

first ever to do a videotape commercial. I'm very bad on dates. But I did the first Easter Parade, and the Easter Parade was very successful in New York. I was the first variety show host and sports announcer. The first one to ever do a commercial on TV; the first to ever do a commercial half-hour show; the first to do wrestling; and the first to do a game show.

Q: What was the first television commercial?

D: It was for Wedgewood China. The whole half hour was a commercial and I starred as a soldier. The soldier was coming home from the war and he had seen Wedgewood China, and he was describing the Wedgewood China. A very interesting thing happened—they were going to run a piece of film on how the china is made from mud, and the film chain broke. They gave me a "stretch" because everything was live and I just kept on talking about mud. How they handle the mud in England and how they took this mud and developed it and how you were going to see it in a moment. I went on about mud for three and one-half minutes and I got an extra \$25 for that.

Q: How did you get to do the first TV wrestling?

D: I came out of the war in 1946 and my first assignment was to become the prosecuting attorney on *Famous Jury Trials* which went on television at that time. And then Dumont came to me again and said we have a wrestling thing. Would you do it for us? Well, I'd never seen a wrestling match in my life. I got hold of a book and got in touch with Sam Lane who had worked with me before and who was an authority on sports. I sat at ringside and would thumb through the pages of the book. When I would see a hammerlock, I would see the pictures and say, oh yes, mother, that is a hammerlock. I started to gear all my commentary to mother, because I figured all the guys in the bar (and bars were very important to TV in those days) knew more about this than I did. So I would say, "Mother, that is a hammerlock"—so that if she wanted to say to her husband, "Is that right, John?" he could say, "Yes, that is right." and so he would be a hero. I used to do the fights too—from Sunnyside Gardens, Jamaica Arena, from Park Arena and then I did the Wednesday Night Pabst Blue Ribbon fights. But the important thing that I was always gearing this to mother. The president of Sterling Drug called me and asked me to do a daytime show for them and we called it *Okay Mother*. It was one of the first audience participation shows ever (around 1947).

Q: How long did you do wrestling?

D: Until about 1951.

Q: Did you work with the big ones?

D: Oh, all the big ones. Gene Stanley—Mr. America, Sandor Koufax, Gino Garibaldi, Georgeous George, Bibber McCoy, Tarzan Hewitt. I used to do whole wrestling matches in spontaneous poetry, and one day I said, "Look at the suet on Hewitt." Now this is a man who wrestled for \$50 a night

and before I got finished playing with him, he became a headliner. So one night in the dressing room before we started, he grabbed me in this hammerlock that I'm talking about and almost broke my arm. He said don't ever talk about the suet on Hewitt—say anything else you want, but don't call me fat. Well, two weeks passed, and Milton Berle, who was hot in television in 1948, asked me to do a guest shot with him and asked me to bring a wrestler to wrestle with him. So I brought Tarzan Hewitt. Now he gets \$1500 for this performance. During the spontaneous commentary with Berle I forgot and said, "Look at the suet on Hewitt." Tarzan Hewitt jumped out of that ring, grabbed me, and I am down on the floor and he wasn't kidding, and this is coast to coast on the Berle show. He never appreciated my making him a star.

Q: How did "Hat Pin Mary" come into existence?

D: Very simple. She was in the Jamaica Arena on the other side of the ring within camera range (these people always know how to get in front of a camera, better than an actor) and she would run up and stick a hat pin in the derriere of a wrestler. There was always a villain and always a hero, and she would stick this hat pin into the villain. So we ran a contest with the viewers and "Hat Pin Mary" was the name we selected. There was another loud guy back there and we ran a contest on him and settled on the name, "Heckleberry Finn."

Q: How did the wrestlers put up with getting jabbed? Did it hurt?

D: Well, sure it hurt. It was all part of it to them. But then the boxing commission, which supervised wrestling, said you cannot use the hat pin. So she took cold Popsicles and ran up to do the same thing, which was a very funny picture.

Q: One of the things we all associate you with is telethons for cerebral palsy. Could you tell us how you got into your first telethon?

D: My first telethon was done in New York about 22 years ago. The first telethon ever was with Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, and it was almost the end of all telethons because it was a complete fiasco. They talked about raising two million and they didn't collect \$200,000. Anyhow, the first telethon I ever did had a different MC every half hour. Jackie Gleason and all the big names of that time. I was scheduled to come on because I was doing a big show at that time, and I came on at 11:30 at night. Luckily the phones started ringing, and the producer said this kid stays on for the rest of the telethon. Other succeeding MC's just came on as guests. That is the way it started where I did the whole thing for 20 hours.

Q: How much money do you think you have raised for cerebral palsy?

D: I used to do New York and maybe one other city. But I did 10 of them last year and will do about 12 of them this year. So now it has come to over \$20 million.