

OBITUARIES

Doris Roberts of 'Everybody Loves Raymond' dies at 90

BY CARMEL DAGAN
VARIETY.COM

LOS ANGELES — Doris Roberts, a character actress who labored honorably both on stage and screen for years before finding the perfect vehicle for her talents, the hit sitcom "Everybody Loves Raymond," died on Sunday. She was 90.

Her "Everybody Loves Raymond" co-star Patricia Heaton confirmed the news on Monday.

A cause of death has not yet been released. According to TMZ, which first reported the news, Roberts died in Los Angeles.

Roberts was nominated for 11 Emmys, including seven for playing Marie Barone on "Raymond," winning four for her work on that series; she picked up her first Emmy in 1983 for a guest appearance on "St. Elsewhere," making for a total of five wins overall.

On "Everybody Loves Raymond," Roberts' almost omnipresent Maria Barone (she appeared on every episode of the show, which ran from 1996-2005) made life difficult for her son, Ray Romano's Ray, and especially for his wife, Debra, played by Heaton.

Roberts explained to the website Jewish Virtual Library that to create Maria she combined aspects of Romano's Italian mother and series producer Phil Rosenthal's German-Jewish mother.

"They are different rhythms, different personas. I meld them together," the actress said. "This woman could be a harri-dan. She really is more than meddlesome."

But in her performance she made Maria's actions more palatable.

"Everything I do, I do it because I want (the other characters) to make a better life, a better home. It all comes from love. That's why I'm very pleased and excited that I have that much of a contribution for that character that makes everyone laugh, because if you laugh at me, you can laugh at your own parents."

When "Remington Steele" producers were



Actress Doris Roberts arrives at the Hollywood Film Awards in Beverly Hills in 2015. The co-star of the hit comedy television series "Everybody Loves Raymond" died on Sunday, according to local media reports.

looking to make changes in the supporting cast in 1983 after the show's first season, they envisioned a new character, Mildred Krebs, as an attractive 35-year-old woman who could be a rival for the affections of Pierce Brosnan's Steele. Despite how the character was then delineated, Roberts, who'd recently won an Emmy for guesting on "St. Elsewhere," asked to read for the part and won over executive producer Michael Gleason in her audition — and the character was changed to fit Roberts. She recurred in the second season and became a series regular thereafter, appearing in 72 episodes of the show from 1983-87.

She earned her first Emmy for the fourth episode in the initial season of "St. Elsewhere," "Cora and Arnie," in which she and James Coco, longtime friends, played a homeless couple who face devastation as she learns her feet must be amputated, which will render her unable to care for the mentally challenged Arnie.

Recent film work included romantic comedy "All Over the Guy" (2001); David Spade vehicle "Dickie Roberts: Former Child Star" (2003); comedies "Grandma's Boy," "I-See-You-Com" and "Keeping Up With the Steins" (all 2006);

the romantic comedy "Play the Game," in which she had a substantial role opposite Andy Griffith; family adventure comedy "Aliens in the Attic" (2009); and Tyler Perry's "Madea's Witness Protection" (2012), in which she played the mother of Eugene Levy's character.

In a 2007 episode of "Law & Order: Criminal Intent," Roberts played the ill, mistreated matriarch of an aristocratic New York family. In recent years the actress also guested on "Grey's Anatomy," "The Middle" (reuniting with Heaton), "Raymond's" Heaton, "Hot in Cleveland," "Desperate Housewives" and "Melissa & Joey."

Doris May Green was born in St. Louis. After her father deserted the family, her mother raised her in the Bronx with the aid of her own parents. Her stepfather, whose surname she took, was Chester H. Roberts. He and her mother, Ann, operated stenographic service the Z.L. Rosenfield Agency, which catered to playwrights and actors.

In her brief time at NYU, Doris Roberts studied journalism, but she soon moved to the Neighborhood Playhouse to study acting (later she joined the Actors Studio).

Roberts made her Broad-

way debut in 1955 in a revival of William Saroyan's comic play "The Time of Your Life." For the hit original comedy "The Desk Set," starring Shirley Booth, she played a supporting role and served as stage manager. After an absence from Broadway of a number of years, she appeared in "Marathon '33," starring Julie Harris, in 1963-64. She served as a standby for a couple of plays, then appeared in "The Natural Look" in 1967.

Roberts starred with James Coco and Linda Lavin in Neil Simon's hit comedy "Last of the Red Hot Lovers" in 1969-71. She appeared in "Bad Habits," a pairing of two Terrence McNally plays starring F. Murray Abraham, in 1974, and made her final appearance on Broadway in 1978 in "Cheaters."

She had appeared on television even before she made it to Broadway, making her small-screen debut in 1951 on the CBS show "Starlight Theatre" and appearing on shows including "Ben Casey" and "Naked City" in the 1960s.

Roberts made her film debut in 1961's "Something Wild." Later in the decade she had small roles in "Barefoot in the Park" and "Divorce American Style" (both 1967) and somewhat

larger roles in "No Way to Treat a Lady" and Kirk Douglas film "A Lovely Way to Die" (both 1968). The actress was fourth billed in the 1969 cult classic "The Honeymoon Killers."

In the 1970s her career picked up considerably both in film and on TV.

During the decade she guested on shows including "Mary Tyler Moore," "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman" (as a faith healer), "All in the Family," "Rhoda" and "Barney Miller."

Roberts was originally intended to play Vivian, the character ultimately portrayed by Rue McClanahan, on "Maude," but the producers decided that her persona was too similar to that of series star Bea Arthur.

In 1978 she had a story arc on ABC's seminal comedy "Soap" as the mother of Father Timothy Flotsky (Sal Viscuso) who curses her son for leaving the priesthood, makes a scene at his wedding, then dies on the wedding night.

In 1979-80 she was a series regular on the single-season sitcom "Angie," starring Donna Pescow as a Philadelphia waitress, with Roberts playing her mother. Roberts directed an episode of "Angie," her only such effort.

On "Alice" she guested as the mother of the title character, played by Linda Lavin, with whom she'd worked on Broadway. In the 1980s she guested on "Cagney & Lacey," "Full House" and "Perfect Strangers," drawing an Emmy nomination for her performance on the last of these.

She picked up another Emmy nomination in 1991 for her work on a segment of PBS' "American Playhouse" called "The Sunset Gang," about life in a retirement community. The actress complained to the L.A. Times when the show debuted: "I won an Emmy for a dramatic role on 'St. Elsewhere.' I have yet to be given a dramatic role (to do since) in this town. Comedy is what they put me in. I came from New York theater. I am an actress — I do everything."

During the 1970s she appeared in films including the Alan Arkin-directed "Little Murders," Elaine May's "A New Leaf" and "The Heartbreak Kid," classic thriller "The Taking of Pelham One Two Three" (playing the mayor's wife), "Hester Street," Joan Rivers' disastrous "Rabbit Test" and "The Rose" (in which she briefly appeared as star Bette Midler's mother).

She had a small role as one of the grandmothers in the 1989 Chevy Chase comedy "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation." During the 1990s she appeared in films including "Used People," starring Shirley MacLaine and Marcello Mastroianni; Warren Leight's romantic comedy "The Night We Never Met," starring Matthew Broderick and Anabella Sciortta; "The Grass Harp," with Sissy Spacek and Walter Matthau; and Billy Crystal comedy "My Giant."

Also during the decade she recurred on HBO comedy "Dream On" as Angie Pedalbee.

She starred in McNally's "Unusual Acts of Devotion" at the La Jolla Playhouse in June 2009.

In September 2002 she testified before the Senate Special Committee on Aging about age discrimination in Hollywood and how the problem is particularly acute for women.

"Many of my friends, talented actresses in the 40- to 60-year-old range, are forced to live on unemployment or welfare because of the scarcity of roles for women in that age bracket," she declared in part.

She was the longtime chair of the Children Affected by AIDS Foundation, using her Hollywood connections to fundraise.

Roberts was married twice, the first time to Michael Emilio Cannata from 1956 until their divorce in 1962 and the second time to novelist and playwright William Goyen, to whom she was married from 1963 until his death in 1983.

She is survived by her son Michael, from her first marriage, who also was her manager; and three grandchildren.

Veterans still can face long waits for care — if they get it at all

BY ERIC YODER
THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — Veterans newly enrolling for health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs and requesting an appointment can endure a months-long wait before they first see a medical provider, according to an audit issued Monday.

The Government Accountability Office also said that the department's method of measuring wait times understates the delay a veteran experiences.

The average waiting time — as measured from the time veterans requested that VA contact them to schedule appointments to when they were seen — at the six medical centers GAO studied ranged from 22 to 71 days. Of the 180 veterans GAO tracked, 60 still hadn't been seen by the time the auditors ended their review last month, in several cases because VA never followed up on their requests to be contacted or because of other administrative errors.

In addition, wait times "varied widely, even within the same medical center," and 12 of those who were seen had waited more than 90 days.

"These time frames were impacted by limited appointment availability and weaknesses in medical center scheduling practices, which contributed to unnecessary delays," the report said.

The report was issued ahead of a House Veterans Affairs' Committee hearing on Tuesday, two years after a hearing there helped trigger a flood of revelations that veterans

had been enduring long waits for care and that some patient records had been fudged to hide it.

"This report proves what we've long known: wait-time manipulation continues at VA and the department's wait-time rhetoric doesn't match up with the reality of veterans' experiences," Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Florida, the committee chairman, said in a statement. "But given the fact that VA has successfully fired just four people for wait-time manipulation while letting the bulk of those behind its nationwide delays-in-care scandal off with no discipline or weak slaps on the wrist, I am not at all surprised these problems persist."

GAO noted that the department calculates appointment wait times from the day that veterans request an appointment date, rather than from when they first ask VA to contact them to schedule one. "Therefore, these data do not capture the time these veterans wait prior to being contacted by schedulers, making it difficult for officials to identify and remedy scheduling problems that arise prior to making contact with veterans," it said.

It gave as an example a veteran who applies for health-care benefits on the first of a month and requests that VA contact him to schedule an appointment; on the seventh, VA determines he is eligible; on the 12th, a scheduler contacts him and learns that the preferred appointment date is the 17th; on that date, VA reschedules the appointment for the 21st because no appoint-



Robert McGuire, president of the Florida chapter of the Korean War Veterans Association, tells members of his state's congressional delegation in 2014 about hassles he faces trying to use the Department of Veterans Affairs health system.

ment is available for the preferred date; and on the 21st the veteran is seen.

Although 20 days have passed since the veteran set the appointment ball rolling, by VA's reckoning, the wait time was only four days — from the date the appointment was finally set until the veteran was seen.

In addition, GAO found that "scheduling errors, such as incorrectly revising preferred dates when rescheduling appointments, understated the amount of time veterans waited to see providers."

In comments to the report, VA agreed with recommendations to ensure that newly enrolling veterans requesting appointments are contacted promptly; that it begin measuring wait time from the first request to be contacted until the patient is

seen; and that it clarify scheduling processes and assure that staff members are trained on them.

In response to the disclosures in 2014, VA revised many of its scheduling practices and Congress passed the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act. That law allows veterans facing long waits or lengthy travel distances the opportunity to obtain health-care services — including primary care — from community providers.

The 2014 law also restricted the appeal rights for VA's senior executives, shortening the time they have to respond to proposed discipline and to appeal once the department does take action. Also, the department wins by default if a Merit Systems Protection Board hearing officer does not

overturn the discipline within three weeks and there is no further right of appeal.

Despite those limits, hearing officers recently overturned the department in three high-profile cases. VA then proposed to revise the 2014 law by allowing most executives to appeal only to internal review boards and by requiring the MSPB to give more deference to the department's decisions for the rest.

Such language may be incorporated into a bill the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee is drafting as an update to the 2014 law. Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Georgia, chairman of that committee, recently said that the measure will be designed to improve care and "hold all VA employment accountable for mismanagement and misconduct."

The House last year passed with bipartisan support a bill to extend across the VA workforce many of the 2014 law's provisions now applying only to executives. It would give VA authority to more swiftly fire or demote any employee for poor performance or misconduct while adding protections for whistleblowers and limiting the agency's ability to place employees on paid leave pending disciplinary action.

The full Senate has not acted on a counterpart that passed its committee late last year, however.

"Veterans need better access to private care. Unaccountable bureaucrats need to be fired. The VA needs a radical transformation if it is ever going to adequately care for our veterans," House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-California, said in a statement. "Congress has already given the VA the power to do all of this. If the VA wanted to, it could change. What is keeping veterans from getting improved care they deserve? Bureaucratic inertia."

Senior VA medical officials are scheduled to testify at Tuesday's hearing, as are representatives of the GAO and VA's inspector-general office, which has investigated so many allegations of manipulated wait times that it recently began bunching its findings by state.

The independent Office of Special Counsel also has launched numerous investigations of wait-time manipulation, in some cases finding that VA management had retaliated against whistleblowing employees.