



Larry Gelbart

February 25, 1928 - September 11, 2009

Beverly Hills, California

Larry Gelbart, the American writer whose comic intelligence shaped the television series M*A*S*H and Broadway's A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, died in Beverly Hills, California, on September 11, 2009. He was eighty-one. The cause was cancer.

Born in Chicago on February 25, 1928, and raised in Los Angeles, he wrote jokes for radio while still a teenager, then graduated to Sid Caesar's television rooms and a Hollywood career that treated wit as architecture. Forum (with Burt Shevelove and Stephen Sondheim's score) proved he could build farce that sang; M*A*S*H proved he could make a war comedy that kept its moral temperature. Tootsie and other screen credits extended the same precision to film.

He was a writer's writer - protective of craft, allergic to soft punches, generous to colleagues who did the work. Awards accumulated; the better measure was how often later comedy rooms stole his timing. He died in Beverly Hills on the same September 11 as Jim Carroll, a pairing of a Midwestern-born gag man and a New York diarist that only a calendar could invent.

He died in Beverly Hills on September 11, 2009. The laugh lines remain sharp enough to cut.

Gelbart's M*A*S*H scripts treated laughter as a vital sign - proof the patient was still arguing with the world. He hated empty wisecracks and loved structure; Forum's Roman chaos is engineered to the inch. Writers who passed through his orbit absorbed a standard that made network comedy feel like it had a spine. Even when Hollywood softened edges, his drafts tried to put them back. Beverly Hills was only the zip code; the real

address was the page that refused to waste a setup.

Services

Died in Beverly Hills, California, on September 11, 2009. Writer for stage, television, and film; private funeral services.

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