



Don Imus Bio

Given recent history, there is information that should be included in line one, paragraph one, of any Don Imus biography. However, if it were, the reader might not get beyond those initial facts, wad up the bio and throw it in a wastebasket, or, worse, fashion a complaint for referral to some government agency. Therefore, we shall begin at the beginning, and defer those other details for later inclusion.

Imus broadcast his first program from New York City back in 1971. He broadcast what some said – vehemently – should have been his last in 2007. His life journey has by some accounts been arduous, by other accounts a freak parade, and by still others as a matter for a RICO investigation. It began out in the great American West, California and Arizona, and eventually would make its way on across the country to Ohio and New York.

Imus was born in Riverside, California. Ranching was the family business and he was actually raised on a big cattle spread called the Willows near Kingman, Arizona. Don recalls that period of his childhood fondly and his familiar cowboy persona is completely legitimate. His irascibility

appears to be equally legitimate, influenced by more than a few hard knocks along the way. If he revels in the agony of others, as he jokes, it may just be because he's had a little of that himself. His parents divorced when Don was fifteen, he changed schools frequently, got arrested after a school yard fight, won election in secondary school as class president and was impeached, and, at seventeen, was pushed by his mother to join the marine corps as the best strategy to keep him out of jail. While it all added up to what Imus himself has described as a fairly horrible adolescence, it also disproves a theory that he actually had no parents and instead spawned spontaneously in dust clots behind the Laundromat dryers where one day he would seek shelter. When did all of these events unfold? It doesn't really matter. And why annoy Don by asking?

Despite the occasional rough patch, Imus did spend a full twelve years in public school and emerged with no formal education...a product of automatic social promotion not even casually tied to merit. He graduated with no honors and no skills, a rare stroke of luck because a broadcasting career required neither.

Difficulty continued to dog Imus after his school days: his undistinguished, infraction blotched stretch in the marines, onerous labor in a Superior, Arizona copper mine and a Grand Canyon uranium mine where an accident left him with both legs broken. There was work as a freight brakeman on the Southern Pacific railroad and a back injury suffered in an engine derailment, and at one point the indignities of homelessness, hitching, being flat broke. Better, and worse days were to come.

This quintessential American and often challenging personal passage materially defined Imus, instilling him with humility, a deep respect for our country and its workers, and a disturbing need to get even. He emerged

from the experience with attributes that contributed enormously to the broadcasting distinction he would realize: an intrinsic, conspicuous authenticity, and a unique ability to connect with real people who work hard, serve their country, and care passionately about what really matters in the world.

Once Imus began broadcasting, fame and acclaim came quickly. He was showered with the laurels of radio celebrity including inductions into both the National Association of Broadcasters and radio halls of fame. He was the recipient of four Marconi awards, broadcasting's equivalent of Hollywood's Oscars. It got to the point that he would throw this or that slab of walnut with crystal crap glued to it against the wall of his office as a convenient means of intimidating horrified underlings. He was featured on television programs from NBC's "Today" show to CBS' "60 Minutes." He was a guest of Charlie Rose, David Letterman, and of special note, Larry King, in shameless, mutual ass-kissing marathons that challenged the audience's gag reflex. In addition, he was and continues to be a subject of countless print articles, many with no point but some with far more serious substance than is comfortable. Most of the latter have been published relatively recently, and apply to that opening paragraph's deferred information we said would be included later. Like now.

Regrettably, acclaim and fame sometimes can quickly mutate into notoriety and disfavor. That happened pretty much in an eye blink when Don made a crack about the Rutgers University women's basketball team. The remark was without malicious intent, but it made no difference. The simple fact is that distasteful words were spoken and could not be pulled back. Nobody acknowledges that reality, or is sorrier about it, than Imus himself. With what seemed like light speed velocity, the Imus broadcast

career dropped into a black hole. Strike that. It disappeared into the media equivalent of a physical construct popularized by Stephen Hawking from which nothing can escape. Well, nearly nothing.

Although he was bludgeoned from every point of the compass, hammered ruthlessly by both foe and “faux friend” alike, within a matter of months Don would defy his Pharisees to rise again, make amends, resume a remarkable career, and become the subject of yet another convulsion of print and broadcast agita.

Was a lesson learned? Certainly, but more likely an understanding: a broader, deeper recognition of how and whom words can hurt, intended or not. Does that mean *you’re* off the hook? Excuse me. The Imus biography is still being written. Happily, it does seem to improve as it goes along. But don’t tempt fate.

So, here we go again. Will TIME magazine assign him to its list of the 25 most influential people in America a second time? Few would be surprised. Will that sun seared, dried apple, Brokeback Mountain visage be cover story material all over again? That’s guaranteed. Will it also show up on missing person milk cartons as his ever-loyal radio staff still hopes against hope? Not yet. Will Imus be invited to speak at the Clinton Presidential Library? Sure, if somehow it would be to deliver his own eulogy.

In the interim, Don and wife Deirdre will continue to run the Imus ranch for kids with cancer, raise more millions for the Tomorrows Children Fund, the CJ Foundation for SIDS, America’s veterans and their care, autism studies, environmental concerns, and all the countless other things Don does, most with notice neither assigned nor sought.