



Sunday, 29 July 2012

## The Walking Man

He made up being 39, being incredibly cheap and having a butler named Rochester, but Jack Benny was occasionally completely honest in some of the things he said to the listeners on his show. When he mentioned on the March 7, 1948 broadcast that he had stayed up all night re-writing his show because he was guessed as the Walking Man the night before, he wasn't kidding.

The Walking Man was a contest on the audience stunt show "Truth or Consequences." Host Ralph Edwards promised a mountain of prizes if the person he telephoned could decipher the weekly clues to guess whose feet were being heard on the broadcast. Edwards proved to be a promotional genius. The contest got all kinds of free, front-page publicity for his show. And it didn't hurt Jack, either. He built two of his shows around it, including the one with the quick re-write job.



Jack picked his good friend Ed Sullivan to tell how it all unfolded. Sullivan's known today as a stiff Sunday night TV host with "a rilly big shoe." But he'd been a newspaper columnist on the Broadway beat for years before that and, more importantly, gave Jack what turned out to be his break on radio.

Here's Sullivan's column of June 19, 1948.

### Little Old New York

By ED SULLIVAN  
Behind the Scenes

On the third Saturday night on which he came home late, Mary Benny said to her husband: "Jack, I'm getting fed up with this every week. What's the alibi this time?" She looked at him with the curious glint in her eye that husbands accept as the last calm before the storm. "I haven't any alibi, Doll," said Jack weakly. He had pledged not to tell even his wife that he had been picked as "The Walking Man."

Each Saturday, at 5:30 p. m., he had to drive into the Hollywood hills, to a house occupied by a semi-hermit, where they recorded the clues that had the country going daffy. As a result, he was late for dinner each Saturday night, and he was rapidly getting himself into a peek of trouble with the irate missus.

The only tension that ever existed in the Jack Benny home developed during the weeks leading up to the final announcement that Benny was it.

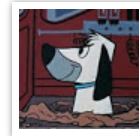
The tension started easing about two weeks ahead of the formal revelation. At that time, in Los Angeles, enterprising hawkers were peddling handbills in the street, price \$1, giving a regular racing sheet rundown of the possibilities. Mary bought one of them, saw that Jack was high on the list of probabilities.

From then on, when he came home late Saturday nights, she just looked at him coldly but stopped bawling him out. When it was all over, he said: "Thanks, Doll, for trusting me."

"It even started mysteriously," Benny told me backstage at the Roxy. "I got a call from Mickey Rockford, of MCA, to rush to NBC to discuss something he couldn't divulge over the phone. He met me and told me to follow him to an office. He unlocked the door, looked up and down the corridor, entered quickly and beckoned me in. When I saw Ralph Edwards alone in the place, I figured that it was one of Ralph's contests, and it was. . . 'This is the only time I'll ever talk to you, Jack,' said Ralph. 'From now on, we can't ever be seen together.' Then he gave me my instructions and I had to pledge I'd never reveal our secret to a soul."

"It was funny at Hollywood parties," grinned Benny. "Van Johnson is a nut on mystery contests, and this

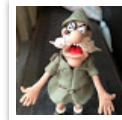
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## Blogs to See

### Peter Gray's Comics and Art



Spencer Jordan's amazing work... we are hoping artists like Ian

Knox...and families of these comic artists can see these gems... - made with fimo clay I had ago and its not very easy to do...  
4 hours ago

### Fernando Liera Blog Cartoons



Vehicle Verification Centers of Mexico City will reopen in August with COVID

safety measures. - ©2020 fernandollera.com  
5 hours ago

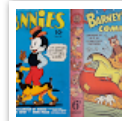
### Movies with Michael



Cowboy Church #67 - Hello my friends and welcome back for another

service of cowboy church. Today's musical selection begins with Gene Autry singing "Dear Hearts and Gentle Pe...  
8 hours ago

### Termite Terrace headlines



Question for All You Cartoon Collectors! - OK so I've been doing some

looking around. Bosko apparently had a comic book and I'm wondering if any of you know of

contest really drove him batty.

"One night, at the Billy Goetz house, Van was sitting with me and saying how exasperated he'd become at his failure to identify 'The Walking Man.' He wouldn't talk about anything else. 'Ding, dong, bell,' reasoned Van, 'must be a church. Do you think it's Winston Churchill, Jack?' I said it probably was.

"Weeks later, after the announcement, I met him at a party. Van looked at me and whispered: 'You no-good louse.'"

His radio writers started suspecting that it was Benny, laid a Saturday trap for him instigated by Mary's brother, Hilliard, (Jack's program is written every Saturday afternoon).

Hilliard and Sam Perrin, pretending they'd left their cars at home, asked Jack to have dinner with them after the program was drafted and then drive them home.

"Throughout dinner, Jack couldn't look at his watch. Then he drove them home, and after dropping off Perrin, he drove away very slowly. Once around the corner, Benny tore at high speed up to the house in Hollywood hills, reaching there at exactly 5:29.

"If a motorcycle cop had grabbed me, I'd have been a dead pigeon," says Jack.

For fear of tipping off contestants, the Benny program following Ralph Edwards' announcement could not be written in advance.

On Saturday afternoon, the Benny writers completed the regular Sunday night program. A few hours later, Ralph Edwards named the winner.

Benny had to assemble his writers and, with the exception of the Phil Harris spot, they had to write a whole new program. They finished it at 2 a. m. Sunday.

"And you know," marvels Jack, "it was one of the funniest programs of them all."

Benny emerged from the contest with a deep regard for the scrupulous honesty of "Truth or Consequences" and a tremendous respect for the radio savvy of Ralph Edwards.

"The one thing that was stressed was the secrecy that had to be maintained. There was no leak at any point. It was a very impressive set-up, and that guy Edwards is an amazing organizer and executive."

Edwards couldn't have come up with a more appealing winner for his contest, unless it was a soldier who had been crippled in the recent war. It was a widow from Chicago. The International News Service reported:

#### Clerk is "Fluttery" About Winning \$23,000

CHICAGO, Mar. 8 (INS)—A gray-haired, 68-year-old shop clerk, winner of the lucrative NBC "Walking Man" radio contest said last night she would bank the \$23,000 in cash awards and continue to work in a Chicago Loop department store.

Mrs. Florence Hubbard (of 48 North Waller St.) said she still felt "fluttery" about her good fortune. She declared:

"I can hardly believe it happened to me. I came home Saturday from work, wet from the rain, hungry and tired.

"I took a hot bath and just had an opportunity to get into a bathrobe when the telephone rang.

"It was Conductor Ralph Edwards of the Truth or Consequences program, sponsors of the 'Walking Man' program. He asked me who was the 'walking man' and I replied: 'Jack Benny.' Mr. Edwards congratulated me and told me I was the winner."

She said she hardly had an opportunity to realize her good fortune when the telephone began jangling and her apartment doorbell began buzzing.

It was newsman, neighbors and friends calling for a story or eager to offer congratulations. Mrs. Hubbard laughed happily as she declared:

"I never did have a chance to get dressed properly or even comb my hair. News photographers simply swarmed into my apartment and littered the floor with flash bulbs.

"It was tremendously exciting."

The small, pleasant faced widow said that despite the excitement she spent a restful night and slept well. Yesterday she posed for news reels and continued to meet interviewers.

She ate lunch with a woman friend in a nearby restaurant and planned to retire early so that she would be rested when she reports back to work as a \$30-a-week-checker in the casual clothes section of the store. Mrs. Hubbard said:

"I don't see any reason why I should change my mode of living or quit my job. I enjoy meeting people and I like to work.

"Part of my awards include trips to Hollywood and Palm Springs. I am leaving it up to my company officials when I will take the trips."

Mrs. Hubbard said she mailed "20 or 30 letters" to contest officials. Each contained a reason why "we should support the American Heart Association." She declared:

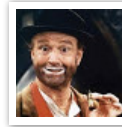
"I cannot recall the exact text of my letter but I remember that I wrote everyone should support the Heart



additional covers you could share! ...

17 hours ago

#### Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog



Born on July 18, 1913 - Red Skelton - \*Today's post commences

with the Guzzler's Gin routine ...

1 day ago

#### News From ME

Sorry... - As far as I know, I do not have any diseases. I just have too much to deal with right now so I won't be blogging much if at all. I'm postponing all the web...

2 days ago

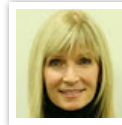
#### Cartoon Research

In His Own Words: H.T. Kalmus on Disney in Technicolor - Suspended Animation #276 Many references may be found regarding two-strip Technicolor. I have been guilty of discussing Walter Lantz's King of Jazz (1930)...

2 days ago

#### AFRTS Archive

Mary Turner 1985 - Mary Turner today Mary Turner really rocked the house.



Normally when any of the jocks got a reaction, it'd be split.

The ones that were really liked wou...

4 days ago

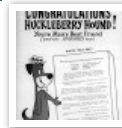
#### The World of Knight



TONIGHT, 11:54 PM. - COPYRIGHT 2020 BY MILTON KNIGHT

4 days ago

#### Yowp



Hanna-Barbera Birthday Did-You-Knows - 63 years ago today, some

forms were signed by George Sidney, Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera creating what eventually became the biggest TV cartoon operation i...

1 week ago

#### Supervised By Fred Avery: Tex Avery's Warner Brothers Cartoons

Wabbit Twouble: A Small Addendum to An Outstanding Podcast -

Association because it is seeking a cure for heart disease.

"My husband, Dr. Charles F. Hubbard, an optician, died of heart disease 13 years ago, and I have been interested in it ever since."

What did she win? The INS gave a list:

Home laundry consisting of washer, drier and automatic ironer.

\$1000 diamond and ruby watch.

New 4-door sedan.

Gas kitchen range.

Sixteen mm. motion picture sound projector and screen with print of current film and delivery of motion picture of the month for one year.

Two weeks vacation for two from any place in the United States to Sun Valley, Idaho, all expenses paid.

\$1000 diamond ring.

Vacuum cleaner with all attachments.

1948 console FM and AM radio-phonograph combination and television set, all in one cabinet.

Gas refrigerator.

All metal Venetian blinds throughout entire home.

Paint job on house, inside and out.

Complete wardrobe of women's clothes for every season in the year.

Fifteen cubic foot heavy duty home or farm freezer, filled with frozen foods.

All metal plane.

Installation of ceramic tile in kitchen and bathroom.

Furniture to fill dining room and two bedrooms.

De luxe trailer coach with modern kitchen and sleeping quarters for four.

Typewriter.

Thousand dollar Persian lamb coat.

Aluminum boat, complete with outboard motor.

Piano.

Two years supply of sheets and pillow cases for every bed in house.

Choice of \$500 worth of electric home appliances.

Electric blankets for every bed in house.

Three suits apiece for every man in immediate family.

Desk console electric sewing machine.

And what became of Mrs. Hubbard, you ask? Her three-room apartment (the building was built in 1927 and still stands) couldn't fit most of what she won, so she kept only the sterling silver set and the sewing machine. She turned down 40 marriage proposals. She quit her job at Carson Pirie Scott & Co. about a year later and bought a duplex in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Read about her passing in the comment section.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:48](#)



Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

## 5 comments:

**Anonymous** 13 November 2012 at 20:29

Florence Isabel Hubbard was not her. That Florence Hubbard had her social security number issued to her in Florida. There was a Florence Hubbard who died in Texas on November 30, 1977 whose SSN was issued in Illinois.

[Reply](#)

**Anonymous** 14 November 2012 at 10:30

I checked with the cemetery in Illinois where her husband is buried. She is not there with him. So the mystery persists. If she's the one who died in Texas in 1977, then why is she not buried with her husband? I'm thinking maybe she remarried.

[Reply](#)



**Unknown** 2 March 2014 at 14:53



Original animation drawing from Wabbit Twouble with color notations

for the ink and paint department. Release date: 12/20/41 Availability: Looney Tunes Gol...  
3 weeks ago

**Mark Kausler's CatBlog**

[The Lady and the Tiger](#) -

From the Cathy Hill Archive of Unpublished Comics comes "The Lady and the Tiger". This story was drawn before Cathy started the "Mad Raccoons" series. U...

4 weeks ago

**What About Thad?**

[Cartoon Logic Podcast](#) -

And yet another distraction from this brick and mortar blog... I've entered the world of podcasting with renowned animation director and historian Bob Jaques...

10 months ago



**Likely Looney, Mostly Merrie**

[That's all, folks!](#) - My posts have gotten thinner over the years. I'm aware of that. I've been hopeful for a long time, that I can remain active with blogging and sharing furth...

1 year ago



**Dr. Grob's Animation Review**

[The Flying Man](#) - 'The Flying Man' is a very short absurdist film in which a man drops his coat to take a swim in mid air. Another man with a dog drops by, tries the same th...

2 days ago

## Blog Archive

- ▶ [2020](#) (216)
- ▶ [2019](#) (376)
- ▶ [2018](#) (379)
- ▶ [2017](#) (380)
- ▶ [2016](#) (396)
- ▶ [2015](#) (389)
- ▶ [2014](#) (390)
- ▶ [2013](#) (388)
- ▼ [2012](#) (397)
  - ▶ [December](#) (39)
  - ▶ [November](#) (34)
  - ▶ [October](#) (32)
  - ▶ [September](#) (34)

Florence Hubbard, my great aunt, was buried in Dallas, Texas in 1977. She had lived many years in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida but moved to Dallas to be near my mother, her niece. The Walking Man Contest win is a big part of our history and the story is more interesting than you could imagine.

[Reply](#)



**Martin Grams** 13 December 2014 at 15:44

Mark, Can you contact me asap? I have a dozen or more never-before-published photos of your great aunt I'd like to send you. Martin

[Reply](#)



**wtravler** 4 March 2017 at 17:13

Interesting bit of Jack Benny related history.

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- [August \(33\)](#)
- ▼ [July \(34\)](#)
  - [Not Even an Egg](#)
  - [Oompahs Backgrounds](#)
  - [The Walking Man](#)
  - [Betty Boop On Trial](#)
  - [Felix and the Snakecycle](#)
  - [Hollywood Loves Vin Scully](#)
  - [Not the MGM Lion](#)
  - [Reckless Driver Outlines](#)
  - [Porky the Fireman](#)
  - [TV Needs More J.P. Patches](#)
  - [What to do with Adolf](#)
  - [Disney and his Big Bad Wolf](#)
  - [Music by Screwy Squirrel](#)
  - [San Francisco, Giddyap Style](#)
  - [The One Failure of Arnold Stang](#)
  - [Hot Spot Backgrounds](#)
  - [Balloon Land](#)
  - [Fred Allen Talks Television](#)
  - [Walter Lantz, Jitterbugs and Old Drawings](#)
  - [Bugs as Groucho Smear](#)
  - [Excited City Wolf](#)
  - [Jim Backus, Radio and Recovery](#)
  - [The Loose Nut Explosion](#)
  - [Wacky Blackout Title Drawings](#)
  - [An Oscar-Winning Boy Scout](#)
  - [Jack Benny and Gracie Allen](#)
  - [I'll Have the Mashed Potatoes De Guard](#)
  - [William Schallert](#)
  - [A Fish!](#)
  - [Yankee Doodle Mouse](#)
  - [It Started With a Football](#)
  - [Nancy the American Patriot](#)
  - [Northwest Hounded Backgrounds](#)
  - [Doris Singleton](#)

- [June \(34\)](#)
- [May \(31\)](#)
- [April \(32\)](#)
- [March \(31\)](#)

- ▶ [February](#) (29)
- ▶ [January](#) (34)
- ▶ [2011](#) (106)

Labels

<a href="#">Aline Mosby</a>	(17)
<a href="#">Art Davis</a>	(33)
<a href="#">Bad Luck Blackie</a>	(9)
<a href="#">Bob and Ray</a>	(10)
<a href="#">Bob Clampett</a>	(82)
<a href="#">Bob McKimson</a>	(59)
<a href="#">Bob Thomas</a>	(53)
<a href="#">Chuck Jones</a>	(142)
<a href="#">Columbia</a>	(33)
<a href="#">Counterfeit Cat</a>	(8)
<a href="#">Cynthia Lowry</a>	(26)
<a href="#">Dick Thomas</a>	(14)
<a href="#">Don Patterson</a>	(17)
<a href="#">Earl Wilson</a>	(6)
<a href="#">Erskine Johnson</a>	(37)
<a href="#">Felix the Cat</a>	(27)
<a href="#">Film Daily</a>	(50)
<a href="#">Fleischer</a>	(154)
<a href="#">Frank Tashlin</a>	(24)
<a href="#">Fred Allen</a>	(43)
<a href="#">Fred Brunish</a>	(11)
<a href="#">Friz Freleng</a>	(137)
<a href="#">Gene Deitch</a>	(18)
<a href="#">George Pal</a>	(10)
<a href="#">Grant Simmons</a>	(4)
<a href="#">Hanna and Barbera unit</a>	(99)
<a href="#">Hanna-Barbera</a>	(2)
<a href="#">Harman-Ising</a>	(61)
<a href="#">Henry Morgan</a>	(13)
<a href="#">Irv Spence</a>	(8)
<a href="#">Jack Benny</a>	(454)
<a href="#">Jay Ward</a>	(30)
<a href="#">Jimmy Durante</a>	(17)
<a href="#">John Crosby</a>	(84)
<a href="#">John Sutherland</a>	(28)
<a href="#">Johnny Johnsen</a>	(27)
<a href="#">Kenny Baker</a>	(6)
<a href="#">King-Size Canary</a>	(8)
<a href="#">Laugh-In</a>	(11)
<a href="#">Legend of Rockabye Point</a>	(6)
<a href="#">Little Rural Riding Hood</a>	(7)
<a href="#">Magical Maestro</a>	(9)
<a href="#">Maurice Noble</a>	(12)
<a href="#">Mel-O-Toons</a>	(4)
<a href="#">MGM</a>	(553)
<a href="#">Norm McCabe</a>	(5)

<a href="#">Pat Matthews</a>	(10)
<a href="#">Paul Julian</a>	(13)
<a href="#">Paul Terry</a>	(2)
<a href="#">Sara Berner</a>	(5)
<a href="#">Screwy Squirrel</a>	(34)
<a href="#">Spider-Man</a>	(1)
<a href="#">Terrytoons</a>	(84)
<a href="#">Tex Avery</a>	(468)
<a href="#">Tom and Jerry Human</a>	(29)
<a href="#">Tralfaz Sunday Theatre</a>	(17)
<a href="#">Ub Iwerks</a>	(80)
<a href="#">UPA</a>	(57)
<a href="#">Van Beuren</a>	(94)
<a href="#">Vernon Scott</a>	(42)
<a href="#">Virginia MacPherson</a>	(14)
<a href="#">Walt Disney</a>	(145)
<a href="#">Walter Lantz</a>	(241)
<a href="#">Warner Bros.</a>	(586)
<a href="#">Who Killed Who</a>	(10)

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