

SUN CITY METHODISTS TO HONOR HOLLYWOOD'S "CRYBABY" METHODISTS TO HONOR HOLLYWOOD'S 'CRYBABY'

By [Jim Rothgeb \(/staff/jim-rothgeb/\)](/staff/jim-rothgeb/) 12:01 a.m. April 13, 2013 Updated 2:32 p.m. April 12, 2013

Anyone who lived in Sun City about 25 years ago might remember Robert "Bobs" Watson.

He was the minister of the United Methodist Church on Carmel Road, and from what I hear, a pretty darn good one. He was different in that he taught the Good Book, but he didn't exactly go "by" the book.

He combined his two loves — that of a Divine Spirit, and his desire to perform on stage. This Sunday, his nephew by marriage, Mark Price, will be on hand to revive his memory in a special presentation of "Doubting Thomas."

Eighty years ago, Watson was part of what was known as the First Family of Hollywood. Like his brothers and father, Bobs, which was his real name, was a child actor. He was pretty good at it, too.

For those fans of Turner Classic Movies, you may remember seeing him as the cherubic-looking "Pee Wee" in the 1938 classic "Boys Town," which also featured such then-unknowns as Spencer Tracy and Mickey Rooney.

Movie biographies also say Watson was remembered best for his ability to cry big tears at the director's slightest tug. In fact, he was dubbed the "Crybaby of Hollywood" and he did that alongside Lionel Barrymore in "On Borrowed Time" in 1939. It was generally regarded as his best role.

But despite his family pedigree, Bobs Watson wasn't destined to be a Hollywood star. He studied theology in Claremont and became an ordained minister. That's what brought him to Sun City in 1981. By then, he had barely turned 50.

And he didn't give up acting; he merely brought it with him. He wrote his own scripts and performed his versions of the Bible at the church on Wednesday nights.

"The first time I saw him, he did Pontius Pilate," Price said. "Another one I remember was him playing a centurion standing guard over Jesus on the cross. He went for about an hour and 45 minutes, wondering if this was truly the Son of God."

Price, who lives in Alpine, has had a parallel career. He was a Shakespearean actor for a while, then a standup comic performing at clubs in Los Angeles. But his life turned after watching his uncle's work at that church in Sun City.

"We were very close," Price said, "and he challenged me to do this kind of ministry. Now, I have about six characters that I portray and will have a seventh starting in October. It's all because of Bobs' encouragement."

Price performs at churches throughout Southern California. Local folks may know him best for his one-man shows at St. Vincent Ferrer Catholic Church in Sun City and St. Martha Catholic Church in Murrieta.

But Sunday will be a first. Price has never performed for the congregation at the Sun City United Methodist Church, which is sort of a birthplace for this part of his life.

"I'm excited and honored to be doing it," Price said. "I liked Bobs very much, and I think two of his three sons will even be there."

Watson died of cancer in Laguna Beach in 1999. A highlight in his final days, Price said, was listening on a cellphone as the Watson family was honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Bobs Watson never saw Mark Price perform, but something tells me at 9:30 on Sunday morning, his spirit may be hovering within the 50-year-old walls of that Methodist church.

The Crybaby of Hollywood will be watching, with a broad smile on his face and, true to his nickname, maybe a little tear of joy and nostalgia in his eye.

If you know of someone who would be interesting to feature in a column, call Jim Rothgeb at (951) 676-4315, ext. 2621, or email jim.rothgeb@californian.com

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