COMIC BOOKS, RADIO “DAZE” AND THE BIRTH OF TELEVISION

QUINN: I was a reader of things that amused me. I had a ton of comic books with Donald Duck, Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig and other characters. I remember my Dad occasionally bought me some Classic Comics. Actually, looking back I think Classic Comics were really a pretty good idea.

Q: These were comics based on The Odyssey or other literary works? --

QUINN: Yes! Like the Tale of Two Cities -- but in comic book form. A regular comic book cost a dime and a Classic Comic was 15 cents. Probably my first choice would have been Donald Duck or Looney Toons or something like that. But I remember reading those Classic Comics and being introduced to more serious subjects. I was also a big listener of radio.

Q: What were your favorites -- “Lone Ranger,” “Jack Armstrong?"

QUINN: “Lone Ranger,” and “The Shadow.”

Q: Oh yes.

QUINN: “FBI in Peace and War,” "David Harding, Counter Spy,", "G-Men". I sent away for a David Harding badge. I still remember getting it in the mail, with my own serial number. It could be turned into a magnifying glass for secret detection work.-

Q: How about “The Little Orphan Annie?” Was that --

QUINN: No. I don’t remember listening to it at all. I didn’t read it in the comics, either.

Q: It may have -- the --

QUINN: Maybe it was a little bit before my time or something.

Q: Yeah, it was big in my time but I think it may have slipped.

QUINN: Yeah!

Q: Ovaltine sponsored.

QUINN: Ovaltine.

Q: And Ovaltine was not that great.

QUINN: I still to this day drive around in our car listening to the old classic radio programs. My wife listens to them and enjoys them, and she's from Vietnam (laughs). I made my kids listen to old time shows like The Shadow" while on trips in the car. I told them "I want you to experience what it was like when I was a kid growing up." I remember some of the scary shows, like "Lights Out" and "Suspense." Now, in 2016, I even make my twenty-something employees listen to these old programs like Dragnet when we are traveling together.

Q: Yeah.

QUINN: "Henry Aldrich," "Meet Corliss Archer," and "A Date with Judy" we're other favorites when I was a kid.

Q: What about movies?

QUINN: I remember going to the movies in the Bronx. We didn't go that often. I know where the movie theaters were. There was one on 204th Street that we walked to from Decatur Avenue. Later we moved to another neighborhood. It was not for very long -- just about nine months. It was up at 211th Street and Gun Hill Road. The movie theater was on White Plains Avenue. Going to the movies was a neat experience, because the theaters seemed so grand. But I don't remember going very often. I remember going to see a film about Sgt. York and how he and just a few Americans captured a large number of Germans. He used an imitation of a turkey call to get enemy soldiers to pop up their heads and then he would shoot them.

Q: Yeah.

QUINN: I remember going to black and white movies and there was usually a double feature. We would walk in the middle of one film, and then stay to see the end of it. You then would watch the entire second film. After that, you would watch the beginning of the first film until you said, "Oh, this is where I came in." The other memory I have about movies was very occasionally going to a theater near Times Square when we were in Manhattan. I recall going to a "Martin and Lewis" film that wouldn't have made it to our neighborhood theaters.

There were also recording studios in the Times Square area where you could make your own novelty record as a souvenir. My Dad made one where he had me as the star player for the New York Yankees, and then would interview other family members to ask them to comment on my greatness as a player. For some reason, I recall that he introduced my Grandpa Jack as the

Commissioner of Baseball. Every now and then, my family would take it out at home and play it on our Victrola.

Another time, my Mom took me to mid-town Manhattan and wanted to give me a special treat, perhaps it was for my birthday. Aunt Kitty might have given her the money to take me out. I could choose between going to another Martin and Lewis premiere or seeing the Rodeo at Madison Square Garden. I was crying because I couldn't decide which I wanted. Both seemed wonderful and I didn't want to miss either, and as a result my Mom became very frustrated with me. We ended up going to the Rodeo, but to this day what I mostly recall is the terrible pain I felt not being able to decide.

Q: Yeah.

QUINN: And then you went home.

Q: What about politically? Where'd your family fall? Or did you have any feel for it?

QUINN: Well, there were some members of my family who were strong Democrats. My folks were pretty conservative. I remember them sitting around at family events, yelling and shouting at each other about whether Roosevelt knew in advance that Pearl Harbor was going to be bombed. I think my Dad thought he did, and he would be shouting at his sisters and brother-in-law about why they didn't think that. I don't remember ever being told that we were Republicans or Democrats or how my parents voted. But I remember that they did vote. I recall my aunts talking about how the Irish were discriminated against and how they recalled the "No Irish Need Apply" signs just a decade or two earlier. I remember distinctly that in school the Nuns told us that we had to understand that because we were Catholic, we could never be president.

Q: What about in the neighborhood, were sort of the wives standing on the stoops telling kids what they could do? Sort of supervising you?

QUINN: Yes, of course they were! You were supposed to be within shouting distance of your home. If you were just out playing on the sidewalk, you were OK. The moms didn't stay out and supervise. But eventually, your mother would come out and shout your name very loudly. She would yell, "Kenny, Come Home!" That was your signal to go home for dinner. You weren't supposed to play outside of shouting range.

Q: Yeah.

QUINN: That was your call, like a dog whistle or something. --

Q: Yeah.

QUINN: I remember my uncle would tell this story -- one I don't have any memory of it, but he told it many times. He said that I was having such a good time playing that I didn't want to go home. So to trick my mother, I would tell the other kids to "Call me Bobby." In that way, when my mother is looking for me, if she hears somebody referring to me as Bobby, she won't think it's me and I'll be able to stay out longer. It was early preparation for the duplicity that could be involved in some aspects of my later life in diplomacy and intelligence.

Q: (laughs)

QUINN: Moms would be looking around to check on you from time to time, but there wasn't a felt need for a constant presence. And kids didn't wander off too often, although, as I explained before, I did.

Q: Kids, if they got too far afield or a little bit too rambunctious, a neighbor would tell you what to do.

QUINN: That's right. Mothers might echo the calls of other moms looking for their kids to come home. Sort of like the jungle telegraph in Tarzan movies. So Mrs. De Matteo, might repeat my Mom's "Kenny, Come Home" call down Decatur Avenue if she didn't see me responding.

Q: Yeah.

QUINN: Mrs. Antonucci or Mrs. Sacks might do the same. Kids on our block were different ages and had different rules.

Q: Yeah.

QUINN: But since you all had to play together, you always understood where your place was in the pecking order on the block.

Q: Yeah.

QUINN: Who's older and better at sports dictated the male hierarchy on the block of Decatur Avenue between 200th and 201st street. That was our Block, my universe. It even mattered on

which side of the street you lived. When you left the Block, you were in an alien world with its own hierarchy and alpha kids.

Q: Incidentally, what were your favorite meals?

QUINN: I remember really liking grilled lamb chops with burned fat. I loved my Mom's Irish stew. That was always a favorite. But stew and lamb chops were for supper. Pancakes on Sunday morning were a huge favorite. I disliked liver, but enjoyed the bacon that came with it. We usually had tuna fish salad on Friday (no meat for Catholics), but I was not wild about it. I still recall how delicious a charred grilled hamburger was at the Dutch Mill (I think that was the name) restaurant on 204th street [it had a wind mill on top of the building or as part of the sign]. The smells of Coney Island and of the hot dogs there are another indelible olfactory memory.

Q: How about what newspaper did you get or --

QUINN: My Dad would bring the newspaper home. I recall the World Telegram, which later became the World Telegram and Sun. It seemed business oriented. At night we might go out and get the New York Daily News, which cost two cents. It was tomorrow's news, and it would hit the news stand at about 9:00pm. So somebody would give me two cents and I would go down a block and a half to Webster Avenue where the newsstand by the entrance to the El was located and where you could buy the New York Daily News and bring it home. On Sunday we got the Journal American. What I remember were the comics. My Dad would read the Sunday comics to me including "The Katzenjammer Kids" and "Jiggs" and --

Q: Hans and Fritz!

QUINN: Hans and Fritz. And, and then "Jiggs" and --

Q: Maggie.

QUINN: -- I believe it was called "Bringing Up Father?"

Q: Jiggs and --

QUINN: Maggie and poor Jiggs, dressed in his vest and wearing spats. He was always getting in trouble.

Q: Yeah, Jiggs and Maggie were Irish.

QUINN: Is that right? “Mutt and Jeff," was popular as was Blondie and Dagwood, which I still read religiously every morning even today in 2016. The only other comics I still read now are Doonesbury and Mother Goose and Grimm. I love Grimmy the dog. If Calvin and Hobbes was still published, it would be on my must read everyday list, as would The Far Side.

Q: Yeah.

QUINN: So getting to see the comics every Sunday was a big deal for me. Other than that, I don’t remember reading the newspapers. I remember when we got TV, however, that was a huge occurrence.

Q: Do you recall any of the things on TV?

QUINN: Oh, I recall a large number of things on TV when we got it. I remember a local show in New York called, “Mr. I-Magination.” It was on Sunday evenings. He was "the man with the magic reputation" or something like that. And he would tell stories and play the piccolo and the stories would magically come to life. Kukla, Fran and Ollie was on but I didn't care for it as much as I liked the Howdy Doody show, with Buffalo Bob and Clarabelle. Captain Video and the Video Ranger were huge. I got a Capt. Video ray gun for Christmas that was basically a flashlight with a pulsing switch, but it seemed so cool!

I also remember watching lot of old black and white serials that used to be shown in movie theaters every Saturday morning in the 1930s, but were later serialized on TV in the 1940s and 50s. Shows like "Don Winslow of the Navy,” “Don Winslow of the Coast Guard,” “Ace Drummond,” which was about World War I pilots flying in combat; and "Radio Patrol" about police cars now linked for the first time to headquarters by two way radios.

There was also a short public service type clip I recall seeing many times that promoted race and religious relations. It was an all-star jazz ensemble made up of Black and white and Jewish musicians (including Lionel Hampton) and the "beautiful music they made together." It made a lasting impression.

I remember that occasionally I got to stay up late at night to watch “My Friend Irma," or the original, very first “Tonight Show,” which was called, “Broadway Open House" with Jerry Lester.” I remember watching Charlie Chan movies, and “East Side Kids” or Bowery Boys movies, which I really liked.

Q: Bowery Boys --

QUINN: Oh, I loved them.

Q: Leo Gorcey --

QUINN: Leo Gorcey, Huntz Hall.

Q: Oh yeah (laughs)!

QUINN: That was New York City.

Q: Yeah.

QUINN: I remember watching a show called “Big Town” with Steve Wilson the hard nosed editor of the Illustrated Press, fighting crime. Speaking of crime, I have distinct memories of watching Congressional investigations being broadcast live on TV, including the Kefauver Committee hearings on organized crime, and the House UnAmerican Activities Committee that included Sen. Joe McCarthy going after people inside the government and the State Department whom he suspected of being Communist sympathizers or spies. The Korean War was on my scope and I recall Eisenhower’s pledge that he would ”go to Korea” as part of the 1952 election campaign. So I guess I was beginning to pay attention to news and government and international affairs at the age of ten.