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BLONDIE!!

by Paul Barringer

In the 1920's, artist Murat (Chic) Young had drawn several comic strips; "The Affairs Of Jane", "Beautiful Bab", and "Dumb Dora", all flapper type strips, typical of the predominate interests of the era.

On September 8, 1930, Young presented his new strip, "Blondie". Early in the strip the focus was on a giddy, flirtatious young flapper named Blondie Boopadoop and her many boyfriends including the wealthy Dagwood Bumstead, a young playboy, heir apparent to the lucrative J. Bolling Bumstead Railroad Empire.

The strip never did take off as Young would have liked, and it was facing the fate of his other strips when Young, in an attempt to bring the strip out of the doleful decline it was in, decided to have Blondie and Dagwood fall in love.

Despite continued objections from J. Bolling Bumstead, about his marrying the lower class girl (Blondie), Dagwood was resolute in his quest to marry Blondie and went on a 28-day hunger strike. Eventually, J. Bolling Bumstead softened his strong stance against the marriage. However, when the couple married on February 17, 1933, Dagwood's family disowned him, and the millionaire J. Bolling Bumstead cut Dagwood off without a cent. Vowing

to live on love, the couple moved to a quiet humble home in the suburbs. Facing a doubtful future during the depression years, and needing to make a living, Dagwood went to work for the J. C. Dithers Construction Company.

The marriage of the two was just what the doctor ordered for Young's strip; soon it started to increase in popularity and became one of the favorites of readers across the nation. Thus was set the foundation for future movies, television shows and, of course, RADIO.

Blondie began on radio July 3, 1939, eventually

running on all three networks until July, 6, 1950. The radio show was originally slated as a summer replacement for "The Eddie Cantor Show", but returned full time. The *Blondie* radio show cast included:

Blondie: Played by, Penny Singleton, Ann Rutherford, Patricia Van Cleve.

Dagwood: Played by, Arthur Lake.

Alexander: (Baby

Dumpling) Played by, Leone Ledoux (infant stage), Tommy Cook, Larry Simms, Bobby Ellis, Jeffrey Silver.

Cookie: Played by, Leone Ledoux (infant stage), Marlene Aames, Norma Jean Nilsson, Joan Rae.

J. C. Dithers: Played by, Hanley Stafford.

Mrs. Dithers: (Cora) Played by Elvia Allman.



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2009 Convention Schedules

34th Friends of Old-time Radio Convention: Oct 22 – 25, 2009 at the Holiday Inn, Newark, NJ; Info; Jay Hickerson, 27436 Desert Rose Ct, Leesburg, FL 34748 (352) 727-6731, JayHick@aol.com, or web site <http://www.fotr.net>

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Herb Woodley: (neighbor). Played by, Frank Nelson, Harold Peary.

Mr. Fuddle: (neighbor). Played by, Harry Lang, Arthur Q. Bryan.

Alvin Fuddle: Played by, Dix Davis.

Dimples Wilson: Played by, Veola Vonn, Lurene Tuttle.

Harriet: (Blondie's friend) Played by, Mary Jane Croft.

Other regulars early in the program included: Hans Conried, Rosemary DeCamp, Ed Mac Donald, and Bill Goodwin. Sponsors for the show included Camel Cigarettes, Super Suds, Colgate and Ford.



Penny Singleton and Arthur Lake

Born (Dorothy McNulty) September 15, 1908, Penny Singleton showed an early interest in show business. Billed as "Baby Dorothy", Penny Singleton at age 8, sang and danced between the periods of acts at a silent movie theater. She joined "The Kiddie Kabaret", a touring vaudeville act (after finishing the sixth grade in elementary school) where she became a skilled performer. In 1927 she debuted on Broadway in "Good News" the musical, in 1930 she repeated the role in a film version of the stage musical.

When she joined the Hollywood scene, and after marrying Lawrence Singleton (a dentist), she changed her name and started being billed as Penny Singleton, (Penny being derived from saving large sums in penny coins). Singleton got her big break in 1938 when the film version of *Blondie* (the comic strip), was cast. Shirley Deane was originally cast as Blondie for the film, but after Deane was unable to perform the role, Singleton dyed her reddish brown (auburn) hair blonde, got the role, and was signed by Columbia. After the success of the film, Singleton was a lock for the radio *Blondie*.

When Singleton left the radio show in 1949, she was replaced by Ann Rutherford for the remainder of the show's run on N.B.C.

When the show moved to A.B.C. Patricia Van Cleve (Mrs. Arthur Lake) played Blondie on the opening program, but was immediately replaced by Ann Rutherford, who continued to portray Blondie for the rest of the run (which was its' last hurrah).

In May of 1950 as a replacement for "*Fibber McGee*" and in June of 1950 as a summer replacement for "*The Bob Hope Show*", Singleton was on radio once again as a widow selling real estate to support two daughters, in a show titled "*The Penny Singleton Radio Show*". In 1950, after the craze for Blondie ended, Singleton, rather than feeling bitter, went on tour with her own night club show which in turn led to USO tours to military bases in Korea.

A keen and insightful business woman, Singleton was also instrumental in creating residuals when she put a clause in her *Blondie* contract which included payment for repeats of the *Blondie* radio shows or movies. In the mid 30's Singleton had been worried about being type cast while playing parts in several movies where she played women of dubious character. She once said "I just didn't want to be typed, it goes to show you how you can eat your words; I became probably the most typed actress in the world. But at least (Blondie) had some dignity".

In the 1973 book, "Saturday Afternoon At The Bijou" (A book on film serials) Singleton said "I'm proud and grateful I was Blondie", "She was dumb and shrewish sometimes, but she was real and sympathetic and warm, a real woman. a human being, and that's how I tried to play her".

Penny Singleton was the voice of Jane Jetson on Hanna Barbera's "*The Jetsons*" TV cartoon show. Singleton was the first woman president of AGVA, (American Guild of Variety Artists) an AFL-CIO affiliated union. In 1966, Singleton was the leader of the first strike of Radio City Music Hall Rockettes, striking for, and gaining improved working conditions.

Singleton received an Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree in 1974 (St.John's University). In the movie "Swing Your Lady" with Humphery Bogart, Penny Singleton was the recipient of the actor's first on screen kiss.

On November 12, 2003 in Sherman Oaks, California, Penny Singleton died from complications of a stroke suffered two weeks earlier at the age of 95. She was interred in San Fernando Mission Cemetery in Los Angeles, California.

Arthur Lake, (Dagwood) was born Arthur Silverlake on April 17, 1905 to parents who were

circus acrobats, billed as "The Flying Silverlakes". The family moved to California in the late 1910's, and Arthur joined the act. As a juvenile, Lake entered the silent film genre of the era, appearing mostly in comedies for Universal Studios. But in 1930 his option was dropped. He freelanced at RKO, Monogram and other studios, until he signed a contract with Columbia Pictures in 1938 to star as Dagwood Bumstead in the *Blondie* film series.

After the 1938 film and three sequels, Lake joined Penny Singleton in carrying the role to radio. Lake became famous for his role of Dagwood, both in films and radio, but he was so identified with the character he seldom was asked to portray any other character on radio or in films. Lake, unlike Penny Singleton, didn't mind being known and typecast as the bumbling, dimwitted Dagwood. He so loved the role, he once said he wished he could play Dagwood forever. In 1950, after the last *Blondie* film (28 total) Lake's career came to an end.

Although Lake did appear as Dagwood in the short-lived CBS TV series *Blondie*, (which only lasted nine months) Lake's dream of playing Dagwood eternally, came to a sudden sad ending when he was only 52. Lake was the brother of actress Florence Lake and the nephew of Marion Davies.

Earlier in his film career Lake played Harold Teen (another comic strip character) in the 1934 movie. Lake was also the voice of Hook, (not Captain Hook of Peter Pan) the Sailor in U.S. NAVY films, similar to Private Snafu in films produced by film studios.

In 1946 Warner Brothers produced an animated short "Hollywood Canine Canteen", where it is possible, but not known for sure, that Arthur Lake might have been the voice for the Dagwood caricature. The animated short was about a group of dogs that decided celebrity dogs deserved a nightclub for dogs. All of the dogs looked like Hollywood celebrities, such as Edward G. Robinson, Jimmy Durante and others. Some of the dogs had celebrity like names, such as, 'Kanine Kayser', "Boney Goodman", "Hairy James" and "Dogwood and Blondie". The movie was on TCM cable channel on December 3, 2005

Arthur Lake died of a heart attack In Indian Wells, California, on January 9, 1987, and was interred in the Hollywood Forever Cemetery in Hollywood.

SOME INTERESTING TRIVIA:

On the *Penny Singleton* show in 1950, Singleton played Penny Williamson, Mary Lee Robb played her daughter Dorothy, and daughter Sue was played by Sheilah James. Others in the cast included, Jim Backus who played Penny's partner in the realty firm, the role he played was that of Horace Wiggins, Bea Benaderet appeared as Margaret, Penny's cook and Gale Gordon was Judge Beshomer Grundell.

In the 1957 *Blondie* Television show, Pamela Britton was cast as Blondie, Dagwood was played by Arthur Lake, Herb Woodley was played by Harold Peary, Elvia Allman was seen as Cora Dithers, the same role she had in the *Blondie* radio series. In the 1968 *Blondie* Television show, Patricia Harty was Blondie, Dagwood was played by Will Hutchins and Jim Backus was Mr. Dithers, Will Hutchins was Sugarfoot on television, and still attends some conventions, the most recent was when he received the Cincinnati Old Time Radio Convention's "Stone-Waterman Award" in 2004.



Blondie was one of 20 comic strips to appear in the 1995 "Comic Strip Classics" series of U.S. postage stamps. The *Blondie* comic strip is still appearing in over 2,000 newspapers 7 days a week and reaches over 250 million readers, the strip is even shown in Kuwait (of all places) and is on many comic strip web pages.

Unlike many comic strips, *Blondie* has kept up with times, although she and husband Dagwood never seem to age, her kids are grown and are teenagers. Blondie, along with her neighbor, Tootsie Woodley, runs a catering service, even using a laptop computer. If Baby Dumpling, aka Alexander Bumstead, hadn't stopped growing in his teens in the strip, he would be 71 years old.

Dagwood still works for J. C. Dithers; he is the webmaster for the company.

Dagwood no longer has to run out the door every morning to catch the bus, he now carools.

2005 marked the 75th anniversary of the Blondie comic strip.

In 1941, the Bumstead's second child, Cookie, (who was named in a readers' contest) arrived. In the contest nearly half a million suggestions were submitted, the prize was only a mere \$100.00.

The Dagwood sandwich is even in the dictionary. In Webster's New World Dictionary it is described as "A thick sandwich with a variety of fillings, often of apparently incompatible foods, such as peanut butter, avocado, horseradish and a fish". The American Heritage Dictionary lists it as Dag-wood, a multilayered sandwich with a variety of fillings, (after Dagwood Bumstead, a character in the comic strip *Blondie*). The Mustard Museum plans to nominate Dagwood into their Mustard Hall of Heroes.

On the radio program, there were several different openings, "Uh-uh-uh Don't Touch That Dial, It's time for..... (Lake:) Blond-deee, or Uh-uh-uh Don't Touch That Dial, Listen To.....(Lake:) Blond-deee, Another opening was, Uh-uh-uh Don't Touch That Dial, Because There's Nothing Else On, You Might As Well Listen to..... (Lake:) Blond-deee.

Dagwood's name never appeared in the title of any of the Blondie movies.

In 1947, King Features Syndicate published a book called "Blondie's Cook Book" (I have an updated copy circa 1966) in which there is a collection of 277 recipes for Dagwood's favorite soups, salads and "SANDWICHES" which includes the Skyscraper Special (aka The Dagwood) which is the famous sandwich listed in the dictionary and seen in the comic strip.

How well I remember listening to the Blondie radio program and wondering if there really was some one as dim-witted as Dagwood, but oh how I enjoyed every minute of the program.

Research for this article includes: Hundreds of web sites, Library of Congress, Find a Grave, Imdb, Public Library, old radio tapes and old radio magazines.

On the OTR Bookshelf...

A New 700 Club: *Talk Radio Wants You*

Reviewed by Jim Cox

As an online publicist for more than 100 authors as well as a talk show host, Francine Silverman gives readers the low-down on becoming a guest on radio talk shows in her new McFarland book. In *Talk Radio Wants You: An Intimate Guide to 700 Shows and How to Get Invited*, Silverman maintains: "It's a lot easier to get a guest spot on radio than to get newspaper coverage." That should be especially eye-opening for anyone traditionally relying on press releases and contacts with print media for publicity purposes.

The author capitalizes on a sector of broadcasting that began to emerge in the late 1960s, a decade after golden age radio was eclipsed by disc jockeys filling vacant airtime. In increasing numbers of metropolitan markets, key stations stopped playing music one day and adopted a news-and-information format the next. By the 1980s, telephone call-in series, interviews, news and public affairs were hallmarks of radio without music. The popularity of such shows laced with current events, personal, political and special interest issues eventually dominated the aural air in hundreds of local markets. The names of legions of local talk show hosts became familiar within reach of their broadcast towers. And a favored few gained platforms that literally carried their exchanges from shore to shore with commensurate recognition.

To the amazement of many who will buy Silverman's text, she has documented no fewer than 700 hosts belonging to that club. All welcome a wide range of guests to their programs for one-on-one chats about myriad topics. Not all of their shows are broadcast in the traditional sense of the term; many are fed by Internet websites rather than "terrestrial radio" as she designates stations on the air with call letters.

The author has helpfully assigned her club of 700 to one of 40 genres (think of it!) including subgroups like Authors, Business, Finance, Marketing, Entertainment, Food/Wine, Health/Fitness, Politics, Relationships, Religion/Atheism, Self Help, Sports, Travel/Living Abroad, and Women. From questionnaires dispatched to hosts she gleaned a plethora of data

revealing what they are looking for in guests, what a typical guest from hell is like and the types of verbal exchanges characterizing their shows, plus info on how to contact them. At the end of the 315-page soft cover encyclopedia is a particularly illuminating Appendix offering "The 100 Top Talk Shows" based on selections by a leading magazine.

Talk Radio Wants You is a fact-filled adventure into an area most know little about. At \$75, it may be ordered from www.mcfarlandpub.com or 800-253-2187. "I encourage people to use radio as their voice for promoting books, businesses and services," Silverman urges. "After all, it's free and easy." It's possible her comprehensive volume may be the easiest way yet to make the proper connections.



New in the Tape and CD Libraries

by Maletha King

Your club needs your help. We need someone to do the mailing of our newsletter. This amounts to picking up the newsletters from the printer, applying pre-printed address labels and postage and dropping the newsletters in the mail. Rick has done this chore for several years now but he is planning to move on. Anyone who is interested in helping should call me at (303) 761-4139, or contact Larry Weide by email at rhac_otr@yahoo.com.

Also, our printer has informed us that they are going to increase our printing costs by 20%. Since this will have a significant affect on our treasury, I have to ask if anyone might know a printer who would like to make a competitive bid on this job?

Now that we have covered the business side of things, let's sit back and enjoy the new shows that are being offered on CD's this month. We're including "Screen Director's Playhouse" and "Lux Radio Theater". Both of these shows are hour long series and feature the film original casts.

Next we're offering "The Weird Circle". These shows will satisfy those member who want some thrills in their listening.

It's All in the Name

By Paul Barringer

Did you ever wonder why celebrities change their birth names to something else when they reach stardom? Is it because their birth name just doesn't have that glitter or flamboyant flair that sets them apart from the ordinary person?

For instance, would you prefer Alphonso D'Abruzzo instead of Alan Alda, Allen Konigsberg instead of Woody Allen, or maybe Edward Albert Heimberger in place of Eddie Albert? How about Frederick Austerlitz instead of Fred Astaire, or could we call Bogart's wife, (Lauren Bacall) Betty Joan Perske, or maybe you would prefer to call Boris Karloff William Henry Pratt. It just doesn't sound the same does it?

I guess there are perfectly good reasons why celebrities get rid of their real names. Maybe it's to make them more recognizable to their public, or perhaps they just didn't like their birth name.

No matter what the reasoning, it usually works for most of them. It seems like everyone changes their name when they hit the big time, including most movie stars, singers, rock stars, television personalities, authors and writers and even professional athletes. The name changes are not limited to those listed above; even some of our O.T.R. stars changed their names. Below is a very short list of some of them.

Fred Allen - John Sullivan
 Don Ameche - Dominic Felix Amici
 Eve Arden - Eunice Quedens
 Jack Benny - Benjamin Kubelsky
 Milton Berle - Milton Berlinger
 Fanny Brice - Fanny Borach
 George Burns - Nathan Birnbaum
 Jeff Chandler - Ira Grossel
 Lee J. Cobb - Leo Jacoby
 Clayton "Bud" Collyer - Clayton Heermance Jr.
 Lou Costello - Louis Francis Cristillo
 Bing Crosby - Harry Lillis Crosby
 Ken Curtis - Curtis Wain Gates
 Dale Evans - Frances Octavia Smith
 Bob Hope - Leslie Townes Hope
 Al Jolson - Asa Yoelson
 Arthur Lake - Arthur Silverlake
 Groucho Marx - Julius Marx
 Roy Rogers - Leonard Slye
 Penny Singleton - Dorothy McNulty
 Wolfman Jack - Robert Smith

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