

TO: Lissa
FROM: Kathy
DATE: 10/6/94
RE: St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

The following is a brief summary of the information contained in the packet Liz gave me.

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee conducts research and treatment of catastrophic diseases in children, primarily pediatric cancers.

Patients

Since it opened in 1962, it has treated over 13,175 children from the U.S. and from 43 foreign countries. (Patients are accepted by physician referral when a child is newly diagnosed or suspected of having a disease under research and treatment by the St. Jude staff. Children who have been previously treated or who have relapsed are rarely admitted.)

No child is denied admission because of the family's inability to pay for treatment. The hospital covers all costs beyond those reimbursed by third party insurers, and all costs when no insurance is available. After initial evaluation, financial assistance is available for transportation and local living expenses for U.S. families in need.

Staff

St. Jude has a research staff of 276 and a total of 1,545 employees.

Founding

When Danny Thomas was a struggling young entertainer, he prayed before the statue of St. Jude Thaddeus, the patron saint of hopeless causes and asked the saint to "show me my way in life." As things improved in his life, he prayed to St. Jude again and pledged to someday build a shrine to the saint.

When he became a nationally-known entertainer, he did not forget his pledge. He began discussing with friends the idea of a children's hospital in Memphis in the early 1950s. By 1955, local business leaders had joined the cause and began fundraising efforts that supplemented Thomas' benefits that brought major entertainment stars to Memphis. He and his wife, also roadtripped throughout the country in order to raise money. Once he had raised the money for the building of the hospital, Thomas has to figure out how to fund its annual operation.

Thomas turned to Arab-speaking Americans, who he believed should thank the U.S. for the gifts of freedom given their parents. In 1957, 100 representatives of the Arab-American community met in Chicago to form ALSAC - The American Lebanese Syrian Associated Charities - with the sole purpose of raising

funds for the support of St Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Since then, ALSAC has assumed full responsibility for all the hospital's fundraising efforts. Today, ALSAC-St. Jude has grown to be America's seventh largest health-care charity.

In 1987, St Jude Children's Research Hospital began a \$134 million expansion project to double the hospital's size, increase the number of researchers and expand research programs.

In 1991, Thomas died just two days after celebrating the hospital's 29th anniversary. He is buried in a family crypt at the Danny Thomas/ALSAC Pavilion on the grounds of the hospital and white roses are placed at the crypt daily.

Statistics

By the year 2000, one in every 1,000 adults will be a survivor of childhood cancer.

The most common childhood cancer is acute lymphoblastic leukemia. In 1960, only 5% to 10% of children survived this cancer. Now, over 70% survive this cancer which strikes 2,000 children each year.

4TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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Contemporary Theatre, Film and Television

August, 1993; Volume 11

LENGTH: 1401 words

NAME: Danny Thomas

PERSONAL:

Original name, Amos Muzyad Jacobs; changed name to Danny Thomas, 1940; born January 6, 1912 (some sources say 1914), in Deerfield, MI; died of a heart attack, February 6, 1991, in Los Angeles, CA; son of Charles and Margaret Christen (Simon) Jacobs; married Rose Marie Cassanti, January 15, 1936; children: Margaret Julia (Marlo), Theresa Cecelia, Charles Anthony.

EDUCATION: Attended Christian Brothers College, Memphis, TN.

CAREER:

Actor, comedian, entertainer, and producer. Worked in radio in the 1930s and 40s. Appeared as an entertainer in various nightclubs in the United States and around the world throughout his career; entertained overseas in the Eastern Theatre of Operations and Pacific Area of Operations during World War II; toured with Marlene Dietrich and Company. St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Memphis, TN, founder, 1962.

RELIGION: Roman Catholic.

AWARDS:

Emmy Award for best actor starring in a regular series, 1954, for Make Room for Daddy; named Man of the Year by the National Conference of Christians and Jews, 1957; Louella Parsons Award, Hollywood Women's Press Club, 1970; Layman's Award, American Medical Association; Better World Award, Ladies Auxiliary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, 1972; Michelangelo Award, Boys Town of Italy, 1973; award from the Governor of Ohio, 1975; entertainment award, White House Correspondents, 1975; Humanitarian Award, Lions International, 1975; Father Flanagan-Boys Town Award, 1981; Murray-Green-Meany Award for Community Service, American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), 1981; Hubert H. Humphrey Award, Touchdown Club, 1981; Nobel Peace Prize nomination, 1980-81; Humanitarian Award, Variety Clubs International, 1983; American Education Award, 1984; Congressional Medal of Honor, 1985; awarded the Sword of Loyola, Loyola University, Chicago, IL, 1985; inducted into the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Hall of Fame, 1991. Horatio Alger Award, Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans; decorated Knight of Malta; Knight Commander with Star; inducted into Knights of Holy Sepulchre by Pope Paul VI; L.H.D., Belmont Abbey, International College, Springfield, MA, 1970; L.H.D., Medical College of Toledo, 1989; LL.D., Loyola University; L.H.D., Loyola-Marymount University.

CREDITS: TELEVISION APPEARANCES; SERIES Regular guest host, All Star Revue (also known as Four Star Revue), NBC, 1950-52. Danny Williams, Make Room for Daddy, ABC, 1953-1957, later known as The Danny Thomas Show, NBC, 1957-64. The Danny Thomas Hour (also see below), NBC, 1967-68. Danny Williams, Make Room for Granddaddy (also see below), ABC, 1970-71. Dr. Jules Bedford, The Practice, NBC, 1976-77. Dr. Benjamin Douglas, I'm a Big Girl Now, ABC, 1980-81. Uncle Jake

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Hatton, One Big Family, syndicated, 1986-87. TELEVISION APPEARANCES; DANNY THOMAS SPECIALS Host, The Danny Thomas TV Family Reunion, NBC, 1965. Host, Danny Thomas Goes Country and Western, NBC, 1966. Host, The Danny Thomas Special, NBC, 1966. Host, The Danny Thomas Special, NBC, 1967. Ali, Danny Thomas: The Road To Lebanon, NBC, 1967. Host, The Danny Thomas Special, NBC, 1968. Host, Danny Thomas: America I Love You, NBC, 1968. Host, Danny Thomas Looks at Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow (also see below), CBS, 1970. TELEVISION APPEARANCES; BOB HOPE SPECIALS The Bob Hope Show, NBC, 1970. Bob Hope Special: Happy Birthday, Bob!, NBC, 1978. Bob Hope Special: Bob Hope's All-Star Look at TV's Prime Time Wars, NBC, 1980. Bob Hope Special: Bob Hope Presents a Celebration with Stars of Comedy and Music, NBC, 1981. Bob Hope Special: Bob Hope's Thirtieth Anniversary TV Special, NBC, 1981. Bob Hope Buys NBC?, NBC 1985. Bob Hope Lampoons the New TV Scene, NBC, 1986. Mr. Mills, NBC Investigates Bob Hope, NBC, 1987. America's Tribute to Bob Hope, NBC, 1988. Happy Birthday, Bob--Fifty Stars Salute your Fifty Years with NBC, NBC, 1988. Bob Hope's Love Affair with Lucy, NBC, 1989. Bob Hope's "Don't Shoot, It's Only Me," NBC, 1990. TELEVISION APPEARANCES; SPECIALS Host, The Comics, NBC, 1965. Host, The Wonderful World of Burlesque I (also see below), NBC, 1965. Host, The Wonderful World of Burlesque II (also see below), NBC, 1966. Comedian, Guys 'n' Geishas, NBC, 1967. Prince Wolfgang, The Royal Follies of 1933, NBC, 1967. Host, The Wonderful World of Burlesque III (also see below), NBC, 1967. The Tim Conway Special, CBS, 1970. Co-host, City Versus Country, ABC, 1971. Diana, NBC, 1971. Confidant, Dinah in Search of the Ideal Man, NBC, 1973. The Many Faces of Comedy, ABC, 1973. George Burns Celebrates Eighty Years in Show Business, 1981. Louise Mandrell: Diamonds, Gold and Platinum, 1983. Getting the Last Laugh, ABC, 1985. All Star Party for Clint Eastwood, CBS, 1986. Bugs Bunny/Looney Tunes All-Star Fiftieth Anniversary, CBS, 1986. Kraft Salutes the George Burns Ninetieth Birthday Special, CBS, 1986. Candid Camera: The First Forty Years, CBS, 1987. A Conversation with Dinah, TNN, 1989. Fifty Years of Television: A Golden Celebration, CBS, 1989. TELEVISION APPEARANCES; PILOTS The Andy Griffith Show, CBS, 1960. Danny Williams, Everything Happens to Me, CBS, 1961. Danny Williams, Make More Room for Daddy (also see below), NBC, 1967. Danny Williams, Make Room for Granddaddy (also see below), CBS, 1969. The Cracker Brothers, NBC, 1984. OTHER TELEVISION APPEARANCES Man in airport, Three on a Date (movie), ABC, 1978. Charlie Warren, Side by Side (movie; also known as Nothing's Impossible; (also see below)), CBS, 1988. Empty Nest (episodic), NBC, 1991.

Also appeared on Zane Grey Theater, CBS, and on several episodes of That Girl, a comedy series starring his daughter, Marlo Thomas. TELEVISION WORK; SERIES; EXECUTIVE PRODUCER (With Irving Pincus) The Real McCoys, ABC, 1957-62, then CBS, 1962-63. The Joey Bishop Show, NBC, 1961-62. (With Carl Reiner and Sheldon Leonard) The Dick Van Dyke Show, 1961-66. The Joey Bishop Show, NBC, 1962-64, then CBS, 1964-65. (With Leonard) The Bill Dana Show, NBC, 1963-65. The Tycoon, ABC, 1964-65. Rango, ABC, 1967. (With Aaron Spelling) The Danny Thomas Hour, NBC, 1967-68. (With Spelling) The Guns of Will Sonnet, ABC, 1967-69. (With Spelling) The Mod Squad, ABC, 1968-73. (With Spelling) The New People, ABC, 1969-70. Make Room for Granddaddy (also see below), CBS, 1970-71. (With Paul Junger Witt) The Practice, NBC, 1976-77. TELEVISION MOVIES; EXECUTIVE PRODUCER (With Spelling) The Ballad of Andy Crocker, ABC, 1969. (With Spelling) Wake Me When the War Is Over, ABC, 1969. (With Spelling) The Over-the-Hill Gang, ABC, 1969. (With Spelling) The Over-the-Hill Gang Rides Again, ABC, 1970. (With Spelling) Carter's Army, ABC, 1970. Second Chance, ABC, 1972. Remember When, NBC, 1974. (With Ronald Jacobs) Three on a Date, ABC, 1978. (With Spelling) The Return of the Mod Squad, ABC, 1979. Side by Side, CBS, 1988. TELEVISION PILOTS; EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, EXCEPT WHERE INDICATED Producer, Make More Room for Daddy,

Contemporary Theatre, Film and Television, August, 1993

NBC, 1967. (And director with Spelling) Make Room for Granddaddy, CBS, 1969. (With Spelling) The Monk, ABC, 1969. (With Spelling) The Pigeon, ABC, 1969. Second Chance, ABC, 1972. (With Jacobs and Fernando Lamas) Samurai, ABC, 1979. Producer with Jacobs, Starting Fresh, NBC, 1979. (With Jacobs) Featherstone's Nest, CBS, 1979. TELEVISION SPECIALS; EXECUTIVE PRODUCER The Wonderful World of Burlesque II, NBC, 1966. The Wonderful World of Burlesque III, NBC, 1967. Danny Thomas Looks at Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, NBC, 1970. FILM APPEARANCES (Film debut), Mr. Paneros, The Unfinished Dance, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), 1947. Cantor Feldman, The Big City, MGM, 1948. Stanley, Call Me Mister (musical), Twentieth Century-Fox, 1951. Gus Kahn, I'll See You in My Dreams (musical), Warner Bros., 1951. Jerry Golding, The Jazz Singer, Warner Bros., 1953. As himself, Looking for Love, MGM, 1964. Don't Worry, We'll Think of a Title, United Artists, 1966. Voice, Journey Back to Oz, Filmation, 1974.

Also provided a voice for the animated film The Cricket of the Hearth, 1968. RADIO APPEARANCES (Radio debut) The Happy Hour Club (amateur show), WMBC (Detroit, MI), 1932. The Danny Thomas Show, CBS, 1944-49.

Also appeared with Fanny Brice, 1944, and on the Baby Snooks Show, 1945.

WRITINGS:

(With Bill Davidson), Make Room for Danny (autobiography), Putnam, 1991.

SOURCES: PERIODICALS

Hollywood Reporter, February 7, 1991.

New York Times, February 7, 1991.*

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE-MDC: July 8, 1994

5TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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Newsmakers 1991

September, 1991; 1991 Cumulation

LENGTH: 808 words

NAME: Danny Thomas

SIDELITES:

OBITUARY NOTICE: Born Muzyad Yakhoob, January 6, 1914, in Deerfield, Mich.; died of a heart attack, February 6, 1991, in Beverly Hills, Calif. Actor. Danny Thomas may endure as an entertainment legend more for the television shows he produced than for his actual performances, memorable though they were. As a Hollywood producer Thomas amassed a personal fortune that allowed him to become a dedicated philanthropist. Founder of the famous St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital, Thomas told the Chicago Tribune shortly before his death, "When I first prayed to St. Jude on that dark day in the Great Depression when my wife was expecting our first child, Marlo, I asked him to show me my way in life and I vowed to build him a shrine." Emerging from the Depression with a career in the USO, he played to overseas troops during World War II; back home he started a successful nightclub career. Eventually Thomas went on to become a television actor, producer, and virtual icon. He was father to Marlo Thomas---best known for her early work on television's That Girl---as well as to producer Tony, and daughter Theresa.

Thomas said his gift for storytelling came from his family. "My people are inherently storytellers," Thomas told Mervyn Rothstein of the New York Times. "When I was a kid, the entertainment was somebody from the old country or a big city who came and visited and told tales of where they came from." By the time he was a teenager, Thomas had changed his name to Amos Jacobs and was performing with one of his brothers, Ray, in an act called "Songs, Dances, and Happy Patter." At 16 he quit school and became a professional entertainer. The Chicago Tribune reported that he made a living "doing everything from small-time radio (he created the sounds of the Lone Ranger's [horse's] hooves by pounding on his chest [with two toilet plungers]) to telling slightly racy jokes at conventions." Success had to wait until Thomas was in his twenties. In the meantime, he opened his own act in a Chicago nightclub, the reputation of which was so questionable that Thomas felt compelled to change his name in the hope that his new wife, Rose Marie, wouldn't find out that he was performing there. He told the Tribune in January of 1991 that his "real birthday is August 12, 1940, when I opened at the 5100 Club, and I've been celebrating it every year since." By then he had gathered a faithful following, many of whom apparently mistook him for a Jewish comic. His agent at the time, Danny Newman, detailed Thomas's popularity in the Chicago Tribune, saying "He had a terrific following in Chicago, especially with the Jewish audiences who adored his Yiddish-flavored stories---everyone thought he was a Yiddish comic....People would go to hear him again and again, just to hear his Old Country stories." Thomas's ancestry was actually Lebanese.

Among Thomas's landmark career moves was opening the new Sands Hotel in Las Vegas in the early 1950s, before that city had become the entertainment and gambling center it is today. Shortly thereafter he settled into Hollywood to make a long-running series, Make Room for Daddy---later known as The Danny Thomas Show---a project that closely reflected his life; it showcased the

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tribulations of a traveling club performer. Marlo---later married to talk show host Phil Donahue---named the show; it was what the young girl would say when her father came home from work. Tremendously successful and more colorful than its white-bread contemporaries, the program ran for over a decade and still plays in reruns. Make Room for Daddy was also significant in that it was one of the few family shows of the 1950s in which the father was not portrayed as a bit of a fool. It was unique too in that it contained ethnic references, like the crusty Lebanese Uncle Tonoose. Thomas's real wealth, however, was earned in production; his production company produced the enormously successful Andy Griffith Show, Dick Van Dyke Show, and Joey Bishop Show, among others.

The end of Thomas's life was distinguished by a flurry of activity. The 77-year-old entertainment industry giant had just appeared on the Tonight Show to promote his new autobiography, Make Way for Danny. He had recently appeared on Empty Nest, the television show produced by his son, and had been looking forward to doing a television movie with Marlo. In 1986 Thomas was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by President Ronald Reagan for his work with St. Jude's Hospital. His death was mourned by both Reagan and President George Bush, as well as by most of Hollywood's old guard, many of whom were Thomas's close friends.

SOURCES: Chicago Tribune, February 7, 1991;
Los Angeles Times, February 7, 1991;
New York Times, January 10, 1991;
People, February 18, 1991;
Washington Post, February 7, 1991.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE-MDC: October 29, 1991

6TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

Copyright 1991 The New York Times Company
The New York Times

February 17, 1991, Sunday, Late Edition - Final

NAME: Danny Thomas

CATEGORY: Popular Entertainers

SECTION: Section 2; Page 29; Column 3; Arts and Leisure Desk

LENGTH: 930 words

HEADLINE: TELEVISION;

The Man Could Make A Short Story Long

BYLINE: By LARRY GELBART; Larry Gelbart, who has written comedy for television and radio, won a Tony Award for his book for the current Broadway musical "City of Angels."

BODY:

Just a few weeks ago, I sat on a dais at a dinner honoring George Burns on the occasion of his 95th birthday. Next to me sat Milton Berle; next to Berle, George Burns; next to Burns, Danny Thomas. Picture Mount Rushmore -- with cigars.

And now, they are two.

Thomas -- perhaps best remembered for his landmark TV series, "Make Room for Daddy" -- died on Feb. 6. At 79, he was the youngest of the group. One of the last of the comedians who plied their trade all the way from vaudeville to video, Danny Thomas was considered by his peers to be the best storyteller in the business.

Initially, he wanted to become an actor, but he had a simple, compelling motivation for switching to comedy: he didn't want to starve. After being kicked around as a radio performer in the Midwest in the 40's, doing everything from character parts to sound effects, Thomas started working as an emcee in nightclubs -- basic-training grounds for comics in pre-Carson days and the toughest place for anyone to work alone other than in a bullring. It was soon clear that Thomas had no use for standard stand-up fare, the string of one-liners, the quickies. None of that "a panhandler came up to me and said he hadn't had a bite in a week, so I bit him" stuff.

Thomas would take that sort of throwaway joke and build upon it a mosaic of details. He would tell you how the panhandler became a panhandler. He would infuse the man with blood and cover him with flesh. You would learn how life had deprived the pitiful creature of family and fortune, how a once-proud merchant prince was reduced to begging in the street. By the time Thomas finished, you were so filled with sympathy, you wanted to find the man and give him a nickel. In that frame of mind, "so I bit him" became more than just a punch line. The cruel response would blow away all the sentimentality Thomas had so carefully constructed and stirred up in you. You would laugh not only at the story, you would also be laughing at yourself. Now, that's identification.

The New York Times, February 17, 1991

In the 60's, I saw him exercise his craft on a story he built from scratch.

My father, who was his barber for years and himself an inveterate joke teller (not too hard to get laughs when you're wielding a straight razor), told Thomas one about a man who takes his parrot, a brilliant linguist, to synagogue on Rosh ha-Shanah and wagers that the bird can conduct the service better than the cantor. Of course, the parrot remains silent. The only thing that saves the bird's life is when he opens his beak and tells his outraged owner, "Think of the odds we'll get on Yom Kippur." A simple enough joke, not all that taxing. Listening time, probably less than a minute.

Thomas had been looking for a replacement for his famous jack story, the tale of a hapless motorist who gets a flat on a lonely country road and sets out to find a tire jack. Although the story was a favorite with his audiences, after a couple of decades Thomas had grown awfully tired of telling it. He wanted something fresh.

While the parrot joke was hardly new (a new joke is one you've never heard before), Thomas quickly saw the potential in it. He began using it in his act, gradually inventing details, improvising dialogue, embroidering the situation endlessly, lovingly. To make a long story short, he made a short story long. He took a mundane gag and fashioned it into 10 minutes of superb storytelling.

Thomas's pre-television work in the 40's and 50's says as much about audiences of those days as it does about Thomas himself. While he had the skill to tell them extended stories at a leisurely pace, they had the patience to listen. The remote channel-changer had yet to be invented. Audiences had yet to be exposed to a million half hours of sitcoms or to the population explosion among stand-up comics. They had yet to grow callous hearing jokes about assassinations, ethnic groups (in locker rooms, yes; on the air, no) or watch comics do merciless impersonations of Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder. They had yet to experience "Laugh-In," the MTV of comedy, which taught a nation to get a joke in nanoseconds.

Thomas, in the tradition of Jack Benny and George Burns, could and did take all the time he needed, knowing the audience would not grow restless, that it would, in a sense, work with him. And like most of his peers, Thomas worked clean. He knew all the words. Who doesn't? Each generation discovers smut for itself. Modern audiences are the first, however, to have so much of it hurled in their direction: from the stage, on TV, in music. Thomas was not a prude. He just got his laughs the hard way. He sought to involve his audiences in the lives of those who populated his stories. He complained for them, he ranted and raved for them -- an ombudsman in search of belly laughs. And to enhance the timeless, tribal tradition of the storyteller, Thomas echoed the rage of the Old Testament. Lebanese though he was, there was a good deal of the closet rabbi about him.

So much for opinion. Here's a fact.

Thomas gave me my first professional writing job, in 1945. When I was 16 and still in high school he put me to work contributing material for a continuing character he played on the Fanny Brice radio show. He did it as a favor to my father, who, acting as a combination Mama Rose and Sweeney Todd, had taken it into his head that I could do such a thing. And so Thomas obliged him. He generously handed a career and a sense of purpose to the son of his barber.

The New York Times, February 17, 1991

Not only a great storyteller, Danny Thomas, he was an incredible tipper.

GRAPHIC: Photo: Danny Thomas in 1950--Peers thought him the best storyteller in the business. (Philippe Halsman)

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE-MDC: February 17, 1991

9TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

Copyright 1991 The Times Mirror Company
Los Angeles Times

February 7, 1991, Thursday, Home Edition

NAME: DANNY THOMAS

SECTION: Calendar; Part F; Page 1; Column 3; Entertainment Desk

LENGTH: 764 words

HEADLINE: DANNY THOMAS: MIRACLES & BONS MOTS;

AN APPRECIATION: THE COMEDIAN, WHO DIED WEDNESDAY, HAD A BOND OF WARMTH AND AFFECTION WITH HIS AUDIENCE.

BYLINE: By LAWRENCE CHRISTON, TIMES STAFF WRITER

BODY:

The classic story about Danny Thomas -- who died at 79 of heart failure early Wednesday morning -- the one everyone remembers when the subject of miracles comes up, places him in the late '30s in a Chicago night spot called the 5100 Club. His career was spluttering. He had an infant daughter, Margaret (who later took on the name Marlo). His wife, Rosemarie, was pleading with him to get out of show business, a profession he had loved so much that he quit high school to work \$2 gigs in Detroit.

He was still Amos Jacobs then, the fifth of nine children born in Deerfield, Mich. His Lebanese parents had had such a rough time making do as farmers that they tried to start over again in Toledo, Ohio, where his father had opened a candy store (the name Danny Thomas was taken from two of his brothers). Amos himself had been raised by a doting aunt in Rochester, N.Y.. Once he discovered show business selling candy in a burlesque theater, he was hooked. There was nothing quite like this.

In Chicago, it looked as though his dream was about to end. The Great Depression was still on. Dreams were a luxury at the time. Then he did what most people do in a pinch. He prayed that if he could see his way clear through this crisis, he'd pay back his good fortune. The prayer was addressed to St. Jude, patron saint of hopeless causes. Amos Jacobs wasn't a comedian for nothing.

Later he would say, "I never did say 'Make me rich and famous.' I said, 'Help me find a way in life and I will build you a shrine.' "

Whatever he said, of course, worked. Things began to turn around. He began playing more upscale clubs. He tied in with a sagacious veteran publicist, Maury Foladare, and his career blossomed further. He came to Hollywood to do "The Baby Snooks Show" on radio. He made several movies from 1947 through 1953, which included "The Unfinished Dance," "Big City," "The Jazz Singer" and "I'll See You In My Dreams," in which he played songwriter Gus Kahn. Thomas wasn't a conventionally handsome man, but he had a dark, vivid, friendly, appealing look. He was one up on a lot of other comedians because his appearance and demeanor made you feel good before he opened his mouth, which always seemed poised before the delivery of a bon mot.

1991 Los Angeles Times, February 7, 1991

Thomas' great success was his TV show, "Make Room for Daddy," which went on the air in 1953 and made him a national figure over its 11-year run (revived in 1970-71 as "Make Room for Granddaddy"). His role as Danny Williams, an oft-absent entertainer forever trying to mediate the comic Sturm und Drang of family life, is endearing not only in his frustrated attempt to keep his head while everyone around him is losing theirs, but because he was one of the last TV patriarchs who wasn't depicted as an antiquated fool or a tyrannical boob (only Bill Cosby has kept the moral authority of fatherhood alive).

Over the course of his career he was knighted by two Popes and awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by President Ronald Reagan in 1986. He became an insider on the Hollywood social circuit.

Unlike most people however, he never reneged on the deal he made with the Primal Elder that grim night in Chicago. Over the years he worked up enough money through fund-raising appearances and gentle arm-twisting to found a children's hospital in Memphis, St. Jude's. The hospital took in its first patient in 1962, a child suffering from acute lymphocytic leukemia. The survival rate from the disease then was 5%. When Thomas died, the survival rate was over 50% and the hospital had become as famous as its founder and main benefactor.

Thomas had recently come out with an autobiography, "Make Room for Danny," and a couple of years ago he went out on the road with Sid Caesar and Milton Berle in a program called "Legends of Comedy." In truth, the evening showcased three people whose work had dated some. A lot of it was schtick, corny, and heavily freighted with the nostalgia of aging Friars clubbies on a night out.

But Thomas had always been a good soldier on the Hollywood circuit, long after he could have packed it in and basked in sunny retirement in another part of the world. And there was something singular in his appearance in "Legends" as well. He told a few jokes, he mugged onstage with Berle and Caesar. But when he was on his own, the room quieted. He let go of the brass and worked towards the thing he did best, telling a story and basing it not in yocks but on a bond of warmth and affection with his audience.

Danny Thomas gave the gift of laughter and the gift of life. He died a rich man.

GRAPHIC: Photo, Danny Thomas in "Make Room for Daddy": One of the last TV patriarchs who wasn't depicted as a fool. ; Photo, Danny Thomas in "The Jazz Singer": An appealing look.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

11TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

Copyright 1991 The Washington Post
The Washington Post

February 7, 1991, Thursday, Final Edition

NAME: DANNY THOMAS

SECTION: STYLE; PAGE B1

LENGTH: 1349 words

HEADLINE: Appreciation;
Always Room For Danny;
Thomas's Humor Made Him One of the Family

SERIES: Occasional

BYLINE: Tom Shales, Washington Post Staff Writer

BODY:

Danny Thomas knew the warmth of the spotlight for more than 50 years, and it knew the warmth of him.

His death yesterday at the age of 79 was sudden and unexpected, but at least Danny Thomas had one last romp in the public eye before he left, having just completed a few very visible weeks on the talk show circuit to promote his ingenuous autobiography, "Make Room for Danny."

This was almost the actor's dream of dying in the wings after a powerhouse performance. On Saturday night Thomas appeared as the guest star, playing a cantankerous doctor on NBC's hit comedy series "Empty Nest," which is co-produced by Thomas's son Tony. The old pro was still in total command of his keen comic instincts and pinpoint timing.

As he had always been, Danny Thomas was an open invitation to be entertained, and you could see in his eyes how hurt he would be if the invitation had been turned down. What if you weren't in the mood? He would put you in the mood.

One of his last appearances was what producer Robert Morton affectionately calls "a silly walk-on" on NBC's "Late Night With David Letterman" in January. Letterman has a passion for a trademark Thomas sight gag called a "spit-take"; someone says something disconcerting while the comic is taking a drink and then, in pop-eyed alarm, he spits the drink out with a loud pbfbfbfbf.

Thomas, plugging his book on a local New York show that originates in the NBC studio next to Letterman's, agreed to drop by and demonstrate what a properly executed spit-take looks like. Letterman's scheduled guest at that moment was Macaulay Culkin, 10-year-old star of the huge hit movie comedy "Home Alone."

Culkin listened while Thomas whispered the cue in his ear and then, at precisely the right moment, turned to Thomas as he drank from a cup of water and asked, as instructed, "Is that your nose, or are you eating a banana?" Fwoosh, the water spewed forth, the audience cheered, and Thomas took his leave to a roar of applause that made him grin wide.

The Washington Post, February 7, 1991

"He did the plug, he did the gag, and he exited on the laugh," recalls Morton admiringly. "It was very impressive, a nice moment, and it was a lot of fun for all of us to meet him. Many of our writers came down from their offices to see him for themselves." Even the coldhearted Letterman seemed charmed.

Among those watching was another of Thomas's talented offspring, actress Marlo, married to Phil Donahue. She was so impressed that she came on the Letterman show two nights later to do a spit-take of her own. It was good. But not as good as the old man's.

Much of the humor on "Make Room for Daddy," the 1953 sitcom that became "The Danny Thomas Show" when it moved from ABC to CBS in 1957, was broad and explosive, but the series, like its star, had a sentimental streak a mile wide, and beneath the bombast, there was a gentle spirit. Next to "I Love Lucy," the Thomas show was probably the biggest domestic sitcom hit of the decade, outrunning by many years even such classics as Jackie Gleason's "The Honeymooners."

Certainly its theme song, an up-tempo Spencer-Hagen arrangement of "Danny Boy," was impressed upon the public mind as the music you hear when Danny Thomas is about to come from behind the curtain.

With his producers and writers, Thomas created a '50s television family that had more punch and character than such bland vanilla models as Ozzie and Harriet's or Stuart and June Erwin's. The cast included Marjorie Lord as wife Kathy (having taken over the role from Jean Hagen as of the 1957 season), with Angela Cartwright, Rusty Hamer and Sherry Jackson as the wisecracking kids.

The first character who pops into many people's heads when they think of the show, however, is bellicose Uncle Tonoose, (Hans Conried), a madcap Lebanese relative who appeared only occasionally. Thomas really had an Uncle Tonoose and lived with him and an Aunt Julia when growing up the son of Lebanese immigrants in Toledo, Ohio.

And the premise for the sitcom came from Thomas's own experiences as an itinerant entertainer who sometimes seemed a stranger to his own kids. When he came home from the road after touring, they really did say "make room for daddy" at the Thomas house.

"Nobody knew much about television then. We invented it as we went along," Thomas recalls in ABC founder Leonard H. Goldenson's new memoir "Beating the Odds." Goldenson notes that ABC and "Make Room for Daddy" were born the same year. Much later, after Thomas had gone on to CBS, Goldenson visited Thomas at his Beverly Hills home.

"His living room is almost the size of Madison Square Garden. Almost," Goldenson writes. "Enormous murals of the Lebanese countryside cover the walls. It's very appropriate. After all, Danny Thomas's mother was a cousin of Kahlil Gibran, mystical author of 'The Prophet.' "

With Sheldon Leonard, who directed most of the "Daddy" episodes, Thomas formed a producing partnership that led to such TV landmarks as "The Andy Griffith Show," "The Dick Van Dyke Show" and "The Real McCoys" -- programs that upheld the family model that "Daddy" had helped perfect.

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The model is still in place. It was still in place 30 years after "Daddy" premiered when America made room for Cosby.

Success came to Danny Thomas in 1940, when he changed his name from Amos Jacobs and opened at the 5100 Club on the North Side of Chicago, after a meandering career that had included such jobs as supplying horse hoof noises for "The Lone Ranger" on radio.

Thomas always credited his big break to Saint Jude, to whom he had prayed in a moment of despair. Soon a big star in the small world of nightclubs, Danny Thomas went on to Hollywood, but the movies were not good to him. "I have hobnobbed with the top moguls of the movie business," Thomas writes in his autobiography, "all of whom unsuccessfully tried to get me to have my nose fixed before appearing in their movies."

It turned out that what he had was a nose for television, where he achieved success so great that Thomas vowed to pay back the saint who'd heard his prayers, and did that by founding and helping to endow the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis. Thomas did so much charitable work in his career that sometimes it seemed like one long benefit. As an entertainer, Danny Thomas belonged to the great old guard, the veterans who remembered vaudeville and the Great Depression and the Palace Theater and all had a collection of anecdotes about Jolson. Danny Thomas told jokes, yes, but also long, involved stories, some of which came from the hard times of his youth, a few of which might be said to have achieved the status of folk tale.

Like Sammy Davis Jr., who died last year, Danny Thomas belonged to a performing generation that has all but vanished. "I was talking to George Burns about it a while ago," Thomas told a Chicago reporter in December, "and as far as we can tell, we're the last of a breed."

At times, Thomas could indeed be maudlin, once appearing on a talk show to gush about the wonder of holding a grandchild in his arms, "this issue of my own loins." But to compensate, Thomas maintained a repertoire of self-deprecating jokes that he called "treacle cutters" -- laugh lines that undercut sentimental excess. He was his own sharpest critic, and his own best editor.

The older he got, the more natural the sentimentalism seemed. He attempted a comeback in a 1970 series called "Make Room for Granddaddy," and although it was not a success, it certified Thomas as a paternal icon, everybody's grandpa.

"My father-in-law was not only a 20th-century entertainment figure, he also founded St. Jude's Research Hospital," Phil Donahue said yesterday, "and, most importantly of all, he lit up like a Christmas tree whenever he was with the whole family, as he was this past holiday season -- his last, and our most joyful one."

Beneath the show-biz shmaltz, there was a roguish energy. Beneath the false humility, there was a real humility. What always came through with Danny Thomas was a genuine love of people, and when that's what you give, that is what you get back.

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GRAPHIC: PHOTO, ENTERTAINER DANNY THOMAS IN A 1952 PHOTO.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH