Radio Days

by Artie Richard

The radio days were a very brief, fleeting period in time, perhaps 20 years. I still consider it a privilege to have lived during that time, especially as a kid. Before that were the days of the "Penny Dreadful" and "Nickel Novels" not of much use to kids before they were able to read. What the printed word and radio did have in common was the liberal use of the imagination.

I had a vivid, mental picture of Capt. Midnight who, as a purely radio creature, had no real appearance. There were few things more sobering than seeing photos of the actual (actors) Shadow, Green Hornet, Lone Ranger, etc. Also radio was economical. The mere mention of being surrounded by thousands of Indians, or pirates, or Nazis was enough to fulfill the vision in one's mind. You did not need thousands of actors to complete the image.

One of the main ingredients of radio was the use of "catch words" or "catch phrases" and the one that stands out in my memory, done in thick, Jewish accent was: "Pickle in da middle vid da mustard on top, just the way you like em and they're always hot." It belonged to Mr. Kitzel on the Jack Benny program. The "catch phrase" was the trademark of a character and it was used each time the character appeared. Today's audiences probably would not appreciate such repetition but, besides kids, consider who were the audiences of radio.

They were the survivors of the Great Depression and the terrible days of WW II. They had suffered through awful upheavals both at home and abroad. They came home after that war and went back to work without bitching and moaning. Of course if they had, who would listen? People like this need and desire stability. They did not need newer, bigger, better every day.

The radio days were followed, in about 1950, by the "Age of TV." We are still mired there. Some of the radio programs made the leap to TV; few were successful. Without a doubt the standout radio program of all time was "Amos n Andy." Everybody listened to "Amos n Andy" and it is unfortunate that it came under a black cloud later during the civil rights movements. It is curious that TV almost immediately had its "Mr. Television" in Milton Berle and he surely was worthy of the title. But in over 20 years there had been no "Mr. Radio." The radio audiences could be considered like an undisciplined mob of guerrilla fighters while the TV audience was more like an organized army marching in lock step.

The single most famous one time broadcast was 1938's "The War of the Worlds" broadcast by "The Mercury Theater on the Air," the brainchild of the great Orson Welles. The invasion by aliens was so convincing that a large portion of the populace thought it was really happening. Pandemonium ran rampant. Oddly enough this escaped me. I was only four so it was, more than
likely, past my bedtime.

Some of my most vivid memories of growing up in Gerritsen Beach are of the radio programs that held me captive as I tried to do homework. It's probably because of their distraction that I never became a doctor or lawyer. Come to think of it, maybe they did me a favor.

During radio days, programs fell naturally into three major groups: 15 mins. and on 5 times a week. 30 mins and on once a week. One hour and on once a week. The "Lone Ranger" was 30 mins. but was on Mon., Wed. & Fri. at 7:30 PM.

Here are some of the ones I remember and the year they were first heard, and some catch phrases.

Crime

- **Dick Tracy**: Mutual, 1935. Would have been my favorite had it followed the strip.
- **Bulldog Drummond**: Mutual, 1941, 30 mins. An English detective. These were his "American" adventures.
- **Boston Blackie**: Chester Morris, as in the movies. "Enemy to those who would make him an enemy, friend to those who have no friends."
- **Mr. District Attorney**: NBC, 1939, 30 mins. for Ipana. "Champion of the people, defender of truth…"
- **Ellery Queen**: CBS, 1939
- **Sam Spade**: CBS, 1946. Howard Duff was always getting hit on the head (similar to Richard Diamond) they must have had noggins like rocks. "Effie…take a note." Instead of cases he had "capers."
- **The Shadow**: Mutual, 1936, 30 mins. "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?" "The weed of crime bears bitter fruit…"
- Green Hornet Mutual 1935 30 mins. Many people are not aware that Britt Reid was the grandnephew of John Reid, the Lone Ranger. Also his Japanese sidekick Kato morphed, in 1941, into a Philippino. "Get the car Kato."

Adventures

- **Capt. Midnight**: Mutual, 1940, 15 mins. One of the best remembered. Hero with the Secret Squadron fought evildoers all over the world.
- **Jack Armstrong**: CBS, 1933, 15 mins. for Wheaties, breakfast of champions. Here is where one got "whistling rings" "secret decoders" and even "Norden bombsights."
Adventures in Exploring

- **Terry & The Pirates**: NBC, 1937, 15 mins. Right out of the famous comic strip.
- **Hop Harrigan**: ABC, 1942. "America's Ace of the airwaves." "OK. This is Hop Harrigan coming in."

Comedy

- **The Bickersons**: 15 min. John and Blanche (Don Ameche & Frances Langford) were always bickering, usually about Gloria Goosby of whom Blanche was very jealous.
- **Amos n Andy**: WMAQ Chi., 1928, 30 min. Really the antics of Andy and the "Kingfish" They were both always getting in trouble with their wives, the sisters, Ruby and Sapphire.
- **Lum and Abner**: NBC, 1931. 15 mins. for Quaker Oats. Lum Edwards and Abner Peabody a couple of real rustics.
- **Spike Jones**: 30 mins. Musical nonsense with the "City Slickers."
- **Truth or Consequences**: NBC, 1940, 30 mins. "You did not tell the truth so you must pay the consequences." And that could be hilarious.
- **Answer Man**: 15 min. Answers to any questions.
- **Baby Snooks**: Starring Fanny Brice. Her little brother Robespierre and daddy.
- **Can You Top This?**: Mutual, 1940, 30 mins. People sent in jokes and the panel, Sen. Ford, Joe Laurie Jr. and Harry Hershfield would try to top them.
- **Duffy's Tavern**: NBC, 1941, 30 mins. for Bristol-Myers. Duffy was never heard but Archie always answered the phone: "Hello, Duffy's Tavern where the elite meet to eat. Duffy ain't here. Archie the manager speaking."
- **The Aldrich Family**: NBC Blue, 1939, Jell-O, 30 mins. "Henry...Henry Aldrich."
- **Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy**: NBC, 1936, 60 mins. for Chase & Sandborn. What can I say?
- **Fibber McGee & Molly**: NBC, 1935, 30 mins. for Johnson's Wax. Who could forget McGee going to the hall closet and getting buried in stuff? "Not funny McGee."
- **Burns and Allen**: Need no introduction. "Say goodnight Gracie." "Sure, Goodnight Gracie."
- **It Pays to be Ignorant**: WOR, 1942, 30 mins. The panel was never able to answer even the simplest questions.

Sci. Fi.

Westerns

- **The Lone Ranger**: WOR, 1933, 30 mins. This was a real heavy weight. "Kemo Sabe." "Who was that masked man?" "Why, it's a silver bullet." "Hi yo Silver, get em up Scout."
- **Tom Mix**: NBC, 1933, 15 mins. "Straight Shooters always win." Ah, that it were really so.
- **Cisco Kid**: Mutual, 1943, 30 min. Adventures with lots of humor.
- **Death Valley Days**: NBC Blue, 1930, 30 mins. Narrated by the "Old Ranger."

Mystery

- **The Whistler**: CBS, 1945, 30 mins. Mysteries narrated by the Whistler.

Kid Stuff

- **Uncle Don**: WOR, 1928, 15 mins. Don flew a "puddle-jumper" autogyro. King of the kiddie shows, did not much impress me – too tame. Not one monster or shooting.
- **Lets Pretend**: CBS, 1934, Sat. morning, 30 mins. for Cream of Wheat. Absolutely wonderful fantasy.

Soaps

- **Pepper Young's Family**: NBC Blue, 1936, 15 mins. for Camay Soap. Trials & tribulations of the Young family.
- **Portia Faces Life**: CBS, 1940, 15 mins. Trials & tribulations of the lawyer Portia.
- **Stella Dallas**: NBC, 1937, 15 mins. Also an important motion picture. Trials & tribulations of Stella.

Spooky Stuff

- **Suspense**: CBS, 1942, 30 mins. "Tales well calculated to keep you in..." you know what.
- **Inner Sanctum**: NBC Blue, 1941, 30 mins. for Palmolive. Raymond was your host at the squeaky door. "This is Raymond, your host."
- **Lights Out**: NBC, 30 mins. "Lights out......everybody."

There were, of course, many others that I remember, how about you?

Breakfast Club
Nero Wolfe
Believe It or Not
First Nighter
Abie's Irish Rose
Philip Marlowe
Archie Andrews
Arthur Godfrey Time
Flash Gordon
Lorenzo Jones
Big Sister
Camel Caravan
Big Town
People Are Funny
Eternal Light
Famous Jury Trials
The Goldbergs
March of Time
Date With Judy
Guiding Light
Red Skelton
Information Please
Judy Canova
Perry Mason
Queen for A Day
Road of Life
Stop The Music
Backstage Wife
Casey Crime Photographer
FBI in Peace and War
This is Your FBI
Bob and Ray
Candid Microphone
Grand Central Station
Eddie Cantor
Kate Smith
Casebook of Gregory Hood
Our Gal Sunday
Dr. Christian
Major Hoople
My Friend Irma
John's Other Wife
Pursuit of Happiness
Ma Perkins
Henry Morgan
David Harum
Challenge of the Yukon
One Man's Family
Romance of Helen Trent
Fred Allen Show
Quiz Kids
Man Against Crime
Sherlock Holmes
Strike it Rich
Superman
Walter Winchell
Just Plain Bill
Life Can Be Beautiful
Life of Reilly
Life With Luigi
Right To Happiness
Great Gildersleeve
Front Page Farrel
Mr. & Mrs. North
The Thin Man
Your Hit Parade

To name but a few.

TV is surely, in many ways, superior to mere radio. But in some other subtle, elusive ways it does not and will not ever come close to the magic that was the Radio Days.