

Brock In Schoolboy Heaven

SHELBY—When John Brock was the general manager of several Gaston County newspapers in the sixties no one ever suspected he would one day become a motion picture producer and enter the world of make-believe for a living.

The human skull with bad teeth, grinning from the bookcase, may be the first tip-off. Or it may be the bird cage, one of those Chinese temple affairs made of tiny dowels, with the songless skeleton of some largish bird, a parrot, perhaps, upon the perch.

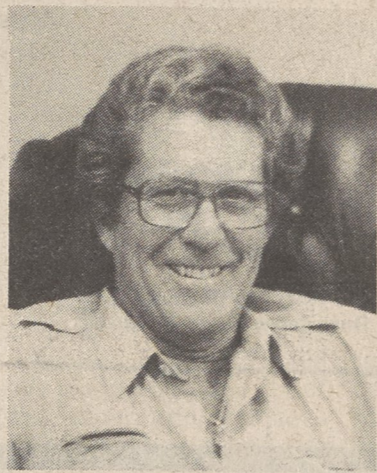
Give or take a bowl of plastic ivy, an orderly desk, sensible books and an arrangement of dried flowers, the room where John Brock, movie maker, sprawls in an easy chair is not so much an executive office as the room of a little boy.

John Brock is 52, going on 11. He's been a newspaper editor and publisher, columnist, historian, an author of scholarly papers on folk medicine and the battle of Kings Mountain, an expert on politics, a college professor, president of a large mechanical contracting firm and a nationally-honored Jaycee. Now, as president of John Brock Productions, Inc., and a partner of adventure film maker Earl Owensby, he's in a schoolboy's heaven.

"I grew up in Charlotte," he says, "and a friend of mine - he's a brain surgeon now - we used to experiment with pyrotechnics. We were into rockets before Wehrner Von Braun. Now I can do it legitimately."

A stream of conversation drifts in from a hallway; a crew of young production people are on their way back to the sound stage, after lunch. "Y'ought to see it, man, it was beautiful," one is saying. "It really tore that house up - chips a wood, flyin' everywhere. You just gotta see it. It was great!"

A blow-up scene, in the current production. "We blow up stuff, sure's the world," says John. "We blow up cars, houses, people." On the sound stage nearby, a barroom brawl is brewing, one of many good fights one



JOHN BROCK

can expect in the upcoming "Rutherford County Line", co-produced by Brock and Owensby and due for release in November.

What is that faint smell of mothballs? "Earl bought 5,000 pounds of mothballs at some salvage place, I think they were in a truck that wrecked, or something," John says. "You wouldn't believe what great explosions they make. Earl's got a girl back there now working full time, grinding up mothballs." We can expect lots of fire, in "Rutherford County Line".

A fleet of police cars flanked the building; several may bite the dust before the bad guy is dragged stumbling to justice. Which, in this case, is a chillingly real reproduction of a modern prison execution chamber.

Earl Owensby stars in this one, as he does in many of his films. This time he's Rutherford County sheriff Damon Huskey, a real life high-powered law man known to reason with his fists.

But though college-trained in drama, at Mars Hill College and Wake Forest University, John Brock rarely acts. "I'm not an actor. I'm not very talented," Brock says, adding that his wife, Barbara, is the talented member of the family. What he likes is production. And where he succeeds phenomenally is in raising money for production costs. Over the last couple of years, he's raised almost \$10 million to finance films made here.

Largely low-budget - "Rutherford County Line" is to be held to \$2 million - the movies make money, Brock

says. The largest part of the income is from foreign distribution to 93 countries, where millions of viewers see rolling Carolina countryside where Owensby's pictures are filmed as a capsule of America.

"We're not into art," Brock says; "we're into entertainment." And entertainment, to John Brock, has always been magic.

"My mother used to take us to the old Broadway, on South Tryon Street in Charlotte," he remembers. "They'd have a stage show, with the movie. It was the remnants of vaudeville, and I loved it."

It distressed him that he couldn't sing. So he had to try something else. "I was eight years old - maybe seven, when we went to the circus. I made up my mind I'd walk the tight rope." He went home and strung up a piece of old telephone wire between two posts, about four feet off the ground. "And I worked at it."

He was beginning to get pretty good at it, too, when he got a sore throat and a fever, when he was in the fourth grade. The illness dragged on; he lost mobility in his legs, and his coordination. The doctor put him in built-up shoes. Later, his trouble was diagnosed as a light case of polio.

So there went the career on the high-wire. But a doctor his mother worked for had an idea. If John would behave in school, which had become somewhat of a problem, he would let him have an old saxophone that had been lying around the house. John behaved.

"I had my first lesson on Tuesday and on Friday, I played the Marine's Hymn for an assembly at Midwood School." By the time he was 11, he was playing in a dance band, for pay. And quietly,

he exercised, and in high school and Junior College, he played football.

Now, he sits in the dimly lit screening room, watching the day's rushes of "Rutherford County Line". The lawmen are closing in on the bad guy; repeater rifles go, "Pit. Pit-pit, pit-pit-pit-pit." A car that should come roaring up comes,

"HMMMMMMMMMM". "We'll fix the sound-track," John promises. "It's too bland - we'll make the car go 'WRRRR-RAAAMMMM!' And the guns go 'BATTABATTTA!'"

Like the skull and bones in his office, the slimy tombs and skull throne and alligator moats inside the cavernous sets, the blood and even some of the BOOOMMs, much of this world of boyhood fantasy is just that. Illusion. "It's not real. None of it's real," John Brock says, on a tour of the movie-makers' domain.

And therein, perhaps, lies its charm and its delight.

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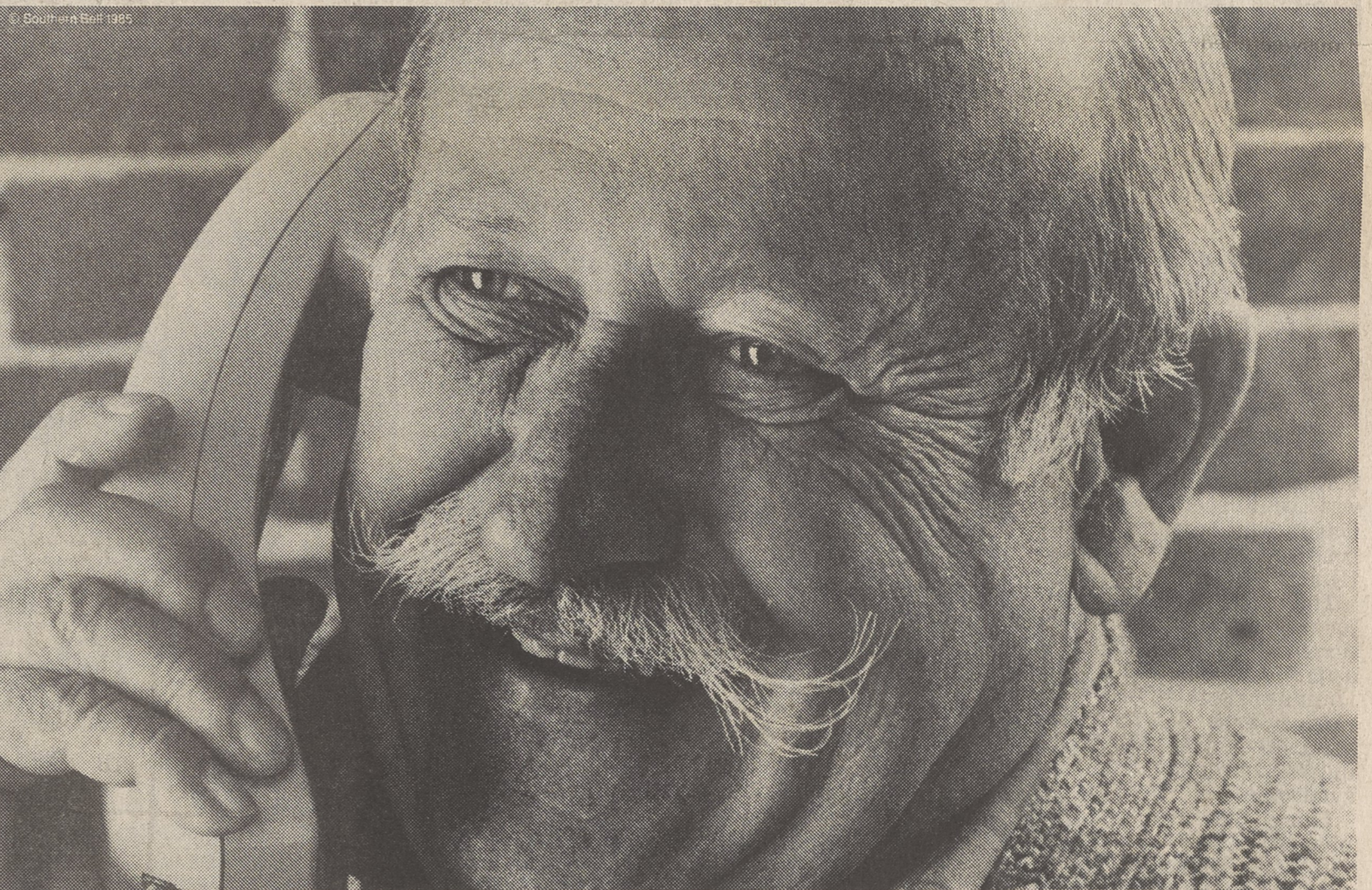
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This Week's Health News & Views
Ragan Harper

Fat babies later on

As new parents, or expecting parents, you need to know the facts. So, here's the question: Do fat babies become fat adults?

Contrary to generally accepted information, the answer is "No." Kids, however, who are fat after six years of age tend to have weight problems later on, so more concern should be exercised after that age.

I have additional hints for new and expecting parents at our Prescription Counter in the form of two Free Handouts. We want you to be well informed, so pick up your "Helpful Hints" while we have a supply.

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