

Can I Get a Witness?

Lowell Paxson, creator of the Home Shopping Network, forbids sex and violence on his Christian TV network. Profits, however, are strongly encouraged. **By Holly Peterson Photo by Dafydd Jones**

TALK: What was your first job?

LOWELL PAXSON: At age 14 I did an AM radio show called *Kiddie-Go-Round*, in Rochester, New York. That was the last time I worked for anybody.

TALK: Did you expect to make a fortune?

PAXSON: No. I worked for 30 years before I ever got a reasonable paycheck.

know, up in the channel 50s and 60s. Most people would never go that high on the tuner. But I just knew—I had prayed about this—that "must carry" [the law that mandates that cable systems must carry all local broadcast stations] was going to be upheld by the Supreme Court. This is what the Holy Spirit told me: "Go buy

wife Marla and I have our own plane, and what we love to do is fly to the boat, put the boat in some exotic port, and then move from port to port around that area. And now we've combined business and pleasure—we have computer, fax, cell phone, and satellite phones on board—so last year we were able to get up to almost 100 days on the boat. My secretary doesn't know if I'm sitting in the office next to her or 2,000 miles away. It doesn't make any difference anymore.

TALK: If you could reincarnate yourself as another businessperson, who would it be?

PAXSON: [Cable mogul] John Malone. He's probably the smartest businessman I've ever met. He understands a transaction better than anybody I've ever seen. I wish we could get him to run for president.

TALK: Do you like all the new technology?

PAXSON: No. I now do the Lord's Prayer with "deliver me from e-mail."

TALK: How do you reconcile your faith with your enormous profits?

PAXSON: The Bible tells us that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to get into heaven. So, you know, you love the game of business and all of a sudden it rewards you with big money. And if you are Christian and you have your faith in God and Jesus, you have to face this problem with the camel and the needle. You work very hard to maintain a level of reasonableness and to think, What am I doing all



TALK: When did you make your first million?

PAXSON: In 1985. We took the Home Shopping Network public.

TALK: What's the best deal you've ever made?

PAXSON: Finding somebody who believed in my creation of home shopping. I got an investor to put up \$500,000—that seed capital took the Home Shopping Network to a billion in revenue in just five short years.

TALK: What's the biggest risk you've ever taken?

PAXSON: Launching PAX TV. Everybody thought I was nuts [in the mid-1990s], when I was buying all these UHF television stations in the big markets—you

the stations. You don't have to worry about "must carry." So we did. We bought 70 television stations, which made us the smartest guys in the world.

TALK: What's the biggest mistake you've ever made?

"I wouldn't like to travel on a commercial airline. My wife and I have our own plane, and we fly to our boat."

PAXSON: In the early 1960s I got an opportunity to invest \$20,000 for a big hunk of a company that was going to manufacture a product called Velcro. I never did it, because I didn't think anything could ever replace the zipper.

TALK: What's your greatest pleasure?

PAXSON: Yachting. And there's absolute truth to the statement that yachting is a great hole in the water into which one pours money. But I wouldn't like to travel on a commercial airline. My

this for? I was one of the founders of the Christian Network, which produces the Worship Network now in 35 countries. That, I think, is one of the nicest things that we've done.

TALK: What else are you working on now?

PAXSON: I recently sold a boat—a 150-foot Trinity.

TALK: Why did you sell it?

PAXSON: Because somebody offered me a lot of money. Now we're looking at a yacht about 180 feet. ■

Above: Lowell Paxson with his wife Marla in Monaco, 1999.