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TODD CONTINUED

the game would be held—usually in the rear of the school's playground—and kept an eye out for cops. He even furnished the group with a name—the Sleeve Tossers.

Another group Todd integrated with he encountered when he took a part-time job with a neighborhood druggist who sold grain alcohol to bootleggers at \$20 a gallon. The druggist kept his alky supply stashed behind a big case of pharmaceutical bottles, set close to a wall. A fat, clumsy man, he appointed Todd (who was appropriately skinny because he never got enough to eat at home) traffic manager of the stash. Todd was so obliging and efficient at humping the large carboys of alky out of their hiding place that the needed-beer brewmasters, bathtub-gin distillers and red-ink vintners expressed their gratification with lavish tips.

Deciding that he had no time for high school, Todd, who had learned that bricklayers were earning \$15 a day, persuaded the authorities at a trade school to let him install a bricklaying course and split the tuition fees with him. The venture collapsed when word arrived that the jealous Bricklayers' Union would refuse to recognize the course's diplomas. Besides, Todd had been slowing things down in class by continually trying to tell the instructor he had hired how to lay bricks.

He and a friend next pooled their capital of \$80 and set out to get rich in what was called the *schlacht* shop field by staging Building-Coming-Down-Going-Out-of-Business-Price-Slash-on-All-Stock sales for small storekeepers who could benefit by some high-pressure merchandising. Never one to pinch pennies when putting on a show, Todd shot the partners' whole bank roll on the opening production, which was so lavish and compelling that it convinced even the storekeeper so that he actually did go into bankruptcy.

The most spectacular venture of Todd's adolescence was the Atlantic Construction Company, which he organized in 1926 at the age of 17 or thereabouts with his brother Frank, who was old enough to vote and sign contracts, as partner. The two opened a lavish office and placed big advertisements attacking the monotony of Chicago's domestic architecture. "Build a Home Different" was one of Todd's inspired slogans. When the hairy filaments of fiber building blocks used in some of Todd's "different" houses began to poke through the stucco, he had the fur shaved off and laughed: by now he was putting up apartment houses and giving advice to architects. In 1928 the brothers had an \$820,000 credit balance at the bond house that was backing them. Then the bond house failed and the Atlantic Construction Company failed with it.

In Hollywood, talking pictures were just being introduced, and it occurred to Todd that there might be some change to be picked up in soundproofing the movie stages. He was getting along well until the Depression struck and Hollywood's main sound problem became the moans of the producers. Todd was at liberty.

It was Chicago's Century of Progress Exposition in 1933 that gave him his first successful crack at the gaudy life of show business. To celebrate the vast strides forward that the Windy City had made in its first 100 years, he created an illusion masterpiece called the Flame Dance in which a pretty dancer named Muriel Page fluttered about the stage drawing nearer and nearer to a huge candle, the flame of which Todd controlled by manipulating a gas machine beneath the stage floor. When Miss Page got sufficiently close to the flame, he would turn the gas on full blast, her gauzy wings and leotard would catch fire, and she would scamper off stage with apparently no clothes on.

Another illusion he contrived at this period was taken from an amusement gimmick once popular in the tonier saloons, known as The Girl in the Goldfish Bowl. This featured a live female nude whose image was reduced by trick mirrors to a height of about three inches. Adapting this principle to a much wider audience, Todd substituted Santa Claus for the nude and sold the idea to toy departments under the name of The Kute Kris Kringle.

As the Century of Progress closed Todd formed a vaudeville unit consisting of the blazing Miss Page, a comedian named Harry



SON Michael, born in 1929, was the inspiration for Todd's present name, which he adopted then to match that of the child.