

ALADDIN WAS A PIKER

He couldn't touch Mickey Rooney, whose magic personality has brought him all he wants—even a reunion with his dad

by Frederick James Smith

It's about time a Hollywood father got a break.

This one is the unknown dad of the most famous boy in the world and he wanders, not a little lonely, about the motion-picture lot where his son is one of the prized possessions. He worked hard all his life, mostly as a burlesque comic, and he finds it tough now to stop and try to play. He is Joe Yule, father of the No. 1 box-office star of America, Mickey Rooney.

A strange, shy, gentle-spoken little man is Joe, just five-foot-four, resembling the boy star in physical appearance, amazingly like him in mannerisms. Yule is Scotch-Irish; grew up in Brooklyn.

Until recently Joe has kept—and been kept—in the background. It was reasoned that America wouldn't understand a father who did eccentric boobs for belly laughs in burlesque. But Mickey finally has grown popular enough to overrule the studio's idea—and now he has his father close by. "The greatest dad ever," says Rooney. And he means it.

Joe has been in the theater since he was seven. One of his first jobs was card boy at Percy Williams's vaudeville theater in Brooklyn. Card boys in the old variety days placed placards announcing the next turn on little easels at either side of the stage. Later he became a stagehand—but all the time he had acting ambitions. Now and then he did bits. He helped Pat Rooney in his broom dance at fifty cents a show. That encouraged him some.

Finally Joe got his big chance to act—in burlesque. He began learning the trade of getting laughs. But his new career was interrupted before he'd really got started: Amer-



Now you know where Mickey Rooney got his stuff

ica entered the World War. Joe enlisted fifteen days before the first draft.

He did his time at Kelly Field in Texas, moved on to Camp Mills, then to France. He was overseas a year and a half.

Even in wartime he couldn't forget the theater. He got into doughboy shows whenever he could. Remembers appearing with E. H. Sothern on the other side. Sothern did a dramatic poem called "The Highwayman,"

and Joe did some clowning. He admits he was pretty good. In fact, his turn went over better than Mr. Sothern's. "E. H. was a little over the boys' heads," is the way Yule explains it.

Joe was discharged from the Army on a Wednesday, joined up on Thursday with Jack Reid's "Record Breakers" burlesque troupe. Altogether Yule was a featured burlesque comic for twenty-two years. Mrs. Yule, known as Nell Carter, worked in some

of the same shows with him as a dancer. It was while Joe and the missus were appearing with Pat White and his "Gaiety Girls" in Brooklyn that the future film star came into the world.

Mickey, who was named Joe, Jr., was born twenty years ago next September twenty-third. At twelve noon, Yule says he remembers it as if it were yesterday. Got more laughs than usual that night.

Eleven days later Mrs. Yule was back with the show at Albany. The baby traveled along with the troupe. Slept in a cart made like an Indian basket.

Mickey's First Laugh

MICKEY—then Sonny Yule—was less than a year old when he made his first public appearance. Somehow he escaped from his Indian basket. Joe looked around and there was Sonny crawling to the footlights. Suddenly he turned about and gave the orchestra drummer an unmistakable Bronx cheer. "Did the audience rock!" says Joe proudly. "That was the kid's first laugh."

Mickey's formal career started three years later in Rochester. After the matinee he approached his dad in the alley outside the stage door.

"All of a sudden he starts to sing a number that Sid Gold and Babe La Tour were doing in the show," reminisces Yule. "It was 'Pal of My Cradle Days.' I bet you'd be afraid to do that on the stage," I says. Mickey came right back: 'Bet I wouldn't.' So Gold lets him do the encore at the next matinee. What a clean-up! He did it so well we kept it in."

In those days, Yule explains, burlesque wasn't what it is today. Maybe a little risqué, but not rough. No strip-tease turns. Such present-day stars as Bert Lahr and Jack Pearl were burlesque features. Lots of women would come to the shows and they adored Mickey. After the matinees they would wait to talk to the boy.

Mickey developed his turn into a ten-minute act the next year. The Yules had a tiny tuxedo made for him. "Took a yard and a half of cloth," says Joe. "I still have that tux." Between shows Mickey would drop

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