



Senior Citizen Service

THE CALENDAR indicated it was the first of November; but summer, like an aging actress, could not resist taking one last curtain call before leaving the stage for good. The rays of the sun, in spite of the disadvantage of their inclination, still managed to drive the mercury up into the low 80's; and the doors of Mac's Service Shop stood wide open.

There was, though, something incongruous, almost oppressive, about the untimely warmth. As Barney, the Number Two Man of the service shop, put it when he returned tardily from his lunch hour, "It kinda feels as though Nature has a fever out there today."

"I was wondering if only I had that feeling!" Mac exclaimed with relief. "But don't try to distract me. How come you took such a long lunch hour?"

"Well," Barney said glibly, "you might say I did it for you. After lunch I called CQ on twenty meters with my ham rig and raised a fellow down in Ormond Beach, Florida. After we had exchanged the usual stuff about handles, QTH's, rigs, beam antennas, reception reports, and the weather, he asked what I did for a living. When I told him, he came right back and said he operated a small radio and TV shop down there. With that, naturally, we were off and running. This guy, Bud, is a pretty bright boy. He not only works at radio and TV service; he thinks about it, too, and he has some doggoned good ideas. In fact, he was coming up with so many interesting comments that I decided I could do us more good listening to him than I could pushing a solder-gun."

"I've got to hand it to you," Mac said, shaking his head admiringly. "Your Irish tongue always comes up with a good story. But you darned well better come up with some examples of those fine ideas you were allegedly drinking in; otherwise you can work a half hour late tonight."

"Fair enough," Barney agreed. "First off, I asked if the humid weather and the nearness of the ocean caused any peculiar service problems. He said he was confident they did. Coil windings in particular took a beating from the salt-

bearing moisture. Open windings and shorted turns were a very common occurrence in transformers, yoke windings, peaking coils, etc. Moisture also got into paper capacitors and caused them to become leaky and short-circuited more often than happened in drier inland localities. He was sure these troubles were unusual in their frequency because his experience revealed tubes *were not* the most common cause of set failure in his area. From his reading, he knew tube failures carried off the booby prize in most other places. I asked if the same conditions adversely affected printed circuits, and he said they didn't. Printed circuits seem to stand up just as well in the humid atmosphere as they do in drier climates."

"This is interesting, in an academic sort of way," Mac admitted; "but I've not heard anything yet of much use to us here in the Midwest."

"Be patient; I'm coming to the goodies," Barney retorted. "But don't forget you're always telling me a really good technician is interested in everything electronic, no matter if the information is of immediate benefit to him or not."

"I said it, it's true, and I withdraw my comment," Mac admitted cheerfully.

"Well, then," a mollified Barney continued, "Bud says the main thing that makes his service work different from that of most other service technicians is the average age of the people he serves. According to him, Ormond Beach is second only to the St. Pete area as a retirement center. A very high percentage of his customers are what Bud calls 'Senior Citizens.' Not once did he say 'old codgers,' 'old folks,' or anything like that. I very definitely got the feeling he not only respects these senior citizens but actually likes them."

"Is that so hard to believe?" Mac asked drily. "If a man doesn't like older folks, he must already despise his parents and is surely going to hate himself one of these days."

"Yeah! How about that? I never thought of it just that way," Barney admitted. "Anyway Bud says these retired

people insist on having the set repaired in the home. There are several reasons for this: first, they do not want to take a chance of having a large bill run up against them without their knowing it. When the work is being done right under their eyes, they feel they are in control of the situation. Secondly, most of them are a little lonely and really enjoy talking to a stranger. In fact, Bud says in working for senior citizens you must learn to work and to listen at the same time. At first it may seem a little difficult to be puzzling out the cause of a missing boost voltage while your ear is being bent with an account of how the customer's son was a real 'electronic' genius as a boy—you know: how he got KDKA loud and clear the very first time he adjusted the catwhisker on his homemade crystal set—but once you get used to it, it's not too hard."

"How about grandchildren?" Mac asked.

"They and pets come under the heading of sacred cows in the home of a senior citizen," Barney explained. "Quite often visiting grandchildren are encountered in the home, and rarely do the doting grandparents exercise as much control over them as parents would, but you must shoo them out of your tube caddy very gently. Be cross with them, and you might as well kick the dog or yell at the parakeet. In either case, your name is mud with that customer."

"Does he think these older people are more critical, more difficult to please?"

"In a way, yes. You see the TV set occupies a much more important place in their lives than it does in the lives of younger, more active people. That TV set often takes the place of an afternoon at the track, the country club dance, nine holes of golf, an evening of night-clubbing, or a day at the beach. In other words, it is their most important, if not their only, source of entertainment. Lavishing, as they do, so much attention on the set, these people are much more annoyed by imperfect reception than are more casual watchers. But by the same token they recognize and appreciate little improvements in performance that would escape people who only watch TV when they can't find something more exciting to do. There is satisfaction in working for a truly critical and appreciative customer—as we both know."

"Well, I know it, and I'm pleased and mildly surprised to learn you do. How does he find his senior citizens when it comes to paying for work? Did he mention that?"

"Yes, very emphatically. He says they are excellent pay. When the job is done, they have the money ready for you. There is none of this 'I'll-see-you-pay-day' jazz. He says senior citizens usually budget their money very closely. They have to. Most of them live on Social Security checks or other limited retirement income, and they have a horror of slipping into debt. They know how hard it is to get out when most of their income is already assigned to meeting current obligations."

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Mac's Service Shop

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"OK, you win," Mac conceded. "You don't have to make up that half hour. Your conversation with Bud has obviously turned your attention to a very important subject: how we, as service technicians, can best serve the interests of our senior citizens.

"Here in the United States we now have better than 16,500,000 people over 65 years of age, and the number is growing at the rate of more than 1000 a day. These figures are pretty impressive in themselves, but consider this: 929,000 of those people are over 85! This compares with 91,000 in 1920, or an increase of better than 920 per-cent in thirty years. If you want to think of a person as becoming 'old' at 65, quite obviously he has a fair chance of staying in this category for at least 20 years.

"These people must be clothed, fed, housed, doctored, and entertained. That means they are very important customers in a wide variety of businesses and professions. Even a casual look at national advertising shows most business men and their advertising agencies are already keenly aware of this fact. But I think this over-65 group is especially important to the radio and TV service technician. I say this because I'm convinced the most avid TV watchers are found at both ends of the life span: children and oldsters. Both groups have a great deal of leisure time; both must

find a large part of their diversion in the home. TV watching provides a method of escape from the boredom that would otherwise result from such a combination of leisure and restricted movement. They depend on TV for entertainment; we depend on TV to earn a living. They need us; we need them."

"I'm with you all the way," Barney chimed in. "And when you get right down to it, the service the senior citizens demand is not much more than any customer has a right to expect."

"There is one other thing they want that is a little extra," Mac said slowly. "It is an 'extra' that does not cost the service technician much to give, but it has a lot to do with his success in dealing with these senior citizens. They want to be treated as real people, not as over-age children. They want to be listened to with genuine interest instead of amused tolerance. The technician who can provide good service *plus* a little sympathetic understanding can easily win for himself a loyal following among this Golden Years crowd. I use the word 'loyal' advisedly. Elderly people do not like change for its own sake as younger people do. When they find a technician they like, they will stick with him year after year."

"I simply gotta get you and Bud together on the air. I never heard two guys sound so much alike."

"People who think right frequently think alike," Mac retorted. "You just listen to Bud and me and we'll make a thinking man's technician out of you yet!"

