

Andy Rooney, a Cranky Voice of CBS, Dies at 92

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Andy Rooney, whose prickly wit was long a mainstay of CBS News and whose homespun commentary on "60 Minutes" delivered every week from 1978 until 2011, made him a household name, died on Friday in New York City.

He was 92 and lived in Manhattan, though he kept a family vacation home in Rensselaerville, N.Y., and the first home he ever bought, in Rowayton, Conn. Slide Show Andy Rooney: 1919-2011

CBS News said in a statement that Mr. Rooney died after complications following minor surgery.

In late September, CBS announced that Mr. Rooney would be making his last regular weekly appearance on "60 Minutes" on Oct. 2. After that, said Jeff Fager, the chairman of CBS News and the program's executive producer, he would "always have the ability to speak his mind on '60 Minutes' when the urge hits him."

But a little more than three weeks after that appearance, CBS announced that Mr. Rooney had been hospitalized after developing "serious complications" from an unspecified operation.

Mr. Rooney entered television shortly after World War II, writing material for entertainers like Arthur Godfrey, Victor Borge, Herb Shriner, Sam Levenson and Garry Moore. Beginning in 1962, he had a six-year association with the CBS News correspondent Harry Reasoner, who narrated a series of "Everyman" essays written by Mr. Rooney.

But it was "A Few Minutes With Andy Rooney," his weekly segment on "60 Minutes" that made him one of the most popular broadcast figures in the country. With his jowls, bushy eyebrows, deeply circled eyes and advancing years, he seemed every inch the homespun philosopher as he addressed mostly mundane subjects with varying degrees of befuddlement, vexation and sometimes pleasure.

He admitted to loving football, Christmas, tennis, woodworking and Dwight D. Eisenhower, one of the few politicians who won his approval because, as an Army general during World War II, he had refused to censor Stars and Stripes, the G.I. newspaper for which Mr. Rooney worked. He also claimed to like shined shoes and properly pressed pants and had machines in his office to take care of those functions, although somehow he always managed to look rumpled.

But he was better known for the things he did not like. He railed against "two-prong plugs in a three-prong society," the incomprehensibility of road maps, wash-and-wear shirts "that you can wash but not wear," the uselessness of keys and locks, and outsize cereal boxes that contained very little cereal.

"I don't like any music I can't hum," he grumbled.

He observed that "there are more beauty parlors than there are beauties" and that "if dogs could talk, it would take a lot of the fun out of owning one."

He made clear that he thought Gen. George S. Patton and Ernest Hemingway, both of whom he had known personally, were gasbags. He disliked New Year's Eve, waiting in line for any reason and the bursars at whatever colleges his children attended.

He once concluded that "it is possible to be dumb and be a college president," but he acknowledged that "most college students are not as smart as most college presidents."

On the subject of higher education, he declared that most college catalogs "rank among the great works of fiction of all time," and that a student of lackluster intellect who could raise tuition money would find it "almost impossible to flunk out."

Time magazine once called him "the most felicitous nonfiction writer in television." But Mr. Rooney was decidedly not everyone's cup of tea.

The New York Times columnist Anna Quindlen, for example, took strong issue with Mr. Rooney's dismissive comments after Kurt Cobain of the band Nirvana committed suicide in 1994. It was not surprising, she wrote, that Mr. Rooney "brought to the issue of youthful despair a mixture of sarcasm and contempt," but it was "worth noting because in 1994 that sort of attitude is as dated and foolish as believing that cancer is contagious."

Mr. Rooney's opinions sometimes landed him in trouble. In 1990, CBS News suspended him without pay in response to complaints that he had made remarks offensive to black and gay people.

The trigger was a December 1989 special, "A Year With Andy Rooney," in which he said: "There was some recognition in 1989 of the fact that many of the ills which kill us are self-induced. Too much alcohol, too much food, drugs, homosexual unions, cigarettes. They're all known to lead quite often to premature death." He later apologized for the statement.

But the gay newspaper The Advocate subsequently quoted him as saying in an interview: "I've believed all along that most people are born with equal intelligence, but blacks have watered down their genes because the less intelligent ones are the ones that have the most children. They drop out of school early, do drugs and get pregnant."

Mr. Rooney denied that he had made such a statement, and because the interview had apparently not been taped, the reporter was unable to prove that he had. "It is a know-nothing statement, which I abhor," Mr. Rooney said.

He said that he had accepted the suspension rather than end his relationship with CBS News. He said that when he was an Army trainee, he had been arrested in the South because he insisted on riding in the back of a bus with some black soldiers who were friends of his.

Many of his colleagues rushed to his defense. "I know he is not a racist," Walter Cronkite said.

Mr. Rooney was suspended for three months but was brought back after only one. During his absence, the ratings for "60 Minutes" declined by 20 percent and the network received thousands of letters and telephone calls from viewers who missed his commentaries.

Mr. Rooney generated more criticism in 2002, when he said in an interview on a cable sports show that women had "no business" being sideline television reporters at football games because they did not understand football.

He did it again in 2007, with a newspaper column complaining about the current state of baseball. "I know all about Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig, but today's baseball stars are all guys named Rodriguez to me," he wrote.

He subsequently acknowledged that he "probably shouldn't have said it," but denied that his intent had been to denigrate Latin American players.

Andrew Aitken Rooney was born on Jan. 14, 1919, in Albany, the son of Walter and Ellinor Rooney. His father was in the paper business. After his graduation from Albany Academy, he worked as a copy boy for The Knickerbocker News before attending Colgate University in Hamilton, N.Y., where he played left guard on the football team (even though he was only 5-foot-9 and 185 pounds) and worked for the weekly newspaper, The Colgate Maroon.

In 1941, three months before Pearl Harbor, he was drafted into the Army and used his powers of persuasion to get himself assigned to Stars and Stripes. He did not know much about reporting, but he learned his craft by working with journalists like Homer Bigart, Ernie Pyle and Mr. Cronkite.

He became a sergeant, flew on some bombing missions, covered the invasion of France in 1944 and won a Bronze Star for reporting under fire during the battle of Saint-Lô in Normandy. A year later, he was among the first Americans to enter the concentration camps at Buchenwald and Thekla, Germany.

In collaboration with Bud Hutton, a Stars and Stripes colleague, Mr. Rooney wrote two books: "Air Gunner" (1944), a collection of sketches of Americans who had been stationed in Britain, and "The Story of the Stars and Stripes" (1946).

After his discharge, Mr. Rooney returned to Albany and worked as a freelance writer.

By 1949, he had persuaded Mr. Godfrey to hire him as a writer. He continued writing for several entertainers, but also became involved in news and public affairs when he was asked to write scripts for "The Twentieth Century," a documentary series narrated by Mr. Cronkite. That led to his long-term association with Mr. Reasoner, which led to his involvement, initially as a writer, with "60 Minutes."

In the early 1970s, after briefly working for PBS, Mr. Rooney returned to CBS and began appearing on camera in a series of specials, one of which, "Mr. Rooney Goes to Washington," won a Peabody Award.

Mr. Rooney was as outspoken about CBS, his longtime employer, as he was about everything else. He made no secret of his dislike for Laurence A. Tisch, the network's chief executive from 1986 to 1995. Protesting Mr. Tisch's cost efficiencies and job cuts in 1987, Mr. Rooney said CBS News "has been turned into primarily a business enterprise, and the moral enterprise has been lost," and he threatened to quit if a writers strike against CBS News was not settled.

Although his commentary was mostly written for CBS News, he also had a syndicated newspaper column for three decades, for which he was given a lifetime achievement award in 2003 by the National Society of Newspaper Columnists. (That same year he received a similar award from the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.) He published a number of books, primarily collections of his commentaries, most recently "Out of My Mind" (2006), "And More by Andy Rooney" (2008) and "Andy Rooney: 60 Years of Wisdom and Wit" (2010).

Mr. Rooney's wife of 62 years, Marguerite Howard, died in 2004. Mr. Rooney is survived by their four children, Ellen Rooney of London; Martha Fishel of Chevy Chase, Md.; Emily Rooney of Boston; and Brian Rooney of Los Angeles, along with five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Mr. Rooney frequently said he considered himself "one of the least important producers on television" because his specialty was light pieces. "I just wish insignificance had more stature," he once said.

But he put things in perspective in his 1,097th and last regularly scheduled "60 Minutes" appearance.

"I've done a lot of complaining here," he said then, "but of all the things I've complained about, I can't complain about my life."

(The New York Times)