

Liz Smith



The wild man of Texas

NEW YORK — Whom the gods wish to destroy, they first call promising, noted the only recently late Cyril Connolly.

When this columnist was just a wet-behind-the-ears journalism undergrad at the University of Texas, the Big Man On Campus was the promising John Bryson, editor of the school magazine. Being promising never hurt Big John. He catapulted to success overnight when Life magazine picked up on his expose of college cheating methods, and promptly hired him away from the campus. Bryson went on to make journalism history as a new kind of photographer-reporter, and the Hunter Thompson of the '50s and '60s is still going strong.

At one of the Cold War's crucial moments, Bryson was the only photographer near Russia's Khrushchev and he dropped his camera, turned reporter and scooped the world. He took the famous picture of Ernest Hemingway walking down a road in Idaho kicking a can, and the movie stars who fell before his lens compose a roster of greats. Stars who wouldn't spit near reporters — Kate Hepburn, for instance — have bowed to the Bryson charm. Two weeks ago he was hanging around in Helsinki with the hard-to-please Charlie Bronson.

WAIT FOR IT! Now Bryson will be the only photographer allowed access to the Richard Nixon-David Frost TV inquisition, which begins March 22 in San Clemente and films for two weeks in 12 two-hour sessions on consecutive Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. (You'll see the boiled-down results in four weekly airings, starting May 4. So far 70 countries have bought Frost's exclusive.) Only Nixon, Frost, three TV cameramen and John Bryson will be there.

The top secret goings on, the high level security, the signed letters of confidentiality, are all part of this year's big media event — Frost has absolute control. Nixon has no idea what Frost's questions will be, has no say-so over final editing, and cannot request any changes after he wings it. In fact, the first time Nixon will be able to see how he fared with Frost will be on

the air. It's one of the most unbelievable, ironclad contracts ever drawn up.

MONEY MAKES IRON FLOAT: Frost has never discussed what he is paying Nixon for this unprecedented public appearance. At dinner parties in the social set frequented by Nixon's agent, Irving (Swiftly) Lazar, they say the ex-President will walk away with \$600,000.

Frost and Bryson flew to San Clemente to shape up final arrangements, and Frost is headquartered in L.A.'s Beverly Hilton Hotel. Bryson, who lived for years in Malibu, is back in New York with his lady love, actress Nancy Guild. (Now that she is divorced from producer Ernie Martin, it can be told, Bryson and Guild are madly in love.)

Bryson says in San Clemente he was told Nixon would only pose for only five or 10 minutes, but Bryson ended up with two full half-hour sessions. Here's Bryson on his exclusive:

"Of course, everybody out there still calls him "Mr. President," and if you think of him as a broken man, hiding in exile, you're wrong. He looks incredibly well. He is fit, tan, not limping, and seemed cheerful. Unlike many of his moments in the White House, he was completely at ease. I had photographed him a number of times for Life, and he remembered me.

"Rosemary Woods is right there, too, working in the office next to Nixon's. I had never met her before. She is a much better-looking woman than her pictures, and she is another one who seems to have weathered Watergate well. I didn't see Mrs. Nixon, but the ex-president said she is recovering nicely from her stroke."

Bryson is not someone you've never seen before, you know. He played the Texas villain in Steve McQueen's "The Getaway." He has come a long way from Amarillo, Tex. He is a sexy virile wild man — the first male I'd ever seen daring enough to wear a jump suit open to the waist with gold chains hanging down on his matted chest hair, in Texas.

SOMETHING COMPLETELY ELSE: The actress who'll play Lois Lane, girl reporter, in the upcoming movie "Superman" will be the unknown Ann Archer, of the TV series "Seventh Avenue." Ann is the daughter of actress Margery Lord, Danny Thomas' wife in the old series "Make Room For Daddy" . . . That good-looking young actor Martin Sheen of "Catch 22," "Badlands," "The Cassandra Crossing," and Emmy-nominated for TV's "The Execution of Private Slovik" has suffered a heart attack in the Philippines where he, Marlon Brando and Dennis Hopper are trying to make Francis Ford Coppola's ill-fated "Apocalypse Now." The movie was almost wiped out by a typhoon: Now this. They are shooting around Martin, hoping he'll be back to work soon.

"Sex has become one of the most discussed subjects of modern times. The Victorians pretended it didn't exist. The moderns pretend nothing else exists," said Archbishop Fulton Sheen.

Hollywood's hottest rumor (I can't prove it!) Claudine and Andy may remarry. Please don't say Claudine and Andy who?