



Saul Pett

By Arthur B. Pine

Saul Pett's heart beats out about 58 words a minute. Since he left the University of Missouri after receiving his B.J. in 1940, Pett has written his way to the top of the Associated Press newsfeatures staff. And today, "By Saul Pett" is one of the most respected and best-known phrases in the business.

"Heart" is Pett's trademark. He's interviewed everyone from a bum near a Bowery flophouse to the President of the United States; he's traveled to the most exotic corners of the world and spent time writing about the plainest corners in the smallest towns. Above all, Pett can make a routine story about a traffic accident sound like a heart-rending drama—not melodramatic, but awfully human.

And that's what Saul Pett is: awfully human. He bites his fingernails, likes sailing in Long Island

Sound, avoids all possible entangling red tape, treats life in a sardonic-yet-serious style and enjoys people. He is understanding, perceptive, sensitive and whimsical. After you've spoken to Saul Pett for three minutes, you're sure you met when you were kids.

As a kid, Pett began his journalistic career in high school, in Passaic, N. J.

"I had a hard time getting on the high school paper," he says, remembering his first few tries at news-writing. "Then my big break came: I began dating the editor. She started me on writing and soon I worked up to having by first byline—on a gossip column. But we broke up the year I graduated and I got kicked off the paper."

When he was graduated from high school in 1935, Saul Pett didn't know what to do, where to go or



Saul Pett *continued*

how to start. The depression had tightened family finances and choked off Pett's plans for college. What was a guy to do then? Pett had no answer.

For the next half-year, Pett rode a bicycle through the busy 42nd Street area in nearby New York City—as a delivery boy. "But I was getting nowhere," he says. By chance, he went back to his old high school to see whether things had changed much. "I saw an old English teacher," he says, wryly, "and she suggested with an historic inaccuracy, 'Saul, Why, you could be another Walter Lippmann!' Then, she told me that the University of Missouri had the world's best School of Journalism—and what was more, she thought I could get a part-time job there while I went to school.

"But I couldn't go without some assurance of a job," Pett says. "So I addressed a letter: 'To the Wife of the Mayor, Columbia, Mo.' I didn't even know whether Columbia, Mo., had a mayor; but I tried anyway. About two weeks later I got a letter back. The mayor's wife had found a job for me, firing furnaces for the woman next door: Mrs. Emmett Hook, at 5 Watson Place. The job was to pay \$7 a month—a room job. I took it right away and Mrs. Hook became my guardian angel for the next four years."

Getting off the bus from New York in January, 1936, Pett was a very scared freshman. He was alone in what people back home had called the Wilds of Missouri and he had no friends, money or confidence. But he could fire Mrs. Hook's furnace; somehow, the other attributes came along rather quickly.

"My first love," Pett says, "would have been to be in the legitimate theater. But acting then was rated as most impractical. Journalism was rated the second worst. So, being fearless, I took Journalism. But I

still continued to write one-act plays for the Drama Department contests."

Pett entered his plays in the contests and won. Eventually he was elected to Purple Mask dramatic honor society. His memories of dramatics at the University are comical:

"We had a shortage of leading men. There was a fella named Dave Speer—a matinee idol on campus. You went to him with a script the way a Hollywood director would go to Cary Grant. I tried mine and he agreed to do it. At the last minute, though, he changed his mind, so I had to play the lead. The play didn't win—that was my first injustice!" he says, sardonically.

For J-School students, the old Givan's restaurant on the corner of Ninth and Elm was the accepted hang-out. Pett was no one to violate tradition, and was a frequent customer at Givan's. In fact, he was the creator of a tradition himself: The TGIF (Thank God It's Friday) Club. "We wanted to start another one," he says, "and call it the Oh, Hell, It's Monday Club. But that didn't go over too well."

At Givan's, Pett recalls, everyone used to sit around and talk about what he was going to do after college. "The consensus then was that no one would work for less than \$50 a week—that was big money then."

At the University, Pett showed no hope of keeping his salary promise. "I wasn't noted for doing much work around J-School," he says. "I was assigned to cover the police beat. Every so often I used to persuade the cops to drive me back to school. We'd go roaring up the driveway near Neff Hall, lights flashing and sirens blaring. Watching this were professors Sharp and Morelock (still teaching at the School of

Continued on page 36

Saul Pett *continued from page 8*

Journalism) and Mr. Swift, who were standing in the press room waiting for the paper to roll. It was very impressive.

"I guess I was an above-average student who somehow managed to get below-average or average grades. I was a bit of a nuisance to my superiors, I think. On dull days in the news room I used to try to liven it up. Once I sent down a number-four headline to the press room—written in Chinese!"

Pett also worked part-time at odd jobs. Later, in his senior year, he got a job as a stringer (part-time reporter) for the now-merged International News Service. "In those days, you used to have to vie for the job," Pett says. "The incumbent INS stringer was a senior, Paul Christman, who used to play football for M. U. I wined him and dined him all semester, and when he left I got his job. It was good experience."

When he wasn't working, Pett sometimes had time to go out. On one dull evening a friend called and said there was to be a dance at the AEPHI sorority house. Pett finished firing Mrs. Hook's furnace, changed his shirt and went out. At the dance, he met an Education major from Quincy, Ill., Miss Leanore Green. Three dances and 4½ years later she became Mrs. Saul Pett.

During his undergraduate career in the School of Journalism, Pett met another very important lady. Frances Whiting, managing editor of *Cosmopolitan Magazine* in 1939, came to speak during the annual Journalism Week. Pett was assigned as her student-host. Pett and about four other students "convinced her the president's reception that night would be a big bore. We invited her to a party the boys were staging at a restaurant on Highway 40. By the end of the party, I remember shouting, 'No, I won't work for you for less than \$200 a week—I don't remember much else. But a week later, she sent me letters of introduction to several newspapermen in New York. And when I graduated, I found a job easily—as a copy boy for the *New York Daily News*.' Salary: \$15 a week, the envy of Pett's classmates.

After six months, Pett was fired: "The assistant city editor now and then would let me write small news stories, although I wasn't supposed to. Then one day, the city editor, who was class-conscious about editors and copy boys and a Bostonian besides, found out about my writing and ordered me to stop. Suddenly I lost interest and sloughed off. In those days writers were pampered. When they sent you out for coffee, they gave you a list of the kind of delicacies they wanted and sent you to a complete smorgasbord restaurant on 57th Street. When they did, I played the pinball machine there for a while. I was fired for being, quote: Lazy, inattentive and unintelligent."

Pett continues: "I was about to go to Quincy and work for Leanore's mother in her auto parts store. At the last minute, the auto parts industry was saved; I got a call from INS's Detroit News Bureau. Would

I work as a reporter for \$25 a week?" It was a raise and a chance to write. So Leanore went to Detroit, where they were married. For 2½ years, Pett served in the Detroit bureau. Then he worked for a while in Chicago, still with INS.

Pett wanted to be a war correspondent, but INS kept postponing his war assignments. Finally, in the summer of 1945, Pett bought his uniforms. He had gotten his shots for typhoid, tetanus, measles et al, and was adjusting his correspondent's collar-pin, when the U. S. dropped the A-bomb and the war ended. So Pett stayed in New York with INS.

He looks back on his days with INS—before financial trouble necessitated its merger with the old United Press—with fondness. "I had a great affection for INS," he says. "Being undermanned, it demanded and got heroic efforts from its staff—and we all loved it." Pett wrote the first INS radio column in 1946.

But although he loved it, Pett grew exasperated just once—and quit. "I got mad and left with a big show of defiance," he says. "I went down to a Third Avenue bar and proceeded to show my independence. Then I remembered I had to go back to the office—I had forgotten my coat. It ruined everything."

Deflated, but not ruined, Pett got a job with the Associated Press—on a temporary basis. The job stuck; even today, 14 years later, no one has yet said the job is permanent.

While working for AP, Pett has interviewed Douglas MacArthur, James C. Pterillo, Bernard Goldfine, Archie Moore, Frank Lloyd Wright, Alger Hiss, Jimmy Hoffa, the Fords, Walter Reuther, the Rockefelleres, Jonas Salk, bums, phoneyes, rich men, poor men, baseball players, screaming women and chorus girls. This past year he traveled almost 50,000 miles around the world. After six weeks in Africa he forewarned the AP about the Congo crisis. He's been in South Africa, the South Pole, South Ferry and the Old South. His stories have included timing how long it would take to ride the complete New York subway system, profiling high society in Newport, tracing a Broadway show from auditions to audiences and writing about a criminal.

To the AP, his still-temporary employer, Saul Pett is as beloved as his warm, home-hitting writing. This past year he won the Sigma Chi award for his coverage of an accident in Shelbyville, Ill., in which eight teenagers were killed.

Some Pett-isms:

On New Orleans: "The needle on the seismograph has begun to quiver. . . . In this Old South bastion of genteel manners and high breeding, groups of shrieking, heckling women have dramatized anew the searing conflict over school integration."

On Kennedy: "As a campaigner, he's a flameless cooker. . . . He generates heat without getting warm himself. He is the impersonal candidate who somehow ignites the highly personal reaction. . . . Girls squeal and wriggle and jump; women—even mothers with babies and grandmothers with arthritis—scream and

throw kisses. Men shout, 'Go get 'em, Jack!' as if this were a young Richard heading out on a new crusade."

On the Great Debates: "About a third of the way through the fourth 'great debate,' our dog got up, yawned, stretched and went outside to count trees."

On Kenya: "We drove up toward the equator, to the beautiful white highland of Kenya, where nature put wine in the air and man added vinegar." (Courtesy The Associated Press).

To his talent and modesty, Pett has added the restriction of taking pride only in a good job. He keeps exhaustive notes, writes slowly and painfully. "I'm a bleeder," he says. "I suffer more than anybody when I write. I'm horribly slow."

When Pett goes off on an assignment, Leaneore usually is understanding. "But she's getting less and less ladylike about it all the time," he says. "On the day before Thanksgiving in 1955 I was told I had to leave immediately for the Antarctic for three months. I figured, Oh Gosh, how'm I gonna break the news to Leaneore? We held a conference at the office. Cynthia Lowry (AP television columnist) said I should call Leaneore first and break the news. I did.

"I came home to find Leaneore in the kitchen, sitting on a high stool, crying and looking out the window. She said, 'Well, I guess I'm supposed to be a good sport about this; I guess I'm supposed to say I'm very happy for you—but I guess I'm not.'"

Home, for Saul Pett, is Port Washington, in suburban Long Island. His house, he says comically, is "a 30-year-old Early Peruvian derivative with a sunken living-room. It looks like something out of 'Sunset Boulevard.'"

The sunken living-room is guarded by a large, lovable dog named Sam. "A farmer told us the dog positively was a male," Pett says. "So we named him Sam. Now we have the only pregnant Sam on Long Island."

The Petts wanted a son, but have three daughters. When he's home, Pett gets a chance to play with his 3-year-old daughter, Suki (for Susan) and talk over school problems with his 15-year-old Kathy and his eldest daughter, Amy, 18. Amy, who attends Goddard College in Plainfield, Vt., also has a talent for writing. "She's much better than I was at her age," her father says. "While everyone else her age seems to be so imitative, she deals more with detail. She looks down her nose at the newspaper business, but that doesn't bother me—it encourages me to try to make the business better."

Now 43 and just graying a little, Pett has been successful in "making the business better." His fluent wit and ability as a phrasemaker have charmed AP readers as much as his personable manner and writing talent have made his co-workers fast friends.

One of them is AP Columnist Hal Boyle, also a graduate of the University's School of Journalism. The two often reminisce about their college days, although each was at Missouri at a different time.

"Reporting seemed glamorous then," Pett says. "It was the most exciting thing in the world. It is, now, in many ways. But it's also hard, hard work. I have no more confidence now than I did in the news room at Missouri."

Pett's desk, filled with old Christmas cards, unused theater tickets, unanswered letters and a typewriter, is flush up against Boyle's desk. Often, Boyle's foot-high pile of letters and papers overflows onto Pett's desk. Although the two are good friends, Pett says, there must be a line drawn somewhere. And so, at the edge of Boyle's desk is a large sign: BOYLE ENDS HERE. And he does.

But in spite of such antics, Pett and Boyle remain best friends. Boyle calls Pett "one of the most gifted people I ever met." Pett, he says, is a "most thorough reporter. He's wonderful company; working with him kind of brightens your day. It's a pleasure to borrow money from him." Boyle adds, with a wink. "He's a sensitive and understanding human being. He's agonizingly comprehensive as a workman. But above all," says Boyle, "Saul Pett is a heckuva nice human being."

Tigers 3-3 in Big Eight

Despite a rather ragged start in basketball in 1960 (2-10), the new year brought brighter days for the Tigers. After six conference games in 1961, the score stood 3 wins and 3 losses for 3rd place in the Big 8.

The Tigers started Conference play by dropping road games to Iowa State and Nebraska, teams that had also beaten them in the Big Eight Tournament. Back on home boards after 6 straight losses on the road, Missouri rebounded with nifty wins over Oklahoma State and Oklahoma. A tough loss in a return match with Oklahoma State at Stillwater interrupted this brief winning streak; but the Tigers came back with their best effort of the season in their next home outing, a blistering 90-72 win over Colorado at Columbia to offset a 20 point pasting by the Bulls in Kansas City.

The only steady performer through these ups and downs has been the Conference's leading scorer, center Charlie Henke, whose 24 point per game average has already eclipsed Norm Stewart's 3-year scoring record of 1,112 points and now threatens Bob Reiter's 4-year total of 1,188 points. Henke needs only 8 points per game for the last eight to rewrite all the books.

Sporadic help has come from Joe Scott, who is sporting a 16-point per game average but who has suffered from the same vicissitudes that the team has. Scott's steadier scoring of late and the sudden emergence of senior Don Sarver have made the difference in the last few games.

Still ahead, though, are four tough ones with K.U. and K-State, the loop's co-leaders. It will take continued diversified scoring and a couple of wins away from home to keep Sparky's crew in contention.