of a week. I knew that others called on her; in fact there was considerable gossip about a young fellow who came over all the way from Augusta to see her.

I wanted to fight for Cecelia, carry her off like a knight of old. At home I had but one thought. At school tomorrow I will see Cecelia. My life became a dizzying thing, one day the mountaintop of joy, the next day the depths of despair, then back to the mountaintop. I was caught in that most devastating love of all, puppy love.

Grandpa Jones dropped down to pay us a visit. Studying me, he said to Papa and Mother, "What that boy needs is something to take up his mind." He was right. In my second year in high school I was rushing headlong into that stage of growth where a young fellow can get into real trouble, especially if he were held down, as he would inevitably be if he were the minister's son.

Ministers' sons didn't get their dubious reputation for nothing. I can remember a swift excursion I made through the hardware store owned by one of the church members, and sneaking a whole box of beautiful jackknives with mother-of-pearl handles. What could one boy do with a dozen jackknives? Why should I do such a thing? I did it because of the pressure I felt to prove myself a red-blooded devil instead of "the minister's son," piously good.

I hid the knives under my shirts in the lower bureau drawer. Whenever somebody was nice to me, I handed out a new, shiny jackknife. Before long, of course, the box was discovered. I was called into the study and put through the old question-and-answer routine until Papa pried out of me the fact that I had stolen a box of knives. The verdict was that I had to get back all I had given away, return them with the rest to the hardware merchant, and say I was sorry; or else pay for them out of my own pocket. Pay for them! If my pocket contained so much as a nickel I felt rich. But imagine, too, the mortification of being shown up as an Indian giver,

going around saying, "Hey, you know that knife I gave you? Well, you gotta give it back." Nevertheless, that's what Papa said had to be done, and that's what I did.

The terrifying business of becoming a man pursued me, seemingly determined to give me no peace. One day I was sent on an errand to the doctor's home. When I delivered whatever it was, his wife invited me in and began showing me some of the doctor's books. They had some rather unusual pictures. After awhile she put the book down and began fussing over me in a warm sort of way, pulling a little at my clothes. She was quite good looking, and I felt flattered because she was an older woman. Then, just when I didn't know whether to feel proud or nervous, a man of the world or afraid, my eye happened to catch sight of a photograph on the bureau—it was of my mother! If Gabriel had blown his trumpet suddenly against my ear, I couldn't have moved faster. Straightening my clothes I leaped up, dashed out the door, and ran all the way home.

Another day I was sent to carry some unsold cakes and pies back to a donor who lived up the hill from the church. The buxom lady chattered a few minutes with me, then said "Wouldn't you like some grape juice?" I said thank you, I would. It tasted fine, with quite a tang. I began to feel warm and guilty. Remembering the other experience but trying to be polite, I said, "Thank you very much, I have to go now." She took hold of my arm, and put her arm around my shoulders, but I squirmed loose, saying, "Well, good-by, thank you for the grape juice."

This footless existence dragged along, I getting into trouble of various kinds, balking frequently at parental restrictions. And then it chanced that a foot-operated Pearl Press was advertised for sale cheap in the local newspaper. As Grandpa Jones and my parents were worried about my having some activity of the right sort, on the theory that "the devil finds some mischief still for idle hands to do," this press and a few fonts of type were purchased for me with the hope that the press would "take up my mind" and inspire my inventive drive and mechanical interest. It did.

The machine was set up in a shed behind the kitchen. I

did some sample printing and got along very well. After school now I had no time for games or girls. I solicited everyone I could think of to let me print their business cards, small display signs, letterheads, and envelopes. People were satisfied with my work, so I branched out, visiting stores and business offices to get their jobs. Soon I had all the printing I could take care of, and profits for spending money. I electrified my shop, bought new type and paper stock. The upshot was that in about a year I put the weekly newspaper out of its job-printing business.

Some of the boys were always dropping in after school to watch me work; usually they just liked to observe how it went and didn't interfere with anything. But one fellow had an incurable itch to spoil something; he'd put his finger in the ink and smear a piece of work or grab a sheet out of the press before it was ready—meddlesome ideas like that. I'd ask him to let up, but he wouldn't. It happened that I was working on a job I wanted very much to do and do well, and his interference got my mad up, as they said around Maine. I have only been as mad as that a few times in my life. The result was that I really lost my temper and heaved this fellow through the glass-paneled door. I stamped back to work and never even was aware that I was badly cut until I noticed that all the papers coming from the press were spattered with blood; I had a six-inch gash on my right wrist. I cleaned up the press, Mother bandaged my wrist, and I got the job done the way I wanted it. I hold the scar to this day.

Now that I was more under control, my older brother Melvin became the problem boy. Jobs, to steady him? In rapid succession he got four, losing them all. His clothes always smelled of tobacco smoke. Defiantly he came in at all hours, though he well knew the minister's sons were supposed to set an example.

"I'll have a talk with him, Georgina," roared Papa with red in his eye.

The talk began in the study. The sounds grew louder and ever louder. All of a sudden the miscreant was heard to answer back! A little shock of fear ran through the family. The pastor was not one to stand impudence.

“Why do you always say our mother wants us punished?” we heard Melvin shout in the study. “If you want to use the razor strap so bad, or your own fists, go ahead, use ’em. We’ll go out behind the sheds and you can do it like a man!” Wow! Mutiny, insubordination, naked and frightening!

This little altercation wound up in an actual fist fight between the pastor and his son, behind the house of worship, of all places! Nobody in the family ever learned exactly what happened; we heard the racket, but none of us could bring ourselves to go and look.

That night, my eyes popping in the dark, I watched my brother collect a few pitiable belongings, heard him whisper bitterly, “So long, kid, be as good as you can—with *him* around!” He tiptoed out of the room, and I heard the back door shut softly. It was about time for the slow freight to come rumbling through town. You always heard it the last thing before falling asleep. You counted the number of cars clattering over the split track; the rhythmic, dreamily monotonous sound tapered off, and you knew that the caboose, with its high roof and winking red light, had passed. . . . My brother would be going out of town on that train tonight. My heart gave a jump of fear. Suppose he should miss his footing, fall, and be killed! I cried a little for the searing brand of hatred and violence and misery on our family life. From that night on, the manse was minus one member.

In the morning my father stared at the empty place at the breakfast table, his face dark and angry, and all of us avoided looking at each other. To me the awful thing, boring into my mind as I tried to eat breakfast, was that not one of us had hope enough to trying calling my brother to breakfast by name. Mother’s eyes were red, but even she accepted wordlessly that Melvin was gone.

Many a boy will run away at least once in his life. Most of them will come back in a day or two; everybody is relieved, and it becomes a little family joke. Many years later I was to see my brother Melvin again, but after that night he never again came home to stay.

All our domestic scenes were dwarfed by something that happened one September morning during World War I.

The war had broken out in 1914. In Canada boys in high school were assigned to special army battalions and drilled under the battalion names. My brother Lawrence, eight years my senior, having gone to high school in Canada, had drilled with the Queen's Own Rifles.

He was at Harvard when he received the call to rejoin his military group. There was some delay in his reaching Canada, and when he got there, the Queen's Own Rifles had sailed for overseas, so he enlisted in the 13th Royal Highlanders.

We in the manse always got up early. While Mother put breakfast on the table, I used to go out and bring in the newspaper.

As usual it lay triple-folded, teetering on a corner of the step where the paper-route boy had flung it. I had never opened the paper before placing it at my father's plate, and don't know why I did so on this particular morning, but the fact remains that I did.

A terrible headline met my eyes. "Lawrence Brokenshire Killed in Action."

I was panic-stricken. Mother must not know. But how could I keep it from her?

I had never asserted myself in the house, assumed the lead, until this morning. Hiding the paper for a moment, I waited until we were all together. Haltingly, as best I could, I told what was in the paper and then showed it to them.

If I had thought Mother would collapse, I was wrong. As I look back on it now, her reaction was typical, born of long experience in coming to grips with crises. "Lawrence isn't dead," she said flatly. No tears, no outcry, just that simple, unequivocal statement. Since it was printed in the paper, the rest of us took for granted that it was fact. But not Mother.

"Lawrence isn't dead," she repeated calmly. With that, she went into action. Lawrence had been a prize student at Harvard, continuing the grades that had won him the scholarships that made college possible.

Mother telephoned to Harvard. Harvard communicated

with the Canadian Government. The report seemed to be definite and reliable.

Mother cabled to London and got a reply saying that for the present "Killed in action" should, instead, read "Missing in action." Mother said, "You see? Lawrence is not dead." It was wonderful, how her mother's faith buoyed up faith in the rest of us; faith in what Father preached and Mother practiced. We, too, began to believe that Lawrence was alive, that it was only a matter of time before he would be found.

A girl named Mildred Wyman, from Arlington, Massachusetts, had now joined forces with Mother, offering financial aid for a search; Miss Wyman had become engaged to Lawrence before he left for overseas. A number of things happened quickly. Dad decided to get into the war as a Y.M.C.A. secretary and Mother to go to London, to search for Lawrence from there. Mildred would go with her.

With Father already gone it was necessary only to dispose of Wilbur and me. The Campbells down in Cambridge came to the rescue and took Wilbur.

Mother said that, at least until the church needed the manse for another minister, I was to stay on there and finish out the school year. It was understood that the Harvey family would more or less look out for me.

A boy rattling around alone in the manse did not work out as badly as you might think. When I woke up in the morning, Althea, Roberta, or Dorothy would be getting my breakfast. They helped me to make the bed and keep the house clean; they let me do a lot of eating over at their house too.

The school year ended. I had the offer of a job in the shoe factory where Cecelia's mother worked. It lasted two weeks.

Then the Lumber King got me a job in a lumber camp. The logs were rolled in, stripped of bark, and cut into boards; the bark slid along to me, and I was supposed to cut it with a band saw to proper length, when it would be carted away.

It worked out all right until I cut off a chunk of thumb. So they put me on the sawdust pile, to keep it shoveled off at the top to make room for more sawdust coming out of the blower. The pile was about twenty feet high. I didn't like the job, and they moved me to another that was worse. They gave me an

adze, a two-bladed sort of ax, with which I was to smooth down logs to be used for telephone poles.

In all her planning before she left, Mother left one direction that came to my rescue now. "If things don't go well for you alone here in Hallowell, you go down to Mr. Wyman in Arlington; he will send you money for the fare and will give you a job on his farm."

Anybody could see with half an eye that I wasn't getting on just right in Hallowell, so I decided I would let Mr. Wyman know and go on down to Arlington. I still had two years of high school. I wanted to finish, but it didn't look as if I would, by myself in Hallowell.

Mr. Wyman welcomed me, announcing that I was going to live in his home and work for him. He was a widower; he lived in a big house, had seven daughters and a hired cook.

Things began looking up for Ebenezer Rosebud.

THREE

THE MOST dramatic news came from Mother. Lawrence was alive, just as she had insisted. He was in London, and he had lost his sight. For awhile that was all I heard.

My first job for Mr. Wyman was to drive a five-ton manure truck on a round of Boston stables. On Saturdays I was to drive Mr. Wyman to a bank where he put away his money.

The Wyman brothers were figures of some importance in Arlington. They owned a big tract of land and grew garden truck—tomatoes, celery, onions, peas, and beans. The war was on, vegetables brought terrific prices; just one box of six tomatoes sold for a dollar.

The Wyman fields were full of migratory workers, particularly gypsies, who were good at the job though hard to handle.

My manure truck was no rose garden, but I thought I had a very nice job; driving Mr. Wyman gave me an "in" that the rest of the employees envied.

In Arlington I learned more about a broader life. Driving a truck is different from being just a minister's son; you come in contact with many more people, learn a lot about human nature. I found it all different from Port Hope or Kingston in Ontario or Hallowell in Maine.

Saturday was payday. The other fellows spent Saturday nights whooping it up in Boston and invited me to go along. When we came up out of the subway the first time, they said, "Let's have a drink," and we went to a barroom. They acted

so offhand about it that I didn't want them thinking I was some yokel, so in my best offhand manner I said, "Sure." Excepting the grape juice with the tang back in Hallowell this was my first drink.

I thought about it while I was drinking it, and it didn't seem so much. This was adventure, the real thing. Home, all that sin stuff that was part of it, was very far in the past. The highball made me tremble a bit, but I had another. Then we went to Scollay Square to a burlesque show.

In my seat the two highballs were meddling with the inside of my head. The stage looked eight hundred miles away. A guy way out there had one of his hands dressed like a boy and the other like a girl, and with two fingers of each hand he was making the boy and girl do a clog dance. It looked so funny, so far away, that I began laughing. I couldn't stop and raised such a rumpus that the manager came charging down the aisle and told me to get out. The other guys stood up for me, so we were all thrown out. Outside, however, they decided that a drunk on their hands would cramp their style so they took me to the subway and pointed me for home.

By the time I'd walked the little distance from the car line to the Wyman place I wasn't drunk, but I wasn't sober either. I didn't have any door key. I didn't want Mr. Wyman to see me looking fuzzy, so I climbed up a rose trellis and in through a second-floor window. One of the girls woke up and gave a yelp, but when she got a good look at me, she woke up another sister, and they put me to bed; in the morning nothing was said about it. In the light of later events that night may have meant something to me, I don't know; on the other hand, boys let loose in the big city for the first time have to get a little sampling out of their systems. Usually there's no lasting harm.

I stayed pretty well on the track through the rest of the summer. When fall came, I knew I had been satisfactory to Mr. Wyman because he called me into the office and volunteered, "If you think you'd like to finish your schooling you could go on living here and attend Arlington High with my girls." For all practical purposes I had become a member of

his family, he said, and I could mow the lawn, shovel snow, and drive him on Saturdays.

In that period Arlington High School had a big reputation and was said to have the highest scholastic rating of any high school in the United States. When I went to enroll, there was a big fuss as usual about my grades in the last school I had gone to, but I was determined to make a showing. If I wanted to, I could always be a good student, and the competition of the girls was good for me. Also I had one ace in the hole; at Arlington High they had a printing class. When the teacher found out I had printing experience, I was asked to be assistant instructor, and that meant extra points.

Every student who took instruction in printing from me must have had a hell of a time later on because I taught them to do everything the only way I knew—left-handed. Ask any typesetter or printer, he'll tell you that it's plain impossible for anyone who is left-handed to set type. It isn't impossible. I'd proved it, making good money with my own print shop. But to teach innocent students to do it the hard way, backward and upside down, when it wasn't necessary, should be punishable as some kind of crime.

By working hard, getting some credits for instructing, and taking part in school theatricals, I finished two years' courses in one year and graduated with the Wyman girls. Altogether it was a singularly happy year, a very important, growing-up year for me. I learned more about how to get along with people, and the value of schooling, and that in the world there were girls with whom you wouldn't take liberties but who still could be good company. The Wyman girls taught me a lot and served the purpose of putting me on my mettle; the continuous presence of competition brought something out in my character.

I heard more from Mother about what had happened to Lawrence. He had been caught in the battle of Ypres. If you remember, that was where the Germans used poison gas for the first time. Among many others Lawrence was gassed. One of his friends was gassed and caught helpless out in the open. Lawrence went out and dragged him back to safety. In

some way the buddy pulled off Lawrence's identification tag, and later when he was found dead, it was clutched in his fingers; his other arm, with his own bracelet, had been blown off. This, then, was how Lawrence Ansley Brokenshire came to be reported "Killed in Action."

Lawrence, totally blinded, was evacuated to London instead of being sent to a French base hospital. It was in London that Mother and Mildred located him. Lawrence began believing in miracles.

British medical scientists were working at top speed on methods to control the aftereffects of poison gas. Through treatment Lawrence's sight was restored. He was transferred for a time to the Royal Air Force, but then high altitude began affecting his vision, and he finished out his war service in the Pay and Records Office.

After I was graduated from high school, Mr. Wyman and his brother Frank called me into the office for a talk. The Boston markets looked to them more and more for well-packaged ripe tomatoes, bleached and unbleached celery, fancy onions, all kinds of fruits and berries in season. They offered me a foreman's job. The truck gardens were going to be enlarged, more of their acreage put under cultivation, there would be a good opportunity for me. They said one of the foremen was going to marry one of the Wyman girls. Watching me intently they also mentioned Cora. But somehow I couldn't just see my horizons limited to fields of onions, even with Cora as a bonus.

Besides, I had been corresponding these last few weeks with Bert Johnson, an old school friend back in Hallowell, about the idea of our trying for summer jobs in the White Mountains. We had applied and already been signed up by the woman manager of the famous Fabian House, a great sprawling summer hotel at the foot of Mount Washington. I thanked the Wyman brothers, saying I had already taken a new job, and left the household with deep affection for them all.

Once again Norman Brokenshire jumped off into space.

FOUR

WITHOUT knowing it Bert and I picked a good season. The United States was still a neutral, but a German submarine, the *Deutschland*, had appeared suddenly near Norfolk, Virginia. Simultaneously there were shark scares at some New England seashore resorts. Because of these things a lot of wealthy vacationists fled to the mountains.

From owners and executives to the last pot-washer in the kitchen everyone pitched in to make the old, very large Fabian House ready for opening day; no distinctions were drawn; everybody washed windows, mowed lawns, scrubbed floors, raked flower beds, did whatever was to be done.

The lady manager—quite a character, domineering, rough-and-ready—lined up the bellhop applicants. You could tell at half a glance Bert and I would never make bellboys. Bert, slight, redheaded, pinch-faced, wheezy, was too small; I was too big, too tall for my weight, with narrow shoulders, and an outsized head that looked even larger because my wavy hair stuck up like steel wool. We were vetoed for answering bells, but the lady said we'd fit in other jobs. Bert went to the kitchen as assistant steward, and since I was the only one with garage experience I got the plum; she put me in charge of the hotel garage.

My job was simple enough: fill gas tanks (most of the guests' cars were big, lumbering, gasoline-devouring limousines) make repairs, deliver cars to the hotel if they weren't chauff-

four-driven, and be ready to answer emergency calls from guests stalled in the mountains; in short, I took care of all guest automotive problems. To my joy the garage boasted a four-cylinder Harley-Davidson motorcycle; when the Packards and Cadillacs and Reos got in trouble on the road, I kited out on the motorcycle to give them a hand.

The garage, a historic, eight-sided old building of frame construction with a high peaked roof, was a quarter of a mile down the road from the hotel. The guests' chauffeurs were a hard-boiled, cynical, bawdy lot who didn't care how they spent their employers' money. "Fix her up," they would say to me as they left the car for the night; "there's nothing wrong but you can make a carburetor or a spark-plug job out of it; give me the bill, I'll split with you." Transients would say, "Fill 'er up." I'd make a lot of racket (those were hand-crank days) winding and unwinding, and somehow every time a gallon got into the tank the pump registered for two gallons—there were so many ways to make an extra buck at the Fabian House garage! The rebellion that had piled up within me in my growing years, I think, was reflected in the way I connived for gain.

Toward the end I got a little scared. I'd never seen so much money. Bert was scared too. So we arranged to have him seized with a sudden bad attack of asthma. He could put on an act at the drop of a hat, and this time he did it up brown. The next morning he couldn't possibly appear for work. As we anticipated, the manager sent for me. My friend was "in bad shape"; would I please take him to a doctor in the next town? The doctor made up a prescription and, for a price, also handed down the opinion that Bert had better leave for a lower altitude right away. When we got back to the Fabian House, I showed the note and suggested that Bert was so bad that I'd better go with him. The manager thanked me for taking care of him before he got any worse, and we were on our way, two of the best-heeled summer employees in the mountains—new suits, new hats, shirts, ties, and pockets full of money.

My gains in experience that summer were not altogether creditable. Finding out how to make easy money was one

thing; and off-duty, lonesome waitresses contributed their bit, too. Undoubtedly I was markedly wiser in the ways of the world than when I had left Arlington.

Bert, of course, wanted to go home, and since Mother had returned from England and was stopping with some friends on a farm outside Hallowell, I went back with him. Secretly the thing I still wanted most was to impress Cecelia.

The first day we did all the places on Main Street, and when evening came, I called Cecelia. I was told that there was no way I could see her. That struck me as peculiar. Was she ill? Well, no, but—er—she was out. I knew a run-around when I met it, and felt sad and very curious.

Before leaving Arlington, I had received a couple of puzzling anonymous letters, enclosing newspaper clippings hinting at some mix-up between Cecelia and that fellow from Augusta. My love told me that, whatever it was, Cecelia could do no wrong. Now it was all too confusing, and I wanted to straighten it out. I must see her, talk to her.

It was in this frame of mind that I went to the farm where Mother was staying, to take the matter up with her. Mother, too, was very evasive; my feeling for Cecelia was something of the past, it would be better just to forget it. But I kept at her, and at everyone else I knew, to find out the truth. I was still infatuated with Cecelia, or with the idea of her, or both. I was a kid; the old love flamed, this was a big moment in my life. I went to the unpainted house where she lived, and I saw her.

She was sad—unhappy. She came right out with it. The guy over in Augusta—she had a baby now, and someday before long she was going to marry the baby's father.

We sat together on the porch, looking at the graveyard across the road. I tried to brighten things up, dig up a little of the happy past, but it just wouldn't work. "Well, Cecelia," I said miserably after awhile, "I guess I'll have to go now."

"Yes," she said. Her lips trembled, her shoulders sagged. I wanted to say something kind but just couldn't think of anything.

Cecelia came down with tuberculosis. The baby's father married her on her deathbed.

The flame of my old love—dead! Hallowell, the river, the steep hills, the ice-cream parlor—everything there died for me. Even the money I made during the summer seemed nothing, a handful of wet firecrackers.

For the living life must go on. Father was teaching in prisoner-of-war camps in Germany. Wilbur, Mother, and I huddled together, a shadowy sort of family, adrift, aimless.

College for me was out of the question. My future boiled down either to going back to work in the Hallowell garage as a mechanic, or the possibility of getting into the General Electric Apprentice School, which I had heard about, in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Mother said that probably I had better apply there.

After all the details had been taken care of, there were several weeks before the course began. Mother decided we should accept an invitation from Uncle John's family, in Keene, New Hampshire. Uncle John himself was away, a chaplain in the Navy.

They had remodeled an old building for their home; it was a nice, plain, comfortable country place, a hop, skip, and jump from a little sandy-bottom lake. As a freckle-faced kid I had visited there, picked low-bush blueberries in the hills, toted milk from a neighboring farm, sneaked off fishing when I should have helped with chores. Then there had been four grownups, eight or nine kids. Now it was all different; there were just the two mothers, and Wilbur, and myself. It was dull, and I could hardly wait to leave.

I was to learn in many talks with Mother through the years that, of all her memories, one of the most poignantly tender was sitting there on the stoop of that house on the hill, watching me disappear into the distance, walking out into the world. In her heart she knew this was really good-by. All she had left now was little Wilbur; she had no home, no parishioners, no responsibilities, just memories and uncertainty.

The minute I saw Pittsfield I liked it. I like it still and remember all the things that were important to me about it. The "Bridge Lunch," where they had wonderful pineapple pies . . . the lake where six of us rented a summer cottage . . . the Excelsior motorcycle I bought (on time) for fifty dollars—it had a clutch in the handle bar and one speed: fifty miles an hour or nothing—the sweet bitterness of chewing tobacco—we weren't allowed to smoke in the plant so I soon learned to chew with the rest—"Besse-Clarke," the clothing store where I worked Saturdays to make ends meet . . . above all, the friends I made. Some of them joined the Army later with me. Still later some were at Syracuse University while I was there.

At General Electric I took the drafting course. The hours were nine to five—two hours in the classroom, the rest of the time in the shop. I got seven dollars a week and was so happy in the work that I'd have stayed for nothing.

The classroom work was largely mathematics of various kinds plus practical problems in mechanics, solving by measurements and formulas, proving by drawings. In the shop students did hundreds of different piecework jobs from the plant proper. On great lathes we turned down steel rods to measurements gauged to 1/1000 of an inch and used the gang drill to make multiple borings in hard-rubber panels. We learned to set up correctly and use all the standard machine drill presses, lathes, planers, punch presses, stamping machines—everything that worked metal we used. In drafting we learned not to expect or demand the impossible, also to design and plan construction in the simplest way, with a minimum of operations. For mechanically minded boys who must go out in the world and make their own way it was and is a good course. I often wish I could have finished it and kept on in that field; I have a hunch I would have made a very good mechanical engineer. But it was not to be. Now war was really in the air. All the fellows my age felt that if they didn't get in they'd be missing something. Everybody was talking, too, about a coming draft. You wouldn't want to wait to be drafted.

My two closest pals and I wanted in; we knew just which

branch. The newly formed Naval Aviation Corps had the best-looking uniforms—that was for us!

I was underage, and they wouldn't take me without my parents' permission. I wrote Mother and asked for it.

"No, Ernest," she wrote sadly; "two sons and a husband are enough for me to give up to war." (Melvin had just sent word that he had enlisted.)

I respected her feeling but couldn't see eye to eye with her. Some of my friends went ahead and got into Naval Aviation. Handicapped by my age, I made a fast trek to Springfield and joined up with the S.A.T.C., at the Springfield Y.M.C.A. College. In some quarters it was derisively called the Saturday Afternoon Tea Club. It wasn't as useless as all that; actually, in S.A.T.C., underage kids could go through a regular boot training at a school where other training could be taken simultaneously, making you officer material in a very few months; when you reached the required age you could transfer to the Regular Army, entering in a preferred position to start your Army career. It made good sense to me, and I joined up.

Ironically after a few months of intensive drilling and study I was on the eve of transfer to the regular infantry when the Armistice was signed. November 11 lives in my memory as a sort of initiation-in-reverse; instead of celebrating my admission to the Army, I was thrown in the lake to celebrate my discharge from it.

Something else made the date memorable. My father had arrived from overseas. He picked me up in Springfield. Deciding, in one of his unpredictable bursts of attention, to give me a treat, he took me to New York with him where he had some business to transact with the Y.M.C.A. It never occurred to either of us that from then on New York City would be my home.

FIVE

WE STAYED at the Mills Hotel, room and clean sheets for fifty cents a day. For a long time thereafter I thought all hotel rooms were alike—steel cubicles painted gray, containing a cot, a chair, and a metal chest of drawers.

I had no idea then how much of a help it would be to me later on to have encountered New York first while it still had a semblance of the palmy days. A girl named Marilyn Miller in the *Ziegfeld Follies* was the toast of the town. Millionaires gave champagne suppers at places called Churchill's, Reisenweber's, Bustanoby's. Everything in and about New York was big, BIG, BIG. Times Square was big, buildings were big, crowds were big, even churches in New York were big. When my father took me out to the Central Branch of the Y.M.C.A., in Hanson Place, Brooklyn, where he had to see a man, I found that the Y.M.C.A., too, was big.

None of the other things at the time did me much good, but the result of that visit at the Y.M.C.A. was my first real job. The war had been over long enough for the troops to be coming back. Y.M.C.A. huts in demobilization areas were being alerted and staffed. I was given the job of third secretary at the hut at Fort Totten, Long Island. For me it represented an easy transition from S.A.T.C. My own training had at least given me an understanding of the wants of troops, and being sent to this particular post turned out to be a lucky break. My Fort Totten stint was my introduction to show

business. Twice a week our stage was aglow with lights and talent. Within a few weeks the assistant hut secretary had to leave, and my position was upped. The head man, Mr. Earl Burritt, and I ran the works.

At their suggestion I went to live with the Burritts. Judy (Mrs. Burritt) was a second mother to me. Their children, Ruth and Merton, were like a sister and brother to me. My love and affection for Mrs. Burritt and Ruth still are a cause for thanks; the one was years older than I, the other years younger, yet my feeling for both was oddly the same. This was home, these my women, to love, protect, to work for and make proud of me.

Most of my time was taken up with arranging for good entertainment, running the pool tables, and looking after the recreational needs of soldiers. The work required initiative, and I broadened out mentally.

While I was trying to do good for others, I didn't do so badly for myself. I had plenty of time off—sometimes hours, sometimes days. Two powerful Bayside romances helped to while away the time. The girls were as different as night from day. One was all for a quick marriage and my taking over her butcher-father's business; she used all the persuasions, but I couldn't seem to see it. The other was a misty, oriental-princess sort of deal, rustling with colorful dreams of travel in far, exotic lands, where the future would be one long love and adventure. I managed somehow to eel my way out of both prospects, telling myself with some relief that I'd better stick for awhile to the safer shallows of Y.M.C.A. work.

This noble resolve didn't prevent my losing my heart completely to a beautiful girl whose favorite place for swimming was a strip of beach close by the Fort reservation. It was off limits for troops but not for a "Y" secretary, and—I planned it so—we met every once in awhile. She had the face of a young goddess, a beautiful golden figure, and an unspoiled charm that, for me, set bells ringing. I never could get up the nerve to tell her how much I admired her loveliness; though she was young, she seemed always in such complete command of herself and any situation. She and her sister Helen lived with their wonderful father in a comfortable old house on the bay,

just outside the Fort gates. Her father was the great movie idol, Maurice Costello, and her name was Dolores. It wasn't many years later that I read the bittersweet news that she was going to become the wife of the great John Barrymore; for a few days I wallowed in the sweet pain of lost love.

This satisfying life at the "Y" had come to me, and like everything else, it seemed to me, was soon taken away. After a little more than one busy year word came suddenly that the hut would close, not, however, before Mr. Burritt was transferred to more important work, and I was made hut secretary, the youngest in the organization.

The staff was scaled down, because in a few months Fort Totten would be reduced to peacetime strength and the wartime huts would have passed their usefulness.

I was discharged, given a service pin, and in recognition of the job I had done, a one-year scholarship at Syracuse University if I wanted to use it. I filed it away for future reference.

Home now was Kingston, Ontario, where Mother was making her home with her sister and Uncle Bob. Mother was a woman of few tears, but she was tremulously glad to be reunited with her third son again, and for a few days it was quite a happy family reunion.

While the visit was restful, I knew I must find my place in the world. So soon I started for New York again, still looking for work but a man now instead of a boy. The Burritts were glad to see me, and as they were in charge of a newly finished Y.M.C.A. branch, I moved in as a paying guest.

Mr. Burritt brought up the subject of the Syracuse scholarship. "Get the best education you can while you have the chance, boy," he advised me, in the spring of the year.

I got a summer job as camp counselor. In the fall, armed with the money I had saved and a brand-new fuzzy mustache, I headed for Syracuse.

When you think of the average high-school boy leaving home to enter college—a move often dreamed of from the moment the nurse announces heartily, "It's a boy!"—you visualize a kind of idyllic, *Stover at Yale* setting: ivy-covered

rose-brick buildings, ancient towering elms, harmonizing on the college fence at dusk, the chapel clock striking midnight, a privileged existence in nostalgic surroundings. For me it wasn't exactly like that.

I paid the fees not covered by my scholarship, bought a few books and clothes, counted up the all too few dollars left, and took a cheap room with a town family who struck me as very like many a family in the straitened circumstances characteristic of one of the Brokenshire parishes. I tried to plunge right into the spirit of things—make like I had as much right to be there as anybody—but somehow I didn't really convince myself. Among six thousand students I was right back to where I'd been in the family, the smallest unit, a cipher.

About all that was clear in my mind was the fact that if I didn't get a job I couldn't stay long in college.

I happened to apply at the Onondaga Hotel at the psychological moment; they needed a night clerk. By soldiering on the job I got in my studying and snatched naps between arrivals of traveling salesmen.

I joined the Glee Club because I thought it would put me in tune with college life. I went out for crew. But in both cases I was a mere passer-by on a busy street. Too many other students had good voices; too many others knew an oar from a paddle.

There were slivers of sunlight in my existence. A couple of boys who had been in apprentice school at Pittsfield were now at Syracuse. We got together to relive our mutual experiences—and were surprised to find how quickly everything we had to say to each other could be said.

I found a brief moment of a sort of glory on the big day of the college year. According to undergraduate tradition everyone had to think up some stunt, contributing it to the time-honored taking over of the town by the student body.

At the moment the newspapers were full of the hunger strike of the Irish patriot MacSweeney. I blush to relate that my stunt was a mock campaign for funds "to feed MacSweeney." Throwing discretion to the winds, I became the impassioned orator, haranguing the crowd from a pile of

bricks around some new construction, while my gang passed the hat. I cajoled and pleaded, I ranted and thundered. It attracted attention—and enough coins to buy my associates a few beers before I pocketed what was left.

Having attracted a certain amount of notice, I was put in the way of jobs now and then, which would enable me to remain in school.

The Near East Relief campaign needed someone to set up meetings and show the film without awkward stage waits. I was given the opportunity. It had always been necessary to put on the lights while the projector operator changed reels. I managed to find another projector, which I threaded while the operator was showing a reel. It made continuous showing possible and created favorable notice from the administrator. He began utilizing me to make the appeal in small, surrounding towns, one of those little things that later turned out to be valuable.

College became for me a matter of diminishing returns. I began spending more and more time working for Near East Relief. One day a definite job for the outfit in the Finger Lakes region opened up, and I decided to quit college, signing up with Near East at a good salary. I told myself that when I got some more money ahead I would go back and finish my course. But after several lean years it felt pretty good to have money enough and to spare coming in each week. Also I had the feeling that with Near East Relief I was accomplishing something that just might lead me, as it were, to my life's work.

The last call I made in Syracuse before leaving for New York was at the home of Professor Knickerbocker, head of the English Department, a genial little man who had been particularly kind in acclimatizing me to the atmosphere of a college town, so different from anything I had known. Perhaps recalling my impassioned exhortations regarding MacSweeney, he said, smiling, as he shook my hand, "And if you're not governor of the state someday I'll be surprised." Something else he said to me was of more practical value. "Education," he said, "is not knowing everything; it is know-

ing where to find out about everything." Many a time I have profited by using that bit of wisdom.

I reported to New York and learned that from now on my status would be that of field worker. I was sent to Geneva, New York, to work under Mr. Moore and learn the work of organization, how to make the need known to the right people in the community and form committees of interested and influential townspeople who in turn would help us in making the appeal for funds in the churches, schools, and factories, and in collecting food and clothing; all this was to establish and maintain orphanages in the Near Eastern countries where homeless children sorely needed homes and training for work.

I liked the crew I had to work with: Miss Rice, Mr. Bloodgood, and, of course, Mr. Moore, who didn't want to go very far afield because his wife was busy getting ready to produce their first baby.

The Geneva countryside was beautiful and inspiring—except for one little spot where they pointed proudly to an odoriferous sulphur spring—with dignified Hobart College and beautiful Lake Geneva, one among many sparkling, bass-filled lakes reaching like the fingers of an outstretched hand through the fertile fields of upstate New York. Names like Geneva, Oneonta, Canandaigua, Oswego fell melodiously on my ear, and as I traveled about I thought the Indians hadn't had to die to discover the happy hunting grounds.

I was to become neighborly with the self-reliant men and women who worked their sprawling farms six days a week and on the Sabbath put on their store clothes to meet at the little white churches, built in many instances on pleasant hills. It was in these churches that the pastors would turn the sermon time over to us; fervently we would make the appeal and pass out the pledge cards.

Sometimes I wondered if the way we were doing it was the best way. A signed pledge meant an undertaking to pay so much a month for five years. Crops could be uncertain; sometimes in the course of five years perhaps these folks' own children wouldn't be eating any too well; should pledges then be kept to feed children far away?

Occasionally New York sent us a "name" speaker, to give a

push to the work if it moved slowly. Mostly we handled things ourselves, sending the pennies, nickels, dimes, and dollars in to New York, together with the pledge cards and our expense accounts. For awhile I lived in the cute little hotel at the end of the main street. But I was out on the road so much that my room was just a place to leave things and I finally moved into the Y.M.C.A. to save money.

I had not much, but a little, spare time. I bought a Model-T Ford roadster secondhand, the model all the jokes were about, and made some changes in it. I took the gas tank from under the seat and put it in the luggage compartment, which I raised on two by fours so that the gravity feed would work. I took one leaf out of each of the springs and added shock absorbers. When I attached a Stromberg-Carlson distributor to the motor, I had a car that was the talk of motor-minded people for miles around. So flexible was it in performance that it would put-put along at four miles an hour, walking right up a hill without missing a beat or tearing along the country roads in a cloud of dusty speed.

In Geneva I found what I was convinced was the sweetest girl in all America. I courted her twice weekly without fail—Sundays in her home, surrounded by her family; Wednesday evenings on the lake shore or some equally romantic spot, with nobody around. She was the first girl for whom I'd had any heart since the terrible Cecelia days, and I poured my emotional starvation as well as love into the affair.

I took a glass of wine more or less regularly. After all, I was working in the heart of a district famed for its wine and brandy. At the time I wasn't aware of it, but as I think back I recall that I didn't drink the wine with a meal, as wine is intended to be taken; I drank it when I was conscious of wanting a glow. Once I had the glow, I worked to sustain it and was apt to bypass food entirely.

A certain friction developed between Mr. Moore and me. After one of our run-ins I would hurry home to find solace in my bottle of *vin du pays*. One day my befuddled mind worked around to the idea that I should be moving on my way. I hatched a little plot, and when I had it worked out

mentally, I put my situation in the form of a report to New York headquarters. An aunt had died, I said, leaving me some property in Florida. . . . I was needed there in connection with settling the estate. . . . Fortifying myself with another glass of wine, I went on to say that I liked the work in Near East Relief. As a matter of fact I would prefer remaining with the organization, but my obligation in Florida . . . unless a transfer could be arranged. . . . Reluctantly I would have to resign. . . . I presume I hit on the idea of Florida because it was now autumn; winter was coming on; soon the pretty lakes, the rolling vineyards, the waterfalls, would be wrapped in snow and ice. In Florida everything would be warm and blooming—including the widely heralded land boom.

I emptied the last of the bottle into the glass and drank it; then I mailed the letter. But wine could hardly dilute the suspense of the next few days. I had visions of headquarters getting in touch with Mr. Moore, of being discharged for going over a superior's head, of being jobless. Would this, would that, would the other thing happen?

Alas, the outcome seemingly stamped the chicanery with approval. Mr. Moore was instructed to give me two weeks off with pay so I could wind up my affairs and prepare to leave for Florida. When I was ready, I was to drive my car to Florida and report to Near East Relief at Jacksonville.

I said good-by to my love with tears on my cheeks. I said good-by to Mr. Moore with my tongue in my cheek. On a quick dash to Canada to say good-by to my mother I found my brother Melvin was there; he was at a loose end, so he agreed to come with me on the long trek down the east coast.

Seemingly Nature conspired to make this trip one of the most thrilling experiences of my life. This Canadian, who had known what it was to tunnel through winter snows, left Canada on a cold, gray day. When we went through New York, it had begun to snow a little. It was stark winter in Philadelphia. But soon the miracle began. In Virginia it was spring again. In Georgia Melvin and I slept in the woods comfortably. In Florida cold, snow, seemed something only encountered in dreams.

I reported to Jacksonville and was told to start my work in

Miami. Melvin ran into a man who had several hotels and arranged to go somewhere to start as bellhop. From that time he worked in a variety of hotel jobs.

To wake up the sleepy South I used Yankee methods. By going to a theological seminary in a nearby town and organizing a class among seniors with speaking ability and an eagerness to earn a little extra money, by giving them a hurry-up course in ways to make the Near East Relief Appeal effectively, I developed my own reservoir of speakers. I raised over five times the money headquarters had hoped for, and with flying colors wound up the biggest season Near East Relief had ever had in Florida.

This time I left my job of my own volition. To stay in welfare work looked to me like the line of least resistance. I decided the time had come when I should be trying the business world. The advertising department of Air Reduction Sales Company, on Madison Avenue, New York, proved to be my one and only attempt at business activity. They manufactured equipment for oxyacetylene welding. The mechanical applications of the processes interested me. When my superiors discovered this, they sent me over to New Jersey to take a course in oxyacetylene welding; I had no idea how far-reaching its effect on my working career would be.

A company headed by Douglas Rothaker had been hired to film the oxyacetylene welding process, to demonstrate that it was better, stronger, and more adaptable than electric welding. The running together of the metal in two pieces in the process of being welded would prove this graphically, but Mr. Rothaker was having trouble getting a film to show it.

I took it on myself to study the situation, and one day when everybody was out to lunch I experimented. Angling a camera lens downward from the tripod, I put two bars of metal on a rack in focus and helped myself to the best welder the company owned. We were on the roof and had natural sunlight to work with beside the glare from white-hot metal. I searched through the equipment until I found a six-inch magnifying lens, which I attached to the camera. When my man had the welding spot in exactly the right position, I turned on the camera. I took three or four shots, then remov-

ing the large lens, I replaced it with the lens Rothaker had worked with.

The film was developed. Rothaker's way showed nothing; when mine was shown, the huge puddle of molten metal took up the whole screen, and you could see the two flows or currents of metal whirling from each piece, blending in the center. It was the perfect demonstration, what they had been after. It clinched the deal for Rothaker and made Air Reduction Sales very happy indeed.

Then someone had a thought. "Who made the film that's right?" they said. Rothaker looked puzzled. "Now that I think of it," he exclaimed, "it wasn't me, by george!" After enjoying the hubbub a few moments I admitted that the idea was mine. I got the six-inch lens from his kit and showed Rothaker. He began to laugh. "Well, kid, you've got more nerve than I had," he said. "I purposely didn't try that lens because sometimes oxyacetylene welding sets up minute explosions; I thought if any molten metal spattered my lens it would ruin it." He gave a squint at the lens. Oh, oh! Ruined. But the film was such a roaring success with the company that he charged the lens off to profit and loss and forgave me.

I finished up my course. Back at the plant on Madison Avenue the advertising agency moguls decided that, since I was so adept at mechanics, they'd better send me out with the film on a tour; I could show it before state engineering societies and lecture along with it.

This was right up my alley. In addition to the lecture I threw in demonstrations of the peculiarities of liquid air by frying eggs on ice, inflating balloons in people's pockets, and similar didos.

Pride goeth before a fall, all right. One night I had too many beers. I went to the station and shipped the film on to my next stop. My duty was to know at all times where the film was.

In the morning I took the train to the next point. When I got there—no film. I racked my brain. I knew I'd shipped the film. All of a sudden it came to me. There was a town in another state with the same name as this. I'd shipped the film to the other state.

I gave myself away by telephoning to New York to find out if another print was available. "Wha' d'you want another print for?" said the boss testily. There was nothing to do but tell him.

"You're fired!" he hollered, just like that. And that was that.

But I'll always have a soft spot in my heart for Mr. Melville, who did the firing; for it was he who had sent me one day on an errand to 33 West 42nd Street. That address was to change my whole life, lift me out of monotony, and open the way for me to keep out of it from that time forth.

SIX

SOME psychologists hold that there is no such thing as coincidence. I am not so sure. If I had not been sent on the errand to 33 West 42nd Street, I might never have seen a door marked "Broadcast Central."

The word broadcast intrigued me. At the time everybody was talking about crystal set radios; a cat's whisker tuned in music and talk. Back with the Burritts now, I spent a lot of time around the Y.M.C.A. Someone was always saying, "I hear those guys that speak over this dingus get paid cash money." That was the cue for everyone to laugh and say, "Why?"

So out of curiosity I opened the door marked "Broadcast Central." There was one small room and a telephone operator with her switchboard. "Is this a broadcasting station?" I asked; it didn't look like much of anything.

"Yes, it is," she said, very pertlike.

"What're the chances of getting to be an announcer?" I said, to keep the thing going; she was kind of pretty.

"Oh, about one in a thousand," she said crisply. Into the telephone she said, "What number are you calling?" I closed the door and went on about my business, but the place stuck in my mind.

At the Burritts' I was able to indulge my mechanical bent in a small way. Merton and I slept in an airy room on the third floor. On cold mornings both of us had an aversion to get-

ting up to close the windows. I took the window frames apart, cut the weights in two so that the sashes would be heavier than the diminished weights, made little catches that would hold the sashes half-open by means of an electromagnet, and rigged a little push button that I could reach by leaning over, closing the windows automatically. I also rigged up a secret lock to our room. You ran a coin or small key along the outer side of the banister and at a certain place—click! The door would spring open.

In between such activities I would check the want ads. I knew I hadn't found my right place yet. One morning at breakfast as I was reading the ads, everything stopped short for me as I read:

Wanted: Announcer for Metropolitan radio station. Must be college graduate and have knowledge music terminology. Apply Broadcast Central, 33 West 42nd Street, New York City.

The coffee grew cold while I wrote an answer to the ad. Days passed, weeks. I had given up hope when one day a post card came. It read, "Please come to 33 West 42nd Street for audition."

The telephone operator gave me the mere flicker of recognition. "Remember?" I said. "You said one chance in a thousand. Well, cross your fingers for me."

Actually the chances were one in seventy-four; there were seventy-three applicants besides me. I never knew how many of the others went through the full audition, but mine consisted of reading something out of a newspaper, a few prepared announcements, each in a different vein, a foreign news dispatch stuffed with foreign names like dates in a pudding, and finally an ad lib period when I was asked to describe the studio where I was auditioning. Out of the tail of my eye I noticed several men, hovering in the glass-enclosed control room over a gadget of some sort. Later I learned that it was an oscillograph, a device that showed actual voice vibrations in revolving mirrors. This device was my unknown friend! The radio people were after a well-modulated voice—in radio broadcasting the peaks and valleys were the dangerous things

—a voice that would mesh with the carbon microphone, with no excessive ranges no matter how exciting the text or other material might seem to the announcer. I found out my modulation was perfect.

In the resulting interview the first question was ticklish; “Are you a college graduate?”

“Well almost,” I said; “I’ve had two years at Syracuse.”

“Do you have a knowledge of music terminology?”

A bit bolder now I showed off the side of my personality that was both to gain me immense popularity in record time and to cause me no end of trouble. Brashly I looked Mr. Popenoe, the manager, in the eye and said, “I haven’t even the slightest idea what it means—*have you?*” There was an instant of stunned silence during which he looked from me to Keith McLeod, who had written the ad in the *Times*, and back at me. Perhaps if I had realized that McLeod was also the station musical director, I might have been a bit more discreet.

With a look of surprise Mr. Popenoe said, “Keith, just what *do* you mean by music terminology?”

McLeod picked up a copy of the *Musical Courier* from the desk. He flipped over to the back cover, which carried a listing of twenty or thirty foreign composers. “Knowledge of music terminology involves the ability to talk easily and accurately about music and to pronounce such names as these correctly.” I ran my eye down the list. Peter Ilyitch Tchaikovsky, Sergei Vassilievitch Rachmaninoff, Jean Sibelius, Igor F. Stravinsky, Jascha Heifetz. “I can learn things like this in five minutes,” I said, not handicapped by modesty. Mr. Popenoe looked amused and slightly impressed. He glanced at his watch, “You’ve got *just* five minutes,” he said and left.

In those five minutes I inveigled Keith McLeod into reading those names over and over to me while I made mental notes, also sneaking a couple of penciled notations on a scrap of paper.

“Now then,” said Mr. Popenoe, “read ’em.” His expression said that it would not surprise him in the least if I ran out the open door, *Musical Courier* and all. Luck was with me. I sped through the list exactly as though I knew what I was

doing. McLeod nodded. "All right," said Popenoe, "you'll have your radio tryout tonight. You'll read the Dow Jones report, a five-minute summary of the day's Wall Street news, scheduled on WJZ from six P.M. to six five daily. I'll be listening at home; good luck."

My brother Melvin was living in a rooming house in the eighties. I was so excited at having a chance in this new and mysterious world of radio that I tore up there to tell him about it. I spun on so long that all of a sudden I noticed I had exactly ten minutes to get back to the studio. I did my best, but when I got to 33 West 42nd Street, white with fear and out of breath, the Dow Jones report for that day had come and gone.

But right there I was to benefit by the first of many good turns in the radio business. Tommy Cowan, the station chief announcer, had called Mr. Popenoe when he found I wasn't on deck, and told him that I was a little bit nervous so he was going to hold me for a different show a little later. I nearly passed out with relief. He saved my job, but more than that, he gave me a better chance; instead of having to make my first impression with dry Wall Street statistics, he had me introduce a pianist, name of Joel Coffey, calling for the exercise of a little bit of personality along with the required modulation.

It went off all right, but the next day I could hardly believe my eyes when I discovered that it had drawn a nice little squib in the one radio column in town, in the *Herald Tribune*, called "Pioneer." Stuart Hawkins wrote: "Who is this new AON? He speaks with perfect enunciation and exceptional modulation."

If you can imagine a day when radio announcers did not use any names, this was it. In 1924 WJZ was following the custom of radio operators on ships at sea, who used only initials for ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore messages. It was the replacing of the spark gap with the tube that made possible the broadcasting of music and voice in place of dots and dashes, transforming radio into a medium for entertainment. The first engineers and operators for broadcasting entertain-

ment all came from ship radio shacks. As a matter of fact, the term “engineer” only came later; we had “operators.”

The letters assigned to our announcers designated location, affiliation, and identity; for example, Tommy Cowan was ACN (A, announcer; C, Cowan; N, New York). For me N couldn't be repeated; E and B sounded too much like C; so I chose O, becoming AON.

The announcer's job was not only to introduce programs but to line up talent and create programs. Talent, not being paid, had to be rounded up among friends or even passers-by. Luckily entertainers were around who had been on the air or were known to be willing, even eager, to be. We would write or telephone them, inviting them to be in the studio on a given day. In one of the two studios one announcer would be on the air with a program, while in the other studio another announcer would be getting a pianist and singer together, maybe a violinist, too, whipping together a little program that would follow as soon as the other was finished. As friends were our chief reservoir of talent, the atmosphere of the programs was informal and happy. Our position as announcers was quite formal, however. Our hours were like the hours of hotel clerks; one long, one short day. In the morning and afternoon we wore regular street clothes, but in the evening it was the tuxedo and the elegant air.

Broadcast Central's two stations were WJZ and WJY; in the trade they were called the twin stations, because of the two antennas on top of 33 West 42nd Street. The so-called studios, draped in monk's cloth for acoustical reasons, were actually just office space adapted for this new and puzzling use. There were windows, but they were kept shut and sealed off with heavy hangings. Rubber snubbing made the doors noiseless and soundproof.

Each day was a separate safari to an adventurous unknown, thrilling little episodes with new people, uncovering the best of existing entertainment, welding together the components in a way to please hoped-for listeners. If we found favor with listeners, we would stay on the air; if we didn't, we'd be through in short order. It is all very well to say that progress cannot be stopped; be that as it may, merely keeping up with

progress is no lazy man's job. At that juncture the main purpose of radio broadcasting was to sell receiving sets. If people found the programs enjoyable, they would buy sets for their homes; if they didn't, there were plenty of other items on which to spend their money. People gathered in front of electrical shops to listen with curiosity to radio broadcasts, and our job was to make broadcasts more than a mere newfangled oddity, rather so fascinating in themselves that every individual would be fired with the idea of buying a set.

The crystal, or cat's whisker, set was followed by wonderful heterodyne, and superheterodyne, hookups that used many tubes with batteries and earphones or a speaker. Stores all over New York sold radio parts, and magazines devoted to mechanics were filled with articles describing how to build your own set, using either a coil, one tube or two, or the heterodyne and other circuits that inventors were pouring into the market.

Once the set was constructed, it was equipped with batteries. Experience showed the majority of sets to be heavy, awkward, often very difficult to tune. As many as six different knobs might have to be accurately tuned to obtain clear reception. Earphones restricted enjoyment of the instrument by limiting the number of listeners. Amplifying horns appeared, rendering earphones old-fashioned if not downright obsolete. Now the whole family could sit around comfortably and enjoy programs. Inventors worked at top speed to render sets without batteries operable, and on house electric current.

Management, program directors, announcers, and operators were working at top speed, too, to develop and try out new entertainment ideas. Broadcast Central stumbled on a Long Island woman who had an intriguing way of explaining household duties to women, particularly the preparation of food. If radio in the home were ever to develop wide popularity, it must appeal to women, who had to spend the most time in the home. It was decided to bring a Mrs. Heath every morning to women in their homes; the first Woman's Hour on radio was born, and Mrs. Heath rocketed as a radio personality.

This program became a stage for me, too. Mr. Popenoe

began receiving intimations that I was acquiring a big following. How, he wanted to know, and listened to find out. By introducing little side lights, ideas, suggestions, in the vein of Mrs. Heath's subject yet separate and distinct from it. For instance, I said one morning, "You know, neighbors, late yesterday afternoon—remember how raw and gray it was yesterday afternoon?—I stood and watched a flock of birds searching anxiously in the snow for something to eat. There wasn't a crumb; nobody had remembered the birds, now that the snow has covered the ground over with its soft white blanket. It made me feel sad. Don't you think you listeners might just take a minute to open your kitchen window or the back door as you prepare to listen to Mrs. Heath, and throw out a few crumbs, a few crusts? Thank you, neighbors; now I feel better. And here is Mrs. Heath. . . ." Or I might say, sheepishly, "You know, Mrs. Heath, I have a confession to make; this morning I wiped my razor on one of my landlady's best towels. . . ." Mrs. Heath would play along with me, saying, "But you must never, never do that. You, ladies, do remind your husbands to use a bit of tissue paper; otherwise they'll cut the fibers in your cloth towels, causing them eventually to unravel."

It developed that a large proportion of Mrs. Heath's mail came addressed to her announcer; every day made it only clearer to management that a station announcer was no ornament or luxury but a real necessity.

This did not make the operators happy, because operators were proud, too. Operators and announcers became natural enemies, each convinced of top importance, each willing to do battle to hold the advantage. It took some time for each to settle down to the fact that one was helpless without the other; but finally a truce was made. It didn't preclude announcers having to help lug equipment to remote broadcast points, and standing taxi fares to keep the operators in a good mood so they wouldn't mess up our modulations or otherwise meddle with our efforts to be good on the air.

"Remotes" developed when engineers worked out the idea that American Telephone or Western Union wires could be used to bring programs to the transmitter from a given

point outside the studio. Up until then programs had been limited to what could be accommodated within two small studios.

The moment we had our new scope we began casting about for likely entertainment value of more complex type. Logical "remotes" were the metropolitan hotels; luncheon music from the Plaza or Waldorf, at Thirty-fourth Street and Fifth Avenue; *thé dansant* music from the Astor, on Times Square; dinner music from the Pennsylvania, only five years old in 1924 and, with two thousand rooms, the largest hotel in the whole world. There was dance music available for broadcast every night from the grills of famous hotels or supper clubs and night clubs (and, during Prohibition, speak-easies!), but now that the technique of "remote control" was developing, many other kinds of programs were possible. For instance, Major J. Andrew White—I had heard him on the cat's whisker at the "Y" long before I answered the ad in the *Times*—broadcast a prize fight, the very first prize fight ever to be heard by radio.

To tell the truth the Major, quite a character, became something of a model for me. In his manner and habits he was a gentleman, definitely the man-about-town playboy.

When I was first hired, Major White wasn't a regular member of the Broadcast Central staff but, imagine, worked on a retainer, doing sports and news broadcasts of special interest, later to be known as "special events" and requiring large and important departments.

I began to be assigned to work with Major White, I the observer, he the announcer of what I saw and passed on to him. We worked the first horse race on the air, the Zev-Epinard race on a Labor Day at the Belmont Track on Long Island.

But the one episode of our working tandem that I'll never forget was the 1924 Democratic National Convention, in the old Madison Square Garden. Nowadays political conventions over television are the thing, with no punches pulled in the heat of argument or internal secrets of excitement sacred; but to me—largely for personal reasons, I admit—there will never be another event like that 1924 convention. A Cana-

dian boy, knowing very little up to now about politics and caring less, here I was suddenly on a platform where everything happening on the convention floor could be seen and reported by us. We occupied a strategically placed glass-enclosed booth, equipped with news tickers to fill us in on the running story. Our job, the Major's and mine, was to relay the running story, adding to it the "color," the hundred and one little incidents and touches to make the event a spectacle that would interest, entertain, and also inform the great voter-radio audience. These broadcasts marked the first time the voter in his home had ever heard the step-by-step conduct of a political convention, including the roll call ("Twenty-four votes for Underwood") and Al Smith's addition to the English language of a new word "*Räd-dio*."

I acted as the Major's leg man, racing around the Garden to pick up bits of information, political news, hints of switches in roll-call votes, and color. Speeches, introductions, ballots, delegation hassles over policies and prerogatives were punctuated with blasts from bands basking briefly in the glare of the political sun. My own moments in the sun came when Major White needed a respite and would take himself off to lunch at the downtown Newspapermen's Club or some such oasis, leaving me in charge.

In one of these spells on the air it was my good luck that a real fight between two delegations mushroomed near my post, well down in front on the convention floor. Spotting it, wanting to do well for the glory of WJZ, I concentrated on the fight and let everything else go by. I explained that one whole delegation had blustered across the aisle to register a complaint, following with a blow-by-blow eyewitness account of one of the finest donnybrooks I'd ever seen. Delegation signs were banged down on opponent's heads, chairs and decorations destroyed; I had a ringside seat. I was letting the listening audience in on the fracas when Major White walked in. When he grasped what I was doing, his face turned pale, he grabbed the microphone from me, signaled the operator to take us off the air, picked up a telephone, and called the studio. We were off the air only a few seconds. Keith McLeod came on, placidly playing "*Träumerei*," while Major White

conferred with the studio about this green announcer who had gone berserk, and what should be done about it. When the Major got back his equilibrium and received his instructions, he took the air again, not, however, before taking me aside and explaining to me in words of one syllable—some with four letters—that WJZ had only secured broadcast rights to this event on the distinct understanding that no disorders of any kind would be reported. “You get some lunch now,” finished Major White, “and in future remember what I’ve told you.” With elegant composure I heard him say, “And now, ladies and gentlemen, we resume from Madison Square Garden and the Democratic National Convention. . . .” As I drooped over my ham on rye in a nearby one-arm lunch, I reflected bitterly that the time to have told me about the prohibition against relaying any disorders would have been before the convention opened. However, standing in awe of men as experienced as Major White, I felt filled with shame and fear and a great anxiety as to whether by tomorrow morning I’d still have a job in radio. Happily for me the station’s permission to broadcast was not taken away. We continued broadcasting until Underwood no longer had his twenty-four votes. Al Smith made his electrifying address, and John W. Davis was finally nominated, with Charles W. Bryan as running mate.

Back at the studio I received plenty of hints that the powers were displeased with me for having seized the initiative; but, too, I detected that they made mental note of my capacity for spot description. My hopes were justified. Soon I was being assigned to do special events on my own.

The first was the arrival at Mitchel Field, Long Island, of the round-the-world fliers. Four planes of the U.S. Army Air Force, Colonel Lowell H. Smith commanding, had taken off in April, 1924, from Seattle, to cover a zigzag course over oceans, deserts, jungles, and arctic wastes; out of the four starting planes two completed the course of 27,553 miles. This round-the-world jaunt with many stops was designed to prove the capacity of the Army Air Force to go successfully anywhere it elected.

The Mitchel Field reception to the fliers was an important

event for two reasons; first, of course, it was headline news; secondly, it was important to radio, because it marked the first chain broadcast, arranged by RCA and publicized as using all its outlets: WJZ, New York; WJY, Schenectady; WRC, Washington; KDKA, Pittsburgh; and KFKX, Hastings, Nebraska.

There were two broadcasts. First, in the afternoon, my vantage point was a little stand on the field; among the celebrities to greet the fliers on my microphone were the then Prince of Wales; the Mayor of New York, John F. Hylan; the commanding officer of the field; and an assortment of Washington dignitaries.

I remember how diffident and nervous the Prince of Wales was as he pinned a medal on the chest of each flier, but I didn't dwell on it as it might have been thought undignified for a mere radio announcer so to comment on the mannerisms of a future King of England. The Prince was good looking, had great charm, and was a popular figure, so there were lots of other things to say about him as I watched from a distance of about three feet.

The second part of the program was the formal reception for the fliers and the celebration that evening in the officers' mess. It had been announced in the radio and news columns as the big feature program of that evening's radio, starting at eight o'clock.

After the afternoon ceremonies I decided to relax for a couple of hours, collecting strength and information to make a good job of the evening assignment.

Following instructions, about seven o'clock I went to the officers' mess, which I expected to find elaborately decorated with flags and bunting—all good for a couple of minutes' air description—full of bustle and the impending excitement of an official military reception, with music, lovely women beautifully gowned, and dancing.

To my horror on entering the building I found exactly nothing. The building was empty, there were no lights, no flags and bunting, no orchestra, no sign of an entertainment committee, nothing. I was scared to death. Had I mistaken the building? Had I been given the wrong directions? Had

there been a mix-up between Mitchel Field and WJZ? Was I in my right mind?

I raced around the building looking for someone who could give me some information. Upstairs I found two enlisted men getting in some sack time. "What about this reception tonight?" I demanded. But they knew from nothing and placidly resumed their snoozing. With something less than an hour before I was due on the air with a gala description, I was in real trouble.

I found a phone and called the commanding officer's quarters. An orderly informed me idly that the C. O., discovering that he had a previous engagement that evening in New York, had hurriedly held the "reception" in his own home after the afternoon shindig, therefore everything was all over. In one blinding flash I saw how new and important radio was to the Army—so new and so important that nobody had taken the trouble to inform the station that its day's biggest broadcast event was off! It certainly left me in a deep hole.

Hurriedly I took stock. The chain was set to carry this program. If the program went on the air, it would be the largest feather in my cap to date. Add the fact that there was no time left for whipping up a program that wouldn't, in view of all the advance advertising, make a monkey out of the station, and I had to make a decision. I decided to hold the reception anyway. Maybe I had heard the expression, "The show must go on." If I had I doubt if I thought of it then—not with eight o'clock thirty minutes away.

I tore to an enlisted men's day room (thank God and the Y.M.C.A. for knowing my way around!) and grabbed a victrola and an assortment of records: Sousa marches, Viennese waltzes, some fox trots and two-steps. Back at the officers' mess (where *were* all the officers tonight, just when they could have been useful?), I yelled to the two sleep artists upstairs to rise and shine. But who were the guests of honor going to be? More important, now that I thought about it, where were they?

My good angel was certainly on duty that night. A race to officers' country turned up two of the fliers, holed up to rest after the excitement of the day; the other two were in the

field hospital! I persuaded the two who were on their feet to come over at the right moment and let me introduce them against a background of martial music; the remaining few minutes before air time I put in scribbling little speeches to be delivered *in absentia* for the two in the hospital.

One minute before eight arrived. I checked with the studio. One of the enlisted men started up "Stars and Stripes Forever," then the operator's voice said, "You're on the air." For good or ill I let go.

This important date in the history of aviation . . . intrepid fliers . . . Army Air Force . . . magnificence of the scene . . . illustrious guests . . . wonderful decorations . . . beautifully gowned women . . . handsome uniforms . . . receiving line (my two enlisted men diligently shuffling their feet). Before I let them go to enjoy the acclaim so richly deserved, I asked permission to introduce the first of two fliers, told about the two in the hospital, describing how they looked, how they were feeling, their little human comments on the great adventure, and read their little speeches. As a climax I introduced the commander of the flight; appreciating the spot I was in, he threw in with me on the make-believe, even including me in the repeat of the things he had said about the reception at the C. O.'s house in the afternoon. When it was all over, I nearly passed out on the mat.

Staggering back to New York and into the studio, I heard compliments right down the line. I had been of two minds about making a clean breast of it with the powers. In the end I just let it ride. Who was going to be helped if I told what had really happened?

In between spectacular and exciting special events, fundamental radio was growing in the studio day by day. We were getting audiences. The problem now was to hold them. In those days there were no polls, no guides to audience preferences. We had to feel our way for common denominators of interest, find talent, and experiment with formats to take advantage of them.

One of the common denominators was the Children's Hour, the first thing of its kind, created in 1924 on WJZ

for the *New York Journal American*. A fellow, by the name of Jack Smith I think, a bachelor and one of the big men in the Hearst organization, thought it would be good promotion to put on a Children's Hour.

At first it was rotated among announcers, but soon Smith decided that he liked the way I handled it, and I took it regularly. My studio salary was still forty-five dollars a week. Smith gave me twenty dollars and a good dinner every Sunday, on the side. Sixty-five dollars a week was good pay in those days for a single kid.

I took to the children, and they took to me; on both sides the affection is still there. Mary Small was a child prodigy; I put her on a chair so she could sing level with the microphone. Eleanor Lanning played the piano, and there were a lot of others. What I like to remember is that the Children's Hour made such a place for itself that it withstood all the organization changes; NBC took it over from WJZ; for many years it was a success under the name "Coast to coast on a bus," and in those years I had the satisfaction of bringing many talented children to the broadcast. Perhaps the original is dearest to my heart, because, a few years after I had been carrying it on in New York, I went to Washington and was asked to organize a Children's Hour down there, which I did. That's where I first came across a little fat girl by the name of Katherine Smith. Washington is where she started, and you know her as Kate Smith.

Although radio was developing fast, it was still pretty primitive; much of the time we had to make do with off-the-cuff programs. In other words, if people dropped into the studio and could perform in any way, we had a program to put on the air; if no one dropped in, we were stuck. If the weather was bad, they stayed away in droves. In a single day three different programs failed to show, and it was up to me to fill in. For the first I played the ukulele and piano and sang a bit. By the second I was at my wits' end. Heaven only knows what made me think of it, but it popped into my head that New York noise was sort of a trade-mark; the noise of New York interested everyone who ever came here. In desperation I pried open one of the windows, dangled a microphone out

over the street, and announced flamboyantly, "Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the noises of New York City!" You'd be surprised to know how many things people found in the noises of New York to write in about.

When for the third time that day they told me that so-and-so hadn't shown up and I'd have to fill in the gap, my mind went blank. Cudgeling my brain as I went into the studio, my eye fell on a small bookcase standing in the hall. I grabbed a book at random. When the mike was open, I said impulsively, "Let's read a story aloud." The book happened to fall open at a short story by Irvin S. Cobb. Of all crazy titles it was called "Fish Head." I took my time reading it, watching the clock anxiously for the moment when I could sign off, praying that the talent for the next program would be on hand.

When I got the sign-off signal, I hadn't finished reading the story so I said, "Well, that's all for today; next time we'll finish the story of 'Fish Head.'" The next morning we had a bushel of mail. "When are you going to finish 'Fish Head'? What day? What time?" There were over three thousand letters. Without knowing it I had stumbled on a formula that is known as the "cliff hanger"; it borrows from the old silent-movie serial days when Pearl White would be left at the end of a reel dangling in some frightful position, as a lure to the customers to come back to the same theater next week to see how she managed.

Mr. Popenoe took one look at the grist demanding, "More 'Fish Head'" and grinned, saying, "O.K., if that's what they want, give it to them." Now "Fish Head" was a fairly long story, but even it had an ending. So we rounded up a bunch of stories to follow it. I was sent on a round of pulp magazine editors. *Detective Stories*, published by Street & Smith, I think, said they would be glad to pick stories out of the magazine for us, cut them into episodes to fit segments of air time, rewriting wherever necessary. And so started the radio continued story. Its characteristic appeal was suspense, and with the development of dramatic enactment and narration, it became the forerunner of the present-day serial.

Today possibly there are thousands of radio announcers in

the United States. In those radio days of 1924 and 1925 a radio announcer was both an oddity and a rarity. On my station for example, WJZ, one of the largest in New York City, there were four announcers. Tommy Cowan and Milton Cross had come with the station from Newark. First Lewis Reid was added to the staff, then I. Tommy Cowan left to join the New York City station WNYC, and a search began for a replacement. There were four: Ernest Revere, a lad named Bradley, an erstwhile young real-estate salesman named Ted Husing, and John B. Daniel. The last two did well.

On the surface good fellowship reigned among us. Actually each man was strictly out for himself; he had to be; in a business where names could be made overnight, there were bound to be jealousies. Each announcer knew in his heart that he was God's gift to radio. The fact that I had been sent out on remotes of all kinds marked me as a fellow to be watched, and if possible held down. Radio was becoming a business of mounting tension, with certain dog-eat-dog overtones.

When one day in early 1925 a staff meeting was called, it was for many reasons a great day for us all. The purpose of the meeting was to announce that from now on we would use our own names in place of the meaningless initials. The step was taken to meet competition.

In New York our chief competition was WEAF, run by the American Telephone & Telegraph Company. Graham McNamee was chief announcer at WEAF; not only he but Phillips Carlin and the rest of the station announcers were using their own names. This fact, coupled with the realization that radio was fast becoming an entity in its own right and needed to divest itself of all remaining ties, real or implied, with marine radio, had overcome the reluctance of management to let announcers function as individuals, utilizing individual talents and mannerisms to build reputations.

At first I was panic-stricken. My radio initials, AON, had become so well-known an identification that I was afraid to let go of them. As a substitute I thought of Arthur Owen, which resembled the initials in sound. But "Arthur Owen" didn't seem to have much zing, so I decided to put my all

on one throw of the dice. "This is Norman Brokenshire," I said that evening, with a lot more fear and trembling than showed in my voice. It went all right; "Arthur Owen" died stillborn.

These first few months in radio probably marked the greatest change of all the changes I had known. Here, within six months, I had become a public personality in my own right; true, nobody knew who I was or what my name was, but they knew AON, and AON was me. I received more than a hundred letters a day. I would cram my pockets with them and read them between announcements on the outside jobs. The Canadian boy who was so proud of his first mail-order long pants was now sporting a tuxedo every night! The boy whose first knowledge of hotels was the stopover in a fifty-cent room at the Mills Hotel with his dad when he first came to New York was now a daily visitor in the best rooms of the best hotels in the largest city in the world.

At first when I left the Burritts' home in Brooklyn, I was to take a room on Lexington Avenue with my brother Melvin. But now I had a very nice room of my own at the Royalton Hotel on West Forty-third Street, just behind the building in which I worked. As my wardrobe and manner of living broadened, so did my horizons. No one knew exactly the possibilities of radio, but there was no doubt in my mind that they were limitless. Still, in my heart, I was for some unknown reason a timid boy. I always felt somehow inadequate. Each job frightened me until I was actually in the middle of it. In meeting and working with so many people, I had acquired a veneer, a front, which I knew sent people away saying, "He's quite a guy," or "What a character!" I had a strong handclasp and a pleasant, reassuring smile—what they did not know was that I also had a fearful heart. I don't know if that ugly term inferiority complex had been coined or not, but I guess that was it with me, and I guess that's why I was so lonely inside. I was twenty-six years old, yet I hadn't had a girl since my "steady" in Geneva. I knew nothing of living, especially sex. I have often said through the years that I matured late. Was it that, or was it that I always



Mr. and Mrs. Norman Brokenshire at the Carlton after launching a Red Cross drive in Washington.



The youthful Brokenshire introduces Fay Lamphier, the outgoing Miss America of 1925. This was during the first broadcast of the Beauty Pageant over WPG in 1926.



He made his first important comeback in radio when he left WCAU in Philadelphia to become Chief Announcer of CBS.



The celebration of Norman Brokenshire's seventeenth year in radio in Jack Dempsey's restaurant. In the background is a bust of Mr. Brokenshire by Lou Biro. Pictured above, left to right, are: Top row: Lewis Reid, who was with the author in the early days of WJZ and later wrote for him; Lou Biro, artist and sculptor who belittled him in his troubled days; J. Underhill Macy, who was with Norman Brokenshire in the original radio transcriptions of the "Mint Quakers" and the "Imperial Imps"; "Senator" Ford, who wrote Broke's first vaudeville skit and created "Can You Top This?" Lower row: Graham McNamee, another radio pioneer and Brokenshire's biggest competitor; Dale Kennedy, old-time announcer still associated with the *Journal of Living*; the author; Joe Bier, one of the original announcers of WOR and long-time friend; Alois Havrilla, who before his death was with WPAT; Paterson, New Jersey, striving for a comeback; Milton J. Cross, a real pioneer who specialized in operatic music.



The author during the busy disk-jockey days when he did ten shows a week, played over ten thousand records a year, and counted his audience in millions, and found that the best drink in the world was a chocolate ice-cream soda.



A happy moment backstage with Charles Laughton as the sound-effects man checks the volume of his laughter.



The gracious and beautiful Irene Dunne in a moment between scenes when the late Homer Fickett makes necessary deletions for the split-second timing "Theatre Guild on the Air" required.



In the twenty hours of rehearsal that preceded each "Theatre Guild on the Air" show, there were many happy moments. Above: Harold Levy, musical director, rehearses Diana Lynn and Dan Dailey in a musical interlude, while Kenny Delmar (Senator Claghorn) looks on and laughs. Lower left: Kathryn Grayson reads her part with the announcer. Lower right: With the famous U. S. Steel Theatre Guild emblem that always graced the velvet background, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., is introduced to some dramatic students that made up the rehearsal audiences (Acme photo).



The summer replacement for "Theatre Guild on the Air" one season was a mystery series directed by Ken Webb (left) of B.B.D.&O. In this one Sir Laurence Olivier starred.



Mr. Brokenshire with Patrice Munsel in Cleveland, for the "Theatre Guild on the Air" production of *Brigadoon*.



Rehearsal in the NBC studios of *Grand Hotel* starring Marlene Dietrich and Ray Milland.



Mr. Brokenshire relaxing during the long TV rehearsals of his "The Better Home Show" (above) and in his place on Long Island with Mrs. Brokenshire (below—courtesy of *Newsday*).

had this feeling of inadequacy, which had nothing to do with years? The venereal disease pictures and "wax works" shown in Army training had left me in a state of fear and disgust. At any parties that I attended I would drink and mingle with the fellows, but actually I was alone a great deal, at a movie or in a restaurant, when not at work. It was a peculiar combination of opposites; but then, had I not been born in June, under the sign of the twins?

I was drinking but it was not a problem; at least no one said, "You mustn't." These were speak-easy days, Prohibition, yet liquor was everywhere. Drinking was smart. Flappers carried flasks in their handbags or in the tops of their rolled stockings. When I went to a hotel or night club, the manager would usually quietly give me a pint, encouraging me to give the place a good plug. I did discover this—that for me it was becoming harder to get over a night's drinking than it was for my associates. Sometimes after a late night in a club one or two of us would linger on with the guests and the proprietors, and I was usually the last to leave. I knew they had made a lot of fun of me, for there would be writing in lipstick on my boiled shirt front; and a taxi driver would have been paid to see that I got safely home. Sometimes when I had a job to do the next day I'd have to prime myself with a few drinks to get going. If I did drink like that, it was more and more by myself, at a place where I was not known, and over in an inconspicuous corner. My hand shook, and I was ashamed.

And yet, it still didn't happen too often. I was progressing nicely in my work; liquor was no problem—at least so I thought.

The program department worked night and day to find events and personalities who would be listenable to on the air and build prestige for the station. We had the usual percentage of unforeseen accidents. One evening the Fred F. French Company gave a big dinner at the Biltmore Hotel. The feature of the after-dinner entertainment was the glorious Mary Garden of the Metropolitan Opera Company.

She was living at the Commodore, and I was sent over to meet her and gather some program notes. Although I liked to think that five years in the Big City had given me a glossy veneer of sophistication, my eyes popped at this glamorous creature in her décolleté gown and ropes of pearls, and I was put to it to keep my wits about me.

The function went on the air. After the usual addresses, after I had made quite a furore about the musical feast to follow, in which for the first time the great diva, Mary Garden, would give of her glorious voice by radio, the first few magical notes went out on the air and—bang! The telephone lines making these out-of-studio broadcasts possible went dead. In exchange for the rest of Mary Garden's rendition the audience got reliable old Keith McLeod, playing "Träumerei" on the piano over at 33 West 42nd Street.

SEVEN

AT LEAST around WJZ no one had any idea that there would be much more to broadcasting an inaugural than planting a man there with instructions to use his eyes and ears and put into words over a microphone whatever he saw. As the only man with even rudimentary experience along these lines, I was told to go down to Washington and do the job. I didn't have any apprehension until I got there and discovered that the WEAf man, Graham McNamee, had a whole staff with him: research man, to help prepare the program; secretary; publicity representatives; and several leg men. McNamee's A. T. & T. network would take in twenty-one stations; our RCA hookup, eight or ten. This Canadian boy began to worry.

In the evening quiet of March 3 I went to the Capitol to size up the situation. My position was going to be simple—as far as it went; my mike would be on a rail in front of a chair in the first row on the Capitol steps, just to the right of the center aisle down which the President-elect would come to take the oath of office.

McNamee, on the other hand, was to have a booth, constructed especially for him, a glass enclosure about six feet square, placed at the top of the aisle and with an unobstructed view of the platform and the great plaza. The booth was just to the left of the doorway through which the official participants and dignitaries would pass. One thing became

terribly clear to me. My problem was to outdo McNamee even with my mean position and no help. I felt the old stir of a challenge.

I went over the whole layout from top to bottom. An electric cactus plant of six microphones bristled from a specially constructed holder, mounted in front of the podium where the President would stand, the biggest "gang mike" setup ever attempted. I measured distances with my eye, timing them. I figured a possible "accident loss," emergencies that could spring up to interfere with a smooth-flowing broadcast. When I had the whole picture as clearly in mind as could be on any dry run, I hurried off to the public library to bone up, making notes on inaugurals from Washington's day down to this March 4, 1925. Then I went to the hotel, to snatch some sleep if possible, anyway rest and still the nerves.

About eight o'clock the next morning, stopping only for a cup of coffee, I sped out Pennsylvania Avenue for a check-look at everything. Again I studied that marvelous microphone setup. I sensed that it had a technical importance far beyond this day. Today radio was going to give the horizons of communication a big push; history would be made.

"Are you going to be the announcer?" someone behind me asked. It was a press photographer, sorting out his equipment. "Dawn of press-radio competition" flashed through my mind.

"Yes," I said, making it sound blasé. Actually I was a badly scared young man with a job so big that it frightened hell out of me. The only thing I was proud of was a new hat. I didn't have second sight and couldn't know that, for all his glass booth and assistants, I would hold my own so well with McNamee that in 1929 I'd be assigned *with assistants* to the Hoover inaugural, and by the time of Roosevelt's first inaugural my assistants would number eight, covering the whole line of march and dogging the President from the oath-taking right back to his plush-upholstered chair in his new White House office.

The photographer and I talked about this national hookup, the first for an inaugural. "How about a picture in front of the mikes?" he said.

"Sure." I gave a tug to my new hat.

“How do you spell your name?” he said. With some mis-giving for not mentioning McNamee (how fraternal did you have to be?) and hoping the photographer wouldn’t ask me about the booth up top, I said I was Norman Brokenshire, this was WJZ-RCA; now if McNamee didn’t suddenly appear, this might be the bread cast upon the waters that would come back cake; I’d have a clear scoop on the publicity. How right I was. Newspapers from coast to coast carried that UP picture; as it turned out, Calvin Coolidge and I were the only ones to get our pictures taken at those historic microphones, the greatest publicity break I had ever had; not a bad beginning in a tight situation, I thought to myself; it had paid to get up early in the morning! Who needed a secretary and a publicity representative! The center fold in several magazines was to show on a map the positions of all stations, both A. T. & T. and RCA, which took the broadcast; lines were drawn in to show all the stations converging on the Washington area, marked by a picture of the carbon microphones and Brokenshire, name spelled right, new hat and all.

Both networks knew that the real importance of this first coast-to-coast chain broadcast of an inaugural lay in first getting the listening audience and second holding it throughout. All known technical facilities had been installed to make the signal clear regardless of distance from Washington. Here was the full-scale test that might lead to commercial tie-ups; here was the test that would show which chain could scoop the other, with the greatest listening audience, the best publicity.

My operator set up below the staircase, with his line amplifier and two lines to New York, one to carry the program, one kept open for instantaneous communication between the studio and me and to serve also as a spare in case of trouble.

At nine o’clock the operator and I tested the lines. I talked sights and sounds. Crowds were gathering. The studio said, “You take the air at eleven forty-five; that’ll give you approximately fifteen minutes for running description and side lights, leaving a half hour for the actual proceedings, scheduled to commence on the dot of twelve.” I checked a fistful of papers, all my notes on previous inaugurals, some jottings on the

character and personality of the incoming President. Just as I figured weather clear, track fast, New York came in. "We've got a tip that WEAF is going to take the air at eleven. You stand by to take it at ten forty-five."

For a few seconds we felt confident we were safe. Then it hit New York and me simultaneously; our wires were A. T. & T., therefore the WEAF engineers had undoubtedly overheard my instructions, would junk their plans, get McNamee on before ten forty-five.

"Take the air at ten thirty," New York snapped to me. I began to collect myself, but then I got the fast one. My operator, waving his arms to catch my attention hollered, "You're on the air! Take it!" The time was precisely 9:44:30. The night before when I was trying to go to sleep I thought, I've got too many notes, what did I make so many for? Now I thought, Am I lucky!

I was lucky up to a point. WJZ had won. I was on the air first, all right. But how to fill the air from nine forty-five to twelve noon? Well, you'll never find out till you try.

Color and behavior of gathering crowds . . . messenger boy, halted by a policeman as he rushes by . . . last night's excitement throughout the city . . . pencil-slim shaft of Washington Monument at midnight . . . Andrew Jackson . . . serried ranks of seats around me, empty now, soon to be filled with duly elected representatives of the People . . . majesty of the U. S. Supreme Court . . . Mr. Chief Justice Taft . . . knows how it feels to be sworn in as President . . . his odd and interesting skullcap, good for twenty seconds of description . . . first oath administered to Mr. Coolidge by his father, in dead of night in Vermont farmhouse kitchen . . . subsequently questioned because Colonel John Coolidge only a state officer, justice of the peace . . . oath administered second time August 17, 1923, before A. A. Hoeling, Justice of U.S. Supreme Court, after Coolidge comes down to Washington . . . so this will be his third oath as President . . . President Buchanan's White House hostess his sister Jane's daughter Harriett, because Buchanan was a bachelor . . . Mrs. Thomas Jefferson died nineteen years before her husband became President, for a time Mrs. James

Madison, wife of President Jefferson's Secretary of State acted as his White House hostess . . .

I left history and statistics. A man ran across the flat roof of a big building off to the left. Dramatize his position. . . . He's excited. . . . Do Secret Service men spot him? What's he doing there anyhow? Look out! Whew! Thought sure he was going to topple over the edge. . . .

For a blessed minute or so that man helped WJZ-RCA and me to hang on to the collective ear. Who is he? Who can say? Who knows? Who has time to care?

More crowds, more notes, more impressions, then the U.S. Marine Band arrived. Ears from Maine to California heard seventy bandsmen reaching for the perfect A, squealing, tootling, blowing; now I could safely jump off to an estimate of what radio would henceforth mean in terms of great events, to be brought into the American home at the very moment of their occurrence. From now on, by means of radio, inevitably world history would be heard in its very making.

I used my name at every decent opportunity. For the nice listeners I think I even spelled it several times.

The seats around me were slowly filling. Still an hour to go. Once a pompous individual swooped by, in a dither about finding the seat suited to his importance. The idea hit me to spill a lot of notes in his path; as he couldn't get by without helping me pick them up, I squeezed an interview out of him. His face was unfamiliar to me, I have no idea who he was; if he reads this, a tardy "Thank you, sir."

Relief was in sight; the band was ready. The Chief Justice arrived, lumbering down the stairs, scattering his famous chuckle among friends. The moment he sat down he became the embodiment of the judicial system, the majesty of the law. He touched his skullcap, settling it tightly on the round head, gave a tug to the regal robes of heavy, rustling silk, gazing about him benignly, Mr. U.S. Supreme Court, in the flesh. . . .

There was a flurry at the top of the stairs. The square figure of Calvin Coolidge came in view. (Oh, yes, Mrs. Coolidge, her family, and some close friends, having been seated, were good for several minutes of air time.) Mr. Coolidge descended the stairs, stepping precisely, the wind plucking at a strand of

sandy hair, the eyes chilly and unsmiling, the lips thinly set.

The National Anthem . . . the Invocation . . . the family Bible brought forth, large, old-fashioned, appropriately worn. Mr. Chief Justice Taft stands up, clears his throat slightly, gives the left edge of his robe an absent hitch, raises his right hand, directing the President to do likewise, placing his left hand on the Bible, and speaks the opening words. "Repeat after me, 'I do solemnly swear. . . .'"

Pitching my own voice low, I noted the Vermont twang in the President's speech, in contrast with the rolling Ohio hard-R roundness of Mr. Taft's.

In a few minutes it was over. The dignitaries turned their backs on the microphones, slowly climbed the stairs. "This is Norman Brokenshire, who now returns you to the studio in New York. . . ."

In midafternoon I knew I had set a record (it stands to this day), two hours and fifteen minutes consecutively filled to the brim with words—and absolutely nothing prearranged to say!

I returned to New York feeling like the conquering hero. But no time was allotted in those days for resting on laurels, and I plunged back into the regular schedule laid out for me.

There was a weekly evening broadcast from the Commodore Hotel, lovely dinner music under Bernard Levitow's baton; every once in awhile a song plugger would get the chance to sing a chorus of a new song. It gave me an idea. (This radio business is really for me; I want to be in it up to my neck.) Why couldn't *I* do more than merely announce numbers? I tried getting right up to the microphone when the orchestra was playing something I knew and liked, whistling along with the orchestra for a chorus, ending with "Pretty, isn't it?" It seems fantastic now, but of such things were huge studio mails made, and mail was the barometer. I began looking for more gimmicks.

There were some beautiful canaries in cages in the hotel lobby. I got to wondering what it would be like to bring into the broadcast the sound of their singing, so I primed the operator to move our line amplifier, putting the announcing microphone over by the cages. Before coming in at the end of a number, I would hesitate; if the canaries were singing, I

got as close to them as possible, let the air take a few seconds of their song. Sometimes it was so beautiful that the whole program was held up. The feature caught on, Mr. Levitow had the canaries moved permanently, and they became a part of his regular setup; from then on we worked together; Bernard, Brokenshire, and birds.

It was radio that gave the dance orchestras the idea of having identifying themes. At the old Pennsylvania Hotel, now the Statler, George Olsen's theme was not a conventional melody; it was a whole production based on the sound of an approaching train, done in rhythmic music, very ingenious. Train in the distance, coming closer and closer, over a simple melody, like wheels turning . . . the brass section would reverse their mouthpieces, blow into their instruments in tempo, producing the effect of a hard-working engine . . . slower, slower, then a great hiss of steam, the bell would clang. . . . As "passengers alighted from the train," I would describe them. "There, I see her now, Aunt May, down from New Hampshire to visit us. . . ." "Hmm-mmm-mmm, Congressman Updown looks a little worried, but Congressmen always look worried when it's lame-duck time. . . ." "Now here's what I call a lovely lady. Someone ought to write a song about her. George? How about it? There is one, you say? 'Corn-fed Indiana girl, but she's Sweetheart to me'? Get along with you, George, aren't you ashamed!"

In one way it was all nonsense, but it was nonsense that integrated me with the program. Sometimes I recited the lyrics of a song. "Drifting and Dreaming" registered a big hit and was the sort of thing that prompted orchestra leaders to ask for me by name to handle their broadcasts.

Radio was well on its way. The thing the WJZ management had fought to avoid got out of hand; no longer could announcers be held down, kept in the background. With thousands of homes adding radios daily, with interest in better programs and broadcasts mounting, suddenly announcers emerged as the lifeblood of the stations, the direct, human link between program material and the listening audience. Announcers were the new matinee idols!

My own mail was now unmanageable, hundreds of letters every single day. I was being demanded for public appearances. When the Metropolitan Theatre League, meeting at the Hotel Astor, persistently requested the station to let me come and make a talk, the powers had to capitulate. Were they going to continue sitting on their high horse and risk alienating from radio listening members and friends of the Metropolitan Theatre League—and potential RCA buyers?

WJZ made one condition. They would accept speaking engagements for me *strictly* on a no-pay basis. I didn't split hairs. I was building a reputation, a career; the money would come.

From an unexpected direction radio artists and announcers, radio itself, received another push. The English Department of New York University decided to run a voice test on the various popular announcers, determining which ones ranked as good examples of the use of the English language. It was emphasized that this was not to be a contest, rather a serious scientific test.

The professors came with their recording apparatus, taking down various announcing voices at normal chores of reading from script, ad-libbing, and so on. The recordings were graded by the English department staff, and there was quite a build-up for giving out the results.

Graham McNamee, of WEAf, was declared winner, with a rating of 87.3. Brokenshire of WJZ was next, 86.9. Naturally I was disappointed; however, a difference of four-tenths of a point seemed mighty small. I accepted it philosophically and went on about my business.

There was a curious sequel. I was to receive some secret information from my very special girl; it was I who had won! I still have a copy of that letter addressed by Mr. RCA himself to Mr. Popenoe. For certain business-political reasons of the moment it seemed best to let the WEAf announcer win; consequently the results were quietly juggled, giving me second place. There were moments when I wanted to make a noise about it, but when all was said and done, it was a minor matter, purely intramural, so I kept still. Now both Popenoe

and Graham McNamee have gone to their reward, and all I have is an old letter—and I am alive and enjoying life.

Each out-of-studio broadcast was becoming more interesting than the preceding one. A memorial to Thomas Alva Edison was to be unveiled and dedicated at Menlo Park, New Jersey. It certainly merited broadcast. I was eager to meet one of my long-time heroes.

By this time Mr. Edison was quite deaf, though he remained a pleasant and uncomplicated man. He showed me through the laboratories himself, explaining equipment and the origin of many wonderful inventions and developments. He impressed me by the way in which he seemed to feel that I was the one who should be thanked, for taking the trouble to come and put the ceremonies on the air; to me the interesting thing was the way his own quiet self set the mood of what turned out to be a quiet but very effective broadcast.

The internal workings of the so-called variety shows of that period were mildly laughable. The format ran pretty much the same; only the names were changed. There would be an orchestra, a male quartet, a soloist, and the announcer. When the show was sponsored by the Reading Railroad, its name was Reading Railroad Revelers; when the Pennsylvania Railroad paid the bills (for the same artists), the orchestra was the Pennsylvania Orchestra, the quartet the Pennsylvania Keystoners, the announcer in both cases Norman Brokenshire. Having a taste for alliteration I like to recall that I was the one who dubbed them the Reading Railroad Revelers; subsequently, holding the last name, the Revelers quartet became famous, at times boasting such tenors as Franklin Bauer, Frank Parker, and Jimmy Melton.

Aviation, not only as military but as civilian transport, was gaining a hold on people's imagination. A plane equipped with a short-wave transmitter was to fly in circles over Central Park in New York, to test radio as a two-way method of communication, between a plane in flight and the ground. I was assigned to a vantage point in the park with a specially constructed receiving set, to attempt the two-way conversation with the pilot as he flew overhead.

A crowd gathered; I was in my glory. Several times I tried

to make contact with the pilot, and failed. Keeping a careful check on allotted broadcast time, three minutes before I had to return the air to the studio, I got it—Roger! A bona fide two-way conversation. True, the voice from the plane was anything but good broadcast quality, but it proved in headline fashion the feasibility of two-way ground and plane voice conversation. Where would commercial air lines be without it today?

With every step of this kind WJZ gained in stature. The soft tenor voice of another announcer, Milton Cross, a singer before he was hired as announcer, was often heard on scheduled operatic programs. To the musical staff of WJZ had been added Godfrey Ludlow, a splendid violinist from Australia. With Keith McLeod and Cross and Ludlow this made a very fine musical combination, so good in fact that a regular Sunday evening broadcast spot that I announced led to a concert, one May night in Aeolian Hall. I was given the pleasant task of announcing the concert, too; WJZ saw it as an excellent means of letting part of the listening audience see several of their radio friends together in person. What a change of heart!

No longer were announcers reduced to waylaying performing talent, dragging it into the studio. Now there was an office staff whose business it was to make contacts with people, like the Landay Brothers, sellers of musical instruments, and the great Wurlitzer Company. In turn these people had contacts with musical schools and organizations that, if approached, would prepare well-rehearsed programs by capable talent. It led to the original form of sponsorship. The Con Edison, Snyder's Catsup, Cliquot Club, Maxwell House Coffee, Royal Typewriter, Bonnie Laddie Shoe people, and many other firms sponsored orchestras and other musical groups or individual artists, receiving free air time in exchange for paying the talent. This was a major forward step. Paid-talent programs were naturally superior to the hit-or-miss program in which passers-by dropped in and sang for free. The way was opening to commercial radio, which, whatever else can be said about it, has been the means of bringing free

to America the cream of entertainment, special events, and myriad types of knowledge and information.

Up to now advertising agencies had been inclined to look down their august noses at radio, on the assumption that it was a temporary ripple on the waters of progress. But now agency men one by one began wondering if perhaps they had been too hasty; if another selling medium were not emerging to be ranked with newspaper and magazine ads, billboards, and car cards. Was it conceivable that the mysterious force of radio could be utilized to inject names of products into the day-to-day word-of-mouth conversation of millions of people?

The advertising agencies began edging into the picture.

EIGHT

ANY accumulation of successes changes the inner workings of a man's mind. The changes may be, and in fact usually are, so subtle, take place so gradually, that the individual is not aware of them. A successful actor begins to avoid autograph seekers. "He's got a swelled head," people sneer. Maybe so; it could be, though, that he is not different from the person he was when he was a struggling nobody; what has changed is his perspective. Now he has important work to do; that fact causes him to see things differently. Over a period of time the effects of success can seem to be a change in fundamental personality.

My perspective changed under the impact of success; yet, I told myself *I* was the same; things, people, had changed. My eye was seeing things in a different light. Companions I had run with constantly just didn't seem to interest me any more. People whose advice I used to seek and value seemed to me suddenly to have lost their judgment. Even the hotel room where I had lived contentedly was suddenly not large enough.

I retained the basic right-and-wrong values of my upbringing but now a veneer, that front I acquired along with the success, had become such a part of me that taking a drink, for instance, was something that no longer appeared to me to be wrong. Now when I went into a bar I no longer made any effort to be inconspicuous. My wallet was stuffed with speak-easy cards; in whatever part of town I happened to find myself

there was a card to give me entree to some pleasant little place where I could stand at the bar or sit at a table and have a little fun rolling the dice for the next drink. Mostly the drinks were very bad, but the friendships were good; everybody in the speaks was your friend when you had a few dollars. Most of my off time was spent in the speak-easies. There I could find release from the tension, an easy bonhomie. There, too, I found something else: escape.

Why did I seek escape when I had a life that was the envy of countless friends, seen and unseen? I don't know. As I look back on it, for one thing, no matter how well I did my job, I began to know down deep that I could do it better. There were situations I did not grasp quickly enough to make the most of them on the air, things it came to me to say, when it was too late to say them. I needed to escape from the nagging knowledge that my sense of importance was allowing me to grow careless. How often was I late? Too often. You just can't be late in radio.

Then there was that Christmas Day. Cross and Reid were both married men. I was not. "I'll cover your shows," I said grandly; "stay home with your families, that's what Christmas Day is for." That was the showy gesture I made. I knew that inwardly I had another reason. The holiday audience was far larger than any on ordinary days. Standing in for them, Brokenshire would be in people's homes off and on a dozen times during the day. Each time he would be saying, "This is Norman Brokenshire. . . ." So my generosity had a selfish, greedy motive. I remember all too well how it turned on me and slapped me down.

Between shows I went to see a friend off on the boat to Miami. There was the appropriate celebrating. For some reason I had a pocketful of gold pieces. I can remember using some of them to pay for little square bottles of choice Scotch. We drank to and with everyone on the ship. When the taxi driver let me off at 33 West 42nd Street I can remember giving him a gold piece, whooping, "Tha's O.K., merry Christmas, fella!"

The studio was like a morgue, and of course the office was empty. The spirit of Christmas was abroad in the land, but in

me were only self-satisfaction and excesses. I was never able to do anything in moderation. No happy medium. Always it had to be all the way or nothing. Soaring joy, wallowing sorrow, full dress, or overalls. . . .

Now was my chance to join the millions of listeners, doing their traditional things at home on Christmas Day. "This is Norman Brokenshire. . . ." (The big man of radio, the *big* man, who brings you the choice programs; nothing but the best; when there's a hard job who do they call on? You said it. *This is Norman Brokenshire.*)

By this time I wasn't even using a chaser. I put my little square bottle in front of me, beside the microphone on the announcer's table. Where's the schedule? There it is. Le's see now; oh, yes, Billy Wynn and his Greenwich Village Inn Orchestra. They're coming to the studio today. Tha's nice. A nice program of nice dance music for all the nice little people who stay in their nice homes on nice Christmas to do the nice traditional things. Grinning to myself like a man with a big secret, I ran my hand comfortingly over the little square bottle, right there where it could keep me company, within reach on the table. Nice little bottle of square Scotch. Man's best friend on Christmas Day when he has all that work to do. . . .

Billy Wynn came in with his boys, and they set up. I would just take another little drink, thank you. Ooops! Not too much. That's enough *and* thank you very much! Merry, *merr-rrrr-y* Christmas. "Hyah, fellas, welcome to the morgue on Christmas Day. Hey, le's brighten things up a bit. 'Nother li'l drink, Mister Brokenshire? Thanks, don't mind if I do. Hey, boys, here y'are, a two-and-a-half-dollar gold piece to every member of the Greenwich Village Inn Band—there y'are, an' a merry Christmas from Sanna Claw. . . .

"*Nice* li'l ol' Christmas drink for good ol' Billy Wynn, here y'are, Billy, m' boy. Billy, m' boy, oh, Billy, m' boy—song cue if I ever heard one, Billy, m' friend! What? No drink? O.K., O.K. on'y leaves more for me. I'll take it now. Can't have it standin' aroun' just gettin' lonelier an' lonelier. . . ."

I wiped my mouth on my shirtsleeve. (Look a' that, who told you about monograms on your shirts? Nice, discreet,

little monograms, no big, vulgar monograms. Nice, neat li'l ol' plain monograms for a neat li'l ol' plain gen'lman.)

Billy handed me the list of numbers and a little smile, a knowing little smile, with a kind of sadness in it, too. (After all, Billy sees drunks at the Inn every night, hundreds of drunks, all kinds, all ages, all shapes and sizes.) Don't you worry, Billy, m' boy; never need to go worryin' 'bout Broken-shire. Good ol' Brokie, he can do a better job drunk than the rest of 'em can do sober.

The band tunes up, the light flashes, I'm on the air. "*This is Norman Brokenshire. . . .*" (That never failing, electric charge, when the light flashes and you know you're on the air; it's as though the switch turned something on inside you, instead of the microphone.) Take it easy now, Broke. Brother Popenoe is one of those nice little people, staying in their nice homes on nice Christmas to do the nice traditional things—turning up the volume on the radio, looking at the schedule, dance music at 770 on your dial. . . .

With a flourish I give the signal, Billy starts his theme. . . . Music down and under . . . then the voice (everybody knows that voice). "And a merry, merry Christmas to you. How do you do, ladies and gentlemen, how *do* you do. This is Norman Brokenshire [oh, oh, did I say that before?]. A full hour of dance music in the Billy Wynn manner—he'll win your heart while he puts your feet in tempo with the holiday spirit. We're off to a *glor-rious* start with 'My Alice Blue Gown'; maybe you, Mother, or you, Sis, or you, Sweetheart, got an alice-blue gown for Christmas? Let 'er *go*, Billy boy!" (They're playing, now I can take a deep breath. Good thing I have the Scotch handy; did it seem like the voice was getting a little thick? Watch it!)

Another announcement, another number; I'm getting down to business now, sitting up straight in the chair, breathing slow and deep. This is going to be quite a job. It's getting close in here. When did they make the studio smaller? Why is it so close? Funny—there's the end of the number? What's next? Where's my place on the sheet? O.K., O.K., I can see! No. 4. special arrangement of "Meditation" from *Thais*, by Massenet. Take a drink, clear the voice. Is that operator in

the control room two miles away? (Remember the stage so far away in the burlesque theater in Boston?) The operator in the control room signals. You're on. Take it easy now, Broke. . . .

"Now Billy Wynn and his Greenwich Village Inn Orchestra will play a speshul 'rangement of Tedetation from my ass by Massen—" The brass roars up, drowning out laughter among the boys, Billy sees to that; he's not smiling now. What's matter? Wha's that guy in the control room looking at me like that for?

I saw him pick up the telephone, listen with a set face. Wha'd I say? Some little watchman of the mind tells me I made a honey. I slide down in the chair a little; don't look at anybody, probably it isn't anything, the hell with it anyway. My hand reached out for the bottle of Scotch. Here's where I really take a drink. As I tilt my head back, the operator gets to me, mumbles briefly, "Popenoe caught it, says for me to take over, sorry." He put a hand under my elbow, helped me out of the chair. With his left hand he passed the bottle for me to take with me.

Things are a little foggy now, but as I open the door to leave I catch a nod, a wave from Billy Wynn. The boys are playing hard. I look once more at Billy. Now he's smiling again, that little smile with the sadness in it. Brokenshire, there goes your generous gesture, I tell myself shakily. What a fool!

When I left the studio, there were still five shows to do. I never did know who did them, only that I wasn't there.

By afternoon of the day after Christmas I was admitting to myself that drinking *was* becoming a problem. A big one. Why couldn't I just be a normal drinker, like everyone else? Norman, the normal drinker (bad joke); in radio a year and a half, now even I could tell that there was a change in me. Funny thing, this being born in June—Gemini, the sign of the twins. Norman Brokenshire must be two people. If so, one of them was certainly in trouble.

First that Christmas broadcast fiasco. Then the time I was late (again); it was for that special broadcast, somewhere on Park Avenue, the one that Popenoe's assistant, Bertha Brainard, was so interested in; that was poison!

However, these things and many others I managed to slough off. It took a peculiar chain of little things to touch off the really big explosion.

The transmitting tubes in those days not only cost about a thousand dollars; in addition, they were hard to get. For that reason the control room, where they were stored, was a very sensitive area indeed; it harbored the amplifiers for the two stations and a few spare transmitting tubes.

One night between shows a couple of us in the studio, inclined to be a little boisterous, were kidding near the door to that important room. There had been a card game, a couple of drinks. A little horseplay ensued, in the course of which somebody pushed me against the control room door. I broke the glass.

The operator scuttled around, trying to find someone to make quick repairs, but it was too late at night; he was ordered to stay put until it could be fixed. He was stuck; he spent the night right there. In the morning the glass was fixed but everything else blew sky high. After a meeting between the chief engineer, Carl Dreher, and Popenoe, I was called on the carpet. The net result was a warning. "If anything like that happens again, we don't give a damn how good an announcer you are, you're out." I could see they meant it. I couldn't get over how a little thing like that could cause such a fuss.

Later the same day I was explaining to someone what had happened. "Honest to God, I couldn't have hit it any harder than this!" I said as I doubled up my left index finger and tapped the glass with my knuckle. Bam! The pane exploded like a grenade. It dazed me. In the rush job the glass must have been set in under a strain. But there it was! I'd been warned; they *had* to do something.

I was told to take that night and the next day off, they'd call me.

That was the craziest day I ever spent. My special girl in the studio kept me posted by phone. There was meeting after meeting, conference after conference. People came from the RCA office—still no call, still no definite word. . . .

I began to know that it wasn't the glass or even the tubes.

The episode simply brought to a head the growing problem by the name of Brokenshire. Without doubt their best man, but irresponsible, a bad example for the rest of the boys; something had to be done. Yet they didn't want to hand me to the competition on a silver platter.

"Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown." My girl came over to the hotel to say, "Take it easy; they'll call you tomorrow morning. You *won't* be fired, take my word for it. They're going to transfer you to WRC in Washington for awhile."

Mood, manners, or morals didn't change much when I hit Washington. The studio was housed in a two-story bank building (Riggs Bank, Tompkins Building) on the outskirts of the city, instead of in a business building in midtown, as in New York. Otherwise WRC was a carbon copy of WJZ control rooms and studios.

Right away they loaded me up with the more important programs. I began building new shows for them. I inaugurated a Children's Hour for WRC patterned after the Children's Hour that I had handled on WJZ. I built a Slumber Hour, too.

Remote jobs, like the concerts of the U.S. Marine Corps Band and a lot of night-club and hotel work, meant that I had to travel miles each day in a car. At first I rented a brand-new little Ford roadster, which was kept for my special use.

When the Marine Corps Band left the Capitol steps to do the summer series in the Sylvan Theatre, in the shadow of the Washington Monument, instead of treating it like just any band concert, I gave it the special-event treatment. Captain Santleman and his bandsmen would be on a platform backed by trees and shrubs. Lawns sloped away in three directions from the platform, and the audience sat around in lazy comfort.

The concerts were excellent, with full program notes supplied by Captain Santleman. However, the intermission made a lengthy break that it was my job to fill. At first I contented myself with describing the crowds, the deepening twilight, the golden net of music enveloping us in a mood. Fireflies were good for a few imaginative minutes, especially if "shine,

little glow worm, glimmer, glimmer” happened to be on the program.

One day I decided I'd give the listeners something unexpected. People came from all over to see the Washington Monument; very well, I'd make a personal tour of the monument and tell the listeners all about it.

There is an elevator, of course, but I decided to make my tour afoot. On the way up and down I made voluminous notes. Thoughtless and destructive tourists seemed to enjoy marking the stones up with pencil or scratching them with penknives. I did my good deed for the day by suggesting that they'd hardly want that done in their own homes by visitors; why abuse the hospitality of the monument? I reported on the number of steps—"I counted them, I *know!*" The views from the little windows at the top, north, south, east, and west, made small vignettes. I interspersed contemplations of America, her first President, the Capitol, all that this monument signified. This time the concert intermission was no lull but filled in with a vivid, flowing, colorful description of something all listeners thought at one time or another of doing—going to the top of the Washington Monument in the nation's capital.

The mail was immediate and extravagant. "Give us more!" A magazine called up and wanted a copy of my script, for publication. (Script! There were moments when I was lucky to be able to make out the scribbled notes.) People stopped me on the street. "I heard you telling about the Washington Monument; the wife an' I are gonna go up it on my next day off." Now the powers were getting a load of the great Brokenshire. Break windows—make bad slips on the air? Pooh! what did that matter! This was it. Just look at the mail! *The King can do no wrong!*

For a while I boarded with an engineer and his wife. My memory of that sojourn is simple and colorful. Everyone knows Washington gets hot in summer. My picture is of a small, tidy kitchen where we sat around—the engineer and I in shorts, his wife in a respectable minimum of sports clothes—happily absorbing cooling drafts of homemade beer, which we developed in ten-gallon crocks in the cellar. We had a

very workable arrangement; when we washed the yeast sediment out of the bottom of each bottle, we deposited two cents in the "bank"; the bank always contained money enough to pay for a new batch, the makings of which could be bought at a nearby store, and kept us in bottles, capping equipment, and shaky health.

Across from the Riggs-Tompkins Building was a large, modern, well-equipped motion-picture palace, with accommodations also for vaudeville, which, however, it never presented.

One day when the manager showed me around, I saw possibilities in the unused top-floor dressing rooms, cute, clean little cubicles about fifteen feet square, running water in each one, and bath down the hall.

After pulling a few strings I got permission to rent two of the cubicles, twenty-five dollars a month. Moving day at the Tivoli Theatre was a gala affair!

All the announcers and engineers pitched in and helped. I bought brand-new furnishings and procured the finest heterodyne set RCA could dig up for me. Presto! Fine bachelor quarters. I waited till after dark to climb the water tower on the roof and hook up the antennas, probably the most intricate and majestic antennas since Marconi first did his stuff. It was necessary to be secretive because this was strictly an off-the-record arrangement; I don't think the owners of the theater chain know about it to this day.

Among those present at my housewarming was the Tivoli Theatre organist, a tippler of no mean accomplishments, also a rabid DX fan. In those days DX, distance radio, separated more men from their wives than golf, smokers, and sitting-up-with-a-sick-friend, all rolled into one. The DX fans were a breed who stayed up all night, dialing away, sorting out squeals, howls, and screeches from their sets to bring in some far-off station. If they could catch a program, make sure of the call letters of the station, give the name of the performing artist and one or two of the program numbers, they could then write the station and in return receive a stamp bearing the station's call letters. Such a stamp collection was more precious than a Babe Ruth autograph. Night after night this

species would twist and grind, study and search, combing the ether for so much as a hair's breadth clue. Bleary-eyed they would go to the office in the morning, to spend as much time as possible when the boss wasn't looking, comparing with the other DX-ers in the office, notes, stamps, and last night's assorted howls and squeals.

The housewarming ended, the guests staggered off into the night; only the organist and I were left, still drinking, still DX-ing. All would no doubt have ended harmlessly except that the organist had one rather unfortunate failing; after a certain length of time drinking caused him to turn happily destructive. In this instance the result was that my newly acquired home was taken apart bit by bit, to signalize each new and distant station brought in. "I'll pay for it, don't worry!" he would yelp joyously as he seized a chair, crashing it to splinters against a wall to rack up a new station. Another distant station, another chair; then a mirror—the hell with bad luck! Oddly enough, I fell in tune with his mood and lent a willing hand, doing my fair share of damage. When we had made a complete shambles of the new abode, we wound up the night down in the theater proper, playing the great pipe organ. When we finished "Good Night, Ladies" and left, it was daylight.

After an interval of drugged sleep I swept out the debris, moved in a supply of new furniture, and settled down to a happy existence, sleeping in the Tivoli Theatre, working over across the street at WRC.

The big bosses down in Washington were a little more impressed than I thought. It proved easy to convince them that it would work to their advantage to let me circularize names and addresses from my fan mail, informing all and sundry that I, Norman Brokenshire, had moved from New York to Washington, and it would be my pleasant task to minister to their listening pleasure. Cashing in on the receptive mood, I suggested to the powers that they supply the letterheads, envelopes, and postage. Somewhat startled, they agreed; RCA had never done anything of the kind at its own expense for an announcer—or been asked to.

In fine fettle I put my imagination to work, creating a

letterhead that I need not fear would reach the wastebasket without being scrutinized. It bore an arty photograph of me, taken just after I arrived to bless Washington; the cameraman had snatched this likeness when I was twisted partly away from the camera, head turned coyly over one shoulder, with a shuddering arrangement of romantic lips and come-hither eyes, all of which we transferred onto lush sepia prints. Inasmuch as I had been posed in an open-neck white shirt we used the head-and-shoulder line at the top of the letterhead, allowing the shirt tone to wash fluidly into the brown of the paper stock. "How do you do, Radio Friend!" ran the legend; believe it or not, there was more, but this is enough to give you an idea.

Of such a masterpiece of personal promotion five thousand copies went out to proclaim that I was now connected with WRC of the Radio Corporation of America, in Washington, and would be happy to have the recipient give ear. I have no idea how this brash gesture was received in listener's homes, but it was catnip to my galloping ego.

Meanwhile, up at WJZ my special girl was keeping me posted on developments. I kept out sheets enough of my eccentric stationery to write her frequent and special letters. In times past she had proved herself a pal, warning me of repercussions from some new antic. She would give up her lunch hour to take dictation for my overdue programs and warn me when my standing with the powers was dangerously shaky. Aside from all this, by just being herself, she was causing me to do my first sane, nice thinking about women since Army days. I found myself thinking about her as a woman instead of just a secretary.

On my letterhead I wrote asking her to come down to Washington to pay me a visit, see for herself how things were coming along for me. "I have a car," I bragged; "everything for your comfort will be arranged; just let me know when to expect you."

When she arrived, I had an especially nice room picked out for her in a very beautiful, quiet hotel, and first on the list a trip through Rock Creek Park. We got her settled at the hotel, made the rounds of several of my broadcasts, and when

the day's work was over, hopped into the rented Ford so I could show her the Washington I knew, winding up in the park.

Now there are two wonderful things about that park. At several points Rock Creek itself flows right across the road, affording a wonderful provocation to stop a car in midstream and scare a city girl by announcing, "Oh, oh, we're marooned; now what'll we do!" After a suitable delay you'd think of a clever method of "rescue," saving your girl from a nasty watery accident. (The joke was on me. Being no fool, she estimated exactly how much danger there was; not saying anything, she let me think I was getting away with it.)

I had another spot in mind, where you could drive off the main road go through a side road, and wind up in a lovely sylvan glade.

We had just got comfortably parked without lights and into a romantic clinch when *bang!* flashlights in our faces from either side of the car, and some rather personal remarks from two police officers.

Very worldly about the whole thing, I explained to the officers who I was: "I guess you know my voice, I'm the announcer on WRC." Apparently the officers couldn't care less. "Well, now, you know how it is, men; we've just got engaged, we came out here to plan our wedding—lots of things to talk over. You know how it is. . . ."

"Mister," said one of them coldly, "you're parked here without lights. That's against the law."

I tried to pass it off gracefully, but I wilted inside. Here I'd planned the perfect romantic interlude, and look what had happened to it! The week end developed a lasting limp right there.

When my girl got gack to New York, she wrote to my horror that a New York tabloid had published the story of my being pinched "with a girl." I wondered desperately if she'd ever come near me again.

My observation is that every once in awhile a radio reporter's experience trips over some incident far back in his life. The death of my baby sister had left me with a patho-

logical reaction against death and funerals. It rose up to plague me when I was assigned to broadcast the funeral services for the great William Jennings Bryan. Bryan was one of my idols. To cover the assignment with distinction would add to my reputation. Ambition and vanity warred with inner repugnance at the idea of having to be near the corpse.

I had my ministerial upbringing to fall back on in conjuring for the listening audience the dramatic solemnity of a headline funeral. I was able to forget myself somewhat as I tried to describe what must be in the hearts of hundreds of people shuffling past the open coffin, and to describe them with proper reverence in a soft voice. Bryan's courageous fight for right marched on. . . . His banners of truth would be picked up and carried onward by those who had caught from him a vision, a vision that lived though the silver tongue was stilled. . . . But now and again my eye would inevitably catch sight of the cold, dead face; damp sweat would make me shiver.

It was over. I stood there, wrapped involuntarily in my own spellbinding. As involuntarily I glanced at my watch. Hurry up, I told myself, just time to make your next assignment. My next assignment happened to be dance music from the roof garden of the Powhatan Hotel, one of the gayest spots in Washington. Wipe the tears from your eyes, forget your revulsion, jump in a cab, jump out of the cab, rush up in the elevator. . . . "How do you do, ladies and gentlemen, how *do* you do. This is Norman Brokenshire, bidding you join the dancing world . . . roof of the Powhatan Hotel . . . lilting music, gaiety, romance . . . lay aside your troubles. . . ."

All things considered, these months in Washington were good radio months. I didn't like the climate; I missed the whirl and exhilaration of New York. At intervals, in moments of self-examination, I told myself that the drinking episodes were no longer funny; if I didn't straighten up and fly right, I might easily never get back to work in New York again. Nevertheless, though I had a feeling at times of treading water, the work in Washington was good experience.

The very possibility that I might not get back to New York jolted me. Scared, I did what so many people do; I went on the wagon. Going on the wagon is, in its very nature, a

temporary thing. My vacation provided me with the flimsy excuse to jump off the wagon in just a couple of months.

The day before I was to leave I threw myself into a flurry of absurd planning. First I bought the Ford car I had been renting. I stowed two bags of sand in the rear compartment, for ballast. I gave the engine the tuning of its life. I planned to drive to New York, visit a day or two, then drive on up to Canada to my old home.

When everything was set, I had a drink or two with the boys; I was off the wagon, hooray! (You have to celebrate, don't you, when you're going away on vacation?) Since I was drinking again, naturally everyone wanted to buy me at least one drink. I still had two assignments to cover before leaving; the result was two broadcasts that were at least, shall I say, colorful.

In the early evening, dinner music from the Mayflower Hotel. Two numbers out of the way, put the microphone back on the line amplifier, pass the time, waiting for the next number. On the show was a comely girl singer, very good to look at, blonde, shapely, luscious. "Yeh, but she's not my type; brunettes are my meat," I remarked to a bystander. There ensued rugged male commentary, blondes vs. brunettes; relative emotional boiling points of each; how many girls understand when to talk, when not to? Merrily we rolled along until the station control engineer flashed my operator furiously. "For God's sake, you're on an open mike. What th' hell you think you're doing?" A new type of broadcast for the elegant Mayflower Hotel indeed! Oh, well, accidents will happen.

The other assignment was more dance music, this time from the Swanee Ballroom. Here the orchestra was placed on a very small, ornately decorated podium at one end of the intimate dance floor. Once more while the boys tuned up, I passed the word around that by daybreak I'd be on my vacation way to Canada. "Hey, that calls for a drink, Broke! Have one on me." What I accepted plus what I had already stowed away put a very garrulous, feeling-no-pain announcer on the sacred air. Toward the end I was gabbing on and on and on, when and whether the music was playing, when it

“took five.” My intentions? The best in the world. The ballroom manager had generously brought me a bottle. (Gotta give him a good plug!) Good ol’ Suwaneeeee *Barroom*—excuse it, please—*Ballroom*. Happp-pppy days! Friends an’ neighbors. . . . Let joy be unre—unconfined. . . .

I drove out of Washington. Along the road I plucked out of the dimness a hitchhiker, going my way, so he said. When he got in beside me, he made room by shoving over my bottle. We tore through the night. He hung on. No car ever made Washington to Baltimore in any more stylish time than that. Straightening out the curves with my sand ballast and tuned-up motor, I skipped the minor bumps, deigning to touch only the important ones. On the outskirts of Baltimore my passenger jibbered, with his first real breath, “Here’s where I get out, pardner!” I laughed at him. “Here, if you’re really gonna get out, have a drink to celebrate—show there’s no hard feelin’s.” I waved expansively, pulling the running board from under his feet, and was on my way. As I hadn’t left Washington till one thirty in the morning, around Baltimore it was dead-of-nightish; so much the better; you didn’t have to worry about anybody being on the road.

In those days the Ford car had two handles on the steering wheel, one for gasoline, one for spark. I pulled them both down as far as they would go, leaned back, and watched the trees go by. Oh, yes, the bird was on the wing.

I suppose everything might have been all right except that at one place in the black macadam road workmen had dug a hole, taking up half the paving, the right-hand half. Steel stanchions marked the excavation, with ropes draped across to block traffic. Maybe the red lanterns had gone out in the cool night wind. Maybe some mischievous boys stole ’em. Maybe I didn’t see red so good at the time. Maybe I didn’t take the trouble to see anything. . . .

The Ford skipped the hole like a little man, taking with it a great swag of ropes, snarling around the front axle and dragging a clanging mess of metal stanchions. The steering wheel jerked itself out of my hands. The car made a crazy right-hand turn off the road, galloping through a field and bringing up with a grunt against a big tree. “God takes care

of children and drunks." The tree hit the car on the right side. In the driver's seat I just got shaken up.

A car traveling not very far behind me pulled up. A clot of Italians ran across the field to inspect the corpse. The corpse was standing on two feet, looking over the damage. "Ho, you not driv-a dat auto no more-a tonight!" laughed one. "You betta get in with-a us, we drivin' da woods, pick-a da mushroom," someone else said. "Shuse! Balt'more police dey no like drink-a an' speed-a." Prohibition and alcohol—mellow as I was feeling, I could well imagine what some judge would have to say if they pulled me up before him!

I accepted their invitation. Afterward I didn't remember much about the trip for the reason that I did remember to take along my trusty little ol' bottle. I remember stopping in a wooded strip and trying to help pick some mushrooms. Every time I stooped to get one, somehow the whole landscape seemed to come up and hit me in the face. Finally I went to sleep in the back seat.

That night the Italians deposited me at a little inn somewhere along the way. I was put to sleep in a room over what seemed to be a camouflaged gin mill. Many hours later I staggered downstairs to find out where I was, what I was doing there. Fortunately my unexpected hosts had a drink handy to start me moving again. The Italians had explained the situation. Somebody at the inn told me where my car was. The mess I was in, what the outcome would undoubtedly be if the cops caught me, I decided I didn't like Baltimore. I hopped a train for New York and never did show up in that neck of the woods again. I wonder what ever became of my little Ford.

In New York I dropped in at WJZ, taking care to call on one or two of the top brass. I gleaned several bits and pieces. For one thing WJZ missed me. ("Good ol' Broke, the life of the station! It's a dead house around here without you. When you comin' back?") In my smugness I thought, They need me now more than ever.

I pushed on to Canada, taking with me several scrapbooks to parade to the family so they could be properly proud of me.

The scrapbooks interested my dad particularly. After looking them all over, he gazed at me thoughtfully and made a remark that struck me as somehow tragic. "We ministers can struggle a lifetime, yet never receive one tenth the recognition you receive from just one show."

New York was my town. When I got back to Washington, I realized this more than ever before. It made me restless. Whatever was necessary to do to get me back to New York must be done.

Radio Digest Magazine was conducting a popularity award contest. My name was high on the list of finalists.

September 25 I was notified that I had won second place. Second!

Now WRC was putting me on its biggest assignments. An address by President Coolidge, broadcast from Constitution Hall; an interview in his office with the then U.S. Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover; an interview with the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Mr. Jardine—my list of credits looked better and better.

F. P. Guthrie, district manager for RCA, was very friendly to me. I saw that the information got to him that I had written to KMOX, St. Louis, seeking a job. This would quickly find its way back to WJZ and Mr. Popenoe, would suggest plainly that I entertained no plans for remaining indefinitely in Washington.

Things happened even faster than I hoped. Mr. Guthrie got on the telephone to Mr. Popenoe. One morning when I arrived at WRC I heard that another announcer, Ted Husing, was being shipped down from New York; in exchange I was to go back to New York as chief announcer of WJZ.

Timing entered into the move. WJZ had just been granted permission to go on superpower. In New York my first assignments were test programs late at night, first on 30,000 watts, then on 50,000 watts, at last on 80,000 watts. Our farthest letter answering these tests came from Shingle Point, Alaska!

"I cover the world!" I told myself brashly. Have to have a drink on it. That's my boy!

NINE

CONTROVERSY boiled over the advent of superpower. The rabid DX fan with the misfortune to live anywhere in the vicinity of a high-powered transmitter lost his pleasure and his pastime, because superpower signals blanketed his set from one end of the dial to the other; unless he was equipped with wave traps, he could bring in only the one station. On the other hand, superpower was a bonanza to listeners at a distance. With just an ordinary three- or four-tube set they got remarkably clear reception.

Expensive experiments were carried on and in well-aimed propaganda explained to the public. In *Wireless Age* for May, 1926, for example, the chief broadcast engineer of the Radio Corporation of America, Dr. Alfred N. Goldsmith, wrote:

Super-power broadcasting is the beginning of an efficient and economical broadcast reception. It is simply an intelligent, and will be a successful, attempt to reduce maintenance costs of receivers, and improve the reliability and quality of reception over great areas throughout the country. This is the reason why such stations as WJZ, Bound Brook, New Jersey, mean a great deal to the future of the radio art; they act as sign posts, pointing to a future of radio broadcasting on an economically sound basis, with minimum burden on the listeners and lowered costs for transmission power.

To those of us engaged in broadcasting the tests in the studio, it was an exciting adventure in reaching the largest number of people. In a short time our station earned the reputation of being the successful pioneer in this new step. Coupled with having been given my second chance at WJZ, it acted as an incentive to me to cut out the foolishness and do my level best. Hours meant nothing. I would work day and night, and not let drinking or any other aspect of personal life interfere with my work.

It is the idle hands for which the devil finds the mischief; when interest runs high and you are kept busy, it is not difficult to stay in the straight and narrow. There were not many idle moments. Mrs. Julian Heath was putting on a better show than ever, and the mail that welcomed our being together again was the surprise of the age. She was president of the newly formed Housewives' League; *Radio Review* and *Radio Home* gave her sustained publicity. The other shows I handled had grown bigger and better, too.

Radio was now taking a big step toward commercialism. While nobody was allowed to buy time on the air, it was acceptable to the station for a firm to pay for the talent; it became logical for the hour or half hour filled by the paid talent to carry the name of the firm. When the Royal Typewriter Company paid for an orchestra and a singing team, a script was written and the show called "The Royal Typewriter Musical Comedy Hour." Snyder's Catsup people paid for a variety show featuring Gus Haenchen's Orchestra, and it was billed in newspaper notices as "The Snyder Catsup Hour." Delta Pearls had "Gems of Romance," with Colonel C. P. Davis, traveler and raconteur to spin tales of love and adventure; the parts of this program that were dramatized brought to radio the famous and elegantly British voice of Frank Knight. When the response to my spur-of-the-moment reading of "Fish Head" created the trend of the continued story, which developed into "Dramatized True Stories," naturally the talent bill went to *True Story* magazine.

Thomas Cook & Son engaged Malcolm LaPrade to do travelogues, a radio version of travel short subjects that were having a success in the movie theaters.

Collier's magazine unveiled a very remarkable personality, in the form of one of its editors, John B. Kennedy, probably the very first of that now numerous breed, the radio news analyst. His delivery was lean, austere, authoritative, and his observations and opinions so incisive that the station, feeling its way toward public approval and consequently inclined to be timid, suffered nightmares over possible repercussions. Everybody breathed sighs of relief as time went on and Mr. Kennedy's verbal avalanches turned out to make more friends for the station and radio than it did enemies.

The piano monologist came to radio in the person of a talented young man named Ray Perkins, whose services were paid for by the humor magazine of the day, *Judge*. The "Bonnie Laddies" helped the sale of shoes for the Sundial Shoe Company. They were Wilfred Glenn (also the bass in a well-known quartet called "The Shannon Four") and an amazing young man, Dale Wimbrow, playing a ukulele he had made and labeled "the Wimbrola." Wimbrow, a leaping extrovert, would establish the mood for the show by arriving in the studio brandishing a fabulous cane (carved by himself of some wood of unparalleled rarity), and strumming his ukulele, he would sing songs of his own composition and Glenn would harmonize with him. Together they would kick around a dazzling hodgepodge, by turn whimsical and philosophical, well-paced, excellent entertainment. If Sundial was Wimbrow and Glenn's benefactor, Wimbrow was theirs; seizing on the sundial connotation, his agile mind gave them their slogan, "Time will tell."

In those days the radio industry functioned with the collective ear very much to the ground. Everybody watched what everyone else did—watched, imitated, and prayed that their programs would be best and capture the audience.

Something else was happening, even more important to radio. Discernibly, sales of those products that were mentioned on the air jumped—but high! When companies showed sales charts to their advertising agencies, comparing results of radio mention with results obtained through newspaper, magazine, and billboard advertising, agency men showed a tendency to lower their noses to a more respectful elevation,

and began to listen attentively to clients who argued to get aboard the radio band wagon.

As I was now chief announcer of WJZ, the programs handed to me were the cream of the crop. My job was to take the general plan for each program and prepare the "script" on the basis of the list of selections for broadcast; the script was a sort of smoother-outer, stuffed with provocative connecting words, adroitly placed. When I had any spare time, I was put on the air with sports events, interviews with interesting guests, spot news, and miscellaneous "experimental" broadcasts; all these were strictly ad lib; as best I could, I snatched up salient facts, spinning the actual story after I got on the air. A spider with a deadline for finishing his web had nothing on me.

It afforded the kind of climate in which I flourished. Now my mind was alert, my reactions quicker, keener, and also more disciplined. Experience was teaching me well.

The celebrated, petite, charming Mary Pickford was prevailed upon to come to the station to be interviewed on the air. She had been in the picture business so long, had such a towering reputation as a winner over great obstacles, that it never entered my mind she would not be able to take the innovation of radio broadcasting in stride.

She arrived mere minutes before we were to take the air. I greeted her, my mind racing over the way I would handle the interview, my eye gathering up the descriptive details that would appeal to the listeners. I got the signal from the control room.

"How do you do, ladies and gentlemen, how *do* you do. This is Norman Brokenshire. At this moment it is my great and particular privilege to introduce to you America's Sweetheart . . . lovely person . . . heart-warming portrayals . . . childhood roles to present day . . . endeared herself to your hearts. . . I am indeed happy and thrilled to present the one and only—"

I looked from the microphone just in time to see Mary Pickford's expression of horror. She reached out one shaking finger and touched the microphone. "You mean," she said faintly, "they can hear everything I say?"

Nodding, trying not to gulp, I said, "And now—Miss Mary Pickford," whereupon Miss Pickford fainted in a heap at my feet. I scooped her off the floor, holding her draped over my right arm while I said into the microphone, "Neighbors, in the pleasure and excitement of Miss Pickford's being here, there are one or two things I forgot to tell you—things I feel sure will increase your pleasure in hearing her." I raced wildly on. Someone had rushed up with a glass of water and had the presence of mind also to rub her tiny wrists.

Let it be said for Miss Pickford, the trouper, that she made it; as I was easing into the new, "And now Miss Pickford," she pulled herself up by main force to her five-feet-nothing, set her lips with determination, mustered a small, shaken smile, and framed the words, "I'm ready now, thank you."

If you couldn't be flexible in the face of emergency, you had no future in the radio of those days, because hardly a day was without its emergencies. Once when I was in the throes of introducing a string quartet, a broken cello string cut across the air like a snake whip. Throwing the cellist a "Don't worry, fix it!" glance, I pulled out of some crevice of my mind a detailed description of the making of gut strings and why they were used; before I was through, the new string was in place, stretched, tuned, and ready for playing.

Queen Marie proved to be an exercise in rolling a star of large magnitude around in the hand. Nowadays a queen would not come to radio; radio would go to the queen. But such was the newness of the medium that no one knew any better than to ask the Queen of Rumania to come to the studio; being a bouncing and obliging lady, full of both good nature and curiosity, she came.

We did have the gentility to roll a red carpet from the entrance of 33 West 42nd Street to the curb. With a police escort and a clamorous convoy of cars filled with reporters Her Majesty's black limousine rolled to a stop. I offered my arm, and she alighted, blazing with jewels and aswirl in a sumptuous gown of satin with a great flowing wrap of purple velvet; as I escorted her into the building, I kept up a running flow of conversation that I prayed would have the

double usefulness of putting her at ease and providing me with bits for the broadcast. Talk about "How do you speak to an angel?" How do you interview a queen!

She was what we in America call a good sport. She was vital and interested, always a good subject for being interviewed. Nothing she had to say would shake the world, but she adjusted herself so easily to the occasion that she might have been a trained actress—which, come to think of it, I guess she was.

Sandwiched in among such headline stuff, out-of-studio work was very much on the increase. In addition to luncheon, dinner, and late dance music from the better-known hotels and clubs, there was an ever growing list of special dinners and meetings during which, from a vantage point somewhere under a table or behind a drapery, I would prepare the way, describing the occasion and the scene, carefully leading the listening audience up to the moment when the main speaker would go into his "unaccustomed as I am to public speaking" bit. The special affairs were many; one I shall never forget—The Old Maids' Club, holding a shindig at the Lorraine Grill. Just why a group of men should call themselves The Old Maids escapes me, but I remember that they were an ultra-hilarious bunch with a vast prejudice against limiting their drinking. By the time I arrived with an engineer to set up the microphones and line amplifier, it was a question whether enough order could be restored to produce the program.

I tried every means I could think of for quieting things down and getting their attention. Finally I gave up anything sensible. I went out on the dance floor with my mike. I stretched out full length on the floor, leaned on an elbow, and placed the mike beside me. As I hoped, this outlandish performance captured the attention of members and their guests, and they gave up their antics to watch me; soon there was enough order to present the music, some story of the group, and more music. This sort of thing developed my reputation. From in town and out the studio received demands for my public appearance.

The powers were still hoping to restrict the announcer to the role of paid employee who would just do his work and

go home. And so personal appearances were discouraged at first, even forbidden.

Another interesting rule existed at this time. If announcers had no knowledge of the nature or source of upcoming programs, they would not be able to make secret plays to grab them. Accordingly, announcers were forbidden to set foot in the programing department without an eighteen-carat invitation and firm appointment. In other words, no dropping in just to look around. The period of keeping announcers in their place, and keeping that place as limited as possible, acted also as a deterrent to office politics. Radio was growing up.

Thinking that the mounting mail might go to my head, Mr. Popenoe ordered the mail department to keep it from me. I had long since learned how important to an announcer mail could be, and I hit the stratosphere. This, I howled, was not right; this was *my* mail.

Mr. Popenoe's answer was ready and waiting. "The *station* gives the program to the public, hence what the public writes in response belongs to the station." I got the point; that was the end of that. No mail, no swelled head. As I couldn't argue with the manager, I handed things over to Uncle Sam. I went around to the main post office, Eighth Avenue and Thirty-third Street, rented their largest box, and filled out a change-of-address card. When the station mail dropped with a thud to less than half its former volume, with *none* for Brokenshire, Popenoe was baffled. Before long he encountered me, carrying huge bundles of mail that had not come through his mail room; he withdrew the order to the mail department.

Meanwhile, enough of the top-secret studio mail was demanding personal appearances by me to give the powers difficulty in sleeping nights. Public opinion has a long record of winning. News just happened to get out that Norman Brokenshire was going to take the Record Boys, a well-received musical group, as entertainment on May 27 to the annual Schwaebischer Maennerchor concert and ball in Bridgeport. . . . Norman Brokenshire and the brilliant monologist Senator Ford were going to entertain at a charity

benefit at Riverhead, Long Island, on such-and-such a date. The Industrial Baseball League of Easton, Pennsylvania, was happily preparing to present Norman Brokenshire plus George Olsen's music at Eddyside Park. In this case one of the sponsors of the affair, one of the larger Easton business houses, asked permission for me to broadcast from their windows. They were flatly refused. However, when I got to the scene of activity and found the setup all arranged, in a glow of good fellowship I got up in the window and did the broadcast. I think this was the first instance in which I deliberately broadcast against authority. When they heard about it, my superiors ground their teeth. Such incidents were building my position as one of the most popular announcers on radio; their stakes were as high as mine; consequently, there was no backfire.

My only real rival was Graham McNamee, who dominated the frequency of our great competitor, Station WEAF, or *Weef*, as everyone in the trade called it.

WEAF was going commercial now, too, perhaps even a little more rapidly than we, by virtue of the dignity of RCA, were permitted to.

You, my friends, may be wondering why I have not mentioned the Atwater Kent Hour, the Happiness Boys, the Ever-ready Hour, the Silver-masked Tenor, the A.&P. Gypsies, Cliquot Club Eskimos, and some others of the period. In writing these words I am reliving those early days of radio, the moods, the jealousies; to us of the "great" WJZ, anything even remotely connected with WEAF or American Tel. & Tel. was a sort of shameful knowledge that, in all loyalty, we were duty bound to conceal—even from ourselves! Actually we were all too well aware of those programs being produced downtown somewhere. But we were obligated to leave the knowledge strictly alone, like a hot poker. In fact, on the bulletin board at 33 West 42nd Street a notice was posted that read as follows:

"Any staff members of WJZ found in or about the Telephone Building will be fired without notice."

I don't know if a like notice regarding station WJZ was on their bulletin board at 195 Broadway; but I do know a large staff was busy day and night, trying to beat us to every punch.

At WJZ, meanwhile, our pay had been raised; I think mine was now sixty-five dollars a week. We were forbidden to accept any outside remuneration in any manner, shape, or form for any job done as representatives of WJZ. In lieu thereof I was plied on every hand with "gifts": a cigarette case, inscribed to me with thanks; a monogrammed gold belt buckle, watches, pigskin wallets with eighteen-carat gold corners; one more imaginative and grateful recipient of my services had the ingenuity to have a placque made up for me that contained a twenty-dollar gold piece—removable.

Fan letters often came in the form of books, candy, jars of homemade cookies, pressed flowers, clippings from local newspapers, jewelry. I was the new sweetheart; girls even sent me rings, given to them by onetime swains who had now fallen into their bad graces. One woman bundled into a box and sent me everything left to her when her husband died, including a deed to some real estate. A nursery on Long Island wrote me that they were holding for my instructions a most beautiful maple tree, purchased for me by one of my admiring listeners. What to do with it was something of a problem, as I lived on Forty-third Street in the heart of Manhattan and no trees were yet being planted in cement sidewalks. I guess the nursery still has the tree. Ties, shirts, hand-knitted socks, engraved stationery, recipes for making homebrew, a curl cut from some girl's head and tied with a blue ribbon—my office desk groaned under all this tangible response.

Once between shows I had to get a couple of hours' rest. It was my long day, and I went to my hotel where I left strict do-not-disturb instructions. Within the hour my telephone rang. The switchboard said a man was calling who absolutely had to see me, a matter of life or death. So I dashed water in my face and received him, to learn that he was the worried husband of an ardent radio fan who had lately given up interest in everything else in order to write me a stream of

ardent love letters. The fact that I had answered none of them had driven her to the verge of losing her mind, and she was now in a state of shock. He said it was a choice of finding some way to get her straightened out or of committing her to an institution. The husband had come to beg me to do something.

Together we searched through a pile of letters I had in the room. He found several in his wife's handwriting, unopened. We read them together and formulated an answer, suggesting as gently and kindly as possible that a radio personality was not worth such emotional sacrifices. The husband went away, taking with him this honest letter, which we hoped, plus his loving attentions, would restore her to a rational way of life. Days later I found a message at the hotel, in which the husband reported that she was improving.

Oh, yes, these were high-pressure days, exciting days, days of unclouded blue skies, of limitless horizons.

The little girl who had for so long kept me posted on inside information, and who had made me that somewhat mixed visit to Washington, was also progressing. WJZ now had an artist bureau, and she was in charge of developing it. Her job was to find program talent that would serve regularly both on radio and outside bookings.

When she first came to New York from Pittsburgh, she had been married, one of those routine marriages that are the lot of many a girl who becomes restless and unhappy at home and sees in marriage the best way out. This one had lasted only a few weeks. After the separation she was forced to look for a job. She put ads in the Situations Wanted columns, and the one that turned out successfully got her a job at WJZ. We had much in common; she got her job only about two weeks after I got mine, and soon we were acquainted.

I discovered that this was a girl with whom I felt at ease. She proved her friendship over and over again. She was miserably unhappy about her marital stalemate, and I saw my chance to return some of the good turns she had done me by helping to find a way of extricating her. Through an attorney with whom I had a passing acquaintance, I attempted to get things started toward the divorce she felt she wanted.

This threw us together all the more; we often had dinner, and she fell into the habit of going along on some of my late broadcasts. Her name was—is—Eunice. She was sweet, unworldly, efficient. She was the first person who told me of the likelihood that Lewis Reid, one of the early birds of WJZ, would be resigning from the staff.

Radio was rushing ahead pell-mell. New stations were popping up like mushrooms, and New York was no exception. It seemed that a clothier named George Sultzbach, duly impressed with the possibilities of radio, had, under the name of George F. George, formed a corporation called the Peoples Broadcasting Company. There were dazzling stories about its plans and potential, and Lewis Reid, having been approached with an offer that would double his salary, had decided to make the change.

Eunice kept me posted, too, on inner-office feelings about my giant rise to popularity and the constant running battles pro and con over my being permitted to make outside appearances. On the one hand, it was thought—grudgingly—to be good public relations for the station, especially since it cost them nothing; on the other hand, it was considered to be dangerously inflating my ego. Furthermore, if I wasn't actually being paid under the table now, it was only a question of time till it would be so, with the inevitable consequence that my fees and status would ascend to such heights that my example would disrupt the whole announcing profession.

Things were just as this stage when Atlantic City requested me as master of ceremonies for its beauty pageant. DeWolfe Hopper had always been King Neptune, and he ran the affair; but the city had a radio station now, and they wanted a man with the publicity value of being connected with radio, who could vividly point up the colorful ceremonies on the air.

At first WJZ gave a cold no. But the World's Playground officials were hardy souls and would not give up. "All right," said RCA, "you can have him provided *we* get the credit for *giving* him to you, and he gets no pay!"

Popenoe called me in. "In letting you do this I want you to understand that it is not a vacation," he said. "You are to commute between here and Atlantic City, maintaining

your regular shows as far as possible." It was a rough prospect.

My feelings were somewhat soothed by the *official* announcement of the station, over the signature of Herbert Glover, that "this is the first time in the history of the pageant that a radio announcer has been chosen for this important work. His duties will require him to preside as master of ceremonies at the judging of the most beautiful girl in America, and act as official announcer to the boardwalk throngs. He will also serve in similar capacity at the coronation of Miss America in the ballroom of the Million-Dollar Pier. From time to time Brokenshire's voice will be heard through Atlantic City's Municipal Broadcasting station WPG as guest announcer. Brokenshire's selection for this assignment represents one of the first tributes paid by the general public to the rapidly rising ranks of radio announcers."

Life has a way of dealing out warnings against overassessing ourselves, warnings that if we grasp them, should have salutary effect.

One evening, after a too short rehearsal, we were putting on a gala show in the studio—the Record Boys; Frank Campbell, Sammy Stept, and Al Bernard, recording artists; a piano and harmony team; and a yodeler.

It was a spot of fun from beginning to end, jokes and funny sayings combined with harmony and patter. I always handled this show, and it was strictly ad lib, off the cuff. After the usual greetings and the yodeling theme we got into the harmony number.

I saw someone signal me from the door of the studio. While the boys were singing, I went over and was handed a telegram. Having to watch the timing, I brought it back to the microphone. The number finished. Interjecting something gay, I announced the next number. Then I opened the telegram.

"YOUR FATHER DIED THIS AFTERNOON AT TWO O'CLOCK," it read, and it was signed "MOTHER."

The thought leaped into my mind, I don't want to see him dead. I must escape that. Telescopically I saw my sister Carol again, cold, pink, waxlike. Now my father was like that. I

could not bear the idea of seeing his deadness. Much about him had been hard, cruel, but there were many nice things; I wanted not to see him dead, only to remember these. There raced through my mind his bringing me to New York after the war; the fifty-cent room we shared at the Mills Hotel. I thought, Mother is alone. Will she be all right? I wanted to think of the living. Two minutes ago I had been gay, confident, effective; now my mind whirled with misery. This was the first serious blow since I had gone out into the world, since I had grown up. (*Had I grown up?*) I wanted a drink.

The number finished. I signaled Al Bernard to ad lib something, anything. Al told a gag. They were all looking at me. Pick it up, I reminded myself, pick it up! "And now ladies and gentlemen—" Tensely I pulled the tone up, made the resonance in the voice come through. I began to feel the mood of the show come back into my grasp. How many more minutes to go? "What's that, boys? A yodeling song? Just what the doctor ordered. Frank Camplain in 'Silver Moon,' Sammy Stept at the piano." I wanted the show to go on and on and on. When it was over, I would have to reply to the telegram. . . .

I wrote my mother a letter. When the funeral was over, and the burial, I went to see her.

Three days of the hectic New York–Atlantic City schedule—the glitter and pageantry, the exotic settings and beautiful build-ups at Atlantic City, the routine broadcasts in New York—gave me a sharp picture of what Popenoe's prohibitions, his itch to hold me down, meant to me in the face of exciting demands from the outside world, a more exciting, more remunerative outside world. I turned rebellious. Something had to change.

After three days of having the whole Atlantic City police force at my beck and call, after being wined and dined and feted and flattered, after hobnobbing with a cloud of the most beautiful girls of the nation, after having the use of Nucky Johnson's penthouse apartment, I came to the reluctant good-bys to all—the important people who engineered the pageant; a sentimental good-by to Fay Lanphier, the re-

tiring Miss America of 1925; the congratulatory dinner and good wishes for Norma Smallwood, Miss America of 1926; the thank-you dinner to Brokenshire, when Armand T. Nichols presented me with a beautifully engraved Hamilton watch in lieu of a fee. After all this I took the train back to New York, exhausted, sleepy, and somehow depressed. Unexpectedly it turned into an eventful train ride. For on board was Charles B. Popenoe.

Here, away from the station on neutral ground, on an equal footing, I was able to talk to this man; while he minimized the announcer as such, I told him I was convinced that I personally could go places as a free lance. I told him frankly how I felt about outside possibilities and that maybe the best way all around was for me to resign and go it alone!

"You'll be making a mistake," said Popenoe. I could see that to him I was still only a hotheaded whippersnapper; because of a little success I had delusions of grandeur.

What he didn't know was that I wouldn't be taking as big a chance as he guessed. I had received word from Canada that the estates of two aunts, long in the courts, had finally been settled and were to be equally divided between the four boys in my family and the five boys in Uncle John's family. This would mean eight or ten thousand dollars for me.

What I didn't know was that plans were in motion to join the forces of the great competitors, WJZ and WEAJ, to form the giant National Broadcasting Company, which as it turned out was to dominate the air for years.

Back in New York, so far as anybody could see, the shiny new watch on my wrist was the only thing about me that had changed. But in my mind things were humming.

On a September evening with the orchestra and quartet I finished doing the Reading Railroad Revelers, a happy make-believe travel program, and went to keep an appointment with a Dr. Jarvis and a Mr. Prince, two gentlemen who had sketched in a very flattering way a picture of me as the man in charge of the radio department of Arrow Amusement Corporation, an outfit newly formed by them. Their offices were upstairs over the Palace Theatre at Forty-seventh Street and Seventh Avenue.

They took me so into their confidence, so swinging me over to their way of thinking, that I decided not only to resign from WJZ at once but to turn over the major part of my inheritance to them as an investment in their prospects. This decision was made in good faith, man to man; and it never occurred to me to check into the men or their company. I am impulsive and trusting by nature; this time I was naïve as well, being at the moment impelled by a definite ambition as well as a combination of pressures. For some time, for instance in talking before Rotarians, Kiwanians, and many other service organizations, I had been prophesying a new type of production in radio shows that I called personalized productions, borrowing from the method of the motion-picture industry with its "Cecil B. DeMille Production," "John Ford Production," and the like; an expert put his standards and experience into a project that then carried his name as its hallmark of quality. I had visions of shows with which I was connected for Arrow Amusement bearing the tag, "A Brokenshire Production," in the same way that today a TV production bears the name of Robert Montgomery as its producer, or "Dragnet" is known as "A Mark VII Production."

In the belief that Jarvis and Prince had numerous connections, I foresaw many and varied possibilities including the vaudeville and private entertainment fields; already in my mind's eye I saw my name in lights, in gold letters on an office door, and prominently on every script the meaningful words, "This has been a Brokenshire Production."

Being by nature a precipitous, no-time-like-the-present guy, if I were going to do a thing, I wanted to get on with it. So I said I would join them the following week, and we shook hands on it all around.

I left them to do the late Saturday night broadcast from the roof garden of the Hotel Astor. Throughout the show my mind was busy painting mental pictures of a fabulously golden future; by sign-off time I had reached a bold decision. At my request the orchestra played for its last number of the evening "Auld Lang Syne." Through the music Brokenshire resigned publicly from WJZ.

What it lacked in orthodox method it made up in graciousness. I dwelt on how nice it had been for me through the years to be with WJZ, for they had been the important, formative years of radio. I described how real and reachable the listening audience had become to me, part of my personal, everyday life. The listeners must not feel now that I was leaving them for long; rather that I was making a change that would enable me to serve them better. At the end the ham in me came out generously. Withdrawing slowly from the microphone, step by step, in a receding voice, I waved them an imaginary *au revoir*. "Don't forget, you'll be hearing me soon again. Not only hearing me, seeing me face to face, for soon I start on a vaudeville tour. And so . . . I'll be seein' you. . . ." I'm sure there were tears in my eyes for this dramatic farewell.

WJZ turned my regular programs over to the other station announcers.

That was a big step I took, and I was to feel many regrets. But I was young; to me nothing was impossible. Success, such as it was, had gone to my head.

When I was fully set up in my new surroundings, I issued a publicity release. If nothing else it shows that I was far ahead of my time; the type of program I had resigned from WJZ to develop for Arrow did not materialize for many years. One obstacle was the jealousies existing between stations. So violent was the competition that any announcer appearing at one station was automatically *persona non grata* at any other; had Norman Brokenshire Productions come into immediate being the very fact that one station favored its work would have been the signal for all others to shun it. Nevertheless, the grandiose release was news, so it went out, and I began what I envisioned as a meteoric career with Arrow at 1562 Broadway.

In my files held together by a rusty clip are yellowed copies of half a dozen letters and a telegram, confirming the arrangements for providing the talent for the Greater Wilkes-Barre Radio & Electrical Exposition October 11-15, 1926. The job netted Arrow the magnificent sum of \$300.00, the exact amount charged for my services as master of cere-

monies. The rather more interesting fact about it is that it represents the one and only piece of business completed in the Arrow Amusement Corporation's existence. On Friday of the second week, when I went to collect some money coming to me, I found an empty office. Everything was gone. Dr. Jarvis and Mr. Prince had vanished into thin air, and with them all my scrapbooks, photographs, mailing list, letter file, even the new suit I had bought and kept hanging there in the closet, like a fireman's rubber pants, to be put on the minute the alarm sounded. A month later it was slim consolation to read in the papers of the arrest in Texas of Dr. Jarvis.

Many years later, by appointment I met a man at the Astor Hotel who wanted to know how much I would give for the return of my scrapbooks. Still years after that, I was waiting for a taxi on Sixth Avenue between Fortieth and Forty-first Streets, when I happened to glance in a dingy, cheap, clothing and haberdashery store; who should I see but an aging and unhappy-looking Mr. Prince, formerly of the Arrow Amusement Corporation; obviously he was running this moth-eaten two-by-four establishment. I couldn't bring myself even to be angry with him, and I jumped into a cab and drove away.

The Arrow Amusement Corporation having blown up in my surprised face, I now had to find immediate work, being really broke. It was Eunice who had the best idea for immediate rescue. "Why don't you go and see George F. George right away?" she suggested. "He's always wanted you on his station, remember?" Shortly after my imposing farewell to radio from the Astor roof garden, she left WJZ, too, joining his station as program manager.

She was right. Mr. George was out after names for the staff, and I was hired at \$125.00 per week. Immediately I was sold for a program sponsored by the Holland Laundry in Brooklyn, a program called "The Holland Kids." We broadcast from temporary studios in the Majestic Hotel on Central Park West. Great plans were underway. The staff now consisted of Lewis Reid, Walter Neff, Alois Havrilla, and Eunice. Adding my name to the list, they also gave me full charge

of the artists' bureau. It looked like a very cozy setup; the hours were good, and with that kind of money coming in, I could recoup.

Yet from the start I had the oddest feeling that something about the operation was strange; something was going on; there was an undercurrent that no one could quite put a finger on, but I felt it.

Finally the veil was lifted on the inner doings of WFBH, with the sudden announcement that the call letters would be changed to WPCH, which could only mean one thing, Park Central Hotel, a great structure nearing completion, on top of which could be plainly seen two slender radio spires pointing into the sky—incidentally standing useless to this day. We found out also that WPCH was going to be known as the American Bond & Mortgage Station of the Park Central Hotel, owned and operated by the Peoples Broadcasting Corporation. We found out that salesmen were going from door to door, to all the friends of radio who had written in fan letters of any kind, trying to sell them stock in the Peoples Broadcasting Corporation. In short, George F. George was battenning on the popularity of radio and the "names" he had caught with large salaries and a salesman's build-up.

In the minds of some of us it raised questions, but things went along. Programs were built and put on the air; salaries continued to be paid. At least here I could do outside work.

For a couple of months I sailed along, had several commercials to do, got the artists' bureau fairly active. I decided to publish a song I had written several years earlier, "Believe, My Beloved, in Me." It was a waltz, not good enough to be published commercially, but I was convinced it could be sold to my fans and provide a good publicity angle to boot. I had a cover made up, with my picture in the center, from which streaks of lightning radiated, representing radio; between the radiating lines were the call letters of every station I had been on, all the programs of note that I had announced. "Believe, My Beloved, in Me," by Norman Brokenshire, radio personality; published by the WPCH Artist Bureau, N. Y. C.

I dug out carbon copies of part of my mailing list, and

with that as a starter, together with a nucleus of new listener addresses, I began mailing out a circular letter, calling attention to the song, the history of my radio career on the cover, also the autographed three-color photograph of myself, all for \$1.00. The sales weren't overwhelming, but the venture satisfied an urge that is shared, I observe, by many people—namely, to have your song printed and sung by others.

The work of my new job lacked the spark. Inwardly I knew that Eunice and I, perhaps Reid, too, had made a mistake in leaving WJZ. So again there was more than enough drinking in my daily life. In fact the whole episode of the WPCB connection seems, as I look back on it, to have taken place in a fine mist—here and there glimmers of bright, shining spots, a broadcast that came off particularly well, a coup of some sort—but as a whole the period seems mighty blurred. I was certainly not happy. My horizons had narrowed; I managed to see very little of my old friends; the future at this point was something I preferred not to imagine. As long as I kept myself half drunk, I didn't have to meet the eye of reality.

I was requested to do some special commercial broadcasts up in Bridgeport, Connecticut, over WICC. I went and was given a prodigious welcome, with a round of cocktail parties that did me no good because I had no brakes. The upshot was some pretty boisterous announcing; it was a mild surprise to me that in those outlying stations they didn't mind this sort of thing in the way that a metropolitan station would; in fact, they talked humorously of those crazy programs for years.

One coup I recall was in November of 1926. I arranged to broadcast the opening of the new John Golden Theatre. I loved John Golden as a man, felt proud to be granted the privilege of inaugurating this landmark in honor of his name and works. For once I meant every nice word I said. The building still stands; the last time I entered it was about a year ago, when I was doing a TV show with Jessie DeBoth, a food and cooking show—shades of Mrs. Julian Heath!

The call letters were changed from WFBH to WPCB on December 6 with appropriate inaugural ceremonies. Our offices were moved from the Majestic Hotel to a large floor of

an office building located at 119 West 57th Street, a temporary location until the Park Central building was completed.

Everyone who was anyone was invited to this gala broadcast; artists came from the Strand Roof, the Knickerbocker Grill, the Club Richman; there were Ray Perkins, the Radio Franks, Senator Ford, Andy Sanella, Irving Kaufman, Sam Herman, Jack Schilkret's Orchestra, the Revelers Quartet. There were famous personalities of the theater: Marjorie Rambeau, Augustin Duncan, Mary Desti; the great artist Howard Chandler Christy and many, many others put in appearances. Artists and guests paraded through the two studios, where the staff took turns announcing throughout the night.

I was introducing a specialty act at one point. The young man had real talent; his act consisted of vibrating a musical saw with a bow. Seemingly the beautiful wailing sounds were peculiarly adapted to radio transmission. But so far as I was concerned the surprise and the laugh of the evening came with a telephone call, just as I was about to introduce the young man's second number. The call was from none other than the great promoter, George F. George, who was listening to the program at his home. "Who's the soprano that's singing?" he roared. "I can't understand a word she says."

The bars, set up around the studios and adjoining offices to make guests feel at home, were liberally patronized by the staff as well. Somewhere along the line, finding congenial company, I just continued with them, leaving the work to others. In the course of the night so hospitable was I to myself that I faded right out of WPCB and, as it turned out, right out of radio.

Sometime before this celebration I had joined the Green Room Club; it was a sort of poor man's Lambs' Club, and for awhile I lived there. Most of the members were theatrical people who liked an atmosphere in which things were done in a cozy, intimate sort of way. There was a great deal of drinking at the club. I drank to whip up the courage to do work I didn't like, then drank for relaxation after doing it, with the result that I went into a downward spiral lasting eight or ten days. When I came up from down under, I re-

called that one of the RKO booking agents, in the Palace Theatre Building, had said he'd be willing to try me out in vaudeville. I went over to renew the acquaintance and finally got a contract. I rounded up Senator Ford to write me a bit of material and forthwith gave up what was left of my distasteful job by becoming the first radio personality to test radio popularity at the box office.

I did what they call an "in one" on the subway circuit. My monologue lasted eight to twelve minutes (according to how long the stage manager needed the curtain down behind me to change the stage setting). I greeted the audience imposingly, told them a few of the more interesting facts about radio, lightening them with gags and some anecdotes of odd happenings in the studios, and finally, with a dummy set on stage, demonstrated the peculiar sequences of words that could come out of a set when you tuned rapidly from one station to another. The result was something like this: "And you take just three or four drops on your fingertips and rub it into your scalp [business of turning dial, squeaks and squeals made by the orchestra, announcer changing his voice slightly] . . . now add salt, pepper, and half a cup of cut chives and beat until [another change of voice] . . . you'll begin to see stars."

The act went fairly well, but I was vaguely embarrassed about it and between shows tried to tone down my inward unhappiness by drinking busily. Combine this with a physical condition that was run down, a weary and discouraged heart, a horizon that now was somewhere down around my feet, and absolutely no prospects for the future worth mentioning, and it may suggest why the last theater where I was booked to play never heard the "famous" voice.

The booking agent called it laryngitis. What it was, was whisky-itis.

TEN

PSYCHOLOGICALLY all of us are sure that, though misfortune and disaster do come, they will come only to others! *We* will escape them. An announcer reads the Safety Council warnings: "Drive carefully, the life you save may be your own," and we nod approval to this sound advice. They certainly should drive carefully. Who is *they*? *They* are they; of course, *we're* all right; nothing will happen to us.

So it was with me at this particular point in my life. In this infant industry I had risen fast, drunk satisfyingly of the cup of success. Oh, a few things had happened, I told myself; that was to be expected. I could visualize the rewards of success; already they had been in my grasp. Some of them I still held. The name was known, my work—when I was sober—stood out, unique, unmatched.

When I was warned that one just couldn't slide out from under responsibility, that radio, like all theater, required punctuality, that not only must the show go on but that it must be good, that a fellow who hoped to keep a foothold, to get anywhere, couldn't afford to be seen under the weather, disheveled, *non compos mentis*, because the public is always on the lookout for some titbit about any well-known person that can be colored and enlarged in the telling—when they reminded me of all these things, outwardly I shrugged them off. I told myself that others could draw penalties, but they would never fall on me. Radio was going places, and I was

going right along with it. I had every right to go along with it. I was a pioneer—even my enemies had to admit the truth of my first newspaper notice: “Perfect enunciation and exceptional modulation.”

My propensity for mistaking failure for success reached a new high. I told myself in the midst of danger that I was safe. On the edge of the abyss I would still escape.

That the Arrow Amusement Corporation had blown up meant, not the loss of a few addresses, scrapbooks, or even dollars, but that I was important. My very scrapbooks had been valuable to somebody! My mailing list of fans had been stolen, like jewels out of a safe! And my name had been added to the list of vaudeville headliners, the very heart of show business. Need I look farther for signs that my star hung in the sky? The little setbacks, jobs that were unworthy of my talents anyway, these were stumbling blocks; all I had to do was kick them aside or step over them.

If I could only have known, these very thoughts, this way of looking at things, are in themselves, symptoms of the alcoholic. Those who through some quirk, some imbalance of make-up or growth, have an allergy to alcohol are invariably expert in making mental excuses. One builds the other; the excuses permit the drinking, the drinking necessitates and multiplies the excuses.

I would come out of a round of drinking by the conventional tomato-juice-raw-egg-milk-cold-shower route, just like anybody else. I would put on the chest-out, chin-up, looking-the-world-in-the-eye act; but more and more, whether or not I chose to recognize it myself, I was quaking inside. A nameless, impossible-to-comprehend fear grabbed at my vitals. Even when I was putting forth my very best imitation of strength, I was hollowed inside with weakness.

The insurance companies have a term, “accident-prone.” For a long time I didn’t know that I was one of those unfortunate people who are alcohol-prone. To such a person drinking is a two-headed serpent. Such a person would run for dear life from the very mention of narcotics, never even imagining that for him alcohol may be as lethal, perhaps more so; for drinking *looks* harmless, just a nice social custom, carried

on in an atmosphere of smiles and good fellowship. The amateur bartender basks in a minor social fame. So one head of the serpent is social acceptance of a custom that, for reasons of individual chemistry, can be as dangerous to the alcohol-prone as taking heroin or smoking opium. The second head is that to such individuals, alcohol has its effect on both body and mind. Intrinsically alcohol is a depressant; any medical man will tell you that. But it has the peculiar and dual property of being a stimulant, too, in its initial effects; and so, while the drinking peels off the cares of the day and the inhibitions of the individual, all seems well. The normal drinker stops while he is in that state, calls it a day. The potential alcoholic, on the other hand, keeps drinking, for each fresh drink postpones, keeps at bay, the depression he knows from experience will come. He succeeds in fending it off, for a day, a night, perhaps another day, the length of time determined by his physical reserve. But as sure as night follows day there comes a point at which his body rebels.

Black-out is a word with a terrible connotation for the alcoholic, for it betokens the period of which he has no recollection. He walks, talks, breathes, but has no knowledge of what he does. He may lie, steal, insult, even kill, yet know nothing of his actions until he is confronted with proof. When, through long, dull sleep and medication, he comes out of his black-out, an erosion has occurred; the bottom has dropped out of his world, carrying with it hopes, aspirations, plans, leaving an ashy residue. There is now no desire to achieve or progress; to look ahead to the problems of the next hour is impossible. His is a horrible emptiness born of weakness, uncertainty, and fear. There is an unaccounted-for segment of time, the blur of humorless laughter. Putting one foot ahead of the other is a problem; friends have somehow changed into enemies; life is a mocking impossibility; there is a choice between two things: self-destruction or more whisky.

With an interval of time and the tapering-off process, the burned-out nerve ends will heal, poisons will be expelled, the black depression will subside. Food becomes conceivable

again, the feet move hesitantly toward human company. But the mind does not in a few days heal as does the body. Habit patterns have been formed. The scars of madness remain and have their effect.

In the enveloping quiet of a movie a boy toasts his girl with a glass of wine; on the street an acquaintance shakes hands and says, "This calls for a drink." Over a great office building an electric sign winks in shades of crimson and purple. "Men of Distinction drink whisky" . . . For everyone else, drinking is accepted; it implies overtones of success, well-being, pleasant leisure. But for the alcoholic the overtones are jangling discord . . . the drunk lying helpless in a dirty doorway . . . derelicts sprawled in Bowery flophouses . . . nameless remains on the cold slab of a morgue—Potter's Field.

Now I knew I had a faceless monster for an intimate friend.

When I paid my hotel bill in New Haven after missing my last vaudeville engagement, and started for New York, the world was a cave of darkness. From the train I went straight to the Green Room Club. There were things there that helped. My credit was good, the club chef always prepared good food. Fellow members, for example, Lee Tracy, slapped me on the back and, by some quip or casual hail-fellow-well-met remark, would help me to believe that, even if you took a drink, you could still work.

The club was putting on a show. I was cast in a take-off bit based on Gallagher and Shean. It gave me something to do, occupied my mind. And Eunice called after her work was done; sensing my mood she said little things to build up morale, remind me of possibilities ahead. And so the dreary days passed.

Hope was born again when Edwin M. Spence followed up letters by coming from Atlantic City to report to me that he thought he could convince the City Fathers down there that they ought to hire me as official announcer for Atlantic City. I straightened out enough to be on the square with him and said I would accept if he could put it over.

A few days later a letter came; the contract was waiting for me. Reprieved! I made myself anxious promises to turn in a good job. I had to prove that I could be trusted with a ten-month contract, at the highest salary ever paid an announcer.

Eunice saw me off on the train. I made the discovery that her divorce had become personally important to me, which it had not been when I helped her to start proceedings. Then it had been just a favor, done for a good Joe. Now somehow she had become a part of my existence; when I got on the train, I realized I was going to be very much alone. I kissed her good-by, saying, "You'll hear from me." As I lost sight of her, the anxious thought came to me that, with her, I had the best understanding of my life.

It didn't take long to get settled in Atlantic City. There was a vacant apartment in the building where the chief engineer of the radio station lived. And the director of the station, Mr. Spence, was also the leading furniture dealer of the city. I felt full of cheerful hope as I signed a lease and furnished a place I could call home.

Added to the regular studio work for the city there were exciting outside jobs, part of the good-will campaign of a city known as both the World's Playground and the Convention City. With the varied attractions of the great hotels and the magnificent piers stretching a mile or so out into the ocean we had an abundance of material for building colorful programs.

I needed a car in this spread-out resort city, even more than in Washington, and I came across a secondhand Packard phaeton. I took it and a current copy of the *Saturday Evening Post* to an auto painter. In the magazine the Packard ad showed a beautiful leopard and a Packard car painted orange and blue to resemble the color and dash of this magnificent animal of the jungle; the body of the car was Packard blue; the top of its distinctive hood was orange, and an orange stripe two inches deep carried around the top of the body. A couple of inches in from the tire edge the orange disk wheels had a blue stripe. With these colors, and the top down, here was a car to behold! "Make my car look like this," I told the painter.

He gaped at me for a minute. But he did the job. Forthwith everyone knew Brokenshire's car.

Suddenly I was made a city marshal. Now, I figured, I really had the run of the town! Our summer studios were out on the Steel Pier. If I got stuck in traffic or otherwise seemed likely to be late, I would jump out of my car, leave it where it stood with the key in it, and dash for the boardwalk. All Atlantic City police officers were instructed that if they saw that car they were to take care of it, put it some place where it would be safe, and bring me the key.

One day I overdid things. In a rush again, I drove it up on the boardwalk and through the crowds of people to the Steel Pier, hopping out and doing my show. Anyone else would have been pinched; I drew a front-page news story.

Another time, preoccupied with the work ahead, I drove a little too fast and found myself astride a safety zone, the front wheels off the ground. Having driven over one of the steel-protected lights marking the ends of the safety islands, I was really hung up, like a ship on a sand bar. I jumped out, leaving it where it was; it was up to my police friends to remove the happy Packard to a less conspicuous spot.

I was so busy, and so interested in everything going on, that I was neglecting the drinking. Envisioning a future of no limit, I got a voice teacher, L. Powell Evans, and began studying voice. He was a Welshman. I had no interest in developing the oversize lungs and bellowing voice characteristic of Welsh singers; I just thought it would be smart to learn how to sing softly for the microphone—"croon" might be the word—knowing that the engineer could manipulate the equipment to build whatever volume was desirable. I had a hunch that soft, quiet tones would be very effective.

My thought, that I could teach the teacher how to teach, didn't work with L. Powell Evans. He didn't approve of my idea. He did teach me to sing one very popular ballad, which begins, "When I was a young man, before my hair was gray," persuading me to sing it in the conventional manner; but it wasn't what I had in mind, and I never sang it or used it on the air. A year or two later I was to observe conclusive evidence that my fundamental idea had been right; Whispering

Jack Smith came along with what was probably the greatest demonstration to date of the soft-voice technique, leaving the building of volume to electronics. And a host of new names busily began crooning; for instance, one of Pops Whiteman's boys did pretty well by it, young fellow by the name of Bing Crosby.

I developed a radio trade-mark for Atlantic City's municipal station by opening a trap in the control-room floor, letting down a microphone, and going on the air "Direct from the Steel Pier." As the studio was constructed of glass, hundreds of spectators swarmed around to watch the proceedings. I'd give the call letters, WPG (a contraction of World's Play Ground), and say, "Now let's listen to the mighty Atlantic ocean as it salutes the playground of the world." The spectators never knew that the hiss they got over the amplifiers when the microphone was let down through the trap door was electrical current, passing through the studio microphone; the microphone I held in my hand was dead. With a little practice the engineer could alternately so lower and raise the gain control that you'd swear you were hearing the beautiful strong susurrant of the surf. It was a very effective stunt and impressed people all the more with the wonders of Atlantic City.

I got the idea of doing a travelogue of the boardwalk, which came off so well that in its pageant number the official monthly bulletin of the Atlantic City Chamber of Commerce editorially jumped for joy and published the script I'd written, word for word. It was captioned "Sight-seeing on Atlantic City's Famous Boardwalk," by Norman Brokenshire, and described "sights along the boardwalk, compiled by Mr. Brokenshire, and broadcast by him from the Marine Studio of Station WPG Saturday night, August 13, 1927, and by popular request repeated over the air Tuesday, September 1."

Little did I know, when I gave a great plug to the neighboring Chesterfield sign, that in another five years I would announce for that same Chesterfield the greatest radio program to date, on a chain of stations larger than any previously envisioned.

The General Motors convention, the Shriners' annual get-

together, the beauty pageant—one after another I put these on the air as part of my job at the resort. Then came the prize of prizes in radio reporting assignments of that day, the reception for Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh. Having proved transatlantic flight possible and after the furore had died down somewhat, he turned his attention to proving that scheduled flight was possible. He jotted down an itinerary of American cities, with a date, hour, and minute after each one. Then he set out in his little plane, the "Spirit of St. Louis," to land at each point at exactly the time he said he would.

On October 19 the Municipal Airport at Atlantic City was ready for him. He arrived over the field two minutes ahead of schedule. He glided down for a landing, almost, then gunned the motor, climbing aloft again, after which he circled the field at ease, waiting until the exact minute scheduled for his landing.

All this I described from the balcony of a little building near the center of the field. That description, plus the broadcast of the public dinner in honor of the Colonel at the Hotel Chelsea that evening, garnered nationwide publicity for Atlantic City, with some left over for me.

I was regaining my old-time confidence and zest. If the occasion presented itself, I would have a drink now and then, but as a burned child dreads the fire, I now knew the danger of drinking. Also I had the desire to prove myself to Spence and the others in Atlantic City, who had a slight knowledge of my weakness, and above all to prove to Eunice, back in New York, that I had the stuff that makes a man.

There were moments of panic. In one of them I telephoned her, "Please come down, I need you." Instead of telling me she couldn't get away, she talked so calmly, so confidently, that I felt wholly relieved.

But it was hard to be patient, waiting for her to be free. One day in the drugstore where I bought gin I mentioned as much to someone, who said, "Hell, I can get things moved along. All she has to do now is establish a residence in Maryland; everything that's needed'll be cared for, one, two, three." I liked the idea and arranged for Washington attorneys to take over.

Eunice resigned from her job as program manager and moved down to Atlantic City. The beauty pageant was coming up; the pressure was on at WPG; it was nice to have a sympathetic person near at hand.

Yet her coming may have been a little premature, for when the beautiful girls began converging from all parts of America to take part in this fabulous pageant of loveliness my duties, not to mention pleasures, often took me away from her in the company of Miss So-and-So or Miss Such-and-Such. Then there was a girl who, though if she had entered she would have stood a good chance, had nothing to do with the beauty pageant. And another, Florence, with whom I did a weekly broadcast called "The Sandpipers"; we harmonized, played the piano, and cooed over the air together. Not surprisingly, sparks were beginning to fly when word came in early December that the final papers could be picked up.

Quickly we arranged to make it a party—Eunice and her brother; her brother's roommate, Fred "Bake" Altvater; and a friend of mine in Atlantic City, Ivan Brooks; and I—together we raced down to Washington, to wind things up with the attorneys.

"Divorced—Wed in Five Minutes!" proclaimed the newspapers. Five minutes after Eunice obtained her freedom she became my bride in Washington. Local friends insisted on a celebration, duly held at the Hamilton Hotel. Then, slightly frayed at the edges from the elopement and trimmings, we raced back to Atlantic City, and I worked out the remaining weeks of my contract. Then to prepare for a European cruise that I had wangled. I was to do two lectures, on ports of call, and send out announcements that this particular cruise was also to be my honeymoon; for the lectures I was to get the cruise for us both for half price; quite a deal for a novice.

I filled in the time before the ship sailed with some commentating over WHN, a local station in Times Square, run by Perry Charles, one of the greatest characters I have ever known, a man gifted at putting up with almost anything for friendship's sake.

Once more celebrations threw a net over me. The stream of toasts—to the success and happiness of our marriage, to

the pleasures of our cruise, to our happy laughter, to this, to that—there was just too much drinking for an announcer who needed a clear mind to do a good job of handling the news on the air. But always Perry Charles stood by, watchfully, protectively, too protectively for the announcer's own good; all Charles knew was that it would mar a cruise for me to be fired from a job in its last few days.

He saw us off on the *S. S. Transylvania*, toasting us genially to the last.

All ashore that's going ashore! Good-by, good-by. Stay sober, or a reasonable facsimile! Don't fall overboard. Send us a post card! For a moment, standing at the rail, fear left me. Surely now that I was married I would settle down to hard work and steady, enduring success. But just for now—well, this was a honeymoon!

ELEVEN

THIS was my first trip to Europe; if ever I wanted to be a nice, normal, down-to-earth, honest-to-goodness good guy, this was the time. The trip would take every cent I owned; but after all, it *was* a honeymoon.

Of Clark's twenty-fourth annual cruise to the Mediterranean and Europe, the brochure said it was "the dream of a lifetime, to spend sixty-five golden days on the halcyon blue waters of the Mediterranean and in Mediterranean lands, so replete with the treasures of legend and mythology, of history and the life of great nations, amid the choicest creations of art and architecture, seeing radiant nature in her rarest and happiest moods, and reveling in the mystic and kaleidoscopic scenes of the magic Mediterranean." The *Transylvania*, a superb new oil burner, sailed January 25, 1928.

After all the *bon voyage*'s, without putting it into words, we both knew, as we stood there watching Manhattan disappear, that we were leaving behind a lot of experiences that were best forgotten, and silently hoped that this would begin a new life for us—together. We set out then to discover "all the wonderful surprises that wait to greet you around each corner aboard a luxury liner." We explored a world free of endless deadlines and demanding stop watches, a world of peace and leisure, of fascinating prospects, of alluring names: Madeira, Cadiz, Gibraltar, Algiers, Athens, Constantinople, Alexandria, Pompeii, Monte Carlo. This was the beginning

of a life that would truly be new. Sailing out into a brand-new world, I would be remade and come back to ride to the very top of my profession. Mr. and Mrs. Brokenshire and, in time, a lot of little Brokenshires, dwelling peaceably among the stars!

We settled in on the ship. We danced to wonderful music by a fine orchestra, without my having to step to a microphone and cater to an audience. We *were* the audience; there were no responsibilities. We stole up into the bow and watched the iridescent waters being parted by the sharp prow of the huge ship. We went to sleep very late that night, at peace with the world and one another. We were close enough even to share hopes and dreams.

They were nice dreams, but I failed to reckon with the influence of being far away from accustomed centers of activity. The tendency to cut loose, when things that held you to a certain discipline and way of living were gone, brought a certain curious, almost astral freedom, a buoyancy that most people take as normal relaxation but which to me was something quite different. To me the freedom I now felt went way beyond the time I had to get up or overdoing a bit on dessert; it reached into the mental processes, letting loose captive or semicaptive restraints, lulling the judgment. Aboard ship fear of adverse publicity, danger of meeting people before whom I should appear circumspect—these things were laid quietly to rest; the problem of being observed at the bar, pay-the-piper consequences, seemed as far off as the distant horizon. Unexpectedly there came to me an added freedom. Eunice was a bad sailor; seasickness dogged her; but while she kept close to the cabin, she insisted that there was nothing I could do for her, that I should go my merry way and enjoy things, which I did. After arranging with the steward and stewardess to take every care of her, I cut free on a fling that I venture to believe is still part of the official log of that voyage.

The bartenders and I arrived quickly at a first-name basis. "Enough of this," they assured me, "and you're seasick-proof!"

"Then fill 'er up, Jack!" I cried happily. By the time we tied up at the island of Madeira Eunice was glad to set foot on

solid ground and stay put, but sheer momentum carried me along in great shape. While she rested up from the motion of the sea, I made the rounds of the wholesale wine cellars. It was a local custom to give prospective buyers samples of various vintages, till they found types they cared to buy. Passing as a merchant, I tried them all, in all the cellars; I rolled the precious, mellow liquids thoughtfully over my tongue, inhaled the bouquet judicially, smacked my lips sagaciously—and never quite found the vintage I claimed to seek. A great act, resulting in mixing my drinks with a vengeance.

I marveled at Madeira, and Madeira marveled at me. The cobbled streets, the beautiful homes and flower gardens on the hillsides, the so-called toboggan slide, made of stones—where had this wondrous place been all my life! I saw one enchanting house and was told that it was a location for a movie made by Charles Boyer and Irene Dunne; in *Love Affair* it was to this house that Boyer brought Miss Dunne to be inspected by his old mother.

It was my duty the next evening to give the ship's passengers a talk on Algiers. My favorite bartender assured me that a gin and India tonic would fortify me sufficiently. With several tall glasses of same and a book borrowed from the ship's library, I sat that afternoon, preparing the notes for this, my first lecture.

The gin and tonic boosted my desire to please my audience but unfortunately materially dulled my capacity to learn in a couple of hours facts that I'm sure many passengers knew already, from actual visits or armchair travel. This uncomfortable combination brought onto the platform at the last minute a lecturer still swimming in his cups, appreciably more interested in swinging on a chandelier or even broad jumping over the moon than in explaining sights to be seen in moth-eaten, mangy, broken-down Algiers. However, here they were, nice, quiet people who had nothing better to do than sit and listen to me. I put down my notes and began. The opening story was great, but it had nothing to do with the subject at hand. Neither did my second yarn, or my third. I talked on and on; only when by supreme effort I was able

to focus on the face of the clock to learn if my penal sentence was up did I become conscious also of frowns and warning gestures from the cruise officers. "And that, my friends," I wound up, "leads me to believe that life will go on, with or without the dirty streets and dysentery that are Algiers!"

Future lectures by me were canceled. I began receiving covert looks of mingled scorn and pity from dear sweet ladies and quiet little old men. There were whispers as I passed. My wife cried a little but tried to hide it from me. In self-defense we kept more or less to ourselves until the ship reached Gibraltar. She had to debark by herself; my constitution had at last rebelled, and I was confined to the ship's hospital.

A man sometimes learns the hard way. My wife did the sight-seeing for both; museums, art galleries, famous landmarks; I went in opposite directions, to the points of interest "where a man could raise a thirst." A street brawl in the Moroccan native sector; a fez bought in Constantinople and worn in the wrong places; lost for two days in Cairo and "found," riding a runaway camel; climbing to the roof of an old armory in Naples, ringing a bell, which unexpectedly brought out hordes of brown shirts, and hiding until they disbanded; almost run over in Pompeii; an invitation to leave the Casino in Monte Carlo—Peck's Bad Boy was on the loose.

But two months is a long time, and there were sober moments, even sober days.

I took some wonderful prize-winning pictures of the photogenic Mediterranean and, in a serious interlude, visited several orphanages on the outskirts of Athens, where, observing attentively, I saw at first hand the work done by Near East Relief, for which I had raised so much money in New York State and Florida.

We made friends with a well-known writer, one Helene Weed, who had been one of the suffragettes, helping to secure women's rights. When an appointment she had sought, to interview Mussolini, was suddenly confirmed, she offered us her side-trip tickets to visit Capri.

For me it was another reprieve. The Blue Grotto was at its bluest; the singers from Sorrento never sang "Neapolitan

Night" more mellifluously; even the funny little hats on the donkey's heads seemed to carry the largest and gayest of flower garlands.

We sailed again through the Straits of Gibraltar, this time heading north, next port of call in Scotland. The long trip gave me time to settle down. In changing ships at Glasgow there was some mix-up about our trunks and our papers; by the time I got it straightened out, our ship had sailed. We were told that if we could reach a certain resort point by train we might catch up with the *S. S. Cameronia* on which some members of the original cruise were now passengers. We caught the train; an excursion boat, acceding to a request of the Clyde Line, put us alongside the big ship, which had been signaled to stop; we went up the pilot's ladder to the sound of cheers from people who thought we weren't going to make it.

In the course of the run to the Grand Banks my wife forgave and forgot all the thoughtlessness in her big, bad boy; with a change of personal and shipboard climate we could enjoy mingling again. I avoided the bar. Instead of shutting my eyes to reality, I began thinking about it, anticipating the day when I would get back into harness.

Two months had gone by. I had to face the fact that I was broke and in debt. It was frightening, yet somehow interesting, pacing the deck during those long, starry nights, to wonder, What will be next?

The home-coming New Yorker looks at the sky line without wonder but with a deep, still satisfaction. "New York, New York, it's a wonderful town," runs the song. The sight of it was good. No matter what lay ahead, New York was a battleground to which I responded.

The traffic lights in the center of Fifth Avenue, which to me always had seemed artistic, had been removed. In Bryant Park the trees had grown much larger; WJZ had moved; the whole front of Aeolian Hall, the familiar 33 West 42nd Street, was transformed into a Woolworth's Five-and-Ten. Otherwise the city looked the same.

Eunice's brother and his pal Bake had taken a little apart-

ment in the Village, on Eleventh Street. We moved in with them until I could look around and find out what I was going to do.

The formation of the National Broadcasting Company had joined WJZ and my bitter rival WEAf; now they were one. Somehow WEAf still seemed forbidden territory to me, so much so that it never even occurred to me to apply there for a job. Rather I went over to the Paramount Building, where, I heard, a new radio chain was being formed. One of the moving figures in the organization was J. Andrew White. When I got to see him, I learned that he had joined George A. Coates, who was good at promoting, and Arthur Judson, who managed the nation's leading concert stars but could not persuade NBC to use his bureau; together they had formed a nebulous outfit called United Independent Broadcasters, Inc. They had no money, no broadcasting station, nothing except an urge to start a network free of the dictates of RCA and create a market for Judson's artists.

To accomplish this they would have to work business magic. Nothing like it had ever been done, or even thought of, before. Seemingly only madmen would go about trying to sell time, an invisible, intangible commodity, to vague entities called corporations, for the purpose of influencing the actions of an audience that no one could see! Theirs was an operation with no head or tail; it began nowhere, it ended nowhere; it was simply a meeting of minds, in itself intangible like all the rest of it. Eventually this tangle of intangibility was to become, under the guiding hand of William A. Paley, the great Columbia Broadcasting System; however, at this point, of course, there was nothing in it for me.

My state of mind grew more tense. I needed a job, needed one badly. I went to the Near East Relief offices, told them about what I had observed on the European trip. I could see their minds working. ("If he can afford a Mediterranean cruise, he must be successful.") I kept a weather eye out for any signs that reports of my playfulness in Europe had preceded me home, but none appeared. "Near East Relief is accomplishing a great deal," I said; "I see you've got another

campaign on. If I can help, I'll be glad to." (Let it go at that; resist the temptation, the need, to press.)

On April 20, 1928, a letter came to lift our spirits. The Near East Relief was putting me back to work, assigning me to the Greater Boston campaign, with headquarters in Cambridge.

Two months followed that were a better honeymoon than the whole cruise, for the reason that I really liked the work, liked the folks with whom it associated me. Though some of the experiences and emotions of boyhood in Cambridge had been pinched and disturbing, I found that time had softened them, and Cambridge represented for me a certain feeling of home-coming. I was able to sublease a luxuriously furnished apartment off Harvard Square from a diplomat of a foreign country; it overlooked the tennis courts maintained by the Sargent School for Girls. For the first time our married life took on a normal social aspect. All the field workers and their wives would meet, compare organization notes, play tennis or cards, or go to the theater. I had two months of busy, enjoyable days. My work was productive, no problems driving me to escape; this was a little island of normality. Only once in awhile, when a radio was turned on, did I feel the tug to be back in the other life I knew, the life of excitement, color, spotlight, in radio.

When we had finished in Boston, I was glad to be put to work on the final Greater New York City campaign. We went down and shared the apartment on Eleventh Street again; this time I could pay our way; and there was another reason for joy; Eunice was pregnant.

The New York work for Near East Relief was different but went along well and was fairly productive.

One night the four of us went to Coney Island for the Mardi Gras, which would close the season. We threw ourselves into a typical night of honky-tonk fun—corn on the cob, hot dogs, popcorn, spun sugar cones, ice cream, the roller coaster, a ride through the Tunnel of Love, more roller coaster.

Maybe there was too much roller coaster; at any rate, when we got home, Eunice had to go to the hospital; by morning there had been a miscarriage.

Before the New York campaign closed I found a little apartment in Forest Hills. It seemed nice to be out of the rush and turmoil of the city, at least part of the time. We lived on the wrong side of the tracks, up over a delicatessen; but it was quiet, and airy, and cool, and it was the first *home* we could call our own.

I set out with determination to get back into radio and quickly found myself knee-deep in trouble. It seemed that in addition to having been gone from the scene about six months, tales of Brokenshire, his drinking and undependability, had grown rather than diminished. When I went to renew a contact, to prospect for a job, I began to notice a tendency to shake my hand warmly, smile benevolently, speak warily. "Yes, sir, Brokenshire, you're still among the best, the very best; but it's this way. . . ." Always the pleasant meeting dropped off on that note, that this person or that really didn't make the decisions, or that—ahem—couldn't afford to take a chance with anything going wrong. "You know how it is; sure wish I could do something for you but, well, you know how it is."

I went back to the Paramount Building. There was no Major J. Andrew White there now, but I found out that the new network was actually underway and had two New York outlets: WABC, on Fifty-seventh Street, and WOR, on Broadway, dividing the honors. When I went to WABC, the real key station (WOR was only being leased, to fill in the required hours), I was told by someone, new in the business but with an air of authority, "Take it from me, Brokenshire, you've done your time—done it well, I might add—but radio is moving fast; what we need now is new personalities, new voices." Oh, fine! At the age of thirty, with three solid years of pioneering radio to my credit I was an old-timer, a has-been!

One reassuring thing happened. One day I was approached and asked if I could take the lead in a play. Well, naturally! Going on the stage ranked among dreams like owning your own house in New York City or a private yacht or airplane. This was a firm offer. Gladly I said yes and went into rehearsal.

Actor's Equity had been formed in 1913; an actor's strike in 1919 had attracted nationwide attention; in 1928 actors still were not paid for rehearsal time, but such is the lure of the theater that a little thing like that couldn't keep us from working like mad.

The script was a helter-skelter affair by John Mooney, a play reader for John Golden. He had put into the play everything he had ever known to be sure-fire; you could tell at a glance that it was just too much. I was cast as a wealthy man about town whose craze for gambling and irresponsible meddling in everybody's business tied him hand and foot into the plot.

Just when the play was beginning to shape up, looking as though something dramatically respectable might come from it, the whole thing was canceled, because of the death of the backer. Several weeks were to pass before I learned that the backer had been Charles Popenoe, the same who transferred me to Washington in order to salvage my radio career, the same who advised against my resignation from WJZ, the same who advised me to buy RCA stock, even one share at a time if that was all I could manage to pay for.

I learned that on the merger Popenoe had been made assistant treasurer of the great NBC. In the meanwhile RCA stocks had soared, been divided and subdivided, so that he was worth over a quarter of a million dollars. Popenoe had agreed to back Mooney's play "providing you give Brokenshire a good part." Thus was word to reach me from the very grave itself, that for all Popenoe's anger over my irresponsibility during our years together, he retained in his heart a concern for me; he had heard about my job-hunting; without letting me know, this had been his way of helping. Truly God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform.

Again I began making the rounds. One day on the street I met a fellow who seemed to know me. He shook hands vigorously, saying, "My name is Tom Harkins. I'm with WCAU in Philadelphia. The other day we were talking down there about having to put on a new announcer. I understand you—er—you're just back from abroad. Don't suppose you'd be willing to come to Philadelphia. The salary wouldn't be

much, but—well, there're a lot of changes going on these days in radio. You know, Mr. Paley's brother-in-law owns WCAU; there might be a tie-in."

I repaid his openness by giving it to him straight. If I could only get back in radio, I'd do anything; the salary didn't matter. Within a few days I had a letter offering me a job at WCAU on a two-month tryout at forty dollars a week. If I behaved myself during the tryout there would be a permanent job and a raise.

The grocer on the block lent me money enough to get to Philadelphia; bag and baggage we left Forest Hills, completely and fast.

After being away from a microphone so long, I found it exciting to take my place again on the staff of a well-equipped station. Henriette Harrison, Andy Stanton, and I started a music-with-comedy show, called "Norman Brokenshire and His Frolickers"; it soon sold locally and became "The Reo Frolickers." It was a good omen for me, starting a whole cycle of commercial programs; in short order I was doing nicely in Philadelphia.

I would do an occasional Near East Relief speaking date on the side to earn extra money, for I had a lot to catch up with. Public appearances began to be requested, and before the two-month tryout period was through, I was well established in radio circles again.

A lucky circumstance that put me back on big time was the fact that, other than Graham McNamee, I was the only radio announcer who had done an inauguration. Plans were being made for the inaugural of Herbert Hoover. WCAU, being part of the CBS network, was in keen competition, of course, with NBC.

I was sent to Washington in February to lay out my strategy. When March 4 rolled around—times had changed since my shaky position on the Coolidge assignment—I was given eight assistants; these I posted at vantage points all along the way from the Capitol steps to the White House portico.

This was a coast-to-coast tie-up for real. After an absence from networks of almost a year, a nationwide audience would

again listen to my voice. The mail, welcoming Norman Brokenshire back into the homes of America, flooded the mail rooms of stations from coast to coast. When the tally reached CBS headquarters, then in the Steinway Building on West Fifty-seventh Street, an immediate exchange was arranged between WCAU and WABC; once again I was a radio announcer, on a network second only to NBC. It was a gratifying situation; the indirect cushion shot that brought me back into mere local radio had now bounced me direct from the Capitol steps into a network job, transferred to Mr. Paley's CBS.

Mr. Paley had worked a miracle. When his father had sent him out into the world with a tidy little sum in the bank to use in finding his niche, he had purchased the nebulous idea housed in an office in the Paramount Building and fashioned it into a chain that in a short time he built up into competition for the best. A new building was under construction at 485 Madison Avenue, with the finest studios.

Shortly I was handling a goodly share of the best accounts. I did the "La Palina Hour," La Palina being a cigar company owned by Mr. Paley, Sr. I originated the "Kansas Frolickers," an extension of my Brokenshire and Reo Frolickers, in Philadelphia, and now sponsored by Kansas Cleanser. It is an amusing side light that Kansas Cleanser paid me in shares of company stock. The show, an instant success, was later bought by the makers of Black Flag Mosquito Spray. It gave me leeway for ad lib comedy and featured such stars as Jerry Macy and Ed Smalle and those great instrumentalists Andy Sanella, Sammy Herman, and Joe Green, all talented in both creative and ad lib ways.

And so the station that months before had turned me away with the lame excuse that new personalities, new voices, were needed, was now giving me the *crème de la crème* of all the going assignments. The "Majestic Hour," with Wendell Hall—"the redheaded music-maker"—Arnold Johnson and his orchestra, and for their guests talent from stage, opera, and screen, had an impressive sign-on; through the opening music the commercial ran, "In the majesty of motion, from the boundless everywhere, comes the mighty name *Majestic*,

mighty monarch of the air!" The "Majestic Hour," sponsored by the Grigsby-Grunow Company, was the first to bring to the air waves Edgar Guest, with his gentle word pictures and homey thoughts.

The organ music of Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Crawford and the "Paramount-Publix Hour"—the first regular weekly program to bring to the air direct from Hollywood the music and stars of current movies—were leaders among the shows of the time. And always there was the drive to create new ideas for a medium that, though new, was now well into its stride.

There was that wonderful gypsy show "Arabesque," written by the beautiful and talented Yolande Langworthy, built on the theme of sultry desert romances, with a background of wailing violins, crying accordions, cymbals, traps, or whatever they call that instrument on which genuine gypsies hammer with a rabbit's foot mounted on a stick. I would open the program with a poem, which was, in part, "Drifting sands, and a caravan, and a woman's veiled face." The charming Zenaida Nicolina sang on this program and for a time was the hit of the air waves.

It was later that comedy entered in as a rounded component of radio. On the "Ceco Courier Hour," for Ceco Radio Tubes, the lovely Harriett Lee did an excellent singing job, but the new and original part of the program was a remarkable radio character named Henry Burbig. Originally Henry was a masseur in the McAlpin Health Club; he relieved the monotony of the slaps, pummelings, groans, and grunts of his calling by telling his customers stories in a strange and wondrously laughable dialect, half Yiddish, half German, generously overlaid with pure Henry Burbig, a tongue all his own. When radio found him and he began to catch on, he rewrote standard fairy tales to his own mongrel phraseology. The development of this specialty made him one of the first big-pay radio comedians. His few minutes midway of the program, paraphrasing the story of Little Red Riding Hood, say, or Goldilocks and the Three Bears, netted him a fast four hundred dollars.

Another innovation of the period was the lightly philosophical program, such as my "Old Man Sunshine" offering

for Tower Health Vibrator, a combination of reading aloud and ad lib. On the air I always felt in good spirits, and this was the sort of thing that helped to gain me national reputation; it demonstrated that working with a crystallized script is never quite so effective as the things that can come straight from the heart on the spur of the moment. My boys became adept at smoothly fitting the mood.

TWELVE

FULLY commercial now, more competitive than ever, the whole working of the industry changed. Whether for reasons of policy, friendship, or talent, sponsor or advertising agency might bring a man of their own selection in on one show; by this act making him a radio announcer overnight. It supplied needed personalities and new voices and helped to set radio in high gear.

“Watch Brokenshire’s work,” newcomers were told. Some new staff men were put in my charge for their first few weeks. One of them was a colorful, very interesting chap named David Rosenthal, a diminutive man with a sad triangular face, a massive forehead, and blue, wondering eyes. This was a dreamer, a poet, who had never left his little corner of New York City but could express his dreams in a voice of pure gold. It was decided that “David Ross” would be a much easier name to handle over the air waves, and so it became; after twenty-four years no one has come along who can read a poem as David Ross can.

With new personalities and new voices came more complex growth. A name to conjure with in these days was Ralph Wentworth, because he was in charge of the artists’ bureau. This bureau listed all the talent ever heard on a radio station and all applicants who wished to be on radio. It was its function to juggle these names, dealing them out to interested advertising agencies for the consideration of sponsors. If you

got a job you paid the artists' bureau 10 per cent of your fee.

Public appearances of radio personalities became an increasingly important part of the business; here, too, the artists' bureau was the go-between. Fees were set in relation to the national scope and popularity of shows. In addition to my studio jobs, whenever and wherever possible I was sent to head up personal appearance shows. In this connection I got an unexpected second chance at vaudeville. The Checker Cab Company put on a very successful radio show and decided to follow through to build up good will with the New York public by sending out a vaudeville act, based on its very good orchestra under the baton of Willard Robison. He was widely known for two wonderful and successful musical numbers of his own composition, "The Devil Is Afraid of Music" and "Cottage for Sale." I was made the master of ceremonies. The act opened with a bang at Coney Island for a tryout, then covered the local Keith-Albee circuit.

All in all those were happy, busy days. Radio was big enough to be exciting in many ways, yet not too big to have an *esprit de corps*, a family gaiety. Between staff and artists you worked among old friends as well as a steady stream of new ones, all absorbed in building the interest and appeal of this wondrous thing called Radio, and of course their own careers.

The special-events department grew both in personnel and daring. We were still on the top floor of the Steinway Building on West Fifty-seventh Street, but the studio facilities were so cramped that we spilled over into the studios of a large recording company across the street, and also into the studios of WOR, which, as I have said, was our joint flagship station.

In our zeal to free special events of all limitations in the public mind, it was announced that we were going to do the impossible. We were going out to meet the great incoming dirigible *Graf Zeppelin* in the air.

The newspapers were full of wonderful stories about Dr. Hugo Eckener's gallant plan to fly for the second time from Germany to the United States in a lighter-than-air craft. In the same year in which Nikolai Lenin died, 1924, Dr. Eckener left Friedrichshafen, Germany, in command of the *ZR 3*,

delivering to the U.S. Navy at Lakehurst, New Jersey, three days later the dirigible that was to be renamed the *Los Angeles*. Now, five years lacking two months later, he planned to moor at Lakehurst on the first leg of a *Graf Zeppelin* round-the-world flight from Friedrichshafen by way of the United States and Tokyo.

Experience as ranking radio reporter got me the assignment. I was instructed to report the morning of August 4 at Hadley Field, New Jersey, flying out to meet the dirigible with the pilot of the Bell Laboratory experimental plane, a four-place Fairchild nicknamed "Flying Telephone Booth."

I went out to the field the night of the third. Scores of newspaper reporters were on hand. The proper journalistic attitude in those days was that radio might "do the stunts" but when it came to the real stuff the newspaper was the thing!

This was to be a big broadcast, the biggest ever, so far. The report, short-waved from the "Flying Telephone Booth," would be picked up at Hadley Field and not only rebroadcast to the CBS chain, but short-waved to Germany; direct lines would also carry it from the field to the city desks of every newspaper and press service in the United States. I was to scoop the reporters by flying out to meet the dirigible, competing with them with an immediate and international audience. It was a large assignment. I was scared.

Planning, eating, drinking went on till well after midnight of the third. When it finally broke up, the pilot told me to be ready to fly at 6:00 A.M.

Breakfast for all of us except the pilot was whisky sours, and I began to wonder if I were altogether sure about him.

Even without the passenger's two hundred pounds the Fairchild was overloaded with the bulky sending and receiving equipment. The take-off required two or three attempts; you could hear the creak and groan of the protesting plane, a worrisome thing. The newspapermen stood by in a huddle, waving, cheering, and I think laughing.

The pilot circled the field twice to gain altitude, then set off for the Jersey shore. I was to check our position with the studio from time to time and report anything I saw that was

of interest or hazardous. The *Graf* was supposedly on course, and the "Flying Telephone Booth" pilot estimated how long we could fly with our gas load and that we would sight the *Graf* well within it.

But the *Graf* was late, and when we ran into a series of high, huffing winds, it didn't help either. Soon the pilot yelled, "Running out of gas; have to land somewhere, gas up." He picked Lakehurst, where the *Zeppelin* was going to moor.

I relayed the word to the studio. "Dammit! If you take time to do that, you'll miss the *Graf*!" roared some earth-bound character, as if we had any choice. I cut off the studio.

In the confusion the studio failed to notify the radio pickup men at Lakehurst that we were taking time out, with the result that while we were being gassed up, and seizing the opportunity to stretch our legs in the sun at the far end of the field, the crew at the hangar, finding themselves out of communication with me, assumed we were in trouble, doubtless by this time down in the Atlantic. Hints of this got on the air, as I learned later, reaching my wife, who, to ease her anxiety and be a little closer to the scene, had decided to come out to the field.

We took the air again; again the pilot began combing the skies. Happily the troublesome winds had hurried elsewhere, the sky was like an empty attic except for fringed scatterings of summer cumulus; no sign of the *Graf*.

I re-established communication with the ground crew and the studio. Balancing my two hundred pounds on a bucket seat, I combed my brain for things to say as I made my second air report. "We have refueled and are heading southeast; I can see the coast line, and two ships at sea, but no sign of the *Graf Zeppelin* as yet. Stand by, please; I'll be back as soon as anything happens."

As I look back on the next little while, it is no wonder to me that in those days the faraway look in the eye, the thinning hair, the constant, tense search for respite were the trademark of the radio announcer, superinduced by punishing pressures, split-second schedules, piano-wire nerves.

The pilot was growing irked by the skyful of nothing. Up to around 10,000 feet, down to 3,500—where were you sup-

posed to look next! There was a regulation that a land plane must not get out over the ocean a distance of more than so-and-so many times its own height, as a protection to gliding back to a landing if its engines should quit. Aggravated at not sighting the *Graf*, the pilot threw the regulations out the window; he climbed high and giving her the gun started for the general direction of the Azores.

Between brief, reassuring contacts with the station, I scribbled notes. Fortunately people flying around in the sky were still sufficiently fantastic to the general public to make good subject matter.

Just when I was beginning to wonder whether, with this assignment, I had the dud of the ages in my lap, the pilot reached over and gave me two quick slaps on the back, jerking a thumb. Off to the northwest the *Graf Zeppelin* was a great cigar sheathed in silver foil. As she floated slowly and majestically inbound, the sun poured a bright wash over her gleaming bulk.

The pilot of the "Flying Telephone Booth" banked around, dropping down to a position alongside the dirigible. For all the fiction about pilots, that they were unearthly creatures incapable of emotion and without nerves, this one, excited to have hit the mark, let himself fly so close to the gondola in which Dr. Eckener stood that when he opened a sliding window panel and I did the same, hollering greetings, I felt as though I could reach out and shake hands. What the studio relayed as the voice of Dr. Hugo Eckener, greeting the world from American shores, must actually have been a blend of whirring propellers and eddying winds; I did speak to him, however, passing on what I read from his lips to millions of listeners.

Back at Hadley Field, mission completed, the celebration lasted out the day and night. Assignments missed? Who cared! My voice had carried to new distances, new millions; bring on your letdowns!

It was exciting, too, when we made appearances at the annual radio and electrical shows throughout the country, at Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Atlantic City, Philadelphia, St.

Louis, and points west. I gave shows with the pick of talent, morning, noon, and night for the two or three days' duration; return trips took the form of gigantic parties, with plentiful liquor to oil the hinges of reminiscence.

During one return trip party I concentrated on my Russian artists. Zenaida Nicolina decided between sips of vodka to teach me all the Russian words of my favorite song, "Dark Eyes." With such a nice teacher and such a good student, it took most of the night.

In our world of radio the trouble was that there was no such thing as week ends in which to rest and recuperate, relax normally, leap lightly over the fences of moderate indulgence, and return to work quieted and refreshed. On the air, holidays were the busiest days of all, for then audiences were larger. Unlike the average citizen, who could spend a little time relaxing, do a bit of harmless imbibing, and even while the effects were still wearing off turn in at least a halfway decent job, with us in radio nothing would do but a steadily maintained excellent best; anything else would show. Actually, for health's sake, gaps between shows were too short, too irregular.

So it developed, during these whirlwind radio days of 1929 and 1930, that a great deal of the time while I worked I drank. The dangerous thing was that it was not the social kind of drinking other people could and did do. High tension, full schedules, one show treading on the heels of the rehearsal for the next—there was no time for the effects of drinking to run their normal physiological course, dissipating themselves naturally. I made the dangerous discovery that I could pull myself up by the bootstraps to some semblance of stability with three or four drinks. Three? Four? Or was it five? Anyhow, the habit pattern grew serious, not only because of an ever present chance that I might count wrong, take more than the one (or two, or three?) drinks I counted on to turn me back to reasonable steadiness, but because as the drinking increased, I felt driven to hide it.

I was at the brink of terrible knowledge about myself. Whereas other men could say casually, "I guess I'll step out and have a drink before the show," go, and come back in

good order, I was beginning to hide every drink instinctively, with a clove or a coffee bean or any other cover-up at hand. Now I was fearful for the reputation I had built up; I shrank from the sidelong glances thrown in my direction by the staff or people in charge of my shows. I was sharply aware of fear in the hearts of those who loved me, yet seemingly powerless to change my direction. The only way left to me to ease their worry was deceive them, hide my habits.

Deception does things to the mind. It undermines your self-esteem, your confidence in yourself. My financial status was healthy enough; I had moved to a beautiful new apartment building just off Lexington Avenue on East Fifty-second Street. My work, my popularity, my fan mail were the gossip of the radio industry, yet these days and nights I walked with a terrifying companion—the handwriting on the wall. In the midst of public approbation and seeming security, I knew that I was doing slipshod work at times, and for it I was being paid in self-accusation and disquiet. Too often, knowing I could not possibly get through a show, I clutched at the easy excuse of laryngitis. Yet there were the times, too, when the devil-may-care Brokenshire recklessly forced his luck, doing all the wrong things, indulging in all the capers, childishly taking comfort in somehow making everyone like it!

CBS moved from its divided quarters to the brand-new building at 485 Madison Avenue, with studios and offices built to specifications for a future whose growth seemed limitless. With my many shows the station seemingly overlooked the soft spots in their fair-haired announcer's performance. As with the bad boy whose antics go undisciplined, since I had got away with things thus far, as the months went by the mischief tended to be multiplied; the problem grew more rather than less.

From my sponsor I got one of the Tower electric vibrators, and trying to fill idle moments too full to allow for pranks and reverting to my love of the mechanical, I converted the vibrator to a compact combination saw, drill, and sander; it

kept me occupied in a constructive way; there were good days for awhile.

My mother came from Canada to pay a visit over the Christmas holidays. For nearly a week I was careful to walk the straight and narrow so that she would not suspect there was any problem. But human nature is perverse and contradictory. On New Year's Eve I took Mother, Eunice, her father and sisters to a big rink over on Broadway for an evening's ice-skating fun. On the way home, leaving them for a moment just before the bells began ringing in 1930, I went into a store and bought beautiful long tapering white candles for us all. I lit and distributed them, and "just for fun" we formed a little parade, which I led, singing as we marched toward home, "Should auld acquaintance be forgot." It brought smiles to a few faces as we tramped a long block and across Fifth Avenue—but the next day the incident was being told by people in the business as proof that Brokenshire was a pretty sad case.

My mother's visit had a painful ending. On New Year's Day I was slated to take Henry Burbig, the Coral Islanders, Dale Wimbrow, Nick Kenny, and some other entertainers down to Tom Noonan's Mission on the Bowery in Chinatown, to brighten things up for the derelicts.

Between five o'clock, when we helped to serve coffee and doughnuts to the men, and dawn when I got home, something happened. Who I was with, what caused me to forget my filial duty, what could have caused me to throw overboard the conscientious effort I had been making, I have no idea. When I woke up the next noon, incredible stories were told me—that I had been brought in by a taxi driver and a policeman, my clothes torn and bloody, everything I had with me gone, money, jewelry, papers. I knew I had broken the hearts of the two women closest to me. More than this, in some groping way I knew that at last I must do something about *me*, for now I had reached the point where I couldn't remember anything—not only what had happened, but where and how it started.

The next three days were a nightmare of anxiety and despair. Everything I had accomplished seemed worthless.

None of the people around me, relatives, friends, business associates, a legion of fans, could change me. Could I change myself?

Drink to sustain me I must have. But the combination of physical and mental sickness I was experiencing now exceeded anything I had ever heard of or imagined. At no other time had such visions of black hopelessness engulfed me. Pride of independence and possession were nothing now; I hated the things I owned; they tied me to a place I didn't want to be. Joy of accomplishment had soured, for I no longer seemed to be the man who had accomplished them. The clean, happy Canadian boy was dead; in his place, masquerading under his name, was an unnerved hulk who belonged among those derelicts he had so recently entertained.

I squirmed, I cheated, I lied, just to get out of the house, away from the drawn faces and inquiring eyes, to get another drink. All of the man I had been was changed to a quaking, fearful travesty whose unsteady feet and shaking hands were the outward signs of a man whose only desire now was not to think.

I hated to face even the man behind the bar. I resented him. How could he, with all that liquor within reach, be so normal, smiling, and easygoing? Here was I, a man who had touched the heights, envying this nobody who was capable of pouring whisky from a bottle into a glass without spilling it; he was a man with a place to go, doubtless possessed of a happy home, a wife and children who loved him and were loved in return, a man with a future to look forward to; I hated him.

I hated him and all the other people who could walk confidently along the streets, confidently meeting the eyes of their fellow men.

Two fast drinks, with a quick chaser to hold them down . . . the third drink, a little slower . . . the cold sweat dried away. . . Two drinks and ten minutes later my hands had ceased trembling. I could think.

I stared at myself in the garishly decorated mirror. I stared into my glass, seeking the answer. What is this crazy stuff?

You take it in fellowship, then you take more to help keep you in that carefree mood. But it drowns your thinking, your judgment. And because you know you're wrong, you take still more. It silences your conscience. Enough more and you walk in darkness, to awaken ravaged and heartsick. What is this crazy stuff that you'll lie and steal to have more of, the only thing that will put you right again?

I pushed the glass across the bar to be filled. "It's poison, bud, but pour me a double." I drew the glass toward me, and I thought of the vaudeville act seen years before: the actor, ragged in a sickly green spotlight, clutching a whisky bottle to his breast, winding up the poem about a drunkard, "I hate you—no, I *love* you, Mr. Boozel!"

When I got back, Mother had left, gone home.

Nothing you can write or say can describe the pitiful heroism of a wife who will stand by in the face of blow on blow, humbling herself to nurse a drunk, praying faithfully, clinging to the better qualities that, having showed themselves before, she fervently believes are still there.

In the unhappy hours and days that it took me to get well again I knew in slow sequence complete, abject helplessness, fear of getting well, having to face people, the humiliation of accepting help undeserved, the stirring again of strength and with it the birth of hope, the ability to eat and sleep again, a lessening of black morose thoughts, hammering down every effort, and finally the ability to work, and the feeling that must come to a drowning man when he is rescued. And while I promised myself silently that that was the *last*, I'd never take another drink, I knew deep down in my heart that I was whipped by alcohol.

Resuming my various commitments at CBS, I was stopped by people saying, "Sorry to hear you were sick, Broke; glad to see you back." There were questions in others' eyes as they said hurriedly, "How're you feeling now?" I felt the unasked questions particularly among those who had been pressed into service to replace me. Some others were merely a little contemptuous. Once C. Marsh Bosworth, a producer and good friend also, wondered aloud to me if I hadn't better

see his brother, Dr. D. M. Bosworth; and because I had made up my mind to do something about myself, it seemed as good a way as any to start.

The routine check-up told me nothing I didn't already know. But then the doctor talked at length about what could happen if I kept up an excess of drinking. He did it in such a way that I was all the more determined to do something. From friends in whom I could confide somewhat, I heard of a Dr. Caroline Findlay who had a different approach to the problem of uncontrolled drinking, a new method of treatment.

Her examination differed from the other and included a test of the nervous system and blood stream. The outcome was that she started me on what she called the "sugar cure." Based on the fact that in the system alcohol turns to sugar, it pursued the theory that a craving for alcohol could be controlled by substituting in the system an excess of dextrose, a quickly absorbed, easily assimilated form of sugar.

Personally I felt no great faith in the method and in my own case saw no immediate effects. Heartened though by my own decisive understanding that I did have a serious problem and a determination to do something about it, I was glad to follow her recommendations. How much the power of suggestion figured I don't know, but soon I was running on all twelve cylinders again, doing the kind of job that had earned me my reputation.

Radio was really dressed up now, big business compared with the office-draped-in-monk's-cloth days of WJZ on Forty-second Street. Now studios were commodious and high-ceilinged, floors especially constructed of cork tile, walls of acoustical tile, angled so that sound waves could not bounce from artist to wall and back to the microphone. Each studio boasted a drinking fountain, toilets five steps away from the outer doors, and as complete air conditioning as was known at that time. Alongside the control room was a foyer where producer, announcer, artists, engineers, could consult without interfering with the broadcast. The control room was smaller than before, because less equipment was required

and its construction was more compact. Each radio control room was connected by multiple cable to a master control room, which, at the push of a button, could pick up one, two, or all studio outputs, amplify them, and disperse them to the transmitter. Engineers were connected by a private telephone system, and special lines enabled executives in their offices to punch in on any microphone, to hear auditions and check the shows. All doors were soundproof and rubber-edged, closing automatically, silently. Light systems over control rooms told whether the studio was on the air, green for the important *stand-by* moment, red for *on the air*, meaning the microphone was open, the show on. Studios were of varying sizes to accommodate different types of shows, and so arranged as to conserve space and reduce cable lines. Little cubicles were ready at the push of a button to receive the newscaster, rushing from his battery of teletype machines to give his regular newscast or break into a show with a bulletin.

The studio I used for the "Old Man Sunshine" program was the size of an ordinary living room and would accommodate piano and violin recitals, instrumental trios and quartets, or a small cast of actors doing a skit or soap opera around a single standing mike. The larger studios accommodated full orchestras and variety shows with casts of twenty to thirty people. Audiences as an adjunct to broadcasting were not yet planned, but there were some larger studios that on occasion could be equipped with fifty or a hundred chairs where invited guests might sit quietly out of the way, observing in wonder what a radio show looked like at its point of origin.

The engineering and operating staff that made all these things flow smoothly now numbered in the hundreds. One whole department did nothing but schedule announcers, gather mimeographed scripts and instruction sheets, and place them in individual cubbyholes. The music department was building an extensive library of numbers and arrangements, kept fresh and clean for the call of the musical director, script writers, and producers. The production department grew large and important; each program had its

producer, responsible for program content, balance, timing, and, with the engineer, arrangement of the best possible pickup.

You notice that now what used to be called operators have become engineers. So it was throughout the technical side of radio; all along the line things were being departmentalized for efficiency; almost day by day radio was outgrowing its facilities. Doors were open and elevators running twenty-four hours a day now, because radio was spotted no longer (as in early days, on the basis of part-time broadcast hours) but was a full-time operation, with a day staff and a night staff. Radio sets had gone down in price and up in quality; the listening audience was estimated conservatively in the millions.

It was thrilling to realize that each time a switch was thrown, this medium, which had begun falteringly as an experiment, was turned into one of the most powerful instruments ever placed in human hands. Sets were not only in the living rooms of the nation; they were in the bedrooms, the kitchens, in father's workshop down in the cellar, and, increasingly, in the family automobile. Radio went on picnics with the teen-agers, to baseball games with Uncle Bill so that, exercising his divine right of divided loyalty, with one eye on the Giants he could find out if the Yankees were doing any better. In certain localities motion-picture houses interrupted their programs when Amos and Andy came on the air. Public affairs were scheduled not to suffer empty halls through collision with a favorite radio program. In short, radio was now a benevolent giant, towering over America's millions, dropping from his outstretched hands a largesse of music, song, laughter, education, news, political speeches, spiritual messages, drama, satire, bedtime stories, the correct time, and the best way to cook pot roast.

In the early thirties a few men found themselves in the enviable position of being famed announcers, with the country hanging on their every word. Name announcers woke up the commuter, getting him through breakfast and off to the office; they cajoled children to school, home for lunch, back to school in the afternoon. They beguiled the housewife at

her monotonous duties, sped the quiet afternoon hours for the old folks, regaled the family group around the supper table, filled the evening with excitement and laughter, and finally lulled one and all to sleep with poetry and soft music after the last newscast of the day.

Few announcers were interested in turning to the executive side. Personality, temperament, and training did not equip them for the mahogany desk, the weighty decisions, the nine-to-five routine. Their goal was either to become still bigger in their own forte, or, if they felt a change would be beneficial, to go into directing or producing. Like the newspaper reporter who dreams of the day when he will write the Great American Novel, I guess all announcers entertained the occupational daydream of one day building and producing the really big shows. It was this daydream nibbling at me that had led me to produce the "Coral Islanders." Round about that time there was a very well-known program on NBC called the "South Sea Islanders." It was the only Hawaiian program of any note. Among my friends was a native-born Hawaiian. I had met him in Forest Hills. I loved to go to Bill Lincoln's apartment to listen to him play the guitar and ukulele; from him I learned many customs and habits of a very colorful people. Bill introduced me to some other members of a troupe that had been brought from the islands by Henry Ford, I believe, to play in the first stage production to feature Hawaiian music, a story of the islands called *Bird of Paradise*, which featured Bessie Bariscale.

As Bill translated for me the meaning of some of the songs, it occurred to me that this was beautiful poetry and that here was the making of a Hawaiian show that could in many ways surpass the popular "South Sea Islanders." With this in mind I got together the entire native-born group—Walter Kolomuko, Bill Lincoln, Jimmy Bird, and Al Green. Walter's steel-guitar playing was out of this world, his handling of the chimes and overtones the perfect background for the island poetry. I got in touch with Don Blanding, poet laureate of the islands, and got him to give me pointers that would enable me to create the authentic Polynesian mood.

I took the idea to Peggy Young, CBS program manager, and it was auditioned. We were quickly put on the air on a sustaining basis, Sunday nights at eleven thirty. For me it signified a thing apart when I entered that studio, dimmed the lights, and, as the "on the air" sign showed, began rolling dried peas rhythmically back and forth on a great bass drum to give the effect of pounding surf. Slowly the ukuleles and steel guitar would pick up the melody of the theme as I sang, "I can hear the surf on the beaten sand . . . and the wind in the coconut trees. . . . They bear me away to a fairy land in far-off tropic seas. . . ." Softly the boys would join in harmony on the last phrase, then we'd drift into the selection "Beautiful Isles of Paradise" and be off to a half hour of song and poetry making for excellent Sunday night entertainment. I prize many letters that tell of romances born under the spell of my "Coral Islanders."

THIRTEEN

MY ONLY salvation was to keep busy. I made as many outside contacts as possible. Rear Admiral Philip S. Andrews, USN, was campaigning for funds to restore the historical vessel *Old Ironsides* and gave me charge of the campaign in Greater Manhattan. I accepted all requests to speak before civic organizations. I gave lectures on radio at City College and Columbia University. I addressed the English Forum at Town Hall. I took program ideas to many of the advertising agencies, suggesting talent I thought was suited to radio, and appeared as guest announcer on many of the other radio stations. Somehow NBC was never among them. There must have been interesting developments there, but as a result of my exit from WJZ I was to have no traffic with them for years, in fact not until they opened the NBC Studios in Radio City.

All my activities were planned to bolster the fight being put up against uncontrolled drinking by Dr. Findlay and myself. On the surface it seemed to be going pretty well. I had by no means become a teetotaler, but there was an improved balance in my drinking, better timing. I classed myself now as a periodic drinker, for there were weeks on end when taking a drink did not enter my head. Two, even three, months might go happily by, then I might drink socially for awhile; eventually because I was pursuing the will-o'-the-wisp of normalcy in drinking, and because for me

it was completely elusive, that would only wind up in heavy drinking again; once more my battle would be lost. I was held up by determination and the tough constitution gained in early years with those three-mile hikes to school in the rugged Canadian out-of-doors, and I managed to work in spite of frazzled nerves, lack of sleep, and butterflies as big as English sparrows.

No one had to tell me that going through life this way was probably as unsatisfactory a way as possible. All too well I knew my work was not of the best; as for happiness or even good times, they were lost to me. My life was a ghastly round of narrowly covered, endless deadlines. I was in a vicious circle of action and reaction, drinking to face my commitments, uneasy because I was drinking, and drinking when my work was over, to relax.

Of all my shows at this time the "Coral Islanders" Sunday night was the one I never worried about. It wasn't sponsored, and went on so late Sunday night that the studios were practically deserted. Of course, the office staff and executives had high-tailed it for home Friday night, so as a rule an announcer was on his own. But circumstances, as they say, alter cases.

One Sunday night I was feeling particularly gay; I had made the rounds and was feeling no pain. I was articulate, but full of springs; if I'd been an Arab tumbler, I would have made my entrance with a couple of cartwheels and a back flip. As it was, I did it verbally. Horseplay and stories Hawaiian style went on to within a split second of air time, not the sort of thing we'd be doing if anyone were around. How could we know that for some reason Mr. William Paley had to be in his office that night? Naturally he punched in the studios to see what was going on around his building. He found out—in fact he even came up to our floor to verify it.

It was too much to expect the president of a great broadcasting network to catch what he caught and overlook it. It fell short of upholding the dignity of the organization; it set a bad precedent. Since he had heard the rumors about me, the incident gave him reason to suspect they were true.

Early Monday morning a memo from the head office of CBS said that Brokenshire was not to appear again on the "Coral Islanders" show or, in fact, any other sustaining show whereby he would be representing CBS. Furthermore, Brokenshire was not to give the call letters at any time on any show.

The radio columns flagged the story:

BROKENSHIRE BANNED FROM CBS

Columnist reaction was varied. Jack Foster, radio editor of the *New York World Telegram*, clapped hands, on the flippant ground that personally he had always wished radio would come through once in awhile with something really exciting; the fuss about Brokenshire at least showed that there was life in the old girl yet.

On February 25, 1930, Nick Kenny's column took a trifle more censorious view, declaring that, if it was true that Norman Brokenshire had been banned from the Columbia Broadcasting System and his place as M.C. with the "Coral Islanders" was to be given someone else, it was a black eye for radio. "... has been a credit to the broadcasting game ... developed announcing into an art ... has more imitators in his own line than Vallee, the crooning champion. ... Instead of going backwards, as have many once popular announcers, Brokenshire has forged steadily ahead until today ... they acknowledge him as the master. ... We caught him last Sunday night, and he was splendid. ... His admirers are legion. ... They should rise up and declare themselves. ... Brokenshire has brought too many radio fans pleasure to be thus summarily banned from a great broadcasting system in whose development he has played such an important part. ..."

This item and others like it from around the country brought down an avalanche of mail on CBS unlike any hitherto seen. Listeners did, indeed, declare themselves. By some method I cannot now recall, I obtained and still have in my files hundreds of letters addressed, not to me, but to newspapers, radio stations on the chain, and CBS and Mr.

Paley direct. I assume that they came into my hands through the concern of private secretaries and girls in the mail room who enjoyed listening to my shows and had become my friends. It still gives me a warm feeling to skim over them. The show of indignation, which I pondered with a feeling of humbleness, seemed capped by a letter from the rector of an Episcopal church, which said in part:

Although Sunday is strenuous for me as for all clergymen, my wife and I never can retire with complete contentment until, seated before the dying fire, we listen to the "Coral Islanders." We are wondering if our good friend Norman Brokenshire was merely AWOL last night or if there is some permanent replacement. . . . We should regret his disappearance from this charming, all too brief, period. . . .

It would seem that for a man who had gained my position in the field of radio the loss of one show would be of no great consequence. As it worked out, however, it marked one of the most serious turning points in my entire career. Yet I am much more conscious of the good wishes of the public and their effect now than I was at the time of the incident. Then, for all the veneer of worldliness, I was actually a thirty-two-year-old individual who had grown too fast from a frightened kid into a frightened man. Most young men of that age who had made their way in the world since second-year high school were free to seek some relaxation, but for some reason, Norman Brokenshire must, like Caesar's wife, remain above reproach; seemingly anything out of the ordinary on his part caused a coast-to-coast stir. To me it was one more case of taking my lickin' for not putting enough Paris green on the potato plants!

One thing, however, was indisputable. If I wanted to continue earning a living, I had to do something else in the way of work, for the effect of all the hullabaloo, besides being immediate, had been drastic. The week following I was taken off the Ceco Courier show; their letter gave a somewhat different reason, but I think the sponsor was unwilling to risk the ill will of the chain. I could see that there was no telling how far this trend might go.

Some months before, an offer had been made to me by an advertising agency located in Chicago, with a small branch in New York. The agency wanted to create a radio department and had said they were looking for a man; would I take the job? Now I went to see them. I joined Kastor & Sons Advertising Agency at a salary of a hundred and fifty weekly to start at once.

I have always rather regretted a little scene that took place the morning after I was let go by CBS. When I went to the offices to pick up my books and other belongings, the elevator that brought me down also carried Mr. Paley, tall, aloof, and quiet. I was nearest the door, and on the point of stepping out on the ground floor, my arms loaded down with tools of my profession, I turned to him and said, "Thanks for the use of the network." Years later I was one of the honor guests at a luncheon given by the Radio Executives' Club for former President Herbert Hoover. Mr. Paley called me over to his table to introduce me to the man to whom he was about to relinquish the presidency of CBS. His smile and handshake let me know without words that there was no hard feeling.

I settled down to months of trying to be a business executive. The spirit was willing, the flesh weak. Executives and artists are simply made of different stuff. Week after week I sat in an empty office decorated with pictures of my favorite radio artists, group pictures of my favorite shows, plaques and cups I had won, and a fresh copy of *Advertisers' Red Book*. In executive sessions I was briefed on the theory that the surest method of developing a radio department in an agency is to play golf with potential clients, stealing them away from present agency connections while they are winning. This was a poser for me. I didn't play golf, nor could I bring myself to do the dirty on other agency men who had, to date, never harmed me but, on the contrary, had done me many good turns.

The calls I made in an effort to dig up business for the agency turned out, paradoxically, to be fortunate—for me. Conversation would veer inevitably to what I could do for

them. Ohrbach's, the Yorkville Radio Store—one after another of our supposed agency prospects proposed that they take my show, or use me on their present show, but retain their own agency.

I wound up by revamping my "Coral Islanders" show, and putting it on over WMCA for Yorkville Radio. In the case of Ohrbach's I used the WMCA house orchestra and built a show that featured a child singing prodigy "Baby Rose Marie." I stood her on a chair so she could reach the microphone, and introduced her songs. Not long ago I sat in the orchestra at the Winter Garden in New York watching a beautiful young woman named Rose Marie do a splendid job in a show called *Top Banana*—"Yes, Sir, that's my baby now. . . ."

Back at Kastor & Sons, when I went out to call on potential sponsors of national scope, they, too, were disposed only to discuss what Brokenshire, an announcer, could do for them. By the end of approximately two months with the agency I was back on the air on several stations, in shows built, written, produced, and announced by myself. In effect I was now accomplishing the thing I had hoped for when I joined Arrow Amusement Corporation. Then the time had not been right, but now the silly jealousies between stations had somewhat subsided; survival had forced them to accept things that earlier would have broken their hearts. Commercial programs were the propelling force of radio, the deciding factor; any station would take any presentable show, if it came well sponsored.

In addition to the shows created by me and being broadcast on various local stations, many other opportunities began coming my way. I had been unable to accomplish anything for Kastor & Sons that would warrant their keeping me on. At an executive meeting I asked the boys to accept my resignation. It was encouraging to know that in stepping out I was leaving behind good friends. They agreed also that I should continue to announce their recorded show "Bremer Tully Time."

Now at last I was truly a free lance—the first in the radio industry.

FOURTEEN

ONCE FREE of obligation to the agency I looked around for all kinds of work. The word got around, and soon I had an offer that was very thrilling; Paramount Pictures had a part for me in a film *Glorifying the American Girl*.

The picture itself was made in Hollywood. There was, however, an important scene of a theater lobby on an opening night, and the set for this was built at Paramount's Long Island studios in Astoria. My part consisted of standing at a microphone in the lobby, welcoming name guests, and interviewing them briefly on their way into the theater. Oddly enough, many famous stars among those I purportedly interviewed that night I was to meet later, as announcer for U.S. Steel's "Theatre Guild on the Air" show.

The interesting thing about the scene as filmed was that the stars I "interviewed" were three thousand miles away, at the studios in Hollywood. I stood at the microphone alone, distributing welcoming smiles to the stars, gesturing in their direction, asking them questions that were answered later in front of another camera on the West Coast; it remained for trick photography to put the two portions of the scene smoothly together. When I saw the finished picture, I was amazed at the quality of intimacy obtained with people I had never seen.

Reaching out for the numerous fields that I hoped would open to me now as a free lance, I issued a press release

planned, not only to bring me business, but to counteract adverse publicity that I had brought on myself. It was handed out at a special press conference I held at the Astor Hotel, where I was appearing at two dinners, of the Ben Roche Association and the Toy Fair Convention. The best way to convey dependability being to show that others are hiring you, I made the picture as comprehensive as possible, saying:

Norman Brokenshire is the first radio announcer to make his profession a business. He has dissociated himself from all stations and chains, and now sells his services direct to advertisers and their agencies. Some of the largest national advertisers as well as local New York firms are numbered among Brokenshire's clients. As a free lance he is also making numerous recorded broadcasts and his most recent departure is playing a part in talking pictures. Brokenshire is also the producer of a vaudeville act, built around one of his famous radio broadcasts, the "Coral Islanders," which is booked by the Loew office.

Whether the release as such did any good or not is problematical; but I did get more work, little things that kept me going; the press seemed to be on my side, and I began to build.

Immediate results of this publicity were gratifying; invitations to speak came from many civic and business organizations. Vitaphone Pictures asked me to do a short subject called "Round One"; the Judson Artists' Bureau came to me for advice on a show for Van Heusen shirts. It developed that the sponsor, the Phillips-Jones Company, was going to use the CBS network, and I worked on the show!

A Mr. Lesselbaum, an independent motion-picture producer, signed me up for a series of one-reel short subjects, for which I was to write the script and do the voice; these were to be marketed as "Talkographs."

Radio Review asked me for an article on announcing. I'm afraid I belittled the staff announcer a bit, but all's fair in love and war—and this was war.

I worked out a new show with Herb Polesie; Quaker State Oil Company put it on CBS under the title "At the Sign

of the Green and White," and it was received by the press so favorably that it added materially to my courage. The radio column of *The Christian Science Monitor* said:

Advertising returns to the discussion lists today. Our text shall be the efforts of Norman Brokenshire, CBS announcer, to caricature the commercial "plugging" of the Green and White program's sponsor, and thus make it more palatable to the listener's taste. Mr. Brokenshire is one of the playboys of the radio world. He knows that his listeners insist on being entertained. He knows that most commercial credits demanded by program sponsors are not entertaining. . . . Mr. Brokenshire plays with the Green and White commercial credit as a cat plays with a ball of yarn. This method has the grace of novelty, and at least a bit of wit.

This show and the style used were a milestone in radio; it started a new, less abrasive trend in commercials, and paved the way for many a welcome comedy touch.

Advantageously my *Radio Review* article was published at about this time, saying in part:

"The Announcer is dead! Long live the announcer!" Why is it that the better a radio announcer becomes, the less he is heard?

The way to create a following among radio listeners is by means of a winning personality which projects itself; to do this it is essential that the words which an announcer reads be his own. How can an announcer be a real part of a program when the general style of the hour is decided by one person, the musical numbers chosen by another, the cast selected by a third, and even the words given him to speak are written by someone in a department which grinds them out by the basketful?

Advertisers, who think primarily of the message they want to put across, are beginning to realize that herein lies the weakness of this most human and closest of all media, and are therefore insisting on the radio specialist, the man who, through years of experience, has developed a sixth sense, a sense of *radio* showmanship, the most important factor in the building of any program. True, you hear him much less often, but when he is on the air he brings you HIS personality, plus a program that sparkles, and as a result you probably look with favor on the commodity made by the sponsor of that program.

Editorially the publication added:

That's what Broke means by saying the announcer is dead. He is speaking of himself, for he has broken with the broadcasting chains and is now a radio specialist. You'll hear him on the Columbia System tomorrow night with the Quaker State Oil "Green and White" program. Although this broadcast has David Mendoza and a great orchestra, an excellent quartet and the gifted Herbert Polesie as co-announcer, it has gained rapid recognition largely through the wit and personality of Mr. Brokenshire. His presence as master of ceremonies on a program broadcast in New York by WMCA has given it a background that makes it rank with the best programs on the air. We refer to the Ohrbach Miracle program. Without Brokenshire it would be like 1000 others.

Entertainment committees of Masonic, civic, and business groups invited me to organize, build, and present radio shows in New York and outlying communities. Paramount Pictures said, "Let's put you in another picture. We're doing 'Young Man of Manhattan' with Ginger Rogers; we'd like to use you in the Dempsey fight scene in Philadelphia."

Henriette Harrison, who had worked with me in Philadelphia in other, struggling days, sold Milton Biow, head of a great advertising agency, on the idea that I was just the man for their new show called "Radio Follies," in which the greatest stars obtainable would be presented as guests. Guy Lombardo and his orchestra would furnish the music, most of it from musical comedy. The opening show would present Eddie Cantor in his first appearance on CBS.

Each week brought new fun, merriment, and the happy lilt of music. The "Sing Something Simple" trio was with us, one of the features of *The Little Show*. The altogether charming Arline Judge; the humor of "Bugs" Baer; talented Frances Williams, from George White's *Scandals*, who introduced "Body and Soul" with Johnny Green, the composer, at the piano; Georgie Price; those wonderful comedians, Joe Weber and Lew Fields; the beloved Gus Van of Van and Schenck; Belle Baker; the Mills Brothers; Ethel Merman; and countless others made this program a deserved success.

The Credit Jewelers' Association sponsored the show nationally, with Finlay Straus to sponsor it in the New York area.

These were great and busy days for me, and the majority of radio editors and columnists had helpful words. Some took the line, "All is well, let the dead past bury its dead." A few adopted a wait-and-see attitude. Jerry Wald, of the now defunct tabloid *New York Graphic*, enthusiastically put out the helping hand, writing on September 26, 1930:

BROKE COMES BACK! Norman Brokenshire who, in my opinion has no superior in the art that is announcing, has definitely quit "hittin' the bottle," a pastime which, by his own admission, was directly responsible for his slipping. Broke is in the midst of a comeback and asks us to print this to keep him on the water cart. Well, here it is. Keep your word, Norman, and radio programs will be the better for it. Your work with us on last Sunday's Finlay Straus program stamps you indelibly as one of the ozone's most prolific word-deliverers. Norman, you're good, your work is outstanding, so there's no reason in this microphoning world why you can't get up on top again as the ace air attraction. I know that several folks around town are continually starting these whispering campaigns which insinuate that you've been speak-easying 'n' all that, but laugh it off, kid, and get goin'. I'm with you, if that'll comfort you.

To put the glamorous, exciting, often foolish activities of those days together to meet the pattern of a book gives them a juxtaposition they did not have. The incidents were strewn along many months, with many lengthy, idle gaps between. The danger then was my inability to handle idle time normally, in an easy, relaxed, restful frame of mind. I couldn't seem to reduce my head of steam, and when this pent-up energy wasn't utilized in work, it had to blow itself off in play. There was ample time to get into the sort of trouble that seemed somehow always to lie in wait just for me.

A part in a picture used up only two or three days. A radio show was soon rehearsed, put on, and gone. Recording sound for films required only two or three hours at a time.

The signing of an announcer for a job was not like the signing of an executive at so many thousands of dollars a year; radio contracts were written for thirteen-week periods and included a ten-day or two-week cancellation clause. Although a list of work done over this period might look very rosy, boiled down to actual labor involved and time consumed, it didn't amount to much. A motion picture might be months in the making as a whole; a radio series might continue over many weeks of entertaining the public; but my part in them might and usually did take a matter of hours. Nor was the pay astronomical. The various guilds had not yet entered the picture, so there were no minimum scales, no rules requiring pay for rehearsal time; it was all a matter of what the sponsor or station was willing to pay, and what the artist might successfully demand for his services.

Notwithstanding my publicized comeback, my reputation for undependability was by no means dead. Now I was confronted with contract paragraphs such as this (in a Judson Artists' Bureau contract for my services on the Van Heusen radio program):

In the event that the Van Heusen program is not broadcast because of some action or condition beyond our control we shall not be required to pay you (NB) unless you actually perform before the microphone. . . . We may, at any time at our option, cancel this contract by giving you ten days' written notice.

The Biow Agency's contract for my services in the "Radio Follies" series took into consideration my reputation for drinking and unreliability, drawing a contract unlike any I had seen:

You are to act as Master of Ceremonies for the Radio Follies to go over the Columbia Broadcasting System. The broadcast will be made from the New York studios, Station WABC. You are to receive for these broadcasts a total of \$325.00 or \$25 a broadcast. You agree to be present at the rehearsals as well as at the broadcasts themselves, and to lend your help and guidance in the carrying out of the programs. It is further understood that these monies are due and payable to you only after the completing of the thirteenth broadcast, it being understood that should you for

any reason within your own control not be present on time the contract automatically becomes cancelled and all monies due you are automatically cancelled.

Some of the sting was taken out of this by the added statement that if continued use were made of my services after the thirteenth broadcast for the "Radio Follies," "we are to pay you \$75.00 per broadcast, *and we hope more*. We are thoroughly mindful, Mr. Brokenshire, that you are doing two exceptional things for us in this contract; one, you are giving us your services at a price well under what we know you are worth. Of this we are deeply appreciative, and we are sure we will make up for it in other programs; two, you are agreeing to a special method of compensation which we are incorporating in this contract. It is improbable that it will operate that way; we are putting it in the contract merely as a protection for us."

Before long I had these problems: a sad but loyally hopeful wife; high rent, which had to be paid; and two letters illustrating the opposites that can come to an individual born under the sign of Gemini, the twins.

One letter is from the Judson office that says:

Please note that your services are no longer required on the Van Heusen program. This means that your appearance last evening, Nov. 27, 1930, was the last one in the series of thirteen for which you were engaged by letter on Sept. 3, 1930. This notice is sent you in accordance with the option contained in the aforementioned letter of Sept. 3, that the contract could be cancelled by giving you ten days' written notice. Consequently although you will not appear on any further programs, you will be paid for the broadcast of Thursday, Dec. 4.

R. M. O'NEILL

The second letter was from the Biow Agency:

DEAR MR. BROKENSHERE:

I deeply appreciate the job you did last night and, without writing a long letter, I just want you to know that you will not be the loser.

MILTON BIOW

As the sheets of this year were torn off the calendar, contracts expired one by one. The novelty of the motion-picture part wore off. The "Talkograph" series was about finished, the films stacked on the shelves in cans—where, disappointingly, they stayed; there was just no demand for them, and incidentally no remuneration for me because I had done them on a percentage basis.

I covered the agencies, looking for work. Radio-department men would start off on a high note: "Hey, boy, you're lookin' fine; what's the good word?" At the first hint that my schedule wasn't full the climate would change subtly. "Norman, you're the best, you're great. Wish I had a spot. You know how it is, lots of people in the situation. . . ." One or two came right out with it: "Announcers—the kind you can rely on—are a dime a dozen. I just can't stick my neck out; you know how it is. . . ."

Many weeks of fruitless search, long hours of worry. How to pay the rent, how to keep that hopeful look in my wife's eyes?

Just when I had about made up my mind that again my reputation had closed all doors to me, I had a call from one Howard Way, a happy call. "Howsa boy, Norman? Thought I'd call you; got something on the fire. I was just wondering if you're too busy." Too busy! The Brunswick-Balke-Colander Company had sold out its recording properties to one of the motion-picture companies, which, in turn, had decided to get into the radio business. The idea was that recording radio programs on disks would accomplish two things: revive the recording industry and bring radio programs of merit to small stations at low cost. To this end an office had been opened in New York and a subsidiary called Radio Producers, Inc., organized under the direction of a dynamic little man who was all mixed up with music, producing, and promotion in Chicago—Howard Way.

The proposition was for me to build shows for him that would be recorded on regulation ten-inch disks on the equipment bought from Brunswick, and stock-piled for distribution to stations around the country. My earnings would be limited only by my capacity to produce shows; the demand

for them existed, and a million dollars had been set aside to produce them.

My desperate need of a job did not obscure from me that here was a historic turning point in the history of radio. Programs by radio transcription! Nowadays a full fifteen-minute show can be put on one side of a sixteen-inch record, an hour show on one roll of tape. At that time a ten-inch record played up to three minutes; six records on both sides made a half-hour show; for an hour show twelve recordings must each be timed and joined in content to the others.

These were called "open-end transcriptions," for the reason that time was allowed for an opening and closing local commercial. A fifteen-minute show required three disks, and they had to be played on double turntables to avoid breaks due to changing.

With relief I plunged into weeks of high-tension activity, throwing shows together right and left. I dug out copies of all my old programs and incurred an everlasting debt to the humorous magazines of the day, *Life*, *Judge*, and *College Humor*, based on all the jokes I could cull on different subjects, marriage, automobiles, drinking, in-laws, bride's cookery, and so forth. I assembled the jokes in categories, developing dialogue to lead smoothly from one subject to another, interspersing the gags. One of the better shows was called "The Mirthmakers."

My fellow "mirthmaker" was Jerry Macy. I collected an orchestra comprising instrumentalists famous today in the ranks of Local 802; Manny Sax, trumpet; Lou Raderman, violin; Jack Shilkret, piano; Andy Sanella, saxophone; Sammy Herman, guitar; Joe Green, xylophone; and Charlie Monyanti, accordion. No music ever had to be used; they could ad lib to perfection.

We had no time to fritter away in rehearsal; everything was one, two, three, straight off the cuff. In addition to performing, the boys in the orchestra and the quartet laughed and applauded the jokes. Timing was set as we went along, something to ponder in these days of platoons of production assistants armed with stop watches. I became expert at winding up a recording when I got the hurry signal, at

blending the opening of the next disk with the point where I left off on the last. Adaptations of my "Coral Islanders" (these called "Hawaiian Shadows"); the "Irrepressible Imps," starring Jerry Macy, Ed Smalle, and myself; "Lest We Forget," a wonderful orchestral program of familiar favorites strung together with philosophical bits according to various moods and welded into a whole by the beautiful music of Harold Levy (for eight years we've been together again, on the U.S. Steel program)—of such things was the new venture made.

Like the rest, this contract was over too soon. Long before they were ever heard over any radio station, my work on the recordings was done. While the remuneration was fairly good, after paying up the debts of the low period—back rent, grocery bills, and many other obligations—financially I was just about where I had been when Howard Way called me. The work had been so confining that I had made few calls, and thus felt farther away than ever from radio. Whether or not you were keeping in touch, radio kept going straight on! Again I was living from day to day, again on the hunt for the elusive one show that would reinstate me solidly in public esteem.

Refuge, forgetfulness, escape—these were what I sought. Under the heavy hand of fear, insecurity, depression, the ambition to get back into the field where I had found success took such a buffeting that I began telling myself I no longer cared whether I got back or not. Of course, then I had to cover up that lie to myself, and so the drinking got heavy again.

If I saw myself as wandering alone in a maze, my friends and family did their best to walk beside me, to help and sustain if they could, at least not to desert me. Dreary weeks passed. I went from Dr. Findlay to other doctors, hoping against hope to find the miracle that would in spite of himself straighten out a man, get him back on the path where at least he could look himself in the eye, and find the power to strike out for new horizons, instead of hiding from them in the recesses of a mind fogged in with alcohol. Many weary days and sleepless nights, many drunken episodes, many

heartbreaks were to follow one another before an offer came that held out the prospect of genuine escape. It represented the type of escape people dream about; vacationists plan for it long months in advance; beachcombers become beachcombers because of it.

While I had been immersed in making transcriptions in a forest of microphones and deadlines, others had been absorbed in the possibilities of a new, color, motion-picture process. Now they came out with a patented improved four-color method, promising pictures of such magnificent beauty that financing was found to form the Colorcraft Corporation. Even while the plant was being built on Long Island for the processing of films, an expedition to obtain them was being staffed. Arrangements had been made with Pan American Airways; camera crew, director, and narrator would be following routes laid out by Colonel Lindbergh, touching all Pan American's ports of call starting at Miami, covering Cuba, the West Indies, and Cristobal in the Canal Zone.

It was a prospect to bewitch the mind of anyone sensitive to the sights and sounds of beauty. Scenes were to be photographed from a plane, flying over places of historic interest, characteristic plantation areas, industrial centers, spots of unique scenic beauty; the aerial photography was to be expanded by close-ups of vivid detail and tropical coloring. These travelogues would be unlike any that had ever come to the screen; not only was the color process finer, but the pictures would be two-dimensional—from the air and on the ground. The crowning innovation would be that, whereas the pictures of other travelogues were shot at random with movie cameras, the commentary dubbed in at the studios, in this case the narrator, traveling right along with the camera crew, would put his descriptive material on a sound track at the moment of the shooting, including side lights in the form of relevant interviews and unrehearsed dialogue, giving the whole colorful adventure a live effect and continuity of interest.

I was picked as narrator. Here was a challenge of fairy-tale quality, a journeying into out-of-the-way places, on an itinerary limited only by our imaginations. The work itself would

derive from my own past experience in selecting scenes and details of interest to people; but it had one other important aspect, which only I was in a position to appreciate; it would take me away from all the atmosphere of disappointment and frustration, from the anxious efforts of well-meaning friends and the slights of professional enemies.

There would be no salary as such; my earnings would come after the films began showing in the theaters, when Colorcraft was launched and solidly on its way, as I had no doubt it would soon be. A drawing account would cover travel and hotel expenses, with five dollars a day allowed for incidentals. Also I could take my wife with me. What more could a man ask?

We put our furniture in storage and notified the landlord that we were leaving.

I shall call the expedition director Bill. Bill and his wife, Eunice and I boarded a steamer bound from New York for Miami. The camera crew left by automobile and would join us there; we were to make the necessary preliminary arrangements and settle the schedule with the Pan American people.

Once again we threw ourselves into the festivity of a sailing. Once more I experienced that inner, odd, and in my case dangerous feeling of leaving all care, all rules, all responsibility behind.

Almost immediately I discovered Bill to be a man after my own heart. Leaving our wives to clear up the *bon voyage* party wreckage in the staterooms, we took one turn around the deck and in good order proceeded to the bar. We were mellow when an invitation was extended to us. How should we know that professional gamblers were aboard? These were jolly carefree people like ourselves; a game of bridge would get the first night out at sea nicely under way.

Bill outlasted me, inasmuch as he was custodian of the company funds. When I climbed into my bunk some hours later, I did not find it best to relate to my lady that the men with whom we had played a bit of bridge had expressed great sympathy when, sheepishly displaying my empty wallet, I had said, "Gentlemen, that's all for me."

Settled in our Miami hotel, two things became evident.

First, our expenses were running very high; second, rain and hazy skies were plaguing the Miami area, making any picture-making impossible.

For a few days we made like tourists. Hialeah beckoned; we whiled away the races with two-dollar bets; we couldn't expose any film, but we were offered the freedom of the clubhouse, and we made friends. At Hialeah we happened to win a few dollars, which we lost promptly at the dog races; somehow the bunny always won. Speedboats on Biscayne Bay took us for free rides; owners of palatial yachts that were there for the season invited us aboard to parties. We were "picture people," everyone was interested and eager to be hospitable. It was a lot of fun—until the money for the camera crew ran out.

I happened to find out that my brother Melvin was resident manager of the Colonial Towers Hotel, not too far distant; I made arrangements with him for the outfit to move into his hotel at reduced rates. Without saying anything to each other, all of us were rather surprised that the money should have run out before we had accomplished even the first assignment on the list, namely, air shots of Miami. Soon it became unmistakably clear that in our director Bill we had a man who could outsmile, outpromote, outdrink, and outspend anyone this side of Mars. He and his wife lived in a little world of their own, rather brighter and warmer than Mars, a world studded with diamonds, wonderful clothes, luxurious partying, through which they raced at top speed, confident that one must live and enjoy today for all too soon it becomes part of yesterday's ten thousand years. Tomorrow? Tomorrow takes care of itself, so why bother?

Even I, who had lived none too economical a life, knew that you cannot live on a fleecy cloud and at the same time get a many-sided and exacting project to working.

For awhile everything simply fell apart. Each member of the expedition blamed the other; personal enmities formed, fingers of suspicion were pointed; there seemed every prospect that the whole project would explode in our faces.

I had a high stake in holding it together, in seeing to it that it perform its mission. I got hold of Bill's office orders

one day when he was again *non compos mentis* thanks to the night before, and made an effort to get things back on the track again.

I discovered that Pan American simply did not have available for our use the type of ship needed for mounting a camera for aerial views. Too, the weatherman disclosed to me that the skies might clear in a day or two, and then again they might not.

A sight-seeing blimp operated daily over Miami and Miami Beach. I made arrangements with the company to take our crew aboard long enough to get the required shots. I took the precaution of a trial flight; the skipper let me handle the controls; I was amazed to learn that lighter-than-air travel is altogether different from airplane flight. Big, cumbersome, slow in answering the controls, with a roll that outdid any top-heavy sailing ship of fact or fancy, I began to doubt the quality of pictures we could get. But we took them anyway.

Bill sensed that he was being outwitted. Forthwith he borrowed some money from his well-to-do wife and straightened out sufficiently to arrange transportation for us to Cuba—on a plane that could not mount our cameras either. However, probably this was a wise move; while the business situation was being put to rights, the camera crew could do some ground shooting at the Botanical Gardens, the beach at La Playa, Morro Castle, and various other points of interest.

Bill, two cameramen, and I registered at the fabulous National Hotel and went to work on the sights, sounds, and moods of Old Havana. I relaxed a little because Bill had got himself under control.

Suffering something of a reaction, the first day I went forth with the energetic idea of drinking Havana dry. I discovered that it can't be done. After my breakfast—gin and tonic and pineapple—a local guide led me to Sloppy Joe's. Fascinated, I watched as the bartender built a *pousse-café* to end all *pousse-café*s. In turn he watched with fascination as I tried to drink them as fast as he completed them. For some inexplicable reason I was able to go on after awhile under my own steam, to a Cuban section, where I paused to harmonize with a peanut vender; on a taxi ride when I persuaded the driver

to let me take the wheel, then I scattered the inhabitants by driving at a fast clip on the wrong side of the street. I found out that the city contained two kinds of ladies: those who would smile at you from open windows, returning your carefree greeting; those on the street, who cast down their eyes and let their duennas do the glaring, when all you sought to convey was how pretty the young ladies were. Late at night I wound up at a night spot. When I noticed that the men in the band seemed to be discussing me, I went toward the leader with some belligerence. "So whassa matter!" Grinning, he handed me a piece of sheet music; the cover of the selection "Cobblestones" bore a picture of me! "It's a small world," I said foolishly, slapping him on the back.

Back at the National I found Bill in the bar. He was celebrating over the plans for tomorrow. He had rented a car, the camera would be mounted in the tonneau, and we could comb the highways and byways leading out to the Botanical Gardens, climaxing the reel there among exotic blooms that were waiting only for the Colorcraft camera to immortalize their tropical beauty.

Bright and early the next morning, after an eye opener with a chaser of breakfast we started out. I think the day would have been uneventful if the cameraman had not spotted a peaceful-looking member of the bovine family, tethered just inside a fence bordering the roadside. I remember thinking that in Cuba cattle were smaller than in the States. Hmmn-mmmm, might make a nice little touch for the film. The camera was focused; the animal posed absently. The cameraman observed bitterly, "Be nice if the damned critter would move."

Handing his assistant my own sixteen-millimeter with the request that he photograph me, I hopped the fence. I was feeling very genial. "Come, bossy, come, bossy, stir your stumps, make some moo for papa," I said brightly. I did notice a certain sort of steady, unhappy glare in small reddish eyes, but it didn't seem important.

As the critter seemed disinclined to move, I decided to help things along, so I reached out and gave the horns a

yank, with a shouted reminder that we didn't have all day. It was just as well that I seized both horns; in this way, at least, I was centered when the animal, hoisting its rear in outrage, drove at me.

The lunge tore me off my feet, flinging me into a back somersault that landed me up against the fence with seconds to roll under and out of reach before *El Toro* got his chance to gore me. I jumped up, gasping frantically for the air the bull had knocked out of me, and clutching a sore midriff.

Pictures? The cameraman and his assistant had been so transfixed that not an inch of film had been exposed. Oh, fine!

On our way back from the Botanical Gardens we conferred with the Bacardi people. Nothing in the way of hospitality was left undone, and we returned to the hotel in a pleasant glow. At least we had some pictures.

A sobering fact met us. One of the Colorcraft executives, a heavy investor, had arrived from New York to untangle the situation. He was loaded for bear and called a conference immediately after dinner.

Everyone was there but Bill. Proceedings were postponed until morning; the visitor took the rest of us off to see the national game of *jai alai*. Who should be there in the *frontón* but Bill, though in no condition to attend a conference. It was decided on the spot that I would be put in charge of the expedition, becoming manager as well as narrator. Later I was handed a new set of instructions and a packet of letters, addressed to mayors and chambers of commerce in every town we expected to touch; included was this masterpiece, which I was to use en route back to New York. It was addressed to the Secretary to the President of the United States and read:

DEAR SIR:

The writer has the honor to address you, requesting through your office that Norman Brokenshire, the well-known radio announcer, and our camera crew be presented to our esteemed President, Herbert Hoover. We have been taking motion pictures in natural color of Florida and the West Indies, with Mr. Brokenshire as narrator, and these will be shown in all the leading theaters throughout the world.

Naturally I hated to see Bill abruptly dismissed, without even a hearing; but I decided I would do a real job on my new responsibilities from here on in.

Ten days after arriving in Havana I brought the crew back to Miami. We had excellent Havana sequences; the flight back to Miami was to enable us to capture the scenes missed there during the inclement weather and general disorganization of the expedition. It was decided that the company executive would return to New York, and the cameraman and I would go on a Pan American Clipper to the West Indies.

The day of departure was bright and clear, all hands were aboard. It was no hardship to me to discover that my seatmate was a dark and beautiful Panamanian princess.

We flew at moderate altitudes over the multicolored waters of the Gulf Stream, watching schools of frolicking porpoises and, in some places, the ocean floor. We caught a few extra shots along the Cuban southerly coast, and over Cienfuegos, the city of a thousand fires. Eight hours or so after leaving Miami we landed at Kingston, Jamaica. A great loneliness assailed me as I stepped off the plane.

Everything about the place looked so haphazard, so carelessly built, so uncared for and poor. The hotel was archaic; the food would make even the birds think twice. Suddenly I felt too far away from the world and the people in it.

Later I could remember Kingston only for the native women I observed, squatting by the roadside, breaking stones with heavy hammers, work for which I was told the government paid them a shilling a bushel. We got shots of them, of bamboo groves, and of the sugar industry and sat down to await further instructions; would it be farther south, or to the Canal Zone, or to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

I had two ways of drowning my loneliness—at least of trying to. One was at the famed Sugar Wharf, where rum punches were born; the other was at an open-air moving-picture show, where on the last evening spent on the island, I sat among a motley crew of black and white natives, beachcombers, and miscellaneous local inhabitants. The sight on the screen of Jeanette MacDonald, running away from her wedding, boarding a French train, and, with her hair stream-

ing at the open window, singing "Beyond the Blue Horizon" made me homesick, for the first time in my life.

In the morning I sat down to my breakfast oranges. It was the local custom to serve them in a bowl, peeled, with a fork sticking in each orange. You tucked your napkin under your chin as a bib, and taking a forked orange from the bowl, sat back and and chewed on it merrily as though it were a candy apple or a lollipop.

A cable was handed to me while I was engaged with my second orange. We were instructed to take the next plane for Miami.

On the trip I had a premonition. We passed the hours, talking about all the places we had expected to visit. But even our drooping spirits would not have allowed us to imagine the news awaiting us.

The expedition was off. The inventor of Colorcraft had committed suicide. All support of the project having ended, we were to bundle up all exposed film and get back to New York the best way we could.

The bright dream of a revolutionary color process, the effort to produce the greatest travelogue yet seen, died with a few hit-or-miss reels of color pictures; unedited, untitled, unnarrated, probably today they are lost in some forgotten file. The scripts I wrote as each sequence was filmed are still in longhand as I wrote them, yellowing on a dusty shelf in one of my closets.

"Back to reality" turned out to be moving in with my wife's sister in New York. The second day, against my better judgment, I began looking over accumulated bills; dead storage for my car, storage for the furniture, two months' rent (it seems that the landlord took the "unfair" view that there ought to be something more to vacating an apartment than just saying you were leaving), food bills, insurance premiums that I was sure now I would never pay. Two months had been squandered on the Colorcraft merry-go-round, and what did I have to show for it? This pile of mail, all bills except—*what's this?* Open it fast; while there's life there's hope!

"Can you," my unbelieving eyes read, "appear as master

of ceremonies for the Masonic Lodge in Bridgeport, Connecticut, on the night of March 20?"

For awhile we could at least eat. The small fees offered were a somber sign that my dire need of work was well known, yet I could not afford to turn them down.

I have before me an exchange of letters that brings back the starkness of my situation:

This is to confirm our telephone conversation of the other day, [wrote the secretary of a Masonic group] and your agreement to appear as master of ceremonies in connection with the Beefsteak Party to be given by the Live Oak Lodge #1024, F. and A.M., to be held on Saturday evening at the Hotel Victoria, New York City. We agree to an honorarium of \$50 for the evening, *to be paid after the performance.*

In reply I wrote:

I shall appreciate it greatly if you will regard the above-mentioned fee quite in confidence; my minimum fee for public appearances is \$100, and I should not care to have it known that I have appeared for less.

Norman Brokenshire now had no respectable market price! The undeniable fact was that grubstakes were getting smaller and smaller; yet no matter what they were, I had to take them and be thankful.

A companion problem was getting myself in shape to live up to my commitments. Whereas frequently the arrangement was that I would be paid only after the performance, the nature of functions usually included free liquor; I was burdened not only with a crippling awareness of the smallness of my fee, but the necessity to remain sober through the evening in order to collect it. Sometimes my performances were pretty bad; more than once payment was refused.

On one occasion I was hired as guest announcer for a special anniversary program emanating from Detroit. "R. B. Clothes Presents the R. B. Style Show of the Air," says an old script I find in my files. The local announcer comes in: "Tonight for one hour on radio station WXYZ, Detroit, and

WKRC, Cincinnati, and through the courtesy of Palmolive Soap and Camel Cigarettes for one half hour on radio stations WWJ and WJH, Detroit, you will be the guests of R. B. Clothes. . . . To describe the brilliant style show R. B. Clothes has engaged that famous radio personality, Mr. Norman Brokenshire. . . ." On the script I wrote this in for the local announcer: "Norman Brokenshire, who has just returned from a motion-picture tour of the tropics and appears for the first time again on radio, after an absence of four months." How feverishly I was trying to hang on to a semblance of fame while the very jobs I had belied it!

No great credit is deserved by a radio announcer who travels to some city to read a prepared script at a radio station; to make a good job of it on the air is only what is expected of him. But for me there was much more to such occasions than the mere reading from a script; and it was the extras that spelled danger.

A family relative happened to be in Detroit at the time of the broadcast. Afterward he wrote my wife:

The president of R. B. Clothes invited us all to the Book-Cadillac afterward for a little whoopee party. Norman insisted that he had to catch an eleven-fifty train. But everybody urged him, and he finally agreed to come for just ten minutes to have a nightcap. So far through the evening he hadn't taken a drop. When we got to the hotel, the room was full to the brim with men, women, and liquor. Norman has begun learning to say no. He stopped at one straight and two highballs, leaving a wonderful party to make his train.

Strangely enough in my mind the problem was not the party, not the drink or two I took, not catching the train; it was the awareness of being unlike all these other people, a fact that could no longer be blinked. When the tension of my job was over, when everybody was feeling happy and relaxed because the program had gone well, of course I wanted to do as the others did, go to a party and have fun, like any normal person among normal people. In this particular case I didn't have to get the eleven-fifty train. If I chose to stay over another day, it would have been all right; the manager of the

hotel had already given me the best room in the house, *on* the house. I said I had to make that train and get back to New York because fear had me by the sleeve, whispering in my ear that I *dare* not stay for the party because I knew I couldn't function as a normal person, drinking in company with normal people. Sad experience had shown that some chemistry in my metabolism would cause me first to get drunk, then to do the wrong things, embarrassing others as well as myself, creating the kind of ill will that damaged both my social and professional standing. So the train bit was my escape hatch; better to go before I encountered the risks. A drink? Of course I wanted to relax the tension with a drink. When I was on the train, alone, I could have it. Thus, slowly and inexorably, my fear was making me a person who lived apart, a solitary drinker.

One nice thing happened on the Detroit trip. My youngest brother, Wilbur, eight years my junior, had married sometime during my wanderings and moved to Detroit. I was happy to be invited to their house for dinner, happier still to find a devoted couple, expecting their first child. It was many years since I had seen Wilbur William; he had grown into quite a responsible young man, and his wife Mildred was charming. At last, a normal Brokenshire!

Other little public-appearance jobs came along, but they were few and far between. I was way behind on my bills. Soon my in-laws, with perfect justification, were making it clear that it would be a relief if we could find it possible to get a place of our own. Defensive drinking did not make these things any more bearable.

Did you ever hear of Mrs. Stanley? Probably not, unless you happened to be wandering between Sixth and Seventh Avenue on Forty-sixth Street around 1930 and saw the sign "Home Cooking."

If you were an actor, an actress, or a chorus girl, out of work, you might easily have known Mrs. Stanley. The Stanleys had had a show-business career of sorts and never refused a meal to anyone in the profession who was in trouble. There is an old ballad that describes New York as "the city that has

no heart." New York does have a heart, the heart of a thousand Mrs. Stanleys.

Eunice and I liked eating at Mrs. Stanley's; the food was good, really home-cooked, and inexpensive. Mrs. Stanley ferreted out our predicament about finding a new place to live. "Now it just happens," she said cheerfully, "that there's a vacant room upstairs. It's fairly light, it's furnished; why don't you take it until you get things straightened around?" She made it sound so much less than the godsend it was! "Let me hold it for you; pay me when you can." And so we moved out from under the roof where we didn't belong, to an old brownstone building, converted into furnished rooms and a restaurant. The stairs creaked, there were cockroaches, the mingled odors as you climbed the stairs were unlike anything on the face of the earth—except West Forty-sixth Street; the chairs sagged, the windows were dirty and rattled on their worn cords, the old iron bedstead wobbled a little, the springs sagged in the middle; but from her heart Mrs. Stanley had held out to us a home! We were accepted, made welcome, no questions asked, no fingers pointed, even figuratively. Lights flashed in our faces all night, bands blared in nearby rehearsal halls, traffic howled, brakes screeched, but we were taken in, welcomed, made to feel at home.

A lot of things happened to us on Forty-sixth Street this miserable year of 1931. Builders of little programs who wouldn't even have approached me in better days, because they could offer only such small fees, hurried to me now, slyly implying that they knew I had to take any work I could get. There were transcriptions for me to make; Blaisdell Pencils, Bost Toothpaste, a drink mixer, Tom Collins, Jr. A fellow by the name of Douglas Storer, who was building a summer replacement show for the Cunard Line, was willing to take a chance on me, put me on his show, at a bargain price. Many jobs came and went; nobody remembers them all now, not even I.

One thing I do remember. One day I was approached by an independent motion-picture producer, name of William M. Pizor. He had made an arrangement with Edgar Guest for the use of his poems. Picture, word, and story were to be imag-

inatively combined into a series of beautiful short subjects; Pizor came to me to see if I would write, and be the voice. It was so exactly up my alley that all of a sudden I felt absolutely sure this was the thing that was going to turn the tide.

I worked like a beaver with Cy Braunstein, Pizor's editor. Night after night we cut and timed film feverishly. While he patched together the working negative, I would fashion the script, blending Mr. Guest's poem into a story line harmonizing with the pictures, so that the whole would flow to a picturesque and meaningful climax. I was so hopeful that this would turn into a source of steady income that I hastily signed contracts calling for me to participate in any profits the series might make. When I read over that contract now, I realize how insecure, how uncertain people felt who hired me in those days. The last paragraph reads:

The artist hereby agrees to conduct himself in his private as well as his public life as not to impair his prestige, standing, or reputation as a recording or radio artist. The artist further agrees that he will so conduct himself in public and in private so as not to impair the quality of his voice or incur any voluntary disability from the performance of his services to be rendered hereunder, and so as not to cast discredit, scandal, or criticism upon himself by misconduct, excessive drinking, loud or boisterous behavior in public. . . .

With all the hard work under conditions that were loathsome to me, the series never earned a cent for anybody. The few dollars I borrowed from Cy while working were put down to profit and loss.

More and more I was banging my head against that stone wall. A pleasant voice and a facility with the English language were simply not enough! To succeed in my profession a man had in addition to have a quality needed to succeed in anything—character. Through the years since my initial success I had permitted myself to become one of those justifiably disliked persons who make the mistake of thinking, because of some gift or talent, that they have the world by the tail. A false sense of greatness, resulting from an overabundance of

ego, leads them to lose sight of fundamental things: a sense of gratitude for the admiring applause that puts them where they are; the humility that should flow from knowing that the talent comes from Him; a sense of duty, to cherish and protect the talent so that it may grow and serve people; a sense of one's actual smallness in the great scheme of things.

I did not bother with any of these, until it was too late. I turned my back on my upbringing, ignored my father's preachings, and forgot my mother's teachings and faith. I rose to heights on sheer vanity over material horizons, and soon fell from them through leaving the spiritual side of my life to wither and decay.

Another try that was to fail was offered by Johnny Marvin, one of the greatest recording artists of his time, who had an idea. We would make records for commercial sale, on which I would read letters from imaginary fans, which Johnny would "answer" by singing the chorus of a song. The script would run, "Dr. Marvin, I have a letter here from a lady who is much too stout. She says she must keep on eating well, because she likes food so much. Is there anything she can do about it?" Whereupon "Doctor" Marvin would reply, "Yes, Mr. Brokenshire, she's got to 'Bend down, Sister,'" whereupon he would launch into one of the songs of the moment, "You've got to bend down, Sister, if you wanta stay thin." It wasn't a very good idea even for those less sophisticated entertainment days and was never pressed.

When the year was out, everything I had touched in the preceding twelve months proved to be an absolute failure, without one cent of profit. I could not imagine where to turn.

During the chill November of 1931 despondency led me to a drinking bout that lasted longer than usual. I stumbled home with the aid of a taxi driver and found that we had visitors. My mother, from Canada, and Tom Noonan, from a mission on the Bowery, in Chinatown.

For some obscure reason my befuddled mind dredged up the memory of an article by a Mortimer Stuart, which I had recently read in one of the papers. It was titled "Announcers Anchor to Chain, and Some to Ball and Chain." The last para-

graph of the article kept whirring like a bat in the cage of my alcohol-soaked mind. While my family watched unhappily, I pulled the wrinkled clipping from my coat pocket, insisting on reading over and over to them that last paragraph: "What happens to all the old announcers? Are they cut up into handy strips and used for polishing cloths, or do they go to the Smithsonian to be preserved for posterity in glass cases?"

I suppose it was meant as witty satire, but in my state of mind it posed a fearful question, demanding an answer. But then I must vaguely have recognized a loving mother, sitting in stunned silence by a dirty window; a wife who managed to smile as she took off my hat, loosened my tie, put a cold compress on my head; and Tom Noonan, a friend with whom I had worked in better days, a friend who had seen and helped so many men in my predicament and worse. I collapsed in a chair, the clipping falling from my hand.

I woke up about noon the next day, to my surprise feeling a certain strange peace that I hadn't known for a long, long time. Unlike that earlier New Year's visit, Mother hadn't left for Canada; when I came out of the bedroom, she was reading quietly. Eunice was getting breakfast for me; I felt a nice atmosphere in the room. There was no mention of the night before, no talk of the past at all. Conversation was pleasant, not forced. I myself brought up the subject of Tom Noonan. I remarked, looking into my coffee cup and feeling ashamed, "Tom's a nice guy."

Mother began, slowly, carefully, patiently, to explain to me just how nice. "He never knew until last night, Ernest," she said, "that there was any problem in your life. I don't know how much you remember of what he said to you, about how he might help you if you wanted him to. He left this for you. . . ." She handed me a little leaflet. My eye took in the first sentence, "There is a balm in Gilead." I looked through the dirty window. For everyone but me, I thought bitterly, my feeling of peace suddenly sponged away.

In spite of myself I glanced at the pages of the leaflet. It set forth that no one need feel hopeless or despair of finding a solution to his problems. Fear, maladjustments, aggressions,

disease—all could be mastered; everyone could seek, and find, a happier, more peaceful world. As I scanned it, it seemed to me that I had heard it all before, somewhere; where? The arguments were plausible; there were quotations from the Bible and from a book written by Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health, with Key to the Scriptures*. I remarked to Eunice and Mother that it sounded familiar. They smiled. “Tom read it aloud to you last night before you went to sleep,” they told me. Eunice handed me a slip of paper. “He left you this if you feel you want further help.” There was a name and a telephone number.

I thought it over. I looked at Mother, sitting with her hands folded in her lap, her head bent in thought. She never was one to talk when a person was thinking, I remembered. I looked at my wife. In my deep unhappiness how much sorrow I had brought to her. I thought of that peculiar sense of peace I had got up with; they said Tom had read to me last night; was there a connection between the reading and the feeling of peace? I said, “It would be a good thing for me to go out and see this man, this Mr. Johnson. I’ll go and telephone him.” I felt unsure of myself; I wanted to be alone, to think this thing out by myself.

The decision to go to this man whose name Tom had left for me was a turning point, another of the important ones of my life. During the days of success I had given religion a wide berth; I told myself (when I thought about it at all, which wasn’t often) that I was putting all that stuffiness of my upbringing behind me.

Mr. Johnson proved to be a Christian Science practitioner. In the next few weeks I went to see him several times. I found in this study of Christian Science something logical and very much in tune with my naturally optimistic disposition. It helped to revive the religious faith that had surrounded me as a child. I now wanted to live a better life.

If there is one common denominator in all religious study, it is the fundamental fact that if one thinks right, tries to do the right things, the returns of life will in God’s own time come our way; we will get along, finding our fair share of happiness.

I took a new lease on life. Doing the lesson each morning with my wife seemed to start the day off right. I began to gain from going to church, this different kind of church where one didn't just sit, listening to someone expound nebulous theological theories; rather one spent the hour in surroundings of quiet inspiration and constructive thought, guided by words of wisdom from the Bible and from Mrs. Eddy's teachings. These interpretations seemed to dispel the fearful God of wrath, that visited terrible justice upon sinning mortals. This view brought Him down into the hearts of men and women in the form of good, good that was "overlying and underlying and all about us"; good that "made the birds to sing and the leaves to clap their hands in joy." I began to get a glimpse of my personal life as a vessel that, filled with water, will hold no more; life could become so filled with fresh ambition and constructive action that there would be no room for such pursuits as inevitably got me into trouble.

My day-to-day existence changed. Radio Producers, Inc., for whom I had made so many recordings, recalled me for more work. I find a message, written by me on a memo sheet from their offices, dated December 4, 1931, signed by me, and reading as follows:

To Howard Way: Through a talk with my mother, together with serious decisions on my own part, I have found a way to straighten out my mental processes, warped by dissipation and resultant loss of work, standing, and self-reliance. By adhering to these changed thoughts and practices, I will become useful, reliable and happy. This I pledge to do.

From this penciled note I had typed my pledge and put it in the hands of Howard Way, who was largely responsible for this added work.

How many people help us, how little we think to do in return! It falls to the lot of few men to go over the past with a fine-tooth comb as I have been able to by writing all this down; in doing so, I realize tardily the debts I still owe so many wonderful people who have helped me on my way. My only chance to repay them now is in passing along their good to others.

We left the surroundings that Mrs. Stanley had so generously let us have. I was not financially able to get the sort of place we would have liked, but Howard Way, though struggling himself, offered us shelter in his apartment until I could make a little headway. He and his wife and their six children lived in a basement apartment in Pelham, New York. It was a tight squeeze, but none of us groused over it.

I used the rest of the year to renew old acquaintances, going from agency to agency. I must have worn my new outlook on my sleeve, for now people were a deal more considerate, and the reason must have been the sincerity of my new thinking. There were as yet no big or even regular jobs for me; I still had to face the fact that no program builder, no account executive, no individual in an agency program department was thus far anxious or even very willing to jeopardize his own security by taking a chance on my reputation. It takes much longer to live down a reputation than to make it.

To make ends meet Eunice went to work with a food consultant, Edith M. Barber of the *New York Sun*. Before long a vacancy occurred in the Pelham apartment house; Way used his influence with the superintendent to get it for us. We had lost our own furniture and had no money to buy new; the superintendent let us have a bed and a table; from the nearby grocery store I got crates and boxes that became our tables and chairs.

The days became good. Hopes ran high; we felt in our bones that 1932 would see everything changed for the better. So we celebrated New Year's Eve with gratitude, satisfaction, and joy. I gathered together a group of loyal friends whom I knew to be with me in spirit: Perry Charles and his wife Virginia; Lewis Reid and his wife Aida; Dorothy and Bill Schudt (Bill was working in public relations at CBS); Jack Foster, radio columnist of the influential *World Telegram*. Our meeting place was Jim Redmond's, a speak-easy on Broadway.

I like to remember that party; with all the boisterous rampaging that went on that night, this little group of people stayed close together. Eunice was in a gay mood, and the rest, knowing what we had been through, seemed to rejoice in our new-found freedom, so the whole spirit of the get-

together was refreshing. I drank only ginger ale but gave toast for toast. I guess we talked of radio, but primarily it was just a group of true friends, seeing the old year out, moderately. I had no inkling of how important that drinkless New Year's Eve was going to be to me.

Early in January, Howard Way was to do me another good turn. He had been given a contract to make a series of recordings for Blue Valley Butter, a Chicago account, and he got me the announcing job. This was a big job and paid well. It was so good to have a little money again. I wired my first pay to Eunice as soon as I drew it, and said, "Get yourself some furniture; pin on a smile; we live again."

When I came back, we really had a home: draperies, tablecloths, rugs, and flowers in a vase on the dining room table.

The series of records made for Blue Valley themselves made a record, the most successful show they had ever had. They played the whole series not only once but twice, and the agency, Henri Hurst and MacDonald, was duly impressed. So much so that soon, when they had another show, which was to originate live in New York City, they hired me.

As master of ceremonies I was the "Broadway Playboy" for Society Brand Clothes. This very happy, lighthearted musical show featured Welcome Lewis, Nat Brusiloff's orchestra, and me; it was a weekly fifteen-minute show, for which I was paid two hundred dollars. Now things were percolating!

The newspapers welcomed me back. "Broke, Lewis, and Brusiloff in new feature on WABC," said one.

"Norman Brokenshire returns to radio at WABC (having been thrown out of there a while back) in a new show with Welcome Lewis and Nat Brusiloff's orchestra. . . ." "Broke, one of radio's most colorful personalities, returns after more than a year's absence in the talkie shorts and freelance field. . . ." "Brokenshire is one of radio's original Musketeers, picked to man the microphones of Broadcast Central; in those early days if there was ever a man-about-town with a microphone, it was Broke. . . ." "Broke bows in grand manner; it was fine to hear that playboy and clown, Norman Brokenshire, back at WABC. Few announcers have his levity;

his charm; like Ben Bernie he has the ability to discuss the product and not make it seem to be offensive. . . .”

WABC and Paley were reassured by the hundreds of letters that came in to say, “Welcome back, Norman.”

I began a new cycle of great and active happy days. The wonderful Perry Charles, Nick Kenny, radio columnist of the *New York Daily Mirror*, and I went up to Sing Sing to do a program to entertain the prisoners. I often went down to Chinatown to help my friend Tom Noonan. The Pelham newspaper said, after I made my first public appearance at the football dinner of the Lions Club, “Mr. Brokenshire expects to make Pelham his home for some time, and generously offered to give his services at any time that the Lions Club or other service organizations care to have him do so.”

With a set of makeshift tools I put in spare time on remodeling our apartment. I made a false wall in the bedroom to house built-in bookcases, a radio, and indirect lighting. I built a segmented wall mirror out of five mirrored backs of old-fashioned buffets, given me by the building superintendent, and I repainted the whole place.

Some new film work came my way; I began a series called “Organlogues,” used throughout the country in theaters to back up a community sing between pictures. I had a couple of regular shows each week, with odd jobs in between, and our lives settled down to a very happy routine.

I had an old Dodge car in which I drove back and forth between Pelham and New York City, and I don’t believe I would have complained if things had remained as they were for years. But as somebody so wisely stated long ago, we cannot stay still; we either advance or retrograde. I was about to advance!

I had not yet installed a phone, so it was a little difficult to reach me from New York. But where there’s a will there’s a way, and so somebody’s Girl Friday found out through information that I was in Pelham; somebody else told her where I kept my car; and that is how, one morning as we were having ham ’n eggs, a grease-stained finger punched our bell, our doorknob turned, and the man from the garage said,

"You're wanted on our phone." Fortunately the garage was only a couple of doors away.

"Hello," I said heartily, "Brokenshire on this end." When I grasped the big message, I couldn't get back to the apartment fast enough. "Eunice, what d'you think! They've asked me to come tomorrow morning for an audition for the Chesterfield Hour!" At first she was stunned. We both realized what it would mean if I got it—three big shows a week, starring Alexander Gray, with Nat Shilkret's Orchestra, coast to coast!

I was just finishing my cooling coffee when the doorknob turned again. "Why don't you come down and live in our office?" laughed the mechanic. "Then you'll be handy to the telephone. Somebody else wants to talk to you."

This time it was Jack Foster. He told me that he had been talking in an advisory capacity with the Chesterfield people and knew that they wanted me very much. Yes, they knew about my past; as a matter of fact, Jack said, they had been checking up on me for the past month. "The clincher, Broke," he said, "was when I told them about that New Year's Eve party; before they'd believe me I swore on a stack of Bibles that you didn't take even one drink. They seemed to be worried about whether you could be your old happy self if you were really off the giggle water. I said all I could tell them was the evidence of my own eyes; you were the life of the party that night, and that they shouldn't worry any longer, you were their man. Well, good luck. Oh, and by the way, it seems that when the Alex Gray contract is up next month they're going on six times a week; they've brought Bing Crosby from the coast, for competition with Russ Colombo. They've taken Ruth Etting from the *Follies*, and they're signing up the Boswell Sisters; each will take two days a week—some show! Well, keep your shirt on!"

Well, this time when I got to the apartment, we just took the rest of the day off, joyfully building up our hopes. Six times a week! This show I have to get. This is it!

The next morning as I entered the familiar 485 Madison I behaved humbly, in contrast to my show-off exit of a few years before. I went up to the twentieth floor, where I was

shown into a small studio and handed a script, which I read. That was all there was to the audition—all, that is, except those fantastic, agonizing, wonderful hours of waiting; your mind whirled. You hadn't done as well as you should have, as well as you were capable of doing. If you could only do it over! Was there any chance, any chance at all? What had they said, back in the control room? What had the executives, the agency man, the sponsors, said, when they heard that voice? Would I be called again? If I were called, what would be said to me? Six times a week, coast to coast!

I went downstairs, got in my car, and drove back to Pelham. I tried to convince myself that, if it came out, O.K.; if it didn't, O.K. I was on the air as it was; I was making a good salary. True, my only contract now was for thirteen weeks; at the end of the thirteen weeks, what? Henri Hurst and MacDonald had been good to me; but they were a Chicago firm. It was the New York agencies that I needed to impress. The Society Brand Clothes show was on the air once a week for fifteen minutes—not enough to impress New York men. The other outside jobs were good as far as income was concerned, but in relation to my career future they meant nothing. But, boy, if I could get this Chesterfield show!

My foot trod nervously on the gas pedal; the car shot ahead. Just in time to save myself a ticket I caught sight of a motorcycle cop, almost concealed up ahead. The heart thumped in my chest. Such a little thing as a speeding ticket could cost me the Chesterfield show! Someone would be sure to say, "Hear about Brokenshire? Drunk again. Uh-huh—got nabbed for speeding, out Westchester way."

To win this audition was to catch hold of the one great golden opportunity. If I got Chesterfield, I would not only be in, I would be on top in radio again; for millions to hear, I would have the unquestioned biggest, the unquestioned greatest commercial show to date in radio. Not once a week but every day, with top talent and a huge network of stations, reaching from Canada to Mexico and coast to coast. In my mind's eye danced a crazy montage, of pictures in thousands of store windows, full-page advertisements, interviews in the

trade papers, people staring on the street. "Know who that is? That's Brokenshire, the Chesterfield announcer!"

I got home safely and put my feet back on the ground. Supper was a happy affair; we kept glancing at each other as if we expected Santa Claus in an off-season visit. I don't remember what Eunice did, but I started to read a good novel; it was the only way to keep my mind off the pin wheel.

The telegram didn't come until nearly two o'clock:

PLEASE COME TO THE ARTIST BUREAU AT CBS HAVE CONTRACT FOR YOU TO SIGN

RALPH WONDERS

FIFTEEN

TO AGENCY and station executives, to thousands of listeners, Brokenshire had simply been off the air a long time. The cause could have been lack of a lucky break, pressure of new interests, or just that indefinable something that finds jobs coming to some show people, no jobs for others. I knew the cause, not a pretty one. It was the kind of personal failure that not only stops press notices, fan mail, and pay checks, but eats at your vitals because you know it can't be explained away by a slow season, or bad breaks, or the law of averages, only by your own mistakes. You let yourself down; in doing so you let down your employers and that priceless asset, your well-wishers.

It is typical of show business that to its people success comes in a special form; so often it's sudden, overnight, overwhelming, an almost cataclysmic happening. When the prospect of success comes after abysmal failure, the immediate glamour, acclaim, and rich rewards can be doubly glorious.

During the first month or two back on the air with Society Brand's "Broadway Playboy," the notices came with a rush that was both exciting and sobering. I remember how my spirits soared when I saw a five-column headline in big type, "Brokenshire returns. . . ." I felt proud when I read "Brokenshire . . . colorful personality returns after more than a year's absence. . . . Infectious greetings, irrepressible humor, familiar to fans since early days of broadcasting. . . ." Proud because

my trade-mark was not forgotten, but sobered, too, because in one terrible year I had learned good fortune's fickleness, the fragility and tinsel of public acclaim, and the fact that though you still had it in you to please people and earn the acclaim, you still might fail.

So I tried to take the praise with humility, with gratitude, and with prayers that I wouldn't make the same mistake again, and throw it all away. When I carted fan mail and clippings out to Pelham and spent hours putting them in order in scrapbooks, I was like the boy back in Port Hope, carrying home a good report card. Only now the boy was a man, and he'd learned that he couldn't afford to coast on one good report card.

I had two or three weeks of tasting recognition and fair success again before that unbelievable day when I sat at Mr. Wonders' desk and signed for the show for which every announcer in the business would have given his eyeteeth, Chesterfield.

Norman Brokenshire Merits Big Hand [whooped the *Daily News*]. A big hand for Norman Brokenshire for his clever new-style work on Chesterfield's new "Music That Satisfies"; we hear it is his own idea. Style now more informal, with Nat Shilkret's orchestra as basis; show has situation-type background for Ruth Etting; frivolity and wisecracks for Boswell Sisters, and Brokenshire's own poetry to give lyrical touch to Alexander Gray's songs. It's good.

In *Radio Guide* Ed J. Fisher wrote thoughtfully:

... extend our congratulations to Norman Brokenshire, one of the pioneer announcers who has hit the high and low spots... now comes back over a tortuous road of misadventure to the air waves... Always a great bet, with a voice that ingratiates... Witty, at times irresponsible master of ceremonies, Brokenshire... one of most lovable characters in radio... We are assured that Broke has thoroughly rehabilitated himself and will (we predict) rise to new glories via the Columbia network. Best of luck, and may the road be easy.

“One Dialer’s Column” said:

Whether one of Norman Brokenshire’s ancestors was an India rubber man with a circus we don’t know, but Broke certainly fell heir to the ability to bounce; the erstwhile playboy of radio who has been down and out so often, radio-ly speaking, that we’ve lost count, has bounced back in the picture seemingly with more resiliency than ever, for which we’re sincerely glad. We trust this time the return may be lasting. . . . Last night Broke displayed all his oldtime *savoir faire*; his resounding “How do you do, ladies and gentlemen, how *do* you do, this is Norman Brokenshire” seemed like old times. Incidentally the broadcast marked the debut of the Boswell Sisters with the Shilkret group, and they never sounded better. Shilkret’s music and Broke’s announcing provided a splendid setting for their harmonies. Now if Broke will only behave, all will be well; even Paley may be willing to forgive and forget. Here’s to you, Broke, you likeable old rascal.

No doubt was left that I—and my mistakes—was well out in the spotlight. Another paper said:

Good old Broke, in the dumps for a year or so, then a chance again on CBS to make good, and how he took advantage (last night) of that last straw! Washing well behind the ears, wearing his hair in a braid and promising to cut out the playboy style, Broke has leaped overnight into the niche that was formerly his, namely head man of the announcing profession. A grand personality, heaps of natural talent, a *sangfroid* manner that will again endear him to millions. Watch him come on, now that he has started off on the right foot; and he is one of those chaps you don’t have to talk to through a third party, no matter how high he climbs.”

Jerry Wald, nowadays a motion-picture producer, wrote under the caption “A microphoner makes a comeback”:

Well, we knew he’d do it, and we’re more than glad he vindicated our judgment. We’re talking about good old Broke, more commonly known as Norman Brokenshire, who proved to a sceptical radio world of cynics and phony friends that it is possible for a fellow along the airialto to come back. Broke, a pioneer in radio, stayed at the top of the microphone heap until bad habits

and too much prohibition dragged him into the mire, with several of his so-called friends on hand to give him that extra shove that forced him in deeper. According to the mob Broke was through, and they were going to see to it that he wasn't coming back. Three months ago when he was suggested for a commercial program the sponsors snickered, studio officials exclaimed "Oh my God!" Then he went on the air with this Remington-pounder. Once again we recognized the man's outstanding genius. We ran a column at the time, advocating his immediate return, and when Broke promised us that he would positively lay off that giggle-water stuff, we felt somehow that he would come through and we said so, in print. The other evening we bumped into Broke at the Madison Avenue Air Factory. It was a genuine delight to see that Norman had kept his word, and he assured us that he has been as dry as the Kansas Republican, and as far as this big-eared individual is concerned, Norman Brokenshire is the top-notch studio word-slinger. But here's the point of this wandering yarn—perhaps you've guessed it. Already those who came to jeer at the "man who came back" now remain to cheer, and the leaders in the ranks of finger-pointers are now in the front ranks of the back-patters; and so it goes. Credit must be given to his Society Brand sponsors, the first ones to break the ice for Norman, giving him his re-entry to those air waves and, what's more important, the chance to become head man on that new Chesterfield airing. Our hat's off to you, Broke, and our sincere wishes that we'll be writing about you from now on, and still calling you Radio's Most Beloved Announcer.

There were hundreds of such welcomes home. I took seriously the fact that practically all of them stressed that my voice and manner still held the old charm; instead of accepting it complacently, as in earlier days, I told myself now that it put a big and important responsibility on me.

For internal as well as external reasons my new situation with Columbia Broadcasting System was enviable. In writing my contract with the Liggett & Myers Tobacco Company my services were reserved exclusively with the exception of any programs for which I had commitments at the time of signing; thus I was able to finish the thirteen-week period with Society Brand Clothes and some other, recording, contracts. All told I had leaped from the peach crates to over \$1000 weekly income. I was given an office at 485, something I

hadn't had even when I was staff announcer. I wasn't to run across Mr. Paley for some time, but I became a favorite with the page boys, and staff announcers looked on my position with awe.

I tried from the word go to be responsible about it all. I went around to the Corn Exchange Bank branch on Park Avenue, where I opened a checking account, made arrangements to buy a block of Corn Exchange Bank bonds, and rented a safety-deposit box. I was going to learn what it was like to cut coupons, and needed a place of safekeeping for the bonds. Also I started a savings account in the Bowery Savings Bank on Forty-second Street.

Way back in the poverty-stricken days of 1928 and 1929, when I wasn't sure whether the next meal would be hot or cold or at all, I had accepted an invitation from Bill and Dorothy Schudt to spend a week end at their place in Lake Ronkonkoma, Long Island; Bill was in CBS public relations. Eunice and I had been so grateful for the invitation; it meant that at least we'd eat regularly for awhile, and maybe get a little relaxation from the grinding depression.

The day after arriving we took a walk along a lane called Browns Road. The country quiet, the loveliness of the locality, made me feel like a new man. I noticed a breathtakingly beautiful stand of birch trees. Impulsively I said, "Someday I'm going to buy that spot there." I thought often of the birches. At the time I talked in such an offhand way of buying I couldn't have bought an empty paper bag. But I'd never been able to forget the place.

Check number one from my new Corn Exchange checking account lies before me on my desk; it is made for five hundred dollars to the order of Carl Eklund, a down payment on that piece of land boasting those lovely birches. Then it was wild, virgin woods; now it's my one acre in paradise, a symbol as well as a real-estate holding.

When Carl sent word that I owned the land, I put my drafting knowledge to work, sketching out the plan of the sort of country house I wanted, a size I thought I could afford; I started Carl clearing the ground and beginning construction.

There must be something to the childhood game of follow-the-leader. Now that I was back on the air regularly with a big show, things happened fast. Requests poured in for my services as master of ceremonies for local shows of various types. I remember in particular working for the Policemen's Benevolent Association at Madison Square Garden, the new Garden, at Fiftieth Street and Eighth Avenue.

Every seat was taken. The arena space was empty except for a small platform in the center. On the public-address system a voice came from nowhere, describing my earlier work, my list of firsts, the interlude of absence, and how I was missed, finally introducing me, "Your friend and our friend, Norman Brokenshire," with which the spotlights picked me up from six angles, and I appeared on the platform to deafening applause. A band played "Should auld acquaintance be forgot" as I stood there, unable to see, not only for the spotlights but also for the tears, able only to hear thousands of people cheering, yelling my name, beating their hands together.

The greatest void I have ever experienced was that moment or two when the applause was still, before I got sufficient mastery of myself to say, "How do you do, ladies and gentlemen, how *do* you do; thank you very much; this is Norman Brokenshire." Through my mind raced the thought, *This is*, thank you very much, Norman Brokenshire; it was, in fact, thanks to them, and to all the listeners out along the air waves that once more I could be Norman Brokenshire as they knew him.

Ralph Wonders signed me up also to do talking films with Morton Downey, the Boswell Sisters, and others. But compared to the weight and prestige of the Chesterfield series, the outside jobs were insignificant.

It was precedent-setting, in becoming the first "across the board" commercial in radio. The broadcast being heard six days every week gave tremendous listening impetus and so pyramided the audience that, overnight, it was the most talked-of program on the air. For this reason the show could make almost any entertainer a star in a very short time. Its effect on me was tremendous. I began to hear of people who

went into the corner tobacconist's and asked for "A package of Brokenshires, please." Considering the competition among cigarette companies, it was thrilling to see Chesterfields become the acknowledged first in a gratifying number of places, including New York City.

Nat Shilkret's wonderful orchestra stayed with the show about a year. The first artist of the series, Alexander Gray, a very remarkable personality, was followed by Bing Crosby, who joined to make the famous triumvirate Bing-Ruth Etting—the Boswells; Connie, Vet, and Martha hailed from New Orleans and had done very well in vaudeville. This twice-weekly presentation quickly made them the best-known girls' trio in the country. Their forte was light, happy music, tricky harmony, and a wonderful beat.

Ruth Etting was divine. She had been a *Ziegfeld Follies* star and was one of the most popular recording stars of the day. I was so entranced by her that it became obvious in my announcements. Nothing much gets by radio listeners. The fan mail began intimating coyly that there was more between us than was being committed to the air waves. It was good publicity, both she and I recognized that, and certainly I could not be so ungallant as to deny the soft impeachment. The fact was that Colonel Snyder—he gave himself the nickname "Gimpy" on account of his lameness—was always to be found by her side. He plied the radio engineers regularly with liquor and money to make sure his Ruth got the very best electronic attention. There were times in the studio when he disturbed things, but it never dented Ruth's allegiance. Gimpy discovered her in Chicago, presented her in a night club he operated there, and built her career.

I soon learned that to get Ruth without Gimpy was impossible. One night I asked her to have dinner with me after the show. Her answer was short and to the point; I don't know whether the wistfulness I read into it was really there or if I imagined it. "Life is so short," she said; "why make it any shorter?" She nodded in the direction of Gimpy, standing a little distance away; for the first time I noticed that he wore not only a flashy tie but a shoulder holster. A strange com-

panion for a girl whose songs were invariably lovely, sweet, and plaintive.

The other two days of the week were filled by Bing Crosby. Here was a young fellow who at the time wasn't doing any too well out on the West Coast. He had left the Rhythm Boys, Paul Whiteman's harmony singers, and subsequently got in some financial trouble. He had tried to pay off his debts and get squared away by doing a series of short comedy films; whether because of poor management or something else, he had succeeded only in getting in deeper.

At the time NBC rejoiced in possession of the services of the great Russ Columbo. Mr. Paley was determined to find competition for Columbo and offered Crosby a contract. Bing took it, and after a not-too-good show of his own was sold to Chesterfield—that did it!

The Crosby-Columbo "feud" was whipped up into a fierce publicity conflagration. Bing won hands down. Strangely enough he doesn't mention the episode in his book *Call Me Lucky*, yet I personally feel that the series of programs he did for us was the real beginning of his success.

Time went on, and it was decided that "Chesterfield Time" could be reprogrammed to cover the whole range of entertainment, from opera to slapstick. If these two moods of entertainment were to be included in the same show, it might draw even larger audiences. To this end the beautiful Grace Moore was inveigled from the hallowed world of the Metropolitan Opera Company, to be presented in the same show with Lou Holtz, the comedian, with his cane, his slapstick, and his straight man, "Colonel Showowsky" (whose real name was Benny Baker).

How history repeats itself; I'm thinking of the records made by Helen Traubel and Durante.

The Grace Moore-Lou Holtz team was a good try, but the two personalities clashed from the instant they found themselves in the same studio. Miss Moore, actually a gay and fun-loving person, was simply not geared to take the type of fun that was Mr. Holtz's specialty. Holtz, never reluctant to speak his mind or use the tip of his cane, wasted no time with the retort courteous, with the result that the studio would have

done very well indeed as a location for a movie based on the Black Tom explosion.

My chief job during this period was referee, charged with maintaining peace at all costs. All I lacked was a Western Union uniform, because I spent my time running back and forth between the stars (they finally refused even to speak to each other); Shilkret and all the executives connected with the program were so afraid of a walkout that I conveyed their messages, too.

A more peaceful period ensued with the advent of the wonderful Jane Froman, who deserted her classical training to work in the more popular vein. She made the transition very well. It was decided to introduce comedy relief in alternate programs, by way of Tom Howard and George Shelton with their inspired nonsense.

At about this time Nat Shilkret had to return to his Victor recording job. The new Chesterfield musical director was Lennie Hayton.

Arthur Tracy, the Street Singer, who will always be associated with the song "Marta," did his part to make the "Music That Satisfies" become a part of everybody's listening schedule. Tracy made like he played the accordion and seemingly wandered right under your own personal window and sang to *you*.

An indication that I was staying in the groove is found in a squib from the *Kansas City Journal Post*: "If you have heard it before, excuse me; Norman Brokenshire stays with Chesterfield when the artists change."

Week ends I had now, and I used them to the full, in the country. What I originally planned out at Lake Ronkonkoma was just a cute little place in the country. What I have now is altogether different. The explanation of the sudden change brings me back to the day its construction began.

One week end I went out to see how Carl Eklund was progressing. I made a few gin-mill stops on the way, for I told myself that I had learned my lesson, knew where my trouble lay, also my saturation point, and could handle relaxation in reason.

I planned to have a cellar under one half of the building.

When I got there, Carl had about finished digging the hole. "What're you digging, Carl, the cesspool?" I yelled from the car. He laughed as he yelled back, "That's your cellar, boy."

Compared to my acre of land, the hole looked absurdly small. I was sick of tiny apartments; here in the country I wanted elbowroom. So I said in my usual offhand manner, "Hell, then, make it twice that size." He did, having also to double every dimension in my drawing to make it fit. It was the simple way.

That somewhat unorthodox beginning, plus additions I have made from year to year, resulted in what the local Smithtown paper described on its front page as "a palatial mansion." It isn't, of course; it's just twice as big as originally planned, plus. I'm glad for every foot of wood I cut, every nail I pounded through the years, for very often I'm sure the interest and physical labor were what took me away from a mental process that could have been fatal.

As one of my precautions against losing any ground in this new period of advancement, I incorporated myself, somewhat in the same way that Bing Crosby set up Bing Crosby Enterprises, Inc. It seemed the thing for me to do. My lawyer, Emil K. Ellis, was treasurer, my wife was secretary, I was president of Norman Brokenshire Associates, incorporated under the laws of the State of New York.

Mr. Ellis' job was to handle my money. The first bit of advice I received from him was to go into voluntary bankruptcy so I could start over again with a clean slate. So many debts had piled up that, while I wanted and intended to pay them all, I did not want collectors on my doorstep or dunning my clients. I decided the bankruptcy would be the best solution, and filed in voluntary bankruptcy the last day of May in 1932.

To round out my organization I hired a fellow by the name of Douglas Silver to do publicity and in some instances help me with my writing.

Four months had passed; from March through June I could trace the regaining of all the lost ground, the adding of more importance and prestige than ever to my career. My following was greatly enlarged, so that when the results of the

Daily Mirror's Radio Popularity contest were announced, a headline cried, "Brokenshire, Downey, Vallee Win Radio Cups." Harry Richman and Ruth Etting were declared King and Queen of Radio. "King Richman rules the air waves and dons the royal cloak; His Queen is sweet Ruth Etting; his announcer, good old Broke." In the rundown of figures the *Mirror* said, after commenting on the showings of Richman, Ruth, Downey, the Boswells, Vallee, and Baby Rose Marie, "Now be amazed. Norman Brokenshire heads the radio announcers division with the tremendous total of 176,831 ballots, nearly 50,000 over the highest number of ballots cast for the leaders in any category!"

The outcome was celebrated at a huge bandstand in Bryant Park just behind New York's famed Public Library, with its lions, which never roar! That jaunty dandy, Mayor James J. Walker, with many flourishes and just the right words, gave each winner his silver cup.

While it was interesting to watch the growth of my place at the lake, I decided that I should have a place in which I could relax for the rest of the summer; and when Helene Weed, the writer we had met on the Mediterranean cruise, got word to me that she had to work in Washington for months and would lease me her wonderful home called "Rocks and Shoals," facing the bay on Wilson Point near Norwalk, Connecticut, I took it and invited Eunice's brother and family to join us for company.

The *Washington Herald* referred to me as "Lucky Broke," reporting that I had "become a country gentleman, having leased a large estate in Connecticut; the estate has spacious grounds facing on the bay shore and a private cruiser goes with it, for Broke's fishing trips." It made nice reading, but in point of fact the "cruiser" was a rowboat, to get us out to the great rock from which we could dive and swim.

In keeping with my new position in life I ordered a custom-built Auburn "12" convertible with overdrive, and with a green beret to match the color of this low-slung charger, I guessed I looked the part. To add to my prestige one of the officers of the Pelham National Bank sponsored me for membership in the renowned New York Athletic Club.

It would seem now that I had everything necessary to make me feel secure and happy. Instead, I was in personal trouble again. I wasn't afraid to take a drink, and in my new-found affluence I was experimenting with pleasures that I told myself belligerently a man was entitled to, and which had been denied me all these years.

One hears it said that every man must sow a certain number of wild oats, that if they are not sown before, they will be after marriage. I busied myself in this direction. The immature fear of the opposite sex now whirled into an indiscriminate love of women; every new beautiful creature was a challenge.

I rented a hideaway apartment in a side street handy to the broadcasting sector and set up to live the life of a well-to-do bachelor, the man-about-town playboy type, and divided my time between the summer place at Wilson Point in Connecticut, where I should have rested and husbanded my strength, and the dingy little nook in town where I did just the opposite.

The moralists tell us that this sort of thing inevitably ends in disaster, and my experience was no exception. There came the day, after a gay and eventful night on the town, when I was needed imperatively by my sponsor, because of a change in script. When they called Wilson Point and I was not there, my wife very naturally started a search, first calling my office; reaching Doug Silver my personal representative, giving him a list of my old drinking haunts, she instructed him to find me. Then she caught a train into New York. In the pocket of one of my suits she had found a marked "Apartment for rent" ad, and she would eventually have wound up at the hideaway except that Doug located it first through a taxi driver. He roused me out of my coma, got me under a cold shower, and delivered me to the sponsor before any great harm was done.

It gave me a scare. I learned other things. My life wasn't the secret I had thought. The Chesterfield people were stirring unhappily; they went so far as to suggest that my wife move back into town.

Eunice and I talked it over. There was no big dramatic scene, no excitement, no tears. Taking the line that now I was

a big shot, I simply suggested a separation, with a divorce to follow.

I did the evening's broadcast. We set out in the car for Wilson Point. The gentle woman by my side spoke sensible thoughts softly; the next morning, instead of going to a lawyer, I went to a practitioner.

I did my best to straighten things out, to get myself back on an even keel. When I went back to the city to pay off what I owed on the hideaway and give it up, I found I had an entirely different problem on my hands. The landlord, having found out who I was, had decided that he could make some extra money. When I prepared to pay what was due, he demanded more, informing me blandly that if I refused he would inform the Chesterfield people of what had been going on. As far as I knew, Chesterfield's unhappiness with me was only on the score of my drinking, and I didn't dare let the rest of it get to them.

I dragged along on the thing, periodically receiving threatening letters from the man. One day I decided that nothing was worth going on this way, so I took the most recent blackmail letter downtown to one of the executives of Liggett & Myers and explained. When I had laughed the whole thing off as something obviously ridiculous, I tore up the letter and threw the pieces in his wastebasket.

Sometime later, after a great deal of morbid thinking, which wound up in a speak-easy across the street from the now hateful apartment, I decided to settle it once and for all. I went to the place and found the landlord upstairs; words led to fists; and in my blind hatred I knocked him down a flight of stairs.

Now he had what he wanted! The next thing I knew I was hauled to court on a charge of assault and battery. A date was set for the complaint to be heard, several weeks later.

Since the leases both at Wilson Point and at Pelham were expiring, I decided to take the advice of the Chesterfield people and move back to the city.

Some years before, Eddy Mayo, an entertainer, had introduced me to a Mary Desti, an attractive and brilliant woman. She had an exclusive beauty preparation business, at 603

Fifth Avenue. She had had an exotic and glamorous life covering many countries and many fields of endeavor. Her salons were social centers. She entertained nobility in London, the elite in Paris. She wrote a society column for a London newspaper. She married many husbands, including a Turkish nobleman. She had been Isadora Duncan's closest companion and eventually wrote the life story of the dancer. By an American husband she was the mother of Preston Sturges, whose fabulous theatrical career had started with his writing of the speak-easy hit of Broadway, *Strictly Dishonorable*.

The third floor of 603 had at one time been specially appointed for the use of Peggy Hopkins Joyce. The luxurious space had been divided by great sliding doors; Mme. Desti's salon was in front, her living quarters in the rear.

But now Mary Desti had just died; her niece, Marion Whiteley, had settled her affairs, and because we had been close friends, and as helpful as possible in Mary's problems, we fell heir to 603 Fifth Avenue. Desti's houseman, Heim, came along as part of the deal.

Here, then, we put the morbid past behind us; gracious living, we reasoned, should be possible in these fabulous surroundings. Once more, in spite of a few small, unpleasant aftermaths, the road ahead looked wide and smooth.

SIXTEEN

WITH a Fifth Avenue apartment that bespoke comfort and elegance; with Heim to see that my clothes were always pressed and in order; with our colored maid Hattie to tend the house; and with Doug Silver now assigned to put all his time on my business rather than personal problems, a period of agreeable living set in. Money matters were handled entirely by Mr. Ellis, to whom I went also for business advice.

Another Christmas and New Year's passed, dry and happy. The same group of loyal friends who had gathered at last year's eventful holiday season joined us again. This time we attended the opening of the spectacular RKO Roxy Theatre, marveling at its immensity and luxurious appointments. In our party was the beloved vaudevillian "Doc" Rockwell; he had made arrangements for us to be shown the intricacies backstage, dreamed up by that genius S. L. Rothafel, familiarly known to theatergoers as "Roxy."

Roxy came to New York an unknown from Forrest City, Pennsylvania, where his first venture in the motion-picture field was an empty store, with chairs rented from the local undertaker. In such a primitive location Roxy actually studied the dynamics of lighting, presentation, experimented with the drawing power of atmospheric prologues. He attracted attention among theater exhibitors and was offered a job running the first out-and-out motion-picture theater in Minneapolis.

New York movie-goers knew him as the talented manager of the Strand, Rialto, Rivoli, and Capitol theaters successively; finally he realized his greatest dream as director general of the great Radio City Music Hall.

As we inspected his latest marvel, once more it was proven to me that an evening could be thrilling without drinking.

Chesterfield's new series started January 2. Tom Howard and his partner George Shelton replaced the Boswell Sisters; Lennie Hayton replaced Nat Shilkret; and more stations were added.

I felt in rare form; things were going so well that even Eunice felt no cause for worry.

On the fourteenth of January at dinner she told me that several of her close friends were sailing the next evening on the *S. S. Europa*. Edith Barber, with whom she worked, had just returned from Europe with the glamour of an ocean voyage still on her. One of Eunice's friends was off to cover a Paris fashion show; a lad who played bridge with us was going over on a buying trip; another couple were covering the winter sports carnival in Switzerland; just by chance they were all sailing on the same trip. Pensively Eunice said, "My, how I'd like to be going along." She added thoughtfully, "You know something? If I got over there, I could look up father's family, find out if anything remains of that huge estate in Meiseritz he's always talking about; he hasn't heard from his brother since World War I; there's some question whether the town even is part of Germany any more; maybe now it's part of Poland, being so near the border."

I was in a happy, generous mood. "If you can prove to me between now and sailing time that you'll be with friends and have a good time," I said, "you pack some things and I'll take care of the rest." With that I hurried off to the Chesterfield show. Eunice must have got very busy with the telephone because when I got home again she was set to go. Edith Barber had given her time off; Heim, who had a way with him and was always very efficient where anything adventurous was concerned, had pulled strings known only to him and, even at this late hour, arranged her passage.

Overnight I was a bachelor. Out came my trusty little black book. Number 603 Fifth Avenue became a headquarters of fun and frolic. Now I could leave bottles out in the open if I liked, have a fling without the dread of being caught. I reveled in it. Anything to keep Old Man Loneliness at bay!

As luck would have it, to such an extent had Hitler flexed his muscles in Germany that Eunice was advised to return to the United States on the same boat and did so. The day she landed back in New York coincided with my appearance in court for the hearing on the assault and battery charge.

Heim went to the boat to meet Eunice. He was about to give her a tactful account of what was going on when she stopped him. "I know already," she said anxiously; "news-papers came abroad at quarantine."

"And there's a message for you from the Liggett and Myers people," Heim told her. "They want you to call them as soon as you can; very important."

When she called, the executive disclosed that I had torn up a letter from the man who had sworn out the complaint against me and that he had taken it into his head to save the pieces from the wastebasket. "I have them for you if you think they'll serve any purpose now," he told her. She took them, and she, Heim, and my lawyer did the rest. Bless that Liggett & Myers executive, he was my salvation! I have before me a clipping dated at the end of January, 1933. "Broken-shire calls accuser assaulter" it is headed, and it relates that on my appearance in Yorkville Court to answer his summons charging me with assault things changed abruptly when his pieced-together letter proved he had attempted to blackmail me. I became the complainant instead of a defendant, he was put under arrest, and I was freed.

With Eunice back, home ceased to be an annex to the Paradise Club. My next several months were active, extremely constructive.

I was sent as a member of the Columbia staff to handle the first Roosevelt inaugural; my assignment post was the portico of the White House.

Three of us used the same hotel quarters. As my job would

come at the end of the parade back to the White House from the Capitol, I was the last one up in the morning. I took my time in the shower, dispelling the effects of our inaugural-eve rinky-dink. Just as I shut the water off, one of the amateur comedians rooming with me dumped a whole quart of blue-black ink on me over the top of the shower curtain, leaving me in a pluperfect mess. It took a lot of time and labor to become white again, with the result that I found myself mighty late for my assignment; in the street I seized on a motorcycle policeman, explained my predicament, and got him to lend a hand. Instructing me to get on the back of his machine and hang on because we were going to take off, I soon learned that was the understatement of the ages! When I didn't show up on schedule Boake Carter had been grabbed to replace me; when the officer traveled the last alleyway, leaped the last of the curbs, and cut through the White House lawn, Carter was hard at it, riding high. I still managed to get in a few words just for the record. The gay boy I had to thank for all this was Ted Husing, whom I had helped break into radio some years before, and who had replaced me in Washington when I was moved back to New York as chief announcer on WJZ. Someday I must remember to ask him if he always carries quart bottles of ink around with him.

Back in the studios I began to take notice of a man who seemed to spend a lot of time just standing around in the hallways near my studio. Several times I thought I heard him mumbling to himself, in a way that sounded like a very passable imitation of me, "How do you do, ladies and gentlemen, how *do* you do." I paid no particular attention; people often used to greet me with that.

One day I learned to my amazement that this young fellow was being paid a hundred dollars a week just to stand by and be ready to take over if anything happened to Brokenshire. No wonder he was mumbling my air signature! By further inquiry I learned that he had come from Philadelphia and was a staff announcer, doing pretty well, they said. His name? Paul Douglas, the same Paul Douglas who made such a hit when he forsook radio for the part of the millionaire junk-

man in *Born Yesterday*, with a resulting film career known to everyone.

The full irony of the situation was yet to come. He *did* replace me on the Chesterfield show; but after a time he, too, lost the account.

Who is it who says that across every tragic situation struts the peacock of comicality? I have before me a clipping that tells of a small sequel to Paul's study of my style. It appeared in a radio column and is captioned "Beware of Imitations," going on to reveal, "Announcer warned not to make himself sound like Norman Brokenshire of the grand manner." It seems that a listener had written to the columnist, demanding to know whether Station WABC was playing fair with its public by palming off Paul Douglas as Norman Brokenshire. Jack Foster wrote:

... it's strange that your letter should come to the top of my desk this morning, for only last week Mr. Douglas' chief warned him not to make his announcements sound so much like Brokenshire's. A newcomer to wireless life, doubtless Mr. Douglas unconsciously adopted many of Broke's vocal flourishes, his grand manner, thus causing confusion among listeners. Mr. Brokenshire has such a decidedly distinctive style that he is sure to be trailed.

Be that as it might, the Chesterfield people turned out the following month to have been very wise. Somewhere near April Fool's Day I appointed myself to be the fool!

I had been drinking on and off. If it were in me to be a normal social drinker, I would probably still be drinking on and off. But now there was no question that I was an alcoholic. Periodically I was carrying drinking to the point where I was not responsible for the things I did, nor could I remember some of them. Ordinarily I had enough remaining common sense to time them so they did not interfere with my evening job. In those days I did get short week ends to myself; Sundays were free, and usually I managed to get clear-eyed in time for my Monday work.

But as always happens with the alcoholic, a time comes when he doesn't and can't clear up; then it is that things begin to happen.

The thing that happened to me began with April 1; I appeared at a rehearsal visibly under the weather. Very wisely my chief took me aside and insisted that I skip the rehearsal; I'd clutter things up and make a bad impression on the artists and everyone else.

I went home like a bad schoolboy. On the way to 603 Fifth Avenue I stopped at a gin mill and belligerently got really drunk. With each drink my indignation soared; I wallowed in self-pity. By the time I got home all rational judgment had left me.

Heim was there alone. I ordered him to pack some summer clothes. While he was doing that, I ran downstairs to a travel bureau in the building and by a combination of boisterousness and arrogance acquired a passage on the *Queen of Bermuda*; as she was sailing in about twenty minutes, I persuaded them to hold her for me till I could get there.

"Heim," I threatened, "you are not to tell anyone anything; get that straight. You haven't seen me today!" With that I was gone. In the worst form of subconscious desire to escape from myself and the miserable bed I had made for myself, I hopped a cab and rushed to the pier. People stared, cabin boys snickered, officers looked on coldly as they watched a character fling himself aboard ship. But I was crazed. Keeping *me* off the air—I'd show *them*!

The ship's whistle gave forth its throaty blast; the *Queen of Bermuda* backed slowly into the stream and set out in the fading twilight. Behind me, responsibilities, ties; ahead of me, the old alone-in-the-world feeling. At least there was no one I must answer to now! I made my way to the bar, telling myself that this magnificent solitude was all I needed in the world.

I set out to drink away the pangs of conscience. Eunice, alone. All those people who depended on me. Too late now. You musn't think. . . .

I can't call back anything about those days on the outward run except that there seems to have been a girl who was in a party of two or three or four, and that they called her "Monkey." Anyone who gets drunk and is amusing can always find company. I found company. Some troubles loomed

about money. In the rush I hadn't taken care of having enough cash with me. I had some wild idea about heading for Elbow Beach; I'd heard of the Elbow Beach Hotel; there I'd decide what came next.

The ship docked at Hamilton. I must have sobered up to a degree. I can remember coming out of the dark labyrinth of my own mind, into open air, making my way down the gang-plank to an open square, on the other side of it a row of stores; into a liquor store: "Two bottles of good Scotch." That was what people came to Bermuda for.

The bottles wrapped and under my arm, just as I began to wonder how a fellow got to Elbow Beach, a ship steward in a great hurry said I must come back to the ship. There was a telephone call for me. He took me to the captain's quarters, and someone handed me the wireless telephone.

Eunice was calling from New York. The gist of it was that the Chesterfield people were pretty sore, but if I came right back on the same ship, my job would still be good.

In reality there was nothing I wanted to do more. In moments of lesser drunkenness I had glimpsed the preposterousness of the thing I had done; no matter what it entailed, the only way out was to go back and face it.

I arranged with the captain to pay the return passage at the New York end. I promised not to leave the ship again until it docked, and the ship became my prison; the cabin walls closed in, holding me as surely as if I were in shackles and a strait jacket. I still had the two quarts; as long as it lasted I needed no food, no companionship, no talk, nothing; just a glass.

There were more complications, but promises and I.O.U.'s and my gold engraved watch from Atlantic City got me somehow through the homeward voyage. I kept telling myself that at least I was still alive. But then they met the ship and paid up my bills, and I debarked, mean, crestfallen, bloated, sick, unhappy. A doctor put me to bed.

Three miserable days and alarming nights of shaking fear and depression before I could hold even a little nourishment. Two more weak and sweaty days and restless nights until I could hold up my head again.

What is this curse upon certain men, which causes them still to pull the cork and with their own hands pour and drink the stuff they know through repeated experience will drag them down until their very souls cry for oblivion? What is in the make-up of a man and in the formula of this stuff that, for awhile when they fuse, can make all seem well with the world? For awhile everything seems possible; there is no trembling of hands, no quivering of the mind. Yet in the end, as sure as the law of gravity, the fusion leads to the death of a personality.

To pay the debts incurred on this fool's errand, annuities that I had worked hard to accumulate and lay aside for our retirement were forfeited, sold at forty cents on the dollar. Among the shows I had missed for Chesterfield was one built around the fact that I had been with them exactly a year. That anniversary celebration never got on the air.

My only contact with the sponsor was through Eunice. "Get him well," they told her, "then have him call the office when he feels fit."

When the dreadful five days had passed, I called and was told to call back Tuesday of the following week. We went out to the lake to wait, away from worries and surroundings that added to the strain.

I called on Tuesday, and the word given me was to call a week later. Chesterfield had gone off the air; their future plans were not set.

I filled up my time with working on the house. By keeping my hands busy I could forget, at least a little—sometimes as long as fifteen minutes at a time. The cellar was my favorite spot. I set up a workshop there. Often I would look up suddenly; there, sitting on the steps and watching me silently, would be Eunice. There was something tender in her smile, that something that always helped me through.

Many more telephone calls were made punctually; unhappy, uncertain waiting periods piled up. Finally word came; I was to appear at the offices of Liggett & Myers in New York.

The interview was short and to the point. Could I give one single adequate reason as to why I did such a thing? Lamely,

I pointed out that, whereas all the other artists were given two-week vacations during the year, in addition to working only two days each week, I worked six days a week and was given no vacation.

The reaction to that was unexpected, fast, and positive.

“If you’ll agree to go where we send you, we’ll give you a vacation now,” they said.

“Where?” I asked suspiciously.

“Keeley Institute, at Greensboro, North Carolina.” They handed me a pamphlet headed, “For the treatment of the liquor, opium, cocaine, and tobacco addictions, and neurasthenia or nerve exhaustion.”

It was explained to me that Chesterfield was not going back on the air for a month. The Keeley treatment took a month. If I took it, and things turned out all right, perhaps I could work with Chesterfield again.

I accepted.

SEVENTEEN

IT WAS 6:30 A.M. when I arrived at Greensboro, North Carolina, sober as a judge. There was time to kill, and as I sat in the station wondering what to do, perversely I thought, since I had come to be cured, I should be at least half-drunk when I made my entrance. So I inquired from a slow-moving porter where a fellow could get a drink. He looked at me, then at the two dollars in my hand, and gave me a card. A taxi took me to the address. I found myself at the home of another porter who made bathtub gin on the side. I had several drinks, but felt nothing. The pressure was on me. What was I getting into? What did they do to drunks to cure them? I had misgivings, and I had hope, too. If whatever this was would only work!

One of the most subtle fears within the heart of an alcoholic and the greatest hindrance to a successful cure is the trembling thought that, if a treatment should be successful and liquor became a thing apart, never to be taken again, what of those moments when it was the only thing that made living possible? I remember the lines from Omar Khayyam: "I wonder often what the Vintners buy one half so precious as the stuff they sell."

It was about quarter to eight when the cab let me off at the Keeley Institute. It took up a whole city block. It was like a park. On the other side of the hedge, a curved flagstone walk led to the impressive entrance. It was a magnificent old

building; once it had been the governor's mansion. The door was locked, and there was no sign of life inside or out. I reached for the bell and changed my mind; I'd walk around till that door was open. I wasn't in such a hurry to get in that I had to wake everybody up!

There were nice lawns, paths through landscaped grounds, a few outbuildings, and a spacious veranda. Around toward the back of the house was a little miniature golf course, and some benches. I sat down as the day began to warm. Soon there was activity; I went back to the front door and found it open now.

The office was still empty, but the houseman said they were expecting me and my room was ready. As we trudged up the stairs, he said, "Is this yo' fust trip heah?" When I assured him it was, he said, "You know, some ob de folks that's gittin' treated heah seed you lookin' over de place, an' dey figgered you was aimin' to buy it or sum'p'n, 'cause mostly dey gits carried in." With a deep-throated chuckle he put my bag down by the dresser, opened the window a little, and said, "Y'all is goin' to like it heah."

The sun came in the window, and I said, "Yes, it's real nice; but what do they do? What kind of a treatment is it?" He was a friendly old man, and I just had to know.

"Well," he drawled, "fust dey gibbs you a red devil, an' den dey feeds you a tonic dat'll make you eat de hide off'n a wet mule." As he left, he chuckled again. That was perhaps the simplest description ever offered of the famous Keeley gold-chloride method.

After I was settled in my new home, I went down to the office. When I had given my name and gone through a physical examination, from somewhere under the counter the receiving officer produced a good-sized drink of bourbon. "You may have one of these every hour today," he explained to me, "every two hours tomorrow, and so on. While you're drinking you will not leave the grounds. Later, when you feel better and don't need the liquor, you can go where you like, but be here at nine for the injections, and be here for all meals."

I took the drinks as the hours passed, and met some of the "guests." I felt pretty good; the tonic bottle had my name

on it and was on the top of one of four long shelves that lined the wall of a small alcove on the way to the dining room. Each week the tonic was changed in content and moved down a shelf. When there were no more shelves to move your personal bottle to, you were through! That night, after making up my mind to get the very best out of this treatment, to cooperate in every way, I slept well.

The second day I said I'd do without anything to drink, and they gave me the freedom of the town. I stood by the routine; the line-up every morning for the gold-chloride injection, the tonic three times a day; and before long I was eating well, feeling better than I had in many a moon. One thing, however, began to haunt me; I noticed that mostly the people I met here had been through this before; some were on their second, third, even fourth visits. I had hoped that it could be a permanent cure. When I asked the doctor, he assured me that to many it was. They, of course, weren't here for me to talk to. The doctor took me upstairs to a room where a man was being cured of the drug habit. That gave me needed confidence, and I carried on.

Four weeks passed. I felt fine. I had made many new friends. I even bought an old second-hand Model-T Ford for twenty-five dollars; when the time came, I would drive myself back to New York instead of taking a train.

In the interim a sketchy bit of correspondence had come from the sponsor. They would be glad to see me on my return; maybe there would still be a job for me.

I graduated; with the Ford all fixed up, my health and spirits good, I set off for New York. The trip north had one mishap; a connecting rod let loose and drove a hole through the crankcase. It sure looked and sounded like the end of the road for my flivver, but I found an old-time mechanic, and a few dollars and a few hours and we were on our way again.

The good part of the trip was the fact that, although I was completely on my own, I felt no desire to drink.

I had made it a comfortable trip; old cap on my head, old slippers on my feet, I landed at 603 Fifth Avenue looking just about as sloppy as the car. The folks were there to meet

me, and there was happy laughter; both the happiness and the laughter lasted, too, for after an interview with the Chesterfield people I went back to work. They were on only three times a week now, trying out new shows.

There was stiff recreation along with the work, for during my absence Eunice, her two sisters, and their father Eugene Schmidt had worked hard on the grounds at the lake and made a wild patch of country look a lot more homelike. I fell in with their plans and worked hard to finish the interior of the house, installing a lot of little conveniences and comforts.

For several months it seemed that there would be no more worries about drinking. I don't recall thinking much about it. Perhaps I should have, or perhaps the thing that happened next was inevitable. In the light of knowledge gained in later years, I guess it was. For Keeley had ministered to the body well, but done nothing for the mind and spirit.

In the latter part of September, when the Atlantic City beauty pageant was again in full swing, I was asked to do a special broadcast from their new Convention Hall. For some inexplicable reason I drank before the job. I can't imagine why. Sometimes I think if an alcoholic could put his finger on the *when* and *why* of the start of a binge he'd have the problem solved.

But there it was. I did a bad job and drank more to forget it. During the brief stay in Atlantic City I had found a boy with a true Irish tenor voice, who was entertaining on a sight-seeing boat. Stanley Meehan thought he'd like to try New York, and I thought I might help him, so when we left, he was aboard.

With sundry stops for libations I made it all right until we got to Hoboken. Somewhere on the outskirts I stopped for a couple of thirst-quenchers, but by this time I was out of hand, and Eunice decided to get the car away from me, taking it home herself where it would be safe. She had Stanley on her side, and he said he would stay with me.

When I had finished my drinks, we came out to find the car gone. That threw me completely off. I hailed a taxicab. When the driver said he wouldn't go to Manhattan, the fight

was on. Climbing in, telling him that there was a law that once a fare was in the cab they had to be taken where they wanted to go, I slammed the door so hard that I broke the glass.

The driver called a passing cop, and matters grew much worse. The cop pulled me out of the cab, in the tussle I tore his uniform coat half off—I knew my rights!—but just the same and pronto, I was put under arrest in the Hoboken jail.

They refused me the use of the telephone. I raised such a rumpus with my heels on the metal side walls of my cell that after two hours the chief of police came down in person. (Nothing but the best for Brokenshire!) Finally I got to the phone.

So at two thirty in the morning I got the vice-president of Liggett & Myers out of bed. When I excitedly told my story and said I'd have to get out if I was to get to rehearsal in the morning, there was a pause, and then the vice-president said coldly, "There is nothing I can do," and hung up.

The lonely, troubled night passed. In the morning an apology, and costs, got me free.

For awhile this experience subdued me. I kept quiet and tried to work very hard.

Stanley Meehan was sold to WOR; he had one show of his own and another, called "Midnight Musings," for which I prepared the script and did the announcing. Elsie Boyd played the organ accompaniment beautifully to Stanley's lyrical singing. Sometimes I prefaced his numbers by reading the lyrics of the ballads before he sang; often I read poetry to Elsie's organ arrangements. Going out over the air from a studio on the eighth floor of the Paramount Building, it became quite a show, encouraging rest and sleep for thousands of listeners; but it kept me awake till all hours.

The Chesterfield show went off temporarily; they were digging up something new, so I commuted to the lake and filled in with odds and ends. I signed a contract with William Pizor of the Imperial Distributing Corporation, to prepare scripts for a film series called "Here, There, and Everywhere with Norman Brokenshire." It was to start soon, but deep down I had such a feeling of failure that my interest in what was

happening was halfhearted. The great and glamorous days of Chesterfield Time had slipped through my hands, somehow I felt for all time. True, they were dickering to go on the air with some sort of show, but it seemed to me that whatever they did would lack the bigness, the importance of the programs that had been. Of course, the weak, childish way I had run away on that Bermuda trip and the resulting insecurity were ever present. That Liggett & Myers were obviously making the effort to overlook it only made it worse. And so, when the Chesterfield series was announced on November 28, though I was relieved to be working for them again, the new program left me cold.

From nine to nine fifteen, they were now broadcasting the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Leopold Stokowski. The programs emanated from a specially constructed studio at WCAU in Philadelphia; the commercials were made in the New York studios. What a comedown from the happy, busy hours spent with the artists in times past. Then everything combined to gladden the spirit, to bring out full artistry, to stir the soul; now it was just another job, at a much smaller salary.

December 18 it was decided that I should go to Philadelphia to make the announcements. There was a feeling in everybody's mind, including my own, that it wasn't safe to trust me out of town. The producer of the show, Fred Bethel, was told to call Eunice, with the suggestion that she go to Philadelphia with me. Unfortunately at the moment her mother was critically ill, and as she couldn't leave, I went to Philadelphia alone.

My personal *status quo* had reversed itself completely. Instead of drinking when my schedule permitted, now drinking was my schedule, eased off only by force of circumstances, when a job had to be done. The necessity of going out of town ran up the old danger signal.

I did the Philadelphia job under severe nervous tension. At times like this the alcoholic drinks in an effort to keep normal. This will no doubt seem paradoxical to the average person, but, oh, how sadly true it can be! In trying to be right for a task the alcoholic may try not drinking at all and

find that he falls apart, nervous, hesitant, weak, afraid. I was walking a tightrope, my job at stake; a certain amount of alcohol was necessary even to contemplate the type of work I had to do, for my voice must be solid, my timing sure, my decisions positive. And so I drank—not to be carefree, not to shed inhibitions, but to gain composure, to become “normal.” As I look back to the good old days, “normalcy” for me meant to be the happy-go-lucky man about town, the announcer with the jaunty manner, all set to describe everything to an audience eager to hear: now the expression on a soloist’s face as he or she faces the microphone, just before singing the first notes on which his fame and future depend; again, the thoughts that might have been in the mind of a great composer, sitting by himself in a cold, poorly lighted garret, struggling to create a masterpiece. These were the things I used to do easily, with joy in my heart, from eight in the morning till two the next morning. Now I had to bulwark myself with alcohol to go through a fifteen-minute show, three or four announcements, jousting ceaselessly with an adversary that had the upper hand from the start.

Even the drinking became hard, drinking to be normal, drinking in order to do a job. Two drinks too many, or bad timing, meant complete failure. You mustn’t show that you’ve been drinking, or your job is gone. But if you don’t drink, you can’t do the job. The whole thing was so hard, in fact, that when the job was done, I literally counted the seconds until I could get off by myself and drink without the thought of having to stop in time.

So it was that I didn’t return to New York with Fred Bethel that night. From some dark place of release, I called Eunice to say that I wouldn’t be back that night or at rehearsal the next day. “Please cover me the best way you can.” I hung up before she could be persuasive. She would know that I was on a binge, and that it would last until it played me out.

When I finally arrived in New York a porter in Penn Station had to put me in a wheel chair. I remember waking up, surrounded by baggage in the baggage room, a bottle in my pocket.

For many, many weeks, my life seemed to be in a fog.

Eunice's mother passed on. I used it as an excuse to get a vacation—and stayed away from the funeral. I lost my voice and was given a few more days off when I called up and said I had laryngitis.

The day came when the cards had to be put on the table, face up. After lengthy interviews at the Liggett & Myers offices, I was told I was through. I picked up my last check, took my belongings out of my office at CBS, went to 603 Fifth Avenue in the depths of despondency, and told Eunice I had been given a long, long vacation. "I guess I'll go out to the west coast and look into that proposition," I said. The proposition was invented on the spur of the moment, to cover up the familiar impulse to make an escape. I couldn't bear to tell her that I'd been fired. By my side she had gone through too many messes with me. Drinking and lies, verbal and living, had at last eaten away the structure of a man, leaving only the veneer built by radio work and public acclaim; and now even this was a sham. So once more I ran away, leaving Eunice no alternative but to handle as best she could the problems that would surely arise.

I had learned that Howard Way and his family were heading out to the west coast. He said he had a good proposition and that if I would join him, there would be work right from the start. It was a recording company, and it had big things in mind. I knew that here in New York, on the same kind of a deal, Howard had done a good job.

He made the job for Titan Productions on the coast sound imposing. I was to discover that, in addition to being a man of talent, Howard Way was also a dreamer.

EIGHTEEN

WE HAD an unusual trip to the coast. I left New York alone, Way having preceded me to Chicago. We met there and divided up his family; I took three of his children, he took Mrs. Way and the rest of the children, and we went our separate ways to the coast. My money ran out. The last three nights the children and I spent in the car; there was no money for lodging so we took turns at sleeping in the seats. The last tankful of gasoline was borrowed from a softhearted filling-station owner who was moved by our plight.

In Los Angeles I visited the Don Lee studios; discovering that I had a pretty good rep there I was able to borrow fifty dollars to send us on our way to San Francisco. No sooner had I arrived there, handed his children over to Howard, and paid a visit to Titan Productions than I knew something was wrong. The next day I was to learn that Howard hadn't seen eye to eye with the owner and in a huff had severed his connection. Claiming that he had a personal agreement with me, he tried to use me as a lever and said that I would not do business with them either. It was a mighty bad start for someone who just had to work, and fast! Because of the friction, and as my only hope of making a buck, I left him and his family and threw in with the Titan Productions engineer. I moved into his apartment and through him got back with Titan and worked out a job. I was to go to Byron Hot Springs to create a series of scripts to advertise the Byron Hot Springs

Crystals, a new product similar to Crazy Water Crystals, which were having quite a vogue.

While I received no pay, I did get free board and room at the Hot Springs Hotel. Oddly enough it was a very interesting few days for me. I took all the mud and sulphur baths and drank from the springs. I was about to begin putting all my firsthand observations into script form when suddenly I got a telephone call; the whole deal was off and I was to return to San Francisco immediately.

I concentrated on making radio contacts around San Francisco and made the disturbing discovery that the pay standards were so low that even success would be failure for me. In New York any show worth putting on the air would pay at least a hundred dollars; in San Francisco a big account offered thirty-five for writing, rehearsing, and putting on the show—if you won the audition over the local boys. This let all the wind out of my sails. There was just no sense in my even trying to settle there; living as I was, from hand to mouth, it didn't take much persuasion to point me back east. In a bar I met a wandering Irishman, name of Jimmy Kelly, clean-cut and jolly. It was in his mind to get to St. Louis, his home; a few dollars rattled in his pockets; all he needed was transportation. I had the transportation, so over our drinks we pooled our resources and decided to start east. "I'll look up my brother there," he said; "maybe he'll have a roll, or some ideas." I said I could wire Imperial Distributors and probably Mr. Pizor would send me a little advance on the films I had contracted to do.

I left San Francisco without a backward look; to say the least my trip to the west coast had been disillusioning.

A movie should be done about that trip back east. The car wanted by the finance company; strangers riding together, but not altogether trusting each other; ways and means of getting gasoline and food enough to keep traveling—I remember one meal consisting of two small cans of beans, heated over bare rocks under the blazing sun of the Painted Desert.

Miles and miles of territory covered, yet I remember so little. Again the uselessness of it all was upon me. Again I was on my way back to face the music. Whenever I could, I would

acquire a bottle, handing the responsibility over to Jim. I knew I was safe as far as St. Louis; he had a goal, and it was the right direction for me. After that I'd take over.

When I met his brother, all was well, too. Here was a fellow after my own style. The drinking accelerated, and I now had company in the back seat; we both relied on Jimmy.

The brother had thrown up his job in St. Louis just to join the rough riders; for awhile he was able to stake us. When we finally got stranded, I tried out the "advance" idea, and it worked. They must have figured it was the only way to get me back to start work on their film.

The trip ended in a blaze of misunderstanding. The Kellys were all for plunging right through the Hudson Tunnel but I insisted they pull up at a little restaurant and bar that used to be directly opposite Newark Airport. I had a tidy buck or so stashed away and needed what drink I could get and a splash of cold water to pick me up for the coming ordeal.

While I was stretching the back by conning the bartender, the boys got restless and took off to get a closer view of the activity in the airport, meaning to circle around and come right back before I was through in the bar. But the bartender turned me down quicker than I expected, and when I came out mad, it was to find the car gone and my playmates with it. Now all the doubts that had been in the back of my mind came suddenly to life. Of course they were playing me for a sucker; letting me ride along as far as my home, then they were going merrily on their way. They'd even got ahead of themselves, and by morning they could easily be five hundred miles away—with my car! Now things were worse than ever!

Craftily I saw one way out. If I reported the car as stolen, that would get one debt off my back, and besides give everyone else something to think about other than me, when I made my entrance!

I found a cop, a motorcycle cop; when I had made my report in good faith, he made a call, then said he would take me to the tunnel and make sure I got into New York. It was a nice ride, an experience, but my mind wouldn't let me enjoy it.

My entrance was as I planned it. The excitement of hav-

ing the car stolen took a lot of the curse off—only just at the wrong time, who should walk in but the Kelly brothers! They had got tangled up in the maze of the airport and returned to the bar to find *me* gone. After looking around for me for an hour they had ferreted out my address. I felt a little lousy, having sicked the police on them. In turn they were apologetic at having got things mixed up; so with a little forced laughter and some coffee that Eunice whipped up, all was forgiven. The real pay-off came when we went down to put the car away, though; this time it *was* gone! The finance company had 603 staked out, watching for a return; their man happened to be right there when the Kellys got out of the car; he took the car without even saying thank you.

It took me a week to get over the trip. When things settled down and my mind cleared a little, I could see that I had come back to my own personal, very real hell.

When I felt capable, I would make appointments with stations and agencies. Sometimes they would see me, but they had nothing for me, not even much time; all, that is, but one. Lewis Reid, who had stayed with WPCB until it folded, was now program manager of New York's mightiest local, WOR. Lew still believed in me, and finally he was able to do something about it. With "names" for negligible fees, he used me and others of the "Old Battalion" to form tryout shows. There were such ideas as "The Three B's," a program with Nat Brusiloff's orchestra, Henry Burbig's humor, and announcing by Brokenshire—all three of us badly needing work. My fee? For creating, writing, and announcing the show I received twenty-five dollars less 10 per cent; I thought of the west coast prices and shuddered. There was also a show called "Norman Brokenshire and His Orchestra." In my talk I made like I was the leader, but the leader was actually Fran Frey, fresh from George Olsen's band. These shows were put on to build up the new Mutual Broadcasting System.

Attempting to get on commercial shows, I got a new line once in awhile. It was said, "Our sponsor can't use you because every time you say, 'How do you do, ladies and gentlemen, how *do* you do,' you're still selling Chesterfields, and that's not their product."

The turn was a long time coming, and it came through a fluke. Somebody said, "The Good Gulf Show is making some changes; why don't you see so-and-so?" I did and was put on a live show the next week as a tryout. I kept on being tried out week after week. It was a big show, but the fact was I had no spirit for it because, as far as I knew, each show was my last. Each time I got a check for a hundred dollars, and somehow it lasted that way for months; whoever they expected to take my place never appeared, it was that funny! But it saved my name, even my life, for awhile; for this was network and commercial. Between shows I drank heavily; I blamed this on the uncertainty of it all.

If the show made any impression whatever, it was certainly thanks to the "names" presented—Irving Berlin, Eddie Rickenbacker, Stoopnagle and Budd, Will Rogers, and others—and the international flavor of the program, which, for the first time, introduced talent from Europe, sent over on short wave and rebroadcast on our network. Drinking away my confidence, I made the work very hard for myself. I can remember standing on the stage at Carnegie Hall, holding onto the microphone to control my shaking hands sufficiently to be able to read the script; my knees knocked together, too, but nobody saw them.

A whole year passed, made up of miserable days, weeks, and months, while I searched for something, I knew not what, something that would give me back the capacity to be happy in work—searching for a way to put my life to rights so that, once more, when I said, "This is Norman Brokenshire," I would say it with a smile as once I had, and with a feeling of contentment.

So I struggled, and fought, and battered my head against that stone wall. A block away from my front door Radio City was being built, but in it there was no place for me. Fellows who once envied me were making names for themselves now; day by day their importance grew while mine lessened with every hour off the air. Radio history was being made, and I was no part of it.

Throughout this year, so full of uncertainty, I tried to keep friendly with agencies and stations, chilling at the reactions

of people in executive and other positions of authority in radio, who had been in radio a month for every one of my years! Now they looked on me as a has-been, an artist who could, as the phrase in the profession has it, be bought for coffee and cakes. I whirled in an endless circle; bad habits engendered uncertainty, uncertainty bred bad habits. It had two possible outcomes: I could either straighten myself out and work hard and conscientiously as long as necessary to re-establish myself; or I could go on as I was going, and the jobs would grow fewer, and poorer, and eventually there would be none at all.

At one point the WMCA Artists Bureau got in touch with me to ask if I would go to Washington to handle an affair of an international police association at which Will Rogers was to be guest speaker. I had handled him on the Good Gulf Show, so naturally I was happy to accept the job; an advance was given me for expenses, and again I took myself wearily to Washington.

I stayed resolutely sober until my job was done, but then I rushed off to my old drinking haunts, the afterhours joints. I have a hazy recollection of two automobiles filled with people, wandering from one address to another, of winding up finally in an extravagantly furnished penthouse apartment, and of a party that lasted all night. Of course, I slept over plane time. After missing two or three more planes I finally pulled myself together enough to check in for a flight, for me an eventful flight because Will Rogers happened to choose that one too. They let me aboard even though there was no seat for me. I wandered about; every place was my home, including the men's room, where I had secreted a bottle. When I became boisterous, it was Will Rogers who quieted me down and managed to keep me in conversation. One of his remarks comes back to me with a sense of shame. "I've heard it said, Brokey, that you can do a better job of announcing drunk than anybody else can sober. The thing I'd like to know is, why work so hard? Why not just be yourself?" It might have had a sobering effect on me if I had known that from this flight the beloved Will was to go straight to Alaska, on that fateful trip with his close friend Wiley Post,

in the course of which the whole nation, and in a strange way I, too, would lose a great friend.

By returning late to New York I missed out on another show. And so it went, through the last weeks of this whole, hectic, miserable year. For example, about this time, Major Bowes, who had made history with his *Amateur Hour* on WHN, had signed a terrific contract with NBC to switch his show there. I was called in. What was needed was explained to me. But because it was WHN, and through lack of interest, I did a halfhearted job, and I lost out on what could have been a whole new career. The one show I did on the air as an audition was the only show I got to do.

It was the little things that kept us afloat during this period. I wrote and recorded voice for an eight-reel travelogue of Russia, a long and arduous task, done mostly at night. This was for Pizor, and I enjoyed working with that wonderful and congenial fellow named Cy Braunstein. The pay was miserable, but I could always borrow a dollar or so from Cy.

The word got around; someone else found out that the famous voice could be bought for pennies, so I did voice behind a nudist colony film—the picture was made in Germany—and wrote the script with the authoress of a nudist book. This was a strange collaboration on a strange subject; I had never known much about nudism, neither had I ever met or worked with a lesbian.

There were occasional bright spots. One was the request from the Fox Theatre in Brooklyn to build a presentation around my Hawaiian boys, the “Coral Islanders,” for a picture that was showing there for a week. We worked like mad at rehearsal. The great thrill was to see my name in lights on the marquee; this had been a secret desire for years. I was very careful to hunt up a photographer who would take his equipment out at night and photograph this sign of my pseudo success.

But even these helter-skelter, underpaid operations came to an end. Toward a warm June in this year of 1935 I can remember sitting dejected and alone at 603 Fifth Avenue; Eunice had gone out to Akron on a hopeful project. The apartment was as disheveled as myself. There was nothing for

me to do. I would just sit, and drink, and sweat, and wonder. . . .

In the midst of one of those lost days some little man from a cheap theatrical agency in New York that specialized in talent for summer resorts came to me with a proposition. "You can't do anything here," he said boldly; "I can book you as M.C. at a Jersey lake resort. You'll have a place to stay, you can get a drink and draw a little pay; why don't you sign up for a two-week try? If you like it, I'll get you more."

This was an escape. This guy knew I was drinking, and didn't seem to mind. I signed on the dotted line.

Leaving things at 603 Fifth Avenue as they were, I jumped into the car with these people the next Friday; after a long drive they deposited me at the dance pavilion at Budd's Lake, New Jersey.

My job was master of ceremonies for a honky-tonk show put on very late every night on the pavilion dance floor. Thirteen steps away from the dance floor was the bar. Whatever my salary was, I drank it up in the first two days. The fact that I was already sick when I started meant that within a few days I was out of commission. Naturally the entertainment people put someone else in my place, a comedian by the name of Jackie Gleason. I was stowed away in a bedroom in someone's home, and there, for two or three days, I tried to take milk, or eggs, or anything I could keep down. I was a very, very sick man and got to the point where I couldn't even take liquor.

I was in this condition when I saw, dimly in the distance, a figure I knew, heard a familiar voice. Rumors had reached Eunice; she had cut her trip short in order to trace me down. Even though I was out of a job again, I was so glad when she showed up that I swore to myself it would be the incentive to get me back on my feet, back to work again. I was able to persuade the people who had hired me to put me to work again. They scheduled me to go to Tuxedo Park, where I would introduce Baby Rose Marie. For an hour or so I reflected that it would seem like old times, the days when I had stood Baby Rose Marie on a chair so she could reach a microphone with her precociously wonderful voice.

How well I did or how badly I don't know; I don't remember the actual episode. I connect it in my mind with returning to New York only to find that we had been put out of 603 Fifth Avenue. All our furniture and personal belongings had been sent to storage, and we were handed a storage receipt for the goods and chattels and a bill for unpaid rent. The telephone—still connected, the instrument silent on the floor—there was a bill for that too.

NINETEEN

SOME TIME back I had made contact with the Paramount News people, who had a special way of producing their news-reels. They put behind the events voices that suited the activity; they used a well-known sports announcer for sports events, developed a voice for straight news, used a woman commentator for fashion, and so on. They said I might be used for the dramatic color of special events.

I began calling them every day in the hope that some film sequence had come in that called for a voice like mine. Now and then they would say there was something I could do. I would rush to the studios, in a small cubicle look at the reel, they would give me the prepared script, it would be timed, and I would put the voice on the sound track. I would collect ten or twenty dollars, depending on the length of the script.

The cheapest hotel room I could find was at the Claridge Hotel in Times Square at Forty-third Street, and we lived on these ten- or twenty-dollar bits. Every morning I went out to hunt work. Every now and then we pawned something. Our funds sank lower and lower, and we had nothing left to pawn. As we had through Mrs. Stanley, we learned again that New York does have a heart.

The chambermaid on our floor, sensing our predicament, would secretly leave rolls and butter just inside our door.

Things like that done for people give them the lift needed

to try again. On the strength of such kindness I made a bold move—going back to NBC, where I succeeded in getting an appointment with John Royal, then in charge of programs. With humility and all the salesmanship at my command, I besought him to give me a job, just any kind of a job.

“Brokenshire,” he said gravely, “the cards are stacked against you. No one wants to take a chance.” As I wished the floor would open and swallow me up, he went on, “But I know there are times when it ought not to be that way. So I’m going to try my best; keep in touch with me, maybe something will develop.” It wasn’t much, but there was friendship in his eyes, and that was something. I liked his handclasp when I left.

I kept in touch. “Sorry, but don’t give me up,” he would say. I don’t know which was harder to take, the fact that there was nothing or that I knew he was really trying to throw something my way. The next time I called up it was October 8. I had a cup of coffee and a stale roll under my belt when I reached him.

“I’m glad you called, Brokenshire.” My heart hit the top of the telephone booth. “Would you be willing to come in as junior announcer?” Junior announcer meant demotion to lower than my earliest days in radio. “If you would, I’ve got a job waiting for you.” NBC had a new setup; in it a junior announcer didn’t have any programs as such, unless he could be used on some sustaining program. Mostly his job was to go into a small cubicle on the fourth floor for stated intervals and push the buttons. Between shows, from a schedule, you push a button that cuts a show on or off the network, rings the NBC chimes, or hooks up a stand-by studio.

“I’m sure willing,” I said to Royal. “When do I start?” I was the happiest man alive, glad of even the crumbs from the bounteous table of radio. For awhile the crumbs were all from humble pie, but in exchange I had two things; an income again and entree to what was to me the sanctum sanctorum of the broadcasting business, NBC studios. I was prompt, avoided the booze, and told myself that this time it was for good.

In those first important months at NBC I knew how care-

fully I was watched. I behaved myself, and it wasn't long before I was given a sustaining show. It was called "Velvetone" and featured a singer whose specialty was a soft, mellow voice, and an orchestra that played accompaniments to match. I was put in to do the soft-voiced announcing. It never did become commercial, but it was on long enough for me to be heard. Milton Biow, of the Biow Agency, passed me in the hall and said, grinning, "You're still the best." He proved good as his word and put me on a commercial show for Coty, with Ray Noble's orchestra. As time passed I was doing less and less button pushing and more shows. The big moment came when they decided my work with Bing Crosby made me the logical choice for the Roger & Gallet show, which featured Bing's brother Bob; there was Bob's orchestra and his singing and a charming artist by the name of Alice Frost, who did impersonations. Things were really breaking for me; I was on the way back.

In radio anything can happen. Suddenly it was decided that the Roger & Gallet show should be put on the road so that Bob could take dance-hall engagements. The very thought filled me with panic.

I went immediately to Bertha Brainard, who had been program assistant at WJZ and was now assistant to John Royal. I didn't have to beat about the bush with her. "Bertha," I said frankly, "I'm afraid to go outside with this show. Can't you please arrange it so I can do the announcements here at NBC?" And, bless her, she fixed it. The troupe left to do the show in Baltimore; it came from WBAL, and my commercial announcements from Radio City.

The troupe moved on to do the show from Cincinnati. Up rose the sponsor with an objection to the show being done in pieces; it was to be an all-in-one job, and I was to go to Cincinnati, and that was that.

Inwardly I liked the idea, but there was the mental hazard. Psychologically I could not separate liquor and freedom "on the road." Here, tied to the discipline of working in the studio, I was happy in my work, consumed with the urge to succeed, and seemed to have no need of liquor. But a commercial sponsor had spoken. Besides, as Bertha said when she

called me to the office, how far could I get if I held to this fear? Studio work was limited. So I packed my bags and took the train. Band and staff had already left, and I was alone on the train.

I read. I dozed, and soon I was at ease. When evening came the charm of the diner, its warmth and friendliness, put me right back into the days of plenty. For this one trip I'd be like I used to be, successful, expansive, normal. I ordered a bottle of beer even before I looked over the menu. It was nice to lean back and sip beer while you waited for the order. There was sort of a glow from the beer. This was a pleasure I couldn't have in New York. I'd take it easy, but another bottle of beer, just beer, couldn't hurt. And so I drank beer all through the meal, and it felt good. There was no need to go back to my empty room. It was so much more friendly and comfortable in the club car. So I took a seat, found a good magazine, and ordered another beer. By the time the people began to thin out, I was going great; the steward and I were pals. Then, at some point in the ordering, I had a straight rye before the beer. After all, I had all night to sleep it off. Conscience? Well, I had broken my promise to myself. Another drink wouldn't break it any *more*, and if I used my head, nobody would know. But an alcoholic does not use his head after a few drinks, and so there I was again! There were cards, stories, laughter. Sometime later I fell asleep on the bed, clothes and all; and I had three of those little bottles in my pocket when I awoke.

By the time I reached Cincinnati, I was thoroughly drunk. I arrived at the hotel in midmorning; the thing I had to do now was avoid everyone and sober up enough to handle myself at rehearsal. I showered, went to bed, took a nap, got up, showered again (cold this time), and dressed an hour before rehearsal. But I felt so vague and hollow inside, feathery and uncertain, that I went to the bar for a couple of drinks to steady me for the ordeal.

Rehearsal went all right. We were going to broadcast from the grand ballroom of the hotel. The interlude between the end of rehearsal and the beginning of the show, about four hours, was my undoing.

I returned to the bar. I encountered an interesting girl. In my foggy mind I figured she could sober me up, and so we made a pact for her to take care of me.

She took care of me. When I woke up about an hour before show time, she was gone, with my wallet, with even the loose change I had emptied out on the dresser. My mind was a vortex of sickness, apprehension, guilt, frustration, disgust, remorse; I had to have another drink or two to get me to the ballroom and ready for the broadcast. The tension was terrific. *I* knew that *everybody* knew I was drinking.

Yet I seemed to hold my own. The opening announcement had the support of the band, and the characteristic opening-of-the-show excitement. My mind began to race, playing tricks on me; I remembered the abject promises made to John Royal and Bertha Brainard. ("I told you, Bertha, I shouldn't be sent out of the studio! Don't you remember that I tried to keep this from happening?") Promises! The music came to a blaring stop. That was my cue. Start the second announcement. I tried to speak, to read from the script. I opened my mouth. No sound came out. The lights dimmed. I slumped to the floor.

The show went on. The music came up loud again. Someone helped me off the floor. Attention was centered on Bob Crosby's singing. There wasn't any commotion; it was an engineer who was helping me out of the ballroom. I asked him one question. "Do they know about it in New York?" "Yes," he said. It was all I had to know. This was the complete end. I had dug my own grave. I had promised Royal that if I ever began drinking again he wouldn't have to fire me; I just wouldn't show up. *This was it.*

I signed for enough money to get me back to New York, and some to spare. *This was it.*

From Grand Central I went home. The minute I walked in the door I knew I needn't say a word. Of course, Eunice had been listening to the broadcast. She knew from experience that when the announcing voice was changed in midbroadcast it was for a reason. I sat down in a chair without taking off my coat and hat. It seemed to me that I could hear the doors of

agencies and stations slamming against me all over town, one after another.

I withdrew into a shell. Because an alcoholic hates the darkness of night, I turned night into day. Always the lights in my apartment were on. Would Eunice play a game of poker with me? Could we go to the movies? When one movie finished, then we'd go to another—escape awhile longer. Sometimes she would have to help me up the aisle; sometimes I'd run out in the middle of a picture. Cards again when we get home? Anything—everything to keep me from having to face myself. When exhaustion felled me, I slept. When guilt shook me roughly by the shoulders, I lay awake, staring at the ceiling.

Eunice tells me now that she got a small advance from someone for whom she was doing a little work; she gave me the money because in my psychotic chatter I talked of having to get home to my mother in Canada, where I was going to begin all over again. I talked of my childhood days; at a distance they seemed filled with peace and quiet. I talked of people who never expected me to do the impossible. Let me get away from this silly city, this silly world, from radio, from everything; let me go home.

Thoroughly frightened, Eunice thought perhaps this was a solution, so she gave me the money, saw me off to a bus station where I could get a bus that would start me on my way to Canada. She said good-by tearfully and went back to work.

A few hours later she received a call at her work. There was big trouble at home. It was the superintendent. No explanations, no excuses would do; we were to get out of the place immediately. I had let the bus go without me, while I drank away her borrowed money; the picture of going home to Mother the way I felt was too much when I got close to it. And so I drank, and then when I got back to the house, they wanted to know how it was that I could drink yet couldn't pay my bills. That started the rumpus heard for blocks.

When Eunice arrived, I had a new theory. I had a home of my own, I said, and hundreds of thousands of men worked with their hands; their work made them tired, and they could go to bed and sleep well, and get up and know they had a place to go, and things to do; some of them had dozens of

children, and the children all had shoes and food to eat. . . .

“The place out at the lake is only a shell, but couldn’t we go back there and begin over? I’ll make it comfortable, and I’ll get a job. I’m a good carpenter, a good house painter; if you’ll only come with me, I’ll promise. . . . I can use my hands.”

The next day we were at Lake Ronkonkoma, in a house that had no heat, no hot water, no lights, no single room that was finished; but it had walls and a roof and doors that could be locked to keep the world outside. And we had eight dollars.

So began a period in which I hoped to rebuild a body and mind that had been completely whipped.

Lake Ronkonkoma is fifty miles from New York City. After you have crossed the Fifty-ninth Street Bridge, Queens Boulevard takes you through congested Long Island City into suburban Sunnyside, on through Forest Hills and Kew Gardens onto the Grand Central Parkway. Fifteen miles of landscaped driving. Glimpses of thickly settled Jamaica, set down like a toy village under a Christmas tree. And soon, as far as you can see, there is just country, with towns and villages somewhere out of sight along roads that feed into the highway. The quiet country begins twenty-five or thirty miles from the city. Mineola, Westbury, then scattered settlements, tiny villages. When your watch tells you you’ve been on the road about an hour and a half, the woods open to receive you. No more housing developments, no more hustle and bustle of a crowded trunk highway; just scrub pine and red oak and winding country roads that once in awhile widen to make room for a crossroads store, a country post office.

The lake is a mile across, three miles around. It’s a resort in summer, with pavilions and road stands, drawing its largest crowds from Brooklyn and the Bronx because of the direct highways to the lake.

Browns Road starts to the north of the lake and travels away from it. Here it was, in virgin woodland grown thickly with wild grapevines, blueberry bushes, pine, birch, and oak trees, that I whacked out a driveway from Browns Road to my house. I staked out the position of the house by the sun; a line drawn from where it rose early in the morning to where

it set as the birds sang their evensong made the boundary line for the front of my house. I could tell the time of day by the direction of the sunlight streaming through my front windows. Good old Paul Bates, living alone in a weather-beaten farmhouse across Browns Road, was the only neighbor. The nearest house other than his was half a mile away, where Carl Eklund lived; all around me just woods, birds, rabbits, squirrels, woodchucks, and an occasional fox or deer. Here it was that I finally fell asleep surrounded by country sounds, known so well when I was a child.

The mind and body have amazing powers of recuperation. A night's sleep, a day's rest, Eunice's nourishing food and quiet care, two more days of sane living, and I began finding the heart to look around me, enjoying what I saw. A hike through the woods brought back to me the long walk from home in Port Hope to school in Port Brittain. As I did then, here I looked for an animal track, an uncommon wild flower, a bird singing from the branch of a tree, a tuft of cirrus cloud in the sky. I stopped and laid my ear against a telephone pole to hear the hum of the wires. I picked up a pine cone and shied it at a boulder half hidden in the underbrush. This was clean country, untouched by the destructive hand of civilization. Fifty miles away were filth and heartbreak in noisy canyons of brick and cement; fifty miles away were men at each other's throats, contesting night and day for little advantages, small victories, jealous triumphs, never thinking to take time out to live, to breathe, to explore, to grow and expand—only time enough to beat the next guy to the punch, to the subway seat, to the next red light—or to a contract.

Here, I thought, there were friends, and *time* for friendship. No matter what time of day or night we might drop in at the Eklund home, the coffeepot would be on the stove, and there would be a smile of welcome, for this was the country. The Eklunds kept cows and sold milk; a calf scampered in their pasture; there were chickens, and fresh eggs, and dogs to feed, and clothes to mend, and a wash to iron, and houses to build. Surely with the quiet neighborliness of such people I could put the heartbreaking failures all behind me, find the escape I longed for so despairingly; perhaps here I could even

learn to pray, to thank God for merely being alive, and so be happy. . . .

By the end of a week I was able to go to Carl in fairly decent physical shape, to tell him I was going to be living at the lake for awhile and would like to work for him, at anything he could give me to do. He was our busiest local builder.

He smiled—but put me to work; so I was kept busy for awhile at carpentry and painting. Each of the few dollars I earned was so important; I was beginning all over. Nothing mattered so much as keeping busy.

Busy I stayed; after hours I worked at completing my own house. There were a million things to be done. I painted bungalows, I laid cement blocks for pay, and in my spare time I hammered and sawed late into the night and made a house to live in. But evidently it was not written in the book of living that I should be left in peace to save my life.

About three months after we took refuge in the country, quite a lot of publicity was given to the fact that the WPA, Works Progress Administration, had work to give artists in places such as Jones Beach. All through these recent days of hard manual labor I had told myself stubbornly that I was well rid of show business and wanted no part of it ever again, that if I got away from show business, I could find a normal life and live it. Inside, I was miserable. There was a place for me still in show business; I had earned it, yet I was not in it.

I talked over with Eunice and Carl Eklund the advisability of registering with the WPA and decided to do it. For ten dollars I had bought a ramshackle old used car so we could get around, after a fashion; and, feeling fine, clear-eyed, and purposeful about bettering myself, I drove to a neighboring town where the nearest WPA office was, and registered.

“Do you want relief?” the registrar asked me, without interest.

“No, I want a job,” I said. Then the merry-go-round started.

“We only get jobs for those on relief; please fill in this card.”

“Look. I don’t want relief. I read that there are some jobs

at Jones Beach, and that's what I'm here to see about; I want to make application for work."

"You can't register for a job until you're on relief, so you'll have to fill out this form." He turned away.

The way I figured it, I had nothing to lose. So I filled in the card.

Name: Norman Brokenshire.

Address: Lake Ronkonkoma.

Last employment: Radio. . . .

When someone picked up the card and saw the name, a whispering session got underway behind the application desk. Then there was a pause. Then somebody came and asked me if I would please sit down and wait a few minutes. There was more buzzing. After awhile they told me I needn't wait, I'd probably hear from them.

I heard, all right. That evening there was a headline in the *World Telegram*: "Broke, broke." A story followed; how I had drunk myself out of my top place in radio, squandered thousands of dollars, owed everybody, lost the chance to earn my living with the voice that had thrilled millions. Now I was hiding out on Long Island, trying to get on relief.

It took me a little while to learn how the paper came to print the story. Seems that the girl who was to file my card recognized my name and, having a boy friend on the *World Telegram* reporting staff, called in and gave him the juicy bit of news: the great Brokenshire, applying for relief!

The other papers picked it up. Now I made some discoveries, one of them touching and heart-warming. I found out that radio fans are true-blue; I learned this from hundreds of letters that came pouring in, wishing me well. Some enclosed a dollar, some five dollars, some even quarters and half dollars.

I found out, too, that a certain number of vultures are always about, waiting to prey on a person who has suffered misfortune. Suddenly I was inundated with wires and special-delivery letters from exploiters of every description. Every

time I looked out on my front lawn some highbinder was coming to promote something. For days there was no rest.

Finally an offer came that seemed to make sense. I accepted a contract to make public appearances at the Nut Club, in Greenwich Village. It was for a limited time, but it offered good money, and in the back of my mind was the idea that it might lead to new work in my own line.

So on the appointed night I began this new try in New York. Booked as an entertainer, I found out that in reality I was hired as a side show, a freak, pointed out to the customers as a has-been, the once great voice. I suppose there are those who could take such an experience in stride, laugh it off; but it filled me with disgust and chagrin. What is it in people that gives them pleasure at seeing a fellow human being in trouble? Why do we inwardly sometimes hope the other fellow will fail? Could I blame the tricky managers of the club, who were only concerned with one thing, namely to get people into their night club so they could collect an extra dollar from them? Using an individual's misfortune and resultant publicity, they were drawing people in from morbid curiosity. Were *these* people my radio fans? Some brought young children with them and, pointing, said, "That's the man you heard over the radio, you saw his picture in the paper."

In working onstage it's possible to pay no attention to individuals, work to the audience as a whole; this I would do. I had been hired as master of ceremonies. My job was on the floor, at the microphone. I heard nothing, saw nothing, I made myself busy with the talent.

I did the eleven o'clock show. I was contracted to do two shows; the second was due between one and two in the morning, when the noisy ones would be there.

After the first show I retired to a corner with friends who had come along to lend me moral support. As I sat at the table, the realization came to me: here, truly, I was tasting the dregs of my professional career. The pointing, the whispering, the snide laughter—I excused myself and went around the corner to a bar, so I could imbibe freely. I imbibed so freely that my real feelings took over; forfeiting my pay, disregarding the consequences, I went back, collected my

friends, and left the club without waiting to do the late show.

After I got back to the lake and quieted down I faced the fact that I had a double problem. Number one, I couldn't find a legitimate job. Number two, try as I would, I couldn't get back into my own field of radio. All this bluffing, trying to fool myself, saying I wanted to live in the country, that I wanted to work with my hands, that I wanted evenings, week ends, to myself—all this was just so much rationalization; inwardly I knew I would never down the desire for the thing I was cut out for, show business, radio.

The struggle was too unequal. I went into a new tailspin, wilder than any of the others. Any job that came my way I did either indifferently or in a fighting mood, to convince myself that this was what I wanted all along to do; of course, both ways were wrong.

For almost a year I existed at the lake. Gradually all the pleasure in the surroundings faded; instead of refreshing and strengthening me, the country air, the quiet, the peace imprisoned me. My friends and neighbors dropped away quietly one by one; nor could I blame them.

One day, thanks to the friendly efforts of Louis Katzman, former musical director for Brunswick Recording, I was called in to Station WINS in New York; they had a news program, sponsored by a typewriter company; perhaps I could read the news?

In all honesty I tried. But you can't be in the mood I was in, drinking all the time to cover unhappiness, and do good work on radio. WINS put up with me for a month or so; finally I had to tell them—I think about five minutes before they were going to tell me—that it was impossible. This little station was too different from what I had been used to, so unlike the big-time broadcasts that just entering the studios, where there was no one to greet you, nothing but a microphone on a desk, a clock on the wall, gave me a feeling of inferiority. There was no spirit; just a little check at the end of a drab week.

Little by little every call for my services dwindled away. Things became so bad for me mentally and financially that I began wondering if I should sell my house in the country.

Instead of being able to sell it, I found out I was on the verge of losing it, because payments on the mortgage were behind.

In a sudden gush of hope I wrote an urgent letter to Bing Crosby, then at Paramount Studios in Hollywood, telling him that I was going to lose my house unless I could get some money; two hundred dollars would save it. I knew better than to do this, but I was desperate. Of course, the letter didn't reach Bing. His brother wrote me the usual "too bad, everything tied up," that I deserved.

Small loans from relatives and friends kept us going; but soon the day came when it was just impossible to stay at the lake any longer, and we moved in with relatives in Long Island City. This was just a subway ride from New York, which made it possible for me to spend more time now looking for work. I met a promoter by the name of Jay Lewis, and in his office at the Roosevelt Hotel we worked out one or two shows. They were strictly small, local shows of short duration, but they were on WOR; for all they were hit-or-miss, they did enable me to be heard, at least by the station people, who knew now that I was around.

Soon the WOR Artists Bureau decided they had a cheap replacement for Ed Fitzgerald, who was doing a daily variety show, originating in the Newark studios. WOR was a New Jersey station then; in order to keep its license a certain number of broadcast hours had to originate within the state. So there was a studio high up in the L. Bamberger Company store in Newark. The WOR Artists Bureau would send over singers, fairly well known; it was my job to write a script and put on this variety show. Leo Freudberg was the orchestra leader.

Like all such jobs it was a small-salary, hard-work job, going to a limited audience. For me it meant commuting every day from Long Island City to Newark; that in itself was so wearing that we decided to move over to Newark, and took a small furnished room in Lincoln Square.

These were very dismal days because no one was ever sure whether I would be drunk or sober. But one wonderful thing did come out of it. Toward the hot summer days a food and

health authority, named Victor H. Lindlahr, went on his summer vacation; Lindlahr had been on the air for years, and his audience numbered in the many thousands. His sponsor was the *Journal of Living* Publishing Company, and Health Aids, makers of Serutan and other products.

In some way Mattie Rosenhaus, president of the organization, got the idea that I would be able to put together a good program of the homey, inspirational type, so I was called in, and together we created the format of a show called "Wake Up and Live." For this I got fifty dollars a show, and there were three shows a week. It was a program that called for quite a bit of research and reading, and suddenly it began giving me something to live for; the incidental work put my mind back on the track, and in an entirely unexpected way it acted as a valuable therapy.

With a hundred and fifty a week in addition to my salary from WOR I could pay something on my back debts, save the country house, and buy another secondhand car.

When the "Wake Up and Live" show ended, in the humid, hot days of August, a series of unhappy incidents took place; aggravated by drinking, the mosquitoes, the smells from the Jersey flats, and the wearing heat of the closed-in apartment, we decided to move back to Long Island City.

That trip back may shed a side light on my temperament and crazy way of living; also misadventures seemed to have a way of involving my cars. When I had our goods and chattels, all our suitcases and miscellaneous paraphernalia packed in the back seat and rumble of my old Ford, I stopped for a "farewell to Newark, New Jersey," drink and fell into conversation with two wandering minstrels. One played the saxophone; the other sang. They were fantastic characters. Their gimmick was to go into apartment-house courtyards and sing until, to get rid of them, people would throw pennies and nickels out of the windows. There was some sympathy appeal, as one of them had lost a leg.

After we had quenched our thirst together, they decided the place they, too, wanted to go was Long Island City; changing their scene of operations might change their luck.

We rode from Newark through the Holland Tunnel, across

steaming Manhattan, across the Fifty-ninth Street Bridge; by the time we got to Queens Boulevard, before I turned off to where I was to stay, it was time for another drink. We went into a bar and grill and had several. The minstrels decided that it wouldn't be matey not to see me to my destination. This seemed logical, and in our new found bonhomie I thought they might help me unload the car.

I drove up in front of the house, which was in a rather lonely section, a couple of streets away from the Greenpoint section. I said I would go into the house first, to get the lay of the land; I wasn't sure whether the in-laws or even my wife would be there, but if they were, they might object, not only to my condition, but to my bringing in strangers.

I went through the house to find out who was there. Fortunately everyone was out. I then proceeded to open doors and roll up rugs so we could bring the things in from the car.

By the time I got to the front door, the car was gone, bag and baggage, minstrels, everything, gone! For a quick getaway if necessary, I had left the motor running, and my wandering friends had simply taken advantage of their situation and skipped with everything.

In a panic I called the police and reported the car stolen. That midnight it was located in a deserted empty lot; they had taken my clothes and a suitcase that contained my nicer things, what jewelry I had left, and an engraved Tiffany silver dresser set, presented to me by Chesterfield, breaking the last link with them.

It wasn't long before history repeated itself. Work came to an end, and another move brought us back to the country house. It was a lonesome session this time; I made no effort to get work; if I made a few dollars, I drank them up. For awhile Eunice had a job, but although this allowed us to live, it also aided in my decay, for I misused every long, lonesome day.

How many weeks passed, how many months made up of days of mounting uselessness, as two people, so alone in their struggle, became weaker and weaker as each day passed, adding its worry to bend the most stalwart heart! Eunice was the

first to break down under the strain. How long had she hoped, prayed, stood by, sapping her strength to hold me up? Now the body was no longer strong enough to uphold her own proud courage. But it was like her, not to let me see her at the breaking point.

One afternoon I came home, and in a very conspicuous place I found a note.

In my blind selfishness I had thought I was the only one who was suffering; I hadn't given much honest thought to this girl who had stood by me through so many and such terrible experiences.

The note said she couldn't take things any longer; she had to have physical and mental rest. She didn't say where she was going, but attached to the note was a five-dollar bill. She wrote, "I have ten dollars; here's half."

If you ever lived in a house in the woods, if you ever found yourself suddenly alone in it, you know its incredible vacancy. I had come to a full stop, the dead end. Interest, hope, were gone.

I couldn't spend another minute in the house. Escape. . . .

I took the flivver and drove toward St. James. There was a movie there. Perhaps . . .

I never got to the movie. Somewhere along the way I stopped. There was a light in a window, laughter inside. . . .

What transpired there I have never really known. It was the first and last time I ever was in that particular bar.

I only know I woke up the next day in the Smithtown jail, weak, trembling, bandaged, and in great pain. When I was able to comprehend anything, I was told that on my way home I had run into a tree. The car was smashed beyond repair; I had severed a temporal artery on the rear-view mirror and sprained my ankle on the brake pedal. Someone in a nearby house had seen the accident and was able to apply a tourniquet to stop the flow of blood, which, in a matter of minutes, would have killed me. I had been treated by the city doctor and housed in a cell, charges uncertain.

When I could begin to think, I got permission to call the Lake Ronkonkoma bank, where once, for awhile, I had a pretty good account. I explained to the president what had

happened. He said he would come. When he bailed me out, he explained that he had found a small balance in my account, but to this day I believe he paid my bail himself. He drove me home; they had to help me into his car because the ankle was now too swollen to use.

The doors of the house were all locked, and I had no key. We broke in through a window. The banker, in frail health, nearly spent himself in the struggle but managed to get me on a couch. He left me then.

For hours I lay perfectly still, alone, it seemed to me, in the universe. I realized that I was completely helpless. Without a phone, unable to walk, hungry and weak, I fell into the long sleep of exhaustion.

TWENTY

AT MIDNIGHT of the next day Eric, a relative of Carl Eklund, happened to be passing by on foot; seeing the light, he decided to pay a friendly call. It was he who brought me back to myself. He soaked off the bandages, got a razor, and shaved off a four-day growth; all the time he was smiling and friendly, and gradually I achieved a better frame of mind.

He knew from the look of the ankle that something was very wrong, and when he left, he said he would send a doctor to look at it. It wasn't a strain or a sprain; the ankle was broken in two places, and the doctor said the only way to avoid serious trouble was to have immediate surgery. He said he would make all the arrangements; the next morning he bundled me off to the hospital in his own car. They had a malleable patient; I didn't care any longer whether I lived or died.

The well-known Dr. Child pegged the break with steer bone, and all was well. The experience revealed two important medical points: namely, that an alcoholic is so conditioned to alcohol that, instead of ether anesthetizing him, it makes him drunk; so in my case a combination of pills, gas, and ether was indicated. Moreover, an alcoholic, unlike a normal person, can take ice water on coming out of the anesthetic. As I was coming out, four orderlies held me, one on each arm, one on each leg. I caught sight of a pitcher of ice water within arm's reach; I knocked loose the four orderlies, and before

they could seize me again, I had downed half the ice water—no ill effects.

Nobody offered to autograph my cast for fun, and in the usual number of days I got well. A day or two before I was to be discharged I looked up to see my Eunice entering the room. Searching her face, I told myself, "She's the one who needs to be hospitalized." She was emaciated, shaking.

Now that she was back and there was someone to take care of me, it didn't take long to arrange for my discharge. The first morning after we were back home on Browns Road a strange car pulled into the driveway. From my wheel chair I greeted a radio actress with whom I had worked; I wouldn't have known her, but she remembered me from the CBS program "Valiant Lady." Having a problem in her family similar to mine, she had arranged with Eunice to come out from New York and talk to me.

At that stage I always felt an involuntary resentment when anyone brought up the subject of alcoholism. Perhaps she anticipated that. Pleasantly she explained in a detached way that a certain Mr. Rudolph Schnorrenberg had done wonders in helping her brother-in-law, and she was just wondering if I would consent to see him. Perhaps it was that first soul-searing glimpse in the hospital of what all this had done to Eunice that made me say, "I will gladly see *anybody* who can do me any good." And so it came about that I began studying the Peabody Method with Mr. Schnorrenberg.

He began by giving me a book to read called *The Common Sense of Drinking*, explaining that it described a process whereby one could work from the point of the subconscious mind, that part of the mind that neither slumbers nor sleeps, and, through making certain impressions on it, change harmful habit patterns.

I found the method itself very simple. Many psychologists are agreed that the times when the subconscious is most responsive to impressions are just before one goes to sleep at night and just after waking. On this theory, certain paraphrased truisms were given me to be read before going to bed and also to be copied out in longhand just before putting out the light and going to sleep. I call them truisms because

they were facts that I already knew; for instance, "Alcohol is interfering with my life"; "I am convinced that I cannot drink without damaging my work, myself, my friends, my income"; "I am convinced that I must do something about my drinking." I quote these from memory to illustrate the type of thinking engraved on my subconscious under the Peabody Method. As I went along with the method, the ideas became a little more varied and complex.

In several ways my consultations with Schnorrie marked a turning point. The root of the method was to get squared away in all departments of one's life, for so complex is the psyche that one aspect cannot be healed without the healing of all. Only a complete ordering of my life would solve my drinking problem. In time this was to take in such a seemingly minor detail as my citizenship. A total ordering of my life required me to decide whether I wished to remain a Canadian, which I was, never having done anything about changing my status, or become an American, which to all practical purposes I was. When I began to get my bearings in the Peabody Method I set things in motion to become an American citizen; I received my final citizenship papers January 14, 1942, a day that has a deep psychological importance for me along with the legal significance.

I can say this in all honesty; the Peabody Method did change my habit patterns. For example—here again this may seem a little thing—formerly I had been rather slovenly, never hanging clothes up when I retired, always scattering things around for someone else to pick up. On the surface it would seem hardly important enough to be called a bad habit. Actually it was a symptom of something much deeper, a demoralized and chaotic inner state. The interesting thing was that in a matter of weeks I found myself little by little veering away from this slovenliness both physical and mental.

I became very much interested in the study. I read the book a second time and learned about Mr. Peabody and what he did for his followers. I learned that Mr. Schnorrenberg had himself overcome the drinking habit, and that he had turned his efforts to helping others.

As my ankle got better, so did my living and thinking.

During the days of convalescence I thought for the first time of writing my story; I wrote page after page about the days of my childhood, and it helped to while away the long period of healing. However, when I got into the days of radio, I found myself making excuses to put it off; after a time I forgot it altogether.

By July I was fit to go out and look for work, ready in more than just the physical way. By now my thinking had brightened, there was less self-pity left in me, no remorse, no dejection, no malice toward anyone; the study with Schnorrie had started me off on a new approach. I felt that if I just got out and started, made *enough* calls, I'd find work; I proceeded to do exactly that.

It was a struggle to get around; a block or two and I would have to rest, but now I went into the city to see Mr. Schnorrenberg. And after one of my visits with him I decided to try to talk with the man who had put me on the air to replace Victor Lindlahr on WOR, the summer before. It was a pleasant prospect, for I remembered Mattie Rosenhaus as a man you could talk to, one who tried really to understand. He was under thirty years of age; he had built a wonderful business because his dealings were always square and honest.

I shall always remember that address, 1819 Broadway; it was to be my home for many years.

During a long visit I learned that Mr. Rosenhaus was introducing a new product, V-Bev, a vitamin powder that, mixed with milk, made a vitamin beverage.

Mr. Rosenhaus had found out that it took about thirty-five a week for me to live, and although he had no actual job, he put me on the payroll for that amount until something worked out. I was installed in the office with a writer, and I studied the product. I had several conferences until one day I worked out a Hawaiian show, and it was launched on WOR. To give you an insight into Mr. Rosenhaus' thoughtfulness and fair-mindedness, he called me into his office twice; each time the conversation had nothing to do with business at hand. Once it was to find out how much commutation I was paying, so he could add that to my check; the other was when the weather

turned cold. "Have you storm windows on that country house of yours?" he said.

"Just on two rooms," I said.

He insisted that I find out how much it would cost to get the rest of the windows equipped, and the check was made out immediately and handed me.

I did another show called "Memories," in which I sang old-time favorites and recited lyrics to Jay Stanley's accompaniment. We put this series on records, and when it was played on WOR, the mail was terrific.

Mattie wanted to make a test, which we did by offering a booklet "My Favorite Songs." Five thousand copies were printed, and twenty thousand requests came in. It offered me an insight into Mattie's personality when he sent a crew around to interrogate the letter writers. It developed that almost half of the requests came from children; inasmuch as the product was supposed to interest people over thirty-five, the program, even though it quickly developed the earmarks of success, was discontinued. But with this and many other interesting activities, four years passed rapidly; at the end of that association with Mattie Rosenhaus my income was nearly two hundred a week.

I didn't touch a drop of liquor during that entire period, and life was enjoyable again. I had kept up my study with Schnorrie for a full year, and, as agreed, I was giving him 10 per cent of what I earned. This I was happy to do. Often I ate lunch in a bar and grill; food was served at a bar, a continuation of the regular liquor bar. Sometimes I would watch a man drink—and wonder to myself.

Somewhere along the line I was asked if I wouldn't write an article about my alcoholic experiences for the *Journal of Living*. The only trouble with the piece, as I see it now, was the title. I called it "I was an alcoholic." Unfortunately it was to take a few more years of study, and real deep turmoil, to discover that once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic.

An opportunity presented itself out at the lake when an old building was offered to a friend and me for purposes of developing a business. We fixed it up, decorated it, hired a

chef, a bartender, and a complete staff, and opened the Clover Club, with a full house, on Decoration Day of 1941. Besides being copartner, I was manager and general handyman for this eating and drinking place that presented shows on the week ends; and for one season we made a great success of it. I would serve food, tend bar, and mingle with the guests, and I noted with satisfaction that I never felt bothered by wanting to take a drink.

About this time the *Saturday Evening Post* had a major article about a group of alcoholics who had banded together to help themselves. The story told of their meetings at the "place with the red door" on Twenty-fourth Street; and one day I decided that I had better go there. Maybe I could spread to others good that had come to me. I had been dry for about four years and felt very, very good about it.

Maybe twenty or thirty people were at the meeting. The founder and the secretary of the group were sitting at a desk. Pretty soon the meeting got under way. One after another got up and told how they had found help. The spirit of the meeting took hold of me, and I got up and told how I had handled my problem. There was no humbleness about it; in fact I guess I was pretty proud and positive. I knew nothing of the principles of the organization, but those who did had reason to worry about me and my attitude, as time soon proved.

While it is true that I didn't drink at the Clover Club, it is also true that others did, and in that soil grew a summer romance that came slowly but surely to full bloom. Toward the end of the season Eunice made a trip to her home town of Pittsburgh; while she was away, a week-end trip on the old Fall River Line to Boston developed. Pure romance and adventure on the way up, but when the glorious gaiety and sparkling newness of it all wore off, there was time to think. Somewhere near Revere Beach we sat at a table; the young lady excused herself for awhile, and as I sat there, thinking and waiting, I sampled her drink. That's all. But the mental process had started, and that sip, plus a guilty conscience, developed with whirlwind speed into a binge that ruined everything, including the trip, my job, the Clover

Club partnership, my hopes, and almost my own home. The return trip to New York was completely out of hand. Everything smashed, but everything. I stepped off the boat in New York knowing that Mattie Rosenhaus would have none of this kind of thing! I took the bull by the horns and resigned my job. The Clover Club partnership was dissolved. I had saved nothing. When Eunice returned from Pittsburgh and learned all that had happened, our life was again in turmoil. Could peace be made with her, and with myself as well?

The next six months were like an ugly dream. I couldn't sleep or eat, and I floundered in a vortex of self-accusation, self-pity, and mental disorganization. I tried to tell myself again that the basic thing was to take anything that paid any money at all. Knowing that you were earning a dollar was a catharsis in itself; earning a dollar, getting a paintbrush in your hand, by such small means the climb would begin, you would have taken the first step out of degradation. I told myself all this, but it seemed only vaguely real.

Christmas was coming on. There were people to whom I wanted to give gifts, and I had no money. I could not bear Christmas to find me empty-handed, and I plunged down into the cellar when I couldn't sleep, and began making gifts out of wood: chess tables, foot stools, hanging bookshelves. The word "Oakcraft" came into my mind. Perhaps I could develop my own woodworking business. I clung to the stabilizing aid of working with my hands. But the idea of Christmas made a chill wind blow over me. The breach between Eunice and me was widening to a point where our hearts and hands could no longer meet. Only a miracle could put us to rights again, and I had long since given up looking for miracles.

No one looked for the war in Europe to touch us either. But it did, and in such a way that the whole nation, including us, was shaken.

On December 7 the doorbell rang. As I opened the door I saw two glum faces; they belonged to the Kelly brothers, my companions on the return trip from San Francisco. They were far different men now, family men, both happily married. Jimmy had worked himself up to an executive position

with an important Philadelphia shipping firm. His brother was in the Army, stationed at nearby Camp Upton.

Standing at the door, they were just two more incredulous Americans, giving us the first word we had of the news that shook the world: the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor!

In minutes my mood changed; my own troubles seemed to evaporate. The country at war! This was big, real, something to jolt even the most self-centered individual out of himself. What did I or my career or anything matter now? My mind began to race; what could I do that would be useful? "I'm going out to look for a job," I told Eunice.

Pittsfield came to mind. I'd fitted myself to serve in the last war by taking that G. E. Apprenticeship course. The war had been over too soon for them to use what I had learned to do. They'd hardly take me in the Army now, but surely there'd be some place in mechanics for me; there had to be!

My old teacher at Pittsfield sent me a lot of information and a letter of introduction to the authorities at Connecticut State College, where he said I could get a refresher course.

Because my mind was active with constructive plans, Christmas was tolerable. My gifts were appreciated, and in my own mind I had been able to hold my own.

The letdown set in. Eunice stopped off to visit her brother the day after Christmas, and saying I had to investigate the refresher course, I went off by myself. I began drinking; New Year's Eve I came home in bad shape, befuddled, defensive. Eunice, concluding that she had been left to see the New Year in alone, had invited some friends to the house for a little party. When I arrived, she telephoned them all that the party was off.

New Year's Day, early in the afternoon, a neighbor who had dropped in on some errand, said she smelled smoke. At first they couldn't find anything burning. Coming in from the garage, Eunice opened a door to a storeroom and a wall of fire leaped at her. I was dead asleep, but the shouts brought me up straight. In no time fire apparatus came pouring into Browns Road from all directions, and everyone for miles around who had begun to be a bit bored by New Year's Day

arrived to watch and to kibitz. "Brokenshire's house is burning down!" people shouted, tearing through the roads.

There was a peculiar irony in the cries. Brokenshire's house did indeed seem to be burning down, the house of his hopes and dreams, the house of his striving to escape from the grip of alcohol.

It was providential. There was a little wait before I could get into the refresher course. Meantime, there was plenty of work for my hands, tearing away the charred part of the house, cleaning things up, rebuilding. When the work was done, I had improved the house a little and saved my soul for a little while longer. . . .

When I took the refresher course, I lived for two months in Hartford while I went to school again. I passed with honors and became eligible for what was known as a "Green Line" inspection job in the factory where Pratt & Whitney Whirlwind engines were made.

Arithmetic was against my staying on in the Hartford area, paying living expenses in a strange town when I had a home on Long Island. In the nick of time I heard that a new factory had sprung up at Farmingdale on Long Island, where they were making the Thunderbolt, a fighter plane powered by Pratt & Whitney engines. If I lived at home, my salary would mean something.

So I passed up the opportunity of the "Green Line" inspection job and got into the inspection department of Republic Aviation at Farmingdale; the factory was running twenty-four hours a day; my salary was twenty-four dollars a week for an eight-hour day, but everybody worked overtime, and I did more than average. I really went into the work conscientiously. Several times I worked out developments and improvements, receiving in return an award in government bonds; and before long I was writing a column for the factory paper.

One improvement had to do with discovering that the reason several test pilots had been killed was their losing control of the Thunderbolt when it went into a dive. I asked myself what could cause that error. I narrowed the problem down to my own satisfaction as one of cable failure; the control

cables used in the Thunderbolt were fabricated, stretched, and tested in the cable factory, then coiled and delivered to Republic. My study convinced me that the coiling process caused the cables to lose some stretch and that this was not taken into account when the cables were installed and adjusted. Then, when the Thunderbolt bucked winds aloft at terrific speed, the stress and strain under diving conditions caused them to stretch again, enough to put the plane out of control in that important second when the pilot was pulling out of a dive.

My solution consisted of special stretching and testing equipment and a method of packing, storing, and installation that did away with this hazard. And it worked!

I also developed an improvement for the duct system, to keep the supercharger from burning. The grind of long hours and overtime was new and wearing to me, but the work was interesting; once more in mechanics, my first love, I felt keyed up, optimistic, and things went well.

Only rarely did my drinking interfere with the work. I learned to use Benzadrine to carry me through a morning if I had overdone it the night before. But once in awhile it showed. By this time I had all kinds of special privileges. I could wander off the job for hours at a time, for I would supposedly be collecting information for my column. The guards at the gates knew me and would wink as I passed, for sometimes I would just take a little walk for a drink or two.

To a select few my problems were known. One of the chief inspectors was interested in my fight and offered me his version of psychology to straighten out my thinking. We began visiting back and forth, his family and mine. I appreciated his friendship, but the ideas he was attempting to put into my mind tended only to mix me up the more. No good came of it, although he did his best.

I was on the verge of becoming a bad inspector when a call came from one Ben Larsen. He'd been in radio for many years, and now was part owner of a station in Washington, D.C. Larsen was promotion-minded. His calling me had to do with his belief that my name was still good down in Washington and could be sold.

These months, studying in Connecticut and working long hours every day at the plant, had been a refresher in more ways than one; thrown with thousands of other men working in the common interest, I had left somewhere along the way my feeling of loneliness, of being an outcast; I had rejoined the human race and was the better for it. There had even been company of my own kind; Lewis Reid of the original WJZ staff was an inspector in another building at Republic; Alexander Gray, the original Chesterfield singer, was in Army Inspection, assigned to Republic; one of the Harvey girls from Hallowell, Roberta, was in the tool cage; in my column I wrote about others from many walks of life, from musician to executive, whom I had rediscovered in this branch of war work, and it was all very pleasant. I was still not fully contented or happy, but the experience proved to me the meaning and purpose of some of my earlier training; that I was still skilled at mechanics; that I could be of service; that, comparatively meager though it was, I *could* earn a living.

Just beneath the surface, however, was an undiminished drive to get back again into the spotlight. In a real sense this experience had been good for me, for I had carved out a certain measure of security, dependent not on how I looked, what mood I was in, what my breath smelled like, rather on ability to do necessary work and earn a wage.

Perhaps for the very reason that I no longer had to face my life as a hopeless mess, the call from Ben Larsen came as really a good omen. Once I would have had to jump at it, in desperation. Now I had bought my way back psychologically to the point where I could safely take it a little slower, a little easier.

On the second call from him I made an appointment to meet him in New York. When the meeting was over, I had been offered a radio job in Washington with WWDC, at a guaranteed salary of fifty a week and the prospect of making much more. Larsen laid down no laws, rules, or regulations, handed me no pledge to sign; he just made me an out-and-out offer and said he honestly believed I'd make money on the deal.

“If I can get my release at the plant, I’ll come with you,” I said.

At the plant they were very decent about it; actually they wanted to be taking on men, not letting them go, but I had a good record and a sound reason; radio was considered an essential job, too. And so, within a few days, I was on my way back to Washington and the world of radio.

“Why don’t you stay here at the lake,” I said to Eunice, “until I size up the situation, see if it’s going to work out? If it does, I’ll find a place for us to live.”

TWENTY-ONE

WHEN I saw the studio and setup in Washington, I realized that here I could certainly keep myself busy and be happy. I was put up in a hotel until an apartment could be found, and given an immediate schedule.

The first week I spent most of my fifty dollars before it was due. The second week I made seventy-five, and by the end of the month I had been sold on enough commercial spots and programs to bring me nearly two hundred a week.

On the strength of relief and optimistic hope for the future, I went a bit overboard with my drinking. In overcrowded Washington there was no apartment immediately available, so I was living at the station; out of a storeroom that had a door leading directly into the studio, I had made a very comfortable bedroom.

Off duty one day I had gone places and done things and was feeling a bit gay. Passing through the studio to my room I made some flippant remark to the announcer on duty, and to put a flourish on it, stepped up to the microphone and added something that, to me, at the time probably seemed very bright; but to Ben Larsen, who was listening in at home, it proved a point.

Things happened so fast that I knew he must have been waiting for me to make just some such mistake. He had a plan all prepared. Without even stopping to put on a hat Larsen jumped in his car and tore to the studio. As I was going out,

he got me into his car on some pretext and took me to a doctor's office. The doctor gave me an injection of something, a nerve tonic they told me. It quieted my nerves a bit too much; the next thing I knew I woke up in bed in a place that looked like an untidy hospital but in reality was a local sanitarium, with a "cure" for alcoholics.

Here treatment was approached differently than at Keeley. This rough method was designed to bring you to the point where you hated the sight, the smell, and the taste of whisky.

It began by your being given some nauseating stuff at intervals, by injection in the skin of the chest, strategically just under the nose to let you have the full benefit of the dreadful aroma. This was followed by a dose of whisky to drink, not good whisky, and beer, warm beer. This was continued until you got sick and vomited; if for any reason this didn't result (with me it didn't), then you got a dose of mustard in hot water. The theory, of course, was to make you periodically deathly sick; then they cleaned you up, made you rest, and before you knew it, it was mealtime. They gave you just enough time to digest the meal and obtain some nourishment from it, and then started the process all over again. You drank, and you got sick; you slept, you read. They brought in another meal; then you drank again, got sick, and so on. It was a horrible process, scheduled to take about three weeks. Many a patient just couldn't take it, got up, and walked out. But I did not want to lose this job by drinking; if this cure had any chance of doing me some good, I'd take it, to the bitter end. I hurriedly wired for Eunice to come.

When it was over, they equipped me with a lot of vitamin tablets, and bade me good-by. No sooner was I out the door than I began thinking of places where you could get a glass of beer, *cold*.

Harry Martinsen, a neighbor from Smithtown near Ronkonkoma, was stationed in Washington with the Navy. He had come with Eunice to drive me away from Greenhill. I clung to their company and made sure that we stayed together until far into the night. There were things I wanted to say, things I wanted to hear. In the next day or two I'm sure I came to the realization that at least part of my problem was

again the temptation of idle time. So I determined to give everything possible to my job and to fill every free moment with activity.

I found a part-time job selling Bibles. Having been reared as I was, I figured I knew enough about the Good Book to get me by. The job turned out to be one of the most heart-warming and at the same time funniest I had ever had.

My territory was in the colored sections around the city of Washington. The sales campaign was geared to the well-known instinct in colored people for religion, and especially the Bible. The job had a few gimmicks. Purchasers were given all the time in the world to pay for their Bibles; they could pay as little as five cents a week, even every two weeks or every month. Signing up to purchase a Bible automatically made them members of a special Bible society, and there was a monthly premium, colored pictures illustrating certain Bible stories.

No matter how poor the neighborhoods there always seemed to be an abundance of laughter. A wrinkled old lady, grinning toothlessly, would shyly offer me a cookie fresh from a ramshackle oven; an old uncle, leaning heavily on his cane, would tell me about one day at Chickamauga; you counted on your fingers (behind your back) and weren't sure he'd actually been there, but from the look of him he could have been, and he told his story with a patriotism as tranquil as a summer day, as sure as the tide washing the shore. The home I visited might be a seething tenement or just a little shanty overrun with mummies, pappies, aunties, uncles, and glossy-eyed pickaninnies. Since it was wartime, despite the fact that many of these folks scarcely had enough food to eat, they seemed able to buy war stamps; but when I came along with this tantalizing offer of a shiny new Bible and beautifully colored pictures, there seemed to be a problem whether to buy their war stamps or the Good Book. I just couldn't press the sale. The clinchers I was taught I never used; the samples I was allowed I gave away. I walked many a mile, I made no money; but I learned so much of a world unknown to me before that I could well afford to call it square.

I put in at least an hour or two every day, visiting program

clients with new suggestions to keep them happy and promote my services.

In line with the determination to keep myself too busily occupied to leave any time for mischief, I spent as many evenings as possible at the Stage Door Canteen, doing what I could to entertain the servicemen. Also I located a "get your patent by mail" company (to be more exact, it was the Chartered Institute of American Inventors) and arranged to do part-time work for them, drawing up amateur inventors' plans and reducing what was patentable to technical description. This not only afforded extra money but renewed the fascination of my days of study in Pittsfield and my drafting courses.

One of my sponsors was a home-decorating outfit. After a period of describing how to make over furniture and appearing in public with their demonstrator, I took up the hobby myself. I was attracted by Peter Hunt's ideas and antiques a desk and some run-down chairs.

I heard about several members of Congress who had taken up knitting and weaving as a relief from the pressures of wartime legislating, and I joined a class; I mastered the art of making hats and scarves, and they came in handy as Christmas gifts.

Oddly enough drinking did not bother me for some time after I was released from the sanitarium. I was conscious that Larsen's eye was on me, and therefore I behaved and did a very good job at the station. As I look back, I realize that a fight was starting within me; with my job at WWDC the gates of radio had again swung open for me a little, and I was willing to fight to keep them open until I worked my way well inside once more. Yet with all the hard work, the many duties, and the extras, I was conscious of a subtle, irritating uneasiness; I couldn't put a finger on it, but it was there.

One night, when I was enjoying the opening of a new night club, a special invitation affair, I found myself at a table with two executives from another station, WMAL, the Washington outlet of the blue network of the National Broadcasting Company and a competitor of WWDC. Of these two men,

Ben Baylor and Kenneth Berkeley, the latter had been my boss in the old WRC days.

Gradually it dawned on me that, thinly hidden in all their chitchat, a job was being offered me. They managed to get from me the fact that I was not tied to Larsen by contract. They let me know that they could offer me at least as much money as I was now getting and a network affiliation in addition to local programs of a higher standard. "Anytime you feel like it," they wound up, "drop into our office for a talk."

I spent the next few days in weighing this prospect against the allegiance due Mr. Larsen and WWDC, and also what I owed myself in my campaign to put my career back on its feet. I knew I could never be happy remaining permanently in Washington or, for that matter, any other town but New York, no matter how high I might rise again. To satisfy myself I had to climb the heights in New York again, where I had started, where I had succeeded, where I had failed.

Twice I went to Ben Larsen, suggesting that I had earned a contract for a specified period of time. Each time he refused, hedging. I told myself that if a man wouldn't take your allegiance on reasonably even terms, that ended your debt. Pulled by the weight of a chain affiliation, I made the change.

Several things happened now to help me in my personal fight. First of all I was given an early-morning disk-jockey job. WMAL had a knotty problem of competition with Washington's most popular morning announcer, Arthur Godfrey. They decided that if there was any one place where Brokenshire could prove himself it would be in going out and nabbing a sizable chunk of Godfrey's audience and rating. They put me opposite him.

My disk-jockey programs became loaded with commercials. Starting with three, I soon had thirty-three and could only play half a record at a time. When the ratings came out, they showed that I had nosed Godfrey out of first position, the first time in his history that that had happened.

By far the greatest value of this was to bolster my self-confidence. But also I was given the coveted audience-participation show called "Pin Money," which WMAL broadcast

from a restaurant and in which I did interviews on the air with the patrons.

Soon a great wish was realized when I was selected to announce a dramatic show, originating in Washington and carried by the network. Now there was reason to hope for things; the uneasiness that stirred within me was explained; I wanted only to use this job as a springboard to get me back on the big time, as the interval at WCAU in Philadelphia had pushed me back on Columbia.

Washington felt good to me now as I drove to work in the dark of the morning and home in the early afternoon; one day, with a smile, I could say, "Thank you very much; I'll see you again," but from the other end of the radio wires; I'd be on my way back to New York City.

I was driving home one day in early September when a traffic light changed suddenly. I jammed the brake pedal to the floor board—and nothing happened. The brake was out of order, and I piled into a heavy Buick just ahead. Both cars were considerably damaged, and I was dazed. The accident occurred directly in front of a charming little house; its occupants rushed out, helped me into their living room, sat me in a big soft chair, and hurried to give me a drink of very good liquor. In the light of the fact that that drink started me off on a binge, the accident itself, painful and costly to me though it was, was nothing. Now I don't say that to an alcoholic a drink under such circumstances will always have the same result, but I do say it's a risk. In my particular case, under the stress and strain of my life, that one drink led relentlessly to another and another; for the next month I fought alcohol as well as the problems of my work.

On a Sunday, returning on the train from Philadelphia with the then victorious world-champion professional football team, the Washington Redskins, whose broadcasts I had been covering all fall, doing the local color, things really got rolling. Eunice had made this trip with me, and I left her happily engaged in conversation with a former radio colleague of ours in New York, John S. Young, who happened to be on the train, while I took off to the private car of the team to congratulate Sammy Baugh and the rest of the boys. There

was lively celebrating; the drinking was running high, and I jumped in to do my part.

I don't remember getting off that train, but I do remember in days that followed making the rounds from one doctor's office to another, trying to get help in checking the drinking that now was thoroughly frightening to me.

Thus far my lapses had been concealed from the station, and as a vacation was due, I hurried to record a backlog of shows so I could spend the Christmas holidays in Long Island.

Being in New York again I guess put an edge on my obsession. Now Washington got on my nerves! I went back to work, but the station irked me. I was drinking all the time now, and it was the same old story. Late in January there were several days I couldn't work. It was the familiar cycle again, the fang of the snake that bit me; a drink to get well, which of course made me worse than the drinking I did to cover the guilt. Nothing interested me any more. Undeserved malice piled up against the very people who were making my comeback possible. In a mood that nothing could hold back I called Ken Berkeley and proceeded to explain to him in colorful words of one syllable how he ought to run WMAL; I pointed out that his biggest mistake was in not having humanized the relationship between himself and the artists; I wound up by resigning my job.

When I was in that condition, things always happened fast. Thirty minutes after resigning I was on the train bound for New York. At the station I called Eunice, told her what I had done, and that I would write her from New York. It was a ridiculous and dangerous way to re-enter the city where in any case I had such a battle on my hands, but I told myself that at least it landed me geographically where I had to be.

I headed straight for Lake Ronkonkoma. For a few days I got along by cashing small checks on a Washington bank, in which my account already was overdrawn. But I soon found out that it was no good trying to fight my way alone. I called Eunice to get a trucking company to pick up our furniture and move it home to the lake, that I was not coming back to Washington, and for her to get to the lake herself as fast as she could.

We got the house settled, and I began to look for work. On one of my trips into New York I ran across an owner of a small Brooklyn station, WBYN, who offered me a hundred a week and lots of publicity if I would come and announce the Dolly Sisters show. They were bringing back a lot of old-timers.

Although this was getting back in radio by the back door for fair, I needed the money so badly that I agreed to work a couple of hours nightly for him and began commuting from Lake Ronkonkoma to Brooklyn. It turned out to be the most distasteful bit of broadcasting I had ever done. I soon learned that the whole build-up was done in an attempt to sell the station. After the first show I began to fortify myself for the broadcasts in adjacent bars.

The first broadcast of my second week was my last. After it was over, I not only had several fast ones before making my train, I got a carton of beer to take on the train with me.

As usual Eunice went to the station to meet the train. She was told that the train was half an hour late. When it finally came in, everyone ran for cars and taxis; Eunice kept looking for me, but no Brokenshire. Suddenly, in the darkness, one of the last passengers to get off paused and said, "You're Mrs. Brokenshire, aren't you?"

She nodded.

"Did you know there was an accident?"

She laughed. "Oh, the Long Island railroad is always having accidents."

He looked at her anxiously. "You don't understand, Mrs. Brokenshire. The accident was to your husband." He went on to explain. "I was playing cards with some of the boys, and one of them knows your husband. As a matter of fact he saw your husband just before he fell off the train. A bit later the conductor came through the car and explained to the passengers that the train would proceed as soon as they removed the body."

Now we can never be absolutely sure of anything in this world, but I'm pretty nearly sure that that particular accident was the biggest single turning point in my life. It must have knocked some sense into me.

What happened was that I had sat alone on the train as long as I could stand it. Seeing a bunch of soldiers in the vestibule, finally I got up with my carton of beer and went and offered the boys a drink. One guy was pugnacious; he was having his troubles with a nearby M. P.; in a quarrelsome mood already he wheeled around at me and not only knocked the carton out of my hands, but pushed me so hard that I lost my balance, tripped over something, and fell off the train. Since the train had just pulled out of Westbury station, the brakeman had not yet closed the doors.

The train was pretty well underway. The place where I landed was banked with crushed stone and cinders, slanting toward the tracks. Why, when I hit, I didn't roll back under the wheels, God alone knows, for I was knocked unconscious. They told me later that somebody pulled the emergency cord, and within minutes an ambulance and the police were there. I was picked up and taken to Meadowbrook Hospital.

When I came to, hours later, I found that my head was bandaged and my left arm paralyzed. The nurses found me wandering down the hall, looking for the way out of the hospital; I only wanted to go home. It was early in the morning; no matter what alarming pictures they painted of the risk, or the fearful outcome they tried to implant in my mind, I insisted on going home. They called Eunice, and by the time she arrived I had signed myself out, assuming full responsibility for anything that might come of it.

After one day at home I found myself possessed of a great confidence. I could not use my arm, but I had no fear. I was convinced that the same God who takes care of the sparrow and the lilies of the field was caring for me; I knew this very surely and deeply.

It was only a couple of days later that a fellow by the name of Foffee, a complete stranger to me, knocked at the door and explained to me that he had just purchased the Silver Slipper Club. And finding that he had more than he could do to handle extensive alterations he was making, he wondered if he could get me to lend a hand.

It seemed providential. I needed an interval of peace in which to put myself to rights. Working with my hands always

helped me to do this faster and better than anything else I knew of. I agreed.

Foffee arranged to send someone to my house to pick up my electric saw and set it up on his premises. I went to the lumberyard and ordered supplies. With that electric saw and one undamaged arm I proceeded to do my job. I built a new bar. Little by little I found myself using the paralyzed arm, fingers first, then hand, then the whole arm, thus disproving the fear shared by the good doctors who had examined me at the hospital. I had no quarrel with their thinking what they felt they must; I was just thankful I had my own brand of occupational therapy.

TWENTY-TWO

I WAS invited to dinner at the Vanderbilt Hotel. The reason seemed vague—"a mutual friend" it was said. Toward the end of the evening it came out that my host was a member of that same organization that met behind the "red door" and was of the impression that it might help me. I wasn't ready to make any great decision, but I was trying to think constructively, and our discussion, the questions I asked and the answers, probably helped me considerably.

The accident had materially restored my religious faith. I realized that one reason why the Peabody System, while it had to a degree changed my habit patterns, had failed as any permanent cure for alcoholism in me was that it had not touched the spiritual side of rehabilitation. Donald C—— emphasized that discovery of a power in which he could place his belief had become the dominating help in keeping him permanently dry.

I read again the copy Donald had given me of Henry Drummond's lectures, *The Greatest Thing in the World*, a book of inspirational reading; as I studied it, I found it developing in me a positive desire to be good and do good.

I began picking up a dollar here and there at incidental jobs in New York. On one visit to the city I volunteered to go when I could to the veterans' hospitals, working along with the artists giving shows for convalescent boys. I found a new kind of job, too, rather a peculiar job for a radio an-

nouncer, but I was glad to get it; some of the advertising agencies prepared surveys for their clients, and my work was to visit stores, beauty parlors, and restaurants, and with the help of the manager, or someone in authority, fill in a questionnaire showing the kind of lighting used, when it had been installed, how much it cost, whether it was satisfactory, whether they preferred fluorescent to incandescent lighting, and where they purchased their bulbs. I was paid by the day and was obliged to make a set number of calls.

In the course of this work I ran into Sid Rubin, a man who had worked with me in other days; he was with an agency now and put me on the track of a few jobs, making recordings for small radio advertisers.

In the time I spent out at the lake, I got work as handyman around a Christian Science rest home run by a lady whom everyone called Hank, whose real name was Mrs. Mabelle Elliott. From time to time as I repaired doors, windows, locks, painted, and in general did what I could to help, Hank and I had many constructive chats. As the weeks passed, all these activities combined to give me a better hold on myself, with the result that, although people I met in a business way in New York often seemed surprised to see me still in the land of the living because of the publicity given the train accident, I felt well able to face them, present a pretty good appearance, and hold my own in conversation.

On East Forty-sixth Street there was a firm called Biro & Wehde. Lou Biro, one of the partners, had been an artist on the *Journal of Living* when I worked there for Mattie Rosenhaus. I took to dropping in at Biro & Wehde to rest a bit and have a chat with Lou, who was very friendly and seemed anxious to be helpful. I could use his phone to line up new appointments, and report to him successes and failures.

One day Lou said, "Why don't you stay with my wife and me when you have to come in to New York, and save yourself so much commuting?" It was one of the finest things anybody had ever done for me. The Biros had a nice apartment in Jackson Heights, and other than the week ends I spent at the lake, I stayed with them while I struggled to reinstate myself in radio. I got one turndown after another but learned

to take them with a smile, knowing that if I worked long enough, and did the right thing, someday I would make the grade.

I was in this frame of mind when I came out of a Madison Avenue building, and as I waited for the traffic light to change, I heard someone say, "Hello, Broke." I was greeted by a radio producer I had known many years before, Charlie S——. I remembered that he had had trouble similar to my own, becoming undependable, having all kinds of difficulty keeping a job. But at a glance, I could see he looked happy and prosperous. I asked him if he was working. "Oh, yes," he said, "I'm doing three or four things. By the way, what're you doing this evening?" It was then about five thirty. I said, "I don't know exactly; my evenings are about all the same. I'm staying with Lou Biro; we might play cards, or go to a movie, or something."

"Well then," said Charlie, "why don't you come along with me tonight?"

"All right; where're you going?"

"Never mind, just come along." We walked over to Times Square and took a subway to Forest Hills. We stopped in at a restaurant, had dinner and a chat; as we left, he took my arm and steered me to the Forest Hills Inn, through the lobby, around to the right, into a large room where thirty or more people were gathered. "These," said Charlie, "are our fellow alcoholics." People were talking, in pairs or small groups. After he had introduced me to several, he led me over to a corner where we sat down. During dinner he had told me a lot about good things that were happening nowadays to him, how he had recaptured the faith of colleagues in the radio field and was doing very well.

Sitting there in the corner, he told me the other side of the story. When I had known him, he had been successful, too, but he drank a lot, and it got so bad that he lost one job after another until he just couldn't get work. His wife left him. I could see that the world had been as black for him then as it was to me in my worst moments.

Then Charlie found this group of alcoholics—another branch of the same organization I had read about. He had

been coming ever since to the meetings. Gradually, slowly, he had regained his place; he had a new wife, a new baby, a new home, and everything was going along just fine. "Yes, sir, Broke," he said, "you'll like this bunch. I know you will."

The gavel sounded; the cliques broke up; everyone took seats. As the meeting went along, I learned that everyone in that room had been down and out at one time or another; their problems were similar to mine, some worse, some not so bad, but all caused by the same thing.

As I sat there, listening to men and women speak openly of the lost years, of problems they had faced, I no longer felt alone. By hard effort, and with the help of a power greater than themselves, they had been able to stay away from alcohol for twenty-four hours at a time; the days had accumulated. Now many, like Charlie, had been happily sober for years, back at their jobs, reinstated in society, with a new light in their eyes, new buoyancy in their step.

I listened and I watched and I thought. I realized that here I felt happy, happier than I had for years. It certainly wasn't the place. I'd been in hundreds of hotels, large and small. So it must be the people. Here I felt at home, accepted; no longer did I have to keep part of my life secret; I was no longer an outcast.

The meeting ended; people got together again in groups, to have coffee and doughnuts while they chatted; some wandered over to the piano and sang together. Here there was no hush-hush; you were among people you could understand, people who could understand you, and without making a big fuss. I noticed that if one told some awful thing he or she had done while drunk, someone else could top it by telling something even more terrible; the important thing was that now all of them could laugh about it. Ah, that was the great thing, to be able to get these dreadful experiences of the past out in the open and look at them *as things of the past*; they didn't try to hide them; they laughed at them.

I couldn't laugh at my experiences, not yet. Inside, I knew that miserable occurrences could still be in my future. But the meeting gave me the will to try even harder. I met more people, and right there three of those strangers offered me a

helping hand. One man who had been fired from an advertising agency was making good now with Paramount; he told me he would make an appointment for me and see if they couldn't get me on the newsreels. Another said it was always a hard thing to be alone under these conditions, and didn't I want to come along home with his wife and him? Still another gave me three addresses in New York where he said I could get part-time survey work. Of all these men and women none looked askance at me; nobody gave me the feeling I got so often in the city during interviews, that they were saying to themselves, "Oh, you're here today, and I'll admit you look pretty good, but what about tomorrow?" Yet all these people had been drunks. What was the source of this warmth, the wellspring of these friendly smiles and outstretched helping hands?

On the way home Charlie and I talked some more. "It's simple," he remarked; "we join nothing, pay no dues, we come and go as we wish, yet there's a great tie that binds us."

"All right, Charlie," I said, "what do I do next?"

"Simple, Broke. You want to stop drinking. O.K. First, we admit that our drinking is out of our control, that it is interfering with our happiness, our lives. Then we admit that a higher power is ready to help us in our struggle for freedom and happiness. In that knowledge we decide to do without a drink for the next twenty-four hours, just twenty-four hours. Then, when we get home, we read the book that you have there under your arm. When we get a chance, we talk to others in the group who have made it work. Then we come back to the next meeting. There are other wonderful steps, like holding no grievance against anyone, going to the people we have wronged or to whom we owe money; we state that we're trying to straighten up and fly right and are sorry for what we have done; if and when we can, we pay a little on what we owe. Later on, when we have found our footing and are feeling stronger, maybe we'll tell others some of our experiences. Then, when we have really accomplished something, comes the most important step of all; this is called the twelfth step, and it simply means going out and helping the fellow who needs help, just as I'm trying to help you."

I had never been much for listening to people, but I listened to Charlie; knowing what he'd been through and watching him as he talked so matter-of-factly, I discovered that it all made sense.

Once in a while the Biros and I would go out in their little car for an airing or to visit a friend. The evening after that meeting we took such a ride. It happened that it was Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, the "first" day of many dry, happy years that I have very good reason never to forget. As we drove along, I was bubbling over with enthusiasm and joy, and I told these friends about attending my first meeting and the thoughts, the inspiration that had come to me.

When they asked me about the other, earlier visit to a similar meeting, down on Twenty-fourth Street, I told them I guessed I had not been ready; I was too sure of myself, headstrong, and arrogant. Some people who had been at that meeting had felt certain I would fall again, because I had said things and exhibited an attitude contradictory to the whole trend of their way. But last night I had gone with Charlie to this meeting with an open mind, in a spirit of humility, ready to accept any help that might be offered.

As we drove that autumn evening, I felt the encouragement of my friends, their belief, their joy in the fact that, after long wandering and despair, I had found something to hold onto; their supporting faith helped me in making the full decision to follow this thing through, make it succeed.

From then on I went to those meetings religiously, twice a week, both the open and the closed meetings, in Forest Hills. In making my schedule I put those dates down first, and I didn't let anything interfere with them. For twenty-four hours at a time I did not take a drink.

Each day found me a bit stronger physically, mentally, and spiritually, until I was really, not the old-time Brokenshire, but a new and better Brokenshire, with verve, spirit, and the honest joy of living.

Now when I was rebuffed at an agency I did not go away

depressed and afraid; rather it made me go faster, fight harder, to win a way back into this business of broadcasting, into the hearts of the men I met.

In this confident mood I ran into another old-timer between calls; his name was Douglas Storer, and his business was handling talent. Many years before he had given me a show, so he knew my former ability. He caught my new frame of mind as soon as we met. "Why don't you come up and use my office as your own?" he said. "I'll be glad to help you in any way I can."

From that day on, when I called on radio people, I began mentioning Doug Storer's name casually. They always had a good word for him and his method of representation. When I learned that he represented "Believe It or Not" Ripley and was part of the General Amusement Corporation, headed by Tom Rockwell, who handled some of the top artists and bands in the business, I made a point of accepting Doug's offer, and we became good friends.

A peculiar thing had happened to me. Notwithstanding my long years of experience, now when I discussed possibilities for work with Doug or anyone else, I had the feeling of being a novice, a beginner; even after things developed to the point where popular opinion placed me right back at the top of my profession, I didn't have the *feeling* of success. When I read in the papers that now my income was in six figures, I felt as though I were reading about someone else; to this day the feeling of affluence bypasses me.

It had perhaps always been true of me that new interests and events erased the past. Whereas Doug Storer doubtless thought of me as someone with whom he had worked before, remembering the way I had done things, whether I had made his particular show a success or a failure, in dealing with him I had the illusion of doing so as a brand-new person, meeting him for the first time; I carried over nothing of our past associations.

He did not suggest in any way that I sign up with him; he simply said he wished me great success, that he would do what he could for me, and that I could use his office as my headquarters whenever it would be useful.

The combination of my new experiences and this acceptance by Doug made me feel so much better that I wanted to convey my feelings to Eunice, talk over the whole situation, where formerly that was one thing I shrank from doing.

When I went to the lake now, I started doing the many things that needed doing around the place, and while I did them, we talked, discussing the progress I had made thus far. Some time before, a prize-winning cocker spaniel had been given me by Dale Kennedy, one of my associates at the *Journal of Living*; I had bred the spaniel, and a litter of pups was now ready to be sold. Two that I sold in the neighborhood enabled me to make a payment on the personal loan that had helped to carry us through the lean days; I knew I could sell the others to a pet shop in New York.

So when I made my next trip to the city, we made quite a party of it, Eunice, the puppies, and I. Exciting thoughts raced through my mind on the fifty-mile drive; perhaps now I could begin repaying this patient woman for all the sadness, heartbreaks, and tears that had been her lot for truly standing by, "in sickness and health, for richer, for poorer. . . ." If only this new spiritual method would continue to work for me, perhaps she could spend the coming years in peace and comfort, without the constant, gnawing worry of my every absence, free of the "I told you so" glances of friends and relatives, free of the grueling despair that is the lot of the failure's wife.

For a bit as we drove along we harmonized together. The puppies whined and barked at the sound, and we laughed together. It was a good feeling, laughing together. We began harmonizing our favorite for such occasions—"I'm forever blowing bubbles." I slowed down to enter Grand Central Parkway. Eunice opened the glove compartment to get me a cigarette and pulled out a newspaper forwarded to us from Silver Springs, Maryland. Charley Kopeland, publicity representative for Silver Springs, had been helpful to me in many ways when we lived in Washington; he had sent this paper so I could read his radio column on a new show called "We Live Again," which featured Hope, Crosby, and many big stars. Eunice read the column aloud to me. After a mo-

ment she said, "Why don't we look into that show? Maybe there's a place on it for you." It was worth thinking about.

I sold the puppies to a pet shop on Eighth Avenue, and Eunice and I went over to Biro's office, where his wife Natalie put in a series of telephone calls for us, which not only filled up my time for the rest of the day and the following day, but proved that a friend is the most valuable thing in the world next to your health and peace of mind.

We found out that an old friend was working on the "We Live Again" show. It was Jesse Butcher, and when I got in touch with him, he said, "There's no reason under the sun why you can't really go places this time. Everything you ever had you've still got—your characteristic manner of speaking, your voice, your timing, your ingratiating manner. Probably your talents have improved." Before he was through talking, I was so heartened that I was ready to follow his suggestion. He had been working on a war activities program and had turned "We Live Again" over to WOR.

So I went to WOR, to say hello again to a lot of people I had worked with in years gone by and, to my surprise, to pick up a lot of mail that had been gathering dust in the mail room, waiting for me.

What was even more to the point, I met the new executives who now were running the station and the Mutual network. Chief among these was my onetime competitor, Phillips Carlin, who had left the announcing field and was now vice-president of Mutual, in charge of programs. He told me that the "We Live Again" program had been dropped as a program, not only by Mutual but by the government agencies; but he said he was glad I'd dropped in, that he'd been hearing some nice things about me.

It may have been sheer coincidence, or it may have been preordained that our activities should be pin-pointed, because only a few days passed before I received a wonderful telephone message from Douglas Storer's office, one that I was to hear many times in ensuing months—"Broke, you're in!" Storer had been in to see Phillips Carlin, too. He had sold Mutual a three-times-a-week program built on the lovely singing voice of Anita Ellis and a five-piece orchestra. Doug

told me that he said to Carlin, "Now all you need is—" and that Carlin had interrupted him, saying, "Don't say it. You've been harping on him for days. Brokenshire would be great for Anita, but it's too big a chance to take." At that point Carlin had swung his chair around, and it looked as though the subject were dropped. But then Storer's salesmanship went into action.

"Phil," he argued, "show me just one way you can lose! Supposing you hire Brokenshire for a minimum fee. You'll get reams of publicity because his name is still good and he hasn't been on the air in New York in years; you'll work up a big fat audience of his old admirers. So let's say he goes on the air for the first show—great. Then he goes on the second show; he does a good job. Then for the sake of argument we'll say that he comes in drunk on the third show and you can't use him. So you get on the phone and call one of your staff announcers, and he fills in, and you fire Brokenshire. You've still garnered priceless publicity for your station, and the show has a good start. Show me one thing you can lose, and I'll never mention Broke's name to you again."

Doug told me later that for a while there was absolute silence in the office. Slowly Carlin swung around and faced him, slapped his desk with the palm of his hand, and said, "O.K., Doug, put him on the show."

The Anita Ellis show was to start around the first of February, but by now my snowball was rolling faster and faster, getting bigger and bigger. Even before the program with the wonderful Anita started, Carlin put me on a show called "Do You Need Advice?" which featured Jane Porterfield, writer of a lovelorn column that had a large following. As announcer to Jane Porterfield I worked five days a week. It was the scale minimum pay per program, but five times scale still brings in a pretty good week's salary.

Naturally when I started working again I left the Biro household, but certainly not their affections. I took a cheap, inside room at the Hotel Wentworth, on one of the side streets in mid-town Manhattan, and carried on from there. Walking back and forth each morning and evening, I noticed a sign on West Forty-sixth Street that somehow piqued my

imagination. "Loft for Rent" it said, although I noted that this was not a loft building. Finally one day I climbed the stairs to the top floor and knocked on the door. A pale and peaked lady let me into a very artistic apartment, such as you'd expect in Greenwich Village; skylight, fireplace, high ceiling—very nice. I knew it wasn't a loft; this building had been a residence and was now broken up into flats. I said, "There's a sign 'Loft for Rent'; do you know what it is?" She looked a little vague, then said, "I have a room I could let you have." She showed me a front room and said it could be rented very reasonably. It wasn't what I was looking for; but on the way down I pushed open a door on the next landing and found a whole floor that was vacant. The place was a terrible mess, but it had huge windows, two fireplaces, and great sliding doors divided the space in two. There was another small room off the front part and, such as it was, a bath in the hall. Now curiosity was upon me, for at this time it was mighty hard to find apartments in New York. To think the whole thing over sensibly and quietly I went downstairs and sat on a box that belonged to a shoeshine boy. While he worked, I found that he was familiar with the neighborhood. I began chatting about the place I had just come from, and he told me the whole story. A costume-jewelry manufacturer had had that empty floor; the use of jeweler's rouge on polishing wheels accounted for the mess. The building owners had tried for a year to get the manufacturer out of the building, without success; finally the means showed up in the fine print of the lease, which said that business was prohibited in the building; so the manufacturer had been dispossessed.

In a day or two I located the owner's representative and put in a bid for the "loft," saying that I would use it for residential purposes. I was able to make a deal and rented the entire floor for a thousand dollars a year, payable monthly.

A lot of my radio friends would have laughed to see me one evening, pulling a huge commercial floor scrubber along the Sixth Avenue paving. I had borrowed it from the WOR porters, promising to bring it back at the same hour the next night; I wheeled it along Sixth Avenue from Fortieth

to Forty-sixth Street. It was a herculean job to get it up the two flights of stairs, but this I did, just as I did everything else to make this space clean and comfortable to live in. My handiness with tools and the urge to keep busy made it a pleasure. Between the daily tasks at WOR and afternoon appointments at agencies and stations, with my own hands I scoured down and painted the whole place; when I got off the old rouge and the dirt of years' accumulation, I found that in the rear part of the apartment I had a wonderful hard-rock maple floor, which I bleached and varnished. In place of the sliding doors I put a partition, flanked by large closets. I ripped out old pipes and shelves and wiring, put in a small bathroom, added a refrigerator and stove to the corner alcove, which already housed a sink, and before long I was living in the rear apartment myself and renting out the front half for more than the whole thing cost me.

I was again immersed in comeback days; but this time the process, while slow, was steady and quiet, with little fanfare. The first bit of publicity was seen January 17, 1945, in a little inconspicuous corner on page 26 of *Variety*: "Brokenshire joins web," it said; "Carlin hired his first new talent last week, setting Anita Ellis, vocalist, formerly with the Blue, for a 3-nights weekly spot. Norman Brokenshire will MC the show. Carlin has also set Brokenshire, veteran announcer, for Jane Porterfield's 'Do you need advice?' session, aired across the board at 11:15 a.m."

Amongst all the things I have done, that first Anita Ellis show stands out in my mind as though it were yesterday. Here were real artists—Anita herself, so sure, so confident, so poised; and the musical group, at ease, rehearsed, and ready.

I was filled with inner turmoil, mingled joy and anxiety. This was it! The Porterfield show was nothing, opening and closing announcements; this was real radio; the art lay in building up this wonderful Ellis personality, this girl who sang a song with her heart. I must myself feel and understand her message, my voice must convey the mood, which she could then hold and develop until every listener loved her song as she loved it. Then would come that equally important moment when her song ended. I must say exactly the right

words, so spoken that the listener would hold the picture while I transposed the mood.

Oh, I knew so well what I must do and how it must be done! But in those seconds of stand-by, while waiting I grew tense. It had been so long since I had done fine work. Had Carlin made a mistake? Had I lost the touch? Had wounds of heart and soul made callous the tenderness that enabled me to express the lights and shades of delicately changing moods? Even if I remembered the art, could I do it now? Would they expect too much of me? This was the turmoil and the anxiety—but the joy was there, too. I loved Anita's singing. I was glad to be on the air with her. This was *network* radio; that mike was *live*. Out there were my friends, ready and waiting to welcome me back. The tenseness tightened my throat; I was not free. This *was* it! The light flashed. Phil Carlin, Doug Storer, so many were checking. *How do you do, ladies and gentlemen, how do you do.*

It was Brokenshire all right, but it was Brokenshire *trying too hard!*

Mail! Nice mail, warm, generous, interested mail, told me I had not been forgotten. The American Theatre Wing asked me to be master of ceremonies of the Fashion Parade for the Armed Services. It was to be held in the Grill of the Roosevelt Hotel.

This was the first public-appearance job of any importance that I had done in many a moon in New York. These were the things that counted now.

Another sign that the right people were placing confidence in me came when I was selected by Mutual to do the closed-circuit talks. This is a method of informing the managers of affiliated stations in advance of coming programs. It was a pep talk over the hookup wires to each station, but not on the air—an inside job.

That night the meeting in Forest Hills was pure joy for me. I had been with them long enough to tell my own story. I was the second speaker. I told my story simply and softly. "My name is Norman Brokenshire, and I am an alcoholic. . . ." How wonderful to be able to say that in public. I went on to tell things that I had thought I would always have to keep

inside of me. I was honest, sincere, and lifted up by the silent understanding that was there. There was no shame in my confession, only relief that I was with people to whom I *could* tell the truth. There was no boasting when I told of the new work I was doing—just joy that I had been accepted again. After listening to the speaker that followed me, and after the fellowship that followed the meeting, I went away with great happiness and deep humility—thanking God.

Yes, things had started up again for me, all right. But the comeback trail is a lot longer and harder than anyone who has tried it likes to admit. Humpty-Dumpty found out how easy it is to roll off the shelf, how difficult to put oneself together again. True, I was on the air, I had a showcase. Yet WOR and Mutual had never had great problems with me; it was NBC and CBS that I had to convince before I could really say I was back.

TWENTY-THREE

THE FACT that I had two regular shows, and that they were planning to use me as the announcer for Elsa Maxwell when she started her series, was no guarantee of permanent employment. These shows were contracted as usual for thirteen weeks at a time. Any one of many things could happen; any or all of the shows could fold up almost without warning. So goes radio and indeed show business in general. The stardust can fall on you one week and turn to hailstones the next.

As it turned out, Jane Porterfield did go off the air after her first thirteen weeks. Knowing my need to keep occupied, I took on a great deal of volunteer work; at least twice a week I acted as master of ceremonies at the famous Stage Door Canteen on Forty-third Street; I joined units of the American Red Cross that were entertaining at the various military camps and in hospitals in and around New York City. Once in awhile a pay job would pop up. Occasionally there was a laugh; I acted as master of ceremonies for the annual dinner of the Society of American Magicians at the Barbizon-Plaza Hotel. There I was, backstage, watching the experts work from behind—and I still couldn't find out where the rabbit came from!

I was becoming a solid citizen out on Long Island, too. I think one reason the Suffolk County Medical Society invited me to speak before them was because so often, when the terrible problem of alcoholism presented itself to them, they had

no answer for it. I gave them my version of the things I had learned and practiced through my group, and man-to-man personal questions were fired at me long after the meeting was over. *Doctors* were believing in this group-therapy organization.

As the summer slump started, I was mighty glad to be approached by the War Activities Committee of the Motion Picture Industry, which was doing its part in the sale of war bonds from a reproduction of the Statue of Liberty erected in Times Square. This was a huge affair, four or five stories high, with a platform about ten feet above street level, a powerful public-address system, and, directly beneath, a place to buy bonds.

At first they simply asked me to act as master of ceremonies when I could; shortly, however, they offered me a steady job, at sixty dollars a week. Here was a showcase in which I would not only be heard but seen by literally thousands of people gathered daily about the statue. The managers of the important movie houses along the Great White Way formed the committee, and a staff of eight or ten people manned the statue. Because of my real interest in the work and the growing sale of bonds, soon I was made manager of the entire enterprise, at double the salary.

I had made steady progress in my own state of mind, too. It was great to feel that each week I could unburden my soul to people who understood—take the moldy memories of miserable, unhappy experiences that had been pushed into secret corners of my overburdened mind and bring them out into the open, fling them on the table of common knowledge where, in the light of understanding, they would no longer be able to tear down my hope of rebuilding a life. Perhaps my experience might even help others toward our common goal: *nothing to drink for another twenty-four hours.*

When I was asked to be chief speaker at the anniversary meeting of the Forest Hills group, I knew I had made tremendous strides.

By the end of June all my busy daily schedules had come to an end, statue and all; the summertime lull was on radio. I turned the Forty-sixth Street apartment over to my good

friend Lou Biro and went out again into the quiet of the country. This time I wasn't slinking off to hide; hope was high in my heart. I had something to hang onto, God was in His heaven, all was well with the world. Day by day He was aiding me to stay dry, twenty-four hours at a time, and to look to the future with confidence, to forget the past except as it could be a guide, directing my steps in this new and sunlit direction, in knowing true hope.

Simultaneously something new was happening; I was being patted on the back. Several letters from Mr. Lesser and Mr. Solomon, guiding lights of the Motion Picture War Activities Committee, said these nice things:

"I must say," wrote Mr. Solomon, "that you were most conscientious and willing, creating no end of goodwill, and I am more than thankful."

Said Mr. Lesser: "...you afforded our industry all the dignity we feel it deserves.... If this same committee is privileged to function in future... drives, we hope we may have the pleasure of associating with you...."

For professional reasons I was proud of a letter that reached Doug Storer from Phillips Carlin, who might, at one point, have felt he had been overpersuaded to take me.

I want you to know [Carlin told Doug] how happy we were to find that he is performing like the Brokenshire of old. He has something which none of the modern announcers possess. There is a certain charm, rhythm and grace to his announcing, combined with ease when he is acting as a foil for a second person. I'm now auditioning him for another strip across the board, and I hope when Elsa Maxwell returns to New York she will make use of his services in connection with her program....

As I worked hard at restoring my country home to good shape after years of neglect, I rediscovered the thrill of friendships. Carl Eklund and his wife Frieda, who had been loyal friends from the beginning, must have been relieved to discover that they could come in and sit down in my home with the knowledge that the gruesome troubles from which they had disentangled me so often were no more. Mabel and George Fehring, stalwart friends who, like my wife, felt that

someday I would find myself and who had so many times helped me financially, aided me now to keep my happy outlook through this summer; in the course of our trips here and there around the island for recreation and change, they found that they could actually stop worrying about me and enjoy themselves. And there were inspirational get-togethers with new neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Ross Thompson and their four talented children, who had moved nearby; the whole family was musical, and we often got together to try out new arrangements and just enjoy music for its own sake.

I sometimes think the way we used to set those musical evenings up could be the basis of a happy show. Mr. Thompson, sitting at the piano by the window of my large studio room, playing the accompaniment; one of the children, Carol, perched in a little window opening into the studio, high above the piano; Maureen, in a corner opposite the piano; Doris, leaning over the balcony railing; Ross, Jr., standing beside his father—from all these directions the harmonies would blend in beautiful song.

Business activity was not at a complete standstill. Eunice had been appointed by Mattie Rosenhaus to be one of the associate editors of the *Journal of Living*; oftentimes she tested new foods and new dishes in our kitchen, coming forth with delicious concoctions for meals.

Doug Rothaker had put me into his productions again, on a retaining fee doing research and writing for a new film he was making for the International Nickel Company. Dolph Opfinger, program director of WOR, had taken a cottage out at the lake for the summer, and we were in occasional conference.

Of course, each time I went in to New York on business I made sure to attend a group meeting somewhere in the city or do what I could to help in the alcoholic-rehabilitation work at Knickerbocker Hospital.

On one of my trips back to the lake I bought a German shepherd puppy. I had been waiting for this particular litter for some time. The pup cost seventy-five dollars, which I could ill afford to spend for a dog, and I was a bit nervous

when Eunice met me at the train. Would she think I had gone crazy again? I spirited the carrier into the back seat, keeping up a running chatter to distract her attention. It was pretty late in the day to fool Eunice about much of anything, though; she knew I was hiding something, and pretty soon the puppy whimpered out my secret. Knowing how much I wanted a dog to round out my country-squire picture, she wasn't too hard on me; from that day Artus Von Britzen, "Britz," became a member of the family.

Harry Martinsen, pal of Washington days, was now town supervisor in nearby Smithtown and came often to see us. Florence Kyte, my "Sandpiper Sweetheart" of Atlantic City days, was a well-known voice coach in New York City and often came out to see us, seizing the opportunity to help out on some new musical arrangements for the Thompson family. Georges Baptiste, my neighbor, friend, and pal of the 603 Fifth Avenue days, liked to come out and help me mow the lawn. That exotic personality, Hattie Velleman, was always leaving a gift as she passed; and Kenny Martin, who had left the singing field, married, and become a successful jewelry manufacturer, came with his wife to spend several week ends.

The active summer helped a great deal to heal the wounds of past years, and it set my sights on a happy, sensible future. One of the great decisions came when I decided to build the equivalent of a three-car garage, which would serve also as a shop and storage area. I was so confident now of the future that I did not hesitate to sign a note for the nearly two thousand dollars it would cost to build the addition.

Shortly before the Labor Day holiday I made a number of calls in New York. When I came back to the lake, I dropped in to chat with Mrs. Thompson, asking her, inasmuch as I had no phone, if she would be on the alert; there might be some messages, and I had given her number. I went home, got into old clothes, and started to work on a stairway I was making.

Later that day there was a call. It was Jesse Butcher, whom I hadn't heard from since we talked about the government radio show "We Live Again." He talked to me rather obscurely about some big organization being interested in get-

ting a little more information about me; could I give him some references in New York? I gave Doug Storer, Charlie S——, and a couple of others who knew I had been working seriously to stop my drinking. He wound up by saying, "Broke, I don't think it'll be another six months before you hear from me again," and bade me a pleasant good-by.

As long as I was near the phone, I thought I'd make a routine call to Doug Storer. I told him about hearing from Butcher. "That's fine," he said, "and I have another lead. I'm on my way now to see B. B. D. & O.; they've got a big deal coming up there. I'll tell you more when I see you."

I went back to the stairs, which were nearly done. In the early afternoon Mrs. Thompson came running over again. This time she was out of breath and greatly excited. "They say this is a very important call—come quick!" she cried. It was Jesse Butcher again, and he was a little more open now. It seemed that the United States Steel Corporation was working up their big show, and he had been consulted. They had tried many announcers but were still not satisfied. They had hired Joe Hevesi to write their commercial scripts; at one time he had been with Major Bowes's Amateur Hour, and he had suggested me as the best possible man for the job they wanted done. They had a meeting. A number of the board members wanted to find out more about me, not only to verify my ability as an announcer but to look into my reputation and the stories going around that I had straightened myself out. That was why Butcher had asked me for the references; they were investigating me from all angles. Now they had reached a decision and wanted to see me.

I told Butcher about having called Storer, and what I said. He laughed, "Forget it; Doug and I have already talked together. It's the same show. You've got a date now with the United States Steel Corporation. Be there tomorrow promptly at two thirty."

I slept well that night. Bright and early the next morning, clean, shaved, and shiny, I put on the very best suit I owned. It was a bit worn in strategic places, but pressed and clean. The gay tie was knotted in the collar of a clean white shirt,

and I set out to see Mr. J. Carlisle MacDonald, of the United States Steel Corporation.

As I went into town, years rioted through my mind. Fourteen years ago, fired by CBS—ten years ago, let go by the biggest radio account of the period—for eight years now I had been blackballed by the advertising agencies. For that long I had merely existed. Now and again the local builder, Carl Eklund, had thrown some job my way—paint a bungalow, widen a sagging porch, lay cement blocks. Only when I kept busy could I keep from thinking about the mess I had made of my life. Only hard physical labor exhausted me enough to give me any sleep at night. Now this call!

The air in the reception room was still, too still, the atmosphere of power overwhelming. Seventy-one Broadway, New York City, home of the United States Steel Corporation, one of the greatest organizations in the world!

Like a captive balloon my thoughts surged in great arcs, to and from the past, into a possible future. When I had tramped the streets, hunting for the little jobs I might get to bring me back into radio, how often I had prayed for just one big show, one show to prove to the world that I was still the same Norman Brokenshire that they had once acclaimed.

The balloon gave a swing. Maybe this is it. It swung off on another tangent. Even if they do need an announcer, with my reputation what chance have I? Eight years of bad headlines, eclipse. "Broke is broke!" "Onetime big shot. . . ."

The office door opened. My stomach turned over.

The office was large, distinguished, orderly, bright. A friendly smiling man crossed the room to welcome me, Mr. J. Carlisle MacDonald, assistant to the chairman of the board, a man in charge of all the public relations of a great corporation, a man with many serious responsibilities on his mind.

"Well Mr. Brokenshire," he said, motioning me toward a big leather chair, "I've heard a lot about you." A slight pause, a twinkle in the eye. "Both good and bad," he added. He continued, "As you may have heard, we've contracted with the Theatre Guild to go on the air with a dramatic show. What we need now is an announcer who has the manner to uphold

a standard of dignity in keeping with their productions and our prestige.”

I waited, hardly breathing.

“We have been looking for someone whose personality will lend distinction and authority to our broadcasts, someone—” a pause, his eyes looking deeply into mine— “someone we can rely on.” He swung his chair, facing me squarely now and said, “Ours is a big plan, a five-year plan. We mean to surpass anything that has ever been on the air. There must be no hitch, no letdown. As I said, we know something of your past, your achievements, your mistakes as well.” Offering me a cigarette, he asked with direct simplicity, “Do you feel you can work successfully for us?”

For once in my life I didn’t try to put up a front, or be smart, or pretend anything that wasn’t dead on the level.

His question opened the floodgates. I guess no man ever bared to another his inmost thoughts, hopes, fears, more than I bared mine that Indian summer afternoon. For over an hour no knock came at the door, no telephone rang. I got an honest hearing, a sympathetic judgment. And when the interview was over, I was hired.

As he shook hands with me at the door, Mr. MacDonald said, “By the way, five years without a vacation won’t be too long, will it?” There was a smile in his voice, and there was honesty in mine when I answered. “Believe me, sir, I’ve had enough vacation for a lifetime!” I added, “One thing more. I’m glad you didn’t ask me to promise that I would never take another drink. I’ve made that promise often, too often. I honestly believe that signing a pledge never helped a man like me or proved anything to a man like you. But this I do promise. If I ever take another drink while I’m working for you, I’ll call you and tell you so.”

Although I quietly told my immediate family and close friends about it, I still felt that this was some sort of a dream. It wasn’t until I got a wire from Mr. MacDonald, asking me to be present at the preshow press conference, that I felt it was actually a fact, that soon I’d be on the air.

No one who participated in it will ever forget that first program. The thrill began for me when we went into rehearsal at Radio City. It was great, walking into this giant monument to radio, knowing I was a part of it and representing one of the biggest sponsors yet to buy time. It is human to want to be wanted. Even when I was just standing by, those periods of rehearsal were among the greatest morale builders I ever knew.

The first show went on at the Ritz Theatre one hot and muggy Sunday evening, September 9, 1945. The play was *Wings over Europe*, starring Burgess Meredith in a story written by Robert Nichols and Maurice Brown seventeen years before the actual exploding of the atom bomb on Hiroshima made his prophetic story come true.

Ever since *Oklahoma* and *Carousel*, the very name Theatre Guild had been uttered with a sort of low bow; and, of course, United States Steel Corporation's name was the greatest. Everyone in the cast extended themselves to make this first night a big success. Henry Daniell and Cecil Humphreys, featured players, wore formal clothes; under the tension their linen soon wilted, but their dignity remained unimpaired.

As for me, I got off to a great start. It fell naturally to my lot to do the warm-up speech before the show; as the whole format was new, I had to guess as best I could about timing. I had introduced everyone in the cast and brought them onstage—with the exception of the star!—when I got the signal to take the air. There was Burgess Meredith, whom everyone wanted to see, standing in the wings, and the show was on! But Burgess was a good sport; when things got underway, he slunk in as unobtrusively as he could.

Perhaps Harriet Van Horne's column in the *World Telegram* will give you the best picture of public and professional reaction to my appearance on the U.S. Steel's Theatre Guild on the Air debut:

Something to ponder:

Theatre Guild play stirs thought on Atom's impact on the films. The announcer for the Guild's new series is Norman Brokenshire, long absent from big-time radio. . . . but he still has a fine, easy way of announcing, mercifully

lacking in the phony exuberance we have too much with us these days.

Certainly everyone in the cast and on the staff felt proud that night after the performance, when the Theatre Guild party was held in their impressive mid-Manhattan home. Lawrence Langner, his most charming wife, professionally known as Armina Marshall, and lovely Theresa Helburn were the hosts of the evening, and everyone left feeling that a landmark had been set up that night.

In a very personal sense it was a landmark for me. I went about my daily tasks with renewed confidence. It wasn't very long before I noticed that people greeted me as though I had never been out of radio. Within two weeks of the opening of Theatre Guild on the Air WOR-Mutual signed me up for a program called "Remember," a daily disk-jockey show but with the twist that I used recordings that were very old, many of them classics.

I wrote the scripts that were built around the records. A little novelty was added by finding out what the favorite stars who had made the records were doing at present. The idea worked two ways. If I couldn't find out where the stars were, what they were doing, I asked for information from the listeners, and the chances were that someone knew and would let me know. It gave listeners a feeling of real participation in the program and built up great human interest. The show ran about six months. I had to drop it only because U.S. Steel began taking the Theatre Guild on the Air out on the road.

That first trip, to Chicago, showed most of us a brand-new way of life. The show traveled on a private train, with two diners and a club car; the cast, Theatre Guild officials, advertising agency representatives, musicians, sound engineer and technical crew, publicity and network representatives, together with officials and representatives of United States Steel formed one huge party. Your tagged baggage was taken in charge when you boarded the train. Each member of the party had a private room, and there were people on hand at every turn to see that everything for comfort was provided; porters,

stewards, stenographers, and maids all were tipped in advance; at the Chicago station limousines were waiting, and when we were shown to our sumptuous rooms at the famed Ambassador East, our bags were unpacked, flowers and fruit were there, and a welcoming note from the manager of the hotel.

In my first few months with the show I was to become acquainted with such stars of stage and screen as Walter Huston, Aline McMahon, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, Burl Ives, Shirley Booth, Paulette Goddard, Frederic March, Kathrine Hepburn, Ray Milland, and many others.

When I got back from the Chicago trip, WOR-Mutual had another show ready for me. "Detect-a-Tune" was a musical program, featuring Vincent Lopez and his orchestra, with an audience-participation gimmick, not unlike "Name That Tune," the TV show I am doing as this is being written.

Early the next week, when we took the Theatre Guild on the Air show to Pittsburgh, I was to learn at first hand that my alcoholic friends were national in scope. Pete W——, a radio executive, was leading a meeting during the part of the week when I'd be in town. He wired, asking if I would speak. My wife and I were guests at his home for dinner before I was scheduled as chief speaker at the downtown combined-group meeting. The next night I spoke on the North Side to the Allegheny group. It had been two years since I had had a drink, and for the first time my life was at peace. True, I was still working on the twenty-four-hour system, but as each twenty-four-hour period passed, the thought of drinking, the need of a drink, receded further and further from me; as mental security became greater, my admiration for the founder and the tremendous force for good that he had set in motion grew in proportion.

Drinking had brought me and mine years of unhappiness, finally setting me down at the foot of the ladder. How often had I heard men exclaim disgustedly, "I drink myself, but dammit I don't get drunk, mess everything up; you need to be a man, use your will power." I had tried so many things—going on the wagon, only to fall off, in weeks, even in days. The sugar cure had bolstered my system with dextrose, but that was only part of the problem. The Keeley Institute

repaired my nerves up to a point and restored my appetite for food; they tapered me off drinking, made me superficially well, held out the hope that I could stay well. The Peabody Method had taken away the need for liquor for a longer period, through getting at habit patterns, changing them. But here too something was missing, and certainly the Washington sanitarium left a lot to be desired.

In everything I tried, by myself or with the help of others, efforts were sincere; with me all of them failed. Until I came to this group of alcoholics who worked together on their common problem. Their methods had something the others sadly lacked. Let a doctor define it:

We doctors have realized for a long time that some form of moral psychology was of urgent importance to alcoholics, but its application presented difficulties beyond our conception. What with our ultra modern standards, and our scientific approach to everything, we are perhaps not well equipped to apply the powers of good that lie outside our scientific knowledge.

United States Steel ended the first season by taking two shows to the west coast, one to Hollywood, the other to San Francisco. This was a fourteen-day trip, surpassing anything in the history of radio. I took Eunice along.

In my manager's office and among the agency men there had been some murmurings that I would not be renewed for the second year, on account of the Theatre Guild's desire to make the productions "all theater." In this business we learn to take such things in stride, so as we proceeded to have a wonderful time, meeting old friends, I didn't let the rumors bother me.

Before the first rehearsal we met Brad Browne and his wife again. Back in the early days of CBS Brad was the creator of the "Nit-Wit Hour." His wife Peggy was the selfsame young lady who, as program manager, had booked my "Coral Islanders." They were living now in an attractive little home that had belonged to Mae West.

After rehearsal we ran into Fran Frey and his wife Marion;

Fran was my orchestra leader and straight man on the WOR shows called "Norman Brokenshire and His Orchestra." Now Fran was making musical arrangements for Bing Crosby's pictures and setting the music for the *Ice Capades*. We went with him to Paramount, and I renewed the happy friendship with Bing. I was more than a little surprised that after all the intervening years he remembered me, spying me first on the huge lot and hailing me by name. Later we exchanged greetings with Bob Hope, whom I hadn't seen since he beat me out in an audition for a cosmetic radio show, many, many years before. And, of course, we visited Anita Ellis, and met her mother and brother. Anita decided to give us a real day; she met us with a chauffeured car, and we watched the Red Skelton show on which she was the featured singer. It was nice seeing Red again, for I hadn't shaken his hand since Atlantic City days, when he was clowning with a group at the Steel Pier.

I took Anita to visit Bob Taplinger, who had been in CBS publicity when I was there and now was doing marvelous things in the motion-picture industry. He was frantically engaged at the moment in building a swimming pool on the side of a mountain. Bob arranged with Warner Brothers that before I left Hollywood I should be signed up as an extra, and I worked for a day on an outdoor picture called *Stallion Road*; later when I saw the picture at the Capitol Theatre here in New York, I caught sight of myself, buying a charming girl a coke! But the important part of that day was the visits we had in the tent dressing rooms with Alexis Smith and Zachary Scott, stars of the picture.

Eunice seized the opportunity to interview Alexis on the subject of favorite foods; it turned out that both Alexis and her mother were devotees of the *Journal of Living* and the food advice of our friend Victor H. Lindlahr.

After a hurried visit to San Diego and La Jolla we flew to San Francisco to do the show in the Opera House, historically interesting now because it was the place where the United Nations was organized.

I had been too busy and interested in everything I was doing to worry about it, but sometime in the course of a last-

minute rehearsal Mr. MacDonald met me in the lobby, holding me by the arm long enough to say, "Broke, I thought you'd like to know that it's been decided; you'll be with us for next season."

Theatre Guild on the Air went off the air in June but continued to broadcast a summer dramatic series called "The Mystery Theatre Series."

It was July 1 of that year 1946 that the famous "Glamour Manor" came east for the summer, and I was hired to do the Crisco commercials, as "Chef Quigley," for Proctor & Gamble. We were three old-timers carrying on in this show: Ed East, one of the original Sisters of the Skillet; Eddie Dunn, old-time master of ceremonies and radio announcer; and I. It was a five-times-a-week daytime show, a happy series, which helped to fill in the time and build up the income.

NBC took notice that I was around and offered me a place on a sustaining program they were trying out, the part of Professor Butterfield on the Johnny Morgan show. Kenneth MacGregor was the producer. It was a good try but lasted only a few weeks.

The second season of Theatre Guild on the Air began; and early in 1947 I started another outside job that was a little different from the rest. A motion-picture producer, Don Parrish, was making a series of documentary films in certain southern towns. While he was in New York, we arranged that they would take the pictures, then send me the film and covering script; I would time it and do the recording in New York. With this they could complete the make-up, saving a great deal of time and expense. It was an interesting piece of work, very profitable, and lasted through the year.

While I was on the west-coast trip, I had put my dog Britz in the hands of a famous trainer, Bill Holtzman, whose kennels were on Queens Boulevard, in New York. He had trained most of the dogs for the Army Canine Corps. Now I was able to help him in forming the Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind, called Guiding Eyes. I was elected to the board of directors, and put several shows on the air, helping to raise funds for training dogs, and blind people to use dogs, and getting them together. The foundation is a nonprofit organiza-

tion, devoted to helping the blind meet the challenges of readjustment.

Out-of-town trips with the Theatre Guild on the Air shows became more frequent. We visited Washington, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Chicago. In the course of one of these trips, it came to me how marvelous it was to be able to take a train—especially this wonderful private-car train, bountifully supplied with liquor—yet never once worry about wanting to take a drink. Once it had been that boarding a train meant one thing—running away from myself. Now all that was changed.

Back in New York I got a message to call an agency man, Larry Bruff, at the earliest possible moment. We got together. It was very satisfying to learn that they wanted me to make one-minute spot announcements advertising Fatima cigarettes. The happiness came not so much from the added work as from the fact that Fatimas were made by Liggett & Myers, and for a long time I had wanted more than anything to restore myself to the good graces of the great Chesterfield organization that I had let down so badly.

When the commitment was set, I wrote Mr. Benjamin Few that it was as though they had sent me a message, "Come home, all is forgiven." And that proved to be only the beginning.

Midway in the second season of Theatre Guild on the Air I made up a party of four one night to go to the Copacabana; Ruth Etting had returned to New York and was singing at the club. It was wonderful to watch her work again, still more wonderful to meet her later in her dressing room and catch up on her news; by this time she was separated from Gimpy and married to her pianist-director, with whom she had fallen deeply in love. Later they were to get a year's contract with WHN, a local New York station; every evening they put on an hour musicale, with her husband to do the arranging and lead the orchestra, and Ruth to sing.

Chesterfield seemed to be "in the air"; within two weeks of meeting Ruth again, Liggett & Myers asked me to make the one-minute spots for Chesterfield cigarettes.

Once more my voice was being heard all over the dial, not

only because of the recordings for Fatima and Chesterfield, but also because NBC had engaged me on a thirteen-week contract to announce Elsie Stapleton in a morning series of budget shows.

But the really big pleasant surprise came when Chesterfield decided to give listeners of the Perry Como show a little nostalgic fling, by introducing Ruth Etting and me into one of the programs. A special format was devised for the occasion; Ruth and I did bits from the original version of the Chesterfield show, so popular fifteen years before, with Perry and his orchestra following with the modern version.

A month or so later Ben Grauer, announcer of the Como show, was sent by NBC to South America to report the eclipse of the sun to be observed only in that sector of the globe. He would be gone approximately two weeks, and I was engaged to fill in on the Como show for him. This was really like old times!

In the middle of the second week, as I was waiting in the audience section of the studio to take my turn at rehearsal, one of the studio pages came to me and said, "Mr. Tony Provost would like to see you as soon as you are free." This was music in the right key! Mr. Provost was WNBC program manager.

As soon as rehearsal was over, I hustled down to the fourth floor. Immediately I was ushered into the same office where I had called fruitlessly so many times when I needed a job, just any little job.

I was introduced to Jim Gaines, station manager. He said, "You know, it's a funny thing, Brokenshire; for a month I've been wondering what to do with a time segment I have open, twelve thirty to one, and you've been around here all the time! Why don't you make a recording of what you'd like to do on a show of your own every day, and we'll see if we can sell it to the powers that be." This was the most exciting prospect that had come to me since the call from United States Steel. A possibility of having a show of my own again!

Immediately I looked around for some help. I thought of Lewis Reid, who had been so fine to me in earlier days and had himself done a lot of writing. Between us we whipped up

a suggested show, using records, which I called "Brokenshire Broadcasting." A happy-go-lucky, folksy sort of show, allowing me just to chat with the listeners and enjoy the music as much as they.

The audition record was played before a group of executives and salesmen. "You bet we can sell that!" they cried, to a man. Doug Storer, my manager now, fixed the contract. When it was signed, June 23, 1947, was set as the opening date for the program, which I would do five times weekly.

Two things happened now that were really firsts. A telephone call came from Mr. MacDonald's office. Inasmuch as they weren't going on the air this summer, but since it was through no fault of mine, would I consider accepting half pay throughout the summer months?

The second was Tony Provost, saying, "You'll have to have an office, Broke; suppose you take room six-sixty, on the sixth floor." To the reader this may seem a little thing. It carried me back to the time when I was living at 603 Fifth Avenue, watching Radio City building, and saying wistfully one day as I looked at the construction, "Someday I'm going to have an office in that building." It wasn't only that the dream had come true. There was a curiously exciting omen for me in the fact that the number of my office, 660, was also the wave length of NBC, which it was psychologically so important to me to be on.

With so many things suddenly moving into high gear I had to close the house at the lake. Eunice moved into the city; through Dorothy, our neighbor who had first invited us out to the island and been very close to us on Browns Road ever since, we subleased a furnished apartment.

Setting up my own office to do my own show was an experience, a first, too, for I had never formed an organization like this. Eunice came with me into the office, to act as secretary until we got things underway. I hired Lew Reid on a regular salary to write for me, and a producer named Clay Daniels was engaged to help me in choosing the records.

The fact that I was being heard so much on the air now brought a stream of new accounts. I was asked to do commercial spots for a product called Breeze, and a special type

of recording for Van Camp's Beans, a recording that would be played in retail stores while housewives did their shopping, a combination of music and buying advice.

But one of the most rewarding outside activities developed when Fordham University asked me to teach radio writing, announcing, and microphone technique to their summer classes. So from July 7 to August 15, from 10:00 to 11:00 A.M., I was a faculty member at Fordham.

The fraternal Order of Eagles was buying a show called "Fraternally Yours," which I was recording two or three times a week; as a result of the success of this type of show, the makers of Polident had me create a series called "Neighboring with Norman." All in all I was tremendously busy, and it was plain that I needed more help. During the previous season Theatre Guild on the Air rehearsals had been in the Vanderbilt Theatre, on Forty-ninth Street. Across the street was a small restaurant where we used to go to get coffee in rehearsal breaks. I remember noticing a little waitress there, for the reason that, whenever she got a tip, she changed it into nickels that she put in the jukebox. When I commented on it, she said, "I just love records." This incident had stuck in my mind, and I remembered it now while wondering whom I could get to help with choosing records and the details of preparing, listing, getting clearance—all the hundred and one things that have to be done for a daily show.

I kept thinking of this girl, because I knew if I could get a nonprofessional, one who just loved music for its own beauty, someone with a fresh outlook, I would be able continuously to come close to presenting records that would appeal to the listening audience. It has always been a theory of mine that no one person should choose all the records for a show; I myself have very set likes and dislikes; I needed someone who could modify and broaden the scope of choice.

So I went to the restaurant; once more I watched the funny little waitress put her funny little nickels in the recording machine.

When she was free, I asked her if she had a day off. Yes, as a matter of fact, her day off was tomorrow. I arranged to have her meet me in my office at ten o'clock in the morning.

When she arrived, she was in pigtails and blue jeans, looking very young indeed for all her twenty-three years. I took her to the NBC record room, gave her paper and some freshly sharpened pencils, and said, "Here are thousands of records, and there's a player; supposing you just have yourself a time now, pick out the records you would choose if you had to make up three air shows, eight records to a show. Here's the catalogue, here are the files; try to balance the music nicely, let me see what you can do." She looked stunned but nodded politely, like a good child.

I went back to my office and promptly forgot the record room and the task I had set for her there. When I next thought of her it was after five o'clock. I hurried there, wondering if she would still be among those present.

She was—and in tears! She had managed to make up one program. But then other people had come in to make up programs, and she had just sat in dumb misery, listening and sure she would never be able to do the job right. Such excitement, so many people, so much hubbub—she had never seen anything like it before.

Nevertheless, this same little Massachusetts girl was the first person I hired for my regular staff; for over six years she was with me. She picked over ten thousand recordings for me, with never a complaint from executives, from listening audiences, or from myself.

One of my greatest assets, Virginia Laffey not only took full charge of the music, but as time went on she handled hundreds of visitors, fans, promoters, and business associates, in such a way as to conserve my time and free me for multitudinous activities. She was able to handle mail with only a penciled word or two to go by, and what was even more important, she had a way of keeping everyone in the office smiling and happy. I owe a lot to Virginia.

When my responsibilities grew, I found a remarkable girl in research and writing in Helen Phillips. Still later I was able to utilize the intriguing originality of my erstwhile Sandpiper mate, Florence Kyte. Others who aided me in those busy, creative days were Henry Holt, Barbara Hodgekiss, Lee Gilmore, Dale Wimbrow, and Henry Burbig.

TWENTY-FOUR

WITH THE second season of Theatre Guild on the Air well underway my self-confidence knew no bounds.

It will be remembered that in that year of 1947 automobiles were rather hard to get; orders ran far behind deliveries. I turned in my old Terraplane for a secondhand Buick convertible and placed orders for a DeSoto and an Oldsmobile, figuring that the first dealer who would give me delivery would make the sale.

Word does get around as to success as well as ill fortune, especially if a person is in radio. Two events that fall illustrated this.

Because of my reputation and way of life, for years insurance companies had refused me either life insurance or insurance on an automobile. Suddenly I learned that an insurance agent had reported my change of habits to his company, and after two very thorough examinations I was enabled to take out two substantial policies. Next I was approached to buy a brownstone house on West Eighty-fourth Street, in Manhattan.

Dottie Wimbrow, wife of Dale Wimbrow of old WJZ days, was visiting in our home. She told us good news of Dale's building a weekly newspaper at Vero Beach in Florida. Then she remarked, directly to me, straight-faced, "I understand you're going to buy some real estate in New York City."

While I was waiting for the punch line, Eunice explained.

She and Dottie had lunched with Victor H. Lindlahr, Eunice's boss at the *Journal of Living*. He'd explained that he was going to make his headquarters in Florida in the future, adding that he'd rather sell his house to us at a loss than to anyone else at a profit.

The girls expected me to pass the opportunity by, but I fooled them. "The idea interests me," I said; "when can I see the house?"

That night we had dinner with Vic and his mother at the house on Eighty-fourth Street. The house appealed to me, and it was arranged that Vic would come out to the lake the next week end, to talk it over.

By the time he got there I had taken delivery on the DeSoto. Over a good meal, with some happy joking, we worked out a contract-sale for the house, in which the down payment was my secondhand Buick, and monthly payments of as much as I could afford, until the remainder of five thousand dollars should be paid, at which time the papers would be turned over to me.

Psychologically as well as materially this was a big step forward, to be able to move from our cramped apartment to a four-story private dwelling, completely furnished and ready to live in. In fact, when we arrived to take possession, dinner was on the table, for Vic's cook-housekeeper was part of the deal.

Financial plunging when it took just about all I had always turned out pretty well for me. Within a month, at a party given by Bob Smith, who ran the early-morning show on WNBC, as we were enjoying the sociability of a get-together with the Big Brass, I was asked how I would like a morning show.

"O.K.," I laughed, "only not too early!"

Jim Gaines laughed too, saying, "You're on—from nine thirty to ten, across the board, starting next Monday." It seemed to me that this was the greatest thrill yet, because according to the contract drawn by Doug Storer, I would be on WNBC an even dozen times each week; compared with years I could remember only too well, my salary now would be

astronomical. Thus was my "Melody Time" show launched, and it was to become an immediate success.

To add to the satisfactions of those days I was asked to be a guest on the famous Fred Waring show. Also NBC inaugurated its now well-known "Salutes" to outlying New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut towns, every couple of weeks sending featured NBC artists out to broadcast from the honor towns; Tex and Jinx, Mary Margaret McBride, Bob Smith, and I were regulars; other would come and go.

For me this activity and success took second place when I was asked to speak before the national annual banquet of our organization of alcoholics, held that October at the Commodore Hotel. Fifteen hundred members from all over the country gathered to hear from the founder and the group of selected speakers. This was a great honor.

The Theatre Guild was going stronger than ever; unquestionably it had won first place among dramatic shows on the air. In November it made another long trip, to Birmingham, Alabama.

Shortly after returning from that trip, I was explaining to Doug Storer one day how I was building a swimming pool out at the lake and landscaping the grounds. He said if I would come with him to Bob Ripley's party, he'd come to the lake with me. I accepted, and said I would call for him, drive him there and home again; I wanted to show off the new Oldsmobile, delivered to me the day before. On the way Doug poked a lot of fun at me because of the multitude of buttons by which the car was operated. "Look out you don't push the wrong button so the whole thing'll blow up!" he cautioned me. But just the same I kept it—the DeSoto for Eunice, the Olds for me.

While fan mail is a pretty good barometer of the health of a radio program, it does seem a trifle boastful to be running to your boss all the time to show him the letters, so I contented myself with the official count that issued from the mail room, which constituted valid proof of the success of the first program I originated, "Take It Easy Time." But as there was something else I wanted my superiors to know, instead of

taking the mail to them, I brought them to the mail. I invited the station and program managers to my home on Eighty-fourth Street for dinner, and after dinner I let them in on some of the things that were going on as a result of my program; at times they were difficult even for me to believe.

The letters they read suggested many things. For example, one Frank Westphal, composer of a song titled "When you come to the end of the day," who had been in bed since World War I with some mysterious disease, wrote saying that thanks to my broadcasts, after twenty years of bedridden illness, he had been able to get up on his feet, move to Connecticut, and begin writing again. People with alcoholic problems, of their own or in their families, had been helped by the broadcasts in straightening themselves out. Marital problems had been resolved successfully without resorting to divorce or separation. A woman who suffered cruelly from arthritis was now able to paint. Many folks who formerly had sat in idleness were working at hobbies that I had described on the air. Finding encouragement through me, people of fifty or sixty had returned to constructive occupations. First-aid units and other civic organizations had stepped up in size and service. A hundred or so new endeavors credited my show with new life and development.

The only way I could explain these eye openers was that perhaps since I personally had experienced so much misfortune, others who had troubles could feel my sympathy and understanding on the air, reading between the lines and taking encouragement. They seemed happy to know that their station was doing so much and offered every help to carry on and enlarge the work. NBC lost a great team when Jim Gaines and Tom McFadden individually went on to greater things.

When the third season of Theatre Guild came to an end and radio settled into the summer doldrums, I moved my "Melody Time" show to an interesting spot on Fifth Avenue called "The Dream House." This was a wonderfully constructed small suburban home, complete in all details, erected in the stream of Fifth Avenue traffic, on the corner of East Forty-eighth Street to serve as the headquarters for a prize

contest for the benefit of the New York Heart Fund. The house itself was the prize and was won by someone who purchased a ticket to go through on the inspection tour and wrote the best slogan.

When this project was concluded, I moved my show to the Johnny Victor Theatre, a miniature theater built in the RCA Exhibition Hall, across the way from the NBC studios. "Melody Time" now had a happy nickname and was known as the "Welcome, Neighbor" program; the new location added color and interest to the broadcasts, and from time to time now I had as guests well-known speakers on subjects of helpfulness and occasionally some visitor selected from the audience.

Came June, 1948, and I decided to have a triple celebration: of my birthday, Eunice's birthday, and the anniversary of my original show. So I invited all the NBC executives to a barbecue and clambake at the lake house. No sooner had I issued the invitations than people began calling up to know if they could bring their wives, their secretaries and sweethearts.

The result was one of the grandest, happiest parties anyone ever was privileged to give. We christened my swimming pool. The flower gardens were at the peak of their beauty, lawns were lush, the water sparkled in the blue-green circular forty-five-foot pool against the background of the fifteen-foot sycamore hedge, dominated by a gigantic pine that I had imported to mark that corner of my property. Back of a great bower of purple and white lilacs the barbecue pit sent forth enticing aromas, because I had snared Long Island's best barbecue and clambake chef and his wife to prepare the clams, chicken, lobster, and corn. Between the pool and the barbecue a great slate-covered table had been turned into a bar with choice liquors and beer on tap. When the number of invited guests had swelled from thirty-five to seventy-nine, the sun was shining brightly, the birds were singing, and all, I thought happily, was very well indeed with the world. Browns Road looked like a side street leading to Broadway, and behind the high rustic fence my lush acre resounded with the talk and laughter of business executives at play. The

Thompson children harmonized around the pool, and everywhere the click of amateurs' motion-picture cameras could be heard.

Although things in radio were quieter during the summer, there wasn't too much time to spend in the country, because my two daytime shows carried on. But such are the vagaries of this wonderful profession that I can recall one week end when I went out to the lake, so glad of freedom from stop watches and a little fresh air, and twenty minutes after I got out of the car the telephone rang and someone asked if I would come in immediately to make a twenty-second recording for Good Luck Margarine. The temptation, of course, was to say I wouldn't be available till Monday. But nowadays nothing was more grateful to me than to be wanted, so I turned the car around and drove back to New York to do the recording, which turned out to be an audition. It shortened my week end considerably, but then again it resulted in a very lucrative contract, including both radio and television in the ensuing months and years.

Shortly after Theatre Guild on the Air began its fourth season, I was to revisit another scene of early struggles, Washington. Silver Springs, Maryland, was dedicating some civic improvements in the form of a new underpass, railroad station, and high-school stadium, making a gala occasion of it. I was asked to be master of ceremonies, and they welcomed me with honors as the top in my line of business.

In November, CBS asked me to join with Lowell Thomas in broadcasting running election returns from what was known as "The Bubble," a mobile unit with a plastic top, housed on a truck in which we roamed the city, reporting scenes and election returns. This was my first official return to CBS air, and it led to another contract that established me permanently there, on the Bromo Seltzer "Inner Sanctum" show. Even when this show went to Hollywood and "Inner Sanctum" was replaced by "Hollywood Playhouse," I was retained to do the commercials. At long last I was again giving the CBS call letters.

By the end of the fourth season of Theatre Guild on the Air I was doing important broadcasts every week from each

of the four major networks, NBC, CBS, ABC, and Mutual. Behind me was a long and tortuous road, ahead the highway stretched fair and wide. I felt justified in devising a special broadcast on my "Take It Easy" hour to mark my own twenty-fifth anniversary on the air.

We made it something of a family affair. My two secretaries pre-empted the announcing tasks. They and my engineer, Jack Petry, told (tongue in cheek) what it was like to work for Brokenshire. Among those who dropped in or sent nice words were station manager Tom McFadden, network president Niles Trammel, Theatre Guild radio director Homer Fickett, Mary Margaret McBride, U.S. Steel officials Irving S. Olds and J. Carlisle MacDonald, my old announcer-pal Milton J. Cross; the whole thing was nicely set off by a bit of philosophy and friendly comment from Bruce Barton, of famed Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn.

The mail that came in response to this anniversary broadcast filled seven bushel baskets.

Once more I felt established in my business. Under a picture of me at a microphone an issue of *Time* Magazine said, "Norman Brokenshire, keep on what you're doin'," (that expression was part of the salutation on my "Take It Easy" program) and described in a two-column story how Brokenshire's latest comeback to radio seemed to be sticking. It had begun in 1945, with the announcing chore of Theatre Guild on the Air; then two years later NBC had signed him up. Easy microphone manner and new dependability made him a solid hit with both sponsor and audience. Soon he picked up "Melody Time"; last week "Inner Sanctum" on CBS was added. An intense and sympathetic bond has grown up between Brokenshire and his audience. All in all Brokenshire earns about \$100,000 a year, has a house in Manhattan, country place on Long Island, is buying all the insurance and annuities he can get hold of.

We live at such speed that we seldom stop to analyze by what steps one becomes established as a solid citizen. One day I was happy and surprised while I was dictating in my office to a secretary, when the telephone rang and a woman representative of the New York City Credit Bureau said, out

of a clear sky, "Don't you think, Mr. Brokenshire, in view of your new activity that you should have a rerating of your credit?"

Naturally I said I'd be happy to.

"You won't mind," she continued, "if we circulate our members and see if there are any outstanding debts?"

"Not at all. I've done my best to clear everything up. I'd be glad to know if I missed any."

A week or ten days later I got another call. "We find only one debt," said the lady; "the Borden Company has a charge standing against you for sixty-four dollars; it's some fifteen years old." I assured her I would put a check in the mail immediately. Thus I found that I had established a brand-new credit status. All manner of stores speedily sent me charge-account tags—a snowstorm that made Eunice even happier than it made me.

By the time the Theatre Guild's fifth season opened, I had wiped out the evils of my two voluntary bankruptcies and felt secure in having worked my way back into the respect of all my sponsors, especially Liggett & Myers. I had recaptured my large listener audiences, multiplying them by the fact of having leading shows on all four networks.

It was personally thrilling to contemplate that through the years I had acquired listeners in three generations. Capping it all was the knowledge that Yom Kippur, 1949, would mark for me five contented, happy years of sobriety.

The requests to speak at various outlying alcoholic meetings were numerous, and I accepted as many as I could. Too the twelfth-step work was going on all the time. One of Miss Laffey's duties was to keep a record of those who came to me for help, or those to whom I was sent by other members, and the progress they were making. When it seemed wise, I would put to work "pigeons" who were under my care. At one time and another alcoholics under my wing were helping with reconstruction work on my house in town and in my office at NBC; still another, who needed to get away from the city, I took out to the lake. There was always work to be done there. One man brought his wife and lived with us until we could get him a job. Another urgent call brought

me to the son of a man for whom I had once worked, and whom I loved very much. I'll never forget the joy in his wife's eyes when we were able to persuade him to take the five-day dry-up period in Knickerbocker Hospital. Artists came to me with whom I had worked years ago. Before I left that office, in room 660, there were over 150 names in my special book. This twelfth-step work is not just something self-sacrificing that you do; it is of utmost importance in one's own rebirth. Naturally, too, it is deeply gratifying to be able to help bring human beings out of the slough of despond into the sunlight of new activity; the friends you make in doing this work are friends for your lifetime.

A wire from Mr. MacDonald, of U.S. Steel, to all concerned invited us to another giant press gathering at the Waldorf, to celebrate the formal opening of the fifth season. As Theatre Guild on the Air was now the unquestioned prestige show of them all, this was the greatest gathering of theatrical, motion-picture, and radio stars the world of entertainment had ever seen.

It was at this press conference that for the first time I made the acquaintance of the reporter who, back in 1936, started considerable furor by writing that "Broke is broke" item on the front page of the *New York World Telegram*. As we shook hands, there was an expression of admiring wonderment on his face. He asked me one question: "Do you still have that place at the lake on Long Island?" I was happy to be able to tell him that, not only did I have it, but it had been remodeled, enlarged, and finished, until now it was a year-round house, the pride and joy of the Brokenshire family.

There came an interval when every night the giant electric sign atop Palisades Park across the Hudson River was spelling out my name, with the message that Norman Brokenshire Day was coming, at the park. A day, with my name tied to it, when it seemed such a short time ago, really, that I was walking the streets, miserably reading the minds of acquaintances who weren't quite sure whether to run the risk of speaking to me.

Around Labor Day of that year I thought I deserved a

little vacation, so I arranged to record enough broadcasts ahead so I could go away for approximately ten days.

The apprehension had always been at the back of my mind that I might have done myself irreparable damage with my drinking. So I resolved to take the first two days of my vacation to go into Doctors' Hospital in New York and have a complete examination. The report handed me by Dr. Handler, NBC's as well as my own doctor, told me in medical terms that I was in perfect shape, possessed of the constitution of a high-school boy. This was both gratifying and an encouragement. However, one other thing was in my mind that I wanted cleared up, a hurdle I wanted to get over.

Always in reflective moments I was bothered by that outrageous trip I had made to Bermuda. And so, on the spur of the moment, I booked a seat on a plane for Bermuda, planning to spend a few days there and take the boat back to New York.

Explaining to family and friends that it was a needed rest and change, I made the trip alone. Down deep in my heart I needed to prove to myself that I could take such a trip and enjoy it—without drinking or wanting to drink.

The boat trip back was particularly eventful because one day I was invited to the captain's quarters; I was not surprised when he turned out to be the same one who had had such an annoying experience with me on my previous trip.

Wine was served in his cabin; the captain and I grinned at each other as we drank—Vichy water, straight.

The trip was serene and untroubled. Not once was I even vaguely tempted to take a drink. I landed in New York having proved to my own needed satisfaction that the mind as well as the body had responded to the treatment of basic Christianity that is the essence of our organization. When I got into the throes of work again, it was with greater spirit than ever.

And so it is that through the happy sober years I have tried very hard to undo every wrong of which I was guilty. I have retraced many a step and come away lighter of spirit, more sure that I have at last found the right path to follow.

Theatre Guild on the Air was to go eight full years, instead

of the five originally planned, before it went off radio, and we took with us every award it is possible for a radio show to win.

As I finish writing this, my longest and most serious script, I am no longer a disk jockey. I was able to turn my lifelong hobby of mechanics into a very successful television show called the "Better Home Show" and am now engaged in adapting the format for a film series already sponsored by Stanley Tools, Black & Decker, DuPont, and others who feel as I do that TV is the perfect medium to use in product demonstration.

With the peace and contentment that has at last come to me, I no longer feel it necessary to fill every spare minute frantically to avoid the temptation to drink. But no matter how "retired" I may become, there are sponsors like Mattie Rosenhaus who have been so good to me that I will always be grateful. For such as those I will do my best as long as they want me.

As I lean back a little and begin to write more slowly, because I have almost come to the end of a work that has taken the better part of two years, I realize anew that I have more true friends than the average man, just as I have more deep memories good and bad. I can even face the bad with equanimity, for I'm sure that, like many others, I had to go through the fire of experience to remove the slag of gross desires and to purify my hopes and ambitions so that they would lead me to the path lighted by spirit and truth. It is my earnest prayer that some good will come of my story—that it may serve as a signpost in directing any who may be "alcohol-prone" into wiser, earlier judgment in avoiding the deep sorrows I and mine have known.

