

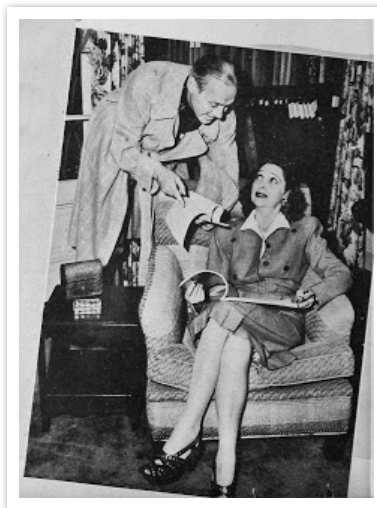
Sunday, 19 June 2016

Writing For Benny

Jack Benny and his radio writers didn't spend their time in Palm Springs because of the weather. Or because of the busy social scene, though that may have been part of the reason; the little town was filled with vacationing film stars and executives in the '30s and '40s. I suspect they spent their time in Palm Springs because of Mary Livingstone.

Mary didn't go with them to Palm Springs. And she pretty much stated why.

Here's a story from the March 1945 edition of the movie magazine *Screenland*. Whether Mary actually wrote it is debateable but I have no doubt it reveals her true feelings—that she really didn't like her peace and quiet being disrupted by Jack and his writers putting together the weekly radio show at their home. It seems perfectly logical that Jack tried to keep his wife happy by getting in the car and heading to Palm Springs to do the writing there, and enjoy some sun and sociability.



The photos accompanied the article. There's one of Mary, Jack and Don Wilson that has an ink splotch on it, so I've left that one out.

My Life in a Gag Factory

by Mary Livingstone

Benny Exclusive! You're invited to the home of the Jack Bennys, where you will learn just how the Benny brain-trust works out those hilarious scripts

IF THE powers-that-be in the City of Beverly Hills read this article, I hope they will not descend on our home and condemn it simply because I choose to call it a gag factory. Our street is not zoned for industrial activity. It's strictly residence territory. And, however we might choose to kid about it, the Benny domicile is likewise strictly residence. But, for nine months of the year, this home of ours is likewise the scene of activity which produces some thirty-nine weekly radio programs and is a contributing force in such motion pictures as my spouse, one Jack Benny, gets to play in.

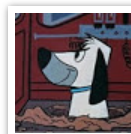
There was a day when a radio performer, especially a comedian, would cringe at the thought that the public was wise to the fact that he didn't write all of his own broadcast material. That day has long gone, and if you follow the columns about this

hectic profession of ours you see constant references to huge stables of writers for one performer or another. Now, Jack doesn't have a huge stable, but he has a nice-sized team of five. They are, reading from left to right, up or down, on the bias, or running around in circles, which is more usual, Sam Perrin, Milt Josefsberg, George Balzer, John Tackaberry, and Jack Benny. Yes, Jack works with the boys and provides the locale for its



"The writers are so sure that their gags are wonderful they can't wait until Jack finishes his breakfast to pounce on him. Ballin pours the coffee, but still talks. Tackaberry, Perrin, and Balzer really gang up on him."

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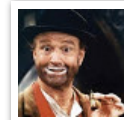
Movies with Michael
Some Cartoons For Saturday Morning #80 - Hello my friends



and welcome back for another selection of classic cartoons. Today's selection begins with one of the great Mickey, Donald and Goofy car...

5 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 (from Zieg...
6 hours ago

Fernando Llera Blog Cartoons

'Cozy Bear' Group Tied to Hacks on Covid Vaccine Research. - ©2020 fernandollera.com



19 hours 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

many and long writing conferences which go on a good part of the day for some five to seven days per week. The innocent little script which is to flow merrily along for exactly thirty minutes on a Sunday evening is carved out of hard rock, syllable by syllable; gag by gag; floor-pacing by floor-pacing; re-write by re-write.



"Jack and I listen to a new song by Larry Stevens, the young chap who is taking Dennis Day's place. Jack asked me to listen to all the candidates but when I heard Larry (who'd never sung professionally before) I knew we had a find."

on a bathrobe, gets word through the grapevine to the kitchen that he's ready for a little coffee and juice, and then the gang starts to really put together the show. There's a soft-voiced amanuensis (and that's a \$50 word for secretary that would throw Phil Harris completely out of gear) whose name is Jane Tucker, and who acts as sort of a script girl. I would say hers is the most difficult job because first, she has to record the basic gag. Then she has to extract from each person's reaction to the basic gag exactly what Jack wants to have kept in the final script. There may be eighteen reactions, one topping the other, before they all feel they've got something. Then Jack will say, "Read it back, Janie." Janie reads it and this time he might say that it should be changed thus and so, and then they're off again with another dozen toppers to the line she just read. And finally that thirty second to two minute spot is ironed out. Now this goes on all week. Sometimes they'll call me in and say, "Mary, this one will kill you. What do you think of it?" I listen. If it kills me, I act properly dead. If it doesn't, I react properly or improperly deadpan and Jack sighs a disappointed "Oh" and they start all over.

And if you think that I'm the only one in the house who's called in to act as guinea pig, then you don't know what happens to my daughter, Joan; to the cook; to the man who comes over to take care of our garden and who would be summoned from the other end of the Victory patch, and to the boy who might be delivering a bundle of laundry, the grocery man, or even the mailman, if he happens to ring twice just when the Benny brain-trust is in and wants a fast reaction. I'm certain that if most of our neighbors weren't professionals themselves, they would all think we were slightly nuts and would wonder what kind of a household I was running. Sometimes I wish I could share the five to six day non-concern of most of the members of our troupe. Phil Harris can play tiddly-winks or backgammon with Alice and his youngsters, and not worry about Benny from each Sunday until the following Saturday. Don Wilson can make small talk with his wife and be the squire who examines the fruit on his citrus ranch in the Valley without a concern about Jack or his sponsor for the same length of time. The same Bennyless five days go for Rochester who can, unless he is doing a picture, tinker with his model airplanes, or spend time with his model wife and model son. But not Mary Livingstone. She is Mrs. Jack Benny, keeper of the key to his kingdom, steward of his household, foil for his jokes, mother of his child, and, above all, audience supreme, and guinea pig deluxe.

During the summer, my house was comparatively peaceful. I could wake up in the morning any time it pleased me, and there would be a luscious quiet, broken only by a faint whir of a lawn mower, or possibly by distant sounds of breakfast being prepared in the kitchen. I could come downstairs and eat with my daughter, Joan, and carry on an uninterrupted conversation. I could wander from room to room and contemplate the furniture Jack and I are pleased to call our own and were so pleased to shop for when we built the house. I could walk into the garden. I could chat with the gardener. I could go into my own kitchen and have an unharassed talk with the cook, and find out what we had in the house and what we needed for the next day or two. I could sit at my desk and write letters without tripping over gag writers. I could work at my household accounts and figure out, on my fingers of course, how well within (or without) my budget I was keeping, and do it without making any false starts because of interruptions. All this was because the summer was without

The brain-trust confers for a policy meeting ten minutes after a Sunday broadcast in Jack's dressing room at the studio where a very rough outline of what they expect to do for next week is drawn up. Then each scrivener goes to his own home to pick his own brains for next week's laughs. They may team up into two groups of twos the following day, but by Tuesday, bright and early — I know because their merry prattle and their foot-pounding, fist-pounding, and argument-pounding awakens me — they are at the Benny menage loaded with cute gags and funny sequences.

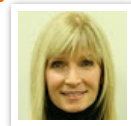
Then it starts. They may come up to Jack's bedroom. Jack, since it's his house and he's the boss, avails himself of the privilege of sleeping up to the last minute of their arrival. He probably puts



"We start reading the script. It's a bit between Rochester and Jack and makes Larry (in big chair) laugh—me too. Reading takes place in our playroom. Rochester, in case you don't know, will soon be seen on the screen in 'Brewster's Millions.'" data-bbox="426 674 673 704"/>

Animation #276 Many references may be found regarding two-strip Technicolor. I have been guilty of discussing Walter Lantz's King of Jazz (1930)...
1 day 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...

3 days ago

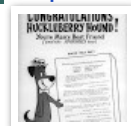
The World of Knight



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

3 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 -

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

Termite Terrace headlines

Porky's Hot Dog Intake - Western Publishing definitely isn't free of

Benny, without jokes or joke writers, without radio. Mr. B. was in the South Pacific entertaining G.I.'s. That's the way he spent his vacation, and it was a rest for him because he didn't have any gag men in his hair either — and no cracks about the hair; he has some, you know. Or don't you?



"Jack does the famous Benny pace routine as he describes a piece of business and gives the sound man directions. Producer Bob Ballin takes a few technical notes. That's 'Play', Phil Harris looking so serious at the extreme left."

The first two or three weeks he was gone, this new-found quiet was paradise. Then the letters started coming from the South Pacific, and though it was still kind of paradise to be at peace, I began to wonder what the new show would be like for the following season. By the end of the second month the quiet I wanted so badly began to bore me. And by the middle of the final month there was nothing so noisy as that same silence. I literally yearned for the return to our normal life of abnormal activity. Soon I would hear the patter of gag writers' feet. Soon the pacing would recommence. Soon I would be interrupted as I was brushing my teeth by Jack running in and saying, "Doll! This is terrific. It will kill you! What do you think?" Soon agents would come up with picture offers, Bob Ballin, the radio program producer, and sound effect men would come up with gadgets, gimmicks and bit players to which Jack would listen. Soon I would be going crazy again and that would make me sane, because, believe me, by September this sane existence had me literally insane.

So Jack arrived home from the South Pacific September 15 and the brain-trust started functioning the following week. We went on the air on October 1 and just to make it a little more complicated Jack went back to work in his picture out at Warners, "The Horn Blows At Midnight," early in October. At this point not only did he saturate the household with his radio activity, but his producer, his director, his picture writers were out to the house making plans. Looks like Warners established a beachhead at the Bennys, then Jack established a beachhead at Warners — in his dressing room — for his radio writers and himself to carry on with each week's program, but he kept in constant communication with the house to make sure that we were all part of everything that went on.

However, I'm not complaining. I can still remember the summer quiet, particularly at the latter part of the summer, where I swore that never again would I resent living in a gag factory.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [06:46](#)



Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

1 comment:

Darrel 19 June 2016 at 13:53

Thank you so much for making these old articles on the Jack Benny Show and cast available for a new generation of fans!

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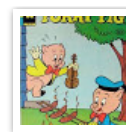
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cannibalism when it comes to comics featuring Porky Pig. These are

just some of the covers in which Porky is ei...

4 weeks ago

Peter Gray's Comics and Art



An early Tom Thug page for sale and other comic art by Lew Stringer go

to link and ebay.. -

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https://www.ebay.co.uk/sch/graphite47/m.html?__nkwl=&__armsr=1&_ipg=&_fom=

5 months 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...

1 day ago

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