



THE ME-TO-YOU-CORD

“It’s a new station. A group just got the license and they have to go on the air and nobody knows what the hell they’re doing. You’d be perfect for for it.”

“Me?””””

“Yeah, what are you doing here?”

“I’m teaching production. Film production.”

“What do you know about film production?”

“Nothing. I’m making it up as I go along. How does a new station happen?”

“Well, when television first came in, they wanted to do everything they could to create new television stations. So they did what they did with radio stations. A group of investors would get together, go to the FCC and say ‘We want to have a new station and we want to transmit on a certain channel and we want to transmit at a certain power.’ It was like the Wild West out there. So, you say like, for instance, we want to

start a station in Toledo. And we want to broadcast on channel 2 and we want to have 50,000 Watts of power.

So the FCC would give you a testing permit. You put up a tower or rent space on one and put up your transmitter and you transmit on the channel they assigned to you. Channel 2 was usually CBS because they got in there first and it was the best channel to transmit on, technically. You'll notice CBS, channel 2, all over the land, and NBC is channel 4. There might've been a Mutual or DuMont channel at channel 3 but those companies seem to have failed. ABC came along later and it's mostly channel 7 and 5.

Well, you start broadcasting a test pattern and you see if it interferes with anyone else... like Cleveland or Chicago or Cincinnati. And if it interferes, you either have to reduce power and your coverage, and your market, or you switch to a different channel.

And this worked out well and television spread throughout the land. Now, in the 60s when the Kennedys came in and the liberals from the East Coast, they came up with the Fairness Doctrine, which said that a TV station and other media in a market is powerful and can affect politics and everything. So they said no one company can have too many media outlets in any one market.

So, in Boston they had WHDH which was owned by this guy named Clancy, who's on the right wing. And he ran HDH television and HDH radio and the Herald for the Hearst company. And someone said, 'Well that's too much. And he's trying to tell people what to do politically.' So some smart guys looked into it and realized something very interesting. The guy didn't have a broadcast license. All he had was a testing permit. He had never bothered to get the license. Nobody ever challenged a license up until then.

When you get a license you have to re-apply every year or so. You do that by sending a postcard to the FCC saying you'd like to renew your license. And that costs a dollar. But it's legal.

But this guy never bothered to do that. So suddenly he's got five groups challenging him for the license, because Boston is a major market, fifth in the country. And because it's worth hundreds of millions of dollars, and he didn't renew.

So the book on this is called "The \$100 Million Lunch". Because he took an FCC commissioner to lunch and tried to bribe him. And that cost him the license.

So all these groups of investors battled for the license to broadcast on channel 5 in Boston. And all these smart guys, these investors and lawyers, mortgaged their houses, raised cash, put up their children's college funds... whatever they had to do. And they fought each in court for years, each promising to do great things for the community. And this group called Boston Broadcasters Inc. went down to the wire. A

lot of ins and outs but it went all the way up to the Supreme Court and on a Friday they got a phone call. They won. And they won by promising, among other things, to do 52 hours of local programming a week. Which is impossible. But nobody knows that. Nobody knows nothing. Nobody's ever done this before. Nobody's ever tried to do it. So they got the call on Friday and on Monday they had to be on the air."

"So, can you run a whole bunch of crazy cameras and shoot documentaries and stuff?" he asked.

"Sure."

'Look, they're in big trouble. They got their license by promising the FCC they would produce all these documentaries and specials... 52 hours a week of local programming. It's not going to work. The cameramen from station WHDH, they have their peculiar way of shooting, which is basically like news. It doesn't seem to work in documentaries. They're desperate to get anybody who knows anything." Then he handed me a card.

"Call Ed Nielsen at Channel 5 in Needham."

"Where the fuck is Needham?"

"Well, that's where they are ...ready to go, in an old Caterpillar Tractor showroom made into a TV studio. And that's probably not too easy to do. They've got a whole bunch of cameras. They just don't know how to use them."

So what it happened is the old WHDH-TV shut down and all the engineers and news Cameramen in IBEW 1228 just came over to the new station and picked up where they left off.

Thing is they had a bit of an equipment problem. The investors, when they thought they were gonna get their license, they got a couple of experts to go scope out all the broadcast equipment. So naturally these experts did what you and I and anybody naturally would do; they fucked off to Paris and London for a couple years, all expenses-paid and came back with some of the weirdest shit you ever saw.

Well, among the things they hadn't figured too well was electricity. You see in the US we're on a 60 cycle system which means 30 frames goes into sixty cycles really well and our TV is based on that. In Europe, you may notice, their grid is based on 50 cycles, so their frame rate tends to be 25... somewhat of a mismatch.

So their equipment just didn't work. A Producer would go in the studio with a plot for three cameras and find out he only had two or maybe one. And some of the cameras bought to shoot documentaries were crazy stupid. This is when cameras were designed by engineers who don't have to actually carry these monsters on their shoulder all over town, all day long.

So they came back with the Canon Scoopic, I called them Canon Stupids... Useless. They shoot 200-foot loads which is five minutes and it's not sync and it's not silent and it's not sound, so it's useless.

They bought a Bolex Pro, which must be 4 feet long and takes about three people to operate. You can't get through a doorway with it. And the magazines are in back of you and your hands are on these two handles like a motorcycle, not on the lens. And you can't zoom without fucking taking off like a rocket. It's not like today where it feathers into your zoom easy: as you press harder zooms faster. This thing, when you hit the zoom button, suddenly you pop somewhere else. Your hands aren't even on the lens so you can't pull focus should something important happen in front of you.

At the same time, you can't switch. You can't open it up and you can't shut it down. You can't even reach the lens through all the gear. It's a complete mess, completely useless. But the experts got a couple of real fancy dinners in Paris.

The only halfway decent camera was an ARRI BL which became my ax for a number of years.

It was an old model from World War II squeezed down to 16 mm with a heavy metal blimp around and a sound module stuck inside. It weighed as much as a Recoilless Rifle, but it would generate sync. And it connected to a Nagra; you had double system sound. You could also put a single system in the camera. But it was a brute to drag around all day.

But none of the guys at the station would pick up any of these pieces of equipment. Nobody knew how to handle them and nobody had any training on them. Probably because nobody there knew enough about them to train anybody.

So the guys who are supposed to shoot these documentaries are news cameramen from HDH and the only camera they would use was the worst camera in the world except for all of these... the Auricon.

The Auricon...It's a brutal news camera that determined how news was shot. A big box with huge Mickey Mouse ears on top and a long zoom lens on the front. 12-120mm or something, with a crank handle. And it was single system so one man could record picture and sound.

The sound was recorded on a tiny little stripe on the side of the 16 mm frame, not a great sound but good enough for news. The sound head was exactly 9 frames before the picture frame so you had to get your loop just right.

The problem with all this gear is it's so heavy and awkward you either have to use a shoulder brace or stick it on a tripod. But then you had your boxes. You had a

box for the sound with three pots, four input/output plugs and a wire going from the shotgun mic mounted on the top of the camera. You had another one for the stick mike for the reporter, another for the subject, and another for a Lavalier you could just stick up your ass.

This was connected to the back of the camera by the Me -To-You-Chord...which was also connected to a leather strap that went over your shoulder and banged around on your side with another cord. On the other side, was the battery pack that powered the camera; little heavy bricks that powered everything. And you have to carry extra, along with the extra magazine or two in a bag with another shoulder strap. Then you had your Sun Gun with a battery belt in case you needed a light.

With all this gear, you couldn't move. You put the camera on the tripod. You point it toward the talking head. You turn it on and you frame loosely because he might move around and you're not going to be there. Then you walk away, camera running, to shoot cutaways with the Bell & Howell Eyemo Windup; A design for paratroopers; three fixed lenses in a wind-up gear... good for bashing Nazi soldiers on the battlefield.

So your main camera is just shooting the guy talking and it's all in one shot so you have a jump every time you make a cut that you have to cover with a silent shot from another angle. Hard to do anything with an Auricon except give yourself a hernia.

So they asked me if I could shoot with an Auricon. What I usually say to questions like this...is "Sure".

So my first partner was Johnny Davin. He came over from HDH with the rest, but not for long. He was 65 years old and panicked that they were going to forcibly retire him. His last partner was forcibly retired two years previously and took only one year to drop dead. Lack of adrenaline.

You don't shoot news for 20 years and suddenly stop cold turkey. It's a shock to the system. You just sit around knowing something is going on and everybody's covering it and you have no idea. So Johnny, he fretted if they retired him, he'd pop off too.

We'd be driving through Boston and every four or five blocks, it seemed John had a guy he had to talk to at the corner Tavern. So when Johnny went in to talk to that guy over and over, I'd sit in the news car and light up a joint.. John would come back smelling of Irish Rose, and go..."What's that funny smell. And I'd go. they must be burning leaves again. And he say, "What? In the Spring?"

Sometimes Johnny would get artistic, strip a small limb off a tree. hold it above the top of the frame in case they wanted an "artistic shot".

But one day he disappeared, retired, and I wound up with “World Famous Sumner Shain”. Sumner was known far and wide. In fact, it was said of Sumner that if the World Was Ending, Sumner would stop and take a light reading. Sumner was the sweetest guy in the world, which was why you couldn’t yell at him. But he also had a mental challenge, focus wise. Like you’d be standing there with a camera on your shoulder filming something, connected somewhere by the Me-To-You-Chord, and suddenly you wouldn’t have a camera. It was flying out of your hands and off your shoulder and smashing on the ground.

Cause Sumner had suddenly seen his cousin from Swampscot and had to tell him something. Sumner had a bit of a focus problem, and possibly attention deficit disorder. Which doesn’t work great in news but is great for a lot of laughs. Like the time we were driving 80 miles an hour down to Fall River to film the opening of a school with Ellen Rossen and she, knowing Sumner, asked if he had, in fact, brought a shotgun mic. Sumner rooted around in his gear and said “Um like, no”. And Ellen was already biting her nails down to the quick because her father was the big Director Robert Rossen and this was her first job in media.

So I said “Don’t worry, I’ll tape the stick mic to the light stand and we can use it as a shotgun, sort of.” So thereupon she had to make sure and she asks Sumner about the stick mic. Sumner roots around in his bag and said “Well, actually, no.”

We’re doing about 90 now on I95, passing cars left and right, and Ellen is freaking out. “Don’t worry, don’t worry,” I say. “We’ll use a Lavalier and I’ll tape it to the light stand and we’ll hang it right in their face.” And Ellen turns to Sumner full on and asks if he had, in fact, brought a Lavalier mic.

At that point I glanced in the mirror and saw the look on Sumner’s face and I slammed on the brakes, burning rubber, and aimed at the next turn off, put it around and headed back to Channel 5 at high Speed. We had left with no mics. We were a silent film news crew.

Sumner’s most famous adventure was when Mr. Universe came to the Hynes Auditorium and, for some reason, it was a big media event. All the cameras were rolling and the curtains parted and there was Mr. Universe in full flex, muscles bulging, oiled down, shining like a statue of Oscar. And, of course, kneeling right in front of Mr. Universe and turning around for the audience with all the complete surprise of a deer in headlights was Sumner Shain, taking a light reading. Of course, all the photogs snapped a picture and Sumner played on the front page of the Boston Globe. The caption was; World Famous Sumner Shain...and... Mr. Universe.

So it turns out there weren’t quite enough crews in the News department to fill every flight they needed so they’d come to me every now and then and ask if I wanted to work overtime shooting news.

Seemed like a fun idea, especially with the fact that I'd never done it and had no idea how to do it and nobody seemed to be interested in teaching me anything. They just assumed. So please shut up and figure it out as you go along. I agreed.

So I showed up at the station and started to throw my gear into the usual rent a car, when some guys said...

“What are you doing?”

I said “I'm getting the camera. It's what I like to use to shoot film.” And he said, “Oh no. Not that one. This is this one. Use this news car and use this one.”

I head into Boston and they say “Okay, Go to Mass Avenue between MIT and Harvard. You're gonna cover a special event. I said “What is it? and they said, “The Lampoon is giving someone.. some actor... an award.”

So I set up to get a drive-by. I pull up, open the trunk and reach for the Camera. And all I see is an Auricon. Oh shit. They didn't tell me how soon this event was going to get to me so I'm slapping the camera up, slapping a magazine on, funneling the film through the gate, plugging in the sound, setting the light, taking a light reading, setting the lens, setting the focus, turning the power on, checking the batteries, and just as I get it clear, comes a roar down the center of Mass Avenue, an APC... Armored Personnel Carrier.

This is during the war, the Vietnam one, and on top of the Armored Personnel Carrier, waving to the crowd, which is now gathering, is the famous actor John Wayne, who's getting the award ironically: For the best performance in the movie that everybody here hates. “The Green Berets”.

The Harvard guys have given him the award so as to embarrass him, when he took it and they played it kind of... in your face. He's accepting ironically. And now I have to pack up and get to the Harvard Theater before the ceremony begins.

I leap into the car and roar up to Mass Avenue. Breaking News! And slam park right in front of the Harvard Square Theatre.

Did I mention I was wearing corduroy pants, which I will never do again for any reason but particularly for this reason; they were kind of weak.

And I'm sweating bullets because I'm late. I'm screaming into the theater and most of them are already seated and they're all watching me lurching down the aisle like some comedy act. My Third Armored Division worth of equipment is clanging and banging down the aisle as I try to get to my position, which is in the orchestra pit, right before the stage.

I'm alone except for the camera things. I can hardly walk with all the gear bouncing and swinging and throwing me off balance in front of a thousand Harvard and Radcliffe people, all looking at me like I don't know what the hell I'm doing, which I don't.

They all seem to sneer at the media, or anybody with a real job. So I waddle down, camera, tripod, mag boxes, batteries, spare mag, Eyemo, and the extra battery bricks stuffed into the pockets of my corduroy pants. And the pants are so tight with the tension from the stuffed bricks that I find it hard to walk, or move at all.

There's a big steel fence guarding the orchestra pit. And you can't shoot through it, you've got to go over it. And there's nobody to help you or unlock it, and there's no time. So I determine to go right over it with all seven tons of banging equipment and all.

As I jump to the top and teeter there, Wayne looks over like I may be an assassin. I follow with a jump to the top of the pit and, in full view of the entire Harvard student body, I hear a rip as the pants split right up the ass.

But as I am a professional, and as I am used to being attacked and humiliated for any number things, and because it is my job and my pleasure, I stand there, mooning the entire Harvard student body. Something I have long longed to do.

And that was as close as I ever got to John Wayne.

WCVB

I am in the Roxbury projects, set up on Mrs. Jefferson, a poor black lady who is having a very bad day. The defective elevator, which is the best and most dangerous way of getting to the 11th floor, suddenly dropped a story with her ten-year-old daughter and her teenage son Orlando inside it. And Orlando, thinking fast, and throwing his little sister through the closing hole as the elevator dropped, had thrown himself through to follow. But he hadn't made it. He'd been cut in half by the dropping car.

I am on a medium close-up of Mrs. Jefferson. She's sitting quietly in her rocker, in some kind of shock. And the reporter asks, "Mrs. Jefferson, when Orlando was cut in half by the elevator... how did you feel?"

I am on Tremont Street, Park Street Station. Eunice is the producer of "Your Place and Mine, the first lesbian series in American television. Eunice's father is an investor in the station.

“Why are we here? What are we doing?” I ask in my most professional manner.

Eunice directs me. “Chip, I want you to shoot the pigeons.” There are a hundred of them, all swirling around, pecking at food from the tourists.

“Why, I ask, am I to shoot pigeons”, although, they are quite active and there are plenty of good shots.

“I want you to shoot them walking around...”

“Don’t they mostly fly?”

“I want you to shoot them walking around.”

“Why?”

“Because pigeons are wild birds. They have their own rules. They don’t have to take orders from men.”

“Do they take orders from women?”

“They don’t have to. They’re free as a bird. They take orders from nobody. And the female pigeons don’t have to walk around all sexy, just to attract men.”

“How can you tell?”

“Tell what?”

“Which are female. And when they are and are not walking sexy. Pigeon sexy, that is. They all look the same to me.”

“That’s the point, isn’t it?”

“Of course, I wouldn’t know a sexy pigeon walk if I saw one.”

“Just shoot them, okay.”

‘Suppose so. Pigeons asses, coming right up!’

I find that to shoot pigeons walking sexy you have to get right down with them. So I’m lying on the ground shooting artistic pigeon ass shots when some wiseass comes up and asks what the hell I’m doing.

“Shooting pigeons asses,” I reply. “What’s it to ya?”

So I ask Eunice...“Would you like me to shoot some women’s asses,” I ask. “Walking all sexy and stuff... You know, for contrast. For context. I can do that if you promise to post bail.”

“No. That won’t be necessary,” she huffs.

The talent for this enterprise is one cute little blond named, I seem to recall, something like Emily. She is also of the distaff persuasion and, in fact, has a Theological degree from my Alma Mater, BU. Or maybe it was Harvard. Anyway, a fount of higher learning, which has Vicars, whatever they are. Old men immersed for life in the higher order of things like God and such. Academicians for Christ and good behavior, I believe.

And for a student of such to achieve a higher degree of high degrees from these august gentlemen, one must, I am told, present an oral argument or discussion being something about Christ. Or finance maybe. And, of course, the Protestant thing.

But, so Emily, was a modern thinker and she had an agenda. She was, in fact, an activist, which attracted Eunice’s interest. Also, she had no earthly use for men. And knowing her power, and the fact that the Vicars don’t want to open any can of worms or fuck with the Diet of Same, they gave Emily full permission to substitute a short color film for her oral presentation. Just the word oral presentation in this context gave them the heebie jeebies. And they were not about to fuck with Emily in any of the many senses of that phrase.

I was also learning that the first Protestant, Martin Luther, had, on the front door of some church, posted a “Diet of Worms,” which is why nobody would eat with him.

And, in fact, I am told that Emily had indeed produced a short film on a subject of most interest, and had, in fact, produced it in Kodachrome; living color heavily in the warm tones of red, yellow and orange.

And the image of this filled me with wonder, as I imagined again and again, the looks on the faces of these ancient rectilinear, conservative, tight-ass churchmen, who had no choice but to award Emily an advanced prestigious degree for an extremely close-up, graphic, full color presentation of what was most important to her... Menstruation. In full color, close up. OMG, literally. And, after all, isn’t mens-truation, in this context, a misnomer?

I turned the film in to the lab. Stan asked, as usual, “What’s in it?”... as I am a great hero to the lab guys who have that pasty look of chemicals and a life out of the sun. I am known for my “honey shots”, which are the cut-aways of pretty girls taken from the crowds between innings of a baseball game, interesting demonstration or riot.

“Whatcha got there,” he asks.

“Pigeons asses. Why do you ask?”

“Oh, nothing. And, you know, you’re supposed to write the name of the show on the can, so we know where to send it.”

“I did.”

“I don’t think so. I think the name of the show is “My Place or Yours?”

“Terrible title.”

“I know. But there it is. And they won’t know where to send this.”

“They’ll figure it out.”

“Don’t think so.”

“Why, I had a strange day.... What’s it say on the can?”

“It’s not “Your Place or Mine.”

“That title makes me queasy. I was stressed. So what does it say?”

“Leave it to Beaver.”

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I am at three Thousand feet over the North Atlantic. There is nothing between me and the North Atlantic except 3000 feet. I am hanging out of the Coast Guard Orion. We are circling George's Bank. Below, a long line of enormous East German factory ships are surrounded by smaller fishing vessels. The factory ships are dragging tons of wriggling fish up stern ramps into the holds below where they will be immediately canned for the East German market. The small ships are bottom draggers. They sweep the bottom and drag up everything that lives, wiping the area clean of fish, crabs and other sea life, including next year's fish. George's Bank is an Undersea Mount, the spawning ground for many of the creatures living in the North Atlantic. The East Germans and others are wiping it clean.

Cape Cod got its name from early explorers who claimed you could walk ashore on the backs of cod, there were so many of them. Now they were endangered. The Portuguese fished the bank from earliest days. There were prevailing winds one way and currents the other from Lisbon to the Bank... Energy for sailing ships both ways from Portugal to Georges bank to Canada where the fish were left to dry and salted,

packed in barrels and sailed back to Portugal as critical proteins to feed Europeans decimated by one of the little ice ages.

Georges Bank's spawn of cod fed the early settlers of North America. I'm shooting a documentary called "No Fish Tomorrow." I'm in back of the Coast Guard Orion, used to survey the fishing grounds and estimate how much fish are lost to foreigners. The answer is practically all of them.

The cod are now an endangered species and the Studds-Magnuson Act may extend our fishing territory and protect the grounds.

I'm in the back of the Orion. I'm alone. The producer, Joe Day, is up in the cockpit with the pilots and scientists. There's nothing in the rear of the plane except me, my Arriflex, and a large opening in the side of the plane.

Of particular interest to me is that there is no safety harness. There is nothing between me and the North Atlantic except 3000 feet. There is one cargo strap, either for me or the camera. I tie it to the camera on the grounds that I will hold onto the Camera for dear life. But the camera won't hold onto me. The plane is going up and down, yawing left and right, and rolling in the turbulence. The Floor is slippery and I'm sliding across toward the open door.

But I do have an unrestricted shot of the fishing ships, the factory ships, and quite a lot of the North Atlantic.

A sudden gyration of the Orion has me rethinking my strategy. Now I slam into the panel below the open space. And start to lose my connection to the plane.

I retreat to the cockpit. They seem happy and somewhat surprised to see me. I hook the sound cable into the intercom to hear their chatter and do a complex zoom from their fingers on the chart, to the cockpit, to the faces of the scientists, to the window with the plane arcing over George's bank, to a zoom down to as close as you can get to an overhead on the cables dragging the large bags of fish up the ramps. I'm really proud of that shot. And that I was alive to make it.

I am in a wooden fishing boat of 60 feet and 60 years old and 60 nautical miles out from Gloucester, From the same pier and the same bar they shot in "The Perfect Storm".

We are pulling in Fish with gear so old that it seems the fish will win. The rusted junk cranks and wheezes, the boat rolls into the waves with the weight of the catch. They swing the net over the deck, and pull the release, a flood of saline splatters on the deck, and rushes for the gutters...

The fishermen are knee deep in sea life, sorting and flipping fish into wooden channels. Cod, in one, herring in another, ugly monkfish in a third...Some use rubber gloved hands, some use shovels...some flip junk fish over the side. They blast them clean with a sea water hose, open hatches and sluice them down to the holds.

Below decks crewmen with pitchforks heave the catch into holds on layers of ice. The holds smell of rotten fish, rotten rubber, old diesel fuel and puke. The hold rolls and plunges. Seawater, diesel, fish guts and spit-up tobacco, churn from side to side and up the bulkheads. I taste my breakfast in my mouth and wipe the fish scales from the lens.

“Lie down on the centerline and look at the horizon,” they say. The centerline is covered in fish mash, and slippery to the touch. I do not touch.

In the cabin, Captain and mate, as old as the boat, are deep into the adventure...the catch may pay for the boat, for the crew, for drinks at the Bar on the pier. This is American high tech and why our industry is dying and the East Germans are up to here in fish.

On the bulkhead above, a wooden Christ on the Cross is leaping and banging against the ancient wood like he’s trying to fly away, His arms are out on the cross like he’s trying to warn us of something.

Out on deck, the air is fresher, if you are upwind of the fish. The stills guy, Ihor, is straddling a wooden partition, getting good closeups of fish. I notice that in one partition the fish are alive and snapping at his feet and legs. These fish show a dentist’s wet dream of teeth. I yell at Ihor but the wind takes it. I yell at him again and he waves me off. He’s an artist at work. And we are bouncing all over the place. I yell to a crewman and point to the fish.

“What kind of fish are those?” I ask.

“Dogfish,” comes the reply. Ihor gives me the finger.

“I don’t think you should stand there,” I offer. He gives me a mind-your-own-business look. The fish are all around him, snapping at his legs.

“Is there another name for dogfish?” I ask the crew.

“Sharks,” he says.

Ihor jumps into the rigging.

I am walking down the halls of WCVB. I glance to the right, into a little grottoes where they put things of interest to the station. And I see, of all things, some kind of award. Seems that “No Fish Tomorrow” has won the Atlanta Film Festival award for Best Documentary. And I’m thinking that’s pretty cool.

The award gives the credits. Producer, Joe Day. Cinematographer, me. Director, somebody named Puttkammer. And I go...

“That’s pretty cool. All the time I was risking my life hanging out of that airplane and throwing up in the hole of a 60-year-old wooden fishing vessel and

lugging a 30-pound Arriflex into the air over the sea and trying to hold it steady and tell the story with pictures, this guy, this brilliant guy was so brilliant that he was directing me by pure mental telepathy. Cool. What a fucking genius! And all the time, I didn't even know. Now that's talent.

Puttkammer, whose distant relative advised Hitler, was the director sitting comfortably in the chair in the control room, calling the tape transfer. He had a script from the editor and his job, from time to time, was to say, "Ready A...Take A. Ready B. Take B".

And Puttkammer, to give him his due, was good at this. And he was good at directing the news when a few of the cameras would go down and the replay wouldn't work and the graphics were all wrong and talent had to vamp. Puttkammer wouldn't panic at all. Four to five half-quart Vodka Tonics at Callahans down the road were said to have helped. So he certainly must have been able to reach me two hundred miles out over the North Atlantic. Did I ever hear

"Pan left. Ready one. Take One. Or not?"

Sometime later, I decided to watch TV. I thought I'd check in on the smarter guys at PBS, over near Harvard. WGBH was a class act. They had months and tons of money to shoot their documentaries. And once in a while I would watch.

I looked at my joint. What's in this shit? I thought. Because I was having one of those acid flashbacks, I thought something looked kind of familiar. There was a wooden Jesus flopping back and forth on a bulkhead. And fish in the hold. Artistic shots, sunset at sea... East German.... Wait a minute. That's my footage...Leading a big, expensive, prestigious WGBH documentary? Great. Of all the footage in all the world... And well, they could have shot their own if they thought they could do it better... of all the footage, they used mine. So, I'll get a good credit on PBS. Maybe even a "Director".

Are you fucking kidding! Nope. And Nope. But that's Channel Five.

Pretty soon, since I have no idea what I'm doing in terms of professional TV, I am creating a whole new lexicon of shooting. Instead of setting a shot and walking away to shoot cutaways, I stay on the speaker. And when he stops talking and the reporter starts, I change the shot. Sometimes I listen and if I think he says anything noteworthy, I zoom in. Other times I zoom out. I get bored.

The editor comes to me. "What are you doing?," she asks.

As you know I am standing in the hallway of a TV station, trying to figure out if I need to take a piss. It's a long way to Brockton."

"No, with the shooting."

“Oh, that. Nothing. I don’t know. What? What’s the problem?”

“Your stuff. It cuts much better than the others.” It doesn’t jump cut. I don’t need those cutaways, which, sometimes you don’t even shoot. What do you do?”

“Well, I did study under Gurdjeff, the mystic. It has something to do with my chakra. Or maybe yours.”

She frowns and walks away... People skills! People skills!

CAM A LOT

Years later when I am researching Top Gun, I find that the aviators actually do play volleyball on the beach. And give each other’s teams names. The favorite is “The Teddy Kennedy Driving School.”

I am shooting Teddy Kennedy, but in a good way. He and Joan are walking out of the middle school. We’re doing a documentary special on his actions as Senator or something... I am walking backwards as he moves forward, covering him. There’s a producer and an assistant and my sound man, who supposedly has my back. I’m walking backwards. I can’t see where I’m going. I’m framing Teddy and his wife when suddenly the world turns upside.

My heel hits the curb and the sound man, incompetent as usual, stupid as he ever was, has not, in fact, guided me like a normal person would. I’m flat on my back, looking straight up at the sky, still filming, as a big red Irish face comes into the frame, laughing at me.

“Senator, can I talk to you about the National Health?”

The sound man is standing around giggling. He is a member of a down-trodden minority, as he constantly reminds me. And, as such, he never really has your back.

I’m in the Eastern Shuttle, it’s 5 AM, freezing outside, overheated inside and we are huffing from slamming all the gear into the plane.

We are in Washington DC, pulling up to the Capital Building, late. It’s freezing, we’re bundled up, we’re sweating our brains out, dragging tons of equipment out of a truck. We hustle, up the stairs, through the guards, town to the speaker’s office, dripping snow and mud, red-faced and puffing, snapping equipment open, setting up light stands, plugging in, switching around, setting up tripods, setting up the shot, framing the shot, waiting and waiting.

The speaker is late. Government business. Maybe a vote. It is hot and stuffy. We’re bundled up to the gills, but also slowly melting...dripping... Equipment’s up, we

have nothing to do but wait. The speaker's office is impressive; pictures of famous people, statues of things, knickknacks, phones and two beautiful silk couches.

Charlie and I are still breathing hard. We sit down to wait. It's warm and stuffy. We've been up for hours. We've been hustling equipment. I lean back and close my eyes for just a second. A sound. I look up. A giant red Irish face fills my vision. I glance around. My muddy feet in my Gloucester fishing boots are up on The Speaker's silk couch.

"Aaaahhh", I scream. Oh my God. I will be shot at Dawn! I stammer something, in full panic; a confession of sorts. The Irish face stares hard at me. I start to jabber. It breaks into a grin, He's laughing. He's laughing out loud at my panicked expression. At that moment I fall in love with Tip O'Neil.

"Hey, you guys from Boston? Come down to take a little nap? Ha Haaaaa!" He shakes my hand, pulls me up, pats me on the back. Now this is a guy you'd vote for. This is a guy you'd follow to the ends of the earth.

We are in Bobby's home, in Maclean. The producer asks Ethel "What... if Bobby was alive, what do you think he'd be doing?"

"Oh, you know...something about those poor people," she says,

She glances at the couch. Some kid has left a fudgesicle there. She spots the wood handle and the deep brown stain. She quickly turns the cushion over. On the other side, a popsicle has melted into the fabric. She smiles.

COURTESY OF THE ROAD.

That's what you wanted and they wouldn't give it to you for just anything. You had to call the police on the radio and tell him breaking news and you had to get there and even though you were in a bust down Crown Vic with bad shocks and a ton of gear in the trunk you could go just as fast as you want.

I was coming back from a story in town. I was shooting news. I handed the story to the film courier and relaxed. It was 20 to 6 and there would be no further stories in my day. So naturally, I lit up a joint.

Suddenly the radio came alive. The News Director... with something high-pitched in his voice.

"Where are you?"

"95 near Needham, I said. What's it to you?"

"Breaking news. Need you in Waltham right away, fast as you can."

"I'm over. I'm heading to the barn."

“You're the closest one. We've got an inmate in Waltham Maximum-Security. He's got a shiv to the throat of a guard and he wants to say something on the news. He wants to talk.”

“On our news?”

“... and he's threatening to kill him. Go save his life.”

“I don't like cops. Sometimes they're mean to me.”

“Quit screwing around.”

“Can you get me courtesy of the road?”

“All right... yeah, yeah, yeah, just get there.”

“My uncle was a prison guard. He knew not to piss off the felons. What did this guy do?”

“Just get there. What's your ETA?”

“How do I know? I've never been there. I've been to the Charles Street Jail, and Norfolk. I've been to Framingham women's prison and probably some others. Never been to The Max. Hope I got battery left.”

“You got Courtesy of the Road.”

“OK, let's see what this baby can do!”

I scream into the parking, barely missing the cluster of Staties. They look at me suspiciously as I drag the camera out of the car, fumble for a full mag, slap some batteries into my pants, take off, running up the stairs.

I get inside and they're happy to see me. I'm the first camera there. And the shiv is currently a little shaky at the guy's neck.

“What's this... all about?” I ask.

“Just get in there.”

“Like to know what the story is. Helps to shoot it.”

“Just go, you'll figure it out.”

“OK...”

“First the body search.”

“What body search?” I say.

“Maximum-security. You can't go in without a body search.”

“Oh... Really?” I say, suddenly remembering that big joint in my pocket.

“Oh shit. Batteries,” I say.

“What?” they say,

“Batteries. I think my battery is low. I need a new battery. It's out in the car.”

“No. No. no time for that. “

“What if I run out, in the middle of the shot. That wouldn't be good.”

They look at each other for a moment. I look at them. I indicate toward the car.

“Don't worry,” the smart one says, “Just keep shooting even if you aren't shooting. Keep shooting and make it look like you're shooting, you know, like in a movie. He'll never know.”

“The camera. Will stop. There won't be a noise. There won't be a tally light. There won't be that little thing going around.”

“He's a fucking prisoner. He's not gonna know.”

“How do you know?”

“He wouldn't be a prisoner if he was smart.

Can't argue with that.

“By the time he doesn't appear on TV, he won't have his shiv anymore.”

I can't argue that.

“Quick, he's making a move. Get inside!”

“Never mind the body search.”

Thank God for that as we go in concentric rings of security, each with a Bull making bad googoo eyes at this stranger. It's Max. More Max. Even more Max. And

Ultramax ring. And each one has an angry looking Bull pressing the button, buzzing the door, sliding the bars back...CLANG!

Deeper and deeper and deeper into the jail. I glance to my right. There's a room filled near to the top with a rancid smelling pile of something I can't quite identify.

"That's the library," he says. "That's the issue. "

"Those are books? All wet and moldy and fused together? That makes them hard to read."

"Well, they did it. They set it on fire, we put it out."

"You left it there?"

"Their own damn fault. What were we gonna do, carry out tons of things that used to be books?"

"No. You're right. Crazy to even ask."

I'm set up on the prisoner. He's looking a little peaked, but he's been holding that shiv in the Guard's throat for an hour now. His arms are getting tired. The shiv is kind of wavering near the jugular.

From the look he gives me, we all know he's going get the shit beat out of him soon as he drops the shiv. And my roll seems to be recording for posterity what he looks like before.

The guard looks like he wants me to roll, so I do. The prisoner says something incomprehensible, but still news. You can say that about most things I shoot. The camera doesn't lie. But in proper hands, it misdirects.

I roll, and save the guard's life. You'd think I'd get one of those police badges for my car, so I don't get a ticket. But no. They don't like media more than anybody else."

And still, it's breaking news. It's action. It'll make the six or the 11. And I'll get overtime. I can leave this library in this terrible place and.. Oh, I forgot. I'm pretty fucking high.

Walking down third Avenue in New York City. And I've suddenly gone back in time. I'm filming a Gershwin special, and why we're doing a special on Gershwin I have no idea. Turns out the producer is fucking a singer who specializes in Gershwin and we're gonna shoot her and Gershwin's/girlfriend, Kay Swift, who's 90 years old.

Shooting a Glamour Puss at 90 is a great challenge for me. I put on every soft light of God, every piece of scrim, every piece of anything to soften it up, bounce light down, off the ceiling, off the floor, off the walls.

I surround, I feel, everything, and she looks like a golden angel. A 90-year-old one, I admit, but still... She is very appreciative of the care I take.

Now I'm definitely walking down Queer Street cause everything looks weird. Buildings look older and somehow prettier than the street I turned off from.

The signs look old. The fonts are funny. Everything seems more colorful, more heightened. When is the last time I dropped acid?... I think.

So, I'm walking down the street, camera rolling and filming both sides and forward, a nice traveling shot, the CP-16 swinging side to side, wide angle, beautiful.

For some reason the street is... And a big hand grabs my shoulder, squeezes hard, stops me in my tracks and says, conversationally,

“What the fuck are you doing?”

“Well sir, I'm fucking a blue gazelle in my mind.” I find in street confrontations that it's best to confuse, not buckle, so I finish up with...

“What the fuck are you?”

“Come'ere,” he sez, and I do... without using my feet.

That, sir is a movie camera, a CP-16. Best goddamn documentary camera in the market right now. And it is fully registered and insured. And should it have occasion to disappear from my shoulder, or become smashed to bits for some reason, that would be destruction of station corporate property, which would alert all the litigators in the vicinity. And while I have your attention, I might point out that your hand on my should could be considered assault, or possibly battery. While damaging my battery might possibly be something else.”

“Oh, a wise guy, huh?”

“I prefer to think of myself as a citizen walking down the street, bothering nobody, doing my job while suddenly being accosted for no reason I can fathom, and responding in a calm and reasonable manner so as not to incite further aggression. Or anything at all.”

“Who said you could shoot this street?”

“Lumier, I think. Edison. Maybe Alexander Graham Bell, can't be sure. Might I also add, the Constitution, the FCC, Certain media lecturers at Harvard, the Supreme Court and the New York Yankees.

“Why the New York Yankees?”

“Why not? They Just beat Boston, three to two. So they have some authority... Oh, and my union.”

“What union?”

“IBEW Local 1228”, and I snap a snappy salute.

“This ain’t their territory.”

“What is it, then?”

“This is IA.”

“You own the street? I didn’t know a union could do that.”

“It’s our set. Come’ere.” He drags me into a storefront by my shooting vest.

And now I get it. The city didn’t put all this up for Gershwin...

“Set for what?” I say,

“Paramount Pictures. Godfather 2.”

“Oh, cool.” And I seem to be in the Olive Oil office. “Well, that’s great, but it also works for Gershwin.”

“Who’s Gershwin?”

“He made bicycles, No wait, I think that’s just Schwinn, Get them confused.”

“You’re a funny kid.”

“Thank you.”

“Should I kill you?”

“Don’t think so.”

“Maybe I should, Maybe I shouldn’t. Sit there. Gotta make a call.”

I sit there awhile. He comes back. I know a few gangsters. Talking isn’t gonna get you much if they have something on their mind, So what the fuck.

“You still thinking about that last thing.”

“Had an idea. An offer.”

“One I can’t refuse?”

"We'll see. Now who's the head of your union?"

"Who wants to know?"

"Me. I'm right here. Since you just pulled me off the street, Kidnapping, you know, And I'm not a kid. Man-napping, I like to think. Like I was doing yesterday. So, I believe the head of your union, his name is Mike Procia, yeah."

"How did you know?"

"Stay with me on this. So my brother is an editor at ABC. And he's in NABET. And his name is Mike Proser, and all you guys keep getting the two confused. And Mike knows about this, and he thinks it's funny, And Mike Procia knows we have a kinda connection...to "the boys", You know...through our dad... So, I thought you might just call up Mike Procia and tell him you grabbed Mike Proser's brother off the street where he was just walking down, but you did it on account of you take your responsibility seriously, and you were like...alert."

I say this all pretty fast, and I can see his brain buffering, trying to catch up. I go on.

"And so, there's no signs up, saying, well this isn't a public street no more, and the guy was just walking down the street looking for Gershwin's house, and then you just checked him out and then he walked away... so there's no problem, is there?"

So I get up slowly and walk out the door. I walk slowly, eyes on the threat, like you do with a rattlesnake. And in the camera is the opening shot for the Gershwin show.

A MOB

I am on the streets. I am surrounded. And they are angry. They are hostile. I am familiar with that from all that time with Mom. Most people don't like me, but now that I'm full time in Media, it works. Nobody likes media. Just ask them. We always get it wrong. Like if they had a television station, they'd get it right. So there's that. For whatever it is, they need someone to blame. Someone to act out in front of. And now there's thirty of them, I'm in their turf, and my sound man has disappeared, this is not his fight. And, of course, there's women to chat up.

So, they try to start something. I know the drill.

"You take my picture, man? You take my picture?"

Like yeah, I stole their soul doing it, and I should pay. Like I came down here for breaking nooz to take their picture, when actually I did. And they know it. And they're trying to fuck with me, trying to get a rise, a move... an attitude...something

to work with, so they can beat me up and steal the camera. But I am not a grad student from Dubuque. I been here before. And I study lines under the greats. Like Forman of the Globe, Pulitzer winner...

And they're edging in closer, pressing on me...trapping me in hostility...

"You take my picture, you take my picture, man? You take my picture?"...
Laying it on heavy for the ladies.

"You take my picture...my picture...you..."

I look around at them all and shake my head.

"Naw... We don't do Zoo Parade anymore." And I push through the crowd and out.

BACK IN THE PROJECTS AGAIN.

I am wide on another stunned poor person.

"So, Mrs. Robinson, when those kids threw your Bobby off the roof and he got impaled on that iron fence...how did you feel?"

VIDEOTAPE

I am in the South End, heading to a bar somewhere.

"You wanna work news?"

"OK."

"Go down to the Holy Cross Cathedral . There's some new guys being made into priests."

I pull up to the cathedral and the tape truck is already there. I start to pull the camera out of the trunk when they stop me.

"What are you doing, "they say? " I get that a lot.

"Thought I'd get the camera. Helps with the shooting. you know."

“No no. Not that camera. This camera. We are the crew. We are your crew. You are our cameramen. And this is the camera.”

I look at it. It's one of those RCA 100s. Total piece of shit. Designed by engineers, not by cameramen. Most of the guys go to the hospital if they have to hook this around on their shoulder. Totally unbalanced. Big box hooked to a thick cable. No fun at all. You can't move with your cable tied to the truck and you're stuck.

“Are you sure?” I say. “I've never shot one of these”

“No problem, nothing to it, just do what we say. “

Where've I heard that, before?

“Your funeral,” I say, “or is it just an investiture?... That's a Catholic joke.”

“You better quit joking around and get in there. They're going to make these guys from whatever they are now into priests and you wouldn't want to miss that.”

“And so we can talk to you.” He hands me a headset. I put it on and listen to comments about the Sox pitching. I drag the camera down the center of the aisle and it's really dark in there. There's no lights at all. The only light comes from stained glass windows high up on the wall, by the altar, and the votive candles or whatever you call them.

The guys were going to be priests. Oh great, they're all wearing those medieval hoods. There's no light anywhere. I can't see a thing. The guys are chattering. I shoot the window. At least that'll come out, and show I tried; it's got like, some light. I shoot the banks of candles flickering.

I turn back to these guys all kneeling at the rail. The head priest is in drag and doing some hocus-pocus and I kneel down in front to cover the priests. There seems to be one small problem: I can't see their faces. All I can see is the very tips of their noses, which catch a bit of light from the stained glass.

“Can't see a thing,” I say.

“It's nice.” they say. It's beautiful. Keep shooting.”

I figure they're union and just don't give a shit.

“OK.”

I figure the nose is about an inch and a half from the eyes so I back focus the required distance and shoot away. I still can't see a thing or two but since nobody's complaining and they're the tape crew, they should know what they're doing and if anybody's gonna get yelled at it's gonna be them.

So what the fuck.

Next we gotta go outside for a talking head with the Monsignor. I have just enough cable to reach the stairs to the rectory. He stands, above, directly in front of the sun.

“We got to move, I don’t have a shot”

The reporter is nervous. He wants to get the footage back. I tell him I can’t see. The guys in the truck crackle in my ear.

“It’s fine. Just shoot. “

What the fuck!

I line them up, I shoot directly into the sun. I can’t see anything. It’s all a big flare to me. He jabbers away. We get the shot. The reporter signs off. I grab up the camera and walk out there, coiling the cable as I go.

“Really nice, thank you very much,” they say.

“Thanks for nothing. Don’t tell him I did this.”

Well, that’s the last I do news I figure. Later, I pull into the newsroom, unload the car, give the keys back, stand in the hallway by the window into the control room to watch the six. If it’s really that bad I want a quick getaway. The news Director comes up.

“See, all you guys are complaining all the time you need training and stuff. This guy hasn’t been trained for a minute and look what he shot!”

I look.

The new priests are beautiful. Soft light has crept under their hoods. They look like those spooky medieval paintings of saints. The Monsignor on the stairs... the sunlight directly behind him catches the dust in the air and makes a perfect golden halo around his head like he too, is a saint.

The tape crew is there, smirking at me.

“The eyepiece, it’s another little TV screen about an inch big. It’s electronic. Right. You can turn it up, make it brighter so you can see.”

You can’t do that in a film camera. What you see is what you get. I look at them.

“Why didn’t you mention that?”

“You were doing great without seeing anything. Why should we fuck that up?”

The CP-16 was a great advance. First, it was designed by a cameraman...what a concept! It has a power zoom, a sound module, it's light and simple. You have a crystal in the camera and the same crystal in the Nagra. And as long as you can make a snapping noise for sync, you got it. You can plug in, Me-To-You if you need to.

But the best thing about it, it's a good fighting camera. You can hold it with one hand and swing. It's got a big wide back with a battery brick in the side. You hit somebody with that, he goes down. I've done it.

MANCHESTER

Manchester was cold as hell. And it was filled with politicians, which also seemed like hell. Once again it was all hands on deck for the first primary of 1976. I was pulled into news again. And again I was low man on the totem pole. The top news cameramen had first pick over which potential presidents to cover. Primack took Morris Udall, the front Runner, and the other guys made their choices., Jerry Brown, George Wallace, the segregationist from the South. I was last up to bat and got the dregs.

“This guy, who is this guy?” I ask. I just wanted to see what they'd say.

“Peanut farmer,” they said.

“Cool. I like peanuts!”

I actually knew he was a peanut farmer and governor of Georgia and, for some reason, he'd been getting his name in Time magazine, what with all the celebrities and other pols who seemed to have reason to stop in a place called Plains, Georgia.

New Hampshire always has the first primary and, in this case, it was even early for that because a new law had just been passed providing government money for campaigns. But you had to show up and show that you could attract some votes in a place like Manchester, New Hampshire.

So every campaign was pretty much flat broke. We didn't expect much in terms of the usual Hurrahs. The other guys looked at me with pity. I could shoot all day and my stuff had no chance of getting on. It's going to be Udall, they agreed.

We all waited at the Wayfarer Inn and hooked up with our reporters and headed out for our separate campaign headquarters. We're expecting not much. It would be very low key, without the usual funds for the sturm und drang of politics.

It was a weird time. Nixon had been forced out over Watergate. Jerry Ford became president pro tempore and was tasked with quickly getting him a pardon and out of sight, before too many Americans realized how corrupt the whole system was. No need to have a big inquiry, no need to have a whole pack of lies to calm down America, like the Kennedy assassination. Get him out of town, get him gone.

Next in line was Nelson Rockefeller who had been waiting patiently for too many years because, just as he was to take the mantle, he dropped dead in the arms

of a congressional assistant or staffer... Well, anyway, that was the cover story, which made me feel that it was actually, probably, a goat. Or something so disreputable and weird that the cover story was actually an affair with a staffer.

The public had had it up to here with crooked politicians. Nixon's first VP, Spiro Agnew ran a bribery scheme out of the Vice President's office and was about to do some time in the slammer. Yes, it was a different time.

Everyone felt that the public was tired and disgusted by all the crooked pols, the Washington insiders, and wanted a clean, upstanding saint from the stix. Jimmy Stewart should have run. With Donna Reed as his First Lady. He would have walked away with it.

We all set up on the riser; myself and all the other poor souls who drew the short straws. Half a dozen cameras to cover the entrance, not for real news but just in case somebody got shot. And we looked around and realized It had all been prettily lit. Cool. Less work for us. We all stood around. Our fate? Waiting for nothing to happen, when we heard a commotion, panned to the door and started to roll.

Boom! The door blew open. A roar from a crowd, a marching band. Pretty girls in straw boaters with red, white and blue trim, waving flags and banners. Clouds of cheering citizens dancing to the music, waving at the cameras as if we were actual people. Then, right in the middle, and in perfect rim light, in perfect position for all of the crew, the new face. Jimmy Carter, hand in hand with wife. Using the other one to wave to the non-existent crowd...it was only us cameras... And just as we were thinking, wait! This is all too much, the band hit a high note. A balloon drop. Red, white and blue. A cloud of confetti,, and with a wave, they passed out of sight.

"What the fuck was that?" We all said to each other.

Later, in the bar, where you can usually find cameramen...

"No. Listen. Something is happening here. It was just like a Kennedy. I swear. The straw boaters, the choreography, the same pretty girls...they must keep them on ice somewhere... You gotta look at this guy. Something is going on here. There's money here. It was not, for want of a better term, "peanuts"!

"Ah, you're crazy," they said...They had been at the Morris Udall party and were pretty chuffed at missing the fun.

"What do you know? You're not even from news."

"Well, I got news. This guy has got some mojo going. And you better watch out."

So, turns out, later in his admin, his banker goes to jail. Seems at a time when nobody had any money, he had three or four million... A loan from a small, obscure, peanut-driven bank in Georgia run by one Bert Lance. And the bank didn't even have enough to cover that kind of cash, so somehow, somewhere, a bigger bank came in

and guaranteed the money, and that bank was Chase Manhattan, run by one David Rockefeller.

Yea, brother of... and before raising peanuts, this Carter fella was raising periscopes on a nuclear sub. And the nuclear sub is part of the Navy run by Admiral Hyman Rickover, and Hyman Rickover, David Rockefeller, Jimmy Carter and a whole bunch of other people were what we used to call The Tri-Lateral Commission; a Republican old-boy network, think tank and secret agency tasked with making sure that there was a continuum of rule by the ruling elite, with a weak yet pliable operator, a placeholder further weakened by attacking rabbits and feckless hostage negotiation, while awaiting the Great Communicator from the West. The man who said the scariest words are "I'm from the government and I'm here to help." The man who destroyed the unions, gave money to the rich on the grounds that a rising tide would raise all yachts... A man who secretly negotiated with the Iranians to release the hostages only if he was President. A man who funded the Contras... Saint Ronald the Great. The man who didn't know whether he was in World War II or just in the movie of it, who got a deferment to fight the battle of Culver City. The man who developed Alzheimer's and nobody noticed the difference. But I digress.

HAVE SOME MADIEROS, Ma' DEAR.

It was holidays coming up. Time for the annual giving of the gifts. And we were on our way out to see the head of all the Catholic Church in Boston. And those Cardinals live pretty well. We passed through the gate protecting the entire peninsula of Cape Anne.

We came upon and entered a large mega mansion and dragged equipment past the major domos and the flock of nuns lining the passage like desert crows. The Cardinal was a big guy going to seed from expensive lunches, from having his butt kissed nine times a day, from the promise of going to that special VIP place in heaven... you know, that smug attitude I knew so well.

I had gotten a full year of Catholic when I was 13 and it still stung in cold weather. But we were here for the annual jerk-off about Catholic charities. At a mega mansion on a spit of land, a peninsula out into the North Shore. A 300° view of sea, and surf hitting the rocks and blasting into the air... panoramic shots of a green lawn going down to the shore.

I didn't shoot any of that. It wasn't the story..And I probably would've pissed the good cardinal off, and got someone ex-communicated again.

This was a pseudo-event, a promotion, a cover-your-holy-ass fundraising item just before the holiday gift giving season and the end of the fiscal year. And as my dear accountant always said as his last question;

"And have you been good to the church?" And thence did he take a few hundred bucks off my return for charity. I hadn't been good to the church, except if you count staying as far away from it as possible. That counts for something.

The nuns fluttered about and asked if anyone wanted tea or sparkling water. I declined in case it might be holy. We made a formal introductions. Thirty-five seconds of chitchat, establishing our co-humanity, and then we got to the point.

What the reporter asked and what the Cardinal said, I have no idea. I never listen. I look at their eyebrows and when they go up, I change the shot.

We got through that blah blah and got to the main event. And the crows force-marched the couple of highly polished orphs into the room. The kids marched in at attention and then stood at parade rest. A priest went over, inspecting each and every inch of them for flaws. Somebody would answer for any imperfections.

I looked at the presents and had a funny feeling. There was a pile of them on the side table, but each identical to the others. 4 x 4 x 4 and each in a light blue wrapper with silver stars.

Hey, since I sensed a great disappointment, I pulled out on a two-shot, the cardinal and the kid, and the kid and the cardinal. Whichever, it would make a perfect hallmark..

The Cardinal was savvy enough not to set the kid on his lap. He must've known what legally was coming at him. And, also, he didn't want to look like Santa Claus... Too ecumenical. Now, this was to be a purely Catholic thing.

And he handed the kid a present. One could see a moment of interest, in a long, short life of nobody giving a damn about you. The kid's eyes opened slightly as if, maybe, maybe, possibly, hopefully, perhaps... this might be something that involved, somehow, in some way, fun.

Ha ha ha good luck. The kid ripped open the paper wrapping carefully, as if he knew he would account for it later. And he opened the box and, sure as shit, inside was a Snowball Jesus. Jesus underwater, in a fluid of some sort, a lotta white stuff at his feet.

But the cardinal took it and demonstrated the fun for the camera; if you shook it and turned it upside down and turned it back over again, the white shit would look just like a snowfall over Jesus. That, or God really had dandruff.

Either way, the kid's eyes fell in the direction of Purgatory. This was fun. You could shake it up, spin it around or bowl it down the hall... to the same affect: the white shit would swirl about Jesus. What fun.

But wait. It gets worse. A firm arm pulls this kid back. The next happy camper is pushed forward. This guy is the backstop, the guy they count on. We all knew what was next but this guy is going to sell it. Oh my God, what a surprise?! It's another snowball Jesus. And my money is on all of them. There's nothing says to an orphan that you really care about them and even know who is who, like giving a hundred of them the same goddamn Snowball Jesus.

“Hey, wanna trade?”

“Whadda you got?”

“A snowball Jesus. Whadda you?”

“A snowball Jesus.”

“....Naw.”

Like, sure, we have all these nuns sitting around doing nothing but praying for a holy orgasm but what do they know about shopping? Better to go with the snowball

Jesus. Who's gonna know? We gave them a present. We had a pseudo-event. The media will protect us. They fucking better! We control a lot of your viewers. And we've got lawyers and publicists like you wouldn't believe.

So I gave that Stan Laurel smile that I use to get out of places and back off from rattlesnakes and I used it. Just cause they got a whole bunch of similar Snowball Jeezy, and I caught him glancing over. He knows I don't cut that stuff, so I might as well not film it. And with a third-hand phone call it will never make air. So who was I kidding? Anna Teresa Malloy. She never should've tried to program me with this stuff.

And the really sad thing was ...that Jesus never really got to celebrate Christmas.

IN OLD PASADENA

It's several years later. My friend David Ronne, the sound man, calls up and says "What are you doing?"

"Nothing. I'm rewriting a movie for Norman Jewison."

"Want to get out of the house?"

"Sure, why not?"

"We're shooting a Bob Fosse movie out in San Marino. Tomorrow they need some people to be News documentary cameramen."

"I don't think I'm in the right union."

"You don't have to shoot anything. You're an extra. You just show people how to do it. They have no idea."

"Where have I heard that before?"

"Anyway, it's sunny. There's craft service and it's about a girl who got murdered by her boyfriend."

"Sounds fabulous. I'll be there."

I show up and he points me to a crowd. There's nobody around here who seems to know what they're doing so I feel right at home.

There's a bunch of guys sitting around looking at me like I might know something or know somebody who knows something, or knows nothing. Or I might be somebody in charge. So I accept the mantle.

There's a whole pile of props that look like RCA 100 cameras. They have lenses, plastic lenses on front that aren't real lenses. They have cords coming out the back, they have braces and they're painted to look like real cameras.

I look around for someone who might know someone who knows something but there's nobody there. Finally, a guy walks up and says, "David says you used to be a cameraman."

"Still am, actually. I just don't let it show. "

"Well, nobody else knows how to do this and the director doesn't have time, so here's the deal, it's gonna be all these girls in bikinis on roller skates, skating around this tennis court. Now, Cliff Robertson is going to be playing Hugh Hefner and he's going to be walking around with a bunch of bimbos and a martini and talking to the cameraman while they're getting a shot..."

"So I'm the second AD and Fosse is in there doing the main work. So, could you tell all these guys how to act and look like cameramen. "

"Actually that's something I never figured out but I'll give it a try."

"OK"

"So, you guys are cameramen. Pick up the cameras and put them on your shoulder and pretend you're looking through the eyepiece. Don't look through the eyepiece, look where you're going... Actually you'll be walking backwards so look where you've been."

You guys take these cords and coil them up like they're attached to some kind of sound gear you don't seem to have. You're playing sound men. But here's the important part. Put your hand on your cameraman's belt and guide him as he walks backwards so he doesn't fall on his ass and bump his head, OK?"

They all set up just like we're real.

"All right, now, don't get in each other's way... Separate like you're actually getting the shot. Stay in formation and try to hold it steady."

The Director comes on. The AD tells him, "They seem to know what they're doing." He nods like "Who cares..."

The real crew sets up. "Roll em, Speed..."

And he says "Action."

We walk backwards, around and around. A dozen bimbos in bikinis on roller skates are skating in and out. Cliff's got some lines and I'm a foot and a half in front of him, walking backwards and holding him as if I've got a Close-UP. And Cliff's looking at me closely, and we do it three or four times. Then Fosse says, "Cut. Great. Thanks a lot." He walks off.

The AD says, "Thanks guys, you're done, craft service is over there." But Cliff is looking. Cliff is looking at me. He walks up at me and goes...

"Tell the Director you've got the shot."

“What?” I say.

“Tell the Director that you've got the best shot.”

Well, I'd been right in his face, walking around and around and around with this non-Camera focused at him, but he says I have the best shot.

“Cliff, it's not real.” I say. “Look!” I tap the camera. It rings hollow. “Balsa wood! Not a real camera. I'm an extra.”

“I know I know. But tell the Director you've got the best shot.” And he walks away.

I know it's part ego. He wants the Close-Up. But he's an Academy Award-winning actor, known in the business. He's married to Dina Merrill and lives in Mar-a-Lago. He's been around forever. He played Jack Kennedy in PT 109 and won the Academy Award for “Charley”, and he's just given me what I consider my own Academy Award... “Best Supporting Extra”.... I look enough like a cameraman to fool 'em.

SCHOOL BUSSING IS FUN.

I actually like riots and demos and your standard disaster. A lot of people get nervous about them, All I do is think “Overtime!” Time and a half. More on the weekends if you haven't had “Rest”... Golden Time!

A good year with plenty of riots and natural disasters, you could buy a boat.

And there's plenty of overtime when the whole state is in an uproar. The whole state is in an uproar because of one judge. This judge found that the education in Boston was racist. That each little enclave or ethnic community basically ran its own schools. Some were good, some were not so good. And since all taxpayers pay for schooling, that didn't seem fair. What's more, he found that the schools in the black communities were not so good. He also found that the school in Southie was absolutely terrible.

This was a long history in Boston where the rich guys and owners' kids got a really good education while the poor people and the new ethnics, not so much. There was one school called Boston Latin where smart kids from the lower classes could show their stuff and get lifted into good colleges like Harvard and Tufts... and there were magnet schools where smart kids, even some black kids, could get in and get ahead in life.

Well, this judge found out the whole system was not quite fair. So he ordered that you had to bus kids around the city to different schools to even it all out. It was kind of crazy because this meant some of the black kids that were going to the good

magnet schools had to be bussed to bad ones. Some of them to one of the worst; Southie High School. Practically nobody got into college from there. You could get into the State Police. Or the Winter Hill gang. You had your choice.

So they had a brilliant idea. To even things out they had to send some black kids there, which didn't go over too well with the local inhabitants. So this led to months of rioting, which, of course meant, quite a lot of overtime.

So one day, the black show thought it'd be a really neat idea to go down to Southie and maybe try to interview some people on the street without, maybe like, getting killed or something. So I was driving a van full of black guys and we had just forgiven Margaret for ordering chitlins and stinking up the whole truck when we pulled into the street leading to Southie High School.

And suddenly I realized this wasn't a good thing to do. There were people on the rooftops throwing beer bottles and other things down at us. All the black faces hit the floor and dove under the seats, and I'm driving along like the Beverly Hill Billy and not knowing what the fuck I'm doing, which of course I didn't. Because it was like Viva Zapata where everybody's on the rooftop surrounding you and you've got no escape.

Then somebody thought it was a good idea to go over to Bunker Hill and see how they were taking it there. I was riding on the hood of the car, filming a traveling shot and a couple of the guys came out and started throwing hard balls at me... I figured they were the bullpen for the Red Sox because they couldn't hit anything. So they go zooming by my head and I'm calling them, like "High and inside," "Low and away," "Ball two. Fuck you!"

And one of the fun things in life; driving around Boston at night in Larry Weisberg's car, with the radios on and the police scanners with little red lights zooming around your head as each channel comes on the air. There is a black market in Police crystals, and Larry had scored quite a few, the State-ies, the locals and even the FBI. There were scanners across the dash, under the deck, up in the headliner, and down inside the driver's door, so you're surrounded by red lights scanning... a spaceship tuned into the conflict universe.

But it was the sickly kind of daylight when we got the call.

"Car 100. Car 100 come in."

I'd been down at the Black Rose, with Dana Jones. Dana separated cocktails into 5 degrees of seriousness; the "Tincture", the "Sharpener", the "Snorto", The "Snortorino" and the "Snorto Deluxe."

Dana was an advertising man. Second generation. His old man, in addition to being a world-class drunk, was advertising-famous, having invented the phrase "Snap Crackle and Pop". But Dana specialized in limericks.

"A lovely young lady, Miss Peach."
Committed a terrible breach."
Rules of nature, she floated!
Suck, suck," he shouted.
Blow is only a figure of speech."

I believe he was hanging out with Spreadbury, who is also famous, since the owner of the agency had told them more than once not to drink vodka at lunch,

“Drink gin or something. I want them to know you're drunk, not stupid.”

Seems Spreadbuwery had gone and gotten fired because the guy insisted he come up with a slogan for WolfSchmitz Vodka by 10 AM Monday. He walked in and said, "I've got it!" He tees it up and gives it his all...

“If it's not WolfSchmitz, it's not breakfast!”
He got fired.

So I was driving around the neighborhood with the sound man, a black guy who had taken it upon himself in the midst of School Bussing, to dress as a field hand, a cotton-picker. With the bib overalls, a black power T-shirt and a beanie in the color of the Nigerian flag.

“ Might better have adopted some kind of protective coloration,” I offered, but he just looked at me and farted from one of those Shabazz bean pies. That's when we got the call.

“Car 100! Car 100 come in.”

“What do you want? We're having a good time here.”

That's about to end.

“We need you to cover a rally.”

I was already suspicious.

“What kind of a rally?”

“It's in the Park Plaza, in the ballroom.”

He was dissembling. This wasn't good.

“Roger, what kind of rally might that be?”

“Well, there's gonna be a speaker there.”

“And his name might be?”

“Well, that would be George Wallace.”

It was a long silence on my part. And on his, It was a lot of dead air.

“Do you know who we are?” I said. “Do you want this on your conscience? It’ll mean therapy!”

“You are the guys in car 100 shooting news.”

“We are not your normal news crew, if you know what I mean.”

I glance over at sound. He seems to be rethinking his career choice.

“I know, but with all that’s going on, you’re all we’ve got.”

“Is there an upper limit on Harvard Medical coverage?”

“Now, I need you there right away, it’s about to start. Yours is not to question why, yours is...” the rest broke up.

So me and the field hand saunter jauntily into the Park Plaza hotel, past the phalanx of Boston’s Semi Finest and walls lined with State Police. They looked at us, like Hemingway looked at the small bulls entering the ring.

“Ahhh, he’ll make a fine death...a noble death...a death in the dust of an afternoon... and a fine thing it will be to see.”

I may have been hallucinating.

Past the glowering State-ies... past the smirking Feds... I gave them my finest Stan Laurel, just before he steps into the manhole...as the sound man looks for escape routes.

We burst into the ball room like we belonged... like we belonged somewhere else. Banging with the equipment and showing we know what we’re doing. We are professionals and we are going to cover whatever happens. Right away I noticed one thing that was slightly unnerving... We were completely alone.

No. There were about 5000 drunk and angry Irishman from Southie and points north, east and west. They crammed the hall, jabbering to each other and hung out of the balcony and private boxes. They glared at us and pointed and gave us the finger, and some other signs known only to them that you reserve for media, who constantly piss you off. Or maybe they just fucked up the finger. They were pretty drunk.

And I recognize this from my own family occasions. And, hell...I’m a minority. I’m an Irish Catholic, Presbyterian, English, Russian Jew raised by a black woman. My ancestors were shot, starved, run down by Cossacks, gassed, strung up, thrown into pits, drowned and probably drawn and quartered but you don’t hear me complaining. Well, okay, you do. But in an ironic way, when somebody calls me “The Man.” If I was “The Man” wouldn’t I ride to hounds or something? And now, my position is standing calmly, my back to the surging mob, while connected by the Me-To-You-Cord to somebody they really hate. And although it clearly states in bold block letters on the

back of my shooting shirt: **INNOCENT BYSTANDER**, they are not buying this. I am media. And I lie.

And we are alone in the sense that there are no other news crews dumb enough to be there. And no reporters. The other crews, being somewhat more professional, had been practicing their alibis, and learning to fake radio interference by blowing through a comb.

We are the only ones dumb enough to be anywhere near here, and I am the only one connected by the Me-To-You-Cord to, well, stylistically at least... to a field hand. Again I ask him what the hell had he been thinking. And I get the same answer, so I make the sign of the cross and pray to the patron saint of media, whose name, I believe, is Sid.

Just then George Wallace comes out. He stands on the stage just above us and I get a lovely, large Mussolini shot. He looks at us and doesn't like what he sees. There's only one crew. Not even a reporter; some of them are smart. How's he gonna make the news and jump-start his presidential bid if he can't get on multiple channels?

He's only up here cause he thinks he could be President and heard there was some racist shit going on. But he's a professional racist and he's here to give the crowd what they want. They've already had quite a bit of that in the beer and liquor bottles rolling down the aisles and some shoving and pushing and shouting and it seems some of it is about the Bruins.

But he starts riding on his rap. They were already fired up from 45 weeks of angry drinking and don't need much more help, but he starts ranting:

“Great to be here in “Mass a toot setts”.

“Mass a TOOT setts”?, for fuck sakes!...but I'm rolling. I'm rolling on all of it and I got that good low angle Mussolini shot... what now?

“You don't have to put up with this. This is your town. This is your state. I'm proud to be here in Mass a TOOT setts... Mass a TOOT setts is one of the best states but it's going to the dogs...”

There is one small problem I might point out. He can't pronounce Massachusetts. It comes out “Mass a TOOT setts” every time. I can't believe this cracker comes all the way from the south and can't even pronounce the state he's in. What kind of staff work is this?

This makes them madder than hell or than when they set out to get mad. They start pushing and shoving. These are mad drunks thinking... “he's our racist, and he's not even a smart one. Or one that bothers to take the time to figure out where the fuck he is. And how to say it.”

This confuses them and makes them madder. Should we cheer him because he's a famous and accomplished racist, or throw something at him...for, you know... the disrespect?

“Shut up, you dumb cracker” I mumble. It's just us, with just dingbats staring into our backs. We don't need 'em madder. They already came like that. And we have no defense. I'm connected to Sound by the Me-to-You Cord and his fate is mine. He

can't bolt and I can't bolt without him. And Wallace is jacking up the crowd. You gotta have somebody to hate... you gotta have somebody to threaten...you gotta have somebody to get killed and I believe it's gonna be us.

I look around and guess what? No police. They're outside, they're all outside guarding the outside of the door, and the corner to the door, and the front door and the little door that goes round and round. They're guarding the stairs, the elevators. They are not guarding us. And I don't think we can expect any help from that quarter. There's a slow pressure building and it's the crowd moving, moving like the tide coming in and coming down on us, and he's working the mass.

"It's the media, the media you got here in Mass a TOOT SEZ and they're not for you they're for the liberals and the blacks and the Jews. And those rich guys up on Beacon Hill and those crooked Pols and those crooked judges and all those guys are holding you down." And he leans over and points down directly at us...

"It's them ! They're your problem."

"Who, me!"

Suddenly there's a crash. Bottles hit the floor, explode like booze grenades, wafting a scent of Irish Rose, of Guinness.

Look to my right and up in the box a fight has broken out... What's the chance of that! Four or five guys go at it big time, hanging out of the box, beating the shit out of each other. Blood, booze, beer and bad attitude raining down on the crowd, which makes them madder.

Of course, I swing on it." If it Bleeds, it Leads." I zoom it tight and frame it good. These guys are battling. The group below are cheering them on, making bets...

"Five bucks on Red..."

"Ten he falls over the railing!"

...and then I hear Wallace and look back. He's pointing down at us and screaming.

"Here's the media! See! It's covering the fight, not the issue."

I think the fight IS the issue. And what? Am I not gonna cover it?

"It's making you look bad. It's just what they want to see!"

Since when does a fight make Irish look bad, I think? Seen a John Ford movie?

I swing back on him and he's red-faced ranting, spittle flying out in a rainbow, wild-eyed... but in control, you know. An act, a performance. He done this before.

And the wave has broken, like a thousand villagers with pitchforks, like a Klan with ropes, looking for a tree.

"We'll be leaving now," I say to the sound man. He nods agreement like a rabid chipmunk. And we move. I swing the camera, he grabs the sticks... There's a lurch, and I look back. I look back and there's a zombie, I think. He's drunk, and he's got the

Me-to-You-Cord. He's got it between his teeth. And he's trying to bite it through... Or pull us down by his teeth. I yank it back hard and his teeth go flying over the crowd. He grabs his bloody mouth and falls back.

Just then, a slam from the side. I turn. Another drunk has slammed the camera into my head. He's got his fist back for another punch when I grab the CP by the handle, and swing for the fences, and for his face. I catch him flush in the mush and he flies straight back, arms out like Christ. Blood flies, he falls into a line of drunks waiting their turn to kill us. The whole line goes down in a string, like dominos, like the Rockettes, and chairs and bottles and booze go flying. The mess forms a barrier and we leap through and burst out the door.

Outside. the State-ies are laughing at us. They're lining the walls, hands in pockets, grinning ear to ear. Crushed pilot hats, shined jackboots, Sam Brown belts, guns, badges, bullets, they look like nothing so much as a gay motorcycle gang from the Haight. And just as helpful.

There's a kid I know from high school. What is he doing here? I hand him the sticks. "Follow us!" I slow and saunter past. Never show fear in front of a cop.

And they all think they got us, but I got them. A drunken riot, a crooked, racist pol, a cracker who can't even pronounce the state he's in, a fight, a bite, some blood, a crash, a Mussolini shot, a miraculous escape, just like in the movies. I got the story. And it leads. You can see what he is. You can see what it is. It's all in pictures and a word: "Mass a toot setts". He won't be back. He won't be president. And pretty soon someone will shoot him for stuff like this.

And I told the story. All in pictures. That's the job.