



Sunday, 23 April 2017

## Generous Jack

Jack Benny was ridiculously cheap on the air. That was the idea. Ridiculous equals laughs.

The real Benny was generous, partly because he was boxed in by his radio/TV character. He felt the need to show people in real life he wasn't cheap.

Some examples are given in this feature story in *Modern Screen* magazine of October 1942. Movie magazines aren't exactly reliable sources of journalism but what's contained in this article was echoed elsewhere for many years. Jack's mind was elsewhere when he ran into people and his bedroom was laden with pills just in case he got ill. The only odd statement is at the end about giving a break to Rudy Vallee. Vallee was one of radio's earliest stars and was giving breaks to others before Jack even started on the air.



Gary Cooper and Sandra, that gorgeous wife of his, dining with Jack Benny. Jack's crazy about kids, plans to adopt another one to play with his adored foster child, Joan Naomi.

The pictures below accompanied the article.

### Benny's from Heaven

But Jack's no angel! He's a Hellzapoppin' zany with the biggest line of gags this side of Allen!

By KIRTLEY BASKETTE

One day, not long ago, Jack Benny met a slight acquaintance in the halls of NBC's Hollywood studios and stopped for a chat. The man mentioned the wife of a mutual friend who was very ill. "Zat so?" murmured Jack vaguely, puffing his cigar. "H-m-m-m-m — too bad." Then he changed the subject and strolled on with an absent-minded "So-long."

The acquaintance stared after him and shook his head. "That guy Benny!" he muttered angrily. "What a selfish dope! All he cares about is himself and his show. He must have a cake of dry-ice for a heart!"

A week or so later the same man ran into the ailing woman, now up and about and bustling along the Boulevard. He said she looked swell and what was the hurry? "Got a date to meet Jack Benny," she smiled. "I want to thank him for being so nice!"

"Benny!" sputtered the gent, recalling the disinterested episode. "Good Lord, why Benny?"

"It was the funniest thing," bubbled the lady. "I hardly knew Jack, you know. But one day when I was so sick, he showed up loaded with flowers and presents. He sat around all afternoon telling stories and making me laugh so hard I couldn't help get well. It was the day before his show, too. I know he was busy, and — well, I think he is swell."

Because he is modest, most people think Jack's stand-offish. Because he's shy, they call him cold. Because he plays tightwaddery for a radio gag, they'll tell you he's a penny pincher. Because he's gone absent-minded, wool-gathering on how to make folks laugh, they're sure Jack's distant, indifferent and selfish. Some call him stuck-up because he's been the number one chuckle champ for years; others paint him grass green with envy of Fred Allen, Bob Hope, Red Skelton or every other Joe Comic.

All of which is a lot of scuttlebutt, as they say in the navy. If you don't believe me, you might ask Ann Sheridan. Jack has just finished "George Washington Slept Here," with Oomphy Annie out at Warner Brothers'. Jack always makes buddies out of his movie leading ladies, and always before the picture is over they turn up on his radio show. Jack thought Ann would be particularly swell on a Sunday laugh spot, but when he suggested it, she shivered and shook.

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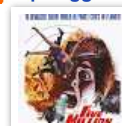
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We continue along last-week's trail, following closely behind the protruding abdomen of a marching ant, as his column descends into the depths of a subter...

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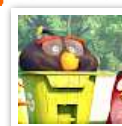
[Five Million Years To Earth!](#) - It's felt like five million years sometimes.

I've yearned to have "Five Million Years to Earth" \*or as it's otherwise know\* Quatermass and the Pit i\*n my ...

10 hours ago



[Movies with Michael](#)



[Movie Review: The Angry Birds Movie 2](#) - Michael's Movie

Grade: B+ To be honest I didn't care for the first "Angry Birds Movie". I simply just did not find that film enjoyable. That is what made ...

14 hours ago



Jack Benny (portrayed by Rochester) shells out 10,000 buttons in overhead for each week's airing. Manages to salvage 15 grand for personal services.

"I'm allergic to radio mikes," protested Ann. "I'm likely to faint or draw a bamboozled blank and ruin your program. Sorry, Jack, but it's impossible."

Jack tried to soft-talk her out of it, but he saw Ann wasn't kidding. Mikes do convert her nifty knees to jelly and turn moths loose in her tummy. But Jack was convinced Ann would be terrific, and he had an idea. "Okay," he told her, "I'll write two complete shows — one with you and one without you — and rehearse 'em both. Then if you just can't go through with it at the last minute — well — you won't have to." And that's what he did — although it cost Jack a pretty penny and some horse-sized headaches, too, to double the order just to soothe Annie's nerves.

The first year that Jack's black Man Friday, Rochester, clicked on his program, he got a \$10,000 check for Christmas. Every member of Jack's big staff, his writers, Bill Morrow and Ed Beloin, his entertainers, Phil Harris, Dennis Day, Don Wilson, and all the rest get regular raises on already fat salaries well above what their options call for. Nobody who has ever worked

for Jack is happy with anyone else. His secretary, Harry Baldwin, has been with him 11 years. Two actors he brought out from Broadway several years ago haven't worked on Jack's show for months, yet every Saturday night their check is in the mail. On his army camp shows Jack personally foots all transportation and technical expenses, which run into four figures about every week. If I mentioned his private charities, I'd only embarrass a sensitive guy. But I can tell an incident on the "George Washington" set that happened just the other day.

passing the "buck" . . .

They were collecting for a certain war fund around the Warner lot, signing up the various stars for various amounts. It was all on the cuff and in advance, but when Jack was approached he said — "Oh, sure," and reached in his pants pocket, extracted a roll of century notes big enough to choke a cow and said, "I don't know how much is in it, but take it. Wait," he added, peeling off a lone dollar bill. "I need gas to get home." Most of this abundant generosity in Benny comes from the fact that he has little use for the green stuff except to pass it around. He has been so up in the chips for so long that he knows it isn't mere bank notes that count. You wouldn't think a hardened entertainer would be sensitive about his comic stock in trade. But the penurious, misery air Jack assumes for gags on the air waves touches him to the quick.

A Brown Derby waitress told me, "Jack Benny doesn't over tip. He over-over-over tips." He's afraid somebody will think him a nickel-nurser. A couple of years ago when his wife, Mary, was in Honolulu, Jack cabled her one night. "Jack Benny cabling Mary Livingstone in Honolulu," said Jack. "Oh," replied the operator, "then you'll want the message sent on the deferred rate, won't you, Mr. Benny?" Deferred trans-ocean messages are lots cheaper, and in this case it made only an hour or so's difference, and the message wasn't rush at all. But Jack flushed — "No — no," he said hastily. "Send it straight — send it straight!" He was afraid even an operator would think him stingy.

Actually, the luxury requirements of Jackson Benny are pretty meager. He has never felt exactly comfortable in the plush life, remembering too well the hard times he waded through to success. He lives in a Beverly Hills colonial mansion of movie star proportions, all right, but that's mostly a gesture to Mary and his family. Jack himself holes out in his bedroom, which is his workroom, library, studio and about everything else. He has a complete radio transcription outfit there, recording machine and playback equipment. The walls are lined with bound scripts of his shows. He has dope and data scattered around on a couple of big desks and seals himself in amid dense cigar smoke for inspiration on this or that.

Like most Beverly Hills citizens the Bennys sport a fancy swimming pool in the back yard. Jack never uses it. Instead he goes down to State Beach, the public strand at Santa Monica, and mingles with the mob. He's a guy of the people, really, and is happiest when he's doing just the things they do. His biggest daily recreation is a walk downtown in Beverly to hang around the drug store. He used to get his biggest recreational kick driving his open roadster around town slowly, often with Joan, and buying her all the things she shouldn't have. He likes to go to the fights and movies and the Play Pier at Ocean Park. slightly stupendous . . .

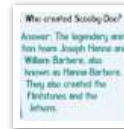
When the Jack Bennys first got settled in Beverly Hills, they used to entertain a lot, and like all Hollywood entertainers, they found that their



Jane Wyman, tagged along with the Benny party to San Francisco for an eager squint at her handsome lieutenant husband, Ronald Reagan. Jack, Mary Livingstone, and Don Wilson came to sprinkle with levity the dedication of the new NBC Radio City.

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**Recommended Reading -**  
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**Screwing the Name Up: HB edition -** A while ago I wrote about the spelling

Walt Disney. Today, I'll be talking about Hanna and Barbera. We all know that William Hanna and Joseph Barbera defi...  
 2 days ago

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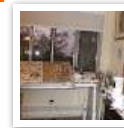
#### **Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog**



**Sunday String Swing -** \*Continuing the thread from last Sunday's

post, as the following caricature of Django ...  
 3 days ago

#### **The World of Knight**



**LAST NIGHT -** The sky was a beautiful color last night.

1 week ago

#### **Mark Kausler's CatBlog**

**Racketty Ann's Mystery Flight!** - Here are pages 5 through eight of "Racketty Ann and the Lost World". There's delightful fantasy here as Racketty Ann and Bla Bla take a ride on the back o...  
 3 weeks ago

#### **Peter Gray's Comics and Art**



**New blog on my Art work...Original art...prints for sale petergrayart**

ist@gmail.com for prices etc... -  
 https://petergrayart.blogspot



parties soon became events. A guest list starting at ten zoomed to two hundred in no time. People they slightly knew came and kibitzed on the food and entertainment. One New Year's Jack and Mary threw a lavish party—with gay canopies all around the place, an orchestra, fancy catering and almost a stage set around the swimming pool. Everybody came — and stayed, and it was such a chilly night that the Hollywood night clubs actually beefed about Benny taking away their customers.

In the midst of the gala event, a good friend of Jack's came up to him and noticed that Jack wasn't having such a hell of a good time. He pointed to the mob. "It's colossal, Jack," he cracked. "Why don't you photograph it?" Since then the Benny's don't entertain like that. When they go in for good times it's with their close pals, and what they do are the little ordinary American fire-side diversions — cards, conversation and home movies, as a rule.

The intimate Benny set includes Barbara Stanwyck and Bob Taylor, Ronnie Reagan and Jane Wyman, the Ray Millands, the Mervyn LeRoys, Loretta Young and her husband, Tom Lewis, George Burns and Gracie Allen and Jack's in-laws, the Myrt Blums.

For a long time the clique maintained a Sunday night "Turnabout Club," the turnabout part being that each member took turns footing the check for an evening of dancing at Ciro's or some Hollywood glitter gallery. Jack loves to dance, and he's good, too, especially at a rousing rumba. Since the war and his army camp shows, his one night of stepping out has been stepped on. Sunday evening is Jack's high spot of the week in more ways than one. It's the only time he can relax — after the radio show is over — and as anyone will tell you, Jack's weekly radio stint is the essence of his life.

He worries about it from Tuesday until it goes on the air Sunday. Sunday night is the only night he lets down, when the "So-long, folks" signs him off the air waves. Monday he sleeps late and that is what his colleagues call "the wolves' day." Every Monday people who want Jack to attend to this or that, people with axes to grind, solicitors, business agents, tailors with fittings, salesmen and all extra-show business characters swoop down on Jack. He holds court far into the night. Tuesday morning he starts worrying again — about Sunday's show. Jack is a great worrier — maybe that's why he's so good. His nails are chronically bitten down. He's a perfectionist, and he's always sure everything he does is terrible. The people who brand him disinterested and self-centered don't know that from Tuesday morning at 7:30 on (Jack is an early riser every day except Monday), Benny is deep in mental agonies about his next Sunday program. He puts in hectic work on it surrounded by his staff who tag after him to his several offices, scattered around Hollywood at NBC, his home, Paramount, Warner Brothers and Twentieth Century-Fox. During that time he is likely to stare old friends in the eye and not know them. Sometimes Mary Livingstone, after repeating the same thing to him five times and getting "H-m-m-m's" for answers, will cry, "Remember me? I'm your wife!"

benny's self-torture . . .

Jack himself bemoans this concentration because it takes plenty out of him, but he's convinced that his stuff depends on timing and finesse. That's one reason he feels so chagrined about his value as an army camp entertainer. He feels that the continuity type of program he puts out is not zippy and fast enough to make good watching entertainment for the doughboys. And while he doesn't beef about it, it's no secret that for him to stage a program where every faculty isn't just right is a torture his audience never knows about. When things aren't smooth as silk, Jack Benny dies a slow death.

Jack envies Bob Hope and Red Skelton and the only gag ad libbers who can toss off a show at the drop of a hat, tear themselves to pieces and love it. "If I was only about ten years younger like those guys" he wails. Jack always gives out with a 45-minute warm-up to compensate for the less slam-bang character of his program. And he's already made plans for a 13-week road tour of the camps this summer, devoted exclusively to entertaining soldiers with a show prepared especially for them. He'll pay the expenses, by the way, and it will cost plenty. But that's the only way Jack figures he can really do a good job and keep out of a coffin.



scene in which he was drenched in a rainstorm. After the prop storm deluged him a few times, Jack cracked,

Health is a great concern of Jack's. Some people call him a hypochondriac. He's a great pill swallower, dieter and general health faddist. "Benny," Phil Harris once cracked, "eats an 11 course meal — five courses of food and six courses of pills!" The other day a waitress at Warner Brothers brought Jack his lunch; it was Jack's tomato day. As she set the plate down the waitress gasped, "Oh, Mr. Benny, I'm so sorry!"

"What's the matter?" gulped Jack.

"Why, your tomatoes — they're sliced, and I forgot you like them quartered!"

Jack doesn't drink. When he does he falls asleep. If he goes for a cocktail before dinner it's always a pink lady. He's always furrowing his brow about the cigars he devours but can't stop them. His dietary weakness is rich food and late night stuffing. "Restaurants will be the death of me," he wails after stocking up on a choice morsel.

Oddly enough, Jack's not one bit touchy about the signs of Old Man Time. In fact, he's always joking about his thinning, gray hair. A few days ago on the "George Washington" set he had a

.com/ Will update it like I do on facebook.

5 weeks ago

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



Coming Soon To This Blog...

2 months ago

### **What About Thad?**

Chris Reccardi Interviewed

- I don't want to start a practice of publishing an interview every time someone from Ren & Stimpy dies, but Chris Reccardi (1964-2019) was too important a f...

2 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...

6 months ago

### **Kids, Eh?**

#1288: Bird Call - #1288: Bird Call

10 months ago

### **Cartoons, Model Sheets, & Stuff**



Pete Hothead Model Sheets - Here are a few model sheets from

the first Pete Hothead short. Released in 1952 and directed former Tom & Jerry animator Pete Burness. Ted Parmelee was the...

1 year ago

### **Dr. Grob's Animation Review**

Posljednji valcer u starom mlinu (Last Waltz in the Old Mill) - In this latter-day Zagreb Film studio short two grains change into a prince and princess who waltz around a remote water mill.

59 minutes ago

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"For gosh sakes — get me out of here — my hair's slipping." don't tell allen, but . . .

Probably the highest glee of Jack's week is listening to the caustic comments of Fred Allen which rip his own show to pieces every Sunday. He carries a couple of portable radios with him to be sure not to miss them, smoking a stogie furiously and chuckling when Fred — who pulls no punches — hits a particularly tender spot. The Allen-Benny feud, by the way, is entirely impromptu. It was never a studied gag, like the Walter Winchell-Ben Bernie battles. Jack and Fred, who have known each other from vaudeville days, never correspond or arrange pots at each other. Each Sunday it's a complete surprise to Jack, and he's never yet got really mad. Jack is always telling his friends that he'd give anything, including a small fortune, for a year's rest. Sometimes he probably means it. "I'm tired," he sighs. "The pace is killing me," but there's always some reason why he can't stop. Right now, of course, the reason is that Jack thinks he'd be unpatriotic to loaf when the government can use the cartwheels he collects each week and when the public can use a few belly laughs.

What Jack Benny will probably do if he ever ends up on the retired list is to sit and reminisce — his favorite recreation today — about the fun he's had making other people laugh. About the kick of giving breaks to radio stars like Rochester, Kenny Baker, Rudy Vallee, Phil Harris, Dennis Day and a dozen more. And the headaches he's enjoyed stewing on picture sets, taking it on the chin from sassy birds like Fred Allen and generally worrying himself sick — and happy. Probably Jack Benny will be most remembered in Hollywood's archives by his last picture, "To Be or Not To Be" — because it undoubtedly is his best to date. It would be a funny thing if some future Hollywood historian links him with the one he's doing now — "The Meanest Man in Town." Because, take it from me, that's one thing Jack Benny is not and never has been — and the people who get that impression just don't know their Benny.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [06:48](#)  
Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

1 comment:


 **Kamden Spies** 25 April 2017 at 06:07

I know that Jack was not at all a rascist. In Mel's book that's not all folks, He tells a story about he Jack and Rodchester visitng New Orleans. He goes to a restaurant and the 3 men walked into a restaurant and they said "I'm sorry Mr. Benny, we don't want your friend's kind of people at our restaurant," Jack got upset and was so mad that they left New Orleans and Jack never went to the South again.

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