

*The Old Time Radio Club*

Established 1975

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Number 237

June 1996

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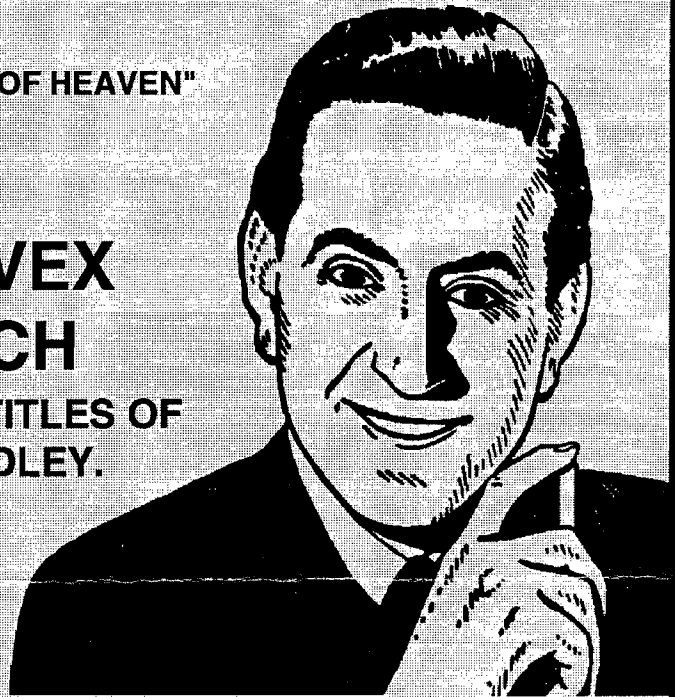
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narrated by David Ross and featuring

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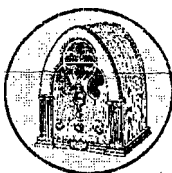
[1950]

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New member processing, \$5 plus club membership of \$15 per year from January 1 to December 31. Members receive a tape library listing, reference library listing, and a monthly newsletter. Memberships are as follows: If you join January-March, \$15; April-June, \$12; July-September, \$8; October-December, \$5. All renewals should be sent in as soon as possible to avoid missing issues. Please be sure to notify us if you have a change of address. The *Old Time Radio Club* meets the first Monday of every month at 7:30 PM during the months of September to June at 393 George Urban Blvd., Cheektowaga, NY 14225. The club meets informally during the months of July and August at the same address. Anyone interested in the Golden Age of Radio is welcome. The *Old Time Radio Club* is affiliated with The Old Time Radio Network.

**Club Mailing Address**

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## GEORGE BURNS, The Legendary Comedian

by Dom Parisi

George Burns said he was going to live to be 100 and that he was looking forward to a two week booking at London's Palladium. He reached the 100 mark, but a fall in his bathtub in 1994 forced Mr. Burns to cancel the London date.

Burns passed away on Saturday, March 9, 1996 in his Beverly Hills home. His son, a nurse and a housekeeper were with him at the end. Ailing with a bout of the flu, and a heart condition, Burns couldn't even attend a party in his honor a few days before his 100th birthday.

George Burns, the ninth of 12 children, was born in 1896 on the lower east side of Manhattan. Nathan Birnbaum (his birth name) learned very early in life to fend for himself. He once said that "there were only two ways to make enough money to be able to move uptown and wear spats: become a gangster or entertainer. And both of them were considered equally respectable."

"I got into show business when I was 7 years old, when I used to work for a candy store," he said in a 1991 interview. For some 90 years Burns had the whole world laughing at his humor on the vaudeville stage, radio and later television. Again in his 1991 interview, Burns went on to say: "three kids and myself made syrup downstairs in the cellar (of the store); we had chocolate, vanilla, strawberry, and all the flavors. And on the lower east side there was a letter carrier, and he loved to sing harmony. One day he happened to come down to the cellar, and he saw us small kids and taught us how to sing harmony. So we sang — we sang pretty good. And one day when we were singing, I looked upstairs from the cellar, and saw about six or seven people standing up there, just listening. And then they threw down a couple of pennies. And I said boys, lets get out of the chocolate business."

That was the start of George Burns' mighty career. He did all kinds of acts — a skating act, he worked with a seal, he worked with a dog, a couple of sisters; he did anything that was available so that he could stay in show business.

Burns claimed that he didn't really become a bona fide pro until the 1920s, when he met Gracie Allen. He told her to quit secretarial school and join his act. She did and the rest is history. The audience loved her. Early in their careers George did the punch lines, Gracie did the

straight stuff. Audience response toward Gracie persuaded Burns to reverse the formula.

Their first radio show broadcast in a regular format was over CBS on February 15, 1932. They were regulars on the Guy Lombardo Show and were on the air for the next seventeen to eighteen years. They had many different sponsors: White Owl Cigars, Campbell's Soups, Grape Nuts, Hinds Cream, Hormell Packing and Lever Brothers. George and Gracie ended up on NBC for Maxwell House Coffee; and a final jump to CBS in 1949-1950, their last full season on radio. In October 1950 George Burns and Gracie Allen moved to television.

Gracie died in 1964 and Burns started to lean toward retirement. Then at 78 years of age he won an Oscar for his performance in "The Sunshine Boys." which goes to show that you can't hold back a gifted man.

I don't know if this is true or not, but I read in the newspapers that even in death George gave his wife top billing. It's reported that his burial vault is below Gracie's. That would be Burns' style. A gentleman to the end, George Burns, the comedy legend is no more. Who knows, maybe he's got St. Peter rolling around the clouds in stitches!

(Note: Special thanks to the Buffalo News for material quoted in this article.)

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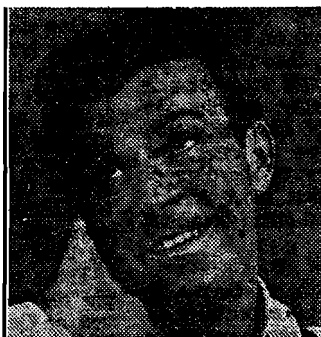
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- 2267 Sherlock Holmes - The Stockbroker's Clerk
- Sherlock Holmes - The Norwood Builder
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Boston Blackie - Charity Gambling Racket

## DENNIS DAY

9:30 Tonight

Tonight Dennis Day discovers that the big demand on television is for wrestlers, not singers! And, as you might guess, he ends up in a wrestling promoter's office. Then the fun really begins! Hear the amusing Dennis Day show tonight at 9:30 on WHAM!



## THAT'S MY BOY!

By Mrs. Patrick McNulty

*Dennis Day, according to his mother, played tricks, brought home stray pets, just like anyone else's son. Not unlike other little boys, he sang — in a voice so big the family begged him to take it down cellar!*

Somebody's always asking me — and why not? — How does it feel to be the mother of a famous singer.

Well, I'll tell you — I don't know. Somehow, in spite of the radio and movies and all, I can't get to think of Dennis as anything but my son, my youngest. I can't think of him any way but as the kid who was always bringing home a stray animal to take care of — an eel it was, once, of all things — or the boy who sang so loud the whole family used to beg him to go down cellar!

Even when it comes to his singing, I don't think of his name up in big letters, or hearing some announcer introduce him like he's somebody — which he is, mind you, and you can't take that away from him! But I think back to the day when he earned his first money singing, and how I worried about him.

Dennis had it in his mind those days, to be a lawyer. Singing was a hobby with him, as it was with the whole family. He'd been going to enter Fordham, this time I'm talking about, as soon as fall came. But Meantime he'd got sick and had to have an operation, and he didn't get well as soon as we'd thought. All in all, by that time he'd missed the fall semester and we talked him into waiting until the next year, and getting his strength back meanwhile.

So there he was, with a lot of time on his hands, that was when he began to fool around with recording machines. He used to go downtown — to Broadway, in New York, where we lived then — and make records of songs he'd learned. Just to pass away the hours that were hanging heavy on his hands, now he felt better.

And one day, when he was singing in a little back room, it so happened that some executives from a big Canadian corporation heard him and asked him to sell the record he had just made. "Jeannie With The Light Brown Hair," it was. They gave him seventy-five dollars for it — imagine!

That was a day, to be sure! Coming home, Dennis started yelling at the corner. Yelling and waving. Waving

that fistful of dollars, and yelling that he'd sold a record of his singing. Well, what could we all think but that Dennis was up to his old foolery again? Sell his singing, the boy we'd always say to, "Please, Dennis, go to the cellar!" and he would, for his voice was too big for the house.

But finally the young rascal made us understand that actually he'd been paid to sing. For a moment when I saw that bunch of money he had clutched in his hand, my heart turned over. Panic, like. You know how mothers are.

"Son," I began in a worried voice "you didn't — well, that money — it is all right, isn't it?"

"Oh, you darlin'," cried Dennis, wrapping me in a bear hug. "I didn't steal it, beg it, or borrow it. I earned it, Mama. For singin'!"

My, you'd have thought he'd got a million dollars, such a fuss he raised about it. Patrick, his father, was as full of disbelief as I was. In amazement he said, "they give the lad money for singing? My, what a wonderful country this is — when I sang back in Ireland, they just threw water at me!"

Everyone was crowding around by that time, and laughing and talking all at once. But suddenly I felt a sense of peace in the midst of all the excitement. I felt that maybe this was the thing Dennis was meant for. Music. Not that he was unhappy, mind you, about going to law school. But it never lit up his face the way this did.

I didn't say much though. I let the boy pick his own way. And sure enough, one day a while later he came home and said, "Ed Herlihy, down at the radio station, says I should maybe get serious about my singing." He paused. "But I don't know for sure, Mama. I think I'd like it. But you, now — would you rather have me a lawyer?"

"Dennis, dear," I told him then, "I want you to be anything and everything you want to be" so — singin' it was.

I can tell you the furthestest thing from my mind, when I set out for America all those years ago, was the thought that I would someday become the mother of a famous singer.

I was just plain Mary Grady then. I can remember as clear as if it were yesterday the day I landed in Boston with a brogue as thick as the grass of Carracastle. It makes me laugh to think back on what a wide-eyed

young greenhorn I was. Not so green, however, that I didn't have my wits about me when I first got a glimpse of one Patrick McNulty! I met him while I was visiting some friends in New York. We got married in the spring of 1911. It was a real old-fashioned Irish wedding with all the trimmings. Singing and dancing. And me with my beloved accordion. I suppose it's a bit strange, a girl playing such a thing at her own wedding but we've always been such music lovers in our family. My own mother had a beautiful voice, and it's probably from her Dennis inherited his talent for singing.

Even as a tiny lad, still in his crib, there was nothing that made Dennis so happy as to have me sit by and sing to him. He was a wonderful baby.

Dennis had a special sense about animals and things. A stray turtle could spot him for a handout from six blocks away. He brought home pigeons, dogs, cats — everything you could think of.

About the only other thing that absorbed Dennis as much as his menagerie was music and musical goings-on. We used to have a lot of fun in those days putting on family shows. And by family, I also mean the neighbors' children, too. Sometimes on week-ends there'd be as many as twenty-five young ones scrambling around our house.

What a great time we used to have! We had miniature vaudeville right in our living room. Sometimes we'd persuade Dennis and his sister Marie to put on an act for a church social or a benefit. It wasn't as easy as you think. Dennis didn't mind putting on a show in the house, but to make a public appearance — ah, that was an Irishman of another color. I remember a couple of times when I literally had to push him out onto the stage.

One time I had to promise him a corduroy suit that he'd been wanting. Although usually a soda or a candy bar would be bribe enough. Oh, that corduroy suit

One day early in September, when Dennis was only five, I had shipped off the two older children to their first day of school. Then — I look around and no Dennis. And no corduroy suit. After two hours I really began to get uneasy. I was about to phone Patrick when up the walk as nonchalant as you please comes Dennis in his suit, flanked on both sides by Marie and John.

"Dennis followed us to school," James explained solemnly. "And they got his name in a book in the office. We just brought him home for lunch." "You mean Dennis registered for school?" I asked incredulously. James

said that was so. But after lunch Dennis didn't want to go back. Three weeks later a truant officer showed up. It took some explaining to convince the man that Dennis had been premature in his school registration.

It was when he was seventeen that Dennis went to Ireland, to see the country and my mother and father whom he had never set eyes on before. He loved them. My mother, having such a fine voice and all, was so delighted that Dennis liked to sing. And my father loved the humor of the boy.

Of course Dennis always did have the knack for mimicry. No one escaped it. Sometimes I'd think I'd hear the milkman, rush out with the money, and there would be Dennis having his joke.

Then there was the time he sold that record of "Jeannie With The Light Brown Hair." The beginning of the beginning it was, for about this time Jack Benny was looking for a replacement for Kenny Baker. Just for the dickens of it, Dennis sent Mary Livingstone a recording of "Jeannie With The Light Brown Hair." The minute she heard it, she felt the voice was exactly what they were looking for. She and Jack were coming to New York in a few weeks and she wrote New York and she wrote Dennis that they wanted him to do an audition for them. The audition was a success — and the next thing I know, I'm packing his bags for California.

When he first took me to meet Jack and Mary, I was trembling, so I thought my knees were made of molasses. But they soon scattered my fears away and were talking as though we had always known each other. After we were sure it was a permanent job for Dennis, I went east and collected the rest of the family.

None of us have fallen into the ways of Hollywood glamour. We like to live as we always have — simply and together. We couldn't find a house big enough for our clan, so we bought a small apartment building.

I have one tiny confession to make. And that is, I did have a hand in Dennis' marriage to Peggy Ahlmquist. I introduced them to each other. After that it was up to them. I think I knew what to expect when I saw Dennis' face light up when he was with her. The way it lit up the day he decided to make music his career instead of law. I was delighted when Dennis finally told me he was going to marry Peggy. She's the kind of girl you can't help loving.

And now, as you know, Peggy and Dennis are the parents of a third Patrick McNulty. (That's Dennis' real name, though of course everybody thinks of him as

Dennis Day.) An enchanting little fellow he is. Got a voice, too. Not much melody yet, but loud. We'll probably be sending him into the cellar to practice like his father used to. In fact Dennis has already mentioned such a possibility. "It was good enough for me," Dennis says, "and I want my son to have all the advantages I had."

In a way I think Dennis was serious when he said that. About the advantages, I mean. The advantage of being in a home with lots of love. That's one thing we never took away from our children. No matter what mischief they got into, what problems they created, they knew we loved them and wanted them. And they, in turn, gave us their love and confidence. That's our success. We're happy.

(Reprinted from Radio and Television Mirror - February, 1950)

## Member's Mike



Dear Dom,

Just a short comment on your science fiction series. I enjoyed both parts of your article, but your mention of *Flash Gordon* in Part 2 brought back a few memories. As a young boy growing up in the 1930s I spent most of my time outdoors playing, but I did manage to hear some radio programs, and *Flash Gordon* was one of them. Even in those days I had trouble keeping *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers* apart. They seemed almost interchangeable in the comics and on the radio. Is that true if you listen to the shows today, or is it just my faulty memory at this late date?

Incidentally, there is a little more information available on the *Flash Gordon* Show. Radio Soundtracks: A Reference Guide, 1986 and Handbook of Old Time Radio, 1993 both have more detailed entries on the show. And, of course, Jay Hickerson's Ultimate Guide also mentions it and says at least 30 shows are available. I have at least 5 shows if you would like to hear what it sounds like.

Thanks again for the informative article(s), and hope to see more from you soon.

All the best,  
Jack L. Palmer

## RADIO MEMORIES

by Francis Edward Bork

Henry, Henry Aldrich. Remember the most famous call opening one of radio's best remembered juvenile programs? And who could ever forget Henry's reply via Ezra Stone, coming mother. *The Aldrich Family* still is one of the best remembered of all radio comedies. Because it had an unforgettable format, which kept the audience in stitches wondering just what Henry and his friend Homer Brown were going to do next. In sheer nostalgia the opening of "*The Aldrich Family*" ranks with *The Shadow's* laugh and *Inner Sanctum's* rusty creaking door. For fourteen years the show was broadcast weekly into the homes of an estimated 20 million families, all eagerly listening for Henry's frustrated mother call "Hen-ree, Henry Aldrich." Our ticket to an evening of unforgettable entertainment was the crackling voice of the adolescence Henry answering coming mother.

Henry was created by Clifford Goldsmith, a rags-to-riches playwright who had tried to break into show business several ways without success until "Henry" appeared. He created *The Aldrich Family* for a play "*What a Life*" and hit upon a formula that would adapt to radio, become a popular movie and then finally move to the boob tube as one of the pioneering shows and later a series on TV.

Goldsmith was virtually penniless and making his living on the high school lecture circuit when he wrote the play. Developed from material Goldsmith had collected on his lecture tours, the plot was set entirely in the office of Henry's high school principal. In 1938 it came to the attention of radio personality Rudy Vallee, who asked Goldsmith to write a skit for his radio program using all his characters from the play about *The Aldrich Family* and of course bring along the play's original cast to play the parts they portrayed on Broadway. Ted Collins' assistant heard one of the skits played on *The Rudy Vallee Show* and signed *The Aldrich Family* for 40 weeks on *The Kate Smith Show*. Later that year when Jack Benny took his summer vacation *The Aldrich Family* became Jack's summer replacement broadcasting on Sunday nights from the NBC studio, it premiered on the second of July 1939. Late that fall the Jell-O Company bought the rights to *The Aldrich Family* now it became a regular once a week radio program, earning Goldsmith, now one of the highest paid radio writers, more than \$3,000 a week. With Jell-O as the new sponsor and now broadcast from the Blue Network *The Aldrich Family* was placed on a new day, Tuesday, until 1940

when it went to Thursday evening back with the NBC Network once again. Ezra Stone and Jackie Kelk sang the Jell-O commercial in their adolescence voices which became almost as popular as Henry's famous crackling reply to his mothers call — Com-ming mother. And now *The Aldrich Family* — the opening would bring on Henry and Homer Singing — oh, the big red letters stand for the Jell-O Family, oh, the big red letters stand for the Jell-O Family, that's J-E-L-L-O yum, yum, yum Jell-O's pudding yum, yum, yum Jell-O tap-i-o-ca pudding, yes sir-ree.

And now *The Aldrich Family*. What was heard next was sheer lunacy pure and simple, even by today's sometimes strange standard. Using the trials and tribulations of adolescence youth of that (some people call it the greatest of times to be young,) day, Goldsmith would embellish each incident, using it as a starting point then he would snowball with complications which now seem just a little ridiculous. As you listened to the shows the generation gap was there, (no big deal like today's "TV sitcoms," with the children openly defiant to their parents and any form of authority) with situations involving teenage love, or maybe like the time Henry lost his pants and (golly-jeepers) just gotta find them. Sometimes as simple as going to the store for his mother could be made into a minor disaster by Henry Aldrich. When the show began with Henry having a problem on the family telephone, well before the half hour show was over you knew that Henry would have every telephone in town tied up with his mixed-up information from the Malt Shop to the Emporium.

Somewhere during all these years from 1937 when *The Aldrich Family* first appeared on Broadway, until the radio show closed in 1953, Henry must have found that "Magic Chocolate Malt" that has kept him a 16 year old these many years.

*The Aldrich Family* began its regular radio run on October 17, 1939 with Ezra Stone as the forever young Henry Aldrich, House Jameson as the father-lawyer, Sam Aldrich, Katherine Raht as Henry's ever patient mother Alice Aldrich and Ann Lincoln as his sister Mary.

The part of Henry was originated by Ezra Stone on the New York Stage, which he played to perfection on radio as well as the stage.

One sad note came for Ezra when Jimmy Lydon was selected to play the part of Henry in all *The Aldrich Family* movies for he had expected he would naturally be chosen to play Henry. After all wasn't he Henry on the radio, who else could possibly be Henry? On radio

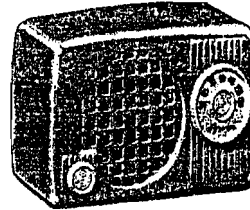
Jackie Kelk played Homer Brown, Henry's partner in mischief. House Jameson remained as Mr. Aldrich while Katherine Raht was replaced by Regina Wallace and Mary Shipp took over as Mary, Henry's meddlesome sister and also as his girlfriend Kathleen. These were the most remembered players for *The Aldrich Family Show* which had one of the highest cast turn-overs on radio with the exception of Jackie Kelk, who remained with the show for most of its run. By the year 1943 there wasn't one of the original cast left, for every part in the show was recast several times. The radio magazine "Tune In" reported that the show had gone through five fathers, four mothers, at least half a dozen Mary's and two Henry's. Ezra Stone had joined the traveling *Army Variety Show* in June of 1942 and was on a tour of U.S. Army Camps. Norman Tokar, Ezra's under-study replaced him, but proved to be short lived for Tokar was called to active duty with the Army Signal Corps a month after he took over for Ezra. His loss to the show at the end of the 1942 season sent talent scouts out on a frantic search for yet another cast member, Henry. It was reported at the time that over 700 young actors were tested for the part of Henry. A young 16 year old actor who first appeared before the microphone at age 5 won the part. Dickie Jones had an impressive number of screen credits two of them were *Stella Dallas* and *Renfrew Of The Mounties*, while his biggest part was the voice of the Puppet Pinocchio in the Walt Disney full feature movie. By July 1945 all three of the Henry Aldrich's were in the Army. A young lad by the name of Raymond Ives became the fourth Henry Aldrich, but alas his part on the show was also short lived, because Stone came back from the Army in October of 1945 to resume playing the part of Henry Aldrich the eternal teenager.

*The Aldrich Family Show* closed in 1953, indeed a sad day for all of us perpetual minded teenagers. Stone launched into a new career that as a TV director.

As a frequent guest at the old time radio convention even into his middle age he could still get his voice on demand to that high pitch Henry's croak . . . com-ming mother.

Thursday, March 3, 1994 was a sad day for all of Henry's fans, those of us who grew up with him, but it's a day I think we will all remember for (Ezra Chaim Feinstone), Ezra Stone (Henry Aldrich), died in an automobile accident. Yes Ezra's gone but he shall never be really forgotten, just pop a cassette in your stereo unit and listen, Hen-ree, Henry Aldrich — coming mother. Just sit back and enjoy another half hour of Henry and his pals.

Well that's it for now,  
Till next time.  
Happy Radio Memories



## SAME TIME, SAME STATION

by Jim Cox

### JUST PLAIN BILL

"A 15 minute giant of the air" was radio historiographer John Dunning's take on the barber of Hartville's series, *Just Plain Bill*. And analyst Robert LaGuardia labeled it "the first smash hit network soap". If he erred, he didn't do it by much.

Bill's epigraph over a lively harmonica and guitar rendition of "Polly Wolly Doodle" by gifted instrumentalist Hal Brown said it all: "For his millions of radio friends we now present *Just Plain Bill*, barber of Hartville, the real-life story of a man who might be your own next door neighbor . . . and of people just like people we all know."

Barbers commonly cut hair and speak of sports and politics with their customers. But Bill Davidson seldom dropped by the barber shop — his services were more often needed mending broken relationships and quelling town gossips on his easy days; rescuing trapped citizens from burning buildings and solving forgeries and other crimes like murder on his worst days.

In Bill's case, there could be no rest; his practical philosophy gave him license to delve into others' problems and discover solutions when all seemed hopeless to everybody else. Writing in *Variety*, one critic described him as "calm and quiet and gentle and sympathetic and tolerant and understanding and kind, but still firm and strong and wise." With all of those traits in his arsenal, is it any wonder Bill Davidson found so many people who needed his help in running their lives?

Some astute observers of the genre have intimated that Bill and Ma Perkins ran their respective towns of Hartville and Rushville Center similarly — dosing out homespun advice based on strong moral and ethical convictions. Ma, for one, was accused of being "Bill Davidson in skirts." And Bill was labeled a "male Ma Perkins." Their theories were so alike, in fact — and their actions so predictable — that either could have conquered the dilemmas facing the other.

A widower, Bill had a daughter, Nancy, who early on was courted and won by Kerry Donovan. Later, they had a son, Wiki. A great deal of Bill's domestic pursuits involved the Donovan clan, who needed straightening out about as much as anybody in radio. Sparing the little family from those who would snare and lead them astray was all in a days work for Bill. Family came first; he could cut hair some other day. Dialoging with Bill between crises was his pal Elmer Eeps, proprietor of the Hartville general store, with whom he often mused over current events.



There can be no mistaking that the roots of soap opera were nestled in the climate in which Bill was formed — from which it would draw an almost obsessive following. Recall the events that led up to its debut: Anne Ashenhurst had joined the Chicago advertising firm of Blackett-Sample-Hummert, pursuing radio drama with one of the firm's principals, Frank Hummert. (She also pursued Hummert and soon took him to the altar, but that is another story.)

Not long after, a young newspaper reporter, Charles Robert Douglas Hardy Andrews (one person), who wrote serialized fiction extensively, came to Hummert's attention. Hummert and Ms. Ashenhurst were trying to create a successful radio formula on behalf of the makers of cleansers, soaps and like wares that would especially appeal to milady.

Andrews (whose early successes with Blackett-Sample-Hummert would include *The Stolen Husband*; *Betty And Bob*; *Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy*; and *Judy and Jane*) was given the task of developing a program with a homespun flavor for Chicago station WMAQ. In his youth, he recalled a small town haircutter who was seen as both friendly and inquisitive. This would be the central character of the new drama. Andrews wanted to call the show "Bill the Barber." But Ms. Ashenhurst overruled — "*Just Plain Bill*," she intoned.

Bill began as a nighttime series, debuting on CBS Sept. 19, 1932 at 6:45 p.m. for Kolynos toothpaste. So great was its following from the start that the Hummerts soon brought it to the sunshine. On Oct. 16, 1933 they added a daytime version of the popular nighttime story. Two years later, Bill became the exclusive property of the daytime audience, remaining for two decades. First it was a morning feature (CBS, 11:45 a.m., 1935-36; NBC, 10:30 a.m. 1936-40); moved to mid-afternoon on the NBC Blue (future ABC) network at 3:45 p.m., 1940-42; and finally settled at NBC in late afternoon — 5:30 p.m., 1951-55. For most of its run Bill maintained a high rating, gaining its largest daytime audience in the late forties.

Tapped to portray the soft-spoken, gentle, good-natured Davidson was veteran stage actor Arthur Hughes. He not only sounded like the homespun philosopher but looked like him. When he appeared for 10 days in the early thirties as Davidson at New York's Roxy Theater, 175,000 reportedly paid a dime and a boxtop to attend. So convincing was he in his radio role, and so devoted were his followers, that Hughes received thousands of written requests over the years for his advice in solving listeners' personal crises.

Born in 1893 in Illinois, Hughes entered radio in the late twenties. While clearly identified with the part of Davidson, he was one of three actors to play the title role of *Mr. Keen, Tracer Of Lost Persons*. He often appeared on *Jungle Jim*, was a jewel thief on *The Orange Lantern* (1932-33, Bill's first season) and played supporting roles on many other dramatic series. The greatly respected actor died in 1982.

Until 1950, when she was overcome by illness and had to relinquish her part to actress Toni Darnay, Ruth Russell played Nancy Davidson Donovan. Ms. Russell was also one of the children on CBS' *The American School of the Air*. Ms. Darnay had played the lead in *The Strange Romance of Evelyn*

*Winters* (1944-48, 51-52) and the lead part of Nona Dutrell in the ill-fated *Nona from Nowhere* which appeared briefly on CBS in 1950.

Meanwhile, the longest-running Kerry Donovan was busy radio actor James Meighan. His popularity and versatility allowed him to simultaneously play the part of Larry Noble, *Backstage Wife's* jealous husband, a trait he often displayed on *Just Plain Bill*. (astute observer John Dunning characterized Donovan as "a jealous moody highbrow.") Meighan was also the male lead in *Lora Lawton*, played title roles on *The Falcon* and *Flash Gordon* and the leads or supporting roles in many lesser series, particularly in the thirties.

The voice of Donovan's son Wiki, was supplied by two women, Madeline Pierce and Sarah Russell. And Joe Latham played Bill's chum Elmer Eeps.

Other members of *Just Plain Bill's* cast included radio luminaries Bill Quinn, Bill Lytell, Charles Egleston, Anne Elstner, MacDonald Carey, Clayton 'Bud' Collyer, Teri Keane and Helen Walpole.

In 23 years, nearly everybody announced it — Andre Baruch, Ed Herlihy, Roger Krupp, Fielden Farrington, Tom Shirley, Hugh James, Don Pardo, and John Cornell. Farrington, who also announced for the same sponsor's products on *The Romance of Helen Trent* (Aerowax, Anacin, BiSolDol Mints, Black Flag Insect Spray, Freezone Corn Remover, Heet Liniment), probably was the longest-running narrator. Interestingly, this first soap opera with staying power was never sponsored by a soap manufacturer. For most of the run bills were paid by American Home Products, Whitehall Pharmacal Company and Miles Laboratories.

For a decade, Bill was a Hummerts/Andrews collaboration. Other writers were David Davidson, Jack Kelsey, Peggy Blake, Evelyn Hart and Barbara Bates.

The versatile Hal Brown, who played the harmonica and guitar on "Polly Wolly Doodle," plucked out a different tune — "My Darlin' Nellie Gray" — before final commercials in later years (earlier, this was the opening theme). It was unique by any standard, for almost all other serials relied on the organ and a single familiar theme.

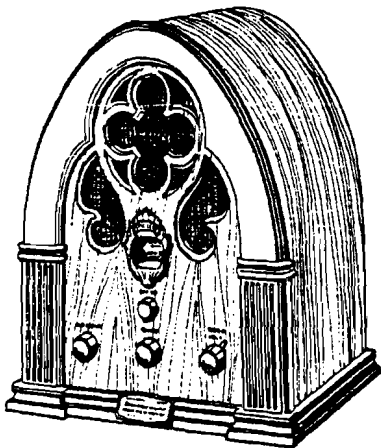
Why did *Just Plain Bill* leave the air? In the fall of 1955, NBC began to eliminate some of its oldest and most successful serials to allow for a 5-hour Monday-through-Friday magazine series to be called *Weekday*. It was based on NBC's early success with *Monitor*, a weekend magazine that had begun that summer. By the time the network had reinvented its daytime schedule, listeners, embarrassingly, were turning their radios off in great numbers, and the experiment failed miserably. The long-running success *Just Plain Bill* and its counterparts had brought to network radio quickly evaporated — never to return.

But for millions, while it lasted, Bill Davidson made us think "of people just like people we all know." And in that process, many found affirmation about their own circumstances.

*Gone . . . But Not Forgotten*



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