



Island Rapport

Friday, Jun. 23, 1961

Her normally brown hair sprayed soft silver for the occasion, the job applicant presented herself at the desk of George Chaplin, editor of the Honolulu Advertiser. Honolulu Housewife Heloise Cruse, 40, admitted that she knew nothing about journalism, but Chaplin was undone by the sight of that sterling coiffure topping 62 inches of feminine aggression.

"It was obvious," said he later, "that if I didn't say yes, I was going to spend the rest of my working days saying no to her."

So began, in improbable fashion, one of the most improbable success stories in the annals of U.S. newspapering.

Cup & Water. Heloise had come to the Advertiser on a friend's dare, but she had a specific project in mind: "Something wide open where women and men could talk about anything they had on their minds." Her compass was so broad that her new column in the Advertiser's women's section was given the all-purpose title of "Readers' Exchange." As it developed, Hawaiians had plenty on their minds. A 22-year-old Chinese woman wrote that she had been a "walking zombie" since the death of her mother; her published letter produced a flood of sympathy, including an answer from an elderly haole (Caucasian) woman who had lost her husband. The bereaved young matron and the bereaved widow are now fast friends.

Another reader reported that Sanford's Xit, an ink eradicator, was also fine for removing banana-leaf stains, a common island washday problem. When this intelligence, duly confirmed by a home test, appeared in "Readers' Exchange," it generated such a demand that the U.S. manufacturer had to fly in an emergency planeload—which vanished in a day. So many similar hints poured in ("For those who have no dustpan. Wet the edge of a newspaper. Place it on the floor and sweep residue onto this"), that Columnist Heloise soon had a reputation as a household authority.

Heloise is the wife of an Air Force lieutenant colonel stationed at Honolulu's Hickam Air Force Base and the mother of two children. Her grasp on good housekeeping is scarcely older than her column. "I didn't know you had to clean a John until six months after I got married," says she. Once, before guests arrived for a garden party, she dressed up brown spots on her lawn with green vegetable dye. But her homely hints are usually followed to the letter: when she recommended putting a cup of water inside a turkey to keep it juicy while roasting, some readers obediently stuffed their birds with both cup and water.

Cleaning & Spraying. Letters now stream into "Readers' Exchange" at the rate of 1,000 a week, and Heloise is something of an island vogue. Last month, when the Advertiser gave a luncheon in her honor, 800 faithful readers bought tickets in advance. Heloise's column now appears in two mainland dailies. She has published a pamphlet of labor-saving household tips (the first

edition of 5,000 sold out in three days), and is in steady demand as a lecturer. Still an inveterate hair sprayer, she has changed color at least nine times—including blue, purple and green—since Editor Chaplin first saw her in her argent mood.

If the usual yardsticks of journalism cannot take Heloise's measure, Chaplin thinks he can. He is sure that her column's enormous popularity has played a substantial role in his paper's recent growth: circulation is up 40%, to 64,372, since Heloise boldly approached his desk. Said Chaplin last week: "Her readers sense that she is one of them, that she understands and appreciates—even if their families don't—the drudgery and tedium of day-in-day-out washing, cooking, cleaning and mending. Heloise is 'them,' and they are Heloise. It's the most fantastic rapport between columnist and readers I've ever known."