

Dennis Day Biography

Patrick Andre

Owen Patrick Eugene McNulty was born on May 21, 1916 in the Bronx. He sang in the choir of St. Benedict's Church and later at St. Patrick's Cathedral. He graduated second in his class from Manhattan College with hopes of being a lawyer, whereafter he received the Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia's vocational scholarship. He was convinced to try for a career in show business and took his grandmother's maiden name that had the more professional ring of Dennis Day.

In 1939, Kenny Baker, who played the dim-witted tenor on the *The Jack Benny Radio Program*, was offered his own show and decided to leave the Jack Benny cast. To fill the void, an audition list was drawn up. Benny's wife, Mary Livingstone, had heard Dennis Day sing "I Never Knew Heaven Could Speak," a recording given to her, which Day recorded of himself. She had added Day's name to the list and he was eventually chosen over 100 other singers. This working relationship with Benny would last over twenty-five years and included radio, television, and even several movies including the 1940 movie hit, *Buck Benny Rides Again*. Day was also a mimic and would perform impressions of famous celebrities including Ronald Colman, Jimmy Durante, and James Stewart.

In 1944, Dennis Day joined the navy and entertained the troops for two years. In 1946, while still singing on *The Jack Benny Radio Program*, Day was given a radio show of his own. Titled *A Day in the Life of Dennis Day* as a play on his name, the series ran for five years until 1951. In the midst of this series Day, a devout Catholic, married Margaret Ellen Almquist, a film and radio singer, in 1948. Their marriage produced ten children.

In the 1950's, '60s and '70s Day would appear on a variety of television shows, and be heard doing voiceover for animated shows. His time on television included his own *Dennis Day Show* starting in February 1952 and running until 1954. But he would stay with Jack Benny until the storied series' final program in 1965. Although 49 by then, Day was the perpetual youngster and Benny would still say, "That crazy kid drives me nuts..." Their last appearance together was in 1970 for a public service announcement.

All told, Dennis Day is credited with 11 movies and 21 television shows. Day was particular and would refuse roles he thought objectionable. Also, for a period of time he and his wife ran an antique shop, but his fine tenor voice was his life-long trademark.

In 1987 Day was diagnosed with ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease. Day died the next year on June 22, 1988 in Bel Air, California. He was survived by his wife, his children, and thirteen grandchildren. He was 72 years old.

Information for this biography was taken from John Dunning's *The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio*, from the AmericanRadioHistory.com website, from the Internet Movie Database, and from Wikipedia.



See also: <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=106868951>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dennis_Day

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0206376/>

The Radio and Television Mirror, January 1940:

<http://www.americanradiohistory.com/Archive-Radio-Mirror/40/Mirror-1940-Jan.pdf>

John Dunning's *The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio*