

# opinion/editorial

## Uncle Walter's last broadcast inspires nostalgia

It probably won't settle in until late this afternoon. When Americans come home today they will find that the "Man Who Came to Dinner" for the last 19 years really has taken his leave.

"Those who've made anything of this, have made too much," said Walter Cronkite on his last broadcast as anchorman for the "CBS Evening News" Friday. "Old anchormen don't fade away, you see, they just come back for more."

With a twinkle in his eye and a coyishly upturned smile, Walter passed the baton to the highly capable, but more austere, approach of Dan Rather. Walt's probably right, people did make too much of his stepping down. Some tributes sound more like eulogies, and, after all, as a workhorse and institution at CBS, we will undoubtedly be seeing that reassuring, paternal mug on the screen again before we know it.

But why did arch rival ABC take out full page ads in major publications to thank Cronkite for his contributions in the industry? Though ABC's Roone Arledge has been critically tampering with the foundation that Walter built, it still is a stirring tribute that gives rise to the notion that true greatness in one's field can transcend competition.

Walter started with 15-minute newscasts, back in the days when network news was treated more like a necessary nuisance and visual aids were primitive. Perhaps it was the dynamics of the 1960s that enabled a trustable hero like Cronkite to emerge. Those first years of Walter's reign years it might be noted that saw rugged rating competition with Huntley and Brinkley on NBC saw man's first ventures into space, the first televised war, the growth of effective civil and women's rights movements, three shocking assassinations, a mind-boggling growth in technology, and a mass questioning of all the value the country had previously upheld. If ever we needed an honest voice to explain things, this was the time.

I remember watching Walter during this time, most likely because the "CBS Evening News" segued "The Flintstones." But nevertheless his impact was there. He seemed to share my childhood fascination with the space program, and he was the unanimous choice as commentator when the television was wheeled into the grade-school classroom to view the launches of the Gemini and Apollo programs.

I also remember viewing the newscast one day in 1967 when the coy Cronkite introduced a piece on the emergence of a new subculture in California, dubbed "hippies." About a year later I was awakened in a Chicago hotel room by the television blaring full volume in the next

room. It was an emotional but determinedly professional Cronkite reporting on the assassination of Robert Kennedy. While on family vacation in 1969, all frantic timetables were dropped to find the nearest television set where Walter, in his most distinguished glory, commanded our earthly connection with Neil and Buzz on the moon.

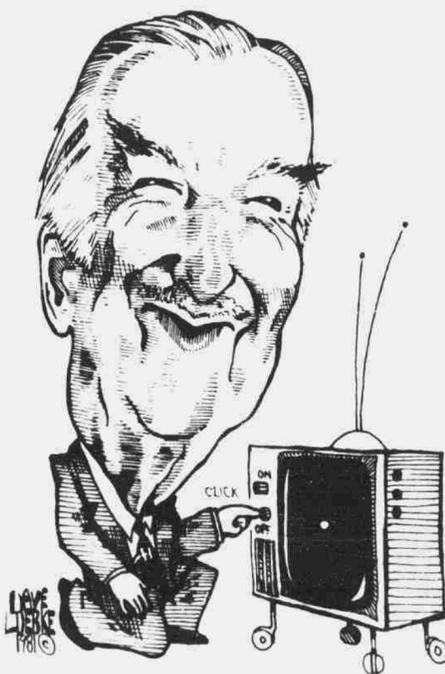
Like many people, my network news viewing has become sporadic at best. Then why did people like myself or even less news-interested persons feel the sense of obligation to catch Walter's last stand? Part of it comes for the reason people turned in the last episode of "The Fugitive," "Gunsmoke" or even "Escape from Gilligan's Island," and that is our fascination with finality and transition in the fairy-tale world of television.

Another reason is that Cronkite is the only person many of us have known in that time slot, since television started reaching real saturation levels when Walter began as anchorman. We tend to become temporarily flushed with instant nostalgia at times like this.

The final newscast was actually rather uneventful and his closing note was the essence of humbleness. But for this, the first real television generation, it was that rare event, a scheduled opportunity to bid farewell to one of the few institutions the industry has produced. We may expect a similar, if slightly less reverent, treatment when late night television says goodbye to Johnny Carson.

With all the press Cronkite received of late, the words "fatherly," "Uncle" and "old friend" are always close by his name. Well, he won't be around to bounce us on his knee and tell us about civil unrest in far-away lands anymore. And as the country crawls off his trusted lap, one could be excused for turning on the news tonight and saying, "Hey, it really is a jungle out there."

Casey McCabe



## A midnight stroll through scrambling Manhattan

Why not. You've done it in Corpus Christi, and you've done it in Toledo, and you've done it in Beverly Hills. There's nothing that says you can't do it in New York.

So you set out to wander the town at night. It's not such an exotic pastime, but it has brought you pleasure in so many towns so many times before, it has become part of your traveling timetable. Just once, before you leave a place, you head away from the room you have bought for the night, and walk the streets to see what you will find."

### greene

In New York, though, it feels unusual. Maybe it's because nobody seems to just wander in Manhattan every one has some place to go, some place specific, and it always appears as if they're 15 minutes behind. So when you begin your meandering walk, you feel as if you're the only one without a destination.

The nicest thing about New York is that it always makes you feel like such a hillbilly. You figure it has the same effect on people who've lived here for 20 years there's something about the town that dwarfs even the most ambitious and aggressive of men and women. You've never met anyone yet who doesn't act as if, in some way, the city is bigger than even their biggest dreams.

Other cities are brawny and appalling. But for all the time you have spent in Chicago and Los Angeles and Atlanta, the palpable difference in New York strikes you every time. You head for Rockefeller Center, and the skating rink is lit in the night. The ice is pure white, and the skaters cut slices along it as they twirl to the music coming from the loudspeakers.

You are not alone here. There are others hanging over the railings, watching, and the men and women on the ice laugh, a joy on their faces that has as much to do with where they are as what they are doing. They could skate on a frozen pond anywhere in America, but to do it in the middle of Manhattan on a chilly night, while all around

them the city is hurrying about its evening business that brings a special grin.

You stare for awhile, and then you wander on. At a street corner, as you wait for the light, a man and woman are arguing. You eavesdrop; they are from another town, here on a trip, and their anger is fierce. If you had to guess, though, you would say that they would be calm by morning, and that when they do look back on it later, it will be that "fight they had in New York", adding luster to a commonplace squabble.

This is the one town in America where one really is best advised to make dinner reservations, no matter how humble the restaurant he is looking for. You will have room service later; now you stop in three or four places at random, and even though they are all crowded, there are seats at the bar.

So you order a beer, and lean back and look around you just as if you were in Omaha. A beer at each place, and a smack of overheard conversation. At one restaurant a man and his family are waiting in the bar for their table to open up in the dining room. He is telling his teenaged daughter that he bought his watch at Tiffany's in 1949. Tiffany's, he tells her, will repair only its own watches, and tomorrow he is going to find out if they will take one that is more than 30 years old.

He bets they will, he is saying, even though his watch is old and broken, it is a Tiffany watch, and he says they will accept it and make it work. His daughter is either bored or doesn't understand, but the father's message is clear enough; he was traveling in 1949 and it was a big deal when he bought the watch, and now he is traveling, all this time later, and New York is still a special place to him. He could have the watch repaired back home, but he wouldn't miss taking it into Tiffany's for cash or gold.

You finish your beer at the fourth restaurant, and when you return to the streets they are still crowded. New York isn't the only American town that stays crowded at night, although there aren't many; but this is the only place where the people behave as if they are still busy at this late hour. Other places, you will see them slow down after dark, they will stroll instead of scramble, but not

here. Everyone seems to have an appointment, and they look straight ahead, getting to the next place so they can have a jump on getting to the next.

There is a concrete plant stand at 50th and Madison, and you sit on its edge. Several people glance sideways at you, and you realize that you are the only person who is just sitting and watching. But that's OK, if you can do it in Salt Lake City you can do it in New York, and no one's going to arrest you. You sit back and look around you, and it's better than any play you could have selected on Broadway.

Maybe that's the trick here; for all the attractions the city brags about, the best one is that you can just sit back and watch it all for free. Even that could get old, you guess, and become something less than special. But it's not going to happen this evening, not on this New York night.

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