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.... Radio Gunsmoke is really "Adult"

□□□□By NORMAN MACDONNELL

HOLLYWOOD (NEA) — Something has been bothering me on and off for several years now . . . and last Saturday morning it came to mind again as Matt, Chester, Doc and Kitty walked into the studio for the weekly "Gunsmoke" rehearsal.

Everything in the studio was much as it has been for the past eight years. It was a John Meston script, as most of the "Gunsmokes" are. The supporting cast included some of the best actors in town: John Dehner, Larry Dobkin, Virginia Gregg, Joe Kearns, Vic Perrin, Jeanette Nolan, Virginia Christine. There was coffee on the table, and the actors relaxed as they marked their parts and talked of the episode we'd heard last week, That's right . . . heard, not seen. The show we were rehearsing was the Radio "Gunsmoke" — the granddaddy of "Gunsmoke" TV—and for that matter, the granddaddy of all adult westerns. You see, there is a TV version and a radio version, and I'm deeply involved in both . . . producing the TV version during the week and directing the radio show on weekends. Now, herein lies my problem: These days some people tend to ignore radio and recognize only the more glamorous medium — television. Of course "Gunsmoke" is a top rated TV show and, I think, one of the best. We have the best producing organization in the business, the best crew, the best stories and the best cast. After all, with four principals like James Arness, Dennis Weaver, Milburn Stone and Amanda Blake it would be hard to go wrong. The success "Gunsmoke" TV has enjoyed certainly testifies to this. But, going back to radio, and to a Saturday in April 1952 when Matt, Chester, Doc, Kitty and I met in Studio 1 for the first time. . . . well, it was an exciting day. And Saturdays at CBS Radio are still exciting. William Conrad, now producer/director of his own TV series, "Klondike" for NBC, still arrives each week to play Matt Dillon — the role he created. Parley Baer still plays Chester, in spite of his busy schedule on television and in 'theatrical films. Howard McNear — and who can forget him on "The George Gobel Show" or in "Anatomy of A Murder" or as the plumber on "Burns and 'Allen" — still plays Doc. Georgia Ellis plays Kitty, as she has since Kitty first went to work in the Long Branch in 1952. "Gunsmoke" is still heard, every Sunday afternoon over stations of the CBS Radio network, and of course, "Gunsmoke" is seen every Saturday night on the CBS Television network.

I find myself in the position of being an enthusiastic member of two highly successful "families," each of which over the years has earned a respected place in its own medium. It's with « great deal of pride, affection and gratitude that I realize I'm a part of both these "Gunsmoke" productions. They are two separate entities . . . each contributing to the success of the other and each richly deserving the awards it has won. "Gunsmoke" Television is five years old; "Gunsmoke" Radio is in its ninth year. In 1952 John Meston referred to "Gunsmoke" as an "adult" western. By this he meant it would appeal not only to children but to adults as well. As it turned out, he was quite right. "The child is the father of the man."□