

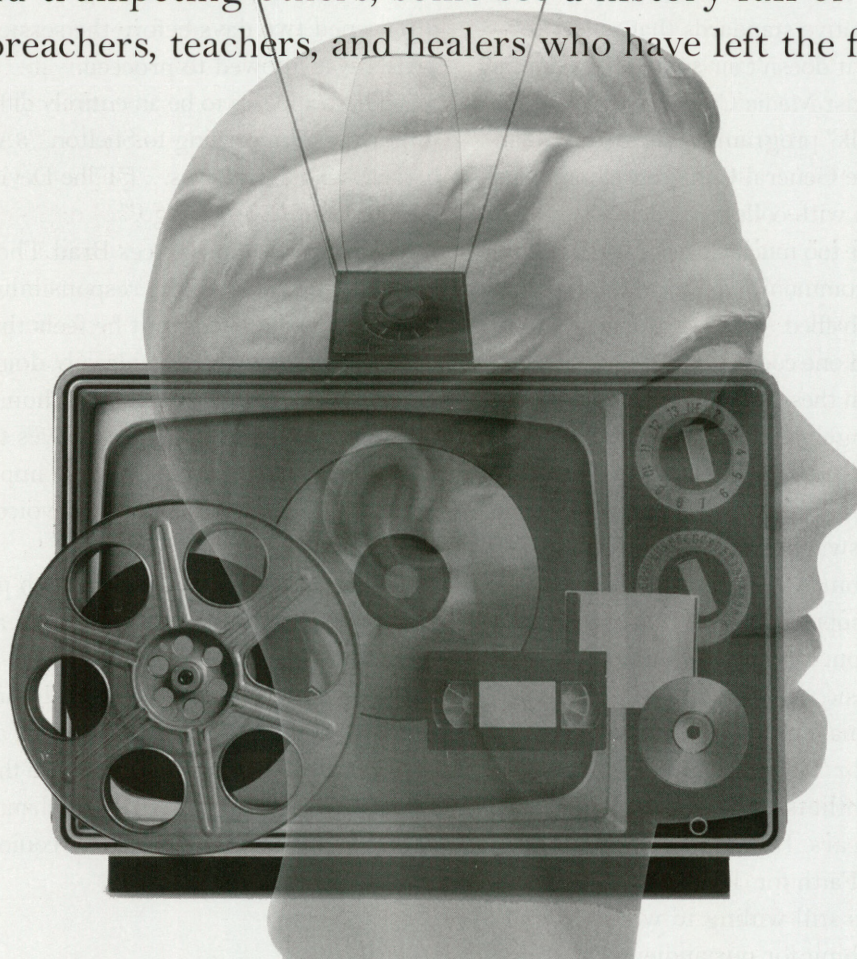
Discussed: Ben Carson, Ozzy Osbourne, Linda Shelton, "Gilmore Girls," H. M. S. Richards Senior, principles, Leonard Bailey, *The Road to Wellville*, self-esteem, Cliff Davis, Del Delker, Paul Theroux, Doug Batchelor, hair

Celebs in Home Circles

A Few Adventists Who Are Known for Being Known—
and Why We Care

By Alexander Carpenter

Traditionally, Adventists avoided the appearance of celebrity. Not only did the faithful eschew looking and dressing like the worldly and made-up famous, but even prominence within the Church worried those who saw evidence of a too-human focus. Supporting this fear of lifting up and trumpeting others, some see a history full of star preachers, teachers, and healers who have left the fold.



Comprised of mere pilgrims in this world—and educated to prepare for the next—the Seventh-day Adventist Church doesn't attract famous adherents, as does the Church of Scientology. Nor have we grown as many as the Latter-day Saints, with their singing Osmonds, the habitual Covey, and "Jeopardy" know-it-all Ken Jennings. When an Andrews University graduate appeared on "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" a few years ago, it was Adventist news just because host Regis said he had heard of the school. But then he had attended university only twenty minutes away at Notre Dame.

There are a few certified celebrities who grew up Adventist, such as Little Richard, Prince, Art Buchwald, and Joan Lunden. And, for the record, that rumor about Ozzy Osbourne and pals polishing their Black Sabbath metal in the halls of Monterey Bay Academy is false.

Actor Cliff Davis, the Chamberlains, and good-hearted Leonard Bailey garnered media attention during the eighties. More recently, in the developing world, Adventists have led a revolution in Fiji, aided genocide in Rwanda, and headed the government of Uganda.

Although relatively slim on stars, Adventism itself makes a shady appearance in *A Cry in the Dark* (1988) and stars in the fascinating Australian film *The Nostalgia Kid* (1992). At least one Seventh-day Adventist dies administering hydrotherapy at the Battle Creek Sanitarium in the 1994 film *The Road to Wellville*—with Anthony Hopkins as a bucktoothed John Harvey Kellogg. Korean Adventism is mentioned on the Warner Brother's "Gilmore Girls" and in the novels of Paul Theroux, who calls Adventists "Sevies," and writer David James Duncan references Adventist culture.

Celebrity carries the often-correct stigma of chasing the spotlight to generate publicity. The celebrities in the Adventist community, although well-known, are recognized because of how they use media to accomplish their personal calling. In his interview with *Spectrum*, Doug Batchelor pointed out that "people identify with people. It's one thing to read a series of doctrinal beliefs, but that can leave you dry without marrying the principles to real people. When you can associate a person with the teaching it makes it authentic."

Matching a good-looking face with religion makes it more interesting. All those 1960s housewives didn't watch George Vandeman just to hear another text. Twenty-five hundred television and radio stations tap into the eighty-million-member world of evangelical Christianity. Twice a year the largest of these media outlets, Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), holds "Praise-a-thons," which

garner about ninety-million dollars each. And that apparently helps out its four-billion-dollar ministry.

Of course, there is an obvious difference between the glitz and explicit money collecting of TBN and the simple talk of eighteen-year-old Three Angels Broadcasting Network (3ABN). But there is a common gospel that is preached, sung about, and prayed for at both: that accepting its message will change each person's life. Both solicit prayer requests, both advertise products created by its personalities, and both ask for money to share Jesus with others. In fact, 3ABN calls itself the "Mending Broken People Network."

With the marital breakup of Danny and Linda Shelton, the co-owners of 3ABN, the second largest Christian network in North America (in regard to number of UHF stations owned and operated) mimicked too closely that common rite of fame—the celebrity breakup, albeit over "spiritual adultery."

Del Delker, who has been singing around Adventism since 1947, reports that the public eye is not always fun. As an unmarried woman, Del says that sometimes people would write "poison pen" letters when they thought they saw a telling wink between her and members of the King's Heralds quartet.

Christian media can be a messy mix of money, mass religion, and larger-than-life personalities. Attract fans and soon the critics show up. Drawing disciples and then anti-disciples is as common now as with Jonathan Edwards, medieval popes, and the Corinthian followers of Paul or Apollos or Cephas.

Why do we care about famous Adventists? Perhaps for the same reason that we enjoy finding friends in common with Adventists we've just met. It's a revelation of identity. Just like classical heroes and religious saints, we pay attention because often their story helps us understand ours. There is a cultural connection that runs through the Church; we share beliefs, hopes, guilt, and fears. And just as families are proud of their good scions and whisper about their black sheep, so goes the Church.

But wait, why is celebrity important? *Spectrum* decided to ask a few Adventists who are famous as mixers of medium and message. Of course, none of the four thought of themselves as celebrity material, but let's face it, they are known for being known. And media—books, music, television, Web sites—have contributed to their recognition.





Linda Shelton

Linda Shelton shaped much of the programming at 3ABN during her eighteen years with the organization. Her writing and singing, chats with guests, and natural good looks exemplified the womanly ideal of many viewers. In addition to cohosting "3ABN Presents" she has recorded at least five albums of gospel music.

On the benefit of charismatic media personalities: Statistically, we find that with Christian networks it is those who have distinguishable leaders that thrive and survive in an age where there are a lot of options for TV viewing. Just as the people demanded a king back in the days of Saul, people want a leader, a visionary, and "a place where the back stops." Obviously with leaders there are risks and potential hazards, but the fact still remains that TV ministries that have them grow at a much faster pace than those that don't.

On being famous:

Of course at times there were the photographs and autographs. At first, I was extremely uncomfortable with these requests because I felt that perhaps they looked at me as an icon. Later I decided it was unfair

for me to think this way because so many expressed that they just felt I was a part of their family. There are so many lonely people who have been forsaken by their family members! Christian television fills the void in so many people's lives.

I have sweet memories of people coming up and telling me about their Aunt Bessie or Uncle George (as if I knew them), simply because they felt that since I was "in their living rooms" each evening I knew all about their lives. I also have some incredible memories of people coming up and relating how they met Jesus through the programs they saw on their television sets. It was genuine ... you could see it in their eyes and in the expressions on their faces! These experiences made the blood, sweat, and tears worth every minute of it.

On being famous for hair:

On one occasion we were at Atlantic Union College on a Sabbath afternoon. The auditorium was full to capacity with about fourteen hundred people. Afterwards we were shaking hands and an older man came up to me and said, "I cut a piece of your hair to keep as a souvenir." I laughed because I thought he was joking. Later, when some women were observing the back of my hair, they discovered the man was telling the truth. Still ... I'd rather have a hair cut than a razor taken to my reputation!

The effect of media on the Adventist Church:

The statistics prove that television, the Internet, and radio are the most effective, inexpensive vehicles to reach the masses with the message of Jesus Christ for this age. In light of the fact that the world's population is growing at a much faster rate than Christianity, I believe that God has provided these tools to multiply the efforts of a few people to reach the masses and finish the Gospel Commission. There are good and bad points to consider in any evangelistic venture, but when it comes to the media, the good outweighs the bad.

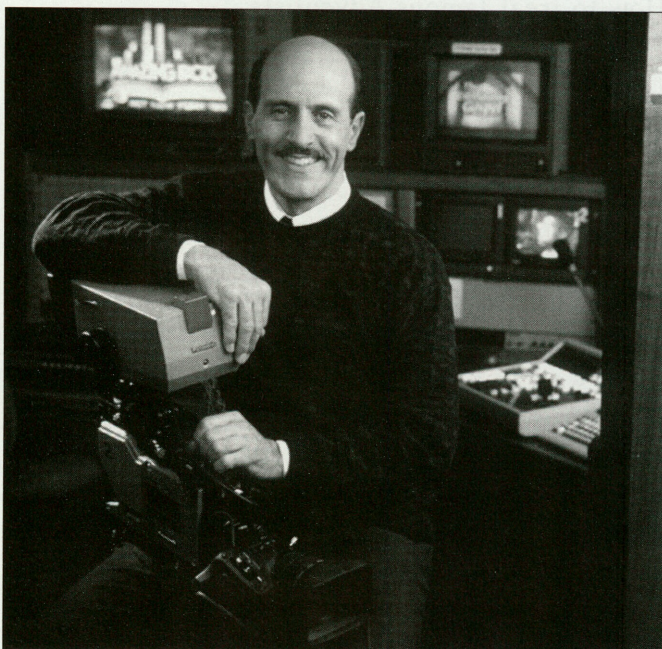
On filming with dogs:

I'll never forget on one particular day I was sharing a devotional thought on camera with Fluffy and Sheltie (my dogs) beside me. Normally they were quite well behaved on the set, but on this particular day Sheltie was pawing and biting at Fluffy. Just at the moment when I was speaking about the importance of peace and tranquility as a part of our characters, Fluffy

snapped at Sheltie, baring her teeth viciously at him. The camera operators came “unglued” and nearly ended up rolling on the floor. Needless to say, we did the segment all over again.

Differences in gender treatment:

I have rubbed elbows with the most well-known personalities in the Adventist Church, and from my perspective, I did not see a profound difference in how the Adventist public treats men and women personalities.



Doug Batchelor

Doug Batchelor is director/speaker of Amazing Facts, a ten-million-dollar-a-year media production and training ministry. His riches-to-rags story, accessible preaching style, and Sabbath morning ubiquity have made him the most famous name in Adventist television. In addition, he is senior pastor of the Sacramento Central Seventh-day Adventist church.

On having a public persona:

I grew up with a mom who was in movies and on national television five days a week so I saw early on that the bigger-than-life aura that the cameras can create is really an illusion. I honestly forget that our programs are on around the world until a stranger approaches me. I still enjoy the wide-eyed wonder of kids who recognize us from our programs.

Some encounters are humbling. One time a cashier at a Costco discount store said, “I know you, you’re that annoying preacher I see on TV late at night.”

The effect of media on Adventist ministry:

The tools of modern media provide a profound opportunity to multiply the messages presented before a small group or even a single camera. In addition, it is mind boggling to me that our church services are streamed live and can be seen virtually around the world on a computer within seconds. Jesus said: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14). The media makes this prophecy an imminent reality.

Preaching on camera:

During a live taping, a sleep-deprived cameraman drifted into a deep slumber while I was preaching before a large audience and slid off of his stool, falling to the floor, and making a tremendous clatter. He quickly sat back down and continued with his job like nothing had happened, but people teased me for putting him into such a deep sleep.

On why people enjoy the story of the time he spent living as a “caveman” during his youth:

I can only speculate it is because they find aspects in the testimony they can relate to. People seem to resonate with the questions, doubts, and searching, as I did in my youth. Most of us are driven by the same fears and longings.





Del Delker

Del Delker joined the “Voice of Prophecy,” the flagship of Adventist media, in 1947. She has participated in ninety recordings, including forty-five solo albums in English, six in Spanish, and two in Portuguese. Her fifty-five years of music ministry have allowed her to travel around the world, appearing on radio and TV hundreds of times.

On the early days of Adventist media:

Media is a powerful force for people to meet God. What H. M. S. [Richards] Senior did was really show how the gospel could be spread by employing brand new tools. Media really is a powerful tool and extends the Church's influence. It reaches millions of people, and there is no better way for God to meet them.

On H. M. S. Richards Senior:

In 1947, people were still giving H. M. S. Senior fits about his radio ministry. They didn't think it was a good use of money. But he just dealt with it by not responding. He was really good at getting along with everyone. Over the years I have sung with twelve quartets and all of them would have laid on railroad tracks for him. He always commanded respect, but he never demanded it. We young employees would crowd into the uncomfortable seats in the “Voice of Prophecy” limousine just to be closer to the “Chief.”

How to treat famous Adventists:

Affirm them, don't slobber over them. Too much attention is not good for people.

A funny occurrence:

While in Brazil, I was to sing for a television broadcast. Often in poorer countries it is cheaper to tape the program and then play it later. I was lip-syncing the song and I felt that something was wrong so I signaled for them to cut the music so we could restart. It didn't work so I started waving my arms wildly and making the cut-throat signal. Everyone looked horrified and then someone mouthed to me that it was a live broadcast. I tried to finish, but realizing that I had acted like an idiot I burst into tears, humiliated.

On early success:

When I first sang in front of a large audience my head almost popped with pride. But I felt the peace that I knew was from God leave me. So I rushed into a vineyard—this was in Lodi, California—and prayed to God to take my voice away if I couldn't get that peace back. The danger with having a high profile is that it can go to a person's head.

How Adventists treat their famous women:

Adventist men currently treat Adventist women better than they used to. I've certainly suffered from male chauvinism. But now sometimes I am asked to speak during the eleven o'clock service. Even at the “Voice of Prophecy,” there were some who thought that they shouldn't have a women around, especially since they thought I wasn't qualified, since I can't read music.

It has been interesting over the years. Sometimes there has been a lot to put up with. Originally all I wanted to do was go to Andrews University and marry a fella who was going to be minister. I wouldn't have done all this if I hadn't been called into it.

Ben Carson

Ben Carson's use of books to broadcast his educational philosophy has made him the most famous Adventist today. In addition to leading pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins Children's Center, he serves on the board of Kellogg Company, Costco, and the Yale Corporation, and operates, with his wife, the Carson Scholars Fund, which rewards students in grades 4–12 for superior academic achievement.



On being famous:

When I walk down the hallway in the hospital people call out, "It's Dr. Carson, oh my god. Can you take a picture with me?" There are good things. Back in the days before I always flew first class the attendant would recognize me and give me a free upgrade. There is no question that you get different treatment. I bought a car once and they said that they would give

me an incredible discount and then they also donated money to my foundation. You get different treatment; there is no question about that. Even from the police.

On celebrities:

When you see somebody often through media there is adulation. And I think that a lot of that comes from not having proper perspective. I love everybody. Christ died for everybody, but I do not get excited about people. I'll do anything for the janitor or for the president because they are all God's children. You know, you look at England—the queen, the prince—they put their pants on just like everyone else. And how we treat them is the height of absurdity, quite frankly. Why do people want to hear what a celebrity has to say? They don't know anything. It is so artificial.

By starting the Carson Scholars Fund I am trying to help people see that there is a different perspective and we are making progress. I just came back to my office and my office manager told me, to my great surprise, that I've been selected for an award that I cannot mention now because it hasn't been announced. But I am receiving \$250,000 for the charity of my choice, which of course, is my scholarship fund. There are so many wonderful things that I fully recognize as the Lord's doing.

On his story:

A lot of people feel that they can identify with me because I came from a situation where I had low self-esteem, things weren't going well. A lot of poverty, a broken family, terrible temper, something just about everyone can identify with. I make it clear to those people that I am no genius. I say: "You do your best and God will do the rest."

On seeing children who remind him of himself:

I meet them all the time. And I sometimes tell them that they are just like me. And that seems to help some of them. I hear amazing stories of transitions in children who have read the books, or seen an interview on



television, or heard one of my speeches. And that is actually more important to me than my primary job as a surgeon, because only one person at a time is in the operating room. But through the platform that the Lord has provided I can touch thousands—if not millions—of lives. Not for one moment do I feel that I am smart enough or good enough to have done all these things. It is very clear to me who is really behind it.

On a Christian public persona:

I do a lot of public speaking, including at secular universities. I never give a speech without people knowing that I am a Christian. And that is what drives me. I make it very clear to people that if it's not their bag, that's fine, but I want to talk about what drives me. If they are Buddhist, that doesn't offend me, and my Christianity shouldn't offend them.

If you are "successful," the thing that is behind you becomes interesting to people. They want to know: How did this guy get there? What drives him? And I believe that that is an effective way to lift up God's name.

On speaking to kids and bankers:

If I am speaking to a group of poor, innocent kids, I will choose different aspects of my story than if I am talking to a bankers' convention. In the first group, I spend a lot of time talking about how I felt when I was known as a dummy, why I lashed out, and how that was injurious to me.

When I'm talking to a group of bankers, I will emphasize the part of the story that shows the potential that could be wasted if opportunities weren't granted. I point out to them: to whom much is given, much is expected. I know many "successful" people, and the ones who are happy and fulfilled are not necessarily billionaires, but are the ones making a difference.

The thinking behind the Carson Scholars Fund:

We'd go into schools and see trophies for all-state sports, and the quarterback was the big man on campus. But the academic superstar was a nerd or a geek. That is the reason we are doing so poorly vis-à-vis other nations, particularly in science and math. And so Candy [his wife] and I started giving thousand-dollar scholarships out of our own pocket to students with incredible academic achievement and who demonstrated care for other people.

The money would go into a trust fund developed

by our financial people and the student gets a trophy every bit as impressive as any sports trophy you have seen. They get a medal, they go to a banquet, they get local press attention. We put them on the same pedestal as the athletic superstar.

The concept being: we're saying that what will keep us on the forefront is not the ability to shoot a twenty-five-foot jump shot but the ability to solve a quadratic equation. So we have to emphasize that. We were encouraged because we could see the effects, not just on the honored students, but also on those around them. And some teachers have told us that the grade point average in their classrooms has gone up a whole point for the next year because everybody was trying so much harder.

The Delaware legislature unanimously—all the Democrats and Republicans—allocated \$500 thousand for our scholarship fund to be matched by the private sector, and they are going to give another \$500 thousand for this next year so that they can endow all their schools with the program. We are in eight states already and we are moving into several more this year. And God willing, by the time I die, every fourth and fifth grader will see that they can get the same kind of attention for superior academic performance and humanitarian qualities as they can for athletic prowess.

Currently reading:

I probably get three books a week that people send to me. I just got one today, what was it called? Oh yeah, it's title is something like being rich without guilt. I am kind of anxious to read it. Actually, the book I am currently reading right now is the *Desire of Ages*, for the umpteenth time. I am getting ready to write another book shortly. It'll be about taking risks.

Alexander Carpenter handles special projects for *Spectrum* and the Association of Adventist Forums.