

# Profile

## A man for all new TV seasons: CPT's Dave Gerber

It's a tough life in Hollywood—one that produces the town's own special characters. One of them is Dave Gerber, executive vice president for worldwide production of what used to be Screen Gems and is now Columbia Pictures Television. He will say, half-jokingly, in his fast and raspy trademark voice: "My father prepared me for Hollywood. He worked in a slaughterhouse." Brooklyn born and bred, and a veteran of over 20 years in the television business, he has survived well in the rough-and-tumble arena of programing.

He began training early for his present occupation. He first went West as a young man to the College of the Pacific, in Stockton, Calif. He went for two reasons: "football and Hollywood." As to the first reason, he was an end out of Samuel J. Tilden high school in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, and coaching at COP at the time was the late great, Alonzo Stagg. As to the second reason: "It was California. I always knew I was going to Hollywood, ever since I got my first taste of the movies at the Avenue D movie house."

College was good to Mr. Gerber. He refers to those times as his "student prince days." An all-around BMOC, he was on the football team, he was sports editor of the college newspaper with his own column and he had his own show on the campus radio station. He stayed on after graduation for two years as director of special events for the school's athletic department.

One of the people who had urged him to stay with COP was an executive with the Los Angeles office of BBDO who was also a trustee of the school. When it was time to enter the real world of business, he went with that ad agency, combining his earlier ambitions of football and Hollywood by serving as director of the Los Angeles Rams' radio and TV network and account executive for one of the team's broadcast sponsors, Burgermeister beer.

But even then he had his eyes set on TV program production. A television script he had written found its way through friends into the hands of a senior partner of the Famous Artists Corp., in Hollywood. This senior partner liked the script well enough, but he was more impressed with young Mr. Gerber and felt that he was just the man Famous Artists needed to get that talent agency into TV. Mr. Gerber was invited to join the firm. He did and spent most of his time packaging shows and giving Famous Artists "know-how about the advertising agency business."



David Murry Gerber—executive VP—worldwide production, Columbia Pictures Television, Los Angeles; b. July 25, 1930, Brooklyn, N.Y.; BA, University of the Pacific, 1950; television supervisor, BBDO, Los Angeles, 1952-57; executive, Famous Artists Corp., 1957-61; VP-television, General Artists Corp., 1961-65; VP-television sales, 20th Century-Fox, 1965-72; independent producer, 1972-74; present post, 1974; m. Laraine Stephens, June 12, 1970.

The firm later transferred him to New York where he was later wooed to General Artists Corp. for a vice presidency and a \$25,000 salary—"big money in those days," he says.

It was during his tenure at General Artists that he happened one day to be in the offices of 20th Century-Fox's Irwin Allen (producer of "The Poseidon Adventure"). On the office walls were color stills of the movie version of Jules Verne's "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea."

"And I said to myself," says Mr. Gerber, "that story belongs on TV." He made a co-production deal with Bill Self, then in charge of Fox TV, and sold the series to ABC. It ran for four years as *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*.

Meanwhile, Mr. Self, impressed with Mr. Gerber's abilities and feel for television, invited him to join Fox as sales manager. Mr. Gerber accepted, primarily, he says, because Fox was a producing studio and the job meant he would be back in Hollywood again. (He actually was only back in Hollywood half the year; the other half he spent in New York or "going back and forth like a shuttle.")

The seven years he spent with Fox, where he became a senior vice president, were his "greatest years," he now says. He says it was a transitional period for Fox—a movie studio moving heavily into TV.

But after all that, he still had his

yen for production. ("And," he adds, "I was tired of living in hotels.") So, in 1972, he established David Gerber Productions as an independent production firm. And, in association with Columbia Pictures Television (then Screen Gems), his firm was responsible for four series currently running in prime time: *Police Story* (now in its second year), *Police Woman* and *Born Free*, all on NBC, and *Nakia*, on ABC.

Altogether, Mr. Gerber says he has sold more than 50 shows to the networks in his career. Yet he feels like a dying breed: "You can't go in like [CPT President] John Mitchell and I used to, with a reel of film under your arm, and sell an advertiser and a network. TV has gotten too complex for that today."

It's not only TV program selling methods that have changed over the years. The programing itself has undergone sweeping changes since the fifties, he says. "You can talk about *Playhouse 90* and all that," he says. "Certainly they had their impact in their days. I think, though, we have much more mature programing today. We get involved in much more provocative or adult material. I think we push back some of the shadows in our shows."

As to the form of future programing, he says there is no question that in years to come, 25% of original prime-time programing will be in the two-hour or mini-series format.

Dave Gerber wasn't always on such sure footing. Hollywood is, after all, a tough town.

In 1972, his independent firm had three series running on the networks—*Nanny and the Professor*, *The Hope Lange Show* and *Cade's County*.

But then, as he says, "Senator Pastore got very disturbed about violence and CBS had *Mission: Impossible* and *Gunsmoke* and about six other hours of violent-action shows." *Cade's County* was out; *The Waltons* was in in its place. ABC switched low-rated *Nanny* from its Friday night slot to Monday, where it died, and the *Hope Lange Show* was faltering and headed off the air.

The usually ebullient Mr. Gerber says he was "kind of down and talking to myself. Kind of rocky and disturbed."

But the call came from John Mitchell to hook up with CPT. "And I said to him," Mr. Gerber says, "'maybe you don't want me. I'm off the air for the first time in 15 years.' and he said, 'Are you stupid?'"

He went with John Mitchell as an independent producer, still feeling down, but he was soon back in the Hollywood swing. "I got calls from agents and ad agencies and they laughed at me when I said I wasn't sure I had the touch any more. And then I realized it was a hell of a good business."