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When Stepin Fetchit Stepped Into

Fame

In his own words he tells where he got his name; why he was forbidden to drive his three stunning Cadillacs, and many other things about his interesting and unique career.

Dixie Lad Has Risen from a Poverty Stricken Orphan to the Most Popular Negro Actor on the Screen Today.

By RUBY BERKLEY GOODWIN

(Prepared Exclusively for the Illustrated Feature Section)

Stepin Fetchit really knows his public. And he gives it what it wants.

For some people the third time is supposed to be the charm, but in trying to interview Stepin Fetchit one's patience has to lengthen out considerably. At least eight appointments were broken before a successful interview was finally landed.

Having arrived at the charming Perry bungalow, I was told by his sister that Mr. Perry (Stepin's real name) would see me in a few minutes.

My observations of the cheerful and exquisite furnishings in his home were interrupted by the entrance of a wide-awake young man, who neither drawled nor whined, but held out his hand, smiled pleasantly and said "Good-morning."

Different From the Stepin in Pictures

I was surprised. I had expected to see a mild "Gummy," not quite so lazy as the original in "Hearts in Dixie," but slow enough to be known and recognized as "Gummy." That is why I had to adjust myself to this energetic young man with a collegiate look and a nervous vitality that showed itself in his gesticulating and restless movements.

Has to be Funny

"People expect me to be funny. I am funny. I have to be, you understand?" he began.

To corroborate his statement he handed me a press clipping ranking him to be the "greatest comedian since Bert Williams."



Stepin, the Smooth Cultured Gentleman

Stepin in one of the "Hearts in Dixie" poses.



Here he is at the wheel of the car that his contract forbids him to drive.



"I was born in Key West, Florida, but they know all about that I s'pose. You just ask me what you want to know and I'll tell you," he finished with a trifle of impatience.

"Well, we're curious about your name. We heard you took it from a race horse; did you?"

Where Stepin Got His Name

"Yes, it was this way. Some of the papers have it all wrong. You see I used to hang around the tracks; was everything from stable boy to tout. It was at a Texas race track where I saw 'Step and Fetch It,' the racer. I had lost on every race and didn't have a dollar in my pocket but I did have on some classy togs and a stud that sparkled like 'nobody's business.' Before the next race came on a friend who was with me wanted to bet me that Lawn Martin would win the race. Lawn Martin had never been beaten on that track but as I looked over the list I saw the name 'Step and Fetch It.' It struck me. Names do somehow. 'Here's a horse that can beat Lawn Martin,' I told my friend.

"Even money says he can't," my friend came back.

"I'm broke but I'll bet you my clothes and my pin. How much will you bet?"

"My friend knew that the sparkler was genuine so he said, 'One hundred and fifty.'"

A Race Horse Start

"Well, Step and Fetch It stepped home a head in front of Lawn Martin, thereby saving my wardrobe and pin and netting me some cash.

"I was a dancer and singer and after that I teamed with a fellow. We took the name of the horse. He was called 'Step' and I was called 'Fetch It.' Our act was good but we split up and I was billed with a minstrel show as 'Rastus, the Buck Dancer.' But I didn't like that name so I called myself 'Jolly Pard,' then later 'Skeeter Jerry.'"

Stepin Goes Straight

"Then hard times came to 'Skeeter Perry.' He was put in jail and it seemed that his residence there was to be permanent.

"I ain't ashamed to tell you that I really prayed," he confessed. "I told the Lord if He'd just let me out I'd go straight if I starved." Stepin's hands once had a way of "stickin'" to things.

Well, his prayer was answered. "I've seen some pretty tough days since then but I never forgot my promise. At times I made as low as fifteen dollars per week, but I always stayed straight. So God knew I meant what I said and then I began to get some good. I got on a vaudeville circuit and was soon pulling down one hundred per week. I took the name 'Stepin Fetchit.'"

First Movie Try-Out

"One day a friend said to me, 'Step, why don't you try out for pictures. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer needs a boy in 'In Old Kentucky.'"

"I went out to the studio and entered a room filled with aspirants for the role. When the man asked my name, I said, 'Stepin Fetchit.' He smiled. 'Is that your name?'"

"Sure," I replied.

"He soon came back and said the director wanted to see me. I slouched into the office and flopped in the chair nearest the door. You see, I put on that pose for their benefit.

"Well, the director liked me so they offered me one hundred per week to play the part. I told them, all right, and he told me when to report for work.

\$75 A Day

"When I got back to my room I started thinking. I had sold myself too cheaply. I was making one hundred on the stage. Why quit that if I wasn't going to get more. The day before we were to begin work I went to the studio and told them, 'Nothin' doing for one hundred per week.'

"How much do you want?" they asked.

"One hundred a day," I said slowly.

"They laughed and I started out the door.

"Hey, wait a minute," they called me back.

"Well, we finally agreed upon seventy-five per day." John M. Stahl was Stepin Fetchit's first director and he is more enthusiastic over him now than when he first slouched into his office.

Salary Over \$750 Per Week

Stepin Fetchit has a two year optional contract with Fox Studios. Many people will tell you that he makes one thousand per week. He told me himself that he made quite a bit over seven hundred and fifty per week and all expenses. He is to receive two hundred per week raise in salary every six months.

Pinched Eleven Times for Speeding

Yes, he has three cars. A special built Cadillac and two others fully as impressive looking. He couldn't be as slow as people say for he received eleven tickets for speeding so Fox Studios suggested a chauffeur.

Likes Old-Fashioned Girls

His father and sisters are with him. And, oh yes, Stepin is to be married and to prove that he is old fashioned, he said:

"I want a house full of children. I'll have plenty to take care of them with, so the girl who doesn't want to mother children, doesn't want me.

"I give ten per cent of all I make to the church." Stepin Fetchit is a Catholic by conversion. He goes to mass every morning but Monday and every Sunday you will find his three cars loaded with friends that accompany him.

Never Misses Church

True to his promise to his God, he lets nothing interfere with his attendance at church. The studios know this

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