

## BEN CASEY, WON'T YOU PLEASE COME HOME?

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One of the interesting personalities in popular medical make-believe is the bedeviled neophyte neurosurgeon, Dr. Ben Casey, whose weekly sufferings on television have captured the fancy of current audiences.

Not since the long-gone days of Lew Ayres and Lionel Barrymore, whose movie and radio roles as Drs. Kildare and Gillespie carried them through many years of medical crises, has a doctor been so much on the public's tongue. While Gillespie, the philosophical, wheelchair oracle might have been classified as an internist diagnostician, the original Kildare, as we remember him, was more of a general specialist well versed in areas that ranged from the prostate to the middle ear and was equally at home over a patient supine on a psychiatrist's couch or one jackknifed for hemorrhoidectomy on an operating table. It is probably a reflection of our frenzied present time that Ben Casey confines his medical miracles to that most glamorous and high powered of all specialized fields, Neurosurgery. His super specialization was more than evident during a recent program in which Ben Casey was content to stand by in a delivery room, pushing timidly on a swollen fundus, (a little unsure of himself, we thought), consoling one of his postoperative brain tumors, while a couple of inexpert obstetricians grew panicky over the simple delivery of a seven month premature. The old Kildare would not have put up with such pussyfooting.

We do not mean, really, to chide Ben Casey for his unfamiliarity with other fields, since it is apparently perfectly acceptable conduct in this day of specialization, and especially in his position as a resident physician. We do have great admiration for Ben Casey's neurological acumen and cranial surgical skill, but we are becoming a little worried about some of his personality problems and his difficulties in adjusting to hospital routine and personnel.

As near as can be gathered, Ben Casey (he is seldom referred to as Casey, Dr. Casey, or even plain Ben, but always by both names run together in the fashion of the musical Bill Bailey) is the senior neurosurgical resident in a rather confused general hospital. Consulting our most recent *Directory of Medical Specialists*, we find that the training qualifications for board eligibility in Neurosurgery require at least one year of rotating or surgical internship, plus a period of progressive graduate study in the specialty of not less than four years. By simple calculation, this would put Ben Casey, at the latest, in the class of medical school graduates of 1957. If we assume that Ben Casey was an average student, and giving him a full eight years of elementary schooling, four years of high school, four years of college and four years of medical school, his age at present must be in the vicinity of 30 – 31 years. This figure checks with *TV Guide*, which puts Vince Edwards, who plays the role of Ben Casey, in his thirtieth year.

From all outward appearances the general hospital seems to revolve around Ben Casey, who, instead of being grateful for this position of prominence, skulks around the corridors and treatment rooms, at times depressed and cynical, and nearly always in a foul humor; insulting staff members, chiefs of service, head nurses, and making life miserable for his subordinate third year resident, whom he sarcastically refers to impersonally as "Doctor;" whenever they meet over coffee, x-rays or open skulls. Ben Casey is a "loner," chronically tired and overworked, but carrying on doggedly and bull headedly in his determination not to yield to the pressures of organized medicine or hospital regulations and policy. He carries on a running feud with the hospital administrator, whom he obviously thinks is a

jackass, and with the hospital board, which, after almost four years of it, must certainly be worn out from being called into special session to deal with the medicolegal and ethical problems that Ben Casey and his actions have thrust upon them. In fact, and particularly in the light of the unfailing loyalty and support of his fawning and simpering chief of Neurosurgery, played by aging Sam Jaffe, there can be no possible reason for retaining Ben Casey on the hospital staff payroll unless the whole bunch are involved in some massive, illicit narcotics trade, with Ben Casey holding the upper, blackmailing hand.

When we first saw Ben Casey in action, we had him spotted as the chronic resident—a victim, say of ten or twelve years of hospitalitis. Knowing now; however, that he has just turned 30 in only his fourth year of training, and that in a few months he will be forced to leave the sheltering walls of his general hospital to go out and face life and the hard realities of practice on his own, we wish that he could be made to mend his ways. If he continues in his present frame of mind, we can foresee nothing but more trouble ahead for Ben Casey in his specialty.

Neurosurgeons, and we must confess that their image in our minds may have been influenced by our recollections of two former professors and a local example of our own, are notoriously not the most easy-going of medical artists, and generally tend to become more cantankerous with age. Having observed Ben Casey already in a series of temper tantrums; throwing instruments across operating rooms, embittered against the world in general and his fellow doctors in particular, and snapping at the patients and families that may someday be his livelihood—all this while he is still in his formative period with his training yet incomplete—we can only hope that somehow soon he will have a change of heart. Perhaps if he were to come home for a while, and forget the head injuries and brain tumors, or spend a month at the seashore with one of those attractive nurses who follow him breathlessly to the emergency room, his outlook might improve. It's really not too late, Ben Casey. We have known lots of residents who saw the light and gave up the stress and strain of a surgical specialty to go into Dermatology or Radiology and have lived happily ever afterward.

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