

ASPECT

a slightly different view on marketing

In this issue:
an interview with
Captain and Mrs. Noah

ASPECT examines the viewpoints of an eclectic mix of notable people in the search for truth, wisdom, and some surprisingly insightful marketing analogs.
Sponsored by Dudnyk Healthcare Group.

Photographs by Jeff Sacks Productions, Inc.
Written by Linda Bailey.



*“Listen with your eyes and sing everything you see.
Red and yellow and pink and green,
purple and orange and blue.
I can sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow,
sing a rainbow, too.”*

LISTEN WITH YOUR EYES

Beloved by millions of Americans as dear old Captain Noah, W. Carter Merbreier is a legend. On par with Mr. Rogers and Captain Kangaroo, he and his wife, Pat (Mrs. Noah), brought *“Captain Noah and His Magical Ark”* to life. That Philadelphia-based children’s TV show ran for 27 years, starting in 1967. At its zenith, it reached a remarkable 57 share in 22 markets.

Today, many viewers can unabashedly sing the Ark’s theme song, *“Sing a Rainbow.”* In particular, they remember the line “Listen with your eyes and sing everything you see,” which celebrates the world’s wonderful diversity of people and cultures.

Captain Noah is, among other things, a Lutheran minister, a former Philadelphia police chaplain, an author, a narrator of children’s concerts, an award-winning host of a TV series for teenagers, a devoted husband and great-grandfather. He is also a brilliant marketer. Together, he and Mrs. Noah were successful in reaching an ever-evolving audience to “market” their message. That they did so using puppets Wally the Walrus, Maurice the Mouse, and the Mumwup—all hand-sewn and animated by Mrs. Noah—shows they really knew how to communicate directly with generations of children.

In 2001, the Merbreiers were inducted into the Pennsylvania Association of Broadcasters’ Hall of Fame. They are also active members of the Broadcast Pioneers of Philadelphia. To their delight, the studio set from the *“Magical Ark”* will become part of the Please Touch Museum in Philadelphia. No doubt, it will also be the place many fans visit to relive the times long, long ago when they learned to listen with their eyes and sing a rainbow.

Dudnyk: En route to the interview today, I got a text message from my wife: “Listen with your eyes.” She used to sing the “Captain Noah song,” with its unforgettable line “Listen with your eyes and sing everything you see” over and over to comfort our colicky child. It was the only thing that worked. What is it about that song? What else can we learn from listening with our eyes?

Captain Noah: Thank you for sharing your story. That’s a real compliment—and a tribute to the power of that song. *“Sing a Rainbow”* really is a positive message about appreciating the variety of people and cultures in the world around us.

Mrs. Noah: It teaches us about the rainbow of different kinds of men, women, and children—people of all colors and talents.

Captain Noah: When we were in Ephesus, Turkey touring a Roman amphitheater, the tour guide asked a young couple to demonstrate the acoustics of the structure. They huddled up a minute then burst into *“Sing a Rainbow.”* We were so struck by this that we made our way down and finished the song together. The power of listening with your eyes is the ability to connect with people, to reach out, and bridge generations.

Dudnyk: Did you have a vision, an idea, about Captain Noah working with children?

Captain Noah: We wanted to do a show for children that was a moral, positive show demonstrating faith in God and God’s purposes on Earth.

I was a clergyman by background. An opportunity came up in television for free time for public service, a half an hour on Sunday morning. I made a personal commitment at that moment to come up with a show to use television—now we’re talking 35, 40 years ago—to reach children with a message of faith and morality that I didn’t think we could cover with 100, 200 children in a Sunday School.

Dudnyk: Why Noah?

Captain Noah: I wanted a character who was both Christian and Jewish that would appeal to all the children. Noah was obvious because where else could you have animal puppets? I didn’t choose Noah. Noah chose us.

WHAT I’VE LEARNED BY LISTENING WITH MY EYES

On persistence and preparation:

I always believed that persistence wins. Persistence wins. Work on the principle. Persistence wins. When people would come to the station I needed to talk with . . . when they were too busy . . . when they got in at 9:00, I was there at 8:30. When they were having a coffee meeting at 8:30, I was in the lobby at 8:00.

I disdain people who just come to you and say, “I’ve got an idea.” You need more than an idea in life. Sit down and lay it out. Do the work. Just don’t go in and take somebody’s time.

On professionalism:

A professional is two things: number 1, always on time; number 2, always does a good job. That’s the sign of a professional.

On getting the best from people:

You talk about me being easy going . . . I’ll tell you our show was good because I demanded the best of everybody—demanded the best. As they all said, you’re a great guy except when we have to work with you. I mean I really laid the law down.

Jon Stewart, the comedy show host, said when he appeared on the show as a little kid, he said that Captain Noah was one tough egg. Once the camera went on, you better watch out! And I was. When we were on, we were committed to it being good.

On knowing the audience:

I tell you, we never lost sight of our audience. We never lost sight of the ghetto child who was all alone or who had no one to nurture him. We never lost sight of the fatherless family.

On being relevant:

Whatever you do has to be relevant or forget it. Somebody has to stand up on somebody’s shoulders and see where the crowd is going before the crowd knows the direction it’s going. You gotta be relevant to where they’re going. You can talk about the ‘hood, but unless you live in the ‘hood, you really don’t know the ‘hood.

On fun at work:

If you’re enticed into [your job] naturally, that’s when it’s fun. If you had to do something that’s not natural for you, that’s no fun.

On the key to communication:

We’ll be in a restaurant someplace and somebody will smile and say hello. When I ask Pat about it, she’ll say, “Well I smiled and said hello to them with my eyes first.” That is the key to the communication.

—W. Carter Merbreier

Captain and Mrs. Noah are passionately committed to helping children. The sculpture *“Reaching for the Stars”* symbolizes the Merbreiers’ lifelong service to God by reaching out to children, on and off the airwaves.

Today, 11 years after their TV show went off the air, some fans still wistfully recall that they sent their drawings to the Ark Art Gallery, hoping to see their pictures on TV. Along the way, they learned self-reliance, confidence, and a little bit about gardening from a couple who sincerely love helping children grow up right.

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Dudnyk: What were some of the things you learned in your television journey about communicating with children?

Captain Noah: Pat and I never talked down to children. That was number 1. When we first went on the air, I had a doll put up on the camera, and I talked to the doll. Because we wanted to talk to the children at home, I had to learn to talk to one child.

Number 2. Keep it short. We never had a segment that went over five minutes—even when the alligator got loose in the studio and was chasing everybody around!

Also, we never lost sight of who we are. I'm Carter Merbreier. She's Pat Merbreier, luckily for me. We never were anybody but what we were. I never played a character. The only thing that made me a character was this red uniform.

Dudnyk: How did Pat join you on the show?

Captain Noah: We didn't have any money. We were paying a professional puppeteer \$100 a week. At the end of 13 weeks, I didn't have another \$1300.

So I came home to Pat and I said, "It's over." I said to Pat—a graduate of Oberlin Conservatory of Music with a beautiful singing voice—I said, "I've got no puppeteer." She said, "You do now." So with no training and no anything, she sewed our own puppets. She developed things. It all fell into place. We did things because we felt we should do it for children. It was a gesture of faith.

Dudnyk: How did you and Pat work together for so many years?

Captain Noah: The one thing that people have to realize in marriage is that every building must develop a few cracks in the foundation in order to settle firm. Our foundation had already been settled by many years of marriage by the time the show aired.

Dudnyk: Can you give me a sense of how you and Pat figured out your approach and how it evolved?

Captain Noah: I didn't figure it out. I was dragged there. It's like learning to swim. We just jumped in because we thought it was something we should do.

Remember, we went into television in a day when something like Captain Noah was not the thing to do. It was all Bozo the Clown. It was all making balloons. Don't think there weren't people in our business who didn't try to remake us in that image. Don't think it was easy to keep our total vision of how we wanted to present this and what we said to children.

Dudnyk: Where did the inspiration come from to introduce Mrs. Noah's garden, teach some French, use different puppets, to try things that had not been done before?

Mrs. Noah: Carter's a very creative person. Clever and funny. He was then and still is. About all kinds of things.

Captain Noah: I really don't know. A lot of the things were the result of my growing up, the things I did as a kid. I think I'm very childlike in a lot of ways. I think that's why—then and now—I can be close to children. I get along very well with kids.

Everything that's worked out for us are things we seem to have been naturally adapted to by nature. I guess if I had to learn, it would have been a flop. I guess if it didn't come natural to Pat—doing voices as a singer, using her interest in horticulture—it would have seemed not genuine. The things I do, I don't think about doing.

Dudnyk: What are some of the lessons learned?

Captain Noah: The biggest lesson I've learned is that the most important thing on the face of this Earth is family.

Mrs. Noah: I've found that if you're nice to people, people will be nice to you. If you like people, people respond to how you are and usually like you back. So you have to be nice if that's the way you want your life to be.

Dudnyk: When you think of the world around you, where are the positive influences coming from?

Captain Noah: There are a lot of them. For every story in the newspaper about a couple of lousy parents not feeding their children, there are stories of volunteers who are doing wonderful things for children. There are people out there who have not lost their commitment to children.

Dudnyk: Any final comments?

Captain Noah: Every good thing that has happened in our life—every dream that has come true—is a result of doing something that we didn't do for profit or fame. We just honestly love children and we honestly love God.

Mrs. Noah: And we honestly love each other. **DHG**

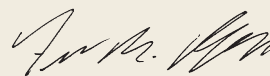
Intersection

Where Plane A, "relevance," meets Plane B, "marketing."

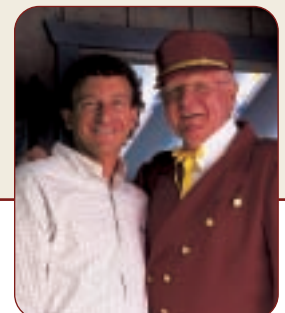
Captain Noah's questions to me were, "Tell me again why you're doing this newsletter, and what relevance do I have to healthcare professionals?" The answers I gave the Captain I share with you, the readers of ASPECT, to reinforce for you our belief in this type of communication.

Simply said, our business is built on interesting, insightful people and their ability to collaborate, communicate, and interact with a variety of personalities to achieve common goals. Our assertion is that among the muck and mire of getting things done, it's refreshing to learn about—and perhaps be inspired by—some intriguing people who, through ASPECT, bring a unique perspective to their accomplishments. That's it. Except for the fact that when it comes to helping achieve goals, we'd like you to remember and consider Dudnyk Healthcare.

I hope you enjoy this issue of ASPECT and will look forward to future issues. If you have comments or a story to share, I would appreciate hearing from you. Please feel free to contact me directly at 267-532-1054 or via e-mail at frobbs@dudnykhealth.com.



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