

WALLACE AND LADMO

—a *brief* history by Sharon Kelley (a Wallace “Watcher” from the age of five.)

If you grew up in the Valley or lived here before 1989, you likely know about the “Wallace and Ladmo” phenomenon. But if you moved here after the show went off the air, you probably keep hearing about these guys and wonder what the big deal was! This is for you.

Wallace and Ladmo was a kids show on KPHO that aired for over 35 years, and as far as anyone knows, it was one of the longest running shows (with the same cast) in TV history. Many adults and ASU students watched it, too. It was kind of a Saturday Night Live format—with comedy sketches, live music, guest appearances and cartoons. The daily (Monday thru Friday) hour long show, was performed in front of a live studio audience. Much of the humor poked fun at local politics which kept adults watching—but most of the time it was plain slapstick—appealing to both kids and adults.

It started in 1954, “LIVE” and in black and white, with Wallace (**Bill Thompson**) who at that time was the KPHO art director and studio floor director. A new cartoon package had been acquired and the program manager needed someone to “fill” in-between cartoons and commercials. Wallace volunteered and so began the show “**It’s Wallace**”. He soon talked his friend **Ladimir Kwiatkowski**, a KPHO camera operator, into joining him as a “sidekick.” Ladimir’s name was shortened to “Ladmo” and “The **Wallace and Ladmo Show**” was born.

The two performed various comic sketches in between cartoons, with Ladmo often locking the camera off, and running around in *front* of the camera to perform the various bits. A few years later, Channel 5 hired a young weatherman named **Pat McMahon**. Pat, who grew up in a vaudeville family, often watched Wallace & Ladmo from the sidelines and was astounded at the stunts these two performed. Soon Wallace enlisted Pat’s help and the trio was complete. Pat took on the role of dozens of characters including Marshall Good - a has-been cowboy star; Aunt Maude - a hip, sarcastic old lady from “Senior City”; an “unfunny” clown named Boffo (who wasn’t that wild about kids) and a spoiled rich brat named “Gerald” (who kids loved to hate!)

Lucky contest winners would be invited to appear on the show to receive a **Ladmo Bag** (a sack full of goodies and free coupons.) The Ladmo Bag became a Holy Grail to Arizona kids, some of whom would try their whole lives to win won!

Guest appearances through the years included a young Steven Spielberg (who grew up watching the show and would make occasional visits with his latest amateur 16 mm film); Jack Benny, Mohammed Ali, Steve Allen, Rex Allen, Dale Robertson, Lorne Green, Don Rickles, Red Skelton, George Carlin, The Monkees, Mel Torme, Mel Blanc, Waylon Jennings, Alice Cooper and many others. The show won numerous regional Emmys and a host of other broadcasting honors. When it celebrated 35 years on the air—a celebration was held at Encanto Park. Over 50,000 fans showed up on that beautiful sunny day. The cast and crew referred to it as a “mini-Woodstock.”

After almost 36 years on the air, the last show aired in December of 1989. Every station in town sent a reporter to the Channel 5 studios to cover the event.

When Ladmo passed away in 1994—it made the *headline* in the Arizona Republic and longtime fans mourned their favorite kids show host. Billboards went up to pay tribute to him, there were editorials in the newspaper, and the public was invited to his funeral which was standing room only.

Pat McMahon is still one of the Valley’s most well known broadcast personalities – and can be heard on KTAR radio in addition to a morning talk show on KAZ-TV.

Wallace makes occasional appearances and has written a book with AZ Republic writer Richard Ruelas, called “Thanks for Tuning In” (now in its second printing).

W&L lives on through plays, books, numerous websites and even a museum exhibit devoted to the show.