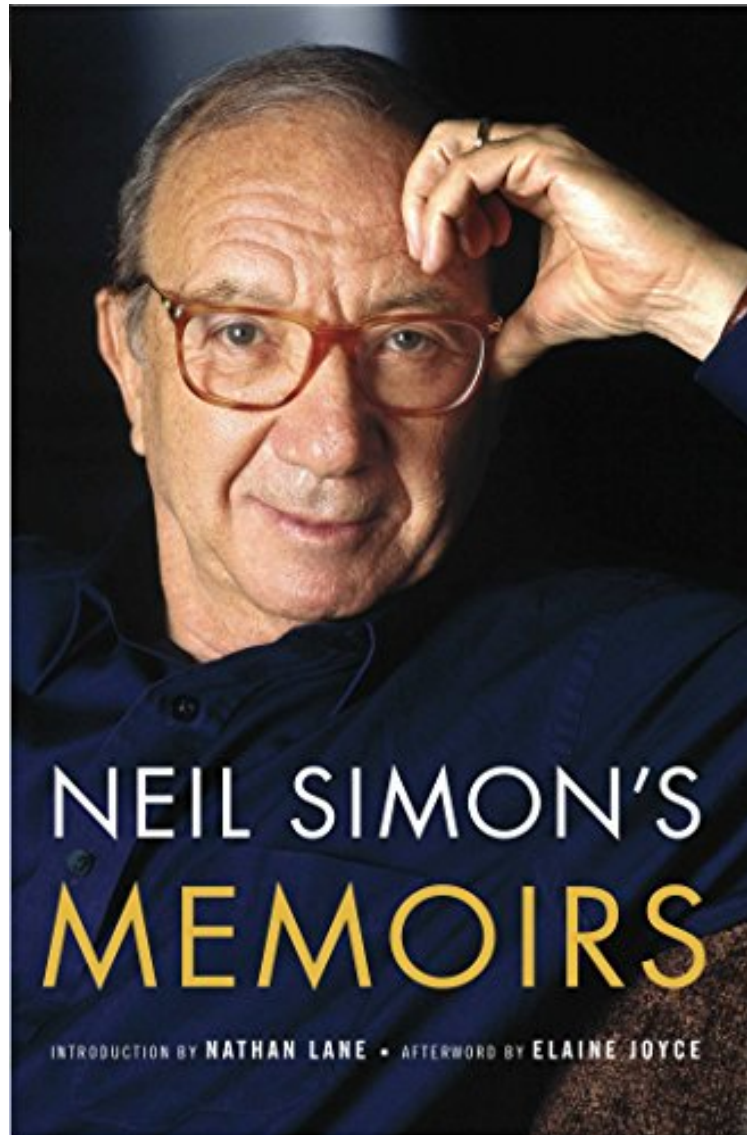


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## Neil Simon's Memoirs

*Neil Simon*

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**Neil Simon : Neil Simon's Memoirs** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Neil Simon's Memoirs:

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good history of the theatre scene of mid 20th century and an entertaining read. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Neil Simon memories! By SirTuck\_KYQuick, packaged perfect, great price, immaculate, new condition.

The complete memoirs of playwright Neil Simon—;the author of such iconic works as *Lost in Yonkers*, *The Odd Couple*, *Biloxi Blues*, and *The Goodbye Girl*—;now with a new introduction and afterword. This omnibus edition combines Neil Simon's two memoirs, *Rewrites* and *The Play Goes On*, into one volume that spans his extraordinary five-decade career in theater, television, and film. *Rewrites* takes Simon through his first love, his first play, and his first brush with failure. There is the humor of growing up in Washington Heights (the inspiration for his play *Brighton Beach Memoirs*) where, despite his parents' rocky marriage and many separations, he learned to see the funny side of family drama, as when his mother screamed thinking she saw a body on the floor in their apartment—it turned out to be the clothes his father discarded in the hallway after a night of carousing. He describes his marriage to his beloved wife Joan, and writes lucidly about the pain of losing her to cancer. *The Play Goes On* adds to his life's story, as he wins the Pulitzer Prize and reflects with humor and insight on his tumultuous life and meteoric career. Now, with the whole story in one place, Neil Simon's collected memoirs trace the history of modern entertainment over the last fifty years through the eyes of a man who started life the son of a garment salesman and became the greatest—and most successful—American playwright of all time.

About the Author Neil Simon is the writer of more than forty Broadway plays, including *Barefoot in the Park*, *The Odd Couple*, *The Out-of-Towners*, and *Lost in Yonkers*, which won the Pulitzer Prize. Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Neil Simon's Memoirs *THE HORN BLOWS 1 IN THE SPRING OF 1957*, I was unhappily in California working on a television special. I was thirty years old and knew that if I didn't start writing that first Broadway play soon, I would inevitably become a permanent part of the topography of the West Coast. The very thought of it jump-started me to my desk. I sat at the typewriter and typed out "O N E nbsp;S H O E nbsp;O F F," all in caps and putting a space after each letter and a double space after each word, trying to picture what it would look like up on a theater marquee. Four spaces down, in regular type, came "A New Comedy." I sat back and studied it. Not a bad start for a first play. Then I suddenly wondered: when they wrote together, did George S. Kaufman type this out or did Moss Hart? No, it must have been Hart. He was the eager young writer poised behind the trusty old Royal machine while Kaufman, the seasoned old pro, would be lying across a sofa in his stocking feet munching on his handmade fudge, bored by such prosaic labors as manual typing. Kaufman had probably put in enough time punching the keys back in the old days when he was drama critic for *The New York Times*. How I envied young Moss Hart being in the same room with the great Kaufman, knowing he would be guided through the pitfalls of playwriting much as any cub reporter would feel the security of marching behind Henry M. Stanley as he guided his pack-bearers across the African plain in search of the great missionary, and then, upon finding him, having the coolness and gift of a great journalist to put quite simply and memorably, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" But, I had no Henry M. Stanley to teach me the impact of brevity in great moments. As a matter of fact, I had no George S. Kaufman, no fudge, no nobody. I had me. Not only had I not written a play before, I had never written anything longer than twelve pages, which was all that was required for a TV variety sketch back in the mid-1950s. Even that was a major step up from the one-liners I used to write with my brother, Danny, when we were earning our daily bagels working for stand-up comics and sit-down columnists. Now I was faced with 120 pages to feed, complete with characters, plots, subplots, unexpected twists and turns, boffo first-act curtain lines, rip-roaring second-act curtain lines, and a third act that brought it all to a satisfying, hilarious, and totally unexpected finish, sending audiences to their feet and critics to their waiting cabs, scribbling on their notepads in the darkness, "A Comic Genius Hit New York Last Night." At least Lindbergh had the stars to guide him. I didn't even know how to change the typewriter ribbon. Nevertheless, I pushed on. I was about to jump four spaces down to write the simple word "by," no caps, this to be followed by my name a little farther down the page, when it suddenly occurred to me that of the only two lines I had written so far, one of them was inordinately stupid. "A New Comedy." I had seen this printed in the theater section of the *Times* for eons, seen it on billboards and marquees all over New York, and it never hit me until just now. "A New Comedy"? Was this to make it clear to the audiences they should not confuse this with "An Old Comedy"? Shouldn't it just be "A Comedy"? And even that was a matter of opinion. A century ago, Chekhov had written "A Comedy" before such plays as *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard*. According to his biographers, however, neither of those plays was ever staged as a comedy during his lifetime, much to his beleaguered protests. So much for interpretation. Novels never made any such pronouncements. My copy of *War and Peace* never said, "A New Epic Drama by Leo Tolstoy." Never once in any movie theater did I see the screen titles come up and read, "Some Like It Hot, A New Farce by Billy Wilder and I. A. L. Diamond." If novelists trusted their readers to discover what their books were about and filmmakers didn't feel it necessary to spell it out, why do playwrights or their producers hold their audiences in

such low esteem? Would I be brave enough to break with tradition? Since I had not yet typed in "byrd" and "Neil Simon," I didn't feel I had enough experience. I plunged back into intensive work and finished typing in "byrd" and "Neil Simon." I sat back and studied my work so far. It was good but something was missing. It did not occur to me to type in the lower right-hand corner of the page "1st Draft, Oct. 15, 1957." I never assumed there would be a second draft or, God forbid, a third draft. Wasn't writing a hundred and twenty pages accomplishment enough? Surely I would change a few words here and there, possibly cut a few lines or add some last-moment inspirations of wit, but new drafts? It was unimaginable. Did Shakespeare do rewrites? How? He obviously wrote in longhand on cheap parchment with a scratchy quill. His plays ran four hours and he wrote thirty-seven of them, not to mention the sonnets, letters to actors and producers, love notes to Anne Hathaway, and excuses for delayed payments to roof thatchers and the local dung heating suppliers. The quills needed for this enormous output alone must have taxed the poultry growers of the region to their capacity. The acting roles in each of the plays numbered in the thirties, which meant at least that number of additional scripts, not to mention those for stage managers and understudies. Even if he had friends and apprentices quill-copy each play to make up the additional scripts, it must have meant thousands upon thousands of naked fowl running around central England. The time, the labor, the costs, and the wear and tear of stress on Bill Shakespeare would certainly inhibit and prohibit the luxury of rewrites. He was certainly in the top three of the world's greatest geniuses and if he had to do without rewrites, why should I worry about them? But I did. I typed in "1st Draft, Oct. 15, 1957," took it out of the typewriter, put it on my desk face down, inserted the next blank piece of paper in the machine, and said to myself, "how do you begin a play?" All I had was the subject. Not a story, not a plot, not a theme, just a subject. Actually, the subject was my third priority. Number two on my list was a desire to write for Broadway. Number one—and this was my dominating motivation, far and above all the others—was a desperate and abiding need to get out of television. In the mid-1950s, when some great electronic genius picked up the coaxial cable that would interconnect all television stations from coast to coast, plugged it into a wall socket, and saw that it worked, my days in New York were numbered. Television, like the film industry some forty years prior, was going west with all the young men. California had the largest studio space, the sun for shooting outdoor scenes, and the smog for shooting London scenes. It all seemed to make sense. Not to me, and certainly not to my wife, Joan. We loved New York. Life without New York was inconceivable. I grew up on the streets of Washington Heights in upper Manhattan; Joan was raised a horse's canter away from Prospect Park in Brooklyn and about a home run's length away from Ebbets Field. I was a Giants fan; she, of course, was a Dodgers fanatic. We were the Montagues and Capulets of baseball, who found true love despite this insurmountable barrier. When the Polo Grounds was finally toppled into dust and Ebbets Field was dismantled brick by brick, downing a vial of poison each was not totally out of the question. Moving from New York to California was. If possible, Joan was even more adamant than I was. To her, New York was the center of the universe. It was the ballet, the theater, the museums, The New York Times, the Seventy-second Street Marina, steamed clams in Montauk, fall drives through Vermont, the U.S. Open in Forest Hills, sailing in Long Island Sound, old bookstores, Greenwich Village pubs where you could see Franz Kline paintings and Maxwell Bodenheim poems tacked to the walls in lieu of their paying their bar bills. And yes, even walking barefoot in Washington Square Park with a feisty dog named Chips, on a cool October night, sitting on a park bench till three o'clock in the morning facing the great Arch and the elegant brownstones and mews where Henry James's heroines once looked longingly through a candlelit window for a lover who never returned. Leave all this for what? Houses built on stilts in a place where Lorenz Hart said the nights were cold and damp and the ladies were mostly tramps? "We're just not going to California for the rest of our lives," Joan said in that tone that never beat around the bush, and would certainly never beat around a giant redwood. There was, unfortunately, little to keep me in New York. All the television shows I had worked for in the past—Your Show of Shows with Sid Caesar, Phil Silvers in Sgt. Bilko, The Red Buttons Show, and many more—were either defunct or had moved to California. Worse still, my friends, the writers, had all gone where the work was. I couldn't believe that the brightest and wittiest of them all, the staff of the Caesar show—Carl Reiner, Larry Gelbart, Mel Brooks, and Sid Caesar himself—were now living in the place we had been satirizing for so many years. The L.A. networks pounced on them all with golden offers, as well they should. But it was still beyond my understanding how you could look out a window, see a palm tree in the sun, and think funny. If that were possible, surely there would be great Hawaiian comedy writers by now. I was one of the few who remained in New York, devoid of work and three-fourths of my closest friends. Even my older brother, Danny—my mentor, my spokesman, the Kaufman to my Hart—moved west to a place called the Valley. From his letters and picture postcards, the Valley looked like America's Shangri-la, a place where your life span could increase by a hundred and fifty years. The catch was that when you eventually did die, it surely wouldn't be from laughing. Money never mattered much to Joan. She could and did live contentedly in our first apartment, a one-room, five-story walk-up in the Village. It had a small dressing room which she converted to an even smaller bedroom. It had a low doorway and I couldn't see how she could get a bed in. It would, I thought, have to be born in there. Never underestimate the wiles and ingenuity of a newlywed decorating her first apartment. I came home that first night we moved in, having put in a full day on the

Caesar show, and found the bed in the room. "How?" I asked, expecting some reasonable answer. "I don't know," she replied. "I just did it." With the bed now in the room, reaching and touching all of the four walls, I stood amazed. Perhaps she had rented the apartment next door, broken down the adjoining wall, shoved the bed in, quickly replastered the wall, and broken the lease on the adjoining apartment—all in one afternoon. She was capable of things like that. One could open the window by standing on the bed, but opening the small closet on the opposite wall was another matter. What we did was walk across the bed, pull the closet door open about three inches, a major feat in itself, then you would squeeze your arm through, reach in, feel around, and whatever you pulled out was what you wore that day. No one noticed, because people in the Village dressed strangely anyway. When I came home at night the bed was neatly made. A shoehorn was her only possibility. The apartment was on Tenth Street between Fifth Avenue and University Place, three blocks from New York University. Walking our dog past NYU at night was the closest I came to a college education. The kitchen was comprised of a "sinkette," and an antique two-burner stove which was powerful enough to warm water but not actually boil it. The apartment's main attraction was a red brick fireplace that could fill the room with smoke in three minutes flat. Some of this, fortunately, could escape through the large hole in the glass skylight fourteen feet above. Unfortunately, this also permitted rain, sleet, and snow to fall gently and otherwise on the sofa, the only good piece of furniture we had. This meant that Joan redecorated the room every time the weather changed. It had the advantage of making it seem as though we lived in a six-room apartment. As for amenities, there was a vertical bathroom. No tub, just a shower big enough for you to make a phone call but not large enough for you to bend over and wash the lower half of your body. This may have been the reason Joan liked to walk barefoot in the park so much. We moved there on the day we were married, September 30, 1953, after a rather austere ceremony that took place in the Criminal Courts Building in lower Manhattan. We were married by a judge whose new false teeth had not yet properly settled in his mouth, so that when he tried to pronounce our names, we sounded vaguely Armenian. In attendance were Joan's mother and father, a sweet, happily married couple, and my mother and father, who were separated and did not speak to each other. At least not in the first person, anyway. At the end of the ceremony, the best my father could manage to my mother was "Congratulations to her." My mother nodded back, looking in the opposite direction. From moments like this, the seeds of comedy are born. Joan was gloriously happy up in our tree house on Tenth Street. I was gloriously happy with Joan, although not quite as stoic. I would announce with a touch of sarcasm as we squirmed into our miniature bed, "We'll be sleeping from left to right tonight." On April 25, 1957, Ellen Marie Simon was born. She was six and a half pounds and Joan was in labor for eighteen hours. By the time Ellen entered the world at 7:28 that morning, the long struggle of labor and birth had taken its toll on the baby. Her head was as pointy as a dart. With the twisted mind of a comedy writer, I looked at her in panic, thinking, will she sleep in a crib, or do we just throw her into a dartboard at night? It was with great trepidation that I asked the obstetrician, "That pointy head, that does go away, doesn't it?" He assured me that by nightfall her head would settle nicely. The jobs were getting scarcer in New York, our savings were dwindling, and with Ellen now in our lives, we had no choice but to move to a larger, but more expensive apartment. Larger was no problem because every apartment in New York was larger. We moved down a few hundred feet on Tenth Street to a more prosaic and adult building. This one had an elevator, ten floors, a doorman, two bedrooms with reachable closets, a stove that made hot food, a full bathroom with a tub, and a living room that was protected from the elements, which meant that our furniture placement could remain stable. A week after we had moved in, we realized we had suddenly grown up. Our bohemian life, such as it was, was behind us. We missed the hole in our skylight, the light snowfalls in the living room, and the bedroomless bedroom where we were forced to sleep tightly in each other's arms, knowing that being an inch apart was not only physically impossible, but was also gloriously wonderful. The compensation was that now we had Ellen. Within a month it was clear she was going to be as beautiful as her mother, especially now that her head no longer looked like a sharpened pencil. Suddenly, a call came from my agents at the William Morris office. Would I like to work for Jerry Lewis again? I had previously written one television special for him with Mel Tolkin, who was formerly the head writer on Your Show of Shows, where we worked together. Mel was not available for this second show, and Jerry asked if I would do it alone. There were two drawbacks to this. One was that it would be in California; the other was that it would be for Jerry Lewis. Admittedly, I was once caught up in the Dean Martin/Jerry Lewis craze that had swept the country a few years before. Jerry was that wild, uninhibited lunatic who was half child, half cheetah, and he surprised us all with the anarchy of his behavior. He made me laugh in spite of myself, because I saw something in him that was missing in me and perhaps in most of us—the freedom from being so fearful of how people judged us. Elvis Presley soon proved you could do the same thing with music. Jerry had his fans, no doubt of that, but it was pushed to ludicrous excess when France practically made him their patron saint. Since then, however, he had split with Dean Martin, and the half-mad child without his keeper and protector was now simply behaving like a demented adolescent that someone had deserted in the streets. One minute he was the goonlike simian, walking like a flamingo, who has just been hit by a bus, speaking like a human adenoid, then suddenly, as the audience's laughter hit its peak, he would become a hip, articulate, cool performer with a Sinatra-like grip on a cigarette. We all felt as if we'd been had. He turned comedy on and off like a lightbulb. It was as

though he were showing homemade films of himself as the funny, incorrigible kid, then quickly turning the lights back on, revealing the suave, sophisticated performer he had matured into so "brilliantly." We longed for Jack Benny who was always Jack Benny, the eternal thirty-nine-year-old lousy violinist tightwad we could always depend on. All this aside, I took the job. Okay, so I wouldn't be writing for the facile, sharp-tongued wit of Phil Silvers, or for the almost classic and timeless humor that Sid Caesar spoke in English, French, Italian, German, and Japanese. A buck was a buck and you do what you have to do, I thought in Spanish, a language I spoke fluently to myself as I walked down shadowy streets. When somebody kills your partner, you have to do something about it. That's the way things aren't. Why couldn't the Morris office get me a Bogart picture? I would love to have words like that spitting out of my typewriter. Instead, I was going west to write for a spastic, aging bellhop. A separation did not appeal to either Joan or me, so we reached into our well-lit closet, picked out clothes of our choosing, wrapped Ellen, now four months old, in her Gandhi-like cottons, and headed west on a pre-jet flight that lasted fifteen hours. As the plane touched ground at the L.A. airport, Joan turned to me in her seat and shouted above the roar of the engines, "Don't you just hate this place?" Actually, it wasn't all that bad. We rented a charming little Tudor house off Coldwater Canyon, owned by an English actor of little renown, who made his living by playing barristers or members of Parliament, all of whom, alas, got murdered twelve minutes into the Sherlock Holmes films that were his specialty. Living in a little bit of England was a treat we didn't expect to find in the City of Angels. Unfortunately, the houses that surrounded us were a little bit of Spain, a little bit of France, a little bit of Switzerland, a little bit of Gingerbread, and a little bit of Halloween. I don't remember the name of our street, but I imagine it was something like Potpourri Lane. On our very first day there, we were busy unpacking and not speaking to each other, because thirty-eight seconds had gone by where we couldn't find Ellen. Joan had actually had me outside the house looking for wolves carrying off small bundles, when suddenly there came a knock on the door. Only in Hollywood would I write a phrase like, "when suddenly there came a knock on the door"; I opened it and saw a tall, heavyset man who looked somewhat familiar to me. When I realized who it was, my mouth dropped open with a thud. It was Ward Bond. Now you have to be at least over fifty and a film aficionado to know about Ward Bond, but he was part of my childhood spent in neighborhood movie theaters, a world of memories. Ward Bond, of a hundred films made at Warner Bros. Ward Bond, who appeared with Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, and John Wayne. Ward Bond, the friendly California cop in *The Grapes of Wrath*, who told Henry Fonda and the Joad family, "You're best be goin' back where you come from. There aren't no work out here." But mostly it was Ward Bond from *The Maltese Falcon*, playing the police sergeant Tom Polhaus, who first told Bogart/Spade of the murder of his partner, Miles Archer. Was Ward Bond Sergeant Polhaus or was that Barton MacLane? Either way, there he was at my kitchen door, about as big as he looked up on the giant screen. "Excuse me, sir. My name is Ward Bond." The fact that he felt the need to tell me his name was as incredible as his calling me sir. He had a slight smile on his face, the kind a cop makes when he tries to make you feel it's nothing personal about his having to arrest you. Maybe word had already spread through these hills that Joan and I had been bad-mouthing L.A. ever since we picked up our rented car, and he wasn't about to take any of that smart-ass New York wise-guy talk from two punk kids. When Joan and the thirty-eight-seconds-lost baby appeared next to me, he smiled and tipped his hat to the womenfolk. "Nice to meet you, ma'am. Boy or girl?" "Girl," Joan said, touched by the big man's cordiality. He reached out and wiggled Ellen's tiny toes with his big, warm hands. "Hi, little lady. Now aren't you pretty?" Joan was completely won over despite the fact she wouldn't know Ward Bond from Montgomery Ward. "I'm the neighborhood representative for fire control," said Ward, who was now apparently my neighbor. "Just want to make sure you don't leave those exposed dry leaves and brush around the house. Once the Santa Anas start blowing, this place could go up like a tinderbox." Never before in my city-bred life did I have to worry about dry leaves, dry brush, or tinderboxes. And who was Santa Ana? Was he the philosopher or the Mexican general who slaughtered every last man at the Alamo? "Don't worry. My husband and I will take care of it as soon as we put the baby to sleep." It was the first time in our three-year marriage she had ever referred to me as her "husband." "It makes us sound so old," she would say. Chances are, if Ward Bond had stayed five more minutes, Joan and I would have become "Maw and Paw." He smiled, tipped his hat, wiggled Ellen's toesies, and then shook my hand. His grip was so tight, his fingerprints suddenly and permanently became mine. He then turned and rode off into the sunset in his Chevy pickup, probably to join a poker game over at the Duker's house with John Ford, John Huston, Victor McLaglen, and a couple of cousins from Dublin, in case they felt like brawlin' afterward. So ended our first day in California. I GOT SOME INKLING of who Jerry Lewis, the man, was when he showed me around his Pacific Palisades home, and opened the double double-doored clothes closet in his immense private dressing room. It was mirrored from wall to wall, and from the size of it, I thought I may have taken a wrong turn in his house and wandered into the Royal Quarters in Versailles. In the closet there hung about twenty-five identical black tuxedos, an equal number of identical black suits, and at least that number of sports jackets in various shades, but no less than five each in the exact same pattern and color. Pleated white shirts were lined up on hangers, looking like a hundred maicirc;re drsquo;s parading for inspection. He kept pulling open

drawer after drawer—;which slid out speedily and noiselessly—to show me his endless array of sport shirts, casual shirts, pool shirts, pajamas, handkerchiefs, and boxer shorts, like a child might show off for you his lifetime collection of marbles. More to be admired than adorned. His socks and his sweaters, mostly cashmere, were all red. Not some. All. The red socks were lined up in rows, side by side, enough to be hung on fireplaces for a thousand Christmases. There were enough shoes in the shoe closets to last out the combined careers of Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly, and Secretariat. As we left the thickly carpeted room to continue our tour of his house in the Pacific Palisades, he tossed me a red cashmere sweater with matching socks, the first of a plethora of gifts I was to receive. Generosity was not one of Jerry's shortcomings. As we went from room to room seeing his kitchen, his screening room (where one could play back a Jerry Lewis appearance anywhere in the world with the flick of a switch), his office, his electronic system (which could not only hear his children's breathing at night but could probably take their temperature as well)—;the presents in my arms kept mounting. The tour plus lunch took about an hour and a half. The discussion of what I was to write for the show took about three minutes. "You know what I do, kid. I trust you. If you screw something up, don't worry. I'll make it funny." He immediately made a face and a rabbit sound and I laughed, I admit it. "When you're through writing, call me." He opened the front door. "I'll have fun, you'll see. I didn't get this house for being stupid. And I never read a book in my life. Here, take this." He threw me a silver cigarette case with a caricature of him engraved on top, smiled warmly at me, and as I started for my car, he yelled out for all to hear, "Thief! Thief! Stop him!" Then he closed the door and went back in. I opened the door of my car, my arms filled with, among other things, red socks, a red sweater, a green Jerry Lewis baseball cap, and a yellow umbrella, making me look like a burglar with bad taste. I had two sketches to write in six weeks. On the Caesar show, we used to write two sketches in two days, but then, of course, there were eight of us. Now, for the first time in my life, I was flying solo. Writing becomes easier for me when I know who I'm writing for. When Danny and I were writing monologues for comics in the early days, we never just wrote a routine then looked to sell it to someone. We tailored it for specific comics. The bad comics just did jokes and we weren't interested in just jokes. The really funny men, like Buddy Hackett or Phil Silvers, had their own unique style, their own particular vision of life. We wrote our routines specifically for them, and we had the ability to capture their rhythms and their personalities. This is contrary to writing for the theater or films. You write a play, then cast your actors. And I never wrote a film for a specific actor, because the chances of getting that actor—;especially a star—;were somewhere between slim and anorexic. "I'll amend that. I wrote two films which actors had already agreed to do, based on the premise alone: Richard Dreyfuss and Marsha Mason in *The Goodbye Girl* and Jack Lemmon in *The Out-of-Towners*. Once they agreed to sign on, I tailor-made the parts to fit their specific and unique gifts. It is, I imagine, easier to paint a portrait when someone is sitting for it. Writing for Jerry Lewis didn't present any real problems for me. As a matter of fact, I had the feeling that if I just gave him a premise and twenty props, he would be just as funny as with anything I could write for him. But I wasn't being paid to think of twenty props. Knowing his loony, bombastic style, I was not likely to go astray and dash off some witty Noel Coward—;type drawing-room comedy. Unless, of course, there were two baboons sitting at the piano. With Jerry you go for the jugular. I finished both sketches in five days, writing full days and most nights. One sketch had Jerry as the inspector from the Department of Safety, looking over a factory for danger areas. Once he walked in wearing his ill-fitting suit and that Jewish Inspector Clouseau look on his face, the die was cast. Within seconds, he was twisted, mangled, pressed, stomped, and stretched in every machine and moving part he came in touch with. The other sketch, though vague in my mind now (I have not saved one single line of anything I ever wrote in my ten years in television, nor any of the comedy monologues Danny and I wrote in those developing years), was equally physical in its humor. I presented the sketches to Jerry in his offices on the Paramount lot. He sat and read them in stony silence. Not a sound, not a peep, not a smile, not a chuckle. He breezed through the pages, tossed them on the coffee table—;just missing the coffee mugs shaped in his own image—;leaned back with his hands behind his head, and said, "I love it. Hysterical! You're finished. Wasn't that easy?" "But you never laughed once," I said. "I'll laugh when we do it. It's not funny when I read." "So what about rewrites?" I asked. "I'll fix it in rehearsal. You're such a worrier. Go home. I'll see you in five weeks." "That's it?" I said in amazement. "No meetings? No conferences? No nothing?" The telephone rang. He was immediately on to other business. Another film, club dates in Vegas, interviews. He kept talking as he threw me something in cashmere, a red scarf with his signature in gold. As he talked, he put up his hand to me, spreading out his fingers, meaning, "I'll see you in five weeks," waved, threw me a kiss and a walnut, and swiveled his chair around as he gave an interview completely as Melvin, the thirty-six-year-old man with the fourteen-year-old brain. I was out the door, looking for my car, wondering what in the world I would do in Hollywood with five weeks and a red scarf on my hands. "WHY DON'T YOU start that play you're always talking about?" Joan offered as she tried to get the clothes washer to work, this being the eighth time it had broken down in the week it'd been there. She knew better than to ask me to help, since my skills with all things mechanical and electrical were limited to turning on a light switch or turning it off, but not necessarily both. My way of dealing with being alone in a house where the toilet won't stop

running and overflowing is to pretend to be writing, not even noticing that the water is up to my ankles, and then acting out surprise when Joan comes in and screams, "Are you going to wait until the house floats away before you call a plumber?" Actually, I probably would. "I don't have a play that I'm always talking about," I answered, handing her a wrench she had totally no use for. "I just want to write one." "So think of one," she said, looking at a valve whose purpose must have been a mystery even to the company who made it. "Think of a play? A whole play? With a beginning, middle, and end? Do you have any idea how hard that is? It would take me two or three years at least. And what if it wasn't any good? What would we do for money?" "I'll get by. Just write the play," she said as she clicked on a switch that started the washing machine working better than it did even when it was new, which I doubt it ever was. I was convinced it was made by the Dr. Frankenstein Company, with abnormal parts taken from the deceased bodies found in some washing-machine graveyard. Two days later I typed out the title page. ONE SHOE OFF A New Comedy by NEIL SIMON 1st Draft Oct. 15, 1957