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Family Leisure TV News

Larry Linville Built Plane Between Parts

HOLLYWOOD — What to do between parts is a problem that has long plagued actors. Some just loiter around, feet dangling in the pool. Some write, some paint, some simply bite their nails, worrying about when and where the next job will come.

Larry Linville, after he left "M.A.S.H.," solved the problem neatly. While waiting for something good to come along, he built an airplane.

It wasn't as remote a project as you might at first imagine. Linville does have his pilot's license and has flown. And he has had some engineering experience, so he knows what he's doing when he starts figuring stresses and loading factors.

Still, it isn't something every actor does. He says it was fun, and it kept him occupied and, besides, now he has a plane. It is not a propeller-driven aircraft, however.

"It's a tailless glider," Linville says. "And it's all made out of lightweight materials. I hope to test it out soon and, if it works, maybe I'll market it in kit form."

He says that building a plane

was something he always wanted to do. And, fortunately for him, his wife was very interested in the project, too. In fact, he says that she did somewhere around 50 percent of the work.

"The next thing we'll do," he says, "is maybe build a monoplane, or some other type of real, power-driven aircraft. My two brothers are both pilots, who live in Sacramento, and I might build a plane for them to fly."

But it could be a long time between jobs for Larry Linville now. He's signed on to play Jack Albertson's son, a two-star general, in Albertson's new NBC series, "Grandpa Goes to Washington."

Linville was, for five years,

Major Frank Burns on "M.A.S.H." The part was one of the great characterizations in recent TV history. So great, in fact, that it caused the inevitable problem after Linville left the series.

He left, he says, purely out of boredom.

"After five years," he says, "we were beginning to repeat things. I found myself playing the same scenes with Hot Lips, the same scenes with Hawkeye, the same scenes with Radar. I had to leave so I could do something new."

But he had made such an indelible impression as Frank Burns that it was almost impossible for him to find work for a while. He says he could have worked — he was offered parts on "The Love Boat,"

playing a dumb Army officer accompanied by a tough blond — but he realized that was just the show's attempt to cash in on the Burns-Hot Lips characters.

"So I said, no thanks," he says, "and I went down to the hangar and worked on my glider."

When the part in "Grandpa Goes to Washington" was offered to him, he at first almost rejected it out of hand. That was because the character was in uniform, and he thought that it, too, was an attempt to bring back Frank Burns with another name.

"But Kelly — that's the name of the man I play — isn't at all like Burns," Linville says. "Burns was a caricature, while this man is real."

Kelly is a general, but the difference goes beyond rank. Linville says that he is playing General Kelly completely differently from the way he played Major Burns.

This man is, he says, a living, breathing human being, not an exaggerated cartoon.

Linville says that, after "M.A.S.H.," there were only a very few things offered to him that he bothered with. One was a guest role in "The Rockford Files," with James Garner, which had him and Garner together for most of the hour.

But, far and away, most parts offered to him were copies of Frank Burns. So he just turned his back on them, went to the hangar with his wife, worked on the plane and waited.

He says his wife, the daughter of an Air Force colonel, always loved tools as a child, but her father said tools were for boys, and she should play with dolls. But when they got married, he says, he said it was OK for her to play with tools — "and she is a whiz" — and he often gives her power tools for presents.

LL between jobs

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