

# Parade

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MISTER  
ROGERS TRIVIA  
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**CAMERAS**  
to **CARDIGANS**  
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THE PARADE INTERVIEW

5 Things  
I Learned From  
**MISTER  
ROGERS**  
By Tom Hanks





# Tom Hanks Is Miste

One of our favorite actors takes on one of our favorite TV icons in *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood* (in theaters Nov. 22). We asked **Tom Hanks** to tell us what it was like. Plus, he shares five things he learned from Mister Rogers.

## WHAT WAS THE HARDEST THING ABOUT PLAYING MISTER ROGERS?

Slowing down, finding the cadence and the tempo, because so much of making movies is usually a pressure-filled thing. You're always sure to be staying 10 minutes late; you're always trying to get a shot before you lose the location; you're always trying to just get through it. That's totally contrary to what Mister Rogers was about. So I would say for me, the hardest thing about playing Mister Rogers was being able to find the quiet spaces inside spaces that had to be filled.

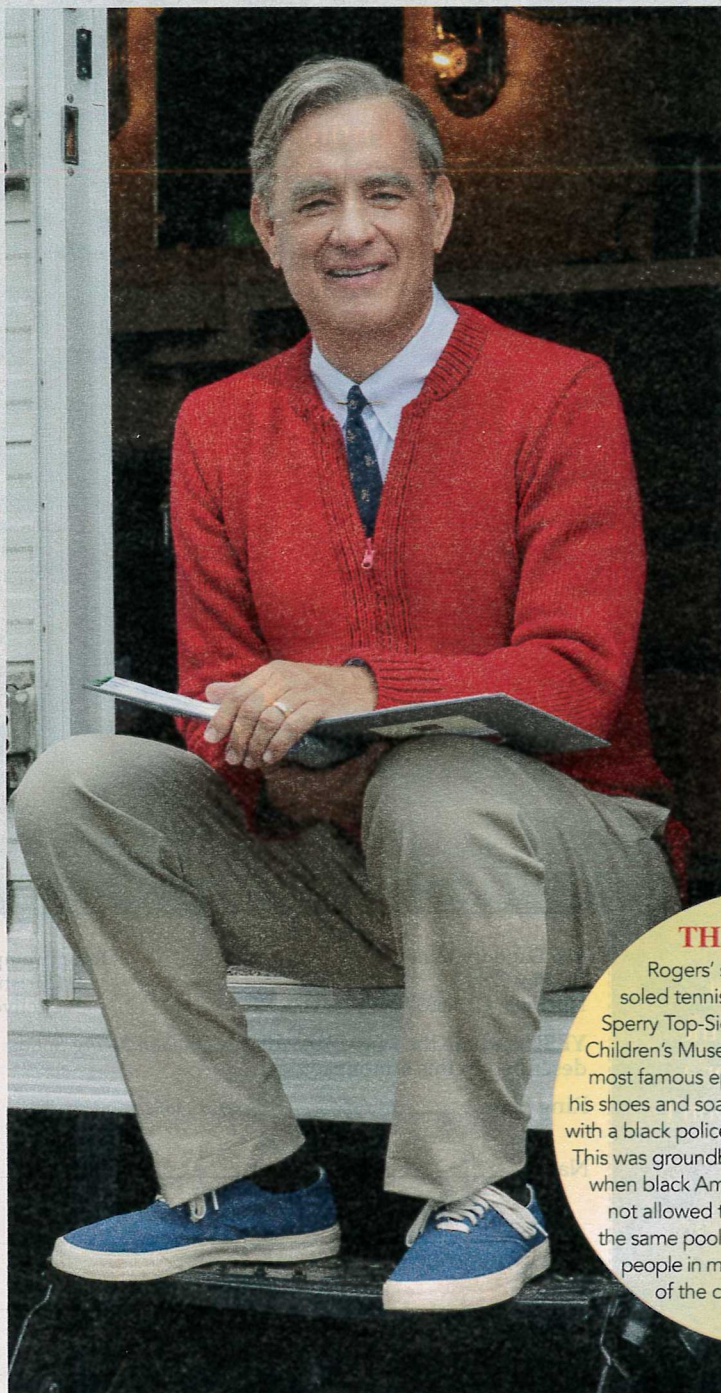
## HOW DID YOU PREPARE FOR THE PART?

When I started preparing for the role in earnest, I started looking at many, many, many, many hours of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. It took me a while to realize that the

show was not for adults or for anyone who understands nature or physics or even how flashlights work. The show was meant specifically for the mind of a child, who is just forming the logic of how elevators work, or why sometimes our parents are in a bad mood or why I'm jealous because there's a new baby in my family. The show was specifically planned to enlighten the unenlightened. Also, we shot the film at WQED in Pittsburgh, the same studio Mister Rogers shot in, and many of the

## THE TENNIES

Rogers' signature navy rubber-soled tennis shoes were Converse or Sperry Top-Sider brand, according to the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh. One of the most famous episodes has Rogers taking off his shoes and soaking his feet in a children's pool with a black policeman, Officer Clemmons. This was groundbreaking in 1969, when black Americans were not allowed to swim in the same pool with white people in many parts of the country.





# r Rogers

same people were still working there. So I heard lots of stories. I read Fred's handwritten scripts of the shows on legal tablets.

## WHAT'S A FAVORITE BIT OF WISDOM FROM THE MOVIE?

There's a question that Fred asks in the film, and he's asked it in a number of public forums: "Is there somebody who loved you into existence, who loved you so much that you became who you are right now?" Who taught us how to love, who accepted us exactly as we are? Who told us that we were special and gave us that foundation of confidence and benevolence that we would not have had if they had not been in our lives?

## IF YOU COULD HAVE HAD DINNER WITH FRED ROGERS, WHAT THREE THINGS WOULD YOU HAVE TALKED ABOUT?

I would want to have talked to him about the early days of television and how he was able to create this singular, completely individual enterprise that would likely never see the light of day today—and would certainly not be as sophisticated as *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* was. "You're going to start your show with a dead fish? What are the kids going to learn from that?" I would want to talk to him about when he was young, growing up as a fat, sickly kid who got made fun of. You could go through a lot of people in history who were very sick when they were young and became artists because they spent so much time alone. And then I would want to talk



## THE SWEATER

Those iconic cardigans were inspired by an avid knitter. "Until she died, those zipper sweaters that I wore on the *Neighborhood* were all made by my mother," Rogers said. "She made one a month." After his mom's sweaters wore out (Mrs. Rogers died in 1981), the show's art director would order sweaters of the type worn by postal workers and dye them the vibrant colors Rogers preferred (even though he was color-blind). One of those sweaters lives in the Smithsonian, where it's considered an American treasure.

## 5 Things I Learned From FRED ROGERS

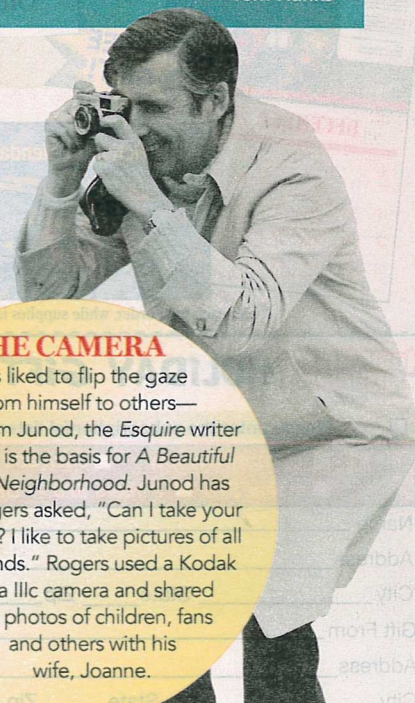
1. Hot cranberry juice is a perfect morning beverage. Not coffee or tea, but cranberry juice, heated up in, I guess, a microwave. The man got up at 5:30 every morning, so he knew what worked.
2. Getting up at 5:30 a.m. every day means you can answer an awful lot of mail.
3. A daily 20-minute swim does a world of good for you.
4. Weighing 143 pounds was his full-body message of "I (1) love (4) you (3)." "It takes one letter to say 'I' and four letters to say 'love' and three letters to say 'you.' One-hundred and forty-three," Rogers said on his show.
5. "That which is essential is invisible to the naked eye"—his framed quote, in French, from Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince*. This was Fred's take on life, on being human. And it's correct.

—Tom Hanks

about what it was like growing up in a place like Latrobe, Pennsylvania—which was in some ways Anytown, USA, but at the same time was pretty rarified air. He was wealthy, and to be wealthy in a place like Latrobe would've had a kind of noblesse oblige aspect. You lived a kind of different life, but you were still in Latrobe; was that advantageous, or was that difficult? If I had dinner with Fred Rogers, I'd say nothing about me; I'd just ask Fred questions about his life.

## THE CAMERA

Rogers liked to flip the gaze away from himself to others—including Tom Junod, the *Esquire* writer whose story is the basis for *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*. Junod has said that Rogers asked, "Can I take your picture, Tom? I like to take pictures of all my new friends." Rogers used a Kodak Retina IIc camera and shared his photos of children, fans and others with his wife, Joanne.



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Number of seasons *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* ran on public television. The kids' program didn't shy away from tough topics, including nuclear war, divorce, death and disabilities.



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## MISTER ROGERS: Man With a Message

A *Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood* centers on the real-life intersection of TV host Fred Rogers (Tom Hanks) and magazine journalist Tom Junod (renamed Lloyd Vogel in the film and played by Matthew Rhys), who's interviewing him for *Esquire*.

Surrounded by Oscar buzz, the drama plays a part in a newly revitalized interest in the legacy of Rogers nearly two decades after *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* ended its long TV run, a year after the popular *Won't You Be*

# 50-100

Number of pieces of fan mail Mister Rogers received every day, often from children navigating difficult emotional terrain. Rogers answered every single one.

*My Neighbor?* documentary and 16 years after Rogers died at 74 in 2003.

In his life and career, Rogers—who came to be recognized as an oracle of gentle wisdom and advice for children, especially during turbulent times—emphasized the importance of real human connections.

"What was so important to Fred," says Benjamin Wagner, who directed an earlier 2010 documentary called *Mister Rogers & Me*, was "being really, really present and deeply engaged with the person you're sitting across from."

"Mister Rogers" wasn't playing

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a role on his TV show. The Fred Rogers of the series was very much the Fred Rogers in real life.

"People who've worked with him in any capacity say what you see is what you get," says Tim Lybarger, the founder of the Neighborhood Archive fan-appreciation website. "He wasn't playing a character on TV."

Lybarger says he thinks Rogers' work is as relevant as ever today. "We need that message now more than ever," he says. "Who isn't starving for a message of self-value and peace and love and appreciation?"

Lybarger's own appreciation took off after he sent Rogers a fan letter. "Within days, I got a letter back from Fred thanking me for working in education," he says. "That's when I started thinking, *OK, this guy is much more than a kids' show host.*"

What might Rogers make of the divisiveness we see in 2019? "I think he'd be saddened but hopeful," Lybarger says. "To this day on social media, you'll frequently see a quote from him about 'looking for the helpers.' I think Fred was magnificent at finding the good in any situation. So despite his frustration, his sadness or the confusion in our society, I think Fred would have been able to discover the good in there somewhere, and he would have been able to capitalize and build on that good that he found, and bring that out to those who might not be able to see it otherwise."

—Samuel R. Murrian

Did Mister Rogers have tattoos? Visit **Parade.com/rogers** for 15 facts about the children's TV icon.