

# Foreword

*by Will Hutchins*

I'm glad I grew up on radio. As a wee lad, I'd take the bus to Hollywood and scrounge for tickets to see my idols of the airwaves in action. One time I sat beneath an overhanging mike at CBS and laughed my head off. Next day my school chums told me they'd heard me on *Burns and Allen*— my show biz debut.

Nighttime was magic time. Radio on, I'd lie in the semi-dark, listening. The amber hallway light kept the goblins away. I was transported to another dimension, the theatre of the mind. Radio provided story, actors, music and sound effects — I provided the rest. Budgets of my radio shows were limitless, for my dreams were boundless.

Tommy Cook and I went to different schools together. On Saturdays of yore, I'd cheer for ol' Tom as he volleyed and thundered on the tennis courts of Griffith Park. Then I'd bike over to the Atwater Theater and cheer some more when Tommy as Little Beaver and Don Barry as Red Ryder on the screen, foiled the schemes of the evil Ace Hanlon. Tommy's night job was playing Alexander Bumstead on the *Blondie* radio show.

I remember growing up in a gentler, carefree, smog-free Los Angeles where you knew all your neighbors for blocks around and Saturday movie matinees cost a dime. I'd whoop and holler as my cowboy heroes rode across the silver screen, guns a-blazing. I loved Hoot, Hoppy, Smiley, Andy, Gabby, Tex, Roy, Gene, Johnny Mack, and Don "Red" Barry, Lash, Durango Kid, and all the rest.

Many years later I hired on at the Warner Bros. "ranch" in Burbank, just one feller in a stable full of television cowboys. Clint "Cheyenne" Walker was our foreman. He trail-blazed the way for us; he was the king, the backbone of Warner Bros. Television. And there were the stars of *Maverick*, *Bronco*, *Colt .45*, and *Lawman*, none of whom ever went on location; every darn outdoor scene was shot in wild-west Warner Bros. fashion — meaning in their back lot.

For some reason I reminded my bosses of Will Rogers, so quicker than a fast draw they changed my name from Marshall Lowell Hutchason to Will Hutchins. My real name was too long, they insisted. (Soon after, they hired Efrem Zimbalist, Junior.) For all my years as *Sugarfoot* (1957–1961), we were always boxed into musty sound stages or the cramped back lot we shared with all the other Warner Bros. westerns. Once I lost control of a few head of cattle and rode them down the main western street into the middle of a scene being filmed for *Maverick*.

Occasionally, the producers would toss in some stock footage from the Warner Bros. film library to give the illusion of a higher budget. Then I'd get to dude-up in assorted outfits to match the stock shots. Over the years, I had the privilege of wearing Walter Brennan's shirt, Errol Flynn's coat, and Humphrey Bogart's pants. I never felt comfortable in my own duds, somehow reminding me of *Buster Brown*.

The roughest, toughest gang in the west was not the James Gang, nor the Dalton brothers, and not the Younger brothers either — it was the Warner brothers! They rode us hard and put us away wet. After a grueling week of 14-hour days in the 1950s, they'd send us western actors out on weekends for personal appearances for which Warners was paid handsomely and we were paid ugly.

Despite all the projections of Warner Bros., the emerging star turned out to be Bugs Bunny, the superstar of the lot, coming out of the small bungalow which was the home of the Warner Bros. animated cartoon department. Not long after *Sugarfoot* bit the dust (he flunked his bar exam), the entire Warner Bros. television department went down the tube, followed shortly thereafter by most TV westerns.

But I returned to those thrilling days of yesteryear when in 1998 my lovely wife, Babs, and I found the Friends of Old Time Radio (FOTR) Convention in Newark, New Jersey. (Or did they find us?) No matter — it was paradise! I now met all my boyhood heroes and heroines up close and personal. Shucks, those radio folks welcomed me with open arms — great people. Such camaraderie. The radio stars of yore were now in their 60s, 70s, 80s, even 90s, but their voices still rang clear and true, evoking countless memories. Radio actors can be of any age, color, height, or look — the voice is still all! What's more, I got to work with them as well since I was enlisted to fill in on four radio show re-creations... sort of like a utility infielder. Worked a few rodeos, never worked radio — easy roper, interloper, Sugarfoot.

One of my roles was in "The Return of the Cavendish," the 20th anniversary show of *The Lone Ranger*. I played a Western Union messenger and was seated on the stage next to Fran Striker, Jr., son of the show's creator and writer. When the magnificent voice of Fred Foy intoned "From out of the past come the thundering hoofbeats of the great horse, Silver" and the *William Tell Overture* soared, accompanied by hoofbeats and gunshots, well, I was a kid again.

In this re-creation, John Hart was a stalwart Lone Ranger, backed up by Dick Beals, Jackson "Cisco Kid" Beck, sweet Elaine Hyman, and Earl George, a Tonto for the ages; most were WXYZ alums. Sound effects experts Ray Erlenborn and Bob Mott played Silver and other sundry animals as needed. And of course, the Ranger and Tonto grunted every time they got off their horses.

Babs and I moseyed back to the FOTR convention several times. That's where I met up with David S. Siegel and Jack French; in fact, Jack appeared in one of the re-creations with me. Both these guys are diligent old-time radio historians, whose research abilities match their writing skills. The two of them love radio westerns as much as I do, so I was downright pleased when they asked me to write the foreword to their book.

They've corralled a posse of radio historians and western experts who wrote individual sections on the western series they've researched the most. Each one of these knowledgeable fellers and gals have nailed down the complete history of the shows they know best, so I reckon this volume will inform and entertain everyone. Most of their efforts were aimed at the more popular and durable series: *The Lone Ranger*, *Tom Mix*, *Red Ryder*, *Gunsmoke*,

