

LABORTEAUX TRIO: MATT, PAT AND MOM

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Tomorrow night NBC's " Little House on the Prairie" has a new episode, " A Christmas They Never Forgot," in which members of the Ingalls family, trapped indoors on Christmas Eve by a fierce snowstorm, recall favorite Yuletide moments.

Matthew Labordeaux, who plays adopted son Albert, is mostly a listener. His 17-month-older brother, Patrick Labordeaux, who was a " Little House" regular as Andy Garvey, son of the character portrayed by **Merlin Olsen** , until Olsen switched this season to the title role in " Father Murphy," isn't involved in the on-air proceedings.

However, the real-life story of the brothers, siblings by adoption, is ideally attuned to the holiday season.

Both were " unadoptable" infants with seemingly incurable maladies. Patrick, declared psychotic at 3 months, was adopted six months later by designer Ron Labordeaux and his performer wife, Frankie. Matthew, added to the family when he was 10 months old, was autistic and tantrum- prone. He did not speak until after his fifth birthday.

Both underwent almost miraculous change after being brought on stage by their mother.

Patrick showed an early aptitude for performing.

" I was doing shows at the Troupers' Club and at hospital benefits," Mrs. Labordeaux recalled during a recent luncheon in Burbank, Calif. " A writer friend wrote a Halloween skit and asked Patrick, who was 3 1/2 , 'Would you like to do it with Mama?'

" Patrick said yes and memorized five stanzas of a poem."

" I still remember them," said Patrick, 16. He began:

" Little Orphan Annie

Came to our house to stay.

To wash the cups and saucers up

And brush the crumbs away. "

" It's by James Whitcomb Riley," Mrs. Labordeaux said. " Patrick did it with an accent and gestures and everything. I have a recording. He was a riot!"

" We have other tapes," said Matthew, who was 15 on Dec. 8. " She was doing an act, and we fixed the tape so that the introduction for 'Frankie Marshall' had the audience going 'Boo! Hiss! We want the boys!' "

" That was when we were just starting out," Patrick said. " I was 8."

" I taught them old vaudeville routines," Mrs. Labordeaux said. " People began to ask, 'Are the boys going to work with you?' They had red blazers, straw hats and canes.

" She worked up an act for us," Patrick said, " and named it 'Pat and Matt.'

"

" I was going to adopt another boy, Nathaniel," Mrs. Labordeaux said, " and make it 'Pat, Matt and Nat,' but I decided two were enough.

" One of the routines went like this: The boys were billed separately, so after I finished a routine, I'd do an introduction for them. I'd be looking one way and they'd come in behind me. I'd do a double take, and then we'd go into an old burlesque skit."

The former partners volunteered some sample knee-slappers:

Patrick: " Mom, you have the brains of an idiot."

Mom: " You want 'em back?"

Mom (to Matthew): " You're so stupid you don't know your ABCs."

Matthew: " A, B, C."

Mom: " Well . . . ?"

Matthew: " There's more?"

" It was in front of an audience that Matthew spoke for the first time,

" Mrs. Labordeaux told an earlier interviewer. " When he talked, it was in complete sentences. He loved the applause and on stage did exactly as he was told. It was only when it was time to get off that he threw tantrums.

" I told him, 'You can throw tantrums at home, but not when you're acting.

If you do, I'll have to assume that you're not having fun and you shouldn't be acting.' "

Later, when Matthew was being paid for his contributions, he had a temper tantrum during a film session. Mrs. Labordeaux promptly led him off the set and into her car. They were halfway home before he stopped his yowling.

" I had to call his bluff," she said. " He made the decision and decided he would rather act than act up. He learned to control the tantrums and then they

disappeared altogether."

Matthew accompanied Patrick to an audition. Asked by the director, " Can you cry?" he nodded and, on cue, began to blubber.

The instant tears resulted in his being cast as an alcoholic's son in a United Way film starring Cliff Robertson. Later, on Robertson's recommendation, he was hired for A Woman Under the Influence , starring Gena Rowlands, John Cassavetes and Peter Falk.

At 8, he earned an Emmy nomination for his performance in an NBC Special Treat daytime drama, " Papa and Me."

" He was beaten out," Patrick said, " by an unknown named Danny Kaye."

" We didn't even know Matthew was on the ballot," Mrs. Labordeaux said.

" The producer put him on without telling us."

" It was the producer's representative in New York," Matthew said.

" He was so young at the time," Mrs. Labordeaux said. " It wasn't the wisest thing to subject him to. He was still shy."

" Say 'strange,' " Patrick suggested.

" He's learned," Mrs. Labordeaux said, " to control his strangeness."

" I put up with that," Matthew said with a sigh. " I've heard it enough!"

" There's no straight man in this family," Mrs. Labordeaux said. " We're all comedians."

" Yeah," Matthew said. " Everyone tries to be funny - including Pat."

Matthew received a second Emmy nomination for his performance last season in a " Little House" episode.

How did Patrick feel when his kid brother, a fellow " Little House" cast member, was singled out for special honors?

" I was 300 percent behind him," Patrick said. " There was no jealousy. If he had won, that would have been great. I had a lesser role in 'Little House' last season, but if hypothetically we had both been nominated, we'd have been rooting for each other and ourselves."

It was in " Papa and Me" that Michael Landon, the creator-producer- star of " Little House," first saw Matthew. Landon hired him to portray his own character, Charles Ingalls, in a flashback episode. The following season Matthew was brought back for another episode, about a youthful Charles' first meeting with his wife-to- be, Caroline.

Patrick was hired as a full-time member of the " Little House" troupe a year before Matthew achieved the same status.

" When Pat was cast," Mrs. Laborteaux said, " Michael wasn't aware that Pat was Matt's brother. Laborteaux is an unusual name, but Michael never uses names. He calls everyone 'honey' or 'babe.' He just hired a third Melissa for the show without realizing it."

This eighth " Little House" season is expected to be the last. Landon, who is also producing Olsen's " Father Murphy" series, plans to transfer his variegated talents to large-screen films.

" I've already been sent out to pasture," Patrick said. " I'm taking a video workshop, so I can become more familiar with the other end of the camera. My long-range plan is to attend the University of Southern California film

school."

" We're looking for scripts for Patrick," Mrs. Labordeaux said. " We've found one we kind of like, The Fighter , that we've submitted to NBC. It's about a young boy training for the Golden Gloves who's in an accident and suffers a brain tumor."

" We've formed a corporation, Star- Lab," Matthew said, " and we're already looking for scripts. That way, if 'Little House' ends, we can go directly into production, instead of into limbo."

" Before Bo Derek's Tarzan, the Ape Man ," Mrs. Labordeaux said, " we were thinking of a film about Tarzan as a teenager."

" Hey, Mom," Patrick said, " let's go to the banana and malt shop."

" My husband's a designer, and he was working on ways to get around the ape business. You can't work with actual gorillas. It was for Patrick primarily."

" Can't I play Jane?" Patrick asked. " Actually, I'd love to play Tarzan.

Next to playing Superman, it would be the most tremendous ego boost! During a 'Little House' hiatus I did an 'Aloha Paradise' episode as a bully who beat up people. I loved it!

" Olivia Barish, the girl who was raped in 'Sylvia,' the 'Little House' Matthew got his Emmy nomination for, played my girlfriend. We had a scene in a pool, and the director said, 'Dunk her, but don't tell her you're going to. We want an unexpected reaction.'

" I did it and she hit me. It hurt, so I hit her back, not hard, but there were bruises. 'You hit me,' she said. 'The director told me to,' I said. She

wouldn't talk to me. She said I was a method actor!"

" Matthew's an AAU swimmer," Mrs. Labordeaux said. " He has medals and ribbons. If he plays Tarzan, he'll have to start body work and get his body more honed ."

Mrs. Labordeaux, whose maiden name was Newman, was for 10 years part of a comedy act, Marshall & Marshall. She used a nom de show biz, Frankie Marshall.

" I've been called 'a female Jerry Lewis.' I was doing that kind of 'shtick' before Jerry Lewis.

" My partner and I pretended to be brother and sister. He'd protect me from guys. If I gave him a signal he'd come and save me.

" I've been an actress since I was 6. I come from a vaudeville family - dancers, singers, roller skaters, strippers - primarily on my father's side. My sister, who's two years older, and I had an act when she was 8.

" An aunt, Stella Newman, a singer- dancer whose stage name was Dorothy Dale, was my mentor. Aunt Stella was like Auntie Mame. She paid for my singing and dancing lessons."

" She was a 'torch girl,' " Patrick said.

" She was a torch singer at the Club Alabama in Chicago for 10-12 years. That's how she met her husband."

" She's now Stella Capone," Patrick said.

" She knew Georgie Capone, Al Capone's little brother. He was from the same neighborhood. He beat up a violinist because he gave Stella the wrong key.

" I had an uncle who was an Indian chief - I don't remember his name, we

called him Chief. He'd bring 'plants' up from the audience and throw hatchets at them. He used to baby-sit for us and make Indian spaghetti as long as a table.

" Sometimes I'd be a target for my roller skater uncle.

" My father, Frank Newman, the only one who didn't change his name, was a musician - trumpet and drums. For years he traveled with Tommy Dorsey. Later he played with dance bands at small clubs in Cincinnati."

" Did you ever hear of Tommy Dorsey?" Patrick asked.

" As soon as I was old enough I became part of Marshall & Marshall," Mrs. Labordeaux said. " We were with Dorsey on 'The Ed Sullivan Show.' " She met her husband when she was performing at the Fort Benning officers' club.

" He was at Officers Candidate School. He wears a size-14 shoe, and those big feet were propped up on the stage. I kicked them off and got a big laugh.

" He was from California, so I went there. I kept working in the act for two or three years after we were married, but Ron didn't want to travel, because it was wrecking his education. It took him 12 years to get his degree.

" I tried to do an act here, worked in little theater, got occasional bits in films.

" Ron and I found we couldn't have children, but we had so much love between us that we decided to give some to children who weren't getting any. We decided to adopt older boys who needed homes. Then they called them 'nonadoptable.' Now it's 'hard- to-place.' "

The boys and their careers, she said, help keep her young. How young was she? " You're really trying to hurt me," she said. " I'm so old that . . . " She groped for a gag line.

" That's one of her best-kept secrets," Matthew said.

" She's 28," Patrick said.

" Thank you, Patrick," Mrs. Labordeaux said. " I don't look as old as I am because I have a perfect marriage, I have perfect children and I'm a perfect person."

Grinning, Patrick and Matthew nodded agreement.