



GENE LESTER

Bing at a Pebble Beach, Calif., golf match. His studio once made him glue his ears back, but "for everyday use" he preferred to let them flap.

# Call Me Lucky By BING CROSBY as told to Pete Martin

**Hollywood looked at Bing Crosby's big ears and thinning hair and said, "There's no future for you in pictures." Here's the story of Crosby's big battle with the make-up men—and how he became a star in spite of his looks.**

## PART FIVE

I was in the 1934 film, *She Loves Me Not*, that I made my brave stand against having my ears glued back to increase my beauty. This nuisance stemmed from the time when I was courting Dixie and was having my trouble with Abe Frank. I was playing a lot of golf then with a Broadway actor, Dick Keene, who was working at Fox, and it was his notion that I'd be a good bet for picture work. He took me to see Jim Ryan, the casting director at Fox's Western Avenue studio. Ryan had me sing a couple of songs and read a few lines. He seemed to like the way I did them. But after looking me over, he said, "I'm afraid there's no future for you in pictures."

"Why not?" I asked.

"They could never photograph you," he said. "The ears are wingy."

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I thought he said, "The years are winging," meaning that I was getting old. I wasn't very old and I flipped.

"I don't mean your age," he said. "Your ears protrude. They stick out too far. A camera pointed straight at you would make you look like a taxi with both doors open. They'd have to photograph you three-quarter-face or profile, and that would put too much of a limit on the cameraman. I'm sorry."

Dick and I went out feeling pretty crestfallen.

Seven or eight years later I became a parishioner of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Beverly Hills. Jim Ryan is a member of the congregation and we sit near each other. I always get up and go out before he does, and I never fail to bat my ears significantly at him as I go by. We both grin, because in the time which has elapsed between the meeting in his office and the time I became a parishioner of Good Shepherd, I'd made some highly lucrative connections.

When I went to work in *The Big Broadcast*, Paramount shared Ryan's view of my ears as a photographic problem and they insisted on gluing them back against my head with spirit gum. I must admit that I was surprised at what the gluing did to my appearance. I looked streamlined, like a whippet dashing after a mechanical bunny. I put up with the spirit gum for a long time. Then they tried adhesive; then they went back to spirit gum. George Raft's ears were batty, too, but he'd had a muscle cut behind his ears which made them fall back against his noggin without having to be pushed by a make-up man. I wouldn't go for such an operation. I liked my ears the way they were—at least for everyday use. However, I was resigned to pinning them back for screen purposes, although both the glue and the adhesive were disagreeable. Then, too, no matter how firmly they were pinned back, they kept popping out all the time, much





Bob Hope and Bing at a Philadelphia war-bond drive in 1943. "It was Hope," Bing claims, "who thought up the vulgarization, 'groaner.'"



Off-screen, Bing lays aside his "scalp doily." At this Crosby party, entertainment was furnished by guitarist Perry Botkin and other jazz musicians.

to the annoyance of Paramount's make-up department.

One of the scenes from *She Loves Me Not* had to be heavily lighted, and the heat kept loosening the stickum until my ears popped out eight or ten times. The tenth time I said, "This time they're going to stay out."

"I've got orders not to shoot you that way," the cameraman told me.

"They're out and they're going to stay out," I said. "I'll be at the Lakeside Golf Club. If the studio changes its mind, tell them to call me there."

That first tee at Lakeside is my refuge when the studio is obdurate about what seems to me a reasonable request. If I'm convinced that they are being bullheaded or are pulling rank on me, I retire there to await developments. Finally a man at the studio called. "We'll shoot them sticking out if you feel so strongly about it," he said. So *She Loves Me Not* was shot partly with them out and partly with them in. In the first part I looked like a whippet in full flight. In the second part I looked like Dumbo. They've been out ever since.

But though I won a victory over stickum back of my ears, I capitulated to another nuisance—cake make-up. This nuisance was wished on me by Harry Ray, a make-up man. He was never around when we needed him, so we called him Mile-Away Ray or The Seldom-Seen Kid. He'd make me up in the morning, then disappear, and my face would grow shiny. We spent a lot of time figuring where he vanished to. There was one theory that he hid in a restaurant several blocks away called the Health Center. An alternate theory was that he flitted around the lot visiting other sets, playing *Run, Sheep, Run* and *Prisoner's Base* with the scouts and posses we sent to look for him.

When he was on deck, we engaged in a running debate because I refused to wear cake make-up. I'd used the professional kind in my vaudeville days, but my skin was dry, and it had made my face itch. After it had dried and I'd had it on a while it seemed to grow flaky and I'd go around all day screwing my face up like a man with a tic. I'd developed quite a hatred for it. In the end, *The Seldom-Seen Kid* played on my college loyalty. Gonzaga was coming to town to play Loyola, and Mile-Away Ray lured me into making a bet on the game. The bet was that if Loyola won I'd wear the make-up he wanted me to wear. Loyola won and I wore it.

Robert Hope, of the nonclassic profile and the un-lissome midsection, is sometimes goaded by a knowledge of his own lack of physical charms into referring to me as "skinhead." I don't have to specify what he means. It's generally known that for screen purposes I wear a device the trade calls a "scalp doily," "a

mucket" or "a divot." The technical name for it is a hair piece.

I hate to put it on, and I'm always trying to have interior scenes photographed out-of-doors, so I can wear a hat. Before he died, Buddy De Sylva, former head of production at Paramount, promised me that if I would do a favor for him—I forget just what it was now—he'd buy a story for me in which I could play a rabbi and wear a hat all the time.

Each morning when I get a script, I look through it to see if there's any way I can get through the day without donning a mucket. Not that it's such a chore to put on, but the glue in it makes my forehead itch and I can't scratch the itching places without pulling it off. I'm always plotting ways to do a love scene wearing a hat. In one scene I was to meet a girl at a railway station and greet her with a big embrace and a kiss. "You'll have to take your hat off for this one," the director said firmly.

If he thought I'd give up that easily, he'd misjudged me. "Not me," I said. "This fellow's so excited at seeing his girl he doesn't remember to take his hat off. He's deeply in love with her and hasn't

seen her for a long time, so he has no time to think about the social amenities when she arrives. He just grabs her, and after that he's too busy to take his hat off."

Speaking of muckets, Wally Westmore of the fabulous Westmore family, identified with the make-up end of the picture business almost since its inception, has kept me in pictures many years longer than I would ordinarily have endured. It was he and his brothers, the "Marryin' Westmores," who developed the mucket—or "bowser," as it's sometimes called—which saved many an actor whose thinning thatch would otherwise have doomed him to an early theatrical demise. Who but Wally could have been taken on a trip to Paris for exterior-location shots on my last picture, *Little Boy Lost*, on the unlikely possibility that I might be induced to doff my chapeau and need a hair piece? It was Wally's first trip to Paris and some mornings, following expansive evenings, he got it on backwards, sideways or tipped rakishly.

Another prop for my manly beauty was forced upon me in a 1935 movie (Continued on Page 113)



Bing and Dorothy Lamour rehearsing a number for the movie *Road to Bali*, latest of the "road" series.



Film star Gary Cooper exchanges back slaps with fellow "Oscar" winner Crosby.



## CALL ME LUCKY

(Continued from Page 41)

called Mississippi. It's fairer to say that I forced it upon myself, for I'd let my weight creep up to 190 pounds. I was eating a lot and getting lots of sleep, and it had been a long time between pictures, so I'd blown up to an unfashionable one-nine-o. Mississippi was a period picture—Civil War—and the pants I had to wear in it were so tight that my extra suet was conspicuous. As a result, I had to be strapped up, and I soon found out why women are so anxious to get out of their girdles.

Mississippi was the first time I'd worked with W. C. Fields, although I'd met Bill on the golf course and in the local bistros and he was one of my idols. His comedy routines appeared spontaneous and improvised, but he spent much time perfecting them. He knew exactly what he was doing every moment, and what each prop was supposed to do. That "my little chickadee" way of talking of his was natural. He talked that way all the time.

Bill was getting along, but he was still hard to shave on a golf course. He

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## BALANCED ACCOUNT

By Georgie Starbuck Galbraith

When I'm gloom-decked  
That through the years  
My fairest hopes  
Have failed to bloom,  
I recollect:  
My blackest fears  
Have met the same  
Unseemly doom.

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couldn't hit a long ball, but he was marvelously clever with his hands. And he was a terrific putter. I guess he got his superb co-ordination from having been a juggler in his vaudeville days. He played a cagey betting game. Looking at his brightly blossoming nose and his graying locks, more than one optimist figured he could take him, but Bill made a lot of tax-free coin on the golf course.

During the war Los Angeles had a mysterious and never fully explained "Jap-air-raid" scare. The anti-aircraft guns around the airplane plants fired for hours and made a terrific racket. Bill was no type who walked briskly home from the office each night in a chesterfield and bowler, carrying a tightly rolled umbrella and a brief case full of sales reports to analyze. He was more apt to roll home lit with inner alcoholic fires, his progress sounding like the passage of a frigate firing broadsides. Some wag explained the commotion by saying, "Those weren't AA guns. It was just Bill Fields going home late from Dave Chasen's restaurant."

Bill had a house on the shore of Toluca Lake near the Lakeside Golf Club. His lawn went down to the edge of the lake. He had a small arbor there where he sat and drank bourbon and practiced his comedy and juggling routines. Toluca Lake attracted flocks of geese and Bill complained testily that he had to quit practicing because they hissed him.

Speaking of hissing brings me to the day in 1939 when Robert Ski-nose Hope came along. He'd come to Paramount originally to make B pictures, but he

caught on fast and became a favorite. Then one day someone decided to team us in a picture called *The Road to Singapore*. It was a lucky hunch for everybody involved. The widely publicized Hope-Crosby feud was not a planned vendetta. It was a thing we fell into. It grew out of the fact that when we appeared on each other's radio programs and in the *Road* pictures, it seemed easier for our writers to write abusive dialogue than any other kind.

When our Hatfield-McCoy routine became a byword with the public, we did nothing to derail it. We expanded it and pitched in merrily to think of insults to hurl at each other. When we're doing a radio show, Hope shows up at the studio with libelous comments about me penciled on his script. He writes more during rehearsal. I do the same. We may even think up a few verbal barbs after the show goes on the air.

Hope's very nimble at this sort of thing and I can only remember sticking him once, but I'm proud of that once, for I had him really blubbering. He had made some disparaging remark about my figure, and I said, "I just got a load of your rear when you walked away from the microphone, and you looked like a sack of cats going to the river." He went dead for almost a minute. He thought up a rebuttal later, but in our league, if you don't come up with a reply right away, it's no balls, three strikes and sit down.

Our first road picture baffled its director, Victor Schertzinger. Victor is a nice fellow and he'd directed some fine pictures, but he'd had no experience with comedy. He was an experienced musician and, although he knew nothing about hokum, Paramount signed him to direct the first *Road* picture because of his musical background. He was a quiet fellow, used to directing his pictures in leisurely fashion. His awakening was rude. For a couple of days when Hope and I tore into a scene, ad-libbing and violating all of the accepted rules of movie-making, Schertzinger stole bewildered looks at his script, then leafed rapidly through it, searching for the lines we were saying.

When he couldn't find them he'd be ready to flag us down and to say reprovingly, "Perhaps we'd better do it the way it's written, gentlemen," but then he'd notice that the crew was laughing at our antics. He was smart enough to see that if we evoked that kind of merriment from a hard-boiled gang who'd seen so many pictures they were blasé about them, it might be good to let us do it our way.

So we had more trouble with our writers than with our director. Don Hartman, now production head at Paramount, was one of the writers. The other was Frank Butler, who still writes *Road* pictures and who collaborated on our most recent tour, *The Road to Bali*. Hartman and Butler didn't like the way we kicked their prose around, and it didn't help that when they visited our set we ad-libbed in spades. When Hope called out to Hartman, "If you recognize anything of yours yell 'bingo!'" Don left the set in a huff to register a beef with the production department.

We were curious as to what the front office thought of our antics, so when the eleven-o'clock rushes were run off, Hope and I sneaked up to the projection room. All the studio executives were in there; the door was ajar, and we could hear those inside guffawing. They even roared when Hope stopped the action and talked directly to the audience, a most unorthodox procedure. So we knew we were in.

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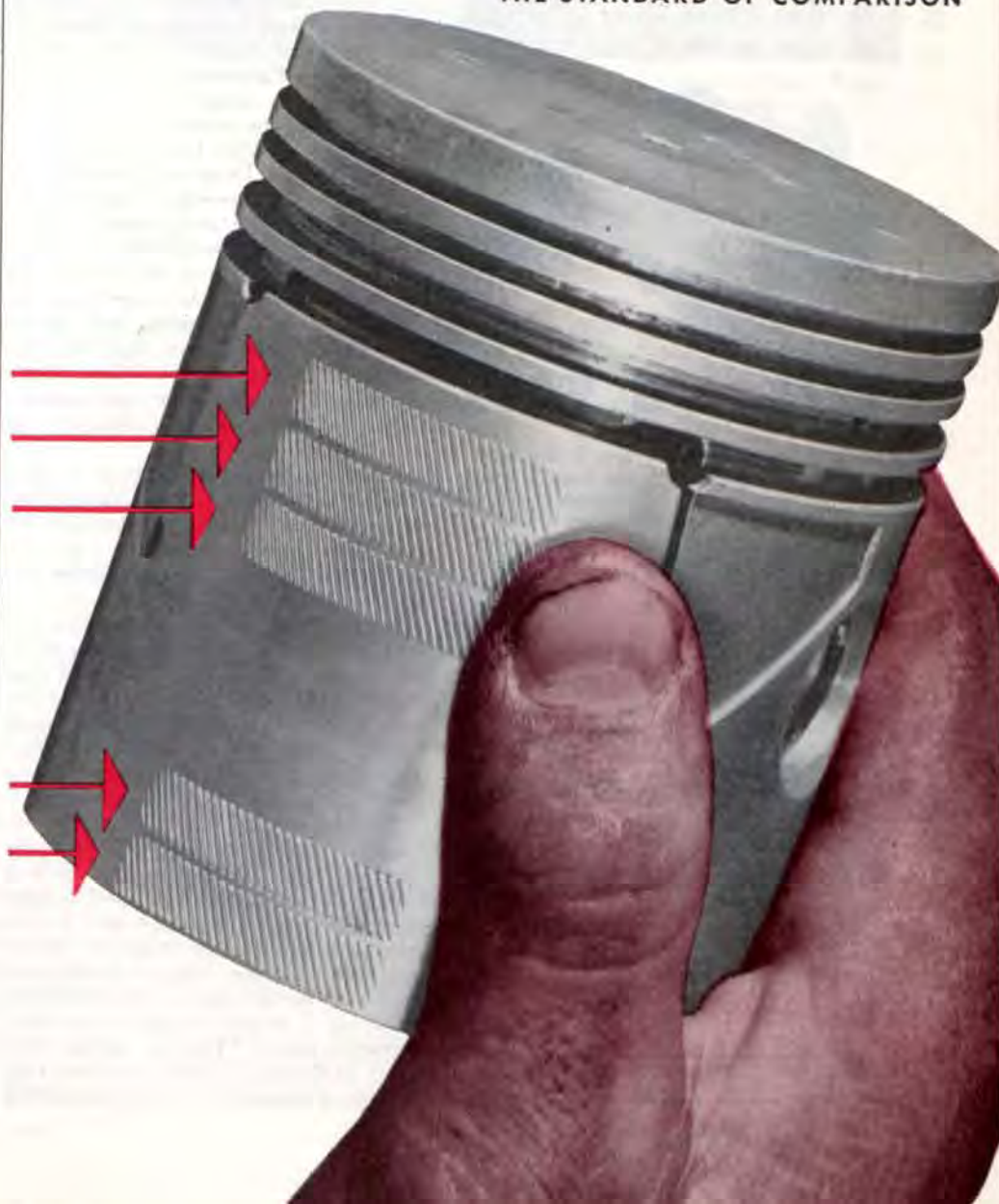
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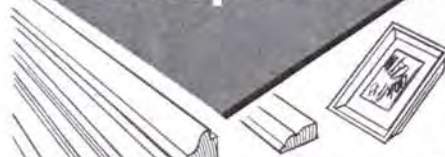
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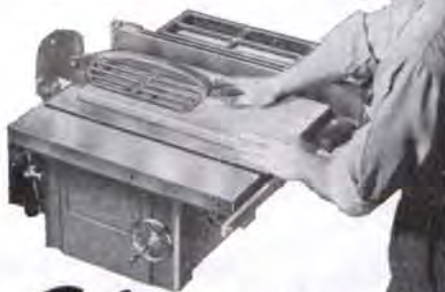


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The basic ingredient of any Road picture is a Rover-Boys-type plot, plus music. The plot takes two fellows, throws them into as many jams as possible, then lets them clown their way out. The jams are plotted in the script, and although they're bogus situations and on the incredible side, they're important because they hold the story together and provide a framework for our monkeyshines. Gags can't be played against gags; they have to be played against something serious, even though the serious stuff is melodramatic. Hope and I invent many of these gag escapes from predicaments as we go along, and to prevent our imagination from flagging, we prevailed upon Paramount to employ a pixie in human form, Barney Dean. Barney looks as if he'd posed for one of the seven dwarfs in Disney's Snow White—not Grumpy, but one of the merry ones—and he's just about their size. He showed up on our set one day peddling Christmas cards.

Hope and I remembered him from our vaudeville days. Barney had done a dance act with a party named Tarradash. Barney's real name was Fradkin, so the team bore the improbable title of Fradkin and Tarradash. I don't know how Fradkin and Tarradash ever got bookings. Tarradash could tap a little, but Fradkin just shuffled. If Tarradash grew tired or wasn't feeling too well, the audience heard no taps at all. When the booking shortage grew so acute that no food was coming in, Barney gave up dancing and formed another act with another pal, Jim McDonnell. In this new act he played a pesky little stooge, and McDonnell was a big, tall, suave straight man. Every time Barney pulled an insane line on McDonnell, McDonnell hit him and Barney crashed to the floor. They broke their act in at a theater in Chicago, a house where knockabout, baggy-pants, putty-nose comedy went over big because the audiences liked their fun gamy and unrefined.

When the Paramount-Publix circuit talent scouts caught the Dean-McDonnell act, the audience was unusually riotous, so they booked them. Unfortunately for Dean and McDonnell, they opened their new booking in Montreal in a neighborhood house before a sedate family audience. When Barney told his first joke and McDonnell hit him and Barney hit the stage floor, the audience made a noise not unlike "tsk-tsk." When Dean and McDonnell kept right on knocking themselves—and each other—enthusiastically out, the tsk-tsking turned into an ominous booing.

That was the last of them as a team. Barney returned to New York, then came to Hollywood as a stand-in for Sid Silvers, who was making a picture at Metro. As it happened, Silvers was at war with the director, the production staff and the writers on the picture, and Barney was constantly striving to pacify him. He was afraid that Silvers would talk himself out of a job, and if that happened, Barney would be out of a job too. "Take it easy, Sid," he begged. "You're flirting with my job."

When, despite Barney's frantic flapping of olive branches, the job finally flickered out, Barney took to selling Christmas cards. He'd dropped in, hoping to sell us some. Hope and I were reminiscing with him when he pulled out one of those bits of pasteboard with your fortune printed on it that you get from a penny weighing machine. Barney's read: "You are gifted with great business acumen. You are very well fixed financially. There's nothing

in your future to indicate that you'll lose your great fortune."

"If I go back to my hotel and find they've locked me out of my room," he told us, "I'm going to sue the weighing-machine people."

"Why don't we have Barney sit around on the set and if he thinks of anything amusing, suggest it?" Hope suggested. "Even if we don't use it, it may serve as a springboard for another gag." Which was why we used our influence with the brass to have him put on the payroll as a writer. He was given an office with a secretary, but he'd never seen a secretary except on the street, and he was afraid of his. Day after day, his secretary sat alone in his office, until we told him, "You can't let that poor girl stay there all alone. Why not at least write a letter to your mother?"

For a moment Barney looked frightened. Then he said triumphantly, "But I haven't got a mother!"

When we finished shooting that first Road picture, he stayed with us, and if Hope's not making a picture, Barney works on one with me.

Barney had quite a time in 1947 when we were on location for The Emperor Waltz—a non-Hope picture—at Canada's Jasper National Park. Jasper Park is like Yellowstone. A lot of animals, including black bears, wander around loose. These bears are fairly tame and tourists feed them sugar, but they can be mean if the sugar is taken away from them too fast or if there's a cub about. I don't think that Barney had ever trod any wilder surface than a pavement before or had seen many wild animals even pacing around in zoos. We arrived there after dark, and were walking from our bungalow to the main dining room when a big hulk came lumbering along in the dark, followed by a couple of cubs.

Barney, who still shows traces of the fatherland's accent when he gets excited, asked, "My Gott, vat's that?" "Those are bears," I told him.

"Who needs them?" he asked querulously.

He's very good at thinking up visual gags, but he does more than that. He keeps us from using things which might be considered in bad taste. Influenced, no doubt, by his Montreal fiasco, he is instinctively sensitive to such material. Sometimes, when Hope and I get going in a scene, we are carried away and, before we know it, we

say things we wouldn't say if we had time to think about them calmly. That's when Barney speaks up. He had quite a battle with Hope once over a line in which a booby trap in the way of a possible *double-entendre* was concealed. Hope thought it was harmless, but Barney said he couldn't use it.

Finally Hope gave up and said to me with awe in his voice, "Just think. We raised this little Frankenstein ourselves."

It was Hope who thought up the vulgarization, "groaner," for the word "crooner." I've been asked, more times than I could shake an answer at, when the word "crooner" was invented. As far as I know, Rudy Vallee was the first to be called that, although a case could be made out for the prior claim of the vaudeville-and-night-club headliner, Benny Fields. As for defining the word, it originally meant someone who sang with a band and crooned into a small megaphone or made mooing noises into a microphone. In France they call a crooner a *chanteur de charme*. I suppose this means a singer of charm, although it seems a loose term to describe me.

Crooner connotes a slurring of words until they're mashed together in a hot mush in the mouth. When I'm asked to describe what I do, I say, "I'm not a singer; I'm a phraser." That means that I don't think of a song in terms of notes; I try to think of what it purports to say lyrically. That way it sounds more natural, and anything natural is more listenable.

Time was when I let lyrics roll out of me without thinking how they sounded. Playing some of the records I made in the '30's, I notice that in many of them I was tired; my voice was bad and had a lot of frogs in it. The notes were generally in key, but sometimes I barely made them and they sounded strained. But I paid no attention to whether they were bad or good when I made them. And they sold. They were popular. When I play back some of the records I've made in the past year or two, they're too vocal. They're oversung. I'm listening too much to what I sing when I sing it, and it makes me self-conscious.

For the same reason, I've never liked the title Mr. Music, which Paramount gave to a picture I made in 1950 with Nancy Olson. That label made me self-conscious too. The picture didn't do too well at the box office, and I've

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always thought it was because its title was unfortunate. Any time you name anybody Mr. So-and-So, you're in trouble. It sounds as if the one named is claiming more than he's entitled to. I fought against that Mr. Music title because I thought it would put me in a position of claiming to be a leading figure in the music world. But the studio thought otherwise. In fact, that "leading figure in the music world" angle was the one their ads and their exploitation played up.

I think it soured a lot of people on me. Pin a name on a stage or screen actor like America's Boy Friend or The Orchid Man, or Mr. Music on a singer, and he's behind the eight ball. People go to see him with a "he's-gotta-show-me" attitude. It's easy to turn such a label into a gibe. It can bounce. That Mr. Music title took in too much territory for anybody, especially me, since I know relatively little about music.

However, if a movie actor makes enough pictures, he's bound to get lucky once in a while, not only in his titles but in his material, his songs and his directors. I thought Here Comes the Groom, made in 1951, was a funny picture. Frank Capra, who directed it, starts with a good script, but if he feels

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Nowadays the hardest thing to cut down to your size is your debts.  
—HOMER PHILLIPS.

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like it, he varies it as he goes along. If an inventive mood strikes him, he's quite likely to think up something better, as he did in It Happened One Night.

He has an unusual feeling about the music in his films. He won't allow any of it in one unless it comes in naturally. He says that in real life people don't carry orchestras around with them. To his audiences it appears that a character in a Capra picture actually makes any music they hear on the sound track. If Frank wanted me to sing a song while I was riding a horse, he'd have me playing a guitar or banjo or an accordion and accompanying myself, or he'd have somebody ride beside me playing. For this reason, he's had many fights with music departments and with song writers who like to hear their songs supported by a big string orchestra. Me, I take a neutral position. But it seems to me that if it's O.K. to score a picture for music, it should also be permissible to use an unseen orchestra when somebody's singing. On the other hand, the way Capra staged the song, In the Cool, Cool, Cool of the Evening, written by Hoagy Carmichael and Johnny Mercer for the film Here Comes the Groom, helped it win the Academy Award as the best song sung in a motion picture in 1951.

One of the best things that's happened to me is a 145-pound Irish leprechaun named Johnny Burke, who's written the lyrics for such songs as Pennies From Heaven; I've Got a Pocketful of Dreams; Moonlight Becomes You; Sunday, Monday or Always; Swinging on a Star—an Academy Award winner for 1944—Annie Doesn't Live Here Anymore; and An Apple for the Teacher. Johnny had known Dixie when she worked at Fox and he'd written a song for her then called the Boop-Boop-a-Doop Trot. Later Dixie and I had a lot of laughs over that title, but in the late 1920's it was considered very jazzy.

Johnny's appearance is deceptive. He looks guileless, but he's the most enthusiastic rib artist I've ever known. A good rib artist never lets sentiment or friendship interfere with his rib. During the last World War a number of fliers from an airfield near Monterey were in Hollywood on leave. I'd done a few shows at Monterey for those fliers, had put in a little golf with them and had sat in on several jam sessions with them too. So, in an effort to return their hospitality, I invited ten or twelve of them to Hollywood to tour the studios and to attend one of my broadcasts. To climax their week in town, I threw a party for them. It was a nice party; I'd lined them up with dates, everything was going great, and they seemed to think I was a good guy. But the truth is, I was having as much fun as they were.

Burke chose that moment to have an attack of ribitis. He found two or three of my guests leaning against a bar, and asked, "Having a good time?"

"Wonderful," they said.  
"You know, of course," he told them, "that Bing just does this for publicity. Actually, he's quite a louse." His rib began to pick up pace, and he ran me down in every conceivable way. For a while they tried to laugh it off; then they began to see red. Finally they swung on him and he yelled for help.

Johnny wouldn't have minded a poke on the kisser. A genuine rib-steak artist thinks it a mark of distinction to have a black eye; this means that his rib was highly successful; but two or three sets of fists coming at Johnny at once were too many for him.

What with this and that, Burke's reputation is synonymous with that of the lad who got his kicks calling "Wolf, wolf," which brings me to the day of January 2, 1943, when my house burned down. The story has been told, but always by others. I've never told it. I had a date to play golf with a friend of mine, Dick Gibson, late in the afternoon. Then, since I wouldn't be home in time for dinner, we planned to move on to the Brown Derby. The house burned down in midafternoon and I was paged by telephone around town, but since no one knew where I was golfing, I couldn't be reached. Burke, who was a neighbor of ours then, did most of the phoning. Finally he reached me at the Derby and said, "Bing, this is Johnny. There's nothing to be concerned about, everybody's fine. Dixie and the kids are all right, but your house just burned down."

I thought it a very light rib for him and a bald approach for a guy who was supposed to be so clever at ramming home the needle. "All right, Johnny," I said. "Good luck to you too. I thought you were more adroit than that!" Then I hung up. No sooner had I sat down than the phone rang again. It was Burke once more. This time he repeated his tale with such passionate sincerity that I believed him. He reported that the fire was out and that he was with my family at Bill Goodwin's house, two doors down the street from us.

When I finished dinner I drove out to view the ruins. The house was a shell; the staircases were still there, but the roof was gone. It was during the racing season. I'd won a little on the races and I had \$2000 in cash stuck in the toe of a sport shoe in my dressing room. The ways of the human mind are peculiar. There I was with my home gutted, but as I got out of my car and walked through the ruins, I was thinking only of that loot in my boot. The firemen

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and the fire chief met me upstairs and followed me down the hall through what was left of my house. I went into my dressing room, picked up a shoe, reached in and took out the choker I'd stashed in it. I'd had a cabinet made for my shoes so that their toes would fit into slots. The fire had scorched the heels of some of my footgear, but the toes were intact.

I said good-bye to the firemen, who'd watched me, bug-eyed, at my treasure hunt, and joined my family at Bill Goodwin's. We were feeling pretty blue trying to figure where we'd live when Dave Shelly, a friend, sauntered in. He'd passed the ruins of my house on the way.

"Hi, Bing," he said brightly, "what's new?" It relieved the tension. Somebody got out a bottle of beer, we had a meal, and assumed a "so what, it was only a house" attitude. The next day we checked in at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Then we moved into one of Marion Davies' houses—one she didn't happen to be using at the time.

Johnny Burke's only trouble as a lyric writer is that, if anything, he's too literate; he hates to write anything obvious. But I remember once when his erudition paid off. A 1941 Hope-Crosby picture, *The Road to Zanzibar*, had been laid in an unidentified country and for political-good-will reasons the studio wanted Johnny to write a song in a language at which no nation could take umbrage. This might have stumped a lesser man, but to Johnny it was a breeze. He brushed up on his knowledge of Esperanto, and wrote the song in that universal language. He even made it rhyme.

It's impossible to think of Johnny without thinking of Jimmy Van Heusen too. For several years now, Jimmy and Johnny have teamed together and have produced some outstanding hits. Jimmy's real name is Chester Babcock, but he thought it so unglamorous that he jettisoned it. When Jimmy went into the song-writing business his first song was called *Shake Down the Stars*.

I like to spoof him about that song. "It's the most violently wasteful song I've ever heard," I tell him. "A guy rips down the whole firmament because some flutter-brained dame doesn't love him. He sounds like an H-bomb scientist gone nuts." But Jimmy takes all of his exercise, violent or mild, out in song writing. He abhors physical

exertion. One day I asked him to go for a walk.

"Not me," he said.

"Why not?" I asked.

"Walking's corny," he replied scornfully.

The things I find myself remembering about the people I've worked with are the small, human things, not the serious and important things. The same thing is true about the movies I've been in.

One of my favorite movies was *The Birth of the Blues*. It was made in 1941, with Mary Martin as my leading lady. The story paraphrased the career of the Original Dixieland Band and was set against a New Orleans background. In it, a song written especially for the film, *The Waiter, the Porter and the Upstairs Maid*, was buttressed by such classics as *Melancholy Baby*, *Wait Till the Sun Shines, Nelly*, and the *St. Louis Blues*; an array which was, as they say in France, formidable. But my principal recollection of that picture is the great jazz trombonist, Jack Teagarden, cast as one of the members of a band and sitting with his legs over the tail gate of a wagon—the way the New Orleans bands once played—while he made with his slip-horn. Those wagons toured the streets of the Crescent City, the blaring music advertising various bordellos. These tail-gate musicians even played on their way to and from funerals. They didn't play dirges or laments at such times. They figured the one who was gone would like something with an upbeat.

I remember *Holiday Inn* because in it Fred Astaire danced himself so thin that I could almost spit through him. In *Holiday Inn* he did one number thirty-eight times before he was satisfied with it. He started the picture weighing 140 pounds. When he finished it he weighed 126. In *Holiday Inn* I danced a little too. At least, I did a modified buck-and-wing shuffle, with off-to-Buffalo overtones. But when you're in a picture with Astaire, you've got rocks in your head if you do much dancing. He's so quick-footed and so light that it's impossible not to look like a hay-digger compared with him.

I remember a 1940 picture called *Rhythm on the River* because of Jimmy Cottrell, a prop-man pal of mine. I'd gone to school with Jimmy in Spokane, but when he left school he became a fighter and I'd lost track of

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him. In his prime, he had fought in the Hollywood stadium, taking on pugs like Mushy Callahan and other main-eventers. I ran into him again in Hollywood when he quit fighting and was looking for something to do, and I helped him land a job at Paramount as a property man. He's been there ever since.

When Rhythm on the River came along, Oscar Levant's name had become one with which to conjure in the entertainment world. Oscar was on Information Please, he'd done concert tours, he'd appeared as a soloist with some of the country's biggest orchestras. He'd written a humorous book and it had had a respectable sale. His quips and cracks were grist for the Broadway and Hollywood column mills. It so happened that in Rhythm on the River there was a character who matched Oscar's personality, so he was hired for the role.

The first day of shooting, Cottrell was busy readying his props when Levant shambled onto the set looking like a treeful of owls. He's a chain smoker and his hands were stained with nicotine. His blue serge suit was so thickly covered with tobacco ash that it almost covered the spots where he'd spilled coffee. He drinks fifty or sixty cups of coffee a day, and what with caffeine and nicotine plucking his

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The trouble with patching up a quarrel is that it may turn out as good as new. —MARY ALKUS.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

nerves like a harpist, he sleeps only in fits and starts. He's also a thorough-going hypochondriac, and his pockets are stuffed with pills and tonics. His collar is usually half open, he wears a black string necktie, and his cuffs are frayed. He won't mind my describing him this way because if he were describing himself, he'd do an even more corrosive job.

Lowering himself into a chair, he yelled for coffee, and Cottrell brought it to him. A few minutes later he yelled for more coffee. This went on for some time, while Cottrell eyed him critically. He hadn't quite dug Oscar. He was still casing him.

Finally he asked, "Who are you?"

"I'm in this picture," Oscar told him.

"What part do you play?" Cottrell wanted to know.

"I play the part of Starbuck," Oscar told him.

Cottrell shook his head as if wondering what stupidities the studio would commit next. "You're playing Starbuck, eh?"

"Yeah!" Levant said.

"I can't see you in that part," Cottrell said, and walked away, leaving Levant smoldering at having a prop man lay into him like that. Usually it's Oscar who pushes people into the grease.

Cottrell came over to me and asked, "Who's that joker over there with cigarette ash all over him who's ordering coffee like he owned the joint?"

I said, "Levant," but it meant nothing to Jimmy. It rang no bell.

"Who's Levant?" he asked.

I tried to tell him, but Jimmy is a great one for original impressions. He said, "He's not going to get much of a ripple out of me."

Several days of armed neutrality and glaring went by; then Oscar discovered that Cottrell had been a boxer. Levant's an avid boxing fan and this knowledge began to temper his ire at Jimmy's treatment. Next he found that Cottrell had been a baseball player, and next to boxing and music, Levant loves baseball. This gave them another common bond, and at the picture's end they were very buddy-buddy. It has always seemed hilariously incongruous to me that Levant, the dilettante, the sophisticate, the musician, the saturnine pundit, should establish a Damon-and-Pythias relation with an ex-pug. But to them it doesn't seem peculiar. They still correspond voluminously. It's my bet that their letters would make absorbing reading. I'd rather have their collected correspondence on my bedside table than the exchange between George Bernard Shaw and Ellen Terry.

Cottrell identifies himself to those he meets with, "I'm the fellow who taught Bergman how to box in *The Bells of St. Mary's*." Under his tutelage, Ingrid became real handy.

During my last year of high school and my first two years of college, a boy named Leo Lynn was one of my classmates at Gonzaga. Then, one day in 1931, when I was new at Paramount, I was going into the studio and I saw Leo behind the wheel of a foreign-made limousine. He was wearing a chauffeur's cap. But I recognized him right away. I couldn't forget him. He'd been a real shenanigan character in college, putting on impromptu entertainments and mimicking various actors and athletes.

When I'd said hello, I asked, "What are you doing?"

"I'm driving for the English actor, Clive Brook," he said.

"How'd you like to work for me?" I asked him.

"You've hired a man!" he said.

Brook wasn't annoyed at my theft of his chauffeur. Leo found a substitute to take his place, and Clive is so aloof in the traditional English manner that I don't think he knew Leo was gone. In addition to chauffeuring for Dixie and acting as a factotum in the Crosby household, Leo was my stand-in. Contrary to the public's understanding of such things, a stand-in doesn't have to resemble the one for whom he stands in. Leo has my skin pigmentation and he's about my height. That's all the cameraman requires.

Leo is grateful to me, too, and perhaps the best way to describe how he feels about me is to report a thing that happened when I was at Pebble Beach playing in the annual invitation tournament. Trying to do any good for yourself in that event is about as tough as doing it in the National Amateur. The Pebble Beach draws almost the same field that the National attracts and it's played over one of the world's toughest courses. I'm lucky if I qualify, let alone beat any of that field.

While I was at Pebble Beach, Leo ran into Johnny Burke in Hollywood.

"Where's Bing?" Johnny asked.

"He's up at Pebble Beach for the tournament," Leo told him.

"How do you think he'll do?" Johnny inquired.

Leo looked at him scornfully and said, "If he's feeling good he'll win it." Leo's loyalty is unreasonable and illogical, and I have been careful never to disillusion him. A man needs all the people like that he can get.

Editors' Note—This is the fifth of a series of articles by Mr. Crosby and Mr. Martin. The sixth will appear next week.

## "I Miss Our Chats, George"

"You used to have time for such nice long talks."

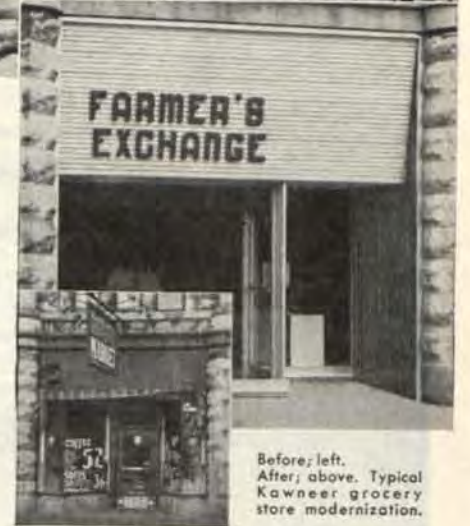


"Since you remodeled your store, filling orders takes all your time. I'm glad you're making good, but I do miss our chats, George."

George probably misses those chats, too, in a sense. But if you're in food retailing, you know time for chats means slow business. Like you, George wanted business, but even his most faithful customers were drifting away. Then George decided to call on Kawneer for help.

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Before; left. After; above. Typical Kawneer grocery store modernization.

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