



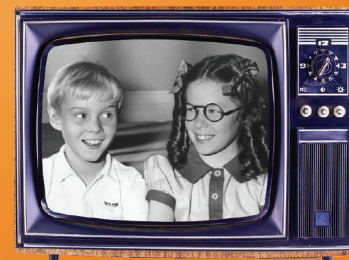
TV Dinners



**40 Classic TV Kid Stars
Dish Up Favorite Recipes
with a Side of Memories**



By Laurie Jacobson



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*This book is lovingly dedicated to child actors everywhere.
Your road is not an easy one. Your sacrifices are great,
but oh, the lovely light you leave behind.*

Foreword

By Paul Petersen

When you come into people's living rooms once a week, people understandably feel they know you. And so it was in the mid-'50s when television took over the world of entertainment. Three networks, 100 million television sets. For kids who were featured on the many shows that drew entire families into the living room, the effects were immediate... and unprecedented. Fame, real Fame on a level only rarely seen in the world of motion pictures, became a suffocating reality.

Kid actors suddenly found themselves the center of attention when they went to the movies, shopping, even just walking down the street. Airports became a gauntlet of autographs and hurriedly snapped pictures. You had to attend family gatherings, so your cousins and shirt-tail relations didn't think you were "stuck up." And fan mail came in oversized canvas bags.

For the guys, meeting girls got easier. For girls, the dating world became perilous, indeed since every hormonal male wanted to be "the first." I got a black eye now and then standing up for my big TV sister, Shelley Fabares.

My father, an engineer at Lockheed, accurately summed up the process. "I used to love it when I could introduce you as my son...but I hated it when I was introduced as your father."

And everywhere the same words: "Don't let this go to your head."
Yeah, right.

Say what you will about the famous kids working the sunny side of the street in Hollywood in the Golden Era of television. They knew where to hang out.

In the Hollywood of the '50s, young actors didn't have a lot of opportunities to socialize. Often we'd see each other on auditions and despite the competitive situation, find the time to visit. You might meet up at the Work Permit office downtown; or, if you already had a regular job on a series, at one of the rare events that brought the well-known kids together like the Hollywood Christmas Lane parade or an arranged gathering where our various publicity agents got us together for roller skating, bowling or a traditional pool party. What a pack we were—fifteen or twenty kid stars from mostly television shows like *Lassie*, *Father Knows Best*, *Leave it to Beaver*, *The Mickey Mouse Club*, *Dennis the Menace*...a pack of puppies learning as we went.

This was long before the days of Craft Service (a company that caters an array of food throughout the day on the set.) Food is now provided by the Producers. When you worked (in the '50s), you went out for lunch; once it was time to eat, you had choices to make. If you were in the Valley, it was DuPar's or the Hot Dog Show. If you were in Hollywood at CBS Television Center, you headed for Farmer's Market or Canter's Deli. The circuit of favored restaurants ran past all the major studios, commercial houses, and dance studios. For us, these places were about more than the great food; it was a chance to get out of the dark, stale soundstage, to feel the bright, warm California sun on your skin...and to see some girls.

What fun, those Good Ol' Days as a working kid actor in Old Hollywood...

Paul Petersen

Jeff Stone on *The Donna Reed Show*

Introduction

Growing up in the '50s and '60s was a pretty swell time for most Baby Boomers. Television was still a new and wondrous delight broadcasting shows in black and white with orange tubes glowing in the back and funny “rabbit ears” on top that had to be adjusted just right. During the Golden Age of Television, just three channels ruled the airwaves. That meant, in 1960, when 90% of American homes had TVs, about 55 million people watched each show every week for years! With all the channels that exist today, that is a phenomenon unique to one generation and will never be repeated.

And long before streaming, or DVRs or even VCRs, family members came running from all corners at the appointed time to gather in front of often the only TV set in the home to enjoy their favorite programs together. For many, watching them became a family tradition.

Today, a plethora of nostalgic networks allow Boomers to enjoy their favorite shows again with their children and grandchildren. Families continue to bond watching Classic TV series and the kids who starred in them. These icons and the characters they played are firmly embedded in our popular culture, cherished by millions of loyal fans who continue to celebrate them. We didn't just watch those kids grow up, we grew up with them. They are an indelible part of the fabric of our lives.

To this very day, the shared experience of watching these kid stars continues to connect us with family, with friends, and even with complete strangers. If someone shouts “Danger, Will Robinson!” we freeze in our tracks. When a Boomer says, “He's a real Eddie Haskell,” we know EXACTLY what that means! We were all part of the “peanut gallery.” We all sent in soup labels and cereal box tops for secret decoder rings and other treasures. Everyone knew how to spell Mickey Mouse. The kids on television were thought of as best friends and blood brothers. Their photos hung in bedrooms and school lockers across the nation.

At a time before society was so connected, these kids *were* the connection for millions of

people. The Mouseketeers got it right when they sang their closing theme: “Now it’s time to say goodbye to all our family...” We were family. That’s how we felt.

And as our extended family, having dinner with our TV best friends just seemed natural. Swanson even developed a packaged meal to eat while watching them called a TV dinner. It fit nicely on a folding table called a TV tray which was the perfect height for dining while sitting on the couch. That’s what many of us did, but what did the kids we were watching do? What did they eat back then...and where? For that matter, what do they eat today? I asked 40 of them to share their favorite dishes from then and now—some passed down through their families, others from restaurants now extinct, but all served with a side of delicious memories that provides glimpses into their lives both as child stars and as adults. Hope you brought your appetite!

Laurie Jacobson
Santa Rosa, CA

Laurie Jacobson is a celebrated Hollywood historian, writer, and reformed stand-up comic. She has authored *Hollywood Heartbreak*, *Hollywood Haunted*, *Dishing Hollywood* and *Timmy’s in the Well—The Jon Provost Story* as well as having contributed to several other tomes on Hollywood history.

She has written and produced documentaries, television series and specials, including *The 20th Anniversary of the Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *The Museum of Television and Radio’s Salute to Funny Women of Television*, *The Warner Bros. Studio Rededication Party*, *The Suzanne Somers Show*, *Photoplay* and *Hollywood Chronicles*. For nearly a decade, she served as head of development for legendary producer Jack Haley, Jr.



As a reigning expert on Tinseltown mysteries, scandals, and ghosts, Laurie appears regularly on television, podcasts and radio. In 2017, the Southern California Motion Picture Council presented her with their Lifetime Achievement Award for her outstanding literary contributions in the entertainment industry. She and husband Jon Provost make their home in Northern California.



1950s

No singular invention changed American life more in the 1950s than television. Regional and societal divisions faded as the country discovered they shared values, dreams...and a lot of laughter. *I Love Lucy* ruled. Popular sitcoms like *Leave It to Beaver*, *The Donna Reed Show* and *Father Knows Best* presented perfect families with briefcase-toting dads bidding goodbye to perfectly coiffed moms while the kids created mischief, but always learned their lesson.

And speaking of kids, an array of shows was made just for them like *The Mickey Mouse Club* and its serial, *Spin and Marty*. Westerns were huge; and nothing could beat the adventures of a boy and his dog. Yes, the '50s was a great time to grow up with TV.

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Dennis the Menace



Dennis the Menace follows the antics of the well-meaning but mischievous Dennis Mitchell. The series starred Jay North as Dennis Mitchell; Herbert Anderson as his father, Henry; Gloria Henry as his mother, Alice; Joseph Kearns as George Wilson and Sylvia Field as his wife, Martha; Gale Gordon took over as George's brother, John Wilson after Kearns's death with Sara Seegar as his wife, Eloise; and Jeannie Russell as Dennis's friend, Margaret. It ran four seasons on CBS on Sunday evenings from October 4, 1959, to July 7, 1963, for a total of 146 episodes.

Jay North

Jay North was 7 years old when he was chosen to be the TV personification of the Hank Ketcham comic strip, *Dennis the Menace*. He'd already been working steadily for years by then as a child model and actor in commercials and small parts on a number of variety shows like *The George Gobel Show*, *The Eddie Fisher Show*, and *The Milton Berle Show*. The success of those appearances led to bigger roles on popular series like *Wanted: Dead or Alive* starring Steve McQueen, *77 Sunset Strip*, *Rescue 8*, *Cheyenne*, *Bronco*, *Colt .45*, and *Sugarfoot*. And he'd made appearances on the big screen in *The Miracle of the Hills* and *The Big Operator*.

Then, in June 1958, Jay auditioned for *Dennis*. Hank Ketcham chose Jay personally over 500 others. Jay filmed a pilot that summer with Herbert Anderson, Gloria Henry, and Joseph Kearns. But close to a year passed before they moved forward with the series. *Dennis the Menace* premiered on Sunday, October 4, 1959, and was an instant smash.

Jay's father left when he was four. While his mother worked, his aunt and uncle had charge of him both on the set and off. Jay's personal life, however, was far from happy. His aunt and uncle were cruel to him both emotionally and physically. As his workload increased, he was forced to travel regularly with them on weekends to promote the show.

In addition to the series, North appeared as Dennis in commercials for the show's sponsors, Kellogg's cereals, as well as Best Foods mayonnaise, Skippy peanut butter and Bosco chocolate milk. He also guested on television shows like *The Donna Reed Show* and *The Red Skelton Hour* and in the feature film *Pépé*.

Near the end of season three, Joseph Kearns, Dennis's exasperated neighbor, Mr. Wilson, suddenly died. For season four, the wonderful Gale Gordon came on board as Mr. Wilson's brother, but it was a blow to the show. And Jay, now 11, had begun to outgrow the role. Ratings dipped; and in the spring of 1963, *Dennis the Menace* was canceled.

Jay attended school but continued to pursue work throughout the '60s, guesting on *Wagon Train*, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *My Three Sons* and *The Lucy Show* with his former co-star, Gale Gordon. It was a constant battle to avoid being typecast in roles similar to *Dennis*. He landed the lead in family films *Zebra in the Kitchen* (1965) and *Maya* (1966) the latter shot in India. In 1967, he returned to India for a year to star in a TV series based on the film.

When Jay returned to L.A., he and his *Maya* co-star, Sajid Kahn, were popular teen idols featured in posters and magazines. But Jay had missed a year of school, and now back in Hollywood, he had difficulty keeping up. Film and TV work was scarce, but he found work as a voice actor for animated television series, *The Banana Splits*, *Adventure Hour* and a teenaged Bamm-Bamm Rubble on *The Pebbles and Bamm-Bamm Show*.

Struggling emotionally to deal with both the abuse he suffered at the hands of his aunt and uncle as well as an industry that had failed to protect him, Jay left Hollywood in 1971. Several years later, he enlisted in the US Navy. He left with an honorable discharge in 1979 and, once again, returned to Los Angeles, a bitter, unhappy man.

Paul Petersen, the founder of A Minor Consideration, reached out to help him secure his footing. A grateful Jay was able to find



Sajid and Jay

himself in giving back to others, providing advice and counseling to a new generation of child actors. He also began attending fan conventions with his dear friend and co-star, Jeanne Russell, where he reunited with many old friends.

Since the early 1990s, North has made occasional appearances on talk shows, in documentaries and in cameos on *The Simpsons* and in the David Spade comedy feature *Dickie Roberts: Former Child Star*.

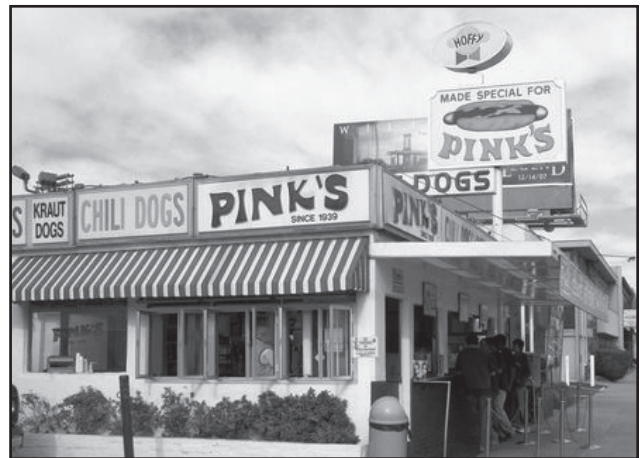


Jon Provost, Lassie and Jay

I liked to add a little yellow mustard. The chili had a kick, and the mustard cooled it down.

He and his wife moved to Florida, where Jay worked for years as a prison guard. He is now happily retired.

“My favorite thing as a kid was sneaking off campus from Marion Colbert’s School with my best friend, Jon Provost. The school was on Fairfax Avenue between Melrose and Beverly. We’d walk up to Beverly to Pink’s, a hot dog stand, family-owned...it’s still there after 75 years. We’d get chili cheese dogs and walk to a nearby park to chow down on them...a fat dog in a bun smothered in chili with grated cheddar cheese melted over the top.



As an adult, I eat a little differently. I have to admit I never really had much interest in cooking or the kitchen. Fortunately, my wife enjoys it, and she created this great dish I ask for often.”

Jay’s Favorite Broccoli Casserole

1 pkg frozen 1 lb fresh broccoli chopped or spears—Cook, cool and drain
2 eggs beaten
1 cup mayo
1 can cream of celery soup
½ cup milk
1 cup sharp cheese, grated
1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
Salt and pepper
1 tbsp. Onion flakes

Mix all ingredients and stir in broccoli
Butter the bottom of a casserole dish and pour in mixture. Top with Ritz crackers and dot with butter.
Bake 40-45 minutes at 350 degrees