

Famous folks from El Paso

I received a letter from John Ponciano this week. A friend of his sent him an article from East Moline, Ill., about Debbie Reynolds. The article mentioned that she is a native of El Paso. John suggested that I write a column about Debbie Reynolds, Sandra Day O'Connor and other well-known people from El Paso.

Here are a few names you may recognize starting with John's suggestions:

Reynolds was born in El Paso, April 1, 1932, and spent the first eight years of her life here. Her father worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad and was transferred to Burbank, Calif.



Reynolds

In 1940.

She married singer Eddie Fisher in 1955, then divorced him when he left her and their two small children, Carrie (Princess Leia of "Star Wars") and Todd Fisher, for Elizabeth Taylor three years later. She married and divorced twice more.

On July 9, 1950, a Times article reported, "El Pasoan Has Role In Film." Reynolds had landed a part in the film "The Daughter of Rosie O'Grady."

The article goes on to say, "Debbie, who was christened Mary Frances, is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. R. F. Reynolds of Burbank, Calif., formerly of El Paso, The young actress's grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Owen Harman, reside at 3219 White Oaks Street.

"As 'Miss Burbank of 1948' Debbie, then only 16 years old, reigned over the city's 61st birthday celebration, and shortly afterward walked off with a Warner Bros. contract.

"She had a bit part in 'The Girl from Jones Beach.'"

In a 1954 interview her uncle O.D. Harman, of El Paso, was quoted as saying, "Success hasn't changed her one bit. She's fun-loving, noisy and mischievous.

"We get along real well, but then, she gets along with everyone pretty well. When the family is around, or even friends and strangers, Fran-nie's (that's Debbie's family name) is as down to earth as she's always been."

"Her father, Ray Reynolds, according to Harman, comes to El Paso often and still has



TALES FROM THE MORGUE

By Trish Long

Have a question?

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many friends here. Debbie's grandmother Mrs. Maxie Harman currently is living with Harman's sister in Burbank, Calif., after residing in El Paso for several years."



Sandra Day was born March 26, 1930, in El Paso. Her parents owned the Lazy B Ranch near Lordsburg, N.M., where Day grew up. Her parents sent her to live with her maternal grandmother in El Paso to attend school.



O'Connor

O'Connor attended Radford School for Girls and graduated from Austin High School in 1946, at the age of 16. At Austin, she was a member of the National Honor Society and wrote for the Austin High School Round Up yearbook.

On Dec. 20, 1952, she married John Jay O'Connor III, son of Dr. and Mrs. J.J. O'Connor, of San Francisco, Calif.

Sandra Day O'Connor graduated from Stanford in 1950 and received her law degree from there in 1952. She was nominated to the Supreme Court by President Ronald Reagan and took office in 1981.

Before she was appointed to the Supreme Court, O'Connor was on the Arizona State Senate from 1969 to 1975.



Actress Irene Ryan, Granny Clampett on "The Beverly Hillbillies," was born in El Paso on Oct. 17, 1903. In a 1963 interview with the Times she said, "I think I was born at home. My father was in the Army, stationed at Fort Bliss, and not long after that we moved to San Francisco. But I came back, many years later,



Ryan

and played an ingenue in the Ed Redmond stock company at the Crawford Theater."

The article goes on to say, "Miss Ryan has traveled all over the world giving benefit performances, appearing at veterans' hospitals and costarring with Bob Hope in his tours of military installations during World War II and the 1948 Berlin Airlift."

"In show business since she was 13, going from vaudeville to radio, motion pictures, nightclubs and television, in that order, she hit stardom as Granny Clampett, the pipe-smoking rustic in Beverly Hills. The show was the unquestioned hit of the 1962-63 television season. In three weeks on the air, it shot to the top of the audience rating, defeating even Bob Hope in the surveys. No show had been able to do that to a Hope special before."

When asked about "The Beverly Hillbillies," Ryan was quoted as saying, "It is really Americana. It is tradition, it is us. The show is very simple, very clean, and I think American audiences are getting pretty sick of the other. People love this hokey comedy."

"We've had no repercussions from the hill people," she continued in the article. "You know, an awful lot of people talk just that way. Paul Henning, the show's creator, is from Tennessee, and he writes the vernacular into the script. It wasn't hard to pick up."

She was last in El Paso in 1949 to do a show with Bob Hope. Ryan died in 1973 after a stroke.



Of course, these are just a few of the famous people who called El Paso home. Do you know of any others who El Pasoans people might be surprised to hear about, or do you want to find out more about a celebrity El Pasoan? E-mail me or comment on my blog.

Trish Long is the El Paso Times' archivist and spends her time in the morgue, where the newspaper keeps its old clippings and photos. She shares some of this history in her blog, Tales From The Morgue.

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