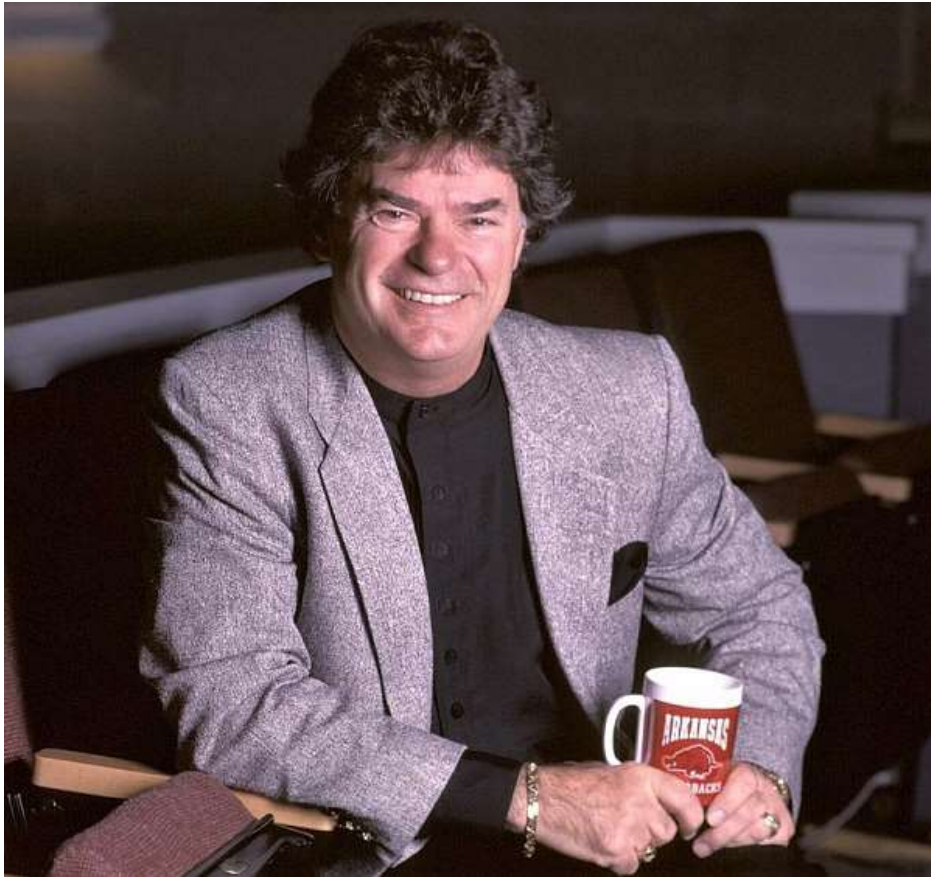


Frank Bonner, 'WKRP' star, Little Rock native, dies at 79

by Eric E. Harrison | June 17, 2021



Frank Bonner, photographed in 1996 at the Arkansas Repertory Theatre, died Wednesday at age 79. (Democrat-Gazette file photo/Staton Briedenthal)

Frank Bonner, an actor and television director from Little Rock who showed off his Arkansas roots with a Razorback mug that sat on his desk at a struggling Cincinnati radio station on the TV sitcom “WKRP in Cincinnati,” died Wednesday. He was 79.

Born Frank Woodrow Boers Jr., Bonner’s defining role was that of polyester-plaid-wearing ad salesman Herb Tarlek on the show, which ran on CBS from 1978-82.

Bonner's wife Gayle told The Hollywood Reporter — a digital and print magazine that focuses on the film, television, and entertainment industries — that Bonner died at his home in Laguna Niguel, Calif., of complications from Lewy body dementia.

Bonner appeared in 88 of 90 episodes of “WKRP” over four seasons. He also directed six episodes. He reprised his role in a 1990s spinoff, “The New WKRP in Cincinnati,” and acted and directed in “Saved By the Bell: The New Class” in 1994.

Bonner was born Feb. 28, 1942, in Little Rock, and his family subsequently moved to Malvern. In a 1996 interview for the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette’s High Profile section, Bonner said he decided at age 9 he wanted to be an actor and, a decade later, used the Navy as a one-way ticket to the West Coast.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Bonner acted in and directed shows at the Arkansas Repertory Theatre in Little Rock, including 1986's "Natural Disasters" with North Little Rock native Sally Sockwell and 1991's "Talking Things Over With Chekhov" with North Little Rock native Mary Steenburgen. Bonner directed "I'm Not Rappaport" at the Rep in 1990.

But he is best remembered for "WKRP in Cincinnati," which aired from 1978-1982 and was set in a lagging Ohio radio station trying to reinvent itself with rock. The cast included Gary Sandy, Tim Reid, Howard Hesseman and Jan Smithers.

Loni Anderson, who played the station's receptionist Jennifer, said she was "heartbroken" over his death.

"Frank Bonner was like family," Anderson said in a statement. "He was one of the funniest men I had the pleasure of working with and he was the nicest man I have ever known."

Bonner's daughter, Desiree Boers-Kort, told The Associated Press that her father valued his time on the sitcom in part because it led him toward the career he favored over acting — directing.

"He did prefer the behind-the-camera [work], and he thoroughly enjoyed helping people get to where he needed them to be for the scenes," Boers-Kort said Thursday. "He was very humble and down-to-earth, and just a nice, kind human."

He got a kick out of Herb's ill-advised wardrobe and kept some of the belts when the show ended, his daughter said. He was fond of them because he knew the character's style was "one of the things that people loved about him."

Bonner, whose previous marriages ended in divorce, is survived by his wife, Gayle, and four children. A fifth child preceded him in death, Boers-Kort said.

Information for this article was contributed by The Associated Press.

[-https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2021/jun/17/frank-bonner-wkrp-star-little-rock-native-dies-79/](https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2021/jun/17/frank-bonner-wkrp-star-little-rock-native-dies-79/)

Frank Bonner

Biography

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Overview (3)

Born February 28, 1942 in Little Rock, Arkansas, USA

Died June 17, 2021 in Los Angeles, California, USA (complications from Lewy body dementia)

Birth Name Frank Woodrow Boers Jr.

Mini Bio (1)

Frank Bonner was born on February 28, 1942 in Little Rock, Arkansas, USA as Frank Woodrow Boers Jr. He was an actor and director, known for WKRP in Cincinnati (1978), Equinox (1970) and The New WKRP in Cincinnati (1991). He was married to Gayle Hardage, Catherine Sherwood, Lillian Garrett, Mary Alice Rings and Sharon Gray. He died on June 17, 2021 in Los Angeles, California, USA.

Spouse (5)

Gayle Hardage (28 July 2006 - 16 June 2021) (his death)

Catherine Sherwood (24 November 1981 - ?) (divorced)

Lillian Garrett (24 February 1977 - 1980) (divorced)

Mary Alice Rings (14 October 1972 - January 1975) (divorced)

Sharon Gray (1 April 1966 - 1971) (divorced)

Trivia (6)

His ex-wife, Lillian Garrett, guest-starred on his TV series, WKRP in Cincinnati (1978).

The Canadian rock group, 'Rheostatics', wrote a song about his WKRP in Cincinnati (1978) character "Herb Tarlek". Bonner also starred in the music video.

Kept an Arkansas Razorbacks coffee mug on his desk on WKRP.

Friends with Tim Reid.

He was a lifelong Republican.

Upon his death, he was cremated and his ashes returned unto his surviving wife.

[-https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0094894/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0094894/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm)

'WKRP' star Frank Bonner remembered by castmate Loni Anderson: 'I am heartbroken'

The actor, who played Herb Tarlek, passed away on Wednesday at age 79

By Stephanie Nolasco | Fox News

Loni Anderson is mourning the loss of her beloved castmate.

Frank Bonner, who starred as Herb Tarlek in the hit sitcom "WKRP in Cincinnati," died on Wednesday at age 79. The actor passed away "peacefully" amid a battle with Lewy body dementia, his family told TMZ.

"Frank Bonner was like family," the actress told Fox News. "He was one of the funniest and nicest men I worked with. I am heartbroken."

As the plaid-loving Tarlek, Bonner played a radio station sales manager who could never reel in a big account. The comedy aired from 1978 until 1982. He later reprised the role in a spinoff titled "The New WKRP in Cincinnati," which aired from 1991 until 1993.



Pictured left to right: Richard Sanders (as news director Les Nessman), Frank Bonner (as advertising salesman Herb Tarlek), Loni Anderson (as receptionist Jennifer Marlowe), Gordon Jump (as general manager Arthur 'Big Guy' Carlson), Howard Hesseman (as morning disk jockey Dr. Johnny Fever), Gary Sandy (as radio program director Andy Travis), Jan Smithers (as assistant and traffic coordinator Bailey Quarters) and Tim Reid (as nighttime disc jockey Venus Flytrap) star on WKRP in Cincinnati, a CBS television situation comedy about characters at a radio station. Originally broadcast September 18, 1978.

According to the outlet, Bonner made headlines in October 1979 when he was hospitalized following a parasailing accident. He fell 20 feet and suffered several internal and back injuries, the New York Post reported.

"WKRP" castmate Gary Sandy also confirmed Bonner's passing on Facebook.

"It Is True!" the 75-year-old wrote. "Frank Passed Away, Yesterday June 16th at 3:48 Pacific Time RIP My Great Friend!!!"

Back in May, Anderson recalled her favorite "WKRP" memory to Fox News -one that included her pal.

"Gosh, I have so many," said the 75-year-old at the time. "But there's one spectacular scene I did with Frank Bonner, who played the salesman who was always after me. Jan Smithers, who played Bailey Quarters, told me to accept a date with him and maybe I would scare him away and he would leave me alone."

Frank Bonner stars as advertising salesman Herb Tarlek, on WKRP in Cincinnati, a CBS television situation comedy about characters at a radio station. Originally broadcast September 18, 1978.

Frank Bonner stars as advertising salesman Herb Tarlek, on WKRP in Cincinnati, a CBS television situation comedy about characters at a radio station. Originally broadcast September 18, 1978. (Photo by CBS via Getty Images)

"However, it didn't scare him," she continued. "We have a scene alone in my apartment, which was so beautifully written. Frank is really poignant in it. It was such a wonderful scene to play because he's so talented and gifted. We got fan letters, the two of us, from Steve Allen and Jack Lemmon about that scene. So I think that's my favorite memory."

Bonner's death was also announced on Facebook by his daughter Desiree Boer-Kort, Deadline.com reported.

"I'm deeply saddened to let you know that our beloved Frank Bonner passed away today at age 79," she wrote on the "WKRP in Cincinnati" home page. "He loved his fans and was still signing autograph requests up until the last few weeks of his illness. Thank you to all who followed his career. He will be forever missed."

The outlet noted that Bonner is survived by his wife, two adult daughters, two adult sons, seven grandchildren and a great-grandchild.

-<https://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/wkrp-frank-bonner-costar-loni-anderson>