HEAD, HEART *and* HEEL

By BILL TREADWELL

"UNCLE DON" CARNEY 1907

$4.00

HEAD, HEART and HEEL

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THEY SAY, "it takes one to know one"—but no one, not even one of his many wives, mistresses or millions of fans knew the REAL "Uncle Don" Carney, subject of this astonishing new book, HEAD, HEART and HEEL, by BILL TREADWELL.

The passing of "Uncle Don" is the passing of a fabulous era in radio. No one will again have the continued audience, the many sponsors, or will set such a long-lasting pattern for children's entertainment as did "Uncle Don."

A vaudevillian who stood on his head and played a piano, and years later became pioneer children's entertainer of early radio days, "Uncle Don" fooled all of the people all of the time—and in so doing made broadcasting history. Because of his multitudinous deals, he has been called the nation's first radio bamboozler, and could well be called the father of the "free plug."

"Uncle Don" made over a million dollars from his kiddie shows and spent more than he made on the bevy of women in his life, the whiskey with which he warmed the cockles of his fun-loving heart, and on the unbelievable days and nights he spent living a Jekyll and Hyde existence.

HEAD, HEART and HEEL is a true, uncensored and astounding story. When "Uncle Don" Carney died, no one who was sane thought of eulogizing him. But everyone thought enough of him to remember him. And they still do—even if only in repeating the famed anecdote contributed to the radio Uncle. They claim Don thought he was off the air after finishing his nightly broadcast on WOR and the Mutual Network and he was reputed to have said, "Now that'll hold the little bastards." The entire listening audience, supposedly, was in on this significant sign-off.

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BY EDWARD OZERN, NEW YORK

ABOUT THE BOOK, THE AUTHOR AND THE SUBJECT

HEAD, HEART and HEEL is the sixth book by Bill Treadwell. Three of his other books have been about people in show business. "50 Years of American Comedy" gave the history of the professional laugh phase of the entertainment world. "The Big Book of Swing" told of the men and women in the music industry who made up the great swing era of big bands and dynamic vocalists. "Give It To Me Easy," his first book, was a series of anecdotes about famous people the author had met while writing about the theatre, night life and the motion picture industry.

HEAD, HEART and HEEL records accurately another segment of show business—the early days of radio.

Here's what the critics have said about Bill Treadwell's writing:

. . . . a gifted and facile writer and his style makes for very easy reading—Spot News Syndicate

. . . . his easy style, free use of slang, clever phraseology make breezy reading—Journal Gazette, Fort Wayne, Ind.

. . . . the author's flights of fancy are tinged with many a gaudy Hollywood touch—News, San Francisco, California

. . . . a distinct contribution to Americana —Bee, Sacramento, California

. . . . entertaining reading—Times, Davenport, Iowa

. . . . he has met a thousand and one headliners from coast to coast—Geneva-Excelsior, Tenn.

. . . . he has a hobby of meeting people by the hundreds in all walks of life and writing about them—Record, Columbia, S.C.

. . . . pen-pointing the foibles of the famous—Union, San Diego, Calif.

. . . . a specialist in making and keeping friends—Herald, Bridgeport, Conn.

. . . . a clever guy—Times-Star, Cincinnati, Ohio

. . . . by a guy who loves people—The News, Indianapolis, Indiana

MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bill Treadwell was born in Greenwich Village, and during the past thirty-five years has met millions of interesting people from all walks of life. His professional writing career began at the age of 15 when he was contributing to College Humor Magazine. For 10 years he wrote the widely syndicated columns, "Treadin' The Town," and "Dial Well" which appeared in more than 150 newspapers. As creator of the comic strip, "Gabby Scoops," Treadwell reached a new audience—children. He has written for several radio and television programs and for motion pictures.

Owner of one of the largest gag files and humor libraries in the country, Treadwell also has a serious side, and during the past 20 years has handled public relations for a number of large corporations and national associations. He has represented the United States at several International meetings in England, France and Italy. In 1957 he was President Eisenhower's People-to-People Program representative at the British Institute of Public Relations Annual Conference.

His father, the late Frank Treadwell, was nationally known for his work in public health. His mother, the former Gertrude Barton, was a concert singer and one of the first women to be featured with "illustrated songs." Treadwell is married to Dorothy Benson of the musical comedy stage and has two sons, Brian and Bill, Jr.

He spent twenty years collecting notes, anecdotes and photographs for HEAD, HEART and HEEL.

MR. & MRS. BILL TREADWELL, WELCOMED HOME FROM LONDON BY TV'S TONY MARVIN

BILL TREADWELL

Head, Heart and Heel

Illustrated with Photographs

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HEAD, HEART AND HEEL

FOR

B, B, D & G

Contents

Introduction

THEY SAY THAT A LEGEND is a narrative based on history which has assumed the golden haze of popular tradition.

Uncle Don of WOR and the Mutual Network was a legendary character in the early days of radio. Those of you who weren't in his listening area will still find him a familiar character. The following account of his life and times is typical of show business personalities who, with little formal education and business knowledge, find themselves suddenly bestowed with power, and with this new vested power they can convince, conceive and even connive.

Uncle Don influenced not only the millions of small fry every day and night who listened to his famous broadcasts, but also their parents, aunts, uncles, grandmas, grandpas, and first and second cousins, too.

There were many acts, deeds and shenanigans in his life that made him legendary, right up to the evening of his death, on Thursday, January 14, 1954.

The one anecdote about him that was repeated millions

of times around the world during the past thirty years, was the one quoted by *Time* Magazine when, in their January 25, 1954 issue, they wrote Uncle Don's obituary:

"Uncle Don was plagued for years by a persistent but apocryphal radio legend: 'Once, having ended a program with a particularly fat string of clichés and commercials he loosened his tie, curled his lip and snarled: There, I guess that'll hold the little bastards.' Then he learned he was still on the air."

The story you are about to read is true and could not have been written while Don Carney and some of his wives lived.

Some of you, no doubt, will recall listening to him in the days of your crystal set, others will remember him coming from the speaker horn of your one tube radio set and still others will remember him from the early hours of television shortly before World War II.

He lived five lives in one: he was a business man, a theatrical performer, a Beau Brummel, an educator and a public benefactor.

He had a HEAD for business, a HEART for his audience and was a real HEEL when it came to the multitudinous women in his life.

HEAD, HEART AND HEEL

1. *It's a Real Fairy Tale, Kiddies*

ONCE UPON A TIME there lived, in the pleasant little town of St. Joseph, Michigan, a small boy who had three beautiful sisters—and he hated their guts! They had really pulled the wool over the whole damned town. "The Three Angels," they were called, when all the neighbors happened to be in church on Sundays to see Mrs. Rice's lovely daughters get up and sing. Not that they sang so well, as brother Howard would argue, or got you so interested. Hell, he'd much rather watch his fat uncle Charlie sing at New Year's. Now there was a guy who could hold an audience. He did a favorite every year called Old Long Sign, a song Howard always heard at New Year's—and the highpoint (the lowpoint for Uncle Charlie) was always when Charlie had said Old Long Sign for the last time; he'd step back, wave with his left hand, take a drink of punch with his right, and fall over the piano bench. Every year. And backwards. Wave, drink, and over the piano

bench. Howard wished he would do it some Sunday in the choir loft.

In the days before General Motors came to Michigan there already existed a widespread means of transportation, and Howard's father catered to it—he was a horseshoe salesman. Traveling all over the state selling shoes to the village blacksmiths kept him away from home for weeks at a time, so Howard saw little of him. But things at home were far from dull—all week long the Rice's front room looked like onstage at the Copa, as Mrs. Rice put The Three Angels through their singing and dancing paces after supper. Howard, too, had his own pursuits. Since his arrival on the planet and in St. Joe, happening simultaneously on Aug. 27, 1888, he had been an individual. He never cut up in school, but then he rarely went. During his grade school years, some kind of familial pattern kept him crazy about horses—not selling their shoes, like his father, but riding them eight hours a day and wearing their feet to a frazzle! Always a practical boy, he put his riding to good use by hanging around the local bars with his horse, and for a few cents would high-tail all over town on errands for the patrons. Nobody knew for sure if this was a service the house provided with its beers, or what, but Howard got a lot of mileage out of his mounts and was one of the few grade school kids in St. Joseph to drink his sisters' health in rotgut!

Howard's years in St. Joe had a lot of Tom Sawyer in them, and Mrs. Rice had about as much luck as Tom's Aunt Polly making Howard a pillar of the community. He was a complete rebel, couldn't stand his "model" sisters, and lived virtually without a father in a household of

women. So at 15, Howard devised his own cure, actually just as successful in breaking the umbilical cord as sending Chauncey off to Groton. He ran away.

Trading in his horse for a rail ticket, he got into Chicago in the fall of 1903 with $3 in his pocket. With his instinct for bargains working strong, Howard headed for the South Side, where he pulled into a flophouse for 15¢ a night. The break from home must have hit him full on that first night, with drunks banging up and down stairs, gambling going on all around him, pick-ups everywhere—the kid had deliberately jumped into a cesspool, as he must have realized. Mary Alice, Mamie and Florence, his sisters, couldn't have seemed quite so bad to him, when he looked back toward St. Joe from his Chicago hovel, as they had at home. But pride meant a lot.

He had plenty of time on his hands, at least until a job showed up, so the next week he combined job-hunting and sight-seeing. Free hours and nights were spent in the boarding-house, where a beat-up piano stood beckoning. Howard did get one thing more from his old home than an urge to escape it: he got the rudiments of some kind of musical skill. On his good days, when he could stand his sisters, they tried to give him piano lessons; his own quirk led him to trick stunts instead of straight Paderewski. By the time he took off, he had got far enough to play "Dixie" with his mittens on, a talent he promised himself he'd work on.

During the daytime, now, Howard had latched onto a job as an electrical apprentice. In a way, he and his father had chosen jobs right in the mainstream of American life. His father a horseshoe salesman on the eve of the auto,

now Howard one jump ahead, working in electricity as the gaslight flickered out for good.

But Howard couldn't be detached enough to watch the American scene floating by, at least until he had saved up the cost of a few more nights' sleep. Money soon came easier, though, when his electrical job opened the door to a second one. Modernizing the movie-house in Chicago by putting in electric light was the apprentice's main job, and during one of the forays young Rice heard the theater manager crying the loss of his sick piano-player. The kid licked his lips. He had been practicing, and could play a pretty mean "flophouse piano." Since he'd been in Chicago his efforts had been aimed at an amateur show one of the burlesque houses was having; he planned to do some trick piano stunts, shoot a line of patter to go with it. This nickelette job looked good.

"Say mister," he yelled across the row of seats. (Working on a ladder gave him a pretty good spot to hear the manager, who stood in the center aisle with his projectionist, cursing out the absent piano-player.)

"How about me taking the piano this afternoon. I've played off and on for years. Look, I'll come down and show ya!"

Rice almost got to the floor, headed for the piano in the front of the theater. Mentally Howard was already donning his mittens for the irresistible finale of "Dixie."

"Cut it, kid. Stay put. We may be hard up, but you're nuts if you think I'd let you get up in front of a whole crowd and mess around. Get back up that ladder and stick your finger in the socket."

Rice hadn't put the socket in yet, or he might've, just to

show the guy. It was pretty tough arguing with a character like that, so he decided to "stay put" for a while and see how things broke. By the time he got the socket hole drilled, pulled the wires through and worried like hell about the juice coming through them, it was time to eat. Generally he grabbed a hunk of sandwich stuff, bread and cold cuts, on his way to work, and plastered them into something like food on the run—that way he could sleep later, without having to get fancy about lunch. He skipped breakfast anyway. He went out for it at first, but with the frost coming on felt more like lying in the cot a few minutes longer, so he said the hell with it. Permanently!

"Hey Swede, can I have a potato sandwich?" Rice added a big guffaw. Swede was the only name anybody knew for the Bunyan-sized Scandinavian who bossed the apprentices for the utility company, and he ate a steady diet of potato sandwiches, a food Howard never saw in St. Joe. Big slabs of cold boiled potato stuck in with mustard; not that he *wanted* any of the stuff, but it was a big gag for everybody.

"You want to see my knife?" asked Swede.

"Yeh, O.K. But I bet the damned thing's just like it was last time." This knife bit was getting him down.

The foreman hauled out a big electrician's knife, pulled open the main blade. For the nth time, he drawled along the story that went with it. Even in a week's work Howard had heard the damned tragedy four times, with exhibit A being dragged out by the Swede every chance he got. Some stuff about cutting through a piece of line leading into a cellar somewhere. Naturally, all his buddies thought the cable was dead, but when Swede lit up four shades

of blue they figured somebody made a mistake. Didn't knock him out long, though. In fact he was glad it happened. The juice melted a strip on the blade and dyed the rest black for a few inches around, and Swede was so proud of his red badge of courage that he wouldn't use any other knife, even though this one was pretty much shot to hell.

The kid hustled back on his ladder. Not that he was a bug on killing himself in honor of lighting the crummy theater, especially with that bastard who owned it; but you could take just so much from the Swede. Sitting through the two-a-day all at one meal got nauseating; that was one thing about Howard. He couldn't stand to be bored very long. Five minutes over the limit was par for the course, he could take it. But any more, and he picked up his marbles and checked out.

Howard stuck to the socket for another hour. Corrigan, the theater manager, insisted that Swede and whatever apprentice he had for the day work right up until the gaslights dimmed to start the afternoon show at two o'clock. When the kids started filing in, Rice was still on his ladder, finishing up the first socket. There was a row a mile long where the next ones were supposed to go, but he figured if he didn't hurry he'd be around the place for a couple of weeks. Pretty soon old Corrigan came out to the head of the center aisle, and like he did every day, sort of waved vaguely at Rice and the Swede on their ladders. And like every day, Howard pretended he didn't see him. He mostly kept his back to the manager while he inched down the steps putting a few last minute touches on the fixture with his screwdriver.

"I don't see that guy that played yesterday. Whatsa matter, is he late?" Howard pointed over toward the piano. He knew damned well the guy wasn't late, he was sick in bed. But what the hell, he wanted to play that lousy piano.

"Ya know kid, if you keep on like this, we may just have to stick you up on that hot seat in front of all the little girls and let you make an ass out of yourself. How'd ya like that?"

"Look, all I said was I've been playing for years, and this little bit here couldn't put any strain on me. Gimme a shot at it, huh? I tell ya when I do 'Dixie' with my mittens on these kids'll go nuts. No kiddin'."

Corrigan looked blank. Howard thought he was getting through to him, or else he was wearing hell out of him. Not a good sign. Then he sort of shrugged. Corrigan *was* in a mess; one thing he never stopped to do himself was learning how to play the piano. And Mosco, the projectionist, couldn't play the thing. He had a hell of a time just running the movie right side up. Any minute, too, the grimy little brats would start stamping on the floor to get the show going or throw candy up at the projection booth door. Mosco told him it sounded like rain on a tin roof.

"O.K. kid, you asked for it. We're goin' to roll in about two seconds. You jump up front and go to it, and remember—if you bitch it up, I'll boot you out on your ass right in the middle of the show. In fact you'll get a bigger laugh than what's on the screen, and you won't have to use your *brain*, either."

Corrigan chuckled as the lights went down. Howard left his ladder in back of the hall. He didn't worry about laying off the sockets for the afternoon, because he saw

Swede's big form perched in the back row. Every afternoon when they worked in a movie-house Swede would knock off to watch the show. They couldn't bump around in the dark too well, so the crew just took it easy. Swede'll get a bigger charge out of today's show than ever, with me up there, thought Howard. He started up the aisle toward the piano. The place was about half full, and hushed. Howard wondered if the guys on the aisle could see his dungarees. Never thought he'd start his professional career dressed in these old faded blue jeans, paint-spotted shirt and work shoes. Lucky it was pitch black.

He slid onto the bench and looked around. The first thing on was a bunch of slides; the kids yelled a little about that—they wanted the moving stuff straight through the afternoon, but Corrigan generally tried to warm up the crowd with the stills first. They were cheaper anyway. Howard could look right at the screen, on his right. On the left he saw most of the house. In front, the piano cut off the first couple of rows. He started playing, soft at first in case he screwed it up. It was a lot of trash, snatches of old popular songs, random chords and a few scales thrown in and disguised. Mostly it took bluff, one thing Howard had plenty of.

He tried not to stop playing, but every now and then he slowed down so he could watch the slides. It was the same old crap he always saw, and even seeing it for free didn't help. There was the Brooklyn Bridge, a real big favorite. Different scenic wonders with a few people stuck in front to show you what a big place the outdoors was, in case you hadn't been out lately. He concentrated on his left. Everyone was looking past him at the screen, so he

didn't feel bad when he missed a note. One thing about playing in a movie-house. The competition on the screen really saved you if you couldn't play too hot.

As he looked around, it was tough to keep on playing. Every other row had a couple in it making love, and all Howard had was his piano. By now the movie had come on, a bunch of short Westerns. Without looking, Howard knew when the night scenes came on—he'd be watching some couple near him when night would fall on the screen, and the boy friend would get real serious for a minute. By the time dawn came up front, the girls were pretty ruffled up, and the farther back you looked in the house the more dishevelled they got. The old noon scenes, with the sun blazing on the screen and lighting up the whole house gave Howard a big charge. He'd see Tom or Louie necking away like mad while the cowpunchers were having a drink in the saloon—then all of a sudden the camera would shift out on the desert. Lights streaming all over the movie-house and Tom and Louie are jumping like hell, looking all around to see who's been watching. Naturally Howard was having trouble keeping his face straight, and his fingers were really getting crossed up.

As the afternoon wore on, Howard got more and more interested in a little drama going on in the third row. He'd seen a girl about sixteen sitting there with a bunch of her girl friends. The seat on the aisle was empty, until the movie part started, when a dopey-looking guy came down the aisle and sat next to the girl. The girl friends all looked across her at him, started nudging and shoving each other and giggling like mad. Howard was somewhat of a connoisseur of sixteen-year-old girls, and even those down to

thirteen and up to twenty, and he thought this bunch looked pretty trampy. The guy had long blond sideburns, not on purpose, but because he hadn't had a cut in weeks. They went down his face sort of spiky-like. With freckles and buck teeth, Howard remembered a million farm-boys he'd seen in Michigan.

The girl decided she'd have a little fun with the guy, to give her friends a big kick. Pretty soon she reached over and held his hand; every once in a while she'd look back on her left and start giggling like crazy. The poor dope fell for it. Howard and the girls were about the only ones in the house who weren't wrapped up in the big chase scene now. Howard kept playing along like mad, with his eyes glued on the third row section. The guy was kissing her once in a while, and every time he did there was a chorus of laughs. Funny he didn't catch on. The girl was a real short chubby thing, the kind Howard had heard described back home as "not much to look at, but she's a load of laughs." Judging from her size, this one was a barrel of fun.

Finally the end was near up on the screen. The cowboy star was scrunching his way through a mine shaft, black as hell, looking for the chief of the rustlers. Down on the floor the guy in the third row was advancing under cover of darkness too. Howard could hardly see him any more —he was slouched down in his seat, leaning over on the girl. Howard was so busy watching he'd stopped playing. Everybody else in the theater, even the girl friends, had stopped whispering, and they were all concentrating on the screen, as the hero inched forward. The girl in the third row began to giggle as her hero inched forward. Then

with complete silence in the house and Howard watching fascinated, the big one looked up, freed herself quickly and cackled in a loud voice: "Ha ha, you made the wrong move that time, Buster!"

Everybody forgot all about the screen. There was one general head-turning, a huge howl of laughs went up, and everybody in the place looked right at the silly bastard; the girl friends were shaking with guffaws, holding each other from falling down between the seats. Howard was laughing so hard he almost fell over his bench like Uncle Charlie. The center of attention used the old amazed "Who, me?" look, but everybody guessed damned well what was going on. He got flustered at last with all the finger-pointing, jumped up and ran out the back door. Howard finished his piano stint, and the movie slowly ended. By now nobody cared whether the hero found the rustler or rode his horse down the mine shaft. Howard got up and staggered for the door wiping the tears from his eyes. He had to go back to the boarding-house to rest up for the evening performance. It'll be pretty dull after this one, he had to admit.

Howard's piano career stopped after the evening movie. The next day the recovered piano player came back to work at the nickelette, either because he was scared of losing his job or he heard how much fun Howard had the day before. So the down and out pianist kept his job on Swede's electrical crew. Anyway the company boss who hired him told Howard he'd get bounced if he missed work even once. And the nights were colder.

2. *A Stocking to Hang*

CHRISTMAS 1903 was coming on, but there wasn't a less sentimental 15-year-old anywhere in Chicago than Howard Rice. Include St. Joe, Michigan, too. Maybe even the U.S. Howard was one of those people who got born grown up; he never thought of himself as a kid—(the toughest thing to fight if you want to be an adult at fifteen). This was all a big adventure to him; and even when the novelty wore off he couldn't stand to go home just for the sake of being home again. It wasn't that big a thrill.

Weighing in the 170's and being five-eight helps a lot when you're buying drinks at fifteen. Howard was pretty well set up. He smoked all the time, drank religiously every night after work. At first, back in St. Joe, he drank for a lot of reasons. The old guys thought you'd throw up —well, the first few times they were right. But soon Howard was cleaning up on bets made by middle-aged newcomers that he couldn't hold a few rotguts. Then, from his

own personal point of view, he drank because it was a challenge. Two ways. To get it down, and then to keep it from coming up! At first the stuff tasted so goddamned terrible he lined the walls of his stomach with will-power. After a good while he got to like it for real.

He dropped into the bar near the flophouse. He was still living in the flophouse. It wasn't too dirty; it was cheap; and as some of his friends told him, "guests" could be received at all hours. If he got hold of a guest. He ordered a drink from Howard, the bartender. It was a big joke with his friends, having the bartender with the same name. When they thought the joke was funny enough, they staked him to drinking contests. He couldn't outdrink his namesake yet—what *else* did the bastard do all day but drink?—but it gave him lots of practice.

The Fort Dearborn Cafe was a dark, dingy, pre-Capone hangout for bums, laborers, con men and prostitutes. It was run by a short, tough Italian, Tony Giannini. The regulars called him "Tony G." for short. Howard had changed his first name to Don by now—like most kids, he hated the first name his parents had blessed him with, and thought Don sounded more masculine. He finished up a game of darts with Tony G. and lounged at the bar.

"You owe me $5 on that last game; ya got it, or should I write your folks for it?" Tony G. smiled as it got a big laugh from his cronies. "Nah, I don't want your money, kid. But I tell ya what. Some of them guys on that crew you're on say you ain't a bad piano-player. Look, you bang that Baby Grand over there for an hour, and I'll even throw in a beer. Otherwise it's no more darts. (Pointing to

his arm.) Ya can't tie up a machine like that for nothing, ya know."

Don didn't need a second invitation. He even played a different melody with each hand. Tony G. went back to his dart game, taking money from his challengers. As Don played he would look over at him and smile through a cloud of heavy cigar smoke. He'd turn back to the customer he was throwing against—beat him, take a bill from the loser's hand and say "Kid's not bad, huh? Sort of makes ya feel calm and relaxed, don't it." The customer seeing the bill vanish, winces and says "Yeh."

After a few numbers, Don returned to the bar again. Tony G. was now playing darts with a blond floozy. "Come and join us," said Tony G.

"Aw, come on, Tony. It's past my bedtime. All I want ta do is crawl in this beer mug and fall asleep, nice and quiet. The home for every 'little wanderer' in Chicago that knows how ta drink."

"C'mere. Like the man said, I got somebody here I wantcha ta meet." Before Don was close to them, Tony G. was shouting over the room noise.

"Diane, thissiz Don. And vice versa." Tony G. left them.

Don perked up and hefted a dart—waving vaguely at the board.

"D' you play, by any chance?"

She giggles. "Not darts."

"Well then, I think you need a lesson. Just in self-defense. For the next time you play Tony G., I mean." Don pulled her over to the firing line, made motions of throwing darts. All the time he hugged her around the shoulders smooching the side of her neck.

"Ya know honey, this dart-playing's a mighty tirin' sport. How about you buying me a little strengthener of some kind. Can't tell how many games you and I'll be playing tonight."

"O.K., O.K. Siddown."

"Where you from, honey?"

"Town in Michigan."

"How come you're in Chicago? You don't look so old to me."

"Maybe I just got bored at home." Don started to fondle her again. "Who knows? If my stupid sisters and their girl friends been more like you, I might never've left." He smiles, she laughs.

As it gets late, they stay drinking together, finally stagger out the door and toward the flophouse. Diane was his girl now.

It is Christmas Eve and with it comes a visit from Don's sister, Mary Alice. She's a tall, slim, solemn type. Religious, sexless, obviously set to be an old maid.

After arriving in Chicago she began inquiring at different bars around the South Side for Don.

Oddly, she wasn't the first member of the Rice family to visit Don in Chicago. Little did Mary Alice know that only a few weeks before, her father was in Chicago to check on his only son. They made a big night of it and shortly after midnight, father Rice took his ageing son to a house of ill fame. When they arrived the youngish madame opening the door and looking at Howard said, "Who's that old geezer with you?" Howard, of course, had visited with her and her group several times previously. His Dad

didn't know this when they ventured to this popular house down the street from the Fort Dearborn Café.

Finally she located his rooming-house. She climbed two flights to his room and waited, reading her pocket Bible in this den of iniquity. She had fond hopes to reclaim him and bring him back to St. Joe for the holiday. As the winter dusk set in early, her corner of the room darkened to obscurity. Snow was falling fast outside the window. There wasn't a sound on the second floor. Mary Alice dropped off to sleep in an easy chair, for a few hours.

Finally, she was awakened by Don's footsteps on the stairs. He was laughing and hooting with Diane. They didn't see Mary Alice in the corner as they entered the room. They sat on the bed together.

"Now we've got to hang up our stockings. Just two of 'em. Wonder where I could get two . . . (he seems to ponder). Then he slowly reaches up, and peels one stocking off Diane's leg. She giggles and mildly protests. "Oh Don, no!" They play around on the bed like high school lovers.

"You be good, Diane, else he won't come down our chimney. And he won't stand by our big, good lookin' fireplace wondering what to give a nice girl and boy like you and me!" They laugh. Quiet settles again in the room.

"Howard." The word comes out of the dark. Don sits up.

"Howard." Again the same voice. He jumps up, walks to the corner of the room shouting, "Who's there?"

Don sees Mary Alice's frame against the window.

"Who's that? Mary Alice!"

"Howard, oh Howard, what's wrong with you? Who is that woman? Are you going to let her stay here all night? I don't understand, Howard . . . "

"Mary Alice, you shouldn't have come."

"Oh Howard, you've changed, horribly, living in a terrible place like this. You don't even have your name any more! What did she call you? Don? Come back home for Christmas, Howard. Please come back with me."

"I know. You were sent by the family. You're the ambassador, s'pposed to bring me home and make a good boy out of me. Well I'm not going. Anyway I've got a job."

"You could have one at home, too. If the money is all you want, come home. You know Dad's done very well, besides, he was planning to bring you into the business in a few years."

"But I don't want his money! For a change I want to make my own money. Maybe that's why I left. Everything was too good that way, at home. Shows what a sucker I am. Why would anybody that wasn't crazy run off and leave a sure thing? That's what they're all saying at home, aren't they? 'Why did Howard do it?' 'You know what a scandalous child that boy was, but I hear his father was taking him into the business anyway!' "

Mary Alice looked down and shook her head. "I don't know what they're saying, and I don't care. Never mind all that. Just think of us. Aren't you sick tonight, just a little bit? Maybe we didn't get on like a family all the time, but Christmas was holy. We all tried to love each other best then. It was the one time we were all happiest, with the church going, and the show and the aunts and uncles—and you pick that time and ruin it like this. With that thing (pointing at the silent Diane). Do you love her Howard? Did you marry her?"

"No, of course I didn't."

"How could you forget me when you ran away," she said sobbingly. "I always loved you. Do you love her more than me, your own sister, Howard? Do you? How could you do it?" "No (she weeps) . . . no, . . . now stop it, Mary Alice. How could I know you'd see her? It was just like making my own money. I had to try everything myself. I had to . . . you shouldn't have come. I told you that."

"You won't come home, will you? You're right. I was a fool to think I could change your mind. You've been like this all your life, but I never saw it till now. Why couldn't you be like everybody else? No, you had to hang around all the bars in town. You had to skip school all the time, and go around with wayward girls, just for fun. I've met her before. She's just like a hundred others you ran around with at home. I don't even know why I'm surprised. I should have seen how filthy you are long ago—my own brother lying in a pig-sty like this with a woman on Christmas Eve." Howard tried to embrace her to quiet her down. "Let go of me, Howard."

"No, Mary Alice. You lie down here. I'll fix some blankets, and you can sleep right on that bed over there."

"What about you; you planning to sleep with her? That's what you would have done if I'd kept quiet another five minutes, isn't it?"

"Never mind that stuff now. I'll stay on the floor here."

"Then you won't come home with me tomorrow? Please, Howard. Think of the family Christmas we'd have. Like the old days when we were too young to hate each other."

"I told you, Mary Alice. It's too late to change. I'm not going."

"All right, Howard. I hope you and your friend have a nice Christmas. Let's not talk too loud, or we'll wake her up. I s'ppose she'll be going to work in the morning—or will she? She does most of her work at night, doesn't she? I'm going."

"But you can't go now? Where'll you sleep?"

"On the train. I hope it'll mean something to you when I say I'd rather spend Christmas alone on the train than with you two in your 'bridal suite.' Good bye, Howard."

"Wait, I'll walk ya' to the door."

"No, don't bother. I was stupid enough to find my way in here, and I'm smart enough to get out alone, since you're not coming back. Good night, Howard. We'll all pray for you."

Howard muses—goes over to Diane's bed, looks long at her as though wondering whether to get in her bed. Finally, as though Mary Alice had won some small victory, he goes to the other bed and falls on it.

3. *The Carney Circuit*

IT WAS A HOT SUMMER all over the country. St. Louis had staged a World's Fair where the ice cream cone, the hot dog and iced tea were discovered. New York City was sweltering and for the first time in the history of Coney Island it played host to a million visitors. Chicago, too, was hot but was experiencing a new era of tent shows and summer vaudeville. Street carnivals and block parties with featured entertainers were prevalent all over the city.

This meant a lot of work for young entertainers like Don Carney, who for the last three years had been taking every kind of a job in show business from tent shows to carnivals offered by Chicago's theatrical agents.

The agents called him "The Carney Kid" and that's how he got his last name.

Don Carney had arrived. His act was billed as "Don Carney and his Trick Piano." It consisted of Don standing on his head playing a different song with each hand, some

jokes and impersonations and for the finale he would put on a pair of white mittens and play "Dixie."

This was the business for Don. Like the sailor who had a girl in every port, Don, through the medium of show business and multitudinous bookings, could have a girl on every vaudeville bill he played.

Ellie was his girl this week—a week in early show business he always remembered because he turned eighteen.

Ellie had her own act. She had tame monkeys and dogs and could crack a mean bull whip, too.

Backstage at a tent show right out of Chicago near Evanston, Ellie gave a party for Don. The rest of the cast were invited. Don was announced as a twenty-one-year-old.

Everything was informal backstage at a tent show. There was only one dressing room and everyone in the cast, if they had to change clothes, changed in this one room. Don's seat was next to Ellie's. "Where are you staying in Chicago?" Don asked. "Haven't located yet. Wasn't sure they'd keep my act in this show." Don did some quick thinking. "Let's check in together. I'm staying at the Hotel Victor. It's only six blocks from here."

After the last performance, Don and Ellie were off to the hotel.

Stepping up to the front desk, Don asked the clerk for a room.

"What's the name?"

Ellie spoke up, "Mr. and Mrs. Don Carney." "We're with the tent show." Both of them had big cardboard hat boxes. Don also had a big straw suitcase with his name and billing written on it with crayon.

The desk clerk at the Victor escorted them to the biggest double room on the first floor. The "Carneys" were given the low theatrical rate of one dollar a day.

"Hey Ellie, this oughta save us some money, huh?"

"Yeh, and we won't hafta go out for entertainment." They both laughed loudly as they entered the room and shut the door.

"Time t'eat. Y'got some food in those boxes?"

"I got my whole act in here, Don." She opened the boxes and monkeys and dogs piled out, one on top of the other.

"Hate to keep 'em cooped up like that, but you know what those hotel clerks are like. Have some dog food on a bun!" They laughed again. Don and Ellie sat around eating, while the dogs and monkeys waited to be fed too.

"Here's one ya can add t'your act, Don; it's right up my alley. 'Bout the lady animal trainer that married a gorilla? Well, they had a nice cer'mony, went off t'Africker on the honeymoon. And pretty soon she quit her job t'have a kid. Got any questions?"

"Sure. Was it a boy or a girl?"

"They don't know. Couldn't get it off the roof t'find out! (She laughs.) Not bad, huh Don?"

"You never mind that stuff. I'm the comic. I'm s'posed t'tell the jokes. Well, let's clean this mess up."

As Don used to tell the story there were dogs and monkeys all over the room. In fact "it was the first time in my life that I had a gallery watching me make love" Don recalled.

This arrangement only lasted a week while they played together. By the end of the week, they were on a com-

panionship basis. Ellie was ready to take up with another entertainer and so was Don.

Success didn't spoil Don Carney and he was now ready for his first trip back to St. Joe, Michigan.

The trees were starting to turn color all over Michigan and as the train pulled into the St. Joe depot, Don looked for a familiar face at the station. He hadn't told his family that he was coming back home for a couple of weeks.

The Rice home was near the station and Don walked it carrying his straw suitcase.

You can imagine the tearful reunion staged by Mother Rice and her three darling daughters.

A day after Don arrived home, he was bedded with pneumonia. It was a tough siege for this run-down vaudevillian who had lived a fast three years of dissipation. One doctor the Rices had called in advised the family that if "Howard" lived, it would be a miracle.

He was a "miracle" case and in two weeks' time was back on his feet visiting the local saloon where he had spent many hours of his younger life.

Don was getting fed up with his sisters again. In the last days of his recovery they spent many hours each day reading the Bible to him.

"They would skip all the racy and interesting stories," Don remembered, "but I had to listen or Mary Alice threatened to tell Mom I had a bottle of whiskey in my room. This would have hurt her more than anything else I know."

On the day that Don was scheduled to leave St. Joe for Chicago, Mother Rice received word that her husband died on the road. He died of natural causes, was the report from a doctor in Northern Michigan, but there was a little

mystery to it about which the family kept silent. His death had been reported on the road by a young widow, who was a former resident of St. Joe.

The body was brought back to St. Joe for burial. Don made it a real wake and for the first time in many years there was excessive drinking in the Rice home.

Don and his father didn't have the usual father and son relation found in happy family life. He had been very strict with Don. He had run the Rice household by remote control with the Rice daughters getting more than their legal share of the best.

Don stayed after everyone had left the grave. He stared at the earth, thinking about the dead man. The bunches of flowers left by the last mourners leaned against the stone. Finally turning, the wayward son performed his own tribute for the father who had never cared whether he lived or not. Drawing a token from his pocket, Don presented a grisly memento to the dead horseshoe salesman—over his right shoulder flashed a spinning piece of metal. As it thudded on the dirt Don walked away without looking. A rusty horseshoe now lay on the grave.

Don left for Chicago early the next morning. It was back to the tent show circuit for him.

Al Zucca, a leading theatrical booker in the Windy City took a particular interest in Carney. He booked him for forty successive weeks. This was prosperity for Don. Before he made the trip, he bought a fur lined black cloth coat with a brown fox collar.

This circuit was comparable to a Radio-Keith-Orpheum guarantee.

The unit opened with a trapeze act billed as "FLYING

EMMA." Emma was a fairly plain but nice girl and it didn't take more than three hours after she opened for her to fly right into Don's heart.

This time it looked like it would develop into a romance that was for real.

Between shows they spent time together on the trapeze. Emma taught Don to do a lot of tricks. They ate regular meals together. They even planned a future act together. Don's physique was building amazingly in the short span of ten weeks. He was actually becoming barrel-chested. This double trapeze act was something for the future.

Don escorted her to her room every night.

"Good night, baby," Don would say as he kissed her tenderly. "I keep wondering how I can say good night and settle for a *kiss* every night.

"Don Carney satisfied with a girl's kiss! My friends'd think I was crazy—but I don't feel odd. It must be you. You're so different!"

"No, Don, *you've* changed from your old self, and I'm glad. You're a new person—you told me yourself, from what you used to be. We understand each other, Don, and we always will. We belong together."

"Emma, from the day you picked me up off that lousy piano bench and taught me to trapeze, I've tried to thank you. But our life has gone beyond just thanks; I've seen it, because I'm in love with you. Emma, will you marry me?"

"Oh, *Don*, yes, yes . . . yes." Don wasn't sure if these were the words he wanted to hear. "And that's all a girl can say—after she spends years thinking up the words! Just yes . . . yes."

"We'll plan it tomorrow. See you in the morning, beautiful; we've got an *act* to do tomorrow."

When they finished their act the next day plans were made for their marriage.

"And we can get the license and marry in between shows. Right after you come off; we'll have plenty of time before supper and the evening show."

"Don't you think it was worth waiting for? I mean, when you used to pout about just *kissing* me! What a silly! Oh, I'm so glad we waited, darling."

This was one phase of his life that Don told very few of his friends about.

Don and Emma did work together, for a short while, in a traveling show. Don did an act alone, worked with Emma in a trapeze number and also acted as stage manager. He even drove a truck between cities. This show had three trucks to carry all the props and act as bedrooms when they had to travel between cities.

On one of these trips, in southern Illinois, they were rolling down a curving road. The road was narrow and at the bottom they ran head on into a small car. Don swung off the road and landed in a gully.

Emma was thrown from the front seat of the truck and died in Don's arms before medical attention could reach her.

For the first time in his life Don claimed he felt remorse. He felt the beginnings of a heart.

4. *He Put the "Roar" in Roaring Twenties*

AFTER EMMA'S DEATH, Don gravitated back to his perennial field of piano trickery, and got good enough to tour the RKO circuit for forty weeks each year. He even got to that mecca of vaudevillians, New York—but not being Judy Garland, had to settle for the Keith-Albee on 59th Street instead of the Palace on Broadway. Coming up with a stunt to top "Dixie" with your mittens on takes a lot of thinking, but Don finally found one—in fact he had to use his brain all during the stunt, or at least his head. This gag featured Don standing on his head in front of the keyboard, with arms extended up behind him from the floor; even dressed in full evening clothes, Don was unruffled enough to play "The Stars and Stripes Forever" on these occasions. Of course the acts following him cursed plenty —Don was getting as tough to follow as Marilyn Monroe!

Don met a girl during his vaudeville tours named Margaret. He fell in love with her enough to get married,

always for Don the final test of devotion. The World War was on, and recruits were being taken from vaudeville and everywhere else to put on a show for Kaiser Wilhelm. Don had to take his physical, but the bad lung he developed from his recurrent pneumonia attacks showed up and kept him in civvies. The draft board put pressure on him to get into defense work, so he talked himself into the novel role of foreman at the New York Shipbuilding project at Camden, N. J.

Life was now unfamiliar to Don, and he hated it. The dull job (the only way Don ever pictured himself working on a ship was as a piano player on a Caribbean cruise), the regular hours, and the enforced sobriety got him down. To top it off, "Maggie" came down with scarlet fever; he would come home from work for weeks at a time and tend her at her bedside. Don kept it up as well as he could; his "bedside manner" was by now proverbial among his friends, but he had never used it with a sick girl till now!

Complications in their marriage showed up quickly. To start with, Maggie was old enough to be Don's mother. Maybe that's why he married her—to replace a parent he never admired or loved. Lying all day alone with her illness, seeing Don's hatred of his job, and at the end of her life as a potential mother, Maggie became a mental case. The doctors advised Don to leave the North, plainly for his wife's sake, but for his own too.

Now the small-town kid from Michigan had a chance to become a Southern planter, but he wound up as poor white trash! Don and Maggie set up shop on a small farm in La Platte, La., near where her cousins lived. Don

flopped as a farmer, and became a buzz-saw operator in a local lumber mill. The change seemed to do them good—Maggie recovered some sanity, but kept enough insanity to live her crazy life with Don. Don was off the bottle now, living the "good life," coming home nights to build a little bungalow by himself.

His personal tragedy kept dogging him. After about a year, the bottle began to look better than the buzz saw; and playing the piano nights was more fun than working on the house. To be within reach of both, Don switched to working in the local saloon, as an entertainer. Poor Maggie gave up her dream of a country estate and became a waitress.

But even in the depths of misfortune, Don was a comedian, sometimes in spite of himself. For instance: one night in the saloon a man and wife came in to celebrate their wedding anniversary. Maggie waited on their table; during the course of their celebration, hubby excused himself to go to the john, and came back to find Don in the place of honor! Seems Don had come over to pass the time of day, and wound up just making a pass. The irate husband, filling his traditional role, finished his bottle of beer and broke it over Don's hand, breaking his little finger. Making like Marshall Earp, he said if Don were still in town by the next night, he'd kill him. Not being thrilled by the thought of his blood all over the keyboard, Don grabbed Maggie and they took off for New York. Maggie seemed glad to get out of her rotten existence in the South—who knows? Maybe the husband was one of her cousins!

The City of Broken Dreams was no kinder to the Carneys than it had ever been. Don couldn't make a living in

New York, so he traveled the tank circuit up and down the East Coast as "Don Carney—Trick Pianist." Each time he came home, Don found Maggie sinking lower and lower; she suspected him of consorting with other women on his tours, became a hypochondriac. When he discovered her one night with her wrists slashed, she went to a hospital, then to a mental institution in New Jersey—ironically, the state where they were married.

Don had returned to the Langwell Hotel from another tour. As he went into his room, a woman appeared from down the hall and held his arm.

"Don, I'm back, to be with you. Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Maggie! How'd you get here? You shouldn't 've run away like that from the home."

"I couldn't stay there when I knew you were coming back now, at the end of the month like you always do. Don, don't make me go back. I hate it there, away from you. They keep telling me I shouldn't want to go back to a lonely room, without any money or comfort, while you're away all the time. But they're wrong! I want to be with you. Take me on the road with you, Don! I don't want to go back . . . I don't!"

"Now Maggie, be sensible. The only reason I let you stay there is so you'll get *well!* You're still sick, darling, or you wouldn't've run away like that. Think what might have happened to you on the way over here from New Jersey. You're not *well* yet!"

"Let me stay here tonight, Don. Please, treat me like your wife. Don't hurt me any more. Don't be mean to me." She tried to force her way into the room.

"It would be better if you didn't, Maggie. Please don't come in. We'll go out and eat, or something." She became more frenzied, and pushed her way in.

"Let's go to sleep, Don. I'll put my things over here, in the bureau." She opens the drawers, starts putting things away. Then Maggie stops, puzzled.

"Don, it's already full. Whose things are these? They look like my old leftovers, but there's new blouses and slips, too." She gets strident.

"DON! There's another woman staying here. Don! Is there, Don! You want to send me back, too. Don, help me. *Help!* You're trying to *kill me* with this. Who is she? I was right before, oh . . . I was right! Help me! Oh, I want to die, I want to die. . . ." She fell on the bed, sobbing hysterically. Don looked helpless, ashamed. Then he went out for help.

By 1925 the nation and Don Carney were "back to normalcy." He was on the bum, looking for good engagements, not finding them, and working in dumps, normal for him. During this period, he got nearer religion than he ever had before—he played the piano in the meeting room of the Salvation Army in Atlanta, and slept there every night. Finally he got tired of their attempts to convert him, and went to the other extreme. He took a job in a local house of ill repute! Don's sense of the dramatic now came to the fore. In a scene right out of Homer, Don played the piano near an open window while the girls sang around him—the young madam selected the music and conducted. Soon a Ulysses would pass in the street beneath the window, and if he had a few bucks on him,

would knock to be admitted to the land of the Sirens. And if he had a few bucks, he would be.

Having soothed most of the savage beasts in Atlanta with his music, Don went back to New York to beat his head against the wall again. It was 1927, the top of the Twenties, the year of Lindbergh and Babe Ruth, Dempsey and Tunney, Weber and Fields. Don now decided to turn his hands (a melody in each of them) to radio, the infant bonanza. But after a million auditions, he was still on the outside looking in. All he could remember about 1927 was a composite face of all the program managers he had seen—and it was frowning. Then he remembered the guy who said, "Who d'ya think you are, Mac—Sam 'N Henry? I only see one of you. My advice to you is, split in half. Ha ha. . . ."

5. *Johnny on the Spot!*

ONLY A GUY like Don Carney, who had bounced from job to job and state to state could have so much perseverance. Pretty soon Don got odd jobs at Station WMCA and WOR in New York. Al Cormier, the sales manager of WOR gave him a job out of self-defense, to keep Don off his neck. At the start of radio, a pianist was needed almost as much as in the old silent movie-houses; if something went wrong on a show, piano music would lull the listener until they carried the dead announcer off or put a new tube in the station's transmitter. Don worked as a stand-by pianist. He had also cracked the talent market, helping to write, act in and direct the show, "Main Street Sketches," an early situation comedy. He played many parts including the lead, Luke Higgins, the Mayor of Titusville.

Don's mode of living hadn't changed much, even on the afternoon his big break came, Cormier was looking everywhere for him, but was told by Floyd Bowman, the recep-

tionist, "He said he'd be right back. He had a lady friend meet him here. He's staying at her house in Brooklyn." Nothing new to Cormier, so he asked Floyd to have Don come and see him when he dropped in again.

Cormier had a chance for a new show, one that seemed to require the odd menagerie of talents Don had accumulated. When Don arrived, Cormier told him "the Steiff Toy people want us to set up a audition for a kid's show —you know, Don, songs and stories for the little brats. How about taking a try at it?" Don said sure, he could have it ready in half an hour! He departed for one of the empty studios with a Steiff stuffed dog under one arm, for inspiration.

Sitting alone in the studio, Don thought up a character for himself and a way of presenting him that lasted for almost twenty years—proving again to himself how much the breaks meant, being at the right spot at the right time. Don had been at so many different spots at so many times that one of them *had* to be the right one! And here it was at last.

Don had his "act" ready for the sponsor later that afternoon. He introduced himself as "Don Carney, boys and girls, your Uncle Don." This particular show told a story about a lost toy dog who couldn't be identified because he didn't have a Steiff trade mark button in the ear. Flattered, the toy company bought the show.

"Uncle Don" went on the air regularly in September, 1928, never guessing his simple pseudonym would get as familiar to his "little friends" as Robin Hood or Buffalo Bill. As the weeks wore on, Don filled his half-hour from 6 to 6:30 with the gimmicks of genius: the favorite being the "birthday" part of the show, when names, dates and

ages of kids were read, and even the place around the house where gifts could be found, thanks to Mommy and Daddy.

A typical show opened with the roar of an airplane engine and the announcer described Don landing on the roof of WOR in his helicopter, or autogyro, at that time. By the time the engine stopped (when the fan had ripped up all the newspaper stuck into it), Don had descended from the roof, and sang his theme song, to the music of "My Caroline":

"HELLO, LITTLE FRIENDS, HELLO"

Hello nephews, nieces, mine
I'm glad to see you look so fine,
How's mama? How's papa?
But tell me first just how you are
I've many, many things to tell you, on the radio
This is Uncle Don, Your Uncle Don,
Hello, little friends, hello.

After a few more remarks, Don would then go into another song, like:

"WHAT DO WE EAT TODAY"

"Today is Monday, what do we eat today
(at this point the kids would yell out spinach)
Spinach Monday, all you little children I wish the same to you."
As the song went on, the kids would yell out,

"Tuesday— Roast Beef
Wednesday—Soup
Thursday—Spaghetti
Friday—Fish
Saturday—Ice Cream
Sunday—Turkey, I wish the same to you."

As each day was repeated, and the food for that day, the original first two lines would be repeated.

After a song or story, he would ad-lib into the daily Uncle Don Birthday List. Here's part of one from Monday, March 10th:

(*Kids listed as "Savers" had placed deposits in the Greenwich Savings Bank*)

Eleanor Coultoff—9 yrs. old; having a party; serving Walnettos candy

Arnold G. Tew—3 yrs. old; senior saver; shouldn't suck fingers; poor eater

Richard Darmstadter—4 yrs. old; senior; sucks his thumb; present under radio

Tommy Schaefer—6 yrs. old; present behind radio

Nesta Lawrence Griffen—7 yrs. old; Junior saver

Bethany Sloane—7 yrs. old; has a new brother; go to bed on time; present in wash tubs

Marilyn June Pfeiffer—6 yrs. old; senior saver

Winnie Mae Holloway—6 yrs. old; has stopped biting her nails and now they are very beautiful

Tommy Gorman—was 6 yrs. old Sat. March 8th, good boy; present in school bag

Bernie Masterson—11 yrs. old; celebrating with Aunt Marion; having a party; don't kick sister.

By this plentiful use of names and ages, and *habits*, Don built up a loyal audience, who were hanging on every word: "Will Uncle Don 'member t'say my name?" "Does he know where a present for me is?" "Is he goin' t'say I bite my nails?" So, hoping for good or fearing bad, the kids were still fascinated enough to listen from 6:00 to 6:30, and that's all Don asked.

Financially, Don reflected the time he worked in. He started his show right at the beginning of the Depression, and gradually tightened it up to save money. He dispensed with an announcer and finally with the airplane effects, because they needed a union sound effects man. His theme song, "My Caroline" had to go, because the musician's union forbade his playing published music—so he thought up his own opening. He was forced to be creative on another front—he stopped using published stories, because he had to pay royalties. He now thought up his typical boy and girl, Willipus Wallipus and Susan Beduzen. But through all these changes, he never lacked sponsors, because of his cardinal rule: he never refused a sponsor. Some weeks he did thirteen different shows with as many sponsors.

Don started many radio trends. His show was the first to be sold across the board each night to a different sponsor. His lineup was mostly food items, with others thrown in for good measure. He even accepted chewing gum and a cola drink.

Borden's Milk, Mel-o-roll Ice Cream, Wesson Oil, Maltex Cereal, My-T-Fine, Drake's Cake, Postum, Greenwich Savings Bank, IVC Vitamin Pearls, Walnettos Candies, Calox Tooth Paste, Tip Top Bread, and the Sunday Comics of the N. Y. Journal American were all on during the same week.

Mail came to him from some 18 states. The WOR signal of 50,000 watts covered this entire area. The signal was proven from the response of mail.

Excerpts from Don's mail formed a real cross section of

America! All nationalities, all religions, all races, and all mentalities, would write to Don. Simple notes like:

"Please send me a coin bank.

Mildred Ziemianek
5125 Market St.
Phila., Pa."

"Dear Uncle Don

Please send me a sample of Maltex Cereal. Thank you and I almost forgot could you please send me the words of Gabby Scoop that you sang so nice over the radio.

Your Little Earnest Saver,
Morton Weinstock
1398 East 92 St.
Brooklyn, N. Y."

"Dear Uncle Don

Please send me a copy of the words of that song.

Sylvia D. Gould
Box 536
Woldeboro, N. Hampshire"

"Dear Uncle Don

Send me a book about where to go on Sunday.

Lynn Sherman
15 R.R. Avenue
Park Ridge, N. J."

"Dear Uncle Don

Will you please send me a copy of "Gabby Scoops" and a drawing to. I like you song and I like to listen in to your programs and song and every story that you tell me. And the first story I liked was the story how they make sugar and the story

of the Cricket and the Pink Ticket and the Bunny that walked past him.

From you Earnest Saver,
Philip Sandler
332 Boulevard
Bayonne, N. J.

Don got them listening when they were very young and he even attracted the old, old ones. Prisons tuned him in. Old age homes made his program a ritual.

"Dear Uncle Don

Kindly send me a copy of the words to your theme song. I am sure you would be thrilled as I am to watch my daughter 2½ years waiting alongside the radio for your special song.

Thanking you I am,

Yours truly,
Mrs. Hilda Barten
26 Metropolitan Oval, Bronx, N. Y."

In a very shaky handwriting, came this note:

"While I eat a light supper of crackers and milk in my room in this American Women's Club, I am entertained by your program daily. Please send me a copy of song Gabby Scoops with account of the British ships now in New York City.

Mrs. Anna W. Church
A. W. Assoc.
353 West 57th St.
New York City"

Many fathers and mothers would try to write in a humorous vein:

"Dear Uncul Donn!

Dunno whether we're singing some of those hibbity skibbity

hutsut words correctly—so will yuh pliz send us the kerrect copy. It would make uss and our muvver very 'appy.

Skol.
Judy and Linda Perlin
6 Plymouth Road
Great Neck, L. I., N. Y."

All the comments from the fans weren't peaches and cream. Plenty of complaints came in daily. The fans would sense that Don mentioned children of many personal friends. Those not mentioned would protest to WOR and to Don's office. Their complains didn't faze him a bit. The requests kept coming in.

"Dear Uncle Don,

My children are constant listeners to your show including myself, and we have lots of fun singing together with you.

My son Herbert is going to be 9 years old Nov. 14th. Will you please announce same and tell him not to use bad words and eat nice—also not to fight with his sister Muriel, 15 years. He doesn't obey and listen. Maybe he will listen to his Uncle Don. Thanking you and looking forward to hear you on radio. I am yours truly,

Mrs. Siderman
1594 Townsend Ave.
Bronx, N. Y.

P.S. Please send words for song. Thank you."

A couple of sacks of mail a day came into Don's office. Etta Trost, his secretary, found it difficult to keep up with it all. Post cards were sorted out first, for quick reading. Letters got opened later. Birthday requests were filed in a monthly folder, and Don usually announced about twenty-five a night.

Don was a super salesman by now, after selling himself in and out of jobs for years. He was a real con man with the kiddies. That's why the parents in his listening area got up in arms when he took on Pepsi-Cola and Charcoal Chewing Gum as sponsors. School principals joined the parents in battle, presumably to save the tooth enamel of the youth of our nation. But Don, like most people in show business, could weather any storm. He had no cause to worry, because he had the Midas touch—he kept looking for sponsors, and he kept getting them. He could give any of them a sales boost.

With this great power over the kiddies, and his power to get sponsors, he had the knack of treating the sponsors the way *he* wanted to on the air. Nobody could imagine a kid's song dedicated to such a somber old place as the Greenwich Savings Bank, but that's just what Don pulled —and that was part of the genius it took to raise a sales curve, by pitching an adult product to the kids. This important section of the show was the "brainwashing" part, which was devoted to discussing why children should ask their fathers and mothers to buy the products advertised that evening.

The song was Don's vehicle for everything—sponsors rode into the black on Don's song, more kids were lured to the WOR spot on the dial by them, and Don's campaign to correct the evils adults saw in kids went on via the song. Uncle Don's audience was mostly under ten years of age, and the two great vices of this age group (according to Don's letters) seem to be thumb-sucking and cursing—cursing being so popular it's taken into maturity, and improved upon, if the child has any imagina-

tion at all. Here is the way Don fought the thumb-sucking menace, ending it with a maneuver that even Don, with all his tricks, never could do:

THUMB SUCKING

A Nephew of mine in the city
Is young and also quite witty
But he can't talk, when he goes for a walk
'Cause he sucks his thumb, what a pity.

If you keep sucking your thumb
You hardly can help being mum
For what can you say, with your thumb in the way
Why everyone thinks you are dumb.

The way to get rid of this best is
To know what the thumb sucking test is.
All those that I've seen, the thumb is quite clean
No matter how dirty the rest is.

Now the cure for this, so I've read
Is always go early to bed
And then to make sure, of a permanent cure
Just suck on your elbow instead.

Advertisers found, in the Uncle Don program, new life for feeble products and greater life for great products. They found the children's market wealthy beyond belief, exceedingly responsive and unusually productive.

McKesson-Robbins, Inc. used Uncle Don from September 1935 to September 1936 to promote the sale of Calox Tooth Powder in the New York area and to introduce the product in Philadelphia. Calox became the fastest growing tooth powder during that period.

Every sponsor would use a series of tests or mail-pulls.

Calox offered samples of their product. Immediately, 7,796 requests came in.

In the next test, they gave away 25 Electric Nite-Lite pencils and averaged about 2,000 samples of handwriting and a proof-of-sales per week.

Then a third test was tried. Kids had to get a prescription sticker from their druggist. The prize was 500 Nite-Lite Pencils. In a couple of weeks 7,500 poured in. A response of this kind was unheard of in radio before the coming of Uncle Don.

Calox was just another typical case history. Don had forced distribution in drug chains. Don created consumer demand which continued. And incidentally the Uncle Don program was the only steady radio campaign used by the sponsor during this period.

The response to any Uncle Don commercial was truly amazing. I.V.C. Pearls were a pure concentrate of vitamins A and D. Unlike most vitamin products, they were tasteless, odorless and sold well before and after the winter season.

It was during September 1931 that the International Vitamin Corp., makers of I.V.C. Pearls, turned to Uncle Don to establish their name, build consumer demand and at the same time, pave the way for other products that this new firm had in its future planning.

In only six months I.V.C. Pearls had complete distribution. As each year passed another product or two were added to the line until I.V.C. had eighteen in all. And the Uncle Don program brought them a sales increase year after year of 100 percent.

In fact so responsive was the Uncle Don audience that, when I.V.C. offered ten large paint boxes to children during 1934, on only seven announcements, 44,001 entries were received. And for our readers who are statistically inclined, I.V.C. received a total of 110,240 pieces of mail in 20 announcements.

Dr. Lubarsky, who headed this company, was a business giant by day and a social butterfly at night. He and Don were on the town at least once a week. "Doc," as Don called him, made a fortune from these vitamin products and finally sold the company. He remained on the Uncle Don program a little more than two years. Success spoiled their friendship and business association. What really peeved "Doc" was that Don always ended up with the best-looking girl and could always outdrink him.

Parents would pour out their problems in letters to Don in the same way that the public writes to Dorothy Dix. Each day new and interesting problems would face Don and the show itself. One day a New Jersey mother wrote to Don that her nephew, who was eight, wouldn't talk to his baby brother. His mother died at childbirth. Don talked to the eight-year-old that evening and tried to reason with the lad that her death was the work of the Lord, who knew best.

In the mail, a few days later, came a letter from an adult listener who confessed the following:

"When I heard you talk to that little boy who disliked his brother, it struck home to me. When my own son was born, my wife died and I hated the boy for it. I refused to rear him and left him with relatives for eighteen years. Then, when I heard you speak the other night, I realized

how terribly stupid and cruel I have been and I went to my son and asked his forgiveness. We are planning a new life together and I am trying to make up for the wrong I have done."

There wasn't a habit known to children that Uncle Don couldn't correct if the kid was one of his followers.

A Connecticut woman once wrote that at the request of her son she had changed from Sheffield's milk to Borden's.

"If you wish proof," she wrote, "I will send you the broken pieces of the Borden's milk bottle I threw around the place the last time your name was mentioned."

6. *The U.S. Shouts Uncle*

DON'S SUCCESS was so great that every new city that built a radio station felt it had to have an "Uncle" to go along with the package. Don tried to stop those who called themselves "Uncle Don", even if Don was their real name; but the imitators never matched the original. He was the biggest, the best and the one who gained a national reputation. His formula was the real McCoy—maybe it wasn't very educational, but it did the impossible. It plunked a kid down in front of his radio at 6:00 right when Mom wanted dinner and Dad wanted the radio for his favorite news or sports show; and once the kid was there, he stayed there till 6:30.

The gimmicks to tie in the different sponsors more closely with the show continued. Don had another brainstorm, and came up with the "club" treatment, designed to hit the kid over the head. There were Savings Clubs

for the bank sponsors, Vegetable Eaters Clubs, Health Clubs, Wealth Clubs and just plain clubs. Naturally the more clubs a kid joined, the fonder the eye of his favorite uncle gazed on him. Each club was run by a Ways and Means Committee (who said Don wasn't educational?), about which Don could really get ecstatic:

THE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

The Ways and Means Committee,
Have rules and by-laws too;
Of certain things you must not do,
These Rules apply to YOU.

You must not bite your finger-nails,
This rule is written twice;
So all you members can observe,
And keep your fingers nice.

No child must ever suck its thumb,
This is written in Red ink;
It is a silly thing to do—
Sucking a thumb, I think.

And about this Eating Business,
Somewhere in the rule you'll read—
"Eat whatever mother gives you,
She knows just what you need."

"Drink milk and a plenty of it,"
This Rule goes on to say;
In the By-Law, Section twenty-one—
"Drink Four Glasses Each Day."

Too, all this crying, crying,
This Rule is for everyone;
The Ways and Means say this is Out,
Always crying, can't be done.

If something hurts you badly,
Shed just a tear or two;
But, there's a rigid ruling,
About that eternal Boo-Hoo.

Another By-Law reads—"Please keep
On the sidewalk when at play;"
Accidents to the children,
Who do not this rule obey.

Uncle Don's format was so good that child psychology students at Columbia and Yale rushed to inspect this new phenomenon. If there was one thing in his life Don never read it was a text on child psychology, but his results were still amazing. The college boys got a lot of term papers out of Don, and everybody came up with the same conclusion: his homey entertainment might drive the adults crazy, but the best way to prevent sibling rivalry was to stick Junior and Sis in front of a radio at 6:00. Here's a little ditty the psychology students puzzled over (and maybe the English majors, too), but it put thousands of kids to bed. I found myself writing three or four of these every day.

MY NEPHEWS AND NIECES

I have many nephews and nieces
Whose health will be broken to pieces
If they don't mind their mother
And somehow or other
Try to do always as she says.

Now many times I have heard it said
You will not go early to bed
But stay up to play
At the close of the day
When you should be sleeping instead.

If you had to go without sleeping
For a week at a time, you would be weeping.
And I think by that time
Into bed you would climb
And go right to sleep without sleeping
So let us make a habit of trying
To go right to bed without sighing.
Or weeping, or moaning
Or howling, or growling
Or yelling, or screaming, or crying.

In his first three years he was on WOR, Don instituted a lot of things now commonplace on radio and television. He was the first performer to thoroughly check his sponsors and the products they manufactured; sort of a one-man Good Housekeeping. But it paid off in his hiked reputation. Bad products in a market as sensitive as the kids' area would have ruined him. He was the first entertainer to sample products on the air; and since the early 30's the "smacking lips" commercial has been used constantly to show how yummy something is, thanks to Uncle Don. He was also the first to accept free loot from non-sponsors—in return he would talk about these gifts on the air. He got everything from end tables for his home to Four Roses, his staff of life, which of course he didn't recommend to the kiddies. With success, with an unlimited stream of gifts and the highest paycheck at WOR, Don was just

making up for lost time when he started living like a millionaire.

A new face popped up in Don's Rogue's Gallery of females. Her name was Marilyn (Don was never too particular about last names), and she was an ex-Brooklynite. In the late twenties before he hit at WOR, Don had taken her out a lot, and when he was broke stayed at her house. He was then doing odd jobs, adding to his incredible roll call of occupations by being a barker at Rockaway's Playland, a salesman at Gimbels, a short order cook in a Greek restaurant, and a used-car salesman. Marilyn had flunked as an actress, but being Don's girl in the rough days meant she should get in on the gravy now, and she had a ring for a passport. Anyway, she liked Four Roses too.

Don and Marilyn lived in a big, modern penthouse on West Ninetieth Street in Manhattan, with built-in fish tanks, bars, beds and, of course, radios. Outside Don was reminded of his various rural sojourns in Michigan and Louisiana by trees, a vegetable garden and woodsy landscaping. The bedroom was full of mirrors and Don originated the three-dimension hangover. But even with the fancy bedroom they never had any children—they would often blame each other's impotence in front of friends.

Don had the usual catalogue of rich tastes—a special body for his high-powered Lincoln, hundreds of neckties, a mink for Marilyn (he got himself a raccoon), tailored suits. He wound up with a slight limp from gout—too much high living, so he went on the wagon and followed a starch-free diet. He knocked off forty pounds in two weeks.

Marilyn was an attractive red-haired gal with no brains

and no responsibilities. The Japanese houseboy took care of the chores, so she just followed Don around getting jealous. She was jealous of some of his little fans, but more so of wives found in the studio. Don decided to move to the suburbs, where the nearest she'd come to WOR would be on her radio—he bought the twenty-room house of ex-Mayor Lohr of Yonkers, and they moved in 1933.

Marilyn kept on his trail, and though often wrong, she had a point—Don had kept an Oriental dancer named Eve on the string for six months before the move to Westchester, even putting her on his payroll. He said she brought out something "hard to explain" in him—when Marilyn found out, it was even harder to explain!

One episode in Don's life which he retold thousands of times happened when he and Marilyn had a housewarming. He rushed home to Yonkers after his broadcast as the guests were due to arrive around 9 P.M. Marilyn had spent the afternoon with her sister and was sitting on the floor loaded. In fact she couldn't even make it to a low chair.

Don got one look at her and dragged her out into the yard. Before her sister left she had helped Marilyn get into her black party dress.

"Sit here now," said Don, as he rushed to get the lawn hose.

Don wasted no time at all. He turned the hose on her—full force.

This helped to sober her up a little bit to the point where she began shouting and cursing Don in her own inimitable way.

The neighbors, who by now were tired of their noisy neighbors, called the cops. Not a squad car, but a patrol

wagon arrived. The Carneys were off to talk over the hose incident at the station house.

Don was brought back to the house in a squad car. They kept Marilyn at the station house for more than an hour.

The guests started to arrive and Don gave them all the same chatter. "Marilyn will be back in a minute—she is visiting some friends."

Finally she walked in. The formal dress, still wet, was clinging to her.

"I had an accident, Don—fell in the Bronx River."

One of the female guests rescued the situation. Took her upstairs and changed her clothes.

Don mastered the situation by going to the piano and in his free style way played, "Ain't We Got Fun."

7. *Mish Mash*

A LOT OF PEOPLE protested Don's nightly mish mash, and one of the most vehement groups was the Women's Club of Scarsdale, N. Y. In a big editorial in the Scarsdale Inquirer they recommended complete boycott of all the merchants selling Don's products. Even a door-to-door canvass was started.

As Don's publicist, I was able to undermine the plot by getting the names of most of the threatened merchants, who might possibly be forced to remove some of Don's products from their shelves. Then Don took over, and on the air he mentioned these merchants, with birthdays and all the trimmings; this broadcast was the talk of the next Chamber of Commerce meeting, and Uncle Don had Scarsdale yelling "Uncle." By the end of the week his ice cream sponsor, Bordens-Hortens & Reids, had checked their Westchester locations, and found the Uncle Don-

sponsored product Mel-o-rol up 100 percent over the previous week!

The irate women from Scarsdale were never heard of again. In fact, the incident caused a community guilt complex. Afterwards, when Scarsdale mothers wrote to Uncle Don about the birthdays of their children, they invariably added that they were *not* members of the offending Women's Club!

It was time to replace "My Caroline," Don's famous theme song starting: "Hello, Nephews, Nieces Mine," due to the pressure of the musician's union. The "Hut Sut Song" had become popular, using a crazy, mixed-up jargon, and Don was practicing his pig-Latin. He and a friend from vaudeville and radio, Roy Smeck, "The Wizard of the Strings," while wandering around the nightclubs decided to think up a song in the new language. The starting point was the phrase "Hibiddy Gits," used by Don and Roy to mean "it's time for a drink" when they were in public. So Don's old sense of the droll created "Hibbidy Gits," the title of his new kids' theme! This song beat "Hound Dog" and "Tutti Frutti" to the punch by twenty years—it went:

> "Hibbidy gits, hass hah,
> Rainbow ree, Sibonia,
> Skividee,
> Hi-lo-dee,
> Horney ka-dote, with an alikazon,
> Sing this song, with your Uncle Don."

As soon as the kids heard it, Don had scored again! The WOR Music Department was swamped with requests for

the new number. "Hello, Nephews, Nieces Mine" was enshrined in "Uncle Don's Song, Game and Paint Book," and published with new music by Melrose Music Company.

Don's fame progressed one notch farther—he became the favorite gag material of Fred Allen and all the other leading comics, surely a sign you've arrived! Toots Shor would slap him on the back. Don loved it. He'd take me out to the Queen's Terrace on Long Island and spend $200 on food and liquor to hear Jackie Gleason spoof him in his night club act. He actually felt flattered by it, even when his all-time favorite song for kids and grown-ups, "The Green Grass Grew All Around," was laughed at.

Don became America's Number One guest, sought by nightclubs and saloons alike. He found he could soak up all this entertainment night after night without picking up a tab—he didn't even bother tipping the waiters or headwaiters! Crackpots showed up in his office a couple of times a day; Fred Allen used him as a butt on his network comedy show. Through 1934 and '35 Uncle Don basked in the sun at Long Island's plush Lido Beach, between shows. Nobody ever had it so good!

When the Mutual Broadcasting System started to become a network, in 1934, Don and WOR dreamed of big things. By 1936 the network was completed on the West Coast, and Mutual became the third national hook-up. Mutual got wide publicity with stunts like broadcasting from Howard Hughes' around-the-world-plane in 1938; and by 1938 Uncle Don was promoted to a network spot on Mutual. In 1939, with the war beginning in Europe, Uncle Don did all his shows from the World's Fair grounds

in New York. But something was terribly wrong in his network approach, and it didn't click. Sponsors wanted "out" for the first time on any of his shows.

One of the troubles was the lack of enough national brands to keep the show profitable—there just weren't enough products aimed at the kiddies that were sold coast-to-coast. The different time zones and delays in mailing fouled up the 'birthday' section of the show. In general, Don couldn't sustain enough local publicity and local interest to be heard all across the nation.

Filled with fear and worry, Uncle Don was taken off the network late in 1939, after running a little over a year! This failure was the first serious setback he'd had in his whole radio life, and it shook him up badly.

With this on his mind, Don's brawls with Marilyn were worse than ever. She had hung on through thick and thin for ten years, a new long-distance record for one of Don's girls, married or otherwise! She pulled tantrums in the studio and Don would call her "shanty Irish." She'd call him a "shaky drunk!" Then in a Hitleresque mood, her mink coat would be thrown on the floor, she'd jump on it for a while and spit at him! What maddened her most was something she couldn't fight: Don would sing kiddie songs to her on the air, addressed to "little Marilyn." Like these:

FALSEALARMS

Some people think it's smart to make folks worry,
Pretending they're in trouble when they're not—
They make an awful fuss to call attention to themselves,
Which bothers everybody quite a lot.

Now that is very dumb, as you'll agree dears,
So note this little pointer that I mention,
If you shout when help's not needed
Your real troubles won't be heeded.
I hope that you will give this your attention.

Or one like this.

HASTYTONGUES

Count ten before you speak is a good method
To keep from foolish words when you are mad
For HASTYTONGUES do harm—you never know what they will say,
Often you are surprised, they act so bad.
So watch your tongues, and make them mind their manners,
And here's a little pointer that I'll mention,
If you let tongues have their way,
They'll make you trouble everyday—
I hope that you will give this your attention.

"Aunt" Marilyn would listen to these songs and smoke cigarette after cigarette. Many times, when she lit one with her shaky hand, her lace veil would go up in flames. She always carried a couple of extra veils in her handbag as spares.

Marilyn had a violent temper. One evening after fighting with Don for more than an hour, she broke dishes, a six foot rectangular fish tank, furniture, glassware, and even the bed they slept in. She then headed for the grand piano. Don jumped up from his easy chair to protect it, and sat down at the piano and played, "God Bless America." This stopped her. While Don was singing the second chorus, she left the apartment, returning three days later.

This all happened when Don and Marilyn lived in an apartment at 1225 Park Avenue in New York City.

They lived there for a little more than a year. It brought Don nothing but unhappiness. One night Marilyn fell asleep smoking a cigarette. The bed caught fire and the firemen were summoned by neighbors. Don arrived home about 5 A.M. as they were pulling Marilyn out of the smoke-filled room. She only had some minor burns but the smoke and fire had done a lot of damage throughout the entire apartment.

After the show each evening, Don would celebrate as if it were New Year's Eve. He claimed he only needed five hours sleep a night. This gave him about fifteen hours for playin'.

He had an unlimited mental file of shady ditties, parodies on popular songs of the day and bits of minstrel material. Much of this had never been heard on the floor of a New York night club. Night after night Don would be called upon, as a guest, to do a routine.

His most requested parody was to the tune of the Eva Tanguay oldie, "I Don't Care."

Surely many of the parents who heard Don perform it for the first time in a night club, or at a private party, were gravely shocked.

He could go on for hours singing one parody after the other.

"There was a young girl from Trenton
She took out her teeth and she bent them
She says I don't care
I can get another pair
These are not mine, I just rent them."

Yes, plenty corny but with the Uncle Don charm and his particular kind of umpah accompaniment on the piano, it sounded like bright repartee.

"My Uncle got married, right off the reel,
He started to save for an automobile
The day that he got it, from drinking he died,
From the house to the graveyard, was his only ride.
His wife then got busy, no time did she lose,
Some lucky handsome boy, landed in his shoes
Now every evening, they both can be seen
Riding around the graveyard, in his limosine."

One of the bits of song material that Roy Smeck and Don did together many times, on night club floors, was entitled "When I Leave the World Behind."

"He left his son Sam, a pack of flour,
He left his sister, a pound of cheese,
And to the old folks, he left an address—
Of a place that will never freeze.
He left his night gown to his brother,
He fooled the whole bunch, all combined—
He left his property to charity,
He left them the world behind.
That's all he left behind."

Most of Uncle Don's girl friends were pick-ups around the night club circuit. During the two years of the New York World's Fair he could find a new one every night of the year. In fact one night he brought eleven female entertainers home to his penthouse and he always boasted that he, personally, undressed each one of them.

His girl friends always had typical show business names,

too. There was Sherry, Sweetie, Nutsi, Minion, Flossie and Bootsi. One dilly headed up her own musical group. Besides outfitting her, Don outfitted the whole group and his payoff was the usual.

When he played the Roxy Theatre, the chorus girls were dressed as kids and sat around Don and his piano singing his opening number. His pet in the chorus line broke him up during one performance. When he looked down at her, in the middle of singing his theme song, she sat there with her legs crossed but without her pants on.

One night Roy Smeck came into the control room shortly after the start of the show. He threw his arms around a girl he thought was Don's wife. But it wasn't. It was another entertainer who stayed for the night. She was decked out in Marilyn's fur coat and black satin hat.

"I don't know you," she snapped to Roy.

"I'm as close to Don as you were," Roy flipped back.

While Don was living high on the hog, Roy was along for laughs. Show business was good to him. He could still play more than thirty weeks or split-weeks of vaudeville and night clubs. Don and Roy had done many things together in show business. They played together on the "Main Street Sketches" series. Roy was featured with the Firehouse Band in the musical numbers. They both were featured on the old "Halsey Street Playhouse," one of the first big variety programs on radio. When Don was making pictures, Roy was called in for features and short subjects. In 1927 Roy was in the first talking short for Warner Bros. titled, "Don Juan."

And then when NBC was doing the first test panels for television in 1937, with Tex O'Rourke as Master of Cere-

monies, they called in Uncle Don and Roy Smeck. Both did individual acts first and then teamed up together for a finale number.

Off and on over the years, Uncle Don would use Roy on his program playing the uke and harmonica for the kids. He would tell the kids to have their mothers and daddies come into the room to hear Roy. This was a million dollars' worth of publicity for Roy and surely kept his name alive in the days when vaudevillians were on their way out.

Don and Roy would exchange gag gifts. Roy's to Don one Christmas was a cane with a lighter in one end and a tube whiskey flask in the other. Don carried this for months. Most of the time with brandy in it for his coffee.

When Don was getting ready to liquidate his love interests both legal and illegal, having separated from Marilyn, he knew that he couldn't leave the city to get a divorce. He always knew that sooner or later she would be putting detectives on his tail for evidence of desertion or adultery.

One of his Broadway friends was a theatrical booking agent, Vivian Bradley, who booked mostly girls for any use whatever—stags, club dates or the usual.

Don got the idea that one of Bradley's belles would be the proper agent to get information about Marilyn from her rum-soaked brother. He needed the dope to start divorce proceedings. It was easy to set up. First Don hired the girl. He told her to come to the Hotel Lincoln cocktail lounge and sit at a table near him.

He had made a cocktail date with Marilyn and her brother. Marilyn usually showed up once a week to get her personal check from Don.

The meeting went off like clockwork. The belle made eyes at Marilyn's brother and when Marilyn went off to the ladies room, he asked Don for fifty bucks so he could sit with the belle and make time.

Don staked him and when Marilyn returned to the table, her brother was well into a cocktail romance.

"Come on over and join us," Don shouted.

They did and in about a half hour, Don was off to the studio.

Marilyn went back to the Hotel Alamac where she was living and the new romantic twosome was off on the town.

The belle was able to duck out of the party by midnight and had previously arranged to meet Don at Jimmy Kelly's in Greenwich Village.

She turned up, with all the information Don needed. It was that night that Don learned Marilyn's heart interest was a bookie.

The next morning he met the brother and had fun listening to a re-hash of their romantic evening. "Boy Don, wasn't that something? I sure hope you can still pick 'em up when you get to be my age! Guess the old charm's still there." He went on so long Don was almost convinced—he had to peek at his check stubs to remember he'd actually paid for the brother's heavy date.

The next day he put four detectives on Marilyn's tail. One was armed with a movie camera to record her slips for posterity (and the judge).

In the next two days the shutterbug took two hundred feet of film, supposedly choice stuff showing Marilyn with her boy friend going into a brownstone home in the West Seventies.

Don and the private eyes had a big home-movie party. Lights were dimmed. The switch went on, necks craned forward—but all the film was black! Don blew his top. He sent the dick to a local camera parlor to find out what happened to the movies. The detective showed the store-owner just how he'd been shooting the movies. Suddenly the expert saw right to the bottom of the problem. "Hey, you dumb jerk, you shot all that stuff with the lens cover on." But he finally got his divorce after he staged a raid with some of his friends. They burst in on Marilyn, who wasn't alone—her bookie had stayed past his bedtime.

8. *Radio's Pitchman Par Excellence!*

UNCLE DON reached the peak of his career during the early Thirties. All the execs at WOR knew they had a hot property in Don, and they expected him to last as long as his voice held out and the birthrate continued—neither of which seemed to be slumping!

Don was a walking, unincorporated business. The name "Uncle Don" was not copyrighted or trade-marked in any way. He just got there first with it, and kept it on a priority basis. His WOR programs were managed through the WOR Artists Bureau and its manager, Nat Abramson, a top booking agent, who got lots of outside entertaining jobs for Don.

In 1935 all the officers of WOR were called together and the law was laid down—Uncle Don must continue to be the biggest attraction on the station. John Gambling, a big star on his early morning show, and a lot of other talent had their noses out of joint for months. But the

mandate of the people (those people under ten) carried the day.

Even with this vote of confidence, Don feared his show was slipping in 1936. He told me this after I had become friendly with him, often seeing him around Westchester and the Manhattan night club circuit. I really got to know him at 4 A.M on a Monday night in Jimmy Kelly's in Greenwich Village. He wanted me to drop around to his office the next day to discuss how we could put some new life into his show. He was firing Artie Price, his combination press aide and handy man. He needed someone to write material for his program, do his personal management, promote his show, set up personal appearances for him, and generally "pull the show up by the bootstraps," in Don's homey phrase.

I'd graduated from Manhattan College with a Master's in engineering, a far cry from what I started to delve into. I wrote a syndicated radio and theatrical column in college, and after graduation needed money. I wrote for some radio shows, including Joe Penner, Ray Perkins, Morey Amsterdam, Benny Rubin and local shows on Westchester's WFAS. But the kiddie market was definitely not up my alley. Then, out of left field, came Don.

"When do I start?"—I asked the age-old question.

"Monday" was Don's answer, even before we talked money. But in those days you grabbed any job you could get, and worried about the money later.

Don was always rapid—"I'll fire Artie after the show tonight. I've got a lot of personal gripes against him, anyway." So there I was at 21, knowing not much about the

business, and working for a guy old enough to be my Uncle. Boy, those first weeks were rough.

I got quick help from Jules Seebach, the WOR Program Director, Jack Poppele, a WOR Veep, and Al McCosker, the President. Uncle Don had little respect for the WOR brass. He called them the "Gestapo." Johnny Johnstone, the press chief, helped a lot too, and after about a month I came up with my first stunt, to raise the show's appeal.

The project was called "Uncle Don's Healthy Child Contest." It was to be run off the next summer, 1937; I thought if I planned far enough ahead and got my brainchild accepted, it would be a good job insurance. It was.

This contest, like many later stunts, played a key part in keeping Uncle Don every kid's favorite uncle for some years to come. Don was pleased with it—I was more so.

Here's the format we planned for our "Healthy Baby" contest, including a welcome in Albany by that very healthy adult, Governor Herbert Lehman—which helped Uncle Don's rating to grow healthier than ever.

Said a WOR Press Bulletin:

"Uncle Don, WOR's pioneer children's entertainer who, now that Amos 'n Andy will retire from their present sponsor, holds the record for more consecutive performances than any other personality on the air, is at present handling one of the biggest contest jobs that he has ever attempted.

"His Healthy Child contest, the winners of which will be received by Governor Lehman at the State House in Albany, has some of the most outstanding names on its committee that have ever been gathered together to judge a competition of this type.

"The committee that will select the winners at Palisades Park, N. J., is made up of Walter Thornton, model authority who handles many of those children and women you see in newspaper and magazine advertisements; Dr. S. Lubarsky, president of I. V. C. Pearls; James Boyd of Borden's Ice Cream Company; Dr. James Stotter, noted beauty surgeon and author of several books; Arthur Cremin, well-known child psychologist; Joseph Schiedler of Wesson Oil Company; Bill McCune, youthful orchestra leader who will award two silver loving cups to the winners. Bill Treadwell is chairman of Uncle Don's Ways and Means Committee.

"The boy and girl selected as the most healthy members of Uncle Don's radio club will be flown to Albany in a luxury liner of the American Air Lines. They will be allowed to visit through the State House and will be given an opportunity to observe how the Governor spends a working day at the helm of his governmental ship, the State of New York."

The Sales Promotion department was doing its job, too, and monthly they put out bulletins like this one:

A WOR SALES PRESENTATION:

"PRESENTING Uncle Don—an Institution in WOR Radio.

Uncle Don is now in his 8th year of broadcasting on Station WOR—

His uncanny ability to put over a *DIRECT SALES MESSAGE* to the radio audience along with his personality as an entertainer . . . makes him one of the outstanding personalities of the air.

"Nearly a million and a half letters, from parents and children attest to the fact that Uncle Don is the beloved friend of children in the area reached by WOR.

"They listen eagerly to his broadcasts. When he tells them to drink their milk, save their pennies, brush their teeth or study their lessons, they OBEY!

"Six nights a week from 6 to 6:30, Uncle Don is on the air.

"The program is sold on a composite basis, which makes it possible for each sponsor to enjoy a mention preceding and following the program . . . and on one night of the week to receive the benefits to be derived from full representation in the entire half hour."

(They then discuss his program format.)

The Sales Promotion Bulletin also quoted letters from parents, sponsors and fans.

From a Long Island Father

"I have a youngster of 4½ years who is so enthusiastically an Uncle Don rooter that at times the procedure of the household is upset until your half hour period is over. As a direct result of your broadcasting, the boy has ceased biting his fingernails and even his mother and I are amazed at how quickly he eats his cereal. He promises to eat Mason's Peaks, IVC Pearls and wear the 'wash suits' which you think are so good. We think you are doing a swell job, and, in addition to the youngster, find your broadcast very interesting."

From a Dentist in Philadelphia.

"I want to tell you that I can heartily endorse your programs. Especially do I approve of your methods and efforts in getting

the children to eat the proper vitamin-containing foods and to drink their milk regularly. I listen to your broadcasts because you emphasize health and behavior. I am especially interested in what you say in regards to keeping the mouth and teeth clean. More power to you in your splendid programs."

From Mrs. W.R.

"The children are writing you for banks, so will take advantage of the opportunity to tell you what I think of your program. First, it is no strain for father and mother to have to listen to you; second, your talks are clean and inspiring and last but not least, you laugh with us and not at us. There can be no mistake that your aim is constructive and a help to both parent and child. The fact we all love your friendly criticism is proof of the result."

From Mrs. H.L.S., New York City.

"Uncle Don, I shall continue to use all the things you sponsor and have my relatives and friends do the same, and that is a very small return to you for the good you do, but I suppose your greatest reward is in knowing the joy you bring to others."

From Mrs. F. D. McM., Arlington, N. J.

"The products you advertise must certainly have a tremendous increase in sales when you take them over, if Charles' enthusiasm is a sample. I really believe that you could get a child to take castor oil and like it!"

From a New York City father—written from his office.

"My young son has fallen hook, line and sinker for your daily talks and I am quite amazed at the influence which these talks

have on the younger generation. From a psychological viewpoint, it is interesting to note that a child will immediately pay attention to a "voice" coming over the air, while it would take the parents three months of daily reminding to achieve the same results. I have today deposited in my son's name $5.00 with the Greenwich Savings Bank at Broadway and 36th Street and I am told this is in accordance with your instructions and entitles the child to a button or something."

From the Captain of the Private Yachts of a motion-picture executive.

"Due to the fact that I have been under pressure applied by my three little daughters for the past month, I am compelled to write to you and enclosed their note also. The children admire you greatly and you sway their judgment to such an extent that the cupboard is chock full of various cereals and malt drinks. My wife and I wish to thank you for your kindness to the children in your broadcast and think that you have the best children's broadcast on the air."

From a child in Manasquan, New Jersey.

"When I heard my name come out of our loud speaker you gave me a thrill I'll always cherish and remember. My heart kept beating faster and faster as you said each little word and my appetite for my supper kept getting bigger and bigger. And, Uncle Don, before climbing into bed I said a great big prayer for you. I prayed that WOR would always keep you on their program as long as you live!"

From the Agency for VENIDA OIL SHAMPOO.

"This letter is to let you know that the success of the Uncle Don program for Venida Oil Shampoo has exceeded our fond-

est hopes and expectations. While the campaign has been in progress for only three weeks, we have heard sufficient evidence of Uncle Don's pulling power to warrant the statement that this program has produced the greatest results with the least expenditure in the shortest time for our clients."

From E-Z Mills, Inc.

"The enthusiasm of the thousands of children who listen to you is shown in the countless letters we have received asking for buttons and competing in the handwriting contest. So far as the trade is concerned, we have heard from many sources of the beneficial effects of your broadcasting."

From the makers of TASTYEAST.

"We have received more letters from Uncle Don's feature than any other feature we have used. Not only has Uncle Don pulled 48,624 letters from February to July 25th, but he had created a demand for our meritorious product, TASTYEAST, making it a leading seller in New York City and New Jersey.

Borden's Health Club.

A member of this club who sent in a milk score-card showing that he had drunk a quart of milk for 20 days, the card to be signed by the child and one of his parents, received a badge of honor (made from milk curd or casein.)

During the life-time of this club—a little less than five months—the following mail was received:

Applications for membership in Club and other mail	70,776
Badges of honor distributed—each representing consumption of 20 quarts of milk . . . or a total of 234,720 quarts of milk in the five months' period	11,736

The Tastyeast Club.

Desiring to introduce Tastyeast to juvenile New Yorkers, makers of this product commissioned Uncle Don to broadcast an offer of a sample bar and a membership card to each child who sent in written applications for membership.

In 29 weeks, 94,214 children wrote for and received samples of Tastyeast.

Greenwich Savings Bank—The Earnest Savers' Club.

Every Monday throughout the year Uncle Don offers a coin savings bank free to each child who sends a written application to join the Greenwich Savings Bank Earnest Savers' Club. During each Monday's broadcast, Uncle Don, before the microphone, drops a coin or two in his own bank and urges his juvenile listeners to join him in this "ritual." He promises children who save a dollar and deposit in the Greenwich Savings Bank, a button designating them as "Earnest Savers." Children who have deposited $5.00 in the Greenwich Savings Bank are given buttons identifying them as having reached the degree of "Earnest Saver Junior." Those who have deposited $10.00 in the Greenwich Saving Bank are given buttons showing that they have the degree of "Earnest Saver Senior."

In one year alone Uncle Don was responsible for the opening of over 32,000 savings accounts in the Greenwich Savings Bank.

International Vitamin Corporation—IVC Pearls Club.

IVC Pearls are a tasteless cod liver oil product. Uncle Don offered membership buttons bearing his picture to children who write in to join the IVC Club. From time to time he also

invites them to enter drawing contests which IVC conducts. Prizes in these contests are dollar bills, or two weeks supply of IVC Pearls. During six fall and winter months, 9,100 children joined the club.

A drawing contest running for eight weeks attracted over 40,000 entrants.

Fairy Soap—Children Cleanliness Club.

Uncle Don offered a Quintuplet Doll (for the girls) and a mechanical train set (for the boys) each week for 12 weeks to the children who sent in the best jingle on Fairy Soap accompanied by three Fairy Soap wrappers. Over the 12-weeks period, better than 900 children each week joined the club and sent the required proof of purchase.

The program competition on the other major New York stations, showed that News dominated.

Tuesday, September 8, 1936, 6:00-6:30 P.M.

WEAF	6:00-6:15	Flying Time: Aviation Sketch
	6:15-6:20	Esso News Reporter (Standard Oil of N.J.)
	6:20-6:30	Mid-week Hymn Sing
WJZ	6:00-6:05	Esso News Reporter (Standard Oil of N.J.)
	6:05-6:15	Minute Men; male quartet
	6:15-6:25	Animal Close-Ups
	6:25-6:30	Concert pianist
WABC	6:00-6:15	Patti Chapin; songs
	6:15-6:30	News of Youth; Junior News Drama (Ward Baking Co.)

WOR POSITION: *Tuesday, September 8, 1936*
Preceding: Dick Tracy; sketch (Sterling Products)
Following: Val Ernie's Orchestra

Over a twenty year period Uncle Don's sponsors included:

American Molasses Company
American Sealed Kap Company
Borden's Farm Products Company
Borden's Ice Cream
Calox Tooth Power
Castle's Ice Cream
Charcoal Gum
Charm Pops
Cod Liver Oil Tablets
Cushman Bakeries
Dr. Posner's Shoes
Drake's Cakes
E-Z Mills
Fairy Soap
Fischer Bakeries
General Baking Company (Bond Bread)
General Foods (Postum)
General Foods (Post Toasties)
Good Humor
Greenwich Savings Bank
Hormel Products
International Vitamin Corporation (IVC Pearls)
Indian Walk Shoes
G R Kinney Shoes
Lionel Trains and Toys
Maltex Cereal
Mason Candies
McCoy Laboratories, Inc. (Cod Liver Oil Tablets)
Mel-o-rol Ice Cream
Mutual Grocery Company
New York Journal American (Sunday Comics)
Peter Pan Fabrics
Purity Bakeries
Popsicle Service
Reiser Company
A. G. Spalding Company
Spratt's Dog Foods
Stahl-Meyer Meat Company
Steiff Toys
Tastyeast, Inc.
Tip Top Bread
Sunsweet Prune Juice
United Profit Sharing Company
Venida Oil Shampoo
Walnettos Candy
Wesson Salad Oil

When Uncle Don was ready to celebrate his 10th anniversary on WOR, he had established the record for continuous children's shows and was running neck-in-neck with many of the adult shows like Amos 'n Andy, Don McNeill's Breakfast Club and John Gambling.

Also numbered among Don's firsts, was the fact that he was the first performer who rang the four familiar Good Humor bells, over the air. When these were first introduced on his program during a Good Humor commercial they immediately attracted attention. Some kids wrote in that they reminded them of Sunday Mass.

9. *"That Oughta Hold the Little Bastards"*

AFTER EVERY PROGRAM Don always registered a sigh of relief. He was constantly on guard against slips of the tongue while on the air—and leading the kind of Jekyll-Hyde existence he did, it was hard. Normally a guy who dipped into as many fleshpots as Don wouldn't exactly be a shoo-in to have a kids' show; but once getting the show, no bookie in New York'd bet he wouldn't make a bad slip some night.

Thus one of the most famous and immortal gags in show business, and a real thorn in Don's crown of success, was the popular belief that after signing off one night he snarled into a supposedly dead mike: "I guess that'll hold the little bastards." ("Little bastards" is the only part of the quote that ever stays the same.)

There were many versions of this famous yarn. People would ask, "Did it really happen?" Others, in retelling it, would even mention the length of time WOR was sup-

posed to have kept him off the air. Or they said WOR got another guy with the same kind of voice to carry on, while Uncle Don was in exile.

I first heard the story in 1931. Later, oddly enough, Don told me he heard the same story about the late announcer Graham McNamee, in the late twenties. I heard a newer version lately—seems it happened at the New Jersey Building of the New York World's Fair in 1940. Don was doing his nightly program from there, and this adult fan, a mother of a neighbor of mine, said the audience almost pulled the building down when he made the remark.

But it never happened!

For many years I carried a clipping in my wallet written by Alton Cook, formerly Radio Editor of the New York World Telegram. Cook knew radio, and he knew Don earlier. He got a scoop human-interest story when he wrote about Don's garden on top of his penthouse, where he grew beans and other vegetables like corn; (Don also grew that at WOR). Here's what Cook said about the incident:

THE NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM
Saturday, March 2, 1935
By Alton Cook
World Telegram Radio Editor
Uncle Don's Contribution:

"The most famous chapter in WOR history concerns Uncle Don. The story goes that as he finished his program for the kiddies he muttered to himself, "There, I guess that will hold the little so-and-sos until tomorrow." Unfortunately the microphone had not been disconnected and the remark went out on the air.

"The story has been told and retold but the whole thing is untrue. A Baltimore columnist made it up one dull afternoon and used Uncle Don's name because these programs were not on a Baltimore station."

And who can blame the public for not wanting to forget a bit of its folklore?

The legend gained even greater popularity, when the full "drama" of the remark was recorded a few years ago. Kermit Schafer compiled an album of the so-called most hilarious boners on radio and TV in the past twenty years, calling it "Pardon My Blooper." The events were "actually recorded" at the time of their happening, said the jacket. Uncle Don got his place in the sun on Volume 1—after a few words from the announcer which set the stage, Don was cut in saying his usual "Good-night" to the kiddies. There was a moment of silence, and then a muffled voice off mike muttered, "That oughta hold the little bastards." Only it wasn't Don's voice!

Bringing the famous quote up to date, here's a discussion that appeared in Sidney Skolsky's syndicated column "Hollywood Is My Beat," July 24, 1957—spreading the legend to anybody who hadn't heard:

"I've just run across your reference to Uncle Don's classic blooper on radio and your bid for the exact story from a reader, who had some connection with the incident," writes Oliver M. Sayler.

"It was back in the winter of 1928–29. The station was WOR. I was in the fifth year of my weekly book and play review, 'Footlight and Lamplight.' One of Uncle Don's programs for children immediately preceded my time on

the air. But I had no contact with it except, when occasionally, other studios were occupied and I was asked to broadcast in the studio he had used.

"On this particular occasion, I was to follow Uncle Don on the spot, and I was standing by in his studio, waiting for the late Floyd Neal to sign him off, give the station break and introduce me. Uncle Don twittered his usual cheery wind-up, and then, not realizing that I was to follow on the same microphone, and thinking he was off the air, blurted out: 'There, I hope that'll hold the little b——.'

"Well, he wasn't off the air! The nation-wide reaction to his blunt statement raised a furor that impaired his celebrated program. Only after a 10-year atonement and the spending of a fortune on his part to conduct a children's entertainment concession at the N. Y. World's Fair in 1939, did he manage to return fully to radio's good graces. But he never again achieved his former vogue.

"Thanks. This does it. It's good to be able to obtain truthful and exact information from readers who, in some way, were concerned with the event in question."

If Don had really said this, he would surely have been removed from the air (which he definitely wasn't). The trip back to the carnival circuit would have been an overnight one, this time. The story has been told so often even his close friends believe it, and why not? If you knew Don the way I did personally (or as I hope you're coming to in this book), you couldn't think of anyone more likely to make the remark than Uncle Don. A quip like that was like breathing to the guy. He should have said it. But the craziest quirk of his whole life was that he didn't!

10. *The Carney Kid*

THE ROSENTHAL BROTHERS have run New Jersey's Palisades Amusement Park for many years. They cleaned up a defunct carnival lot, got the good favor of the townspeople and local police and operate one of the most successful amusement parks in the United States. This park was the home of the "Mrs. America" contest for years; it also housed a motley crew of run-offs that included the "Diaper Derby," the "Most Beautiful Girl With Eyeglasses," and "The Girl With the Best Legs in Jersey!" Bert Nevins, publicity planner extraordinary, was the guy behind all these special events. He's been in the publicity game for years, and found out early that a contest is one sure way to get names into print. Nevins is the guy who put over National Donut Week. He made dunking an accepted national pastime.

He also persuaded Uncle Don to start making Palisades his second home. During the thirties Don made hundreds

of personal appearances at the park. Every time there was a contest, Don was called in as a judge. He broadcast once a week from the park for several years. Don was very amenable about payment, usually settling for as much Four Roses as he and his friends could drink the night after the show. But this had repercussions. One day at Palisades, Don was greeting the kids, shaking hands and giving out autographs. One little girl, about seven, wouldn't go back to her mother. She stayed and stayed. Finally she was the only one left. Don was feeling no pain at this point, having furtively downed about six good belts of Four Roses during the afternoon. The little girl came up to him for her private audience, found out which way the wind was blowing, and confided: "Uncle Don, you smell just like my Daddy!"

Every performer, especially a kids' idol, has a full repertoire of "touching" and "poignant" stories to tell about visiting sick people. Uncle Don's three quantities of "head, heart and heel" have really only been two so far—the middle one has hardly been heard from. But here's an instance where Don's heart was found to be beating in sympathy, for a change, and not to the tune of his press releases.

In the course of one of his runs at Palisades, a little girl fan of his tried to get to see him but failed. She was a polio victim. The Herald-News, in Passaic, N. J. where she lived, brought her story to our notice. Don arranged to visit his little friend, and bounced in to see her one noontime. Making a bee-line for the living-room piano, he entertained her for a while as she listened devotedly on a sofa across the room. Then he matter-of-factly called her over to sit with him and play a duet. With the strength

only a person's idol can inspire, she got up and haltingly crossed the room to join him. Her mother burst into tears. It was the best progress she'd made since the start of her illness. When he left, Don told her to go at her exercising cheerfully, and walk a few more steps every day. That night, and for many nights afterward, Don spoke encouraging remarks to the little girl on his show. Everyone who saw the living-room performance, including Don, still believe it took a miracle to give her the strength to cross the room to be with her favorite radio uncle.

Another yearly booking Don never missed was playing with the Hunt Bros. one-ring circus every summer. He'd play with them every afternoon, when the circus was within a hundred miles of New York. Don would open the Circus Parade at the beginning of the show astride Dolly, one of the big elephants. He got $50 an appearance, and at the end of the week he got a case of Four Roses if he hadn't missed an appearance that week. The carney was his life's blood—he never forgot the thousands of hours of entertaining he'd put in as a kid with tent show after tent show. These afternoon excursions formed a good change of pace from the WOR show, as long as Dolly didn't trample him. He loved the sawdust atmosphere and the whacky people that traveled with the circus—and the Hunts were quite happy to have him along.

The circus got about $1,000 worth of free publicity for each of Don's appearances. It was so good they cut down on their print and poster advertising. Don just plugged the hell out of all his performances, and the usual effect followed. Radio execs outside the circle at WOR were amazed that Don's bosses gave him so much freedom. But

he kept getting it, because they wanted to keep him happy. They thought his show's future as a money-winner looked better than anything he'd done in the past. And who could blame them? They merely wanted the show to go on forever!

Don played with the Hunt Bros. Circus for many seasons. It was a cash and carry business for him. Sometimes he came back to the studio with a pocketful of small change and dollar bills—even the large ones.

His pal was Charley Hunt who liked to think of himself as dean of the circus owners. Don and Charley would talk about wagon routes and the circus days at the turn of the century. Charley knew them well. He was born in 1873 and always claimed that when he was twenty he took out his first circus.

He also claims never to have missed a circus season. The Hunts' big top went on through war, depression, prosperity and television.

Charley has walked with a limp for many years. This was caused by Dolly, the elephant that Don rode in the circus. Dolly was running wild on the circus lot, dragging Charley. His hand was holding a big bull hook and with it he was trying to control the beast. When she finally came to a halt, she shifted her weight and one foot trampled on Charley's leg.

He hurt his hand in an accident over Dolly, too. She fell in a swamp and the men were trying to pull her out. A rope was tossed around her neck. A group of men started pulling too soon and Charley's hand was caught in the rope.

The only way you could figure Don's real age was to

listen to him reminisce with old cronies like Charley. He knew all the circus routes and had played most of them. He knew how to repair a wagon wheel when a spoke gave way or the hoop split.

Old Charley died at circus headquarters in Burlington, N. J., on September 11, 1957. He was 84 at the time. Don's girl at the Hunt Circus was the Rubber Girl. She was attractive, and her bones felt like rubber tubes. She could twist and turn into a living pretzel or go through the gyrations of curling up into a coil.

The first time Don told Roy Smeck about his new friend, this Rubber Girl, he described her as a real different type of girl to take to bed.

"You know, Roy," said Don, "she can stretch everything out of shape and then snap it back at you."

With these remarks Roy was stopped dead in his imagination tracks.

The '39 World's Fair was a fantastic show. I did a lot of work for Uncle Don at the fair, setting up and arranging his participation in it. On the communications side, Mutual was there with NBC, CBS and the other outlets. They were supposed to play up the technical side of radio as well as its entertaining features. Radio proved to be a magnet drawing all the Broadway and Hollywood big shots. And did it draw the promoters!

Grover Whalen was chairman of the Fair. I saw him so often I almost expected my name for him to be given official recognition—the "Gentleman Promoter." He formed all the committees well in advance of the Fair's opening, and decided a mammoth parade would bring world atten-

tion to the Fair. It did! You could walk over the route for four hours before getting to the end. The floats were enormous and innumerable.

I turned my hand to making a float for Uncle Don. It was to represent WOR as well as Don, so he wanted a good one—but with a budget of $75! The other networks had spent a fortune on Rose Bowl-type stuff and here we were with our drop in the bucket. The kid's angle was to be the theme, naturally, with Don the focus. I got hold of an old circus wagon over in Jersey. We tacked up as many circus posters as we could find all over the thing. Our menagerie was then wired for sound, and we rolled down the street emitting roars from lions, tigers, leopards and other animals, culled from the noise library we had on board the wagon. And riding high over the monster we had put in motion was Uncle Don, like a Cecil B. DeMille!

My heart dropped when I spotted the NBC float—the Four Freedoms themselves rolling down the street! Pretty tough competition for the flea-bag Barnum outfit we'd thrown together. Their stuff must've cost thousands—our truck and driver came to a $30 rental (even old circus wagons in Jersey are worth something), and $40 for decorations and animal noise equipment.

As we passed the reviewing stand sounding like a jungle on the loose, Grover Whalen rose from his seat and ran out to greet Don. And shortly after that, we found out we'd won first prize in the communications division. I think a lot of my artistic ingenuity, and all that, but let's face it! I still don't know what Don promised Grover but here is what I got from the chairman:

New York World's Fair 1939 Inc.

"My dear Mr. Treadwell:

I deeply appreciate your splendid cooperation in making the Preview such a success.

Your excellent spirit in this event makes us confident of your continued support which will ensure the complete success of the Fair in 1939.

Sincerely,
Grover A. Whalen"

We set up shop at the Fair, and Don broadcast all of his shows from it. By now I'd given signs I might be a carpenter in disguise—I decided to build us a studio in the New Jersey State Building. The end result was something between a goldfish bowl and Captain Nemo's "Nautilus." It had a round glass window in the front of the booth; then short plate-glass partitions around it, to give the public a full glimpse on three sides. Inside were a cute little Musette piano the Wurlitzer Co. had given Don, script files, and a control room complete with engineer and announcer. The exhibit was so much fun for the onlookers that everybody from the janitor to Gov. Moore of New Jersey dropped by. The WOR Executive staff thought this broadcast booth was just what the doctor ordered.

WOR OFFICE MESSAGE

Date:—June 30, 1939

From J. R. Poppele, Chief Engineer

"To Mr. Bill Treadwell

I want to compliment you on the very splendid effort you have made in the assignment of the Uncle Don Program at the New Jersey State Building at the World's Fair. The studio

was well planned and well designed, and I am certain it reflects to the credit of both Uncle Don and Wor."

The New York World's Fair officials used every gimmick in a publicity text book to drag in extra visitors to the Fair Grounds. August 27, 1939 was Uncle Don Day at the Fair. It was Don's birthday, too. The staggering event started at 10 A.M. with a parade featuring some forty bands and drum corps and finished at midnight with Don putting on one of his special "after dark" shows at Morris Gest's Midget Village. These interesting people gave Don many hours of enjoyment while they were on exhibit. He would spend an hour or two a day with Gest and his midgets. Another hangout was at Frank Buck's "Bring 'em Back Alive" layout. Don knew the barker there and could always pass in dozens of his friends.

At noon when the parade was over, the band and drum corps competed for prizes on the lawn of the New Jersey State Building. The drum majors and majorettes tried for trophies, too.

Some six thousand children and adults had participated in the parade and other special events including a series of phone calls to Hollywood celebrities from the New York Telephone exhibit at the Fair. We had arranged to feed this mob. The procedure was quite easy. We had over twelve thousand sandwiches. Nedick's Stores had given us hundreds of gallons of orange drink. Borden's, another sponsor, gave us the ice cream and many concessions gave us passes for their exhibits, and more free eats. Again we had six thousand happy and fun loving people. Don did his regular broadcast from the New Jersey State Building

and the mob was so great that the State Troopers had to call special World's Fair police to help protect Don and the glass front on the studio.

The authorities published a report the next day that Uncle Don Day was the biggest attendance in the month of August.

He could hardly play the piano on the next day's broadcast because his fingers were crippled from signing thousands of autographs.

From June 28, 1939 to October 31, 1939 over 2,250,000 people visited the New Jersey Building at the World's Fair. Over a million had seen the Uncle Don Broadcasts the first year we were at the Fair.

Don had three special hangouts at the World's Fair. He could easily be found at either Morris Gest's Midget Village, Frank Buck's Jungleland or the Baby Incubator Exhibit.

Don had known Morris Gest for many, many years but never as the maestro of midgets. Night after night he would visit with them and was amazed at their talent. There was Andre, Billy, John and Jackie. Most of them were married. Some had grown children of normal size. They lived at this doll-like village during the entire period of the fair. It was on the direct route to the Baby Incubator where Don could always get a hooker of paregoric. Excessive drinking would work havoc with his bowls and the only thing that could correct the disturbance was paregoric. You couldn't buy the quantity that Don consumed weekly. Most nights during his broadcasts he had a paper cup full of it on the side of the piano and before or after a song would say to the kiddies, "My throat is a little

parched. Uncle Don has been rehearsing his Hibitty Gits Songs all day. He needs a drink of water."

Frank Buck was an old crony of his, too. He and Frank would sit by the hour in Frank's office at Jungleland and talk about chicks they both had in St. Louis, Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit and other spots inside the U.S.A. He might have brought back animals alive but he also deserves credit for satisfying a lot of pretty maidens. Or so he said.

When they ran out of stories or people to talk about, they would roam the grounds and take rides on the big elephant in Jungleland. These three spots gave Don refuge before the dinner hour, which usually was about 9 P.M. at either the French Casino, the Brazilian Pavilion or a nearby hamburger stand. He even accepted dinner invitations from the Russian Pavilion. That was the first year of the Fair—it was torn down the second year.

11. *Hollywood Here We Come!*

MAYBE IT WAS his Tenth Anniversary year that gave Don renewed energy—whatever it was, 1938 was a banner year. Early in the winter the WOR brass embarked on a new "sell Uncle Don" strategy all over New York. The admen were kept on their toes buying them on the highly popular half-hour.

As November neared, plans were completed for the giant party. A lot of schools around the county celebrated "Uncle Don Day" and his 4,500th consecutive broadcast fell in this period. The huge celebration was held at the New Amsterdam Roof, Florenz Ziegfeld's old hangout. Don's favorite announcer, Jeff Sparks, was MC. The night went over with the bang of champagne corks, and Don once again felt great about things. The newspapers all over the country paid tribute. Their sentiments were expressed in this typical story which appeared in the radio column of the New York *Sun.*

"A flock of uncles, aunts, sandmen, men-in-the-moon, big brothers and sisters rushed up to the microphone in the early days of broadcasting to tell fairy tales and bedtime stories. Many of them were crowded out by blood-and-thunder sketches, adventure tales and serial yarns when radio forsook its amateur standing and went professional.

Among the few who have survived is Uncle Don, who this week celebrates his tenth anniversary on the air. He linked himself with the commercial airwaves and rode along with the "trend of the times." He has had forty-six different sponsors and figures he has broadcast 4,500 programs consuming 2,250 hours."

On the endless chain of ideas for Uncle Don, another link was needed. There had to be a new gimmick to appeal to the older kids who thought they were too smart to sit and listen to Don coo at them nightly. Also, since Don was now on the network in '38, a way to tie the Eastern and Western kids together had to be invented. For the perfect answer I set up the "Uncle Don Talent Quest." This gag utilized kids up to 15 in the WOR listening range of eighteen states, auditioning the hopefuls in the Mutual studios on Broadway and giving the winners a trip to California complete with screen test and possible movie role. The Santa Fe Railroad was contacted to zip the kids to the Coast, and they said fine. Hollywood movie studios also gave the green light. The chiefs at WOR said O.K., and got fully behind it. Finally, in homes miles from New York, thousands of stage mothers prepared to push Junior to stardom.

Here's how the fun began. The parent or guardian had to fill out the following comprehensive application:

UNCLE DON
STATION WOR
1440 Broadway
New York City

"THE UNCLE DON HOLLYWOOD TALENT CONTEST
For children between the ages of 8 and 15 years

"THIS APPLICATION MUST BE FILLED OUT AND READ BY BOTH PARENTS (If you are child's legal guardian or if one parent is dead, or child is orphan, please indicate at bottom with signature).

NAME OF CHILD:

ADDRESS: CITY: STATE:

AGE: DATE AND YEAR OF BIRTH:

HEIGHT: WEIGHT: SEX:

SCHOOL NOW ATTENDING:

PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS:

DANCING, SINGING OR DRAMATIC SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

MOTHER'S OCCUPATION: FATHER'S OCCUPATION:

WHAT PROFESSIONAL TRAINING HAVE YOU HAD:

ON WHAT RADIO PROGRAMS HAVE YOU APPEARED:

ARE YOU UNDER CONTRACT TO ANY FIRM, PERSON, SCHOOL, OR ANY OTHER MANAGING AGENT:

ARE YOUR PARENTS CITIZENS:

THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT IS TO BE SIGNED BY BOTH PARENTS:

I, the undersigned, give as parents (guardians) my consent for the above mentioned child to partake of all the prizes offered by the Fifth Annual Uncle Don Hollywood Talent Contest and I also give my child permission to act and speak in whatever picture assignment is offered by this contest while the winners are in Hollywood on their annual trip. I also give my

child permission to travel to Hollywood escorted by a member of Uncle Don's staff.

FATHER: DATE

MOTHER: DATE

ADDRESS:

CITY: STATE:

"PRIZES: The two winners to be chosen sometime *in April, will be taken to Hollywood on the Santa Fe Railroad* with a representative of Uncle Don's office. After a tour of the picture studios, the children will return home.

FINALS: At the finals of this contest there will be about twenty judges from the theatrical field as well as picture company talent scouts. One boy and one girl will be chosen as the Most Talent Children in the Metropolitan Area. Several opportunities arise from this contest each year and Uncle Don reserves the right to announce these at a later date.

IN THE FINALS CONTESTANTS WILL BE JUDGED ON THE FOLLOWING:

PART ONE: Singing, dancing or musical ability: general poise, presentation and selection of material.

PART TWO: Reading, diction and natural dramatic ability.

PART THREE: Physical appearance, hair, eyes, weight, height, teeth etc.

PART FOUR: Memory work, imitations or dramatic skit.

PART FIVE: Child will be asked a set of questions that boys and girls their age should be able to answer.

Twenty points or parts thereof will be given for each PART listed above.

Eliminations will be held under the direction of Uncle Don's staff."

"At the first audition, children will be examined on PARTS TWO, THREE and FIVE.
If they pass this audition, they will be examined on the other two.
Quarter finals, semi-finals and finals will be held in March, 1942.
PLEASE NOTE: IMPORTANT: Childs birth certificate must be presented when child takes first audition. No child will be permitted to be auditioned without it.
ADDRESS: All auditions will be held at WOR, 1440 Broadway, New York City.
Please report on date listed above. Come on time. All must pass a diction test.
Entire contest under personal supervision of Uncle Don.
BILL TREADWELL is the Director of Auditions.
IF FALSE INFORMATION IS GIVEN, UNCLE DON RESERVES RIGHT TO REJECT CONTESTANT.
ALL CHILDREN MUST BE EIGHT YEARS OLD TO ENTER AND NOT OVER FIFTEEN YEARS AT TIME OF AUDITION."

WOR Press Bulletins like the following were fed out to the press in 18 states:

"Favorite of the children, WOR's Uncle Don who is heard nightly at 6 o'clock, Sundays at 10:45 A.M., today announced the group of judges who will pick the two most talented children in the Metropolitan area at the New York World's Fair in May.

"These judges include Jimmy Scribner, creator of the "Johnson Family"; Jerry Lawrence, WOR announcer, C. J. Ingram, radio editor of the "Jersey Journal"; Tommy Hamilton and Harriet Heller, winners of the 1938 Uncle Don Hollywood Contest; Walter Thornton, fashion authority and model agent; Frank Crumit and Julia Sander-

son, stars of "Battle of the Sexes" and Broadway shows; Dorothy Benson of "Leave It to Me"; Al Mitchell, WOR's "Answer Man"; Martin Wainick, publisher and printer; Stan Lomax, noted sportscaster; Joe Holton, talent scout of 20th Century-Fox; Bob Neff, United Airlines; John S. Young, radio division of New York World's Fair; Jack Rosenthal, of Palisades Amusement Park where the children will make a personal appearance. John Turtill will act as chairman and enumerate points on which finals of the contest are based.

"Contestants will be judged on singing, dancing, memory work and diction, natural dramatic ability, poise, physical appearance and general intelligence."

"United Airlines will fly the winners to Hollywood where the 20th Century-Fox plays host to them during their West Coast stay. The two winners are also to make a personal appearance at the San Francisco Fair and on a few California radio programs."

The '38 contest was so successful that they ran annually after that. Loads of clippings came in from all over the country, and cemented Uncle Don as a national figure. Maybe proving the amateur nature of the contests is the fact that none of the winners ever amounted to anything in show business. I've seen almost all the winners in the last ten years, during trips of one kind or another, and they're all pretty ordinary people.

The '38 winners were Tommy Hamilton and Harriet Heller. Tommy's a commercial artist, and Harriet's living in Oceanside, L. I. with a family of her own. Her father's the manager of Lindy's Restaurant on Broadway. In '39

there were three winners—Anna Mae Suhay of Ozone Park, Long Island, who carried on in show business for a few years, then married. Jackie Arthur of New York City is a successful businessman. Carol Lee Monette of Detroit lives in Los Angeles with her husband and family—as a talent kid, she put on quite a show: she was only five when she won. At her 20th Century-Fox test they were wondering whether to give her the Shirley Temple-Jane Withers build-up. Carol settled it for them—she turned temperamental, wouldn't sing, dance or say a line! So now she's a housewife.

The 1940 winners were Buddy Swan and Marcelle Wissman. Buddy probably got the best part of any Uncle Don winner—he played the youthful Orson Welles in "Citizen Kane" for RKO. Marcelle did a few pictures for Monogram (now Allied Artists). In '41 Coleen Bartram of Bridgeport and Gary Cole of New Haven won. Both married later but not to each other, and left show business.

The Fifth Annual in 1942 was called off for two reasons. The war was a great blow to everyone; and I was leaving Uncle Don and closing my office to work in industry. Don didn't feel like running it alone, or letting a new man teeth on it.

In the spring of '45, Don asked me to see him about the Talent Quest. He had heard rumors that WOR wanted no resumption of the contest, but thought maybe I'd like to beef the Quest up for a last fling. I had a new job starting with Fawcett Publications in August. But I had a few months to work on it if need be. We met at the bar in Dunhalls, on the first floor of the WOR Building. Don talked me into it.

The Fifth Annual was a hollow shell of the pre-war contests. Very few of Don's audience wrote in for applications. Most of the kids were from other radio programs that used children—I got their mailing lists, and wrote them. We dragged in about 1500 kids and auditioned them. There was no appeal or enthusiasm this time. Our prize was only a citation. No trips to the West Coast. No screen tests.

It was a pretty sad response. After it was all over, I ran across the letter Don had written suspending the last contest in '42. Reading it now, with the war over and Don on the down-grade, it was like an epitaph. If you looked ahead at his future and then back at the great old days, it turned into one of the most touching things of his checkered life:

"WOR
Bamberger Broadcasting Service Inc. New York City N.Y.
Business Office and Studios 1440 Broadway Pe 6-8600

March 18, 1942

Dear Talented Club Member:

Due to the troubled times of our country at War, and other circumstances beyond our control, we have found it necessary to postpone the FIFTH ANNUAL HOLLYWOOD CONTEST, for a period.

This does not mean that we will not have the contest at a later date. The record of your audition and all others in the contest will be kept on file so that you can be notified when we are ready to resume it.

I am sorry that we had to do this, because it is really a lot of fun. Please show this letter to mother and daddy, so that they will understand why we cannot continue at present.

With love and very best wishes to you and the family. I am as ever,

Your,
(s) Uncle Don"

12. *We Pulled Out All the Stops*

THE YEARS FROM '36 to '42 were highly commercial ones for Don. Also highly competitive. The children's shows had gathered in a tight noose around the New York area. Nila Mack was handling the highly successful "Let's Pretend" on WABC. There was the Horn & Hardart Children's Hour on WEAF. The Yiddish Children's Hour on WEVD. The Kid Wizard did his stuff on WHN. Jules Alberti's serious "Youth Marches On" marched along on WJZ. Nick Kenny, the New York *Daily Mirror's* radio and TV columnist, did a kids' talent program. He called himself Uncle Nick, and his brother Charlie played the fiddle on the show. Madge Tucker's "Us on a Bus" was on WJZ, while WNYC and WHOM had their shows, too. At WOR, Irving Caesar had "Safety Songs," but Don liked to think he was the leader of the flock.

Staying ahead of the pack required more and more ideas. On Memorial Day, 1937, President and Mrs. Roosevelt

were to receive Uncle Don and the two children who had won his American Citizen Contest. The kids, Don and I flew to Washington. It was the first commercial flight for all of us, and we got a big charge out of it. A luncheon for us was set up at the Mayflower. The White House reception was to be at three. I called and found Mrs. Roosevelt was out horseback riding, and would return after four. We sat it out at the White House till 4:45. At that point we were whisked into the main office. Mrs. R. came by in her riding habit, with a polo coat over her shoulders. F.D.R. lit a cigarette and met the kids. Then he chatted with Don, whom he'd met as Governor of New York. We had a good chat and left.

Don's safety program for the kids took it on the chin, thanks to me. For a brief period I was parking my car near my office on Broadway. It turned out to be a little expensive though, because I got about three parking tickets a week. I took it for a while and then wrote a meek little note to Commissioner Valentine of the New York Police. In two days I got the word:

POLICE DEPARTMENT
CITY OF NEW YORK

"Dear Sir:

You are requested to appear at the Office of the First District, 138 West 30th Street, Manhattan, at 10 AM April 6, 1937 relative to an investigation of your complaint against Ptl. Rail, Traffic Precinct B.

Bring any witnesses you may have.

Very truly yours,
James J. Phelan
Deputy Inspector"

I showed up without witnesses and finally met the nice cop who was doing his duty, but good. Little did I think it would make the papers, but a day later Louis Sobol had this in his column, to Uncle Don's chagrin:

"For the past four weeks Uncle Don in his broadcasts has been emphasizing the safety campaign sponsored by the Police Department.

The other day, Bill Treadwell, who writes the scripts, was handed a summons for parking in a safety zone."

Uncle Don-endorsed merchandise in the form of hats, suspenders, boys' suits, girls' dresses, pins, shirts, coats, etc., was in wide circulation in department stores like Jordon Marsh Co., in Boston; Gimbel's, Pittsburgh; Hess Bros., Allentown, Pa.; Kirven Co., Columbus, Ga.; Wanamaker's, Phila.; R. H. Macy in New York, and Bamberger's in Newark, N. J. He received an advance plus a twelve percent royalty and netted several thousand dollars a year.

Don's extra-curricular social activities went on at the same swift pace. While he lived in Yonkers, his "home away from home" was Murray's on the Bronx River Parkway at Tuckahoe. He liked it so much he pulled the Palisades bit—had his Sunday program beamed from the club. It gave him more hours to live it up. Don's friend Buddy Kennedy was the MC. He cracked the whip over the chorus line. Any time of the morning, noon or night that Don needed a date he could find one at Murray's. Don was shrewd enough not to be on the make for the headliners at Murray's. He always settled for the uncomplicated ponies in the chorus line.

One way to finance his high living was through the sale

of children's records. Joe Higgins, now a booking agent and personal theatrical manager at General Artists Corporation, was the first agent to see Don's possibilities on records. Joe was at Brunswick Record Company in 1935 and had Don make several sides of nursery rhymes.

Just before the war he made some for Sonora, a popular label. The deal was strictly cash and carry—Don didn't want any royalties for his family. He got 50¢ a side. In this series he fitted in about 35 songs and jingles on eight sides. The album sold for $2.09 and got wide distribution. All the department stores in the New York area carried it, as well as sports stores, music and record shops and even candy and stationery stores. The album was called "Sonora's Playland, Featuring Uncle Don."

A little sugary, but the ads read, "Millions of children worship him, listen to him daily on Mutual Broadcasting System. Now you can bring him into your home on Sonora Records—singing, story-telling, piano-playing Uncle Don." There never was any check on the Sonora deal. Dor played both ends against the middle—now he went out and tried to get another company to put out a similar album, but got turned down.

Fitting in with Don's snowballing revenue, I had a lucky dream. One Christmas I sent out a card with a caricature of me on it, showing a guy with hat pushed back, octagon-shaped glasses, loud pants and tie and pencil in hand. My birthday's soon after Christmas, Jan. 3rd—so I didn't have time to forget the card. After a birthday luncheon I went home early and daydreamed at the caricature. Names started popping up and "Gabby Scoops" hit me full force.

Here was a crazy kind of roving reporter who gabs all the time, and "scoops to conquer." Maybe he'd make an exciting comic character—I saw Gabby in neon lights; syndicated, everything!

In a few days I got hold of a young artist, Bill Connor, who was working as a Wall Street clerk. We got working on Gabby Scoops together. After flipping off a few strips, I rushed over to Oscar Le Beck at Whitman Publishing. He floored me by buying four to six pages of Gabby to go in the *Crackajack Funnies Book*. Gabby was now in the elite company of Red Ryder, the Owl, Don Winslow, and Wash Tubbs.

I sold Uncle Don on Gabby, and every Friday night afterwards for three years was "Gabby Scoops Night." Don stuck Gabby in his "Song, Game and Paint Book." On the Friday shows he'd sing some special jingles and song-poems "Gabby" had prepared for him. Holland House Coffee got on the bandwagon and carried coupons for the "Goofville Gazette" and other Gabby publications. Best of all, two hundred thousand kids became Gabby Scoops Junior Press Club Members. When anniversary time came, Gabby was serenaded with special ditties.

THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF GABBY SCOOPS
(*Sung to the Tune of "Billy Boy"*)

I hear this is your happy day, Gabby Scoops, Gabby Scoops
I hear this is your happy day, Mister Gabby
Yes, I'm honored and I'm proud
To think that I have been allowed,
To spend the past year with the ways and means committee.

Who introduced you to our club, Gabby Scoops, Gabby Scoops?
Who introduced you to our club, Mister Gabby?
Bill Treadwell, by the way
Just a year ago today,
Presented me, to the ways and means committee.

Of course you joined our Indian Tribe, Gabby Scoops, Gabby Scoops
Of course you joined our Indian Tribe, Mister Gabby
I got my ring a year ago
A present from Chief Walnetto,
I go to pow-wows with the ways and means committee.

What is your favorite breakfast dish, Gabby Scoops, Gabby Scoops
What is your favorite breakfast dish, Mister Gabby?
Maltex Cereal keeps me fit
And I find it makes a hit
With all the members of the ways and means committee.

Are you fond of macaroni, Gabby Scoops, Gabby Scoops?
Is spaghetti on your list, Mister Gabby?
R-O-N-Z-O-N-I
Spells the name that you should try,
Recommended by the ways and means committee.

Are you in the comic books, Gabby Scoops, Gabby Scoops?
Are you in the magazines, Mister Gabby?
I'm in Crackajack Funnies all the time
A copy costs you but a dime
And it's read by all the ways and means committee.

Are you an Earnest Saver too, Gabby Scoops, Gabby Scoops?
Are you an Earnest Saver too, Mister Gabby?
Yes, a senior I've been made
I often lead the big parade
On Monday nights with the ways and means committee.

We've had a happy year with you, Gabby Scoops, Gabby Scoops
I'm glad that you've been happy too, Mister Gabby
And may nineteen forty-one
Bring you gladness, joy, and fun
That's the wish of the ways and means committee.

GABBY SCOOPS AT PALISADES PARK
(*Sung to the tune of Little Brown Jug*)
Gabby Scoops, that funny little man
Guess what he's up to, if you can
He's right here now, at Palisades Park
Just came over for a lark.

Jiminy crickets . . . jiminy gee
Come on boys and girls let's see
If Mr. Gabby we can spy
We're sure to find him, if we try.

Perhaps he's on the Merry Go Round
Hark, I hear the music sound
Gabby's horse is dapple gray
He rides the regular cow-boy way.

Jiminy crickets . . . jiminy gee
Hurry, hurry, let's go and see
If Mr. Gabby we can spy
We're sure to find him if we try.

The Roller Coaster is his pet
He might be there, it's a pretty good bet
Boy O Boy, he takes the swerves
Up hill, down hill, round the curves.

Jiminy crickets . . . jiminy gee
Come on boys and girls let's see
If Gabby Scoops we can spy
We're sure to find him if we try.

Tied to the end of his walking stick
Are three balloons . . . just take your pick
Laughing, whistling, always gay
Gabby Scoops knows how to play.

Peanuts, popcorn, lemonade
Gabby buys at the Penny Arcade
Frozen custards, everyone knows
Just where Gabby's money goes.

Jiminy crickets . . . jiminy gee
Palisades Park is the place to be
Barrels of fun, goodies to eat
And Gabby Scoops you're sure to meet.

Believe it or not, but the Ferris Wheel
Has for Gabby a great appeal
Higher, higher goes our flyer
That funny little man we all admire.

Jiminy crickets . . . jiminy gee
Gabby Scoops you're sure to see
Having fun at Palisades Park
For that's the place to have a lark.

The skoot, skoot, skooter, at the place
Where Mr. Gabby wins the race
Drop around early, he may be there
Quite the center of the whole affair.

Jiminy crickets . . . jiminy gee
Palisades Park is the place for me
Barrels of fun, goodies to eat
And Gabby Scoops you're sure to meet.

The Gabby Scoops landslide went on for three years—Gabby recorded a children's record, got his crazy figure in merchandise displays and almost was made into a lollipop by Charms Candies. His loyal fans sent in 2,000 letters a week and treated him like a Hollywood idol. But then Gabby got drafted. Bill Connor, the artist, and Lou Grossman, my publicity colleague, were drafted. Crackajack Funnies was no longer published. Uncle Don's nightly time was cut down. Holland House Coffee, a Gabby sponsor and all the others were rationed. The curtailments showed that the reign of Uncle Don was not always untroubled. There was another Uncle, name of Sam, who carried a lot of weight, too.

Nobody can turn down a giveaway, least of all the younger set. Uncle Don's Picture Book made a big hit because the kids got the book free and sent in pages they colored for a prize. A giveaway with "ear appeal" was the Greenwich Savings Bank's premium. It was the longest-lived of Don's giveaways. The gift was a tin savings bank, and once a week Don performed a radio rite. Gathering the kids under his wing in front of their radios he asked them to join him—then he would audibly drop a few coins

in his personal Greenwich tin bank, while his audience did the same. This "box-top and coin" philosophy was highly effective. It could even inspire nostalgia. Arthur "Bugs" Baer wrote in his syndicated column in 1952, "I long for the glorious old twilight of Uncle Don, when all the kids did was save their box-tops and rattle their piggy-banks."

A couple of times Don's public protested things bitterly. When he was sponsored by Ronzoni Spaghetti, we wrote a special song for Don to use to the tune of "Yankee Doodle." "R-O-N-Z-O-N-I . . . is how you spell Ronzoni!"

It's America's favorite dish, give us all Ronzoni."

The public squawk was over the fact that Uncle Don used a typical American melody like Yankee Doodle to sell an Italian product with an Italian name. Touching, this patriotism!

Another time we got hundreds of letters protesting the song Don did at dinner time. It was about Mickey Mouse. The public was horrified that he should mention a "mouse" during the dinner hour. And we thought *nobody* ever quibbled with Walt Disney!

The Veg-Eat-Ers was the club set up for Wesson Oil. Don had the kids send in a post card requesting a recipe booklet for their mothers. The recipe book had a foreword addressed to mothers: "Here's good news for you," it said. "It's time something was done about helping us children to enjoy eating our vegetables. The trouble was we were getting the same vegetables the same way all the time. At least, they all tasted the same. So here's a nice suggestion the Wesson Oil people have prepared for you, with twenty tempting, tasty new vegetable recipes with really new

flavors that we love—and Daddy will like them . . . and you, too, Mother."

Don also composed some of his prolific jingles:

"I'm growing big and strong like Dad
Whoops and three big cheers
I'm full of vim and vitamins
I've joined the veg-eat-ers
We used to take such tiny nibbles
Of ordinary veg-i-tibbles
But now we veg-eat-ers all say
Just taste them once the wesson way."

These lyrics were a mouthful but even the four-year-old members got to know it and sing it along with Uncle Don.

Don could take any type of poem, lyric, prose or anecdote and put it to music. A favorite of his was taking animals and birds and singing about them. One ditty went something like this:

Alligator, hedge-hog, anteater, bear
rattlesnake, bullfrog, anaconda, hare

Buffalo, woodchuck, wolverine, goose
whippoorwill, chipmunk, jackal, moose.

Mud turtle, whale, glow-worm, bat
salamander, snail, and a Maltese cat.

Polywog, fox, catamount, lynx
Kangaroo, ox, panther, mink.

Polecat, dog, otter, cat
pelican, hog, doto, rat

Black squirrel, coon, opossum, wren
red squirrel, loon, and a South Guinea Hen.

Reindeer, black snake, ibex, nightingale, marten
Wild goose, crocodile, quail

Weasel, windcat, penguin, puma
antelope, switzer-ox, janqual, llama

Turkey, buzzard, humbird, flea
Swan, muskox, fawn, chickadee

White bear, peacock, bobolin, doe
crossbill, hornbill, flamingo, crow.

Don's monthly articles that I helped him prepare for *Funny Animals* magazine, a Fawcett publication, always featured jingles with a moral like the following on "Slackerminds:

SLACKERMINDS

It's too much bother to do what I ought to
That's how the lazy SLACKERMINDS all talk
And then when things go wrong, and for their faults they have to pay
They make a fuss, and how they squeal and squawk
So make your minds behave and do their task, dears,
Just note this little pointer that I mention
If you keep your wits at work
Your hands and feet will never shirk
I hope that you will give this your attention.

Here was another that the parents liked a lot:

MEANWELLS

The MEANWELLS don't intend to make folks trouble
They really mean to do their very best
But good intentions aren't enough—they sometimes do more harm
Than you would think, it has to be confessed.
It's what you do, not what you mean that matters,
And here's a pointer I would like to mention,
"I meant to" won't please mother, dear
"I did it" she will like to hear.
I hope that this will meet with your kind attention.

The "Uncle Donisms" made a big hit with the kids, too, and probably corrected a few manners.

Uncle Don would do ninety percent of his business outside of his office. He was always getting into song deals, book deals, game deals and even talent deals.

Vaughn DeLeath, the First Lady of Radio, had her "Drive Safely" song published by Dave Ringle Music Publishers in 1937. She immediately came to Don to get it plugged on his program. Vaughn appeared, played and sang it, and it started a whole wave of safety songs.

It was such a success that Don was sought after by almost every song publisher in Tin Pan Alley to plug their latest efforts.

This was during the early days of the "payola." Professional music men either paid cash or gave gifts if their tunes were plugged on a major program during the day or night. Programs after 6 P.M. were the most sought after. Don was not fussy. He would accept a cash gift or a case of Four Roses.

Don even made deals with dance schools and in 1943

became a personal backer of the Paulette Sisters who appeared on his program many, many times. He was offered a music deal and took it for the tune which gained a little popularity titled, "Who's Your Little Oogie Boogie-Woogie." Charles Lowe and Clarence Gaskill were the writers and they put Uncle Don's name on the tune as one of the co-writers. This tune was published by Mills Music, Inc.

Don's picture with the Paulette Sisters surrounding him and a WOR mike appeared on the cover page of the music sheet. Don plugged the tune day in and day out on his program. He would make the rounds of clubs and dance spots at night to get bandleaders to play it. He appeared on other programs for children and adults. He tried every way to make it a hit. Nothing happened.

Don never had a book publisher as a sponsor probably because all of them could get free mentions of their children's books if they let Uncle Don use material from it on his nightly broadcasts. Don used up as much material per night as most children's programs used in a week. We didn't like to repeat stories or songs for that matter and consequently he was wide open for contacts with pub-

Correspondence from editors, promotion men and women and publishers flooded his desk every day. The following is typical.

ALFRED A. KNOPF, INC.
501 Madison Avenue
New York, N. Y.

October 30, 1941

"Dear 'Uncle Don,'

For years and years I have been listening in to your program and, as editor of Books for Young People at Alfred

A. Knopf, it seems to me that you should know the books of Walter R. Brooks.

In order to acquaint you with them, I am taking the liberty of sending you a copy of FREDDY AND THE IGNORAMUS, his latest publication. Adults are as enthusiastic as children about Mr. Brooks's work, and I am convinced that he gets almost as much fan mail as our "Uncle Don." Do read it and if at any time you can help to promote and publicize this really excellent book, we shall be most appreciative. I am enclosing one of the circulars and strips which are offered free and which we will be glad to make available for distribution if you care for them.

Thank you for any assistance which you can give us along these lines.

Yours sincerely,
(Mrs.) Lillian J. Bragdon
Editor of Books
for Young People"

"Uncle Don"
WOR
1440 Broadway
New York, N. Y.

This letter from a publicity gal at Bobbs-Merrill Company was the usual reaction to an Uncle Don book mention during a nightly broadcast.

The Bobbs-Merrill, Company
468 Fourth Avenue
New York, N. Y.

February 19th 1942

"Dear Mr. Treadwell,

Won't you tell Uncle Don how much we appreciate his fine words about FUZZY-WUZZY the other evening. As

usual, my little girl Judy Burke told me all about it. She was very much excited when I got home, had her copy of the book in her hands, and said, "Oh, Joie, Joie, Uncle Don spoke about Fuzzy-Wuzzy and Bobbs-Merrill." The book has always been a favorite one with her, and she was delighted to hear Uncle Don say he liked it too. (p.s. Yes, she calls me "Joie" but what can I do? When she speaks of me to her friends, I am always "My Mother," so I figure it's okay.)

I want to thank you, too, for sending the little bank along. Judy doesn't seem to want to save regularly, and up to now has had a transparent piggy bank. She doesn't want to make the change to the Greenwich Savings Bank, and I thought perhaps there may be other children who feel the same way. A slight admonition from their favorite Uncle might help speed them on the way.

With all good wishes to you, Uncle Don and the program,

Yours sincerely,
Josephine Reynolds
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY"
publicity

"Mr. William Treadwell
c/o Uncle Don Program
1440 Broadway, New York

P.S. Some days ago you said you would get Uncle Don to write a paragraph about our PENNY PUPPETS book. I wonder if you've overlooked it."

Although Don was a local luminary, he was known coast to coast through not only his Mutual Network shows but also his friendship with Broadway and Hollywood stars.

When David Nelson was born to Ozzie and Harriet, Uncle Don was quick to welcome David into the club. He

did a special dedicatory program and had Harriet hold David in her arms in her bed at Doctors' Hospital while he read the ritual. It gave Ozzie and Harriet a lot of publicity and made Don a lot of adult friends.

He was constantly plugging the popular child stars of the era like Shirley Temple, Deanna Durbin, Jane Withers and Jackie Cooper.

A lot of the New Yorkers who had made the grade in pictures, like Jimmie Dunn, Joan Davis and her then husband Cy Wills, Claire Trevor, Cowboy Tex Fletcher, Susan Hayward and Orson Welles would stop around to see Don when they were in town and wanted to plug a picture or some other independent or personal project.

Many vaudevillians were numbered among his bosom friends too. Singers like Peter Higgins, Buddy Kennedy, Jack Arthur and Benay Venuta. Dramatic performers like Pat Barnes, Paul Muni, Edmund O'Brien and Gertrude Lawrence. Mutual didn't have too many network stars, but the ones they did have like Radie Harris, Morey Amsterdam, Mabel Todd, George Fisher and Bob Emery would slip in an Uncle Don mention time and again. Most of the time the public really thought they knew him but they actually didn't.

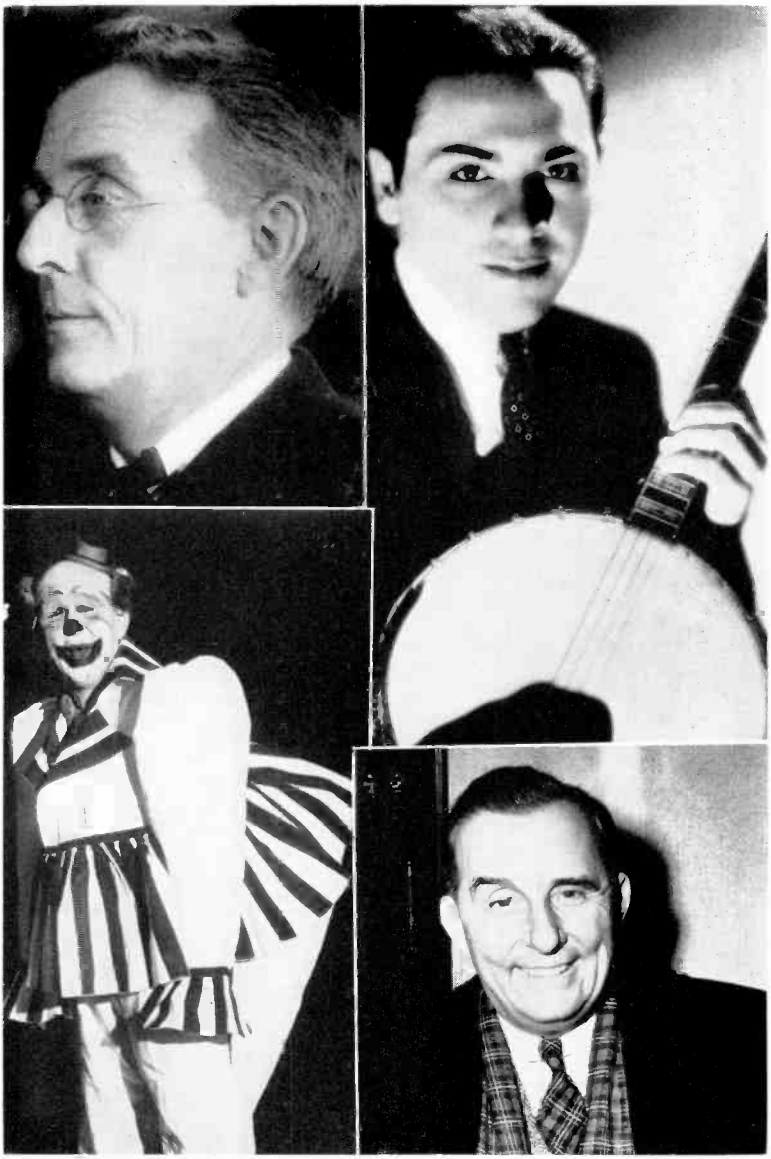
Walter Thornton, the model agent, gave a special dinner party for Don one evening. This was during Walter's early days as a merchant of Venus. He had many models at his apartment including Lucille Wilds who was considered a real top model in the Thirties.

Don was sure in his heaven. The girls made a big fuss over him and he copied each and every name down. On his broadcast the next evening Don threw the regular

birthday list aside and took out his list of models and treated them as if they were birthday club members. To Lucille he said, "And now Lucille don't stoop over so much." To another model who got a little tipsy at the party he said, "Remember, you are older now—don't drink out of a bottle."

Anytime we needed beautiful children to dress up a picture in the WOR studio, we would send an S-O-S to Thornton and we could always expect a studio full of beautiful children and attractive mothers.

It's autograph time. Uncle Don signed hundreds every day. He even signed his name on diapers at the diaper derby in Palisades Amusement Park. (*Lower left*) His favorite portrait. (*Lower right*) Before we made our first commercial airplane flight to Washington D.C. in 1937. We were received by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.



Don Carney in 1927 made up as Mayor Luke Higgins, his starring role in radio's popular situation comedy "Main Street Sketches," (*Upper left*). To the right is Roy Smeck in 1924. Roy was Don's best friend. (*Lower left*) Don is made up in Felix Adlers' Clown makeup. (*Lower right*) Don smiles to show his new set of teeth.

1907 . . . Don Carney—"Trick Pianist"

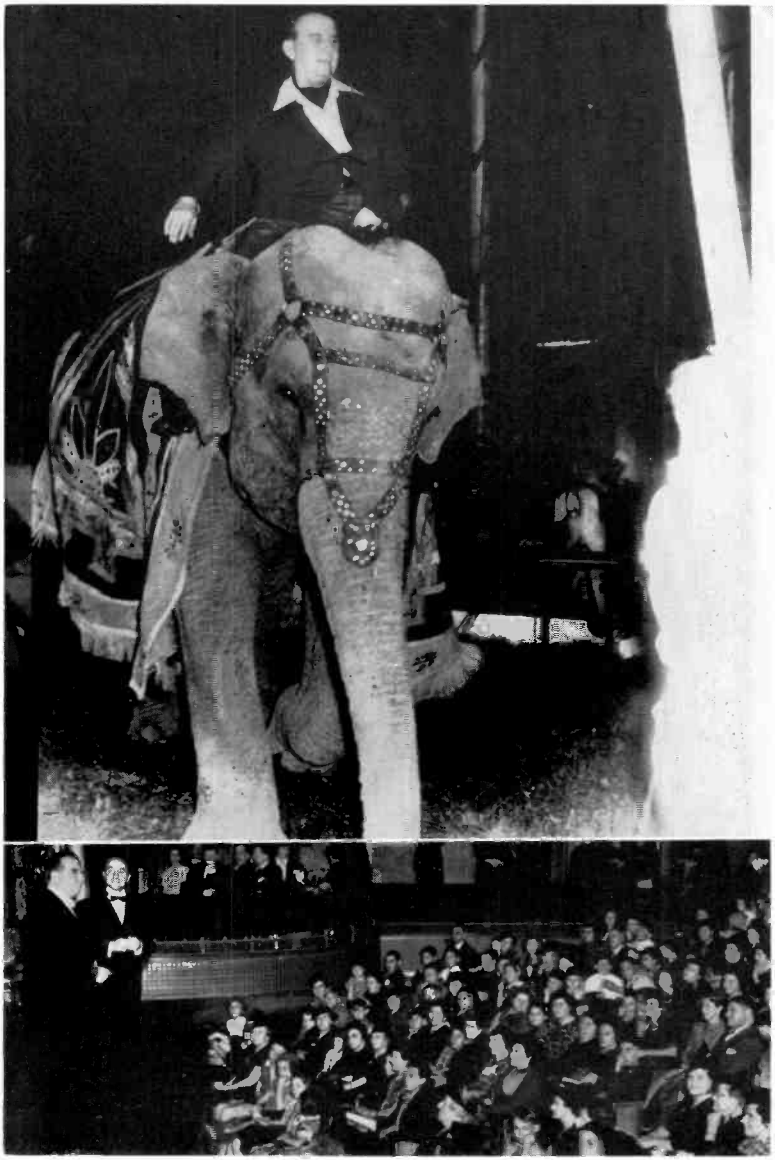
Ed Wynn mugs during an interview conducted by Uncle Don Club members. (*Lower left*) Elaine Bell and the author during a remote broadcast from Westchester. Uncle Don made a guest appearance and was so impressed with Elaine he offered to finance her career. She was sixteen at the time. (*Lower right*) Etta Trost Burstin, Uncle Don's secretary for many years.

For the opening of the circus season at Madison Square Garden in 1934, Don (*Right*) dressed up as a clown. He said, many times, he would go back to clowning if a scandal broke about him. (*Below*) Mayor "Butch" La Guardia puts a Bulova watch on a winner of an Uncle Don safety contest. Officers George Rose and Charlie Krumm look on, along with the author.

Howard Lindsay, Victor Moore and Uncle Don sort out Christmas presents at the annual Kiddie Party in London Terrace, New York City. (*Below*) Don with Roy Smeck and a friend after one of his broadcasts.

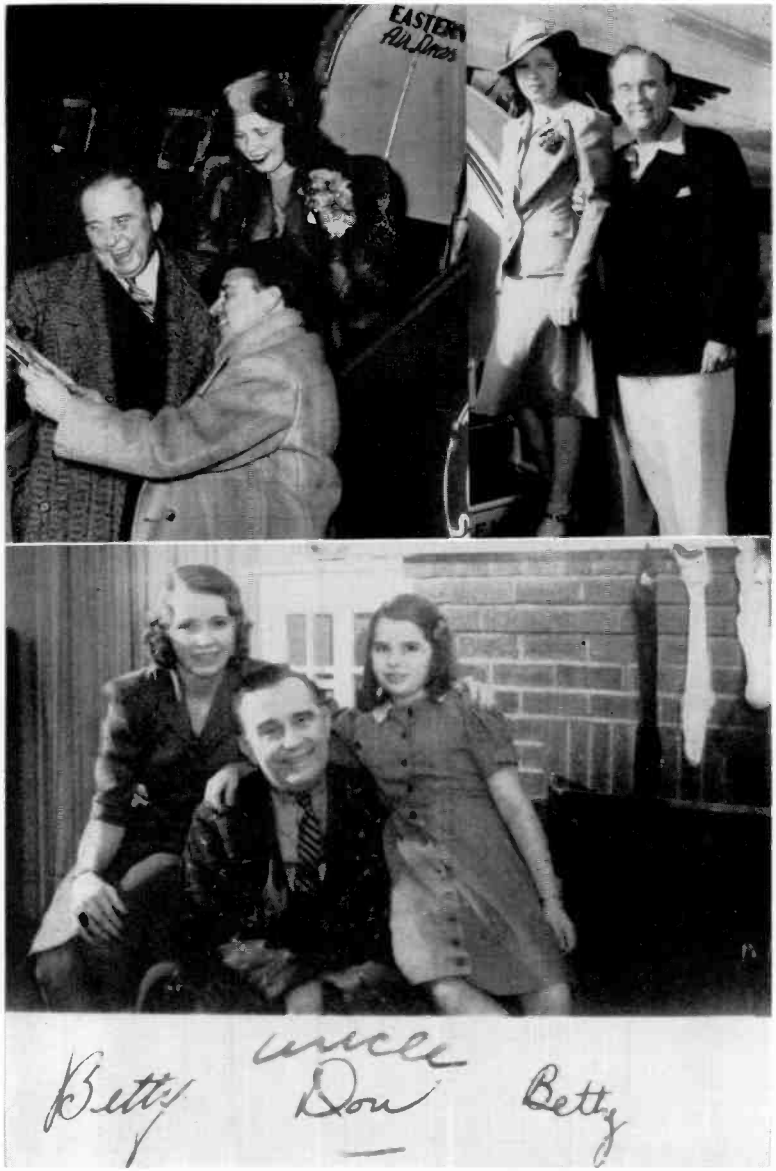
From his radio studio in the New Jersey Building at the New York World's Fair, Uncle Don introduces the winners of his 1939 Healthy Child Contest. (*Below*) Club members are introduced to the winning entries in the press photographers' annual competition.

Kids, kids and more kids. Every mother whose daughter listened to Uncle Don thought she had another "Shirley Temple" in her home. Note curls *et al.* (*Below*) Fredric March presents the American Way trophies.



Uncle Don rides atop "Dolly," the Hunts' Circus elephant. (*Below*) Don with his favorite announcer, Jeff Sparks, at the tenth anniversary broadcast of the Uncle Don program in 1938.

Big Betty and Little Betty at the Camp Kimikomuck reunion in a New York hotel. (*Below*) Don and Betty entertain Roy and his ex-wife, Gladys Dahl Smeck.



The Carneys travel by air to Florida, Cuba and Points west. Their Christmas card presented the type of family unit Don had hoped for all his life.

Tommy and Harriet visit with the late comedian Joe Penner in Hollywood. Jane Withers greets Carol Lee, Jackie and Anna Mae. All were winners of the Uncle Don Talented Child Contest.

Ethel Barrymore poses with Gary and Coleen as Don looks on. Mary Beth Hughes cuddles Buddy as Marcelle relaxes. Winning an Uncle Don Talent Contest meant a trip to Hollywood and introductions to many movie stars.

Here's the Uncle Don circus wagon that won top prize in the New York World's Fair motorcade. (*Lower left*) The New Jersey Building at the fair. (*Lower right*) Don had a lot of midget friends. Here's a couple of them.

As fall guy at the Circus, Saints and Sinners luncheon meeting, Uncle Don shows off his gams. (*Below*) He had to eat his sponsor's product.

A big stage was needed for talent night. (*Below left*) Uncle Don does a special broadcast for deaf children who listen to him through Acousticon equipment. (*Lower right*) Don presents souvenir dolls to club members.

13. *Another Dream Girl*

In 1938 Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia ruled that if a theater allowed children to attend performances alone, they had to sit in a separate section attended by a matron. This new law was music to the ears of Betty Marsh of Scalp Level, Pa., a gal who'd forsaken the coal mining towns to make a go of it in the Big City. Betty thought she'd like to be an actress. Her qualifications were interesting, if nothing else—she didn't read too well; the thought of a high-school play filled her with dread, but she did go to the movies. In fact that's where she picked up most of her education.

She brought along a souvenir from Scalp Level—Betty Junior. Betty Junior's father was never mentioned. She just figured she grew, guided by a loving mother who took jobs as a domestic for bachelors. Betty Senior was so diligent about her chores around the various houses she worked in that her daughter was left alone for hours at

a time. And that's how Betty Junior discovered Uncle Don.

She joined all the Uncle Don Clubs, wrote for a mention on her birthdays and even followed him on personal appearances when it fitted in with her mother's house-hunting. So when Don was planning his big Easter Show in '38, young Betty happened to mention all the details to her mother. She ended her recital with a very weighty statement: "Why Mommy, it's all in The New York Times." And it sure was:

CHILDREN'S EASTER SHOW

April 15, 1938—New York Times

" 'Uncle Don's Circus' to Open on Monday at the Windsor From next Monday through April 23, the Windsor Theatre will be occupied by an Easter children's show called "Uncle Don's Easter Circus" that will include Uncle Don of the radio; the Sue Hastings Marionettes, a Punch and Judy show and other numbers. Continuous performers will be given daily, starting at 11 A.M. and ending at 5:30 P.M.

The Manteo Marionettes are announced to appear at the Bayes Theatre on April 27, in a bill consisting of an Italian curtain-raiser, Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso" and an abridged "Macbeth" in English."

Mommy had trouble reading it without moving her lips, but she got the drift—and it gave her a great idea. A lot of her friends were working as theater matrons. So Betty decided that a big event like Don's Easter Circus needed the presence of a dowager like herself. She rushed down to see Gilbert Josephson, the director of the World Theater, who was in charge of the Easter Circus at the Wind-

sor on West 48th St. Probably the only thing in her favor was that she got there ahead of the crowd—the line hadn't formed yet, so Betty got the job. Six bucks a day and the manager promised Betty Junior could meet Don backstage. And then maybe Betty Senior could.

In the meantime the star of the show was having his usual extra-marital troubles. Don's current flame was Eve, the Oriental dancer, but spring was coming on and he felt it was time for a change. They had a fight and she threatened to go home to Mother in Hong Kong, or somewhere, so he said bon voyage. The winter had been deadly dull anyway. His summer romances at Palisades Park with showgirls and the mothers of his little fans had been in mothballs for months. Don was just in the mood for meeting another dream girl! But that wasn't a very exclusive term—every broad he ran into got the dream girl treatment.

The meeting finally came when Don couldn't ignore little Betty's attempts to see him. After all, she was only 9, and he was supposed to be nuts about kids. But if he wasn't always nuts about kids, he was usually daffy about their mothers.

"You know, Bill," he said to me at the first broadcast after meeting Betty, "this girl is so sincere, has a beautiful child and even offered to wash my handkerchief after I wiped her lipstick off." What could you say to devotion like that!

Don and Marilyn had put a lot of furniture in storage when they sold their house in Westchester. This turned out fine, because it was just what Betty needed. She found an apartment and had Don move all his wife's furniture

into her place! What could be better? Uncle Don now had his own private Captain's Paradise.

Don was quickly falling head over bankroll in love. He now had Betty's teeth fixed—she got the Hollywood cap treatment, and in two months looked like the girl in a toothpaste ad. Don never hid the fact that he was keeping her. Betty didn't hide it either. In fact, she started to bring in relatives from Scalp Level to live off Don! Her parents owned a saloon in the home town; she had a "brother" Dick who spent six or eight months resting up between jobs; then she was always showing up with sisters, cousins and "uncles." One of these "uncles" might even have been the first husband everybody suspected she'd had.

After "meeting the family," at his expense, Don decided to marry Betty.

Now Don's problem was "how to tell the kids." He'd introduced "Aunt" Betty on the show when he started going around with her, and here it was time to get married. One night he just told the kids that Aunt Betty and Uncle Don were driving to Scalp Level to get married! How the parents explained that one to their little darlings, I'll never know.

They got married and drove around town on a fire truck. Poor Betty Junior couldn't make it. To fit in with the new pattern of luxury, she was off at Greycourt School in Connecticut, being turned into a young lady. Don always thought a lot of little Betty. He kept giving her advice over the air, and said what a great example she was to him:

In a radio publication, Don was quoted as saying:

"To my 12-year-old daughter, I am thankful for one great lesson. Betty, in her dozen years, has taught me that the word "don't" is best used as is garlic—sparingly and with tact. In fifteen years of broadcasting a kids' program over WOR and the Mutual Network, I've received about 10,000 letters. A good tenth of the mail is from parents who want me to tell their youngster not to bite his nails or some such thing. My own child has taught me that a suggestion is much more effective than a command. I never tell a youngster to stop biting his nails; I say I'm glad to hear that he has cured himself of the habit. In most cases, the psychology works. All the "don'ts" in the world wouldn't have broken Betty of thumbsucking. But by advising her to suck her elbow, I so absorbed her mind with the impossible feat that she forgot about her thumb. I've never told Betty that she had to go to bed. When she reached the age of rebellion, and one night stubbornly refused to trundle off upstairs at the customary hour, she met with no resistance. Through sheer will power, she managed to stay awake until midnight. The following evening, she went to bed of her own accord at seven-thirty. A couple of weeks afterward, she again decided to stay up and did. All the kick of staying up late was gone when she found no one cared and now the habit of regular hours is well ingrained. There are, of course, some occasions when a command is necessary, but in nine cases out of ten, suggestion works better than force. Children have a sense of fairness and of co-operation found in few adults, and reason is a better instrument than the rod."

"Every child should have a pet of some sort," said Don. "Betty has a canary." Sometimes Uncle Don's psy-

chology fell flat. Over the air, he told a boy, that because the youngster had stopped swearing, he would find a present back of the sofa. The boy rushed to the sofa, then said, "How the hell did it get here so fast?"

Parents should have few secrets. Surest way to tempt a child to smoke or drink, Uncle Don believed, is to make it appear a vice. Betty, by lighting her father's cigarettes, will consummate a natural desire to imitate her elders, without thinking of smoking herself.

To prepare a child for the questions he or she will want to know about sex, nature is the best textbook. Starting point might well be a flower or pod of seeds.

He did make sense when he was publicly quoted or talked philosophy on his nightly programs.

Once Don was married again he moved constantly. Maybe he was trying to forget he was married—or maybe he got tired of Betty and used psychology, figuring she was so dumb that if he moved often enough she'd get confused and go back to live at one of the old addresses! They shifted around on Long Island and wound up in a penthouse on 86th street. Don treated his wives lavishly. He endeared himself to Betty by getting her a white fox coat, a Buick and a maid.

Betty had things easy, but she still looked forward to more. From the day she got married, she was always "burying" Don, in public, too. She would phone his insurance agent, Bill Waterman, to quiz him on Don's insurance. She probed his business affairs at WOR. She even hounded him on personal appearances asking bold questions of all the food show and amusement park promoters. And worst of all, just like Marilyn, she was jealous.

Betty made monthly trips back to Scalp Level to see

her family—that is, the months when most of the family weren't in New York sponging off Don! Don thought she must have a young man on the string. She was always asking him for his old suits, ties and even underwear to take back with her—but maybe the family was just broke.

The bonds of holy wedlock never got Don in a stranglehold. He had some really exciting times when Betty made her pilgrimages to Scalp Level. One of the most memorable was the night Don was out drinking with a young ad man; the ad man had a friend who acted awfully gay in his grey flannel suit, but Don thought nothing of it till they got back to his penthouse. By now the party included a girl entertainer from the Chateau Madrid.

Things were copacetic until the gay one made a pass at Don. Uncle was a little startled—*he* was used to making the passes, and not at guys. Rousing all the Jack Armstrong in him he told the fly to get out. Don wasn't too diplomatic, and soon a bunch of fires sprouted in the penthouse. The New York Times reported it like this, but they were in the dark about who was there:

Nov. 4th, 1941—N. Y. Times
UNCLE DON HAS 2 FIRES
Radio Entertainer Fights Flames in
Penthouse Apartment

"Following two successive blazes in different parts of the penthouse apartment occupied by Don Carney, known to radio listeners as "Uncle Don," at 115 West Eighty-sixth Street, between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues, an investigation was begun last night by the police of the West 100th Street station and the office of the fire marshal. The radio performer was quoted by detectives as saying that he had returned home about 9:30 o'clock with friends, two men and a woman,

to await a telephone call from his wife, Mrs. Betty Carney, who was in Pennsylvania. He discovered the first fire soon afterward in a bedroom occupied ordinarily by his 11-year-old daughter, who was at school. Mr. Carney and his friends said they put this blaze out with small damage. The second blaze, discovered later in a bedroom across the hall from the daughter's room was finally extinguished by firemen after Mr. Carney had failed in an effort to put it out with a hose kept in an outside hall as part of the apartment building's fire-fighting system."

Word filtered through from Betty Junior's finishing school that she'd about had it. Betty made the discovery that the glories of living in Connecticut at the Greycourt School were for "kids," as she put it. She wanted the excitement of New York. Without waiting for the year to end she whipped back to her room in Don's penthouse, for some fast living.

She grew up pretty quickly—before you could say "Uncle Don" (and before Uncle Don said anything to her), she was off to her favorite hangout, the Gay Blades roller skating rink on the West Side where she could pick up the most boys. Little Betty married an Army private at 17 just before World War II. All Uncle Don could say was "Like mother, like daughter." But it was for the best. Her mother was getting very jealous of Little Betty.

Betty's insincerity was boasted on numerous occasions.

In fact she said this to Roy Smeck one day. "I live for the day when I can collect that bastard's insurances and you know where I'll spend it?—well, I'll buy a big car and a lot of clothes . . . and spend all my time sitting in the Waldorf lobby . . . where I could meet some real men."

14. *Control Room Society*

In the early days of the Uncle Don program there was one announcer assigned to Don each evening. Don had an opportunity then to pick the one he wanted. Joe Bolton was his first selection in the early thirties. Joe now has his own children's program on television on WPIX. He is known as "Officer Joe" and does the Uncle Don bit of birthday mentions and has many of the mannerisms he picked up in his years around Don.

Jeff Sparks was another announcer who became well known with Don. Jeff is now associated with radio and television at the United Nations.

Jack Barry came to the show much later, after the Union ruling stating that Don's program called for grade A announcers' scale. Jack, soon after joining the show started a children's program of his own, "Juvenile Jury." According to several trendex ratings, "Juvenile Jury" was the top Sunday afternoon network program.

Other announcers who were associated with Don's show and are still around included Barry Gray, who now has his own nightly program from a New York Restaurant on WMCA, Henry Morgan, associated with the panel show, "I've Got A Secret" moderated by Garry Moore, Frank Knight, Norman Brokenshire, Floyd Neal, newscaster Arthur Hale and remote announcer engineer Charles Kibling. In fact, Charles Kibling was an engineer but because he lived in Westchester County, in Rye, was assigned to handle the Sunday show when Don "Read the Comics." This show originated from Murray's night club on the Bronx River Parkway at Tuckahoe, N. Y.

Don never became too friendly with any announcers or for that matter any executive at WOR or the Mutual Network. He had very few close friends.

Roy Smeck, known all over the world as the "Wizard of the Strings," was his closest and dearest friend. Roy went back with Don in show business to 1924 when Don was working for D. W. Griffith in the movie "America." In this motion picture thriller Don played over a dozen bit parts including an Indian Chief. Two other top films he played parts in were "Birth of a Nation" and "Tolerance."

Roy was a home movie fan and at least once a week he would rent a feature film and bring it to Don's Penthouse for a home showing. Anytime Don had to play a benefit or make a special appearance or was invited to a restaurant for a free meal, Roy was invited along, as Don's special guest. Roy would bring his harmonica and uke with him, so he could entertain. The pair had worked up several after dark routines.

Eddie Mack, an engineer at 20th Century Fox Film

Corporation in New York, was another of Don's after-dark pals. Eddie owned half a mountain over in New Jersey and would spend several nights a week in town so he could be on the job early the next morning. Some nights he didn't even go to bed.

There were always a lot of show business people around the studio as anyone could pop in, unexpectedly, to view Don's show. J. Fred Coots used the Uncle Don program to try out the small fry appeal of his many hit tunes. It was on the Uncle Don program that Coots introduced "Santa Claus Is Coming To Town." The Uncle Don club members helped to make the song the hit it is today.

Felix Adler, the star clown of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey circus for many years, was another frequent visitor to the show when he was in town with the circus. He and Don would talk over old times on the program. Don had even taken the part of a clown with a small midwest circus during his show business days around Chicago. That's where he met Felix.

Politicos would often stop by to see Don requesting him to make various personal appearances. Governor A. Harry Moore had a pet charity in a hospital in Jersey City. Governor Harold Hoffman even had Don out in Jersey stumping for him. New York Vehicle Commissioner Charlie Hartnett had a benefit a week lined up for Don to play. This helped Don with his traffic problems. He gave Don the N. Y. license plate, "DC."

Police Commissioner Valentine, was another friend who would help Don out of local scrapes. Don, in exchange, would give the New York Police Department several minutes of sponsored time, free, to preach Safety mes-

sages to the kids. George Rose and Charlie Krumm, of New York's Finest, were tapped to put over these Safety messages. The kids loved them because they talked like typical New York cops.

You always knew when Don was getting ready to buy a wife or a girl friend a fur coat, because I. J. Fox would be a guest in the studio. In the same same way when he was promoting accommodations in Florida, Bernarr McFadden was the studio guest. He owned the McFadden-Deauville Hotel at the time. Eddie Rickenbacker would be interviewed when Don was promoting a free trip each year to Florida. His insurance agent, Bill Waterman would only show up when Don owed money or was settling a claim. Don was the only one I knew who was way ahead of the insurance companies. He had more petty fires and lost more personal items than anyone else I knew.

Grace and Artie Sorenson, theatrical agents, were around the show at least once a week. Grace worked for Ziegfeld as a comedienne and Artie was a leading pianist. He played for the Uncle Don Opportunity Night programs when talented children were featured. Grace and Artie became very close friends with the Carneys. In fact Grace was the only woman who could tell Don off and get away with it. He showed her great respect and followed her advice.

Many organizations made exchange deals with Don and WOR both directly and indirectly. The Port of New York Authority was one in particular. Every week, Phillip Hunter, a member of the executive staff of the Port Authority, would bring questions and answers to the studio and Don would allot five minutes for this type of propa-

ganda. It was usually a five minute commercial selling the virtues of the Lincoln Tunnel, the Holland Tunnel and the George Washington Bridge. For this Don got some free tickets. WOR obtained free posters at the entrances and exits. Phil and his wife Ruth now run the Towndock Theater in Port Washington, Long Island.

Don hated to pay a check in a restaurant and if the owner forgot to take the tab, Don would take it out on the waiters. In fact he never tipped a waiter, even if he received a evening's free entertainment. He was actually spoiled because everyone and their brother wanted to entertain him.

One hangout of his was the St. Regis Restaurant on Broadway and 41st Street. This restaurant's managing director was Hyman Heller, who is now manager of Lindy's famous Restaurant on Broadway. Heller had a talented daughter who was one of the winners of the Uncle Don Hollywood contest. She won it on her own merits however, but Heller was so enthusiastic and happy about her success that he paid Don's bills personally any time he wanted to come in the St. Regis restaurant. Don, of course, overdid it and many times brought as many as eight friends in at one time to cuff Heller's hospitality.

When he couldn't pick up a hotel or restaurant invitation, he would accept one to a private home. He liked kosher food and would make the trek over to Brooklyn to be served kosher food at the home of the Endlers'. This family too, had a couple of talented kids, Jack and Marilyn. Jack grew up to be an announcer in Washington D. C. and Marilyn played with the Mae West company when Mae returned to Broadway several years ago.

Don has been known to drive to Budd Lake, N. J. some sixty miles out of New York for a free meal. He would drive to the Jersey shore for a mess of free steamed clams. He devoted his entire program one night to a dancing school for a case of Four Roses.

This was another first for Uncle Don. He was the first entertainer to accept loot night after night in exchange for favors and plugs for the products on his nightly programs. The motion picture producers and writers carried on this vogue in the mid-Thirties. It had its selling value and attributes. When Clark Gable wore a T shirt, the nation wore them. When Humphrey Bogart drank tea in a movie, the males of the nation accepted it as the thing to do. When Lana Turner wore a shortie night gown, so did all the girls.

These were the days of low income taxes. Don's office overhead was very modest. He had one secretary who joined him when she was fresh out of high school and spent fifteen years of her young life with him. Born Yetta Trost, she changed her name to Etta when she moved into the shocking position as Don's gal Friday. Etta liked her job. Her salary was shared by Don and WOR. She hated the Christmas season because Don would only give her a pocket book or an unbrella for a Christmas present, alternating the selection each year.

Etta married an advertising man, Joseph Burstin and when she left Don, settled down to bringing up a family.

It was hard for Don to keep a steady secretary after she left. He was never in his office long enough to instruct her in details. He had five in all in the short period of two years.

Each one would call me almost daily wherever I was. Mail was forwarded to me to answer and in this way I was able to keep in touch with the Uncle Don operation during and after the war years although I was no longer operating my business out of the same office.

Most of the mail sent to Don written by adults received immediate answers. Here is a typical letter from an adult where we had a chance to contribute Uncle Don's ad-lib remarks to a speech to be delivered in Boston:

J. M. Major
3001 Henry Hudson Parkway
Riverdale, New York City

August 13, 1942

"Uncle Don
WOR
New York City
Dear Uncle Don:

Today (Aug. 13th) I heard your announcer tell about Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton, and wooden water mains of early New York City. I liked that dialogue and would like to have a copy of the same for use in my talk of September 15th before the National Water Main Assn., in Boston.

If you'll send it, I'll return in exchange a Photostat of The United States Gazette, published May 2nd, 1789, which carries an eye witness account of the FIRST INNAUGURATION of George Washington as the FIRST PRESIDENT of the FIRST Democracy on earth. This should interest your boys and girls.

Come on—let's make the trade. The photostat will cost $3.50, so before going to that expense, I'd like your answer.

Very truly yours,
(*s*) J. M. Major"

This guy was frank anyway, wasn't he?

15. *Charity Begins at Don's Home*

DON ALWAYS BELIEVED that charity began at his home. His time was money to him but he didn't mind giving hours of it in making personal appearances at hospitals, children's institutions and shelters.

One of his yearly trips took him to the Ruptured and Cripple Hospital on East 42nd Street. Here he was a welcomed visitor not only to the bed-ridden but also to the staff as well. Nurses who were there year after year were taken by his ready charm. A piano was always wheeled into the various wards and Don would do fifteen minutes of songs and tell a few stories. The kids and adults knew him well as they were allowed to have the radio tuned to him every night.

Another yearly trek was sponsored by the United Hospital Fund. Don would make the rounds of eight or more hospitals in one day. A small piano was carted on a van and moved into each hospital ward. A corps of news-

papermen and photographers usually accompanied Don on these junkets. Everyone had to admit that Don brought a great amount of cheer and entertainment to those mortals detained in hospitals by physical handicaps.

In the course of a year Don would visit more than five hundred hopitals, institutions and shelters, in eighteen Eastern states. From the Children's Village in Dobbs Ferry where a group of teen-agers assigned to one house chanted in unison, "Uncle Don is a son of a bitch . . . Uncle Don is a son of a bitch . . . and so are we," to the Brooklyn Federation of Crippled and Disabled where he was guest of honor at the dedication ceremonies. In Don's honor a label from a Four Roses bottle was slipped into the cornerstone.

Every thank-you letter Don received relative to his hospital trips, was sent immediately to the President of WOR, Al McCosker.

The thank-you note from the Federation of Crippled and Disabled did not comment on Don's contribution of the Four Roses label:

FEDERATION OF CRIPPLED AND DISABLED, INC.
Executive Offices and Shops
163-5 West 57th St., N. Y.

Kings County Headquarters
47 S. Oxford St., Brooklyn

"Dear Bill:

May I take this opportunity to thank you on behalf of the officers and members of the Federation of Crippled & Disabled for the kindness you have shown and the cooperation you have given us, to help make our dedication ceremonies a success.

It is such expressions of faith in the work that the Federation is doing for disabled persons in this community, that have helped us in the past, and that will be an incentive for the members of this organization in the future expansion of our activities for the benefit of the ever increasing number of disabled persons who constantly seek our aid.

I sincerely hope that you will pay us a visit at your first opportune moment, so that you may see what progress we are making, and that our future relations will always be pleasant as they are at present.

With kindest personal regards.

Sincerely yours,
(Signed) Jack Mortan
Public Relations Director"

His charities were few, but he would seldom refuse any group that requested time on his program. Each year he gave many hours to the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Church groups and Philanthropic organizations. Even political groups could get free time for their causes.

One of his pet charities was assisting the blind.

One time the Industrial Home for the Blind brought a group of blind boys and girls to the Circus at Madison Square Garden and unlike previous visits of this type, where they had to depend on their ears for impressions of the big show, Uncle Don was their "eyes."

A separate section of the Garden was set aside for the children and the WOR Engineering Department enclosed it with a public address system to carry Uncle Don's word-by-word description, Don was there to describe the opening parade and stayed there until the curtain went down on the big show. This was the longest speaking

assignment ever attempted by Don; the show ran over three hours, and he just had ten minutes to get to the WOR studios twelve blocks away, for his six o'clock broadcast.

He gave equal time to the deaf. Many times deaf children were brought to the studio and the leader of their group would use the sign language to describe what Don was singing and saying.

The Camp Fire Girls needed help. Don cancelled a musical guest so that he could present their cause and interview one of their representatives.

It was letters like this one that made WOR feel that they could sustain the appeal of Don for many years to come.

CAMP FIRE GIRLS, INC.
88 Lexington Ave.
New York, New York

January 14, 1943

"Uncle Don
Station WOR
1440 Broadway
New York, N. Y.
Dear Uncle Don:

I don't want any more time to elapse without telling you how grateful we all are here at the National Office for your taking the time on your delightful program to interview Miss Dorothy Biddick on Tuesday evening.

The informal and impromptu interview was very smooth and is bound to increase the attendance at the Ice Show tonight, to say nothing of increasing our membership ranks (as a matter of fact, Miss Biddick says there were three calls yesterday as a result of it!).

Thanks a million for your grand cooperation with us and many more long years to your program.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Wilde
National Publicity"

EW:o

As late as August 1945 Don was trying to tie in with as many outside organizations as possible. He thought a child guidance program might help him hold the interest of older children.

Called the Uncle Don Child Guidance and Recreational Institute, this new enterprise met with the immediate cooperation of all the agencies in the nation which were devoting their time to child problems and their solution.

Carney had been broadcasting on WOR and the Mutual Network for 18 years now. Many of the former club-members have grown up and have had children of their own listening to Uncle Don's program chit-chat of song and stories, jingles and rhymes, birthdays and club announcements, interviews and jamborees.

The new Child Guidance and Recreational Institute was to develop into his biggest undertaking. The first announcement of it was made to the press and various agencies that dealt with children, in the middle of June, 1945 and programs each week were devoted to the activities and needs of these agencies.

Uncle Don offered his radio program and his personal services free to all these agencies. Besides cooperating with several organizations, the Uncle Don CGRI set up a definite program of instruction and guidance which took the form of outside program material.

During the month of July, Uncle Don clubmembers were encouraged to start hobbies and write to their radio Uncle about their new activities. At the end of the month ten of the most interesting and entertaining hobbies were announced on the air and congratulatory citations were sent to the winning club members.

During another period several announcements were broadcast during his program asking the children to send in books and magazines of all types which could be sent to children's wards and orphanages. Several thousand listeners responded and thousands of books were redistributed.

Once a week Uncle Don invited interesting guests to tell the club members about the existing activities in playgrounds, boys' clubs, camps and girls' clubs. Some of the guests included: Peter Capra, Executive Director of the Boys' Club of New York; Mrs. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Director of the Forest Neighborhood House in the Bronx; and Mrs. Julia Gitnick, Director of the Junior Auxiliary of the American Woman's Voluntary Services.

It was always Uncle Don's policy to guide children by reasoning with them and talking to them in an adult fashion and the CGRI plan followed that same format.

Every need of the agencies responding received aid and a helping hand from the Uncle Don CGRI.

Don was called on by many medical organizations to play a more active part including becoming a member of the board. He never would become too closely associated with any one group. Even Al McCosker couldn't get him to be a member of the board of his pet charity, the McCosker-Hershfield Cardiac Foundation. This he organ-

ized with Harry Hershfield, the famous after dinner speaker, cartoonist and story teller.

These outside organizations would appeal to him this way:

EADIS MILLICENT AID FOR
CARDIAC CHILDREN, INC.

Non-Sectarian

INCORPORATED UNDER THE MEMBERSHIP
CORPORATION LAWS OF THE
State of New York
1860 Broadway
New York, N. Y.

Telephone: Circle 6-9158

August 13, 1942

"Mr. Don Carney
c/o Station WOR
1440 Broadway
New York, N. Y.
Dear Mr. Carney:

Knowing of your keen and sincere interest in helping the underprivileged and unfortunates I am taking the liberty of inviting you to become a Director of the above institution of which I am very proud to be the Chairman of the Board.

The Eadis Millicent Aid for Cardiac Children, Inc., was organized for the sole purpose of maintaining a home in Florida for the underprivileged children suffering from rheumatic fever. These children will be given proper medical attention as well as a regular education. In the summer when the children are brought back to their homes our doctors will give the mothers instructions from time to time as to their care.

There are many more prominent members on our Board

whose names do not appear upon this letterhead, but the prestige of your name on our literature will help us to accomplish the purpose for which our institution stands, and that is to SAVE THE LIVES of poor youngsters suffering with rheumatic hearts.

I am looking forward to your kind acceptance. With kind personal regards, I am

Very sincerely yours,

Samuel R. Zack

P.S. We would like an early reply before we go to press with our new stationery."

The money Don gave to charity never came out of his own pockets. Each year we would put on an Uncle Don Charity Show. Kids would sing, dance, act in skits and play musical instruments. Don would call in his professional pals from Broadway and Hollywood and at fifty cents a ticket it was easy each year to pack the Astor Roof with Uncle Don listeners. It was easy to raise two or three thousand dollars a year. This money was used for various charities around the New York metropolitan area.

Don would do a lot where it did him the most good. One group that received an allotment each year was Governor A. Harry Moore's School for Crippled Children in Jersey City, New Jersey. Don carried a personal letter from the Governor addressed to all police officers stating that Don was to be given every courtesy on the roads of New Jersey and if he were stopped for any violation, the Governor was to be informed immediately if a charge was to be pressed. This was a strong letter to be signed by a Governor but he, too, believed in Don and this was

his way of showing appreciation for the yearly contribution of loot to the Governor's pet charity.

The fund grew and grew each year, as this letter from the Governor points out:

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

Jersey City Office
January 16, 1940

"Mr. William Treadwell
Director of Uncle Don programs
Station WOR
New York, New York
Dear Bill:

Thanks for the check for the A. Harry Moore School for Crippled Children. We are raising quite an endowment for these cripples and the check is gratefully appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

(s) A. Harry Moore
Governor"

Don's name was used many times by telephone solicitors who worked on charity appeals. Almost every week we would receive phone calls from irate listeners who were menaced by these phonies. In fact, one day their sollicitation worked in reverse. A phone ace called the Carney residence and asked for Mr. Carney. Don came to the phone and a voice said, "We're assisting Uncle Don and his Charity Program. If you send us a dollar in the mail today, we will make sure your children or relatives are remembered on Uncle Don's program on their birthdays."

After this pitch was made on the phone to Don, we immediately stopped our activities. Don announced on the air that there would be no more "Uncle Don Charity Shows."

16. *A Sinner and a Saint*

Harold G. Hoffman
State House
Trenton, New Jersey
November 1, 1939

"Bill Treadwell:

Next Tuesday noon—Nov. 8—you are to be my guest when we go to work upon your best known account.

Cocktails in my suite at the Astor at 12—luncheon at 12:30. Colonel Margerum will have your ticket.

If you have any suggestions for the luncheon, please shoot 'em to me.

Harold G. Hoffman
President
Circus Saints and Sinners Assn."

One of the leading fun clubs for men in New York and other cities, "The Circus Saints and Sinners" was founded in 1929 by F. Darious Benham in memory of the late Dexter Fellows, champion publicity and advance

man for the greatest show on earth, Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus.

The club meets every month and stages a big luncheon. The profits of the organization go to a home for sick circus people in Sarasota, Florida. The club also has a hospitilization plan. If a performer is injured in any part of the country, the club will aid him financially when he cannot afford the proper care.

At each luncheon one fall guy is chosen and the entire entertainment takes place around this guest. The fall guy, after he receives his hazing, is given a life membership in the club. Over the years the club has been headed by former Governor Harold G. Hoffman, ex-mayor James J. Walker, and Harry Hershfield. Luncheons have been so big that the club had to move out of the Hotel Astor to the main ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria.

Above the hotel dining room is spread a big red and white tent top. All kinds of rigging hang down from it such as trapezes, nets, polls, wires, tapes and small platforms. In the reception room, which is right outside the main ballroom, you will find a typical set-up of a side show with its caliope, pink lemonade stand, barkers, clowns animals in cages and a congress of freaks lining the side of the room on platforms about four feet high. The freaks are stuffed dummies, but the banners above them are authentic, some come from the original collection of Barnum.

Concession men stand around yelling at the top of their lungs. They're selling programs on the show in the main tent. Clowns are running around, most of them are the new members being taken into the club. These men wear

clown suits and their names are attached to the front of the suit in large letters.

A full ritual is read at the beginning of the luncheon to initiate the new members pledging their loyalty to the old circus performer who has given so much fun and enjoyment to both young and old during his many years of traveling with the circus. An old circus clown poses with the spotlight on him while the ritual is read.

After the ritual, the hell-raising begins. The Circus Saints and Sinners have had many interesting fall guys, among them Gene Tunney, Leo "Lippy" Durocher, Uncle Don, Lee Shubert and Dr. Allen Roy Dafoe, who was crowned "Doctor of Litters," for which the committee was almost crowned, legally that is, by Poppa Dionne.

The fall guy is introduced by a very destructive introduction and he appears most of the time clothed in an outlandish costume. There is the main stage where he appears first and then he is taken to the speaker's platform where is is served luncheon. When Uncle Don was a fall guy, he was fed his sponsor's cereal "Maltex" from a garbage can.

All parts of the big show are represented at the Circus, Saints and Sinners luncheon. Every month this group brings back to all the businessmen attending, the thoughts and desires of their early childhood. Most luncheons last from eleven-thirty, when the tired businessmen start arriving, till about two-thirty in the afternoon.

The Uncle Don initiation was in the fall of 1939. That year the funmakers lauded Col. John R. Kilpatrick, Dr. Wm. Lyon Phelps, Glenn Cunningham, Doctor Allan Roy

Dafoe, Father E. J. Flanagan, George Jessel, Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson, Larry McPhail and Fred Waring.

After the soup and nuts have been served, the president of the club announces that the chairman of the "Who's Hooey" committee, "after a complete research of the past and a half-astrological projection in the future of the Fall Guy," was prepared to make his report. Up to this time the President has ignored the undignified foot stomping and the chorused cries of "Give us O'Rourke."

At this moment Tex O'Rourke is presented to the assembled hell raisers. A smiling Texan, six-feet-two in his stocking feet, and weighing almost two hundred pounds without his spurs, steps to the microphone, exhibits his empty pockets and rolls up his sleeves to show that he has no concealed weapons or notes upon his cuffs. With the meager preparation afforded by the pursuit of every kown occupation in every corner of the globe, with information gleaned from delving into newspaper files and musty libraries, as well as from home town postmasters, former sweethearts, and by the surreptitious steaming of the flaps of envelopes marked, "personal and confidential" the interclocutor and executioner of the Dexter Fellows Tent is ready to perform an oratorical operation upon the smiling and unsuspecting Fall Guy.

A guy must have guts to get up on the Platform of the Circus Saints and Sinners, before hundreds of his friends and have Tex recount the trials and tribulations, the love and sex affairs and the ins and outs of the show business that Don encounted over the past fifty years.

Tex outdid himself with the run down on Don's past and present life. Tex has a ready charm and a smooth

flow of words. He starts off in a this-hurts-me-more-than-it-does-you manner that completely anesthetizes his victim. Then he starts locking syllables together like a train of cars—but he doesn't use a caboose, because a caboose goes on the end and Tex is not yet in sight of the end. He has a fondness for long and rolling words that take a noticeable time to pass a given point.

Almost every incident in Don's life was given the tongue-in-cheek treatment. Don was proud of the bastardly events in his life which were brought to the fore on that day.

Don knew he had a good thing going and guarded his nightly program with an eagle eye accordingly. This was the first time that events in his personal life were brought out in the open.

Bob Emery was another children's entertainer on WOR. He was on every Sunday morning for many years but was never sponsored. He left WOR after the war and went up to his native Boston and now runs one of the leading children's TV shows in the East. He's on WBZ-TV.

Bob, too, has been in the game for years. He operated out of a Boston station with the "Iodent Club of the Air" for children. Later they moved it to NBC in New York. He had a little band playing for his songs. The band was made up of Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey, and several other well-known band leaders. Imagine all that talent on a kiddies' show!

The Emery show on WOR was kept non-commercial because of the Uncle Don program. While both men appeared to be friendly on the surface, there was bitter rivalry underneath it all. Emery staged a very interesting

and appealing show with talented boys and girls performing. Don admired this aspect of the show. However, any time that Emery got interested in outside projects or contests, Don would run to the Sales Department and make sure they were stopped.

Don resented all the kid shows. Nick Kenny, radio-TV editor of the Daily Mirror was doing a kid show. Don resented the fact that he referred to himself as "Uncle Nick" and his brother as "Uncle Charlie." Nick mentioned birthdays and had kids singing and dancing on his show.

One of Uncle Don's fiercest rivalries came near the end of his WOR career. Don had made an institution out of reading the Sunday comics to the kiddies. He started the fad in 1931, three years after his regular show went on. The comics became a great hit—at one time Don was reading them from 8:00 to 8:30 on Sunday morning and later from noon to 12:30 to accommodate all the kids who had to go to Mass or Sunday school. This went on well into the '40's, until his rival showed up. In the spring of 1945 there was a newspaper deliverers' strike in New York. The kids weren't getting their comic strips and things looked bleak, when City Hall stepped in. Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia was a very publicity minded mayor and he decided to read the kids' funnies right from his City Hall office over the city owned station, WNYC. In a great blast of publicity His Honor started in. He promised the kids they'd have their comics come rain, shine or deliverers' strike—he was going to read them himself. Uncle Don could do a lot of things well, but he couldn't fight City Hall. So the uneven duel continued with Uncle Don and "Uncle Fiorello" locked in combat for a few weeks.

His Honor finally suspended operations after a couple of readings. Don's jealousy cooled off as "Uncle Fiorello" went back to kissing babies and left the Sunday comics to their rightful owner.

Don had the same resentful feeling for Ralph Edwards when he was the announcer and master of ceremonies of the Horn and Hardart children's program. He would sit in his car listening to this show and would discuss it with me on the following Monday. Seldom did any of these talented children appear on Don's show.

Don hated to give up any time on his show to guests, especially if they were interesting and had appeal to the children. He didn't mind interviewing a bore. Each year we would do a big Christmas show from London Terrace, the site where Clark Clement Moore wrote "Twas the Night Before Christmas." I would get leading celebrities in the theater to read this poem. Don wanted to do it himself, but WOR said what made the show great from London Terrace was the added FREE guests. We used Victor Moore, Howard Lindsay, Edmund O'Brien and many others. After three years of these special broadcasts, when Don couldn't get his own way, he cancelled the show.

At Christmas time Barney Pressman of the famous New York Men's Store, of "Calling All men to Barney's" fame, would give Don several hundred coats for needy children. Don always was personally given several business suits and overcoats for himself from Barney.

Don's wife Betty thought she should get in on the free loot, and when Don couldn't promote ladies suits in ex-

change for this tie-up with Barney, he pulled out of this yearly Christmas project.

There were a number of food shows playing around the Metropolitan area. These were set up to introduce new products and remind the public how good the old products tasted. Don was used to put on shows at a number of these exhibitions. He would attract the kids. The kids came with their parents and the food shows were packing them in, not because of the food products represented but because of Don.

Don's sponsors were grossly upset about this operation. Here he was lending his name to a number of food shows and helping all products and his regular sponsors, many of them not even invited to advertise and display at the Food shows, were paying thousands of dollars to sponsor him personally on radio.

After this practice was stopped, Don resented food sponsors and took on Pepsi Cola and Charcoal Gum just to show those food packers he could sell anything.

With the advent of the comic books in the late Thirties, young America no longer wanted songs and fables. They wanted blood and thunder, guns and horses, Cowboys and Indians, romance and women. The Lone Ranger came to the fore out of a Detroit radio station. Fred Harman, cowboy artist, came through with his famous "Red Ryder" that was also made into a radio show, besides appearing in syndicated newspapers and comic magazines.

"Superman" starring Bud Collyer was another adventure series the kids were attracted to.

Don resented the fact that WOR permitted these two new shows, Lone Ranger and Superman to be sponsored.

But the biggest thorn that hit the Uncle Don nightly camp was the Brooklyn Dodgers baseball broadcasts over WOR and the Mutual Network.

When Don signed his contract in 1939 there was a rider which stated that he would get paid for his seven daily shows but WOR could keep him off the air if the Dodger baseball game ran over into his broadcast time, or if they had a special event to broadcast. This was written into the sponsors contracts, too.

During the baseball season Don was off the air almost every other night. The Dodgers were playing a lot of extra inning baseball. This was one sure way to lose an audience fast. After this period he never really regained the full two million listeners that rating bureaus had credited to him.

17. *The Broadway Beat*

DON AND HIS PAL Roy Smeck made the rounds of night clubs like Broadway columnists. In fact many times they would follow columnists Louis Sobol, Walter Winchell and Hy Gardner from spot to spot.

One popular spot for laughs was the famous Nut Club where comedian Jerry Bergen, a real funny guy, was getting his start. This joint featured as many comedians as most clip joints feature strippers. Lou Dolgoff was another funny man in the lineup. The club also headlined Jackie Osterman from time to time.

The Hollywood and Paradise Restaurants on Broadway were other stopping off points with Mario's Mirador in the Fifties, Sherman Billingsley's Stork Club, John Perona's El Morocco and Nick and Arnolds Versailles—all must stops on Uncle's nightly escapades.

If he had had a snoot-full early in the evening, he

would stop off at Janet of France's restaurant for a bowl of onion soup.

After a round of the mid-town spots, Roy and Don would drift to the uptown Cotton Club around 125th Street, Gladys Bentley's in Harlem and to real off-beat spots along Seventh Avenue. He would even drop in at the old Savoy Ballroom for "kicks."

The Harlem clubs were open all night and after late shows, Don would talk and breakfast with Cab Calloway, Ethel Waters and any other Negro stars who were appearing in these spots.

At 4:30 a.m. coming out of the Mirador he was spotted by the parents of a young fan. As the mother passed Don on the street she said to Don "I saw you come out of the Mirador at 4:30 a.m." Don looked her straight in the eye and said, "Well, I had to come out sometime, didn't I?" "Don't you think when a person has enough to drink they should ask for sarsaparilla?" "Yes, lady," said Don, "but how many people can pronounce it at this hour."

Dorothy Kilgallen wrote in her Voice of Broadway column on Wednesday, December 3, 1941, the following blind paragraph:

"Once upon a time there was a restaurant operator with two thriving places on Broadway. He had a big house, a lovely wife, and a music-minded daughter whom he adored. He spent a small fortune in voice, piano and elocution lessons for his little girl, because he dreamed that someday she might sing at the Metropolitan. But along came painful confirmation of the old theory that there's many a slip twixt cup and lip.

"In 1932, the receivers snatched up what was left of his dwindling business. With no income, he spent most of his savings on his daughter's music. Then came the second K.O. punch. Her teacher regretfully informed him that the girl might be good, but never great—never a standout.

"Today he's a waiter in Lindy's—a restaurant only slightly more popular than his used to be. His wife works in a beauty salon. And his daughter is the librarian for a swing band."

The restaurateur was Hyman Heller. The daughter was Harriet who won the first Uncle Don Hollywood Talent contest.

Don met Hy around 1932 when he came in as managing director of the St. Regis Restaurant near the WOR studios on Broadway. Harriet was attending the Professional Children's School in New York and spending afternoons and evenings studying her dramatics and music. The St. Regis became a hangout for the WOR performers and executives and even the embryonic actors and actresses because talent managers were frequenting the place, too.

After one of Don's nightly shows, he stopped by for his usual shots of Four Roses with Nat Abramson, the WOR Artist Bureau Chief.

"Have you ever met Hy's daughter, Don?"

"Don't believe I have. Is she the kid on Bob Emery's Rainbow House Program?"

"Yes she is. She's been on the program for about a year now. Has lots of talent. Why don't you spot her on your I.V.C. Talent Show?" Don thought a moment and was

quick to reply, "Have her come up tomorrow. Artie Sorenson will play for her and she can audition for the show."

Nat called Heller over to the bar and Don told him that he would like to have Harriet audition for the I.V.C. program.

She was there the next day—a half hour early, waiting for her audition.

The following Thursday, Harriet made her debut on the Uncle Don stanza and when she went off the air, the switchboard was jammed with calls congratulating her. This was a little confusing to Don and the girls on the switchboard. Never had this happened for a kid singer before and what's more, even if it was done by relatives, this kid must have had them in droves.

Don was a regular, night after night and most times before the show at the St. Regis. He knew all the bookies who hung out there. He knew the unmarried girls and the waitresses who'd go out for a good time. He used the place as his private club.

For those who were near him at the bar, Don afforded a certain amount of free entertainment. He would always tell a new dialect story or a funny happening to him or one of his club members.

Heller often wondered where Don picked up his unlimited amount of jokes and funny stories—most of them off color.

"He was never offensive, even if he told a Jewish joke," Heller would volunteer.

Heller was the only one who could explain why Don drank Four Roses. "There weren't many brands in the

Thirties and Don took a liking to the taste of this whiskey," and stayed with it through the years.

Harriet was a sweet girl. You didn't find many sweet ones seeking show business careers. As we said earlier, Harriet went on to win the biggest kiddie talent contest of them all. Her charm and talents carried her further than this—but not far enough. When she was sixteen she started singing in New York and New Jersey night clubs. In the Village, in Westchester, on Long Island—in fact, all around town. The nights were long—sometimes four shows a night. Friends would come in to see her and she would have to sit with them by the hour and listen to their meaningless chatter. She did this for a few years—five in all. And then came the war. And then came love. And in 1942, Harriet fell in love with a soldier named Leroy Millard. They married one year later and in '44 along came a new interest—a baby girl.

She's now the mother of three children, two girls and a boy and the Millards live in Oceanside, L. I.

Leroy is in the insurance business and what probably makes them so happy is that from the day Harriet met Leroy, she divorced her mind from show business and stressed her home business.

She stayed as sweet as she was the day she auditioned in the WOR studio to appear on the Uncle Don program. And besides being the first girl to be chosen the most talented, she also had another first to her name. She was the first person to perform on the Queen Mary via a coast to coast show, when it docked in New York on its maiden voyage. She was just another talented kid on the Big Brother program but was selected to deliver a welcoming

dissertation. Her dramatic coach polished up the original manuscript and when she finally delivered it, it really made the welcome ring.

Don wasn't the only personality to hang out in the St. Regis. Enrico Caruso, the Metropolitan tenor, could be seen there, eating dill pickles. Howard Lindsey of "Life with Father" fame would eat a bowl of Kellogg's corn flakes before going to the Empire Theater down the block for his nightly appearances. Gabriel Heatter was in there most nights with his brother Max. All the Broadway crowd, Milton Berle, Hy Gardner, Louis Sobol, Earl Wilson, Rags Ragland, Phil Silvers, Eddie Davis, Jack White and hundreds of others could be seen there anytime of day or night.

Heller and his wife went through all the emotions of a performer during the years when Harriet was in show business. In fact, he would have butterflies in his stomach and even resorted to sea sick pills to quiet his nerves. Mrs. H. broke out in a rash thinking about her daughter's trip to California. It was the kid's first airplane flight and my first coast to coast trip. Mrs. H. had sort of a premonition that we wouldn't make it and we didn't. We were grounded in the United Airlines Mainliner plane at Salt Lake City where we had to stay for the night. There I was with two children, Tommy Hamilton and Harriet, and no luggage and I had to check in at the local hotel. We took a cab to the Hotel Utah and there I checked us into two double connecting rooms. I had to do a little talking to get us in, but after the desk clerk and a local police chief checked the airport, they knew my story was correct.

We made it on to Los Angeles early the next day.

Heller gives a most logical reason for taking the waiter's job at Lindy's after being a manager and owner of other restaurants. "Besides being hungry and financially busted," he will tell you, "I found that the restaurant industry was moving at such a fast pace I had to learn the tricks all over again." It didn't take Leo Lindy, the head man, long to find he had a real gem on his staff. And P.S.—he got the manager's job.

18. *No Wind for the Sails*

On January 15th, 1942 the Office of the Director of Censorship in Washington D.C. issued an order that dealt Don the most serious blow of his career. It was a wartime code of practices for radio broadcasters. The code was drafted by Director Byron Price and Assistant Director J. H. Ryan after conferences with the radio industry. It asked that some classes of information, which might aid the enemy be withheld. The government further requested that broadcasters exercise careful control over certain types of programs which were potential espionage tools for the enemy.

The Uncle Don program because of its freedom of announcement, was considered a program that could be used as just such a tool. In fact we had heard from various executives around WOR that the enemy listed Don's program as one of the top ten for assistance. The German

Library of Information had called Uncle Don many times and had sent him all kinds of literature.

There were three types of program which were their targets. These were news programs, ad-lib programs and foreign language programs.

In setting up the form of censorship for the Uncle Don type, commonly called the ad-lib show, the Office of Censorship stated:

"Certain program structures do not permit the exercise of complete discretion in pre-determining the form they will take on the air. These are the ad-lib or informal types of programs. Generally they fall into four classifications. a) Request programs b) Quiz Programs c) Forums or Interviews d) Commentaries and Descriptions.

"As experience dictates the need of changes, they will be made and all stations notified. Stations should make certain that their program departments are fully acquainted with these provisions.

"A. Request programs. Certain safeguards should be adopted by the broadcaster in planning request programs. It is requested that no telephone or telegraph requests for musical selections be accepted for the duration of the emergency. It is also requested that all mail bearing requests be held for an unspecified length of time before it is honored on the air. It is suggested that the broadcaster stagger replies to requests. Care should be exercised in guarding against honoring a given request at a specified time.

"Special note is made here of "Lost and Found" announcements and broadcast material of a similar nature. Broadcasters are asked to refuse acceptance of such ma-

terial when it is submitted via telephone or telegraph by a private individual. If the case involves a lost person, lost dog, lost property or similar matter, the broadcaster is advised to demand written notice. It is suggested that care be used by station continuity departments re-writing all such personal advertising. On the other hand, emergency announcements asked by police or other authorized sources may be accepted. Announcements bearing official authorization seeking blood donors, lost persons, stolen cars and similar material may be accepted by telephone, but confirmation of the source is suggested.

"It is requested that announcements of mass meetings not be honored unless they come from an authorized representative of an accredited governmental or civilian agency. Such requests should be accepted only when submitted in writing."

The censorship bulletin was issued by Dave Driscoll who was Director of Special Features and News. Dave called a meeting of WOR's top brass including President A. J. McCosker, Vice President Ted Streibert, Station Sales Representatives Fred Weber and Gene Thomas, Program Director Jules Seebach, Vice President in charge of Engineers, Jack Poppele and several others.

While this bulletin meant all programs, the staff knew that the Uncle Don program would be the hardest to censor. Don had to mention birthdays or there wouldn't be any program. Don had to mention kids who had started a new savings account at the Greenwich Savings Bank or there wouldn't be any sponsor.

WOR didn't care much about the program at this point. They wanted to cooperate with the Government so that

there wouldn't be any further censorship of private enterprise. WOR, after reading the Washington release, knew they could live with this type of censorship very easily.

All WOR programs were represented at this meeting. Further rules and regulations were read. Don did a lot of questioning. But no one would take the responsibility of answering him.

Driscoll concluded the meeting with a final bulletin sent by Director Price.

"From time to time, the Office of Censorship may find it necessary to issue further communications, which will either interpret certain existing requests, amend or delete them, establish new ones or cover special emergency conditions.

"These communications will be addressed to managers of radio stations and networks. They should have preferential handling and it is therefore advisable that certain alternate executives be appointed to execute them in the absence of the regularly constituted authority. All such communications will be coded in numerial order, i.e.: R-1; R-2; R-3; etc. Stations are advised to keep them in careful filing order.

"The American broadcasting industry's greatest contribution to victory will be the use of good common sense. Too frequently radio in general instead of the individual offender is blamed for even the most minor dereliction. If material is doubtful, it should not be used; submit it to the Office of Censorship for review. Free speech will not suffer during this emergency period beyond the absolute precautions which are necessary to the protection of a culture which makes our radio the freest in the world.

"Broadcasters are asked merely to exercise restraint in the handling of news that might be damaging, for the Army behind the Army represents a great force in the war effort. Radio is advised to steer clear of dramatic programs which attempt to portray the horrors of combat; to avoid sound effects which might be mistaken for air raid alarms. Radio is one of the greatest liaison officers between the fighting front and the people. Its voice will speak the news first. It should speak wisely and calmly. In short, radio is endowed with a rich opportunity to keep America entertained and interested, and that opportunity should be pursued with vigor."

THE OFFICE OF CENSORSHIP,
BYRON PRICE, DIRECTOR

When Don and I left the meeting, he said: "Well, Bill, it looks like curtains for us."

"I can't see it that way, Don. This censorship will only be temporary," was my reply.

"I guess you better tell the sponsors tomorrow."

This I did but from that point on Don was resentful of the fact that by order he was not free to ad-lib in his usual way. WOR started to make several recordings of his various programs for file purposes.

Don did not obey the censorship. If he had the name and comments of a club member given to him by a friend or someone he would run into at a saloon or night club, he would continue to put their name on and talk to them directly during the program. This was just what the Government didn't want him to do.

This went on for a few weeks and finally Dave Driscoll sent the following memo.

2/4/42
Dave Driscoll

"Uncle Don
cc: Bill Treadwell

It has been my understanding that we agreed to discontinue the mention of where birthday gifts were hidden, messages of what to eat, etc., on your program. However, I understand that we have been continuing the practice. It is requested that, from this date on, you merely announce birthdays and the names of the children, discontinuing the above practice. It is assumed, of course, that you will continue to hold the letters requesting these announcements for five days before using them on the air."

When Don came to the office the evening this memo came in, he was getting ready to sign another record contract. But in the contract there was a stipulation that he must mention the album on his nightly program. This was included because since he made cash deals, the record company wanted to make sure that Don would do everything possible to boost sales for them.

The Greenwich Savings Bank was concerned about the censorship and because they were starting to lose help to defense plants, had discussed ending their contract with Uncle Don.

"You had better send a copy of this memo to Turner."

Charles Turner was the advertising manager of the Greenwich Savings Bank.

This was done and when Turner received the notice he

called me to report that the bank was pulling out and that we could expect a cancellation momentarily.

The censorship was one obstacle that Don couldn't fight with women or liquor.

He just had to learn to take it and obey it. Eventually, he became one of the leading broadcasters supporting the defense and later the war effort. Don put on every possible type of message including special tie-ups with Government agencies. The Army, Navy and Coast Guard even used his juvenile program for recruitment. The F.B.I. checked information on radio people with him. Don served his government well during the war years and kept plenty of sponsors too. It wasn't as bad as he thought it would be. Nothing in life really is.

19. *A Touch of the Dramatic*

THERE WAS ONE EPISODE in Uncle Don's broadcasts that probably will be recorded in the growing collection of material which goes to make up Rooseveltiana.

As soon as F.D.R. died in 1945 all the radio stations throughout the United States went into deep mourning for three full days. Every program repeated tributes to the President and even the disc jockeys were solemn broadcasters for this period.

The WOR Program Director called Don into his office and told him that they had decided to keep his program off the air during this memorial.

"But Mitch," said Don shaking, "I'll get Bill to write some material on Roosevelt's boyhood and I promise it will be the best memorial program on the air. The kids know how I admired the President. This is one show I want to do. You can take me off for baseball and other

special events, but let me do this show." Don again made the sale.

It was now eleven o'clock in the morning. Don had come to the studio early that day to record the Sunday comics as he planned to spend the week-end in Scalp Level.

Don reached me by 11:30 A.M. and I was off to the New York Public Library to quickly research the boyhood of the late President.

That night Herman Berger, the WOR engineer who was assigned to the show most nights, and I sat in the control room. Don had only two pages of notes and with this brief and scanty outline of the boyhood of F.D.R., he ad-libbed for a full thirty minutes. Berger and I didn't talk, but wept constantly. Don held up through it all until the end of the program. When he received the signal that he was off the air, he sat still for several minutes—this dramatic broadcast was so much for him, that he felt as though he'd had a heart attack.

He had put his best dramatics behind the ad-libbed lines. He spoke with sincerity, with believability. He spoke not only of the spiritual and political giant F.D.R. but also of the every-day activities in his boyhood and early manhood at his beloved home at Hyde Park. This phase was missed by other commentators. Uncle Don received over five thousand requests for a copy of these rough notes which he ad-libbed. The WOR switchboard was jammed for seven hours after the broadcast. The Western Union office in the building stayed open all night to handle the wires he received complimenting him on this broadcast and asking for a copy of the script.

When you scan the following notes, you will agree that by this time in his career, Don was now the master of ad-lib.

SCRIPT MATERIAL ON FRANKLIN R. ROOSEVELT PREPARED BY BILL TREADWELL FOR "UNCLE DON" BROADCAST April the 13th

"Franklin Delano Roosevelt was born at Hyde Park, which overlooks the Hudson River in upstate New York. The Roosevelt family had lived at Hyde Park for over one hundred years and when Franklin was born on January 30th, 1882, he became the only child of James and Sara Delano Roosevelt.

"His father's family was of Dutch descent and made its first appearance in America in 1654. The Delano's, from whom his mother sprung, were of Flemish origin and had followed a migratory group into Massachusetts even earlier that the Roosevelts came to New York.

"Mr. Roosevelt was christened in the St. James Episcopal Church at Hyde Park. During his early schooling he mastered the French, German and Spanish languages. This was all accomplished before he entered high school. At fourteen he entered Groton Preparatory School where he prepared for Harvard School.

"He was like all American boys and enjoyed fishing off the banks of his father's property which adjoined the Hudson River. In his early childhood he enjoyed reading the history of the United States. When he was but three years old he made his first trip to Europe and from his 7th year to his 15th year he crossed the Atlantic every year, most of the time with his parents.

"He always liked to swim, but his Shetland pony was his greatest joy when he was young. At 14 he cruised the Bay of Fundy and the Maine coast in a 21 foot knockabout boat and

a year or two later took a 40 foot sailing boat from New York harbor to Halifax and back.

"Mr. Roosevelt distinguished himself as a football player while he was at Groton school and later when he attended Harvard University he excelled in his studies and won entrance into the honor fraternity, Phi Beta Kappa. In his senior year he was president and editor of the Harvard Crimosn and showed for the first time his interest in politics.

"The President always liked to play on the lawn of the White House with his grandchildren. The Easter Egg Rolling Contest brought him delight each year.

"On every possible occasion the President liked to rest and relax at his big home in Hyde Park. There he entertained King George VI and Queen Elizabeth of England at a celebrated HOT DOG party. He was host to other Royalty there too. Even after the war put an end to formal entertaining, it was there he went for secret conferences with such statesmen as Winston Churchill and Prime Minister Mackenzie of Canada.

"What boyhood memories must of been connected with Hyde Park. Memories of climbing trees, of playing games and of playing tag with a little girl who later became his wife, Anna Eleanor.

"He took full charge of his pony which was a gift from his parents. His love for horses and other animals was well known. His dog Falla traveled with him all over the country. It traveled out to sea when the President met Mr. Churchill. The President had various farm animals when he was a boy and showed them at the Dutchess County Fair like our present day boys and girls exhibit their stock at the 4-H Club shows. One of his biggest collections was of birds. He always liked naval subjects and wanted to attend the Naval Academy after

graduating from Harvard. However, he continued at Harvard to study law."

Roy Smeck met Don at the studio after the broadcast and they were off to Dunhall's Restaurant to mourn the death of Franklin.

Several hours later, when the telephone operators were changing shifts, one stopped by the restaurant with her boy friend and told Don about the requests they had received for his script. Don's reaction was not as serious as his plea in the program office.

"Those buggars will ask for anything. If I offered to give Roy Smeck's guitar away, I'd have a million requests for it."

She left the bar let down. She had been proud to announce the good news to Don but when he had half-a-bottle of Four Roses in him he was another man.

At nine the next morning Mitch was on the phone again and Don was asked to devote the Saturday program, which usually was News Nite, to another memorial broadcast on F.D.R.

By now the newspapers were full of Presidential obituaries and I was able to cull the next set of notes for Don's ad-lib chat from the New York Times and the World-Telegram.

The broadcast was less dramatic. Don was nursing one of his usual hangovers and besides this, he was in the doghouse with Betty.

He and Roy had stayed out all night and rolled in about seven A.M.

The requests came in for both scripts. The second was

a little longer than the first. Don also ad-libbed about the President's grand children, Buzzie and Sistie Dahl who were club members in all the Uncle Don clubs.

As you can see from these notes, the material was a little difficult for young kids to understand but I always believed these two programs had the largest audience of adults that ever listened to Don. Unfortunately, we didn't receive ratings for these nights as even the rating bureaus were in mourning for F.D.R. and consequently, were not pestering listeners about the shows they were tuned to.

"SCRIPT MATERIAL ON FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT FOR UNCLE DON PREPARED BY BILL TREADWELL.

Sat., April 14th

"Well boys and girls, our great nation and all the Allied Nations of the World are still mourning the death of our great President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Last night during our club meeting I was able to tell you a few interesting events in the active life of our late President when he was a boy at Hyde Park, N. Y. where he was born. I told you how he studied hard and entered Harvard University and later studied law.

"His life was always very active. Most historians say the time he was stricken with the tragic illness of infantile paralysis was the turning point in his career. This happened in August, 1921. He was swimming with members of his family at his summer home. The next day he felt a stiffness as if a cold were coming on. On the second morning he could not get out of bed. His leg muscles were paralyzed.

"This attack was very serious. It was with extreme difficulty that he was brought back to New York where he could receive the most skillful medical treatment obtainable. For months he was bed-ridden. All during this time, he was fighting and

praying and finally he began to recover. His patience and courage, doctors said, were powerful allies in the battle to recovery. You see boys and girls, our late President was paralyzed from the waist down. It was almost a year before he could move about at all with the aid of crutches. But he never gave in. To a man in love with outdoor life, swimming, sailing, tennis and horseback riding, the ordeal was doubly trying.

"It was at this time that Mr. Roosevelt discovered Warm Springs in the state of Georgia. The waters down there have extremely health giving qualities for the type of ailment the President had. He went to Warm Springs and spent much time swimming in the pool. Gradually he regained in part the use of his legs. He was able to discard his crutches and move about with the aid of canes and steel braces which had been fitted to his lower limbs. This small recovery process took many years. The weight of the steel on his legs was almost ten pounds.

"Franklin Delano Roosevelt took a very active part in the Boy Scouts. He made nine personal broadcasts to the Boy Scouts during his Presidency and they were all messages that inspired all of the 2,000,000 Boy Scouts that are members in good standing in all parts of the United States. His last broadcast to them was in February 1941, but even after the war had curtailed such broadcasts President Roosevelt called on the Scouts for war services from the sale of Bonds to the salvage of aluminum. His helpful and sympathetic understanding of the needs and problems of youth has always been a source of inspiration to the leaders and teachers of children all over the world. At Mr. Roosevelt's request Boy Scouts played an intimate part in the ceremony of his first two inaugurals. The Eagle Scouts provided an Honor Guard and filled the Court of Honor as he reviewed the parade.

"It was in 1922 that our late President helped organize the Boy Scout Foundation of Greater New York and he was Presi-

dent of this movement until 1933. He always said that he took a leaf out of the notebook of scouting when he established the Civilian Conservation Corps.

"In 1930 the Boy Scouts of America presented Mr. Roosevelt with the Silver Buffalo award for distinguished service to scouting.

"The President enjoyed collecting all kinds of gadgets and the top of his desk in the White House held many famous knickknacks. There were about a dozen donkeys made out of wood, clay and metals. There were elephants, pigs, dogs, bears, rabbits and a little Chinese character. The President's desk also held a thermometer and a barometer. On one side of his desk was a frame containing the pictures of his four sons.

"Yes, boys and girls, the President is mourned all over the world by all nations, races, colors and creeds. He carried a burden of responsibility almost too great for any man to bear. He had his job and did it up to the last flicker of his strength. He has stamped an impression upon American life, American thought and American manners that can never fade.

"Men mourned Abraham Lincoln because they felt that his guiding hand was needed to bind up the nation's wounds. Men are mourning Franklin Delano Roosevelt because his hand was already set to the task of binding up the wounds of all civilization.

"The president recently said, 'Many months of earnest work are ahead of us all and I should like to feel that when the last stone is laid on the structure of international peace, it will be an achievement toward which all of us in America have worked tirelessly and unselfishly.

'This year of 1945 can be the greatest year of achievement in human history.'

"Our late President had many great accomplishments to his

credit. He was elected to the New York State Senate. He was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Navy in President Wilson's administration. Was twice elected Governor of New York State and four times elected President of the United States."

Roosevelt, like Uncle Don, never "talked down" to people. Roosevelt's Fireside Chats made you feel that he was talking to you individually. The kids had this same feeling when listening to Don. Only one who had known Don intimately would dare to make this simple comparison.

20. *After the War*

Uncle Don, like every other American, looked to prosperity after World War II. Shortly after V-J Day, Don was back doing the kind of show that the pre-war kids went for. Only now he would give them more songs, more stories and would many times read a full story from Funny Animals, the Fawcett Publications comic book that carried an Uncle Don feature each month.

Each one of these stories had a moral. There was the one about folks that talk too much about others. This he summed up with a song ditty titled "Talkabouts."

TALKABOUTS

"When people speak unkindly of their neighbors
It's silly to repeat the words they say,
Talk makes a lot of trouble, so we'd better hold our tongues,
For we can lose our dearest friends that way
If we can't say nice things, we'd best say nothing,

And here's a little pointer that I'll mention—
It's not hard to criticize
But it's neither kind, nor wise—
So this I hope you'll give your full attention."

As the post-war months went by, Don started to run dry of ideas. There were only a limited number of children's subjects he could write about, and after twenty-odd years there weren't many left. And anyway the kids were pretty damned hep in the Forties.

A subject Don always thought important was pride. He did a long story on "Stuckups," showing the dangers of overindulgence in vanity. He lectured the kiddies "Nobody is very fond of people who think they are a lot better than other people, just because they have prettier clothes, or because they think other people are poorer than they are. Being a STUCKUP is a very silly mistake to make." Per usual, he ended with a typical Carney jingle:

STUCKUPS

"It's stupid to judge people by their clothing,
They really may be very nice inside,
And just because they don't put all they have upon their backs,
It's foolish to look down on them with pride
So don't let's be STUCKUP with any one dears,
Remember this small pointer that I'll mention.
It isn't smart, it isn't fair,
To like folks just for what they wear.
I hope that you will give this your attention."

Don never really ran out of general themes to pitch to the kids. He could repeat the important ones over and over. Here was a favorite musical bit about a perennial problem; crying.

CRYTERIONS

"Now let me tell my nieces
And little nephews too
To cry when you can't have your way
Is not the thing to do.

"Who wants to have Cryterions
Around the house all day
In school or out or anywhere
'Twill never do I say.

"You make your faces streaky
You make your noses red
You pucker up your little lips
And drink the tear you've shed.

"Please do as Mother tells you
Her way is always right
Then all our club cryterions
Will soon be out of sight."

The prosperity Don had hoped for after the war eluded him. The balloon was slowly sinking from the heights it had reached in the Thirties and nobody knew it better than Uncle Don. The causes were an interesting commentary on the changing American scene. All through the war, kids stayed glued to their radios to hear blood and thunder adventure stories, many of them based on the Allied attack on the Axis. After a kid had listened intently to Captain Midnight tracking Ivan Shark to his secret submarine base in the South Pacific no one could blame him for getting restive when Uncle Don's songs and stories

came on. The dial was covered with fifteen-minute serialized adventure yarns every night from 4:30 to 6:00. Don's playful fun finally couldn't compete any more in the huge way it had ten years earlier.

The rise of television began to make encroachments on Don's audience. Every new TV set almost surely weaned another bunch of kids from Don to whatever happened to be on TV during his half-hour. The novelty was too overpowering for any radio show to withstand, as the months went by. The inevitable happened at WOR—Don took a salary cut. This was the logical end of a downward spiral featuring a smaller audience every time a new poll was taken. One by one sponsors began to want "out," because they weren't pulling the response they used to in the "good old days."

And in his personal life Don had been defeated again. His present wife, Betty, was having an affair with an Army captain. In the old days Don would've just kissed her good-bye and got a new girl. But he was getting tired. He really liked Betty, and for the first time he was the "betrayed husband" when it meant something to be betrayed.

The old cronies didn't hang around the studio much any more. The old enthusiasm was gone. Only in the bars did he meet the people he'd known for years. He was quite conscious of his dwindling money when I came to see him from time to time to arrange new contracts. He became a "bottle" problem. There was always a pint hidden in his lower desk drawer these days.

The trouble he was in came over even in his ditties on the air. Especially money. Every time he sang about money

to the kids, even pennies, he choked up. This one about Gabby Scoops and his ten pennies could shake him up when he thought of his lost dollars:

TEN PENNIES AND HOW THEY DISAPPEARED

"TEN happy pennies
Had a jolly time;
Added all together, they
Made a merry DIME.

"TEN jolly pennies
Feeling big and fine
Gabby Scoops took one off;
Then there were NINE.

"NINE little pennies
In a nervous state
For Gabby took another;
Then there were EIGHT

"EIGHT little pennies
Counting odd and even
Careless Gabby wasted one
Then there were SEVEN.

"SEVEN little pennies,
Cross as crooked sticks
Gabby lost a shiny one;
Then there were SIX.

"SIX little pennies
Glad to be alive
Gabby spent another one
Then there were FIVE"

"FIVE little pennies
Feeling sad and sore
Gabby lost a hopeful one
Then there were FOUR

"FOUR little pennies
Crying "Dearies Me"
Gabby Scoops here again,
Now we are THREE.

"THREE little pennies
Feeling very few
Gabby spent another one;
Then there were TWO.

"TWO little pennies
Hoping for some fun
Gabby snatched a half of them
Then there was ONE.

"ONE little penny
Trying hard to run
Gabby caught him right away;
Then there was NONE!

"Oh, those little pennies
Lived and hoped in vain,
Never were a DIME, my Dears,
Never more again."

Don was always invited to press junkets staged by the big movie companies like Warner Bros., 20th Century-Fox, Paramount and MGM. He was also on the press list of all kinds of commercial companies including Eastern Airlines,

United Airlines and Pan American. Don accepted his last free press junket invitation from Capt. Eddie Rickenbacker on September 29th, 1947. Eastern Airlines had decided to put Super Constellations on its New York to Miami run and flew a load of press people out to Hollywood to pick up the first Eastern Connie and fly it back to Miami.

I was staying at the Beverly Hills Hotel on a special project for FAWCETT Publications. Maxwell Hamilton had just been made editor of Motion Picture Magazine and I was setting up a party for 600 celebrities. Yes, there are that many in Hollywood.

When the press junket arrived in Los Angeles, Don called me on the phone and I arranged to meet him for dinner at the Earl Carroll Theater Restaurant on Sunset Boulevard.

Don was not his usual gay self. Most of the press junket members were dining at the restaurant. Arthur Godfrey was along for laughs, too.

"You know, Bill, I'm glad to get away from New York for a few days. I have a problem which I don't know how to solve."

"Why, what is it, Don?"

"Well, Betty has been having an affair with an Army Captain. She said she'd think it over while I am away and let me know if she plans to divorce me."

This was not news to me. Betty and Don had come to our home for dinner several weeks before and she told my wife Dorothy, all about this affair. She had picked him up at a traffic light. Both cars stalled at the same time and they started a conversation over it. Cocktail dates followed

and then weekends in Pennsylvania. She was off with the Captain for a long week when Don was on this press junket. Betty was now giving Don a dose of his own medicine.

In discussing this affair with Dorothy, she remarked how lucky my wife was because she had a young husband.

Betty had everything that most women desire. She was the wife of a celebrity, had her own car, furs, a daughter in a private school, a penthouse, her own bank account, and was sure of ample insurance money if Don died.

Living with Don had been an education for Betty. Even with these luxuries, she wasn't happy. It was the same old story. The physical attraction wasn't there. She wasn't in love with Don, and probably never was.

This affair came upon her at the time when she finally realized the mistake she made being married to an older man.

Many times Betty would flirt when she was in Don's company but this was the first time she went all out and even discussed a divorce. After telling me the story briefly at Carroll's Restaurant, Don tried to forget the whole mess over a bottle of Four Roses. I stayed right with him and drove him back to the hotel. The Junket left the next morning for Miami.

Don called me from the airport before he left.

"Betty called early this morning, Bill. She didn't go away after all. I told her to grab a plane and meet me in Miami. Gee, I love that girl. Someday we'll live in Miami. I know I could make Betty very happy down there."

21. *This Was His Life*

PROBABLY THE SONG most closely associated with Don was "The Green Grass Grew All Around." If gold records were given out for best sellers in the Thirties, Don would have received one for this ditty. It was the song most requested on his radio program and at every personal appearance he made. He sang it in a very fast tempo and built up the ending. The words went like this:

"The Green Grass Grew All Around, All Around, The Green Grass Grew All Around,

There was a tree and it grew in the woods—was the cutest tree you ever did see—

A tree in the woods, the woods in the ground, and the green grass grew all around, all around, and the green grass grew all around.

And on this tree there was a little limb—the cutest limb you ever did see.

A limb on the tree, the tree in the woods, the woods in

the ground and the green grass grew all around, all around, and the green grass grew all around.

And on this limb there was a little twig—the cutest twig you ever did see.

The twig on the limb, the limb on the tree, the tree in the woods, the woods in the ground and the green grass grew all around, all around and the green grass grew all around.

And on this twig, there was a little nest—the cutest nest you ever did see.

A nest on the twig, the twig on the limb, the limb on the tree, the tree in the woods and the green grass grew all around, all around and the green grass grew all around.

And in this nest, there was a little egg—the cutest egg, you ever did see.

An egg in the nest, the nest on the twig, the twig on the limb, the limb on the tree, the tree in the woods, the woods in the ground, and the green grass grew all around, all around, and the green grass grew all around.

And in this egg, there was a little bird—the cutest bird you ever did see.

A bird in the egg, the egg in the nest, the nest on the twig, the twig on the limb, the limb on the tree, the tree in the woods, the woods in the ground and the green grass grew all around, all around, and the green grass grew all around.

And on the bird, there was a little wing—the cutest wing you ever did see.

The wing on the bird, the bird in the egg, the egg in the

nest, the nest on the twig, the twig on the limb, the limb on the tree, the tree in the woods, the woods in the ground and the green grass grew all around, all around, and the green grass grew all around.

And on the wing, there was a feather—the cutest feather you ever did see.

A feather on the wing, the wing on the bird, the bird in the egg, the egg in the nest, the nest on the twig, the twig on the limb, the limb on the tree, the tree in the woods, the woods in the ground and the green grass grew all around, all around, and the green grass grew all around.

And on the feather, there was a little bug—the cutest bug you ever did see.

The bug on the feather, the feather on the wing, the wing on the bird, the bird in the egg, the egg in the nest, and the nest on the twig, the twig on the limb, the limb on the tree, the tree in the woods, the woods in the rgound and the green grass grew all around, all around, and the green grass grew all around.

And on the bug, there was a little eye—the cutest eye you ever did see.

The eye on the bug, the bug on the feather, the feather on the wing, the wing on the bird, the bird in the egg, the egg in the nest, the nest on the twig, the twig on the limb, the limb on the tree, the tree in the woods, the woods in the ground and the green grass grew all around, all around, and the green grass grew all around.

And on the eye, there was a little eye-winker—the cutest eye-winker you ever did see."

"An eye-winker on the eye, the eye on the bug, the bug on the feather, the feather on the wing, the wing on the bird, the bird in the egg, the egg in the nest, the nest on the twig, the twig on the limb, the limb on the tree, the tree in the woods, the woods in the ground and the green grass grew all around, all around, and the green grass grew all around."

Playtime Records, a division of Columbia Recording Corporation, put this song out on a six inch record. It was one of the first hits Don made. No one knows how many were sold but Don sent out an average of 50,000 copies a month of the lyrics, for many years.

Night after night I would hear Don sing another favorite. It was the song about Freddy Kent who simply couldn't save a cent. It went something like this:

"There was a boy named Freddy Kent
Who simply couldn't save a cent
When his allowance came from Dad
To spend it quick, was his main fad.
Though mother scolded half the time
He wouldn't even save a dime.

"Then Uncle Don he heard one day,
While listenin' in with Aunty May.
Sent for the bank and when it came,
Found saving money quite a game.
Now this same boy named Freddy Kent
Simply would not waste a cent.

"The moral of this poem is:
Save all the pennies that you can;
You'll need them all when you're a man."

Like so many of us, Don never thought the day would come when he would need money. He had made and spent a million. He lost $60,000 on his Yonkers home. He lost $24,000 in stock deals. He paid off one wife with $20,000. In fact he spent half his life paying off this one and that one, always the soft touch for the pretty gal with the hard luck story. He even admitted he paid out more than $10,000 in abortion money over the years. His yearly salary averaged over $100,000. Besides the feeling of not running out of money, Don always felt that his program would continue on and on as long as his voice would last. He received the sad awakening, early in 1949, when WOR announced to the press the fact that the Uncle Don Program, after twenty-three years of continuous programming, had bit the dust.

The January 2nd, 1949 issue of *Variety*, the Bible of Show Business, reported it this way.

Uncle Don WOR
After 23-Year Reign;
Kids Too Sophisticated?

"Just when TV is taking over as a baby sister, WOR, N. Y. announces the bowing out of Uncle Don (Don Carney), who has been on the station for 23 years.

"Starting Feb. 6, 'Uncle Don Reads the Funnies' will be replaced by the Gainsborough Associate package. "Here's Heidy," with Heidy Mayer telling stories to the moppets every Sunday at 8:45 A.M WOR programmers felt that kids were losing interest in Uncle Don's funny paper stint, but would perk up to Heidy's modern approach.

"In addition to the growing sophistication of tots under

10, Carney was caught in a WOR-Mutual squeeze. The net wanted additional early evening time some years back and he was forced to give up his 6 P.M. across-the-board spot. Later he was moved up from 5 to 4:30 P.M which proved a poor time for the minors, and he had to give up his strip.

Disappearance of Uncle Don from New York airwaves marks the end of an era, during which his format of singing, story telling and club announcements was widely copied. Carney is now in Florida, doing his program on a local station. He has been sending WOR his show on platters."

The trip to Florida was made with Betty in the fall of 1948. Don had received word from WKAT in Miami that he could do his nightly kid show on this local Mutual station. It paid only a few hundred dollars a week but Don was getting all sorts of aches and pains and figured the warmer climate would help him physically.

For the previous year and a half he had been conducting Uncle Don's Record Party—sort of a Kids' Disc Jockey Show on WOR.

Said *Variety,* in a review on this new episode in Don's life:

"The program has sufficient variety for all children, in songs about animals, songs as birthday greetings, disks on hillbilly music, nursery rhymes, jazz, etc., a visit to a zoo with a song introduction to the animals.

"Uncle Don, who seems to be having a heckuva good time through it all, chats informally, simply, about various songs and matters, not patronizingly at all. He gets in a

plug for the Red Cross; plays a fast disk slowly to see how it sounds; pulls other stunts. Oh, to be a kid again now that Uncle Don is here."

Adults were always as interested in Don as the children. The adult listeners accounted for about one-half of all the mail he received. The amount of mail varied directly with the audience and as the audience dropped off in the mid-forties, much of it was in the form of personal and heart warming letters recounting moments of pleasure Don had given radio fans of all ages over the years. One of the last letters he showed me and asked me to answer, was this one. Don now had two generations of listeners.

Joseph C. Byers
1926 Greene Avenue
Brooklyn 27, N. Y.

18th May, 1948.

"Dear Don Carney:

Last Sunday evening, my family, and some friends, were discussing radio, and television, and the conversation drifted to the early years of radio, which seemed to open the door for our 14 year old granddaughter, who chimed in with, Uncle Don.

Little did she know how far back she carried my wife, and I, to catch up with the personality behind Uncle Don, and because we all became interested, I decided to write direct to you, and ask if you'll kindly give us first hand, authentic, data.

I remember you first, about 1926 or 1927, as an announcer, pianist, and singer, on WMCA; the next one we recall, was at WOR, as the Mayor of a rural town, and the time you had with the local Harry James, one Horace Peters, but darned if we can recall the title; If I'm wrong, correct me, but, wasn't that show written by a radio announcer?

I originally came from a small Connecticut rural town, and got many a chuckle from that production, and the people who made up the cast.

If it isn't too much trouble, may I ask you to send me a brief outline of your term as Mayor, etc., such as,

Name of show?
Writers name?
Whom did you succeed, as Mayor?

Names of principals, and names of characters portrayed?

I'd be happy to have data on your work at WMCA, and when you started as Uncle Don, together with anything else you care to add, and with grateful thanks, and every best wish. I am,

Sincerely Yours,
(s) Joseph C. Byers

Don, I lost both my legs in 1923, and 11 other operations, and a complication of ailments, since, find me pretty nearly helpless, hence my interest in radio, past, present, and future; however, I'm able to copy it down, if you'd prefer, phoning to writing."

Don and Betty lived very modestly in a small white rented bungalow on the outskirts of Miami. His radio activities on WKAT were reduced to one show a week. He had very little money left and Betty started to look around for a job. She was interviewed at Burdines Department Store and was promised a job shortly after the Christmas season, 1949.

On December 29th, while taking a bath she decided to put a hair dryer on to do the two operations at once. She was immediately electrocuted when she turned on the current.

Don called me from Florida after this accident happened

and asked me to give the obituaries out to the papers and wire services.

For a guy who got his formal education in show business and was held aloft in the public eye by press releases, a death in the family was always something special.

"Be sure to mention that she was Uncle Don's wife. And, oh yes, Bill, give out her age as thirty-seven."

22. *Peaches and Brandy*

DON WAS NOW financially down, but not out. He shipped Betty's body back to her home town of Scalp Level, Pennsylvania, but didn't accompany it.

On the outskirts of Miami there was a little tavern known as the Corn Crib and Don became a most frequent visitor to forget his troubles.

It was in the Corn Crib that Don met Mrs. Priscilla Ripley. They were good for each other—they both liked to drink. Because he was also short of cash, Don was able to sell the owner of the club on using him for week-end entertainment.

It was here that Don carried on the last romance in his life.

"Peaches," as Don called her, had brought something new into Don's life. What this something was, it was hard for Don to explain, but when I spent an evening with him at the Key Biscayne Hotel late in October, 1953, he wanted

me to know that he was really very much in love with her.

Later she told me, confidentially, that they had been divorced for about three months. The year or so of marriage with him was impossible. He had become a hopeless, helpless drunk. Was committed several times to a hospital and an institution for several weeks at a time. In fact she considered that this was her daily charity. Even after the divorce she would stop off to see Don in his meager surroundings and make sure he had enough liquor for the day.

That night in October, when they drove me back to the Key Biscayne Hotel, she said to Don, "Let's stop for a pint of whiskey, so Bill can have a night cap on our way back to the hotel."

They did and they polished off the pint with four gulps each.

The next time I heard from Peaches, it was to tell me that Don had died in her apartment in Miami. The cause was not known. Again I was called on to do the obituaries.

By now every newspaper morgue in the country had a full and complete file on Don Carney, radio entertainer.

In the United Press story, which was used in the New York Herald Tribune, the fact that he denied swearing on the air, was highlighted.

"About fifteen years ago the story went around that Mr. Carney at the end of one of his 6 o'clock programs employed a swear word in reference to his juvenile audience. He is supposed to have believed that the mike was dead. In the years that followed, however, Mr. Carney denied calling his audience an unseemly name."

In the Associated Press story, which was used in The New York Times, the fact was reported that Uncle Don had made eight albums of records and more than a million copies were sold.

Said the AP report: "His frothy stories, simple songs, cobwebbed jokes, birthday announcements, readings of the comics and advice against misbehaving—all delivered in a nasal monotone with a Midwest inflection—endeared him to juveniles and adults alike."

The press always treated him kindly. Never was he dragged through a Broadway column or written about in a scandal magazine, although all the reporters and columnists knew he was living a life of sin. They all knew it meant too much to the kiddies of the nation to expose him.

Peaches now had another problem on her hands. Don wanted to be cremated but left no will or letter indicating his wishes.

She was able to arrange these details with a local funeral director. I told her I would be glad to sign a letter indicating Don's wishes as he had mentioned them to me several times. It wasn't necessary, however. His ashes were thrown out over the Atlantic off Miami Beach.

I tried to obtain Don's scrapbooks and old scripts for the Theatre Section of the New York Public Library. Peaches promised me she would work on it but after an exchange of correspondence, she summed up the problem this way:

Sunday—

"Dear Bill—

Received your letters and apologies for not answering the first one—it arrived the day I was departing—without cere-

mony—to the hospital—with a vase of Virus—pneumonia—and a re-broken foot—needless to say the last two weeks in here have been more than charming!

Meanwhile my apartment was locked up—and as a result my correspondence has been vastly limited.

Your second letter—with the New York library request was brought over here to me yesterday—Thursday—and finally—enabling me to produce a prompt reply—

I think that I will be able to attend to the packing and crating of Uncle Don's collection towards the end of this week—here's the situation however as I understand it—nothing can be removed from Uncle Don's home until the total assets are determined by the Curator of Dade County—I was given to believe that—meant things such as the value of furniture—land—house—car etc. etc. etc.—and that personal property—such as clothes—books—and so forth would not be appraised in the all-over estimate. I will have to phone the Curator to get permission to remove said writings and such of Uncle Don's—as I believe his home is sealed—

I've kept away—on purpose—also do not have a key—some relations of Don's former wife Betty are trying to build up a bit of a storm—also Betty Jr. (who is in Germany) is claiming everything too—my lawyer and I are playing a quiet—waiting game on the sidelines—my only interest being his collection—and perhaps one picture that he liked so much—

I believe I have "smuggled" the badge—and will check on the Gabby Scoops—I hadn't been able to locate the Gabby Scoop orig.—checked with the radio station too—(his last program didn't include the Gabby song—)

I get "released" from here on Thursday—so will get busy on the phone and will write you concerning time and tide—

Best of everything to you & yours

(s) Peaches"

And then a few weeks later, another letter came from her.

9740 Bay Harbor Terrace
Bay Harbor Island
Miami Beach, Florida

Helen Brown Ripley

Friday

"Dear Bill—

A quick note—checked with the curator of D's estate—he allows as how I can send the listing's up to the library—we are making a date for next week—also—which is amusing—the will that "D" left turns out to be a copy—not the original—so—I have no legal authority so to speak! Really quite funny—however—it also releases me automatically of D's debts! Some mess!

Will keep you posted—

Best of everything—

(s) Peaches"

That was the last I heard from Peaches. A letter to her, early in 1957 was returned.

The press and public have kept the name Uncle Don "alive." There seldom is a day that passes when some newspaperman or radio or television performer fails to remind his readers or listeners that Uncle Don was a famous legend in the early days of radio.

On March 27th, 1957 Joe Franklin over WABC-TV in New York paid the following tribute to Radio's legendary Uncle.

"We're going to play an old time cartoon now and then a salute to the great Uncle Don of yesteryear."

* * *

"We'll get around to our Uncle Don Salute, though, for the boys and girls, following this memo from one of our favorite 1957 sponsors."

* * *

THE CAMERA SHOWED MR. FRANKLIN SEATED BEHIND A DESK. IN HIS HANDS WERE A NUMBER OF PICTURES. AS HE SPOKE, MR. FRANKLIN HELD EACH PICTURE UP SO THAT THE CAMERA COULD SHOW IT IN CLOSE-UP.

"Ladies and gentlemen, something most unusual now. We have gotten in the mail over a period of years thousands and thousands of letters asking what has become of Uncle Don—Uncle Don in his day every night from 6:00 to 6:30 on the radio over a local radio station. He was a legend. He was the legend of legends. His theme song was 'Hello, Nephews, Nieces mine, I'm glad to see you look so fine!' Everything stopped from 6:00 to 6:30. The boys and girls listened. And as to where he is today he's no longer among the living. Uncle Don took his final curtain call a few years ago.

"But we managed to get a few photographs that we're going to flash on the screen of this great man who more than anybody kept the boys and girls of yesteryear glued to their TV sets (sic)—to their radios. There was no TV back in those days. So here he is, perhaps his TV debut. I don't know. Gone but certainly not forgotten, the man who thrilled us night after night, including me because no night was ever complete if you couldn't listen to the friendly warm and wonderful voice and manner of Uncle Don Carney.

"Here he is at the peak of his fame on the radio, Uncle Don. Here he is again and this, I believe, must be one of his very last pictures. It shows him in a very pensive mood leaning

back, maybe remembering that he used to thrill the boys and girls way back when. Uncle Don had what was known as a talent contest. Every year he used to choose two boys and girls from the local audience and send them out to Hollywood to make a screen test. We have some photographs here that we got from Uncle Don's ex-manager and publicity man, a gentleman named Bill Treadwell, of a couple of these winners out in Hollywood. These are the winners of the Uncle Don talent scout contest of the 1930's. We'll see a couple of the boys and girls and we'll see some of the stars they met out in Hollywood.

"Leon Erroll—I believe that's Leon Erroll greeting them upon their arrival in California way back when. Here they are with the great Joe Penner, the man who said, 'Do you want to buy a duck?' 'You nasty man!' and so many famous phrases.

"Here we see Uncle Don. Let's see, now he's with Ethel Barrymore, I believe, about 20 years ago and the boys and the girls—one boy and one girl—who won his talent contest. Fibber McGee and Molly greeting the winners of the Uncle Don contest. A very young lady in the middle there named Jane Withers—Jane Withers in the mid 30's greeting the winners. Here's a big group. I believe Ed Wynn—there's Ed Wynn on the end meeting them, making them feel at home in Hollywood. That was their prize—a trip out there for a screen test. Here we see a very young fellow named Robert Cummings—Robert Cummings and a young lady whose name I just can't figure out and the boys and the girls. I wonder who that young lady might have been? Mary Carlisle, Mary Carlisle.

"And, of course, Uncle Don was profiled in the New Yorker. We have a reprint here. We won't bother going into it now except to mention that we consider it a privilege merely to mention his name and let his name flow out over the air waves. We hope we've—here's one more picture we want to show,

though: Uncle Don at the piano entertaining the boys and the girls in the mid 1930's.

"We'd like to conclude this little tribute, by the way, by unwinding one little fallacy. There was a story that went around—still goes around—that one night Uncle Don thought his program was finished and he said good night the way he always did and then he thought the microphone was disconnected. But it wasn't and he said, 'Well, I hope that will hold the little so and so's until tomorrow.' That never happened. That little story which still goes around was a figment of the imagination of a columnist in Boston. I don't know his name but it was quite a few years ago. He had nothing to write that day and he made it up. And the story spread like wild fire and the story hurt the career of Uncle Don Carney, very very much. But we found out on pretty good authority it never happened. This has been our salute, anyhow, to the great memory of Uncle Don."

When I talked to Roy Smeck late in the summer of 1957 he agreed with me that Don was ten years too late for television. Had he performed on that medium at the same frequency that he performed on radio, he would have been Uncle Television and the top favorite of the small fry.

Another fact that interfered with Don and TV was Old Man Barleycorn. He had the type of voice that wouldn't tell on radio if he'd been drinking, but TV would show off his inebriation through his eyes.

Don could always sober up in moments with a big bowl of oatmeal. As he scientifically explained once, "They're just like having a big blotter in your stomach." Often, when drinking all afternoon, he would stop off at Dun-

hall's Restaurant, on the ground floor of 1440 Broadway where the WOR studios were, and would order his oatmeal, many times eating it in the kitchen out of view of the regular cocktail customers.

Roy was Don's friend for 30 years. He is one of the few performers who bridged the gap from vaudeville, to night clubs, to radio and then on to television. He also can point to the motion picture screen and millions of records as other show business accomplishments.

To go backwards, he has appeared with Arthur Godfrey, Milton Berle, Olsen and Johnson, Ed Sullivan, Steve Allen, Robert Q. Lewis, Jack Carter and others on television. He has made over 500 records for every phonograph label including Victor, Columbia, Coral, Okeh, Sonora, Decca, RCA and ABC Paramount.

The audiences of every top theater in the country have either seen him on the screen or on the stage, including Radio City Music Hall, Paramount, Roxy, the London Palladium and the best spots in Canada.

He has written thirty books for banjo, ukulele, guitar and other stringed instruments.

Don's death, while not a shock, threw Roy for a personal loss. They were fun pals for thirty years. Roy stayed with Don in Miami when he was getting his divorce there. When Peaches and Don travelled to New York, Roy accepted his new wife and they were together night after night. They visited many of the old haunts. They even looked up Heller at Lindy's and accepted his continued hospitality.

Roy went on the wagon the year Don died, and hasn't had a drop of liquor since. He continues to work more

than forty weeks out of the year and still celebrates Don's birthday every August 27th. "Last year I was in Atlantic City," Roy told me, "playing the Steel Pier at that time. I took some performers over to the Claridge Hotel for dinner and ordered a birthday cake in Don's honor. The hotel treated to the birthday cake because the party was for Don."

And so, kiddies, the wonderful fairy tale of Uncle Don comes to an end. In a way it reminds me of a kid I knew when I was 12. This guy was a boy genius in the days before the $64,000 Question"—having no outlet for his talents, he had to settle for going to Harvard at 14. But he was "big for his age" mentally. One time we were discussing Santa Claus and he told me how horrible he thought his parents were for telling him that old fable. "Why when I found out it wasn't true, I was upset for months. They never should have told me."

The image of Uncle Don was a lot like this guy's Santa. It was unreal, too, but because he was the kids' idol none of the gossip columnists ever took him apart. They were afraid a national trauma might be started if he were held up to ridicule. Don had a carte blanche to do almost anything he wanted without fear of a bad press. And he really used his privilege.

Nobody but an entertainer could have lived a life like Don's. And entertainers would have trouble getting away with it today. Today's journalism in tabloid and pulp form, would have exposed him. Can't you just see him as a cover story in Confidential Magazine?

But Don did live this way for decades. For better or worse he was the picture of the "American individualist."

He did just what he wanted when he wanted. In one sense, Don was the greatest phony who ever lived. What else would a guy be who was one person for a half-hour every night, and somebody else the rest of the day and night? Dr. Jekyll went on the air at 6:00 and then Mr. Hyde took over for the drinking and philandering.

Looking back from maturity at Don, he was the greatest entertainment bargain in the world—two people for the price of one.

Up to the age of ten the fairy godfather on the radio thrilled you beyond description. After the age of twenty, the accounts of his wacky life didn't thrill, but they were great fun. When he died no one who was sane would think of eulogizing him. But everyone thought enough of him to remember him. And they still do.

Index

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