

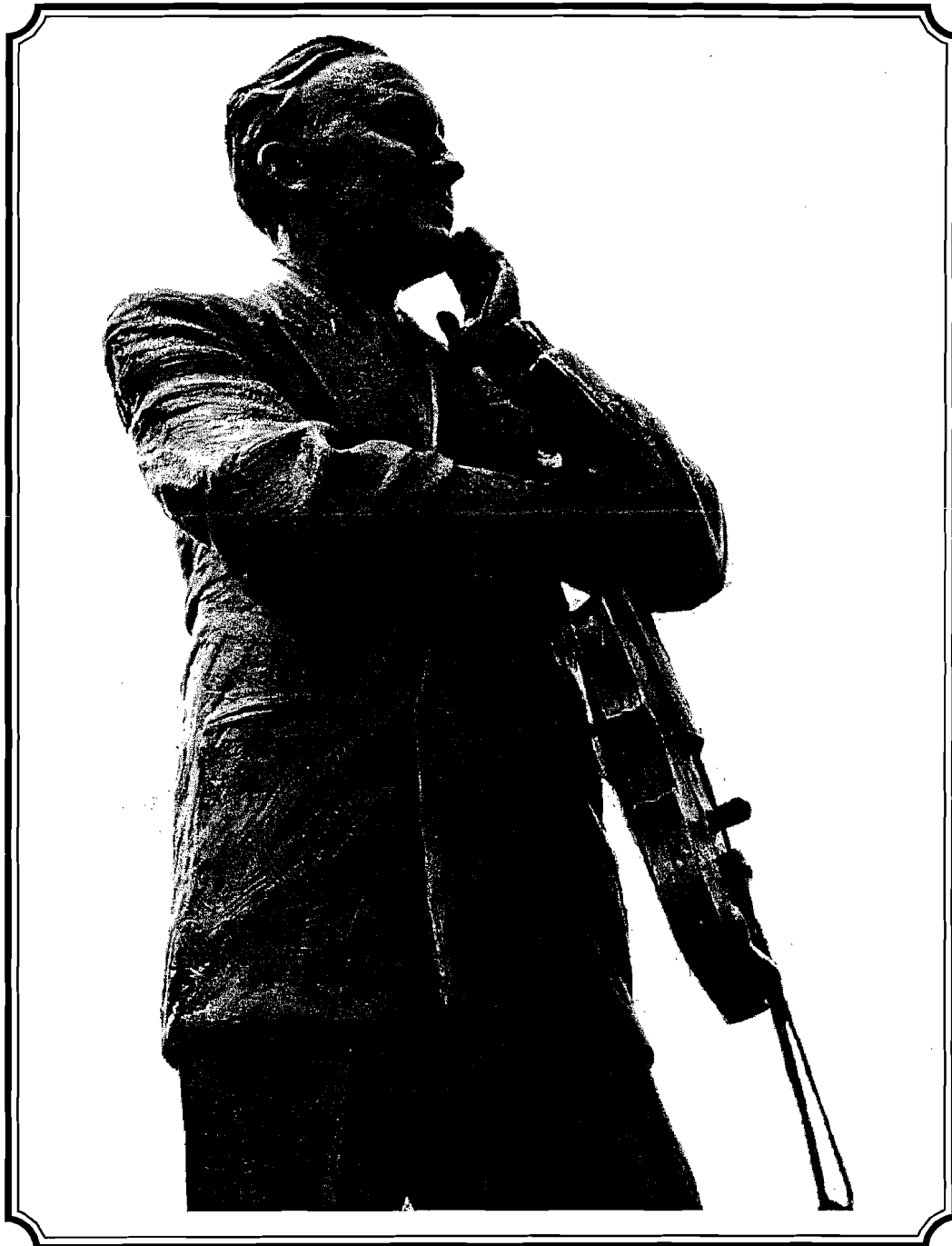
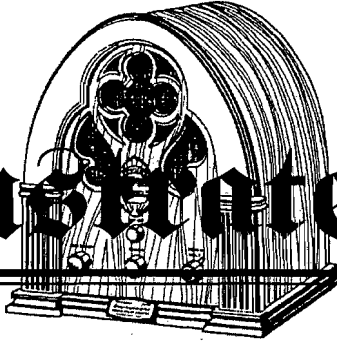
The Old Time Radio Club

Established 1975

The Illustrated Press

Number 302

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Jack Benny Statue Dedicated in Waukegan

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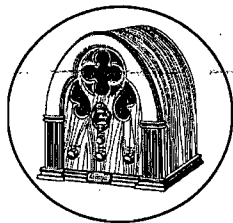
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Ed WANAT's Clips

(This column is made up of clippings from various publications gathered over the years by Ed Wanat)

On the Road with Bob Hope

By Maurice Zolotow (1981)

It was almost midnight that Saturday in November, and I was walking very fast along a dark and deserted street in Lexington, KY. I had set out on a four-mile hike with a famous star of stage, screen, radio, television and golf courses—Bob Hope. He was risking his life and worse, my life, to take his regular nocturnal constitutional. I was Hope's traveling companion for one of his "college tours" and shared his hectic and unbelievable life for almost four days.

We all know what is out there in the night—killers, rapists, carriers of knives and Saturday-night specials (and I don't mean Hope's kind of NBC special). I suggested we go back to our hotel as we had to get up early and fly to Houston, and on Sunday it was Orlando, FL, and Monday to Las Vegas.

Suddenly my worst fears were confirmed. Out of the night, a white Mustang pulled up sharply. From it stepped a lissome young female in a tight cashmere sweater, crying, "Oh, Mr. Hope!" She said she had seen his wonderful show that evening after the University of Kentucky homecoming football game. Could she please hug and kiss him? Pleeeeeze? To my horror, he agreed. It was the old badger-game ploy! While she distracted him, her young confederate would club me on the head, mug Hope and rob both of us. But her friend only wanted to shake Bob's hand and say how much he admired him and his work for the armed forces. Then other cars started pulling over. It was in the middle of the night, but Hope amiably signed scraps of paper, cracked jokes, allowed himself to be kissed by beautiful Kentucky girls, shook hands like a presidential aspirant, smiled and listened. A few blocks later there was a police car. The officer wanted an autograph and he mentioned a place in Korea.

At one point, we found ourselves on a really evil-looking street with suspicious-looking creatures of the night—hollow-cheeked women and larcenous men. But all they wanted was to hug Bob Hope or get his autograph. Then up ahead there were *two* police cars. After Hope signed autographs and joked around with the officers, one of them said we were in a high-crime area and

they would escort us back to our hotel. I thought it was a splendid idea, but Hope declined. He found another deserted hill to climb, quipping all the way. And the fans found him again.

Rare Bird.

Almost every week of the year, Leslie Townes Hope, 77, leaves his abode and flies on similar jaunts. (Actually, he has two abodes—one a pastoral English house on six acres in Toluca Lake,

North Hollywood, and the other a sumptuous castle on a hill in Palm Springs, CA.) Since 1941, Hope has flown almost ten million miles. In 1980, he starred in five 90-minute NBC specials and went to 24 college campuses to play one-man shows. He is as popular with the razzle-dazzle collegians as with the older groupies who remember him from his 1940s radio



Bob Hope with Elizabeth Anne Cole, University of Kentucky homecoming queen.

programs for Pepsodent. "My Pepsodent fans," Hope likes to say, "are now using Polident." But not Hope. He has all his own teeth. And he does not wear a "rug" like the late Bing Crosby. Though Hope's hair is thinning on top. He not only seethes with high energy but possess the skin, the muscularity, the energy, the effervescent gleam in his dark-brown eyes, of a man in the prime of life.

In 1980, Hope was either the master of ceremonies or the main speaker at 35 testimonial banquets and "roasts," and you can hardly put on a charity golf tournament without asking Hope to tee off. He also did 23 guest shots on television talk shows and appeared on six telethons. Last summer there were 12 weeks of touring in county fairs, auditoriums, theaters—places that would book Hope for a night at his fee of \$35,000. But many if not most of the soirees and matinees are charity appearances. Hope receives no fee and pays his own travel expenses.

Why does the man keep up this pace? Certainly not for the money. He is one of the richest men in the world; he modestly says that he is worth about \$75 million—"give or take a few digits." Is it then possible that Hope is suffering from an obscure form of insanity known as dromomania—an exaggerated desire to wander? Maybe, though he also likes to fly home and be with his wife, Dolores, to whom he has been happily wedded for 47

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years. So what drives him to pack up (he does his own) and sleep in a different hotel room every night? I think there is a deep impulse in Hope to give and receive love. It is not enough for him to receive the mass adulation of a theater or television audience. He craves direct contact with people. This makes Hope a rare bird among superstars, many of whom shun direct contact with their fans and find the loss of privacy a terrible price to pay for fame. Comic Woody Allen is the best example. He is a recluse. Yet Woody's favorite comedian is—who else? Bob Hope!

Energy Source.

Hope's first evening performance on our trip together was a benefit ball for the Chicago USO. A quintet of strolling violinists played "Thanks for the Memory"—the first of about 148 renditions I was to hear in the next few days. No sooner were we seated than people began seeking autographs, interrupting him as he tried to put a forkful of meat in his mouth, asking him to pose for pictures.

I was sitting alongside Jim Barrett, a Washington, D.C. businessman who heads the USO. "Bob knows the best bootblack in every city—and the best millionaires—and he treats them all the same way," Barrett said. Barrett told me that in the morning Hope had gone out to the Great Lakes Naval Training Station to give the graduating class a pep talk. Then Hope had attended a charity luncheon. That afternoon he had talked to a few hundred people. Now it was almost 9:30, and he was still going strong. I soon realized that Hope drew energy from people.

After the banquet and the handshaking and the posing with the fans, it was time for Hope to do his monologue. A jazz band played a swinging arrangement of "Thanks for the Memory." Hope stood there, tall and smiling, and jaunty in his dinner jacket, flashing the famous ski-proboscis profile, belting out those one-liners.

He said many people had asked him whether his old friend Ronald Reagan would offer him a post in the new Administration. "I hear I'll be male ambassador to the Bermuda Triangle. Frank Sinatra may be named ambassador to Italy—but do they really need two popes? Jimmy Carter called Reagan after the votes were in, congratulated him and asked, "Ronnie, is there anything I can do for you?" And Reagan said, "Yes, run against me in 1984."

It was just 11:30 when the show was over, and Hope asked if I was ready to take a walk with him. I thought he was just testing my sense of humor because

it was cold, windy and raining; so I laughed and said I was tired. He said he would meet me in the lobby precisely at 10 a.m. The next morning I learned he had actually walked *two miles* the night before. Yet he was out of the hotel at 9:55. He is never late, and does not wear a wristwatch.

The first time I realized I was in real trouble was when we drove to the airport and parked alongside a small plane, about the size of a toy. I couldn't believe Hope would fly in such a fragile craft. We crawled into the plane, and he reached into a drawer for a box of ice cubes. I sat frozen in my seat for our three-hour flight to Lexington. Bob just sat there sucking Ice cubes, talking about how he first met Bing Crosby on Broadway in the 1930s and how they would amuse themselves and their friends by ad-libbing routines at the Friars Club.

As we touched down at the small Lexington airport, he told me that he had been out here a few months previously and had done a show for Tom Gentry, a famous horse breeder who was paid \$1.6 million for a yearling. "What was the horse like?" "I didn't get to meet the horse, but if I had I would have asked him who his agent was," Hope said, grinning.

Time for fans.

There was a crowd of reporters and fans to greet us as we deplaned. Hope was unfailingly polite and witty. We were due at the homecoming football game but took a minute for lunch in the hotel coffee shop. Again people began coming at him. *May I kiss you? May I have your autograph? I have been waiting 20 years to shake your hand, Mr. Hope I saw you in Berlin during the airlift. I saw you in a Danang hospital. I love you, Bob.* Old men, young men, old ladies, young ladies, little children 5 years old—they didn't leave him alone. But he didn't rush a single person.

Hope eats quickly, I was still nibbling, and he had already cleaned his plate—totally. I asked him about his high energy. "Do you think it's because you eat so fast?" I asked. "Yeah I do eat fast, don't I? Guess I'm in a hurry to get to the next place."

At the stadium, Hope and I were driven onto the field for the halftime ceremonies. Again boys and girls started asking for autographs. Then a 200-piece marching band, with marimbas, came out blaring, yes, "Thanks for the Memory!" If I were Hope I'd be sick of this number. But he told me he just dotes on it. He can't get enough of it.

Hope received the young homecoming queen as she walked through a crossed-swords line. He placed a

crown on her head and said, "It's lovely to be here. I knew I was in Kentucky when I got off the plane, because they threw a saddle on me."

Back in the limousine later, we tore across the campus to the Memorial Coliseum, where Hope was giving a concert and show that night. The undergraduate orchestra was playing "Thanks for the Memory" as if the musicians were rendering Mozart's "Sinfonia Concertante." The next morning at 9:30, there was a knock on my bedroom door. It was Hope, smiling and debonair in his blue pajamas and gold bathrobe, ready for breakfast. He always has stewed fruit first, then Nescafe. He took a powerful multivitamin pill. He also takes megadoses of vitamin C and niacin.

And that, members of the President's Commission on Problems of Aging, is about all I can offer in the way of evidence on how to grow old—not gracefully, really—buoyantly? ecstatically? stewed fruit, Nescafe, niacin and, oh yes, long hikes in dark streets, playing three, four shows a week and don't forget this, Commissioner, flying in tiny planes.

Old Habit.

While we were flying in the plane from Lexington to Houston, Bob began reminiscing about his happy days as a young actor—going out on the road to play vaudeville. He talked about his love for the small towns and the big towns. He remembered dates in Terre Haute, Ind.; Madison, Wis.; towns so small they weren't on maps—and split weeks and one-nighters and packing up after a show and going to the railroad station to wait for the early-morning train.

That's when he got into the habit of walking the streets of America. He would send his trunk down to the depot and walk through the clean little towns, with the white picket fences and the neat lawns, and that smell of the good earth in the air. I'd meet lots of folks just walking along, and it always made me feel glad I was a comedian and could bring these folks a little laughter. But I found out what they brought me was more than I brought them.

In Houston it was like Lexington and Chicago and as it would be the next day in Orlando, and the day after that in Las Vegas, and the day after that. He would go on, but I was dropping off here. We said good-bye and I boarded an enormous 747 for Los Angeles. By the time I got home, I was already missing the toy plane and the wonderful song-and-dance man with his happy-go-lucky attitude. I even missed the thrills of a dangerous walk along a dark street.

Jack Benny Returns to Waukegan

By Virginia Mullery

Thousands of people tuned their radio dials to the *Jack Benny Show* every Sunday evening during the 1930s and '40s. Many of them, their children and grandchildren gathered in June to honor the man who brought laughter into so many homes for so long.

Waukegan, Benny's hometown, which gained national renown through his radio skits, dedicated a statue of him during a three-day celebration, June 7 to 9, aimed at recognizing both their native son and a newly launched downtown revitalization project. The nine foot bronze statue depicts Benny characteristically posed with hand to cheek, bemused expression on the face, hallmark violin under one arm. It stands on a black granite base in an award-winning urban plaza diagonally across the street from the Genesee Theater. That long-shuttered, ornate, 1920's-era movie palace is undergoing a \$15 million restoration and is scheduled to open in the fall of 2003 to major theater productions.

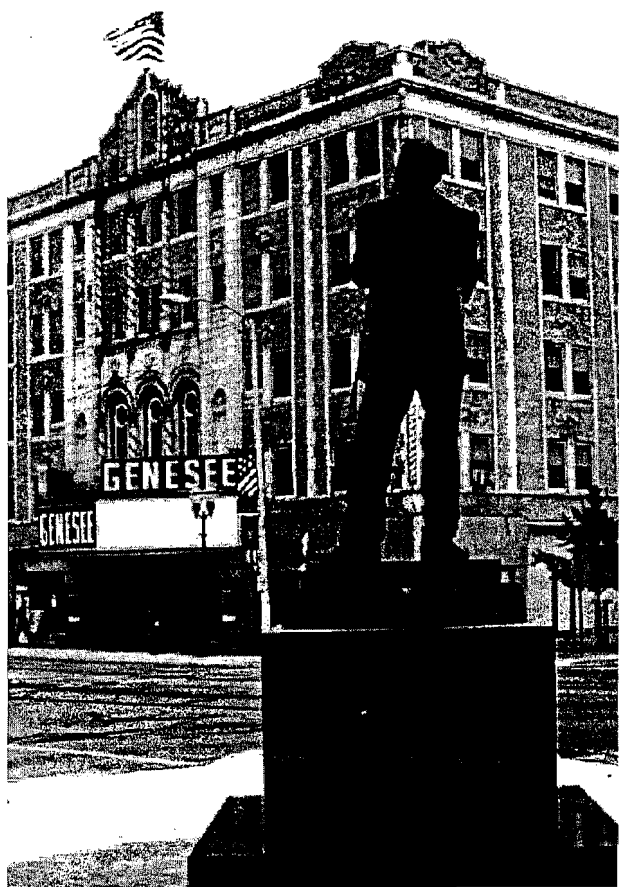
The dedication ceremony was kicked off by Eddie Carroll, the only Benny family-approved impersonator, doing great stand-up shtick. He said later, "It is a joy to carry on Jack Benny's legacy. He was a much loved comedian and for me to be here in Waukegan is an enormous privilege."

Members of the International Jack Benny Fan Club then did a recreation of one of Benny's shows, including Dennis Day, Rochester and Mary Livingston, who in real life was Benny's wife.

Laura Leff of San Francisco, president of the 11,000-member organization, said, "Jack Benny had a universal appeal. I still have teenagers contact me after hearing his old shows. The characters had such human characteristics.

Also present for the dedication were two of Benny's four grandchildren. (He had one daughter, Joan.) Granddaughter, Maria Randolph of Denver, who was 17 when Benny died, said, "Granddad would have been very proud and pleased (about the festivities). Even though he was the most loved comedian, he worried that he would be forgotten and to think this many years later this is happening would have been very meaningful for him."

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The Jack Benny statue overlooks the Genesee Theater, site of the June 25, 1939 broadcast of the Jack Benny Show.

Music for the event was provided by the Waukegan Municipal Band, Waukegan Concert Chorus and Waukegan Symphony Orchestra. Chuck Schaden, WDCB 90.7 Public Radio host of "Those Were the Days," was broadcasting live from the bandstand and playing three Benny shows from the late 1930s for his radio listeners, including one on which a former Waukegan mayor appeared. Present mayor, Richard Hyde, presided at the dedication.

Jack Benny, born Benny Kubelsky in 1894, grew up over his father's store only a few blocks south of where his statue now resides. He played violin in Waukegan's vaudeville Barrison Theater before joining the Navy and eventually going into the comedy business in California. But he never forgot Waukegan and Waukegan never forgot him. In 1939 he returned to town with Dorothy Lamour, Betty Grable and other cast members for the world premier of his movie *Man About Town* at the Genesee Theater. In 1959 he rode in the town's centennial parade and Waukegan named a new junior high school for him. There is also the Waukegan Park District's Jack Benny Center for the

Arts and even a Benny Avenue. Early in 1974, the year he died, he played his violin in a benefit performance for the newly organized Waukegan Symphony Orchestra.

When downtown revitalization plans first began to gel, local artist Laini Zinn and Hank Bogdala, then a township commissioner, conceived the idea of the statue. The \$50,000 cost was realized in large part from private donations, including Pennies for Benny, which Zinn spearheaded. Over \$3,400 was collected in pennies from Waukegan school children. This was apropos the Benny persona as a penny pincher. Zinn said, she was in sixth grade when *Man About Town* premiered and she's never forgotten the thrill.

Sculptor Erik Blome, 35, whose studio is in western Lake County, is too young to remember the comedian but said he researched him so thoroughly he knows him well. He decided early on "if I'm not having fun doing this one it's probably not right. Most of my subjects are people with a serious purpose. This was different and it was fun." Blome, who earned a master's degree from Boston University and studied at the Royal College of Art in London, has numerous works throughout the midwest including the Blackhawks grouping outside the United Center in Chicago and a bronze medallion of sandhill cranes in the main plaza of Independence Grove Forest Preserve in Libertyville, Ill.

Dedication weekend began on Friday evening with the Benny Bash, an annual fund raiser for scholarships to the Jack Benny Center for the Arts. Admission is always \$39—the age Jack Benny perennially claimed to be. On Sunday the Waukegan Historical Society organized a do-it-yourself tour of Benny-specific sites.

Waukegan, population 87,900, became an Illinois Main-street Community in March, one of only four in the larger-city category. Membership gives it recognition throughout the state and makes it eligible for grants for redevelopment of the downtown, according to Dennis Teigen, executive director of the Waukegan Downtown Association. Already they have received the Lieutenant Governor's Award for Excellence for design of the Benny Plaza, which features brick walkways, ornamental plantings, rustic benches and old-fashioned lighting. It's south perimeter is the brick wall of an early 1900's building. Lakefront condos, a lakefront sports complex and new restaurants are on the drawing board. Waukegan, the county seat of Lake County, already boasts a well developed marina. The lakeshore campus of the College of Lake County is also located downtown, housed in two attractively remodeled former department stores.

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DRAGNET

by TOM CHERRE

Dum De Dum Dum. These four notes are probably the most familiar sounds in radio history. From 1949-1957 Fatima and Chesterfield brought us one of the most credible police dramas your ears had the occasion to listen to. The name was *Dragnet*. Jack Webb who starred as Detective Sgt. Joe Friday, to me was the epitome of the no-nonsense, by the book cop. Friday had no time for foolishness, wise-cracking, or heaven forbid, the ladies. In fact of all the episodes I've heard, Joe never told a joke or let out with any kind of giggle. The comic relief was handled by partner Frank Smith, played notably by Ben Alexander. Frank was a normal run of the mill cop. He was often complaining to Joe about his lazy brother-in-law, or his wife's lousy cooking. He would occasionally try to fix up Joe with one of his cousins or one of his wife's friends, all to no avail.

Friday's first partner was Ben Romero, played by Barton Yarborough. Maybe it's me, but I've always felt



Romero should have been cast as either Lum or Abner. He sounded like he was from the back hills of West Virginia with that southern drawl. Yarborough's passing away in the 3rd season opened the door for Alexander who played Frank Smith till 1957 and played the same role into the TV venue.

Dragnet's opening had Friday introducing himself, and letting us know the date, time and weather, setting the scene for either a burglary, homicide or other criminal offense. The dialog was unlike any other show on the air.

Friday and Smith worked hard searching for clues and pounded the pavement, and you could always hear their footsteps. Rounding up suspects was Friday's forte. His method of questioning suspects and witnesses was beyond reproach. Usually before he got around to asking the pertinent questions the suspect would rabble on with something completely off the wall. They would usually offer Friday some coffee, a snack, or perhaps a cigarette. Friday would always decline, except for the cigarette. I'm sure they were either Fatimas or Chesterfields.

Friday, when accusing someone would many times take a lot of "crap" excuse me, from some people. As always the case, Sgt. Friday would say yes sir or no sir. "I wonder if that's how it is in real life"? Once in a while when someone would really lay into him Friday would climb on the pulpit and start preaching with a "Listen here now mister." He would explain what's good and bad and eventually get it off his chest. Incidentally, I've yet to hear Sgt. Friday once say "Just the facts mdme".

"Look guys this is real vintage stuff". What really rocks my boat is hearing announcers George Fenneman or Hal Gibney say how 9 out of 10 doctors see no ill effects to your health with smoking Fatimas, best of the long cigarettes. The censors would have a field day with that one.

Dragnet also had some tremendous sound effects. The police sirens heard were actually real police sirens. When there was ever a brawl with fisticuffs it sounded like Fibber's closet opening for two minutes. The gun shots although seldom heard were authentic and believable.

Basically *Dragnet* was a little corny, "Did I say a little?" The scripts were pretty much predictable, with an ensemble cast of about 24 often hearing the same voices week after week. The really fantastic thing was *Dragnet* always had a fast moving pace. It was exciting and interesting with not a lot of over sophistication or complicated plots. It also had one of the best sound tracks.

Friday always got his man, the transition to TV was also very successful. Jack Webb was more or less stereotyped for future roles, but obviously retired a rich man.

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Ben Alexander and Jack Webb during a *Dragnet* performance

He was married to the very vivacious singer Julie London. Webb died at the young age of 62 in 1982, of lung cancer, no doubt a victim of too many Chesterfields. Watching Webb later on TV I can honestly say he is the only one I know who could walk without swaying his arms. I still enjoy listening to the many episodes of *Dragnet* even with its trite anecdotes and familiar idioms, and the way Friday closed the case with an abrupt one or two words or maybe with his wise words of wisdom and I still love hearing Dum De Dum Dum.

A Date With Judy

There's something eternally funny about adolescence—for grown-ups. With all the tales of changing voices, sprouting whiskers and puppy love, however, few have ever paid much attention to the peculiar problems of the feminine sex. But now at last, radio has filled this lack by giving us a teen-aged charmer, *Judy*, to represent the distaff side in that famous gallery of American youth portraits which includes *Penrod*, *Tom Sawyer* and *Henry Aldrich*. Judy's problems can be summed up in just one word: Men. Most of her time is spent desperately struggling to ensnare some reluctant swain for "A Date With Judy." Far from understanding the importance of this earnest quest, the two males in her own family merely add to life's difficulties. The essence of all kid brothers, *Randolph*, is past master of the derisive remark and even better at finding out what he's not supposed to know. Harassed father *Melvyn Foster* simply cannot comprehend why *Judy* must involve the whole family in her elaborate plans to gain popularity. Only mother *Dora Foster* understands the world-shaking decisions to be made about pompadour versus flat-top hair-do, or false eyelashes versus natural appeal. Much of the sparkle of this story of American family life may be traced to the fact that the actors really fit the roles they play. The precocious title character is acted by sixteen-year-old Louise Erickson, who gets crushes on movie-stars just as *Judy* does. Right now, the blonde, blue-eyed starlet is sighing over Alan

Ladd, and her room at home is practically papered with various poses of the stalwart young idol. Before Alan, Louise had swooned over Cary Grant, Dennis Morgan, Walter Pidgeon and Clark Gable—so she can easily understand *Judy's* rapid changes of heart. Louise (who prefers to be called Bobbie) feels that she's learning a lot from *Judy*, too. Recently, against her mother's wishes, the young lady bought herself a pair of high heeled shoes and found herself resorting to *Judy*-like persuasiveness in trying to overcome her parent's disapproval. Louise doesn't go out every night with a new date, however. Instead, she confines her engagements to Saturday nights—and always with the same boy. She, too has a twelve-year-old brother who is quite a thorn in her side.

Randolph's wise-cracking role is carried by brown-eyed and freckled Dix Davis, now almost fourteen. Dix, whose impressive full name is Peter Dixon Davis, is much too preoccupied with such masculine interests as mapmaking, football and swimming to have any time for girls. According to his mother, he, like his "Date with Judy" counterpart, is very ingenious in mischief-making. His pet bulldogs, Maggie and Toro, are forbidden in the house, but as soon as Mrs. Davis leaves, Dix invites them in. On one occasion, they turned up all the rugs, chewed slippers and generally raised havoc—for which Dix had to pay by hauling 25 logs for the fireplace. The youngster takes his career pretty seriously, however, and has always made a success in various fields. At the age of four, he was cast in the movie *Kid Millions* with Eddie Cantor, and several years later played in the West Coast stage production of *Our Town*. It was Rudy Vallee who discovered him for radio in 1939, giving him a part opposite Lionel Barrymore. Since then, the lad has made a name for himself as the mike's youngest comedian, through such roles as *Belly-Laugh Barton* of the *Jack Benny Show*, *Pinky* of *One Man's Family* and *Alvin Fuddle* of the *Blondie* series.

Both "parents" really fit their parts like gloves, too. John Brown, known for his character and dialect roles with Fred Allen and Jack Benny, finds himself right at home in the "Date With Judy" studio—for, in real life, his two energetic youngsters are always confronting him with similar embarrassing situations. Lois Corbett, on the other hand, has never been married in real life, but has been playing mother roles—with the greatest success—since her seventeenth year.

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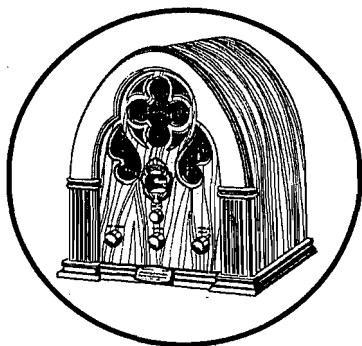
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