Meinhardt Raabe was the son of first-generation German Americans. He was born in 1915 on a small dairy farm near Farmington, Jefferson County, Wisconsin. He and his younger sister, Marion, were the only children of Henry and Eleonora Raabe.

When he enrolled in Johnson Creek High School, the principal had Meinhardt examined by a UW physician because of his small stature. He was only four feet tall at that time compared to his “little sister” who though four years younger was several inches taller. In high school he learned for the first time that he was smaller than normal but because of the rural setting there
were no other little people to chum around with. He concentrated on academics rather than athletics and played clarinet in the school band because he could get an instrument with a finger spacing that fit his small hands.

Raabe enrolled in Northwestern College in Watertown in 1931. But in the summer between high school and college he and his parents visited the 1933 World’s Fair in Chicago. There he was exposed to other little people and became interested in the Century of Progress, Midget Village.

Selling chickens and rabbits from his family farm generated some funds to pay first year college expenses but he really needed a better source of income to continue in college. Meinhardt wanted to spend the summer after his freshman year with the Midget Village; however the job started before the end of the semester. He petitioned the college president who allowed him to take final exams early but told Raabe that he didn’t expect he would see him in the fall. Meinhardt had a productive summer and returned to school.

After three years at Northwestern College, Meinhardt transferred to the University of Wisconsin in Madison and graduated with a degree in accounting. His first job was as an accountant in the Madison plant of Oscar Mayer and Co. starting in 1937. This job developed simultaneously with a new marketing effort coordinated by Carl Mayer. Carl coordinated the development of the “Wienermobile” to promote the company’s products and proposed a midget chef to be called “Little Oscar, World’s Smallest Chef” to introduce children to the company products. Meinhardt was a natural for this position and began as the company’s first Little Oscar in 1937.

Shortly after Raabe started touring the Midwest with the Wienermobile he heard through the network of friends he met at Midget Village of a movie about to be made in Hollywood featuring 124 little people and called “The Wizard of Oz”. Meinhardt, now adept at asking for a leaves of absence, requested one from his company. It was granted, reluctantly. He went to Hollywood, auditioned for a role, and was selected to be the Coroner who would announce that the “Wicked Witch is dead”.

The film brought Meinhardt great fame which he coupled with his Little Oscar career when he returned to Oscar Mayer. He continued to work for Oscar Mayer during World War II, but because of the War effort, the Little Oscar and Wienermobile were sidelined. Meinhardt worked as a traditional Oscar Mayer sales representative in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. In 1946, he married Marie Hartline, whom he had met in 1941 while working as Little Oscar in Akron, Ohio.

Meinhardt struck out on his own in 1946 but was asked by Oscar Mayer to return as Little Oscar in 1950. In total, Meinhardt worked 29 years with the company, many of which were spent training other Little Oscars who became a corps of the most recognizable sales representatives of the time.

Marie, Meinhardt’s partner in marriage for over 50 years, died in an auto accident in 1997. Meinhardt died April 9, 2010 in Florida, at the age of 94. He is buried near his home farm at Farmington, Wisconsin.
In this role as the spokesman for Oscar Mayer, Meinhardt Raabe was a unique, humorous, educational, interesting and positive influence in marketing the virtues of meat as one of Wisconsin’s finest foods. Not only was he “Little Oscar” for Oscar Mayer and Co., he was also a significant member of Wisconsin’s meat industry.