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Tales Of The Broke And Famous

By Stephen Schochet

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"Beverly Hills is a place where you spend a lot of money you don't have to impress a lot of people you don't like!" – Anonymous Hollywood Producer

If the rumors are true that Michael Jackson's lavish life style has left him broke, he would not be the first famous celebrity in financial straights. John Wayne found himself in hock after 150 movies. Three wives, seven children, investing his own money in the box office troubled The Alamo (1960) combined with an exceedingly generous nature left the Duke completely wiped out. He would often walk into bars and shout, "Drinks for everybody on me!" He would get fan letters full of wild pleas for money, from people who had tax problems to mothers who asked for help to pay for their daughter's braces. Wayne would agonize over them but send financial aid if he thought the requester was really needy. One time his second wife Chata, with whom he was about to divorce hired a private detective to get the goods on him. Down in Mexico near where Wayne was filming the western Hondo (1953) the investigator forgot his identification one day and got locked up in a Chihuahua jail. Not knowing anyone in a foreign land the desperate P.I. called Wayne himself. The Cowboy Star arrived with his buddy and frequent co-star, a disbelieving Ward Bond. "Duke, this guy is trying to ruin you! Let him rot!" Wayne reached into his pocket and pulled out the necessary coin to pay the bail. "Ah come on Ward, the poor man was only doing his job."

Stars can find themselves in money trouble before they know it. While performing in Las Vegas with Dean Martin at the Flamingo hotel in 1953, twenty-seven-year old Jerry Lewis ran up \$137,000 dollars in gambling debts. The mobsters who ran the casino confronted him to ask how he planned to pay it off. The nery Lewis told them it was their fault for letting a kid run up such a large tab. How irresponsible! The gangsters, a bit bewildered, agreed, then repeated their question. Realizing that these nice gentlemen could whack him, Jerry asked them what they suggested. After a hasty conference they told him he would work it off. The gambling addicted Lewis asked if he could win it back at the card table instead, he was told a firm no. The debt took a year and half for the comedian eliminate. He would have retired it quicker but the card games continued during train rides with former Blackjack Dealer Martin, who kept putting the volatile clown further in the red.

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Another star who suffered through money trouble in the fifties was Marilyn Monroe. Tired of playing dumb blondes, she bolted from her studio Twentieth Century Fox to start Marilyn Monroe Productions. Actors are often advised not to use their own name in their personal ventures, it makes other ego-driven stars less willing to work with them. Marilyn's film output slowed down and by 1959 her husband, playwright Arthur Miller, was telling her she should accept the dumb blonde role in *Some Like It Hot*, they needed the money. "I can't see through Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis in drag? Oh my God, I've been dumb before but never that dumb." She went to her well renowned acting teacher, the revered Lee Strasberg to ask how she could make the audience believe her character. Strasberg suggested that Marilyn, always a man's woman, play the part as someone so desperate for female friendship, she simply didn't pay attention to her co-star's masculine features. She took his advice and the result was a comedy classic.

A celebrity's money trouble can spill over to others that they work with. Judy Garland was a popular guest on television talk shows in the 1960s. The problem with booking her was in cities where she appeared hotels were reluctant to put her up. She was famous for abusing the help and skipping out on her bills. One time New York based Host Merv Griffin called up the Waldorf to see if she could stay there. Absolutely not, he was told. She owes far too much money. What if Merv paid her outstanding bills? He was told he could pay double what she owed and she still wouldn't get a room there.

Comedian Stan Laurel found money so tight he ended up in a sixty dollar a month apartment in Santa Monica in the early 1960s. He was listed in the phone book and people would call him up. Are you the Stan Laurel? Can we come over and meet you? Charlie Chaplin's former vaudeville understudy would warmly welcome the fans who visited his residence. But what happened to all his money? Laurel would joke about his three wives getting it all, then explain that Producer Hal Roach owned all the Laurel and Hardy films. He and Oliver Hardy, (or Babe, as his friends called him) had been scared to death when the silent films had ended in 1928. When Director Leo McCarey came up with the idea of teaming the skinny English comic with the rotund Georgia born actor, the two were happy just to keep getting a weekly check. Who knew that the two reelers that they were only paid once for would be shown to new generations on television? Stan often told the story about how he and Babe had gone touring in Europe. While browsing in an airport gift shop in London they saw some miniature Laurel and Hardy figurines. To take them back as gifts they had been forced to pay full price.

Comebacks abound in the movie business. Frank Sinatra, who had not served in World War II due to a punctured eardrum, was very unpopular with American fighting men who were jealous of him being back home crooning to their girlfriends. As our military forces began returning his popularity began to wane. By 1949 both his film and singing career had bottomed out to the point he was telling his manager to pay people to attend his concerts. His voice was in bad shape, his marriage was ending, his weight had gone down to 118 pounds and there were reports of suicide attempts. Four years later he was back on top, winning an Academy Award for his performance in the film *From Here To Eternity* (1953). He decided to enjoy his accomplishment by taking a solitary moonlight walk through the quiet streets of Beverly Hills, just him and his Oscar. After ten minutes the Chairman Of The Board was stopped by two police officers who rained on his parade by not recognizing him, and asking hard questions about where he had gotten that statue.

Being broke in Hollywood is often a matter of perspective. One time at a party Martin Scorsese was

lamenting to his fellow director Frances Ford Coppola," Frances I'm broke. They've torn up my credit cards. I have nothing, do you understand me, nothing!" "Marty, will you shut up? I owe fifty million dollars."

Want to hear more stories? Stephen Schochet is the author and narrator of the audiobooks Fascinating Walt Disney and Tales Of Hollywood. The Saint Louis Post Dispatch says, " These two elaborate productions are exceptionally entertaining." Hear RealAudio samples of these great, unique gifts at <http://www.hollywoodstories.com>.

Purpose Of Books

By Karen Conroy

Since the beginning of time stories were written and told. Stories and happenings were first written on walls as hieroglyphics and on cement tablets. Most early stories were non-fiction and told the story of what life was like way back when. As time developed so did reading and stories. Books were written for more pleasurable entertainment. Hans Christian Anderson wrote the some of the most famous Children's, books. He wrote hundreds of fairy tales and stories including, The Emperor's New Suite, The Ugly Duckling, The Princess and the Pea and The Red Shoes. There were many other famous children's books such as Cinderella, Goldie Locks and The Three Little Bears, and The Little Mermaid. These books were all were written to entertain the young at heart. These were also call fiction books because they told fantasy stories. From the early day of school I remember reading a bout Dick and Jane. This was a chapter book written strictly to develop a child reading habits and vocabulary. Non fiction books tell us a true story, while biographies tells about a specific person's life. An Autobiography is a story written by people about themselves like Helen Keller, The Story of My Life. Then there are the classics such as Julius Caesar, Huckleberry Fin, Moby Dick, and Tom Sawyer. Legions, such as The Legend of Sleepy Hallow by Washington Irving bought us a little mystery. Fables were written with a moral to every story. Remember the story of The Hare and the Tortoise? The hare thought it could beat the tortoise easily in a race so it slacked off and the tortoise won the race. And the great tall tales, such as The Story of Paul Bunyan bought us great entertainment.

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Teacher of elementary education for thirty years. Enjoy sun, traveling and reading.



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