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A long way to go—and no TV script to show the way.

JEAN SHEPHERD

• Television rarely does anything that accurately portrays the day-to-day lives of real, walking-around people. There just never was a TV assistant producer remotely like Mary Tyler Moore. Or, for that matter, a sappy TV station that seems to revolve around her—and particularly her social life—where there are no salesmen, and that apparently does only a news show and a cooking show. It goes without saying that nowhere in our land can be found the hospital where a Marcus Welby worries endlessly over the well-being of his patients and never mentions Medicare or Blue Cross. Yet I'm afraid many of us secretly believe that there is such a hospital, or doctor, if we could only find it—if we weren't in the clutches of that money-grubbing MD who charges \$55 for a five-minute interview about a maverick bunion that concludes with him saying, "it sure beats me. Have you tried going to work in bedroom slippers?"

Have you ever run into one of those crinkly-eyed "We can be so friendly" Sunoco pump-jockeys? Or how about that lovable barrel-of-monkeys funfest of a war that seems to occasionally occupy the time of those "soldiers" on M.A.S.H.? Anyone who had even a slight speaking acquaintance with that particular war can tell you that M.A.S.H.'s version resembles the real thing about the way the Land of Oz looks like Newark. A friend of mine who spent two and a half years of his life in Stalag III after parachuting out of a burning B-24 at 600 feet once got up quietly during a *Hogan's Heroes* episode, went into the next room, returned with his 20-gauge bird gun and blew his TV set into the kitchen with one well-aimed charge right in the middle of one of Col. Bob Crane's most lovable escapades.

All these curmudgeony thoughts were going through my mind the other day just after I had a very interesting contact on 40-meter phone. Since I was a kid, I've been on the ham bands in one way or another, and it's the one hobby in my life I would fight like hell before giving up. For God's sake, don't confuse this with CB, which has nothing to do with amateur radio. Anyway, it was a quiet midweek afternoon, about 4:30 or so, when a station came back to me on 7248 kHz. He had the deep, rich accent of the mountains. We talked briefly, conventionally for a bit, then the following exchange began. He was in Moundsville, West Virginia, which, if you don't know it, is the real article.

Me: "West Virginia. I wish I had 10 dollars for every hour I spent driving through those hills late at night, listening to the Jamboree on WWVA out of Wheeling."

Bill [such indeed was his name]: "Yeah, I kinda like that good ol' country music myself. But then I grew up with it, so I figure I ain't got no choice."

Me: "As far as I'm concerned, Nashville is the capital of the recording industry, but Wheeling is the capital of country music."

Bill: "Right on, buddy. Half them sounds comin' out of Nashville are about as much country as Lawrence Welk. You ever see the mob that shows up at the Capital Saturday night after the Jamboree? My God, they must come from 40 states. There just ain't nothin' like the Jamboree."

Me: "What do you do for a living [a question that is rarely asked on the air]?"

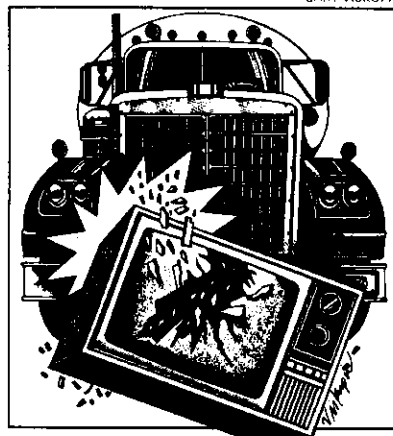
Bill: "I'm a long-haul trucker."

Me: "No kidding? What do you drive?"

Bill: "A tanker for a chemical outfit. She's a new Mack."

Me: "You carry any ham gear in the

GARY VISKUPIC



truck? Two meter, maybe?"

Bill: "You kidding? Half the stuff I haul has a flash point of zero degrees Fahrenheit. Sometimes down around minus 30 degrees. I don't want no RF wattage floatin' around that tank. I could blow up half the county if she went off. It's bad enough sittin' ahead of that stuff as it is, without lightin' a fuse."

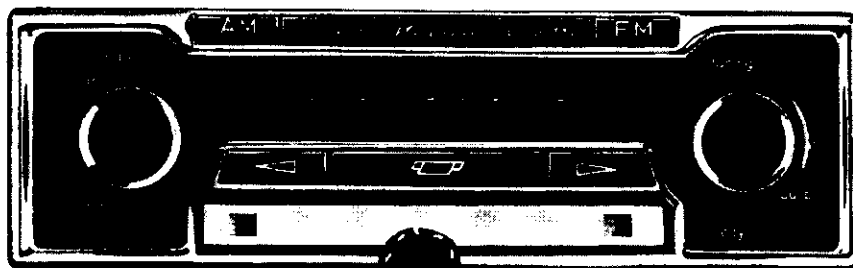
Me: "How long you been driving?"

Bill: "Thirty-one years. Give or take a few that I spent on my back."

Me: "What do you mean by that?"

Bill: "Well, one time I was asleep in the

(CONTINUED)



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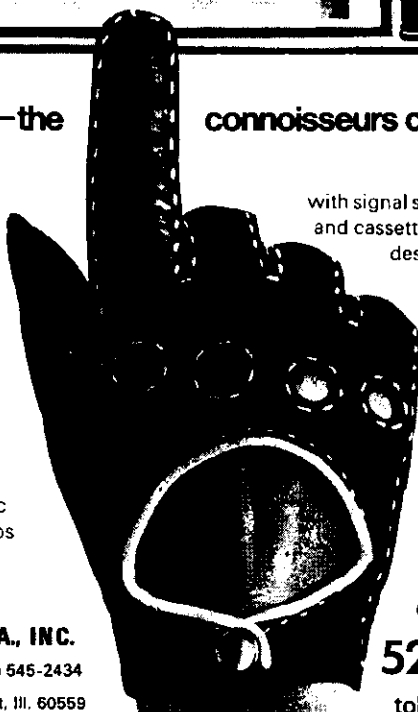
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JEAN SHEPHERD (CONTINUED)

bunk and my partner was drivin' outside of Reno when the left front axle give way. Equipment failure. She hit the side of a concrete viaduct, ripped along the abutment for 40 yards and tore the left side of the rig right off. Took 'em three hours to burn me out of that one with acetylene torches. I got a year and a half off, layin' on my back with my legs up in the air on pulleys."

Me: "Wow!"

Bill: "Well, a few things gotta happen to you in 30 years."

Me: "How do you like the Mack?"

Bill: "So far, okay. She handles well. I hope it holds up. If it does, it'll put Mack right back in business."

Me: "What else have you driven?"

Bill: "I can hardly remember 'em all. Brockway, GMC, Ford, White, Kenworth. Practically everythin', except there's one that I'd love to get my hands on."

Me: "What's that?"

Bill: "A Peterbilt. As far as I'm concerned, that's the Cadillac of trucks. Made in California. A hell of a machine. I want to put some time in one before I leave the road for good and take up shuffleboard."

Me: "That time in Reno the only bad one you had?"

Bill: "Hell, no. There was the time I caught fire comin' down a grade into Buffalo. With about 30,000 gallons of naphtha behind me. But I managed to get it out before she blew. I'd love to tell you more about that one but I gotta shave and shower 'cause me and my partner are leavin' town tonight at seven and I want to get ready."

Me: "Before you run, Bill... you ever watch *Movin' On* on the idiot box?"

Bill: "Never miss it [he laughed embarrassedly]. I hate to admit it, but I really dig that show."

Me: "So do I. That's a Kenworth they drive, isn't it?"

Bill: "Yep. You're so right. It's one hell of a piece of machinery. You notice it's always clean, but that's TV. I sure get a kick outta the stuff that happens to them good old boys. I been drivin' 31 years and nothing exciting has ever happened to me yet."

Me: "I never saw Will and Sonny catch fire with a load of naphtha."

Bill: "Well, that's real truckin'. That ain't fun, like on TV, with all them girl hitchhikers that Will keeps finding."

Me: "Well, Bill, I guess none of us live exciting lives like on TV. I'll let you run."

Bill: "Yeah, I gotta get movin' on, as they say. I got a long way to go tonight."

Me: "Okay, Bill. Here's to Dave Dudley."

Bill: "He's some kind of a good ol' boy. Don't sing bad, neither."

Me: "Hang in. See you later."

Bill: "Keep an eye out for Smokey."

We signed, and I began to think about *M.A.S.H.* and Mary Tyler Moore and *Movin' On*, and I realized once again that real life, real wars and real trucking are always far more exciting than TV ever could be. Even Sonny and Will would have to admit that. ●