

# More is revealed about long saga of our Mr. Bingle

The history of **Mr. Bingle** continues to unravel.

Mr. Bingle, a trademark of the **Maison Blanche** department stores, was a popular Christmas character for the old **Lowenstein's** department stores in Memphis in the 1950s. Both stores were **City Stores** at the time.

The little snowman with wings, magic candy cane and ice cream cone hat had his own TV show and was featured in the store's advertising.

**Joan White**, senior vice president of **Ward Archer and Associates**, shared her memories of the snowman in **Bluff City** a few weeks ago. Mrs. White wrote scripts for the **Mr. Bingle** TV show from 1956 to 1958. A new toy was featured on each show, which starred a **Mr. Bingle** marionette and Mrs. White as "Miss Holly."

Recently, **Bettye Crenshaw** shared a few memories of her affiliation with **Mr. Bingle**. These date to before the time Mrs. White came to work for **Lowenstein's**. Ms. Crenshaw, who now lives in **Fairfax, Va.**, was a fashion copywriter for **Lowenstein's** in the early '50s.

Ms. Crenshaw, 64, said she also wrote and produced the first **Mr. Bingle** TV shows, which ran on **WMCT** a year before moving to **WHBQ**.

Ms. Crenshaw believes **Mr. Bingle** was invented in Memphis. Competition was fierce between **Lowenstein's** and **Goldsmith's**, she said. The fact that **Goldsmith's** had **Rudolph** the **Red-Nosed Reindeer** for its Christmas holiday infuriated **H. J. Isaacson**, **Lowenstein's** vice president in charge of advertising, she said. He wanted his own character.

So, **Isaacson** entered the advertising room one day. "I want an elf," he said loud and clear, "who'll drive **Rudolph's** nose through **Fred Goldsmith's** ear," said Ms. Crenshaw. **Goldsmith's** was president of **Goldsmith's**.

"**Martha Hamilton**, we called her 'Ham,' sketched two circles — he didn't have legs — like a snowman and popped that little thing on his head to show what I took to be an ice cream cone," said Ms. Crenshaw. "She threw it at me."

**Martha Hamilton**, who now is **Ham Embree** of Memphis, remembered making the sketch and said she might have invent-



**MICHAEL DONAHUE**  
Bluff City

ed **Mr. Bingle**. "This may be. I've drawn so much so long."

But she thinks he originally was a display character sent from **Maison Blanche**. "We gave him a lot more life. I love to do cartoon figures. I used him in ads in multiple ways never used before."

Ms. Crenshaw wrote the history of **Mr. Bingle**, which involved **Santa** giving the snowman Christmas ornament eyes, a magic candy cane and holly wings so he could fly.

The live TV shows, which at that time featured **Leroy Anderson's** *Syncoated Clock*, were a huge success, said Ms. Crenshaw. **Grace Van Dyke**, the top fashion model in **Lowenstein's** **Orchid Room**, was **Mr. Bingle's** foil on the show.

**Wink Martindale** was one of the handsome young men who visited "Miss Grace" and made **Mr. Bingle** jealous on the TV show. During this time, toys were not the only Christmas gifts pushed, said Ms. Crenshaw. Men were enlisted to model gloves, scarves and neckties on the show.

At that time children were on the show, too. **Miss Van Dyke** would read the history of **Mr. Bingle** from a big book. **Karen Lindsey** was the little girl who usually was told the story on TV, said Ms. Crenshaw.

During one of his visits to the show, "Santa" took **Karen** on his knee. He said, "I'm **Santa Claus**." **Karen** then confused more than one young TV viewer when she said, "No, you're not. You're **Mr. Orndorff**." The **Santa** impersonator was **Lowenstein's** comptroller.

Ms. Crenshaw remembered one of her TV shows in which **Mr. Bingle** told viewers the new **Lowenstein's** telephone numbers. That was the year **Memphis** changed to the all-

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number phone numbers instead of the **Glendale**, **Fairfax** and **Broadway** prefixes.

When she returned from the TV studio, Ms. Crenshaw heard telephones ringing all over the store. "Every store manager was on the phone saying, 'Ho, ho, ho. Yes, this is **Santa Claus**.' Every kid wanted to talk to **Santa Claus**."

"I walked into **Mr. Isaacson's** office. He said, 'Crenshaw, you're fired. Ho, ho, ho.'"

Ms. Crenshaw didn't get fired, though. She continued to work at **Lowenstein's** until she was called to active duty in the **Women's Army Corps** in 1957. "I was sent to **Korea**. That's when I lost track of **Mr. Bingle**."

But **Mr. Bingle** ended up in **Korea** anyway.

Instead of putting the **Seventh Cavalry** crushed beer can insignia on her infantry scarf, Mrs. Crenshaw had a **Korean** artist paint **Mr. Bingle**.

And for a Christmas show for the **Korean** officers in the demilitarized zone, the rest of her unit wore **Mr. Bingles** on their scarves.



**Grace Van Dyke and Mr. Bingle**