TRALFAZIAN STUFF

Sunday, 26 June 2016

### Not 40!

Jack Benny was known for, among many things, his perennial age of 39. The full-stop before he could hit 40 came comparatively late in the radio career, February 15, 1948 to be precise. On the air, it took him about a dozen years to gain three years of age prior to that.

A first-person, tongue-in-cheek feature story bearing Jack's name was published in *Collier's Weekly* of February 19, 1954. We've given a sidebar portion of it in this post. Now here's the full article. Unfortunately, I don't have good copies of the photos that accompanied it (they were from various photo services) so what you see attached to the post are substitutes from my files.

# After 39 Years—I'm Turning 40 By JACK BENNY

THE day started like any other in Beverly Hills. The sun forced its way through the early morning smog, the birds in the trees began to cough and I tumbled out of bed, happy, carefree and ready for the next 24 hours—like any healthy young animal.

Early rising is a ritual with me. Unlike my nocturnal brethren in show business, I am matutinal by nature. (I have always been matutinal, but never knew how to say it until I made an appearance on the Omnibus television program with Alistair Cooke. He slipped me the word, as he put it, "as a lagniappe." I don't know what lagniappe means, but the next time I see him I intend to ask.)

Anyway, the morning to which I refer began normally enough. I flung open the bedroom windows and started my daily dozen. I had just gotten around to the knee-bending exercises when I heard the stairs creaking and I knew that Rochester was on his way up with orange juice and coffee. Then I remembered that this was Rochester's day off. Suddenly I realized it wasn't the stairs that were creaking. It was my knees.

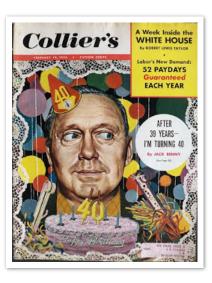
The shock straightened me up. I tried the knee-bending exercise again to make sure I had heard right. There was the same creaking—only this time louder, like somebody scraping a fiddle string. I winced. I can't stand bad violin playing.

I've always expected that sooner or later I'd start showing signs of wear. But I never expected the signs to be audible. I stood there, listening, and my eyes settled on the wall calendar, as they frequently do: it was a gift from Marilyn Monroe. After a moment or two, I glanced down at the date. It was February 1, 1954! In less than two weeks, on February 14th, I, Jack Benny, would be forty!

Forty! I shuddered, and my eyes fogged. The clock on the dresser seemed to be ticking faster, in a deliberate effort to hasten the fateful date. Cold chills and hot flashes coursed intermittently through my body. In a sort of hazy stupor, I could visualize myself sitting on a park bench with Barney Baruch, feeding the pigeons. As reason slowly returned, 1 realized that Father Time had been waving his scythe under my nose, and 1 had been too comfortably ensconced in the sage and durable age of thirty-nine to heed the closeness of the blade. Trifling occurrences that I had dismissed as unimportant came back now to plague me with their full significance.

Lately, I had noticed that the Martinis were getting stronger, the hills on the golf course steeper, flirtations scarcer. Perhaps I had been cutting too fast a pace for a man on the brink of forty. I would have to change my habits. No more carousing with the boys. From now on. Charlie Coburn, Guy Kibbee and Lionel Barrymore would have to fun around without me.

In the following days, I underwent a transformation. I brooded and fretted, found fault with everything. I changed from a bright, lovable young man to a bitter, churlish, middle-aged curmudgeon. Rochester was on the verge of quitting. Polly, my parrot, wouldn't talk to me. I insulted the people on my radio and television



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### Blogs to See

### 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...

4 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... 5 hours ago

### E Fernando Llera Blog Cartoons

'Cozy Bear' Group Tied to Hacks on Covid Vaccine Research. - ©2020 fernandolleracartoons.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... 23 hours ago



In His Own Words: H.T. Kalmus on Disney in Technicolor - Suspended

shows. I even began to hate myself—and I was the last person in the world I thought I'd ever hate. Finally I decided I would have to adjust. After all, it isn't a crime to be forty. A pity, maybe, but not a crime. I got a grip on myself and went to see my doctor. That is, I didn't exactly go to see him. I invited him over to my house for dinner. It was friendlier than going to his office . . . and much less expensive.

After a modest meal, I led the conversation around to the state of my health and my impending birthday. The doctor was reluctant to talk business at first, but a couple of quick ponies of brandy loosened his tongue.

"When most men reach forty," the doctor said, "they find themselves up against a psychological block. Forty is considered the gateway to middle age and nobody wants to make the trip."

I refilled his glass and he continued his dissertation:

"A man seems to feel, and with some reason, that while he's in his thirties he's within shooting distance of his youth, but when he hits forty he's all shot." He helped himself to some more cognac.

"That all depends on the health of the individual," he went on. "Now, I'm forty-eight and I'm far from shot. Why, I can outdrink two twenty-four-year-olds put together."

I hastily put away the cognac bottle.



I had drawn some cheer from the doctor's observations. But I still was not satisfied. I yawned in his face a couple of times so he could get a look at my tongue. I saw his quick professional glance, and his lack of comment was reassuring.

I took the little wooden hammer out of the nut bowl and casually put it down on the table within easy reach of his hand. Then I crossed my legs and waited. Sure enough, he took the bait. He picked up the hammer and tapped me on the knee. I hadn't realized my reflexes were so fast. If he hadn't pulled his head back just in time, I would have punted his teeth into the kitchen.

The doctor remarked that he hadn't seen such knee action since Nijinsky. If I took care of myself, he said, I could live to be a hundred and forty. Keeping the doctor's visit on a social basis, I said, "Doc, if you had a patient like me, what kind of diet would you put him on?"

He told me everything I wanted to know and it didn't cost me a quarter (including the price of the cognac). However, the diet he prescribed was disquieting. I was limited to expensive steaks

and chops, lean cuts of meat, fowl and a few green vegetables. Bread and gravy, potatoes and rice, the old standbys that regularly graced my table, were taboo. Under my tutelage, Rochester had become proficient at preparing some wonderfully economical dishes . . . braised beef hearts, fried pork livers and country gravy, breaded fishcakes and the hundred different kinds of hash that help the housewife stay within her budget. I was loath to discontinue this fare, especially since my freezer was full of beef hearts and fishcakes. Besides, Rochester was now so expert at preparing this type of food it would be a pity to make him stop.

### **Rochester Offers an Ideal Solution**

After turning the problem over in my mind, I finally found a way out of the dilemma. Rochester was not on a diet. There was no reason why he couldn't go on eating beef hearts and fishcakes, even though I was stuck with steaks and chops.

As I walked the doctor to the door, I felt reassured. Still, I had been unable to think of a way for him to take my basal metabolism. I began toying with the idea of inviting him to dinner again. I could make the invitation for two and ask him to bring his machine with him. As we shook hands, I held the grip, and fed the doctor one more leading question.

"So you think I'm in good shape, eh, Doc?"  $\,$ 

"Yes," he said, struggling vainly to get his hand loose, "but I think you ought to drop by the office for a checkup in a week or so."

"Another checkup?" I asked, taken off guard.

"But you just gave me one."

"Well, you can't be too safe," he grunted, tugging at his hand. "Besides, a man of your age can change overnight."

All my old fears overwhelmed me again. In fact, I was so staggered that my grip turned to mush, and the doctor, released suddenly, went flying out the door.

The doctor's pessimistic remark left me frustrated and disappointed. But I was able to find consolation in the fact that even though the body was beginning to sag a little as birthday number forty crept closer, mentally my faculties were never sharper. I still retained all my old cunning and guile. Besides, I decided, even though I might change by tomorrow, I was still in good shape tonight, so the money expended on food and drink for the doctor had not been entirely wasted.

#### When the Plumber Comes to Dinner

Feeling a little better, I checked my supply of cognac and was pleased to find there were still a few pints left. Not that I drink myself, but I like to keep some in the house for my guests. Next week, I'm having my plumber over for dinner. There's an annoying leak in the kitchen drainpipe, and I'm sure that after Herman imbibes a

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. -COPYRIGH T 2020 BY MILTON KNIGHT

3 days ago





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

# Parmite Terrace headlines

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

few samples of the grape, he'll be under that sink like an old firehorse, I'm counting on quite a saving, because the plumber's fee is usually higher than the doctor's.

The next morning I could find no perceptible change in my health, in spite of the doctor's dour warning. Nevertheless, I bathed and dressed carefully to avoid taxing my strength, and, wary of my protesting knees, I had Rochester help me with my socks and my shoelaces. Then, after a cautious breakfast of orange juice and hot vitamin-fortified milk, I set out on my program of readjustment. First I dropped in to see my old friend and colleague, Eddie Cantor. Eddie had long since endured the experience I was now undergoing, and I hoped to acquire a few tips on how a man should



dress, behave and adapt his philosophy when he reaches forty. Eddie proved to be a disappointment. He beat around the bush and seemed reluctant to discuss the subject.

Finally, I put it to him point-blank. "Eddie," I said, "did you feel that your whole psychological structure changed when you became forty?"

Cantor answered that he wouldn't know; he never had been forty and he never intended to be. You see, Eddie went from thirty-nine to sixty overnight, and the only one who ever suspected it was Ida. After lunch, I left Cantor's house, still groping for a panacea to restore my confidence and bolster my shattered morale. As I walked down Sunset Boulevard, I felt that everyone was staring at me. I could almost hear people saying to themselves, "Look at him. He must be forty if he's a day."

I decided a few holes of golf might help my frayed nerves. I was going to take a taxi out to my club, but it was such a pleasant day I chose to walk. It was only seven miles and I knew a short cut, most of it paved. The only bad stretch was a half mile through a beanfield, but I knew the terrain like the back of my hand. I started out briskly enough, but after a few blocks (he pace began to tell. My strides were slower and my breathing was faster. I thought a cup of coffee might pick me up, so I dropped into Romanoff's. Not Mike Romanoff's. This place is owned by a man named Joseph Romanoff. Joseph claims he is the real prince, and Mike is a phony. But Joseph is a very sweet fellow and doesn't want to make trouble, so he doesn't even use



As I sat on the stool sipping my coffee, the thought occurred to me that Joe was about forty, and his views on the subject of middle age might be worth hearing. "Joe," I said, "would you credit a man of thirty-nine with having a lot more stamina than a man of forty?"

"Mr. Benny," Joe answered, "in my place, I give credit to nobody and I don't care how old he is. Besides, we got no stamina here. If he don't want a hamburger, let him go someplace else."

Naturally, this answer was of no help to me, although I couldn't dispute the soundness of Joe's business acumen. I left Romanoff's considerably refreshed, but I decided against walking the rest of the way to my club. There was no point in expending my waning energy just to save a few cents. I took a bus.

All my life, I meditated as the bus weaved its way through the traffic, I'd been saving my money for my old age. Well, there was no point in saving for it any more. It was here.

I almost changed my mind when I looked up and saw an attractive young girl smiling at me. I smiled back, my spirits soaring at this evidence that I had not lost my great appeal for the other sex. Then, as she moved closer, my world collapsed again: she was merely after my seat! I settled back, and her smile changed to a dirty look. But a man of forty is obliged to conserve his strength, even at the expense of his manners.

### **Youthful Comic Worried Too**

I was very much depressed as I entered the club. A lot of the boys were there, and I sat down and chatted with Jerry Lewis, hoping that he would cheer me up with some of his usual zany antics. But it turned out that Jerry, too, was in a somber mood. He confided that he was going to be thirty soon and he was worried about it. I found that I was unable to summon up any sympathy for this kid. There he was, a full 10 years younger than I; what did he have to worry about?

I was about to give up and go home when George Burns walked in and pointed his cigar at me. I broke up with laughter. George has a way of pointing a cigar that nobody else can top. At least, it seems that way to me. As everyone in Hollywood knows, I am George Burns's best audience. As a matter of fact, there's a rumor around the club that if George Burns were playing a date, I'd even pay to see him. Well, anyway, that's the rumor.



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.. -

http://lewstringercomics.blo gspot.com/2020/02/originalart-for-sale.html https://www.ebay.co.uk/sch/ graphite47/m.html? \_nkw=&\_armrs=1&\_ipg=&\_f rom= 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

### **Blog Archive**

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- **2016** (396)
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  - November (33)
  - October (31)
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I invited George to join me for a little golf. By the time we teed off, I was in much better spirits. All during the game, George kept me in stitches. He really has the greatest sense of humor in the world.

George was wearing a big diamond ring and he called the caddy over and showed it to him. As the caddy looked at the stone admiringly, a stream of water shot out of the ring and hit him in the eye.

I had seen the trick work before, but the way George did it was so funny I became hysterical. The caddy didn't appreciate the humor until George gave him a dollar. Then the boy laughed louder than I did.

#### Make-Up Caused Healthy Look

After the game. I had a steam bath and a massage, and, thanks to George Burns, I set out for CBS in a much better frame of mind. We were rehearsing a TV show, and everyone in the cast remarked how healthy I looked. I didn't bother telling them that I had just spent an hour with the make-up man. It was a few days before the show went on, but I always like to look my best. You can never tell who might drop in to watch the rehearsal.

I apologized to Mary Livingstone for my petty griping of the past several days. She tried to be kind and said she hadn't noticed any difference. Then I explained that the cause of my mental stress was the sudden realization that I would shortly be forty. Mary burst into that infectious laugh of hers. She said she just couldn't believe that was my right age. I wasn't surprised. No matter how often I tell people I'm thirty-nine, some of them refuse to believe I'm that old.

It was Mary who finally straightened me out. by reminding me of others in my age bracket who were carrying on with the vim and vigor of teenagers. Georgie Jessel, for one, was never concerned about age, either his own or that of whoever happened to be his date.



As Mary spoke, I thought of Bob Hope, whose case was so similar to my own. Maybe he was even a year or two older. But Bob was as frisky as a two-year-old colt, and covered a lot more ground. And what's more, the ground he covered had oil in it.

Then I thought of Bing Crosby. Bing had hurdled the forty-year barrier without drawing a long breath or a wrong note. His popularity had increased with the years, both here and abroad. In Germany, I understand, they still call him Der Bingle. I remember talking to my press agent once about giving me a build-up in Germany, finding a nickname for me comparable to Bing's. He started publicizing me as "Der Jackal." For reasons I don't remember, we were forced to abandon the campaign.

At home that night, I reflected on Mary's words and decided she was right. Aside from a pair of noisy knees, I had never felt or looked better. Oh, there were a few tiny signs of age. The brown hair that used to tumble over my forehead now tumbles all the way to the floor. And of course, there's the pitter patter of little crow's-feet around my eyes. But I'm lucky they're little; some crows have bigger feet than others. Anyhow, I don't mind having a few lines in my face. I think it gives me character.

I walked over and looked into the mirror. My eyes were just as blue as they ever were. And no matter what anyone says. I've never dyed them. I smiled, and noted with satisfaction that they were my own teeth smiling back at me. I tried to look at myself objectively, and after a few minutes I came to the conclusion that it was not by accident or camera trick that I projected so handsomely on the television screen.

I was now reconciled to the idea of being forty, although I knew it would be quite a while before I got really used to it. If seemed, in retrospect, that all my life I'd been thirty-nine. I suppose it's because so many things happened in that one year.

When Rochester called me downstairs for dinner, I was the old Jack Benny once more: gay, carefree, and bubbling over with the joy of living. I had shed my gloomy cocoon and emerged as a radiant caterpillar . . . fuzzy, but free.

Rochester had noticed the change in me and by way of celebration he had whipped up an elaborate dinner. He presented the menu to me with a flourish. I had decided to wait until my freezer was depleted before embarking on my new diet of steaks and chops, so there was a fishcake cocktail, pork liver *de fois gras*, *salade de la* plain lettuce, and for the entree, braised hearts of beef, with a new invention of Rochester's which he called city gravy. As I attacked the savory fare, I contemplated the new pattern of behavior I was to adopt as a man of forty.

#### A Generous Gift for Rochester

I would have to be a trifle more conservative in my dress. I called Rochester in to make him a present of my green plaid suit, but found he was already wearing it. I told him he could keep it without charge, but that the alterations would have to come out of his salary. I was in good shape for the transition so far as the rest of my wardrobe was concerned. True, I had two or three ties that were a little on the loud side, but I could have them dyed.

Rochester then suggested a birthday party. At first I was against the idea. The fuss and bother didn't appeal to me; besides, real friends should give presents whether they're invited to a party or not.

But then I reconsidered. The best way to handle an unpleasant situation is to face it squarely. Why not have a

- ▶ July (34)
- **▼** June (32)

An-udder Joke

Goldfish, Church Bells, a Sea Gull and Fred Allen

Dog Skid Stop

I'm Being Followed by a Moon Collar

Not 40!

Cartoons of 1956, Part 1

**Shaking Simple Simon** 

Walter Winchell Sphinx

Not Terrific

The Lion is the Bomb

Breathe, Stupid

Writing For Benny

Any Bonds Today?

Hypnotic Hick

Son of a...

Also Appearing During the Golden Age of Radio

No Good Humor

Cool Down, Bimbo

Tralfaz Sunday Theatre – Hollywood's Golden Years

Eddie Anderson's Big Role

Terry at 25

A Nose For Golf

Laughing Gas

Elva

Wolf Puts on the Brakes

The Ducksters

Tralfaz Sunday Theatre: Wings For Roger Windsock

Schlepp

Van Beuren Makes a Fable

Stand Back, Musketeers!

Patterson's Panther

He's Got to Be Shovelling Off

- May (34)
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- ▶ January (32)
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- **2014** (390)



party? Why not announce to the world that Jack Benny, star of stage, screen, radio and television, was forty?

Secretly, I had been entertaining the thought of fibbing a little. I could always say I was thirty-nine and get away with it. Yes, I actually considered that. But fibbing goes against my grain. And so I made my decision: a party it would be.

Rochester volunteered to contribute the cake, provided I paid for the forty candles. I told him that was satisfactory. I knew I wouldn't have to buy forty candles. I could get ten and cut them in quarters.

As I pen these words, the invitations to the party in celebration of my birthday are already in the mail, and I stand exposed to the world as a man of forty.

I hope the revelation will not come as too great a shock to my millions of fans who, as fans will do, have cloaked their idol with the mantle of perennial youth.

Today I face the future fearlessly, convinced that, after thirty-nine years of the best fruits of life, my next thirty-nine years will be just as fruitful—and will last just as long.

Posted by Yowp at <u>07:17</u>



Labels: Jack Benny

### 1 comment:

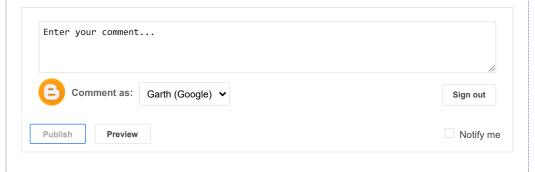


### rnigma 28 June 2016 at 18:43

Of course, Jack was actually turning 60 that year.

Always enjoy the articles about Jack Benny, even though they don't get as many comments as the animation posts.

### Reply



Newer Post Home Older Post

Subscribe to: Post Comments (Atom)

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- **2011** (106)

### Labels

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Bob McKimson (59)
Bob Thomas (53)
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Columbia (33)
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Don Patterson (17)
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