

# With the death of Fred Rogers, it's a sad day in the neighborhood



PHOTO COURTESY OF KRT CAMPUS

Fred Rogers and his wife, Joanne.

by Hal Boedeker  
The Orlando Sentinel

Pause for a moment today and remember all the people who have helped you along. Mister Rogers would like that.

"No one of us gets to be a competent adult without other people taking an interest in us, without loving us," he used to say.

For more than 30 years, Fred Rogers helped millions of children and parents with the lessons of love, kindness and friendship he delivered on public television's "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." That sprawling and appreciative population now mourns him.

Rogers died early Feb. 27 of cancer at his Pittsburgh home. He was 74. He had been diagnosed with stomach cancer shortly after the holidays, family spokesman David Newell said.

Rogers met his wife, Joanne, when they were both music majors at Rollins College in Winter Park, Fla. In 1991, the college laid a stone in his honor in its Walk of Fame, right outside the house where he lived as a student.

He called Rollins "a nurturing neighborhood for me, just the right place to learn and grow. Some of the most enduring friendships I have in this life began at Rollins."

His death was the top story on morning news programs. "He created a safe place for kids on TV," said Harry Smith of CBS' "The Early Show."

He is survived "by his wife, Joanne:

two sons, two grandsons and millions of grateful neighbors," Katie Couric said on NBC's "Today."

Diane Sawyer of ABC's "Good Morning America" said she hoped the 900 episodes of his show would run forever and recalled the special treat of interviewing him.

"When he'd come to the studio, he would end it always by hugging you, hugging members of the crew and saying, 'Think about what you're doing today' to remind everybody this isn't just a job. It's your life you're creating," Sawyer said.

It's a lesson that people in the television business would do well to ponder a day after the cheesiest ratings period ended. Flooding the airwaves were the sagas of a deluded pop star, a fake millionaire and pampered celebrities in the Australian jungle.

The foolish programs catered to the lowest common denominator, unlike the classy Rogers. But he wouldn't criticize others. That wasn't his style.

Rather, the ordained Presbyterian minister tried to reach the best in his audiences. During a 1997 awards ceremony in Los Angeles, he received a career achievement award from the nation's television critics.

He followed a dirty joke by Drew Carey and several giddy acceptance speeches with a story about a monastery where the number of monks dwindled. The problem: Success replaced love.

"I realize more and more that even if we do all the right things in television scripting and production and editing and

promotion, even if we should deliver the perfect program that everybody in the world would see, if we don't have love for the people we're working with and the audiences we're working for, our whole industry will someday dwindle," Rogers told the audience.

"Love and success, always in that order. It's that simple and that difficult."

He followed that approach on his program, which was produced from 1968 to 2000 at WQED, the Pittsburgh public television station.

The last first-run episode of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" was made in December 2000, but didn't air until August 2001.

He was much loved everywhere. His sweet singing of the show's theme ("it's a lovely day in this neighborhood"), his cardigan sweater and his gentle voice delighted young viewers and reassured parents that there was an oasis of beauty in an increasingly coarse medium.

"His legacy will be that he made millions of children feel safe and comforted in a time when so much of the bombardment of the media is overwhelming," said Linda Ellerbee.

The veteran newswoman, who has won acclaim for her Nick News programs, called Rogers a wonderful example. "For everything that we all agree is bad about television and children, he was the good of it," she said. "Nothing is as bad as he was good."

Audiences serenaded Rogers wherever he went. One of his sweaters hangs at the Smithsonian. Eddie Murphy spoofed him with "Mister Robinson's Neighborhood," a "Saturday Night Live" skit that Mister Rogers enjoyed.

Beyond the trappings and fame, "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" touched on serious themes, from war to love to feelings. He was gratified to hear parents, who grew up with the program, say they were sharing it with their children.

"If those parents can, through watching again, recapture some of their own childhood, that's going to help them be in tune with their children and their growth," Rogers said in 1997.

In later years, in appearances at the White House and the Daytime Emmy Awards, Rogers asked audiences to remember "the extra special people" who had helped them. He asked for a half-minute of silence.

"I'll watch the time," he would say. People would laugh, then grow silent. Many would be in tears later.

"Wherever they are, how pleased the people you've been thinking about must be," he said afterward. "My hunch is, that besides me, there are many others in this life who often think about you and all that you've done for them."

Millions are pausing now for another reason: Thank you, Mister Rogers.

# Miramax films dominate the Oscar nominations

by Terry Lawson  
Knight Ridder Newspapers

"Chicago" was their kind of movie, and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences proved it by showering a whopping 13 Oscar nominations on the movie version of Bob Fosse's musical. But the biggest winner at the 75th Academy Awards nominations was Harvey Weinstein.

The chairman of Miramax not only shepherded "Chicago" through nearly 10 years of development but presided over the three-year public relations disaster that was "Gangs of New York," which repaid his bluster with 10 nominations.

As icing on his cake, Miramax has the overseas distribution rights to "The Hours," which received eight nominations, and it has a financial piece of "The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers," which Miramax developed before turning it over to New Line.

After a couple of years of being shuffled off to the Oscar sidelines with little but showy but empty candidates like "Chocolat," the man who virtually invented modern Oscar campaigning reminded the competition that this was how it was done. First, you produce great movies. Then you convince the 5,816 members of the academy that those movies were great with a barrage of advertising and hype.

Miramax also pulled off a couple of minor coups by securing a best actress nomination for Salma Hayek in "Frida" and a supporting actress nomination for Queen Latifah in "Chicago."

Meryl Streep, who could have had nominations in either of those categories for "The Hours," had to console herself with becoming the most-nominated actress in Oscar history courtesy of her supporting actress nod for "Adaptation." She now has 13 nominations, surpassing Katharine Hepburn's 12.

There were few bona fide surprises in Tuesday's announcements, save for the relatively poor showing of "Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers." While the first installment of the trilogy led the nomination tally last year with 13, the second installment earned only six for a film that both critics and audiences considered superior to the first.

Director Peter Jackson suffered a major snub by being shut out in the best di-

rector race. His spot was taken by Spain's Pedro Almodovar, whose "Talk to Her," unlike the films of the other directing nominees, was not nominated for best picture.

(The Is-My-Face-Red award goes to this writer, who confidently predicted Monday that neither first-time director Rob Marshall of "Chicago" or convicted felon Roman Polanski, director of "The Pianist," would be recognized by the academy. Both were.)

The film with the most nominations has won the best picture category for 18 of the past 20 years, which bolsters the view that "Chicago" is essentially a lock to become the first musical to win best picture since "Oliver!" in 1968. Still, it is a long shot to win most of the other categories in which it was nominated, including best song.

Julianne Moore undoubtedly has mixed emotions. Yes, she became only the ninth actor ever to be nominated twice in one year, and the first ever to be nominated in two categories for two pictures — supporting actress for "The Hours" and best actress for "Far From Heaven." But she had to feel disappointment at the overall performance of "Far From Heaven." It failed to receive a best-picture nomination or a best-director nomination for her friend Todd Haynes. And perhaps most grievously, her costar, Dennis Quaid, was overlooked for best supporting actor. Perhaps the acad-



PHOTO COURTESY OF KRT CAMPUS

Miramax's "Chicago" swept the Oscar nominations this year with 13.

emy thought that nominating two straight men playing gay roles — Ed Harris did make the cut for "The Hours" — would just be tacky.

Of course, any supporting actor debate is practically moot. Paul Newman, in "The Road to Perdition," will probably be a near-unanimous sentimental choice by the time of the March 23 ceremony. (The late cinematographer Conrad Hall, also nominated for "Perdition," automatically becomes the front-runner as well.)

That "Gangs of New York's" Martin Scorsese will finally win the best-director prize he was denied for "Raging Bull" and "Goodfellas" is a foregone conclusion. But with Oscars, foregone conclusions often can become formidable mistakes in judgment.

Lost in all the "Chicago" hoopla were a couple of small victories. Just a few days ago, Variety announced that the triumph of computer animation over the traditional hand-drawn style could have dramatic ramifications for Walt Disney Studios. On Tuesday, Oscar voters gave four of the five animated-feature nominations to films that were primarily hand-drawn, and three of those were Disney films. They included the probable winner "Lilo & Stitch," and "Treasure Planet," whose box-office failure prompted Disney to take a \$75 million tax writeoff.

Fortunately, Miramax is a wholly owned Disney subsidiary.

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