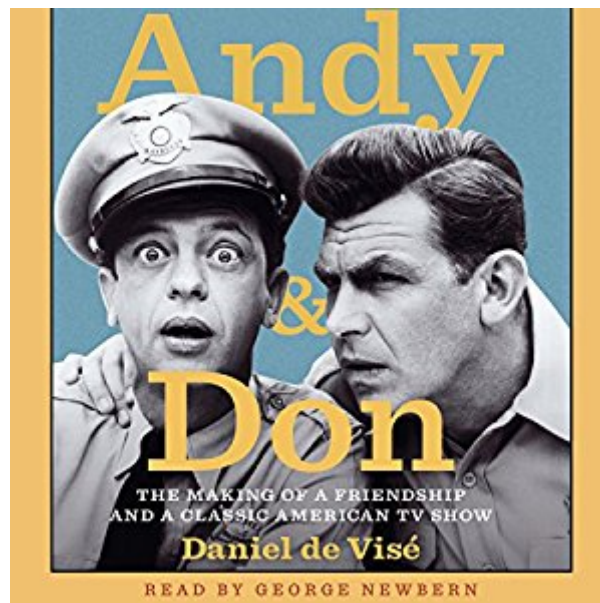




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Andy And Don: The Making Of A Friendship And A Classic American TV Show



Synopsis

A lively and revealing biography of Andy Griffith and Don Knotts, celebrating the powerful real-life friendship behind one of America's most iconic television programs. Andy Griffith and Don Knotts met on Broadway in the 1950s. When Andy went to Hollywood to film a TV pilot about a small-town sheriff, Don called to ask if the sheriff could use a deputy. The comedic synergy between Sheriff Andy Taylor and Deputy Barney Fife ignited *The Andy Griffith Show*, elevating a folksy sitcom into a timeless study of human friendship, as potent off the screen as on. Andy and Don - fellow Southerners born into poverty and raised among scofflaws, bullies, and drunks - captured the hearts of Americans across the country as they rocked lazily on the front porch, meditating about the simple pleasure of a bottle of pop. But behind this sleepy, small-town charm, de Visser's exclusive reporting reveals explosions of violent temper, bouts of crippling neurosis, and all-too-human struggles with the temptations of fame. Andy and Don chronicles unspoken rivalries, passionate affairs, unrequited loves, and friendships lost and regained. Although Andy and Don ended their Mayberry partnership in 1965, they remained best friends for the next half century, with Andy visiting Don at his deathbed. Written by Don Knotts' brother-in-law and featuring extensive unpublished interviews with those closest to both men, *Andy and Don* is the definitive literary work on the legacy of *The Andy Griffith Show* and a provocative and an entertaining listen about two of America's most enduring stars.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

[Reviewed from an advance copy of the book.] What American hasn't seen THE ANDY GRIFFITH SHOW? TAGS (as the show's diehard fans call it) is an enduring piece of Americana, its two central characters — Sheriff Andy Taylor and Deputy Barney Fife — as indelible a pair as Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. While there have been a number of other books dealing with this television classic, ANDY AND DON is the surely first one to focus on the professional and personal relationship between Andy Griffith and Don Knotts. Griffith and Knotts had an enduring friendship that started when they met during the Broadway production of NO TIME FOR SERGEANTS in the mid-1950s. The two men immediately bonded over their shared southern backgrounds and difficult childhoods. The delightful chemistry that Andy and Don displayed on screen — worthy of the greatest comedy duos, of Laurel and Hardy or Abbott and Costello — was based in their real-life friendship. ANDY & DON is written by Daniel de Vise, an author and journalist who is the late Don Knotts' brother-in-law. He is a sophisticated prose stylist and has given a cogent structure to his double biography, first pursuing Andy's and Don's separate strands of narrative and then bringing them together. Don's childhood was nothing short of Dickensian, with grim poverty, persistent health problems and a mentally ill father who once nearly killed him. Andy's was outwardly more comfortable, yet he too had his battles to contend with, including persistent bullying. Throughout his life Don Knotts was insecure, neurotic and anxiety-ridden, much like Barney Fife. Andy Griffith's personality was more complex, with some of Andy Taylor's magnanimity coexisting with less attractive qualities. The most enjoyable part of the book by far is the middle portion, which chronicles the production of THE ANDY GRIFFITH SHOW. There are some great on-set anecdotes here, as well as character sketches of the various people involved in the show (including Howard McNear, Frances Bavier, and Jim Nabors). The latter portion of the book gets more and more depressing. After Don's departure from TAGS, the program steadily declined in quality — "An odd sort of ontological crisis gripped [TAGS] in its sixth season," the author writes). It finally dissolved in 1968, giving way to the spinoff series MAYBERRY RFD. Neither Andy nor Don was able to rekindle the success of TAGS, though Andy made several attempts to revamp the program in different guises. Both stars were caught up in the general cultural decline of the late 1960s and 70s and took on a number of "trendy" film and television projects in order to stay active and relevant. Much of the time they struggled to find work. Eventually Andy found new success in the 1980s with MATLOCK, his popular courtroom drama. But for the most part, TAGS represented a career high that would never be recaptured. All this is not to speak of the two men's turbulent personal lives. De Vise does not spare us the less palatable details. Andy, as it so happens, had a

violent temper and a drinking problem. Both he and Don developed into great lotharios during their Hollywood years, indulging in a number of extra-marital relationships; Andy had quite a yen for Helen Crump, actress Aneta Corsault. In fact, those who prefer to maintain an idyllic picture of Andy Griffith and Don Knotts might not enjoy parts of this book. DeVise 'spices up' his narrative with some off-color anecdotes and dialogue reconstructions which strike me as gratuitous and unnecessary. All in all, though, this is an absorbing and interesting book that fills in the gaps in our knowledge about this great comic duo. Finally, on a side note: it is not true, as the author claims, that Otis Campbell's wife never appears on TAGS; she appears in at least three episodes that I can recall, including "A Plaque for Mayberry."

I'm giving this book five stars because it's well-written and deftly weaves back and forth between Andy's and Don's story, providing important biographical context; describing how they came into contact with each other; and chronicling the evolution of their friendship that spanned multiple decades and lasted throughout the remainder of their lives. Along the way, it also provides interesting insights into the classic television show that was largely responsible for the fame and notoriety they enjoyed. So on those two accounts, this book delivers in spades. But as some have noted, there's a lot of sadness covered here as well. Despite the idealism, values, and gentle humor the "The Andy Griffith Show" brought forth on a weekly basis during its 8-year prime time run and continues to present nearly five decades after it left the air, there was a dark side to each of the two main characters - one stemming from a Jekyll-and-Hyde family upbringing, and the other perhaps from a tendency to hold long-lasting grudges and succumb to temptations. So if you don't want to face the reality that Andy and Don in real life didn't line up particularly well with Andy and Barney of Mayberry, then you might want to pass on this one. That said, one of them experienced somewhat of a return to the good values on which he was raised and with God's grace, was able to overcome a lot of the demons that plagued a large part of his adult, professional years. The other, I'm afraid, might not have been so fortunate. But it is true that both shared a deep, abiding friendship and love for each other, and that's the central focus of the book. As a lifelong fan of the show, I'm glad I read the book. I learned a lot of interesting things about the show; how things were done in the golden era of television; and the pressures and expectations that often accompany the fame. Portions of the book saddened me; other parts relieved some of the sadness. And while I'll always enjoy the show, I don't think I'll quite ever view it again as idyllically as I once did. Mayberry is nice place to fantasize about, perhaps even long to visit or live in because of its good people with good values

and simple lives, but we live in a world far removed from Mayberry . . . if there ever was a true Mayberry.

For those who have enjoyed watching Andy Griffith and Don Knotts collaborate to make Mayberry a vivid, humorous part of our lives, this book will illuminate the personalities of its two main characters like nothing else. The squamish Don is followed closely from birth and his early days in Morgantown, WV through his multiple insecurities, three wives, and his highly successful comedy career on TV and films as well as his eventual death. Similarly, Andy, his life-long friend and straight man, is also portrayed in respectful narrative through decades of ups and downs that challenged their close ties and disrupted Andy's three tumultuous marriages. De Vise portrays the pair as a Laurel and Hardy or Abbott and Costello comedy team, but includes enough of Andy's selfish traits to cause the reader to wonder if they were not more like Martin and Lewis. Certainly it was Don who earned the artistic awards while Andy attained the wealth and benefits. This is a fascinating and fun read. You will be disappointed only when the book ends.

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