

Comedian Hazell hits bull's eye with baby boomers

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Talk about taking a rocket ride back to childhood.

That's what a conversation with comedian Pat Hazell is like. You immediately find yourself awash in memories of bell-bottomed blue jeans, long trips in the family station wagon, baloney and Velveeta sandwiches, summer Kool-Aid stands, Charlie Brown specials on TV.

Hazell brings his hilarious observations, called *The Wonder Bread Years*, to the Manship Theatre in Baton Rouge for just three performances this weekend. The former *Seinfeld* writer found success with his one-man show, which started as a PBS special and quickly morphed into a national tour.

It works because baby boomer audiences can identify with every word.

"When you think about it, those of us who are a certain age grew up with the exact same television shows, commercials, toys ... there were only three TV stations, remember. No matter where you grew up, you knew about the Sears wish list, Easy Bake ovens, the Manwich, and little green Army men. We traded candy with each other on Halloween and sat at the kids' table on Thanksgiving."

In other words, a childhood spent in the '60s was simpler. Entertainment choices were more limited. This created a collective consciousness that most baby boomers share.

"My show is about looking for things that bring us together," Hazell said. "When I was writing for *Seinfeld*, we didn't know we were pioneers. We were just writing to our own sense of humor."

Hazell also worked as the warm-up comedian for *Seinfeld*'s studio audience. But he left (on good terms) because he "didn't want to be a mechanic in someone

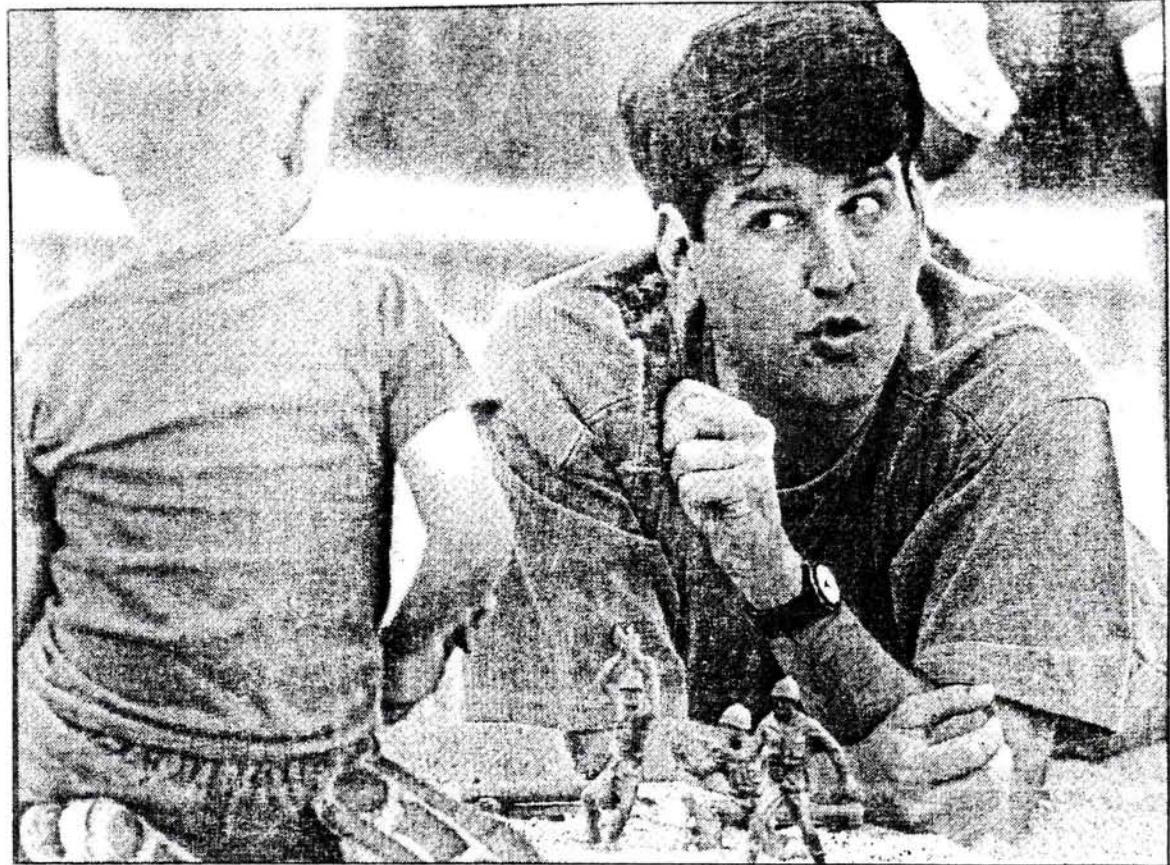


Photo provided by Manship Theatre

Former *Seinfeld* writer Pat Hazell shares some hilarious childhood recollections in his show *The Wonder Bread Years*, which comes to the Manship Theatre this weekend. Here, he plays with his 'little green Army men.'

else's shop."

(*Seinfeld* later called *The Wonder Bread Years* "milk-snorting funny.")

When Hazell searched for that common denominator to make the most people laugh, he realized that for his generation, at least, childhood memories were a great place to start.

Like the resin ball with the nylon cord. "Everybody remembers playing with it until it got stuck on a telephone wire," he said. "And that wonderful backyard family game — lawn darts! Doesn't everyone have a scar from those dangerous things?"

The Wonder Bread Years

WHEN: May 12-13

WHERE: Manship Theatre

ADMISSION: \$25-\$45

Interestingly, Hazell has settled in Mandeville, La., after 20 years in Los Angeles. He and his wife are raising their children near her family. But Hazell continues to perform and has franchised other shows around the country.

"You have to be able to laugh," he said. "My show gives people a positive release from everything going on in the world right now. I want people to just let go of all

that and not worry about anything and just enjoy our memories for a little while."

Memories ... of Tough Skin jeans, the 90-minute Erector set, milk money and chasing the ice cream truck. "That's the beauty of nostalgia," Hazell said. "We have more affection for our childhood as more time passes."

Not unlike a long road trip in the Country Squire Wagon — eventually, you settle in and get comfy.

The Wonder Bread Years will be performed Friday, May 12, at 8 p.m., and Saturday, May 13, at 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. Tickets are \$25 to \$45. Call (225) 344-0334 to order.