

Ralph Edwards

Biography

Ralph Edwards Productions

Edwards, the man who coined the phrase “This is Your Life” and literally helped found Hollywood through a campaign on his classic show “Truth or Consequences,” is a television pioneer whose charm and wit have been shared in the living rooms of Americans for more than half a century. He is attributed with raising more money for worthy causes than any other broadcast personality through his various radio and television shows and has two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Perhaps best known for his ground-breaking television series “This is Your Life” and “Truth or Consequences,” Edwards has written, performed or produced thousands of hours of television programming, much of it live through Ralph Edwards Productions. Among the now standard television production techniques, Edwards pioneered the three-camera, live-on-film format, which was later adapted by Desi Arnez for “I Love Lucy.” Since 1950, there has been a Ralph Edwards property on television every year.

In 1940, Edwards founded Ralph Edwards Productions and created and starred in his own game show, “Truth or Consequences,” which was based on a game he played as a kid. “Truth or Consequences,” would become a landmark in broadcast history as radio’s No. 1 audience participation show. As its host, Edwards asked contestants trivia questions and made them “pay” for missed answers by performing silly stunts.

A Ralph Edwards-created stunt on “Truth or Consequences” officially put Hollywood on the map. A contestant gathered more than 500,000 signatures on a cross-country trip, requesting official recognition for Hollywood and delivered them to the Post Master General. By official decree in 1948, the postmark Hollywood, Calif., was born.

From the outgrowth of an act of goodwill on “Truth or Consequences,” Edwards created, produced and hosted “This is Your Life” in 1948 on radio, and introduced it to television in 1952. The show, that touched the lives of millions of people, surprised guests with the story of their lives by reuniting them with friends and family. From 1952-1961, Edwards surprised some of Hollywood’s biggest stars, including Milton Berle, Bob Hope, Elizabeth Taylor, Will Rogers and Nat “King” Cole. The show ran from 1948-1961 and again from 1971-1973.

Edwards has been just as successful behind the camera as in front of it, producing more than 20 hit shows, such as “The Ralph Edwards Show,” “Name That Tune,” and “People’s Court,” (in conjunction with Stu Billet Productions). At one time, Edwards had six shows, totaling 17 half-hours of programming a week, airing on three networks.

Through the popularity of “Truth or Consequences,” which aired until 1977, and “This is Your Life,” Edwards pioneered the cause marketing movement, setting an industry precedent by leveraging the company’s popular entertainment programs and its Hollywood influence to benefit innumerable charitable causes. Edwards generated enough funds through his “Hush” and “Walking Man” contests on “Truth or Consequences” to help launch the American Heart Association.

Over the course of his career, Edwards and his company have been responsible for raising tens of million dollars for charitable organizations, including March of Dimes, Make-A-Wish Foundation and numerous hospitals and schools. Today, Ralph Edwards Productions strives to continue the work its early days, producing award-winning family entertainment and keeping cause marketing at the forefront of its efforts.

Throughout his 60-year career, Edwards has been awarded numerous honors and awards, most recently, the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Lifetime Achievement Award in May 2001, and the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce “Lifetime Achievement Award” in April 2001. He earned his first Emmy for “Truth or Consequences” in 1950 and two Emmys for “This is Your Life” in 1953 and 1954.

Prior to starting Ralph Edwards Productions in 1940, Edwards worked in New York as a CBS radio announcer in 1936, after he auditioned and won the position over 60 candidates. Within two years he was announcing as many as 45 network shows a week.

Edwards received his bachelor or arts degree in drama from the University of California at Berkley in 1935 and married the late Barbara Jean Sheldon in 1939. He resides in Beverly Hills, Calif., and has three children: Gary, Christine and Lauren, and four grandchildren.

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