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DeForest Kelley 1920-1999

This Month's issue of THE MIGHTY MAX has been dedicated and devoted to the memory of DeForest Kelley. All regular features and columns will return next month. Thank you.

**Submissions for the July 1999 issue of the Mighty Max
Are Due no later than Midnight on June 30th, 1999.**

**Send them to
Chris Stephenson
298 Jennie Drive
Gahanna, OH, 43230-2138**

**E-Mail
Chrisstephenson@hotmail.com
or ft99@hotmail.com**

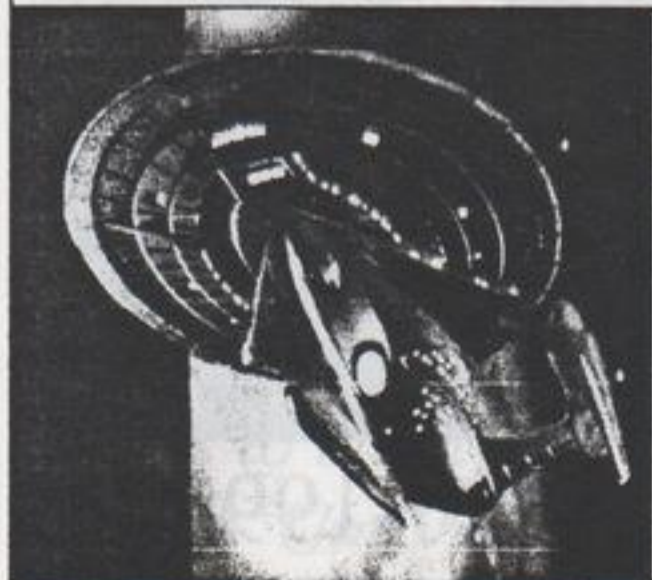
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DeForest Kelley 1920-1999



DeForest Kelley, actor beloved as Dr. McCoy on TV's "Star Trek", dies at age 79.

By Elaine Woo, L.A. Times Staff Writer

DeForest Kelley, who played the irascible but wise Dr. Leonard "Bones" McCoy in the "Star Trek" television series and movies, died Friday at the Motion Picture and Television Fund Hospital in Woodland Hills. He was 79.

Kelley entered the convalescent home three months ago and died after a lingering illness, said A.C. Lyles, a longtime producer at Paramount Studios, where the original series was shot. Kelley's wife of 55 years, Carolyn, who was recuperating from a broken leg in the home, was by his side when he died. Kelley was a supporting actor on film, stage and television for 20 years before landing his distinctive role on what would become a cult science fiction series. "Star Trek," which aired on NBC from 1966 to 1969, was director Gene Roddenberry's saga of the star ship Enterprise, a 23rd century spacecraft with a mission to study unexplored worlds and transport supplies to Earth colonies in space. On the Enterprise's motley crew, Kelley was the resident surgeon, diagnostician and humanist, the perfect foil for the coldly logical Mr. Spock played by Leonard Nimoy and the macho Capt. James Kirk played by William Shatner. "He was one of a kind, a great friend and a very important part of a collection of personalities," Nimoy said Friday. "He had the humanist point of view in the show. It fit him very well. He brought a decency and sensibility

that made you want to have him around." The son of a Baptist minister, Kelley was born in 1920 in Atlanta, where he sang in the church choir. He left Atlanta after high school to visit an uncle in Long Beach, and joined a theater group. In the mid-1940s he was discovered by a Paramount talent scout who saw him in a Navy training film. The scout offered him a screen test and later a contract. He made his film debut as a man who may have committed murder while under hypnosis in a 1947 film noir called "Fear in the Night," which showcased Kelley's distinctive arched eyebrows and occasional wild-eyed expressions. He appeared in several more films before moving to New York, where he worked in theater and in early television anthology dramas such as "Schlitz Playhouse of Stars." He returned to Hollywood in 1955 to resume his film work, appearing in director Sam Fuller's "House of Bamboo" and "Tension at Table Rock." He had a slight Southern drawl and a weathered face that he parlayed into roles as ranchers, town folk and minor villains in westerns such as "Gunfight at the O.K. Corral" in 1956. In 1960 he landed more television roles, including the lead in a pilot written and produced by Roddenberry. Although Roddenberry

later cast another actor, Edmond O'Brien, in the series "Sam Benedict," he did not forget about Kelley. Kelley was not a fan of science fiction. But when Roddenberry invited him to a screening of the original pilot for "Star Trek," which starred Jeffrey Hunter, he did not turn him down. After the screening, Roddenberry said: "Well, cowboy, what did you think?" Kelley replied: "Gene, that will be the biggest hit or the biggest miss ever." Over lunch in the studio commissary, Roddenberry offered him a choice of two roles, one of which he described as "this green-painted alien." Kelley chose the other role. "I'm glad it turned out that way," he told the Chicago Tribune some years ago, "because I wouldn't have been anywhere near Leonard [Nimoy]. He's been marvelous." Although his character often clashed with Nimoy's character, the two were united in loyalty to Shatner's Kirk. He was often beamed down to hostile spots in the galaxy along with the other members of the show's trinity, but was most at home in the high-tech dispensary aboard the Enterprise. McCoy's sarcasm endeared him to fans. "Did you see the love light in Spock's eyes? The right computer finally came along,"

The Mighty Max

McCoy said in an episode called "The Ultimate Computer," in which the Enterprise tests a computer designed to run the ship without a crew. Kelley stalwarts loved his trademark lines: "I'm just a country doctor," uttered when he was faced with some ghastly outer-space malady, and, "He's dead, Jim."

Few could have predicted the extraordinary longevity of the "Star Trek" craze. The original series, premiering on Sept. 8, 1966, was a ratings failure. It routinely lost in its time period. At its peak in 1966-67, it still ranked 52nd among all series. NBC canceled the show in 1969. But a legion of "Star Trek" fanatics lobbied fiercely to return the program to network television. It achieved cult status in the 1970s and succeeded in reruns. Annual "Star Trek" conventions were held in the United States and abroad. An animated version ran on NBC from 1973 to 1975, with original cast members, including Kelley, supplying the voices. Kelley developed his own loyal following over the years, welcomed by "Trekkies" at confabs around the world.

In 1989, the year Paramount released "Star Trek V: The Final Frontier," he received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. He reprised the role of McCoy in all seven "Star Trek" movies made with Shatner and Nimoy, beginning with "Star Trek: The Motion Picture" in 1979 and ending with "Star Trek: Generations" in 1994.

(A new generation of Enterprise officers was featured in the 1996 release "Star Trek: First Contact," which starred Patrick Stewart and Jonathan Frakes.)

Most of the movies were roundly panned, and the endless sequels became targets for late-night television show jokes. The last in the series fared best at the box office, grossing \$70 million. After a while, Kelley came to dread the critics' words.

"The one thing I always dread about critics' reviews of the 'Star Trek' movies is they first review us," Kelley said in 1991, when "Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country" was released.

STARFLEET DOSSIER

Startrek.com

DeForest Kelley had played villains most of his adult career, usually in Westerns, until Gene Roddenberry plucked him up to play a lab doctor in his short-lived series *The Lieutenant*. A generation later the world knows him simply as that ol' country doctor, Leonard H. "Bones" McCoy.

The Character
McCoy was not a character in either of the first two pilots and, like Nichelle Nichols' Uhura, was not a member of Kirk's crew until the beginning of regular production. Thus, "De" Kelley first appeared in Starfleet logs for "Corbomite Maneuver," but viewers first saw him in the first one-hour aired, "The Man Trap" -- which by coincidence featured about as much of McCoy's "backstory" -- an old girlfriend -- as we would learn in almost the entire original series.

The Episodes
Despite that, McCoy was featured prominently in several episodes, en route to getting co-starring billing in the opening credits with the coming of Season 2. One might never have guessed it based on his film career, based mostly on a horse or behind the wrong end of the law, but De Kelley made the role his own and made the doctor an equal foil for both his captain and his arch-debate partner, Spock.

Kelley's heaviest episode as McCoy undoubtedly included that with the longest title -- "For the World Is Hollow and I Have Touched the Sky" -- as he fell in love with the Yonadan priestess, Natira, after realizing he had less than a year to live. Neither event eventually came to pass, but they clearly played a big part of his life.

Perhaps Kelley's most notable performance came in the classic "City on the Edge of Forever." As the pivotal focus of an accidental change in time, Kelley's bewildered revival from an accidental overdose -- a scene shared with Joan Collins, 1930s social worker Edith Keeler -- is a classic of the role.

But Kelley had his moments throughout the series, because rather than Kirk's heroics or Spock's logic it was often McCoy's skills that saved the day. From saving Spock and Kirk in both "Amok Time" and "Journey to Babel" to his blow for medical diplomacy in "Friday's Child" and medical intelligence in "The Trouble With Tribbles," McCoy was in the thick of what made the U.S.S. Enterprise's voyages legend.

The Movies
De Kelley had several shining moments as McCoy throughout the film series -- and many of the best lines. From his opening grouch-fest as a bearded "draftee" with old friend Kirk amid the crew reunion of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, to the housing of Spock's katra and a bare bones admission of friendship in *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock*, McCoy has been a character that grew throughout. Kelley's portrayal of McCoy's confrontation with past choices over his dad's final days was a gripping moment in *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*.

And More...
Kelley has been a favorite of fans ever since the earliest days of conventions, and his poem "The Big Bird's Dream" has been reprinted and recited often. One of his latest appearances was at Huntsville, Ala., for the 30th Anniversary festival, where he shared the stage with his original stars, held his own against the "Big Two"

William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy, and even out ad libbed *Star Trek: Voyager's* Bob "EMH Doctor" Picardo, no slouch on the witticisms himself.

Biography of Deforest Kelley-Startrek.com

Jackson DeForest Kelley was delivered at home in Atlanta, Georgia, by his uncle, a prominent local physician. The son of Clara Casey Kelley and Rev. Ernest D. Kelley, a Baptist minister, DeForest lived all over the South.

After singing in the church choir, DeForest discovered that he enjoyed singing and was good at it. Eventually this led to solos and later performing on radio station WSB in Atlanta. As a result of his radio appearances, he won an engagement with Lew Forbes and his orchestra at the Paramount Theater. It was DeForest's first taste of being an entertainer, and he liked it.

DeForest moved to Long Beach, California to live with his Uncle Casey. He saved money working as an usher in a local theater until he had enough for the move. DeForest found that he loved the sun, surf and excitement of Long Beach and told his parents he was going to stay and get a job. Mopping floors soon gave way to operating an elevator in a hotel near the ocean.

One day, DeForest was sitting in a restaurant when Rohn Hawke, who was doing local theater, came over and asked if he had any acting experience. Hawke worked with him to smooth out his Georgia accent, wanting DeForest to appear in a play he was directing. He auditioned and won the part. During the run of the play, a talent scout caught his performance and felt he had a future in acting. In the evenings, he continued to appear with the Long Beach Theater Group to gain experience, while operating an elevator and 'roughnecking' for Richfield Oil during the day. Sometime later, DeForest and some friends from the group started writing and staging plays at a local radio station. This led to other radio work for him.

He was tested for the baby-faced killer in *This Gun for Hire* and was assured, after 13 takes, that he had the role. Unfortunately, it ultimately went to Alan Ladd and DeForest went back to the Theater Group.

In 1942, DeForest appeared as a beach bum in "The Innocent Young Man" with the Long Beach Theater Group. His co-star was a blonde, blue-eyed



beauty named Carolyn Dowling. Toward the end of the play, Carolyn was to hand him a five dollar bill and say, "Here, Bill, take this money and buy yourself a drink." Carolyn used her own five dollars, with DeForest giving it back at the end of each performance. When the play closed, DeForest "forgot" to return the money and called her from the bar where he was having a drink. "I've got your five dollars, so you'd better come down here and help me spend it, or it's all going to be gone."

Their budding romance was interrupted by war and DeForest went into the Army Air Corps in New Mexico, where Carolyn visited often. Finally he was transferred to Culver City to act in a Navy training film. That was when the couple decided to get married. They found a judge that married servicemen free of charge, bought two Indian rings for 25 cents and were married on September 7, 1945.

A Paramount talent scout spotted DeForest in the Navy film and it led to a three year contract. His first film was a starring role in "Fear in the Night." It was a low-budge project, but it caught the attention of the public and became a box-office sleeper – a real hit – and DeForest was established as a respected actor. Shortly after that he made "Variety Girl" and he was on his way.

A couple of years later the Kelleys decided to try their luck on the New York stage. While DeForest sought work, Carolyn got a job in the main office of Warner Brothers. While DeForest did find work on stage and live television, after three years they returned to Hollywood. He landed a part in a *You Are There* episode. That part led to another and another.

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A couple of years later the Kelleys decided to try their luck on the New York stage. While DeForest sought work, Carolyn got a job in the main office of Warner Brothers. While DeForest did find work on stage and live television, after three years they returned to Hollywood. He landed a part in a *You Are There* episode. That part led to another and another. His exceptional performance as Ike Clanton in the episode, "Last Gunfight at OK Corral" was his first role as a heavy and it brought him three movie offers.

For nine years DeForest primarily played heavies and found them interesting and challenging. He built up an impressive list of credits, alternating between television and motion pictures. Afraid of being type-cast, DeForest broke out of that mold by doing "Where Love Has Gone" and a television pilot called "333 Montgomery." The latter was written by an ex-cop named Gene Roddenberry. A few years later, DeForest would appear in another Roddenberry pilot, "Police Story." That didn't sell either, but it led to *Star Trek* and the unforgettable role of Dr. Leonard McCoy.

After *Star Trek* ended production, DeForest took a long, well-deserved vacation. He made a few movies and did some television, but primarily went into retirement. He says that nowadays, "Acting has become my hobby and my home has become my heart." DeForest enjoys his garden, where he tends 50+ rosebushes, reads biographies and works around

Dammit, Jim! He's my hero, not just a doctor!

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"Excuse me... but what's a nice (apparently sane) girl like you doing down on your hands and knees on the Hollywood Walk of Fame?" you may ask.

Go ahead. Ask.

If you really MUST know, I'm polishing the star of actor DeForest Kelley, keeping it in tiptop shape... the way it was on the day it was presented to him in 1991.

"Does he pay you to do this?"

Heavens, no! Are you kidding? Absolutely not! I volunteered for this!

"What does HE think about it?"

You are VERY nose-y. But okay. Here goes. One time he cautioned me, "Just don't get arrested." What does THAT tell you? It probably embarrasses him. Too bad, so sad. He's stuck with me.

"Then you ARE crazy."

DE-mented. There's a fine line, here! I'm DE-mented: crazy about De.

"Why?"

Why?!

"Yes. Why?"

It's a LONG story. Nearly 30 years long.

"We have the time."

Well! I'm a fan! For starters.

"He has millions of fans. Not too many of them are down on their hands and knees every Sunday polishing his star."

Okay. I'm a fan. That's how it started. I wasn't a fanatic fan at first, you know. Just a fan fan. Thought he was cute, and had always enjoyed his portrayals in westerns, and I LOVED the way he handled Spock and Kirk. He was the ONLY one on that starship who could straighten those two out and get away with it. I LOVED that.

Well, then I had the chance to MEET him. In person. Me. A timid, shy, scared 17 year old. And he was so gracious, so appreciative, so benevolent, so UN-self-important, that I --- I just fell totally in love with him. (With HIM AND HIS WIFE, CAROLYN! Let me clarify this right now, in case The National Enquirer or The Globe is lurking nearby in the bushes!) I was so taken with him that I wrote an essay for creative writing class all about meeting him, telling how wonderful he was. The essay impressed the teacher and he suggested that I send a copy of it to Mr. Kelley. Well, I freaked! I did not -- categorically DID NOT -- write to TV stars! I told him that flatly. He suggested, "Look, if YOU impressed somebody as much as he obviously impressed YOU, wouldn't YOU want to know?" "Well, sure!" I countered, "but he's an ACTOR! He gets that ten times an hour!" "SEND THE ESSAY!" the teacher ordered. I complied. (He was, after all, the guy who decided my grades, and evaluated my character and such as that. He had me a a distinct disadvantage!)

Besides, I figured, DeForest's SECRETARY would get the essay -- and she'd toss it LONG before HE ever laid eyes on it, wouldn't she? Of course! So, what was I worried about?

Only -- guess what? DeForest's secretary is HIS WIFE! She didn't throw the essay away. She handed it to him and together they decided to send it to an entertainment magazine for consideration as a published article! And the magazine ACCEPTED it! And DeForest wrote to tell me this!

I tell ya, my parents had to peel me off the ceiling -- for WEEKS -- several times a day!

"So... Your favorite actor launched your freelance writing career?"

YES! And that's just the beginning! How much time do we have left?

"Not a lot. Can you capsulize the rest?"

Well, THEN --- 18 years later (how's that for capsulizing? We've gone from 1968 to 1986 at warp speed!) -- the 20th anniversary of STAR TREK came along! I had successfully been published in DOZENS of magazines and newspapers by then but hadn't stayed in touch with the Kelleys to let them know, so I figured I'd attend a TREK convention that had DeForest as a guest (my first TREK con ever!) and try to get a chance to thank him privately for being the one to prove to me I really WAS ready to write successfully! I dropped a brief note to him (via Paramount), jocularly warning him to PREPARE FOR A LONG-OVERDUE HUG!!!

Well, of course as soon as I did that, I realized the presumption inherent in the ridiculous idea, and nearly scared myself out of attending! The 17 year old shyness and timidity reasserted itself and I felt like a bimbo for even having IMAGINED writing him a note like that! Of all the nerve! He was an ICON at this stage! He was my childhood HERO! What was I DOING, sending him something as INANE and UNDIGNIFIED as a HUG ALERT!!!

"So, THAT'S the first time you noticed you were slipping the surly bonds of sanity?"

No, no, no! That's not it at all! I'm PERFECTLY SANE! WAIT! I just polish his star! You have no PROOF yet!

"Continue."

O.K. So I went to the con, feeling darned sheepish. Even took my ten year old nephew along as my "cover", my reason for being there. ("He loves McCoy... Don't you, Philip?"). Because I was pretty broke at the time, I stayed in a tent at a campground at night and drove to the convention hotel each of the three mornings. Because I was pretty sure that the hug and a brief meeting was a fond fantasy of MINE, and mine ALONE, it never occurred to me that DeForest and Carolyn Kelley were searching for me by phone in the con hotel and in surrounding hotels! But they were!!! When nothing came of their efforts, they concluded I had been unable to make the trip as originally indicated, and gave up.

Incidentally, I tried the first day of the convention to locate them, "just in case". I asked the front desk at the convention hotel if they could get a note to the Kelleys for me. Absolutely not, they assured me. The Kelleys were not staying at this hotel, and they had no idea where they WERE staying, and it was just impossible. So I figured that was that. (No convention hotel in its right mind is going to agree to contact a celebrity for fans, or they'd never have time to do anything ELSE! I understood.)

Sunday finally rolled around. This was DE-Day... the day that DeForest Kelley would address the "congregation". I sat on the floor in the aisle toward the front of the auditorium, audiotaping every word. Toward the end of his presentation, with only minutes to go, I was wound up like a top, knowing that if I didn't raise my hand and thank him now, the opportunity would slip away and I never WOULD get to say what I had gone there to tell him. I raised my hand into the sea of upraised hands, and -- call it a miracle -- he picked it!

I said, "I just wanted to thank you for launching my writing career."

De looked at me and inquired, "Are YOU Kris?!"

"Yes," I said, feeling totally flabbergasted.

"I've been looking all over for you!" he exclaimed -- before the entire audience! He proceeded to tell them that I was a writer he had discovered and whose career he had proudly launched! A Phil Donohue type ran down the aisle to me and thrust a microphone in my face, expecting me to react. React?! I was SPEECHLESS! Finally, I uttered quietly (into the mike, so "only" De could hear it? HAH!) "May I give you a hug?" "YOU CERTAINLY MAY!" he smiled, and I was up there at warp seven (while every female Trekkie in the audience audibly sighed and as flashbulbs exploded relentlessly) hugging him and patting him on the back and thanking him and trying not to take up too much of his remaining time with his audience! He told me, "We're proud of you. Keep up the good work." I dived back to my spot on the floor and my nephew inquired, "Did you cry?" "No," I said. "But almost." Then I asked little Phil, "Were you embarrassed when I asked him for a hug?" "No!" he asserted. "I WAS PROUD!"

The next morning -- again planned by Fate, I no longer have ANY doubt -- I was in the lobby talking to a computer specialist when the Kelleys came through on their way to the car which would carry them to the airport for their flight home. The crowd gasped when they saw him and pushed forward in his direction. Instantly timid again, I hung back, figuring I had had my moments with him, and that now it was someone else's turn. De spotted me and grinned, "Kris! Good morning!" and took Carolyn's arm to guide her through the throng in my direction. Totally flabbergasted yet again, I headed in their direction to make the trek less arduous at their end. De introduced me to Carolyn and she grinned and took my hands in hers, telling me they had often wondered what happened to the little girl who had written so well. I told them quickly of successes as a writer and Carolyn said, "Stay in touch! Don't disappear again! Send us your articles!" I said I would and again they headed for their ride to the airport.

This gets even better. Because I'm good at following directions, I did begin to write to them in earnest, to the point where De began to joke at conventions about receiving his "daily letter" from me! In 1989 I moved to southern California to try and land a job in the entertainment industry and once again, the inconceivable happened. The man who had launched my writing career now dedicated himself to helping me get my foot in the door in Hollywood! And he and Carolyn helped me with an even TOUGHER chore: searching for a home to rent with a landlord who would accept a knee-high serval (a wildcat native to Africa) which I had rescued as a kitten!!

I now work at WARNER BROS. If anyone were to ask me whether the person I have become would have been possible without the encouragement, faith and devotion of the Kelleys, I would say, "No." The teenager they took under their wing (FAR earlier and more snugly than she ever even KNEW) has learned to fly, but nowhere in my book do I feel I've ever flown "alone".

The stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame should ALL be polished by one fan or another, in my opinion. Few are, because not that many fans want to be considered eccentric! But I'll take that chance. De's star shines brightest in Hollywood because his kindness has shined so brilliantly into THIS fan's life, and into the lives so many others I'd love to name.

If you, too, are a DeForest Kelley fan, you've identified one of the best souls ever

The thoughts and prayers of the U.S.S. Maximillian will be with DeForest's family...as well as himself, as he continues to boldly go where noone has gone before...

Until next month...Live Long and Prosper.