

# JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA

Produced for PBS by  
WGBH - Boston

Jean Shepherd broke into show business in second grade, landing a big part in the Oral Hygiene Pageant. He played a molar with a cavity.

From that debut, there was no place to go but up. And up was the commercial world of New York radio and television.

Jean Shepherd isn't really a New Yorker, though. He grew up in northern Indiana. But he's not really a Midwesterner either. He has lived in lots of places, in what he calls "a mostly accidental life," adding each experience to his enormous stock of great stories.

And that's what Jean Shepherd really is - a story-teller - a modern-day Mark Twain. He's also written books, film scripts, and plays, and acted in Broadway and Off-Broadway productions. His articles and short stories have appeared in practically every major magazine in the country, and for several years he was a regular columnist for The Village Voice and The Realist. His short stories have won four Playboy humor/satire awards, making him the only writer in history to win this coveted award more than once. Shepherd was also recently appointed a Contributing Editor of Playboy magazine.

Jean Shepherd came to WGBH-TV in Boston in 1969 as a Rockefeller-Artist-in-Residence, where he produced 20 "Rear Bumpers," a series of short features that ended each day's programming. And that's what prepared the ground for this latest venture - JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA.



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Generic Release

Half-Hour Color

Apparently Columbus didn't do a good enough job back in 1492, because Jean Shepherd has rediscovered America. You know Jean Shepherd - he's the guy who tells funny stories about growing up and writes best-sellers on the side.

Well, what he's done now is to travel with a crack videotape crew recording an America not usually seen on TV. The result is JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA, and he calls it "a pforound and humorous view of the underbelly of American culture." The series of half-hour programs makes its debut on PBS, Public Television Channel , night at .

The America that Shepherd catches is our fads and foibles, our national idiosyncracies. Television usually ignores these obvious, every-day parts of our environment - things like billboards, the hot dog stand in the beautiful natural setting, trailer parks and turnpikes. Jean Shepherd celebrates them.

In fact, Jean Shepherd celebrates just about anything that crosses his path. His series is not a documentary, analyzing and criticizing. It's a completely new concept, taking life just as it happens, enjoying every moment.

In one show, for example, Shepherd returns to the steel mills, where he once worked for several years after high school. Another program takes him through the state of Alaska, where he defies a glacier.

Whatever the location, from Maine to Hawaii, JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA is good watching, a mirror reflecting all that is earthy, fresh and alive about this country.

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One of the stars of JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA is transported in three small suitcases and costs one-quarter-of-a-million-dollars. That star's full name is the Phillips PCP-90 Back Pack Camera System, and Ampex VR-3000 color video-tape recorder, and its role in the series is almost as vital as Jean Shepherd himself.

The use of the PCP-90 in JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA represents a television first. It is the first time that series-length programming has been produced totally with a highly portable color video-tape system rather than film. And we call it video-verité. Before the PCP-90, mobile video-tape production, especially color, was extremely complicated, requiring dozens of men and tons of equipment. It was simply impractical to use tape very much; it took too long to set up the equipment, used too much manpower, and, above all, the camera just could not go everywhere.

The PCP-90 changes all that. It is designed for portability. For his series, Jean Shepherd travels with three technicians who hand-carry the entire system for location work. One of these men operates a hand-held camera that produces high-quality color video-tape material with no muss and no fuss.

Recently, Shepherd and his crew were doing just that on location at Maui Beach in Hawaii. Greg MacDonald, the cameraman had waded into the water with the PCP-90, and was getting "close-up shots" of the shallow, foamy surf. He never noticed the huge, seven-foot wave that suddenly appeared, and buried him with \$175,000 worth of camera in a torrent of salt water.

Fortunately, the story has a happy ending. The drenched cameraman simply picked up the drenched PCP-90, returned to the motel and deposited it in a bathtub. The salt water was washed off, and the PCP-90 was as good as new. Not only can it go anywhere. Apparently the PCP-90 is indestructible as well.

The team producing JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA can and does travel around the country without any special arrangements. They make use of commercial airlines, trains, boats, or a station-wagon. What they see, they video-tape. It's as simple as that. There is no need to plan shots carefully in advance, or to prepare people for the camera. Things are recorded as they occur naturally.

And it's exactly this spontaneous quality that makes JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA a brand new kind of television.



# JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA

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#1

Half-Hour Color

"...THE PHANTOM OF THE OPEN HEARTH LIVES - SOMEWHERE IN INDIANA."

There's a lot of folks in America who don't believe in ghosts or phantoms of any size or shape. It's a cinch they've never seen the open hearth at Inland Steel. Jean Shepherd has ( he worked there back in '41 and '42 ), and he claims that the Phantom of the Open Hearth is a sight you'll never forget.

So, non-believers, now's your chance. Jean Shepherd is planning to reveal that fabulous phantom on JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA, . . . night on PBS, Public Television Channel at . . .

While the Phantom of the Open Hearth is a featured performer, Jean Shepherd has actually put together a different kind of program. It's not the usual documentary style, where the camera shows a machine and a narrator tells you, "This is a machine." Instead, Jean captures the mood of the mills in a virtual bombardment of visual images, and in the great stories he tells.

He knows how it feels to get that new pair of "safety shoes" and he describes it with love. And he knows what it's like to be the man behind the safety goggles - "You see the world like you're looking through a brillo pad."

Sometimes he gets downright poetic. With great affection, Shepherd tells what it's like to punch in at dawn on the day before a day-off. Or that first swallow of coke after 3000° of fire and brimstone.

And, did you know that steel-mill workers are great lip-readers? They have to be.

JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA was written and created by Jean Shepherd; produced and directed by Fred Barzyk. Associate Producers: Olivia Tappan, Leigh Brown.



Half-Hour Color

"...ONE MAN'S VERSION OF HEAVEN IS A SUPER HOWARD JOHNSONS WITH 28 FLAVORS AND NO LINES FOR THE REST ROOMS. MINE IS A FAST-MOVING STREAM."

One man's version of heaven, says Jean Shepherd, is a super Howard Johnsons with 28 flavors and no lines for the rest rooms. But Shepherd himself would gladly skip all 28 for a fishing rod and a fast-moving stream in Maine. That's his version of heaven.

This week on PBS, Public Television Channel , night at , JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA is Jean Shepherd's idea of heaven.

It's not a new dream. One of Jean's childhood joys was fishing for crappies in northern Indiana. And fishing for crappies is just another name for snagging hooks on beer cans and old submerged tires. The "dream" was to fish from the banks of the Kennebec River. And that's what he finally gets to do.

That's not all you'll hear about, because Shepherd keeps up a non-stop monologue. He doesn't just follow the camera around, explaining what's being seen. And he is definitely not into show-and-tell. When you see an unbroken stand of Maine forest, he's telling some great fishing story. And it's beautiful.

Shepherd himself puts it this way, "If a guy sees a glass of beer on the screen, he knows what it is and I don't have to tell him. My series isn't a documentary. It's going to be hallucinogenic."

There's a main street of a small town in Maine, looking like an America of simpler times. And a county fair, where you'll meet Bob, the champion weight-puller of the Skowhegan County Fair. Bob is only the strongest horse in the whole world. At least that's what Jean Shepherd says.

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Half-Hour Color

"...THE END OF AN ERA - RIDING THE 'CITY OF LOS ANGELES' ON ITS LAST JOURNEY ACROSS THE AMERICAN WEST"

Jean Shepherd took a train recently. But they made him put it back. Fortunately, you can see the whole caper on JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA, on PBS, Public Television Channel  
 , night at .

Shepherd has been scouring America to find out what makes it America. And he finds every-day life, things too commonplace for anyone else's television show. Things like houseboats, turnpikes, pizzas, county fairs - and trains.

The train odyssey is pure Shepherd, a ramble through the vast freight yards of life. He remembers the last train ride he ever took, back in World War II, with K Company. It was a troop train, heading off from Boot Camp with thousands of soldiers. And Jean Shepherd pulled KP. On a troop train.

Now this isn't exactly the way most people would go about fitting trains into the American scene. In fact, Shepherd never comes to any serious conclusions at all. He's too busy having a good time.

If you've ever heard a train whistle in the night, felt lonely, and wanted to be on that train - if you mourn for the passing of this part of American life - then you'll know what Jean Shepherd is all about.

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Half-Hour Color

"...A BUNCH OF THE BOYS WERE WHOOPING IT UP AT THE MALAMUTE SALOON"

There's still a bunch of the boys whooping it up at the Malamute Saloon. But the chances are the shooting isn't coming from gunfighters. It's coming from TV cameramen, capturing the mood of Alaska for JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA.

Robert Service fans, and everyone else interested in that frozen hunk of land that makes Texas the second largest state, JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA is on PBS, Public Television Channel , night at .

Shepherd's jaunt to Alaska leads off with this piece of fantastic information: "Alaska, it just isn't like Cleveland."

One of the reasons that no one could confuse the two is immediately apparent. Shepherd is cracking his jokes directly in front of an enormous glacier. Now glaciers are not the sort of thing that appear on television every day. But when Jean Shepherd threatens to hurl his body against it to stop its further progress, you know you're seeing a television first.

Shepherd's Alaskan venture is full of strikingly original camera shots, and, of course, the inimitable Shepherd wit.

His technique is really a whole new approach to television, call it video-verité. The point is spontaneous conversations, unplanned occurrences.

One such unrehearsed moment finds Shepherd questioning a leathery old gentleman from Nome. The man dwells on the romance of Alaska's bars, and you can't help loving it.

JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA is another sensual essay with the camera's eye view the next best thing to being there.

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**JEAN  
SHEPHERD'S  
AMERICA**

Half-Hour Color

"...THERE'S A LOT MORE TO LIFE THAN A HOSTESS TWINKIE"

Jean Shepherd is a man with a mission, a cause, something to believe in. Food. Especially American food. He thinks it's great, that it smells good, tastes good, and looks good. Anything from Maine lobster to Klondike bear stew, they're all the Mona Lisa to him.

So he's taking his crazy love affair with American cuisine to television, on JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA on PBS, Public Television Channel , night, at .

Shepherd believes that Americans are one of the most inscrutable, mysterious nationalities in the world today. And one way to figure out the mystery of what it is to be an American is through the stomach. We are what we eat, and all that.

So Shepherd shows us our food - like we've never seen it before. Loving, lingering close-ups of rocky mountain rainbow trout, Virginia pecan pie, New England baked beans, deep southern candied sweet-potatoes, fancy hogs-head cheese...the list goes on and on.

And, all the time there's Jean Shepherd in the background, smacking his lips. And cracking his jokes, telling his stories, talking about the mouth-watering food with genuine relish.

Maine lobster is one of his great favorites, so naturally there's a quick lesson in consuming one of these beasts. "I'm an ad-libber when it comes to lobster, not a classical lobster devourer," he admits.

There's a lesson to be learned from it all. Jean Shepherd puts it this way, "I just thought you ought to know, there's a lot more to life than Hostess Twinkies."

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#6

Half-Hour Color

"...AND THE BAD GUYS ARE BACK ON THE SHORE, SHAKING THEIR FISTS"

Jean Shepherd might well be the world's only real-life comic-book hero. The things he actually does come right out of dreams, comic-book fantasies. Like this week's episode of JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA, on PBS, Public Television Channel , night at .

Jean remembers one comic-strip from his boyhood in which the hero gets away in a houseboat. The bad guys are faked out, and left back on the shore shaking their fists. Meanwhile, as the sun slowly sinks in the west, the hero sails safely away. And thanks to the houseboat, good triumphs over evil.

Ever since that time, Shepherd has wanted to be the "houseboat hero." And now he gets his big chance on JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA. No bad guys this time, and no chase. Just Jean Shepherd on a houseboat.

But "just Jean Shepherd on a houseboat" is truly something to behold. He stands proudly at the helm, reaching into his never-ending stock of stories. There's the soft sound of the engine purring in the background, and the gentle lapping of the waves to complete the mood.

It's all part of his love affair with America's crazy fads and foibles. A lot of us have wild dreams about living a nomadic life at sea. And Jean Shepherd goes and does it. He's America's reflection of itself, and he's enjoying himself every minute. You can't help enjoying his dream version of the "houseboat hero."

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#7

Half-Hour Color

"...THE PERPETUAL SWISH OF THE WIND-SHIELD WIPERS IS THE SOUNDTRACK FOR OUR LIVES"

Why doesn't Jean Shepherd trust anyone who wears bow ties and doesn't drive a car? Why does he say that anyone with glands must love to drive? You'll find out when JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA gets behind the wheel on PBS, Public Television Channel ,  
night at .

Shepherd thinks he knows the ultimate dream of every American male - to sit in the driver's seat and drive to the ends of the earth. Right or wrong, moving along the turnpike is an unquestionable part of the American mystique.

So Jean Shepherd drives along, relaxed, watching America go by the window, something all of us do when we feel the need to get away. He has comments and stories about everything, especially the important parts of a driver's self-enclosed world.

"The perpetual swish of the windshield wipers is the soundtrack for our lives. Think of the millions of dramas played out to that tune." And Jean Shepherd does, and tells about it lyrically.

Today's steering wheel is what the wheel of a New Bedford canvas-sail was, back in 1810. To Americans, there's something adventurous about a wheel, whether it's on a sailing ship or a racing car.

JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA comes to no conclusions. It just gives us a chance to look at ourselves. And that's Shepherd's specialty.

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#8

Half-Hour Color

"...IT WON'T ALWAYS BE THIS WAY "

"There has always been a basic tension in the way we want to live," says Jean Shepherd. "On the one hand, we want roots, the nesting instinct. On the other, we want mobility, freedom to go anywhere."

Shepherd thinks we can have both. And the time is now. He shows us this vision of the immediate future on JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA on PBS, Public Television Channel , night, at .

Shepherd's look at tomorrow's style of living is no documentary. It's a fast-moving collage of events, backed up by Jean's gift of gab.

One place where Shepherd finds the future is in a vast crater surrounded by mountains, near Boulder, Colorado. It's the beginnings of a city called Pueblo West, and it's an island of civilization in the middle of the wilderness, not designed for completion until the 21st century.

Jean Shepherd finds another kind of joy in a luxurious mobile-home. Not everybody can wheel their house around a hair-pin turn at 40 miles per hour. Shepherd does, and tells the amazing story of Gertz and his pre-fab Cape Cod Manor at the same time.

Predicting the future has always been a popular spectator sport. But Jean Shepherd never could stand back and watch. He's making his version happen today.

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#9

Half-Hour Color

"...FROM ITS GOLDEN, ICE-COOL DEPTHS COME THE ECHOS OF LOST BATTLES, THE SOUND OF ANCIENT VICTORIES, THE NOISE OF A MILLION BALL GAMES"

Beer is on the job 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And Americans are not quite sure if they want to know why.

Jean Shepherd has always known about Americans and their love affair with beer. And he welcomes the golden brew on JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA, on PBS, Public Television Channel , night at .

Shepherd treats beer with a respect approaching reverence, calling it a phenomenon more universal than sex. At any given moment, thousands of Americans everywhere are imbibing the nectar-of-the-hops.

Running down the "beer mystique" takes Jean Shepherd to many places. One of them is Mary Vnuk's Tavern, on Packard Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The late-night shift from the factory across the street, piles in there at 7:00 every morning for some serious drinking. And Jean Shepherd comes away from this visit with his share of foamy realism.

But beer is not just some innocent beverage that makes us happy. Jean Shepherd shows us the whole story - beer art, beer bottle ballet and beer shampoos.

Beer becomes a first-class citizen of JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA only after Shepherd rips off the pop-top and lets go with one of his fabled beer stories. And Jean finally finds the answer to that vital question, "Which comes first, paternal love, or that first long pull on a can of Canadian Ace after a long day's work?"

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#10

Half-Hour Color

"...I MIGHT EVEN SNAG ONE FOR OLD AHAB HIMSELF"

Americans everywhere can rest a bit easier now - Sea Weed Ernie has been found. It all happened quite accidentally, while Jean Shepherd was in Florida finding an America hardly anyone else knows.

Sea Weed Ernie and a few more vital discoveries are on JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA, PBS, on Public Television Channel , night, at .

Sea Weed Ernie was a complete surprise to everyone, including Shepherd. But that's not unusual for JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA. Ernie lives in an old wrecked boat in the middle of a watery nowhere. He's a bay-side hermit, but he's friendly and human, and he has a lot to offer to the man who'll listen. Jean Shepherd listens.

Jean Shepherd is also a fishing fanatic, so he can't resist a try at the fabled waters of Florida's Black Water Bay. Predictably, he comes up with no fish, but he's got a Shepherd fishing story instead. The story tells what happens when four Midwesterners try deep-sea fishing off the Florida coast. And Shepherd was there. Sea sickness aside, it is a heroic experience. Jean Shepherd feels one with such sea-going immortals as Ernest Hemingway and Captain Ahab.

This is a part of Florida you might never get to see, except for JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA.

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#11

Half-Hour Color

# JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA

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THIS IS NOT AN EMPTY SPACE.

JEAN SHEPHERD IS STILL TOURING

AMERICA.

AND VIDEO-TAPING THIS PROGRAM.

SO HANG IN THERE.

THIS SPACE WILL BE FILLED.

SOON.



# JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA

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WGBH - Boston

#12

Half-Hour Color

"...LIKE ALL GREAT INNER-TUBE SPECIALISTS, HE FINALLY MADE THE CLASSIC MISTAKE"

What happens when you let a guy like Jean Shepherd loose in a place like Hawaii? He has a luau, watches the surfers and talks about his father, of course.

Watch when JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA annexes the 50th state, on PBS, Public Television Channel , night at .

About Jean Shepherd's father - he was only the All Time Inner-Tube Specialist of America. Furthermore, he knew that the only decent inner-tubes made for floating were Firestone's. So while you watch surfers skimming in on the Hawaiian waves, Jean Shepherd will be telling you about how his father, this great master of the inner-tube, got carried out of sight in the fierce currents of Lake Michigan.

And that's not all. You haven't lived until you've seen a luau like the one Jean Shepherd runs into. Keep your eye on the man playing the mean washtub bass. It's our hero, Jean Shepherd himself.

The visit ends as it should, with Shepherd relaxed on a deserted beach, welcoming all true beach-cuckoos into JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA.

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AMERICA**

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PBS

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