

John William Carson was born on October 23, 1925 in Corning, Iowa and grew up in Norfolk, Nebraska. His lifelong interest in magic started when he was 12 years old. He performed for bridge clubs and church socials as a magician and comic by the name of "The Great Carsoni."

He began his broadcasting career in 1950 at WOW radio and television in Omaha. Next, he hosted a morning television program called *The Squirrel's Nest*. He moved to Hollywood shortly after his work on *The Squirrel's Nest* and became a staff announcer at KNXT (now KCBS in Los Angeles). Carson also wrote for the *Red Skelton Show*. As a result of a concussion suffered by Skelton, Carson was a last minute host on Skelton's show doing a monologue he wrote on the way to the studio.

While still writing for Skelton, one of Carson's on air adventures at KNXT included the five minute *Carson's Coffee Break* where he had invited Red as a guest for several weeks in a row. When Red came on, he was never allowed to speak as they always ran out of time. Finally, Red Skelton tied Johnny up and took over the show.

While he was at CBS, he could be seen hosting such programs as *Carson's Cellar* from 1951 to 1953, *The Johnny Carson Show*, a half-hour prime time television variety show that ran from June 30, 1955 to March 29, 1956 and a morning show also was titled *The Johnny Carson Show* that began in May 1956, but ran only through the summer. He stayed with CBS until 1956 and moved to ABC in 1957.

In 1957, replacing Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, Carson took over the prime time game show *Do You Trust Your Wife?*

This series launched him into the public consciousness. When the show returned as a daytime show on ABC on September 30, 1957, it kept the *Do You Trust Your Wife?* title until July 1958 when it was renamed *Who Do You Trust?* In March 1962, Carson was asked to take over from Jack Paar on *The Tonight Show*, but he still had six months remaining on his contract with ABC which he fulfilled.

During the late 1950's and early 1960's, Johnny Carson could be seen on such programs as *The Garry Moore Show*, *I've Got A Secret* and *To Tell The Truth*. Johnny Carson was asked to fill in for Jack Paar as guest host of *The Tonight Show* in 1958.

He made his *Tonight Show* debut on October 1, 1962. The program originated from New York. His first guests that night were Rudy Vallée, Tony Bennett, Mel Brooks, and Joan Crawford. Groucho Marx was on hand to introduce Carson to the audience.

He moved the *Tonight Show* from New York to Burbank, California in 1972 at NBC in Studio 1.

Carson retired as host of *The Tonight Show* on May 22, 1992, at age 66. Later that year, *The Tonight Show* won the Emmy for Outstanding Late-Night Series after 13 tries.

NBC gave the role of host to the show's then-current permanent guest host, Jay Leno. By 1993, Leno and David Letterman were soon competing on separate networks.

Among the awards Johnny Carson received: He was inducted into the Television Hall of Fame in 1987; was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1992; was honored at the Kennedy Center Awards in 1993.

At the end of his final Tonight Show episode, Carson indicated that he might, if so inspired, return with a new project. Instead, he chose to go into full retirement, rarely giving interviews and declining to participate in NBC's 75th Anniversary celebrations. He made an occasional cameo appearance, including voicing himself on the May 13, 1993, episode of *The Simpsons* ("Krusty Gets Kancelled"), telephoning David Letterman on a November 1993 episode of *Late Show with David Letterman* and appearing in the 1993 NBC special *Bob Hope: The First 90 Years*.

On May 13, 1994, Carson appeared on the *Late Show with David Letterman*. During a week of shows from Los Angeles, Letterman was having Larry "Bud" Melman (Calvert DeForest) deliver his "Top Ten Lists" under the guise that a famous personality would be delivering the list, instead. On the last show of the week, Letterman indicated that Carson would be delivering the list. Instead, DeForest delivered the list, insulted the audience (in keeping with the gag) and walked off to polite applause. Letterman then indicated that the card he was given did not have the proper list on it and asked that the "real" list be brought out. On that cue, the real Carson emerged from behind the curtain (as Letterman's band played "Johnny's Theme"), an appearance that prompted a standing ovation from the audience. Carson then asked to sit behind Letterman's desk. Letterman obliged, as the audience continued to cheer and applaud. After some moments, Carson departed from the show without having spoken to the audience. He later cited acute laryngitis as the reason for his

silence. This turned out to be Johnny Carson's final television appearance.

Quotes from Johnny Carson:

"My name is Johnny Carson, I've devoted a lifetime to comedy and the next 90 minutes are going to seem like a lifetime to you."

"If life was fair, Elvis would be alive and all the impersonators would be dead."

"I know a man who gave up smoking, drinking, sex and rich food. He was healthy right up to the time he killed himself."

"Ed and I were out last night and I asked him why he drank so much. He said he drank to forget. I asked him, "To forget what?" And he said he couldn't remember."

"I was so naive as a kid I used to sneak behind the barn and do nothing."