

Sunday 11 August 2024

Teeth, Eggs and 39

How often is a star's birthday front-page news? Especially if it's not a milestone, like 90 or 100, but the same old birthday, year after year.

Well, it was in the case of Jack Benny.

Jack didn't just get laughs when he claimed he was 39 when it's obvious he wasn't. He got publicity. It seems whenever February 14th rolled around (Jack began the "39" claim in 1948), at least one of the wire services wrote about his birthday. We've reprinted a number of these columns in this blog.

I've stumbled across another one, a rather short piece written for the Associated Press which hit the wires on the 14th and 15th of February 1964. It was picked up in papers from Honolulu to Portland, Maine. Remarkably, I've found it on the front page of the *San Pedro News-Gazette* in California, the *Buffalo Evening News*, the *Daily Star-Journal* of Warrensburg, Missouri and the *Glens Falls Times* in New York, to give you several examples. It shows you how much Jack Benny was enjoyed across the U.S., almost 32 years after he had begun his radio show.

The story echoes something George Burns used to tell about Benny—how Jack would rave, almost to the point of embarrassment, that he had just had "the best coffee I ever tasted" or "the best shoeshine I ever had."

Oldest 39-Yr.-Old

Guess Who Is Not Really 39

By JAMES BACON

AP Movie-Television Writer

HOLLYWOOD (AP) — Jack Benny, the oldest living 39-year-old, celebrates his 70th birthday today.

He doesn't look it or feel it.

He makes one comment:

"Thank God, I haven't had a sick day in my life."

The other day he had a polyp removed from his nose but that was just a minor interruption in his busy television schedule. The doctors asked him what anesthetic he was allergic to.

"I don't know," he replied. "I've never taken any before. I've never even had a tooth pulled.

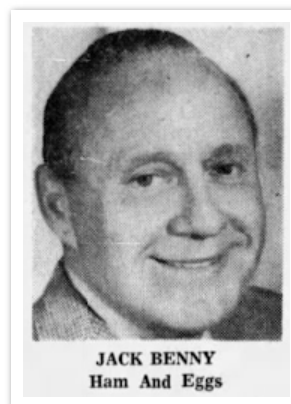
Enthusiasm is the key to Benny's secret Fountain of Youth. No man in town enthuses about or remembers the little things of life as does Jack. Once when he attended a party at the White House during the Truman administration, he and a friend decided to wind up the evening with a walk. A few blocks from the White House, they stopped in a little diner and ordered ham and eggs.

"You know," enthused Jack, "these are the greatest ham and eggs I've ever eaten in my life."

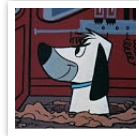
Five years later, the same two attended a White House party given by President Eisenhower.

Jack's after party comment:

"I want some more of those ham and eggs."



About Me



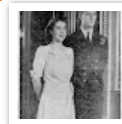
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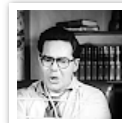
My Blog List

Old TV History



[Week of November 16, 1947](#) - For a country that fought a war to get rid of British rule, American sure loves the British Royal Family. Through gossip columns, they followed the advent...
1 day ago

Yowp



[Daws Butler: Living the Characters](#) - Daws Butler once told interviewer Larry King that he did not do "voices." He did "characters." If anyone was the glue that held the Hanna-Barbera cartoons...
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Blogs to See

News From ME

[Today's Political Post](#) - I don't like pouring icy H2O on anyone's joy but I do like being cautious, especially on a matter as vital as the future of American Democracy. The New Yor...
1 hour ago

I was going to end the post here but decided to hunt around and see if anyone else wrote about Jack's birthday on Feb. 14, 1964. The answer is "yes." There were several columns, all praising Benny. I've decided to reprint a feature story from *Newsday*.

Benny's 70 Today—What's His Secret?

By Shirley Wood

Newsday Special Correspondent

Hollywood—Quit? Are you kidding? Jack Benny, celebrating his 70th birthday today, has no intention of quitting. Not only is the comedian entering his fifth year of doing a weekly show on television but he also has elevated his violin from a joke to a second career. Show business is one of the most difficult fields in which to stay at the top, but Benny has been one of its top moneymakers for 30 years. Other and younger stars have fallen into semi-retirement or lesser roles in entertainment. But Benny goes on and on.

How does he do it? His secret in escaping the effect of time consists of careful preparation for growing old. This is evidenced in two ways: by maintaining a careful watch over his physical activities and by remaining alert to changes in the public's taste in comedy. Consequently, the Jack Benny Show seems ageless even though its star has in fact long since passed his perennial 39.

Cheats Father Time

Benny's appearance, to be sure, lends substance to the jest about his age. In face and carriage, in the quickness of his step and the sparkle in his blue eyes, he gives the impression of man no more than 50. "A woman cheats on her age a little bit and it's okay," Benny remarks. "Instead of cheating a little, I cheat a lot."

He is certainly not one to let his actual age interfere with his activities, but Benny has imperceptibly but effectively altered his pace to suit the advancing years. The comedian has always taken care of himself and is taking better care himself as he gets older.

"Jack was never one to live high," says Irving Fein, producer of the Benny program, "so he never developed any bad habits to abandon. But he is watching himself more carefully these days. His doctor tells him what he should weigh and he gets more than one or two pounds over, says, 'Oh no, I'm putting it on,' and he diets moderately until he's back down again.

Regular medical checkups have been another part of Benny's recognition that time continues its march. He knows the unprejudiced eye of doctor can often spot a condition that a patient would ignore. So far Benny has had no extreme medical problems. Sunday he underwent surgery for removal of a benign polyp at the back of nasal passage. But his surgeon reported afterward that the comedian's condition was good. He went home Tuesday and is now convalescing without apparent ill effect.

In keeping his TV program apace with the times, Benny is a constant and serious student of the humor business. He watches new comedians in action and remains sensitive to changes in the public mood. He keeps his material up-to-date and alternates the many fundamental gags he has developed over the years, always presenting them in different ways.

Many stars of show business have succumbed to "over exposure" and Benny's type of weekly show is considered an easy medium in which to contract this frustrating ailment. One reason Benny has escaped this problem is his concept of what his own place in the show should be. The Jack Benny Show without its star is inconceivable, but he isn't a camera hog. Over the years he has functioned on the basis of building up guest stars and members of his cast in the interest of the show as a whole. "You know,"

Fein says, "Jack has had whole shows without a really funny line for himself. If things work out so that Don Wilson or Dennis Day or Rochester get the big laughs, that's great." Benny describes his method this way: "I never have time for jealousy. To have a good show, you have to keep everybody happy." Almost from the beginning of his days on radio, the Benny show had one quality that was unusual (and is even rarer today in television): continuity of personnel. This quality makes possible the smoothly functioning organization that allows Benny, at 70, to do a weekly show. There are key people, such as the producer, director, writers, announcer and half a dozen cast members, any one of whom could cause a minor upheaval if he were to depart. On the Benny show they don't leave. Fein, the producer, has been with Benny for 18 years. The two "new" writers, Al Gordon and Haln Goldman [sic], arrived three years later, joining Sam Perrin and [George Balzer](#), who have been writing for Benny since 1941 [actually 1943].

Serious Joke

Benny used to play the violin purely for laughs. About six years ago he did a skit in which he dreamed he



Jack Benny in a Familiar Pose

Movies with Michael

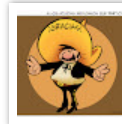


Cowboy Church #189 - Hello my friends and welcome

back for another service of Cowboy Church. Today's musical selection begins with Roy Rogers and Dale Evans with "It is No ...

4 hours ago

Fernando Llera Cartoons



Mexico renders thanks to all Mexican athletes competing

at the Olympics. - ©2024

fernandollercartoons.com

5 hours ago

AFRTS Archive

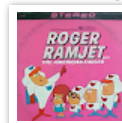


Mary Turner 1984 - Time for another visit with Ft McCadden's Mary

Turner. Mary really did rock the world. KMET, AFRTS, Off the Record. Classy and always done well...

6 hours ago

Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog



Dracula, Roger, Shrimpenstein - The Comedy of Gene Moss

& Jim Thurman -

2 days ago

The Exposure Sheet

Video of the Week: Daws Butler on CNN - It's not everyday you stumble upon a TV interview with Daws Butler, and for this week's video, I've got quite a special one. Below is a segment that aired...

2 days ago

Cartoon Research

Kidding Around: The 40th Anniversary of "Jim Henson's Muppet Babies" - "Never heavy-handed, but with a light and zany touch, the show delved into crucial themes, such as the importance of friendship, kindness, and self-esteem...

2 days ago

was a concert violinist. One of the studio violinists gave him a few lessons to add realism to the skit. To his amazement, Benny found that he could make music that wasn't bad. Now he practices as much as two hours a day. His concerts, in which he plays a little and clowns a lot, have raised nearly \$3,000,000 for debt-ridden symphony associations all over America.

Jack Benny, at 70, looks to the future: "Doing my show gets easier every year," he declares. "I've never had a year that wasn't easier, and more fun, than the one before."

Even though Jack stopped joking about "39" toward the end of his life—he told reporters the gag had outlived itself—fans still associated it with him when he passed away. The venerable *Los Angeles Times*, in its obituary in 1974, simply wrote: "He was 39." 50 years later, the gag lives on.

Posted by Yowp at 07:06

Labels: Jack Benny

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2 weeks ago

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 [A Mistake Only Charlton Could Make](#) - The Jetsons, here mistakenly referred to by their Spanish name, Los Supersonicos, in Charlton's Huckleberry Hound#3.
4 weeks ago

 **Pete Hale**
 [Read My Newest Blog](#) - *No, I'm NOT getting rid of this blog.* Check out a new blog of mine, intended as my "official site", simply titled Pete Hale, Cartoonist. It is mainly ...
1 month ago

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