

Lights, camera, action!

Tuning in again with 'Marty's Corner'

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Host Marty Shields and San Gabriel Valley Newspapers' writer Michelle Mills on the set of Marty's Corner." (Correspondent photo by Mike Mullen)

As the reigning Occasional Pasadena Doo Dah Parade queen, I often receive requests to make appearances, so I was not surprised when producer John Garside invited me to be a guest on "Marty's Corner," a monthly cable access variety talk television show based in Hacienda Heights.

I replied that I would be honored and he promised to send me the details. Soon, my part in the show grew, as I was next asked to co-host

and then to be in a skit as well.

I arrived at the KCAT3 studios in Hacienda Heights an hour before taping. Program host Marty Shields was going over the plans for the show with some of the crew, so I found the green room. It was more like a conference room with a large table surrounded by a clutch of chairs, rather than a place to relax. The studios also lacked a formal dressing room, so I was off to the bathroom to change, fix my makeup and fluff my hair.

Tech announcer Tony Ridley called the evening's cast, guests and crew outside for a short meeting and a pep talk. Then he asked the actors for the skit to stay for a rehearsal.

Unlike many television shows, the main idea of the skit was in place, but there wasn't a script: I was going to have to wing my part. Fortunately, I have experience, as for about five years I co-hosted "G-Man's Freak Show," a now-defunct cable access variety program in the Los Angeles, Bellflower and San Gabriel Valley areas. We never used a script and often aired live, which included fielding calls from viewers.

Returning to the green room, I noticed that there were quite a few people making their way into the studio. "Marty's Corner" is filmed in front of a live audience and they were certainly lively and excited to be a part of things. Soon Ridley and Garside were asking everyone to take their places on the set. The lights were blazing and the cameramen stood at the ready.

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"Live from Hacienda Heights, it's `Marty's Corner,'" Ridley said.

The audience clapped and cheered as each guest was announced and went wild when Shields stepped on to the stage for his monologue. He wrapped up his bit by mentioning that there is talk that the TV station may close (in real life, it is a possibility, but nothing has been decided) he added that he was sad that there isn't a real Hacienda Heights City Council that could hear his appeal and maybe help the station - and his show - out; Hacienda Heights is still part of unincorporated Los Angeles County.

Thus began the skit. No surprise, it featured a fake Hacienda Heights City Council comprised of Shields' crew of actors and friends.

After the "meeting" started, I stepped up to the podium in full Doo Dah regalia and tried to convince the "council members" that they should hold the Doo Dah Parade in their town instead of Pasadena; after all, I said, I am a graduate of Los Altos High School.

The "council members" asked a few questions:

Them: Would I want the key to the city?

Me: Yes; I'd take two, in fact.

Them: Who would clean up the mess after the parade?

Me: How about the cute guys who work down at the pool? I'm sure the "mayor" and I could get

them to help for cheap.

The council said they would consider my suggestion; I thanked them and made way for the next citizen.

A young man in a stiff white shirt and bold tie fidgeted in front of the podium as he ranted and raved about his local business to the "council;" they all looked bored. The louder and more agitated he became, the more unconcerned the board members looked, and soon his time was up. And he hadn't even made his point; not atypical of a real city council meeting.

Shields was on next, pleading with the council to allow his cable show to go on. He ended his part a la James Brown - "please, please, please!" as Ridley draped a cape over his shoulders and led him away.

After the skit, I waited in the backstage area for Shields to introduce the real me. I sat next to him in an over stuffed chair as we chatted about my Fun 101 stories for this newspaper, the Doo Dah Parade and my previous stint on television.

"Your show is just like `G-Man's Freak Show,' only on my show, the entertainment was much better," I said.

The audience laughed at my quip while Shields winced with a grin.

We took a break and I stayed with Shields to interview the guests after each of their acts. Comedian Tim Mars shared stories from his job

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as a karaoke DJ. The band Killjoy offered up a few rockin' tunes.

The hardest part of the show was sitting under the hot lights and trying not to stare at the camera, but instead to concentrate on Shields and the guests, as well as acknowledge the audience. The saddest part was that it was over all too soon.

Traditionally after each show, the cast, crew and guests are invited to gather at Shields' home nearby for a little party. At midnight, everyone crowds into the living room to watch the playback of "Marty's Corner." It was interesting to see the show from the viewers' perspective and to note all the nuances, as well as mistakes, caught by the cameras.

My adventure on "Marty's Corner" took me back several years when I was invited to be a presenter at the Rockies, a music awards show sponsored by Rock City News magazine. There were tables set up at the entrance of the venue for the affair where people could vend their wares and promote their political opinions. Michael Devine, the host of the cable television show, "Hollywood and Devine," was standing next to me as we listened to one particularly fiery speaker who spouted out about the repression of the common man.

Devine died in 2006, but his response to the orator remains fresh in my memory: "We're not the bourgeoisie! We're cable access stars."

How true. That little part of me still shines.

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To see Michelle Mills in "Marty's Corner," visit www.youtube.com and enter Doo Dah Queen or Marty's Corner in the search bar.

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