

Mr. Potato Head Had His Eyes On Success

ONLY IN AMERICA could a lowly spud endear himself to generations of fans and not get fried from all the years of publicity.

Inventor George Lerner came up with the idea of facial parts with points in the back so you could make a face with a fruit or a vegetable.

He sold his idea to a cereal company as a possible premium, but always knew his creation wasn't half-baked.

In fact, he spoke with two Rhode Island manufacturers, Henry and Merrill Hassenfeld, and they agreed with him. Together, they bought back the idea and refined it, bringing Mr. Potato Head to the market in 1952.

The manufacturing company, later renamed Hasbro, first offered the facial parts (eyes, ears, mouths, noses and the like) without anything to stick them in. Parents supplied their own fruits and vegetables. It was the first toy to be advertised on TV.

And less than a year later, Cupid's arrow struck; Mr. Potato Head met and married Mrs. Potato Head. Eventually, they had more than a dozen small fry.

In 1964, the Potato Head toys came complete with a hard plastic body to hold the pieces. Ten years later, the potato-head part and all the related pieces doubled in size, after new child-safety regulations were introduced.

Over the years, Mr. Potato Head has become quite the "spokesspud."

In 1987, he surrendered his pipe when he represented the American Cancer Society's annual Great American Smokeout campaign. In 1992, he gave up his "couch potato" status and received a

Presidential Sports Award from the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.

His movie career began when he appeared in Toy Story in 1995, then in Toy Story 2 in 1999.

His sense of humor was never more evident than when he dressed as the infamous Darth Vader to become "Darth Tater." He later branched out into Star Wars character takeoffs "Spudtrooper" and "Artoo-Potatoo."

But he probably reach the epitome when, in 2005, he made his debut in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, representing the U.S. Potato Board.

Pretty good for a starchy tuber.