Interviews: Here’s the Story of ‘The Brady Bunch’ in the Present Day

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CHICAGO – In 1969, amid the turbulent decade of the 1960s, a landmark TV sitcom made its debut with the simple phrase, “Here’s the story…” “The Brady Bunch” has endured in entertainment culture ever since, and four of the actors who comprised the Bunch – Barry Williams (Greg), Christopher Knight (Peter), Mike Lookinland (Bobby) and Susan Olsen (Cindy) have evolved to adulthood with varied interests and pursuits.

They appeared last March at ‘The Hollywood Show,’ a twice-a-year event in which fans can mingle, take photographs and get autographs from the celebrities – like The actors who portrayed the Bradys – who appear there. There is also a great opportunity to purchase memorabilia from a host of showbiz vendors, all in one room. The fall session of The Hollywood Show will take place at the Hilton Rosemont Hotel on River Road in Rosemont, Ill, on September 7th, 8th and 9th, 2012. For complete details click here. [15]

HollywoodChicago.com was at the event to interview all four of the 1970s icons, with photographer Joe Arce capturing a memorable group photo.

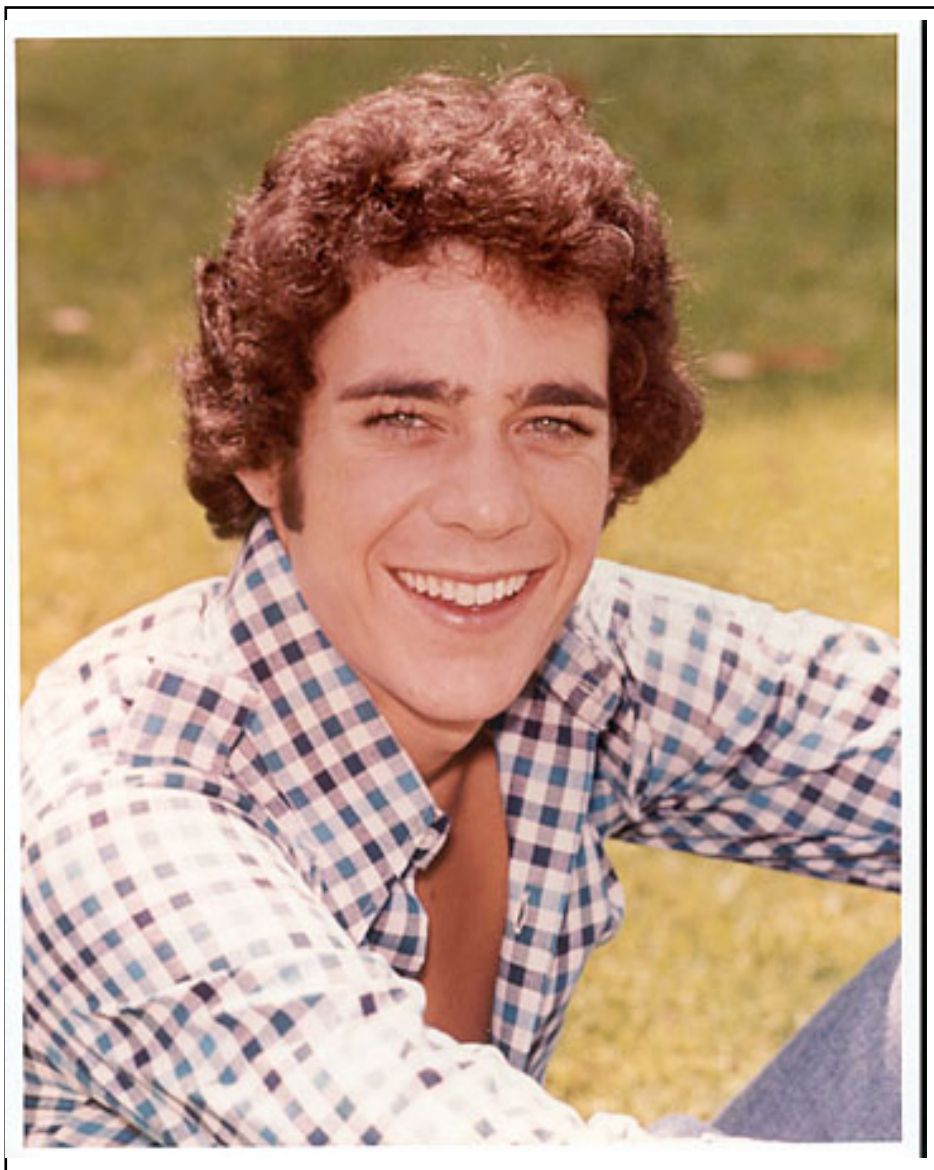


Barry Williams, Mike Lookinland, Susan Olsen and Christopher Knight at ‘The Hollywood Show,’ March of 2012
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

Barry Williams, Greg Brady on “The Brady Bunch”

Barry Williams, as the oldest of the Bradys, has been the family member who has kept his show business career going, touring with Broadway musical companies and developing a new Brady Bunch revue in Branson, Missouri.

HollywoodChicago.com: What was the attitude towards your TV career in your real family, and did you find it strange that you were in essence participating in two families?



Barry Williams as Greg Brady
Photo credit: Paramount Home Entertainment

Barry Williams: My parents were reluctant but supportive. I never found it strange because my television family was a professional one, and I was always clear about who my real family was. What is nice, is that my professional family has now become my second family in real life.

HollywoodChicago.com: What kind of realizations did you have about the realities of the era when you were participating in the pop icon nature of The Brady Bunch? Did you follow the crimes of Watergate or have an opinion regarding the Vietnam War?

Williams: I was always intrigued by the anachronism our show portrayed, because there was so many real problems coming out of the world, especially after the 1960s, when we started, and even through the 1970s and the wind down to Vietnam and the beginnings of Watergate. We created a little cocoon of idealism, positivism, morality, values and communicated all those things. I was and have always been proud of that.

HollywoodChicago.com: You had so many different performance opportunities playing Greg Brady in the various incarnations. Which one of those talents did you enjoy learning the most, and which one stuck with you?

Williams: Singing and music. Particularly now in my current adventure, which is called 'The Brady Bunch Lunch.' I've opened a show in Branson, Missouri.

HollywoodChicago.com: You had a long run doing touring Broadway musicals and theater. What is the most vulnerable or difficult stage role you've taken on, and how did you make it your own?

Williams: Probably 'The Music Man,' playing Harold Hill, because Robert Preston left such enormous shoes to fill. So I felt vulnerable with that, because it's such a powerful role it's like a runaway train, once the character of Harold Hill gets started it just never stops. The way I got around it was to study Robert Preston, and steal everything he had. [laughs] It worked just great, because it was so definitive.

HollywoodChicago.com: You have a show in Branson called The Brady Bunch Lunch, where you perform and tell anecdotes. What still surprises you about how our generation connected to that show?

Williams: Let me put it another way. It doesn't so much surprise me but fills me with gratitude, because of the multi-generation appeal. I put on a show that goes through the various stages of The Brady Bunch, and I use actors and singers to represent the kids. We perform the music and wear the costumes, from the beginnings all the way up to the variety show. We even have a competition between the Bradys that wishes Greg wasn't the big brother, but Keith Partridge was. And if that doesn't work, how about Donny Osmond or Michael Jackson?

We branch into all styles of music, and I just think it's fun that literally grandparents can bring their children and their children's children, and there is always a touch point of familiarity. I'm proud to represent it and to deliver it.

Christopher Knight, Peter Brady on "The Brady Bunch"

Christopher Knight has branched out far beyond his Brady roots, being involved early in the technology revolution, with interests in 3D

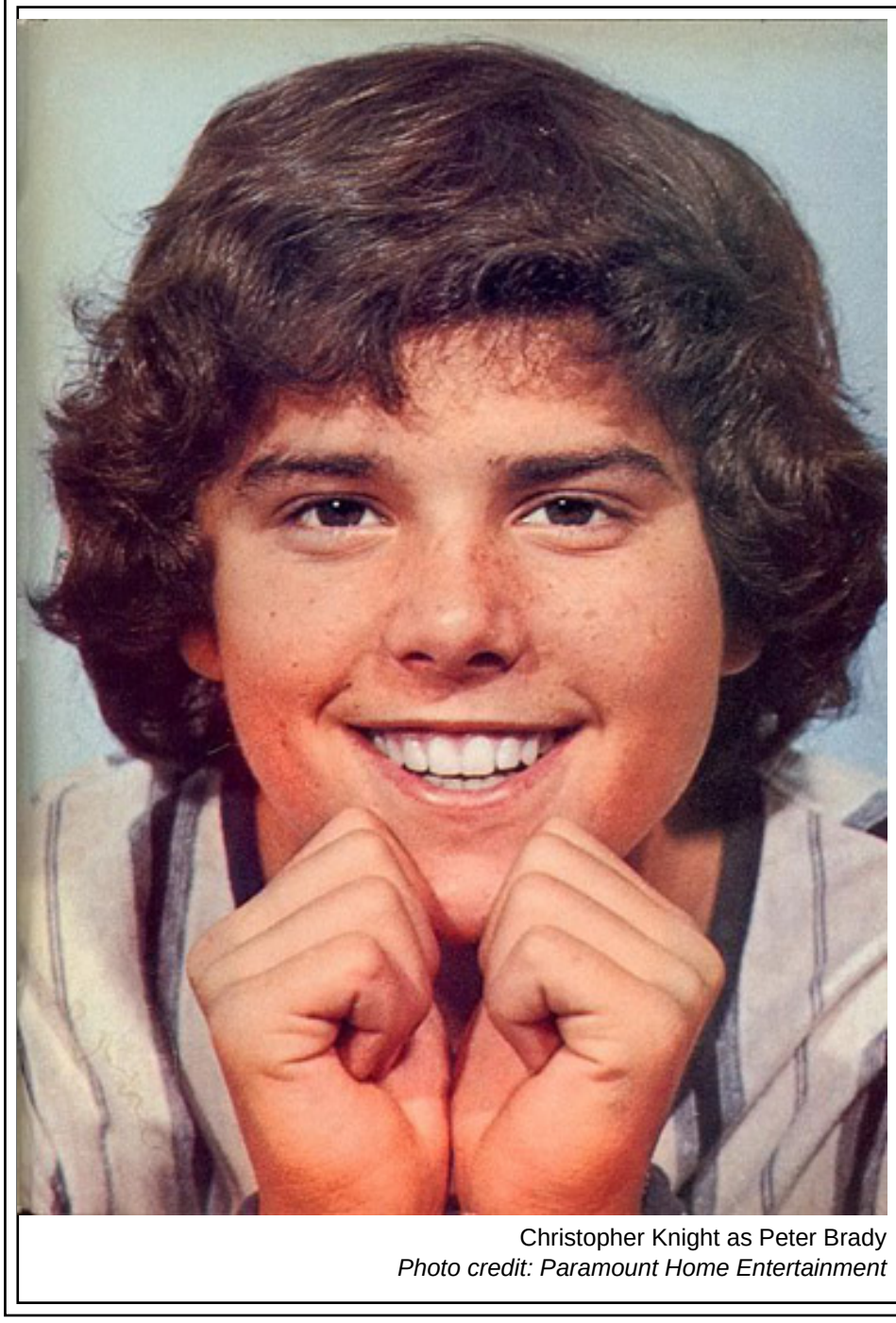
rendering, kids software, hardware and video add-ons. He kept his performing toe in Reality TV, appearing on VH1's "The Surreal Life," which led to meeting model Adrianne Curry. They were eventually engaged, and made their wedding plans into another reality show, "My Fair Brady."

HollywoodChicago.com: What was the toughest thing about doing a reality show ['My Fair Brady']? Did you feel at times like your relationship only lived on television?

Christopher Knight: No, that it lived at all was the hardest part. [laughs] Reality TV is by far the hardest thing. Outside of the obvious, first you have to live within the craziness of it. And then, it's put together and aired, and you have to live it again, but differently. Because what has happened is pretty intimate, it was just us and the crew, and they never commented on it. And then it plays on TV.

Oftentimes we would say things that are being captured by a camera, then it is seen by the person we are talking about – not that it happened to us that often, we were just two people. That's all going to come out, though, what we we thinking? Because of that, I had to be really present, to understand the implications. If I couldn't say it in front of the person, don't say it. I only recognized the power of it later when it all played out.

HollywoodChicago.com: I read in your bio that your actor father got you involved in auditions in the first place. Did you initially do it reluctantly or were you willing to go along with it?



Christopher Knight as Peter Brady
Photo credit: Paramount Home Entertainment

Knight: I think I was only seven, so the conversation was 'we're going to get you an agent and do commercials.' I said okay, even though I didn't know what it meant. Once I learned what that meant, I hated it, because it meant coming home from school and seeing my mother dressed up. I knew that whatever I had planned with my buddies, that wasn't happening. I was getting in the car, and she smoked, and we drove a hour in traffic, and then we'd get home late. My brother did it with me. He went on every interview with me for at least three years, and he never worked. He was eventually released from that, when it became futile. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: Like many of our generation, did you have a period of mistrust or disillusionment regarding the U.S. government following the Watergate era?

Knight: I was a bit young during that time, but the mistrust did start even before Watergate, just with the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. I remember that. It was a difficult era, and there is still a mistrust when anybody is too righteous in representing our actions.

HollywoodChicago.com: Since you are also involved in tech industries, and our world is changing so fast because of it, what do you feel are the most positive and negative results of it?

Knight: How much time do we have? [laughs] What is most positive is that communication is so simple. The era has brought the world closer together. And the negative is that communication is so simple. [laughs]

Mike Lookinland, Bobby Brady on "The Brady Bunch"

Mike Lookinland, the youngest male Brady, was also known for a couple of outside roles from the family, co-starring with Steve McQueen, Paul Newman, Jennifer Jones and Fred Astaire in the '70s schlock classic, 'The Towering Inferno" and on the Saturday morning live action show "The Secrets of Isis."

HollywoodChicago.com: In you early days as an actor, what did your parents do to make sure that you would have a relatively normal life, or was there nothing normal about it?

Mike Lookinland: My family all had as normal a life as we could. We were all registered in public schools. Up until high school, I went through the Los Angeles public school district, in grade school and junior high.

HollywoodChicago.com: Did they make accommodations for your TV work schedule?



Mike Lookinland as Bobby Brady
Photo credit: Paramount Home Entertainment

Lookinland: The tutors and the parents took care of that. I'd go back to my regular school ahead in class, because I had a tutor. We had two teachers for the six of us.

HollywoodChicago.com: Since you and your fellow cast members of The Brady Bunch has been linked together for so long, what do you admire about them as adults that you didn't expect since you knew them as kids?

Lookinland: I don't know, I wouldn't imagine that Susan Olsen would be a mother, be raising a son. Chris hit it big in computer software, and I couldn't imagine he'd be that big a businessman. I hit one button on a computer and it crashes. [laughs] I admire him for that. And Barry has made a great career just continuing with the Greg Brady and Johnny Bravo theme.

HollywoodChicago.com: What was hardest about the song and dance period in the 1970s regarding The Brady Bunch and was there ever a time you didn't want to go along with it?

Lookinland: I actually went along with everything I did based on the fact I was told as a child that 'they' hired you and 'they' were your employer, and I was the employee. They were the boss, and I had to do what they told me. That was sort of the theme of my young life. We weren't allowed to go off the rails, we were kept on a pretty tight lease. I didn't mind the singing, I am a singer and musician. But I can't dance to save my life. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: Besides meeting two of the coolest actors ever – Steve McQueen and Paul Newman – on the set of 'The Towering Inferno,' who else from that famous cast do you distinctly remember?

Lookinland: I have to say that Fred Astaire struck me as a very special person. Just being near him was like, 'wow, look at him.' His feet never touched the ground when he walked, but that's to be expected from Fred Astaire.

HollywoodChicago.com: How did you get that gig?

Lookinland: I just got cast. I really think the kids were an afterthought in that film, because we were cast on a Thursday afternoon, and Monday morning I was at work. It wasn't like there was any kind of big process. I spend the next four months at 20th Century Fox watching fires burn, it was great.

HollywoodChicago.com: Your son portrayed you in the TV movie 'Growing up Brady.'. What tips did you give him about portraying the old man?

Lookinland: I probably just told him be yourself and do what the director tells you, because I'm not the director, he is. Just do what what the director tells you and everything will be fine. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: What is the best part in this stage in your life?

Lookinland: My family. My wife and I are going on 25 years of marriage and I definitely married the right person. It's family, and my relationship with her.

Susan Olsen, Cindy Brady on "The Brady Bunch"

Susan Olsen, the "youngest one in curls," has become a high profile animal rescue advocate, serving on the Board of Directors for the organization "Precious Paws."

HollywoodChicago.com: You work closely with animal advocacy. What got you interested in those efforts and what are you currently involved with now?

Susan Olsen: I just got a text, showing me six puppies that just got dug up from under a building. Had they not found them, these little guys would have drown. I began as a foster parent for the shelter, bottle babying kittens and puppies. I would feed them until they reached a couples pounds, then they can be spayed, neutered and adopted.

Interestingly enough, Chris Knight worked with a woman named Georgyne Lalone of Precious Paws. He introduced me to her, and it turned out she had started rescuing cats on the Paramount lot, which generations later were the offspring of the cats I used to feed when I was a little girl on the Paramount lot. I always have had 'Elly May Clampett Syndrome,' I like taking care of critters. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: You came from a large family yourself, and your brother was in a Hitchcock movie, right?



Susan Olsen as Cindy Brady
Photo credit: Paramount Home Entertainment

Olsen: I had two brothers who were actors, my sister as well. All four of us were 'discovered.'

HollywoodChicago.com: How did the family dynamic lead to so many notable acting roles?

Olsen: It wasn't a dynamic, I think it was a curse. [laughs] My grandmother thought it was her blessing, but I'm the seventh generation ancestor of a woman who was hanged in Salem, Massachusetts. So there might be a little magic in the family. It started with my oldest brother, who was beautiful, too beautiful to keep to ourselves. He was literally discovered standing on a street corner.

My Dad didn't like it at all, but one-by-one we all got discovered. My Mom would say, 'it must be fate, you have to give them a chance.' So each of us went through it, and got out of it around high school. I'm the only one who stayed in it, to some degree.

HollywoodChicago.com: You are also a pop artist. What part of your personality does the expression of that art define, and what are you most proud of regarding that journey of creation?

Olsen: It's funny, because I don't like 'pop' music or 'pop'-style movies, but pop art makes sense to me. I was a graphic artist, and have done art since I was a little girl. The aspect of my personality that is coming out from my pop art is my insanity, my love for frivolous and silly things.

I paint pictures of jars of Fluff Marshmallow Creme, in different situations. It started because 'Fluff,' was my nickname, so that is what I pursued. Fluff Marshmallow Creme is actually very American. It is made in a factory where it's the only product made. It's still a small-time product, still made like it was in the 1920s. Very unusual for a product today. It's a piece of Americana in a jar.

"The Hollywood Show" comes to Chicagoland on September 7th, 8th and 9th, 2012 (Saturday 9/8 and Sunday 9/9 are celebrity appearance days), at The Hilton Rosemont, 5500 N. River Road, Rosemont, Ill. For complete details, click here. [15]

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