

Christian show focuses on sex, 'hot problems'

WALL, Pa. (AP) — When it comes to on-the-air chitchat, confessions and counsel, nothing is sacred for Christian television talk show host Dick Hatch.

His late night program, "Hatch!," which focuses on sex and other provocative issues, is a hit among believers and non-believers alike. It's also a source of consternation for conservative Christians and clergy.

Hatch doesn't mind. In fact, he rather enjoys the controversy.

"I've always liked doing things that other people are not doing," he said, shrugging. "There are plenty of preachers and teachers."

The 34-year-old former coal miner shouts at some callers, throwing up his hands and rolling his eyes, while shedding tears for others. Their queries range from philandering husbands and abusive fathers to homosexuality, alcoholism and oral sex.

"Where else are they supposed to talk about this stuff in an open, informed, intelligent setting?" he asked. "They're not going to get it in their church, there are too many little old ladies who are going to fall over if they do. They may be embarrassed to talk about it or may feel their pastor has a particular bias in one direction."

"Besides, I'm not sexually frustrated and I'm not prudish. So I don't mind talking about it. And I don't mind trying to put it back into some intelligent, Bible sense."

"Hatch!" has been scorching the airwaves since its debut Sept. 5, 1985, on Cornerstone TeleVision's WPCB in Wall, a little town outside Pittsburgh. WPCB is a local station that shows only Christian-oriented programming.

It's part of a slight but noticeable shift in Christian broadcasting from "academic talking heads" to "gut-level issues," according to Ben Armstrong, executive director of the National Religious Broadcasters.

"The hottest shows in religious radio and television are those dealing with royalty, sex and deity," Armstrong said. "If you deal with these kinds of subjects, you're able to reach more people. That's really the

bottom line."

Oleen Eagle, corporate vice president for CTV, said, "All the things they hear are the things they're thinking anyway."

CTV was hoping to attract a young audience when it asked Hatch to serve as host of a live, one-hour talk show last year.

The son of an Ohio coal company executive who dropped out of college to work in the mines, Hatch started his broadcasting career in 1979 at WPIT, a Christian radio station in Pittsburgh.

He turned his efforts toward counseling after receiving a call from a woman who had been raped. Appalled by the lack of services for such victims, he opened the Christian Resource Center in downtown Pittsburgh in 1984 to help victims of sexual abuse.

He accepted CTV's offer after being assured that half of any profits would go to the center. His show was an instant success, largely because of his refusal to adhere to old-style religious broadcasting.

Although a Bible is always present, Hatch seldom refers to it. He peppers his conversation with such words as "sleazeball" and "slimeball," tells religious jokes and occasionally rides his motorcycle onto the set. Guests include politicians, sex therapists and atheists.

"My father's generation of evangelists insulated themselves from the public," he said. "What we do is mix it up."

His loud, abrasive style has gotten him into trouble.

A Presbyterian minister chastised him after he told a teen-age boy seeking advice about his pregnant girlfriend, "You've done a pretty good job of making your life a mess."

Despite his on-air success, the Christian Resource Center remains his primary concern.

Mornings are devoted to his wife, Roe, and their three children.

"When I get judged, God is not going to judge me on my TV show," Hatch said. "He's going to judge me on my personal life and the Christian Resource Center."

Storytelling survives, grows in popularity for Latin Americans

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Storytelling, old as mankind, is having a new surge all over Latin America, after having almost vanished due to hard competition from TV, cinema, the publishing industry and other modern entertainments.

"People are finding again that telling stories and listening to them has a magic that TV and the cinema lack," Venezuelan storyteller Isabel de los Rios said in an interview with The Associated Press.

De los Rios is one of a few dozen Venezuelans who took up storytelling after tours here of Cuban storyteller and storyteller Francisco Garzon Cespedes, who has in the last years actively promoted the old art all over Latin America.

De los Rios, a professor of law at the Universidad de Los Andes in Merida — 450 miles west of Caracas — says her life took a pleasant new turn when she discovered "the fun of sharing stories with others."

"I had always liked to tell stories at parties, but this was something entirely different," she said. "Garzon Cespedes showed us that training and discipline were necessary, and also that storytelling was a very serious matter, not to be regarded as childish at all."

In the Middle Ages, she points out, storytellers known as "troubadours" and "jugglers" made their liv-

ing wandering from town to town all over Europe telling their stories in public squares and princely castles alike, often playing musical instruments and engaging in skilled games as well.

And in the Middle East, traveling dervishes are still eagerly surrounded in the town squares by crowds who listen attentively to their old-time stories, in search of wisdom, moral instruction or plain amusement.

De los Rios and six other storytellers have formed a group called "Tales and Enchantments" and perform every Sunday at Caracas "Museo del Teclado" (Piano Museum, a government-sponsored cultural center downtown).

"People just love listening to stories," said Kira Kariakin, a 20-year-old journalism freshman who tells stories every Thursday to fellow students at the Universidad Simon Bolivar.

De los Rios says, "People like listening to stories, because they open up new perspectives in their own lives, a new world where they regain a precious part of themselves. Listening to them in a group, sharing the awe, the feelings, the memories the story evokes, has a special quality that more sophisticated entertainments can't provide."

Childhood pen pals meet after writing for 13 years

READING, Pa. (AP) — Sometimes it just isn't enough to "reach out and touch someone" via long distance telephone service.

That's why Patricia Ingram, 26, of Llansamlet, South Wales, crossed the Atlantic Ocean recently to meet her childhood pen pal, Linda Bickler, 27, of Bethel.

"We started writing each other when we were kids," Ingram said. "Linda initiated the letter writing because of an article she read in American Girl magazine. We've kept in touch for 12 years ever since, and now I finally met her."

Ingram made the trip to the United States with her husband, Keith.

The pen pals spent most of their time together in Pennsylvania, reminiscing about their childhood as international literary counterparts, and visiting local historical sites.

Bickler said, "We spent most of our time looking at old wedding photos and other pictures from when we were young. We also took a trip to Lancaster."

Ingram was most impressed with the housing arrangement of the area.

"The housing in Bethel is very spacious," she said. "There aren't any fences to close you in like there are in our residential sections. I liked that."

"I also liked the food. Dining out in Pennsylvania is a lot cheaper than at home."

One unusual aspect of this long-awaited encounter of "best friends by mail" is that the Ingrams traveled nearly 3,000 miles from their home at 46 Bethel Road, Llansamlet, only to wind up at a street with the same name six hours later.

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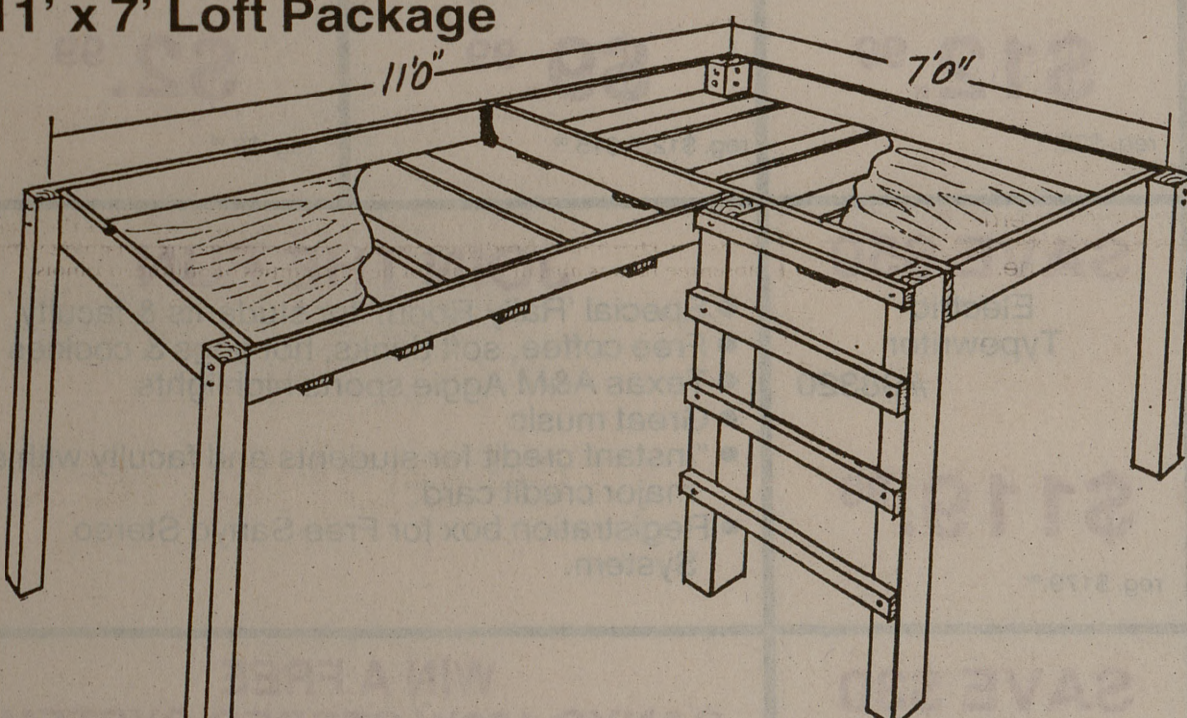
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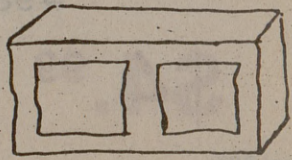
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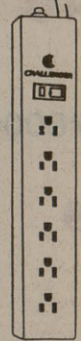
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