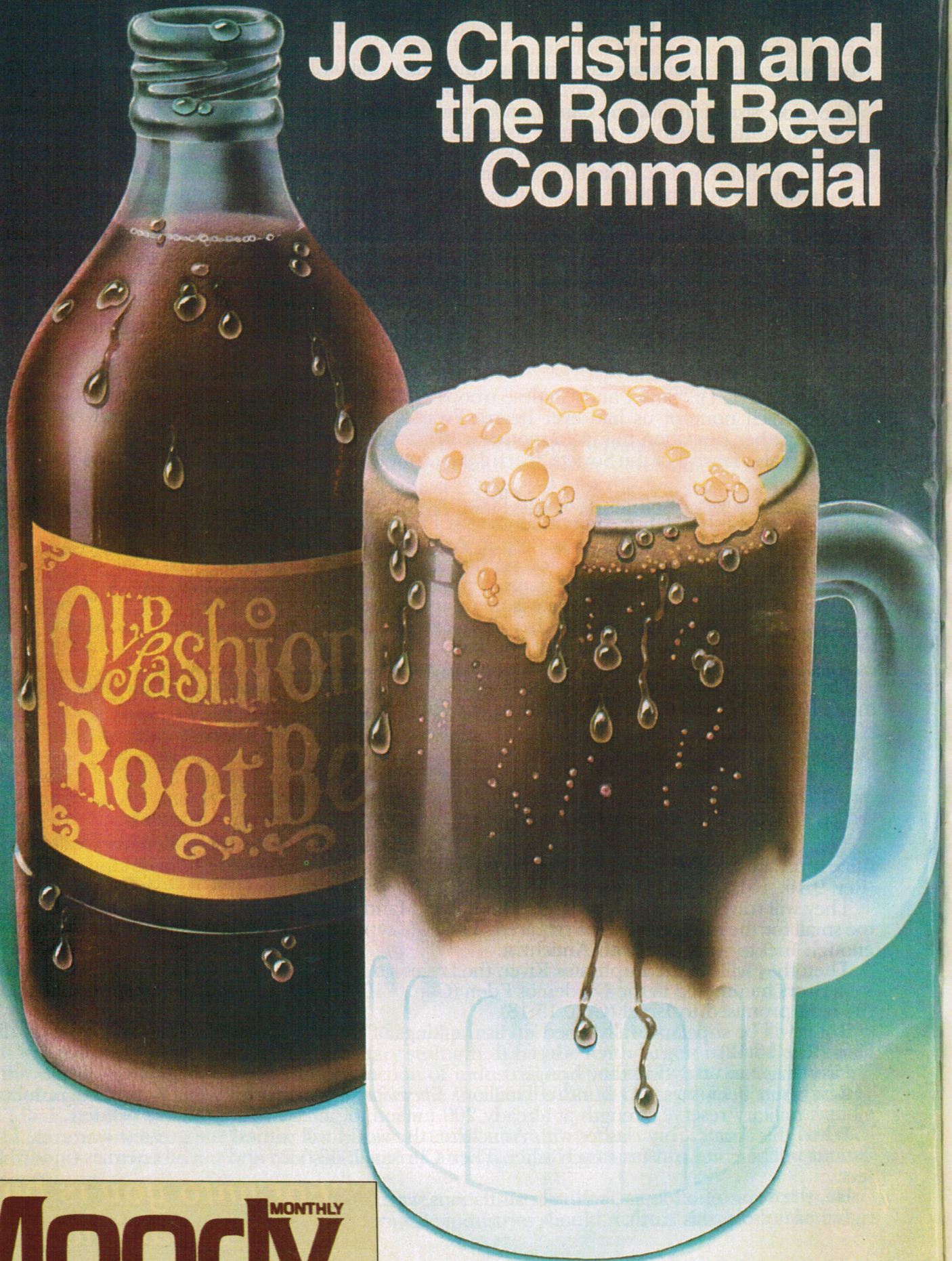


Joe Christian and the Root Beer Commercial



by John Prin

6:27 a.m.

The propman arrives on location driving a van filled with twenty coolers of root beer, chilled exactly to thirty-eight degrees. Of vital importance is that the root beer be cold enough to form a good head but not so cold that the glass frosts up or the head goes flat.

The root beer is unloaded, amidst the chaos of electricians moving lights and grips carrying dolly tracks, and placed safely inside the bar where the filming will occur. Each cooler is checked to verify that the labels, color-corrected picture-perfect facsimiles applied by hand to polished bottles the night before, are firmly attached and not wrinkled.

The production manager informs the propman that the director wants to shoot the root beer pours—the shot in every root beer commercial when the root beer is seen cascading into a glass—immediately after the master shot. The propman shows his assistant where to set up the glass-washing operation.

While the propman checks the thermometers inside each cooler, his assistant carries in a table, two drying racks, three bus trays, four cases of pilsner glasses, diapers (useful for wiping off the bottles and glasses to a lint-free gleam), brushes, and detergents, and sets up a wash and double-rinse using distilled water.

6:45 a.m.

The propman's twin brother, asleep in a city 2,000 miles away, hears his alarm clock. He rolls out of bed, spends three minutes shaving, four minutes fixing a small breakfast, and two minutes praying to the living God.

He reads in his Bible from John (4:35-36), "Vast fields of human souls are ripening all around us, and are ready now for reaping. The reapers will be paid good wages and will be gathering eternal souls into the granaries of heaven!"

7:03 a.m.

The director arrives and be-

Mr. Prin is in commercial work in Hollywood, California.

gins rehearsing the master shot. The propmen help rearrange furniture, hang curtains, and place an original antique root beer sign—the client's key prop—on a priceless mirror. It takes the combined efforts of the key grip, two best boys, and the propmen to hang it safely.

Extras arrive. A production assistant checks them in and mistakenly instructs them to sit next to the root beer coolers. One or two of the extras sit on the root beer coolers. The prop assistant alerts the propman who politely but urgently tells the extras to find seats elsewhere.

7:30 a.m.

While driving to work, the propman's twin brother tunes in a Christian radio station and hears a minister preaching about receiving Christ. Grateful for his own salvation, he resolves to tell at least one person about his faith and whistles "Amazing Grace" for the remainder of the journey to his office.

8:10 a.m.

The four principals, two handsome men and two lovely ladies, arrive. The production assistant directs them to the motor home where they change into wardrobe and makeup. Unexpectedly, the star spokesman (a famous TV celebrity) arrives early. He informs the production assistant that his schedule has changed, necessitating his leaving location four hours early.

The production assistant tells the production manager, who tells the director, who confers with the advertising agency team and then announces to the crew that all scenes involving the star will be shot first.

Hearing this, the propman and his assistant set up for the reverse angle prior to the pour shot (a close-up so close that the star is not seen) which means moving their equipment, coolers and all, outside so that the camera and dolly can occupy their corner of the counter.

8:05 a.m.

The propman's twin settles in behind his desk. His secretary brings him the previous week's sales charts.

He tells her about the joy in his life, but a disturbing inventory ratio catches his eye and he lets the real point slip his mind.

9:15 a.m.

The director, impatient that the master shot is still not ready to film, tells the production manager to call in the principals and extras. The propmen are indisposed because the root beer—the real star of the spot—is warming in the bright sun. The production manager throws furniture blankets over the coolers and urges the propmen back in to their part of the work.

The star spokesman appears from the motor home full of apologies to the agency. They laugh at his quips and usher him into the set.

The production manager calls for quiet and yells, "Roll 'em!" The tedious process of forty-two master takes begins. Each "Cut!" means a new root beer bottle, a new empty glass, and new dolly and lens adjustments.

11 a.m.

The propman's brother grabs the phone to determine why there is a downward trend in computer sales. During the next hour he'll talk to nine different people, trying to keep in mind Colossians 4:5-6, "Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer every one."

11:20 a.m.

The propmen, sweating as if in a steam bath, hear the sweet words, "Wrong set-up, boys. Check the gate." Each wipes his face with a diaper. The propman runs outside to check the thermometers. The average is forty-five degrees. He and his assistant dump ice in the coolers.

The director rehearses the principals and extras while the crew hustles to speed things along. The production manager shouts, "Lunch, a half hour!" He reminds the director that the star must leave in three hours. The director paces, muttering, "The reverse angle, his single, wild lines, how'll we get it all in?"

Noon

The propman's twin meets his su-

ervisor for lunch in the executive dining room. They discuss the ramifications of the downward trend, now verified, and formulate strategies to reverse it. His supervisor admits in passing to a downward trend in his personal life, something about his family. The twin detects a spiritual conflict in the man's priorities but, shying away from clichés, limits his responses to secular advice.

12:30 p.m.

The production manager shouts, "We're back!" Within

minutes the crew is ready to shoot. The director frames the shot for the close-up, and twenty-seven takes later—thirty minutes of the brand name being repeated—calls for the extras.

The propmen give the principals and extras the same bottles and glasses as in the master shot. The propman is careful to give the spokesman the best hero ("perfect") bottle and sprays drops of water on the glass to give it that mouth-watering look.

Meanwhile the camera crew readies for the reverse angle and, after rehearsals and thirty-nine takes, the production manager whispers in the director's ear, "Don't forget, we lose our spokesman in ten minutes."

The director calls for wild lines, and the copy is recorded innumerable ways. The spokesman waves to all, shakes hands with the director, thanks the agency team, and leaves.

3 p.m.

The propman's brother, feeling guilty about missing his opportunity at lunch, sees his chance to reflect the bright side of the sales trend to his secretary. Knowing that all things work together for good to those who love the Lord, he tells her that everything will be okay. "I wish I could feel that good about it," she says. Hurrying into his office because of his busy schedule, he mumbles that his certainty comes from the Bible.

4:20 p.m.

The director shoots close-ups of each principal, twelve to fifteen takes each, every time with fresh bottles and glasses. The propmen move like well-tuned pistons. He tells the actors they are through, then turns to the propman and asks how soon he'll be ready to pour. "Twenty minutes, sir."

The director and agency team slip away for a break. The director of photography places a stand-in glass on the counter and frames the shot. The gaffer adjusts the lights and highlights the glass. The key grip adjusts additional equipment and makes the area surrounding the glass a gnarl of protuberances.

Contending with the antique sign in the background, which he cannot obstruct (or nudge), and the grip's protrusions—which he cannot move, the propman leans from off-camera with the help of his assistant and pours the root beer into the thrice-washed glass. The agency creative director, shoulder-to-shoulder with the director, comments that the root beer head is too high. The propman, aware that the angle of the pour is a critical factor, assures them that

▷ 40



The Bible tells us we all begin our new lives in Jesus Christ as "babes," drinking milk before we start in on solid food.* We have to crawl before we can walk.

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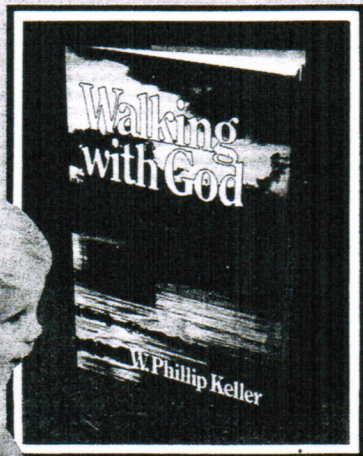
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*1 Cor. 3:1,2

he will get it right the next time. Meanwhile the assistant washes, rinses, and drains each glass.

5 p.m.

The propman's twin gets a call from his wife to stop at the grocery store on his way home. He tells her about his frustrating day. She reassures him that actions speak louder than words, and that his true witness is how he behaves under stress. They pray together, asking for help in his work and his boss's life.

6:30 p.m.

The crew is now four hours

into overtime, the director and agency team are eager to keep their dinner reservations, and the moment for which this spot was created has yet to happen. The pressure is building. The director of photography works twelve minutes with the lighting until it is just right.

At last, a new glass is placed on the counter and the hero bottle is sprayed with water droplets. The director calls "Action." The agency team holds its breath. The propman pours. The root

beer enters the glass with smooth 'blubs,' rises evenly, forms into gleeful bubbles that transform into a thirst-quenching head, and—too bad—gurgles over.

6:40 p.m.

The propman's twin stops at the neighborhood grocery. An elderly shopper, a familiar lady, accidentally bumps her cart into his. She apologizes, but his mind is on getting home and he hardly hears her. Nodding, he pushes on. She starts visiting with him, however, monopolizing his time as one woe after another tumbles from her mouth. Annoyed, he makes excuses rather than helping solve her loneliness and successfully avoids her.

7:20 p.m.

Take 5. The high temperatures from the lights and the high tempers from the tension are felt by everyone. This shot is what everybody is being paid for, and not doing it right means a re-shoot. Money is of no consequence. Performance is of the essence. The client's product must not be minimized. Frowns appear on the faces of the dozen onlookers. The prop assistant gives his boss a 'thumbs up.' The propman, kneeling like a contortionist, rubs his tired forearm and nods.

The ease with which the root beer descends into the glass foretells perfection. The bubbles are "hero." The head is "hero." The pour is "hero." Shouts of joy. Applause. "Print!"

The propman's brother arrives home. His wife takes the bag of groceries as he flops, exhausted, into an easy chair and does his best to be a good father to his two kids who are bursting with energy. His morning vow has not yet been carried out.

8:30 p.m.

The glass-washing operation is disassembled, the antique root beer sign is packed away, the glasses and hero bottles are wrapped individually.

The prop assistant slaps the propman's shoulder and compliments him on a great performance. "It's an art like anything else," the propman says. "When it gets hot and heavy, you either come through or you don't."

"All that work for just thirty seconds of screen time!"

"To a nationwide audience, it's worth it," the propman says. "That's what sells." □

The choice is yours.

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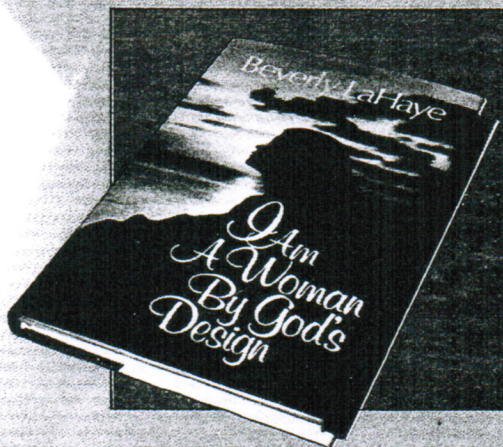
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