

Smiling On the Radio

All I had to do when I was done was sit back and watch people come running to the

bookstores, right?

by Len Schritter

The commercial was taking way too long.

I took a deep breath and brushed away a trickle of sweat that was sliding down my left temple. My hand began to ache as I held the telephone receiver to my right ear in a death grip. All the while, the announcer's voice droned on and on as the energetic rhythm of the car dealership's jingle crackled in my ear. The past twenty seconds had seemed more like twenty hours.

Was that thing ever going to end?

It was an early July morning and my first real live attempt at being a book marketer was about to commence.

"Oh, you'll do just fine," my publisher had said a few days earlier when she telephoned me with the news of my first radio interview invitation. "Just be yourself and talk naturally. Oh, and be sure to smile. The listeners will be able to tell if you're smiling by the way you sound."

That sounded simple enough at the time. Smile. I could do that. But when I called in at promptly 6:25 a.m. on the appointed day and was put on hold and told that the host of the radio show would be right with me as soon as the commercial ended, smiling suddenly became the furthest thing from my mind. With the commercial dragging on, my

heart pounding away, and sweat dripping off my face like a sieve, it was all I could do to keep from fainting.

Was that blasted commercial ever going to end?

“How did I get into this mess?” I thought.

All I had wanted to do was write a book. That’s all. Just sit back and write about what it was like to be a Snowbird in Arizona—the interesting people, the fun times, the crazy incidents. That other stuff someone else could do. Didn’t publishing companies have marketing departments? All I had to do when I was done was sit back and watch people come running to the bookstores, right?

Wrong! I soon learned from everyone I talked to and every article I read on the subject that the number one rule of book marketing was: “Selling is the Author’s Responsibility.”

“Oh, that’s just great!” I remember thinking.

I brushed my forehead with the palm of my hand and wiped the sweat off on my pant leg. My heart pounded away as I took a deep breath. I clenched the receiver even tighter as I realized that the commercial was wrapping up. Then, the cool, calm, friendly voice of the male radio host filled my ear.

“We’re visiting today with Len Schritter, the author of a new book, *The Secret Life of a Snowbird*. Len, before we talk about your book, I understand you’re a potato farmer from Idaho. Is that right?”

My mind raced.

Say something, you idiot. It’s your turn to talk. What do I say? What do I say? I hadn’t anticipated that question.

My mouth opened and my lips moved involuntarily as I heard myself croak, “Well, Tom, I don’t know what other state I’d be from if I was a potato farmer.”

I heard the most wonderful sound on the other end of the line. Laughter! The host was laughing and chuckling at something I had said. I began to calm down.

The sweating and the pounding heart slowly subsided as the host continued, “Well, I’m sure, Len, that there are other states that grow potatoes, but none as well known as Idaho.”

More laughter.

I felt myself calming down—and we were off. I sat down and propped my feet up on the desk and began talking. Soon I’d almost forgotten that we were on the radio. Like two old friends chewing the fat, the host would ask a question and I’d answer. Invariably, that glorious laugh would permeate the receiver and I’d relax even more.

Time suddenly flew by. After ten minutes, we broke for another commercial. I found myself once again listening to another jingle, another announcer, but this time there was no sweat, no pounding heart. I couldn’t wait to get back on and talk.

Where are you? Come back! Let’s do this some more. This is fun.

As the commercial jingle was winding down, the deep, rich voice of the host crackled back through the telephone receiver.

“Today we’re talking about snowbirds—what they do, how they feel. Len Schritter, author of a new book, *The Secret Life of a Snowbird*, is filling us all in.”

I leaned back in my chair and anxiously awaited the next question.

“So, Len, I have to ask you this. How much input did your wife have on what you wrote? Was there anything in the book that she tried to get you to change?”

There it was. The question I'd been waiting for. For the last several days, I'd been rehearsing how I'd answer that question—in the car, in the shower, when shaving in front of the mirror. I was ready—and I pounced like a cat after a mouse.

“Tom, you're not going to believe this. I had this wonderful chapter written about the snowbird's best friend. It was informative. It was educational. It was uplifting. People were going to read this chapter and go out and be inspired to do great things. It was a chapter about the snowbird's best friend. But my wife wouldn't let me put it in the book.”

I stopped talking and a slight chuckle came from the other end of the line.

“Yeah?” the host replied. “And what would that be?”

I allowed a long pause before I answered, “That would be Viagra, Tom.”

A deep roll of laughter rumbled through the telephone as I sat back, enjoying the moment.

Hey, this wasn't so bad. In fact, it's kind of fun. Maybe, I'll enjoy this marketing stuff after all.

Just then, I caught a glimpse of myself in the reflection of the blank computer screen on the far side of my desk.

I was smiling.