

Why Zuzu At All?

Posted on [March 9, 2013](#)



Philip Van Doren Stern

In 1943 Philip Van Doren Stern (1900-1984) wrote a short story entitled "[The Greatest Gift](#)" from which the movie "It's a Wonderful Life" was made in 1946. The name Zuzu did not appear in the story.

In other words someone added the character in the movie script. For reference here are the names of the movie's prominent characters: George, Mary, Clarence, Henry, Billy, Ma, Bert and Ernie. Good, solid names from 1940's Anytown, USA. Then there's Zuzu. It's an exotic jewel amidst all this Americana. Why on earth was it added to the movie? And to what end?

[I have mused](#) about Zuzu being a product placement. Jeffrey, a reader of this blog, has posited another theory. He wrote, "*The name "Zuzu" is used as a nickname in Hungarian for Izabella. There were many Hungarian directors and producers in the early years of Hollywood. Is it possible that one of them was friends with someone involved in the film?*"

The movie's [Wikipedia page](#) lists the screenwriters as Frances Goodrich (an American), Albert Maurice Hackett (American and Frances' husband), Jo Swerling (American) and Frank Capra (the movie's Sicilian-born American director and producer).

The short of it is that I can't find any supporting documentation for Jeffrey's interesting theory. But, then again, I can't find anything to support any other theory. So I'd like to put it out there and see if anyone can shed any light upon the choice of this curious name. If you have any information – or theories – please post them in the comments and I'll do a follow-up.

Thanks Jeffrey.

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Was Zuzu Bailey a Product Placement?

Posted on [December 31, 2012](#)



The question has to be asked... was Zuzu Bailey, the youngest of the children in “It’s a Wonderful Life,” a product placement? By all accounts the character’s name was taken from the popular ginger snap. Product placements in movies were certainly not unknown at the time. In fact “It’s a Wonderful Life” has another notable product placement, a National Geographic magazine. George Bailey as a boy (played by Bobby Anderson) is talking to Mary as a girl (played by Jean Gale)...

He (George) pulls a magazine from his pocket and shows it to her.

MARY

A new magazine! I never saw it before.

GEORGE

Of course you never. Only us explorers can get it. I've been nominated for membership in the National Geographic Society.



So it’s not like they were above it. Also, the rest of the Bailey children have fairly common names: Janie, Pete and Tommy. Zuzu is indeed an odd character name in this all-American family.

I have always assumed that Zuzu was a nickname which would sorta, kinda lend more credence to the name being used for product placement. Then as now, Zuzu was not a common given name. But when George Bailey, the father, is talking to Zuzu's teacher Mrs. Welch he refers to his daughter as Zuzu. If Zuzu was a nickname it seems like he would have used her "real" name when addressing this official person. But it was a small town where everyone knew each other and nicknames might have been used for small children even in "official" situations. Also, plot-wise, it would have only complicated things to have to introduce her given name and link the two for the sake of some kind of realism.

All that being said I'm not buying it. When the movie plugged National Geographic it was not subtle about it. The product was mentioned in dialog and the magazine itself prominently shown. It would have been a simple matter to show a package of Zu Zu Ginger Snaps on Zuzu's bedside table or in Gower's Drug store. But it wasn't. Also, as far as I know, there wasn't any cross-promotional marketing from the Zu Zu Ginger Snaps side of things. Nabisco (then N.B.C.) was not shy about marketing its products and it seems like they wouldn't let something like a famous movie tie-in go by without a poster or two.

Maybe a document will surface some day showing that the sweet, little Zuzu was only a corporate marketing arrangement. But I hope not.

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On The Lawn With Snaps

Posted on [December 22, 2012](#)



I ran across this photo on the bighappyfunhouse.com site (they say it's available for purchase – see info below). No information was provided. It's an odd photograph if you think about it. It looks like a posed scene (two open boxes positioned to show front panels) but Zu Zu Ginger Snaps never used, as far as I know, photos – always illustrations – in their advertising/marketing materials. My wife suggested that it could have been submitted as part of [some competition](#). And what is he holding in his right hand? Any ideas would be appreciated.

Photo credit: bighappyfunhouse.com

Purchase photo: email bighappyfunhouse@gmail.com

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We Baked Ginger Snaps from Zuzu's Recipe

Posted on [December 21, 2012](#)



Ginger snaps baked using Zuzu's recipe.
Photo by ZuZu Montoya

The little girl who played Zuzu Bailey in “It’s a Wonderful Life” grew up and in 2000 she ([Karolyn Grimes](#)) wrote a cookbook called “[Zuzu Bailey’s It’s A Wonderful Life Cookbook: Recipes and Anecdotes Inspired by America’s Favorite Movie.](#)” In it she – not surprisingly – lists a recipe for baking gingersnaps which she calls “Zuzu, My Little Ginger Snap” Cookies.’ I’d like to state that there is no reason to believe just because she played Zuzu Bailey (who was famously named after the snaps) that her recipe bears any resemblance to the actual product. As far as I can tell it doesn’t but we couldn’t resist giving it a go.



Coated with brown sugar and about to go into the oven.
Photo by ZuZu Montoya

I won’t list the recipe here out of respect for Ms Grimes’ copyright (you can buy her book) but I will say that it’s easy enough to find on the internet. I’ve wanted to cook them for some time but never got around to it. When our friend Bobbi Forsythe was visiting recently she offered to be the head chef. So I put the recipe in front of

her, we started assembling the ingredients and my wife ZuZu starting taking photographs (and helped bake). Thanks to Bobbi for being the catalyst and making the snaps even though it was getting a little late.

I will say that while these may or may not taste like the originals they were very delicious. The recipe makes a molasses cookie that is very crisp. But from the photographs I've seen of the actual Zu Zu Ginger Snaps they were a light brown (the recipe produced dark brown snaps) and I suspect more gingery/spicy.

So now I'm on the hunt for a recipe that approximated what they originally tasted like. Please let me know if you have any first-hand accounts of their taste or if anyone knows of an old recipe that attempted to duplicate the famous snaps. I'd love to try it out and report the results.

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The First Published Gingersnap Recipe

Posted on [December 18, 2012](#)

The improved housewife

A. L. Webster

According to Brette Sember in "[COOKIE: A Love Story: Fun Facts, Delicious Stories, Fascinating History...](#)" the "first published recipe for gingersnaps was written in 1805 by Mrs. A.L. Webster in her 1842 *The Improved Housewife*." I was not able to

confirm either that this is the first published date of a gingersnap recipe or that Mrs. Webster wrote the recipe in 1805 but did not publish it until 1842 but we'll go with it. You can in fact skim (and download for free) [Mrs. Webster's book on Google Books](#).

So I present not one but two of Mrs. Webster's gingersnap recipes plus one for ginger cookies:

311. *Ginger Snaps*. No. 1.

Take one pint of molasses, one teacup of butter, one spoonful of ginger, and one teaspoonful of saleratus; and boil all the ingredients thoroughly; when nearly cold, add as much flour as can be rolled into the mixture.

312. *Ginger Snaps*. No. 2.

Mix four ounces of lard and four of butter, melted, with four ounces of brown sugar, a pint of molasses, two spoonfuls of ginger, and a quart of flour; strain in two teaspoonfuls of saleratus dissolved in a wineglass of milk, adding sufficient flour for rolling out thin. Cut into small cakes, and bake in a slow oven.

313. *Ginger Cookies*.

Take one teacup of sugar, one of molasses, one of butter, one egg, one spoonful of saleratus, one of ginger, and one of vinegar; and mix them with seven teacups of flour.

Brette Sember goes on to state "It is believed the word 'snap' comes from the Dutch word 'snappen,' which means to seize quickly." I'll add this from Dictionary.com: "1495, 'quick, sudden bite or cut,' from Du. or Low Ger. snappen "to snap," probably related to M.L.G. or M.Du. snavel "bill, beak" (see [nib](#)). Sense of "quick

movement” is first recorded 1631; that of “something easily done” is 1877. Common in compounds to indicate instantaneous.”

Do with that what you will and happy baking.

Note: “salaeratus” (or “saleratus”) is more commonly known as baking soda.

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Rare Zu Zu Sign Featuring a Female

Posted on [December 2, 2012](#)

I have never seen a Zu Zu Ginger Snap sign that featured a female so it was a bit of a surprise when someone from Azio Media sent me a link for this one. From [their site](#):

“Nice paper sign made for general store, drug store, department store. Zu Zu Ginger Snaps were round drop cookies produced beginning in 1901 by National Biscuit Company (NBC) – later changed to Nabisco – until the early 1980s. The snaps were “a spicy combination of ginger and sugar-cane molasses” and came in a distinctive yellow box with reddish type. Sign States: “Buy some NBC Quality Cookies Now! Children Love Them.” Approx. Size: 36” x 15.5 inches”



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The sign is advertising N.B.C. but the girl is holding a Zu Zu Ginger Snaps box. I’m not sure if the sign is for sale. Looks like they might have copied some text from the [Zu Zu Ginger Snaps Wikipedia page](#).

Update: Azio Media contacted me to say that, yes, they are selling it on [eBay](#) (\$325.00 + \$30 shipping).

Trolley Card and Counter Display

Posted on [September 16, 2012](#)

Here are two new images sent by John Barney ([whom I've mentioned before](#)), one a trolley card and one a counter display both from his personal collection.



©2012 John Barney



©2012 John Barney

To be fair I don't know much about trolley cards in general. This is from the [Learn About Movie Poster](#) site:

“Trolley cards measure 21” x 27” and resemble jumbo window cards, except they don’t have a blank space at the top like a jumbo window card does.

Trolley cards were printed for local theaters and sometimes have the theater name printed on them.

Most of the ones that have survived are from the 1920s and 1930s and were originally used in San Francisco, California. It is said they were displayed on famous trolley cars there, which is why they are called trolley cards.

Trolley cards are normally silkscreen art, and it is almost always artwork and usually different than other poster artwork.”

If you have any information regarding trolley cards, especially Zu Zu Ginger Snaps trolley cards, please [send me an email](#) and I’ll post here. Thanks.

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