



Sunday Nights at Seven

Jack Benny , Joan Benny , George Burns (Foreword)

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From Publishers Weekly

Comedian Benny left behind his unpublished autobiography when he died at age 80 in 1974. Here, in what PW termed an "entertaining and moving" manner, he reveals the secrets of his tremendous appeal as his daughter supplements the text with accounts of the family's home life. According to PW , "The daughter's sensibilities, at least as expressed here, contrast sharply with the father's bighearted outlook on life." Photos. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

From Library Journal

About half of this book consists of an unpublished autobiography that Jack Benny wrote in the late 1960s; the remainder comprises reminiscences and commentary by Joan Benny. Joan's feeling for her mother, Mary Livingstone, could best be described as ambivalent, and her life (including three marriages) hasn't been perfect, but the love and admiration she feels for her father is apparent. By virtually all accounts Benny was a nice, pleasant man, and those same adjectives also apply to this book. The best Benny biography is still The Jack Benny Show by Milt Josefsberg (LJ 3/15/77), a long-time writer for Benny. But Sunday Nights is better than his manager Irving Fein's Jack Benny: An Intimate Biography (LJ 12/15/75) or Mary Livingstone Benny and others' Jack Benny (LJ 2/15/78). Previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 7/90.

- John Smothers, Monmouth Cty. Lib., Manalapan, N.J.

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Sunday Nights at Seven Details

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From Reader Review Sunday Nights at Seven for online ebook

David says

The actual cover lists this book as being by Jack and Joan Benny (his daughter) and if there is anything that mars this wonderful book about a great entertainer it is her wandering style-- which is understandable-- it lends a little bit of special charm-- but her continual wandering from the chronological to a marginally related story leaves the reader dizzy at times. Those departures may have made sense to her, but there were indeed times when they leave the reader puzzled about what triggered the connection in her mind.

At some point, Joan discovered her father's partially written autobiography in the back of a closet. She attempted to fill in some of the gaps and at times that filling in is indeed necessary, but at others, they come across as selfish and self-serving, as if the story is about her more than her father.

The biography is also about Mary Livingstone, who changed her name from Sophie Marks (can you guess her showbiz family)...

We have here the delightful story of Jack, his professional and private life.. his many friends in show business.. and separating out the CHARACTER he played on radio and TV from the real life generous, kind man he was. If there is too much of daughter Joan at times, we have to remember that she was his only daughter, and an important element in his life.

Worth reading.

Mary Beth says

After reading quite a few biographies on celebrities and learning about their addictions, this bio was a pleasant surprise. No addictions, just a life full of laughs. There were some bumps in the roads but nothing major.

Laura says

Joan Benny found her father's memoir after her mother died and added her own memoir to it. It's interesting, but doesn't match the title. There's plenty of anecdotes about Benny in show business, but it's more about the Bennys as a family, especially later in the book where it's more Joan's memoir. Perhaps there was a bit too much of Joan, but her marriages and divorces do need to be covered because that's where the Benny grandchildren came from.

I was a little tempted when I started reading to skim the Joan parts, but they were too interesting. I especially liked her story about the neighbor who put up a sign that Jack Benny didn't live there, he lived next door.

There are even a couple of things I learned about the Dick Van Dyke show watching this. I never thought that show was true-to-life because the writers wrote the show the week it was to air. I thought they would have it mostly done a couple of weeks ahead of time and tweak it as needed the day or two before doing it. The Jack Benny show, however, was written the week it was performed. I suppose other comedy shows did the same. I also didn't believe entertainers would have parties to entertain each other as they did in the Dick Van Dyke show. But that is exactly how Hollywood parties work in this book. Entertainers love to entertain.

Larry Hostetler says

I picked this book as a fun and hopefully funny book to read. But it turned out to be both more and less. Joan has taken Jack Benny's autobiography and added her own perspective to it.

Her additions fill out many missing parts and explain some parts that Jack's version elided. They also contain some very interesting stories from some of Jack and Mary's many friends (and even some of Joan's). I also found Joan's recounting of her mother's descent into chronic depression very interesting because of its honesty, it's breaking of unhealthy taboo on the illness, and its replication in my wife's family. But I also felt there were times earlier in the book when Joan's part detracted. Perhaps there wasn't enough of Jack's content to make a good book, or didn't flow as well as what was included? But they at times seemed superfluous.

Overall, though, the book was a wonderful account of what appears to be a wonderful man whose life was successful in vaudeville, radio, and television. While his movies were mostly forgettable and even a source of humor, his life among the icons of the golden ages of radio and television is interesting and insightful.

A very good read for anyone.

Mike (the Paladin) says

I don't know how many of you reading this remember Jack Benny. If you don't, you've missed quite a bit. I would suggest that you go immediately and find some recordings of the radio programs and give them a listen. The humor may be a bit dated but it's some of the funniest humor out there.

I enjoyed this as Mr. Benny (Benjamin Kubelsky) goes over his career. There are some laughs and some sadness. There are for me memories and also reminders of that time.

I recall him more from TV than radio. The character he created, the stingy, age denying, miser who was actually just the opposite of Mr. Benny himself was so believable that people simply assumed it was the real Jack Benny.

In one account he relates an incident, I don't know if I can give the laugh value without giving a lot of explanation but I'll try. Mr. Benny created a character who was a penny pinching miser who drove an ancient car because he refused to pay for a new one, who paid his employees poverty wages who never let money go if he could help it.

One day (in real life) he had to use a public restroom and after he had left said restroom he missed his wallet.

He hurried back to the restroom and looked under the door to the stall and saw his wallet laying there. This as it happened was something you don't see anymore, a pay-toilet. You had to put a dime in the door to get it to open, so Jack was reaching under the stall to get his wallet when a man walked in.

Jack saw the smile on the man's face when he was recognized. What the man saw was "the miser Jack Benny" crawling under the stall door to save a dime.

I like the book and if you happen to recall Jack Benny I think you'll really enjoy it.

I gave it a 4 as the memories of Mr. Benny's daughter while interesting, did not really interest me as much as those of her father (from a manuscript he wrote but was discovered by his daughter only after his death). I did skim through and skip a bit of her sections... To each.

I can recommend this one enjoy.

Don LaFountaine says

I really enjoyed this book. Much of it was by Jack Benny but hid away until his daughter Joan found it and then combined her thoughts and memories with Jack's to complete this book.

Jack Benny was a beloved entertainer who started out in vaudeville, then moved into radio, and finally ending up on Television. His sense of humor and legendary perfect timing made millions laugh during his career, and has since added millions more with those of us who only discovered him after his death.

The book follows his life throughout his personal life and show business. Jack tells a lot of his own stories, and if you have listened to and/or seen a Jack Benny show, you can't help but read the book in his voice while adding his pauses at the right time. Some of the stories told include:

- How he met his wife at a holiday gathering and did not recognize her later on in life and had to be told who she was.
- What it was like to work with his best friend George Burns
- How he felt when he made the transitions from vaudeville to radio to television
- What life was like growing up for Joan in as the daughter of Jack Benny and Mary Livingston
- How Joan was able to interact with each of her parents as well as all their famous friends
- How others in the entertainment industry felt towards Jack Benny

This was a wonderful book about the life of one of my favorite entertainers. I wish more words had been written by him, but I loved most of the book. (Admittedly, the "Mommie Dearest" parts written by Joan about Mary Livingston were a little off-putting.) I would most certainly recommend this book to anyone who is a fan of Jack Benny, vaudeville, and early radio and TV shows. It is a must read,

Teresa Watson says

After Jack Benny's death, his daughter Joan found his unpublished autobiography hidden away. Using these pages and her own memories, she produced this marvelous book full of stories and laughter.

The story does cover his childhood, it is the stories about his career in radio that dominate the book. While Joan does include her own memories, she allows her father Jack to tell his story in his own way. Many of the things in the book are covered in Milt Joseberg's book, which I have previously reviewed. What is touching is how Jack talked about the comedians that made him laugh the most, and how Joan cuts in with her memory of those hilarious moments. One in particular involves George Burns, who also wrote the foreword of the book. He told her that he always played the most outrageous jokes on her father, and how people who did not know them thought he was being rather sadistic to poor Jack. But George told her that if he hadn't played jokes on her father, he would have thought George hated him. It all started when they were talking on the phone, making arrangements to meet that evening. Somehow, they got disconnected. When they met that night, George found out he was the funniest comedian in the world, because Jack thought it was hilarious that George had hung up on him. After that, George told Joan, he always hung up on Jack because he wanted him to go on thinking he was the world's greatest comedian.

Eighteen of the last twenty pages are from Joan's point of view, as Jack retired but continued to stay busy. She talks about the touching funeral service and the memories her children had of their grandfather. But it is Jack who gets the last word, talking about feeling like a passenger on a train admiring the scenery. "And when the train arrives at the last station, I get off. I look around. I like the place where I am. I don't know exactly how I got here, but I'm glad to be here just the same."

Robin says

I loved this book. It talked about the history of electronic entertainment (radio, television and finally the early moving pictures) that I was mostly unfamiliar with or had forgotten. As each form of entertainment became available to Americans, I liked thinking about how my great-grandparents, grandparents and parents responded to them. There was a lot of name-dropping about the stars of each entertainment form, which I enjoyed. These were names I had heard of at some point and of which I was vaguely familiar. It was good to learn how these people fit into the entertainment scene, what exactly they did, with whom they were friends, etc. Again, as a genealogist, I asked myself, "What did great-grandparents Emil and Selma think of him/her?" "Did my grandparents dance to that song?" "Did my parents play this song?"

Having grown up in California and being familiar with Los Angeles and Hollywood, it was nice to read about how and why people lived there in the early days. For example, at Jack Benny's homes in Hollywood, there was no security necessary. When buses of tourists drove around the neighborhood, Jack would often run out of the house to meet the bus and say "hi". Jack's family lived just next door to George Burns' family for some years. The two families became quite close.

My husband and I have found a place where we can rent the Jack Benny show. We've found much of the humor still funny today. I look forward to renting the shows of the other people mentioned in the book!

Conan Tigard says

Sunday Nights at Seven: The Jack Benny Story is an autobiography told from two points of view, and is actually about two different people. Apparently, Jack Benny started writing an autobiography, but never finished it before he died. His daughter, Joan Benny, found the work and decided to publish it along with her

part of the story. So, inside the book, the bolded print is Jack Benny's writing while the normal print is Joan Benny's work.

Let me start off by saying that Jack Benny is my favorite comedian. No one even comes close to his dry wit and impeccable timing. I just love this guy. So, color me tickled pink when I found this book in the local Goodwill store. I couldn't wait to get home and read about one of my heroes. I loved every bit of writing Jack did in this book. His stories are highly entertaining and I found myself very involved in just learning more about a man I admire so much. During the first half of the book, it is mostly Jack's writing, so I absolutely loved it and at this point gave it my highest rating.

Then along comes Joan Benny and her stories. At first I tried to find it interesting. But when the second half of the book hit and it was mostly about her, I found I didn't care all that much. I had never even heard of Joan Benny before the novel. So, I got to know Joan through her writing, all the while hoping for more of Jack's writing to be interspersed with hers. There wasn't as much as I would have liked. I didn't pick up this book to read about Joan Benny, so I was mostly disappointed by the second half of the book. Although this book is supposed to all about Jack Benny, it isn't.

There is a bonus with this book, though, and that is the foreword by George Burns. You see, George and Jack were pretty good friends. In fact, it seemed like Jack was pretty good friends with most of Hollywood's elite. I loved all of the interesting tidbits about the radio and movie stars of those bygone days, as I grew up watching all their movies on the Family Film Festival on Los Angeles's television station KTLA. Every Saturday and Sunday at 3 pm, I would sit down and watch one of these old movies, and it was always followed Star Trek. Ah . . . those were the days (the late 1970's and early 1980's). So, I had a pretty good knowledge of most of the old movie stars that are mentioned throughout this book. These sections I really liked.

Overall, Sunday Nights at Seven: The Jack Benny Story told by Jack Benny is an outstanding story. The parts by Joan were interesting when they pertained to Jack and his wife, but not at all when it was just about her. This really brought the story down in my eyes. If the book would have been all about Jack, I probably would have given it a 10 out of 10. As it is, I can only give it a 7, splitting the difference as I would have ranked her story around a 4 for interest. I compare this to listening to John Lennon's final album, Double Fantasy. All of John's songs are great and all of Yoko Ono's can be skipped.

I rated this book a 7 out of 10.

J says

Jack Benny's recollection of early days in vaudeville were interesting, as were the challenges of the transitions to radio and later TV. Most of his daughter's insights were less interesting, many passages were heavy with name-dropping.

Terry says

The best parts of this book are the ones written by Jack Benny himself. Joan XXX writings do add to the story in places, but this is also her autobiography. She was older than my parents, so I wasn't really familiar

with her other than the times she appeared on the Benny program. So some parts weren't all that interesting to me, but may be to some. There are a few good photos, but there are better ones out there in different books on Benny. I think the best book out there on the topic of Jack Benny is "Jack Benny and the Golden Age of American Radio Comedy."

Christine Norman says

Joan Benny relates her own personal memories of her father interspersed with excerpts from her dad's memoirs. Interesting peek into the social lives and friendships of familiar Hollywood stars in the 40s, 50s, and 60s.

Medlibrarian says

If you are looking for a critical biography of Jack Benny, this is not it.

This is part autobiography and part memoir. Benny's daughter found her father's attempt at an autobiography, and then edited it and added her own recollections.

Looking at it with that lens, it's not bad. Although frankly, there's a lot more in Joan Benny's section about herself than I probably needed.

Michael says

This is Jack Benny's autobiography co-written with his daughter Joan. Jack had an unfinished manuscript that Joan retrieved after his death, doctored and added her own stories, resulting in this book.

The best parts are Jack's retelling of some of the skits that he performed on his radio show. I enjoy listening to his rebroadcasts on satellite radio, so reading some of the pieces were LOL mementos for me. He truly knew how to paint hilarious pictures in the minds of his listeners.

The not-so-great parts of the book were Joan's reminiscences. There are two or three significant gaps in Jack's story where Joan jumps in to tell the reader about her childhood, school years and three successive failed marriages. This book could use less of Joan and more of Jack.

I believe that there are two or three other biographies of Jack Benny out there. I suggest reading one of those and skipping this one.

John L says

I'm a completist, but I have to admit that, about 2/3 of the way through, I began skipping past the portions written by Joan Benny. My rating is ***** for the parts written by Jack and ** for the parts written by Joan, averaging to ***.

