Television

‘I Think I Ought to Mention

By MILLARD LAMPELL

In 1950, I began to keep a journal with a title borrowed from Dostoevsky: "Notes From Underground." In it I recorded the ironic, sometimes bizarre, sometimes ludicrous experience of living in the twilight world of the blacklist. The last entry is dated 1964. I am not by nature an injustice collector. I think martyrdom is for the saints and self-pity is a bore. So, at the Television Academy Award ceremonies, when I went up to accept an Emmy for my Hallmark drama, "Eagle in a Cage," it was with some surprise that I heard myself saying, "I think I ought to mention that I was blacklisted for ten years."

At the press conference afterward, a reporter asked why I had said it. I had to stop and consider, and a line of the philosopher Santayana's swam into my mind, "All those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

The Emmy broadcast brought a flood of letters, including a number that asked in puzzlement, "What was this blacklist?"

By 1950, I had been a professional writer for eight years, including the time spent as a sergeant in the Air Force that produced my first book, "The Long Way Home." I had published poems, songs and short stories, written a novel and adapted it as a motion picture, authored a respectable number of films, radio plays and television dramas, collected various awards, and seen my Lincoln cantata, "The Lonesome Train," premiered on a major network, issued as a record album, and produced in an edge page condensation.

Then, quietly, mysteriously and almost overnight, the job offers stopped coming.

Free-lance writing is a fiercely competitive arena, and when work bypasses you and goes to others, the logical conclusion is that they have more talent. At the same time, however, there was another disturbing note. I began to have increasing difficulty in getting telephone calls through to producers I had known for years.

It was about three months before my agent called me in, locked her door, and announced in a tragic whisper, "You're on the list."

It seemed that there was a list of writers, actors, directors, exec designers, and even trapeze artists, choreographers and clowns who were suspected of Communist leanings or prejudice, and never thought to give a damn who the sponsoring organization was. Nobody ever tried to tell me what to say.

Years later, before the Senate Committee, I found that period haphazardly reported and presented as evidence that I had taken part in a subversive plot to bring riots and ruin to my native land. I ordered to account for my life and to give the names of everyone I could ever remember having seen at those bygone benefits. Considering privacy of belief to be a constitutional right of all Americans, I refused.

Even though I appeared at a closed session of the committee, it didn't take very long for the news to get around. The blacklist slammed doors completely shut.

In the late summer of 1952, I gave myself a deadline of three months, resolving that if I couldn't earn a living as a writer, I would pack up my family, return to the city where I was born, and go back to work in a dye factory.

Excerpt from my journal:

This morning, nine days before the deadline, the director V. calls to offer me a job writing a documentary film about an old boom town in North Dakota. He is aware that I am blacklisted, but is willing to take a chance. Apologies for not being able to give me a name credit. Disgusted by the blacklist, he will, as a protest, not ask me to use a pseudonym. The credits will not mention any writer.

If the predominant tone of the era was fear, there was also moving evidence of courage and compassion.

In today's mail, a letter from the prominent actor C. Some time ago he starred in a radio play of mine, but I really do not know him very well. He is a rock-ribbed conservative, but in the envelope I find a $300 check and a brief note. "I have a feeling that life is getting pretty rough in the days ahead. This is a gift to use when you need it. Such things are going around. I return the check with thanks and a dignity which I probably cannot afford."

Leading through the journal, I come upon an entry that is pure Gogoliana:

The television writer L. stops me on the street with a nightmare tale. A year ago, having no political activity in his past, but feeling he might become the victim of some repressive act--
benefits for Spanish refugees, striking Kentucky coal miners, and starving Alabama sharecroppers.

We were all children of the Depression, who had seen bone-aching poverty, hummed freights across country, shared gunky-sack blankets with the dispossessed and the disdemeaned. We had learned our songs from Gaunt, unemployed Carolina cotton weavers and evicted Dust Bowl drifters. Such as they were, our politics were a crude, hand-me-down cross between Eugene Debs and the old Wobblies. A primitive, folk version of what Franklin D. Roosevelt was saying in his fireside chats. We were against hunger, war and silicosis, against bankers, landlords, politicians and Dixie deputty sheriffs. We were for the working stiff, the underdog, and the outset, and those were the passions we poured into our songs. We were all raw off the track, and to New York's left-wing intellectuals we must have seemed the authentic voice of the working class. Singing at their benefit kept us in soup and guitar-string money.

Then came the army, and the week after I was discharged I appeared on Town Hall of the Air teamed with Bill Mauldin, debating two generals on the subject, "What The GI Wants." It was a natural set-up for audience sympathy, enlisted men against the brass. I got almost two thousand fan letters, and overnight found myself a kind of celebrity, in demand as a public speaker. I spoke anywhere that the subject was relevant, no given a written certificate of clearance.

In due time, L. was found to be free of taint, and given his document, only to discover that he was no longer able to get work. It appears that in the course of proving him, the investigators questioned a number of network executives. He assured them that it was only a routine check and L. was not under suspicion. Their reaction was skeptical. "Where there's smoke, there's fire," L. haunts the waiting room of the networks, a guilt ghost desperately banishing his certificate. He has not worked in eight months.

In those first years, the two major sources of work were other writers suffering from a creative blacklist and desperate producers with deadline and budget trouble. I spent four months filling the assignments of a well-known writer who found himself unable to face his tried typewriter. It was a lucky and profitable arrangement that ended when he appeared one midnight and haggardly told me that his analyst had advised him that signing his name to my work was giving him an even deeper psychological problem. "He says I'm losing my identity."

By taking everything that came our way, a few dozen of us on the East Coast and in Hollywood were working sporadically and managing to survive. For every blacklisted writer who anonymously kept at his trade, ten fell by the wayside. If you could turn out a feature film in a couple of weeks or an hour television play to get calls from who would choleric your play on television you can't say any can't kid me, I'd style anywhere." S. became my new another name. Sor not, my protests avail, and I wasn' to feel amused or en

The producer T. the thrill of a ma studio threw the f a script back at "It stinks. Do me a favor, give me a blacklisted writer."

It was a scramble myself writing all I'd never tried before training films, traying Broadway pl cho s to go thro in many ways it skills and expanded invention.

The actor C. i lunch and propose the play script for one of the network him and his wife plain that I am b what he would ter the job, I will he pseudonym. He in name will be on as my warnings cause trouble, tell he considers the bis repugnant.

I write the plot, is delighted with it personally it turns out to be a brisk success in el duction who glance hands it back C. protests that he reads it only to "Look, even if it w would be lousy."

Sobers but stuf s me the job an sign my work w name. Only it will the name of an wh who can appear at fferences and refuge some searching, I young writer who col write, and wh face will represent.

In the end, I was four different peequing a Swedish nam sensitive art-house there were two or writers willing to si when the network o named a name wit and a list of reputat I read Kafka, prepa me for the livin in the strange nearness. A script a major award, and the queer feeling of"

Of course, there w avoid all the difficulty

EMMY ENCORE—Simone Signoret, in a repeat of her award-winning performance, plays opposite George Maharis in "A Small Rebellion" on "Bob Hope Presents" Wednesday, 9 P.M., on N.B.C.
I Was Blacklisted

Writer Millard Lampell: "Quietly, mysteriously and almost overnight, the job offers stopped coming"

in five days for a twenty-fifth of your former price, you had a chance.

It was a lot tougher for the directors and the actors. They couldn't work without being present in person. One brilliant clown who has since become the toast of Broadway and Time magazine used to go around roaring, "I'm Z., the man of a thousand faces, all of them blacklisted!"

The doorbell rings, and I find myself confronted by the well-known character actor, S. In the last decade he has appeared in more than fifty Western movies. Blacklisted now, he is peddling Christmas cards house-to-house. He displays his wares, and I regretfully explain that I can't afford to send cards this year. He slits for a cup of coffee, and reminisces about Gary Cooper and Gene Autry.

By the mid-1960's, the situation had eased a bit. A sympathetic fledgling producer, employing the talent of the blacklisted writers, came up with two extremely successful network children's adventure series. And the word was getting around that in broad such a Hollywood always appear before the committee and purge oneself. There were two lawyers who specialized in arranging this, one in New York and one in Hollywood. The established fee was $5,000, for which one got expert advice in composing a statement of one's qualifications, avowing that, being an artist, one was naive about the devious ways of politics and had been the dupe of diabolical forces. One was also required to offer the names of former friends and acquaintances who were the real subversives. If one knew no such names, the lawyer would obligingly supply some, in one case arguing away the qualms of a famous choreographer who was anxious to clear himself but reluctant to become an informer with the reassuring thought, "Hell, they've all been named already, so you're not really doing them any harm. They can't be killed twice."

I find a whole section of my journal devoted to those who sought to purge themselves, pathetic case histories of the anatomy of panic:

K. has known the playwright for twenty years and experienced with self-abasement and the need for absorption.

Walking down Broadway, someone catches my elbow from behind. It is R., whom I have known for fifteen years, and who recently appeared as a 'co-operative witness' before the Committee. He asks plaintively why I passed him without saying hello, and I explain that I didn't see him. He shakes his head, "No, no, you stared right at me." He grimaces. "I don't blame you. I'm disgusting. Do you think I'm disgusting?" I am not particularly proud of the fact that I nodded yes and walked away. Who appointed me his judge? He's as much a victim as the rest of us.

In 1960, what seemed to be a wide crack appeared in the wall of the blacklist. I was offered the job of writing a film in London, working with a renowned Hollywood director who had fled a committee subpoena. It was a suspense film of which I think, considerable artistic quality, and despite the fact that our names were on it, American distribution rights were purchased by a major Hollywood company. When the first publicity

Actually, blacklisting last longest in broadcasting. By 19 my cantata "The Lonesome Trail" was beginning to be performed again in schools and colleges. In 1962, I got my first name credit on a film for a Hollywood ma studio, without profit lines or pay. But it was not until 1967 that David Susskind and Don Mill hiking Talent Associates approached me to write a script for their CBS series, "East Side/West Side." I said I wouldn't consider doing it without credit, and they answered unhesitatingly, "Of course." The play I wrote was called "No Hiding Place." It was about a Negro family moving from a white suburb. The first time name had appeared on the honor screen in more than a decade, script won half a dozen awards and the network scheduled a special repeat broadcast.

George Schiefer, director of Hallmark's Hall of Fame, happened to see it, and had his assistant look up my name in telephone book. He asked if I would accept a commission to write an original drama for the network. I said yes, and the result was "A Day in the Family," a teleplay based on my own experiences. It won a Peabody Award, and several of the principal roles were given to Negro actors. The first time a Negro was on a national network drama since the blacklist.

The blacklist is a thing of the past, and I am grateful to those who worked behind the scenes to make it possible to write again."

Bob Green
Strange Things in Red Rocks

By VAL ADAMS

The "Bell Telephone Hour," which believes there will be a
later this fall, filled its Easter television program the oth
day in the Red Rocks amphitheater, 10 miles west of Den
er, Colo. In the huge outdoor arena covered with grass for
years, the forces of nature, the happenings were unusual, ev
little mystery.

The Bell System had engaged the Mormon Tabernacle Choir
to sing selections from Handel's "Messiah." From headquarters in
Salt Lake City, Utah, 225 choir members were sent by special
train (they were to fly until the windows were stuck) to Denver
and then on to Red Rocks. Between talent and production crew (10 film camer
including one in a helicopter), the Bell System had spent months in working
out logistics. The only question was whether it might come up rain on the day of the
rning. In a nonsectarian way, Ms Bell reportedly sought special

When the morning of filming the sky was overcast and threatening. The Mormon Tabernacle Choir ar
red Rocks about 1 P.M. and, conforming to custom, uttered a prayer before it started to re
rse. During the prayer the suppliant petitioned for fair weather.

A moment later there was a clap of thunder and a downpour.
"It looked to me that we would have to do a show on Noah's Ark instead of Handel's "Messiah,"" said a Bell representative.

The rain poured but it did not disturb the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. One male member sat in the open, umbrella overhead, writ
ning. Two others, sheltered by the overhang of a huge rock, played chess. The other 322 Mor
mons nonchalantly nibbled on their box lunchers. The hard-bitten television crew shivered in the rain
and cursed the elements.

In an hour the rain ceased. "The weather cleared beautifully and there was a great big sun up in the sky," said Bell's man.

Rehearsal went forward and in dazzling daylight the show was filmed in glorious color. Before nightfall the Mormon Tabernacle Choir got back into its eight buses and headed off in the sunset to
Denver and the return train to Salt Lake City.

WRONG AUSPICIES

There was a fight on television last Monday night in which Joe
Torres retained his light heavy
ot against Eddie Cot
On ABC in the program the TV announcer said that Cot
ton, who is 46 years old, was in

great condition because he did not smoke or drink. The broadcast was sponsored by Consolidated Cigar and Schaefer beer.

CHANNEL 13 IMPACT

There were some interesting revelations in the study of Channel 13 that was issued last week. The report on the impact of the educational station in the metropolita
New York area was compiled by Louis Harris and Associates, who went around asking viewers all sorts of questions.

One question asked was "How many viewers had spent their spare time in the last week. Twenty-five different activities were listed, in
ccluding "lazed around doing nothing." Well, sir, 25 per cent of the total viewers in the sample said they "lazed around doing nothing." And 30 per cent of Channel 13 viewers did the same thing. Are Channel 13 viewers lazier than others?

But Channel 13 viewers shoot less pool than others. Ten per cent of the total viewers "went bowling or played pool," but only 6 per cent of Channel 13 viewers were engaged in such plebeian pastimes.

The Harris study also observed that Channel 13 was reaching a lot more older than younger viewers and that this was a weakness over the long haul. Maybe Channel 13 needs Soupy Sales.