



Sunday, 16 February 2014

Mayer's Son Benny

Today, show biz gossip magazines generally consist of who is sleeping with whom, who is having a kid, who is getting married/divorced, who is in/out of rehab, who is under arrest. Ah, but there was a simpler, kinder time when people were satisfied with low-down, not dirt.

With that, we reprint a feature story in the January 1936 edition of *Radio Mirror* on Jack Benny. An interviewer chatted with Jack's father, who would have been 75 when this interview was conducted (he died in 1946). The story's amusing and touching, and one wonders whether it's the kind of gentle story the entertainment press would write today.

Jack Benny's Father Tells All

FROM THE ONE MAN WHO REALLY KNOWS HIM COMES A MOST HUMAN AND REVEALING STORY ABOUT RADIO'S ACE COMEDIAN

By DAN WHEELER

IN suburban Lake Forest, just north of Chicago, lives a proud and happy man. His name is Mayer Kubelsky, and his son is Jack Benny.

I found him in the back room of the little haberdashery and tailor shop he founded in Lake Forest. His son-in-law, Leonard Fenchel, is the proprietor now, but Kubelsky still spends most of his time in the store, talking to old friends and to the tailor who has been with him for the past twenty-five years.

Jack Benny's father is slight, thin, upright in bearing. His hair, almost entirely gray, sweeps straight back from a high forehead, and his brown eyes, deep-set, glow with honest pleasure as he greets you. He is full of a simple, unhurried courtesy, combining the dignity of the old world with the warm humanity of the new.

It doesn't take one long, talking to him, to realize what a close bond of affection there is between him and the son who every Sunday evening makes a gift of laughter to millions of people. The inflection of his voice, the expression of his wise, kind eyes, as he speaks of Jack, tells of the sympathy and love each feels for the other. Yet there was a time when this beautiful relationship could have been ruined forever, when Jack's future happiness and success hung on a single word. Mayer Kubelsky is thankful now that he had the wisdom to conquer the anger and prejudice in his heart, and refrain from speaking that word.

The story goes back to the days when Jack, not yet grown into long trousers, was playing violin in a movie-theater orchestra. That was in Waukegan, Illinois, Jack's birthplace. The Kubelskys had the attitude of their race toward music—as something primarily a part of one's life, not a means of making a living—and the thought of music as a career for Jack had never entered his father's mind.

No, the orchestra job was looked on as a source of pocket-money for the boy—that and good experience. In the meanwhile, he would continue going to school and, when the time came, would take charge of the clothing business. Since 1885, Kubelsky had been working to build up a prosperous commercial establishment, a worthy bequest to leave a clever and energetic only son. Not that young Jack, in those days, showed any particular aptitude for a merchandising career. "I left him alone in the store one day when I had to go to Chicago," Kubelsky reminisced. "When I come back, a policeman meets me at the depot.

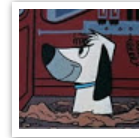
"We want you to come over to the station and identify some pants," he tells me. So I go with him to the police station, and there, sure enough, are about a dozen pair of pants from my store.

"I go home and I say to Jack, 'Did you have some customers?' He tells me no, just one man who wanted to look at shoes.

"But, I say, 'you sold some pants, didn't you?' And that makes Jack angry, because he thinks I am accusing him of selling some pants and not giving me the money. 'No, Father,' he says, 'I did not, either, sell any pants!'

"And this is how it was," Kubelsky, his eyes twinkling, rose from his chair and demonstrated to me with gestures. "Here is the man sitting down, and right behind him are the pants, and every time Jack turns away to get another pair of shoes, the man reaches behind him and grabs a few pair of pants and puts them into his suitcase. But Jack didn't even miss them when the man left—without buying any shoes, either!"

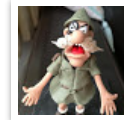
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Blogs to See

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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...
2 hours ago

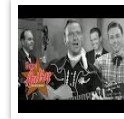
Fernando Liera Blog Cartoons



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

safety measures. - ©2020 fernandollercartoons.com
3 hours ago

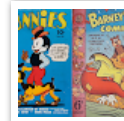
Movies with Michael



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..."
6 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

On another occasion Jack, left in charge of the store; fell asleep, probably from sheer boredom. Once he complained, his nose wrinkling in disgust after he had sold a pair of shoes to a long-unwashed farmer, "Father, you want me to make my living that way?"

But, his father thought, the boy would outgrow this distaste for business as he grew older and learned that work is the lot of every man, and he was entirely unprepared when, at the end of his second year in high school, Jack announced that he wanted to go on the stage.

The stage! It was unthinkable to the elder Kubelsky.

Every instinct in him rebelled against permitting his son to lead the life of a roving vaudeville performer. His mouth set in grim lines.

"Where do you get this crazy idea?" he asked.

"Miss Salisbury, the pianist in the theater orchestra, says I can play the violin well enough to go in vaudeville," Jack told him, white-faced but determined.

"She should mind her own business," he growled.

For several days they argued the point, the father reiterating his contention that stage folk were bums, riff-raff, immoral, and no good; the son sticking tenaciously to but one argument—that to play his violin in vaudeville was the one thing in life he wanted to do. As Kubelsky realized how serious and determined Jack was, his anger mounted. At last he said, all the bitterness and pain in his heart spilling over into his voice:

"All right, then, go on the stage! But remember this. You are leaving your home behind you. You can never come back to it—never again! When this show business has made a bum out of you living in some cheap room, hungry, lonesome, maybe you'll think about the home you could have had, if you'd had the sense to keep it!"

Jack accepted the ultimatum. Only one who knows the solidarity of true family life can realize what it cost him to defy his father and leave him in anger.

"All right, Father," he said quietly. "But that isn't what I'll think about. If I get to be like you say—a bum—it won't be because I went on the stage. It'll be because I haven't any home!"

THE anger drained out of Kubelsky's heart. He had a swift, terrible vision of what Jack's life might be. Not the physical and financial hardships, they didn't matter. He'd had to endure them himself, when, a boy in his teens, he had left his native Russia and come to America, to escape the long period of compulsory military service forced on everyone by the Czar's government. But he had not left his parents in anger. That made all the difference. Through all the hardships of starting life in Chicago as a peddler, he had been conscious of his parents' love, even though they were thousands of miles away. He had not been so alone, somehow, not alone and embittered, as Jack would be if he sent him away now. He realized that knowing he had a home, filled with sympathy and understanding, to return to if all did not go well, might spell the difference between success and failure for his boy.

"You are right, son," he said. "I can't say anything more. I wish you luck, but —but you will always be welcome, whatever happens, here with your mother and me."

So Jack took the surname of Benny and in company with another boy, a pianist, formed the vaudeville team of Benny and Woods. Success came slowly at first, of course. Jack Benny was not a comedian in those days—that came later, during the war, after he had made a totally unexpected hit as an "orderly to the Admiral" in a Navy comic skit. The Benny and Woods act was Straight music, but it was good, and gradually bookings became better and more plentiful.

Every week Jack sent a good part of his pay envelope home to his father. If he did not send as much as usual, he wrote and explained why the amount was short. Kubelsky did not use the money for himself; the understanding was that it was Jack's money, to be saved and invested for him by his father. Only once did Kubelsky draw upon the sum. That was in 1915, when he was forced into bankruptcy and lost his store in Waukegan. A week later, Jack began an engagement in Chicago. With shocked amazement, he learned of the disaster.

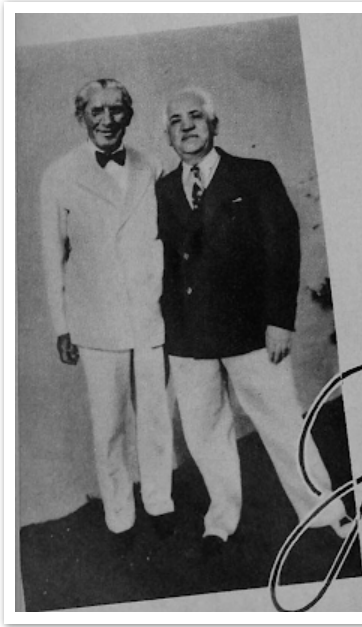
"But why didn't you take my money?" he cried. "Or wire and ask me for it, if you didn't want to take it?" "I wouldn't take it without asking you," his father said. "And I knew if I asked you, you would say 'Yes' without hesitating, but I would not know if you meant it."

"Well, you'll take it now," Jack insisted; and Kubelsky did, using it to establish himself in a new store in Lake Forest, where he is now.

"Tears came to my eyes," he confessed to me. "Yes I cried, a grown man. I could not help it."

The financial arrangement between father and son endured even after success had come to Jack, even until six years ago, three years after Jack's marriage to Mary Livingstone. Not until then did he write and say that now, he thought, he could take care of his own finances!

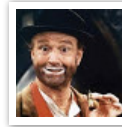
Jack and Mary were married in January of 1927, just two weeks after Jack's sister, Florence, had become the bride of Leonard Fenchel. Florence's wedding had been timed to occur when Jack was working in Chicago. A



additional covers you could share! ...

15 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...

1 day ago

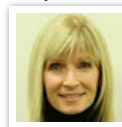
Cartoon Research

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

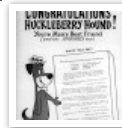
The World of Knight



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 -

few days after his arrival, he told his father that he wanted to be married, too. There was a girl he'd met in Los Angeles. . . .

Kubelsky said nothing for a day or two. Then, "I want you to ask this girl to come to Chicago in time for Florence's wedding. And for Sunday dinner with us."

The arrangements were made. Mary gave up her job in Los Angeles, came out to Chicago, was present at the wedding. The Sunday dinner, a ceremonial Sunday dinner, was accomplished. And Jack took Mary back to her hotel in Chicago.

When he returned to Lake Forest, his father said gravely, "Jack, I want you to do me a favor."

"What is it, Father?" asked Jack nervously.

"I want you to get married before we go to Florida next week," Kubelsky said, letting drop the mask of solemnity he had worn, and grinning broadly.

When he had finished telling me this, Kubelsky smiled and reached for a slip of yellow paper lying on his desk.

"I was made so happy yesterday," he said. "Look." It was a telegram, printed on a special Jewish New Year blank: "Happy New Year to Grandfather from his loving granddaughter Joan."

Joan is the baby girl Jack and Mary adopted a year ago, already as dear to them as their own child. Since she is still several years short of being able to write telegrams herself, the source of the New Years greeting was obvious.

As we sat there, Kubelsky and I, his eyes grew misty with memories—memories of Jack's childhood and maturity, incidents which vividly revealed the man as only his father knows him.

He began to take music lessons when he was only six years old," Kubelsky said, chuckling. "His violin teacher wouldn't let him play anything but scales for three years—scales and 'Home Sweet Home.' He said to Jack.

'When you get tired of scales you can play "Home Sweet Home," but nothing else.'

"He wouldn't practice unless his mother and I would listen—no! And when his grandfather and grandmother came to visit us, then is when he was happy! He would line up a row of chairs in the parlor, and we would all sit and listen while he played his scales and 'Home Sweet Home!'

"He was always so generous, just like he is now. Once when he was a little boy he asked us for a dime to go to a movie. We gave it to him, and he went away, but in a few minutes he was back. 'Didn't you go to the movie?' I asked him.

"'No,' he said. 'A man asked me for a dime to get something to eat, so I gave my money to him.'

"He never used to be riding his own bicycle, always he would have loaned it to some other boy. And once—you know, they say beggars make marks on houses to show which ones they can get food at? I believe it, because always beggars would turn in at our gate. One time Mrs. Kubelsky told a man who came to the door to wait a minute, but when she came back with some food he was gone.

"'He must have misunderstood me and thought I said no,' she said; and Jack was so angry with her! 'Now, Mother, see what you've done!' he said, and went running down the street to catch the man and bring him back!"

By the time you read this, Mayer Kubelsky will be with Jack, either in Hollywood or Florida. For years Jack has given his father several weeks in Florida every winter, as a Christmas present. "Often Jack is there, too." Kubelsky told me, "and every morning, before he leaves the hotel, he comes into my room and kisses me good morning."

But if Jack remains in Hollywood, and his father joins him there, I hope he doesn't go to too many of Jack's broadcasts. They tell a story in New York of the time he attended a broadcast there, and was so nervous, for Jack's sake, that he couldn't sit still. Just one more incident, told as Kubelsky told it to me. More than anything else, it seems to illustrate the beautiful relationship between these two men:

"When Jack left home to go on the stage, I asked of him one thing. I told him he must go every New Year's Day, at least, and every Sabbath that he could, to a synagogue. But I had forgotten all about telling him this, it was so long ago, when one day came a letter from him saying, 'Father, I am so sorry, but I could not go to a synagogue last New Year's Day. I was working all day long, and couldn't get away. I hope you will forgive me.' 'I had forgotten,' said Kubelsky, 'but he had not.'"

Posted by [Yowp](#) at 06:50



Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

1 comment:



bgrauman 16 February 2014 at 11:56

Jack WAS aware of "Yom Kippur" ["The Day of Atonement"], the most solemn day in the entire Jewish calendar, which usually takes place in September or October. On October 17, 1948, Yom Kippur Eve fell on a Sunday. Jack talked to writer Milt Josefsberg about being on the air at sunset as the highest of Jewish holy days was beginning. Milt tried to assure him that virtually every Jew would be in their synagogues, and wouldn't know he was on the air. "I wasn't thinking of the Jews, Milt", Jack insisted, "I wouldn't want the Gentiles to think I didn't respect my religion." So, Milt and the writers came up with a subtle way for Jack to let his listeners know that he was aware of WHAT holiday began at sunset. This is what was heard after



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

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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 beginning of that broadcast:

{the phone rings- Jack answers it}
JACK: Hello? Yes, my program goes on the air at 5 P.M., Pacific Daylight Time. That's right, 7 o'clock in the East.....you're welcome. Goodbye! {hangs up phone}
ROCHESTER: Who was that, Boss?
JACK: NBC. They're not too sure about it, either....

Milt later said, "Jack was content with that....and he was right in wanting those lines inserted."

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Watermark theme. Powered by [Blogger](#).