

Interview: Chicagoan Bill Daily, One of TV's Favorite Sidekicks

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CHICAGO – Mention Bill Daily's name and you might experience puzzlement. But mention Roger Healey of "I Dream of Jeannie" or Howard Borden of "The Bob Newhart Show" and there will be instant recognition for one of TV's favorite supporting characters. Bill Daily also grew up and started his career in Chicago.

His family moved here in the late 1930's, and Daily attended Lane Tech High School in the city. He worked his way up the show business ladder by doing stand-up and music for clubs in the area, attended the Goodman Theatre School and worked as a floor manager for a local TV station, WMAQ. It was through those connections that he met his future co-star Bob Newhart, who was beginning his stand-up career as well.



Bill Daily at the "Hollywood Show Chicago" in 2013

Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

He eventually made his way to Hollywood, and began working on TV in small parts on shows like "Bewitched" and "My Mother the Car." In 1965, he was cast as Roger Healey on "I Dream of Jeannie," and would play that memorable comic part for five seasons. After Jeannie was canceled, old Chicago pal Bob Newhart tapped Daily for the role of next door neighbor Howard Borden on "The Bob Newhart Show." Daily was with that series until it ended in 1978. Afterward, he made numerous TV guest star appearances through the late 1990s, and did some radio from 2006 to 2009 after he retired in New Mexico.

Bill Daily appeared at the "Hollywood Show" Chicago, an annual event in which fans can mingle, take photographs and get autographs from the celebrities who appear there. The next session of the "Hollywood Show" Chicago will take place in Rosemont, Ill., on August 15th-17th. For complete details and ticket purchase information, [click here](#). [15]

HollywoodChicago.com: What did you take with you from your Chicago roots that has stayed with you throughout your life?

Bill Daily: I'm 86 years old, I have trouble remembering yesterday [laughs]. I loved the people, the charm and being the only Irish guy in my neighborhood, around Ashland and Chicago Avenue. I went to grammar school in Logan Square, went to high school at Lane Tech, and studied acting at the Goodman Theater. I got my first job working on the Cubs games for WGN-TV, and was a floor director at WMAQ-TV, the NBC affiliate in Chicago.

I did all this despite being dyslexic, and had a hard time reading, so I naturally became funny to overcome it. I would have been nothing if I hadn't been dyslexic, because when you can't read, you'd better be funny. so that's how it all worked out.

HollywoodChicago.com: You had your first encounter with Bob Newhart when you were both young stand-up comedians in Chicago. Can you describe those first, early days with him?

Daily: Bob is the nicest human being you'll ever meet, but not so great to work with – he's so smart he never wanted to rehearse. So we'd have to get up in front of a live audience with little rehearsal, the pressure was on. But he is one of my best friends, and just a great guy.

HollywoodChicago.com: I read that you were involved in his famous Abraham Lincoln stand-up bit, where Bob plays a press agent talking to him on the phone ...



Bill Daily and Barbara Eden

Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

Daily: I was working as a director at WMAQ, as I said. I was helping to produce an awards show, and at the time Bob was still my accountant [Newhart's pre-show business job]. Right before the show, the engineers went on strike, which meant I had more minutes to fill. I knew Bob had the Abraham Lincoln Press Agent bit from playing the local clubs, so he went on the show, he did the bit, and just killed. After that, he was signed to do comedy albums, movies and such, but that was the break. I never told that story before.

HollywoodChicago.com: The late, great Larry Hagman had his difficulties on your show in the late 1960s, as it is documented that he was part of the L.A. party scene. How did you help him get through that period as a co-worker and friend?

Daily: He had a drinking problem, but I loved working with him. We were a true team – he would rehearse, he'd go over and over stuff, and he was brilliant, even when he was drinking. I loved the man.

HollywoodChicago.com: You only managed to do one feature film, Walt Disney's 'The Barefoot Executive,' in which your co-star was a chimp. Was there any other films you auditioned for, but somehow didn't get?

Daily: I had to audition to the chimp, because he had a tendency to be mean to his co-stars [laughs]. At one point, I had to throw him out of an airplane, but he really liked me – but even then, he would snap at me if we had too many takes. I didn't get much opportunity in film, but I did something late in my career called 'Alligator II: The Mutation' (1991), which was beyond horrible.

HollywoodChicago.com: The great Marcia Wallace told me that you love women more than any man she ever knew. What was your best opening line?

Daily: I was always funny, so that makes it easier. I'm not the type of guy who wants to hang around guys, I love to hang around women. They are funny, smart and easy to be with, but I was mischaracterized as a womanizer. I was married to my first wife for 30 years, but I didn't love her, so it seemed I was going out on her. When I met my second wife, I was madly in love with her, and that made all the difference.

HollywoodChicago.com: Turnabout is fair play - tell me something about Marcia Wallace that the rest of the world doesn't know.

Daily: We both didn't make any money on the Newhart show initially because of the contract structures in those days. Also later we sat next to each other on the game show 'The Match Game.' She was always brilliant, charming and funny.

The "Hollywood Show" Chicago will be August 15-17th, 2014, at the Hilton Rosemont Chicago O'Hare Hotel. 5550 N. River Road, Rosemont, Illinois. [Click here](#) [15] for details, celebrity appearances and to purchase tickets.



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