

About Jane Nebel Henson

Jane Nebel Henson met Jim Henson in a puppetry class at the University of Maryland and soon after became an integral creative and business partner in what would become the world famous Muppets.

As a fine arts education major studying at the University of Maryland in 1954, Jane Nebel shared with Jim Henson a unique approach to puppetry that is joyful and sophisticated. While still an undergraduate, Jim Henson was offered a spot on the local NBC affiliate in Washington, D.C., WRC-TV, and asked Jane Nebel to join him as a co performer and creator.

The television show, *Sam and Friends*, which aired before *The Huntley-Brinkley Report* and *The Tonight Show Starring Steve Allen*, in Washington D.C., began to attract an enthusiastic audience. It wasn't long before the Muppets were making special guest appearances on the top variety shows of the time. Their first national television guest appearance was on Steve Allen's *Tonight Show*, the same show that *Sam and Friends* had preceded. Jane Nebel graduated in 1955, but continued working with Jim Henson at WRC-TV as a performer, puppet designer/builder, and business partner. In May 1959, Jane Nebel married Jim Henson at her parents' home in Salisbury, MD.

Within the next five years, Jane gave birth to Lisa Henson (1960), Cheryl Henson (1961), Brian Henson (1963), and John Henson (1965). Heather Henson was born in 1970.

Jane Ann Nebel was born June 16, 1934 in St. Albans (Queens), New York City. Her parents were Winifred Johnson Nebel and Adalbert Nebel. Her father was known professionally as Dal Lee, an astrologer. Older siblings include her sister Margareta Regina Nebel Jennings and brother Brereton Edward Nebel.

In addition to her work on the Muppets, Mrs. Henson continued her studies in fine art at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. Years later, the family would live in Greenwich, CT, where Jane was assistant art teacher at the Mead School for Human Development. She continued her official association with The Jim Henson Company, and actively participated in the company as it became an important global family entertainment organization, collaborating with Jim Henson on a number of projects that included the traveling museum exhibit *The Art of The Muppets*, and *The Muppet Show on Tour* and *Sesame Street Live* arena stage shows. Known for her keen eye for spotting puppeteer talent, Jane also became the point of entry to the company for many top puppeteers.

Mrs. Henson also served on the board of The Jim Henson Foundation, founded in 1982 by Jim Henson to promote and develop the art of puppetry and presently headed by Cheryl Henson. Each year the Foundation introduces thousands of adults and families to puppetry through grant-making and public awareness efforts. Since its inception, the Foundation has awarded more than 675 grants to more than 300 American puppet artists for the creation and development of new work. In 1992, Mrs. Henson funded and founded The Jim Henson Legacy, to conserve, preserve and present the artistic contribution of Jim Henson. In 2001, Mrs. Henson created the Jane Henson Foundation, where she continued her philanthropic work.

Mrs. Henson also co-founded The National Puppetry Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, where she displayed a notable talent for discovering new performers and supporting their work. Her association with the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, the Union Internationale de la Marionette (UNIMA), Puppetry Guild of Greater New York, the University of Maryland Alumni Association, The Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, GA, The Paley Center in New York, and The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History has brought to Mrs. Henson many awards and honors.

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Legally separated in 1986, Jim and Jane Henson continued to share their love of, and vision for, the Muppets. Jane Nebel Henson, always modest about her own contribution to the creation and success of the Muppets, would often speak to the public about Jim Henson's body of work and how "Jim wanted to leave the world a better place." According to Arthur Novell, the Trustee of The Jim Henson Legacy, "most would agree they both did."

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