

Shout to the dead

by Mathew Paust

My anal retentive, passive aggressive, narcissistic, atheistic dad would get this. He always said everybody's a little nuts. It went without saying he meant except him. Haven't missed him much until this moment. I just now realized the actor we met on the set of *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* in December 1959 was "I didn't set no fires." All the years since, until this morning, I'd thought the actor was James Gregory. He was playing Zelda's father. During a break in the action he walked over to where we were standing and greeted us warmly. My dad said, "I feel like I know you, but I don't know your name." The actor, Dabbs Greer, laughed and said he heard that a lot.

Several times in recent years for no particular reason I tried to find Gregory in the Gillis series, checking all of the segments to its end in '63. No Gregory. I checked Gregory's credits. No Gillis. This morning, after reading something about Bob Denver, I again went through the series and decided the man we met must have been Greer, who played the father in only two segments. Both aired in early 1960. Googling some photos, I saw a resemblance to Gregory. Mystery solved, yet something else about Greer's face nagged me. A search of his credits turned up a role in the cop show *Code 3* called "Ashes Will Happen", about a series of arsons. Greer played the arsonist. In the climactic scene, under police questioning, he repeatedly insisted, "I didn't set no fires," while setting a fire in the waste basket next to his feet. My dad and I laughed insanely at this. For years afterward "I didn't set no fires" became an occasional vocal reminder of how we'd bonded that night.

When my dad shook hands with Greer he didn't recognize our favorite fire bug. Neither did I. Lloyd, dammit, read this! You shook hands with "I didn't set no fires!"

