

‘Golden Girl’ Rue McClanahan Dies at 76

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on June 3, 2010 - 2:06pm

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CHICAGO – Rue McClanahan, the vivacious Southern Belle from “The Golden Girls,” died this morning at age 76. Her death comes just days after the passing of two other prominent figures in show business, Gary Coleman and Dennis Hopper. Earlier this year, McClanahan had suffered a minor stroke after recovering from bypass surgery, and it was a massive stroke on the morning of Thursday, June 3rd, that proved to be fatal. She was reportedly surrounded by her family when she passed at 1 a.m.

Born in Healdton, Okla., McClanahan attended the University of Tulsa before moving to New York City, where she eventually landed roles in the theatre. It was there that producer Norman Lear discovered her, and decided to cast her in an episode of “All in the Family.” She then landed a recurring role on the show’s popular spinoff series, “Maude,” opposite Bea Arthur. Her next major television role was on the short-lived “Mama’s Family,” co-starring Betty White.

In 1985, McClanahan re-teamed with Arthur and White for the show that would land her a permanent place in television history. For eight seasons, McClanahan played the saucy, sharp-witted, and flirtatious Blanche Devereaux on “The Golden Girls.” The role garnered her various accolades, including three Emmy nominations and one win, as well as devoted fans of all ages. McClanahan’s death comes just a year after Arthur died, and two years after her other co-star, Estelle Getty, passed. This leaves White the last surviving cast member of the much-beloved and influential television series.

McClanahan also appeared in several films, including “They Might Be Giants,” “Out to Sea” and “Starship Troopers.” Apart from her work onscreen, McClanahan was also a lifelong animal welfare advocate and vegetarian. She also lectured about her battle with breast cancer at various support groups.

In 2005, McClanahan returned to the stage, playing Madame Morrible in the Broadway production of “Wicked,” and in 2007, she released her memoir, “My First Five Husbands...And the Ones Who Got Away.” Last year, she made her final television appearances on episodes of “Law & Order” and Tyler Perry’s “Meet the Browns.” Our condolences go out to her husband, Morrow Wilson, and her son, Mark Bish.

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