

## RADIO SOAP OPERAS - Part 2

© By Clay Roehl

There is an underlying formula in the writing of daytime serials although it is not readily apparent. Most shows average four or five characters. By far the most important character is the heroine. She is usually gentle, wise, strong, brave, tolerant, an understanding mother, a tender, loving wife, above such human vices as jealousy, greed, hatred, bitterness; beautiful, slim, graceful, captivating and somewhere between the ages of 25 and 35. Whether she was born rich or poor she still must be the epitome of all the virtues.

Take, for instance, the opening announcement of "Our - Gal - Sunday! The story of an orphan girl named Sunday, from the little mining town of Silver Creek, Colorado, who in young womanhood married England's richest, most handsome lord, Lord Henry Brinthrope. The story asks: CAN this girl from a mining town in the West find happiness as the wife of a wealthy and titled Englishman?"

She must have a problem and the emotion it engenders must be perpetual and must be as durable as the heroine. The problem must be a

chronic threat to the heroine and all she holds dear. The importance of the woman as a leader in the family, in the circle of her friends, and even in the large community of the nation is constantly emphasized. The reform of a *weak* husband is expected to be brought about by the wife. Husbands are fully conscious of their wives' importance. Constant efforts are made by the serial authors to prove that a middle-aged woman still has her full share in life. Witness the daily opening of *Helen Trent*. "The romance of Helen Trent who, when life mocks her, dashes her against the rocks of despair, fights back bravely, successfully to prove that romance can begin at thirty-five."

The writer must create noble female protagonists who suffer endlessly but win great moral victories . . . avoid strength, initiative, masculinity in good male characters. Women have to be the top-dog all the time, even when they are the underdog. They must *suffer*. Most of the soap operas made the woman feel superior to mere man, or ill-used by man. Heroines went on valiantly in the face of the most overwhelming obstacles. When men occupied the central interest [*Road of Life* and

*Young Doctor Malone*] of the stories they still never managed to make the grade as men. Most of them, particularly if they were married to interesting or competent women, were kept in a helpless state. The natural man never appeared. The natural explanation that any man can lose some of his glossy finish if his wife is a dullard never appeared either. The soap operas were for women, not for men, and the constant self-flattery of them was vital to their success, artistic and commercial. It made up for what psychiatrists call a woman's *sense of biotic incompleteness*.

The daytime serial was to radio what the continued story had been to the magazine business - long stories told in a series of episodes which all interconnect in a common plot. The production design was kept very simple. Most transitions were achieved either by fade-ins and fade-outs or by simple organ music of an appropriate nature. Sound effects and musical treatment were usually furnished by the organ because of its flexibility and inexpensiveness.

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# RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO

Dedicated to the preservation of old time radio programs and to making those programs available to our members.

## RHAC Board Meeting Thursday, June 3, 1999 - 7:30 PM

At

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### LIBRARIES

<b>Reference Material:</b>	Bill McCracken, address above	303-986-9863
<b>Logs &amp; Scripts:</b>	Fred Hinz, c/o RHAC, P O Box 1908, Englewood, CO 80150	
<b>Open Reel Tape Librarian:</b>	Maletha King, 900 W. Quincy Ave., Englewood, CO 80110	
<b>Cassette Tape Librarians:</b>		
#1 (1-499)	Marilyn J. Turner 2299 S. Sable Blvd., Aurora, CO 80014	303-751-4325
#2 (500-999)	David Gatch PO Box 70, Glen Haven, CO 80532	970-577-0805
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By JoAnn Bantin

This month the Sherlock Holmes Club and The RHAC Players are presenting Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's drama, "The Final Problem" on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's birthday. The play was transcribed by John Licht and Charlene Schnelker and there were two successful productions last year for various causes. This is an extremely exciting story, all the sound effects are live, and the actors are fantastic. This production really is a must for everyone and all the funds go to a charity foundation, The Rocky Mountain Respirateers. This is an organization that co-ordinates and provides relief to those assisting needy people. John Licht has been actively involved in this cause for several years and therefore knows your funds will be going to a very good cause. We need to give a little chuckle at John's humor as to where our play is being performed. The information needed to attend is as follows:

**Production:** "The Final Problem"

**Date:** May 22, 1999

**Time:** 2:00 P.M. Saturday Afternoon

**Place:** Olinger's Mortuary at E. Colfax & Magnolia

**Donation:** \$20.00 per Ticket

Next on our list is the fact that we have two new players to our organization and lots of response to help with different projects. All of the *Players* will not be actively rehearsing until fall. At that time there will be readings for "The Iron Box" and also for "A Christmas Carol." Dates of readings, rehearsals and productions will be posted as soon as possible. Both plays are being transcribed and edited at this time. As mentioned previously, these productions will be a

dinner theater affair and open to all members and friends, as was our Christmas production of Richard Diamond.

Other workshop news is that Dorothy and Larry Weide are at it again. A third script titled, "Time Bomb." Just the name tells us there is a lot of excitement. It is filled with a modern setting, early action, terrorists, computers, and a thickening plot. The most exciting thought is that the answer to everything is in the last two words. Scary thought. Also our workshop has a new transcriber and writer in our midst, Francie Masel. She will begin editing and help transcribing "A Christmas Carol." She is then considering transcribing the play, "The Devil and Daniel Webster" amongst others. We are so glad to have Francie with us. Hopefully, we will be doing these productions in the near future.

Just as a thought before closing, April and this year 1999 has brought us many tears with Kosovo and Columbine High School. The month of May might help relieve some our fears. Nostalgia time was also war time and brought us many tears. Radio brought the world not only the terrible news at times that we did not want to hear, but it also brought us hope, adventure, laughs, and joy with programs such as *Inner Sanctum*, *Captain Midnight*, *Fibber McGee & Molly*, *Gildersleeve*, etc. Now it brings us different things, athletic games, weather, music, traffic reports, etc. Whatever, but thank goodness for radio and especially for the golden radio of yesterday.



### Radio Quiz

This month we start a new series of quizzes by David Michael starting

in May. Both the quiz questions AND answers will appear in the same issue.

**Part 1 - Name The Sponsor(s) (some may have more than one) of:**

1. *Mary Noble*
2. *Chandu*
3. *Charlie Chan*
4. *Jack Armstrong*
5. *Dragnet*
6. *Jack Benny*
7. *One Man's Family*
8. *20 Questions*
9. *Vox Pop*
10. *Walter Winchell*

The answers to this month's quiz can be found on page 6 of this month's newsletter.

### RADIO SOAP OPERAS Part 2

Continued from Page 1

The soap operas were usually built around one central character, although occasionally a pair of characters might form the nucleus of the program. This central character, or pair of characters, formed a hub around which the various plots of the story could revolve and in most cases they would be the protagonists of the story. Most leading characters, formed a hub around which the various plots of the story could revolve and in most cases they would be the protagonists of the story. Most leading characters tended to fall into two categories - the folksy down-to-earth [*Ma Perkins*] type or the glamorous [*Our Gal Sunday*] type. The leading character could not age [*Helen Trent*].

Secondary characters didn't have to be all black or all white. They might be subject to human frailties and human weaknesses, not held to the high standards demanded of the central characters. Even the antagonists did not have to be hopelessly beyond redemption. The locale of the story had to furnish a logical place for varied story



development. It had to be a place where stories *could* happen. The average family home in a small town was the most frequent locale. Dialogue had to be rather deliberate and repetitive. Major points had to be repeated two or three times in a single ten minutes of dialogue..... Repetition of the same idea by different characters in the script is often the best solution.

The soap opera formula was elusive. *Guiding Light* was the story of a kindly cleric, Reverend Rutledge, who showed people how to live and, by his deep understanding, extricates his townsfolk from the most difficult situations arising from matters of morals, ethics, love and hate. *Women in White* is the never ending story of a young surgeon who, while healing the ailing in body, himself suffers the torments of hell in his involvement in a hopeless love affair with a nurse. In *Against the Storm*, mists of distrust between lover and beloved arise and affect the lives of lover and beloved direly. The latter program received a Peabody Award, a rare occasion. *Life Can Be Beautiful* conforms to the usual theme of daytime serials which is that no matter how bad or unjust things seem, everything will finally turn out happily for those who deserve it.

Albert Crews, in *Professional Radio Writing* laid down some general rules to be followed in writing the daytime serial. The end of each program should provide a slight climax or a slight increase in the tension of the conflict in order to carry the audience over to the next broadcast and encourage it to listen. A fairly strong climax needs to be placed near the end of the Friday script in order to carry the audience over the weekend. Three months is usually about as long as an audience can be interested in one major plot line. The plot will tend to revolve around fairly obvious conflicts. A new story line must be introduced and sufficiently

well established to have captured the audience's interest before an old story line reaches its climax. The main plot lines must be reiterated frequently, not only on a single program, but in succeeding programs, in order to help the audience to follow it. It is possible to use not only a main plot or story line but one or more subplots simultaneously. An obvious conflict between protagonist and antagonist is better than a subtle, complex conflict.

Nearly all-daytime serials were designed for and slanted to the middle class of women listeners. They used the radio as a running background for their housework. Slate and Cook, authors of "*It Sounds Impossible*" described a housewife's day when the housewife was the vast majority of women, "The soap opera helped the housewife time her day. She would sit down to her second cup of coffee with *Betty and Bob*, wash the breakfast dishes to *Judy and Jane*, pick up the living room through *Our Gal Sunday*, and start lunch with *Helen Trent*. She'd start the kids back to school with *Vic and Sade* scrub the kitchen floor to *Road of Life*, and start peeling potatoes for supper with *Just Plain Bill*."

The soap opera became, over the years, the most criticized form of radio entertainment and one of the most loyally followed. The criticism stemmed from the large number of such programs carried by the networks and stations, the slow pace at which the serials moved and the nature of the dramas themselves, what with their concentration on neurotic women, helpless husbands, and acts of violence. The fans identified their personal hopes and frustrations with those of the central characters. Millions of listeners took the anguished lives of their favorite characters very much to heart, writing them letters of advice and encouragement and even sending them gifts when births, weddings or other happy occasions in the story

warranted them and when writing to actors, they used their radio names.

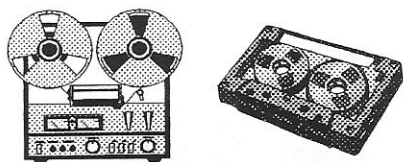
Women in all social strata and of all degrees of education listened, but women with little formal education were more addicted than those who were better educated; women in rural districts listened more than those in cities; the soaps were simply a means of emotional release.

Identification was invited in the soap operas by various means. The central position of a character invited the listener to perceive and to evaluate the plot situation from the point of view of this person. This held good for the heroine or the hero who were not necessarily identical with the protagonists of the current episodes. Identification was furthered by the sheer quantity of time devoted to a character and by the amount of insight given into what the person thought and felt. Physical, intellectual and ethical perfection, social power and prestige had to also promote identification very strongly. The object of identification had moral perfection, was spotlessly virtuous, good-hearted, helpful, intelligent, often physically attractive, and a leader by personal qualities. Women felt that "It helps to listen to these stories. When Helen Trent has serious trouble she takes it calmly. So you think you'd better be like her and not get upset." "I always tell the woman upstairs who wants my advice, to listen to the people on the radio because they are smarter than I am. ... I told her to listen to *Aunt Jenny* to learn good English. Also you can learn refinement from *Our Gal Sunday*." Frequently the advice seems confined to good intentions without any influence on basic attitudes. "They teach you how to be good ... I still can learn from them."

The radio soap opera is dead. It began to die in 1945 - television may have been a causative factor but the changing pattern of society was a more likely reason. The radical

changes in society engendered by World War II had a profound influence on audience attitudes. The radio soap opera held on for another fifteen years, ten years after the first television soap opera, *The Goldbergs* and *Vic and Sade* left the air in 1945 signaling the last act. The radio soap opera, like vaudeville, is a part of Americana that had been missed by increasing numbers of people as memory faded and nostalgia set in. Now those *washboard weepers* are a half-century ago and remembered by few.

*Editor's Note:* You will find some of the programs mentioned in Clay's article in the RHAC Tape Libraries. Consult your Library Program Index for details.



## New in The Tape Library

By Maletha & Dick King

This month's new entries into the libraries are seven reels of *Bing Crosby Shows* and one of *Mr. District Attorney*. Bing's shows were variety shows with lots of Bing singing light songs of the times. These shows date back to 1946 through a few in 1952. The guest on these shows are among the film and radio greats such as Bob Hope, Henry Fonda, Fibber McGee and Molly, Jack Benny, Bob Burns and on and on. Our members in for many hours of great shows and very good music.

### List Alternate Selections PLEASE!

We are still finding members who do not give enough alternate selections and then wonder why they don't get their orders promptly. If you were the only member who wanted the numbers you selected as first choice, our

libraries couldn't even exist. Remember, we have over 500 members and it is necessary to give plenty of alternative selections on your orders. Needless to say, the newest entries are in big demand, but the new members like to start at the beginning of the catalog and work on through.

*Mr. District Attorney* is a great series starring David Brian and Paul Garrett. The plot lines indicate that the District Attorney does all the investigation of each case, but that bit of fancy just has to be part of the artistic license, not reality. There will be much more of this series in the following month.



## The Clown

By Lon McCart

One of my favorite radio programs from the 1940's was *The Red Skelton Show*. In those days, I thought his name was Red "Skeleton." What interested me was not the comedian, but the characters that he portrayed during the program.

My favorite character was Junior, "the mean widdle kid." Whenever he was tempted with doing something naughty, he would start debating with himself and then finally give in by saying that he was going to do it anyway. His poor granny, played by

Verna Felton, was always stuck with Junior and whenever he scared himself she would give comfort by saying, "Bless this little heart." Granny would always put up with him for a while, but when her nerves were shot she would spank him and end up feeling sorry about it. I think it always hurt her more than it hurt him. In some ways, Junior was much like Baby Snooks.

Another one of Skelton's characters that I loved was Deadeye. He would come riding into the story on a horse that had no intention of stopping. How I loved when he had to plead with the horse to stop. "Woah! Woah! Oh, come on horse, woah!"

Other characters in the "Skelton Scrapbook of Satire" included Clem Kadiddlehopper and his girlfriend Sara Dew, played by Ge Ge Pearson. They were both pretty stupid. Skelton also created the characters Willie Lump Lump and J. Newton Numskull.

When I listen to some of the old *Red Skelton Shows* today, I can now appreciate some elements which didn't interest me as a boy. I especially enjoy the old format of comedy shows with musical breaks. In some of the programs I have heard recently, David Forrester and his orchestra supply the musical interludes plus adding their bit to the skits as traveling music or sound effects. Anita Ellis was the vocalist on those programs. In the years before I listened and before Red Skelton joined the Army during World War II, the featured orchestra leader and singer was Ozzie Nelson and Harriet Hillard. She was also a member of the acting cast. One of the characters she portrayed was Daisy June. In addition to the music, today I also enjoy the banter which went between the announcer, Rod O'Connor and Skelton at the beginning of each program. "Hello, Rod." "Hello, Red."

Many people remember Red Skelton because of his work on

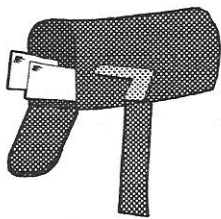
television and in the movies. They were O.K., but I enjoyed him most on the radio.



## Clow & Stevenson Honored

John Stevenson and Dave Clow were recently honored by the Radio Reading Service of the Rockies (RRSR) for their production of the show *Tribute to OTR* which appears weekly on the KRMA, Channel 6 Secondary Audio Program. Dave and John received Certificates of Appreciation from RRSR "In recognition of your outstanding Volunteer Services to the Blind, Visually-Impaired and Print-Handicapped Citizens of Colorado."

Congratulations to John and Dave for their fine work in producing the show *Tribute to OTR*.



## A Member's Letter

From Don Busenbark

I remember when I was 15 and my dad bought me my first Old-Time Radio show. It was the famous "Who's on First" routine of Abbott and Costello. Well, after that, I bought a "Best of Jack Benny" and I was soon

hooked. I started out slow since tapes were hard to find at first. Eventually, I started finding more and more to add to my meager collection.

It was when I found another OTR collector that my collection began to flourish. I copied every show he had from Amos & Andy to X-Minus One. Then, what started out as a mild interest became an almost obsessive hobby. Now my collection has grown to over 1500 shows and continues to grow in leap and bounds.

Although, I was not raised during the radio era, I have found them to still be as appealing as ever. The theatre of the mind raises the level of imagination and thought to a higher level. I love to listen to OTR when I travel, at night when I go to bed, or at work while I am correcting papers or writing tests.

A teacher by trade, I have even used OTR in my classes. I have found that competing against music, movies, tv, Nintendo, etc. is a difficult task. Kids today don't like to use their imagination without a visual aid. They don't get the theatre of the mind because they have to make their own pictures. Fortunately, my own kids have developed an appreciation of Old-Time Radio which I continue to nurture. I believe it makes them better students in the classroom, because they have to use their minds without the visual cues. I also think it makes them better readers, because they have better imagining skills from OTR.

Since the advent of the Internet, the growth of OTR has exploded. The more I surf the Web, the more sites I find that applaud, support, & share OTR to all who want to hear. What a great opportunity to bring OTR to the world again. One of the best sites I have found is called *Bobby's Digital OTR* ([www.zebra.net/~rbreslin/](http://www.zebra.net/~rbreslin/)). This Web site is part of the *Old Time Radio Link Society* Web Ring which gives you access to a plethora of OTR sites.

What I like best about this site is

the listing of other sites where you can listen or download OTR on either Real Audio format or MPEG-3 format. I have downloaded 100's of shows and have had very few problems. I think you others will find this a great site to increase their collections and be able to listen at home or at work to great OTR.



## May, 1999 Quiz Answers

From Page 3

Answers For Name The Sponsor(s)

1. Dr. Lyon's Tooth Powder
2. White King Soap
3. Lever Bros.
4. Wheaties
5. Fatima Cigarettes (later, Chesterfield)
6. Chevrolet, Canada Dry, Jell-O, Grapenuts, Lucky Strike
7. Miles Laboratories
8. Ronson Lighters
9. Kentucky Club Tobacco
10. Jurgens, Lucky Strike



## HELP WANTED!

We are again running low on articles, your help is needed and would be appreciated. To keep the RHAC newsletter interesting, articles from our members are needed on a regular basis. You don't have to be a professional writer to submit an article. Write about your favorite Old-Time Radio series, personality, or on whatever radio-related topic you want. But, please write.

Send your articles to Stewart Wright. My addresses, regular & E-Mail, are listed on page 2 of the Newsletter.



# RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION of COLORADO

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May, 1999



## Distaff Detectives

*Editor's Note:* Our series women radio detectives by Jack French, the editor of *Radio Recall*, the newsletter of the Metro Washington OTR Club continues with *The Defense Rests/ Defense Attorney*. These articles can also be found on Kevin's Smith's *Thrilling Detective* Web site. Kevin's site is located at: <http://www.colba.net/~kvnsmit h/thrillingdetective/>

### Marty Ellis Bryan

Radio's *The Defense Rests* (also known as *Defense Attorney*)

began on NBC in the spring of 1951 with Mercedes McCambridge playing the role of a female lawyer, Marty Ellis Bryan. She spends little time in the courtroom and was usually on the streets, solving crimes. She is somewhat assisted by her boy friend, a reporter, played by Howard Culver (who had just left *Straight Arrow* where he played the lead and his secret identity, Steve Adams).

After a few months, NBC dropped it so ABC bought it, cast and crew, retitled it *Defense Attorney* and ran it from the August of 1951 (originally as a summer replacement for *Richard Diamond, Private Detective*) and then through December 1952.

McCambridge, by the time she got this role, was so well known in Hollywood that many fans forgot

she got her start on radio, in the soaps. Both she and Culver were skilled performers, the writing on the series was crisp and realistic, and its only problem was it came too late in the Golden Age of Radio.

There are a total of seven shows in circulation; one of the NBC series and six of the ABC version. All of them are extremely well done.

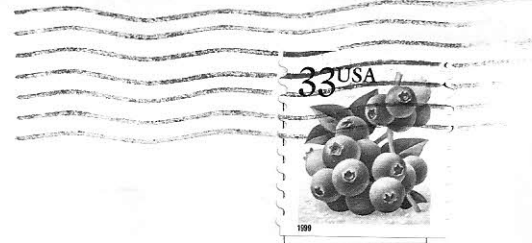
*The Defense Rests* (1951, NBC)

Starring Mercedes McCambridge as *Marty Ellis Bryan*  
Howard Culver as *Jud Barnes*

*Defense Attorney* (1951-52, ABC)

Starring Mercedes McCambridge as *Marty Ellis Bryan* and  
Howard Culver as *Jud Barnes*

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