



PAT MCMAHON
1933

Honored as a Historymaker 1992
Creator & Performer for
Longest Running Children's TV Show
Wallace & Ladmo



The following is an oral history interview with Pat McMahon (**PM**) conducted by Steve Hoza (**SH**) for Historical League, Inc. on July 26, 1991, at the studios of KTAR Radio, Phoenix, Arizona.

Transcripts for website edited by members of Historical League, Inc.

Original tapes are in the collection of the Arizona Heritage Center Archives, an Historical Society Museum, Tempe, Arizona.

SH: For the first part of the interview, I would like to ask you about the years before you came to Channel 5. What was your family's involvement in the entertainment field?

PM: My parents did what is most clearly described as a vaudeville act. Vaudeville was a kind of variety show of that time. They were on the tail end of that type of revue. My dad, being 30 years older than my mom, actually was in the heart of vaudeville and worked great theater like the Hippodrome, Leow's, and Paramount circuits across the country before he and mom married. He worked with Bums and Allen, W.C. Fields, and other vaudeville acts. His appearances were especially interesting since. His act was the only one of its kind.

Usually it's easier to say, "They did a dance act," because my mom was a dancer, but my father was a fighter, a professional boxer, through some ninety-seven or ninety-eight fights. He fought in the big times as a lightweight and became a champion bag-puncher. During his training on the bags, he became so adept that he worked the punching into his act, like a juggler would. Then he taught my mom how to do it and they did this bag-punching act together. But she was primarily a dancer and they combined their two specialties into a unique act called *McMahon & Adelaide*. They travelled with it all over the world.

I was conceived in Balboa, Panama. When my mom didn't look good in her wardrobe anymore she went back to the States, to her home town of Leavenworth, Kansas, to have me. I will always hold a grudge because of the stupid prison jokes people say when I tell them where I was born. I left Leavenworth at the age of five weeks and went out on the road myself. By the time I was thirteen, I had been in forty-eight states and we travelled to countless other countries. So that was it. We were a show biz family. I was born



in a trunk and I never got a dollar from Samsonite for mentioning that.

SH: At what age or during what year did you leave the travelling circuit and come to the Phoenix area?

PM: My parents worked theaters and night clubs and I was tutored as a lot of circus and military and show business kids are. I left the travelling circuit when I was about twelve in order to go to a regular school. The first time I had ever been in a classroom in my life was as a freshman in high school. I was just a little over twelve, and my parents picked a private boy's school very much like Brophy Prep [in Phoenix], almost identically- sized, about the same distance from the heart of the town. It was in Des Moines, Iowa, because it was centrally located.

Iowa was a great state for education. My parents were intent on education, but they were very determined about keeping me with them until it was time to go to school, so that I wouldn't have to jump around to a whole bunch of grade schools wherever we went. But finally, I had to find out what chalk and a blackboard and teachers were like, so I went to Dowling Prep in Des Moines. It was the first time I had ever been in any one community that long. I would only go home during school vacations.

After Dowling, I went to St. Ambrose College, Davenport, Iowa, where I studied speech and drama. I started a broadcasting career in Davenport, a part of the Quad Cities. I decided on broadcasting because, even as a freshman in high school, I knew I wanted to be an entertainer. But how would I do that and not have to live out of a trunk all the time? The travelling part was fun when I was with my parents, but I saw comics, dancers, jugglers, and other performers who were always in hotels. I thought that there had to be another life. How do I do that?

The best way was to do it electronically, by sending me into people's houses rather than my having to stay in some actors' boarding house. That's how I got the idea of broadcasting, simply as a means to an end. I was fascinated by it, so I majored in theater and broadcasting.

I got an afternoon job in Davenport as what would have been the equivalent of a rock & roll disc jockey. It was the early days of rock & roll. From there, I worked in Iowa and throughout the Midwest, doing commercials in Chicago and starting in television in Davenport with my own "American Bandstand" type of show.

I was drafted into the army, and my army stint was all show business. I was in Special Services and sang my way across the United States. It was not a bad way to spend time in uniform, because the worst thing that could have happened to me was that I had a sore throat. My days were spent singing Sinatra favorites across the country and entertaining folks and having a terrific time.

Toward the end of my stint in the service, we rehearsed a show in Colorado Springs and took it on the road. A guy in the touring group asked, "Where are you going after you get out of the service?" We were getting out at the same time, and he said that he was thinking of going to Phoenix. I thought, "Gee, I



haven't ever been there. I'm on my way to New York, but I'm in no rush. The people I'm going to see in New York about broadcasting jobs will be there. There's no urgency. How about if I go to Phoenix and sit by the pool for a couple of days and just sun this khaki off?" I have been here ever since!

I drove to Phoenix in May of 1960, instantly fell in love with the city, loved the weather. Hot weather never bothered me because I was used to it. Hot weather places were where my parents and I used to spend most of our years. We didn't spend too much time in cold places on purpose. I was immediately enchanted with the whole area of Phoenix. So I thought, "I think I'll stay here. But, wait a minute. I had no idea that I was going to stay, but if I do, I'm going to have to buy groceries. I applied to all the local television stations and Channel 5 had an immediate opening. So I started work there as an announcer. One of the first television shows I saw at Channel 5, before I had ever worked at the station, was "The Wallace & Ladmo Show." I almost turned it off, because I thought, "No! Not another one of those stupid kids' shows with an agonizingly saccharine host who tells the boys and girls to eat all the green vegetables on their plates and brush their teeth."

SH: Was that typical of children's programming at this time?

PM: Everywhere! At Chanel 5 there was some guy from another department that they gave an extra \$42 to. He put a sock on his hand and was a cheap ventriloquist act. Most of the time children's programming was just a gathering of no-talents of the world who demeaned the audience of kids. We were not around kids at all, and I had not been a children's entertainer as such, but I knew better than to talk down to kids. But God, I saw the "Wallace & Ladmo Show" at my house that day for the first time, and I said, "This is brilliant!"

I remember it was 1960. Here were two guys doing a commercial for something called *Ruskettes Flakes*, and Wallace says to Ladmo, "We're in trouble again. The advertising agency doesn't want us to ad-lib the commercial." Ladmo says, "Well, what are we supposed to do?" Wallace says, "Well, we're supposed to read the script. Here, you be Personality One and I'll be Personality Two." **THIS IS ON THE AIR!**

I never saw these guys before. Ladmo looks at the script and says, "Gee golly, willikers, gang, these are scrumptious and good for you." Then he says, "Wallace, I can't read this. People don't talk this way." Wallace says "You're absolutely right." He tears the top off the box and says, "Look kids, they're com flakes. You like com flakes, then why not try these? There's a guy named Ruskettes that has a warehouse full of these things over on the coast. Why not have him unload some at your house? If you don't like com flakes, you can always wait until the holidays." He reaches in and tosses the com flakes in the air and sings, "Should old acquaintance be forgot ..." I said, "I love these guys. I want to be on that show. I want to be a part of that madness."

That's the first time I ever saw them. I got the announcer's job at Channel 5, started hanging around the studio, watching the show with no idea that I really would be on. One day Wall, who had become my friend, and Ladmo who also had become my friend because we all saw things in the same kind of warped



way, said "Hey, we need another guy on this bit, this three-man bit. Will you help us out?" I helped them out for the next 30 years.

SH: Where was Channel 5 Studio located?

PM: It had been in the Westward Ho Hotel before I got there. When I arrived, it was in the building next to the Westward Ho Hotel. About half-way through the existence of "The Wallace & Ladmo Show," it was moved to the Black Canyon facility, a huge building. It's still one of the largest facilities in the Southwest.

SH: How did the format of the show change when you joined?

PM: Wall would probably say what he has said before ... Oh, are you going to talk to [Wallace] or have you talked to him?

SH: I have talked with him.

PM: Than I'd better watch myself because he may have already answered this question. He says that the format allowed for characters to be created, because Wall and Lad were primarily playing themselves- the characters Wallace Snead and Ladmo. So they did create characters. I think you can see from films and from what Wall tells me, when they did bits, they did mostly slapstick stuff. Then there was me who had been an actor all of my life. Here was the opportunity to say, "We don't have to have just one guy on the show; we can make up a myriad of characters." That was ideal for me because I really had no idea that the Wallace Show existed until I came to Phoenix. This sounds like one of those set-ups, but it's absolutely God's truth. As a kid I used to watch "The Sid Caesar Show" and say, "That's what I want to do. I want to do a lot of different characters." It was called "Your Show of Shows." I remember it was my absolutely favorite show in the whole world because Sid Caesar got to do dialects; he got to do voices.

Even to this day, as long as I was on "Wallace & Ladmo," the stuff that I've been involved with has lasted, both on radio and television. I still think that it would be dreadful to be on a soap opera and play the same guy, or to be stuck in a series of things where you play the same character. That's just me; I love variety. I love the idea of going in and having no idea what characters had been written for that day, created just for me.

Wall would say, "Look, I have this great idea. Ladmo is the good guy; we really need a bad guy." Then we would just kick things around. Wallace came up with the name "Gerald Springer" and thought it would be a good idea that he be a rich kid because there's a certain logic. You don't want him to be an authority figure; you want him to be something that the kids can really strike out at. We didn't know that they were going to strike out quite as viscously as they did against Gerald.

Wall would call me and say, "Pat, the Beatles are the hottest thing in the world; the Beatles are the hottest thing. We need our own rock & roll guy. Who could it be? I have a great name for the group, "Hub Kapp



and the Tire Slashers". I said, "As the pacifist in the group, I think that is a little violent. I think we're going to get static from parents. Besides, I don't think that he would have a long life if he were a really bad, tough guy that people were afraid of. How about "Hub Kapp and the Wheels?" Usually, Wall would leave it up to me as to what the character would look like and sound like, but it was always a contribution thing. Somebody, like Lad, would say, "Yeah, and then he could ... what about this?"

SH: Were any of the characters based on ones that you had seen on other shows, spoofing other children's television programs; such as Marshall Good?

PM: No, because Marshall Good started out as a massively effeminate role which we later watered down a bit so as not to offend anybody. We never meant anything by it. It was just that he was named Guy Good, and in bar fights he used to slap their faces and scratch their eyes. We weren't making a social statement or making fun of any group at all. We were taking the opposite tack, rather than having a Jack Palance or another tough guy, or the hero whose white suit never got dirty and who never ran out of bullets. Marshall Good would never have had a gun. We had no weapons, guns or knives.

Marshall Good was extremely sensitive, but we did pull back on the sensitivity a bit. He was still a looser, a guy who never really had a full-time job. But no, he was not patterned after anybody.

The character we got accused about every once in a while was Aunt Maud. The critics would graciously say we *borrowed* from the Jonathon Winters character of Maud Frickert. We thought they really meant *stolen*. But I was doing Aunt Maud before Jonathon Winters, at least before he did it publicly on television. We would not borrow. We would rather forgo a laugh than to borrow something. We would rather do something mediocre and original, than fabulous and on the Johnny Carson Show the week before.

SH: Did the management at Channel 5 have any problems with the content of the show?

PM: Constantly, on a daily basis. For the first little while, I think they just threw up their hands in despair; or they just threw up. Depending on what mail they received from a lady who just got in from Ohio and was used to seeing Mr. Nicey-Person back in Cleveland, the guy with the sock on his hand, they would tell us, "No conflict, no good guy/bad guy melodrama."

We were the National Wrestling Alliance of children's shows, and sometimes parents weren't ready for that. We were a very, very responsible group of people. We were responsible primarily to the kids, to make them laugh. We didn't do it at anyone's expense. We did not disregard a sense of responsibility. We never lied to them about products, not to the degree that Wallace and Ladmo would do commercials and destroy products. They had a product called a *Scooter Pie* and they would always be Galling it a chocolate hockey puck and kicking it around, but they never said this was bad for you, because they would not have allowed that on the show. If it said *unbreakable toy*, Wallace would try to break it.



So management mostly was concerned, as management always is, about the content of the mail, or about some lady or local dignitary who had had lunch with the boss that day and who had said, "Look, we're a little concerned about this Gerald being a bad influence on the children of this community." But, it rarely happened. A couple of times, in the very beginning, they wanted us to stop Gerald. In the early days of Hub Kapp, there was a big conflict because they said, "It's rock & roll designed to warp children's minds and destroy their souls."

It is still being said. Some of it is true, but we were mainly talking about doing Beatles stuff, very, very benign, benevolent things. But just the idea of rock, right? They wanted to get rid of Hub, but the audience wanted Hub to stay and let them know it in no uncertain terms. The management didn't realize that little kids, too, not just teenagers, were buying rock & roll records. There was always that conflict. Actors are more aware of society's demands and likes and dislikes than management usually is.

SH: Why do you think the character of Hub Kapp, even though done as a spoof, became so popular?

PM: I haven't the foggiest idea. That is the mystery of my life. I guess one of the easiest answers is that we live in times when certain types of music create a certain response. In the 1960's you had a kind of passive, flower-child attitude toward the rock & roll of the time; it was very laid back. It was non-show bizzy. Now, my God, rock & roll is some of the greatest theater around. The stage costs \$250,000 to build and they cart their own stuff and lights and laser beams, choruses, huge dance groups. If you look at the Madonna thing she did in Europe, the Madonna tour, whether you like Madonna or not, that's a big production. She had something like twenty-seven people on stage. It used to be that a group would come on, like the Beatles. As big as they were, it would be four guys and they would do a half hour and split. That's it, "She loves you...Goodnight!"

Hub was a part of that period when it was hysteria time, so that if you walked on stage, there was a certain obligatory opportunity to scream. Everybody knew that Hub Kapp was me. I was a guy in a James Brown pompadour and eyebrows pasted on, wearing this black suit. Why the community responded the way it did I will never know, because it was really an ordinary rock & roll group. We didn't try and stretch our abilities to handle the music we did.

What was really funny was that the biggest victims of the put-on were Capitol Records and Hollywood. They thought, "My God, this is amazing. Look at this." A guy came over to see one of our concerts and got trampled. I mean he was literally knocked over and was trying to survive behind some chairs in the auditorium. He said, "I saw the fire marshal trying to clear the aisles, but I never saw him again. It was that kind of hysteria.

SH: So you're saying that the local audience knew that it was a take-off.

PM: And loved it! Loved it and went along with it. But they weren't putting anybody on. They just said "Hey, this is fun, let's participate in this. Let's do this." There were banners and people throwing stuff on



the stage. It was fun. It wasn't so much fun that I would have wanted to continue it. That's why we stopped, because after a while, we didn't have any problems with Capitol, but we were spending so much more time over there [Los Angeles] than we were here. To tell you the truth, our focus was the Wallace Show. That's what Hub was on.

Then we started branching out into these concerts and shin-digs and the "Steve Allen Show" and Capitol Records contracts. What the hell were we doing? What was that? They made me wear the Hub Kapp costume and makeup into the studio to record at Capitol. Nat Cole was coming out of the building and someone said, "Nat, this is your replacement. If tomorrow your parking space over there is taken by this guy Hub Kapp ...

SH: Capitol Records really took it seriously?

PM: They knew there was a guy under there. When we were doing our business negotiations, we didn't have to wear costumes. Listen, they had a press party with all of the disc jockeys and whomever the Robin Leaches were at that time. There were a lot of leeches around, as a matter of fact. They were in the main studios where Sinatra, Nat King Cole, and some of the Beatles stuff were recorded. And there's Hub Kapp and the Wheels being presented to the esprit de corps of the press along with this guy that was a disc jockey at KFVB named Gene Weed.

He was a buddy of mine in the army, and he came over to interview me and I was not allowed to reveal who I was. I am wearing this big blonde pompadour wig, with the eyebrows, and this black outfit and Weed is interviewing me and I'm doing Hub, right, in the Hub Kapp voice. "Well, I was raised in Cotton Comers, Tennessee, Mr. Weed, and the whole idea of being here in Los Angeles, California, is pretty intimidating to a small-town boy like me. I haven't really been out of the South that much." I'm doing this thing and Weed is saying "Well, tell me more. Do the Wheels come from there as well?"

I saw him five years later and he said "Pat! I haven't seen you since the army." I said "Yeah, I saw you that day at Capitol Towers." "When did I see you? I don't remember." I said, "Remember Hub Kapp and the Wheels?" He said, "Yeah, I remember that group, a really weird-dressed guy." I told him that was me and he fainted. He couldn't believe it. That was the kind of dual-identity thing I did. Everybody should be a rock & roll star for fifteen minutes.

SH: How many appearances did you make on the "Steve Allen Show"?

PM: Six. That was a long time ago, 1962 to 1965. Because I was a program director at KRIZ radio after that, we finally came back and said, "That's enough, we don't want to do hullabaloo, we don't want to do Hub Kapp and the Wheels for the rest of our lives." Actually, it was fun for a while but none of us were really taken by that. We didn't start out to be rock & roll stars. It might have happened and it might not have happened, but it's a life. It's a world that nobody was particularly interested in living. I wanted to do the Wallace Show. I never regretted it. Imagine being a forty-five-year-old Hub Kapp?



SH: On the subject of the many stage shows that you did over the years, were there any close calls with the character of Gerald?

PM: Every time the security force turned its back, I was pelted by missiles of various kinds.

SH: Are there any particular incidents that come to mind?

PM: If I had kept all the vegetables that were thrown at me, I could have opened my own produce concession. Some of them got dangerous. When I was running outside at night trying to get into a car that was waiting for me, the gate was locked. All of a sudden, there was a massive crowd of people behind me who were ten and eleven year old kids, just tall enough to do serious damage to a Gerald. Hub always had to escape. You think I'm kidding, but you can get hurt even by girls.

I remember the first appearance by Gerald. His first appearance was at Papago Plaza in Scottsdale. The kids had never seen Gerald live, only on television. Papago Plaza made a big mistake in passing out huge dill pickles to the audience. I was pelted with pickles and soaked with brine. Oh, you laugh, sure, certainly. They began to break down the stage that had been built for us and began to tear the stage apart trying to get at Gerald. At that time, we didn't know about having a security group in the contract. Why did we think that anybody would go after this little blonde Lord Fauntleroy character that had just been introduced? After that, we always had a security group.

I think Gerald had only been on the show for a week or so. When part of the stage gave way, Gerald beat a hasty retreat to the pick-up truck that that was right behind the stage. The kids began rocking the truck back and forth, trying to turn it over with me inside. Wallace, I remember, stood on the stage and said to Lad, "Ladmo, I think we're on to something here."

SH: Of all the characters that you played, did you have any favorites?

PM: Sure. Gerald. Gerald is a therapeutic kind of alter ego that I'd like to think is not at all like me because he is a totally unprincipled person who's sort of a sad character. You can over-analyze characters, but every year at Christmas time was the only time he ever really showed the other side of himself. He used to put presents under the tree anonymously for Wallace and Ladmo, but unsigned.

Gerald got to say all of the stuff that every human being on earth would love to say. So, it was great being Gerald. I got to blitz all the guest stars that came on, as well as Wallace and Ladmo. People would think that I really didn't like kids. But the funny thing about it is that they are my favorite people. Gerald was a very successful character. When people booed, that was the standard line the kids asked. Little kids would say to me, as Pat, "Doesn't it bother you when people boo you?" I would explain to them that when you're playing a character like Gerald, booing is like applause. If the audience gave you a hand, you would have failed.



SH: Did you have any least favorite characters?

PM: No, no. Some characters just didn't last because of limitations. Some characters were intended to be one-shots where the bit would carry it, and you'd have to just make up a guy off the street. Other characters we thought would have a longer life, but then found they were not dimensional enough to carry a long-term relationship with the audience.

We are getting very analytical. If you watch the show, you'll notice that there are some characters that are on every day - Gerald, Captain Super, Marshall Good. Aunt Maud and Boffo the Clown are both on often because there are a lot of things that you can do with them. When we did an East Indian seer like Nuru the Guru, there's only so much that you can do with him. Bobby Jo Trouble was quite limited. The characters were in the show relative to how much writing we could do for them. You could always write one of those ghastly stories for Aunt Maud, which is now being done on television as "The Crypt", that cable show.

SH: *Tales from the Crypt.*

PM: *Tales from the Crypt.* That always reminded me of Aunt Maud.

SH: What was your level of involvement in the production of the show?

PM: Very little. I was always doing other things. I used to bop in at four o'clock from KRIZ radio where I was program director for a successful rock & roll station, or my talk show, or my own company, "The Idea Factory," a production company. I've always been involved with a lot of other creative efforts, so Wallace used to consider me a writer. But I didn't write my stuff down. I would take the structure of what they wrote and find areas to ad-lib my lines, always going back, if it were a completely written bit, to places where I could add my own dialogue. Wall gave us complete and total control and creative freedom.

Since you've already talked with Wallace, I won't embarrass him with this by him hearing me. He is the only person who ever had anything to do, any contact at all with "The Wallace & Ladmo Show," who did not clearly understand the immensity of his own contribution. I grew up in show business. I've seen and worked with some of the giants with big reputations, and I cannot say offhand that I've ever worked with anybody, or had any contact with anybody professionally, that had the level of true genius that Wall had in the field, of truly being able to entertain children as the prime target audience and involve everybody else, parents, grandparents. The level of sophistication was beyond anything I have ever seen since. Maybe Jim Henson is close. Jim had the added benefit of being able to also create figures like that. He had an edge. He could do things technically that you couldn't do with human beings. But Wall still doesn't have any idea what kind of impact his material has had on three generations of lives.

SH: On the topic of your sophisticated humor, how did you keep the humor topical?



PM: You mean the group *you*?

SH: Yes, the people involved with the writing of the show.

PM: When you said *you*, I wanted to let you know that not just mine was the sophisticated material. How did we keep it topical? The first source was the news, what was on television that day, in the newspapers, what was going on the planet, what people did basically. We just held up mirrors to people. We said, "This may not be you, but maybe it's your Uncle Manis." Then we would gently take it a little off-center.

There's nothing wrong with being a conservative, but Captain Super considered Barry Goldwater to be a neo-Marxist. Captain Super wasn't just a conservative, he was an extremist, an extremist at everything he did. Captain Super was a good example of how many different levels were going on at the same time. I would love to have everybody who is listening to this tape think, "Wow, those guys must have planned this every day. Every day must have been planned months in advance and they had this huge staff of research people." No, it was just the way we thought. Captain Super was this way because this is the way we would see him.

A four-year-old, which was younger than our target audience, would see that silly man in the red suit. An eight or nine-year-old would see a blowhard that couldn't be trusted, like Uncle Manis, who came over on holidays and would say, "Hey, listen, I meant to bring you a \$20 bill to give you for your birthday, but you know what? I don't have anything that small. Listen, I'll catch you next time." You know, always the floor flusher, the guy that was putting kids on. Kids would recognize that in Captain Super, the phony, because he was wearing shoulder pads and thought that nobody noticed. Then high school and college people would notice, and adults would notice, too, the political ramifications of being an extremist who saw communists behind every bush and a conspiracy going on designed to keep him off the front page of comic books everywhere. That's what I'm talking about.

SH: Could you relate some of the practical jokes that Bill Thompson, who played Wallace, played on you? He has the reputation of being a practical joker.

PM: No, he doesn't, he doesn't. Someone just told you these things. One time I was sleeping in the back seat of a van on the way to Yuma, and they pulled off the road and almost knocked me out of my seat. Wall and Lad said "My God! Did you see that thing go over?"

Another time they told me this whole UFO thing. I have no idea why they did that. There is nothing that I recall that was UFO-oriented about our conversations up to that time, but they told me that they called the Air Force.

The biggest practical joke was actually played on Mike Condello and me. Mike Condello, music director, another gifted, brilliant guy, who started with us when he was fifteen years old, wrote all of the musical parodies that we did. He was the lead guitarist on Hub Kapp and the Wheels, who wrote



the theme song, "Ho, Ho, Ha, Ha, Hee, Hee." Mike and I were absolutely huge Beatles fans. I had never been quite so enchanted with the creativity of music people as I was with the Beatles. One day while we were going to a personal appearance, Wall says, "You know, because the Beatles are coming to America, it would be kind of fun to have them come to Phoenix. Wouldn't that be great?" We all looked at Wall and thought, "Mr. Naiveté does not understand the world of rock & roll. Fun? Sure, they only booked up to thirty-two years in advance; you can't just get them all of a sudden." Wall said, "Well, they're going to be in the western United States, why not? Why wouldn't they want to come?" He's so good. He did this so straight-faced, so Wallace-like. Then he was gone.

Wall is patient as a practical joker. That's one of the keys. It can last for weeks. The next time he brought it up, he said, "You know what, guys? I'm going to write them. I'm going to write the Beatles' office." A couple of weeks later, nothing had been said. Finally, Wall says "Oh, I forgot to tell you..." like he wouldn't be running into our homes with this news, "Brian Epstein, the Beatles' manager, wrote back to me." Mike and I thought, "Yeah, right." Wall says, "No, see here, isn't this nice?" Wall shows us Brian Epstein's letterhead stationery which says, "Thank you, Mr. Thompson, for your attention. The Beatles will be available for one night between their appearance in Las Vegas and their appearance in Los Angeles at Dodger Stadium. We will be in need of this much money, put in escrow in the bank." In those days I think the Beatles' were working for \$100,000 for an appearance, and \$50,000 up front, plus we would have to have an opening act.

I'm doing Hub Kapp and the Wheels. At the same time I'm also thinking of how many of my possessions I could mortgage, including my children, to put the money together. Wall says "Wouldn't it be fun if we could do it?" Fun? **DO IT!** Meanwhile, Condello is rolling around on the floor having seizures and we're looking at Wall like, "You don't understand. We have the opportunity to bring the Beatles in! Hub Kapp and the Wheels could be the opening act!! Why don't you understand?" We're screaming! Anyway, it evolved into us finally being let in on it days later. The fact was that Wall had written to Brian Epstein. He had sent a letter back, a form letter, saying "Are you out of your mind?" Then Wall copied the letterhead and did this joke. Condello and I had the last laugh. We were so ticked off because of it that we got tickets for front row seats in Dodger Stadium to see the Beatles, so at least we got to their show. That's the kind of practical joke Wall did. Very involved.

SH: And the third part of that practical joke?

PM: You mean, there's a number three?

SH: The pilot project.

PM: Oh, yes. Wall and Lad said, "Hey, Meredith Broadcasting, owners of Channel 5, want us to do a pilot for their other station." So we're writing, wondering how we can do this. We can't do any local material; what will we do? Wall and Lad and I are on the phone at night putting this thing together. This was going to be our national debut for a syndicated show, to all of the Meredith television stations around the



country. I'm a nice guy. I don't know why I became the butt of these jokes. I think it was because, (no one knows this), Wall is fundamentally evil; if you say his name backwards, it's a Satanic message.

He and Lad said, "I don't know how to break this to you, but this has to be a two-man show. There's not enough money in the budget for a third guy." I was crushed. I mean, I had been a part of the show for years. So it was a two-man show. Then, Wallace had the gall to say, "Listen, Pat, you're such a part of the show, would you come up and see the tape that we made and let us know how you feel about it?" That he would invite me to see the tape [rapping noise]. That's me hitting the table in frustration built up over the years, of the pilot that they were going to send.

The worst thing of all was that the Gerald character was going to be a hand puppet. So I'm on, but I'm not on. I'm not getting paid, and some yahoo with a hand puppet being Gerald is in there with Wall and Lad. It's terrible! That I was a hand puppet was the worst part.

I'm listening to all this and it's dreadful material. What am I going to say to my friends? I'm looking out for them, and here is Wall doing this pilot with terrible, cornball stuff. When they turn the lights up, they're going to turn to me and say, "What do you think?" It was just wretched. They didn't turn the lights up right away, but Wall finally looks at the camera and says, "Oh, by the way, Pat, that's number three." He never quite topped that one.

SH: Was that typical?

PM: That was typical Wallace humor. He loved doing it. He would pull those things never ever to offend; but the more complex, the more convoluted his jokes were, the better. He loved putting on the world, but not as Bill Thompson. In his role as Wallace, that was his sense of humor. Bill Thompson as himself is a very serious guy, a student of the Civil War, a gentle, shy, caring person who I still see every once in a while, like I do Lad.

SH: What was your relationship with Ladmo?

PM: Well, how could you not enjoy being around someone who got his Ladmo button stuck years ago? Lad was supposed to be the fool on the show. He was supposed to be the guy who didn't get it, the lovable foolish guy. But, he's the only one with a degree. Wall went to DePauw University in Indiana and studied all the stuff he wanted to and left. I went to St. Ambrose and studied drama and broadcasting, but left because I had a broadcasting job offered to me, thinking as so many do, "Well, I'll go back and get my degree." But I was doing what I had been studying to do and I kept doing it.

SH: In the characters that you've done and the ad-libbing that you would do with politicians and local celebrities, did you ever have any of them say, "Knock it off?"

PM: A lot of times on my radio show.



SH: Really?

PM: Sure. The radio show is straight interview stuff, so you're talking to the newsmakers of the world. There's no limit, Washington insiders, presidents and presidential candidates, international leaders and people from the Soviet Union and Greece and London. So, yes, often. Kitty Kelly wasn't too thrilled the last time she was on.

SH: I must be misunderstanding you. The people who you lampooned on the show would call you ...

PM: No, no, no, on my radio show as a talk show host, there were people who did occasionally threaten to get up and leave. But let me see. No, I never remember anyone political [doing it].

SH: Like when you mentioned earlier that Captain Super was calling Barry Goldwater a communist ...

PM: Oh, Barry loved the show. He and his family used to watch it. In fact, his kids, Mike and Barry Jr., grew up with the show.

SH: There was never a point when Acquanetta objected? You poked a lot of fun at her.

PM: Acqua only called one time when we had misspelled her name. No, she's a hip lady. She's a very fun, fair lady. She wanted us to keep it up because it was selling Lincolns and Mercurys [Acquanetta's husband was with Jack Ross, a local car dealer]. We called her "Acqua- Velva" at the time, and her husband was Zack Wallniss and she used to beat the hell out of him. Do you have those two on tape? Do you have any of the Acquanetta stuff on tape?

SH: No, but I have still photographs.

PM: Stars would come in and not understand the level of humor and they would think that they were going to be on some "Mr. Rogers" kind of show, which is a totally different approach. Mr. Rogers does a good job playing to really little kids, three and four-year-olds. They feel comfortable with him. Captain Kangaroo does a wonderful job. But, Wallace is a little loud, a little brash for them. I still think Jim Henson comes the closest, who really understood the use of satire. I think Hensen was the closest thing to Disney as anybody we've had in my lifetime.

Aunt Maud was the fan club president, the Senior City fan club president of anyone who was on. But she never knew what anyone did, and would always screw things up with whoever the star was. She would fall madly in love with whoever it was, a matinee idol or Michael Landon, who was a terrific guest. Muhammad Ali was interviewed by Aunt Maud, and Jose Greco, an unlikely person for a kid's show.

SH: Did these people happen to be in town?



PM: Yes. They were here in concert promoting their appearance on any live thing that was on television here. They loved being on our show. Once they appeared, they kept coming back and back and back. Jerry Van Dyke loved to come. His brother, Dick, used to watch the show when he was living here with his family.

Liberace would forget his lines. I remember telling him, "Here's the deal. Aunt Maud is just a little dippy. So, she's going to come in and say that she's absolutely crazy about you and that her favorite record of yours is *Autumn Leaves*, which was Roger Williams' record. So you say [in Liberace's voice], 'I'm, I'm really sorry, that's Roger Williams', another piano player.' Then I'll do a punch line."

So I said, [pause, then in Aunt Maud's voice], "Liberace, even though your family was too poor to give you more than one name, God bless you. I still love your work and my favorite record is that *Autumn Leaves*. How you go up and down that keyboard, I'll never know." I sat there, waiting, and Liberace just smiled. So the audience was left with idea that we had no idea, and the audience is thinking, "You jerks, that was Roger Williams." But most of the time, the audience really was terrific about going along with whatever we wanted them to.

SH: What were your feelings when you heard that the show was going to end, and how did you first hear of it?

PM: It wasn't one of those sudden things like an anvil falling on you. After the 25th year, we began to think, "One of these days, one of us is going to leave; one of us is going to die; one of us is going to get sick," or else the show will simply fade into the distance and it'll be time. After the 35th anniversary, we wondered, "How long can a show last?" It was five days a week, 10,000 shows. I think it ended in the best possible way. What would have happened if one of us really would have had an illness, or if the newspaper that the kids pick up the next day all of a sudden said, "Somebody killed in an automobile accident"? That's a hell of a way to close a memory.

When you close it the way we did, it was good. I can't tell you how many times I've run into people who taped the last show and have kept it. Of course, I have a tape of it; we all do. But you know that I watched it for the first time only last month? Not because of a sense of loss, because my attitude was, "Wow, what a run! What terrific laughs."

But I'm so busy doing other stuff, it's only time I'm looking for right now. Besides, I wouldn't miss the guys if I didn't see them. They all have other outlets and you never think, "Gee, I wish I could be there at four o'clock." This was the first State Fair that I didn't go to, but not because I avoided it. I never even thought about it when it was running this year. That was the first one in thirty years I didn't go to because we didn't do a show. It was the best way it could end. When I didn't watch that last tape, it was because I had no abiding need to. Finally, somebody wanted to see it and I watched it with them. It was moving and funny. It was every kind of wonderful spoof at ourselves that Wallace would have included.



You see, we never, never allowed the show to get too serious about itself. You can take comedy too seriously and think, "Hey, we're big stars." The furthest thing from everybody's mind, even with the last show, was Captain Super talking about his next career. Gerald talks about breathing a sigh of relief because, after all these years, thirty-five, (and he's only twelve years old), he is finally getting rid of this nemesis of his. Marshall Good just wanted a place to live under the stairs. Everybody is looking out for themselves. Isn't that real life? Bottom line is, "Yeah, but what's going to happen to me?" That was the plot of the last show. So I laughed and laughed and laughed until the Gerald bit. That got to me.

SH: How did you prepare for that final scene with Gerald when he expresses his love for Wallace and Ladmo? Who wrote that bit?

PM: Wallace did. He wrote the words. I don't recall ad-libbing around them that much because the words were so perfect. Wallace allowed himself a certain level of sensitivity that he normally wouldn't have. He didn't feel terribly comfortable about exposing those kinds of inner soul elements of himself. He didn't mind if you did it, but I would like to tell you that with Wall, it was the result of Stanisloski training. I myself would call on my memory about an event that happened with a puppy once or something like that [to help me feel the part].

But the real question is, how did I get through the whole rest of the show? You know, you're an actor, and then all of a sudden when you're called upon to express that kind of emotion, well, it was close enough to my real feelings, that Gerald spoke for all of us. Listen, he had been building up for all those twenty-eight years that Gerald had been in existence, and you can only be a little son-of-a-bitch for so long.

SH: Can you name some of the characters that are a little lesser known?

PM: I'm not very good at this, because it's like saying, "Tell me the funniest thing that happened, or tell me the best guest you've had on the radio show."

SH: How about ones that the younger viewers had never seen?

PM: Byron Doogood was the first character I ever did. That was the character that Wallace asked me to do when I was watching the show that day in 1960. Byron Doogood was the consummate civic servant, the one who volunteered for everything. He was on the anti-litter campaign, and as he was reading his script, of course, he was tossing the remnants of the papers on the floor.

I mentioned Nuru the Guru. Then there was the oriental cowboy television star named Bamboo Shoot. Somebody wrote to tell us that there were something like seventy-eight characters that they counted. I guess there's someone who is out of a job. Over all those years there might have been even more with all the time machine characters. They were among my favorites. That was fun stuff. How would you do Einstein? What would he do, and what about Beethoven? And so on. Isn't that funny? I honestly cannot



tell you.

SH: What was the inspiration for Zoomar the Spaceman and what kind of character was he?

PM: Boy, this is going to sound patronizing. But, I feel sorry for some of the brilliant, contemporary people like Eddie Murphy who feel obligated to do such constant filth. I don't mind if something is off-color that is written funny, but I do mind when you are hammered over the head. Richard Pryor and Eddie Murphy are just brilliant talents, but I keep responding to the excesses. I guess that bothers me. I like Seinfeld because he doesn't do that. It's not a moral judgment. Sam Kennison would be funnier to me if he didn't scream. I know it's a style gimmick, but I also I think it's the easiest comedy job in the world to be really dirty, to do shock comedy, like shock radio. When you don't do that and you're funny or clever, that I have a real respect for. Then you're saying, "That is a barrier that I have to get around. I have to avoid the easy shot and I have to do something that takes a little bit more mentally." I think that just anybody can drop their pants in front of a convent and get a gasp, but you're not necessarily going to be considered a great talent.

SH: I think that is all of the questions that I have. Is there anything you would like to say in closing?

PM: Thank you, Arizona!

