

Answers and Problems

03-24-2021 4 by Harry Zirkelbach

And she said to him,
“Before you speak, I’ll answer your question.”

Certainly that has been said to you. It can be unsettling.
Someone claiming they can read your mind.

Answers by themselves are truly meaningless. “No.” “I have a headache”
“That’s the best you ever have done, and it stinks.” “I don’t know.”
“You better have a better excuse than that!”

While perhaps intriguing, answers provide only a hint of information.

Which recalls for me, some of the great “Answer” men, all TV humorists,
beginning with **Steve Allen**, then **Ernie Kovacs**.

Finally, perfection may have been reached when in 1964 **Johnny Carson**
introduced **Carnac the Magnificent**. Here Carson wore the most outlandish
of costumes; huge feathered hat, flowing cape, pendants and jewelry befitting
the great soothsayer, sage, seer, Walmart Greeter. Carson emerging from
behind the curtain and a hint of fragrant mists of the ancient fakers of India.

This was introduced bombastically by Carson’s side-man and announcer,
Ed McMahon, the first of two props needed for his skit;
the other prop, the sealed envelopes.

You remember those promises.

“No one knows the content of these envelopes, hermitically sealed,
kept in a #2 mayonnaise jar on Funk and Wagnall’s porch.
Yes, none know the contents of these envelopes, but you, on your borderline
divine and mystical way, will ascertain the answers
having never seen the questions.”

As magic, it was overwhelming, and hilarious; McMahon had trouble restraining his
laughter, adding to the studio and home audience’s enjoyment.

On being handed each envelope, Carson would hold it to his left forehead,

announce the Answer, which McMahon would often repeat loudly, to Carson's feigned annoyance. Then quickly tear off one end of the envelope, blow into that torn end, pull out the Index Card, read the question. Not all were considered hilarious by the audience. Should the joke fail, Carnac would bless the audience with some Middle East Curse, as "May your son become goalie for a nude hockey team."

Questions and replies were brief, simple, generally hilarious, and well received.
A few favorites.

"Hop Sing." "What do you call a prison for a one legged men?"

"34-26-38-17" "How do you describe a girl who has something extra."

"Lawrence Welk and a Crowbar" "Name two things that can soften your brain."

"Sitting Bull" "Describe a talk show."

"UCLA" "What you see when the smog lifts"

"Over 105" "Tea Party age when all will begin to receive Social Security."

In retirement, Carson never gave an interview with reporters. Instead, imitating **Carnac** he provided a pre-typed list of ten answers. Included,

"Yes I did."

There's no truth to that rumor."

"I did, twice, both times on Saturday."

"It happened to a friend of mine, and its a story I'll never forget."

"I can't do either, bur prefer the first."

'Miss you Johnny.



Tonight with Johnny Carson was aired 30years (1962-1992). **Carnac** and **Art Fern** (Tea Movie Announcer) were two roles Johnny Carson created.

Both were humorous portrayals.

No other comic has successfully copied these individuals, or even created personas, other than themselves, with success.

The Great Carnac, knower of all,
who on entering the stage from behind the curtain,
could not find the desk on which to perform.

Like to say, **May I have quiet, Please**, to which McMahon would say,
sometimes you get too much.

Somer other memorable questions and answers.

A Thousand Clowns the gang at NBC making up the Fall Schedule.

“100 Yard dash” what you do after eating 100 yards of prunes.

“What is Hurry Up?” 7 Up and Prune juice.

”Gator Aid” . . .What an alligator gets on welfare.

Johnny Hosted **Tonight 30 years**, 1962-1992 (dies 2005)