

1999

SEEDLINGS TO SUNFLOWERS

Written By Hannah Louise Shearer

Randy Mantooth and I will spend six hours on the Internet tonight, answering over 250 questions from his devoted fans. I'll be typing, he'll be talking.

Ugh.

Not that I don't adore him – I do. Not that I don't think the fans on the *Emergency!* news group are nice folks – I do. But yikes, some of the questions they ask give me a headache. Randy's diplomatic and funny. I just want to scream *Really? Really? Why are you asking that??!!* The introvert in me screams, *why do you want to talk to me?* Hannah! Get a grip. They don't want to talk to you. You're a *conduit!*

So I ask myself, why are you doing this? Not for the money, because there isn't any. Out of loyalty to Randy? To *Emergency!*, a show that's been off the air for two generations now? To Bob's memory? To the piece of me that liked myself more than I do now?

I have no clear answer. The urge, the instinct to follow this path is too strong to ignore.

That may be why I stood in 105° heat on a Sunday not long ago, under an awning that was barely there, to let the public view Project 51 for the first time. Little or no publicity, Orange County for God's sake, a show that's older than *I* like to admit being...what for?

Over a thousand people thought different. Stunning. A thousand people stood in line for four frigging hours, waiting for Randy and Kevin to sign their memorabilia, memorabilia kept over the years or purchased right then and there. We made over \$10,000, minus expenses, on this, our first practice appearance.

I cannot take credit, although it would be nice, for the idea of putting *Emergency!* into the Smithsonian. *Emergency!*, to me, was the place I grew up in the business, a situation that can't ever be duplicated, a family of people who loved each other and had a great time making a show watched by 30 million people a gazillion years ago.

It also happened to make people aware of the possibility and reality of paramedics, and pushed forward the progress of emergency medicine in the field, by ten years. It also happened to influence, literally as we are now discovering, thousands of people to go into EMS as a paramedic or a nurse or a doctor. It also happened to save, by doing this, thousands of people who would have died without that care in the field.

I can't get my mind around any of that, really. They're just words, and a thing to be proud of in a distant sort of way. I don't count much in all of this hoopla, anyway.

It's the other stuff, the memories, the shared experiences, the friendships and feuds, the losses and the lessons, that's what's real to me.

But when the Smithsonian accepted *Emergency!*'s contributions in a record eight months instead of two years, she says proudly, none of us on the Project 51 committee of actors, writers, producers, widow of creator, firefighters, had any clue what we'd wrought: planning the incredibly complex tour of the shiny refurbished Squad 51 across the country in the Spring; fundraising for the trip and the induction; the merchandising with all its unbelievable headaches; the search for just the right fulfillment house, something no one had ever heard of a few years ago, let alone in the 70's; and the process of donating proceeds to the L.A. County Fire Department's Education Fund. This whole thing mushrooming like a nuke.

Right now we're not even a blip on the media's radar. By the time we hit Vegas, Chicago, New York, by the time we celebrate with the Orioles at Camden Yard, by the time the *Today Show* and *Oprah* are through with us, we will be. By the time we hand over the goods to the American Museum of Natural History, to be included in three (she says, again proudly) museums, Entertainment, EMS, and Fire, by then we'll be somewhat more than a blip. It's a lot more attention than we ever got from our peers when we were on the air. We were always that "other" show on Saturday nights, the one opposite the prestigious *All in the Family*.

Those of us who work in the background will be pushed out of the way and run over by the hordes who want to touch the hem of Randy and Kevin's turnout coats. Ever thus, and that's okay.

And there we'll be. At the Smithsonian. So that's pretty much why I'll get carpal tunnel tonight while Randy paces, even though I'd rather be going out to dinner.