

Roddenberry, Gene Encyclopedia Article

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Roddenberry, Gene

Gene Roddenberry sits with creatures from his television series *Star Trek*, the first television series to have an episode preserved in the Smithsonian Institution.

American Writer and Futurist 1921-1991

Gene Roddenberry, creator of the television series *Star Trek*, saw space as a place for learning new ideas and ways of thinking. Born in El Paso, Texas, on August 19, 1921, Roddenberry was a pre-law student in college for three years before becoming interested in aeronautical engineering. In 1941 he trained as a flying cadet in the U.S. Army Air Corps. During World War II, he took part in eighty-nine missions and sorties and was decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal.

During the war Roddenberry began to write, selling stories to flight magazines. Back in the United States, he went to Hollywood intending to write for television. He joined the Los Angeles Police Department to gain life experiences and soon sold scripts to such shows as *Goodyear Theater*, *Dragnet*, and *Have Gun Will Travel*.

Roddenberry's creation, the series *Star Trek*, debuted in 1966. The series developed a loyal following and was the first television series to have an episode preserved in the Smithsonian Institution, where a 3.3-meter (11-foot) model of the U.S.S. Enterprise is also exhibited on the same floor as the Wright brothers' original airplane. The first space shuttle was named Enterprise in honor of this fictional spacecraft.

While making *Star Trek*,* Roddenberry gained a reputation as a futurist, speaking on the subject at universities, the Smithsonian, meetings of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and Library of Congress gatherings.

Roddenberry died in 1991. A year later a canister of his ashes was taken into space aboard the space shuttle Columbia.

***Star Trek became a motion picture in 1978, leading to a number of movie sequels and prompting a popular new series, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, in the late 1980s. Three other spinoff series would follow, the most recent, *Enterprise*, debuted in 2001.**

See Also

Burial (Volume 1); Careers in Writing, Photography, and Filmmaking (Volume 1); Entertainment (Volume 1); *Star Trek* (Volume 4).

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Internet Resources

"Gene Roddenberry." *Spacelight*. <<http://members.tripod.com/~gwillick/roddenb.html>>.

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