

AFTRA LOS ANGELES LOCAL

# DIALOG

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***L.A. Local moving February 1, 1987***  
***to***  
***8th. Floor, 6922 Hollywood Blvd.***  
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# Frank Nelson Remembered...

For the first time since its founding in 1937, AFTRA is without Frank Nelson. Frank died on September 12, 1986, of the cancer he had been battling for several years.

His memorial service was held on September 27. The music was provided by AFTRA singers, Jackie Allen, Billie Barnum, Susan Boyd, Dick Castle, Bill Cole, Donna Davidson, Michael Dees, Stan Farber, Ian Freebairn-Smith, Mitch Gordon, Jim Haas, Ron Hicklin, Marilyn Jackson, Jon Joyce, Tom Kenny, Edie Lehman, Myrna Mathews, Ron Smith, Sally Stevens, Susie Stevens, Jackie Ward, Ann White, and Jerry Whitman, conducted by Jack Halloran. Speakers were John

C. Hall, Jr., AFTRA National Executive Secretary; Frank Maxwell, AFTRA National President; Mark Alan Farber, Los Angeles Local Executive Secretary; Sanford I. Wolff, former AFTRA National Executive Secretary; Joe Slattery, former National President; Claude L. McCue, former Los Angeles Executive Secretary; Peter Leeds, former Los Angeles Local President; Sally Stevens, Local and National Board member; Stan Farber, former Los Angeles Local President; and Bill Hillman, former National President. Frank is survived by his wife, Veola, his son Doug, daughter Bonnie, and by a granddaughter and a great grandson.



Frank Nelson was here from the very beginning, in the 1930s, when radio actors were being paid \$5 a show and then only after hours of unpaid rehearsal. And then the network talent bureaus usually wanted a commission. Frank was one of a group of radio actors who knew something had to be done and began to think about a union.

At the time, Frank was already a radio veteran. His career began in 1926 on station KOA in Denver, and in 1929 he arrived in Hollywood, where he worked as a leading man and as an announcer. When transcontinental shows began in Hollywood, his first sponsored national show, *Flywheel, Shyster & Flywheel*, starred Groucho and Chico Marx. It ran for 26 weeks and Frank Nelson appeared on every show.

But he and the others like him knew that performers needed a strong voice to speak on their behalf. So they met with radio actors here and in New York and in 1937, the American Federation of Radio Actors was born. Frank was one of its first Local and National Board members.

In 1949, Frank was elected Local President, a post he held until 1954, through the merger of AFTRA with TvA which formed AFTRA. He served as National President from 1954 to 1957, and again as Local President from 1966 to 1968.



In 1954, just prior to his election as National President, he fought for and got a mandate on the AFTRA Convention floor to establish a pension and welfare plan for freelance performers under AFTRA's jurisdiction. It came into being in 1956 and was the first pension and welfare program ever established for performers. He served as AFTRA's Senior Pension and Welfare Trustee from the plan's inception until his death. He also served as senior trustee of the Los Angeles Local's Sick & Benefit Fund, another service committed to helping AFTRAns in need which he helped establish in 1959.

In 1958, he was awarded the George Heller Memorial Gold Card, AFTRA's highest honor. At the presentation, Frank was called "a living legend of our union—and a walking encyclopedia and book of knowledge of all things AFTRA—highly respected on both side of any negotiating table."

Even with his heavy involvement in AFTRA, Frank's career read like a history of radio: *Burns and Allen*, *Fibber McGee and Molly*, *Bing Crosby*, *Eddie Cantor*, *Lux Radio Theatre*, *Bob Hope*, and *Red Skelton* are only a few of his radio credits, climaxed by his most memorable creation, Jack Benny's nemesis, who always greeted Jack with the inimitable "Yeessssss?"

He moved into television with ease, acting on *I Love Lucy*, *Make Room for*



*Daddy, The Real McCoys, The Phil Silvers Show* and *The Addams Family*, among others. And, of course, the *Jack Benny Specials*, where by now Frank's appearance was greeted with roars of laughter.

In recent years, he had concentrated on commercials, though he was heard some seasons ago as the elegant Spiffy the Cat, one half of the animated series *The Oddball Couple*. He had worked a commercial session as recently as last spring.

But through the years, Frank came to be known as "Mr. AFTRA." He was always at Board meetings, at Trustees' meetings, at committee meetings, at negotiations, and at Membership meetings and Conventions, accompanied by his actress wife, Veola. He never came to a meeting, however small, without doing his homework on the issues to be discussed. He was a loving friend, a formidable adversary, and his voice was a familiar one, usually raised in indignation at some fresh evidence of what he perceived to be a threat to AFTRA and its members.

It will be hard to think of AFTRA without Frank Nelson. He gave it 50 years of devotion and hard work and fought to the end for what he believed was the best for the union which he helped to create.