

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Whoopi Goldberg

PERSON

Goldberg, Whoopi, 1955-

**Alternative Names:** Whoopi Goldberg; Caryn Elaine Johnson

**Life Dates:** November 12, 1955-

**Place of Birth:** New York, New York, USA

**Residence:** New York, NY

**Occupations:** Actress; Comedian

## Biographical Note

Actress and comedian Whoopi Goldberg was born Caryn Elaine Johnson on November 13, 1955 in Manhattan, New York to Emma Harris Johnson and Robert James Johnson. Goldberg's mother raised her as a single parent in the Chelsea-Eliot Houses public housing project. Goldberg attended St. Columba Catholic School in Chelsea, New York and Washington Irving High School.

Goldberg studied with theater teacher Uta Hagen at HB Studio in New York City during the 1970s before moving to Berkeley, California, where she performed with the Blake Street Hawkeyes, an experimental theater group. In the early 1980s, Goldberg began developing The Spook Show, a one-woman series of character monologues. She eventually took the show to the Dance Theater Workshop in New York, where director Mike Nichols asked her to perform on Broadway. Renamed Whoopi Goldberg, the show with Goldberg caught the eye of Steven Spielberg during its 1984 to 1985 run, who cast her in the starring role of Celie in the 1985 film adaptation of Alice Walker's The Color Purple, earning her an Academy Award nomination for Best Actress. Goldberg went on to appear in the 1990 film Ghost, for which she won the Golden Globe and Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress. In 1992, Goldberg starred as Sister Mary Clarence in Sister Act, reprising her role in the 1993 film Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit. The highest paid actress at the time, Goldberg went on to appear in The Long Walk Home (1990), Ghosts of Mississippi (1990), the South African film Sarafina! (1992), Made in America (1993), The Lion King (1994), Eddie (1996), How Stella Got Her Groove Back (1998) and Girl, Interrupted. From 1998 to 2002, Goldberg executive produced and appeared on the popular game show, Hollywood Squares. A lifelong Star Trek fan, Goldberg appeared in the recurring role of Guinan on Star Trek: The Next Generation. Goldberg has authored numerous bestselling books for children and adults, including Book and the Sugar Plum Ballerinas series. In 2007, Goldberg

became a moderator on the morning talk show *The View* alongside Barbara Walters, Joy Behar, Sherri Shepherd, and Elizabeth Hasselbeck. She has continued acting throughout the 2000s and 2010s, appearing in films such as *For Colored Girls* (2010), *Big Stone Gap* (2014), and *Nobody's Fool* (2018). She has produced numerous projects for television and stage.

Goldberg has received Emmy, Grammy, Tony, and Oscar awards, making her the first African American to receive all four awards. In 2017, she was named a Disney legend by the Walt Disney Company.

Goldberg has one daughter, three grandchildren, and one great grandchild.

Whoopi Goldberg was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 5, 2016.

## Related Entries

**St. Columba Catholic School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Washington Irving High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

[EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**HBO Studios** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1970 to 1979]

**Assistant**

**Huson Guild Community Center** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1970 to 1979]

**Actress**

**Various** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1985 to ?]

**Television and Film Actress**

**Comic Relief, Inc.** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1986 to 1986]

**Host**

**One Ho Production** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1992 to ?]

**Owner, President, Producer**

**Slimfast** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 2004 to 2004]

**Spokeswoman**

**Lyceum Theatre** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 2005 to 2005]

**Stage Actress**

**ABC's The View** [EMPLOYEE OF]  
[from 2007 to ?]

**Moderator and Host**