

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY



A kid in a raincoat, in a rowboat, with a parrot.

You've got to be kidding.

That was my first reaction when I was asked to work with Capt'n Eli. Luckily, in spite of my reservations, I looked deeper and discovered a whole other universe and the opportunity to create an odyssey. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's start at the beginning.

Capt'n Eli is a namesake. It affectionately honors Eli Forsley of Gray, Maine. He was known as Dr. Eli and, in his time, he was that and more. He served in the U.S. Navy in the Pacific during World War II. After the war, he earned his master's degree in social work and a doctorate of education. He was a pioneer in providing the mentally ill and disabled veterans a home where they could be a part of the community.

Before I get even further, I should tell you that Capt'n Eli is also a brand. A brand of soda and, more specifically, a root beer. Eli Forsley's root beer. Yup, an old family recipe.

You probably think I'll say it's the best I ever tasted. You'd be right and I wouldn't be lying!

Fred Forsley, Eli's son, named his own son Eli. Around the time his son was born, he decided he wanted to bring the family root beer to the world -- or at least to his home state of Maine -- so, in honor of his Dad, Capt'n Eli's Root Beer was created by Fred and his partner Alan Pugsley. The soda label (featuring a kid in a raincoat, in a rowboat, with a parrot) was developed by the designer of this book, Chris Hadden, and illustrator Bruce Hutchinson. Scott Doyle joined the crew as brand manager and a recipe for success was created!

Since the beginning, Fred saw the potential of Capt'n Eli to be more than just a brand mascot. His father was well known as a great storyteller and for his spirit of fun. That sense of fun was expressed in his root beer and Fred felt this same sense of fun could be instilled in an adventure story. Combining the two E's -- entertainment and education -- he saw how Capt'n Eli could be a positive addition to the world of children's entertainment. He hoped the character could be developed into an animated show for kids.

This is where I come in.

Fred took a look at my work. I have a little experience with comic books and animation.

Check out *Scrap City Pack Rats* on eBay. Even after a decade, they are considerably cheaper than *Action Comics #1*. But seriously, folks, *The Rats*, as they were affectionately called, were the first team of disabled superheroes and the series was produced with Goodwill Industries of Maine.

I also used to work for Tom Snyder Productions, art directing and animating educational CD-ROMs. Check out *Fizz and Martina's Math Adventures* sometime. I also helped get Fizz and Martina on television by contributing animation to *Squigglevision*, which aired on ABC's *One Saturday Morning*.

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It didn't really sound as silly as I first let on (no sillier than other stuff I'd worked on!). But I still had my doubts. Could we create something that stood on its own? I gave it some more thought. The Lone Ranger, The Green Hornet and Captain Midnight were all created to entertain and sell a product. Why not Capt'n Eli?

"Let's make a pilot," Fred said. Exaltation and fear mixed. Television production is a dicey and expensive game at best. Okay, I was a little chicken, but I suggested we start slow.

"A placemat," Fred said. We decided to start with an activity placemat with games and comics for families to enjoy while waiting for their meals to arrive at a restaurant.

At first, we thought a storybook fantasy approach might work, a la Dr. Seuss. I suggested we add Barney (I love dogs!) and name the parrot Jolly Roger. Capt'n Eli had a crew and we were off! *The Great Root Beer Battle* was created (check out captneli.com). It was fun. It was cute. I had a hard time thinking up another placemat.

Capt'n Eli as a detective and inventor intrigued me. While many adore the adventures of a boy on a broomstick, The Hardy Boys and Tom Swift were the adventurers of my childhood.

The Mystery of the Haunted Lighthouse was created as our first comic book. People liked it, kinda like Scooby-Doo, some said. It still wasn't clicking for me so it was back to the drawing board.

What did I want to do? What could I do? How could I best serve the purpose of promoting the product and create something that could stand on its own? I thought about all the great adventure stories of myth. I thought about seafaring stories, Captain Nemo, and old adventure comic strips. I thought about Eli Forsley. I thought about fathers and sons. I thought about heroes, real and imagined. I thought about every cartoon and comic I ever loved. I thought about the web. *The Undersea Adventures of Capt'n Eli* began to form and grew into this book.

In the next book I'll go deeper into how the story was created and some of its influences.

Thanks for reading and drop me a note anytime at jaypiscopo@captneli.com.

Until then, **STAND BY FOR ADVENTURE!**

JAY



Eli Forsley, 1943