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## A MESSAGE FROM CAROL SERLING

**T**This is the second in our series of *Twilight Zone* books and I believe that you will find these stories as varied and engrossing as the series itself. They cover the entire five-year period that *TZ* was on the air. Presented are two stories each from the first, second, third and fifth seasons, and one (an hour-long) from the fourth.

The first one, “Walking Distance,” is definitely one of my all-time favorites, one that all *TZ* “Zonies” remember, and the one that was perhaps the “most” Rod. He said at one point, “When I dig back in my memory, I get one particularly distinctive feeling: that’s warmth, comfort and well-being.” He told the story of walking on a movie set at MGM and seeing a tree-lined street and a little park that suddenly took him back twenty-five years to his own hometown. This story *is* Rod. In “Walking Distance,” he wrote of the golden summer of his youth and his desperate hunger to be young again...to return to the parks, the merry-go-round, the cotton candy and the gentle serenity of the small town with its shaded streets.

After the show was produced, Rod had some criticisms regarding the time movements (his own plot development) and the scenes in which “Martin” confronts his father. However, he finally accepted the scenario as the beautiful fantasy that it truly was. Everything seemed to fall into place in the production, including the fine acting by Gig Young and Frank Overton along with the director, Robert Stevens, who caught the feeling and nostalgia of the piece from the beginning. Of course, the score—written specifically for this program by

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Bernard Herrmann—added immeasurably to the feeling of wistfulness and longing.

The other program from the first season is “Judgment Night.” This is a suspenseful story of a “frightened ship that carries with it a premonition of death,” and a variation of the famous “Flying Dutchman” legend. It was a scary and moody piece that was well received.

“King Nine Will Not Return” was the first show of the second season and in my view a real winner. The idea came from a news story about a group of geologists who found the remains of a bomber, guns intact, in the desert in 1959. Water jugs were full but there was no trace of any human crew. The plane had disappeared in 1943 with no further explanation.

The show was a *tour de force* for Bob Cummings, for his part as the captain of the downed plane was almost entirely a monologue. Bob Cummings was a friend of Rod’s who agreed to do this tremendously challenging show for *TZ*. In exchange, Rod was then signed to appear on Bob’s TV show.

“The Silence” was a bit of a departure for *TZ* in that the story did not employ any fantasy or supernatural elements. Actually, it was similar to a famous story written some time before by Anton Chekhov, although the ending was very different. Like so many *Twilight Zone* episodes, “The Silence” has the familiar ironic/flip ending. During the second day of shooting, Franchot Tone, one of the leads, appeared on the set with half of his face beaten up, a result of an apparent affair of the heart. The director coped with this by shooting Tone in profile and it actually added to the drama of the program.

As each TV season came to a close there was a question as to the future of *The Twilight Zone*. Would the program be renewed and would sponsors be found to line up behind the production? One day Rod would hear, “Yes, we’re back on” and the next day, “No, we’re cancelled.” The decision always seemed to go right down to the wire. Of course, the third year did happen, but as part of the bargain Rod had to agree to be part of the commercial pitch.

“The Passersby” played early in the third season. It was a story of the aftermath of the Civil War and those who were a part of it. Rod was fascinated with this war; he studied it, read about it and often used it as a backdrop for his work. But the general consensus is that this story really did not “make it” and that the ending was telegraphed from the very beginning.

## AS TIMELESS AS INFINITY

“The Trade-Ins” was a different story. This is a beautiful (if sentimental) tale of age and aging. Joseph Schildkraut, who played the old man, was outstanding in the role. He wrote to Rod after the filming, “With admiration for your talent and with gratitude for a meaningful, beautiful script. Affectionately, Pepi.” The feeling was mutual, for Rod had great admiration for Schildkraut’s work; not only in his *Twilight Zone* episodes (“The Trade-Ins” and “Death’s Head Revisited”), but also for the memorable performances he had given before the movie camera and on the stage.

The ratings for *Twilight Zone* were never at the top of the chart, so again...would the series continue for a fourth year? As it happened, it did not get the go-ahead until January and played as a mid-season replacement with a new producer and with an entirely new format—one hour instead of a half-hour. In my opinion this was a big mistake and Rod thought so, too. He said at one point, “*Twilight Zone* is the perfect half-hour show. Going to an hour, we’d have to flesh out stories soap-opera style.” Many of the shows were padded in just this manner. The hour just was not right for the nature of the *TZ* concept.

“Of Late I Think of Cliffordville” was an adaptation of a short story called “Blind Alley.” Again, just as in “Walking Distance,” our character returns to the town of his youth, but this time he is transformed into a young man. Other than this return to the past, the story is totally different in plot and feeling from “Walking Distance” and didn’t work very well. It was not very memorable.

When the series was picked up for the fifth season, Rod was truly weary. He had written seventy-six of the one-hundred-and-twenty shows that had been broadcast in the previous four years. When the series first started, he had said that each show was a kind of very exciting opening night. The second season he likened to a vacation without pay. But by the third season, coming up with new material was beginning to be a tough grind. And by the fifth, he said that when he sat down to write, he felt he was beginning to meet himself coming around the corner.

With “A Short Drink from a Certain Fountain,” we have an aging man who “pines for the lost morning of his life.” Through a *Twilight Zone* miracle he finds the way to become young again, but in a true *TZ* flip, it doesn’t end there. There was a strongly diverse critical reaction to this one, but you can read it and make up your own mind.

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“I am the Night—Color Me Black” was an effort to again address the problems of mob rule and scapegoats, subject matter dear to Rod’s heart which he had dealt with so successfully in “The Monsters on Due on Maple Street.” This is an entirely different story and despite the gimmick of permanent night, it does not surprise the viewer or pack the punch of “Monsters.”

*Twilight Zone* may never have reached the top in the ratings battles, but over the years, the *TZ* television marathons, the conventions, the DVDs, the continual TV exposure and the myriad references to *The Twilight Zone* in the spoken word and literature (such as this book!) surely indicate proof of the lasting quality of truly good stories that are well told. Believe it or not, *The Twilight Zone* is nearly fifty years old!

## EDITOR'S PREFACE

From his earliest experiments in the embellished style of radio storytelling to his later work as a teacher in the art of writing, Rod Serling poured his talent and passion into a wide variety of formats. Rather than conform to a particular category, Serling sampled them all, and deftly sculpted each story to match his own unique style. Less distinctive authors may cloak their technique with a particular type of story—or lose it completely in the unfamiliar subject matter—but quite the opposite is true in this case. A Rod Serling script is undeniably a Rod Serling script, regardless of topic or genre.

Like most writers, Serling toiled in many different fields; but his particular mix of language, style and theme is instantly recognizable. Be it drama, broad comedy, speculative fiction, Western, mystery, suspense, science fiction, fantasy, horror, or any combination of these genres, no byline is necessary in identifying a Rod Serling teleplay. His characteristic literary voice echoes throughout each and every one of his tales.

This phenomenon is particularly visible when one examines the vast spectrum of anthology tales that comprise the *Twilight Zone* canon, and is exemplified by the nine scripts in this collection. The diverse range of subject matter includes wistful nostalgia (“Walking Distance”), sentimental romance (“The Trade-Ins”), poetic metaphor (“The Passersby”), nail-biting suspense (“The Silence”), psychological mystery (“King Nine Will Not Return”), social indignation (“I am the Night—Color Me Black”) and ironic retribution (“Judgment Night,” “A Short Drink from a Certain Fountain,” “Of Late I Think of Cliffordville”). Yet each story bears the unique stamp of Rod Serling.

*The Twilight Zone*—a realm where a multitude of imaginative topics converge into a cohesive whole—is very much a product of its creator.

