

**30TH
FRED ROGERS
YEAR**

1983-1984 Season Commemorates Fred Rogers'
30th Year In Children's Television

- 1954 "Children's Corner"/WQED Pittsburgh
- 1964 "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood"/Eastern Educational Network
- 1968 "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood"/National Educational Television (PBS)

**MISTER ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD
PROGRAM NOTES**

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PHENOMENAL MISTER ROGERS

After 30 years in children's television,
Fred Rogers' star shines brighter than ever.

The man is full of surprises.

His voice is among the quietest on television, but ABC's Nightline chooses him to speak to the nation about the possible effects of "The Day After" on children.

His message is one of respect for fellow humans, but Joan Rivers requests his presence on The Tonight Show.

His personal style is traditional, even conservative, but The Village Voice cites him as the only valid father figure on television.

In his television series, a measured minute passes in silence, but the series' ratings, consistently on the rise for 18 years, outpaces all but three of Public Broadcasting's top runners in 1984.

As Lady Elaine Fairchilde might say, "Something's up, Toots!"

Lady Elaine, in case you're wondering, is the lovable mischief-maker of Make-Believe in MISTER ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD, Fred Rogers' series for children that is often as surprising as the man who created and still hosts it.

It was there, in the "Neighborhood," that Lynn Swann, Pittsburgh Steeler all-time-great wide receiver, talked about his other life as a ballet dancer....

...that Al Worden told children how astronauts "go potty" in space....

...that the Wicked Witch of the West and the Incredible Hulk were reduced to human proportions....

...and that children may for the first time have heard direct and open talk about divorce, conflict, the threat of war, and death.

"Is Mister Rogers warm and wonderful -- or just plain dippy?" asked the Philadelphia Inquirer in a brassy headline some years ago.

Yes, Fred what are you?

"I'm a composer and piano player," answers Rogers thoughtfully, as though not quite sure where to begin, "a writer and television producer...almost by accident a performer...a husband and father. And I'm a minister. You know, most of us are many things, and I remember the marvelous feeling I had when I realized that many parts of who I am could be brought together in work for children and their families. That's what I am the most: A man who cares deeply about children."

Many adults who happen to catch a MISTER ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD program are downright perplexed as to why anyone, children included, would want to watch the series. Where's the zap!, the pow!? What's this character up to, anyway? Thirty years of this kind of thing? How come?

Yes, Fred, how come?

"It's true that I started in children's television 30 years ago," explains Rogers. "Not with MISTER ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD, but in a direction that led me there. That direction was the creation of television programming that spoke, with respect, to the concerns of early childhood -- not as adults see it but as children feel it. It took me 12 years and the support of some remarkable people who helped me understand children's feelings...and helped get me back in touch with the feelings I'd had as a child.

"I know firsthand how hard those feelings are to reawaken, to recapture, and that's why adults sometimes miss the point of what we're doing. They may find it funny that I'd write a song called, 'You Can Never Go Down the Drain.' But the adults who laugh about that song now may once have been two-year-olds who were terrified to take a bath.

"There's something else: I'm not a character on MISTER ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD. I don't think of my time away from the studio as my 'real' life. What I do in the studio is my real life, and the person on camera is the real me. I think children appreciate having a real person talk with them about feelings that are real to them. Why have two generations of children watched our programs? I'd say: That's why."

The significance of Fred Rogers' work has not eluded all adults, however.

For instance, on the serious side:

For a 25th Anniversary salute to Rogers, distinguished academicians from across the country convened at a symposium on Creativity and Childhood. Keynote speaker: the Dean of American psychologists, Erik Erikson.

At last count, more than 30 colleges and universities have awarded Rogers honorary degrees.

He has received virtually every major award in the television industry for work in his field, and dozens of others from special-interest groups in education, communications and early childhood.

In addition to his appearance on Nightline and two appearances on The Tonight Show, Rogers has been a guest on The David Letterman Show, Good Morning America, Hour Magazine, The Today Show, P.M. Magazine, and Entertainment Tonight.

And on the flip side, Rogers has:

been spoofed by the likes of Johnny Carson, Eddie Murphy, Harvey Korman, SCTV, and The National Lampoon;

turned up for comic relief in the movies Poltergeist, Paternity, and Being There;

provided humorous references for political cartoons and daily comic strips.

Despite all this hullabaloo, visitors find Fred Rogers a man of reticence who is more inclined to listen than to talk. He does not feel at home in the spotlight of notoriety, though he is unfailingly friendly when stopped on the street or in airports, or asked for autographs in restaurants. "It's not always easy to be well known," Rogers admits. "I am, by nature, a private person, and I think my family deserves privacy, too. But," he adds with an ingenuous smile, "I feel fortunate to be going through life with this face."

Star? Rogers dislikes the term. A better one, perhaps was coined by a poetic admirer who called him: "A bright light in childhood's sky."

Coincident with his 30th Anniversary in children's television, Berkley Press published Mister Rogers' Talks with Parents, a book in which Rogers lets adults know more about himself and his work than he ever has before. It met immediate success with critics, book clubs and the public, going into a third printing in

its first six months. In typical Rogers' style, the book has few prescriptions for successful childraising. Rather than telling parents how to raise their children, Rogers reassures them that they can. Said People magazine, which rated the book among the year's ten best, "Thanks, Fred. We needed that."

Those familiar with Rogers' work and who have watched his rise to national prominence and influence reach a 30-year, all-time high, often wonder where he will go from here.

What is next, Fred?

"When people ask me, 'What's next?'" says Rogers, "I tell them: This is next -- just what I'm doing. That doesn't mean standing still. No one can stand still, any more than a child can stop growing. But adults keep on growing, too. I may have reached the national speed limit in age, but I have no plans to slow down. I'm going to keep right on trying to help children grow within their families, and trying, as well, to help parents in those families stay in touch with the children they once were."

Trivia Department:

To whom did Helen Hayes say: "So shines a good deed in a naughty world"?

The Sears-Roebuck Foundation recently set a record for continuous funding of a public television series. Whose series was it?

In response to whose testimony at a Senate hearing did Senator John Pastore say: "I'm supposed to be a pretty tough guy, but...I feel goosebumps"?

Who was Arnold Palmer's high-school buddy -- but never beat him in golf?

Who is the godfather of Senator John Heinz's youngest child?

Whom did Gloria Swanson invite to tea one afternoon?

Whose performance in corporate boardrooms did The Wall Street Journal acclaim as "a hit"?

In reference to whom did New York Times critic, John O'Connor, say: "Gentleness can have clout"?

(Clue: The answers to these questions can be found, daily, on the stations of the Public Broadcasting Service.)

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A BRIEF SIDEBAR HISTORY

Fred McFeely Rogers was born in 1928 in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, a small industrial town about an hour's drive east of Pittsburgh. His family was involved in manufacturing and banking, and it was in traditional and "comfortable" surroundings that Rogers spent his earliest years. He was an only child until the age of 11, at which time adoption brought him a baby sister.

Rogers stayed in Latrobe through high school and then went off to Rollins College in Florida where he majored in music composition. After graduation in 1951, he was hired by NBC in New York as an assistant producer on The Voice of Firestone, later working as floor director for The Lucky Strike Hit Parade, The Kate Smith Hour and the NBC Opera Theatre. He was married in 1952 to Joanne Byrd, a pianist and a fellow Rollins undergraduate.

In November, 1953, Rogers moved back to Pittsburgh at the request of WQED, the nation's first community-supported public television station. The station was not yet on the air, and its management asked Rogers to develop program schedules for the following year. One of the programs which he developed and produced was called Children's Corner. It was a free-wheeling, live, hour-long visit with puppets and host Josie Carey, another Pittsburgher, and in 1955 the series won the Sylvania Award for the best locally-produced children's program in the country. There, on Children's Corner, several "regulars" of today's Mister Rogers' Neighborhood began their long lives -- among them, Daniel Striped Tiger and King Friday XIII. It was also during the seven years of Children's Corner that Rogers began spending his off-duty hours studying Child Development and attending the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. He was ordained in 1962 with a charge to continue his work with children and families through the media.

Opportunity led Rogers to Toronto in 1963 where he created a 15-minute children's series called Misterogers. For the first time he appeared on camera as the programs' host. By 1964 the series had been renamed Misterogers' Neighborhood and the programs were twice as long. In 1965, however, he chose to return to WQED in Pittsburgh, bringing the series with him. The programs were distributed over the Eastern Educational Network. In 1968, it was made available to the 200 affiliates of the Public Broadcasting Service -- the same year in which Rogers was appointed Chairman of the Forum on Mass Media and Child Development of the White House Conference on Children. Distinctions and awards have followed ever since, including a George Foster Peabody Award and Emmys.

Rogers is President of Family Communications, Inc., the nonprofit corporation he founded in 1971 and which now produces a wide variety of materials that bear on the healthy emotional growth of children and their families. The television series has, since 1969, been retitled Mister Rogers' Neighborhood (out of concern for children's early reading skills) and reaches 7 million families each week. There are currently 535 episodes in the series, and Rogers continues to write and produce 15 new ones each year, adding freshness and immediacy to what has become the longest-running children's series on Public Television. Now in its 18th year of production, Mister Rogers' Neighborhood remains "a place where friends help children find within themselves the courage to grow."

Rogers, his wife, and their two grown sons still live in Pittsburgh.