

A Minor Consideration  
"Kid Actors, Past & Present"  
Paul Petersen, President and Founder  
Minorcon.org

Paul Petersen's Story:

The very same character traits that resulted in me being Fired from The Mickey Mouse Club (for Conduct Unbecoming a Mouse) back in 1955 are, for better or worse, still present in the man I have become, turning 63 years old in 2008 and now known as a leading advocate for the rights of working children. Time Magazine calls me "the predatory spokesman for kid actors" and rightly so, because when there is "trouble" I show up.

A good chunk of America watched me grow up on "The Donna Reed Show" from age 12 to 20 (1958-1966) on ABC every Thursday night playing Jeff Stone. I became the dreaded Bubble Gum Star, complete with hit records, screaming fans, fast cars and faster women. I had a lot of fun in an era when you could understand the words to popular music and sex couldn't kill you.

Then I got the bill. The hidden costs, psychologically and emotionally, were more than I could pay at the time.

I worked quite a bit before the Donna Reed Show, rising up from the debacle of being a Fired Mouse at age 9 to perform in national commercials, then gradually moving into more important roles on classics like "Playhouse 90," "Lux Video Theater," and "Ford Theater." These led to movies, and by 1957 I was co-starring in the much-loved "Houseboat" with Cary Grant and Sophia Loren, which led directly to The Donna Reed Show.

After the eight year, 276 episode 'run' of The Donna Reed Show I worked on a string of movies and television shows ("Happiest Millionaire," "Journey to Shiloh," "Time For Killing," "Something for a Lonely Man," "Gidget Grows Up" and more, but each year the work grew less and less. The handwriting was on the wall.

I made some terrible choices in my 20's...drugs, alcohol, bad people and worse associations...and eventually realized that Mickey Rooney's advice ("Get out of town for at least 25 years, Paul") was absolutely correct. There is little room in Hollywood for "former kid stars." I made the move back to Connecticut and there, with new friends and a new outlook I began the arduous process of putting myself back together. Simon & Schuster gave me a chance to prove myself as a writer, and now, after 16 published books, I consider myself an author...when I'm not being an advocate for working children everywhere they labor.

My business card reads, "Actor, Author, Advocate" and that about sums it up.

A Minor Consideration actually began as a book, but the needs of the kids I grew up with and admired soon showed me that it was more important to actually DO something about the problems rather than just collect and record the stories. The death by suicide of Rusty Hamer ("The Danny

Thomas Show”) actually started our organization in January 1990. At the beginning it was just my wife, the formidable Rana Platz-Petersen, RN, the current Business Representative of Local 767, IATSE, Studio First Aid, and yours truly. Our early interventions were successful and gradually we drew other “formers” into our foundation. Today there are more than 600 former kid stars involved with AMC. We are all in “Trivial Pursuit.”

I have three children, Brian Andrew Petersen, age 33, who is taking advantage of his service in the Navy to pursue advanced degrees in Neuroscience and also works at UC Riverside...Ethan Alexander Petersen who, at age 31, is a Producer/Casting executive of popular reality shows (“The Janice Dickerson Show” and “Hole In The Wall”) and is partnered with Stuart Krasnow of NBC...and at age 21, the beautiful Shannon Kimberly Petersen who put her education on hold to join the Navy and is currently stationed in Pensacola, Florida.

A partial list of the accomplishments of AMC can be found at our website.

I am currently the AFTRA Chair of the Young Performers Committee, a credentialed Delegate at the United Nations for the World Safety Organization charged with improving the welfare of 250 million children who go to work everyday, a past Board-member of SAG and a sitting National and Local Board Member of AFTRA. I sit on the Board of the Fender Museum, and the Center for Improved Child Caring, as well as the American Foundation for Drug Prevention, and the Child Labor Coalition.

We here at AMC are pursuing an ambitious legislative program with successful landmark legislation passed in five states, and are committed to ending the exemption to federal child labor standards suffered by children in the Entertainment Business found in the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. The rules for working children should be the same everywhere, and their protection a societal guarantee.

All of us have read the Disclaimer at the end of movies that says, “No animal was killed or injured in the making of this film.”

We think that sort of Disclaimer ought to apply to children, too. Don’t you?

A most surprising turn of events in the past four years has led me into an advocacy for Seniors, the most rapidly growing segment of America’s population. Call it enlightened self-interest, or the needs of more than one-third of AMC’s membership who are, like me, aging into the group that will include 80 million Baby Boomers by the time 2021 rolls around, but this new-found cause has resulted in a television talk show called, “Aging In LA,” produced by the Los Angeles Department of Aging and broadcast three times a week here in LA. I have the honor to be the Host. Several of my “Aging In LA” shows can be seen by visiting. We have completed 110 half-hour episodes of “Aging in LA.”

Naturally, in keeping with my relentless personality, my Hosting duties have led me to a ten-year appointment to the California Commission on Aging, and in 2005, a Presidential appointment to the White House Conference on Aging. It just stands to reason...at least to my brand of reasoning...that the two most under-served segments of our population, Seniors and Youth, deserve to have a familiar voice

on the national scene, and it's hard to be any more "familiar" with America than literally growing up in front of the nation as I did.

The latest surprise in my life is the release of the Donna Reed Show DVD (October 28th 2008) that contains the entire first year of the show, in time for the 50th Anniversary of our debut on ABC back in September of 1958. Talk about Home Movies!

Life is good. I don't want to go to bed at night and I can't wait to get up in the morning. How cool is that? Grandpa Burr was right when he told me, "Find a job you love and you'll never go to work a day in your life."

Sincerely,

Paul Petersen,

President

AMC – a non-profit corporation