



*International Jack Benny Fan Club*

# *The Jack Benny Times*

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## *President's Message*

Jell-O again, folks...since last we spoke, many of you know that my current work has afforded me the opportunity to be on the road to a number of locations around the country. Happily, I have been able to leverage my travel into a couple very nice Jack Benny-related gatherings.



The first was "Pennies for Benny"—a celebration of Jack's life held on the anniversary of his passing, December 26<sup>th</sup>. Traditionally when visiting a Jewish grave, one places a rock as gesture of respect and remembrance. Without any overt coordination, this practice has evolved to leaving a penny on Jack's grave; every time I visit, there is always an assortment of pennies and other coins. The only other place I have seen this practice is at Ben Franklin's grave in Philadelphia. I guess that's another connection Jack shares with Franklin, besides George Burns' and Groucho's bet on their physical similarity (from the 4/2/61 show).

In anticipation of this celebration, members from all over the world sent in pennies and notes to be placed at Jack's grave. One member even sent a pair of shoelaces, complete with the receipt from Dollar Tree in case Jack wanted to return them. And a Kentucky member sent half of one of the original stones her grandparents used in building the family home. We were also very privileged to have Michael Rudolph, Jack's oldest grandchild, attend the proceedings. Afterwards, we lunched at Nate 'n' Al's Delicatessen, and then watched rare Benny television programs in the beautiful Mitchell Theatre of the Paley Center for Media in Beverly Hills. Many thanks to both Jill Glasband of Hillside Cemetery and Martin Gostanian of the Paley Center for helping this vision become an enjoyable reality.

Then in January, a group of us gathered at the legendary Carnegie Deli in Manhattan to share an evening of Jack Benny stories, conversation, and incredible amounts of corned beef and pastrami. One of the highlights was that we were joined by Will Jordan, whom most of you will know as the pre-eminent Ed Sullivan impressionist and all-around performer. He also brought along





some friends: magician Mal Cross, actor George Nestor, and Rose Lindenmayer (who apparently does an amazing Eleanor Roosevelt impersonation, although we couldn't quite get her to grace us with it that evening). Almost everyone at the table had some connection to "the business"—writers, actors, musicians, documentarians, etc. And one IRS person...got to have someone divvy up the bill, you know. Here are the folks in the photo from left to right: Mal Cross, Will Jordan, Rose Lindenmayer, Craig Shemin, Jonathan M. Smith, Karl Tiedemann, me, David Massengil, George Nestor (hiding behind), Howard Mostovy, Jerry Kaplan. And don't miss that sandwich on the table in front of Jerry. We've truly got to do this again some time.

Now on with the show!

## *New Members*

(State abbreviation or country is listed after the name)

\*\*\*\* Edward Latz (NY) \*\*\*\* Bengt-Ove Andersson (Sweden) \*\*\*\* Betty Cook (MO) \*\*\*\* Richard Gietl (IL) \*\*\*\* Julia Hardie (TX) \*\*\*\* Robert A. Miller (PA) \*\*\*\* Thea Oatman (UT) \*\*\*\* Gallagher Terence (IL) \*\*\*\* Mitchell Yount (TX) \*\*\*\* Ken Busse (IL) \*\*\*\* Jean-Pierre Tresp (Belgium) \*\*\*\* Steve Hunter (GA) \*\*\*\* Cynthia Fulbright(TX) \*\*\*\* Melody Holzman (CA) \*\*\*\* Gene Wachtel (WA) \*\*\*\* Ron Birnbaum (MA) \*\*\*\* Mike Ace (CA) \*\*\*\* Jason Beard (NY) \*\*\*\* Dan Cohen (NY) \*\*\*\* William Rickard (MI) \*\*\*\* Harry Urban (MI) \*\*\*\* Bill Reynolds (AR) \*\*\*\* Michael Hageman (WA) \*\*\*\* Jon Willerton (Ontario, Canada) \*\*\*\* J.E. Schmidt (MT) \*\*\*\* Sophia Scotino (MO) \*\*\*\* Adam Robert Roach (VA) \*\*\*\* Kitty Malone (Qld, Australia) \*\*\*\* Jason Sleet Shirley (IL) \*\*\*\* Heather York (WI) \*\*\*\* Adam Cassius (CA) \*\*\*\* Jerry Hall (TX) \*\*\*\* Brian Philbin (CA) \*\*\*\* Mike Burley (OR) \*\*\*\* Brook Zelcer (NJ) \*\*\*\* Annie Sims (IL) \*\*\*\* Rayna Patton (KS) \*\*\*\* Richard Kraft (NY) \*\*\*\* David Wechter (CA) \*\*\*\* Frank Thomas (IL) \*\*\*\* Guy Marsh (IL) \*\*\*\* Kelso Shields (NC) \*\*\*\* Patrick Patterson (CA) \*\*\*\* William Larson (MI) \*\*\*\* Michael Cowand (NC) \*\*\*\* Steve Sandman (IL) \*\*\*\* Richard Ameil (CA) \*\*\*\* Mark Monroy (NY) \*\*\*\* Dennis Cain (IA) \*\*\*\* David Bakish (NY) \*\*\*\* Pam Russell (NC) \*\*\*\* Patrick Morgan (WA) \*\*\*\* Ron Greenfield (FL) \*\*\*\* Rick Dotta (MO) \*\*\*\* Daniel Anstey (BC, Canada) \*\*\*\* Ryan Maxwell (IN) \*\*\*\* Keif Simon (NJ) \*\*\*\* Rodger Hinson (TN) \*\*\*\* Eric Barach (MI) \*\*\*\* John Picarello (PA) \*\*\*\* Gary Heyberger (CA) \*\*\*\* Scott Payne (Ontario, Canada) \*\*\*\* Donald Casali (MA) \*\*\*\* Nugent Dan (TX) \*\*\*\* Spiro David (CO) \*\*\*\* Chris Dixon (MO) \*\*\*\* Sharon Eddy (MA) \*\*\*\* Ted Ellis (CT) \*\*\*\* John Farmer (PA) \*\*\*\* David Flood (IL) \*\*\*\* Larry Fox (NY) \*\*\*\* Patricia Germano (CA) \*\*\*\* Jim Goode (Ontario, Canada) \*\*\*\* Chris La Porta (FL) \*\*\*\* Albert Lam (MA) \*\*\*\* Cliff Lewis

(BC, Canada) \*\*\*\* Ralph Marnie (Ontario, Canada) \*\*\*\* Brian McCarthy (CN) \*\*\*\* Rankin Paul (VT) \*\*\*\* Adam Seneker (TN) \*\*\*\* William Jackson (NY) \*\*\*\* Lilah Ringler (RI) \*\*\*\* Danielle Terrones (IA) \*\*\*\* Eric Cooper (CA) \*\*\*\* Riccardo Bozza (NY) \*\*\*\* Erik Coffman (OH)

## *The Tale Piece*

In the spirit of the Laugh-In “quickies,” here are a few short stories about encountering Jack and his associates. The first is from Wayne Kline:

“While I was on a Norman Lear show (Good Times) and Milt Josefsberg was on All in the Family, he gave me a tape of the Jack Benny ‘Your money or your life’/‘I’m thinking’ joke. He said the laugh really did go on forever. I said, ‘How come on the tape it’s only something like 25 seconds?’ He explained radio shows were originally recorded on records and they would change the records during big laughs.”

[EN: I commented back to Wayne that I think Milt was bluffing—I don’t hear any break in the laughter after that joke, and it’s too close to the end of the program to need a transcription change. What do you think?]

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From Joe Miller (I suppose that makes this a Joe Miller joke):

“My mother met Jack Benny in an elevator in Miami Beach in the mid 1930’s. She got on the elevator with my older brother, and Jack said to her ‘What fine boy. What’s his name?’ My mother said, ‘His name is Jack.’ Jack said, ‘What a great name—that’s my name too!’ That story is why I became a Jack Benny fan many years later. My mother died several years ago at the age of ninety.”

[EN: Chances are very good that Jack was visiting his father during that visit to Miami Beach.]

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David Lynch’s eagle eye sent me a link to this interview with Alan Young: <http://classicshowbiz.blogspot.com/2010/12/interview-with-alan-young.html> I highly recommend reading the full article for lots of non-Benny information, including how he originated the characters of Senator Claghorn and Titus Moody who transitioned to being regular residents of Allen’s Alley. Here are some excerpts about Jack...

Alan Young: Yes. Of course, my girlfriend was in my dressing room waiting for me to come back down. I came back and one of the girls I had gone

to school with, Wendy Stoker, I'll never forget, beautiful girl, rushed to the dressing room and threw her arms around me and said, "Oh, Alan, that was so good." She walked out and my girlfriend wouldn't speak to me for days. She didn't know what show business was like. That was the show at The Orpheum Theater on Granville Street.

Kliph Nesteroff: That's the theater that Jack Benny saved. It still stands to this day, but they were going to knock it down in 1972. Jack Benny had heard about that and he had played it during vaudeville many times—I think it was where he originally encountered Mary Livingstone—and he put up the money to save it and restore it.

Oh really? I couldn't pass on researching that bit of trivia. Jack was definitely playing the Orpheum circuit in 1920 when he met Mary, so that jibes. However, it seems that the original Orpheum Theatre was at 761 Granville Street, closed in 1969 for demolition, and was replaced by the Pacific Centre. The current Orpheum opened on November 7, 1927 (10 months after Jack and Mary were married). A bit of data from Wikipedia:

In 1973, for economic reasons, Famous Players decided to gut the inside of the Orpheum and change it into a multiplex. A "Save the Orpheum" public protest and fundraising campaign was launched, which even Jack Benny flew in to help with, and the Orpheum was saved. On March 19, 1974, the City of Vancouver bought the theatre for \$7.1 million, with \$3.1 million coming from the city itself, and \$1.5 million from each of the provincial and federal governments. The Orpheum closed in November 1975 and a renovation and restoration was done by the architectural company Thomson, Berwick, Pratt and Partners. It re-opened on April 2, 1977 and has since been the permanent home of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra.

Back to Alan:

Kliph Nesteroff: But you did get to meet Jack Benny. And you encountered him for the first time in the NBC washroom.

Alan Young: (laughs) Yes. It was all the same - just the one washroom for everybody [at CBS Hollywood]. There I was washing my hands, and it was such a thrill when Red Skelton walked in. "Hiya, Jack!" and there I am washing my hands and I hear [Jack Benny and Red Skelton] talking about things. That was a real thrill. Going to the bathroom was a thrill (laughs). Later on I actually met him because I was then doing television. I saw him in the control room and I thought, "Oh, boy. He's coming to watch me." Then I saw Lucille Ball and Desi in the audience during rehearsals. I became a little proud of myself, you know. Then I found out

they were all coming in to see how awful live television was. How hard it was. They all talked to CBS and said, "We're not going to go live like Alan Young, we're going to put our shows on film." That was the only reason they were interested in me - to see how rough it was. It was terribly rough. We thought radio was hard, but oh boy, live TV.

## *Do You Know?*

New member Ted Ellis says, "I've been a fan for many years, especially since finding out I had an indirect connection with him. The Hungarian Jewish woman in NYC (a Holocaust survivor) who babysat me very frequently was the designer for his daughter Joan Benny's wedding dress."

Joan says, "The designer of Joan Benny's wedding dress was Don Loper. Maybe that woman was a seamstress for Mr. Loper." If you have any additional information, let me know at the address at the end of this newsletter.

## *You Do Know!*

Speaking of Joan, she pointed out a story in the April 23<sup>rd</sup> New York Times about jazz violinist Aaron Weinstein, who is performing his show "Have Strings, Will Swing" at New York's Metropolitan Room on West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street. Per Times writer Stephen Holden:

Other pieces in the set, devoted entirely to standards, included medleys by Frank Loesser ("If I Were a Bell," "Moments Like This") and George Gershwin ("Someone to Watch Over Me," "They All Laughed," "Somebody Loves Me"). "Love in Bloom" was offered as a witty parody of the Jack Benny theme song that Benny (whose name he didn't mention) comically flubbed... Having displayed his technical bravura in the first two-thirds of the show, Mr.

Weinstein retreated with the Gershwin songs into a simpler, more emotionally expressive mode. He is not really a descendant of Jack Benny, but of Woody Allen, with serious musical talent.



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Marlan Clark E-mailed me looking for information on a piece sung by the Sportsmen Quartet called The Hum Song. She was directing a Jack Benny radio program recreation and wanted to use it in the production. Happily, Sportsmen expert Tom Wagner was able to provide some help: "The Hum Song was featured in a movie called Paris Follies of 1956...I have no concrete knowledge that the song was performed on the June 1954 Saturday Night Revue. I found a review of the show and all it states is that the Sportsmen sang





a song about their life with Jack Benny. I'm only making an assumption due to the time frame matching up. I would love to get a copy of the show."

Marlan then ran with a lead from Tom about checking the Thousand Oaks Library, and bingo! She found the score of The Hum Song. She E-mailed me that evening, "There were so many verses for the song. It's like they couldn't stop. Each one funnier

than the other. There's even one about Truman and daughter Margaret. Each of the Sportsmen had a solo and the name was penciled in on the charts. The full orchestration was there."

She also found the movie Tom mentioned: "I looked on line for Paris Follies of 1956. It was also called Fresh from Paris...The opening credits list the Sportsmen Quartet and The Hum Song: [http://www.archive.org/details/fresh\\_from\\_paris](http://www.archive.org/details/fresh_from_paris)." You can also see the Sportsmen singing the song on YouTube—just search for Sportsmen Hum Song. (the photo above is captured from that clip).

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From Lloyd Dennis: "Here is a truncated quote I just happened to read today from the author Philip Roth: 'Certainly there are wonderful models for the kind of humor that manages to be wildly funny and perfectly gruesome all at once....Jack Benny used to do [that] on Sunday nights for stinginess. I like that kind of comedy...' This quote is found on page 74 of Reading Myself and Others, 1975."

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Ken Behrens shared some lovely scans from the 1935 issue of Radio Guide Mikroscope Album & Log Book. It originally sold for 50 cents and was printed by Radio Guide,





## JACK BENNY

It never was the intention of Jack Benny to be the insouciant comedian whose subtle style has brought him national radio fame. By nature and experience he is a rapid-fire, or "patter," comedian. But ennui, brought on by constant futile auditioning for prospective sponsors, fostered the languorous type of presentation which has made him outstanding among the leading jesters of the day. He conceived the technique one day out of sheer boredom. It won him a contract, whereas his natural style had left him hors-de-combat. He wouldn't desert it now for any consideration.

Nor would he desert Mary Livingstone, his charming wife and stooge, who has been the icing on the Benny cake ever since Jack won his first commercial radio account.

Jack wasn't born "Benny." It's a trade name adopted when Jack decided that the stage was his metier. He decided that the family tag, Kubelsky, wouldn't drag the customers into a theater. He wanted them to come *in* and laugh—not stand out under the marquee and chuckle.

Vaudeville engagements, none too lucrative, followed his service hitch, but in a few years brighter engagements ensued. Then the movie magnates determined that Benny was just what the films needed. But it was in radio that Jack Benny found his natural outlet, and from an ordinary salary in pictures he has risen to an elevation where even the most extravagant sponsors have called strategy conferences in order to meet his terms.

Jack has none of the appearance of a comedian. In fact he has all the savoir-faire of a successful broker. At that he is a comedian only 30 minutes each week. The remaining 6690 waking moments find him a somber, businesslike sleuth, keen on the scent of any situation which he can turn into a gag, with the able help of his material prop and moral supporter, Harry Conn.

He plays a violin as would a beloved maestro. (Yeah?) Love in Bloom is his favorite selection.

Jack is five feet, ten and one-half inches tall and weighs around one hundred and eighty pounds. His clothes are meticulously selected; he wears them with a natural grace. He could give an Englishman cords and tweeds and beat him at his own game. His once dark hair has grayed almost completely, adding to his air of aristocracy and offering unimpeachable evidence of his torturous search for the elusive jest. The Bennys have an adopted girl baby, Joan.

Jack was born on the shores of Lake Michigan in the year 1894 on a date later made auspicious in Chicago by one of the most dramatic crime stories in history, February 14th, the celebrated Valentine's Day gang massacre.

Inc. out of Chicago. The bios appear on pages facing the photo in the original booklet, but are rearranged here for space consideration.

From Brian Forbes:

"Incidentally the drugstore coffee shop / soda fountain where Jack actually frequented, and Jack, Don and Dennis ate in the first part of 'In Scotland. Jack goes Shopping with Mary' 09-21-52 was at the Columbia Drug Store (on the Northwest corner of Columbia Studios) on the

corner of Gower and Sunset in Hollywood, exactly cater corner to the CBS Radio Studios. It is now a restaurant called 'Eat on Sunset.' You could probably special order a lettuce and tomato sandwich (the true Jack Benny sandwich) and a glass of milk, but I don't think they have plain white bread.

"Running across to the Columbia for a quick bite is something they did often, or they would go around the block between shows to the Brown Derby on Vine. NBC was on the next corner (Northeast) of Sunset and Vine (across from Earl Carroll's Nightclub, which is now Nickelodeon Studios), so the CBS people would walk down Sunset, round the corner at Vine and go North to the Brown Derby (where Leonard Levinson, Harold Peary and the Great Gildersleeve





## MARY LIVINGSTONE

MARY LIVINGSTONE had accepted Jack Benny "for better or for worse." One day when he needed a stooge for his vaudeville act, and elected her because she was his wife and the first person at hand, she consented. She figured that nothing could be worse than stooging. That was six years ago. She's been stooging professionally for Jack Benny ever since. But in private life he's her stooge.

Mary was born in Seattle, Washington. She has one brother and one sister. Her sister is married to a theatrical man. Mary blames her sister's husband for launching her on a stage career. She went to school in Vancouver, and was graduated from high at the age of fifteen. Then her folks moved to Los Angeles, where she went to business college. She used to be able to type a hundred words a minute, but now she says it takes her five minutes to pick out one word.

When she was seventeen Mary took a job as a hosiery and lingerie buyer. She liked that. She has a passion for lingerie, tailored stuff; has drawers and drawers full of filmy things now—pinks and blues especially.

After a year Mary quit her job and became a home girl. She was always a popular kid, invited to a different party every night; liked to dance, and still does on every occasion. She never tries to lead her partner, but gives him a dirty look if he steps on her feet. Jack is a divine dancer.

Jack first crossed her path when he was appearing in the Orpheum Theater in Los Angeles. Mary's brother-in-law introduced them. Jack took her out a few times, but the conversation was not particularly serious. Mary didn't think so much of her future husband the first time she saw him. But she adores him now.

Her radio debut came about in this manner: A couple of years ago, shortly after Jack first went on the air with George Olsen and Ethel Shutta, the script was short one night. Jack decided to fill in with their vaudeville act. He and Mary did. After that Mary remained off the air for a few weeks, but when people wrote in to ask who the girl was, she got her part back.

In Winter Mary goes in for somber colors, but lets herself run away with pastels in Summer. There are 40 pairs of shoes and 30 hats always in her closet. She doesn't get a chance to wear half of them. Mary dresses according to her own individual taste. "The style can be hanged," she says, and wears whatever looks good on her. She gets into a 12 dress, 5 shoes and 21 1-2 hat.

Mary is especially fond of furs—minks and ermines attract her and look well on her; she loves jewelry, mostly diamonds. That's why Jack thinks she's a little extravagant. Her first piece of jewelry was a ring her father gave her for graduation. It had a tiny diamond, but she thought it was the biggest thing in the world. Now she has a lot of diamonds. She loathes night clubs, but spends most of her time at the movies. Joan Crawford is her favorite actress. As for men, Herbert Marshall makes her heart thump the loudest.

Mary is an inveterate card player, not so good at contract, but she can play Russian bank all day and night. She's a terrific gambler, especially when it comes to roulette. Travel is one of her hobbies. She loves London and Honolulu, but thinks no place in the world compares with New York.

Mary goes in for plain food. Her favorite meat is broiled steak, rare; not much on desserts, prefers fruit. She likes candy but doesn't eat much, in order to keep weight down. Weighs 118, and is five feet and a half inch tall. Outside of forsaking candy, she doesn't have to do anything to control weight. Her closest friends are Mrs. Jack Pearl and Gracie Allen.

Gracie lives immediately above her, and if they had a dumb waiter they could carry on dumb-waiter conversations. This way they have to use the house phone.

Attractive dark brown hair, large brown eyes and dark complected—that's Mary. Send her a birthday card on November 27.

cast would eat in between shows) or go across the street to Tom Breneman's for something faster (where Bed Bath and Beyond is now)."

*F.E. Boone*

*Memories*

I have been very fortunate in being contacted by relatives of Jack's associates (more on that shortly), including the niece of F.E. Boone. She shared these recollections of her famous uncle.

I'm F. E. Boone's niece (his sister, my mother, was about 20 years his junior). He was "Uncle Dicey" to me and my favorite uncle. My mother used to take me to New York to see the Hit Parade and/or Jack Benny, and to LA where my aunt & uncle also

resided. Mother and I lived in Lexington, KY. I can only share some memories, sparse though they be (keeping in mind that I was very young - I was 13 when my uncle died).

It was 11 days before my 4th birthday when my uncle held me on his shoulders in Times Square to celebrate Victory Day on August 14, 1945. I barely remember that and of course, at the time, had no idea what on earth was going on!

I remember when my mother, my Aunt Rita, and I would shop in New York City, and once my Uncle Dicey said, "You shop all day long and come home with nothing but a bar of soap?"

I remember going to Your Hit Parade shows and marveling at the beautiful full, long dresses the women wore. I especially remember June Collins and how beautiful she was. I also remember Snooky Lansen.

I don't think I was ever taken to any of the Jack Benny shows, but my mother absolutely loved Jack Benny as did I growing up. I still think he was one of the funniest comedians EVER! The facial expressions were priceless and the only person who could effectively mimic them was, of course, Johnny Carson.....both are so missed!

I remember how much I loved visiting my aunt and uncle in Beverly Hills—especially when the "ding ding" man would come by selling ice cream.

At some point, my aunt and uncle moved to Robersonville, NC (or maybe they had always owned a home there, I'm not sure), and I remember the house being full of flowers when my uncle died and so many people in attendance at his funeral. My mother adored her big brother (so did I) and was absolutely devastated when he died. In retrospect, I think my uncle was the father figure she never had (and the grandfather I never had).

## *Jack Benny meets...Batman?*

There has long been a highly peripheral connection between Jack Benny and Batman, with Madge Blake (Clara from the Jack Benny Fan Club, Pasadena Chapter) doubling as Bruce Wayne's Aunt Harriet Cooper and a cameo appearance by Don Wilson as a news reporter. I am sure that there was more crossover in the host of supporting Benny characters and those on the Batman series; I'll leave you to delve into that analysis—let me know what you find.

That said, imagine my surprise to find that Jack contracted directly with Mr. Wayne and his associate for their assistance on a case. This was well after his cartoon appearances in True Comics in February 1948 and his retreat to Li'l Abner in Dogpatch (September 18, 1955, featured in our first 2009 Times issue); and it was well before his 1990s support of Wolff and Byrd (featured in our second 2008 Times issue). Fascinating how Jack has inspired so many cartoonists across the decades.

This article is reprinted from the blog of Steven Thompson (aka BookSteve) with his permission. Our thanks to him for allowing us to reproduce it here, and for a very fine review of the piece. Now to you Steve...



Longtime readers will recall that I'm a big fan of comedian Jack Benny. I even contributed a couple of years back to a published anthology covering different aspects of Benny's career. My piece covered Jack's 1990's comic book appearance with Batton Lash's WOLFF AND BYRD. What I didn't know at the time was that this was NOT Jack's first major comics exposure!



The beginning of 1967 saw the United States still in the grip of the preceding Spring's Batmania! TV's high camp BATMAN series was in its second season and huge stars all wanted to appear on it! Van Johnson, Tallulah Bankhead, Art Carney, Shelley Winters. Had Liberace not appeared as an evil pianist, it might not have been a surprise to see Jack Benny on BATMAN as a crooked fiddler! Instead, though, Jack's appearance was in another venue entirely...and has been almost completely forgotten in the years since.

Once again, let's revisit the never-reprinted, TV-based BATMAN newspaper strip from the late 1960's. Beginning in early 1967, Jack Benny was the special guest star in a seven week sequence credited on Wikipedia to writer Whitney Ellsworth and artist Joe Giella (but I seem to detect a trace of some



assistance at times).

The plot has the comedian



in town for a fundraising violin concert for the Gotham Symphony when his rare Stradivarius is stolen by an unknown villain. In spite of Batman's protests that they don't work on commission, the Dynamic Duo agrees to take the case for \$1000 dollars per hour (from cheapskate millionaire Benny!) donated to the Symphony.



The catch is that for those prices, Jack insists on tagging along to be sure they don't pad out their fee! Thus we see Jack taken blindfolded to the Batcave where the Batputer [sic] immediately and easily identifies the thief as "The Collector," a non-descript bad guy who likes the finer things in life.



Next it's off for a 15 story bat-rope climb—with Benny in the lead—to the villain's penthouse lair. BUT!...he is expecting them with poison-tipped darts which Batman diverts with his batarang...or at least he calls it a batarang. This is followed by the ClockKing-like Collector turning loose the two vicious gorillas he just happens to have in his luxurious apartment. Gorillas, of course, are NOT known for being vicious but hey...



Jack manages to deal with them by unintentionally finding their funny bone and getting them laughing, leaving the arch-criminal to resort to the tried and true method of a gun. Not to worry, however, as Batman immediately recognizes that the gun has



been rigged by the Collector's enemies to blow up and kill him when he tries to shoot it. It takes the Caped Crusader a few minutes to convince his foe of this but after that, all's well that ends well.

With his Strad returned, Jack signs over a 7000-dollar check to Batman for the symphony. All that's left is for Robin's punchline and a brief plug for the following week's million dollar



debut of...Batgirl (which I don't have...yet!) Special Thanks to Marko in Croatia for pointing me towards these scans!



## *Frankie Remley: All in the Family*

As I mentioned earlier, I have been fortunate to not only be contacted by various Benny associate relatives, but even have the opportunity to put some of them in touch with each other. I connected F.E. Boone's niece, Connie, with another relative. And I had a similar "networking" opportunity with the family of Frankie Remley.

Many of you have probably been reading to this point wondering who that is on the cover of this issue. Those of you who already recognized him should be congratulated on a sharp-eyed connection to the often-mentioned but only occasionally-seen left-handed guitar player named Frankie Remley. The man on the cover is the *real* Remley—not Elliott Lewis who played his part on the Phil Harris-Alice Faye program! (You can insert your own joke here about not recognizing him because you can't see the bottle in his hand, or because he's not under a table, etc.) Not a bad-looking gent—I have heard a few people comment that they see a resemblance between him and Lawrence Welk. This is scanned from a beautiful 10" x 13" professional portrait taken, we estimate, in the early 40s. It was donated to the IJBFC by Jack Strong, Frankie's nephew, and we are very grateful to him and the family for sharing it.

E-mailing with Jack Strong and getting his memories led to E-mailing with his older brother, Harry, and his sister, Joan. Then in the middle of all this, I get an E-mail from Thomas Bakken with a photo he had, asking if I could confirm that it was Frank Remley. So I shared it with Jack, Harry, and Joan to get their opinion. They confirmed the identity, and wondered if Thomas was related. Turns out that yes...there is a blood connection! They then began sharing family information, and again, my thanks to them for keeping me in the loop of their discussion.



Thomas Bakken's photo of Remley

I have been scratching my head trying to figure out how to best present all the information exchanged among us over the various E-mails, since there are many good, long quotes where I want to give proper credit, but also tie in bits of information from other discussions. So I'll do my best to give you a cohesive, linear story from this incredible Lucky Dip of Remley's family data and personal history. Once again, endless thanks to all four of the folks who contributed their knowledge and memories!

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Frank Remley's great-grandparents (mother's mother's parents) were John Gallagher (1815-1907) and Bridget Stevens (1816-1906). They hailed from Ireland, possibly from County Sligo. Going

back an additional generation, John Gallagher's parents were Patrick Gallagher and Margaret Dunn, while Bridget's Parents were Patrick Stevens and Bridget Dunn (I don't have information on whether Margaret and Bridget were related, although they share a common surname). John and Bridget Gallagher immigrated to Chicago and had multiple children, including a daughter, Mary, and later a son, Patrick H. At some point, the family moved to Minnesota. Patrick Gallagher married Dorothy C. Markin, and their grandson is Thomas Bakken.

Mary Gallagher married William Moran, who was born in Ireland and immigrated to the US. They had several daughters (married names in parentheses when known): Nellie (Remley), Anna/Annie (Hesch), Bridget (Lavelle), Margaret (Westlake), Catherine, and Ellen. Nellie married Constance Remley, whose family immigrated from Germany, and they settled in Fargo, North Dakota. Their first child was Alice (Doyle), then Lillian Elizabeth (Strong, born November 21, 1900), and Frank William (born October 23, 1901). After Constance passed



Sisters Annie Hesch and Nellie Remley





Phil Harris and his band at the Wilshire Bowl, Frankie prominently in right front

away, Nellie married Michael Kennally and they had a son named Edward Kennally. Edward became a career Marine and never married.

Per Joan, "Frank and Mike Kennally did not get along, so [Frank] left home at a very early age. Somewhere along the way he learned to play the guitar, and because he was left-handed, he learned to play the guitar that way. Frank was a very personable guy, friendly and easy going." Frankie married Helen Lorraine Hobart, who was born on September 27, 1904. Helen was a very petite lady, only about five feet tall, and was often called by the nickname "Stubb." They were childless until some time in 1942, when they adopted a young baby boy in Los Angeles from a Catholic Adoption Agency. They named him Frank William Remley, Jr. More on him later.

Although the family doesn't know exactly how or when Frank met Phil Harris and started working with him, it seems that he was with the orchestra by the time Phil joined the Jack Benny program in the fall of 1936. The first reference to Remley, though not directly by name, comes on the program of October 24, 1937, and he even appears briefly on the April 10, 1938 program. Even though the character of Remley was portrayed as a heavy drinker, Joan confirms that her uncle "didn't drink much at all and preferred a glass of buttermilk...ugh!" At some point, Helen started working as a personal secretary to Mary Livingstone, Phil Harris, and Alice Faye. Frank and his family settled in Newport Beach and spent a good deal of time at the ocean.

Joan recalled this story that Helen related to her: "About the time of the end of World War II, Jack Benny and his troupe were ask to go to Europe to entertain the troops by the USO. I'm sorry I can't remember what country they were in but the whole crew was put up in a castle. They were all taken to their rooms, which were all lovely. Soon after Frank and Helen settled in, there was a knock on the door, and it was Mary Livingstone. Now, Helen told me that Mary Livingston hated not having her own bed, and she wanted to see if Helen and Frank had single beds. She looked at their room and told them she wanted to change rooms with them because her and Jack's room only had one big bed. Helen said, 'Sure, that's OK,' and she and Frank packed up their things and moved to Mary and Jack Benny's suite. Helen was aghast—she said it was the most gorgeous room she had ever been in, packed with antiques and beautiful paintings. It was like a ballroom and they were so thrilled and happy, they couldn't believe their luck and she had never forgotten the moment."

I asked Joan if it was possible that this could have been as late as the Summer 1952 trip to Europe the Bennys took on the Queen Mary, since I don't believe that Mary went on either of Jack's USO European tours in 1943 or 1945. Helen's recounting was that it was "right after the war ended," which points to the possibility that Mary may have been on at least a portion of the 1945 trip.

Joan also had a very pivotal story from Helen: "When Phil Harris was on Jack Benny's show and it was time to renew contracts, Phil Harris decided he wanted to go out on his own and do new things. My Aunt Helen begged my Uncle Frank to stay with Jack Benny, as she finally wanted some security for their future. Frank and Phil were such good friends from early years, but my Uncle adored my Aunt Helen and told her that he would abide by her wishes and remain with Jack Benny. Phil Harris never forgave him, and he and Frank never spoke from that day on. My Aunt remained friends with Alice Faye, and when my Uncle died in Newport Beach, she came to his funeral but Phil Harris would not. My Aunt felt very guilty over this and never talked about it again. I believe either Helen or Frank or both might be godfather and godmother to one of Alice Faye and Phil Harris daughters."

Joan and I had some extensive discussion about the ongoing relationship (or lack thereof) between Frank and Phil. In a letter from Jack to Frankie dated December 22, 1952, Jack encloses a classic "Ripley's Believe It or Not" clipping and comments, "It says here that 'VODKA' in Russian means 'Little Water.' Naturally I wouldn't know much about this because I'm not a heavy drinker. However, Rem—I would suggest that if you and Phil are not enemies any longer—I would take this up with him as am sure he can give you the correct answer. However, if you and Phil are not talking—I would suggest you take it up with anyone of the boys in the band... If they don't know anything about it—I will call Bill Morrow. I'm sure he can give me the right answer." Remember that



Bill's real-life exploits provided a lot of the inspiration for Phil's on-air character.

The name of Remley's character on the Harris-Faye show was changed to Elliott in the fall of 1953 without explanation, about a year after Phil's summer 1952 departure from Jack's radio show. Joan stated, "When [Phil] left completely, he was notified that Jack Benny owned the character of Frank Remley and he couldn't use it any more, and that's when Harris switched to using Elliott Lewis' name."

On Phil's This is Your Life appearance on September 25, 1957, Frank is introduced as "your oldest and best friend that you've known since you were teens." They do exchange some banter on the show, although Phil looks a little stiff at the outset. Phil's October 5, 1958 appearance on Jack's television program features a small exchange between the two of them which seems cordial, at least in front of the cameras.



"[After Jack Benny left radio], my Uncle formed his own band and played for many years at the Roosevelt Hotel in Hollywood. My brother Jack and I would go every once in awhile on a Saturday evening and dance to his music. He was always so glad to see us. They still have pictures of him and his band at the Roosevelt Hotel."

Our ongoing discussion inspired Joan to do some additional research into Frank and Helen's son, Frank Jr. They knew he

had met a tragic end, but Joan was able to fill in the details. "[Frank Jr.] was on an albacore fishing trip on August 13, 1966. He was with Gary Barker, age 26, and Frank was 24. The accident is recorded in the archives of the Reported Press Telegram on September 15, 1966, Long Beach; the Independent on October 8, 1966, Long Beach; and the Redlands Daily on October 8, 1966, Redlands, CA. I do think that these two guys were also delivering this boat to its owner because that's what Helen told me, so maybe they did a little fishing first. The boat blew up and as far as I know the two boys were never found, only wreckage. Frankie Jr. never married, but I believe he was involved with a lady who had some young children. Needless to say, both Frank and Helen were inconsolable."



On January 1, 1967, Frank had a heart attack at home and died at the hospital. Helen went on to live well into her 90s, never losing her memories and always remaining extremely lucid. She donated her body to the USC School of Medicine. After the school was finished, she was laid to rest next to Frank. They are at the Pacific View Memorial Park in

Corona del Mar, Orange County. They are in the Vista Del Mar section, lot 784.

Some first-hand memories from the family:

### **Harry Strong**

I remember after I got out of US Marine Corps Boot Camp, I had a ten-day furlough which I spent in LA visiting my maternal grandmother. During that stay, I had a chance to visit her son [my uncle] Frank Remley. This was in 1943. At that time, Jack Benny had a radio program with Phil Harris, Rochester, et al. On one of the days the program was to air, my Uncle Frank took me to the studio with him. I had a chance to watch Jack and the cast go through their final rehearsal. My Uncle Frank was not allowed to attend the program rehearsal because Jack Benny depended on his unusual laugh to gauge how well the program was going. When we listened to the program back home, we could always identify Frank's laugh. When the rehearsal was over, we stepped out on a back balcony to have a smoke, and I remember Jack Benny coming out to join us. He was a regular sort of a guy and very enjoyable to be with.

After I got out of the Marines in the summer of 1946, that fall my mom, dad, and myself drove to Chicago to see my Uncle Frank. Jack Benny and Phil Harris were appearing at the Chicago Theatre on stage. My dad got us admitted to backstage, and we were ushered into a room where we met Alice Faye, Rochester, and some of the orchestra members. While there, the phone in the room would ring occasionally and Rochester would answer it in his radio character. We all had a good laugh. When Phil and his orchestra went on stage as an intro to Jack Benny, I watched from the side of the stage. All of a sudden, I heard a violin playing, looked over my right shoulder, and sure enough, there was Jack Benny playing along, apparently warming up for his part in the show.

Finally, my Uncle told me how the guys in the orchestra would try to break up Jack with a joke or funny experience. When Jack thought the joke or situation was funny he would slap his right knee, and if he slapped it three times, you would know your joke was a hit. I know that Jack Benny and my uncle were



very close. He would often call my uncle and go for a ride around the Hollywood countryside talking up a storm.

### **Jack Strong**

In the summer of 1938 (could be 1939), Jack Benny came to the Orpheum Theater in Minneapolis to do a show along with Phil Harris and his band. Our whole family was so excited to be able to go see the show and meet Jack and Phil, plus visit with my Uncle Frank. My Grandma, Nellie Strong, lived on a farm in Edina, MN and she offered to host a dinner for Jack, Phil, and Uncle Frank along with the rest of the "Strong" clan. Jack accepted the invitation, and we had a grand old time with he, Phil and Frankie. I was only 10 at the time but still remember meeting Jack and Phil and having fun with my Uncle.

My wife, Joanie, and I met up with Uncle Frank on several occasions after we got married in 1958. Uncle Frank and his band would play at the Sheraton Hotel on Wilshire Boulevard near downtown Los Angeles. We would go there and dance to his music, and then visit with him during his "break." He was always so friendly and fun to be around and of course his famous "laugh" was infectious! He was a great "Uncle," his smile lit up the room, and he was loved by so many.

When listening to some of the old Jack Benny Radio Programs I can still hear/pick out his famous laugh! He loved Jack and Phil so much.



With Trini Lopez on The Jack Benny Hour  
aired December 1, 1966

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Please send all questions, comments, corrections, and additions to:

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