

# 'Bread' has a long shelf life

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People glance at comedian Pat Hazell's credits, and the first thing likely to pop out of their mouths is: "Wow, you wrote for 'Seinfeld'!"

Not that there's anything wrong with that.

It's just that "Seinfeld" is only one in a long line of accomplishments on the resume of the 43-year-old Louisiana-based funny man who's bringing his own nostalgia-based, one-man show to the Capitol Theatre in York Thursday.

Hazell has one calling card most comedians still treat with reverence. He was on "The Tonight Show With Johnny Carson" shortly before Carson's retirement.

"To a young comedian, being on 'Carson' was like being on the mountain with the Dalai Lama. When there were only three networks, it was simply THE calling card that said you'd made it," Hazell said.

He recalled with pleasure that he got his "Carson" spot shortly before his 10-year high-school reunion. "That was great," he said, "especially since I'd been voted Most Likely to Succeed!"

## Old-hat now

Hazell has been on "The Tonight Show With Jay Leno" six times since Carson's reign ended. But he says opportunities in comedy are so much bigger now that an appearance on the show no longer carries the cachet it once did. Besides, he and Leno were already friends from the comedy-club circuit.

Still, you might remember Hazell's one-man tribute to the passing of the Olympic torch on "Leno," during which he balanced a burning handkerchief on his nose while the band played the Olympic theme.

A native of New Jersey who grew up in Omaha, Neb., Hazell, like Carson, had worked for Omaha's WWT-TV. And, like Carson, he did sleight-of-hand magic.

"I spent 20 minutes in Johnny's office, talking about Omaha and

doing magic tricks, and I just assumed that's what everybody did," Hazell said during a phone interview from the upstairs offices of Sweetwood Productions, a booking and publishing company that represents him and seven other stand-up comics he dubs "The Good Humor Men." The limited-liability producer is busy enough to have three employees.

Downstairs, Hazell lives with his wife of five years and their two preschooler sons.

His own childhood is called into play in "The Wonder Bread Years," which he'll be performing in York.

In the show he wrote in 1999 and took on the road 25 times last year, Hazell appears on the simple front-porch set with its screen door and rocking chair, dressed in a service-station shirt, blue jeans and sneakers. He talks about "stuff from childhood" and does a sort of dialogue with the audience.

"They share their own memories, sparked by things like Easy Bake Ovens and station wagons with backwards-facing seats," he said.

If "The Wonder Bread Years" sounds reminiscent of the former TV sitcom "The Wonder Years," Hazell says it's because both titles use humor to pluck the nostalgia-for-childhood chord.

Hazell admits wryly that he's "very good with titles." He did a pilot and six episodes of his own series, "American Pie," for NBC. "One episode aired once on the West Coast," he said. "Otherwise it never got on. I call it 'musty' (as opposed to 'must-see') TV. It had NOTHING to do with the raunchy movie 'American Pie.' It was based on a play called 'The Bunk Bed Brothers' I'd written with a friend (fellow stand-up comic Matt Goldman).

"I also wrote a play called 'Grounded for Life,' long before that series came on the air, and totally unrelated."

## Seinfeld connection

Hazell met Jerry Seinfeld when both were performing at the Com-

edy and Magic Club in Hermosa Beach, Calif. It was around the time Seinfeld and Larry David were playing with the idea of a TV sitcom to be called "The Seinfeld Chronicles," about how and where a stand-up comic gets his material.

Seinfeld, David, Hazell and Goldman wrote the pilot and the first shows that aired (the ones that ended with Seinfeld doing a stand-up bit). Hazell warmed up the audience for 75 shows and appeared in two episodes - once actually doing the warm-up in a show-within-a-show; and once behind the curtain of a hospital bed, sharing a room with George Costanza.

It was Hazell who came up with the concept of "Kramerica Industries," whose first product, a necktie you could tear off at the knot if you got a stain on it and then pull down another one, was also Hazell's idea.

Hazell also wrote American Express commercials for Seinfeld, including ads that had Jerry and a monkey sorting mail and Jerry mourning the death of his goldfish who'd been "buried at sea" (i.e., flushed).

He left "Seinfeld," he said, because he wanted to perform as well as write, but mostly because he wanted to work in his own voice and not keep trying to match Seinfeld's.

"What I write and perform is very much nostalgia-based. It's about finding the common denominator in people and how to connect to the sense of wonder we all had as kids. I really don't do stand-up. What I do is more like 'show-and-tell.'"

*"The Wonder Bread Years" will be presented at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 13, at the Capitol Theatre, 52 N. George St., York. All seats are \$25. Call 846-1111 or visit [www.strandcapitol.org](http://www.strandcapitol.org).*