



**RAYMOND E. FEUERSTEIN, SMA '34**  
**AKA Raymond E. Forrest**  
**(1916 – 1999)**



Raymond Feuerstein was born in Germany on January 7, 1916, and came to the United States with his parents. He entered Staunton Military Academy (SMA) as a freshman in the fall of 1930 from Paterson, NJ. Graduating in 1934 as a Lieutenant in B Company, Ray was the Manager of Varsity Baseball, was in the Cotillion Club and Honor Club, and was on the Shrapnel staff.

He was a pioneering TV announcer, host and news broadcaster from the very earliest TV era (pre-World War II) through to the 1960s. If Ray is better remembered among New York television viewers for the acclaimed educational program "Children's Theater," that he produced and hosted for WNBC-TV under the name of *Raymond E. Forrest*, from 1949 to 1960, there is a reason his earlier work has been virtually forgotten.

At the time he became the most visible presence on television (1939 to 1941), there were fewer than 1,000 television sets in existence.

On April 30, 1939, at the opening of the New York World's Fair when President Franklin D. Roosevelt and David Sarnoff, the president of the Radio Corporation of America, NBC's parent, inaugurated regular television programming with a broadcast over NBC's experimental station, W2XBS, NBC only had radio announcers present.

Indeed, for months the television station employed no announcers, recruiting them from NBC Radio staff as the need arose, a process that so irritated the radio network's chief announcer that, by the fall, he persuaded W2XBS to stop pestering him and make one of his six junior radio

announcers the full-time TV announcer. Forrest, who had begun his TV career with a job in the NBC mailroom three years earlier, was a by then a 23-year-old junior radio announcer, and he won the job. For the next two and a half years almost every time he opened his mouth he made American television history.

Wearing a tuxedo to intone the formal sign-on when NBC went on the air each evening, Mr. Forrest announced every station break and every program. There he was, covering wrestling, boxing, hockey, horse racing and movie premieres; interviewing men and women on the street; introducing dramatic productions; serving as quiz show announcer and variety show host and even becoming the network's first full-time news anchor (after Lowell Thomas, whose radio news had been simulcast on television, decided to do his broadcasts from his upstate home.)

Forrest was the on-board announcer for the first airborne telecast, from a U.S. plane flying low over New York City on March 6, 1940, and later that year he was the NBC announcer at the first televised political convention, in Philadelphia, where the Republicans nominated Wendell Willkie. (CBS Television, which was racking up some firsts of its own, broadcast the convention in color.)

The next year, Forrest read the formal announcement on camera when W2XBS, newly licensed by the Federal Communications Commission and renamed WNBT (it later became WNBC), ushered in the era of commercial television on July 1, 1941.

The first commercial, a film showing a ticking Bulova watch, used no announcer, but three days later, on July 4, Forrest did the first live television commercial, for Adam Hats, a chore that earned him no sponsor's fee unless you count the hat Forrest was allowed to keep.

On December 7, 1941, Forrest apparently became the first television announcer to break into a program with a news bulletin, interrupting a Sunday afternoon movie, *The Playboy* (1938) with Harry Richman, to announce that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor.

From 1947 – 1949 Ray was almost as busy as ever, among other things as the announcer for *In the Kelvinator Kitchen*, an early cooking show, in 1947, and as the announcer and eventually the host of *Television Screen Magazine*, one of the first television magazine shows, in 1948 and 1949.

Then he was asked to produce and be the host of a television program that Forrest regarded as his most important contribution to television. Forrest hosted New York City's earliest and one of the most distinctive children's TV variety series called *Children's Theater*, which was seen on Saturday mornings on New York's WNBT/WRCA TV Channel 4 (even before it became WNBC) from 1949 to June 1961. Ray Forrest personally created the TV series which encouraged children to explore many places of interest, to read books, showed them how to care for animals and become involved in local activities.

Forrest wrote, produced and narrated his own nature films as well. Often he shot his shows on location (using primitive videotape technology), as early as September 24, 1960.

Other notable location broadcasts with Forrest included a series of pre-taped shows from the now defunct "Freedomland Amusement Park" in the Bronx. It gave his young viewers a chance to not only see the park but to experience vividly events that were a part of America's history.

*Children's Theater* shared the 1957 NYC Emmy award for "Best Children's And Teenage Program" with WCBS TV's *On The Carousel*. During its long run, *Children's Theater* also showed the 1958 color versions of *Crusader Rabbit* TV cartoons. *Children's Theater* remained on WNBC-TV Channel 4's Saturday morning line-up until Saturday, June 17, 1961.

After leaving television, Ray worked for many years at his family's jewelry store in Paterson, NJ, and died on March 11, 1999, at a hospital near his home in Kinnelon, NJ. He was 83 and all but forgotten as the man who became a hero to hundreds in 1939 as the nation's first television personality.

[www.digplanet.com/wiki/Ray\\_Forrest](http://www.digplanet.com/wiki/Ray_Forrest); [nytimes.com/1999/03/21/nyregion/ray-forrest-is-dead](http://nytimes.com/1999/03/21/nyregion/ray-forrest-is-dead); and [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ray\\_Forrest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ray_Forrest). Edits by Kelly McGavock, SMA '59

The picture at the top of this biography is from an early edition of *The Box - An Oral History of Television 1920-1960* by Jeff Kisseloff.

## **Filmography Summary**

### Producer

- 1949 [Children's Theater](#) (TV Series) Host (1949-1960)
- 1948 [TV Screen Magazine](#) (TV Series) Host (1949)
- 1947 [In the Kelvinator Kitchen](#) (TV Series) Announcer (1947)
- 1946 [Television Screen Magazine](#) (TV Series) Emcee / 'Editor' (1948-1949)

[www.imdb.com/name/nm0286681/](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0286681/)