

## Entertainment News: Comic Legend Joan Rivers Dies at 81

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NEW YORK CITY – There are legends, and then there is Joan Rivers. The comedian and show business survivor had a life journey as an influential star from the 1960s all the way to the end of her life. Joan Rivers died on September 4th, 2014, in New York City after suffering respiratory failure last weekend.

Joan Alexandra Molinsky was born in Brooklyn, New York, and was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate from Barnard College. As she developed her comic act, her agent at the time – Tony Rivers – suggested a name change, so Joan took his last name as hers. She was fired by Rivers as a result. Her training in comedy included a seven-month stint at The Second City in Chicago, but she got her feet wet in the comedy clubs in New York City in the 1960s, which included fellow comedy performers like George Carlin, Richard Pryor, Lenny Bruce and Woody Allen. She moved into television with “Candid Camera” and made her first appearance on Johnny Carson’s Tonight Show in 1965.

As the 1960s and ‘70s progressed, Rivers appeared on variety shows like “The Ed Sullivan Show” and “The Carol Burnett Show,” and became the favorite guest host of Johnny Carson when he vacationed from “The Tonight Show.” She dabbled in films, supporting Burt Lancaster in the classic “The Swimmer” (1968) and directed one film, the experimental “Rabbit Test,” starring Billy Crystal.

It was the Carson connection, and her continuing stand-up career, that launched her into national prominence. The fledging FOX TV Network lured her away from guest hosting to launching her own talk show, “The Late Show Starring Joan Rivers” in 1986. The relationship between Joan Rivers and Johnny Carson was never the same again, as Carson thought he had been slighted in the move. Rivers did not appear on “The Tonight Show” again until March of 2014. Her short-lived talk show only lasted a year, as Rivers’ husband Edgar Rosenberg caused tension as executive producer, and the network fired them both. Rosenberg committed suicide three months after the firing, and Rivers always blamed the FOX Network humiliation.

Joan Rivers was all about re-invention, and after the FOX debacle, she had a successful daytime talk show in the 1990s, and began to do red carpets interviews in 1994 for the E! Entertainment Network. That relationship lasted until the end of her life, as she also starred in “Fashion Police” for the network, and made memorable appearances over the years on “Celebrity Apprentice,” the WE-TV reality show “Joan and Melissa: Joan Knows Best” and on the Louis C.K. show “Louie.”

Rivers was married twice, and birthed her one daughter and show business partner Melissa Rivers in 1968. Joan Rivers died after complications following throat surgery on August 28th, 2014. She never recovered after she stopped breathing during the procedure, and passed away on September 4th. She is survived by Melissa Rivers and one grandson, Cooper Endicott.

On the next page is a 2010 interview conducted with Joan Rivers by Patrick McDonald of HollywoodChicago.com, and published here for the first time. In this extensive career overview, she talks about everything, in the brassy and profane way that was her trademark. The spirit of Lenny Bruce had better watch out. Click page two for Joan Rivers, in her own words.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Since you began your comedy career in an era when there were restrictions on bad language and controversial subject matter, do you think it’s easier or harder to do comedy with less restrictions?

**Joan Rivers:** No, you change with the times. It’s getting wilder because you are allowed to get wilder now. You don’t know that you’re saying “f\*ck” and “c\*nt” and all that. Everybody is doing it now. Kathy Griffith is a very good friend of mine and I went and saw her act the other night and she was wonderful. I listened to her language and thought, ‘Gee, mine isn’t so bad’ [laughs].

Life now is rougher and tougher, and comedy reflects that. I’ve never made a conscious decision about what I talk about in my act or where it is going. It just evolved. I get on stage, and whatever feels right that’s what I do.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You have a distinct Chicago connection. What clubs did you play here in your early career?

**Rivers:** I played the Gate of Horn [Chicago Avenue and Dearborn], Mister Kelly's [on Rush Street, now known as Gibson's] and I came out of The Second City. I was at The Second City for seven months and it was fabulous, and kicked off a lot of wonderful things. In those days I performed with Alan Arkin, David Steinberg and even Mike Nichols came and directed a show.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You seemed to be on the cutting edge of the revolutionary acting and performance scene of New York City during your early career. What do you think New York had then that it doesn't have now and why?

**Rivers:** I don't know and I don't care. New York now is so exciting and so terrific, because comedy is so exciting now, because you can say anything. The only thing New York had in the early 1960s were these wonderful little coffee shops where you could break in, which they don't have now. You could go down Bleecker Street and there would be George Carlin appearing in one, Richard Pryor in another and me in a third. And that's all gone now.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You were honing your stand-up act in the days when women weren't necessarily encouraged to be stand ups. What kind of sexism did you encounter in your early days?

**Rivers:** There has never been sexism in comedy. I think that if you're funny, you're funny, and no one could care less if you are a man, woman or child. It's rubbish. The fact that women weren't allowed to be funny is bullshit. Let's talk about Mae West, Fanny Brice, Lucille Ball; it just isn't true. It's just that few women chose to be in that field. So it looked like women weren't allowed in. But it was never said to me, ever, that its not a woman's field.

But I live so much in the present. I've done the memoirs and I let it go. It's what's happening now that is so interesting and fun. There is so much comedic fodder, and you don't have to look back, it's in your face now.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What is the main difference in television production between when you were starting out on 'Candid Camera' and 'The Tonight Show' and what you observe today?

**Rivers:** None. Think about it, 'Candid Camera' was one of the first reality shows. And 'The Tonight Show' hasn't changed. It's exactly the same [makes snoring sounds]. That's what makes it so boring. The hosts, the guests, the guest chair, the couch. Late night hasn't changed one iota, and they should be ashamed of themselves.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What did you do different when you got your Fox late night show in 1986?

**Rivers:** We started doing the out-on-the-street packages, where you go outside and talk to people, which has become standard. We were the first to ask deeper questions, nobody gives a shit that you were happy on the movie set. We opened it up.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You knew Johnny Carson as both a show business mentor and personally. What was the main difference between Johnny the public persona and Johnny the Private Man?

**Rivers:** He had a drinking problem. He was not a very nice person in private life. They always say the camera doesn't lie. The camera lies a lot. Having said that, he was the king of late-night comedy. He was the most brilliant of all the late-night show hosts, and he was a brilliant straight man who knew just the right question. I have utmost respect for what he did.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Why do you think he had such a problem with interpersonal relationships?

**Rivers:** I think all comedians do. Comedians are very damaged people. I'm very angry and very damaged [laughs]. It has taken a lot to achieve what I've achieved in my private life, holding together my family. That's because I wanted it very much. Comedians are outsiders. If we were insiders we couldn't make the jokes about all this stuff.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You made a famous cameo in the Burt Lancaster film 'The Swimmer.' Why did you decide not to do more film in that era, waiting ten years until 'Rabbit Test'?

**Rivers:** I didn't decide, nobody asked me. It's a very strange business, and you go where the work is, and you never know that the work will be. If you hang around and wait for what you think is right for you, you can end up waiting your whole life.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** I noted that the film 'Rabbit Test' – which you directed – was the first film to be shot on video and then transferred to film stock. Why did you decide to do it that way what did you have to go through to get it produced with you as director?

**Rivers:** We did it on tape because we couldn't afford film. It worked out well because tape was cheaper than film. It took away a little of the preciseness, but we saved money and got the result. It took a lot for me to be a director on that. It is the one thing I'm really not good at, being a director. I'm thrilled I gave it a shot, I love the writing and editing, but I just did not particularly like the directing.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Are you pleased that you went through an evolution in woman's rights, to give you more freedom to advance your career?

**Rivers:** I truly believe that I want to live my life how I want to live. I'm law-abiding, I pay taxes and the rest is none of your business. The past is the past and the reason I think I stay so current is that I don't care. I'm always thinking 'what am I doing today, what am I planning for tomorrow?'

**HollywoodChicago.com:** If you could magically conjure one person from your long career to talk to again, who would it be and what would you say to them?

**Rivers:** Probably Lenny Bruce, and I'd say 'do your act again for me' [laughs].

Source for this article from Wikipedia and Yahoo.com. Joan Rivers, 1933-2014.



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