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"Old Stone Face" can now smile while nibbling from pot as daughter Betty Precht looks on.

Now I Can Smile!

Television's original poker puss says life's a lark—now that his ulcer is gone

By ED SULLIVAN as told to Marya Saunders and Robert Gaines

WHEN I WAS IN PARIS last year, I dined one evening with Maurice Chevalier. My ulcer had been acting up all day and, though we were in one of the most expensive restaurants on the Right Bank, I could barely touch the marvelous meal that was served to us.

Chevalier noticed this and said, "Ah, my dear Edward, are you feeling all right?"

"Fine," I said.

He pointed to my plate. "But you're not eating."

"I never eat," I complained sourly. Chevalier raised his eyebrows in the inimitable way he has, as if to say, "How crazy these Americans are! They fly 3,000 miles to Paris and then refuse to taste its greatest pleasure—good food."

How can you tell a Frenchman who has always enjoyed the very best cuisine what it is like to live with an ulcer? How can you tell him what it is like to live on mush and baby food? Or how an ulcer can completely cut you off from the world of good food and pleasant after-dinner talk?

For 13 years—ever since my first appearance on TV—people and particularly the TV critics have used terms like "dead pan," "poker face," and "stone face" to describe me. A few laughingly nicknamed me "Old Smiley." There was ample justification for this dour description. I didn't smile. An ulcer isolated me in a world of irritability.

Last June, I had an operation. My ulcer was removed surgically. Eight weeks later, I began discovering a brand-new world—a world most people take for granted.

After my first live TV show this fall, a friend stopped me on the street and said, "Boy, Ed, did you look happy on the show! You even smiled." The following day, cards, letters, and calls poured into the network complimenting me on the show and the fact that I seemed to be smiling and happy and getting so much more pleasure from the acts.

The reason was simple. You saw a smiling and happy man because for the first time you saw me on the air when I wasn't in physical pain.

If you have never had an ulcer, it is difficult to understand the tremendous pleasure of getting over it. I'll tell you what an ulcer is: you can be walking along the street and the mere impact of your heel on the sidewalk will start a sharp pain in your stomach. It spreads until it is in your upper back, and you are encircled by a band of aching pain.

Smile? It wasn't easy.

It seems to me that for most of my life I have lived a freak existence. Since high school back in Port Chester, N.Y., when my ulcer began, I've seldom had a decent meal. Food has meant little to me except pain, nausea, and the constant, depressing experience of pumping my stomach. I got by on pills and powders and nervous energy.

The tragedy of an ulcer is not only that it cuts you off from the world of food, but it can cut you off from friends. In spite of the fact that I have met many fascinating people, my ulcer often made me a lonely man. I couldn't count the number of times I've sat in fine restaurants staring at a poached egg while everybody else was discussing the gustatory joys of their various steaks and sauces. Finally I would get bored with being the outsider, and I would go home early.

Often, I wouldn't even bother to go out at all. After rehearsals of our show, the cast would go out together to eat, but I would stay up in my dressing room and wait for them to bring me back a container of milk and pound cake.

This is the world that has so recently come to an end for me. The ulcer is gone now, and I eat like a horse. It's the "goldarndest" feeling. I even look enviously at other people's plates and feel like swiping what they're eating!

Some people get ulcers because they produce excess acids in their digestive tracts. When they are upset or tense, the vagus nerve, which controls the supply of acid, becomes overly active, and acids spill into the stomach.

Once in the stomach, this acid begins to eat away at the lining. Imagine what it would be like if you had a little scratch on your hand and each day you rubbed acid on it. In a short time you would have a good-sized irritation. This is what happens in the stomach when you have an ulcer.

ONLY IN THE PAST 10 years has an operation been perfected to sever the main vagus nerve and tie off the smaller branch nerves. Before that time, doctors could only cut out the ulcer, not the cause. In the case of an ulcer as bad as mine, this would have left only 20 percent of my stomach and the dreadful prospect of acids still eating away.

Once the flow of acid is cut down, you realize you are free of the ulcer and begin to live like a normal human being. I even eat like one. Now I love to eat, and for the first time in my life, I can eat anything. Anything!

Now that I enjoy three full meals a day, I've developed new reading habits, too. Not only do I carefully read every menu that comes my way, but I own a calorie book.

This interest in calories is actually a deliberate plan on the part of my doctor and me. I'm trying to gain weight.

You gals may not think so, but this is very difficult. After my operation I weighed 130 pounds, which was 25 pounds under my normal weight. In three months I've put on 16 pounds. Now, that's pretty good eating!

Someone asked recently if I could name my favorite feast of calories now that I was so busy eating. Well, the meal would start off with oysters on the half shell, then creamed chicken hash or two French lamb chops. As side dishes, I

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