



Sunday, 1 April 2018

Grandfather at 39

Jack Benny was a devoted father, according to someone who ought to know—his daughter Joan. And her book about her dad reveals he was a devoted grandfather, too.

If a gossip magazine is to be believed, there was a bit of a story behind the birth of Jack's first grandson. The December 1955 issue of *TV Radio Mirror* contains a feature story about the first, together with the familiar story of how Jack and Mary Livingstone met.

The title of the article is a bit misleading. "Great grandfather" is meant as in "good grandfather." Were Jack alive today, he *would* be a great grandfather; one of his great grandchildren submitted an article to the *Jack Benny Times* fan publication last year.

The photos came with the story.



He's a Great Granddad!

At "39," Jack Benny shrugs off the years— and revels in the delight his first grandchild has brought him

By FREDDA BALLING

AS EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jack Benny is only 39. It's one of the enchanting myths which the Waukegan wit has encouraged about himself, and which the American public has gleefully accepted. But Jack's self-proclaimed "ceiling on birthdays" does create some problems in statistics — none greater than that which transpired last summer, when daughter Joan Benny Baker became the mother of a six-pound, four-ounce baby boy named Michael. This somewhat early grandfatherhood fascinated newswriters and amateur gagsters around the land.

It was written that the baby was born with a heavy head of hair about the color and consistency of Jack's "Sunday toupee" (he doesn't wear one any day of the week). The infant's eyes were said to be "mountain lake" blue, and the song that soothed him in moments of distress was, inevitably, "Love in Bloom." But principally Jack was headlined as one of the youngest grandparents in show business — at the age of 39.

The American public quickly took it up. Letters began to avalanche upon the already crowded CBS-Hollywood office. The mail could be divided roughly into three categories: Boasts from younger-than-Benny grandparents (one precocious type from, naturally, Texas, reported himself a grandfather at 28); boasts from legitimate 39-ers with more than one grandchild (usually acquired in a multiple birth); protests from Jack's authentic contemporaries (he has never made a strict secret of his actual 61 years) — who complained that, if he'd only stress the truth about his age, they would be far and away ahead of him in the grandparent sweepstakes.

A good many of the letters enclosed snapshots of beloved progeny. At length, after having spent a morning in study of letters and pictures, Jack observed thoughtfully, "Mary and I made just one mistake. We should have had a family of six or eight. Just look at these kids!"

Aren't they great? Wouldn't you love to have every single one!" Jack added, taking on the Benny TV personality, "Of course, there's something special about Michael . . . and I'm not saying it because I'm prejudiced. Hmmmmmmm . . . it's true."

Michael started out being "something special" about seven months before he was born. During one of Joan's regular long-distance phone calls, placed to her parents two or three times a week, Joan confided that she had her doctor's assurance she was going to make Jack a grandfather. She added that she wanted to keep it secret as long as possible.

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Jack and Mary agreed with their daughter. A secret it would be.



The following day, Jack showed up at Hillcrest Country Club, as usual, for his luncheon date with George Burns and other members in good standing at the Comedians' Table. George, grandparent of almost a year's seniority at the time, "happened" to have a fistful of his grandson's latest pictures in his wallet, and passed them around.

This was more than mortal man could stand. With quiet dignity, Jack announced that "by this time next year" he would have some pictures of his own to

parade. He added, however, that his anticipation was a secret for the time being. After luncheon he joined a foursome for golf and confided his news to them, again with the aside that the information was given in confidence. At the nineteenth hole, Jack joined the usual alibi session and, as soon as he could get a word in, spread the tidings — requesting, of course, that there be no broadcasting of the facts.

All in all, it proved to be a lovely day. Always enthusiastic, Jack had a prize inspiration on his way home and stopped at an out-of-the-way shop which is patronized mainly by musicians of note. After proper deliberation and testing, he tucked his purchase under his arm and hastened home to Mary's welcoming kiss.

"Hi, Doll. Bought a present for the expected," he said, handing the package to Mary.

"Not already!" she moaned, and her expression took on starch. There was no real need for her to remove the wrappings and unfasten the case, but she played out the scene just the same. Nestled in the velvet lining was a quarter-sized violin.

"Oh, Jack!" said his wife, her tone a compound of exasperation, amusement and intense affection.

"Cute, huh?" said Jack, very offhandedly.

Suspicion gradually superseded all other emotions as Mary studied the man to whom she has been married for nearly twenty-nine years. "Jack, you didn't tell anyone at the club, did you?"

Jack said, "Well . . ." as only he can say it. After a pause he went on, "Naturally, I had to tell George." Jack explained that George had been flashing pictures around the luncheon table, so . . . And then, out on the golf course, one of the guys had said something about his daughter's youngsters, which reminded Jack . . . Oh, yes, and then in the locker room there had been a few fellows standing around. . . .

"Jack! What will Joanie think?" Mary demanded, and this time the inflection denoted shocked reproof and genuine annoyance modified very little by loving understanding.

Jack took refuge in a show-business trick which is his and his alone, because — according to other comedians — no one else has the courage it takes to put it into effect. It goes like this in a theater: Jack tells a joke and then, with a straight face — a face on which cosmic melancholy and quiet command are mingled — he stares at the audience and waits. And he continues to wait, permitting himself no more than a patient sigh. According to show-business experts, this leaves an audience with a choice: To laugh or to leave the theater. They always laugh.

And so, regarding Mary with his life-is-a-bad-joke-on-somebody-but-don't-blame-me expression. Jack waited. And Mary laughed.

She had no real cause to fear betrayal of the secret. The Hillcrest Country Club takes care of its own. Not one word of the Baker expectancy oozed out of California. Not until Eastern columnists noted Joan's chic maternity outfits did the item appear in the press.

The three Bennys have always been exceptionally devoted. During the war years, when Jack was spending every possible hour doing shows at military installations, there was a gag among his troupe that he had to be told a departure hour was thirty minutes in advance of the true time, because he would be shopping until the last minute for keepsakes for Mary and Joan. Some of the finest modern-Marine handcarving of native outriggers and temple ornaments brought genuine antique prices from a not entirely hoodwinked customer from Beverly Hills. It was in India that Jack — according to reports — would have been left behind if it hadn't been possible to hear him, over a mile's distance, hastening to the plane. They sell an awful lot of bells in Bombay.

Bearing this family devotion in mind, several local financial wizards called their brokers to order additional shares of telephone stock, when they learned that Joan Benny was to marry Seth Baker and live in New York — while Jack and Mary remained on the West Coast. Telephone dividends, the wizards figured, were certain to rise on the basis of fantastically increased long-distance tolls from coast to coast.

When the same shrewd gentlemen heard of Jack's impending grandfatherhood, they added still further telephone shares to their holdings. Well-informed sources say that this perspicacity has paid off — at least one such "wizard" bought a custom-made Cadillac the other day.

There is a story behind the long-distance telephone enthusiasm of the Bennys. As is rather well known by now. Jack and Mary met when Zeppo Marx and young Mr. Benny were invited by Mary's sister Babe — who was also in vaudeville and on the same bill with the boys — to enjoy a home-cooked meal in Vancouver, where Mary's family was then living. Mary was twelve at the time and was overwhelmed by the looks and charm of

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21 hours ago

Movies with Michael



Cowboy Church #20 - Hello my friends and welcome back for another

Cowboy Church service. We begin our musical selection off with Roy Rogers and Dale Evans performing the Sout...

22 hours ago

Yowp



Explaining Cats - Hanna-Barbera made good copy in 1961. The

proof is in a search through newspapers as Arnie Carr's PR department successfully pushed the studio's newest se...

1 day ago

Termite Terrace headlines

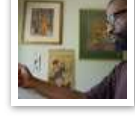


Popeye Cans the Spinach (Commercial Corner) - Due to the Tom and

Jerry hiatus, the monthly commercials are returning. This month we'll look at Popeye canning the spinach and advertising with other a...

6 days ago

The World of Knight SATURDAY AFTERNOON



Nice view. I actually drew it into a panel

today.

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...

1 week 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.. -

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the "Walter Raleigh" of Waukegan.

It can't be recorded that Jack reciprocated her interest. Actually, there was in his deportment, a suggestion that — far from tossing down his cloak for her dry-footed comfort — he would have gagged her with it. Sub-teen Mary was stuck at the conversational stage of development and was trying hard to impress Mr. Benny — which might have been okay if he could have used any of her lines in his act afterward. But no such luck. Said Benny to Marx, "Get me out of here. What am I doing with this . . . this kid?"

Years passed. Mary and her family moved south to San Francisco and, once again. Jack was a dinner guest during a San Francisco booking. He excused himself as quickly as manners would allow. By the time Mary met Jack for the third time, the family was living in Los Angeles. By now, Mary had been graduated from high school and was working at the hosiery counter at the May Company (a long-time Benny radio gag which is actually based on truth). Mary and her family caught Jack's act at the Orpheum, and he joined them afterward for a post-theater dinner. As Mary remembers, "He sounded a little like a jukebox with the needle stuck. He couldn't get off one subject: 'My, how you've changed!'"

The following day he strolled into the May Company shortly before noon and asked Mary to join him for lunch. She was so excited she couldn't swallow her coffee, much less a sandwich. That night they had dinner at what was, in those innocent days of 1926, one of downtown Los Angeles' great restaurants. The Victor Hugo. Mary had never been in the place before. Again, she was too thrilled to eat.

The following night Jack took her to the Cocoanut Grove, and Mary definitely had no appetite. She might have starved altogether if Jack hadn't left to keep his San Francisco booking, and from there worked his way northward, theater by theater. When he reached Seattle he learned that he had been re-booked in Los Angeles, so naturally he telephoned Mary to ask her to reserve a few dates while he was in town. He had learned — by the secret method of listening to Mary's conversation — that she had at least one beau who kept her evenings busy, so he felt he should clear the way.

When the long-distance call came in from Seattle — the first one Mary had ever received — she was so overcome that she couldn't think of anything to say. The fact that it was one o'clock in the morning and she had been awakened out of a sound sleep may also have had something to do with it. Plus the fact that her parents were having no trouble finding words to say how they felt about it all.

Mary's second long-distance conversation with Jack resulted from Mary's placing a call to her sister. Babe, in Chicago to announce that she was going to be married. Babe said Mary was too young, and why didn't she come to Chicago, where Babe was appearing on the same bill with Jack Benny, to discuss the matter. Jack got on the wire and seconded the motion. So Mary went to Chicago to talk over her "youthful unpreparedness for marriage" — and three days later, in Waukegan, married Jack. The date was January 14, 1927, and it marked the beginning of one of the greatest telephonic relationships on record.

Passing a practice from one generation to the next was easy, in this instance. When Joan Benny was a student at Stanford, an audit of the telephone expense indicated that her annual tuition was only slightly greater than her toll calls.

And then she married, moved East, and set out a welcome mat for the stork. During one of her calls last spring, Joan told her father that she and Seth had almost settled on a choice of names for the impending infant: "Jack" for a boy, "Jacqueline" for a girl. Jack considered. "Alexander Graham Baker might be a nice name," he murmured.

Always a quick man to respond to requests for benefit performances. Jack has always tried to adhere to one rule — that the site of the benefit be close at hand.

Yet, in March, when he was asked to appear in Florida for a worthy cause — at the height of the radio and TV season, when every moment was precious — he said with alacrity, "I should be able to fly to New York, have a day with Joanie, fly to Florida, do the show, fly back to New York for a day with Joanie, and be home in time for the Sunday show." He made it.

Originally the stork's visit had been scheduled for July 7, so the Bennys, George and Gracie Auen Bums flew out of Los Angeles on July Fourth, in order to reach New York in plenty of time. George and Gracie were scheduled to serve as godparents for the infant, and also as shields against a nervous breakdown for corridor-pacing Jack.

July fifth passed without incident, except for the record-breaking heat and humidity, which — as George pointed out — could have been a mild reflection of Jack's blood pressure.

The sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth sweltered by, marked only by the nightly trips of the Bennys, the Burnses, and the Bakers to some air-cooled restaurant where they talked far into the closing hours. Inevitably, someone would stop at the table, fix Jack with a sympathetic eye and ask, "How are you getting along. Jack?"



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3 weeks ago

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



Coming Soon To This Blog...

1 month 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

FernGully: The Last Rain Forest

- Up until the rise of computer animation in the late 1990s, with powerful players entering the field (first Pixar, then Dreamworks, followed by BlueSky, Son...

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Jack and Mary gave Joan and Seth Babin a wedding so lavish it made headlines. But it was nothing to the fad day news-men and gossips had when Jack became a granddad at 39.

Really, I mean." It began to prey on Jack's already unsteady nervous system. He said to George Burns one evening, "How do you think I look?" "About thirty-eight," said the man who has known him since he was eighteen. On the night of July fifteenth, Paul Hahn (president of the American Tobacco Company) gave a party to which all the ladies- and gentlemen-in-waiting were invited. Joan had never looked lovelier — nor more remote from the hospital. Jack spent the evening trying to avoid people who wanted to tell him the joke about the twins who refused to be born because they were so polite that neither would go first. At seven on the morning of a sweltering, shimmering July sixteenth, Seth telephoned to say that he and Joan were at the hospital. Jack and Mary were still trying to get showered, dressed, and breakfasted in order to charge into the waiting room when Seth called again at eight to say that Michael had made his debut. All critics' reviews were raves — Michael looked like a smash hit.


After their trip to the hospital to meet Michael and to check on Joan's condition (she was doing wonderfully), Jack and Mary departed to go on separate errands. Mary had postponed several weeks of essential shopping, not wanting to be away from Joan at a critical time, but now she could descend on the shops with an easy mind. She agreed to meet Jack at their Sherry-Netherland suite at five. He was ten minutes late. "Because a fellow can't do a thing like this in a rush. There are too many details to be checked," he explained. Pridefully, he pulled the wrappings off a junior golf bag and a full set of clubs. "Oh, Jack," said Mary. So far, however, Rochester has had the last word. When he was told that Jack was now known as "Grandfather, J.G." — and the "J.G." was identified as "Junior Grade"— he sniffed. "That's nuthin'," he said emphatically. "In twenty years, when Michael becomes a father, Mr. Benny will be the only great grandfather in the new Kinsey report — still thirty-nine!"

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:00](#)
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