



Q&A with David Van Deusen

Q: Your new book, *From Fandom to Friendships*, shares the remarkable story of how a lifelong love of *The Dick Van Dyke Show* led to decades of friendships with the people who created it. What inspired you to share these personal stories, and what can readers expect to discover in the book?

A: My first book, [*To Twilo and Beyond! My Walnut Adventures with “The Dick Van Dyke Show” Cast*](#), published twenty years ago, focused on preserving the history, memories and making of the show. But so much has happened since then, and over the years I realized that I had accumulated another kind of history—my own personal collection of memories, stories and experiences with the people who brought the show to life. The 65th anniversary of *The Dick Van Dyke Show* seemed like the perfect time to bring those experiences together and share not only my journey over more than three decades, but also the extraordinary archive I have built along the way.

From Fandom to Friendships brings together the personal memories, photographs, memorabilia, correspondence, archival materials and other treasures I have collected over the years, along with the stories behind them. It offers fans an opportunity to experience the people behind the characters they have loved for generations and to see how those relationships continued to grow long after the cameras stopped rolling.

What I hope readers discover is that the people they know as television legends were also wonderfully funny, generous, talented and very human. I was incredibly fortunate to get to know the cast and creators of the beloved show in that way, and I wanted to share those experiences with fans while preserving the photographs, artifacts and personal history that document them.

Ultimately, *From Fandom to Friendships* is a very personal look at what happened to me because of my love for a television show—the people I came to know, the friendships that developed, and the remarkable collection of memories and archives I was fortunate enough to gather along the way.

Q: What first inspired you to become a fan of *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, and what led you to create *The Walnut Times* in 1995?

A: I was just one year old when *The Dick Van Dyke Show* premiered on October 3, 1961, so my first exposure to the series likely came through daytime reruns in the late 1960s. When the show experienced a resurgence in popularity in the 1990s, I started watching it again and discovered a new appreciation for just how special it was. I was captivated not only by the incredible performances of the cast, but also by the writing, the chemistry between the actors, the relatable storylines, and the creativity of the comedy, musical numbers, and unforgettable sketches.

I became such a fan that I set out to record all 158 episodes so I could watch them whenever I wanted. As I became more involved with the show, I looked for a fan club where admirers could come together to celebrate the series and its cast. When I learned that one did not exist, I started thinking about how I could create a way for fans to share their appreciation.

I spoke with others involved in fan organizations and received the suggestion to create a newsletter. I loved the idea, but I wanted the publication to have a name that immediately connected with fans. One of my favorite moments from the series was the classic "It May Look Like a Walnut" episode, so after giving it a lot of thought, I decided to call it *The Walnut Times*. I soon realized it was the perfect name.

Published from 1995 to 2015, *The Walnut Times* became a way for fans around the world to celebrate *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. Over 20 years, I produced 62 issues, first in print and later in digital form, reaching subscribers in the United States, Canada, Germany, Australia, Japan, and beyond.

The greatest reward was the response from the people who created the show. Dick Van Dyke loved it, Carl Reiner embraced it, and Rose Marie would often write after receiving each issue to tell me how much she enjoyed it. Their support gave the publication credibility and opened doors to relationships with other cast and crew members. What began as a fan newsletter ultimately became the foundation for decades of friendships and my ongoing effort to preserve the legacy of *The Dick Van Dyke Show*.

Q: How did you first begin meeting members of the cast and crew, and how did those relationships evolve from your passion as a fan into genuine friendships?

A: My first contacts with many of the cast and crew came through traditional letters and requests for interviews. Over time, those exchanges translated into telephone interviews, and I believe they began to see that my interest in *The Dick Van Dyke Show* came from a genuine appreciation for their work. I wasn't just collecting information—I truly wanted to celebrate what they had created and preserve the memories of the series. That passion helped establish a sense of trust, and when I traveled to Los Angeles and asked if I could meet them in person, I was warmly welcomed. Those meetings eventually grew into lasting friendships.

My relationship with Dick Van Dyke evolved from those early connections into many wonderful experiences together. I would visit with him on the set of *Diagnosis Murder*, and later we would meet for lunches in Malibu, where he always insisted on paying the bill. Dick was always gracious whenever I reached out while I was in Los Angeles.

Carl would also meet me for lunch. He introduced me to Japanese food on one visit and took me to a diner in Beverly Hills another time. Once our friendship was more developed, he invited me to his

home to visit. We would sit and chat in the living room where he and Mel enjoyed dinners together or retreat to his office for conversation. And at one point, he remarked to me how much the newsletter had matured since it started. Carl was always happy to sign photos or books to be used as giveaway prizes as part of newsletter contests. He was incredibly generous with his time and always supportive of my efforts to celebrate *The Dick Van Dyke Show* and its legacy.

Of all the cast members, my friendship with Rose Marie became the closest. What began as a professional connection through *The Walnut Times* gradually became a deeply personal friendship. Our letters turned into phone calls, visits, birthday cards, holiday gifts, and wonderful conversations over the years. I was fortunate to share meals with her, including memorable evenings at The Magic Castle in Hollywood and The Smokehouse in Burbank. Our friendship had reached a personal level and one where we genuinely cared about each other.

One of the most meaningful moments came when Dick, Carl, and Rose Marie agreed to participate in a documentary featurette I produced about the making of "It May Look Like a Walnut." Dick made time during his busy shooting schedule to participate, Rose Marie welcomed me into her backyard for the interview, and Carl, despite being ill with shingles, still came to be part of the project. By that point, our relationship had grown far beyond that of a fan and the people he admired—it had become a true friendship built on mutual respect and a shared love for one of television's greatest shows.

Q: What was it like to meet Dick Van Dyke for the first time, and what do you remember most vividly about that encounter? How has your relationship developed over the years?

A: My first meeting with Dick Van Dyke was on the set of *Diagnosis Murder*, and it was an experience I will never forget. The meeting was arranged through Dick's publicist, Bob Palmer, who helped make the introduction.

When I arrived on the set, filming was underway, so I watched from the sidelines for a while. Simply being there and seeing Dick work was a thrill. An assistant told me that Dick would come over and say hello as soon as there was a break, and he did exactly that. He walked over, reached out his hand, and said, "Hi, I'm Dick Van Dyke." I remember thinking, "As if you have to tell me that. I know exactly who you are!" But that moment perfectly captured who Dick was—warm, humble, and completely genuine. Rather than simply stopping by to say hello, Dick spent a great deal of time with me. He took photos, answered my questions, signed items, and made me feel completely welcome. He was exactly the person fans hoped he would be: talented, gracious, and incredibly down-to-earth.

Over the years, that first meeting developed into a wonderful friendship. Dick always made time to get together when I visited Los Angeles. We shared lunches, conversations, and many memorable moments. He even invited me to his home and allowed me to attend a rehearsal of his a cappella group, The Vantastix. Dick affectionately gave me the nickname "the Head Walnut" and was always gracious whenever I reached out while I was in Los Angeles.

One of my favorite memories was acquiring a special birthday gift for Dick. I knew of his admiration for Stan Laurel's bow ties, so I found a classic vintage style and gave it to him as a birthday present. Later, when he mentioned that he was forming a barbershop quartet, I received permission from composer

Earle Hagen to create a four-part arrangement of *The Dick Van Dyke Show* theme for him. That arrangement was later performed by The Vantastix on television, at The Hollywood Bowl, at Disney's D23 fan convention and at other special events.

Dick was also incredibly generous in supporting *The Walnut Times*. He allowed me to use his caricature of the cast on coffee mugs and permitted his image to be used on a watch that I offered to fans. I offered to compensate him and he declined. He understood that everything I did came from a genuine desire to celebrate the show and share its legacy with other fans. One of those *Walnut Times* mugs even had an unexpected moment in the spotlight years later when Carl Reiner gave one to Jerry Seinfeld to use during an episode of *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee*.

What stands out most about Dick is that, despite being one of television's greatest stars, he always treated me with kindness, generosity, and friendship. That first meeting on the set of *Diagnosis Murder* was the beginning of a relationship I never could have imagined when I was simply a fan watching *The Dick Van Dyke Show*.

Q: At what point did your love for the series become a life mission to keep its legacy alive? When did you realize that your role had evolved from being a passionate fan into helping preserve and share the history of the series?

A: What began as a personal passion for *The Dick Van Dyke Show* gradually evolved into something I could have never imagined—a lifelong opportunity to help preserve and share the legacy of a series I loved so much. As I continued researching the show, collecting materials, documenting stories, and building relationships with the people who created it, I was fortunate that others began to recognize my commitment and knowledge of the series. Being entrusted with that responsibility has been one of the greatest honors of my life.

Over time, my role expanded beyond *The Walnut Times* and fan appreciation. I began being contacted by outside organizations and production companies because of my knowledge, research, and archives. I contributed photo samples of Rob Petrie to an artist who was creating a sculpture of Dick Van Dyke for the Television Academy, provided assistance for A&E Biography, E! Entertainment and TV Land programs about Dick, and contributed research and materials for DVD and Blu-ray bonus features. Those opportunities made me realize that the work I was doing had become part of preserving television history.

I think that mission truly came into focus in 2004 with Carl Reiner's reunion special, *The Dick Van Dyke Show Revisited*. Carl had often expressed his appreciation for the work I was doing to keep the show visible and connected with fans. He recognized and shared his view with me that I was instrumental in keeping the show in the public eye. Carl personally invited me to attend the filming, and while there, I was asked to help research and locate flashback clips from the original series. Being involved in that project was an incredible honor and a defining moment in my journey. My efforts earned me a credit on the program.

I am currently updating and rereleasing for the 65th anniversary of the show a feature-length documentary I produced in 2021 celebrating its 60th anniversary, bringing together decades of research,

interviews, and archival material. I believe it represents one of the most comprehensive explorations of the series ever created. More recently, I contributed a video birthday greeting with Larry Mathews to Steve Boettcher's *Dick Van Dyke: 100th Celebration* Fathom Events presentation and served as Creative Consultant for PBS's American Masters *Starring Dick Van Dyke*.

Looking back, I never set out with the goal of becoming a historian or archivist of *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. I was simply a fan who loved the series and wanted to share that appreciation with others. The fact that it grew into a lifelong mission to preserve its legacy has been an unexpected and extraordinary journey.

Q: Over the years, your relationship with the cast and their families grew from that of a devoted fan into what Carl Reiner called the “unofficial historian” of the series. How did they come to trust you with helping to preserve the history and legacy of *The Dick Van Dyke Show*?

A: I think, initially, the cast and crew were probably a little curious about this person who was creating a newsletter about *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. To help them understand what I was trying to do, I sent each of the cast members copies of *The Walnut Times* so they could see firsthand that it was created out of genuine appreciation and respect for their work.

Over time, they came to understand that while I was a passionate fan of the show, I was also someone who respected them as individuals. I wasn't interested in simply collecting stories or having access to celebrities. I wanted to celebrate their accomplishments, preserve their memories, and help keep the legacy of the show alive. Through years of conversations, meetings, and shared experiences, trust developed naturally.

I believe that trust was built through honesty, patience, and consistency. I never tried to rush the relationships or ask for more than people were comfortable sharing. I was always mindful that these were real people with lives and histories beyond the characters they played on television. My goal was to listen, learn, and preserve their stories in a way that honored them.

Over time, those relationships grew far beyond a fan connection. Carl Reiner affectionately called me the show's "archivist" and even gave me the nickname "the other DVD." Dick Van Dyke referred to me as "the Head Walnut." Those names were wonderful compliments, but what meant the most was the friendship and trust behind them.

Rose Marie was another example of how those relationships evolved. She trusted me enough to share Morey's home phone number and encouraged me to reach out to him. She also personally recommended me to director John Rich, who was known to be challenging to access. Moments like those showed me that I had earned a place of trust within their circle.

Looking back, I think the relationships developed because people could see that I had no hidden agenda. I simply loved the show, respected the people who created it, and wanted to preserve something meaningful for future generations. The trust they gave me was never assumed—it was earned over many years, and it remains one of the greatest privileges of my life.

Q: Over the past three decades, you have collected, preserved, and documented an extraordinary amount of material related to *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, much of which is featured in the book, while becoming one of the foremost experts on its history and legacy. What are some of the most unusual, meaningful, or surprising items in your collection, and what stories do they tell?

A: My collection grew naturally out of my desire to preserve the history of a show that had such a profound impact on me. But as my relationships with the cast, writers, crew members and their families developed, I came to realize that these weren't simply pieces of memorabilia. They were tangible connections to the people who created the show, and many of them came with very personal stories.

One of my prized pieces is the original prop glass pitcher from the famous “It May Look Like a Walnut” episode. I also have original scripts from the series, many of which were signed by Carl Reiner, Sam Denoff and other writers. Those items connect me directly to the creative process behind the episodes that fans have watched for generations.

Some of the most meaningful pieces, however, were created specifically for the cast and crew. There is a cast ashtray featuring caricatures of the cast drawn by Dick Van Dyke, as well as playing cards featuring the same artwork. I also have cuff links given to the men on the show, featuring a drawing of Dick's head that he created. After the passing of Bud Molin, the show's film editor, his wife Nita gave me a set of those cuff links because she knew how much they would mean to me. That transformed them from a piece of show memorabilia into a personal reminder of Bud and our friendship.

I treasure a Rose Marie hair bow that she personally gave me, as well as an “absorbitron walnut” artifact that I created and had signed by Carl Reiner. And one of the most special pieces in the entire collection is an original self-caricature that Dick Van Dyke personally drew for me when *The Walnut Times* came to an end. That was an extraordinary gesture of appreciation and friendship.

I also have photographs, interviews, audio recordings and video materials that document the people and events surrounding the show. But for me, the value of the collection isn't simply in how rare or unusual an item is. It's in the story attached to it and the person who gave it to me.

Taken together, these treasures represent the friendships, trust and connections that developed over more than three decades. They are pieces of *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, but they are also pieces of my own journey with the people who made it—and part of the legacy I feel privileged to preserve for future generations.

Q: You produced the *The Dick Van Dyke Show 60th Anniversary Celebration*, which you are now updating and re-releasing for the show's 65th anniversary. What makes this documentary unique, and what rare memories and insights can audiences discover?

A: I believe my [*The Dick Van Dyke Show 60th Anniversary Celebration*](#) film is the most comprehensive documentary ever created about the series. When I began working on it, I faced an important challenge: many of the original cast members had passed away, including Mary Tyler Moore, Rose Marie and Carl Reiner, while Dick Van Dyke was now 95. With Larry Mathews as the only surviving principal cast member, I realized that telling the complete story would require going beyond the surviving cast and finding the people who knew them best.

That led me to reach out to family members, creators and others connected to the show. Because of the relationships that had developed over more than three decades, many were willing to share their memories and personal experiences. I was fortunate to interview Carl Reiner's son, Lucas Reiner, who had never met me before but agreed to participate after learning about my work. His interview offered a deeply personal perspective on his father and his connection to the series.

I also wrote to Chris Van Dyke, Dick's son. After months without hearing from him, I was thrilled when he contacted me and asked if it was too late to participate. He told me that he had mentioned my request to his father while they were attending the Kennedy Center Honors, and Dick immediately encouraged him to do the interview. Chris shared personal insights about his father, his family and the show's impact that audiences had rarely heard.

Mary Tyler Moore's widower, Dr. S. Robert Levine, had rarely spoken publicly about Mary's career, but I decided to reach out. After confirming that the documentary was an authorized project, he agreed to participate and shared thoughtful memories of Mary and her experiences on the show.

I was also fortunate to locate Andrea Bershad, daughter of Executive Producer Sheldon Leonard, who offered memories of her father and his role in bringing the series to life. Guest stars and other people connected to the production added still more perspectives.

What makes the documentary especially meaningful is that many of these conversations could only have happened because I had the opportunity to reach these people at that particular moment in time. Some had rarely, and in some cases never, given in-depth interviews about their experiences with *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. They were willing to share candid memories and personal stories that might otherwise have been lost.

What struck me throughout the process was the affection everyone expressed for the show and for the people who made it. Again and again, they described an atmosphere of creativity, respect and collaboration, qualities that I believe reflected Carl Reiner's leadership as producer and Dick Van Dyke's warmth and generosity.

Taken together, these interviews created something more than a 60th anniversary celebration. They became a historical record of the people who lived the history of *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. My goal was to preserve their voices, memories and perspectives so that future generations can not only watch the

show, but also understand the remarkable people and relationships behind it. (To watch the film trailer, click [here](#).)

Q: After more than 65 years, *The Dick Van Dyke Show* continues to connect with audiences across generations. Having spent decades studying the series, interviewing the people who created it, and hearing from generations of fans, what do you believe makes the show so timeless? What do you think audiences continue to discover and love about the series today?

A: After more than six decades, I believe *The Dick Van Dyke Show* continues to resonate because, at its core, it was always about real people and real relationships. The writing was exceptional, but what made the show special was that the stories were grounded in everyday experiences that audiences could recognize in their own lives—a husband and wife working through a disagreement, parents navigating challenges with their children, workplace frustrations, friendships, and the ups and downs of daily life.

Most importantly, the show's humor remains timeless because it came from relatable situations, and the characters felt genuine. Rob and Laura Petrie were not just a television couple—they represented a loving partnership. The writers created characters who were funny, flawed, and human, from Buddy and Sally at work, to Alan Brady's larger-than-life personality.

Carl Reiner played a significant role in creating that authenticity. He was always interested in what was happening in people's real lives, often asking writers and others what experiences they had encountered that might inspire a story. That attention to everyday moments helped create episodes that still feel relevant today. Sam Denoff and Bill Persky were also instrumental in shaping the show's writing and maintaining the consistency and quality that audiences came to expect.

I continue to see the show's impact through my role as co-host of [Tripping Over the Ottoman](#), the only podcast devoted specifically to exploring *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. My co-host Abby and I approach the series from different generational perspectives, which creates interesting conversations about why the show continues to connect with audiences today. We research each episode in depth, uncover behind-the-scenes details, and explore elements that even longtime fans may not know. For the 65th Anniversary, we will be featuring a special episode with guest Larry Mathews, where we will discuss “The Gunslinger,” the final filmed episode of the sitcom.

Ultimately, I think audiences continue to love *The Dick Van Dyke Show* because it was built on timeless ingredients: great writing, extraordinary performances, unforgettable characters, and stories about the human experience. The world has changed dramatically since 1961, but the emotions, relationships, and laughter at the heart of the show remain as meaningful today as they were when it first aired.

Q: You began as a passionate fan, but your interest in *The Dick Van Dyke Show* ultimately led to deep expertise, lifelong friendships, and a mission to preserve its legacy. What do you hope readers take away from your journey—and what might your story say to other passionate fans about where their own interests can lead?

A: I hope readers come along with me and become part of the journey—experiencing the incredible moments, friendships, and discoveries that I have been so fortunate to experience over more than three

decades. I hope they come away with a deeper appreciation not only for *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, but for the remarkable people who created and starred in this classic series. They will see the cast members not just as the legendary performers they were on screen, but as real people with personalities, passions, humor, and stories of their own.

Along the way, readers will also discover new details about the show itself, from behind-the-scenes stories and production history to fascinating pieces of information about the people, places, and creative process that brought the series to life.

The message I have always shared with other fans is simple: don't ever be afraid to ask. If I had never asked Rose Marie to do my first interview for *The Walnut Times*, the newsletter would have likely never have gotten started. If I had never reached out to Dick Van Dyke's publicist and asked if I could meet Dick during a visit to Los Angeles, that first meeting would never have happened.

I believe it is important to not limit your own aspirations. If you are hesitant to ask for an opportunity and ultimately don't ask, the answer will always be no. Even if you take that chance, the answer might still be no. But it could become yes. In my case, those yeses to questions I asked opened doors I never could have imagined and led to friendships and experiences beyond anything I dreamed possible.

My journey from fandom to friendships has been an extraordinary gift. When I started *The Walnut Times*, I never imagined where that passion would lead. I was simply a fan who loved a television show and wanted to share that appreciation with others. The fact that it grew into a lifelong mission to preserve its legacy is something I will always be grateful for.

Press kit documents are available [here](#), Images [here](#) and Videos, [here](#).

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