

## Doug Davies: Rum & ragtime renaissance man

Santa Claus, Oliver Hardy, Buckle Billy Buckley and a cast of thousands are dead. They lived in our midst for the past 23 years disguised as a gentle giant named Doug Davies who left us at age 57 a week or so ago.

Like all who make a real contribution to the world we live in, Doug was a high profile guy who often went unnoticed because he fit this state so perfectly well. He was a bear of man who early on learned the Nevada way: keep several ironons in the fire at all times or you don't last here. Davies was armed with one formidable set of ironons, starting with the most magnificent voice since Orson Welles. He had the boom of James Earl Jones, but without the harsh edge of either man. A thousand times on radio and TV, you have heard that voice combine the depth of oceans with the sweetness of syrup.

The rich texture hid a secret. I've read that oriental weavers intentionally build some flaw into Persian rugs on the philosophy that nothing but God should be perfect. As with the finest fabric from the loom, the Davies imperfection was impossible to find unless he told you about it. Like the greatest orator of the century, Winston Churchill, the great Davies had a lisp. He was better than Churchill in making sure the rapt listener never noticed.

Oh, what times we had! Davies outsmobbing William F. Buckley while selling mobile homes in a super-intellectual radio spoof. Davies as a reporter chasing



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an runaway pig around a shopping center. Davies as a talking computer with a cold. Davies chasing the Easter Bunny around Sherwood Forest.

You can get away with a lot on radio, but Doug was just as good in front of a camera. I remember him as Oliver Hardy unflinchingly starting into the lens while taking a hot pizza in the face (I threw one and we ate the spare.) With Reno High graduate and Hollywood actor Herman (Jack) Marston as Stan Laurel, that series of television commercials won two awards for excellence. They were filmed by John Hanks, former owner of Pauline's Sportswear in Greenbrae Shopping Center, where Davies once lived in real-life miracle on 34th Street.

One day near Christmas, Santa didn't show. Hanks called Doug and the Big Guy created another instant character, heard and all, to the delight of several hundred little Sparks kids. Whenever I asked Doug Davies to do a radio commercial as Santa Claus, I ended up actually hearing Santa Claus, not an announcer doing the usual plastic ho-ho-ho. He was Hollywood material, and eventually got his chance, winning some

small parts in Hollywood films shot in Nevada.

Doug Davies will never depart the high desert. He left too much behind. The highest-rated talk show host in northern Nevada history, Travis T. Hipp, has used ragtime theme songs since he crossed paths with Doug Davies many years ago. He knew classical music and was also an excellent ragtime pianist, one of the movers of the annual Virginia City ragtime festival. One time, filmmaker Hanks and I needed some background music for a commercial series entitled "The Apparels of Pauline," a black-and-white silent movie campaign. The Renaissance Man with the big hands supplied himself, furiously playing a rag entitled "Dill Pickles." That commercial scored us another award. I still have the music.

Our paths first crossed briefly in Las Vegas about 1970 when Davies worked at KLA-TV and I was a green advertising executive. By the time I got promoted and moved here in 1971, Davies was firmly entrenched as the voice of KCRL radio and television (now KROW-AM and KRNV TV-4). He later worked at KPRTV-AM in Carson City and KOH-AM in Sparks.

His memorial service last Thursday was very well done, but it lacked a few Davies touches, like a big scale model 747 jumbo jet hanging from the ceiling. Doug's idea of the perfect vacation always involved a long 747 ride, usually to town with a huge rollercoaster. The ser-

vice also needed a bar set up with the famous Davies exotic rum drinks. Vitamin C was never so tempting or dangerous before or since. Walkon's Sparks chapel really needed Doug's miniature dice table. His idea of the perfect gathering meant inviting over some friends, serving them good food and drink, and then playing croqueter in a game for pennies. Sometimes, I'm sure, the guests were members of the local Laurel & Hardy society, of which he was a distinguished member.

In many ways, the big man with the booming voice was a big kid. It was the height of irony that he made his last media appearance portraying a scowling unshaven suspect in a police lineup as part of newspaper and outdoor ads for National Guardian alarm systems. Of course, he played the part well.

One night many years ago, Doug and I worked late at a radio station producing some spots. He was very excited about an upcoming trip to Hawaii aboard a 747. "I'll tell you something about me, Barbo. I'll never wear the fanciest clothes or drive a brand new car. A long time ago, I figured out that memories are all that matter, and I'll spend my money gathering them."

Nevada is richer because Douglas Langley Davies once gathered around and embraced us.

DIRTY TRICKS DEPT. I never throw anything away. Deep in an old file, I found a copy of the polling place intimidation consent decree signed in 1982

and apparently violated by New Jersey Republicans last week. It reads, in part, that "The Republican National Committee and State Committee agree that they will in the future, in all states and territories... refrain from undertaking any ballot security activities in polling places or election districts where the racial or ethnic composition of such districts is a factor in the decision to conduct... activities to deter qualified voters from voting..."

That 1982 agreement was apparently broken within weeks in Texas. I have a copy of a poster from Dallas bearing the words "you can be imprisoned" in huge letters. The signs were posted near polling places in — you guessed it — black and Hispanic areas. In light of the current New Jersey allegations, the smaller type on the signs is almost comical. The finer print reads that you can be imprisoned "if you influence or try to influence a voter how to vote." By that standard, every candidate or office holder alive should be in jail right now. (Give 'em time.) The Texas poster also threatens incarceration "if you offer, accept or agree to offer or accept money or anything else of value to vote or not vote." If the New Jersey vote-suppression charges prove true, let's hope somebody can make that last statement come back to haunt the perpetrators. This type of activity is not new. No less than now-Chief Justice William Rehnquist has long been ac-



