

CELEBRITY

7 Fun Facts About The Unsinkable Debbie Reynolds

On Sunday, Debbie Reynolds will receive a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Screen Actors Guild Awards. Here's a fun look at the Hollywood legend and some highlights of her amazing life and career.

Laurie Ulster · Dec 27, 2016

364 SHARES



Actress Debbie Reynolds has starred in over 50 movies, including the classic "Singin' in the Rain," and is being honored with a SAG Lifetime Achievement Award.

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Where to begin with the unstoppable force that is [Debbie Reynolds](#)? She's appeared in over 50 movies, had a chart-topping song (sandwiched between hits by [Elvis Presley](#) and [Paul Anka](#)), and is an Oscar, Emmy, and Tony award nominee. The woman has had an interesting life: she grew up poor, lived her early adult years and first marriage in the pages of the tabloids, had two more bad marriages after that, and saw the demise of the studio system that started her career. She starred in classic films in the golden age of Hollywood, holding her own against major league co-stars like [Gene Kelly](#), [Jimmy Stewart](#), [Gregory Peck](#), and [Frank Sinatra](#).

This Sunday, she'll receive the SAG Lifetime Achievement Award, given annually to an actor who fosters the "finest ideals of the acting profession." Her award will be presented by her daughter, novelist/screenwriter/memoirist [Carrie Fisher](#), whose relationship with her mother has given her boatloads of material for her writing. The two women live across the street from each other, remaining close despite the ups and downs of spending their lives in the spotlight.

And the spotlight's still on: here are seven fun facts about this amazing, undaunted star.

HER SQUEAKY-CLEAN 'GIRL SCOUT' IMAGE IS ACTUALLY PRETTY ACCURATE

Debbie Reynolds was raised to be a good girl, and it's because of this that she says, with regret, she never had a particularly passionate sex life. She was a virgin when she married [Eddie Fisher](#), and ultimately lost him to the sultry, sexy [Elizabeth Taylor](#) in a headline-grabbing break-up.



Debbie Reynolds and co-star and husband Eddie Fisher during the filming of "Bundle of Joy" (1956). At the time, Reynolds was pregnant with their daughter Carrie Fisher. (Photo by RKO Radio Pictures/Getty Images)

As for being like a [Girl Scout](#), she actually was one, and she's proud of it. She was a Campfire Girl and a troop leader who earned no less than 47 merit badges, and there's a Girl Scout scholarship in her name. Her scouting came in handy the day she met her *Singin' In The Rain* co-star, [Gene Kelly](#). He was introduced to his leading lady, unaware that she had no real dance experience. He asked her if she could do a time-step, and she happily replied, "Yes, I learned it at Girl Scout camp!"

SHE GOT HER START IN A BEAUTY CONTEST

At age 16, Reynolds entered the Miss Burbank beauty contest, mostly because of the exciting prizes: a silk scarf, a blouse, and a free lunch. She won the contest, and was asked to do a screen test for Warner Brothers the next day.



Debbie Reynolds was just 19 when she starred as Gene Kelly's love interest in "Singin' in the Rain." The young actress had never sung or danced before, but said she learned a lot from Kelly whom she has described "as the most exacting director I ever worked for." (Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

FRED ASTAIRE GAVE HER THE COURAGE TO DANCE. PERSONALLY.

When shooting began for *Singin' In The Rain*, she was just an amateur. [Gene Kelly](#) and [Donald O'Connor](#) were virtual acrobats, and the movie demanded that she keep up. At 19, she was overwhelmed, and used to crawl under the piano to cry when things got tough. One day a pair of legs walked past, then stopped and a voice asked who was under there. The legs belonged to [Fred Astaire](#), and when she told him her troubles, he broke his normally unwavering rule, and let her watch him rehearse. He wanted to show her just how challenging it was for him, too, to get the right moves. He then sent her back to the set to learn her routines, without the tears and without giving up.

She certainly learned how to tough it out: shooting the musical number "Good Morning" took 14 brutal hours. Watch to see why it was worth it:

HER BROTHER WAS IN SHOW BUSINESS TOO

Debbie Reynolds' brother William was a makeup artist who worked on shows like *The Waltons* and *Eight Is Enough*, and before that, for [Elvis Presley](#). Apparently Elvis used to play all kinds of tricks on him, putting popcorn in his pants or worse, snakes.

During an interview with [Alec Baldwin](#) for his NPR show *Here's The Thing*, Debbie learned that her brother had been Baldwin's makeup artist for a year and a half on *Knot's Landing*. Baldwin says it was "Billy" who helped him survive the experience: he always reminded Baldwin to bring a book with him, since he knew it would be hours before the show's notorious divas, [Joan Collins](#) among them, would leave the makeup chair free.

SHE'S A MEMORABILIA MAVEN

Reynolds started buying up classic movie props and costumes in 1970. She created one of the greatest personal collections ever assembled, a combination of items she purchased and gifts from her famous friends. Rat Packer [Joey Bishop](#) joked that she was a "nutcake" for wanting his old pants, but the five Rat Pack tuxes together were valued at \$30,000 - \$50,000 last year. Some of her other big ticket items included a pair of ruby slippers from *The Wizard of Oz*, one of Scarlett O'Hara's dresses from *Gone With The Wind*, a bowler hat of [Charlie Chaplin's](#), [Orson Welles'](#) fur coat from *Citizen Kane*, and a [Harpo Marx](#) wig.

While she has sold off most of her collection – much-needed after she filed for bankruptcy in 1997 – she has kept a few of her favorite items, most notably a *Maltese Falcon* from the movie of the same name.



Carrie Fisher and mom Debbie Reynolds in 2014. (Photo: Helga Esteb / Shutterstock.com)

SHE DIDN'T BELIEVE ALBERT BROOKS HAD THE CLOUT TO CAST HER IN HIS OWN MOVIE

[Carrie Fisher](#) convinced her to meet with [Albert Brooks](#) for the movie *Mother*, having loved the script. Reynolds read for him, and Brooks thought she was perfect, so he told her she had the part. She sweetly explained to him that she'd still have to meet with the director to get approval. He told her he was the director. She replied that he'd need the producer's approval, then. He explained that he was the producer, the director, and that it was his movie, and he wanted to cast her. "You can't just suddenly hire Debbie," she told him, worried that he'd get in trouble with his superiors. Eventually, he was able to convince her that he was indeed the decision-maker, and the part was hers.

SHE'S NICE, EVEN WHEN YOU HURT HER

In 1997, Reynolds guest starred on the sitcom *Roseanne* as Dan ([John Goodman](#)'s) mother, recently released from a psychiatric institution. At one point in HBO's *Behind The Candelabra*, she's always given it her all. She once broke her ankle during a performance, and went back on stage with her foot in a bucket of ice to finish the show. Carrie Fisher's word for her mother's perseverance: the ability to "sur-thrive": a lifetime achievement indeed.

"The show must go on," seems to have been written with Debbie Reynolds in mind. From her first movie role in 1948 to her most recent turn as [Liberace's](#) mother in HBO's *Behind The Candelabra*, she's always given it her all. She once broke her ankle during a performance, and went back on stage with her foot in a bucket of ice to finish the show. Carrie Fisher's word for her mother's perseverance: the ability to "sur-thrive": a lifetime achievement indeed.

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