

Family Weekly is proud to present the first of a two-part condensation of the soul-searching story of a famous broadcaster's battle for health and happiness against a relentless foe—drug addiction. This is the story of his secret war and his final victory. We salute his courage in telling his story as an inspiration to others. Both installments are excerpted from his autobiography, "The Taste of Ashes," written with Oscar Fraley. Copyright © 1959 by Oscar Fraley and Bill Stern. By permission of Henry Holt & Co., Inc., 383 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

# THE TASTE

**I**T WAS A DAY of sunshine and laughter. The huge oval Sugar Bowl Stadium in New Orleans was packed with 83,000 football fans this New Year's Day of 1956 to watch Georgia Tech play Pittsburgh. The opening kickoff was only minutes away.

These are always moments of tension. Yet there was even more of an undercurrent than usual in the American Broadcasting Company radio-television booth perched high atop the concrete lip of the sprawling stadium.

Bill Stern, whose mellow, authoritative voice was to carry the game to countless millions from coast to coast, was late.

A moment later he burst into the booth, plunged to his seat, and took the signal from the engineer.

"Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. This is Bill Stern speaking from the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans, where this afternoon we bring you the Sugar Bowl classic between Pittsburgh and Georgia Tech. The captains are going out on the field, and here are the starting lineups:

"For Pittsburgh, at left end, Joe Walton, 210 pounds, from Beaver Falls, Pa.

"At left tackle, Bob Pollock, six feet, two inches, from Mount Carmel, Pa."

After these few words, the tension in the booth built to a suffocating pitch.

Bill Stern, the man whose smooth, steady patter was radio legend, had begun to run down like an old-fashioned phonograph. Wide-eyed watchers in the booth noticed for the first time that his make-up had been daubed on with slapdash abandon, showing waxy white patches of skin, and his lips moved with a strange mechanical stiffness.

"At left tackle," he repeated, groping for words that would not come, "at left tackle, ah, Bob, ah . . ."

The floor man stared helplessly at Ray Scott, who was to assist Stern in the broadcast. Billy Whitehouse, ABC's sports editor, acted. Snatching a pencil, he scribbled a note and thrust it in front of Stern.

"Give it to Scott."

Bill Stern sat there, his voice frozen inside him, as the game began. A few minutes later, with painfully studied deliberation, he lifted himself from his chair and stumbled blindly from the booth.

What had happened to Bill Stern?

He wasn't a drinker. ABC, searching desperately for a plausible excuse, announced that he had been shaken up in an automobile accident enroute to the stadium.

That was a fantasy, just as were some of the stories Bill Stern had told on the air as he drove himself ruthlessly to success and a \$200,000-a-year income.

The truth was a dark secret Bill Stern had fought to keep from the world for 16 years: that he was a "legal" drug addict.

It all began on another bright, sunshiny day in Texas 21 years before with an automobile accident and led through physical agony and mental torment to a sanitarium where, for six months during 1956, Bill Stern fought and won a desperate battle for his life.

This is the story of that battle and the courage it took to find victory in the darkest hour.



Bill Stern and his wife Harriet in their home in Purchase, N. Y.