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REGISTER STAFF WRITER

When comedian Pat Hazell was a kid, he and his siblings never got to choose their own disguises for Halloween.

"Mom had a box of costumes," he recalls. "You had to be a hobo or a witch or a football guy."

Or — and this was the worst — Colonel Sanders, complete with cut-out mask and a cardboard Kentucky Fried Chicken bucket to collect candy.

"If you were the Colonel one year, you didn't have to be him for another six."

Hazell, a former "Seinfeld" writer, has made a career from ordinary memories like this, and his one-man show, "The Wonder Bread Years," is full of them. The play, which he describes as "a grand salute to baby boomers and pop culture," comes to Ames Friday and Saturday.

With a slide show of his childhood in Omaha and a little audience participation, the comedian invites audiences to cast their memories back a few years — to the days when Kool-Aid

was cool, Toughskin Jeans were all the rage and Wonder Bread was the greatest thing since, um, all those other kinds of sliced bread.

"It's pretty interesting to see people bond over the silliest things," said Hazell, 46.

During appearances on "The Tonight Show," "Comic Strip Live" and "MTV Half Hour Comedy," the comedian noticed that jokes about his early years usually got the loudest laughs. Audiences on the coasts usually assumed he was stretching the truth.

Hazell says Midwest stimulates imagination

"The Midwest has a way of stimulating your imagination," said Hazell, who admires Dick Cavett and the late Johnny Carson, two other comedians with roots in his home state. "In some strange way, the idea that there's a bigger piece of the sky — in New York, maybe, or L.A. — that creates a certain amount of imagination."

It's that same imagination that inspired a "A Christmas Story" creator Jean Shepherd to long for a Red Ryder BB Gun. Same goes for author Bill Bryson, who recounts his boyhood bike-riding adventures around Des Moines in "The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid."

"There were big moments of trying to create events," Hazell said.

Some of the most memorable events during his childhood occurred in the "way back" of the family's Country Squire station wagon during endless road trips out west or to odd-ball destinations like the Corn Palace in Mitchell, S.D.

Of course, now that Hazell has two sons of his own, ages 7 and 5, he tries to create the same kinds of memories for them — with limited success.



SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

Comedian Pat Hazell's comedy routine recalls the toys, food, clothes and culture of the baby boom generation.

"I'm now in the front seat looking back at them, wondering why they aren't looking out the window trying to spot things," he said. "You want them to have a sense of why the road trip is fun, but they're just bored out of their skulls . . . I was actually saying this weekend, 'We never had any of this. We were happy to have a checker and a rock!'"



Wonder Bread helps build strong comedian

Former 'Seinfeld' writer salutes baby boomers and pop culture.

'The Wonder Bread Years'

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Friday, 3 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Saturday

WHERE: Stephens Auditorium, Iowa State Center, Ames

TICKETS: \$32.50 for adults, \$17.50 for youth

INFO: (877) 843-2368, center.iastate.edu