Live Long and Prosper: How Gene Roddenberry (and Fans) Turned a TV Series into a Worldwide Phenomenon

Elizabeth Thomas, Murray State University
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By
Elizabeth Thomas
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Professor: Dr. Robert Lochte
In 1964, Gene Roddenberry, an ex-WWII bomber pilot, ex-commercial pilot, ex-police officer-turned-writer, genuinely, passionately believed in television. He believed it had the power to bend minds and capture imaginations. He believed that he and a small band of creative souls could harness the newest telecommunications marvel to draw all of humanity together in a free exchange of ideas, art and knowledge. In creating and producing Star Trek, he proved to himself (and the world) that people are willing to think beyond those petty beliefs “which have for so long kept humanity divided.”

The Genesis

Late in the evening of August 19, 1921, in El Paso, Texas, Eugene Wesley Roddenberry was brought into the world with a large piece of placenta still attached to his face. Dr. Herbert Stevenson, who supervised the home birth, excitedly exclaimed, “Why, it’s a veiled baby!” Folklore of that time spoke of babies born with such accoutrement as gifted with second sight, an ability to see into the future. While Gene’s 17-year-old mother, Caroline (Glen as the family called her), didn’t believe in such nonsense, she would nonetheless come to understand that the doctor’s words describing her son as a visionary were, indeed, prophetic.

In March of 1923, Eugene Wesley Roddenberry, Sr., Gene’s dad, sent for his 19-year-old bride and 19-month-old son to join him in Los Angeles, California. Papa Roddenberry had fought in World War I and served as a railroad detective in Texas. He had also dropped out of school in the third grade. Gene’s self-educated father easily passed a civil service exam and in 1922 joined the ranks of the LAPD. He would serve the city for his entire professional career. His eldest son would follow in his steps … but young Gene would leave quite a different footprint.
Little Gene, as he was called, enjoyed an idyllic childhood compared to his father’s. His love of science fiction and film is documented as far back as 1926 when he is reported to have discovered pulp fiction, spending hours reading his favorite publication, Amazing Stories. He excelled in school and published his first written piece at age 10 - a four-line poem which appeared in the elementary school newspaper. When Little Gene was 12, the family moved to Highland Park, a Los Angeles suburb just a few miles northeast of downtown. By then, Gene had two younger siblings. The new Roddenberry home was convenient to papa’s work but still far enough away from it that the family was somewhat shielded from the seedy underbelly of the City of Angels through prohibition and the Great Depression. 3

Gene was his father’s son in many ways, though they disagreed on important issues. While papa was an intelligent, moralistic and farsighted man, he was also a child of the south who carried with him an ingrained cultural and racist viewpoint. Young Gene attended Franklin High School in the late 1930s and this is where the seeds of his humanistic values were planted. Gene tried to understand his father’s contradictory behavior – confused by the man who showed so much love for family and at the same time such intolerance for certain minorities. 4 While Gene grew up free of his father’s bigotries, he was greatly influenced by the conflict they caused within the family. Thirty years later, after Gene had created the television program that broadcast the first-ever interracial kiss, he was unable to discuss it with his father, even though the elder Roddenberry lived to see the program. The subject was off limits. 5

Discovery

Gene’s desire to become a writer grew stronger during high school where he was influenced by his English teacher, Mrs. Virginia Church, who also sponsored him at an annual Authors’ Workshop. She motivated him to think about writing and literary criticism. After graduating
with the winter class of 1939, Gene entered Los Angeles City College where he studied “Police,” as it was listed in the curriculum. Secretly, he dreamed of writing for the movies.\textsuperscript{6}

It was at this time that Gene began dating a 16-year-old blonde bombshell still in high school, Eileen Anita Rexroat. Eileen and Gene would eventually marry and have three children, but divorce soon after \textit{Star Trek}. At the beginning of his second year at LACC, Gene was recruited by the Army Air Force and enrolled in its Civilian Pilot Training program, receiving advanced flight training while still pursuing the Police degree at LACC. He was 18 years old.

On June 26, 1941, Gene graduated with an Associate of Arts degree in “Police,” a major achievement since he was the first member of his family to finish high school and the first to graduate college. Within a matter of weeks, he became a cadet in the army air corps. The War Department instructed his squadron to be available at a moment’s notice. While awaiting the inevitable call, Gene spent a summer at the Cal Tech Institute of Peace Officer Training at UCLA. He worked part-time as a wrapping checker for the May, Co. department store and was a temporary mail carrier for the Post Office.\textsuperscript{7}

On December 7, 1941 at 7:55 am, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii was bombed by the Japanese. The attack galvanized the nation and sent Gene into full-time active Military duty. Within days, he received the telegram instructing him to join his squadron. Before he left, on June 20, 1942, in San Antonio, TX, he married Eileen and moved her into base housing.

In August, Gene completed his military flight training and received an officer’s commission as a second lieutenant. His young wife pinned the first wings on his uniform. That December, he was sent on assignment to Hawaii and Eileen moved back in with her parents in Los Angeles. Gene became a bomber pilot and went on to fly 48 missions between 1943 and 1946. He
experienced the very real ravages of war in the South Pacific. His experiences there solidified his antiwar stance, something that would become an underlying theme in his writing.  

On August 2, 1943, while piloting a B-17 bomber, Gene crashed on takeoff, killing two of his comrades. An official investigation deemed the crash an accident and left no black mark on his military record. Two days later, he was back in the air. After the crash, however, he flew only a few uneventful missions before the faulty B-17’s were phased out. His unit returned stateside in September, 1943. Ironically, Gene’s expertise would continue to be sought in investigations of military plane crashes.  

Following transfers to Fort Worth, Texas, Salt Lake City, Utah and several other bases, Gene completed his military service in late-1945. He was honorably discharged at the rank of Captain. Even before formally leaving the military, he was able to begin flying commercially for Pan American Airlines. He became a junior pilot, living in Long Island, New York, and later, in New Jersey. He flew what Pan Am referred to as the “long runs” – from New York to South Africa and Calcutta. After the carnage of the war, he welcomed this change but quickly found he was bored. He took advantage of his proximity to New York City to enroll in writing courses at Columbia University. Fate soon intervened to change the course of his life yet again.  

The Pan-Am Incident  

While co-piloting the Pan Am Clipper “Eclipse” on a transatlantic crossing, one of the plane’s four engines burst into flames, and ultimately three of its four engines failed. It made a stupendous crash landing with a significant death toll, but an equal number of survivors. The plane flew on three engines for several hours before crashing in the middle of the Syrian Desert. Gene, who had gone on break as co-pilot just before the first engine exploded, slept through the first two hours of the emergency, and had no idea what was happening around him. Many
passengers and most of the flight crew were killed in the fiery crash. Then Gene, now wide awake, took charge. He carried burning passengers out of the wreckage at great peril and was credited with saving many lives. He took over as senior officer without urging and masterfully led the evacuation and on-site triage. The experience had a profound effect on him, and quashed any desire he had to pursue piloting as his long-term career. Approximately nine months after returning from that fateful crash, his first child was born.\textsuperscript{10}

It was during his recuperation that a neighbor introduced Gene to his new toy, a black and white TV that had cost nearly $1,000. Gene was entranced. With all his sci-fi reading and his desire to become a writer, he saw that this could become the entertainment medium of the future. On May 15, 1948, Gene resigned from Pan Am (following one last close call in the air). He had had enough.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{Police Story}

Gene headed back to Los Angeles without proper planning. He assumed that since Hollywood was the Mecca of film, it would be where TV would grow. So, he packed up his young family and set out to become a TV writer.

To save money, Gene, Eileen and baby Darleen moved in with his parents in their tiny home in postwar Los Angeles. Gene parlayed his love of photography into a job with Tri-Vision Sales Corporation of Alhambra, but 3-D photography never caught on. Early in 1949, with no writing prospects in sight, he finally marched down to the LAPD headquarters and filled out an application. Once again, he was following in his father’s footsteps, but this time, he was determined to also pursue his writing. Ten days after graduation from the Police Academy, he was assigned to the traffic division as a rookie, just as his father had been.
So, Gene Roddenberry - former bomber pilot, genius, visionary and would-be television writer - earned his living for half of the 1950s standing at the intersection of Fifth and Broadway directing traffic. He never complained. His supervisors commended him regularly. In March of 1951, he submitted a form requesting permission to pursue outside employment. He was careful to categorize this work as “dignified;” he was asking to sell Amana freezers on the side.¹²

Gene’s interest in science fiction continued throughout this period. He was an avid reader and a constant filmgoer. And, he was keeping an eye on what was happening in television. Throughout the ‘50s, he noted that formats were being developed, especially in shows like Dragnet. For Gene, this meant his chance to write for TV had finally arrived.¹³

**Have Gun, Will Travel**

In 1955, Roddenberry left the Los Angeles Police Department to pursue writing full-time. At first, he was just a moonlighter, selling several stories to Dragnet and a few other programs, stories he had lived or heard from fellow cops. In April 1956, he sold his first script to E. Jack Neuman, writer-producer of the series West Point, a series about army cadets in training. Over the course of that year, Gene sold 10 more West Point scripts; one of which was a rewrite of a story by Sam Rolf, who was creating a new series called Have Gun, Will Travel (HGWT).

Eventually, Gene found real work, contributing 27 episodes to HGWT, the last one just before he met Norman Felton. Felton was a highly successful writer/producer who had purchased and used a single Roddenberry script for an episode of Dr. Kildare. The two had not met during the transaction.

Felton found Roddenberry’s story about an embittered army general who checked into Blair General Hospital so intriguing that he did something highly out of character. He sent Gene a
note of appreciation, paving the way for what would become a grand friendship. From 1959 to 1964, Gene went on to create four pilots for Screen Gems, but all of them were failures. Nearing 42 years of age, he felt his time was running out. He approached his friend Felton and told him he had an idea for a new series.14

After writing for nearly seven years, Gene had begun to see the value of being the creator of a show; so he and Felton planned to create a series that might make it into the fall schedule. Gene’s rough idea was sparked by the same character Felton had admired in his Dr. Kildare script, and ultimately, the pilot for The Lieutenant was written. The Ashley-Famous Talent Agency represented both Roddenberry and Felton, and thanks to some clever negotiating on their part, Felton was able to pitch The Lieutenant to MGM as a “free-ball,” which meant the studio would foot the entire bill for the pilot and then offer the series to all three networks. The creative strategy worked well, and on January 10, 1963, Roddenberry’s pilot script, “A Very Private Affair,” introduced the character of William T. (for Tiberius) Rice (portrayed by Gary Lockwood), a second lieutenant in the US Marine Corps. The plot of the episode turned out to be semi-autobiographical as it dealt with infidelity. Roddenberry had just embarked on a secret love affair with the young Majel Barrett. Nine years later, Gene would divorce Eileen and married Majel.15

After three screenings for three networks, it was NBC that committed to put The Lieutenant in its fall lineup. As written, NBC was very worried the series would be cost prohibitive. The always enterprising Felton decided he could gain the support of the US Marines and use their locations and equipment, thus making the series feasible. Unfortunately, the only caveat to using Marine facilities was that anything portraying the military as less than perfect would not be
 tolerated. This proved to be the death of Roddenberry’s first series. It was over in just one season.

In the summer of 1963, before the first episode of The Lieutenant had even aired, Roddenberry skipped out on a day of filming to attend a Dodgers baseball game with Alfred Knopf, nephew of the noted book publisher and a successful TV writer himself. Roddenberry told him he had an idea for another series. It would be set at the end of the 19th century on a dirigible. The enormous balloon would be filled with people of mixed races and they would travel from place to place each week, places no one had as yet discovered. He asked Knopf if he would write the pilot for him.\textsuperscript{16}

In later interviews, Knopf said there was no doubt in his mind that this conversation at the Dodger’s game was the impetus for Star Trek. Nearly six months later, in February of 1964, already knowing that The Lieutenant had no future, Roddenberry became a freelancer again. He approached Felton to talk seriously about his new series saying this time that it would be set in the future not the past, and on a space vehicle not a dirigible. His agent suggested that science fiction might sell now that all eyes were looking skyward. The US American Mercury space program appeared to be lagging behind that of the Soviet Union, and the stars were very much in the news.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Undertaking Trek}

After that initial meeting with Felton, Roddenberry went home and summarized his concept in a six-page outline, including brief character sketches of all the principals. After reading it, Felton, said: “You mean Wagon Train to the stars?” Felton didn’t like it at first though, believing it would be too expensive to produce. Gene didn’t give up. His talent agency was also the agent for Desilu Studios which had just come under the sole control of Lucille Ball following
her divorce from Desi Arnaz. As an incentive for her to continue to work on *The Lucy Show*, Ball was given the sum of $600,000 from the Desilu Development Fund to be used in any way she chose. In the first year, she commissioned *Mannix* and *Mission: Impossible*. Just a year later, Roddenberry was given the money to develop *Star Trek*.18

Desilu’s executive in charge of production at the time, Herb Solow, determined which Desilu projects would be pitched to the networks, and traditionally, CBS got first dibs on Desilu shows. According to Solow, Roddenberry’s treatment for *Star Trek* described an anthology series that introduced new characters every week, but Solow saw that as its fatal flaw. He came up with a remedy – a captain’s voiceover at the start of each show that would explain who, what and why, placing the crew immediately into each story. Roddenberry was lavishly appreciative of Solow’s input on the series, often calling him the most talented man he had ever worked with.19

*Star Trek* premiered in 1966 on NBC, but only after a rocky start. The original pilot was created for CBS, a two-hour episode called *The Cage*, starring Jeffrey Hunter as Captain Pike. Leonard Nimoy as Mr. Spock and Majel Barrett (as the first officer) were the only two permanent cast members who appeared in that original pilot. The network didn’t like it, and they especially disliked the character Roddenberry had created for his girlfriend, Majel Barrett. In mid-1965, Roddenberry had little hope of getting *Star Trek* on the air, and then NBC stepped up. The network commissioned a second pilot, something very rare in television at that time. In the second incarnation, Roddenberry wasn’t taking any chances. He changed the cast, retooled the outline and listened to every network criticism. Ultimately, he came up with three scripts for consideration – *The Women* (an episode that introduced popular space “huckster,” Harry Mudd), *Man Trap* (in which a salt-sucking alien assumed the appearance of Dr. McCoy’s ex-girlfriend), and *Where No Man Has Gone Before* (a compelling story of power and corruption involving
Kirk’s best friend from Star Fleet Academy who is accidentally infected with godlike powers).
Choosing the right story would make Star Trek a reality. The creator agonized.

Where No Man Has Gone Before was the winning script choice; the network loved it. The sole conception of creator/producer, Gene Rodenberry, Star Trek and its multicultural (and highly enlightened) crew encountered weekly adventures aboard the starship, USS Enterprise from 1966 to 1968 on NBC. The crew featured the handsome Captain, James T. Kirk, a Vulcan science officer with pointed ears named Spock, and a crusty ship’s doctor, Leonard McCoy. In the original series, the crew dealt with alien races, spacial anomalies and interplanetary conflicts. These were always resolved within the hour-long episode. Over the opening credits each week, Captain Kirk explained that the ship was on “a five-year mission to seek out new worlds and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man had gone before.”

That five-year mission was never realized, however, since Star Trek was cancelled after three seasons, supposedly due to low ratings. Originally, it was to be cancelled at the end of the second season, but intense fan pressure convinced NBC executives to grant a one-year reprieve. The ratings failed to climb high enough for NBC in the last season and the show suffered its fate a year later - despite a renewed letter-writing campaign by the now avid fans. Marketing personnel at the network complained to management that the series' cancellation was premature. New techniques for profiling demographics later demonstrated that Star Trek’s audience had been highly profitable for its advertisers. While this revelation came too late to resume production, Star Trek was far from over.

The original series did not simply fade away like so many other failed shows. Its loyal fans lobbied repeatedly for repeats of the original 79 episodes. The “magic number” to earn
syndication rights had always been (and still is) 100 episodes – a milestone Star Trek never hit. Much later, 80 episodes would actually air in syndication. NBC finally responded to the incessant prodding of fans by syndicating the original series despite lower number of episodes. Additionally, an animated Star Trek series was created and ran from 1973 to 1975.

Fans never ceased clamoring for more Star Trek, although it took the early success of science fiction films like Star Wars and Close Encounters of the Third Kind in the late 1970s to finally convince the executives at Paramount that there was enough interest to begin production of a film that they could possibly parlay into a franchise. As it turns out, this was a wise move. Star Trek: The Motion Picture grossed $82 million, even though everyone agreed it was not a great film. It still spawned a continuing series of feature films, seven of which featured the cast of the original series. Today, Paramount is in pre-production for the 12th Star Trek feature film.21

Trek films have taken loyal fans on adventures back in time (Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home), on an emotional journey including the death of a beloved character (Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn), and through the end of the longstanding Cold War between the Klingon Empire and The United Federation of Planets (Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country).

In 1986, Roddenberry and a team of new producers finally succeeded in creating the much anticipated second Star Trek television series, set 100 years farther in the future than the original. The original Star Trek was set 300 years in the future – in the year 2266 - while The Next Generation was set in 2364. The new embodiments of Star Trek enjoyed far greater commercial success than the original. Star Trek: The Next Generation aired in syndication for seven full seasons, featuring an entirely new crew but exploring space on the same mission in a new starship Enterprise.
In its second incarnation, *Star Trek’s* mission became more egalitarian, even changing the spoken verse over the opening credits calling for the Enterprise “to boldly go where no one has gone before.” The crew was even more enlightened but the challenges of space remained the same. On a weekly basis, the crew faced alien races, spacial anomalies and interplanetary conflict. The main difference between the two series was the characterization of the ship’s captains. Kirk was known for his impulsivity, his way with the ladies, and a heroic tendency to shoot first and ask questions later. Picard, on the other hand, was the ultimate diplomat, negotiating his way out of danger whenever possible. Both shows were equally popular with the core Trek audience.

*The Next Generation* spawned the seven-year syndicated run of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, which in turn gave birth to the five-year run of *Star Trek: Voyager*. After a production break of several years, the last of the *Star Trek* TV series - *Enterprise* – enjoyed a five-year run. As the internal developmental history linked each subsequent *Star Trek* incarnation, the series evolved and changed. The fan base did not, however; it just kept growing.\(^22\)

**The Fans**

Much like an Enterprise landing party stumbling upon a cache of pure dilithium crystals or Cyrano Jones finding out the Tribbles didn’t really eat all of the quadro-triticale, fans have expressed a sheer joy in all things *Star Trek* – almost from the beginning.

America was moving down a crooked path in the 1960s. People were busy dealing with personal dilemmas and the hassles of everyday life, but the world had some pretty big problems to deal with. And, suddenly, there was *Star Trek*. It was that thrill of first contact with an alien race and those who discovered it that made people fall in love with this TV series – and an
ideology. From MDs to MPs, housewives to children, NASA scientists to the average Joe, everyone was represented among the *Star Trek* fandom.\textsuperscript{23}

You’ve heard them called many things from Trekkies to Trekkers to just plain “crazy.” Mostly, they are just people who love *Star Trek*. At its core, America is a very optimistic country. In all its forms, *Star Trek* painted a picture for viewers of a future universe where their optimism was well founded, where it had already overcome all the petty differences that plagued society. Furthermore, it depicted a future where earth and space were fun places to live.

**The Birth of the “Trekkie”**

Three years after it cancelled *Star Trek*, NBC admitted it had made a mistake. This confession is attributed solely to the efforts of the show’s fans. They never stopped writing letters and calling. It took just under three years to convince NBC to syndicate reruns of the original series which continue to air on cable today - 43 years after the original show debuted. In 1971, Paramount began to negotiate seriously with Roddenberry for a new live-action revival of the series, although it was many years before *Star Trek: The Next Generation* would air.

Meanwhile, jubilation had started to spread among the show’s fans. With the re-runs, the fan base took on a life of its own, a life far removed from Roddenberry’s own efforts to revive *Star Trek*. *Star Trek* fans had found each other. Fans like teenagers Phil Sneed and Cheri Daw who got involved with Trek right up to the tips of their rubber Spock ears. In the span of just three months, the 16-year-old duo started the first fanzine, completed their own *Star Trek* novel and started the first of many *Star Trek* fan clubs.

What was truly remarkable about these young *Star Trek* fans was that they were not unique. *Star Trek* fans were not just teenagers but the younger fans were inextricably linked to the middle-aged housewives, married couples, laborers and professors. Sneed and Daw later
founded Star Publishing, the first publishing company devoted entirely to *Star Trek* literature. In this move, they unleashed the creative forces of hundreds of fantasy writers who developed a multi-million dollar industry in *Star Trek* fiction.

Hundreds of *Star Trek* authors published with Star throughout the 1970s while more and more fans continued to build new relationships with *Star Trek* based on the animated cartoon series and reruns of the original episodes. The momentum that began with a simple letter-writing campaign kept this series on the air for a third season (1968), got it into syndication, and then gave it a new life in films.

Science fiction conventions had been around for years before *Star Trek*, but they were never the same after *Trek* fans joined in. Initially, the *Trek* fans were barely tolerated at traditional sci-fi events. Then, two early organizers, Elyse Pines and Joan Windham, decided they would gather a couple hundred acolytes in one location and celebrate *Star Trek* far from the sneers and jeers of all the other sci-fi aficionados. What began as a meeting in a living room grew into the “Con” that changed fan conventions forever. The inaugural event took place in a Manhattan convention center in January 1972, and featured keynote speakers Gene Roddenberry and famed science fiction writer, Isaac Asimov.

At a pre-convention talk designed to simply measure fan enthusiasm, event organizers were overwhelmed when a room they rented to hold 300 people was jammed with 750 actual attendees. It became clear then that the pent-up demand for *Star Trek* was huge and so was its first major event. The first *Star Trek* “Con” also garnered a front-page headline in the *New York Times*. *TV Guide* and WABC requested entry and WCBS News later called expressing anger that it was not on the original guest list.
The Roddenberry’s, Gene and Majel, attended the event and supplied what is now a well-known “blooper” reel, something that had not been seen from the TV industry before. Thousands in attendance were also treated to the first public screening of the never-before-aired original Star Trek pilot, “The Cage.”

Even NASA got in on the act, supplying a gigantic replica of the Lunar Module for display in the Con exhibit hall. When Gene and Majel tried to enter the exhibit area the first day, a young volunteer stopped them at the door and asked to see their badges, explaining that only registered attendees and those affiliated with Star Trek were allowed to enter. Roddenberry replied, “Young man, I AM Star Trek,” and marched right by.

Even Roddenberry was stunned by the turnout at that first Star Trek convention. He was overheard repeating throughout the day, “I just can’t believe it, all these great people coming here to honor Star Trek.” Then, the ABC and CBS television crews showed up and began filming. Chaos reigned. At one point, both Roddenberry and Asimov had to be secreted away to private rooms for interviews, as the convention hall was overcapacity in a joyous bedlam. 24

Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations

Gene and Majel were mobbed everywhere they went. Speeches were made and scientific talks given. Finally, at one point during the convention, Gene opened the floor to questions.

‘What does the “T” in James T. Kirk stand for?’ A fan shouted. The room was silent. This topic had been hotly debated among fans for years and speculation was rife. The most popular theory was that the “T” stood for “Tomcat” to embody Captain Kirk’s love of the ladies. Gene answered, “It stands for Tiberius.” Even William Shatner did not know before that moment that this was his character’s middle name. 25
The first memberships to the official *Star Trek* fan club were sold at the Con. In the years that followed, membership grew to include millions of people all around the globe. The Con would also serve as a guide for hundreds and then thousands of events over more than four decades. The basic event format included trivia contests, exhibits, vendors selling memorabilia and artwork, autograph signing sessions and a “Costume Call.” The wheels were in motion.

On the last day of the first Con, the entire organizing committee was presented with a banner made by attendees. It bore over 1,000 signatures and carried a simple message of thanks. To the committee members, it represented love. Love was what *Star Trek* conventions were made of and love was ultimately what *Star Trek* was all about – love of self and love of our fellow man. *Star Trek* fans had discovered that loving a show or an ideology was nothing to be ashamed of. The rest of the *Star Trek* story is, as they say, history.26

It was after that first wildly successful *Star Trek* event in New York that people really noticed what was happening with *Star Trek*. Followed closely by intense coverage in *TV Guide*, the convention sparked the growth of the official *Star Trek* Club. Before then, there had been no single, unified organization.

In its infancy, *Star Trek* was caught traveling at warp speed in the high-pressure television world. Its proper audience didn’t have time to find it before it was gone, but the need of it persisted. The need grew so strong that thousands of fans gathered together and fought for a TV series, and they did so long before the Internet or email. They found one another; they met; they wrote millions of letters and they never stopped asking for new programming.

**Tribbles, Tri-corders and TV Icons**

Creation Entertainment was founded in 1971, by Gary Berman and Adam Malin, two more teenage fans from New York. Today, Creation Entertainment continues its 37-year tradition of
producing conventions for fans of all genres of television and film. It has been producing *Star Trek* conventions for more than four decades in cities all over North America and Great Britain.

At the height of *Star Trek*'s new popularity in the early to mid '90s, Creation was organizing 110 conventions a year, sometimes three in a single weekend. They have a long licensing history with Paramount and Viacom Consumer Products, and together these companies have sold hundreds of millions of dollars in official *Star Trek* merchandise. More recently, they began holding an annual “Official *Star Trek* Convention,” as their main event in Las Vegas. Fifteen thousand people bought tickets to the initial Las Vegas convention in 2005.

A 40th anniversary convention was held in Las Vegas, August 17-20, 2006. This was also a stop on the international tour of the *40 Years of Star Trek: The Collection* exhibition. This year, The History Channel produced a *Star Trek* documentary titled, *Star Trek: Beyond the Final Frontier*, and Paramount broke box office records with the release of its newest movie, *Star Trek*, in June of 2009.

The only official *Star Trek* website today is [startrek.com](http://startrek.com), although there are literally thousands of other *Star Trek* and Trek-related sites. [TrekWeb.com](http://trekweb.com) is a popular one, believed by many fans to be one of the more reliable and prestigious sites because of its connection to Paramount Pictures, the production company which owns all *Star Trek* properties today.²⁸

**Roddenberry Realized**

Across all the series and films, the stories of *Star Trek* stressed teamwork and cooperation, something America was ready for in the sixties and which it has not yet tired of. The franchise celebrated America’s presence in the universe. It lived at a time when science was feared; in *Star Trek*, the benefits of technology were celebrated. That so many intelligent Americans are still devoted fans speaks strongly to an underlying belief in the application of science to achieve
“belongingness,” the ultimate of human needs. Roddenberry explored the classic oppositions between individual and society, reason and emotion, common sense and technology, humans and aliens…and all of these common struggles were consistently and triumphantly reconciled in the world of Star Trek. 29

He was born before Jolson sang or Garbo talked, and his first films were the silent ones he saw on his mother’s lap. In Star Trek, Gene Roddenberry primarily held up a mirror so that we could examine ourselves. He was a born storyteller, a human being with the ability to excite both our hearts and minds with the power of his words and images. His creative vision spawned a fan phenomenon that took hold via the US Postal Service and spread wildly as technology caught up to Trek, adding websites, accessible collectibles, comics, films, video games and more television.

Roddenberry received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1985, the first ever awarded to a TV writer-producer. Trekkies all over the world have wondered when the name Roddenberry would join the ranks of television’s immortals in the Television Hall of Fame by the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, and they are about to see that dream realized. The Hall of Fame Gala and Induction Ceremony scheduled for January 20, 2010, at the Beverly Hills Hotel, will include Gene Roddenberry as an inductee.30

On all his sets and in some fan circles, Roddenberry was often referred to as “The Great Bird of the Galaxy.”31 In January of 1975, when contemplating the question, “What is the measure of a Star Trek fan?” the Great Bird himself wrote: “Of thousands of them I have met over the years – people of widely varied ages, occupations and backgrounds – one unusual quality seems to have been shared by all…The typical Star Trek fan is invariably a remarkably gentle human being, gentle as in the lovely but too often archaic concept of gentleman and
gentlewoman – the kind of gentleness which comes out of an affection for this universe in general and for life in particular. It is this capacity for affection which led the *Star Trek* fans to approve and appreciate our view that humankind is not best characterized as evil – as the visionless would have us believe– but, rather, that its past has been a lusty infant’s period of learning by trial and error…[the child] is moving toward a proud adulthood, of course. In time, perhaps even beyond that. The fans and I dream the same dreams about such things. That is our bond.” 32

It is this author’s hope that Roddenberry’s vision of our future can be sustained. As long as fans continue to cherish the ideals of *Star Trek*, perhaps we can all *live long and prosper*. 
Reference Notes


9) Fern, The Last Conversation, 82.

10) Alexander, Star Trek Creator, 82-84.


20) Lichtenburg, Marshak and Winston; *Star Trek Lives!*, 207-220.


23) Lichtenburg, Marshak and Winston; *Star Trek Lives!*, 10.


29) Simon; *Trash Culture, Popular Culture and the Great Tradition*.

30) [www.creationent.com](http://www.creationent.com).


32) Lichtenburg, Marshak and Winston; *Star Trek Lives!*, from the Foreword.

**Additional Resources**


Appendix:

Credits (Roddenberry):

Star Trek 2009, Film
Star Trek: Nemesis 2002, Film
America Loves... Star Trek 2001, TV
Enterprise 2001-2005, TV Series, Creator
Gene Roddenberry's Andromeda, 2000-2005, TV Series
Muppets from Space 1999, TV Special
Star Trek: Insurrection 1998, Film
Gene Roddenberry's "Earth: Final Conflict" 1997, TV - Creator, Writer
Star Trek: First Contact 1996, Film
Star Trek: Voyager 1995, TV Series, Screenplay
Star Trek: Generations 1994, Film
Star Trek: Deep Space Nine 1993, TV Series
Star Trek VI: the Undiscovered Country 1991, Film
The Star Trek 25th Anniversary Special 1991, TV - Actor, Executive Producer
Star Trek V: The Final Frontier 1989, Film
Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home 1986, Film
Star Trek III: The Search for Spock 1984, Film
Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan 1982, Film
Star Trek: The Motion Picture 1979, Film
Spectre, 1977, TV Pilot
Planet Earth, 1974, TV Movie
The Questor Tapes 1974, TV Series
Genesis II 1973, TV Pilot
Pretty Maids All in a Row 1971, Producer/Writer, Film
Have Gun -- Will Travel 1957, TV, Writer
Naked City 1956, TV, Writer

Other credits: 1955 – 1961 The Lieutenant (Creator/producer), The Fantasy Film World of George Pal (Film-Actor, Assistant Director), Dragnet (writer-10 episodes).
Grade:

Thomas

This is obviously something you have enjoyed for most of your life, and that shows in the paper. The first 8 pages could be compressed somewhat. One challenge in writing history is deciding how much context to include, especially if you encounter some really interesting back stories. But you have to remain focused on the central theme or research questions. And if you have to edit stuff out that you really like, you have an excuse to write a second essay. You did a copious amount of reading for this. I didn’t see any reference to Jean Lorrah and wondered if she told you anything worth quoting. You can send this to the Science Fiction and Fantasy interest section of the Popular Culture Association if you want to go to the conference in St. Louis next Spring. Details are in the Links section of the Blackboard site.

The presentation was well-documented, but it ran long and you kept getting ahead of the slides. One more run-through would help.

Paper 290/300  Presentation 90/100  Total 380/400

Bob Lochte. Professor and Chair

Department of Journalism and Mass Communications

114 Wilson Hall

Murray State University

Murray KY 42071

Phone 270 809 3172

Fax 270 809 2390
E mail bob.lochte@murraystate.edu

Website http://murraystate.edu/jmc

Often the surest way to convey misinformation is to tell the strict truth. – Mark Twain