

## Paul Mills Rhymer (1905-1964)

Paul Mills Rhymer was born in Fulton, Illinois on November 21, 1905. He was the eldest son of Sidney and Mabel (Gale) Rhymer. By 1911, the Rhymer family had moved to Bloomington, Illinois, settling in a house at 708 ½ West Monroe Street where Sidney began working for the **Chicago and Alton (C & A) Railroad**.

It appears that Paul was drawn to entertainment from an early age. When examining an old diary of his in 1937, Paul noted that he spent an “**appalling**” amount of time at the movies during his youth – spending a nickel a day at the Scenic Theater, located at 302 North Madison Street in Bloomington. Paul also developed an interest in writing and engaging with music during his youth, participating in a writing club and the orchestra while he attended high school.

Following his graduation from Bloomington High School in 1925, Paul attended Illinois Wesleyan University (IWU). When Paul first began his career at IWU in 1926, he was involved in the English Coffee Club. As a member of that club, Paul participated in guest **lectures**, directed short plays for the club members, and wrote papers of his own. He also began writing for *The Argus*, IWU’s student newspaper.

The highlight of Paul’s college writing career came when his short story, “Hen,” was sold and published by the popular magazine “College Humor.” “Hen” told the story of Bill, a physically **disfigured** railway worker, who told, what appeared to be, **fictitious** stories to account for his **shortcomings** in life. Throughout the story, the reader learns that Bill’s stories are truthful. Outside of writing organizations, Rhymer was involved in Sigma Chi **Fraternity** and Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society.

However, in 1929 it was necessary for Paul to drop out of IWU and return home to help his widowed mother in Bloomington. Two years prior, Paul’s father, Sidney Rhymer, passed away from pneumonia in 1927 at the age of 51.

1929 was a busy year for Paul, as he jumped from odd job to odd job before finally landing in radio. Paul then began his one and only career in newspaper writing for *The Pantagraph*. For two months Paul was a visiting reporter in Bloomington. His job required him to call around the Bloomington area looking for personal information on its residents. Rather than fulfill his job description, Paul spent his workdays back at the Sigma Chi house at IWU and used the house phone to call the parents of fellow Sigma Chi members to get the latest gossip from around Bloomington. In doing so, Paul produced fake stories using the information that had been shared with him. Paul’s hijinks worked for about two months until Bloomington residents began to complain that Paul never met with them, and that the information reported in the pages of the *Pantagraph* was inaccurate. As a result, Paul was fired from *The Pantagraph*.

It was also in 1929 that Paul moved to Chicago. He worked a variety of jobs including selling magazines and working as a taxicab driver before landed a career in radio. Paul’s first success at NBC occurred with the radio show *The Keystone Chronicle* in December 1929. The show also included the experiences of those living in the small town, specifically the hardware store owner, farmer, a country agent, as well as other members of the community who happened to stop by the newspaper office.

As *The Keystone Chronicle* (later renamed *The Northwestern Chronicle*) was growing in popularity, so too was Paul Rhymer’s new **sketch** *Vic and Sade*. The show served as an “attempt

to show everyday American home life” by detailing the lives of the Gook Family. The family included Vic, an accountant of the Consolidated Kitchenware Company, his wife, Sade, as well as Rush, their adopted son.

When Paul first started working on the *Vic and Sade* scripts, he was a bachelor. However, on July 29, 1933, Paul married Marry Francis Murray in Chicago. Following their marriage, they made their home in Chicago. They had one son, Paul Parke Rhymer, who was born on September 20, 1937.

Despite Paul living in Chicago, *Vic and Sade* was firmly **rooted** in Bloomington. Although the show was set in an unnamed, small-town, residents of Bloomington, Illinois began to “...see a remarkable resemblance between the names of streets, telephone exchanges and names...in the programs.” So much so, residents of Bloomington began to send in **fan mail** noting such connections.

*Vic and Sade* continued to grow in popularity over the years. As a result, the show, noted as the “Most Popular Air Family,” was broadcast over additional radio networks such as WHP and a nationwide Columbia network by May of 1938. The following year, Republic Pictures expressed interest in filming *Vic and Sade*; however, *Vic and Sade* did not grace television until July 1948 – nearly 10 years later! In the meantime, *Vic and Sade* continued on the radio.

By September 1944 *Vic and Sade* left the air ways and signed off for the first time in 12 years. At the time the show had about 7,000,000 listeners and was appreciated for its being “**slanted** with comedy rather than the **trials and tribulations** of family life.”

In July 1949, a few months following Paul’s mother’s death, *Vic and Sade* made their television debut. Although Rhymer continued to write the scripts, Bernadine Flynn (Sade) was the only original cast member to join him on the television of the show. The rest of the cast was replaced with Frank Dane as “Vic” and Dick Conan as “Rush.” Despite Paul Rhymer’s quality script writing, the new cast members were not well received, with one newspaper columnist stating that they were not “quite as funny on TV as they were in their great days on the radio.”

That being said, the show itself was viewed positively, with the same newspaper reporting that “the old radio programs, converted to television, was as fresh as spring water, whereas the new TV shows are tired before they’re born.” Despite somewhat positive reviews, the TV debut of *Vic and Sade* did not result in a long-term television series, as the show concluded after three weeks’ worth of episodes.

Throughout his life, Paul also maintained his connection to Bloomington. One way he did was through his support of the Bloomington High School Short Story Club. He donated the “Paul Rhymer Medal,” which was awarded to the student who wrote the year’s best short story. In addition to this, Paul also maintained relationships with his Sigma Chi fraternity brothers by attending sporting events together and IWU’s homecoming. Although, his connection with Sigma Chi was expressed through close personal connections, Paul continued to be remembered by his fraternity as demonstrated by Sigma Chi’s involvement on “Paul Rhymer Day.”

Paul Rhymer passed away on October 26, 1964, at the age of 59 in Passavant Hospital in Chicago. Paul had been in poor health for a few years prior to his death after suffering multiple heart attacks. On the evening of October 26, 1964, he suffered a severe **stroke** and died shortly thereafter. Paul’s funeral took place at Graceland Cemetery Chapel in Chicago, and he was laid

to rest at Lexington Cemetery, in Lexington, Illinois where he would later be joined by his wife, Mary.