

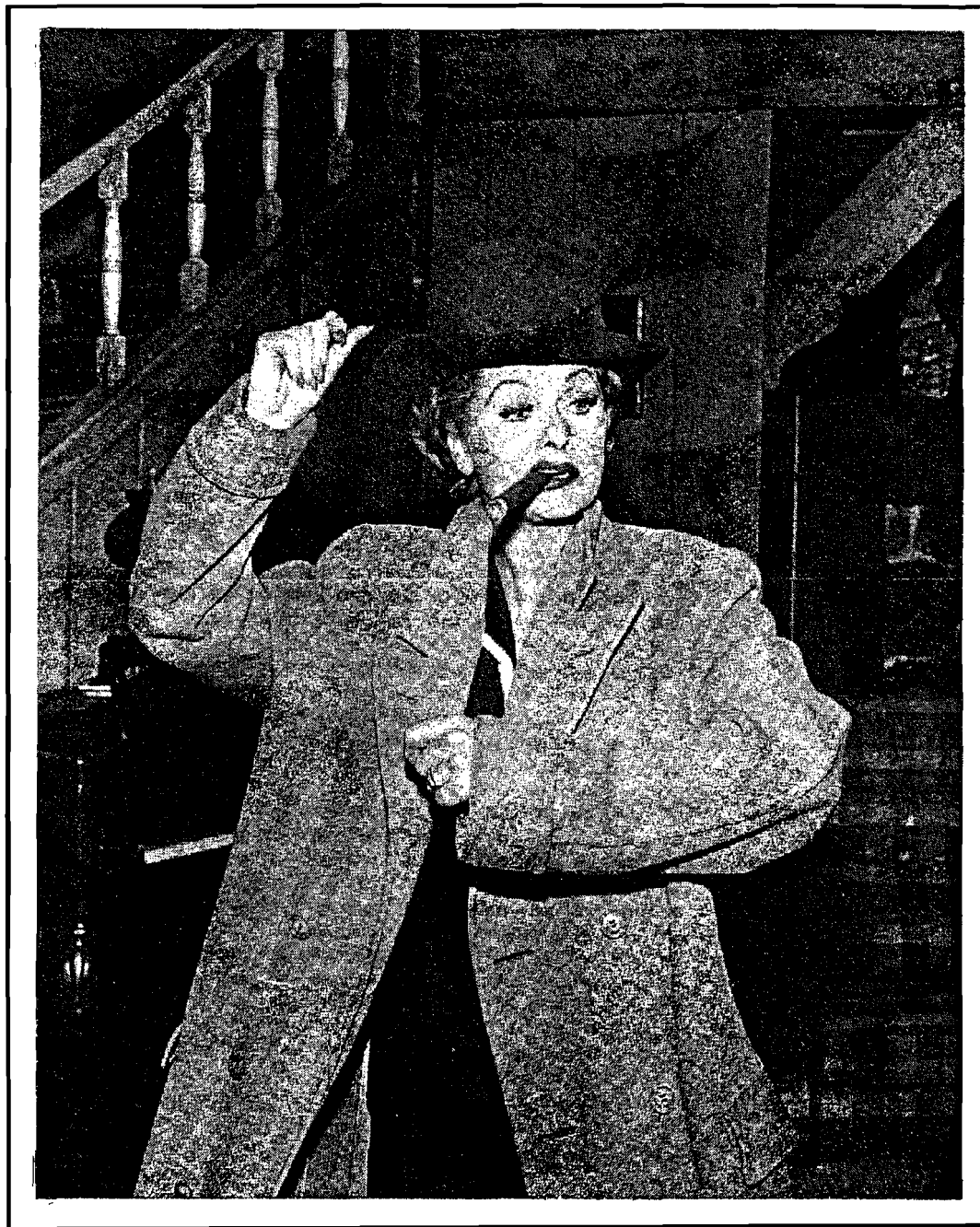
*The Old Time Radio Club*

Established 1975

# THE ILLUSTRATED PRESS

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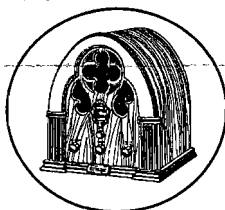
**LUCILLE BALL** in *"My Favorite Husband"*

**Membership Information**

New member processing, \$5 plus club membership of \$17.50 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, \$17.50; April-June, \$14; July-September, \$10; October-December, \$7. 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**

Old Time Radio Club  
56 Christen Ct.  
Lancaster, NY 14086



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# **MURDER IS MY BUSINESS**

by MAURICE ZIMM

The man in the coroner's office glared at me! "What gave you the idea we freeze bodies?" he demanded. "That isn't exactly what I meant," I said hastily. "You see—."

But it wasn't easy to explain! It never is! People give you that strange look when you tell them that you're trying to figure out an interesting way of committing murder. As a radio mystery writer, murder has become my business. I lie awake nights devising new ways of committing the "almost-perfect" crime. The children wouldn't even look up from their cereal were I to exclaim to my wife at breakfast: "How would it be to kill a man in the private office of J. Edgar Hoover?" Friends are always dropping in to announce: "Say, I've hit on a marvelous way of killing somebody!"

Yes, murder is my business—and business is phenomenal! The demand for escapist entertainment is so insatiable that the airplanes are literally cluttered up with criminologists hot on the trail of that elusive clue which will trap the killer just in time for the final commercial. But it isn't so much the number of mystery series on the air as the fact that each program is broadcast *weekly*—at least thirty-nine, and often as not fifty-two weeks a year. And each broadcast is generally a complete "adventure" in itself! Consider the number of plots and counter-plots—of murders, motives, red-herrings and assorted clues—that this involves; and you'll begin to appreciate why the radio mystery writer is soon driven to phenobarbitol!

After all, A. Conan Doyle was so exhausted with Sherlock Holmes after twenty-five stories that he tried vainly to get rid of him over a cliff. And for all of Gilbert K. Chesterton's fabulous ingenuity, Father Brown had in toto but fifty adventures. Yet any run-of-the-mill radio hawkshaw can number his dramatic exploits in the hundreds!

So the next time you're able to pick out the murderer before the first act is over, or recognize a clue that was used on another series just the week before, please don't write to the sponsor. The poor scripter is probably having enough trouble just crying to make the next deadline. And make it he must! You have never yet tuned in your radio to hear, "Ladies and gentlemen, we regret that 'The Adventures of .....' will not be broad-

cast tonight, due to the fact that the author couldn't think of a plot!"

Granted, there have been cases where the scripter staggered into the studio clutching the last few scenes when the show was already in rehearsal. But when the tense moment comes for the producer in the control room to throw the opening cue, there's always a show to go on—and whether or not you're satisfied with the quality, you get the twenty-nine minutes and thirty seconds of quantity.

Like many another radio mystery writer, I never know from one week to another where my next plot is coming from. I have committed fictional murder in bathtubs and at bridge tables . . . in airplanes and amphitheatres . . . in subways and submarines . . . at New York's 42nd and Broadway, and in the most inaccessible recesses of the Himalayas. Each time I'm desperately certain that I have wrung the last possible murder situation out of my reeling brain, but somehow there's always another—and another—and another. Often the advertising agency which handles the account will offer suggestions. Like the other day when a story editor called and said, "The Old Man thinks it would be cute to find a body in a freezer—with the plot hinging on the fact that the freezing made it impossible to fix the time of death." "But," I remonstrated, "that might be awfully tough to figure out." "Yeah," came the callous reply. "I'll expect it by the end of the week."

So you drop the phone—and whatever you're doing—and rush for the library. You look up everything under "freezing," "refrigeration," and "Arctic," but all you achieve is mental confusion. Apparently, no one has ever anticipated your particular problem, or at least never bothered to write about it. Once again, research has let you down!

Next begins a tour of refrigeration plants, cold storage vaults, ice houses and kindred establishments. In some places you pose as a prospective buyer; in others, you frankly state your predicament. By the end of the day you have collected a cold, some embarrassing rebuffs, and a few—a very few—helpful facts.

Having tentatively decided how you're going to bring your victim to his frigid end, you stare out next morning on the next phase of your problem: the brilliant deduction by which your criminologist is going to solve the case. So you call up all the doctors you know! Most of them try to be tolerant and understanding. They'd be glad to help you—if you'd call back, say, in a week! You reply that you'll call back in a week, all right—about something else! But right now would they please take half-a-minute to tell you how fast hair grows after death?

Now the real trouble begins! Some of the medicos say that hair does *not* grow after death. They don't give a pink pill if you did hear it on a radio program with a high Crossley just last week; neither are they impressed by the number of books and magazines you've read it in. It's nothing more than a fable!

But mind you, only *some* of your doctor friends say that—not all. A few accept the growth of hair after death as a fact! One eminent urologist is willing to stake his professional reputation on the thesis that for three days following death hair grows at a rate which is readily discernible to the eye; after three days, the growth is negligible. So now you are in a fog! Is it or isn't it true? In desperation you go to the coroner's office, and explain that you are concocting a plot about a fellow being frozen to death, and you want to know whether his hair would keep growing after death—because that's your pivotal clue. Then it is that the man in the coroner's office glares at you and growls, "Whatever gave you the idea we freeze bodies?"

Well, forty-eight hours later you finally get an answer that you're ready to accept as final. Your authorities are the coroner's senior pathologist, an ex-coroner, and an embalmer who has exhumed hundreds of long-interred bodies.

HAIR DOES NOT GROW AFTER DEATH! THE OLD MEDICAL TOMES WHICH TELL OF COFFINS BURSTING OPEN FROM THE ACCUMULATION OF HAIR ON A CORPSE ARE RIDICULOUSLY UNSCIENTIFIC. THERE IS NO CELLULAR GROWTH AFTER DEATH!

Hurrah, you say to yourself! Now you've really got a story! Exploding that myth is sure to do things to your Crossley! Feverishly, you chain yourself to your typewriter—contriving, correcting, perfecting, polishing. At last comes the triumphant moment when you stumble into the agency with the script neatly typed—in triplicate! And what happens? The Old Man holds up the broadcast of your script for a month—because he, himself, once heard from his grandmother, sainted be her memory, that hair **DOES** grow on a corpse!

That's the way it goes! They're always demanding something "different"—but woe unto you if it's too different! Some of the best, most dramatically inviting clues and data I've ever come across, I haven't dared to use. Everyone would accuse me of having made it up!

Take "dhatura," for instance. It's a drug obtained from the flower of the same name, which grows wild in the fields of India, almost as generally as the daisy and buttercup in America. "Dhatura" can readily be mixed with

food or tobacco, and a small dose of it has the extraordinary effect of robbing the victim temporarily of his memory. A person drugged with "dhatura" is not conscious of what happens to him while under its influence. More than that, the victim is even unable to tell how he came to be poisoned. And as the final payoff, "dhatura" leaves no trace which can be detected by chemical analysis'.

Dear reader, have you ever heard of anything more made to order for the mystery writer? But you don't really believe that it exists, do you? And if I were to use it in a script, you'd take pen in hand in write the sponsor that he'd better dispense with such hokum—or never again would you wash with his soap, eat his dessert, or buy the economy-sized bottle of his deodorant!

Speaking of trouble, the root of all evil to the radio mystery writer is the all-knowing listener who—no matter how frantically or effectively the poor author pummels his brain—can always say, "I told you so" as regards the identity of the murderer.

Consider the handicaps under which the scripter labors. To begin with, the average mystery program restricts him to a maximum of seven actors. This is done for the sake of clarity, as well as budget considerations. And though it makes for better drama, you can't deny that it aggravates the author's problems grievously. In the average printed whodunit, there is such a parade of characters that you may find yourself turning back a few pages to keep them straight in your mind. This very multiplicity of possible suspects clouds the trail and cloaks the villain. But with only seven characters to work with, well—

First of all, there's Mr. Master Mind, your criminologist, and his stooge, male or female. That leaves five characters. Then there's the homicide inspector, whom Mr. Master Mind is always showing up. That leaves four characters. Then, if the murder doesn't take place prior to the start of your story, or off scene, there's the victim. Which leaves three characters! And of this triumvirate, the smart-alecky listener simply picks the least likely suspect—and bingo, he's got you!

Some day (when I'm entitled to old age benefits) I'm going to cross-up this unfair element by making the **MOST LIKELY** suspect end up as the murderer! Ah, what a tearing of hair and gnashing of teeth that will produce! But meanwhile, to paraphrase Lincoln, it's enough to: ". . . fool some of the people some of the time!" Besides which, to each scripter there comes occasionally a moment of sheer, unadulterated triumph! Like the time my severest critic (the wife, of course)—

laid down a script that was hot out of the typewriter and gushed, "Why, I didn't know until the very last page who the murderer was!"

Whereupon I, like a fool, had to up and confess "Neither did I, old girl!"

**LATEST ADDITIONS TO THE CASSETTE LIBRARY**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>2947 The Great Gildersleeve "March of Dimes Dance" 2/1/50<br/>The Great Gildersleeve "To Work or Not To Work" 2/18/50</p> <p>2948 Wild Bill Hickok "Aunt Sarah's Gunfight" 10/16/53<br/>Wild Bill Hickok "Gundown Tunnel" 10/21/53</p> <p>2949 Wild Bill Hickok "Boot Hill Special" 1/13/54<br/>Wild Bill Hickok "Bullets in the Blizzard" 1/15/54</p> <p>2950 Wild Bill Hickok "Eight Hundred Feet Down" 1/27/54<br/>Wild Bill Hickok "Dead Man's Dollar" 1/29/54</p> <p>2951 Wild Bill Hickok "The Red Skull" 9/23/53<br/>Wild Bill Hickok "A Dirtyed Shirt" 9/18/53</p> <p>2952 Wild Bill Hickok "Nobread's Treasure" 12/16/53<br/>Wild Bill Hickok "Seven Silver Bullets" 12/18/53</p> <p>2953 Arch Oboler "Strange Morning"<br/>Arch Oboler "The Day The Sun Exploded"</p> <p>2954 Arch Oboler "Letter At Midnight"<br/>Arch Oboler "I Have No Prayer"</p> <p>2955 Arch Oboler "The Family Nagashi"<br/>Arch Oboler "This Living Book"</p> <p>2956 Arch Oboler "Johnny Got His Gun"<br/>Arch Oboler "This Precious Freedom"</p> <p>2957 Arch Oboler "Suffer Little Children"<br/>Arch Oboler "The Women Stayed Home"</p> <p>2958 Casey, Crime Photographer "Treasure Love" 9/25/47<br/>Casey, Crime Photographer "Great Grandfather's Rent Receipt" 10/30/47</p> <p>2959 Casey, Crime Photographer "Camera Bug" 10/16/47<br/>Casey, Crime Photographer "Lady In Distress" 10/23/47</p> <p>2960 Casey, Crime Photographer "The New Will" 12/11/47<br/>Casey, Crime Photographer "Blond Lipstick" 11/13/47</p> <p>2961 Casey, Crime Photographer "Miscarriage of Justice" 12/11/47<br/>Casey, Crime Photographer "Wedding Breakfast" 10/9/47</p> | <p>2962 Casey, Crime Photographer "Serpent Goddess" 12/4/47<br/>Casey, Crime Photographer "The Bill" 11/27/47</p> <p>2963 Philip Marlow "Night Tide" 5/14/49<br/>Philip Marlow "Promise to Pay" 5/14/49</p> <p>2964 Dragnet "The Big Parrot" 11/23/50<br/>Dragnet "The Big Betty" 11/23/50</p> <p>2965 This Is Your FBI 5/11/45<br/>This Is Your FBI 6/1/45</p> <p>2966 Lord Dracula (BBC) 1975 (90 min.)</p> <p>2967 Roland's Afterlife (BBC) 1/25/92 (90 min.)</p> <p>2968 The Wizard of Oz (BBC) 12/4/94 (90 min.)</p> <p>2969 This Is Your FBI "Innocent Hostage" 12/16/49<br/>This Is Your FBI "Return of St. Nick" 12/23/49</p> <p>2970 This Is Your FBI "Pan American Patriots" 2/22/46<br/>This Is Your FBI "Castaway Killer" 3/1/46</p> <p>2971 This Is Your FBI "Million Dollar Question" 11/2/51<br/>This Is Your FBI "Travelling Bride" 11/9/51</p> <p>2972 This Is Your FBI "Baby Big Shot" 1/31/47<br/>This Is Your FBI "Highjacks, Inc." 2/7/47</p> <p>2973 This Is Your FBI "Runaway Guest" 7/1/49<br/>This Is Your FBI "Transatlantic Shakedown" 7/8/49</p> |
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**"MR. BENNY"**

A local stage production entitled "Mr. Benny" was attended by several of our members who gave it a resounding thumbs up. The play was written by Mark Humphrey and directed by Philip Knoerzer. It starred Tim Newell as Jack Benny who, according to our attendees, gave an excellent performance.

**Writer's Notes:**

"Mr. Benny" is an evening spent in the company of one of America's premier entertainers. The play itself centers around two evenings separated by a period of fifteen years. The first evening is the premier of his new television show, the second evening centers around the last night of that show. During the course of those evenings, Jack talks about his life, his career, and he treats us to some stories about the early days of radio and television.

Why Jack Benny? . . . Because, at one time, he was the most predominate figure in entertainment. His voice was recognizable by 97% of the American public (On hearing that, Jack said, "What do I have to do to reach the other 3%?").

He also introduced several concepts in entertainment that today we take for granted. Ideas such as doing a show about a comedian doing a show and the concept of letting the co-stars get the bigger laughs.

A final note: The reason this play is called "Mr. Benny" is because when I mentioned to people that I was going to write a play about Jack Benny, many people would say, "Mr. Benny!" in that gruff, Rochester growl. In essence, this play was named by it's audience.

For those interested: The books Sunday Nights at Seven and Raised on Radio were used for much of the material in this show.

Sincerely,  
Mark Humphrey



## Meet Lilton' Tilton

Sam, the man who made the pants too long, gave Martha Tilton her first job on an air show. Her singing suited the tailor man fine and he paid her the lordly sum of twenty-five dollars for her renditions over a Los Angeles radio station—thousand watter KFAC.

The day she got her first paycheck from the sponsor Martha rushed over to a department store and bought three items—a new hat, imitation pearls for her mother and a pink sweater for her dog who was enduring a cold winter. Martha spent everything and to her chagrin was later put off the street car when she failed to come up with the requisite fare.

Thus started rather chaotically a career which was to see Martha Tilton put off no stations thereafter. She became a swing singer of note on American's *Radio Hall of Fame* and her motion picture appearance also helped enhance her renown.

For, as it happened, Martha's singing over KFAC was heard by a prominent agent. He approached the petite blonde who had come to Los Angeles from her native Corpus Christi, Texas, at the age of seven and asked her if she would like to sing at the Coconut Grove. Martha assented to the salary of \$45 for she had always wanted to be a professional singer, had thought about it since her graduation from high school at seventeen. Yet she was far-sighted enough a little later to shift to Hal Grayson's band at a salary cut of fifteen dollars because she would be able to tour the country and meet the people.

Her strategy was successful for her next step was to sing on "*Three Hits And A Miss.*" While on this program she was given an audition as vocalist for the Benny Goodman band. Benny listened patiently to one number and walked out on the second. Martha noticed the retreat and immediately thought that her next stop would be Los Angeles or Corpus Christi. She went home in what is know as a blue funk.

When she arrived she heard the telephone ringing. Thinking it was another bill collector she picked up the receiver, heard a voice say angrily, "Why did you walk out?" "Who wouldn't?" returned Martha with asperity, "Goodman left and that's why I did." "Well," said the voice which was that of Goodman's manager—"Benny liked you and he wants to talk to you." She was hired the next day at \$125 a week and sang with the Goodman band for three years.

Martha had many exciting experiences while singing with Goodman. When Benny was at the Paramount in New York a couple of enthusiasts jumped on the stage and started dancing. This is the first known instance of such exhibitionism. The incident was unforgettable because the boy who was dancing accidentally kicked Martha and she collapsed on the stage.

Miss Tilton returned to the coast, joined NBC, and was featured in a program called "*Lilton' Martha Tilton Time*" which ran for a full year. She was a guest star on the Fibber McGee and Molly, Jack Carson and Dick Powell programs, as well as many others.

In 1944, Martha shipped off for a South Pacific tour with Jack Benny, Carole Landis, Larry Adler and June Bruner. She was a hit from here to Guadalcanal and back. Then on *Radio Hall of Fame*, Miss Tilton each week welcomed a famous guest whose career was reviewed in song and story. Personable, unspoiled she managed to delineate her own charming character in each of the songs she sang.

Martha's path to success was never easy—her father Fred was in the wholesale rug business and that was no guarantee that one is to be an outstanding singer for young rug-cutters. Martha had an up-and-down row to hoe until she impressed Benny Goodman.

That meeting with Benny Goodman affected her life in more ways than one. She eventually married Benny's manager, Leonard Vannerson, who had been a seaman, first class, in the Navy, and whose return to civilian life found him back in his old position with Goodman's band. Much of his managing comprised of his wife's activities. When a girl appears in pictures, sings a song, "I'll Walk Alone" which sells a million copies and is on

Philco's Hall of Fame, she has already stepped into big business—a far cry for Martha Tilton from the days she sang hopefully for Sam, the man who made the pants too long.



# MY Favorite ACTRESS

By Desiree Ball

I've been asked, as I suppose nearly every actress's mother is, how Lucille ever got into show business. The answer to that is easy—you find it in our early home life, in the way Lucille was brought up. "If," I tell them, "you'd seen our house in the old days, with play-acting all over the place, day and night, you'd know it would have been a minor miracle if Lucille Ball turned out to be anything *but* an actress!"

Lucille says the same thing. "You made me what I am today," she'll tell me, lifting the words out of one of the old ballads that used to make our little white house in Jamestown, New York, shake in its rafters. We had a good time—a wonderful time. There wasn't a lot of money, and the house certainly wasn't anything like the showplace Lucille lives in now, and Lucille and the other children didn't have lovely clothes and big cars and all the trimmings they've managed to acquire since they've grown. But we had the best thing in the world, the one that money can't buy, that all the riches in the world won't make up for, if you lack it.

My children and I made our home with my parents, in a rambling two-story frame house—the old-fashioned kind with a living room and a parlor, and huge sliding doors in between. We'd come to Jamestown from Wyandotte, Michigan when Lucille was four, right after her father died and just before her brother, Fred was born. Later on, when my sister passed away, her little girl, Cleo, came to join us. With Grandma and Granpa, we had one of the first requisites for a happy—and noisy—home: Lots of people, plenty of children. Almost from the first day we moved to Jamestown we were mixed up in amateur

theatricals in one way or another. We were especially proud of the family orchestra which we organized a little later on when Fred and Cleo were old enough to play. It was the nucleus around which we built our productions. Lucille played the saxophone and drums, Fred played the cello, and little Cleo—she's four years younger than Fred—sawed away on the violin.

"And Mother played the piano and Grandpa gnashed his teeth." is the way Lucille always finishes the description of our family circle in those days.

Besides her work in the orchestra, Lucille also did specialties during intermission—dances, songs, imitations—in the entrance hall we made believe was a stage. The hall had a staircase that was grand for making dramatic entrances, and the red and green velvet portieres that divided the hall from the parlor were perfect for the curtain. The family parlor wasn't the only scene of our activities, though. In those days I directed school plays in the village—PTA projects, they were. Very often Lucille played the lead. We put everything we had into those plays—including most of our furniture. Father would come home in the evening and find the parlor stripped bare as Mother Hubbard's cupboard. The parlor furniture was made of wicker, and it was just right for use in stage settings. We saw no harm in it, but the poor family had to use the living room, supposed to be kept for special occasions. No wonder Grandpa gnashed his teeth!

It was her first operetta (during her freshman year in high school) that Lucille wore the red wig that was her big discovery. She brought the wig home and showed it to the family. "Isn't it beautiful? This is it." she raved, dancing around the dining-room table. And it became as soon as she could wangle it. (Lucille's hair is really a dark brown. I know she doesn't mind my telling, even though her red hair is practically a trademark.) I was working as an assistant buyer in a local department store then, and by the time she was eleven Lucille had assumed the responsibility of looking after the younger children and

cooking for the family.

**The My Favorite Husband crew: Richard Denning and Lucille Ball as the Coopers, with Ruth Perrott as Katle the maid.**



She was a good cook, even at that age, although I will admit that nothing ever tasted exactly the same twice. She couldn't seem to resist ad libbing with the ingredients. But we all liked it better that way, so it was just as well.

Nowadays, whenever Lucille flies off somewhere to be with her husband, Desi Arnez, while he's doing personal appearances, she always tries to find an apartment instead of going to a hotel, so she can cook. The only fault I ever found with her cooking in those starting days—if you could call it a fault—were the guests who came to dinner.

Lucille also loves to give things away. I'll never forget the time her best pussy-willow brown taffeta dress disappeared. We had a good dressmaker come to the house twice a year to sew for us and that taffeta dress (trimmed around the bottom with beaver fur) was the last word. I hung it in the closet (I thought) waiting for a special occasion. But when the special occasion, a school dance, arrived, Lucille said she didn't feel like going. A Strange attitude for her to take, I thought. After a little probing she finally confessed. "I lent the dress to Aggie," she told me. Aggie was a schoolmate. "Why in the world did you do that?" I demanded. "She asked for it." was her simple explanation. I sent her after the brown dress pronto. It turned out, however, that Lucille's "loan" had really been an out-and-out gift. When she tried to get it back, Aggie only cried "Indian giver" and slammed the door in her face. She never did get the dress back, and I refused to get her another party dress that winter. It hurt me terribly to see her go without, but I thought she needed to be taught a lesson.

The discipline didn't take too well, I'm afraid. To this day she's generous to a fault. All you have to do is admire something and it's yours. Even if she needs it and uses it all the time. The other day she called me, in a dither. "Mom, I can't find my electric mixer." . . . "You gave it to me," I told her, acting surprised. I wasn't really surprised. I've learned to put "gifts" like that away for safekeeping, knowing she'll need them back. Of course I'm writing now about the things she parts with when she gets carried away and acts on impulse. Her talent for unusual and surprising gifts is another story. For example, we're still talking about the wedding she gave not so long ago for her brother Fred and his bride, Phyllis Brier, a girl from Jamestown. Lucille had converted her ivy-covered tea house into a wedding chapel, and in one corner she banked white flowers, stocks and gladioli, four feet high all along the wall. She had white alter candles there to shed a glow over the place and rolled out a white carpet for the kids to say their vows on. Afterwards the birds in the trees joined in

with the organ music. (Lucille had even thought to bring in an organ.)

Another high in gift-giving was the time she opened in "Dream Girl," her hit play, in Detroit. She called me long-distance (I was here in Hollywood) and said "Mom, I want you here for my opening. I've already bought your plane ticket and you've got to come. Don't disappoint me, darling." I assured her that I was packed and had been packed for a week. "Don't let me down, Mom." she insisted. As though all the king's horses could keep me away! Lucille knew very well I wasn't likely to miss her opening. All that fuss about not disappointing her turned out to be just a smoke screen for the surprise she had up her sleeve. When I arrived in Detroit and checked into my hotel, who should be there too but Grace Munson, an old friend from Jamestown. Lucille had asked Grace to come out so I wouldn't get lonesome in Detroit while she was busy with interviews and rehearsals and such. That was one of the loveliest surprises I have ever received from anyone.

Lucille started up a little theater group in Jamestown when she was fifteen. In one of the plays, "Within the Law," she played a tough girl part that made a big hit with the local drama critic. He went overboard in his column. "Lucille Ball is a potential Jeanne Eagels," he wrote. That did it. My heart did nip-ups at the thought of my little girl all alone in New York, naturally. But I wasn't surprised when Lucille came to me and said that she'd like to go to New York to study at the John Murray Anderson Dramatic School. "We'll see," I said, and we began figuring ways and means. It wasn't very long before we made the trip to New York. I saw that she got safely settled in a conservative second-class hotel and briefed her on the perils of life in the Big City. Then I returned to Jamestown.

I had the feeling from the beginning that she wasn't doing too well at dramatic school. She was always crying into the phone that she was homesick and wanted to come home. But I kept encouraging her to stick it out. Frankly, I couldn't understand why she wasn't making the grade. She'd shown promise back home and gotten enough recognition to make us think she had what it took to make good.

It wasn't until I visited her in New York that I saw what was happening. Lucille, left to her own devices, had fallen into a rut of hamburgers and Cokes, a diet that told on her badly. She was terribly run down. Besides that, she was going through a stage where she thought she was getting too tall (she's five-six), and no matter how I insisted that she's be glad someday she was tall, she went in for slouching. That didn't fool anybody about her height and only hid her natural poise.



Those things, plus the fact that she couldn't lose her Western twang, got her off to a bad start. At the end of her first year Robert Milton, director of the school, told her, as gently as he could, "Your mother is wasting her money." She took the hint and left. More long distance calls. "Mom, I'm homesick," she'd cry, and "Keep trying," I'd tell her.

We were especially glad she stuck to it, the night that Robert Milton called backstage to congratulate her after seeing "Dream Girl," some years later. "I'm the one you told to quit acting, remember?" Lucille let him have it. The director was happy to admit his mistake. But not as happy as we were, you can be sure. When Lucille landed a chorus job in the third road company of "Rio Rita" it looked as though the tide was beginning to turn for her. But after five weeks of rehearsal—for free—she was out. In those days the performers didn't get paid for rehearsals and it wasn't unheard of for a show to fold up after weeks and weeks of rehearsing without pay. It was terribly hard on the actors. After four such ill-fated attempts to arrive on Broadway, it dawned on her that she could probably get there faster some other way. So she became a model in one of New York's wholesale dress houses. By that time long-distance telephone tolls had gotten me down. I packed up and took the other children to New York so we could all be together. I got a job at Stern's on 42nd Street and we took up where we left off in Jamestown.

The cloak-and-suit job brought Lucille to the attention of Hattie Carnegie. Soon she went to work in the Carnegie Salon on Fifth Avenue as a model, and shortly after that she became the "Chesterfield Girl" on billboards. Next thing we knew she was "discovered" by Hollywood. Were we ever excited the day Lucille took off for Hollywood! As we said goodbye she promised to send for us as soon as she made good and before long I received a call, long-distance. Lucille was thrilled to pieces. "I've just signed a contract! Columbia Pictures! Come right away!" The words poured out breathlessly. We packed that very night, but before we had a chance to buy the tickets we had further word from Lucille. Columbia Pictures had just that moment to dissolve its stock company. Her contract was just a pretty piece of paper. She said "Come anyway." When we arrived Lucille was working as an extra. Thank goodness that was the end of the setbacks. From then on Lucille went right up. RKO. MGM Technicolor musicals. Co-starring with Bob Hope at Paramount. And now her own radio show (and very soon television).

Am I proud of Lucille's success? You bet I am. I visit her occasionally at the studio when she's making a picture and I've only missed one broadcast since the programs been on the air. The show's a lot of fun to watch.

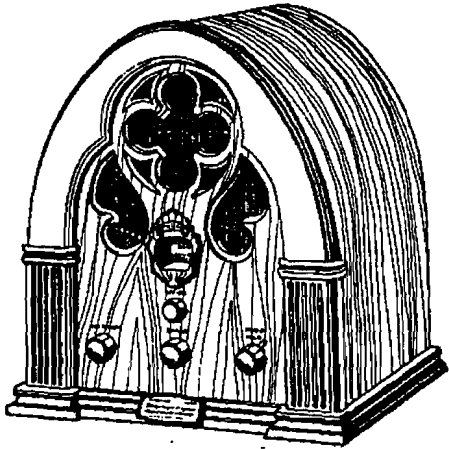
Instead of just reading the script. Lucille and the other actors try to make it visual. Sometimes she uses props, like eating real crackers the time the script called for eating crackers in bed. Or she'll munch on toast or dress up as an old lady and wear a shawl. Sometimes her realism bounces back at her. For example the time when Liz was supposed to be getting back at George for growing a moustache. Lucille went out and had the make-up people glue a grey moustache and goatee on her face for laughs. The laugh was on her when she couldn't get them off. She struggled for hours. She thinks that radio sound men know their business and that they contribute a lot to a show. But when it comes to things like kisses, she believes in the real thing. So if the script starts out with a kiss between Lucille and her Favorite Husband, Richard Denning, it's a real kiss that you hear, and not a sound effect.

*My Favorite Husband* has some of the longest rehearsals in radio, simply because Lucille likes to spend half her time clowning for the orchestra and cast. (Shades of Jamestown!) She brings some of her personal life into her radio characterization. When she and Desi were married they made it a rule never to go to bed on a quarrel. You'll notice that neither do Liz and George on the radio. The reason why *My Favorite Husband* is a successful show, if you want my opinion, is that the people in it are real people. There are no melodramatic situations. She has budget troubles and does foolish things that any woman might do. George is always the stronger (people seem to like that), but in the end she's the one who straightens things out.

Lucille made a lot of radio appearances before she got the show, as many movie personalities do. But this is the first time in her career that she's been starred in a series like this. The break wasn't anything she sought. As a matter of fact, it came to her quite by happenstance. Lucille's agent, Don Sharpe owned the *My Favorite Husband* idea (package, they call it). Don needed a good record to play for the radio people and he asked Lucille to cut a record for him, to put the character over. CBS heard the record and liked it. They decided to put it on the air one time, to test the audience reaction. They liked that first try so well they decided to make it a steady thing and it's been on the air ever since a year ago last July. It's wonderful being the mother of a radio star like Lucille. Most any day you'll find me weeding my garden in Canoga Park, a tiny country town six miles away from where Lucille and Desi have their ranch in Chatsworth. Fred built the house when he started up in the construction business. It was originally supposed to be sold in the usual manner, to whoever showed up first with the necessary down payment. Lucille decided that Fred had put too much of himself into this first venture for it to go to a

# Old Time Radio Club

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stranger, so she bought it for me and here I am in Canoga Park, growing radishes, planting trees and square dancing. I'm having the time of my life. Lucille planted most of the trees on her own place herself and wants me to have the fun of watching mine grow, too. Whenever I get impatient I take a run over to her house and look at their home movies. She and Desi have kept a movie record of the ranch from the time they bought it eight years ago. "It's good luck," she says. Like most people in show business she's superstitious. She was thrilled when she discovered a cricket on the hearth one day. Desi was all for getting rid of the noisy creature but she wouldn't hear of it. "Don't spoil our good luck," she warned. The next thing they knew they were knocking on my door and asking if they could spend the night. All of a sudden their house had turned thick with crickets and they were forced to call in a fumigating crew who sealed the place up while the poor crickets were being purged.

That's my favorite radio star for you. — October, 1949

