HAVENARRATIVE.COM

STEPHEN SCHOCHET

THE THREE STOOGES' PAIN

In the early 1930s, when Moe Howard of The Three Stooges decided childlike violence would be their trademark, it caused decades of repercussions for both the comics and their followers. After appearing in some two hundred films, middle Stooge Larry Fine lost all feeling on one side of his face. Curly Howard, the junior member of the team, wore a disguise in public to avoid being kicked in the shins by fans. Shemp Howard, who left the act and came back after younger brother Curly suffered a stroke in 1946, almost got knocked out by a young actress that he criticized after several takes for being too ladylike with her punches. Moe led his partners through orchestrated mayhem aimed at adult movie audiences for twenty-five years. He never imagined that beginning in the late fifties, the Stooges shorts would constantly replay on TV in front of impressionable kids. A sentimental family man in real life, Moe traveled throughout the country to teach youngsters the techniques of harmless, two-fingers-to-the-forehead eye poking.

Extra: One evening in the late 1920s, Shemp Howard (1895-1955) accused Larry Fine (1902-1975) of cheating at cards and poked him in the eyes. As Larry rolled on the floor writhing in pain, and Shemp apologized, Moe Howard (1897-1975) held onto his sides laughing. The eventual leader of The Three Stooges thought the incident was the funniest thing he'd ever seen, and incorporated similar violence into their act.

Extra: By the late 1930s, Jerome "Curly" Howard (1903-1952) had become the most popular Stooge. A skilled basketball player and ballroom dancer, Jerry's athleticism came in handy for his energetic antics on the big screen. Unlike Moe, who learned his scripts to the letter, the childlike Curly was a spontaneous performer. One time during filming, the youngest Howard brother suddenly got down on the floor and spun like a top for a few minutes until he remembered his lines.