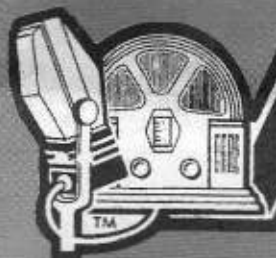


MAY CONVENTION SCHEDULE ANNOUNCED • WHERE WERE THEY THEN BUT ON RADIO



sperdvac

RADIOGRAM

Vol. 33 • No. 6

March 2008

IN THE LAND OF

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RADIOGRAM

Volume 33 • Number 6 • March 2008

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Radio Drama, Variety and Comedy

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"DEEP CLEANING, DEEP CLEANING!"

Archive Catalog CD Pages Coming Soon to Website

By the time you read this the SPERDVAC election results will probably be known. I hope you all cast informed votes because the election will determine what direction the organization will take in 2008/09.

Member Mickey Smith, a retired professor of Pharmacy Administration, has written a number of articles about pharmacy in old-time radio. He now wants to pursue a topic he has had a long time interest in, *Fibber McGee and Molly* broadcasts during World War II. He writes:

"I know others have written on the subject but I hope for a book-length, comprehensive treatment including: the nature and importance of wartime 'propaganda'/patriotism/information, the kind of the foregoing found in the *Fibber and Molly* broadcasts, and especially the role of the writers, Quinn and Leslie, and the sponsor in shaping the resulting programs. (If someone else has already done this and I have overlooked it, I hope you will tell me right away!)

"I am doing my homework but I certainly don't want to miss anything. So, I am asking your help in identifying previously published or unpublished work on this subject, contact information on others who might provide background, and suggestions."

If you can help regarding how Don Quinn and Phil Leslie incorporated wartime messages while retaining the humor, how the Johnson's Wax people and ad agencies decided to participate, any government involvement such as Gerd Horton mentions in *Radio Goes to Wax*, or anything else relevant, please contact Mickey Smith at 601-234-5335, mickandmary@webtv.net

A number of you have requested that the Archives CD catalog pages be posted on the SPERDVAC website. After years of requesting this to no avail I have received assurances from Dan Haefele and Bob Steinmetz that they will consider it a priority to do whatever needs to be done to accomplish this. Stay tuned!

Speaking of the website, some members may not be aware that there is an index of all of the shows in SPERDVAC's libraries: General,

Archive, Hollywood Museum and Printed Materials. If you're looking for a particular series this is the easiest way to find them. You'll find the link on the home page at "To know more about SPERDVAC click here", then scroll down to "SPERDVAC's Catalog Index Click Here."

Here's a "Question of the Month" for you. Maybe several of you have had the experience you'd like to share with others? Nowadays it is common to fast forward past the TV commercials or change stations or tune out those on radio. Unlike now many of us enjoy listening to the old commercials in our OTR

shows and are even annoyed when someone has deleted them. Have you been influenced by them to the extent that you purchase the product based on the 50 to 70-year-old ads?

Here's one example of how it's happened to me. I've had the habit of buying a particular brand of laundry detergent. One time I found that brand was sold out. What to buy? My eye caught the boxes of Oxydol! I heard the voice of Charlie Warren intoning that Oxydol was "Deep cleaning, deep cleaning!" Although far too late to keep Ma Perkins on the air, I thought I'd do my part, belatedly.

Til next time, spaceman's luck!♦

Send your news, comments or questions for this column to *Information Please*, c/o Barbara J. Watkins, P.O. Box 628, South Pasadena, CA 91031, or preferably by email to kinseyfan@hotmail.com

On a similar note, imagine the surprise when ol' ed walked into an antique store to find a birthday gift for a friend, who is also an old-time radio buff, and what should ol' ed find inside a display case near the door? A tiny box intermingled among various other tiny boxes, trinkets, buttons and just plain junk. The box carried but five words. Ol' ed had to read the box twice—maybe four times—before the words actually sunk in. It was true. It was unbelievable. And then ol' ed heard echoing inside his vacuous mind the words spoken so often by Knox Manning: "A cold is a miserable thing."

Yes, ol' ed had found a box of Groves Bromo Quinine Cold Tablets sans the tablets, of course. The clerk was bemused by the passion exuded by ol' ed as he frantically inquired as to the price of the tiny and innocuous box. For one dollar ol' ed had found the perfect gift for not only an OTR buff but an OTR Sherlock Holmes devotee as well. A tiny pill box now shares collectible space with a tin of George Washington Coffee—sans coffee, of course.



Barbara J. Watkins

Will Celebrate 75 Years of Tom Mix, Lone Ranger

Preliminary Schedule Announced for May Convention in Studio City

Convention chair Walden Hughes has announced the schedule for SPERDVAC's big three-day old-time radio convention in Studio City, CA set for May 2, 3 and 4 at the Sportsmen's Lodge hotel.

The convention will begin Friday at 1 p.m. with a "Radio in the Movies" panel that will feature film actress Coleen Gray, who will share her experiences of working on *Lux Radio Theatre*.



Coleen Gray

SPERDVAC's own Stuart Lubin will direct different radio sketches at the 2 o'clock hour, and that program will be followed by a Lone Ranger panel with Fred Foy, Dick Beals and Casey Kasem.



Chuck McCann

A re-creation of the "Mission Completed" episode of *Suspense* with Chuck McCann starring will be presented at 4 o'clock.

At a time yet to be determined, Jim Harmon will direct a Tom Mix re-creation celebrating the 75th anniversary of Tom Mix's radio program.

But at the 6 o'clock dinner SPERDVAC honorary member and radio/TV personality Jimmy Weldon will serve as emcee. Jimmy was the voice of Yaky Doodle in the Yogi Bear animated series. Frank Bresee is working on two special presentations, and the evening will cap off with a re-creation of *The Great Gildersleeve* starring Shirley Mitchell in the role of Leila Ransom. Gregg Oppenheimer will direct the re-creation.



Jimmy Weldon

Saturday morning kicks off at 9 o'clock with a panel on the great entertainers in radio hosted by Frank Bresee.

At 10:30 o'clock, Bob Mills, a writer for Bob Hope for 17 years, will share part II of his memories working with Hope.

Former radio show talk host Peter Ford will share memories and stories about his

father, Glenn Ford, and his mother, Eleanor Powell, at 1 o'clock. Peter will also discuss his parents' careers in radio, movies and television.

At 2:30 o'clock, Ray Briem and others will participate in a panel called "Music on the Radio."

Bob Hastings will star in a presentation of a new radio drama titled *Adventures with Captain Hudson* at 4 o'clock, and at 5 o'clock 30 Minutes to Curtain will present a re-creation directed by Barbara Watkins.

Following the 6 o'clock dinner Eddie Carroll and Chuck McCann will star in a Jack Benny re-creation to be directed by Gregg Oppenheimer. Eddie and Chuck did a fantastic job in November during a special luncheon in honor of the 75th anniversary of the Jack Benny program. For SPERDVAC's May convention, Eddie and



Eddie Carroll

Chuck are doing a different program.

Saturday evening will be capped off with Frank Bresee directing an episode of *The Lone Ranger* starring Fred Foy, Dick Beals, Casey Kasem, Ben Cooper, Ivan Curry, Tommy Cook and John Harlan. The re-creation will honor the 75th anniversary of the great radio show that began, as everyone knows, at WXYZ in Detroit.



Fred Foy

A 9 o'clock brunch Sunday morning will feature a "sitting around and visiting" panel discussion of radio memories by radio personalities hosted by Dick Beals.

In addition to the re-creations and panel discussions, there will be a raffle and a silent auction of memorabilia.

Walden reminds members that the reservation deadline is April 22. The registration form can be found on page six of this month's *Radiogram*.

This schedule is preliminary, reminds Walden, and he says more details about re-creations, panels, and such practical matters as parking will be covered in next month's *Radiogram*.

Additional information as well as general information about SPERDVAC can be found on SPERDVAC's website at sperdvac.org.

AT A GLANCE

Schedule May 2008 Convention Subject to Change

Friday, May 2

- 1:00 p.m. — Panel "Radio at the Movies" with Coleen Gray
- 2:00 p.m. — Stuart Lubin will direct different radio sketches
- 3:00 p.m. — Lone Ranger Panel with Fred Foy, Dick Beals, and Casey Kasem
- 4:00 p.m. — *Suspense*: "Mission Completed" starring Chuck McCann
- Time to be determined: Tom Mix re-creation
- 6:00 p.m. — Dinner with emcee Jimmie Weldon. Frank Bresee is working on two special presentations. *The Great Gildersleeve* directed by Gregg Oppenheimer with Shirley Mitchell

Saturday, May 3

- 9:00 a.m. — Frank Bresee will host a panel based upon the great entertainers in radio.
- 10:30 a.m. — Memories of working with Bob Hope with Bob Mills.
- 1:00 p.m. — Peter Ford on the radio-film-television work of his parents, Glenn Ford and Eleanor Powell.
- 2:30 p.m. — "Music on the Radio" with Ray Briem
- 4:00 p.m. — *Adventures of Captain Hudson* with Bob Hastings.
- 5:00 p.m. — Re-creation by 30 Minutes to Curtain directed by Barbara Watkins
- 6:00 p.m. — Dinner. *The Jack Benny Program* with Eddie Carroll and Chuck McCann Directed by Gregg Oppenheimer followed by *The Lone Ranger* with Fred Foy, Dick Beals, Casey Kasem, Ben Cooper, Ivan Curry, Tommy Cook, and John Harlan.

Sunday, May 4

- 9:00 a.m. Brunch — "Sitting Around and Visiting" panel discussion of radio memories of radio personalities hosted by Dick Beals.

Remember, schedule is subject to change.



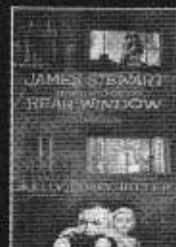
75 YEARS OF THE MASKED RIDER OF THE PLAINS WHO LED THE FIGHT FOR LAW AND ORDER IN THE EARLY WESTERN UNITED STATES. RETURN WITH US NOW TO THOSE THRILLING DAYS OF YESTERYEAR! FROM OUT OF THE PAST COME THE THUNDERING HOOFBEATS OF THE GREAT HORSE SILVER. THE LONE RANGER RIDES AGAIN AT SPERDVAC'S OTR CONVENTION IN MAY! DON'T MISS IT! SIGN UP TODAY. USE THE REGISTRATION FORM ON THE BACK OF THIS PAGE AND MAIL TODAY! HI-YO SILVER! AWAY!

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SPERDVAC OLD-TIME RADIO CONVENTION

May 2, 3 and 4, 2008

Sportsmen's Lodge- 12833 Ventura Boulevard, Studio City, CA 818/755-5000

RESERVATION FORM

Cancellation Deadline is April 22, 2008

Name _____ SPERCVAC Member # _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Day Phone _____ Evening Phone _____

() Special Diet Requirements _____

NOTE: If you wish to be seated with your friends, please send reservation forms and fees together. Convention tickets will be held at the Registration Desk. This is not a fundraiser and the full cost of tickets goes to cover costs. Therefore no part of the ticket price is considered a tax deductible contribution.

CONVENTION RATES Before 4/15/2008

(Prices are per person)

- 1. Special Discounted Convention Package (\$140) _____
 - 2. Friday daytime \$5 _____
 - 3. Friday evening dinner & program \$50 _____
 - 4. Saturday daytime \$20 _____
 - 5. Saturday evening dinner & program \$50 _____
 - 6. Sunday brunch & program \$25 _____
- TOTAL** _____

After 4/15/2008 - Total Cost: \$175

- 1. Friday daytime \$10 _____
 - 2. Friday evening \$55 _____
 - 3. Saturday daytime \$25 _____
 - 4. Saturday evening dinner & program \$55 _____
 - 5. Sunday brunch & program \$30 _____
- TOTAL** _____

DEALERS' TABLES - \$40/TABLE

HOTELS

Sportsmen's Lodge Hotel on the same property as the convention. Reservations: 800/821-8511. Mention SPERDVAC. \$142 + tax/night. Rates good until 4/11/08. After 4/11/08, rates based upon occupancy.

Days Inn (12933 Ventura Boulevard, Studio City, CA 91604 - 1/2 block from convention site Reservations: 818/789-6900. Mention SPERDVAC. Single: \$99 + tax/night. Double: \$109 + tax/night.

TRANSPORTATION

Sportsmen's Lodge: Free parking in the back of the Lodge.
Burbank Airport: Delta, US Air, Southwest, Alaska, and Jet Blue. Shuttle from the airport to Sportsmen's Lodge (15 minutes)

There will be a raffle and silent auction. Radio items are needed for both events. If you have an item to donate please contact Walden Hughes at 714/454-3281.

Make checks payable to SPERDVAC. Mail to Walden Hughes, 2527 Duke Place, Costa Mesa, CA 92626. Telephone: 714/454-3281. Email: Walden1@yesterdayusa.com. Checks are needed by April 15, 2008.



WHERE WERE THEY THEN? ON RADIO

Naturally!

by
Fred Essex

The title alone, old-time radio, suggests a distant past. But how old is old? For me, it started on Thanksgiving Eve, 1935, when along with nine other high-schoolers we performed on *The Fred Allen Show*. It originated in Studio 8H in 30 Rock and we did two shows, the second three hours after the first for the West Coast because there were no tapes in those days. It's hard to realize that that was 73 years ago.

Today, available statistics state those most interested in OTR are between the ages of 40 and 69 with the major numbers between 50 and 59. To people under 40, it must be curiosity leading them to read about or play recordings of programs their parents enjoyed. To those over 60, evidently their interests are primarily centered on TV and movie DVD rentals.

But what about the radio performers who took varying paths to grow in their profession since radio programming had changed drastically? We acknowledge a debt to the many actors, actresses and other performers who, by their talents, made it an important and memorable era. However, almost out of necessity they used radio as a spring-board to market their entertaining skills in other media.

Some names are well known, others kept busy but not in the limelight of publicity.

I recall directing an episode of a soap *Big Sister* and one of the cast members was Richard Widmark who later made an indelible mark in motion pictures when he pushed a woman in a wheelchair down a flight of stairs.

How many really remember *Major Bowes and his Amateur Hour*? I do with fondness for it was the first show to which I was assigned. "Round and round she goes and where she stops, nobody knows" Bowes would intone, a phrase some may recall. Then there was the gong he hit when amateurs were bad. Amazing! Listeners never thought the participants were pre-screened. Bad performances were scheduled to provide an aura of authenticity to the amateur hour. Still, his show did provide the first national broadcast of a singer, who was part of a quartet. His name? Frank Sinatra.

My responsibility was to time the com-

mercials and note the exact second the announcer began to read. Why? Later I learned some radio stations across the country could momentarily be off the air, perhaps due to an instantaneous power failure. If it occurred during the commercial time, the sponsor would be given a "make-good" commercial for the one lost.

A regular part of OTR were the late night remotes of big bands and their singers. While many singers were not part of established programs, radio gave them exposure and a head start leading to the big screen or to the small one.

Two come immediately to mind: Les Brown "the band of renown" had a cute singer originally named Doris Von Kappelhoff. Now you remember her as Doris Day who moved on and eventually starred as a lead actress/singer in many films.

Then, Ozzie Nelson and his orchestra had a singer, Peggy Lou Snyder, renamed Harriet Hilliard. When they were on the air with their music no one knew of TV. It wasn't until a dozen or more years later before all America watched the Ozzie and Harriet show as they represented all-American parents raising sons.

Fran Allison was "Aunt Fanny" on the long-running radio program *The Breakfast Club* hosted by Don McNeill out of Chicago. All those years she was unaware there would be a program in her future called *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*, which became a perennial TV favorite.

Mercedes McCambridge was heard on many radio dramas and eventually her talents were recognized by the motion picture industry. True, it was a time jump, but the night arrived when she was awarded an Oscar as best supporting actress for her work in *The Exorcist*.

Ed Begley, who was our Charlie Chan in radio, years later often guested on TV's *Bonanza*. Then, moving to the big screen, he earned an Oscar as best supporting actor in *Sweet Bird of Youth*.

Jim Backus and his wife, Henny, were regulars in radio. Jim went on to be the voice of Mr. Magoo and was the pompous millionaire on *Gilligan's Island*. Together they starred

in TV's *Blondie*.

Most of the actors consistently cast in radio dramas started on small local stations across the country before migrating to the big cities hoping for their break. Although radio was the top of the ladder in those days, when they moved on to try other fields most never forgot their broadcasting roots.

One particular illustration comes to mind; an announcer who early in his career recreated from ticker tape the Chicago Cubs baseball games while sitting in a studio of a midwest station hundreds of miles from Wrigley Field. If the ticker stated the player had a hit, he would slap his leg for the sound effect.

Years later after taking major steps from radio to starring in several motion pictures, he was elected president of the Screen Actors Guild. In that position he realized he liked the responsibility and soon developed a strong interest in politics. At this point it should be obvious reference is being made to the baseball recreator, "Dutch" Reagan. The one who was subsequently elected President of the United States. Although history will document his leadership in the world, apparently the allure of early radio remained with him.

Few are aware that after leaving office he attended an All-Star Baseball game, picked up the mike and did some broadcasting. Many in the crowded stands listening to the game announcer on their small radios recognized his voice. The cheers began and grew louder and louder. This time he didn't have to slap his leg for a hit. He was the hit!

Yes, OTR, and memories are made of this. ♣

FOR THE RECORD

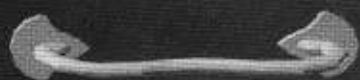
We received a couple of corrections regarding Fred's article, "The Ultimate Sacrifice," in last month's issue. Fred himself writes, "When re-reading the text I found my own stupid boo-boo in the first paragraph. 'Avenue of the Stars' is in Century City near the 20th-Century lot; 6th Avenue in New York became 'Avenue of the Americas' in the mid-forties."

Arthur Anderson, author of *Let's Pretend and the Golden Age of Radio*, added that CBS in the 1930s and 1940s was located in a 23-story building at 485 Madison Avenue at the corner of West 52nd Street, not 57th Street as stated in the article.



IN THE LAND OF

OZ



THE STORY OF RADIO'S FAVORITE FAMILY

by Jim Cox

UNlike the preponderance of family radio comedies, this one represented the authentic home-grown variety. These characters weren't fictional mirrors of their audio neighbors, with surnames like Aldrich, Anderson (*Father Knows Best*), Andrews, Archer, Brewster, Bumstead, Foster (*A Date with Judy*), Graves (*Junior Miss*), Riley and a host of ancillary nuclear tribes that only pretended to be family units. On *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* you got the real thing. Partially so, at least. For the most part, the key figures comprised members of the Nelson household. While they were professional actors, they were also genuine living, breathing Nelsons who—placed within the trappings of fantasy scenarios—purportedly lived at home the way audiences heard them on the air. Their fans merely eavesdropped on their personal exchanges and dilemmas by tuning in to new episodes every week.

"One of the reasons for the program's tremendous following was that audiences actually believed that the Nelsons were truly playing themselves, a myth the Nelson family helped perpetuate," conceded one scholar. Ozzie Nelson, for one, opposed giving the writers credit on the air. "We will lose an illusion [if we do so]," he maintained. "They [audiences] think we are really making this up as we go along." Of course, most family conversations aren't scripted and rehearsed. But then "normal" interactions in most clans wouldn't be very interesting to anybody hearing them, either. Fictitious situations were invented, as on every other show. The difference was that the four stars—Ozzie, Harriet, David, Ricky—shared the same family surname and were related. If nothing else, that clearly separated them from most of the other four-member units on the air. Somehow it may have made it all seem more believable, too.

The principals, Ozzie and Harriet "America's favorite young couple" (after all, an announcer validated it every week for a decade, even as they were approaching their fifties!)—not only starred in but significantly shaped the program named after them. Ozzie's driving influence, in particular, prevented the series from joining a glut of undistinguishable teenage sitcoms in the 1940s. On those latter shows the expressions and crises almost always focused on a younger personality. Think Henry Aldrich, Archie Andrews, Corliss Archer,

Joey Brewster, Judy Foster, Judy Graves, et al. *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, on the other hand, most often began and ended with the parents instead, and predominantly with Ozzie. It didn't even rotate between family members from week to week, as did *Father Knows Best* with its mixture of individuals' personal concerns. Ozzie and Harriet simply was what it was. One authority branded it "the Holiday Inn of sitcoms—no surprises."

One chronicler, at least, conjectured that the whiny voiced Ozzie was the show's foremost figure, citing "his tangents [as] the vehicles to confusion." The historiographer explained: "Once Ozzie had set his mind to something, nothing could dissuade him until disaster had run its inevitable course.... Ozzie would take it to ridiculous lengths, Harriet would gently try to guide him back to reason, David and Ricky would get in a few wisecracks, and Ozzie would be further confused by the ill-timed advice of his next-door neighbor Thorny." Syd Thornberry's (Thorny's) arrival at the Nelson home was habitually announced by an innocuous "shave-and-a-haircut" rat-tata-tat-tat door knock, sans the usual "two bits" finish. It became his trademark—in addition to the rash counsel he dispatched. A couple of other characters were good at giving ill-timed suggestions, too, especially the kind that wasn't helpful or fully appreciated: Mrs. Hilliard, Harriet's mother (her "instructions" were usually meted out by telephone), and the opinionated minor Emmy Lou (who appeared to get along in life without a surname—unless, of course, it was Lou).

Oswald George Nelson, the "preeminent sitcom dad of the 50s," was born of Swedish heritage on March 20, 1906, at Jersey City, NJ. He was reared in the affluent suburbs of Ridgefield Park, where, decades later, the street on which his high school stood was renamed Ozzie Nelson. He excelled in sports in his youth and initially thought he was cut out to be a cartoonist. Yet, when he learned to play the ukulele his ambitions changed. He picked up the banjo next. Combining his talent with pianist Frank Leithner, young Nelson performed at local venues. At about 14, he and his chum joined a couple of others their age to form the Syncopation Four. They played garden parties, local clubs and weddings. Ozzie Nelson also vocalized regularly.

Enrolling at Rutgers University in 1923, from which he earned a baccalaureate degree four years later, he demonstrated prowess

as an athlete in the boxing ring and on the football field. The athlete-musician worked his way through school coaching football and fronting a band he organized at Rutgers. His entourage played college proms, hotel ballrooms, nightclubs and other tuition-paying venues. His "signature theme" was his alma mater's school song, "Loyal Sons of Rutgers."⁴ Nelson systematically worked his way through all the instruments in his musical brigade, allegedly mastering every one except the trumpet. The saxophone was his matchless specialty. Following graduation he remained at Rutgers for three more years, gaining a law degree there in 1930. He was a well-educated impresario in the making.

Although he had prepared himself to become a barrister, by the time he was out of school the Great Depression had plunged the country into economic chaos. Nelson found the money from the dance orchestra simply too promising to let it go. His outfit, in fact, was believed to be one of the nation's best paid at the time. He acquired a permanent spot on a local station that beamed his melodies throughout Gotham.

Young Nelson was a sharp-witted theorist. He set goals and demonstrated early on that he was anything but a laggard. He acquired savvy business acumen as well as an entrepreneurial spirit while coursing along the route to eventual stardom. Those factors helped him reap substantial financial rewards down the road. At the same time, he exhibited a free will that signified he wasn't above priming the pump, resorting to a little manipulation to accomplish his desired ends, particularly during that early epoch.

In 1930, when *The New York Daily Mirror* printed a poll asking its readers to indicate their favorite radio orchestra, a resourceful Nelson hatched a plan to achieve maximum returns. His manager informed him that the newspaper street vendors received credit for unsold papers they could not disperse by simply returning the front pages of the copies to the publisher. That news—coupled with the fact that the ballots were printed on the back page of the issues—allowed Nelson to stoke the furnace a bit. He surreptitiously dispatched cohorts to retrieve hundreds of leftover back pages as they were discarded. The ballots were filled out with his name and turned in to the paper.

The journal soon announced some startling results: Ozzie Nelson's group surpassed

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Ozzie and Harriet in late 1940s publicity pose.

those of the better known national orchestras fronted by conductors like Rudy Vallee (with whom Nelson shared a physical resemblance), the legendary Paul Whiteman and a few more of their eminent stature. Nelson's manager applied the poll as leverage to book the Nelson troupe into the Glen Island Casino, a renowned venue on Long Island Sound that offered radio exposure to dance bands. Nelson, it seemed, was on his way to bigger and better things.

He kept the band going throughout the 1930s and 1940s. In the 1950s, with the demands of weekly radio and television broadcasts, he found the band impractical to manage any longer and dissolved it. In its heyday, however, his musical entourage was composed of a coterie of music-makers that

was widely heralded for its impressive impact on the business. Included were Nelson as leader-vocalist; Holly Humphreys, Harry Johnson and Bo Ashford on trumpet; Abe Lincoln and Elmer Smithers on trombone; Charlie Bluebeck and Bill Stone playing clarinet and alto saxophone; Bill Nelson on clarinet and tenor saxophone; Sid Brokaw playing violin and bass violin; Harry Gray and Chauncey Gray on piano; Sandy Wolfe playing guitar; Fred Whiteside on string bass; Joe Bohan on drums; and Harriet Hilliard as feminine vocalist.

Beyond a family movie in which he starred in 1952, Ozzie Nelson's dossier included a half-dozen more theatrical films in which he demonstrated his acting prowess as well as his music: *Sweetheart of the Campus* (1941), *Hi, Good Lookin'* (1944), *Wave-a-Stick Blues* (1944), *Take It Big* (1944), *People Are Funny* (1946) and *The Impossible Years* (1968). In 1939 his was one of 49 bands that NBC Radio carried via remotes over its dual chains. Nelson later turned up in eight one-shot episodes of popular TV fare like *The Bob Cummings Show*, *The Mothers-in-Law*, *Adam 12*, *Night Gallery* and *Love American Style*. He wrote, directed and produced the 1965 motion picture *Love and Kisses*. Furthermore, he directed several assorted series, as well as solo installments, on TV. He toured with his spouse in lighter stage performances like *The Marriage-Go-Round*. Together they played in an occasional radio anthology drama, such as *The Lady Esther Screen Guild Theater* in 1946, and *Suspense* in 1947 (and twice more in 1950). This occurred at the crest of their aural series' popularity.

He was awarded two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, one for television, the other shared with his wife for their radio contributions. In 1973, as he and Harriet were at-

tempting a television comeback, Prentice-Hall released his memoir, *Ozzie*. In the meantime, that same year Ozzie and Harriet starred in the syndicated sitcom *Ozzie's Girls*, with David Nelson directing. Its premise had the Nelsons renting the boys' rooms to a couple of college coeds. By then the gentler environment of an earlier age had significantly dissipated, however, and viewers had little tolerance for a show like theirs. It didn't survive the season. "It wasn't even up to their radio standards of 25 years before," one authority opined.

Although the couple had been voted "Best Husband-Wife Team in TV" for seven consecutive years by subscribers to the fanzine *TV-Radio Mirror*, the family patriarch was finished. The Internet Movie Data Base (IMDB), a key resource tracking the professional accomplishments of film and television personalities, suggests no new credits for Ozzie Nelson beyond 1973, even on the talk show circuit. By then he was suffering from recurring malignant tumors. He passed away, from liver cancer, in Hollywood on June 3, 1975. For a while prior to his death Harriet slipped into semi-retirement alongside him at their Laguna Beach manor. Until she resumed sporadic TV acting in 1976, she, too, was out of the public spotlight for about three years.

Harriet Nelson was a Midwestern girl. She was born Peggy Lou Snyder in Des Moines, IA, on July 18, 1909. Her father, Roy E. Hilliard, 30 at her birth, and mother, Hazel, 22, were "theatrical dramatic artists." Their daughter made her own show business debut at six weeks of age as a "walk-on" in *The Heir to the Hurrah*. The infant was carried onstage in the arms of her singer-actress-dancer mama. At about that time her folks were members of a traveling stock outfit, Morris Brothers Night Company. At age three the child had a speaking role in the Southern opus *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*. At five she was enrolled in school, and for 11 years she concentrated on her studies—except during school holidays, when she toured with her showbiz elders.

Harriet grew up living in a hotel with her family, so she was unaccustomed to a more traditional home environment. "Ozzie and Harriet," noted *The Akron Beacon Journal* in 1994, "did not reflect her life any more than it resembled life in the homes where it was seen."

As a young teenager she won a beauty pageant. At 16, three months shy of high school graduation from Kansas City's St. Agnes Academy, she followed her mom by then separated from her husband, Harriet's dad, to New York City, seeking performing venues. There the young woman joined the Corps de Ballet at the Capitol Theater on Broadway. In 1927, at 17, her career advanced as she became a member of the Gotham-based Radio Keith Orpheum vaudeville circuit, on which entertainers like Gracie Allen and George Burns performed. She worked with Ken Murray for a year as a straight woman—feeding him lines in comedy routines—and later with Bert Lahr in a similar capacity. At about the same time, she danced in the Harry Carroll Revue, the first vaudeville unit on the RKO



The animated Nelson family in sponsor Hotpoint's early 1950s television series introduction.

circuit to play double shows daily.

Writing in 1998, a *New York Times* reporter revealed: "She hung out at the Cotton Club, began smoking at 12, was briefly married to an abusive comedian and lived a highflying life until she fell in love with Ozzie and handed over her career to him." According to an A&E biography, "She liked a good off color joke. She enjoyed her cocktails at night. She had the talent to go on and be a big star, but she made that decision to be Ozzie's wife." Such disclosures were a new twist to the veneer that publicists and the public itself ascribed to her. Obviously the image building eclipsed her earlier life, which, upon reflection, appeared alien to the image concocted for her on radio and on the screen. It was probably a past that she was happy to escape. Eventually her exposure on the stage and vaudeville tours led her to Hollywood, where she appeared in a credited role in the 1932 B-film *The Campus Mystery*.

Several recorders have testified that bandleader Ozzie Nelson—seeking a distaff singer to add to his entourage—saw her in the movie and was impressed enough by her looks and talent to track her down. He found her appearing at a gig in a New York restaurant. Whether he actually saw her in the film before he met her is moot. She clarified this much in 1989 when she met radio interviewer Chuck Schaden: "I went into a very large nightclub called the Hollywood Restaurant in New York City. I was the mistress of ceremonies there.... I met Ozzie at that time." When he offered her a permanent job—he was still performing at the Glen Island Casino—she took it and became no more than the second female in history to vocalize with a big band (Paul Whiteman's Mildred Bailey was the trendsetter). She and Nelson developed a patter-and-tune swap that became an on-stage signature. As the band played softly in the background, the duo hurled songs back and forth between them with aplomb. They exchanged jocular repartee, pioneering a technique not seen elsewhere prior to their innovation. "For Ozzie, though he didn't know it then, it was the final stroke of fate that pushed him irrevocably away from the practice of law and cemented him into show business," a historian wrote.

The following year his new lady singer was on network radio, accompanied by Nelson's orchestra, on NBC Blue's *Baker's Broadcast*, aka *The Joe Penner Show*. Harriet Hilliard cut records for four labels—Brunswick, Vocalian, RCA Victor and Blue Bird. During their first summer working together the vocalist and the maestro also fell in love. They wed on October 8, 1935. Her movie career resumed the following year, and over the next 16 years she made another 19 theatrical releases, a few of them

with her spouse. Among her film credits are *Follow the Fleet* (1936), *The Life of the Party* (1937), *Cocoanut Grove* (1938), *Sweetheart of the Campus* (1941), *Confessions of Boston Blackie* (1941), *Canal Zone* (1942), *The Falcon Strikes Back* (1943), *Hi, Good Lookin'* (1944), *Take It Big* (1944) and, of course, *Here Come the Nelsons* (1952).

Harriet performed in lots of stage productions, too, among them *The Impossible Years* and *State Fair*. She was prominent in television. In addition to the two family series in which she co-starred, she appeared in *Once an Eagle*, a 1976 miniseries. Between 1972 and 1989 she made the rounds of TV anthologies, dramas and sitcoms, where she acted in single episodes of *Love American Style*, *The Love Boat*, *Fantasy Island*, *Happy Days* and *Father Dowling Mysteries*. Following Ozzie's death in the mid-1970s, she turned up in a half dozen made-for-TV flicks, with intriguing titles like *Smash-Up on Interstate 5* (1976), *Death Car on the Freeway* (1979), *The First Time* (1982) and *The Kid with the 200 I.Q.* (1983) among them. An appearance on February 10, 1989, as Sister Agnes on the ABC TV series of granddaughter Tracy Nelson (Rick's eldest child), *Father Dowling Mysteries*, was allegedly Harriet's final public appearance. She quietly lived out her remaining years at Laguna Beach until October 2, 1994, when she succumbed to congestive heart failure. She was 85.

Five years earlier she replied to the question, "What was the best time for you?" in this manner: "I loved radio best.... You could have a life of your own in radio. It was the best of all worlds. It was big-time. You did it live. Then you had the thrill of working in front of an audience and having one crack at it. You didn't dare make a mistake, so you were absolutely on your best. It only happened once a week, so you could live like a human being the rest of the week. You could go to the movies, you could have people in for dinner. When we went to television, it was 24 hours a day, seven days a week.... I still get such a kick out of those radio shows." The Nelsons' son David Oswald Nelson was born in New York City on October 24, 1936. By the time he was a teenager the family was in California, where he attended Hollywood High School. While he appeared in 13 theatrical motion pictures in the halfcentury from 1948 to 1998, the only memorable one (besides the 1952 family epic) was 1957's *Peyton Place*. Others included forgettable titles like *The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker* (1959), *-30-* (1959), *Up in Smoke* (1978) and *Broken Vessels* (1998). Much of David's professional career was invested in directing and producing films for the big and small screens, a talent he clearly picked up under the tutelage of his father. The eldest son produced and directed 1973's *Easy*



Band leader Ozzie Nelson with his vocalist Harriet Hilliard and radio's Joe Penner in the early days.

to *Be Free* and 1983's *Last Plane Out* for the cinemas, while directing a few other films for dual mediums, plus the 1965-66 ABC sitcom *O. K. Crackerby!* He was director of *Ozzie's Girls* in 1973, laboring alongside his parents once again. David also directed a plethora of television commercials. He acted in a quartet of made-for-TV films, including one with his mother, 1976's *Smash-Up on Interstate 5*. Far removed in 1983 from the teen scene, of which he was such a visible part three decades earlier, he turned up that year in the TV movie *High School U.S.A.*, playing, of all people, the janitor. For his TV efforts David Nelson was awarded a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

On May 20, 1961, David Nelson wed June Blair. She joined the television series that year and remained with it until its cancellation five years later. To the pair was born Daniel Blair Nelson on August 20, 1962, and James Eric Nelson on June 8, 1966. The couple divorced in 1975, and David remarried on September 3, 1975, to Yvonne O'Connor Huston. He became the stepfather of Teri Nelson, who married TV game show host Chuck Woolery. David and Yvonne continue sharing their lives together as of this writing.

David's younger brother, Eric Hilliard (Ricky) Nelson, meanwhile, was born at Teaneck, New Jersey, on May 8, 1940. Nobody knew it then, of course, but he was destined to become one of the nation's first teen idols, if not the first. Early on he distinguished himself on the family radio and television series, where, according to a critic, "He was the young, cocky boy with his own catchphrase ('I don't mess around, boy') decades before Bart Simpson was born." Life began to turn in a new direction for Ricky, and for the Nelsons themselves, when the juvenile reached his mid-teens.

The commingling of fact and fiction in the family's lives was well illustrated in 1957 when

"I loved radio best.... You could have a life of your own in radio. It was the best of all worlds. It was big-time. You did it live. Then you had the thrill of working in front of an audience and having one crack at it. You didn't dare make a mistake, so you were absolutely on your best. It only happened once a week, so you could live like a human being the rest of the week."



Rock Hudson makes himself home at the Nelson dinner table as Harriet, Ozzie, Barbara Lawrence and Ricky and David welcome him in *Here Come the Nelsons*, a feature that convinced ABC that the Nelsons could be just as humorous on television as on radio.

16-year-old Ricky's impressionable real-life sweetheart developed an overpowering infatuation with rising superstar Elvis Presley. To counter the offender, young Ricky convinced his dad to set up a recording session for him to cut a rock 'n' roll tune. Within a week of its release in April 1957, the youth's single of Fats Domino's hit "I'm Walkin'" sold a million copies and climbed to the second spot on music popularity charts. He was instantly America's newest idol, and the teenyboppers coast-to-coast had a fresh heartthrob. Between then and 1963 Ricky Nelson cut 17 more top-selling single discs that put him high on the record charts and kept him there. They included "Be Bop Baby" (September 1957), "Poor Little Fool" (June 1958), "It's Late" (February 1959), "There'll Never Be Anyone Else but You" (February 1959), "Travelin' Man" (April 1961), "Hello, Mary Lou" (April 1961), "Young World" (February 1962), "Fools Rush In" (September 1963) and "For You" (December 1963). He would have only one more colossal hit after that, a long time coming, "Garden Party" (June 1972). He is assumed to have been second only to Presley in sales of single discs in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Ricky Nelson's career as a pop singer benefited tremendously from his exposure on a weekly TV series. As the storyline concluded on many episodes, he was surrounded by salivating hordes of yelling, screaming teenyboppers (who were actually paid TV "extras") as he introduced his latest rock 'n' roll number. It wasn't a bad way to launch a promotional campaign. With the support of the music trade papers, his fortune zoomed overnight. All of it exhibited an entrepreneurial spirit

that was seemingly passed from father to son. One pundit allowed: "More important than his actual music perhaps was the fact that in giving their blessing to Ricky's career, Ozzie and Harriet demonstrated to millions of timid middle-class Americans that rock and roll was not a satanic threat but a viable musical alternative."

Unlike his sibling David, the younger Nelson remained primarily a performer after the family TV series faded. In addition to recording, he turned up in eight films screened in theaters and in three movies on television. All were less-than-memorable, excepting 1959's *Rio Bravo* and 1960's *The Wackiest Ship in the Army*. He made a few noteworthy guest appearances in a dozen TV episodes of shows like *The General Electric Theater*, *Hondo*, *McCloud*, *The Streets of San Francisco*, *Owen Marshall-Counselor at Law*, *The Hardy Boys Mysteries*, *Tales of the Unexpected*, *The Love Boat* and *Saturday Night Live*. Rick (he had gotten rid of "Ricky" long before) also hosted the 1967 ABC TV summer music series *Malibu U*.

On April 20, 1963, he married Kristin Harmon in a ceremony that *Life* magazine touted as the "Wedding of the Year." Like her sister-in-law before her, she too joined the TV series from 1964 until it left the air in 1966. The couple, meanwhile, produced four offspring: Tracy, Matthew, Gunnar and Sam. Tracy Nelson subsequently gained renown as a Hollywood actress, co-starring in *Father Dowling Mysteries* on NBC and ABC from 1989 to 1991.

Despite all the good news, "By the late 70s," according to Wikipedia, "Ricky's life was in shambles. His wife had divorced him

[this didn't occur until 1981] and taken their four children. He wasn't making records, and when he played live at all, it was in very small venues." He was still singing and was engaged to wed Helen Blair when they both died in a plane crash on December 31, 1985, at De Kalb, TX, en route to a New Year's Eve concert in Dallas.

The younger Nelson was admitted posthumously to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987. Like others of his family, he also received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. In 2005 TV Guide ranked him second on a list of TV's 25 Greatest Teen Idols.

Having "met" the four principals in *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, we return now to our regularly scheduled feature already in progress. During their formative professional years, when the parents were musicians, "Ozzie's deliberate hesitancy and self-deprecating humor were the perfect foil for the sweet and sassy Harriet, who interrupted her songs with sarcastic banter," as one source observed.

In the early 1940s the pair joined the cast of *The Red Skelton Show* on NBC Radio on Tuesday nights, gaining far-reaching notoriety via ongoing performances. On some of those occasions Harriet portrayed the Mean Little Kid's mom, as well as Daisy June and Calamity June. Additionally, the big band routines were replayed, including the husband-and-wife banter Ozzie and Harriet had developed years before. They added some sketches that ostensibly afforded humorous glimpses into their offstage lives. It was all fodder for the creative mind of Ozzie Nelson, who was making notes all the while.

When comic star Skelton was drafted into the Army in 1944, family patriarch Ozzie wasn't sure what their next pursuit should be. But all that changed over dinner one evening at the Brown Derby Restaurant when the couple socialized with old friend Don Quinn, who made his living putting words in the mouths of *Fibber McGee & Molly* every week. He assured Ozzie, "You could write your own show." Ozzie wasn't as confident, but he and Harriet ultimately decided to go for it. He penned a half-hour program, they made an audition tape in a studio with a live audience, and producer John Guedel (*People Are Funny*, Art Linkletter's *House Party*, *You Bet Your Life*) flew the trial platters to New York. Within a week the pair signed for a series with International Silver Company. They decided to use child actors to play their sons, feeling their own offspring were not yet old enough to be exposed to entertainment's exploitative nature.

That fall Ozzie and Harriet, plus the boys, shifted their allegiance to CBS on Sunday nights,



David and the irrepressible Ricky in the early 1950s.

inaugurating their own domestic sitcom. The 14-year television extension—which superseded the radio version and closely paralleled it in the decades to follow—prompted an astute assessment by Nina Leibman:

From the outset, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* had a nostalgic feel, resembling Ozzie's 1920s youth in New Jersey more than 1950s Los Angeles. The picket-fenced neighborhoods, the corner drugstore and malt shop featured weekly in this slow-paced half-hour infiltrated American culture at a time of social unease and quiescent distress. In reality, most 1950s fathers were working ten-hour days and commuting long distances to isolated suburbs. For the Nelsons, however, Ozzie was always home, neighbors still chatted over the back fence, and downtown was a brisk walk away. The Nelsons presented an America that never was, but always wished for, and, through their confusion of reality and fantasy, worked to concoct an image of American life that is, to this day, mistakenly claimed not only as ideal, but as authentic.

Another assessor viewed the whole thing similarly:


Ozzie was a guy who never seemed to work: he lounged around his home ... in a sweater and slacks, his whole existence built around his weekly displays of flawed judgment. This even became a running gag for nightclub comics: the question "What does Ozzie Nelson do for a living?" was prime trivia. For the record, he was a bandleader; because most of the action of Ozzie and Harriet was set on weekends when the boys were out of school, his occupation was never a factor. But the notion persisted as the

times changed—here was a family from Neverland, far away from Real Life.

At its start the series focused on the foibles of the bandleader and his clan, with numerous references to band rehearsals, road tours and other performing activities. (An aside: did this possibly inspire one of the premises of TV's *I Love Lucy* a decade later? Coincidentally, recall that both shows had a "little" Ricky, also.) Comedy sketches were balanced with full-length songs. The music was dropped completely within two years, and complete storylines filled its 30-minute allotment. Not until April 1949, after Bing Crosby made a guest appearance on the show, accompanied by his son Lindsay, did Nelson become convinced that putting the real David, age 12, and Ricky, age nine, on the air could be a good thing. In a trial run, the boys first escorted their father on a reciprocal visit to the Crosby show, *Philco Radio Time*. The audience loved it. Replacing the child actors with the authentic adolescents increased the Nelson series' appeal, effectively adding to the verisimilitude of the purely fictional narrative.

Actually, the initial appearance of the Nelson boys on a national radio hookup occurred on the popular CBS matinee feature Art Linkletter's *House Party*. "What do you want to be when you grow up?" the gregarious master of ceremonies asked each of the precocious kids (who say the darndest things!) that day. Eleven-year-old David Nelson, whose hero and mentor was obviously his dad, replied: "Well, I'm going to go to law school and become an attorney and then I'm going on the radio." Like father, like son. And little Ricky, then eight, declared his intent to become one of two things—"a Cub Scout or a Lone Stranger."

At about the same time that was transpiring, Ozzie Nelson bargained for and obtained the very first non-cancelable 10 year contract in broadcasting history when he signed with ABC that year (1949) to air his family sitcom. Pulling that feat off was a coup de grace that became the talk of the industry and the envy of other entertainers, and set a new standard for future negotiations. Translated, it meant that for a full decade the Nelsons were effectively exempt from any obstructions that the network, their sponsors or advertising agencies might decide to toss into their paths. Even better than that proviso, however, was the fact



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that they were herewith assured of receiving a basic payment sum for the lifetime of the contract, whether their program aired or not.

Parenthetically, the show maintained ratings that approached or exceeded double-digit figures (considered acceptable, and even good) during the first three years of their 10 year agreement (e.g., 10.0 in 1951-52). However, the numbers plunged to 3.6 in 1952-53 and 2.8 in 1953-54, the last two years they were on radio. By then they were also on ABC TV, which contributed significantly in reducing the number of radio listeners to a fraction of their former highs, as more and more Americans became mesmerized by the tube.

When Universal Studios released a motion picture, *Here Come the Nelsons*, in 1952, co-starring the tribe with Rock Hudson, it was a smashing success. ABC, meanwhile, took

RADIO'S FAVORITE FAMILY of HAPPY MILLIONS!
Now the screen delight of millions more!



OZZIE and HARRIET DAVID and RICKY

HERE COME THE NELSONS

57 VARIETIES OF FUN!

Co-Starring **ROCK HUDSON** with **BARBARA LAWRENCE** - **SIBYLON LEONARD** - **JOE BACKUS**

Advert for the 1952 film with Rock Hudson

note of the development and believed it had a strong prospect already under contract for an equally award-winning television sitcom. It guessed right, of course, making its infamous 10-year indenture pay off handsomely for the web, as well as its stars. Incidentally, in the two years that both the radio and televisions coexisted, Ozzie Nelson—ever the vigilant overseer, down to the smallest detail—insisted on totally different scripts for the dual formats. The radio show was prerecorded (audio tape had come into vogue then), and the TV series was filmed separately at General Service Studios, a dozen blocks from the Nelson domicile. (Although the Nelsons' program was shot in color in its final two years, an eyewitness noted, "In spirit, and in the popular imagination, they remained black-and-white denizens of the 1950s.")

Nelson's astute business acumen translated into him being actively involved in the 435 chapters of the show aired on television, just as he had been with the radio program. Correctly dubbed a perfectionist, he oversaw the writing, editing, directing and producing of the show, demanding the most rigid criterion be stringently met.

When he didn't direct an installment, David Nelson did. Night-long story idea sessions involving secondary scribes and production personnel were calendared weekly at the Nelson abode in Hollywood Hills. Nothing was left to chance.

"A stickler for quality," affirmed one insider, "Ozzie was adamant that his [TV] program look different from the inferior kinescope products dominating the television schedule." The program was filmed using the highest quality 35 millimeter celluloid available. Once preparatory editing had been completed, Nelson reeled it before an audience situated in a Los Angeles theater he had rented to determine at what points and how intense the laugh track cues should be. It was a highly professional business; it was much more than merely acting to Ozzie, for he gave it his all—from concept to finished product.

The network publicists dubbed the Nelsons "America's favorite family," and such backslapping persisted for years. While the show's complete title for most of the run was *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, it was TV Guide that pontificated: "There wasn't, in fact, much 'adventure' anyone could discern in the lives of the suburban Nelson clan." Reviewer Gary Brumburgh observed that "Ozzie's dad character came off stammering, hesitant and slightly absent-minded, which meshed perfectly with Harriet's smart, wisecracking appeal."

In their early radio days the Nelsons resided at 1847 Rogers Road, a fact that the critics found "insidious," "despicable" and

"shameless." It was no subtle reminder that their long-running sponsor, the International Silver Company, plugged its 1847 Rogers Brothers silver patterns at every commercial break. In television, however—with tableware long a thing of the past—the Nelsons occupied a two-story Colonial in the hamlet of Hillsdale at 822 Sycamore Road, an address that related to nothing. It was hyped as "an exact replica" of their real home in Hollywood, although that hardly seems conceivable. And what would be the point if it was? What percentage of viewers would know or really care? Nevertheless, when the Nelsons transitioned seamlessly onto those small video screens in America's living rooms, "they looked exactly like we thought they would," an observer gushed.

The shows in both mediums chronicled the growing pains of the boys and their parents, and dealt with mundane issues like school, club memberships, girlfriends, hobbies, sports and rivalries. After the boys grew up (on television), they went off to college, returning as storybook attorneys, a profession not so far from their dear old dad's heart. In sweeping generalities the plots frequently setup; (b) complication (if one person was responsible for this, it was normally Ozzie); (c) additional complications; and (d) resolution (most often facilitated by Harriet).

In a typical Christmas show aired in the 1940s, the senior Nelsons had just purchased a radio-phonograph combination for their living room. Both mom and dad convinced themselves that this appliance, a rather heavy investment, would satisfy their Christmas needs that year. Each one promised the other not to go behind his/her back and purchase another gift for the partner. Following that setup, the plot thickened as Thorny (played by John Brown), Mrs. Hilliard (Lurene Tuttle) and Emmy Lou (Janet Waldo or Barbara Eiler) contributed separate recommendations for gifts the spouses should consider giving one another—and how disappointed the other would be if he/she didn't receive it. In the end, of course, a covert purchase was made by Ozzie and Harriet and hidden away for a surprise revelation at the family celebration. And they all lived happily until the following week. Once listeners heard a few of these states of affairs they could almost write the predictable outcomes.

Some typical installment titles included the following, some of which prompt intriguing thoughts: "Jury Duty," "The Argument," "Interior Decorator," "The Mustache," "The Circus," "Night School," "The Mystic," "Easter Sunrise Service," "Man and Superman," "Don't Spare the Rod," "Mother's Day," "Boy's Day," "David and Ricky's Punishment," "Father's Day," "Self Confidence," "Fourth of July" and "The Real Estate

Deal."

Will the real Ozzie and Harriet Nelson please stand up? Unlike his public persona, Ozzie was compulsively attentive to business while Harriet was an alien to the kitchen. They employed a butler, cook, upstairs maid, chauffeur, gardener and a traveling nursemaid for their journeys from home after they had children. Their dinner guests weren't the Thornberrys of the storyline for the Nelsons routinely entertained the likes of Charles Correll, Art Linkletter, Fred MacMurray and their wives. They also hung out at Don the Beachcomber's and Chasen's, not at the corner drug store soda fountain. What fans heard on the radio or saw on TV didn't resemble how the Nelsons actually lived, even though it was enchanting.

Some biographers have suggested that the Nelsons themselves made the decision to remove their long-running television series from the air in 1966. But David recalled it differently. In an interview 23 years afterward, he admitted, "It was really ABC who made the decision." According to David, "Rick and I were ready, but my father never was."

The Museum of Broadcast Communications observed: "The Nelsons embodied wholesome, 'normal' American existence so conscientiously (if blandly) that their name epitomized upright, happy family life for decades." Conversely, the fact that three of the four members of that kinship divorced a spouse while perpetuating the fantasy of the idyllic domestic environment is an ambiguity. As they portrayed America's ultimate nuclear family, the values that were hypothetically imbued in the national psyche were being lost. In many places, the optimistic idealism which was an underlying theme of those shows no longer prevails. It was Camelot for the common man, a kind of hoped-for impracticality that could never be. Despite that, vast throngs were convinced that it really did exist, if only for the moment. ♦

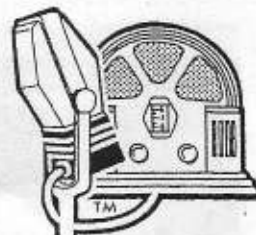


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