

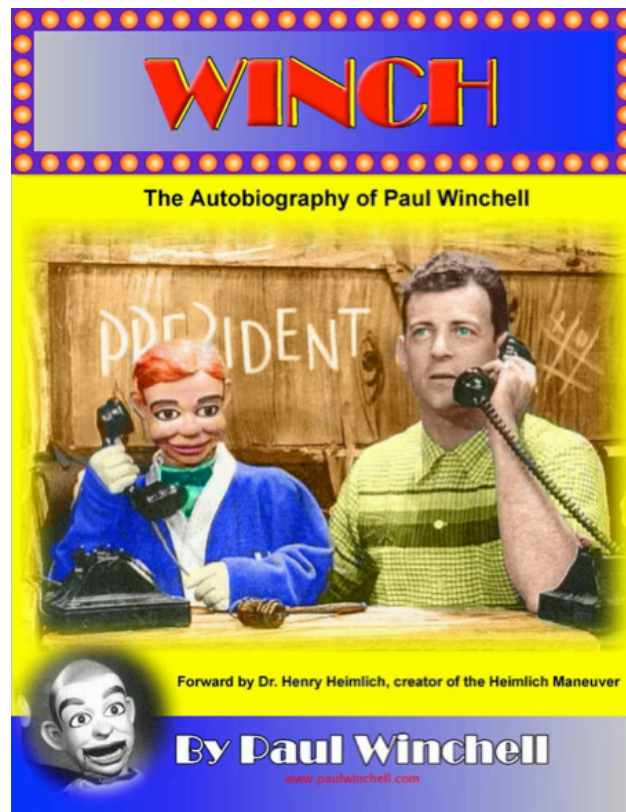
WINCH

A Screenplay Sample
Adapted From

Paul Winchell's Autobiography

by

PAUL WINCHELL AND JOHNNY BLUE STAR



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Johnny Blue Star
760-323-0193
cvnewz@aol.com
[skype: johnny.blue.star](skype:johnny.blue.star)

INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM. WILCHIN HOME -- LATE AT NIGHT

A little boy, five years, PAUL, sleeping.

PAUL (V.O.)

In my life, I've soared like Icarus to taste
of the height of fame and fortune.

Thousands remember me because I brought them
joy and laughter as children.

HOWLING WIND and LOUD BANGING outside window, wakes him up. TREES
are madly tossed by the wind, BRANCHES crashing into his window.

PAUL (V.O.) (CON'T)

Besides being a ventriloquist, I was an inventor,
a sculptor, an author, a pilot and many other
things. Yet, during all these explorations,
survival set me on my most important course, my
realest journey- the journey to find myself.

The boy looks up, terrified.

INT. KITCHEN. WILCHIN HOME -- MORNING

Paul, about twelve, and his Papa sit at the KITCHEN TABLE. Papa is
reading NEWSPAPER. Paul is eating. Clara looks at Paul, speaking
to him sharply with a strong Yiddish accent.

CLARA

Paul, get me the flour!

Paul tries to mount a STOOL and trips.

CLARA (CONT'D)

You lame piece of shit!

PAPA

How can you say such a thing?
Our boy had polio.

CLARA

Shut up, you schwantz! You want him to be this
way his whole life, tripping and stuttering.

INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM. WILCHIN HOME -- AFTERNOON

Paul, still twelve years old, looking down at his PAJAMAS and
SHEETS, soaked in urine.

PAUL
(whispering)

Oh, no.

He limps over to TRUNK, retrieving PRAYER BOOK and PRAYER GARMENTS. He binds PHYLACTERIES (TINY LEATHER BOXES WITH BIBLICAL PARCHMENT) to his forehead and arms, throws on PRAYER SHAWL and puts on SKULLCAP. Prays in Hebrew, moving in a silent dance to the words. BANGING.

CLARA
Open the door, Paul! What are you doing in there? Open it or I'll break it down!

He opens DOOR. Clara looks at him, dressed in his PRAYER GARMENTS, PAJAMAS drenched in URINE.

CLARA (CONT'D)
Pissing in bed again? You think prayers are gonna get you anywhere, WHEN YOU DO THIS!

PAUL
Why not, Mama?

CLARA
Because God, my clever son, does not like disgusting things.

She quietly removes PRAYER GARMENTS and puts them away. Takes out small CAT-OF-NINE TAILS.

CLARA (CONT'D)
You know what this is?

PAUL
Grandma Frieda's medicine. I don't like it.

CLARA
What you like or dislike is not the point. That you have offended God is very much the point.

Throws him back powerfully into a corner. Lashes him three times. He tries to block her blows.

CLARA (CONT'D)
Well, there is another part of Mother's medicine that always works.

PAUL
(quietly)

It never works.

She grabs the URINE-SOAKED SHEETS and crams them into his face, smothering him.

CLARA
I'm your mother. Don't talk back to me!

He is gagging and spitting, almost retching. She glares at him abruptly, leaves. He peels off CLOTHES, noticing an UGLY WELT on his arm. She comes back in. He is already in the TUB.

CLARA (CONT'D)
We're going to the butcher. Be sure and stay in your room. Remember, God is watching you! Always!

She leaves. He dresses. Suddenly, a DOORS SLAMS. Paul peeks through crack in door. He hears NOISE. Frightened, he moves towards NOISE. He peers in room and sees RADIO. He ventures into room.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
And, now, the CHASE AND SANBORNE HOUR with Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy..

APPLAUSE FROM RADIO AUDIENCE ON RADIO

EDGAR BERGEN
Charlie, guess who I met today?- your best friend, W. C. Fields.

CHARLEY MCCARTHY
You're kind of stretching the word, "friend," aren't you, Bergen?

EDGAR BERGEN
And I brought him with me today.

MORE APPLAUSE FROM AUDIENCE.

CHARLEY MCCARTHY
Watch it Bergen, I'll clip you. So help me I'll mow you down. Him, too- where is he? Let me at him!

EDGAR BERGEN
The first thing he said to me this morning, very affectionately, I might add- well, he called you a woodpecker's lunch, Charley.

CHARLEY MCCARTHY

Let that old rum-pot say it to my face.

W. C. FIELDS

I will, you pile of sawdust. I got half a mind-

CHARLEY MCCARTHY

Yeah, that's all you've got.

EDGAR BERGEN

Charley, behave!

Paul sits on floor in front of RADIO, enraptured.

EXT. CONEY ISLAND. NEW YORK -- LATE AFTERNOON

AERIAL VIEW OF CONEY ISLAND. CUT TO Paul and his sister, RUTH wandering through Midway.

PAUL (V.O.)

Ruth, my older sister, and I went everywhere together. She was my defender and teacher.

They come to building, WAX MUSEUM.

RUTH

Let's go in there.

PAUL

I don't want to.

RUTH

There's nothing to be afraid of. Look, there's a side door.

They sneak in, passing GEORGE WASHINGTON and GRETA GARBO. Paul stares, mesmerized, by WAX FRANKENSTEIN AND DRACULA. They find EDGAR BERGEN AND CHARLIE, their RADIO SHOW playing in background.

RITA

That's Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy.

PAUL

Charlie doesn't look very real.

RUTH

That's because he's a dummy, dummy. He's made out of wood.

PAUL

If he's wood, how does he talk?

RUTH

Bergen throws his voice into the dummy- and he talks just like you and me. He's a ventriloquist!

PAUL

Throws his voice?

RUTH

Yes, that's exactly what they do!

They pass RACK OF CANDY AND TOYS. Paul sees book, "HOW TO THROW YOUR VOICE" by Edgar Bergen.

PAUL

Can you buy me that, Ruth?

RUTH

That's ten cents. I really don't have it. You'll have to ask Mama.

INT. LIVING ROOM. THE WILCHIN HOME -- EARLY EVENING

The children come in. PAPA greets them warmly.

PAUL

Papa, we went to the WAX MUSEUM!

Clara comes in.

CLARA

Did you say- Wax Museum?

Paul nods. She takes out WHIP, striking each of them.

CLARA

That is a dark and dirty place. There are horrible ghosts there-

RUTH

You're wrong, Mama.

CLARA

Wrong am I?.

She beats Ruth mercilessly. Ruth grabs WHIP HANDLE. Clara slaps her hard. Ruth pauses, slaps her mother back- harder.

RUTH
Come on, Paul. Help me!

PAUL
I can't. She's my mother.

Clara is on floor, out of breath. Paul looks at PAPA, who shakes head and walks out of room. Paul stares at Clara.

CLARA
What do you want, Paul. Can't you see I'm hurt? I'm probably dying right now.
Papa, come back here! You schtick dreck!

Papa comes back.

CLARA (CON'T)
Again, he loses his job. Help me up, you idiot.
You stand idly by while Ruth beats up her mother.

PAPA
You sicken me with that whip!

CLARA
Sicken you? You sicken me- you jobless bastard.

PAUL
(crying)
Mama, please don't talk to Papa that way.

RUTH
She has to, Paul. She's a goddamn bitch.

CLARA
(to Ruth, holding up whip)
That's how you talk to a mother...?

CLEVE, in his early twenties, opens door.

CLEVE
I thought I heard screaming. Sorry I barged in.
(sees Clara holding whip)
Are you beating Ruth with that thing?

CLARA
You want to come around here anymore, Cleve,
then mind your own business. Are you working?

CLEVE
I have a job. So what?

CLARA

Can you believe I passed up marrying a rich man for this jobless Putz. You better be good to my Ruthie. They certainly don't take care of me.

PAUL

(stuttering)

I'll take care of you, Mama. I'll always have work. I swear.

CLARA

God should strike you dead if you're lying to me. You will burn in Hell and suffer. Wait my son, soon I'll be dead then you'll cry- oh why didn't I appreciate her when I had her?

PAUL

Please don't die, Mama.

CLARA

Mark mine words. And I know something else. When I die, you won't even say Kaddish for me. You won't even say a prayer for the dead.

PAUL

I'll say it, I *will*, Mama. As God is my judge, I'll say it faithfully.

CLARA

(in a chilling voice)

If you don't say Kaddish when I'm dead, I'll know.

Clara walks in kitchen and lights STOVE.

PAUL

Mama, there's something I really want- that I saw today in Coney Island? It's a book by Edgar Bergen.

CLARA

Oh, now you want to be a ventriloquist?

PAUL

I just want the book, Mama. It's only ten cents. I want to be like Edgar Bergen.

CLARA

You think money grows on trees? First, we can't afford it. Second, I'd never give it to you for such a stupid book. And third, look at my hand-

She holds out her palm and points to it.

CLARA (CONT'D)

When hair grows here, that's when you'll be like Edgar Bergen. Bergen is talented. But you're not. If you make a dime, I'll be surprised.

She leaves. Ruth sits down next to Cleve.

CLEVE

She beats you with a whip. Why do you even stay here?

Cleve goes up to Paul.

CLEVE (CONT'D)

You can be whatever you want. I'll put my money on it.

Opens his palm and puts dime into it.

INT. PAUL'S BATHROOM. THE WILCHIN HOME -- AFTERNOON

Paul in front of MIRROR, with Bergen's BOOK in his hand.

PAUL

Glease tass the dutter.

(looking in book)

Think "B." Say "G" but think "B." GLEASE TASS THE-

Clara swings door open with COLD COMPRESS wrapped around her head.

CLARA

What is all this screeching and this kvetching?

PAUL

Look at this, Ma.

(talks without moving mouth)

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

CLARA

You won't learn it. All you do is stammer and stutter when you talk. You weren't made for this. Do something useful.

She leaves. Paul looks in MIRROR solemnly.

PAUL

I'll show her she's wrong if it's the last thing I ever do,

(his lips aren't moving-
in a different voice)

Go on, kid, show the bitch.

(now, in his own voice)

Don't talk about my mother that way. Never- or I'll put you in a trunk and never take you out.

INT. HALLWAY. SCHOOL OF INDUSTRIAL ARTS. MANHATTAN -- AFTERNOON

SIGN in hallway: "SCHOOL OF INDUSTRIAL ARTS." Paul is entertaining fellow STUDENTS with new DUMMY, JERRY MAHONEY. Paul notices PRINCIPAL standing by, who signals for him to come with him. CAMERA FOLLOWS THEM TO PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE. STUDENTS are looking at them. Paul looks very concerned.

PRINCIPAL

Relax, Paul. You know, I just watched you entertain our students for almost fifteen minutes. I'm impressed. Have you heard of the Major Bowes show?

PAUL

Who hasn't?

PRINCIPAL

The Major is a good friend of mine. I'm going to ask him if he'll have you on his show.

INT. MAJOR BOWES' RADIO BROADCAST STUDIO. NEW YORK CITY -- EVENING

MAJOR BOWES with SHOW BIZ HOPEFULS. Paul and DUMMY are seated next to him. BANNER PROCLAIMS: "DODGE-DESOTO PRESENTS MAJOR BOWES ORIGINAL AMATEUR HOUR"

MAJOR BOWES

And now, I want to introduce to you my newest discovery, a lad from Coney Island, the amazingly young ventriloquist, Paul Winchell!

PAUL

My name's Wilchin.

MAJOR BOWES

(whispering to Paul)

That's your name now, Sonny. You have to have a stage name. Capice?

Paul nods and begins his act.

JERRY

You know, I was driving a car the other day. It
it suddenly began to speed. I was scared stiff.`

PAUL

I bet you were in a dilemma.

JERRY

No, it was a DeSoto.

CLOSE-IN ON BANNER, advertising the car, DESOTO. LAUGH from audience.
When laugh subsides, JERRY turns to Major Bowes.

JERRY (CONT'D)

How'm I doin', Major, how'm I doin'?

LOUD, POSITIVE APPLAUSE for their ad-libbing.

INT. THE WILCHIN HOME- EARLY EVENING

The family is having dinner.

PAPA

Where's our Paul?

RUTH

I'll show you where your son is, Papa.

Ruth switches on the RADIO.

MAJOR BOWES

And tonight's winner is- Mr. Paul Winchell. Well,
tell me, Paul- what are you going to do with that
\$100? Can you believe this? He's blushing, folks. I
believe he's going to give it to some young lady.
And, what do you have to say for yourself, Mr.
Winchell?

PAUL'S DUMMY VOICE

See you next week, everyone- on the Major Bowes'
Original Amateur Hour.

RUTH

He won, Papa. He won!