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# AmericanProfile

SEPTEMBER 12-18, 2010



## Remembering TV's groundbreaking '60s sitcom

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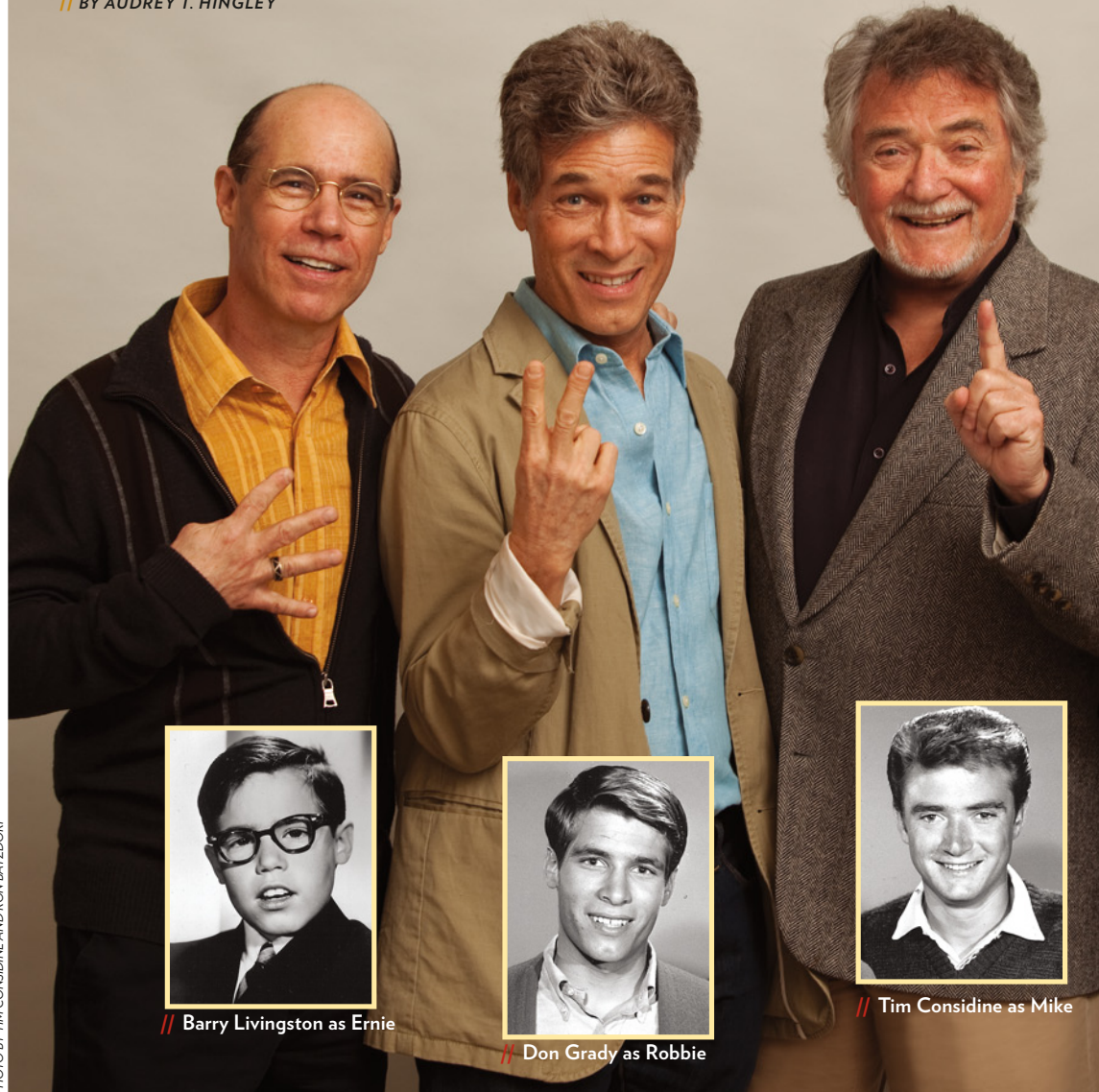
**>>> SEE PAGE 2**



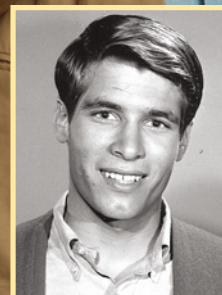
# Remember 'My Three S

## TV's '60s family brought a sense of stability

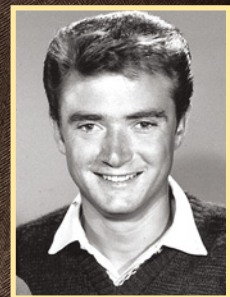
// BY AUDREY T. HINGLEY



// Barry Livingston as Ernie



// Don Grady as Robbie

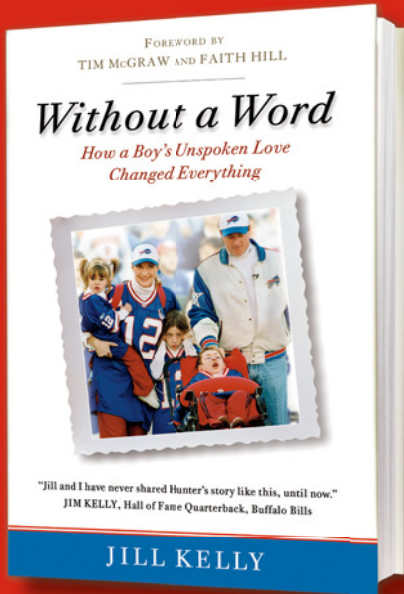


// Tim Considine as Mike

PHOTO BY TIM CONSIDINE AND RON BATZDORF

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# ing Sons'

to a turbulent era



// Stanley Livingston as Chip

**IN 1960**, a snazzy, jazzy, toe-tapping saxophone theme heralded the opening of a groundbreaking TV show about a single dad, a shaggy dog and a trio of brothers.

For 12 years and 380 episodes, *My Three Sons* starred Fred MacMurray as widower Steve Douglas raising his three boys in a house that looked—for the first time on network television—much like a “real” home.

“Clothes were strewn all over the place, the boys were jumping over the furniture, the dog was eating off the table,” recalls Don Grady, who portrayed “son” Robbie. “Up until then [on TV], you came to breakfast in your suit!”

Grady’s TV brothers were portrayed by Tim Considine (Mike) and Stanley Livingston (Chip). When Considine left the series in 1965, Stanley’s real-life brother Barry became adopted son Ernie, thereby allowing the show to keep “three sons” in its title.

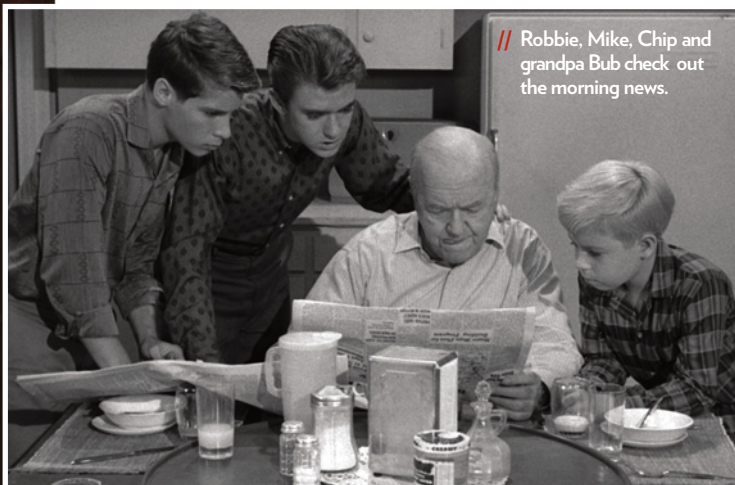
The premise for each episode was simple, Barry Livingston says. “The boys have a problem, and MacMurray, with his subtle wisdom, lets them work it out—but guides them with an invisible hand.”

MacMurray’s character juggled parenting duties with his work as an aeronautical engineer, getting some household assistance from his gruff father-in-law, Bub, portrayed by William Frawley (Fred Mertz in *I Love Lucy*). Forced to leave *Sons* due to failing health, Frawley was replaced by William Demarest as another relative, Uncle Charley.

The family’s shaggy dog, Tramp, added an additional layer of family-style warmth to the weekly plotlines about parenthood, teenagers and suburban life in the ’60s.

## An all-American dad

By the time the series launched, MacMurray had appeared in more than 80 movies and was one of Hollywood’s wealthiest actors. But he also was notoriously thrifty, driving his station wagon to



// Robbie, Mike, Chip and grandpa Bub check out the morning news.



// Family portrait with Tramp the dog, Fred MacMurray (top) as Steve Douglas, and William Frawley as Bub

work and eating brown-bag lunches.

“People thought MacMurray was aloof,” Considine says. “But he wasn’t—he was bashful. He was kind and fatherly, but also smart and shrewd.”

Grady’s parents divorced just before *Sons* debuted, and he found an instant connection with his TV father. “We bonded immediately,” he says of MacMurray. “All of a sudden, I had a dad.”

Some TV viewers were taken aback by MacMurray’s part as a wayward husband in *The Apartment*, which hit the big screen the same year *My Three Sons* began its television run. Grady recalls seeing MacMurray upset after a woman who’d seen *The Apartment* accosted him at Disneyland, trying to swat him with her purse and vowing that she’d never see any of his movies anymore.

“He said, ‘That’s the last heavy I’m going to play,’ and he never did again,” Grady adds. “He loved creating the warm, fuzzy dad.”

Grady remembers seeing MacMurray for the last time while performing years ago at an event at the Hollywood Bowl. Celebrities in the audience were greeted with polite applause as their names were called. But when MacMurray was introduced, “the entire audience went ‘Ahhhh!’ Fred loved that. That’s how he wanted to be remembered.”

## An oasis of family values

Ron Simon, curator of television and radio for The Paley Center For Media  
(Continued on page 12)

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(Continued from page 11)



// As the "sons" grew up, Barry Livingston (lower right) came aboard as adopted brother Ernie, and William Demarest (upper right) moved in as Uncle Charley.

in New York, says *Sons* has "a charm that stands out" due to great professionals turning out a high-quality series at an astonishing rate. "They did 36 episodes in one year," he says. "Nowadays, if you get 22 a year, that's big."

The series also is notable because of its bedrock of family values during an otherwise turbulent time. War, political upheaval and social unrest may have been making headlines (and showing up in the plotlines of other TV shows). But they never lapped at the door of the Douglas household, an oasis of reassuring stability and wholesome escapism during an era of change and turmoil.

"*My Three Sons* was designed to be entertainment, and nothing more," says Barry Livingston.

Considine agrees, adding that the series depicted a group of people who "loved each other and got on each other's nerves, just like real families do."

Frawley died at age 79 in 1966; Demarest, at 91, in 1983; and

MacMurray, at 83, in 1991. But *My Three Sons* has endured. The first season is available on DVD, and reruns air on FamilyNet, a network available to more than 15 million households.

Considine, Grady and the Livingston brothers, blessed with youthful good looks and success that extended beyond their careers as child actors, all live in California and remain close.

### All grown up

Born to a legendary show-biz family (father John was a movie producer; mother Carmen was heiress to a prestigious circuit of movie theaters), Considine made his movie debut in 1953, later skyrocketing to fame in numerous Disney movies and TV shows, including *Spin & Marty*, *The Hardy Boys* and *The Shaggy Dog*. He acted sporadically after *Sons*, choosing instead to pursue his passions for cars, sports, photography and writing. His most recent role was

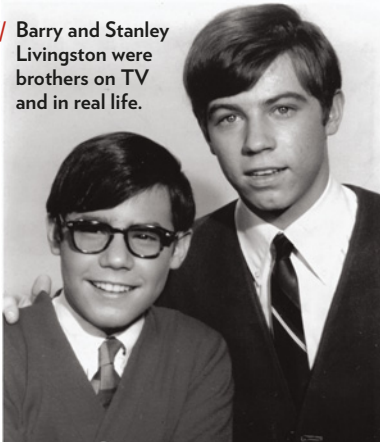


as a crooked judge in the 2006 movie *Ray of Sunshine*.

Now 69, Considine has written three books, including *American Grand Prix Racing: A Century of Drivers and Cars*. A contributing editor for *Road & Track* magazine, he's working on others. He and second wife Willie, a former movie-studio executive, have been married for 30 years. Son Chris, 29, runs CXC Simulations, a company producing high-end motor racing simulators.

Grady, 66, who started his career as a Disney Mouseketeer, was an actor in various TV Westerns, including *The Rifleman* and *Wagon Train*, before *Sons*. A music prodigy who mastered eight instruments by age 12, he left *Sons* after 11 seasons to act and record under his real name, Don Agrati. Today he's an established music composer, with credits including stage productions, TV shows and more than 30 Disney DVDs, plus a new solo CD, *Boomer*. He and his wife of 25 years, Ginny, a singer, dancer and

// Barry and Stanley Livingston were brothers on TV and in real life.



actress, have two children, Joey, 19, and Tessa, 15.

Spotted by a talent agent at age 4, Stanley Livingston spent four years on *The Adventures of Ozzie & Harriet* before joining *Sons*. He went on to appear in films, TV movies and stage productions. His new *The Actor's Journey* is an eight-DVD set featuring interviews with more than 100 industry veterans sharing information on the business of acting. Livingston, 59, calls it "professionals passing their legacy and insiders' information to the next generation." He has one adult daughter, Samantha, from an early marriage, and is engaged to Paula Drake, an attorney.

Barry Livingston, 56, has remained

(Continued on page 14)

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(Continued from page 13)



// Barry (left) and Stanley Livingston (right) and Don Grady remained close after the show.

a working actor, with scores of TV roles and films to his credit. His recent television appearances include parts in *Monk*, *Lie To Me* and *Southland*, and he last year completed a role in a movie called *Dancing on a Dry Salt Lake*. He and wife Karen, a physical therapist, have been married for 27 years and have two children, Spencer, 20, and Hailey, 17.

Like his TV brothers, Barry has nothing but fond memories when it comes to *My Three Sons*.

"The stories are timeless—the simple problems of raising three boys, usually with some sort of positive message," he says. "Generations keep rediscovering what the show has to offer." ★

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