

A Man in a Hole...

Furious Activity in Gaping Basement Offers Chance for Questions, Answers

By SISTER MARY GILBERT

He's always in the hole. He doesn't belong to the underground, but he spends most of his time there. And if you're trying to "dig up" a feature, Jim O'Donnell's your man. He's overseeing the excavation for the new science building.

"Is that your bull dozing?" I began experimentally, as I skirted the huge pit between the journalism school and the press.

Jim signaled a truck driver to go ahead.

"Where are they taking all that dirt?" I asked.

Simple Logic

"They're using it for a fill at the new University heating plant," he told me. "They can't build here till they have a hole and can't build there till they haven't one."

A scoop full of earth cascaded into a waiting truck.

"What a tremendous mud-pie potential," I reflected. Out loud, I said, "What's that yellow monster over there?"

"That's a turn-a-pull," Jim answered. "Sometimes they call 'em scrapers. They can go about 25 miles an hour except when they get caught in this stickum. Then it takes a pushcat to get 'em out."

"Pushcat?" I queried, trying to spot the animal.

"Bulldozer," he translated amiably.

We watched the 40-thousand-dollar toys cavorting through mud.

Just Like Magic

"They can't tip over," he assured me as one of the frisky yellow giants waddled over a miniature mountain. "They're electrically controlled."

I shifted my gaze anyway, just in case . . .

"And the other equipment?" I urged briskly.

Two draglines lift dirt onto trucks which carry about four yards of gumbo each trip, the foreman explained. It takes about two minutes to load a truck, and they total 40 trips or so a day.

"If the mountain won't come to

Mohammed," I muttered.

"What's that?"

As Clear as Mud

"I said, 'Are you going all the way to China?'"

He tipped his hat back and squinted in my direction.

"Hard to hear above this racket," he yelled.

"How far down do you have to go?" I shouted back at him.

"Twelve feet. We've been working 10 days, and it'll take another week or 10 days to get there."

Still in Hole

Mentally, I subtracted the days I don't have class from 10. Then I multiplied by the number of frayed nerves.

"Science is wonderful," I screamed with the best smile I could work up on short notice. "And the riveters probably will get here for summer school, if not before."

Jim looked a bit puzzled.

"On the heating plant," he began, "we have two cats and . . ." I left him in the hole.

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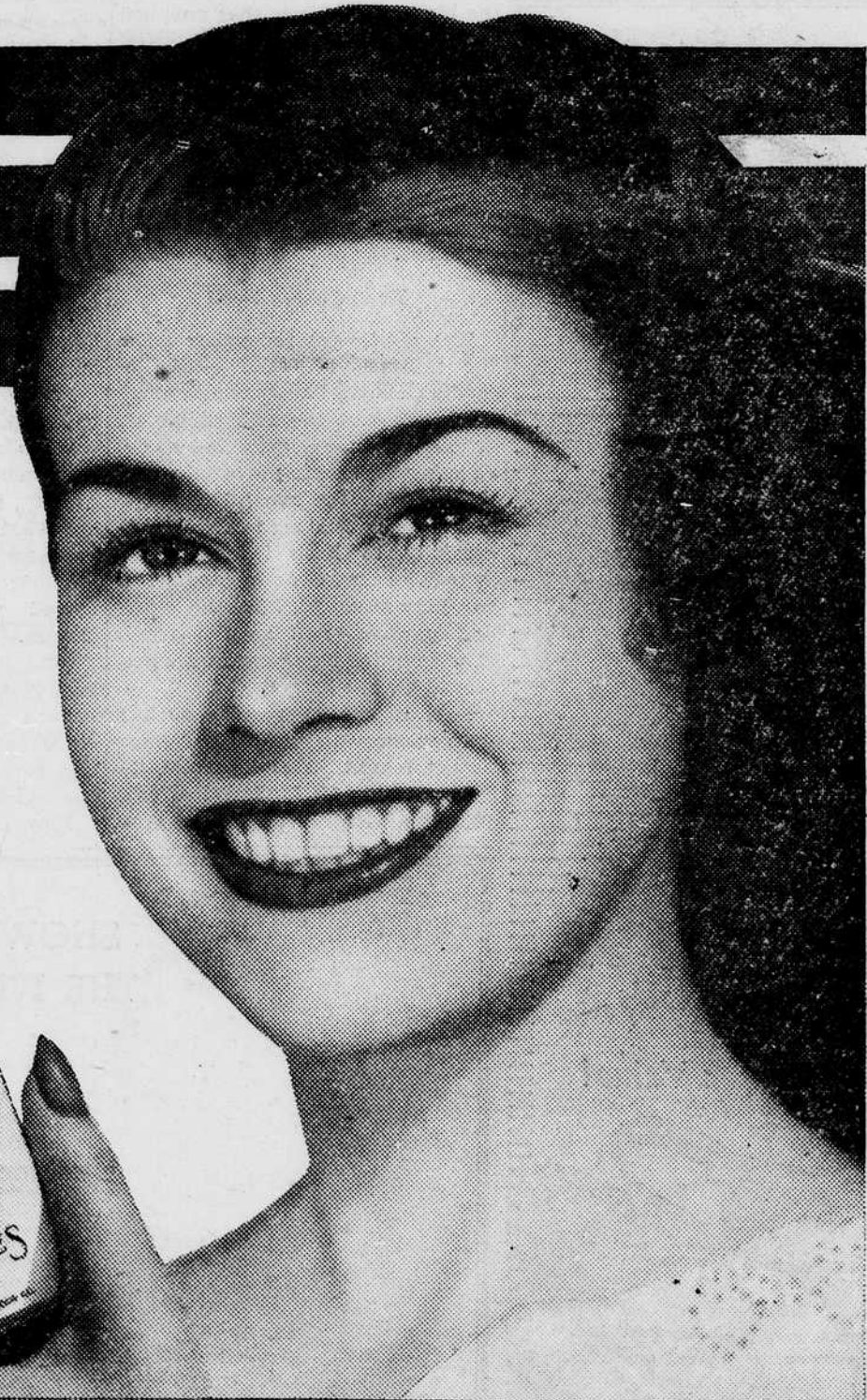
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