

## Hugh Downs

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While Hugh Downs was perhaps best known for his easygoing manner as co-host of NBC's *Today Show* and as anchor of ABC's news television show *20/20*, he had a broadcasting career spanning 60 years on radio and television. For several years he held the Guinness World Record for the most hours on network television, until eventually being surpassed by Regis Philbin.

Downs was born February 14, 1921 in Akron, Ohio to Milton Downs and Edith Hick Downs and grew up in and near Lima. He briefly attended Bluffton College before dropping out to help support his family. He was hired by nearby WLOK as an announcer in 1939 and within a year was promoted to program director.

In 1940 he moved on to WWJ in Detroit. After a stint in the Army, he joined Chicago's WMAQ in 1943 as an announcer, where he worked until 1954. While there, he served as an announcer on several episodes of Richard Durham's radio series *Destination Freedom*, as well as a handful of episodes of the 1950 series of the same name. He also did some acting, including as the "co-pilot" on the children's radio series *Uncle Ned's Squadron*.

In 1945, Downs made his first television news broadcast from WBKB-TV (now WBBM-TV). He became a regular on television in 1950, announcing for *Hawkins Falls*, the first successful television soap opera, and as an announcer on the children's puppet show *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*.

Downs moved to New York City in 1954 to become the announcer for *The Home Show* and Sid Caesar's show *Caesar's Hour*, and attended Columbia University 1955-56. In 1957 he joined his highest profile show yet, *The Tonight Show*. He remained there until host Jack Parr left in 1962. He also hosted the popular daytime game show *Concentration* during those years, from 1958 until 1969. In 1962 he assumed the role of host of *Today*, helping cement his reputation as not only an announcer but also a respected television journalist.

In 1978, he received a call from Roone Arledge, then president of ABC News, asking him to take over as anchor of the TV news show *20/20* – which had a disastrous debut the week prior. In 1984 he was reunited with Barbara Walters when she joined as co-host. He had previously worked with her as cohosts of the popular syndicated television show *Not for Women Only* in 1975-76. He remained with *20/20* until his retirement in 1999.

Hugh Downs married Ruth Shaheen in 1944 and they had two children. They remained together until her passing in 2017. Downs passed away July 1, 2020, of heart failure at the age of 99.

Among his many interests, he was a published composer, an amateur guitarist, a painter, the author of several books, an advocate for the elderly (he earned a postgraduate degree in gerontology from Hunter College), an audiophile who built his own equipment, and an environmentalist.

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