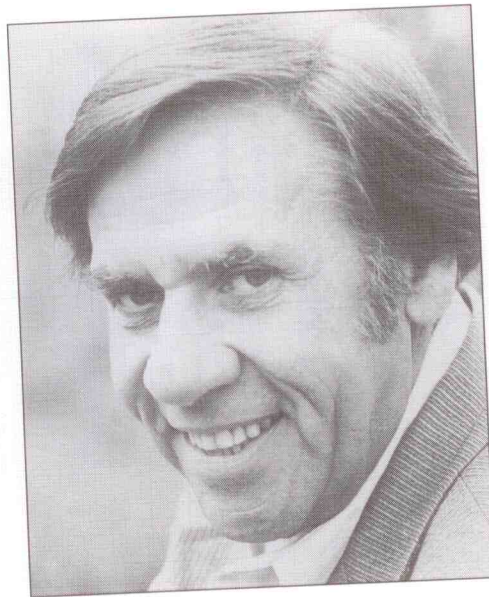


## Ray Rayner



How does one adequately describe a career in children's television that started in a World War II German prisoner of war camp? Outrageous, unsettling, creative defined by generosity and friendship—or, you could just say—Ray Rayner.

Ray was among the Army Air Corpsmen in the German P.O.W. camp when the Germans decided they needed a theater and a mock-up radio station. A buddy wrote scripts, costumes came in from Berlin and Ray got talked into trying out by just clowning around—something he'd do for the rest of his life.

A native New Yorker, Rayner—after the war—returned to a Long Island radio station, and he started to work his way west, to Dayton, Ohio, then Grand Rapids, Michigan. He hosted music programs, wrote some news, did a couple of quiz shows. In 1953 he found himself in Chicago, auditioning for a job at a new television station called WBBM-TV. Ray Rayner worked on *"The Little Show"* with a duck named Havelock, and became Chief Abernathy in *"Popeye's Firehouse."* In 1961 Ray went to WGN-TV, where you watched him on *"The Dick Tracy Show"*, *"Bozo's Circus"*, *"Rocket to Adventure"* and, of course, *"The Ray Rayner Show."* To top it off, Ray, the guy who clowned around under pressure in the P.O.W. Camp, was the first Ronald McDonald on network television.

Ray had his moment of seriousness. A lover of learning and education all his life, Ray decided to go to the University of Chicago to study humanities. He wrote a thesis arguing that children's television should first be entertaining; they deserve the morning cartoons to make them laugh and brighten up their day. Ray was awarded a Master's degree and has also been rewarded with the love of children throughout the Chicago area for helping them grow up laughing.