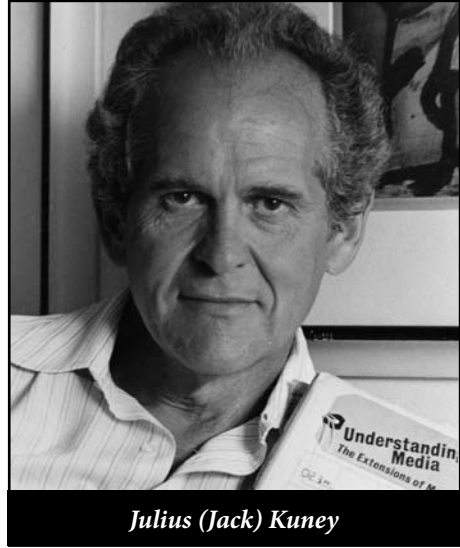


Remembering Julius (Jack) Kuney

Last November the pioneer television producer Julius (Jack) Kuney died in Bradenton, Florida, at the age of 88. Television Quarterly invited several of his former colleagues to write tributes to him. A selection follows



Julius (Jack) Kuney

A Major Contributor to “Television’s Golden Age”

By Lawrence K. Grossman

Jack Kuney, a versatile, award-winning producer, director, writer and pioneer of television’s early years, was a major contributor to what some have called “television’s Golden Age.” Born Julius Kuney, he changed his name to Jack, he told me one day, because with a football scholarship to his beloved University of Illinois, Jack seemed tougher and more appropriate for the gridiron than Julius. So Jack Kuney stuck as his professional name, and only his friends and relatives called him Julius.

Julius was a man of passion, as anyone who worked with him would verify - - passionate about quality television; passionate about good writing and good theater; passionate about justice, racial equality, and peace; passionate about food,

and passionate about his adored family and in later years, his musically accomplished grandchildren, and his surviving wife Marjorie.

Often Julius’s passion was endearing; at times it was infuriating. In 1968, after dozens of American cities erupted in inner-city riots, a group of us organized a challenge to the television license renewal of New York City’s WPIX, channel 11, a woefully underperforming station owned by the then influential Chicago media powerhouse, the Tribune Company, and run by its rich tabloid subsidiary, the *New York Daily News*. We sought an FCC hearing to replace WPIX with a responsible, civic minded, independent commercial television station that would truly serve the New York metropolitan community with unprecedented daily hour long local news broadcasts and multiple public affairs programs. Our challenge was a quixotic effort, but we were determined to provide a blueprint that would demonstrate how a quality commercial TV station should operate. Julius was one of the first to sign

on to Forum Communications, as our company was called. We named him our program director. Our group ended up being interracial (unprecedented at the time) and filled with accomplished, strong-minded, outspoken New York City community leaders, well-known television professionals and Wall Street financial supporters. It was a brave move for Julius, who was unemployed at the time, because being part of an FCC license challenge, we were warned, was like being a traitor to the broadcasting ownership establishment. He had to worry about becoming unemployable in television, which, fortunately as it turned out for all of us, did not happen. Julius was so passionate about what programming proposals we would submit in our station application to the FCC that he drove everyone crazy, arguing through the night for his ideas, unwilling to compromise or accept anybody else's suggestions of what would be "realistic."

What was always amazing to me was Julius's remarkable versatility throughout his years in television, producing all-star classical dramas in the ground-breaking, magisterial *Play of the Week* series for WNTA, Channel 13, then a commercial station; quality children's TV series, *Let's Take a Trip* starring Sonny Fox, and *One, Two, Three, Go!*, which introduced a young Richard Thomas; as well as the brilliant interdisciplinary religious series seen in CBS's Sunday morning television "intellectual ghetto," *Look Up and Live*; the highly original Variety/Documentary alcoholism special, *Drink, Drank, Drunk*, starring Carol Burnett, still seen from time to time

on local public television stations, four annual Emmy Award-winning telethons for the United Jewish Appeal.

Julius wrestled with, dealt with, fought with, and successfully produced and directed television productions with the most remarkable and diverse pantheon of legendary stars, among them: Zero Mostel, Burgess Meredith, Alfred Drake, Jo Van Fleet, Tammy Grimes, Eddie Bracken, Lillian Gish, Woody Allen, Warren Beatty, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, George C. Scott, Colleen Dewhurst, Billy Dee Williams, Tony Randall, and Max Von Sydow, Merv Griffin, Steve Allen, Regis Philbin, Mike Douglas, Alan King, Hal Linden, Judd Hirsch, Ed Asner, Bette Midler, Leonard Bernstein, Itzhak Perlman, and Placido Domingo.

Julius's most endearing traits were encouraged and reinforced by his delightful wife of 50 years who died in 1997, Francine, a beautiful and bright former Busby Berkley dancer and talented cook. Their friends partook happily and often in their good-hearted hospitality and took full advantage of the Kuneys' enthusiasm for discovering and introducing obscure new restaurants; out-of-the-way places to buy wonderful and exotic vegetables, fruits, meat, pasta and breads; interesting destinations to visit in the city and country, in New York, Connecticut, California, and the Florida Keys.

Julius started his career in radio while still at the University of Illinois. During World War II, he served as a dashing Navy Lieutenant, the communications officer on the destroyer *USS McCalla* in the Pacific Theater. He pursued his storied and varied television career

during the medium's formative decades. And, fittingly, spent his final working years of a long life teaching at the City University of New York, directing the Master of Fine Arts Program in Television at Brooklyn College.

Lawrence K. Grossman is former president of NBC News, PBS and Forum Communications, and for 50 years a friend and colleague of Julius (Jack) Kuney

His Passion for Quality Broadcasting Enriched his Classes

By Sister Camille D'Arienzo, RSM

To say that Julius (Jack) Kuney was an interesting person is to oversimplify his reality. He was a man of many friends, abiding loves and multiple interests: husband, father, grandfather, soldier, broadcaster, producer, director, writer, and entertainer. Trying to describe him conjures up an image of a reversal of *The Blind Men and the Elephant*. You knew him by that part of him that touched you.

Along with Professors Jim Day and Bob Williams, I hired him for a position on the faculty of Brooklyn College's TV and Radio Department. His passion for quality broadcasting and his personal history in media enriched his classes.

A few weeks after he settled in, he made an offhanded, meant-to-amuse comment about prayer. I chided him gently for that. "Julius, I want you to understand that prayer is important to me, as is faith, anybody's

faith, and so is my life as a Sister of Mercy." Years later when I wondered aloud when our friendship began, Julius went right to that conversation, that moment of honesty.

In the early 80's Julius called me one night with this message:

"Camille, Francine and I have the use of Larry Grossman's home this weekend. It's a beautiful place in Westport, Connecticut and it has a pool. We'd like you to come with us on Friday morning."

"Sorry, Julius," I replied, "I have another engagement."

Five minutes later he called back. "Francine wants to know what you have that's more important than the two of us,"

"Well," I replied, "I was arrested on Good Friday for protesting the nuclear arms production. I have a court appearance in Manhattan at 9 a.m."

Minutes later, he called again with this directive:

"Francine and I will meet you for breakfast in Ellen's Café on the corner of Broadway and Chambers. Then we'll come to court with you. And when that's over, we'll all go to Westport."

We had a long wait before my case was called. I approached the judge and said softly, "Your honor, the words inscribed on the wall behind you read, 'In God we trust.' I cannot believe that the God in whom we trust wants us to kill one another. That's what these weapons are for."

My case dismissed, I returned to find Julius in tears. Putting my arm around his shoulder, I teased, "Now, Darlin', was it something I said?"

He replied, "I didn't hear a goddamn word you said! But you're up there doing this for the rest of us!"

He and Francine had protested injustice on many fronts. They had crossed the

bridge at Selma with Martin Luther King. Now they were pleased to encourage me.

That day I knew again that the relationship we three shared was deep and durable. There are families of blood, families of faith and families formed by shared values.

We went to Westport and later that afternoon, Francine looked on from a poolside lounge chair as Julius and I floated on rubber tubes shooting at one another with water pistols.

“Some pacifists you are!” she observed.

Sister Camille is a professor emerita of broadcast writing in the TV Radio Department of Brooklyn College, from which she retired in 1993 to assume the presidency of her congregation, the Sisters of Mercy.

We Shall Never See the Likes of him Again

By Mort Silverstein

I was fortunate enough in my television writing career to have had a terrific time with Executive Producer Jack (Julius) Kuney at NBC, Westinghouse, N.E.T., New York public-television station WNET/13 and other venues. Not only was the work fun—and challenging—but so was our friendship, which endured with his late wife, Francine, whom he married when she was a dancer under contract to Columbia Pictures. She taught him not only the two-step but also civility under stress.

The reader will know that television

is one of the toughest of all businesses—creatively and fiscally. During our long tenure together, Julius and I had each other’s backs: always being in sync whenever we were faced with those pejoratively known as “suits,” who, we felt, just didn’t get it—or refused to. Most often we prevailed, remarkably.

In one of our last collaborations, a documentary on the Little Rascals (from Hal Roach’s *Our Gang* shorts), Julius provided a fadeout which became—damn it—autobiographical.

As Spanky and Alfalfa walk down a road into the distance, Julius writes, concerning their originality and feistiness: “We shall never see the likes of them again.”

Julius, we celebrate you!

Mort Silverstein is an award-winning documentary film maker whose interview with Bill Baker, recently retired head of public television station WNET Channel 13 New York, appears on page 25 of this issue of Television Quarterly.