RUBY IN THE ROUGH

BY BOB RUBY

$8.95

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This is the bold, brash, outspokenly frank autobiography of one of the leading program innovators in the radio broadcast industry.

Bob Ruby, known simply as Ruby to his vast listening audience, displays in this volume the wit, charm, and audacity that led to his rise to a position as the number one morning personality in the New Orleans radio market.

The veteran broadcaster for radio station WWL writes candidly of the many zany and often extraordinary happenings that have become a trademark of his daily show. His broadcast of a taped interview with Sandra Good, for example, in which the acknowledged member of the Charles Manson family threatened the lives of numerous American business executives, made headlines throughout the nation and led to his appearance as a witness at her trial.

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A madcap interview with a listener determined to jump off a bridge and a conversation with one of the lawmen who ambushed Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow, both transcribed in these pages, indicate the range of Ruby's probing personality.

It is amazing, concludes Ruby, what people will say on a live radio show—and he offers excerpts from his program to prove it.

Ruby discusses the evolution of his own singular style as a one-man variety show. Clearly, he provides the unusual—something out of the ordinary. His lively monologue each morning is designed to generate call-ins and to encourage listener participation in the show. His consistently high ratings attest to his success.

Ruby concludes this work on a serious note, offering his personal assessment of the broadcast industry—its strengths, its weaknesses, and its growing problems, including the controversial area of government regulation. With insight sharpened by experience, he declares that radio is enjoying its last glory days and provides a personal view of what the future of broadcasting holds.

RUBY *in the* ROUGH

By

BOB RUBY

Broadcast Innovator

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RUBY in the ROUGH

For Jerry Mullen
with great affection
Love Lucy
August 1981

For my mothers and father

Acknowledgment

To Myron Tassin,
For conceiving the idea of this book and for
holding my hand while it was pregnant.

Contents

Foreword

The foreword to this book was supposed to have been written by my friend, Max Fetty. If you knew Max like I did, you would agree that no one can take his place.

Preface

When Myron Tassin first asked me to write this book, I was flattered. But I also warned him that age 38 was a bit premature for most men to start thinking seriously about an autobiography, with the possible exceptions of Ivan the Terrible, the Duke of Windsor, Lazlo Lakaka,[1] and Pedro the Cruel—each of whom ran on a faster track than I did. For this reason, I eliminated a great many details of my life and opted instead for a synthesis of sorts, in order to keep as many people as possible awake. For those anticipating high romance and chain-lightning action, take your sales slip and exchange this book for a copy of *How To Stop Raising Rabbits.*

To any fledgling radio personality looking for a few one-liners, I can only caution that more disc jockeys are killed by old jokes than vice-versa. To critics who find this first attempt at full-scale writing less than stimulating, please donate the unused portion of your copy to the Symphony Book Fair. If the book fair can't find a sucker, I suggest disguising it with long whiskers and dark glasses, wrapping it in an unused jacket cover of *The Sensuous Woman*, and mailing it in a plain brown wrapper to Wayne Hays.

[1]Author of *Siberian Bananas: Why They Failed.*

Ruby (right) and program producer Mike Adams.

RUBY in the ROUGH

Ruby, age 8.

I

Harold and Ida And Bob and Jo

I never met a man I liked or admired more than my father; and if Harold Ruby wasn't the smartest man I ever met, I'd be forced nonetheless to rank him in the top three. He's seventy-three years old now, and I don't know him as well as I should. He's always been a very private man, who has managed to keep his deepest thoughts and dreams to himself and still does—a master practitioner of that peculiar midwestern stoicism that isolates children of this region from their parents in many ways, but thoroughly insulates them from the blizzard raging in the world beyond the front door.

Harold was a super-salesman of the old school, a man of limited background and high ambition whose life hung by the slender thread of his personality. In his lifetime he was a buyer, a seller, a trader, and an inventor—but always a man whose most important product was himself. Immensely likable, energetic, and possessed of a diamond-in-the-rough intellect acquired through compulsive reading, he consistently rose above the challenge of hard times. As often as his back was against the wall, his foot was seldom out of the door of a new prospect.

He was the third of nine children born to Frank Ruby and Jesse Chezum on the family farm near Stockport, Iowa, . . . delivered nearly back-to-back after Paul and Myrtle. Clearly if Frank and Jesse had spent more time back to back, there would have been more room in the bed for Harold and the brothers and sisters that followed. His ancestors were pioneer farmers who plowed their way westward from Virginia and Kentucky, finally settling in Iowa sometime after 1838 when the first territorial government was organized and the land in the southeastern corner was surveyed and put on sale by federal authority.

Harold's time saw the last of the one-room school, with seats and desks made of black walnut lumber just wide enough for two people and varied just enough in height so the ones in back were big enough for adults and the ones in front small enough for five-year-olds. A large coal stove stood majestically in the center of the room, and in front, on a platform six inches above the floor, rose the teacher's desk. The building was painted white on the outside and known as Taylor School. It was the sum total of Harold's formal education.

Even though Frank Ruby's hundred acres of black Iowa soil put plenty of food on the table, there was little extra money to divide reasonably among eleven people. So, like many young country boys of the early 1900s, Harold finished most of the eighth grade and then went to work—certain that money was power, and power was never again having to wear his brother Joe's undershirt on alternate days.

When he was sixteen, Harold raised the price of a train ticket, and arrangements were made for him to board on his Uncle Sherm Chezum's ranch on the

Tongue River near Miles City, Montana. Uncle Sherm was a kindly, short man, made all the shorter by a series of crippling encounters with good bucking horses and poor doctors that left his legs perfectly bowed. When he walked, it was as if he were still astride some imaginary bronco, ready to come out of the chute. Uncle Sherm's gentle ways had a profound effect on my father, whose own sometimes leathery exterior barely masks the lessons he learned from this compassionate old man.

After a year, Harold left Uncle Sherm and Aunt Mabel's ranch to work for the next four years in the oilfields at Midwest, Wyoming, on the site of the famous Teapot Dome. In 1928 he returned to Montana, hiring on at the Hugh Lynch ranch on Rosebud Creek. The next two years of cowboying for forty dollars a month and board collided head-on with the depression. So when a traveling seed buyer offered Harold a job, he hung up his chaps, bought a suit of clothes with money earned in a bucking horse go-round and checked into a boardinghouse in Kansas City, Missouri. For the next ten years he walked on the edge of hard times working in the seed business, first selling, and later buying.

From 1930 to 1935, he traveled the Midwest and parts of the South for Peppard Seed Company. While other salesmen were going under along with the rest of the country, Harold kept himself afloat selling popcorn by the carload to movie houses. But the commissions he received were discouraging, and gradually he moved into the more profitable buying end of the business—purchasing seed from farmers in the field and reselling it in bulk at retail.

As he learned this new trade, Harold noticed the

lack of an efficient method of separating impurities from the raw seed. With his brother John, he started a small manufacturing company built around a device they co-invented called a "Gravity Machine." It worked perfectly, but the partnership didn't. They sold the patent rights, and the machine became a standard in the industry, minus the Ruby brothers' name. Despite this setback, Harold's buying career continued to blossom, and during the bluegrass harvest in 1936, he met a pretty, vibrant twenty-two-year-old girl named Ida Latzka in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Ida and her two brothers, one older, one younger, were born in St. Cloud, a small, intensely Catholic community sustained by railroading and granite quarries. Although the quarries have long since been exhausted, the town remains fixed in the minds of those who knew it because of its peculiar aroma issued by the "stone sheds," as the rock-processing plants were called. The offending agent was a musty compound of granite dust and water that persists today in older homes in the area where thousands of tons of grey powder were deposited, layer upon layer, in living rooms and bedrooms by men too spent to bother undoing the brass snaps on their Oshkosh B'Gosh bib overalls.

Ida's house smelled of the stone sheds. Her father, John, was a stern, scrap-iron-tough German who toiled in those nineteenth-century sweatboxes polishing tombstones. The only visible compensation beyond his nominal paycheck seemed to be the odd pieces of polished granite he brought home and used to fashion an eclectic front porch of shiny rock set in concrete. It was a grueling existence, one that fos-

tered firm convictions in a man that money was meant for necessities, and little else. Once, while walking to work, John was struck by an automobile and knocked a dozen feet. As he picked himself up, uninjured, the driver rushed to him and asked if there was anything he could do. John told him yes, by God, there was. He'd better have a new lunch bucket by tomorrow or he'd know the reason why.

Although he would mellow in later years into the archtypical American patriarch with pictures of his grandchildren in plastic containers, John Latzka ran his own household with a teutonic severity that developed into a running, often raging conflict over priorities, especially Ida's. The buffer in each crisis was Ida's mother, Mary. But even the gentle Mary was regularly drawn into battle because of her husband's hard ways. When money was appropriated from the pot in the cupboard for something special for Ida, hell was raised. In this often confused atmosphere of love and hard times, Ida grew to early maturity.

Long after, her father would feel deep regret over the waste of their resounding collisions, but while they lived under the same roof neither John nor Ida could muster the needed compromise. Occasionally, the results were spectacular. Compulsively clean, Ida pleaded with her father to replace the mattress in her bedroom. When he refused, she opened the upstairs window, threw the mattress out into the back yard below, then ran down and burned it.

By today's standards, Ida's needs were modest. An attractive and popular girl, she liked pretty clothes above all her small possessions. Knowing well there would never be enough money at home for the luxuries she so desperately wanted, she left high

school in her junior year, 1930, and found work as a waitress at nearby Lake Karonis.

Employment suited her, and with the earnings that began to fill out her wardrobe came an independence that perfectly matched her spirited ways. Ida was a superlative dancer, a quick if sometimes ribald wit, and, above all, a person of high laughter and warmth. To my father, she was doubtless more than that when they first met in late April of 1936. There is still some question about whom Harold courted harder, Ida or her father, since both Harold and John liked nothing better than fishing for walleyed pike—a mutual passion that cemented their friendship at the outset, and greatly facilitated Harold's plans for Ida.

Conceding that confession was probably good for the soul, he converted to Catholicism and married Ida that July in Painesville, Minnesota, exactly six weeks and two thousand walleyed pike from the day they met. Ida was a bit nervous about leaving home for the first time, especially as far away as Des Moines. But Harold had pitched this sale well. He threw his bride's suitcase in the trunk of a '35 Olds and drove south into the future.

It was either sometime before they crossed the state line, or shortly after they crossed the threshold that Harold and Ida were pregnant. To no one's surprise, I was delivered the following April just before five in the afternoon with normal vital signs and a ruptured navel. There was no explanation why I was christened Robert, except my father thought it might look good on the bow of his fishing boat. My only recollections of the event are some pictures taken on the lawn at home of a small baby with a large bandage on its stomach, at first glance easily mistaken for a midget with a cummerbund. Harold was doing well by

this time, rapidly establishing a solid business reputation. But his constant traveling often made the marriage lonely for Ida, even when she went with him. She wrote frequently to my aunt Alyce, her best friend.

11,1,'39
Miles City, Montana

Dear Alyce,

I have been out of the hospital for a week, feeling swell and ready to travel. Perhaps I should mention what was wrong. I had a tube pregnancy and it burst, so was taken to the hospital and operated on at nite. Was there eleven days. Harold was out of town when this happened, and I seemed so all alone. Had to find two people for a blood transfusion and Harold's cousins matched. Finally, they located him and he came dashin' in. But all's well now, and I will soon forget it, except the bill, and the awful cut on the tummy. Everyone was so nice to me.

Enough of that. We are starting home Friday morning if the road is all oil to Willmar.

Love,

Ida and boys

She signed all her letters "Ida and boys" since Harold never wrote, and I couldn't. The pregnancy she discusses was a sign that her health was slightly less than robust, but nothing that caused any serious concern. Most of the time, Ida was able to keep herself in good humor.

Feb 13, 1940
Des Moines

Dear Alyce and boys,

Just a note. Have been waiting for an answer to

my last letter. While I'm waiting, I'll send a couple of "Confuseious" (maybe misspelled).

Confuscious say: girl who rides horse can stretch good thing too far. . . .

Conf say: girl who wallflower at dance be dan-de-lion in bed. . . .

Conf say: man who fart in church sit in own pew. . . .

You may have heard these, but got a big kick out of them. Papa usually comes home with plenty stories. If you hear any good ones, let me know.

Bye,

Ida and boys

Although this letter hardly establishes the true extent of Ida's repertoire, it does touch upon a fascinating probability: that girls can be near-perfect reproductions of their mothers. Had Ida and her traveling man ever borne any daughters, they never would have wanted for fresh material.

In the late summer of 1940, my parents and I made one of our usual shuttles from Des Moines to St. Cloud for a visit. Harold had a new Chevrolet, and it was decided that Ida and several of her friends would drive it to nearby Minneapolis for a shopping trip. As they were returning, a passing car suddenly squeezed in between Ida and the car ahead. She came down hard on the brakes, a tire blew, and her car skidded into the opposite lane, crashing nearly head-on with another automobile. The vehicles were demolished, and everyone sustained serious injuries. Ida's were the worst. She lay for weeks in traction with a triple fracture of the pelvis. Miraculously, the baby she was carrying survived; and gradually, Ida too began to heal. The hospital had been like a prison.

10,11,'40
Friday a.m.

Dear Alyce and Clarence,

I am so happy, don't know if this letter will make sense or not. I am trying to tell you I am going home next week. Isn't it wonderful—doctor said the X-Ray showed perfect position of bones, and saw "The" skipper, too. Said he looked like a real dandy. They are ordering a special made corset rush, and as soon as it gets here I am going to learn to walk. Going in a different bed, too. Can't think of anything else to write. Only know the time from now 'till next Thursday will seem like an eternity. Tell Tom Jesus heard his prayers and to keep it up.

Love,
Ida

It was the last letter Ida would ever write. She did see part of that next Thursday, up to the moment her brother Bill helped her into the car, just before she collapsed and died in his arms. The weeks of immobilized mending on sandbags had been invisibly undone by a blood clot that raced, unobstructed, to her heart.

Ida's death was a terrible blow to my father. To this day, he has never once discussed his life with her, and I doubt he ever will. But what he did next was the greatest gift a man ever gave a little boy. Patiently rejecting offers from relatives to take me in, he decided instead to raise me himself; and together we went back to Des Moines and rented a room at Mrs. Mahaffa's boardinghouse.

The accommodations were spartan—a pair of twin beds took up most of the space; toys and seed

samples accounted for the rest. Harold brightened up the bare walls a bit by removing a picture of General MacArthur from the front of a writing tablet and tacking it above the nightstand.

While he traveled during the week, he left me in Mrs. Mahaffa's care. The only low moments I recall were his Monday morning departures, when he would take me to a drugstore and buy two comic books, then deposit me on the curb in front of the boardinghouse and drive off. But the anticipation and realization of his Friday night arrivals gave me much to hope for, and his comings at the end of each week, to me at least, were not unlike those of a king.

In early 1942, Harold introduced me to the most unusual-looking woman I'd ever seen. Her name was Jo Sorenson, and she was, in a word, startling! Her appearance was unconditional, aided by a figure that filled every last inch of her clothes and a crown of long, straight, dark hair combed back tightly over her head, with the excess carefully braided into a single pigtail that wrapped smartly over the top again. Her large, expressive brown eyes and the bright reds of her lipstick and nail polish contrasted so sharply against her perfectly chosen, dark clothing, that she seemed almost photographed.

Jo was thirty-four years old. An eighteen-year career with the telephone company, where she rose from a $6-a-week operator to supervisor, gave her much the same force of personality as my father. This probably had a good deal to do with the fact that she had never married, since most men in the depression couldn't compete with that kind of feminine success. When she and Harold were brought together by a mutual friend, they found common ground.

Harold, age 30.

Harold and Ida at their new home in Des Moines, 1938.

Harold and Jo, Hardin, Montana, 1954. Publicity photo after Harold was named "Salesman of the Year" by Northwestern National Life Insurance Company.

Jo's entrance was a bit unsettling for me, since she was the first woman my father had ever brought to the boardinghouse. In fact, their relationship had gone farther than I knew.

They were married in August, 1942, and the three of us moved into a new home Harold bought for the occasion. This abrupt togetherness created instant problems between my new mother and me. Unused to the demands of a small child, she was quick to anger in the early going. One evening, while my father was out of town, we fought. Jo fled the house in tears, leaving me alone to contemplate whether she would ever return. She did of course, after a few minutes, and in the midst of my relief I remember discovering for the first time that I liked her very much.

The battles though, were far from over. A very serious difference of opinion, even greater than my being force-fed asparagus, was Jo's insistence that I wear knickerbockers. I can't remember why I hated those pants, I only know that I did. I tried stuffing them under the mattress, hiding them under the bed, stowing them in the trunk of the car, and leaving them at a friend's house. I even tried putting them in the garbage. Once. It was no use; this quick, intelligent woman was not about to be outmaneuvered, and in the months that followed frictions lessened as I began to accept the distinctions between a landlady and a mother.

Jo, from scratch, became undisputed mistress of the house. Her remarkable energies began to spill over into my father's life as well. She not only became his wife, but his confidante and business associate; and somewhere in between the coordination of

Harold's affairs and unraveling the mysteries of child-rearing, Jo cooked three splendid meals a day, entertained clients, washed and ironed, and still managed to look stunning from start to finish. To this day, I have never known anyone so supremely self-assured; but it was the kind of self-assurance firmly anchored in a great heart rather than a massive ego. The ease and grace with which she moved in and out of people's lives spoke for itself. A masterful bridge player, her opponents delighted in going down for the count; a diplomat of the highest rank, with gifted but forgiving conversation, she fashioned fools into centerpieces.

Her torturous migraine headaches were never spoken of until they finally confined her to bed for days at a time, and even then the meals were miraculously, meticulously prepared and the house was in order. Most important to me was her undivided attention. I didn't know it at the time, but the years we would spend together were the most valuable learning period of my life.

Harold was a clever fellow, and he was no fool about women, either.

II

Hardin

I've never believed any of the old clichés about all small towns being alike. Cities, to me, tend toward sameness. Even with a television set in every home, small towns remain very special worlds, not entirely ignorant of the larger world around them, but more often indifferent to it. Small communities are inclined to see themselves and their surroundings as unique, an attitude made possible by the isolation of one town from another by time and distance. And the very fact of their isolation does, in a sense, make them one of a kind, unfettered by slavish imitations of others and, in the absence of any external pressures, left with only themselves to deal with.

Hardin, Montana, was such a place, situated in a shallow valley and surrounded like a small kingdom by a moat of rolling prairie hills for fifty miles in every direction. From its beginnings in 1908 as a trading post and land development project, Hardin grew to 1,200 people in the first forty years—thanks to a flood of immigrant European farmers imported into the Dakotas and Montana by the railroads after 1900. The more conservative among them started small irrigated farms by tapping the Big Horn River that

snaked through the valley. The gamblers broke the topland or benchland above the valley out of sod, planted it in wheat, and prayed for rain. Most prospered, and so did Hardin.

By the 1940s it was one of the few small towns in Montana with paved streets and a dependable sewerage system. The general drabness of the houses and buildings was a reflection of the plain tastes of the farmers, and gave no clue to the real stability of Hardin's economy. Recognizing these things, my father decided to start his first business here. It was 1942, and the drought years of the thirties had passed. The rains began, and farmers and ranchers were once again growing large crops of alfalfa hay that was threshed in the field for seed, which in turn was sewn into large cotton Bemis bags and stored in the barn to await the high bid of a traveling seed buyer. With the promise of wet years ahead and considerable financial backing from a wealthy partner named Charles Sinn, the house in Des Moines was sold, some gas coupons were borrowed, and the Harold Rubys left for Montana.

We arrived in Hardin in the middle of winter and moved into the Luther Apartments, a dark, heavily constructed, two-story brick building. It was an ill-ventilated structure, one that caused each family's space inside to smell like someone else's supper. Added to this disappointment was the brownness of everything, or so it seemed to me. The furniture was brown, the drapes were brown, the walls were brown, the Catholic church across the street was brown, I wore brown shirts, my stepmother wore brown slacks, my father's car was brown, the grass was brown, the old man in the basement apartment chewed brown

tobacco, and my Uncle Mark Chezum wore brown suspenders. The only thing that wasn't brown was the courthouse. It was grey. I would walk up the frozen streets and stand in front of it for long periods of time. I thought it was beautiful.

I also thought the Indians were very brown, or maybe they looked that way against the whiteness of that first winter. They were Crow Indians, most of whom lived on a federal reservation, the boundary of which began a few miles south of town. A few thousand Indians on a few thousand acres deeded by treaty to the tribe. They were divided by governmental fiat into two categories—competent and incompetent. The distinction was designed to protect the so-called "incompetents" from themselves, and from the financial clutches of the white man. The "competent" Indian was free to conduct his business affairs as he saw fit; the "incompetent" was subject to the scrutiny and approval of the Tribal Council and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

This well-intentioned, paternalistic system doubtless looked good on paper to those who designed it and knew how difficult the white man's world was for an Indian, who was, after all, barely fifty years removed from the Stone Age. But as in many federal undertakings, it worked far better for the bureaucrats than for their wards. If anyone has any illusions about total governmental regulation of their life, they should take a hard look at the American Indian.

Much tribal land was leased to local farmers and ranchers, some of whom maintained small offices in town. Every day, dozens of Indians made the 14-mile trip to Hardin from their enclave in Crow Agency to borrow money at these offices—sometimes for a few

dollars to see them through the week, sometimes for a loan against a future transaction. The money was seldom repaid, but for the farmer or rancher it was a sound investment against the day when a lease came up for renewal.

The bucks, as the Indian men were called, and their squaws would come to town early and huddle out of reach of the wind against the sides of the low buildings downtown. Many establishments had "No Indians" signs prominently displayed, so there were few warm places. The train depot was one shelter, and when the cold became too intense they would retreat in groups to its warm interior to thaw a bit, and to use the facility marked "Indians"—a backhanded convenience provided by the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad, whose tracks ran across tribal property.

When I wasn't staring at the courthouse, I was staring at the Indians. It wasn't exactly a fashion show. The men wore Levi jackets, cowboy boots, and flat, wide-brimmed hats with high crowns; under the hat was a scarf pulled down over their ears and knotted under the chin. Each squaw was wrapped in a faded, patterned blanket and wore calf-length moccasins secured tightly below the knee by a single strand of rawhide. The moccasins disappeared under the hem of a flour-sack dress, the side of which was not stitched, but held together by a wide leather belt. The belt was also useful for disagreements. Often, two or more squaws would draw battle lines on the sidewalk and begin whacking away at each other with these cowhide weapons, unconcerned that they wore nothing underneath the dresses that flew in the opposite direction of the blows. I learned early to take for granted that many squaws wore no underclothing.

One morning my father took me for breakfast at the Mission Inn, a dingy corner establishment with a bar and card tables in front and a counter-and-stools restaurant in back. At the time, the sale of liquor to Indians was prohibited by federal law, but the Mission was one of two or three places in town that felt the Crows were nonetheless as entitled to a square meal as anyone. The white businessmen who ate there were tolerant because the owner and cook, Tillie Elder, was a past master with ham and eggs. Tillie had just served up our food, and my dad was talking snowdrifts with Ted Remlie, the owner of the dime store. A squaw came in and sat down two stools away; I watched as she ordered something and began fussing with her blanket. Suddenly, one of her breasts popped out from underneath and came to rest, motionless, on the counter. Except for me, no one, including the squaw, paid any attention to it. And not knowing exactly what it was anyway, I could only worry that she might spill hot coffee on it and feel sorry that so much of her was brown.

The hostility of the whites toward the Indians would often focus on incidents like this; but stereotyped conclusions that most Indian men were drunk and their women filthy masked a grudging respect of the white community for these proud, intelligent, sometimes arrogant people. Even as a child, I seldom passed by a standing, silent group of Crows without the feeling that they were laughing at me; and as many times as I watched an Indian urinate on a crowded street, I was never absolutely certain whether he lacked proper instruction, or was simply delivering a message.

Hardin had other, smaller conflicts. The bulk of the community was German-Russian, or "Rooshins,"

as their detractors called them. There was also a substantial Scandinavian, or "Norskie," population. In addition, the town had one Greek, Sammy Poulous ("Sammy the Greek"), one Jew, Simon Marquisie ("Simie the Jew"), one black family, the Tates, and one very poor family, the Rollinses.

The Rooshins and the Norskies were mostly farmers. Sammy the Greek ran a small cafe near the train depot that specialized in strange-tasting chili for a mixed clientele of Indians, drifters, and gandy-dancers. Simie the Jew owned the only men's clothing store and haberdashery in town. He was a kindly old man, and with his wife used to good advantage what would today be called a low profile. They were never excluded from the scheme of things, but they were never exactly invited either. Nonetheless, for many years Simie and his wife represented the pinnacle of culture in Hardin, since it was common knowledge their son was a violinist in Syracuse. The Tates and the Rollinses ran about dead even in respectability, even though Mrs. Tate and her daughters worked hard for years for Mrs. Waterman, the florist, and no one was ever sure what Mr. Rollins did or was doing at the moment. The Rollinses were a tragic family, with a son who would later go to prison for murder and a daughter so pathetic and neglected she was often chased home after school like a dog.

But despite its failings, Hardin was still a perfect place for a boy of modest circumstances to grow. To offset its twenty-one bars, there were nine churches: one Catholic, one Methodist, one Four-Square, one Baptist, one Seventh-Day Adventist, three Lutheran, and a Church Of The Open Bible. The Open Bible church was my favorite, even though I was Catholic.

They always seemed to be having such a good time inside, and I stood by the door many evenings to hear the evangelists sing.

Theeee game was played on Sunday,
In Heaven's own backyard,
With Jesus playin' halfback,
And Moses playin' guard.
The score was six to nothin',
The crowd let out a yell,
Then Jesus scored a touchdown
Against that gang from hell!
Stay with God! Stay with God!
ROCK 'EM! SOCK 'EM! JESUS KNOCK 'EM!
STAY RIGHT WITH GOD!

Other favorites of mine were "I Want to Be a Jesus Cowboy in the Holy Ghost Corral" and one called "There Will Be Slim Pickins."

There'll be slim pickins',
You'll be sweatin' like the dickens,
If the devil stays for supper one more night,
Take your pot roast from the oven,
Fill it up instead with lovin',
Give old satan indigestion he can't fight.

One of the great delights that awaited me in Montana was the discovery that there wasn't a pair of the hated knickerbockers within 500 miles. Every boy in Hardin dressed in a basic uniform of Levi pants and a flannel shirt. Anyone without this attire was a new arrival and marked for trouble until his mother could get him refitted. There was a freedom in those Levis I hadn't known before. Not only were they durable, which eliminated interminable trips to the store

with your mother, but a pair could be worn for weeks without showing the dirt, and only then were they finally betrayed by the smell.

I was equally pleased to learn shortly after my arrival that I knew how to sing. Moreover, I was able somehow to hear more than just a melody line, and could construct entire chord sequences in proper musical progression in my head. This was also a little awkward for a first-grader during music period. While the rest of the class sang a melody, I was unable to block out the appropriate harmonies the melody suggested, and often sang in fourth and fifth intervals to create the illusion of a chorus in my mind.

At first, this was mistaken for atonality. But a gifted music teacher named Ethel Schuster liked what she heard, and moved me from the front row of desks where the tin ears sat to the back row with the better singers, where a certain amount of improvisation was tolerated. That is, except for Tiny Rupe, a large girl who tolerated nothing. When she turned around and told me to stop singing those funny notes, I responded with a gritty retort passed on to me by one of the men at my father's seed house, and spent the next hour cleaning the lard sandwich from her lunch sack out of my hair. My association with Tiny was brief, but I would remain a pupil of Miss Schuster's for the next twelve years, a circumstance beneficial to whatever success I later enjoyed as a musician and a performer.

My best friend in these early days was a bright, curly-haired boy named Butch Schmit. We were classmates, and like good friends everywhere we dug caves and rode bikes and flew kites. We fished and served mass, and, only because Butch was gentler

than I, we fought, and I always won. At one point I was so angry I threatened to castrate him. He said it was all right with him, because he didn't know what it meant anyway, and it was sure a hell of a lot better than getting beat up again.

At night we listened to the radio, and afterward went to either his bedroom or mine, turned off the lights, and laid on the beds quizzing each other about sports heroes until we fell asleep. If either boy was missing from his bed the next morning, his mother always knew exactly where he'd spent the night.

It was an intense friendship, one that ended abruptly in 1947 as we walked home from school. Butch loved his father, and as we came in sight of his home, he saw Mr. Schmit in the car out front and ran to greet him. When he opened the car door, he found his father dead. Not long after, Butch's mother moved the family to Miles City, and we gradually lost touch. After high school, Butch entered the Jesuit priesthood. He remained for fifteen years, dropping out of the order just prior to taking his final vows to marry a nun.

When Butch departed, I began a more significant and enduring friendship with a boy named Pat Fox, whose family had moved to Hardin shortly before Mr. Schmit's death. The Foxes came from Salt Lake City, Utah, and were the first real breath of fresh air the town had known in years. They were also responsible for the largest single population increase on record. Each time one of the Fox brothers had a baby, he went out and bought a box of cigars. Their milkman bought a Cadillac.

Ken Fox and his two brothers arrived modestly enough, opening a small Shell bulk plant and gas sta-

tion on the east end of town. It was apparent from the start they were more than pump jockeys. Ken, the oldest and the leader, had left a promising executive career with Shell Oil; Rich was a recently discharged Army colonel and Chick left the service a captain. Together, they were determined to make a go of it on their own at a time when opportunities of this sort were scarce. In the early years, their energy was often mistaken for brusqueness, their long hours for aloofness, and their brilliant and talented children were looked upon as somewhat effete in a community dedicated to sugar beets and calf roping. What the Foxes brought to Hardin was a large, permanent slice of life beyond the Big Horn valley—an unforgivable sin to some, an inconvenience to others. But as their business prospered and their influence grew, so did their acceptance; and to those of us who knew them best, their presence was a constant source of celebration.

My earliest memory of Pat Fox is of a small, chubby eleven-year-old boy who sat down at the piano in our front room and suddenly electrified those present with a dazzling, precocious performance worthy of an adult. I had never seen another boy play the piano before; until that moment, I was sure I was the only boy in the world forced to practice the forbidding instrument. But how could a boy, a BOY, play so well? I wanted very much to play like that, but my household was not inclined toward esthetic discipline of any kind, and it was easy to divert my parents' attention to less substantive activity. It didn't matter really, because neither boy ever made a dime in later years playing the piano. It was our mutual love for music that set the friendship; ahead were the endless ping-pong games, scout hikes, raft trips, snowball

fights, band concerts, chorus rehearsals, football games, basketball tournaments, Christmastimes, and all the other kinds of special glue that made the fragile machinery of our lives in Hardin seem so indestructible. Underlying these things was a unique rapport that lasted far beyond our expectations, that would serve us well in later years.

There was very little we didn't do together, even though Pat was older by two years. One of the community obligations we shared was playing the bugle at military funerals. Several times each month, veterans or their relatives were brought in for burial at the Custer Battlefield National Cemetery near Crow Agency, a site chosen for its proximity to the original location of the famous Custer massacre. For these occasions, the Bullis Mortuary would round up a bugler to play taps and a squad of local American Legionnaires in business suits and caps to stand over the grave and fire a volley of blanks from their ancient bolt-action Springfield rifles. These were awkward rites at best, especially at twenty below zero when the bolts on the weapons tended to jam and the mouthpiece of the instrument stuck to the bugler's embouchure.

One particularly raw day there was some confusion about who was supposed to bugle, and I was taken out of class and rushed to the Custer Battlefield (Buster's Cattlefield, as one faded wit christened it) for a burial. When I arrived, the ceremony had been completed and the casket lowered into the ground. But a small group of people remained and the legionnaires stood stiffly at attention, because a relative insisted that taps be played. Normally, I would play the piece out of sight behind some large bushes.

This time, Mr. Bullis ushered me to the graveside in line with the firing squad. I played well, and the sound carried far in the cold, still air. When I finished, there was a long silence; then the command "Right Face!" was given. Turning smartly on the frozen snow, my feet left the ground and I disappeared into the hole with the deceased. After much grappling and groping and cursing I was pulled to the surface, face to face with the dead man's brother who gave me a dollar and said it was the best taps he'd ever heard.

As lucrative as this performance proved to be, it wasn't until the day of my thirteenth birthday, when a magician came to town, that I made up my mind to become a performer. Doctor Magic, he called himself, and when he asked for a volunteer and pointed to my wildly flapping arms, I knew I had been rescued from patent obscurity. For the next thirty minutes my stageworthiness was put to the test. Holes were drilled in my head that drained water ("What's yer mother clean yer ears with, kid, a pump?"), nickles extracted from my nose ("That's yer allowance, kid, don't blow it all in one place!"), fires extinguished in the seat of my pants ("I've hearda hot pants, kid, but this is ridiculous!") and a brassiere pulled from my shirt pocket ("Are you wearin' this or keepin' it for a friend?"). The applause was deafening, my debut a success; but what I remember most about it was the bear hug Doctor Magic gave me in front of those people, a special signal that there were no fools onstage that afternoon, only fellow travelers.

I was on fire. Even if I lacked the dexterity or, ultimately, the will to become a magician, I began converting limited funds into goods from my

Johnson, Smith & Co. catalogue, a malignant collection of exploding cigars, celluloid teeth, hand buzzers and stink bombs ("more fun than a limburger cheese"). Anyone who took his boyhood seriously during the first fifty years of this century sooner or later sent an envelope with a quarter inside to Johnson, Smith & Co., Racine, Wisconsin, then anguished like an expectant father for the next six weeks until the blessed arrival of #2953: "The Whoopee Cushion or Poo-Poo Cushion as it is sometimes called is made of rubber. It is inflated in much the same manner as an ordinary rubber balloon and then placed on a chair. When the victim unsuspectingly sits upon the cushion, it gives forth noises that can be better imagined than described."

If my new act lacked imagination, it did have a strange continuity, thanks to Mr. Johnson and Mr. Smith. The running gag was a dazzling assortment of squirt devices—a squirt flower ("The bouquet in your buttonhole looks so fresh and sweet that everyone is tempted to inhale the delightful perfume. This is the moment to press the bulb. Gee whillikens! Don't they jump?"), a squirt cigar, squirt electric button, squirt mirror, squirt pencil, squirt rubber heart, squirt mouse, and a squirt ring ("an attractive-looking diamond that cannot fail to be the center of attraction. The observer experiences a very great suprise.").

The show was supplemented with a small bag of magic that included the Handkerchief Vanisher ("practically undetectable; never fails"), the Mesmerized Penny, Trixo the Climbing Monk, and the Incomprehensible Two-Card Monte. Finally, the audience was finessed with selections from "100 Parodies on the Latest Songs," and socko material courtesy

"One Thousand Choice Conundrums and Riddles" ("enough to last you for years"). I was on my way.

At the same time, Pat Fox and I were rapidly developing into the town's foremost Spike Jones impressionists. The original routine consisted of pantomimes done to City Slicker recordings. Gradually though, we grew bolder, abandoning the records and performing the material "live," accompanying ourselves with cornets. While one tooted, the other sang, belched, snored, hiccoughed, whistled, and guffawed his way through this musical compost heap, alternating roles with the tooter at crucial points if he found the sound effect unmanageable. Pat, for example, could shatter glass with a two-fingered whistle, while I was clearly the superior belcher. Our rivalry for the spotlight was intense, but our rapport unshakable.

Mercifully, the act ran its course when the good will of numerous church groups and the Kiwanis Club was exhausted. What was important about these beginnings was that we knew instinctively we were not good; it was no handicap, because for every piece of bad material made worse, we learned to laugh long and hard at ourselves, and in the process created the first measurable traces of self-esteem.

Disappointment was rare during these early self-explorations, except perhaps the realization that I wasn't much of a cornet player. Things started well enough when my parents bought a secondhand horn and I started lessons in the seventh grade with the band director, Mr. Solazzi, who was, incidentally, Hardin's only Italian. Shortly after the lessons began, a large pimple developed precisely in the center of my upper lip. I was never sure whether the pimple was aggravated by the horn or the horn by the pimple, but

in an attempt to reach an accommodation with both I repositioned the mouthpiece far to the left of center, and began blowing the best I could in a line roughly parallel with my left ear. This switch gave both the horn and me instant relief, but the net result was musically disheartening and a cosmetic disaster. Thanks to a classic case of amblyopia, I was blessed with an eye that remained firmly targeted forty-five degrees out in space. When I stood to play, the horn stuck out of the left side of my face, my right eye scanned the rafters and the remaining eye darted madly in between, searching out the notes on the music. From a distance, it was difficult to tell exactly what I was up to. One evening after a band concert, Mr. Ping, the banker, came backstage to congratulate me for memorizing my solo; he said he didn't see me look at the music once.

Another minor setback was the discovery that I wasn't destined for the Athlete's Hall of Fame. Hardin was a big basketball town, and I seldom missed shooting two or three hundred baskets a day at a hoop nailed to the garage in Jack Butorac's driveway. Even in winter, I was out there honing moves and perfecting dribbles in my galoshes. Regrettably, Hardin High School never scheduled any games in galoshes on Jack's driveway. If they had, my overshoes would have been retired and enshrined in a glass case in Butorac's garage.

It was in Hardin that I began a lasting romance with the telephone. Ma Bell operated a small system there, cooperatively handled by two unmarried sisters, Anna and Nettie Ray. They rotated shifts at the switchboard, and over the years were able to recognize the voices of each of the several hundred sub-

scribers, always thanking them by name after the query, "Number please?" This very personal service created some knotty situations when the high fun and low humor of prank calls overcame my better judgment. Heading the list of potential victims were the grocery stores, who unfailingly answered yes when asked if they had Aunt Jemima in the sack, then hung up when I told them to put on their socks because Uncle Jemima was on the way. More than once, Anna and Nettie's incomparable recall pinpointed the last connection to a complaint, and I was called back at once for a stern but ladylike review of telephone company policy.

Mostly though, the phone was an indispensable tool in the day-to-day conduct of my life. Our home number was simply 5. It was the same as my father's seed company, so both phones would ring after closing and no business opportunities would be lost. The rest of the phones in Hardin had three-digit numbers, and the dozens I committed to memory were an index of my daily activities—326, to find out if Pat Fox had any extra valve oil for my cornet; 241, to see if Lennis Lammers felt like putting on his truss and shooting a few baskets; 181 to ask if we could use Butorac's basket; 172, to check on new arrivals and potential trades in the Evenson brothers' peerless comic book collection; 225, to collect the twelve dollars Alan Goller owed me for taking his paper route on vacation; and always 5, to find out what time supper was.

My watershed year was 1951. I turned fourteen, fell in love with an older woman (Shirley Lind. She was sixteen and told me it would never work), started high school, became a brother, and managed to land

on my feet in a close contest with puberty. It was the year I did my first singing role in a school musical called "Rio Rico." I played a character named Tubby who made twenty-five separate, timely entrances with the single line "When do we eat?", and who sang a Freudian duet titled "Hot Buns" with a fat girl costumed as a Negress. Following this performance came a curious chain of requests to sing at weddings and funerals. I was asked to do this for the next several years, and although I didn't make any money, I did accumulate a large collection of cufflinks. Of the dozens I received, I still have one enormous pair in my dresser, a memento of some half-remembered nuptials bearing the mutilated inscription, "To Bog Rugy, with thanks from Naomi and John."

Also, 1951 was a year of surprises for my stepmother, Jo, who at 44 woke up pregnant. At first, she wasn't quite sure how to break the news to my father, until he bounced into the kitchen one evening and asked her what she had in the oven.

There was little change for the remainder of my time in Hardin. I fell in love again, wrecked my father's car twice, played some football, and on long winter nights lay in my darkened room dialing faraway places on a small radio—WBBM in Chicago, KFAB in Omaha, WHO in Des Moines, KOA in Denver, WWL in New Orleans. The magic voices coming through that tiny speaker told me at once how much there was to know, and how little I really knew.

III

Going Away

Leaving home for the first time wasn't the hardest thing I ever did. On that Friday night when the senior boys gathered in an empty classroom in caps and gowns awaiting their final marching orders to the gymnasium, I was anxious to go. We chalked our names on a blackboard with the same flourish with which we'd painted them on the water tower the night before, vowed to stay in touch, then on cue filed soberly to the proceedings in our only suits and fathers' ties.

Some of the boys had already enlisted in the service, some married, some registered in colleges and business schools, one went to Annapolis, and the usual small number were well on the way to going bananas. Launched by Harold and Jo in a used '51 Chevy with a Mobil credit card and solid financing, I left for the University of Montana with the admonition to write even if I didn't need anything.

The next four years were mostly good, except for another failed love affair and chronic ring-around-the-collar from doing my own laundry. I wore the right clothes, took the right classes, and joined the right fraternity, pledging not to reveal its secrets

upon pain of having my innards strewn over the South Atlantic by a bald eagle. I was among the last of the great conformists, destined for quiet absorption by the Establishment, no questions asked. Although I agreed with the justice of this fate, I did wonder if life would ever give me a shot at show business.

The chance came in the fall of my freshman year. Pat Fox had already been at the university for two years, and one afternoon in the student union I watched him sing with two fraternity brothers in a trio predictably called the Sigma Nu Hotshots. It was no ordinary group—not only because it was a trio at a time when no male trios existed, but also because of the odd, captivating informality of two people sitting on top of an upright piano, in such total musical agreement with their accompanist that all three were able to break into song. It was like a scene from an M-G-M musical—three guys hanging around a piano in a roomful of sullen, talking people, impetuously delivering a series of thunderbolt show tunes that brought the crowd to its feet again and again.

I knew when I heard the first few bars of intricate, fortissimo harmonies the trio was a totally original, genuine powerhouse, and I wanted in. The two lead singers were Pat and a fellow named Warren Grass; the pianist and leader was Dick Riddle. That winter, Fox and Riddle (we somehow started addressing each other by last names, and it stuck) sponsored my apprenticeship in the Sigma Nu house on grounds that they could always use another singer at sorority serenades. Just before Christmas, Warren Grass married and dropped out of school, and I was drafted into the Hotshots. Making music with Fox and Riddle was even better than listening to it; and singing and

rearranging the same six or seven songs over and over improved the quality of our performance, if not the size of our repertoire. We became roommates which was all right with me, because at the time I was sharing space with an Arabian named Ali-Al-Saudi who learned to speak English listening to short-wave radio. Like Fox and myself, Riddle came from a small town, one in northwestern Montana called Libby, whose chief exports were lumber, feathers, and wolf meat. When we weren't lying about our home towns, we practiced, drank beer, and sometimes went to class. Actually, Fox always went to class; of the three, he was the best student and had the transcript to prove it. Riddle was the most accomplished with women. He was the school's head cheerleader, and just stopped short of convincing his dates that the captain of the football team could perform weddings. I was the most outspoken, once setting a record for the most four-letter words used against a left-handed pitcher in a single softball game.

Our real stage training began the second year when we expanded into a group called Campus Capers. Bill Williamson, a splendid pianist and dancer, was added because he worked lounges at night and had money to lend; the other two newcomers were Riddle's sister Judy and a short, lively girl named Smoo Boggess. We did about two hours of Broadway show music and dancing (I didn't dance, except for numbers that called for a clubfoot), tied together with songs by the trio. The closest we came to professional employment was a tentative offer from Amato's Supper Club in Portland, Oregon, that aborted because everyone had an eight o'clock class. But opportunities to perform and develop (Judy and Smoo were already

well-developed) came often, and we traveled the Northwest for the next couple of years playing campuses for lodging and expenses.

The act collapsed when Fox and Riddle graduated, as, I assumed, had my ambitions. Judy and I were the only ones left my senior year; after a few rush week performances together she got married, I got a job driving a school bus and started classes, and the Campus Capers passed on to that great amateur night in the sky.

When I graduated the following spring, I'd almost forgotten about show business. I took a summer job as a room clerk in Glacier National Park. There I plotted an alternate future, improved my chess game, and wrote a few unpublishable songs, including one for a farewell party titled "Good Things Come in Pairs," featuring four girls dancing topless on a picnic table who were fired by the hotel next morning. Faced with the draft when Glacier closed that fall, I joined the Air National Guard because of their good reputation for avoiding hand-to-hand combat, and spent the balance of the year in basic training where I lost the heart of the drill instructor and won $900 playing poker.

My formal education was finished. I thought briefly about going to law school after basic, but my parents were out of money and I didn't have the slightest idea how to make any. It was January, 1960; the country and I were slogging through a major recession brought on by a common need for heavy spending and high times. On a gloomy January day, I lined up behind seven other men in the Billings, Montana, office of Universal CIT Credit Corporation in response to an ad offering $300 a month, a company

car, and training in the rigors of low finance. A couple of days after the interview I was called and told the candidates had been narrowed to two, and was then asked to dinner with the district supervisor. It was a very nice restaurant, and, as I found out later, the most money the company would ever allow me for a meal again. The supervisor was a classic executive named Charlie Wingfield—huge, imposing, and altogether confident that finance companies were privy to the origins of the universe. After ordering the biggest steak on the menu and getting away with it, I was sure I'd made the proper impression. Near the end of the meal I excused myself and went to the men's room for the usual reasons, and also to practice a few conclusive gestures and facial expressions in the mirror. Returning to the table, I placed my napkin back on my lap and realized instantly that my fly was not only open but definitely akimbo. We continued to talk; my hands worked furiously under the table trying to straighten the damn thing out and get it closed. Finally, it went up, almost at the moment Wingfield called for the check. It was a good sign. We shook hands, rose from the table, and started for the door with Charlie in the lead, me in the rear, and the tip of the tablecloth stuck in my zipper. The owner was understanding about the fractured dishes, a couple at the adjoining table said it was an anniversary dinner they'd never forget, and Charlie Wingfield gave me the job on the spot.

The title they gave me was "adjuster," dreamed up no doubt by a descendant of the man who first called sawed-off shotguns peacemakers. Adjusters were CIT's in-house bill collectors, whose function was to keep the company's past due accounts under

1 percent. The Billings branch had roughly a thousand customers, and it fell to me to see that not more than five or six were ever thirty days or more past due. It was one of the smaller offices, with a budget permitting only a single adjuster, or "inside-outside man." That meant working a week at my desk, followed by a week of travel to personally squeeze late payments out of those unimpressed by my telephone technique. The idea was to make as many collections as possible by phone to cut the expense and risk of face-to-face confrontations. CIT collection procedures were direct, tough, and the best in the business. Unfortunately, they fostered the medieval notion common to all lenders that everyone on the face of the earth is a deadbeat. But the work was interesting, and the best introduction I could have had to life as it really is.

Deer Mr. Ruby

I can pay no more like you and CIT want.
I leev car and keys by miget bar on main st.
I keep the tires you rotten sonabich.

yours turley

Manuel Fuentes

Repossessions were a black mark against the adjuster. Getting the payment was far less costly than seizing the merchandise, and each "repo" had to be explained in triplicate. Negotiation, especially on large balances, was the preferred method.

Mr. Ruby:

Enclosed are two payments @ $150.00 on my trailer like we agreed and you won't have to take it back.
Sorry I am behind, but business was slow and I had

to lay off two girls I had working in it until last week. Things have picked up again and I have three girls in there now and need a bigger trailer. I got my eye on a 4-bedroom job. Can you handle it?

Sincerely,

Marge W.

Despite my best efforts, I was forced to travel every other week. My boss was an ex-marine who ran the operation like a full alert, and always knew where I was. He used to astonish me by pulling his car alongside mine out in the middle of nowhere, motioning me to the side of the road like a highway patrolman. There, he examined my accounts one by one, making penciled notations urging me on to the attack. He was a good guy, really, and smart, but paranoid in the extreme.

My territory included all of eastern Montana, western North Dakota and northern Wyoming. Distances were great, and either by design or accident CIT made no allowance for a radio in the car; by the time I got from one place to another, I was talking to myself, and in no mood to settle for anything less than what I had come for. The company was also frugal when it came to expenses. I had $4 a day for meals, $4 for a room, and no allowance for lunch. If I needed a big meal at night, I skipped breakfast the next morning to pay for it. If I happened to work late and had to settle for the last motel in town for $5, I spent an hour explaining it back at the office. All of this tended to make adjusters a bit unpleasant, which may have been the intended effect. Making collections for CIT wasn't as hazardous as it could have been, since most of their money at the time was tied up in automobile loans.

This gave me tremendous leverage, because most men would sell their sisters to save their wheels. Nevertheless, there were still plenty of problems. A farmer who was stalling for time invited me into the house for lunch (which I needed), then paid his kids fifty cents apiece to let the air out of my tires so I wouldn't be able to tow his pickup away. I paid each kid a dollar apiece to pump them up again, and drove off with the truck in tow.

The strangest happening of all occurred one evening just before dark in the small Indian hamlet of Lame Deer on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation. I drove to the house of an Indian man who had defaulted on his last six or seven payments and knocked; when the door opened, I could just make out his huge silhouette against the dim light from inside. I told him I'd come for his car and needed the keys. He didn't speak, but went back in the room for a moment, then reappeared suddenly with his arms in the air. Hollering at the top of his voice, he charged me. Instinctively, I raised my arms to counter the blows and ran for the car, hoping to get inside and lock it. But he was too quick, and chased me around the little Ford again and again until he finally slipped on the frozen ground, giving me the seconds needed to get in the car and start it.

Roaring out of the yard, I spun onto the gravel highway and stopped for a moment to collect myself. In the dark, I felt something wet on my hands and turned on the overhead light. It was blood—my shirt was a mass of red. I'd been stabbed! I clutched my chest, and the harder I clutched it, the more it bled. There was no pain. Shock, I thought. There's no pain because I'm in shock. The lights of the government

Indian hospital a mile down the road suddenly registered and I shoved the gas pedal to the floor. The car skidded through the gate and bounced up the first six steps of the entrance. I stumbled out and fell into the arms of an old man shoveling snow; together, we wheezed up the rest of the stairs and through the door to a lady behind the counter. I told her as steadily as I could that I'd been knifed. "Knifing! Knifing!" she announced in loud, flat tones. A series of white-stockinged women emerged from doors in the hallway, gathering behind a large female in a nurse's cap who pushed a wheeled slab with a white sheet on it toward me. God, I thought, that's what they put dead people on! I started shouting. "I can walk! I'm okay!" "The hell you are!" the leader shouted back, pushing me down on the table as the others grappled with my legs and ankles. "Whoo-eee, look at him bleed," one said. It started to hurt. The leader spoke. "Get your hands off your chest." I couldn't move them. In a single motion she forced the hands apart and ripped open my only good shirt, stared down for a moment, then grabbed my wrist. "You been drinkin'?" I shook my head. "Well, sonny," she snorted, "if you ain't much of a drinker you're sure one hell of a bleeder," pointing to two small cuts on my left hand that looked more like sabre wounds to me at the moment. "Is it bad?" I asked dramatically. Her face softened. "Shoot, no," she said, leaning close to my ear. "But the way you bleed I'd hate to see you get stabbed someplace really serious, like the ass!"

The nurse sutured the cuts expertly, gave me a pat on the back, and walked me down to my car. As I opened the door, a small metal object appeared in the sleeve of my overcoat and dropped to the ground; I

picked it up. It was a beer can opener stained red at the tip. The guy had tried to open me like a can of beer! I thanked the leader quickly, then crunched the transmission into reverse, bounced backward down the six steps and through the gate again, and sped off.

As soon as the hospital was out of sight, I stopped and began pounding my fists on the steering wheel—out of rage, because of what I'd been through, and frustration, perhaps humiliation, because the bastard had botched the job. I decided not to tell anyone. Standing in the snow, I stripped off my clothes, wrapped them in the overcoat, and threw everything over a barbed wire fence. With fresh pants and a clean shirt from my suitcase, I drove back to Billings. Except for a call to a sheriff who bluffed his way onto the reservation next day and repossessed the car, the details of the incident were never mentioned.

I'd been working rather hard for ten months when Charlie Wingfield flew up from Denver and offered me the collection manager's job in Casper, Wyoming, for the princely sum of $325 a month and a title. I was barely making it in Billings on $300, and Casper was a lousy, windy town in the middle of an oil patch with a lot of tough cookies on the short end of long delinquencies. But Billings had a bad habit of rolling up the streets at nine o'clock, and I didn't have anything better to do anyway, so I let Charlie take me to dinner again and we struck another bargain.

The following morning my phone rang. It was Riddle. He was calling from Libby and told me he'd just been discharged from the Army. He wanted to know if I was interested in going to New York. To do what? I asked. To sing? He reminded me that Fox was

due for discharge from the Navy in a week and had mentioned in a letter he was anxious to go. I said I'd let him know. The next night Fox called, saying that he and Riddle had talked it over and were definitely leaving in two weeks. I hadn't seen either one of them for nearly two years, and there was no prospect of discussing the matter face-to-face for at least ten days. Unfortunately, CIT wanted me in Casper at the end of the week. I stayed out all that night, which is hard to do in Billings. At seven the next morning I drove to the airport, catching Charlie Wingfield just before he boarded his plane, and told him I'd changed my mind. He paled, told me I was missing a wonderful opportunity, but said he understood. We parted manfully, then I went into the men's room and threw up.

Fox, Riddle, and I met on schedule. That is to say, Fox showed on the appointed day; Riddle arrived three days after that. Riddle was, is, and ever shall be late. Other than performances, for which he was very punctual, he has never been on time for anything in his life. If the truth were known, his wonderful mother Inga probably had a record-breaking pregnancy. I never felt he was consciously off schedule, it's just that he was easily distracted.

During his college days, Riddle worked as a houseboy at the Alpha Phi sorority. One evening at dinner the housemother asked him to go upstairs for some extra napkins. Normally, men weren't allowed on the second floor because the girls' living quarters were there; but attendance at meals was mandatory for members, and it could be safely assumed the upper floors were empty. When Riddle reached the top of the stairs his eyes fell on a new hairdryer in the hallway. For some reason, he'd always wondered what

it was like to sit under one. Without hesitation, he sat in the chair, pulled the dome over his head, and turned it on. It was at that precise moment he realized the housemother hadn't counted heads, because the homecoming queen stepped out of the shower room completely nude, went to the telephone ten feet in front of him, and began a lengthy conversation with her boyfriend. Someone called for him from the bottom of the stairs. He was frozen to the chair. Someone called again. The queen heard, put her hand over the receiver, and seemed to look directly at him as she unconsciously relayed the page, then turned her attention back to the phone. The dryer was on high, and Riddle began to perspire under his cheerleader's sweater. By this time the housemother had mounted the stairs and arrived on the second floor. She asked the queen if she'd seen Riddle; the queen said she sure as hell wouldn't be standing there in the buff if she had. The queen hung up and began chatting with the housemother. Sweat started running into Riddle's eyes. The housemother leaned over the stair railing one more time and called down for him. Riddle thought he smelled his hair smoking; he braced himself for a rush to the shower. Suddenly a voice called up for the housemother. Applying a maternal pat to the queen's rear end, she descended to the dining room, and the queen disappeared into her chamber. Riddle eased out from beneath the dryer, removed his loafers, and made a silent dash for the back fire escape and safety in the yard below. Ten minutes later, he burst through the front door, explaining that he'd received a call from home, but it was nothing serious. The housemother and the queen, who was now seated at the table, both told him they were glad nothing had happened.

I don't remember now what he told Fox and me when he finally arrived in Billings that November, probably something about visiting his Aunt Honey, who in truth had as much trouble scheduling an appointment with him as anyone. But it didn't matter; we were all very much at liberty now, and ready to go as far as our funds and nerve would take us. Fox and I made a private agreement not to let Riddle too far out of sight, to avoid delays; Riddle and I agreed not to let Fox do all the driving (he was a compulsive wheelman); Fox and Riddle made a pact not to lend me money for cigarettes, to make sure I could hit the high notes when we needed them.

We left in my salmon and grey '55 Chevy with a trunkful of clothes and the remainder of our worldly goods roped on top, including my electric piano. I had about $200, Riddle had $300, and Fox, as usual, led with $1,000. We sang as we drove, piecing back together songs we hadn't done for three years. No one in his right mind would have been as optimistic as we were, but it was a new start, and guts were our most negotiable commodity. A friend of ours from Montana who was living in New York, Norma Beatty, found an apartment in Greenwich Village and talked the landlord into holding it until we got there. That, we felt, was a good omen, and it gave us a sense of having a foothold in New York before we even arrived.

En route, we stopped in Minneapolis for a couple of days and boarded at the Sigma Nu house at the University of Minnesota. We'd only planned to stay a night, but someone suggested going downtown to a nightclub and talking the manager into a cameo appearance. We did, the manager obliged, and after the performance a man came to our table who said he was

from Capitol records. Impressed, we agreed to meet him at the Greyhound bus station next morning for a possible signing. It never occurred to us that Capitol didn't sign contracts in bus stations, and even when he didn't show we spent several hours discussing the text of an angry letter to the record company. It was the first of a long series of encounters with people who drove forklifts by day and made stars by night. As ridiculous as some of the propositions were, we took them all seriously, knowing that sooner or later we'd have to meet someone with genuine credentials to succeed.

The Minneapolis fiasco, though, was still fresh in our minds the night we arrived in New York, and it was decided the thing to do was go straight to the top. Before we even notified anyone that we were in town, we stopped at a pay phone and called the "Jack Paar Show," asking for an audition. The producer asked who our agent was, if we had any recordings, were we appearing anywhere in New York, and had we done any television. When the answer on all counts was no, he asked if our mothers knew we were out so late. It didn't matter. Our first night in New York and already we'd talked to the producer of the "Jack Paar Show"! That is exactly the way we put it to our friends that evening, minus the part about the mothers. It made them feel good, it gave us courage, and it was, to a point, true.

The apartment we were about to rent belonged to another Montanan named Merv Bendewald, a clever fellow who first showed it to us, waited a moment for our excited approval, then announced the rent was $200! It was twice what we were prepared or could afford to pay. But the temperature

outside had dropped to 15° and it was snowing hard, so we paid him the first month's rent and agreed privately to find a cheaper place as soon as we could. It was a basement apartment, originally one room used as a studio by an Indian artist named Red Robin, in whose name the phone was still listed. Merv had sublet it from Robin, who had probably sublet it from someone else, and now we were in it. Whoever owned the building didn't know we were there at least, which was fine with us when we began regular practice sessions. Bendewald had divided the one large room into a living room, a bedroom, and a small bath by means of light wooden frames strung with knitting yarn. The only bona fide room was a tiny kitchen, separated from the bathroom by a wall. A pair of small french doors opened off the kitchen onto a small, grimy brick patio, qualifying the premises, in New York terms, as a garden apartment. Despite the high rent, we were more than satisfied with the feeling of permanence the apartment gave us that first night—that is, until the rat bounced across Fox's covers at two in the morning and disappeared into the woodwork. I'd never seen Fox so shaken. Riddle and I weren't exactly tickled to death. After an hour, we decided it was safe to go to sleep again. A few minutes after we turned out the lights, there was a noise in the kitchen; something was rattling the sack in the garbage can. Riddle reached for the light switch and we ran to the noise. There were two more rats in the garbage can having midnight supper! Without thinking, I turned the can upside down and sat on top while we made a plan. The rats were furious. Lousy service, I guess. Not knowing whether we could kill them or they could kill us, we slid the can to the french doors,

threw the rats and garbage out onto the patio, then slammed and locked the doors behind us and went back to bed, exhausted.

When I woke the next morning, there were more noises in the kitchen. I looked through the entrance and saw another rat in the bottom of the can trying to get out, but the sides were too high and the rodent couldn't get a grip on the slick plastic surface. At this moment Fox ran in with a large piece of melted green glass that decorated the coffee table. He looked at the rat for an instant, then dropped the glass in the garbage can. We had a rat trap. Until we found and boarded up all the holes, each night we put the garbage in a sack out on the street for collection, and put a small amount of food in the bottom of the empty can. Each morning one or two rats would be inside and the glass was dropped. We started calling the glass kryptonite in tribute to its great powers. No one thought of buying rat poison; the kryptonite and the plastic garbage can were a grim combination, but then it wasn't hard to dislike rats.

After the initial euphoria of being in New York wore off and money ran low, it was time to find work. Because we'd come to sing, full-time employment was out of the question, but good part-time jobs were hard to find. We started working as temporary office help; Fox and Riddle could type, and did. At the time I couldn't type, and was sent from business to business as a file clerk. I read not long ago that file clerks head the list of boring jobs; from experience, I can vouch that this occupation is deadly. I was sent one morning to the Gulf Oil building on Wall Street, where a man took me into a room about 125 feet long with ten rows of five-drawer file cabinets stretching

the room's entire length. "These are our entire East Coast credit card records," he said proudly. "Alphabetize them." He closed the door behind him, leaving me absolutely alone. I went to a row of cabinets and opened a drawer; three manila folders stuffed with credit card receipts and bound with rubber bands popped out and fell on the floor. Looking in the back of the drawer, I discovered seven more. I began walking down the cabinets and opening drawers at random. More manila folders popped out onto the floor, each with the same contents. When I returned to the starting point I started looking around for Alan Funt, or Franz Kafka behind a one-way mirror taking notes. The man poked his head in the door and asked how it was going. I stared at him, sat down on the floor, and opened the first manila envelope. Golden, Gould, Gerschner, Zygowicz—Zygowicz? Brown, Brown, Brown, Matthews, Adams, Jones, Jones, Feldman, Pauli, Thomas . . . by noon I'd finished two envelopes. Each time a new folder was opened the names had to be introduced into the preceding folders. In alphabetical order. By three o'clock, I'd finished five folders in the first drawer of the first cabinet of the first of ten 125-foot rows. At four I was sitting by an open window making small paper planes out of the receipts and monitoring their performance to Wall Street sixty stories below. Some had messages.

For the love of God, HELP!
I am a prisoner in a file cabinet.
For the sake of future generations, keep them out of this room.
If God so loved the world, why did He give it to Gulf Oil?

At five I left that place and never returned, but I could never go near the Battery afterward without breaking into an icy sweat.

Just after the new year began, we realized we weren't bringing in enough money to keep things together. We practiced hard after work each night, but were too tired to do the kind of work needed on new material. About a week before the rent we couldn't pay was due, an old friend came to town, a fellow Montanan, A. B. "Bud" Guthrie, Jr. Bud was then at the peak of his powers as a Pulitzer Prize-winning author and screenwriter. His daughter Helen was a classmate and close friend and lived in New York not far from us. At her urging and by her father's invitation, we had spent long weekends each summer at Bud's writing retreat in the mountains near Choteau, Montana. He was particularly fond of Riddle, a writer of unusual talent. Each occasion was a festive one, and although Bud gave no formal lessons on either his craft or the art of living, the riotous, argumentative, challenging conversations that stretched into daybreak left a subtle tatoo on the minds of those who listened closely to this outrageous, extraordinary man.

When Bud came to our apartment in New York, he knew instinctively what needed to be done. Pulling out his checkbook, he told us to stop work for a couple of months, lock ourselves in, and get the act on a paying basis. Then he gave us $1,000 and told us to pay him back when we could. The money paid two months' rent in advance, and the balance was budgeted for basics as we began working twelve hours a day on a legitimate repertoire. By the end of January we had a solid set of thirteen or fourteen

numbers. After trying them out on friends, we bought matching sports shirts and faced our first nightclub audiences at a small place on Grove Street in the Village called the Upstairs at the Duplex. It wasn't hard to get work there; the owner, Jan Wallman, used would-be and had-been acts for entertainment. We all performed for nothing, inviting agents and other potential career-boosters in to catch a showcase of the acts.

During our first week at the Duplex, Woody Allen began performing on the same bill. The following week, an unknown promoter named Marty Erlichman brought in an eighteen-year-old girl with a big nose and hair coiffed like a beehive to sing for the first time. The song was "A Sleepin' Bee," and when she finished I realized I'd watched the first genuine happening of my life. Her name was Barbra Streisand, and we would see her again, often.

Our performances at the Duplex were sharpening the act, but we had trouble getting anyone who could really help us to come and see it. By day, we followed every possible lead, shoving my electric piano into subway cars, then screwing on the legs and plugging it in agents' offices an hour later. Everyone who heard us acted enthused, but it was Catch-22 all the way—no experience, no job. One potentially good break came when Fox started dating a copy girl from *Look* who persuaded the magazine's editor, Dan Misch, to do a picture spread on an act trying to crack the bigtime. *Look* sent a photographer to live with us for a week, which improved both our morale and our diet, especially when they shelled out for their share of the groceries. But a month later Elizabeth Taylor recovered from her famous bout with pneumonia,

and the magazine devoted an entire issue to her—the one our story was scheduled for. Although our career hadn't exactly gone up in smoke, some time was lost demobilizing relatives in Montana who were poised at every newsstand.

We'd been in New York a little over three months and were growing tired of the Duplex, of agents, and of stealing toilet paper at cocktail parties. In mid-February of 1961, we were invited to a function at the apartment of Sandra and Bob Auchincloss, friends of Helen Guthrie. We never turned these affairs down, and were always asked to sing—partly, I thought then, because people liked what we did, and also in partial payment for the dozens of finger sandwiches we stuffed in our coats. We sang well that evening, and afterward a man named Tom Hammond introduced himself, saying he was attorney for Irving Haber, owner of Upstairs at the Downstairs. This was no small claim. The Upstairs was the hottest club in New York, thanks to the genius of its impresario, Julius Monk. We had talked many times about working there, and reasoned we probably would one day when we were well-known. Tom seemed sincere when he asked if we'd audition for Julius the next afternoon, and perhaps we should have been more excited when we accepted, but we'd been silver-tongued into enough dark corners since the bus station in Minneapolis to say yes as a matter of course, rather than hope.

Even when he called the next morning and set the audition for two that afternoon at the club, we gave the doors an even chance of being locked. They weren't. Julius Monk, the unreachable, appeared regal and smiling at the entrance. He ushered us be-

Ruby with Harold, Jo, and sister Dana on graduation day at the University of Montana, June, 1959.

Ruby, Fox, and Riddle with Senator Edward Kennedy, 1964.

tween the gold chairs and red velvet walls of this entertainer's womb to a table and ordered coffee from the kitchen. Julius was about six feet four with a great head of grey hair and a pencil mustache that drew your eyes to the long, sad lines in his face. He was not just well-dressed, but a sartorial triumph. In his late forties, he looked every bit the man who finally had the world by the tail. He spoke in soft, perfectly-rounded theatrical tones noticeably colored by a North Carolina accent. I discovered later he was a little hard of hearing, especially one night when I brought a girl to the club I was trying desperately to impress named Bonnie Pitsch. Julius, in his grandest manner, referred to her the entire evening as Miss Pitts.

It was clear from the moment we sat down that Julius intended to hear us at our very best. We talked and drank coffee for over an hour, pausing for an introduction to Irving Haber who joined us, having come to hear the audition. Finally, Julius rose to his full height and extended his hand to the piano on the stage. "Gentlemen," he said, "it is time for the evidence." For the next hour we sang better than we ever had in our lives. Until then, we weren't sure if we were good; the look on Julius' face told us we were. The look on Irving Haber's face told us we were hired. It's hard to remember how excited I really was the next day when Julius phoned (Julius Monk phoning US! Damn!) and asked if we'd be interested in replacing Mabel Mercer in ten days. He then asked in his peculiar way if we were "properly costumed" for the event, meaning of course did we own matching suits. When we told him we didn't even have matching money, he instructed us to meet him at a men's store that afternoon.

At the appointed time, Julius made his usual magnificent entrance through the glass doors of the establishment and shook our hands. "And how are my three young men from Montana today?" he asked, motioning in the same breath to the owner who came quickly, tape in hand. "I think that's what I shall call you," he added suddenly, "the Three Young Men From Montana." We offered no resistance. After months of haggling over names (the WestMont Trio . . . the High Dividers . . . Bob, Dick, and Pat . . . Pat, Dick, and Bob . . . Dick, Pat, and Bob . . . Tom, Dick, and Harry, etc. etc.) it was time for a settlement of some kind, and after Julius selected the three black suits and charged them to his account, no one wanted to argue. He also advised us to find a manager, which we lost no time in doing. His name was Milt Kramer, who was then vice-president of Frank Music Co., Frank Loesser's publishing firm. We had auditioned for Milt and Frank several weeks earlier when we learned they were interested in expanding the publishing house into personal management. The audition had gone well, but like all the others it was wait and see. When we phoned Milt and told him the deal at the Upstairs was firm, he offered immediately to negotiate it if we would sign with the company.

Within a week, we were under contract to both Frank Loesser and Julius Monk; within three months of our arrival in New York we had fallen into the friendly clutches of the creme de la creme of entertainment. We pondered this on opening night, as we drove around Central Park in a chauffeured Rolls-Royce rented for the occasion by our friend and landlord, Merv Bendewald. I remember how tickled Julius was as he watched us step out of it in front of the club. Even though we had to take the subway

home, it wasn't the Upstairs at the Duplex anymore, it was the Upstairs at the Downstairs. I was so excited I could hardly breathe. The place was packed with its usual crowd of after-theater celebrities—Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, Joan Fontaine, Eddie Albert, Myrna Loy, Roddy McDowell; the only strangers there that night were Fox, Riddle, and I, and a half-dozen friends. We sang nervously, but well. Milt Kramer and Frank Loesser led the cheering section in front, while Helen Guthrie and Norma Beatty applauded wildly in back. The reviews next day were tremendous. But the most crucial opinion wouldn't come for a week, from Popsy Whittaker, the entertainment editor for the *New Yorker*. When it came, it was one of Popsy's typical one-liners: "The Three Young Men From Montana is a club that's glee in every sense of the word." With that cryptic thumbs-up from the *New Yorker* we were in business. Milt began using the enormous prestige of Frank Music to bring record companies and agents in to see the act. By June, Columbia had advanced us $3,000 to record a first album. One evening a song-plugger from Frank named Seth Shapiro came into the club with Barbra Streisand. She was appearing at the time in a small revue at the Gramercy Park Theater called "An Evening With Harry Stoons," written by Jeff Harris, who later would write many pieces of material for both Barbra and us. She looked pale that night, and her blue jeans and tennis shoes contrasted sharply with the poshness of the Upstairs. When she got up to go to the john, Seth followed her with his eyes. "You guys may have gotten the first breaks," he said, "but she's going to be the biggest star of all." We felt he was right, if only she got the breaks.

Good things were happening fast for us now. Milt decided we needed a first-rate lawyer to iron out the details of the Columbia contract, and sent us to the offices of Weisberger and Frosch, two men who represented the very biggest stars, including Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Kramer hadn't said anything about cost; as we sat in Arnold Weisberger's office putting our names on the final agreement we asked, naively, how much we owed him. "Nothing," he laughed, "only your promise that we'll represent you when you earn over a quarter of a million a year!" It was incredible, this outpouring of faith in an act that was barely in business; all the bad jokes about agents' hearts didn't seem so funny to us now. Later, even in the worst of times I would never feel that anyone who represented us ever did less than his best.

Shortly before our last option expired at the Upstairs we signed for the June opening of the original Playboy Club in Chicago, and the second Playboy opening in Miami in July. Milt Kramer was talking a third date with Max Gordon at the Blue Angel in New York. We spent the two weeks prior to our departure for Chicago recording at Columbia in New York. Teo Macero, the artist and repertoire man for the Brothers Four, and a little-known arranger, Hugo Montenegro, were assigned to us and we were impressed; but the results, I thought, were less than great. Two songs were lifted immediately from the album and made into singles. The first, "Walk the World Like a Man," climbed to about 85 or 90 on the charts; the second, "Chime In," died, but was resurrected that fall by the National Conference of Christians and Jews as the official song of National Brother-

hood Week. We had recorded the official national campaign song for the United Fund prior to that, an equally forgettable tune called "One Gift Works Many Wonders."

By now, Barbra had been picked up by Columbia too. One night, after work in Chicago, someone punched up "Happy Days Are Here Again" on a jukebox. It was her first hit, and we knew Seth Shapiro was right. About this time we began competing for work with two other groups, the Chad Mitchell Trio and an act called the Big Three. Both had a bit of an edge because they sang folk songs, which were still big stuff. The slick New York material we'd developed had a more limited appeal. I don't remember the names of the two men in the Big Three, but the lead singer was Cass Elliott; even then she had a voice that could slice bread. We were also getting a crash course in the realities of the record industry. Going from one radio station to another with a record plugger was depressing business. The lobby of every station looked like an unemployment office, and what amounted to taking a number and waiting our turn behind a dozen other acts and an equal number of record pluggers wilted out spirits. After a three-hour wait to pay court to one music director, he put our record on a turntable and skipped the needle across the grooves in a space of about ten seconds. Blip! Blip! Blip! Blip! Then, turning to five tape dispensers behind him, each with a different color in it, he selected yellow, slapped it on the record, and thanked us very much. Angry, I shook his hand and told him I'd learned a lot by coming there. "Well, son," he said, "if you stop learning, you stop living." His body and fender man told him that.

But things continued to go well for us. By mid-July we were basking in Miami at the Playboy Club and looking ahead to the last six months of the most incredible year of our lives. Late one afternoon, I was summoned from the pool for a long-distance call. "Dis is Sergeant Rocco Belfiore of the hunnert and foist tactical control squadron," the voice said. "Is dis Robert H Ruby, AF28713673?" God! What was the first sergeant of my National Guard unit calling for? Was it the traffic ticket I'd gotten on Long Island after the last meeting? Yes, I responded. "Okay, Ruby, dis here will notify you dat your unit is bein' called to active duty as of October foist, 1961. The foist meetin' of all poisonnel is one month from today, so make sure you're up here." Just like that. I don't know why I thanked him but I did and then hung up. All bets were off, and I knew it. President Kennedy had threatened to call up the reserves earlier that year in response to the Russians in Berlin, and now he'd made good on it. I waited until the last show that evening to tell Fox and Riddle. The next morning we called Milt Kramer. Returning to New York, I learned my Guard unit had scheduled a series of mandatory weekend drills in August and September in preparation for the call-up, and all dates and plans for those months were automatically washed out.

On October first, Fox and Riddle rented a Volkswagen with the last of our money and delivered me to the Air Force on Long Island. Thirty days later I was on my way to Germany to spend the longest ten months of my life. Kennedy's Lambs, we called ourselves—4,000 airmen staring across the border at 40 divisions of Russians. In two months, my squadron was operational and armed to the teeth. A week later

Khrushchev and Kennedy were on the hot line telling traveling salesman jokes. The generals probably figured "what the hell, as long as we've got 'em here let's play war games for another eight months." And so it was.

Luckily, I had a modestly rich bunkmate blessed with a Mercedes and money from home, and the four of us traveled the continent at every opportunity. But there wasn't a minute I didn't wonder if the act was finished forever.

Just after Christmas, Milt sent a cheery letter and the final master of the Columbia album; it was awful, and I wondered if they'd even have the guts to release it. Fox wrote in early spring saying he'd gotten the juvenile lead (the part of Hero) opposite Karen Black and Zero Mostel in "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum." Riddle had started writing his own musical, based on the life of cowboy artist Charlie Russell. I was sure it was over. There was some consolation in the good reviews Barbra was getting for her role as Miss Marmelstein in "I Can Get It for You Wholesale," and I did manage to write a half-dozen melancholy, unpublishable songs with a friend, Bruce Cohen. Bruce later told me why they were flops. "Never collaborate on a sad song with a Jew," he said. "Just when you get to the best part, they're always trying to cheer you up." Before we received our final departure orders in June, I performed the last act of my European concert tour, writing and directing a scatological tribute to the Air Force titled "So Long Uncle Sam, We Sure Got a Bang Out of You," which earned me the enduring contempt of the first sergeant, a reprimand from the squadron priest, and endless delays in the awarding of my overseas medal.

Ruby (at switchboard answering phones as usual) as Airman 3rd Class, 106 Tactical Control Squadron, Mannheim, Germany, 1962.

Ruby, Dick Riddle, and Pat Fox in 1964. Last publicity photo taken of group. Name changed to "The Montana Men."

We were mustered out in Washington, D.C., on July 10 (does anybody forget the day he got out?), and I grabbed a train for New York. Prepared for the worst, I climbed the stairs to our East 32nd Street apartment and rang the doorbell. Riddle answered, and after much embracing, handshaking, and I'll be damned's he told me the first good news I'd heard in ten months—he and Fox were broke and out of work. Fox came an hour later and confirmed it; he'd been replaced in "Forum" during the run in Washington. Since April, they both had been waiting tables to keep the wolf at the door from having pups. It was difficult for Fox, especially, to conceal his disappointment, but then the year had been a disaster for all of us. Later, Fox would become a very good actor with the credentials and bank account to prove it. For the moment, all we had was the $160 separation pay I brought home, which was immediately applied to groceries that evening and cab fare to Milt Kramer's office the following morning.

Milt was his usual optimistic, ebullient self, and ready to help us get things together again. He asked if we intended to exercise our option for a second recording at Columbia, adding that if we did they might insist on renaming us the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse Minus One. He then suggested we forget the option and make a new start on Cameo-Parkway, a company suddenly rich on the recordings of Chubby Checker and Bobby Vinton. We agreed, and within a week Milt not only had the new deal ready for signing, but an additional agreement with International Talent Associates to begin booking club dates. On Milt's further advice we made an agreement to give a small percentage of the act to Jeff

Harris, in return for a regular supply of special songs and material.

Things were beginning to look better. While I was gone, Riddle had begun a friendship with Jim Lowe at WNBC radio. Jim, best known for his recording of "Green Door," was represented in New York by Dick Rubin at United Talent Management. Dick was a friendly, capable man and a specialist in talent placement on network television. He persuaded us to sign a television-only agreement with UTM and promised to work hard to get us our first shots. It would be unfair not to give Riddle credit for being the most sociable link in the group, and the one most responsible for our best allies like Rubin and Lowe.

By September, ITA had come up with some significant bookings, including the December opening of the New York Playboy Club and the Stroller's on East 57th. Knowing there was time to fill until the major club openings, our agent, Irvin Arthur, began booking us on weekends with Barbra Streisand at Bill Hahn's, a Jewish resort near Westbrook, Connecticut. Barbra was still appearing in "Wholesale" with Elliot Gould, and the two of them lived together in an apartment just around the corner from ours on Third Avenue. On Saturday mornings the five of us piled into a rented station wagon and drove to Westbrook for that evening's show, and afterward spent the night and the balance of the weekend at Seth Shapiro's family estate in Westchester. Occasionally, Barbra's mother and younger sister would come along. (About seven years later, her sister started performing under the name Roslyn Kind.) Neither Elliot nor Barbra was hard to be with; he was quick and intelligent, she was naive to the point of absurdity.

Strangers mistook her offstage daffiness for stupidity. In truth, it was a cover for her youth (nineteen) and a stunning lack of interest in anything but performing. To me, she was as natural and friendly as a puppy, and I never felt she was anything less than genuine. But most important, her magnificent talent towered above the rest of us.

In mid-September we started recording the Cameo album. It was the only disappointment we'd face for an entire year. Cameo's president, Bernie Lowe, insisted we record only folk material, and it was clear he intended to sell the record on the strength of its cover rather than its contents. The results were melodious, but ludicrous. September was also the month I started dating a pretty girl from Boston named Eunice Goodman. For weeks I insisted on sleeping with her, but she said no unless we got married and Fox and Riddle moved out of the bed. In love, we were married October 13, 1962. We couldn't have picked a better time. The act was working steadily, and in November Dick Rubin booked us on the "Hootenanny" show at ABC. It was the beginning of a good series of national television shots that lasted as long as the act did.

The best and most constant exposure we received was on NBC's "Today" and "Tonight" shows. Johnny Carson had taken over from Jack Paar in the fall of 1961; unlike Paar, who played games and favorites with talent, Carson reserved the stand-up entertainment portion almost exclusively for new performers. If you did well, you were asked back again and again. We first auditioned for the show in a small room for Skitch Henderson, who was coordinating talent at the time. We got along well, and did the first show a week

later. After a second "Tonight" appearance, Dick Rubin began scheduling us regularly on "Today" with Hugh Downs. The "Today" show was the more difficult of the two, since it lacked a live audience and you had to be there at 4:00 A.M. for make-up and wake-up. It was also tougher to sing at that hour; but there was less pressure and confusion, and Downs was a totally relaxed host.

In July, 1963, we were doing the show when Hugh suddenly came over to the piano after a number and began chatting with us on camera. Among other things, I told him my wife had just given birth to our son Matthew that morning at the Boston Lying-In Hospital. At that moment Ethel Kennedy was watching from *her* room in Boston Lying-In, where she too had just had a baby boy named Matthew. A week later, Dick Rubin received a letter from her, inviting us to perform at a September gathering of State Department diplomats in Washington.

HICKORY HILL
4700 CHAIN BRIDGE ROAD
MCLEAN, VIRGINIA

July 15,1963

Dear Mr. Rubin,

This letter will confirm Mrs. Brown's conversation with you last Thursday. I believe she told you how delighted and impressed I was

by the Three Young Men from Montana when they appeared on the Today show. Never have I enjoyed a performance more.

It occurred to me they might consider coming to Washington to appear before a group of young executives and diplomats which we sponsor. This group met once a month throughout the spring and on each occasion entertainment was provided by an outstanding artist.

The programs are held in the State Department auditorium (where the Presidential press conferences take place) and the audience usually numbers 1,000—sometimes 1,200. Full dressing room facilities are available back stage and the program is very flexible, usually beginning at 8:30, lasting an hour or 90 minutes with any type intermission desired. We could probably invite anyone in whom the young men are especially interested—such as Senator and Mrs. Mansfield. We would be delighted to have all three of them as our guests for dinner preceding the performance if this could be worked out.

I understand Mrs. Brown explained to you this group operates completely without funds. To date, every performer has donated his time and talent and even provided his own transportation and lodging. The only compensations we can offer are an appreciative audience, excellent publicity and an opportunity to contribute to international understanding and goodwill.

If it is possible for you to schedule this appearance, I believe the last week of September would be a good time and of that week, Friday, the 27th, is most preferable. Otherwise, it might be better to wait until after the first of the year—say the end of January or February—when Congress is back in session and all the diplomats and government people are hard at work.

I am eagerly awaiting your answer—
for I sincerely believe the three young men
would have a most favorable effect on the young
men and women who have just come here and are
anxious to learn about the American way of life.

Sincerely,

s// Ethel Kennedy
Mrs. Robert F. Kennedy

P.S. Whatever happens—the boys are great.
They are loaded with talent and have
lots of zip—and it was sheer
pleasure to see them.
You've got three stars on your hands.
Congratulations.
s// Ethel Kennedy

Since no money was offered, our press agent described it to the columns as a command performance, which I suppose it was. But those orders weren't hard to take, and the occasion turned out rather remarkably. The show was done in the west wing of the State Department auditorium, where the President held his televised news conferences, and it was impressive as we rehearsed that afternoon to look stage right into the wings and see that podium with the presidential seal on it. If any act ever collapsed en masse from stage fright, we should have that night. When the lights went up we looked briefly to Milt Kramer in the wings for courage, then stared speechless for the first time into the faces of Bobby and Ethel Kennedy, seated in the center of the first row about ten feet from us. Bobby was chewing anxiously on a cigar, despite a number of lighted No Smoking signs in the room. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara was seated on his left, Mrs. McNamara was next to Ethel.

A couple of other cabinet members were present whose names were lost to me later in the excitement. Bobby laid his cigar on the armrest to join the short flurry of polite applause, then stuck it between his teeth again as we began. He seemed to glare at us through the entire performance; God knows what he had on his mind that night. But we were in good voice, and during intermission agreed that if "Swanee," our closing number, didn't get to him, nothing would. When it came, we blasted it out; the crowd began clapping in rhythm as we closed in on the finish and sang: "When I get to that Swaneeeeeeeeeee . . ." at which point Fox and Riddle dropped out as I continued to hold the "eeeeeeeee . . ." as was customary until, feigning lack of oxygen, I fell from the stool with a thud to the floor. In clubs, this finish always brought the house down; in the west wing of the State Department auditorium there was deadly quiet. On my hands and knees, I looked up and saw the attorney general and secretary of defense of the United States, respectively, rush to the stage, scale it, and in their all-powerful arms help me to my feet. I thanked them, walked slowly in the long silence to my overturned stool, and caught sight of Riddle giving a downbeat with his head as we sang, in the best three-part harmony of our lives "Shorrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrree!!" The applause in that acoustically-perfect room was deafening, and if no one really got the joke, they were unanimous in their enthusiasm for my moxie in the teeth of a "serious accident." One Pakistani politely suggested I write a letter of protest to the stool manufacturer.

There were many introductions and a lot of

handshaking on stage afterward. The Kennedys said a brief hello, then seemed to vanish. When the last exchange was over, we began gathering our things on the stage. Suddenly, from the back of the empty, darkened auditorium a voice shouted, "Hey! You guys!" Looking around for Milt, I assumed it was probably him and started walking in the semi-light up toward a figure headed my way. As we closed on each other, I was startled to see Bobby Kennedy, his hand outstretched, the cigar still firmly between his teeth. "Tremendous! Just tremendous!" he said, flashing his enormous smile and crushing my hand in an iron grip. "Thank you, Mister Kennedy," I responded imaginatively. "Bobby. Just call me Bobby," he grinned. "Well," I blurted, "you can call me Bob!" He turned to the back of the room. "Ethel, let's get this show on the road!" She came quickly and took my hands in hers. "Mrs. Kennedy, I—" Her index finger went to my lips. "We just loved you, but please call me Ethel. We didn't mean to desert you after the show, but if we'd stayed up there with all those people, we'd never have gotten out of here. Besides, we wanted you fellows to come with us." Come with the Kennedys? Where? "Hurry up, you guys," Bobby said, motioning to Fox and Riddle on the stage. When they realized who it was, they began struggling with a stack of coats, sweaters, and music. Bobby climbed the stage and greeted them much as he had me, then grabbed two heavy attaché cases full of music in each hand, commanding, "To horse!" As we walked up the aisle Ethel turned to me. "I overheard the man from Pakistan telling you to protest the condition of your stool. Nothing makes a Pakistani's day like a good protest letter."

As we came to the entrance, an old and dear friend, Leon Billings, and his wife Pat were standing by the glass doors. I excused myself, and went over. "What the hell are you doing with the Kennedys?" he asked. "You guys are supposed to be going to Mike Mansfield's apartment for drinks." He was right. We'd forgotten about the invitation, and I asked him what to do. He put his arm around my shoulder. "Look," he said, "you better go with Bobby and Ethel. I'll cover for you at Mike's—somehow." "Goddam," he added, "I've been lobbying on the Hill for four years, and I'll never get as close to that powerful little bastard as you will tonight. Go on, it's your party." Not entirely convinced we were doing the right thing, we climbed in the back seat of the Kennedys' robin's-egg blue Ford convertible anyway, and with the second most powerful man in the world at the wheel and the top down, sped off into the cool Washington night. Pausing for stop lights, cars would pull alongside and the people in them would stare. I tried to look as if I belonged there, at one point raising my arms over my head and yawning widely for emphasis.

In fifteen minutes we were in the driveway of their Georgetown home. Bobby went in briefly, emerging with a portable record player which he put in the trunk. Another five-minute drive, and we arrived at the home of Rollie Evans, half of the nationally syndicated political column of Evans and Novak. The record player in his arms (he insisted on carrying everything), Bobby led the way inside to a small gathering of about a dozen people. Except for Evans and his partner Richard Novak, I didn't recognize any of the names and faces as we were introduced. They were in fact, a group of the Kennedys' closest

friends, the ones whose names never made the papers. There was constant conversation (most of which I don't remember), and when Bobby put his records on everyone started dancing. Couples who were seated and talking continued their discussion as they danced. It was true. The Kennedys tolerated little wasted time or motion. The President's prep school roommate and chief political crony, LeMoyne Billings, stood behind the bar mixing drinks in paper cups. The spirit and intensity of the conversations might very well have given someone standing outside the impression that a much larger affair was taking place. Around midnight, Bobby cornered me and asked, since I was from Montana, what I thought about the Indian problem. I told him I felt the government had bungled it. He laughed. "I certainly hope you're not including my brother's government in that remark." With that, he took my paper cup to the bar and put another drink in it, returned and said, "We'll discuss this matter over breakfast tomorrow at Hickory Hill." Hickory Hill? The Kennedy estate in Virginia? Ethel came over with Fox and Riddle in tow. "You fellows *are* going to spend the weekend with us at Hickory Hill, aren't you? I thought we'd leave in about an hour." Another decision, a quick discussion. Cameo had scheduled a recording session for Saturday evening, and we concluded that Bernie Lowe wouldn't be interested if we spent the weekend with God Himself. "That's too bad," Bobby said, "because I wanted to go over the possibility of you guys singing the Democratic campaign song for next year's election." Our disappointment showed. "But don't worry, we'll get together another weekend soon. I want the President to meet you and hear you sing." Since we couldn't come

to Hickory Hill, Ethel asked if we had enough time before leaving Washington for a quick tour of the White House the next morning. There was time, and LeMoyne Billings said he'd meet us at the entrance. The party ended, and we piled back into the little blue Ford and drove to the Windsor Park Hotel where we were registered. The doorman watched passive but impressed as Bobby unloaded our gear from the trunk and put it on the sidewalk. "Are you sure you won't change your mind and come with us?" Ethel asked. My partners and I looked at each other for a long moment, told her we wished we could, and said goodbye. "Thanks for everything," we shouted as the car pulled away. "Don't forget the campaign song!" Bobby shouted back. It was the last time we would ever see them. But every Christmas, until Bobby's death in 1968, we each received a poinsettia and a personal note.

Next morning, our cab was cleared through the White House gate and LeMoyne Billings greeted us at the entrance. We'd come expecting the standard tour. Instead, Billings escorted us to an elevator, saying to the operator, "Two, please." When the doors opened, we realized we were where few had ever been—the President's living quarters. For an hour, we roamed the premises. Lincoln's bedroom, the children's nursery school (Selected children were brought into the White House during the week to attend. Each had a small orange crate stood on end for their things. In front of one was a small pair of sneakers held together with a clothespin and marked with a child-lettered sign that said simply, "Caroline K."), each gave the moment meaning when I could actually see and touch them—to know that, after all, human beings really lived there. The living room was large and

beautifully decorated. On various tables there were jeweled swords, ivory carvings and other exquisite gifts, and in each ashtray a book of matches with the inscription The President's House. On either side of the living room were the President's and Jackie's bedrooms. His was simple—a double four-poster bed with a suit neatly laid out on top, at the head, a large watercolor of a sailboat. There was a single, plain telephone on the nightstand, an electric razor and a bottle of Mennen Aftershave on the dresser. The door to Jackie's bedroom was closed; Billings discreetly didn't open it, nor did we ask to look inside.

We left for New York at noon. It had all been something that would stay with us for a long time. Two months later when we turned on the television set in our hotel room in Toronto and learned the President was dead, we sensed somehow that something had come to an end for us too. Kennedy's death was, for most Americans, a death in the family. In self-defense, the country began a purge of all that was old and dead, including music. The arrival of the Beatles was changing the face of entertainment forever; this change failed to register on the Three Young Men From Montana. The shiny, new act of three years before was aging prematurely, and rapidly. We didn't realize it; adding fright wigs and presumptuous parodies of the Beatles to the act didn't fool anyone. Shortly before the end, the truth did begin to dawn on Fox, who suggested more than once that with guitar lessons we might survive. But by this time our recordings couldn't be given away, and shortly after a taping of the "Steve Allen Show" in California, we returned to New York and disbanded. It was May, 1964, and with Eunice and the baby, I decided it was time to go home for awhile.

IV

Reconstruction

Leaving entertainment and plunging back into the real world was like slamming on the brakes at ninety miles an hour and going through the windshield. I was absolutely unequipped to do anything except collect bills and teach school—both honorable professions, but not exactly what I had in mind. The years as a performer still ran deep, which accounted for my decision to phase out of the business gradually until I received at least a journeyman's card signifying stable, legitimate membership in the Middle America Club. Eunice and I were in Billings, Montana, and running out of money fast.

The most logical opportunities seemed to lie in either radio or television, but inquiries at local stations were rejected on grounds of non-experience. I learned early that a performer's value ended abruptly offstage, and in each case it was credentials, rather than potential, that counted. With this in mind, I began toying with the idea of a children's television show. I knew the owner of a television station in Great Falls; his name was Dan Snyder, and at that time he had a deserved reputation as the most imaginative broadcaster in the state. He agreed to an interview,

during which he told me he wanted someone to do double duty as host both of a daily children's show and of a weekly program based loosely on the format of the "Tonight" show. We came to terms. I immediately went out and bought a large basset hound named Morgan, had three puppets hand-sewn, and was in the television business. But things didn't go well between Snyder and me that year in Great Falls. First, the children's show was yanked in four months after it was savaged by the "Mickey Mouse Club" in the ratings. Then, there was also a conflict over the format of the weekly evening program. Snyder wanted it light; I kept it serious. Although he never openly contradicted me on the matter, I knew he was unhappy. There were doubtless other smaller discrepancies in our relationship that, added to the total, ended in disappointment for all concerned.

Sensing that I'd never make it big in small-town television, I quit and took an engineering job at a TV station in Missoula, Montana, also enrolling in graduate school at the university there. In six months I discovered engineering wasn't my long suit, either. I was fired ten days before Christmas. Lacking money, I dropped out of school and sold Hammond organs for a few months. One afternoon a Missoula broadcaster, Chet Murphy, called, asking if I'd be interested in working at a small radio-television complex in Helena. Organ business was lousy, and I said yes. I was hired at television station KBLL to do weather and sports, and in the process was introduced on an occasional basis to radio. But it wasn't a particularly happy place. By the time I had come to the point of developing a genuine interest in the microphone, I was offered a job at United Press International which held a good deal more promise.

In the summer of 1968, I was sitting at my desk in the UPI office late at night when a local attorney named Gordon Bennett called. He was ramrodding the gubernatorial campaign of Attorney General Forrest Anderson, and asked me if I wanted to go to work for the candidate. When I inquired why he was calling me in particular, he said he'd already offered the job to five other guys and they had turned it down. Measuring the $200 weekly salary offered against my $165 at UPI, I took the job, knowing of course that I might be out of work at the finish in ninety days. But I saw it as perhaps the one good chance I might get to view politics from the inside.

I doubt that I'll know a man again quite like Forrest Anderson. He was among the last of his kind, an old-style Democratic politician with the finesse of a trapeze artist and the instincts and temperament of a barracuda, who knew, without the aid of polls, where every vote was hidden and every bone was buried—at least the ones that counted. As many times as he was returned to public office by them, he was not particularly beloved by Montanans; his quick, logical mind and ferocious temper perhaps made them feel a bit vulnerable. Despite his brilliance and uninterrupted success as a lawyer, state supreme court justice, and attorney general, he was a man of limited ambition whose intense interest in matters political stopped at the state line. Forrest's chief assets as a gubernatorial candidate were his definite plans for Montana and the ability to get action on them.

As fundamental as his politics were, he was a progressive administrator, who seldom let his substantial ego interfere in the selection of key associates as bright as, or brighter than, he was. This paid particular dividends during his twelve years as attorney

general, when that office became the most respected in the state. The same selection process, combined with deep political savvy, later enabled him to secure a new constitution and reorganize state government in his one term as governor. But Forrest was more than a planner; he was, in the oldest political tradition, a plotter. Nothing made him unhappier than those days when he was unable to hatch something, however small, that would alter the scheme of things. After thirty years of the same routine, his political mechanism was as finely adjusted as a Swiss watch.

Another important reason behind my decision to join the campaign was a belief that Forrest couldn't lose. His opponent was the incumbent, Tim Babcock, former owner of a small trucking line who had been elected lieutenant governor in 1960, then rose to chief executive when Governor Don Nutter was killed in a plane crash the following year. Tim, like Forrest, was a short, handsome man in his middle years. Unlike Forrest, he was immensely appealing in his public appearances and utterances. But his experience as a public official was limited to two terms as governor, and as a politician considerably less than that; compared with Forrest, he was full of charm but light of weight. An image of Forrest I've never been able to put out of mind is one of a great bull snake lying coiled under a log, waiting patiently for the perfect meal . . . for thirty years . . . and Tim was it.

Babcock had made two dramatic errors. The first was in 1966, when he ran for the U.S. Senate in the middle of his second term after promising voters he wouldn't. The second, and last, was in 1968. Babcock had been either convinced or pressured into the mistaken belief that Montanans wanted a sales tax.

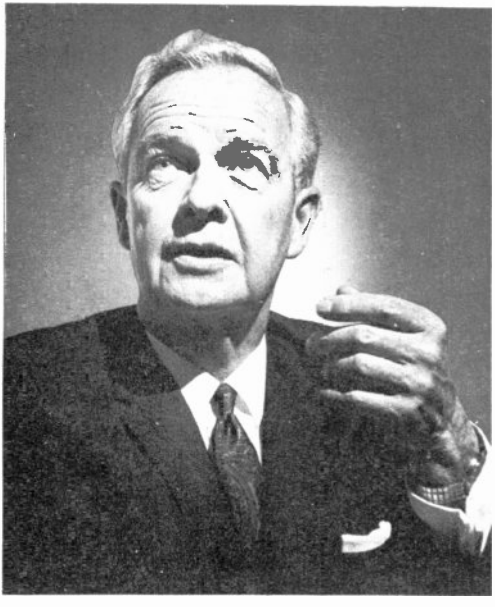
Whether they needed it or not is still a hot issue in some quarters. The fact was and is that few men advocating higher taxes ever carry an election. Montana Republicans that year sensed this lapse of judgment too late; when Forrest's billboards proclaiming Pay More? What For? began blossoming on the highways, the Republicans, quite humanly, turned their rage and frustration on the Democrat, and in the process made him an even larger opponent than he was. Privately, and with great reverence, they began to view Babcock more as a martyr than a candidate.

When I started work on September 1, I was delighted to see a private poll verifying my suspicions that Forrest was the undisputed frontrunner. I don't believe the others who refused my job knew how commanding his position was; if they had, I'm certain they would have grabbed the opportunity as quickly as I did. Originally, I was hired to do press relations, but after the first week Gordon Bennett and I suddenly realized our candidate was without any campaign schedule whatsoever, and had no place to go. Montana is an enormous state, and sixty days wasn't much time to arrange personal contact with voters. Fortunately, Gordon had a good knowledge of the northern and western part; I was well acquainted with the southern, eastern, and central portions of the state. Together, we worked day and night for a week on a total schedule, sectioning off a large Mobil road map in red pencil, and making lists of friends and county Democratic leaders who needed contact and persuasion to organize rallies and banquets, teas, and main street tours. After that, Gordon returned to his principal task of running the spacious but dismal campaign offices above a men's clothing store on

Helena's main street, a thoroughfare named, appropriately, Last Chance Gulch. Except for occasional, necessary retorts which Gordon skillfully handled, Forrest's media relations were well taken care of by the Republicans, who saw to it daily that his name made page one, thus completely freeing me to press ahead with the job of organizing and coordinating the road campaign.

During September, the pace became killing for both Forrest and me. On alternate weeks, I would spend seven sixteen-hour days on the telephone arranging functions and appearances; then, exhausted, I'd collapse on Monday morning in Forrest's Chevrolet, fighting to stay awake during the six days and 2,500 miles ahead. Luckily, he liked to drive, and when I wasn't listening intently to his plan of the day, I learned to sleep soundly in an automobile. These early forays together were a crash course in politics for me. Forrest was neither pompous nor stingy with his insight, and from the beginning responded to my naiveté with firm but patient explanations. As our rapport grew, the campaign at its best became great sport for both of us; even at its worst, we were provoked to great laughter by our blunders. As the newest member of the circle, I never incurred the regular volcanic bursts of temper that his other associates had by this time grown used to; but his loyalties were equally fierce, and those who withstood the heat weren't forgotten. Some of the rewards were subtle enough to go unnoticed—not once, at least in my presence, did he ever personally or professionally depreciate those who worked for him behind their backs. If someone failed, we all knew it, and that was the end of the matter. I found it impossible not to like him.

Ruby on wedding day, October 13, 1962, Boston, Massachusetts.



Governor Forrest Anderson of Montana, 1968.

Despite hard work by everyone connected with the campaign, the greatest pressures were still on Forrest. First, as the candidate, and second, as the principal money-raiser. By early October, funds began to dry up alarmingly, and on several occasions he abruptly called a halt to our travels and checked into a motel for a few days. Stripping down to his shorts, he locked himself in with a carton of Salems and got on the telephone. I neither saw nor spoke to him during these times until the phone rang in my adjoining room with the news that he'd put enough together for another week.

It was a terrible strain on him, mostly because he was a proud man who basically despised the begging aspect of a candidacy. Knowing this, I advised him one weekend of a wealthy farmer in my hometown of Hardin who was placing full-page ads in state newspapers supporting the Democratic ticket. I was sure a personal visit by Forrest would produce some money. He agreed, I arranged the appointment, and we flew the 300 miles to Hardin. Uncharacteristically, Forrest sat in the farmer's living room and listened to him talk for nearly an hour. Finally, he popped the question. The old man rose, tugged for a moment at the suspenders holding up his work pants, then shuffled in his black hightop shoes to a desk and wrote out a check. Folding it in three parts, he returned and tucked it in the breast pocket of Forrest's suit. Courteously ignoring it, he shook the donor's hand and we drove to the airfield. Spirits high, we lifted off and Forrest pulled out the contribution, examined it carefully for a moment, then turned his eyes on me with a look that could have melted lead. "Goddamit, Robert," he said, "we really hit the jackpot." The

check was for $25, and I never brought up the subject of money again.

As election day drew nearer, some voters typically began having second thoughts, and Babcock started gaining substantially in the polls. This made us uneasy, since Montanans had a history of electing Republicans to state offices and exiling their Democrats to Washington. I always felt this showed great insight—not only did it make the Republican majority, most of whom were either directly or indirectly involved with big business and agriculture, feel more comfortable at home, but it gave them a high stake as well in the business of the majority at the federal level. This time, however, political alliances within the state were clearly altered. Those who saw the high property taxes as an intolerable burden argued simply that a sales tax would offset further increases, and possibly decrease existing levies. The opposition insisted that a tax was a tax, that the probability of one tax offsetting another was remote, and since a sales tax most dramatically affected those least able to pay, it was the most regressive revenue option of all: Conceding that higher taxes were a fact of life, sales tax opponents proposed gradual increases in the state income tax to offset expenditures, reasoning that a flat deduction based on income would cost an individual less and still raise needed money. Regardless of the merits of either proposition, traditional Republicans in Montana crossed the line, particularly farmers and ranchers and those who relied on them (whose interest focused more sharply on the cost of living, rather than the cost of property). When the last ballot was counted, Forrest carried fifty-six of fifty-eight counties and 58 percent of the returns. If Montana had

had an electoral college, it is doubtful Babcock would have received many votes.

A few weeks after the election, when Eunice and I returned from a short vacation, Forrest called me into his office and asked what my plans were. When I told him I had none, he offered me the job of administrative assistant and I became his first appointment. Forrest and I both were aware of my lack of legislative credentials, and I suggested he contact and consider a bright and clever man, Ron Richards, chairman of the Montana Democratic party, for his executive assistant. He did, Ron accepted, and after the inauguration we settled down as part of a staff fleshed out by a lawyer, Jim Sorte, from the attorney general's office. The early weeks and months were exciting. The legislature was in session, Forrest was laying plans for governmental reorganization, and the first steps were taken to arrange a state constitutional convention. But by late spring when the work became more plodding and much of my time was devoted to writing speeches, I very suddenly found myself bored. To this day, I've never really been certain why this change occurred, except perhaps that I preferred fighting the war to keeping the peace.

As my activities grew more passive, I became restless, and one evening in late April I dropped by the governor's mansion to discuss it with Forrest. He told me he had felt it coming and asked how much time I would need to find something else. I said three to four months and he agreed, provided my work continued in a normal manner at the capitol. It was a hell of a decision, the biggest I'd made since I quit Charlie Wingfield at the Billings airport eight years before. Eunice backed me all the way when I came home

from the mansion that night and told her that I had, in effect, resigned. I also told her that since I didn't have anything particular in mind, it might be fun to see if I could get a job at a decent radio station. I was too old by now to go back to work in saloons, but the idea of performing still had great appeal. I felt strongly that with some luck I might be able to bluff my way in and get a hold. The next day I borrowed a book from a friend containing lists of all the radio stations in the country, then wrote a check to petty cash and took home a box each of executive envelopes and stationery. Calculating weekends and roughly a week's vacation time, I came up with forty actual days in the next four months in which to find a job.

With the help of another friend, I taped a fake, but presentable, aircheck and had two dozen copies made. Then, turning to the radio book, I selected only those stations with 50,000 watts and wrote them, saying I would be in town on such-and-such a date on official business and wanted to speak to the general manager. Most answered, and with few exceptions were cordial when I showed up and asked for a job. They were also skeptical, and from the first dozen interviews came a glossary of responses.

1. We only hire professionals here.
2. Why don't you try a smaller market first.
3. We own this town and don't need anyone right now.
4. I can recommend you to a friend in Klamath Falls, Oregon.
5. Yes, it is the number one station and we intend to keep it that way.
6. Everyone here made it the hard way. I suggest you try the same.

7. I like your tape. It almost sounds faked.
8. You in some kind of trouble?
9. Stay in politics and keep out of this rotten business.
10. Ten thousand dollars and Sunday night off.
11. Your ideas are good, but your voice lacks timbre.
12. There are schools of broadcasting that specialize in people like you.

In two months, I'd used up most of my money flying and driving to these interviews, and in desperation began mailing the tapes and letters of introduction. By August first, I'd received only one other non-affordable offer from WFAA news in Dallas. Staring at the letter of resignation on my desk, I wondered if I had made a mistake. But in a week, the first real break came. KTRH in Houston called, said they were mailing a plane ticket, and wanted to talk. I flew down, snapped at a modest salary and an offer to pay half my moving expenses, and started preparing to fill a slot in their all-talk programming in September. A day after I arrived back in Montana, John Pela called from WWL in New Orleans. I told him that I had accepted the job in Houston but was open to a better offer. He said he'd check, called back, and offered to pay *all* my moving expenses plus four dollars more a week, an offer I couldn't refuse. I contacted KTRH and explained, and we started packing for New Orleans.

V

Funny, He Looks *Jewish*

Dear Mr. Ruby:

Several months ago I heard you tell a caller who inquired if you were Jewish that you were not, and that your wife was an Irish Catholic. I fully realize that a man's religion is personal and not the business of anyone. However, since your answer to the above inquiry was over the public airways, I feel that under such circumstances I am justified in making the following observations:

Being Jewish myself, from the first time seeing you on TV ads and singing at Saints games, in addition to listening to you on various occasions, I was convinced that you were Jewish. I am now more convinced than ever after viewing your pictures. Obviously, since you deny being Jewish, carefully consider the following:

(1) Your father was Jewish and your mother a gentile, and you were raised in your mother's faith.

(2) That you were born of Jewish parents, and when you married your wife you converted to her religion.

Even if you are a convert and *do have* Jewish background, you should be proud to admit it, as Jesus Christ was a Jew.

* * *

With my basset hound Morgan panting on the back seat from the heat, my son Matthew and I drove into New Orleans on a Friday night in August. After a

series of rejections by various establishments, the DeVille Motel on Tulane Avenue finally registered Morgan for what she was—Jewish. The next afternoon we picked up Eunice as she stepped off the plane eight months pregnant (women gestate fast in Montana) and drove back to the motel just in time to watch newscaster Alec Gifford announce that Hurricane Camille was due to make land around midnight. Following his instructions, I dashed across the street to a small grocery store, purchasing $12 worth of canned goods and $30 worth of masking tape. Eunice filled the sink and bathtub with water and I covered the entire motel room window with two layers of tape, except for a small peep hole that Morgan insisted upon.

On Monday, I reported for work at WWL's original studios in the Roosevelt Hotel. It was a bit chaotic, since the station had been on the air since Saturday night broadcasting emergency information to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The entire staff was there, working round-the-clock-shifts—Maury Magill, Herb Holiday, Vince Alletto, John Pela, Ken Hanson, Sid Noel, and two new men who had also just been hired, Dave Ralston and Dan Lucas. For the balance of the week we continued the grim broadcasts, pausing only for network news. By Friday, communications had been restored to the coast and Pela began regular programming again. Because no definite airshifts had been assigned yet, the three new men were rotated for the next several weeks. Dave, Dan, and I shared the sleep-disturbing 6-to-midnight and midnight-to-6 programs, until it was announced that Sid Noel had decided to leave his morning show and that both the morning and afternoon slots were up for grabs. Pela

decided to fill the morning vacancy first and scheduled Ralston, Lucas, and me to do the program a week each. When the competition ended, I was chosen; Dave Ralston took over the afternoon show and Dan Lucas became the all-night man.

* * *

Dear Ruby,

Of all the egotistical, overbearing, arrogant bastards, you reign supreme. Your brains are made of hash. I'd like to make hash out of the rest of you. You'll find my name and address below in case you want to answer this letter personally.

Yours truly,

Dear Sir:

Some idiot using your name sent the enclosed crazy letter. I thought you'd like to know.

Cordially,

Bob Ruby

* * *

I was hired at WWL as part of a drastic management and personnel change. Overall, the station had been languishing in the ratings for several years, although its profitability was still intact thanks in large measure to some rather extensive nighttime programming, including what was probably a CIA-funded broadcast called the "Cuban Freedom Committee" that used the station's powerful clear-channel signal to reach into that country. The plan was to put WWL back into the daytime radio business and make

it a factor in New Orleans once more. When staff assignments were fixed, John Pela initiated a fairly flexible music format, and between each of the seven or eight records each air personality was required to play there was time for a certain amount of talk. As my confidence grew, I began asking John for more time to talk and fewer records. He agreed to the experiment, and the morning show began to take on its present form.

At the time I began adding more conversation to the format, I was aware of one or two radio personalities in other cities who used the telephone with great success. Although call-in talk shows were common at the time, one man, Wally Phillips at WGN in Chicago, also used the phone frequently to call out, and not always around the corner for a pizza. More than once I had heard him call Europe or the Far East live, on the air, and had found the effect fascinating. In late 1969 when the rumor of Beatle Paul McCartney's death began to spread, I decided one morning to pick up the phone and call Apple Records in London to discuss the matter, and more important, test audience reaction to the idea. It was the first time I'd ever used the phone on the air.

RUBY: All right, is this Apple Records in London?

DEBBIE: Yes, it is.

RUBY: This is Bob Ruby at WWL in New Orleans, Louisiana, in the good ol' U.S.A., and we want to put to rest once and for all this rumor about Paul McCartney.

DEBBIE: Yes.

RUBY: Have you heard it?

DEBBIE: Yes I have. Oh yeah, definitely!

RUBY: And who are you, may I ask?

DEBBIE: I'm Debbie.

RUBY: And what do you do there, Debbie?

DEBBIE: I'm the main receptionist at Apple.

RUBY: Well, what—have you been swamped with calls? Could you tell us—

DEBBIE: Absolutely swamped, yes. We've had thousands.

RUBY What's going on? What is the truth?

DEBBIE: We have been just denying it. There's nothing much we can really say. We got a statement from Paul yesterday and he said that, um—the statement reads: "Paul McCartney is unconcerned about the rumors about his death, and he figures that if he is dead anyway he'd be the last person to know it."

RUBY: That's the whole statement, Debbie?

DEBBIE: That is the whole statement that he has given. But as for all these reasons, you know, I just don't understand people at all, I just don't know what they're getting out—But he's alive and well. He's at his home, I spoke to him yesterday.

RUBY: And he's taking a bath in his money.

DEBBIE: Pardon?

RUBY: And he's taking a bath in his money.

DEBBIE: Yeah.

RUBY: Okay. And that's the whole statement. Is there any chance we could talk to Mr. McCartney?

DEBBIE: Well, no, because he's just sort of so fed up with it, you know. We've had literally thousands of calls. We haven't had any, in

fact, from anywhere else in the world. They've all been from the States, every one of them.

RUBY: Well, of course, that's probably where most of the Beatle business is done.

DEBBIE: Yeah, but, you know, some of these reasons, I just can't understand it at all. I just can't understand people thinking things like that.

RUBY: What kind of a guy is Paul McCartney, Debbie?

DEBBIE: I'm sorry, I can't hear you.

RUBY: What kind of a guy is Paul McCartney?

DEBBIE: He's very nice. He's just charming, you know.

RUBY: Is he the most charming of the Beatles?

DEBBIE: Well, no. They're all pretty nice, but he's good fun and he's just sort of a bit, well not upset, you know, he thinks it's a sort of big joke that they've said all this about him. But he understands, you know, because he says, "Well, you know, people are going to think all sorts of things, and just let them think and it will all blow over."

RUBY: Well, I'm glad to hear he is indeed still good fun. Could you read that statement once more?

DEBBIE: It says, "Paul McCartney is unconcerned about the rumors of his death, and he figures that if he is dead he'd be the last person to know it anyway."

RUBY: Well, that gets right to the point. Thank you very much, Debbie at Apple Records in London—

DEBBIE: And thanks to you, too.

RUBY: —and we'll be talking to you—

DEBBIE: Bye.

RUBY: Good-bye.

The dam had burst. For the rest of the morning, I answered calls, this time on the air, from people who had never heard this done before. After the program, I asked Pela for authorization to make further calls of this nature, and other long-distance conversations within the country; once again, he agreed without hesitation and the program began to fly. Although the idea wasn't original, it was in such limited use as to be almost unheard of. I discovered this in my initial rush to put as many out-calls on the air as possible each morning. On those occasions when I'd scheduled a surprise call to another radio station, I was usually greeted with disbelief and often hostility from the personality on the other end of the line. Interestingly, the impact of these calls to other stations was not lost, and within a few weeks many people I had phoned on the air began returning the courtesy from their end for the first time.

I've often wondered if I wasn't largely responsible for letting the cat out of the bag by phoning so many other stations, because in only seven years the concept has become commonplace and is used in even the smallest radio operations—with one important difference. I at first thought interest in the program could be sustained simply by making a large volume of calls. It didn't work that way. In the first few months I had pretty well covered every conceivable type of phone conversation, and found myself resorting to a lot of "trash"—calls that had no redeeming entertainment or informational value whatsoever.

There were many days when the list of calls was so weak that I literally had to force myself to pick up the phone, and listeners began responding with static ratings. I realized the program had become one-dimensional, and lacked a real person at the microphone. Up to this point I hadn't really injected my personality, for better or worse, into the show; I was Mr. Nice Guy, who treated bigots with the same deference as saints. This wasn't my style, and I knew it, and so opinions—my own and the listeners'—were gradually introduced into the conversations with the understanding that both were subject to the scrutiny of either party. Unveiling the real Ruby came as a shock to those grown accustomed to platitudes and pap; for others, it was a natural release for their own constructive thought and criticism. I don't believe, and never will, that unchallenged opinion has any place in a medium as persuasive and influential as radio. If God had meant it so, he'd have put ears on our rears so we could sit on them all day. As instructive as decent opinion is, it is equally important as entertainment.

Each of us, after sex and food, enjoys no greater pleasure than the weight of our own ideas. The major criticism leveled against both myself and this aspect of the program centers on intolerance, rather than weakness of intellect. I asked John Schwegmann one morning if he had any patience with fools. "Only sincere fools," he replied. Although lack of judgment plagues me often, I have tried to approach each confrontation with as much charity as possible. But anyone tuning in for either a counselor or a priest could better schedule their time on a couch or in a confessional. But the program survived this latest change,

Parachute jump training for jump with wife at Covington, Louisiana, December, 1970.

and despite a certain number of defections the ratings started climbing again. About the ratings: until the last couple of years the show never rose higher than third in the market, behind WSMB and WTIX. Today, WWL enjoys an equal share of the morning audience with these two stations, along with the revitalized WNOE. This late showing of strength by WWL can be credited to the addition of airborne traffic reports. No radio personality can successfully claim complete credit for his time period. The additional features provided by a station add credibility to his presence and points to his ratings. Without them, he has little chance for a strong showing.

* * *

Dear Ruby:

My mom likes you, but my dad says he hates you. He works for Exxon and thinks your oil is a quart low. Why don't you ever play Tubby the Tuba. Please send Chiquita Banana stickers.

your friend,

Mike

* * *

With telephone calls, discussions, and commercials, I had reached a point by the late summer of 1971 where it became difficult and often impossible to include the still-required number of records each hour. When the average dropped to two, I met with John Pela to ask for the last major alteration, one that would set the show apart from the rest of the WWL format forever. I suggested that, rather than playing

Ruby singing national anthem at New Orleans Saints football game.

records, I should fill the time with monologue, thus converting the entire four hours to talk. Pointing up the success of my competitors Roy Roberts and Jeff Hugg at WSMB with an all-talk show, I told Pela I was convinced it would work at WWL, especially in a radio dial overburdened with music stations. Again, he agreed. In spite of certain differences of opinion between John Pela and me in recent times, I'll always be grateful to him for backing my plays when it counted, in particular during the first three very difficult years. Not a handicapper by instinct, he deserves credit for selling conservative higher management on a longshot.

Adding a monologue to the show opened doors to nearly unlimited programming possibilities. Up to this point, I had been working fourteen-hour days with no help. Once again, I sought John's assistance; I asked him for a full-time producer, plus an additional person in the studio during the show to handle logging and other time-consuming mechanical chores. Management was convinced; by September, Mornings Are Ruby had its first full-time programmer, and within three months I had nearly tripled the contents of each show. It's difficult to describe the volume of work and planning that goes into each new day. Newspapers have to be read and clipped, magazines scanned, filing done, interviews arranged, appointments scheduled, phones and letters answered, jokes culled, taping sessions set up, salesmen and engineers pacified, records selected. Finally, all this input and outgo must be sorted and collated in a half-dozen manila envelopes marked Today's Show.

By 1972, the program began collecting a small cast of characters, some real and otherwise. My favo-

rite all-time guest has always been Cyril LaPorte, bass singer and rising star of New Orleans opera. At least that's what it said on his stationery. But I never really held that against him; my own letterhead is emblazoned with my name in type five inches high. Cyril is a dear man who started calling in his songs in 1969 each Friday morning promptly at 7:15, and has hardly missed a Friday since. Regardless of the pressure I've received from larger stars for equal time, I'm devoted to him.

Long before WWL sprung for Skywitness traffic reports, Levi Prairie Chicken Shoe (emphasis on the *Shoe*) arrived with his brother Leonard and sister Mary in their great gull-winged, buffalo hide, red, white, and blue tri-motored Fokker. It was the only impression I ever did badly. The other 200 were even worse. Ask any Indian. Levi persisted off and on until late 1975, when the State Police requested his permanent retirement on the ground that he was damaging their credibility. He's now appearing weekends at the 40¢ Hiball Place as backup man for a shoeshine beaver who specializes in wooden clogs. Monday through Friday, his time is divided between repairing his '52 Packard and serving as the quasi-charismatic leader of a small religious sect who believe that when you die, your soul goes to a House of Pancakes in Amarillo. The rest of the WWL cast—librarian Celia Lipps, the Story Lady, the old harmonica player, and others—began cycling in and out of the script in the next few years as the occasion required.

In 1974 I was jogging around the track at the YMCA with Sam Adams discussing his music. At that time, Sam was part-owner of a musical revue in the back room of the Absinth Bar in the French Quarter.

As we ran, he sang me a couple of numbers he'd written. (Sam Adams can be heard singing almost anywhere—on the track at the Y, in the shower, in his Honda Civic, to bank tellers, meter readers, life insurance salesmen, supermarket clerks, traffic cops and certified public accountants, at black-tie dinners, weddings, wakes, bar mitzvahs, barbeques, and Orange Julius stands.) I was intrigued by his originality, and asked if he'd compose and record a couple of short songs about New Orleans. A week later two tapes arrived. One, just in time for the energy crunch, was titled "I'm Riding My Lawnmower to Work." The other reached deeply into the frustrations of morning drivers in the city and turned out to be the most popular number ever played on the show; he called it "The Carrollton Interchange March."

Oh, the Carrollton Interchange is mighty strange,
And whoever designed the mess is mighty deranged,
It was obsolete even before they could complete
The Carrollton Interchange—
With the merging of many busy traffic streams,
It's the scourge of the motorist here in New Orleans,
So for safety's sake, try not to ever, ever take
The Carrollton Interchange.

If you possibly can avoid this traffic snarl,
Do it, even if you must drive through Oakwood Mall,
It's inadequate, really it's just not worth a—dern,
This Carrollton Interchange—
When the Pontchartrain ramp is open be aware,
You are on a collision course so do take care,
In an ambulance maybe you'll have a better chance,
At the Carrollton Interchange.

Where the artery that comes in from the Airline,
Meets the artery that comes from Metairie,
There is bedlam and chaos where these lines combine,
Are your seatbelts on, they'd better be—

I'm waiting at the Carrollton Interchange,
And I've been here God knows how long,
I see the shaking fist of the motorist,
And hear their language fierce and strong;
At seven-fifteen, I approach the scene,
To find congestion that's unreal,
I'm waiting at the Carrollton Interchange,
In an overheated automobile.

Sitting here, not getting any younger,
In a jam behind a thousand cars,
Possibly one day I'll die of hunger,
Or quietly go through menopause—

Bumper to bumper, backed up for a mile,
Each weekday morning without fail,
I'd like to shun this run from Jefferson,
Won't someone build a monorail;
Why do we funnel to this bottleneck,
Where you expect a wreck each day,
I'm waiting at the Carrollton Interchange,
And there's got to be a much better way.[1]

Sam's musical contributions since "The Carrollton Interchange March" have been enormous, and listeners hold him in great affection, as I do.

Another very strong feature I introduced into the format was old-time radio. Replays of broadcasts from the thirties, forties, and fifties managed to include at least two generations of listeners each morning, and even teenagers showed a certain amount of fascination for what was to them ancient history. But as the commercial load increased, it became nearly impossible, particularly in recent years, to air them intact, and I could include only a few cameo portions of these great and still funny programs.

To give each day more significance, I started

[1] Reproduced by permission of Sam Adams.

haunting record stores and the National Archives in Washington, D.C. for rare recordings, re-releases and out-of-print records. Since every day is a birthday or anniversary of some sort, I felt recordings of actual voices and events connected with a particular observance would give the occasion more meaning to the listener. In five years I collected over 1,200 recordings and tapes, and I'm always looking for more. Thus, when it's Samuel Gompers' birthday, I can play an old Edison recording of Gompers urging workers to stand up to the Pullman Company; if it's the anniversary of the opening of "No, No, Nanette!" I can pull a rare waxing of the original 1932 cast and scatter selections throughout the morning; when the date of Hitler's ascension to power in Germany comes around, I am able to play his speech to the Reichstag with the assistance of an interpreter on the telephone. The Hitler playback revives chilling memories in the Jewish community, and has always drawn a certain amount of protest. But I believe in telling it like it was (and is), and the banning of recordings is no less dangerous than the burning of books. These features are an attempt to give the program worthwhile continuity, and to provide a sensible balance. Without this kind of relief from the raw entertainment aspects of the show, both the listener and I would turn into silly putty in a week.

* * *

Dear Ruby:

I get out of bed with you every morning. Ha Ha. Yesterday, my husband cut his face shaving he was laughing so hard at the couple singing in the shower to you over the

telephone. We used to take showers together but that was the old days. Now my old man says I'm too lumpy. Ha.

Sincerely,

_____

* * *

By 1974, after five years, I felt I'd finally developed a pretty solid act—not perfect—but solid. I'd watched it gradually develop from a series of guessing games with the audience into a one-man variety show. Sometimes I think of myself in the morning as one of those old vaudevillians with the bass drum on his back, a harmonica in his mouth supported by a coat hanger around his neck, and cymbals between his knees. I had created enough work for two men and thoroughly enjoyed the salary of both of them. But of all the additions and subtractions, the telephone was still the magic number with listeners. It would be hard to categorize the hundreds of calls; there's been no one type of call people seem to prefer to another. If anything, the out-call, that is, when I actually dial someone and speak to them on the air, has been the audience's favorite method. Some are funny, some are sad, some informational, a few even newsworthy. The humorous out-calls are what first drew the most attention. Generally, they were done within the context of a particular topic, as most of the calls are. For example, the day I noted the birthday of the Oakland Bay Bridge.

GIRL: Bay Bridge

RUBY: (in Southern accent) Yeah, I'm callin; from my truck. I'm headed for the Bay Bridge.

Someone said to call this number. It just occurred to me I don't have any cash. What's the toll on the bridge?

GIRL: For a truck?

RUBY: Yeah. Well, . . . it's a semi. I got a load of hogs.

GIRL: I better transfer you to the toll sergeant.

RUBY: Alright.

GIRL: Now hold on. Just a moment.

RUBY: OK.

(SWITCHING)

GIRL: Go ahead please.

RUBY: Hello?

T.S.: Sergeant's desk.

RUBY: Yeah, I'm callin' from my truck. . . . I'm up from San Diego and I'm headed for the bridge and now someone put me on to this first number. I got a load of hogs and I don't think I got the toll. Can I get across the bridge?

T.S.: Where are you?

RUBY: Well, I'm headed up the, ah . . . I don't know much about your city.

T.S.: Well, you don't . . . you're calling from San Francisco?

RUBY: Yeah, I'm calling from my truck.

T.S.: I know you're calling from your truck, but you don't know what highway you're on?

RUBY: No, not really. I just know I'm headed for the bridge.

T.S.: Well, . . . where do you come from? What city. . . ?

RUBY: I come up from San Diego. I'm headed north to Portland.

T.S.: You come up 5 and then to 580?

RUBY: Yeah, that's it.

T.S.: Then you might be on . . .

RUBY: But the problem is I now just discovered I don't have my wallet. I gotta get across the bridge. How do I work the toll with you guys?

T.S.: (Laughs) Well, don't get crabby. I have ways of fixing tolls.

RUBY: Could I . . . could I leave you a hog?

T.S.: (Laughs) Well . . . depends on how big it is.

RUBY: A side of bacon?

T.S.: No, no. You come into the plaza and park your car, ah, truck and just before you come into the plaza and walk into the building we'll fix you . . . bring your license number and your license and we'll take care of you.

RUBY: OK, well, I mean . . . I'd leave you a hog for the toll.

T.S.: No. (Laughs) We wouldn't know what to do with it.

RUBY: OK, well, thanks a lot, fellas. I'll see you in a little bit.

T.S.: OK.

RUBY: OK.

Rarely, do I rely on what will hopefully be a funny call to stand on its own merit. To simply call the Oakland Bay Bridge and do a bit on hogs would be dumb. But acted out within the framework of the bridge's birthday, the stage was properly set for a gag. The recipients of these calls are seldom hostile, and if it were possible to meet each one and thank them personally, I would.

* * *

Dear Mr. Ruby:

My fiance and I are going to be married Saturday and going to Pensacola for our honeymoon. Would you please ask Al Duckworth what's going to happen there over the weekend? We'll be listening.

* * *

When a phone call backfires, there really isn't much I can do but admit it. I first read of the Dale motor car in a front-page story in the *National Observer*. My following conversation with "Elizabeth" Carmichael seemed innocent enough, and listener response was heavy. Car dealers, automobile buffs, and people simply looking for cheaper transportation flooded my office with inquiries. One man, after hearing the call, contacted Dale headquarters in California and mailed them a check for $1,969 without ever having seen the car. He didn't see his money again, either. I was thunderstruck when news of the Dale fraud broke. Not only did Elizabeth Carmichael turn out to be Jerry Dean Carmichael, but he or she and his or her associates had pulled off one of the slickest flimflams of the century. No one knows, or perhaps ever will, exactly how much money was ripped off with this nonexistent automobile, and the dubious honor of having conducted the first broadcast interview with Carmichael fell to Ruby, the biggest sucker of them all.

LIZ: Hello, Bob. Are we on the air?

BOB: We sure are, Liz, and I found an article on the Dale—a car called the Dale that's sup-

posed to be the next thing in cars—the ultimate in cars—and I wanted to find out more about it. The Twentieth Century Motor Car Corporation out in Encino is making them. You're the president, is that right?

LIZ: That's correct.

BOB: A lady president of a car company.

LIZ: Ha-ha.

BOB: Is this a sign of things to come, Liz?

LIZ: Well, no, I don't think so. I don't think it's the sign of a trend. I just happen to know more about cars than anybody else in the company, so I'm the president.

BOB: A lot of men are saying, "What the heck does a woman know about cars?" How did you get into the car business?

LIZ: Well, I started out on the farm and had to learn to tune a car when I was twelve years old (we were short-handed there) and I had to do things that if I'd a had another brother, a brother would have done. And so I learned to tune a car when I was twelve, I learned to rebuild an engine by the time I was sixteen, and by the time I was eighteen I was building my own cars and racing them. And since eighteen years of age I've been in business manufacturing cars on a custom basis and engineering engines. So I'm quite knowledgeable. I probably know as much about cars as any man living.

BOB: So where did you get the idea for the Dale?

LIZ: Well, two years ago there was quite a bit of low-level publicity regarding the possibility of future shortages of fuel. There was also some noise being made about pollution. And it occurred to me two years ago that by the

time I could produce the Dale, which I thought would be roughly two years, there would be a dire crisis at hand, and I wasn't wrong—there is. And I felt that the public needed, and would be willing to pay for, a car that would get seventy miles to the gallon, and would be safer than any car built, and would do a lot of other things that our car is doing. So I started planning this thing two years ago with the crisis in mind that we're facing now.

BOB: All right, the Dale, according to my information, not only gets seventy miles to the gallon, it's made of completely indestructible plastic and runs on three wheels.

LIZ: Yeah, that's been a problem that we've had when we first started, is getting people aware that a three wheel configuration was actually safer than a four wheel. In geometry the most stable figure there is is the triangle, and our car forms a triangle by the three wheels. Now the broad side of the triangle moving forward does happen to be the most stable of all configurations. For example, on a turn as long as the turn is no more than a forty-five degree radius our center of gravity stays inside the triangle and the car is impossible to turn over at fifty-five miles an hour. You can take L-turns with it, you can zig-zag back and forth in full cramped conditions and the car won't even teeter back and forth. A cup of coffee sitting on the dash won't spill taking an L-turn at fifty-five miles an hour, and you really have to see it to believe it.

BOB: How much will this cost?

LIZ: The entire car?

BOB: Uh-huh.

LIZ: The Dale, which is a two-seater, will sell for $1,969.00. The Revelle, which is a five-seater, will sell for $2,450.00. And the Vanagon, which is an eight-seater, will also sell for $2,450.00.

BOB: An eight-seater kind of like a bus.

LIZ: Well, no—it's a station wagon.

BOB: Ah! But shaped like a triangle.

LIZ: Yeah, although when you look at it our designs are such, you said you saw an article, and if you saw a picture of it, it's a beautiful car. All three of our models are beautiful cars and if you looked at them you'd wonder, "Where in the world would a fourth wheel go?" We've designed this thing to where a three-wheel configuration looks natural, and nobody's going to have to sacrifice beauty for the sake of economy here. We've developed a car that not only is the most economical ever built, but it's also the prettiest.

BOB: Now is this something that you're going to produce yourself or you're ultimately looking to sell the patent to major manufacturers?

LIZ: No, we're going to produce it ourselves. In fact, our goal is to become the largest automobile manufacturer in the world, and we're going to knock General Motors right off the top of the heap.

BOB: Gee, I'd hope you would be. I'd like to say forty years from now, "I had the first conversation on radio, or one of the first, with the lady president of the largest automotive company in the world."

LIZ: The way we feel about it, I have a group of dedicated men who have come under the banner, and they're dedicated in a life-and-death struggle to produce the best car ever built, the safest car ever built, the most economical ever built, and in the process to become the largest manufacturer of cars in the world.

BOB: When are you going to have it on the market?

LIZ: We're going to start production in June in a limited way here in California. We'll be on the market by July in a very limited way. We're going to have our national unveiling in the fall. About the time that the other cars are introducing their new models we'll be coming out across the country with our new models.

BOB: You have dealerships lined up now?

LIZ: Yeah, we have a tentative 1,100 dealers all over committed to supply only 250 of them during 1975. We'll supply the balance of them in '76.

BOB: And that's parts and everything.

LIZ: Yes.

BOB: Well, you really are in business in a big way. Did you have any trouble raising money for a new automobile?

LIZ: Well, I did at first. The first year I had to use my own money, and I had a limited amount. I'm a fairly successful marketer, and had been involved in marketing engines and marketing cars, and I had managed to accumulate a little money and I spent my own the first year to prove my point. I travelled to 1,100 cities across the country, stood on

street corners, showed pictures of the car I intended to produce, asked people, "Would you buy a car like this if it could get over fifty miles to the gallon in gas?," and overwhelmingly the people said yes they would. I came back with a stack of questionnaires two feet high, and with this and with my design and with test cars I had already built I was able to convince a few people to come in with a little bit of money, and now they're coming with money sticking out of every pocket wanting to jump on the bandwagon.

BOB: What kind of a motor is it? Is it a regular piston—

LIZ: It's a cylinder piston engine—

BOB: It's not a Wankel.

LIZ: —not much different than most. It's air-cooled, it's only a two-cylinder, and they're opposed, that is, the cylinders lay down horizontal to the ground opposed to each other.

BOB: This is an engine of your own design.

LIZ: Yes, although it's not a far departure from other engines. It just happens to be a little bit better than most. Our real secret is in our weight-power ratio. The car only weighs a thousand pounds because of the new material that we're using, and as a result we're able to use a much smaller engine and still get the kind of steam out of it that you would expect to get out of a Corvette or a Ferrari. It's a car that will burn rubber in all three gears and still will get seventy miles to the gallon.

BOB: Is that a fact! It gets good mileage. Is it a comfortable car?

LIZ: It's about like sitting in a Cadillac. We have very cushiony seats—those, too, we designed ourselves. Inside, now I'm six feet tall, probably as big a woman as there is around, and I still have three inches of head room, plenty of leg room. It's not a little car. Our car is as big as the Corvette, but we've designed it in such a way that it's as comfortable as a Cadillac.

BOB: And it really accelerates, huh?

LIZ: Yes it does.

BOB: I'll be darned. And you can make that for less than $2,000.00!

LIZ: That's correct.

BOB: You don't think plastic shortages or all shortages will make a difference in the construction or the design?

LIZ: Well, that's another thing we did. During this two-year formation period we developed our own plastic and we're manufacturing it ourselves. So, we're not having to rely on outside sources for our materials, we're doing everything ourselves.

BOB: Well, you may not only be the biggest automobile manufacturer one day, you may be the target of a new anti-trust suit.

LIZ: I suspect that that's on the horizon.

BOB: At the rate you're going. You're a lady of great confidence. Liz, I wish we had more time to talk about this. The one thing I don't have is a picture of your automobile, but when I mail you a tape of this conversation perhaps you could mail me some pictures back when you have our return address.

LIZ: I'd be more than happy to.

BOB: I wish you great success with this car called the Dale, and there are a couple of other models, and it's going to be out *en masse* you think in a couple of years for sure, nationwide.

LIZ: Well, actually it'll be nationwide by September of this coming year.

BOB: You think there'll be two, three-hundred dealers by then.

LIZ: Yes.

BOB: Okay. Well, the very best of luck to you at Twentieth Century Motor Car Corporation. I really wish you the very best.

LIZ: Thanks a lot.

BOB: Thank you, Liz, very much.

LIZ: Okay, bye-bye.

BOB: Bye.

After his arrest, Carmichael said he was a transvestite who had undergone sex change surgery. Pictures of "Elizabeth" Carmichael with her three children in the Dale promotional material were in fact legitimate; but the children actually were posing with their father, who was dressed in woman's clothes, and loving every minute of it. The fact that Carmichael had trouble deciding which sex he was never bothered me, and the feeling of being suckered passed quickly. But the incident did remind me of the potency of radio, and how much depended on me to control it.

Much of the monologue I do each morning is designed to generate call-ins, and to encourage listener participation in the program. As important as dialing out has been, I've had many remarkable conversations with people calling in to the station.

RUBY: Hello?

MAN: Is this the radio station?

RUBY: This is the radio station.

MAN: Were you the one who guessed my age this morning?

RUBY: Was I the one that was guessing your age this morning?

MAN: Yeah, I said I was going to jump off a bridge.

RUBY: Well, did you decide to jump?

MAN: I'm comin' in.

RUBY: You're coming to jump off the bridge.

MAN: Yes sir.

RUBY: For sure?

MAN: I wanted to call and let you know where I'm at.

RUBY: Let me tell you something. I've never talked to a man before that decided to do away with himself. Why?

MAN: Well now, look here, I'm gonna tell ya my name.

RUBY: Well, what's your name?

MAN: You want to write it down?

RUBY: I'll write it down.

MAN: J-O-E.

RUBY: J- . . . . That's Joe.

MAN: Right.

RUBY: Alright, Joe.

MAN: A-R AR_____.

RUBY: Joe AR_____?

MAN: Yeah.

RUBY: Well, now listen, Joe, why are you going to do this?

MAN: Well, they got me charged with robbin' a service station and I didn't rob it.

RUBY: When did you rob it?

MAN: Sunday or Monday.

RUBY: Well, do you remember which day?

MAN: In Houma, Louisiana.

RUBY: Did you do it, Joe?

MAN: Oh no, I didn't do it.

RUBY: Did they throw you in the jail for it?

MAN: No, I've not been in jail yet.

RUBY: Have you ever been in jail?

MAN: Oh yeah, I've been in jail. (sound of bells in the background)

RUBY: What are you doing? Putting money in the phone there?

MAN: Huh?

RUBY: Joe, let me tell you something, I think . . . I think what you're about to do is . . . is a hell of a bad idea.

MAN: No. No, it ain't when ya ain't got nothin' to live for.

RUBY: Well . . .

MAN: Whoever put that on the air this morning guessed my age right.

RUBY: What, about fifty years old?

MAN: Fifty-two.

RUBY: Fifty-two?

MAN: That's it. Fifty-two.

RUBY: Yeah. Well, Joe, I think you're making a very serious mistake.

MAN: Why?

RUBY: I think you're probably a better man than you give yourself credit for.

MAN: I'm a better man, but, I mean, the circumstances . . .
RUBY: No, No, you're wrong.
MAN: Listen, I had a flat tire this morning.
RUBY: Yeah?
MAN: Or I woulda been in.
RUBY: Or you'da . . . you'da been in and jumped off the bridge if it hadn't been for a flat?
MAN: I am gonna jump. I'm comin' down there.
RUBY: You're gonna come down here and jump off the bridge, huh?
MAN: Yeah, I'm comin' down there.
RUBY: What kind of car are you driving?
MAN: I ain't gonna tell ya.
RUBY: Well, I wish you would.
MAN: Huh?
RUBY: I wish you would.
MAN: Why?
RUBY: I won't hold your car against you.
MAN: I'm sure you won't.
RUBY: Naw, I won't hold it against you.
MAN: You won't tell the police?
RUBY: Well, I won't hold your car against you. I drive an old car.
MAN: No, now I'm sayin' will you tell the police?
RUBY: Of course I'll tell the police! What do you think I am, a fool?
MAN: No, you're not a fool.
RUBY: Would I sit here and lie to you? Yeah, you tell me your car and I'll tell the police.
MAN: Well, I don't . . . I don't blame you a bit.
RUBY: Yeah. I don't want you jumping off that bridge.

MAN: Well, I'm gonna try like hell to.

RUBY: Listen, Joe, why don't you do this? Why don't you do like most Americans? Why don't you commit suicide with a fork?

MAN: A fork! ?

RUBY: Sit down and in one year's time eat yourself to death.

MAN: Yeah?

RUBY: Yeah. I think you're making a mistake. As a matter of fact, I think going off the bridge is a very cruddy way to go.

MAN: Now looky here!

RUBY: No. Now you looky here. I think you're doing a very undramatic thing.

MAN: In thirty minutes . . . in thirty minutes I'm gonna call you again.

RUBY: And where you gonna call me from?

MAN: I'll be right around Canal Street.

RUBY: You'll be around Canal Street.

MAN: And I'll get up on the bridge . . .

RUBY: Yeah?

MAN: . . . and jump over the bridge . . .

RUBY: Yeah?

MAN: . . . and you don't know the circumstances.

RUBY: Well, I just think . . .

MAN: Bye-bye.

In case you're wondering, the guy never did jump off the bridge, at least not on *my* program. It's amazing what people will say on a radio show with thousands of others listening—many things they probably wouldn't discuss in a sealed room with their best friend. There's a sort of paradoxical anonymity involved, like standing stark naked on Canal Street

and going unnoticed, because nobody really believes you're doing it. Nameless callers say extraordinary things on the air with the utmost confidence in the confidentiality of the conversation. One example is the fellow who would not wear pajamas, but whose wife insisted that he at least wear socks.

RUBY: That satisfies her.

MAN: Yes it does; apparently it does. She just has some sort of hangup on total nudity. However, that is the only clothing that I do wear at night. Just the stockings.

RUBY: May I be so bold . . . I've got to find out now; does your wife wear socks?

MAN: Well, no. She doesn't.

RUBY: Does she wear pajamas?

MAN: No, she doesn't wear pajamas, but she will insist that *I* do at least wear socks.

RUBY: Well, now, does she wear something?

MAN: No, sir.

RUBY: Oh, in other words somebody has to have something on.

MAN: Right.

RUBY: Well, why doesn't she put on one sock and you put on one sock?

MAN: (pause—thinking) You know I never thought of that, but we might try it.

RUBY: As a matter of fact, that might take you a step closer to the solution to the problem. That way everybody would have part of the action, and she would feel maybe less hung-up on that. That *is* an interesting problem. You're really leveling with me on that?

MAN: Yes. This is the truth.

RUBY: Why don't you ask her. Say, "Look, tonight you wear one sock, and I'll wear one sock."

MAN: Well, we've never thought of it. In fact the psychiatrist has never mentioned it.

RUBY: If you really want to go far out you could put the left sock on the right foot and the right foot in the left sock . . . or something like that. This really is an unusual problem, and it's an interesting one.

MAN: Well, she's listening right now and she seems to go for the idea.

RUBY: Alright.

MAN: She says she will try the one sock bit. You know, at least give it one try. . .

RUBY: Let me know. You guys try one sock apiece.

MAN: Will do. OK. Thank you.

RUBY: And let me know if it improves anything.

MAN: I will, and I'll also mention it to the psychiatrist. It seems as though he could have come up with at least, you know, at least something.

RUBY: Something like that. The difference is he gets $50 an hour.

MAN: Yeah.

RUBY: I'm working here for a dollar and a quarter.

MAN: (Laughs)

RUBY: Thanks for calling.

MAN: Thank you very much.

(THE NEXT DAY)

RUBY: How did that suggestion work out? Did you try one sock apiece?

MAN: Yes, Bob. It worked fantastically. Of course, I led off the night by taking her out to supper.

RUBY: That helps.

MAN: Yes, that might have been . . . you know, broke the ice.

RUBY: With or without your socks?

MAN: Oh, I do wear socks.

RUBY: You do wear socks to the better places in town; that's very important.

MAN: For sanitary purposes, of course.

RUBY: Absolutely.

MAN: But, when we returned we did experiment and, I did allow her to wear one sock, and I wore the other and we had a very, very pleasurable evening. You asked me to let you know how it came out.

RUBY: You're serious about this now.

MAN: Very, very serious.

RUBY: Isn't that incredible!

MAN: She had visited psychiatrists off and on and we never did come to any real . . .

RUBY: . . . understanding of the problem.

MAN: Understanding or solution to it, but we attempted your advice yesterday and it seemed to work well.

RUBY: So now what's going to happen? Are you going to try this for awhile?

MAN: Well, we're going to attempt to continue this method and see if at a later date we can, ah, I can remove my sock.

RUBY: OK! And then maybe get her sock off.

MAN: Right! That's the general scope of the idea. And if this does work, we'll look like we'll have our problem licked.

RUBY: That'll be $30. To you, $29.95.

MAN: Bob, I certainly do appreciate the advice; you

really don't know how much you've helped me.

RUBY: Well, I'm flabbergasted that I was able to do it, to be perfectly honest with you, and I think that it comes as a total surprise to you.

MAN: Well, it did. It really did. I had never thought of it.

RUBY: Somehow . . . let me be perfectly candid with you. I can't imagine two people in bed with nothing on but one sock apiece. But if that's how it works, more power to you.

MAN: Yes, and it did work out beautifully, Bob, and we really want to thank you.

RUBY: Well, you're entirely welcome! Good luck!

MAN: Nice talking to you, Bob.

RUBY: Keep me posted.

Sometimes callers are simply confused. I think the telephone frightens certain people, and whatever they thought they were going to say when they picked the instrument up gets left behind.

RUBY: How are you this morning?

LADY: Oh, fine, thank you, and I don't mean to be a nuisance, but on my way to work listening to the radio yesterday about 6:35, you-all played a beautiful song that the phrase "Anchors Away" came through an awful lot. Are you, by any chance, familiar with that?

RUBY: Yeah, that was called "Anchors Away."

LADY: Uh-huh. Well, I thought from years back I remembered it but I love that orchestra and that singer, you know, the singer that was in it.

RUBY: Well, it was the Philadelphia Orchestra and

the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. That goes back to the days of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," which was the only hit they had.

LADY: Uh-huh. Well, I mean is that a record that could be . . .

RUBY: Yes, it's on Columbia. It's called the Mormon Tabernacle Choir Sings Anchors Away.

LADY: Just a minute. My memory's bad. I'm at work. Let me write this down.

RUBY: Well, look. Let me just give it to you once because I gotta press ahead. Ask for the Mormon Tabernacle Choir Singing . . . it's on Columbia . . . Singing Patriotic Songs.

LADY: Patriotic songs? Is that an album or . . . ?

RUBY: Yes, it's on an album, and it's a beautiful album. It's on Columbia.

LADY: Ah, Columbia Records.

RUBY: Right.

LADY: And that's Morning . . . ah . . .

RUBY: Hello?

LADY: Yeah.

RUBY: Yeah, it's the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

LADY: Tabernacle.

RUBY: You know what a Mormon is?

LADY: Ah, well, it's some kind of a church person.

RUBY: (Laughs) (Singing) Anchors away, my lads, Anchors away!!! Listen, it's the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

LADY: Uh-huh.

RUBY: Have you got that?

LADY: Yes.

RUBY: It's on Columbia. They'll know what it is.

LADY: It's on Columbia? I thought you meant on Columbia Records.

RUBY: Well . . . ah . . . Let's start again. Hello?

LADY: Yes. Uh-huh.

RUBY: How are you this morning?

LADY: Um-hm.

RUBY: Listen, about that "Anchors Away" song. That's on Columbia and it's by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir on an album called the Mormon Tabernacle Choir Sings Patriotic Songs.

LADY: Patriotic songs. But, pardon me, do you mean it's on Columbia Street or Columbia Records?

RUBY: Well, they used to be on Columbia Street but they have since moved to Columbia Records.

LADY: To . . . Columbia Records. Well, is that any location here in town?

RUBY: I don't believe this is happening to me. It's only a quarter after seven.

LADY: Well, I hate to tax you . . .

RUBY: I love you. Tell you what.

LADY: Well, let me tell you something. I ride the exercise bicycle in the morning; I get up at 3:15. And I love some records to play . . .

RUBY: You get up at 3:15 to ride an exercycle?

LADY: Ah, yes, and get ready for work.

RUBY: Well, that exercycle isn't doing anything for your memory. This is ridiculous. Look . . .

LADY: I'm sixty-two years old.

RUBY: Well, listen, I'm not, but that doesn't make any difference. I jog with men sixty-two years old. Look, . . . ask for the Mormon Tabernacle Choir at Smith's Records and they'll help you out on that.

LADY: Who? Who? What was that name?

RUBY: I wish I hadn't said that! Smith's Records.

LADY: Smith's Records . . .

RUBY: Yes. Now they are not on Columbia Records; the Mormon Tabernacle Choir is on Columbia Records and Smith's Records is on . . . Almonaster. Oh, hell, I don't know what I'm talking about. Look what you've done to me this morning. I've gotta do some traffic.

LADY: Well, listen, I'll see what I can do, but can I tell you something real quick?

RUBY: Oh, sure.

LADY: Do you have a minute?

RUBY: No, I've got about ten seconds. At this rate it's going to be newstime.

LADY: Well, can I tell you something real quick?

RUBY: OK.

LADY: I work here at the office. I told them my head's hurting so I'm going to the hospital . . . I mean I have so much work I'm going to cut my head off and send it to the hospital so I can go on with my work here. And the man said, "Go ahead and do it. Your boss says you'd do a better job without your head than with it."

RUBY: I don't know if that's true, lady, but I hope you find the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. As a matter of fact, I recommend a trip to Salt Lake City for the real thing.

LADY: Salt Lake City? Utah?

RUBY: Ohhh. I wish I hadn't said *that*! Listen it's nice to talk to you.

LADY: Well, thanks for your time, y'hear?

RUBY: And listen, if I were you I'd take a break from that exercycle.

LADY: Oh, no! My doctor says it's wonderful for my lungs and my heart.

RUBY: What's your doctor's name?

LADY: Ah, . . . Doctor . . . ah . . . Israel Fisher. And when I retire I'm going to take tap dancing so I got to keep in shape.

RUBY: You're going to take tap dancing?

LADY: Um-hm!

RUBY: Good luck.

LADY: OK.

RUBY: Bye.

There are others quite prepared to calmly tell you only the most incredible stories—most often, I think, as a kind of catharsis and, perhaps, to measure my sanity against theirs.

LADY: Hello, Ruby?

RUBY: Yes.

LADY: I just wanted to tell you. You said something that the [Super] Dome was loaded with pigeons and they couldn't get rid of them?

RUBY: Well, I didn't say they couldn't. I said that they just haven't dealt with them yet.

LADY: Oh, because I thought I'd give you a suggestion if you'd like to have it.

RUBY: Sure.

LADY: And that is . . . I'm from southwest Louisiana where birds and pigeons used to get under the eaves, you know, in these old homes. And what we did, we took mothballs and we tied them up in cheesecloth and threw them up in the eaves and it got rid of them right away.

RUBY: Mothballs, eh? I'm sure it isn't an engineer-

ing impossibility. They have, I think, 40 cats, Bob told me, and 500 pigeons. See, the pigeons have made a home there, because at lunchtime the workmen have been for the last three or four years feeding them, so they stayed.

LADY: OK, I thought I'd offer that suggestion and I would also like to know have you been hearing about these voices in the air and about escaped convicts taking over the city of New Orleans?

RUBY: (Pause) Where did you hear that?

LADY: I hear that on the air. Do you hear voices in the air?

RUBY: Are you hearing voices in the air?

LADY: Yes, I am.

RUBY: Tell me about it.

LADY: Well, what I want to tell you is that they are. It's getting worse, and I am personally being attacked by them.

RUBY: By voices in the air and convicts?

LADY: That's right. They have instruments and they shoot what they call "hurts" and needles through the air, and they admit they are killing a lot of people. I don't know why I hear them. Now, my husband does not hear them; he believes what I say, but this has gone so far that I had gone to a psychiatrist to be examined and he tells me that I'm in perfect condition mentally and all . . . says there's definitely something to all this, and the FBI and the police don't want to talk about it. I've contacted the City Hall and so forth.

RUBY: Hmmm. When did you first start hearing these voices?

LADY: I've been hearing this for four and a half or five years, and I'm just beginning to get officials and the people to realize that this is really true. There are about ten or fifteen of us in the city who hear this.

RUBY: You mean there are other people?

LADY: Oh yes . . . other people who hear . . . there are people.

RUBY: You get together as a regular thing?

LADY: No. We don't get together. I'm just finding out that they knew about it and when I contacted the governor's office over on, whatchacallit, Loyola, they tell me they've gotten over a hundred complaints . . . about this. And that these people are using instruments and that they're shooting needles and "hurts"—they call them hurts—through the air. I've been badly hurt and they say because I can hear that they're gonna kill me, and the mayor's next. They're gonna get rid of the mayor next.

RUBY: These voices are telling you this?

LADY: Yes, they are. And they continue all the time. This goes on and on and on. A lot of 'em can't even speak English. And I understand that a great percent of 'em are escaped convicts and that a number of them have come from other planets.

RUBY: Do you recall the first time you heard these voices?

LADY: I've been hearing this for almost five years.

RUBY: Where were you exactly when you first heard these voices?

LADY: I was at home and I hear it in the office too.

RUBY: Alright, you were at home . . .

LADY: Yeah, and I'm hearing them right now.

RUBY: What are they saying to you now?

LADY: What they're saying to me right now . . . they're laughin' at me because I told you about the mothballs and the cheesecloth.

RUBY: Do they have anything to say about me?

LADY: Yes they do.

RUBY: What do they say?

LADY: Well, I'd rather not tell you. (Laughs)

RUBY: Go ahead. Tell me what they say.

LADY: Can you hear them?

RUBY: I'm trying.

LADY: They say you're a phony.

RUBY: (Pause) Let me hear. Quiet, let me see if I can hear them.

LADY: Alright, can you hear them? (Silence) They're not talkin' now. They're scared.

RUBY: They're saying I'm phony?

LADY: Yeah.

RUBY: They're saying I am phony and they're gonna kill the mayor.

LADY: That's right, and they're gonna kill me first because they don't want me to hear what they're sayin' and I don't know why I hear it but I do and I . . .

RUBY: Well, that's what you get for associating with phonies.

LADY: Yeah. And anyway, the governor's office says that there are over a hundred people in the city who have reported this to their office. You know, they have an office . . .

RUBY: That they're hearing the voices of escaped convicts in the air?

LADY: They're escaped convicts and they're also

people from other planets. That's what they say.

RUBY: That's what they keep telling you?

LADY: Yes. Uh-huh.

RUBY: Are they telling you anything at this very moment?

LADY: Well, not at this very moment . . .

RUBY: They've stopped, then.

LADY: Because they're listening to what I'm telling you.

RUBY: Are you sure they're not going to kill me and that the mayor's a phony?

LADY: Well, I don't know. I'm just telling you what I hear through the air. I reported this; the mayor's office knows about it. I've reported, I've written letters and I've reported it all the way down the line. But, I wanted to tell you about the mothballs and the cheesecloth and I just thought I'd tell you that they say that they are here to take over, take us over, take over the city of New Orleans.

RUBY: You and I have covered a lot of ground in the last few minutes.

LADY: Yes, I think so too.

RUBY: Tell you what, keep me posted on what you're hearing, will you?

LADY: OK, I certainly will do that.

RUBY: I'd ask you to keep your ear to the ground but you're probably going to have to keep it to the air.

LADY: I hear this all the time and if you get real sick and nobody seems to know what's wrong with you, it's because they are shooting all this stuff through the air.

RUBY: They're shooting hurts?

LADY: They dip their instruments in dynamite.
RUBY: What kind of instruments?
LADY: I don't know. I haven't got the slightest idea.
RUBY: They dip their instruments in dynamite?
LADY: Yes. I've never seen any of them.
RUBY: Hmmm.
LADY: That's what they claim.
RUBY: And what happens?
LADY: They claim that they're here to kill . . . that they're going to kill the people here and take us over. They're controlling the strike and all that stuff. It's a horrible thing.
RUBY: I'm terrified.
LADY: It is terrifying; it's something to be terrified about.
RUBY: Doesn't this bother you a little bit? You sound very calm.
LADY: Yes, it bothers me a lot. I spend all my time working with it.
RUBY: You are a working lady?
LADY: I'm not working now because the buses are on strike.
RUBY: Oh, I see. You're a bus driver?
LADY: No, I'm not a bus driver but I can't get to work. I don't have a car.
RUBY: So you're stuck, eh?
LADY: So I'm stuck, so I work on this thing.
RUBY: You're stuck at home with these voices.
LADY: I'm calling . . . I call all the politicians and everybody and . . .
RUBY: Have you spoken to any other radio stations about this?
LADY: Yes, I've talked to, ah, Mutt and Jeff.

RUBY: You've talked to Roy and Jeff about these voices?

LADY: Yeah.

RUBY: What do they say?

LADY: Well, they were pretty much surprised, you know, about it. They were shocked like everybody else. When they first hear it they don't want to believe it, but that's why I went to a psychiatrist.

RUBY: If the voices think I'm phony, what do they think of Roy and Jeff?

LADY: I don't know . . . they didn't . . .

RUBY: Had no comment on Roy and Jeff, eh?

LADY: No. No comment on them.

RUBY: I see. But the voices don't like me at all.

LADY: No. They don't.

RUBY: Well, that's too bad because I'm in a rating period and I'll take anybody I can get.

LADY: That's right. That's right. I like you, Rudy.

RUBY: No, no. *Ruby*.

LADY: Ruby.

RUBY: Those voices are confusing you.

LADY: OK. I like you, Ruby.

RUBY: Listen, tell me what happens. Keep me posted on this, will you?

LADY: Alright, I'll call you again.

RUBY: OK.

LADY: Bye-bye.

RUBY: Yeah, so long.

The greatest volume of out-calls are generated from source material—newspapers (we subscribe to eight), magazines, and wire service copy. It will be

years before television develops the informational capacity of these services. Scanning the Los Angeles *Times* alone results in ten or twelve potential calls daily, of which I may use one or two. The trick is in the selection. Articles with eye-catching headlines may be so much puff after the first paragraph. But often, the innocent story can help make a radio program. A tiny story from the L.A. *Times* crossed my desk one day; the small headline read: "Connecticut Installs Comfort Stations," followed by a single sentence that said, "The state of Connecticut has installed comfort stations for dogs on Interstate 95, it was announced by the State Department of Transportation Monday."

RUBY: Is this the Connecticut Department of Transportation?

GIRL: Yes, it is.

RUBY: How ya doing this morning?

GIRL: I'm doing just fine.

RUBY: OK. Listen, I'm calling long-distance from New Orleans. My name is Ruby?

GIRL: Yes?

RUBY: We were up in Connecticut over this past weekend; we were seeing some friends at North Stonington.

GIRL: Uh-huh.

RUBY: We stopped at your little comfort station on, we were going, I think, west on Interstate 95.

GIRL: Uh-huh.

RUBY: My dog has developed a rash.

GIRL: (Pause) Oh?

RUBY: Well, yeah, it has. It's an English sheepdog

which is kinda amazing in itself because it's a little hard to see a rash on one.

GIRL: Uh-huh.

RUBY: But I wondered if there was something we might have picked up at your comfort station. Have you had any complaints about that?

GIRL: Ah, not that I know of. This is the information desk.

RUBY: Well, I don't know if he used the soft pink or baby blue fire hydrants you have there, but he's very uncomfortable and he's a big dog and it's hot down here in New Orleans and the rash is, is, well, I'm a little upset about it.

GIRL: Well, I'll tell you what, why don't I transfer you to Mrs. Milligan. Ah, maybe she can give you some information on that.

RUBY: Well, I'd just like to find out what to do about the rash. My vet says it's just something he might have picked up. It's nothing recognizable. I wondered if you'd had a rash of complaints.

GIRL: Perhaps Mrs. Milligan would know something about that. I'll transfer you to her and you explain it to her, and if it's something she can't help you with she'll certainly tell you who to talk to.

RUBY: OK.

GIRL: 'Cause this is the information desk.

(TRANSFERS)

M.M.: Mrs. Milligan

RUBY: Ah, Mrs. Milligan

M.M.: Yes.

RUBY: I was just referred to you. My wife and I and my dog just came back from a long weekend in Connecticut . . .

M.M.: Well, wait . . .

RUBY: Hello?

M.M.: Could you hold the line please? I have a call on another wire.

RUBY: You do?

M.M.: Yes, I'll be right with you.

RUBY: Yeah, well, OK.

M.M.: Thank you.

(ON HOLD)

RUBY: Hello? Mrs. Milligan . . .

M.M.: Hello. I'm terribly sorry.

RUBY: Oh, that's alright. I'm . . . I'm calling you from New Orleans. I just . . . I have a small problem.

M.M.: Yes.

RUBY: My wife and I spent a long weekend in New York and Connecticut and we took our dog with us. We were with some friends going west on Interstate 95 when we stopped at your little dog place there.

M.M.: Yes. Yes.

RUBY: And my dog, which is an English sheepdog, developed a mysterious rash and I took him to the vet and he said maybe to call someone there to find out if maybe there had been a . . . an epidemic or something that we could maybe get some idea what it was.

M.M.: I see. Well, how could I reach you?

RUBY: Well, let's see. Ah, I'm unreachable this morning. I've got your number. Maybe I can

call you back, but I was curious if maybe you had had any complaints.

M.M.: Yes. I . . . I hardly think so because, I used to do an anti-litter program with a special dog that I had. He passed away about a year ago and, . . .

RUBY: What . . . he passed away?

M.M.: Yes, and everyone is aware of my feeling for dogs and so forth.

RUBY: Yeah.

M.M.: I'm sure it would have come to my ears, but let me check it out. Now we have the doggie rest area on 95 . . .

RUBY: That's where it was. Yeah.

M.M.: In the Groten area?

RUBY: Yes.

M.M.: Right.

RUBY: I just wondered if it was the heat or something he might have gotten off one of the fire hydrants.

M.M.: That's possible, but by the same token you know some of the grasses here . . . I have a poodle now and she gets a rash on her stomach, usually from the grass.

RUBY: Well, that isn't exactly where the rash is.

M.M.: I see. (Laughs) Is it male or female?

RUBY: It's a male. It's an English sheepdog.

M.M.: English sheep.

RUBY: Yeah . . . he's always hot anyway.

M.M.: I see.

RUBY: Well, listen. Let me call you back later this afternoon.

M.M.: Very well, Mr. Ruby. We'll do everything we can to assist you.

Now and then, a decent call can happen spontaneously. This one occurred one morning when the discussion centered on insurance rates, and someone suggested I call Fireman's Fund for some rather dry statistics. I decided at the last moment that the audience didn't need them.

RUBY: Is this Fireman's Fund American?
LADY: Yes.
RUBY: I got an animal coming up the river on a boat and I think I want to put some additional insurance on it.
LADY: An animal on a boat coming up.
RUBY: Yeah.
LADY: OK. Let me just see if I can get Mr. Louey.
RUBY: Oh, OK.
LADY: Hold on just a moment.
RUBY: OK.

(SWITCHING)

GIRL: Miss Staley's desk.
RUBY: Yes?
GIRL: Miss Staley's desk.
RUBY: How . . . how do you pronounce that ma'am?
GIRL: Staley.
RUBY: Oh, Miss Stanley?
GIRL: No. Staley.
RUBY: Oh. Miss Staley.
GIRL: Uh-huh.
RUBY: Oh, I'm sorry. I've got a bad connection. Miss Staley, this is John Nipperman with the Clyde Beatty Circus?
GIRL: Uh-huh.
RUBY: Listen, I'm calling because we've got an ani-

mal coming up the river; it's headed up for . . .

GIRL: Wait a minute. Wait a minute.

RUBY: What's that?

GIRL: Wait a minute. You don't want to talk to me. You want to talk to Mr. Lou Staley.

RUBY: Oh, Mr. . . .

GIRL: I'm not . . . I'm not him.

RUBY: Oh, Mr. Lou Staley?

GIRL: Uh-huh. I'm just taking his messages for him. He's not in right now.

RUBY: Oh, he's not in?

GIRL: No.

RUBY: Well, listen, let me tell *you* my problem. I've got to get hold of somebody. I've got an animal coming up the river, see?

GIRL: Uh-huh.

RUBY: And I know we've got some Fireman's Fund Insurance on him right now.

GIRL: Um-hm.

RUBY: We want to put some more on him. It's a rare animal and we want to get him . . . well, in case something happens between here and St. Louis.

GIRL: Uh-huh.

RUBY: And, uh, we want to put some additional insurance on him.

GIRL: Right. What kind of animal is it?

RUBY: It's a camel.

GIRL: A camel?

RUBY: Yeah. Actually it's a rare camel. It's what they call a half-humped camel.

GIRL: Half-humped?

RUBY: Half . . .

GIRL: . . . humped.

RUBY: Half . . . yeah. Or as it's known in the trade, a half-a-humper.

GIRL: Uh-huh.

RUBY: And . . . it's a yearling. It's about 800 pounds. And I want to know what the additional insurance would be from New Orleans to St. Louis.

GIRL: Uh, and you say we have a policy on this camel already?

RUBY: Yeah, the policy was written in Cairo.

GIRL: Uh-huh. Do you have the policy number?

RUBY: It was either . . . it was either Cairo or Casablanca. No, I've got it here, but I can't read Arabic.

GIRL: Oh. Where are you now?

RUBY: It was written in . . . I'm here in New Orleans. I just flew in. I'm flying in ahead of the camel. I'm flying in ahead of Jelly.

GIRL: Oh.

RUBY: We call him Jelly for short because that half a hump kinda looks like I don't know, it kinda looks like a bowl of Jello.

GIRL: Uh-huh.

RUBY: But, uh, What . . . How soon . . . I'm a little concerned . . .

GIRL: Can you call back at three?

RUBY: Sure thing.

Conversations that hold the greatest fascination for me are the ones dealing with real slices of Americana—particularly when the person I'm talking to was present at, or part of, a significant happening.

My favorite has always been the one with Ted Hinton, one of the lawmen who ambushed Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow. At the time we spoke in 1971, Ted had just been defeated for reelection as sheriff of Dallas County in Texas. He was sixty-two years old and still sounded tough as nails, noting that he jogged two miles each day. Hard-bitten, I suppose, was my impression of him, but the depression made hard men, and unmade others.

RUBY: Ted, the reason that I called is that it says in this article that you were the man who gunned down Bonnie and Clyde. Is that true?

T.H.: Well, I'm one of the six of 'em that was in on the deal.

RUBY: Do you recall that? Do you recall that particular day clearly?

T.H.: I sure do, because me and my partner were the only two boys that ever faced that boy twice and lived to tell it.

RUBY: What was the first time?

T.H.: Right about where this International Airport is being built in Dallas County right now. And that was about November 23, 1933.

RUBY: What happened then?

T.H.: Well, if we had jumped him in the daytime we wouldn't have been here now, because he could have seen what he was doing. But it was at night, and when he had turned around the road he saw us and he switched out his lights and straightened out and went to shootin' at us. Now if he could have seen who he was shooting at . . . That fella didn't miss anybody when he shot at him.

RUBY: What were the events leading up to that final showdown with Bonnie and Clyde?

T.H.: Well, we knew he had got separated from one of his partners there in Louisiana, and we knew where his partner lived down there fifteen miles southwest of Gibs[1], Louisiana, and they got separated on a Sunday; so we go down there Sunday night and stayed there until Wednesday morning. At 9:15 here they come up over the hill going towards his house that was about two miles from where we were there in those woods. We knew what he was doin', and you could tell who it was by the way he drove. He'd made A. J. Foyt look like a kiddie-car driver, that boy would. He knew how to drive that automobile and he knew how to shoot that gun, too.

RUBY: What kind of gun did he have?

T.H.: They had six .45 automatics in their car and he died with one in his hand. She, Bonnie,—somebody shot one out of her hand. I don't know who did that with all that shootin' goin' on around there.

RUBY: They drove up over the hill, and then what happened?

T.H.: Well, they saw Mr. Metson's truck sittin' there and it had a flat tire on it, so they went to a slowin' down. We had him handcuffed out there in the woods about, well, I guess 30 feet out there where it was so thick you couldn't see in it, and our car was in there too. They couldn't see nothin' 'till we raised up on out of those woods and hollered at them.

RUBY: What kind of weapons did you have?

[1] Gibsland

T.H.: I had a 30-06 machine rifle and a 12-gauge shotgun and two .45 automatic pistols, and when I got through shootin' at them I never had any shells in none of 'em.

RUBY: What happened? You shot at them, and then what?

T.H.: Well, they tried to get away but there was a gravel road there, Bob, and they couldn't get any traction to pull out and then everybody started shootin' at 'em, the six of us lined up along there, and I run in between all them guys shootin' tryin' to catch up with 'em and the car fell over on the bank of the levee right there and I jumped up on it and tried to get in it and couldn't; then I jumped up on the hood and down on the other side and by that time there's two or three other officers there and everybody had quit shootin' at it then.

RUBY: Did Bonnie and Clyde actually get out of the car?

T.H.: When I pulled the door, why, she fell out of there and she died while I was holding her there. But Clyde was already dead. He had 54 holes in him.

RUBY: They were both in the car.

T.H.: Yeah.

RUBY: Yeah. What were you thinking at that moment, Ted?

T.H.: I was wantin' to eliminate that boy. He had already eliminated thirteen people and that is the second time I had been lookin' at him and I wanted to stop him if I could 'cause he was a pretty bad boy.

RUBY: Did you see the movie *Bonnie and Clyde*?

T.H.: No sir, I didn't. It was made right here in Dallas, Texas, too.

RUBY: I'd wondered if you had seen it . . . if it was realistic, if it was like anything you remembered.

T.H.: No. My son saw it and he got up and walked out of it because it wasn't. I got a film of it down there that I shot after it was all over with . . . the shootin' was all over with and well, I had a 16 mm camera and I done some shootin' of it there where they were still in the car and before we carried them to the morgue and all the people had gathered around there. Course we had to go to town there about 15 miles and call in and tell the sheriff here in Dallas and the people what we had done and where they were and boy, the people really went crazy.

RUBY: And you say Clyde had about 54 bullet holes in him.

T.H.: Yeah.

RUBY: How about Bonnie?

T.H.: Well, I imagine it was around 50 in her.

RUBY: Were they firing back at you at any time, Ted?

T.H.: No. They just died with their guns in their hands. We knew what they'd do because this was the second time my partner and I had run into them and I knew what they' do; the thirteen other people layin' out there in the morgue had tried to holler at them and make 'em give up but they didn't have anything to lose. They couldn't give up. There was no way.

RUBY: They were really desperate.

T.H.: Sure, they killed thirteen people.

RUBY: You say you took some 16 mm film? About how many feet of film did you have of that?

T.H.: Oh, about a hundred feet.

RUBY: It's black and white, a pretty historic piece of film.

T.H.: Yeah, and there's a lot of people who want it and everybody wants to get ahold of it but I just kept it here. I want to give it to my son and his family.

RUBY: Would you say Bonnie and Clyde were the most desperate characters you came up against in your law enforcement career, Ted?

T.H.: Yeah. They . . . well, I don't know. I caught a lot of boys here. There's burglars and thieves and I caught Raymond Hamilton and his partner. Becker and I caught him over in Ft. Worth. There was five of us over there and we caught that boy over in the Ft. Worth Railroad yard. But that boy, Clyde, would make that Dillinger look like near a first-grader. Dillinger gave up three times, and when that boy started out he and that gal never gave up at all. And they was in twenty-one gun battles, and got out of them.

RUBY: Good heavens. Ted, you're sixty-two years old. It sounds like you've been in a few gun battles in your life.

T.H.: Yeah, I have.

RUBY: Well, you're a lucky man.

T.H.: I'm the luckiest guy that ever lived!

RUBY: (Laughs) You can say that!

T.H.: You know somethin'. That's right!

RUBY: Ted, I appreciate your talking with us. I really feel like I'm talking to a piece of history here, because it's been a long time.

T.H.: Well, they kinda just started that picture, Bob, when they made that Clyde and Bonnie

picture they made a hero out of him and the little ole boy didn't have any return after they killed the first man who was Mr. Belcher down in Hillsburg, Texas. . . . Clyde and Raymond and Bonnie was robbin' the people down there, and Raymond let a gun go off and hit the safe and killed an old man so they had no return there and even though Raymond got out and was caught, and put in the penitentiary and in the death house and got out of that, way back in 1934. There were five of us all told that caught him over in Ft. Worth.

RUBY: Y'know, Ted, there's a guy up in . . . I talked to him about a month and a half ago, up north of us here . . . I forget . . . a little town up north of New Orleans who in 1933 or '34, right in there, just before Bonnie and Clyde were killed, they came by; he had a little flying service and they drove up to his hangar one day and they saw his plane and they wanted a ride and he took them up for a ride and flew them around and he said they were the nicest folks he ever met.

T.H.: Yeah, they were. She had a new permanent when she got killed that she had got there in Shreveport somewhere . . . ah, Saturday I imagine it was the way her hair looked and everything. But they never . . . from November, 1933, until they were captured down there they had never . . . they wouldn't go to sleep together; one would sleep and the other one was awake. And they never went to sleep in a bed from then on; they stayed in that car all the time.

RUBY: I wish I could spend more time with you . . .

T.H.: Bob, the FBI came down there after we was through with all that and caught Raymond. Hoover sent a representative down there to get us to come up there and catch that Dillinger for them. But we woulda took him with a switch. I'd a-told that boy . . . I'd a-punched him and told him to come on here. I wouldn't a-done all that shootin' at that picture show because there wasn't any needin' it.

RUBY: But you say Clyde Barrow in your estimation was tougher than that.

T.H.: Well, he killed thirteen people and Dillinger never killed anybody but a couple of punks that he was foolin' around with. That's all. He was just up there where he could get a lot of publicity and he had the FBI that could get all that. But they tried to get us to come up there and my partner and I were willin' to go but Mr. Smoot wouldn't let us. I mean the sheriff there wouldn't let us.

RUBY: Ted, it's good to talk to you and are you going to run for reelection?

T.H.: Ah, hell no. I'm going to stay up at the ranch and take little mother fishin'. She's just tickled to death that I lost.

RUBY: Nice talking with you, Ted, . . . I hope we can meet again. I'd like to see that film.

T.H.: Mail me a tape of this interview if you would.

RUBY: I certainly will.

T.H.: I sure do thank you, Bob.

As far as I know, Ted is still thriving in Dallas. I'm tempted to fly over some weekend to see the film he took that day. As grim as it probably is, it's still

history. I hope that, rather than leave it in his family, he will donate it to the Smithsonian, where it stands a better chance of preservation.

The most disturbing conversation ever aired on the program was a taped interview with Sandra Good, the roommate of Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme and a member of the infamous Charles Manson family. It was arranged by one of my assistants, Norm Schroeder, about a week after Fromme's 1975 assassination attempt on President Ford in California. At the time of the taping, I was amazingly unconcerned about the potential news value of what was being said. I wasn't unaware of her threats to certain New Orleans people and others, but for some reason the weight of what she was saying failed to register on me. The interview concluded, I took the tape to my office and put it on the desk. When I returned from lunch an hour later, my producer, Rich Koster, and Schroeder were quite excited. They said they had listened to the tape and, acting in my absence, had taken it to the WWL television newsroom and given it to the news editor. I asked them if TV news had called back. When they said no, I immediately called Bill Elder, who picked up the still unexamined recording and brought it to my office. He listened to it in silence, then without a word put it in the box and took it back to Channel 4. That evening, Bill broke the story on the 5 o'clock news. Because of time restrictions in TV news presentation, only that part of the tape was played specifically mentioning those threatened by name. There was a threat made against me as well during the course of the conversation, and when the *Times-Picayune* splashed the story on page one the following morning, it said the threat had been deleted in

the television coverage. The facts were that Good's threats against me were more spontaneous than premeditated and not particularly newsworthy. In any event, some unacquainted with the truth asked why Channel 4 had chosen to protect my name and none of the others. They didn't. The story was covered accurately by Elder, and in the interest of time only the most important aspects were considered. The next morning when the *Picayune* carried the item on the front page, I played the tape in its entirety twice—and the threats against me were laid bare for anyone with a radio, not that those threats mattered. It was the lunatic tone of the interview that counted.

RUBY: Sandra, Bob Ruby. Can you hear me clearly?

S.G.: Yes.

RUBY: OK. Can we go ahead and start taping this?

S.G.: Ah, well, first tell me how long it's going to be.

RUBY: Oh, I don't know, ah, what do you think, ten minutes?

S.G.: Alright.

RUBY: OK. Fine. We're taping this now.

S.G.: Now . . . just a minute.

RUBY: OK.

S.G.: OK.

RUBY: No, alright.

S.G.: I have information on, ah . . . I don't know if you've heard of the International People's Court. Have you heard of that?

RUBY: No.

S.G.: I've spoken of it. It's a wave of assassins. And I have information regarding people in New Orleans and the South. Does your radio station reach places like Texas?

RUBY: Oh, yeah. It's a 50,000-watt clear-channel station.

S.G.: So you pretty much cover the South.

RUBY: Oh yeah. We get over into Houston.

S.G.: OK.

RUBY: Ah, do you want to talk about it on the air?

S.G.: Well, if I make . . . if I can recall names that I've heard of that are targets for assassins would that be a waste of time to . . . for me to give those names?

RUBY: Well, I don't know. It's up to you. You can say what you want.

S.G.: Well, would you air it?

RUBY: Yeah, as far as I know we would.

S.G.: You . . . would there be any laws preventing you from airing people's names?

RUBY: Well, if there were we'd check them, Sandra.

S.G.: Yeah. OK. If I can think of any names I'll just rattle them off.

RUBY: Alright, well, we'll get to that. OK.?

S.G.: OK.

RUBY: Can we start recording?

S.G.: Alright.

RUBY: Alright. On the other end of the line is Sandra Good, who is Lynette Fromme's roommate, has been for some time. How

long have you and Lynette been roommates? How long were you roommates, Sandra?

S.G.: Oh, just a minute. There's somebody at my door.

RUBY: Oh, alright.

S.G.: Hey, click-off, OK.?

RUBY: OK.

S.G.: (Background noises) OK.

RUBY: OK., Sandra. Everything copacetic?

S.G.: Yeah.

RUBY: Alright. Let's start it again then, if it's alright. I just got to give an intro to this.

S.G.: OK. (garbled) people are around and just things are going on so . . .

RUBY: Oh, I suppose.

S.G.: I may have to interrupt.

RUBY: Very well. On the other end of the line is Sandra Good who has known Lynette Fromme for some time. They were roommates prior to Lynn Fromme's arrest for . . .

S.G.: Hold it again.

RUBY: Alright.

S.G.: (Background noises) OK.

RUBY: OK.?

S.G.: Yeah.

RUBY: OK. You ready?

S.G.: Uh-hm.

RUBY: Alright. On the other end of the line is Sandra Good, a longtime associate of Linda

[*sic*] Fromme who's been accused of attempted assassination of the President of the United States. Ah, Sandra Good was on television the other night. How long have you known Lynn Fromme? How long have you two girls been together, Sandra?

S.G.: A long time.

RUBY: Starting when?

S.G.: I don't live in time.

RUBY: Tell me about that.

S.G.: I don't live in time. We've known each other for a long, long, long time. Forever.

RUBY: Forever?

S.G.: Uh-hm.

RUBY: You don't count time in terms of years?

S.G.: No.

RUBY: OK. Do you remember when you first met?

S.G.: (Pause) Ah . . . go on to another question.

RUBY: Alright. Ah . . . you and Lynn Fromme were together with Charles Manson at one time. Is that true?

S.G.: Uh-hm. We've been together for a long time.

RUBY: Can you tell me about those times?

S.G.: No. I can tell you about what's coming, a little bit. If you don't straighten up . . . I'll tell you about New Orleans if that's where you're broadcasting from.

RUBY: That's right.

S.G.: There are people there and there are people all over this country that better start taking a good look at their country and what they're doing to it. Um, you have people in New Or-

leans . . . who's selling poison to the children in the form of foods. Ah, you have . . . who's selling lies using the media. Um, you have people who are ripping up the land; you have people who are killing wildlife; you have people who are playing around with nuclear materials. Um, you have people who are poisoning the rivers; people who are poisoning the air. These people had better stop now or their wives and themselves, primarily their wives, are targets for murder. Right now, anybody who is willfully harming the earth, its animals, its wildlife; anyone who is cutting down trees *best stop now because they will be viciously, viciously murdered. Do you understand?*

RUBY: Could you say by whom?

S.G.: By whom. There is a wave of assassins on the move; they are watching. They are everywhere and they are called the International People's Court of Retribution. . . . Put all your money, I'm talking to all of you multimillionaires who are ripping up this earth and leaving nothing for your children to live in, I'm telling you now, you put all your money right now into cleaning up this earth right now. . . . *We do not want nuclear power on this earth*; we do not need nuclear power on this earth; it is dangerous and you know it. Um, IT&T executives, you know what you've done and you know what you've got coming. You wives who put money and prestige and social position and what your face looks like over the lives of your children and your earth, you know what you've got coming. Either leave the country or you put every

penny you have into cleaning up what you have done. There's been too much blood spilled on this earth, too many people killed, too many thousands and thousands of people killed so you all can have your money. Um, Mobil Oil executives, you know who you are in Texas and Houston. Um, you all know who you are. You know who's been cutting down the trees and killing the wildlife and polluting the rivers and the oceans, poisoning the air, you stop now or you're gonna die. Now that is just a warning, OK.? Would you like to ask another question?

RUBY: Alright, ah, are you involved at all in this or this something you have knowledge of?

S.G.: I have knowledge of many, many things that you people are too smart or too smug or too judgmental to listen to your children. If you start listening to your children you might learn something. You're too busy judging them and sending them off to psychiatrists rather than looking at yourselves as a world. Look at yourselves, people. Look at yourself! Don't put the blame somewhere else. Look at yourself!

RUBY: Sandra, do you intend to participate in any of this?

S.G.: In any of what?

RUBY: Of what you just mentioned.

S.G.: I'm watching you. Don't ask me stupid questions! I've got my eyes on all of you and there are thousands of people who have their eyes on you. There are many groups, the largest is the International People's Court; they'll look under every rock. You can't get away from them.

RUBY: And who are . . .

S.G.: They're in Belgium; they're in London. Go on to another question.

RUBY: Alright. I was going to ask you who are the International People's Court?

S.G.: Well, I'm sure not going to tell you each name.

RUBY: Well, no, that isn't . . .

S.G.: Your own children for one and there are other people. They're all races, all races of people who wish to live, who wish to see their earth cleaned up, who wish to live under a blue sky that will stretch from here to China in harmony, people who wish to clean up, to stop this madness and live in harmony.

RUBY: Alright, the names you named now, ah, what do you want these people to do exactly. What do they have to do in your opinion?

S.G.: Stop hurting the earth, stop killing the wildlife, stop putting . . . stop any jobs that in any way harm the environment or its wildlife.

RUBY: What would you have them do today, quit their jobs?

S.G.: (Garbled) Quit their jobs. Put all . . . right now, um, there are alternatives to any jobs that pollute. Put all their energy, all their technology, all their money into new jobs that do not harm the environment. No more cutting trees for one. There are alternative fuels for cars. Um, new engines can be built. For every destructive job there is an alternative. Any revolution should not hurt the working people. I'm talking about the executives. I'm talking about the chairmens [*sic*] of the board. They put all their money and

technology and change what they're doing and they clean up what they have done. They can devise ways to go down into the ocean. They can get those oil slicks out of the ocean. Ah, they can clean up the rivers. They do everything they can, and their wives, ah, quit their bridge club and they start gardens. Every wife start a large garden and start working like the people she's been making work!

RUBY: You say the wives will be murdered?

S.G.: *The wives will get the worst of it!*

RUBY: Why?

S.G.: Because they push their husbands to, um, to put money over her children's lives. She, ah, she demands new coats, new prestige. She pushes her husband; she nags him. She controls him. She makes him her little boy. She manipulates him. She uses her body.

RUBY: You say these people will be murdered. Now is this a threat from you or is this a threat you're, ah, you're relaying for the . . .

S.G.: I . . . the International People's Court . . . I hear things. I have knowledge of many things.

RUBY: Is this a threat from the International People's Court of Retribution which is worldwide?

RUBY: Are you a member of that court?

S.G.: I have a v . . . I have an ear of what they are doing.

RUBY: Are you a member?

S.G.: I said what I said! I hear what they are doing.

RUBY: Alright. Is there anything we can talk about, ah, about Lynette Fromme?

S.G.: Sir, listen. When I answer a question don't pump me for what you want to hear. Do you understand me!?

RUBY: Alright. Alright, tell me what you want to say.

S.G.: Do you understand me!?

RUBY: I understand you.

S.G.: And your life is on the line if you don't stop that B.S.!

RUBY: Now what would you like to say?

S.G.: Alright, ask me another question. Alright, I said that . . . Alright. You best let Manson out. Manson was judged in '69. He was convicted for Nixon's conspiracy. Nixon is walking free. Every law in the book was broken to put Manson where he is. He needs a new trial. He needs to present the case that he wasn't allowed to present because he didn't . . . because he spoke the truth and he does not lie.

RUBY: Do you feel Charles Manson was innocent?

S.G.: He does not lie.

RUBY: And what is the truth?

S.G.: Are you innocent?

RUBY: What is the truth in the Manson case?

S.G.: You ask him. You give him his voice. If you all want to live . . . there's madness coming to your streets. When the economy has frozen, it has frozen, when the money won't spend because the nation and the people have put their trust and faith in a system that is frozen, their ah, faith in a money that won't spend, there'll be madness. Um, nobody in government positions is in a position to fix it. They don't know what they are doing. They're confused. Everyone is confused. This coun-

try is going to need order put in it soon. Ah . . . the Manson family can prevent much, much killing, much misdirected, chaotic killing. We can prevent that if you give us a courtroom and let us put on the case, let the family put on the case that they were never allowed to put on in 1969.

RUBY: Do you think . . .

S.G.: And your lives depend on whether you allow Manson to get out and have his forum. He doesn't want around us earth people . . . y'know. He personally would like to be away from this earth's madness, but I know that he can fix it. I know he can put order into a country that needs order very badly. I know he can fix the economy.

RUBY: Do you feel that Lynette Fromme got a fair hearing, a fair shake over the past few days?

S.G.: I don't think anybody is getting a fair shake anymore. I don't think anybody is.

RUBY: Do you feel that what she did was right?

S.G.: Right? Wrong? What is right and wrong? How do you judge right and wrong nowadays? Is Nixon right? Do we, um, do we let the Nixons of the world walk around free? Is that right? Do we let people lie to us and sell us poison using the media? Do we, um, let people sell our children violence? Um, through the televisions to sell a product? Is that right? Is, ah, sending thousands of American boys over to Vietnam to be killed and to kill . . . is that right?

RUBY: Which people in your view are not guilty?

S.G.: Children . . . animals . . . the earth, a lot of little people, a lot of meek people, a lot of

humble people, a lot of people who have done nothing but give all their lives. They've been down for a long, long, long time. They've been down since they crucified Christ; they've been down ever since. They've been trompled under your bloody feet!

RUBY: (Pause) You're angry.

S.G.: Of course I'm angry and there's a lot of people angry. A lot of your children are mad. They can't stand your mad world, you . . . you robots who put money over their lives. You start looking at the sky your kids live under and the water they drink and where are all the animals to play with. Where are all the fields. Where are the long, long fields, you know, where your eyes can just stretch and see far, nothing but trees and grass and . . . where is that anymore? It's all paved over with concrete and parking lots and your phony, um, universities where people just read books and run in circles of confusion. You need Manson people; you people are mad!

RUBY: How would the Manson people change the world if they were in control?

S.G.: You ask them. You ask them. This world is living in a despot. Look at your TV programs. What do you people love to watch every night? You know? Somebody miserable on the operating table, somebody being shot at. You people are crazy! This is what you like. This is . . . if this is what you really like this is what you're going to get. Those people who wish to live, who wish to clean up the earth . . . the children, I know, do. Ah . . . we

need new thoughts to live in other than death and destruction and suffering.

RUBY: And yet you're talking about murdering people.

S.G.: This is what people seem to be asking for . . . by their self-destructive ways, by their murdering of the earth, by the murdering of their children's minds by what they put into it, by the food that people sell. Ah . . .

RUBY: Didn't . . . ah, you mention Jesus.

S.G.: . . . I'm telling you, you quit selling that poison. You know what you're doing.

RUBY: Uh-hm.

S.G.: Ah . . . we don't need those things. Stop it! . . . we don't need new development. You take all that concrete and all that garbage off the earth and you let the flowers grow. You give your children something to play in other than concrete. You stop or get away. Get out of this country.

RUBY: Sandra?

S.G.: Hmm?

RUBY: You mentioned Jesus at one point in this conversation. Ah, do you recall Jesus's words "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone"?

S.G.: "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." Your children are casting stones. Your children are casting stones. Look at our eyes. Look in Lynn's eyes. Take her picture . . . take the picture on *Time* magazine and look at her eyes. Put it on your wall and look at the eyes. The eyes are the windows to the soul. Look at your children. That's your children right there. That's all the love . . . that's

all the love that you people have been murdering right there and that's your child and this is what you've been driving them to. You've been pushing them to it. You've been pushing them to the nuthouses, to the prisons, the jails, to murder, to dope. One thing I'd like to say is we, Manson family, do not drink and do not take drugs. Ah, we wear red robes now, we're nuns. The red robe is a symbol of Christ, the Lamb. It means that Manson gave his head underground for a new start for all and to prevent a race war and to free a people and give them their rightful place. I'm going to read that again. The red robe which we are now wearing . . . all of us women are wearing red robes . . . is a symbol of Christ, the Lamb. It means Manson gave his head underground for a new start for all and to prevent a race war and to free a people and give them their rightful place.

RUBY: Has the International People's Tribunal set any time limit, any . . .

S.G.: The International People's Court of Retribution.

RUBY: OK.

S.G.: If you continue to distort words, media people, and to insert your own thoughts over the thoughts that are given to you by the people you too are in trouble. Do not distort words. Do not interject your opinions because you're wrong.

RUBY: Alright.

S.G.: You don't know what you're doing. You're digging for a story. Listen to what I'm saying

and you say it as I say it without your own interjections. Do not splice this tape to suit your own sensational . . . ah . . . fantasies.

RUBY: No, it won't be spliced.

S.G.: Do you understand me?

RUBY: Yes, but may I ask you one thing? Ah, has a deadline been set for any of the things that you mentioned?

S.G.: Deadline? Ah . . . people are watching. They'll move when they see fit to move. Each person who has been abusing the earth, the animals, the water, their children, they know who they are; they know what they've got coming. They know why . . . ah . . . you IT&T executives, you know why you drink too much. You Westinghouse, General Electric executives, Exxon, you all know why you can't face each other without a stiff drink. Your guilt for what you've done is tremendous. I see you and your children see you and what you do, you miserable maggots. You stop killing this earth. You stop now. You use all your brainpower and your money into cleaning up what you've done. Alright?

RUBY: You feel the Manson family is without guilt.

S.G.: (Pause) We have a very . . . we, ah, we've taken on a lot of your guilt. We've taken on all your problems. As a family, we've picked up all of your problems. All of your children's problems. We are the children and we've picked up a lot of your problems. We're reflections of them. We're your kids. We're a reflection of your whole world. (Pause)

RUBY: How long do you intend . . .

S.G.: We've given our lives. We've given our whole lives for your world. I don't have any guilt. Lynn's clean. The family's clean. We're clean. Look at our eyes.

RUBY: How long do you intend to . . . how long do you intend to . . . to keep this going?

S.G.: To keep it going?

RUBY: Yes.

S.G.: This country needs to change, mister. You need to be willing to change. Things . . . there is a solution for every problem. This country has manifold problems. Ah, madness is coming. I love the earth and I love the children and I love the animals and I love the working people of this country. I do and I'm not going to abandon anybody and my family in prison. I'm not . . . I'm not leaving anybody. I'm not leaving the earth for your bloodthirsty, money-minded robot minds to, ah, tear up. Uh-uh. No, there's too many people who love this earth. Too many people who love it and won't . . . and won't . . . and there's other things moving of a cosmic nature. There are many things in what you don't know rather than what you think you know that are moving. Many, many cosmic things are, uh, afoot. Many thoughts have been set on earth, and, uh . . .

RUBY: By whom?

S.G.: . . . it's a matter of time; it's a matter of cleaning up, it's a matter of balance; it's a matter of truth over lying. The lie will die. The lie has to die. All your lies . . . you . . . people have been forced to live in a lie. You watch your TV and you tell me how much love, how

much truth, how much honor, how much worship is in your television, your television programs.

RUBY: Do you feel . . .

S.G.: How much honesty is in the advertising? How much honesty and integrity are in your government leaders? How many public servants do you have? Where are your public servants? Most of them are black. Most of them are in prison. They're little people. The've been serving you too long. Too long. They're tired of you. They're sick of you, sick to death of you and your murderous ways and your love of money and social prestige and makeup and women. I'll tell you who's gonna be the most viciously slaughtered is women. They . . . She's been selling her body. Look at the cover of *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Um, does that woman show love of children or her, um, her earth? Or animals? Uh-uh. She's selling her body to sell some makeup. She's become a bitch. And then she wonders why she's gonna get beaten up and raped. She's been asking for it. Yeah, those women who work at *Cosmopolitan* better clean that magazine up. Make it a nature magazine. Start showing women cleaning up the earth, planting gardens, not woman selling her body and clothes and makeup and things that people don't need. You tell those women at *Cosmopolitan* to clean themselves up or they're going to be, uh, cleaned up . . . with knives, with acid in their faces.

RUBY: Is there anything else you'd like to add to that?

S.G.: Nope. Just give your world to the kids and,

uh, recognize a servant. Manson is a servant. *Manson is a servant*. You better hope that he'll help you with your problems. He wants away from your world's madness, but only he can fix it, and I don't know if he will. I don't know if he'll do it after what you all have done to him, what we all have done to him and I include myself, what we have done to him for this long. I don't know if he'll help us out of the mess that we put ourselves in as a people, as a nation, as a race, as a world. You've got a whole world that's at each other's throats. You don't even have people in the same family that can live in harmony anymore in the United States. Your country's a mess. It's a big, big, big mess and it's going to get worse and you're going to need some help and you better pray that you're going to get it. But you got to work for it, you got to be willing to change. You've got to change and you've got to recognize the last family has given their lives to show you yourselves, to have you take a good look at yourselves and what you're doing to your children and what you're pushing them to. That's about all I have to say.

RUBY: One *last* thing. Are you willing to give your own life?

S.G.: That's all I have to say.

RUBY: OK., Sandra.

S.G.: Uh-huh. Bye-bye.

RUBY: Good-bye.

It is not unfair to ask whether the names of those threatened should have been mentioned. I deliberately omitted all names except my own in the tran-

script for this book because although the issue is past news, it may not yet be past history. Given a choice, I prefer beating a dead horse to raising the devil. This kind of news bothers many who feel, with some justification, that the media spends too much time in the sewerage of sensationalism. The distinction between news meant to boost ratings or sell papers and news prepared strictly as information will always be a subject of hot dispute. The names involved here are important ones, and will be with or without the cuckoos of this world. Anyone risen to prominence suffers a tremendous loss of privacy, and at times will rightfully resent the prevailing view that they are public property. As the traveling salesman said, it goes with the territory. Nevertheless, I am convinced it would serve no valid purpose to include those target names in this volume.

Sandra Good and her roommate, Kathryn Susan Murphy, were tried and convicted on federal conspiracy charges in Sacramento, California, in March, 1976. I was subpoenaed to bring the original tape of our conversation to the trial and offer additional testimony. Sandra Good acted as her own attorney during the entire trial. She wore a blue costume that resembled the habit of a novice nun. After my tape was played for the jury, she cross-examined me for about twenty minutes, mostly in reference to errors in the FBI's typed transcript of the recording. Her questions finished, she stared at me for a moment and said, "You mean for talking to you I'm gonna get twenty years?" I don't know if I've heard the last from her.

The past seven years have, on the whole, been good ones for me. I have seen trends and people and ideas come and go in radio; as in all enterprises in-

volving creative people, today's talent is tomorrow's used car salesman. This process is accelerated in broadcasting, as it is in all businesses, by overkill—the tendency to stretch the useful limits of an idea until it snaps in two. Few who make their living as I do are able to survive the long pull in either radio or television. The smart ones must always be prepared to bail out; and frankly, I never come to work without a parachute. Anyone allergic to either change or conflict can always take two Anacin commercials and avoid drafty radio stations.

* * *

Dear Ruby:

My family and I sure enjoy you every morning. We hope you stay in New Orleans a long time. What are the chances?

VI

Reflections

For the sake of balance, I promised myself not to overburden this book with polemics. I changed my mind. Broadcasting, like journalism, is one of the more self-congratulatory professions, and because of its relative newness, almost sophomoric in its reaction to criticism. I've been told on more occasions than I care to recall that radio has been very good to me, to which I reply, "Yes, but I've been very good to it, too." There is a kind of cosmic notion common to many in the radio fraternity that we are all in this thing called "Radio" together, and that we should never speak less than respectfully of it. This is hogwash. The "Radio" these people speak of is nothing more than a building, a bunch of wires, and an antenna, not one of which ever sent me a get-well card. I've always referred to this kinky image of radio as the "Transmitter Syndrome."

Ignoring the phallic possibilities of the antenna, it is not unusual for a radio station to think more of its equipment than its employees—an unspoken attitude that says, in effect, "Long after you've left, this station will still be here." The trouble with this thinking is that a radio station *is* people. In order to be anything,

it has to be populated by human beings who have no doubts that they are. Perhaps the most telling remark yet applied to modern radio is that it is still called a medium, because it is neither rare nor well-done.

Anyone ever trapped in an automobile on a long trip, tuning a radio dial gorged with music, substandard talent, and subhuman commercials, should agree. Of the thousands of radio facilities in America, only a handful represent a serious effort on the part of the owners to put quality on a par with profit. This is not because most owners are careless or irresponsible, but rather because most are bottom-liners, whose creative instincts cease to function, intentionally or otherwise, beyond a profit and loss statement. Too many stations defend programming quality strictly in terms of a proper balance of entertainment, news, advertising, and service. The most popular phrase in radio is still the solemn pronouncement, "This is _____ Radio, serving Greater _____."

But too often "service" is a smokescreen that attempts to conceal breathtaking shortfalls in other areas of programming. Some argue that since 50 percent of the radio stations in America operate in cities of less than 25,000 people, their profits can't produce the kind of programming quality found in large cities. Actually, profit has little to do with it. Most stations in these markets seldom search beyond the want-ads for an announcer, and even then wouldn't recognize an authentic talent if he were recommended by God Himself. Most have only a bare knowledge of news techniques, too many lack the ability to write decent advertising copy, and all of the aforementioned tend to hire people no better than themselves.

Uninspired and unled, many radio stations in

markets of all sizes have become little more than chattels, always for sale if the price is right to anyone who meets the Federal Communications Commission's minimum professional, moral, and solvency requirements. Smaller stations, in particular, should upgrade themselves and play a greater role in program pioneering; with limited competition and a near-exclusive audience, they could afford mistakes that larger-market stations in their insane competition for listeners find unacceptable. Instead, small stations look to cities for inspiration, and attach a mystical significance to the machinations of metropolitan radio that defies logic.

Major market stations wage a sort of surreal religious war, where Drake, Gavin, and *Billboard*[1] reign as godheads, and originality is the devil. It's called format radio, and the prize is ratings. The battle is fought at all levels—Top 40, middle-of-the-road, country, soul, even talk and news. The idea is to fine-tune programming instead of talent; the tragedy is that the audience is in the hands of manipulators instead of communicators. The tighter the ratings race, the more stations begin to sound alike. The pressures of this one-dimensional struggle sometimes cause stations to try to break out, but few escape.

About four years ago, a program director in California called me and said his station was tired of fighting it. He said he wanted to try something new, and asked me to send him a tape. I did, and a week later he wrote back, saying my show didn't fit into their format. There was a desperation in that exchange that reminded me of an animal with its foot

[1] Drake and Gavin are format radio consultant firms, *Billboard* magazine is the Bible of the record industry.

caught in a trap, unwilling to chew it off in a bid for freedom. Most radio stations do not dictate to themselves, but are dictated to by a system. The jaws of the system are its profitability; the price for those profits are a lockout of too many creative broadcasters and mediocrity for the listener. The old bromide "We're only giving the people what they want" originated with the first of a long line of shuck-and-jive promoters with the instincts of a starved wolf and the intellect of a vacant lot.

Top 40, or Rock and Roll radio, is where this story trend began. However, Top 40 has been used as a whipping boy long enough. Other stations may have been infected by some of Top 40's programming abuses, but the infection was self-inflicted. Top 40, in fact, has begun to clean up its act. In New Orleans, Joe Costello brought WRNO through the scream barrier with bold and intelligent presentations of modern artists, showcased by talented, knowledgeable air personalities like Captain Humble. Contrary to persistent myth that only "bubble-gummers" listen, WTIX and WNOE have an enormous adult audience, despite their mechanical formats. The gradual maturing of rock stations and their followings still leaves others in the cold. So-called "middle-of-the-road" or "easy listening" or "adult" stations continue to flounder in the mistaken notion that they have something for everyone; their program directors lack both the sense of audience of rock radio and the background to successfully exploit gifted air personalities. These stations are losing ground rapidly to an even more lackluster kind of broadcaster, the automated, wall-to-wall-elevator-music FM station. If I were left in a

room for more than twenty-four hours with those high-pitched violins, I swear I would confess to anything.

WWL has survived the past seven years as a kind of maverick operation by abandoning tired concepts of strict continuity and flaccid time and temperature men for the more demanding role of instant on-air creativity. They've accomplished this during peak listening times at least, by attempting to seek out talent both able to program and perform. The ability of a radio station to entrust day-to-day development and execution of programming to certain on-air personalities is one sign of that station's maturity. There are few stations in America secure enough in their own judgment to permit the kind of freedoms I enjoy. Of those that are, I can think of none that would have given me the time I needed to evolve a successful program. During the first couple years when ratings were low and business was scarce, WWL stood as firmly behind my ideas as they do today. There have been differences, and not even WWL agrees with all that I do and say; but then, neither do I.

Radio is a powerful vehicle, and errors in judgment can come back to haunt you just as crushingly as they can a doctor who accidentally kills a patient on the operating table. There is a classic, possibly apocryphal story about a morning radio personality in Chicago who opens his microphone and screams, "Put on the brakes!" The results of such a lapse are unimaginable, but point up the risk taken each day in radio, by stations and listeners alike. The greatest risk in presenting personalities lies in the station's ability to accurately gauge the limitations of a particular tal-

ent and to channel his best qualities through the microphone. Young talent, particularly, suffers from this lack of managerial insight. Left strictly to his own devices, a gifted but inexperienced personality tends to be smitten by fan mail and other positive responses from the audience that can transmogrify his enthusiasm into terminal megalomania. Of all creative businesses, radio has more disgusting arrogance and suffocating egos per square inch than any other. Broadcast talent is its own worst enemy. Nationwide, it has a deserved reputation for skipping town, freaking out, and in general being emotionally bankrupt. Part of the blame can be laid to management, for not screening talent carefully enough, and part to the talent itself, for confusing these low standards with reality. There has never been a proven link between weirdness and talent. Gifted individuals who behave eccentrically do so in most cases simply to draw more attention to themselves, and can be lived with. But those gifted *only* with the ability to draw attention to themselves are the frauds of this world, and should be recognized as such.

Radio is enjoying its last glory days. As RCA and MCA-Phillips push steadily ahead with the development of the video-disc, television as usual, will have the last laugh. The next ten years will see the loss of status of the "DJ" and the evolution of the "VJ," or video-jock, as hundreds of new UHF and low-power VHF channels are licensed to handle television's last great thrust, one that will virtually monopolize the recorded entertainment industry. Sound is fine; but sound plus pictures is irresistible. Speaker systems in television receivers will be improved dramatically, as

will be the UHF reception system, in order to give viewers equal or near-equal quality to their quadraphonic sound-and-picture playback units, which will be commonplace and affordable. And the video jock will be the new king of television, displacing even the anchorman, as he spins his Top 40 video hits morning, noon, and night. It won't be until the video telephone comes into widespread use that local television stations will be able to come up with anything remotely resembling the radio teletalk program. Ma Bell isn't taking any bets yet on mass-producing the videophone, so talk radio at least will have a measure of reprieve; FM stations will still have jocks playing the sound portions of video hits. AM stations, lacking true ability to reproduce multi-dimensional sound, will go heavily into news, information, and talk.

Without exception, I advise all young people interested in broadcasting to gear themselves for television. As well as being lucrative, it offers the greatest number of possibilities for creative people of all kinds. Of all businesses, it is perhaps the most complete in what it has to offer prospective employees—talent, sales, promotion, public relations, data processing and computer work, electronics, weather forecasting, news, photography, sports, clerical work, and dozens of other related jobs yet to be created as its influence grows. In tandem, television's glamour, profitability, and insatiable need for talent at all levels will gradually drain the best minds from radio.

Of special concern to me, however, is the potential for permanent government control of the industry. Sooner or later, nearly all news and information will originate from broadcast facilities. Once the

large-scale use of pulpwood for newsprint becomes economically and ecologically unsupportable, even newspapers will turn to some form of television to ply their trade. At the moment, commercial radio and television stations outnumber daily newspapers 4 to 1, and the discrepancy is growing. The vast majority of Americans and peoples of other advanced countries already rely on television for the bulk of their news. The danger is that, unlike newspapers, broadcasting in the United States may be slowly strangled by the federal government's non-application of First Amendment rights to broadcasters. The First Amendment to the Constitution prohibits passage of laws interfering with freedom of the press, and is designed to protect citizens from the government. But the Federal Communications Commission's "Fairness Doctrine" prevents these rights from being equally applied to broadcasting.

In an industry-slanted article in *TV Guide*, Senator William Proxmire argues that even though the policing of broadcast frequencies is necessary to prevent interference, government regulation has gone too far. If a broadcaster angers the FCC for any number of vague reasons, he faces loss of his license. Proxmire points out that since 1934 the FCC has withdrawn or withheld the licenses of more than 100 broadcasters, and cases against 58 more were pending at the time his article was written. He states that from 1970 to 1974 the FCC levied more than 500 fines totaling $640,000 against broadcasters. Here's the contradiction: NO newspaper has stopped publishing on orders from Washington, and none has or can be fined by the government. Proxmire sensibly points

out that the First Amendment recognized the diversity of ideas held by citizens of this country, but government control works against this idea. And, he says, if seven commissioners can decide what is heard and seen on television, there is no diversity, and ultimately, no protection from the protector.

The trouble with Proxmire's article is that it seemed to be written more in the nature of a complaint than a warning. But understood in complete context, it should indeed sound an alarm, since a fundamental right is being ignored, and neither Proxmire nor anyone else has any serious intentions of doing anything about it. Winking at this threat is, more than anything, retarding the brightest prospects of an industry that appears to be galloping ahead at full speed, but in reality is still in the political starting gate; but most important, is the very real danger it represents to the public.

Sadly, the blame for this precarious state of affairs can be laid directly on the broadcasters themselves. Local television stations have chosen to climb in bed with the monopolistic network triumvirate of NBC, CBS, and ABC; and when the federal government smells a monopoly, it moves swiftly, if not always surely, to regulate it. Although broadcasters would be happier with no regulation at all, they have managed for the moment to turn it to their advantage by politically manipulating the membership of the Federal Communications Commission. "Media Watch," the newsletter of the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting, stated it clearly: "The FCC has been operating as a government trade association for the broadcasting industry. It is run by industry sym-

pathizers or former industry officials; and if needed, Washington corporate lawyers, trade associations and stations are well-equipped to advance their cause."

The National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting is a non-profit organization chaired by Nicholas Johnson, an FCC commissioner from 1966 to 1973. During his term of office, he was the most outspoken critic of industry domination of the Federal Communications Commission. Johnson was a guest on my program, and although his views and those of his organization were too elitist for my tastes (I counter their charges that most network television programming is less than the public deserves with the fact that in any given year, commercial television offers more high-quality programming than any of us really have time to watch), they are not incorrect about the heavy hand of broadcasters in the regulation of their own industry. But as long as broadcasters insist on a near-monopoly situation, they must live with the reality of a full and unpredictable partnership with the government, and in the process are shooting dice with the public's ultimate right to a free flow of entertainment and information. By exclusively substituting profits for philosophy, which they are doing at this moment, broadcasters are not fulfilling their roles as public trustees of the 8,000 radio and television channels in the United States; and if, in the end, government gains the absolute upper hand in an industry so crucial to our basic freedoms, broadcasting will have failed us all.

Am I biting the hand that feeds me? Not at all. I simply want to see broadcasting slip from the grasp of hacks with high-sounding slogans and into the hands

of more people geared to give, not take. I wish this industry the very best because of the many good people who make it work in spite of itself. And one day, when we're all too old and tired to worry about it any more, we'll meet at the 40¢ Hiball Place and talk about girls.