

# Jim Youngblood: The Radio Icon

By Per Jensen

1979 was an eventful year. The Ayatollah Khomeini returned to power in Iran once the Shah was ousted, followed by an angry protest that took over the American Embassy. The Three Mile Island Nuclear Plant in Pennsylvania suffered a dangerous, near melt down. The Academy Award for Best Movie went to "*Kramer vs. Kramer*". Popular songs in 1979 were "*The Devil Went Down To Georgia*" by Charlie Daniels, "*Heart of Glass*" by Blondie, and "*Bad Girls*" by Donna Summer. Pittsburgh had a great year in sports; the Pirates won the World Series and the Steelers won the Super Bowl. But in Paducah, Kentucky it was the last year for the morning radio icon, **Jim Youngblood**. After nearly 30 years of dominance rarely seen in the industry, he had become so ingrained in the minds of listeners that few could even name the DJ's on competing radio stations. His hook phrase, "Tell 'em JY sent you by!" was as classic and deep-rooted as "See the USA in your Chevrolet!" He went quietly, with no fanfare, but his legacy will never be forgotten.

James Robert Youngblood was born in Marion, Illinois on September 27, 1923, to Oscar and Gethel Youngblood. Oscar and Gethel were married in July, 1916, and had five siblings. There was Jim, Paul, Ellis, Aliene, and Ella May. Unfortunately, Jim never met Ellis, Aliene, or Ella May because they died of complications from Scarlet fever in March of 1922. An outbreak of the infection spread rapidly throughout Marion, and tragically, they died within a mere two weeks of each other. After such terrible events, Jim's healthy arrival with the survival of his older brother Paul made them a very close, consonant family. (*Side note: the names "James" and "Robert" are of Greek and Scottish descent. Amazingly, his name is interpreted as 'holder of bright fame'!*)

Jim's family background is one of intrigue. He was the grandson of William and Martha Youngblood from America, Illinois. They were able farmers, but apparently William was rather a mischievous character. Records from that area were so ill-kept that detailed information about them is extremely sketchy, but it is now known that the Youngblood heritage was larger than previously believed. Absolum, Frances,

Moses, and William (Jim's *great* grandfather, not grandfather) were able to make public domain land acquisitions between 1836 and 1854. The tracts of land became sizeable in total because they were procured at different times but in locations close to one another. There are no records of William Youngblood (Jim's grandfather) making his own purchases, so it's possible that he worked as a laborer for his family, or assumed control of that land when family members were older and unable to maintain crop production.

**A**s Oscar grew older his vocation had become carpentry. Carpentry is vital on any farm, but apparently farming wasn't his purpose. In his late teen years Oscar re-located to Marion, Illinois where wood working and construction was more plentiful and where other family relations were located. Oscar soon met his future wife, Gethel Pulley. Gethel's family was a large one and well known in Williamson County. Her family heritage was startling when it was discovered that her Mother's lineage was verified as going back to 1662. It was a shock to learn that Jim Youngblood's great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandparents were William Bradley and Frances Burden of Middlesex, Virginia; a part of what today is known as Hog Island. The first notable pioneer in the family was John Bradley (wife was Phoebe Holloway) who moved initially to Brunswick, Virginia, then to Cumberland in 1749. Their son, also named John, was the child who made his way to Williamson County, Illinois sometime around 1805. It was here that the family settled and prospered. It was Lucy Bradley who married Berry Pulley in 1862, their granddaughter Gethel to be born December 10, 1893.

**A**fter Oscar and Gethel lost their three children they spent only a few more years in Marion. Once more, Oscar needed to be available for more abundant work and moved the family to Cairo, Illinois (very near his birthplace) in or around 1928. This was the time Jim Youngblood remembers most of his childhood. Cairo is located at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, where continuous river and railroad traffic were the base of their healthy economy. Even when the Stock Market crashed and thrust the country into the harshest economic depression in modern history, Oscar was still able to maintain his family.

**Y**oung lads are always notorious for their many youthful pursuits, but for Youngblood a standout was baseball. One of his most remarkable memories was a trip to St. Louis to attend a baseball double-header between the Cardinals and the New York Giants in 1933. He doesn't remember much of game #2, but game #1 was an unforgettable

pitching match up between Hall of Fame pitchers Dizzy Dean against Carl Hubbell of the Giants (Cardinals lost 2-1). As exciting as it was for a young baseball fan, he also remembers the long bus rides back and forth, and how exhausted he was when finally arriving home late that night. On another occasion, Jim's brother Paul was playing for a local baseball team when suddenly they had the chance to play against a semi-pro 'barnstorming' team. They were a collection of players from the Negro League, and on that day the pitcher just happened to be the future Hall of Famer Satchel Paige. Paige's legend was based mostly on his blistering fastball. Jim remembers watching Paul's team strikeout over and over again, amazed at how effective Paige was. Paul came out to sit in the bleachers with his brother Jim and in utter frustration commented, "Hell, we couldn't hit those pitches with an oar."

**A**nother significant change for Jim occurred in the mid 1930's; it was when Oscar gave his family a radio. In those days Radio had grown into the center of home entertainment. Everything from news to comedy to drama to music was everywhere to be heard on the dial if close enough to pick up the broadcast signals. (*Side note: the most shocking event of live Radio was Orson Welles' presentation of "War of the Worlds". It happened on Halloween of 1938, and without warning many people believed it was actually happening. A public panic ensued. Even local authorities demanded an explanation from Welles as to the purpose of the broadcast. It distinctly helped establish the true power of Radio.*) Cairo was some distance away from strong signaled stations, the closest and clearest being WPAD in Paducah, but Youngblood was glad to hear it fuzzy or not. Music was especially captivating for Jim. "Big Band" music had its start in the early 20's with Jazz, from which Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong would gain their fame. By 1934 it had become a sensation. Artie Shaw, the Dorsey Brothers, Gene Krupa, and Glenn Miller were so popular that they were virtual household names in their own time. With this surge in music Radio was so popular a pastime that sometimes the whole family would gather together and listen rapturously to the many broadcasts. It was television of its day. It was something Jim Youngblood would never forget.

**W**hen Jim was 13 years old his father surprised him with a special gift – a Trumpet. His immediate interest took him into the High School music program and he began studying music right away. To everyone's surprise he had a knack for the Trumpet. Besides the intricacies of reading and understanding the written form of music, Brass instruments are especially difficult to play. It is mostly based on

lip power. The original form was a long, straight, belled instrument that featured little melody ability. Brass instruments evolved into varying forms, which literally took centuries, but in the early 1800's they had developed into a number of more compacted instruments. These important improvements were numerous curvatures in the metal structure in order to accommodate varied voicing, as well as advancement of 'valves' and 'mouthpiece bells' for better control of tone and pitch. Jim began with the Trumpet but would later favor the Cornet because for him it played more comfortably. It had a wider array of tones, and it wasn't as piercing as the Trumpet; it 'mixed' with the band better. It was his ability to maintain the long, careful wind and lip functions which created his first-class playing style. At the age of 18 Jim Youngblood was the best musician from his high school, and it was clear that he was of professional quality. The only Big Band of stature in the Kentucky, Illinois, and Missouri area was "Jack Staulcup & his Orchestra". At Youngblood's surprising level of talent it didn't take long for him to join.

**T**he strange environment of professional music was unexpected. Youngblood was not quite prepared for what he was to experience. Nightclubs and Dance Halls are not always the friendly, lovely, party-time night spots that many perceive. Once the drinking and revelry begins an evening can suddenly end in harrowing fashion. There were places so 'rough and tumble' that the bandstand was housed in an area surrounded by chicken coop fencing in order to protect the band. One of his endless memories was a night in which an all-out brawl happened, and all his band mates had to scramble out of small but nearby windows. They all made it while clutching their highly valued instruments, except for the sad drummer because his bass drum couldn't fit through the window!

**J**im Youngblood played with Staulcup long enough to polish his professional abilities and refine the necessities of travel. His next step up was a higher level of professional play with Ace Brigode from Evansville, Indiana. Jim later became a featured member of the robust Tiny Hill band (who also did some recordings), certainly one of the strangest of all bandleaders. Tiny Hill was infamous for terrible appearance scheduling. There were nights when performance locations were so far apart that it would take endless hours of driving, sometimes all night, to reach their destinations on time. There was also the constant snickering that the pro nickname 'Tiny Hill' was well earned because he weighed 300 pounds. Jim would make wisecracks like, "Tiny is so big that he never goes swimming – he's afraid of

getting harpooned." Or, "I hear Tiny's going to retire soon and apply for Statehood."

**T**hese were trying times for professional musicians. The United States was in the midst of World War II, and the need for bright, bustling entertainment was all too real. People needed distraction from the intense reality of demented nations trying to conquer the world. Too many could see it only as a long, bad dream. A nice evening out for nice dinner and music helped lift the spirits. But from the musicians' viewpoint, tales of the road were different. Party-goers saw just the tip of the iceberg as to what the music business was really like. Jim Youngblood once told the story of a fellow who cheated their food stipend (always given them in addition to their pay) by catching cockroaches and storing in a pill bottle. Near the end of a meal he would hide one on his plate and convincingly complain to restaurant management to get the meal for free. Or there was a fellow Youngblood roomed with who was an overindulgent drinker. After arriving at the hotel one afternoon he began consuming and happened to see a lovely lady walking toward the hotel. He and Jim were on the second floor but as she neared he began yelling catcalls. She ignored him, but he leaned further out the window to get her attention. Until he finally fell out the window! Luckily the awning over front entrance was just below the room. He landed on it, rolled off, hit the sidewalk, got up, and kept on with his catcalls.

**T**here were plenty of occasions when embarrassment was inevitable. One particular night the Ace Brigode band was playing the Topper Ballroom in Cincinnati. They were broadcasting a live, coast-to-coast event on WLW Radio. The bandstand was a special display, built several feet above the stage itself, with tiered levels for each band section. The Drums were on the top level. One of their best songs was "*Swamp Fire*", and it featured a big, 'flag-waver' drum solo. Just as it was about to happen the drummer was slightly adjusting his seat when he scooted the stool too far back and suddenly fell off the bandstand! There was an accompanying God-awful sound of boom-crash entanglement as if a bomb had exploded. All on live radio. Luckily the drummer didn't break his neck yet it was a fall of nearly 12 feet. Even more amazing, the band didn't miss a lick; they actually played the entire song without a hitch.

**S**ometimes Youngblood had his own share of embarrassments. The Ray Herbeck band made an appearance at the Roseland Dance Hall in Times Square of New York City. It was Youngblood's first visit to New York, and it was to be a featured live broadcast on WCBS Radio. Band

mates weren't usually nervous about on-air performances since Radio work was common, but this was a very special moment. A nationwide broadcast on CBS, one of the largest networks in the country, is no everyday venture. As the countdown closed in, the nervous, cold sweat in the armpits was hidden only by their band jackets. Thankfully, the show began without a problem. Nerves from network stage personnel, lights, live microphones, and broadcast booth started to fade. Jim's first solo came and he stood up to belt it out, except this time he completely botched it! So bad that he later described it as sounding like, "... a drunk goose passing gas."

**B**esides the frequent stories of alcohol, drugs were also a common presence. Drugs became very popular during the rapid growth of the entertainment industry as early as 1903. Opium was at the top of the list, but availability of numerous drugs turned into a virtual chemical catalog once show business had become so large. (*Side note: 'Opium Dens' were common throughout Europe and America as far back as the 18th century.*) It was well known in the Hollywood social scene, but more prevalent in the Music Biz because it was 'round the clock' work. Long hours spent onstage was one thing, but the constant travel to strange hotels, restaurants, and cities – an entire lifestyle - is truly a stressful challenge. It was easy to be dependent mostly on 'uppers' and 'downers' to induce sleep and energy, but marijuana ('gag'), cocaine ('snow'), and morphine ('morf') were just as common. One had to be very careful that the boredom of so much travel didn't entice one into addiction. These habits wouldn't make their way into widespread public consciousness until the mid 1960's, but in those days Show Biz was teeming with it.

**I**t was in 1944 when things began to change for Jim Youngblood. He could sense that a lifetime of music was not likely, and when a lady came along who expressed serious interest (infatuations with show biz celebrities is another trait), he paid attention. It developed quickly. They were soon married and for a time she too enjoyed the limelight of Youngblood's success. They had two children; Ron was born May 16, 1944, and Cherry was born June 19, 1946. Life on the road with a wife and children wasn't easy, but Jim found the best music gig he would ever have. It was with Francis Craig in Nashville, Tennessee. Craig was so well-known that stars such as Phil Harris and Dinah Shore got their start with him. He was an extremely celebrated personality, and his musical renown was maintained as 'house band' at the distinguished Hermitage Hotel. This meant that Jim Youngblood could thankfully alter his usual traveling habits by unpacking his

suitcase permanently and live at one address for a change. Even better, Craig's road work was very limited.

**A**mongst so many memorable experiences, sometimes there are extremely unfortunate events that are inevitable. The Francis Craig band was en route to a live appearance south of Nashville. When they approached a train crossing, an accident had occurred only minutes before. Only one policeman was present, and they were forced to stop because the crossing was blocked. It was a tragic sight; a car had been hit broadside by a train traveling at full speed. Band members were overwhelmed, but tried to help the authorities slowly beginning to arrive. It was a ghastly scene; the car was an unspeakable mess. With so many people inside the car, it looked like an exploded can of tomatoes. Youngblood personally found human limbs that had been disembodied. Damage to them was so appalling that some body parts weren't even recognizable. He fell to his knees and his stomach emptied. The resulting nightmares would not abate for years to come, memories that lingered throughout his life.

**Y**oungblood's closest brush with fame took place at that time. When Jim took the job with Craig he was not aware that Francis' time in the business was to be short. By 1946 it was daunting for Jim to learn that Craig was breaking up the band for good. In celebration of that, Francis recorded his two most well-known songs. One was his 'signature' tune called "*Red Rose*", and the flipside called "*Near You*". Jim remembers the recording sessions as rather straightforward. The band gathered around the studio microphone in a semi-circle so that all instruments could be heard as clearly as possible. This was still the time when recordings were made direct-to-disc, and why different 'takes' for perfection were unacceptable; wasted discs from musical mistakes were too expensive. As the songs were very well rehearsed the sessions took little time and the results were excellent. Final appearances were promoted heavily, and for increased record sales Craig hired a plane to drop toy-like record discs that had a plastic rose attached. It sparked much more popularity than expected. "*Red Rose*" may have been his anthem, but Radio stations preferred "*Near You*". It was quickly a hit in Nashville, but by September it had grown into a nationwide hit. Unbelievably, "*Near You*" achieved #1 on the charts where it stayed for 17 weeks (according to Record Review magazine), the longest running #1 song of all time. That's an achievement it holds to this day, eventually to sell more than 2½ million copies. Craig was so surprised that he decided to establish a solo act featuring that song, but still disbanded his orchestra. Another song called "*Beg Your Pardon*" was also met with success but that was

his final farewell to live music. Francis Craig became an on-air personality with WSM radio of Nashville.

This experience may have subliminally suggested ideas for Jim Youngblood. A move to Radio made sense, but he did not act on this quickly. Fascination for music was still alive. Youngblood found another spot with the upper echelon Ray Herbeck band, so good an orchestra that recording was as much a forte as it had been with Craig. In fact, Herbeck was one of the first from that era to use recording tape instead of the old direct-to-disc style. However, Jim was suddenly faced with very difficult times. His wife left the marriage without warning. On-the-road style of music had grown very old and the care of two children made it back breaking work. By 1948 Jim Youngblood had had enough of professional music. He had never been able to establish a 'home' anywhere, so he came to Paducah, Kentucky because his parents had moved there in 1942. Oscar and Gethel were thrilled to be with him again, and it aided Jim's ability to care for his children. It was much easier for him to finalize his divorce and have full custody of his kids with a minimum of legal processing.

It was also an opportune time to consider Paducah his new home. The city was booming economically from the War's end. A massive project called the Tennessee Valley Authority was established in 1933 which led to enormous changes for that region. It resulted in the construction of dams (the reason Youngblood's father moved to Paducah), one for the Tennessee River and the other for the Cumberland River. This effort created at that time the largest man-made lakes in the world. Besides the work it offered to people of the area, it provided huge amounts of electrical power, flood control, soil conservation, and forestry restoration. In addition to TVA's flood control efforts, a large levee was constructed around the entirety of Paducah because of the disastrous flood in 1937. (*Side note: it was a large number of German prisoners of war that provided much of the physical work necessary. After the war ended many of them chose to stay in Paducah.*) A Union Carbide chemical plant was built, which was a direct link to the creation of the Atomic bomb that had finally ended the war. The presence of Union Carbide helped establish other related businesses, including many other manufacturing companies. Expansion within the city flourished, various construction projects were to be seen everywhere. The city of Paducah was in the midst of the most bustling era it would ever experience. Since his children needed a normal life and a place to call home, life on the road was over for Jim Youngblood.

**S**hortly thereafter Jim put together "The Jimmy Youngblood Orchestra" for local work. It was an exciting moment because it was the first time he was a bandleader. His approach was not unlike that of Harry James in which Trumpet was the featured instrument. And in Paducah there was very little competition. As good as Youngblood was, the ability to sharpen the meager talents of band members was top notch. No other band could compare; the Youngblood Orchestra gained a reputation fast. It wasn't full time income but it was very steady and far less stressful than the professional level. Plus, Radio was soon to come.

**T**he existence of Radio has a complex history. It took many years to develop, and is the grandfather of not only television, but the massive worldwide communication systems that abound today. The name most associated with the 'invention of the radio' was the Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi, but this is extremely inaccurate. It came about from the work of numerous individuals. The first and most important discovery was made by Heinrich Hertz in 1887 with the very first transmission of wireless radio waves. Hertz's name would be forever memorialized in AM (Amplitude Modulation) wavelengths. A number of researchers would soon follow with numerous variations of Hertz's work, each of them able to establish patents on their particular discoveries. In fact, a little known change occurred in 1943 when the Supreme Court overturned Marconi's main patent, which gave the acknowledgement of Radio 'inventor' to Nikola Tesla. Tesla's invention of the Coil, 3 phase electricity, and AC motor (with transformer) were imminently key to Radio development. George Westinghouse purchased Tesla's patents 1885, and it was Westinghouse who went on to create one of the largest communication conglomerates in existence.

**A** unique coincidence is the existence of Nathan Stubblefield in Murray, Kentucky, a small city near Paducah. Stubblefield's developments were interesting in that they were similar to wireless broadcasting, but many were operated by Earth-based means rather than atmospheric. The most significant aspects of his studies wouldn't become known until the developments of Microwave capabilities during the 1980's. Stubblefield was able to get a telephone patent in 1907 because of differences in functional method, and he created working models of his inventions for public presentation. Several companies were developed so his devices could be manufactured and sold. A school of early electronics was established where the Murray State University is today located. Unfortunately, competitive inventors were better financed and the business interests of Stubblefield finally collapsed. He could find no one to finance and continue his work.

Stubblefield's fateful, regretful act was to destroy all original examples of his devices because he wanted no one to profit from his efforts. Sadly, his name in historical perspective is now a mere footnote. He spent the rest of his life in anonymity and died on his farm in 1928.

In the meantime, progressive radio inventions continued quickly. Names of prominence were J. Ambrose Fleming, Lee DeForest, Reginald Fessenden, Ernst Alexanderson, all of whom provided inventions and efforts that were invaluable. Of particular note was David Sarnoff. He made his initial fame as the Telegraph operator who was the first to intercept communications from the Titanic. He spent 72 straight hours informing the world of the maritime disaster and its rescue attempts, as well as providing the names of survivors. Sarnoff soon became a part of Radio Corporation of America (RCA), and he was instrumental in developing Radio into an entertainment format with a nationwide reach. The first public broadcasts were originally by independents throughout the country (the earliest in 1909), but the first nationwide commercial system was the establishment of the National Broadcasting Company in 1926. Their on-air operations began in October of 1927. *(Side note: in November of 1933 the original location was moved to a newly designed network studio located at 30 Rockefeller Center. It took up 280,000 square feet of space, 22 separate studios, 5 audition rooms, numerous switching booths, several client and observation rooms, many associated technical facilities and equipment rooms, all overseen by a Master Control Center. This very impressive facility was nicknamed "30 Rock", not unlike the by-line of a Rock station we hear today!*

In contrast, FM (Frequency Modulation) radio didn't come into popularity until the early 1960's. It was developed by Edwin Armstrong, an undergraduate student at Columbia University. In 1912 he found a means of improving Lee DeForest's work with the Audion tube, which drastically improved Radio reception. It also created the onboard 'amplifier'. While Armstrong was eventually denied a patent for improving DeForest's invention, he went on to a number of other projects. In 1934 Armstrong found another major improvement, the use of Frequency Modulation rather than Amplitude Modulation. FM was far clearer than AM. Plus, it was known even at the time that it was stereo in broadcast. FM transmitted not just one wavelength, but two simultaneously. Its most notable achievement was use by the Military during World War II. Enemy forces could not understand that form of communications, which was critical in international warfare. Unfortunately, David Sarnoff (head of RCA) had no liking for Edwin Armstrong. RCA was the most powerful business force of Radio and

they made sure that FM made no headway in the broadcasting business. A legal battle ensued, which went on for many years. Edwin Armstrong could simply not afford to keep fighting RCA, financially or emotionally. He committed suicide in 1954. It would be another 10 years before FM was more commonly used, and by the 1980's FM had become the most popular form of Radio.

**I**t was 1948 when a sudden opportunity emerged for Jim Youngblood. The local 'flagship' Radio station, WPAD, was apparently having problems with on-air personnel. Youngblood had been aware of WPAD since he first began listening to the Radio in the mid 1930's. He clearly remembered an incident during the Radio news coverage of the calamitous Ohio River flood in 1937. WPAD made the bold move of on-the-spot news, a format they had never attempted, but comforting to listeners considering such rampant fear. The newscaster was earnest when he was handed a typed announcement, but he made an obvious 'flub'. To paraphrase he said, "Everyone needs to move away from advancing waters as soon as possible. Paducah is flooding quickly and the city is being excavated." In the background someone said, "That's *evacuated* you dumb\*ss!" The person who made this classic remark turned out to be the owner of the station, Pierce Lackey. In the Radio business he wasn't the friendliest man in the world, but he appreciated a good sense of humor. With this in mind, Youngblood took a chance at going to work in Radio. (*Side note: Lackey was a former mayor of Paducah. He was soon required to appear in Washington, DC, to face the Federal Communications Commission because use of on-air profanity was strictly banned. But considering the broadcast was under emergency conditions he wasn't officially reprimanded.*)

**R**adio performance for Youngblood wasn't easy at first. Personality was definitely the important aspect in those days. Sitting in a glassed, boxed booth operating the control board talking into a microphone trying to create an 'environment' for the listeners is very difficult. There is even a certain vocal delivery unlike normal conversation that has to be perfected. Only certain people can do it. But as Lackey made clear, it was a golden opportunity to step forward and see what Youngblood could do.

**R**adio work wasn't unlike what he discovered with the Trumpet; he had a knack for it. He found a comfort in that atmosphere. There was an electric excitement about it, and there was no on-the-spot entertainment attitude with it. The broadcast booth felt private; it was a small, sound-proofed room with nothing but him and the studio

microphone to deal with. Youngblood once mentioned, "It was better than the privacy of a bathroom." There wasn't a paying audience sitting and watching and expecting entertainment; it allowed a much freer flow of imagination. Youngblood had always been well known for his off-the-wall sense of humor, and with an open ended approach he soon learned how to make the most of it.

**I**t also took effort and experience to develop a steady format. As time went by the details of work and performance improved, as did public response to him. Youngblood originally began by working the evenings, but his loony style made him a natural choice for the most select program time of all, the morning slot. Initially, many people weren't sure what to make of it. Youngblood was gaining a reputation of honesty and originality never heard in a city of small size. Paducah could never be exposed to and understand the top level disc jockey's in cities like St. Louis, Nashville, or Chicago, and how close Jim would compare. Once Jim began establishing himself, his style was too hard not to listen to. Between the usual servings of music and commercials his comedy outbursts were zany. The closest comparison would be Spike Jones & the City Slickers, but still very different. There were all sorts of bizarre sound effects, antics, noises, wisecracks, one-liners, and weird sounds; some of these sounds were so strange that no one had could even guess where they came from. This is also when his classic byline, "Tell 'em JY sent you by!" started catching on.

**B**esides his fast rising notoriety, other great things were falling into place. It was 1955 when Jim met his wife-to-be. His daughter required a Tonsillectomy and it was the hospital visits which introduced them. Alma Dye was born on November 17, 1927 in Pulaski County, Kentucky. She left there at an early age and did quite a lot of traveling before settling in Paducah in the early 1950's. Youngblood made yet another classic remark, "When I first saw Alma, I was so struck by her beauty that I nearly broke my jaw when it fell off and hit the floor." It was so strong a synthesis that they both felt it a natural union. Jim & Alma were married on June 18, 1956 in Benton, Kentucky. (*Side note: Jim once mentioned, "What I remember most was leaving the Church and everyone was throwing rice at us – in boxes."*)

**A**lma had children from a previous marriage; Sharon was born on September 6, 1946, and Ira Dell on May 30, 1954. With Jim's son and daughter as part of the new household, it was Jeff's birth on August 17, 1957 (Jim and Alma's only offspring) that seemed to unify their household into true family form. And it was Jeff's arrival that created

still another unique incident. During visiting hours Youngblood went to the maternity ward and noticed a group of people gathered at the glass window. They were having a jolly laugh at something. Jim joined the gathering and to his horror saw his newborn child on his knees with his naked butt pointed directly at the unprepared audience. Youngblood was too embarrassed to admit it was his new son. Alma's response was, "That's going to be him for the rest of his life – always showing his \*ss."

**B**y the late 1950's Jim Youngblood's name was already a household word. WPAD was the most powerful station in Paducah and his audience spread far and wide. In those days (long before there were organized disc jockey associations) Movie Mirror magazine presented the most well known "Disc Jockey of the Year" award. As usual, it was the stations in large cities that received the most attention. When Jim was approached by two representatives of Movie Mirror regarding his entry into the DJ award he was completely surprised. The two men explained that they had been en route to Memphis (from St. Louis) to monitor the various personalities under consideration when they accidentally found WPAD on the Radio dial. They were so impressed that they turned back, and drove to Paducah in order to personally locate Jim. They spent a few days there to gather information on his background, listen to more of his shows, and even visited his house for pictures of his family. Jim Youngblood was tastefully presented in the magazine, no different than the famous names in Radio. Due to the fact that voting was the prime source of winning the contest, Paducah was obviously no match for large metropolitan cities, but Youngblood was included in the contest again two years later. It was the respectful acknowledgement from the industry that clearly spoke for itself.

**B**esides nationwide esteem, there was local and state recognition as well. Youngblood was twice awarded the "**Duke of Paducah**", in 1961 and 1964; they were presentations by the city in honor of his very special public achievements. In 1966 Youngblood was presented the "**Kentucky Colonel**" award, select recognition from the Governor in honor of goodwill and fellowship that well represented the Commonwealth of Kentucky. In addition, according to the Arbitron rating system, his show reached listener ratings so high that it has never been equaled before or since. More than 62% of the listening populace was tuned into Jim Youngblood's broadcast every day. Even his local dance band was so popular that he attracted full houses everywhere, finally giving it up because of such endless work.

**B**est of all, Youngblood's Radio show did not change. If anything, it improved. As technology improved it aided Radio work in many ways. It was Youngblood's style that put it to the real test. The sound effects were much easier to handle and allowed him to increase their use, making his show more topsy-turvy than ever. Youngblood was able to record many of the oddball sounds himself. His stature also allowed him access to various sources that few others had, such as his endless one-liners. Many were so classic that Henny Youngman would have been proud, and some were very risqué. Here are a few examples:

"Mom, am I a vampire? Son, shut up and eat your soup before it clots!"

"Why do Polar Bears always dig in ice? Because they like their iceholes."

"Yeah, my brother is doing fine. He gets out of prison in just 5 years."

"Politicians are like TV commercials – you can't believe a word they say."

"My uncle is so dumb he can't even pass a blood test."

"Your mother's so old that she remembers when Heinz only had 7 varieties."

"My wife doesn't like peanuts so she eats 'em just for the shell of it."

"My cousin's so dumb that 'Jethro' on the 'Beverly Hillbillies' is his hero."

"Some people are so dumb they think that on the automatic stick shift in their car 'R' means 'Race'."

"Both of my boys are good kids. Except one was born and the other was hatched."

"Elvis Presley and his brother could've been a great duo. Just think of it – Elvis the Pelvis and his brother Enis the..."

"If you ever see a Tornado coming, all you can do is lean down, put your head between your knees, then reach up and kiss your butt goodbye!"

There were many other incidents that were just as memorable as the jokes. The quiet, unassuming accounting manager at WPAD wore Fedora hats everyday. The particular style was commonly found in Paducah. Youngblood (and an accomplice who shall remain nameless) bought two identical hats, one slightly larger, one slightly smaller. When the accountant was out of sight Jim and his sidekick would switch the hats. At first the poor fellow thought someone was playing a joke on him, but never noticed anyone laughing as he stood there looking confused. He started acting strangely, as if he was wondering if his head had shrunk rather than his hat. Soon he made sure that his hat and overcoat were kept inside his office, just to make sure his head wasn't playing tricks on him.

At times there were wonderful surprises. When "*Ticket To Ride*" by the Beatles was released in 1965 Youngblood surprised his two sons by bringing them a copy. Jim did this because after the radio station's promotional copies had arrived, still more followed. It wasn't discovered until later that the additional "*Ticket To Ride*" promo discs were sent specifically to replace the others. The original copies contained the byline "from the Beatles film *Eight Arms to Hold You*". The films' title had been changed to "*Help*" at the last minute, meaning that the records with the byline 'Eight Arms To Hold You' were suddenly a delectable collector's item.

There were other memorable moments involving the Beatles. Youngblood never liked them very well, but when the Beatles "*White Album*" was released his two sons would request songs from it and he would usually play one per morning. One day Jim dedicated a track to a school teacher who hated both of his boys - the song was "*Happiness is a Warm Gun*". Most notable was a morning in which his boys had not mentioned a song to play. Youngblood pulled one of the "*White Album*" discs, picked a track, cued it up, and let it go. The sounds emitted were shocking. It was the loudest, wildest, most screaming onslaught of aggravating, nerve wracking noise he had ever heard. He had accidentally played "*Helter Skelter*". In a Bible Belt city like Paducah it was the worst choice he could possibly make. But Jim was in a mischievous mood that morning so he let the entire song play. The telephone lit up worse than a mass of 911 calls. People in the office were scrambling to answer calls and fumbling for the correct apologies. One lady kept knocking on the studio window frantically trying to make him shut it down. Youngblood just smiled and waved back. It was learned that he was threatened personally, and why he change his personal schedule. But as "*Helter Skelter*" ended he said, "And that was the Lawrence Welk Orchestra!"

**S**ometimes there were alarming, serious incidents. It was in 1968 when Paducah experienced a sizeable earthquake. WDXR had moved temporarily into the top of floor of the city's tallest building, the well known Irvin Cobb Hotel. The earthquake was strong enough to give the building a feel of 'swaying', and in such a well built structure it was a terrifying experience. WDXR moved soon after.

**A**fter Pierce Lackey died in the late 1960's, the future of WPAD was to change. The new owner had a completely different approach to the operation of Radio stations. His was usual - a reduction of operational costs and an increase in advertising rates. Programming was to become homogenized and pasteurized, with a de-emphasis on personality. Station management fully expected Youngblood to follow this edict. Meanwhile, hush-hush interest from the competing WDXR made itself known. Unbeknownst publicly, WDXR was preparing to take some bold steps forward. The station owner was planning not only to expand its Radio capabilities, but to initiate an independent television station. Independents have prospered in larger markets for many years because of expanded marketing share, but in Paducah such a market did not exist. It was a very risky business maneuver. A large part of the WDXR wager was based on the inclusion of Youngblood's dominant Radio presence. Besides the advertising dollars his show produced, his fame would undoubtedly shine on the new TV station. For the first time, "Tell 'em JY sent you by!" was a literal investment. With the arrival of Jim Youngblood in 1968, WDXR was almost overnight the highest rated Radio station in Paducah.

**T**hese were perhaps the most glorious days of Radio for Jim. The creation of a potential media 'empire' within Paducah was a very arousing possibility. Before it was on the air, the brand new, impressively modernistic building in the downtown area was revealed to be the new home of WDXR Radio and TV. It grew into a ripple of excitement that could be felt throughout the city; no advertising was needed. Even the introduction of "Bozo the Clown" (to be an afternoon show) was ingeniously used as a media event. It was 'covered' by all competing TV and Radio stations, and featured a Parade through the downtown area which culminated at the new WDXR headquarters. With Jim Youngblood the prime example of imagination, the other time slots had to find new ways to entertain and keep their audiences tuned in. Unlike the blasé formats of the other stations, WDXR tried to keep each slot lively. An evening 'shock jock' once did a contest for "Best Reason Not To Play The Same Song". He played the song "*Get It On*" by T. Rex for nearly an hour until a woman called in and did nothing but howl a bloodcurdling scream.

Jim Youngblood's show would never be more entertaining. He spent the next seven years in full control of his show, as hilarious and fervent as ever. His ratings had never been higher, and were so steady that WPAD had fallen to a distant second. Youngblood's classic "Tell 'em JY sent you by!" was still so widespread that it was second breath to everyone in that entire region.

The TV efforts were almost as successful. They found many different ways of elaborating their programming schemes. Various syndicated game shows were their morning bloc, the Bozo program and other teen draws made them strong in the afternoon, and Classic movies with TV sitcoms were their forte for evenings. It seemed to give the viewing audience nice alternatives, a refreshing change from the local NBC affiliate. Rare choices were given to viewers, sights and sounds to which there was no other availability. Many people were so happy about another choice of TV that WDXR and WPSD were in a virtual dead-heat of ratings for their first year.

However, the imaginative efforts eventually sagged. Limited financial means restricted their ability to build a good visual library and viewers got bored. It eventually deteriorated so badly that even the highly touted Friday night horror features were embarrassing C-rated melodramas. The TV ratings weren't bad at first, but when the slide began it was like trying to stop an avalanche. WDXR could no longer afford to stay on the air. It created a financial entanglement so complicated it would later take attorneys and accountants years to unravel. As expected, the only survivor was Radio. It had been Radio success that had floated the entire business structure from the start, but the horizon was so bleak that desperate changes had to be made. Payroll cutbacks are the usual firsts for any business blunders, and Jim Youngblood didn't even wait for the bomb to drop. He said goodbye early because he refused to be associated with such inept business practices.

This was not his last hurrah. After so many years on Radio he didn't feel comfortable with bowing out in such a manner. Some time had passed but he worked once more with WDXR. Management had changed and they were well aware of his unshakable command of morning Radio. "Tell 'em JY sent you by!" was too powerful to ignore. Youngblood worked his show three more years, and in certain ways it was yet more interesting than before, partially because he dealt more with the current trends in music. At times his show was borderline bonkers; Jim created more of his own sound effects thanks to still improving recording capabilities and sources of soundbytes.

Rejuvenation of his show was somewhat successful in trying to draw younger listeners but it was a tiring effort. While his ratings were top notch, advertising income had dropped. The mindset of Paducah had become more dispirited because of sagging economics, which had a particularly depressive effect on small cities and towns across the nation. Numerous well established businesses, including factories, permanently closed. The downtown area would finally devolve into a near 'ghost town'. It was a recession that many never recovered from. Along with that, radio had become dreary. It was sinking to the level of colorless Pop Muzak with an emphasis on FM rather than AM, and very little personality. This was when Jim Youngblood decided to call it quits. He quietly retired from radio permanently.

**L**ike so many others, Youngblood didn't waste time with such a glum environment. Jim and his wife Alma moved to San Diego, California in 1984 where they took up a new life they vastly enjoyed. Continuous sunshine with an endless upbeat attitude was rejuvenation, a new beginning they truly needed. At first they missed the sights, events, and memories from their long life in Paducah, but history can't be lived twice. Jim and Alma eagerly ensconced themselves in a joyous new life, opened their eyes to many new experiences, and parlayed a new outlook they truly deserved. Except such a blessed reprieve negated Youngblood's interest in his Radio years for historical purposes. The many 'air check' recordings he made (recordings used to monitor one's sound) were not kept. Neither were the numerous classic bits and sound effects that crystallized the memories of many people who remembered Jim Youngblood as if he left only yesterday. Jim has no regrets for it. He was happy that so many could enjoy his presence in their lives, but for him today was not yesterday.

**A**fter the devastation of Alma Youngblood's death in 1994 from Cancer surgery complications, Jim retired. He never fully recovered from that tragic loss, but he managed to lead a very quiet, contented life. Jim arranged a permanent memorial for Alma, his heart warmed when he lights special candles everyday in her memory. Youngblood stayed close to his family, a comfortable blanket of serenity. He observed the world around him, and his wit remained as sharp as always. Even his criticisms and suggestions for improvement in radio and music are just as marked because he listened and he still cared. Jim was glad there are a few who still have the honest, appreciable attitude for good entertainment. Age may have taken his body away from him but his mind never diminished. Jim was above those false expectations. He lived with pride but with humble acceptance.

Thankfully, Jim Youngblood's radio legacy was not forgotten. In 2005 his life story with various mementoes were submitted to the Kentucky Historical Society for permanent keeping and was heartily accepted. Also that year a CD was produced featuring the few recordings he appeared on. Most surprising was the ultimate award Youngblood never expected - the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Kentucky Broadcasters Society, and gratefully honored at the KBS convention later that year. Jim Youngblood was indeed a Radio icon.

Mr. Youngblood died on January 26, 2006.

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“Jim Youngblood: The Radio Icon”

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