

A UNITARIAN PROFILE

Rodman Edward “Rod” Serling

Rodman Edward "Rod" Serling was born on December 25, 1924 in Syracuse, New York. The Serlings, a Reform Jewish family, moved in 1926 to Binghamton, New York where Rod would spend the remainder of his childhood. The Serling family was involved in the Binghamton Jewish community, though they only went to synagogue on High Holy days.

After graduation from high school Serling enlisted in the Army, where he fought in the invasion of the Philippines in 1944. He was awarded the Purple Heart for a severe shrapnel wound to his knee. He would then enroll at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Serling was stimulated by the liberal intellectual environment and began to feel "the need to write, a kind of compulsion to get some of my thoughts down."

During his first year at Antioch, Serling met his future wife Carol Kramer, a Protestant. Both families had a difficult time accepting the proposed union. Serling's mother had always hoped her sons would marry a Jewish woman. Carol's father told her, "I absolutely forbid you to marry that black-haired little Jew." Shortly before their marriage Carol convinced Rod to convert to Unitarianism as a compromise between their religions. They married in 1948 and had 2 daughters, Jody and Ann.

In 1950 Serling graduated from Antioch with a degree in literature and started writing scripts for teleplays, and later television shows. His most famous show, "The Twilight Zone" aired from 1959 to 1964. Another show of his creation "Night Gallery" aired from 1969 to 1973. He wrote the screenplay for the 1964 political thriller "Seven Days In May," and he co-wrote the screenplay for "Planet of the Apes."

The Serlings were active members of the Unitarian Community Church of Santa Monica, California. The minister of the church was Ernest Pipes, whose humanist preaching suited Serling's outlook and with whom he corresponded on politics and the state of humanity. Serling was an ardent supporter of the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Santa Monica church, and the American Civil Liberties Union.

In 1967 Serling said, **"I happen to think that the singular evil of our time is prejudice. It is from this evil that all other evils grow and multiply. In almost everything I've written there is a thread of this: a man's seemingly palpable need to dislike someone other than himself."**

Serling was a lifelong smoker, which took a toll on his health and led to his first heart attack in May 1975. He died during bypass surgery on June 28, 1975 at age 50.

~ submitted by Melanie Walters