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Jack Benny

(Continued)

ing up on me. And who was mingling among the guests? Jack—who had made the call from the kitchen!

This little gag of his should prove at least one point about Jack—he's not stingy at all. Flying back and forth for that opening must have cost him several thousand dollars at least.

In fact, he is probably the most generous guy in the world, although you'd never know it from him. He just doesn't talk about it. I don't know of any charity he has ever turned down. He has collected over \$2 million for musicians' funds for symphony orchestras in numerous cities and has flown back and forth to New York City six or seven times a year to play charity concerts on the behalf of musicians. This takes about six or seven weeks a year out of his time, and at Jack's salary that's giving up a lot.

THERE ARE many misconceptions about Jack—like the one that he is a hypochondriac who's constantly worried about the state of his health.

This isn't true at all. The idea is probably based on his yearly visits to the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital for a checkup. Actually he spends four days a year at the hospital just to get a rest. Mostly he watches TV.

After his first night at the Cedars, Jack usually sneaks home for dinner and then returns to the hospital. It's expensive to eat at home and watch TV at Cedars of Lebanon for four days.

Talking about eating, if you eat with Jack, he's never happy with what he orders: he always wants what you order. Don't ask me why—he's just that way. If you order the same thing he has ordered, he's heartbroken.

That "other-peoples'-pastures-are-greener" attitude even extends to the houses we live in. That was proved about 25 years ago when I built an Early American-style house for Gracie, our son Ronnie, our now-married daughter Sandra, and myself in Beverly Hills.

When Jack saw our house, he liked it and got our architect to build one for him, Mary, and their daughter Joan. After his house was built, he said: "Would you like to sleep in my bedroom?"

I said: "No, then you'd want to sleep in mine." He likes what the other fellow orders, no matter what.

Jack hasn't really changed much since I first met him 38 years ago, before I married Gracie. By the way, it was Gracie who introduced us. She used to live with two other girls, one of whom was a friend of Jack.

He was already doing well as a single, making \$400 a week. We hit it off as soon as we met. I laughed at him on stage, and he laughed at me off. He was even telling stingy jokes then, and I remember one of his favorites about taking his girl friend



Their shows find George sticking to a cigar; Jack is likely to be almost unrecognizable.

out to dinner: he said something funny, and she laughed so hard at it that she dropped her tray.

Other comedians have gotten rid of their old material. Jack is a courageous comedian. When he gets a gag rolling, he keeps it going for years—like gags about his Maxwell and his money vault.

Our families have always been close. His daughter calls me "Uncle George," and my children call him "Uncle Jack." Our wives, Gracie and Mary, are very good friends, too. Mary's a sharp businesswoman, and Jack talks over everything with her and has a high regard for her opinion. Of course, Jack himself has a keen mind for business and is a good judge of people.

UNLIKE MANY close friends, we don't play cards together. The reason? Simply because I don't play gin, and Jack doesn't play bridge, and this is one time he doesn't want to sample my favorite.

We always go to each other's opening night, no matter what part of the country it's in. Jack usually drives his car, and I fly. Jack likes to drive—why, I'll never know. I drove with him about 10 years ago, and he smacked right into a wall. I looked at him and said: "Jack, you still drive better than you play the violin."

For the past 20 years, everything that has happened to Jack has been big, important things. So they ceased to be important, and the little things became important. Recently he was at his lawyer's to sign a contract for probably a million dollars. When he got home, he was very excited—he had found out that if you drive down Wilshire Boulevard at 20 mph, you miss every red light!

That's my friend Jack Benny—he misses the lights but hits the walls.