



# Elinor Donahue

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**Mary Eleanor Donahue** (born April 19, 1937), credited as **Elinor Donahue**, is an American actress, best remembered today for playing the role of Betty Anderson, the eldest child of Robert Young and Jane Wyatt, on the 1950s American sitcom *Father Knows Best*.

## Early life and career

Donahue was born in Tacoma, Washington, the daughter of Doris Genevieve (née Gelbaugh) and Thomas William Donahue.<sup>[2]</sup>

Appearing in dancing-chorus film roles from the age of five, Donahue was at one point a ballet-school classmate of future Fred Astaire partner Barrie Chase. She was a child actress working in vaudeville and had several bit parts in movies as a teenager, including *Love Is Better Than Ever* (1952), starring Elizabeth Taylor. She played one of the daughters in *Three Daring Daughters* in 1948 and appeared as Mamie Van Doren's sister in *Girls Town* (1959).

## Father Knows Best

Donahue achieved stardom for her role as the elder daughter, Betty, on the television family series *Father Knows Best*. Her co-stars were Robert Young, Jane Wyatt, Billy Gray as her younger brother, James "Bud" Anderson, Jr., and Lauren Chapin as her younger sister, Kathy.

Donahue was a musical judge in ABC's *Jukebox Jury* (1953–54).<sup>[3]</sup> While in the first season of *Father Knows Best* she also appeared on *The Ray Bolger Show*, starring Ray Bolger as a song-and-dance man. Thereafter, she was cast with James Best, Ann Doran, and J. Carol Naish in the 1956 episode "The White Carnation" of the religion anthology series, *Crossroads*. She guest starred on an episode of U.S.

### Elinor Donahue



Donahue in 1960

<b>Born</b>	Mary Eleanor Donahue April 19, 1937 <u>Tacoma, Washington, US</u>
<b>Other names</b>	Mary Elinor Donahue
<b>Occupation(s)</b>	Actress, Singer
<b>Years active</b>	1942–present
<b>Spouse(s)</b>	<u>Richard Smith</u> (1955–61; divorced) <u>Harry Ackerman</u> (1962–91; his death)

Marshal. She also appeared as a new bride in the George Burns and Gracie Allen Show episode titled "The Newlyweds" that aired April 2, 1956.<sup>[4]</sup>

	Lou Genevriano (1992–present)
<b>Children</b>	Chris, Brian, Peter, and James Ackerman <sup>[1]</sup>

## 1960s to 1980s

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She played Georgiana Balanger in the episode "Dennis and the Wedding" (1960) on Dennis the Menace.<sup>[5]</sup> Donahue was also cast, in 1960, with Marion Ross in an episode ("Duet") of The Brothers Brannagan. She played Miriam Welby on ABC's The Odd Couple, Jane Mulligan on Mulligan's Stew, and Nurse Hunnicut on Days of Our Lives.

She was featured in 12 episodes of CBS's The Andy Griffith Show as pharmacist Ellie Walker, even getting a mention in the opening credits. The character was intended to be a love interest for Sheriff Andy Taylor, but after one season (1960–1961), Donahue decided to ask for a release from her three-year contract.<sup>[6]</sup>

In 1963, Donahue was cast in an episode of NBC's short-lived modern Western series, Redigo, with Richard Egan as the rancher Jim Redigo; then in 1964, she appeared as Melanie in "The Secret in the Stone" in the NBC medical drama dealing with psychiatry, The Eleventh Hour, starring Jack Ging and Ralph Bellamy.

Additionally, on February 9, 1963, she played Letty May in the episode "The Burning Tree" on Have Gun Will Travel.

In the 1964–65 season, Donahue costarred as Joan Randall, the daughter of Walter Burnley, played by John McGiver, on the CBS sitcom, Many Happy Returns about the complaint department of a fictitious Los Angeles department store. She guest-appeared on Star Trek in the second-season episode "Metamorphosis" (1967) as commissioner Nancy Hedford.

In 1966, she guest starred on the TV series A Man Called Shenandoah, episode 8, "Town On Fire."

Donahue portrayed Miriam Welby in 17 episodes of The Odd Couple (1972–75).

Donahue appeared in a 1981 episode of One Day at a Time, as Alex's mother Felicia.

Donahue portrayed the sister of Sister Bertrille (Sally Field) in three episodes of ABC's The Flying Nun (1968–70). In 1977, she appeared in an episode of the ABC crime drama The Feather and Father Gang. In 1978, Donahue starred in the NBC sitcom Please Stand By. In 1984, she made an appearance as Mrs. Broderick, the mother of a teenaged drug addict on the last season of Happy Days.

In 1987, she played the title character's mother in the short-lived Fox series The New Adventures of Beans Baxter. In 1988, she appeared in a Newhart episode ("Courtin' Disaster") and appeared (in a 1989 episode) on The Golden Girls as the newest wife of Dorothy Zbornak's ex-husband.

## 1990s and later

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In 1990, she played Bridget, a Beverly Hills clothing-store manager, in the film Pretty Woman. Donahue played Gladys, the mother of Chris Peterson (Chris Elliott), in all 35 episodes of the sitcom Get a Life (1990–92), and had a recurring role as Rebecca Quinn on the CBS drama series Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman.

In 1991, she portrayed the "Orphanage woman" in *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare*.

In 1992, she voiced the mother on the *Fox Kids* animated series *Eek! the Cat*. In 1994, she made an appearance as Aunt Lillian in "*The One Where Nana Dies Twice*", an episode of *Friends*. She played the part of Lorraine, Luther Van Dam's girlfriend, in season five of *Coach* in the early 1990s.

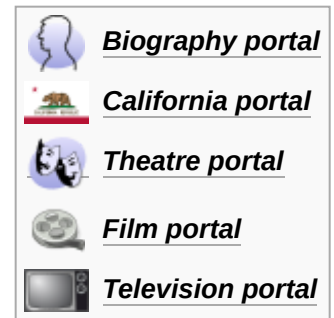
In 1998, Donahue published a memoir entitled *In the Kitchen with Elinor Donahue*, in which she relived some of her memories of Hollywood along with providing more than 150 of her recipes.<sup>[7]</sup>

In September 2010, Donahue made an appearance on *The Young and the Restless* as Judge Anderson, one of Nikki Newman's old friends and also as the woman minister who will officiate at the wedding of Billy Abbott and Nikki's daughter, Victoria Newman. The wedding took place in front of the Abbott's new home, which just happened to be an exact replica of the Anderson house from *Father Knows Best*.

## References

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1. Profile (<http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20097226,00.htm>), people.com; accessed April 19, 2014.
2. "Elinor Donahue Biography" (<http://www.filmreference.com/film/40/Elinor-Donahue.html>). FilmReference.com.
3. *Jukebox Jury*: Research Video, Inc.: Music Footing Licensing Agency and Vintage Television Footage Archive
4. "'The Newlyweds', April 2, 1956" ([https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1601727/?ref\\_=nm\\_flmg\\_act\\_83](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1601727/?ref_=nm_flmg_act_83)). Internet Movie Data Base. Retrieved August 17, 2015.
5. "'Dennis and the Wedding', October 9, 1960" (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0557920>). Internet Movie Data Base. Retrieved February 9, 2013.
6. "Archive of American Television" (<http://www.emmytvlegends.org/interviews/people/elinor-donahue>). Retrieved 7 July 2012.
7. Donahue, E. (1998). *In the Kitchen with Elinor Donahue*. ISBN 1-888952-92-X



## Further reading

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- Dye, David. *Child and Youth Actors: Filmography of Their Entire Careers, 1914-1985*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1988, pp. 58-59.

## External links

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- [Elinor Donahue](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0231942/) (<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0231942/>) at IMDb
- [Elinor Donahue interview](http://www.emmytvlegends.org/interviews/people/elinor-donahue) (<http://www.emmytvlegends.org/interviews/people/elinor-donahue>) at Archive of American Television

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