



Skipper Bruce Sedley



Class of 1997

Silver Circle Profile By: **Kevin Wing**

The life trajectory of **Bruce Sedley** began ever so modestly in the Bay Area. Born in 1925 in Oakland and raised in Berkeley, Sedley's curiosity about the world around him led to an interest in radio broadcasting at a young age. An early career in Bay Area radio followed by a stint in the service during World War II — to which he eventually did news broadcasts for troops overseas — led him to an interest in the new medium of television.

But, it was a gift from someone — in the form of a rudimentary ventriloquist's dummy (a "head on a stick," as Sedley describes it) — that would ultimately change his life and open many doors along the way, figuratively and, quite literally. Call it fate.

That is how Sedley, known in the 1950s and 60s to young viewers as "**Skipper Sedley**," and later, as "**Sir Sedley**," became a celebrated television icon of children's programming in the Bay Area.

Sedley, inducted into the elite *Silver Circle* of The San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in 1997, was a huge hit on KRON-TV from 1957 to 1960. That's when he hosted *Popeye* cartoons, serving as the "human go-between" before and after commercial breaks, announcing the next cartoon and having a little fun by entertaining young viewers with "**King Fuddle**," a fun-loving puppet with a mind of its own.

"Those *Popeye* cartoons were tremendously popular in those days," Sedley recalls. "For a station to air *Popeye* on its schedule, well, it was something else. It was that popular during that era."

Sedley became so popular that he was recruited by Children's Fairyland, the iconic children's theme park on the shores of Oakland's Lake Merritt, to develop the Storybook Boxes operated by "Magic Keys," that became a treasured symbol of the park.

His first stint on radio was for KJBS in San Francisco in 1944, then in 1947 with KTIM in San Rafael, immediately after his discharge from the service.

"I was an announcer there," Sedley says. "I was there only six months, but it was one of those great jobs where you had to do everything. I also spun my own records, collected them, put a playlist together."



It was at that time that Sedley realized he had a talent for "doing voices." He mixed up his show by using them, including one for a character named "**Professor Fuddle**," who would give the daily weather forecast over the air.

From KTIM, Sedley moved to Oakland's KROW to be an announcer. "It was a great, fun job," he recalls. "I had to be there at 6 in the morning. We were independent. We did all locally produced programs, including live remotes. We did remotes for churches, airing their Sunday services. I did a lot of those remotes. They were difficult to do at times. I just took a transmitter box and plugged it into a phone line. It's what got me involved in voice recording production."

Sedley stayed at KROW four years, eventually opening up his own recording studio in his mother's San Francisco apartment building. The famous **Don Sherwood**, who ruled Bay Area radio airwaves in the 1950s and 60s, was also a KROW announcer. He mentioned to Sedley his desire to build spec houses as he was also an accomplished carpenter. Sedley asked him to build his recording studio, which Sherwood proceeded to do.

Getting involved with many recording projects through his studio, Sedley became associated with a production company in San Francisco owned by **Gene Walker**. Sedley says Walker was very respected in the production community in the Bay Area. The company specialized in producing documentary films.

It was during that time that Sedley met **Al Dinsdale**, an elderly man who came in to the studio one day, asking if the company needed the use of miniature sets, or dioramas. In his book of photos, there was a ventriloquist figure he had made for his daughter, **Shirley**, who was using it on television in Los Angeles, having started on radio in San Francisco at the age of 14. Shirley had received the very first Emmy® award for being the "Most Outstanding Television Performer" of the year in 1949, for her show *Judy Splinters*, named after the figure her father had made for her.

Sedley mentioned to Dinsdale that he had done character voices on radio and would be interested in having a puppet for his "Professor Fuddle." A few

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days later, Dinsdale returned with what Sedley described as “a realistic man’s head on a stick.”

“It had movable glass eyes, eyebrows that raised, a mouth that moved, and everything was controlled by the stick,” Sedley was hooked. Then Dinsdale brought in the rest of the dummy — a body dressed in a sailor suit.

“At the time, I thought, hmm, maybe I could use this in some way,” Sedley said.

With his experience as a voice talent and his newfound love for ventriloquism and puppetry, Sedley went into animation work in the mid-1950s. Eventually, he would pop up on KGO-TV, doing live commercials for Laura Scudder’s Potato Chips, being the comic foil for his puppet. The commercials were a hit.

By 1957, KRON-TV had been looking for a way to capitalize on the popularity of children’s programming, which it had witnessed by the popularity of *The Mickey Mouse Club* on another station at that time. KRON bought the rights to air the *Popeye* cartoons. In 1957, the station began airing them and hired Sedley to be host, to which he would do the live commercials.

“I had to audition for it,” Sedley says, “and, by golly, I got the job. I had great fun doing that for the next three years.”

It was also during his years at KRON-TV that Sedley made contact with the Oakland Parks Department, which was looking for a “newfangled way” to entertain children at its Children’s Fairyland park, with the help of some type of audio recording that children could access throughout the park.

So, Sedley developed “message repeater” audio units, which was a device with endless-loop audio, as opposed to the method of reel-to-reel, which was commonplace in the 1950s. With the assistance of a \$3,000 loan from his mother, Sedley went to an Oakland company that would make a plastic key. It would operate a switch, which would turn on the message repeater unit, and hence, the audio would play and children would hear a fairy-tale story.

It was a done deal. Fairyland made the Storybook Boxes, and Sedley provided the keys and the message repeater units and signed a contract with Fairyland. That contract also included a clause

for personal appearances at Fairyland by Sedley — who was still on-air at KRON-TV — and his puppet, “King Fuddle.”

“I sort of became the official host of Fairyland, along with King Fuddle,” Sedley recalls. “KRON realized what a wonderful opportunity this was, so I did interactive things at Fairyland that would involve the audience and the kids who were watching KRON. The Hostess Company was a part of it all, as was Kilpatrick’s Bread. Coca-Cola would provide the soft drinks, Morrell Meats would provide the sausages, and we’d have barbeques at Fairyland for the kids. 7,000 people would show up every weekend we did this. Everyone was thrilled. It was a great cross-promotion for KRON and for Fairyland.”

Leaving KRON in 1960 to concentrate on his business of “the talking storybooks,” his newfound business was installing the audio boxes at the San Francisco Zoo and at zoos all around the country.

Enter KTVU. In 1962, the station was looking for a host for its newly-acquired *Three Stooges* shorts, and Sedley returned to children’s television, and he brought along “King Fuddle,” who was already very popular thanks to the KRON show from several years before. Sedley and his puppets entertained kids after school with that show, which aired at 4:30 p.m. weekdays. Sedley stayed on until 1964.

By then, doors were opening for Sedley in other ways, namely through his association with manufacturing keys. He was one of the original developers of the card-key system, getting U.S. patents along the way. Sedley associated himself with a company in Burbank which manufactured identification cards for defense plants and commercial facilities. The company liked Sedley’s idea for card-key systems.

Within several years, Sedley’s company expanded. With an office in Burlingame, his Corkey Control Systems company expanded to Hong Kong, where the key products such as card-keys would be manufactured. “It was cheaper to do business in Hong Kong,” he says. That was 35 years ago, and the business is still going strong. It still maintains offices in Burlingame.

Sedley is always coming up with new ideas. In fact, he has 240 U.S. and foreign patents. He is currently developing an electronic lock which would

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not require putting a key in a slot, instead, the user would simply wave the card-key in front of the lock to unlock it.

"I'm an inventor of this type of card-operated technology. I enjoy it very much," he says. His company is small; between Burlingame and Hong Kong, Sedley has just 15 employees.

Sedley, a youthful and energetic 84 years of age, has lived in Hong Kong for years so he can be close to his lock factory there. He returns to the Bay Area occasionally, and was here late last month for the 50th anniversary of the Talking Storybooks and their Magic Keys at Children's Fairyland. Sedley, whose first wife passed away, is remarried and also maintains a home on Kauai, where his daughter lives. He has another daughter who resides in Nashville.

As for his years in TV in the Bay Area, Sedley looks back with fondness.

"It was just a very enjoyable time for me then," he says. "I was always interested in theatrics and puppetry, and I enjoyed entertaining the kids. I've been lucky and fortunate to lead a very rewarding life."

CBS 5 Goes VJ on Saturdays

By **Bill Mann**, TV Critic/Columnist

This TV critic has always enjoyed weekend newscasts. That's when the "second stringers" come in. There are often misspelled graphics and other technical errors.

But local weekend TV news has just gotten more interesting: KPIX has just begun its version of the "VJ" — video journalist — news on Saturdays, saving money by having reporters shoot, report and edit their own stories. KRON, which is now owned by creditors, started this dubious experiment first to cut costs.

KPIX sources now tell me that engineering/logistical whiz **Andrew Shinnick**, who's ably handled technical chores for both stations, approached Channel 5 news director **Dan Rosenheim** offering to help KPIX avoid some of the mistakes KRON made. He was politely turned down.

But, for whatever reason, KPIX news chose to

High School Awards Contest



The **National Student Television Awards** offered by the National Television Academy have been put on hold due to lack of funding. The San Francisco/Northern California Chapter Board of Governors has voted to offer High School Awards on a regional basis.

All high schools in our chapter region (Northern California, Visalia to the Oregon border, Reno and Hawaii) are eligible to submit entries.

The eligibility period is from October 1, 2008 until September 30, 2009. Awards will be presented in six categories:

1. News
2. Arts and Entertainment/Cultural Affairs
3. Long Form (Fiction and Non-Fiction)
4. Sports
5. Public Affairs/Community Service/
Public Service
6. Writing

The awards entries are due on October 23, 2009.

Students will receive a certificate of achievement and the entering schools will receive a pillar similar to the photo above.

Complete contest rules and entry forms are available on the chapter website www.emmys.tv.

The board thanked Governor **Pilar Niño**, Reporter, KSTS Telemundo 48 for organizing the competition.

forge ahead without Shinnick. I'm guessing to save a few bucks. Says one KPIX newsroom insider:

"So, PIX is on its way to ... implementation of a new system, without adequate infrastructure or thoughtful, professional training, with disastrous consequences if it fails."

My source adds: "I really do wish Channel 5 success, but this is like laughing at an infant as he learns how to walk. Schadenfreude? Stay tuned!"

The longtime KPIX staffer adds this: "Even before they started, one of the VJs came back with a 'negative roll' tape (she thought the camera was on when it was off, and vice versa). Another was caught using her husband to help her shoot in the field. PIX's first reporter proponent of VJs now says it's a bad idea. The whole newsroom is in an uproar as reporters are rushed through VJ training, while editors and videographers are essentially ignored and left to worry about their jobs."