

FELBERG REAL LIFE STORIES

*Tom
Hanks*

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY


Felberg SJA

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Tom  *Hanks*

A short biography

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INTRODUCTION

Almost every American actor has a label. There are stars, superstars and megastars. There are gangsters, lovers, action heroes, comedians. And then there is Tom Hanks. He is not as handsome as Brad Pitt, not as tough as Bruce Willis, not as sleek as William Baldwin. He is too young to rival the generation of Dustin Hoffman or Robert De Niro. He is too old to be one of Hollywood's eternal youngsters like Tom Cruise or Leonardo DiCaprio.

Tom Hanks is simply Tom Hanks. Hollywood has no label for him because he is painfully average. In his private life there is no scandal, womanizing, drinking or drugs. His first marriage may have failed, but he calls his current one “the greatest happiness on Earth.” He hates parties and trendy night clubs. He dislikes the way the media take interest in his life.

Is Hanks a bore, then? Or is he one of the very few morally impeccable figures left in Hollywood? How did Mr Average become the conscience of America in *Philadelphia*, reviving the old-fashioned virtues of loyalty and honesty? What is so special about his role in *Forrest Gump* that it brought the actor his second Oscar in a row? In other words—what is Tom's secret of success?

A lonely child

Thomas J. Hanks was born on July 9, 1956 in Concord, California. Tom's father Amos was a cook, and his mother Janet worked as a waitress. Mr and Mrs Hanks had four children. Apart from Tom there was Sandra (born in 1953), Larry (born in 1953) and Jim (born in 1961). When Tom was five, his parents divorced. Mrs Hanks was given custody of the youngest son, while the father was to take care of Tom and the two older children.

Tom remembers the day of his parents' separation very vividly. His younger brother's crying when they had to part. The open wardrobes and the suitcases packed in a hurry. The shelves in his room that he had to clear of his toys. Then there were only tears. The actor still remembers one teddy bear that he clutched while they drove away into the night. The toy got all wet as little Tom cried and cried into it on the back seat of his dad's old truck.

Tom spent most of his childhood on the road. His father often changed jobs, moving from place to place whenever a new

Tom Hanks almost becomes the character he portrays.



restaurant offered him better money. Amos and his children traveled across California and didn't stay in one town long enough for Tom to make friends. "It was a life of packing and unpacking," says the actor. "It was large country houses and then small city apartments. I felt very lonely. Whenever I started liking someone at school, dad began to pack our bags and we were on our way again. And I was just a child who needed some warmth and a sense of security!"

The fact that Tom's father remarried twice made things even worse. The boy's first stepmother had five children of her own and his second stepmom was Chinese. Sadly, Tom's mother also did some marrying and remarrying and the boy couldn't find much comfort or security with her either. Years later, the actor summarized his family situation like this: "By the age of 16 I'd had three mothers, four fathers, five schools and ten homes."

In effect, Tom was growing up alone. He walked the streets aimlessly or listened to the radio for hours on end. At one point he even considered a career as a radio presenter. "The radio was like a drug, I listened to it night and day. But then I discovered the theater and decided that it had even more magic."



CHAPTER TWO

Little big Tom

In the late 1970s Tom studied theater at California State University in Sacramento. His stage debut was a student theater production of Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard*. Tom's part in this play was noticed and appreciated by director Vincent Dowling, who invited Hanks to take part in the Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival in Cleveland. It was thanks to Dowling that the 21-year-old actor first appeared on professional stage in the role of Gremio in *The Taming of the Shrew*. The production was successful enough to make Tom Hanks quit university and stay in Cleveland, where he took part in a few more theatrical projects. Three more seasons of Shakespeare brought Tom critical appreciation—he even received the Best Actor award for his part in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*.