

Entertainment Outlook

Frank Shuster "stories from the road"

Frank Shuster (of Wayne and) is a good collector and relater of stories. So is his partner, of course, but this column is about Shuster.

He and I bump into each other fairly frequently, and if there's a little free time we get into some reminiscing, which is how I pick up a few of Frank's stories.

He told me, for example, about the very first television program W. and S. did — not, as you might think, in Toronto, but in New York. They were

doing a highly successful radio series for CBC at the time, which was 1950 — two years before there was any Canadian television.

Their sponsor (yes, CBC radio had sponsors in those days) was Toni Home Permanent — remember "Which twin has the Toni?" A high ranking representative of that company visited Toronto and met the Canadian comedy team his U.S. company was sponsoring. He was impressed enough that he invited

them to New York to appear on a television show the same company was sponsoring there, on CBS. It was called Toni Twin Time.

Frank and Johnny went to New York and appeared on the program, and Frank still remembers that the host was an engaging young man named Jack Lemmon.

Their guest appearance went well enough that they were invited back for a second appearance, which they did later that summer. The sponsor

then told them they should move to New York and get into television there, but they declined that offer.

About 11 years later, Wayne and Shuster were in Los Angeles, filming a summer replacement series called Holiday Lodge. One day, Frank and his wife, Ruth, were driving along Sunset Boulevard when Ruth noticed the man driving the car next to them: Jack Lemmon, by now a big film star.

Both cars were stopped for a red light. As the light changed Shuster pulled ahead, but not before calling out to Lemmon: "Hey, I remember you from Toni Twin Time."

Frank Shuster is a pretty good movie buff, and not without good reason. When he was a young boy, his father ran a movie theatre in Toronto and young Frank spent a lot of time watching the flicks.

For some reason, one of the early films he always remembered was a 1931 fantasy called Just Imagine, whose cast included a then-up-and-coming young actor named Frank Albertson. Shuster was aware of Albertson's career for many years afterward. Albertson appeared in such noted movies as Alice Adams, The Plainsmen, Room Service, The Hucksters, The Last Hurrah and many others. His last film, in 1963, was Bye, Bye, Birdie, made a year before Albertson died at the age of 55.

Barris Beat

But in 1961, again when Wayne and Shuster were in Los Angeles making Holiday Lodge, Frank spotted Frank Albertson (by now a white-haired man) at Chasen's Restaurant. Shuster recognized him immediately, and still remembered the first time he had seen Albertson in Just Imagine — 30 years before.

When the two men accidentally met in the washroom of Chasen's, Frank Shuster couldn't resist saying to Frank Albertson: "I loved you in Just Imagine."

That Johnny Wayne and Frank Shuster were longtime Jack Benny fans was not new to me. I still remember with fondness a TV special they once did titled An Affectionate Look At Jack Benny.

What I didn't know, until Frank mentioned it, was that they had worked with Benny way back in 1943 — in Toronto.

Benny was touring armed forces bases at the time and his schedule included a show at Camp Borden, Ontario. Because he couldn't get back to New York in time for his regular Sunday night broadcast, it was arranged that he would do it from the CBC's McGill Street studio theatre in Toronto, and feed to NBC in New York.

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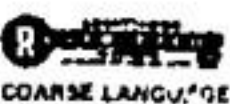
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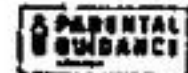
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