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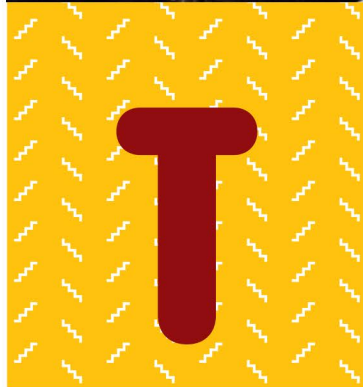


Hollywood's
Greatest
—
UNTOLD
STORIES

Was it all just a dream? Bob Newhart, the cast, and the writers of *Newhart* revisit the famous finale twist of the beloved comedy.

by **LYNETTE RICE** @LYNETTERICE
photographs by **ART STREIBER**

← William Sanderson,
Bob Newhart, and Julia Duffy



Though it aired for eight seasons on CBS, the '80s sitcom *Newhart*, which was recently honored by the Paley Center, will forever be remembered for the side-splitting finale in which a discom-

bobulated Bob Newhart woke up next to Suzanne Pleshette, his TV wife from his previous series, *The Bob Newhart Show*. Hulu is now streaming the first season of the comedy about a New York writer named Dick (Newhart) who runs an inn in rural Vermont with his wife, Joanna (the late Mary Frann). Newhart and his fellow actors and writers look back at the legendary final episode and give credit where it's due. Their recollections are as remarkable as the characters who populated the quirky sitcom.

Newhart always said he wanted to go off a year too early, especially after seeing "too many shows that had overstayed their welcome." So, in the spring of 1990, writers began crafting an episode about a Japanese tycoon who buys up the whole town to turn it into a golf resort. Other than Dick and Joanna, everyone took buyouts and moved away, including Michael (Peter Scolari) and his wife, Stephanie (Julia Duffy), as well as the hapless Larry (William Sanderson) and his seemingly mute brothers named Darryl (Tony Papenfuss) and John Voldstad).

BOB BENDETSON (producer, 1988–90) We went broad. We had a Japanese man wanting to build a vertical golf course, which made no sense to anybody. Then we jumped five years. There was no other reason we wrote the finale that way than to make it easier to come up with jokes.

SCOLARI That was the first and only time the Darryl brothers ever spoke. Their three wives were chattering on, so they finally turn and yell, "Quiet!" That set Bob up to say, "Your brothers can speak?" One of those three actresses was Lisa Kudrow.

STYLING: SHARON WILLIAMS/ART-DEPT; SANDERSON GROOMING: LEAH RIAL/TARTE COSMETICS/EXCLUSIVE ARTISTS; NEWHART GROOMING: ANNA BERNABE/PURLISSE; SCINGARE/EXCLUSIVE ARTISTS; DUFFY HAIR: PAIGE DAVEY/PORTBUBBLE AND BUBBLE; EXCLUSIVE ARTISTS; DUFFY MAKEUP: AGOSTINA/MAC COSMETICS/EXCLUSIVE ARTISTS; PROOF STYLIST: ANTHONY AUTOMAKE

NEWHART: CBS/EVERETT COLLECTION; BOB: VIRGINIA NEWHART; MPTV IMAGES

DUFFY I do remember some group hug in the episode. It was an echo of the last *Mary Tyler Moore Show*. I just love that.

BENDETSON The one who came up with the idea for the final scene was not any of us. [Writer] Dan O'Shannon gave us the idea during the previous season.

O'SHANNON It looked like it was going to be the final year. Shortly before I popped up with this, there was the ending on *St. Elsewhere*, where it turned out the entire series was the vision of an autistic kid looking into the snow globe. So it occurred to me, Why not have Bob wake up as Bob from the first series? I went into the writers' room and told them. They said it was great. The executive producers called up Bob, who apparently loved it. It looked like a go. But then *Newhart* was picked up for another season, and I went to *Cheers*.

NEWHART JFK once said victory has a thousand fathers and defeat is an orphan. This is the true story of how the show ended. It was in the sixth year of the show, and my wife, Ginny, and I were going to a party. I said, "I think this is going to be the last year of *Newhart*." Suzanne Pleshette was at this party, so Ginny said, "I think I have the ending. You should wake up in bed with Suzanne and explain to her this dream you had." So I gave it to the writers.

DUFFY The writers came to a few of us when Bob wasn't present and told us the idea. But you can see two people coming up with it.

O'SHANNON Here's my thought. I believe, yeah, Ginny probably came up with it years before I was even on the show and forgot about it. But it's not like Bob ever came into the writers' room and told us.

BENDETSON It's like, all right, whatever you guys want to believe.

NEWHART The crew didn't know about it the night of the finale. We did a run-through, the crew went to dinner, and when they came back, we told them we added a scene. We just told them to keep filming, whatever happens.



← (Clockwise from far left) Sanderson, Newhart, and Duffy; the cast; Newhart and wife Ginny; Newhart and Pleshette in the finale reveal

SCOLARI It was the loudest reaction I had ever heard from a studio audience. They screamed and howled and broke into this tumultuous applause that did not stop. What you see in the final edit is a cut version because the applause was unnaturally long. It was very exciting.

O'SHANNON It's a little-known fact that they shot an additional scene where Newhart wakes up back at the inn with Mary Frann, the idea being he dreamed about waking up with Suzanne first. They wanted to please the female lead of the show, though they never intended to run it. I know because I was there. I was invited to the finale because they still liked me, and I did come up with a pretty nice idea.

BENDETSON I'm not 100 percent sure, but I don't believe that scene was ever shot. After the scene with Suzanne Pleshette that received such a huge response from the audience, Mary told us not to bother

shooting the additional scene with her—she realized it would have been a letdown from the Pleshette scene. I thought that was gracious and also realistic of her.

SCOLARI Bob went so far as to plant a fake story in the *National Enquirer* that in the final episode his character is going to die and meet God, and God was going to be played by either George C. Scott or George Burns. Bob was so pleased with himself for having scammed the *Enquirer*. His manager, Artie Price, planted the story.

DUFFY I do hope people will talk about the other 183 episodes. There were gems in there. If we didn't have this iconic last episode, these things would get brought up and talked about sometimes. But we always talk about the finale.

SANDERSON Somebody asked me at the end: "Do you think this is the pinnacle of your career?" I kinda laughed. No, I didn't think that. But it may have been.

NEWHART There was a lot of sniffing during that final week. I always introduced them as the best cast on television, but when I said it before the finale, I choked up because I realized it was going to be the last time. It's a terrible cliché, but we were a family. We just laughed and laughed over eight wonderful years. ♦

