



~From the television show
The Wonder Years

"Memory is a way of holding onto the things you love, the things you are, the things you never want to lose."

MY MEMORIES OF Mickey Shaughnessy

by Steve Murray



Young Steve Murray

As I wrote in the last issue, my grandparents had apartment houses in North Wildwood from the 1940's to the 1980's. Because of my mothers' show business past, many of their tenants

were entertainers working at various night clubs across the island. This was Wildwoods "Golden Age".

Our most famous house guest was actor-comedian, Mickey Shaughnessy. He stayed with us for about 5 or 6 seasons, from the mid 60's through early 70's. Mickey, at that time, was working at Club Lou Booth (Club 18).

He lived and worked in California and Nevada during much of the year, but like most night club entertainers he followed the "circuit", of which the Wildwoods were an important part. He was also under contract with the Walt Disney Studio during his years with us.

Mickey was born in 1920 in New York City. He got into show business when he was a teenager, as, believe it or not, a singer. He found a lot of work at the popular Catskill Mountain Resort Hotels in upstate New York.

When he realized he could make more money as a comedian, which he also had a natural ability for, he quickly changed his act.

World War II came along and he was drafted into the Army. His big stature and booming voice helped him earn Sergeant Stripes and he was put to work as a drill instructor. He also coached a regimental boxing team.

His performing talents were not wasted though and he was asked to join up with a new service revue in 1943 called "Stars and Gripes". This allowed him to continue to learn and fine tune his act.

After the war ended, Mickey took his now polished act on the road and eventually ended up playing the big clubs in Philadelphia. He quickly developed a great affection for the city and made close friends with the areas other entertainers such as Cozy Morley. It was only a matter of time before he also discovered, and fell in love with, the Wildwoods.

The Wildwoods were a better summer venue than Philadelphia so Mickey began working for Eddie Suez at his Club Avalon (before Cozy Morley bought it). It was here, Mickey said, he was "discovered" by a Hollywood agent that offered him a screen test. He obviously scored a home run because he was put under contract with Columbia Pictures and placed in his first film "The Marrying Kind" with Aldo Ray and Judy Holiday in 1952. Next came "Last of the Comanches" which finally led to his big break in the movies.

In 1953 he was cast in one of the greatest Hollywood Classics of all time - "From Here to Eternity". Mickey appeared as Cpl. Leva and



Studio photographs from Steve's collection of Mickey with MGM lion, and with Dean Jones and Frank Sinatra, which is autographed to Steve's Grandmother to: "Mom! My Home away from Home!"

worked along side such legends as Burt Lancaster, Frank Sinatra, Montgomery Clift and Ernest Borgnine. This role opened the door wide for Mickey and after this he appeared in about 2 movies a year until the early 1970's.

Mickey was best known for his roles as dumb but loveable heavies such as Junior in "Pocket Full of Miracles" and Farragut Jones in "Don't Go Near the Water". He was though, also considered a fine dramatic actor and this can be seen in roles such as Scottie O'Brien in "Edge of Eternity" or Hunk Houghton in "Jailhouse Rock". Mega star Glenn Ford was a close friend of Mickey's and would have him in his films whenever possible. They made about five pictures together including "The Sheepman" and "Designing Women". This last film provided a very funny role for him, as he played a punchy ex boxer who slept (and snored) with his eyes wide open. He appeared in over 40 movies during his career.

He also was seen in many of the popular TV shows of the 50's, 60's and 70's including Maverick, One Step Beyond, The Untouchables and the Wonderful World of Disney. The One Step Beyond episode was a classic.

During his summers with us he became like part of the family. He lived by himself for most of his stay although for one or two seasons his sons Michael and Kevin stayed with him. Mickey ate dinner with us frequently. (He loved my mom's cooking). He was very sweet to my grandmother, whom he called Mom and got along great with my dad, another big Irishman about the same age.

During and after dinner he always entertained

us with great inside stories about the movies and other actors. Once he was telling us about filming a scene in "Jailhouse Rock" in which he teaches fellow prison inmate Elvis how to sing and play the guitar. After my prompting he sang the song (One More Day) at the dinner table. This was a real treat and he had a very beautiful Irish tenor voice, although it was a country song. He once sang Danny Boy for us and it even made my tough guy fathers' eyes tear up.

One of Mickey's prized possessions was a diamond and gold cuff link and tie bar set given to him by Elvis for being his co-star. He said even years after the movie was made, Elvis still called him Hunk, his characters' name.

Once after a long night of TV, the 11 O'clock news with John Facenda was just ending. Mr. Facenda said "good night" in his wonderful trademark way and then said "stay tuned for the late night movie, Edge of Eternity, starring Cornel Wilde and Mickey Shaughnessy" then he repeated in mock amazement "Mickey Shaughnessy?" We all laughed but Mickey wrote down something, folded it and gave it to me along with a \$5.00 bill. "Do me a favor and take this down to Western Union, first thing in the morning". I did what he asked me and read it on my way there. To John Facenda c/o WCAU TV Phila., "yeah me, Mickey Shaughnessy".

That night Mickey was working but my family sat together waiting to see if John Facenda would acknowledge the telegram. Once again he signed off and announced the name of the late movie and its stars, then he paused a bit and looked down hard at his notes and said "what- no Mickey Shaughnessy?"

Mickey asked me to look after his boys once in a while - they were just a little younger than me. In 1970 he was in the Disney movie "The Boatniks" with Phil Silvers. The Wildwood premier was at Hunts Strand Theater on the boardwalk, and Mickey asked me to take the boys to see it. When we got there I gave the manager a note from Mickey. They then proceeded to give us (3 kids) the red carpet treatment. They escorted us to our seats, turned the house lights on, and announced "Mickey Shaughnessy's sons are here today, let's give them a hand". Everyone applauded and I felt like a celebrity for a while. It was hard to watch the movie though. Michael and Kevin had been on location during the filming and wanted to tell me every behind the scenes thing about it. It was a very funny film though.

Another time Mickey took me aside and asked me to go to the Aqua Circus with him and the boys. He handed me a \$20.00 and said "whatever happens tonight just stay with the kids and get them home early- but don't tell them I talked to you". The Aqua Circus Show was at the old Sportland Pool on the boardwalk. It was billed as the "world's largest water show". It featured the "Aquamaid's" (beautiful synchronized swimmers), the comic group the "aquamaniacs" and an Alcapulco cliff diver who did a high dive of 130'.

We arrived together and watched the show without any fanfare. The "aquamaniacs" came on and one of their antics was a battle with padded pugil sticks while balanced on small floating platforms. In between bouts the MC announced that actor Mickey Shaughnessy was there with his 3 sons. Everyone applauded him and us kids (a little old lady even patted me on the head). Anyway, the MC said "I have an idea - why don't we ask Mickey to come down and try his luck against one of our guys?" Everyone applauded and Mickey finally agreed. (Now I knew what the secret was).

Mickey, fully dressed got out there and jostled and hammed it up for the audience until he finally ended up in the water. Afterwards he disappeared to go change and get ready for his show at the nightclub. This was my cue to take the boys for the night on the boardwalk before going home.

Mickey's last year with us was about 1972. He had earlier in his life, I think, several bad marriages and some periods of awful bad luck, but he eventually found happiness with a local woman, Sarah Gallagher, and they married. My family continued to keep in touch though.

Mickey developed lung cancer in the mid 80's and passed away on July 29, 1988 at the young age of 64. He had made one last movie in 1987, a sci-fi thriller called "Primal Scream" but unfortunately it was not released until after his death.

Mickey was very talented but more importantly, he was a good and very generous man. I make it a point to look for his movies on TV. They are all great films and it always brings back a lot of good memories.

