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Happy Days' Fonzie jumps over a shark—and into the American lexicon



“For the start of *Happy Days'* fifth season, we wanted to take a trip with the cast to shoot a three-parter we wrote that would take place in Hawaii. But suddenly, the studio said there was no money for Hawaii. So we decided to put those three episodes in Hollywood. We had all the characters get a trip to California, and we shot scenes in Malibu and Pacific Palisades. But the episodes had no kick. Previously, we'd had such success with [Henry Winkler's character] Fonzie jumping over garbage cans on a motorcycle. So we said, 'Fonzie has to jump something!'

It was pretty much my idea to let him jump over something on water skis—and Henry knows how to ski. Someone finally said, 'Well, a shark is exciting.' I thought, 'We'll see.' We did a lot of strange stuff to tap-dance past Hawaii. And this made no sense. It was not a good idea. But we were stuck with three shows!

The object the stuntman would jump over would be a mechanical shark—well, it turned out to be a bad

Show creator and producer **Garry Marshall** recalls how they tried to make a splashy season opener

mechanical shark. It was really just a fin. We weren't Steven Spielberg. But he jumped over it, and we thought, 'Well, we escaped with this one. It's not a great episode, but at least it's water, it's fun, we were at the beach.' And we'd finally gotten out of the studio. By then, we'd had enough already in Arnold's. The Cunningham living room was becoming a little boring for the writers. So getting the characters outside was for us really something.

Later, someone coined the phrase 'jumping the shark' to mean the moment when a show starts going downhill. But for us, that actually hadn't been true. *Happy Days* ran for six more years. But the episode became famous inadvertently, and now that phrase shows up in all areas of the world, in politics and entertainment. I've never been hurt by that—I think it's great. Look, we became part of the American talk. The show had created deliberate catchphrases like 'Sit on it' and 'Aaaay'—and instead, 'jumping the shark' became the most famous of all, without us even trying." ■