

Laughing with Philadelphia Stooge Larry Fine



William C. Kashatus

During the 1938 Independence Day weekend, hundreds of Philadelphians flocked to Atlantic City, lured by the sparkling beach and the frenetic boardwalk with its extravaganza of amusement rides, theaters, arcades, and Steel Pier, the showplace of the New Jersey shore. Many stood in line at Steel Pier waiting to see three men who had captured their hearts and imaginations—The Three Stooges. The popular comedians used slapstick, punctuated by unforgettable wisecracks and outrageous storylines, that made audiences laugh and forget their troubles in the wake of the Great Depression.

The act featured Harry Moses “Moe” Horwitz (1897–1975), his younger brother, Jerome “Curly” Horwitz (1903–1952), and their longtime friend, Louis “Larry” Feinberg (1902–1975). Playing to a packed house, Moe, Larry, and Curly ambled onto the stage to a standing ovation while the band played a jazzy rendition of “Three Blind Mice.” Each at less than five and a half feet tall, and with their trademark hair cuts—Moe’s mop-top, Curly’s nearly bald pate, and Larry’s frizzy thatch—the pint-sized entertainers resembled dwarfish, if not dysfunctional, brothers.

“Pick two,” Moe said to Curly, holding out his left hand. Choosing Moe’s first and second fingers, Curly replied, “One, two!” Moe immediately poked his brother in the eyes as the audience roared with laughter. “Yeow!” screamed Curly.

“Hey, whadidya do that for?” protested Larry. Moe turned and tried to poke Larry in the eyes, but Larry blocked his fingers with his palm held sideways on the bridge of his nose. The audience again howled with laughter. Poking, slapping, and kicking one another was old vaudevillian shtick, but the audience loved it.

Spanning several decades, from 1925 to 1970, The Three Stooges became the world’s most famous and beloved comedy troupe. The irrepressible trio made more than two hundred movies, including six feature-length films. Their boisterous comedic skits, involving eye pokes, pie throwing, and conking heads, centered around basic plots dealing with ordinary, unremarkable issues of daily life.

Moe, who changed his surname to Howard (as did his brothers), was the act’s irascible leader, the one who bopped and conked and slapped his fellow Stooges at will. A native of

Brooklyn, New York, Moe served as business manager and handled the team’s scheduling and financial decisions. In 1925, he married Helen Schonberger (1899–1975), who demanded he give up touring when she became pregnant the following year. Moe complied and unsuccessfully attempted to adapt to more mundane work before returning, in 1927, to the only job he ever loved. His younger brother, Curly, with his pudgy build and a seemingly bottomless reserve of animated gestures and hilarious catch phrases, was more comedic. Curly was one of four comedians who played the “third” Stooge, along with another brother, Samuel “Shemp” Howard (1895–1955), Joe Besser (1907–1988), and Curly-Joe DeRita (1909–1993), born in Philadelphia as Joseph Wardell.

Larry Fine appeared as the lovable patsy in films starring The Three Stooges. His comedy came naturally, delivered with a pleasant but unusual



“Soitenly!”

The Three Stooges about 1940 (clockwise, from left), Larry Fine, Moe Howard, and Curly Howard, regarded as the most popular comedic team in American history, spans generations—from vaudeville to video.

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nasal tone. A confident, self-assured actor, he was the most eccentric of the three. He also gave the comedy routine its integrity, serving as the glue between Moe, the tough boss, and the wisecracking Curly, Shemp, Joe, or Curly-Joe.

Born Louis Feinberg on October 5, 1902, in South Philadelphia, Larry Fine was the eldest of four children of Joseph and Fannie Lieberman Feinberg, followed by brothers Morris (1904–1986) and Phillip (1909–1919), who died of influenza, and a sister, Lyla (1920–2002). The Feinbergs were among the forty thousand Jewish immigrants who came through the port of Philadelphia at the turn of the twentieth century to escape religious persecution in their native Russia. Joseph Feinberg, a jeweler and watchmaker, owned a store at the corner of Third and South Streets, above which his family lived. Although the original building has been replaced by a tavern, the current establishment's owner proudly displays reminders that this was the site of Fine's childhood home. As a youngster, Larry entertained his father's jewelry store customers by cracking jokes and dancing on a display counter.

A terrifying incident, which scarred Larry for life, led him to develop his musical talent. "When I was a child, my father used oxalic acid to test gold," recalled Larry. The elder Feinberg, from the corner of his eye, noticed Larry

about to sample the corrosive acid, mistaking it as a beverage. His father knocked the bottle away, probably saving Larry's life, but the acid spilled on Larry's left arm. Doctors at first advised that the arm, burned to the muscle, be amputated. However, after skin graft surgery, a doctor suggested that Larry take up the violin to rebuild muscles in the damaged arm.

Music therapy worked wonders for the scrawny, strawberry-blond boy. By the age of nine, the child prodigy performed with the Philadelphia Orchestra. "My violin teacher had great hopes for me to become a concert violinist," Larry admitted. "However, my tastes ran to jazz. When I was thirteen, I taught some of the boys in the Southwark Grammar School band to play jazz, much to his discomfort." Shortly after, Larry joined the Newsboy Sextet, playing his violin and dancing before audiences in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston for two dollars a perfor-



“Pick two,” Moe said to Curly.

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mance. He also took up boxing, becoming a formidable opponent, but his parents objected strenuously to any pugilistic ambitions.

During World War I, he worked as a riveter at Philadelphia's William Cramp and Sons Shipbuilding Company, but his passion for show business continued to surface at local amateur nights where he danced the high-stepping *kazočka* (kazotchka) in the Russian Jewish style while playing the violin. Fine also won wide popularity with his Charlie Chaplin impressions, performing on street corners, and, on summer weekends, clowning on the beach in Atlantic City. He wore a tank-top swimsuit emblazoned with the Hebrew symbol for kosher on the front and, on the back in Gaelic, *Erin go brough* ("Ireland forever"). The ethnically schizophrenic swimsuit was only superseded by his storehouse of Jewish humor.



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Jon's Bar and Grille in Philadelphia commemorates Larry Fine's birthplace and the site of his family's residence and jewelry store.

Between 1918 and 1920, Fine bounced between Central High School for Boys, the country's second oldest public high school, opened in 1838, and his father's jewelry store. According to Larry's brother, Morris Feinberg, instead of discouraging his son's ambitions to pursue music and comedy, Joseph Feinberg encouraged him by giving Larry "two weeks notice" and a \$100 bonus to quit the jewelry business.

Larry was a natural for vaudeville. Among the most popular shows were one-act plots in a schoolroom setting. With a young, underpaid cast, no scene changes, no fancy backdrops, and no elaborate props, the productions cost little to stage. Only a teacher's desk and a row of students' desks appeared on stage. The plot involved a frenzied school day with students making classic wisecracks that many audience members wished they had had the nerve to make in real life. When the teacher left the room, the students performed their song and dance numbers under the guise of misbehaving. It was primitive musical comedy at its best.

Philadelphia comedian Jules Black, who had been presenting such school acts for nearly twenty years, signed Fine as one of the students, along with sisters Loretta and Mabel Haney. Jolly Joyce, a robust comedian in his mid-twenties, played the pompous teacher with a thick German accent. Dressed in clothes befitting Lord Fauntleroy, Fine was the first student on Joyce's roll call. "Absent!" Larry shouted after Joyce called his name. "I'm sick in bed with a headache." The response earned him a crack on the head with a stick.

"Vot did Kristofer Kolumbis do in 1492?" Joyce asked Black, who played a wisecracking Jewish youth.

"I don't know, techer," he replied. "I vas oud of town dat veek."

Black's school act toured the New England and Mid-Atlantic states for five years. A romance eventually developed between Fine and his

beautiful, blue-eyed costar, Mabel Haney. He recalled the social obstacles to their relationship. "She was Irish Catholic and I, of course, was Jewish. Both of us were also too young to marry." Haney converted to Judaism, and on June 22, 1926, the couple wed in Philadelphia. They remained married forty-one years.

The Fines left Black's touring

company to form Haney Sisters and Fine, a musical comedy act that featured Larry playing violin for Mabel's jazz dance, and traditional selections to accompany sister-in-law Loretta's classical dance. They toured the country until 1928, when they decided that Mabel would stay at home to care for their newborn daughter, Phyllis (1928–1988).



When The Three Stooges officially incorporated on June 2, 1934, Larry Fine was already a seasoned vaudeville and nightclub comedian.

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Three actors followed Curly Howard as the clownish third Stooge: Moe and Curly's brother, Shemp Howard (bottom), until his death in 1955, followed by Joe Besser (center), who left in 1959 for other film offers, and Philadelphia native Joseph Wardell, known as "Curly-Joe" DeRita (top).

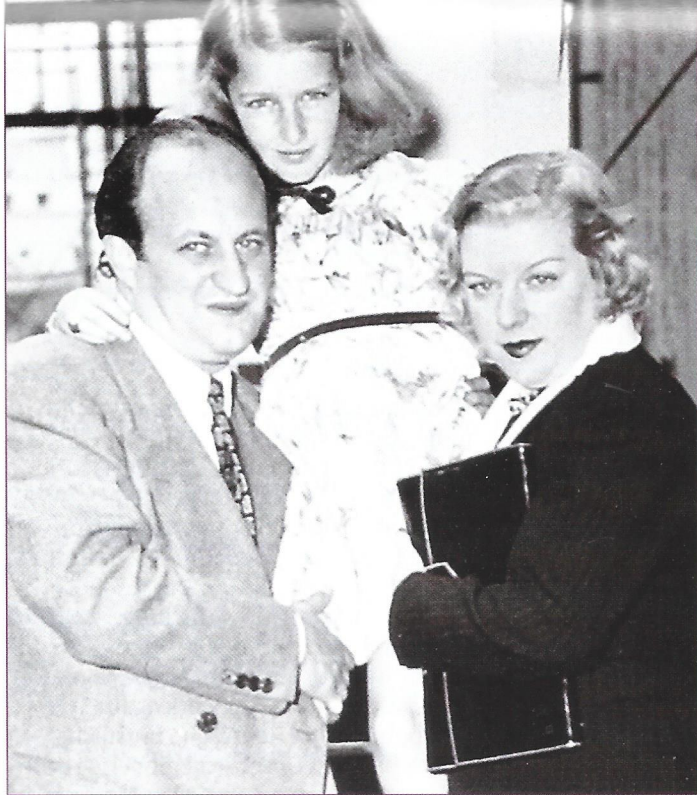
On March 24, 1928, comedian Ted Healy (1896–1937), a childhood friend of Moe Howard, and Moe's brother Shemp were in the audience watching Larry perform Al Jolson impressions and jokes at Mann's Million Dollar Rainbo Gardens in Chicago, reputedly the country's largest nightclub. Jolson was also performing at the club at the time. Healy, appearing locally with Shemp in a musical comedy, *A Night in Spain*, was better known for Ted Healy and His Stooges, a vaudeville act established in 1925. Healy would attempt to sing or tell jokes while his noisy assistants, Moe and Shemp Howard, kept "interrumping" him. He

responded by verbally and physically abusing his Stooges. Healy offered Fine a weekly salary of ninety dollars, plus an additional ten dollars if he would drop the violin. Larry agreed to the terms, uniting the group for the first time.

No matter how hard the pokes, slaps, punches, or prods were delivered, no one was ever seriously injured, but the physical comedy could become rough at times. Once Moe socked his brother Shemp so hard that he staggered through the remainder of the show. The moment they left the stage, Shemp complained. "Why, the audience could hardly hear the slap," replied Moe. "Next time, I'll make it good and hard." Only next time Moe missed Shemp altogether and hit Larry squarely on the jaw. Larry would have fallen had the others not grabbed him and pretended they were in a football huddle. The audience thought it was planned and roared with laughter. The Stooges incorporated the bit as a regular part of their routine.

A grizzled Irishman who struggled with chronic alcoholism, Healy shaped the Stooges' signature slapstick humor. He was, however, jealous of his partners and extremely protective of his own star power. "The Stooges hated him," claimed Edward Bernds (1905–2000), who later directed the trio during their years with Columbia Pictures. "In vaudeville, there are ways of hitting and slapping that don't hurt so much. But Healy would really belt them, especially if he had had some alcohol. He deliberately hurt them. And, of course, the boys had to go right ahead and take it. He also cheated them out of money." Although Healy was one of the highest paid entertainers on the vaudeville circuit, regularly earning \$1,750 weekly, he paid his sparring partners \$100 to \$150 each per week.

In 1930, Healy signed on for the Fox Film Corporation movie, *Soup to Nuts*, a smorgasbord of Keystone slapstick routines (skits relying on blumpling and misunderstanding) starring him as a romantic straight man and the Stooges as comic firemen. Healy did not fare well in the reviews, but the Stooges were highly praised and Fox offered them a separate contract. The infuriated Healy told studio executives that the Stooges were his employees, and the studio withdrew the offer. After Moe,



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Larry, and Shemp learned about the unscrupulous Healy dealing behind their backs, they began searching for their own opportunities.

Healy signed a contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) in 1933 for the Stooges to appear in a series of feature films and short subjects. The following year, they left their manipulative manager and signed a one-year contract with Columbia Pictures. Healy tried to stop them with legal action, claiming they were using his copyrighted material, but his efforts failed. Shemp, weary of the constant feuding, pay and contract disputes, as well as Healy's alcoholism, left the group and found work in other comedic films. On June 2, 1934, Moe officially incorporated the group as "The Three Stooges." He also replaced his older brother with his youngest, Jerome, who cut his long chestnut red locks, shaved his facial hair, and renamed himself Curly.



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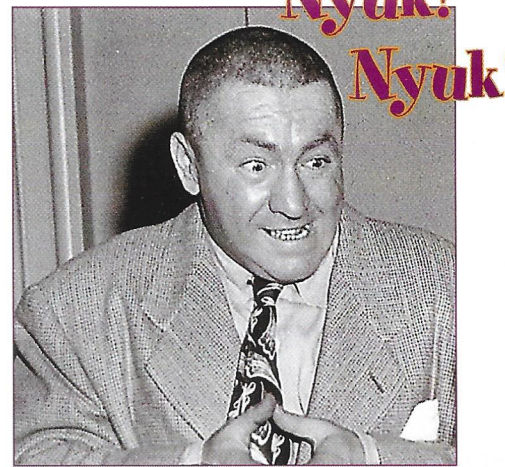
In 1928, Larry Fine was invited to join Ted Healy (above) and His Stooges.

Larry Fine, daughter Phyllis, and Mabel, his vaudeville costar and wife of 41 years, photographed in the late 1930s (left).

"Shemp was more the deadpan, expressive type," explained Moe. "Curly, we never knew what he was going to do half the time. He was a 'hard study,' which meant that he didn't absorb the lines so quickly and solidly. Curly would adlib, but not in words. If . . . his line was due and he couldn't

think of it, he'd . . . fall on the floor and spin around like a top, or he'd fall on his back and roll all over the place. It was all very inventive, but he was simply trying to catch up on the dialogue. It was all we could do to contain ourselves."

One of Curly's improvisations was the Mad Dog impression. When startled, Curly would bark at the source, including policemen, mobsters, oysters, false teeth, fish, dogs, cats, hot dogs, alligators, skunks, and automobiles. He was known for a few inventive catch phrases as well. When agitated, he would run around in circles wailing, "Whoop-whoop-whoop-whoop!" If looking at something that frightened him, he'd yell, "N'yaaah-ah-ah!" and run away. Other favorites included "Soitenly!" (certainly); "I resemble that remark!"; "I'm a victim of



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Curly Howard (above) suffered a debilitating stroke in 1946 during the filming of *Half-Wits Holiday*. He had one last cameo in *Hold That Lion* (1947).

soicumstance!" (circumstance); and, of course, the inimitable laugh, "Nyuk! Nyuk! Nyuk!"

Offstage, Curly was quiet, insecure, and reserved, qualities that endeared him to Larry. "Personally, I thought Curly was the greatest, because he was a natural comedian," said Fine. "He had no formal training. Whatever he did, he made up on the moment." Curly also brought out the best in Fine's acting. As the straight man, Larry provided the voice of reason between the extreme characterizations of the two Howard brothers.

After breaking with Healy, The Three Stooges received \$1,000 among them for their first film, *Woman Haters*, a 1934 singing comedy with its entire dialogue in rhyming verse. The film opened inside the Woman Haters Club where the trio was holding a meeting, "for the seventh time," as Larry proclaimed, "to convince each member that romance is a crime." Marjorie White, a vivacious young starlet who tragically died in a car accident the following year, portrayed the glamorous Mary and quickly put an end to the club's mission. The film ended in a hysterical flourish of eye pokes, punches, and head conks. Impressed with the final product, Columbia immediately renewed the contract for \$7,500 per film.

One of The Three Stooges' early short films, *Men in Black*, was nominated in 1934 for an Academy Award, the only Oscar nomination they



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In *Punch Drunks* (1934), the only film written by all three Stooges, Curly plays a boxer who wins fights when he hears "Pop Goes the Weasel" on Larry's violin—until the violin breaks. Seated with Larry is costar Dorothy Granger (1912–1995).

received during their long career at Columbia. In the film, the Stooges played three brainless physicians who had been in the senior class too many years to stay any longer. Proud that they graduated "with the highest temperatures in our class," the Stooges converged on the fictional Los Arms Hospital where they rumbled through the corridors on bicycles, go-carts, and horses, crashing through glass windows and stirring general mayhem.

In another popular film, *Punch Drunks*, Curly was bamboozled into becoming a prize fighter, K.O. Stradivarius. Larry played "Pop Goes the Weasel" on the violin, turning Curly into a fighting machine. Using moves that would later become personal signatures, Curly slapped his own face, stamped his heels, and bellowed "whoop-whoop-whoop" when he entered the ring to fight Killer Kilduff, played by Al Hill, for the title bout. After Larry's violin broke, Kilduff punched Curly silly.

One aspect of early Stooges films was the successful exploitation of their short physical statures. To enhance the comedic effect, many of the Stooges' female co-stars were tall, including Dorothy Granger, Lucille Ball, and Geneva Mitchell.

Jules White (1900–1985), the founder of Columbia's short-subjects department, was the Stooges' most

important off-camera influence. During his career, White directed more than 300 films and produced nearly 360. He demonstrated to the Stooges exactly how he wanted the violence staged. "He didn't pull any punches," said Larry. "When Moe hit, he hit. What you see is what we got. . . . Many times, we didn't even use sound effects. We never meant to get hurt, but working rough like we were, we couldn't help it." The Stooges initially did their own stunts until Larry objected. "We were making a football picture, *Three Little Pigskins*" (1934), he recalled. "The director [Ray McCarey] said, 'Curly gets the ball and Moe and Larry run interference for him.' As we approached the goal line the photographer said, 'Hold it boys. Now the two teams are going to swoop down and tackle you.' I said, 'Tackle who? You mean football players are going to tackle us? They don't know anything about stunts. They're liable to kill us.' I wouldn't do the scene. So . . . the director was forced to call in three doubles. All of them went to the hospital with broken legs and arms. After that, [White] was convinced that we should have doubles."

The Stooges were usually cast as underemployed, or unemployed, bumblers who seemed to get their revenge on society's upper crust. In the process, they offered biting social commentary on the class divisions and

economic hardships in the aftermath of the Great Depression. White directed two films spoofing Adolph Hitler and the Nazis. *You Nazty Spy!* (1940) cast Moe as a Hitler-like figure with Curly and Larry as his henchmen. Set in the Kingdom of Moronica, the Stooges plotted to overthrow the king. As dictator, Moe planned to "make love to beautiful women, drink champagne, enjoy life, and never work again." Slapping on a Hitleresque mustache, Moe barked nonsensical gibberish with a clipped German accent, promising the people everything and giving them nothing. The film ended with the Stooges being fed to the lions.

A year later, in a sequel, *I'll Never Heil Again*, Moe was resurrected from the lion's den. The dictator of Moronica collaborated with a Mussolini look-alike named Chissolini and a Japanese leader who stereotypically insisted on taking photographs. The film concluded with the three scheming nitwits being blown up by a booby-trapped billiard ball and their heads mounted on a wall. The spoofs were the Stooges' blatant contribution to World War II propaganda, the first film released nine months before the more famous Charlie Chaplin motion picture, *The Great Dictator*. It was a daring move, produced at a time when the United States maintained a position of neutrality. The Stooges—all of whom were Jewish—remained exceptionally proud of the parodies.

On March 15, 1936, Mabel Fine gave birth to their second child, John Joseph Fine (1936–1961). Larry was a doting father, generous with hugs and kisses for his two children. Although the Fines were Jewish, they celebrated Christmas and indulged their children. "Larry was the epitome of the spoiling father, especially at Christmastime," recalled his son-in-law Don Lamond (1921–2003). "There were gifts for everyone. He loved playing Santa Claus."

The good times were tragically

“Whoop whoop whoop whoop!”

interrupted on May 6, 1946, when Curly suffered a stroke during the filming of *Half-Wits Holiday*. Shemp Howard reluctantly rejoined the act to take his youngest brother's place. Larry insisted that each Stooge give fifty dollars of their weekly salary to support Curly who could not work, a magnanimous gesture that touched Moe deeply. Curly's condition declined until his death on January 18, 1952. With Shemp back on board, the Stooges appeared in seventy-seven more shorts and an occasional feature film.

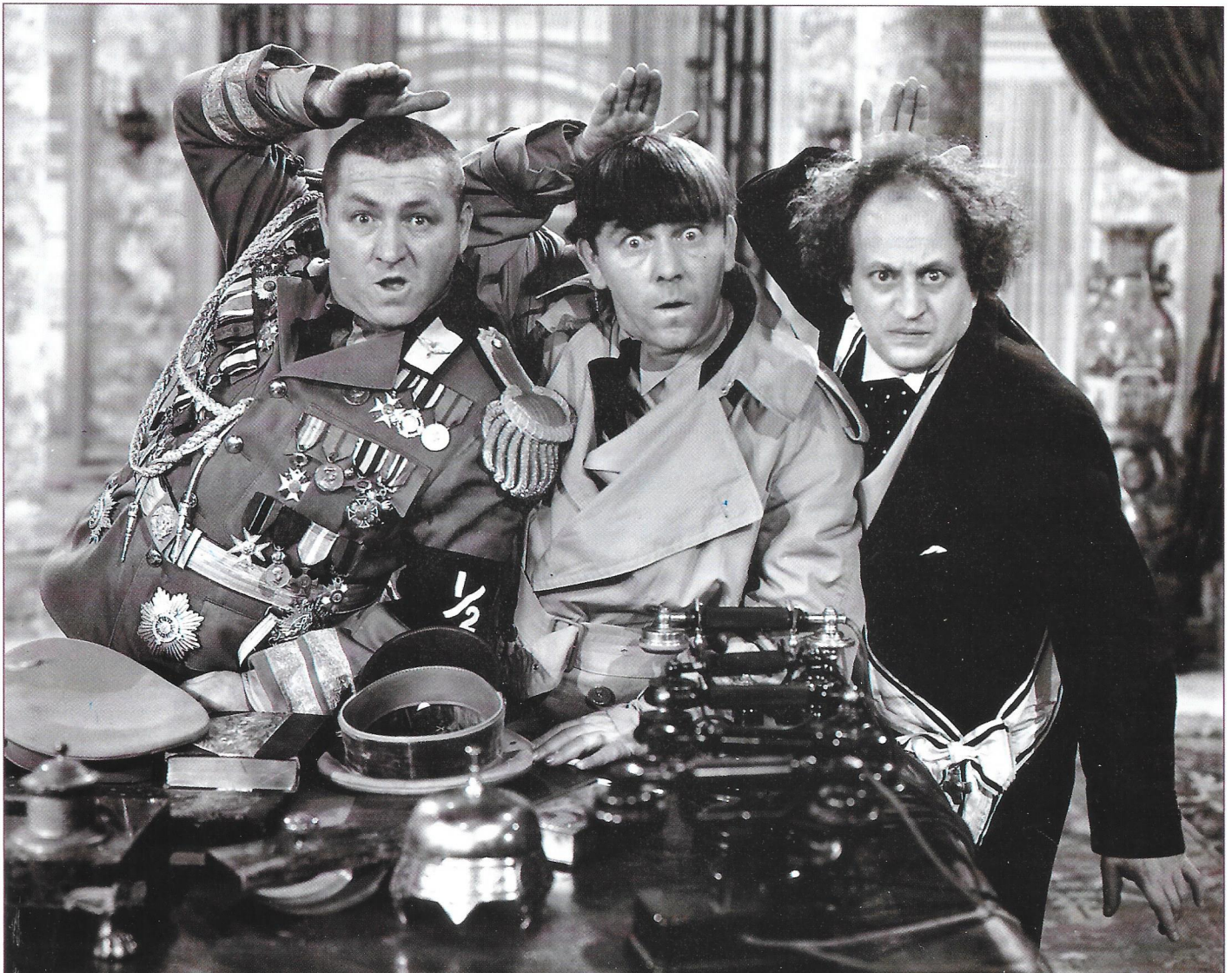
Their success, however, had come at a price. Often, the Stooges worked while injured, enduring weekly bumps and bruises. Rarely, if ever, did they com-

plain, nor did they ask for a raise. For a time, their annual salary was \$20,000 each (about \$230,000 today), but they also made five times that amount in personal appearances. They constantly worried about job security since the demand for short-subject films was declining. Columbia Pictures studio head Harry Cohn would always wait until the last minute to renew contracts. Lacking a savvy manager to protect their financial interests, the Stooges were exploited by the studio, as well as by their unscrupulous agents.

Columbia Pictures declined to renew their contract in 1954, but their careers

were revived five years later when the company syndicated the entire Three Stooges film library for television. With no restrictive copyrights, their short films were so inexpensive that any television station could afford to purchase them. Many stations ran the shorts during after school programming for children or incorporated them into their own Saturday morning kiddie shows. As a result, the Stooges were rediscovered by Baby Boomers.

Jewish by heritage, the Stooges were proud of their pre-World War II satires of Adolph Hitler and the Nazis in two films. They appeared in their first daring spoof, *You Nazty Spy!*, in 1940.



After Shemp Howard's sudden death on November 22, 1955, the role of the third Stooge passed first to Joe Besser, known for an effeminate, "sissy" style of stooging, and later to Joe DeRita, who shaved his head and became "Curly-Joe" because of his resemblance to Curly Howard. Between 1959 and 1965, The Three Stooges made a series of popular full-length films aimed at the children's matinee market. Most of the films relied on slapstick in the Stooge tradition, with the exception of *Snow White and the Three Stooges* (1961), a children's fantasy in Technicolor®. Throughout the 1960s, The Three Stooges was one of the most popular and highest-paid live acts in the United States. The trio made more than 150 short comedy skits and animated cartoons for *The New Three Stooges* television show. They also appeared in entertainment clubs and marketed a wide range of merchandise.

Larry and Mabel Fine lived life to the fullest during the 1950s and 1960s,

Photographed in the 1960s, Moe and Larry (above) enjoyed live appearances. The Stooges inspired and endeared themselves to the famous. Celebrities Ted Knight (left) and Edward Asner (right) enjoyed Larry's friendship in the early 1970s.



although they endured the tragic death of their son John in a 1961 automobile accident. The couple maintained apartments on both coasts—the President Hotel in Atlantic City, leveled in 1979 for a resort that was never built, and the historic Knickerbocker Hotel in Hollywood, also home to Frank Sinatra, Barbara Stanwyck, Lana Turner, and Mae West. They enjoyed taking cruises, occasionally gambling, and socializing with other stars, especially Phil Silvers, Milton Berle, and Lou Costello. Larry continued to be excessively generous to his family and show business friends who had fallen on hard times.

On May 30, 1967, The Three Stooges were touring the Mid-Atlantic states. Larry had just spoken to his wife by telephone, but minutes later, his daughter Phyllis called back with the devastating news that Mabel died of an apparent heart attack.

On January 9, 1970, during production of *Kook's Tour*, a pilot for a television series starring The Three Stooges, Larry suffered a paralyzing stroke, ending his acting career and future plans for the series. He moved to an entertainment industry retirement community managed by the Motion Picture House and Television Fund in Woodland Hills, near Los Angeles. Ironically, like their first film, *Soup to Nuts*, it was feared their final



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film, the pilot of *Kook's Tour*, would not be released. Thanks to modern technology, these films are now available to the public on video.

Even after the debilitating stroke, Larry Fine remained accessible to his fans, taking telephone calls, responding to letters, and receiving visits from many admirers. A second stroke ended his life on January 14, 1975, at the age of 72.

Devastated by Fine's death, Moe Howard vowed to continue The Three Stooges. He asked Emil Sitka (1914–1998), a native of Johnstown, Cambria County, to replace Larry as The Middle Stooge. Sitka had appeared with all six Stooges in their films as a favorite foil. Moe Howard, Curly-Joe DeRita, and Sitka were to appear in the film *The Jet Set*, but Moe, a life-long smoker, fell ill from lung cancer and died on May 4, 1975. The film was recast with the Ritz Brothers and retitled *Blazing Stewardesses*.

Today, The Three Stooges are honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, maintained by the Hollywood Historic Trust, and their pratfalls and patois continue to inspire many contemporary comedians. Cable and satellite television have helped preserve their comedic legacy for audiences throughout the world. The Three Stooges live on in the hearts and imaginations of countless admirers as icons of twentieth-century American popular culture. 🇺🇸

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The author and editor gratefully acknowledge Gary Lassin, curator of *The Stoogeum, A Museum of Three Stooges Memorabilia*, in Spring House, Montgomery County, and his wife, Robin Lassin, niece of Larry Fine, for providing images appearing in this article.

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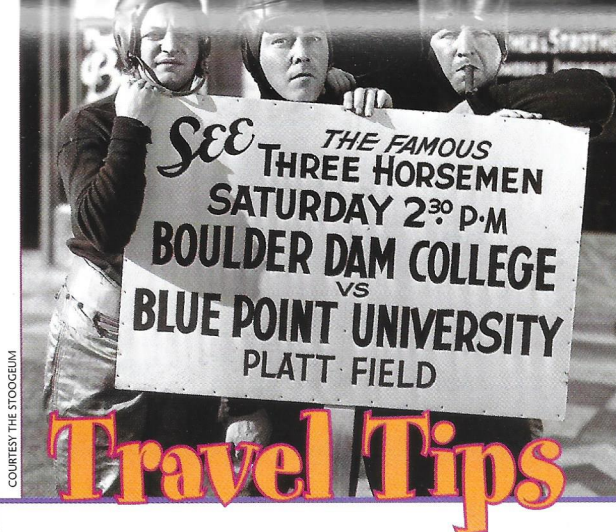
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For the 1934 comedy *Three Little Pigskins*, Larry, Moe, and Curly insisted that producer Jules White use stuntmen, several of whom were injured during filming.

Thanks to Gary Lassin, fans of The Three Stooges can see an extensive collection of the comedic team's memorabilia and enjoy a series of their film clips. Lassin, vice president of finance for a national mail-order gift catalogue company, opened *The Stoogeum, A Museum of Three Stooges Memorabilia*, in 2004 to showcase exhibits chronicling the history of the beloved trio. *The Stoogeum* is located in Spring House, Montgomery County, twenty-five miles north of Philadelphia. The three-story building comprises 10,000 square feet of exhibit space and includes an 85-seat theater.

"I always liked the Stooges as a kid, but I didn't get really involved with them until I met my wife, Robin, in the late seventies," says Lassin. "Robin's the grandniece of Larry Fine and I got to know her grandfather, Morris, quite well. He started *The Three Stooges Fan Club* and when he died in 1986 I took it over." Not long after, Lassin began collecting ephemera and souvenirs as well.

"I began collecting memorabilia for the fun of it," he says. "The hunt for items is always the most enjoyable part for a collector, and I'd spend hours at flea markets looking for things. It wasn't like today when you can go on to eBay, type in 'Stooges' and 3,000 items come up." Over the course of three decades, Lassin purchased many large collections, including those of family members. Most of the items found their way into a small office, tucked away in boxes and filing cabinets.

"It was getting really frustrating for me and other members of the fan club not to be able to look at the stuff," he explains. "It was then that I began contemplating the idea of an exhibit." The idea became reality in 2000 when his wife faced a life-threatening illness. She survived, but the incident prompted Lassin to consider what he would regret in his own life if he faced the same circumstance.

Lassin purchased a building for his Stooges memorabilia and hired the Philadelphia exhibit planning and design firm of Ueland Junker McCauley Nicholson. For the next four years, he worked with the firm's designers to plan every detail of the museum. The result is an engaging multi-media exhibit of 10,000 artifacts that offers visitors an extensive overview of the lives and careers of The Three Stooges, and includes personal memorabilia, costumes, motion picture posters, an arcade game, and a theater screening classic shorts. Life-sized replicas of the Stooges greet visitors with their trademark "Hello" in three-part harmony.

Even though *The Stoogeum* is located off the beaten path and is open by appointment only, about 2,500 people visit the museum each year, many during the annual gathering of the *Three Stooges Fan Club*, which is composed of more than 2,000 members nationwide. For more information, or to make an appointment to visit *The Stoogeum*, visit www.stoogeum.com on the Web.