

The AUNT DAISY story

"HOW shall we celebrate our wedding anniversary?"

"How about two minutes' silence?"

An anonymous wit dropped the cartoon bearing this caption into Aunt Daisy's mailbag when she reached her 21st anniversary as a commercial broadcaster. She was delighted. Like the Scot who enjoys the myth of his own parsimony, she likes best the jokes about talkative women.

"When I started to broadcast commercials," she says, "I told my husband that each one was only a hundred words. He said, 'Impossible, Daisy! You couldn't use less than a thousand words to ask for a cup of tea.'"

Rarely has the voice of Aunt Daisy been silenced. There was one period of three months, during a lecture tour of the United States and Canada, and another shorter period when a severe cold deprived her of her voice. On both occasions her daughter Barbara took over the programme.

Exact reproduction of Aunt Daisy's broadcasting technique would, however, be almost impossible. She prepares most of her material in the afternoons, ransacking her files for information and recipes, testing products, or watching manufacturing in progress. "When you advertise so many unrelated products," she says, "you have either to have seen them made or to have read about them—whether they're in your field of interest or not. Plenty of things I have never any idea about, especially electrical things, but I have to find out."

(9) LIFE BEGINS AT FOUR A.M.

When there are difficulties to master, Aunt Daisy runs over her material again in the evening. But as an early riser, she prefers to be early to bed. "I try not to work at home too much," she says. "One gets too duty-struck. Soon after the news at night I begin settling down, but I may tell you I very frequently get up in the night and make a cup of tea."

MOST mornings begin for Aunt Daisy at four o'clock—never later than four-thirty—with a cup of tea in bed. In the quiet before dawn she reads one of the quarterly books she receives from the Bible Reading Fellowship. "Years ago," she says, "the Queen Mother appeared in the Albert Hall advocating the Fellowship and backing it up. That made me join. I've learnt so much through it. It's not a matter of reading a word or two and feeling holy. There's something for every day, and it's deep. It's clever." From this reading usually comes Aunt Daisy's invariable preface to her session, her Thought for the Day.

Daisy's own personal prayer for the day is as characteristic of her as the pastel blues she habitually wears or the ebullience with which she greets the morning:

God, give me sympathy and sense,
And help me keep my courage high;
God, give me calm and confidence,
And, please, a twinkle in my eye.

By the time broadcasting begins, with the 6.0 a.m. news, Aunt Daisy is bathed

and dressed and preparing breakfast ("I like an egg every morning, though I eat only the yolks") for herself and her son Freddie, who still lives at home. She is at the studio by a quarter to eight—more than an hour before she goes on the air. The cheer of her early-morning greeting to the staff is matched only by that of the breakfast session announcer. She is on Christian-name terms with everybody, a popular figure always ready for a joke or a pleasant word or three with anybody. Each year she buys a Christmas cake for 2ZB's staff, and another for the taxi-drivers who take her to the studio.

Getting down to work, Aunt Daisy rifles again through her notes, arranging them in the proper order and making a final decision on which item from the morning paper will serve her best for an introduction. At ten minutes to nine she obliges the technician with a microphone test, and at five to nine a speaker in the studio is turned on so that she may hear her cue.

"At that time," says Aunt Daisy, "I always go out for a last look at the weather. It's amazing sometimes; there's been a beautiful day when I left home, and when I look again it's pouring with rain. Or vice versa. Of course, the weather round Cook Strait is very local. I've said it's a beautiful morning—really lovely—no wind. And someone rang up afterwards and said, 'Well,

Aunt Daisy, just when you were telling us how beautiful the weather was, it was blowing like mad out here at Miramar.'"

At nine o'clock exactly, the studio gongs sound, the announcer introduces the network broadcast of Aunt Daisy's Morning Session, a recording is played of "Daisy Bell," and Aunt Daisy goes on the air. She dislikes being observed at work, and curtains are drawn across the glass-fronted studio. Behind this screen she goes into a kind of trance, with no one for an audience but the technician in his cubicle.

"I shut my eyes to keep everything out," she says, "so that what I have to talk about is clear in my mind. I try to know what I have to say so well that it will simply pour out, without my looking. I open my eyes to tick off each item, but otherwise I'm just telling people. I want them to know I mean it. I care about it! I'm sincere and I want them to know about these things."

This inward need to convince, Aunt Daisy confides, is the reason she sometimes runs over time. "The Service is very good and indulgent to me," she says, "but every few months I get a letter saying they're sure I will co-operate, but I have been going over time once again. I'm very very careful for the first few weeks after the letter—but, oh, I do forget."

Though shy of onlookers, Aunt Daisy has never felt shy of the microphone. "Mike fright" is unknown to her. "The only nervousness I ever feel," she says, "is when I come off the air and I think, 'Oh, I should have done that differently,' I often forget things till afterwards. I've never been altogether pleased with myself."

RIGID confinement to a half-hour programme makes Aunt Daisy nostalgic about her carefree early days in radio when it was a cardinal sin to cut short any broadcaster who still had something to say. The problem was rather to find people who could happily fill the gaping hours. "It was in the early days that things happened," she says. "Everything goes quite well now and is very very smooth. It's almost too efficient!"

Under an individual contract with the Broadcasting Service, Aunt Daisy is not housed in one of the department's congeries of buildings. After her Morning Session, she leaves 2ZB for the office of Aunt Daisy Radio Advertising, in Lambton Quay. Here, with the help of her secretary—invariably referred to as Grace—she answers mail and deals with the morning spate of phone calls

DURING her 1946 visit to the United States, Aunt Daisy broadcast with her "opposite number," Mother Parker, of Station WEEI Boston

