

Active over 50[®]

Aging:
Fate or Choice?

—Dr. Walter M. Bortz, II

Rita Moreno

**Actress, Singer,
Dancer, Activist**

Ageless Art
New Grandma Moses

Dad's Final Years

Winner Best Story

ObamaCare

—Evelyn Preston

**Watch What
You Eat!**

Rita Moreno

By Marsha Felton

Profile: Rita Moreno

Born: Rosita Dolores Alverio in Humacao, Puerto Rico

Age: 81

Occupation(s): “CEO” – “Child Entertainer Octogenarian;” Prolific Actress (film, TV, stage), Singer; Dancer; Civil Rights Activist; Humanitarian; Hispanic-heritage Trailblazer; Author

Family: Daughter Fernanda Gordon Fisher, actress, dancer, fine jewelry designer, (<https://www.etsy.com/your/shops/NandizDesignsJewelry/preview>), son-in-law David Fisher, grandsons Justin 15, & Cameron, 13; 45 year marriage, (1965–2010) to Dr. Leonard Gordon (deceased)

Residence: Berkeley, CA

Honors & Accomplishments (partial):

- 1944 Broadway debut ‘Skydrift’ (age 13)
- 1950 Feature film debut, ‘So Young, So Bad’
- 1954 *Life* Magazine Cover - ‘Rita Moreno: An Actress’s Catalog of Sex and Innocence’
- 1956 ‘King & I’ film – “Tuptim”
- 1962 Academy Award, Best Supporting Actress - “Anita” - ‘West Side Story’
- 1962 Golden Globe Award, Best Supporting Actress - “Anita” - ‘West Side Story’
- 1968 Joseph Jefferson Award – “Serafina” - The Rose Tattoo
- 1971 ‘Carnal Knowledge’ film – “Louise”
- 1971-77 ‘The Electric Company’ PBS children’s series
- 1972 Grammy Award, Best Recording for Children – ‘The Electric Company’ album
- 1975 Tony Award, Best Featured Actress in a Play - “Googie Gomez”
- 1978 Emmy Award (2nd), Outstanding Guest Actress – ‘The Rockford Files’
- 1981 ‘The Four Seasons’ film – “Claudia Zimmer”
- 1995 Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame
- 1997 London’s West End’s ‘Sunset Boulevard’ – “Norma Desmond”
- 1997-03 ‘Oz’ HBO TV series - “Sister Peter Marie Reimondo”
- 1998 National Council of La Raza ALMA Award
- 2000 Library of Congress ‘Living Legends’ Award
- 2003 ‘Beyond Borders: John Sayles in Mexico’ documentary – Herself
- 2004 Presidential Medal of Freedom
- 2009 National Medal of the Arts
- 2011 ‘Rita Moreno: Life Without Makeup’ – Berkeley Repertory Theatre
- 2012 Latin Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award
- 2013 ‘Six Dance Lessons in Six Weeks’
- 2013 ‘Rio 2’ – voice of blue macaw
- 2013 **Rita Moreno: A Memoir published;** *New York Times* bestseller
- 2013 **Screen Actors Guild Life Achievement Award**



Legendary Rita Moreno. Photo (+ cover): Mike LaMonica

When you get the opportunity to interview a legend who has won the 'Grand Slam of Show Business' you go! Rita Moreno, quintessential 'un-Diva,' an exceptionally talented woman, graciously welcomed me with her indomitable exuberance, contagious laughter and fascinating revelations.

Rita has surely touched your life during her nearly eight decades of performing and activism. May this Q&A fill you with wonder and a desire to learn more about Rita's inspiring life journey in her best-seller *Rita Moreno: A Memoir*.

"I feel like I'm in the prime of my life."

MF: For ActiveOver50 readers, what is your advice for staying healthy?

RM: Think of yourself as a young person, keep your ideas, your dreams. Keeping your brain active may be the most important goal. I've had knee replacement surgery. I can't do hills anymore so I walk moderately and swim when I can. As far as diet, I listen to my body. If I want to eat red meat, I do but I am eating less of it these days. As a dancer, I am an athletic body-type. I do not hesitate to go to a doctor if I feel any ailment. I don't want any mysteries. I need to know. Maybe some are afraid but be brave. Learning new songs can also be brain workouts.

Rita's empowering 1992 VHS 'Now You Can! Fit and Fabulous Forever' is still timely, fun and motivating, affirming: It's never too late to workout. Whoever you are, you have power, you have value. And if you haven't learned that yet, now is the time. Every time we work out, it's going to be a celebration!"
Clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4anDXCc7roo>

MF: Do you have an exercise to recommend for keeping fit?

RM: Yes. My husband was a classical music buff. Lenny studied biographies of composers who were also conductors during the 1600s and 1700s and discovered they lived longer than others. He concluded that upper body exercise contributes to longevity. So put on classical music. Then think of yourself like a conduc-

in the Bay Area. One day, we went wine tasting. The problem was, Dr. and Mrs. Gordon went wine swallowing. Tasting? What's that? We were clueless," she laughed! Within two months, they settled into an elegant Berkeley home. Rita has appeared in a number of Berkeley Repertory Theatre performances, including 2011's hit *'Rita Moreno: Life Without Makeup,'* co-created by



Rita Moreno and grandchildren Justin and Cameron Fisher; daughter Fernanda Gordon Fisher: Photo: PRPhotos.com

tor at a symphony with your baton, moving your arms and upper body to the music. You may have to cut down on wide movements; it can be exhausting. You can do it anywhere, outside, when you're in the shower. When I've talked at places like the AARP, I bring along John Philip Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever" and we conduct. People are amazed at how demanding it is. I love "Candide Overture," it's really hard, you're out of breath, your face gets flushed...it's fabulous!

*Berkeley:
"I love it here!"*

MF: Why did you move to Berkeley after living in NYC and Los Angeles?

RM: We came to visit my daughter Fernanda and her husband who lived

artistic director Tony Taccone. Rita has said "I am amazed how Tony could fit 79 years of living into two hours yet capture the excitement, sadness, humor, surprise and verve with which it was lived. Sharing my life in this place is fitting. After all, Berkeley is my port of call."

*"Esperanza y Perseverancia"
(Hope and Perseverance)*

Rita and Sonia Sotomayor share a deep friendship based on "true chemistry." Both Latina women pioneers, of Puerto Rican descent, lived in the Bronx. With their towering talents and perseverance, they have achieved tremendous goals and stature in our 'land of opportunity.'

MF: How did you meet U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor?

RM: When my manager told me that Sonia wanted to talk to me, I was thrilled and amazed! I had cried on behalf of the United States and the Hispanic community when Sonia was named to the Court. When we spoke, it was a 'song and dance' of mutual admiration. Sonia asked me to read her memoir, *My Beloved World* on tape. It takes humongous amounts of energy when you're using only your voice. This was a real honor for me.

After our on-stage dialogue closed to reporters in Washington, D.C. last March, Sonia emailed that praise had gotten around and we'd been asked to take our show on the road. I replied, "We can be like 'Thelma and Louise' without the car crash. I'd go anywhere with you!"



Rita Moreno and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor. Tom Fontana, (I) creator of HBO's 'Oz' and Tony Award winner Lin-Manuel Miranda.
Photo: Rita Moreno

"Being involved in something that is greater than you is what makes a person complete and whole."

MF: How did you get involved in Civil Rights Activism?



Rita Moreno at 1960's Rally. Photo: Fang Family San Francisco Examiner and Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley

RM: I met a wonderful woman in group therapy who was very politically active. She was like my 'Professor Higgins.' I have always sought mentors... This woman knew I had all the right instincts. My first march was at a 'Ban the Bomb' rally. The FBI was very involved in tracking us. I got scared but didn't let that stop me.

MF: You were asked by Harry Belafonte to join other celebrities at the historic 'March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom' in August 1963. What are a few remembrances?

RM: I was so honored... I was sitting about 12 feet away from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the Lincoln Memorial as he gave his historic 'I Have a Dream' speech. What a thrilling experience! I spent the day with goose bumps.

In her Memoir, Rita shares moving details from being at the 1963 'March.' For over five decades, she has been aware that her celebrity "gives voice to valuable causes" and is an activist for a multitude of organizations.

MF: You were galvanizing about your passionate commitment to "Be-In-Service" at the Professional BusinessWomen of California's Conference. What are a few activities and causes that mean the most to you?

RM: I have found a wonderful way to help organizations at their fundraisers. I attend and auction myself off for a lot of money! I've done it for The Berkeley Rep., 'Planned Parenthood,' 'Meals on Wheels,' U.S. Congresswoman [N.CA 14th district] Jackie



Rita Moreno receives 2009 National Medal of Arts award from President Barack Obama.
Photo: Richard Fraiser

Speier and others. For 'Affordable Housing,' I have cooked at my home for auction winners. One non-profit told me they were almost at their wits' end and hadn't paid their bills; after auctioning me, they paid in full.

Rita's humanitarian savoir faire includes two prominent U.S. Presidential Awards, serving on the National Foundation for the Arts and as a commissioner on the President's White House Fellowships. She is currently a member of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities.

"You always have to be able to get up, dust yourself off and move forward."

In her Memoir, Rita reveals life-long insecurities, her loving and tortured affair with Marlon Brando (she dated Elvis Presley to make him jealous!), lows and highs of her career, marriage and re-inventing herself. It's poignant and compelling personal narrative.

MF: In your Memoir, you reveal many personal challenges. What's your present morale?

RM: I wake up humming. I am filled with an appreciation of how privileged I am. Yet, the 'dark presence' is always there. It stays with you forever. It's a question of how you measure your maturity, how well you deal with those little demons. I just send her to her room all the time but she's there. It's impossible to get rid of her. She's the one who says, 'Nay, nay, nay, told you, you couldn't do it.' In me, she still exists and I have a feeling that creature exists in a lot of people. They just don't think of her or him as an entity. I do. Finding peace with her "otherness" and her life is uplifting and insightful in her Memoir.



"I'm deeply grateful for the applause and I thrive in the spotlight."

Rita always had a sense of destiny; from a young age when she was on the stage, she wanted to do nothing else. In her Memoir, the plethora of film, stage and screen roles and actors she's worked with is awesome...from meeting her first movie star, Clark Gable, working with Gene Kelly, Ann Miller, Anthony Quinn, Sammy Davis, Jr., George Burns, Bill Cosby, just to name a few.

MF: What are some reflections about winning the Academy Award in 1962? [Best Supporting Actress for 'Anita' in West Side Story]

RM: It changed my life. It gave me worldwide celebrity. I flew into LA from making a film in Manila. To be in that audience and hear my name called, it was a sense of disbelief! Walking to the stage and having the Oscar® handed to me, I still felt like the little Puerto Rican girl. It was an 'out of body' experience, hard to accept as reality. After I won, I was told that Spanish Harlem went crazy. In those days, they didn't have Internet and I hadn't heard from my community in years. They'd shouted: 'She won, She did it.' I understood what they were really saying was 'We Won, We did it.'

MF: What is one of your favorite movies you were in?

RM: I love 'Four Seasons.' It's such a great movie. I watch it every Christmas and laugh so much! Rita's impeccable comedic timing and talents can be seen among hundreds of online videos. My personal 'fav' is Rita singing (or attempting to!) "Fever" with 'animal' on percussion in a 1976 Muppets skit:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yvHWyvxZA>

"Retirement is not in my DNA!"

MF: You are ubiquitous these days with the popularity of your Memoir. What's up next?

RM: I am beyond thrilled to learn that I am being honored by the entertainment industry, my peers, as the 2013 Recipient of SAG's Life Achievement Award. What a life I've had!

The SAG-AFTRA Life Achievement Award is SAG-AFTRA's highest tribute. Check out details in this Profile. Rita also recently completed filming 'Six Dance Lessons in Six Weeks' (in post-production) and 'Rio 2'—voice of blue macaw (2014 release date).



Rita Moreno has been named the 50th recipient of SAG-AFTRA's highest tribute – the SAG Life Achievement Award for career achievement and humanitarian accomplishment. The honor is given annually to an actor who fosters the "finest ideals of the acting profession." Moreno will be presented the performers union's top accolade at the 20th Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards® on January 18, 2014.



ABOUT MARSHA FELTON
 "I'm on the 'inspiring and motivating' beat. I cover exciting people and uplifting endeavors."

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