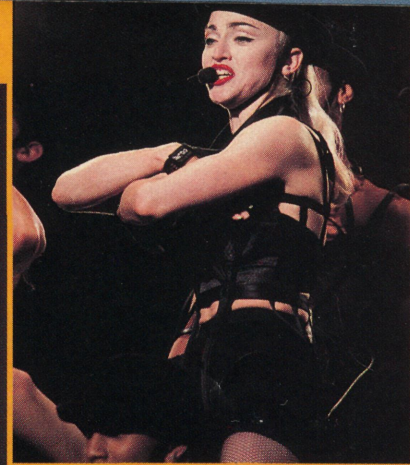


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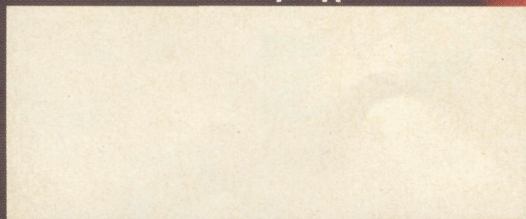


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# 'I JUST LAUGHED'

Even Lucy and Desi's daughter saw something newly hilarious in the *I Love Lucy* pilot airing this week

By Lucie Arnaz



WYNN HAMMER/CBS

Arnaz, with folks framed, says of the pilot, "I never knew it existed."

► In this pilot scene, Lucy's robe conceals her impending motherhood. (Lucie arrived four months later.)



with Grant as executive producer), CBS is airing the show, never before seen on television, this Monday (April 30) at 10 P.M. (ET).

When Lucille Ball and her husband Desi Arnaz taped the 34-minute pilot of *I Love Lucy* in March 1951, they were just like their soon-to-be immortal characters, Lucy and Ricky Ricardo: two up-and-coming performers eager to expand their audience. In the pilot, many of the elements that made the show a classic are evident: her double takes, his malapropisms, her timing, his musical interludes. And as it would so many times, the plot concerns Lucy's attempt to crash Ricky's act.

At the time the pilot was filmed (before a live audience), Lucy was five months pregnant with her daughter, Lucie Arnaz—host of the pilot special. In one of her first interviews since her mother's death last April, Arnaz, 38, an actress married to actor Laurence Luckinbill and the mother of three children, spoke with Los Angeles bureau chief Scot Haller about the pilot and the chemistry between her parents that made America love *I Love Lucy*.

I thought maybe the pilot would make me cry or something, but I just laughed. It was delightful. I thought after a few minutes, I would say, "Oh, yeah, I remember seeing this as a kid. . . ." But truly, I had never seen it. My mother looks so completely different than she ended up looking as Lucy Ricardo. Her hair was longer, and of course, she was much heavier because she was so pregnant. Watching the pilot, I was struck by how unsure she seemed. There are comic possibilities that she let go that I think the Lucy we knew later would have caught and played out and made even funnier.

Actually, I think the pilot was much more my father's show. I think he's spectacular in it. What was incredible is that you watch him being tentative at the beginning, but by the time you get to the material they had been doing in their live act on the road, it takes off like gangbusters—because they were comfortable with it. I think that's why my mother always stuck with the vicious rehearsal cycle we had. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse. Because the more you rehearsed, the more unrehearsed it looks, the more natural it looks.

My father was a natural wit. He understood comedy better than people gave him credit for, I think. He loved letting the other guy get the joke line. He loved being the one who reacts to someone else's humor, setting it up and then doing the double take. Even in real life, he would do that. And he wasn't afraid to laugh at himself. Of course, my mother never was either.

There's a moment in the pilot when



▲ Both mother and daughter took the cake at little Lucie's first birthday party in July 1952.

## VOICES

Call it *I Found Lucy*. When Joanne Perez, 84, peered under a bed in her Orange County, Calif., home last December, she saw a canister of film labeled *Lucy-Desi-Pepito* audition. She took it to her friend, producer B. Donald "Bud" Grant, who had put her up to looking for it. Eureka! The film turned out to be the 39-year-old pilot for *I Love Lucy*, in which Mrs. Perez's husband, the "Spanish clown" Pepito, makes an appearance. (Pepito died in 1975.) The episode had been considered irretrievably lost for nearly 40 years. Now, thanks to the fortunate discovery (and

► Things were shakin' all over when Lucie, then 11, played a soda jerk on *The Lucy Show* in 1963.





## VOICES

they're doing their act and my father seems to break character to laugh at my mother. It was a bit they did in their act forever and ever, in which he asks, "Are you making fun of my English?" When I saw that moment in the pilot, I thought, you know what, it just hit them. It just hit them that they are now doing this act as a pilot for a TV show. It's the one point in the show where they lock eyes and realize it: Look what we're doing, look where we are. It just cracks them both up. It comes from each having enormous respect for the other's talents, which was true all the way through their lives together.

I think the reason the pilot sold is that the network saw there could be both broad comedy and a sexy love story between two people who were very attracted to one another. At the beginning of the pilot, they start with Lucy and Ricky waking up in the morning in their apartment. It's so simple and so clever. Right away, they started with something that every wife and husband can identify with—watching your husband shave, making those faces in the mirror. They did things that every-

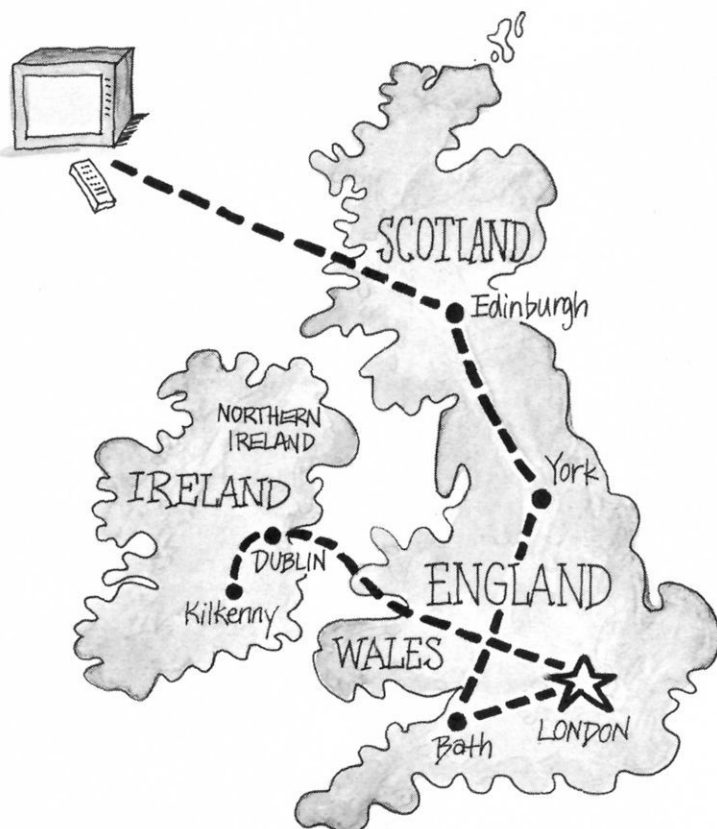


Three generations having a Ball: Lucie's daughter, Kate Luckinbill, then 3, joined Mom and Grandmom on a 1988 outing.

body does. So right away, you think, "Oh, she's like me, he's like my husband."

My mother's sense of comedy was definitely intuitive. I don't think you can teach how to do what she did. She tried to. She held these seminars and classes all over the place, and I haven't seen any other Lucille Balls come popping up. She instinctively had a clock inside of her that could time a laugh better than anyone else in the world. Like the famous routine about [putting] eggs in the pants and the shirt, from the show where they were out in the country raising chickens. Remember? Ricky wanted to tango, and she got caught with all the eggs when the door opened. It's the longest laugh ever recorded on *I Love Lucy*. And to watch her take the hit and absorb what was going on after she got crunched with the eggs—that's a lesson in comedy in itself. And I'll bet you that even after somebody studied that scene, nobody else could do it.

My mother loved television. She hardly ever had it off. I don't know what her favorite sitcoms were. I don't think she liked sitcoms very much in general after a while. But she did like to watch *Wheel of Fortune*. Every night. Whenever we were eating dinner, it was always on. I guess that's a sitcom in itself. □



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