CHAPTER 2

Washed Up in Babylon

The better horses are put out to pasture—or, for the lucky few, out to stud. The also-rans end up at the glue factory, or so the story goes. Where do actors go when their time in the limelight is over? They don’t go to rehab. Instead, they get a Web site.

It’s fascinating to check in on the people we grew up watching on TV or in the movies. In many cases, they have taken on a new identity thanks to the Web. Sometimes (as in the case of Bob Crane) you learn that there was a dark side hidden behind a sunny public persona. In other cases, people who were famous (or almost famous) have found a new life through their Web sites.

From the Small Screen to the Small Monitor

The most hilarious rebirths that have taken place on the Internet have to do with celebrities who never made it to the top echelon of stardom. You would think that members of this group wouldn’t have so far to fall. Ah, but you would be wrong, dear reader—surprisingly wrong.

The Rise and Mysterious Fall of Bob Crane

Bob Crane was best known in the 1960s as the star of a TV series about World War II called Hogan’s Heroes. In the show, which ran from 1965–1971, Crane played the leader of a group of Allied soldiers who were imprisoned in a German POW camp called Stalag 13.

Hogan was hardly a model prisoner. He always had some kind of secret scheme in progress. Rather than trying to escape, though, he used the POW camp as a base for intelligence operations against the Germans. His men regularly went underground, headed into town, and somehow obtained gourmet foods and other supplies. Crane and his fellow cast members, including his second wife (who played a character in Hogan’s Heroes), are depicted in Figure 2-1 in an image from Morty’s World of TV, one of the many fan sites that provides facts about the show (http://mortystv.com/showcards/hogans_heroes.shtml).
In the 1950s, Bob Crane was a successful radio host on radio station KNX in Los Angeles, California. His real ambition was to be an actor, however. He began to get parts in various TV shows of the early '60s, including The Dick Van Dyke Show and The Twilight Zone. He briefly had a role on The Donna Reed Show but was dismissed by the show's producers because his character, Dr. Dave Kelsey, was "too suggestive."

In 1965 he landed the lead role in Hogan's Heroes, for which he was twice nominated for an Emmy. During the run of the show, he met Sigrid Valdis (also known as Patti Olsen), who played Hilda on the show. Crane divorced his wife of 20 years and married Olsen in 1970 on the set of Hogan's Heroes. For several years, Patti Crane ran a discussion group on Yahoo! Groups devoted to Bob Crane and dispelling the many myths about him (see Figure 2-2). She recently had to abandon the group for health reasons.

After Hogan's Heroes was cancelled in 1971, Crane found a few acting roles, but nothing that gave him the notoriety and satisfaction of the TV show. He was in Scottsdale, Arizona, in 1978, starring in a play called Beginner's Luck, when he was found murdered in his motel room. He had been beaten with either a lamp or his