

The Last Of 'Today's' Girls

By Margaret McManus

TODAY, NBC-TV's morning show, almost thirteen years old, is giving up on girls. "Today" is at odds with the national statistics on longevity. The men associated with that show go on and on, and the women just go.

Since the show started in January, 1952, there have been just three hosts, Dave Garroway, who was on for ten years, John Chancellor, the NBC news correspondent, and the current host, Hugh Downs. Frank Blair has reported the news on the show from its first day and except for a year's absence, Jack Lescault has reported about everything else.

There have been ten "Today" girls, including the most recent, Maureen O'Sullivan, who left after only six months.

Over the years she was preceded by two other actresses, Betsy Palmer and Louise King; by one Miss America, Lee Ann Meriwether; by one Miss Rheingold, Robin Bain; by two singers, Florence Henderson and Helen O'Connell; by a weather girl, Pat Fontaine, who has returned to St. Louis; by Estelle Parsons, the first "Today" girl, who lasted two years and two months; by Beryl Pifer, the sixth "Today" girl, who lasted seven months.

AL MORGAN, the producer, said he has decided to abandon entirely the idea of having a "Today" girl appear regularly on the morning show.

"We have come to the conclusion that it is nonsense to assume that you must have a pretty girl for viewers to look at," Morgan said that one of the problems about the job is that it looks deceptively easy, but it is actually a killer.

"It looks like an easy way to make a lot of loot and become a celebrity and it is far from that," he said. "You have to get up at 4 o'clock every morning, and be rested and alert at dawn. If you are very young and you've suddenly become a sort of celebrity, you want to swing a little at night, and you can't. You have to go home and go to bed just when the band starts playing.

THERE'S also a lot of homework to be done during the day. It is impossible to interview an author about a book if you haven't read it. You have to keep up with the news, or you will find yourself in a spot where you look embarrassingly ignorant. These girls had a tough job and most of them wanted out, after they had done it a while. The actresses wanted to go back to acting and the singers wanted to go back to singing. It's easier work."

Morgan plans to continue having women, distinguished in their field, talk about what they know best.

Two or three times a month, Judith Crist, the motion picture



Blonde Betsy Palmer is among the ten girls who have been featured on the 13-year-old "Today" show. Al Morgan, producer, says girls no longer will appear regularly on program.



Lee Ann Meriwether

doesn't have to be spoon-fed, and she's at ease in the medium.

"It was a difficulty with Miss O'Sullivan that television was not her medium. She has a great deal of charm in the movies and on the stage, but she was not comfortable with television."

critic of the New York Herald Tribune, appears on the show, reviewing the important plays and movies. Aline Saarinen, an art authority, author and critic, also appears frequently.

The closest approach to the old "Today" girl is Barbara Walters, a reporter and writer on the "Today" staff, who covers and writes her own stories, and who will be on the show two or three times a week.

"She has something tangible to contribute," said Morgan. "She is a good reporter. She has ideas. She writes her own stuff. She



Robin Bain



Helen O'Connell

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