

Giant Thinking

How did what was to become The

Friendly Giant begin?

Bob Homme (pronounced “hummy”) graduated from the University of Wisconsin with a major in Economics. But instead of some of the typical plans for an economics major, Bob was headed in a different direction. Following graduation, Bob pursued his passion. He took a job with the University of Wisconsin State Radio Station WHA. Radio had long been Bob’s first love.

Bob grew up in the golden age of radio where the imagination could thrive with the voices, music and sound effects of the story tellers of the day. Radio was an interactive medium requiring the listener to fill in so many of the details and pictures using the imagination. Those who were gifted in radio productions knew how to stimulate their audiences to imagine, think and dream.

Knowing that the future was going to be in television more than his beloved radio, Bob wanted to learn more than he could in his limited role at the community station. Better training came from observing the big productions.

At that point, he was working part-time at the university radio station, and a booth announcer on the community television station. From his

experiences in radio, he believed that he could create a program of music for commercial use. As he explored this concept, he was put in touch with MUZAK a concept and a company then in its infancy. Bob arranged to represent MUZAK in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin area. Bob was going from dentist office to doctor's office with this musical product. The usual result was that Bob would be in a "blue funk." It was not long before he realized that selling was not a place where he would either make money or have much fun. But with a growing family, he worked away at it.

Watching from the balcony of the huge Chicago Merchandise Mart became an important and enjoyable past-time for Bob and some of his friends. On Sunday mornings driving two hours from Madison in Chicago, people could see the rehearsals of the very popular "The Dave Garroway Show." This television variety show included many big names in the entertainment world.

Peering down on the set, Bob and friends could watch what went into "Network Television" at that time. There were few technical tricks but there was a lot of imagination. It was also a great place to be entertained and inspired. The trip back included a stop at a restaurant with a television to see the finished product from Chicago they had just seen rehearsed. It was stimulating to this young man who had a passion to use his creativity. Bob had developed an interest in programming.

Then it was while driving back from Chicago to Madison, Wisconsin in 1953 that a life-changing insight struck Bob. It is amazing to think how important a typical drive home can be. For Bob, a sudden insight that struck him in that discouragement was a real inspiration, "If the set and props are miniatures, then I can be a giant!"

That was an idea that would work on television. If they are miniatures, then I am a giant. At that time there were no giants on television. The Jolly Green Giant of the vegetable variety had not yet moved from radio to television.

Like so many great ideas, Bob didn't know where this one came from but there it was in his mind. That was it. He would be a giant. But he would not be a nasty giant but a kind one. One of the problems with a really great idea is that someone else might agree with you. They might take your excellent idea and make it happen before you can do so yourself. Who better to talk to than a spouse? Bob arrived home and it was clear to his wife Esther that something was up.

Bob explained the idea of a children's show featuring himself as a giant surrounded by miniatures. She immediately thought it was a great idea. But still he wondered. Would a giant be too scary for children? Esther's answer was, "Not if it is a friendly giant." There it was – The Friendly Giant.

This led to an easy decision. Realizing that the dentists he visited as a MUZAK salesperson would likely sell him an unnecessary set of

dentures before he sold them his product, Bob quit.

He approached the program director of the station at the University of Wisconsin and told him about his big idea. His half-time radio job became full time. As it happened, the University was six months away from having their television license. With small budgets, programming would be a challenge. The Homme offer was well received.

Excerpt from:

**Look Up – Way Up! The Friendly Giant
The Biography of Robert M. Homme
By Grant D. Fairley
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