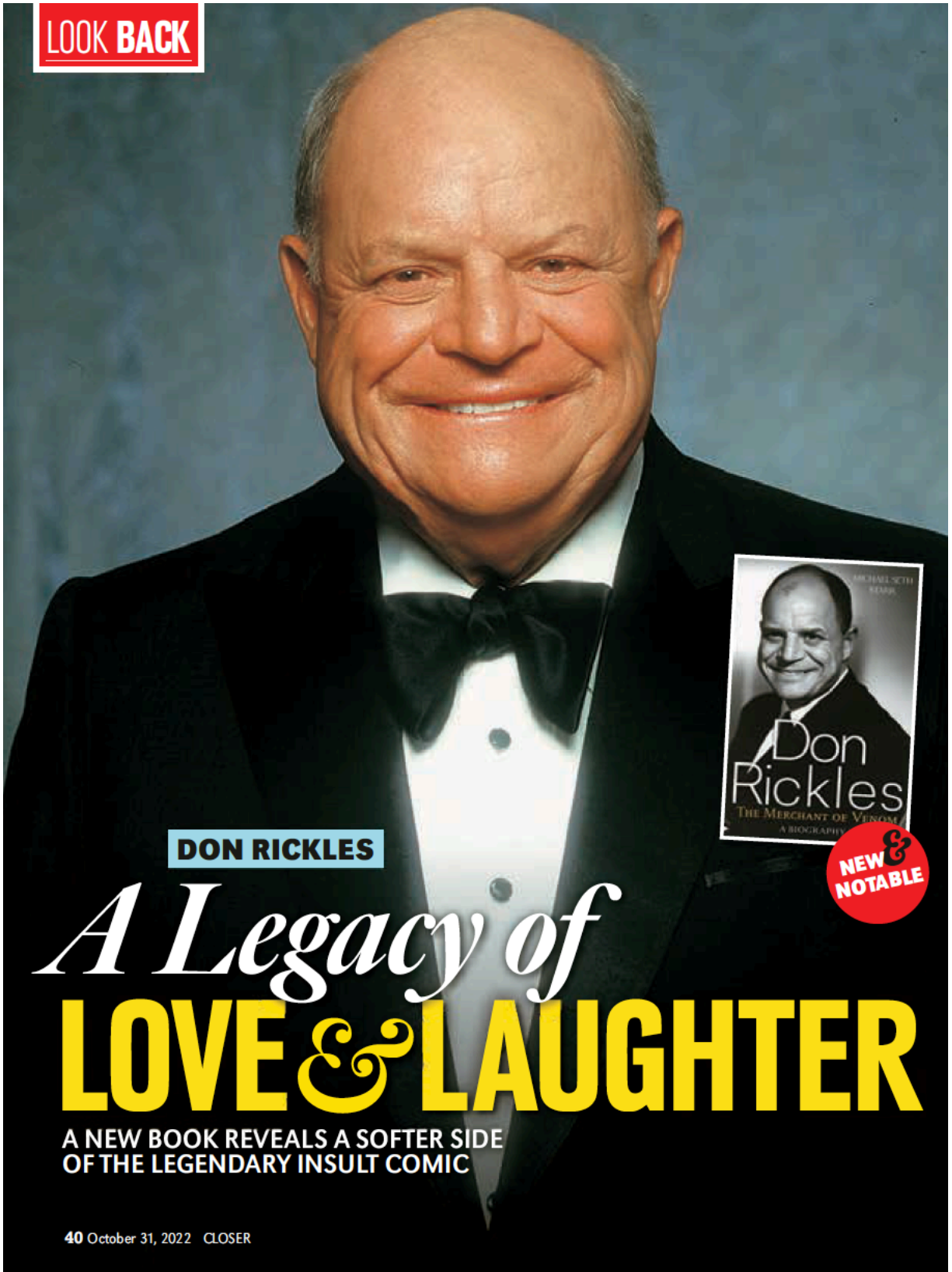


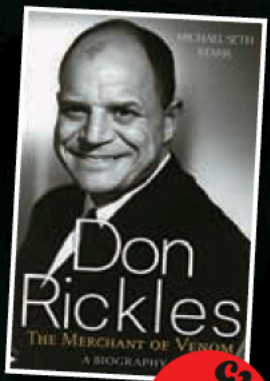
LOOK BACK



DON RICKLES

A Legacy of
LOVE & LAUGHTER

A NEW BOOK REVEALS A SOFTER SIDE
OF THE LEGENDARY INSULT COMIC



**NEW &
NOTABLE**

Comedy legend Don Rickles, famous for hurling blistering barbs at celebs and civilians alike, was a very different man offstage. “Don happened to be an insult comic, but not in private,” says biographer Michael Seth Starr, author of *Don Rickles: The Merchant of Venom*. “He was a nice man and led a low-key life compared to the frenetic guy you saw running around, mopping his brow and yelling at people.”

Don’s ability to leave his show persona at the door might have been the result of his acting studies. “He was classically trained at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. Grace Kelly was one of his classmates,” explains Starr. He’d dreamed of becoming a serious actor and tried for years to break into the Broadway scene. “I paraded up and down Broadway for parts and got turned down, rejection after rejection,” Don recounted.

To make ends meet, Don started emceeing at nightclubs with the encouragement of his number-one fan and stage mom, Etta Rickles. “My mother would say, ‘Get up and get a rouse out of people,’ and I did. I could always make people laugh and work the audience,” Don said. Later, Etta called in a favor and helped Don land his big break. “Etta was friendly with Frank Sinatra’s mother, Dolly. She convinced Dolly to tell Frank to come see Don’s show,” Starr says. “Sinatra walked into the club, and Don said, ‘Go ahead, Frank, make yourself at home, hit somebody.’” Frank laughed, and a lifelong friendship began.

FAME AND FAMILY

By age 39, Don had a successful comedy career. But he’d yet to meet his romantic match until he laid eyes on Barbara Sklar. “She worked in his agent’s office, and they hit it off. She had this, I’m-



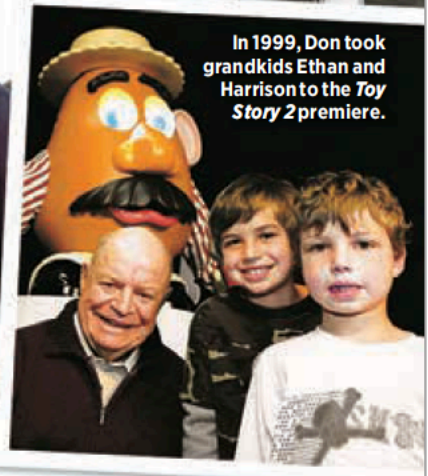
Don, with his mother, Etta, served in the Navy during WWII.



The comic and his wife, Barbara, after the birth of their son, Larry, in 1970.



“He was one of the kindest, most sensitive human beings we have ever known,” Bob Newhart said of his longtime pal.



In 1999, Don took grandkids Ethan and Harrison to the *Toy Story 2* premiere.

“You can’t study comedy; it’s within you. It’s a personality. My humor is an attitude.”

—Don Rickles

not-taking-any-crap kind of attitude, which I think Don really liked,” Starr opines. “They had a terrific marriage, raised two kids, and stayed together for 52 years.”

A dedicated family man, Don embraced fatherhood. “His kids loved him. They had a great rela-

tionship, and he tried to be around them as much as he could,” Starr says. When his busy tour schedule sent him around the globe, Don often traveled with the whole brood, including his mother and his best friends, Bob and Ginny Newhart.

Never one to slow down, Don kept performing well into his twilight years. He even impressed his grandkids by voicing Mr. Potato Head in the *Toy Story* movies. Asked about his legacy at age 90, Don said, “I’m just going along for the ride and having a great time with my wife and kids. I was never out to hurt anybody. It was an act and nothing more.”

—Hilary Hattenbach, with reporting by Katie Bruno