

Producer **Linwood Boomer** grew up as a gifted child, one of four brothers, in a wacky home he describes as "very rowdy." If that sounds strangely similar to Fox's Malcolm in the Middle, it should -- Boomer based it on his life.

"It's completely exaggerated and self-serving for comedic effect," says Boomer, 43, "but yes, there were four kids in our family, I was the second youngest, and I did go to a special class. And every story in the first episodes, except for one, came from my childhood."

The son of an engineer dad and a bookkeeper mom, Boomer moved to San Mateo, Calif., from Canada when he was 2. He skipped college and moved to Los Angeles for acting classes. At 20, he got his first gig -- playing Adam Kendall, Mary's (Melissa Sue Anderson) instructor-turned-husband on Little House on the Prairie.

After Prairie, the acting work dried up, so he switched to writing on shows like Silver Spoons, Night Court, 3rd Rock From the Sun and, most recently, NBC's upcoming God, the Devil and Bob. When that gig ended, he decided to tackle his own life.

"At lunch, I would always tell stories about my childhood, and people really thought they were funny," Boomer says. "So I decided to write it, but it ended up coming out really depressing. This kid stuck in this miserable experience. Then I came up with the creative device of having him talk directly to the camera."

Boomer lost his dad many years ago, but mom calls him after Malcolm airs to offer "corrections," as do his three brothers.

"She was a bit uncomfortable about the show until she saw it," he says. "Thank God she thinks it's funny."

Twice divorced and currently single, with kids ages 19 and 5, how would Boomer feel if they wrote a sitcom about their childhood?

"It would be totally fair. If they're earning a good living and happy, I'd be thrilled."