

MRS. BROGAN

By Fred Hobbs

Now perilously close to my 80th birthday, like many of my age-related peers I am not sure if I aged (and so far continue to age) gracefully or not. So, I hesitate to offer an opinion on the secret to obtaining that grace. But, a half century ago, I encountered a woman who seemed to have done so while spending the last years of her life in a most peculiar circumstance.

She was Mrs. Brogan. She lived in, of all places, a radio station, Denver's KDEN. The station was owned by legendary Denver radio and TV on-air personality turned popular newspaper columnist Gene Amole and his business-savvy partner, Ed Koepke.

The station was located atop Ruby Hill in southwest Denver overlooking the South Platte River. Today, the area includes a park, especially liked by snowboarders in the winter and kite flyers in season. The original transmitter tower still stands there, now used by Colorado Public Radio. Back in 1960, though, Ruby Hill was known principally for its weeds, surrounding rather seedy dwellings some of which seemed to house some decidedly shady characters. At night it was understandably a pretty scary place.

Figuratively limping back from an ill-fated venture in Wyoming, I was hired to host a six-hour all night radio show on KDEN. From midnight to 6 a.m., I was the king of Ruby Hill, which is to say I was all alone, broadcasting popular music on the AM station, monitoring the automated FM classical outlet and a taped background music service. Did I say all alone?

Oh, no. On my first night on the air, already a little spooked at the surroundings and apprehensive starting a new job on one of Denver's most popular radio stations, I heard the sound of something or someone moving about in the area adjacent to the record library. While a record was playing, I cautiously peeked around the corner only to see a white-haired little lady who looked to be about in her 80s, in bathrobe and slippers shuffling down the hall.

It seems that Gene and Ed and the announcer on the shift before me had done a good job of acquainting me with the station's operation and my duties, but had neglected to introduce me to...Mrs. Brogan. Not knowing really how to react, I believe I just said "hello". She smiled and said cheerfully, "I'm Mrs. Brogan and I live in the little apartment across the hall." The record was running out, so I had to hurry back to the studio. Meantime, Mrs. Brogan had retreated to her apartment.

I had to wait until the early morning disc jockey showed up for his shift to find out, as radio's Paul Harvey used to say, "the rest of the story." It seems that when Amole and Koepke bought the station, one major caveat came with the deal. They had to agree that Mrs. Brogan, the mother-in-law of one of the original owners, could stay there as long as she could live independently.

Amole was especially fond of brushing off the many would-be broadcast consultants who wanted him to hire them to advise on running the station. When they came to view the facilities, they would inevitably ask what's behind that door and he would reply: "Oh, it's just Mrs. Brogan."

They were aghast that the stations, especially the classical music one, would be housed in such an "unprofessional" setting. It was a convenient point at which to send them packing.

Amole and the radio station staff often had hearty laughs recounting that New York-based pomposity and were tickled to continue to refer to Mrs. Brogan as our "house mother." And if, for a time, at night, I was the king of Ruby Hill, she was definitely the queen.