Getting Along Famously

The Academy of Achievement’s Corner on Celebrity

By Paul Hendrickson

Everybody knows what a celebrity is: the person you’d stand up in line for at a restaurant to stare at, knocking over your chair if necessary, ignoring your wife’s pleadings to sit back down. Telly Savalas is surely on everybody’s A list of famous people, while Charlton Heston, professor Irwin Corey and Ben Feldman may be a little further down.

Ben Feldman! He was “America’s No. 1 salesman of 1965.” That was the year he got tapped into the coveted American Academy of Achievement, along with Prof. Howard H. Aiken (“Father of the Computer”) and Helen Keller (“First Lady of Courage”).

Maybe you never heard of the Academy of Achievement, but it’s kind of a big deal. It’s sort of like a kind of exclusive club where you can meet famous people and have dinner with them, and they tell you all about their lives and their experiences.

The AAA, as some call it, is a kind of walking talking People magazine. It deals in fame, money and everything in between. Prominence is a tricky business, of course. By the time you realize you have it, you may not.

Brooke Shields, by Laura Elliott for The Washington Post; at right, from left: Ed Asner, Edward Teller, Alex Haley, Glen Whitney & James Doak

When you’re a celebrity, you get to jump the line at the movies and the trains, and you don’t have to worry about where to park your car.

At AAA everybody is a “great” by definition, though some are greater than others. But isn’t this kind of like life itself? Woe, we always have first among equals? At AAA everybody has an instant ID, a kind of Prominence Handle. They are printed in the program notes.

See ACHIEVE, C4, Col. 1
The academy's great idea has al-
yways been for each crop of little neu-
trons to beonoff AFA's big neu-
trons. Glen T. Whitney, 83 pounds of
brainpan, newly hatched from
grammar school, came to this year's
convocation wearing spectacles and a
watch that nearly swallowed his
wrist. Glen T. Whitney is deep into
mathematics. Next year he'll take
calculus. When he was in second
grade, his folks had him take a Stan-
ford University achievement poten-
tial test; his I.Q. was clocked at 180.
Recently the 15-year-old has been
starring in the Gifted and Talented
program at Abraham Clark School
in Rosedale.
The name of that school again,
please.

"Are-a-ham Clark. Clark, C-J-a-
r-k. One of the signers of the Decl-
are of Independence."

Of course.

"His father is involved in electron-
ic thermometers and special clocks. I
do all of his programming. He's a
very smart man, actually, but he
doesn't understand about computers. I
find myself very inter-
ested in design considerations, equa-
tions that determine how circuits
work. But what I want to do is break
out into other languages, specifically
Assembly and Fortran language.
That's forth, as in go forth."

The scribbler is breaking out into
a sweat. Maybe a change of subject.
How did you get here, Glen?

"Dallas. Flight 729. Departed
Nashville at 5:30 a.m. Eastern time."

"What's been the highlight of the
convocation so far?"

"I was especially interested in Dr.
Louis Sokoloff's talk on the brain."

John Sinos was supposed to go
to this convocation. All the
interviews he had to do in con-
junction with the 100th anniver-
sary of the University of Virginia. He
would be glad to be otherwise, I

"I like their program. If you look
down the line a bit, you'll see that,
you've got to be impressed. I was
inducted in Orlando in '77. I think
I had a good deal. I'm going to put
my name up. Leon and I are good friends, you

AAAs operating budget is about
$500,000 per year. The basic funding
is from big businesses who come back
as patrons after they've been inducted.
A developer or industrial tycoon will buy
eight or ten memberships and put up
dough. Next year, Ernest Hahn of San
Diego will cohost the event with the
Reynolds family. Hahn owns 42 shopping
centers. The 85 convocation will be in
Colorado Springs. William Coors of Coors
Beer will cohost.

The next convocation is not entirely
clear. There are awards councils and
nominating committees. Previous honorees are not necessarily con-
averse ones. If you're rich/power-
ful/athletic/cinematic/scientific or some-

Brian Reynolds, whose quackish
testimony this all was two decades ago,
is getting up in years now. He lives in
Palm Springs and still functions as
the academy's executive director.
His youngest son, Warren, functions as
the academy's managing director.
Wayne lives in Malibu and just got
out of law school. He's been working
on AAA since he was 8-15. He was
calling up the likes of Lili Nover
and Werner von Braun to ask them to
be members. (He had to bear his
voice.) He will carry his father's
great mission into the new century.

By then AAA may have to hook on
the Los Angeles Coliseum for its annu-

Lenny Kuntsch addressed an
afternoon symposium. He didn't pre-
pare his remarks. "No, I don't do
those," he said, before he went down to
the hall. "I just got up there, and if I feel some-
thing, I just say it. I just feel 'thank you'
and sit down."

He expanded on it for about six
minutes. His eyes watery. "I cared for
her, that's all," he said, trying to
explain why he loved into the Poto-
cac last Jan. 13 to try to save Prin-
cilla Timido. He turned to the mea-
lon for his words, his hands free.

His mother, who was in the audi-
ence, stood and applauded.