

On Arthur Godfrey and Haleloke
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In retirement as I am, not plugged into the outer world day to day, memories of my childhood come into my consciousness and I'm prompted to make sense of how that time of my life shaped me and affected the rest of my life. It's hitting me that this is something that would have been good to do much earlier than now; I would have done a better job at living if I had.

This week, Arthur Godfrey popped into my head for whatever reason, I really don't know why. I presume few people these days know anything about him, even know his name, but at one time, I'm talking about the 1950s, he was the biggest thing going in television. He had, get this, concurrently running, *three* highly successful CBS network television shows. Every weekday morning for an hour-and-a-half, there was the simulcast (on both radio and television) of "Arthur Godfrey Time." Wednesday evenings, there was an hour-long variety show, "Arthur Godfrey and His Friends." And on Monday evenings, there was a half-hour talent contest, "Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts." You can pick up from the names of the shows that they all were really about the same thing—Arthur Godfrey.

Arthur Godfrey, in his late forties back then, was a pleasant man, though there was a bit of an edge just beneath the mild-mannered surface, red-hair, pudgy, ruddy complexion, bulbous nose, a non-descript-looking sort in his conservative business suit. He walked with a slight jerkiness and limp, the result of a bad car accident in his youth. He possessed no performing ability you couldn't pick up in time for the next office Christmas party: he sang a little and plucked on a ukulele, which, if you aren't familiar with it, is a small four-stringed, guitar-looking musical instrument that I associate with Hawaii. His biggest talent was for making banal but somehow still engaging small talk on national television. He wasn't witty or funny, and he didn't make you more knowledgeable or get

you to think about anything or improve you in any way, and he really didn't even try to entertain you; he was just there, a benign presence in your living room.

Godfrey's morning and variety shows featured a group of modestly talented singers known informally as the "little Godfreys" because they were associated with him and nothing much else. Among them--these names come back after all these years--were Frank Parker, Marion Marlowe, Janette Davis, Julius La Rosa, the Mariners (a male quartet), the Chordettes (a female quartet), Lu Ann Simms, Carmel Quinn, and someone I'll talk about in a bit, a female Hawaiian singer named Haleloke.

The morning show involved Godfrey free associating about whatever came into his head, what he had for breakfast, anything. The little Godfreys, along with the show's announcer Tony Marvin, sat in plastic chairs and one at a time stood up and came to a microphone and, in deferring fashion, chatted with Godfrey who sat ten or so feet away at an elevated desk, or it seemed elevated anyway, the topic could be gardening, anything, before singing their song. There was a band off to the side to accompany them led by Archie Bleyer, the name comes back. Interspersed were commercials by Godfrey himself, seemingly ad-libbed, for products that came to be identified with him, including Lipton Tea and Chesterfield Cigarettes. Godfrey described Lipton Tea as "brisk"—a word I think he made up—and, with Chesterfields, he urged us to "buy 'em by the carton." Unfortunately, Godfrey died from lung cancer.

The evening show was basically the same format as the morning show except the plastic chairs were in a semi-circle facing the audience rather than in a straight row facing Godfrey's desk (throne?) on our left.

The Monday night talent contest involved Godfrey sitting at a desk—again raised, kind of like a judge in a courtroom—where he would cozy up with someone who was billed as a talent scout. After some Godfrey-specialty chit-chat, the talent scout would introduce a professional entertainment act that thus far hadn't made it big, who

then did their number. Three chit-chats, three introductions, three performances, some just-you-and-me commercials for Lipton Tea, and then the studio audience picked the winner of the talent contest by applauding for their favorite act. The act that received the loudest applause as measured by what was called an “applause meter” won the night’s contest. Some of the winners got to be on Godfrey’s morning show for three or four days and/or an evening show or two, and a few of them, including Haleloke, became full-fledged little Godfreys.

To give you a sense of Arthur Godfrey’s *modus operandi*, there’s a “Talent Scouts” episode on YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFOrOxNQMoo> Though it’s supposed to be a talent contest, eight-and-a-half minutes of this half hour go by and there’s no mention of that fact or movement in that direction. Godfrey begins with extended comments on the weather and traffic conditions in New York City. Then he brings a talent scout on, just says his name, which meant nothing to me. Exactly what this man—bald, bespectacled, advanced middle-aged, who looked like somebody who’d be selling you home furnishings—had to do with the act being introduced was never made clear. He wasn’t identified as an agent, or a relative, or a night club owner, and he wasn’t in the music business. Why is he the talent scout? We’ll never know. He and Godfrey spend at least five minutes talking about their mutual interest in private planes; it could have been just the two of them kibitzing over lunch somewhere. Finally, Godfrey asks Mr. Everyman talent scout whom he is presenting to us and, rattled off fast, we get the name and that it’s a bluegrass band and a couple of venues where the band’s performed. Godfrey, reading from a paper on his desk, repeats the name of the band, for emphasis I guess. And then suddenly so it seems--incongruently, really, coming straight from a discussion of the weather, traffic, and private planes, and in the middle of Manhattan--filling the television screen and huddled up close are four men and a woman, around 30, decked out in country and western outfits and in possession of their musical instruments, a guitar, mandolin, banjo, violin, and stand-up

bass. It later becomes clear that they were just a few feet away from Godfrey's desk, but they could have been in another television studio, or in another city, for that matter. Like wind-up toys let loose, smiling and animated as all get out, they jump right into their playing and singing.

The blue grass song ends and it's back to Godfrey at the desk. He repeats the band's name, again reading from the paper in front of him. No comments from him on their performance. Then, no change in manner or tone, he segues into a casual, conversational, pitch for Lipton Tea—he takes a sip, oh so good, brisk. Then he introduces the next talent scout (should talent scout be in quotes?) and it's another chit-chat about something or another. Godfrey pays virtually no attention to the three acts (besides the blue grass band, there's a male classical violinist and a female pop singer). At the end of the show, he stands up from his desk and, remaining on the riser, leans over and shakes hands with a couple of the night's winning act, the blue grass band, and then turns away from them and waves goodbye to the studio audience, and then the show abruptly ends replaced by the CBS "eye" logo.

What comes to mind as I recall the time I spent, and it was extensive, with Arthur Godfrey?

That I was eleven to thirteen, in there somewhere, with so many constructive things I could, and should, be doing, lounging on a couch watching this tripe, and that I was doing it all alone; my brother and sister were much older and out of the house and on their own by the time I was seven, and my parents were somewhere other than with me the whole time I was growing up. And that neither of my parents ever asked me, "Do you have any homework that needs to get done?" or said something like, "I think there are better things that you could be doing with your time than watching this crap . . . here's a good book you can read." And that since one thing leads to another in life, watching Arthur Godfrey—and Dick Clark's "American Bandstand" show every afternoon, and Steve Allen's "Tonight Show" every night, and "Sky King" and all the other Saturday shows, and televised sports, including baseball, football,

basketball, and professional wrestling—had negative consequences for me, in high school and college, throughout my life, including right now. Junk breeds more junk. Watching (rather than doing, producing, creating, becoming) breeds more watching.

I asked my mother for a ukulele like the one Godfrey played, and she promptly bought one for me, along with an instruction booklet. I think it cost \$10, a lot of money back then, and we didn't have money. I don't know where, how, she came up with the money. Without a word, she handed me the ukulele and the instruction booklet, and that was it for her. She never asked me "How it's going with the ukulele?" "Learning to play any songs?" "Would you play something for me?" nothing. I learned two chords and set the ukulele aside. Did that kind of thing—it was typical: "Here's your Cub Scout shirt," and then zero follow-up--have lasting consequences for me? Yes, it did. The message, the lesson: It doesn't matter what you do. Which I took to heart. Did I understand, realize, that I had done that earlier in my life when I was seventeen and twenty-seven and thirty-seven and forty-seven? No, I didn't, and I so wish I had.

Godfrey had a predilection for publicly firing his little Godfreys, and Haleloke the Hawaii singer with a flower in her hair—she did the hula while she sang--met that fate in 1955. She would have been in her early thirties at that time. I never heard of her after that. This week, I became curious—what ever happened to Haleloke? Using the internet. I looked into it.

Haleloke was her first name. Her full name was Haleloke Kahauolopua. Here's a YouTube of her along with some the other little Godfrey's and Tony Marvin the announcer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziQ-b34JXZU> After Godfrey fired her from the show, he gave her a job at a hotel he partly owned in Miami—not in entertainment, some kind of office work or management. While working at the hotel, she befriended an older couple, 60-ish, Paul and Stella Keck, who were vacationing in Miami from Indiana. She went back with the Kecks to Union City, Indiana, population 3,500, and spent the rest of her life with the

Keck family. Particularly as she aged and her appearance changed, people didn't know about her semi-illustrious past. Paul Keck died in the 1960s, and Stella died in 1991, and Haleloke died, at 81, in 2004. The only notice of her passing was a short obituary in the local newspaper.

What's Haleloke's disappearance from view about for me now?

That we really don't have to stay in one place or keep anything going in our lives. We can move to Union City, Indiana—or perhaps better, South Dakota, they don't have a state income tax there—and make a new life for ourselves. Haleloke did it, and so can we.

When I started writing this thought I assumed that this last paragraph would be my finish: we can head out of town and chuck it all just like Haleloke. One of the great things for me about writing, and the biggest reason I keep doing it, is that the process of writing informs me. Writing about Haleloke moving to Indiana and dropping out of the entertainment business made me stop and think, and it became clear to me that sometimes we *do* have to stay in one place and we *do* have to keep things going. I assume that there weren't people in Haleloke's life that needed her to look out for them. It's taken way too long for me to come to this conclusion, this admonition, but I finally have: if going to Union City and changing our lives gets in the way of protecting and nurturing those close to us, we don't do it. We take care of our own.