

Accidents Spin Stars Toward Fame

Minor Disasters Have Started Screen's Foremost Celebrities on Careers



To escape a licking, W. C. Fields ran away from home, learned juggling, and landed in Hollywood.

By Linda Lane

A GARDEN rake, a monocle, a chance remark—

Little things, but if it hadn't been for them, W. C. Fields might today be a desk-bound lexicographer, Marlene Dietrich a violinist and Claudette Colbert a concert singer.

Such "tremendous trifles" started some of Hollywood's foremost screen celebrities toward their careers, or lifted them from obscurity to stardom.

When Fields was a small boy in Philadelphia—interested even then in the word-lore that was to become part of his stock-in-trade—his father stepped on a rake in the back yard of their home.

It flew up and struck him in the face, and to escape a licking for leaving the implement lying around, the boy ran away from home. Living from hand to mouth, without opportunity for schooling, Fields learned juggling and started his career as an entertainer.

His ambition to be a lexicographer went by the boards, but not his interest in words. He garnered one of the widest vocabularies among picture people, and today three dictionaries are kept at hand on Paramount's lot to check his jaw-breakers.

But for a broken finger, Dietrich might today be a violinist playing in cafes. But the accident destroyed her finger nimbleness and regrettably she entered the extra ranks at a Berlin studio. One day she had to wear a monocle for a cafe scene; it immediately attracted the director's attention to her; she was given an important role and a year later was a star.

SUCH stories of people who thrive on disaster are among the oddest bits of Hollywood curiosities.

And the stories of Warner Baxter, Carole Lombard, Harold Lloyd, Fred Stone, W. C. Fields, Gary Cooper, Herbert Marshall and William Wellman. All attained their present positions through their own or somebody else's bad luck.

Claudette Colbert wanted to be a concert singer, but a throat infection blasted this ambition and she became a voice teacher. One day, at a New York tea, she met Ann Morrison, playwright, and remarked that the theater "must be an interesting career."

"Would you like to try it?"

"Why—ye-es, I think I would."

So Miss Morrison got her a three line bit in "The Wild Westcotts." Better parts followed. It wasn't long until she was doing leads, then was signed by the movies.

Paradoxically, it was a "flubbed" note that started Gladys Swarthout toward her operatic career. Giving a private recital as a child, she fell flat on a high note of "My Heart at Thy Sweet Voice."

She stopped singing, turned to her accompanist, said: "We'll start all over again."

They did and this time the note rang clear as crystal. Two wealthy women in the audience



War wounds kept Herbert Marshall from following business. He became an actor—and you know the rest.

were so impressed by her pluck they underwrote her career.

A pair of glasses changed Harold Lloyd from a second rate comedian into one of the country's foremost stars. Lloyd was doing Chaplin imitations when caught in a studio explosion. Physicians feared he'd lose his sight. But Lloyd hoping defective eyesight would be the worst result, began laying plans for the "glasses" character he afterwards made famous. Recovering his eye sight completely, he had become so enthusiastic over the idea that he has used it ever since.

HERBERT MARSHALL became an actor because he thought wounds received during the war too severe to permit him an active business career. And William Wellman, now a director, entered the movies only when physicians assured him that injuries suffered in an air crash at the front would render him unfit for life as a commercial pilot. Ironically or not—depending on how you look at it—he recovered to such an extent that doctors tell him he may fly whenever he wants to. He's one of Hollywood's most avid aviation enthusiasts, too.

It took an air crash—and Will Rogers—to draw Hollywood's attention to Fred Stone in 1928. Injured while playing in Broadway's "Jayhawker," Stone was in the hospital for a year—but Rogers flew back to Manhattan to take his place in the show. As a result of the nationally

publicized story, Stone was signed by Hollywood upon his recovery and began a film career at the age of 62.

Carole Lombard was a bathing beauty when so severely lacerated in an automobile accident that it was feared she'd be disfigured for life. She recovered, however, decided to try dramatic roles, and achieved acting fame.

Gary Cooper turned to the movies as an extra because he couldn't get a job as a newspaper cartoonist, couldn't pay his rent, and hadn't enough for his next meal.

When Raoul Walsh was a little known actor, his brother, George, was a star. Today George is a bit player and trainer of his brother's race horses, and Raoul is directing Paramount-Walter Wanger's "Big Brown Eyes," starring Joan Bennett and Gary Grant.

AFTER struggling for years as an actor, Raoul one day saw his chance when cast for a leading role in a major picture. At the same time, his friend, Warner Baxter, unable to get good parts any more, was all packed and ready to quit Hollywood in disgust. Then a traffic accident cost Walsh his right eye.

Casting frantically about for someone to fill the role originally set for Walsh, the studio drafted Baxter. The picture was "In Old Arizona," and started the substitute to stardom. Meanwhile, the missing eye caused Walsh to turn to directing.

There is the story of young Jimmie Hogan, who a few years ago slid into second base in the Yankee Stadium, broke a leg, and hobbled out of baseball into movie directorship.

Latest to join the film colony's "trifles club" is Irene Bennett, whose talisman was a magazine subscription. She "crashed" Paramount Studio to sell subscriptions, sold one to Jack Votion, head of the talent department. He was so struck by her manner and appearance he signed her at once.

"Ramona" Will Be Colored Film

WITH the completion of highly satisfactory color tests, 20th Century-Fox production of "Ramona" looms as one of the pictorial milestones of moving pictures, and is certain to be one of the pictures worth watching for.

The new color camera's sensitive reproduction will bring to all corners of the world one of the beauty spots of Western America—the mountain meadows of the historic Warner ranch.

Nearly 4,000 feet above the sea level, the 44,000 acre ranch is an almost endless succession of green expanses rolling toward the dusty purple of the far mountains, every shade cleanly defined in the clear, dry air.

In these surroundings, where soft greens and purples lie in drowsy beauty under the bright blue mountain sky, has been reared an exact copy of the historic Moreno hacienda, spreading spacious and graceful in the shade of a group of giant cottonwoods. Two of the largest trees rise out of the patio, throwing into mottled sun and shade the stone-flagged walks and the verandahs bright with peppers and great red earthen jars filled with poppies and musk. Red Rambler roses have been trained along the patio wall and upper balconies. A tiny fountain dances in the sunlight in the center of the patio.



A "flubbed" note started Gladys Swarthout on her operatic career.

Claudette Colbert wanted to be a singer, but a throat infection blasted this ambition. So she signed in the movies, was given better and better parts. Today she's famous.

Where a Mouth Can Be a Fortune!

THE old adage that "my face is my fortune" is literally true for Martha Raye, Broadway comedienne and night club singer who has been signed by Paramount, because Miss Raye has two claims to fame—the funniest face in Hollywood and the biggest mouth in Hollywood.

"It's my stock in trade," she said. "One thing about having a face like mine, is this: If a man starts telling me how beautiful I am, I know he's no gentleman. He must have motives."

"Now, in regard to my mouth, I have a mouth what is a mouth. Joe Brown just has a slit in his face, but my mouth is a mouth. It starts in the middle of my face and darned if I have ever been able to figure out just where it does go. Sometimes I think I have found its limit, and then the next time it wanders some place else."

"But in regard to my face: I remember mother telling that one time I had wandered away and she was looking for me. She walked up to a perfect stranger and asked:

"Have you nearly died laughing within the last few minutes?" she asked anxiously.

"The stranger looked at her as if he thought she were crazy and said, 'Why, no. Why?'"

"My mother replied: 'My daughter is lost and I was trying to find out if you had seen her.'"

Miss Raye is 19 years old and has been on the stage 19 years. She was born in a dressing room in Butte, Mont. Her father and mother were known as Reid and Hooper, vaudeville comedy and singing team. She toured with her parents until she was 14 years old and then left to work for Paul Ash, Chicago night club master of ceremonies.

LATER she joined and toured with one of Benny Davis' shows. In the show were

Jackie Heller, Jai LeRoy, Vilma and Budd Ebsen, and Sunny O'Dea, all of whom have now won fame.

After that show closed, she went on the Loew's circuit over her own vaudeville act but returned to New York to play in "Calling All Stars."

She was in the current edition of Earl Carroll's Sketchbook, but her agent asked her to leave the show and come to Hollywood with an eye on motion pictures.

But she didn't get past the front gate, and started singing in a Hollywood night club. At that time Paramount was casting Bing Crosby's "Rhythm on the Range" and searching for a girl to play opposite Bob Burns, the Arkansas story-teller. Jack Votion, head of the talent department, happened to go to the club where she was singing one night, and before he left he had signed her for the picture, and placed her under an optional contract.



Martha Raye says, "Joe Brown just has a slit in his face, but my mouth is a mouth. It's my fortune!"

stamping to the click of castanets—will be lacking entirely in the picture.

Instead, Fernandez said, he has revived two dances really belonging to the period, both intricate patterns of grace, which millions will see for the first time in the picture.