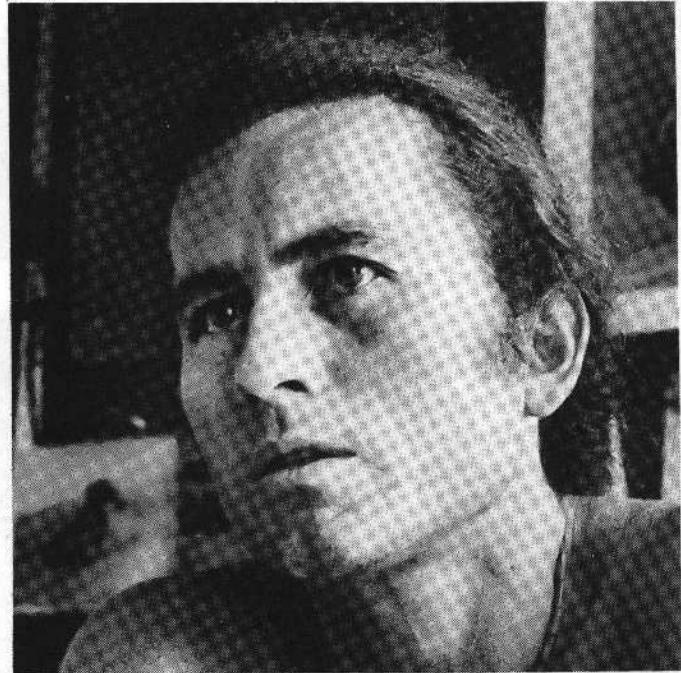
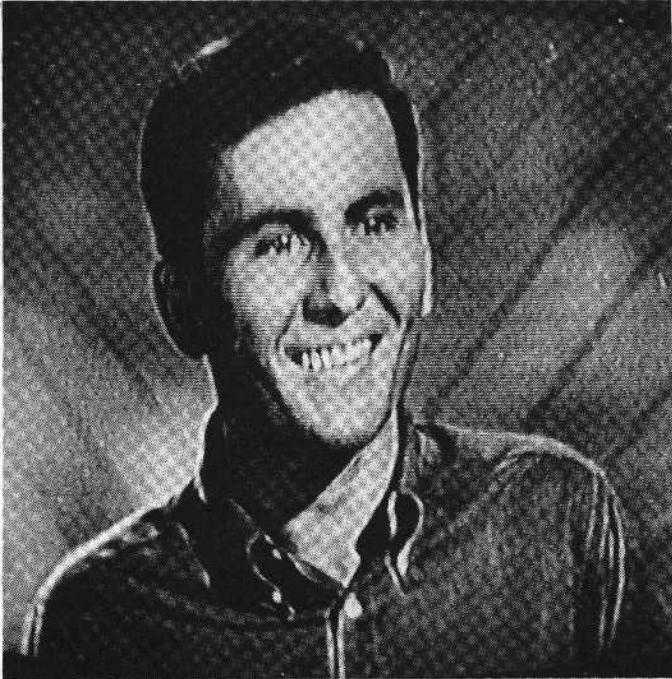


BILL GRAY



Q: Let's get right down to an area you're identified with—situation comedies. You were Bud Anderson on *Father Knows Best* when we were growing up. You were our stereotype, a conditioned response. You're our alter-ego in a way. Our parents had values like Jim and Margaret Andersons'. Then you were not only a part of it as an actor, but as a person too. How do you feel about *Father Knows Best*?

B: An actor has a responsibility for the role he plays. That's why I'm not too happy about *Father Knows Best*. It perpetuated the status quo, and the things I was portraying were not healthy responses. There's no way to avoid the process of imitation and emulation. By portraying situations that the producers wished, you reinforce reactions in the viewers—well that was the way it ought to be 'cause that's the way it was on *Father Knows Best*. Any show is just bristling with examples of it. The last one I saw was one about Betty wanting to become a road surveyor—it was male chauvinism just straight on down. Every show has some bullshit, phoney values.

Q: What did you think about those conditions then?

B: I didn't like them at all. I argued against them tooth and nail, but couldn't change a word. It was an acting job.

Q: How did you get to be Bud Anderson?

B: An interview. A couple of interviews and then I did a test. It was just a regular job.

Q: Are you getting any residuals from that program now?

B: No. I haven't for years. No foreign reruns. I haven't received any money for close to 10 years.

Q: When and where was *Father Knows Best* shot, and how many episodes were there?

B: There were about 200 episodes shot from about 1955-1961 at Columbia Studios in Hollywood.

Q: What were you getting paid at the beginning and end?

B: I'd been an actor since I was six, and I'd gotten my salary up to \$500 a week. The contract was originally written out for \$500 a week. But the morning the contracts were approved, Eugene B.

Rodney, producer of the series, added a rider to the contract. Instead of \$500 a week, he'd pay me \$250 a show, and shoot two shows each week with a week off in between. Evidently it looked somehow like \$500 a week to my agent, and I don't know if my agent was in cahoots with Rodney or not. So everybody signed it. And after a few weeks the schedule went to one show a week. So in effect my salary was cut to \$250 a week. I ended up at \$700 a week, it jumped \$50 every contract option pickup. So, I think I was bilked out of about \$80,000 all together.

Q: What have you done on network television since that time?

B: I did lots of things. I forget. Things like *Wagon Train*, one of the mystery things like *The Defenders*. I don't know. I don't like working on television and don't do much stuff like that any more. It's a total abortion of any kind of endeavor that has meaning. At least the way it's structured right now. All people are concerned with, although they give lip service to artistic matters, is getting finished on time and not going over budget. And everybody's getting drunk on the set and wanting to go home early. It's a low energy trip.

Q: What was Jane Wyatt like?

B: A very nice person except she was Catholic. I was raised Catholic and it's hard to deal with Catholics if they've gone for it. Because they have to close their mind to go for it. So you're dealing with somebody who has already shut off their intelligence.

Q: When you're out on the street, do people continually recognize you?

B: Not continually, but an awful lot of people do.

Q: How does it feel to still be Bud Anderson?

B: I don't consider myself to be Bud. I don't have any particular reaction to it. I don't intend to make the point that Bud wasn't real. And the things he's gone through are things that people experience from time to time. I'd been an actor since I was six, and was expected to deal with grownups as a grownup, and do a grownup job. I was way in advance of my years. My childhood in Hollywood was like sneaking into three or four movies a day when I wasn't in school. Even when I was in school. That was fun to do and killed the time. So I wasn't ever in Bud's adolescent childhood situation. I kind of enjoy that because I can be in it now. I was drawing upon my own experience and my own knowledge and understanding of human nature in portraying the part. I actually had few of the hang-ups that Bud experienced. I could portray Bud because I was a good actor.

Q: How old are you now?

B: Thirty-three.

Q: Was there a feeling of family on the set of *Father Knows Best*?

B: No, no feeling at all of family. And if anybody

felt it, they were deluding themselves. It was a professional situation. All the people involved had worked for years and years and years, except for Lauren Chapin. But she had worked. She wasn't a total beginner.

Q: What became of Lauren Chapin?

B: I don't know, but I feel sad about her because Lauren's mother was an alcoholic and drank up all of the money. She even got into Lauren's contract money—10 per cent is supposed to be put away for minors—by going to court. So Lauren got pretty well screwed over.

Q: What projects are you doing now?

B: A friend of mine and I were just chopping up the effectiveness of commercials and how they offend you so much. But yet they do actually work. The more times something is said into your brain, the more times it is implanted, the more immediate or more automatic your response is. Like when you see an item again and again, like on a shelf in a supermarket. You know—Ajax, Ajax, Ajax, Ajax, Ajax, Ajax. And then the lady goes in and reaches for Ajax without even thinking about it.

So we were talking about that and got into politics a little bit. If you could only program a person's image—a picture of him—enough times you could vote by image or picture instead of having a man's name written down and you check after that name. That if you check after a picture instead, the choice would be more automatic.

So it occurred to us that I perhaps have more positive implantation in the brains of more people than you could imagine and in a realistic setting. It's not like Hoppalong Cassidy or some actor that plays various roles. This is "Bud," a real-life, idealized situation—everybody thinks it's good. And we thought of a movie idea, *Billy Gray for President*.

We got a story line together, linked into a new picture ballot voting system and a research outfit called Visual Data, Inc., VD, stumbling on Billy Gray. It's a fantasy satire, Gulliver's Travels sort of thing. In it are some very radical political ideas like the abdication of the office of the presidency. The main thrust of the movie is, you know best, father doesn't know best, you know best. When you give the authority to make decisions away, you're dehumanizing and depowering yourself. And our country has really been guilty of taking the power away from the people in insidious ways. For example, the whole school structure is designed to produce automatons. A lot of people have been afraid of getting involved with the movie, but Jack Nicholson is interested in being executive producer. The project is still in the process of falling apart and falling together. I've got a director, Dean Stockwell, and we're probably going to write it together. We're trying to get it off in a couple of years in time for the off-year '74 elections.