

Oprah Winfrey

*“You know you are on the road to success if you would do your job,
and not be paid for it.”*

Born on January 29, 1954 in Kosciusko, Mississippi to teenage parents who were never married, Oprah was destined to overcome tragedy and become great. She was originally named Orpah, a biblical name, but a mistake on her birth certificate changed it to “Oprah.” Oprah spent a very troubled and impoverished childhood in Mississippi. She was sent to live with her mother in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Her situation there worsened as she was repeatedly sexually abused by male relatives.

At age 14 she went to live with her father in Nashville. Her rebellious nature conflicted with his strict religious discipline. He gave her love but she rebelled against his rules. She struggled with drugs, and misbehavior and lost a baby after giving birth prematurely. Eventually though she was awarded a university scholarship. Oprah attended Tennessee State University where she studied Speech and Performing Arts.

Her father’s high expectations and standards inspired her to aim high. While in school, Winfrey became a part-time radio reporter for station WVOL, Nashville. In her sophomore year she became an anchor at Nashville's WTVF-TV. She was the first black woman to hold that position. She worked for another station and then was given a talk show to host.

Her popularity gained her attention and she took a job in 1984 in Chicago as a morning talk show host. She was opposite Chicago’s own Phil Donahue and the results were astounding. "AM Chicago", an early morning talk show at WLS-TV, went on to become the number one ranked talk show shortly after she started and it was renamed “The Oprah Winfrey Show” after one year. As she expanded the operation, her profit line expanded as well. With the purchase of a large downtown production facility, Winfrey was able to become the third woman in the American entertainment industry -- after Mary Pickford and Lucille Ball -- to own her own studio. She named it “Harpo,” which is "Oprah" spelled backwards.

In 1985 she starred in the movie, “The Color Purple,” which launched her screen career with an Oscar nomination (for Best Supporting Actress), followed by 1989’s “The Women of Brewster Place,” which later became a short-lived television series. Meanwhile, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* went on to become one of the most successful and highest ranked television talk show programs. The program is viewed by millions of Americans every week and broadcast internationally to more than one hundred countries. She dealt with sensational issues until 1994 when she decided to take a more serious look at life with her programming. That year, Winfrey almost discontinued the show, but her commitment to making it the best day time talk show spurred her on to greatness.

She began the highly successful Book Club on the popular talk show, where authors are interviewed on the program. She endorses novels written by lesser known authors and

most of the books she has chosen end up best-sellers. In 2000 she launched her own magazine, "O." Oprah began producing popular films based on some of her favorite contemporary written works. Along with executive-producing made-for-television adaptations such as "David and Lisa," "Tuesdays with Morrie," and "Oprah Winfrey Presents: The Wedding," she served as producer on the 1998 big-screen adaptation of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a film she also costarred in.

Winfrey continued to be a powerful force in the world of day-time television in 2003, when she spun off a regular segment from her show featuring psychologist Dr. Phil McGraw into McGraw's own daily program, Dr. Phil. In appreciation, he never allowed his program to be aired opposite her show in syndication. In that same year, her web site, Oprah.com also launched "Live Your Best Life," an interactive multimedia workshop that features Oprah's personal life stories and life lessons along with a workbook of thought-provoking exercises. Oprah.com averages 64 million page views and more than three million users per month and receives approximately 12,000-15,000 emails each week. Also in 2003, Forbes magazine list of American billionaires included Winfrey — the first African-American woman to reach billionaire status.

Oprah's generosity and commitment towards improving life on Earth for others is widely known. Each year she donates millions to charities, including her own Family for Better Lives foundation and Tennessee State University. She is actively involved in lobbying for children's rights and in 1994 was present when President Clinton signed her proposed bill to create a national database of convicted child abusers. She also has developed schools to educate thousands of underserved children internationally and created "The Oprah Winfrey Scholars Program," which gives scholarships to students committed to using their education to give back to their communities in the United States and internationally.

In 2005 she was awarded an Emmy for International Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, inducted into the NAACP Hall of Fame, the Freedom Award by the National Civil Rights Museum and selected as one of the most influential people in Time magazine. Last year she started OWN – Oprah Winfrey Network. Today, Oprah Winfrey continues to be a powerful influence in the media, politics and culture even though she stopped producing her daytime talk show, is still the most successful female talk show host in American TV history.