

Limelight America

by Michael Drew Shaw

On the evening of September 20, 1948, NBC launched its Midwest TV Network with a gala 3 hour program originating from KSD-TV in St. Louis. Toledo's WSPD-TV (now WTVG) was part of this six-station conglomerate.

By 1956 WSPD's programs included Captain Kangaroo, Arthur Godfrey Time, Search for Tomorrow, Art Linkletter's House Party, the Phil Silvers Show and ten minutes of news and weather at 11:00 p.m. followed by Les Paul & Mary Ford.

In the early, more thoughtful days of broadcasting a lot of attention was given to children's programming. There was Romper Room, Miss France's Ding Dong School, The Little Rascals, Soupy Sales and later the Mickey Mouse Club.

PBS now shoulders the responsibility of caring for our kids via television and they do a great job in my opinion. But is it coincidence or just my imagination that when *main stream television* walked away from its long-time commitment to serve the children in our communities that the moral landscape of our communities also changed?

Kids weren't showing up at school with assault rifles back in the Howdy Doody days, but hey, maybe it's just my imagination again telling me there just *might* be a connection.

In the gentle world of children's programming, Jim Henson was a warrior who refused to stick with the status quo. Rejected by American television, he syndicated his work via Britain's ACC group. His innovations connected new technology with the ancient art of puppetry and attracted a weekly audience of 235 million viewers at its peak. But for Henson, it was never about the money.

The biggest names in show business vied for guest appearances. Stars like Bob Hope, Steve Martin and Rudolf Nureyev who danced Swine Lake with Miss Piggy. U.S. network executives had said The Muppet Show was too-child oriented when they had turned Henson away.

Jim Henson didn't just thumb his nose at "the system" that rejected his entrepreneurial vision, he chose to pursue value of content over money. And guess what? The money ultimately came to Henson, and rightly so.

In 1923, a small group of the world's wealthiest *and loneliest* men gathered at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago. At the time, they collectively had more cash than the U.S. Treasury. But here's what eventually happened to them.

Charles M. Schwab, head of America's largest steel company died broke. Schwab became notorious for his "fast lane" lifestyle including opulent parties, high stakes gambling, and a string of extramarital affairs producing at least one illegitimate child.

The stock market crash of 1929 finished off what years of wanton spending had started. He spent his last years in a small apartment. He could no longer afford the taxes on "Riverside", the most ambitious private house ever built in New York. It was seized by creditors. He had offered to sell the mansion at a huge loss but there were no takers.

At his death ten years later, Schwab's holdings in Bethlehem Steel were virtually worthless, and he was over \$300,000 in debt.

Also penniless at death's door was wheat speculator Arthur Cutten. Richard Whitney, president of the New York Stock Exchange turned embezzler died in prison. Jess Livermore, Leon Fraser and Ivar Krueger, all Wall Street barons committed suicide.

The moral? Don't confuse wealth with happiness. Always make things more enduring than money your first priority. Be a Jim Henson.

Listen to **Limelight America** on Fox Sports Radio 1230 WCWA, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday 5-6 pm and online at **www.limelightamerica.com**

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