

TEASE

CLIP: GET SMART

BARBARA FELDON

The moment that he would step up to his marks and I would, then there was a rapport between Max and 99. // It was like the perfect relationship.

ERIC MCCORMACK

My first impulse as a future actor was, "I want to do that. I want to do a sitcom. I want to be funny like Don."

BERNIE KOPELL/BUCK HENRY

The voice alone keeps something going. You know, people don't forget it.

DON ADAMS

(cell phone rings) Excuse me, my rear end is ringing. Somebody take this and tell them I'm not home.

CLIP:

TITLE: DON ADAMS: WOULD YOU BELIEVE...

ACT ONE

CLIP: GET SMART

NARRATOR

**Long before Austin Powers was crowned
International Man of Mystery...**

And before Leslie Nielsen "Spied Hard"...

**There was Don Adams, otherwise known as
Secret Agent 86, otherwise known as
Maxwell Smart.**

CLIP:

ERIC MCCORMACK (1/1)

Icons are icons for a reason, and he's
iconic // because he dared to create a
character that was absolutely unique.

NARRATOR

**Don Adams worked many long years for
his so-called "overnight" success - and
then he self-destructed because he
didn't feel he deserved it.**

DON ADAMS (3/3)

I was famous, rich, everything that you
could dream of or want in your life.
And then I screwed it up.

BARBARA FELDON (1/2)

There was a much bigger human being
than one would suppose seeing Maxwell
Smart.

NARRATOR

**Dramatic TV shows like "The Man From
UNCLE" and "The Prisoner" took the
business of spying very seriously.**

**But sooner or later, someone was bound
to start mining the subject for comedy.**

Enter Don Adams as Maxwell Smart.

CLIP:

ERIC MCCORMACK (1/1)

That was really the first // kind of
send-up of that genre. // It was
almost sacrilegious.

BERNIE KOPELL (1/2)

Get Smart was a satire. You don't have
too many satires that sustain a long
life. // And here we are in 2004,
it's on // and it's still funny, which
is kind of amazing.

ERIC MCCORMACK (1/1)

Don wasn't just sort of hired to play
this part and said his lines and went
home. I mean he was someone that really
helped to create that show and create
that character and was involved in a
daily basis in keeping it great.// You
sensed that it was personal for him.

CLIP:

NARRATOR

**Don Adams did have a personal stake in
keeping "Get Smart" on top--after all,
the hit series represented his enormous
triumph over a lifetime of difficulty.**

**He was born Donald James Yarmy on April
13, 1926, in New York City, to a couple
whose marriage started out with major
obstacles.**

LEE WOLFBERG (1/2)

Mother was a very strong Catholic,
apparently. Father was Jewish. That in
itself is enough to screw up everybody.

DOROTHY FERRANTE (1/2)

Both of their parents disowned them,
and his father was going to go to
medical school and then never did go as
a result, which is kind of a shame.

NARRATOR

**When Don was three, the Great
Depression swept the country. His
parents had a tough time just making
ends meet.**

DON ADAMS (1/32)

I had a younger brother, an older sister. // We didn't eat, it was a very hard time. // I knew that even to get a crust of bread was a big thing.

STACY ADAMS (1/1)

They were of modest means, in a, you know, a fifth floor walk-up on the west side of New York, which at that time was not the West Side of New York that it is now, and my grandfather worked as a soda jerk in a drug store.

DON ADAMS (1/3)

My mother thought my father was a millionaire. And (laughs) she spent money like she thought he was a millionaire.

STACY ADAMS (1/1)

My grandmother // was the matriarch, very strong woman, matriarch of the family. And my father was her favorite. She adored him.

NARRATOR

In the emotional contest between his father and mother, Don clearly favored his mother.

DON ADAMS (1/3)

I was very close to my mother. // My father was very lenient, very permissive, very laid back. My mother was a tiger. She was tough. And we didn't get away with anything with her. And she was a great lady. // I hardly ever saw my father. Get up at six o'clock in morning, eat breakfast, go to work, come back at six o'clock at night, read the newspaper, eat dinner and go to bed. "Hi there" and once in awhile he'd take me to the ball game.

NARRATOR

There was one lesson Don did learn from his father: that gambling was a handy escape from the harshness of daily life.

LEE WOLFBERG (1/2)

His father was a degenerate horse player.// He was a big track goer, the father.

DOROTHY FERRANTE (1/2)

They went to the racetrack a lot, either as a family or individually. // He was practically raised at the track.

NARRATOR

For young Don, gambling was far more thrilling than boring old schoolwork.

When he wasn't betting the horses with dad, he was hanging around with other boys who hated school.

LEE WOLFBERG (1/2)

They were street kids, I remember that. And they were all, they were gamblers. They were young, hustling kid gamblers going to the track.

NARRATOR

There was another marvelous escape from tough times.

Like millions of other Depression-era Americans, Don was seduced by the glamour and magic of the silver screen.

DOROTHY FERRANTE (1/2)

Just from the day, I think, that he was born, he was, he loved movies. And to this day, he can quote dialogue from entire movies.

DON ADAMS (1/3)

I was a terrible student; I never went to school.// I'd go to 42nd Street and go to the movies and stay in the movie house all day long. My truant officer would know where to find me. I was closer to my truant officer than I was to my father.

NARRATOR

Money was tight and his father ignored him, but in Don's fantasy world of the movies, he could look up to cool heroes like Ronald Coleman and John Wayne and Humphrey Bogart.

HUGH HEFNER (1/1)

He grew up at the movies // and saw all these wonderful films from the 1930s and got very good at doing the voices.

DON ADAMS (2/3)

I did Bogart. I did Cagney. (impression) I did a pretty good Cagney. // What do you know what do say kid? Eeh (inaudible). Mmm-mmm.

STACY ADAMS (1/1)

He wanted to be an actor. He did not want to be a comedian. He wanted to be a serious actor.

DON ADAMS (1/3)

After eighth grade I went to high school, D. Wood Clinton High School in New York, and the first week I saw (a) word called geometry and trigonometry and I never went back. I got a job in a theatre as an usher for thirteen dollars a week.

STACY ADAMS (1/1)

If you talk to him now, he's an extremely intelligent man, and that's all self-education. He reads nonstop. He's a history buff. He's a movie buff.

NARRATOR

Movies were pure enchantment, and they gave Don a future to dream about.

But the young drop-out was about to get a harrowing lesson in real life.

In December 1941, when he was sixteen, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

His head filled with romantic images from too many John Wayne movies, Don lied about his age in order to enlist in the Marine Corps.

DON ADAMS (2/3)

I'm very proud that I was able to get through boot camp, which is one of the toughest things that anybody can go through because they try to break you. They try to break your spirit. They try to break your body. They try to break your mind. And uh if they break you you're out. And if you last and have the will power to see it through you have a certain pride in that.

NARRATOR

After surviving boot camp, Don was assigned to the Fleet Marine Force as part of an assault troop—the first guys to land, the first to be blown to bits.

His unit was shipped to Guadalcanal.

STACY ADAMS (1/1)

He was on the graveyard shift, where he was responsible for taking care of the dead bodies, which was // very traumatic for him. And then he got sick with malaria, black water fever, and he was put on a death watch // in a hospital in New Zealand.

DOROTHY FERRANTE (1/2)

They really expected him to die. And // he remembers thinking, "I am not going to die." And he said he prayed over and over and over, like a mantra, and then on the sixth day he rallied. And — and, uh, defied all odds, because it's a very fatal disease.

NARRATOR

In December 1945, Don returned to New York City with an honorable discharge.

He had left his John Wayne fantasies far behind in the Pacific.

DON ADAMS (2/3)

I realized that I would never be young again. And...I buried a lot of good friends.

NARRATOR

Many returning vets couldn't wait to get married, have kids and settle down to some kind of normalcy.

But Don just felt adrift.

Uncertain what direction to take, still harboring fantasies of becoming an actor, Don left the wintry climes of New York City and thumbed his way down to Miami.

DON ADAMS (2/3)

I just bummed around and slept in hotel lobbies and then I met a friend of mine who did impressions and I did impressions. // That was Jay Storch, Larry Storch's brother, Larry Storch from *F-Troop*. // And we said, "Let's put our impressions together and do an act."

NARRATOR

Billing themselves as "The Young Brothers," Don and Jay proceeded to take show biz by storm...starting at the bottom.

LEE WOLFBERG (2/2)

If you could work a strip club, you could work anywhere. They're not waiting for you to come out and do your 12 minutes; they're waiting for the girls. So it's tough. But that's how comics had to work.

DON ADAMS (2/3)

Oh we played in the worst places imaginable. // We played in one place in Biloxi, Mississippi. And women were nursing their children in the front rows. There was a dog act that did stuff all over the stage. We followed the dog act.

NARRATOR

Don put up with all kinds of misery – just to be up on a stage, hoping to make people laugh.

LEE WOLFBERG (1/2)

Wanted to be accepted. Absolutely. All comics are that way. They want to be accepted, every one of them. I mean, you – it's not normal to get up and try to be funny. It's just not normal. So in order to do that, you're – you bet they're saying – every comic, they're saying, "Love me."

NARRATOR

Before long Don was saying, "Love me" to a singer named Adele Enfantis, who was working in a Miami nightclub.

Adele wanted to get married.

Don didn't.

But his romantic nature got in the way of his better judgment.

DON ADAMS (2/3)

We met, we fell in love, we got married and we had four kids. Boom! // I didn't know why I was getting married. I didn't have any money. I didn't have a job. Her whole family were there and I had to borrow ten bucks from her brother to pay the minister. And I didn't want to get married. I didn't know what I was doing there. And so the minister said, "This is no laugh, laughing matter, this is a marriage." And I said, "I'm not laughing, I'm crying and laughing. I'm hysterical."

NARRATOR

Then came their first daughter, Christina Angela, in 19___. The birth just heightened Don's sense of claustrophobia.

DON ADAMS (2/3)

My wife was in her ninth month, and me and two of my friends were playing cards. And she said, "I think the baby is coming." And we said, "Wait a minute, we have to finish this hand." She said, "Well I'm driving to the hospital." I says, "Well, can't you wait until we finish this hand?" (laughs) So it's a terrible thing to say but, you know. We were young.

LEE WOLFBERG (1/2)

They had a strange, strange marriage. // It was a fiery marriage, to say the least.

NARRATOR

Three daughters later, Don felt like he was sinking in quicksand.

His show business dream just kept getting further and further out of reach—and Adele had had enough of his acting out.

DON ADAMS (2/3)

I wasn't working, I was gambling. I had no job and she got fed up and kicked me out of the house. // I didn't know what I was doing, where I was going. My life was half over with. I had accomplished nothing. Done nothing but work in strip joints.

NARRATOR

Don moved in with a friend, and his beloved mother came to visit from New York. She had some sage words of advice.

DON ADAMS (2/3)

She said, "Well, you know, you've got to make up your mind now because you're almost thirty. And life goes by very fast. And you're a long time in the ground. So you either have to hurt yourself or the people you love but you have to do it now." She died two days later.

DOROTHY FERRANTE (1/2)
He adored her. And when she died, it
was devastating.

NARRATOR
Devastating...and galvanizing.

**Don Adams was twenty-eight years old
when he lost the woman closest to him.**

**His mother's last words haunted him.
He had to make a choice.**

**Would he continue the penny ante
existence with the wife and children he
felt trapped by?**

**Or take his chances on the stardom he
had craved since he was a child?**

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

NARRATOR

In 1954, Donald James Yarmy returned to his native New York City for his beloved mother's funeral.

Devastated by her death and motivated by her final words, Don decided to separate from his first wife, Adele, and pursue his show-business dreams.

In New York, he heard that "Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts"—the "American Idol" of its day—was holding auditions.

LEONARD STERN (1/2)

In New York, the winners usually were immediately booked on variety shows. Or into nightclubs.

NARRATOR

At twenty-eight, Don felt as though he needed a lucky break.

He was absolutely determined to get onto "Arthur Godfrey."

Even though auditions were booked three months in advance, he managed to talk his way into the line.

DON ADAMS (2/3)

I was in the end of the line. // My real name is Donald James Yarmy. And I said, "It's going to take me forever to get to the top of the line." // So I said, "My name is Adams," and I got up to the front. He said, "We don't have any Don Adams." I said, "You have to!" I said, "I hitch-hiked all the way up here from Florida." // He said, "Okay we need an impressionist." So he put me on and I won the show.

NARRATOR

Don's gamble paid off—big time.

DON ADAMS (2/3)

It got me a job in some of the better east side clubs in New York. Then it got me on *The Steve Allen Show*. Then it got me *The Jack Parr Show*. And then it got me on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and *Perry Como Show* and so on and so on and so forth. So I moved up from being a stand-up comic in a strip joint to being a stand-up comic on television.

CLIP:

NARRATOR

The new street creds gave Don the clout to go back on the club circuit too – but this time, he was headlining at A-list venues like the Cloisters in Chicago.

There, he befriended a young publisher named Hugh Hefner, who was scandalizing the nation with a shocking new men's magazine called Playboy. Hef immediately picked up on the messiness of Don's love life.

HUGH HEFNER (1/1)

Don and I have been close enough so that I've seen the foolishness of some of his personal life. When I first met him, he was married but madly in love with what became his second wife.

NARRATOR

The new object of Don's affection was a 20-year-old former Rockette named Dorothy Bracken, who worked as a June Taylor Dancer on "The Jackie Gleason Show."

DOROTHY FERRANTE (1/2)

The first time I met Don was in New York, in the Adirondack Mountains, and summer stock in a company called Green Mansions.

DON ADAMS (3/3)

// She happened to be going with Hugh O'Brien who had a hit television show, *Wyatt Earp* - they were engaged.

DOROTHY FERRANTE (1/2)

We were rehearsing a number called "Devil's Child" in the big ballroom, and here he comes on his knees doing a knee slide, and he ends up at my feet in this position, and I said, "I beg your pardon?" // I taught him how to dance. And we would ballroom dance. And it was cute because I'd sort of dance and twirl around him and he'd just sort of do basic steps, but nobody ever really noticed. He loved that. And I did, too.

DON ADAMS (3/3)

And we fell in love and Wyatt Earp came in from the coast to see his fiancée and he saw her and I and he said, "What is it with you and that comic?" And she told him, she said, "Well we're in love." So he went back to the coast and Dorothy and I got married.

NARRATOR

This time, Don impetuously wanted to get married—but couldn't.

'Twas still the little matter of Don's existing marriage to Adele.

DON ADAMS (3/3)

Adele came up and I told her, I said, "I'm in love with a girl dancer." And I said, "And I want a divorce." And it took her three years to get a divorce.

NARRATOR

Dorothy and Don pursued their careers and saw one another as often as possible - but it wasn't often enough for Mr. Romantic.

LEE WOLFBERG (1/2)

He was not used to being on the road and it is a lonely experience. // This guy was a one-woman man right from the kick.

DOROTHY FERRANTE (1/2)

He had everything. // Tenderness, sensitivity, funny. But at the right times. //(2/2) The most unbelievably romantic man--hung up on romance--that I've ever known. Poet--writes magnificent poetry, has a really beautiful heart, and, has a gift for expressing it.

NARRATOR

In 1960, Dorothy and Don were finally wed.

Dorothy quickly discovered that her new husband had some private demons, courtesy of World War II.

DOROTHY FERRANTE (1/2)

On our honeymoon, we went to Acapulco, and the first time we were in Mexico City, and he woke up screaming. And that always will always stick in my memory, and that was because he had been dreaming or had some sort of nightmare about – but he would not – did not like to talk about it. It was a very painful subject for him.

NARRATOR

Don was on safer emotional ground when he was on stage performing comedy, where he could be in control and make people laugh.

By then, Don had partnered with a comedian and writer named Bill Dana, who was known to audiences as "Jose Jimenez" on "The Steve Allen Show."

It was a match made in heaven.

DON ADAMS (1/3)

The "would you believe" is something that Bill Dana and I wrote. // You know when you see those pictures about the British in India. They're always the same. // I would say, the lieutenant with Muhammed Khan says, "Muhammed Khan," he says, "Muhammed Khan you'll never get away with this Muhammed Khan." And he said, "Why not" and he said, "Because at this very moment the Seventh British Cavalry is on its way." And he'd say, "I find that hard to believe." "Would you believe the Sixth British Cavalry?" And he said no. I said, "How about a donkey with Gunga Din on it?"

DOROTHY FERRANTE (1/2)

Bill and Don were best friends, and they wrote – most of Don's material, they wrote together.

DON ADAMS (2/3)

I had seen "The Thin Man," which was a movie that they made a series out of, William Powell and Myrna Loy. And William Powell had this odd way of talking. "Laura? Where's Laura? Estha? Where's Estha?"

CLIP: THE THIN MAN trailer (or trailer for one of sequels)

DON ADAMS (2/3)

So I took that and exaggerated it into this voice that became my identification voice. // "There's your man inspector. A liar, a cheat, a thief, a blackmailer and a homicidal maniac. But he's my son and I'm proud of him."

CLIP: Don routine with "The Voice"

DON ADAMS (2/3)

Bill said to me, "You gotta use that voice." I said, "I hate that voice." I said, "It's like fingernails on a blackboard." He said, "You don't understand that voice is funny." He said, "You can take mediocre material and make it funny with that voice." And he was right.

NARRATOR

In 1963 Dana recruited his friend to play bumbling house detective Byron Glick on the new "Bill Dana Show." He insisted Don employ "The Voice."

JAY SANDRICH (1/1)

I just couldn't stop laughing at him. And the more time you spent around Don the more you start talking like (him)—I mean everybody did.

NARRATOR

That same year, Don also gave "The Voice" to a cartoon penguin, Tennessee Tuxedo.

DON ADAMS (3/3)

The unbelievable part is that today, and that must have been done forty years ago, today people come up and tell me about Tennessee Tuxedo. It's the voice. "Tennessee Tuxedo will not fail. All right Chumley, let's go see Mr. Whoopee."

NARRATOR

To Don's disappointment, "The Bill Dana Show" was cancelled in 1965.

Don still wasn't quite the star he'd dreamed of becoming...and he was on the cusp of forty.

Would his big show-biz gamble fail to pay off?

Or did he have one more hand left to play?

A&E BIOGRAPHY: DON ADAMS
2/23/04

Writer: DIANA RICO

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

CLIP: THUNDERBALL trailer – Bond ballyhoo

NARRATOR

1965. The height of the Cold War.

Americans hated Communists, Communists loathed Americans, and international relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union couldn't have been more frigid.

The tension between the two superpowers was reflected in a spate of spy versus spy stories in popular culture.

The heroes and heroines *du jour* were secret agents—those suave, mysterious, danger-seeking fantasy figures who could be found lurking everywhere from movies and TV shows to lunch boxes and cereal packages.

BARBARA FELDON (1/2)

In the early '60s, the spy craze erupted.

ERIC MCCORMACK (1/1)

The Red scare and the cold war was such a huge topic.

BARBARA FELDON (1/2)

We were all, as citizens, suddenly aware that // there was this other world operating in the dark sort of like dark matter. // And there's something very kind of spooky about that I think and also intriguing.

DON ADAMS (1/3)

"James Bond" exploded on the scene. And like everything in television, when something is a hit, everybody goes and tries to do something that's like it. So immediately after "James Bond" came *I Spy*, //and all those others.

NARRATOR

"The Man From UNCLE," "Honey West," "The Avengers" -- television was filled with international men and women of mystery.

But no one had yet tried to build a TV comedy around spies...until a producer named Leonard Stern came along. Leonard had written for "The Honeymooners" and written and directed "The Steve Allen Show."

LEONARD STERN (1/2)

Dan Melnick // and David Susskind and I were partners in Talent Associates, and Dan had the idea that a spoof on James Bond would work, // and he got hold of Mel Brooks and Buck Henry.

NARRATOR

Mel Brooks and Buck Henry had cut their teeth writing satire for such TV comedians as Sid Caesar and Steve Allen.

They were logical choices to create a world where rival government agencies were called CONTROL and KAOS, and an utterly dedicated but doltish spy was named Maxwell Smart.

LEONARD STERN (1/2)

They did the original *Get Smart* script for ABC. // And the script was rejected. Uh, ABC felt it needed work. // So we were without a connection, and we learned that NBC was looking for a show for Don Adams, who they had under contract. This was past the pilot season. It was almost an impossible hope. Chances of it materializing were insignificant.

NARRATOR

But then, betting on long odds was what Don Adams was all about.

DON ADAMS (1/3)

NBC called me about a stupid secret agent uh and I said and they said they wanted to do a pilot. And I said well it's late in the pilot season and // I said, "Who wrote it?" They said Buck Henry and Mel Brooks. I said, "I'll do it." They said do you want to see the script? I said no.

BUCK HENRY

At the time we were writing the pilot, we had not got Don Adams in mind. // Now, of course, //I can't imagine it without Don. He is Maxwell Smart.

NARRATOR

Once Don was cast as Smart—AKA Agent 86—the producers needed to find the right foil to play Max's partner-in-fighting-crime, Agent 99.

The producers showed Don a TV clip of a young actress named Barbara Feldon.

CLIP: BARBARA FELDON COMMERCIAL

DON ADAMS (1/3)

I said, "My god she's fantastic! // Look at those eyes, those bedroom eyes! And she's gorgeous and she speaks great and she's got this tremendous kind of pre—" I said, "Is there anyway that we can get her?" And Buck Henry says, "We already have her. We just wanted..." So I started to walk out of the screening room and they said don't you want to see some more?" I said "No, no, no. // I fall in love too easily and I'm a married man."

BARBARA FELDON (1/2)

It was so easy. That's the strange thing. We didn't grope for that relationship. Don came in with Max intact. 99 just had to respond to that already solidified Max. And I think right away that chemistry locked in.

NARRATOR

Veteran character actor Edward Platt was cast in the role of 86 and 99's perpetually exasperated Chief.

BARBARA FELDON (1/2)

I think the chemistry between Don and Ed Platt depended on Ed being so completely grounded. He was like the mooring. And then Don could be as extreme in //Max's absurd way as he wanted to be.

NARRATOR

Don endowed Max with "The Voice" he had developed with his friend Bill Dana's encouragement.

As for the writers, they went to town.

Nothing was off limits—government intelligence agencies, subterfuge techniques, even spy gadgets.

BUCK HENRY (1/2)

Mel invented the shoe phone.

CLIP:

BUCK HENRY (1/2)

I invented the Cone of Silence.

CLIP:

BUCK HENRY (1/2)

They just accumulated. I mean everyone involved in the show would say, "What about, you know, poison lipstick?"

CLIP:

NARRATOR

In the midst of all the creative, ah, chaos, Don became a father yet again-- to his fourth daughter, Stacy.

This time, he couldn't have been more thrilled.

DOROTHY FERRANTE (1/2)

She was born // on the day that he was shooting the pilot film, so that we had, we had so much excitement going at one time. A brand new baby, and I had wanted a baby for, you know, a few years, and this was sort of my miracle child and it was very exciting.

NARRATOR

But Don didn't have a moment to stop and celebrate.

NBC executives wanted to see footage – and only the show opening been shot.

DON ADAMS (1/3)

We thought we had no chance of getting on the air. We had six good minutes we thought out of the whole thirty minutes. And so we're all looking around for jobs. We said well forget we're out of work. And then the NBC affiliate called and said we can't show all the pilots we have too many. So do you have six minutes? And we said boy do we have six minutes and how. And we sent the six minutes, really good minutes that we had to the affiliate's center at the, in New York.

LEONARD STERN (1/2)

And that was all we sent them. That opening sequence. And they bought the show.

NARRATOR

Once the pilot was done, Don sought reassurance from one of his most trusted buddies.

HUGH HEFNER (1/1)

He was very anxious for me to see it, and he brought it out and we screen it at the Mansion before it first aired, before the show was picked up. And I, you know, was very much amused by it, but had no idea—no idea—what it was going to, what a phenomenon it was going to turn out to be.

NARRATOR

**Then Don made his personal stakes
really high.**

BERNIE KOPELL (1/2)

They said, "Okay um you can either have twelve thousand dollars," which at that time was big money, "twelve thousand dollars a show, or you can have four thousand dollars a show and a piece of the action." I never found out how much of a piece that was but it was substantial. Being a gambler he chose the four thousand dollars and a piece of the show.

NARRATOR

**For 39-year-old Don, it was the
ultimate gamble—on a new, offbeat,
untested TV series...and on himself.**

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

CLIP:

NARRATOR

"Get Smart" premiered on NBC on
September 15, 1965.

___ million viewers tuned in to watch
Don Adams as the inept, lovable spy
Maxwell Smart.

Don had spent most his life in search
of adoration on stage.

Now, all of a sudden, success was going
to hit him like a tidal wave.

JAY SANDRICH (1/1)

I think Don knew this character from
the beginning. It was that sort of
bumbler that somehow managed to catch
the bad guys, but very single-minded
and very serious about his work.

ERIC MCCORMACK (1/1)

This character // was a strange
combination of kind of sexy and
dangerous in himself. And yet the voice
wasn't what a sexy, dangerous spy
should have. And // he could go from
the most kind of giant faces, and then
he could also light a cigarette and
look very very '60s, and it was a great
combination.

BUCK HENRY (1/2)

The success of the show was aided
enormously by the fact that Don had a
way of implanting those dopey one-
liners into people's brains. //
"Sorry about that" really hit Vietnam,
all - all over the place. // Kids
were saying, "Would you believe?" //
So all of - all of Don's little
oddball, his repertory of strange
phrases became part of the language.

BARBARA FELDON (2/2)

I think part of the pop fervor for Agent 86 was because Don did such an extreme portrayal of a character that it made it easy to imitate, so anybody, kids or anyone can say, "Sorry about that, Chief," you know, with his intonation.

LEONARD STERN (1/2)

Four weeks after the show did its initial broadcast, there was a, a flight to the moon, and they had problems aboard the capsule, and one of the astronauts, in Maxwell's delivery, said, "Sorry about that, Chief." And it broadcast over the world.

NARRATOR

As the show's success grew, a rotating cast of deliciously absurd characters was added.

In season two, Bernie Kopell came on board as the sinister KAOS kingpin Ludwig Von Siegfried; Dave Ketchum was CONTROL's kvetching Agent 13; and Dick Gautier was handsome Hymie the Robot.

BERNIE KOPELL (1/1)

I didn't know what to expect with Don, and it to my mind it just seemed there was an instant affinity, an instant agreeableness, an instant happiness about working together.

JAY SANDRICH (1/1)

Bernie was very funny. And we also had Dick Gautier, who played Hymie the Robot, and he just, Don would break up with Hymie, I mean personally.

NARRATOR

But the beating heart of "Get Smart" was always Don, who played a hands-on role not only as Max but also in the writing, directing and producing.

After fighting for so many years to get to the top, Don was determined to put his mark on the series.

STACY ADAMS (1/1)

He was famous for coming on the set and rewriting everything and changing everything. He wasn't exactly, you know, easygoing. // He likes to be in charge. He just has that personality.

BARBARA FELDON (1/2)

It was just delicious when they said, "Action," that was the fun of my day because Don was gonna be there and it was gonna take off like, you know, like a car out of control, in a way, but very much in control. And all I had to do was sit in the passenger seat and go for a great ride.

NARRATOR

In 1966 Don won the ultimate accolade from his industry—the first of three Emmy Awards for his performance as Maxwell Smart.

After forty years of hard work, he was thrilled by the acclaim...but he also found it unexpectedly unnerving.

DON ADAMS (1?/3)

You're nothing and all of a sudden you're something. And people are after autographs and people stopping you on the street. And all of a sudden you're not poor any more you're rich. And all of a sudden you're known and your life changes around and you have to adapt to the change because // it's too sudden.

DOROTHY FERRANTE (1/2)

Life was propelled into a very, very fast lane overnight. // We would turn around and see our picture on the cover of magazines, and then magazine articles. Things that weren't even true.

STACY ADAMS (1/1)

They were (the) very sort of fashionable, cool couple, cool '60s couple. // In the '60s they had, you know, the red convertible and the right – the Pucci – my mother was dressed in Pucci and he was named best dressed on television, which was such a joke, because left to his own devices, he was a disaster.

NARRATOR

Don's Maxwell Smart voice continued to be the most imitated in America.

"Get Smart" maintained its popularity and was renewed in 1967, 1968 and 1969.

The pressure on Don was intense.

STACY ADAMS (1/1)

I think he's at his happiest, at his best, when he's working. I think that he will tell anyone that the best years of his life were when he was doing the series, "Get Smart," that he loved every minute of every day. He didn't care if, you know, he was getting four hours' sleep at night. He didn't care if it was grueling, because he was doing what he loved.

NARRATOR

While he was deep into his fifth season as Maxwell Smart, Don and Dorothy decided to adopt a baby boy.

The new father was ecstatic.

DOROTHY FERRANTE (1/2)

Sean was born on our tenth wedding anniversary, on that day. // And it was very, very exciting. Wonderful.

NARRATOR

But by 1969, the craze for the sophisticated Sixties spy versus spy genre was dying down.

The Summer of Love had arrived, Richard Nixon was in the Oval Office, and the anti-Vietnam War movement was in full force.

Hippies, M*A*S*H, Timothy Leary and Woodstock were the new cultural touchstones.

When the network announced it was cancelling "Get Smart" after five seasons, Don was relieved. The final episode aired on _____, 1970.

DON ADAMS (1/3)

I was ready to call it quits. I wanted to do something else. I had a lot of shows in mind that I wanted to write and produce // and directing was something that I loved doing better than acting. And I was also a stand-up comedian. And don't forget we did 138 shows, which is a lot of shows in television.

NARRATOR

Don Adams was ready to step out of Maxwell Smart's shoes.

But would the public let him?

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

CLIP: PARTNERS - quick

NARRATOR

In 1971, a year after "Get Smart" went off the air, Don Adams created a sitcom called "The Partners" for NBC.

Don costarred with Oscar nominee Rupert Crosse in the show about two inept detectives.

Don saw the show as a black-white cop buddy piece that would explore racial tensions.

NBC executives, however, did not want to take on serious social issues and instead opted for what many saw as a "Get Smart" imitation.

CLIP: PARTNERS

DON ADAMS (1/3)

It was "Lethal Weapon" before they even thought of "Lethal Weapon". // It was two guys that would talk in the car and talk in about mundane things and then an action would come and, and that was a first. And it got rave reviews and unfortunately it was put up against a show called All In The Family, which was the number one show in America. So we only did twenty-two shows.

NARRATOR

Producer Norman Lear was doing the cutting-edge work these days; Don Adams was starting to be seen as a dinosaur.

Moreover, audiences would not accept him as anything but his brilliant creation, Maxwell Smart.

BARBARA FELDON (2/2)

You do get somewhat typed and people expect a certain thing from you.

NARRATOR

In 1974 Don tried another approach.

Drawing from his love of old movies, he created, hosted and directed the syndicated program "Don Adams' Screen Test," which gave acting hopefuls the chance to re-create major movie roles with celebrities.

ERIC MCCORMACK (1/1)

He // had // "Don Adams' Screen Test," which I loved, you know, where people that weren't actors would win an opportunity to do a scene from a movie, and they make it look exactly like that.

DOROTHY FERRANTE (2/2)

Again, he got a chance to be every actor, you know, in the world. He got a chance to, to play Clark Gable in "Gone With the Wind."

HUGH HEFNER (1/1)

He parodied old movies and played characters and doing the various voices that he was doing. // He can do everybody. You name it, you name an actor from the 1930s.

DOROTHY FERRANTE (2/2)

We thought it was hilarious. I still do.

STACY ADAMS (1/1)

And now, you know, you have shows like "American Idol" and whatnot, where it's the same kind of thing, // a talent search.

CLIP: DON ADAMS' SCREEN TEST

NARRATOR

As Don tried to find his footing in a post-"Get Smart" world, Dorothy began to notice some troubling signs in her husband.

DOROTHY FERRANTE (2/2)

It felt like the marriage was falling apart at the seams. // The way he was acting, the way he was dressing. Everything about him. Everything about him was changing. Then I thought it was midlife crisis.

NARRATOR

Dorothy couldn't have been more on point.

But Don was unwilling to face any problems. Once again, his natural tendency was to escape.

DON ADAMS (3/3)

I was 49, I looked at 50, I said, "It's over! The next thing is picking out the casket." So when a 20-year-old girl, who is posing for the centerfold of Playboy, said, "Come over here honey..."

NARRATOR

The 20-year-old was a model named Judy Luciano, whom Don met at the Playboy Mansion.

HUGH HEFNER (1/1)

He fell in love with this girl who was destined to become a Playmate, who was a little bit of a free spirit and a little crazy, and she was a little too crazy for Playboy, but she wasn't too crazy for Don.

DON ADAMS (3/3)

I took her out. And there goes the marriage, there goes the house, the kids, the car, the tennis court, ffffst!- the career, everything.

NARRATOR

Don's midlife crisis reached its apex during a sailing trip along the Mediterranean coast.

He was so out of control his behavior became positively surreal.

DOROTHY FERRANTE (2/2)

We decided to take a trip to Europe. I think I maybe decided // that would fix the marriage right up. So we did. And he still wasn't himself. And I still didn't know the reason why.

DON ADAMS (3/3)

So we went to France and we check in to the Carlton Hotel. // I went to the phone, I called Judy in Los Angeles and I said, "I want you to get on a plane and fly to Paris. And then I want you to fly to Cannes and I'll meet you at the Carlton Hotel in three days." Now I expected her to say, "Come on, you're out of your mind. What are you, nuts?" And she said, "I've been waiting for your call, my bags are packed."

DOROTHY FERRANTE (2/2)

He jumped ship and he said, "I have to get off. I have to go home and do a commercial." And then I believed that.

NARRATOR

Don got off the yacht at Portofino, Italy, and hitched a ride with a guy on a motorcycle.

DON ADAMS (3/3)

My wife is on the yacht, my girlfriend on a plane in Paris and I'm riding around, a fifty year old man riding around in the hills of Portofino. I said, "What happened to your brain?"

DOROTHY FERRANTE (2/2)

When we came back into Cannes, I tried to call him at home in Beverly Hills, and // the butler said, // "He's not here. He hasn't come home." And that's when I said, "Uh oh, something's really wrong."

NARRATOR

In the meantime, Don had met up with Judy and made his way to Spain—where he discovered that Maxwell Smart still had a huge fan base.

DON ADAMS (3/3)

People went nuts you know, they had a Spanish name "Super Ochiente-ocho Seis". And they're screaming and yelling and I'm trying to hide.

DOROTHY FERRANTE (2/2)

We arranged to meet in London. // When he walked in the room I thought, "Okay, where's Don? Did you leave him in the hall? Who are you?" His hair had gone to an Afro and the weirdest outfit you've ever seen, // I mean, platform shoes and this big plaid shirt, leather strapped thing, and flaming lion and sequins or whatever, rhinestones on his back on his jacket. // When we got back, I kind of put the pieces together within the next month and we split up.

DON ADAMS (3/3)

I was happily married to Dorothy, we had two beautiful children, a huge house in Beverly Hills. Had anything...I was a famous, rich everything that you could dream of or want in your life. And then I screwed it up. It was like I said, "I don't deserve this. I'm not that good I don't deserve this. They're gonna come and take it away and if they don't I'm gonna give it back to them."

NARRATOR

Don married Judy Luciano in 1977 - but the marriage collapsed after ** years, and the birth of one child: Don's sixth daughter, Beige Dawn.

STACY ADAMS (1/1)

The reasons for the break-up for the marriage were made clear to me from an early age. And I was never -- funny, I was never angry with him about it during those years. That came later. But he has shared with me how he felt and what he went through, and he suffers, he suffers to this day about that choice, and I encourage him to forgive himself.

NARRATOR

Not only did Don blow his happy marriage -- he couldn't escape the role of Maxwell Smart.

In 1980 he made a "Get Smart" feature film called "The Nude Bomb."

CLIP: THE NUDE BOMB

NARRATOR

But Maxwell Smart was no longer hip.

A new generation was more interested in "The Blues Brothers," "Superman II" and "The Empire Strikes Back."

DON ADAMS (3/3)

I don't want to talk about "The Nude Bomb."

ERIC MCCORMACK (1/1)

I dragged friends that didn't want to go. I said, "Come on, it'll be fun. Great. It's a 'Get Smart' movie." Not great.

STACY ADAMS (1/1)

He was very disappointed in it, because it was an attempt to make some kind of comeback, and, you know, it was a terrible flop.

DON ADAMS (3/3)

If you look in the dictionary under disasters, right next to the Titanic, you'll see "The Nude Bomb."

NARRATOR

Over the next few years, Don attempted to bring Max back two more times: in the 1989 TV movie "Get Smart, Again!" and in a 1994 Fox Television update of "Get Smart."

In the latter, Max was promoted to Chief of CONTROL, 99 went to Congress, and their son, played by Andy Dick, became a spy.

But this latest attempt to revive the "Get Smart" magic not only disappointed fans—it also faced on-set problems due to tensions between Don and Andy Dick.

DON ADAMS (3/3)

Andy was all right, he was a little nutty. You know, a little crazy.

BARBARA FELDON (2/2)

It was very strange. // We were still Max and 99, but I was a senator and he was the head of CONTROL. It felt wrong.

NARRATOR

Don also resurrected "The Voice" for a new cartoon character, Inspector Gadget, in the mid-Eighties.

And in 1985 he made a comeback in the Canadian-produced syndicated sitcom "Check It Out!," playing the manager of a supermarket in 66 episodes.

DON ADAMS (3/3)

It was a very bad time in my life. // I was gambling //and I just wasn't doing anything. // So I went to Canada and the show was on in Canada for three years. Which made it suitable for syndication. The bottom line is I made more money with that show than I did with *Get Smart*.

LEONARD STERN (1/2)

He was victimized by his skill.
Subverted by his talent. He wasn't
given credit for creating a character.
He was believed to be Maxwell Smart.
That's an enormous handicap.

BUCK HENRY (2/2)

I think Don's a really interesting
actor, and I am sorry not to have seen
him have a shot at some other things
that his reputation probably makes
impossible.

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

NARRATOR

In the 1990s, Don Adams witnessed a boom in the spy spoof genre that he himself had helped to start so many years before.

Mike Myers' "Austin Powers" films, "Spy Hard" and the "Spy Kids" franchise caught the public's imagination.

At the same time, an entire generation of new fans were being introduced to classic "Get Smart" episodes thanks to syndication...and old fans were being reminded of what they had loved about Maxwell Smart.

ERIC MCCORMACK (1/1)

It was the first adult thing, with the exception of maybe Loony Tune cartoons that was my own that I discovered, that wasn't something my parents happened to be watching. // I felt like kids feel when they're allowed to sit at the adult table and listen to jokes they don't quite get, but they feel cool that they're allowed in, you know.

B-ROLL: Don, others at recent GET SMART reunion

DON ADAMS (1/3)

I knew the show was groundbreaking, but // I didn't think that today thirty years or so after *Get Smart* people would stop me on the street and take off their shoe and tell me, "Here this is for you." In restaurants, in every place.

BARBARA FELDON (2/2)

There's a lot of interest in *Get Smart* that just continues, and // I can understand it in the sense that when kids were growing up, they watched *Get Smart*, and they identified with the characters, with Max or with 99, and that grew into them like it was grafted into their psyches in some way.

NARRATOR

These days, Don spends his time betting the horses and hanging with his old friend Hef at the Playboy Mansion, where he's been a regular at the Wednesday-night gin rummy game for decades.

And when fans want to pay tribute to Maxwell Smart—as they did recently at the Museum of Television and Radio-- he's always happy to oblige.

BERNIE KOPELL (2/2)

Don today is much mellower. He's not concerned with the weight of the world on his shoulders to make something funnier. // He'll look back and he'll say, "Didn't we have great time doing such and such?" Or, "Wasn't that funny? Remember the gong in the 'Nitro Whispering' show?"

CLIP: beginning of close

NARRATOR

Don Adams was a tough Depression-era street kid who dreamed a big Hollywood dream...and made it come true.

With a brilliant comedic sense, perseverance and sheer chutzpah, he made it to the top of the Hollywood heap...and changed the cultural landscape in the process.

Along the way he created a much-loved character that has become an indelible part of our comedy history.

HUGH HEFNER (1/1)

He has a wry sense of humor, probably a little wryer than it used to be, but you know, he's a joy. He's one of my best friends.

BARBARA FELDON (2/2)

The surface is fun, witty, intelligent. Don is so much more than those lovely things. // He's a compilation of a lot of complex elements. Deeply sentimental man, very romantic, which belies that crisp bullet-like Maxwell performance that everybody loves from him. // You can look into those compartments and see riches that you would have missed if you were too entertained.

ERIC MCCORMACK (1/1)

There's no one else that's ever sounded like Don or looked like Don. // I loved him because of that voice, because of his ability to just push it. // Don after "Get Smart" would forever be Maxwell Smart. // That is his epitaph.

DON ADAMS (3/3)

I would have done it for nothing. Well, not for nothing, but.

CLIP:

END OF SHOW