

# DANNY KAYE'S DAUGHTER OPENS UP I MISS HIS SMILE

THE LEGENDARY COMEDIAN AND HUMANITARIAN WAS AS BELOVED AT HOME AS HE WAS AROUND THE GLOBE

**D**anny Kaye was a man of many talents — actor, comedian, dancer, singer, humanitarian. Add devoted dad to that list. As fans and friends celebrate the 105th anniversary of his birth, his daughter, Dena, remembers a caring father who always put family first. “I miss the smile on his face when he would see me,” she tells *Closer*. “I miss his company, his friendship, his support. I miss his scrambled eggs with onions and green peppers he used to make for breakfast!”

No Daddy Dearest, Danny was the antithesis of the narcissistic celebrity parent. “He was as down-to-earth as you could get,” says Dena, 69, his only child. In fact, Danny remained happily married to wife and collaborator Sylvia Fine for nearly 50 years, and they lived at the same home in Beverly Hills from 1947 until Dena sold it in 1991, four years after Danny’s death from heart failure. “We had a normal household,” she recalls fondly. “We watched TV and ate on tray tables. My parents came to my school plays.”

The only parenting duty Danny shunned was helping with homework. “He was a high school dropout, and he thought there was as much to learn in life as there was in school,” Dena explains of the man born David Daniel Kaminsky to Ukrainian Jewish immigrants in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Danny got his big break in the 1941 Broadway play *Lady in the Dark*, wowing audiences with his quick-tongued banter. Hollywood took notice and the rubber-faced, nimble-bodied talent starred in classics like *Hans Christian Andersen* and *White Christmas*. On TV, *The Danny Kaye Show* won acclaim in the 1960s. “It was the gold standard of variety shows,” Paley Center for Media curator Ron Simon tells *Closer* of the series, which was released on DVD in late 2014.

But Dena says her dad was never comfortable with the spotlight shining directly on him: “One of my father’s greatest gifts is that he never tried to steal the stage from the guest stars,” who included Nat King Cole, Liza Minnelli and Louis Armstrong, among many others.

That unselfishness carried on to his charity work. In 1954, he became UNICEF’s first Goodwill Ambassador, drawing attention to impoverished children around the world. It was work he loved deeply. “He had an ability to communicate with kids, bar none,” says Dena. “He spoke their language — hugs, shrugs, rolling on the floor, rubbing noses. He truly believed if you could help a child and give them a healthier life, the world would be a better place.”

— Jonny Small, with reporting by Katie Bruno

“He loved to give,” raves Dena of her dad. “He was incredibly sensitive and responsive to an audience.”

“Life is a great big canvas. Throw all the paint you can at it.”



Sylvia was the true love of Danny’s life, says Dena (with her parents in 1949).



Dena (in 2013) became a journalist for TV and such magazines as *Travel + Leisure*.

CLOCKWISE FROM MAIN: GETTY (2); EVERETT (2); GETTY; EVERETT; CORBIS; REX

**HIS CAREER THROUGH THE YEARS**



**THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY**

Danny played the titular dreamer in the 1947 hit, later remade by Ben Stiller.



**WHITE CHRISTMAS**

He joined Vera-Allen, Rosemary Clooney and Bing Crosby in the 1954 musical.



**THE COURT JESTER**

Danny suited up with Angela Lansbury and Glynis Johns in the hit 1955 comedy.



**THE DANNY KAYE SHOW**

Guests on his 1963–67 variety show included Lucille Ball (left) and Mary Tyler Moore.



**SKOKIE**

Danny was especially proud of his role as a Nazi death camp survivor in the 1981 TV movie.