DIMENSIONS OF IMAGINATION

The Official Newsletter of the Rod Serling Memorial Foundation

FALL / SERLINGFEST 2024

ROD SERLING MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

EDITOR'S LETTER

Notes from *Dimensions of Imagination* Editor Paul Gallagher

Hello, everyone, and welcome to the Fall 2024 issue of *Dimensions of Imagination*.

As we were putting this issue together, Christmas was approaching—a season that truly captured Rod Serling's heart. His beautiful scripts for *Twilight Zone*'s "The Night of the Meek" or "The Changing of the Guard" make this abundantly clear, but Rod was wearing his yuletide joy on his sleeve even long before the *Zone* was on the air.

Exhibit A: "No Christmas This Year," a Serling radio script that dates back to 1952. Tom Elliot, host of *The Twilight Zone Podcast*, introduced fans to this rarity at this year's Serling Fest, and he reproduced it for this issue of newsletter. You'll see the seeds of Rod's later Christmas scripts in this sweet yet sobering tale.

"No Christmas This Year," like much of Rod's earliest work (both for radio and TV), was created while he lived in Ohio. Elsewhere in this issue, you'll learn more about this pivotal time in Rod's life, courtesy of author Mark Dawidziak. Mark, a fellow RSMF board member and Mark Twain expert who's written dozens of books, demonstrates what a profound influence the Buckeye state had on the future creator of the fifth dimension.

Fast forward to the mid-1960s, and we find Rod hard at work on writing the screenplay for "Planet of the Apes." But he isn't the only screenwriter listed in the credits, which has led to confusion over the years about the film's famous "Statue of Liberty" ending. Who came up with that? RSMF board member Gordon Webb, who years ago interviewed one of the film's producers, settles this question for good in a special article for this issue.

Of course, Rod was indeed the sole screenwriter for the 92 *Twilight Zone* scripts that carry his byline … with one notable exception. When he was working on the time-traveling fan-favorite "The Odyssey of Flight 33," he asked his brother, Robert—a pilot and a noted author in his own right—to help create believable cockpit dialogue.

You can learn more in this issue about this unique collaboration from Jeff Serling, Robert's son and Rod's nephew. You'll also discover more about Robert's work, and get a glimpse of the man himself, in a reminiscence penned by the RSMF's Tony Albarella. Jeff and Tony provide a well-rounded look at the talented man who was proud to call Rod Serling his little brother.

Ever heard of "Nightmare at Ground Zero"? If not, you're in for a treat. Another pre-TZ script from Rod, this time for a TV series named *Suspense*, it tells the story of a man who provides the mannequins for a nuclear-testing site. RSMF's own web master, Steve Schlich tells us more about this intriguing tale (and where to watch it) in this issue.

And as you can probably guess from this issue's cover, you'll get coverage of this year's Serling Fest. As many of you know, this year's gathering was special for two reasons: It marked the centenary of Rod's birth, and it saw us install our wonderful statue of the man himself—a project long in the making! Needless to say, it was a landmark moment for the Foundation, and for Rod's hometown of Binghamton, NY.

On behalf of all of us at the Foundation, I'd like wish everyone all the best in 2025. Hope you enjoy this issue of *Dimensions of Imagination*!

- Paul Gallagher

Rod Serling Comes Home: A Special Statue-Unveiling Caps the 2024 SerlingFest

By Paul Gallagher

"Fame is short-lived," Rod Serling once remarked while *The Twilight Zone* was in its first run on CBS. "One year after this show goes off the air, they'll never remember who I am."

How shocked he would have been to see, more than 60 years later, fans thronging Recreation Park in his hometown of Binghamton, New York, to witness the unveiling of a special statue.

And yes, to remember. Because the architect of the fifth dimension seems about as likely to be forgotten as Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, or William Shakespeare are. In short, he's in a pantheon of literary immortals.
Serling was at least partly right, though. Fame *is* short-lived. But he couldn't foresee that his work would continue to touch millions around the world for years to come, enabling him to transcend mere fame. Nor could he know that on a sunny afternoon 29 years after his untimely death, many of those fans would be drawn to the park near his boyhood home.

"One of the sad ironies of Rod Serling's life may have been that he never really fully appreciated the magnitude of the monuments that he left behind," RSMF President Nick Parisi said. "Well, now we have this literal monument to say that we understand the magnitude of what Rod Serling left behind, that Binghamton embraces Rod Serling's legacy."

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ROD SERLING
MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

OUR PLEDGE

Rod Serling's achievements in playwriting, speech making and broadcasting are considerable and important. As members of The Rod Serling Memorial Foundation, we dedicate ourselves to promote and preserve this great man's contributions to the Arts and Humanities.

We pledge to educate the public about Rod Serling's genius and his passion, hoping that they will understand and appreciate his mastery of the creative arts, his unique understanding of human relationships, his esteem as a writer, his generosity as a speaker in and around Binghamton, and his uncompromising commitment to quality.

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NON-PROFIT PLEDGE The Rod Serling Memorial Foundation is operated exclusively for the above and other non-profit purposes, and is registered with the IRS as a non-profit entity. No part of any net earnings shall inure to the benefit of any private member.

COVER PHOTO: Tony Albarella
COMIC: Christopher Tupa - see more at ctupa.com

SERLINGFEST: FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

As does the world. TV shows come and go, but the characters and stories of the *Zone* are in another class altogether. They don't merely entertain, they edify. They didn't pass through the culture, they shaped it. Even people who have never watched one episode of his signature TV series will use the phrase "twilight zone" to describe anything weird or out of the ordinary.

So we shouldn't be surprised by the number of people who say Serling inspired them to become writers. Who see the world differently because they carry invisible passports stamped in a realm filled with cosmic justice and ironic twists. Who never tire of seeing a bookworm in a bomb-blasted world happily surveying his reading stacks, a confused shopper remembering that she's really a mannequin, and a former mental patient trying to convince everyone that *something* is on the wing of their airplane.

That's what brought more than 300 people to Binghamton on the weekend of September 13-15, 2024, for this year's SerlingFest. They came to celebrate Serling in the centennial year of his birth, to delve into the many facets of his career, and to toast one of the most remarkable TV shows of the 20th century, which itself turned 65 this year.

That's 15 more years than Serling got. And yet, surveying his legions of fans, it's clear that, in a more important sense, he's still very much with us. And now thanks to the RSMF and its many members—and to Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, who helped secure some crucial state funds—there's a permanent marker to pay tribute to one of Binghamton's favorite sons.

"It's in a quieter part of the park, to create a more contemplative space," said Lupardo. "We also figured there were going to be a lot of people who would want to come and sit and think about Rod Serling and his legacy and, of course, all of the things he inspired going forward."

Anne Serling, Rod's younger daughter, emphasized his local connections. "He would drive by his house on Bennett Avenue and make his way here to Recreation Park, sit on the bench and watch

Top: The RSMF extended family: Tony Albarella, Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, Jodi Serling, Nick Parisi, Gail Flug, Andrew Polak Joe Bardales, Anne Serling, Douglas Sutton, Jeff Serling. Bottom: SerlingFest Facebook event graphic

the merry-go-round," she said. "It seems only fitting that the statue would be erected here."

Added his older daughter, Jodi: "Binghamton was the center of his universe and the starting gate for his creativity. So it's clearly appropriate that my dad's statue stand here, representing his love and dedication to the town in which he grew up in."

This year's SerlingFest began on Friday, September 13, with a special "video marathon" that included 1950's "Grady Everett for the People," the first TV show to bear a Rod Serling credit. That was followed by two episodes of Rod's western series, *The Loner*, two episodes of *Night Gallery*, and yes, two episodes of *The Twilight Zone*.

Saturday brought a roster of fascinating presentations. Tom Elliot, host of *The Twilight Zone Podcast*, unveiled a rare Serling Christmas story (and he writes about this program elsewhere in this issue). Boxing expert Christopher Benedict spoke about Rod's personal and professional involvement with "the sweet science"—a topic Chris covered for our Spring 2024 issue.

Several of my fellow RSMF board members also made special presentations, including Anne Serling, Mark Olshaker, and Mark Dawidziak, who together gave Fest-goers a window into Serling the man, not just Serling the writer. "My father was the polar opposite of what you imagine when you see *The Twilight Zone*, and you see this dark image walking across the stage, and he's serious, and he's tight-lipped," Anne said. "Because the dad at home was so funny, so kind, so sweet, and so silly."

But, the trio noted, he was very serious about the issues that mattered to him the most—racism chief among them. They cited the 1955 torture-murder of Emmett Till in Mississippi, which outraged many Americans—including Serling, who wrote a scathing teleplay based on the Till case. "Noon on Doomsday," alas, was practically ruined by a nervous network afraid of controversy.

Tony Albarella, another RSMF board member and author whose work is often featured in these pages, presented something a bit lighter: "Serling Unscripted." Fest-goers were treated to numerous rare Serling video clips, including outtakes from several PSAs he filmed late in his career, off-the-cuff discussions about writing with college students, and appearances on such TV shows as Betty White's *Pet Set*.

The RSMF's Gail Flug, our graphic designer whose work has graced many Foundation newsletters, t-shirts, SerlingFest programs, and other special projects, gave a presentation particularly fitting for someone who is also a veteran rock journalist. "We are about to embark on a musical journey to explore how *The Twilight Zone* has played a part in rock music," Gail said as she introduced music video clips from the many hit songs that have referenced the series over the years.

Fans of *Night Gallery* were also in for a real treat: Jim Benson and Scott Skelton, authors of "Rod Serling's Night Gallery: An After-Hours Tour," discussed Rod's other anthology series from the early 1970s—which, unlike *The Twilight Zone*, emphasized horror stories.

"I remember vividly seeing the (*Night Gallery*) pilot film in November of 1969," Scott said. "I had just turned 10 … and *Night Gallery* scared the living hell out of me. I became fascinated by it, and when the series began, I was a captive audience at the time. That was my first introduction, really, to Rod Serling's writings."

It all wrapped up with the statue unveiling on Sunday at noon. Fans were also able to ride the "Walking Distance" carousel, to see the bandstand nearby with a medallion commemorating Rod, and to take countless pictures of themselves with the new statue.

"For whatever else I may
have had, or lost, or will find,
I've still got a hometown,"
Rod once said. "This, nobody's
gonna take away from me."

And now, no one's gonna take him away from Binghamton.

Welcome home, Rod.

RSMF Board Member Paul Gallagher is editor of the Dimensions of Imagination newsletter.

Watch presentations from SerlingFest 2024 at https://tinyurl.com/Serlingfest2024-streams

ROD SERLING

Ohio's Role in Shaping the Land of Shadow and Substance

By Mark Dawidziak

Rod and the staff of

Those *Twilight Zone* devotees with a strong grasp of Fifth Dimension terrain know that some classic episodes of Rod Serling's massively influential anthology series were set in Ohio. They include "It's a Good Life," with Bill Mumy as a powerful little boy holding everyone around him in a grip of fear, and "Nick of Time," with William Shatner as a superstitious newlywed who falls under the spell of a fortune-telling machine in a small-town diner.

Those familiar with the players who populated Serling's wondrous land could tell you that many notable *Twilight Zone* actors were from Ohio. Chief among these was Cleveland native Burgess Meredith, who starred in four episodes, three of them written by Serling: "Time Enough at Last," "Mr. Dingle, the Strong," and "The Obsolete Man." The fourth, "Printer's Devil," was written by Charles Beaumont.

Meredith also appeared in a 1965 episode of Serling's Western series, *The Loner,* and two episodes of the horror anthology series *Night Gallery*.

Other Ohioans who can be spotted in episodes of *The Twilight Zone* include Cleveland's Jack Weston in "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street" and "The Bard" (with his wife, fellow Cleveland native Marge Redmond), Youngstown's Joe Flynn in "Escape Clause," Dayton's Jonathan Winters in "A Game of Pool," Columbus Grove's Dean Jagger in "Static," former Akronite and Clevelander Jesse White in "Once Upon a Time" and "Cavender is Coming," Cincinnati's Dan Tobin in "A Penny for Your Thoughts," and Defiance's Katherine Squire in "One More Pallbearer" and "In His Image."

But Ohio's role in shaping that land of shadow of substance began long before Serling opened *The Twilight Zone* for business on October 2, 1959. In fact, it began even before the creator and proprietor of this magical fifth dimension discovered he was a writer.

Reeling from the horrors of World War II, Serling headed for Ohio in 1946. Unsure of what he wanted to do with his life, he was searching for a sense of direction and purpose. He was looking for a place where there was at least a chance of coping with his hellish battle experiences as a paratrooper in the South Pacific. To his great fortune, and to ours, he found all of this, and quite a bit more, in the Buckeye State.

Indeed, the path that would eventually lead him to *The Twilight Zone* truly began on the campus of Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. It is no understatement to say that, without Ohio, Serling may never have found his way to that TV territory "as vast as space and as timeless as infinity."

It was in Ohio that he discovered writing. It was in Ohio, to be sure, that Serling realized he was a writer. And it was here that he learned his craft, served the apprenticeship, and honed the skills that would win him six Emmy awards and enduring fame.

The Ohio connections run deep and rightfully will be celebrated in the months following the 65th anniversary of the *Twilight Zone* premiere on CBS and the 100th anniversary of Rodman Edward Serling's birth in Syracuse, New York. Notable among the planned honors will be the unveiling of an Ohio Historical Marker at Antioch College in 2025.

Approved by the state last summer, the two-sided marker will tell visitors about "Rod Serling at Antioch College" and "Rod Serling Television Pioneer." It also will commemorate Serling's addition to the Ohioana Library Association's Ohio Literary Trail, which charts the state's rich literary traditions and spotlights such writers as Toni Morrison, Hart Crane, James Thurber, Louis Bromfield, and Paul Laurence Dunbar.

"When Ohioana announced the new Ohio Literary Trail in 2020, we hadn't considered that the Trail would continue to expand," said Ohioana board member Betty Weibel, author of *The Ohio Literary Trail: A Guide*. "Then in 2022 we added a new Toni Morrison historical marker in Lorain County to our trail stops. Ohioana was proud to help fund that marker and contribute to its promotion. Now we are proud to spearhead the addition of a new Rod Serling historical marker on the campus of Antioch College."

So, who was the Rod Serling who showed up at Antioch 78 years ago? By his own admission, Serling returned from World War II both an angry young man and something of a lost soul. The relatively happy and secure existence he had known growing up in Binghamton, New York, had been brutally shattered by the horrors of war.

Binghamton, his hometown, would forever be viewed in a nostalgic haze. There was always a yearning in him to go back to those pre-war summer evenings of hot dogs, cotton candy, band concerts, and carousel rides in his beloved Recreation Park, located just a few blocks away from the Serling home. That Binghamton – that world – was lost to him, except in memory.

Upon graduation from Binghamton Central High School in 1943, he enlisted in the US Army, joining the 11th Airborne Division's 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment, even though at five foot four, he weighed only 118 pounds. The war left him damaged, physically and psychologically. The physical trauma was due to an exploding mortar shell that sent shrapnel into Serling's knee and wrist. He was awarded the Purple Heart for his injuries and the Bronze Star for bravery. The knee continued to give him trouble, sometimes spontaneously bleeding, sometimes causing him to fall.

But then there were the wounds you couldn't see . . . the horrors that weighed so heavily on his psyche and fueled his nightmares. "Shrapnel wounds and mangled, bullet ridden bodies are not the only casualties of war," Serling would tell an adult writing class at Antioch College in the 1960s. "There are casualties of the mind. Every war produces a backwash, a residue of pain and grief."

He decided to give Antioch a try because his older brother, Robert, had gone there (class of 1942). He enrolled on the GI Bill, planning to be a physical education major. The coping process is what turned him into a writer. "I was bitter about everything and at loose ends when I got out of the service," Serling

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would say. "I think I turned to writing to get it off my chest."

He was in the ideal environment for this cathartic revelation. "The seeds of his strongly felt convictions, understanding of human nature and ability to see beyond the obvious were nourished at Antioch and would become the trademarks of his work," his daughter, writer Anne Serling, observed in her foreword to my 2017 book, *Everything I Need to Know I Learned in The Twilight Zone.*

He switched his major to language and literature. A student literary magazine gave him an outlet to publish his prose, and his first short story in *The Antiochian* appeared in the March 1948 edition. During his first year at Antioch, Serling met Columbus native Carolyn Louise "Carol" Kramer, a 17-year-old education major. They were married on July 31, 1948, in Columbus.

"Among its many distinguished alumni, Rod Serling was probably Antioch College's most famous graduate," university archivist Scott Sanders said. "As he put it in a 1962 interview, he came to campus in 1946 `as a somewhat pathological 22-year-old, quite unsure of himself,' and was part of a host of other World War II veterans enrolled on the GI Bill. To him Antioch was `a very special place which made the assumption of maturity on my part,' but provided freedom and just enough structure that allowed him to explore his interests. This he did largely through the centerpiece of an Antioch education: cooperative education.

"After road testing his first chosen field, physical education, as a swimming counselor at a youth camp, although he loved the work, he noticed within himself (in his words) a `little hole, that sense of hunger, that all is not right, that something was left out.' That something was writing, which he pursued enthusiastically both in his studies and on multiple co-op jobs in broadcasting, which put him on the career path that, at least initially, he didn't know he had."

Or, as Serling put, "this is what Antioch offers: the chance to make a mistake. But even more importantly, the chance to ratify that mistake. This seems to me to be the essence."

Rod and carol

According to Saunders: "Serling also valued the educational atmosphere at Antioch, particularly the freedom to question."

Serling called Antioch "a place of dissent, but I think of wholesome dissent . . . this is what I learned at Antioch, that when something was wrong, I could get up on my own two feet and make comment on it."

Serling's true apprenticeship as a writer began when he was named manager of the student-operated campus radio station. He was writing and directing a new show every week, often acting in productions broadcast on Springfield stations WJEM-FM and WJEL-AM. He also managed to sell scripts to national radio anthology shows while at Yellow Springs. After graduation in 1950, he moved to Cincinnati, where he found work as a staff writer at AM radio station WLW.

"Rod Serling's first professional writing job for WLW radio and television for $75 a week lit his creative fire for all the wrong reasons," said John Kiesewetter, TV/Media reporter for Cincinnati Public Radio's WVXU-FM and former *Cincinnati Enquirer* TV columnist. "Serling was frustrated writing patter for TV variety shows, regional travel series, and even a sitcom called *Leave It To Kathy*. And he must have felt trapped in a twilight zone when his bosses convinced him to put on clown makeup and audition as a sidekick for Toony the Clown on a WLWT-TV children's show. Serling wanted to write serious dramas, and finally found his outlet at a competing station, WKRC-TV."

While still employed at WLW, Serling started contributing scripts to *The Storm,* a new anthology show on WKRC. He sold 32 scripts to this half-hour live drama series that premiered in 1951. Some of these scripts were later reworked for national network shows, including "The Time Element," a fantasy drama broadcast on the *Desilu Playhouse* in 1958 as a sort of a dry run for the landmark anthology series he would launch the following year.

"What Cincinnati viewers didn't know at the time, of course, was that they were witnessing the works in progress of a TV genius," Kiesewetter said. "`Mr. Finchley Versus the Bomb' also first aired on *The Storm* in 1951, five years before the national TV audience watched it on the *Kaiser Aluminum Hour*. And before *Playhouse 90* broadcast Serling's acclaimed *Requiem for a Heavyweight* in 1956, Cincinnati saw `The Twilight Rounds' in 1952 on *The Storm*.

"Serling found his groove in Cincinnati. Tapping into a passion that set him on a course to create *The Twilight Zone* by the end of the decade. The fulfillment he found in *The Storm* prompted him to quit WLW after two years in 1952 and freelance scripts from Cincinnati for *Kraft Television Theater*, the *Hallmark Hall of Fame, Lux Video Theater* and other New York-based live drama series."

Now completely focusing on his career as a freelance writer, Serling commuted between New York and Ohio as he sold script after script to network television shows. Accepting the need to be closer to New York, the Serlings moved to Westport, Connecticut, in 1954. So, while Ohio may not be the first state you associate with Rod Serling, all told, he spent eight of his adult years there. For someone who only lived to be 50, that's hardly an inconsiderable amount of time.

By the time he left Cincinnati, he was well on his way to establishing himself as one of the most promising young writers contributing scripts to the infant medium's golden age of live dramas. That promise was fulfilled with the acclaim for *Patterns,* his 1955 play about a young executive from Ohio hired by the hard-hearted president of a major Manhattan corporation. It won him the first of his six Emmys. Others followed for *Requiem for a Heavyweight,* his 1956 story about an aging boxer, and *The Comedian,* his 1957 adaptation of the novella by Ernest Lehman.

By the late 1950s, however, Serling had grown frustrated with increasingly intrusive network censors demanding changes in his socially conscious dramas. His answer was *The Twilight Zone*. The 34-year-old Serling took a gamble, betting that, under the guise of fantasy, he could address the exact same issues and themes that were making those networks censors nervous: prejudice, racism, greed, scapegoating, how we treat children and the elderly, authoritarian dangers, and the human race's penchant for war.

The gamble paid off, garnering Serling two more Emmys for writing. He was not only the creator and host of *The Twilight Zone,* he was the show's principal writer, penning or co-authoring 92 of the show's 156 episodes.

By then living in California, Serling, his wife, and their two daughters, Jodi and Anne, would spend their summers at the family cottage on Cayuga Lake in upstate New York, north of Ithaca. Ever feeling the sentimental pull of Binghamton, he always would take a day to drive over to his hometown and walk the streets of his youth.

He also returned to Antioch, accepting a teaching position in 1962 after the third season of *Twilight Zone*.

"When I think about our time in Yellow Springs, it seemed we were

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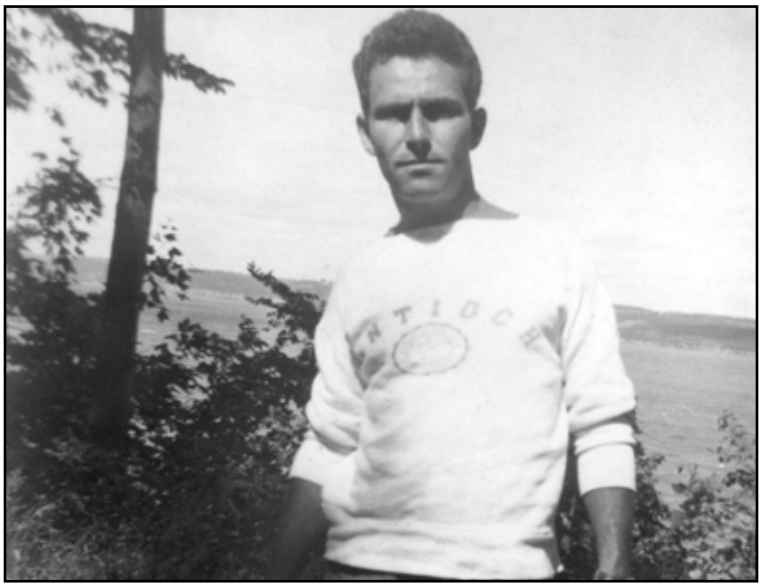
all excited to go," Anne Serling said. "I think my dad felt grateful for the opportunity to teach at his alma matter. As it turned out, my dad had to fly back to Los Angeles numerous times. He was still writing *Twilight Zone* episodes, recording intros and writing a screenplay adaptation of the novel *Seven Days in May*. I think it's fair to say these six months were not the respite he intended. But there were still great moments and memories."

Serling picked up a sixth Emmy in 1964 for *It's Mental Work,* a dramatization of a John O'Hara short story produced for NBC's *Bob Hope Presents the Chrysler Theater.* He had moved to the big screen with film versions of *Patterns* in 1956 and *Requiem for a Heavyweight* in 1962. These were followed by his screenplay adaptations of the novels *Seven Days in May* in 1964 and *Planet of the Apes* in 1968 (his original script reworked by Michael Wilson).

Eight books by Serling, including several collections of short stories, were published between 1957 and 1972. One of those books, *Season to Be Wary,* featured two of the three stories in his 1969 TV movie, *Night Gallery*. That script won



Rod on campus sporting his Antioch shirt

him the Edgar Award for Best TV episode.
Night Gallery then became a horror anthology series that ran on NBC for three seasons (1970-73). Although Serling served as on-air host and wrote some of the series' most memorable episodes, including the Emmy-nominated "They're Tearing Down Tim Riley's Bar," the show proved a frustrating experience because he didn't have the producing duties or creative control he had on *The Twilight Zone*.

"I just want them to remember me a hundred years from now," goes the famous quote from Serling's last interview. Approaching the 100th anniversary of his birth, we remember. We remember the writer, and we recognize the importance of the writing.

Binghamton recognized Serling during this centennial year with the September unveiling of a six-foot statue in Recreation Park. The culmination of a four-year effort by the Rod Serling Memorial Foundation, the larger-than-life statue depicts Serling in an iconic narration pose familiar to fans of *The Twilight Zone*.

Ohio will follow with the historical marker at Antioch. The unveiling is expected to occur in October 2025.

"Ohio shaped the work done by Rod Serling across his lifetime," said Ohioana Library Association executive director Kimberlee L. Kiehl. "It is the place where he found and developed his writer's voice. His weekly radio plays for WJEL in Springfield, his dramas written for WHIO, and his years at Antioch all contributed to him becoming the writer he was and to creating shows and films that have stood the test of time."

RSMF board member Mark Dawidziak is the author or editor of 25 books, including five about Mark Twain, "Everything I Need to Know I Learned in The Twilight Zone," and "A Mystery of Mysteries: The Death and Life of Edgar Allan Poe."

2024 Winners: Narrate Your Own Twilight Zone Competition

by Steve Schlich

Imagine a new Twilight Zone episode. Write Rod Serling's opening and closing narrations. Give it a title and send us your entry …and you did!

Last year, the contest's sixth, we received a record seventy-two entries. This year is the all-time runner up to the record with 61 entries. It seems that playing Rod Serling is almost as much fun as watching him! That makes running this contest so worthwhile.

First-place winner Ron Wolfe has submitted at least one narration for every contest. Way to go, Ron. Perserverance pays off!

You have available to you the fruit of much honest labor: 62 stories that will take you on enjoyable flights of fancy. And a video of the contest winners, narrated by Stephen Dexter performing as Rod Serling. This is Stephen's seventh time performing for you—pausing his busy schedule of acting, voicing, writing, and producing, to make these prizes such a treat. Check out Stephen's website for a dizzying list of this hard-working artist's projects onstage, on TV, and in the movies. We thank Stephen for donating his abundant skill and limited time!

THANK YOU to everyone who submitted an entry. A big crop of entries again this year for you to enjoy. I wrote one myself, based on a short story of mine. It was not eligible to win of course; it's an Easter Egg for you to find. We had duplicate titles again this year, a fun coincidence that reminds me of a classic Writing Class assignment: everybody gets the same title, now go write your version! And one of the duplicate-named narrations came in second.

Read all the winners at: tinyurl.com/2024-Narrate-TZ-winners

"Time for a Friend"

Opening Narration:

The man you see here, this man of tears and trembles, is Charlie Flanders, age 67. The old fella in Charlie's arms is Charlie's dog, Bo, the man's only companion, age 17. The door ahead reads: "Dr. R. S. Willoughby, DVM. 'Ask about special care.'" The doctor is waiting with a needle for Bo and a question for Charlie—a question to be answered only … in the Twilight Zone.

Closing Narration:

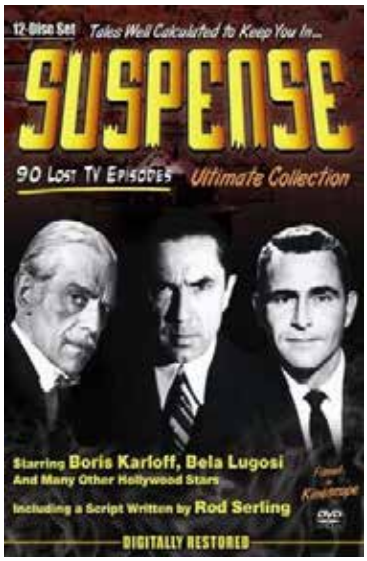
This man of the happy step is Charlie Flanders, age 67. The bounding fella beside him is Charlie's dog, Bo, age 7. Charlie didn't hesitate at the doctor's question. "Would you give half your remaining years for you and your dog to come out even?"

Sentimental slop, you might say. Charlie would say, sometimes, the good guys win. And a very special Doctor of Veterinary Medicine says there's always room for a good boy … in the Twilight Zone.

BEFORE THE TWILIGHT ZONE

The Proto-TZ from 1953: "Nightmare at Ground Zero"

by Steve Schlich



Left: O.Z. Whitehead and Louise Larabee Right: Suspense - Ultimate Collection (12-DVD Box Set)

Consult almost any *Twilight Zone* timeline, and you'll find the reasonable argument that the first episode was not the series premiere, "Where Is Everybody?" Many TZ historians assert that it's "The Time Element."

Desilu Studios produced "The Time Element" as an episode of the one-hour anthology series *Desilu Playhouse*. The script that Rod Serling submitted in 1957 was initially met with disinterest, and languished in the CBS vault for a year before producer Bert Granet found and used it.

Serling hadn't written the script as an audition for his own series, nor did CBS think of it that way. But fate intervened; "The Time Element" earned positive reviews and 6,000 fan letters. The show's success made it a stepping-stone to *The Twilight Zone*.

But it wasn't the first episode, either. In *my* opinion.

I think that honor belongs to "Nightmare at Ground Zero." It's an early and dusty gem in Rod Serling's filmography, from 1953—the 17th of his 219 television credits.

That it still exists at all is the fortuitous result of someone filming a TV showing the live broadcast in 1953. This was typically accomplished with a 16mm camera, transforming a studio performance into a blurry but watchable kinescope.

"Nightmare at Ground Zero" is an episode of the anthology series *Suspense*—not to be confused with the later series *Kraft Suspense Theater*, and also not to be confused with a *Playhouse 90* episode of the same name, which Serling co-wrote.

This early work is remarkable for the ways that it "auditions" characters and themes that would appear in his iconic *Twilight Zone* almost a decade later.

Bonus: "Nightmare at Ground Zero" establishes itself as an oasis of 1950s' surrealism by including commercials that feature stop-action Autolite car batteries marching across the screen.

SPOILER ALERT: I will describe the entire episode, but in my opinion, that won't diminish the experience of watching this surreal Serling oldie.

ACT I: George Vance meticulously prepares mannequins for use in an atom-bomb test. They will occupy a furnished house near Ground Zero. You've likely seen a blurry '50s video clip of a house being utterly and instantly destroyed in an early A-bomb test. This will be that house.

ACT II: Vance's wife, Helen, shows up and complains so ceaselessly about his affection for his work—at the expense of their marriage—that he drugs her and abandons her at the house before the early morning test.

From the episode's page in the Internet Movie Database: *The Nevada Proving Ground is set for another nuclear bomb blast at 4 AM. A harried artist is rushing to finish the mannequins he's been hired to construct that will populate a house at ground zero. His nagging wife, who does nothing but complain about his work, finally pushes him over the edge. As contracted, he delivers five "people" to the house that's about to be destroyed.*

Act III: Vance has a last-minute repentance and rescues her just before the test. In the final scene, the nuclear blast lights up the night behind them as they drive away.

The non-realism of that escape reflects the U.S. government's of-the-times public portrayal of an A-bomb's physicality and its survivability at a short distance. For more on *that* widespread fantasy, search the Internet for "duck and cover drills."

The production values scream "1953, the dawn of TV," and Serling's script does not jump off the page, not even the dialogue. But I delighted in the ways that it tries out characters and themes, and even some of the look, of the future *Twilight Zone*:

The plot involves a family of mannequins, and implies that George Vance was hired to create them. In fact, we only see him tarting one of them up, and it's likely that he acquired them from a manufacturer. The dummy is no Anne Francis, but I still thought of "The After Hours." And although none of the mannequins come to life, at one suspenseful point in the story, Helen is mistaken for one.

Helen Vance has a sharp tongue when criticizing her husband, which made me think of Gart Williams's wife in "A Stop at Willoughby." But in this story, she has a valid complaint of neglect, which presages Henry Bemis's wife—also named Helen—in "Time Enough at Last." What surprised me was how Vance decides to be free of her.

George Vance is every bit as meek as Henry Bemis, and attends to his mannequins as lovingly as Bemis did to his books. So it's a leap, but not entirely out of character, when he drugs her and leaves her at the target house in place of the wife mannequin he's been adorning. There certainly were *Twilight Zone* characters capable of such an act, but they were *not* named Bemis or Williams.

The abrupt, authoritarian colonel in charge of readying the house won't even let Vance complete a sentence. He reminded me of Williams's dismissive boss from "A Stop at Willoughby" (*"push-push-push!"*) and made me wish it was him that Vance left behind in the doomed house instead.

The photography, despite the kinescope blurriness, foreshadows the surrealistic camera work of future *Twilight Zone* episodes in many places, including close ups, angles, and framing. I doubt that Serling's script included any detailed camera instructions, but the similarities struck me.

Sadly, the music is drearily standard for a 1953 TV drama—mostly organ accompaniment straight out of Sunday church. No Bernard Herrmann or Marius Constant anywhere within earshot.

Please forgive the spoilers; I don't think they will affect your enjoyment. Each viewing of this delicious little tale takes me straight into *The Twilight Zone*. I hope that it does the same for you.

Watch the episode, and those commercials, for free on www.youtube.com

Steve Schlich is the webmaster of the Rod Serling Memorial Foundation official website; www.rodserling.com

ROBERT SERLING

The Serling Family Brick and Flight 33 Forever

By Jeff Serling

It was truly an honor to join my fellow *Twilight Zone* fans and the Rod Serling Memorial Foundation in September for the unveiling of the Rod Serling statue in Binghamton, New York. The Kickstarter earlier in the year was an opportunity to purchase a brick at the base of the statue. I took full advantage of this and had our brick inscribed with the following:

Odyssey of the Serling Family
Jeff, Michele, RJ and Andrew
Flight 33 Forever

Some may know the story. But I wanted to share my father's connection to the episode "The Odyssey of Flight 33" and why it's a favorite of my family.

If you are not familiar with the episode, "The Odyssey of Flight 33" is about a commercial airliner, Global Airlines Flight 33, travelling from London to New York City. As the plane nears its destination, the crew notices an inexplicable increase in their ground speed. Despite their best efforts to understand and control the situation, the aircraft is propelled through a mysterious temporal rift.

The plane emerges in the prehistoric era, surrounded by towering dinosaurs. After a brief and terrifying encounter, the crew manages to return to their own time, but not quite. Instead of landing in then-present day 1961, they find themselves in 1939 New York City. The cliffhanger ending has the crew and passengers preparing for a new reality, while still hoping for another portal to take them home.

"A Global jet airliner, en route from London to New York on an uneventful afternoon in the year 1961, but now reported overdue and missing, and by now, searched for on land, sea, and air by anguished human beings, fearful of what they'll find. But you and I know where she is. You and I know what's happened. So, if some moment, any moment, you hear the sound of jet engines flying atop the overcast—engines that sound searching and lost—engines that sound desperate—shoot up a flare or do something. That would be Global 33 trying to get home—from The Twilight Zone."

Left: Jeff, age 9, with his dad, Robert, Summer 1981; Right: Jeff, age 2, with Uncle Rod, Summer 1974: Above : "The Odyssey of Flight 33"

As the story has been told by my father (and shared in *The Twilight Zone Companion* by Marc Zicree), the idea for the episode came in a conversation he had with Rod. It started with a brochure sent to Rod offering a mockup of a Boeing 707 Jet available to use for filming. Rod asked my father to drive his new car while Rod was developing an idea. My dad was a little taken back, as this was not something that Rod had ever done. My father had horrible eyesight, so it was obvious that something special was going on.

Rod pitched the idea of a freak tailwind pushing an airplane through time back to prehistoric days. This was the simple plotline of the episode that aired in the second season.

Rod and my father both were established writers, and while it didn't happen often, they enjoyed opportunities to collaborate with each other. Rod was eager to add some authenticity to the cockpit dialogue. So he asked my father, who was a pilot, to provide a script on conversation that would occur in the cockpit during an event like they had discussed in the car a few weeks prior. My father, alongside a pilot friend of his, provided both the internal conversation and radio dialogue used in the episode.

Rod received letters and correspondence from people in the aviation industry that told him that while the episode was a time-travel science-fiction story, the dialogue was authentic and felt very real—better than many of the TV shows and movies that attempted to add this level of realism to the plane-to-control-tower conversation.

My father received his first and only credit of *The Twilight Zone* as a consultant, and he beamed with pride whenever anyone talked about the episode. While we all loved hearing the stories of how the collaboration transpired, my father's version of the story over the years morphed into a story similar to the prize-winning fish that was caught yet seemed to grow over time. It evolved from the car conversation, to the cockpit dialogue, to a consultant credit, to "Hi, I'm Bob Serling, co-writer of the *Twilight Zone* episode `The Odyssey of Flight 33'."

As I struggled to find what I wanted to say on my brick that would sit in Recreation Park for many years to come, I decided that the best way to honor my uncle, my father, and their legacy of growing up as proud sons of Binghamton, was to honor their collaboration. And I could hear a new version of Rod's closing narration of the episode:

"A Global jet airliner vanished more than 60 years ago. She's flying in that mythical place between shadow and substance, and she has two very special passengers who have passed on, two brothers who for a small moment in time were able to create something special. Two brothers who shared a bond and an incredible skill for writing. Two brothers who will be forever reunited on Global Flight 33—in The Twilight Zone"

Flight 33 Forever.

Jeff Serling, a Rod Serling Memorial Foundation board member since 2017, is the nephew of Rod Serling. His father, Robert, was a best-selling author and brother of Rod.

ROBERT SERLING

With the Real Twilight Zone Writer Please Stand Up?

By Tony Albarella

With Jeff Serling's article on his father's Twilight Zone involvement appearing elsewhere in this issue, this seems an appropriate time to share my own recollections of Robert J. Serling. But first, let's squeeze in just a dash of biographical information.

Born in 1918 as Jerome Robert Serling (disliking the "Jerome," he later swapped his first and middle names), Bob was almost seven years older than his brother, Rod. He went on to become the aviation editor for UPI, an air safety consultant, a bestselling novelist, and the author of 24 fiction and non-fiction books.

His novels include Wings, The President's Plane is Missing, Air Force One is Haunted, Something's Alive on the Titanic, Legend and Legacy, and Stewardess. Bob fell in love with airplanes at an early age and lived and breathed all things aviation in both his personal and professional life.

The writers that I came to know during my quarter-century-plus of Rod Serling/Twilight Zone research seemed to fall into one of two categories. Richard Matheson and Del Reisman, for example, were introverts; soft-spoken, reserved gentlemen whose calm and cool demeanor gave little indication of the imaginative fiction they were capable of conjuring. Earl Hamner and George Clayton Johnson, by contrast, were extroverts; gifted yarn-spinners with warm, whimsical dispositions to match the warm, whimsical tales they told both in print and in person.

Bob Serling fell headlong into that latter category. He had an irascible sense of humor, a big personality, a kind heart, and a gregariousness that lit up a room, or a conversation, like the finale of a fireworks display. He deeply loved his little brother, was very proud of him, and although the two were competitive, never begrudged Rod his success. Nor was there any need to; Bob had a remarkably successful writing career of his own and left the literary world some stellar work.

I wish I had gotten to know Bob a little bit better. Our association only spanned the period between the early 2000's and a year or so before his death in 2010. It consisted essentially of a few dozen phone conversations and email exchanges (via his lovely wife Patty's email account – as far as I know, Bob never made the technical leap to the Internet era). I can report that the limitations of print- or verbal-only contact did little to blunt the sheer presence of the man.

We did have one in-person meeting—an extended, ridiculously enjoyable affair arranged by Rod's wife, Carol. Carol, bless her soul, always had a standing, annual invitation for me and my family to visit her Cayuga Lake summer home in Interlaken, New York, a gracious trend that continues to this day thanks to our dear friends, Jodi Serling and Michael Talarski. In August 2006, Bob and Patty came in from Arizona to spend a few days with Carol, and my wife Cindy and I coordinated our trip to coincide with their arrival.

The visit stands out in my memory as a glorious whirlwind of activity. I don't mean physical activity, as the action consisted mainly of sitting around the dining room table and talking. But conversing with Bob essentially was a physical activity. My girls, young at the time, patiently played in the living room while the adults chatted…well, at least one of the adults. Carol, Patty, Jodi, Michael, Cindy and I primarily hung back and let Bob do his thing, animatedly regaling us with stories, family memories, anecdotes about his life and work, and jokes. Lots of jokes.

For Bob was an inveterate joke-teller. Clean jokes, not-so-clean jokes, witticisms, snarky one-liners, colorful adjectives nestled strategically within his speech… he had quite an arsenal. He was 88 years old at the time, fully embracing his second childhood, and his age was frequently the source of his own jests.

As an example, here's Bob inscription on my copy of Something's Alive on the Titanic: "To my friend Tony, with regards and a firm denial that I was on The Titanic." (Incidentally, I love that book, and had re-read it a couple of times long before I even knew Bob.) Another example: Carol had a copy of Bob's A Century of Wings at the house with an inscription that included, "To Carol with love from the man who taught the Wrights how to fly."

Humor, I found, was the foundation of Bob's character. He joked with me on several occasions that he had taught Rod everything Rod knew about writing, and that I wasted my time admiring the work of the wrong brother. This came full circle when I edited Volume Five of As Timeless as Infinity: The Complete Twilight Zone Scripts of Rod Serling, published in 2008. That book included "The Odyssey of Flight 33," the script for which Bob had served as technical advisor. He supplied me with quotes to pepper my commentary, and provided one of the introductions for the volume.

I tried to repay him with the dedication: "This book is dedicated to Bob Serling. It's about time the world found out who really wrote all 156 episodes of The Twilight Zone." He got a chuckle out of that, and I was happy to have returned a volley of the good-natured sarcasm he often used to entertain me.

Back at that 2006 get-together, I took advantage of a rare pause in Bob's recitations to tell him a story of my own, a true one: the way I discovered his novels. I had grown up a Twilight Zone fan, and by my teenage days in the mid-'80s, I was beginning to explore Rod Serling's other work. I had seen a broadcast of "Patterns" on PBS, had secured a VHS copy of "Requiem for a Heavyweight," and was hungrily pursuing any other Serling info I could find.

I was in high school and worked evenings at a bookstore. This was during the archaic pre-Internet days, and we used a microfiche machine to look up and order book titles that weren't kept in stock. I searched "Serling" to see if Rod had written any novels or collections of which I wasn't aware. Due to space limitations, however, the microfiche system truncated author names, offering only a first initial alongside a full last name.

Thus, my search yielded entries for "Serling, R." that included The President's Plane is Missing and Air Force One is Haunted. Now, don't those titles have a real Rod Serling

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THE BOOKSHELF

Rod Serling at 100: One Writer's Acknowledgment

By Nick Parisi

Two biographies of Rod Serling have been published, not including Anne Serling's wonderful memoir and my own biography/critical analysis/reference guide. And there have been, of course, several books dedicated to *The Twilight Zone* where you can learn every fact and factoid of that series' five-season history. And if *Rod Serling's Night Gallery* is your passion, Scott Skelton and Jim Benson have given us the Bible on that polarizing series. What has been missing from all our libraries, however, is a book-length study of Rod Serling *as a writer* – a discussion of what made Serling's words so powerful and inspirational. Countless writers have sung Serling's praises, but none had sufficiently put that praise in print until now.

Joseph Dougherty's *Rod Serling at 100: One Writer's Acknowledgment* is exactly what the title suggests, one writer's acknowledgment of Rod Serling's impact as a writer, published in recognition of Serling's 100th birthday this year. Among his accolades, Dougherty can boast what seems to be a Serling-esque combination of having won an Emmy Award for Outstanding Writing in a Drama Series (for the series *Thirtysomething*) as well as having once been nominated for a Ray Bradbury Award by the Science Fiction Writers of America.

From the book's Foreword:

"I've never been shy about claiming I wouldn't have a career if it wasn't for the effect Rod Serling had on me. His one-hundredth birthday gives me a chance to explore some of the reasons he's meant so much to me as a dramatist.

His writing worked on the hard wiring of my brain from a very early age and sent me off on the impractical and soul-saving ambition to be a writer. Writing has been a major part of everything good that's ever happened to me. And Rod Serling was the man who started me off before I even knew what a writer was."

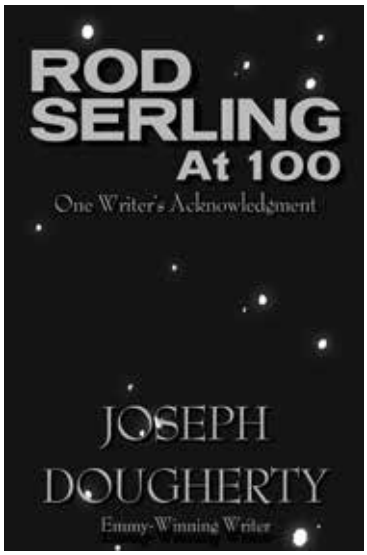
In the book's first proper chapter, *Things and Ideas*, Dougherty looks for the reasons why Serling's work has endured. And though he sets himself up as an unabashed fan, what he comes up with seems as close to objective fact as one man's opinion can be.

"Sincerity is the bass note vibrating through all of Serling's work," he writes, "when he was writing at the top of his game and when he was exhausted. Sincerity and authenticity."

And who could argue with this:

"Serling was an unrepentant lover of language. Of words and their rhythms. Alliteration, merism, aposiopesis, anadiplosis, hypotaxis, parataxis, chiasmus, prolepsis . . . you may not recognize the formal names for the building blocks of language, but you've experienced them in Serling's writing."

Don't let that list of twelve-dollar words fool you. Dougherty's book is never overly academic and never dull. *Rod Serling at 100: One Writer's Acknowledgment* is, in so many ways, the book we, or at least I, have been waiting for.



RSMF President Nick Parisi is the author of Rod Serling: His Life, Work, and Imagination"

ROBERT: FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

ring to them? I certainly thought so and ordered them on the spot. To my dismay and disappointment, when they arrived several days later, I found that they were written by some joker named "Robert Serling."

A typical writer might have taken offense in learning that to me, at that time, his bestselling, award-winning work lurked under the shadow of his more-famous brother. But Bob Serling wasn't typical. He laughed heartily, then quipped, "It doesn't matter how you got there, what matters is that you eventually discovered the real talent in the family."

That was pure Bob. That's why he is missed, and that's why the mere act of jotting down these memories brings a smile to my face.

RSMF board member Tony Albarella is the editor of numerous books on Serling's work, including the 10-volume series "As Timeless as Infinity: The Complete Twilight Zone Scripts of Rod Serling."

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PLANET OF THE APES

Planet of the Apes: Whose Ending is it Really?

By Gordon C. Webb

Rod Serling's body of work finds its way into many of my conversations these days, and the fact that he wrote the original screenplay of the 1968 *Planet of the Apes* usually elicits a look of surprise. Nearly everyone remembers the classic "Statue of Liberty ending," but most don't realize that Serling wrote it. In fact, almost since the film's release, controversy has surrounded the film's final scene.

The film was released while I was a student at Syracuse University, studying TV-Radio-Film. Already a devoted *Twilight Zone* fan, I bought a ticket as soon as it opened and was intrigued by the film's credits: "Screenplay by Michael Wilson and Rod Serling." The other S-U "film buffs" I saw the movie with thought the ending was a blockbuster... and most newspaper reviewers agreed: "It has one of the most chilling endings of recent years." (Dial. *Atlanta Constitution,* April 11, 1968, p. 27)

"The ending is a shocker, I warn you." (Dresser, *The Toledo Blade,* April 11, 1968, p. 58).

"... it ends smashingly..." (Drew, *The Hartford Times,* March 6, 1968, p. D1).

I still had a year of college to finish, and didn't give this much more thought until, many years later a friend gave me a copy of Joel Engel's *Rod Serling: The Dreams and Nightmares of Life in the "Twilight Zone."* Toward the end of the book, the author deals with some of Serling's post-*Twilight Zone* work, including *Planet of the Apes*. Engle mentions screenwriter Michael Wilson's involvement in the *Planet* script, and on page 295 he claims: "He also invented the movie's surprise ending: finding the head of the Statue of Liberty washed up on the beach, the man discovers that he has in fact landed on earth far in the future, after the atomic holocaust." Recalling my reaction to the film's ending nearly 30 years earlier, I thought "this can't be right!" At this point, I was a faculty member in the Park School of Communications at Ithaca College and, following the rules of academia ("publish or perish"), I decided to find out who was the true creator of the classic *Planet of the Apes* ending.

A researcher's best friends are people who actually "lived the story"—primary sources. By this time only a few of the individuals involved in the production of the film were still alive, but I found that Associate Producer Mort Abrahams was living in Los Angeles, and he agreed to an interview. What made this even better was that it was Abrahams's job to hire the writer for the project. What follows is my November 7, 1994 interview with him – published for the first time in its entirety.

GORDON: What I'm trying to get a handle on is, I guess, the chronology of what happened as far as the script is concerned. Serling, from what I've read, was commissioned to write the first draft. Is that correct?

MORT: Yes, that's right.

GORDON: The promotional material that I have with one of the scripts indicates that by the time they got to production, Serling was no longer available, so they brought in Michael Wilson to rewrite it. I've also heard there were problems with the script or whatever. What's your recollection of what happened?

MORT: Well, Rod broke the back of the story, unquestionably, in turning the book into a screenplay. Then he got busy, and then he felt he really didn't want to return. And I called in Michael Wilson... Michael did a fix on it. But I wasn't quite satisfied, and then I got a third screenplay writer.

GORDON: Yeah, I did see another name in one of the newspaper articles.

MORT: I'm trying to remember now... it's been so long now... he's since passed away. He did, essentially, a dialogue polish.

GORDON: Is (Producer) Arthur Jacobs still around?

MORT: No, no... Art died several years ago.

GORDON: Ok, and Franklin Schaffner, the director, is dead, right?

MORT: Ah, yes—Frank died about a year and a half ago. I did most of the work on the screenplay. Oh, Kelly—the third writer was Kelly. I can't remember his first name, but he did a dialogue polish. But the backbone of the story was Rod's.

GORDON: In the archive, we don't have the first draft, but I have the second draft that was dated early '64, so it's way back. And that one did not have the classic Statue of Liberty ending.

MORT: Yeah, but he did that.

GORDON: Then, in the third draft, that showed up.

MORT: Yeah. I figure that the third or the fourth draft we used as, essentially, the screenplay. Then there was a small rewrite by Michael, and then a dialogue polish by Kelly.

GORDON: There's a couple of specific points I'm curious about. Carol Serling was very gracious in making copies for me of all the reviews that she had... and it seems that the bulk of the reviews were positive. But, one of the main criticisms I read was the kind of "campy" dialogue that appears in it, where they took off on phrases like, you know, "I've never met a man I didn't like" and they'd

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change it to "I've never met an ape I didn't like," and "human see, human do"—that kind of thing. As I recall, a lot of that was not on the original Serling script.

MORT: No, no. That was mostly Kelly.

GORDON: And that got a lot of the criticism. The other thing—I don't know if you've read Serling's biography by Joel Engel, but he claims in that book that Wilson added the Statue of Liberty ending.

MORT: Not true. Not true. No.

GORDON: I didn't think so.

MORT: That was Rod. That was Rod's ending.

GORDON: That's such a classic Serling ending, anyway.

MORT: I don't know where he got that information from, but it's not accurate.

GORDON: I'm not as involved in the industry as you are, but there must be some reason why it's credited as Michael Wilson and Rod Serling, as opposed to Rod Serling and Michael Wilson. Do you know why Serling got second credit?

MORT: No. The workings of the Writers Guild and arbitration is very mysterious. Although I'm a member of the Guild myself, I've been at odds with them on several instances in recording credit. You know how the process works?

GORDON: Yes.

MORT: It's an arbitration process, and there's no real appeal from it, and nothing much you can do about it. They theoretically read all the drafts of the screenplay. Michael made some changes in the so-called "romantic relationship," but it was all essentially there in the screenplay by Rod. There were no really major changes that Michael introduced.

GORDON: Yeah, as I recall, there was a romantic interest with what became the Roddy McDowell character, and he beefed up the "Cornelius" part quite a bit.

MORT: Yes, Michael did that.

GORDON: As you say, to add kind of a romantic twist?

Left: Opening credits for Planet Of The Apes. Right: Mort Abrahams

MORT: Right. We thought it needed a little more of that, and Michael supplied it. But, it was a very difficult adaptation, and getting to the essence of the plot—translating it from Pierre Boullé's novel was very, very difficult, and Rod kind of got it almost right away! I mean, three or four drafts is nothing!

GORDON: The first thing I did was to go back and read the original novel, and it seems to me that, while it's difficult to adapt a novel into a movie, his draft is much closer to the original theme.

MORT: Yeah, (it was) closer... I mean certainly the ending, as I recall from the book, is at the Eiffel Tower, isn't it?

GORDON: Yeah.

MORT: It's been a long time... but in trying to get that equivalence, he (Serling) got something even much more powerful.

GORDON: My original goal in doing this research and writing this article was—25 years later—to kind of go back and reconstruct the process, and I read other reviews that basically said that the producers didn't like Serling's script and therefore hired Wilson to rewrite it, and that kind of thing.

MORT: No, that's not true at all. No, no—we have great admiration for what Rod did, and I was a long-time fan of Rod. I was one of the people who brought him into Cincinnati in the early days.

GORDON: Really?

MORT: Yeah, he worked for me years before *Planet*—when I was doing a science fiction series called *Tales of Tomorrow*, back in 1950.

GORDON: I've seen a couple of the things he did at Cincinnati.

MORT: Mostly he was writing radio shows. But no—his contribution cannot be exaggerated, because they were enormous. Without his having broken the back of the screenplay, I don't know who else could have done it. And of course, you're aware now that Oliver Stone presumably is going to do (a version of "Apes"). It's been coming up for the last three years. I don't know how true that is.

GORDON: I've read something that indicated that he's trying to do something that's not an adaptation... not a sequel... but supposedly a totally different approach.

MORT: Well, the last I heard, it was going to take place on a different planet, but I don't know if he's ever going to get involved in it. Fox is trying to press it, because they have the franchise, but I don't know if it's ever going to happen. It's way out of his normal kind of filmmaking.

GORDON: I believe you were involved in at least one of the sequels—is that true?

MORT: Ah, yeah, the next two. I co-wrote the second one... I was involved with the third, and then Arthur and I split—amicably, I must say—and he went on to the rest.

GORDON: So what was APJAC Productions?

MORT: Well, APJAC Productions was a corporate name and Fox bought APJAC in order, among other things, to get the rights to do the television series which was, unfortunately, a failure.

GORDON: I guess neither you nor Serling were involved in that at all.

MORT: No, they asked me to become involved in it, but when they told me what they had in mind, I said no thank you. They couldn't decide whether it was a children's program or an adult program. They didn't know what it was.

GORDON: In going through the files from the archive, I came across a couple of what looked like drafts of television scripts that Serling wrote—episode 1, episode 2...

MORT: For the television series?

GORDON: They appear to be... it's just *Planet of the Apes*, episode 1, and it doesn't resemble anything close to the movie script, so I can only assume that it was TV, but Carol told me she didn't think he was involved in it at all.

MORT: I was not aware that he ever was... he never mentioned it to me. In fact, I had suggested that when they asked me to become involved—I said it would help convince me if Rod would come along, and they said no—they had approached Rod, (but) he wasn't interested. So I don't know what happened.

GORDON: In going through the files, I came across, just buried in one of the drafts, a very funny two, three-page "joke" script where Rod had rewritten the ending, and he was either in a very bad mood or a very funny

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

PLANET OF THE APES

ABRAHAMS: FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

mood or something, and he wrote an ending that was a parody of his own work. It has the big climax, and as Taylor approaches the structure sticking out of the sand, and he looks up -- it's a giant hand with its middle finger sticking out (Abrahams laughs)... I don't know if anyone knows this exists, it was just stuck in a file.

MORT: I never heard it... (laughs again)... (he) must have been in some kind of a mood.

GORDON: I'll have to send you a copy. It's one of those things writers do when they're frustrated, I guess. Probably after the sixth draft and he couldn't take it anymore.

MORT: (Laughing) He was probably pissed off at me, among other people.

GORDON: Well, is there anything else you can think of, relative to the story development, the writing of it?

MORT: No, not really. It was pretty well complete by the time it got into Frank's hands. Frank just loved it right from the beginning—and really made only very minor changes—mostly little dialogue here and there. But basically, I think it went through four versions with Rod and three or four with Michael, and then he got written out....ended up in San Francisco... he wrote himself out, and then I called in Kelly and he did two or three drafts, which was, as I say mostly dialogue polish... and added a couple notes of humor... and a couple which Frank and I added on the set, like the "monkey, see monkey do" and "see no evil, hear no evil"—which, at the moment seemed like a funny thing. But, script-wise, that's about the story.

GORDON: I have a copy of what's called the shooting script which I purchased from one of these script houses, but the title page on that particular version—and it matches the film pretty closely—lists only Wilson.

MORT: It doesn't list Kelly at all?

GORDON: It doesn't even list Serling! This one lists " `*Planet of the Apes*' -- screenplay by Michael Wilson, based on the novel by Pierre Boulé. Shooting script May 5, 1967." And I also uncovered one

Kim Hunter and Rod Serling on the set of Planet Of The Apes

at the Motion Picture Academy, in their library, and it's the same thing... in fact in their card catalog it says: *Planet of the Apes* written by Michael Wilson. In the screen credits, it's Wilson and Serling. So, that's kind of strange.

MORT: That's very strange.

GORDON: Unless that just happened to be Wilson's copy that they had.

MORT: It may have been Michael—who was sometimes a little ornery—just, you know, he himself wrote that in. You know, it wasn't the official version—it was his version, so he credited himself. That's conceivable. I don't recall that ever being called to my attention, or I didn't notice it... never became an issue. I'm a little vague on that 25 years after.

GORDON: Sure, sure. So there are all kinds of interesting twists here. But I really appreciate your information....

MORT: There aren't many of us (still) around who were connected with *Planet*... let's see, I think Bill Creeber is still around—the production designer. The cinematographer is gone... Frank's gone... of course Roddy's around (MacDowell), Maurice Evans is gone. Chuck (Heston) is around, of course.

GORDON: Well, yeah, I guess that's something else I read somewhere... that Heston's enthusiasm for the story or the script was one of the things that got it going. Is that your recollection?

MORT: Well, it helps. I mean, originally the casting with Heston had Edward G. Robinson... and when I did a screen test for the make-up, it was a scene with Chuck and Eddie Robinson. But subsequently Eddie had some heart problems, and he was afraid—I think correctly—that it would have been physically too draining on him.

GORDON: So that would have been the Dr. Zaius character?

MORT: And that was Zaius, yeah. So he dropped out, and I got Maurice Evans, but he and Chuck did the make-up test... but, yeah—I'm sure that Chuck's interest was a valuable asset. I mean, there's no question about it... but, of course, he didn't want to do the sequel.

GORDON: Well, it's been very helpful. Do you mind if I use any of your comments in my article?

MORT: No, no—not at all.

GORDON: I appreciate your help so much. You've filled in a lot of gaps.

MORT: Not at all. If there are any questions or anything further I can do, just give me a call.

GORDON: Good. I will do that.

Gordon C. Webb is a board member of the Rod Serling Memorial Foundation. His article "30 Years Later: Rod Serling's Planet of the Apes" was published in the July-August 1998 issue of Creative Screenwriting. It also appears in The Planet of the Apes Chronicles, released in 2001 by Plexus Publishing Limited, London. You can also find it online at the RSMF website: www.tinyurl.com/Mythbusting-POTA

Maiden, the Mascot, and Serling

By Gail Flug

Imagine, if you will... You're watching one of your favorite bands on the planet in concert, so immersed in the music that you're not paying attention to anything else. It's the first encore, and Iron Maiden is performing the epic track "Hell On Earth." Then it hits you—they're playing in front of a backdrop showing a desolate, post-apocalyptic landscape. The only thing left standing is the Statue of Liberty, but it has the face of the band's infamous mascot, Eddie.

Reality sets in, and you realize it's a tribute to the classic final scene of Planet of the Apes, written by your hero, Rod Serling. Your phone is off and buried in your jacket pocket, and there's no way you're going to stop watching and listening just to take a picture—even though the song is ten minutes long. Besides, you know there will be hundreds of YouTube videos where you can grab a screenshot of their homage to Serling.

Gail Flug, a board member of the Rod Serling Memorial Foundation since 2021, is the foundation's graphic designer.

BEYOND THE TWILIGHT ZONE

The Time Rod Serling Showed Us a World Without Christmas

By Tom Elliot

On December 25, 2024, fans around the world remembered Rod Serling on his 100th birthday. And this landmark made me reflect on how some of my most cherished memories of Rod Serling's work are the pieces that he wrote about Christmas.

His exploration of this theme spans his entire body of work, yet with each return, he crafts a fresh experience. Serling doesn't merely repaint the same canvas; he creates entirely new masterpieces every time. Familiar threads run through these stories, but their diversity is astounding.

So I invite you to join me on a journey through Rod Serling's Christmas tales and to remember him through this special thread where he created magic time after time.

We begin our journey not with one of Serling's celebrated Christmas *Twilight Zone* episodes, but an obscure curio from the days when he was writing and directing plays at Antioch College: "No Christmas this Year," which was produced for Serling's Antioch college radio series. Thankfully the script still exists, and it's a fascinating glimpse into the writer that Rod Serling was at the time—and the writer he would later become.

Picture a time, perhaps the late 1940s, where Christmas has been cancelled. The play suggests that humanity's preoccupation with war and greed rendered us undeserving of this holiday, and life had ground us down so much that when Christmas vanished, we accepted it without question. Except for one curious soul: Johnny Jones, a little boy who dared to ask why.

Johnny first asks his parents: Why is there no Christmas? When they don't know, he embarks on an adventure around the U.S. and even the world, where he tries to find out why there is no Christmas, and what can be done to get it back.

He speaks to workers, politicians, even Santa Claus himself. And along the way Rod Serling passes on his message of hope—that perhaps people can change and be deserving of Christmas once again.

It's a sweet tale, and while it may not be remembered with Rod Serling's other works due to its obscurity, as we explore other Christmas works by Serling, perhaps we'll find echoes of this early obscurity woven into the fabric of his later masterpieces.

Tom Elliot presentation at Serlingfest 2024

So our journey begins—and the first stop, of course, is "The Night of the Meek."

First broadcast:
December 23, 1960
Written by Rod Serling
Directed by Jack Smight

In "The Night of the Meek," Henry Corwin, a down-and-out department-store Santa, is drowning his sorrows in alcohol, disheartened by the rampant poverty and commercialism around him. On Christmas Eve, after losing his job, he stumbles upon a magical bag that gives out presents, allowing him to fulfill the wishes of the needy. This encounter brings joy not only to the children and destitute individuals he helps, but also restores Corwin's faith in himself and the spirit of Christmas, demonstrating that even in the darkest times, hope and generosity can prevail.

Such is the magic and the power of "The Night of the Meek" that it could be felt even on set.

In *The Twilight Zone Companion*, Marc Zicree writes, "Taped just three weeks before Christmas, 'Night of the Meek' had a special effect on the cast and crew, and especially on the many children on the set. Production assistant Lillian Gallo recalls, 'There were more children performing as extras than on the other tape shows, and I remember their excitement and their joy. Sometimes it was difficult for them to contain themselves during the times that you have to be quiet during the show. There was a different atmosphere throughout that shooting schedule'."

So magic runs through every aspect of "The Night of the Meek," and it gives us one of the most heartwarming endings of any *Twilight Zone* episode, when Henry Corwyn takes up the mantle of Santa Claus and is able to spread joy every year.

Now, let's circle back to "No Christmas This Year." In both the play and the *Zone* episode, Serling weaves a tapestry of common themes—threads that bind humanity across time and circumstance. The two main characters are very different: Johnny Jones, an innocent child, and Henry Corwyn, a downtrodden adult man. But where they are the same is that neither wields any great power in this world, yet both grasp the true essence of Christmas—not for themselves, but for others.

They transcend their positions in society, reaching for something beyond the ordinary. And in their quests, they mirror the very spirit of the season.

Our next stop is a *Twilight Zone* episode in which Rod Serling gives us a completely different flavor of Christmas story. He doesn't just do a re-tread of this past success, but he realizes that the Christmas experience will be different for different people, and he makes a Christmas story for a particular kind of person in "The Changing of the Guard."

First Broadcast: June 1, 1962
Written by Rod Serling
Directed by Robert Ellis Miller

Professor Ellis Fowler is a teacher at a New England school who contemplates suicide after he is forced to take retirement after 51 years of teaching. In his brush with the fifth dimension, this solitary man learns that while he might not have family at home, he has touched the lives of many people. And although he may no longer have the job that he loved, life is still worth living.

In many ways, I think "The Changing of the Guard" is my favorite of Rod Serling's Christmas stories. It doesn't have the Christmas iconography of "Night of the Meek," no Christmas trees or Santas. But what it does have is a message to those people for whom Christmas time may be different.

Traditionally, Christmas is about family and togetherness, but not everyone's life turns out that way. Professor Fowler's certainly hasn't; his personal life is a more solitary one, but he still has a profound effect on the students that he teaches. But in "The Changing of the Guard," Rod Serling places a comforting hand on the shoulder of the people like Professor Fowler and says that a life lived in a different way need not be any less special.

So let's take that thread from "No Christmas This Year" that we then wove through "The Night of the Meek." Both tales echo the power of the individual—the ability to make a difference, even when the world seems indifferent.

Johnny Jones and Henry Corwyn stepped up when opportunity knocked, but Professor Fowler has been quietly making a difference all along. When *The Twilight Zone* intervenes, it's not to help Professor Fowler to sprinkle magic—he's already been doing that. No, this time it's to remind Professor Fowler that he isn't a forgotten soul and that he deserves magic too.

Although there is more we could say about Christmas in *The Twilight Zone*, our next stop is that other Rod Serling anthology series, *Night Gallery*, in its Christmas story, "The Messiah on Mott Street."

First broadcast:
December 15, 1971

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CHRISTMAS: FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Written by Rod Serling
Directed by Don Taylor

In "The Messiah on Mott Street," an elderly Jewish man named Abraham Goldman is gravely ill, and his young grandson, Mikey, fears losing him. Desperate, Mikey searches for a miracle on the snowy streets of their New York neighborhood. He encounters a mysterious figure who offers hope and guidance.

This poignant story explores themes of faith, love, and the power of belief, illustrating how the bond between grandfather and grandson, coupled with unwavering hope, can inspire miraculous moments in the direst of circumstances.

"Messiah" director Don Taylor also helmed one of the best episodes of *Night Gallery*, "They're Tearing Down Tim Riley's Bar." In *Rod Serling's Night Gallery: An After-Hours Tour*, writers Jim Benson and Scott Skelton include a quote from Anne Serling: "The final results of 'Tim Riley's Bar' and 'Messiah on Mott Street' are very close to what my dad intended. They have such a strong human element that they can both bring me to tears all these decades later. They're just so well-crafted. My dad was so pleased with these episodes too, despite his ambivalence about the series."

Once again, let's recall "No Christmas This Year." Little Johnny Jones stepped into the world from the safety of his home, determined to mend his fractured reality. And now, in "The Messiah on Mott Street," Mikey embarks on a similar journey—stepping out of his safe space on a quest to help his ailing grandpa.

Again, both characters share a common thread: They lack worldly power. Johnny is an innocent but hopeful child; Mikey, a poverty-stricken orphan. Serling once again reminds us that the true spirit of Christmas resides with the meek—the ones who possess little but willingly extend themselves for others.

Once again, we are reminded of where Serling's allegiances lie. These stories aren't resolved by wealthy benefactors swooping in to save the day. None of these characters are CEOs or politicians; they're everyday people — children, the downtrodden, the overlooked. Yet they step beyond their own needs, seeking resolution, healing, and hope.

Peter Sellers as Imperial Me in "Carol for Another Christmas"

All of Serling's characters are the unsung heroes who don't hold any great power in the world, but wield kindness like a secret weapon. They remind us that Christmas isn't about grand gestures or lavish gifts; it's about reaching out, even when our pockets are empty.

This is exemplified in this quote from Rod Serling's daughter Jodi:

"The spirit and the feeling around the Christmas season, the sense of fellowship and the warmth that surrounds that time of year, was keenly felt by both my mom and dad. In his work, Dad often used that special feeling of selflessness and magic that goes hand in hand with Christmas time to work some magic of his own. He used it especially well to recognize and reward his favorite kinds of characters – the forgotten people, the downtrodden, the hopeless and the lonely ones.

"You can see it in TZ's 'The Night of the Meek' or in 'The Changing of the Guard,' and in 'Carol for Another Christmas,' his contemporary updating of the Dickens classic … In these stories he used fantasy to bring awareness to their plights and gave them the relief they rarely found in real life."

As I mentioned earlier, Rod Serling's characters in these stories aren't typically businessmen or politicians. But what happens when he does feature a businessman, someone with enough power to influence politics as well? If we step back in the timeline, between *The Twilight Zone* and *Night Gallery*, we can see just that.

The Twilight Zone was famously Rod Serling's method of embedding his messages within science fiction and fantasy, effectively hiding them in plain sight. However, as the series progressed, we observe Serling becoming more forthright, sometimes dropping the subtlety altogether to deliver his messages directly. Episodes like "Deaths-Head Revisited," "He's Alive," and "I Am the Night—Color Me Black" make their intentions clear without any disguise.

Serling fully embraced this direct approach six month after the *Zone* ended in his adaptation of the Charles Dickens classic "A Christmas Carol," titled "A Carol for Another Christmas."

First broadcast:
December 28, 1964
Written by Rod Serling (based on a story by Charles Dickens)
Directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz

For those of you who haven't seen it—and that's understandable, as it spent many years in the wilderness since its initial broadcast—"A Carol for Another Christmas" was one of three specials commissioned to promote the United Nations and educate viewers about its mission. But this isn't your typical holiday fare; it's a thought-provoking journey into the dark heart of humanity.

Our focus rests on Daniel Grudge, a wealthy industrialist with a firm stance: America should steer clear of international affairs. No foreign aid for the needy, no entanglement with the United Nations. Grudge's convictions run deep, and they collide head-on with the spirit of the season. He is the complete opposite of the characters we've met so far on this journey.

Now, I love "A Carol for Another Christmas," but I'll be honest, it's pretty heavy going after your Christmas dinner. This isn't light entertainment. It is intense. The dialogue is magnificent, and it's delivered by some of the best actors in the world, but it does get very dark.

In one unforgettable scene, three Japanese children lie shrouded in white gauze, their voices united in singing a haunting song. But the true chill settles in when we learn that their faces were burned away in the atomic blast of Hiroshima. The echoes of war, the scars etched on innocence—Serling doesn't shy away from the raw truth.

Remember little Johnny Jones from "No Christmas This Year"? In the play, he asked Santa why Christmas had vanished. Santa's answer? Humanity's fascination with weapons and greed—always money for war, but never for the poor. We hear about it in "No Christmas this Year," but we see it in "Carol for Another Christmas."

Thankfully, as in the Dickens original, things do work out. But as it's one of the lesser-seen Serling works, it's well worth seeking out for yourself.

This year at SerlingFest, the audience was given an opportunity to reconnect with a formative period in Rod Serling's life and hear segments of the Christmas radio play that would sow the seeds of his later yuletide-themed work. Broadcast publicly for the first time in over 70 years was Rod Serling's "No Christmas This Year," and now in the RSMF newsletter, you can read segments from that script.

No Christmas This Year
Written by Rod Serling

SERLING:
Stop the music! Stop the music! There, that's it. No, my friends, this isn't a quiz show. We had to stop the music—it was Christmas music. And there is no Christmas in this particular year in this particular story. We'll call the year the present; the time, now; the cast, you and your neighbors. This could be 1948 or 1949 or perhaps the year after, but for our purposes we'll just call it now.

The month—we can be specific—is December. But not like other Decembers. There are no lights, no Christmas trees, no

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CHRISTMAS: FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

tinsel, no crowds of joyous Christmas shoppers. There are no children pressing their tiny noses against department-store windows where toys used to be filed with breathtaking array. There are no toys in the department-store windows, and no sounds and childish laughter.

Even the snow was different. It's not the white, fluffy snow of past Decembers. It's gray and dark and melts in the dirty slush on the sidewalks. People's stamp their overshoes in it as they rush home after work, their heads surrounded by upturned coat collars, looking straight ahead, not bothering to pause for a nod and a smile, a cheery hello, perhaps. No, this year there is none of the usual fellowship—no good wishes, no cheery good will. All of this came with the past, and this … well, this is the present, and there is no Christmas this year.

Why no Christmas this year? Well, nobody seems to know. It was just announced—yes, tersely announced on the radio and in the newspapers that civilization would dispense with Christmas this year. Oh, there was some reason for it, but no one knew, and being human beings they were used to disappointments. But still they wondered.

There was no explanation. No one seemed to know why, but there just wasn't any Christmas. It was as if someone had thrown a blanket over the world and extinguished all the lights. As if someone had passed a law proclaiming happiness illegal. As we said, everyone wondered, but no one did anything about it.

There was, however, one little boy. His name was Johnny Jones, and in addition to wondering, he started asking questions.

Johnny:
Daddy…

Dad:
What is it, son?

Johnny:
Dad, why isn't there going to be a Christmas?

Dad:
I don't know, son—people like us, we wouldn't know. We're the little people.

Johnny:
Well, who would know?

Dad:
Oh, somebody in politics maybe. Somebody high up.

Johnny:
How high?

Dad:
Oh, I suppose the mayor might have an inkling… might have, that is.

So Johnny Jones's journey begins, but think back to Mikey in "The Messiah on Mott Street." Naive, innocent, but hopeful. Stepping out into a world that he knows little about—and we can see Mikey's roots here, in Johnny Jones, doing the exact same thing.

Mikey and Johnny don't think about whether they should be speaking to people like the mayor or the messiah. They don't think about whether these people are above their station. They're just trying to do the right thing. So when Johnny Jones goes to see the mayor, he's told that he needs to go higher up. He needs to go to Congress.

Senator:
Yes, my boy, what can I do for you?

Johnny:
Did you know there wasn't going to be a Christmas this year, Senator?

Senator:
Yes, I'd heard rumors to that effect.

Johnny: Well, whatcha gonna do about it?

Senator:

What am I going to… why, my boy, nothing. Absolutely nothing. Congress is tied up with important things now.

Johnny:
Important things? What's more important than Christmas?

Senator:
More important than Christmas, he says. Haha, well, there's the proposal to end the poll tax. The South's against it, and it looks like another doggone filibuster. And there's the new minimum wage law that just passed the House committee. Fight developing there. Parity price on wheat. That looks doubtful… that's funny, where'd that little boy go?

Johnny Jones shares Mikey's determination, but he also shares his naivete. Neither of them really know how the world works yet. So when Johnny keeps getting told he needs to go higher up, he keeps going higher up.

Johnny:
Sir, do you own this building?

Janitor:
Me? Own the Empire State Building? Well hardly, boy. I'm just a custodian. That's all I am.

Johnny:
Well, I've been goin' around trying to find somebody high up who knew why there wasn't a Christmas. I been to my dad. Then the mayor, and then the Senator, but I guess they wasn't high up enough 'cause they didn't know.

Janitor:
So you came up to the 101st floor of the Empire State 'cause you figured somebody here's gonna be high up enough, huh?

Johnny:
But how high do I have to go? Who can I see?

Janitor:
Beats me. Guess Santa Claus is the only one. Yep, Santa Claus himself.

Johnny:
Santa Claus! Sure, that's who'd know. That's who could tell me. I'll go to see Santa Claus.

Now up until now, this has been quite a light-hearted affair. There is an undertone of something has gone wrong with the world, but as he would years later with The Twilight Zone, Rod Serling is easing us into what this is really all about. And in this scene where Johnny meets Santa, we start to really get Rod's message…

Santa:
When we got a letter asking for a doll, we got a hundred asking for eight batteries of 105 Howitzers. And when we got a couple of letters asking for an erector set, we got two hundred asking for an atomic bomb or a reasonable facsimile thereof. And the person adds that he's been a good boy all year! Well, Johnny, what could we do? We were all set to make scooters, and they wanted dive bombers. We had plans for some wonderful bikes… we'd have to scrap them for tanks. Now I ask you, Johnny—is that Christmas-like?

There is a level of humor hearing Santa talk about these absurd things. But at its core, the message is there, and it's an important one. We always find time and money for war, but not for the things that make us feel good in life. The things that bring us together. Things like community, or the arts. And in this case…Christmas.

Johnny:
What can I do? Is there anything I can do?

Santa:
I don't think there's anything you could do, Johnny. If you were the whole of civilization, I'd use your own vernacular. I'd say, "Get wise, people, get wise. Quit hating, quit envying one another. Quit being selfish and false.

Johnny:
I'll tell them that. I'll go back and tell them all that.

Santa:
I wish you could, Johnny. Maybe they'd wake up and forget about trying to make the North Pole an arsenal.

So Santa sends Johnny Jones home, closely followed by an elf to keep an eye on him.

Now, remember how in all of the stories we've seen so far, Rod's heroes are the meek. The children. The down and outs. Or people who felt life had left them on the scrap heap. They weren't businessmen. They weren't CEOs. And when we do meet one, it's Daniel Grudge. And while our CEOs in "No Christmas This Year" may not be quite as bad as Grudge, they still need some convincing to do the right thing.

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CHRISTMAS: FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Sarnon:
The meeting will come to order. We meet today as members of the Amalgamated Union of American Broadcasters…

Johnny:
Excuse me, sir.

Sarnon:
What is it, little boy? A phone call for me?

Johnny:
I want to go on the radio. I've been up to the North Pole. I talked to Santa Claus. He told me why there wasn't going to be any Christmas this year. He explained the whole thing to me, and I'm supposed to tell everybody the story. Then maybe the big boss'll change his mind. Maybe he would if we could prove to him that we realized our mistakes and then…

Sarnon:
Come, boy, you've interrupted a busy meeting. A broadcast coast to coast and short-waved overseas would cost you approximately a thousand dollars a second.

Elf:
Hello, Johnny. Having trouble?

Johnny:
Oh, hello, Mr. Elf. Where am I going to get a million dollars? It's going to cost at least that to talk on the radio.

Elf:
Hmm… they're tough customers. Penny wise, pound foolish. Here, take some of this happy dust.

Johnny sprinkles the happy dust on the executives, and they all begin to laugh.

Sarnon:
His idea intrigues me, and the child is in earnest.

Man 1:
Let's give the boy a break.

So once again, through kindness, innocence and a bit of happy dust, Rod Serling's heroes prevail, and it's time for Johnny Jones to make his address to the world…

Johnny:
This is Johnny Jones, world. I'm eight years old, and I have something pretty important to say. I've been up to the North Pole talking to Santa Claus. He told me he wasn't having no Christmas this year. Why the streets were dark, and people was unhappy, and nobody had time for good will or friendship. He told me why the factories up at the North Pole weren't making no more toys. He told me all these things, he told me to tell all of you, to speak to the whole world.

Now here's what Santa says we should do. Quit destroying one another. Start having faith in each other. Without it, we won't deserve Christmas. We can't have anything we don't really believe in.

As Johnny Jones starts to put out his message, the world starts to wake up. People start to call in to the radio station. Reporters start to excitedly talk to each other about the message that this little boy is putting out. Johnny Jones's message is getting through…

Johnny:
So there it is, world, the whole thing is right in our laps. If we lose Christmas, we lose our last chance. We lose our right to happiness. We lose everything we've ever won. I'm just a kid, but I'm speaking for all the kids all over the world.

Give us back Christmas. Give us back toys and holly and trees and gifts, give us back the time of year everybody starts figuring out why it's so useless to hate all the time, when liking is so much nicer and so much easier. Then, if we get Christmas back, maybe we'll be able to start fresh-like. We'll be able to figure out just what's important and just what means something. Sure, we all know Christmas is only one little day in a whole year of days, but if you cross it out, you cross more than one day out—why, you cross a whole year of hope and expectation and faith.

Like I told you, I'm only eight years old, I know I ain't smart and big and important, but I figured the whole world didn't get like this deliberate-like. It didn't give up on Christmas, it just sorta forgot how important it was.

So everybody, quit fighting and quit hating. Please, like Santa says, be full of good cheer and like everybody's been saying since the three wise men, peace on earth, good will to all men.

Through Johnny Jones, Rod Serling focuses us on what truly matters. Kindness, decency, unity—where our priorities really should be. Taking care of each other.

I want to thank everyone who helped me to get to this point: Anne and Jodi Serling for allowing me to use this forgotten gem. Amy Boyle Johnston and Nick Parisi for making me aware of "No Christmas This Year." And Cathy Michael, the librarian and archivist at Ithaca College who facilitated the recording and does such a good job of keeping the Rod Serling archive over there.

But it's only proper that the last word should go to the great man. So Rod…take us home.

SERLING:
So there you have the story of a year when there almost wasn't any Christmas. Granted, it's a fantasy. Hardly likely that it could happen, but aren't we outrageously lucky that it shouldn't? We go on year after year celebrating peace on earth—one day out of the year feeling good will and brotherhood, and one day out of the year possessing the good will and brotherhood—one day out of the year possessing the good will that comes with Christmas.

But after that one day, we throw all these things away with our old Christmas trees. Yes, we're mighty lucky someone hasn't gotten disgusted with us poor fools and taken this wonderful holiday away from us.

So today and tomorrow and as Christmas draws nearer, listen to the bells, look at the smiles. Feel warm in the good wills and see if all of you, like little Johnny Jones, can keep the spark that is Christmas in your being so that you might love your fellow man just as much on the Fourth of July as on the Lord's birthday.

Because, you see, fantasies may not be likely to happen, but that doesn't mean they couldn't. Go ahead—just for fun, look out of your windows. Are there Christmas trees and decorations and holly? Are there?

Oh, there are! Well, Merry Christmas then to all you people out there. Merry Christmas to all you lucky people

Tom Elliot is host of "The Twilight Zone Podcast." Check out his work at www.thetwilightzonepodcast.

Sandy
'Grandmother'
Age: 72

Alton
'Grandfather'
Age: 73

OUR FIRST TIME TO WATCH:

The Twilight Zone

Christopher
'Dad'
Age: 47

Rylan
'Son'
Age: 15

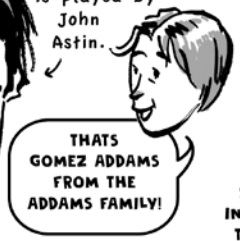
Rod Serling
Creator and Writer

Season 2, Episode 23: A Hundred Yards Over the Rim

So basically the leader of a wagon train that can barely continue on, stops to explore the surrounding area and search for food and water. When the leader goes over a large sand dune he winds up in the future. He meets some people who help him and give him some penicillin that he takes back in time to cure his dying son.

Cliff Robertson plays the leader of the wagon train, Chris Horn.

Charlie, one of the other wagoneers is played by John Astin.



THE VIEW FROM THE TOP OF THE RIDGE REMINDS ME OF A SECTION OF HIGHWAY WE DROVE IN CALIFORNIA ON A ROAD TRIP WE TOOK FROM TEXAS TO SAN DIEGO.

WHEN CHRIS WENT OVER THE RIDGE AND SAW HE WAS IN A STRANGE PLACE HE SHOULD HAVE TURNED AROUND AND WENT BACK TO HIS PEOPLE AND GOT THEM.

HE SHOULD HAVE TAKEN SOMEONE WITH HIM IN THE FIRST PLACE. SAFETY IN NUMBERS. ETC.

When Chris Horn enters the future time line he walks down the highway and a mile later comes to a roadside cafe where he meets Joe and Mary Lou who try to help him and even call a doctor to get his opinion.

While Chris is at the diner, he has time to read an encyclopedia and reads an entry about his son who had become a doctor.

What a coincidence the encyclopedia just happened to have an article about his son.

Probably a lot of words in there a man from 120 years in the past wouldn't understand.

I KNOW IT'S A TV THING. BUT BOY DO PEOPLE GET CLOSE TO EACH OTHER WHEN THEY TALK!

Joe
played by
John Crawford

Mary Lou
played by
Evans Evans

The Doctor
played by
Edward Platt