

Danny Kaye Kathy Hammel

Danny Kaye was often described as a Renaissance man, multitalented with a diverse collection of skills and abilities. Not only was he an actor, singer, dancer, and comedian, but he was also an accomplished Chinese chef, a pilot, a symphony orchestra conductor, as well as a humanitarian who was honored with both the French Legion of Honor and a Presidential Medal of Freedom. Other awards included Oscars, Emmys, Golden Globes and Peabodys. He even owned a baseball team. In addition, he was a father to one daughter and a mentor to many other children through his many charitable works.

David Daniel Kaminsky was born on January 18, to Russian Immigrant parents. His birth year was either 1913 or 1911. 1913 is the more widely used birthdate but his daughter later claimed it was actually 1911. He is said to have been an entertaining youngster. From the age of 5 he was singing and dancing at Jewish weddings.

Kaye ended up dropping out of high school and became a tummler – someone whose job it was to clown around and entertain guests at Borscht Belt resorts in the Catskill Mountains. It wasn't long before he found himself on Broadway in minor roles. In 1939 he met his future wife, Sylvia Fine, and life just got better from there. They married in 1940 and Sylvia took his career into her capable hands, writing and editing his material as well as vetting those who worked with him.

By 1943 Danny made the move to Hollywood with a contract by Samuel Goldwyn and made quite a few movies. He'd done a few minor radio roles in the 1940s, but wanted to do more. In January 1945 the half-hour variety show *The Danny Kay Show* sponsored by Pabst Blue Ribbon beer debuted on CBS. With a weekly show budget of \$16,000, his income was much better than the \$100 his few earlier radio appearances garnered. Eve Arden, Lionel Stander and Butterfly McQueen were some of the recurring actors on the show.

While Danny himself was not able to serve in the military due to back problems, he did go off to entertain the troops. He did that through WWII, and continued on during the wars in Korea and Vietnam. At the same time Kaye continued to gain fame and kudos for his efforts on the big screen. The man had boundless energy.

As popular as Kaye was in motion pictures and personal appearances, the radio show would last for only a season and a half, ending in May 1946. Kaye's brand of zany comedy was better when he could be seen and not just heard. He continued to make movies and shortly his radio show translated well to television where his physical comedy and facial expressions were better appreciated.

Well before the time of his death on March 3, 1987, Danny Kaye had become extremely popular in the United States and Great Britain. His public appearances had been as uproarious as the Beatles were in their time. His wife Sylvia said of his life, "Walter Mitty dreamed it, Danny Kaye lived it."

In an article on Danny Kaye at the UNICEF website, they quote a Hollywood writer who once wrote, "If Danny Kaye had not been born, no one could possibly have invented him. It would have been stretching credibility far past the breaking point." An apt memorial for a man of so many talents who touched so many lives in such a wonderful way.