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The Golden Ham: A Candid Biography of Jackie Gleason

Jim Bishop

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The Golden Ham, first published in 1956, recounts the career of entertainer and comedian Jackie Gleason (1916-1987) from his beginnings in show-business to the mid-1950s when he was at the peak of his early success with *The Honeymooners.*

From the book's dust jacket: In his foreword, author Jim Bishop says of Jackie Gleason that when the comedian read the manuscript for the first time “he did not ask that anything be either omitted or altered. And yet there were parts of this biography that made him wince.” For *The Golden Ham* is candid biography. To it Mr. Bishop brought his painstaking interest in detail, his reporter’s curiosity, his layman’s interest in the world of the theater, and his detachment. And most important, he began and ended his job with Jackie Gleason’s guarantee that nothing Bishop wrote would be censored. The result is a kind of theatrical biography that is entirely new and, like Gleason himself, is made up of a great deal of a great many things. As Bishop says: “There are several Jackie Gleasons. I know some of them. There is Gleason the comedian. Millions know him, and he’s a great talent. Then there is Gleason the producer and Gleason the writer. Some people know these...Gleason the businessman-second-rate, but he thinks he’s good at it – and then there is Gleason the thinker (apt and fast) and Gleason the man (fat, out of shape, but light on his feet) and Gleason the tenement-house kid from Brooklyn (nervy and not a bit surprised that he’s on top) and Gleason the lover, Gleason the musician, Gleason the moody, and Gleason the lonely, tormented soul.” This is a book about Jackie Gleason. If you like him, it may make you like him more, or less, depending on the kind of person you are. If you never liked him, it may change your mind a little. If you never had any special attitude toward Jackie Gleason, you will have one by the time you have finished this book.

Gleason, a 4-pack-a-day smoker, passed away at his home in Florida on June 24, 1987.

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