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Battle of the Tv Medics

THE OTHER DAY at a Beverly Hills restaurant, a woman rushed up to actor Dick Chamberlain. "May I have your autograph, please?"

The young man obliged by scribbling "Dick Chamberlain—Dr. Kildare" on the back of her menu.

The woman hesitated, then pointed to her midriff. "I... I have a persistent pain right here. Of course, you're not a real doctor, but I thought you might've heard something."

Dick Chamberlain smiled sympathetically. "I get the same thing myself." His voice lowered to a confidential whisper. "I think it's my belt. Too tight."

"Thank you so much," the woman gushed, and returned to her table.

"This happens all the time," the star of television's Dr. Kildare series told me, "and frankly I don't know what to do—except kid people about it. But often they take it seriously. And believe me, I don't know anything about medicine."

At a recording studio only a two-minute walk from Desilu studio, where his "Ben Casey" series is filmed, Vince Edwards took time off from recording a ballad to tell me that he, too, is constantly pressed for medical advice. "Even real doctors and nurses discuss cases with me. It gets to be pretty monotonous!"

In a way, public reaction to today's two top tv heroes is not surprising. In recent months, Doctors Casey and Kildare have succeeded in taking the limelight away from the long-popular Westerns and focusing it on the medical profession.

EDWARDS is 30 according to him, 33 according to his official biography, and 36 according to other sources. Chamberlain is 27, but admits the studio will never let him grow older. Together they have made such an impact on television audiences that by next season it will be impossible to find a week night that doesn't expose the viewer to some communicable disease via a new medical series.

How do the present heroes of the bandage clan feel about this competition?

Ben Casey, alias Vince Edwards, insists, "I don't want to play a doctor indefinitely, anyway. But we have a good show, and I'm not concerned about competition."

Dr. Kildare, nee Dick Chamberlain, worried about his show's future at first but has since gained confidence. "Let them come," he says. "The more the merrier."

The difference in appearance, outlook, personality, and background of the two popular stars makes an interesting comparison. It is to their credit that neither has ever been heard muttering an unkind



Dick Chamberlain shares the spotlight with veteran actor Raymond Massey and Dina Merrill on recent show.

Richard Chamberlain ("Doctor Kildare") and Vince Edwards ("Ben Casey") have different bedside manners, but both have found the prescription for success



In one of his rare smiling moods, Vince Edwards discusses a case with his patient mentor, Sam Jaffe.

remark about the other. In fact, Dick Chamberlain insists he would like to meet Vince "to compare notes." Vince hasn't made such overtures, but then he isn't exactly the exuberant type. In fact, the former Vincent Edward Zoino of Brooklyn has already established a reputation as tv's most dour personality. Finding a smile on his face is rare indeed!

After a stint in B movies, Vince made some records which didn't sell, and no one was conscious of his presence till he walked into agent Abby Greshler's office a little over a year ago. Abby, one of the shrewdest men in his field, recognized Vince's potential qualities and set up a meeting with "Ben Casey" producer Jim Mosher. The latter was so impressed by the earthy, seemingly belligerent Edwards that he chose him from more than 100 candidates for the title role of "Ben Casey."

While there's nothing very conventional about Edwards, there's nothing extraordinary about him either, other than that he hated to wear shoes and socks as a boy. He stands 6 feet, 2 inches, has brown hair, hazel-green eyes, is the youngest (a twin) of seven children, takes pride in being trim and well-muscled, distinguished himself as a swimmer at Ohio State University and the University of Hawaii, and at one time was New York State swimming champion.

His mother, a dietitian, helps prepare meals at a New York high school. His father, who was a construction worker, died several years ago.

Vince lives with his grandmother in a modest Hollywood home, but says he is looking for a house of his own in Brentwood. He is currently going steady with Sherry Nelson, an attractive blonde non-professional, and his friends think his interest in a new home means he's ready for marriage.

VINCE NEVER had much money before he started his series. "As a result," a friend says, "he is still pretty tight with a dollar. When he goes to a restaurant, he will analyze the bill the way he diagnoses a patient on tv."

But Vince's bank account is swelling with his popularity, and not just because of his conservative financial policies. Vince went to work at \$1,750 a week and is in a hot battle with producers for more—specifically, \$7,500 a week, 25 percent of the profits, and \$100,000 to finance pilot shows of his own.

Dick Chamberlain, who shares the spotlight with veteran actor Raymond Massey in "Dr. Kildare," has made no such financial demands. In fact, he hasn't made any. He started with \$400 a week and, according to a studio official, still makes less than \$1,000—and never complains. Yet his appreciation for the dollar is just as great

By PEER J. OPPENHEIMER

as Edwards' although he was born in Beverly Hills—on the wrong side of Santa Monica Boulevard.

His father was a market-fixtures salesman who started his own business only three years ago. To earn pocket money, Dick had a paper route, was a box boy at a supermarket, and a construction laborer while studying art at Pomona College. "I had hoped to become a commercial artist," he told me, "and I still like to paint. Unfortunately there's no time now."

The idea of becoming an actor first occurred to him at college and, with the help of an agent-friend, he landed a small supporting role in "Gunsmoke."

Dick was tested by MGM for the leads in two other series and was turned down both times. The Kildare role had been tentatively assigned to Lew Ayres, who had originated it 25 years ago opposite Lionel Barrymore's Dr. Gillespie. But the sponsors reportedly considered Ayres too old, and the race was on with 35 young actors testing for the part. Luckily someone remembered the tall, blond, blue-eyed young man who was considered almost "too pretty" for the role. He won out.

LIKE VINCE, Dick is single, and has a steady girl, Clara Ray, whom he met while studying singing at the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music. "The marriage-license bureau isn't going to collect my \$3 for a long time," he insists. "With my work time, I'm lucky to have any private life of my own."

He rents a small, hardly accessible house in the Hollywood Hills and is likely to stay there for some time. In spite of a gradual increase in salary, there are too many things he wants to buy—including a new car to replace his ancient foreign sports model—before investing in a home.

A short while ago, Dick followed Vince into the recording business. Even if he is successful in this venture, he stands no chance of getting rich as a singer. His recording is done for MGM as part of a seven-year exclusive contract for his services in all fields of entertainment.

On the other hand, in spite of several unsuccessful starts in the recording field before he became famous, Edwards could make \$1 million from his first recording.

Whether these two actors want to or not, they will be involved in a popularity contest. At this time it is anybody's guess who will win. And there's always a chance that both will die from a common tv malady—overexposure.

Meanwhile, they might find some satisfaction from the longevity of other tv durables—like the Western and the private eye, both of which have weathered more crises than Doctors Casey and Kildare are likely to encounter for a long time.

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