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Meinhardt Raabe dies at 94; one of the Munchkins in 'The Wizard of Oz'
Meinhardt Raabe, who played the Munchkin coroner in "The Wizard of Oz" and proclaimed that the Wicked Witch of the East was "really most sincerely dead," has died. He was 94.

Raabe died Friday morning at a hospital in Orange Park, Fla., after an apparent heart attack, said his caregiver, Cindy Bosnyak.

Raabe -- pronounced RAH'-bee -- was one of the 124 Munchkins in the 1939 classic film and one of only nine who had speaking parts.

He portrayed the Munchkin official who solemnly pronounces the witch dead after Dorothy's farmhouse lands on her: "As coroner I must aver, I thoroughly examined her, And she's not only merely dead, She's really most sincerely dead."

In 2007, Raabe was one of seven surviving Munchkins who attended the unveiling of the Munchkins' star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. He delighted the crowd by reciting his famous lines from the movie.

"There is nothing in the picture that dates it," he told the Associated Press in 1988 about the film's continued appeal. "There are no old vintage cars or old vintage streetcars. . . . It's a fantasy picture that will be fantasy for generations to come."

Raabe was about 3 1/2 feet tall when the movie was made and eventually grew to about 4 1/2 feet. He said he couldn't remember what he was paid for his role but "by today's standards, people would say you were crazy to work for that."

Raabe, born in Watertown, Wis., in 1915, was a member of the Midget City cast at the Chicago World's Fair in 1934. He used jobs at such fairs to pay his way through college.

He earned a bachelor's degree in accounting at the University of Wisconsin and, years later, a master's in business administration at Drexel University.

In 1946, Raabe married Marie Hartline, who worked for a vaudeville show called Rose's Royal Midget Troupe. She died in a car crash in 1997.

Raabe also toured the country for 30 years in the Oscar Mayer Weinermobile, promoting hot dogs as "Little Oscar, the World's Smallest Chef." He was working in Oscar Mayer's public relations department when he learned about "The Wizard of Oz" roles.

"Every little person who walked through the front gate got a job with MGM," he told United Press International in 1989.

Raabe became a regular visitor to an annual event in Chittenango, N.Y., the birthplace of "Oz" author L. Frank Baum, after reading about it in the late 1980s.

"Things didn't start to get really big until Meinhardt first came and we started getting the Munchkins to come," organizer Barbara Evans said in 1998.

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