

Dear Readers,

The following chapter was written by me in 2009. They were based upon letters exchanged between myself and the late Bud Abbott in 1973 when I was a teenager and Bud was out in California in an old age home for actors. Recent research concerning Lou Costello's 1958 TV appearance shows that his dramatic performance was actually in an episode of the western "WAGON TRAIN" and NOT, as Buddy Abbott related to me in 1973, "GUNSMOKE ". The mistake in the name of the actual show COULD HAVE BEEN either Bud Abbotts or my own, I cannot say and we will probably never know. Please keep this in mind when reading the following chapter.


The author
PAT/SALTY

SOME MORE ON ABBOTT + COSTELLO
BY PAT/SALTY

BUD ABBOT WAS AN EPILEPTIC - HE HAD EPILEPSY - AND OF COURSE WAS NOT ALLOWED TO DRIVE. HIS - AND COSTELLO'S - GREATEST FEAR WAS THAT ONE DAY HE MIGHT SUFFER A MAJOR EPILEPTIC SEIZURE WHILE ON STAGE OR IN FRONT OF A LIVE AUDIENCE. FORTUNATELY, THIS NEVER HAPPENED - BUT HE - THEY - CAME CLOSE TO IT A FEW TIMES. BUD ABBOT HIMSELF ~~TO~~^{TOLD} ME - SALTY - THIS HIMSELF IN A LETTER HE HAD A NURSE WRITE OUT FOR HIM BACK AROUND 1973 - JUST A YEAR OR TWO BEFORE HE DIED - WHEN HE WAS LIVING - JUST ABOUT BROKE WITH ONLY A SOCIAL SECURITY PENSION - IN AN "ACTORS HOME" (A NURSING HOME FOR ENTERTAINERS) OUT IN CALIFORNIA. HIS LETTERS TO ME WERE IN RESPONSE TO LETTERS I - SALTY - HAD MAILED TO HIM AT THE "ACTORS HOME" BACK THEN. IT IS A SAD FACT OF LIFE THAT WHEN A FAMOUS ACTOR OR ENTERTAINER IS IN HIS OR HER PRIME, THE VISITS + CALLS + LETTERS THEY GET EVERY DAY ARE ALMOST NEVER ENDING YET ONCE THEY ARE OLD + ALONE + BROKE ~~THEY~~ THEY RECEIVE LITTLE SUCH ATTENTION AND BUD ABBOT WAS, BY THAT TIME, 1973, GRATEFULLY TO RECEIVE MY LETTERS AND TOOK THE TIME TO ANSWER THEM BACK. HE TOLD ME ABOUT HIS EPILEPSY - WHICH I THINK HE TOLD ME HE HAD ALL OF HIS LIFE - AND MANY OTHER THINGS PERTAINING TO HIM + HIS CAREER AND HIS LIFE, WHICH WAS NICE. HOW HIM AND LOU COSTELLO HAD RUN UP →

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STAGGERING DEBTS WITH BOOKIES BETTING ON SPORTS AND ESPECIALLY THE HORSES. HOW HE, AS THE SURVIVING MEMBER OF THE ABBOT & COSTELLO PARTNERSHIP, WAS LEFT HOLDING THE BAG FOR MILLIONS OF DOLLARS THE I.R.S. CLAIMED THEY OWED IN BACK TAXES. (LOU COSTELLO HAD DIED OF A HEART ATTACK BACK IN 1959, JUST A COUPLE OF YEARS AFTER THEY BROKE UP). BUD ABBOT WAS A SURPRISINGLY SHARP AND SENSITIVE AND ARTICULATE GUY - WHICH OF COURSE IS NOT THE IDEA THE PUBLIC GOT OR GETS FROM JUST WATCHING HIM IN HIS OLD SHOWS & MOVIES (HARDLY SURPRISING). HE TOLD ME HE HAD LITERALLY CRIED WHEN HIS OLD COMEDY PARTNER LOU COSTELLO HAD LOST ONE OF HIS KIDS IN AN ACCIDENT BACK IN THE 1950'S (WAS IT BY DROWNING? I THINK SO) AND HE TOLD ME ONE THING IN PARTICULAR THAT I REMEMBER TO THIS VERY DAY; HOW, AFTER HE & COSTELLO BROKE UP BUT BEFORE LOU DIED - HOW LOU COSTELLO HAD TURNED IN THE GREATEST PERFORMANCE OF HIS LIFE AS A WEEKLY GUEST STAR IN AN EPISODE OF THE OLD C.B.S. T.V. ~~WESTERN~~ SERIES "GUNSMOKE"; A DRAMATIC PERFORMANCE! FROM WHAT BUD ABBOT TOLD ME IN HIS 1973 LETTER, LOU, BEING THE TYPICAL CLOWN THAT ALWAYS SECRETLY WANTED TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY, HAD PLAYED THE SERIOUS ROLE OF A BLACKSMITH IN AN EPISODE OF THE T.V. WESTERN STARRING JAMES ARNESS BACK IN THE LATE 1950'S.



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BUD ABBOT TOLD ME THAT HE HAD WATCHED IT AT HOME ON TELEVISION JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE AND WAS STRUCK BY THE FACT THAT THIS DRAMATIC, SERIOUS ROLE LOU PLAYED (AS A BLACKSMITH) WAS THE FIRST (AND, IT WOULD TURN OUT, THE ONLY) TIME THE WORLD GOT TO SEE AND HEAR THE REAL LOU COSTELLO - OR, AT ANY RATE, THE SAD AND BROODING AND SENSITIVE AND DEAD SERIOUS LOU COSTELLO - WHICH ONLY HE - BUD ABBOT - AND A VERY FEW OTHERS EVER GOT TO SEE AND HEAR. BUD ABBOT TOLD ME THAT HE COULD HARDLY BELIEVE - AT FIRST - THE ACCLAIM AND CRITICAL REVIEWS LOU'S BLACKSMITH PORTRAYAL RECEIVED AFTER THAT ONE EPISODE OF "GUNSMOKE" HAD AIRED; HE TOLD ME THAT THE PUBLIC & CRITICS HAD PRAISED LOU COSTELLO'S HIDDEN ACTING ABILITY BUT BUD TOLD ME THAT THE CRITICS AND T.V. AUDIENCE JUST HADN'T UNDERSTOOD; LOU COSTELLO WASN'T ACTING IN THAT ONE DRAMATIC ROLE HE HAD EVER PLAYED; LOU WAS SIMPLY BEING HIS REAL SELF! HE HAD BEEN DOING ALL THE ACTING FOR ALL THE PREVIOUS YEARS BY PLAYING THE ROLE OF A 'CHILDLIKE CLOWN'!!! ABBOT THOUGHT THE IRONY OF THE WHOLE SITUATION WAS BEYOND WORDS, ALMOST; HE TOLD ME THEN (THIS WAS BACK IN 1973) TO TRY AND GET A COPY OF LOU'S 1950'S "GUNSMOKE" EPISODE SO THAT I COULD WATCH IT FOR MYSELF - WHICH, SAD TO SAY - AND I AM NOW WRITING THIS IN 2009 - I HAVE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO DO; EITHER SOME OF "GUNSMOKES" EARLY TAPES GOT →

LOST (OR ERASED & REUSED) I DON'T KNOW, BUT AS A COLLECTOR, FINDING A COPY OF THAT ONE LATE 1950'S EPISODE OF "GUNSMOKE" STARRING LOU COSTELLO IS LIKE SEARCHING FOR ONE OF THE HOLY GRAILS OF COLLECTING; DOES SOMEONE OUT ~~HERE~~ THERE HAVE AN OLD COPY? OR EVEN A COPY OF A COPY? I DON'T KNOW. LOU COSTELLO DIED SUDDENLY IN 1959 SO THIS EPISODE OF THE C.B.S. TELEVISION WESTERN "GUNSMOKE" HAD TO HAVE BEEN FILMED AND SHOWN NO MORE THAN A YEAR OR TWO BEFORE HIS DEATH - AT MOST. BUD ABBOT WAS AN OLD AND SICK MAN AT THE TIME HE WROTE TO ME AND HE WASN'T SURE OF THE DATE OR EXACT YEAR COSTELLO HAD FILMED IT - HE WAS ONLY SURE THAT IT WAS DONE SOMETIME AFTER THEIR PARTNERSHIP HAD BROKEN UP (AND THAT - I THINK - WAS IN 1957). FROM HIS 1973 LETTERS TO ME, BUD ABBOT - BY THAT TIME, AT ANY RATE - WAS A SAD AND LONELY ~~AND~~ OLD MAN WHO WAS ANGRY AND BITTER OVER A NUMBER OF THINGS; HE WAS MAD AT THE I.R.S. & FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OVER THEM COMING AFTER HIM FOR A FORTUNE IN UNPAID TAXES (BY LAW THEY COULDN'T TOUCH HIS - RATHER GENEROUS - MONTHLY SOCIAL SECURITY PENSION BUT THEY SEIZED AND GRABBED & TOOK EVERYTHING ELSE HE HAD) - ABBOT WROTE THAT HE AND COSTELLO HAD PERSONALLY (& WITHOUT PAY) RAISED MILLIONS OF DOLLARS FOR THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN WAR BOND DRIVES DURING WORLD WAR TWO →

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AND COULDN'T BELIEVE HOW THEY WOULD COME AFTER AN OLD MAN LIKE HIM YEARS LATER (THE I.R.S. HAD "NO GRATITUDE", ETC.) I WROTE BACK TO HIM THAT OF COURSE THEY HAVE NO GRATITUDE; DO VAMPIRES SHOW GRATITUDE TO THEIR VICTIMS AFTER SUCKING THEIR BLOOD? OF COURSE NOT; THEY JUST RETURN AGAIN & AGAIN & AGAIN - IF THEY CAN - TO SUCK OUT EVEN MORE BLOOD AND - I TOLD HIM - REMEMBER THAT MOVIE YOU & LOU MADE, "ABBOT & COSTELLO MEET DRACULA"? WELL; DID DRACULA EVER SHOW ANY GRATITUDE BY SAYING "THANKS?" - ~~POOR~~ POOR OLD BUD ABBOT GOT A BIG KICK OUT OF THAT LINE I WROTE HIM WHEN ONE OF HIS NURSING HOME NURSES / ATTENDANTS READ IT TO HIM. THE NURSE ADDED THAT HER AND THE OTHER NURSES HAD NEVER SEEN OR HEARD MR. ABBOT LAUGH SO MUCH SINCE HE HAD BEEN THERE. MAKES ME - OLD SALTY HIMSELF - HAPPY TO THIS VERY DAY THAT I WAS ABLE TO BRING SOME LAUGHTER & JOY INTO A POOR OLD LONELY MAN'S LIFE - IF ONLY VIA A LETTER FOR A LITTLE WHILE - ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING ALL THE JOY & LAUGHTER THAT POOR OLD MAN HAD ONCE HELPED TO BRING INTO THE LIVES OF MILLIONS OF CHILDREN & PEOPLE THE WORLD OVER. GOD MAY HE REST IN PEACE - WHEREVER HE IS - MY OLD FRIEND MR. BUD ABBOT.....

THE - UNUSUAL - THING ABOUT IT IS THIS; AS A KID I WAS NEVER A BIG FAN OF ABBOT & COSTELLO, AT LEAST I NEVER THOUGHT →

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OF MYSELF AS A BIG FAN OR ALL THAT MUCH OF A FAN. AND LETS FACE IT; KIDS FOCUSED 95% ON THE FUNNY CLOWN LOU COSTELLO AND MAYBE 5% ON THE "STRAIGHT MAN" BUD ABBOT. ADULTS, TOO, I IMAGINE. BUT PERHAPS THEY WERE - OR THEIR IMAGES WERE - AS MUCH A PART OF MY LIFE AS ANYONE ELSE; IT SEEMS THAT EVERY THANKSGIVING - AT LEAST HERE IN THE NEW YORK AREA - ONE OF THE LOCAL T.V. STATIONS WOULD RUN ABBOTT + COSTELLO'S 1930'S MOVIE "MARCH OF THE WOODEN SOLDIERS" (OR "BABES IN TOYLAND") NO, WAIT! THAT WAS LAURAL + HARDY! BUT BUD + LOU'S OLD 1950'S T.V. SHOW WAS A STAPLE IN RERUNS FOR YEARS + YEARS + FOR ALL I KNOW STILL IS, THEIR MOVIES ABOUT VAMPIRES + MUMMYS + WHATEVER WERE ALWAYS RUN ON T.V. AND ALWAYS BIG WITH KIDS; AND TO THIS DAY - TO THIS VERY DAY! - THEIR BASEBALL COMEDY CLASSIC "WHO'S ON FIRST" CRACKS ME UP EVERY TIME (IT IS EVEN CONTINUOUSLY RUN UP IN BASEBALLS COOPERSTOWN, THEY TELL ME). SO NOW I - SALTY - WILL TRY TO SUM UP THIS ABBOTT + COSTELLO THING BY SAYING THIS; LOU COSTELLO MAY HAVE MADE ME LAUGH AS A CHILD - AND MANY OTHERS, TOO - BUT IT WAS GOOD OLD OVERLOOKED STRAIGHT MAN BUD ABBOT WHO HELPED TEACH ME A FEW THINGS ABOUT LIFE WHICH, I WOULD SUM UP, TEACHES US ALL AN IMPORTANT LESSON; NEVER OVERLOOK SOMEBODY BECAUSE THEY ARE OLD; THEY MIGHT JUST BE ABLE TO TELL YOU A THING OR TWO...X.