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Memories of 1944

BY BOB PERLONGO

It's the North Side, Chicago, October 1944, and my Uncle Antony, just back from the war in which he bombed Germany and was wounded in ways you can see and ways you can't, is looking through the brightly boastful Sunday *Tribune* spread out over half the kitchen table.

Everyone – Antony, Mom, Dad – is saying the war news looks good, and that pretty soon "those rotten Nazis" will be getting that long-hoped-for "hot time in the town of Berlin."

"Look at this," my uncle says, holding the paper up in front of Dad. "President Roosevelt's going to be at Soldier Field Saturday – probably his last time here before the election."

"I don't even see why he bothers," says Dad, somewhat scornfully. "He's a *shoo-in!* I mean no *way* that dinky twerp *Dewey's* gonna beat him. Wanna know why?"

Antony's answer is a quizzical expression: *No, why?*

"Cause with that little black mustache he looks like *Hitler,* and this is on *top of* his being a *Republican!*" Dad pronounces the last word as though it were something so vile and loathsome that even to utter it was to risk contamination. "I mean, *think* about it! – *someone who looks like Hitler, who's a Republican!* The bozo will be lucky if his *mother* votes for him!"

"So what do you think" asks Antony, in his usual calm way, so different from Dad's. "Want to go? Maybe we could *all* go!"

"Gee, Antony," says Dad. "I dunno..."

Mom, meanwhile, is silent, seeming neither for nor against the idea.

"Can we, Dad?" I ask. "I'd really like to see him."

Dad scowls. "You know how many people'll be there? *Thousands and thousands!* And even if you *did* go, there'll be so many bodyguards around him, you wouldn't see *diddly.*"

Right, right," says Antony. "Hey, maybe just Bobby and I can go, and tell you how it was."

"Fine by me if you wanna fight the crowd!"

Finally, after a week's worth of eternity, it is, in fact, the big night, and Antony has just brought me back from Soldier Field, where we actually did see President Roosevelt. .. sort of...

It was eerie, a slow spectacle unfolding like one of those strange dreams where you feel awake and dreaming at the same

Bob Perlongo is an Evanston-based writer/editor whose articles have appeared in the Chicago Tribune, *the* New York Times Almanac *and elsewhere. His books include* The Everyday Almanac *(Capra Press, 1995) and* The Write Book *(Art Direction Book Co., 2002).*

time and want everything to stay like that, never to end. I felt that if I tried hard enough the moment *would* somehow stay still, even as it slipped away faster and faster, under a bright, almost-full moon that passing clouds kept hiding and unhiding, as I strained to make out the president's words amid the fizz and crackle of the amplifiers and the muffled babble of the surrounding, standing-room-only crowd.

Even so, I silently told myself, it really *was* him, the great FDR himself, a miraculous *someone* possessing the power to change history this way or that - a tiny speck from whom almost-palpable human electricity radiated in every direction, guarded by a ring of other tiny specks and all the busy paraphernalia needed for the speck to go from one place to another.

Hardly any complete sentences got through as far up and away as we were. Most were swept away by the chilly autumn breeze coming in from the lake. But you could tell he was talking about the same things you were hearing and reading about everywhere: the enemy in retreat on all fronts, victory moving ever closer ...

* * *

It's a December Saturday, 1944 – after D-Day but before the Bulge with Christmas looming large on the horizon, and here's my Uncle Antony, a B-17 bellygunner with no more missions to fly, standing in the kitchen of the apartment my parents and I live in on Clark Street, about a block north of the Valentine Massacre garage.

Antony's back with injuries to his legs and chest that he assures us were "not really serious at all," and in any case all healed now. Even so, I'm keeping a close eye on him as he talks, searching for changes from how he used to be.

I'm surprised by how many there are, starting with his eyes - blue-gray, like Dad's, only somehow darker and sharper than I remember. Another new thing is that in pauses while he's talking – and seemingly without being aware of what he's doing – he'll suddenly use a knuckle to push in his left cheek, then start chewing on the inside of the cheek. Or he'll pull on the fingers of one hand with the fingers of the other, or from time to time dart his gaze about.

It's hard not to stare. I can see Mom and Dad are also trying not to.

Mom gets up to put a pot of coffee on. "How about some real homemade doughnuts?" she asks, looking at Antony, who nods and murmurs, "Sure, sure," but without much enthusiasm.

"So," he says, looking at me and suddenly smiling his old wide smile again, "how are my records?" The records he means make up his modest but highly treasured 78-rpm jazz collection, and each of them, when he had entrusted them to me, had been in mint condition, each in its original pristine sleeve.

He's looking at me now as closely as I had been looking at him. "Did you take care of them, like I asked?"

I nod yes. "My friend Binnderman wanted to borrow the 'Boogie Woogie' one, but I said no. I wouldn't even let him touch it."

"Good, good," he says, reaching into his duffle bag. "Well, I guess you deserve a reward then – maybe *a couple.*" Beaming like a bestower of diplomas, he hands me an official Army Air Corps wristwatch, an official compass, and two V-discs, one by Duke Ellington, the other Woody Herman.

"Wow!" I say, and, again, "Wow!" Even though I'm nowhere near the jazz

fan he is, I've learned to like it, especially when in newsreels and movies some big band is blasting it out, while a bunch of zoot-suiters and jitterbugs wiggle and jump and slide about on the high-gloss dance floor.

Antony says the watch and compass are for Christmas and the records are for my Christmas Eve birthday.

"Thanks, thanks," I say, already looking forward to Monday at school and showing off these fresh-from-the-war-zone treasures to Binnderman.

"Maybe this'll make up for the pajamas!" Antony laughs, referring to the last Christmas we all celebrated together, two years back, when he gave me a pair of pajamas – the tops for my birthday, the bottoms for Christmas.

We all join in on the laugh, I of course a tad less heartily than the others. As for the current goodies, I'm happy and appreciative indeed. But the best present of all is just having him back, even with his strange new mannerisms, his unsought souvenirs. For the previous couple of years, I'd been imagining much, much worse. ■

COVER STORY

Radio Sportscaster, Television Host, Screen Star, etc.

'Not bad – not bad at all...'

BY GARDNER KISSACK

What effect would saving a person's life have on the rescuer? Or saving several persons? Or dozens? And how did those who were rescued feel?

By now, nearly everyone who wants to know, knows the legend of the sturdy, young Dixon, Illinois, lifeguard who saved at least 77 lives from the rushing waters of the Rock River during the summers of 1927 through 1932 – the guard's high school and college years. The story is well known and oft repeated. And save lives he did. But once, as a high school senior in 1928, he wrote lightly of his experiences for an assignment, Meditations of a Lifeguard: "On they come, hordes of swimmers, bathers, sleepers, or what have you! A mob of water-seeking humans intent on giving the beach guard something to worry about...

President Ronald Reagan

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"Now in this motley crew there must be one ray of hope. There is, she's walking onto the dock now. She trips gracefully over to the edge of the crowded pier and settles like a butterfly. The lifeguard strolls by, turns and strolls again. He settles in the immediate region of the cause of all this sudden awakening. He assumes a manly worried expression designed to touch the heart of any blonde, brunette, or unclassified female. He has done all that is necessary. She speaks and the sound of her voice is like balm to a wounded soul, the worried expression fades in the glow of glorious realization, the birdies strike up in chorus, and somewhere celestial music plays the haunting strains recognizable as 'The End of a Perfect Day.' "

Ronald Reagan was born in Tampico, Illinois, February 6, 1911, in the second-floor flat of a building that was a bakery and later a bank on the east side of Main Street.

The modest, five-room apartment was

Gardner Kissack of Chicago Heights, Illinois is a retired school teacher and a member of the Those WereThe Days *support staff.*

merely adequate for his folks and older (by two years) brother. His father, Jack, was not the best provider, partly because of to his bouts of drinking, but his mother, Nelle, was a staunch believer in the fundamental values of trust, honesty, and dedicated hard work. Her faith was strong, and shared.

Somewhat reserved ("a thinker" some said) in his early grade school years – young Ronald's extreme nearsightedness was not diagnosed until he was a teen – he was apparently unsure of himself. He later solemnly recalled his attempts as a youth of lifting his weakened, fallen father after an evening bender into the sheltering safety of their home.

Knute Rockne, All-American (1940)

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The family moved several times in those years (1915-1925), settling in Dixon, renting a substantial, two-story frame home at 816 S. Hennepin Street. The boy grew to young manhood through his successes in high school, where he was, by his senior year, president of the North Dixon High School student body, and of the drama club, and the art editor of the yearbook.

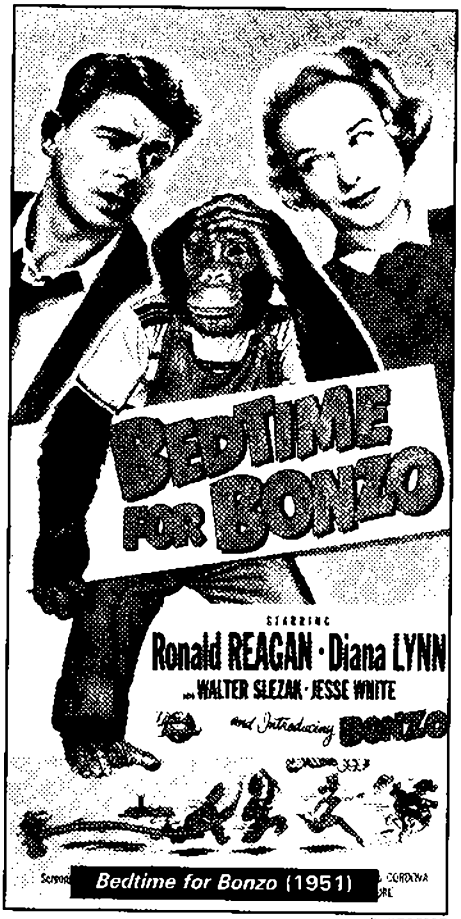
B. J. Frazer, his English and history teacher and drama club advisor, remembered that "he was good at taking direction" and starred in two plays (with his high school girlfriend), *You & I*, and *Capt. Applejack*. He played tackle for the varsity football team and had been on the track squad as a sophomore. Because Dixon received Chicago radio stations, he listened to a variety of programs and sportscasts – in their infancies during the 1920s. His summers from age 15 were spent guarding at Dixon's Lowell Park Beach (land along the Rock River donated to the city by Charles and Myrtle Walgreen, whose family estate, Hazelwood, was nearby), where today a plaque commemorates his life-saving deeds.

Beneath his senior yearbook picture were these words: *Life is just one grand song, so start the music.*

Over the years his contacts and visits to Dixon were many, often for festivals and homecomings, where he'd get to ride a horse along the parade route. How he loved riding horses! He was an excellent horseman most of his life.

Thinking back with the sharp view that is afforded by hindsight, could there have been any other college for him than the one with such a name as Eureka – perhaps the most inspirational name for a school with the possible exception of Hope College in Holland, Michigan. For him it was Eureka!

His athletic scholarship paid $90 toward the $180 annual tuition; he washed dishes to pay for his meals. He was an offensive guard on the football team, on the swim team, in drama club presentations, and feature editor for the *Prism*, Eureka's yearbook. He graduated a member of the class



Bedtime for Bonzo (1951)

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of 1932, but he would return many, many times – once proclaiming "Everything that has been good in my life began here."

According to Eureka College alum Dr. James M. Brandon ('94), in addition to the impressive museum of memorabilia (Curator Dr. Brian Sajko/www.eureka.edu) for the college's most famous graduate, the sports complex is named for him (and his brother Neil), and a bust of him is at the center of the campus Peace Garden.

After graduation Reagan hitch-hiked to Chicago to find work at a radio station but was told to get some experience first ("in the sticks"). He found some radio work in Davenport, Iowa, and in 1933 became a sportscaster for Des Moines station WHO covering the Chicago Cubs. He became well known and popular with his listeners, who supposed he was at the ballpark watching the game instead of being in a studio merely reading basic telegraphed reports and facts supplied by ticker tape, so vivid were his embellished play-by-play accounts of the action on the field.

He thoroughly enjoyed the experience, learning and gaining confidence with every broadcast, and years later he delighted in recounting to friends his on-air techniques.

In 1936 he followed the sun west, to California. Years later he would say, "If I had gotten the job I wanted at Montgomery Ward's, I suppose I never would have left Illinois."

Ronald Reagan married actress Jane Wyman in 1940 and, after being divorced in 1948, on March 4, 1952 married actress Nancy Davis, who had been raised in Chicago on East Lake Shore Drive by her mother, Edith Davis, and renowned surgeon Dr. Loyal Davis. Pal William Holden and his wife were best man and matron of honor. The newlyweds, who honeymooned at the quietly swanky Scottsdale (Arizona) Biltmore, began their journey through life together.

Beginning in June 1937 at $200 a week (by 1942 it was $5,000 weekly), his film career ran the gamut from important dramas – *Dark Victory*, with Bette Davis ('39); *Santa Fe Trail* with Errol Flynn; *Knute Rockne, All-American*, and *Kings Row* (his co-star, Robert Cummings, told people on the set, "Someday I'm going to vote for this fellow for President!") to such lighthearted fare as *Million Dollar Baby* in 1941; *The Girl from Jones Beach* (1949), and, most notably, *Bedtime for Bonzo* in 1951.

Some of the pictures were forgettable (he made nine films in 1938, seven in '39) many were unforgettable, and in light of

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subsequent events, all are interesting and enjoyable in one way or another. He and his wife Nancy did but one film together, *Hellcats of the Navy*, in 1957. (During World War II, he made many military training films – his poor eyesight kept him stateside – and someone observed that more people had seen him in uniform than any other soldier except for General Eisenhower.)

His filmography includes at least 56 movies. Some of them are *Love Is On the Air* (1937); *Boy Meets Girl* ('38); *Brother Rat* ('38); *Tugboat Annie SailsAgain* ('40), *This is the Army* ('43); *That Hagen Girl* ('47); *Law and Order* ('53); *Cattle Queen of Montana*, with Barbara Stanwyck ('54).

He was the television host (and sometime cast member) for the *General Electric Theater* (1954-1962) and of *Death Valley Days* (1965-'66), and corporate spokesman for General Electric.

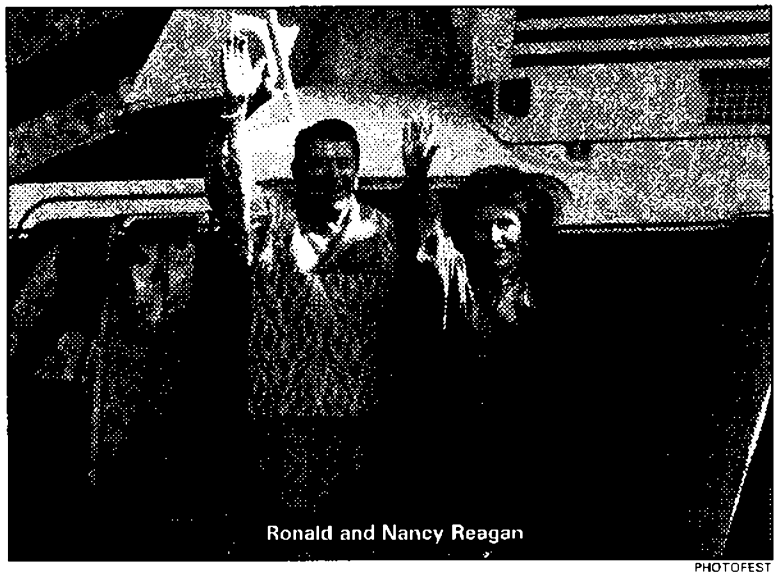
Both popular prime time weekly programs were, of course, seen by tens of millions of viewers across the country over the years.

And so the music continued for this son of Illinois. After his GE years his career was mostly just Gee!

He became active in politics and was governor of California (1967-1975). That service became a political stepping-stone to his election as the 40th President of the United States, serving two terms (1981-1989).

As Ronald Reagan said, summing up his life in January 1989 (as his Marine One helicopter lifted above the White House in Washington, D.C.), "All in all, not bad – not bad at all." ■

Tune in TWTD *October 23 to hear Ronald Reagan on radio.*



PHOTOFEST

CROONERS

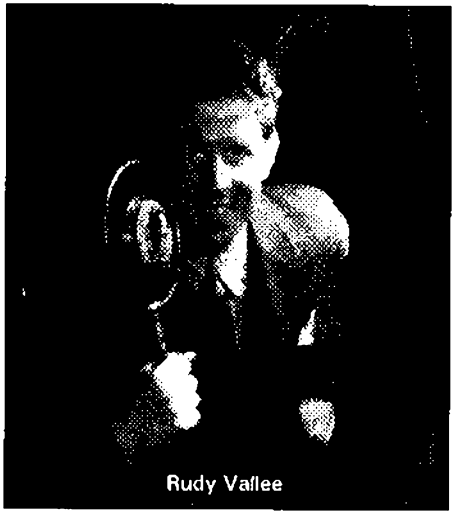
BY WALTER SCANNELL

Who would think **Rudy Vallee** would start the phenomenon of teenage girls and young women swooning over ballads? He was an ordinary-looking son of a druggist and had a rather ordinary voice so small he used a megaphone to carry it across the dance floor. But he exuded – well – sex appeal more understood in the 1920s than today.

Hubert Prior Vallee – "Rudy" came from saxophonist Rudy Weidoeft – was born in Vermont in mid-1901 and grew up in Westbrook, Maine. Amid the enlistment fury of World War I, he dropped out of high school in early 1917 to join the Navy, but after three months was kicked out when supervisors realized he was only 15. Vallee worked as a soda jerk at his father's store, studied the saxophone, and decided to let music pay for his education.

He formed the Connecticut Yankees after graduating from Yale and was booked at New York's Heigh Ho Club, where he welcomed radio listeners with "Heigh Ho everybody, this is Rudy Vallee speaking." His biggest year was 1929, when he starred in the film *Vagabond Lover* and switched from the Heigh Ho Club to Fleischmann's radio music hour. Heady with success, he was not known for turning down attractive women who threw themselves at him.

The outbreak of World War II gave Vallee a chance to stay in uniform. He joined the Coast Guard, led its 11th District Band, and more or less settled down. He returned to radio in 1944, but as his listenership drifted



Rudy Vallee

to Bing Crosby he took life easy and appeared in non-singing roles in a few light comedy plays and films. He impishly enjoyed impersonating stodgy characters.

In 1985 he even jokingly took part in a music video, not that he needed the money. His Spanish castle-style home overlooking Los Angeles was estimated as being worth $10 million at his death in 1986.

With Vallee's success, big bands wouldn't think of featuring tenors, except for Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadians, who bucked the trend with **Kenny Gardner** of Lakeview, Iowa. Gardner, born in 1913, joined Lombardo in 1940, had a smash with "Enjoy Yourself, It's Later Than You Think" in 1950, and stayed with the group until it broke up in 1979.

For other bands, the male singer needed to be a baritone young women might go nuts over. Let's skip over **Bing Crosby**, whose career is well known, and **Dick Powell,** who left band work to star in early

Walter Scannell is a history buff and nostalgia fan from Chicago.

film musicals. Let's go straight to **Dick Haymes**, who could have had it all, and blew it away.

In 1918 Buenos Aires, Argentina, saw the birth of Haymes, of Scottish-Irish and Irish descent. His parents moved to the U.S. soon afterward, split up when he was 2, and his mother took him and brother Bob to Paris, where she became a society dressmaker. Dick and his brother went to school in Paris and Switzerland, but then the Depression hit Europe as well as the U.S.

Their mother took the boys to Los Angeles, where Dick grabbed a no-pay job singing on a local radio station and picked up paychecks as a stunt-man at MGM. The brothers thought they could make a better living writing songs, and Bob Haymes did. But when Dick tried to plug a number of his own to Harry James, the trumpeter-bandleader turned down the tune but hired him as a crooner.

Dick Haymes had looks and a creamy voice, but insecurities from a continually disrupted life left him a wreck. In a moment of panic, he evaded the World War II draft by registering as a "resident alien," foregoing his American citizenship. Realizing he had just kissed his career goodbye, he tried to enlist but was turned down for medical reasons, so he showed his patriotism by making frequent visits to USO centers. He married Joanne Dru in 1941 when she was still a model, and her moderate success in films a few years later strained their marriage.

After his divorce, Haymes met Rita Hayworth in the early 1950s at the low point in his life. The IRS was asking him for thousands of dollars in back taxes, and his radio and movie contracts had expired. After he followed Rita to Hawaii, not yet a state, he was refused readmittance to the U.S. because of his "resident alien" status. He married Hayworth in 1953 but hit the bottle. Rita had her own problems, and they

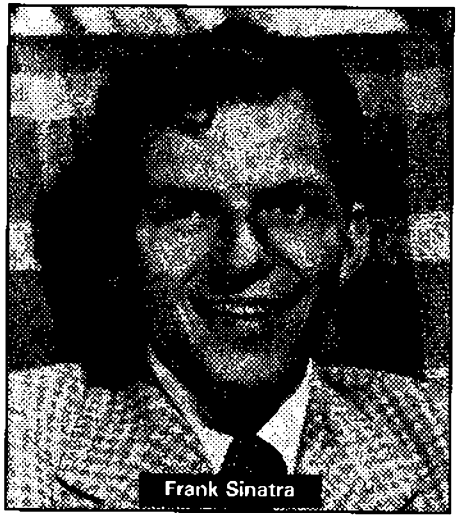

Dick Haymes

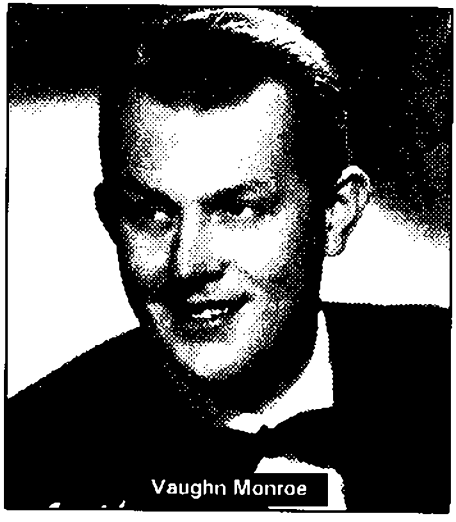
were divorced in 1955. Haymes settled in Ireland in 1961 and spent a decade straightening out his life. He became a better man, but it was too late for his career, and he died of cancer without much public attention in 1980.

Haymes had been popular, but no crooner could match Vallee's army of swooners until **Frank Sinatra,** even though men couldn't get it. As Harry James said, Frankie looked "like a wet rag." Sinatra got his start singing on Hoboken street corners for pennies, and when facing thousands of fans he would pick out one pretty face and sing only to her, even when moving his eyes to others. Every female thought she was the one.

Tommy Dorsey lured Frankie from Harry James, and James signed on Dick Haymes. As a father figure, Dorsey taught Sinatra to take breaths out of the corners of his mouth so he could sustain long notes, and to improve his delivery by listening to Crosby records.

After Sinatra's "I'll Never Smile Again," Dick Haymes became a has-been. Females screamed and rushed forward in their seats whenever Frankie treated the microphone like a love object. Dorsey's band encour-


Frank Sinatra


Vaughn Monroe

aged the impropriety by having the musicians reach out to them, too, as if to say "It's all right, girls!"

In real life Sinatra was both a tough guy and a mama's boy, and female fans loved that conflict in him. The swooning was real, but rumor had it that a press agent paid bobbysoxers to line up and wave Sinatra photos outside downtown movie theaters when one of his films was showing.

Although Sinatra's career almost crashed in the early 1950s, he begged for the meaty part of Maggio in *From Here to Eternity*, won an Academy Award, and the rest was easy street.

Vaughn Monroe couldn't have been any more different. He was six feet tall, well built, and had regular features brightened by a shy smile. His baritone was too low for traditional ballads, so he played the trumpet in addition to singing in his own band. At the beginning of the war he joined a number of artists recording songs in studios, concert halls, nightclubs and military bases for shellac V-Discs to distribute to troops overseas as "music from home."

Monroe's band, part of the time with future conductor and arranger Ray Conniff on trombone, lasted from 1940 to 1953. During that time it was frequently heard on the *Camel* (Cigarettes) *Caravan*, *Vaughn Monroe Show*, and *Spotlight Bands* radio programs. Since he was not a major balladeer, he often sang Western songs, topped by "Ghost Riders in the Sky," and melodies with a religious theme, including "Peace in the Valley." He even was a credible actor in the low-budget Westerns *Singing Guns* and *Toughest Man in Arizona*.

Vaughn still had the looks and heft for such roles but came off a little bland. In 1950 he took a job as an announcer for Sid Caesar's *Your Show of Shows* and was given his own TV show that year and in 1954. After doing RCA commercials, he took a graceful retirement until his death in 1973.

Kay Kyser's band did not have a distinctive sound but it sported a distinctive look, with Kyser in professorial robes and mortar board hat, and his players in mock beanies and college jerseys (a throwback to Vallee days). With all the crooning going in supper clubs and on the radio, Kyser decided to add novelty songs. Baritone **Harry Babbitt** delivered "Three Little Fishes" in a comic high voice, but he could almost bring tears with "The White Cliffs of Dover."

Babbitt enlivened Kyser's band from 1938 to when it expired in 1949, with time out for the Navy in 1944-1946. He sang from the Waldorf-Astoria in New York to Chicago's Aragon Ballroom. But the band used Los Angeles as its home base during the war and played nearly every weekend to servicemen at the USO's famed Hollywood Canteen. Babbitt's good-natured, down-to-earth style and relatively high baritone suited the band's campy musical-quiz radio show, *Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge.*

Apart from the fact that "Three Little Fishes" is hard to get out of your head, Babbitt's most memorable song was probably Frank Loesser's "On A Slow Boat to China." But unlike the better-known crooners, he didn't transfer well as times changed. Without a band, he sang on a 15-minute radio program on radio and hosted some local television shows. He retired from the business in 1964, moved to Newport Beach, California, and had a successful career in real estate.

But when Kyser died in 1985, just when big bands were becoming popular again, Babbitt toured the country with a careful copy of the Kyser sound and antics. He kept performing into the mid-1990s and died, his name largely forgotten, in April 2004.

After the war, a new energy swept through the country and the big bands faded away. Frank Loesser went from writing ballads to show tunes for productions such as *Guys and Dolls.* Between Sinatra's early years and Elvis Presley, women in the audience no longer swooned, but the mellow-singing tradition managed to continue as the entertainment industry moved on.

Standing firmly in both eras, **Perry Como** had the longest singing-only career of all the crooners. Not that anyone would have guessed it when they heard Pierino Como, the singing boy-barber in the coal town of Canonsburg, Pennsylvania. At 14 he achieved his life's goal of opening his own shop, but it wasn't enough. In 1923, at age 21, he hooked up with bandleader Freddie Carlone for $28 a week and got a break in the-mid 1930s with Ted Weems and his orchestra, later featured on Garry Moore's *Beat the Band* radio show (1940-


Harry Babbitt

PHOTOFEST


Perry Como

1944). Listeners whose song question stumped the band received $50 and two cartons of Raleigh cigarettes.

When Weems joined the Army in 1943, Como hosted a regional CBS radio show later called *Supper Club,* and this soon led to an RCA contract that made everyone happy. His rendition of "Til the End of Time" spent 10 weeks at the top of the charts in 1945.

In 1948 his NBC radio program, *Chesterfield Supper Club*, was also broadcast on the small screen (9 to 13 inches). Como was a natural for live television. Not only was he tall and handsome; he barely moved. He said he adopted that style to keep from being unnerved by all the crashing going on behind the set.

His three-times-a-week show moved to CBS in 1950 as *The Perry Como Show.* His program kept its name even when NBC eagerly outbid CBS and brought him back to his home network for an eight-year run. He disliked doing fast ballads such as "Don't Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes" or "Hot Diggity," but his fans loved the change of pace.

Five years after he had what seemed to be his last hit, "Catch a Falling Star," his show was cancelled in 1963 because the network wanted to attract a younger audience. But Como showed up the know-it-alls when his "It's Impossible" was one of the hits of 1970. He still looked great into his 80s and made occasional appearances but bowed out gracefully and died in his sleep on May 21, 2001.

A band singer who took a different path was **Joe Williams,** who morphed from crooner to jazz singer and was liked by pretty much everyone in the industry. He was born Joseph Goreed in Cordele, Georgia, and sang at church functions. He performed with several Chicago bands in the 1930s, but the city lacked anything like New York's Harlem, where well-off whites

Joe Williams

PHOTOFEST

went to see black performers.

The small clubs in Bronzeville were closing down, and Williams was reduced to being a door-to-door salesman in the 1940s. It wasn't until 1954 that he found his stride, when he was hired by Duke Ellington.

As composer as well as bandleader, Ellington followed the Paul Whiteman tradition, but Williams had his own mind. Every note Ellington wrote short, Williams would sing long, creating swing with a rhythmic tension. As put by the Chicago Tribune, "his every phrase seemed to buoy across the bar line."

He stayed with Ellington until 1961, then struck out on his own and managed to sustained a fan base in his cross-over from ballads to blues and jazz, winning numerous awards along the way. Despite a late-in-life rasp, he continued singing well virtually until his death on March 29, 1999. His songs can be heard in the soundtrack of several films from the 1950s through the 1980s because he was one of the most American of American singers.

But no popular singer showed more energy in his voice than Chicago's own Frank LoVecchio – **Frankie Laine.** He was

born to Sicilian parents in the Little Italy neighborhood on the Near West Side on March 30, 1913, and took his professional name from his school, Lane Tech. But the Depression came, and he found himself without a career. Young LoVecchio worked at International Harvester in Chicago but was fired as the economy worsened.

He earned money in grueling dance marathons in places such as the Arcadia Ballroom in Chicago and then around the country. His partners included future actress June Havoc and future band singer Anita O'Day. Sometimes he sang to entertain the audience toward the end of marathons (which could last more than a week).

The young man snuck into hotels when he could and slept on the floor. "I got thrown bodily out of 11 different New York hotels," he says. His only skill was singing. Without knowing how he did it, he developed what has been called a "throbbing vibrato in the high range and a barrel-chested rumble at the bottom." He was never a band singer, but the crooner era paved the way for him.

Laine admits that part of his success was that he "sounded black," letting him venture into jazz-blues before staying in pop. But he might still be an unknown if it weren't for a Los Angeles robber. After taking a date home one night in 1946, a mugger took his last $40. Desperate, he went to Billy Berg's club in Hollywood, where he had sung without being paid.

Hoping someone might offer him a job, Laine started a Hoagy Charmichael song. As he tells it, "Some guy in the front stands up and starts yelling for everyone in the room to shut up and listen to me. And it was Hoagy!"

Laine's cares were over in 1947, when he belted out "That's My Desire," and the hits kept coming. He didn't create the Western theme-song craze of the 1950s; Tex


Frankie Laine

Ritter did that with "High Noon," but he made moviegoers want to climb into a saddle with *Gunfight at the OK Corral* and the TV series *Rawhide*. Like Vaughn Monroe, he gave energy to tunes such as "Mule Train," "Jezebel," and the softer "That Lucky Old Sun."

Laine might seem a quintessential American singer, but he was even more popular in England. His "I Believe" stayed on top for 18 weeks in 1953, something the Beatles could only wish for. Laine knows he's been lucky, but he also had the talent and self-confidence to avoid sounding like anyone else. As a lark, he parodied his headlong style for Mel Brooks' *Blazing Saddles*.

There is still a longing for a time when a baritone could dream of having a love with him on a slow boat to China. Harry Connick Jr., who is not a bad movie actor, still imitates the one-on-one sound at concerts around the country for thousands who missed the boat. ■

Recordings of these crooners will be featured this autumn on TWTD.

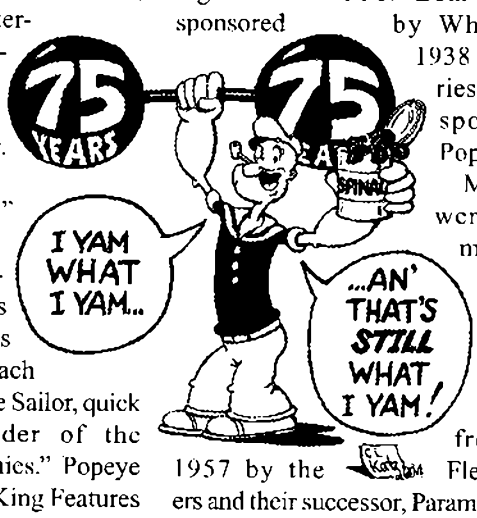
POPEYEISMS

BY CURTIS L. KATZ

Ham Gravy and his pal Castor had a dilemma. It was January 1929, and fortunes were being made everywhere. Having just acquired the lucky Whiffle Hen, they realized they could get rich quick if only they could sail to the casinos on Dice Island. But knowing nothing of nautical matters, they went down to the waterfront, and approached a plug-ugly with anchors tattooed on his ample forearms. "Hey there!" demanded Castor. "Are you a sailor?"

"'Ja think I'm a cowboy?" was the gruff response.

Thus 75 years ago on January 17, 1929, the world was introduced to that pugnacious mariner with a diet of spinach and a heart of gold, Popeye the Sailor, quick with his "fisks," defender of the "weakerest," foe to all "emenies." Popeye was the inspired creation of King Features Syndicate cartoonist Elzie Crisler Segar, who nominally patterned the character after Frank "Rocky" Feigle, a waterfront ruffian from Segar's boyhood home of Chester, Illinois, on the Mississippi. Initially Popeye was just an incidental character in Segar's *Thimble Theater* comic strip, which since 1919 had featured the adventures of the Oyl twins, Castor and Olive, and Ham Gravy, Castor's buddy and Olive's boyfriend. But Popeye caused such a sensation on the funny pages that within months he was *Thimble Theater's* leading man, and in the ensuing years his popularity spread to other media including toys, comic books, radio, and movies.



The 15-minute Popeye radio program, heard three times a week, debuted 1935-1936 on NBC, and was carried the following season on CBS. Both seasons were sponsored by Wheatena. A 1938 summer series on CBS was sponsored by Popsicle.

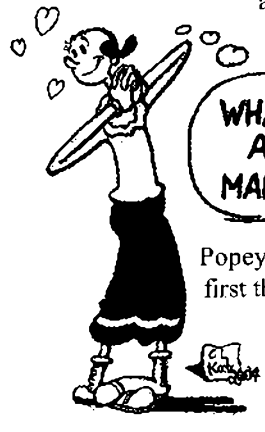
More enduring were the animated theatrical Popeye cartoons, 234 of them produced for Paramount from 1933 to 1957 by the Fleischer brothers and their successor, Paramount Famous. Several people, starting with vaudevillian William "Red Pepper Sam" Costello, supplied Popeye's distinctive gravely voice for cartoons, radio, and children's records, but it was Jack Mercer, an amiable gag man at the Fleischer studio, who had the longest tenure providing the sailor's unique "whiskey baritone."

The animated Popeye quickly took on a life distinctly different from the comic-strip Popeye, though they occasionally influenced one another. The Popeye cartoons tended to focus on the Popeye-Olive-Bluto love triangle and Popeye's feats of strength, while the comic strip dwelled on Popeye's picaresque adventures that often culmi-

Curtis L. Katz is a popular cultural writer from Chicago, Illinois.

nated in cataclysmic fist fights or boxing matches, some of which lasted for weeks. During World War II, Paramount found in Popeye a ready-made symbol of America's military might, dressed him in Navy whites, and turned him loose against the Axis. The comic-strip Popeye remained aloof from the real world. During this period, both the screen Popeye and the newsprint Popeye (carried in over 600 papers) were enormously popular.

Elzie Segar lived just long enough to enjoy his creation's success. He died of cancer in 1938 at age 44. Initially Segar's protégé, Forrest "Bud" Sagendorf, was passed over by King Features and a succession of other cartoonists continued the strip, but eventually Sagendorf would enjoy the longest watch of any captain of the Popeye crew. He drew the Popeye strip from 1958 until 1986 and then just the Sunday comic until he died in 1994 at age 79.



Meanwhile a new generation of cartoon fans was being introduced to Popeye via television, first through the syndication of the 234 theatrical Paramount cartoons in 1957, then through the production of 220 new TV cartoons by Paramount / King Features in 1960 and '61. In 1978 Hanna-Barbera reintroduced Popeye to TV in a CBS network series that lasted several seasons despite being hamstrung by modern standards regarding violence in children's programming.

In 1977 a 6-foot bronze statue of Popeye was dedicated in Elzie Segar's hometown of Chester. As Popeye's 50th anniversary approached, the venerable swabby seemed as strong as ever, appearing in 250 newspapers and generating millions of dollars in merchandise tie-ins for King Features. But in fact, Popeye was sailing into perilous waters.

In 1980 Robert Altman directed an improbable live-action movie featuring Robin Williams as Popeye and Shelley Duvall as Olive Oyl. It flopped. A 1987 animated TV series, *Popeye And Son*, lasted only 13 weeks. In the 1980s, America's Favorite Chicken Company started the Popeye's Chicken & Biscuit fast food restaurant chain, but by the mid-1990s they had withdrawn the image of Popeye himself from their advertising. When former underground cartoonist Bobby London, who had been drawing the Popeye daily strip since 1986, began infusing Popeye's adventures with controversial topical issues, King Features fired London and yanked the strip from the mere half-dozen domestic newspapers that still carried it, in 1992. Since 1994 Popeye has appeared in a few papers as a Sunday feature drawn by Hy Eisman, an old hand at King Features long associated with *The Katzenjammer Kids*.

Popeye's career may have peaked in a previous era, when he stood as a symbol of America's tough resilience during the Depression and of America's strength and determination during World War II, but his effect on American folklore and language is indelible. Here are some words, quotes, utterances, and mutterances spoken by or associated with Popeye and his friends:

I'M POPEYE THE SAILOR MAN (TOOT! TOOT!): Popeye's familiar theme song was first heard in his cartoon debut in 1933. Composer Sammy Lerner reportedly dashed off the song in two hours to meet a deadline he had forgotten, and was ashamed of the result. Lerner was an established and successful Tin Pan Alley tunesmith whose hits included, "Is It True What They Say About Dixie?" but

"I'm Popeye The Sailor Man," with its simple hornpipe melody and doggerel lyrics, would become Sammy Lerner's most famous song and one of the best-known tunes in animated film.

I'M STRONG TO THE "FINICH" 'CAUSE I EATS ME SPINACH: As everyone knows, *spinacia oleracea* is the source of Popeye's phenomenal strength. Segar introduced spinach as an incidental gag about a year after Popeye first appeared in *Thimble Theater*, but it was the Fleischer cartoons that made spinach an integral part of the Popeye mythos, to which the comic strip eventually had to conform. The persistent legend that the Fleischers were in the pay of spinach farmers is unfounded, but Popeye's radio sponsor paid King Features $1,200 per week for permission to substitute Wheatena for spinach on the air!

VIM, VIGOR, AND VITALIKY: What one gets from eating spinach. These benefits are not unique to Popeye. In the 1937 Fleischer cartoon *Lost And Foundry*, Popeye becomes separated from his spinach can and it is Swee' Pea who consumes the vegetable and saves the day. In the 1943 Famous Studios cartoon *Too Weak To Work*, Popeye forces his rival Bluto to eat spinach, ensuring Popeye will get a thorough beating that will land him in a naval hospital ward administered by an attractive nurse.

#@!?&#!!: Since Popeye was a salty old sailor, it was totally in character for him to swear like one. Despite this demure comic strip convention for representing expletives, Segar was deluged with letters from readers complaining about Popeye's frequent profanity. The cinema Popeye, whose language was strictly sanitized by the Hayes Office, had to content himself with the phrase, "Well blow me down!"

IT'S THE NATURAL THING TO DO: Another source of complaint against Popeye was his crudity and pugilistic violence. In 1934 King Features ordered Segar to make Popeye more "respectable," and he reluctantly complied. The Fleischers' response to these objections was a 1939 cartoon in which Popeye, Bluto, and Olive Oyl are told to "cut out the rough stuff." They attempt to act refined, but inevitably their efforts devolve into a brawl as they sing the cartoon's title song, "It's The Natural Thing To Do."

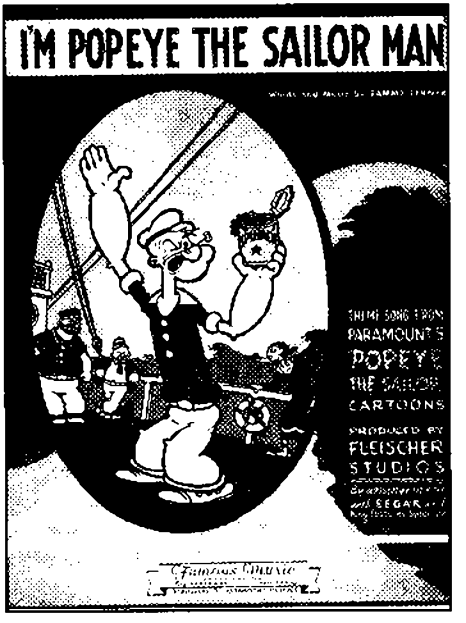
THAT'S ALL I CAN STANDS, 'CAUSE I CAN'T STANDS NO MORE!: That's Popeye's call to arms. Even as Segar was making the comic strip Popeye more respectable, the animated Popeye was becoming more genial, mainly under the influence of story man / voice man Jack Mercer. Given a longer fuse, Popeye became more conciliatory, giving bullies and provocateurs the benefit of the doubt. But when fair play was clearly compromised, the gloves came off, and out came the spinach...

WHY... *I'LL* FIX 'IM!: That's Bluto's call to arms. "Bluto the Terrible! Lower than bilge scum, meaner than Satan, and strong as an ox," was just one of many tough guys whom Popeye battled in the comics during the 1930s. He appeared in only one *Thimble Theater* story, during the summer of 1932, but the Fleischer Stu-

FELICITATIONS FROM POPEYE!

About a year before I got married in 1976, I was introduced to Gordon Sheehan who, with his wife Edith, lived in the Chicago suburb of Evanston. Gordon had worked on several dozen Popeye cartoons as an animator for the Max Fleischer and Paramount Famous studios in the 1930's and '40's. On the occasion of the first Christmas after Suzanne and I were wed, Gordon sent us this greeting... from Popeye.

–C. L. Katz



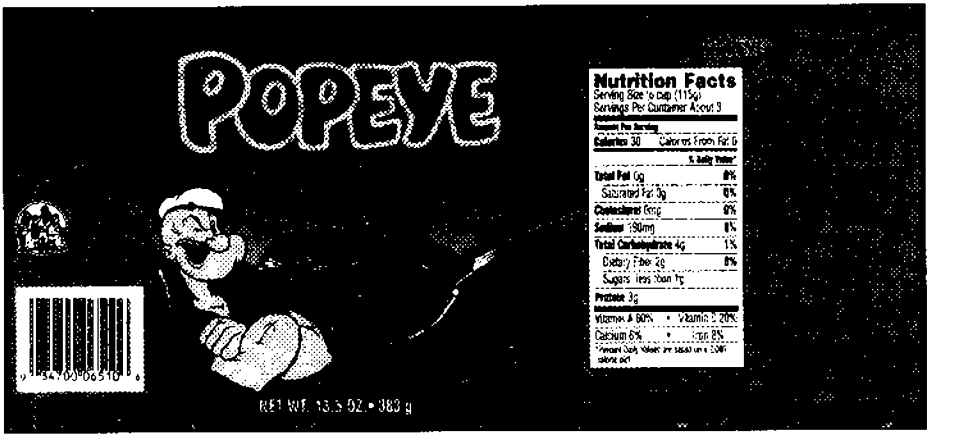
dio seized upon him as Popeye's arch nemesis. It wasn't until the 1950s that Bud Sagendorf created a comparable villain for the comic strip, Brutus, who was also the featured bad guy in the 1960s Popeye TV cartoons.

WIMMIN IS A MYSKERY: Shakespeare had Beatrice and Benedict; Segar had Olive Oyl and Popeye – a classic romance of lovers falling in and out of love. Their first meeting was inauspicious: Olive turned up as a stowaway on Popeye's boat to Dice Island in January 1929, and it was grudge at first sight. But when Popeye and Olive accidentally kissed in August of that year, the first faint spark of love was kindled. In the ensuing years Olive endured Popeye's lack of gentility, and Popeye put up with Olive's whims and caprices including her occasional preference for Bluto. Olive Oyl and salt water might not always mix, but Olive has remained Popeye's "sweet patootie."

I LIKE BABIES AND INFINKS: Gradually Popeye developed a soft spot for animals and children. In July 1933 he unexpectedly received a package containing a foundling child. Segar intended to eventually name the kid Schooner, but his readers came to like Popeye's term of endearment, "Swee' Pea." In the Fleischer cartoons, Swee' Pea would often wander into danger and innocently pass through unharmed while Popeye, trying to rescue him, "got the worsk of it." Cynics still speculate about Swee' Pea's parentage, but he was never anything more scandalous than a "tiny baby orphing infink."

I WILL GLADLY PAY YOU TUESDAY FOR A HAMBURGER TODAY: J. Wellington Wimpy, likeable opportunist and hamburger fiend, first appeared in another Segar comic strip, *The Five-Fifteen*, before joining the *Thimble Theater* cast in the early 1930s. So closely was he associated with hamburgers that in England they became known as "Wimpies." When he wasn't mooching hamburgers, Wimpy was angling for a fast buck. If Popeye got into a fight with some bruiser, Wimpy was quick to sell tickets to the melee. In such instances Wimpy's motto was, "Let's you and him fight."

GOON: Big-chested and dopey-faced, with



hairy calves and forearms, the goons were goofy monsters who lived on Goon Island. Popeye eventually domesticated one of them – Big Alice The Goon – who became nursemaid to Swee' Pea. Soon after these absurd creatures first appeared in *Thimble Theater* in 1934, the word "goon" became popular slang for the brawny brainless thugs that crime bosses retained as "muscle."

JEEP: Eugene the Jeep arrived on Olive Oyl's doorstep in a package from her Uncle Ben in 1936. The Jeep was a bulb-nosed puppyish animal that had magical powers and ate only orchids. Willys-Overland's versatile four-wheel-drive World War II vehicle came to share this character's name because of its odd appearance and GP ("general purpose") designation. After the war General Motors introduced a "GP" series of general purpose diesel locomotives referred to as "geeps," pronounced "jeep" but spelled with a "g," perhaps to differentiate them from the military conveyance, if not from Eugene.

I YAM WHAT I YAM: Parents have been appalled by Popeye's vulgarity and fisticuffs. Pollsters were startled to find that kids preferred Popeye to Walt Disney's more genteel Mickey Mouse. Children appreciated Popeye as the little guy who could successfully stand up to bullies. Social critics saw Popeye as emblematic of America itself, especially during World War II – slow to wrath, but mighty and resolute when provoked to battle. Today some regard Popeye as unacceptably vengeful, rather than heroic. But Popeye himself was neither philosophical nor apologetic about his roughneck manner or his simple sense of fair play and justice. He always acted from his highest sense of right, and if any found fault he would stoically declare, "I saw my duty and *done* it... 'cause I'm Popeye the Sailor Man!" ■

Tune in TWTD *November 13 to hear a radio episode of* Popeye the Sailor.

Deanna, Judy and a Rainbow

BY WAYNE KLATT

Any other studio would have had difficulty casting the part of a child who could sing like an adult and show a range of emotions, but as MGM had an embarrassment of riches as it went into production for *The Wizard of Oz*.

Shirley Temple was out, because MGM didn't have any star Twentieth Century Fox wanted to borrow, but the producers had two accomplished newcomers, Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland. Both were cute, likable adolescents with phenomenal voices.

Since either Deanna or Judy would be fine as Dorothy, let's see what the deciding factors were.

Every Sunday (1936)
Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland

PHOTOFEST

Deanna – born Emma Mae Durbin in Canada in December 1921 – is easier to describe: slender, blondish, fresh-faced, eager to please, a little impish. Her voice had an amazing maturity and range. Judy – born Frances Gumm in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in June 1922 – was a hard worker, could lose a few pounds, didn't have much of a smile, came with considerable vaudeville experience, and felt more comfortable with people helping her. Her voice was strong and carried with it a sadness and a longing for joy.

The girls already knew each other but were not friends. They had the same studio teacher in music appreciation but not at the same time. They sometimes lunched with stars together, and Deanna at 14 was flirtatious with Clark Gable and Robert Taylor.

The studios in the 1930s were introducing new talent such as Bob Hope and Bing Crosby in two-reelers to get the actors used to making films and see how the public reacted to them. In 1936 MGM put Deanna and Judy together in the short *Every Sunday* to see which one would go over more. As a producer said, "I can kill two birds with one stone." Instead of killing birds, he was launching two careers with one film, which pitted jazz (actually a sort of peppy swing) against classical music (actually, fluttery coloratura). The film had fewer than than four days of preparation and one week of shooting.

Watching the results, Louis B. Mayer had no idea of the girls' worth. Margaret Booth, his chief editor, preferred Deanna

Wayne Klatt is an editor at the City News Service of the Chicago Tribune and a free-lance writer.

but others liked Judy more. "We'll keep them both," Mayer said. But through a blunder, no one signed Deanna's contract, leaving the studio stuck with Judy.

Universal snapped up Deanna for the delightful *Three Smart Girls*, in which she shows a gift for feather-light comedy as a teenager saving her broken family. Her musical numbers were astonishing. At a preview of the film, 14-year-old Judy was heard muttering, "When am *I* going to get a chance?"

Deanna was easy to work with, and she was especially popular with middle-aged women who imagined her as the daughter they wished they had. Universal, close to bankruptcy, knew it had struck gold and quickly began cranking out scripts, each one allowing for Deanna's growing physical maturity. After just her second feature, Deanna was allowed to plant her hands in wet cement outside Grauman's Chinese Theater. Mayer was furious at her success and came to regard the still-pudgy Judy as a consolation prize.

One Hundred Men and a Girl (1937)
Deanna Durbin and Leopold Stokowski

Judy in 1938 was wasted in *Everybody Sing*, in one number playing a "boy" to middle-aged Fanny Brice's Baby Snooks. Songwriter-producer Arthur Freed was excited by Judy's potential, but Mayer was unimpressed. When she sang "Dear Mr. Gable" in *Broadway Melody of 1938*, others joined Freed in wishing they could shake Mayer to his senses. Freed, who had written many songs, including "Singin' in the Rain," persuaded his boss to let producer-director Mervin LeRoy buy *The Wizard of Oz* but couldn't sell him on Judy, a songwriter's dream.

MGM, disappointed at being unable to borrow Shirley Temple, asked Universal if it would consider lending out Deanna for the film. Universal agreed, thinking the vehicle would make its only real star even more bankable. Now, with carpentry work being done on *The Wizard of Oz*, Judy and Deanna were competing with one another for a role that would determine their careers and even their personal lives. They were trying out for the same songs and same dialogue, but they were nothing alike.

Although Deanna was born in Winnipeg, her family moved to California when she was a child. She loved performing for her family and early on showed a talent for singing. Rather than being pushed onto the stage, as Judy was, Deanna was trained in classical voice and enjoyed acting.

Judy's parents, Francis and Ethel Gumm, were both vaudeville troupers. Her father

looked a little like Pat O'Brien, and everyone liked him. Ethel, who was only passably attractive in her early years and put on weight later, seems to have been a simple person, and when she introduced her three young daughters to vaudeville it wasn't as a pathological stage mother but simply a way of continuing family traditions. Performing was all she knew. Only when her marriage became strained in the early 1930s did she begin pushing Frances, her only daughter with real talent.

The Wizard of Oz (1939)
Ray Bolger, Judy Garland, Jack Haley

Even though Frances' voice could not be appreciated when she debuted at two-and-a-half, she could dance some and do imitations. Everyone was doing imitations then, but the sight of such a small child interrupting her older sisters' singing to do a solo brought down the house. Especially Daddy's house, a theater in the Mojave Desert town of Lancaster, California. From there the Gumm sisters traveled across the country. In Chicago, Ethel, at the suggestion of George Jessel, decided to change her daughters' last name to "Garland." But the sister act soon ended when one of them got married, leaving Frances as a solo.

Frances loved her father. When she was young the kind and gentle man would put her on his lap and sing to her every night. As Emma became more insistent that she keep performing between school semesters, Frances began imagining her father as more wonderful than he could possibly be – and more necessary to her. Even her name wasn't her own, she took "Judy" from the title of a Hoagy Carmichael song ("If she seems like a saint to you and she ain't, that's Judy!").

An agent spotted Judy's act and arranged an audition at MGM. The studio introduced her to large audiences through guest appearances over the radio, but then her father died in late 1935 and emotionally she felt adrift. In her continually uprooted life, he had been the only steady element, even when they conversed only by letter and over the telephone. Frances Gumm the belter of loud songs passed away with her father, and the Judy Garland we know was born. Then she heard that Mervin LeRoy was looking for an adolescent girl who could sing.

Deanna Durbin was a "name," and she could handle the role of Dorothy with ease, perhaps too much ease. Her mannerisms were rather independent for a girl needing the help of a scarecrow, a tin man and a lion, and although she was only a few months older than Judy, her figure was developing. Besides, her professional voice might not be convincing for a Kansas farm

girl. And so it was that the deciding factor in letting Deanna go back to Universal and chancing everything on a virtual newcomer was that Judy's voice carried an earnest vulnerability. Deanna could entertain, but Judy, with her insecurity and longing for a lost childhood, could touch people with her most memorable song.

But "Over the Rainbow" almost didn't make it on paper, let alone the screen. Freed had chosen songwriters E.Y. Harburg and Harold Arlen over Ira Gershwin and Jerome Kern. But Freed thought all the songs they offered were too light and asked for a ballad. After they talked things over, Arlen came up with a great melody but Harburg thought it was too powerful. Rather than try again, Harburg intentionally wrote the lyrics down to a child's level. But Arlen was still stuck on a "bridge" in the melody.

Filming was about to begin in September 1938, and here he was, dithering over a few notes. Harburg, who lived a block away from Arlen, said in exasperation, "Harold, you know that whistle you use when you call your dog into the house? Try that." He did. Five minutes later, the song was completed. When they heard Judy sing it in her trembling, sincere way, they knew they were having the greatest moment of their professional lives.

Yet some MGM executives thought the song slowed the action down, and after the preview someone gave the order to cut it. Judy was heartbroken. Freed went to Mayer and said, "Either that song stays – or I go." The song was spliced back in and won an Academy Award, and Judy was presented with a special Oscar for the role that Mayer had tried to deny her.

The rest of the story is that two likable teenage girls who competed for the same part went on to vastly different careers and lives. Deanna indeed saved Universal from bankruptcy. She was charming in *Three Smart Girls* and *One Hundred Men and a Girl*, but *It Started With Eve* is hilarious and she even showed that she could be a good in more than musicals, as in the deft mystery with surprisingly sophistocated elements, *Lady on a Train*.

But she was never more than a good superficial actress, and she was never given the opportunities that kept Judy busy at MGM. Deanna sang a few times on the Eddie Cantor show, and that was the extent of her radio work.

While still Hollywood's highest paid female star, she retired in 1948 at the age of 26. She lived for the rest of her long life in Europe, apparently glad no one recognized her as she walked down the street.

As of this writing, Deanna Durbin is still living in France.

MGM kept controlling Judy's life, particularly her tendency to put on weight. She was always a trouper – as in the knockout "Get Happy" in *Summer Stock* – but her personal life was increasingly self-destructive. She had to sound enthusiastic rather than exhausted when she entered radio studios for the Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, and Bob Hope shows, the wartime GI programs *Mail Call* and *Command Performance* (once as Tess Trucheart in the great spoof of "Dick Tracy"), as well as the *Krafi Music Hall*, *Maxwell House Coffee Time*, and the *Screen Guild Players*.

Late in her life Judy tried dramatic acting in the films *A Child is Waiting*, *Judgment at Nuremberg*, and the excellent remake of *A Star is Born*, but audiences did not want to see her in downbeat roles. She died in June 1969, just past her 47th birthday.

Looking back, we might wonder what would have happened if Deanna Durbin had won the role of Dorothy. Would *The Wizard of Oz* remain as endearingly human? Would Judy Garland have become less popular – but at least a little happier? ■

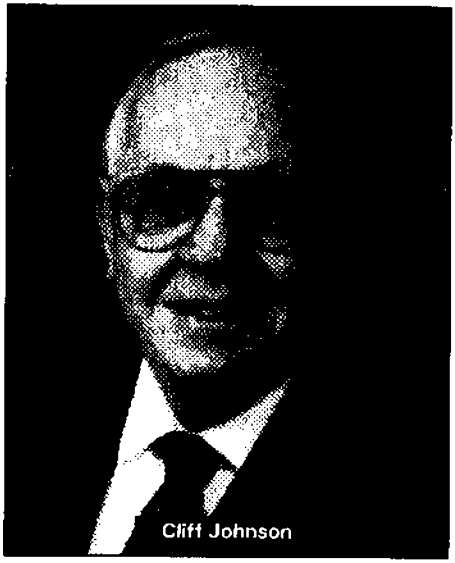
Up There with the Big Boys

CLIFF JOHNSON'S STORY as told to F. DEAN LUEKING

Landing a prize job at WBBM was a huge break, one that catapulted Cliff Johnson to the top echelons of the Chicago radio world. The CBS affiliate joined three other stations, WLS... WGN... and WMAQ [and] ranked among the strongest stations anywhere in the nation. The soap opera world emanated from its studios. *Ma Perkins, Vic and Sade,* and other daytime favorites were the daily fare of millions of Americans. Housewives phoned each other to chat over episodes. Office workers would take long lunch breaks, even come home over the lunch hour when possible, so as not to miss another chapter in the story. Getting on board at WBBM was the dream for which every aspiring young announcer or script writer would give his eye teeth.

He was "up there with the big boys" ...Les Atlas, Fran Allison, Dale Evans, Bobby Brown, Jim Conway, Fahey Flynn, John Harrington, Tommy Bartlett, Les Paul and others who had made it into this charmed circle.

Radio was at its peak in the nation. From Chicago came the radio signals that criss-crossed the Midwest and beyond. For a rookie from the Dakota prairie to go on the air at this level was unprecedented. To stand before a microphone and announce



Cliff Johnson

"This is the WBBM Air Theatre, Wrigley Building, Chicago" gave him a spine-tingling thrill at the thought of listeners tuning in from dozens of surrounding states and as far beyond as Alaska.

How was it that Cliff Johnson got the nod?

One part of the answer is Les Atlas, the WBBM owner and general manager who hired him... to fill a particular niche for which Cliff Johnson was uniquely suited: He could reach a woman's audience.

An earlier program host for reaching [that] audience [was] Tommy Bartlett, [who] gained a following on the *Meet the Missus* and *Shopping with the Missus* programs. As contract renewal time came around late in 1941, Bartlett abruptly left the station to join the service as a military transport pilot. To fill the opening, Atlas sought a successor but not a carbon copy of Bartlett. He saw in Johnson not a rotund quipster but a skinny communicator who could create a two-way conversation

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Cliff Johnson's family radio show is a milestone in Chicago broadcasting. Excerpts from the book are printed with permission of F. Dean Lueking and Cliff Johnson. The Cliff Johnson Story: Up There with the Big Boys, *is available for $20 at Logos Book Store, Oak Park, Illinois (708/848-6644); Barbara's Book Stores (708/848-9140) and at Amazon.com.*

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with women that helped them discover that they were interesting in themselves and not simply a foil for the star quality of the host.

This was the Johnson trademark. He was people-centered. His man-on-the-street style clicked with people from all walks of life... Atlas spotted it and put Johnson to work as host of several programs for which he was ideally suited.

His typical format seemed almost too simple. His *Do You Know the Answer?* program aired at 8:15 a.m. daily, the hour when housewives listened with one ear while tuning the other toward the sound of kids going out the door for school. Cliff had a pool of a hundred or more names and phone numbers of people he would call at random. His opening line was a cheery "This is Cliff 'Twenty-Five-Dollars-in-the-Pocket' Johnson" followed by a plug for the program sponsor, Tip Top Bread. The Tip Top wrapper, he would explain, had a cluster of stars at the end, and the question was to guess how many stars. The twenty-five dollar prize for the right answer was nothing to sneeze at in 1941, and then the radio banter would move on to things of interest to women.

His *Listen to Cliff* program, which he launched late in 1941, aired from 7:30–8:15 a.m. daily and soon established him as a household name throughout the WBBM listening audience. He learned this one morning when a delayed start from home meant he was pushing 70 m.p.h. down Chicago's Marine Drive to the Wrigley Building. The police officer who pulled him over asked him where he was going in such a rush and who did he think he was. The response was a humble but effective, "I'm Cliff Johnson and I've got to be on the air at the Wrigley Building in twelve minutes." With that, the officer snapped his traffic ticket book shut, nodded his head in affirmation that he knew that voice from somewhere, and gave the terse command: "Follow me." The two made it to the studio in time. Cliff did not miss the opportunity to make the police officer his first radio guest of the day.

One memorable morning in April 1941, he was again cruising to work along Chicago's Outer Drive that borders Lake Michigan, this time well within the speed limits. His nineteen-month-old curly-top daughter Sandra was with him ... relentlessly pressing him with queries about where they were going and why. [Cliff's wife] Luella was ill that morning. There was no baby-sitter alternative to taking her along to the studio. Arriving at the second floor studios at the Wrigley Building, he checked in for his morning work of hosting *Do You Know the Answer?*

Walking into a WBBM studio with a toddler made the broadcast crew instantly dubious. This had not happened before. Cliff propped his toddler up on two Chi-

cago phone directories and started his "This is Cliff, twenty-five-dollars-in-the-pocket" routine. Sandra, quiet as a mouse at first, piped up with a very audible "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy." Cliff back-pedaled expertly, filling in the audience with the news that "this is my daughter, and this is a day off for my wife, Luella." Hoping it would suffice, he added, "Look, dear, just wait till I finish the program." It didn't suffice. Sandra countered with "Daddy, Daddy, I can't." Cliff pleaded, "Please, dear." Sandra's ultimatum followed, "Daddy, I can't. I HAVE TO GO"

The mild consternation that erupted from the studio crew was indicative of the radio culture of the early 1940s, in which nobody knew what to do with that on-air statement never found in any script. Cliff handled it as any Dad would. He took her to the bathroom, and then, as he later confessed to Luella, tried to disappear.

The impromptu call of nature and Cliff's paternal response made him worry that he would lose his job. He came to work the next morning wondering what awaited him, but was surprised and relieved to learn that the WBBM switchboard had already lit up with approving calls from delighted listeners. "Who is that child?" and "Keep the kid on – she livens up a dull show" were among the responses that planted the seed of an idea in Johnson's mind. Six years later Sandra and her siblings were kids on the air around the Johnson family breakfast table in a program destined to run for ten years as a first of its kind on a national radio network.

* * *

Breakfast with the Johnsons: The girls, Luella, and Cliff did what they did each morning before breakfast, praying the family prayer of thanksgiving: "God is great, God is good, and we thank Him for our food. Amen." Next came the commercial advertising Nelson Brothers Furniture Company. Cliff touted the quality items and great bargains of the store, ending with the tag line – "Nelson Brothers! From the pictures on the wall to the rugs on the floor, we've got it all!" The ad line portrayed enough of a visual picture to stir up lively response from the girls, especially Sandy and Pamela, who started arguing about how those people in the store could keep track of... and then Sandy inadvertently reversed the commercial words with... "all those pictures on the floor and rugs on the wall." That led to a full two-minute back-and-forth between the two girls on where the pictures and rugs belonged. The kids' magic was instantaneous. It was the "pictures on the floor and rugs on the wall" line that was a keeper, and the two-minute spontaneous argument that kept the spotlight on Nelson Brothers was unexpectedly effective advertising. *Breakfast with the Johnsons* was on its way for a ten-year run that would make the family a household name throughout the twelve-state area initially and later nationwide. The date was September 15, 1947.

* * *

The Johnson program moved from WBBM to WGN in April 1951, ending a five-year affiliation and beginning a new radio network home that would continue until 1957. The move propelled *Breakfast with the Johnsons* from a ten state, primarily Midwestern area, to coast-to-coast coverage served by 154 [Mutual] stations, including such major metropolitan centers as New York City, Cleveland and Detroit.

The neighborhood-friendly feel the program conveyed included the regular, rhythmic knock each morning at 7:45 sharp when Bill, the milk delivery man, brought in the morning's supply. His noisy "Good morning, good morning" was heard by hundreds of thousands day-by-day, along with his enthusiastic pitch for specials on cottage cheese, butter and a rundown on

life from the window of the milk truck. Cliff would needle him from time to time about all the free plugs Bowman Dairy was getting, but never a freebie in return. Bill promised, however, that on his last day before retiring from a 35-year run, he would load up the Johnsons with freebies galore. And he did. He was the star of the program that final day.

One of the biggest mail responses ever came when the program engineer wired a mike to a robin's nest under the garage eave, which enabled a two-week build-up to the first cracking through of the new born chicks.

When the four Johnson girls were told that a new family member was on the way, it was inevitable that the subject of where babies came from would arise. The nine-year-old Pamela asked the question with typical directness: "Mom, who put the baby under your heart?" She could see from her mother's swelling middle that there was, indeed, a baby growing inside under the heart. Luella's answer came after a reflective pause: "God put the seed under my heart and it grew," a response that came without difficulty.

* * *

The children were growing up. Radio was changing. Television was bringing a new reality that would not fit the *Breakfast with the Johnsons* format.

It was a bittersweet morning in June 1957, when the final *Breakfast with the Johnsons* aired. More than three thousand programs had filled the 10-year span since the first program opened with Cliff and the family singing "Bless This House," then ending with the table prayer of thanksgiving.

When the final "Amen" was spoken, a silence followed. Luella broke it with "Some more coffee, Cliff?" – the same (and only) words she spoke on the first broadcast in 1947. ■

In Flanders Fields

BY FR. KEVIN SHANLEY

There is little doubt that the most popular poem of World War I (1914-18) is "In Flanders Fields," written by Lt. Col. John McCrae, a Canadian Army medical officer.

Even today schoolchildren learn to recite the poem, especially around Armistice/Veterans Day and Memorial Day. And it brought the lowly poppy flower great renown.

The poem, first published some 90 years ago in the Dec. 8, 1915 issue of the English magazine "Punch," was composed during the Second Battle of Ypres (which the Allied soldiers referred to as "Wipers" because of the heavy casualties) in Belgium.

It is reported that the poem was inspired by the death of a close friend, Lt. Alexis Helmer, who was killed on May 2, 1915 when an enemy shell exploded at his feet.

Even though a doctor, Col. McCrae could do nothing to save his wounded friend. McCrae recited the prayers as Helmer's remains were lowered into the soil of Flanders, and a wooden cross marked the grave.

Afterwards, Col. McCrae sat down to write his now famous poem:

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

Although Col. McCrae left his poem originally unsigned, since he did not initially realize its great literary value, it soon found its way to many people who felt greatly the suffering experienced by the troops in Flanders. People wanted to know who was the author. The poem soon became the most copied verse of World War I, and was read from thousands of platforms in England, France, Canada and elsewhere.

And when the United States entered the war in April of 1917, the poem was used to stir patriotic sentiment for "the war to end all wars" and "to make the world safe for democracy." Although the poem's first verses were a eulogy for the fallen heroes who made the supreme sacrifice, the final one was used to recruit new troops for the war.

The poppy soon grew as the memorial flower for the American and Allied war dead. This tradition goes back to Col. McCrae's experience in battle. After a day of fierce battle at Ypres, he looked out from his muddy and blood-soaked trench.

In looking through the barbed wire, he was struck by the multitude of little red poppies waving in the breeze above the rows of makeshift crosses that marked the new graves of his fallen comrades. The

---

The Rev. Kevin Shanley is staff member of the Carmelite Spiritual Center in Darien, Illinois and a member of the Those Were The Days *Radio Players.*

sight touched him deeply.

It was a tribute to nature that the tiny flowers grew in such profusion. The wild poppy grows best in recently cultivated soil, although its seeds may lie dormant for years, waiting to be uprooted.

Unfortunately, in the spring of 1915, the fields around Ypres were greatly disturbed by the digging of trenches and the frequent bombardments by hundreds of cannons on both sides of "No Man's Land." Not long afterwards, both Allied and German troops were amazed to see great numbers of the tiny red flowers springing up among the graves to make an almost pastoral scene in the blood-soaked soil of the battlefields. It was almost as though nature wanted to soften the impact of so much death and destruction.

Touched by the scene and the memory of so many fallen comrades he had attended to as a medical officer, Col. McCrae soon found paper and pen to jot down the verses that came quickly to mind. It soon became one of the most memorable war poems in the English language. It is still taught in elementary schools to this day.

Although he survived the horrors of the trenches in The Great War, Col. McCrae died of pneumonia while on active duty a few months later on Jan. 28, 1918 in the military hospital in Boulogne, France, where he was the director.

Dr. John McCrae, the son of David and Janet McCrae, was born on Nov. 30, 1872, in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. His Scots Presbyterian family had lived there for several generations. After attending local schools, he won a scholarship to the University of Toronto and graduated with a degree in biology in 1894. After a brief but unsuccessful career as a teacher, John McCrae returned to the university to study medicine. He graduated in 1898 with a gold medal and a scholarship in physiology and pathology.

It was during his student days that John McCrae first published his poetry. Ironically, much of it focused on the theme of death.

The new Dr. McCrae practiced at the Toronto General Hospital and Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, before accepting an appointment in pathology at McGill university in Montreal and Montreal General Hospital.

In 1900 he joined a Canadian contingent to fight in the Boer War in South Africa where he rose to the rank of major.

It was his first experience of war although he had been interested in the mili-

tary since boyhoood when he marched with the Guelph Highland Cadets. His father was also in the Canadian militia. And when World War 1 broke out, Dr. McCrae soon offered his services as a medical officer.

When peace finally came on November 11, 1918, long known as Armistice Day and now called Veterans Day, returning troops brought home memories of the red poppies growing on the battlefields and in the many military cemeteries. The tiny flower took on an almost sacred significance for those who had survived the war. It was a way of remembering their fallen comrades, who had given their lives in the great struggle.

But it was mainly through the great efforts of Moina Michael, a Georgia schoolteacher, that the red poppy eventually became recognized in many nations, especially the United States, as the beloved symbol of both honoring the deceased and helping the surviving victims of the war.

Even though she had never been to war, Moina Michael was so touched by the poem that she vowed to wear a poppy of remembrance for the rest of her life, and to help make the tiny flower a symbol to honor those who made the supreme sacrifice.

The Georgia schoolteacher is also responsible for the practice of wearing a poppy on our own Memorial Day, which originally honored those who were killed in the American Civil War. She herself made paper poppies to sell to family, friends and others, and then donated the proceeds to help disabled veterans.

But Michael's efforts remained only local until the then newly-formed American Legion adopted the poppy as its own symbol. The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and other similar groups followed.

Ironically, the first public sale happened almost unplanned. At the homecoming of the 32nd (Red Arrow) Division in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in June of 1919, a coffee-and-doughnut booth with red paper poppies was soon stripped of its decorations, and those who took them left donations of several hundred dollars.

Fortunately, Mary Hanecy, one of the volunteers at the booth, soon realized that the poppies meant so much to people. She then proposed to the American Legion that offering the poppies to the public on Memorial Day would be an excellent way to raise money for those in veterans hospitals. Post Number1 in Milwaukee readily accepted the idea.

According to reliable sources, the very first "Poppy Day" was held on the Saturday before Memorial Day in 1920. It brought in so much in donations that the American Legion soon adopted the poppy as its official memorial flower at the group's national convention in 1921.

The success of the American Legion's poppy program encouraged other war veterans groups in the U.S., England and France to adopt the sales program, too. Funds raised then, as they are today, are given to help needy and disabled veterans, their dependents, and widows and orphans of deceased veterans.

Even today the red poppy of Flanders fields is still a reminder of those who gave their lives in war, and a hope that, as Scripture says, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another; nor shall they train for war again." (ISAIAH 2:4) ■

Three of the Rev. Fr. Shanley's cousins were killed during World War I and are buried in Flanders fields.

For more information visit the In Flanders Fields Museum website, www.inflandersfields.be

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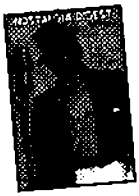
OCTOBER 2004

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2

STARS IN THE AFTERNOON (9-22-46) The Columbia Broadcasting System offers listeners a preview of their 1946-47 season in this hour-and-a-half program heard "over the 159 CBS stations from coast-to-coast." This special broadcast features Dinah Shore and Frank Sinatra; Jimmy Durante and Garry Moore; Patrice Munsel, Jack Smith and Al Goodman and the orchestra from *Family Hour;* Penny Singleton, Arthur Lake, Hanley Stafford and the cast of *Blondie;* Hoagy Carmichael; Ralph Morgan and the *Screen Guild Players;* House Jameson as Dr. Benjamin Ordway, the *Crime Doctor;* Les Damon and Claudia Morgan as Nick and Nora Charles of *The Thin Man;* Staats Cotsworth as *Casey, Crime Photographer;* Howard Duff as *Sam Spade;* Raymond Edward Johnson as Raymond, the host of *Inner Sanctum;* Jean Hersholt as *Dr. Christian;* Vaughn Monroe; Ann Sothern as *Maisie;* Peter Lind Hayes; Howard Claney, Bob Hannon and Victor Arden of *American Melody Hour;* the *Lux Radio Theatre* with Virginia Bruce performing a scene from "The Letter"; Tom Howard, George Shelton, Lulu McConnell, Harry McNaughton and Ken Roberts of *It Pays to be Ignorant;* Bob Hawk. This is an excellent example of prime-time radio in the early post-war 1940s. Sustaining, CBS. (34 min & 29 min & 28 min)

JUKE BOX SATURDAY NIGHT (10-19-74) Mike Schwimmer, regular host of the *Yesterday Shop* on WLTD Evanston, substitutes for regular host Karl Pearson. Various sponsors, WLTD. (28 min & 30 min & 15 min)



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SATURDAY, OCTOBER 9
RADIO ON THE TRAIL

WILD BILL HICKOK (9-16-51) starring Guy Madison as U.S. Marshal Hickok with Andy Devine as Deputy Jingles B. Jones. A cattle drive snarls up Hickok and Jingles in some real "trail herd trouble." Kellogg's Corn Pops, MBS. (25 min)

STRAIGHT ARROW (5-6-48) "Stage from Calvados" is the first program in the series starring Howard Culver as rancher Steve Adams who, in times of trouble, becomes Comanche warrior Straight Arrow. A stagecoach is held up by a masked man who knew exactly what he wanted. Nabisco Shredded Wheat, MBS. (30 min)

LUX RADIO THEATRE (11-2-36) "The Virginian" starring Gary Cooper, Charles Bickford, Helen Mack and John Howard in a radio version of the story which, by this time, had been filmed three times. Cooper is a rugged cowpoke whose best friend is found guilty of cattle rustling. Host is Cecil B. DeMille. Lux Soap, CBS. (21 min & 14 min & 24 Min)

FRONTIER TOWN (12-5-52) "Six-Gun Justice" starring Tex (Jeff) Chandler as lawyer Chad

Remington in this "adventurous story of the early West." A rancher in nearby Roaring River wants to retain Remington to help protect his homestead.Syndicated. (28 min)

LONE RANGER (1-18-52) "The Sheriff from Texas." Brace Beemer is the Masked Man and John Todd portrays his faithful Indian companion. A new sheriff has been assigned to clean up the lawless town of Colman City. Syndicated, ABC. (30 min)

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16

PARADE OF STARS (10-14-46) The National Broadcasting Company offers listeners a preview of its 1946-47 season in this two-and-a-half-hour program of highlights from its upcoming fall schedule. This special broadcast features Paul Lavalle and the *Cities Service Orchestra;* Phil Harris and Alice Faye; H. V. Kaltenborn; Thomas L. Thomas on the *Manhattan Merry-Go-Round; Curtain Time; Carmen Cavallaro from the* Sheaffer Parade; Art Linkletter in *People Are Funny; A Day in the Life of Dennis Day; Mr. District Attorney; American Album of Familiar Music;* Bill Stern's *Colgate Sports Newsreel;* Bob Burns; *One Man's Family;* Perry Como of the *Chesterfield Supper Club; Can You Top This?;* Roy Rogers and Dale Evans with the Sons of the Pioneers from the *Saturday Night Round-Up;* Bob Hope; Ralph Edwards and *Truth or Consequences;* Alan Young; Evelyn MacGregor on *Waltz Time;* Lowell Thomas; Red Skelton; Ed Gardner and cast from *Duffy's Tavern;* Red Foley and Minnie Pearl on the *Grand Old Opry; The Mollé Mystery Theatre;* Rudy Vallee; Judy Canova; The Sportsmen, and Dr. Frank Black conducting the *NBC Symphony Orchestra.* Another fine example of prime-time radio in the post-war 1940s. Sustaining, NBC. (17 min & 21 min & 28 min & 15 min & 22 min & 24 min & 24 min)

HECTOR Q. PEABODY SHOW (1954) *Excerpts* featuring Chuck Schaden and Dan McGuire. WLEY, Elmwood Park. (30 min)

OUR SPECIAL GUEST is **Dan McGuire,** author of "Now When I Was a Kid..." book of nostalgic ramblings that originally appeared in *Nostalgia Digest.*

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 23
REMEMBERING RONALD REAGAN

LUX RADIO THEATRE (12-2-40) "Knute Rockne, All-American" starring Pat O'Brien, **Ronald Reagan,** Donald Crisp and Fay Wray in the radio version of the screen biography of the Notre Dame football coach. Reagan, as George Gipp, delivers his memorable "Win one for the Gipper" line. Cecil B. DeMille hosts. Cast includes Griff Barnett, Ted Bliss, Charles Seel, Earle Ross, Lou Merrill, Arthur Q. Bryan. Lux Soap, CBS. (22 min & 16 min & 21 min)

CAVALCADE OF AMERICA (12-12-50) "Ulysses in Love" starring **Ronald Reagan** as Second Lieutenant Ulysses S. Grant, who falls in love with the colonel's daughter. DuPont, NBC. (29 min)

MGM THEATRE OF THE AIR (1951) "Joe Smith, American" starring **Ronald Reagan** in a radio version of the 1942 film, a story of patriotism and courage during World War II. Syndicated. (23 min & 19 min & 14 min)

OUR SPECIAL GUEST is motion picture historian **Bob Kolososki,** who will talk about the film career of **Ronald Reagan.**

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 30
ANNUAL HALLOWE'EN SHOW

SCREEN DIRECTORS' PLAYHOUSE (11-18-49) "The Uninvited" starring Ray Milland in the radio version of the film about a young couple who encounter spirits after moving into an old house.Sustaining, NBC. (29 min)

LIFE WITH LUIGI (10-30-51) J. Carroll Naish stars as Luigi Basco, the little immigrant who buys candy and chewing gum to give to trick-or-treaters on Hallowe'en. Alan Reed is Pasquale. Wrigley's Gum, CBS. (30 min)

SEALED BOOK (4-29-45) "The Accusing Corpse." The Keeper of the Vault opens the book on the story of a man who would stop at nothing to accomplish his ends. Syndicated, MBS. (29 min)

SCREEN DIRECTORS' PLAYHOUSE (4-3-49) "The Ghost Breakers" starring Bob Hope with Shirley Mitchell and Sheldon Leonard. A radio reporter travels to Black Island, which is inhabited by zombies, crones and ghosts. Sustaining, NBC. (30 min)

NEW ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES (5-20-46) "The Haunting of Sherlock Holmes" starring Basil Rathbone as Holmes with Joseph Kearns as Dr. Watson (subbing for Nigel Bruce in this broadcast). Holmes gets a ghost for a client in this story based on "The Sussex Vampire." Petri Wines, MBS. (32 min)

Today's Hallowe'en Eve broadcast will be presented on a special ghost-to-ghost network and, if conditions are proper, may also be heard on the Weird Wide Web at Boo.ogre Don't miss it if you can.

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NOVEMBER 2004

★ INDICATES A WORLD WAR II BROADCAST OF SPECIAL INTEREST

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 6
RADIO AND WORLD WAR II IN THE AUTUMN OF 1944

★ **WORLD NEWS TODAY** (10-15-44) Douglas Edwards and CBS reporters world wide keep listeners up-to-date. "The last 18 hours have brought the greatest air attacks of all time against Germany. Thousands of Allied heavy bombers attacked military targets in the Cologne area within 40 miles of the battleground at Aachen, where American ground troops continue to make some progress.... The German News Agency has announced the death of Field Marshal Rommel, 'the Desert Fox'." Admiral Radios, CBS. (25 min)

★ **EDDIE CANTOR SHOW** (10-18-44) Eddie introduces guest Esther Williams on this show for stateside U.S. Navy personnel at Roosevelt Field. Esther plays a college principal as Eddie and Harry enroll for classes. AFRS rebroadcast. (25 min)

★ **HOP HARRIGAN** (11-7-44) *Isolated episode.* Hop and Tank Tinker, in disguise as Nazi officers, steal an enemy plane from the "Death's Hero Squadron." Grape Nuts, BLUE Network. (14 min)

★ **PRESIDENT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT** (11-10-44) FDR returns to the nation's capitol from Hyde Park following his election to a fourth term. Kenneth Banghart reports from Union Station in Washington, D.C. "Washington has turned out this morning to greet the first fourth-term president of the United States.Special Report, NBC. (16 min)

★ **WORDS AT WAR** (11-14-44) "One Damn Thing After Another," the story of Tom Traynor, a war correspondent for the Los Angeles Times and the National Broadcasting Company, and his adventures during the war. William Janney as Traynor. Sustaining, NBC. (29 min)

★ **THE WEHRMACHT HOUR** (11-22-44) *Excerpt.* A propaganda broadcast to German troops featuring Major Glenn Miller and the American band of the AEF. Hosted by "Ilse" Weinberger, most of the program's dialog is in German. Sgt. Johnny Desmond sings "My Heart Tells Me" in German. American broadcasting Station in Europe. (11 min)

★ **MYSTERY CHEF** (1944) This chef helps listeners cope with wartime food rationing and shortages. In this program, he gives a recipe for "stretch-butter" and cinnamon crumb coffee cake. Sustaining, BLUE Network. (14 min)

★ **FIBBER McGEE AND MOLLY** (11-28-44) Jim and Marian Jordan as the McGees, broadcasting for the Sixth War Bond Drive from Navy Pier in Chicago. Cast includes special guest Navy Specialist Third Class Bill Thompson in his roles as the Old Timer and Wallace Wimple. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (30 min)

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 13

INNER SANCTUM (4-24-45) "Song of the Slasher," a story about a police detective searching for a slasher who has murdered and mutilated five women in eight days. Lipton Tea and Soup, CBS. (29 min)

POPEYE THE SAILOR (1936) *Isolated episode.* Popeye, Olive Oyl and Wimpy meet Robin Hood. Wheatena, CBS. (13 min) ***Read the article about Popeye on page 14.***

LUX RADIO THEATRE (5-3-54) "Going My Way" starring Barry Fitzgerald and William Lundigan.It's the warm-hearted story of a down-to-earth priest winning over his aging superior and a sidewalk gang of kids. AFRTS rebroadcast. (19 min & 15 min & 16 min) ***Read the article about* Going My Way *on page 54.***

KATE SMITH SHOW (10-15-44) The "Songbird of the South" stars with Ted Collins, Four Chicks and Chuck, comic Harry Savoy, comedienne Shirley Booth (as Dottie Mahoney) and guests The Ink Spots. Kate sings the musical questions, "How Many Hearts Have You Broken?" and "What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life?" AFRS rebroadcast. (29 min) ***Read the article about Kate Smith on page 39.***

BURNS AND ALLEN SHOW (3-24-49) George and Gracie welcome guest Jane Wyman, who has been nominated for an Academy Award for her performance in the film "Johnny Belinda." Jane is nervous about the upcoming awards ceremony. Maxwell House Coffee, NBC. (28 min)

OUR SPECIAL GUEST is author **Robert P. Ledermann,** who will talk about his new book, "Chicago's State Street Christmas Parade."

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20
ANNUAL THANKSGIVING SHOW

MY FRIEND IRMA (11-15-48) Marie Wilson stars as Irma Peterson with Joan Banks as Jane Stacy.The girls decide to prepare a turkey dinner for their boyfriends on Thanksgiving Day. Pepsodent, NBC. (30 min)

FATHER KNOWS BEST (11-26-53) Robert Young stars as the head of the Anderson Family as they discover that Thanksgiving can be a very complicated event. Post Cereals, NBC. (30 min)

FAMILY THEATRE (11-27-47) "Home for Thanksgiving" starring Paul Henried and Joan Leslie. After World War II, an Austrian man and his American wife travel from Germany to his family home, arriving on what in America is Thanksgiving Day. Sustaining, MBS. (29 min)

ALDRICH FAMILY (11-23-52) Henry and Homer have been assigned by their mothers to do the grocery shopping for their familes' Thanksgiving dinner. During this series' last season on radio, Bobby Ellis is Henry Aldrich, Jack Grimes is Homer Brown with House Jameson and Katharine Raht as Mr. and Mrs. Aldrich. Announcer is Dick Dudley.Sustaining, NBC. (29 min)

ABBOTT AND COSTELLO SHOW (11-25-48) The boys present Lou's Thanksgiving play, "The Brave Little Band of Pilgrims Who Landed on Honest John's Rock." Abbott is Capt. Miles Standish, Costello is John Alden, Veola Vonn is Pricilla Mullens. Matty Malneck and the orchestra with singer Hal Winters. Network syndication, NBC. (30 min)

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NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2004

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 27
RADIO TO GET INTO THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT BY

ADVENTURES OF OZZIE AND HARRIET (12-19-48) The Nelsons agree on a "practical" Christmas gift for the house -- a radio-phonograph which will be their gift to each other. Ozzie and Harriet star as themselves, with John Brown as Thorny, Mary Jane Croft as Harriet's mother, Janet Waldo as teenager Emmylou. International Silver Company, NBC. (29 min)

CINNAMON BEAR PREVIEW (1937) A promotional recording intended to persuade stations and sponsors to support the proposed Christmas season radio series for young audiences. Announcer John Hiestand introduces producer Lindsay MacHarrie, who tells how the series was developed. (16 min)

CINNAMON BEAR (1937) *Isolated episode.* Chapter Five: Just as Paddy O'Cinnamon, Judy and Jimmy are about to be pushed into the Immense Inkwell, the Crazy Quilt Dragon arrives with an army of Scissor Soldiers. Syndicated. (12 min)

SUSPENSE (12-21-58) "Out For Christmas" starring Raymond Burr as an ex-convict who poses as Santa Claus to get the policeman who sent him to jail. Cast includes Joan Banks, Howard McNear, Karl Swenson, Dick Beals. Multiple sponsors, CBS. (23 min)

CHRISTMAS EVE OPEN HOUSE (12-24-84) *Excerpt* from Chuck Schaden's nine-hour Christmas Eve broadcast on Chicago radio station WAIT, celebrating with old-time radio shows, holiday music and conversations with the station's air personalities: Eddie Hubbard, Rick Patton, Len Johnson, Ken Alexander, Dick Harley, Jack McGuire, Duane Dow, Dick Buckley. This segment features the opening of the show and the complete **SCREEN DIRECTORS' PLAYHOUSE** production of "Miracle on 34th Street" starring Edmund Gwenn from 12-23-49. (21 min & 22 min) *Additional excerpts from this WAIT special will be featured on* TWTD *during the next three weeks.*

THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH (12-24-45) This is Charles Dickens' *other* Christmas story, written in 1845, two years after "A Christmas Carol." It looks like a dismal Christmas for poor toy maker Caleb Plummer and his blind daughter when Mr. Tackelton, Caleb's stern employer, refuses a salary advance and demands a full day's work on Christmas. Cast features Arthur Sedgewick and Charles Eggleston. Narrated by Everett Clarke. Music by Joseph Gallicchio and the NBC Chicago orchestra. Sustaining, NBC. (24 min)

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SATURDAY, DECEMBER 4
RADIO TO PLAN YOUR CHRISTMAS LIST BY

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (12-20-36) Jack exchanges Christmas gifts with his cast: Mary Livingstone, Kenny Baker, Don Wilson, Andy Devine, Phil Harris and the orchestra. Phil (who has been with the Benny program for only 12 weeks) and Jack have been feuding. Jell-O, NBC. (30 min)

CHRISTMAS EVE OPEN HOUSE (12-24-84) *Excerpt.* Chuck Schaden introduces staff announcer Ken Alexander, who talks about his childhood Christmases. WAIT, Chicago. (18 min)

JACK PEARL SHOW (12-21-36) Pearl stars as Baron Munchausen, with Cliff Hall as "Charlie," plus Mae Questel, Frank Readick, Tommy Dorsey and the orchestra, and announcer Paul Stewart. Charlie's little son isn't too sure about Santa, so several cast members dress up to surprise him. The Baron's "Information Bureau" takes many questions about the holiday. Singer Edythe Wright and the Dorsey orchestra offer "There's Frost on the Moon." Raleigh-Kool Cigarettes, NBC. (27 min) *Note that this show was broadcast on the day following the Benny program above.*

CHRISTMAS EVE OPEN HOUSE (12-24-84) *Excerpt.* Mid-day program host Rick Patton tells about the time when he really received the joy of Christmas. WAIT, Chicago. (9 min)

THE LONE WOLF (12-25-48) "The Golden Santa" starring Walter Coy as Michael Lanyard, known as the "Lone Wolf." A pretty young thing has lost her gold statue of Santa Claus and asks Lanyard for help in finding it. Cast includes Jeanne Bates, Herb Vigran, Jack Petruzzi, Jack Edwards. Sustaining, MBS. (26 min)

CHRISTMAS EVE OPEN HOUSE (12-24-84) *Excerpt.* Program host Len Johnson recalls his favorite Christmas memories. WAIT, Chicago. (15 min)

BLONDIE (12-25-39) Penny Singleton and Arthur Lake star as the Bumsteads in this program from the series' first season on the air. On Christmas Day, while Blondie reads Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" to Baby Dumpling, Dagwood takes a nap and dreams that he is Bob Cratchit and that his boss, Mr. Dithers, is Scrooge. Leone Ledoux as Baby Dumpling, Hanley Stafford as Dithers, Harry Lang as Mr. Fuddle. Bill Goodwin announces. Camel Cigarettes, CBS. (28 min)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 11
RADIO TO ADDRESS CHRISTMAS CARDS BY

THE WHISTLER (12-24-50) "Three Wise Guys" is the Whistler's story for Christmas. A Damon Runyon yarn about some New York types who try to recover factory payroll robbery loot that has been hidden in the town of Bethlehem. Cast features John Brown, Marvin Miller, Bill Forman, Jack Moyles. Signal Oil Co., CBS. (28 min)

CHRISTMAS EVE OPEN HOUSE (12-24-84) "Travel Briefs" host Jack McGuire remembers a World War II Christmas in the service. WAIT, Chicago. (13 min)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (12-12-37) Jack and Mary Livingstone go Christmas shopping in a department store where Frank Nelson is the floorwalker, Eddie Anderson is an elevator operator and Schlepperman (Sam Hearn) is a singing Santa. Also: Kenny Baker, Harry Baldwin, Elliott Lewis, Bea Benaderet, Andy Devine, Don Wilson. Jell-O, NBC. (30 min)

CHRISTMAS EVE OPEN HOUSE (12-24-84) *Excerpt.* Sports reporter Duane Dow with memories of broadcasting on Christmas. WAIT, Chicago. (8 min)

ESCAPE (12-29-50) "The Cave," a Christmas story about two ten-year-old boys and what they find while exploring a cave. Cast: John Dehner, Georgia Ellis, Peggy Webber, Jay Novello, Lou Krugman, Wilms Herbert. Music by Ivan Ditmars. Sustaining, CBS. (29 min)

CHRISTMAS EVE OPEN HOUSE (12-24-84) *Excerpt.* Morning news editor Dick Harley talks about Christmas trees, trains, and his birthday on Christmas Day. WAIT, Chicago. (18 min)

BOB HOPE SHOW (12-25-50) Guest Bing Crosby joins old Ski Nose for some holiday fun with regulars Jack Kirkwood, Carol Richards, Les Brown and his Band of Renown and announcer Hy Averback. In a flashback to the week before Christmas, Hope and Crosby agree to spend only a small amount on each other's Christmas gifts this year. While shopping, Hope meets Santa (Kirkwood), who says "Put something in the pot." Bing sings "Silver Bells" with Carol Richards. AFRS rebroadcast. (25 min)

CHRISTMAS EVE OPEN HOUSE (12-24-84) Todd Nebel, Chuck Schaden's engineer/producer for this special holiday broadcast, tells that his birthday is the day *after* Christmas. WAIT, Chicago. (6 min)

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DECEMBER 2004

★ INDICATES A WORLD WAR II BROADCAST OF SPECIAL INTEREST

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 18
RADIO TO WRAP, BAKE AND DECORATE BY

SIX SHOOTER (12-20-52) "Britt Ponset's Christmas Carol." James Stewart stars as the Texas plainsman in a retelling of the Dickens classic, set in the West. Sustaining, NBC.

CHRISTMAS EVE OPEN HOUSE (12-24-84) Jazz music host Dick Buckley talks about jazz versions of Christmas songs and reads a Christmas card he received from Duke Ellington. WAIT, Chicago. (20 min)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (12-24-44) It's the night before Christmas and Jack is decorating his tree. In a flashback to last week, we find Jack and Mary Livingstone doing their Christmas shopping. Cast includes Phil Harris, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Don Wilson, Larry Stevens, Andy Devine, Frank Nelson, Verna Felton, Bea Benaderet. Jack offers a toast to the boys overseas. AFRS rebroadcast. (30 min)

CHRISTMAS EVE OPEN HOUSE (12-24-84) *Excerpt.* In this final segment from this broadcast from 20 years ago, Chuck Schaden talks with the station's morning personality and program director Eddie Hubbard, who reminisces about his career and recalls a lonely Christmas in Chicago. WAIT, Chicago. (21 min)

CBS RADIO WORKSHOP (12-23-56) "All is Bright." On Christmas Eve a noted conductor, one of the passengers on a ship in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, tells the story of "Silent Night." Sustaining, CBS. (25 min)

FIBBER McGEE AND MOLLY (12-19-44) Jim and Marian Jordan star with Arthur Q. Bryan, Shirley Mitchell, Marlin Hurt, Harlow Wilcox, King's Men, Billy Mills and the orchestra. Fibber snoops for his Christmas gifts in the hall closet. Teeny and the kids sing "'Twas the Night before Christmas." Johnson's Wax, NBC. (30 min)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 25
MERRY CHRISTMAS

Christmas Day in 1944:

★ **CAVALCADE OF AMERICA** (12-25-44) "America for Christmas" starring Walter Huston. A group of soldiers, sailors and marines celebrate the holiday on a small island in the Pacific as a USO troupe presents a Christmas show about America. Special songs by Woody Guthrie, arranged by Earl Robinson and sung by the Sportsmen Quartet. DuPont, NBC. (29 min)

★ **CHRISTMAS PARTY** (12-25-44) Don Ameche hosts the third annual holiday special for servicemen and women around the world (via short wave) and all the folks at home. An all-star two-hour show with Ginny Simms, Bob Hope, George Burns and Gracie Allen, Bing Crosby, Carmen Miranda, Jack Benny, Vera Vague, the Army Air Forces "Swing Wing," Charioteers, violinist Joseph Szigeti, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Les Paul and his trio, Louis Silvers and the orchestra and chorus. Elgin Watch Co., CBS. (60 min & 60 min)

MAYOR OF THE TOWN (12-25-44) Instead of the usual "Mayor of the Town" story, Lionel Barrymore stars as Ebenezer Scrooge in the annual presentation of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol." The program is rebroadcast by the Armed Forces Radio Service under the title "Globe Theatre." (30 min)

LUM AND ABNER (12-25-44) Chester Lauck and Norris Goff present their traditional Christmas story, first performed in 1933. Lum, Abner and Grandpappy Spears are headed east out of Pine Ridge to bring supplies to a young couple staying the night in a barn on an abandoned farm while awaiting the birth of their child. Miles Laboratories, BLUE Network. (15 min)

Kate Smith: First Lady of Radio

BY RICHARD K. HAYES

When we recall Kate Smith, we think of a heavy-set lady with a rich, clear voice and a hearty laugh. She did everything in a big way; in fact her 1938 autobiography was titled "Living in a Great Big Way." In the heyday of radio's popularity, Kate had not one, but two top-rated programs. Her weekly prime-time variety show, *The Kate Smith Hour,* and her midday commentary program, *Kate Smith Speaks,* were No. I in popularity polls. But let's go back to the beginning.

KATE SMITH COMMEMORATIVE SOCIETY

Kathryn Elizabeth became "Kate" for theater marquees during the run of the Broadway musical *Honeymoon Lane* in 1926. Born in Washington, D.C., May 1,1907, she was discovered by song-and-dance man Eddie Dowling and brought to New York to sing and dance in his production. She was an instant hit, later appearing in blackface in a revival of *Hit the Deck* and opposite comedian Bert Lahr in 1930's hit musical comedy *Flying High.* It was at a performance of the latter that one Ted Collins was taken by her beautiful contralto singing voice, as she sang the big ballad "Without Love."

Collins was a vice president of the Columbia Phonograph Company, for which Kate was recording. He advised her that radio was her proper medium, as she was the object of laughter onstage because of her girth. Lahr was making her life miserable; Collins promised to take care of that matter if she would allow him to be her manager. She agreed, and they formed a partnership on a handshake. That partnership lasted until Collins' death in 1964; there was never a written contract. Ted said, "You do the singing and I'll

Richard K. Hayes is a member of the Kate Smith Commemorative Society which has an impressive and extensive archive of her radio broadcasts, both singing and speaking. The mailing address is P.O. Box 3575, Cranston, RI 02910. The web site is www.katesmith.org *New members, as well as inquiries, are welcome.*

KATE SMITH COMMEMORATIVE SOCIETY

fight the battles."

Kate always traced her first radio broadcast to May 1,1931, her birthday, although in fact she had been on a number of shows previously, including Freddy Rich's Rhythm Kings, Rudy Vallee's *Fleischmann Sunshine Hour*, and a "special" on April 4, 1929, with Ted Lewis, Sophie Tucker, and Nick Lucas. She tried a late-night series of her own on NBC, but it failed to attract an audience at that hour. Collins took CBS owner Bill Paley to see her on stage at the Capitol Theatre, and he was happy to put her on his network for 15-minute shows three times a week. *Kate Smith Sings* debuted April 2, 1931 at 7:45 p.m., broadcast over WABC,the CBS flagship station in New York City.

Her theme song was *When the Moon Comes Over the Mountain,* as all of us over a certain age well remember. She kept that theme song throughout her long career. Her simple greeting to listeners was "Hello everybody"; in fact, when Paramount signed her to star in a feature picture in 1932, that was its title. Her sign-off was "Thanks for listenin' and goodbye, folks." For many years, even on television, she would sing – on the anniversary shows – a medley of the four songs she sang on that first broadcast: "Dream a Little Dream of Me," "By the River Ste. Marie," "Please Don't Talk About Me When I'm Gone," and "I Surrender, Dear."

Mayor Jimmy Walker, a showman himself, crowned Kate "Queen of Radio," and Rudy Vallee "King" in a ceremony on the city hall steps July 7,1931. Later a bitter Vallee would claim to have discovered Kate, saying she never acknowledged that. (Vallee had a huge ego.)

After a two-year stint on the "airialto," sponsored by LaPalina Cigars, Paley's father's company, Kate went on the vaudeville circuit with her "Swanee Revue," playing from coast-to-coast. She returned to radio in 1934 with *Kate Smith's New Star Revue,* a series that introduced new talent, sponsored by the Hudson Motor Car Company.

Kate Smith and Babe Ruth
KATE SMITH COMMEMORATIVE SOCIETY


Kate Smith enjoys Abbott and Costello
KATE SMITH COMMEMORATIVE SOCIETY

In 1935 Collins signed Kate to a two-year contract with the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company to advertise their three brands of coffee: Bokar, Red Circle, and Eight O'Clock. The series was inaugurated with a huge Madison Square Garden gala on September 30. For the first season it was a thrice-weekly *Kate Smith's A&P Coffee Time* singing series. On March 15, 1936 she starred in an hour special "to test the waters" for a prime-time series. Its high ratings set into action plans for a weekly Kate Smith *A&P Bandwagon* for the 1936-37 season, opposite Vallee's variety hour at 8 p.m. Thursdays. Soon Miss Smith drove Mr. Vallee off the air and he never forgot it. That's show biz.

The Kate Smith Hour was broadcast from 8-9 p.m. Thursdays, later Fridays, on CBS for five seasons: from 1938 to 1943 The format consisted of, besides Kate's songs, a comedy segment, a dramatic sketch, and often a celebrity guest interview. Andre Baruch was the announcer, aided and abetted by producer Ted Collins. The orchestra was conducted by Jack Miller, with Ted Straeter leading the Kate Smith singers. It was sponsored by such General Foods products as Calumet baking powder, Swans Down cake flour, Grape Nuts cereal, and Sanka coffee.

Often the drama was a scene from a brand new motion picture, with the stars taking their roles. When Kate said in a later interview, "We had everybody! Everybody who was anybody was on our show," she was almost literally correct. She kept autograph books, inscribed by all of the guests, and those are worth a fortune today.

Generally the comedy acts signed up by the season. There were Henny Youngman, "The Aldrich Family," Abbott and Costello, Willie Howard, Minerva Pious (Pansy Nussbaum on *The Fred Allen Show* and Charlie Potter, Olin Landyck, "The

Ted Collins and Kate Smith
KATE SMITH COMMEMORATIVE SOCIETY

Hackensack Gossip", Tommy Riggs and Betty Lou, and "It Pays to Be Ignorant."

Kate introduced her most famous song, Irving Berlin's *God Bless America,* on the November 10, 1938, broadcast, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the end of the [first] World War. She sang it at the end of nearly every show until the ASCAP recording ban, which began in January 1941. At that time she couldn't even sing her theme song.

She introduced more new pop tunes on the radio than any other artist; the number is said to be over 600. Since Collins chose nearly all of her songs, his friendship was coveted along Tin Pan Alley. In 1966 Kate made an LP titled "The Kate Smith Anniversary Album," consisting of eight medleys of three hit songs each supposedly introduced by her on the radio.


Kate Smith

In September 1943 Kate's weekly broadcasts were reduced to thirty minutes and renamed *The Kate Smith Show,* and later, *Kate Smith Sings.* They were rebroadcast to the military over Armed Forces Radio, and many of those transcriptions survive. Curiously, to our knowledge, only two complete hour shows exist: December 9, 1937 and September 27, 1940. When she moved to the Mutual network in 1947, *Kate Smith Sings* became a 15-minute disk-jockey program, with Kate and Ted playing only Kate's records.

Kate Smith was consistently named one of the three most beloved and respected American women, along with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and actress Helen Hayes, in popularity polls. Because of this, as well as her radio personality, early in 1938 Collins suggested a non-singing radio program for her. The first broadcast of *Kate Smith Speaks,* a 15-minute show, aired April 4th. Collins accurately predicted its popularity, and before long it became a midday fixture on weekdays. Ted would open each broadcast with the words, "It's high noon in New York and time for Kate Smith, and here she is!" Kate gave her cheerful "Hello everybody" greeting and read a few current events items. She spoke about new books, movies, exhibits, fashions, the weather, and the like. From time to time Collins would chime in for some lighthearted banter, punctuated by Kate's hearty laugh.

By 1940 *Kate Smith Speaks* had become the No. 1 rated daytime program, and CBS insisted it be continued through the summer. Smith and Collins said, "Not unless we can do it from Lake Placid" (where both spent summers), so CBS brought a cable across the lake to her island Camp Sunshine and a tiny broadcast studio was made from a small closet. Robert Ripley described it in *Believe It Or Not as* the world's smallest broadcast studio. Kate weighed 300 pounds at the time.

At about 12:05 Kate would turn to Collins and ask, "And now, Ted, what's new?" and he would read a few hard news items. Kate was not averse to addressing

social and political issues, and she delivered many heartfelt editorials over the years. By 1947 CBS was censoring her remarks. In protest, she left that network and moved to Mutual: same time, different stations. Her fans followed her, and the show continued for another four years.

Kate's broadcasts took on additional importance during wartime. She sang many patriotic tunes and dedicated love songs from GIs to their loved ones at home. She conducted several radio war bond marathons, and is credited with the sale of some $600 million worth of them. This helped earn her the Medal of Freedom, given her by President Reagan in 1982. She ended each wartime *Speaks* broadcast with the reminder, "Remember, if you don't write, [to folks in the armed services] you're wrong."

As the television age approached, critics predicted Kate would not make the transition, because of her weight. Collins took on the challenge and *The Kate Smith [Television] Hour* began its four-season run in September 1950. On live each weekday afternoon, it was a pioneering venture that succeeded admirably. Kate's personality, warm smile, and wink of the eye translated successfully to the visual medium. She was light on her feet, too.

In later years, when asked whether she preferred radio or television, Kate always said, "Radio, because I felt closer to my audience there." Her favorite series was *Kate Smith Speaks,* despite the fact that she loved to sing perhaps more than anything else. It came so naturally to her, and she never ceased thanking God for her voice – and her admirers. Collins had all of the *Speaks* scripts preserved in leather-bound volumes, and they, along with other career memorabilia, are now at Boston University. ■

Tune in TWTD *November 13 to hear a Kate Smith radio show.*

In Soap City, Not All Dreams Come True

BY JIM COX

It must have stung something awful.

To substantially nurture something for a lengthy period of time and then suddenly have it yanked from one's clutches with little chance of influencing its future must have been disheartening at best and, quite likely, devastating to the caregiver.

The mother of soap opera, Irna Phillips, experienced it the spring of 1956 when her ties with a previously malnourished daytime radio serial were abruptly severed.

"It doesn't seem possible that last week my association with *Young Doctor Malone* and the Columbia Broadcasting System was terminated," she launched into a typewritten invective from her Chicago address at 1335 North Astor Street to *Malone* scriptwriter David Lesan on Valley Road, Cos Cob, Connecticut. The date was June 2, 1956. While her memo didn't reveal the circumstances of her separation, she acknowledged to Lesan: "Knowing Procter and Gamble, you should realize by this time they never do the obvious."

Irna Phillips' departure from a potent storyline-consulting role for *Young Doctor Malone* was particularly painful to her. Just 20 months earlier the quarter-hour narrative she had affectionately inspired had catapulted into first place in the Nielsen ratings among nearly three-dozen daytime dramas. That dynamic encouraged her toward even loftier heights that she had obviously harbored for a long while.

A few days following the release of *Malone's* superior ranking, on October 5, 1954 Phillips dispatched an appeal to Compton Advertising executive Lewis H. Titterton in New York (who represented *Malone's* agency of record): "I would like your permission to kinescope, at my expense, two episodes of *Young Doctor Malone*. . . . I would not want you to feel in any way obligated to present them to Procter and Gamble if you did not think it wise to do so." A carbon of her letter went to William M. Ramsey, supervising the *Malone* program for Procter & Gamble Productions, Inc. in Cincinnati, Ohio. In longhand, at the bottom of the carbon, Phillips added: "You don't know anything about this—unless you think it doesn't matter."

For a long while it had been her intent to take the popular aural medical feature to weekday television. She had previously underwritten kinescopes of *The Guiding Light*, one of her radio creations, in an effort to persuade P&G to add a video version of that venerable narrative. After considerable persistence, she persuaded the soapmaker and personal goods manufac-

Jim Cox is a prolific author of books about old-time radio, including Radio Crime Fighters; Say Goodnight, Gracie; The Great Radio Audience Participation Shows; The Great Radio Soap Operas, *and* Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons, *all published by McFarland & Company, Inc,* www.mcfarlandpub.com *He is a retired college professor living in Louisville, Kentucky.*


Irna Phillips

turer to initiate the durable drama on the small screen following the same story line broadcast on radio. Beginning June 30, 1952 and continuing through June 29, 1956 when it left the aural ether and became a TV-only feature, *The Guiding Light* aired once in both mediums every weekday. Phillips fully intended to repeat her good fortune with *Malone*.

Regrettably, time for her to influence the outcome ran out before the idea could be implemented. While the program ultimately arrived on the small screen on competing chain NBC on December 29, 1958, a pundit observed: "This TV adaptation of the long-running radio serial of the same name . . . transferred only the principal characters' names and the credits of Irna Phillips as creator and Julian Funt as writer." According to reporter Wesley Hyatt, the setting and story line were dramatically altered from the radio version, yet running on CBS and featuring Sandy Becker in the lead. The radio series was still penned by David Lesan. The dual-though-separate narratives continued until the aural version departed in late 1960. On TV it remained as a half-hour daily performance through March 29, 1963.

Irna Phillips can still be clearly recognized as the omnipresent drama mama, the original guru of daytime narratives who – perhaps as much as anybody – was instrumental in placing Chicago on the national radio map. The plethora of dramatic programming that stemmed from her inventive mind generated scores of added shows airing from within and closely adjacent to the Windy City's renowned Loop.

Her strong influence, extending geographically around the globe, was also timeless. It continues to be witnessed today through the televised serials she so pervasively motivated. No other single individual left a mark on daytime drama to the extent she did. Among the handful of radio's washboard weeper creatives, she alone succeeded in transferring her brilliant concepts to video and – in due course – to future generations. The story of the humble initiation of this radio pioneer is captivating.

In the summer of 1930 Phillips, still in her twenties (and for several years a teacher in a Dayton, Ohio, normal school) returned to her native Chicago seeking seasonal work between academic terms. One of the doors she knocked on was that of radio station WGN, a Midwest powerhouse whose regional scope extended far beyond the confines of its native turf. Cherishing a longtime interest in performing, she had the good fortune to be accepted by the station as an actress. She initially appeared by herself, then with Ireene Wicker, another schoolmarm-turned-thespian, in various dialoguing exchanges. Both women soon relinquished their teaching careers to de-

vote full time to a professional life in broadcasting.

Phillips would gain the distinction of creating the very first daytime serial, *Painted Dreams*, which debuted over WGN on October 20, 1930. Revolving around an Irish-American household, the cast included a matriarch, a daughter and a friend of the daughter. Potential sponsors, however, were hesitant to underwrite such an untried formula. Undaunted nonetheless, station management launched the program on a sustaining (unsponsored) basis. For a year *Painted Dreams* appeared without benefit of commercials, airing new episodes six days a week. In October 1931 it was sold to a Chicago-based meatpacker, Mickleberry Products Company.

Irna Phillips was assigned to write the drama and play dual roles in it. As the elderly widowed Mother Moynihan, she became a kindly, philosophical, all-wise protagonist coping with the realities of the Depression era. Her single goal in life was to ensure the ultimate happiness of her grown children. The simple message of the drama was that marriage, love and motherhood offered the greatest achievement and destiny any female could hope to experience. Most of the action occurred in an urban Chicago neighborhood where the Moynihans resided.

Not surprisingly, Ireene Wicker was featured in the *Painted Dreams* cast, playing the part of the heroine's daughter, along with several other roles. Lucy Gilman, Kay Chase, Alice Hill and Olan Soulé were also among the actors in the troupe. A conspicuous sidelight was that Frank Hummert whose name would be identified with an assembly line turning out more daytime radio series than anyone else -- produced *Painted Dreams* for his most formidable soon-to-be competitor, Irna Phillips. The show wafted onto the ether with "I'm Yours" as its musical theme.

While other similar broadcast features achieved network status before *Painted Dreams* began airing over CBS on October 10, 1933, there can be little doubt that

Ireene Wicker

the program and its originator, Phillips, were the first of a breed of hundreds of serials and scores of creators to populate the daytime airwaves. Their success would set the agenda for the bulk of programming in the sunshine hours that persists today and has been copied around the globe. It was truly a momentous occasion, although few would have so ascertained then.

Phillips, meanwhile, became embroiled in a legal quagmire over ownership rights to *Painted Dreams*, a controversy that dragged on in the courts for almost a decade. While she lost the battle, her indomitable spirit was demonstrated, displaying little evidence that she was negatively affected by it. The experience turned her into an astute businesswoman. From that day forward she established her rights to the material she created and continued in that vein throughout the remainder of her career. It also turned her into a very affluent individual. In time the lifelong spinster was personally carrying more than a quarter of a million dollars out of radio every year. After she was established in television, that figure rose to millions.

Phillips created no fewer than nine radio serials, in chronological order: *Painted Dreams* (1930), *Today's Children* (1932), *The Guiding Light* (1937), *Road of Life* (1937), *Woman in White* (1938), *The Right to Happiness* (1939), *Lonely Women* (1942), *Masquerade* (1946), *The Brighter Day* (1948). She was later credited with writing or co-writing eight TV incarnations—*These Are My Children* (1949), *The Guiding Light* (1952), *The Brighter Day* (1954), *As the World Turns* (1956), *Another World* (1964), *Days of Our Lives* (1965), *Our Private World* (1965), *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* (1967). A critic noted that *The Guiding Light*, currently in its seventh decade including both radio and television renderings, could be touted as "the longest story ever told."

Beyond that, through several protégés Phillips' ideas have continued in no fewer than five other televised serials: *One Life to Live, All My Children, Loving, The Young and the Restless, The Bold and the Beautiful*. When she died on December 23, 1973, she left a legacy that influenced serialized melodrama in two mediums. Some of the precepts practiced in the modern era stem directly from ideas concocted by the legendary imaginative genius.

Unlike her soap opera production contemporaries Frank and Anne Hummert, who relied upon assembly-line techniques to flesh out dialogue for a surfeit of serialized scripts (they were responsible for 61 soap operas), at least at the beginning of Phillips' reign as the mother of the genre, she wrote every word herself. At the time with only a few shows on the air she used a manual typewriter and carbon paper to make copies of her scripts for every cast member in a single typing.

Numerous stories have circulated over

the years, and are believed to be true, that when changes were made in her scripts during rehearsals -- just before airtime – Phillips raced to the typewriter to hammer out corrected pages for everybody. Sometimes she fed new dialogue to actors while a show was *on the air*, just moments before those lines would be spoken live.

Later, as she expanded her repertoire of daytime serials, it became impossible for her to type enough scripts to provide for every show. This presented no problem to a talented originator, however – she bought a dictating machine and *said* those lines of dialogue into it. Clerical helpers turned her dictation into completed scripts. (Elaine Sterne Carrington, a prolific soapwriter protégé, would become a principal exponent of Phillips' dictating system.) For a while Phillips was dictating as many as six scripts daily, amounting to 60,000 words weekly and three million words annually.

When the dictating machine became too cumbersome, Phillips finally acquiesced. Admitting her personal limitations to herself, she hired a group of unnamed hacks to churn out much of the verbiage she had been accustomed to writing. For their efforts she compensated them at $100 per quarter-hour script ($500 weekly), a far cry from the measly $25-per-show the Hummerts were doling out to their dialoguers. That alone appears to have made working for Phillips far more attractive to aspiring scribes than toiling for the rival Hummerts.

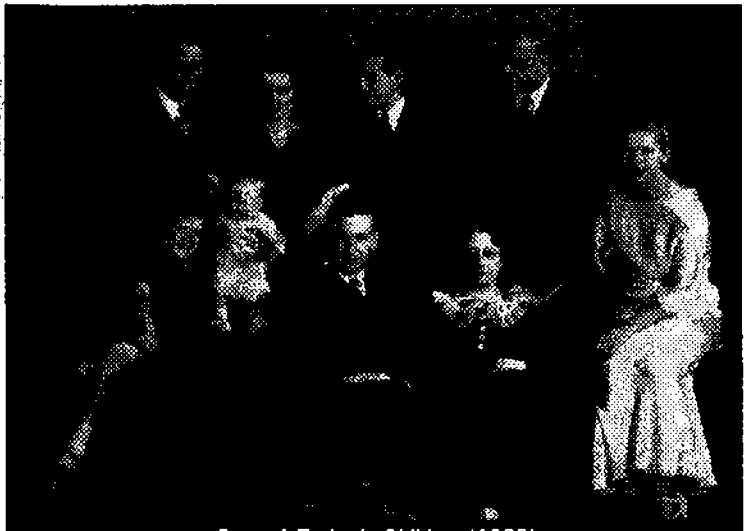
Irna Phillips, furthermore, imbued the soap opera strain with a number of predispositions that were to have permanent effect.

She placed strong emphasis on characterization in all of her serials. She claimed, "The important factor . . . is that the story grow out of characters rather than story superimposed upon characters." (The Hummerts, for a couple, were guilty of weighing their central figures with heavy plotting.) "This [characterization] I have found to be most successful, realistic and believable," Phillips continued. "We do what we do because we are what we are." Asserted one critic: "The success of Irna Phillips' serials came from her devotion to reality and from her careful understanding of the women who made up her audience."

Over time, little by little Phillips revealed innate details about the people in her stories, allowing her audiences to identify with those individuals. A couple of her subjects might spend an entire quarter-hour on radio dialoguing with one another. That is something that ostensibly never have happened on a Hummert serial, despite those producers' determined efforts to hold down their costs by reducing the number of players appearing in each installment.

It's reliably reported that Phillips realized that not only could the characterization be advanced by such lengthy chats but her bottom line would be significantly enhanced in doing so, too. The technique became a staple in her modus operandi. Whereas the Hummerts limited their dialoguers to inserting a maximum of 25 speaking roles in their serials over any five-day period, Phillips usually got by with substantially fewer, perhaps no more than 15 in some weeks.

Phillips was also the first daytime serial writer to focus on the career professional as a protagonist. Such figures as clergymen (*The Guiding Light, The Brighter Day*), physicians (*Road of Life, Young Doctor Malone*), nurses (*Woman in White*), attorneys (*The Right to Happiness*) dotted the landscape of her drainboard dramas. She insisted that the professional crowd made far more appealing subjects for her stories than simply ordinary common citizens with uninteresting careers. In pursuing that agenda she capitalized on an area that had



Cast of *Today's Children* (1933)
Writer Irna Phillips, seated second from right, was also a cast member.

gone unnoticed by many radio producers, intentionally or otherwise. The preponderance of such skilled artisans in contemporary daytime television serials probably emanated from Phillips' shrewd perception so many years ago.

Phillips may also be credited with yet another concept that was to profoundly influence the soap operas currently transmitted. When she became convinced that televised serials were the wave of the future, she relentlessly lobbied the networks and sponsors to increase the traditional quarter-hour dramas to half-hour shows. It took two years before CBS and sponsor Procter & Gamble finally either grew weary of her persistence or were won over and gave in. On April 2, 1956 they instituted not one but two 30-minute serials on a single day – *As the World Turns* and *The Edge of Night*. The new practice eventually led to the hour-long feature, which Phillips championed. In 1973 she would be acclaimed "the single most important influence on television soaps" by a couple of insightful researchers of the genre, Madeleine Edmondson and David Rounds.

Flashback now to the early 1950s: Irna Phillips' watchful eye was overseeing *Young Doctor Malone* for CBS. David Lesan, an utterly commendable dialoguer during Golden Age Radio's fading epoch, was fleshing out the *Malone* narratives with sterling conversations that contributed heavily toward advancing the show to number one. Yet it was Irna Phillips who was plotting the details and furnishing the outlines to him for those sequences. Some correspondence from that era, uncovered recently, paints a picture of a woman who had her finger on the pulse of everything that transpired on "her" show. She was, in many ways, a woman possessed with creative imagination.

"As plans now stand," Lesan wrote Compton Agency rep Lewis Titterton on May 27, 1954, "Irna will have completed her new outline for *Young Doctor Malone* by June 7th at which time Bob [Short, unidentified further] has suggested that we get together with her in Chicago for one of our routine discussions of same. Is this satisfactory with you?"

Lesan continued: "Irna has also suggested that in the interests of a closer relationship between her and the Producer, that Bill Bohen [the show's recently appointed head honcho at Compton Advertising] accompany us on this trip. In this way he will see how a working contact is main-

tained with her; how questions, discussions and disagreements are expressed; how a compromise is finally hammered out which is satisfactory to all – in short, receive a valuable 'short course' in one Ima Phillips which might be of inestimable value to both him and her in their future dealings together.

"I think this is a pretty logical step, as unless and until a close relationship is gained with the woman, it is difficult to make any headway with her as a writer, as you and I know."

If there remained any doubt about who was actually in control of *Young Doctor Malone* (and by extension, presumably Phillips' other broadcast features), such an exchange – typical of other expressions composed in similar vein – should clear the air.

Writing Lesan on July 28, 1954, Phillips observed, "Just so everyone's happy and the show goes to TV, we're happy too." She went on to state, "Now that Aggie [writer Agnes Nixon] is taking over G.L. [*Guiding Light*] again, I have more time to dream up new ailments. If I run out of ailments, I'll let you know and we'll plot a few. Frankly, it's a relief not to be dialoguing for a change. When I get tired of just plotting, I think I'm going to sell another show. To whom? L.T. [Lewis Titterton] looks like a likely prospect. . . . Inasmuch as you and L.T. are spending his vacation together, I think you should try to talk him into Malone TV, then we'll all be happy. Yes? Yes!"

The prospect of the show moving to TV obviously wasn't ever far from her thinking.

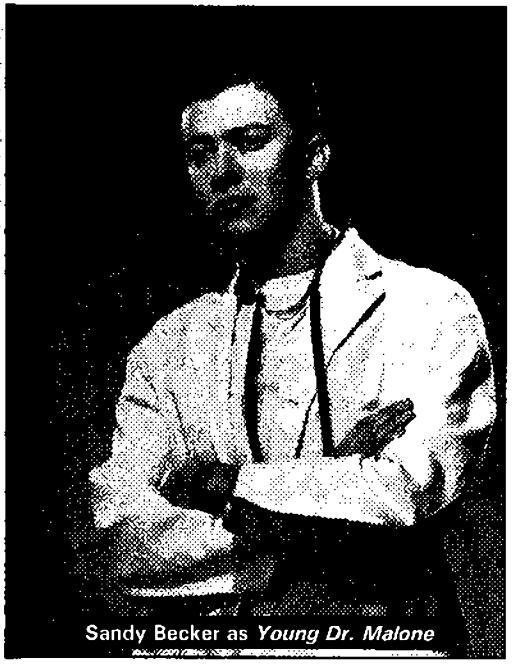
Phillips could be just as meticulous as she could be determined. In a letter to Compton's Bill Bohen in New York on August 24, 1954, she allowed, "I am as happy with Dave's scripts as all of you are, but – and it's a big 'but', Bill – the production is no different; what criticism I had in the past I still have. Dr. Brown is still belligerent, clipped in speech, and the tempo is way out of line with the character that was originally outlined and as it is being written at the present time."

Phillips adds: "Long scripts suddenly become short scripts; dialog is so speeded up to create conflict that you don't even know what the characters are saying; and I don't think, Bill, that a fast tempo necessarily creates conflict. Evidently the director does. Some of the pauses you could drive a truck thru. . . .

"I know you've heard these same criticisms over and over, so now I'm going on record via Uncle Sam. I hope to be in New York sometime in September, and maybe we can kick it around more at that time."

In the interim, meanwhile, the announcement was made of *Young Doctor Malone's* chart-topping Nielsen success. Reaction from Procter & Gamble Productions' Bill Ramsey was swift. To writer Dave Lesan he said on September 28, 1954: "Since I've taken to myself the immediate supervision of 'Young Dr. Malone' I have, of course, been reading all of the scripts. There is only one word that I can think of which describes them adequately and that word is 'superb.' In addition to their dramatic intensity, they have many of the qualities of great music. I can only regret all the years we've wasted in not having taken advantage sooner of your tremendous talents as a writer.

"And to cap it all," Ramsey's words fairly leaped from the letterhead, "today's Nielsen report puts 'Young Dr. Malone' in first place and 'The Guiding Light' in second place! It's the first time within my memory 'Young Dr. Malone,' excellent though it was when our good friend Julian [Funt, who would be tapped later to pen the separate televised *Malone* story] was writing it, has ever been in first place.



Sandy Becker as *Young Dr. Malone*

"Again I say, I love you, David, and I love Weazer [Mrs. Lesan] too."

With such affirmation, surely the scripts Lesan was turning out *had* to be inspired. If Lesan's head was in the clouds after that communication, Irna Phillips quickly helped him replant his feet solidly on terra firma. On September 30, 1954 she dispatched a new missive to him, launching it with: "The next time you go out of town let me know so I don't have to worry. I call up, you're not there, I worry, the phone rings and rings and rings, so I call Bob Short, he informs me that you're fine but are taking a few days off. I knew you were planning to do this, but I didn't know exactly when. Your itinerary please, Mr. Lesan."

She softens the blow by stating further down, "May I say that your scripts for the week of October 18th are kind of super. It seems to me that your people were all in character most of the time; add to that they were really scripts that moved – well I like them!"

Phillips' domineering stance regarding *Young Doctor Malone* is underscored further in a letter she typed on January 24, 1955 to Lesan. "There has been a question in my mind, as you know, as to whether or not we have the best possible producer and the best possible director," she stated stridently.

"I'm somewhat at a loss to understand your reason, other than wanting a very good show, for discussing production with either Bob Rehbock or the new director. I'm sure you will agree that the last thing either of us wants is to create any kind of confusion as far as production is concerned. If you are to give your views on direction and production and I am to give mine, somewhere along the line we're bound to contradict each other.

"Now here's how I feel about it, Dave: If you want to keep in touch with production and direction on *Malone*, this is fine with me; but let it be understood that all criticism, comments, good, bad or indifferent, come from one source. Okay? Okay!"

The single "source" seems to be unmistakably understood without defining it.

Roughly two weeks before Ms. Phillips' firing by CBS and resultant disassociation with *Young Doctor Malone*, CBS Radio official Preston H. Pumphrey [sic] sent the following communiqué to David Lesan, dated May 8, 1956: "Attached are an original and four copies of a contract covering the agreement we reached on the phone last week for your writing of *Young Dr. Malone*.

"I trust you will find it all in order, and if so, we'd appreciate your signing and returning all the copies. After that, I'll have them signed for CBS Radio and will send you copies for your files.

"We also talked about keeping this show within budget. The show is budgeted for eighteen performers [separate speaking

roles] per week in addition to Sandy Becker [the actor in the title role]. Becker's contract has a five-time-a-week guarantee, so there is nothing saved by leaving him out. "I will be looking forward to making your acquaintance the first time you're in New York."

Although regrettably we don't possess further details of Irna Phillips' abrupt departure and the specific reasons behind it, on face value it would be easy to speculate that Lesan might have become the fair-haired boy and – with an expressed emphasis on cutting costs – Phillips, and whatever perceived baggage she brought to the show, were plainly shelved. It's not a stretch to assume that by this time the seasoned scribe (Lesan) had acquired knowledge, training and experience beyond mere dialoguing duties, and the tasks of outlining and writing the show were consolidated and vested in his apparently capable hands. There is no documented proof of a "successor" as such to Irna Phillips.

Of course, by then Phillips already had her own hands full with the launch of her first half-hour televised serial, *As the World Turns*, which had debuted a couple of months earlier (April 2). Nonetheless, her sudden departure from her beloved *Young Doctor Malone* must have smarted. Her dreams of carrying it to television were dashed and – while the drama would eventually make it to the small tube – her association with it there appears to have been limited to the mention of her name as the program's creator and little more.

The radio series continued on its judicious journey for another four-and-a-half years, meanwhile, earning the distinction of enduring to that fateful day when CBS Radio pulled the plug on its last quartet of open-ended daytime soap operas. That momentous occasion brought to a close a broadcast breed that had extended for 30 years. (The other national chains had abandoned their washboard weepers some time earlier.) David Lesan was officially notified of his impending doom in a CBS memorandum issued on October 25, 1960. "The last broadcast of *Young Dr. Malone* will be that of November 25, 1960, and we hereby terminate the agreement between us dated May 1, 1956, as amended, at the conclusion of that broadcast, and any delayed or supplementary broadcasts as provided therein."

The message concluded: "We deeply regret the termination of this program [although obviously not enough to save it], and we want to express our appreciation of your contribution to the success it has enjoyed."

Those weren't the only words of commendation Lesan would receive. On November 25, the very day that *The Right to Happiness, Ma Perkins, Young Doctor Malone* and *The Second Mrs. Burton* bit the dust forever, George M. Perkins, CBS Radio director of network programs in New York, dropped a line to the seasoned hack. "Let me express my sincere admiration and deep appreciation for your skillful creation of 'Young Dr. Malone' over these past years," said Perkins.

"You can forever be proud of your contributions to one of the most glorious chapters in all of broadcasting history. You will be missed by those of us who remain, as well as the multitude of your daily followers.

"My personal thanks go to you for all of your talented efforts and helpfulness."

And there was at least one other affirmation, written December 20, 1960 by no less an eminent principal as CBS Radio president Arthur Hull Hays, who admonished: "It is always unfortunate when we terminate the services of someone who has been doing outstanding work which is certainly true in your case. I am sorry that the changes forced us to eliminate *Young Dr.*

Malone, and I did not want to let the occasion go by without expressing my personal gratitude to you for your excellent work.

"Wishing you a very happy Christmas and a successful New Year."

It's uncertain where a successful, though unemployed, writer for a medium that was no longer accepting applications might turn, of course. The correspondence file ends with that letter, and Lesan's professional career definitely appeared to be on hold, if not absolutely in permanent jeopardy.

Parenthetically, an NBC-TV serial, *Today Is Ours*, jointly concocted by Lesan and contemporary Julian Funt, the preceding scriptwriter for radio's *Young Doctor Malone*, premiered on June 30, 1958. By December 26, 1958 their creation was off the tube, succeeded by a hardly recognizable *Malone* penned by Funt. Lesan kept writing the radio play. For him, foreboding handwriting would appear on the wall before long.

And as for Irna Phillips, while severance from her beloved *Young Doctor Malone* undoubtedly hurt tremendously, within a short time she was probably laughing all the way to the bank, drowning her sorrows in martinis, the result of her fabulous fortune in TV Land (the incubatory one).

The Phillips-Lesan-*Malone* tale exuded many fascinating components. The pathos of a beleaguered heroine, a joyful hero with legions of admirers who was riding the crest of popularity, and finally, subsequent crushing adversity was similar to soap opera's basic themes. Who better to understand what had happened than two who were embroiled in it? Phillips' excessive penchant for reality made it easy to contemplate but most difficult to abide. ■

Going My Way for 60 Years

PHOTOFEST

BY RANDALL G. MIELKE

At the 1944 Academy Awards, such films as *Gaslight* and *Double Indemnity* were nominated for the Best Picture of the Year. But it was *Going My Way*, a relatively simple film which exuded warmth, sentimentality, and good humor that won the Oscar for Best Picture.

The film celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2004.

Going My Way was the idea of director Leo McCarey, a friend of Bing Crosby. McCarey was an Oscar-winning director in 1937 for *The Awful Truth,* a screwball comedy with Cary Grant and Irene Dunne. He also directed comic legends W.C. Fields, Harold Lloyd, the Marx Brothers, and Eddie Cantor in a succession of films in the 1930s. He wanted Crosby to play Father Chuck O'Malley in the film, even though most of the Paramount studio executives could not see their singing star in a religious role.

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

Crosby, too, had his doubts, telling McCarey that the Catholic Church wouldn't stand for him as a priest, since he was a singer and he had spent a good deal of time at the racetracks. McCarey disagreed. He told Crosby his idea of an easy-going priest who finally wins over his strict superior, and the story impressed Crosby. Crosby also had immense respect for McCarey's judgment and it was this that swayed him to accept the role.

"Leo had made some brilliant successes and it had always been my axiom to get in the hands of a great director," said Crosby at the time. "So I just went ahead and did it."

In *Going My Way* McCarey artfully blended a series of episodes revolving around St. Dominic's parish – about a new young priest sent there to "get the parish in shape." In the film Crosby is playful, modern, and psychologically oriented as the young Father O'Malley. As the new parish priest, Crosby turns a group of young Manhattan delinquents into a choir which

tours the country to raise funds for the old mortgage-ridden church. McCarey cast the veteran Irish actor Barry Fitzgerald as Father Fitzgibbon, the builder of the church, who is just a bit behind the times, but wise, nevertheless. Later during his career, Fitzgerald appeared in such films as: *The Naked City* (1948), *The Story of Seabiscuit* with Shirley Temple (1949) and *The Quiet Man* with John Wayne (1952).

Frank McHugh, Bing Crosby, Risë Stevens

PHOTOFEST

The film also features Risë Stevens as Jenny Linden and Frank McHugh as Father Timothy O'Dowd. Although Stevens had done several films, including *The Chocolate Soldier* with Nelson Eddy in 1941, her greatest achievement was being the contralto of the Metropolitan Opera Association. McHugh's film credits include *The Front Page* (1931), *State Fair* (1945), *There's No Business Like Show Business* (1954), and *Say One for Me*, also with Bing Crosby (1959).

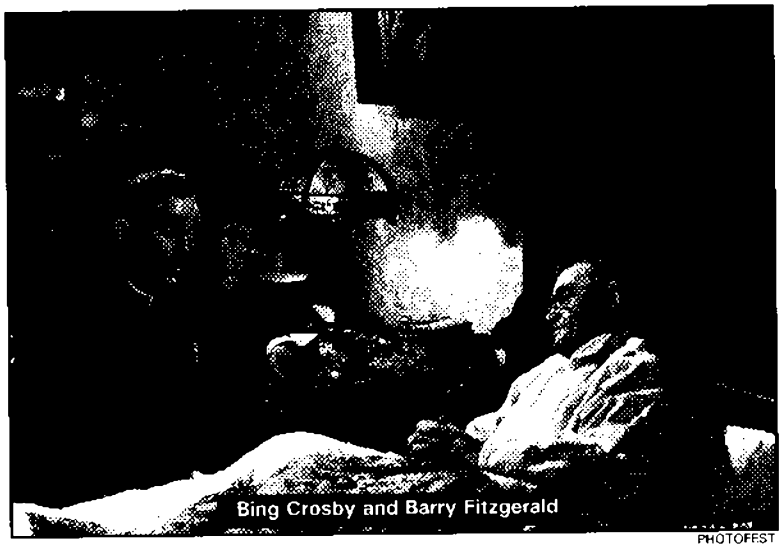
McCarey, along with screenwriters Frank Butler and Frank Cavett, managed to capture a sure-fire plot, but also the elusive diction of Crosby himself, which fit the characterization of Father O'Malley perfectly. In addition, they were able to grasp the stumbling, staggering, touching speech of the little old priest that Barry Fitzgerald played. Crosby felt at the time, that this was McCarey's plan to make the picture work.

"He must have felt that if the picture was to have a chance, and if the characters in it were to be acceptable, they would have to be portrayed as natural, normal, and homey, rather than as pious or sanctimonious," said Crosby.

Fortunio Bonanova, Risë Stevens, Frank McHugh, Bing Crosby, boys' choir

PHOTOFEST

But despite well-defined characters, the plot appeared to be a little more free-wheeling. According to Crosby, McCarey had not prepared a complete script by the


Bing Crosby and Barry Fitzgerald

PHOTOFEST

time shooting was to begin.

"I don't think when Leo started that he even had the full story in mind," said Crosby. "He had his characters - Barry Fitzgerald and me – but we were never sure what we'd be doing from morning to afternoon. He made a lot of it up as we went along."

An example is a game-of-checkers scene in the picture which involved Fitzgerald, McHugh, and Crosby. The three actors adlibbed the scene right on the set under McCarey's direction. McCarey shot it from just one angle, and then said, "Print it."

McCarey's free-and-easy handling of Crosby and Fitzgerald created a unique partnership that came across splendidly on screen. Risë Stevens recalls that Crosby found this part of the process particularly appealing.

"He and Barry used to try out scenes together," Stevens said at the time. "Then they would throw in certain little idiosyncrasies of their own. And this really worked out and the results were fabulous."

The results were also fabulous when it came to passing out the Oscars. In addition to winning Oscar honors as Best Picture of 1944, *Going My Way* won several other Oscars including Crosby as best actor; Fitzgerald as best supporting actor; Leo McCarey as best director and for best original story; Frank Butler and Frank Cavett for best screenplay, and James Van Heusen and Johnny Burke for "Swinging on a Star," the best song.

Part of the reason that Crosby won the Academy Award statuette was that the Father O'Malley character was a departure for him from his crooning and comedic roles. It was the first picture in which he did not rely heavily upon his singing for its success, and it also was his first picture with a serious dramatic theme.

What makes *Going My Way* work so well is its simplicity and understatement. In the film, Risë Stevens' character, Jenny Linden, an old girlfriend of Crosby's, has become an opera star. In the dressing-room scene in which Jenny sees O'Malley's priestly clothes, revealed by his opened overcoat, she understands why O'Malley stopped writing her to become a priest. The scene has a dramatic impact beyond the words themselves.

Now, as 60 years earlier, whenever *Going My Way* is seen, the reaction of audiences is the same: laughter, smiles of joy, and tears for a film with a lot of heart. ■

Tune in TWTD *November 13 to hear a radio version of* Going My Way.

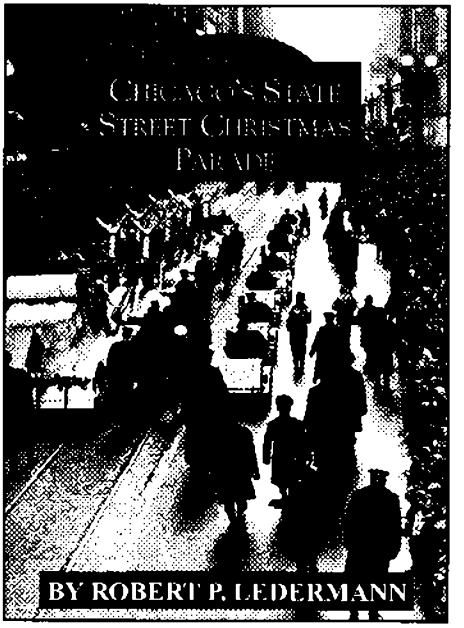
"I love a parade!"

These words come into my mind every time I see a parade, but most of all when it's a Christmas parade, and even more so when it's a Chicago Christmas parade.

Still today I look on with envy at the participants, lucky enough to be in the parade – the marchers playing their instruments with the school band, the Shriners in their special dress costumes, and the clowns working the crowds on the side curbs, filled with onlookers. It must be a wonderful thing, to be in a parade.

I remember back to the crowds, the cold weather, the department stores up and down State Street, with all their fabulous window displays, the lights and street decorations, and the great anticipation children have of seeing Santa Claus. I loved the excitement of the coming holidays, knowing Christmas Eve and Christmas Day were getting closer and closer.

Where and when or who started the very first Chicago Christmas parade? Surprisingly enough, it was on December 7, 1934 when Walter Gregory, then president of the State Street Council (now the Greater State Street Council), thought up the idea to cheer up the people of Chicago during the hard Depression. The Mayor of Chicago, Edward Kelly, agreed and felt then it could also stimulate the economy and the development of State Street during the holidays.



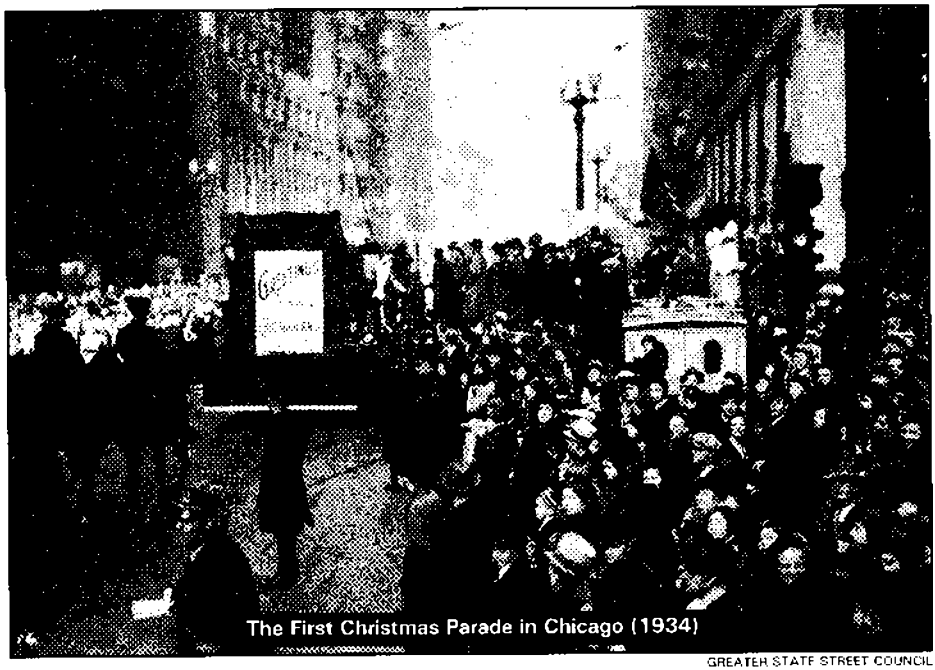
He was right, for it jump-started the largest holiday buying period since 1927 for State Street and Chicago. He didn't call it a parade at all, but a caravan. The "caravan," led by Santa and Mr. Gregory, consisted of toys and merchandise from stores along State Street. This symbolized the Holiday Season and began the tradition of the holiday parades on State Street for years to come.

It was cold on the day of the first Christmas parade. The weather was described in the *Chicago Daily News:* "A cold wave grips the city and sent the temperatures down to abnormally low levels. The coldest spot in the middle-west, Galena, Illinois, registered 14 below zero."

The first parade moved along State Street from North Wacker Drive, down to Congress Parkway.

During the 1930s and '40s at Christmas time, when there was still some horse traf-

Robert P. Ledermann is the author of Christmas on State Street *and a new book,* Chicago's State Street Christmas Parade *(Arcadia Publishing, $19.99). Publication date is October 15, 2004.These excerpts from his new book are reprinted with permission.*



The First Christmas Parade in Chicago (1934)

GREATER STATE STREET COUNCIL

fic on Chicago streets and alleyways, the Anti-Cruelty Society would quietly, without fanfare, distribute warm blankets and baskets full of fresh feed to the horses, especially the older, weaker ones.

State Street was closed to through traffic in 1940-41 because of subway construction. Finally it reopened to traffic on October 27, 1942, and the first subway trains ran beneath State Street on October 16, 1943.

In the war years of the early 1940s, the

Christmas Dinner Float (1948)

GREATER STATE STREET COUNCIL

'The Shepherds' Christmas Float (1956)

GREATER STATE STREET COUNCIL

parades, for the most part, reflected patriotic themes. And Chicago always threw a fantastic welcome-home celebration for those returning home from serving their country. As World War II pressed on, work was hard and all over America, as here in the heartland, Chicago focused on lifting the mood of its people. There were many marching military bands, R.O.T.C. groups, and lots of flags everywhere.

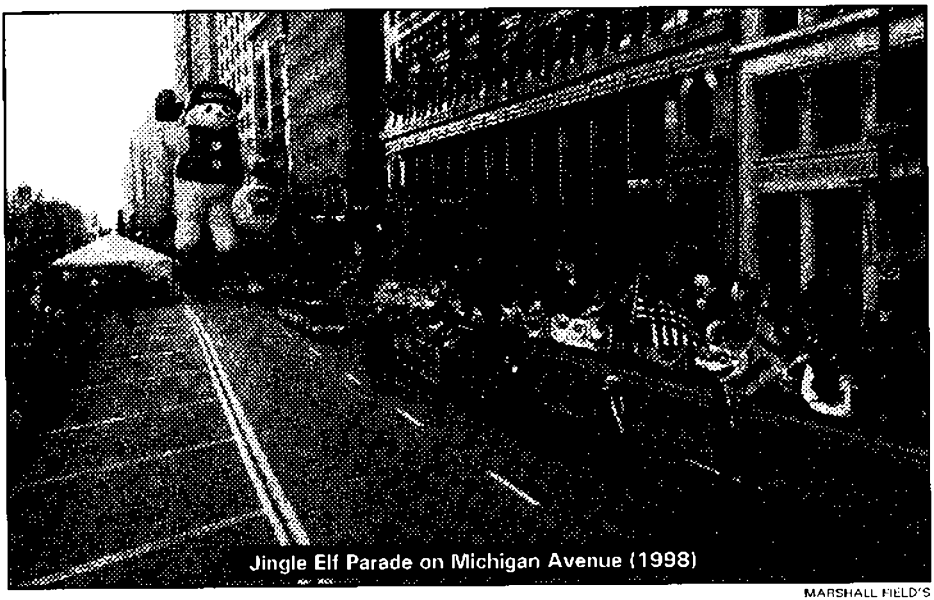
[After the war] the Christmas parades were getting more elaborate and with each passing year it was apparent that these parades were in fact a win-win place to be seen. Politicians began to take an unusual interest in being part of the activities.

In 1955 Governor William Stratton and Senator Everett Dirksen took time out of their busy schedules to crown the Star Queen in an elaborate ceremony prior to the annual parade.

The parades became so long and expensive to put on that in 1967 the State Street council said it could no longer keep up the expense to sponsor and organize the annual Christmas parades. Chicago's mayor at the time, Richard J. Daley, and his office appointed Col. Jack Reilly as the Director of the Mayor's Office of Special Events. Col. Reilly would now be responsible for working with the city merchants and sponsors to produce all of the future parades up through 1983.

For those 16 years... City Hall used its political connections to get more involvement from local teamsters and local companies. These parades featured local school marching bands, service leagues, firemen, policemen, drum and bugle corps, ethnic organizations, plumbing council, electrical workers, pipe fitters, printers' union, and car dealerships that provided beautiful convertible automobiles for the parades.

In 1975 State Street shoppers had the convenience of a free Santa Claus bus service. A north-south, east-west route oper-



Jingle Elf Parade on Michigan Avenue (1998)

MARSHALL FIELD'S

ated during the holiday season. The Salvation Army's brass band was always a traditional sight to see playing tunes on the corner of State and Madison.

State Street celebrated America's bicentennial in 1976 with a spectacular red, white and blue patriotic Christmas parade.

The 1978-79 Christmas parades became a real issue with the city planners. The tremendous problem was *where* to have the usual nine-block parade. In 1978 the street belonged to the bulldozers – State Street was going to become a "mall." The parade was moved over to Michigan Avenue until 1981, when it moved back to State Street. The Mayor at the time was Jane Byrne, who wanted something spectacular for the first Christmas parade on the mall.

On that morning she had Santas lined up from curb to curb, starting the parade, their hands filled with over 10,000 balloons, which they passed out to [some of] the estimated 500,000 parade watchers. She herself watched the parade go by from the largest reviewing stand ever erected at State and Madison.

In 1983 rumor had it that there might not be a parade that year. New Mayor Harold Washington and his administration determined that there was no money available in the budget for any holiday parade.

One of his campaign cornerstones was "to cut the fat on spending." However, since the parade was planned and the funds [had been placed] in trust by the previous administration, it was agreed a smaller parade could be held. So in 1983 a slimmed-down "static" parade was held on State Street even though it was the 50th anniversary of the very first Chicago Christmas parade.

On November 15, 1996 a very special new parade was put on by Marshall Field's. "The Marshall Field's Holidazzle Parade" celebrated the unveiling of the new and improved State Street. It was a spectacular fairy tale procession with 200,000 strings of brilliant lights on floats with story book and nursery rhyme characters. The mall was gone – State Street was ready that year for its reopening to traffic with new historically-inspired 1920s lamp posts.

In 1998 Marshall Field's took over the

sponsorship of the parade and established the "Field's Jingle Elf Parades." In 1999 Target joined Marshall Field's as the presenting sponsor and renamed the parade "Field's Jingle Elf Parade presented by Marshall Field's and Target." They moved the parade route back to State Street, from Congress up to Randolph. It is interesting to note that the 1999 parade was the first time since its beginning that the parade was actually on Thanksgiving Day. The 2002 parade was named "The Target Thanksgiving Parade."

No one can take full credit for the continuing success of Chicago and its annual Christmas parades. It is not an easy task to organize a parade, let alone a Christmas parade. Here in Chicago the weather is a big factor.

Putting on a parade takes an amazing amount of work and planning. Each large helium balloon on a parade float requires an average of between 3,500 and 6,000 cubic feet of gas to be fully inflated. One balloon usually takes about four months to be designed and made, for a price of as much as $60,000. A deflated balloon weighs about 120 pounds. It literally takes hundreds of dedicated volunteers and parade professionals to put on a successful parade.

I hope you enjoyed this small visit back to a much more innocent and simpler time... Though times continue to change, Chicagoans can still take pride in their great tradition of a Christmas parade, and be thankful for all the people who give their time and hard work to make each parade happen.

I hope you have enjoyed this march down parade routes past and I look forward to seeing you at an upcoming holiday parade. ■

Robert P. Ledermann will talk about his Christmas books on TWTD *November 13.*

Our Readers Write

WE GET MAIL

LAKE IN THE HILLS, IL– I have been a longtime listener of not only *Those Were The Days* programs, but also our gone-but-not-forgotten classical selections on WNIB as well as the present WFMT musical offerings. I also own a large collection of audiotapes along with a detailed database of musical gems. I remember quite well the melody for *One Man's Family* musical theme. I could even sing or whistle it at this moment. I must confess that I cannot equate that melody with the works of any of the classical composers. My sense of curiosity has gotten the best of me, to the extent I am writing this letter for your opinion on the subject. –**MALCOLM FISHER**

(ED. NOTE– The theme music used on *One Man's Family* from 1932-1941 was "Destiny Waltz" by Sidney Baynes. From 1941-1959, the theme used was "Patricia" by Paul Carson. Carson was the organist on the program from the beginning of the series through May 1951. You didn't ask, but the theme music used on Carlton E. Morse's other program, *I Love A Mystery,* was "Valse Triste" by Sibelius.)

TINLEY PARK, IL– I am 45 years old and have been listening since I was 13, when you were on 1590-AM [Evanston, Illinois]. You and Ken Alexander do an excellent job and you should be commended. But I think you made an error in not highlighting the number one band from 1943-45, which was Harry James. When he took over for Glenn Miller on the Chesterfield show, his career skyrocketed. Of course, marrying Betty Grable didn't hurt, but he was number one in record sales and in box office sales from his personal appearances.

–**GREG JOHNSON**

(ED. NOTE– When big band historian Karl Pearson and I did our "Big Bands in 1944" program (*TWTD,* May 29) we were concentrating on the most popular sounds of that year. Harry James will get his proper place in our Big Band spotlight when we do "Big Bands in 1945" next summer. Stay tuned and don't touch that dial!)

BLUE ISLAND, IL– I first started listening to

MORE MAIL

you in 1971 when I moved to the Chicago area with my family. When I came back from college I was delighted to hear you on classical radio station, WNIB. I remember listening to Ken Alexander on the old *Zephyr* program and through the years I have greatly enjoyed "Jack Benny Month." I greatly enjoyed Fred Allen's radio shows and my interest was piqued further when I read his book, "Much Ado About Me." I now use portions of it in teaching writing in my English classes. **–BRUCE R. WEAVER**

E-MAIL– I'd love it if you could also post a picture of Ken Alexander on your website. I enjoy listening to him as much as to Chuck and the shows themselves. I'm a fan from back when he was on the classical music station. **–DEBORAH KNIGHT**
(ED. NOTE– You'll find a nice photograph, along with a lengthy autobiography of Ken Alexander's radio career, when you visit www.nostalgiadigest.com

CHICAGO– The essay by Curtis L. Katz about space travel [Summer 2004] was great reading and IS the stuff that positive dreams are or can be based on. With a negative future ahead, we need all the moral encouragement we can muster, even if it does come from the archives.
–BRUCE W. AMIESMIER

CHICAGO– The Summer 2004 issue of the *Digest* has an excellent article by Matthew Hoffman on the Dick Tracy serials and he is dead on about the one he screened at the LaSalle Theatre [some time ago]. Everyone I talked to loved it. I was especially impressed that he contacted Ralph Byrd's widow and William Witney. Now where would a young lad like Matthew get the notion that such contacts would be important to his readers and perhaps to the history of popular entertainment?
–WILLIAM O'NEILL
(ED. NOTE– Mr. Hoffman is passionate about his subject, as are many of our *Digest* contributors, and seeks to learn as much as possible to share with our readers.)

BLOOMINGDALE, IL– When I was a kid, in the late '40s and early '50s, I listened to radio a lot. Our family didn't even have TV until 1953, and that was a seven-inch Hallicrafters. So I heard the last few years of the old-time radio era. I remember two kids' shows that I have never heard you mention. Maybe these were local to Chicago and never recorded. I don't

Malcolm Claire

remember which stations they were on. I used to sit in front of our big Stromberg-Carlson corner radio. I wish I still had that radio.

Happy Hank was on between 7 and 8 a.m., so we would hear him while getting ready for school. He had riddles and songs and contests. And stuff you could send for with box tops from Cream of Wheat. Every day there was a contest to see whether the girls or boys in the radio audience would be the first to get dressed. He had a special machine that would indicate how many boys and how many girls were dressed. A bell would ring and he would make the announcement. He played songs like "Would You Like to Swing on a Star" and "Three Little Fishes in an Itty Bitty Poo."

Uncle Mal had a story hour after school. When the story was about a train, he made the sound effect of a steam whistle (which was common in those days). One day he announced that he would appear at a local department store and demonstrate how to make that sound (you whistle and hum at the same time), so I got to meet him. **–KEN LUNDGREN**

(ED. NOTE– I remember listening to both programs. I was sure that Happy Hank used the "flickering green eye" on my Zenith radio dial to see us kids at home. Hank may have been played in the morning by Malcolm Claire, who was also *Uncle Mal* on the after-school program. Uncle Mal was Malcolm Claire, who used multiple voices and dialects on his show as well as on the *National Barn Dance* and on a program called *Sinclair Wiener Minstrels.* Incidentally, Joe Kelly, of the *National Barn Dance* and the *Quiz Kids* show, had a morning program for kids called *Jolly Joe,* sponsored by Coco-Malt. Unfortunately, I have never been able to find any copies of any of these shows, which were broadcast "live" every day and probably never recorded. But we can always hope.)

BRIDGEVIEW, IL– I have had many, many years of wonderful listening to those old time shows. They are all gems now and bring back the good old days we spent as youngsters.

You and your sidekick Ken Alexander are the best thing that happened to radio since the demise of the old-time radio format. The many other people who contribute to your broadcasts and with articles in *Nostalgia Digest* do a wonderful service in keeping so many of us old-timers perked up. We know every Saturday at 1 p.m. we can close our eyes, turn on our imagination button, and then be transported to another time and place. Now with your world-wide Internet exposure, a whole new and much younger audience is tuning in. Please keep going with your *Those Were The Days* show for many more years. Don't even *think* about retirement. **–DON C. WHITE**

CHICAGO– I've so enjoyed listening to *TWTD* for a lot of years and, more recently,reading *Nostalgia Digest.* I wish I had subscribed sooner because I love reading about old-time movie stars. I was a real movie fan. I keep looking for an article or any mention of the singer Dennis Morgan. he starred in the movie version of the musical *The Desert Song*, which I thought was about the most romantic movie ever made, at the time. I have been searching for years for a video copy of the movie or a recording but have had no luck. Is there any chance of there being an article about Dennis in the future? **–PEGGY ANN SPIETH**

(ED. NOTE– Dennis Morgan seems to be one of those "forgotten actors" who was much loved during his heyday. He was born in Wisconsin in 1908 and began his film career in 1936 using his real name, Stanley Morner. He changed that to Richard Stanley in 1938 and, in 1939, to Dennis Morgan, which became his

STILL MORE MAIL

permanent professional name.

Dennis Morgan's first big hit was in 1940 when he appeared opposite Ginger Rogers in *Kitty Foyle.* Because of the success of that film, he was kept very busy on the silver screen during the 1940s, appearing in such hits as *Captains of the Clouds, Wings of the Eagle, Thank Your Lucky Stars* and your favorite, *The Desert Song,* opposite Irene Manning. He went on to star in *Shine On, Harvest Moon; The Very Thought of You; God is My Co-Pilot; Christmas in Connecticut; My Wild Irish Rose* and co-starred with pal Jack Carson (also from Wisconsin) in a pair of well-received "buddy" comedies, *Two Guys from Milwaukee* and *Two Guys from Texas.*

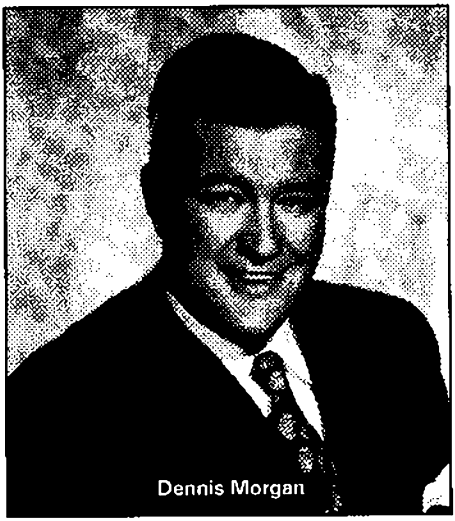
He mostly retired from movie-making in the 1950s, but did appear in a handful of films, usually in supporting roles, and on a number of TV shows, including *General Electric Theatre, Ford Theatre, Alfred Hitchcock Presents, Dick Powell Show* and *The Love Boat.*

He died in 1994 at the age of 85. Many of his films, but, alas, not *The Desert Song,* are available on video tape or DVD.

More information about the career and films of Dennis Morgan may be found on the Internet Movie Data Base, www.imdb.com

EDWARDSBURG, MICHIGAN– I've just started hearing your Saturday program on the Internet after many years not listening. You do a great job! Thanks for the hard work. **–DAVID ALLEN**

E-MAIL– I am a Major in the U.S. Army stationed in Afghanistan. I am lucky enough this evening [July 3, 2004] to be able to listen to *Those Were The Days* on-line. I have been listening to the show for years and enjoy it very much. It reminds me of the great sacrifice that the WW II generation made for freedom and liberty. Now that I am in a similar endeavor I marvel at the effort that the whole country made. I can't imagine how they did it, leaving home and not knowing when or IF they would come home. Our one-year rotation is difficult enough and we have computers, e-mail and


Dennis Morgan

phones. I salute that generation, the generation of the Golden Age of Radio, the generation of patriots. Happy Independence Day. **–WILLIAM A. LaFLEUR, MAJ, SC**

(ED. NOTE– You, too, are part of a great generation of Americans who have taken time out of their lives to defend the freedom of the U.S.A. And your generation is not – will not be – forgotten. Be assured of that. Best wishes for a safe tour of duty and a speedy return home. God bless you and God bless America.)

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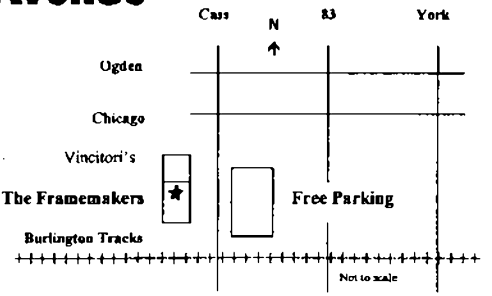

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← KATE SMITH
was the First Lady of Radio. Richard K. Hayes writes about her broadcast career in an article on page 39.

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