

Tallulah Bankhead
Kathy Hammel

Tallulah Bankhead once said of herself, "Nobody can be exactly like me. Sometimes even I have trouble doing it."

Indeed, she was quite a unique personality and somewhat of a triple threat. She was talented, driven and beautiful. She was also strong-willed, flamboyant and uninhibited. A trio of traits that may well have led to her eventual downfall.

Tallulah's Alabama family was prominent and well off. Her grandfather was a Senator, her father soon to be a Congressman. Being born to an American "Aristocratic" family in January of 1902, she grew up with many privileges, though having a mother wasn't one of them. Her mother died from sepsis within a few weeks of Tallulah's birth, and her grieving father handed over her care and that of her elder sister to their grandmother.

Unfortunately for grandmother, the girls were a handful. Tallulah especially seemed to need to be the center of everything. She would sing and dance and perform for family guests, reveling in the attention. Her antics and temper tantrums, often joined in by her sister, were soon too much for their grandmother and the girls, as pre-teens, were shipped off to a convent school where they at least learned some manners.

Those manners did end up working well for Tallulah. A somewhat pudgy little girl, she soon grew into a startling beauty. At 16 she entered her photo into a magazine contest and ended up with a small part in a New York production. By 18 she was in her own apartment in New York and getting roles in local plays.

Tallulah loved being on stage, but while she had an abundance of looks and charm, she wasn't getting the level of roles for which she yearned. In 1922 A fortuneteller advised her that her fame would come from overseas. Shortly after, she was invited to come to England for a play there. She jumped at the chance and spent the next eight years in England. She was vastly popular and even had her own adoring fangirls who emulated and followed her around. As her confidence grew, so did her outrageous lifestyle.

She later returned to New York and soon landed in Hollywood, where she made films. She preferred her life in New York and stage acting to film. She found Hollywood too restricting. Her wild party-girl ways made it hard for the studios to keep up with her. She drank, took drugs, and was free with her sexual favors. Even her brief marriage to actor John Emery couldn't last. They divorced in 1941, a bare four years after marrying.

In 1951 she was offered and accepted the role of host for a new radio show. *The Big Show* was a 90-minute variety show that was touted as the savior of radio. Though radio's golden era was swiftly ending, *The Big Show* lasted two years. Tallulah's natural feel for comedy and her witty quips were a large part of its success. Her trademark drawled, "*Dah-ling*" also played a large part in her repartee and popularity.

Having grown up around politicians, Tallulah, in addition to acting, was also an activist that offered her celebrity and vast energies to Presidential campaigns as well as taking up the fight for civil rights. She fought so unrelentingly for that cause that she was one of the only White personalities to be featured on the cover of *Ebony* magazine. She even got a close friend out of trouble once by calling on an old friend, Herbert Hoover, to get her charges dropped. Not too surprising for the well-connected daughter and granddaughter of a congressman and a senator.

Tallulah continued making appearances on stage, radio and film until shortly before her death on December 12, 1968. While the official cause of death was pneumonia, it is likely it was the effects of her boisterous lifestyle that left her too weakened to fight off the illness. Even so, it's doubtful - if given the chance to go back and change - she would have done anything differently in her brazen past. She once said, "If I had to live my life again, I'd make the same mistakes, only sooner."

Tallulah lived as she liked and left with no regrets.

Sources:

<https://www.factinate.com/people/facts-tallulah-bankhead/>

<https://tallulahbankhead.weebly.com/biography.html>

[https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/The_Times_\(13/Dec/1968\)_-](https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/The_Times_(13/Dec/1968)_-_Obituary:_Miss_Tallulah_Bankhead)

[_Obituary:_Miss_Tallulah_Bankhead](https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/The_Times_(13/Dec/1968)_-_Obituary:_Miss_Tallulah_Bankhead)

<http://www.awhf.org/bankhead.html>

https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Tallulah_Bankhead

[https://www.townandcountrymag.com/leisure/arts-and-culture/g32290146/tallulah-bankhead-](https://www.townandcountrymag.com/leisure/arts-and-culture/g32290146/tallulah-bankhead-photos)
[photos](https://www.townandcountrymag.com/leisure/arts-and-culture/g32290146/tallulah-bankhead-photos)