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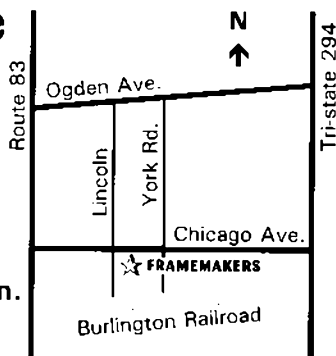
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# CHUCK SCHADEN'S NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

BOOK TWENTY-FIVE

CHAPTER FIVE

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2000

## *Hello, Out There in Radioland!*

*When the cat's away, the mice will play!*

While my wife Ellen and I were on our winter vacation earlier this year, we had no idea that our daughters were conspiring with listeners of *Those Were The Days* to cook up a surprise for my 30th broadcast anniversary.

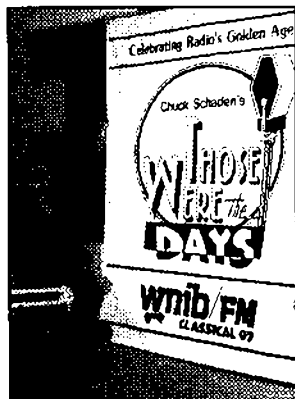
While we were gone they had arranged with our *TWTD* guest host Ken Alexander to get some air time on the program. Then Sue and Patty got on the air in late January and early February and asked if any listeners would care to participate in a scheme to celebrate "our Dad's thirty years on the air."

Anyone who wished to participate, they said, might want to take a few moments to write a note, or a letter, or a card to express what "Chuck Schaden and *Those Were The Days* means to you and how the show has affected your life."

They asked listeners to send their thoughts to a special post office box they had set up in Glenview, Illinois.

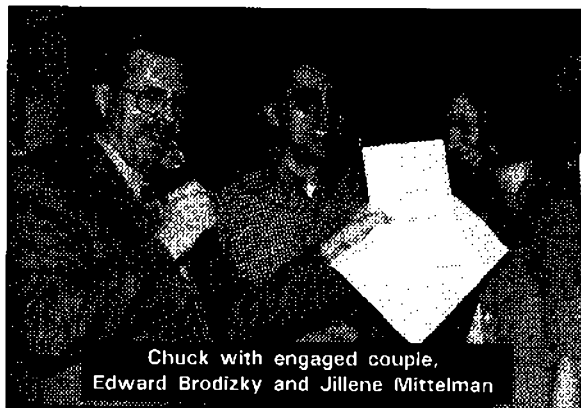
Sue and Patty said it was going to be a surprise —and a challenge— to keep this a secret until their Father marked his anniversary on the air at the end of April. "Shhh," they said on the air with thousands of people listening. "Don't tell Chuck!"

Well, I'll tell you, no one did. Nobody spilled the beans. The girls didn't even tell Ellen (who later said she was glad not to know, otherwise she would have been a nervous wreck!). When we went on the air for our 30th anniversary program on April



29th, we had absolutely no idea of the surprise that was in store for us.

Naturally, we were pumped up and excited about the milestone. We began the program in front of a jam-packed studio audience—with a look back at thirty years of *Those Were The Days*. We acknowledged some long-running and current sponsors, played some



Chuck with engaged couple,  
Edward Brodizky and Jillene Mittelman



*Those Were The Days Radio Players*  
"The Maltese Falcon"

clips from past broadcasts including one from a year ago during which a young couple became engaged on the air (and who were again in our audience to invite us to their wedding!). We offered an audio collage of some of the interviews with radio personalities that we've been fortunate to meet over the years. Next we introduced the *Those Were The Days Radio Players* for a live, hour-long reenactment of the *Lux Radio Theatre* production of "The Maltese Falcon."

Following the *Lux* show, it was time for the usual station break and it was at this point that announcer Ken

*Anniversary photos by Don Pointer*

Alexander said he had something to do, asked me to take a seat, and then introduced my daughters, Sue Sturm and Patty Randstrom.

The girls came to the front of the studio, took up a microphone and told the story of how they had grown up with our rebroadcasts of old time radio, and how it had affected their lives. They told what the program meant to them and said that they had wondered what *Those Were The Days* meant to listeners "out there in Radioland." They revealed to me, for the first time, how they had invited our radio audience to participate in this 30th anniversary scheme.

When Patty asked about the listener response, Sue held up three letters. "And they're wonderful letters," she said.

"They are -- "

Patty interrupted. "Sue! Three letters are hardly proof that Dad has had an impact on the lives of listeners."

"Well," said Sue, "I have more proof, but I hesitate to produce it at this time."

Patty said, "Why don't you just put it here on Dad's lap —"



Patty Randstrom and Sue Sturm



"But I don't think you understand," said Sue.

"Sue. Sue, put it here, on his lap."

"But... but..."

"Sue! Put it *here* on his lap."

"Alright," said Sue. "Jim, Steve, bring up the Grandkids....."

And with that our five granddaughters—Katie, Corianne, Jenny, Tracy, and Natalie—came down the studio aisle, each carrying a large "mailbag" filled with letters and they started emptying them all on my lap! The girls were followed by our sons-in-law Steve Sturm and Jim Randstrom—who were carrying four large albums, filled with hundreds and hundreds of cards, notes and letters listeners had sent to join in this surprise.

It was like a scene from the movie, "Miracle on 34th Street"!



I was very touched and moved to tears of happiness by this wonderful outpouring from those who listen to our program each week. If you were in the studio audience or tuned in on that day, you know what I'm talking about.

It took almost a month to go through the scrapbooks of cards, letters, drawings, tapes, banners, posters and other memorabilia that was sent to help celebrate our 30th broadcast anniversary.

You wrote about having first heard our program back in the early 1970s, on the little station in Evanston.

You wrote how much you enjoyed *The Cinnamon Bear* and "Jack Benny Month."

Many listeners commented on our WW II series and other special themes we've presented over the years.

Quite a number of folks said that when we played certain old-time radio shows, they were pleasantly reminded of their deceased father, or mother, or husband, who had always loved that particular program or performer.

Many wrote to say that they enjoyed our comments about the radio days, saying that they felt that I was part of their family. What an honor!

You told me—with warmth and sincerity—exactly what *Those Were The Days* and our efforts mean to you.

You couldn't have given me a more meaningful gift to mark my 30th year on the air.

It is one that I will treasure forever.

Thanks for listening.

Thanks for everything.

—Chuck Schaden

# THE LOVABLE LUG

BY CLAIR SCHULZ

Deep in the files of the Columbia Broadcasting System a card contained these words about an actor written after his radio audition: "Excellent—a bet for *Gangbusters* and *Skyblazers*... Specializes in mugs, tough guys, gangsters, policemen." An interviewer described the man's expression as being "very like the puzzled look you see on the face of a dumb fighter as he comes out for one more battering in the tenth round."



For a time William Bendix rebelled against typecasting and considered his face his misfortune until he met a character who taught him to accept life's vicissitudes with a philosophic "It's a losing fight."

To young Bill Bendix who grew up in a tough New York neighborhood fighting became a way of life on the streets, although he credited his mother's firm hand with keeping his name off police blotters. Because his father held a variety of jobs from musician to stevedore, Bill hardly had time to get into any trouble in one place as he passed through ten different schools in eight years.

Bendix, who loved playing stickball, passing a football, and swimming off the docks more than hitting the books, left school in 1920 at the age of fourteen to engage in a series of odd jobs, none of



William Bendix

which brought him more pleasure than working at the Polo Grounds when both the Giants and Yankees played there.

There, in the shadows as locker boy and in the sunlight as bat boy, he got to know some of the legendary ball players of the time. Bendix claimed to have seen a hundred of Babe Ruth's home runs and to have contributed to Ruth's indigestion when he brought the slugger handfuls of hot dogs. Bendix filed these memories away and later retrieved them when he assumed the lead role in *The Babe Ruth Story* in 1948.

From 1923 to 1927 as a semipro baseball and football player sports continued to be in his blood and vice versa for it was during those years that his oft-broken nose received its distinctive shape.

In the 1930s Bendix engaged in a series

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*Clair Schulz is a free-lance writer, movie historian and collector from Trevor, Wisconsin.*

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of jobs including running a grocery store, massaging sentimental ballads as a singing waiter, counting automobiles crossing a bridge for the WPA, and selling cheese, a position he lost for eating too many samples.

His first nibble of show business came as a member of the Federal Theatre where, for \$17.50 a week, he performed in less-than-glamorous sites like gymnasiums, cellars, and school auditoriums. In 1939 as part of the New York Theatre Guild he appeared in several minor productions on Broadway and gained additional experience by playing summer stock in New England.

Later that year his breakthrough role, that of a policeman named Krupp in William Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life*, allowed him for the first time to support his wife and daughter with a respectable salary of \$100 a week and, more importantly, brought him to the attention of Hal Roach, who signed Bendix to a movie contract.

Although *Woman of the Year* is fondly remembered today as the first pairing of Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn, it also marked the screen debut of William Bendix, cast in the role that would soon become his trademark, a tough cookie on the outside who could talk with a snarl but who everyone knew was a softie at heart with a sentimental side.

Because Bendix possessed the face of an ordinary Joe he seemed right at home playing soldiers in the war pictures *Wake Island* and *Guadalcanal Diary*, his work in the former earning him an Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor in 1942. In *Guadalcanal Diary* he purloined the plaudits that might have got to top-



*Who Done It?* (1942)  
William Gargan, Abbott & Costello,  
William Bendix and cops

PHOTOFEST

billed Preston Foster and Lloyd Nolan and drew one critic's praise for his impressive performance that "adds humor and meaning to every scene in which he appears."

As dim-witted detective Brannigan in Abbott and Costello's *Who Done It?* he proved to be an adept scene-stealer in comedies as well. His antics during the handcuff bit, according to Bob Thomas in his book *Bud and Lou*, prompted Costello to storm into producer Alex Gottlieb's office and demand that Gottlieb never again "put anybody who's funnier than me in a picture of mine!"

If the histrionics of a shackled Bendix brought laughs in a supporting part, his dual role of a poetic marine and a chorus girl in *Abroad with Two Yanks* generated twice as many guffaws two years later in 1944. The sight of the corseted, burly Bendix singing "I Need a Man" while dancing sedately amazed the character played by co-star Dennis O'Keefe and amused audiences who welcomed wartime fluff in their local theatres.

Although Bendix had some funny moments as a gangster who wouldn't stay dead in Fred Allen's *It's In the Bag*, his metier continued to be dramatic roles. As the one person who had to endure more pain than any of the other survivors floating in *Life-*

## THE LOVABLE LUG

boat he earned one of the highest tributes given to an actor when a writer for *The New York World-Telegram* stated that "William Bendix, who has never been bad in a film, has never been better."

In the title role as *The Hairy Ape* he brought some sensitivity to brutish stoker Hank in the adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's play, prompting one critic to call it "his all-time high performance" and to claim that his work in the film "rarely falls below excellent." As Hank, a man bent on a course of murderous revenge against a woman who insulted him, Bendix seemed well-cast because in real life slights and ridicule wounded him deeply due to his inherent desire to please everyone. He took adverse criticism perhaps too seriously, though conversely he never nurtured a "Hollywood ego" over the pices of puff distributed by Paramount.

At Paramount he developed a friendship with Alan Ladd and also an image as a roughneck in the Ladd vehicles *China, The Glass Key, The Blue Dahlia, Two Years Before the Mast, and Calcutta*. The disparity between the blond good looks of the one actor who spoke in carefully-worded sentences and the plain features of his

stocky colleague who delivered his lines in his characteristic Carnarsie dialect made for a natural contrast on the screen even in movies that didn't cast them as adversaries.

Of all the films Bendix made the one that turned his career in a different direction and eventually gave him a lasting identity was a now-forgotten B picture called *The McGuiers of Brooklyn*. Irving Brecher, who had written screenplays for the Marx Brothers and MGM musicals, saw in Bendix's performance as a strong-willed schmo the embodiment of the oafish character who would blunder through *The Life of Riley*, a comedy radio show he planned to produce.

The audition was a mere formality and in January 1944 Bendix stepped into the lead role in a series that would become his steady meal ticket until 1951.

Unlike other situation comedies in which geography and social status remained anonymous or of little import, *The Life of Riley* set the scene virtually every week by reminding the folks at home that the Rileys, solidly entrenched in the working class, lived in a bungalow within coughing distance of smoggy Los Angeles. Millions of Americans could identify with Chester A. Riley who, lunch box in hand, trudged

daily to and from his work as a riveter at an aircraft plant.

Even though many listeners knew first-hand the economic struggles of a middle class family, the writers took the sting out of the similarities by making Riley not only arbitrary and stubborn but also nearly illiterate and clearly obtuse. Every week they would place self-revealing words in Riley's mouth



*Blue Dahlia* (1946)  
Alan Ladd and William Bendix

PHOTOEST



that we understood but he apparently did not such as "It's time you learned that if you don't ask me questions, you won't get a foolish answer" or "You can't win an argument with a moron and I ought to know" or "I'll dig around in my head and come up with something concrete." The gags in which Riley cut himself deepest sometimes came when the voices of Alan Reed or Frank Nelson would haunt Chester as his conscience by claiming to be in his head to which Riley would reply, "That's a lie! There's nothing in my head."

Bendix's delivery of these and other lines was so perfect that he squeezed more laughs out of simple statements than the jokes merited. When Riley enigmatically claimed to neighbor Jim Gillis, "I'm engaged to be married... but don't tell my wife," we can almost see Gillis doing a double take at Riley's dead pan. When wife Peg forgave him "for all the nutty things I've done," Riley blithely added, "Now I know why we make such a nice couple. You're even nuttier than I am," a punch line Bendix served up so delectably that it is still funny after repeated playings. Anyone who listens to Bill's reading of this half-hearted ad which, at the insistence of his conscience, Riley placed in a newspaper for a fur he found and doesn't smile belongs in the Buster Keaton Stone Face Club: "If you think I found something you think you lost, try and prove it."

Being fatuous and funny week after week is no easy matter as listening to the puerile chatter emerging from the mouths of Jerry Lewis and Marie Wilson fifty years ago proves. Somehow Bendix was able to im-



*Life of Riley* Radio Show  
William Bendix and John Brown

buc lines like "Hand me a piano" before launching into some treacly lyrics about mothers with an air of spontaneous asininity that induces us to chuckle and say, "That's something that nitwit Riley might really blurt out on the spur of the moment."

Bendix made Riley such a good-hearted lummock that we forgave him for stumbling weekly into predicaments which were exacerbated by his obstinate behavior. Paula Winslowe capably played the patient wife who tolerated the hot-tempered but soft-headed klutz, and John Brown did Jekyll/Hyde double duty as Gillis, who often laid traps for his neighbor, and as Digby O'Dell, the friendly undertaker, who dispensed good advice and whose entrance could be predicted when the soliloquizing Riley, in the midst of one of his dilemmas, would toss out a straight line such as "I'll never be in any deeper than I am right now."

Versions of O'Dell's famous signature lines, "You're looking fine, Riley. Very

## THE LOVABLE LUG

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natural" and "I better be shoveling off," became the "in" way to begin or close conversations across the country, and Bendix through Riley also contributed to the colloquialisms of the time with his remarks of "My head's made up," "It's a losing fight," "You're hanging an innocent man," and "What a revoltin' development this is." If such a book as *Bartlett's Familiar Expressions* existed in the post-war years, *The Life of Riley* would probably have earned as many entries in it as any other radio program.

Bendix, who routinely exhibited his range as Riley by going from pigheaded autocrat to whimpering weakling in seconds, continued to appear in a variety of movies while working on the series including a musical fantasy (*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*), a western (*Streets of Larado*), comedies (*Kill the Umpire*, *A Girl in Every Port*), message pictures (*The Time of Your Life*, *Johnny Holiday*), and crime melodramas (*The Dark Corner*, *Detective Story*).

Of course, when Brecher wrote the scenario for and planned to direct *The Life of Riley* there could be no one else to take the part of Chester Riley than William Bendix. Ironically it was because Bendix had contractual commitments to complete *The Life of Riley* and other films that prevented him from being part of the cast for the initial TV version of *The Life of Riley* which ran from October 1949 to March 1950. Jackie Gleason assumed the part of Riley in that aborted effort, but it became clear that Gleason possessed a brash, insolent edge ill-suited to playing a simpleminded, well-meaning family man and that his talents would be better utilized in a show without children where he could pace back and forth spouting his half-baked theories to a doubting wife.

Late in 1952 with a lull in his movie career and no radio show to prepare for Bendix began filming episodes of *The Life of Riley*, which premiered in January 1953 and became an NBC Friday night regular until August 1958 when it retired into Rerunland. Changes from the radio cast included Marjorie Reynolds as Peg and Tom D'Andrea as Gillis. Neither John Brown nor the character Digger O'Dell appeared in the Bendix version of the Riley saga.

The Riley viewers saw on television did not disappoint for just as Bendix sounded like a blue-collar stiff so his craggy appearance might easily have prompted those at home to say, "Now there's a guy who looks like he works in a factory."

The plots still centered around Riley's mismanagement of the family's affairs including sticking that prominent nose into the activities of his children, although complications involving Riley's eccentric friend Waldo Binny (Sterling Holloway) figured in numerous episodes. When prognathous Bendix appeared head-to-head with Holloway whose husky voice often gave way to squeaks better suited to the throat of Henry Aldrich viewers might easily have said aloud, "There's a guy who looks like he works in a factory listening to a guy who sounds like he swallowed the factory's whistle."

Throughout the 1950s Bendix made guest appearances on comedy-variety shows and performed a number of televised dramatic programs including two of some historic note. On September 29, 1952 he starred as "The Hollow Man" on the final episode of *Lights Out*.

In 1958 during the first season of the *Desilu Playhouse* he played a man who had a recurring dream which placed him back in December 1941 trying to warn people about the coming attack on Pearl Harbor. That episode, "Time Element," written by

Rod Serling and centering around the juggling of the time-space continuum that characterized many of Serling's scripts, sold CBS on the idea of a new series that would eventually be called *The Twilight Zone*.

Bendix appeared at least once on virtually all the prestigious anthology programs including *Playhouse 90*, *Schlitz Playhouse of Stars*, *Fireside*

*Theatre*, *Screen Directors Playhouse*, *Robert Montgomery Presents*, and *Philco Television Playhouse*. In the summer of 1959 he played one of the unfortunate kidnapers in a special adaptation of O. Henry's story "The Ransom of Red Chief." Later that year he returned to thugdom one more time as a leader of the Tri-State Gang who found out it's a losing fight to tangle with Eliot Ness and *The Untouchables*.

Early in 1960 Bendix starred in his only other TV series, *The Overland Trail*, which attempted to follow in the tracks of the other westerns riding TV's crowded range at that time. The premise of a Civil War vet and a dexterous youngster played by Doug McClure interacting with different passengers in their stage every week made for a type of *Grand Hotel* on wheels, but after seven months it became just another desert drama to bite the dust.

Bendix tried several more times to score with a series. A 1961 episode of *Mr. Ed* misfired as a pilot for *The Bill Bendix Show* and an unaired pilot for *Rockabye the Infantry* was produced in 1963. When CBS



Life of Riley TV Show

William Bendix, Marjorie Reynolds  
Wesley Morgan, Lugene Sanders

cancelled *Bill and Martha*, a proposed series teaming Bendix and Martha Raye, the actor sued the network for breach of contract. Although Bill received a sizable amount for settling out of court, his alter ego Riley might have appraised the situation with a pithy "I got the dough but no show."

To an old trouper like Bendix the show had to go on even if it meant taking minor parts in featherweight films like *Law of the Lawless* and *For Love or Money* or appearing in summer stock productions of *Take Her, She's Mine* in venues so far removed from the bright lights that his most severe critics may have been strident crows in nearby cornfields.

He continued taking the roles that came his way until pneumonia claimed him at the age of 58 on December 14, 1964, less than three months after his last television appearance on an episode of *Burke's Law*.

Four years before his death Bendix took stock of his accomplishments in an interview in which he said, "I've had a long, varied, eventful career. I don't hate anybody and I don't have any bitter thoughts. I started out without any advantages, but I've been lucky and successful and I've had fun."

He lived the life of Riley so we could have the time of our lives. ■

NOTE-- Tune in TWTD August 12 and 19 to hear William Bendix in *The Life of Riley*.



# Radio Chefs

BY RICHARD W. O'DONNELL

Americans have a lot of help preparing their meals as we begin the 21st

Century.

There are great chefs all over the video.

You can't channel surf without running into one of them. If it isn't the *Galloping Gourmet*, it's

*Today's Gourmet*, or *Gourmet Cooking*. There is even *Ciao Italia!* Can you guess what is cooking in that kitchen?

And don't forget *Marcia Adams Cooking*. There is even a show called *Chef Paula*

*Prudhomme's Fork in the Road*. That's probably the longest title on television.

Cooking experts from foreign countries, including a few nations you did not know existed, can be found on the channels. If it isn't Chinese food, the menu is Japanese, Asian, German, French, Swiss, Mexican, Spanish, and a lot of other places.

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*Richard W. O'Donnell is a free-lance writer from Port Richey, Florida.*

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They even dragged Julia Child out of retirement a while back to do a few shows. Old cooks, they say, never fade away. They just keep *sauteing* away.

Ask yourself this question. When was

the last time you went to a friend's home for dinner, and been informed the main course would be concocted from a recipe tested by one of these TV chefs?

It seldom happens. Don't blame the TV cooks though. Your home-style chef probably does not want to take any chances, and will use an old familiar



Edith Spencer as Aunt Jenny

recipe. As for the TV recipes, they will be tried out on poor family members first and, most of the time, they are just filed and forgotten.

Maybe that is why radio, in its formative stages, did not have any major national cooking shows. Think back. Famous radio chefs are more difficult to find than that little old needle in the haystack. Most cooking shows at the national level failed to capture any significant ratings.

In 1930, NBC had something called *Our Daily Food*. It was sponsored by the old A&P food store chain, and the show was loaded with recipes. It lasted for a year or so on the airwaves and then was gone forever. Those were the depression days, it must be remembered. Perhaps listeners lacked the funds to buy the extra ingredients needed.

Remember *Aunt Jenny*, the sweet old lady who lasted on radio for two decades? At the end of most of her shows, she used to come up with a recipe. All of her recipes required Spry, the cooking miracle that sponsored the daily drama on CBS. And you could also find recipes on labels of cans of Spry.

Mary Margaret McBride, when she first started her long run on the airwaves in 1934, used another name. She was supposed to be the grandmother type who knew all there was to know about everything and anything, including cooking. Mary Margaret was on the air for more than three decades but, as her ratings climbed, she lost her cook book.

Kate Smith, on her daily show, featured recipes, not all the time, but when she came across food secrets she wanted to share with listeners. And her sponsor's product was not always required when the food was prepared.

The soap operas *Ma Perkins*, *Stella Dallas*, *Joyce Jordan*, and all the gang -- were great at sneaking in recipes towards the end of the show. You were warned to "have your pencil ready." If the lead broke, an address was provided if you wanted to request the recipe be mailed to you. Of course, you had to come up with a pencil without broken lead if you wanted to jot down that friendly address.

Local stations did have their cooking shows. But these shows, and there were hundreds of them, never produced a "star," if you will, who went network in a big way.



Mary Margaret McBride

In Boston, for years, a chap named Gus Saunders read recipes over the air. At times he had a female named Marjorie Mills with him at the mike. She was a chatty and popular personality, but it was Gus who handled the recipes.

He had a magic touch and could make you think toasting bread was an adventure. If there is a Hall of Fame anywhere for radio recipe readers, Saunders deserves the first pedestal, if not the highest one.

In the old days, before TV news came along, newspapers dominated. And each journal, whether morning, evening or Sunday, had a household section. They were loaded with fine recipes. To a degree, this may explain why radio did not fall head over heels in love with cooking shows. TV shuffled the cards, and our American press lost a fair share of its impact. Those newspaper recipes just weren't as important as they used to be.

Also, there were those magazines for women. In the recipe department, old time radio had to compete with them. As time went by, these magazines became less interested in what went on in the kitchen. In

## RADIO CHEFS

their heydays though, they were the prime source of recipes for the home cooking crowd. No radio cooking show could reach as large an audience.

Of course, there was prime time radio and its awesome audience. Few food sponsors took advantage of this opportunity. Sure, they pushed their products, but if you wanted recipes, they had an address you could contact.

An exception to that rule was the *Kraft Music Hall*, a top-rated show back in the late forties. Toward the end, announcer Ed Herlihy gave

you the "Recipe of the Week." Prior to Herlihy, Ken Carpenter and Mary Jane Higby did the Kraft commercials on the same show.

"After you have mixed the spaghetti and tomato sauce together -- pause -- add the hamburger, and blend well. Then pour on pregnant pause your rich and creamy melted Kraft cheese and you will have a meal fit for a king. It will melt in your mouth."

After Herlihy was done with you, if you didn't have any Kraft cheese at home, you would have knocked down the doors at

your neighborhood market, even if you did not like cheese. That guy knew how to make you hungry in a hurry.

Last, but certainly not least, we come to *Elsa Maxwell's Party Line*, a show that was on NBC and Mutual during the early forties. Maxwell was billed as the world's most famous party-giver, and she had tons

of tales to tell about the rich and famous on her show.

During her radio years, Maxwell was also a crusader. She urged overweight people to cut down on their fatty foods and to get plenty of exercise. Her sponsor was Ry-Krisp, a tasty little cracker that was supposed to keep you trim.



Elsa Maxwell

PHOTO/LSI

Whenever possible, Elsa would come up with a low fat recipe to aid her listeners in the war against flab. She was years ahead of the low fat champions we have today.

There was a second reason for the radio star's battle against those extra pounds. When she first came on the air, she weighed almost 200 pounds. Elsa, who can best be described as roly-poly, still was crusading at the same weight when the show was cancelled.

Evidently she could not resist all that delicious food served at the parties she tossed for her celebrity chums. ■

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# Frank Morgan

## Wizard of Stage, Screen, and Radio

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BY BILL OATES

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In one movie he appeared as a door-keeper, a guard, a professor, a wizard, and a horse driver. Quite a feat for any film actor, and more remarkably, he did so in the most watched film of all time. Although the actor played the title role, he was not the star.

He's Frank Morgan and his performance was as the Wizard in MGM's 1939 beloved masterpiece, *The Wizard of Oz*.

Born Francis Philip Wupperman on June 1, 1890, young Frank-Morgan-to-be joined an affluent family that would not have required him to work

in any strenuous occupation. However, being the second son of the Angostura bitters importing organization convinced neither Frank nor his elder fellow acting brother Ralph to take the easy road.

Before Francis Wupperman achieved stardom and changed his name, he sold space for a Boston newspaper, spent some time at Cornell University, and eventually headed west to become a cowboy. (Brother Ralph changed his last name to Morgan after he abandoned a business career and

struck out for the stage.)

Returning to their birthplace, New York City, the Wuppermans respectively created their own vaudeville sketches. As a result of his stage work, Frank was offered the

juvenile lead in *Mr. Wu* in 1914 with famed actor Walker Whiteside. This noteworthy legitimate stage premiere in New York led to more impressive roles, such as his starring debut in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, before he moved on to play the lead in stock companies. Even though Frank Morgan's star was on the rise, his tenure on stage was



temporarily sidetracked when moving pictures beckoned the young leading man.

Just prior to the first World War, filmmakers successfully began luring "legitimate" actors into film. Once producers like Jesse Lasky and his Famous Players studio (later Paramount) convinced stage stars that it was not degrading to act in movies (and that the money could be quite good), Morgan and others moved to studio locations in the New York area by day to act in motion picture plays.

Exceedingly good luck came to Frank Morgan when Anita Stewart's usual leading man, Earl Williams, left her produc-

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*Bill Oates, of Kouts, Indiana, is a high school English teacher and author.*

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## FRANK MORGAN

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tion company at the Vitagraph studios. When he took the actor's place, Morgan began appearing with her in films such as *The Suspect* (1916) and *Light in the Darkness* (1917), before moving on to other roles like *A Modern Cinderella* (with June Caprice in 1918) and *That Girl Philippa* (with Stewart in 1918), *Gray Towers of Mystery* (1919), and *The Golden Shower* (1919).

Among the greatest successes of Frank Morgan's early film career was his support of John Barrymore in the 1918 adaptation of the stage hit *Raffles, the Amateur Cracksman*. By 1924, Morgan found himself in the enviable role as star at the Vitagraph studio. Even though his acting success seemed to be moving toward the screen, he also continued starring in a variety of stage triumphs.

As his film career continued through the 1920's, his motion picture parts consisted more in support of impressive actors at Paramount like Gloria Swanson (*Manhandled*, 1924) and Ruth Taylor and Alice White (in Anita Loos' famed *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, 1926). After he began playing more roles at this studio, and certainly after his appearance in an early talkie short, *Belle of the Night* (1930), he seemed destined for a long-term contract with the mountaintop company.

In 1930, his first starring year at Paramount, he also appeared in *Queen High* with Charles Ruggles, *Dangerous Dan McGrew* with Helen Kane, *Laughter* with Nancy Carroll, and *Fast and Loose* with Miriam Hopkins. These films represent the best of what would be Morgan's best efforts at the studio.

But an impressive offering to be with the greatest brother and sister dance team of the century (and probably film's greatest hooper), Fred and Adele Astaire, tempo-

rarily pulled Frank Morgan away from pictures for two years and into the stage version of *The Band Wagon*.

After returning from his stage triumph, Frank Morgan appeared in many pictures at a variety of studios. For instance, he played with Al Jolson in *Hallelujah, I'm a Bum* (United Artists, 1933), but after his MGM debut in John Barrymore's *Reunion in Vienna* (1933), he advanced at that studio playing opposite Alice Brady in *Broadway to Hollywood* and Jean Harlow in *Bombshell*. During this very productive 1933, a year that saw Frank Morgan in fourteen films, he began his long contractual association with MGM.

At first, Louis B. Mayer's studio did not fully appreciate Morgan's potential. Not heralded as a star, yet often managing decent parts, he was frequently loaned out to other studios. Nonetheless, by 1935, the studio's attitude changed, and he enjoyed more impressive roles, like those in Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy's *Naughty Marietta* (1935) and William Powell's triumphant *The Great Ziegfeld* (1936).

For the duration of the 1930's, Frank Morgan's often-befuddled character grew in film prominence. Whether at MGM or on loan to RKO for the third three-strip Technicolor film, *The Dancing Pirate* (1936), or to Fox for *Dimples* (with Shirley Temple, 1936), the actor continued making inroads with the public. One typical Frank Morgan role occurred when he played Una Merkle's foolish husband in *Saratoga* (1937). Later that year he was able to give his fans a glimpse of what he was like on stage when he reprised his role of the Ruritanian king in the film version of *Rosalie*. MGM, however, found that they had a formidable representative when he embarked in a different entertainment, radio.

When Maxwell House Coffee decided





PHOTOFEST

to change the format for its enviable 9 pm Eastern Thursday night slot on NBC, it enlisted the aid of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studio. The intention was to give the listeners a sample of MGM films to come, a chance to enjoy their favorite actors in an additional medium, and all the while encouraging the faithful to enjoy a cup of good-to-the-last-drop coffee while doing so. The novel idea seemed so powerful that Warner Brothers and Paramount attempted to do the same. However, *Good News of 1937* (and the next two years, as well) became the only successful show of the genre.

Premiering on November 4, 1937, *Good News* guaranteed a peek backstage at what was happening at the studio. The show started that way, but it evolved into a formula program. The usual menu included banter from the host, a musical number directed by Meredith Willson, guests in skits or in scenes from their current productions, braggadocio from Frank Morgan,

a *Baby Snooks* routine with Fanny Brice and Hanley Stafford, and the promotion of the guest stars' current cinema ventures. The hosts changed as their motion picture shooting schedules prohibited them from appearing on the radio show, but the most heard masters of ceremony were Robert Taylor, Robert Montgomery, and Robert Young.

Although the regular comedians were not on the first *Good News* shows, by the eighth week Morgan and Brice were included as staples.

On rare occasions, a theme was created for an entire show, as was the case on June 29, 1939. The final *Good News* for the 1938-39 season presented "for the first time on the air" a medley of songs from *The Wizard of Oz*.

Essentially, the program was the epitome of MGM's self horn-tooting but with a polish that made this installment of *Good News* very entertaining. Unfortunately, the following season witnessed a dip in the show's quality and ratings.

By 1939, Frank Morgan found himself in one successful entertainment endeavor after another. However, none would compare to his most famous role as the Wizard. The part originally was adapted for W.C. Fields, after the comedian's triumph at MGM as Eustace McCawber in *David Copperfield*. Fields declined *Oz* for several reasons: 1) not enough money (he wanted \$100,000, and they offered \$75,000), 2) he was not all that fired up about being in a kids' movie, and 3) he was busily working on the script for *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man*.

Comedian Ed Wynn received the nod as director Mervyn LeRoy's first choice in the

## FRANK MORGAN

part, but he too declined.

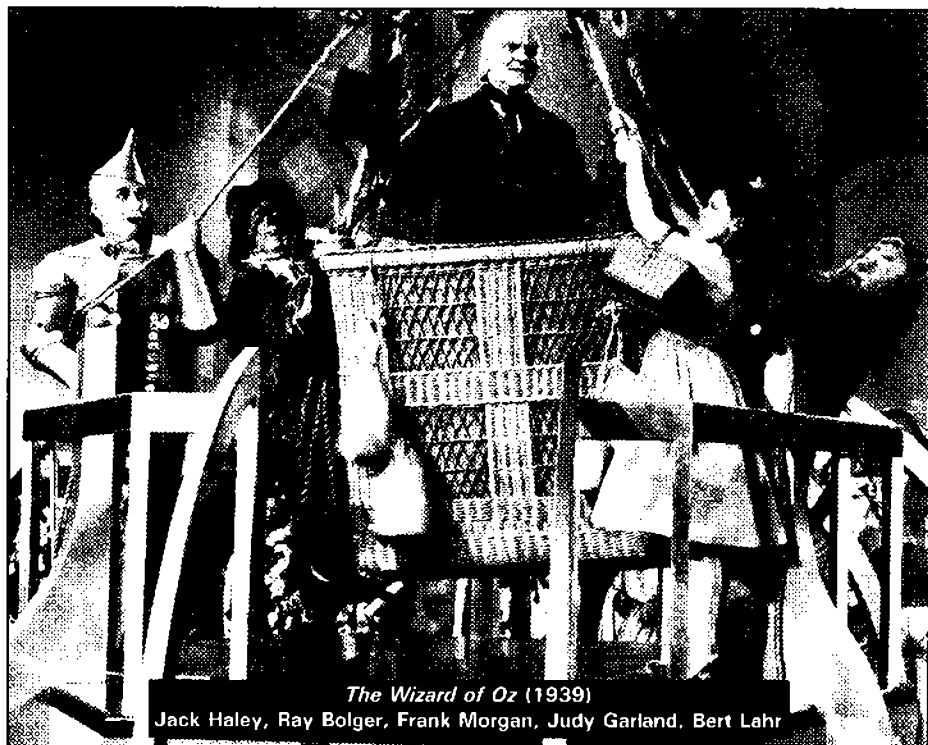
Incidentally, Fields' Wizard probably would have been a more larcenous con-man type, while Wynn's interpretation might have been very silly. Frank Morgan, on the other hand, begged for the chance to play the part. Volunteering to make a screen test, he wowed the audience of crew members with the scenes he had already memorized. Joining the cast late, Morgan went to work to create his five parts.

One sad note to Frank Morgan's career involves his love of alcohol. In order to survive the rigors of film productions, he often carried a briefcase full of martini mixings to his dressing room. Although he drank quite heavily, he never missed his lines and always knew his marks. Margaret Hamilton, the Wicked Witch in *Oz*,

thought the world of him and even helped him fetch "the hair of the dog" when they first met at the RKO lot in 1934. She was an aspiring actress in *By Your Leave*, and when he mentioned to her that he was thirsty and had no hopes of finding the forbidden beverage at a "dry" studio, she changed his prognosis. Margaret helped him obtain alcohol and they remained friends until his death. Years later she called him "lovable, sweet, and considerate."

Morgan's sum total of shooting during *The Wizard of Oz* was less than a week for Professor Marvel and a few more for the Wizard. The relatively short experience was enjoyable for all, and Scarecrow Ray Bolger said of working with Morgan that he was "a divine man."

Perhaps the strangest story to come from the filming resulted after a costume was chosen for the Professor Marvel part.



*The Wizard of Oz* (1939)  
Jack Haley, Ray Bolger, Frank Morgan, Judy Garland, Bert Lehr

Wardrobe wanted a nice coat that had seen better days. Several MGM staff members went to a second hand store on Main Street in Los Angeles and brought back to the studio a pile of garments. Morgan and Victor Fleming (another director on the film - there were four) selected an appropriate Prince Albert, one that was a nice coat when it was new, but

the nap on the collar showed wear. It seemed a perfect fit for Morgan's size and character. During one hot day of shooting Morgan turned out a pocket and discovered that it bore the name L. Frank Baum, the author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

The Chicago tailor who made the item of clothing verified that he had tailored such a coat for Baum, and the writer's widow corroborated the story. After the filming was completed, she received the costume as a memento of her husband's double connection to it. Baum probably brought the coat to the West Coast years earlier when he developed original *Oz* silent films. Sadly, the story seemed so implausible that virtually no one believed it as more than a studio publicity stunt.

By the end of the regular *Good News*' final year (1939-40), the ratings were sagging and Maxwell House opted to change the format. MGM had already dissolved its partnership with the show, and for the new season the coffee company obtained Edward Arnold as the regular host and Connie Boswell of the famed Boswell Sisters as the featured singer.

During the following season more changes occurred when Fanny Brice, Han-



*Good News of 1938*  
Frank Morgan, Hanley Stafford,  
Meredith Willson, Robert Taylor

PHOTO BY LESLIE

ley Stafford, Frank Morgan, and Meredith Willson continued in a half-hour show, with Mary Martin appearing as the singer and Don Wilson as the announcer. The newly titled *Maxwell House Coffee Time* evolved into about a quarter of an hour of Morgan and the same for Baby Snooks and Daddy. Fortunately for old-time-radio listeners, Frank Morgan's personal collection of *Good News* shows ended up in the Hollywood Museum's radio archives, and members of SPERDVAC can listen to a very complete set of the best of the show's offerings.

Outside of the Maxwell House years, radio was not quite the success that movies were for Frank Morgan. He did work for the coffee company through the 1944-45 season. Teamed with frequent *Good News* host Robert Young and popular comedienne Cass Daley, the show featured the familiar incredible boasts invented for Morgan's on-air character.

A new *Frank Morgan Show* was planned for the following season, but no one bought the June 6, 1945 audition. The program included a formidable cast of Reginald Gardiner, Ralph Bellamy, James Baskett, and Larry Keating. The premise, based on

## FRANK MORGAN

a good old boys' club in the first half and a fantasy segment in the second, did not deliver. Later that year, when Bing Crosby engaged in a feud with NBC and Kraft and went off the air for seven months, Morgan moved into the crooner's place as one of a trio of hosts on the *Kraft Music Hall*.

At the end of the 1945-46 season, Frank Morgan was given another chance at his own radio show, when *The Fabulous Dr. Tweedy* debuted as a summer replacement for Jack Benny's Lucky Strike show. This Morgan effort seemed to have more potential than the previous two, and it continued in the fall for Pall Mall cigarettes until March 26, 1947. Thereafter, Frank Morgan's visits to radio primarily included recurring visits on the Old Gold *Bickersons* program during the 1947-48 season.

Over the years, Frank Morgan participated in a number of guest shots on radio. He appeared in one episode of *The Campbell Playhouse* during the 1940-41 season in "The Go-Getter" with Helen Twelvetrees and Randolph Scott. So influential was the actor in 1944, that he was the guest on the October 25 premiere of the game show *Which Is Which?*

One of his most exciting vehicles came



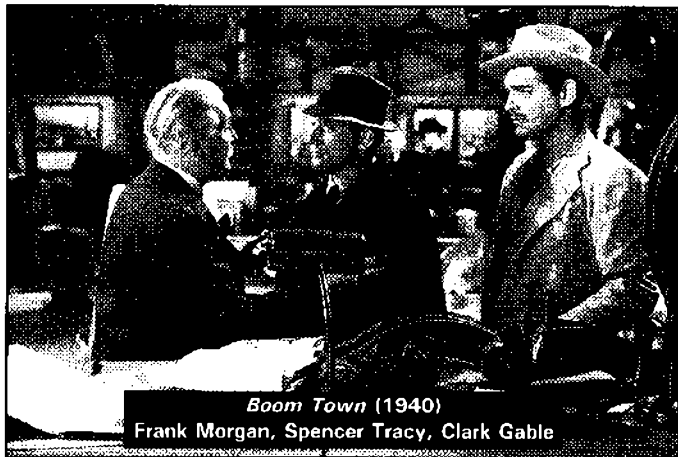
PHOTOFEET

when he visited Armed Forces Radio during the second World War. On February 5, 1945, an all-star cast gathered to present "Dick Tracy in B Flat" on *Command Performance*. Morgan played Vitamin Flintheart, with Bing Crosby as Tracy and a cast of show business greats.

Frank Morgan continued his very successful film career throughout the 1940s. He appeared with Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy and Claudette Colbert in *Boom Town* in 1940 and in 1942, the actor was awarded a second chance for an Oscar, when his

name was placed before the Academy for best supporting actor in *Tortilla Flat*. Eight years earlier he received the best actor nomination for The Duke of Florence in *The Affairs of Cellini*.

Ironically, the role for which he was best known in the *Wizard of Oz* received the same treatment as did the rest of the movie.



PHOTOFEET

No actors from *Oz* received Academy Award nominations. The memorable "Over the Rainbow," which was originally cut from the film, won Best Song, while Judy Garland received a special Oscar for Outstanding Juvenile Performer. Even though none of the four directors of *Oz* was nominated, one of them, Victor

Fleming, won the Best Director award for the other major MGM production of the year, *Gone With the Wind*.

Continuing his long association with MGM, Frank Morgan starred in a variety of motion pictures. Among his outstanding efforts include: *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940, with Jimmy Stewart and Margaret Sullavan), *Broadway Melody of 1940* (with Fred Astaire and Eleanor Powell), *The Human Comedy* (1943, with Mickey Rooney), *The Cockeyed Miracle* (1946), *The Great Morgan* (1946, as himself), *The Three Musketeers* (1948, with Gene Kelly), *The Stratton Story* (1949, with Jimmy Stewart), and *Gold Fever* (1952, released posthumously).

Slated to play Buffalo Bill in the 1950 production *Annie Get Your Gun*, Frank Morgan would be reunited with his *Oz* co-star Judy Garland. Unfortunately, neither appeared in the film. Judy Garland was experiencing emotional problems and was replaced by Betty Hutton, and Frank Morgan died on September 18, 1949, after completing his work in *Key to the City* (1949). He was just slightly over sixty. (His brother Ralph, 73, died on June 11, 1956.)

Frank Morgan will be forever etched in the minds of entertainment lovers because



*The Human Comedy* (1943)  
Mickey Rooney, Frank Morgan

PHOTOFEST

of the movie part he so coveted. Since its immensely successful debut on CBS television in 1956, MGM's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* continues as one of the most beloved classic films.

Not only does *Oz* stay alive in a variety of film media, like home movie film, videotape, remastered theatrical releases, and DVD, but it also receives the very best technical scrutiny so that the next generation to enjoy it does so in the most impressive version available.

Once lovers of the movie appreciate those who starred in the picture, they often discover that the actors all established a very credible list of appearances on film and radio.

Not the least of these was Frank Morgan. His four-and-a-half decade stint as a leading man and lovable rascal stand as a testament to his durability in an occupation that frequently witnesses much shorter careers.

And as long as children of all ages hope for a better place over the rainbow, Frank Morgan will be there to welcome them as its wonderful wizard. ■

*NOTE* Tune in TWTD September 30 to hear Frank Morgan on radio.



Chuck Schaden's

# THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 PM

## AUGUST 2000

### Mid-Summer Festival of Radio Comedy

SATURDAY, AUGUST 5th

SATURDAY, AUGUST 12th

**FIBBER MC GEE AND MOLLY** (5-30-44) Jim

and Marian Jordan star. Fibber goes for a fishing license so he can catch Old Muley, "the biggest, toughest, smartest bass" in Dugann's Lake. Cast includes Shirley Mitchell, Ransom Sherman, Marlin Hurt, Arthur Q. Brian.



Johnson's Wax, NBC. (30 min)

**JUDY CANOVA SHOW** (11-16-43) Judy wants to stage an opera in her barn! Cast includes Mel Blanc, Ruby Dandridge, singer Eddie Dean. Colgate-Palmolive, CBS. (24 min)

**LUX RADIO THEATRE** (10-2-39) "You Can't Take it With you" starring Edward Arnold, Fay Wray, Robert Cummings, Walter Connolly, and Lee Patrick in the radio version of Frank Capra's 1938 Oscar-winning film. A story about a household of free-spirited eccentrics who refuse to relinquish their property to an unfeeling businessman. Cecil B. DeMille hosts. Lux Soap, CBS. (28 min & 16 min & 18 min)

**JIMMY DURANTE SHOW** (2-11-48) The Schnozz stars with Peggy Lee, Candy Candido, Victor Moore, Frank Nelson, Howard Petrie, Roy Bargy and the orchestra. There's a movement to draft Jimmy for Vice President in the current election campaign. Later, he goes to court for a parking summons. Rexall, NBC. (29 min)



**PHIL HARRIS - ALICE FAYE SHOW** (5-22-49) After Phil and Alice discuss their vacation plans, Phil winds up buying a boat. Rexall, NBC. (29 min)

**BURNS AND ALLEN SHOW** (10-21-41) George and Gracie star with singer Jimmy Cash, announcer Bill Goodwin. George tries to stay calm so he won't have high blood pressure for an exam by an insurance doctor (Elliott Lewis). Swan Soap, NBC. (29 min)

**LIFE OF RILEY** (1940s) William Bendix stars as Chester A. Riley with Paula Winslowe as Peg, John Brown as Digger, Bobby Ellis as Junior. Riley lectures his son on the facts of love and finds out that Junior is in love with his teacher. AFRS rebroadcast. (26 min)

*Read the article about William Bendix on page 4.*

**CHARLIE MC CARTHY SHOW** (4-21-40) Edgar Bergen stars with Charlie, Mortimer Snerd, singer Donald Dixon, guest Charles Laughton, and announcer Ben Alexander. Laughton reads "The Little Match Girl," then trades insults with McCarthy. Aesop's Fable: "The Boy Who Cried Wolf." Chase and Sanborn Coffee, NBC. (29 min)



**SCREEN GUILD PLAYERS** (10-5-50) "Champaign For Caesar" starring Ronald Colman, Vincent Price, Art Linkletter, Barbara Britton, Audrey Totter with Joe Kearns in a radio version of the 1950 film, a comedy spoof of television giveaway quiz shows. A brainy show biz type nearly wins the entire fortune of the sponsor's soap company. Sustaining, ABC. (28 min & 29 min)

**HALLS OF IVY** (1-23-52) Ronald and Benita Colman star with Gale Gordon. Ivy College decides to honor an alumnus who is a World War I Medal of Honor winner. Voice of America rebroadcast. (27 min)

**LUX RADIO THEATRE (5-8-50)**

"The Life of Riley" starring William Bendix in a radio version of the 1949 film based on the original radio series. Riley tries to impress Peg's old boyfriend while daughter Babs must make a romantic choice between a medical student and the son of Riley's

boss. Cast includes Rosemary DeCamp, Richard Long, Meg Randall and John Brown. William Keighley hosts. Lux Soap, CBS. (19 min & 19 min & 20 min)

*Read the article about William Bendix on page 4.*

**ADVENTURES OF OZZIE AND HARRIET (1-30-49)** Ozzie decides to take a job as the driver of the school bus, but first he must pass a driver's test. Ozzie and Harriet play themselves, Tommy Bernard and Henry Blair appear as David and Ricky Nelson, with Janet Waldo as Emmy Lou. International Silver Company, NBC. (29 min)

*Read the article about Ozzie and Harriet on page 34.*

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (11-6-49)** Jack stars with regulars Mary Livingstone, Phil Harris, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Dennis Day, Don Wilson, Sportsmen, Joe Kearns, Artie Auerback, Frank Nelson. Jack is worried about being sued for \$50,000 because he refuses to pay for a yacht he ordered. The yacht salesman offers to take Jack and the gang for a "no obligation" cruise. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (28 min)

**BLONDIE (1940s)** Penny Singleton and Arthur Lake star as Blondie and Dagwood Bumstead, with Hanley Stafford and Elvia Allman as Mr. and Mrs. Dithers. Blondie's school chum, a war hero, returns and becomes a rival for Dagwood. AFRS rebroadcast. (28 min)

**LUM AND ABNER (1-30-49)** Chester Lauck and Norris Goff star, with Clarence Hartzell as Ben Withers. The boys start their own collection agency. Frigidare, CBS. (30 min)



**RED SKELTON SHOW (3-25-47)** The Skelton Scrapbook of Satire features "Careless Driving" with Willy Lump-Lump and "The Cat of Distinction" with Junior, the mean little kid. Cast features Verna Felton, Pat McGeehan, Gigi Pearson, Wonderful Smith, Rod O'Connor, Anita Ellis, David Forester and the orchestra. Raleigh Cigarettes, NBC. (29 min)

**BOB HOPE SHOW (1950s)** Broadcasting from Los Alamos Naval Air Station, guest Rosemary Clooney joins Bob, Bill Goodwin and Les Brown and his Band of Renown. Bob recalls how he started in show business as a pianist in a New Orleans nightclub and how he discovered singer Rosemary Clooney. AFRS rebroadcast. (23 min)



**SCREEN DIRECTORS PLAYHOUSE (3-8-51)** "Bachelor Mother" starring Lucille Ball and Robert Cummings in a radio version of the 1939 film. A sales clerk unwittingly becomes guardian for an abandoned baby. Cast features Frank Nelson, Herb Vigran and Jim Backus. Multiple sponsors, NBC. (29 min & 27 min)

**ABBOTT AND COSTELLO SHOW (5-5-48)** Lou Costello wants to be the sheriff of Encino, California. Strange things happen at the home of guest Bela Lugosi so sheriff Costello has to investigate. Cast includes Elvia Allman and Veola Vonn. (22 min)

**GREAT GILDERSLEEVE (9-6-42)** Harold Peary stars as Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve who is entered in Summerfield's annual Labor Day Golf Tournament. Gildy's opponent, Judge Hooker, has gout and can't play so a brash band leader (Frank Nelson) takes his place. Cast includes Lillian Randolph, Lurene Tuttle, Walter Tetley, Earle Ross. Mel Blanc is the golf course announcer. Kraft Foods, NBC. (30 min)



**CARTOON ART BY JERRY WARSHAW**

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Chuck Schaden's

# THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 PM

## SEPTEMBER 2000

### SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 2nd BIG BANDS—SWEET AND SWING

**CAMEL CARAVAN** (10-14-39) Benny Goodman, the King of Swing starts with "the greatest assembly of swing artists in the world today." Guests are Louis Armstrong and the Lynn Murray Choir. Satchmo joins the Goodman Sextet on "Ain't Misbehavin'." Vocalist Louise Tobin sings "I Didn't Know What Time it Was." The Choir joins Armstrong for a rendition of "Shadrach." The Goodman orchestra plays "Moonlight Serenade" and "King Porter Stomp." Ted Pearson hosts; George Bryan announces. Camel Cigarettes, NBC. (28 min)

**LAWRENCE WELK ARMY SHOW** (1959) From the Aragon Ballroom in Pacific Ocean Park in California, it's Champagne Music Time. Vocals by Larry Dean, Rocky Rockwell (also on trumpet), and Dick Dale. Selections include "Let It Snow," "Jeepers Creepers," "When Your Lover has Gone," and "Linger Awhile." U.S. Army, ABC/AFRS. (25 min)

**HERE'S TO VETERANS** (7-19-47) Tex Beneke and the Glenn Miller Orchestra present "In My Merry Oldsmobile," "Long, Long Ago," "Everybody and His Brother," "My Blue Heaven," and "In the Mood." Announcer is Eddie Hubbard. Veteran's Administration. (15 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (7-21-77) Tex Beneke talks about his career in a conversation with Chuck Schaden and Karl Pearson recorded at the Union League Club in Chicago. Tex Beneke died on May 12, 2000 at the age of 86.

**MOONLIGHT SERENADE** (6-12-40) Glenn Miller and his orchestra broadcasting from the stage of the Civic Center in Chicago. Marion Hutton, **Tex Beneke**, Ray Eberle and the boys in the band present "Out-



side of That I Love You," "Say It," "St. Louis Blues," and a "something old, new, borrowed and blue" medley. Chesterfield Cigarettes, CBS. (14 min)

**SPOTLIGHT BANDS** (11-29-41) Freddy Martin and his orchestra broadcasting from San Francisco with guest vocalist Martha Tilton plus Eddie Stone, Clyde Rogers, and the Martin Men. Selections include "A Million Miles from Manhattan," "Kiss the Boys Good-bye," "Symphony Moderne," "Whistling in the Night," "Popocatpetl." Coca-Cola, MBS. (29 min)

**OUR SPECIAL GUEST** will be Big Band Historian **Karl Pearson** who will serve as our guide to these sweet and swing sounds of the big bands.

### SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 9th THE MAGIC OF RADIO



*Today we celebrate a quarter-century of Those Were The Days broadcasts on radio station WNIB. Our first program on WNIB was on September 6, 1975, twenty-five years ago. We'll celebrate the occasion with some personal memories and a few clips from that first show. Don't miss it if you can!*

**FIBBER MC GEE AND MOLLY** (6-12-45) "McGee the Magician" starring Jim and Marian Jordan with Arthur Q. Brian, Marlin Hurt, Bea Benaderet, Shirley Mitchell, Harlow Wilcox, King's Men, Billy Mills and the orchestra. Fibber is practicing his magic act for the Elk's Club Smoker. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (30 min)

**NICK CARTER, MASTER DETECTIVE** (4-8-44) "Murder By Magic" or "Nick Carter and the Mystery of the Missing Identity." Lon Clark and Helen Choate star as Nick and Patsy who are called to Chicago by their pal Scubby Wilson, who is accused of murder. Syndicated, MBS. (27 min)

**BLACKSTONE, THE MAGIC DETECTIVE**



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Click on and tune in Saturday 1 - 5 pm Chicago (Central) time.

(1949) "The Magic Writing" with Ed Jerome as Blackstone, "world's greatest living magician." Blackstone uncovers a blackmail scheme, then describes a magic trick that listeners can do. Syndicated. (12 min)

**YOURS TRULY, JOHNNY DOLLAR** (12-17-49) "Black Magic" starring Charles Russell as America's fabulous free-lance insurance investigator. Dollar travels to Port-au-Prince, Haiti to check out a policy holder who is supposed to be dying of a voodoo curse. Sustaining, CBS. (29 min)

**FIBBER MC GEE AND MOLLY** (1-6-48) "McGee the Magician" starring Jim and Marian Jordan with Bill Thompson, Gale Gordon, Arthur Q. Brian, Jess Kilpatrick. Fibber is working on some magic tricks for the Elk's Club Smoker. *This is a different show than the 1945 broadcast above.* Johnson's Wax, NBC. (30 min)

## SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16th REMEMBERING HARRY VON ZELL Part 1

**BURNS AND ALLEN SHOW** (6-25-45) George and Gracie with announcer **Harry Von Zell**, Bea Beneret, Mel Blanc and Felix Mills and the orchestra. Preparing for a tour of military service camps and hospitals, George and Gracie ask Harry Von Zell's mother to keep an eye on their house while they're away. Swan Soap, CBS. (24 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (2-19-75) **Harry Von Zell** talks extensively about his career in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded in Mr. Von Zell's home in Encino, California. Harry Von Zell died in 1981 at the age of 75. (24 min & 21 min) *The conversation will conclude during next week's broadcast.*



Harry Von Zell

**JOHNSON'S WAX ENTERTAINS** (1931) Promotional recording for Johnson Wax dealers about an upcoming special NBC show featuring the Ted Weems orchestra. Announcer **Harry Von Zell** talks about a \$39,500 contest and previews the series. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (8 min)

**FIFTEEN MINUTES WITH BING CROSBY** (9-2-31) *Excerpt.* **Harry Von Zell** announces Bing Crosby's first radio show. Bing sings "Just One More Chance" and "I'm Through with Love" with Freddy Rich and the orchestra. CBS. (9 min)

**MAIL CALL #150** (6-20-45) Announcer and MC for this broadcast is **Harry Von Zell** who introduces himself... and guests Ella Mae Morse (singing "Cow Cow Boogie"), the Andrews Sisters (with "Every Time I Fall in Love" and "It's Me, O Lord,"), Jimmy Durante with Eddie Jackson (doing the "Strutaway"), and Brenda and Cobina (Blanche Stewart and Elvia Allman) in a romantic scene with Harry and Jimmy. AFRS. (30 min)

**GULF HEADLINERS** (4-28-35) Humorist Will Rogers stars with announcer **Harry Von Zell**, Metropolitan Opera star Helen Gleason, Frank Tours and the orchestra. From California Rogers' monologue starts with a further discussion of his scheme to end the Depression; J. P. Morgan; Aimie McPherson; Mahatma Gandhi; Huey Long; how to spend five million dollars; and ends when his famous alarm clock goes off. *This is a rare, complete Will Rogers broadcast.* Gulf Oil Co., CBS. (30 min)

**EDDIE CANTOR SHOW** (12-6-44) *First of two consecutive and related broadcasts.* Eddie stars with Nora Martin, Leonard Suess, Bert Gordon, Billy Gray, Sportsmen, **Harry Von Zell** and Don Wilson. Harry is upset that announcer Joe Kelly took his place when the program originated in Chicago last week and so he quits the show. Cantor looks for a replacement Bristol Myers, NBC. (29 min)

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# THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 PM

## SEPTEMBER 2000

### SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 23rd REMEMBERING HARRY VON ZELL Part 2

**EDDIE CANTOR SHOW** (12-13-44) *Second of two consecutive and related broadcasts.* Harry Von Zell has taken a job selling candy at a burlesque theatre while Cantor tries to locate him. Bert Gordon, the Mad Russian, reports on the search for Von Zell. Bristol Myers, NBC. (28 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (2-19-75) Harry Von Zell continues reflecting on his career in the *concluding portions* of this conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded in Mr. Von Zell's Encino, California home. Harry Von Zell died in 1981 at the age of 75. (18 min & 23 min)

**FRED ALLEN SHOW** (3-20-40) "An hour of smiles 3600 seconds of fun and music" starring Fred Allen with Portland Hoffa, the Merry Macs, Wynn Murray, and Harry Von Zell. This is the infamous "Eagle Show" when guest Captain Charles Knight, famous authority on eagles, allows his trained eagle, Mr. Ramshaw, to take a short flight in the studio. Chaos reigns! The Mighty Allen Art Players present a take-off on radio quiz give-away shows, "The Tub of Silver," a satire on the *Pot of Gold* radio program. Bristol Myers, NBC. (35 min & 24 min)

**SOUND OFF** (1943) Disc Jockey Harry Von Zell spins the tunes for military audiences around the world as GIs request their favorite tunes by Kay Kyser, Maxine Sullivan, Cab Calloway and Freddy Slack with Margaret Whiting. AFRS. (15 min)

**SMITHS OF HOLLYWOOD** (1946) Harry Von Zell stars as Bill Smith in a comedy show featuring Brenda Marshall, Jan Ford and Arthur Treacher. It's Uncle Cecil's birthday and he's hinting heavily to remind his relatives of the big occasion. Tyler McVey announces. Charles Hathaway and the orchestra. Syndicated. (29 min)

### SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 30th FANNY BRICE and FRANK MORGAN

**BABY SNOOKS** (10-17-47) Fanny Brice and Hanley Stafford star as Baby Snooks and Daddy. Snooks mistakenly "donated" two of Daddy's new suits to the Charity Auction, so off to the auction they go to try to get them back. Cast includes Frank Nelson, Spic 'n' Span, CBS. (28 min)

**FABULOUS DR. TWEEDY** (1946) Frank Morgan stars as Thaddeus Q. Tweedy, an absent-minded professor and Dean of Men at Potts College. Dr. Tweedy tries to help a co-ed who has trouble concentrating on her studies. Gale Gordon as Mr. Potts, after whom the college was named. AFRS rebroadcast. (29 min)

**GOOD NEWS OF 1939** (5-18-39) Robert Young hosts this variety program with regulars Frank Morgan, Fanny Brice and Hanley Stafford, Connee Boswell, Meredith Willson and the orchestra and guest, actor Wallace Beery. Meredith's birthday is celebrated throughout the show. Snooks and Daddy have fun on the golf course, Morgan tells some tall tales. Robert Young and Wallace Beery appear in a Decoration Day drama. Maxwell House Coffee, NBC. (29 min & 31 min)

**BABY SNOOKS** (1948) Fanny Brice and Hanley Stafford are Baby Snooks and Daddy with Arlene Harris and Mommy, with Frank Nelson and Alan Reed. Daddy tries to find the used car he sold to a dealer yesterday. AFRS rebroadcast. (30 min)

**FRANK MORGAN SHOW** (8-31-44) First show in the series starring Frank Morgan with Robert Young, Harlow Wilcox, singer-comedienne Cass Daley, singer Carlos Ramez, Al Sack and the orchestra, and Eric Blore. Morgan tries to get out of his contract with Cass. AFRS rebroadcast. (29 min)

*Read the articles about Frank Morgan on page 13 and Fanny Brice on page 26.*

# "When Radio Was" -- WMAQ-AM 670

## Monday thru Friday 11 p.m. to 1 a.m. Host Stan Freberg

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<b>August, 2000 Schedule</b>				
	1 Murder at Midnight Life of Riley Nero Wolfe	2 Suspense Sgt. Preston of Yukon Suspense Martin & Lewis Pt 1	3 Martin & Lewis Pt 2 Hermit's Cave Green Hornet Mel Blanc Show Pt 1	4 Mel Blanc Show Pt 2 Dragnet Suspense Unexpected
7 Dragnet Abbott & Costello Six Shooter	8 Lone Ranger Phil Harris & Alice Faye Escape	9 The Shadow Vic and Sade The Shadow Baras & Allen Pt 1	10 Burns & Allen Pt 2 Gangbusters Lone Ranger Fibber McGee Pt 1	11 Fibber McGee Pt 2 Boston Blackie Six Shooter Vic and Sade
14 Boston Blackie Burns & Allen Philip Marlowe	15 Green Hornet Martin & Lewis Gunsmoke	16 Suspense Strange Dr. Weird Directors Playhouse Duffy's Tavern Pt 1	17 Duffy's Tavern Pt2 Suspense Lights Out Life of Riley Pt 1	18 Life of Riley Pt 2 Hermit's Cave The Shadow Unsolved Mysteries
21 Frontier Town Jack Benny Lights Out	22 Screen Guild Theatre Fibber McGee & Molly Tales of Texas Rangers	23 The Shadow Bill Stern Sports Escape Abbott & Costello Pt 1	24 Abbott & Costello Pt 2 Boston Blackie Lone Ranger Burns & Allen Pt 1	25 Burns & Allen Pt 2 The Whistler Jack Benny Vic and Sade
28 The Whistler My Friend Irma Crime Classics	29 Strange Wills Duffy's Tavern Michael Shayne	30 Suspense Johnny Dollar Pt 1/5 Have Gun, Will Travel Duffy's Tavern pt 1	31 Duffy's Tavern Pt 2 Suspense Gregory Hood Casebook Charlie McCarthy Pt 1	1-Sept Charlie McCarthy Pt 2 Dragnet The Shadow Bickersons
<b>September, 2000 Schedule</b>				
4 Rocky Fortune Abbott & Costello Nightbeat	5 Boston Blackie Burns & Allen Dragnet	6 The Shadow Johnny Dollar Pt 2/5 Lone Ranger Johnny Dollar Pt 1/5	7 Suspense Johnny Dollar Pt 2/5 Life of Riley Johnny Dollar Pt 3/5	8 Green Hornet Johnny Dollar Pt 4/5 The Shadow Johnny Dollar Pt 5/5
11 Escape Fibber McGee & Molly Sam Spade	12 Lone Ranger Great Gildersleeve Box Thirteen	13 Suspense Johnny Dollar Pt 3/5 Gangbusters Duffy's Tavern Pt 1	14 Duffy's Tavern Pt 2 Gunsmoke Pat Novak for Hire Stan Freberg Pt 1	15 Stan Freberg Pt 2 The Whistler Box Thirteen Vic and Sade
18 Tales of Texas Rangers Jack Benny Gunsmoke	19 The Saint Life with Luigi CBS Radio Workshop	20 The Shadow Johnny Dollar Pt 4/5 Six Shooter Charlie McCarthy Pt 1	21 Charlie McCarthy Pt 2 Sgt. Preston of Yukon Suspense Fibber McGee Pt 1	22 Fibber McGee Pt 2 Damon Runyon Theatre Lone Ranger Lum and Abner
25 Nick Carter My Favorite Husband This is Your FBI	26 Damon Runyon Theatre Phil Harris & Alice Faye Philip Marlowe	27 Suspense Johnny Dollar Pt 5/5 The Shadow	28 Great Gildersleeve Pt 2 Hermit's Cave Boston Blackie Our Miss Brooks Pt 1	29 Our Miss Brooks Pt 2 Dragnet Cavalcade of America Unsolved Mysteries
<b>OUT OF AREA LISTENERS PLEASE NOTE</b> If WMAQ Chicago is out of your reception area, "When Radio Was" is heard on a great many other stations throughout the country. For a complete station listing, plus more detailed program information, and a steady audio stream on the Internet, visit <a href="http://www.radiospirits.com">www.radiospirits.com</a>			<b>TUNE IN</b> "Radio Hall of Fame" Saturday and Sunday Evenings 10 pm to Midnight WMAQ, Chicago	

# FOREVER SNOOKS!

## Appreciating the Radio Career of Fannie Brice

BY ELIZABETH MC LEOD

An accomplished dialect comedienne who brought the Lower East Side to Broadway, a singer of heart-breaking torch songs, a rollicking, rowdy comic dancer — Fannie Brice was one of the most versatile, most popular personalities of the American stage over the first two decades of the twentieth century. But to old-time-radio buffs, she'll always be remembered as a rambunctious six-year-old in an oversized pinafore. She'll always be Baby Snooks.

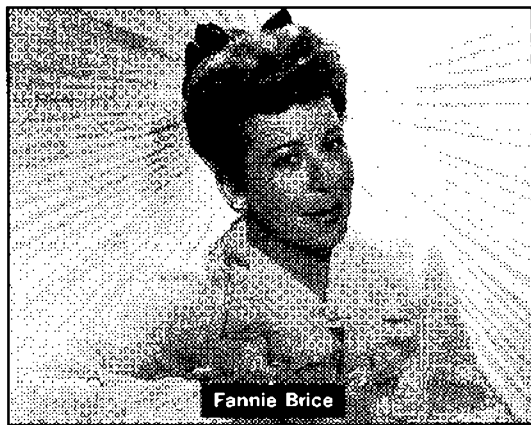
Fannie Brice performed a wide range of acts before achieving stardom with the *Ziegfeld Follies* around the time of World War One. Born Fannie Borach in 1891, she broke into show business as a "professional amateur" in 1904, scratching out a meager living competing in Amateur Night contests at a succession of small-time vaudeville houses around Brooklyn. From there it was a short step to burlesque and by 1910, Brice was making a name for herself as an up-and-coming personality.

Although she was best known as a comic vocalist, Brice did a lot more than just sing

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*Elizabeth McLeod is a radio journalist and broadcast historian who lives in Rockland, Maine. She has specialized in the documentation of early 1930s radio for more than 20 years, and is currently co-writer of the CBS Radio Network program Sound-Bytes.*

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Fannie Brice

during her pre-Broadway stage days — she was also an accomplished eccentric dancer, and even experimented with male impersonation. She also toyed with the "baby" characterization that would eventually prove the focus of her career.

In 1910, Brice joined the *Ziegfeld Follies* as a comic vocalist, with her featured number being a Negro-dialect song, "Lovey Joe." But blackface was not her destiny. Future *Follies* would spotlight her Jewish characterizations — earthy, charismatic delineations of people Brice had known from her own impoverished ghetto childhood. Her characterizations were usually presented in monologue format, with Brice alone at center stage, bringing her gallery of characters to life exclusively through her expressive voice. Between her monologues and her comic/tragic songs, Brice soon became a *Follies* headliner.

In the 1920s, Brice followed the example of many of her *Follies* colleagues in moving into her own musical-comedy revues. Here she expanded her characterizations

into full-blown comic sketches — and it was here that the “baby” character again asserted itself, making a notable splash as one of several specialties performed by Brice in the 1930 revue *Sweet and Low*. But the character wasn’t “Snooks,” not yet.

Brice began experimenting with radio during the late twenties, and made a number of guest appearances during the 1929-32 era, often in partnership with Jewish dialect specialist Henry Burbig. As early as 1928, Brice and Burbig were known for their parody of the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* — a routine adapted from a stage skit — and this bit would be frequently reprised over the next five years, in guest appearances and on Brice’s own short-lived series for Oldsmobile in the fall of 1932. This series featured a cross-section of Brice’s stage routines, both musical and comedic — to the accompaniment of George Olsen’s Orchestra. It was part of a trend which brought practically every big-name musical comedy performer to the microphone during 1932-33, but for whatever reason, Brice failed to catch on with the listening audience and the series ended after thirteen weeks. With Broadway feel-



Baby Snooks and Daddy

PHOTOFEST

ing the pinch of the Depression, Brice returned to the radio guest-star circuit.

The earliest surviving fragment of a Brice broadcast is a short excerpt from the January 12, 1933 edition of Rudy Vallee’s *Fleischmann’s Yeast Hour*. Here again, Brice teams with Henry Burbig for the ever-popular *Romeo and Juliet* bit, but there’s also a hint of things to come — a

hysterical rendition of Vallee’s 1932 hit “Was That The Human Thing To Do?” sung by Brice in her “baby” voice, a characterization introduced as “Baby Mae.” This fragment offers documentation of how the “baby” voice was integrated into Brice’s stage acts of the teens and twenties — not as a full-blown character, but as a novelty, and this segment is also valuable



Fannie Brice and Hanley Stafford

PHOTOFEST

## FOREVER SNOOKS!

documentation of how Brice was seen by the audiences of early 1933 — not as “Snooks,” but as a versatile musical-comedy performer with significant ethnic associations.

“Baby Mae” became “Baby Snooks” in the *Ziegfeld Follies of 1934*, an ill-fated attempt at reviving the stage production after the death of Florenz Ziegfeld. Brice was a headliner in this show, and in addition to her musical specialities, appeared in a sketch written by David Freedman in which the “Snooks” name was for the first time attached to her “baby” character. The skit, entitled “Baby Snooks In Hollywood,” wasn’t quite the Snooks that’s remembered today — notably, there is no “Daddy” figure in the sketch — but the other elements of the characterization are all there, falling solidly into place for the first time.

Brice went from this stage production to the 1936 version of *Ziegfeld Follies of the Air*, and it was here that she established the Snooks character for radio in its familiar format, adding Broadway veteran Jack Arthur in the role of Daddy, and giving Snooks a well-defined comedy foil. After six months, this series faded away, and Brice returned once again to making guest appearances, most often with Rudy Vallee. Unlike her past appearances, she was now fully emphasizing the Snooks character. Teddy Bergman (later known as Alan Reed) joined her as Daddy for these 1936-37 appearances, and both characterizations began to take on life.

Finally, in 1937, Baby Snooks found a permanent home as a featured attraction on the new Maxwell House *Good News of 1938* series, a Thursday-night extravaganza designed as a co-venture between General Foods and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. The

series was intended as a showcase for MGM stars, but it struggled for its first few weeks with no real focus. A comedy headliner was needed, a character who could be identified with the show — and it says much about MGM’s attitude toward comedy performers that no satisfactory in-house comic personality could be found. Brice, whose movie career had been negligible, was approached in late 1937, and agreed to join the show on a permanent basis.

Teddy Bergman had obligations in New York, and was unable to join Brice in Hollywood for the *Good News* series, so a new Daddy was needed. And in one of radio’s most inspired bits of casting, veteran Los Angeles radio actor Hanley Stafford



Baby Snooks and Daddy

PHOTOFEST

was given the part. Stallord was one of the most flexible performers on the Hollywood radio scene in the late thirties, and excelled in playing stuffy authority figures. He was born to play the short-fused role of Daddy — and when he joined the *Good News* cast, it was the beginning of a partnership with Fannie Brice that would last for more than a decade. Brice was a regular on the *Good News* program thru early 1940, when it was cut to a half-hour, split between Brice and fellow *Good News* performer Frank Morgan. This format lasted until Brice went into her solo series in the fall of 1944 — and this series, in turn, ran until Brice's death in 1951.

Despite her success, at heart Fannie Brice was never really a radio star. She never really moved beyond the traditions of the Broadway musical comedy stage — and the entire style of her performing method came out of that tradition: loud, brash, larger-than-life. It's this style that makes her less accessible to modern audiences than many of her radio-oriented contemporaries, this style which makes her comedy seem old and dated to many modern old-time-radio enthusiasts. The "Snooks" character was the sort of thing that was widely seen on the revue stages of the twenties, but that whole style of performance is gone — just as the traditional musical comedy itself is completely extinct.

Taken out of context, this style of comedy often seems silly and pointless to modern audiences — whether they're looking at a film clip or listening to a radio appearance by one of these performers. But musical comedy had a logic and a sensibility



Baby Snooks and Daddy

PHOTOFEST

all its own — it wasn't "movie comedy," it wasn't vaudeville, it wasn't slapstick. It was loopy, self-referential, anti-authoritarian nonsense, designed to be surrounded by lavish scenery and chorus girls.

And even on radio, "musical comedy" performers retained much of their absurdist stage sensibility — a sensibility which was still familiar to the radio audiences of the 1930s, and which worked for them in a way that is difficult for modern listeners, who have never seen a real musical comedy, to recapture. At its best, musical comedy could be quite sophisticated — but in a way very unlike modern ideas of what comedy should be. But this grounding in stage traditions worked against the character of Snooks when the series moved to a standardized situation-comedy format in the mid-1940s.

The Snooks of the thirties was pure musical comedy, the Snooks of the stage. You

## FOREVER SNOOKS!

weren't expected to accept the character as real — Snooks lived in her own little comedy world, where the usual rules didn't apply. Inevitably, the character lost something when she moved into a sitcom setting that was supposed to be grounded in reality. Much the same thing happened in the movies to musical comedy performers like the Marx Brothers or Wheeler and Woolsey — the quality of their comedy declined in direct proportion to the "realism" of their characterizations and setting. An unreal character, an exaggerated character simply doesn't belong in a realistic setting. Snooks is far more satisfying as a cartoonish character in seven-minute sketches than she ever could be trying to carry forward a half-hour sitcom plot. The *Good News* era represents Snooks at her best — and is Fannie Brice's most important contribution to radio comedy.

The submergence of Brice's dynamic, heavily-ethnic stage personality into the Snooks character also offers an interesting example of how performance style tended to be homogenized by radio. The de-ethnicization of popular stage personalities was a common phenomenon during the 1930s — Eddie Cantor is another prime example of a performer who was far more Jewish on the stage than he was ever allowed to be on the air or in movies. On radio, it seems, only stooges (Schlepperman, The Mad Russian, Parkyakarkus) or fictional characters (the Goldbergs, Luigi, et al) were allowed to display an "ethnic" background. Personalities appearing "as themselves," especially Jewish performers, rarely if ever acknowledged their roots. The few who did — George Jessel and Lou Holtz come to mind — had only limited success in the medium.

This is a key point in understanding why



Fannie Brice and Hanley Stafford

PHOTOFLST

Brice's career took the turn that it did. She was so identified with the urban, Jewish aspects of her stage persona that there was no way to make her "middle American" except by completely discarding all traces of that personality. The adoption of the "Snooks" characterization seemed to be the only way Brice could fit into a conventional "white-bread" setting. There really wasn't any room on mainstream radio for the sort of act she had done all her life. Had she stuck to her adult, ethnically-oriented personality she would have undoubtedly remained a marginal figure in radio.

It's sad that radio listeners were only able to see a little bit of what made Fannie Brice such a legendary performer, but at the same time, we're fortunate to have *Baby Snooks* as a small sample of this remarkable talent

and as a souvenir of a vanished era in American entertainment. ■

*NOTE-- Tune in TWTD September 30 to hear Fanny Brice as Baby Snooks (with Hanley Stafford as Daddy) on radio.*



# THOSE GLOBETROTTIN' GLOBETROTTERS

BY WAYNE KLATT

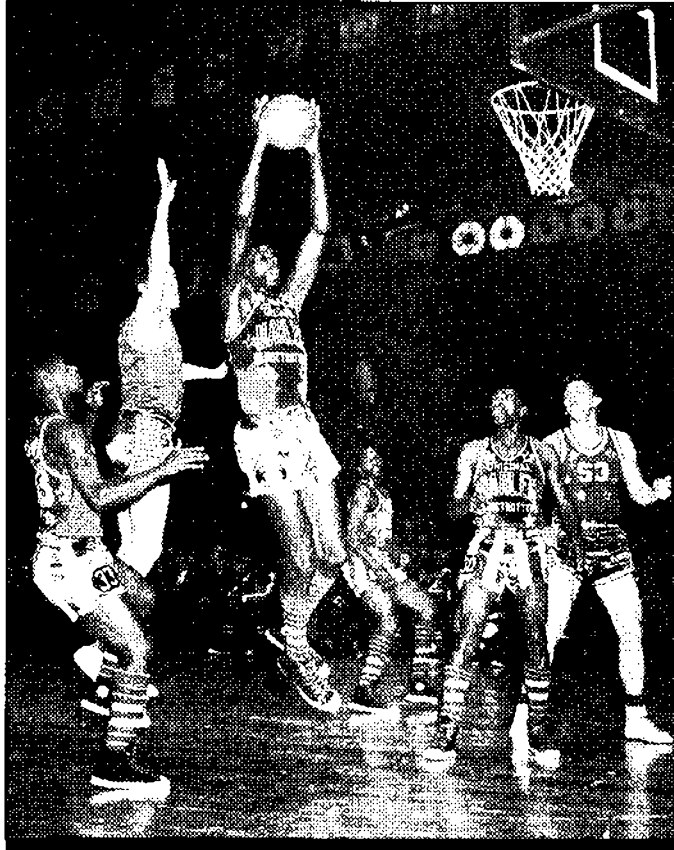
The three ironies of the Harlem Globetrotters are that the team started in Chicago but was named for New York City, the boss of those more than six-foot players was only five-foot-three, and the Globetrotters were considered as debasement of the sport but devised plays that have helped make basketball the most-watched game in America.

Basketball in the 1920s was just dribbling and throwing, nothing more than exercise for teenagers. Every major city had a local team or two, but until Abe Saperstein came along there was no professional competition to motivate the players into giving their best.

As a sports promoter, Saperstein thought a crack team of black players going from city to city could draw big crowds against the locals, such as the New York Rens and the Philadelphia Spahs, if only

they had a gimmick -- spirited comedy.

Saperstein was the son of wandering Jewish immigrants from Poland who left London for America in 1907, when he was



WALTER DUKES, seven-foot center for the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS, gets his big hands firmly on the basketball as he sweeps a rebound off the backboard in the second quarter of a 1955 game with the College All-Stars at Madison Square Garden in New York City. Leaping behind Dukes is All-Star center Dick Hemrik of Wake Forest. Others are Clarence Trotter, left, and Sam Wheeler, second from right, of the TROTTERS, and Minnesota's Dick Garmaker (53) of the All-Stars.

PHOTO BY

## GLOBETROTTIN' GLOBETROTTERS

five years old. He grew up on the North Side and coached basketball at Welles Park High School. He was invited to train players in the Negro American Legion team. When it lost its sponsorship, he decided to recruit his players in Bronzeville schools on the South Side. In January, 1927, he took former basketball players from Wendell Phillips High School and named them the Savoy Five. The only thing he could guarantee them was his personality: energetic, unprejudiced, warm and honest.

The shortest of the original team was five foot eight Albert "Punt" Pullins. Not only was he a great player, he had a car. The Savoy's and three newcomers piled into Saperstein's auto and Pullins' Ford, then shook their bones in a forty-eight mile trip for their first game, before a crowd of just 300 in Hinkley, Illinois. That win, which gave them a total of \$75, gave them as taste of unstoppable victory.

To make the team seem more metropolitan, Abe renamed it the Harlem Globetrotters, since New York's Harlem district in the Roaring 'Twenties was considered the center of black culture.

The Globetrotters played like no one else, except a jazz band. They worked together, but each player would pause from

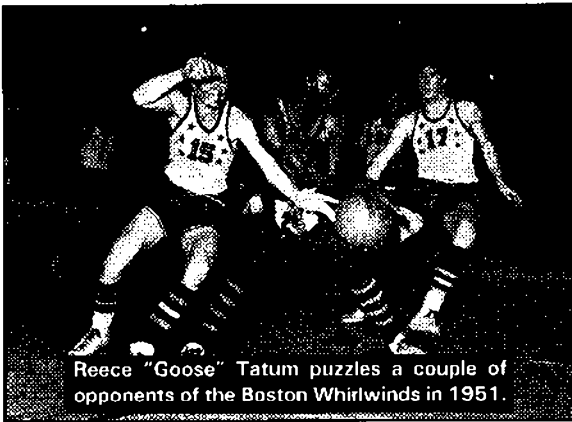
the game to dazzle fans with improvisation. Although the comedy elements were there from the start, the team learned to play up the laughs even if it meant losing a few points, since visitors who beat the pants off the local team might not be invited with scores like 112 to 5.

The 'Trotters weren't always an all black team. Abe himself sometimes suited up as a substitute player when one of his boys was injured or sick. In time, the Globetrotters made enough money to buy a covered truck, and in winter the players would huddle for warmth over just an oil lantern as they rode. Usually they slept in sleeping bags in transient hotels that would accept blacks. Sometimes they would enter an otherwise empty restaurant, and the counter man would tell them, "Sorry, it's reserved." In the South, they had to play separate games for white and for black audiences.

Saperstein had part-time recruiters in a number of high schools, such as assistant Kelyvn Park principal Philip Brownstein, but he sometimes stripped to his T-shirt and put on trunks as a defensive coach to test out some towering kid who thought he could make the team. The newcomers thought only of the glory, they didn't realize that Abe worked them to exhaustion, often scheduling four games for one day.

Marquis Hayes at times would dribble for 30 minutes straight just to let his teammates take a rest.

The Globetrotters energized the sport to the point that prowess with a 16-inch basketball became a source of pride in black ghettos across the country, and white teenagers flocked to their games in admiration. The 'Trotters also increased enthusiasm for college basketball, contributing to the formation of



Reece "Goose" Tatum puzzles a couple of opponents of the Boston Whirlwinds in 1951.

PHOTOFEST

the National Basketball League in 1937.

In the 1940s, the Globetrotters perfected such crowd-pleasers as the bounce pass and the two-hand set shot, and in time the maneuvers were adopted by college and pro teams. "Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, that's Globetrotter basketball," former Globetrotter Billy Ray Hobley once said.

Whenever in Chicago the short, pudgy Saperstein, invariably dressed in a mohair suit and wearing both belt and suspenders, would take the truck in for repairs to the International-Harvester garage at Elston and Western avenues, where he would chat with my father as the mechanic repaired the overworked engine.

The "Trotters were still playing college all-star teams on the second half of double bills in order to boost attendance for local pro teams, such as the Stags at the Chicago Stadium when the all-white National Basketball Association was formed in 1946. The first black player signed up, in 1951, was six foot six former Globetrotter Nate "Sweetwater" Clifton. And the player said to have saved the NBC in its lean years was another Globetrotter, seven foot one Wilt "the Stilt" Chamberlain.

Although the Globetrotters de-emphasized comedy after the NBA began recognizing African-American players, they still pulled down the pants of their opponents, twirled basketballs on their fingertips, and threw buckets of confetti at the crowds.

Fans who became friends of Saperstein's included Carol Channing, Grace Kelly, violinist Isaac Stern, jazzman Louis



*The Original Harlem Globetrotters (1927)*  
Abe Saperstein, Toots Wright, Al Pullins (seated),  
Byron Long, Inman Jackson, William Oliver

PHOTOFEST

Armstrong and comedian Danny Thomas. England's Prince Phillip invited the Globetrotters to a charity performance and the team was introduced to Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev. In 1959, Pope John XXIII received the players in the Vatican.

Saperstein died in 1966, but he is still remembered as more than a coach and promoter. The Rev. Jesse Jackson said Abe "was as much a force into bringing the black athlete into the game as Branch Rickey," who signed baseball great Jackie Robinson.

By the end of 1999, the team had played 20,408 games, and won all except 332, some perhaps because they clowned a little too much. The games—most of them to a whistled rendition of "Sweet Georgia Brown"—were held in more than 100 countries before more than 100 million people. Bill Cosby is such a fan that he has become an honorary Globetrotter.

"It's amazing when you mention Harlem Globetrotters and watch people's eyes light up," recalled former player Ernest Jones. "It's gratifying to me, the way they feel about us. It's a magic name." ■

*Wayne Klatt is an editor at New City News Service, Chicago and a free-lance writer.*

# Ozzie and Harriet: An American Institution

BY RANDALL G. MIELKE

"Well, uh, gosh, what do you think, Harriet?" —Ozzie Nelson

It may sound silly, but no truer words were ever spoken. Because the words were so simplistic and noncommittal, they epitomized what people liked about the television series, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*.

The TV show of the late 1950s and early 1960s offered simple, straight-forward situations and characters that everyone could identify with. The program, which ran for 14 years on TV, had no gunslinging bad guys, no heavy drama, no car chases or knock-about slapstick. Just simple, innocent humor centering on, as it was billed at the time, "America's favorite family."

Since the show was based on real people with (almost) no real problems, it was a reflection of its time. And, like most situation comedies, all the problems were solved in a half-hour format. But the TV series did not just come fully developed to the screen in the early 1950s. Before the Nelson family ever appeared on TV together, there was Ozzie and Harriet themselves.

Ozzie and Harriet had become husband and wife in the mid-1930s after Harriet Hilliard had joined Ozzie Nelson's band. The two gained national recognition in supporting roles on radio comedy shows and then later in their own radio series, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, which premiered on radio in October, 1944.

Their easy rapport and kidding each

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*Randall G. Mielke of Aurora, Illinois is an author and free-lance writer.*

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RANDALL MIELKE COLLECTION

other about marital spats and raising two young children was a hit with radio audiences. (Early on in the radio series, child actors portrayed David and Ricky Nelson. It was not until 1948 that Ozzie let his real-life kids portray his boys on the radio.)

As their stars began to rise on radio, Ozzie wrote a script for a movie called *Here Come the Nelsons*, which served as a pilot for the TV show. It was filmed in 1951, was a success, and the following October, 1952, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* hit the TV screen.

On radio, in the early days of the show, Ozzie had a job as a bandleader and Harriet was a vocalist, as they had been in real life. In the feature film *Here Come the Nelsons*, Ozzie is seen as an executive for the H. J. Bellows and Company advertising agency.

By the time they went into television, Ozzie and Harriet dropped all references to their show business careers and instead played solid middle-aged parents raising their family in a Los Angeles suburb. Somehow, Ozzie's job got lost in the shuffle. By the time the TV series started,

Ozzie's occupation was never identified and, surprisingly, never questioned by friends, family or neighbors. Throughout the 14-year run of the show, he hung around the house A LOT.

*The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* was not a screwball sitcom, but rather a continuing story that effectively presented the daily lives of a very likeable family. When the program came to TV, David was 15 and Ricky was 12 and, over the next 14 years, the main focus of the series was on their lives, from the teen years to young adulthood. The Nelsons were relaxed and natural people and the humor on the show developed from everyday problems and simple misunderstandings that their family, friends and neighbors faced. The show always focused on trivial elements of family life: like a mix-up with having new chairs delivered; or the kids trying to get some money for a date. In its own way, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* was a predecessor to shows like *My Three Sons* and *The Brady Bunch*, as well as many other situation comedies, using the old TV

formula of misunderstood situations to perfection.

As *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* continued, there were some changes made along the way. In 1956, for example, Skip Young joined the cast as Wally Plumstead, David's happy-go-lucky fraternity brother. Also that season, Lyle Talbot and Mary Jane Croft joined the cast as neighbors Joe and Clara Randolph. But the biggest change came in 1957 when 17-year-old Ricky (the real one) pestered his father into letting him sing on the show and make a record.

In the episode called "Ricky the Drummer," Ricky sings the Fats Domino hit "I'm Walkin'" and it immediately went to the top of the charts, thus starting him on the road to rock 'n' roll stardom. From 1957 to 1964, Ricky had more than a dozen top ten hits, including "Travelin' Man," "Poor Little Fool," and "Hello Mary Lou." (Meanwhile, David was starting a movie career of his own with roles in *Peyton Place* and *The Big Circus*, among others.)

Oddly enough, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* didn't seem to be anybody's favorite program. It was not a smash hit like *I Love Lucy*; for example, but it was innocent and charming and everyone watched it.

In time, David first, then Ricky, got married and both June Blair (David's wife) and Kris Harmon (Ricky's wife) joined the cast. Again TV reflected life, which reflected TV, and everyone could identify with it. And through it all, they never lost touch with the people who were watching. By the early 1960s, all three couples — Ozzie and Harriet, David and June, Rick and Kris — were introduced at the beginning of each episode as part of "America's favorite family."

And that they were. ■

*NOTE-- Tune in TWTD August 19 to hear Ozzie and Harriet on radio.*



The Nelson Family

RANDALL MIFLKE COLLECTION



# OFF MIKE

BY WAYNE  
ATKINSON

*Ladies and gentlemen, Chicago is fogged in and we are diverting to Indianapolis.*

The announcement from the captain of the plane was not at all welcome. I was flying to Chicago to take part in a final announcer's audition at Channel 7. This was my second flight to Chicago in less than a month, my earlier flight having involved the primary audition.

I was working as an announcer at WLVA-TV in Lynchburg, Virginia and was attempting to find a better job in a larger market. After having sent out 50 resumes to the top 50 stations in the country, I had received a telegram from Dan Schuffman, the program director at Channel 7, asking if I would be interested in coming to Chicago for an audition two weeks hence. At the appointed time I drove 200 miles to Washington, D.C. and took a plane to Chicago.

I auditioned with eight others that day and was told that about forty had auditioned previously. After the audition Schuffman told me that if I didn't hear from him in two weeks, I was out of consideration. He said that his plan was to pick the top two of all who had auditioned and have them come back for a final audition.

To my great surprise I got a wire about a week later telling me to come for the final showdown. Again the long drive to Wash-

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*Wayne Atkinson of Winfield, Illinois retired on December 31, 1989 after more than 33 years as an ABC staff announcer at Channel 7 television in Chicago.*

---

ington and the flight to Chicago. Now, here I was circling in the fog. I explained to a flight attendant that I had an important audition at 1 p.m. It was then about 10:30 a.m. She was sympathetic but didn't offer much hope that I would get there on time.

*Ladies and gentlemen, Indianapolis is also fogged in. We are going to Toledo.*

I resigned myself to not making it in time for the audition at 1 p.m. We finally landed in Cincinnati at noon. I went to a phone and called Schuffman. His first words were, "You're down somewhere, right?" I told him where I was and explained that the only way I could get to Chicago was on a train which wouldn't arrive till 8:00 that evening. He suggested I return home and send him an audio tape as part of my final audition. I was certain it was his way of letting me down easy, but I promised to send the tape. About a week later Schuffman called and told me I had been hired!

Thus began my employment at WBKB, Channel 7, Chicago, on March 12, 1956.

[Later, the station's call letters would be changed to WLS-TV.]

**IN THE 1950s** there was a man's shirt style which was popular for a short time, called the Nehru. The snug, stand-up collar style was similar to a priest's collar. The early morning newscaster on Channel 7 at the time was a man named Ulmer Turner. Quite often he failed to show up and I would be required to fill in for him on camera. One morning when he didn't appear I happened to be wearing a Nehru shirt. I had no jacket or other shirt available so I had to do the news attired as I was. I sat down at the news desk and prepared to go on the air. About ten seconds to air time, the floor director looked at me and said, "Stand by.... Father."

**CHANNEL 7** announcers were responsible for doing the Network announcements on *Don McNeill's Breakfast Club*



Wayne Atkinson

which aired each morning on the ABC Radio Network. Fred Kasper, who had the morning shift with me, didn't like to make the trek over to the Sherman Hotel where the broadcast took place, so he urged me to go. I welcomed the chance to see the various celebrities who appeared on the show and for several years I was the announcer for the network on the show.

Don often looked for ways to incorporate the audience into the program. One day he asked a youngster to read a commercial. The copy, which ordinarily would have been read by Don, had notations where pauses for dramatic effect should be inserted. The boy read EVERYTHING, thus the audience heard him say, "If you crave a really good breakfast food, pause, then you want Rice Krispies."

Taking my cue from his error, on the next Network identification I said, "This is the ABC, pause, Radio Network."

**DURING THE TIME** that the original *Mickey Mouse Club* aired, I won an audition to do some Bireley's Orange commercials on the show each day. They were one-minute spots so I had to finish in 60 seconds or be cut off as the show returned

to the network. One of the spots called for me to remove the bottle cap and pour the contents into a glass as I continued to talk. The bottle opener I was given was faulty and I couldn't get the cap off. After many tries I finally muttered, "If I could just get the darn thing off..." Through the control room window I could see the agency representative going quietly bonkers, watching my struggle.

**BOB RHODES**, another of the staff announcers, was a delightful character. He always thought of himself as a "Star" and loved to show off for the other announcers. The only problem was that every time he tried to show us how well he could handle cold copy, he would badly blow it. A few examples that I recall:

There was a well-known restaurant on Wacker Drive called The London House. They served excellent food and featured live music. The slogan they used in their advertising was, "Make a date with a steak." When Bob read their commercial it came out, "Make a date with a snake."

The *Chicago Tribune* had a crossword puzzle which could be played each day for money prizes. They called the game "The Little Fooler." Bob urged everyone to play "The Little Feeler."

Burt Lancaster starred in a movie titled "The Bird Man of Alcatraz." But when Bob plugged the movie on the air, it became "The Bride Man of Alcatraz."

During the late movie each night on Channel 7 the announcer was required to take care of all the local commercials, do news, weather and sports during the breaks and also verbally take viewers back to the next segment of the movie. On the final segment one night Bob intoned, "And now once again, the conclusion of tonight's movie."

**HAVING THE SIGN-OFF** shift many nights each week, I sat through countless movies over the years, many of them re-

peated over and over. I became familiar with the names of obscure actors in the films and it made me realize that most viewers knew the names of the stars of any given movie, but none of the lesser actors. As a result I started a practice that I continued till the end of my stint at Channel 7. As I led the viewers back to the movie each time, I would list the stars and then add a few extra names, which were not actors in the movie at all, but rather names of neighbors, friends, my karate instructor, etc. Other than the rest of the crew I worked with, no one was aware that these were fictitious names.

**AL PARKER** was a well-known free-lancer around town and eventually came on staff at Channel 7. He, too, did the name bit on the late movies, but he took it one step further. He always included the name of the audio man on duty, Sam Gornick, as one of the movie cast. Viewers came to expect that Sam Gornick would be in the movie on the nights when Al was working. Al even took to embellishing Sam's name, making it fit with whatever the plot of the movie was.

If the movie happened to be "Three Coins in the Fountain," which took place in Rome, Al would change Sam's last name to "Gornella." Or perhaps the movie was "Gorky Park" in Russia. That meant that Sam now had the last name, "Gornitsky."

This practice went on so long and so consistently that one weekend the TV listing in the newspaper stated, "The Sunday night movie on Channel 7 will be "Rio Bravo" starring John Wayne, Dean Martin... and Sam Gornick, whoever the heck that is."

**SHORTLY AFTER** we moved from the Civic Opera Building to the State-Lake Building, Norman Ross had a morning program with music and slides, done from the

announce booth. He gave the forecast, the sports scores, did some headlines and generally commented on whatever happened to strike his fancy on any given day. One morning I went down to the drug store in the building to get coffee for Norman. When I returned to the elevator I realized I had exactly one minute to do a station ID in the booth.

The indicator showed that the elevator was on the 12th floor. Knowing that by the time the elevator came all the way down and I went back up I would be too late, I put down the coffee and started running up the stairs. The first six floors went quickly but by the 8th floor I was using the rail to maintain my pace. By the 10th floor I was using the rail to remain upright. I burst onto the 12th floor and ran into the booth just in time. Unfortunately, I couldn't utter a word. Norman had to do the ID. So much for dedicated effort.

**ART HELLER** [another ABC staff announcer] never ceased to amaze me. One night he, Bob Rhodes, Al Parker and Gene McGuane went to a restaurant on Plymouth Court called Binyons. It was on the second floor. They had been there many times before but that night when they arrived the doorman told them they wouldn't be able to go in because a national shoe company had reserved the entire restaurant for the evening, to throw a party for their salespeople who were in town from all over the country. Art brushed right past the doorman and went upstairs. He introduced himself as the son of the owner of the company. He came back out, got the other three and introduced them also. They mingled while having drinks and then sat down to a big dinner. Later when Art got up to give a speech, the others felt it was time to leave and convinced Art to go with them. However, the kicker in the whole incident was the fact that Art was doing an on-camera newscast each night at midnight on Chan-





Wayne Atkinson

nel 7. I often wondered if one or more of those salespeople who attended the gathering at Binyons might have gone back to their hotel room about midnight, turned on the TV and saw "the owner's son" doing the news on Channel 7!

**ANOTHER EXAMPLE** of Art Hellyer's bravado happened one day when he was walking south on State Street on his way to work. He was running late and as he approached the north end of the bridge across the Chicago River, the gates went down as bells rang, signaling that the bridge was about to rise. Knowing he would be late for work if he waited, Art darted around the gate and onto the bridge. Racing up the incline he bolted over the parting sections. When he reached the sound end of the bridge, a cop was waiting to issue him a ticket. Art insisted he give him the ticket in the [Channel 7] booth, as he continued rapidly to work.

**FOR SOME TIME** Channel 7 had a midnight talk show, hosted by various talents. There was a scripted opening and closing on the show and as I read the closing the first night, I used an alias instead of my own name. I said, "This is Jerry

Attrick speaking." Howie Shapiro, the director on the show, said he liked the odd name and asked me to think of another for the following night.

This started a series of names that went on for a long time. After I had been doing it for several months I got a letter from a lady viewer who wrote, "I hate the show, but I stay up till the end, just to see what that damn name is going to be."

After the show was no longer on, I continued the odd name bit when signing off the station for the night. Fellow employees around the station began contributing names and it was an amusing diversion for everyone... except the program director. He had apparently been going to bed before sign-off each night because one day a letter from a viewer ended up on his desk. The viewer commented on the name I had used a few nights before and said how funny he thought it was. The program director didn't share his sentiment. The viewer's letter was forwarded to me with a stern note attached, telling me to knock it off.

It is always a great disappointment to me when I encounter someone without a sense of humor. But Chuck Bill put it all in perspective when he said, "We've seen them come and we've seen them go, but we are still here." I waited a few months, the program director was terminated and I resumed using the names.

Here is a small list of some of the names I used over time:

Clair Voyant... Tab Collar... Chuck Roast... Adam Sapple... Len Deneer... Alfredo 'D Dark... Warren Peace... Rich Dessert... Sid Down... Stan Dupp... Sal Amander... Cary Over... Drew Flies... Rex Cars... Howie Dewin... Phil Landerer... Harry Legs... Rick Shaw... Buddy System... Jay Walker... Robin Steel... Don Town... Dan Delion... Skip Ropc... Paul Bearer. ■



## Our Readers Write

### WE GET LETTERS

**BROOKFIELD, IL--** Congratulations on your 30th anniversary! We love the Saturday program and the *Nostalgia Digest*. We are happy to renew our subscription and look forward to another two years of the *Digest*  
--MICHAEL DOOLEY

**SKOKIE, IL--** Congratulations on your 30th Anniversary as the nation's premier proponent of the values of old time radio. No one has the genuine love and caring for the golden days of radio that you do. One hears it in your voice. Thanks for all you've done for all of us out there in Radioland. You'll never wear out your welcome.  
--BILL GERSHON

**E-MAIL--** Loved the stories in the June/July issue. However, in Wayne Klatt's article about the Howdy Doody show, I believe he'll find that Princess Summerfall Winterspring was not a puppet, but a real live (attractive) young lady played by Judy Tyler.  
--GERRY SWETSKY

**NORTHBROOK, IL--** You're probably receiving 100 letters on this, and will - rightfully- print one of them. There was a bad typo error in Jerry Moe's article on the Chicago Cubs in your last issue. The team's last World Series championship was in 1908, not 1980. They have been in five World Series since then, losing all of them.  
--PHIL SCHWIMMER

**(ED. NOTE --** Our error. We heard only from you and Jerry about the mistake.)

**E-MAIL--**I heard you over the Internet today for the first time. Now my wife will say that it was bad enough before when I walked around with my Walkman doing work so I could hear you. Now that I can spend all day on my computer listening to you on Saturday, well, it's great for me!! The program came over the speakers very clear.  
--ISAIAH B. BRADFORD, JR.

**E-MAIL--** I am listening to your program in San Francisco. I am a Chicago native and get back to visit my Mom, who has since

moved to Munster, Indiana. Glad you are now on the Web! --C. TWEEDLE

**LUDINGTON, MICHIGAN--** I am catching you on the Web because we can't get WNIB here. We are on the western shore of Lake Michigan, almost across from Milwaukee. Thanks for the opportunity to "listen in" on the Web.  
--PAUL S. PETERSON

**E-MAIL--**Hearing you loud and clear in Fairfield Bay, Arkansas. WNIB has also gained a renewed listener. I tune in everytime I'm on the Internet. Life is Beautiful!  
--DOLORES V. ANAYA

**E-MAIL--** I am sitting here listening to you loud and clear in New Jersey. I have been with you since you were at the 1000 watt station in Evanston and now we are back together on the Web! Having WNIB and *TWTD* on the Web really fills an old-time radio void here in the New York-New Jersey area. Happy listening Saturdays are here again!  
--DAVE SULLIVAN

**WHITTIER, CALIFORNIA--** Read about WNIB and your debut on the Internet. We tuned in today and have enjoyed the program. You may be hearing from lots of California listeners shortly.  
--JOHN GASSMAN

**GLEN ELLYN, IL--** My mom got me listening to your show as a child. I'm now 22 and have created quite a collection of old shows. Thank you so much for the history that you preserve. I look forward to your show every week.  
--ALISON GIRSCH

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## NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

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# Get the Best of *Those Were The Days!*

**George Burns**  
was born January 20, 1896  
and precisely 100 years later,  
we celebrated his Centennial!

George and his wife Gracie Allen entertained radio fans royally for eighteen years, from 1932 until 1950 when they made a smooth transition to television.

During our centennial salute we'll have lots of sound clips from the radio career of Burns and Allen, including some lengthy excerpts from some World War II appearances on **Command Performance** and **Mail Call**, as well as some of George's musical efforts and a few early George and Gracie comedy recordings.

Plus these complete broadcasts:

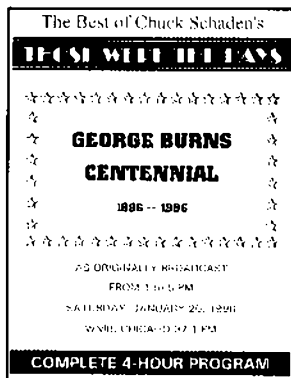
**BURNS AND ALLEN (2-10-41)** Broadcasting from Chicago to entertain the troops at Fort Sheridan, George and Gracie star with Artie Shaw and his orchestra, the Three Smoothies, and Senor Lee, with announcer Jimmy Wallington. Lots of topical chatter about Chicago and a visit from the city's Mayor Edward J. Kelly. Spam, NBC.

**BURNS AND ALLEN (11-9-43)** Gracie blackmails guest Jack Benny into permitting George to sing on the Benny show. George sings "Ain't Misbehavin'." Bill Goodwin announces, music by Felix Mills and the orchestra. Swan Soap, CBS.

**PHILCO RADIO TIME (1-14-48)** Bing Crosby welcomes guest George Burns who has decided to leave Gracie and go out on his own as a singer. "Sugar Throat" Burns and Bing sing "It Might As Well Be Spring." Cast includes singer Evelyn Knight, the Rhythmaires, John Scott Trotter and the orchestra, announcer Ken Carpenter. Philco, ABC.

#### EXTRA ADDED ATTRACTION: "HAPPY BIRTHDAY, GEORGE"

An original sketch written by **Ken Alexander**, directed by **Jed Skillman** and performed by members of our *Those Were The Days Radio Players*: **Frank Greenwood** as George Burns; **Jennie Rentas** as Gracie Allen; **Wally Cwik** as Bill Goodwin. Sound effects by **Karen Skillman** with **Len Kunka** as technical director.



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## ← FANNIE BRICE

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