

Adult Essay
Honorable Mention

Celebrity Encounters—Slim Pickings
By Andy Field

We all dream of meeting a celebrity. Tom Hanks! Lady Gaga! The Mooch!! I met Slim Whitman.

You know, the guy whose commercials claimed he sold more records than Elvis and the Beatles. That guy.

Our rendezvous happened while I was working as a Green Bay, Wisconsin, TV reporter. Our station ran Slim Whitman's record infomercials nonstop. Honestly, no one there had heard of Slim Whitman until those ads ran. The station ran them so often because their co-op advertising deal paid them for every album sold when you called the number.

Our station sat across the street from the Green Bay Packers stadium, and the city's only high-end lodging was at the end of our parking lot.

So, Slim wasn't hard to find for the exclusive interview I sought for our 6 p.m. news.

The competition wanted him too, but I bribed a hotel housekeeper to keep his location hidden. Five dollars, if you must know.

My then 23-year-old enterprising self knocked on country star Slim's hotel room door and he naturally opened it dressed in cowboy pajamas.

The shock of seeing this celebrity passed quickly and he agreed to our exclusive LIVE, on-set interview on WLUK-TV's early news.

At the appointed hour, I walked Slim across the parking lot to our cinderblock box TV station and down into our dungeon-like newsroom. My colleagues reacted as if the messiah had arrived. Remember, we were in Green Bay where the biggest celebrity was Packers quarterback and coach Bart Starr.

My colleague and future CNN Anchor Grant Perry and I used to make fun of the silly Slim Whitman infomercials, singing "Oh Rose Marie, I love you" while attempting a Slim yodel.

I spied Grant in a corner TV editing room piecing together his 6 p.m. news story and knocked on the door.

"What?!" barked Grant, not looking up from his screen.

“Slim Whitman’s here to say hello.” I smiled.

“Right!” Grant replied and then said what I think is a nasty word without looking away from his deadline project

“Howdy, Grant,” said Slim, extending his hand to shake Grant’s. “Holy ...!” (another bad word) replied Grant.

Yes, Slim was our celebrity.

Suddenly, showtime.

We marched up out of the news dungeon to the TV studio. The anchorman—think Ron Burgundy, but a tad more serious—takes his seat. We take ours on a bench off to his side. I’m thinking, they’ll have us on as a feature right after weather or sports.

I thought wrong.

TV 11 music intro plays, the anchorman begins. “Welcome to TV 11 News at 6. Our top story, Slim Whitman is here and TV 11’s Andy Field has an exclusive live interview.”

Not much breaking news happens in Green Bay.

It was the talk of the town. The competing station rushed to our parking lot to get the slim pickings when we were done.

And Slim taught me to yodel.