

WALK SLOWLY WITH PURPOSE

Jerry Lewis and the End of Summer

By Dominic Fortuna

HOLLYWOOD Jerry Lewis, the iconic comedian, actor, and humanitarian, left an indelible mark on the world of entertainment and beyond. Born on March 16, 1926, in Newark, New Jersey, Lewis began his career in show business at a young age, performing in vaudeville and comedy clubs with his parents. However, it was his partnership with Dean Martin in the 1940s and 1950s that catapulted him to stardom. The duo's comedic chemistry and charisma made them one of the most popular entertainment acts of their time, starring in films like "My Friend Irma" and "The Stooge."

Despite their success, Martin and Lewis's partnership eventually came to an end in 1956, with Lewis going on to pursue a solo career in film and television. However, it was his work as a philanthropist that would ultimately define his legacy. Lewis's commitment to raising awareness and funds for muscular dystrophy research was sparked by his work on the film "The Jazz Singer," where he met a young boy with the disease. This encounter had a profound impact on Lewis, and he dedicated himself to helping those affected by muscular dystrophy.

One of the most enduring and iconic aspects of Lewis's philanthropic work was the Labor Day

Weekend telethon he hosted for over 40 years. The telethon, which began in 1966, brought together some of the biggest names in entertainment to raise funds for the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA). Over the years, Lewis worked tirelessly alongside stars like Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Lucille Ball, and countless others to bring attention and resources to this devastating disease. The telethon became a staple of American television, with Lewis's unwavering dedication and compassion inspiring millions.

I had the privilege of being a part of this iconic show when I was a member of the Young Americans, a singing group that performed on the telethon in the 1980s. It was an unforgettable experience, and I was honored to be a part of such a meaningful event. Lewis's passion and energy were infectious, and his commitment to the cause was evident in every aspect of the telethon.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Lewis's work on the telethon was his ability to stay awake and energized throughout the long broadcast. For over 21 hours, Lewis would emcee, perform, and interview guests, all while maintaining his trademark enthusiasm and wit. His stamina was legendary, and it's a testament to his dedication to the cause that he was able to sustain this level of energy for so many years.

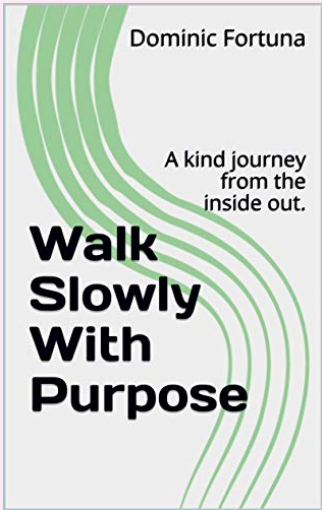
Lewis's relationship with Dean Martin was complex, and their partnership's demise was often attributed to their differing personalities and working styles. However, despite their professional split, Lewis always spoke highly of Martin, and the two remained friends until Martin's passing in 1995. In fact, one of my first jobs in show business was warming up Dean Martin before his performances. It was a thrill to see him get ready to take the stage, and I have fond memories of his warm and charismatic personality.

As Labor Day approaches, it's hard not to feel a sense of nostalgia wash over us. The long weekend signals the unofficial end of summer, and the return to routine and structure that comes with the new school year. But for Jerry Lewis, Labor Day was more than just a holiday – it was an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of those affected by muscular dystrophy. His legacy serves as a reminder of the power of compassion, dedication, and perseverance. As we bid farewell to the final days of summer, we honor the memory of Jerry Lewis, a true champion of humanity and a shining example of the impact one person can have on the world.



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