

# Collectormania!

## Kermit Schaefer's Blooper Records: A Requiem for Uncle Don By Chuck Miller

Kermit Schaefer was a successful radio and television writer/producer from the 1950's and 1960's, who also produced some classic comedy and jazz records on the Jubilee label. But what Kermit Schaefer will forever be known for - for better or for worse - was his collection of "bloopers" - radio and television mistakes, gaffes, malaprops, spoonerisms, and tied-up tongues, or as he called it, "a collection of unintended indiscretions before microphone and camera." He collected many of them in books like *Your Slip Is Showing*, *Best of Bloopers* and *Blooper Tube*. He produced a series of blooper albums for his Jubilee label, then watched as they were re-licensed through such labels as Brookville, Kapp, K-Tel and MCA. In mint condition, the eight Jubilee releases (both in 10-inch and 12-inch formats) are worth about \$10 apiece; a copy of the commercial advertising the Brookville mail-order blooper series is worth about \$20.

Kermit Schaefer's "bloopers" later became the inspiration for television shows like *TV's Bloopers and Practical Jokes*, *America's Funniest Home Videos* and *Show Me The Funny*. There was even a motion picture, *Pardon My Blooper*, featuring many of Schaefer's collected works. Thanks to Schaefer, Star Trek fans can watch videotapes full of boo-boos and oopsies aboard the *Enterprise* (including the seven or eight times Captain Kirk left the bridge - only to crash into the doors because the stagehands didn't open them on cue). And sportscasters like Marv Albert, Fred Roggin and Nick Vakay have compiled reels of sporting gaffes, all descended from the original concept of Kermit Schaefer.

Many of those bloopers on the Schaefer records are certainly worth a good laugh or two. Who could ever forget the football play-by-play man calling an exciting interception, shouting into the microphone - "he's past the midfield stripe and he's running wild, he's going, he's going - look at that son-of-a-bitch run!!" Or the report of a Presidential veto that came from "a high White horse souse." Or the bandleader who got musician Eddie Peabody's name backwards, announcing to the radio audience that "Mr. Eddie Playbody will now pee for you."

But although Schaefer's records contain dozens of live gaffes and over-the-air boo-boos, many of the snippets on the blooper records were re-created from newspaper descriptions or second-hand reports. In some cases, the bloopers were restaged so that a mistake from Lawrence Welk's show would instead come from "a musical radio host of a polka dance party."

From these discs comes one blooper that never really happened - at least not to the person to whom it was attributed.

**Narrator:** *One lesson an announcer learns is to make sure he is off the air before he makes any private comment. But even the greatest sometimes slip. A legend is, Uncle Don's remark after he closed his famous children's show.*

**"Uncle Don":** *"And this is your Uncle Don saying goodnight. (singing) Goodnight, little kids, goodnight. (silence) We're off? Good. Well, that ought to hold the little bastards."*



Except that there is no proof that Uncle Don ever said those words. And therein lies a tale.

“Uncle Don” Carney (born Howard Rice) was a popular children’s radio host and storyteller on New York’s WOR radio station six days a week, entertaining children for over 20 years in the Golden Age of radio. His stories, songs and homilies could be heard by children in over seven states, all waiting to hear their birthday announced or their letter read by the affable host. Never missing a broadcast, he kept young boys and girls enthralled from 1928 to 1947, then moved to Miami Beach and hosted a weekly children’s show on station WKAT until he passed away in 1954.



There have been urban legends about children’s show hosts that have been either so contemptuous of their audience or tired of the incessant children’s music and stories, that maybe they would have said something about their dislike for the job - after the microphone was turned off, of course. A 1930 edition of *Variety* claimed that the children’s host at Philadelphia’s WIP radio station, “Uncle Wip,” blurted out a “little bastards” comment of his own, and was fired the next day after hundreds of phone calls to the radio station - including one from the Federal Radio Commission. But even that information is suspect - as it was reported only by *Variety* and not by the Philadelphia daily papers of the time.

- Link: Hear the “Uncle Don” Blooper
- Link: Urban Legend Homepage
- Link: Collectormania Archive
- Link: Chuck Miller Creative Writing Service

But somehow, the rumor began that Uncle Don made that comment on WOR. There was no tape or recording to prove his guilt or innocence, and although he was never suspended from his show and no newspapers of the time reported him ever uttering such a phrase, he became associated with the scatological comment to his dying day.

As early as 1935, the *New York World Telegram* claimed the “little bastards” story was apocryphal at best. “The story has been told and retold but the

whole thing is untrue. A Baltimore columnist made it up one dull afternoon and used Uncle Don's name because these programs were not on a Baltimore station.”

A few years later, *Time* magazine also defended Uncle Don. “[Uncle Don] would part with plenty to be rid of the persistent but apocryphal tale that one day, when he mistakenly thought he was off the air after a particularly luscious cluster of clichés and commercials, he sighed and said: ‘There! I guess that’ll hold the little bastards.’”

Even his long-time writer and show assistant, Bill Treadwell, when writing Uncle Don’s 1958 biography, devoted an entire chapter to the “little bastards” rumor - and stated that for the record, it never happened.

Now we come to Kermit Schaefer. For bloopers that existed only on paper (for example, newspaper comments about a radio show), Schaefer hired some actors to recreate what might have happened in front of that microphone on that fateful day. He hired an actor to play Uncle Don’s voice, and recorded this actor saying the “little bastards” line. Since there were no caveats on Schaefer’s blooper records that said some of these snippets might be staged or re-recorded, people thought the blooper was the gospel truth, clear proof that Uncle Don cursed on the air.

Schaefer continued to use this blooper in books, in reissues of his albums, in his motion picture *Pardon My Blooper*, and in a commercial advertising a mail-order version of his blooper discs (the commercial showed stock footage of an old cathedral radio, with the Uncle Don clip playing in the background).

Knowing today that the Uncle Don snippet was, at best, a reproduction of an apocryphal event, one can listen to the blooper records and notice that many of the recordings have superior sound quality for a 1930's radio flub-up. And that some of the voices sound too similar - as if Schaefer used five actors and actresses to cover over 50 different flubs.

For those of you who enjoy listening to Schaefer’s bloopers and collect them when you can find them, please understand I am not trying to sully Schaefer’s place in history. He did have many genuine bloopers in his collection (including one that Paul Harvey wished would never hit the airwaves again), but attaching Uncle Don’s name to an event that never happened is equivalent to stating that Paul McCartney is dead and Elvis Presley is alive.

Uncle Don certainly deserved better.