



Review: Ron Howard biography reveals nice guy

By L.D. Meagher
CNN

"Ron Howard: From Mayberry to the Moon ... and Beyond"
By Beverly Gray
Rutledge Hill Press
Biography
336 pages

(CNN) --According to an old saying, "Nice guys finish last." How, then, are we to account for Ron Howard?

Howard's life appears to be an unbroken series of successes, yet by all accounts, he's one of the nicest guys in the world.

Biographer Beverly Gray looks for answers in her new book "Ron Howard: From Mayberry to the Moon ... and Beyond." Despite the cumbersome title, she has produced a breezy and informative examination of Howard's professional and personal lives, and the sometimes-hazy line that separates them.

The legend of Ron Howard is well known. He has been a fixture in the consciousness of practically everyone born in the second half of the 20th Century. In many ways, he is an archetypal baby boomer -- reared in the churning social milieu of postwar America.

Fundamentally, however, he is different from the rest of his generation. He's a born showman, the son of actors, raised in Hollywood and marinated in the business of entertainment.

A star from childhood

By the time he was 10, Howard was the star of a hit TV show and two major motion pictures. Even during those awkward teenage years, when most child stars fade from view in a maelstrom of growing pains, he kept working, and by the time he turned 20, he was starring in "American Graffiti" and "Happy Days."

By age 30, he had firmly established himself as a director of hit movies and he hasn't looked back.

"Ron Howard" goes beyond his résumé in search of the "real" man behind the lifelong fame. What Gray finds is a fellow who is not significantly different from his public persona. She describes his film sets as workmanlike, focused, yet collegial. He makes a home for his family in Connecticut, far from the distractions he grew up with in Tinseltown.

If there are dark secrets lurking in Howard's life, Gray doesn't find them. Again and again, she quotes

friends and colleagues who paint a glowing picture of Howard. His business partner Brian Grazer describes him as "intelligent" and "tough," "calm" but "not easygoing."

The most common descriptive, though, is "nice."

A PG-13 life

Even when Howard turns playfully suggestive, he seems to be living a PG-13 life.

"Howard candidly admitted that he hoped to spend [time] working on the romantic side of his relationship with Cheryl (his wife)," Gray writes. "Obviously, the spark between them was successfully rekindled. When the family flew to England in 1987 in preparation for Howard's next film, Cheryl was once again pregnant. In April 1987 the couple's first and only son was born in a London hospital. The redheaded newcomer was dubbed Reed Cross. To those who remembered the family tradition of giving the children middle names based on the place of their conception, Howard cheerfully explained that his son bore the name of a street, because 'Volvo isn't a very good middle name.' "

While "Ron Howard: From Mayberry to the Moon ... and Beyond" won't shatter the image of the Hollywood powerhouse, it does offer some perspective. His successes are counterbalanced by some notable failures, yet he seems to have emerged from each one better equipped to pursue his career.

More than anything else, Gray helps the reader understand how this particular nice guy manages to finish first.

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