

## Boot-Scootin' Bob

By PATTY REINERT

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WASHINGTON \_ You know him as the folksy anchor who steered the "CBS Evening News" after Dan Rather "retired," the silver-haired Texan who hosts Sunday morning's "Face the Nation."

Now face this: Bob Schieffer has a secret other life. Yes, the Austin-born, Fort Worth-reared broadcaster is a big belt-buckle-wearin', boot-stompin', country and western honky-tonker. He plays a cowbell \_ in *public*, mind you.

"I mean, I can't sing. I'm a fraud," the suit-and-tie Schieffer said over the din of sirens outside his office window and the babble of TV sets above his desk tuned in to the three major networks.

"I never expected this to go anywhere; it was just a joke. But we have gotten so much attention, and it's really been a lot of fun.

"Now people ask me if I'm serious about this thing, and I say, 'Yes! We're tryin' to make it to the Grand Ole Opry!'" he said somewhat convincingly before giving in to a knee-slapping, tear-producing laughing fit.

Schieffer, 70, launched his music career just after surviving bladder cancer. The same passion for writing that prompted him to publish several books and recite his own poetry during a Valentine's Day broadcast inspired the former newspaper reporter and current Delbert McClinton fan to pen a few country songs.

He tested one on Diana Quinn, a CBS colleague and former punk rocker with Tru Fax and the Insaniacs. Quinn now moonlights as a bouffant hairdo-ed girl-band singer with the Fabulettes, and as a guitar player and country crooner with Honky Tonk Confidential.

"For the past couple of years, he's been coming by the news desk and reciting this song about this guy who's working at a gas station and a talent scout comes by looking for a TV anchorman," Quinn said. "Finally, I said, 'OK, listen, we've already done three CDs. Come on, Bob, give me the lyrics and let's put it on the next one.' "

Quinn, along with her partner and fellow band member Mike Woods, set Schieffer's "TV Anchorman" to music, a talking-blues tune sort of like Asleep at the Wheel's "Smoke! Smoke! Smoke! (That Cigarette)." It's a song Schieffer can (sort of) sing:

*"I'm just a good ol' boy tryin' to get along*

*Pumping gas, singing my song*

*Got me a job at Stuckey's out on I-95*

*When a guy pulls up in a red Corvette*

*Says, 'Fill 'er up, but not just yet'"*

The TV scout recruits the gas pumper, using this gem likely to elicit a groan from many a serious broadcast journalist:

*"You don't have to know all that much*

*Like names and dates and facts and such*

*'Cause you've got a face that reeks sincerity"*

## **ROAD KILL STEW**

Now Honky Tonk Confidential, a respectable band that has won several Washington, D.C.-area music awards and that one reviewer described as "absolutely twangbloodytastic!" is marketing a new CD, "Road Kill Stew and Other News," featuring Schieffer as the talking/singing "TV Anchorman."

Schieffer also wrote lyrics for three other songs on the CD, including "Long Shot Love," based on his 40-year romance with wife Pat, and "Little Lulu and Sister Hot Stuff," a rockin' tribute to their 6-year-old twin granddaughters.

Now the band that plays mostly at local beer joints, weddings and county fairs (oh, and a yearly gig at the Arkansas Electrical Co-op convention where it shares the stage with co-op honoree "Mr. Electricity") is showing up with Schieffer at journalism events and celebrity charity roasts. Its CDs are on sale at Stuckey's, "TV Anchorman" is all over YouTube, and Quinn and company are becoming known in some circles as "Bob Schieffer's band."

That suits the band just fine.

For the moment, they are keeping their day jobs, Quinn said. "But would we give it all up to tour the country in a pecan logmobile? Of course!"

Recently, Schieffer and Honky Tonk Confidential squared off against White House spokesman Tony Snow's rock band Beats Workin' at "Honky Tonk Meets the White House Wonk" to raise funds for the National Press Club's library and for cancer research. Snow, like Schieffer, is a cancer survivor.

By applause vote, Beats Workin' won the "Crawlin' Kingsnake Trophy," a gaudy, Texas-size four-column job topped with a coiled snake poised to strike. Snow, who plays a mean flute, not to mention guitar and sax, quipped that as the default winner of the second-place prize, "Bob has to take the trophy home."

As for his wife, Pat, "She just says, 'Oh my God!' " Schieffer said. "When we first told her we were going to do this, she said, 'First and foremost, remember one thing: You cannot sing. Don't sing!' "

Schieffer said he hasn't had this much fun since the minor league Fort Worth Cats baseball team handed out Bob Schieffer BOBble Head dolls to its fans last year.

Still, he hopes he'll be remembered not for his singing or cow bell-playing, but for his stories. One no one will forget is Schieffer's scoop on the day John F. Kennedy was shot in Dallas. A young night cops reporter for the Fort Worth *Star-Telegram* then, Schieffer was home sleeping when the news hit the radio. He raced to the newsroom and helped answer the city desk phones, which were ringing off the hook because the newsroom had cleared out to cover the big story.

"I answered the phone and this lady said, 'Is there anybody there who could give me a ride to Dallas?' and I said, 'Well, lady, we're a little busy. The president's been shot, and we don't run a taxi service.' And she said, 'I know. I heard on the radio. I think my son is the one they've arrested.'

"It was (Lee Harvey) Oswald's mother," he said. "Why in hell she called the *Star-Telegram*, I don't know."

Schieffer grabbed another reporter with a better car, and when they arrived at Marguerite Oswald's house, he got in the back seat to interview her on the way to the Dallas police station.

"When we got there, I just went up to the first uniformed cop I saw and I said, 'I'm the one who brought Oswald's mother up here. Where can we put her so these reporters won't be bothering her?' "

The cop, mistaking Schieffer for a detective, ushered them into an out-of-the-way office, where Schieffer preserved his exclusive and gained access to a telephone he used to call in copy as the paper put out extras. By nightfall, Marguerite Oswald asked Schieffer to see if she could talk to her son. He forwarded her request and soon was following Oswald's family to a small holding room off the jail.

"I'm thinking, 'My God, I might get an exclusive interview with this guy,'" he said. "But a guy standing in the corner said, 'Who are you?' And I said, 'Well who are you?' And he said, 'Are you a reporter?' and I said, 'Well, aren't you?' And he said, 'Listen son, I want you to get out of here, because if I ever see you again, I'm going to kill you.'"

## **BONUS YEARS**

Later, Schieffer traveled to Vietnam, carrying letters from people in Fort Worth telling him where their sons, daughters and husbands were. For five months, he bummed rides and searched for people so he could send their stories home.

"One time, I walked up to this kid, a Marine in full battle gear. He had on his body armor, his helmet, carrying his weapon. I said, 'Hi, I'm Bob Schieffer from the *Star-Telegram* in Fort Worth, and your mom asked me to look you up.' And the kid just started bawling. He just broke into tears. Here he was, this Marine, but he was only maybe 19."

Back home, a local TV station invited him onto a talk show to talk about the war. After the taping, they offered him a job. "It was \$20 a week more than I made at the paper," he said. "I really needed the money, so I took it."

Today, Schieffer, the winner of numerous Emmy awards and a member of the Broadcasting/Cable Hall of Fame, maintains a busy schedule \_ sometimes booking last-minute guests for "Face the Nation" as late as Saturday night. Before the band battle, he had tea with the queen of England who was visiting Washington.

He's addicted to his Blackberry. Remembering his good fortune in the Oswald story, he still answers his own phone.

Being a cancer survivor, he said, "I look on these as bonus years."

"I've had a great life. If my life ended tomorrow, I would not feel short-changed," he said. Still, there's plenty more to do.

"I'm thinking," he said, "about taking some guitar lessons."

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