

# FRANCES FARMER -- ILLUSTRATED SCREENPLAY

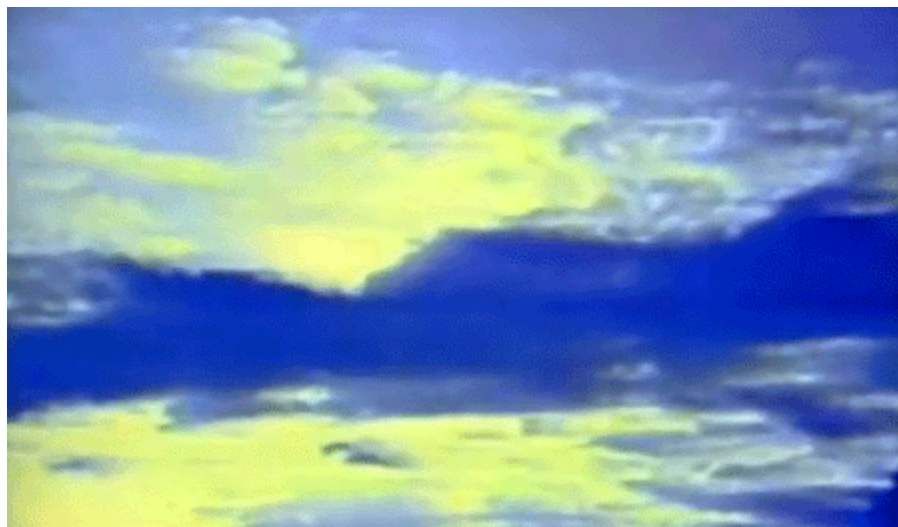
directed by Richard Gottlieb  
1958

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[Transcribed from the movie by Tara Carreon]



*RALPH EDWARDS*





[Ralph Edwards] Hello. I'm Ralph Edwards, and this edition of "This is Your Life: The Classics," is one of the very few times our subject was not surprised. And it was intentional. On January 29, 1958, an exception was made to bring our viewers the most poignant story of a lovely star who had transfixed movie fans with her lyrical beauty only to find herself in a world of enduring tragedy.



Let's relive these rare moments with this extraordinary star.



We want you to meet a beautiful lady whose life might well have served as a model for a play by Eugene O'Neill or a novel by a Theodore Dreiser. The talented star of Broadway and Hollywood, Ms. Frances Farmer!







[Ralph Edwards] Hello Frances.

[Frances Farmer] Hello, Ralph.



[Ralph Edwards] We need not say to you, as we usually do, tonight "This is Your Life" Frances Farmer, though. Do we?

[Frances Farmer] No, I guess not.

[Ralph Edwards] We know that there are periods in your life that have left unhappy scars on your memory. What then prompted you to accept our invitation to relive your life with us here, Frances?





[Frances Farmer] Well, Ralph, in the first place, I wanted to be able to tell something of my early experiences to help people who have, I know, been in the same kind of position, that I received from many letters.



People who want hope or advice even, which perhaps I can suggest where they can find it. It's that sort of thing that I wanted to do for them and for myself. I would very much like to correct some impressions which arose out of a lot of stories that were written about "me," I guess -- but they weren't about me -- attesting to things that I couldn't possibly have been doing, which I never did. I just wasn't in a position to defend myself at the time these stories were published.



And I'm very happy to be here tonight to let people see that I am the kind of person I am ...



and not a legend that arose.



[Ralph Edwards] Right. Well, we're going to try and help you do that, Frances. Other stories accused you of being alcoholic. Were you, Frances?



[Frances Farmer] No, I was never an alcoholic.



[Ralph Edwards] Did you ever use dope?





[Frances Farmer] No! Never.



[Ralph Edwards] Do you want to tell us, Frances, what it was that interrupted your career, and brought you to the brink of disaster?



[Frances Farmer] Well, Ralph, it was a combination of quite a few things. So much has happened to me since I first became successful as an actress. Many agonizing decisions arose that I had to make, and I just wasn't mature enough to, and didn't have time enough, to be able to make them without time and peace to think. And I didn't have it. And I had a nervous breakdown.



[Ralph Edwards] Yes. As a result, you spent nearly ten years in and out of mental institutions.



Child of a broken home, filled with ambitions, backed by talent and intelligence ...



you reached the top rung of the ladder, in films and on the stage.



Then the curtain comes down on a kind of oblivion ...



and finally it rises again on the uneasy, hard road back.



For all of us, as a radiant beginning, filling our parents' hearts with joy and dreams of bright promise for the future, for you, Frances, life begins in Seattle, Washington, on September 19, 1930.





How old was your mother when you were born?



[Frances Farmer] Well, my mother, I was the last of her children, and she was 40.



[Ralph Edwards] You were an exceptionally pretty baby, so your father and mother had every right to be happy at the birth of their third child. Not so long, though.



*1917*

Your father was your mother's second husband, and then they separated. Now, how old were you at this time, Frances?



[Frances Farmer] Well, over a year old. I think I was 1 or 2 years old, as I recall.



[Ralph Edwards] To a child of this age, this can have no special meaning, no inkling of the seeds of uncertainty sewn in a little girl's mind.



But here in 1917, life is fun and full of young excitement.



[Edith Eliot] It was about this time, Frances, that mom took us to Hollywood to live.





[Ralph Edwards] Yes, a voice out of your childhood, but one that's been close to you all. Your sister Edith, now Mrs. Wilmar Elliot of Portland, Oregon. And here's Dede, I think you call her. Dede!



Come and sit down here by her.



Now your mother didn't bring you to Hollywood to put you in the movies, did she?



[Edith Elliot] Oh, no. But we did get into many scenes on the metro lot across the street.



[Ralph Edwards] You did?



[Edith Elliot] Our pay was the pennies that the director threw to the children.



[Ralph Edwards] Well, it looks like you got kind of an early start in movies there, Frances. What kind of a little girl was your younger sister, Edith?



[Edith Elliot] Well, she was sweet, and full of fun. A good sense of humor. And loved animals.



But she had an independent spirit from the time she was little.





Do you remember the family story about when you were four and I was five, and we had a quarrel just before bedtime?



And when I was saying my prayers, and I came to the part, "God bless mama, God bless papa," and you sat up in bed very indignant and you said ...



"Don't you 'God Bless' me, you Dede. Don't you 'God Bless' me!"



[Ralph Edwards] I'm sure all of us love this smiling together. Thank you Edith. Mrs. Eliot from Portland, Oregon.



You'll see Frances later at the party in her honor at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, where all the family and friends are staying.





*1927*



[Ralph Edwards] 1927, now Frances, the year you enter West Seattle High School, where I'm sure your name is well-remembered for many reasons. When did you move back to Seattle, Frances?



[Frances Farmer] Well, all that I remember is it was about in the 6th grade.



[Ralph Edwards] Yes. Now, for the first time, you really come to know your father, don't you?



[Frances Farmer] That's right. I'd never really known dad before.

[Ralph Edwards] He more or less inspired you to advance in higher education, did he not?



[Frances Farmer] Well, yes he did. Dad was a wonderful man, and very affectionate, and also very proud of his children. And he encouraged all of us to study as much as we wanted to.



One time I even thought I'd be a lawyer. because he was a lawyer.



[Ralph Edwards] Yes. Well, you admired him so much that in your early high school days you did think of becoming a lawyer. That's right.



[Belle McKenzie] It was this ambition, I think, that made Frances the star speaker of the high school debating team for three years.



[Ralph Edwards] Well, one teacher you've often said, Frances, inspired and influenced you more than anyone else in your high school days ...



here is that teacher, the Ms. Chips of your life, Ms. Belle McKenzie from Seattle, Washington.





Keep standing here, shall we for a moment, and tell us, Ms McKenzie, Frances' interests were now turning more and more toward writing, weren't they?



[Belle McKenzie] That's true, but she had many interests, and many talents, and an active and inquisitive mind that, oh ...



tried to answer those questions of the depression.



And I think this prompted her probably to write that essay that won the national prize that was sponsored by Scholastic Magazine in 1931, was it Frances?



[Frances Farmer] It was a long time ago.



[Ralph Edwards] Well, that essay created quite a furor all over the country, I understand.





What was the title of your winning essay, Frances?



[Frances Farmer] It was called, "God Dies." [\*]



[Ralph Edwards] Yes, it opens with these [pause] startling words: [cough] "No one ever came to me and said 'You're a fool. There isn't such a thing as God."



Somebody's been stuffing you.' It wasn't murder. I think God just died of old age.



And when I realized that he wasn't any more, it didn't shock me. It seemed natural and right."



I can see why that would disturb a lot of people ...



coming from a 17-year-old high school girl, Ms. McKenzie.



[Belle McKenzie] Yes, but what Frances was trying to say is that God helps those who help themselves. And many people didn't understand that.



Nor did they understand that a young person grows up in religion as well as other things. And that probably hurt you!





[Frances Farmer] Well, I was surprised most of all of how other people reacted to it. It seemed  
[inaudible]



[Ralph Edwards] Well, you were consistently an honor student, Frances. Editor of the school paper,  
sang in operettas, got your first taste of the theatre as the lead in the senior play, "The Queen's  
Husband."



Thank you, Ms. Belle McKenzie from Seattle.



*1931*

In the Fall of 1931, Frances, you entered the University of Washington, to study what?



[Frances Farmer] Well, I started journalism at first, because my brother was a journalist, and I thought maybe I'd be a journalist instead of a lawyer.

[Ralph Edwards] Then you went into --?



[Frances Farmer] Well, then I went on into English, because my first interest and love in the university was to major in English and eventually write. However, I got very interested in acting, almost my first year, and before I knew it I had switched over to a drama major. And I was acting ever since.



[Ralph Edwards] And there you come under the influence of another great teacher who guided and inspired you to future greatness on the stage and screen. The head of the School of Drama at the University of Washington, Professor Glenn Hughes.





[Prof. Glenn Hughes] Glad to see you.

[Frances Farmer] Glad to see you.



[Ralph Edwards] What was your estimate of Frances Farmer, age 18, when she first entered drama school at the University there Professor Hughes?



[Prof. Glenn Hughes] Well, of course, in the first place she was very lovely.



Secondly, she was intelligent and eager.



She always had a sort of intellectual chip on her shoulder, and her dramatic talent was a bit slow in developing.



But we didn't worry about that because we knew the talent was there. She was hard to catch, though. So it was the third year she was with us before we found a vehicle suited to her talents to bring out the star.



That was the Captain Cornell role in Sidney Howard's "Alien Corn." And she did a very beautiful job in that.



[Ralph Edwards] It certainly is. Frances didn't finish. Frances didn't finish her college course, did she?





[Prof. Glenn Hughes] Uh, no. We were sorry about that. But you see, the point is while [inaudible] was running, there was something else running. A Seattle local newspaper conducted a subscription campaign, and the prize was a trip to Russia. Frances had lots of friends in the newspaper profession, and they put her name in, and got subscriptions I think for her.



I doubt if she rang many doorbells herself. I never asked her about that.



But at any rate, she won, and she got the trip to Russia. And the next thing we knew she was in Moscow.



[Ralph Edwards] Much against your family's wishes, I think, Frances. Well, thank you, Professor Glenn Hughes, of the University of Washington.

[Prof. Glenn Hughes] We'll see you later.



[Frances Farmer] Well, of course I was very excited, as you can imagine, being able to go first of all to New York, and beyond that to Moscow, where the theatre was a much-talked about thing. The Moscow Art Theatre is one of the finest in the world.



And it sort of sent me off on my acting career. And I thought, "Now, finally, I'm about to become an actress." And I stayed in New York when I got back.



[Ralph Edwards] Still, as it turned out, this trip had an all-important bearing on the course of your life, Frances.





[Jane Finn Rose] On the ship coming home, you met a young medical student who introduced you to an important New York producer, Frances. Do you remember?



[Ralph Edwards] The voice of a college friend of yours, in whose apartment you stayed in New York ...



in that summer of 1935. She stood by you in the good years and the lean.



An important New York stage, television, and motion picture actress herself, here, from New York, is Jane Finn Rose.



Things happened awfully fast -- won't you be seated there by Frances, Jane? --



after Frances met this New York producer, didn't they Jane?



[Jane Finn Rose] I should say they did. You know, she was tested by Paramount Pictures, and they rushed off the test to Hollywood.



Well, they liked what they saw.





And before Frances even knew what had happened, I think she found herself in Hollywood being groomed for stardom.



[Ralph Edwards] Enough to turn any 21-year-old girl's head.



But you attacked the movies, Frances, with serious intent and earnestness ...



under the tutelage of your good friend, Phyllis Lawton, Mrs. George Seaton --.



who is in our audience here tonight, by the way --



with such pictures as "Rhythm on the Range" with Bing Crosby, "Come and Get It" with Edward Arnold, "Toast of New York" with Cary Grant, and "Ebb Tide" with Ray Milland.



*1936*



You were acclaimed by some critics as the successor to the great Garbo, a frightening challenge for a mere beginner, wouldn't you say, Jane?





[Jane Finn Rose] Yes. I think so.



And I think Frances felt it keenly. She was always very serious about her work, Ralph. And when she didn't think she was ready, she wanted more training.



And so she wanted to go to New York and get the kind of training that she thought only the New York stage could provide.



[Ralph Edwards] Stardom in the movies as against greatness on the stage. This mental dilemma is now your constant companion, Frances.



Well, thank you Jane Finn Rose for your part in your friend Frances Farmer's life.



*1936*



It's not our task, Frances, to comment clinically on the tensions that have beset you since your childhood, but they've been mounting, as we've seen.





A girlhood without a father in the home. The rebellion of your teenage years brought on by the uncertainty born of the depression.



The quest for truth in your college days which always , somehow, eluded you. And now a new conflict in your career as an actress.



But there's still one hour or so of respite before the final storm unleashes itself in its full fury. These are the happy years of your marriage to Leif Erickson.



Your dream of stardom on Broadway is crowned by your success in Clifford Odets' great hit, "Golden Boy."



But somehow your world will just not hold together. Why did your marriage to Leif fail, Frances?



Well ...



[Frances Farmer] I guess neither one of us really should have married each other. He wasn't to blame, and neither was I. We had different goals, and different directions. And we realized that it would be better to just let the marriage go, and go on our separate ways. And it was a very difficult emotional decision for both of us. But we did get divorced, and we've been divorced ever since.



[Ralph Edwards] In Hollywood, your friends blame you for the breakup of your marriage. Up in Seattle your family, too, say the fault is yours. Your nerves are stretched tight, almost to the breaking point.





On the sound stages, your brilliant mind fails you now. You become more and more uncooperative, less and less competent. Resentment against you mounts in all quarters, until no more parts are offered you. In loneliness and despair you turn to drink to blot out the raging conflicts of your mind.



In October of 1942, you are picked up for drunk driving in Santa Monica and placed on probation. When you break that probation only two months later, you react violently to being put in jail.



You're completely without funds.



So your family comes to your side.



And psychological tests indicate that you're suffering from schizophrenia, hallucinations, fantastic illusions, and disorganized emotions. So instead of being an alcoholic, as was so widely thought, you were actually seriously mentally ill.



[Rita Hill] So Frances was placed in a private sanitarium in San Fernando Valley.



[Ralph Edwards] Well, here to be at your side now, as she always has been, is your half sister who took care of you and helped support the family in your childhood. Rita, Mrs. James Hill of Anaheim, California.







Please sit down there by Frances, Rita. Why don't you go around and just sit on this side of Frances, for a moment? How long did Frances stay in this sanitarium, Rita?



[Rita Hill] Oh, about three months I think.



The patients there were given a great deal of freedom, and one day Frances just walked out of the sanitarium and appeared at my house in Santa Monica. What was it? A 15 mile distance?



And she walked every bit of the way.

[Ralph Edwards] And after that?

[Rita Hill] And after that, my mother came down from Seattle, and took her back with her north. And none of us fully realized at the time that Frances was a very sick girl.

[Ralph Edwards] Do you want to tell us what happened then, Frances?



[Frances Farmer] Well, you know, I didn't think then, and I still don't, that I was actually sick, but there was so many people who seemed to think I was mentally ill, that I just had to find out why, and find out whether it was my fault what was happening.



You know, if you get treated like a patient, why you're apt to act like one. And these things just pushed me a little too far. And it led to conflicts and strife with my mother. She thought I needed more care, and so she had me committed to the Western State Hospital in Washington.



[Ralph Edwards] This was on March 23, 1944. And with your hospitalization, having been legally declared mentally incompetent, you lose all your civil rights, and were to be in and out of that institution for the next six years. How you fight to regain your health, and how you finally win a new life, we'll learn in just a moment.





[Frances Farmer] Well, Ralph, it was very much like anyone else who is admitted to a public institution. They don't have means for individual psychiatric care. There's only so many beds available. I stood in line with 15 or 20 girls who were, like myself, in the hospital for one reason or another. We received shots, or hydrotherapy baths, or electric shock treatments. And this was supposed to relax the tensions, and keep us quiet. Which it did. I don't blame the hospital at all. I think they did everything in their power to take care of the enormous number of people they had.



But I really don't think it helped me much.

[Ralph Edwards] Now, of course, had you had money, you could have had psychiatric care.



[Frances Farmer] Well, that's the problem with people who have no money at all. There's no other recourse except an institution like this. And it means that you have to be able to afford proper analysis that could [help you.]



[Ralph Edwards] Have you any thoughts, Frances, on how your cure came about on your recovery?



[Frances Farmer] Well, it took me a long time going this way. And finally I realized that I would have to do it for myself. Because first of all, any cure, to be effective, has to be based on faith in oneself, which means faith in God. If you don't have that, why all the tensions relaxed to the end of the world won't solve your problems for you: the reason why you are emotionally disturbed. I was able, in a kind of grim and very lonely battle, to find this faith for myself, or re-find it, and to hang on to it. And it eventually led me out of the hospital, and back to church, which I think is the only place where you can find a really potent answer to the problems of the spirit in this world that we live in now.



[Ralph Edwards] Your faith is rewarded when you're discharged from the Western State Hospital as recovered. Your civil rights are restored in March of 1951.



*1951*

Your first concern here in 1951, Frances, is your mother.





So you get a job in the Olympic Hotel in Seattle. What did you do there?



[Frances Farmer] Oh, I was taken on as a clerk in a valet department.

[Ralph Edwards] When your mother goes to live with your sister Rita, there's nothing to hold you in Seattle. So in 1954, you take a bookkeeping job in a photographic shop in Eureka, California. And now you meet a man who is to play an important part on your road back. A radio management consultant from San Francisco.



Here he is, your personal manager, Mr. Lee Mikesell.



You helped Frances to return to the movies and stage, didn't you Lee?



[Lee Mikesell] That's right, Ralph. I did. She was rather reluctant at first, and it was only after she went to San Francisco and was an employee of the Sheraton Palace Hotel that a [inaudible] was there and identified her. And after that, the International News Service, IP, UP, and AP all wanted stories.



So we gave 'em to them. We got a flood of mail.





And that was the beginning of it.



[Ralph Edwards] And to help you answer that mail, were your neighbors. And here they are from San Francisco, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Haste.





You knew Frances briefly in Seattle, didn't you Harry?



[Harry Haste] Yes I did, Ralph.



And when our [inaudible] managers told me there was a celebrity in the house, we got together.



[Mabel Haste] And then the flood of mail started. Well, all I could do was help to pitch in.



And I've been doing it ever since.





[Ralph Edwards] Well, your friend Mabel may have taken on quite a job, Frances ...



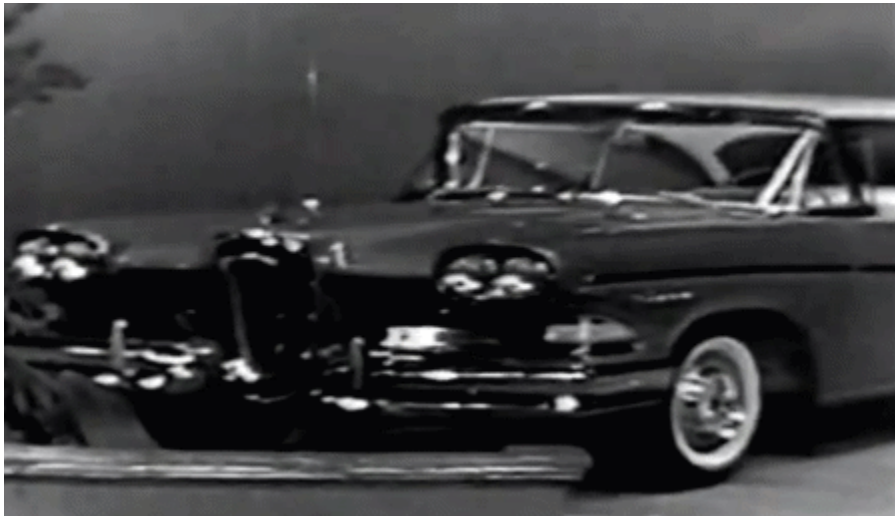
because we've wired 125 Hollywood producers urging them to look in on "This Is Your Life," tonight,  
and to keep you in mind for an important dramatic role



So it looks like you're going to be a busy gal, too, Frances, dashing from interview to interview. And we know you've been depending on your friends for transportation, and so Pace wants to give you a helping hand.



And so does the Edsel Division of the Ford Motor Company, by presenting you with this beautiful 1958, two-door Edsel Pacer ...



with its exceptional power, ease of handling, and above all dependability.



This Edsel will get you wherever you want to go. How about that?

[Frances Farmer] Oh, thank you very much.



[Ralph Edwards] This car is your very own to drive home tonight, Frances. And now, as your sisters and friends gather around you, I'm sure they will join me in wishing you only the best in your new career. Mom and dad, were they alive today, would be mighty proud of their girl.





And we know that all over the country, millions of people are waiting to welcome you to the screen and to the stage.



You've already distinguished yourself on television, on the Ed Sullivan show, on Playhouse 90, and on NBC's Matinee Theatre, as well as the Bucks County Playhouse, and the Chalk Garden.



You'll be equally distinguished, we're sure, on Broadway soon, because you've been offered a number of plays, notably the starring role in Eddie Dowling's production of "The Passions of the Women of Glen."



Congratulations to you. Your life may prove the great need for sympathetic understanding of the mentally ill as patients, not outcasts.



And so Frances Farmer, one book is closed now, its pages sealed, but another lies wide open before you. With faith in God and confidence in yourself, it will be a great book. This is your life. Goodnight and God bless you.



This was one of our most rewarding and touching shows. In speaking with a family member regarding our adding Frances Farmer's life to our classics, I was told that it would be wonderful to set the record straight once again as to what Frances's life really was. We're pleased you could join us for this show, and we hope you'll join us for the next edition of "This Is Your Life: The Classics."





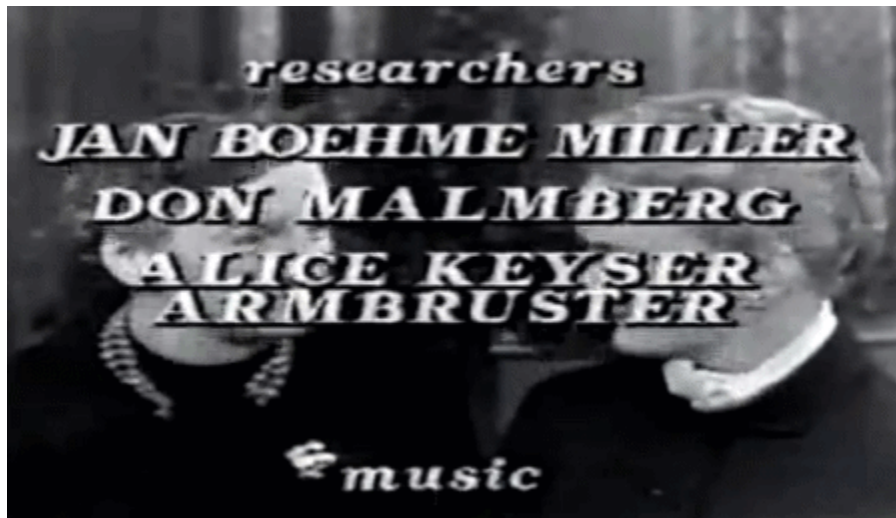
Executive Producer  
RALPH EDWARDS

Producer  
ALEX GRUENBERG



Director  
RICHARD GOTTLIEB

Writer  
AXEL GRUENBERG

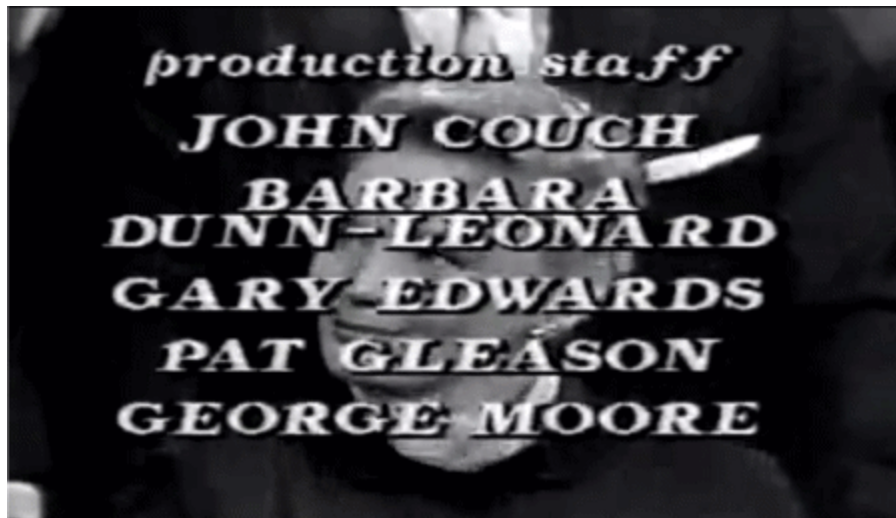


Researchers  
JAN BOEHME MILLER  
DON MALMBERG  
ALICE KEYSER ARMBRUSTER



Music  
VON DEXTER

RALPH EDWARDS UPDATING SEGMENTS



Production Staff  
JOHN COUCH  
BARBARA DUNN-LEONARD  
GARY EDWARDS  
PAT GLEASON  
GEORGE MOORE

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**God Dies**  
**by Frances Farmer**  
**published in The Scholastic**  
**May 2, 1981**

No one ever came to me and said, "You're a fool. There isn't such a thing as God. Somebody's been stuffing you." It wasn't a murder. I think God just died of old age. And when I realized that he wasn't any more, it didn't shock me. It seemed natural and right.

Maybe it was because I was never properly impressed with a religion. I went to Sunday school and liked the stories about Christ and the Christmas star. They were beautiful. They made you warm and happy to think about. But I didn't believe them. The Sunday School teacher talked too much in the way our grade school teacher used to when she told us about George Washington. Pleasant, pretty stories, but not true.

Religion was too vague. God was different. He was something real, something I could feel. But there were only certain times when I could feel it. I used to lie between cool, clean sheets at night after I'd had a bath, after I had washed my hair and scrubbed my knuckles and finger nails and teeth. Then I could lie quite still in the dark with my face to the window with the trees in it, and talk to God. "I am clean, now. I've never been as clean. I'll never be cleaner." And somehow, it was God. I wasn't sure that it was ... just something cool and dark and clean.



That wasn't religion, though. There was too much of the physical about it. I couldn't get that same feeling during the day, with my hands in dirty dish water and the hard sun showing up the dirtiness on the roof-tops. And after a time, even at night, the feeling of God didn't last. I began to wonder what the minister meant when he said, "God, the father, sees even the smallest sparrow fall. He watches over all his children." That jumbled it all up for me. But I was sure of one thing. If God were a father, with children, that cleanliness I had been feeling wasn't God. So at night, when I went to bed, I would think, "I am clean. I am sleepy." And then I went to sleep. It didn't keep me from enjoying the cleanness any less. I just knew that God wasn't there. He was a man on a throne in Heaven, so he was easy to forget.

Sometimes I found he was useful to remember; especially when I lost things that were important. After slamming through the house, panicky and breathless from searching, I could stop in the middle of a room and shut my eyes. "Please God, let me find my red hat with the blue trimmings." It usually worked. God became a super-father that couldn't spank me. But if I wanted a thing badly enough, he arranged it.

That satisfied me until I began to figure that if God loved all his children equally, why did he bother about my red hat and let other people lose their fathers and mothers for always? I began to see that he didn't have much to do about hats, people dying or anything. They happened whether he wanted them to or not, and he stayed in heaven and pretended not to notice. I wondered a little why God was such a useless thing. It seemed a waste of time to have him. After that he became less and less, until he was...nothingness.

I felt rather proud to think that I had found the truth myself, without help from any one. It puzzled me that other people hadn't found out, too. God was gone. We were younger. We had reached past him. Why couldn't they see it? It still puzzles me.