



FALLING SNOW created the perfect holiday scene outside Ralphie's home in *A Christmas Story*.

A Christmas
Tradition

Year after year, families gather and giggle at *A Christmas Story*. For the movie's 30th birthday, its stars share their memories from behind the scenes.

BY LEAH WYNALEK

TURNER ENTERTAINMENT



MR. PARKER'S leg lamp lit up his family's front window for all to see.

“You’ll shoot your eye out, kid!”

Ralphie Parker first heard those famous words of warning 30 years ago in the holiday classic *A Christmas Story*.

The yuletide favorite debuted in November 1983 to lukewarm reviews and disappeared from most theaters before Christmas. These days, the movie is so popular that TBS plays it for 24 hours starting on Christmas Eve. In 2012, the Library of Congress even added the comedy to the National Film Registry, which includes such classics as *The Wizard of Oz* and *Casablanca*.

Based on radio host Jean Shepherd’s memories of growing up in the late 1930s and early ’40s, *A Christmas Story* tells the tale of 9-year-old Ralphie (Peter Billingsley), whose only Christmas wish is a Red Ryder BB gun.

“We’ve all had that one thing in life that we’ve wanted so badly that we would’ve done anything to get it,” says Ian Petrella, who played Ralphie’s little brother, Randy. “It’s like your whole life revolves around that one thing.”

No matter what age they are, viewers can relate to Ralphie’s relentless pursuit. The theme is just as relevant today as it was in the early ’80s, when the movie was filmed, or the ’40s, when the story takes place.

Petrella, who landed his role at age 8, remembers how uncomfortable his character’s clothes were compared with his own.

“Instead of Nikes and jeans, we’d wear uncomfortable leathery shoes and corduroys,” Petrella says. “Back then they were just regular clothes, but to us it completely felt like a costume.”

Zack Ward, who played raccoon-capped bully Scut Farkus, learned the hard way just how tough a pair of old leather mittens could be. He recalls one of his favorite scenes, when Ralphie finally gets revenge and beats Scut to the ground.

“The mittens got frozen in the snow, so every time he punched me in the face, the ‘idiot strings’ actually slapped the bejesus out of me,” says Ward. “If you see the close-up, I’ve got bright red cheeks. It’s not makeup, it’s just me getting slapped all over the place.”

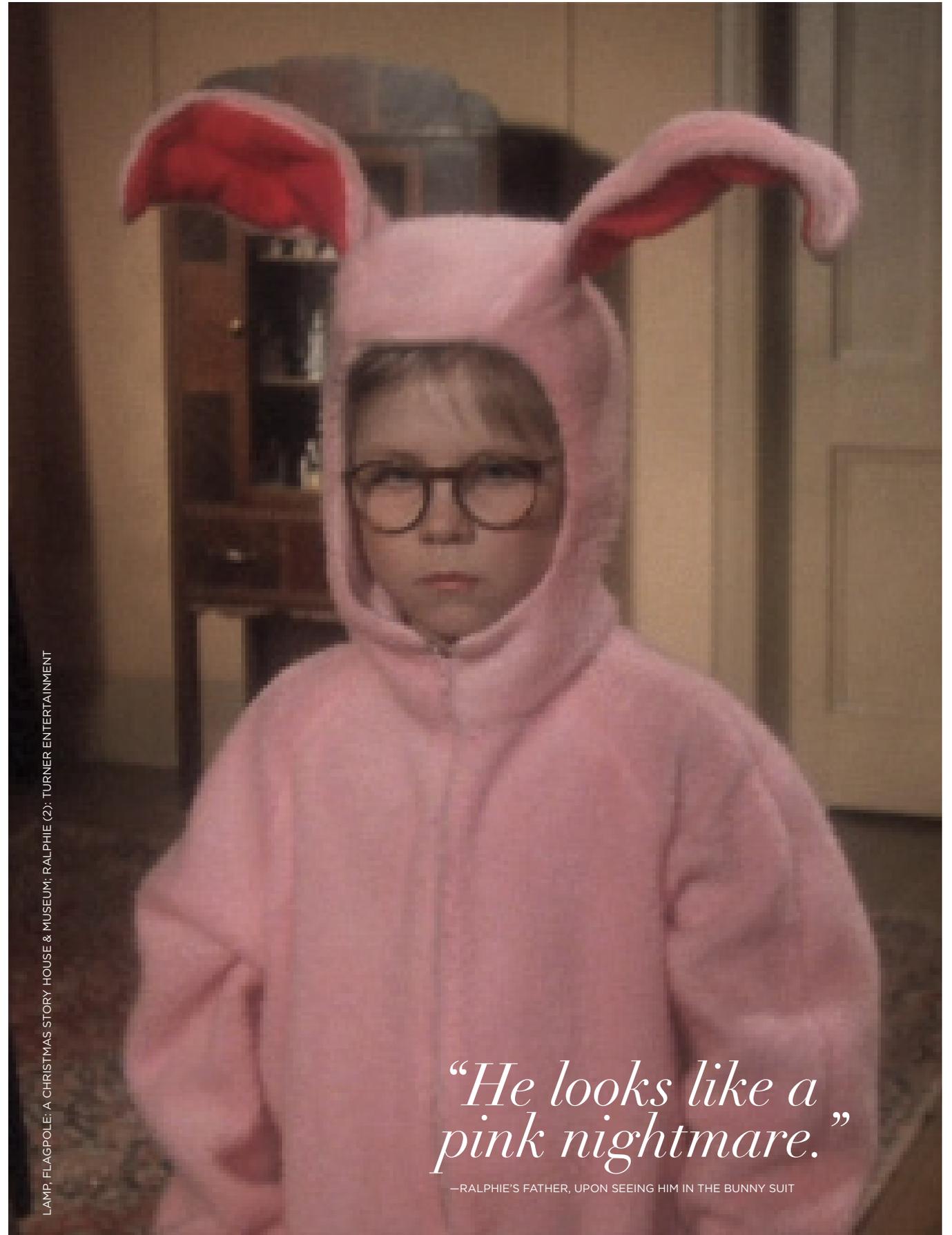
Although Ward will forever be recognized as Ralphie’s snowball-throwing tormentor, he was originally cast as Scut’s sidekick, Grover Dill. When Ward and fellow actor Yano Anaya walked on set for the first time, director Bob Clark put his hands over both of their heads, measuring a height difference of about 8 inches. He hadn’t noticed that before and decided to switch their roles.

“The part was a lot of fun for me because it felt like payback,” says Ward. “Kids used to beat me up when I was a kid.”

For Petrella, the whiny role of Randy felt natural. Like many kids, he had experience acting like a brat from time to time, he says. But when it came time to film, he became a professional. Petrella started acting as a 3-year-old, but *A Christmas Story* was his biggest job yet.



RALPHIE LEARNED many lessons in the movie, whether he was visiting Santa (far left), watching Flick attempt a triple-dog dare (left) or obeying orders to wear bunny pajamas (right).



LAMP, FLAGPOLE: A CHRISTMAS STORY HOUSE & MUSEUM; RALPHIE (C): TURNER ENTERTAINMENT

“He looks like a pink nightmare.”

—RALPHIE’S FATHER, UPON SEEING HIM IN THE BUNNY SUIT



BRIAN JONES, the owner of the house from *A Christmas Story*, stands outside with a leg lamp. He bought the Cleveland home, which was used for exterior scenes, in 2004 and refurbished it to match the film's interiors. Fans can tour the house and visit the adjacent museum.



"It was my first time working with actual celebrities, people like Melinda Dillon (who played his mother) and Peter Billingsley, so it was very exciting for me," he says. "I knew what I was doing, and I had to be cool and on my best behavior at the same time."

Most fans of the movie remember Randy as "Mommy's little piggy." In an attempt to get her picky son to eat his dinner, Mrs. Parker tells Randy to show her how piggies eat. Petrella steals the scene, snorting and shoving his face into a plate of meatloaf and mashed potatoes.

"As a kid it was like, this is your one shot to go for it, and Mom can't say anything, so dig in," he says. "We just sat there for eight hours having fun, take after take, oink after oink, and we got what we wanted."

That funny family moment joins the long list of scenes that have turned the movie into a classic. Ralphie's terrifying trip to see Santa Claus at Higbee's department store is another.

"The scene just captured that bad Santa at the mall and how frightening he actually is," Petrella says. "You think it's Santa and then realize that it's a weird stranger."

Many adults can recall similar disappointments from holidays past. Jean Shepherd, the voice of adult Ralphie, brings those experiences to life through his narration in a way that adults and children alike enjoy.

"You don't really outgrow *A Christmas Story*," Ward says. "As a little kid you watch it and say, *That's me*. As a teen, you think, *That was me*. Then, when you have kids, you share it with them. That's the magic of the film."

The cast members didn't expect the movie to become a Christmas tradition, but are honored whenever fans come up to share their favorite scenes and thank them. Ward says the people he encounters act like they're meeting an old friend who has always been a part of the family's Christmas.

"Here we are 30 years later, and people are more interested in the film now than ever," Petrella says. "Most movies don't have a life like that."



CAST MEMBERS (top, from left) Zack Ward, Yano Anaya (with his son), Tedde Moore (Miss Shields), Ian Petrella, Scott Schwartz (Flick), and elves Patty LaFontaine and Drew Hocevar reunite at the Parker house. ABOVE: Petrella hides under the sink, just like his character Randy. To learn more, visit ACHRISTMASSTORYHOUSE.COM.



MOVIE MARATHON

Tune in for **24 hours** of *A Christmas Story* on TBS, beginning **Christmas Eve** at 8 p.m. Eastern time.

LAMP: SCOTT MEIVOGEL, COURTESY OF POSITIVELY CLEVELAND; REUNION, SINK: A CHRISTMAS STORY HOUSE & MUSEUM/PHOTO BY WALES HUNTER; LOGO: TURNER ENTERTAINMENT