

NONE

OF YOUR

BUSINESS

**OR
MY LIFE
WITH**

J. WALTER THOMPSON

(Confessions of a Renegade Radio Writer)

CARROLL BY CARROLL

NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS

Or My Life with J. Walter Thompson
(Confessions of a Renegade Radio Writer)

By Carroll Carroll

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**To
Bob who introduced me to Norma**

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Preface

The people—the advertising people—during the eighteen years or so of radio’s rise and decline were like children turned loose in a candy store. Not only had they found a new way of advertising that paid off like a nympho in a frat house, they found it was fun. So industrial management went into show biz. Radio became the plaything of corporation presidents, vice-presidents, advertising managers, their friends and families.

In 1932, the wife of the advertising manager of the General Cigar Company selected the numbers to be played on the radio each week by Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians with a view to selling Robert Burns Panatelas.

Frederic Wakeman popularized the term “huckster” to describe the wheeler-dealers and opportunists who shuttled between Madison Avenue and Hollywood Boulevard in obedience to vaudeville’s rule: “Keep moving and they can’t hit you.”

The real gut power of radio surfaced around 1931 when advertisers began to abandon such obvious broadcast nomenclature as the A&P Gypsies, Paul Oliver and Olive Palmer in the Palmolive Hour, the Gold Dust Twins, the Happiness Boys (later the Interwoven Pair—a sock act), the Clicquot Club Eskimos, and, with the use of star talent, gave the *coup de grâce* to the two-a-day, the three-a-day, and the five-a-day, each already mortally wounded by the talkies.

John U. Reber, J. Walter Thompson’s vice-president in charge of radio, was the medium’s first and probably greatest entrepreneur. It was Reber who pioneered the movement to bring marquee strength to broadcasting.

In my last radio column for the metropolitan section of the *New York Sunday World*, unpublished because the rag folded, I wondered how Chase & Sanborn could peddle enough coffee

to afford the five grand it was rumored Maurice Chevalier received for showing up Sundays and doing a sixty-minute broadcast. By the time FDR told us, his friends—and we *were* his friends—that all we had to fear was fear itself, radio was a real force in the land.

Because everybody was ad-libbing his way through the airwaves, the Thompson Company figured the only way to get radio shows that would work as advertising was to have them conceived, written, and produced by an advertising agency. So it built its own radio department that wrote and produced shows, including the commercials, for all its clients, right from an opening like “Heigh-ho, everybody, this is Rudy Vallee” through to such closings as Eddie Cantor singing, “I love to spend this hour with you/As friend to friend I’m sorry it’s through. . . .”

Robert T. Colwell was Reber’s exec in direct command of the troops, which included such radio pioneers as H. Calvin Kuhl, Abbott K. Spencer, George Faulkner, Sam Moore, Herschel Williams, Herb Polesie, Gordon Thompson, Tony Stanford, Frank Woodruff, George Wells, Sanford Barnett, Edmund C. Rice, Philip Mygatt, Ed Helwick, Dick Mack, Robert Brewster, Ezra MacIntosh, John Christ, Earl Ebi, Robert A. Simon, and Ed Gardner before he was “Archy, the manager, speaking.”

We worked harder and longer and drew more satisfaction from what we did (although we really didn’t realize it at the time) than it is possible to believe. There was an *esprit de corps* that would have made the marines look like a band of mutinous guerrillas. And week after week we had five or six of our shows in radio’s top ten.

The following pages will try to give you some of the color and laughs and problems we had dealing with such show biz greats as Bing Crosby, Rudy Vallee, Paul Whiteman, Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, Burns and Allen, Bob Burns, Frank Fay, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, Bert Lahr, W. C. Fields, Gene Autry, Bob Hope, Ed (“Archy”) Gardner, George Murphy, Guy Lombardo, Charles Laughton, Lou Holtz, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Bob Crosby, Nils T. Granlund, Joe (“wanna buy a duck?”) Penner, John and Lionel Barrymore, Robert L. Ripley, and the unforgettable George Olsen and Ethel Shutta.

If you run into any names that are strange to you, you'll find the answers in my next book.

Because it isn't a history book there is a minimum of dates, if any, in this mnemonic exercise.

Research on cake mixes brought out the fact that some housewives resented and would not use them because they took all the creativity out of baking. To beat this, Betty Crocker left out the eggs, which could easily have been included, and directed the ladies to "add your own good eggs."

In order to feel a little creative, not merely reportorial, and perhaps to give this pastry a little added flavor, I may have occasionally, as any storyteller will, "added my own good eggs," safe in the knowledge that one man's egg is another man's yock.

I would also like to add that memory is a sometime thing and mine is sometimes nowhere.

There is always a "goddamned eyewitness" hanging around to correct the details, and louse up the point, of any story you may be telling.

To all you eyewitnesses, if I left out a name it was accidental. Every name is a sale so I tried to squeeze in every one I could think of; spent two weeks on Pope Pius before I had to admit to myself that we'd never worked together. (It is reputed to be Robert Trout whom CBS honored by sending him to Rome to announce the Pontiff's first world broadcast and who made himself immortal by saying, "His Holiness Pie Popus!")

If I spelled your name incorrectly it was only because "I have no respect for a man who can spell a word only one way." And I have no respect for a man who doesn't know who said that for the first time.

To repeat, I purposely tried to avoid all dates. Some crept in. If these are not right on the button, please be kind. This is a rather loose memoir of some very unbuttoned events.

For any slights you may think I slipped you or any of your friends, I'm sorry.

I'm sorry, too, that this is all I can remember. If I had the talent to make up such stuff I most certainly would have "remembered" more.

C. C.

Prologue: Bottoms up

It was about six thirty of a bleak autumn evening in Asbury Park, New Jersey. A hard, cold rain was falling. The boardwalk was deserted.

George Burns and Gracie Allen had just finished a poorly attended supper show. We were going back to the hotel for dinner. As Nat, Googie, and I left the stage door, a handful of soggy autograph seekers were shivering in the rain. Nat held an umbrella over Googie as she signed a couple of books. Nobody bothered with him.

Finally the crowd melted away and there was no one left but a lady carrying a baby in her arms. She had no book, not even one of those foolish little scraps of paper on which autograph seekers ask celebrities to make their marks. But she asked for an autograph.

Gracie smiled wearily and said, "Where shall I sign?"

"Here," the lady said, and offered the baby, ass up.

I handed Googie a pen and she scribbled her name as best she could on the doubly damp diaper. Without even a word of thanks, the woman faded away and we climbed into a waiting limousine and went to dinner.

"That poor baby," said Gracie.

"Don't worry about the kid," said George, "worry about that dame she's with."

NONE OF
YOUR
BUSINESS

Taking it from the top

I was picking up a part-time dollar as a PR man (then called press agent) for Tobis-Klangfilm Syndikat AG. The hours were long and the pay was short. But I hung in there for two reasons: (1) It was better than starving; (2) just saying the name of the company I worked for got a laugh.

The *New York Sunday World* had folded and with it my silly news stories and regular radio column in the Metropolitan Section. The depression, and something called radio, had racked up the humor mags that once provided me with a nice living. So the Tobis job was better than going on welfare because at that time there wasn't any.

One day I got a call from my agent, Nannine Joseph, inviting me to a cocktail party to meet two men from the J. Walter Thompson Company's radio department. She said it might mean some free-lance work. Clearly it meant a few free drinks. You can't beat a double benefit like that.

No sooner had I arrived than I was introduced to the two men from Thompson and, in the way of cocktail party intros, I learned that my name was Carroll (I knew my last name) and each of the guys was Bob. (I never heard *their* last names.)

Also present was a second-string motion picture critic for a third-string newspaper (names omitted to protect the guilty), who was not to be ignored because who else (at that time) would write anything at all about the kind of art movie I was plugging? I knew if I was to get any space anywhere on my fourth-rate flick, a German version of *The Brothers Karamazov*, I'd better concentrate on her. So without even saying good-bye to the two Bobs from JWT, the gal and I split for dinner.

It was one of my smarter investments. When I called her the next afternoon to find out what kind of space I was getting

and how many photos she needed, her office told me she'd resigned that morning and taken off for Grand Falls, Idaho, to join her fiancé, who'd gone there to look for a job and found one in his father's laundry business.

About a week later the phone rang. It was one of the Bobs at J. Walter. It turned out his last name was Colwell. (Fifteen years later he became the big C in SSC&B, formerly Sullivan, Stauffer, Colwell and Bayles, Inc.). He also became my dearest friend.

What Bob wanted to know was, could I come down to 420 Lex to see him. He said, "I think I have something you might be good at."

I told him I'd be right down and rushed out of the house. I then rushed back to put on my pants because I knew Thompson was, at that time, a very staid outfit. Fully and conservatively dressed, I boarded a subway train that took forever to get to Forty-second Street.

Bob was in charge of writing the Eddie Cantor Chase & Sanborn Coffee Hour. Agencies did such things in those days. And he told me they (meaning Eddie) had an idea they thought might be sensational for the coming Sunday's Christmas Eve show. The premise was to have Eddie play a "little-match-girl" type of newsboy selling his papers to the home-going merrymakers. Bob said I could see right away how warm and human and hilarious that could be. He felt it could have all the pathos of Little Eva's flight to heaven plus belly laughs. The format was to be five two-minute "acts," each loaded with very funny jokes and each ending with a furtive tear that was to be increasingly less furtive. Bob wanted to know if I could deliver them—the next morning.

Twenty-four hours later, wearing a short ginger stubble and matching red eyes, I was in his office. He read the five blackouts and reacted with the sort of enthusiasm that his publisher must have shown the day Homer walked in with the *Iliad*. Then we talked money. I was my usual forceful, controlled self, the perfect cold, calculating negotiator.

To my amazement, Bob offered me \$30 each for the five spots. Brought up on the kind of dough *Judge* and *Life* paid for

that sort of stuff, I'd expected about ten or fifteen for tops. You can imagine my reaction.

"Thirty dollars!" I shouted in wide-eyed astonishment. "Okay," he said hastily, "we'll make it fifty!" We closed on that.

On Sunday there was a party for all my friends. (Four or five people don't crowd a room too much.) Some brought sandwiches, some brought booze, I supplied the shelter and the radio. We were gathered to hear my immortal words given to the world by Eddie Cantor.

When he finally got down to singing his closing theme, "I love to spend this hour with you," I could have told you one person who didn't love spending that hour at all.

Not one syllable that I'd written had been uttered by anyone. We drank up the booze very fast.

Two surprises followed this fiasco. One was the arrival of the check for the agreed-upon \$250. The second was a call, about three weeks later, from Bob. He said, "I think I have something that is right down your alley." I didn't tell him the \$250 had gotten me out of that alley.

Among the productions Thompson had on the air was one of those fifteen-minute, five-nights-a-week, Lum 'n' Abner-type, clod-kicking shows. As if this in itself was not enough of a problem, the writer-creator of the strip had gone AWOL. The Thompson people had looked into every bottle in town and couldn't find him. What they needed was a five-part sequence for the following week. Not only that, they needed it fast, fast, fast! I was learning fast, fast, fast that nothing in radio was ever done any other way.

The whole picture was given to me when, at Bob's request, I met with him and the fabulous John U. Reber in a suite at Delmonico's where they were holed up preparing some sort of new business presentation. The fact that I met the unbelievable Reber, one of the most inspired and inspiring showmen of the Golden Age of Radio, while he was clad in Chinese red pajamas is the only thing that kept me from being scared to death of him. It was a good beginning of a long, rewarding association.

In his complicated, roundabout, Pennsylvania Dutch way, Reber told me what they were up against and asked if I thought

I could write the show. I said I thought I could. But I didn't tell him one little detail—I'd never heard it.

We parted with me agreeing to turn in the five installments on Wednesday, which, John said, gave me all the time in the world—almost forty-eight hours.

A hitch on an Indiana farm, and a quick listen to one installment that evening at dinner, made me an expert on rural comedy. So, right on the money, I delivered a sequence of five broadcasts on how a slick city salesman sold a silent policeman to a hick town with no traffic problem. (The drummer promised that within a week after buying his product, they'd have one.) And, for those too young to know what a silent policeman was, it was a type of self-operating traffic signal being installed, at that time, in the middle of the only intersection in every little crossroads hamlet.

Again the money rolled in but the writing was never heard on the air. It seems the author dried out and showed up with his own ideas. I was sad. I'd now picked up a total of five Cs with no play. Somehow it suggested JWT must have had it with me.

But two weeks later I got a call from the *other* Bob, Robert A. Simon, then music critic of *The New Yorker* and resident consultant to Thompson on matters melodic. He told me they'd decided to do an audition for a client. It was to be for a series of thirty-minute radio treatments of European musical comedies that had never been heard in the United States. My job was to do a script, libretto, and lyrics. The property they'd selected for the audition was a little wienerwurst called *Paganini*. Naturally it was in German. If, sensibly, it had been in Italian, I'd still have been in trouble because my Italian was as bad as my German, which was limited to saying "thank you" when someone said, "Gesundheit!"

But if it had been in Italian it would not have destroyed my feeling for the fitness of things. After all, *Paganini* was no *Schuhplattler*.

Bob said he was sending me the book and score. I was to translate, adapt, pick out three or four of the big tunes, and write lyrics. I didn't tell him I couldn't read music. Why blab about your handicaps?

There was a multilingual secretary at Tobis. (I can still

remember her name—Tappernoux.) She translated the dialogue in the films we imported so that the customs men could find out what was being said. For twenty-five dollars Miss T. turned out a literal translation almost in the time it took her to type it. A girl at whose home I ate dinner a lot played the score for me on her flute. I picked out four tunes to which I wrote dummy lyrics that were later turned into purest poetry. And that was it. Boom! I'd made another quarter of a thousand bucks almost overnight. But they never did the audition.

It was about a month later that Bob Colwell called me again. This time he offered me a regular job working in the Thompson radio department. I was surprised he wasn't afraid my writing—just on my track record—would wipe them all off the air.

The following morning I went to work on the tenth floor of the Graybar Building. My first assignment, given as casually as they might have asked me to go out for a container of coffee, was to get together with Vice-President Throttlebottom, the inimitable Victor Moore. We were to start planning a fifteen-minute across-the-board radio strip, starring Moore doing something that the two of us would dredge up from our great well of incompetence.

When I knocked at the door of the Essex House suite, Moore opened it wearing the expression of a man utterly disappointed to discover that someone really had knocked. We greeted each other timidly, I because I stood in awe of that wonderful, quavery pudding of a man, he only because he never in his life stepped out of character.

Only those who can remember seeing him on the stage or have seen him on the "Late Late Show" can appreciate how he sounded saying, "Oh? Wellll. Yes . . . a . . . won't . . . you . . . come . . . in?" He was probably the only man in the world who could say the word "in" with a flutter.

He started to walk back into the apartment and I followed, enjoying the subtle nuance of the funny walk that made every step he took upstage a sure laugh. He sat down. I sat down across a coffee table from him. For a little while we just stared at one another. I was embarrassed because it actually seemed that he was afraid of me. We must have looked like a pussycat

and a bunny facing off to defend ourselves to the death. Finally he said, "I'll . . . re-all-y . . . don't know what you . . . a . . . want to talk to *me* about." His attempt to emphasize the word "me" sounded as if his voice were changing.

I wanted to tell him how much I was enjoying the performance he was giving. But I didn't dare because I felt sure it wasn't a performance. And I couldn't tell him what I wanted to see him about because I wasn't sure. There seemed nothing to do but fall back on basic truth.

"They sent me here," I said, "to talk to you about a radio show."

His face lifted. "Oh, good," he said, getting a happy flutter into the word "good." "I like some of them. What's your favorite?"

It never occurred to me until thirty-eight years later, sitting typing and trying to recall what had happened, that he might have been putting me on.

I laughed. Then he laughed the way a person does who is going along with a joke he doesn't quite dig. There was obviously no reason for me to try to razzle-dazzle this man into thinking that I knew anything about how to create a radio show because clearly he didn't care. So I said, "The J. Walter Thompson Company sent me to see if you and I can work out a format for a radio show in which you will be the star."

"Do you think such a thing would go?" he asked.

"I don't know. This is my first day on the job and I really don't know a damn thing about how to plan a new radio series."

"That's good. Neither do I. Would you like to have a drink?"

I would have drunk hemlock if it meant, as it did, that Moore had to waddle to the bar like a goose that thought she was a peacock but knew if she turned to look at her tail the whole dream would vanish. I asked for a brandy and soda. (Not too many months later, also in Essex House, George Burns said to Jack Benny, "Give Carroll two brandies and he's ten feet tall.")

Moore came back with the two drinks, and after I'd downed about half of mine while we both stared out the window at Central Park I said, "Supposing we do a show called 'The Vice-President Speaks'?" (And this was thirty-eight years before Agnew.)

"That," Moore said, smiling like a delighted billiken, "would

be nice.” And that was the last time either of us mentioned radio. During my pitiful attempt at small talk and his reluctant responses, I began to feel faintly ill, headachy, dizzy, and drowsy. I knew it wasn’t the booze. I hadn’t had enough. So I thought it must be nervousness at meeting Moore and being on a new job that I knew nothing about.

The next day I pulled up with a high fever and spent the following ten days in bed sweating out a case of what was then called the grippe. While I was still home recuperating, my first salary check arrived, hand delivered, from Thompson. I thought I was delirious, dreaming of a company that would pay a guy \$75 a week (my starting salary) to have a drink with Victor Moore and spend ten days in bed. Naturally I hurried back to work and spent twenty-five years, interrupted after fifteen by a ten-year sabbatical. And I still can’t understand how J. Walter Thompson got to be the biggest advertising agency on earth by hiring men like me to do jobs they didn’t understand. And they’re still doing it.

2

Meet Uncle Seymour

Unless you were around at the time you can't imagine with what crushing surprise radio made its guerrilla attack on all advertising agencies. It caught few ready for it but all prepared to fake it. And out of what was generally stumbling, but inspired, improvisation emerged some of the most capable men in the business. Every day a man spent in the early years of commercial radio was an on-the-job training session.

There is the case of Abbott K. Spencer, with whom I worked on and off for several years when he was producer-director of Eddie Cantor's legendary Chase & Sanborn Coffee Hour. Spence was just out of Williams, learning the advertising business by working his way through the several departments of the Thompson Company, when all of a sudden he found himself pinned down by radio.

At the time radio got Spence, he had worked his way through the mail room, knew all about how to deliver letters to vice-presidents, and had advanced to learning the technical details of how to produce—remember that word “produce”—an advertisement. That does not mean plan it or write it. That means turn the finally okayed copy and art into a halftone, line cut, electrotpe, mat, or whatever physical shape it should be in to go to the publication in which it was scheduled to appear. Spence knew nothing about radio except that you turned a switch, twirled a dial, and waited to hear something.

Thompson was starting what can now be called a tired program on WEAf called Around the World with Goodrich. The entire cast was an announcer and an orchestra, probably under the direction of Billy Arnst. The title told the plot.

The announcer said something like “And now to romantic

Spain where, to the click of castanets and fiercely flying feet, we enter a small cafe just around the corner from the Prado and hear—"That was radio.

This was about a year and a half or so before I joined JWT, and to this day the genius who thought up that program is a well-kept secret. But it was, in general concept, not much different from what was then on, or about to go on, the air.

The day of the first broadcast someone from WEAF phoned Thompson (probably spoke to the man who handled the Goodrich account, or possibly to some one in media) to ask the name of the production man the agency was sending to the rehearsal of *Around the World with Goodrich*. Figuring shrewdly that if the question were asked, a production man was expected, the "someone" who got the call told the production department to have a man in Studio 2 at WEAF at two-thirty that day for the rehearsal of *Around the World With Goodrich*.

At two thirty Spence walked into Studio 2 and stood around till someone asked what he wanted.

"I'm the production man from J. Walter Thompson," he confessed.

"Oh, good. Did you bring the scripts?"

"What," asked Spence, "are scripts?"

You'd think his career in radio would have bombed right there. Not at all. It turned out, luckily, that he had a fine musical background and, further than that, the solid, laconic, stick-to-itiveness of the typical New Englander. He whittled. People who whittle don't mind listening and don't mind waiting. They are patient and stubborn people.

Spence's ability to whittle mentally and wait patiently made him the ideal man to produce a show starring Eddie Cantor. Eddie didn't whittle. He didn't listen. He didn't wait. He was a star. He got what he wanted. But not from Spence!

No one knows who it was who recognized the need for a man with Spence's combination of talents to deal with Eddie. It could have been Bob Colwell. More likely it was, as with everything else in radio at that time, an accident.

Sunday after Sunday between two thirty and three in the afternoon the same confrontation took place.

SPENCE: Eddie, we have fourteen minutes to cut.

CANTOR: Are you crazy or something! Cut Rubinoff!

(There is a long wait as Spence mentally whittles. I pretend to scan the script for non-Cantor cuts. Finally . . .)

SPENCE: Carroll has some cuts.

CANTOR: Not a line can be cut!

(Spence says nothing for what seems like a year. It is probably less than three minutes.)

CANTOR: Well, I'm going home to take a rest. See you at seven thirty.

SPENCE: Eddie, we have to cut fourteen minutes.

Week after week this formula was repeated over and over, sometimes for as long as forty-five minutes. Spence never raised his voice. Eddie grew madder and madder. First at Spence for demanding the cut, then at me, who had worked with David Freedman on the script, for being prepared to suggest elisions that might even improve the overall show.

The result? Charlie Dressen, back in 1950, when asked if he thought major league baseball would ever come to the West Coast, said, "Must-be's are will-be's." The cuts were made.

But not before Eddie slashed my suggested cuts in half. Then the dialogue was resumed.

SPENCE: Eddie, we have seven minutes to cut.

CANTOR: Cut the commercial. See you at seven thirty.

Eddie started to go but he didn't leave. Nor did Spence even smile at Eddie's silly suggestion. It wasn't said as a joke. Eddie had power. At one time almost 50 percent of the radios tuned in between 8:00 and 9:00 P.M. EST on any Sunday evening were tuned to Eddie Cantor. He peddled a pretty pound of coffee, made "dated Chase & Sanborn" the nation's number one in sales. He even sang in his closing song, "Let's make a *date* for next Sunday night."

At length he had to give in. He made another concession and cut another four minutes.

SPENCE: Eddie, we still have three minutes to cut.

CANTOR: That's all! We'll talk faster!

Nobody believed or wanted this. But even a patient man knows the moment to compromise. Spence scrubbed the Rubin-off number and I stole a few seconds here and there from various straight announcements.

Then we went for a combination of late lunch, early dinner, and some courage-to-go-on at a spot in the Gotham Hotel that was then called, I think, the Polar Grill. It was called this because it had air conditioning, not yet in general use. And we went to that spot because Spence had taught the barman how to make a cocktail he told me had been created at the Galloupe's Island Yacht Club. It is generally listed in the barman's handbook as a South Side. Spence called it an Uncle Seymour because that benevolent relative had introduced him to it.

When summer comes you'll want to make one. To do this you start by putting into the glass part of a professional cocktail shaker two barspoons of sugar.

Add one generous jigger of dry gin and the juice of half a fresh squeezed lime. Substitutes won't work.

Throw in three or four good full sprigs of fresh mint.

Fill the glass with ice cubes and shake vigorously (don't blend) until you feel a numbness in your arms. This shaking with rock ice breaks the mint into little flakes.

Strain into a cocktail glass and drink straight up. Or pour into an old-fashioned glass full of rocks and drink that way. Or fill a tall glass with ice, pour in the Uncle Seymour, and add soda to taste.

If, when you ask a barman to make this, he tells you he hasn't any mint, go directly to another bar.

3

Hello, Gracie

“Hello, Gracie.”

“Hello, Harry.”

“Harry? My name is George.”

“Well, if you keep changing your name all the time, nobody will *ever* know who you are.”

Eddie Cantor never became reconciled to the cutting that was invariably necessary after the rehearsal of any radio show. But it didn't take George (Nat) Burns long to realize that this cutting had two big advantages:

1. It tightened the script, brought the jokes closer together.
2. Every joke you cut one week meant one less joke you had to write the next.

Number two was his second most important discovery. Gracie Allen was his first. But Gracie Allen without George would have been Irish coffee without the John Jameson. He poured into her all the upside-down humor that in his later years without her changed him from an up-tight straight man into a relaxed comedian.

Working with Nat was fun. I hate that word in almost every sense in which it's used today with reference to adults. And I don't think work is ever fun. Only children really know what fun is. And it was something akin to their childlike happiness that I had (I think we all had) writing jokes for Gracie (who could be more childlike?) with George Burns and his brother, Willy.

It was kicking it around with these two men in a room at Essex House, a dressing room in the Stanley Theater in Philadelphia, or the Indiana in Indianapolis, or on the Paramount lot in Hollywood, or an office suite in the Hollywood-Plaza Hotel that I got on-the-job training as a comedy writer.

Burns used to pay columnist John P. Medbury \$1,500 a week or more to supply him with four or five pages of Gracie Allen-type jokes. These rarely proved more than points of departure for Burns, who was *número uno* in thinking up what Gracie would say, *should* say, and could *not* say. He is a master at switching old jokes and making them into new jokes.

There was only one gag in the whole Gracie Allen catalog that Nat could never satisfactorily switch. Many is the time we tried. Here it is:

GRACIE: George, you should have been with us yesterday at my sister's swimming pool.

GEORGE: It must have been nice, Gracie, at the pool yesterday.

GRACIE: Yeah. We had lots of fun, swimming and diving.

GEORGE: Sounds great.

GRACIE: And tomorrow we'll have even more fun when they put water in the pool.

The closest approach to a switch on that was when Gracie had a wonderful time at Yankee Stadium “. . . and tomorrow it will be even more fun when there's a game on.” But this lacked that wacky picture of Gracie spending an afternoon landing on her head in an empty swimming pool.

My association with Burns and Allen began when I'd beaten the flu bug and returned to the office after my “triumphant” meeting with Victor Moore.

John Reber, Bob Colwell, and Stanley Holt took me back to Essex House (the scene of my Waterloo) to introduce me to the people I had been assigned to work with. From that moment on I was deeply in love with Gracie. Nat, as everyone at the Friars Club called him because his real name was Naftalis Birnbaum, and I hit it off at once because during our first conversation I happened to make some casual reference to the famous Oriental act, Long Tack Sam, a sort of chop suey of magic, balancing, and acrobatics. We fell to discussing Owen McGivney, William and Joe Mandel, Fink's Mules, Power's Elephants, Bert and Betty Wheeler, and other vaude acts I had seen and he had admired and had been on a bill with. Anybody

who knew anything about vaudeville was a friend of Nat Burns. And so for a while I spent so much time with Nat, Gracie, and Willy Burns that I was almost a member of the family.

When I joined the group, in addition to John Medbury, Nat had a joker named Harry Conn working for him. From the first moment we met, Harry disliked me because he saw me as a threat to his job. I disliked him because I didn't think he showed any understanding whatsoever of the character called Gracie Allen.

Harry's way of selling his stuff was funny at first. He'd take ten or fifteen minutes telling us how much time he'd spent writing the material and another five or six explaining how funny it was. A sure way to kill any joke. He'd then tell us how much money Jack Benny, who had not yet made it big, was paying him. Finally he'd take a piece of copy paper out of the inside pocket of his jacket and slowly unfold it, turning away from us as he did so, the way your friends, in your box at the races, turn away from you to make a note of "a sure thing." Then he'd tear off a small corner of the sheet and start to tell the joke he'd outlined on it. I think Nat paid Harry for several weeks just to enjoy watching this routine.

On April 3, 1969, and that may be the only absolutely accurate date you'll find from now on, my wife, Norma, and I were having dinner at Dave Chasen's with veteran television producer Joe Bigelow and his wife, Penny. While we were having our coffee those two gentlemen from Hillcrest, George Burns and Groucho Marx, stopped at our table to say hello. Groucho and I had worked together on radio's most successful failure, a show called "The Circle." It was a very sophisticated production sponsored for a short, glamorous run by Kellogg's Cornflakes. No one knows why.

Burns, feeling expansive, told this story to Penny and Joe. It loses something in the writing because it's difficult to get on paper Burn's timing and his gestures with a cigar.

"I first met Carroll," he began, "when John Reber brought him over and said he was to help me with my radio program. At that time I was getting some of my jokes from a guy named Harry Conn, the first man ever to get a salary of one thousand

dollars out of Jack Benny. At that time Jack was paying him fifty dollars a week. I was giving him thirty-five dollars.

“The first time Conn came to a writing session and found Carroll there, he left in a few minutes and called me back from home to say that unless I fired Carroll he’d quit.

“I said, ‘Harry, I can’t fire Carroll because I’m not paying him. I’m getting him for nothing from the J. Walter Thompson people. So, since I can’t fire a man I’m not paying, why don’t you just take a walk around the block and decide if you really want to quit? If you do, keep walking till you get to Benny’s.’ Conn came back.”

I’d never heard that story but I know that Harry didn’t “come back” for very long. Only a few weeks later Nat, Gracie, Willy, and I went on the road with a Paramount-Publix unit that also starred Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians, the music on the weekly radio show we were doing. It was the start of a trip to Hollywood, where Burns and Allen were to appear in their first full-length movie, *The Big Broadcast*.

After Harry left the routines were put together by Nat, Willy, a secretary, and me. We later added a very funny man named Harvey Helm. The *modus operandi* was simple. We sat around as Nat shuffled through the sheets of two-liners mailed in by Medbury until he came to something he liked. From this we’d start our own fantasizing.

Nat was almost unique in being able to pick out the good line from the babble of a group of guys pitching gags. When he heard it he’d silence everyone and dictate to his secretary, Helen Schorr, the way it should be said by Gracie.

During one of these sessions someone mentioned “a fireman’s lift.” Schorr’sie had never heard of such a thing and asked what it was. Willy quietly got up from the sofa, walked across the room, demonstrated “a fireman’s lift,” and dumped her on the bed in the next room. She never asked another question. But she followed Burns and Allen when they moved to the West Coast, married writer-producer Nat Perrin, and became a moving force in the Hawthorne School PTA in Beverly Hills, a club in which I too was a dues-paying, participating member.

Sometimes, as we worked on the routines, our thinking grew

so inbred and self-devouring that it sounded slightly Brechtian, which in the early thirties seemed even less lucid than it seems today. But most certainly there was an element of the theater of the absurd in the whole concept of Gracie.

One afternoon I had the idea that all of organized baseball—the teams, the leagues, the ballparks—was conceived and built merely to create a market for mustard. How else could you bring so many people together to whom you could sell hot dogs on which they would want to spread mustard? And because so much was used this way, they could afford to give it away free. It was straight-down-the-line Gracie Allen thinking.

We knocked ourselves out writing that routine, told all our friends how great it was, went on the air with it, and laid one of the few bombs a Gracie Allen routine ever laid. The word mustard became what is known as a “room joke.” Every household has a few. It’s a line or reference that breaks up members of the family every time they hear it but outsiders can’t understand what they’re laughing at.

I think it was when Burns and Allen were playing the Buffalo Theater, our first stop on the tour west, that I made the first of my few stage appearances. They had an opening joke that needed a third person. Generally they used the best-looking usher in the house. Why they used me instead I don’t remember. Maybe the theater had girl ushers.

George walked on “in one” and began to talk. Gracie backed on (how else?) while motioning for someone in the wings to follow her out as she implored, “Well, come *on!* If you want a kiss come on out and *get* it!”

I came on and kissed her. As I walked off, she turned to Nat and said, “George, who’s that?”

Our next stop was the Michigan Theater in Detroit. One evening after the last show Nat and Willy and I went up to the three-room suite in the Book Cadillac that Guy and Carmen Lombardo shared, to have a drink with Carmen. While we were sipping our toddy, he told us that Guy had gone out with some automobile people (I suspected he meant the Fords) and was planning to bring them back for a nightcap. It was Carmen’s cute way of telling us peasants not to stay too long.

Nat excused himself and went into the next room. I found out later it was to have a little telephone conversation with the bell captain. About ten minutes later three of the most true-to-type Central Casting hookers you ever saw arrived. When Nat heard Carmen saying, "I think you must have the wrong room," Nat hollered that he'd just invited them up for a drink. "They're old friends of mine," he explained.

Why Carmen let them in, I'll never know. Burns poured three very heavy drinks for them. And when they put his booze on top of what they'd already had, the party took on a new significance. With the three whores so high they could only be reached by radar, Guy and his society friends walked in. Nat said to Willy and me, "We have to go to the room and knock out some jokes. Come on." And we split.

Like so many practical jokes, it had an ending that we weren't around to enjoy. But for days Guy didn't talk to Carmen and Carmen wouldn't talk to us.

After Detroit we played Indianapolis. Those sleeper jumps were killers. The troupe traveled in two Pullmans. Younger readers may not know what they are. One car was all bedrooms. The other was a regular sleeping car of lower and upper berths. In this one there was always a lot of drinking and very little sleeping and most of the sleeping was something else again.

No matter how anyone felt, first thing in the morning, after we arrived and washed up, Nat had to go to the theater to check on his billing and rehearse the house orchestra in the cues for their routine. For a finish, he and Googie (as he called her) danced. During this dance there were pauses in the music. Nat would hold up his hand and say, "Stop!" And they'd do a joke.

"Gracie, how's your sister Bessie in San Francisco?"

"Oh, George, I'm glad you asked. It's just terrible about her little boy."

"What happened to him?"

"Well, I got a letter this morning. It's just awful. They say I wouldn't recognize him. He's grown another foot."

"Gracie, let's dance."

They'd dance a few bars and then she'd say, "My family has *more* trouble."

“I know I shouldn’t ask this, Gracie, but what happened?”

“Last night my sister woke up, looked down at her legs, and they were all black.”

“Black! What did she do?”

“Well, what would *you* do? She hollered and everybody came running.”

“Did you send for a doctor?”

“No. My mother just pulled off her stockings and everybody went back to bed.”

All these cues had to be rehearsed. Gracie did nothing but show up at the theater and get the laughs. Between shows she went shopping. And to show what a wonderful little woman she was, she even found a way to go shopping in Indianapolis.

It was earlier than usual the morning we arrived. “Come on, walk over to the theater with me,” Nat said.

“Before breakfast?”

“Let me tell you what happened to Jolson in this town.”

Three years earlier Al Jolson had become the sensation of the motion picture business when “Vitaphone startled the world” and Jolie sang “Sonny Boy” in the world’s first talkie, *The Jazz Singer*. Every impersonator in the business immediately discarded his imitation of Harry Richman and substituted Al Jolson. He was very large.

“Jolson,” said Nat, “was booked into this very house about a year ago and he came into town the night before so he’d feel fresh for the first show. The best entertainment he could find in town that evening was to walk over to the theater and look at his name in lights. But when he got there his name was not only not in lights, it couldn’t be found anywhere around the front of the house. The next morning he crashed into the manager’s office demanding to know what happened.

“The manager remained calm. ‘Didn’t you hear?’ he asked. ‘I canceled you.’

“Until you know Alsie, your palsy-walsy,” Nat explained, “you just can’t imagine what went on. He made what happened with Vesuvius look like a damp sparkler. The manager just let him carry on until he ran out of steam and then said, ‘For three weeks in a row we’ve had acts in this theater doing imita-

tions of you. Nobody liked them. They're sick of you. So what do I need you for?" "

After getting to know Al, a year or so later, and working with him, I find it hard to believe he left the theater standing.

Two wonderful things happened, however, in Indianapolis. Liebert, my favorite Lombardo, and I discovered the giant-size chocolate sodas that a normal man could hardly lift and only a fool would drink. And I attended the debut of Peaches, the child bride of Daddy Browning, as a burlesk queen.

That Monday matinee in Indianapolis, Peaches Browning's first entrance on any stage was all that really mattered. It was so big that the rest of her act went straight downhill.

There was a flourish of Aida trumpets, or the nearest thing to them that Indianapolis could come up with at short notice. Then on came seven, apparently local, chorines. Each one's costume was in some sort of disrepair. All were artistically spotted with grease paint, food stains, and just plain dirt—everything a pair of tights or a brassiere can pick up backstage in a grind burlesk house. And that's a lot. If the tights are properly filled they can pick up a two-hundred-pound stagehand.

Each of these girls was singing a song the words to which will forever remain a mystery. And each was carrying a pasteboard card about two feet square. Finally, as the song ended, they were lined up downstage for Miss Browning's grand entrance. And as Peaches herself walked on there was another flourish of trumpets and the seven girls turned over their cards to spell out E-P-C-A-H-S-E.

Every week two people came from New York to "help" me put on the broadcast from whatever city we were in. One of these was a young man, Herschel Williams, a man Nat Burns will never forget. The evening Herschel stood in the control room and gave the first cue to start the first Burns and Allen-Guy Lombardo broadcast ever heard, he threw a cue so vigorously that he hit his index finger against the glass of the control room window so hard he broke it—the finger!

When Herschel was not traveling to meet me on Wednes-

days, he produced a Sunday afternoon broadcast called "Roses and Drums." The story began with the outbreak of the Civil War. And after about twenty-four half-hour broadcasts, the war was still in its first week. Sounds silly, but it's pretty good going when you stop to think that twenty-four half hours add up to only half a day.

"Roses and Drums" was one of the first dramatic shows to permit an audience to come in and watch grown men and women read from a piece of paper. To make it more interesting to these guests of the sponsor, Herschel decided to do the show in full costume and makeup, crinolines, swords, uniforms, wigs, the works. He said it helped the actors to get into the mood.

To get a little publicity for this gimmick, Guy Bates Post, who played General Grant, was photographed in full regalia standing in front of Grant's Tomb.

A full-sized cutout of this was placed by the door of the studio in which the broadcast was done. Someone lettered a small sign and pasted it across Grant's chest. It said, "Thought I'd come out for a little air."

This was replaced almost immediately by another sign that said, "Hurry, Martha, you'll miss the bus."

It was in a "Roses and Drums" script that the writer put in a sound effect that caused something of a problem. The script said, "Three men ride up. Two dismount. One remains seated." While figuring out how to get this across, the sound man suggested, "Why not just have the horse turn and say to the rider, 'Ain't you getting off, too?'"

Herschel said, "The client would never okay the word ain't."

The second Wednesday visitor to our little troupe of traveling players was an actor who is still active in television and radio, Santos Ortega. Santos, our announcer, used to travel with a cap that he wore just for train riding. He'd take off his straw boater, put it in one of those big paper bags that Pullman porters had for women's hats, and don his cap. No matter what city we were in he always arranged to arrive wearing his cap and carrying his hat between six and six thirty in the morning. My phone would ring. It would be Santos. He'd come up, knock on the door, I'd let him in, and he'd head right for the

vacant bed to catch up on his sleep until afternoon rehearsal.

The only thing that bothered me about all this was his sleeping habit, meaning what he wore. After saying good morning and telling what a bad train ride he'd experienced, he took off his pants—and that's all—not his coat, vest, cap, or shoes—hit the sack, and went to sleep.

The broadcast facilities we had that week in Indianapolis didn't make life any easier. When Guy's band got into the one tiny studio, there wasn't room for Nat and Googie. So we set things up for them to do their routines from the station's outer office. The only problem was, if anyone came up on the elevator during the broadcast his arrival would go coast to coast. That we completed the show at all was a miracle.

A few minutes before air time I glanced at the clock in the office. It said 8:55. This was interesting because the clock in the studio, where the band was, said 8:50. We were to go on the air in either five or ten minutes.

"Which of these two clocks is right?" I asked.

"Neither," the station manager told me.

"Well, what's the correct time?"

"What does your watch say?"

I had to talk to CBS in New York to find out the correct time in Indianapolis.

After the show, when Gracie heard about the time problem, she did something I'd never heard her do before. She remembered a joke.

"Too bad we didn't go on the air late," she said. "Then my grandmother could have heard us."

Nat said, "I know, Gracie—"

And together they explained, "She's my *late* grandmother."

The unit played another week in St. Louis and then we took the California Limited to Hollywood. And this trip was different from all previous ones Mr. and Mrs. George Burns had ever made. They were not just another good vaudeville act going to Los Angeles to play the Orpheum. They were George and Gracie, radio and soon to be movie stars. Their agent, Lester Hammil, saw to it that they had a chauffeur-driven Cadil-

lac. They took an attractive apartment at the Chateau Elysee on Franklin Avenue, not far from Hollywood and Vine and within walking distance of the Hollywood Plaza Hotel. Here Willy and I each had rooms that doubled as offices where we could write radio shows.

We were two of the corniest boobs who ever stood on the corner of Hollywood and Vine, the crummiest intersection in the country ever to become famous.

A block west of Vine on the south side of the boulevard between Ivar and Cahuenga we spotted searchlights. These, we knew from having read Hollywood gossip columns, summoned the faithful to movie premieres and were “piercing the sky to find a new place in the firmament for a rising star.” So we hurried to be on the spot, when, like a meteor in reverse, this heavenly body headed for home.

Breathlessly pushing our way through the crowd, we found what we’d literally run to see. The lights weren’t in front of a movie theater. They were outside a men’s clothing store. In the store’s two windows were identical signs that covered every square inch of the plate glass.

They said, “Schwab Fails!”

It must have been a proud moment for Schwab. That was in 1932. As of the summer of 1969 Schwab was still selling men’s clothing on Hollywood Boulevard.

One evening Nat let us use his car and driver to see the sights. Willy said he’d heard a lot about Lookout Point. I said I didn’t neck. He said it was supposed to offer a wonderful night view of the city. This was in LA’s pre-smog era.

The driver must never have had a girl friend, because he didn’t know how to get to Lookout Point. But he tried to fake it. So we started up what I later found out was Laurel Canyon, much wilder then than now—the terrain, not the people—and turned off onto a dirt lane. He followed this to a dead end that was definitely not Lookout Point. On the view side of the lonely lane, right where it stopped, were a hillside house and garage.

There was hardly enough room to step out of the car, and what view there was, was across a little valley at another hill. There was nothing to do but turn around and go back. As our

driver backed and filled, turning the long limousine around on the narrow road, he kept bumping up against the side of the house. Willy and I were afraid someone would come charging out and complain about how our car was banging up his building. Finally we got out to see what damage was being done, and then we were really petrified.

There were great big scars on the side of the house where the heavy car had repeatedly hit it. But that wasn't what scared us. It wasn't a house! It was just a flat some movie company had built and left there. The sheer drop on the other side of it was about five hundred feet. To warn the driver we got him out to see what he'd been banging into. He took one look, plopped down on the running board (cars had them in those days), and couldn't get up for about ten minutes. Then he spent the next fifteen minutes driving carefully down the hill.

Without two or three shows to do a day, Gracie had plenty of time to spend with her family, who came down from San Francisco to visit her. And Nat played lots of golf. He looked very continental in the sporty little dark blue French beret he wore on the course. One day the sun got so hot he took off his beret and missed three days of shooting. His scalp was so sunburned he couldn't put on his toupee.

The first time I caught up with the George Burns toupee scene was on the train from St. Louis to Los Angeles. We were traveling comfortably in a drawing room for Gracie and a bedroom each for Nat, Willy, and me.

We'd pulled out of St. Louis about midnight. Before turning in Nat had said, "When you get up tomorrow morning, come to the room. We'll have breakfast and knock out some jokes for next week."

So the next morning I tapped on the door I thought was his and a voice I thought I recognized said, "Come in."

I did. Then I started to back right out. "Excuse me," I said, "I have the wrong room."

Nat nearly exploded. It was the first time I'd seen him without his wig. The difference was the best ad in the world for wearing a scalp rug.

The beauty part about Burns's hair pieces was that he took

such pains to get each one on just right. You see, he had several. Hair has to grow, doesn't it? Recently I've noticed that his hair pieces have become quite gray. I wonder what they worry about.

I went with the Burnses to my first Hollywood party. It was at John Medbury's house somewhere in the hills, and it didn't look like any Hollywood party I'd ever visualized. Most of the men were in the library discussing clothes—in Hollywood men discussed clothing long before it became the “in” thing for men to do. Most of the women were quietly drinking and gossiping in the large living room. There wasn't an orgy in sight.

I joined the men in the library. Every few minutes all the men suddenly stopped talking as a woman's voice was heard. I listened. I didn't know the voice that was coming from the loudspeaker but I knew where it was coming from. John had bugged the bath he'd designated as the “powder room.” That night, listening to what came out of the speaker in Medbury's library, I became a man.

A few days after the Fourth of July—I remember it was the Fourth because Willy and I spent the day (but did not find our love) in Avalon on Catalina Island—I received a wire from the New York office to fly home. Fly!!!

At that time the number of people who had even been up in a plane, much less flown across the country, was very small. TAT (later TWA) had an 11 P.M. flight out of Burbank. I made a reservation and walked around for the rest of the day trying to look like Lucky Lindy. That day my fantasies created a way of life that didn't come into being for over twenty-five years. I made up my own version of the jet set, which wouldn't have seemed so keen called the “prop set.” Who, I reasoned, but the *crème de la crème* with social, literary, or show biz obligations on both coasts felt obliged to fly? All I hoped was that I wouldn't look too conspicuous, too obviously ineligible to membership in the elite corps of beautiful people who traveled by air.

To fade into the group as well as I could, I bought a few magazines to while away the time on the long air journey.

Vanity Fair, *The New Yorker*, which I hoped people could tell I'd contributed to, *Town & Country*, *Punch*, and *The Tatler*. With my arms thus loaded I waited for the bus to pick me up at the Hollywood Plaza. It arrived and I climbed in. Naturally there were only a few of us. I don't think the Ford trimotor carried more than sixteen people.

We drove and we drove and we drove and, strain my eyes as I did, I could see nothing but pitch-darkness on the other side of the bus window. I'd been in Hollywood long enough to know that Burbank wasn't *that* far away. I had a sudden feeling I'd made a wrong move and was heading for New York by bus. If this were the case my magazines would stamp me as a snob. So, at the risk of seeming to be just another tourist, I asked the man sitting in front of me how much farther it was to Burbank. He told me that because of the fog in Burbank we were headed for Victorville in the high desert and would take off from there.

The plane, which looked like a corrugated steel tool shed with three propellers, was waiting when our bus arrived about four and a half hours after leaving Hollywood and Vine. They weighed my luggage. Then they weighed me and my magazines. But there was no charge for excess. They just didn't want to take on more weight than the plane could lift. I was prepared to sacrifice my *Town & Country*.

As we were going through the weighing-in ceremony I got a chance to look at my fellow passengers, and it crossed my mind that I hadn't brought the right periodicals. None of them looked like Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., or Robert Montgomery.

There were eight single seats on each side of the plane. The man who was sitting across from me finally broke the silence and asked me if I was going all the way through to New York. I proudly said I was. He wanted to know what business I was in and I proudly told him. He said he was traveling out of Ipswich in gentlemen's underwear.

We flew for about ten hours, making four or five food and fuel stops of from thirty to sixty minutes each. And each time I got back on the plane with all the joy of a man ascending the steps of the gallows. I was never so scared, or so sick, even the time some years later when, jetting in from London to Ken-

nedy, we ran into a thunderstorm that knocked out our radar, buffeted us about a bit, and finally forced us to land at Logan Airport in Boston.

On that first flight, we finally landed in Kansas City, where I spent the night at the Muehlebach Hotel, which seemed to fly half the night before it finally settled down.

We had flown *through*, not *over*, the Rockies. I had looked out and *up* at the snowcapped peaks. It is an experience I've never gotten used to. I didn't like it flying back to the Coast later that same year. And I didn't like it flying Alitalia from Venice to Paris when the captain of our jet said, "Ladees anna gentlamen, iffa you wanna see Mont Blanc, looka *up* outta the windows onna your left side."

The second leg of the trip across the Great Plains and the bumpy Appalachians wasn't too much fun, either. I don't think anyone was ever as glad as I was to see Newark. And you know that when Newark looks good to you, you're in trouble.

4

Files on parade

I took a cab home from Newark and waited for my stomach to follow me. While I was waiting, and wondering why I'd been summoned home on white man's great tin bird, Bob Colwell phoned. He'd been upped to an administrative post and the shows he'd been working on were being reassigned. I got, among others, Eddie Cantor's Chase & Sanborn Hour. And that's how I became a part-time worker in what was certainly the first and undoubtedly the most efficient of the many joke factories that radio brought into being. It was created, owned, and operated day and night by David Freedman.

Someday someone will write a good solid biography of this remarkable personality, son of an editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward*. Maybe his oldest son, Ben, who with his wife, Nancy, writes novels. That's an order, Ben.

David, a real scholar and onetime short-story writer for the *Saturday Evening Post*, wrote material for Eddie Cantor (for more money than he could make any other way) to finance his addiction to slow horses in fast company. A compulsive gambler, David was forced to make millions to feed his habit. So he organized the world's first gag factory, ignoring one of the items he had on file: "Confucius say he who attempts to dope horses is a dope."

Freedman's atelier of puns, quips, funny sayings, and vaudeville yocks occupied walls of files in his three-story Central Park West penthouse apartment, where he had a corps of young men combing periodicals. Although other gagsters followed David into the radio joke-writing business and compiled gag files, none of them had any idea of how to use them with the same skill and efficiency that came naturally to David.

One day, shortly after Technocracy became an overnight fad

in a depression-sick nation, Eddie Cantor, at a meeting in David's Boffola Boutique, said, "David, you've got to write a routine for me about Technocracy. It's all you hear everywhere. It's taken the country by storm. What is it?"

A lesser man than David might have said, "Okay, Eddie, as soon as *I* find out what Technocracy's all about, we'll get together and knock it to pieces." Cantor might have hollered a little but would have eventually accepted the decision.

What David did was say to one of his young helpers (it could have been Everett Freeman—David's Yock Shop spawned a lot of humorists), "Get me the file on Technocracy."

The young trainees, wise enough not to ask, "*What* file on Technocracy?" or, "When did we get *that*?" just stood and stared.

"Cabinet four," David said with emphatic patience, as if explaining something to a backward child, "drawer two, the F cards."

"F cards?" echoed Eddie. "Technocracy begins with T."

"It's a Fad, isn't it?" David said, still with his patient voice.

David was handed a fistful of cards. In the upper corner of one it said, "Football." What the card said was, "A fat man went to a football game. In order to make sure he'd have enough room he bought two seats. When he got to the game he found the seats were on opposite sides of the aisle." David laid the card face down on the table and picked another. In the upper left-hand corner of this one it said "Fat." The joke was, "A fat man went to a football game" etc., etc., etc.—same joke.

The coincidence of pulling out two identical cross-filed gags was all a gambler like David needed to assure him he was on the right track. So, holding the two cards in his hand, he read aloud, "A fat Technocrat went to a football game. So that he'd be comfortable he bought two seats. When he got there he found they were on opposite sides of the aisle—make that stadium, it's funnier."

Cantor, satisfied that David was equipped to give him a good routine on Technocracy, changed the subject to a postmortem on what had gone wrong with two jokes in the last broadcast.

After he left, one of David's boys asked, "How can he be dope enough to fall for an act like that?"

David laughed. "He's no dope. He knows as many jokes as we do—maybe more. Surely more than *you* do. He was just lighting a firecracker under me."

"We get the message," said one of the guys.

"Then get me some Technocracy jokes."

"Got one! Why are so many women crossing the street lately? To find out about Technocracy. Or, who was that Technocrat I saw you with last night? That was no Technocrat, that was my wife."

"That second one," said David, "might work."

Radio gag writers always spend most of their time trying to make an old joke do a new job. Norma's brother, Elliott Tobias, was at that time a millinery salesman. Like so many good salesmen, he knew a lot of jokes and said funny things. So it occurred to us that he might switch and become a joke writer. Many salesmen had. Radio producer and writer Larry Berns had been a jewelry peddler in Philly. Herb Polesie, who went from radio to picture producing, sold neckties. Ed Poggenberg was a piano salesman before he became Ed Gardner, the radio producer and comic.

After sitting in on a couple of gag-writing sessions, Elliott asked me, "Wouldn't it be better if they spent as much time trying to think up new jokes as they spend trying to switch the old ones?"

"Of course. But there isn't time. Radio needs too much material too often. It eats up copy too fast. No one is capable of being that creative all the time. There are new jokes scattered in every routine—or jokes that you think are new. Actually, it's probably just that you haven't heard them before. So men who are funny have to develop a technical skill for re-constituting comedy so that there'll be enough to supply the market."

Elliott decided to stay in the millinery business.

Working with David had its special rewards, particularly at night. During the day his office was all business, with David constantly on the phone talking to a client or a bookie while busy apprentices scurried around de-filing jokes to be switched

in future Eddie Cantor routines or possibly for Block and Sully (a sort of road company of Burns and Allen) or Fanny Brice or maybe for Lou Holtz.

It was on Lou Holtz business that he, David, and I would assemble about eight thirty, three or four evenings a week, for a writing and rapping session that frequently ran on until two or three in the morning. Much time was spent as David got out the Talmud (his personal library, too, was part of the filing system) to look up lessons that could be converted into five-minute routines for Holtz.

One we used was the story of the man who was accused of stealing money from the butcher. He was brought before the rabbi for judgment, hollering at the top of his lungs that he was innocent. The rabbi had to weigh the evidence presented by friends of the butcher and friends of the accused man. There was no disinterested testimony. So the rabbi had the alleged thief put all the coins he had in his pocket into a pail of hot water. Then he thought deeply on the problem as he gazed through the water at the coins on the bottom of the bucket. Finally the rabbi turned to the defendant and began to chant, "*If you were innocent you would plead your innocence, not shout it at me. And if you were innocent you would probably not have so many coins in your pocket in the first place. And finally, if you were innocent that fat that came on the coins from the butcher's fingers would not at this very minute be rising to the surface of the water. So give the butcher back what you stole from him.*" I don't know how that read in the Talmud but that's the way our routine ended.

It took a long time to find a story like that and translate it into the mystical Hindu double-talk of Holt's mythical maharajah and then into English for the maharajah's translator, also Holtz, to get a second laugh with.

Around midnight, work slowly segued into general conversation and the Freedman kids would filter through the office.

Ben, the oldest, now a novelist, was once one of Red Skelton's joke makers and, as a very young man, wrote gags for me when we were getting out three or four weekly comedy shows from the J. Walter Thompson offices at Selma and Vine over the Thrifty Drug Store.

Stanley Resor, the dignified, conservative president of JWT, never became reconciled to the fact that his Hollywood office was, as Dick Mack used to say, “Upstairs from the drugstore.” As a matter of fact he never quite got used to the “characters,” by his definition, who made up his radio department. Aside from John Reber, they were no more in the mold of the classic advertising man, as Stanley had cast that mold, than the semi-hippie, hairy, TV-creative types of today are typical of the Young Republicans.

Ben Freedman now teaches mathematics at Occidental College in California. David’s second son, Noel, who became a Presbyterian minister, has been busy for years teaching young college people the Old Testament and the Hebrew language. The last time I saw him was at an archaeological dig near Ashdod, not far from Ashkelon, then an Israeli seaside resort, now a port city.

The youngest of the Freedman men, Toby, became a doctor in the space program. Daughter Isa, who changed her name to Laurie, was frequently carried in for us to admire. David, the doting daddy, would show us her little legs and say proudly, “Did you ever see such perfect feet? Look at those toes!”

The kids, in nightclothes, would generally start wandering in when the food arrived. So did the fabulous Mrs. Freedman, Beatrice, her hair in two long braids and herself swathed in a wrapper that looked as if it were designed to get laughs. Sometimes she was followed by her mother wearing an even funnier wrapper. Everything was as *gemütlich* as all get-out by about one thirty, when a platter of Nova Scotia, liverwurst, salami, rye bread, and dill pickles arrived from Lindy’s accompanied by the required amount of Dr. Brown’s Celery Tonic, without which such food can’t be digested. There was seldom any booze.

With his mouth full of food and his arms waving, David would explain to Lou how funny the routine we were planning would be when it was finally written. He would then suddenly withdraw into some mystical Semitic somewhere to be alone, leaving Lou and me to “talk among ourselves.”

During one such interlude, we were having a discussion of popular song lyrics. Lou suddenly reached the astonishing con-

clusion that Cole Porter's words were genuine poetry. "But *real* poetry!" Lou repeated it so I would know he didn't mean just ordinary pop stuff like Rudyard Kipling or Eddie Guest.

"Balls!" shouted David, emerging from the depths of his mental retreat like a Polaris missile bursting from the sea. Then he began to sing:

Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten,
Dass ich so traurig bin;
Ein Märchen aus alten Zeiten,
Das kommt mir nicht aus dem Sinn.
Die Luft ist kiel und es dunkelt
Und ruhig fliest der Rhine

"That!" he said softly. "*That* is poetry. *That* is a lyric. *That* is Heinrich Heine." David then gave Lou a lecture on the meaning of the word poetry and how *real* poetry differed in every way from anything Lou had probably ever read or even heard.

One of the joys of my life was working with that intellectual, wit, gambler, charlatan, raconteur, loving husband and father, David Freedman.

5

Banjo Eyes

Eddie Cantor's Chase & Sanborn Hour opened at 8 P.M. EST every Sunday evening with Eddie singing, "I love to spend this hour with you." When it closed he added the line, "As friend to friend, I'm sorry it's through." The show accumulated such an audience, according to the Crossley Analysis of Broadcasting, that networks, advertisers, and agency people thought there must be something wrong with the analysis.

Their disbelief reached such a crescendo that eventually the CAB had to change its system of reckoning. This, oddly enough, temporarily satisfied its customers but destroyed Crossley. It eventually dawned on everybody that the change offered evidence that the figures probably never had been really accurate. Chaos resulted as other rating systems came along and everyone could accept the system that made him look best. The situation still prevails.

The truth was that Eddie Cantor really did have a remarkable listenership. This was proved by a little boo-boo that Sam Moore, another JWT writer, and I collaborated on one week. Although it was generally conceded by the "sophisticates" of the day that only morons listened to radio and that only the dopiest of those tuned in pure corn like Eddie Cantor's show, Sam liked to open his commercials for the coffee with some esoteric little fact that would stagger everyone with its erudition and, by some osmosis, give the coffee an elite quality.

One morning—we worked on commercials in the morning and wrote comedy with the talent in the afternoon and far into the night—Sam hollered across the room, "Hey, did Samuel Johnson drink twenty-four cups of coffee or tea a day?"

"Who," I asked, "is Samuel Johnson?"

"The hero of that hit biography by Boswell."

“Oh, him.”

“Did he drink twenty-four cups of coffee a day or was it tea?”

“He hung around the Cheshire Cheese a lot and that was no tearoom, so it must have been coffee.”

On the basis of this research in depth, Sam wrote, and Jimmy Wallington opened a commercial on the following Sunday with words that went something like these: “According to his biographer, James Boswell, Dr. Samuel Johnson drank twenty-four cups of coffee a day.” The commercial then went on to say that he probably would have drunk many more if he could have gotten Chase & Sanborn dated coffee. The date, the commercial said, was on the bag. (When Chase & Sanborn switched to vacuum pack they had to drop the date gimmick. Who would sit still for a line like “the date is on the can”?)

Even while Jimmy was still doing the “twenty-four cup” commercial, phone calls began pouring in from “illiterate” radio listeners because the good doctor didn’t drink coffee, he drank tea. The whole incident suggested a joke in an early Burns and Allen routine. Gracie said, “George, you’d love my mother’s coffee.”

GEORGE: Your mother makes good coffee?

GRACIE: Yeah. She makes it with tea.

GEORGE: Your mother makes coffee with tea?

GRACIE: How else can you get it to taste like cocoa?

Jimmy Wallington was, I guess, the first of radio’s announcer-straight men such as Bill Goodwin for Burns and Allen, Harry Von Zell for Fred Allen, and Ken Carpenter for Bing Crosby.

It was Jimmy’s job to build up Eddie’s first entrance each Sunday night. Eddie did quite a bit to build it up, too. He was the first comedian to appear on radio in funny costumes to get a sight laugh.

David Freedman and the rest of us spent a lot of time thinking up gag costumes that would give Eddie an entrance and also relate to the routine of jokes that would follow. Sometimes the costume dictated the subject of the jokes, sometimes it had to be planned to fit the jokes.

One Halloween when the routine was, naturally, about fancy dress parties and funny clothes in general, Jimmy's opening announcement was, "And here comes Eddie Cantor!" (Applause-laughter.) The people at home had to wait till the laughter died down to hear Jimmy say, "Eddie, why in the world are you wearing one golf shoe and one lady's slipper, one silk stocking and one plaid golf sock, tweed knickers and a tutu, a woman's blouse with a man's vest over it, a necktie, a blond curly wig and a Sherlock Holmes fore-and-aft cap?"

"I'm on my way to a costume party, Jimmy. And I'm disguised as an accident going someplace to happen!"

The music on the Chase & Sanborn Hour was billed as Rubinoff and His Violin, not to be confused with Evelyn and Her Magic Violin of Phil Spitalny's all-girl band. And apparently I was the only one amused every week at the way it was introduced. Jimmy announced, "The Chase & Sanborn Hour." The music started. Jimmy waited a moment and then said, "With Rubinoff and His Violin." Then, just when everybody was all set to hear a fiddle solo of "Träumerei," they got a cymbal crash. Then Jimmy almost screamed, "And starring Eddie Cantor!!" And they got another cymbal crash. The effect was that he made his entrance by being dropped from a great height into a crash box.

Cantor swung a lot of weight at NBC and that power brushed off on all those associated with him.

One Sunday morning, according to the story, Jascha Heifetz arrived at Radio City for a rehearsal, carrying his fiddle. When he walked into the elevator, the operator told him that all musicians with instruments had to use the freight elevator.

The great virtuoso just smiled and said, "But I'm Heifetz."

"I don't care," said the lift man, "if you're Rubinoff! You still have to go up in the freight car."

It could have happened. Not too long after, when Cal Kuhl brought "The Mary Pickford Show" east for a few weeks, John Reber wanted to welcome Mary to New York in the grand manner. He arrived at Radio City with two dozen of the most spectacular long-stemmed American Beauty roses I'd ever seen. I'd helped him select them but had stopped to buy myself a

chocolate bar for lunch while he went on ahead with the bouquet.

“You’ve got to take them flowers up in the freight car,” he was told. A stubborn Pennsylvania Dutchman and this time with right on his side, John refused to budge or to say anything but that he was taking a bunch of flowers to Mary Pickford, whom he was going to see, that it was a personal matter, and that he would not ride in the freight elevator.

When I arrived, munching my chocolate bar, the elevator man was again saying, “You can’t go up in this car with a package.”

“Do you mean to say you don’t know who I am?” John snapped. “Ask anybody. Ask this man.”

“Who’s this guy?” the operator said to me.

Ignoring the question, I put out my hand to John and said, “Oh, hello, Mr. Aylesworth. Going to see Mary Pickford?” The car shot right up.

Milton Aylesworth was, at that time, even more important around NBC than Rubinoff. He was president of the network.

6

What glory, Price?

One thing that was nice about the JWT radio department, they never let you get bored working week after week on *one* radio show. Before this could happen you were assigned to another—in *addition* to the one you were doing. So I got to work on a three-times-a-week broadcast starring Georgie Price.

Not long after this radio show went off the air in a blaze of apathy, Georgie went out of show business and became a very successful Wall Street operator. Either Sam Moore, my collaborator on the show, or I could have accurately predicted Georgie's success in the financial world within a few days after our first meeting with him in his Central Park West apartment.

He'd hit on a "great" and "thoroughly original" gimmick for his show. Eddie Cantor was riding the crest, on Sunday, with weekly routines about running for President of the United States. There are some who still remember the chant of his campaign song, possibly the inspiration for "I like Ike!"— "We want Cantor! We want Cantor!"

The premise gave him a chance to be funny about the political situation and get off a few patriotic goodies that classed him as "a great American."

Only certain cynics ever thought that this was what gave Georgie the idea of running for Secretary of the Treasury on his Monday, Wednesday, and Friday show. It was just a coincidence that his running gag song was to the effect that he didn't want to run the country, he just wanted to be the one who handled all the money.

There were even some who thought he worked a little like Cantor. This was true. He worked like everybody. That was his problem. He was a better than average mimic, not a bad hooper,

and he had a good set of pipes. He could sing like Jolson, dance like Fred Astaire, and tell jokes like Eddie Cantor. What he couldn't capture was the spark that made each of those men one he wanted to imitate.

On our first visit to the Price pad, Sam and I were delighted with its comfort and luxury and particularly by a large bar that held a prominent place in the foyer. It was the very end of the Prohibition era, during which both Sam and I, patriots to the end, had drunk a hard fight against the law that threatened our right to remain sober.

We talked for almost an hour about what songs Georgie should sing and in whose personality, on how he'd lead into these numbers with suitably funny sayings, and finally where we'd place the inevitable "I Want to Be the Secretary of the Treasury" song, although it inevitably closed the show. Each show, however, had to have different, suitable, timely lyrics. At last, with all the hard decisions made, the time came to relax, sit back, and discuss the problems of the world the way we so often did with David Freedman.

That evening they turned out to be the great good fortune of Mr. Price. By one of those miraculous and complicated routes through which all people who claimed "to get good liquor from France" received their supplies (they really called Harry the bootlegger and told him to send over a fifth of brandy), Georgie had just gotten some wonderful old Napoleon brandy.

His story, told with an absolutely straight face, was that there had come down through the years several hundred bottles of genuine Napoleon brandy that Josephine had kept stored in one of her closets to ease her through those regularly recurring periods in a woman's life we read so much about in our general magazine ads. Now, you know you can't hardly get that kind of brandy no more, and you couldn't get it then—at least, Sam and I couldn't.

When it became obvious to both of us, by this time slaving with thirst (and hungry, too), that the brandy was going to be all talk and no pour, we got up to leave.

"How about a shot of that Josephine brandy?" I asked.

“It’s too late at night to appreciate it. Next week when you come we’ll have some.”

Next week when we arrived, the first thing Sam said was, “Well, how’s for some of that brandy?”

“Too early. Let’s keep our minds clear till we finish our work.”

The third week Sam showed up carrying a plain brown paper bag. It was winter and a man needed alcohol to warm his innards. We hung up our coats and, with Sam carrying the plain paper bag, went into the living room where we’d sat around now on two previous meetings.

So far the experiment had failed. Georgie didn’t ask what Sam’s package was. Nor did he seem to notice that Sam brought it with him and placed it carefully on the floor beside his chair. We hadn’t been talking long before Sam reached for his paper bag, uncorked the bottle, and took a swig of gin. Then he handed the bagged bottle to me so that I, too, could get bagged. I took a modest gulp, choked, and gave it back. This happened right before Georgie’s very eyes, but he took no more notice of it than if one of us had straightened his tie, a thing Sam would never have thought of doing.

The game wasn’t working at all. Georgie was apparently putting down our put-down.

Finally, on the fourth drink, we began to get through to our host. “I can’t let you drink it like that,” he said. “Let me get you something.” He left the room and we waited for him to return with some ginger ale, at that time the standard mixer for gin, and maybe some cold cuts.

He came back with two glasses. That’s all. He handed one to each of us and said, “It doesn’t look good to have you two guys drinking out of the bottle in my living room.”

So Sam and I each poured a drink and offered one to Georgie. He refused, saying he couldn’t drink it straight.

When Georgie noticed that we both had our drinks on the mahogany end table beside our chairs, he hollered, “Lorraine!”

His wife, a very pretty redheaded lady, who didn’t seem to want to interfere in her husband’s business and never was around when we were in the apartment, came running in.

Georgie said, “Honey, get a couple of coasters for Sam and Carroll.” I do not think we were introduced.

As we left that evening I said, “You know, you never gave us any of that great cognac you were telling us about.”

“I’d give you some right now but I just gave the last bottle to Jack Pearl.” Jack was another vaudevillian and radio star (“Baron Munchausen”) who took his money out of radio and put it in Wall Street.

It was because of Georgie that Sam and I got to know Phil Rapp. Georgie hired Phil, for a mere pittance, to augment the work Sam and I were doing.

Sam, Phil, and I got along great. He was quick and funny and the only man I ever worked with who drew down less dough than I did.

The reason Phil had hooked up with Georgie was that radio had murdered small-time vaudeville, the kind that booked two-man dancing acts like Morris and Rapp.

The first time Phil walked into the Thompson office he caused a major sensation. It was bigger than any entrance he’d ever made with Morris. He wore no hat, in the days before it became popular for men to go hatless. His hair was blond and wavy. He wore a very tightly fitted black, one-button jacket. The button was large and pearl. His shirt was a lovely shade of blue with a very extreme soft collar that topped the conservative button-down collars we radio types got away with wearing around JWT. His pants were white flannel with a grayish stripe, so popular in those days on the boardwalk in Atlantic City, and his shoes were two-tone black and white oxfords. He had no overcoat. It was the middle of January.

You can always tell when an actor is strapped. He starts to wear his wardrobe. And he works for whatever he can get. In the long run Phil did rather well in the “getting” department. When Georgie Price went off the air, Phil was hired to help out with the jokes on the Eddie Cantor show.

Banjo Eyes, revisited

Eddie was playing a week in Pittsburgh and was to broadcast from there, so Phil Rapp and I took a midnight train from New York to arrive early in the morning for rehearsal, which had to be gotten out of the way before Eddie started his heavy Saturday and Sunday schedule of stage shows. There was only one problem. One of the five comedy spots for the broadcast had yet to be written. Phil and I figured to knock it out on the train.

As we rattled across Jersey and Pennsylvania we sat in our drawing room and did what joke writers have done down through the ages. We gassed about everything in the world but the script we had to do, hoping the problem would go away.

I was telling Phil about my Irish terrier, Ditto, and how she made me know exactly what she wanted to do. "I do everything she tells me," I said.

Phil rang for the porter.

"What do you want?" I asked.

"Buy you a drink! We got it. Two dogs talking about how well they have their masters trained."

The porter came. We had the drink. And it didn't take long to write a spot with a premise as simple as the two-dogs idea.

It ran about five minutes and along this line:

FIRST DOG: I have one of the smartest masters in our whole neighborhood. All I have to do is to whine and run to my leash and he immediately knows I want him to take me for a walk.

SECOND DOG: Does he know how to throw a stick when you bring it to him?

FIRST DOG: Sticks, stones, anything. He understands almost like a dog.

There's really no need to go any further. I'm sure you get the idea. If you don't, give this book to some human beings and go out and buy yourself a muzzle.

Next morning in Pittsburgh all Phil and I had to do was check to see if we'd spelled dog correctly, get the spot mimeoed, and show it to Cantor. There were no problems. He felt he could dog it as well as any actor in the business.

After the Sunday broadcast Eddie had one more show to do before we all took the midnight back to Manhattan. Spencer, the show's producer, Phil, and I went back to our rooms at the William Penn Hotel and had the surprise of our lives. We were locked out. Not out of our rooms. Out of the whole hotel. A little sign on the main entrance directed us to a remote back door where we could get in. It was ridiculous.

There was a laundry strike, and apparently the hotel didn't want any laundrymen to get trapped on the premises and be forced to rip its sheets to ribbons to make ropes to escape down the side of the building.

We checked out and called for Cantor backstage. After he got all cleaned up for travel but before he left for New York, he took a satchel and went around to the box office where he picked up his percentage of the week's take—in cash. Eddie had a great respect for money.

Perhaps you never heard what Georgie Jessel had to say about his dearest pal Eddie Cantor's great regard for a buck.

Georgie was courting Norma Talmadge while he and Eddie were barnstorming around the country playing one-nighters in anything that had four walls and a roof.

Thanks to the popularity of Eddie's radio show, they drew people down out of the hills who had to buy shoes to get into the theater. And they pulled out of every spot with a satchel full of large-size, old-style big bills people had dug out from under mattresses and from behind the cider barrel in the springhouse. I first saw the satchel in Pittsburgh. Jessel, whenever he could put twenty-four idle hours together, flew to Hollywood to be with Norma. To Eddie this seemed an extravagance. He didn't even *know* Norma.

He lectured Georgie about squandering his money and then

started skimming off some and salting it away for him in a special savings account. This, Cantor figured, would not only save a little of Georgie's take but leave him too short to pay for frequent plane flights to California.

That is the way I choose to interpret the story. Some said Eddie just kept more and exonerated himself on the grounds that Georgie would only spend it foolishly.

On one trip Jessel came into Los Angeles by train. Norma met him at the Union Station and they started out Sunset Boulevard to the Pacific Coast Highway where she had a lovely beach house. This took them past a huge billboard that once stood just off Sunset in downtown LA. The sign said, "Jesus Saves." Georgie pointed it out to Norma and said, "But not like Cantor."

Carrying Cantor's considerable loot in a satchel, we left the theater and took a cab to the Pittsburgh station. The train was late and we had to sit in the almost deserted waiting room for nearly two hours. The place was only half-lit, to match a few winos who'd come in to flop.

As we sat there flanking Eddie with his valise full of currency between his feet, I began to think that every drunk and derelict in Pittsburgh had x-ray eyes and, by some secret means of communication known only to failures, were planning a mass attack on us. It never happened, but it wasn't that I didn't have the whole thing carefully worked out, even to the realization that they'd have to kill all four of us to eliminate any eyewitnesses.

The story really has no finish but there is a trick ending to the dog routine, naturally. The day after we returned to New York, JWT received a funny paper from a lawyer claiming that his client, whose name I never knew, was suing Cantor, Chase & Sanborn, J. Walter Thompson, and the National Broadcasting Company for plagiarism and an amount of money you wouldn't believe. Luckily the complainant hadn't heard about Phil and me. He said Cantor had broadcast an absolutely word-for-word steal from a piece he'd published called "The Two Dogs."

Fortunately Thompson had Sigrid Petersen, a good copy-

right lawyer, in their legal department and a good researcher in their library. They needed both with guys like us working for them. It turned out that if we had stolen anything—and there was some word-for-word evidence that we had—it was from a piece called “Tha Twa Doggies” by Robert Burns of Ayr, Scotland.

Since it was not one of his most popular works, nor either of us one of his most devoted readers, the decision was that we had, indeed, made it up. The general belief was that it was something any two gag writers, given the premise, might make up on a midnight train to Pittsburgh—or even Harrisburg.

The big brother hunt

When George and Gracie returned from Hollywood, CBS and JWT decided the Burns and Allen Show needed a strong PR campaign to hypo the rating back to where it had been the year before. Stanley Holt of J. Walter Thompson, Paul White of CBS, Nat Burns, and I spent a lot of time trying to come up with an idea sufficiently kookie to suit Gracie's elliptical outlook, different enough and strong enough to command wide coverage in the national press. One afternoon Nat suddenly stood up and said, "What we've been looking for is right in our laps and we've been too dumb to recognize it. We talk about it all the time. The thing to do is to send Gracie on a hunt for her missing brother."

For those who arrived late, coming in after radio, it was almost impossible for Gracie to have a conversation that did not eventually get around to an eternally absent member of her family, her Missing Brother. He had no name. He was just missing. There was a strong suspicion he was being held in escrow by the government. But Gracie worried about him and seemed to receive endless communications from him. When George would say, "Gracie, what does this missing brother of yours look like?" her reply would be, "Oh, George, you're silly. How should I know what he looks like? He's missing."

"All right, Gracie, how long has he been missing?"

"Ever since he left home."

"I see. Tell me, Gracie, how old is he?"

"How would I know? He wasn't home on his last birthday."

"Well, is he your younger brother or your older brother?"

"Now you're just trying to mix me up so I'll say silly things."

"Gracie, if I ever start to understand you, nobody will understand me."

“Oh, George, I’ll bet you tell that to all the girls.”

Nat’s simple little idea was to have Gracie announce that she was going to search both networks for her missing brother. (There was no ABC at that time. What is now the American Broadcasting Company was the Blue Network, a minor chain of the National Broadcasting Company.)

She was to call on three, or possibly four, shows a day and ask whoever was the star of that show for information about her absent relative. This, then, would lead into a typical Gracie Allen routine of from one to four minutes depending on how much time the program would grant us and how much we could write for Gracie and the star.

As the scheme began to work and Gracie started to get bigger and bigger laughs, we began to get offers of more time than we cared to fill. It was a pretty tough two weeks writing two regular programs and all the “surprise” guest shots, which had to be very good or they wouldn’t work.

At first, because the internetwork rivalry made the plan seem too quixotic, it didn’t look as if Nat’s idea would even be considered. But as White and others in the CBS public relations department thought more and more about it, two things pointed to its feasibility: (1) J. Walter Thompson controlled enough shows on both networks to get it started; (2) once started, it would not only help George and Gracie’s ratings by introducing them to new audiences, but it would also bring Burns and Allen’s audiences to the shows she walked in on. People actually began to tune in all over the dial trying to catch Gracie visiting some show they’d never heard before.

Gracie’s walk-in on Rudy Vallee’s Fleischmann’s Yeast Hour went something along this line:

“Gracie, say hello to Rudy Vallee, The Vagabond Lover.”

“Hello. [Pause.] George, what’s a vagabond lover?”

“Just a figure of speech, Gracie. It means he likes a life of carefree wandering.”

“Really? That’s why my missing brother ran away from jail.”

“Talk to her, Rudy.”

“Tell me, Gracie, when did you last talk to him?”

“She doesn’t talk to him, Rudy. He’s more of a pen pal.”

“Thank you, George. Where was he when he last wrote to you, Gracie?”

“Oh, he was back in jail.”

“See what I mean, Rudy? Say good night, Gracie.”

“Good night, Gracie.”

On another show, after their entrance, the host might ask, “What does your missing brother do, Gracie?”

“He’s a writer.”

“Oh? What does he write?”

“Checks.”

“And where is he now?”

“He’s in again.”

“I suppose one of his checks came back marked ‘no funds!’”

“George, this man is silly. It came back marked ‘no bank.’”

“Say good night, Gracie.”

And off they’d go to another show. Although it became harder and harder to turn out little sixty-second routines, it was worth it.

In one interview that Nat gave, he said a syndicate was thinking of starting a third network so it could have some programs for Gracie to visit.

The missing brother stunt did the job but it left us all worn out, and when you’re on the top and you’re tired, there’s only one way to go. It began to happen slowly. The rating began to slip. Some thought it was a reaction to an overdose of Gracie, but nobody really believed this. She was too well loved. People adored anything she said.

“George, do you have any old light bulbs?”

“I throw them away, Gracie, why?”

“My sister could use a few.”

“What for?”

“She puts them in all her lamps.”

“Your sister puts old light bulbs in her lamps?”

“It’s a big saving.”

“A big saving?”

“Of course, George. If you put in new bulbs, they just burn out and you have to change them.”

About two weeks after Gracie presented this economic truth

to the world, the Burns apartment was flooded with used light bulbs of all shapes and sizes, mailed in from all over the country.

One afternoon Nat and Willy and I were in the compartment of a parlor car on our way to Philadelphia, talking about the rating slump. Nat said, “Last night I was going over some of the routines we’ve been doing in the last few months and I have an idea what’s wrong. We’re making Gracie try to be funny instead of being unconsciously funny. We’ve had her seeming to be purposely telling jokes instead of being unaware that she is. It’s not that we have to do any different jokes, it’s just that we’ve loused up our formula for Gracie.”

In the next few weeks we corrected this and the ratings started to rise again. It could only be taken as an almost unbelievable testimony to the acuteness of the radio listeners.

One of this nation’s greatest literary snobs, a storyteller, wit, and critic, had told me how smart the radio audience was, at a time when everyone was putting radio down the way people now tend to denigrate the intelligence of the TV viewer.

The man was Alexander Woollcott. I was interviewing him for a weekly radio column I had in the Metropolitan Section of the *New York Sunday World*. Mr. Woollcott had been on the air for several months and was astounded to find that the most intelligent fan letters he received from all his various audiences—his newspaper readers, magazine readers, readers of his books, and people who attended his lectures—came from his radio audience.

Of course I agree with what Woollcott said, but I can’t quite square it with people sending Gracie used light bulbs. A contradiction of another kind caused a big problem when I was doing *The Kraft Music Hall* with Paul Whiteman.

After one show, letters began to pour in accusing Whiteman and the Kraft Cheese Company and even Lou Holtz, who was on the show at the time, of anti-Semitism. It took a lot of examination of the program that had caused the complaint before we found the solution. Miss Helen Jepson of the Metropolitan Opera had sung “The Jewel Song” from *Faust*. Pops Whiteman’s diction was occasionally a little fuzzy. He really hated

to talk on the air, although in a room it was often impossible to turn him off. We finally concluded that listeners, hearing him announce the Jepson number, thought he said, "The Jew Song."

From the very start I never understood why Nat maintained on the air their noninvolved, vaudeville relationship of two single people. I felt the nature of the medium called for something more intimate than the casual friendship their conversations seemed to imply. Nat argued, "Who would ever marry a nut who talks like Gracie?"

By the time television came along, he had changed his mind and their theme song was "Just a Love Nest." To put the cherry on the cake, Nat wrote a book that answered his own question about marrying a nut like Gracie. It was called *Because I Love Her, That's Why*.

A pair of Aces

A couple of days before Burns and Allen were booked to play a week at the Englewood Theater on West Sixty-third Street in Chicago, Nat Burns, Goodman Ace, and I were in the Burns suite at Essex House. Goodie was telling Nat that he and Jane (the Easy Aces) were going to open at the Chicago Theater in the Loop that same week.

Those were the days when anyone who was a success on the radio could get a theater booking. People wanted to see their stars in the flesh to find out, perhaps, if the whole radio thing wasn't some sort of fake as it certainly seemed to be. How could you believe voices, music, and sounds coming over the air through the walls and right into your home? I worked in it and I didn't believe it. In fact, to this day, I only half believe the telephone. And mine gets even with me by working only half the time.

Burns was saying, "Tell me. What are you and Jane going to do on that mammoth stage?"

"Well," drawled Ace, "we'll have the bridge table with the microphone built into the middle of it—the one we use on our broadcasts—that'll be stage center. I'll say our opening over the loudspeaker, 'Ladies and gentlemen, Easy Aces,' the orchestra will start to play 'Manhattan Serenade,' and Jane and I will stroll across to the table and start to talk, just like we do on the air."

Burns looked at his friend in wonderment for almost a minute before he spoke. "You're going to *stroll* to the table?"

Goodie nodded. "Why not?"

"Goodie, the stage at the Chicago Theater is half the size of Alaska and twice as cold. Your little bridge table will look like a matchbook lying in the Klondike."

"They can move it down front."

Again Nat waited a long while before he spoke. Then, “Have you or Jane ever been on a stage before—*any* stage?”

“Not exactly.”

“What do you mean, ‘not exactly?’”

“Well, no, if you pin me down.”

“And you and Jane are going to *stroll* on?”

“You know how I walk.”

“Sure. Just like you talk, like Jack Benny.”

“That’s an accident!”

“That’s not the point. Do you know how long it’ll take you and Jane to stroll from the wings of the Chicago Theater to stage center? About three weeks.”

“That’s all right. We’ll take our time and give the audience a good chance to get a look at us and settle down before we start to do our routine.”

“Goodie, do me a favor. It’ll be easier. Let them discover you standing by the table. John Barrymore would have trouble strolling that distance.”

“Maybe. But I don’t drink.”

“You try that stroll and you’ll start to.”

Nat and Goodie were doing three-a-day at the big uptown house. They went on about two-thirty in the afternoon, and then did two evening shows.

The Aces’ first appearance at the Chicago, where they crowded in at least four and sometimes five shows a day, was a bit earlier. So it was possible for Nat and me to be at the Aces’ first show. Just as Goodie had planned it, he said, “Ladies and gentlemen, Easy Aces” over the PA system. Then came their music and they began their long “stroll.”

They hadn’t gone far before Goodie looked back as if he thought the proscenium arch were following them. Then they started to accelerate and finally reached their table, center stage, at what today would be a gentle jog. Once they began to talk, everything was okay. Just a little breathless.

We left the theater and went to the hotel to pick up Gracie, but before starting uptown to the Englewood Theater, Nat stopped to send Goodie a wire. It said, “Some stroll. You topped Nurmi’s best time by ten seconds. Congratulations. Nat and Goodie.”

George and Gracie had to do their regular broadcast from the Wrigley Building, which is a sleeper jump from the Englewood Theater way up on West Sixty-third Street. There was no trouble getting downtown for the rehearsal and broadcast. The problem was getting back to the theater in time for the evening shows. So CBS arranged for us to have a motorcycle escort.

When we came down to Michigan Boulevard after the broadcast a cab and a cop were waiting for us in front of the building. Nat told the policeman and the driver where we were going and got into the cab.

“What’s that cop all about?” asked the cabbie.

“Follow him uptown,” said Nat. “Stay right behind him. We have to get to the theater in less than fifteen minutes.”

“Not in this cab, you don’t, mister. I don’t wanna get no ticket.”

“You won’t get a ticket. That’s what the cop’s for, to clear the way for us.”

“Sure, sure! The first light I go through he turns around and gives me a ticket for speeding and going through a red light.”

“We haven’t got time,” Nat said. He handed the driver a five-dollar bill and added, “I’ll take care of everything.”

The cop climbed on his bike, started his siren, motioned to the hackie to follow him, and away we went like an Erie-Lackawanna local on a long grade. Nat turned to Gracie and said, “You know, Googie, till I met this cabdriver I thought I made up your missing brother.”

We kept falling farther and farther behind the cop. Nat kept hollering, “Stay with him!”

The driver hollered back, “I’m scared!”

“So am I,” said Googie.

Nat sat back and sighed as the policeman, his siren screaming, his arm motioning our driver to close it up, vanished from sight.

“I hope,” said Nat, “that officer has at least ten good, funny minutes and a song to get off with or we’ll never play the Englewood Theater again.”

Gong! Gong! Gong!

The summer Bert Lahr took over the Chase & Sanborn Hour, I burned a lot of midnight oil, and drank a lot of it, too, sitting with him, Parke Levey, and Harry Tugend (then just two other radio writers) night after night in the Warwick Hotel trying to figure out how to put the magic of Bert's visual humor on radio.

For most of these writing sessions Bert wore an old silk robe held together with a sash. This was because when he worked he worried, and when he worried he either hit himself on the cheek with his fist or twisted a button on his jacket or both. If he'd been properly dressed when we worked, he eventually would have had to hold all his jackets together with sashes and the floor would have been covered with buttons.

So, lacking a button and anxious to keep from knocking out his own teeth, he twisted a bit of cellophane from a cigarette package. The noise it made could drive you up the wall.

Every line we got down on paper took what seemed like hours. It was agonizing, grueling work trying to convince Bert that anything that was merely spoken, that could not be emphasized by body action and facial expression, could be funny. Getting him to believe in every laugh line was about as simple as selling Ponce de León a twenty-year life insurance policy to take on his trip to the Fountain of Youth. (*I know he didn't find it. But Ponce didn't know he wouldn't!*)

It has been discussed too many times on too many late-night TV shows to bother explaining here how Jack Benny laughs at absolutely everything George Burns says. Bert Lahr had the same strange and wonderful effect on me. I'd ring his bell. He'd open the door and say, "Oh? Hello, baby," in that sad voice of his, and I'd start to laugh.

One winter evening shortly before Norma and I were mar-

ried I managed to get an evening off and a couple of freebies from a press agent to see Bert in *Life Begins at 8:40*. Why hadn't I simply called Bert to get a pair? It's something I've never believed in doing, putting the arm on an actor for free ducats. It's like asking your neighbor, the dentist, for a couple of Annie Oakley inlays.

There's no more overused phrase to describe audience enthusiasm than "I had 'em in the aisles." All Bert ever had to do was make an entrance and that's where I took up residence. My laugh was no new sound to him, so he came down to the foots, peered into the audience like one of Sitting Bull's scouts looking to finger Custer (got a big laugh from the audience, which had no idea what he was doing), and found me in the aisle next to a seat in the third row. All through the remainder of the act he kept wigwagging to me to come back and see him, managing to make the signals look like part of the play.

When Norma and I went back, we were met by Buddy Pearson, a faithful friend and sometime writer, who was to Bert what Barney Dean was to Bob Hope and Ukie Sherin at one time to Bing Crosby. "Hello, baby," Bert said. "Want a drink?" I nodded but began to worry. He was twisting a piece of cellophane.

Buddy poured us each about half a tumbler of cognac and while we started to sip it Bert began to hit himself in the face with his fist. It was immediately clear to me that the evening wasn't going to be all social.

In a few minutes Bert picked up a script and said, "Is this funny? The announcer says to me, 'Do you like pewter mugs?' and I say, 'No. An' I ain't crazy about tin pans either.'"

Norma smiled. I nodded.

"Ya gotta help me, baby," Bert said. "I'm on the air tomorrow with this stuff." He threw about six pages of script in my lap.

"I can't fool around with another guy's work, Bert."

"Yeah, I know. But *I* can!"

"Sure. If you want to."

"Tell me where to fool around."

I read the script. Bert was right. He was in trouble.

"We can't rewrite this thing sitting here," I said. "And it's

getting late. I have to take Norma home to Brooklyn, come back to Manhattan, get some sleep, and be at NBC at eight thirty tomorrow.”

Bert looked at his watch and said, “You’ve got plenty of time. We’ll go to Leon and Eddie’s for something to eat. Turn around, honey.” The last three words were to Norma. He wanted to put his pants on.

So Bert, his Mildred, Norma, and I went to Leon and Eddie’s, and who joined us but Bob Hope—who was in his first hit, *Roberta*—and Dolores.

Through all the chitchat, crisscross of gossip, and gags, Bert never lost sight of his problem but nothing really got done. Finally he asked, “What’ll I do tomorrow?”

“You know where the laughs are supposed to be.”

Bert nodded.

“Whenever you come to a point and nothing happens, flutter your cheek and then give them the profile.”

“Like this?” Bert did it and everybody laughed.

“If they don’t laugh at that go into your British dialect.”

To love Bert the way I did after all the exhausting nights I spent working with him at the Warwick could only mean that he was truly lovable. Lovable but maddening!

There was, for instance, the little Indian war we had one night. I don’t even remember what the routine we were writing was all about, but we needed the name of an Indian tribe. Several were suggested, like Ojibway, Iroquois, Sioux. Bert objected to them all. “If we say Sioux,” he said, “we’ll have to follow it with a lawyer joke.”

We skipped Sioux and went on to Seminole and Arapaho.

“We might get something out of that Rappaport,” he said.

“I’ve got it,” I said. “Potawatomi!”

“Ya made it up,” said Bert. “If we don’t have a real tribe, the joke’s no good.”

“What about Rappaport?” I asked.

“That’s no good either.”

Everybody in the room liked Potawatomi, but we couldn’t make Bert believe it was really an Indian tribe. I think we settled for Blackfoot and some obvious topper. I carried the scar

of my defeat in the Great Potawatomi War for five years or more.

Then one day in Hollywood, when Frank Morgan was the summer replacement for Bing Crosby on The Kraft Music Hall show, we had a spot in which an Indian medicine man was trying to sell his snake oil to Frank who was trying to sell blankets to the Indian. It was a standoff, two con men working on each other, until, convinced that the deal he was trying to make was going nowhere, Frank insulted the Indian, who said, "White man cannot say thing like that to old Indian brave. Young Indian brave, maybe. But old brave, never! Me come from powerful tribe. Me Potawatomi!"

"Nooooo?" said Frank with that funny break in his voice. "You doooo?"

"Me oldest of old Potawatomis."

"Well, I'll tell you what you can do. You can pot your old watomi right out of here."

Bert professed to be baffled by the brilliance of his son, John, an alumnus of Yale and Oxford and a successful drama critic at an incredibly young age.

"How'd a mug like me get such a smart kid?" he asked time and time again, worrying and hitting himself on the cheek. "And money don't mean nothin' to him."

Bert liked to describe himself as a mercenary. But I think he enjoyed using the word rather than honestly believing that it described him.

"Would you believe it? One night the doorman called up and said there was a guy downstairs who said he was my son. And it was John. The doorman was trying to make him go around the back way, he looked like such a bum."

I have an apology to make to John. I incompletely quoted one of Bert's greatest radio lines. It got him the biggest non-mugged-up laugh he ever got on the air. In telling John about it I left out one phrase that, to me, was its most potent ingredient.

Bert was speaking of a little pest named Balzac. He'd made up the name for this child stooge and pronounced it so that the first syllable sounded like a mortar shell leaving the tube. In attempting to describe the frustration and pain he got from running into this irritating little menace, Bert said, as I quoted it

to John for his book, *Notes on a Cowardly Lion*, “I woke up this mornin’, the birds was tweetin’ in the trees, the sun was shinin’, the bees was buzzin’, an’ I had to run into poison ivy.”

Funny, huh?

Well, the complete line—as I now remember it and as Bert wrote it—was better. Here it is with the omission italicized: “I woke up this mornin’, the birds was tweetin’ in the trees, the sun was shinin’, the bees was buzzin’, *the whole world was a flowerpot*, an’ I had to run into poison ivy.”

That’s the story of Bert’s life. The world he knew could never be a flower *garden*, it could never be more than a *pot*.

Ruth Downey Karp, a copy group head at J. Walter Thompson, called me one morning during the last year I was with the company and asked if her son, Michael, could come in and talk to me. I said, “Why not? Everybody else does.”

She explained that he was doing some sort of radio disc jockey work up in New Hampshire where he went to college. When he came to see me it turned out that what he wanted to talk to me about was Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, and the other comedy stars of that era. He came to see me several times and asked me lots of questions. I asked him just one, what was his interest in these people? He really didn’t know.

It is possible that no one was more distant from my mind than Michael Karp as I sat in the chapel at Frank E. Campbell’s, probably the most famous funeral maker in the world. The room was filling with sad, but really sad, people come to say a last good-bye to Bert.

Someone took the seat next to me and said, “Hello,” very softly. It was Michael Karp.

“What are you doing here?” I asked. It was a Wednesday. “You should be up in New Hampshire.”

“I took the bus down last night. I had to come.”

“I didn’t know you knew Bert.”

“I didn’t. I never even saw him on the stage. Only in *The Wizard of Oz*. But I heard so much about him. People said he was great. He must have been wonderful in *Godot*. I felt I had to be here.”

We sat in silence as the chapel continued to fill to overflow-

ing and I thought of the opinion of an immature Hollywood TV producer who had held up booking Bert, saying, "No one knows who Bert Lahr is." And a line Bert said to me at The Players, the last time I saw him, churned to the surface of my mind. It was about the wonderful television commercials he did for the Frito-Lay company. He said, "Ain't it ironic? After all the things I've done in show business, I gotta be kept alive by a potato chip!"

Just before the service started, a service that featured John reading from his father's great characterizations and getting laughs from sad people with happy memories, a man in the middle of the room half rose from his chair and looked around. I didn't know him but he looked, and he was dressed, like every burlesque stage manager I'd ever seen. He leaned over to whisper to the man with him. What came out was one of those old-fashioned, resonant stage whispers that carried to every corner of a theater.

What he said was, "It's a sellout!"

About a year later Michael Karp called to invite Norma and me to be his guests at Madison Square Garden where the circus was opening. Mike had become one of Ringling's clowns.

Bums like us

Ed Gardner, who later became “Archy the Manager speaking” to the ever absent Duffy of the radio show “Duffy’s Tavern,” was one of the radio director-producers at Thompson. When it was decided to make a radio show of the popular newspaper feature “Believe It or Not,” starring its creator, Robert L. Ripley, Ed got the nod. The choice was an inspiration.

On their first meeting Ripley immediately saw what was clearly another item for his feature. The confrontation took place in Ripley’s remarkable apartment. The details are remembered, as well as possible, from Ripley’s own account.

As you might imagine, his pad was crammed with the weird mementos of the many round-the-world expeditions he’d made in search of anything hard to believe. He’d brought home a lot of what he’d found. According to your taste his apartment looked like a junk shop, a motion picture studio’s prop department, or a museum of curios, oddities, artifacts, bibelots, and one-of-a-kind treasures from every corner of the earth.

Ed, in real life, talked just like the character of Archy, created for him by our friend and colleague, George Faulkner, for a CBS show called “This Is New York.”

When Ed saw Ripley’s place, he was at first speechless. He really dug it. He had once worked in the piano section of a Brooklyn department store and liked crowded places. He wandered around, examining everything with interest, commenting on some of the things and asking questions about others. Finally his curiosity got the better of him and he said, “Bob, ya got a swell place here. Did ya rent it furnished?”

Ed’s activities with the oddballs he booked for the Robert L.

Ripley show created some classic moments. His office was generally filled with people even Ripley didn't believe.

One such individual was a man who traveled around the country playing state and county fairs, a career he'd pursued all his adult life. He was billed as "The Only Living Human Billy Goat Butter." His act was to let the goat butt him and then, as a finale, he outbutted the goat, skull to skull.

Hearing him tell about his work, how long he'd been in his brain-busting business, and how much money he'd amassed at it, Ed realized that for the first time in his life he was definitely face to face with a real hardheaded business man. By bargaining shrewdly and offering him more money for a brief appearance on the air than he got for a week of seeing eye to eye with a goat, Ed was able to announce that the following week his show would feature a man who, when threatened with butting by an enraged billy goat, knew how to use his head.

A lot of publicity was printed. The ink was hardly dry before Ed began to get calls from the ASPCA. Thinking the calls were from ASCAP, he told his secretary to call back and tell them that while his show used a lot of freaks of one kind or another, he never used songwriters. What his secretary found out was that a man from the ASPCA wanted to come and call on Ed. Ed said he'd talk to him on the phone. I was in his office when it happened. He listened for a long time and then said, "I don't know what you're talkin' about, cruelty to animals? I love animals. I put cheese in the mousetrap in my room but I don't set the trap. Don't tell me I'm being cruel to animals!" He listened again for a while and then, without bothering to cover the phone and in a voice the man could have heard without the telephone, turned to me and said, "This jerk says he's going to pull my billy goat butter off the show on the grounds that it's cruelty to animals. Don't nobody care about people?"

"He wants to know if my butter wears a helmet." Then he turned back to the phone and shouted into it, "My guy don't even wear a yarmulke!"

Turning back to me, he said, "Now he'll think I'm also anti-Semitic." When he tried to resume his conversation with the ASPCA official, the line was dead. "How do you like a guy

like that,” Ed complained. “We’re having a sensible discussion of a problem and he hangs up.”

In case the whole thing sounds like a joke, a man from the ASPCA showed up at the first rehearsal and pulled the goat off the show.

The wonderful thing about Ed Gardner was that he found all the bizarre problems of the Robert L. Ripley show as routine as brushing his teeth.

One morning he rushed into my office, elated. “Hey! What do you think! I just got a call from an agent who says he’s got a guy who has four balls!”

“What does he do?”

“Have a lot of fun, what else? What do ya mean, what does he do?”

“Well, I thought he might be a juggler.”

“Don’t be stupid. Nobody books a guy who only juggles *four* balls. You gotta handle at least eight and throw in a couple of plates and maybe a cigar or a pickle.”

“A pickle?”

“Yeah. He’s pregnant.”

“How can a man be pregnant?”

“Who cares? It’s a sure way to get on the Ripley show. I’m goin’ out to see him this afternoon, somewhere on Long Island. Want to come?”

I couldn’t go. I’m sorry I missed it. The conversation must have been unique.

Next morning Ed stopped by. “Wanna come downstairs to Janssen’s for a cup of coffee?”

We walked toward the elevator. “Remember I told you about that nut on Long Island with four balls? Well, forget him! He’s out! He’s a fake! I drove all the way to hell out there and he’s only got *three!*”

“How would you have used him on the air?”

“How could I? But who’s going to blow a chance to talk to a guy with all those marbles?”

“Apparently he lost one.”

“Two! Maybe three! He wouldn’t submit to a medical!”

“What was his explanation?”

“He had none! He just bragged a lot!”

Perhaps the best example of Ed’s unflappability, his reluctance to be impressed, was his suave and courtly handling of that famous Broadway and film star, Alla Nazimova.

I’d met Madame Nazimova a year or so earlier when she appeared as a guest on a show I was doing called *Shell Chateau*, or “five acts and Jolson,” a spin-off of Jolie’s successful appearance with Paul Whiteman on *The Kraft Music Hall*.

Nazimova, whose home at Sunset Boulevard and Crescent Heights (across the street from the original Schwab’s drug-store) became a hotel called the Garden of Allah, had starred in the 1915 Broadway hit, *War Brides*. She toured the country in this, went to Hollywood to make it into a picture, and finally did a couple of years on the two-a-day circuit in a twenty-minute tab version of it. There was really nothing about *War Brides*, as a theatrical vehicle, that she had not covered.

When I talked to her, after she was booked for *Shell Chateau*, I suggested that there were still enough people around to whom *War Brides* would be nostalgic and that it would be a new thing to the rest, so why not do a twelve-minute radio version? The moment the suggestion was out of my mouth I could have bitten my tongue off.

How do you tell an actress as steeped in a work as Nazimova was in *War Brides* that you are going to cut it down from a three-act play, from a feature-length film, from a twenty-minute vaude act, to a twelve-minute radio skit, particularly if you don’t know if you can do it?

Without going into how it was done, I managed to reduce the cast to four people by combining several different characters. I cut out great gobs of subplot and stuck to the straight emotional story. The broadcast was on a Saturday. I went to see Nazimova on a Wednesday with my twelve-and-a-half minute version—thirteen minutes with the intro that set up the situation.

Early Thursday morning—*early*—she called *me*!

“My dear! You are marvelous! I have wasted hundreds of hours of my life doing this play the way I’ve been doing it. We

should always have done this version you have written. That's all there is to the play."

I was first relieved, then grateful, then all puffed up at my success as an editor. Rehearsal time came. Herb Polesie (remember him from the TV show "20 Questions"?), who was the regular director of Shell Chateau, was on vacation. Ed Gardner was pinch-hitting for him.

We did the broadcast from Studio 8G in Rockefeller Center. The control room was all the way back in the auditorium, tempting directors, in speaking to the artists, to use the talk-back more than most of them like to do, because it was such a long walk to the stage. We all, when we had any directions for a performer, preferred to discuss them confidentially.

This sort of finesse didn't interest Ed, who was used to working with things and people that no one was supposed to believe.

He hit the talk-back and called, "All right. Let's do this *War Brides* bit."

Madame Nazimova stepped to the microphone and read a few lines. The people who were working with her picked up their cues. It had not gone a minute when Ed again hit the talk-back.

"All right. Hold it! This whole thing ain't right. Now listen, madame, here is how we're gonna do it!"

That wonderful woman said, "Please tell me."

If you'd care to jump to another part of the book (see the index listing for Marlene Dietrich), you may read how another talented actress from another land behaved on another broadcast.

Ed was involved in some extramarital activities that bothered our boss, John Reber, and later Shirley Booth, his first wife and the original Miss Duffy of "Duffy's Tavern," but for different reasons.

At the end of an afternoon rehearsal at CBS, John said to Ed, "Have dinner with us. I have some things to talk to you about."

"Gee, John, I'd like to but Shirley's expecting me home."

"I'll call her and fix it."

"No! No! Don't do that. You see—"

"That broad you're running around with is taking up too

much of your time. Do you have to *eat* with her, too?”
“You don’t understand, John. She cooks like a mink!”

When Ed was sent west to join the growing cadre of JWT radio people in Hollywood, Norma and I met him at Pasadena. (I don’t know why we were the official greeters, but we were.) We met him at Pasadena because nobody rode all the way into town unless he was a traveling salesman.

There was always an air of expectancy when the Chief slowly rolled into Pasadena. Reporters, cameramen, everybody was eagerly looking for someone. It was clear when Ed arrived that he should have stayed on till it reached downtown LA. He looked like a salesman—for Spalding.

He was carrying a golf bag containing at least one of every type of club cleared for tournament play, two tennis rackets in wooden frames, and a polo coat. And as he stepped off the train he dropped them all on the platform, looked up at the sun, and said, “Hollywood! Here I am!”

Then he kissed Norma, said hello to me, and we started trying to stuff all his gear into my Chevrolet. (In those days they were *smaller* than Cadillacs.) I felt awful, meeting a celebrity like Ed in a cheap little owner-driven vehicle. I should have met him with a limousine.

We drove to the Roosevelt Hotel on Hollywood Boulevard across from Grauman’s Chinese. When we got all his luggage out of the car, there was so much on the sidewalk that I said to Ed, “Before you check in, would you like to go across the street and see how your footprints look in cement?”

“Ah, hell!” he said. “How did you know I sent ’em on ahead? I wanted to surprise you.”

“No surprise,” I said. “We know wherever you go you put your foot in it. How about coming to dinner tonight?”

He said, “I’ll call and let you know.”

When Ed arrived for dinner he was inordinately impressed by what was many, many light years from being even a poor example of “a typical Beverly Hills home.” We had a comfortable house on North Doheny.

On one side was a small apartment building, on the other a grove of oranges, lemons, and grapefruit that belonged to

Mel Schauer, an agent, and his wife, Rosita Moreno, an actress. (No, not Rita Moreno! She was still a baby at the time.)

There was honeysuckle along our driveway, and jasmine. It might have been these plus the scent of orange blossoms that made Ed lyrical.

He came in, looked up the staircase to make sure it went somewhere, looked into the living room, strolled into the dining room and found it set for dinner, came back, went upstairs, looked around, and on his way down stopped halfway. He put his arms out like the Pope blessing the multitudes in St. Peter's Square, including Norma and two of our children, Leda and Bruce, and me in his expansive gesture, as he said, "Ain't it a wonderful country where bums like us can have joints like this."

And he was absolutely right.

Ed had been sent out, it developed, to handle the production and direction of a show that George Faulkner, who was on the coast with the Rudy Vallee show, had laid out for Frank Fay. It damn near laid George out. So I got to be a writer on it. And it was easily the simplest and the most frustrating assignment I ever had.

Briefly, Fay had his own idea of what a Frank Fay show should be. He was to come on and say, "Welcome to my show. I'm Frank Fay." Then he planned to ad-lib for a while about anything that came into his head, then segue into a song accompanied by an eight-piece orchestra, which he would lead as he sang.

He then planned to do one of his analyses of a pop song lyric, which he did so devastatingly at the Palace. This over, he'd do a commercial for Royal Gelatin, the lucky sponsor who was to pay him a handsome fee. And so the show would go.

He would talk. He would sing. He would lead the band. He would ad-lib a couple of commercials—and the idea of the sophisticated Fay (of whom Jack Benny is sort of a parody) waxing lyrical over a gelatin dessert was something to conjure with. Thus the happy half hour would pass. He rejected any effort to present him with writing, even though a script had to be written to show the client. It served only as a routine, after he changed it to suit the running order he had in mind.

This left next to nothing for Ed and me to do in the control room—except tremble. Ed took the cue from the NBC engineer and threw it to Fay to start. He then had to warn Fay one minute before he was to sign off. It was at this point that I learned a great truth about Ed, a fact he had managed to keep secret from everyone in the company. He started the show, started his stopwatch, and then, turning to the NBC representative, he held out his watch and said, “Give me a cue to give him one minute before sign-off, willya? I don’t know how to read this damn thing.”

The next time Ed came west it was as Archy the Manager. He had picked up a tax-free bundle in Puerto Rico doing his show about an Irish saloon in New York City and had come to live the luxurious Beverly Hills life of a Hollywood star. There was only one problem. He was never a very secure man and the anxieties of writing and performing in “Duffy’s Tavern” began to overwhelm him. He was death on writers both in New York and Hollywood. Although almost every joke writer alive at the time worked briefly for Ed Gardner, the most famous survivor is the now director-producer Abe Burrows, who really set the character of Archy for all time. Those writers Ed didn’t fire he embarrassed out of his employ.

Long before the come-as-you-are-nude-if-you-please era of the seventies, Ed had the idea. He’d ask his staff, often as many as six or seven, to come out and work with him at his place in Bel Air. When they arrived, they were told Mr. Gardner would see them at the pool. They were then escorted through the house and pointed toward the pool area. There they would find Ed and perhaps a party of friends swimming in the nude. And, as I said, those were the days when “nude” meant “naked.”

Ed would wave, climb out of the water, wrap himself in a towel, and start to go over the jokes while the writers tried not to look at the party of pretty friends doing the Hedy Lamarr bit, as they pretended to pay attention to Ed. It was the hard way to sell jokes.

Although he became less and less predictable, Ed continued to broadcast. On the strength of his “Duffy’s Tavern” popularity

Thompson booked him to emcee one of its two-hour Thanksgiving spectaculars for the Elgin National Watch Company. This put him right up at the top of Big-Time Radio. And he knew it. He grew more and more fussy about the conditions under which he would work. Everything had to be just the same, homey, as it was when he did “Duffy’s Tavern.”

He had a bar to lean on. He wore his funny turned-up porkpie hat and bartender’s apron, and his first line was, “Hello, Duffy’s Tavern. Archy the manager speaking. Duffy ain’t here. Oh, hello, Duffy. You couldn’t get me? That’s because I’m here at the Elgin Watch Company’s big two-hour Thanksgiving show. Yeah. We got lots of stars, Duffy. Listen to this list of them—” Ed then read the long list of names on the broadcast.

It may have been the mixed-up information he gave at the start of the show—answering the phone as if he were at Duffy’s Tavern and then saying he was not there—or it may have been that he left two important words out of a very strong joke he used to open with right after the billboard. Whatever it was, the first joke of his opening monologue died.

Great performers know how to rise above a bad beginning, how to win back an audience when something has gone wrong. Ed panicked. He began to read his gags faster and faster. And the faster he read them the faster they failed.

When we came to the end of the show, out of ten minutes spread we’d allowed for laughs, we’d only used four. Six minutes of theme at the end of any comedy broadcast does not indicate a thoroughly successful effort.

That was the last time I worked with Ed until well after he joined AA, and became even straighter as a member of the Parent-Teacher Association of Hawthorne School in Beverly Hills. That PTA was quite a group, numbering among its members Ralph Edwards, Harpo Marx, Gene Kelly, Bob Cummings, Russ Morgan, Van Johnson, George Wells, Jesse White, Alan Reed, Robert Young, Reginald Gardiner, Skinnay Ennis, George Seaton, Jerry Wald—well, they’re enough.

For “Fathers’ Night” Ed had written and rehearsed a sketch with Jesse White in which Jesse was supposed to be a schoolteacher and Ed the father of a kid who wasn’t doing too well.

It was a fairly funny little skit but I didn't think it had a strong enough blackout.

In trying to figure out when the teacher could have an evening meeting with the father and the boy, Jesse suggested a Wednesday. Ed's answer was, "I can't make it Wednesday. AA, you know."

This, of course, was an obvious laugh among Ed's "friends" in Beverly Hills. But it didn't seem to be quite enough. Ed and I talked it over for a while and finally we came up with an ending that surprised even Jesse, to whom we gave one more line at the finish but without telling him the topper.

The blackout also surprised Mrs. Pogson, principal of Hawthorne. In fact, it almost got Ed's two boys and my three kids thrown out of school.

Here's how the sketch finished:

WHITE: Shall we make it Wednesday evening at eight?

GARDNER: Not Wednesday. AA, you know.

WHITE: AA? You?

GARDNER: No, the kid.

Hellzapoppin'

If the names Olsen and Johnson mean anything to anyone today they stand for *Hellzapoppin'*.

This was a live-action prototype of "Laugh-In" with a cast of family and friends; it was an enlargement of Olie and Chick's zany act that was twenty-four-sheeted on every major vaude circuit in the country. For a while it looked as if *Hellzapoppin'* would remain at the Winter Garden Theater on Broadway forever. Too bad it didn't.

In spite of the fact that almost all of Olsen and Johnson's work was built around the "sightiest" of sight gags, their triumph on Broadway, and the national publicity their lunacy netted them, made them ripe for an air show of their own, at least in the mind of John Reber, whose radio eyes were frequently bigger than the listeners' stomachs. Just as radio found it hard to digest the visual comedy of Bert Lahr, it had double trouble with Olie Olsen and Chick Johnson.

Bob Colwell, who lived in a world of wide-eyed innocence as far as show business was concerned, was a man too stagestruck to be given any hard, unpopular decisions to make when it came to buying talent for radio. He had met Olsen and Johnson and had fallen in love with Reber's idea of giving them a show of their own. He was, in particular, utterly charmed by Olie, whose open smile and deprecating approach to "the art of Olsen and Johnson" were disarming.

The truth was that when you took out all the irrelevant slapstick that went on around them (think about Rowan and Martin) these two buffoons were merely a run-of-the-mill stand-up two act telling jokes that frequently reached the intellectual level of a Henny Youngman lecture on one-liners. Their genius was that the payoff never really seemed to matter. It was the

pace, the variety of different things going on (are you thinking “Laugh-In?”), that got the yocks. As Chick Johnson delivered a punch line, he himself laughed it up so much you could hardly hear it. And the audience roared because as he was giggling, a girl wearing a pair of policeman’s pants was chased across the stage by a pantsless copper.

If I write with some affection for Olsen and Johnson it is not only because any friend of Bob Colwell’s was a friend of mine. It is because they gave me my one and only chance to appear on Broadway. And I say with all modesty that I scored big with the one line I was forced to ad-lib. ’Twas a pity Alec Woollcott wasn’t present.

It all started when Bob said, “Olie and Chick gave me the stage box for tonight. Want to come?” It was as sensible as asking a starving man if he’d like a bite to eat.

“This is what’s going to happen,” Bob told me after we settled into our seats. “Olie and Chick do the if-I’m-not-here-I-must-be-someplace-else-and-if-I’m-someplace-else-I-can’t-be-here bit. While they’re doing this a guy comes out shooting a revolver. [*Hellzapoppin’* audiences sometimes had to be treated for shell shock. The show used more ammo than World War I.] The guy with the gun hollers, ‘Stop!’ Olie asks why. The guy says, ‘Because if you don’t stop talking I’ll stop shooting in the air!’ Then he fires two more shots and runs off. Got it?”

“I’ve got it,” I said. “But what do I do with it?”

“Well, as that stooge fires his last shot, you and I climb onto the stage and chase him off hollering, ‘Stop that man!’ I’ve talked it all over with Olie.”

There was nothing new about this. *Hellzapoppin’* was “living theater” way back in the 1930s. The audience was always involved. Occasionally a man in the audience, generally sitting in the middle of the house, was awarded a fifty-pound cake of ice that was passed along to him and which he had to hold for the rest of the performance. Olie and Chick didn’t care what he did with it.

Several times during every performance an actor would walk off the stage and out through the back of the house carrying a potted palm. Each time the palm got bigger. As the audience filed out after the show, the palm, now a full-grown tree, was in

the lobby with a live monkey in it. (I always thought the guy who carried it out should be in it.)

Bob hadn't told me that he and Olie had cooked up a "thing." So when we jumped onto the stage and started shouting, "Stop that man!" Bob ran right off but Olie stopped me and asked, "What did he do?"

For a second I was shocked and bewildered and stood there tongue-tied. It made the audience laugh. Finally Olie repeated, "What did he do?" I realized I had to say something, so I screamed, "He woke me up!" and beat it off the stage. The laugh I got was like running pool the first time you pick up a cue.

The following week, after days and nights of work, Bob and Olie came up with a script whittled out of Olsen and Johnson's best material. Bob asked me for suggestions. Trying to hear how it might sound on the radio, I kept hearing nothing but Johnson's giggle on every punch line. "Try to get Chick to keep quiet and let the audience do the laughing" was my only suggestion. I was wrong. From the success of their radio show, it might have been better if the listeners had heard Chick instead of the jokes.

While their less than smashing radio show did nothing to enlarge Olie and Chick's bank account, it didn't diminish their popularity one bit. When they took *Hellzapoppin'* on the road the grass roots seemed to be sprouting greenbacks.

Whenever they played Los Angeles they stayed at the Hollywood-Knickerbocker Hotel on Ivar just north of Hollywood Boulevard. In those days it was one of Hollywood's best, uniquely overstaffed with Filipino "boys," each of whom had his own special job. According to Olie, every morning about ten thirty there would be a knock on the door and the same smiling young man in bellboy's buttons would bow and say, "Goo-mooorning. Here's bawthmott." He would then walk through the suite to the bathroom, hang the bathmat over the side of the tub, and, still smiling, walk out.

Olie was a friendly man with a vaudeville straight man's smile frozen on his face from years of use. He smiled at everyone, stopped to talk to anyone who stopped him. One morning

he was walking on Hollywood Boulevard after the pair had been away from Los Angeles for over three years. “I saw this little guy coming toward me,” he said, “with a smile on his face that would have made Pollyanna look like Scrooge. He looked familiar but I couldn’t place him. He walked up to me, stuck out his hand, and we shook hands warmly. Then he said, ‘How’s Bawthmott?’ ”

Granny, dear old Granny

Probably the first show to go on the air and actually create a *need* for the sponsor's product was an omelet I handled for about twenty-six weeks on behalf of Bromo-Seltzer. It was called "NTG and His Girls," and it couldn't have been more accurately named.

Nils T. Granlund (NTG) was perhaps the only Finn in the nightclub business and I only mention it because he was so proud of being Finnish, which was funny. Finish was the one thing he didn't have.

Over a span of years he was entrepreneur and compere of a series of big ballroom-type cabarets, a working word in Granny's day. Each spot occupied a block-long loft on the second floor of a building either on Broadway or just around the corner.

The rooms featured a line of twelve to sixteen girls, and that's about the age Granny liked them to be. They wore as little as the going law allowed, danced, sang, and looked available. The places also offered a band, a large dance floor, small drinks, and bad food. They were a product of prohibition and were on their way out by the time we started "NTG and His Girls." But those spots made a bundle in the days when a visiting fireman could come into town with a bottle of his own sure-shot home-made gin, pick up a broad, and show her a swell time for a lot more money than he thought it would cost him to buy setups and dinner, enjoy what passed for dancing, and probably wind up rolled.

By today's standards NTG's emceeing was clean. By any standards in the world it was vulgar, frequently to the point of being quite objectionable. I never found out who at Bromo or J. Walter had the idea of putting him on radio. It was sort of like getting evangelist Oral Roberts to play St. Patrick's Cathedral

on Christmas Eve. Very bad judgment. But the show went on and I was the midwife who delivered it.

Granny was what every girl who's ever answered a rehearsal call knows as a fanny patter. And that's probably as far as he ever got or tried to go. But he injected himself into the lives of the girls he hired and became sort of a father image, a phrase that had yet to develop into a popular psychological cliché.

Thus it was not remarkable that he thought of himself as "the great discoverer" or that his "discoverees" went along with the fantasy.

It was next to impossible to mention any name from Minnie Maddern Fiske to Joan Crawford or Martha Raye that Granny didn't lay some proprietary claim to. But what was more interesting was that the girls appeared to like him. To most men he was a creep.

The truth is, he merely used the word "discovered" as a synonym for the word "hired." Since almost every singer or dancer, many of whom subsequently became card-carrying actresses, had her start in a café chorus line, Granny had no trouble in putting together quite a card of "first finds."

The broadcast was to feature a guest "celebrity" from the list of Granny's discoveries and six or seven talented chorus girls for whom Granny was willing to predict stardom. If any fulfilled the promise, she must have changed her name. Most of them he saw for the first time at rehearsal.

Besides Granny, the show included an orchestra under the direction of Harry Salter, who later created the hit radio show "Stop The Music" and its TV counterpart, "Name That Tune." The guest budget on the show was \$300. One hundred of this was to pay the guest celebrity. How much Granny threw in, I never knew. The balance of the \$300 went to pay the "talented chorus girls," at the rate of \$25 each. None ever did more than one show. None ever had that much talent.

Harry and I used to audition up to forty girls a week for these \$25 jobs. Most came from agents who took \$2.50 off the top of their clients' salary—a big word for such short bread.

One of these agents, a woman, complained to John Reber that the reason her client didn't get on the show was because she refused to split her fee with Carroll Carroll. It made me

pretty mad to realize what bad study habits in arithmetic had done to me. I hadn't realized there was the kind of money that chiseling agent was talking about.

By knocking down a buck and a quarter (half the commission) on each girl I booked, I'd have been on my way to clearing \$7 a week, \$28 a month, \$91 every thirteen weeks, \$364 a year, or almost a dollar a day. That would build to over \$3,600 if the show stayed on ten years. But I really didn't lose all that. It was on only twenty-six weeks.

Salter and I ran our weekly talent auditions from a blind control room. We'd ask the kids questions over the talk-back, have them tell us whatever story they had, or cared to make up, about themselves. This was taken down in shorthand (no tape yet). Then a studio pianist would accompany the girl if she had a song to sing. Some of them played accordion or guitar, none well.

If a girl had a funny story, Harry would teach her to sing a song. It was always "Parlez Moi d'Amour." Anyone can sing the English words to that.

If a girl could get by with a song but had no funny "life story" I'd make one up. One accordion player had *such* a funny yarn that we put her on in spite of the fact that her musicianship on the tummy piano was almost unnoticeable. To cover her truly awful playing, Harry arranged to have the accordionist in his band watch her rehearse. We had her play her number over and over again. She never improved. But Harry's man learned her arrangement.

On the actual broadcast, when she started to play we cut her mike and opened the pot on the pro. It sounded beautiful. But at the end of her number she made a little cut that left her standing there motionless in front of the mike while the music went on for four more bars. What an echo. The miracle of radio. It was such a success even the girl turned to see how it was done.

Almost everyone I knew at the time got one of the watches I kept getting from Granny as gifts. Each week he'd walk into rehearsal with a fistful of wristwatches, lapel watches, pocket watches, pin watches, and evening watches, and when he didn't

give watches it was perfume. For a while it bothered me. I told him he was spending more on presents than he was making.

“Forget it,” he said. “I get the stuff from the neighborhood boys.” These were the hoods who anged some of the joints he worked in. I should have kept my mouth shut. I now had two problems: (1) I couldn’t refuse the gracious gestures of a kind, thoughtful, and dopey man; (2) I was receiving stolen goods. So I gave all the watches away, making my friends accessories after the fact. I figured if I went to jail I’d have a lot of congenial companions around the place with me.

We had one big dramatic show because of the appearance, or disappearance, of one of Granny’s “old girls,” Sally Rand. A lot of publicity had been released that the famous fan dancer, who had followed in the footsteps of Little Egypt and become the hit of Chicago’s second World’s Fair, would be on the show with Granny. So much publicity went out that NBC began to get very nervous about her appearance on its network, although the possibility of seeing her do her fan dance on the radio was very slight.

We had no intention of doing anything remotely out of line. In fact, the big gag was that we were going to give her a chance to play a legitimate dramatic part—for two minutes. But it turned out it was not the game but the name NBC was scared of and we finally had to cancel her. Knowing nothing about the reason for the cancellation, “the neighborhood boys” became very upset at Granny for treating his friends so shabbily. It was their considered opinion that since she got the publicity for NBC, she should get to do the show.

So at noon on the day of the broadcast we received a phone call saying NTG would be a little late for rehearsal. The caller said he was not feeling well. Or maybe that he was about to feel not well. We soon found out he was more than just not feeling well. He was goddamned sick! He was suffering from all the ills that Michael Flynn visited on the bodies of his victims before he put them to sleep from sheer exhaustion after a session of double-barreled elimination.

We continued with our rehearsals, using a staff announcer, and putting out calls for someone with some sort of a name to

sub for Granny. I think the man we finally had standing by was Jimmy Wallington.

An hour before the broadcast NTG showed up with his doctor. The best way to tell you how he looked is to say that if makeup were used on the radio, we'd have had to call the makeup man from the Riverside Memorial Chapel. Nobody else would have touched him.

The doctor assured us he would be in shape to go on. Now the worry was, if he did get straightened out enough to stand up, could he see to read and what would he say? With a carefully written script in his hand, he had a tendency to develop diarrhea of the mouth and ad-lib gaucheries that now entitle him to be known as the Spiro Agnew of his era. It is interesting to discover that two countries, as far apart in space, climate, and culture as Finland and Greece can develop the same sort of talent.

When air time came, Herb Polesie, who was doing the show, was about to put Wallington on when there was that misunderstanding of signals that can lose ball games. It almost lost ours. Granny's doctor took the cue and pushed Granny on. He was just alive enough to see the microphone and walk to it. But there was not enough life in his brain to inspire him to take his usual embarrassing ad-liberties with the script. He was just alive enough to read the words on the paper slowly enough, for the first time, to be understood. He went through the whole half hour, letter perfect, reading the words with all the vitality of a stiff in a vivisection lab. It was his finest hour.

While one of the chorus girl guests displayed her musical "talent," the doctor worked on Granny, like a prizefighter between rounds. The audience didn't know what was going on. The girls didn't know what was going on. The client, at home, didn't know what was going on and said it was the best show NTG had ever done for them.

Nobody but Salter knew he had his trumpet player standing ready to play taps.

There goes the showboat

At Thompson, John Reber, head of the radio department, knew that while you might build a fantastic audience with two unknowns in an act like Amos 'n' Andy, it took time. Folks had to get hooked on the idea of the two characters, get to know their peculiarities and all their personal preferences. And there was always a better than fifty-fifty chance they wouldn't get hooked at all. The result, in this case, would be a lot of wasted time and money and a chance to go back to Start.

Reber reasoned you were cutting the odds against you if you looked for a track record, built a show around a ready-made personality who had already been selected by the people and become a star. So he bought such names as Rudy Vallee, Eddie Cantor, Bing Crosby, Al Jolson, Burns and Allen, Paul Whiteman, Guy Lombardo, John Barrymore, Bert Lahr, George Jessel, Lou Holtz, W. C. Fields, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, Lionel Barrymore, Nelson Eddy, Dorothy Lamour, Tommy Dorsey, Ronald Colman, Charles Laughton, Milton Berle, Basil Rathbone, Groucho Marx, Mary Pickford, and Wallace Beery, to name a few, and put them on the air, many for the first time, and every one of them in a more flattering limelight than he'd ever before enjoyed. But someone once said, "Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad." Reber finally got so mad he forgot his formula and tried to copy a show simply because it often got better ratings than any of his.

The broadcast that bugged him was the Maxwell House Show Boat starring Charles Winninger as Captain Henry. It was taken from Edna Ferber's novel and the Broadway musical *Show Boat*, and taken miles and miles from both. It's doubtful if it ever used any of the songs from the Kern-Hammerstein

work because that might have been a violation of grand rights.

There's no way of knowing how Reber first heard of a man named Billy Bryant. It might have been from an enterprising agent, or someone could have left a copy of *Variety* lying around his office. Having heard of him, to book him on Rudy Vallee's Fleischmann's Yeast Hour, Al Jolson's Shell Chateau, or even Paul Whiteman's Kraft Music Hall (the way Reber usually tried out acts) would have made some sense. Bryant, theoretically, was a colorful character, a famous showboat captain acclaimed all up and down the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio rivers. Without seeing or talking to him Reber conceived of him as a real-life Charles Winninger-type Captain Henry (modeled after Ferber's Captain Andy).

John reasoned this way. If a phony setup like the showboat broadcast (in which some parts were shared by two people, one talking, one singing) could capture the nation's ear, why wouldn't an original, genuine, true-to-life showboat captain be as real gold to pyrites?

This, of course, is spurious reasoning. If the demand for the real thing in entertainment could be depended upon to transcend the demand for the imitation, motion pictures would never have killed the road for legitimate theater with real, live people. Radio would never have threatened the talkies, where you could see as well as hear. And TV would not now hang as a heavy threat over every sort of "live" entertainment.

The first thing Reber did when he had an idea was to talk it over with Bob Colwell. For some reason or other Bob's usual good common sense disappeared in the face of Reber's powerful presentation of his showboat premise. And the two of them went to work to prepare a radio show that presented a *real* showboat show, just like the ones on the showboats of yore (or something like that). What they forgot was that the "real showboats of yore" got scuttled by the motion pictures and the very radio on which they were trying to revive it.

When Reber and Colwell asked me what I thought of their plan I was too busy on the Joe Penner show and Jolie's Shell Chateau to give it much time, but I do remember saying that I thought there "might be one too many showboats on the

Reber,” that the corny, genuine article couldn’t compete with the slick Captain Henry imitation with his catch phrases, “It’s only the beginning, folks,” and “Run ’em on, Gus.”

When I asked my two colleagues if they’d seen Billy Bryant work, if he had any talent, they said he must have, that he’d been on the river for over twenty years.

“So has the Albany night boat,” I said, “but you can’t put that on the radio.”

“He’s been producing riverboat shows just like the one we’re planning to put on.”

“And appearing in them?”

“He introduces the acts.”

“If you were putting on a show called Shubert Alley would you get Lee and J. J. to emcee it? Unless Billy Bryant’s better than Charlie Winninger your showboat’s never going to get away from the dock.”

I was given a vote of no confidence, dubbed the royal opposition, and thrown out of Reber’s office. The paddle wheels were set in motion to bring Billy Bryant to New York and mount an audition for a *real* showboat show with a *real* showboat captain at the helm.

As the plans progressed Reber’s thinking became more imitative. Instead of having one of his own JWT radio producers handle the show, he did what most other agencies did. He went out and hired a “name,” a radio prima donna, to do the job. The man he bought was William Bacher.

Bill had started his professional life as a dentist. I say that with a reason. I hate writers who speak of a bank president as “an ex-newsboy” because he once had an after-school paper route in some silk-stocking suburb. I was a bakery clerk for a few weeks during one summer vacation. I doubt if Jules Stein was really destined to devote his life examining eyes instead of founding and running MCA. But just looking at Bacher, you knew why he had to get out of dentistry.

He was the only Caucasian I have ever known who wore his hair in an Afro. Standing next to him, Marty Allen would have looked bald. Who would let a dentist with a head of hair like that work on his teeth? A man could get a mouthful of it.

So Bill Bacher had to find some other line of work, and he

did what a lot of people who were at loose ends did in those days. He drifted into that upcoming form of show business, radio, which needed men to develop it, since those who had show biz jobs in other areas were unwilling to give up a good thing and gamble on what could be a flash in the air.

But it wasn't his head of hair that got Bacher the job. He had been a producer-director of the successful Maxwell House Show Boat that Billy Bryant was to shame into drydock. Many meetings were held and for many reasons I finally joined the group that was preparing the audition script. One of the reasons was the need for more manpower. Another was that Bacher asked me to work with him.

It turned out that all they wanted from me was a twelve-minute version of the old tab show and showboat classic, *Way Down East*. It was not to be hoked up with jokes. It was to be played straight just the way it was played on the river.

What we were planning to do was to put on something that was pure camp about twenty-five years before camp took on its present meaning. All sorts of agency personnel came to watch the rehearsals, hear the old songs, laugh at *Way Down East*, and bask in the pre-Tiffany-glass atmosphere of the Toby show type of theater as it had survived on the rivers of the great American heartland.

The audition took place at two thirty on a Wednesday afternoon. Things went beautifully. Every performance was honed to a razor edge. The sight of Bacher, his bush of hair a very crown of glory, his promptbook on a lectern beside the musical director, had to impress the gentlemen Reber escorted into the client's booth a few moments before a new chapter was to be added to the history of broadcasting.

It had been proposed that we try to insure a good reception and a better chance for the show's success by papering the audience with agency personnel, a presumably friendly group. This plan was finally vetoed on the grounds that it could not be kept a secret and would certainly be construed as a sign of fear and possibly as chicanery.

The show started. We had a real calliope. We had crowds standing on the levee hollering to greet the incoming floating palace of fun and entertainment. Everything about the produc-

tion was gayer than Gaylord and more ravishing than Ravenal.

The only trouble in paradise was that the studio audience, a bunch of matinee types, didn't dig it at all. Billy Bryant was as believable as a boardwalk barker. The bombs were not bursting in air, they were landing, right on target, in Studio 8G at NBC.

In the client's booth John Reber began to squirm, and members of the advertising department and top management of the American Tobacco Company began to look at their watches. And this was what happened, as told to me by an eyewitness, Bob Colwell. Only a few minutes after the sixty-minute show started and before the prospective clients could bring themselves to comment on what they were being offered, Reber made his grandest gesture in a lifetime of grand gestures. He rose, raised both arms over his head in a characteristic sweep, and said, "Gentlemen, I apologize! *This* is the *worst* thing I have ever seen! I won't sit through another minute of it and I won't allow you to do so either!" And he walked out. Naturally, everyone followed.

That was the way he wrote off a mistake that had been conceived by him and gentled into existence along the lines of his intuitional and creative impulses. It was the first time he'd ever tried to copy anything, and it was the last. It was infanticide. But it was also the only way he could ever hope to remain in a position to talk again to those men for whom he'd put on the disaster.

He was obeying one of the Ten Rules of Business formulated at J. Walter Thompson by Hunter Richey. The rule was number ten, "Never close a door."

The Whiteman's burden

All radio shows were born during meetings in John Reber's office. His importance in the company was measured by the fact that his office was right next door to the office of the president, Stanley Resor.

Mr. Resor insisted that everyone keep the same open-door policy that he did. Theoretically, anyone could see him anytime. Of course, most of the other doors along executive row were of specially designed wrought-iron grillwork and it made no difference whether they were open or closed. But Mr. Resor's solid oak door was always open except when meetings in Reber's office got so loud he broke his own rule in self-defense.

On the morning the first radio spectacular was born—long before the word spectacular took on its current meaning in the communications business—Mr. Resor not only closed his door, he slammed it.

The meetings were as informal as possible for a man tailored by Wetzel, sitting at an antique refectory table behind open grillwork doors in an office that looked a little like the private chapel of an Italian nobleman, one who liked to line the walls of his sanctuary with radio stars' pictures, all suitably inscribed, by artists who worked, or had worked, for J. Walter Thompson.

Sitting on the floor, or in high-backed tapestried chairs, or on the credenza (a word none of us had ever heard of at that time), and frequently on the windowsill, Bob Colwell, Bob Simon, Cal Kuhl, Gordon Thompson, Abbott K. Spencer, and I surrounded Reber like courtiers; he tilted back in his antique chair, his custom-shod feet on his antique table, a telephone in hand, sometimes one in each. This was the personnel and ambience of the meetings that were always howling happenings if not always howling successes.

The meeting came to order when John took his highly polished British boots off his Florentine table, hung up at least one phone, and held up both his arms like an umpire calling for time out. "Kraft," he announced, "has a new product called Miracle Whip. They think it's so good they plan to introduce it by offering to refund twice the price if you don't like it."

My reaction was instant. "I don't like it!" I was ignored..

"We have to have a show that's sensational enough to match that offer."

Someone suggested Al Jolson.

"Who's he?" asked Reber, not because he didn't know but because he wanted to find out everything the rest of us knew about Jolson.

It soon became clear that everyone knew almost everything about Jolson. This seems silly as I write it, but it also seemed silly at the time it took place.

Then John told us that the two hours from nine to eleven had been bought and we needed more than Al Jolson to fill the 120 minutes. I disagreed. I carried such weight that the first talent agreed on was Paul Whiteman and his organization, Johnny Mercer, Ramona, Johnny Houser, Ken Darby, and a quartet called the King's Men because Whiteman was the King of Jazz and had a group of musicians that could not be equaled in the band business. It was then agreed that Jolson should be one of the guests. I do not remember who the others were.

The one thing that remained to be worked out was something as sensational in radio entertainment as Kraft's double-your-money-back offer was at that time in the grocery business.

"Why not wind up the show letting Jolson do what he used to do to finish the shows at the Winter Garden?" I asked.

There was a silence that told me I'd better explain. "In the middle of the second act, he'd throw the rest of the show out the window, walk down to the foots, open his collar, loosen his tie, and ask what the audience would like to hear. It was, naturally, always one of his sock numbers, and when he was finished he'd sort of lean into a wave of applause, like a happy furrier breasting a Coney Island breaker, and say, 'Folks, you ain't heard nothin' yet!' Then he'd really start to sing! He re-

sponded to applause the way a baby does to love and he'd keep singing as long as he kept getting the reaction he needed. Chorus girls, principals, stagehands, electricians sat around the stage listening and applauding as hard as the people in the seats. And they too called for more because it was different every time Jolson did it." I stopped.

Bob Colwell stepped over Kuhl, sitting on the floor, walked over to me, held up my hand, and said, "To hell with Jolson. Let's book Toots."

One of the terrible things about radio then and television now was and is the rigidity of the timetable. It has always resulted in a crazy circle. First you wonder how you're going to fill the time you bought, then how you're going to get all the elements into it.

Having made my big speech about the Jolson charisma (a word no one knew about then), I felt obligated to defend it. "What we've got to do is turn Jolson loose with that 'Folks, you ain't heard nothin' yet' bit at the end of the show."

"Fine!" said John and he picked up the phone. "We'll give him fifteen minutes."

"You must be nuts!" I screamed. John put down the phone. "It takes Jolson fifteen minutes just to loosen his tie!"

The battle began all over again. We finally settled for thirty minutes. But by the end of dress rehearsal this had been cut to twenty-five minutes, and he finally wound up with only twenty-three minutes and fourteen seconds.

The show went on. The place was the roof of the New Amsterdam Theater, where a few old-timers may remember seeing "Ziegfeld's Midnight Frolics." The time came for the big Jolson finish. He had talked with Pops Whiteman and sung a couple of numbers. So he just walked up to the mike, now a familiar voice to the listeners at home, and said, "I've been savin' the best for last, folks," and he started to sing "Climb upon my knee, Sonny Boyyyyy." The applause was instant. Sitting next to me in the control room, Colwell said, "Like a Coney Island breaker." Jolson continued to sing for what seemed like no time at all when Cal Kuhl said, almost to himself, "We've got to get off in two minutes. Shall I fade him or cut him for the last commercial?"

He did neither. John Reber, who must have remembered about King Canute's lack of luck with breakers, picked up a phone, made an inquiry, and in about twenty seconds was talking to Milton Aylesworth, then president of the National Broadcasting Company.

It's a fairy-tale finish because those years in radio were fairy-tale days. All over the country local announcers were standing by to say some version of ". . . And now from the Mountain View Room of the Hilltop Hotel in Schuyler, Nebraska, the National Broadcasting Company brings you the lilting strains of Lyle Trilling and His Thrilling Rhythm, and here's the famous Lyle Trilling theme song, 'Lilac Time.'"

None of these men strung out along the NBC Red Network opened his yap. The Kraft Music Hall was continuing. The United States Cavalry had arrived. The Marines had landed. The governor had signed the pardon. John U. Reber had bought another fifteen minutes.

Just for the record, The Kraft Music Hall has been on the air in one form or another almost steadily ever since. And from its inception to the end of 1935, when it was taken over by Pops's protégé, Bing Crosby, it starred Paul Whiteman, who hired, belabored, and pampered some of the greatest jazzmen in the music business, from fiddler Joe Venuti to pianists Oscar Levant and Roy Bargy, from saxman Frank Traumbauer to trombonist Jack Teagarden.

It took a little pampering to get Pops himself to relax enough to talk into the mike like an adult instead of like a backward three-year-old reading a primer—and for the first time. That Pops had this problem was funny, because when he wasn't in front of a microphone and didn't have a script in his hand you couldn't turn him off.

After one broadcast in which he felt he'd "acted" (that's what reading from a paper meant to Whiteman), after he'd talked better than usual and people were telling him what a good show he'd just put on, he threw his arm over my shoulder—which wasn't easy to do because my shoulder was about level with the middle stud on his dress shirt—and said, "Mousie here taught me to talk." Bert Lahr's "Baby" and Bob Colwell's "Toots" was Paul Whiteman's "Mousie."

Running a tour of one-night stands can produce a great deal of trouble, particularly with a cat like Jack Teagarden in the group. Pops used to like to tell this story about big T:

“Of all the men I had trouble with on the road, Jack was the worst. We’d play a week in one spot and Jack, to keep himself from being lonesome, like all kids, would find someone his own age to play with. The trouble was his playmates liked to follow him to our next stand. Often this was a violation of the Mann Act and other laws.

“Finally I had to tell him that if he didn’t cut it out I’d have to get someone else to blow his horn. He promised to be good. And he was, until the night we left Cincinnati. I was walking through our two cars at about one forty-five in the morning doing my regular railroad bed check to see that we left none of our group in the local hoosegow when, what do you know? In the last seat in the last section in the last car of the train is Jack and a broad. I didn’t have to open my mouth. He got up, escorted her to the back platform, and, just as the rattler started to pull out, pushed her off the train.

“There we stood. Me looking at him and him hanging his head like a kid caught with his mitt in the cookie jar. ‘I couldn’t help it,’ he said. ‘She came down to see me off and she’s on the station platform waving good-bye and I’m standing right here on the back platform of the train waving good-bye to her. She waves and I wave.’” Here Pops demonstrated Teagarden’s normal, palm-down wave of farewell. “‘And then,’ Jack said, ‘I just happened to do this.’” Pops demonstrated by slowly turning his hand and crooking his fingers toward himself in a gesture of invitation.

I guess that gag’s kind of visual. Call me up sometime and I’ll come over to your place and demonstrate how funny it looks when you can see how Pops Whiteman did it.

It was when Lou Holtz was on with Whiteman regularly that I began to have a little trouble with NBC’s program acceptance department, run by a nice lady named Bertha Brainard. Broadcast standards of taste have limbered up quite a bit since Bertha ruled the roost. I can remember, for instance, when Jack Benny waged an almost holy war for the privilege of saying the word

“lousy” on his radio show because with his delivery the word sounded very funny.

Miss Brainard’s watchdogs were always breathing down our necks when Lou Holtz was on, not because the material was in any way suggestive, but because Lou could read the Ten Commandments in a way that made you want to chase the kids from the room.

One day one of the female leprechauns (if there is such a thing) in Miss Brainard’s department phoned about an hour and a half before show time to tell me there were two jokes in the Lou Holtz script that could not possibly go on the air. This made me feel warm all over. “Hot” is a better word.

I’d just sent the script to be re-mimeoed after cutting twenty minutes, a feat that was accomplished (week after week after week) by arguing, wheedling, and threatening the musical director (try to get an eight-bar cut sometime), three writers, and the comedian himself into submitting to major surgery. I was on my way out for a double brandy and soda (a lethal drink I enjoyed at the time) when the call came.

The silence that followed the woman’s announcement led her to think I’d dropped dead, which would have been the easy way out. She repeated the bad news.

I told her not to worry. Twenty minutes of cuts had just turned the script into confetti and there weren’t two jokes left in it.

She asked if my cuts included the pants joke and the one about the dead cat.

“Those,” I told her, “are the only two jokes left that are sure to get a laugh because they always *have*. And that’s the end of the argument!”

“Then you’ll take out the pants joke?”

“Why?”

“It’s suggestive.”

“A home-loving, God-fearing country of over fifty million fathers, brothers, and sweethearts are almost constant users. If pants are suggestive we’re a nation of lechers. What’s wrong with pants? Or are you asking me to change it to trousers?” (I had been asked to do that before.)

She ignored this, saying, “According to the script a woman

complains that she asked a man behind a counter to deliver a carton of cigarettes to her room and he hasn't moved from behind the counter. The explanation is that he's saving money by not wearing pants."

"Doesn't that strike you as funny?"

"It's suggestive. Could you change it to shoes?"

"Shoes," I said, "are about as funny as an old shoe."

She hesitated a moment before offering more help, then asked, "Could you change the person who wants cigarettes to a man? It would be all right if they were the same sex, you see."

I didn't see but who was I to quibble? "Fine. I'll change the man behind the counter to a woman." There was a resounding silence.

Pushing my point, I went on, "If the guy without pants came from behind the counter, that would expose him. I can see why you'd be shocked. But he doesn't. He's modest. Rather than be indecent and appear pantsless, he loses a sale."

"Wellllll . . . alllll right. But the one where the woman calls the hotel clerk to say there's a dead cat in her room, *that* must definitely go!"

I've found that the word "why" is always a good one to use, so I said it.

"To have the clerk say, 'You know the rules, madame. If nobody calls for it within thirty days, it's yours' is not only rude, it's indecent and unsavory."

I asked if I could change the dead cat to a pair of shoes.

"I don't get it? It isn't funny."

"Exactly my point. But shoes are certainly savory."

After a resigned silence, she said, "Please just try to change it to something that isn't dead."

"It must be something no one really cares for, like a swarm of bees."

"That would be fine."

"That would be terrible! Supposing I change it to a little skunk. Would that be all right?"

"I don't see why not."

"You've won me over. It's been great collaborating with you," I said, hung up very quickly, and went happily off for my double brandy and soda, which I raised in a silent toast to

the program acceptance department for again having helped me punch up a routine.

Incidentally, when I was sent to the West Coast, I found the program acceptance department in charge of a man named Wendell Williams. The job became so upsetting to him that he resigned, went into the advertising agency business with a lot of other upset people, and rose to the rank of vice-president. How significant this title had become even as far back as the forties and fifties is indicated by the fact that John Guedel had a company that produced Groucho Marx and Art Linkletter shows and staffed entirely by vice-presidents. Everybody in the office was a V-P including John himself. There was no president.

The Shell game

The fantastic success Jolson had as Paul's Whiteman's guest at the opening of The Kraft Music Hall couldn't go long unrewarded. It was imperative that we give him a show of his own before someone else did.

Luckily the Shell Oil Company had decided to abandon its policy of regional broadcasts and go national with a network radio show.

This called for another gala gathering in Reber's office with the same cast, plus Herb Polesie, that had created the Whiteman success, and starring the same man who was to engineer the Billy Bryant fiasco.

We all agreed immediately and unanimously on Al Jolson and that the broadcast would have to come from some pretend place that could be made believable, a place where Al could be as informal as we all felt he needed to be for maximum impact. (There I go with that Mad Ave language.)

You must understand that at this particular phase of radio's growth it was thought mandatory to have more than a mere broadcast. It had to be make-believe, a show coming from some glamorous spot a la The Kraft Music Hall, Hollywood Hotel, or Maxwell House Show Boat. So the first thing we tried to do was to think of a locale of some sort. What everybody chose to ignore was that the two shows that set the variety show pattern, of a continuing emcee and four or five guest acts (which was what we had in mind), were Rudy Vallee's Fleischmann's Yeast Hour and the Chase & Sanborn Coffee Hour, both of which came from limbo.

There were few unpreempted locales. We thought we'd have "Al Jolson's Captain's Party" direct from the grand ballroom of the Berengaria. It was shot down because someone thought

it might make listeners seasick. “The Al Jolson Show” coming to you from the north nave of St. Patrick’s Cathedral bombed because it might tend to polarize people. Even “The Shell Oil Company Brings You Al Jolson from the Social Center Gym of B’nai Schlemiel Community House” got vetoed on the grounds that it might be mistaken for a basketball game.

Everyone knew it would be self-defeating to pretend the show was coming from backstage during the production of a musical comedy. Several shows had already fallen into that trap and gone down the chute. The problem of keeping even the slimmest plot going for any length of time, when your characters are supposed to be giving a performance, is brutal. What do you think happened to Ruby Keeler? Dick Powell had to get out of that sort of thing and become a private eye. You keep creating situations that call for dialogue like this:

“Al, your mother is dying of acute leprosy in the charity ward of a condemned hospital in Chillicothe, Ohio. You must go at once if you’re to get there in time.”

“I’m on now. They’re playing my music. We’ll talk about it right after my second encore.”

Finally someone had guts enough to suggest the natural locale, the one we’d all tried not to mention because it was too obvious, a nightclub. Then came the problem of a name. “Jolie’s Place” was immediately thrown out because the client thought no one would know who Jolie was. “Club Jolson” was discarded because it sounded like a license to commit violence. We also saw the possibility of some critics saying that we should have clubbed Jolson before the broadcast began. “Al Jolson’s Rendezvous” wasn’t used because the wife of someone in the client’s office thought it was suggestive. “Jolie’s Follies at Jolly Jolie’s” was killed because it was too long. Finally we got the real reason why all our suggestions using the name Jolson were being nixed. The client wanted the word Shell in the name of the show.

Bob Colwell, who was a very good friend of both Olsen and Johnson, suggested that we forget Jolson, hire Olsen and Johnson, and call the show “Shells-a-Poppin’.” “Shell Inn” was turned down because it suggested shell out, which, in turn, suggested some sort of sleazy shenanigan. “Shell Station” was

turned down when George Faulkner came up with this dialogue:

“Fill ’er up! I’m in a hurry!”

“Okay, sir, as soon as I finish this next number.”

Sound of car driving away.

As you may have noticed, my mind runs to alliteration. But I knew in my heart I shouldn’t suggest what kept running through my head. Finally I just whispered, “How’s about Shell Chateau?”

“Wait till you hear how Jolson pronounces it,” said the prescient Bob Simon.

“Sounds good,” said Colwell, “French and elegant.”

“What’s Jolson got to do with anything French and elegant?” asked Faulkner.

So it went until Shell Chateau was the name ultimately selected for the same reason so many presidents get elected. It was the best of a bad lot.

Simon was right about how Al would pronounce Shell Chateau. After every broadcast we waited for the news that the Legion of Decency, or some other cleanup society, had black-listed us. You see, Jolie put an *i* instead of an *a* in the first syllable of chateau. He made the word sound like a French trade name for a liquid fertilizer. It was *merde-r*.

After many meetings among ourselves, rewritings, and suggestions, a script was completed that I was scheduled to review with Jolson in his tower suite at the Sherry-Netherland at 6 P.M. I was prompt and he was alone. And so our relationship started. Just Jolie and me and his dinner made three.

Events moved swiftly. I arrived. We exchanged greetings. I made some comments on the background thinking that had gone into the script I was about to present to him. He called room service and ordered a tomato and lettuce salad with vinegar and oil dressing, a minute steak medium rare, lyonnaise potatoes, creamed spinach, a piece of cherry pie, and a pot of coffee. Then he motioned me to a loveseat where, it turned out, I’d ultimately be able to get a good view of him eating his dinner. Then he went to his desk and began to read the script.

He read each page very carefully, or he read it several times. Occasionally he scribbled something in the margin. He said nothing. I just sat there.

There was a knock on the door followed by the room waiter pushing Al's dinner. The waiter displayed what was under each silver bell. It was as ordered. The waiter left. Al and script moved to the table. Al began to eat, which slowed up his reading and got some spots on the script. One joke ended in a splash of salad dressing. He continued to make a note in the margin every once in a while. By having two cups of coffee, he managed to make the script last through the meal.

Then he rose, walked over to the fake marble mantel that surrounded the fake hotel hearth, opened a large box of Rose-Marie candy (the most expensive in town at the time), took one piece, closed the box tightly, walked back to the table, got the script, handed it to me, and said, "Fix it."

Now I was not only hungry, I was angry! Jolson's performance had made Georgie Price's look, naturally, like amateur night in Dixie. As I waited for the elevator I leafed through the pages to see what he'd been writing, what suggestions he'd made, what I had to fix. Some pages had no marks on them at all. Others had these two words, "Make better." Nothing else. Nowhere was there any indication as to what word, phrase, thought, or joke he had in mind.

When I showed Jolie's editorial comments to Reber, he asked, "What are you going to do?"

"I've done it. Al said 'make better' so I read the whole script this morning. It seemed better to me than he was last night. So that's it."

The show went well and I made my second trip to the Sherry-Netherland tower. This time I took a tip from Sam Moore's action in the Georgie Price incident. I stopped at Cushman's, a now defunct bakery a block from the hotel, and bought some salt sticks, a type of roll of which I am inordinately fond. With these in a brown paper sack and the script in a JWT envelope and blue binder, I was prepared to "confer" with Jolson.

Again he ordered dinner. Same menu. I ate my rolls. No butter. He paid no attention. Then he had one chocolate from the same box and handed me the script. This time he said, "See you Saturday." A few pages again said, "Make better."

Again the same miracle happened. I reread the script and it was better.

There was a clever taxi driver named Eddie Davis who started his career as a Hollywood film producer by selling jokes to men like Cantor and Jolson when they got into his cab. It became a business with Davis, but he hated to give up the cab because “who knows?” That’s a direct quote.

One evening Jolie had just finished his chocolate when Eddie arrived with a delivery of jokes. Jolie, always the gracious host, greeted him with, “Eddie, your coat’s all ripped at the shoulder. Let me get the valet up here to fix it for you.”

“It’s nothing, Al. Just the seam. I’m going home from here. The wife’ll fix it. Besides, my cab’s parked downstairs. I’ll get a ticket.”

“Do you think I want people coming in and out of here with their clothes in rags?” Al had already picked up the phone.

In a few minutes the valet arrived and Al showed him where the sleeve was separated from the shoulder on Eddie’s coat and told him to have it back right away. The valet promised and sure enough, in about fifteen minutes he was back. He held the coat for Eddie to put on and handed the check to Jolson to sign.

“It’s his check,” Al said, motioning to Eddie.

Jolson had lots of little ways of making himself loved. One day just before the broadcast we were sitting in a small room just off the stage of Studio 8G at NBC. No one was in the room but John Reber, Al Jolson, and me. Al was marking his script for the broadcast, which was to start in a few minutes. He smiled and chuckled quietly to himself at something he read on the paper, looked up at Reber, and said with great enthusiasm and conviction, “You know somethin’, John, Jolie’s writin’ betta an’ betta.” It made me feel warm all over. I’d written every word.

The week Jolson got laryngitis, Herb Polesie, who produced Shell Chateau, conferred with Reber and the rest and it was

decided we'd get Walter Winchell to sub for him. It was short notice. But Walter was on the air for Jergens Lotion telling "Mr. and Mrs. America and all the ships at sea" everything he considered to be of importance up to the moment he was forced to say, "Let's go to press!" Walter even lent a hand at peddling the product and closed his gossipy "newscast" by saying, "And with lotions of love, this is Mrs. Winchell's boy Walter . . ." etc., etc., etc.

Because Walter didn't sing, we had to book a couple of extra guests for him to talk to. One of these was Joe Humphreys, the famous Madison Square Garden fight announcer.

When I interviewed Humphreys, he told me about the famous seventy-five round Sullivan-Kilrain fight in Roxburg, Mississippi, the last major bareknuckle bout in America. Not being much of a boxing fan, I was astonished at a bareknuckler going seventy-five rounds. So Joe told me about the longest fight *he* remembered. It was in Coney Island and he seemed to recall every punch that was thrown. I got him to tell me about this fight three or four times. Each time he told it exactly the same way, so I had no trouble getting it down on paper. It took him about four minutes to describe what he thought were the important moments of the fight.

At rehearsal, Walter introduced Joe and went into the interview by saying, "I understand you saw the famous Sullivan-Kilrain bareknucks in Mississippi in 1889, the one that ran seventy-five rounds."

"Yes, Walter, after seventy-five rounds Kilrain's manager threw in the sponge."

"Was that the longest fight you ever saw?"

Joe was then to tell his story of the Coney Island fight. The moment he started to read the script it was clear that someone had to think of a better way for him to tell his story. His reading sounded as if he were just listing words at random, a few of which occasionally fell in such a way as to seem to make sense.

When Polesie and I discussed the problem, I told Herb that Joe had been perfectly glib about telling the story till he wound up with a fist full of script and tried to read it.

“Let’s just let him *tell* it, then,” was Herb’s decision. “He certainly knows it.”

“Repeats it the same way every time.”

So we told Joe that when Walter asked him about the longest fight, he should tell it as he’d told it to me and a million other people, probably. This was fine with Joe, who knew he wasn’t the best reader in the third grade.

The show went on. Walter introduced Joe and asked him the question about the Sullivan versus Kilrain fight and then if that was the longest bareknuckle fight he’d ever seen.

“No,” said Joe.

“Where was it?” asked Walter.

“In Coney Island.”

“Tell us about it.”

“It was the longest bareknuckle fight I ever saw,” said Joe and walked away from the mike, thus cutting four minutes out of the show.

Herb cued Walter to continue with the next guest but the problem came when it was time to get off the air. The theme was “Sweet Sue.” If you play the song as slowly as you possibly can and still make it sound like a tune, the longest it can take is forty seconds.

While his men were playing the first chorus, which, under normal circumstances, was faded out after four bars for a closing announcement, Victor Young walked through the orchestra telling each man where he’d have to stand by to ad-lib during the next six choruses that would inevitably follow. It became sort of a controlled jam session and we went off the air in a blaze of melody that caused Jolie to ask the next day, “Why can’t they play like that when I’m on the show?”

Shell Chateau was broadcast in those pre-World War II days when “recording” was a dirty word to any network. None of them would play a record for fear Chicken Little’s awesome prophecy would come true. The ban was, of course, inspired by the well-founded fear that if you recorded a show to play at any time and in any place of your choice, who would need a network? And so it came to pass. Bing Crosby forced audio

tape on ABC and ultimately almost everything on the air was “recorded earlier for release at this more convenient time,” day, month, or year.

But the *reductio ad absurdum* of the network ban on playing any kind of record came when CBS would not permit an old single-side Victor Red Seal disc of Enrico Caruso’s voice to be played as a piece of business in a dramatic show. It just occurred to me that if it had been a Columbia record they might have allowed it.

So, because shows could not be recorded and played later, those that wanted to be on the air in prime time in New York *and* in California had to do a rebroadcast three hours later for the West Coast. A famous catchphrase of the period, when you didn’t believe something or didn’t think you’d heard it quite right, became “Will you please repeat that for the West Coast?”

But lucky Shell Chateau wasn’t rebroadcast at midnight the same Saturday. It didn’t go to California and the West until late Monday. At its very least, this was a big pain in the neck to everyone. At its worst, as when we had John Barrymore, it had us teetering on the ragged edge of disaster.

This was at the time in the affairs of man, particularly Jack Barrymore, when he was playing a real life Caliban to Elaine Barrie’s Ariel. Their road to romance was a rocky one and every bump was detailed in every daily. Their antics were considered by many to be shocking but the juice John was using didn’t come from Con Ed.

The agent who booked Barrymore claimed to have made a deal with Elaine, who said she had Jack out at her parents’ home, to see that he was delivered to NBC for all rehearsals and the broadcast on time and reasonably sober. The way it turned out was that Jack pulled a Houdini and was finally found (who knows how he got there) locked in a room in the Hotel New Yorker, wearing nothing but a bathrobe and demanding that the girl on the switchboard connect him with Bacchus. He was brought to rehearsal and taken under the wing of Herb Polesie, who knew if he didn’t keep him in tow Shell Chateau would go on the air *ex-Barrymore*.

The scene John was to play was from *The Jest*, a big Broadway hit in which he had costarred with Lionel. An actor named

Royal Beale was doing the other Barrymore role. Polesie, directing John during rehearsal, said, "I wish I could get Royal to play the scene the way Lionel did, you know, real shit-in-the-barrel."

John said, "I don't think you could get Lionel to do *that* anymore."

When the time came for Barrymore's appearance, Jolson made a suitable announcement as Beale, Sylvia Field, and Edward Emerson took their places at the cast mike. Barrymore's was downstage center. To get to it he had to make his way through a forest of chairs on each of which sat a musician.

Watching from my place in the control room at the back of the studio, I could see John from the moment he stepped onto the stage. Doctors had been attending him and the questions were, did he have enough in him to keep him "up" long enough for the part or did he have enough in him to lay him low and how would the medicine they'd given him work? I waited and finally I saw him start to make his entrance. Then I heard the sound of a foot tripping over a cable and a "distant" grunt that, at the high level of the control room, was definitely "God damn!" But John kept coming.

When he reached the microphone he took hold of the stand and just stood there for a moment swaying, his other hand trembling so badly I was sure he wouldn't be able to read the words on the script he was clutching. Norma, who was sitting in the first row, said the audience gave out a mass gasp at the way he looked. His color was pale green and perspiration literally poured from his body until by the time the twelve-minute spot was over the part of the stage on which he was standing was not merely damp. It was thoroughly soaked. Everyone in the audience was sure John was about to die. But to the radio listener his voice was deep, resonant, and beautiful.

Suddenly he started to sway more than he'd been swaying. He was holding onto the mike stand so the mike swayed with him. He began to breathe heavily. I couldn't watch it anymore. I lay on the floor of the control room to get a "broadcast effect" and spare myself the awful sight of a great actor falling apart.

Suddenly, as he was reading his lines, he began to throw in incoherent asides. Then his glasses fogged up and he couldn't

see. "Where are we?" he muttered desperately to Sylvia. Eddie Emerson ran over and whispered a line in his ear and pointed to his place on the paper. Then he dropped two pages of the script. Sylvia dropped two of her pages and read right along with him. The twelve minutes ended in a tremendous outpouring of applause for a man 250 people had just seen return from the grave. Barrymore bowed and walked off the stage, God knows how, without falling down.

John Reber called from his farm near Reading, Pennsylvania, to say that Barrymore had just given the most sensational performance he'd ever heard on radio. We told him what had gone on and asked him if he wasn't bothered by the snorting, grunting, and heavy breathing. "It sounded like passion," said John.

It was immediately clear to Polesie that if we let Barrymore out of our sight until the rebroadcast the following Monday, we might not be able to find him or he might not be able to work. So Herb did what any 100 percent All-American radio producer would do under the circumstances. He took Barrymore home with him. I followed with a case of Scotch and two cases of beer. The beer was for breakfast.

I have never listened to a more fascinating conversationalist than John Barrymore. Literate, witty, and wise, there were only two points at which he became less than scintillating—when he was just a little underprimed and at that moment immediately before he dozed off. Of anyone else I would have said "passed out." I suspect he never passed out except when he chose to.

We sat around quite late that night at Herb's. Midge, his wife, made us something to eat and we took turns pouring the drinks. The way John was taking it was about two-thirds of a glass of whisky filled with water with or without ice. It made no difference. With one of these weapons to protect himself, he kept himself always ready to beguile or be gone.

It must have been around three or three thirty in the morning when I left. Herb and Midge were still sitting, fascinated. I had to get some sleep because we had made a deal for the next day. The Polesies had to go to Jersey to a Sunday dinner with Midge's family. I was to pick up the vigil with Barrymore the next morning as soon as I could get to the apartment. Herb would leave the key with the doorman.

Drinking with Barrymore, although you knew you couldn't do it the way he did, nevertheless made you drink more than was good for you, and when I woke up the next morning I realized immediately that I had done just that. I lived on the West Side in the seventies. The Polesies were almost directly across town. So I had a cup of coffee, took my dog, Ditto, and, feeling it was the therapeutic thing to do, started to walk across Central Park to take up my job of baby-sitting with the prince.

I opened the door. The Polesies' apartment was dark and quiet. Ditto liked to go visiting, particularly bars. The room smelled familiar. She scampered in and headed right for a sleeping figure on the sofa. But when she got close enough to take a good sniff, she turned, tucked the stub of her tail between her legs, and retreated to the far corner of the room and began to whine.

The sleeping figure stirred a little, gave out a great snort, and I got wind of what Ditto was whining about. Opening the window to let some fresh air in, I started tidying up like one of those dear, sweet ladies who come in three times a week to crooked your pictures, shuffle your papers, and shove the dust from one place to another.

"Where's the bathroom?"

I turned to see Barrymore, fully clothed, sitting on the edge of his bed, his head in his hands, apparently looking for his feet, which he recalled having just put on the floor somewhere.

To ask the whereabouts of the bathroom in that three-room apartment, after having been there for over twelve hours, was like being at the beach and asking how to find the ocean. He leaned over, took off his shoes, which he'd slept in all night, and went into the bathroom as I opened the door for him and asked, "Want any breakfast?"

"Got any beer?"

"Yes. How about some scrambled eggs?"

"Nothing wrong with having an egg in your beer."

I opened a bottle of beer, put it on the table beside the chair he'd been sitting in when I left the night before, and went into the kitchen to fix eggs and coffee.

When I came out carrying a plate of eggs and a cup of java,

John was in his chair, an empty glass in his hand. As if to himself he was saying, "But, soft! methinks I scent the morning air; / Brief let me be. Sleeping within my orchard, / My custom always of an afternoon."

"Want some eggs?"

"Be thy intents wicked or charitable?" He cocked his head and looked at me without the faintest show of recognition. "Thou comest in such a questionable shape / That I will speak to thee." He took the coffee and eggs and handed me the empty beer glass, saying, "Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind."

I opened another bottle and brought it to him.

He had eaten the eggs, drunk the coffee, although I don't know how without scalding himself (perhaps he did). He held his hand out to me for the beer, held it so the light shone through the glass, looked at me, then back at the beer, took us both in with a gesture, and, speaking to the glass, said, "Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio [it was my first appearance in the part]: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy; he hath borne me on his back a thousand times; and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises." He put the glass down without touching the contents and asked, "Isn't there any whisky in this godforsaken house? And where are the women?"

I brought him some booze.

"The women. Bring on the girls."

"Not you, my little lady," he said to Ditto, who had gotten used to the scent of the surroundings and made tentative and friendly moves in Barrymore's direction.

Although it was clear he had no idea who I was, it was also quite clear that he found me congenial, a good listener, a good provider.

"'Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman—a rope over an abyss.' Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche said that. Do you know what he meant?"

"No."

"Neither do I." We discussed Nietzsche no further.

Every once in a while he'd look around and say, "I take no pleasure in these monkish vaults. Where are the women?"

I wish I could remember all the channels followed by his

free-flowing stream of consciousness as it bubbled forth to enrich my soul. When necessary I threw in what seemed to be the right cue to keep things going and at frequent intervals I refilled his glass.

The doorbell rang. There stood three young people who said they were Midge's cousins. One of them said, "Midge told our mother that John Barrymore was here so we thought we'd come over and take a look at him."

"What the hell do you kids think we're running here, a side-show?" I was about to slam the door when I realized I couldn't do that to kin of the house. Besides, what right did I have to deny John Barrymore a larger audience?

As each of the teensters introduced herself, John rose elegantly and shook hands graciously. After they'd stood around and stared for a few minutes, I indicated that the show was over and as they started for the door John said, "Oh? Do you have to leave so soon? We've hardly become acquainted."

I got them out the door before they could take advantage of this remarkable reaction.

That afternoon I heard the son of Maurice Barrymore, whose mother was the daughter of John Drew, run through long passages of *Hamlet* and quite a bit of the two *Henrys*, III and V. It also came out at one point that the events of the broadcast the night before had not entirely escaped Mr. Barrymore. "I must have made a bloody ass of myself up there," he said. "I practically gave birth to a full-grown giraffe."

I was sorry when the Polesies returned. Herb and Midge, their guest, and I had a quick drink and I left to take Ditto for a walk, feed her, and go over to David Freedman's for some work on Lou Holtz's stuff for the Paul Whiteman Show.

Apparently unwilling to let himself reach the point of delivering another full-grown giraffe, which must be very painful for a man, John managed the rebroadcast without a hitch. But it wasn't nearly as good a show.

When it was over, Jack insisted on going back to the Polesie apartment for a drink and to make his manners to Midge, his hostess. He wanted to thank her for a wonderful weekend. But even on the way there, he again brought up his need for female companionship, describing graphically what might happen if

this need were not soon met. So he only took time for a few perfunctory remarks to Midge and a drink that would have floored his full-grown giraffe.

Herb and I escorted him downstairs and hailed a cab. He opened the door with a grand flourish, shook hands with each of us, thanked us for our company, and then, before stepping into the taxi, said to the driver, "My sainted grandmother used to say to me, 'John, when you want a woman, ask the driver of the droshky.'" He stepped into the cab and said, "Drive on."

That toddling town

Chicago, “hog butcher” to Carl Sandburg, was Manhattan Transfer* to me. It was where I changed lives on my way from a snowy childhood in Buffalo and Chicago to a showy manhood and a swimming pool in sunny Beverly Hills.

From a 100 percent WASP society in Buffalo, my mother and I moved, when my father died, to what was then a plush enclave of bluestocking Jews, the Kenwood-Hyde Park area of Chicago’s in-the-chips South Side. Here there was an electric automobile, called either “Yiddisha showcase” or “mezuzah” because there was one in front of every Jewish door. As kids on Halloween, we used to change them all around and the owners had a helluva time sorting out the all-black look-alike vehicles.

I had an uncle who lived in Chicago and manufactured women’s coats and suits, a man who had turned down Julius Rosenwald’s request for a loan of \$10,000 to bolster a business now called Sears, Roebuck and Company that was selling goods by mail, a method of doing business that Uncle Ed knew had no future. We are a family of astute business people.

But I did get to play with one of Rosenwald’s grandkids, a boy named Mutch (rhymes with Butch), and went to a synagogue that was called a temple, held services only on Sundays, and was probably the one that inspired the gag about the synagogue that was “so Reform it closed on the High Holy Days.”

* Manhattan Transfer was a station without a town between New York and Newark on the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad. There, people from the financial district could catch the Broadway Limited for Chicago by taking the Hudson & Manhattan Railroad from the Hudson Terminal, which was within walking distance of Wall Street. It was where a train from Penn Station dropped its effete electric locomotive to take on a sturdy steam engine for the long haul to the Windy City.

I must have gotten in for half fare, being young enough and having a widowed mother who was only semi-Jewish.

Her father was a Bavarian Jew named Strauss, her mother an Irish Catholic named Haggerty from Ulster (how about *that!*) who had kinfolk of Huguenot origin in New Jersey. Thus, already mixed up religiously, she followed the words of Ruth, "Your people shall be my people," and took the faith of her husband.

So in Chicago I discovered Judaism, got confirmed by my father's dear friend, Dr. Emil G. Hirsch, went to Frances E. Willard elementary school, and attended Hyde Park High at a time when the *Chicago Tribune* was getting all het up over the "scandalous" fact that the girls at Hyde Park all wore silk stockings and that "electrics" belonging to the students were lined up along the curbs for blocks in all directions. Today it is too true to be funny when someone tells you that a guy dropped out of UCLA because he couldn't find a place to park.

Between my departure from Hyde Park and my days of commuting between New York and Chicago for J. Walter, there were thirteen years full of advertising and public relations work and writing for newspapers, magazines, and the theater.

The cause for all my commuting to the Windy City was the fact that whenever a member of the JWT office in Chicago attended the opening at a spot in the Loop, he seemed to drink himself into a commitment to give some comic or bandleader a radio audition. The pattern was repeated over and over, largely because if you went to see anyone in the Chi office after 10 A.M. you'd most likely find him in the Wrigley Building bar enjoying the specialty of the house, a martini. This was followed in chronological order by lunch with a client, cocktails with another, dinner and the evening with the third. It was a swinging office whose headman had a capacity for the fruit of the grain with which few could compete, although many tried.

Because of this tendency to swing, I spent a great deal of time on the New York Central's 20th Century Limited between New York and Chicago, where the "radio department" was one man who collected antique mahogany bars from ghost town saloons. Traveling on the Century in those days, particularly if you got a dining car steward or porter who remembered you

(and if you took the train often, you did), was one of the top luxury experiences of the day. You were never “crowded in three abreast,” or forced to eat only partly thawed coq au vin. And you were never hijacked to Cuba. There was even a time when the RR gave you back a buck for every hour the train was late, a deal by which the modern commuter could get rich just going to work.

No matter which way you were going, at midnight, it was always a pleasure to get off at Buffalo, where the two Centuries passed each other, and take a walk between the two trains standing side by side being inspected and refueled. After this midnight constitutional you had a nightcap and woke up bright and early the next morning ready for two aspirin and a Bromo in “that toddling town.”

The promenade on the platform where the two Centuries’ paths crossed gave birth to a story that must be put on paper for fear that today, with most passenger trains gone to that happy roundhouse in the sky, it will be lost to posterity.

It was told to me, I think, by Steve Allen when he ran a midnight talk show on KNX, a radio station in Los Angeles. This is the show that begot “Tonight” and all the other late-night TV jabberwockies that grew out of it.

Two old friends met one midnight as they paced the platform between the two Twentieth Centuries standing in the Buffalo station. While it’s always a pleasant experience to meet an old friend unexpectedly, their greeting was made the more voluble by the fact that both had enjoyed a tot or two before dinner and since.

“Hey! You on the Century, too?”

“Yeah. Waddya know!”

“Lemme buy you a drink before we turn in.”

“That goes two ways.”

They climbed aboard. After the train and the two men were highballing on their way, one man asked, “Are you going to New York on business or just to get away from your wife?”

“New York? I’m going to Chicago!”

“How do you like this wonderful world! What a train!”

“Yeah!”

“I’d never believe it! I’m going to New York and you’re going to Chicago and we’re both on the same train.”

I was in Chicago to put on an audition starring the music of Benny Goodman, already a big name but not yet the absolute climax in clarinetting he was to become. The whole thing was very routine except that the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers was just beginning a rumble with the networks over performance payments. Threats that they'd pull their hits off the air were already being made by ASCAP. No one believed it would ever happen. Nevertheless, speculating on the possibility with Benny, I asked him what kind of a problem it would present if ASCAP yanked its tunes, which were practically all he had in his books.

"I don't know what the other guys'll do," Benny said, "but it's not going to hurt us. We'll just leave off the first chorus."

In those days you couldn't tape an audition and bring it around to the client's office. There was no tape. And he didn't want you to bring him a record. He wanted to be right there and see for himself every note that came out of the horns. So there I was in Chicago with an audition all rehearsed, waiting for the client to arrive, when I got a phone call from John Reber in New York. He had one simple little question to ask me. How would I like to leave Chicago that night for Los Angeles?

"For how long?"

"It might be as long as six months."

I suddenly had the feeling I was talking to Alice in Wonderland. "John," I said, with the patience of a man who has just been asked to take a sip of cyanide to see if he likes the flavor, "what about Norma?"

"I'll talk to her."

"You'd better think of something good. You know the baby's due in a couple of months."

"That's what I'm thinking of. Nothing in the world could be better for the boy [all babies were boys with John] than to be born out there in the land of sunshine. You can leave for the coast tonight and we'll send Norma along later. We want you to pick up The Kraft Music Hall where you left off in New York and carry on with Bing."

"You've only hired him for six months?"

“No. But we figure if you get it going right, you can come back.”

“You’re moving my kid around quite a lot, aren’t you?”

“Bob’s out there now. He’s expecting you.”

“Now, wait a minute, John. You’re asking me to take a girl who’s about to have her first baby three thousand miles from her family—and that’s a very close family! Do you realize she’s never been west of Weehawken, New Jersey?”

“It’s her chance to travel. She’ll jump at it. Don’t worry about a thing. I’ll talk to Norma.”

What chance did an eager, enthusiastic little four-foot-ten girl, with long blonde hair and big green eyes flecked with gold, stand against a six-foot-two, partially bald Pennsylvania Dutchman with a streak of “stubborn” as wide as the Zuider Zee?

Norma had read so much about the romantic West, as she had about almost anything else I ever mentioned (and better still, she remembered it all), that I figured John’s salesmanship and personal charm would cause the “covered-wagon syndrome” that once lurked near the surface of every romantic young American to gush up like Old Faithful and cause her to commit us, spontaneously, to a move I didn’t really think I wanted to make.

I knew the hustler in John would take over and he’d probably lie a lot about how anxious I was to go west, play down the Hollywood glamour angle (which wasn’t Norma’s big thrill), and talk about how good the move would be for the baby. I had to beat him to the punch. So I picked up a phone and called Norma first. I thought.

“Honey,” I began tentatively, “I just had a call from John.”

“He wants us to go to California.”

“He talked to you?”

“A long time. He told me it would be the greatest thing in the world for your career—out there where everything’s starting to happen.”

“What did that con man say?”

“He told me that in a year everything big in radio would be in Hollywood.”

“He did?”

“And Bob called from California.”

“He did?”

“Both of them think it’s a very important chance for you.”

“They do?”

“Definitely.”

“What did *you* say?”

“Well, I told them we couldn’t possibly go in such a hurry.”

“Good. This whole idea is ridiculous.”

“Of course it is. I wouldn’t think of letting you go right out from Chicago and leave me here all alone.”

“Good. I’ll call him right back and tell him our decision.”

“I’ve already told him we won’t leave till Sunday.”

“*Sunday?*”

“Well, we can’t go without a farewell party Saturday night.”

“Oh, for God’s sake!”

“There’s plenty of time. You’ll be home tomorrow morning. We’ll have all day Saturday to prepare the party. Sunday we’ll pack and say good-bye to the people who can’t come to the party.”

“What about the apartment? Our new lease? Our furniture? All that?”

“John said Thompson would take care of the whole thing. All we do is pack our trunks and take the train.”

“What about my mother?”

“My mother will take care of *her*. How’s the audition?”

“To hell with that. Where will we live when we get there?”

“Bob’s going to take care of all that. Please don’t worry. I’m sure it’s the right thing. We’ll talk tomorrow when you get home.”

Thompson was stuck with our apartment for nearly two years. They sent our goods out by van, which was lucky.

Not long after we went west, Thompson sent Herb and Midge Polesie. And again Big Daddy took care of everything. Only Herb’s things, including an original Renoir, took the scenic route and came by boat via the Panama Canal.

When they were told the ship was arriving at San Pedro, Midge thought it would be friendly if they went to the harbor to welcome furniture that had been on such an interesting trip. Herb said, “It was fascinating to see how they swung those

big cases containing a whole houseful of furniture up out of the hold, over the cargo nets to prevent them from falling into the water, and onto the dock.”

I said, “I wouldn’t want them swinging my furniture over the water and onto the dock, even if they did it to music.”

“It was almost an hour before a case came up out of the hold with our name on it,” Herb went on. “Midge waved but it didn’t wave back. It just went up in the air, swung over the side of the ship, broke loose from the boom it was hanging from, crashed down through the cargo net and into the harbor.”

“Maybe it got the idea for the dive while coming up the coast past Acapulco.”

Later, helping Herb to salvage what could be saved, Bob Colwell found the waterlogged Renoir and said, “You don’t want this old thing, do you?”

Across the fruited plain

We were aboard the Santa Fe's crack transcontinental train, the Chief. The Super Chief with its ruffled chromium sides and tapering, snakelike tail, had not yet been invented. (Shortly after it *was*, Norma and I rode east on it. Ours was the last room in the observation car at the end of the train. I hadn't had so much fun since playing crack-the-whip on the duck pond in Washington Park. Then I cracked my head. On the Super Chief I just spit up. Shows you how experience teaches you to cope with the repetition of history.)

Like all the crack trains of its day, the Chief had a back porch with a polished brass rail. There you could sit and sip a drink full of cinders, admire the scenery as it slipped away from you, and return to your room looking like Jolson's understudy standing in the wings waiting for Al to break a knee singing "Mammy."

To those who may be young enough to ask why we were sitting on the dirty observation platform, there is a simple three-word answer—no air conditioning. But this is not to say that the trains of the day didn't have a planned cooling system. One of the two windows allotted to every section, compartment, and drawing room had a fine-mesh screen. This made it possible for you to open the window, or get the porter to do it for you, and be assured of a searing breeze laden with only the very finest bits of coal dust. There were electric fans strategically placed at each end of the car and in each private room. These served to lash the particles of coal dust against your face with sufficient force to plant them deep in each and every one of your pores.

So there we were rattling across the high prairie being bathed in the dust of the great American heartland and the galaxies of still warm cinders being belched from the stacks of the two

enormous 4-8-4 steam locomotives that were hauling us on our conquest of the West.

The trip up to this point had not been bad. If it had happened some thirty-odd years later, the crowd that came to the station in New York to see us off would have been classified by the press as a demonstration and action would have been taken by the police department's Tactical Patrol Force. Skulls would have cracked.

Abbott K. Spencer showed up with a basket of oranges to take to California. Harry Salter came with his violin and played "California, Here I Come" and "Goodbye Forever." I think it might have been something I said at the time that gave him the title for one of his greatest successes, "Stop the Music." John Reber brought an orchid. Norma's mother brought cookies, and I wish I had some of them right now. My mother cried a lot. Norma smiled at everyone, kissed everyone, including a man who was taking the train across the platform, and seemed to be having a glorious time. Funny thing is, she was.

As we sat in our compartment amid the mountain of things friends had brought, perhaps for trading with the Indians, and looked out at the beautiful Hudson Valley flashing by, Norma said wistfully, "Even Carrie brought us something."

Carrie was my "mammy." When my uncle in Chicago teased me by saying, "How can you kiss that black thing?" I flared up to my full three feet and, with all the venom a seven-year-old boy can generate, told him pointedly that "I love her more than *some* of my relatives." When my father died in Buffalo, Carrie came from New York to help us "break up." When mother and I returned to New York to live, Carrie "took care of us." When Norma and I got married, we inherited Carrie.

But Carrie was getting old. At a dinner party we had a few months before our departure, Norma luckily tasted the string beans before our guests did. Carrie had somehow allowed soap to get into them. When she was told that Norma hadn't served the beans because they tasted of soap. Carrie asked, with genuine curiosity, "What kind of soap?"

One evening while she was heading for the bathroom to bathe my dog, Ditto, I noticed that the dog's soap was still on the closet shelf. "Do you have Ditto's soap?" I asked.

“Right here in my hand,” she said and showed me a pinochle deck. But Carrie, of all people, had come to the train with the perfect going-away gift—a lemon meringue pie. Have you ever gone through the five-hour Century-to-Chief layover in Chicago with six pieces of hand luggage, a mountain of *presentos*, a pregnant wife, and a lemon meringue pie? Me neither. I foresaw the problem. The porter on the Century may, to this day, be the only Pullman employee ever to receive, in addition to a five-dollar tip, a homemade lemon pie.

So there we sat on the observation platform of the Chief. I had taken the fourth cinder out of my eye and about the twelfth out of my drink when it crossed my mind that I had a wife to look out for, a wife with a pair of eyes that made Eddie Cantor’s look like buttons.

“You’d better put on your glasses, dear.”

“I can see all right.”

“Okay. But I was thinking of cinders.” Then, remembering this was her first trip west, “Hey! How about those mountains!”

She looked for a few seconds in the direction I was pointing but said nothing. Because the mountains are so much taller than either of us, I thought we ought to respect them a little more, so I said again, “Honey, *look* at those mountains!”

She again looked dutifully in the direction I indicated, then said, “Oop! I have a cinder in my eye.”

“I told you to put your glasses on.”

“First help me get the cinder out.”

I rose, spilled my drink, did all the things a comedian does on the swaying observation platform of a speeding train, and finally, together, we managed to remove the cinder.

“Now,” I said, “will you *please* put on your glasses!”

She did and then suddenly, in a voice of surprise, dismay, and excitement, screamed, “Look at those mountains!”

They were, at that moment, very beautiful with the westering sun slanting across their snowy peaks. And it was, I think, at that very moment that Norma, who had never been beyond Weehawken, became a native of the Old West.

I only include the incident as a parable to prove that working in radio is not the only way to make a mountain out of a cinder.

Much to our astonishment, when we stepped off the Chief at the Pasadena station the long, sunny platform was swarming with photographers and reporters. It was an exciting surprise. Neither of us had any idea Constance Bennett was also on the train.

If that sounds like an old joke, it is, and, like most old jokes, firmly founded in fact. Some “Constance Bennett” was always arriving at that station, returning from a triumphant tour of personal appearances. Or perhaps it was some radio personality or Broadway celebrity arriving to start work in a studio at a salary double the total of all the money earned by all the reporters and photographers present, plus the real estate value of the station and the land it stood on, the engine, and the last two cars of the train.

The only people who didn’t get their pictures taken arriving at Pasadena were the people who lived there in those enormous gingerbread houses we passed on the way to Hollywood, people who thought actors and actresses were very nice to watch on the stage and screen, or listen to on the radio, but not exactly the “sort you’d care to entertain in your home.”

Sam Moore and Helen Raymond (now Lambert) had come to meet us. Helen had been a Thompson secretary in New York, as had Norma. (You see, when you worked in the Thompson radio department you didn’t get a chance to meet anyone outside the company. So when Norma went to work for Bob Colwell as his secretary, he said, “Carroll, I want you to meet Norma Tobias. She’s just about your size. Why don’t you marry her?” He was my boss. So I did.)

The girls kissed, but Sam and I were more restrained. Norma said she felt embarrassed carrying a fur coat in the eighty-degree sun. It was March 3. We’d left New York in a fierce blizzard.

“Don’t worry,” Helen assured her, “you’ll be happy to wear it tonight.” She was right.

I said I felt uncomfortable wearing a vest.

Sam said, “Button your coat and nobody’ll notice it. And when you get to the hotel you can take it off and hide it.” I hid it so well I haven’t worn one since.

The three of us stood around and watched the ceremonies as Connie (as I was shocked to hear myself calling her only a few weeks later) waved to everyone, stepped into her Rolls, and

headed for Beverly Hills. Then Norma, Helen, and I got into Sam's Ford and headed for Hollywood.

The trip took us through the Los Feliz section of Los Angeles, where such solid citizens as Basil Rathbone, W. C. Fields, Adolphe Menjou, and Cecil B. De Mille, among others, still had their estates. It was the area to which the big-money movie people had migrated in their trek north and west from what is now called The West Adams district, where their rambling old mansions have made marvelous rooming houses.

What girl who sells costume jewelry at the Broadway-Hollywood Department Store wouldn't want to sleep in the very same room that was once the boudoir of Fatty Arbuckle or some other glamorous figure?

But as we passed through the Los Feliz section, the only house Sam thought worth pointing out to his tourists from the East was the home of Rupert Hughes, who was most famous then for giving the Father of Our Country a hard time in his acid biography of George Washington.

From Los Feliz Boulevard we came across Western to Franklin, Franklin to Vine, and Vine to Hollywood Boulevard, where the impossible was seen to have happened. Hollywood and Vine was still the same crummy corner. It had not improved one bit in the three years since I'd last seen it—and that seemed impossible. It always looked as if it simply *had* to get better.

Turning west on Hollywood, we passed Schwab's, the clothing store that had failed with kleig lights the first time I was in Hollywood. Being a game guy, he had obviously come back strong in the same store and with what looked like the same merchandise.

We crossed Highland and passed the old Hollywood Hotel, a dreary dowager of a hostelry left over from premovie days. It had given its name but none of its singular lack of glamour to one of the big coast-to-coast broadcasts that was always a problem to us.

Hollywood Hotel featured as its hostess the fabulous Hearst columnist, Louella Parsons, one of Hollywood's reigning trilogy. She made it possible for the show to have as guests, at very little or no money, stars that other radio shows could not buy at any price. One after another, Louella shanghaied talent, bludgeoning them with the awesome power of her gossip column.

She was married to Doctor Harry “Dockie” Martin, who was the house physician (a nice way of putting it) at 20th Century-Fox. One evening well after midnight, when Dockie had arrived at that state of saturation that made him no longer able to contribute to the gaiety, Louella made her apologies to her hostess for leaving “early” by saying, “You have to excuse us for going before the party breaks up, but Dockie has to operate in the morning.”

We finally pulled up in front of what was then the biggie among the Hollywood hotels, the Hollywood-Roosevelt. Sam and Helen helped us hand our luggage to the doorman and went on to the office.

We rode to the top of the hotel and as we entered our room—our *suite*—we were overwhelmed by the sight and smell of dozens and dozens of white roses. The next thing was the Louis de Something-or-other furniture, which looked as if it came from the Paramount prop department. And at one end of the large room was a triple floor-to-ceiling window that afforded the most perfect, uninterrupted view imaginable of the roof of Grauman’s Chinese Theater just across the street.

It was, of course, the bridal suite and I’m sure the virgin white upholstery, moiré wall panels, and even a few of the white roses cringed at the sight of such a pregnant “bride.”

Bob Colwell, who was waiting at the hotel, had really pulled out all the stops. “It’s yours,” he said, “until you find yourself a decent place to live.” I started to ask how long that would be and changed my mind.

Norma said, “It’s beautiful.”

I said, “It’s great!”

To me Bob said, “Take a good look. It may be a long time before you see it again. Come on.”

“Where?” I asked as we headed for the door.

“When will you be back?” Norma wanted to know.

“To work,” Bob said to me. To Norma he said, “He’ll call you.” And there we left her in the middle of a mass of luggage, white upholstery, white moiré walls, and white roses with what must have been an agonizing case of instant loneliness.

On the way to NBC, then on Melrose and Plymouth, Colwell

told me why I'd been rushed west. Cal Kuhl and Sam Moore had taken over the Kraft show when it moved from New York. But Sam had suddenly decided to leave JWT to go with the William Esty Company. Rather than bring in someone strange to the show and to the peculiar ways of Reber and J. Walter Thompson, it was decided to stick with someone Reber and Cal both knew. Me!

We were driving south on Highland to Melrose behind one of the huge red trolley cars of the Pacific Electric Railroad. To me there was something antediluvian about them—big, clumsy, and ominous. Even after I became an experienced driver they frightened me, particularly when they were hooked up in tandem at rush hours or on weekends. Because of the “big red cars” Robert Coote, the actor, and I found ourselves in a bond of mutual interest. I never think of those cars or see a picture of one without thinking of Coote.

He and I were fairly new to Hollywood and lunching at the Brown Derby to discuss what he might do on the Kraft show with Bing. It was then that I learned he too stood in great awe of what he called, in his best Bertie Wooster manner, “those giant red Pacifical Electrical things that bring you here [Hollywood] from wherever you land in Los Angeles.” He'd only been in Hollywood about three months and still wasn't quite clear where he, or anything, was, as he'd spent the entire time between hotel and studio. But as a protégé of David Niven, whose star was rising dramatically, Coote didn't feel he had much to worry about and viewed the Hollywood scene with a naïveté so complete it seemed feigned. In the light of his performances in *My Fair Lady*, *Camelot* and the TV series “The Rogues,” I'm now sure he was putting me on.

His story was that he'd gotten off one of those “Pacifical Electrical things” at Hollywood and Vine, gone directly to the Hollywood-Plaza a few steps away, checked in, cleaned up, and walked across the street to the Brown Derby for a late supper. He claims to have strolled in unchallenged and found himself a spot in a congenial booth. There is a serious flaw in his creaky yarn.

In its heyday the main dining room of the Derby was pre-

sided over by a Cerberus named Bill Chlios. If Chlios (as he was called by all) knew you and liked you, you always had a booth. When you came in through the bar from the parking lot, he'd wreath his face in the smile of a mother seeing her son come home from war, raise his arms toward you in a loving welcome that would explain to the tourists waiting behind the ropes why you were being seated and they weren't, and say, "Ah, Monsieur Carole [a name Don Ameche also called me], I have your reservation." He would then lead me to a "reservation" I had never made. He seemed to know whom to expect from day to day and hour to hour, and ran the room with tremendous expertise, precision, and prejudice. If for some reason Chlios didn't like you or approve of what you were doing, the room could be completely empty and there'd be no booth for you.

One Saturday evening, after a rehearsal of Kellogg's remarkable and well-remembered radio fiasco, "The Circle," a show that broke the ice for the gabfests that later proliferated on TV, I had some cutting to do with George Faulkner and Cal Kuhl. Norma had come to the rehearsal because we were having dinner later at the Derby with Groucho Marx, who was one of the stars of the show. I told the two of them to go on ahead and I'd follow in a few minutes. When they got to the Derby, there was no room for them at the inn.

"What do you mean, no table?" demanded Groucho.

Norma, whom Chlios liked, has a little bit of witch in her, so she said, "We can just stand here and wait till Carroll gets here." They were immediately seated.

It was certainly not that my name was higher on the preference list than Groucho's. It was that Bill didn't approve of any man coming in with another man's wife. When it was made clear that I was to be a member of the party, a booth immediately fell vacant.

Bill always held at least two tables for the President of the United States (at that time, Louis B. Mayer to the Brown Derby staff), who might show up with enough friends to require two booths. If you could convince him that the President was in Washington, you might get one of them.

This is not to imply that money had to change hands. Most of the Derby regulars gifted Bill and his staff at Christmas, and it was generally enough to last through a whole happy new year. The money donated by waiting tourists brought them regular communiqués that “your table will be ready in half an hour.”

This is a lot of explanation merely to document a doubt that Coote could wander into the Derby, as he said he did, and, seeing a man seated alone in a booth, join him as he would in a friendly way in a British pub.

“I thought,” Bob said, “it might be jolly to chat with one of the natives. Imagine my astonishment when, as I sat down, he picked up a phone and started a long conversation without so much as a nod at me. I looked around and all over the place people were talking into telephones. It was the first telephone box I’d ever been in that served food.”

Of course, the telephone bit at the Derby was the “in” thing. Being paged to take a phone call while dining at the Derby was the same sort of status builder as telling someone you were giving him the *private* phone number in your car.

For fun one day at lunch Don Quinn and I worked out a plan to set up an office with one girl and sell Brown Derby pages to people who wanted to have everyone hear them receiving important calls while dining. We worked out a whole system of rates, treating the four Brown Derbys as a network. Noon to one thirty and six thirty to eight were prime time when the rates were higher. The more prestigious Hollywood and Beverly Hills Derbys also were more expensive than the Los Feliz and Wilshire Boulevard ones. The latter, housed in a building that looked like the hat for which it was named, was Bob Cobb’s first beanery.

Although we worked out a rate card with prices, contract rates, and split runs, so that you did not have to buy all four of the restaurants but could concentrate your page in any area where you needed the prestige, we never really put the plan in operation. The reason was that lunch ended and we had to go back to work.

While on the subject of Don Quinn, and before getting back

to Bob Coote sitting in the Vine Street Derby watching a total stranger talk on the telephone, there's the truth about how Don and I got to know each other.

Our daughter Leda, was at the Buckley School, where her favorite playmate was a little girl named Nancy. We hadn't met Nancy but Leda talked about her all the time.

Bing Crosby's Kraft Music Hall had just started to click and, although I got no air credit for writing it (it was supposed to be ad-lib), every radio editor in the country started to run stories on the show, and the bulk of these stories were about me for several reasons: (1) There wasn't much left to say about Bing; (2) I had a funny name; (3) everybody thought Bing ad-libbed the whole script; (4) I was the man who wrote the words Bing ad-libbed; (5) Kraft spent a lot of money advertising its cheese in periodicals.

One evening at dinner, Leda, four at the time, said, "Guess who I know."

We gave up.

"The daughter of the man who writes 'Fibber McGee and Molly.'"

"What's her name?" I asked.

"Nancy. I told you about her. Nancy Quinn."

"How do you know her father writes 'Fibber McGee and Molly?'"

"Because she said so. This morning she said, 'My father writes 'Fibber McGee and Molly.' What does your father do?'"

Always in there punching for the old man, Norma said, "Did you tell her that your daddy writes Bing Crosby's show?"

"No," said Leda.

"What did you say?"

"I said it's a secret."

Meanwhile, back at the booth in the Brown Derby, the man across the table from Bob Coote hung up, saw him sitting there, didn't quite understand it, took a sip of his martini, and was about to say something when Bob broke the silence with, "I say. This is jolly. Fancy a telephone box that serves cocktails. You Americans do know how to do things, don't you? My name's Bob Coote."

"I knew you were too chubby to be David Niven."

"Do you know him? Very good friend of mine. Told me to come here and he'd see I got a proper job."

"Well, sorry, Bob, but, you see, I'm waiting for a friend. So if you don't mind—"

Coote took the cue and as he rose Chilios, suddenly in charge, got the sign and took him in hand.

I've heard Bob tell this story several times. When I finally pinned him down about it one night at the bar of The Players Club, he admitted he had made the whole thing up. It's disillusioning. I'm glad I never ran into Hans Christian Andersen.

Colwell and I arrived at NBC, drove up the perilously narrow driveway that separated it from the RKO studio next door, and Bob showed me the new building in back of NBC that was to house JWT's offices when it was completed. Cal Kuhl, one of Thompson's top radio producers, was standing in the parking lot looking at a blueprint and talking to one of the builders. He welcomed me to Hollywood, told me the rehearsal was over, and said, "Come on in and meet Bing." We went to Studio B.

Bing, wearing a porkpie hat, a dark blue outboard shirt, henna slacks, and black and white golf shoes, was smoking a pipe, doping a race, and running through a new tune, with Jimmy Dorsey reminding him of it on the saxophone. Nothing could have been more typical. The "casual" quality of Bing's dress became one of the running gags of the show. He showed up one Thursday with one black and one red sock. When I called it to his attention he said, "That's funny. They both fit."

Once, while being fitted for a scarlet hunting coat he was to wear in a picture, he said to the astonished tailor, "It's red, isn't it?" I often wonder what the green and red traffic lights look like to him. He just goes when the rest go.

Bing and Jimmy finished rehearsing. Bing said, "Got it," and started to walk toward us for no reason except that we were between him and the door. He was on his way to the Melrose Grotto, a sleazy little eating spot next door to NBC where a man could get what Bing called "a little toddy for the body," a cup of java, a chance to play the slots or the pinball machines, and plenty of talk about sports, women, and the music business.

Cal stopped him and said, "Bing, this is Carroll Carroll." I don't know whether or not he'd been briefed that this exciting meeting was to take place, but he took it very calmly. He said, "Glad to know you." I smiled and we shook hands.

"Carroll just came out from New York to write the show," Cal explained.

Bing said, "Ohhhhh?" By making the sound into a rising curve of question marks, he made it mean anything the listener chose to have it mean. Then he said, "Lots of luck," and continued toward the Grotto.

This meeting led Bing to write in his book, *Call Me Lucky*, "once again I fell into the hands of a man who took a personal interest in me, the writer of the show, Carroll Carroll."

After Bing left the studio following this "warm" greeting, there was nothing to do for a couple of hours, so Cal, Bob, and I walked to the office two blocks away. It was in a shaggy little bungalow so overgrown with rambler roses, honeysuckle, jasmine, and bougainvillea that you practically had to push the vines aside to get in the front door. Sounds wonderful and romantic with all those sweet-smelling growing things. But their scent was more interruptive than seductive and their density made the place dark and damp. And nothing could be done about it. New York couldn't understand the Hollywood radio office's need for a gardener.

Years later I drove by the house and it looked very attractive. I realized I'd never really seen it, just the jungle that hid it. Once you'd fought your way through this and swung in on a vine, the office itself was a different kind of jungle. It was a very small house, and in its less than spacious "great hall" was Cal's desk, his secretary's desk, a couple of banks of filing cabinets, and a teletype machine that hollered at us a lot and kept us supplied with scoldings, complaints, criticisms, and commercials direct from the factory at 420 Lexington Avenue. It look cluttered when I first saw it. As more and more people moved in from the East the place began to look like a warehouse full of stale office furniture.

In the small kitchen there was a stove for coffee, a refrigerator for "leftovers," and a built-in breakfast nook that was Bob Colwell's office. The dining room, with its Tiffany glass chan-

delier, was the bookkeeping office and stenographic pool. The master bedroom, with French windows that opened onto the backyard, was where George Faulkner and Gordon Thompson put together the Rudy Vallee Hour when it was on the West Coast.

The smaller bedroom was occupied by Danny Danker, the one man who assured JWT control of the talent situation in Hollywood at the time.

As for my office, if you can remember the general feeling you got the first time you walked into one of Child's old white-tiled restaurants in New York City, you have a fair idea of the ambience. The equipment was standard—American Standard.

The stall shower was full of filing cabinets. The bathtub contained stationery, a few reference books, a sweater I kept meaning to take home, and the cover to the typewriter. The machine itself stood on what was once a hamper but was now doubling as a typewriter table and wastebasket.

Because it was inconvenient to lift the typewriter every time I wanted to throw away a false start, I jabbed a hole in the side of the basket through which to throw away balled-up paper. The hole was in a permanent state of overflow because the lady who came in evenings, and was supposed to empty it, also found it too much trouble to remove the typewriter.

My seat at the machine was less than the latest thing in leather-upholstered posture chairs, even for those days. It had no adjustable back but the seat had two positions. It was occasionally very convenient, considering some of the things I had to write. I could just make a half-turn and, without rising, wash my hands.

It was in this handsome multifaceted office, specially planned for me but used occasionally, in an emergency, by transients, that I wrote scripts for the first couple of months I was in Hollywood.

Naturally, I had a lot of help. People who came in for conversation and/or ablutions offered suggestions (some pretty good) as they read over my shoulder while drying their hands on the back of my shirt or a paper towel that finally wound up in the bathtub with other crumpled paper towels that ultimately

buried the stationery, the reference books, my sweater, and the cover to the typewriter.

Obviously it wasn't too private. But, probably due to its situation on the shady side of the house as well as to the almost constantly running water (air conditioning had not yet come to homes), it was the coolest room in the place. Aside from that one feature, it left everything to be desired as an office.

When we returned to the studio, Bing was back and he'd changed for the show. He was smoking a different pipe.

He was always very punctual and *you'd* better be, too, or he'd leave. Tell him exactly when you wanted him and he'd be there. But you had to be careful never to tell him when you thought you'd be finished. If you said, "The call is from ten thirty to five fifteen," no matter what you might be in the middle of at five fifteen, like a school kid who knew the bell ought to ring, he left. Bing went by the rules. . . .

To explain how *firmly* Bing went by the rules I must skip ahead about six years. Right after Pearl Harbor, the West Coast overreacted in every possible way. All radio stations were made maximum security areas. And all of us who had any business in them were given elaborate passes that we were supposed to show as identification to guards—who knew us as well as or better than our kids did.

CBS didn't faint with anxiety over the security measures but NBC took them very big. It even had our pictures on our passes and was spit-and-polish gung ho about making us show them in order to identify ourselves to men who had known us for years.

One day I was in Studio B at Sunset and Vine waiting for Bing to arrive. It was about 11 A.M. and musical director John Scott Trotter, who had followed Jimmy Dorsey after a year, had just completed a short rehearsal with piano virtuoso and star of MGM movies José Iturbi. The phone rang in the control room. It was one of the pages. I wish I could say, "And that page today is Gordon MacRae," but I can't. I have no idea who he was or what became of him. But I remember what he said—"You'd better get to the artists' entrance in a hurry."

Something in the tone of his voice made me sure I'd better do exactly as he suggested. When I got there the boy said, "Mr.

Crosby's out there in the parking lot. He's going to Lakeside" (the country club where he was golf champion for a couple of years).

"What happened?"

Instead of answering, the boy made gestures that clearly said, "Never mind the questions or you'll miss him." While all this was going on, Steve, the man who'd been on that door for over five years, sat smiling and silent.

I got to Bing just as he was starting his modest black convertible. "Where are you going?"

"Lakeside."

"What about rehearsal?"

"They won't let me in."

"What do you mean?"

"Steve asked for my pass and I left it in my other pants. So he said I couldn't go in. I figure there's no use hanging around unless you want to string a mike out here. We'd get quite a crowd."

"For Christ's sake," I said, "I'll get you in on *my* pass! Come on."

"Okay, if you think you've got the muscle."

He climbed out of the car and we walked back. And I was wrong. I didn't have the muscle. Steve wouldn't let Bing in on my card. It didn't have Bing's picture on it. And I was again told, loud and clear, that the orders were that everyone had to show a pass.

I picked up the phone on his desk and dialed Niles Trammel, vice-president in charge of West Coast operations. After a little hassling with his secretary, a doll whose name I've unfortunately forgotten, Niles got on the phone and I told him about the idiotic scene that was being played at the artists' entrance.

"Listen, kid," Niles said, "they have orders not even to let *me* in without a pass."

"What the hell difference would it make whether you got in or not? This joint could run for six months and never notice it. But if you don't let Bing in pretty quick, NBC is going to feature one of the most eloquent hours of silence, between seven and eight tonight, that was ever not heard on any network."

"Tell that crooner to go home and get his pass."

“You tell him! On second thought, never mind. Let’s stop playing games. I’ll send someone out to his house for his pass and personally bring it up and show it to you.” At this point Bing started for the parking lot again. “He’s leaving the building again. God damn it, do something!”

“Let me speak to Steve.”

I handed Steve the phone and rushed out after Bing, brought him back, and walked through to Studio B.

I’ve thought about this incident many times and never once, in running it through my mind or telling it to someone, have I ever had the slightest doubt that Bing would have done just exactly what he said. Gone to play golf.

The Rudy Vallee Show, which was temporarily in town, finished an hour before the Kraft broadcast started. To wind up the former and unwind the latter, Kuhl had martinis sent over from Lucey’s, which was diagonally across Melrose Avenue near Paramount and at the time one of the “hot” eating places in town.

I called Norma, who was unpacking at the hotel, and told her to take a cab and come to NBC for cocktails and, to see the show.

That between-broadcasts cocktail routine was one of the many little niceties that JWT popped for in those carefree early days of radio when Thompson yearned to be loved. That meant that everyone had to find it pleasant to do business with Thompson people. Dan Danker worked on an expense account that enabled him to stash his entire salary every first and fifteenth. And we were all able to charge the company with anything we spent that could be remotely connected with making us more knowledgeable about the territory and more loved by its natives.

But, openhanded as the company was at that time with spending money, it never did see eye to eye with me about the big black car and chauffeur that I said I’d have to have if I ever went to Hollywood again after having been stuck for wheels on previous visits. This should have tipped me off that this trip was not merely a visit.

Colwell, however, did okay it for me to rent a car at company expense for a couple of weeks till I could buy one of my

own. Since neither Norma nor I knew how to drive, this would have been a pretty cheap indulgence. So Bob also agreed to have the company pay for my driving lessons.

Our first night Norma, all bright-eyed, shining, and sticking way out in front, arrived at NBC by cab from the Roosevelt in time for the cocktails and to meet the Thompson people, all of whom she knew from New York, and see her first Bing Crosby show.

That little band of carpetbaggers JWT had sent west because the show must go on was so overworked, and the jobs so overlapped, that the entire organization was continually moving from place to place at full battalion strength. At its best it was a great team effort held together by coach and cheerleader Bob Colwell. At its worst we were like some monstrous multiple birth, a group condemned to move as one until some sort of surgery could separate us. We clung together socially like the English at a remote colonial post in the heart of the Raj.

We were like strangers, invaders about to be attacked by a ferocious tribe known as the Cinemas. And that's how they acted and seemed to feel about us. We knew no one in Los Angeles but each other. And as each recruit arrived from the East, he and his wife were initiated into *our* tribe and included in all tribal activities, one of which was eating.

At these grub sessions the men held postmortems on shows just done, planned for those that would inevitably follow, and exchanged individual skirmishes with the Cinemas. We needed them in our business. Squaws like Joan Crawford, Carole Lombard, Barbara Stanwyck, Rosalind Russell, Mary Pickford, Mae West, Madeleine Carroll, Joan Bennett, and even the acid Edna Mae Oliver. And braves like Clark Gable, Adolphe Menjou, Ronald Colman, Cary Grant, Basil Rathbone, Donald Crisp, Ray Milland, Maurice Chevalier, Robert Young, Fred Astaire, and even young Jackie Cooper. They all liked to work for us in radio because they all had a native love for wampum.

But the chiefs of the big cinema tribes like the MGMs, the Columbias, the Paramounts, and the Foxes were afraid that fraternizing with the Radios would overexpose their squaws and braves and make them lose their box office potency.

They might have been right. However, they were never afraid

of reducing any of their precious personalities' box office potency when they needed publicity.

Each tribe had a different strategy. MGM would let one of its stars go on the air—and made every effort to get them on the air—provided the star was not only given a free plug for a current picture but also one for some forthcoming MGM film. Fox would not allow one of its stars to appear without plugging his or her picture *and* Darryl F. Zanuck.

Paramount had a problem. Many of its stars were on the radio regularly: Crosby, Hope, Dorothy Lamour, W. C. Fields, to name just four.

Little Columbia Pictures didn't care what its stars said, since most of them at the time were borrowed from other studios. But in order to get these for radio, they had to mention Harry Cohn's name, even if it were "at the present I'm working for, you should pardon the expression, Harry Cohn."

He was one of the greatest, and most vulgar, impresarios of the film business. When thousands showed up with their autograph books and stood outside the synagogue waiting to see the stars who had come to his funeral, someone said, "See. Give the public what it wants and they'll come." I have heard that line credited to at least five different people and each person who quoted it claimed it was said to him.

After that first Crosby show in Hollywood that Norma and I attended, the Kuhls, the Carrolls, Bob Colwell and his wife, Lou, and the people from the Vallee show, George Faulkner and Gordon Thompson, repaired to Lucey's for more drinks and a good dinner on the company.

As we drove out of the NBC parking lot with Bob, we got our first taste of an amusing experience we enjoyed during our entire twenty-three years on the coast.

The autograph seekers waiting at the parking lot exit to get signatures and to see the stars roll out in their splendid jalopies would look into our Chevy, Buick, Hudson, Cadillac, in that order, and say, "Ah! Nobody! Just dopes. Go on!"

That sort of thing, coming at us two or three times a week for over twenty years, served to level off the head-swelling acquisition of what Joe Frisco called "ample walking-around money," a Beverly Hills home, a swimming pool, a Cadillac, and—sur-

prise of surprises—no overbearing burden of debt that turned many a Hollywood type into a neuro basket case.

It may be hard to believe but I have been in Bing's home only three times. The first was after I'd been writing the show about eight or nine months. He gave a big costume party in a tent on his tennis court. I went dressed as a western gambler in striped pants, long frock coat, string tie (which Norma made ten minutes before we left for the party), high-heeled boots, a gun belt, and a big flat western hat that Harry Carey gave me after his first appearance on radio with Bing. Pat O'Brien got a load of the outfit and asked, "What are you supposed to be, a tenderfoot?"

Bob Burns, "the Arkansas Traveler," who was Bing's bazooka-playing partner on the show, said, "Now, that ain't a nice thing to say to a man, Pat. He don't look as if just his feet are tender. He looks tender all over." Then he looked at Norma's outfit, which had drawn a raised eyebrow and the comment "some figger" from Bing at the door, and said, "Honey, if you're supposed to be what I think you're supposed to be, if a man came into a house and saw you, he'd think he made a mistake an' went to the little red schoolhouse to pick up his kid."

Bob Burns loved Norma. She was his mascot. She was in the first row the first time he did the Rudy Vallee show and made the big hit that started him on the road to riches. He said, "That little girl's big eyes and kinda wide open laugh pulled me through the hardest time I'd had since I was nine years old and they tried to give me my first bath." Later, when he left Kraft and started a show of his own, it was for Lifebuoy soap.

The trouble with the big circus tent in which Bing was holding his party was that it lacked certain sanitary facilities. I had to ask where to go and, to go where I was told, I had to enter the Crosby manse. Burns said, "Ain't this something? Back home we had parties inside and had to go out to go to the privy. Here they hold 'em outside and you have to go in."

One of Bob's great jokes was that after he got some money he sent his Grampa Snazzy a whole modern bathroom. Grampa thanked him by explaining how he used it. "I'm keeping coal in the big long white thing," he said. "We're sproutin' potato

shoots in the thing that looks like a bird bath. And I took the two lids off the thing for washin' your hands and face. Your grandma's usin' one of them for a bread board and I used the other to frame your father's picture."

The Crosby house to which I gave my business was the one that burned to the ground the following winter when a Christmas tree caught fire. Bing was working somewhere in the Los Angeles area. By the time he arrived with the help of a police escort the place was burning with an all-consuming glow. He took one look at his home going up in flames and rushed inside.

Firemen tried to stop him but he put on an exhibition of open-field running that was better than anything he'd shown when he was playing for Gonzaga University. The crowd gasped twice. Once at his agility and once again as he entered what now looked like a bonfire—a *très bon* fire.

There was a big sigh of relief when he emerged unscathed. Only his hair was burned. He'd left it on his nightstand.

Bill Goodwin, one of radio's most successful announcers, lived right across the street. He and his wife, Phillipa, had taken in Dixie and the boys. "What the hell did you think you were doing?" Bill asked.

"Getting these." Bing held up a pair of golf shoes.

"You're an idiot. If you're that hard up I'll buy you a pair."

"Not like these," said Bing, and pulled what looked like a dollar bill from each shoe. But, instead of having a picture of George Washington, each had one of Grover Cleveland. To save you the trouble of sticking your hand in your pocket to relieve your curiosity, Grover Cleveland, who knows why, is on the thousand-dollar bill. Bing stuck the dough in his pocket and handed Bill the shoes.

Bill took Bing by the arm and said, "Come on over to the house and have a drink." Bing wouldn't go. "How often does a guy get to see a fire like this?"

As he stood there in the crowd that had gathered because everyone thought, "How often does a guy get to see a fire like this?" Buddy De Sylva's son, Dave Shelley, came over to him and stood there for a minute. Then he said casually, "What's new?" That was the end of the house in which I had the honor of using the plumbing.

It had taken about six months before my constant presence around the studio on Thursdays began to make an impression on Bing, although he'd been reading my words on the air and, occasionally, discussing them with me. So I was a little surprised when, after only about two years, he asked me to have lunch with him.

At that time he ate in his dressing room at NBC, which he had started to do because he brought his lunch from home in a paper bag. No! Really! He did!

When he gave that up, the food was ordered by his stand-in, Leo Flynn, and brought over at twelve thirty from the Brown Derby about a block and a half away by the most wonderful waiter who ever lived, Benny Massi (rhymes with classy).

Benny knew most of the stars in Hollywood better than they knew each other because he was the one the management always sent out on parties catered by the Derby. When working the room on Vine Street he had his steady customers, and when certain delicacies—like steak and ice cream—became scarce, during World War II, Benny had his own little cache of such stuff that he made available to his regulars.

When Norma, whose yen for chocolate ice cream is like a junkie's need for horse, was in Cedars of Lebanon Hospital having Adam, our third child, and no chocolate ice cream was available in the hospital—or anywhere else at 11 P.M.—it was Benny who met the emergency. Benny's efficiency and good cheer contributed in many ways to making many people's lives in Hollywood a little easier.

Once Bing had cracked the ice, we ate lunch together almost every Thursday noon. They were very quiet, thoughtful, peaceful interludes. Sometimes neither of us said a word. I don't know what Bing was thinking of, but I know what I was thinking of. I was trying to think what Bing was thinking of. But I guess that's the way it had to be with two such aggressively outgoing young men.

The winning of the West

Promptly at 8 A.M. on my second day in Hollywood, the desk at the Roosevelt announced that there was a driving teacher in the lobby waiting for me. Much to my surprise (and perhaps his) I was showered, shaved, dressed, breakfasted, scared to death, and waiting for him.

The whole driving lesson thing happened too fast, like the dentist being ready and waiting when you arrive ten minutes early.

Almost immediately I was sitting in his car (no dual control), feeling like a man hearing the judge read his death sentence, as the teacher explained the working of the H-shift and how, instead of the middle valve, you had to press your left foot down to make the gears go round and round.*

I'm ashamed to say I don't remember my instructor's name or even what he looked like. The latter is, of course, reasonable. I was too busy looking at the road, or closing my eyes to avoid the sight of disaster, to look at the man sitting next to me. Too bad. There must be some sort of civilian award for men like him.

Lost as his name is in the winding corridors of history and my memory, he is worthy to stand beside all the other nameless heroes of the past: the kid who held his finger in the dike, the boy who stood on the burning deck, the man who carried the letter to Garcia, and the lad who said to Napoleon, "Nay I'm killed sire!" the day the French stormed Ratisbon. I don't know a more courageous man than he was unless it was I who accepted his confidence.

After I'd run the gears three times and almost stripped them twice, he said, "All right. That's all you have to know, except

* A popular song at the time was "The Music Goes 'Round and 'Round."

you turn the wheel to the right to turn right and to the left to turn left. You can't go wrong on that. Now drive to Highland, make a right, and keep going till I tell you to do something."

"Right away?"

"We've only got an hour. Let's go!"

There was a terrifying grinding as I did something unauthorized with the clutch, trying to get the car into second. Then we picked up speed and I finally got it into third without too much noise. We had a red light at Highland (which I almost went through). I stopped suddenly, killing the engine by not releasing the clutch while applying the brake.

"I told you to turn right."

"Oh, yes." I made the proper arm signal and turned south into Highland in such a magnificent arc that I crossed the trolley track and almost crashed into a monstrous Pacific Electric car that was standing still, either waiting to cross Highland or for me to bump into it.

My teacher gave me a little advice about that turn. "Don't run into vehicles larger than yours."

With more bumps, grinds, and jerks than Minsky ever heard of, we staggered south to Santa Monica Boulevard and turned west. Somewhere before we came to Beverly Hills, I had to pass a five-car freight train while Master Control at my right kept telling me not to scrape it, not to drive over the curb onto the sidewalk to avoid it, and to go faster. He said if I continued to drive at the rate we were moving my rear end would be hit so often I'd think I was a pledge getting my ass tanned at a fraternity hazing.

I began to feel afraid of the man. Not because I doubted his skill but because I doubted his sanity as he sat there calmly telling a complete greenhorn to drive faster on a street full of automobiles and railroad trains. But, as Charlie Winner used to say every Thursday on the Maxwell House Show Boat, that was "only the beginnin', folks! Only the beginnin'!"

It was very pretty in Beverly Hills. I'd driven around it several times a few years earlier with Nat and Googie and Willy in Burns and Allen's big black chauffeur-driven limousine as we ogled the architecture like a quartet of corn-fed tourists.

On this trip, if there were any houses around I didn't see

them, just the pavement of the road ahead. My fearless companion directed me north across Sunset and into Coldwater, then up and into Benedict Canyon. "You'll have to do a lot of mountain driving," he said. "You might as well get used to it."

Scary as it was, nothing he might have done could have given me more confidence in my ability to control a car. I'm certain that early morning drive on the winding, bumpy dirt road that was then Benedict Canyon cut down the number of lessons I needed, although the strain on my nerves might have shortened my life.

On the third day I was declared ready to take a driving test. My teacher was out to beat the Lord's world record by creating a driver in only *three* days. I made him give me two more lessons. How was I to know that part of the success of his course in making expert drivers in only a few lessons was his connection with the California Motor Vehicle Department, which at that time made getting a license to operate a car about as easy as getting a birth certificate?

When the examiner came to anything he thought I couldn't do, he said, "I know you can do this, so let's try parking over there." And he pointed to a stretch of empty curb.

I don't buy the gag that Californians are bad drivers. They're fast drivers because they grow up with wheels and they know what they're doing. It's the out-of-staters, who don't know how to drive Californian, who louse things up on the highways.

When I returned east after twenty-three years in the West, I found New York driving insane and unsafe, tentative and unskilled. It frightened me because of the unalert and inept. There were too many weekend drivers who never really found out how to handle a car.

Put westerners behind the wheels of all the automobiles on the streets of New York and traffic conditions would improve 18.5 percent, not because they drive faster but because they drive with more initiative and hate to stand in line waiting for a light to change when, by turning the wheel a little, they can form a new line and keep everything moving.

Now, however, after having lived in New York for over twelve years, when I'm in the West I find their speed scares me—maybe it's those twelve years.

It's almost impossible to be in Hollywood long without hearing stories about the Beverly Hills Police Department, the most efficient Keystone Kops in the world. Although I finally had my first run-in with them one morning in front of the home of Robert Young, the fact that I had not been apprehended and promptly beheaded one torrential night shortly after I'd received my driving license convinced me that they were merely an over-rated elite corps of leprechauns.

I was on my way home from Lionel Barrymore's at a time when he lived on North Roxbury Drive. He, Ed Rice, Bob Colwell, and I had spent the evening discussing an upcoming radio program for Swift and Company. It was to star the great ham, Lionel, Sigmund Romberg and his corn-fed music, and Cora Sue Collins, a seven-year-old child star of the era. It was a typical John Reber rebus.

John had a theory that if you put together wildly conflicting personalities—a child star, a great actor, and a composer of mushy music—you'd not only have something for everyone, you'd also have something for everyone to get up-tight about. The Swift show was planned to receive letters that said: (1) Why do you let that Romberg music take time from Lionel Barrymore? (2) Why do you let that pompous ass, Barrymore, interrupt Romberg's lovely music? (3) Why do you have Cora Sue Collins?

Controversy caused people to talk, talk caused people to listen, and listeners built up ratings. It was because so many people thought it positively sacrilegious to let George Burns and Gracie Allen cut in on Guy Lombardo's "sweetest music this side of heaven" and so many people thought that the umpah-umpah of Lombardo should not interfere with Gracie's unique views on the world around her that their program soared to first place in record time. So John was constantly trying to follow the formula.

The West Coast version of the Swift show was actually a loose retread on a similar program Swift had sponsored in New York with Romberg and William Lyon Phelps of Yale. It should have been called "The English Language As It Is Spoken and Broken."

When Rommy had to move to the coast for picture assign-

ments and Billy Phelps hung on in New Haven, Reber put in Barrymore and bolstered him with Cora Sue Collins, to whom Lionel could explain the music Romberg was about to play. John figured that if he could make it clear to the kid, he, John, would also understand it.

Ed Rice, who had worked with Rommy in New York, came out to do the show and told us about the time Herschel Williams, the JWT producer on the job, threw a smashing society-type coming-out party at the Waldorf. It was to launch his sister and gave everyone a lot more pleasure than if he'd just hit the kid on the head with a bottle. By design or by accident, Rommy was not invited to the launching.

"I will get a sign," Rommy told Ed, "and I will put on it, 'Herschel Williams is unfair to Sigmund Romberg,' and I will march up and down with it in front of the Waldorf." If he could have gotten his accent into the sign, he would have been the biggest hit ever to play the Waldorf. But it *is* interesting to recall that protesting, which we think of as a pastime of the middle sixties and early seventies, was not unthought of in the late thirties.

Rommy's accent was a problem even to those who knew him very well. Shortly after arriving in Los Angeles he discovered that he'd left his score of Respighi's most popular work in his New York apartment. So he called his housekeeper, told her what he wanted, where it was, and how to mail it to him.

Five days later the mail brought him a delicious blueberry pie and an equally delicious apple pie from his housekeeper. When he called to thank her and ask about the piece she was supposed to send him, she said, "You just thanked me for them. And it was sweet of you to call all the way from California to ask for pies from home."

In addition to explaining the music to Cora Sue, which cut the IQ of the audience from the eleven-year to the seven-year level, Barrymore had a place in the show where he could do something more in his regular field. For the first show Ed had him recite Eugene Field's "Little Boy Blue," and you can imagine what happened when Lionel pulled out all the stops on that one. For the second week Ed gave him Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart,"

which he really went to work on. This drew a blast from the Chicago office of JWT as well as from the client.

Ken Hinks, the man who handled the hog butcher's account for Thompson in Chicago, called Ed, apparently to tell him how much everyone liked "Little Boy Blue" but really to segue into a beef about the use of anything as blood-and-gutsy as "The Tell-Tale Heart." "There must be no more of such material," said Ken. "All you have to do is give us something every week that's like 'Little Boy Blue.'"

Ed called Reber in New York to complain that this was a bum rap. Where could he find a new "Little Boy Blue" weekly?

"It's your own fault," said Reber. "It's time you learned that when Chicago calls up you don't talk to them. Tell me! That's what I'm around here for. To protect you writers. Somebody has to do it." He was right. He fought our battles bravely, but mostly to prevent us from insulting clients and losing accounts.

He was kept very busy. Clients were so easy to insult. What do you say when you come up against a nonsensical contretemps like this: The Lux Radio Theater, directed by Cecil B. De Mille, sought an okay to do a radio version of the film *The Song of Bernadette*. Lever Brothers was reluctant to okay this property. Its people hemmed and hawed and backed and filled until finally, with great misgivings, they broke down and said we could do it "providing all religious implications were cut."

When our meeting on the strange Swift troika, Barrymore, Romberg, and Cora Sue Collins, ended—inconclusively, I'm sure—and each of us broke for his car, it was raining. This meant that it would not only be the first time I'd ever driven at night, it would also be the first time I'd ever driven in the rain and only about the fifteenth time I'd ever driven.

Unlike the average rain in the East, which has a casual quality it's possible to ignore, California rain has a Sadie Thompson presence. When it's on the scene, it *is* the scene!

I was proud of the fact that I was able to back out of Barrymore's driveway doing no more damage than getting my head soaking wet and smashing his house number sign. I didn't know what to do about the way the inside of my windshield was fogging up so that I couldn't see through it. The rain had

also wet my glasses so I couldn't see through them. Time cured both these problems as I inched slowly north to Sunset and turned right to go home to Hollywood.

Then it really began to rain. It rained so hard that pretty soon I felt I'd run over something and the car began to tilt. When, after a few moments, it didn't right itself, I stopped, rolled down the window, and looked out. I'd been driving for nearly a block with the right wheels cutting a long slit trench in the parkway between the sidewalk and the road. That there was no Beverly Hills patrol car around to grab me on a thing like that made me lose all respect for that police force.

I had that first run-in with the Beverly Hills gendarmerie one morning in front of the home of Robert Young, long before he became a father who "knows best" or a doctor who knows everything.

It was a Friday morning about eleven thirty and I'd gone to see Bob about an upcoming guest shot with Bing.

At that time the Youngs lived in a modest home on North Arden Drive—if any home on the snootier north-of-Santa-Monica side of Beverly Hills (even its extreme eastern end) could be said to be modest.

It was routine to interview each guest who was to appear on KMH before I wrote the script that he/she "ad-libbed" with Bing when they met on the show. This system served a lot of happy purposes: (1) It gave me a chance to hear how the person talked, what kind of language he used, what his cadences were, what areas of special interest he had, and what performing talents, if any, he possessed beyond the one for which he had won success. (2) The person thus interviewed felt he had participated in the creation of the script, which made him much more interested in it.

I have no idea what Bob and I talked about or how the script turned out. I did four such interviews a week for ten years.

When we finished, Bob walked me halfway to the curb and we shook hands. He went back into the house and I headed for my pitiful Chevrolet. The word "pitiful" is mandatory in describing any Chevrolet that enters Beverly Hills. I feel sure that if I'd been driving a Cadillac I'd have had no trouble with the flics.

Double-parked beside my humble vehicle was another car with large, vulgar initials on it—BHPD. In it were two living, breathing, well-built, badge-wearing members of that exalted organization that guards the goods of the stars. Both were staring at me the way Pat O'Brien, the good cop, used to put the double whammy on Eduardo Cianelli. My blood turned to water. I didn't know what I'd done but it was clear that I was guilty. I felt myself being sucked into the quicksand of despair that conquers an innocent man who knows he has no alibi.

The first thing to cross my mind was that driving a Chevrolet on the streets of Beverly Hills was a felony. Those were the days when a man could live a long while on the difference in price between the cheapest Chevy (mine) and the average Cadillac. Then I realized I only had a little over eight dollars in my pocket, which might constitute vagrancy in Beverly. Not only that, I was wearing a coat that matched my trousers, a collar, and a necktie, proving me to be a foreigner. My pants were pressed, my shoes were shined, and my glasses had neither horn rims nor dark lenses. I was clearly a subversive type.

The very least they could pin on me, I figured, was parking too close to a hydrant. But I could see no hydrant. Did I park on *top* of it? (My driving wasn't too predictable.)

What the penalty might be for parking on top of a hydrant in Beverly Hills caused my mind to boggle, which it does easier and quicker than any mind its age.

Then one of the cops hollered, "Hey, you!"

I tensed up. I grew wily. All the Jimmy Cagney pictures I'd ever seen passed before my eyes. Like a hardened criminal I smiled nonchalantly at the officer and then turned to look back at the house as if to see whether the cop was calling Bob.

No, Bob was not there. Coward that he was, he'd vanished into the sanctuary of his own home to hide, leaving me there exposed to the law.

"You!" the cop repeated. "Come here!" There could no longer be any question. Jack Webb couldn't have done better. Clearly the "you" he had in mind was the "me" who wished the earth would swallow him up. With knees trembling I walked toward the prowl car and, in a voice I'd never heard come out of me before, I said, "Good morning, officers."

The cossack who was sitting beside the driver eyed my briefcase suspiciously and, in a tone rarely heard outside a star chamber inquest, growled, “Waddy thinkya doin’?”

Knowing I was a pigeon from having seen all those Cagney films, I faced the law with what bravado I could muster (when ever you have bravado, the waiter always asks if you want it with muster) and I said, “Oh, nothing much. Just peddling a few jokes.” Then I laughed lightheartedly to show I had the personality of a joke peddler.

“Peddling’s a violation of the Beverly Hills Municipal Code Section 390 slash 521 dash 42.” He started to get out of the car. Thinking he’d drawn a gun, I put up my hands.

“Just a minute, officer, I’m not really peddling anything. You see, I’m a writer—” I stopped. I knew I’d said the wrong thing. I was sure I saw him reach for his weapon. His partner got out of the car and walked around to cover him. I didn’t move. They had me. The jig was up.

“All right. What’s in the bag? What ya sellin’?”

I couldn’t tell them. I just stood there staring. I knew anything I tried to say would sound phony because my voice was completely out of control. When it gets like that I sound like Tiny Tim giving an imitation of Janis Joplin or vice versa.

But my heart was really strong and I knew I was too young to go to jail. So I managed to pull myself together and gave the fuzz a complete rundown on my connection with radio and Bing Crosby and the mysterious way in which that had brought me to the sacred soil of Beverly Hills where I had completed my mission at the hallowed home before which I had been apprehended. I suggested they ring Bob Young’s bell and ask him if I hadn’t come clean.

They felt they’d rather not bother Mr. Young, and I was impressed that these simple police officers—and simple is a very good word there—that these simple officers were such dedicated men that even the mention of my connection with Bing Crosby, equivalent to mentioning Johnny Carson today, didn’t cause them to fawn all over me.

Finally, without even frisking me, the boss cop said, “Okay, kid. Get in your car.” (It’s a terrible thing to be called “kid” when you’re thirty-three years old.) I obeyed and waited for

them to tell me to follow them back to the station house. What I actually heard, believe it or not, was, “Get out of town!” If I’d had any doubt before, when I heard those words I was finally convinced that I was in the West with a capital *W*.

It was now clear that Beverly Hills wasn’t big enough to hold me an’ them deppidies. I knew what Gary Cooper would have done. And I also knew I wasn’t Gary Cooper by eleven or twelve inches. So I drove slowly north into the Sunset Strip. I didn’t hanker to try to beat a speeding rap, too.

The officers followed me as I drove between the fields of poinsettias and crossed the Beverly Hills city line into the county strip, which was then just a two-lane road in the process of being widened and paved for the first time. There warn’t a hippie in sight.

About seven years later our home on North Rodeo Drive in Beverly was robbed and the local bobbies got there, as John Wayne would describe it, “mighty fast.”

The first question the investigating detective, whose name I’m not using because I’m scared to, asked us was, “Which one of your friends do you suspect?”

Although we refused to finger anyone we knew, Sergeant G. came to see us every morning to get more clues, hot coffee, and doughnuts.

Then suddenly the case was solved. We got back almost everything that had been stolen, including a whole bagful of soiled diapers. The job had been done by a couple working for Jerry Wald, who lived directly across the alley from us. The case had been broken by—the Los Angeles police.

Connie Wald told us she hated to lose the couple. They did their job so well. They sure did! And it turned out that they did jobs just as well all over Beverly and Bel Air. But—a gentle touch of consideration—they never stole from the people they worked for.

What they took from our houseguest, Augusta Weissberger, was some cash from her handbags, a whole lot of then very hard-to-get nylon stockings, some delicate handmade Brazilian lingerie, and several frocks and gowns she’d had made in South America while working as executive secretary to Orson Welles,

who was making a film down there. The robbers, whose room was directly across the alley from our backyard, must have heard us talking that afternoon about a nine o'clock dinner at Romanoff's.

When they heard us leave, they broke in through the window of the guesthouse, which was silly because the door was unlocked. It must have said in their burglar's manual that you have to enter through a window.

They were specialists in backyard installations, guest and pool houses. When I told Frank Morgan the next day about how the crooks had stolen a broken alarm clock and a sack full of soiled diapers, Frank said, "Those must be the same people who broke into my pool house. They stole some outdoor furniture, all our old bathing suits and things, a lot of worn-out swimming caps, and a whole drawer full of old jockstraps."

"What were you saving *them* for?"

"You never know when someone may need one in an emergency."

As soon as they were caught, this strange team confessed to everything, including Frank Morgan's merchandise, and revealed that they had stored the loot in a Santa Monica warehouse. The only items not found there were the dresses. The woman had altered these but offered to return them as they were when she heisted them.

Their story was that they were saving all the things they'd lifted to furnish a little home of their own someday. It's a safe bet they were the only thieves in the world who spent money to store what they stole instead of fencing it. By this time they should have written a book called *Your Future Is What You Can Steal*.

At the trial the wife testified that she'd known her husband for seventeen years and "as long as I've known him he's been a burglar."

The only thing Augusta really lost was a handsome wristwatch. She identified it at the station house but the police asked permission to keep it there as a piece of evidence. When the trial was over the watch couldn't be found.

I thought of calling the police—the Los Angeles police.

Hail, KMH!

Two months after we arrived in Hollywood the settling-in process was complete and the coming-out party was at hand.

We'd moved from the luxurious bridal suite of the Hollywood-Roosevelt after two weeks and were waiting in an ugly little furnished apartment at 5000 Monroe Street for our furniture to make it across country. It was an impressive-sounding address for a miserable flat in a two-story building at the corner of Van Ness and Monroe, a sad little street—and why not? It only ran for a half block and dead-ended into the Paramount lot, which, some said, couldn't be a deader end.

We picked the apartment only for convenience. It was near enough to the Plymouth and Rosewood bungalow office so that Norma could walk there and sun herself in the yard. And it was within walking distance of NBC, so she could come to the broadcasts.

One Thursday after the show Norma, Cal and Mandy Kuhl, and I were having dinner at Sardi's (run by Dave Covey and Harry Brandstatter and no relation to the New York institution). Stanley Resor, president of J. Walter Thompson, was coming to town and Cal was planning a dinner party for him on the following day. It sounded dull and too much like work to me, so I said, "I'm sorry. I'm expecting a headache." It meant nothing because I knew no matter what I was expecting I'd have to go. But it got a laugh.

The next morning it became clear that it didn't matter what I was expecting. What Norma was expecting started knocking at the portal. But she didn't tell me this. She just stayed in bed and I left for an early appointment. I always had several guests for next week's show to see on Friday. When I finally got a chance to call her at three in the afternoon, she suggested that

I'd better come right home. She'd talked to the doctor. All arrangements had been made. All was well. We were going to the hospital. It seemed a foolish thing to do if all was well.

By six o'clock the doctors and nurses had shanghaied Norma to some secret part of the hospital, barred to concerned husbands. And I'm not sure it isn't better that way than having scared young men hanging around, getting in the way, and "enjoying the beauty of natural birth."

I was told the baby wouldn't be born for several hours. I'm not very good at hanging around. So I left Cal's phone number and split, knowing that whatever other excuse I might have for getting out of that Fathers' Waiting Room, the truth was that it was important to my job (and to the coming kid's education) for me to be at Cal's dinner for Mr. Resor.

I thought it odd, as the party progressed, that Mr. Resor seemed to think it in no way strange that I should be at a party while my wife was delivering a baby. (That sounds as if she had a baby route.) When, much later, I got to know him better, he turned out to be a strange combination of warmth and hauteur, of arrogance and shyness, of tolerance and an inability to believe anyone could think any other way than he thought.

One of the members of the board of directors of the Thompson Company, the man who controlled the valuable Scott Paper account, was a Democrat named Gilbert Kinney. He was very rich and, at that time, perhaps the only Democrat among the brass on the eleventh floor. Mr. Resor once said, "Gil claims he's a Democrat. But we all know perfectly well that when he gets in that booth, all by himself, he votes Republican just like everyone else."

At about 10 P.M. the phone rang at Kuhl's. We both ran to answer. Cal picked it up, then turned to me and said, "Go!" I made record time from Cahuenga and Ventura Boulevards to the Hollywood Hospital at Sunset and Vermont, blazing the trail for that segment of the Hollywood Freeway. I *must* have gone straight across country. My trip made faster-than-a-flying-bullet Superman look like Stepin Fetchit.

Just as I walked into the Fathers' Waiting Room a nurse came out and told me it was a girl. It didn't surprise me. A boy

wouldn't have been so late. And I didn't even get to see her. I was told Norma was under sedation and couldn't be disturbed and the place where they filed the babies was closed. So I went back to the party and took a few bows.

Bob Burns was not only on Bing's radio show, he was also co-starring with Bing in Bob's first picture, *Rhythm on the Range*. He was the first one to come to the house to view the baby after we brought her home to a little house we'd rented, which Norma's mother helped me move us into while Norma was still in the hospital.

Bob had just emerged from the shadow of small-time vaudeville and carney living and was not yet ready to acknowledge that his hungry days were over. He knew what to buy, but he really didn't know what to do with it when he got it.

The last time I saw him was about eight months before his death. I was on a mission for CBS. They had the idea that if Bob Burns would just sit down for a day and dictate all his old stories to a tape machine, these could be cut up into five-minute featurettes for radio. CBS was prepared to offer Bob a \$50,000 advance for this day's work.

The phone number I had for Bob's baronial estate out near Reseda in San Fernando Valley was a stale one. I hadn't used it in years. So I sent him a wire that said, "Imperative I see you. Please call Crestview 6-8703 and tell me when. Carroll."

That evening I had to go way out in The Valley to a rosary service for a girl who had been Ed Gardner's secretary when he was with Thompson in New York. She had married a friend of mine, Ed James, creator of the "Father Knows Best" show.

Norma and I left the house before I heard from Burns. When the service was over I called home and when my son Bruce told me that Bob had not yet answered my wire, I decided to take a chance and go see him, since the Burns estate was very near where we were.

It was about a quarter after nine when we pulled up to his walled compound. While common sense tells me to the contrary, I still feel sure the place had a drawbridge. It was possible to ring the gate bell without getting out of the car. I did. Instantly the whole area was flooded with light. Presently Bob's

voice came through a loudspeaker embedded in the high stone wall. “Yeah? Who is it?”

Almost before I finished saying my name the electric gate began to swing open. As we wound along the Tara-like driveway that led to the house, we could see Bob, looking like the Uncle Fud he told stories about, standing in the roadway.

As soon as the car stopped he said, “I just called you an’ left a message with your boy. You sure got here fast. What’s wrong? Need any money?”

Those last three words did it. I never felt so loved in my life. For Bob to make an offer like that was as unexpected as Martin Luther King, Jr., voting for George Wallace. I assured him everything was all right and after he’d shown us around the house and we were sitting in his upstairs study, where he had all his mementos and keepsakes, I told him why I wanted to see him.

“Honestly, Carroll,” he said, “I’d do it for you—not CBS—’cause you’re askin’ me to. But I just *can’t*. I can’t afford to make another dollar this year. I know you won’t believe this but it’s true. All them lies I used to tell on the radio, they make sense when you put them up next to what’s happened to me.”

My mind ran back over the beautiful house we’d just seen, with the antique dining room table covered by a piece of oil-cloth. He had created the Beverly Hillbillies several years before the idea came to Paul Henning. He was so sorry he couldn’t do what I’d come to ask of him that he tried to give Norma and me almost everything lying around loose.

“I got the nicest little pony out there in the barn for Leda,” he said. She had become eighteen and was going to Sarah Lawrence in Bronxville. So Bob tried to get us to take the animal for the two boys. I told him neither of them was interested in anything that didn’t light up when you plugged it in.

In the Burns garage were two white Cadillac convertibles, one full of hunting and fishing gear that left the seats upholstered in white cowhide and fish scales. The other looked as if it were being used as a hotbed to sprout onions. “Here, take these,” Bob said, and handed Norma a bunch of peacock feathers. “Them damn birds I got out there keep droppin’ these all over the place.”

He had two completely equipped machine shops, one for working with wood, the other for metal. And right next door was a “wine” cellar. He picked up one of the cases of gin and carried it to my car.

A lot of water had flowed through the Burns moat since a day in New York when Gordon Thompson booked Bob for one appearance on the Rudy Vallee Hour. The honorarium—it wasn’t enough to be called a salary—was \$75. That was the broadcast at which Norma “brought him luck” and, in effect, became his mascot.

I was having a cocktail with Gordon and George Faulkner shortly after they’d heard Bob audition and had signed him. “We’ve got to get him some new clothes,” mumbled George, who rarely said anything above a mumble. “He looks just like a hillbilly.”

“I thought you said he *is* a hillbilly.”

“He *is*,” said Gordon. “But if we let him go on in the clothes he has, people will just feel sorry for him. They won’t laugh. They’ll take up a collection. The only thing that’s not pitiful about the yellow shoes he’s wearing is that they’re on the right feet.”

“Besides,” George added, “we don’t go for that nonsense of people wearing costumes on a radio show and no one would believe that what Bob was wearing wasn’t his stage wardrobe.”

The reception Bob and his new suit and shoes got on their first radio appearance was as positive as it’s positive to get.

The next morning, when Gordon and George showed up in Reber’s office, Bob Burns was there. “I found this man in the reception room waiting for me when I got here this morning,” Reber explained.

Bob just smiled and said, “After what I done last night with Rudy, I figured you might be wantin’ to see me again.”

He played a few more guest shots with Rudy, was signed by Paramount for the picture *Rhythm on the Range* with Crosby, and by Kraft to work with Bing on the radio. If you want to figure how low his starting pay must have been, it took him five years with thirteen-week options to get up to \$5,000 a week. When he reached that he was fired.

The evening Bob came to the house to see the baby he

brought his son, Robin, Jr. “Robin ain’t a common name where I come from,” Bob explained, “but my momma had heard about Robin Hood an’ how he stole from the rich to give to the poor. An’ we were mighty poor. So momma felt it wouldn’t do no harm to name her son after a man who might be grateful for the honor. She died a mighty disappointed woman. That Hood fella never did show up.”

The moment the two Robins arrived we headed for the nursery. Leda looked all pink and pretty in her bassinet. Bob leaned over, clucked a little the way men do, and then said, “Ain’t it awful how ugly babies are?” Leda must have been thinking the same thing about people. That big, red, rugged face coming so close to hers didn’t seem to appeal to her at all and she started to whimper.

“Now, you don’t want to do that,” Bob pleaded. “I know I ain’t pretty like your momma and poppa.” Then, as soft as if he were humming the Brahms “Lullaby,” he began to sing, “I’m an’ old cowhand/From the Rio Grande,” and as he continued to plug the tune Johnny Mercer had written for *Rhythm on the Range* Leda began to smile and coo as if the only place she could be happy was in cow country. And from that moment on Johnny’s song, “I’m an Old Cowhand” was her lullaby.

Leda was likely the most-looked-at baby of the era, certainly of our set. Our house, only two blocks from the JWT office, became a lunchtime rendezvous for men who came home with me “to see the baby” (and get some free grub). Their wives dropped in at odd hours to kill a little time between dentist appointments and dates at the beauty shop “to see the baby.” And in the evening they’d come over together to play Monopoly or “the Game” and “see the baby.”

During dinner Bob said, “I got a letter from the mayor of Van Buren, Arkansas. He’s comin’ here to see me an’ give me the key to the city. An’ you can believe me it ain’t gonna be a very big key. But I’m kinda proud of havin’ been born in Van Buren, even if it is a little bitty town and my folks lived way out on the outskirts. To get to where we lived you started by takin’ a train from Fort Smith to the end of the line. Then you’d go by car till the road run out and the car couldn’t go no further. Then you’d go by wagon until the ruts kind of faded

away. Then you got on a mule an' rode as far as he could go. From there you had to swing in on a vine.

"I sure would like to have His Honor on the show to meet Bing. He could do my folks back home a lot of good, honest he could. The folks down there are all mighty fond of cheese and my folks'd buy an awful lot of it if they had any money. And that's how the mayor could help 'em. He could see they got on the town dole!"

Bob was almost kidding on the square. This was the first time anyone had ever come along and tried to hitch his wagon to Bob Burns's star, and naturally he felt flattered.

"When's he coming?" I asked.

"He don't say. He just says he'll call when he gets here."

And that's exactly what he did. He called and got me. Bing and Bob were up at Lone Pine on location at the time. I'd forgotten all about Bob's letter from the mayor of Van Buren and thought it was a gag. "Okay," I said, "I haven't time to play games. Who the hell is this and what do you want?"

The voice at the other end said, "I wrote Bob an' told him I'd be here to give him the key to the city. Honest, I really am the mayor of Van Buren an' I got papers right in my pocket to prove it."

The mayor of Van Buren showed up in my office and outlined to me his idea for presenting Bob Burns with the key to the city of Van Buren. It soon developed that what he was really after were some photographs of himself with Bing and Bob. I told him I was driving up to Lone Pine to see them the following morning and invited him to come along. He was delighted. He was really going to see how they made movies.

Taking the script personally to Bing was not one of my regular duties. I usually spent Friday, Saturday, and Sunday interviewing guests, began writing on Monday morning, and Tuesday evening Bing and Bob each received his script. The guests all got sides in which they were to appear. I'd then get okays from the guests or try to take what suggestions they had that made sense. Early Thursday morning Bing's script, with any changes *he* had, was picked up by a dressy lad named John Christ, who when last heard of was a vice-president of the Leo Burnett agency. All notes and proposed changes were then

made, coordinated, and/or ignored, and a revised script was sent to mimeo to be ready for rehearsal.

One of the procedures that gave Bing's show its air of "gracious informality" was that the dress rehearsal was what went on the air. We ran through each segment separately and timed it. The only performer who ever knew what the whole show was like was Bing and sometimes even he didn't know.

There were three reasons why I was personally taking the script to Lone Pine: (1) It got me out of the office for a day; (2) I had something about future casting to talk over with Bing; (3) who wants to pay for a messenger to carry an envelope a couple of hundred miles up into Owen Valley? It was cheaper to go myself.

After two months of renting a car at Thompson's expense, I had finally splurged on a Chevrolet, brand-new and a current model, which cost at that time between \$700 and \$800. But, of course, that was before Chevys looked like a monster's dream.

I was now a driver of about four months' experience and the trip to Lone Pine was to be the very first time I'd really gone out of the city or its environs.

The mayor of Van Buren, Helen Raymond, and I started early in the morning, and when we got to the long, straight, narrow road that ran up Panamint Valley in the shadow of the High Sierras for as far as the eye could see, I realized that at last I could unleash the Barney Oldfield in me. As the needle nudged above seventy-five and started pushing eighty, Helen said, "You drive pretty well for a new driver."

The mayor, who had thus far been sitting back humming to himself and admiring the majestic view he was getting of the "Old West," suddenly came to life and asked Helen what she'd just said.

"I said he drives well for a new driver. Don't you think so?"

"New driver?" The mayor's voice trembled a little.

"You wouldn't believe it, would you? Isn't he marvelous for a man who's only been driving a little while?"

"H-h-h-how long?" the mayor stammered.

"It'll be a week tomorrow," I answered, cutting off anything more truthful. "My teacher says I'd be great if I could only pick up a little on my steering."

“S-s-steering?”

“I have a tendency to forget which way to turn the wheel.”

“Ooh?” The mayor said the sound half as a murmur of understanding and half as a groan of despair. “Would you mind going a little slower so I can see the scenery better?”

This early version of Mario Andretti eased the speed down to seventy and we stayed at that till we came to the point where we turned into the location site. But the sign wasn't very far ahead of the actual turn-in, so that I wasn't really going slowly enough. I had to brake suddenly to make the turn on a piece of road that was loose gravel. When the car straightened out and continued, the mayor had made one of the biggest decisions of his political career.

I had hardly introduced him to Burns when he said, “Bob, I think I'll ride back from here with you in your car if there's room.” I winked at Bob and shook my head no ever so slightly.

“Well, now, Mr. Mayor,” Bob said, “I don't know whether there's gonna be room in that big studio car with both me an' Bing in it. Bing may have four or five friends he wants to bring down with him. I better talk to him and let you know later.”

When I got a chance to tell Bob what had happened, he said to me, “You oughtn't to have scared a public official of Van Buren like that. He's gonna go back home and tell my people that I'm here in Hollywood movin' in fast company.” He chuckled all afternoon about the mayor, who followed Bob and Bing around like a puppy. This was partly because they were movie stars, and that's what he'd come west to see, but mostly because he wasn't about to let them leave without him, no matter how many people Bing chose to pack into the studio car.

San Francisco is a city you always seem to see for the first time no matter how many times you've seen it. But when you see it for the *very* first time it does something beautiful for you.

We pulled into the circular driveway of the Mark Hopkins Hotel already enchanted. When I asked the room clerk for a high room from which I could see Alcatraz, I got some apprehensive glances from him and a couple of house dicks, probably due to the fact that I had a pair of very powerful binoculars hanging from my shoulder.

I was running low on money so I called the JWT office in San Francisco and asked if I could cash a check. It turned out that I “had a friend at J. Walter Thompson,” so I walked down the hill to pick up the dough. Before I left the office someone asked me where I was staying and I thought it was just in case of emergency. After my first ride up the hill on a cable car, I felt an accident was waiting to happen at every intersection.

Norma’s favorite drink is a mint julep. It was a warm July evening. At about seven o’clock we decided to start off with a couple of juleps. As we passed the Peacock Court, going out through the lobby of the hotel, Norma said, “Why don’t we have our juleps here?”

“Seems kind of corny,” I said, “when I have all these good spots they gave me at the office.”

That evening I learned something that has held true all down through the years. Bartenders don’t like to make mint juleps. It takes too much time to make one. For this reason, most bars avoid serving juleps by never having any mint.

We went from one recommended spot to another, sidled up to the bar, and asked for two mint juleps. When the barman apologetically (they’re always apologetic) told us he had no mint, we didn’t dare walk away. So we had a couple of old-fashioned. You don’t have to have many experiences like this in the course of an evening before you begin to feel pretty good. Finally, still un-julepped but happy, we settled down for dinner in what was then one of San Francisco’s ace steak houses, John’s. The steak was fine and so was the Chianti and so was the zabaglione, and no two happier people walked back up the hill to the Mark.

As we entered there was the Peacock Court. “Let’s,” I said, as if it were the first time it had come up that day, “stop in *here* for a julep. It’ll make a nice nightcap.”

The irony of the whole evening was that right in the hotel, where Norma had wanted to stop first, they had what we’d pub-crawled all over town trying to find. It was about a quarter of four when I stopped for my key, and with the key there was a message. It said, “Would like you and Norma to breakfast with me at 7:15. Stanley Resor.”

What to do? We felt fine and were wide-awake, but to go to

bed for a few hours and then have to wake up just in time to catch the hangover didn't make sense. We sat by the window, looked out over the bay, and listened to the early weather reports and farm bulletins on the radio.

Watching Mr. Resor eat an enormous country breakfast made me feel exactly the way a seasick man must feel on first looking into creamed spinach. Norma, who doesn't eat much breakfast anyway, was tactfully trying to avoid all the little goodies he was putting on her plate because he didn't feel she was eating enough. I know it's impossible for a breakfast to go on for two and a half years, but it would take a long time to convince me that one didn't. When it finally ended, Mr. Resor said, "Coming to the office?"

"Well, Norma and I are here on a holiday. So I thought we'd just get in the car and drive around and have a look at San Francisco."

"Good!" As a send-off, he gave me a pat on the back that nearly sent my head rolling down Nob Hill. "Have a good time."

He got into a cab and we got into the elevator, which was what we had to do before we could get into bed.

Norma said, "The only thing worse than bringing the boss home to dinner unexpectedly is having him ask you for breakfast unexpectedly."

One of the things that made guesting on Bing's show attractive was definitely not the money, it was the gracious treatment and the considerateness with which we handled guests. Our top money was the lowest of any big show on the air. But rehearsal was frequently less than fifteen minutes and practically at the guest's convenience. And, instead of using the guests to make the star look good, we worked just the other way. On top of all this, and a real consideration to many of our regular guests, was a handsome teak cheese tray and huge basket of Kraft's full line of products that each guest received after the show.

This created an interesting problem for David Niven the first time he guested with Bing. It was early in his career and he was under contract to Samuel Goldwyn. When Goldwyn couldn't use him, he let other studios borrow him and took, according to contract, half of any money David received.

Niven took home his cheese tray and basket full of stuff, borrowed a hacksaw from the janitor of his building, cut everything—the tray, the basket, and every item in it—in half, and sent Goldwyn his 50 percent.

One of the joys of writing the show was the chance it gave me to gab with guys like Niven. He'd been a subaltern in the British army and loved to spin yarns, probably apocryphal (which made them no less funny), about his days in the King's Service.

His immediate superior and hero of all his stories was a Captain Trubshaw. Careful students of Niven's career will recognize the name. It's been used in practically every picture Niven's made and, I think, the man himself has appeared in some.

"We were holding maneuvers on Malta," he told me the first time we met. "Trubshaw was standing on a little rise of ground watching the game through monster binoculars that looked like Siamese cannons. It was only about eight thirty in the morning when I came to report, and Trubshaw had been on the hill since five thirty. He was stone sober at reveille. But there he was, after three hours alone on a hill in the middle of Malta, absolutely smashed. But he didn't let his condition interfere with his observations. Every few minutes he'd raise his field glasses to take another look, first tilting his head back to scan the sky for aircraft."

"Finally," Niven continued, "Trubshaw handed the glasses to me and said, 'Good show, old boy. Take a peek for yourself. The right side of the bloody thing is empty. Has been for over an hour. But there still must be a nip or two in the left side. But, I say, be a good fellow and leave a spot for me.'

"So I did as my captain did. I tilted the glasses to the sky. I didn't see any aircraft. But there were a couple of large swallows."

According to Niven, Captain Trubshaw fooled around with His Majesty's equipment in other ways. To celebrate the conclusion of the Malta maneuvers there was to be a regimental parade in full battle gear. Captain T. didn't relish walking for a couple of hours in the hot sun of Malta wearing one of those World War I tin hats.*

* At the time there were only the British and American type World War I tin hats.

To avoid wearing the metal millinery, the good captain had a couple of regulation tin hats copied in papier-mâché for subaltern Niven and himself.

“Everything would have gone perfectly smashing,” said David, “if it hadn’t rained. After about ten minutes of marching in that bloody deluge, the generals in the reviewing stand were astonished to see us slogging along, armed to the teeth, with our blasted paper hats pasted about our ears and cheeks and looking like a couple of goddamned belligerent gnomes.”

Roland Young was another member of the Hollywood English colony, whose people always gave us a good show because they had humor and weren’t as insecure, didn’t take themselves as seriously, as our own movie stars did. Rollo and another Kraft regular, the great, great humorist Robert Benchley, lived at a hotel called the Garden of Allah because it had once been the estate of the European actress Alla Nazimova. There was a big house and a pool around which bungalow apartments had been built. Young lived on one side of the pool, Benchley on the other.

When either of them came home at night and saw a light shining in the other’s room, he’d stop in for a nightcap. On the evening of the story Rollo stopped at Bob’s. After several nightcaps they got into an argument over whether being an actor was, or was not, the easiest way in the world to make money. Benchley, being a writer who made easy money just being himself in front of a camera, supported the affirmative with such vigor and met with such insulting rebuffs from Young, who was a fine actor, that he finally rose and said, “God dammit, I don’t have to take that kind of talk from you. I’m going home!” And he rose and walked out of his own apartment.

You can believe that’s the way it really happened because neither Young, when he told the story, nor Benchley, when *he* told the story, had the other walk out and fall into the pool.

Frank McHugh and Pat O’Brien, both close friends of Bing, if he could be said to have had any close friends at the time, were on the Kraft show frequently.

The first time Frank, who was a regular member of Warner

Brothers' stock company, was to appear on the show, I asked how many pictures he'd been in. It seemed to me every time I saw a Warner picture I saw him. He said, "For God's sake, don't mention that! If they ever found out, they'll fire me." A few years later they found out. Frank now lives in Westchester and I see him Tuesdays in the bar at The Players Club, although Frank never drinks.

Not long ago I saw him gazing into the window of a bookstore on West Fifty-seventh Street near Carnegie Hall. I walked up behind him and asked, "What are you looking for?"

He turned and said, "Nothing in particular. Just trying to improve my intellectual image."

One Tuesday afternoon, sitting in the grill of The Players Club, McHugh said, "By the way, did I tell you I ran into Herb Polesie and Horace MacMahon the other day near where they're tearing down the Astor, and Herb's carrying a brick. When an Irishman carries a brick you don't ask questions. But when a Polesie has a brick in his hand, something different must be going on. So I said, 'What are you doin' with that brick?'"

"I'm taking it back to Flip in California," says Polesie. "Flip lived at the Astor for years and I thought he might like a brick from it as a souvenir. But getting it wasn't easy."

I suddenly had a mental picture of Polesie presenting the memento of the old Astor Hotel to Jay C. Flippen—the famous vaudeville comedian of the twenties and thirties, who went into motion pictures—the way Ignatz Mouse used to present bricks to Krazy Kat.

"Herb and Horace are walking through Shubert Alley," Frank went on, "where the Astor once stood, and Herb starts to pick up a brick from a pile of about ten million of them. In no time a uniformed guard comes over and pushes him away, saying that it's against the law to steal bricks. Herb argues with the officer a little, you know how Herb is, and asks what difference can one brick make. Then he tries to outline for the policeman the sentimental nature of the need. But the cop can't be moved and he starts to shove Herb away from the area.

"Horace, who's been standing on the other side of the alley watching the whole thing, starts to make his move. He pulls himself up to his full height, throws his shoulders back to make

his jacket and overcoat collar stand away from his neck the way he's done in every cop part he's ever played, from *Detective Story* to that TV series, 'Naked City,' in which he was a lieutenant of detectives. Then he saunters over to where Herb is having trouble with the guard and says, 'I see you and my friend are having a little trouble, officer.'

"'Oh! It's you, lieutenant! No, sir. No trouble at all. Any friend of yours is a friend of mine.' Then the officer turned to Herb and asked, 'How big a brick was it you had in mind, sir?' 'A nice smooth medium-sized red one,' said Herb. And the guard went and got one for him."

"You think that's something," said Bill McCaffery, who was sitting across the room with his client Jimmy Cagney. "Not long ago Horace was sitting in Toots Shor's with Howard Leary, New York commissioner of police. A woman walks across the room and interrupts Leary in the middle of a sentence to ask Horace if there isn't something he can do about getting some walking cops on the streets in her neighborhood in the Bronx. Horace says he has a date with the commissioner and will speak to him about it. Leary says nothing."

On the subject of policemen, Pat O'Brien played many of them for the Brothers Warner. He used to say he had pinpricks on his chest from putting on those goddamned badges. As the finish to one of his spots on the show with Bing he wanted to do his big scene from his latest release. He played a patrolman who wanted some advice from the parish priest.

As the script was worked out, when Bing got around to asking Pat about his new picture, Pat said, "Will you do the big scene from it with me?"

"I might consider it," said Bing. "How big's my part?"

"One line."

"Not much to look forward to, is it?"

"It motivates the whole picture. When I say to you, 'Can I talk to you, father?' you say, 'Yes, my son.'"

"Oh, no you don't, Pat. I'm still a juvenile. You're not going to get me to play *your* father."

"You're not my father, Bing. You're my priest."

It was the first and only time I can remember when Bing

was absolutely adamant about not doing a script as prepared. He just didn't want to play a priest.

"It's only three words," I argued. But Bing, never easily persuaded, stuck to his decision. I had to give the line to Ken Carpenter.

When I talked to Pat about it, he tried to get Bing to change his mind. "No, sir," he told Pat, "you're never gonna get me into a round collar. Who'd believe *me* as a priest?"

Three months later he started shooting a picture called *Going My Way*.

Once in a lifetime things happened on Thursday evenings in the old Kraft Music Hall that could never happen again. For example, Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto was played as a duet with José Iturbi on piano and Bob Burns on bazooka.

In case you've forgotten, or never knew, what a bazooka was before it became a weapon of offensive warfare (as if all warfare wasn't thoroughly offensive), it was simply two pieces of one-and-a-half or two-inch pipe. One slid into the other the way a trombone works. At one end was a large funnel. At the other was Burns. It was a very limited bass instrument, one cut above a jug, and Bob played it as base as it could be played.

Iturbi made a special trip to the Baldwin company, for whom he was an exclusive artist, to help me select a piano. He picked a pip. After abuse from three children, a dozen moving men, and friends who spill drinks, it is still being complimented by all musicians who use it.

Another fine pianist, Mischa Levitski, told Bing one Thursday that he thought he played the piano better when he was a guest on The Kraft Music Hall than at any other of his public performances because, he said, he could dress informally and be comfortable.

Bing said, "I'm delighted to hear it, and may I say that all day long I've been admiring your splendid red suspenders."

"A great many pianists wear suspenders exactly like these," Mischa answered.

"Any particular reason?" Bing asked.

"Yes. To hold up their pants."

This old joke, coming from a man of Levitski's stature, was

such a surprise it was one of the biggest laughs ever heard on the broadcast, and Bing laughed louder than the rest because on the script where Mischa said, "To hold up their pants," Bing's script read, "Because the flannel is soft and doesn't cut into the shoulders the way elastic suspenders do."

The women of the classical music world loved working with Bing, too. Referring to some publicized misunderstanding she'd had with the opera management, Bing once called Rose Bampton "the battling Bamp from the Met." A few weeks later he received a wire from a student group at the University of Alabama saying she was giving a concert at the college and asking if she was as good a sport as she seemed to be on his broadcast. Bing wired back, "Meet her at the station with a band." They did!

Helen Traubel first sang "St. Louis Blues" on the Kraft show and did a duet with Bing on "Nobody knows the Traubel I've been, nobody knows but Crosby." She also did a nice job on "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." Risë Stevens, Lotte Lehman, Grete Stuckgold, Stokowski, Piatigorsky, almost every great concert artist you can think of did offbeat things, not because it would advance their careers (many thought it might be bad for them) but because they felt that they must occasionally cast off the mold of stuffiness and let their hair down so that people would look upon them as human beings, not merely music machines. And their presence on each week's show was amusing because our copy platform was "treat opera as if it were baseball and baseball as if it were opera."

Not all concert spots on The Kraft Music Hall were easy, of course. There was the case of an East European violinist named Bronislaus Hubermann. He came to this country for the first time via the Orient and his American agents thought it would be a good idea if he got some national publicity by making his American debut on the air with Crosby.

The day of rehearsal, Bronislaus swept into the studio followed by a group of camp followers who would have made Milton Berle envious and who looked like a clutch of overdressed Middle European gypsies. None of them spoke English. Neither did Bronislaus. This automatically threw out the from-

two-worlds type of dialogue between classic and pop musician that made these spots funny. Bronislaus and Bing were from two worlds, all right, but communication had yet to be established. We had no alternative but to have Bing build him up larger than life and then let him fiddle.

The moment he came into studio B, he took his coat off, took out his violin, and moved from place to place in the studio, playing a few notes in each place he stopped. Finally, as he stood right in the middle of where John Scott Trotter's brass section would be sitting when they came in, he said, "Here I will play."

Cal Kuhl had to do a lot of very patient explaining to straighten him out that he'd have to play where the microphone was set up, which was downstage center. Cal's next problem was to make him understand that an eighteen-minute solo was out of the question. Finally, all things cleared up, he left the studio about twelve fifteen in the afternoon with instructions to be back at six forty-five, fifteen minutes before the broadcast.

As he walked out he handed Cal a tuning fork. Then, without a word, he got into a car and was driven away.

He arrived back on time, broke out his fiddle, walked over to the piano, and hit C. He gave out a horrified sound, rushed over to Cal, demanded his tuning fork, rushed back to the piano, hit the fork, hit C, and suddenly it was clear to everyone that what he had wanted was to have the piano retuned to European concert pitch instead of American which, naturally, it was.

While the broadcast was in progress, a piano tuner and three stagehands pushed the instrument out of the studio and into the hall, where the tuner retuned it. The four men then brought it back into the studio (causing Bob Burns's monologue to lay an omelet) and got it in place just in time for Hubermann's accompanist to play.

But people loved what we called our "concert spots." One Friday morning, I was getting my shoes shined when the man who did this work regularly said, "I heard Bing last night. Great!"

I was pleased to hear this from a man who was clearly one of our shining citizens. I asked, "What part did you like best?" "I liked it all."

“How about the spot where Emanuel Feuerman played the cello?”

“I like them highbrow places you have every week best.”

“Really? Why?” *I had to ask.*

“It gives me time to take out the garbage.”

It was because of the “concert spots” and the need for a different type of orchestra that we had changed musical director from Jimmy Dorsey to John Scott Trotter. He could do what Jimmy did, having created the then famous Hal Kemp sound, and his musical training was much broader based. There was also the fact that a few months after we’d started with Jimmy, Bob Simon had wired us from the New York office, “Just heard Tommy’s new band. We bought the wrong Dorsey.”

John Scott Trotter, because of his fine musicianship and his magnificent embonpoint, was a tremendous asset to the show. His weight was established by such jokes as John saying proudly, “I just lost a lot of weight.”

And Burns’s reply, “Look behind you and you’ll find it.”

John Scott’s gourmet tendencies were also heavily played up. He once flew from LA to New Orleans for the evening just to have Oysters Rockefeller at Antoine’s. He was also a fine chef.

One Saturday morning he phoned Norma to say he was making vichyssoise and would like to give us some. Norma was delighted and they made a deal for him to bring the soup and stay for dinner. But he never showed up.

Sunday morning he called to apologize. There was a simple explanation. When the soup was ready he tasted it and it was so good he ate all of it himself. Then he went to sleep.

Talking to him on the show about his cooking, M. F. K. Fisher, who had just written *How to Cook a Wolf*, asked what he did with leftovers. John asked, “What are leftovers?”

Burns said, “John, you ought to find out how to make them leftovers. It might take some Scott off your Trotter.”

People have heard Jimmy Stewart play an accordion, as a gag, on some of what *Variety* calls “the desk and sofa shows.” He first exposed this little parlor trick of his on the radio with Bing and Burns.

Our rehearsals were so sketchy that we'd never worked out how Jimmy would unharness the squeeze-box and get rid of it so he wouldn't knock over the mike when he came close enough to it to talk. But during the applause that followed his first time out as a solo musician, Jimmy managed to wriggle out of the harness and put the accordion on the floor. In his hurry he forgot to fasten the two ends together and the instrument sighed a deep sigh of relief as one side slowly joined the other, happy that the ordeal had ended. When the laugh died down, Burns said, "I want to tell you, Jimmy, that thing of yours sure dies hard."

Henry Fonda was another who made his debut as a solo instrumentalist with the aid of Crosby and Burns. Fonda played the trumpet but gave no evidence of ever becoming another Bix Beiderbecke. Although he never took a lesson in his life, even a child could tell this on first hearing him play. He taught himself by fumbling around with the valves until he produced a sound that was close to what he and some composer had in mind. To remember his "arrangements" he created his own method of writing music. Over the regular music he made three little circles one above the other. These were the three valves on the horn. Using the words as a key to the melody, he blacked out the circles he should push down.

On the occasion of Fonda's debut, Burns told him, "Hank, the kid who flunked bugle in my little boy's Cub Scout troop come closer to makin' music than you did. And that little kid even made a mess of mess."

Joan Crawford in her book *A Portrait of Joan* tells of the terrible stage fright that kept her off Broadway except when lost in the protective covering of a chorus line. (A line can be a covering even if parts of its parts are uncovered.)

She says in her book that Franchot Tone told her stage fright was like all other fears and that "the only way to overcome fear is to pull its teeth." An exercise in this exodontia took place on the Kraft show with Bing. It was the first time she'd ever appeared as herself before an audience. Of this she writes, "We had a trial run in Hollywood on the Bing Crosby show with an

audience of fifty. All I had to do was speak a few words about music. But I was Joan Crawford. No character to hide behind. I was so nervous they nailed a chair to the floor. Later we used a chrome bar, like a towel rack, for me to hang onto and every line was printed on cardboard. Paper might have rattled in my shaking hand.

“At the last minute I implored them to close the curtain so the audience couldn’t see me, or I them, but that wasn’t possible.” (We explained how those present would resent being denied the sight of Joan Crawford and that unfavorable publicity would result.)

“We went on the air, Franchot watching me from the wings like an angel. I’d have given a great deal for *hauteur* like his. He didn’t care what people said or thought. I did. And I couldn’t bear to fail in front of them. Bing’s writer, Carroll Carroll, actually held me up.”

It’s true. So true that years later, although we’d not even seen each other in the intervening time, we met in the aisle of a New York theater during intermission and Joan flung her arms around me in welcome, still remembering that I had supported her on her first broadcast.

After that incident there was another span of years before we met again. This time, as a magnificently handsome and poised businesswoman, Joan had no trouble at all in addressing a luncheon meeting of television writers and producers.

When she heard I was in the room there was another warm embrace and, to explain it, a description of the awful few moments she had gone through on her first broadcast. But the cream of the jest came later when I, who had never won a prize before, won the door prize. It was an autographed copy of *The Films of Joan Crawford*.

I interviewed Fay Bainter a few days before she was scheduled to make her first appearance with Bing. We had tea and when it was over she said what so many people said to me at the end of an interview, “I don’t think I’ve given you anything.” On the contrary, Fay, like everyone else, gave me enough insight into her personality, manner of speech, tonal inflection, and outlook on life to write suitable dialogue for her and Bing. Few, in fact,

gave as much as Fay did while keeping her private life more to herself than most others did. There was, however, one little detail that she considered so bitter-sweet, so sad-funny, from a mother's point of view, that she couldn't resist, in fact apologized for telling me about it.

That morning she had received a letter from her son, about eleven or twelve, who was in boarding school. He thanked her for all the goodies she'd sent him. But the letter ended with a really earnest plea for the one thing that he felt he couldn't go on without. The closing lines were, "Well, that's about all. Thanks again for all the cookies and stuff. Now if you want to know what to send me right away, something I really want and need most, I'll tell you. Please send me a jockstrap. Love . . ."

Two days before our daughter Leda's first birthday, Norma and I drove up to a town called Running Spring, above Lake Arrowhead, to visit Walter Huston. He too had a kid in school when we first met, which was about six months before the trip to his mountain chalet. But all Walter ever said to me about John was, "John's a smart boy but I don't know what to do about him."

Walter's instructions were to drive up through Arrowhead and continue to Running Spring. There, he said, we'd find a turn off to the right where there was a service station. We were to phone him from the station. He'd come and fetch us. The spring thaw had made the road to the Huston place too muddy for civilian vehicles.

It was a beautiful warm spring day when we set out from Los Angeles and Norma was dressed in a complete pastel pink outfit to match it. She looked like a girl who'd just stepped off a printer's calendar and her smile was in anticipation of our visit to Walter Huston, the one Hollywood actor she admired above all others.

Before we reached San Bernardino it was raining that type of California rain that made you think you'd taken a wrong turn somewhere and were driving under the Horseshoe Falls of Niagara.

A little beyond San Berdoo, as we started into the mountains, the rain suddenly changed to snow. It fell in flakes about the

size of my grandfather's old hunting case watch. And they made a sound as they hit the windshield like a flipped pancake hitting the griddle. The wipers, apparently taking them for pancakes, didn't brush them off. The glass in front of me became a snow-drift. I couldn't see a thing. But it didn't make much difference because the visibility was only about a foot or so. The snow was as thick as the fog that rolls in across the Monterey Peninsula. On the road the middle line had been buried and I couldn't tell which side I was driving on. I couldn't even tell where the shoulders were.

Moving along slowly with my head out the window, we climbed the winding road. It was the first time I'd ever driven in any sort of snow, much less this all-enveloping, smothering featherbed. I knew if I stopped I'd stall. So I kept plowing up and up the mountain.

Coming down two days later when the untimely snow had melted, I saw that, when ascending, the right-hand edge of the road offered a three-thousand-foot sheer drop. It was called "the Rim of the World Highway" and it could not possibly have had a better name.

But the same God that protects drunks and children protects all innocents, and we finally made it—the only idiotic vehicle on the road—through Arrowhead and on to Running Spring and the designated service station. As if the rendezvous had been carefully planned, Walter arrived just as we did. He was driving a half-track.

He picked up Norma, all pink and a little chilly, and carried her from our car to the cab of his. I was allowed to walk in the snow, already nearly six feet deep. And we started through the woods pitching and tossing like a PT boat in a typhoon. But when we stepped into the wonderful world that Walter had built on the top of a mountain it was worth the terrible scare the trip had given us.

Before we could settle down, get our breath, relax, and enjoy the baronial hunting lodge beauty of this mountain retreat, Nan Sunderland, Walter's wife, was saying, "How wonderful you got here for this magnificent snow. How long is it since you've seen snow like this? We must all go for a walk before it gets dark!"

It really was a remarkable snowstorm for the end of April. A record six feet had fallen in the Arrowhead area in only a few hours. But the worst of it stopped almost as we arrived at Running Spring. And it settled down to one of those gentle, fluttery snows that fall in the heart of a paperweight.

None of us had the wit to take pictures of that frolic in the snow. Norma, who could stand under the arm of either Walter or Nan, and I, who just about came to Walter's shoulder, were wearing their winter gear—pants, boots, and parkas. The things were so large we seemed to move before the clothes started. It wasn't easy to trudge through six feet of snow in boots, one of which was large enough for both feet. The sleeves on the mackinaw Norma was wearing were so long they dragged along the top of the drifts, causing her to leave a trail that would baffle an Explorer Scout.

The best way to visualize the Huston house is to think of the most expansive and comfortable mountain lodge a motion picture set designer could create. A huge room with a staircase leading to the living quarters at one end flowed into another huge room at the other that was a kitchen that would have delighted Escoffier.

In the middle of this massive main room was a conversation area about the size of a badminton court, featuring a gigantic circular sofa wider than a single bed, upholstered in deep soft stuff that felt like fur. This area for drinking and talking, located right in the middle of the main downstairs room, was actually larger than the living room in a spacious Bel Air mansion and featured a kind of walk-in fireplace so big that a standard crowbar was used as a poker. Anything smaller wouldn't have handled the "logs," which were railroad ties Walter had bought when the right-of-way of the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad was torn up because the rich veins at Rhyolite had run out and there was no more gold to move.

The guest room, in which we enjoyed one of the twin king-sized beds, was larger than the whole house we were then living in. And, for the first time, we enjoyed the luxury of a bathroom with two lavatories, two bathtubs, two showers, and two enclosed toilets. The only bathroom I've seen since as large and luxurious as the one at Huston's was in the Ritz Hotel in Lisbon.

But the most unusual feature of this comfortable castle hidden in the forest high in the San Bernardino Mountains was that every stick of furniture in it had been made by Walter himself.

And to top this fascinating and thoroughly delightful weekend in the wilds there came a voice from the sky. Someone was hollering through a public-address system from a small plane flying just over the treetops. I couldn't understand what was being said but when I asked Walter about it at breakfast, before we made an early start down the mountain in order to get home in time for Leda's birthday, he said, "Oh, that was just for me. They want me to be on the set at eight thirty tomorrow morning for retakes."

"Did the snow knock out the phone?"

"No. We protected ourselves against anything like that. We don't have a phone. Didn't you notice?"

"No. And if I had, I'd have figured you hid it in a closet or something."

"When I'm up here no one can reach me unless he wants me pretty badly. And nobody comes up here unless I like him pretty well."

That is one of the nicest things anyone ever said to me.

Unlike most big radio shows of the era, Kraft never left its home base to make promotional trips to other large cities. The only exception was a journey to, of all places, Spokane, Washington.

This will cease to seem strange when you remind yourself that skookum country was the family seat of the Crosby clan until the marriage of the girls and the success of the family crooner dispersed them.

Spokane was also the seat of Gonzaga University, from which, had Bing graduated, he would have. His largesse to this Jebbie institution of higher education is well known, and it was following a rather handsome offering to the athletic department that Gonzaga felt some honor should be showered upon the donor.

Thus it came to pass that Gonzaga graciously conferred upon Harry Lillis Crosby, Jr. (who could not read music), the degree of doctor of music. It was a perceptive doctorate when looked

at from a practical point of view. Bing had certainly doctored many a pale weakling of a tune into a healthy money-maker.

It takes longer than you think to get to Spokane and back to Los Angeles. And since Bing had not yet convinced himself that the aircraft was a vehicle he could trust, a whole week was spent shuttling the entire Kraft Music Hall to the great Northwest and back.

“The longest train trip ever made by man,” as I reported the junket to the New York office, began with the entire company gathered at the Glendale station of the Southern Pacific Railroad one morning at 8 A.M. We boarded two special cars that were hitched to the morning train for San Francisco. We never got nearer than Oakland. The cars were then attached to a train that dragged us to Seattle. Here we were again switched to another train, which brought us into Spokane bright and early (well, at least early) sixty hours after leaving home.

As we rolled north through the spectacular Columbia River valley, the country grew more and more beautiful and more and more people seemed to be gathered at each little station we passed through. There were occasional signs saying “Boo-Boo-Boo-Boo-Bing” and things like that.

At stations where the train made a stop there were larger crowds and standing on the step of one of the cars in the center of the train—ours were the last two cars—was always our guest for this particular show, Edmund Lowe. Ed, every inch the actor from his ascot tie, cutaway coat, striped morning trousers, doe-colored vest, dark gray spats, and pearl gray, rolled-brim fedora, was ready to meet and greet one and all.

On the other hand, “one and all” kept looking for the man they’d turned out to see. He was usually to be found, clad in brown slacks and a Hawaiian shirt, about two hundred feet down the track from the end of the train rapping with the brakeman. I happened to be there, too, when the train made a regular scheduled stop at Klamath Falls. It was around eight of a sparkling Oregon morning. Bing looked up the track and said, “What’s that mob doing around the station?”

“Probably watching Eddie Lowe take his morning bends.”

“Can’t be. They’ve got their backs to the train.”

“It’ll kill Ed.”

“Let’s take a look.” We walked forward to see what was going on and it grew clear that the crowd was *not* looking at the train. They were knotted around the bay window of the telegrapher’s office. As we moved closer nobody paid any attention to Bing, and Ed had apparently gone back to his room to sulk.

Fathers were hoisting kids onto their shoulders, people were pushing and shoving, everyone was trying to get a look at something. I grabbed the handhold on the side of the dining car, at the door where the cook always used to look out and wave to people, and pulled myself up onto the step the switchman rode when the cars were being marshaled in the yard. From this vantage point I saw what was causing the excitement.

Cal Kuhl had plugged his electric razor—the first one I’d ever seen when he showed it to me about a month before—into a light socket inside the telegrapher’s office, had run the wire out through the window, and was standing on the platform running his noisy machine up and down his face. The good people of Klamath Falls didn’t know what the hell he was doing and they were nearly trampling each other to find out.

Bing and I walked back and got aboard the train through the first open car. He went directly to Ed Lowe’s room and said, “Why don’t you find out when the next stop is and ask Cal to let you borrow his shaver?”

While Bing’s doctorate was important, I think the most important thing to come out of that trip to Spokane was the emergence of Jerry Colonna as a comic. He was in the ‘bone section of John Scott Trotter’s band. One evening, kidding around on the train, with John Scott on a little organ he’d brought along, Jerry came up with his version of “On the Road to Mandalay,” which featured an opening note like an air raid siren.

The following week, back in Hollywood, Jerry Colonna was booked as our “concert star.” I can find neither a recording nor a script of Bing’s intro to Jerry, but I do recall the credits: “Giovanni Colonna, of L’Opera Fatigay in Paris, La Floppa in Milan, and El Folderino in Madrid.” Bing spoke the names of these “famous” opera companies with such conviction no one realized it was a put-on.

Even when Bing said, “Unlike most tenors who finish with

their high note, Signor Colonna *starts* with his high note and builds from there,” they sat quietly and respectfully. Then on walked Jerry with that mammoth moustache and those hyperthyroid eyes. He opened his cave of a mouth and gave out that siren song that seemed to last for ages and ages. All of a sudden everyone caught on to what was happening and Professor Colonna was born.

The only other incident of note on the trip was Ken Carpenter’s failure to be at rehearsal or even to be in the hall where we were doing the show a half hour before air time. Ken was to fly up and join us in time for rehearsal the afternoon of the broadcast. When he was still a “no show” half an hour before we had to start, Cal called the local NBC affiliate and asked them to send over their best announcer.

He arrived pale and trembling, a very young man who’d never done anything but local shows. The prospect, the very idea, of announcing a full network show had completely unhorsed him.

He paced up and down backstage, mumbling the words, “The Kraft Music Hall, starring Bing Crosby.” At this point Bing would sing enough of “When the Blue of the Night Meets the Gold of the Day” to allow the man to pull himself together sufficiently to read the billboard of the show.

At forty seconds to air time, he was standing at the mike waiting for a cue from Cal. But at the same moment, down the aisle like a man responding to the question “Does anyone know any reason why this man and woman should not be joined in holy wedlock?” came Ken Carpenter. He leaped on the stage just as Cal threw the cue and, as if nothing had happened, started the show.

The local man looked around, perplexed, and disappeared into the night like a humiliated Charlie Chaplin.

Another musical act was born in The Kraft Music Hall—Spike Jones and his City Slickers.

When it became clear that Burns’s bazooka solos had to be protected with suitable background music, John Scott assigned his right-hand man and guitar player, Perry Botkin, to decide what suitable background music for a bazooka solo might be.

Perry and Spike Jones, who was Trotter's regular drummer, went to work on the problem.

It was Perry and Spike, in collaboration with everyone else in the band, who created the funny arrangements that figured to drown out the baleful blasts of the bazooka. It was these noisy bits of musical goulash, full of percussion, glass crashes, strummed washboards, and pistol shots, that were the inspiration for Spike Jones and his "musical depreciation hour."

Just as the Kraft show broke its precedent of never leaving home base in order to pick up a sheepskin for the headman, so we once changed the pattern of having three or four guests and devoted an entire show to Marlene Dietrich. This happened through some Machiavellian public relations maneuver made easy by the fact that JWT had the advertising account of Universal Pictures, which had just produced a saddlesore musical called *Destry Rides Again* in which *Die Blaue Engel* had just made a spectacular comeback.

Instructions from the top were that Marlene, our sole added starter, was to sing several songs from the picture, with and without Bing and even with Burns if things got desperate. Naturally the feature of the show was to be "See What the Boys in the Back Room Will Have," the hot song of the film and the tune that took her out of the sultry, smoldering singer class and put her in contention with Ethel Merman. In its simplest terms, the cheese hour was to become a sixty-minute plug for a horse opera.

In order to write the script that would make this whole magical fantasy become glowingly true, it was arranged that I should meet *die gnädige frau* at 10 A.M. in her bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel. I arrived on time and was allowed to wait thirty minutes.

There is nothing more exciting than waiting half an hour in a hotel room that doesn't even have a Bible. (Why do you suppose they only put the Bibles in the bedrooms?)

When the lady Hemingway came to call the Kraut finally made her entrance, she was wearing a light blue kimono and a pair of matching mules. That's all. The maid brought in a cup of coffee. One. That's all.

As I told her how the show was structured and what I hoped to do, she listened quietly.

The warmth was glacial. There was, however, nothing to do but mush on. “You probably have heard that some people do not believe it’s really *you* singing ‘See What the Boys in the Back Room will Have.’ ”

She rose angrily, without a word walked gracefully to a Capehart record player, and before starting it said, “I will prove to you that it is me by playing you the record.” How this would prove anything is inexplicable. Inexplicable too was the critical action of the Capehart.

A word of explanation is due those who do not remember the versatility of this remarkable record-playing machine. It could handle records of assorted sizes and play them either in sequence or flip them. All you had to do was set it for the procedure you wanted, pile on the platters, turn on the power, and the machine did whatever it pleased.

This time it chose to take the recording of “See What the Boys in the Back Room Will Have” and skim it smashingly across the room. A less controlled man might have murmured, “What a critic!”

I followed the old Mad Ave adage that warns, “When you feel the urge to say something funny in the presence of a client, bite your tongue off.” The lady was not quite a client, but she filled the bill.

Grandly she rose, wrapped her wrapper around her, stepped over the shards of her song, put another record on the machine, and ducked just in time. It *was* a critic! I left as soon as she finished her coffee. I didn’t want to not eat and run. (Isn’t it interesting that so many of the moments I remember best are ones when I was not fed?)

As usual, the script went to Bing and all the other members of the cast on the Tuesday evening preceding the Thursday broadcast. Marlene’s was accompanied by a polite little note saying that I’d call on Wednesday morning to discuss it. I never got to do that.

First thing Wednesday morning Frau Dietrich’s agent called Danny Danker. The ten-percenter gave out the news that his client did not like one word of the script and would not do it.

Danny immediately asked me what I thought of the script I'd done. I told him with less than my usual modesty that I thought it was among the best we'd ever had, and I wasn't just saying that. It was. Danny, knowing I wasn't given to intemperate self-serving, told the agent we wouldn't change a word of the script, that Miss Dietrich could do what she pleased. The agent said, as they always do, "I'll call you back."

He did, too, late Wednesday evening, and what he said was that the dear soul just wouldn't touch the script in its original form, she demanded extensive rewriting. (She wouldn't say what was wrong. Like Jolson, she just wanted me to "make better.")

Danny said, "Thanks for telling me. We'll get someone else."

The agent said, "I'll call you back!"

Then Danny did some telephoning. At that time almost everyone in the picture colony was his friend and most were in some way obligated to him. Joan Bennett, strictly in the friend category, agreed to stand by. Lucky me, I had the whole morning to make whatever changes might be necessary. Joan could read all the lines that were not purely personal things about our defecting star and we could change all the songs to better ones.

Thursday, B day, dawned. At noon Danny heard from the agent that the ice had not been broken.

"Sorry!" said Danny and hung up.

The agent called right back. (The only time you can really get an agent to call back is when you don't want to hear from him.) There had been a sudden thaw. Miss D. had reconsidered. He was told to bring her to Studio B at NBC at 2 P.M. He did. She entered grandly, was utterly charming, and read the script through with the grace and ease of one who had studied it. We went on the air without a line changed.

It was John Reber's habit, in those days, to award an orchid to a particularly good show. This one got one.

Incidentally, that orchid routine of Reber's was kind of an expense to us slaves. Every time he sent orchids to a show the guys who got them had to take their wives out so they could wear the flowers. You can't let an orchid go to waste in the top of a formula bottle.

Somewhere in my files I have an old address book in the back of which my secretary, Virginia Meyers (and later Jane

Brown), kept a list of the orchids Reber owed me. I'd like to show up in whatever hereafter Reber and I are destined to meet again wearing a robe of those cattleyas.

At the other end of the show biz pole from Marlene Dietrich was Patsy Kelly, a very funny, rowdy-type comic lady. I had a little script trouble with her, too.

We'd had our interview and I'd seen her latest picture, in which she worked very hard and got lots of laughs. Her strong, loud delivery and her forceful movements made possible a robust comedy performance of great strength and I wanted to say something to that effect and, at the same time, get a laugh.

The script had hardly had time to reach her home before her agent called Danker to tell him that she had laryngitis and a bad cold and wouldn't be able to do the show, etc., etc., etc. These were the usual excuses movie people used when they wanted to get out of a commitment for some reason that they didn't care to clarify.

Danny knew the agent well enough to ask what the problem was.

"Well," the guy said, "you've heard all this whispering that's going around about Patsy."

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, that's what this is all about. Take a look at the script and you'll see what I mean."

Danny took a look and gave me a ring.

In an effort to express how effective her comedy work was, Bing had a line that read, "I've seen your picture, Patsy, and you really come on strong. I must say, you work like a man."

"Work like a man!" was Patsy's reply. "I work like a horse!"

"Hello, Harris," Dan said to me on the phone. "We've got to take out that line in the Patsy Kelly script about her working like a man."

"Why?"

"When you get a little older I'll explain it to you. Just take it from your partner, Cohan, it's got to go or Kelly walks."

It went.

Danny called me Harris because he said we worked well together like George M. Cohan and Sam Harris, except that by

properly taking the Irishman's role for himself he also became the writer of the team, leaving me to be the producer, which was his role. If this isn't all clear it really doesn't matter.

After Bing had been on the air a couple of years for Kraft, memoranda started to dribble in from Chicago saying that certain members of the Kraft company (or their wives) thought the public was getting a little tired of Bing's singing style and that we ought to talk to him about changing it. Makes you laugh, doesn't it?

It's a measure of the general public's naïveté, which existed then and still exists, about artists and the way they work and think. If they had asked us to get rid of Bing because they'd grown tired of him, it would have been foolish but it would not have been insensitive. But to suggest that we ask him to sing some other way than the style that had won him fame was not only stupid, it was presumptuous.

But we answered all the correspondence in re restyling Bing's singing with suitable vagueness. To have said flat out that we couldn't or wouldn't do what they asked would have been unpolitical. What were we there for? To say that it would be nuts would be impolite. And to have mentioned it to Bing would most certainly have won us his resignation.

So we batted it around, shoved it into pigeonholes, kicked it under the rug, and hoped that eventually it would get lost. Then one day we had a break. Bing was making a movie titled *East Side of Heaven*. The action called for him to sing a revival of the old song, "Look Out for Jimmy Valentine." He started the verse of it in a husky, throaty recitative and continued to sing the chorus in a whispered way that could be said to be, if you wanted to say so, a "different" style.

As a bit of background, it's necessary to know that whenever Bing was rehearsing a song and happened to disremember the lyric, it amused him to go right on singing, improvising words that were once not considered fit to broadcast.

For example, he occasionally liked to sing an old number called "Down by the O-Hi-O." This little gem featured one line of sheer lyric poetry that no man with beauty in his soul could forget: "But jumpin' jeepers creepers, when she's in my arms



Herb.
Crown Al Jolson
When
better
Radio
Programs
are written
you will write them.

Al Jolson and Herb Polesie — star of the TV show Twenty Questions — on the boardwalk in Atlantic City, New Jersey, circa 1934.



Jerry Colonna, George Spelvin, Herb Polesie (singing "The Dipsy Doodle"), Ozzie Nelson at Bing Crosby's fabulous Westwood Hills Marching and Chowder Club party, circa 1937.



Bob (Bazooka) Burns and Bing Crosby hard at work, rehearsing Kraft Music Hall broadcast, circa 1939.



Willy Burns, Carroll Carroll, George Burns, and Gracie Allen, circa 1941.



(Seated) Cal Kuhl, John Barrymore; (standing) Bing Crosby, Bob Burns. (In corner) Bob Burns and Carroll Carroll.



Abbott K. Spencer (J. Walter Thompson radio producer), John U. Reber (J. Walter Thompson radio V.P.), Carroll Carroll, and Mary Martin at Kraft Music Hall rehearsal, circa 1938.



Don Ameche, Ed (Archy) Gardner, and Carroll Carroll at Chase & Sanborn Coffee Hour rehearsal, circa 1940.



Carroll Carroll, "The Ding Dong Daddy of KMH," receiving NBC chimes from Don Gilman, West Coast vice-president of NBC, as Bing Crosby and Bob Burns stand by, circa 1939.



John Barrymore in "The Jest" on Shell Chateau, circa 1935.



Unknown lieutenant, USN, Carroll Carroll, Don Ameche, unknown lieutenant commander, USN, at Naval Air Technical Training Center, Norman, Oklahoma, with Chase & Sanborn Hour, May 19, 1945. (Official U.S. Navy Photograph.)



Cornwell Jackson (J. Walter Thompson, V.P. West Coast), Henry Ford II, the first Mrs. Henry Ford, Bob Crosby, Carroll Carroll, The Ford Show, circa 1945.



George Palmer Putnam, Amelia Earhart Putnam, and Bob Burns in KMH rehearsal shortly before Miss Earhart's attempt to fly the Pacific.



Bob Hope in one of his classic characterizations.



George Murphy, Carroll Carroll, Leo (Ukie) Sherin, and Bob Hope.



W. F. Lochridge (J. Walter Thompson), John Platt (Kraft Cheese Company), Bing Crosby, John U. Reber, and Carroll Carroll.



Standing: Leo (Ukie) Sherin, John Scott Trotter, Carroll Carroll. Seated: Sonny Tufts, Marilyn Maxwell, Tom Brennaman in Kraft Music Hall, circa 1945.



From left to right: Bob Russell, Bing Crosby, John Burke, Hal Boch, Marilyn Maxwell, Ken Carpenter, Leo (Ukie) Sherin, Carroll Carroll, Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, Bob Brewster, Mickey Rockford.



Les Tremayne and Carroll Carroll, Old Gold Show, April 16, 1944.



Carroll Carroll and Frank Sinatra at Army Air Corps installation, circa 1943.



Robert T. (Bob) Colwell, one of the pillars of the J. Walter Thompson Company.



Bob Crosby, Carroll Carroll, Jo Stafford, Bob Crosby's Club 15, circa 1949.



Charlie McCarthy, Edgar Bergen, Carroll Carroll, 1964.

. . .” Lovely as it is, Bing never sang it as written during rehearsal. What he liked to sing was, “But holy jumpin’ Jesus, when she’s in my arms.”

When we went on the air live, of course, and it came time for the song, there was always tension for fear he’d forget himself. He never did.

During the recording of the “Jimmy Valentine” song, Bing ran into a memory lapse that brought forth one of his gamy ad-libs. The producer of the picture sent us an acetate recording* of this bit and after we listened to it a couple of times we decided it really didn’t sound much like Bing.

So we wrote a long, involved memorandum explaining what we had done, technically and persuasively, to convince Bing to change his style and we sent the memo along with one of the recordings to Chicago. We asked them to listen to the record and give us their opinion of the romantic quality of the new delivery.

The record was addressed to W. F. Lochridge, who was JWT’s VP on the Kraft account. Unfortunately Loch was out of town and his secretary handled the whole deal by sending our letter and the record directly to Jack Platt, who was then advertising manager of the Kraft Cheese Company.

On the assumption that Loch knew what he was doing, Jack talked to the people who had been bucking for a new Crosby style, told them about the record he’d just received, read them our letter. They all agreed that the best way to test the new style and get an unbiased opinion was to play it in the company cafeteria for the girls in the factory during their lunch hour. Not one person sought to form his own opinion by playing it for himself before putting it on for the girls.

Someone made an introductory speech telling the young ladies why they were going to hear the record that was about to be played and asking them to write notes on what they thought of it and put them in the suggestion box. Everybody became very eager to hear what would follow.

There was a mysterioso introduction, and then Bing sang the

* Many records and tapes have since showed up of this particular handling of “Jimmy Valentine.” It’s becoming a collector’s item. There was a rumor that it even showed up on a jukebox in Seattle.

verse in a breathy undertone that really didn't sound the way he usually did. When he came to the chorus he segued into his full voice and the girls were just beginning to understand him by the time he went into the second chorus. But as he came to the end of it he did something he rarely did. He missed the rhythm and went out of sync with his accompaniment, so what the girls in the lunchroom heard was the blowup we had meant only for interoffice ears when Bing—suddenly aware that he was musically lost—sang:

Help!
Oh, Jesus Christ, I blew the time
And I'm a dirty son of a bitch
Like Jimmy Valentine, that's me.

It was the spiciest music ever heard in the Kraft cafeteria, and in the Hollywood office we got a pretty hot phone call. Our innocent little gag to get a laugh from our Chicago people very nearly cost J. Walter the Kraft account.

One Wednesday afternoon, Cal got a call from Rudy Vallee, who was doing a show for Sealtest on which he was costarred with, of all people, John Barrymore. It was an embarrassing half hour, Barrymore's swan song, in which he capitalized on his drunkenness. Rudy called to ask Cal to come over and see a comedian who was going to do a warm-up for his show.

Cal tried to back out of this little courtesy chore, but Rudy said, "You've just got to see this man. You'll want to book him with Bing."

"If he's that great why don't *you* book him?"

"We don't use guests."

"If he's that great, make an exception."

"Please come."

"Okay." Cal hung up and reported the full conversation to me. "Comedy's your business," he finished. "You go."

"You got invited."

"I've got a cocktail party."

"Be late."

We boxed around and finally made a decent compromise.

We *both* went. If Rudy had ever been right in his whole life he was right about this guy. For about half an hour the man kept the audience, assembled to see a broadcast, in such a state of laughter it was quite obvious that nothing the show could do would top him.

All the man did was read a little story. But to make it clear, he included all the punctuation marks, to each of which he had assigned a sound. It was, to my knowledge, the first time Victor Borge, the Great Dane, had ever done his famous punctuation routine in public in America.

We immediately booked Borge for our next show. Victor was scheduled to go on after the station break. That meant there'd be a song by Bing, the Victor Borge spot, a commercial, a song by Bing, another guest spot, a song by Bing, a commercial, theme, sign-off.

I shortened the other guest shot because I knew Victor needed time. We took a chorus out of one of Bing's songs. Victor agreed that he could do the spot in twelve minutes. That is, we thought he agreed. He spoke almost no English and only understood, if anything, what he chose to. Bing's intro said he'd seen Victor Borge warming up an audience for Rudy Vallee and anybody who's good enough to warm up a Vallee audience has got to be good enough to heat up an audience in the old Kraft Music Hall.

Victor came on and repeated the punctuation routine and got the same earthquakelike reaction. After twelve minutes he was still going. We lost a commercial. He kept right on going. We lost a Crosby song. Then we lost a guest spot and another Crosby song and another commercial and the closing theme and we went off the air with people howling and applauding Borge. A telephone call came from Reber in New York telling us to sign the guy for as long as possible.

The problem then became not only one of communication but one of creation. Victor did not know enough about radio or the United States to write new pieces of material with any great speed or success. So Ed Rice, who was working with me on other things, was assigned to Borge and did a baseball routine for his second appearance. It was based on Victor's newness in America, his limited knowledge of our language, his

need to understand our national game, his attendance at one and what he saw. It was a magnificent piece of material and Victor scored very strongly with it in spite of the fact that he certainly didn't understand one-tenth of what he was saying. This was because, as I soon found out, it was impossible for Victor not to be funny.

One evening after a broadcast he and Norma and our kids went to dinner at the Vine Street Derby. He absolutely fractured all of us, particularly the children, just reading the menu. Believe me, it wasn't funny. The food occasionally was and often the waiters, but never the menu. I can prove this because I still have a menu from the Vine Street Derby dated 1951.

I saved it because it has a caricature of me on the cover. This was one of the many caricatures that hung all over the walls of the restaurant to spoil people's appetites and attract tourists. There was a full face of Crosby between two profiles of Hope turning his back on Bing. The one of Jimmy Durante had his nose running off the framed picture into another framed picture right next to it that was the rest of Jimmy's schnozz.

As a matter of historic interest, the most expensive item on the 1951 Brown Derby menu was "Turkey Derby—\$2.75." Even today that's not funny.

Victor and Elsie Borge gave a lovely Danish dinner party for John Scott Trotter, Rudy Vallee and his lady, Norma and me. It was cooked by Elsie and the offer I made to her to come and cook for us still stands. Everything was simply delicious, and as we sat on the patio sipping our liqueur and demitasse, she served some wonderful little Danish chocolates. Everyone was delighted with them. Rudy said, "These are all right, but if you want to taste some *real* chocolates, wait a minute." He went to his car, got a box of chocolates from the trunk, brought them back, and passed them around. Elsie was the only one who said how good they were.

The sun was setting in the distance. The view was breathtaking. Everyone said so—everyone but Rudy. He said, "If you think this is a view you should see the view from *my* patio." Rudy then got us all to pile into his car and go up to his house so he could prove it. We then heard a concert of his favorite

music, "Rudy Vallee and the Connecticut Yankees." Funny that the biggest hit those Connecticut Yankees ever had was the "Maine Stein Song."

Bob Burns once said, "I think it's kind of pushy for Rudy to always be singing the 'Maine Stein Song.' He's just trying to get in good with MCA, which everybody knows is run by the main Stein.* It's a pity nobody ever wrote a song about a Last-fogel.†"

Every time I meet people who remember the old Kraft radio show, the thing they talk about is the station break spots. These were little routines that led into the ringing of the NBC chimes, which were rung manually every half hour as a network logo-in-sound and as a cue to local stations to identify themselves.

I have a picture of Don Gilman, then NBC vice-president in charge of West Coast programming, presenting me with a set of genuine NBC chimes inscribed to me as "The Ding-Dong-Daddy of KMH."

After Bing got his doctorate, he changed from being Professor Crosby in these KMH station break spots about a mythical school and became Doctor Crosby. His only pupil, the one he had to deal with week after week, was Ken Carpenter, the big man on campus.

KMH teams played such select schools as Pulse Normal, Tick Tack Tech, Fyon U., and the College of Hard Knox. The student poet was Edna St. Vitus Mitnick, and the whole basic idea of interrupting a show every half hour was the invention of an undergraduate named Stacy Unbrake. The homecoming queen was Consuela Schlepkiess, who was so unhappy about her name she changed it to Ariadne Schlepkiess.

The school colors were pomegranate and puce, and I have always considered the KMH "Fight Song" an outstanding example of that type of music.

While the alma mater, "Moon over KMH," was a nice sentimental tune, "Hail KMH" had that "go," that drive, that spirit

* Jules Stein, the genius who created the star-spangled octopus, MCA.

† Abe Lastfogel was head of the William Morris office, probably the oldest theatrical agency in continuous operation.

that caused old KMH to lose game after game. The music was by John Scott Trotter. And here are the words:*

Hail KMH!
Hail, rain and snow!
Onward to victory
Forward we will go!
Stamping out our adversary
Like a dauntless dromedary
Tramples on his foe. . . .
Forever . . .
Hail, KMH!
Our motto cry!
“Be brave and love each other
Wear the old school tie!”
Like an eagle loose aloft
Wave the pomegranate and puce aloft. . . .
Rah, rah, rah, rah, rah, rah, rahhhhh . . .
With a hey nonny-nonny and a hot-cha-cha
Hail. . . . [Ring chimes]

When ASCAP withdrew its music from the air and Bing could no longer sing “When the blue of the night meets the gold of the day,” the theme of The Kraft Music Hall became “Hail, KMH”—a beautiful symphonic arrangement. No vocal.

* “Hail KMH” by Carroll Carroll and John Scott Trotter. © 1943 SAUNDERS PUBLICATIONS, INC. Used by permission.

Java Jive

Not only did Cal Kuhl, George Faulkner, Gordon Thompson, Bob Brewster, Dick Mack, Lynn McManus, Herb Polesie, Joe Bigelow, Tony Stanford, George Wells, Sandy Barnett, Ed Helwick, Ed Rice, Phil Mygatt, Earl Ebi, Ezra MacIntosh, and John Christ (all members of the J. Walter Thompson radio department) live and breathe broadcasting, so did their wives.

The gals found it fun to attend rehearsals of the Chase & Sanborn Hour and watch Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy joust with W. C. Fields. Or to sit in on a run-through of “The Circle” where they could see, and often get to know, the stars of that show—Ronald Colman, Basil Rathbone, Cary Grant, Groucho Marx, Madeleine Carroll, and Carole Lombard, who frequently showed up with her fella, Clark Gable, and who talked like a circus roustabout giving obscenity lessons to novice longshoremen. (Carole, you understand, not the King.)

“The Circle,” George Faulkner’s dream that never really had a chance, was in essence, a forerunner of today’s late-night TV desk and sofa soirees. Its format was organized informality among high candlepower talent with occasional set pieces thrown in to allow those stars to show off. It was enthusiastically received by the press, and the public might have grown to like it given a little time. But the show was pasted together with some of the dreamiest contractual loopholes ever committed to foolscap.

Each star was given a firm commitment for several appearances at several thousand dollars each, with a firm guarantee of a certain number per year. What’s more, each star was allowed to decide when he would play, with the idea of having only two or three of them on per show, which would stretch the star power and the money over a year. It might have worked if actors weren’t all children.

Each week they'd all phone each other and ask, "Are you going to be on next Sunday? Oh, no? Well, then I don't think *I* will be either. Well, I'd be on if you were going to be on. And Madeleine said she'd be on if you were going to be on. And if you two were on I wouldn't want to be off. And I know Cary would want to be on if I'm on and Ronnie said . . ."

Thus, with each allowed to choose when he'd appear, they all appeared together almost all the time and the money ran out fast, fast, fast! There was either a feast or a famine, and when the famines came they were deadly.

But although "The Circle" was a dismal failure at selling cornflakes—which is no mystery because it failed to get an audience—it was really a mystery why Kellogg's wanted to reach the sophisticated audience "The Circle" aimed to attract. It held nothing for the cornflake set.

One of the most popular rehearsals to attend, often more fun than the show itself, was Edgar Bergen and his dummies, Nelson Eddy (not one of them), Dorothy Lamour, Don Ameche, and the magnificent W. C. Fields putting together a Chase & Sanborn Coffee Hour, which also starred personalities from the galactic heights of Hollywood nobility. Glamour girls of the era like Rosalind Russell, Barbara Stanwyck, Bette Davis, Hedy Lamarr, and Lana Turner were always happy to be flirted with by Charlie McCarthy.

Too much has been written about—and I don't think Edgar Bergen likes to be associated with—"the Great Gobbo" syndrome that is reputed to exist between a ventriloquist and his mannequin. But none of the many who attended Chase & Sanborn rehearsals could fail to notice that while Edgar made frequent fluffs, Charlie never blew a line. It was Charlie who was always needling Ed about his mistakes. "All right, Bergen! Let's go back and try it again."

When they ran through their routines (See that? *Their* routines! It was Bergen's routine!), Edgar stood in front of the mike while he held Charlie, or Mortimer Snerd, on a specially designed stool placed almost in *front* of the microphone in such a way that the dummy could be plainly seen by the entire audience. So real did Bergen's dolls become that even the audio engineer

who rode gain on the show every Sunday would occasionally wigout as he watched Bergen work and holler, "Will someone go out there and tell that dummy McCarthy to stay on mike!"

One Sunday I took my daughter, Leda, to a rehearsal. After the work was over we went onstage. While I was talking to Bergen, Charlie, who was sitting on his stool near the mike, called, "Hey, you. You with the pigtails."

Leda turned toward Charlie and took two tentative steps in his direction.

"You're cute," Charlie said. "Got a piece of gum?"

"No," said Leda grandly. "I don't chew gum."

"Get her," he said in disbelief.

These lines from Charlie came, of course, during *my* half of the conversation with Edgar.

Leda moved a little closer to Charlie. Suddenly he said, "Give us a little kiss."

She stepped back astonished, pulled herself to her full three feet, and said with the air of a mother superior, "I don't kiss wooden little boys."

Charlie just giggled his rakish little giggle. He was never at a loss for words even when Bergen seemed to be out of sight and paying no attention to what was going on where he was. When some curious person would lift the lid to look into the specially built case in which he was carried, if Charlie happened to be inside, the peeker would be greeted with, "Who do you think you're looking at?" Or, "How'd you like someone staring at you when you're resting?"

If someone made a move to touch him, he got the line so often used on W. C. Fields: "Take your hands off me or I'll slug you! So help me, I'll mow you down!"

When it was time to go home and Edgar put Charlie in the case and started to close the lid, if there were any people around Charlie would holler, "Save me! Lemme outta here! This guy's trying to smother me! He's trying to kill me!"

On one of his perennial visits to "the colonies," Stanley Resor was invited to a formal dinner at the Edgar Bergens' to meet Jules Stein, the eye doctor with an eye for power who had put together MCA (Music Corporation of America), the talent

agency that really earned its nickname, “the Golden Octopus.”

Since Norma and I were also invited to this splendid sit-down “do,” it was convenient for all that we drive Mr. Resor to the party. On the way he made it clear to us, without actually saying so, that he was apprehensive about meeting a lot of people he had never heard of, people who were important in the context of the party but not in his frame of reference. To protect and insulate himself, so to speak, he suggested (actually ordered) that one or the other of us remain close to him as a sort of social bodyguard.

It was strange. Throughout the whole cocktail hour he was never without his arm around one or the other of us. And when we went into dinner, I saw one of the most astonishing things I’ve ever seen done by the reserved and, at the same time, imperious Mr. Resor.

There was a long main table for the guest of honor that was to be presided over by Edgar Bergen. Mr. Resor found his place card at this table. But he didn’t find either Norma’s name or mine, nor did he have any idea who the two people on his right and left were. Picking up the cards of the two who flanked him, he slipped them in his pocket and ordered, “You sit here, Carroll. Norma, you sit there.”

This not only destroyed a seating arrangement carefully prepared according to Hollywood protocol, but it worked out so that there was no room for Bergen to sit with his guest of honor. He had to go to another table.

The dinner was followed by a tour of the house, which meant really a trip to Charlie’s room. Here was the ideal setup for the world’s richest, most indulged little boy. The closet was full of costumes Charlie wore on the show as a hunter, a fisherman, a tennis player, a golfer, a diplomat, a gardener, a man about town. Charlie had a wardrobe that was probably more complete than that of any man at the party. Also in the room was every conceivable type of athletic equipment and one of the most elaborate and beautifully landscaped electric train layouts ever seen outside of F. A. O. Schwarz. Although it didn’t take up as much space, it seemed more elaborate even than Zeppo Marx’s layout.

Neither of the other dummies, Mortimer Snerd or Effie

Klinker, had such a room. Charlie was the treasured voice, the alter ego, of Bergen himself, the wit, the raconteur, the playboy. Charlie said the things to people Edgar was too much of a gentleman and too shy to say. But it turned out to be Mortimer who got the biggest laughs. In Edgar's mind there was real jealousy between them and he was speaking for Charlie, really, when he said, "Mortimer, how can you *be* so stupid?"

He was speaking for Edgar Bergen the humorist when Mortimer answered, "I have friends in Washington."

In 1964, 1965, and 1966, I wrote and edited three anniversary radio shows from "the golden days" of radio for Chase & Sanborn. This necessitated that I go back and play over all the old broadcasts of the thirties and forties. They were on huge sixteen-inch glass records. I took off what I wanted on tape and then edited the tape to build the shows.

Of all the material I listened to, there was one routine I never tired of hearing. (Dan Sutter, who helped me on the shows, and I had to play spots over and over again in editing them.) This was a bit between Jimmy Stewart and Mortimer Snerd, who met as panelists on an agricultural forum and developed a liking for each other. Stewart said:

"I kind of like you, Mort. You're nobody's fool."

"Well, nobody's in particular."

"Let's get together sometime."

"Yes, let's."

"Where?"

"We can decide that when we get there."

"Good. I hope to see you sometime."

"Then some other time I'll see *you*. If we change off like that we won't get so sick of seeing each other. Why don't you come to my place?"

"Where is it?"

"I'll tell you how to get there if you don't mind getting lost."

"Well, how far is it as the crow flies?"

"It's a—say, you ain't coming by crow, are you?"

Recordings of those three Chase & Sanborn anniversary radio shows have become collector's items. Only a few records were pressed and packaged in a special album cover to be given

away to guests on the show and to a small, select list of the elite in the grocery business. You didn't get a record unless you knew your groceries. While there are a lot of tapes around, the original pressings and albums grow scarcer every year.

The first of those three shows starred Edgar and Charlie and traced the history of the Chase & Sanborn Coffee Hour from Maurice Chevalier and Eddie Cantor right up through the Bergen-McCarthy years and was called, with impeccable implicitness, "The Chase & Sanborn 100th Anniversary Radio Show Starring Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy." A title like that kind of opens all the doors.

The show got so much favorable free publicity from the television columnists, most of whom had been radio columnists and loved to listen to the past, and it got a rating so much higher than anyone anticipated, that a year later there was a second one. This had a tight little title that should have been set to music, "Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy Bring You the Chase & Sanborn 101st Anniversary Radio Show Presents Fred Allen."

The following year NBC climbed on the bandwagon because it felt that it too had something to celebrate. So the show was blown up from an hour to an hour and a half and called, with elongated fervor, "The Chase & Sanborn 102nd Anniversary Show Starring Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy and Honoring the 40th Anniversary of NBC Radio." We needed the extra thirty minutes to get in the title.

These three shows took hours and hours of careful listening and editing. Routines that had very funny parts and some dull sports were cut to eliminate the dull spots. Jokes that were topical at the time they were first broadcast but had come to be meaningless were cut. Sometimes a fifteen-minute routine would be reduced to four minutes. But all the laughter and reactions were real. The record of each broadcast will, in some cases, give a false picture of what the actual broadcast was like—as in the case of a prizefight and other on-the-spot bits. They had to be edited to leave out all the hemming and hawing as the eyewitness searched for words to describe what he was seeing.

When we were getting ready to do the Fred Allen show and Danny Sutter of NBC and I had selected the miles and miles of

tape from which to cut it, I asked him to get me an editor named Warren Hogan and an editing room for three hours every weekday evening for three months. I had to work at night because I was busy at the office all day.

When Danny told the young man who cleared time for editors and the editing rooms how much time I needed, the kid jumped out of his chair and said, "Goddamn it! I can't give anybody that much time. What the hell does Carroll want with all that time, anyway?"

"He's doing the Fred Allen anniversary show.* "

"Well! Big deal! Let me tell you this! Carroll's not going to get anything like that time."

"You'd better call him and tell him that," said Danny.

"To hell with Carroll. I'll call Fred Allen and talk to him direct."

"After you call him," Danny said, "let me have his number. I think Carroll would like to talk to him too."

Working with W. C. Fields was a wild and confusing sort of adventure. His most casual conversation sounded so funny that trying to write something better was an exercise in futility. Yet you had to go through with it. The network and the client had to see a script, which Bill occasionally looked at but rarely read.

The job of actually shepherding Bill Fields through the neatly planned, carefully time-allotted regions of radio was as full of pitfalls as taking a tank unit through a mine-sown field of quicksand. You never knew when he'd say something that would put you off the air. And the one fatal thing to do was to warn him against using a certain word or thought.

Although he constantly required their attention, he did not have a whole lot of confidence in doctors, nor was he absolutely wild about hospitals. The latter had a tendency to deprive him of his thermos bottle full of "medicine." He called it pineapple juice. Actually, it was what Jack Shuttleworth, editor of *Judge*, called Gordon water with just a dash of dry fortified wine formulated by Martini & Rossi.

Because the sponsor had received some unpleasant mail as

* Fred Allen died in 1956. The Chase & Sanborn anthology of his broadcasts was produced and broadcast in 1965.

the result of a few blasts Bill had put on the medical profession, he was warned not to dwell on the subject of doctors and what he saw as an insane desire on their part to commit him to hospitals. So he ad-libbed something about "sending for a medico because my cook had a severe attack of la grippe. And the next thing I knew it was clang! clang! clang! and I was on my way to the land of the bedpans." He followed this by emphasizing the point of every joke in the routine that followed with "Clang! Clang! Clang!" Each time he said it, it became funnier, and for a while, no matter what efforts were made to stop it, "Clang! Clang! Clang!" became a W. C. Fields catchphrase.

When I was hospitalized to correct a deviated septum, a medical term Bill enunciated with great comic gusto, he sent me a wire saying, "Don't let those sawbones fool around with your proboscis. If worst comes to worst I'll let you have part of mine. Good luck. Bill Fields."

That was the only funny wire I got for that "medical leave." But when I became the sickest I have ever been in my life, with a severe case of chicken pox, I got a lot of "funny" telegrams about a man of forty getting a kid's disease and about all the eggs I had laid finally hatching into chicken pox.

Only Carlton Morse, writer of the interminable and long-lived "One Man's Family" show and "I Love A Mystery," sent flowers and a sympathetic message saying he knew how dreadful it was when a man of my age contracted chicken pox. I have always thought very warmly of him since then.

There was the time I had to have a nasty little lump excised from just below my Adam's apple. I'll let you guess how many wires and cards I received, all variations on the thought that I didn't have to go to St. John's Hospital to have my throat cut. I could have stayed right in the office, I was told and told.

The radio active war

One Sunday not too long before Christmas, we were awakened by a phone call.

John Scott Trotter's voice said, "Carroll? Are you listening to the radio?"

"No. We just woke up."

He made no apology. "You'd better turn on the radio."

"Why?"

"The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor and Roosevelt is about to declare war."

That's how World War II started for us, and it's a strange anomaly that so gentle, peaceful a person was the one to bring us such awful news.

I wasn't particularly surprised. War had clearly been waiting in the wings. What surprised me, along with the rest of the world, was the way of its coming.

I'd expected some overt act from Germany. Our Navy had been patrolling the Atlantic escorting vital convoys of lend-lease goods for months. A cousin of ours, just out of Annapolis, came under fire aboard a cruiser in the Atlantic several months before Pearl Harbor.

Not only was the United States Navy engaged in a war effort before December 7, so, in its peculiar way, was The Kraft Music Hall. For nearly six months before Pearl we had been booking personnel from various branches of the military and civilian establishments, laying the groundwork for the kind of support they'd need when war came. Officers and men from the various branches of the service made their work sound very attractive and important. Conversation people talked about what "might" happen and what the civilian's obligations might be. Naturally, after Pearl Harbor this became a very forthright activity.

So, as the West Coast waited to hear that Japan was pressing its advantage and landing in the Hawaiian Islands, as San Diego with its naval base, Los Angeles with its oil wells, and San Francisco with its deep harbor and military installations—all made vulnerable to air attack by the loss of our Pacific Fleet—blacked out and waited, radio began to beat the propaganda drums with special programs planned, written, and produced to impress upon people the peril of the situation and the need for complete dedication on the part of everyone.

Norman Corwin, Arch Oboler, and others wrote great, sweeping, inspirational paeans planned to arouse the nation to pull in its belt and mentally man the battlements. These broadcasts explained the nature of the enemy and the need to “keep the soil of America from the boot of the oppressor” and stuff like that. They were good. They were rich and resounding, with long lists of beautiful American place-names, the names of great American victories, American heroes, and American rivers, and all the other glories of America “from sea to shining sea.” They were magnificently orchestrated and punched up with tympani rolls. Nobody slept through them. But when they were over the listeners didn’t know what to do but go out and salute a flag.

It was the spot announcements inserted in the popular, regularly scheduled programs that did the day-to-day job of telling people exactly what was needed most from them and which way to direct their efforts.

Bob Hope started doing his radio shows from the various military and naval installations that lined the Pacific coast. He became one of the government’s most valuable spokesmen after allowing himself to be talked into reading one of our “war effort” spots on Kraft. Such pep talks subsequently became a regular weekly feature of Bob’s radio show.

While Jack Benny and Al Jolson and hundreds of lesser players were involved in the same sort of activity—it was probably what killed Jolson—no one can question that Hope was always able to rally more support for any effort anywhere it was needed than anyone else in the country. And I’m proud to say he gave me the opportunity to collaborate with him on a job that brought over three quarters of a million dollars into the coffers of the National War Fund.

I worked with Bob a lot in the months before World War II because that was when he and Bing started their series of “road” pictures, the first of which was *The Road to Singapore*.

Hope made many guest shots with Bing plugging each “new road” as it opened. Their dialogue on these broadcasts was, naturally, an extension of their friendly rivalry in the pictures.

HOPE: You sang that just the way I taught you to, Gravel Throat.

BING: I hardly thought you had the acuity to appreciate it, Ski-snoot.

HOPE: Acuity? I thought that meant pimples.

The Bob Hope program probably played every military installation we had in World War II. Parents, wives, and sweethearts listened to Bob’s shows hoping that by some miracle they’d hear their loved one laughing above the roaring response that bellowed forth from men who frequently stood in line all night to assure themselves a choice “seat” for a Hope broadcast in a hangar, on the deck of a carrier, from the end of a truck in the middle of the desert, a jungle clearing, or just some vast open plain in the middle of nowhere.

In the course of these endless visits to naval bases and army cantonments, it was inevitable that Bob met hundreds and hundreds of GIs, men who made the little piece of Europe, Asia, Africa, or Pacific island on which they stood a temporary part of America, hence home to any American.

One morning Bob called me at the office to ask if I could have lunch with him at Sardi’s.

“Why not the Derby?” I said, knowing Bob usually ate there and because it was nearer the office.

“I’ve got something I want to talk to you about and I don’t want to be disturbed.”

“I didn’t know you cared.”

“Yeah. Make it about twelve-thirty.”

After the simple amenities, like a couple of hellos, Bob said, “I’ve got a contract to write a book called *I Never Left Home* and I’d like you to do it with me.”

I was nonplussed, which was something I’d never been be-

fore. Bob had a whole staff of high-priced writers, the men who did his weekly broadcasts and all the special material that he used up in such quantities on guest shots and benefits. Besides, I'd never written a book. I told this to Bob.

"Have you ever tried?"

"Well, no."

He handed me an envelope full of typewritten pages. "You know how I talk. Read this stuff. The publisher tells me it isn't right for a book. Write something and let's see what you come up with. If I like it and *they* like it, you'll write the rest of it. There's one thing, though, I think you ought to know. All royalties have been promised to the National War Fund."

I told him how great I thought the title was and he told me how soon the publisher wanted the manuscript. Then he went off to Lakeside to play golf and I went back to the office to continue working on whatever script I happened to be hung up with. But I didn't get much done. All I could think of was Bob's book.

I read what Bob had shown the publisher and knew at once what was wrong. It was very funny. But Bob had come to be more than just a comic to the soldiers in the field, the casualties in the hospitals, and their parents waiting anxiously for any sort of word from them or news about them.

Analyzing it, I realized that the book not only had to be funny, it had to be a little inspirational. It had to seem to be telling the soldiers who would read it how deeply the folks at home loved and admired them. It had to tell the folks at home how devoted the GIs were to the unpleasant task they had in hand and how anxious they were to get it over with and come home.

There must be a couple of million men today sitting behind desks, running companies, doing all sorts of jobs, and directing every conceivable channel of the nation's business to whom Bob Hope's arrival at some military installation once seemed the most important event of their lives.

So I wrote about five hundred words that I called with magnificent originality "Preface" and gave it to Bob. What he did with it, I don't know. Probably checked it out with Jack Goodman, who was his editor. About four days later he called me

again and we began to write the book. From the preface on, it was a straight collaboration. Hope talked and I wrote. And if we'd had a tape recorder Jane Brown would have had a lot more Wednesday evenings off.

For what must have been about ten weeks, every Wednesday evening Jane, Bob, and I sat in the Hopes' big comfortable living room on Moorpark Street in North Hollywood and Jane took down in shorthand every word either of us said. Sometime before Friday she transcribed it for me. By the following Wednesday I'd worked it into the kind of language, jokes, and ideas people had learned to expect from Hope. Then the whole routine started over again.

It was a hard grind. I was still doing my regular job for J. Walter and writing reams of propaganda material for the OWI. Nat Wolff, one of the most capable men in the radio business, headed the OWI's broadcasting department in Hollywood with Don Quinn and me as his deputies.

Hope went over each chapter as it was finished, made notes for me, and gave copies to his team of gagmen so that they could contribute jokes that would punch it up. Then I went over the whole thing again, picked the best of the new jokes from the gagmen, and dovetailed them into the appropriate places.

Finally we got it off to the publisher, who sent a copy to Carl Rose, who drew some funny illustrations, and not too long after that it began showing up at the top of best-seller lists. It ultimately sold over a million and a half copies. There was a \$2.00 hard-cover edition that would now be priced at \$5.95. And there was an eight-by-eleven \$1.00 paper edition that would now cost \$2.50. On top of that there was a little disposable thin-paper pocket edition, a disposable book. Neither Bob nor I ever cared to discuss what disposition was made of *that*.

To me the most valuable copy of them all is the one I have in my library, on the inside cover of which Bob has written, "Stick around, I may want to get clever again."

There is a rumor that because of *I Never Left Home* we almost lost the war. So many people sent so many copies to GIs that many soldiers had to throw away their weapons in order to carry all their books.

Naturally *I Never Left Home* had to be followed by a sequel.

This was called *So This Is Peace*. It was considered by its publishers to be a colossal failure because it only sold about one-third as many copies as the first book. There were a lot of reasons for this, not the least of which was that it wasn't quite as relevant. Also the price on the hard-cover edition was raised fifty cents. Also, it wasn't as good a book.

It was while working with Bob on *So This Is Peace* that I learned how to be a shrewd investor.

One evening Bob and Dolores Hope and I were having dinner before going to work and Bob asked me if I had \$1,500 in the bank. I said I thought I did. He said, "Well, send a check for fifteen hundred over to Jack at Paramount in the morning." Jack was his brother, who handled certain phases of his business. So I did.

Bob had been telling his plan to convert from war to peace. Instead of playing for free to thousands of GIs, he planned to use his know-how on working those large audiences and get paid for it at home by playing baseball parks instead of theaters. Clearly it had to work. Every discharged GI within miles of whatever park Hope was playing in figured to take his mom and dad, his wife and kids, or whoever he wrote home to from North Africa, Saipan or wherever, to see what Hope was really like.

The next morning I sent a JWT messenger to Paramount with the \$1,500. About three days later, Norma, who keeps the books because I can neither add nor subtract (and never heard of multiplication and division), asked me, "Why are *we* sending money to *Hope*?"

I carefully explained it to her. "Last Wednesday night at dinner Bob told me to send fifteen hundred dollars to Jack."

"Did he explain what it was for?"

"I didn't ask him."

"Wouldn't it be nice to know?" Women are so nosy. . . .

So just to please her I called Jack and asked him what the money I'd sent him was all about. "Didn't Bob tell you?" The way he asked the question made me understand that he was surprised. Clearly he felt I must know. So I said, "Well, I just wanted to clarify it."

To cut it down to one reel, Bob had formed a corporation to

finance the Ball Park Tour. His agents Jimmy Saphier and Louis Schurr got maybe twenty shares each. Bing got twenty shares, Bob's writers got some shares, Barney Dean got a few shares, and my \$1,500 gave me ten shares.

I told all this to Norma and she was satisfied. She had something to write on the stub in the checkbook. But after a couple of years of asking every four or five months, "What about dividends on the Hope stock?" she felt she ought to make her position a little stronger, so she said, "Find out about dividends on the Hope stock!"

When I tried to do this, all I could get for an answer was, "Do you want to sell it?" The question snapped back at me so fast there could be only one answer, "No!" Norma and Hope Enterprises, Inc., and I had these little exchanges periodically until one day Hope's lawyer, Martin Gang, asked me to bring my certificate to his office and sign it. By this time, shrewder than I was before, an experienced businessman, I asked why. Martin told me NBC was buying a quarter of the corporation. This required each stockholder to sell one-fourth of his holdings. "Supposing I don't sell?" I asked.

"You've got to!" Martin said with the same absolute authority a small girl tells her little brother they are going to play house and that he is the dog.

To show how smart I was getting I even asked how much I was going to get for my two and a half shares. When Martin told me, I thought he was kidding. When I got home and told Norma the amount Martin had mentioned, she thought I was kidding. But when a registered special delivery letter arrived about an hour and a half before midnight on New Year's Eve with a check for \$10,000 in it, the whole thing turned out to be the kind of kidding a man could get to enjoy.

When the same thing happened exactly six years later we were very blasé about it. What else was new? And I no longer bother asking about dividends on the five shares I still own. Oh, yes! I did ask once and Jimmy Saphier said, "Want to sell?"

To make the transition from Bob Hope to Frank Sinatra, here's a bit of a bobble that involves both of them. Right after we moved west I transferred my membership in the Friars Club to

the California branch, which at that time occupied the fortress that once housed Hollywood's luxurious gambling casino, the Clover Club.

Norma and I were having a late dinner there one Sunday evening when we met Howie Mayer, a press agent, who asked us how we liked the picture.

"What picture?" I asked.

"Weren't you at the Motion Picture Academy screening?"

"No."

"Too bad. You missed a good one."

"The only reason we didn't go is that we're not members."

"Not members!" The thought seemed incomprehensible to Howie. "You've worked on Bing's pictures," he said. "I'll send you an application blank in the morning. We need people like you."

Sure enough, the next day an application for membership in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences came in the mail with a note from Mayer telling me to fill it out, including signatures of two members who would sponsor me, send it back to him, and he'd put it through. Simple.

The following Sunday there was a "roastmaster" dinner at the Friars and, by a stroke of good luck and careful planning, I found myself seated between Bob Hope and Frank Sinatra. Before the dinner got too far along I whipped out my application for academy membership and asked the two men to sign as my sponsors. They both did. Who could be sent in better?

I mailed the application with great pride. Two days later a letter came from Howie that said, "Terribly impressed by the two people you have for sponsors. Too bad neither of them is a member of the academy. Please fill out the application I'm enclosing and send it back to me. I'll get you two sponsors who *are* members. Can't you do anything right?"

That was around 1940. I've been a member ever since. Proves you can get what you want in Hollywood without the use of big names.

During the forties no one talked of "civil rights" or "integration." But Hitler's activities caused the word "tolerance" to surface. It referred to tolerance for another man's life-style, color,

or religion. Thinking about it almost thirty years later, it's a very intolerable word. It doesn't really mean "try to understand" or "get to know." It means "leave it alone," "don't mess with it," "don't do anything about it," just "tolerate," and don't knock it.

Nevertheless, the way you had to be, if you were a liberal, was "tolerant." And Frank Sinatra truly felt that way. He wore a St. Christopher medal with a Star of David on the other side. As things have since turned out, if Frank still has it, the medal only has one working side.

My association with Frank started when he was signed to star in his own radio show for Lever Brothers. It was his first sponsored show right after his big, big hit, when comedian Walter O'Keefe said, "I've met Frankie and I've talked to him and he's just like any other normal, young American kid who's just made a million dollars."

Now, beside his million, he had his own radio show and no one will believe what product he'd been hired to sell. The name of it was Vims. It was a vitamin.

The fact that I was writing Frank's show in no way relieved me of any responsibility to Crosby and The Kraft Music Hall. But it put me in an interesting position. Frank's public image had him saying, in effect, "Hey, Bing! Move over!" The newspapers, always eager to keep a fight of any nature going, played it up in the hope of generating some real heat.

This never happened, partly because I was in a position to polarize the two guys—keeping Frankie the brash youngster who wanted in and making Bing the benevolent father figure so firmly established he could smile kindly upon and help any young talent that came along. It worked great for both of them.

Everyone made fun of the skinny kid who came on so strong and looked so weak. No one could quite take him seriously. To the men in the armed forces he was a guy making money and getting all the broads to swoon over him while they were off somewhere drilling or fighting for very short money. He wasn't like Hope or Crosby, obviously too old. He was a real, card-carrying young 4F.

For this reason it was a tremendous tribute to his personality to see him walk onto a stage at the Long Beach Naval Training

Station—where I first saw him do this—look out at about two thousand sullen faces, and say, “You guys have nothing to worry about till they start drafting cats that look like me. Then run for the hills.” With this attitude and a few songs, he literally charmed a whole auditorium full of uniformed men into clapping, whistling, stamping, and hollering for more.

The first year I worked with Frank, he sent out an invitation to his New Year’s Eve party that was one of the most succinct pieces of writing of its kind I’ve ever read. It might have been the work of Sammy Cahn, although Larry Berns or Frank himself could have knocked it off in one of those moments of truth when a man has to figure out how he can invite everyone he wants to be with him on New Year’s Eve while still making sure that the party will be just for those invited.

I had worked in New York with a comedy writer whose name I’m omitting because there’s no use in embarrassing him and his wife all these years later. They moved to Hollywood and before long were giving lovely parties—at our home.

We invited them often because he was a very funny guy to have around. But every time they came, they showed up with seven or eight other people who just happened to drop in on them as they were leaving for our house. So every time we invited them we wound up with a much bigger party than we’d planned on. It got so that when we wanted to see them, they were the only ones we asked. Of course we did make a lot of new “friends” that way. They always brought along whoever it was because, they said, “They’re the kind of people you like.”

Of course, these two characters rarely gave parties in their “classy” Beverly Hills home because, as she said, “Our living room is a veritable museum.” It was. But not the way she meant it. But she sure meant it when she issued the dictum during one of their rare “at homes” that there’d be “no eating in the living room!” There wasn’t any eating anywhere else, either, except the kitchen. When I wandered in there to get a glass of water I found our host making himself a bologna sandwich. He was very nice about it. He offered me one. I made it myself and took it into the living room to eat. Then came the dictum.

Harry Einstein, the Parkyakarkas of Eddie Cantor’s radio show, got so up-tight about her hyper Mrs. Craig protectiveness

of her run-of-the-mill example of the average Beverly Hills interior decorator's skill that he maliciously cracked walnuts by crushing them on the marble hearth with the heel of his shoe.

So it worked out that we always had them over to our house. It was kind of an adventure. They were constantly rearranging our furniture. And occasionally they came up with something better. The wife once told a friend, "Norma's so wonderful. She doesn't mind what we do." One of the things they were very good at was grinding popcorn into the carpet.

But to return to the reason for that journey back through the little Mitteleuropean country of Chutzpa, Frank's New Year's Eve invitation said:

You may bring your wife.
You may come alone.
Please don't bring friends.
We have friends of our own.

Frank's espousal of Tolerance with a capital *T* was, if you knew him, more than merely a public relations gimmick, although it served very well in that respect. It got him exposure in places you normally wouldn't find a pop singer. Here is a cut-down version of a dedication I wrote for him on the opening of a new youth camp that was being established in Phoenix, Arizona:

"I've often thought that to be born in the United States is the most wonderful thing that can happen to a child. To the miracle of life is added the one thing that's most essential to complete happiness—freedom! . . . No matter who your parents are, or what they were, you'll be judged by what you stand for and what you accomplish. Sometimes people lose sight of this. . . . But there are men who never forget that the most important thing today is to keep alive in our youth that red hot flame that welded all nationalities, all creeds, and all races into one unique United States. . . . Such men have envisioned a camp at which children of all colors and creeds may meet their equals on equal terms in friendly congenial surroundings. . . . There certainly is no better way to stamp out racial and religious bigotry that has no place in the United States. . . . Let's hope this camp sets the style for similar ones all over the country."

That was “the Voice’s” voice of Tolerance, an echo of the national impulse during the Hitler era. This stance of Frank’s added immensely to his stature, aided in turning a precocious boy singer into an actor, a “thinker,” and a national personality. Of course there were a lot of other things, too, but there’s no need to mention any of their names.

It’s interesting to note that whenever people find that an artist has an interest outside of show business, a point of view on life (even though they may not totally agree with it or understand it), they are moved to comment on it and even, sometimes, find fault with it.

We had a segment of the Kraft show that was planned to attack the sentimental soft underbelly of the “young marrieds” at whom the show was, in a general way, directed. Almost all of these had what they called “our song.”

We tagged our pandering to their early yen for nostalgia “The Memory Spot.” In this bit, Bing reeled off some of the historical, social, political, and sports highlights of a year, and some of its silly sidelights, and then sang one of that year’s hit tunes. This simple idea was widely copied, notably as “That Wonderful Year” on the Garry Moore TV show that discovered Carol Burnett.

On one occasion, before going into one of these memory spots I happened to have Bing say, and no one ever commented on the contradiction in the sentence, “Without so much as a backward glance at Marcel Proust, we turn now to remembrances of things past.” At that time radio, as TV is today, was under constant attack for its cultural anemia and for catering exclusively to the commonest common denominator of national taste. But the only letters we received on our reference to Marcel Proust were from people who wrote, “What right has a crooner to know anything about Marcel Proust?” and similar suggestions to the effect that if a man made his money singing pop tunes he’d better not let on that he read anything but the comics.

Frank Sinatra, in his Tolerance period, was asked occasionally by columnists to fill in for them. Leonard Lyons was one. And Drew Pearson, when he went on vacation from his weekly radio show, had Frank sub for him one Sunday.

I can no longer find a copy of that broadcast, although I once had not only the script I wrote but an acetate recording of it. But ground deeply in my memory is how and where I heard it when it went on the air.

I was traveling across Utah on the way to New York aboard the City of Los Angeles, the Union Pacific Railroad's excellent answer to the Santa Fe's Super Chief. There was no one in the club car, the only one that had a radio. It was around 11 A.M. A handsome man, the type the Pullman company used to be so lucky to get as porters, was making his bar ready for the prelunch guzzlers. Outside a fierce electrical storm was beating against the speeding train. The radio reception, never too good on trains, was miserable. The loudspeaker was built into the front of the bar about a foot and a half from the floor. It was great for people who heard through their kneecaps. I sat on the floor with my ear pressed almost against the speaker. It was before the stapes mobilization operation that corrected my hearing had been invented.

I thought Frank delivered the speech well, but I felt I might be prejudiced. I couldn't wait to get a reaction from the barman because his interests had been deeply touched upon. I was about to ask him if he'd been listening but stopped myself before I asked a foolish question. He was crying. I just smiled.

"That Frankie," he said. "He must be a pretty good man."

It was one of the proudest moments of my life.

I can thank "Frankie" for three of the most confusing days of my life. I'd just left J. Walter, on what proved to be a ten-year sabbatical and had done three free-lance jobs, one for Columbia Pictures and two specials for CBS that involved Sinatra.

His own show had not been doing very well for a lot of complicated reasons and I had every right to suppose he'd ask me to take it over. When several weeks passed and he didn't, I set up a deal with Arthur A. Bailey, executive vice-president of the Ward Wheelock Company, a Philadelphia-based advertising agency that, at the time, handled the entire Campbell's Soup account. I was to join the agency's West Coast Office, take charge of the writing on all its shows, and become a vice-president.

I was on the Super Chief, heading for Philadelphia for a final interview with Mr. Wheelock, the boss himself, when, on the first night out of LA, I began to get telegrams.

The first arrived, as I remember, at Ash Fork, New Mexico. All it said was, "Don't do anything till you talk to me." It was signed Frank. This clinched everything except for a couple of details. One of them was that I didn't know where to get in touch with Frank because it was at a period in his career when he was changing telephone numbers and addresses as often as he changed his socks.

I wasn't even sure the wire was from Frank Sinatra. I had a good friend named Frank Woodruff who was in the film business, and there was a man named Frank at the Bank of California who always called me when I had an overdraft.

So I wired Norma from Lamy, New Mexico, asking her to find out if the wire was really from Sinatra and what it was all about. But Western Union delayed delivering my wire from Lamy so long (what else is new after twenty-three years?) that she had nothing to tell Bobby Burns, Frank's lieutenant, when he called to find out if *she* had heard from me because Frank hadn't. Natch!

Bobby decided the wire to Ash Fork had missed me, so they sent an identical one to La Junta, Colorado. Here I got their second wire and one from Norma that was so long it probably enabled Western Union to declare an extra dividend that year.

What Norma told me was that Frank and Bobby had stopped at the house to talk to me. When they learned I was on my way east, and the reason for the trip, they sent the first telegram.

Since it was not hard to figure out what Frank wanted (I'd been waiting to hear from him for several weeks), I found myself not only on the Super Chief but also on the horns of a dilemma. The question was whether it was better to have fun and adventure working for Frank Sinatra for a lot of money that could terminate at the whim of a very volatile personality, or to work more conservatively for Ward Wheelock for not quite so much immediate money but perhaps more in the long run, some stock in the company, and a lot of insurance benefits that looked mighty attractive to a man with a fairly large house and three fairly small kids.

I answered Norma from the next stop saying I'd call Frank from Chicago, between the arrival of the Super Chief and the departure of the Broadway Limited for New York. She managed to get in touch with Bobby, and at Kansas City I got a wire giving me a Crestview (Beverly Hills) number at which to call Frank when I reached Chicago late in the afternoon.

I tried the number several times before anyone answered. My train almost left without me while I was talking to the guy I finally reached, who didn't want to answer anything and made out like he'd never heard of Sinatra. He finally said he didn't know where Frank was but would give him a message.

The message I left was that I'd telephone him from New York Sunday morning, that I was going to Philadelphia first thing Monday morning, and we'd better talk before then.

When I arrived in New York it was around noon, which is too early to call a guy like Sinatra in Los Angeles on a Sunday because "around noon" in New York is only 9 A.M. in LA. But I called anyway. I had to find out exactly what was on Frank's mind as soon as possible, so I'd have time to think about it.

A very sleepy gentleman answered my call and told me Frank Sinatra was not there, said he didn't know when he'd be there or where he was. I expected him to ask me, "Who is Frank Sinatra?"

After I told this character the whole story about the cross-country telegram relay and the call from Chicago, he broke down and gave me another Crestview number at which I could reach Frank.

When I finally got that number to answer, I was told I'd just missed Frank. Nobody knew where he'd gone. They stuck to that story and I believed them. It was a very irrational period in Frank's career.

I left my New York phone number and word for him to call me any time up to 8 A.M. Monday, when I would have to leave to catch the nine o'clock train for Philly. Then I phoned Norma to ask what she'd heard, if anything.

She said she'd talked to Larry Berns, a close friend of Frank's and mine. It was Larry who had opened the way for the deal I was closing with Ward Wheelock. Larry told Norma that Frank was desperately unhappy about his air show, that he was a

nervous wreck due to working in a film with Kathryn Grayson, that they had to do scenes over and over and over again, that he also was having trouble at home and with Lana. All this had piled up to make him a bundle of tangled electric wires.

Larry told Norma that Frank was mad at him as well as at me because he'd recommended me to the Wheelock company and now I was deserting him. Larry said *everyone* was mad at *him* on account of me: (1) Mickey Rockford of (MCA) for not telling him I was joining Ward Wheelock. (MCA wanted me as a client.) (2) CBS, which then had an Artists' Service. (They also wanted me as a client.)

Then, to close in a cloud of magnanimity, Norma quoted Larry as saying, "Tell Carroll, no matter what he does, this isn't the biggest decision in his life. He'll just go up and up."

That's the mixed-up saga of how, after leaving Thompson swearing I would never again work for another advertising agency, I made a very lucrative and happy connection with Ward Wheelock. In gratitude I sent Larry a fancy chronograph from Abercrombie and Fitch. When I told the clerk who was filling out a form for the engraver what I wanted inscribed on the back of the watch, he looked at me in astonishment mixed with fear, made me repeat it three times, and then said, "Here! *You* write it!"

The inscription was "To Dreamboat from Tugboat."

Frank's career became more and more of a problem to him and, due to his own excesses, went into partial eclipse, a shadow from which I could do nothing to save him. Only *From Here to Eternity* could have done that.

And here is a relevant quote from a letter I wrote Norma from Philadelphia: "The only important thing you told me Larry said is, 'This isn't the biggest decision of his life.' He's right. Each thing as it comes along from now on will seem the biggest and it will be.

"We'll just play them as we see them and, in spite of everything, the deal I've made with Wheelock looks best. It may not be a year from now. On the other hand, a year from now people may be saying that Carroll's smarter than we thought."

The next time I saw Frank or even spoke to him was about five and a half years later. He was sitting in a chair at Harry

Drucker's barber shop and I was in the chair right next to him.

"Hey," he said, "what you been doing?"

I told him I'd been writing and producing Bob Crosby's radio show, Club 15, for over five years.

He said, "Oh, yeah."

Neither of us mentioned any one-way transcontinental phone calls.

About fourteen years later I was in Palm Springs with Jim Kleid and Matt Harlib of J. Walter Thompson, having dinner with Dick and Eva Brown. She was a Gabor. And she was why Jim and Matt and I were in Palm Springs.

Eva was appearing in print ads and on television as spokeswoman for Masterpiece Pipe Tobacco. It was a throwback to the old smokin' tobacco campaign that starred Billie Burke saying, "I love a man who smokes a pipe."

In case you don't remember the Masterpiece copy, it could be that you only read *The New Yorker*. It refused to run the ad. *Playboy* ran it as the first one in the book. And we *did* have Eva on TV. It goes to show something but I don't really know what.

Eva and I got along great, and during the discussion of some material she threw her arms around me in her over reactive Hungarian way and said to Dick, "I love this man. He spits gold."

I wish I could make a deal with the IRS to spit for them.

As Dick, Eva, Jim, Matt, and I walked into the restaurant, we passed a table where Frank was sitting with Mia Farrow and some people I didn't know.

"Hey," he said, "what you been doing?"

I told him I'd returned to the J. Walter Thompson Company. "Great," he said. "You don't *need* anything?"

I told him I didn't. But it made me think of Bob Burns. Why did each of these men think I ought to be in trouble?

I often wonder what would happen if I wired Frank for money.

Looking back, I find the amount of work done by the members of the JWT Hollywood radio department hard to believe.

Each of us had his own show, but we all also lent a hand on

the others' shows in one capacity or another. I was expected to stand by whenever emergency work was required on a comedy routine—drastic surgery, a joke transplant, or an instant transfusion of comic corpuscles. Then, oddly enough, after the Japanese racked up Uncle Sam's boats at Pearl, I became the guy to see about patriotic speeches. This unquestionably came about because of the ones I'd been doing on Kraft for over six months before the war became official.

It was in my capacity of Mr. Red-White-and-Blue that I met Charles Laughton for the first time. He was in trouble, too, being a member of a peculiar little radio ragout that costarred Milton Berle, Charles Laughton, and Bob Crosby and his Bobcats. This was another of John Reber's stir-up-a-little-controversy combos. What it succeeded in stirring up was a monstrous outpouring of apathy.

Laughton, of course, did classic dramatic bits and recitations as his main contribution to the show and exchanged jokes with Berle that somehow always reduced poor Miltie to the role of straight man. The willingness of the public to pay no attention whatsoever to this broadcast, which was sponsored by Ballantine Ale, was the cause of grave concern at the brewery.

Reber felt that if Laughton did something that reflected an interest in the American war effort, instead of little nineteenth-century literary tidbits, it might convince the audience that he was more than just a flabby ally and was a concerned member of the United States community. I was drafted to write the material that would metamorphose this John Bull into a chubby Yankee Doodle with an unfortunate British accent.

I have since read in some biographical sketches of Charles Laughton, written by people who knew him very well, that he felt at home only with material that had been accepted, had made an impression on the world and survived. This could be why he liked to read the Bible. And in his mind he much preferred to feel himself classed with Ronald Colman, Frederick March, John or Lionel Barrymore, Basil Rathbone, or any of the other men whom he considered to be "real actors" than with Clark Gable, Robert Montgomery, Ray Milland, or any of the "movie stars" who were far more popular with the public. This explains, to some extent, his natural reaction to the material I was called upon to write for him.

The copy was sent to his home the day before the broadcast so that he might familiarize himself with it. When he arrived at rehearsal the next day, he asked to see the “perrrrrrson”—he had a way of saying “person,” when he wanted to, as if it were spelled w-o-r-m—who had written “this preposterous speech that they expect me to spout all over the air. Rubbish!”

I confessed.

I find it impossible to get down on paper any proper description of the blustering, stammering delivery, accompanied by scratching and wriggling, that he called into play to uphold his contention that the speech I’d written for him was not worthy of his talent. “Where—where—tell me—just put your finger on it—where is the *line*—the line of thought? How do you read it? Let me hear how you hear it read! I just don’t understand it! What? I ask you, *what* does it mean?”

“Just exactly, word for word, what it says,” I told him. “It’s a simple, direct appeal to the basic patriotism of today’s American citizen. Call it maudlin. Call it corny, if you care to, but that’s what was ordered because that’s what we know will do the job. I don’t care if you read the speech or not. If you don’t want to, just say so and I’ll let someone higher up decide what to do.”

I really don’t think Charles could afford to have a run in with “someone higher up” at that point in his career, or his finances, so he simmered down enough to say, “Well, just give me some idea of *how* you *hear* this—this thing—read.”

“I wouldn’t presume to tell Charles Laughton how to read a simple little emotional appeal to the patriotic feelings of a nation.”

“Well, then, young man, who would you like to hear read it? Who, in your mind, could read it best?”

“You, sir.”

This slowed him up a little. “If you could not get me, who, then, would you choose?”

Suddenly I was tired of playing cat and mouse with the big ham. “Clark Gable!” I said.

I said Gable because I had a suspicion that if I mentioned any of the really fine actors, Charles would either say, “Why don’t you get him,” or “You don’t expect *me* to do the kind of job *he* could do?”

I had spiked his guns. "Very well," he said, "I will do it as Gable would."

"That will be just fine."

Gable could have done a fine job with the speech. But Charles didn't read it the way "the King" would have. He gave it a wonderful Charles Laughton type of reading because, in the last analysis, no actor ever can afford to do less than his best. It is *he* who gets the blame for mediocrity, often when it is really the fault of the man who put the words on the paper.

But all Laughton's efforts and mine didn't save the show.

Nor did our little disagreement alienate Laughton. We got on very well after that. Perhaps he got through to me a truth that I realized only subconsciously until I read of his need to be associated with acknowledged literary respectability. Or maybe it was because we both received some very flattering mail on the speech.

One day Bob Brewster, who had taken over the direction of The Kraft Music Hall when Cal Kuhl took over Chase & Sanborn, walked into my office to tell me that he'd had a call from Lilac Terrace. I have never stopped being amused that naval headquarters in Los Angeles was located on Lilac Terrace. It always made me think of that funny-looking Frenchman in the Ed. Pinaud ads.

The call was from Johnnie Christ, the same one who used to pick up the Kraft scripts on Thursday mornings at Bing's to bring them to me to prepare for mimeo. He was now Ensign Christ, a Navy PR officer.

Johnnie said the Navy was having an all-out drive for WAVE recruitment and was requesting a plug from Bing at the end of his show.

But first the story of how Johnnie happened to become an ensign in the Navy a little less than half a year after he was drafted into the Army. On that occasion he was sent, as other draftees were, to Fort Ord for his basic training. The minute that was finished he headed south to LA on a three-day pass. When he walked into JWT he got a laugh in every office. Johnnie, who had been an extremely sharp dresser, looked like Sad Sack, a GI cartoon character whose main distinguishing

feature was an unbelievably ill-fitting uniform. Even his sleeves seemed to drag on the ground.

Johnnie's arrival at Thompson was nicely timed. Danny Danker had received a phone call from his friend Commander Bolton, head of public relations at Lilac Terrace. The commander wanted to know if Danny could recommend a good PR man that he could commission as an ensign to help out in his office. When Johnnie walked in looking like a bundle of outgoing laundry, Danny laughed but he said, "We can't let a guy like you walk around looking like that."

"I'm going to have a uniform made as soon as I can," Johnnie said.

"Don't do anything until you hear from me," was Danny's answer. The rest is no secret. Such was the influence of Dan Danker that he was able to get an unknown draftee transferred from private in the Army to ensign in the Navy.

Johnnie sure looked smart in that blue suit.

The way the Navy handled the kind of plug Johnnie was requesting was to give us a fact sheet. When our copy was written it was submitted to the Navy where it was okayed by nobody knows how many departments, bureau heads, and admirals. If it was okayed by one and all, it was ready for broadcast. Everything went according to schedule until right after the show. The Navy called from Washington. Either I had made a mistake or the fact sheet had a typo or the Navy had changed its mind about the minimum age for enlistment in the WAVE. My script said it was eighteen. The Navy said it was twenty-one.

The Navy wanted to know how a mistake like that could happen. That's exactly what I asked *them* in view of all the people who had checked over the copy.

About two weeks later, at lunch, Danny told me he'd been out the evening before with Commander Bolton, who told him the Navy was delighted over the mistake that had been made. It had given them the names of thousands of interested girls who would soon be eligible for the Navy. If they only got a small percentage of them to enlist, they had no recruitment problem in the foreseeable future.

Naturally, this made me happy. It was a relief to know that I wouldn't have to walk the plank.

About a month later the Army sent a similar request for WAC recruitment. The day after I received it I got a call from Washington. "This is Lieutenant Slurrrrrr speaking."

"Sorry, Lieutenant, I didn't get the name."

"I know. And I don't think you will. And if you do, I'll say I never heard of you. Now then. Do you think you could do us a favor and make the same mistake for the Army you made for the Navy?"

"It was the Navy's mistake. Talk to them about it."

"The Navy was the Army's mistake," he said and hung up.

Occasionally, in booking military personnel, we'd get a break of one sort or another. A guy would be awarded a medal, or would have taken part in some action built up in the newspapers. The luckiest break of this kind was after Bob Brewster had gone down to San Diego to interview a few Navy pilots after the Navy had requested a spot on naval aviation.

He came home saying he had found a well-spoken, good-looking guy. I told him how glad I was the man was good-looking because that was important on radio. Bob gave me some of the facts the Navy wanted brought out and I talked to the man on the phone to hear how he sounded. Bob had made a good choice. He *sounded* good-looking. That was on a Tuesday morning.

The next day, on the front page of the *Los Angeles Times* and all the other LA papers, there was a picture of two planes in midair. One plane was rescuing a pilot who had been practicing parachute jumps and whose chute had become entangled in the empennage of the plane from which he had just jumped. The guy who was handling the rescue plane, a very tricky business, was the fellow Bob had booked. Of course, the script was completely rewritten to cover the rescue, and what with one thing and another the guy sounded even more good-looking than he really was.

Then there was the time the Marines landed—right in my living room.

The invasion occurred shortly after the corps' decision to go the route of the other two services and get back into the female

soldier business. The men of the globe and anchor, naturally, eschewed such frivolous designations as WAVE and WAC. (WAVE was a little cutesy-pie. WAC had a whacky connotation. And when the Coast Guard tagged its girls SPARs, it seemed just a bit much.)

Obviously the Devil Dogs of World War I, with their strong PR predilections, felt that something more representative of their spit-and-polish image was demanded, something more truly descriptive, perhaps a little awe-inspiring and majestic. So they described the distaff defenders of the Halls of Montezuma, with simple dignity and absolute accuracy, as Women Marines.

True to the traditions of military nomenclature, Woman Marine became at once, and officially, WM. It's possible that their male colleagues-at-arms thought this stood for Wide Marine. Almost immediately the ladies who had sworn to be loyal to the corps were nicknamed BAMs.

For those too young to remember and those so old they've forgotten, this little acronym stood for Broad Ass Marines.

The first step in reactivating what one crotchety Marine Corps veteran described as the Devil Bitches (they had 'em in World War I) was to commission a commander. Clearly, you couldn't just assign some crusty old leatherneck colonel to be a dean of women. So the guys of Semper Fi got themselves a gal. Her name was Mrs. Ruth Cheney Streeter and she was made a chicken colonel.

When I heard of Colonel Streeter's appointment and read that she would be passing through Los Angeles on her way to San Diego Naval Base, I called Ensign Christ to suggest that it might be a good idea to have this high lady military officer appear with Bing and tell a little bit about what girl marines did besides what everybody thought they did.

The Navy was delighted. So I suggested that since the colonel would be passing through LA on Sunday morning, it would be best, and easiest for all concerned, if I drove down to the station and interviewed her during the half hour or so between trains. In this way I'd be contributing to the war effort by using some of my extra gas ration. As a member of an "essential" industry—no kidding, that's what radio was considered—as

well as a member of the OWI, I had a B quota. This meant I never had enough gas to get anywhere, but always more than anyone else.

Johnnie said he'd let me know what could be worked out. The next morning the mail brought me an official communication from the Department of the Navy telling me about the activities of Colonel Streeter in connection with her induction as Commander of Women Marines at San Diego Naval Base. On reading it quickly—and these military orders never should be read that way—it seemed to say that she was making a stop-over at an installation in Beverly Hills. (I didn't even know there was one.) She was due at this neighborhood base at ten hundred hours.

"Fine," I mumbled to myself as I read it, "I won't have to drive all the way down to Union Station."

It was not until I read the thing again out of curiosity to find out about this secret naval base in Beverly Hills that I discovered it was *my* address. The Navy was sending this newly minted lady brass out to see me when all I wanted to do was talk to her for a few minutes on her way to Dago.

I phoned Ensign Christ and told him it was ridiculous to make this high Marine officer come to see *me*. (We were very patriotic in that war.) John cut me short. "Nothing can be done. She has her orders! She'll be there. Relax."

When I told Norma about the guest we had coming at ten hundred hours on Sunday morning, she told me about some guests we had coming Saturday evening for a little fun and games. Then, being all hostess to all people all the time, she said, "What do I serve her?"

"Navy grog. What else?"

It wasn't easy getting up early enough to police the house and be ready for "inspection" by 10 A.M. But promptly at that moment five Marine vehicles, two command cars and three jeeps, occupied our driveway and the area in front of our house. Clearly we were surrounded. We rushed the children upstairs to safety. You never know what an invading army might do.

The bell rang. I opened the door. There stood the colonel flanked by a truly beautiful second lieutenant in perfect formation. I seem to remember that Mainbocher had designed the

uniform for the WMs, and he himself must have fitted the lieutenant's tunic. Nice duty.

Reinforcing Colonel Streeter, who, true to the tradition of the corps, led the way, were a Marine captain and lieutenant in full dress blues with all medals flying. Each vehicle had a driver with a corporal in command. A staff sergeant stood at our door. If a kamikaze suddenly decided to fly a suicide mission over our house, the sergeant was there to wave.

The marines secured the foyer, took the living room, and in no time were seated in a semicircle looking like some sort of militant white-faced minstrel show. Norma came in. The captain rose, and the lieutenant. He introduced himself, the colonel and her aide (the pretty one), and the lieutenant, and then they all sat down. It was the only drilling they did.

This wasn't what I wanted at all. I'd hoped to get about fifteen minutes alone with Colonel Streeter to get some ideas of her personality, her background, and, hopefully, the reason she'd been chosen for the job. This couldn't be done while she was surrounded by three of her junior officers. So we just talked in general terms about why they were reactivating the Corps of Women Marines and what it could be expected to do to relieve men for active duty. This meant little.

It was clear from the fact that Colonel Streeter was a handsome woman and her aide, the lieutenant, a real tunic full that there was more than a little Marine Corps PR action in the WM lash-up. Obviously, with a few more WMs like the lady lieutenant, they would not only be "the first to land . . . from the Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli" but also the first to land on front pages coast to coast.

Norma showed up with coffee and croissants. It was a shame we didn't have time to rent a Salvation Army uniform.

After chow she and the two WM officers had a little girl talk about the house and wartime problems of running a home. The two men said they hoped they'd be able to come up to LA for the colonel's broadcast because they both "sure would like to meet Bing."

From somewhere someone sounded a silent retreat. The colonel and her group rose as one person, shook hands all around, and headed for the door. From upstairs where the kids

had been stashed there suddenly came forth the triumphant finish for the whole foolish engagement. Leda and Bruce were blending their childish trebles in a stirring rendition of the Marine Hymn.

I have often wondered if the members of that Marine Corps cadre, under Colonel Streeter, received service ribbons for that Sunday morning action in Beverly Hills.

I seemed to be in constant contention with the military during the war.

When the Army Signal Corps garnered a lot of newspaper space one week for a specially brave job of work under fire, I figured it would be newsworthy to get a combat signal corps man on the show to talk about what his outfit actually did. Much to my amazement, the booking was handled personally by Danny Danker, who said, "I got your signal corps man for you."

"You?"

"You'll love this. Wait'll you hear."

I knew I was in trouble. Whenever Danny flashed his Irish charm and his boy-am-I-doing-you-a-favor attitude till you felt it splashing on your tie, you had to look out.

"Give it to me."

"Colonel Darryl F. Zanuck."

"Oh, hell, Dan, I wanted a combat man—a guy who was actually out there stringing wire or running an advance post radio under fire or something. Zanuck's great but he isn't exactly the type of soldier I had in mind."

"Sorry. I thought I was doing you a big favor." He put on his hurt expression. "I'd pick up a phone and cancel it, but you know how it is. Zanuck's a pretty big man in this town and . . ." He never ended the sentence.

"Okay. Okay. Make a date for me to talk to him."

"He said he'll see you at five thirty this evening."

"Supposing that time's not convenient for me?"

"The subject never came up."

At five thirty I found myself in a large, well-appointed office where an attractive secretary asked my mission and said, after two phone calls, "Colonel Zanuck will see you in a few minutes."

She and her associate secretary then got enormously busy, as if I were the man from some time and motion study and they wanted to make a good impression. At about six fifteen there was a phone call, and after one of the girls discussed a few social matters she said, "Okay," and hung up.

She then turned to me and with her most benevolent smile, as if she, personally, had arranged this impossible audience with the great man because she loved and adored me so much, she said, "You may go in now."

I walked through the door she indicated with a wave of her arm and pulled up in another office with two more pretty girls. Actually they were prettier girls and the office looked more like a lavishly furnished living room in which some eccentric had placed two desks. Both girls smiled and one said, "Colonel Zanuck will see you in just a few minutes."

Sitting there for forty minutes made me realize why they had such attractive girls. Otherwise those waiting to see the Leader would go mad, probably break a couple of accessible Ming vases, or maybe even go away in disgust. Finally the flash came. One of the girls rose and, with a gesture toward the door I was facing, said, "In there, please."

I opened the door and found myself in a sound lock face to face with another door. This one launched me into the biggest space I'd ever seen indoors. The carpeting was so deep you wanted to stop at one of the telephones you passed along the way to Colonel Zanuck's desk and call home for your snowshoes. I don't remember whether he was in uniform, but I was pleased to note that all I'd read in the columns and fan magazines about his carrying a polo mallet in the office was true.

My long journey from the door to his desk was finally completed and he motioned me to sit down. I don't think he ever really knew my name. He never used it. He opened our conversation with a couple of words, spoken in a certain tone, that carried me way back to my elementary school days when I was sent down to the principal for some reason or other.

"What is it?"

Feeling just like the kid explaining his problem to the principal, I told Zanuck the whole story about wanting a signal corps man who'd been in action and winding up with him. I

said it as delicately as I could, secure in knowing I had two great things going for me. I was not in the picture business and I was not in the Army. I was a civilian.

I couldn't have made much of a job of my explanation, because he asked, "What do you want of *me*?" Or maybe my explanation inspired the question. Probably he wasn't listening at all.

"I'm here to discuss with you what you can say about the signal corps on Bing Crosby's broadcast next Thursday."

"Oh, yes. They told me about that. What do you want to know?"

"Something about your work with the signal corps."

"Well, I just came back from England—but I can't discuss that."

"Did you see any action?"

"I can't discuss that. But I could tell you what we're doing here in Hollywood to improve the quality of our training films."

"I'm sorry, sir, our whole purpose is to have a signal corps man, preferably an enlisted man, who has been called upon to do signal corps duty under fire and can tell us about it."

"Then you don't want me."

"No, sir."

"That'll be all. I'll tell them I can't do it."

He rose as he spoke and, although I tried to walk away from his dais with the calm and dignity of Winston Churchill turning his back on Joe Stalin, I felt I was fairly running from the room.

Next morning Danny asked, "How'd you make out with Zanuck?"

"He took care of me."

"Good. You see, I fixed it for you."

"You sure did."

"What time's he coming to rehearsal? I'll come over and say hello."

"Don't bother. He thought it would be better if he had the Army send me a combat soldier."

Danny shook his head. "I knew he'd worm his way out of it."

In the worm-his-way-out-of-it department we had another celeb. The Coast Guard wanted to butter itself up a little and spotlight its wartime activities so it offered us Commander

Gene Tunney. They could not deliver the Champ before eleven o'clock the day of the broadcast, which was the time our so-called rehearsal started, so I had no chance to talk to him before writing the script. I might have waited till he arrived, talked to him, and then written a couple of pages of talk, but that would not have left time for it to go through the complicated process required to get Coast Guard, or any Service, okay.

When Gene came in, I handed him the approved script and he read it over with Bing. He then said in a loud tone, "I won't say these goddamned things."

"What's wrong?" Bing asked, saving me the trouble.

"I just don't want to say this stuff," was his annoyed answer. "If you've got a typewriter around here, I'll write something I will say." He was given a room with a machine and in only a few minutes he emerged with some copy. "This is what I'll say." I read it.

"Sorry, Commander, but that hasn't been okayed by the Coast Guard."

"I order you to change this script," he ordered.

"Sorry, Commander, but you can't order me to do anything. I happen to be a civilian."

"It'll have to be changed or I'll walk off the show!"

"Very well, sir. I'll call the Coast Guard and tell them." I went back to Danker's office and told him the problem we were having with the man who had conquered "the Manassa Mauler."

Dan said, "I'll handle it." He picked up a phone and said to his secretary, Evelyn Finney, "Get me that guy at the Coast Guard." I never heard the "guy's" name.

After telling him of the trouble with Tunney, Danny listened for a few minutes, then turned to me. "Where is he now?"

"I don't know. He walked out."

Danny relayed this message, hung up, and told me, "He'll be back for the show."

He was. He did the okayed script, just as Marlene Dietrich had done hers after displaying a little artistic temperament. Of course, Dietrich's legs were prettier. But Gene's were stronger.

As the war ran through '44 and into '45, writers became more and more scarce. I did an awful lot of doubling and traveling.

Sunday after Sunday a command car pulled up in front of our house. It was Don Ameche and generally a friend who was a priest. We'd head for some service installation. Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy and the rest of the Chase & Sanborn show went by bus. But Don and I suffered from travel sickness and the motion and atmosphere of a crowded bus upset us.

So this is what happened one week to a couple of guys who were bothered by bumpy busses.

The Navy flew the show down to Norman, Oklahoma, where they had a training base at the University of Oklahoma. To fly us there they assigned two Marine Corps fighter pilots just back on leave from doing their thing in the South Pacific. The junket was sort of a reward for them. And they were the only two on the flight who had a good time.

The air over the desert in the middle of the day is generally bumpy. To say we ran into turbulence would be to say that a tidal wave was good for surfing. Besides this, our two fly-boys flew the two-engine transport as if it were a fighter plane, and whenever they saw anything on the desert that interested them they'd power-dive down to look at it.

Bergen, himself a pilot, got sick. We all arrived in Norman in a state of mild shock. They loaded us into a caravan of cars and started scorching across the desert at about eighty miles an hour bumper to bumper. But really! Those sailors kept the line so closed up there was hardly more than a foot between vehicles. The very thought of what would happen if the first car ran into anything was too frightening to dwell on. So I just breathed deeply and tried not to throw up.

It was Saturday afternoon when we arrived. It took most of the company until dinner time to get their landlegs back. It took me longer, and I found there was something definitely wrong with my ears. I went to a doctor at the base and he said the one thing I must *not* do was fly home. I must go by train. The Navy said they could get me space.

Those were the days when it was impossible for any civilian below the rank of robber baron to get accommodations on any railroad train. The services reserved or bought up all the space there was and unless you really had connections, you didn't get riding room.

Imagine my delight when the Navy told me they had space for me Monday afternoon on the California Limited. To catch this train I had to leave Norman by Navy car, go to Oklahoma City, and get a connecting local that took about three hours to make the trip to Newton, Kansas, where, if I were lucky, the California Limited would show up sometime, carrying with it one upper berth that a grateful Navy had managed to get for me.

The train that took me from Oklahoma City to Newton would make the most broken-down local on the Penn Central's New Haven division look like the Southern Pacific's old Lark, one of the most luxurious trains I ever rode on. There was, of course, no air conditioning. There were also no springs, no food, and not one thoroughly round wheel on the train.

Then came the joy of spending a few hours in colorful, fun-filled downtown Newton. Food was rationed and the eating places in town were not about to sell any of it to dudes who were just passing through. There was nothing available at the railroad station but sandwiches made from three pieces of blotting paper. They cut two white sheets a little thick and put a thin slice of pink between them. The cheese sandwiches were two squares cut from an old suit of flannel underwear covering some wallpaper paste. I couldn't even find a place in town to buy a book. But I can recommend the graham crackers at the A&P.

I spent a lot of time munching those graham crackers, pacing the platform, and looking up the track for the California Limited. As everyone knows, looking up the track is a sure way to bring the train faster. But it didn't work for me, even though I gave it some of my most intense looking.

But eventually it did come a-chug-chug-chuggin' along with the usual pretentious belching and puffing that steam trains used to affect. Conductors flung themselves off and began marching up and down the platform in a vaguely efficient way, and what with one thing and another the arrival of this second-rate train in that small station began to look like the Congressional Limited bringing President Roosevelt to New York from Washington.

The train was about fifteen cars long. The front ones were day coaches full of servicemen. Then there was a diner—one diner—and then the sleeping cars. I walked up to the Pullman

conductor with my pitiful upper berth ticket clutched in my hot and angry left hand. In my cool and calculating right hand I had a folded ten-dollar bill.

"How do you do?" I said cordially. "Remember me? I rode with you about a year ago from LA to St. Louis." He smiled and said I looked familiar. "Good to see you again," I went on, and we shook hands. "I have this upper berth and I wonder if you could do anything about getting me something better."

He glanced into his right hand as he stuck it in his pocket, looked at his book, and said, "Try Bedroom C in Car 1208X." I did. Sure enough, it was empty. A lot of other ones were empty, too.

The Pullman conductors had a great thing going with those empty berths and rooms on every train.

That evening I learned something else about wartime train travel. Every member of the train crew was in business for himself. I walked forward to the diner and as I stood in a line that stretched through two cars, I saw a dining car waiter having trouble making his way back to the Pullmans with a big tray of food. So I went back to my bedroom, rang for the porter, and told him I wanted a dining car waiter. The man came and I found that I could get almost anything I wanted if I used room service, almost nothing if I waited in line for a seat in the dining car.

Having had this experience with wartime train travel, when the Chase & Sanborn show went to Phoenix to spend a week at the Arizona Biltmore and do two shows on successive Sundays, one at Williams Air Force Base and one at Luke Field, I called ahead of time to ask how many diners there would be on the train. It was a good question. There were none.

This made Norma and me the two most popular people in our party, because she packed a mammoth basket of fried chicken and other goodies. When we got to the Biltmore we found it full of very wealthy Chicagoans who hadn't been told there was a war at all. Every morning a truck would dump off a load of *Chicago Tribunes* and they'd spend the day reading them and telling each other how cold it was in Chicago.

At Williams pilots were training for the B-17s and it was a

very gung-ho sort of installation. The men were on their toes, everything was immaculate, and the morale was extremely high. At Luke Field conditions were just the opposite. The officers, as well as the men, were bellyaching. It was very depressing. The difference, of course, was the commanding officer. Or maybe it wasn't. The food at Williams was great, at Luke awful. Perhaps an army *does* move on its stomach.

Very few schoolchildren studying World War II will read in their history books about Fort Western Avenue. It was located in Los Angeles, just south of Sunset Boulevard on Western Avenue, and the enemy never laid a glove on it. The fort was manned by such military tacticians as Major Meredith Willson, who handled the music on "Command Performance" and "Mail Call," two of several radio shows produced by the Army. The major had in his command some of the finest musicians in Hollywood (all those that were not grabbed by the Santa Ana Air Force Base), including the best-dressed private in the entire Army of the United States, Frank Loesser.

Don't get the idea Fort Western Avenue was manned merely by musicians. It also had a lot of brave joke writers, such as Frank Galen, who had written for Burns and Allen, and Bill Morrow, who later wrote for Bing. One of the most important cogs in this Army Special Services operation was Sergeant George Rosenberg, popularly known as Rosey. He saw to it that the proper stars were contacted and brought to "the Fort" for any broadcasting required by the Armed Services Radio. He also requisitioned whatever work was necessary from such civilian operatives as Don Quinn and me.

There was a time before the war when George Rosenberg, Nat Wolff, and Cornwell ("Corny") Jackson were the three agents from whom JWT bought most of its variety show talent, because these three men worked for talent agencies that controlled most of the top people. (MCA had yet to be heard of for anything but bands.)

George Rosenberg later became my agent. Nat Wolff, who headed the Office of War Information in Hollywood, later hired me to work for NBC, and Corny Jackson took Danny Danker's

place at J. Walter after Danny died. He was sold to Mr. Resor after Bob Colwell and I carefully weighed his qualifications with those of Nat Wolff.

I felt, and Bob went along with it, that Nat would be great in the job. But his record showed that he didn't like to stay for more than a couple of years in any one position. This tipped the scale to Corny. Corny stayed with Thompson for over ten years. In that time, Nat held two different jobs.

One of the most interesting things about Fort Western Avenue, which was not really the Army's designation for the installation, was that, while all the men stationed there (and living at home) were bravely serving their country, they were also still pursuing their civilian occupations. The writers continued to grind out material for the same stars and the agents were still handling those stars for picture and broadcast deals, while the musicians, particularly Loesser ("Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition"), wrote hits and got them plugged like crazy.

The truth is, they had a lot of spare time on their hands. They also had a secretary who wanted to become a radio actress in the worst way, not knowing she'd picked the worst way by working at Fort Western Avenue.

One day I found a message on my desk to call Jimmy Saphier, who was Bob Hope's agent. I did. After the usual amenities, Jimmy saw the conversation was drifting off into generalities and asked, "What did you call me about?"

"What do you mean? I have a message you called me."

"I had a message that Carroll Carroll called."

"Must be some mistake. I didn't."

That was my first clue to one of Fort Western Avenue's most active campaigns.

A few weeks later Frank Woodruff, who was producing and directing the Lux Radio Theater* for Thompson, called me and said, "I just had a funny call from a girl named Carroll Carroll, a radio actress. She was looking for a job and I had a three-line bit, so I gave it to her just for luck."

"Thanks."

* Just for the record, C.B. De Mille, who was the "producer"—actually just the emcee—used to come from home to rehearsal wearing director-type puttees splattered with mud and other stable litter.

“She thanked me for taking her call. And she said it was the funniest thing. Since she’s changed her name, everybody in radio talks to her when she calls.”

That was the tip-off on the Jimmy Saphier call. It wasn’t until the joke was over that I found out the kinds of games men play when they’re in an army five thousand miles from any front.

When the secretary, whose name happened to be Rosalind Russell, told my friends she wanted to be a radio actress, they immediately pointed out that her name was already usurped in the Hollywood heaven of stars and she’d never achieve any recognition until she shed her own name and took a name she could *make* her own. They suggested that since they all ran their lives according to numerology, which was very big at the time, they’d work out a name that would bring her luck.

The name they worked out, of course, was Carroll Carroll. But they warned her, “When you call for a job, if the numerology is to work, you must never say, ‘I’m Carroll Carroll.’ The phrasing must always be ‘Carroll Carroll is calling.’ Then you will be put right through.”

The phraseology worked great and the kid actually got a couple of jobs. But then one day her effrontery really came to the front and she called me.

“This is Carroll Carroll the actress,” she said.

“Yes?”

“Well, I’m beginning to make the name Carroll Carroll really mean something in the radio business and since your name sort of conflicts with mine and since you’re just a writer and a writer’s name doesn’t make any difference anyway, I wondered if you’d mind changing your name.”

I told her the only name I thought would suit me was Rosalind Russell, which had already been taken by another actress.

She got mad and hung up. Some “actresses” can’t take a joke.

Not only did Fort Western Avenue beg, borrow, and steal ideas from commercial shows for the ones they were supposed to write, they also de-commercialized all the regularly broadcast programs and sent them all over the world to our men in the field—as if they weren’t having enough trouble.

In addition to thus serving the armed forces, commercial radio was constantly being tapped for talent to promote and ac-

celerate the war effort. And the minds of those in the Red Cross, the USO, the United States Treasury, and all the other organizations and bureaus that were constantly doodling up shows because it was fun to be in show biz never thought any further about talent than “We’ll get Crosby and Hope.” And, naturally, they always did.

Since I was connected with Crosby, and to some extent with Hope, as well as the OWI, they also got me. Don Quinn and I must have done more of those service specials than any other two civilians in the whole world. We got so we sort of alternated.

While sitting in on a cutting session on a show Don was doing, I noticed that all along the margin of his script were notes and each note was merely the two letters DF. When the show went on, all the DF places had either been changed or eliminated. So I asked Phil Leslie, who worked with Don on the Fibber show, what DF stood for.

At first he pretended not to know—or really *didn’t* know what the two initials meant. Then suddenly it came to him. “Oh, yeah,” he said. “Those are the spots he thinks he has to do something about.”

“That I noticed. But why DF? I just make a check.”

“Well, everybody has his own little mark. He makes DF.”

“I understand. But the initials must stand for something. That’s what interests me.”

Phil hesitated a minute and then laughed before he said, “They stand for Daddy Fix.”

Daddy did some damn good fixing throughout the years. He was a very funny man and a very good man. His “Halls of Ivy” series starring Ronald and Benita Colman was perhaps the first *succès d’estime* of television.

A few weeks later I was working alone on a Hope show to kick off a bond drive. The gimmick of this one was that different stars were to be cut in from base hospitals around the country to tell of the sacrifices military men were making and then go into a bond pitch.

During the second quarter of the show AT&T said we wouldn’t be able to cut to Jack Benny in Palm Springs at a

hospital that was, before the war, El Mirador, one of the swankiest hotels in the area. The wires were down. This dandy news came, about five minutes before we were supposed to cut to Benny.

Cornwell Jackson was the producer of the show. I had pasted it together from the writings of Glenn Wheaton, Milton Geiger, Hector Chevigny, David Gregory, and a host of gag writers. But where were they when I needed them?

“What’ll we do?” Corny asked.

“I’ll rewrite what Benny was going to say for Bob.”

“There isn’t time,” Corny called after me as I ran back to the script room.

Four minutes later he came rushing in. “Bob’s on in five seconds.”

I pulled the paper out of the machine, rushed down the hall, did a Charlie Chaplin turn into Studio B, caught Hope just as he was starting for the mike, shoved the new sheets into his hand, and said, “Read this!”

Much to my surprise and delight, he got three good laughs and the show went on as planned.

This little drama took place at 6 P.M. Pacific coast, 9 P.M. eastern time. We had to do a rebroadcast for the West Coast three hours later, but AT&T told us the lines could not be fixed by them. “The show is over,” Corny murmured, “but the malady lingers on.”

I caught Bob as he was leaving his dressing room for some other commitment he’d sandwiched between our two shows. “If you give me that Benny bit you did, I can fix it up for the western show.”

“Yeah. Lemme see. Where is it?” He looked around the room for a minute and then a great light broke. “I remember walking off in a daze and saying to someone, ‘What did I just say?’ Then I handed the script to someone.”

“Who?” I asked.

“I don’t know. You’ll just have to write it again, dad. See you in a couple of hours.”

We had three script girls, Virginia Meyers, Dorothy Brown, and Helen Bushee. When I found Bob hadn’t handed the script to any of them, each was sent to a different eating and drinking

spot in the area, the Brown Derby, Mike Lyman's, across the street from the Derby, and the Bowling Alley, just across the street from NBC, a handy spot for a trombone player to get a quick one while some comic was on the air. It smelled gamier than the locker room of a semipro basketball team. But it was handy.

Virginia Meyers covered this spot, going from one person to another, none of whom had any idea what she was talking about. Finally she asked Paulette Goddard, at that time Mrs. Burgess Meredith, if Hope had given her a piece of his script.

Paulette thought a moment then said, "Yes. He came off. Gave me a couple of sheets and said, 'Look, they handed me this and I went on and got laughs and I didn't know what I was saying.'"*

"Could I have those pages?" Virginia asked.

"I don't have them. I just handed them to Buzz."

Meredith reached into his pocket and asked, "Are these what you're looking for?"

When they all returned for the repeat show, I told Buzz how he'd saved my life and asked him how it happened that he'd put those two sheets of paper in his pocket.

He said, "They had typewriting on them. I figured they must be important."

When the war ended, Bing was among the first to go to Germany and entertain our army of occupation, and it was in Deutschland, when it was under allies, that he got tagged "Der Bingle."

One of those who subbed for Crosby while he was away was Frank Morgan. Frank was another of those actors who feign to be vague about everything but are always right on the money when the lights go up. He liked to drink, strictly for business reasons. Every old-fashioned cocktail he ordered added to the gross annual sale of Angostura Bitters, which was owned by his folks, the Wuppermans.

Two of the joke writers who were working with me at that

* Bob is one of the most adept sight readers in the business. While he's reading what's at the top of the page, he's scanning and mentally editing what's to follow.

time were Elon Packard and Stanley Davis. Elon was a handsome young man just starting out as a writer. Stan was a little older and a little fatter. He had descended into the joke-writing business from the heights of a custom tailoring establishment called Marianni and Davis. Marianni made the suits. Davis made the contacts. One of them was Groucho Marx, who told Stan he ought to print cards saying “Stanley Davis—Jokes and Suits.”

One day Stan and Elon came back from a weekend in Palm Springs all excited. On the way home they’d picked up a kid discharged from the Navy. They said, “He’s the most fabulous mimic we’ve ever heard. You’ve got to hear him right away.”

Mindful of what had happened with Victor Borge, I heard him right away and he was indeed fabulous. And he did an incredibly good imitation of Frank Morgan. I booked him at once and told Elon and Stan to work out something.

On Thursday, Morgan showed up for rehearsal all full of phony fluster and apology. He had left home without his glasses (he claimed), so he wouldn’t be able to rehearse. And because he wouldn’t be able to rehearse, he said, “What’s the use of me staying here? I could go home and rest.”

“I’ll send a boy for your glasses,” I suggested.

“No—no—you can’t do that—there’s—no one at the house.” Then his face lit up with a sudden inspiration. “Thursday, you know. Maid’s day off.”

I said I thought he’d better stay anyway, and listen. That would give him some idea of what the show was about till he could get his glasses. I told him, “We’ll have somebody read your part for you.”

“Very well. Fine. Good. Let’s *always* do it that way.”

“If you want. Let’s go.”

The cast started reading the buildup to Frank’s first line. When it came, the ex-sailor read it. Frank, who had been sitting there resting with his eyes closed, sat up as if a cherry bomb had gone off under his chair. “Who was that?”

We all pointed to the kid in the sailor suit. “Shall we go on?”

“Yes. Oh, yes. By all means. Go right on.”

Frank sat there listening the way a narcissist looks at himself in a mirror.

“Any suggestions or ideas?” I asked.

“Yes. I have an idea. I think I might have left my glasses on the seat of my car.” He went out to look and, sure enough, he was right and ready to read.

The name of the sailor Stan and Elon had picked up coming in from the Springs was Larry Storch.

George Murphy—later Senator Murphy—also did some pinch-hitting for Crosby. And it was arranged that when Bing came back from Germany, George should turn the show back to him. To make it a real gala we added Bob Hope to the reception committee.

But Bing’s ship didn’t arrive in New York in time for him to get to Los Angeles for the broadcast, because at that time he did not choose to travel by air. Today he’s as happy in the sky as the Flying Nun.

So we put Bing in a studio in New York and had him do the show with George and Bob and Marilyn Maxwell, just as if they were all together. But of course the audience knew that it was actually a very expensive conference call they were tuned in to.

Part of the script went something like this. George said, “Hey, Bing, guess who’s here to welcome you.”

“It must be Hope. I can hear him breathing. He gets so eager when near a mike. Better stand back, George, before he goes berserk and claws you.”

“Well, if it isn’t Der Bingle,” said Hope. “Same old Cros. Jealous of us younger men who can still experience a little passion. I want to tell you, Bing, this is wonderful.”

“Glad to have me back, huh?”

“It is so refreshing after working with you all these years to be able to do it and not have to look at you.”

“And that goes double for me, Toboggan Beak. It’s just as I planned it. And if you think it’s easy to talk a ship’s captain into bringing his barge in a day late, forget it.”

What went on from there I don’t know. I don’t even know how correct my memory is. After all, this is being written twenty-five years later by a guy who forgot to bring home scripts—unless one happened to be in his pocket when he left the studio.

Murdo MacKenzie, who was engineer on The Kraft Music Hall, had a complete collection of recordings of the show up until the time he was taken into the Army, which was probably about '43. He locked all these in a closet at NBC, at Sunset and Vine, put an extra padlock on the door and the sign, "Personal Property of Murdo MacKenzie. Do not disturb." When he got back the closet had a new door and was full of brooms and mops. Murdo was told, "We needed the space." An awful lot of radio that was a most important part of its time went down the drain like that.

There'll be some changes made

Not long after the war ended, Bob Hope and I started to work on *So This is Peace*, a sequel to *I Never Left Home*.

The dedication said, "This book about peace is respectfully dedicated to those who say, 'I don't want to hear any more about war.' Remember that what you don't hear about, you forget and when you forget what war is like . . . you're in danger." It still seems to make sense. But what happened?

The book opened with these words: "In spite of the fact that half the nations of the world claimed they were fighting to sign a peace treaty, the end of the war came so suddenly they were all caught with their pens down." Twenty-five years later nothing seems changed but the price of the pens.

Jack Goodman, who was the publisher's editor on the book, personally brought the galley proofs out to us. He said this was because he was in such a hurry to discuss some changes and get the book on the presses. Actually, what he wanted to do was win back—try to, that is—the advance his firm had given us, or at least recoup his own personal losses at pool (Hope had his own table) and golf (Hope has his own course) incurred when he was out on the earlier book. This enterprise was doomed to disaster for Jack. Mickey Mouse might as well have tried to take on Minnesota Fats and Arnold Palmer.

Thus it came to pass that Jack (and I) followed Hope down to La Jolla one Friday afternoon for a weekend of golf on a course that should have been restricted to mountain goats. The sunbaked clay was so hard under the sparse grass on the not-so-fairway that a lucky bounce could land your ball on the fourth green of the Tijuana Country Club.

I don't play golf. I may be the only person who spent more than forty years in the advertising business without playing

either bridge or golf. It must be some sort of record. But I had to flatten my arches walking up, down, and around the miniature alps of that links because occasionally Bob or Jack might say something relevant to the book and someone had to be around to remember what it was.

After dinner, however, we spent most of the night deciding on what should be done. I took all the notes and headed north for LA the next morning. Jack was to go straight back to New York from San Diego and I was to call him, at home if necessary, the very moment I had all the changes straightened out.

Mostly the changes were moving whole blocks of copy from one part of the book to another and making them fit into their new context. Bob had added a few jokes that had to be dovetailed in wherever they fit. It was about two days' work. When I finished, I did exactly what Jack had told me to do. I called him at home the moment the corrected galleys were ready.

That turned out to be about 12:30 A.M. the following Wednesday morning. This comes to 3:30 the same morning, New York time. A sleepy voice said, "Hello."

"Hello, Jack?"

"Yeah. Who's this?"

"Carroll."

"Carroll?"

"Is this Jack Goodman?"

"Who are you calling?"

"Jack Goodman."

"I'm Jack Goodman."

"Well, this is Carroll. Carroll Carroll. Remember? The Bob Hope book? That lousy golf in La Jolla? You told me to call you the minute I had the corrections ready and that's what I'm doing. Wake up, for Christ's sake, so I can give them to you."

"Oh? Oh, yeah. Bob Hope. Fine. Okay. Go ahead. Let me hear them!"

I spent about an hour and twenty minutes carefully going over every change. Jack kept making noises and grunts to indicate he was following me. When I was finished he said, "That's very interesting. What did you say your name was again?"

"My name? Is this Jack Goodman?"

“Yes. Of course. I’m Jack Goodman.”

“Is this Jack Goodman of Simon and Schuster?”

“Hell, no! I’m Jack Goodman of the Empire Waist and Blouse Company.”

“Why did you let me go through all that?”

“It was very interesting. If you wake a guy up at—”

I hung up. Coincidences like that don’t happen very often, but when they do they always happen to me.

My next problem was telling the long-distance operator (there was no direct dialing then) that the number she’d given me, and I’d talked to for eighty minutes was a wrong number.

The whole incident taught me a lesson. Never take anything for granted. Now, when I call my home and a woman answers, I ask if it’s Norma. If it is Norma Carroll. If her husband’s first name is Carroll and what the address is. If all the answers are right, I tell her I’ll be home for dinner. I could probably pick up a phone in New York, ask for the police, and get Scotland Yard.

Not very long after the war ended Bing became financially interested in a clever little item, now called audio tape, that a couple of thoughtful GIs brought home with them from Germany. Anybody with even the tiniest knowledge of broadcasting could see the potential of this new and versatile way of recording. But it was Bing, with his stake in the tape, who used the muscle of his box office power to force it onto the network-dominated broadcast industry.

When his Kraft contract expired, though he was wooed in many ways to remain, even to the extent of being offered stock in the cheese company (a new ploy at that time), he preferred to improve his tax structure by selling the services of his corporation to a sponsor, any sponsor, who would let the corporation produce his show on tape. He was then in a position to offer this show to any network that would break down and allow this new form of recording to breach the rule that all its broadcasts must be live.

The American Broadcasting Company, once the Blue Network of NBC, eager to do anything to put itself in contention with the two older nets, bought Bing’s idea in order to get Bing.

By so doing it launched audio tape and changed the face of radio broadcasting.

The transaction also changed my life. It terminated my association with Bing. Why? Bing made no suggestion that I come with him. Why? Others who were with him as long as I was have tried to analyze it. The closest anyone came to a sensible reason is that "Bing casts people. A different show required a different cast." Not entirely true. He took his engineer, Murdo MacKenzie, with him. Very complex man, Crosby.

When Danny Danker died suddenly, about four or five days after his doctor had warned him to take it easy, Norman Blackburn and I tried to share his responsibilities. I had one of the two front offices, full of beautiful custom-built furniture of my own design, and almost nothing to do. With the title of editorial supervisor, I did a lot of suggesting and editing but very little writing. I felt as if I'd been deprived of my voice. The Kraft Music Hall had been sort of a column for me. Through it I was more or less able to say anything I felt it was important to say and be certain it would be heard by millions.

It was a dull time. I had all the hash marks of success, including access to all the best hash houses, but no way to maintain within myself any feeling of accomplishment. To add to whatever depression this induced, there was another cloud on the horizon—television. Radio, although no one in it was willing to face it, had reached a plateau. Nothing new was happening. There was nowhere to go but down. No one could even imagine how far down it would go.

People working in radio chose, ostrichlike, to consider TV a flash in the pan, so they turned their pans in the other direction, unwilling to face it. The tiny screen, the darkened room, and a signal that couldn't be thrown beyond the horizon all turned off the radio active people. They had no way of knowing about the soon-to-come coaxial cables, microwave relays, and satellites that now carry live pictures from one surface of the globe to another, and even from moon to earth.

This was the point where I should have broken with radio, as many did. But all of Thompson's TV work was being done in a tiny studio in New York. I had no desire to return east in

conflict with a strong loyalty to a company that held the second mortgage on my home.

We'd been renting for almost eight years, thinking always that we were only temporary westerners. Suddenly, in the middle of the war when there simply were no houses for rent, our landlord sold out and the new landlord said we had to move at the expiration of our lease. Even finding a house was difficult, and paying for one at wartime prices was preposterous. Although I was getting a salary that was still considered good in the sixties, I hadn't put together enough of a nest egg to make the kind of soufflé I needed.

Salaries were frozen. But I was constantly getting flattering offers to do other radio shows or switch to film writing. They were all for more money. But I hated the idea of those thirteen-week-renewal blues I'd seen so many of my friends sweat out. And besides, I enjoyed writing Bing's show. So when we had to make a buy, I told Reber that if JWT couldn't figure out some way to help me, I'd have to leave for more money elsewhere. He was most sympathetic.

Only Norma and I would find a house that had to be bought for cash—and within a few hours. Other people take time. They think things out. They compare values. We had no such opportunities. The house had almost the space we wanted and needed and could easily be added to. And it was the only one available in exactly the area of Beverly Hills we wanted, convenient to school and shopping in gas-rationed times.

It was owned by Loretta Young's mother, had been built by Ernest Torrance's brother, David, had been the home of Virginia Bruce and later Meredith Willson, and there was another offer on it that we had to produce cash to beat within six hours.

We made a thousand-dollar deposit and did something that still seems impossible. We got a first mortgage on the strength of my JWT job and a second mortgage from JWT and bought the house almost the way you'd buy half a dozen handkerchiefs or a pair of shorts. We had no builder look at it, no electrician. We knew nothing about it except that we had to buy it fast, and we did so because the location suited us.

It turned out to be an awfully good house to live in, to rent,

and finally to sell. It may have kept me with JWT a year or so longer than I should have stayed. And after I left them, and their checks stopped coming to me every month, my check went to them monthly till the second mortgage was paid off.

Hanging in my office at home is a wooden plaque given to us by our sons. Fastened to it is the wrought-iron number 618 taken from the door of the house. Above the number is a brass plate that says, "618 N. Rodeo Dr., Beverly Hills, California, the Carroll Carroll Family's Home for 13 Happy Years from 1944 to 1957. Purchased June 1944—Sold October 1969." Bruce and Adam said, "We thought we'd give it to you, sort of like giving the skipper the anchor from his ship." Sentimental chips off the old blockhead.

It was not long after we moved into the new house that John Reber took another nosedive as a talent scout. He'd seen a small-time comic named Barney Grant and thought he could be built into a star, just as he had thought he could do with the showboat captain Billy Bryant and just as we almost did with Jerry Lester, who substituted for Bob Burns on many occasions, was very cooperative, worked very hard, but never got to the hearts of the listenership. I was sorry about that.

John teletyped, wrote, and talked to us on the phone about what great things he and "his boys" in the East were doing with Barney Grant. He kept hitting on that "East" theme. There had been great rivalry between Reber and Danker—they had sort of a Grant and Lee relationship, only for a while Reber in the role of Grant (not Barney) was losing. Then Danny died and left the West again under John's command. I was half sorry he hadn't sent for me to come east and help with the Grant problem and, remembering the Billy Bryant incident, more than half happy he hadn't.

The day the Barney Grant Show was to go on the air, Reber TWXed to be sure and hear it and wire him what I thought.

There was nothing, really, to think. The show turned out to be a collection of cheap jokes that had been told better by many comics before Grant—and before Washington and before Alexander the Great. Even this mediocrity would not have seemed so dreadful had the opening of the show not been ostentatious beyond belief.

There was a flourish of trumpets, a roll of drums, a crash of cymbals, the thunder of tympani, the blare of bugles, more drums, and then a resounding crash that made what happened in the Triumphal March from *Aida* sound like a lullaby. Dead silence followed. Then a man hollered, as if announcing Houdini's return from the grave, "The Barney Grant Show!!!"

The wire I sent said, "Dear John. Heard show. Think you had the wrong guy. The only one who could have followed that opening was General Grant!"

Next morning that wise man called and asked, "What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing. I just didn't like your show."

"Nobody did. I meant you're not the same."

"In what way?"

"Never once did you try to fight me on anything I told you about the Barney Grant Show."

"It was your show."

"That never stopped you before. Maybe you'd better come back to New York."

"That's crazy. I've got three kids who are better off in Beverly Hills. I wouldn't do that New York commuter bit for all the dough in a world of bagels. Forget it."

John said, "Suit yourself."

That conversation apparently was the opening gun in a campaign. There were other efforts to bring me east. Finally after about two years I received a letter from Stanley Resor inviting Norma and me to visit the Resors at their Snake River Ranch near Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

"This means," I told her, "that I am either about to become a vice-president or I am about to be fired." I suspected the worst but I didn't know which one it was.

Norma's reaction was, "Don't be silly. We've entertained Mr. Resor several times. Why shouldn't he reciprocate?"

This was true. He always enjoyed being with us, liked Norma very much. The last time we'd seen him, he had dinner at our house and then we took him to Pasadena to catch the train.

During dinner he'd said he hoped that on the train home he'd be able to get sliced bananas. Because of wartime shortages, the train coming out hadn't had any.

“It’s ridiculous,” he said. “You can’t get a simple thing like sliced bananas on the Super Chief and then I come to your house and you have your own fig tree.” I couldn’t see how one thing related to the other. But before dinner as he admired the fruitless tree, he had told us how Helen, his wife, loved fresh figs.

After dinner Norma disappeared and gift wrapped a couple of bananas. She attached a card saying, “Not to be opened till breakfast.” She handed it to him as he boarded the train.

Getting to Resor’s Snake River Ranch was not half the fun. We had to take a very early hedgehopping plane full of fishermen and their gear heading for northern Idaho. None of the stops the plane made before reaching Jackson Hole had what you could call a first-class airport. What you could call them was open fields. But when we got to Jackson Hole there was a difference. The field seemed to be plowed.

Helen Resor and her two daughters were waiting for us in a station wagon when we got off the plane. I felt worse than I’d felt a few years before when we’d landed in Norman, Oklahoma. Funny part of it was, the ride from the airport to the ranch also reminded me of the Oklahoma experience. The road was narrow and winding and the driving was fast.

The Resor ranch was a lovely working spread just far enough from the Grand Tetons to give you a wonderful view of those magnificent monuments. The house was comfortable, furnished in ranch style, and featured a dining room with a wall of glass that looked toward the Tetons and was built, bridgelike, across the Snake.

Norma had been told to bring her slacks and dungarees. She didn’t. She didn’t own any. The last—and only—time she’d been in pants was when she wore Nan Sunderland’s, up in the snow at Walter Huston’s, and she had looked silly. She looked just as silly in Helen Resor’s. The girls’ jeans didn’t fit her because they were too skinny where married ladies seldom are.

After lunch and a tour of the ranch buildings, Stanley (nobody called him that, not even Bob Colwell, whom he regarded as a son) took us for another winding automobile ride, which I didn’t need, to show us the country and Grand Teton National

Park. And that's just what he did. He *showed* it to us. We drove up to the gate. He said, "That's Grand Teton National Park. It doesn't pay to go inside." I think it cost fifty cents a person. But it was a beautiful drive through spectacular country.

Norma was allowed to get back into a skirt for dinner, before which Mr. Resor asked if we'd like a martini. And *a* martini is what he meant. There was no suggestion whatsoever that another was available.

While dallying over this solitaire cocktail, Mr. Resor said to Norma, "That was an awful thing you did to me with the bananas."

It took her a minute to remember what he was talking about. Then, "Why? What happened to them?"

"When I got on the train I gave them to the porter and asked him to put them on ice. And I kept them on ice till I got home and gave them to Helen."

I sang, "Never put bah-na-nahs in the ree-fridge-or-ay-tor."

"Why did you do that?" Norma asked, totally perplexed. "I wrote on the card, 'Not to be opened till breakfast.'"

"I wanted to surprise Helen. I thought they were figs from your tree."

Neither of us ever again saw Mr. Resor that he didn't say, "You and your rotten bananas!"

Not only was Norma chided by our host, I got into a little trouble, too, because I like to argue about things to find out how people feel and reason.

"Have you ever seen anything more beautiful than those mountains?" Mr. Resor said, as proud as if he'd built them.

"They're grand. But I think the Empire State Building is more significant."

There was a long, long pause. "How in the world can you make such a statement?" It was said with all the patrician chill he could muster. And when it came to patrician chill, he really cut the "mustered."

"The Tetons are an accident of nature. The Empire State Building is the work of man. I've never seen the Taj Mahal, but from what I've heard it could stop the Grand Canyon cold. After all, what is it but a gaudy gully?" Then I heard myself arguing with the head of the world's largest advertising agency,

a man I admired tremendously, and I got a funny feeling below the belt and shut up.

After dinner, which was, of course, perfect, an exciting evening had been planned. Mr. Resor broke out a microphone and a machine on which to make records (no tape yet) and said to the girls, "Mr. Carroll will now teach you microphone technique."

That these lessons were not the first faltering steps of their spectacular careers in broadcasting is clearly evidenced by the fact that neither of them ever had anything to do with it. His son wasn't interested in the business either, and it's challenging to speculate whether heading up a company like J. Walter Thompson—if Stanley, Jr., could have made it—or being Secretary of the Army was a worthier goal.

Right after breakfast the next morning we were back in our work clothes and dangling our legs over the tailgate of a truck traveling north in a fine drizzle to a spot where a piece of road needed fixing. It was the approach to a bridge that crossed one of the twists in the Snake River, and our host sat in the cab of the truck and kept dry while his guests shoveled gravel into the potholes made by an earlier rain.

To impress us with the importance of our work, we were told, "I'm doing this work to cooperate with Mr. Rockefeller." That he didn't say which Rockefeller and that he used the first person singular seemed to me to be very careless for a man to whom explicitness and the choice of words were a business.

After we all got nice and wet and dirty, we went home for lunch, and I haven't the slightest idea what we did in the afternoon. It is highly possible that Norma and I spent all of it rubbing each other's tired muscles.

That evening we drove into Jackson Hole to see a movie. And I learned something new about the great American West. I was already aware that about the only movies you can see in cow towns like King City, California, or Jackson Hole, Wyoming, are westerns. But the new thing was about the girth of cowboys. For Mr. Resor, Burl Ives, who played a cowhand in the film we saw, threw the whole picture out the window. "There is no such thing," said Mr. R., "as a fat cowboy."

"I thought Burl was perfect for the part," I argued. Why I insisted on arguing with the man, I don't know.

“He was. But there’s *no such thing* as a *fat cowboy*.”

“They must have figured there’s no such thing as a thin Burl Ives, so they hired him.”

This sort of backchat didn’t bother Mr. Resor at all, because he considered anyone in the radio department of his company to be a nut. They didn’t even dress respectably. When I first joined JWT, everybody but us radio chickens wore stiff collars, vests, and a serious expression. We wore soft collars, no vests, didn’t get into the office till all hours of the morning, and sometimes the socks we wore were shocking.

On one occasion when Cal Kuhl went back to New York to attend some important meeting, he was in a briefing session with Mrs. Resor. She was a copywriter when Stanley married her and was the first of the smart advertising women. It was Mrs. Resor who thought up using testimonials from highly placed people to advertise popular-priced goods to the lowly buyer.

The office was crowded when Cal got there and so, crazy radio man that he was, he sat on the floor and folded his legs under him. Unfortunately, he didn’t fold his ankles under him. His argyle socks flashed around the room like the eyes of a tart in a bar that’s closing.

Shortly after he returned to California he received a package with Mrs. Resor’s card. Just her name, no message. The box contained three pairs of plain black hose.

Not until the last day we were at Snake River Ranch did Mr. Resor reveal his plan, which was that I should come back to the New York office and become what he called a writer-representative on specific accounts that he had in mind. I didn’t like the idea one bit. I hate being a salesman, and that was what the “representative” half of the job would be. What’s more, I couldn’t see us leaving California and moving back to New York to do something I wasn’t crazy about doing.

Mr. Resor, who wasn’t crazy about not having his plans accepted, let me know a few weeks after I returned to Hollywood that it was management’s decision that I should either come east or resign. They were very nice about it, though. They said I should take my time, find what I wanted, and then make the move. And I believed them.

I really didn't mind leaving. Bob Colwell had resigned some months before to become a founding partner of Sullivan, Stauffer, Colwell and Bayles, and almost all the friends I had in the company were in the West. But I was bombed plumb out of my britches when exactly one month later I was told that my next check would be my last one. The news shocked me so, it was so contrary to anything I thought the company might do, that I got Mr. Resor on the phone and let forth a diatribe so hot and blue that I was ashamed of myself for talking that way to an old man. But never, before or since, have I been so angry and hurt.

Ten years later, when Bob pulled out of SSC&B to take it easy, Mr. Resor prevailed upon him to take it easy at Thompson's expense. It was something Bob couldn't do at anyone's expense and Mr. R. knew it. But he wanted Bob near him for friendship and counsel.

Not long after that, I was having lunch with Bob in the company dining room and Mr. Resor passed our table. We shook hands and he said, "Well! Castro Castro!" I'll never know whether that was a Freudian slip or a Machiavellian thrust.

The Philadelphia story

The first time I met Ward Wheelock was at a party given by the agent Ken Dolan and his wife, Shirley Ross, the eye-filling, sweater-popping, piano-playing lass who first sang “Thanks for the Memory” with Bob Hope. Wheelock was the head of an agency named after himself. It never would have occurred to him to head an agency named after any other man unless it were Teddy Roosevelt.

Teddy was Ward’s ideal. His idol. I don’t know whether this was because Ward was conscious that he looked and was built a little bit like the Tiger of Oyster Bay or whether he got to look like Teddy because he admired him so much—although that doesn’t seem scientifically sound. Anyway, the extent of his adulation can be measured by the fact that Ward was the custodian, prime preserver, and constant user of the word *bully*. To him it was a bully word.

The Ward Wheelock Company, successor to F. Wallis Armstrong, was the house agency for Campbell’s Soup, and for a long time sponsored one of radio’s best-known shows, “Hollywood Hotel.” Ours was an exciting meeting. Ward told me he thought the Bing Crosby show was “Bully!” Before I could say thank you, he had gone.

The next time we met—and it was a solid five or six years later—it was in his Philadelphia office. Wearing a faded, out-at-elbow, alpaca office jacket right out of a nineteenth-century English countinghouse, he sat behind an ugly oak desk and grilled me—literally—for about two hours. He bombarded me with questions on anything and everything he could think of. He had no intention of hiring a man he didn’t know a whole lot about. I got the job.

The events leading up to the Philadelphia mixed grill began shortly after my violent phone call to Stanley Resor. The first

of these events took place within a gratifyingly few days when CBS called me to do two ninety-minute promotional specials starring Frank Sinatra and Dinah Shore. Then my friend Nate Spingold of Columbia Pictures, who liked what I'd done for them on the film *The More the Merrier*, commissioned me to write an hour radio show, starring George Jessel, to promote their picture *The Jolson Story*.

In about four weeks I'd made over a third of my whole year's salary at J. Walter. This would have made me very happy if I hadn't happened to remember a story of David Freedman's about a man named Patrick O'Toole who was very proud of the fact that his salary was \$200 a week. But he only got it once a year, on Yom Kippur, when he took over the custodial duties of a synagogue so that no one need violate the holy day.

There's a similar story about Joe Frisco, the great comic and horseplayer, who, toward the end of his career, wouldn't cut his top price. He was holed up in his hotel room when a friend called and begged him to take an offer for considerably less than what he thought of as his salary. The friend begged, and begged, and finally said, "Joe, at least go over to the man's office and talk to him about it."

"Annn—a—a—and g—g—g—get la—la—la—locked out of my room?" Joe stuttered.

I was always subconsciously afraid of getting in that position, which made free-lancing—a feast or famine type of life—a little scary to me. So when Larry Berns, who had produced and directed the two Sinatra-Shore shows, suggested I talk to a man named Arthur A. Bailey of the Ward Wheelock Company, I talked to him.

Larry was producing and directing Campbell's Soup's "Jack Carson Show" with Arthur Treacher and Irene Ryan for the Ward Wheelock Company. In suggesting me to Art Bailey he was, in effect, selecting his own boss.

People tell me that when I left Thompson I said, "Having worked for the Yankees [which no longer means what it did then] I'll never work for another advertising agency." But what Wheelock offered I couldn't see myself refusing. On the surface it seemed like very little responsibility, very little work, and a lot of money. It didn't work out that way.

Ward was a stormy character who attacked every problem as if he were Teddy Roosevelt shouting "Charge!" at the foot of San Juan Hill. He drove a Cadillac convertible the way Achilles drove his battle chariot, forcing traffic to open up before him. Occasionally, rushing—he was always rushing—in from the Main Line, he'd leave his car with its motor running in the middle of the street outside the old Broad Street Station in Philly and dash to make a train for New York as it was pulling out. Such was the nature of the man (and the Philadelphia police) that an officer would park it for him and see that the key was left in the nearby Ward Wheelock office.

He was not an easy man to work for, but we got along very well because, I think, I occasionally questioned his decisions.

When I joined the company, it was also producing, in New York, a program called "The Hildegarde Show" because it starred that lady of song who played the piano with long gloves on. Her show was in a slump and Ward asked me to come east to see if there was anything I could suggest to boost the ratings.

It's pleasant to remember that the head writer on it was Joe (now Joseph) Stein, who did the libretto for that wonderful musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Ward's idea was that I come to New York, see one broadcast, meet the writers and Anna Sosenko, the producer, and stay for Hildy's upcoming opening in the Persian Room at the Plaza. From all this I was, hopefully, to get some idea on how to freshen up her radio show.

The opening turned out to be formal and the announcer, Ernest Chappel, made it possible for me to have a dinner jacket made, literally, overnight so that I could attend properly accoutered. His tailor pulled a Hong Kong job before they even had the idea. Then a funny thing happened. The Philadelphia office was supposed to arrange my train accommodations back to Los Angeles. It wasn't that I was afraid to fly. It was because flying was bad for my not-too-good ears.

When they told me what they'd succeeded in lining up for me, all plans were changed. True, rail travel tickets were still tough. The trains were jammed with homecoming servicemen going in all directions. And no one was about to give up the under-the-counter dough to be had in black-marketing space.

What Philadelphia had for me was a Pullman seat from New York to Harrisburg, where, at midnight, I changed to a train on which I had an upper to Chicago. From there I had a lower on the California Limited, a train on which I'd ridden twice too often. All this happy hoboing was to start the afternoon after the Plaza opening and after I'd had my meeting with Hildegarde's staff.

The first thing I did was call Norma's uncle, Sam Neger, whose motto was, "If you can get in, don't go," and who could get in almost anywhere. He got back to me in about two hours with a bedroom straight through to LA on the Broadway Limited and the Super Chief. I then called Ward in Philly and told him about the travel pattern his office had laid out for me.

He said, "It's the best we can do with conditions as they are."

"Lewis and Clark had better accommodations," I told him.

"I'm leaving tonight in a bedroom on the Broadway and the Super Chief."

He was torn between anger and admiration. I picked up my new dinner clothes, carried them aboard the Broadway in a box, and didn't get to see Hildegarde work a room until over two years later at the Coconut Grove. In the meantime her broadcast went right on as if nothing had happened.

The next time Ward and I locked horns was over a directive he sent me outlining personnel changes in the production setups of our various shows. By this time Jack Carson and Hildegarde had been dropped. We had "Bob Crosby's Club 15," "Corliss Archer," and a daytime cut-rate version of "Double or Nothing" presided over by Walter O'Keefe.

When I called Ward and told him that I disagreed with his plan because it broke up winning combinations of people and promised to create some whopping personality conflicts, he said, "We've made the decision. That's how we'll do it. When we make a decision we all march together."

"We'll march to defeat!"

"What do you mean?"

"We now have a smooth-running operation. All people on all shows are getting along well with each other. Your changes will upset this and create some personality conflicts. All the shows will suffer."

"It's your business to see that they don't!"

"That's what I'm doing right now."

"Well, we've made the decision and that's it."

"It's a bad decision!"

"I'm running the company!"

"I thought I was running the shows."

"We've made a decision and we're sticking to it."

"No use my telling you again why I think it's wrong. It's all in my letter."

"Good-bye!"

Ward hung up, leaving me without a last word. I actually went around saying good-bye to the people in the office because I thought I'd be fired. The next day a long wire arrived from Ward saying things should be left unchanged.

But Ward didn't lose many. When we were putting together "Club 15" he wanted the Andrews Sisters. Their price was not within our budget. "I'll get them," Ward promised. And he did, way below their known price.

When Ward was to have dinner with us for the first time, Art Bailey briefed me. "When you serve cocktails, Ward will ask for a martini. Make it a big one. He only drinks one. He'll toss it right off and that'll be his drinking for the evening."

When she was supervising the setting of the table, Norma asked me what kind of wine glasses to use.

"None. Art says Ward just knocks back one martini and that's 'eighty-six' for the evening on the booze."

"I'm serving wine. If he doesn't like it, he needn't drink it."

Clearly I was up against another Teddy Roosevelt complex.

When Ward arrived, things went just as Art had said they would. He asked for a martini, got a strong one, and tossed it off. And that was it. Until we went in to dinner and the wine was poured.

As I was carving the roast, out of the corner of my eye I saw him toss off the Burgundy the way he'd done with the martini. His glass was no sooner refilled than he emptied it in one swallow. It was lucky I had plenty of wine. Ward kept slugging it down the way a Japanese alcoholic sops up saki. But neither the martini nor the wine seemed to have any effect

on him. When dinner was over he stayed a polite hour and then was up, up, and away.

Ward lost the one big quixotic battle of his life. He loved to sail and had a beautiful schooner with a crew of two that he kept in Caribbean waters. (One of my big problems was arranging never to receive an invitation to use the yacht for two weeks. His “invitation” was like marching orders to the marines. “You’ll pick her up at Kingston on August 12. She’s yours until August 28th when you come ashore at Nassau.” Then there was a list of what you brought aboard, what you found aboard, and what you wore aboard.)

Mr. and Mrs. Wheelock, their son, and another couple and their son were planning to put out from Hamilton, Bermuda, for Antigua when storm warnings were raised. Ward was advised not to sail. On what basis he decided he could survive the storm, beat it or defeat it, will never be known. The vessel, and all hands, was lost without leaving one single, solitary trace. Not a splinter of furniture nor a life preserver was found, although the Navy and Coast Guard carried on an extensive search.

The only theory on what could have happened came from a sailor who pointed out that the schooner had a large, open deck area aft and that while running before the storm, with everything battened down, this area could have been swamped and carried her down by the stern.

“Bob Crosby’s Club 15” was my special project for Ward Wheelock. It was fifteen minutes across the board—that’s five days a week. And it was *my* show not only because I wrote it, with the help of David Gregory, but because it was different from any such show that had yet been heard. It was more than merely fifteen minutes of singing. It used its regular cast in bits and routines that got laughs by commenting on the passing scene. Even though none of these talk spots ran longer than forty-five seconds to a minute, I can no longer figure out how we did so many different things in such a short time. We always had at least four songs, two commercials, and an opening and closing. These took between eleven and twelve minutes. Figure it out. All that was left for comedy was about two minutes and

forty seconds. It was a tightly packed show, did very well, and, most flattering of all, was widely imitated.

As for flattery, it was just that and nothing else that led to my interest in Bob Crosby. Because it was flattery and nothing else that prompted him to come into my office and say, "Why can't you do for me what you did for my brother?" This was the same question Bob had been asking his mother, and of life itself, from the first moment he realized that he was destined always to be "Bing Crosby's brother."

Bob knew as well as I did that, in those days before tape, no one could do anything for anyone beyond that person's ability to deliver. Today, however, you can edit a personality before showing it to the public, a fact that has become a potent weapon in politics.

Not too long after Bob's complimentary request, in the early days of World War II, we put together a package for Old Gold cigarettes that starred Bob Crosby and his Bobcats with Les Tremayne as the announcer. This little *divertissement* was dedicated to the discovery and presentation of up-and-coming young girl singers. Each week we had a different chick. She was interviewed, sang, and showed off whatever comedy talent she possessed in a weekly feature we called "The Slide Song."

This was simply a variation on the old vaude routine of singing, dancing, or playing an instrument, then stopping to tell an irrelevant joke. Burns and Allen did it as they danced. Henny Youngman still does it with his fiddle. We did it by having Bob sing an old-fashioned song—the kind they sang with slides in the old nickelodeons—stopping every few bars for Les Tremayne and the girl guest to tell a corny joke in the pompous manner of the period, with the delivery always half the laugh. This will give you an idea how it went:

BOB: (sings) By the light of the silvery moon
I love to spoon . . . (pause)

GIRL: (talks) Mr. Tremayne, are you the crude type of fellow who likes a girl who necks?"

LES: (talks) No, Miss Lee, I'm the type of man who necks a girl who likes.

BOB: (sings) With my honey in June . . . (pause)

LES: (talks) Have you thought of getting married, Miss Lee?

GIRL: (talks) Oh, Mr. Tremayne, you must ask my mother.

LES: (talks) But, Miss Lee, I don't want to marry your mother.

Funny no one has ever tried it for television. They're still doing the same jokes.

Among the rising young stars we introduced were the socko Kay Starr, a lovely willowy lass named Peggy Lee, and a fat girl (later a thin girl) named Jo Stafford. The program was terminated when Bob was commissioned to be what he called "the secondest second lieutenant in the Marine Corps."

Bob served with honor and acute impatience in the Pacific and when he came home we tried the same show again, this time teaming him with a rising young film star, John Lund. Norma and I had met John and his beautiful wife, Marie, at Sandy and Larry Berns's house, where we used to go to parties at which we played the Game.*

John and Marie Lund were two very attractive young people. She, besides being pretty, possessed all those wifely arts once thought to be the only qualifications for a girl's success. She was witty, made her own clothes and wore them beautifully, and she could cook, too. John had a fine working knowledge of Shakespeare and the voice to deliver it, together with looks and bearing that interested Paramount enough to make him Olivia de Havilland's leading man in *To Each His Own*, a picture that won Olivia an Oscar.

Knowing that John would be worth more money after *To Each His Own* was released, I made a handshake deal for him to work with Bob Crosby on the show we were assembling for Ford. The next day Mickey Rockford of MCA was in my office with a list of possibilities for the show. I asked him if he handled John Lund.

Mickey asked, "Who is *he*?"

"A young contract player at Paramount."

"Never heard of him. You ought to be able to get him for two or three hundred."

This was around the price John and I had agreed on.

* "The Game," Indications, was the name we had for old-fashioned charades. It was very popular in Hollywood and became the basis for several early TV shows, notably Mike Stokey's "Pantomime Quiz."

The next day MCA phoned and said they could get me John Lund for \$500.

I called John and asked him if he'd signed with MCA. He asked, "Who's MCA?"

The saving on John Lund was only part of the serendipity of playing the Game at Larry and Sandy (Sandra Gould) Berns's. It was at one of these soirees that I met one of the few men who not only pioneered radio but later TV—Charles Vanda.

One Monday evening not long after our first meeting we brought Charles and his wife, Shirly, home for cheese and crackers and coffee after a preview at Paramount. I'd seen Charlie the evening before in a charade show called "Movietown RSVP" on KTLA, a local station then owned and operated on half a shoestring by Paramount. Charlie had been awfully quick and good. And our friendship had reached the point where we were having fun constantly nipping at each other's heels, so I teased him by asking why he'd been so slow in guessing the action.

His answer was, "If you think it's so easy, come on the show with me next week and see for yourself."

I did and stayed with it, with Bud Stefans, Dick Lane, and others, for almost two and a half years. We went on every Sunday around 9 P.M. and stayed on as long as we had material. The whole show was sort of BBC-dy but it was fun. Actually it was the only show in town.

The networks had not yet reached the coast, and the kinnies they sent their key LA stations were the greatest thing that ever happened to the local oculists. So this hambone little game show, because it had a gimmick and featured some show biz people, commanded almost the entire TV audience in Hollywood and environs.

The gimmick was a remote pickup from the home of a star where two teams of actors, writers, and other movie personalities did the usual charade bit against each other. But instead of each team trying to guess what the other was doing, both teams played to a panel at the KTLA studio, where we could see but not hear them. They could hear and see us. The team that got its message across to us fastest was the winner. We got to be pretty good and very popular.

It was fun to be a TV star, to have people stop me on the street and ask for my autograph. One Monday morning a parking lot attendant hollered all the way across the blockwide lot, "Hey, Carroll, come here." I was so enthralled with this attention that I did what he said, walked all the way across the lot to where he was. When I reached him he put out his hand to shake mine and said with great cordiality, "I caught you last night. Boy, were you lousy!"

The postwar edition of the Bob Crosby radio show, sponsored by the Ford Motor Company, was essentially the same as the first one, and I think we discovered some of the same girl singers all over again. While doing very well, it was suddenly canceled. This, I was told, was the reason:

The first Mrs. Henry Ford was embarrassed by it. When she got to gabbing with wives of other motown biggies whose companies sponsored radio shows, she could say with some pride that her husband had Crosby on the air. But when the ladies brightly said, "Oh, Bing?" she had to say, "No, Bob."

This sort of thing was the story of Bob's life. He took over Bing's show one summer, and when he was announced the studio audience groaned. It wasn't that they disliked Bob. It was simply that they were disappointed not to see Bing.

It was only natural, having had two promising but aborted starts with Bob Crosby, that I should think of him when Ward Wheelock asked me to plan a fifteen-minute across-the-board musical for Campbell's Soup. Bob had the best-known name available and I knew how to write for him.

Fortunately for me, Cal Kuhl, another veteran of the Crosby wars, was available to help me start the show. Cal had left JWT for better pay at the Biow Company, which was then shot out from under him. When he returned later to J. Walter Thompson, he was followed on "Club 15" by Ace Ochs and Murray Bolen. The show ran for seven years. It brought back the Andrews Sisters, featured Patti Clayton, the Modernaires, the Pied Pipers, and Margaret Whiting, gave Jo Stafford her best presentation as a single, and "discovered" Gisele MacKenzie. One of Glenn Miller's top arrangers, Jerry Gray, supplied the music.

So that time would not lie heavy on my hands while I was writing the five-times-a-week "Club 15" show, I was also working with Bert Prager, producer-director of another Campbell's Soup show called "Corliss Archer." It was a situation comedy with one standard situation and only as much comedy as I could rewrite into it.

Bert bought scripts on the open market for this pre-generation-gap teen-age foolishness. I then tinkered with them, to the disgust of the original writers, to keep the various characters in character and punch up the dialogue so that, even though it sounded less than true to life, it would at least get some giggles. Ultimately this featherweight Penrod-type tale, with a female Penrod, came up strong enough to give Walter Winchell, who was on against it on Sunday, some solid competition.

This was largely due to the fact that people, given the choice of hearing Walter warn that war with Russia was just around the corner, preferred to escape to an addle-witted girl and her foolish boyfriend who outwitted their parents without materially destroying the *entente cordiale* between the age groups.

In spite of these two shows, Ward felt that "the devil makes work for idle hands," so I met daily with Walter O'Keefe around 9 A.M. at NBC to rummage through newspapers and try to help him figure out some topical jokes for his opening monologue on a bargain-basement daytime variety of the original "\$64 Question" show called "Double or Nothing." We gave away about \$6.40.

One of the joys of being a contestant on this show was a guided tour of Hollywood conducted personally by Walter. You can imagine the joy O'Keefe got from this daily routine.

Part of the tour was to Santa Monica, where the contestants, who came from all over the country, were given a quick look at the mighty Pacific. One day, standing at the foot of Wilshire Boulevard where it dead-ends in a cliff that overlooks the ocean, Walter, almost embalmed in boredom, made a sweeping gesture toward the expanse of water and said, "There it is, Lake Erie. And now you know how stout Cortes felt when with his men he stood silent on a peak in Darien."

Walter figured if Keats could be mixed up historically and call skinny Balboa stout Cortes, he could louse things up

geographically. The truth is that the last time I was in Connecticut I checked the whole thing out and you can't see either Lake Erie or the Pacific Ocean from any peak in Darien.

It was a tricky business interviewing people live on a show like "Double or Nothing," and as far as I know Walter made only one blunder, a case of bad judgment, but it was a pip. It almost blew the fuses on the NBC switchboard.

While interviewing a woman who said she was a waitress, he made the mistake of asking her if she'd ever had anything interesting happen while she was waiting on table. I once had a tape of her answer, made from an acetate air check, but I lent it to someone who never gave it back. In substance her answer was that she had a steady customer, a good tipper, who used to come in every day and kid around a lot. Then he didn't show up for a few weeks. When he came back, he wasn't his old jolly self. She asked him what was wrong and he told her that his wife had left him and that he was sad and lonely.

She reported herself as saying, "You need a woman to cheer you up. You need a good screw."

Today that line would probably get a big laugh. At that time it created what director Richard Hayden (once comedian Professor Carp) used to call a "deadly 'ush."

Walter knew there was nothing he could say that would not make the situation worse, so he tried to forge ahead with the show by starting to announce the next contestant. But the waitress realized that she'd goofed and tried to fix things up by saying, "I meant he should go to a hardware store and get some screws and fix things up around the house."

It's a funny thing. Although there was an occasional embarrassing incident, there were very, very few miscues like that when interview shows were done live. Of course, when tape became acceptable on all networks there were none. There wasn't as much fun for the listener, either. There was no ever-present peril of a possible boo-boo to lend spice to a dull affair.

There's an interesting thing about tape. We did five live "Club 15" shows a week with hardly ever a fluff of any sort. Then the time came when we could use tape and occasionally taped a couple of shows ahead so that the artists could get a little rest. The taping sessions invariably fetched up such an

assortment of misreadings, mispronunciations, miscues, and other artistic misdemeanors as you would not believe. The knowledge that there was no onus to get it right the first time seemed to make it hard to get it right at all.

One day I found out, to my surprise, that some of the Campbell's Soup people, who were in Canada for a sales meeting, had "discovered" a radio artist named Gisele. She sang and played the piano and enchanted them with her voice and her musicianship. Thus enthralled, they came home to Philadelphia, raved about her, and Ward Wheelock, typically, signed her for "Club 15" before telling me, or anyone, about the deal.

I don't know what became of the Ward Wheelock files, but wherever they are, or wherever they went when they went up in smoke, there's some fascinating consideration given to Gisele, whose name turned out to be Lafleche (rhymes with fresh), a perfectly common name in French Canada.

"We've got to change it," I insisted in endless memos, "or people will think we've got a stripteaser working in 'Club 15.'"

That even one person, and that one me, might think this, was so disturbing to the straitlaced soup company (ever try to lace a soup company?) that it was agreed her name must be changed. But to what? It finally came to light that while her father was a French Canadian, Gisele's maternal grandfather was a MacKenzie. And so I suggested we re-name our star Gisele MacKenzie.

Gisele MacKenzie today is no more like the young girl who came down from Canada to work in "Club 15" than I am like the kid who sold cinnamon rolls on Saturday afternoon in Hillman's in Chicago, and I am proud to say that I had something to do with changing the appearance of each.

All Gisele needed when we first saw her was a brand-new hairdo and some new clothes from head to toe, and also to lose quite a bit of weight. With the help of my friend Eddie Rubin, who had run a theater school in Dallas that helped people to change their image, we sharpened up our lovely Canucklette.

What she brought to us was superb musicianship, perfect pitch, a beautiful voice, a native wit, and the ability to play piano and violin with great skill. It is a pity that so much of

her talent got lost somewhere after her long appearance on "Your Hit Parade," the television version of "The Lucky Strike Hit Parade," a show that, instead of making stars, abandoned them to relative obscurity.

One of the periodic problems we encountered on the "Club 15" show was Bob Crosby's tendency to be hit suddenly by attacks of acute laryngitis. One of these developed one day about half an hour before air time. Jack Benny was rehearsing for his regular show down the hall at CBS. I rushed down to see him, told him the problem, asked him to help out, and promised to fix the script any way he wanted. My strongest argument was that it would only take him fifteen minutes.

He took it very calmly, said he'd be glad to do anything I wrote for him, and when the time came sauntered down the hall in his characteristic way and saved the show for me. What a wonderful man! And one of the few comedians I never really worked with until I returned to J. Walter Thompson. They sent me west to help prepare Lux commercials for Jack.

Another time when Bob's throat suddenly closed up on him, we were saved by a pop singer whose face was his misfortune. He looked like a small-time knit goods salesman or some guy who'd spent forty years in the post office sorting mail, but his voice was beautiful. His name was Buddy Clark.

On less than two hours' notice, and with only one hour of rehearsal, Buddy stepped in and sang arrangements that were strange to him, read a brand-new script that was being written while he was on the air, and made us all very grateful for a wonderful job of pinch-hitting.

When the show was over he got a phone call inviting him to fly up to Palo Alto for a football game Saturday morning in a private plane and come back Saturday night.

A little over twenty-four hours later Buddy Clark's career ended near a broken airplane that had run out of gas and tried to make a landing on Alvarado Street, a wide thoroughfare in downtown Los Angeles.

At the time we started "Club 15," with the Andrews Sisters, they were the most thoroughly kidded women this country had ever seen, including the Cherry Sisters who couldn't sing at all

but tried. George Burns used to say the Cherry Sisters sounded more like the pits.

Like so many show biz folk, the girls felt that the only way to keep themselves from squandering their money, or lending it to their friends, and yet making it work for them as part of their professional wardrobe, was to buy diamonds, which, in case of an emergency, are always hockable. These Patti, Maxene, and LaVerne wore all the time.

It was a little shocking to see them show up for a morning rehearsal, wearing rehearsal clothes, but with their arms weighted with hundreds of carats of what Carol Channing has called a girl's best friend. LaVerne, perhaps the sweetest but also the least gifted of the three girls, physically and otherwise, was responsible for most of the laughs, although Patti was supposed to be the comic. But you couldn't make up the kind of things LaVerne said.

One morning she showed up not feeling very well—and morning was about eleven thirty. The moment she started to sing, she realized what had to be done and she stopped and took a solemn oath. "I am never," she said, "never going to drink again! Never! From now on nothing but champagne!"

It was also LaVerne, with a rock pile of bracelets on each arm, who said, "I don't know why my arms get so tired."

Maxene was married to the music publisher Lou Levy in the "Club 15" days and, kidding around with Lou one afternoon, I said, "How about a song for the girls called 'The Mish Mosh Polka'?" The internal Yiddish pun (*meshpocheh* meaning family) amused Lou and he told me to write a lyric and he'd get some music for it.

The song about a mixed-up family had music written in New York by Dick Manning. It was recorded by the girls, and Dick and I became close friends and collaborators on a number of songs that we did by mail and telephone. When I returned to JWT, Dick did most of the music for the advertising jingles I wrote there.

"Club 15" folded after six successful years. And, since that was the only show the Ward Wheelock Company had left on the coast, that ended its West Coast operation and we parted the

very best of friends, a parting distinguished by one of the most generous severance arrangements I have ever heard of.

Promptly on its demise CBS hired me, Herb Allen, an ex-announcer and creator-producer of a successful Chicago daytime TV show called "Hail the Champ," and Ben Feiner, a stockbroker turned entrepreneur, brother-in-law of Richard Rodgers, to create a half-hour daily TV version of "Club 15" to be called, with a certain amount of creative speculation, the Bob Crosby Show.

After Herb, Ben, and I spent a few weeks in Hollywood discussing how we thought the show should be organized, we journeyed to Stateline, Nevada, where Bob was playing at Sahati's, the first casino where a body could drop a buck after crossing the California border.

There we spent five aspirin- and dexedrine-filled days and nights discussing our plans for the show with Bob and Gil Rodin, the man who did more for Bob Crosby than anybody else in the world.

Gil was a sax man in the old Ben Pollock Dixieland Band. When Ben decided to dissolve the group, Gil persuaded the other sidemen to buy the book from Ben and get someone with a name as a "leader." Gil had heard Bob Crosby singing with Ted Weems in San Francisco and decided that with the Crosby name, and enough voice to mumble an occasional chorus, Bob was the man to front them.

At the time Bob was reluctant to go along with the plan because, as he said, "I don't know how to lead a band."

"All you have to do," Gil told him, "is give a downbeat. The drummer will take it from there."

The Bob Crosby Show, we decided at Stateline, was to be a thirty-minute variety format featuring Bob, a girl singer, the Modernaires, two audience participation game segments involving important prizes, a guest two or three times a week, an eight-piece band, and all this five times a week. Impossible? Sure. But we did it.

Gil, with whom I'd worked closely all through "Club 15," made one demand—that the balance of the music pickup on the TV show be of radio quality and not the slipshod, careless sound that existed then, and to some extent still exists, on

television. And *I* had one idea I was determined to incorporate in the show.

I remembered how successful vaudeville singers were when they broke off a song in the middle of the second chorus and spoke sentimental words more or less relevant to the thought in the song. It was this idea, with a message, that I thought we ought to use to close the show. It seemed to me that this would reach right out and grab the type of woman who watched TV in the middle of the day.

Everybody but Bob, Gil, and Herb Allen put me down. Hubbell Robinson and Harry Ackerman, then the twin geniuses of CBS-TV programming, wouldn't hear of it. They said it was corny. That people would laugh at us. Who would believe a Dixieland band leader giving simple thoughts on love—love of woman, love of country, or love of God?

Finally a compromise was reached. The whiz kids of CBS said they'd let us try the recitative but it could only run thirty seconds. The one under discussion ran a little over a minute. I agreed and showed everyone how I was cutting the piece.

But a funny thing happened. When the show went on the air, Bob just happened to read the long version and we just happened to get such a flood of mail on what came to be called "The Godspot" that no one ever said a word against it again.

To give you an idea of what all the expertising was about and what finally got on the first show and (with the ones that followed) brought two or three hundred requests a week for copies, here it is:

Bob sang one chorus of an old song, "Dream." After the first eight bars of the second chorus, he stopped singing and, as the music continued softly under him, read from a small card held right above the lens of the camera but just far enough away so that he had to strain a little to read the words. This made it appear as if he were looking right into the eyes of the viewer. And the viewer, looking back, knew those great big expressive blue eyes wouldn't lie.

It was on the word "dream" that he broke off and read: "Dream—don't ever be afraid to dream—anytime—anywhere. For without dreams none of us would be quite so happy. Dreams are more important than anything in the world. The

wheel—without which we'd still be in the dark ages—was inspired by someone's dream of going beyond the horizon. Benjamin Franklin had a dream. Edison—Marconi—the Wright Brothers—just dreamers. 'What of us romantic dreamers wrapped in thoughts of love—happiness and peace of mind?' You're not impractical. Dreams—all dreams—are the most practical things in the world. Without them there just wouldn't be a world. So hold to your dreams. On dreams alone, yours and mine, rests the whole future of civilization. Without dreams there are no homes—no families—no love. These are what dreams have created."

At the last word he went back into the last eight bars of the song.

Ben Feiner, the executive producer at CBS-TV in charge of the Bob Crosby Show, was a gentle man who, because he was gentle and soft-spoken, was considered ineffectual by some people around him. And, for the same reason, he was. But he had a beautiful corner office with two exposures, two floor-to-ceiling jalousied glass walls, that gave him a clear view west and north. Everyone was envious of his office and his job and when someone asked maliciously, "What does Feiner do in that office all day?" Frank Galen, creator of "Meet Millie," said, "He does very important work. He looks out both those windows and watches for glaciers. The moment he sees one coming he sounds the alarm."

Between MCA's origin as a band booking office and its later incarnation as an entertainment conglomerate, the Music Corporation of America was a talent agency that enjoyed a sort of Macy-Gimbel relationship with the William Morris Company. The Bob Crosby Show was an MCA package. I was a William Morris client. This, when you got to the very bottom of the barrel, was the reason I "left" the show, which, I'm sorry to say, folded not too long thereafter. It's what happens to many winning combinations when management for "business" reasons destroys a personnel mix.

I had hardly cleaned out my desk at CBS when Nat Wolff, at that time head of the radio department of Young and Rubi-

cam, one of the world's great advertising agencies, arranged for me to work with Walter Bunker, Bob Hussey, and Buck Buchanan (later with JWT) in putting together the General Electric Hour to be hosted by Joseph Cotten. It was the first plunge into television of a major picture studio, and probably the best thing I got out of it was a lovely garden office on the 20th Century-Fox lot, and the use of a secretary for getting out some writing that had nothing whatever to do with television.

Twentieth sold the package to Y&R and Y&R to GE on the basis that the film studio would supply fifty-minute versions of some of its most famous films (*Laura* was one) remade with new casts. This was to be dropped into a sort of "movie mag" framework that featured backstage shots of 20th's work in progress and on-the-set interviews with the company's top stars.

In this way 20th planned not only to sell General Electric small appliances with small versions of its old big pictures, it also proposed to sell its *new* big films. The plot didn't work. The stars (or their managers) saw the spots 20th was asking them to do not as publicity for the studio—as covered in their contracts—but as commercial advertising for GE, which it was.

In addition to this insurmountable obstacle, the show ran into a lot of nagging smaller problems. Sid Rogell, acting as 20th's executive producer, steeped in the *laissez-faire* way the old film industry made movies, found it difficult to adjust to the reality that a television episode absolutely had to be done in time to go on the air at an irrevocable hour on an irrevocable day. This made meeting deadlines assume the quality of that dream in which you see yourself running after something that disappears just as you're about to catch it.

Sid's attitude was incubated in the film industry's original fear of radio and its new mortal fear of television, which it thought it could delay by staying out until it was ready to re-create television in its own image. A measure of the efficiency of the whole operation can be taken from the info that the director 20th hired for the framework segments of the show, a stranger to me named Joe Parker, had to borrow \$1,000 from me (which he repaid) to join the Directors Guild. The fact that I write it now bears out the famous old proverb—"Never kiss a homely girl or borrow money from a poor man."

What I had to do with General Electric's 20th Century-Fox Hour was doomed to go down the drain. The first day of shooting it should have been clear that there was a hex on the operation. We were filming a tour of the fabulous 20th Century-Fox lot—the railroad yard, the French village, the Egyptian temple, the western street. And we were finishing up with a long truck shot down one New York street on the Fox lot and across another. Just as we approached the intersection, cameras grinding, another truck crossed in front of us. In great big letters on the side of the vehicle, under the picture of a roaring lion, it said, "Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Inc." As Jimmy Durante would say, "What a revoltin' development!"

Easy to fix? Sure. But the incident had sort of a lion-in-the-manger quality that was hard to explain.

However, one of the joys of that frustrating stint at 20th was watching them shoot *Carousel*. Actually they were reshooting it. They'd taken a lot of footage up in Maine with Frank Sinatra they were now doing over with Gordon MacRae. It was great.

I hadn't been in Maine for many years, so I enjoyed having it brought to me at no expense whatsoever. It was wonderful to wander over to the set in the afternoon and luxuriate in the aroma of a Maine clambake, chowder, and lobster party. They flew in real eastern lobsters, clams, and fish; built fires, and spent many long hours shooting it.

One hot afternoon Joe Cotten and I were on our way over to the air-cooled sound stage with the Maine beach to smell the fish. Although by this time I'd been in California over twenty years, I still walked the way I'd learned to in frenetic New York. Finally Joe took me by the arm. "Slow down," he said. "Walk Virginia."

Not a day goes by anymore that I don't catch myself "walking New York" and mentally take my arm and tell myself "walk Virginia."

I suppose everybody who knew her has a Judy Garland story. But I may have the only one in which she doesn't turn out to be the winner.

I was one of several writers who came and went (according to Judy's whim) on her first TV special, produced by her then

husband, Sid Luft, and directed by Ralph Levy. The work was not easy. We'd sit around and pitch ideas and when one would come along that Sid liked, he'd go over it carefully with whoever had thought of it and then call Judy.

"I have a great idea," he'd tell her. "This is what we're going to do." He'd then explain the idea and spend the next few minutes listening. Finally he'd say, "Okay, dear!" and hang up. Then he'd turn to us and say, "Your idea stinks!"

All I remember of the show was a song-alogue I wrote in which Judy sang and talked about the great performers who had played the Palace—Broadway, not Hollywood.

A few months after the broadcast I saw Judy at a party the Johnny Mercers threw to celebrate their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. She didn't remember me. There may have been a reason.

When Norma and I had been hunting for a house to buy, we were shown an attractive one in Westwood Village. It wasn't right for us in any way but we never forgot it. As we walked from room to room we found in each one a champagne glass half-full or empty. Judy was living in it at the time. One of her bad spells.

That party Johnny and Ginger gave was one of the few really warm and friendly big bashes I ever attended. There were no PR people, no reporters, photographers, or gossip columnists, no one who was not really a friend of the host and hostess.

It was held at Mike Romanoff's, took the whole place for the evening, and ran neck and neck with the fabulous Westwood Hills Marching and Chowder Society's charivaris put on two or three times by Johnny himself with Bing Crosby, Pat O'Brien, Johnny Burke, Jimmy Van Heusen, and a cast of hundreds, including guys like Fred MacMurray who played jam sessions with such pros as Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Jack Teagarden, Gene Krupa, John Scott Trotter, Manny Klein, Sam Fried, Perry Botkin, Joe Venuti, and, of course, Johnny ad-libbing the blues about the people present. Everybody performed, even Herb Polesie, who introduced his own calypso version of a song called "The Dipsy Doodle." Decca made a record of it. If anyone owns it, it's a collector's item. I think they only pressed one.

As the Mercers' party began to disintegrate about two thirty, George Wells, who had left Thompson to join Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and remained there "whence all but he had fled," said he was going out to Judy Garland's. I didn't think George should drive so I said I'd drive him out. Nobody seemed to care if I was in any condition to drive so away we went.

There was a whole new party going on at Judy's, featuring a couple of other girl singers—Helen O'Connell and Lisa Kirk. We found everyone gathered in a large room with a vaulted ceiling and a grand piano on a platform at one end of it. Just looking at it, you could see that it would make a small voice sound like Mario Lanza in a shower. What it would do for Judy was to be anticipated.

At last, to the astonishment of the two other singers, Judy suggested that "just for fun" each of them sing her best song. Both girls were pretty good, but neither of them wanted to go up against Garland on her home grounds and after an evening of partying. Lisa, I believe, got so mad she rushed into another room to have a good cry. Helen sang.

Then someone went to fetch Lisa. Judy, the home team, was to close the inning. Lisa walked out, fire in her eyes, whispered a couple of words to the person at the piano, and to everyone's amazement began to sing—as I have never heard it sung since—"Somewhere Over the Rainbow."

Miss G. was literally hoist by her own petard. The party broke up almost immediately and I distinctly remember putting a nice dent in two Cadillacs—mine and someone else's—as I left the driveway.

The return of the native

It was only a matter of minutes after NBC and CBS started to produce television shows on the West Coast that each came independently to the decision that, no matter how they tried to enlarge their plants, the CBS radio studios at Sunset and Gower and the NBC radio studios at Sunset and Vine could never be made to meet the ultimate demands of TV. So, as quickly as they could acquire land, each network began building.

CBS chose a large site located conveniently near the Farmers' Market and La Cienega's "restaurant row" (and not too far from the Beverly Hills Brown Derby and Dave Chasen's) at the corner of Beverly Boulevard and Fairfax Avenue, right in the lap of the Jewish delicatessen belt. NBC, not so gourmet minded, broke ground in the valley beyond Warner Brothers in what is now known as "beautiful downtown Burbank."

Columbia had quite a head start on the Burbank operation and was quietly going ahead with plans for a great gala, an opening luncheon and tour of the installation, for the press and local advertising agency personnel. NBC, not to be beaten, sent out luncheon invitations to view and tour its new Burbank installation before CBS was ready, and before NBC itself was even remotely ready. While CBS was waiting to have a finished plant to show, NBC was content to have only a roof and four walls and the challenging concept of intercommunicating toilets.

A floor was laid and a bar and buffet set up in one area we were told was a studio. It was like holding a preview of a movie that had not yet been shot. We were led through huge areas of floorless empty space, getting our trousers covered with dust, lime, and mud. These spaces were connected by narrower floorless empty spaces, and occasionally a guide would point out an even smaller floorless empty space and say, to every-

one's consternation and delight, "Here is where we have another of our intercommunicating toilets."

When the luncheon ended and everyone was trying to dust off his clothing and making his manners to our host, John West, I said, "It's beautiful, John, and a challenge to your decorator. But the important thing to remember is that without writers this place could quickly become a warehouse." Every year the possibility grows less and less remote.

Several years after having viewed and occupied an office in CBS' Television City at Beverly and Fairfax, I moved into an office in the finally completed Burbank studios of NBC. It was then, and not until then, that I realized all the intercommunication really *did* come through the toilets. I wasted a miserable year on a series of trivial jobs for people I had trouble relating to. The only thing good about that NBC year, ironic really, was that the moment my contract expired Norma, Bruce, Adam, and I drove to New York to launch Leda on the sea of matrimony and set Bruce adrift as a freshman at Columbia College. Almost the moment we arrived, Nat Wolff, who was then a programming VP at NBC, asked me to do a favor for him and named a price that was a favor to me.

There were two reasons Leda was being married in New York. One was that Harry Salter, when he was musical director of the NTG show, promised when Leda was born that he would "supply the music for the princess' wedding." So we wanted the ceremony to be near the music. The other was she wanted to be near the groom.

Since I had done virtually nothing for NBC the whole year I was under contract, it was delightful to be hired immediately after the contract expired. Naturally, it was to do work that was unnecessary. An elaborate script, which everyone agreed would never be used, had to be written simply because someone had promised General Motors to show them a script on a certain date. Since the fact that it was an exercise in futility was agreed upon when the deal was made, it was amusing to do a "50 Year History of American Popular Music" using every possible great star I could think of in a broadcast that would have run about three and a half hours and cost possibly a million dollars. It would have taken a couple of minutes just to

read the names of the stars. And it would have been a hell of a show. The script is now in the Carroll Carroll Collection at the University of Wyoming.

One night Bob Colwell called me and said, "As long as you're in town, you might as well pick up some expense money." And before I knew it I was back in an office at J. Walter Thompson writing for Bing. Commercials!

The Ford Motor Company had bought a fifteen-minute across-the-board radio show starring Bing Crosby and Rosemary Clooney. One commercial in each show was to be delivered by the stars. But it was pleasant working with Bob Colwell again. And it was interesting chronologically. I resigned from JWT a couple of months after Bob did to become a founder of Sullivan, Stauffer, Colwell and Bayles, and I returned to Thompson a few months after Bob returned to Thompson for rest and recuperation after ten years of killing but rich-making work.

I liked returning to the avuncular atmosphere that still pervaded the Thompson Company in the late fifties. Nevertheless, around Labor Day, Norma, Adam, and I climbed into the old green Caddy and headed for Beverly Hills so Adam would be home in time for the opening of Hawthorne School. But Bob's blandishments followed me west and by Thanksgiving Day we were all back living in New York and I was again a regular member of the Thompson Company, where I kept being stopped by people who would say, "Hello. You been away? I haven't seen you for a while."

While negotiating for my return to alma mammy, I found out exactly what an advertising agency vice-presidency was worth at the time. The man I was dealing with was Howard Kohl, treasurer of the company and a very stern man with a dollar, but secretly a very warm, sentimental person, possibly made a little wistful by the fact that so many people thought of him as an ogre.

Howard's one idiosyncrasy was calling everybody, as an English schoolmaster might, by his last name. This inspired Ed Rice to make up one of the all-time company jokes. He said, "Carroll Carroll's the only man Howard Kohl calls by his first

name.” Howard finally got around the problem by calling me C.C. (One day I was sitting alone at a table in the company dining room and a man asked if I would mind if he joined me. I welcomed him and he introduced himself saying, “I’m from the Amsterdam office. I’m Wessell Wessell.” I was afraid to say I was Carroll Carroll for fear he’d think I was making fun of him.)

As for the price of a vice-presidency, I was asking for \$2,500 more than Howard was really crazy about paying. Finally, after a little thought, he said, “You don’t want to be a vice-president, do you?”

“No,” I said, “I held the title at Ward Wheelock and I don’t think it made me a better man.”

“Very well. You have a deal.” He put out his hand. “Welcome back to the company.”

Although I returned to JWT as a specialist on knotty problems, little by little I became more and more involved with the nutty ones. And, in spite of the fact that I was practically out of the Hollywood scene, I became the resident expert on Bing Crosby and Bob Hope and how to go about getting cinema stars to do commercials before it became the “in” thing for them to do. “In” meaning in the money.

Whenever an account was in trouble, I was called in on the job and that made one *more* who was in trouble. I gradually became “poet” in residence, on call for all social and sentimental occasions, writer of jingles and sales meeting shows and official gagman and puncher-upper of corporate speeches. When one of the really big wheels of the company, Sam Meek, retired and Bob Colwell was ordered to write his handsomely printed biography as a token of the corporation’s esteem, I collaborated on the job.

It always amused me that the company gave Sam a biography of himself as a going-away present. It bore out what a lot of office quipsters said, that Sam didn’t know what he was doing half the time. The company apparently wanted to fill him in.

The truth is, Sam was a most important man in the early growth of JWT, the architect of its fabulous, far-flung, and forward-thinking international setup. For years no other agency had one like it, and to this day none has one *quite* like it. A

bona fide character, Sam was constantly dashing all over the world buying things and leaving them for the next Thompson man to come along and bring home for him. Sam was always forgetting his laundry or his dress clothes. If you were planning a trip to any place on earth, the last person you'd tell had to be Sam unless you wanted to pick up a pair of pajamas that the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo was holding for him or a complete set of flatware from the Silver Vaults of London. It is said that Sam once dashed into the barbershop in the Graybar Building on his way to the airport and said to his regular barber, "I've only got ten minutes. Cut my hair."

The barber said, "I can't cut your hair in ten minutes."

"Okay," said Sam. "If you can't do it alone, put two men on it."

I worked on the radio and TV activities of almost all of Thompson's accounts at one time or another, but I eventually became almost totally involved in "house" projects. This got started as a result of a slidefilm narrated by that famous old radio announcer, Danny Seymour, which I prepared for a party given by JWT's board of directors at "21." I was not at the party.

The occasion was the celebration of James Webb Young's fiftieth year as one of the bastions of the J. Walter Thompson Company. That word is not used as a joke. The company had plenty of those, too, but Jim Young was not among them.

Although it's out of print and hence very difficult to find in bookstores anymore, Jim Young's slim (but pregnant) volume called *A Technique for Producing Ideas* is perhaps the most valuable book a young man starting out in the advertising business can own.

One day I joined a group of young representatives at a table in the JWT dining room. Being the age I am, I did this in an effort to learn how the other half lives. When I said, "Hello, I'm Carroll Carroll," what came right back at me was, "Oh, you're the son of a bitch who wrote the record Ken Hinks made us listen to for half an hour when we were down at his Maryland farm for one of those weekend seminars of his on how to be a JWT rep." Who said young people aren't articulate?

It turned out that Ken was so pleased with a long ballad of his life that Hal Taylor—then Thompson’s top radio producer—and I had taped for his retirement dinner that he played it for anyone who would listen and a lot of people who wished they didn’t have to. It was a series of lyrical and musical parodies on the then popular nun song “Dominique” held together by bits of narration. The narration was written to be read by Dan Seymour, fourth and youngest president of the 107-year-old Thompson Company, who was planning to resume an earlier career—that of Danny Seymour, ace radio “name” announcer of such outstanding entertainment as “Aunt Jenny” and “We, the People”—in honor of Hinks.

Dan, however, was unable to get back to New York from the West Coast with much more time to spare than it takes to clamp on a butterfly black bow tie and get to “21” where the dinner for Ken was being held. Accordingly, with the true grit and hearty stick-to-itiveness of 100 percent all-American boys, Hal and I got in touch with Jay Jackson, an announcer (now broker) who had worked with Danny in the halcyon days of radio and who did a fantastic imitation of him.

We told Jay our problem and he was good enough to stop off at Eddie Abrams’s JWT workshop on his way to catch a plane for Bermuda. In fifteen minutes Jay recorded (in one take) the ten-minute narration Danny could not get back to town in time to record. (Okay. The other five minutes were lost because of engineering problems.)

The members of Thompson’s board of directors who attended Ken’s dinner and heard the record still refuse to believe the announcer was not their president, Dan Seymour. There are two reasons for this: (1) Jay gave a flawless imitation; (2) when Danny heard it, he said, in a loud clear voice, “When the hell did I do that?”

One day I received an invitation from Henry Schachte, executive vice-president of the company, to have lunch with him and meet the people from Eisenhower College. I figured the company was trying to get me matriculated, or possibly to trade me to the biology department as a specimen.

The lunch turned out to be the beginning of a campaign

to raise funds for Eisenhower, a still unbuilt college, in, of all places, Seneca Falls, New York, the launching pad for Amelia Bloomer's fight for women's rights.

At the luncheon were John Rosencrantz, president, and Joseph Coffee, vice-president of the burgeoning institution. The story they told of how their project came to be called Eisenhower College, with, of course, the blessing of the general, is proof that there is a world of truth in that famous saying of the eminent philosopher Bing Crosby, "They can't rule you off for trying." I think the good doctor came to this conclusion watching the performances of some of the nags in his first racing stable. Some said he'd have done better if he'd let the horses rest and raced the stable.

The story of Eisenhower is that a group of Seneca Falls tycoons decided their city needed an institution of higher learning. There was a small normal school in the area and this they acquired as the nucleus of their proposed college. The question that had to be answered before doing a thing about raising money to build the place was to figure out what to call it. All the good names were taken, like Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and College of the City of New York. Finally, after great soul-searching, they decided that the best name in America at the time was that of the winner of World War II, former President of Columbia University and former President of the United States Dwight D. Eisenhower. Then, with all the naïveté and ingenuousness it seems possible for grown men to possess, they wrote and asked the general for permission to name their college after him.

Oddly enough, it was the first request of its kind Ike had received and he was flattered. And it was as simple as that. After telling them he'd think about it, he thought about it for two weeks and then gave his permission.

Bob Hope, because of his great friendship with the general, was with him at the ground breaking for the new school. Naturally, with Eisenhower and Hope on hand, there was TV news coverage. And what the newsmen got was Hope saying, as Eisenhower dug the first spadeful of dirt, "How about this! The former President of the United States winds up in Seneca Falls digging holes."

What Thompson was being asked to do was help in a campaign to raise the dollars to build the college. Some print ads were created under the direction of Samuel Walker. But most of the campaign was Bob Hope on radio and TV asking the nation to celebrate the Eisenhowers' golden wedding anniversary by making a donation to Eisenhower College. Hope said it was the only solution because "what do you give a general who has everything?" Then Bob told the people that Mamie had said she was going to make her golden anniversary present to Ike the one thing he'd like most, a contribution to Eisenhower College.

The production of the radio and TV spots cost nothing, courtesy of Hope's sponsor, which also donated a minute on the Chrysler Hour.

For this production I had to go west, any excuse to get Carroll out of the office. And for the first time I saw the new streamlined way pictures were being made at Universal. I used to sit on the Paramount lot and watch Hope and Crosby waste hours so that a friend like Eddie Marr or Harry Barris would have to be given an extra day's work. They still wasted *my* time, though.

I hung around the Beverly Hills Hotel for three days waiting for a phone call from Bob Hussey, of Young and Rubicam, to tell me when Bob would shoot the two sixty-second spots I had written. Finally the call was for Stage 31, at Universal, at seven fifteen that evening.

To make sure that everything would be all right, I got to Universal about ten minutes early. The first thing that impressed me—remembering the days when you had to bring everything from your birth certificate to your attorney to get onto a motion picture lot—was the courtesy and help I got from the gate-men. One of them almost carried me pickaback to Stage 31, which would not have been easy because I was in a Mustang.

When I got to the stage there wasn't a soul around. How were they going to shoot in ten minutes when no one had made any preparations? I wasn't ready for what happened. And it's always exciting when you're treated to a whole new scene. Adam must have felt that way the first time he looked at Eve. Well—maybe he had different feelings.

Anyway, promptly at seven fifteen a whole crew with all its gear, cameras, lights, sound equipment, makeup, wardrobe, cue cards, everything, moved through the huge door like a commando unit. As they took over the studio, Hope strolled in. We gabbed for a few minutes about the job and what I'd been doing since he saw me last, then he turned to the card boy and said, "Have you got them in the right order this time or have you mixed them up again to be funny?"

The kid said, "Want to read through?"

The lights went on and Hope walked over, stood on his mark, and began to read.

When he'd read through one spot the cameraman said, "That's great! Let's take the second one."

"Wait a minute," Bob complained. "Don't I get a chance to rehearse?"

So they graciously allowed him to read it again, which was great because it gave us extra footage from which to make thirty- and twenty-second lifts. They also shot the second spot twice just to be on the safe side. And that did it for the pictures.

It took another three or four minutes to make a ten- and a twenty-second radio spot and it was a wrap. The radio thirties and sixties we cut from the TV track. Bob asked when the spots would be run and we talked for a minute or two.

Then I turned to ask Hussey when I could see the dailies (ha! some dailies) and the studio was again as empty as when I'd come in. Even Bob vanished as I turned to look for Hussey. I had flown to California and spent four days waiting to do fifteen minutes' work, which took about six minutes and which, as far as my part in it was concerned, had been done the week before I left New York.

One of my postgraduate gigs for JWT was done at the Crosby estate in Hillsborough, California. Matt Harlib, then a JWT producer, two other agency types, and I flew to San Francisco, arriving there about midnight. We were met by my son, Bruce, who was there for ABC-TV News and waiting for his plane back to Los Angeles. He said he'd stayed for two reasons. One was to see me. The other was because there was a doctors' convention in San Francisco and he figured if we had any

trouble renting a car, he'd give us the one he was turning in. We told him we had a car reserved. But none of the car rental agencies were trying harder that night. Bruce gave us his car and we drove to San Mateo, near Hillsborough, and had trouble getting motel rooms even that far out of town because all those doctors who wouldn't make house calls seemed perfectly ready to make calls to another city.

Next morning, bright and early, we met our camera crew from San Francisco and moved in on Bing. Our job, as Jack Webb would say, was to make a short film of Bing apologizing for not being at an RCA sales meeting in person to plug his TV special that was to launch a big RCA sales drive. The chances of ever getting Bing in person to such an affair will always be about as good as the chance of getting to the Sea of Tranquillity on the Long Island Railroad.

The shooting, of course, was a milk run. By the time Bing came home from his morning golf, all the shots had been blocked out. Nothing remained to be done but to tell him where to enter, where to walk, where to stand, and where the cue cards would be.

It was a glorious golden California day if I ever saw one, and I'd seen many. The sun was bright and hot, and a breeze blew through the fragrant trees that perfume the northern California air. I even got quite a sunburn, without being aware it was happening, just going about the things I had to do, standing around and talking to Bing and the kids.

If for no other reason than that it gave me the opportunity to enter Bing's house once more, the trip was a gas. Of course it was to go to the bathroom. But what a discovery! When I lifted the seat, I finally found out what became of "the blue of the night" after it met "the gold of the day." I could have been standing on the balcony of a corner room at the Jamaica Inn in Ocho Rios gazing out across the blue, blue water. As I looked down I was almost ashamed to pollute it.

Besides being introduced to the beautiful blue lagoon water, I was delighted to meet Bing's three young children, Nathaniel, Harry Lillis, Jr., and Mary Frances, for the first time. Particularly Mary Frances. I'd seen her in a teleplay with Bing and been very impressed with the way she worked. When I came

across her sitting on the grass watching the crew set up, I sat down next to her and said, "I've seen you on TV with your father and I think you're a fine little actress."

She said, "Thank you."

"Is that what you want to be when you grow up, an actress?"

She thought a minute. "I think so."

"How old are you?"

"Nine."

"I have a little granddaughter just your age in New York."

"In New York? She's lucky!"

"What's lucky about being in New York?"

"That's where the *action* is."

It took me a moment to recover from that one. Then, referring to the beautiful California day, I said, "You know, New York isn't quite like this. New York is busy and crowded and noisy and dirty—"

Mary Frances was nodding her head in agreement as I talked until she interrupted to say, "Yes, but if you want action you've got to have 'busy and crowded and noisy and dirty.'"

When I told Bing about this he said, "She comes up with them. The day before she was due at the birthday party for a kid in the neighborhood, she had a little misunderstanding with her brother, Nathaniel, who, as brothers occasionally are wont to do, put a little mouse under her eye. She was a cinch for a Tareyton commercial.

"The morning of the party her mother warned her that when she went to the party everyone would most certainly say, 'Who hit you?'"

"Katherine then explained that it would be nicer if Mary Frances didn't say it was her brother. That the thing to do was to slough it off, avoid answering. Don't tell a lie, mind you, but sidestep. Take a little evasive action.

"Later we got the report via the grapevine. Mary Frances walked in. Three people asked, 'Who hit you?' and, smiling sweetly, she said, 'A relative.'"

When I told this story one evening at dinner, my granddaughter, Leslie Sara, just Mary Frances's age, said, "That's awful! Everyone will think it was her mother."

That was exactly the thought I had when Bing told me the

story. I wonder whether it was the way the story was worded or whether all us kids would rather blame our mother for something than our brother.

Not too long before my retirement from Thompson one of the top men on the Ford account, "Chip" (for Walter F.) Meads said he had a job for me in Detroit that looked like "fun." He had to be kidding because nothing in Detroit is fun and he knew it. Around the company the first prize in every comedy contest is a week in Detroit. The second prize is two weeks.

Henry Ford II was giving a party in a little over a fortnight. My job—go to Detroit, spend two weeks, find out about and do a film on the life, times, and friendships of a man I'd never even heard of before, the guest of honor, who was retiring from the Ford Motor Company.

My man was Charles Beacham, vice-president in charge of marketing and sales. He'd been one of the company's most successful dealers and had reluctantly given up his dealerships to take over the leadership of the sales department at the request of Robert S. McNamara when he became president of Ford. The times were then critical for the Ford Motor Company and Bob McNamara had succeeded in getting his friend Beacham to come over from retailing to the management side of the business by saying, "Charlie, I'm in trouble. I need you."

Now Charlie Beacham was leaving the company to take it easy—something he had never done before in his life—and Carroll Carroll and a young TV producer named Carroll Raver had to go to Detroit—Dearborn, to be exact—to make a thirty-minute comedy-documentary about Charles Beacham that Henry Ford could show to Beacham's friends and colleagues at the farewell party he was giving for good old Charlie.

This film, of course, had to be flattering, gracious, true to life, accurate, funny, and in all ways a credit not only to the Ford Motor Company but also to the J. Walter Thompson Company. Groovy!

All Carroll Raver and I had to do was to talk to everyone we could find (and get to see) who knew anything at all about Beacham, anyone who was his friend or enemy, anyone who had ever done business with him and could, in any way, cast

some light on a man who everyone agreed was a “character.” Then a proper script had to be written, material found with which to illustrate it, voices cast for the audio portions, and everything shot and recorded without Beacham hearing or knowing anything about it. And this was to be done in Ford-oriented Dearborn where everybody knew everything about everyone, sometimes before it happened.

The whole thing was rather like preparing a funny obituary of a man who didn’t know he was about to die.

Another thing that made our job more of a problem than a pleasure (as advertised) was the reluctance of some people to tell us anything but their name, rank, and serial number. They seemed convinced that we were not really doing a bit on Beacham but were some sort of spies for the government, the company, or an independent research outfit making an efficiency study.

It was my idea to end the film on a note of genuine sincerity (a tough commodity to find in Detroit) by having short statements from Henry Ford, Lee Iacocca, Arjay Miller, then president of the Ford Company, and Robert McNamara, then Secretary of Defense—of the United States.

Each little speech had to be written and then okayed by the party who would say it. This done, each man had to be met in his office and escorted to where it was to be recorded. Ford was friendly, once I corralled him. Miller was most cooperative in helping me contact McNamara. What went on in connection with this is the kind of snafu that bankrupts corporations, loses wars, and topples empires.

Here are the steps through which the recording of Robert McNamara (the most cooperative of them all) progressed before we finally got his voice on tape.

1. Miller called McNamara, at his office in the Pentagon, to ask if he’d participate in a film for Charlie by recording the speech I’d written for him to close the show. This was the speech: “When I was president of the Ford Motor Company, I found myself in a lot of trouble. So I called Charlie Beacham and asked him to join us because I needed his help. Now that you’re retiring, Charlie, I find myself in another job that’s

giving me a lot of trouble. So please stand by. I may need your help again.”

2. Miller was told that McNamara was not in his office. He was at the White House. Miller left the following message with one of McNamara’s secretaries: “We’re doing a film for a farewell party for Charlie Beacham. We’re all giving him a little send-off at the end. This is what we thought you might be willing to say.”

Miller then dictated the speech to the secretary and asked her to call and tell him if it was okay. When she called back to okay it, he gave her the direct number to the sound studio and asked her to have McNamara call me and I would have everything ready to take his voice down on tape.

3. Miller’s office called me to say that McNamara would call me at 8 A.M. the following morning to record the speech. Cool!

4. At 7:45 I arrived at the studio. The staff was there. The lines were all set up and ready. All we had to do was to get a level and cut it.

5. By 11 A.M. we were still waiting, not only angry but hungry. I phoned Miller to ask what had happened. Miller said he’d try to find out, that maybe McNamara had gone to Vietnam. I was in a mood to hope so.

6. Miller called back. McNamara had indeed called at 8 A.M. But, instead of calling the studio number, he had called Miller’s office. The secretary in McNamara’s office who found the message and saw the number Miller had left realized it wasn’t Miller’s number and thought it was a mistake. So she called Miller. He was not there, but when McNamara asked the secretary who answered if she had a tape recorder to take down what he was going to say and she told him she didn’t, McNamara thought there had been some misunderstanding so he said, “Take this down in shorthand,” and he dictated the speech Miller had dictated to one of his secretaries at the Pentagon, so that *he* could record it on tape, to one of Miller’s secretaries. All clear? No? Well, you’ll just have to read it again.

Miller finally managed to get through to McNamara somewhere, tell him about the snafu, and ask for a second chance.

7. Miller called me at the studio, explained what had happened, and said McNamara would call at 5:45 that evening. (The party was the following evening. The final print had to be shown the following afternoon. Carroll Raver was in a studio still shooting pictures.)

8. Five forty-five P.M. McNamara called. He apologized for the mix-up, which wasn't his fault at all. They got a level on his voice while he was apologizing. He read the message and asked if he should read it again. I suggested he do so, for protection. He did, adding, "It's a cute speech. Thanks." Then he told me to shake hands with Charlie for him. I will if I ever see Charlie. There is every chance that I never will. But his wife was charming. And I wonder if she really kept the film a secret from him.

If I got anything of lasting value out of the two weeks spent in Dearborn and Detroit—have you ever tried to find a restaurant open for dinner on a Sunday evening in Detroit?—it was Charlie's surefire, and polite, way of terminating a telephone conversation that has gone on too long to suit you.

You just hang up. *But!* You hang up while *you're* talking. The person at the other end thinks you've been cut off. He calls back immediately. Your secretary says you've just walked out of the office without saying where you're going, and can she take a message?

There is no question about the efficiency of this method of ending anything that you

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