



Sunday, 18 November 2012

39 Again?

When Jack Benny died in 1974, newspapers quietly joked in their obituaries that he was 39. It seems that Benny was always 39 but despite an Associated Press story in 1950 that it had been a joke of his for years, it wasn't. Benny didn't turn 39 on the radio until 1948. And he decided 39 was a funny number—and the vanity of it fit his character—that he stayed there. He played it up. Other radio shows played it up. As you can see, the AP even did a straight news story about it (newspapers ran it on their front page, too).

Pretty soon, the newspaper columnists realised a Jack Benny "39" birthday feature story was an easy one to do every February. Let's give you a few. The first ones appeared in 1954, and this is one of them that year.



Jack Benny Still Calls It 'Only 40' But He's Actually 60 Valentine Day

By JAMES BACON

ASSOCIATED PRESS STAFF WRITER

HOLLYWOOD, Feb. 13. — Tomorrow is not only Valentine's Day, It is a notable milestone for Jack Benny. He will be 60 years old.

This man, who's been 39 long enough for a whole generation of babies to grow old enough to vote, occupies a special, sort of niche. In years in show business, he has made few enemies. May be none.

This week Benny announces he will now be 40.

Hollywood is a place where a nasty story flies faster than jet ace Chuck Yeager. But you don't hear any about Benny.

There may be a reason. Benny rarely kids anyone else; he's too busy kidding himself. He's made a fortune out of being the butt of his own jokes. That makes it hard for anyone else to get mad at him.

The Benny fountain of youth is just one of many myths that the wag of Waukegan likes to perpetuate about himself. Take his reputation for stinginess.

ANYONE WHO KNOWS will tell you that Benny is one of the most generous men in town. He is a perpetual gift giver, widely known for his charitable work. Yet, while many a star sends along press agents with each contribution, Benny prefers secrecy.

Eddie Cantor tells of the time he invited Jack to his home for dinner. During the course of the dinner, Cantor, an active worker for the cause, told Jack of a bonds for Israel drive.

"I could see Jack was interested," Cantor recalls, "but he floored me when he wrote out check for \$25,000."

Cantor adds:

"The only reference I ever heard him make about it was once when he told a mutual friend: 'Don't ever eat at Cantor's house. He serves the most expensive meals in town'."

ANOTHER BENNY myth is his lack of violin skill.

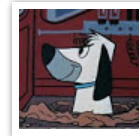
To this day, the fiddle is his great love, except for his wife and daughter. Successful as he is as a comic, he occasionally broods over what might have happened had he practiced the violin more as a child. At the turn of the century, Waukegan, Ill., knew Benny as a child prodigy. Even in grammar school, he was good enough to play in the pit orchestra of the local vaudeville house.

Some weeks ago, he convulsed a swank filmland gathering as master of ceremonies.

After the banquet, most of the big shot guests left. Those who stayed for the dancing got a real treat. They saw happy Benny playing a jazzy violin in the orchestra.

ANOTHER FAVORITE Benny myth is his constant reference to his toupee — always good for a laugh. Jack has

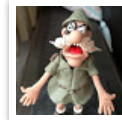
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Spencer Jordan's amazing work... we are hoping artists like Ian

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

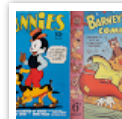
Movies with Michael



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

a good head of hair and needs a toupee like Liberace.

Benny made one of the great movie stinkers of all time a few years back, "The Horn Blows at Midnight." He says frankly "It just plain stunk." But he's made it a sure-fire, laugh-getting gag for years. Recently, with a rewritten script, he played the role on TV in Ominbus, and it came off well.

Benny admits that offstage he is the most unfunny of top comedians. Laughmaking to him is a serious business. But other comics love him, because when he laughs it's because something is funny. George Burns is probably his favorite. He has called Burns "the comedian's comedian."

Once Burns called Jack in London. The call from Beverly Hills came through clear as a bell.

"I just called to say hello, Jack," said George. "So hello." Bang went the receiver.

BENNY TALKED about this gag for a year. Then Burns and Allen played the Palladium in London. Benny flew all the way to London. George and Gracie were attending a party. Benny got on a phone in the next room.

He had Jane Wyman imitate an English operator saying "Beverly Hills calling Mr. Burns."

Jack, on the other end, said: "Hello, George, sorry I can't be there" and slammed down the receiver. Burns thought the gag was terrific. Then Benny slipped into the room to make it even funnier.

One running gag on the Benny show concerns Mary Livingstone's job behind the hosiery counter at the May Company. That's no myth. She actually was working there when she and Jack started getting serious about each other.

They have been married 27 years and she has been an important part of the act almost that long. A job with Benny amounts to a lifetime career. Don Wilson has been with him 20 years, Eddie (Rochester) Anderson 17 and Dennis Day better than 15.

OF KENNY BAKER, once the radio show's top singer, Benny says: "I guess he got a few laughs and thought he could do better on his own. I didn't know he wanted to leave until he left. He could be working for me today." Today Benny says he doesn't know where Baker is now.

Even his writers have been with him 11 years. That probably qualifies as a Hollywood record for the most expendable of local careers.

Benny was one of the first comedians to play straight for the other people in the cast. It has been said that Benny can get more laughs out of a simple "Hmmmm" than most comics get from a sock joke.

"Yes," agrees Benny, "but don't forget that a lot went before that 'Hmmmm' to make it sound funny at that time."

Now from February 14, 1955.

Jack Benny, 39, Promises He'll Be 40 Next Year

BY ALINE MOSBY

HOLLYWOOD — (U.P.) — Jack Benny celebrated another 39th birthday today but next year, he promised, he'll be 40.

For 11 years, Benny has been 39 on his radio and TV shows, a running gag that has turned the veteran comedian's age into a national institution.

Actually, Benny is 61 on this Valentine's day. In 1956 he will reluctantly add another year to the only age he'll admit on his programs.

"I considered becoming 40 this year but my birthday was too far away from my show. Next year it will be closer so we can make a national event out of it," said Benny, a smart showman even when it comes to birthdays.

"By the time I'm 43 on my show I won't be able to work," he smiled.

Believable Age Gag

Benny was sitting in Romanoff's, an upholstered eatery where you often can see celebrities plowing into \$6 lunches. But even in Hollywood the fancy restaurants have home town touches. Between courses Benny exchanged notes, dispatched by a patient headwaiter, with a diner on the other side of the room, Humphrey Bogart.

I thought Bogie's notes were funnier. But, then Benny is the first to admit he surrounds himself with the best of TV-radio writers.

"People say I could just stand on the stage and be funny," said Benny. "I've been in the business a long time. I know better. You have to have material. And it must have a fairly believable premise."

Introduced Gag In '41

The age gag, believable because Benny doesn't look his years, was introduced into his show in 1943. Benny then was supposed to be 36. The following year he became 37 but five years ago stopped at 39, and has vigorously resisted turning 40 ever since.

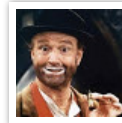
The joke is so well known now that when Arthur Godfrey recently asked a TV contestant his age, the audience howled when the man answered, "39." Even Benny's show business colleagues are mesmerized by the gag.



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

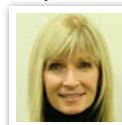
Cartoon Research

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 -

"You should see some of the movie scripts I get," said Benny, "I'd have to be 39 to play them. Recently I was offered the role of a baseball pitcher! And they wanted me to do 'Seven Year Itch' on the stage. They don't think I get any older."

Formula for Youth

"This may be because radio and TV are like a comic strip. You hear the same voice, see the same face. Entertainers don't grow or sound older to people."

Benny has a simple formula for keeping his youthful looks: Diet and stay in show business.

"In this business you keep looking young," said Benny, who has the relaxed, healthy air of a big success (he is No. 1 on radio and in TV's top 10).

"You work all the time and are always around young people. Why, when I walk on the stage I feel as I did when I walked on 30 years ago," he said, and sauntered off to go to a golf course.

Ms. Mosby took a couple of birthdays off. Here's her last one from February 13, 1957. Mosby left United Press to do public relations and freelance reporting from The Brussels Exhibition, then returned to the wire service to report from Moscow.

Actor Jack Benny, 63, Is 39 Again Thursday—Keeping Legend Straight

By ALINE MOSBY

* * *

HOLLYWOOD (UP) — Jack Benny celebrates his 39th birthday again Thursday — because staying 39, he said today, "keeps me young."

The comedian who has won more continued success on radio and TV than any other entertainer actually will be 63 on Valentine's Day. But to his millions of fans, and Benny himself, he's still 39—a happy legend he began on his radio show back in 1945.

"People should forget birthdays and their age," reflected Benny as he sat in his Beverly Hills office on the eve of the occasion.

"If it weren't for observing birthdays, you couldn't keep track of your age. It would be wonderful if a person couldn't. Some people feel old just because of those numbers that are pinned to him."

He Feels 39

"You don't look older to people who see you all the time. I really feel 39—just as I forgot my right name as soon as I changed it to Jack Benny. I do the 39 gag so much on my show that I don't picture myself as much older."

Benny first used the age gag in 1945 on radio when he announced he was 36. He was 37 for a couple of years and finally moved to 39 where he stayed. Since then the age joke—along with gags about his Maxwell car and his gold-filled vault—has become a national legend. Once a Texas newspaper headlined, "Temperature Hits Jack Benny Age—39."

The gentle, amiable comedian realized the importance of his 39 pose two years ago when he planned to turn 40 on his CBS-TV show. It was to be a national event, an hour program bringing together all the entertainers who have worked with him, from Frank Parker to Phil Harris.

But a Boston newspaper talked Jack out of it.

Gag Helps Others

"Someone sent me an editorial they printed," said Jack, parking his feet on top of his desk. "It begged me not to grow older."

"Their reasoning was that it has been a great help to a lot of people who now can figure that when they get to be 39 they won't get any older, either. And so they don't get older."

"I usually don't heed critics."

This was the first time I ever listened to a newspaper. We cancelled the show and I'm still 39."

Each year Jack receives thousands of birthday cards, many marked 39. Fans also send gifts, such as a model of an old Max well that sits on his desk. He also is proud of such presents as a 1955 Pennsylvania license plate, "JB 39," and old hub caps from Maxwells.

This year Jack will be given his biggest birthday party in his life. He'll be feted by the top stars of show business Thursday night at a \$100-a-plate dinner with proceeds going to the American Heart Fund.

Finally, Jack gave some tips in the February 19, 1954 edition of Collier's on how to avoid becoming 40. He got a promo piece from the United Press. There's no byline on this one.

Jack Benny 39?

NEW YORK, Feb 4. (UP)—Jack Benny made an announcement today. He's going to be "40."



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

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The comedian, who has been 85 —or younger — since your old crystal set, told how he discovered and got used to the difficult idea in an article for a popular magazine.

“Today I face the future fearlessly,” Benny wrote, “convinced that, after 39 years of the best fruits of life, my next 39 years will be just as fruitful—and will last just as long.”

In passing, Benny passed on some hints for avoiding 40.

Benny listed them this way:

“1. Before your 40th birthday keep circulating the story that you’re 39. If people hear it often enough they’ll believe it for years.

“2. When in the company of younger people, ask their advice on everything. Pretty soon they’ll begin to believe they’re older than you are.

“3. Stay slim, thin people always look younger. Connie Mack is 92, but he’s so slender nobody figures him to be more than 88.

“4. If you have to spend any money, do it grudgingly. People will think you’re saving up for your old age instead of entering it. This rule won’t cost you anything except a few friends, but you’ll have so much money you’d be ducking them anyway.

“5. Avoid reminiscing about the past. If the name Lincoln should come up in your conversation, be sure that it’s the car you’re talking about and not the President.”


P.S. Who’s Who says Benny was born Feb. 14, 1894, in Waukegan, Ill.

We don't have “a million of ‘em” as the great Jimmy Durante once said, but we do have a few more birthday columns from the 1950s that we'll post some other time.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:49](#) 

Labels: [Aline Mosby](#), [Jack Benny](#)


1 comment:

 **J Lee** 18 November 2012 at 08:50

I'd really like to see the Omnibus version of "The Horn Blows at Midnight", assuming it was kinescoped and someone can YouTube it someday. Jack may not have looked 39 by the mid-1950s, but if you watch the final season of his show (1964-65), he definitely doesn't look to be turning 71.

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