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indicted the six vets for allegedly having planned to do, even if the specifics of the indictment were not mentioned by Hubbard and, in fact, were warned against by many speakers at the meeting.

So Al Hubbard, the Viet vet who is not really one, was able to move in as a *de facto* leader. And, as it turned out, a number of the VVAW ended up following his suggestion that they take to the streets with the crazies that night, even though the great majority of the organization remained nonviolent.

"They kiss his ass because it's black," said one disgruntled vet I spoke to.

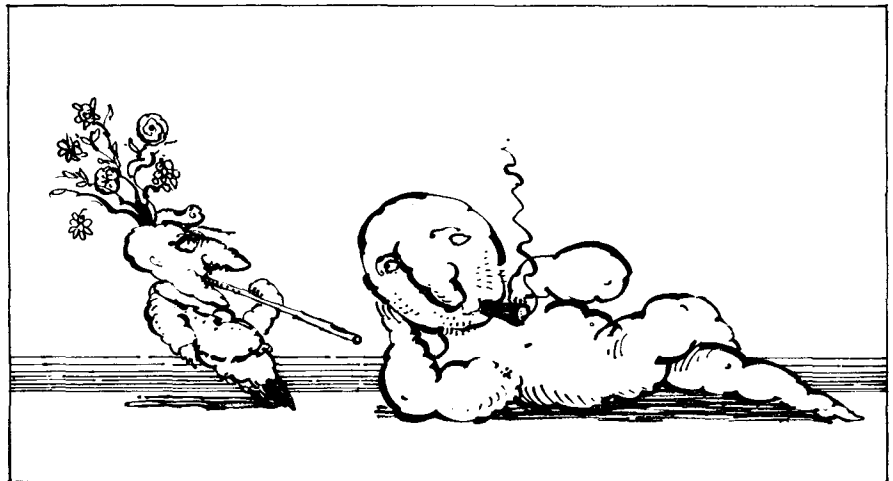
And so they did.

If Al Hubbard is not an agent-provocateur—and most vets I spoke to assured me that he was not—he may as well have been. In general terms, he urged the vets to disrupt the convention—in a way, to live up to the indictment that seeks to destroy them.

So these veterans, who now so forcefully protest the war we sent them to fight, are far from perfect. Still, their standing as opponents of the President's policy is unimpeachable. Not that you'd ever have known it from the way they

were treated at the convention. No Republican official greeted them or took note of their protests. In fact, the attitude of Republicans inside the Fontainebleau on Tuesday, as Kovic spoke in the street on the far side of a triple cordon of state highway patrolmen, was an uneasy one. Those aren't just crazies out there, those are *veterans*. Even the ever-present round of cocktail parties on the yachts docked on Indian Creek seemed to come to a halt. Goddam. *Veterans*. I'm gonna need another Martini after this.

On Tuesday and Wednesday two of the disabled vets were permitted in the convention hall with passes provided them by Congressman Pete McCloskey. As the demonstration following Richard Nixon's renomination boomed on—balloons flying, Young Voters for the President screaming—the disabled vets sat in their wheelchairs off to one side of the convention floor. Right in the middle of the demonstration they held up signs and raised fists against the war. Somebody gave a signal, and they were hurried out of the hall before so much as a single TV camera could turn their way. □



## A Very Practical Joker

BY NORMAN SCHREIBER

NEW YORK, N.Y.—"In Vietnam we have Thieu for the price of one, but it's no bargain."

In the closets of dozens of American comedians dangles the grinning skeleton of Bob Orben. In the studies of

clergymen the guidance of Bob Orben refresheth the spirit. In executive washrooms, in radio studios, in politicians' back rooms, the fruits of Bob Orben's labors are savored.

Bob Orben has been writing gags, yucks, and one-liners for the last twenty-six years. He mails two comedy newsletters—"Orben's Comedy Fillers" and "Orben's Current Comedy"—to 4,000 subscribers for as much as \$75 a year. He also writes special material and has published forty-three joke books.

The chances are that any comic who got started within the past couple of decades drew his first few acts from

one of Bob Orben's joke books. There was a famous British comedian who got his routines entirely from them. He would even say, "I was out driving my car in Jackson Heights when . . . ." College spohomores may have Kahlil Gibran, but chances are that anyone who has to speak in public has Bob Orben.

"1972 will go down in history as the year we saw nothing of Howard Hughes and everything of Burt Reynolds."

When I called Bob Orben to invite him to lunch, we discussed what we would wear for the purposes of identification.

"I'd wear a carnation," he said softly, "but I'm afraid you might kiss me. Ha-ha-ha." It wasn't until I hung up that I realized that Bob Orben had told me a joke.

We met at the dining room of a hotel in Manhattan. Orben was dressed in a conservative gray suit, white shirt, and neatly knotted tie. His sparse hair was closely cropped.

"I started when I was eighteen," Bob told me after we sat down. "I worked in a professional magic shop. We sold props for magicians, make-up, costumes, etc. There was a shop like this in most cities, and all kinds of show people would come in for supplies. Fellows would come in and ask if we had patter they could use for their acts, and we didn't. At that time books for public speakers had quotes from Shakespeare, Mark Twain, Aristophanes, all of which were totally unusable. So I thought I would put a book together."

Bob gathered all the jokes he could find, borrowed some money from his mother, and published *Bob Orben's Encyclopedia of Patter*. The book sold out in two weeks.

"There were two or three hundred of these magic shops around the country," Bob says. "They were perfect outlets."

Orben went from gathering material to writing it. His forty-three titles include: *Ad-Libber's Handbook*; *Bits, Boffs, and Banter*; *Comedy Quickies*; *Emcee's Goldmine*; *Joke Teller's Handbook*; *Patter Parade*; *333 Belly Laughs*; and—his latest—*The Encyclopedia of One-Liner Comedy*. In addition Orben wrote for Jack Paar's TV show from 1962 to 1963 and *The Red Skelton Show* from 1964 to 1970. (The most palpable evidence that he spent time in Hollywood is his air-conditioned convertible.)

"I just figured out why that hijacker wanted his ransom money in \$1,000 bills. Maybe he wanted to stop at the butcher shop on his way home."

Bob reached for a slice of bread and recalled his six years of working to-

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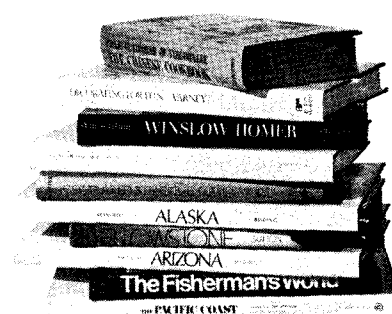
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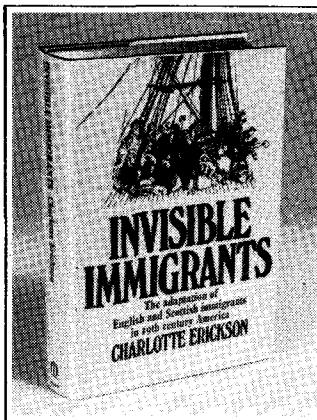
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gether with the comedian Dick Gregory.

"In 1955 I received a letter from Greg. I get a few hundred such letters a year. It went something like, 'Dear Mr. Orben, I'm just starting out as a comedian, and I use your joke books. I know I could really do well if you wrote some material for me.' So I wrote back what is almost a form response: 'I would be doing both of us a disservice if I wrote anything for you. You need material that is especially suited to you. Before that can happen you've got to find your voice, your character, your point of view. Save your money until you find your point of view.'"

"Six years later I received a telegram at two o'clock in the morning. It read: 'I have found a point of view. Please call me in Chicago at the Playboy Club. Dick Gregory.'"

"I called him, and he said, 'You and I are going places.' I have heard that phrase so many times! But I flew down on Wednesday, and we signed contracts on Monday. It was a very pleasant association."

"Did you hear about the go-go dancer who got only one silicone injection and now she's a sensation in Southern California? She leans to the far right!"

"I set myself a goal of twenty-five jokes a day," Orben confided. "I get up at six in the morning and do my reading. I get eight daily papers, and I subscribe to forty magazines. Then I write my jokes. Some days, when I'm really hot, I may do forty or fifty jokes, but the extra ones don't count toward my next day's goal. I'm completely work-oriented. I work seven days a week, and there are many years that I take no vacation. After twenty-six years of doing this, I can say that what I do I do as well as anybody in the world."

"I gave my kid a toy telephone that's so authentic, it's just like the real thing. You pick it up and you don't get a dial tone."

I asked Orben whether it is really possible to write new jokes.

"Oh, sure," he said. "New things are happening all the time, and they lead to new jokes. A fellow called up not so long ago and asked what I thought of Nixon in China. So I told him, 'I don't know, any country that has eight-hundred-million people and claims Ping-pong is its favorite indoor sport can't be trusted.' Ha-ha-ha."

"It's sheer nonsense," he continued, "that there are only three basic jokes or seven basic jokes. There may be only a few hundred formulas or a few thousand formulas—but there are new formulas."

"What," I asked, "is a formula?"

"It's how the joke is constructed. Ex-

aggeration is one formula. Minimization is another. There's characterization—for example, Jack Benny's stinginess. Another formula is, 'I've got good news, and I've got bad news'—that's a catch phrase. A few years ago there was Don Adams's 'Would you believe . . .'. The use of funny words is a formula. Words with a lot of esses or k-sounds are funny—Jack Benny's 'Cucamonga' and W. C. Fields's 'sassafras.' Currently, 'dumdum' and 'dingaling' are funny words."

"Somebody is always complaining in our office. Yesterday the receptionist came up to me and said, 'I want to get something off my chest.' I said, 'What's that?' She said, 'The sales manager.'"

"I realized in the Sixties," Orben said, over salad, "that the really big market was no longer show business but the worlds of business and politics." Corporations use jokes, he explained, "to humanize themselves, snipe at their competition, explain a bad year or point up a good one." Among Orben's subscribers are IBM, Ford, Honeywell, Anaconda, and General Motors.

"In fact," Orben went on, "I was the first person to be retained by a major political party to write material for a top-level candidate in a national election."

I asked who that was, but he wouldn't say. I asked him for the names of other politicians he's written for, even dead ones, but he wouldn't reveal a single name.

I couldn't stop wondering whether some of the political wit I had been hearing recently was really Bob Orben's. Talking about George McGovern and the then-upcoming Democratic Convention, Harry Dent, a White House political adviser, had said, "Some people around here are about to wee-wee in their pants, waiting for him to get the nomination." And the dignified Republican Senator Hugh Scott described McGovern as, "the triple-A candidate—acid, amnesty, and abortion." Did Orben write those lines?

"President Nixon's economic game plan calls for unemployment to be in the neighborhood of 5 per cent. The only trouble is, if you're black, brown, or red—you can't get into that neighborhood."

"In politics," he reflected, "jokes are no longer a two-minute warm-up. A joke is a potent weapon. We have so little idea of what public personalities are like that we often judge them on the basis of jokes told about them. You can take a person's theoretical weakness and keep hammering away at it until the public agrees this attribute is a weakness. Certainly, the line, 'Would you buy a used car from this man?' helped defeat Nixon in 1960."



"The nature of the joke is to bring them down so that the audience can relate to them. It makes the speaker *one of the guys*. Whatever you want to say about Nixon, you couldn't call him one of the guys. That's McGovern's problem, too."

"Did you ever get the feeling that this might be George Plimpton's week to run the country?" □

Norman Schreiber, who lives in Brooklyn, makes his living writing—usually about rock music and photography.



## No Shoot-out in Vienna

BY ALAN LEVY

VIENNA, Austria—In 1971 Munich police opened fire on a bandit outside a bank, killing him—and a hostage he had taken—while a second bandit held four more persons hostage inside. As it turned out, Law and Order in Munich was just tuning up for the 1972 Olympics.

Between the two tragedies, however, the lesson of the first was put to good use in averting another disaster—not in Germany, but in Austria. On Thursday, November 4, 1971, three Viennese bandits serving long sentences in the maximum-security penitentiary at Stein an der Donau were brought before a magistrate there for a periodic review of their records. On their way into the hearing, flashing a knife they had fashioned from a teaspoon, the prisoners managed to disarm their two guards and to seize as hostages not only the guards but also the judge and a young mother who worked as his court stenog-

*Alan Levy, author of Rowboat to Prague, was a hostage to history very briefly on a traffic island in the Czech capital at dawn on August 21, 1968, as Russian tanks rolled into the city.*



## Ana Maria is always a little hungry

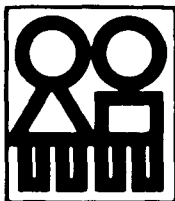
ANA MARIA ANDRADE, SOUTH AMERICAN, AGE 6. Mother dead. Father deserted. Child lives with sick grandmother who also cares for four other grandchildren and baby who boards with her. Total income for 7 people \$9.25 per month. Two meager meals a day . . . coffee for breakfast, sometimes bread. Lunch—rice, beans and corn meal. Dinner—none. Never milk or meat. Children always hungry. Live in mud hut on top of hill. One small room. No facilities. No beds. Two mattresses, 2 blankets, 2 sheets—all in poor condition. Used clothing from other poor families. Grandmother grieves for grandchildren she cannot decently care for. Help to Ana Maria means help to entire family, medical care included.

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