



Helen Reddy: Life Timeline and History

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Helen Reddy, age 53, in a TV interview with Roger Ailes in 1995. Image from video of the interview. Courtesy Fox.



Helen Reddy, age 33, performs on Helen Reddy Special on Australian TV, 19 October 1975. Image from a video of the performance. In the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia. Courtesy Seven Network and NFSA.

Helen Maxine Reddy

b. 25 October 1941 d. 29 September 2020

singer – actor – song writer – television host

Life Timeline

1941 born 25 October in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. Parents, Max Reddy & Stella Lamond, employed as entertainers

1946 makes singing debut as a young girl (age 4) at Tivoli Theatre with parents in Perth, Western Australia

1956 completes formal education (her age 15), after attending Tintern Church of England Girls Grammar School and Stratherne Presbyterian Girls School in Melbourne

1961 marries Kenneth Weate (her age 19)

1963 daughter Traci born

1965 performs on Australian *Bandstand* Starflight International TV show talent contest (her age 24) in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. Sings the song "Strangers and Lovers" in the final round of the contest. Wins contest and a prize, a free trip to New York City and an audition with Mercury Records

1966 arrives in New York City (her age 24) from Australia, along with her 3-year-old daughter, in search of a recording contract.

1966 performs opening act at the Three Rivers Inn in Syracuse, New York

1966 lives in almost dire poverty in New York City

1967 moves to Chicago, in September, for a brief stay of about 10 months

1968 travels to Mexico to obtain a legal divorce from her first spouse Australian Kenneth Weate

1968 marries (her age 26) Jeff Wald on May 25 in Las Vegas, Clark County, Nevada

1968 moves to Los Angeles, Calif. in July

1968 releases single "One Way Ticket" Fontana Records (Philips in Australia)

1969 enrolls at UCLA and studies psychology and parapsychology and other subjects

1970 sings on Johnny Carson's *The Tonight Show* on April 24, with Flip Wilson as guest host for Johnny on this date

1970 signs a recording contract with Capitol Records in Los Angeles, Calif.

1971 launches career to stardom, a single 45-rpm (her age 29) with "I Don't Know How to Love Him" A-side, "I Believe in Music" B-side

1971 releases first LP album *I Don't Know How to Love Him*. The first, lesser-known, version of "I Am Woman" appears on this album

1972 releases "I am Woman" a single that rises to No. 1 on Billboard Hot 100 chart

1972 son Jordan born

1973 competes (her age 31) with Barbara Streisand, Robert Flack, Carly Simon, and Aretha Franklin for the 1972 Grammy for Best Female Pop Vocal Performance. Reddy wins a Grammy on March 3, 1973, at a ceremony in Nashville, Tenn.

1973 with recording success and publicity from winning a Grammy becomes an instant millionaire

1973 releases song "Delta Dawn" a single that rises to No. 1 on Billboard Hot 100 chart

1973 host of *The Helen Reddy Show* on NBC TV, an 8-week summer run

1973-76 hosted on the late-night NBC TV show *The Midnight Special*

1974 buys a home in Brentwood an upscale neighborhood of Los Angeles, Calif.

1974 signs long-term contract (her age 33) with Capitol Records

1974 releases song "Angie Baby" a single that rises to No. 1 on Billboard Hot 100

1974 becomes naturalized U.S. citizen

1974 signs two-year million-dollar contract with MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas for two six-week engagements

1974 star laid on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on Vine Street

1974 plays a small role in the film *Airport 1975*

1975 embarks on a world concert tour to Europe, Japan, and Australia

1976 nominee for Grammy in Best Pop Vocal Performance Female category for "Ain't No Way To Treat A Lady." The 18th Grammy Awards ceremony was held on Feb. 28, 1976, at Hollywood Palladium, Los Angeles, Calif.

1976 performs on stage, Grandstand Performance, Minnesota State Fair

1976 performs at a dinner in the White House, Washington D.C., as a guest of President Gerald Ford

1977 appointed to California Parks and Recreation Commission

1977 stars in film *Pete's Dragon*

1978 performs on stage, Grandstand Performance, at Minnesota State Fair

1979 performs on stage, Grandstand Performance, at Illinois State Fair

1981 signs recording contract with MCA Records, ending her long-time (10 years) relationship with Capitol Records the previous year

1981 final song during career to reach Billboard Adult Contemporary chart "I Can't Say Goodbye to You" (MCA Records) tops out at No. 42. The song tops out at No. 88 on Billboard Hot 100

1983 forms independent label Helen Reddy Inc.

1983 divorces Jeff Wald (her age 41) on January 3, after 14 years of marriage

1983 marries Milton Ruth, a drummer in her band from Australia

1989 performs at Symphony Hall in Salt Lake City accompanied by the Utah Symphony, a charity concert for retired musicians

1990 spends much time with charities, fundraising, and corporate events

1990 guest banquet speaker at conference “Windows to the Past,” in Salt Lake City, sponsored by the Federation of Genealogical Societies and Utah Genealogical Association with support of the Mormon Church

1990 releases album *Feel So Young* on Helen Reddy, Inc. label

1991 has a three-week engagement in March at Michael's Pub in New York City

1992 goes on an international tour to Korea, Japan, Beijing, Hong Kong, and Singapore.

1995 divorces Milton Ruth (her age 53) after 12 years of marriage

1995 performs in production of *Blood Brothers* on Broadway in New York City

1995 interviews with Roger Ailes on TV *America's Talking* program

2001 sells home (purchased in 1984) in Santa Monica, Calif. for more than a million dollars

2001 enrolls as a student at the Hypnosis Motivation Institute, San Fernando Valley, Calif.

2002 retires from music (her age 61) with farewell performance with Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, Alberta, Canada

2002 moves from Los Angeles to Norfolk Island, New South Wales, Australia, and later moves to an apartment in Sydney

2003 practices as a clinical hypnotherapist in Sydney, Australia, and helps individuals connect with those who have died or explore past-life regression

2006 publishes autobiography (her age 64) *The Woman I Am*

2006 accepts ARIA (Australian Recording Industry Association) Award and inducted into ARIA Hall of Fame

2009 added to National Film and Sound Archive in Melbourne, Australia

2012-2017 performs at limited venues in U.S. and Australia

2013 moves back to Los Angeles (her age 71) from Australia in January

2013 featured in a full chapter of the book *Inspiring Australian Women* by Kathryn Spurling and als. In the book is a photo of a painting of Helen Reddy as she appeared in later life by award-winning Canberra artist Margaret Hadfield

2013 celebrates Christmas and performs two concerts on Norfolk Island, New South Wales, Australia

2014 goes on a concert tour in major Australian cities: Melbourne, April 5; Sydney, April 7 & 11; Brisbane, April 13; Adelaide, April 15; and Perth, April 17

2015 diagnosed with dementia (her age 74). For at least half of her life, suffered from Addison's disease, a chronic but manageable disease.

2018 celebrates birthday with family, ex-husband (Jeff Wald), daughter (Traci Donat), and son (Jordan Sommers)

2019 Unjoo Moon produces a biopic of Reddy's life. Film released, September 11, 2020

2020 Helen Reddy dies (her age 78 years 11 months) on 29 September at Samuel Goldwyn Jr. Center for Behavioral Health in Woodland Hills, Los Angeles, Calif. Cremated. Ashes scattered at sea.

Highly Successful Songs by Helen Reddy

No. 1 Hits on Billboard Adult Contemporary, 1973-1976		
"Delta Dawn" Aug. 4, 1973	"Leave Me Alone (Ruby Red Dress)" Dec. 1, 1973	"Keep on Singing" Apr. 13, 1974
"You and Me Against the World" Jul. 27, 1974	"Angie Baby" Dec. 7, 1974	"Emotion" Mar. 29, 1975
"Ain't No Way to Treat a Lady" Oct. 4, 1975	"I Can't Hear You No More" Oct. 2, 1976	

Fifteen (15) of Reddy’s songs reached the Top 10 on Billboard Adult Contemporary chart, 1971-1977. Overall, she had a total of 24 songs that ranked on the Billboard Adult Contemporary chart, 1971-1981.

No. 1 Hits on Billboard Hot 100		
“I Am Woman,” No. 1, Dec. 9, 1972	“Delta Dawn,” No. 1 on Sep. 15, 1973	“Angie Baby,” No. 1, Dec. 28, 1974

Helen had six (6) Top 10 hits on the Billboard Hot 100. Overall, she had 20 hits on the Billboard Hot 100 chart.

The Path to Success

The journey to success in life begins with a strong foundation. In the performing arts, learning and much practice are essential along the way. In her youth, Helen Reddy did not know that stardom was in reach. Nevertheless, she was a keen observer, watching the things her parents did to entertain audiences. Soon Helen was involved too, going on stage with her father. As she got older and on her own, she realized and rediscovered the performing arts anew. As with many young performing artists, Helen poured her heart and soul into the endeavor.

In 1965, she saw an opening. Win the *Bandstand* contest in Australia and a recording contract might be in sight. To hear her tell the story of how she perceived the situation is enlightening. Helen convinced herself that she could win against all odds, even as many others were competing for the same prize. Taking self-confidence, willpower, and pure human energy to another level she won the contest and got a ticket to America and New York City.

It's hard to say when and why Helen realized that Australia is a small market. Modest success was possible in Australia, but to reach the top, America was her best bet. Hence her zeal to get to the United States and try for the magnificent career she had always dreamed of. And true to her plan, this is how things worked out.

Upon arrival in America, a leap in her career did not happen as expected. Success was elusive and not evident. At this stage, Helen drew on her inner strength. Keep your head down and keep working. In other words, don’t let short-term adversity distract you from the goal in your mind. Due to her immigration status work in music in New York was hard to come by. Trips to be on stage in nearby Canada filled some of the voids. She took gigs at every opportunity as circumstances allowed.

After Helen and Jeff (her husband) arrived in California in 1968, networking and developing contacts were important in moving Helen's career forward. As her partner in life, Jeff pursued movers and shakers in the Los Angeles music industry to secure Helen a recording contract. But being newcomers in Los Angeles and unknown to executives in the local music industry and entertainment media, getting a start would not be easy. In any case, perseverance paid off. Artie Mogull, an executive at Capitol Records, gave Helen a recording contract.

The contract with Capitol Records was clearly the break Helen needed. In 1971, she recorded "I Don't Know How to Love him" on a 45-rpm single. The song quickly shot up the Billboard Adult Contemporary Chart, reaching No. 12 in June. On June 5, the song rose to No. 13 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart. Within a short time, Capitol released Helen's first album, with the same title, to build on the success of the single. Even before the release of "I am Woman" the following year in 1972, Helen's musical career was ready to soar.

The next piece of the puzzle in Helen's developing career and success as a singer is not as evident to most outsiders. As if Helen quickly discovered in America, go where the fish are biting. In the 1970s, women were pushing hard to better their station in life. That Helen's personal values meshed with American women was a bonus point. Helen wisely chose to tap into this movement. However, after Helen's death in 2020, Toni Lamond, her sister living in Australia, said that Helen was not a person who showed interest in social issues during her early life, saying Helen's involvement with the women's movement "came out of the blue absolutely." In an interview published in *TV Guide Magazine* (July 27, 1973), Helen offers clarification of the matter expressing support for feminism, but with a limitation: "I am not a card-carrying women's Libber," said Helen.

Regarding the success of "I Am Woman," Helen may not have realized at first that she was riding a huge wave. Fortunately, women showed up in droves to buy the newly released record in 1972. As a result, "I Am Woman" shot to No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart. The song became a phenomenon and shortly propelled her to a Grammy Award nomination. And, even with solid competition aiming for the same prize, Helen Reddy won the 1972 Grammy.

At the Grammy awards ceremony in Nashville, Tennessee, Helen, in her acceptance speech, offers thanks, saying "...she makes everything possible" to acknowledge the enthusiasm of American women for the record, for without so many women buyers "I am Woman" might have stalled and, as such, a Grammy win less likely for Helen. In any case, lyrics alone don't deliver success. Grammy voters who chose Helen appreciated and admired her exceptional singing ability and musical talent. This is what carried the day and separated her from the competition.

From this point forward, Helen Reddy's great musical talent as a singer was evident and recognized by millions. Her voice, beautiful as America would soon learn, and the songs she chose to sing were so amazingly interesting, connecting with the hearts and feelings of almost everyone. Helen's professional career was in full bloom and beyond. Almost as in a flash of light, she had achieved the pinnacle of her profession and the goal she had sought for many years.

"I Am Woman," her early signature song, was wildly popular among women and a tremendous success. Unfortunately, perhaps, this song overshadowed all the other wonderful songs performed by Helen: "I Don't Know How to Love him"; "And I Love You So"; "Crazy Love"; "Somewhere in the Night"; "You and Me Against the World"; "Peaceful" and "I Can't Say Goodbye to You" are an amazing touch and very pleasing to listen to. So beautiful her voice and delivery. Most who appreciate Helen's songs and musical talent see her as an incredibly creative artist, not as a person whose persona is defined by the lyrics of a particular song advocating for social change.

During the early part of her career, Helen Reddy earned a ton of money from her tours and appearances. She once said far less money came from royalties on her songs. In any case, the money didn't last. On a more somber note, in the years after her recording career faded, Helen owed others a lot of money. She told an Interviewer on TV that it took seventeen (17) years to pay off her debts.

Even after living for many years in the U.S.A., Helen's love for Australia never faded. "In her last few years, Helen would tell me during our regular phone chats that she wanted to come home," said Australian actor Barry Crocker in an interview with a reporter from the *Daily Mail*. But due to her failing health, Helen was unable to go "home." She was proud to be a 7th generation Australian.



Grammy Award received by Helen Reddy in 1973 at Grammy Awards ceremony in Nashville, Tenn. for the performance of "I Am Woman." In 2011, Helen donated the trophy to the Arts Centre Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

1968



This, Helen's debut single, was released in 1968 by Fontana Records and by Philips (in Australia). Only a few copies of "One Way Ticket" were bought in the U.S. Sales of the record did better in Australia.

1971



Helen Reddy achieves initial success in 1971 when this single 45-rpm (Capitol Records label) gets significant airplay on radio stations in Canada and U.S. B-side "I Believe in Music." The song "I Don't Know How to Love Him" shot up to No. 12 on the Billboard Adult Contemporary Chart on June 12, 1971, and stayed on the chart for seven (7) weeks. It soared to No. 13 on Billboard Hot 100 chart on June 5, 1971, and stayed on the chart for 20 weeks.

Helen Reddy Quotes to Remember

In an interview on TV program *60 Minutes*, in 1979, the interviewer asks: Helen, what sort of person are you really? You said you're determined. "I can be," answered Helen. Are you soft? "I can be a pussycat, [she hesitates a moment] it all depends," responded Helen.

In an interview with *Australian Women's Weekly* (8 June 1977) in a piece on Beauty Secrets, the interviewer asks: Do you think life is easier if you're beautiful? Helen offers, "Definitely. One need only spend a day looking bad, and on an alternate day looking good to observe the difference in others' reactions. We all get more respect when we look our best." Further, she says, "It is our duty to offer as pleasant an appearance as possible to those around us."



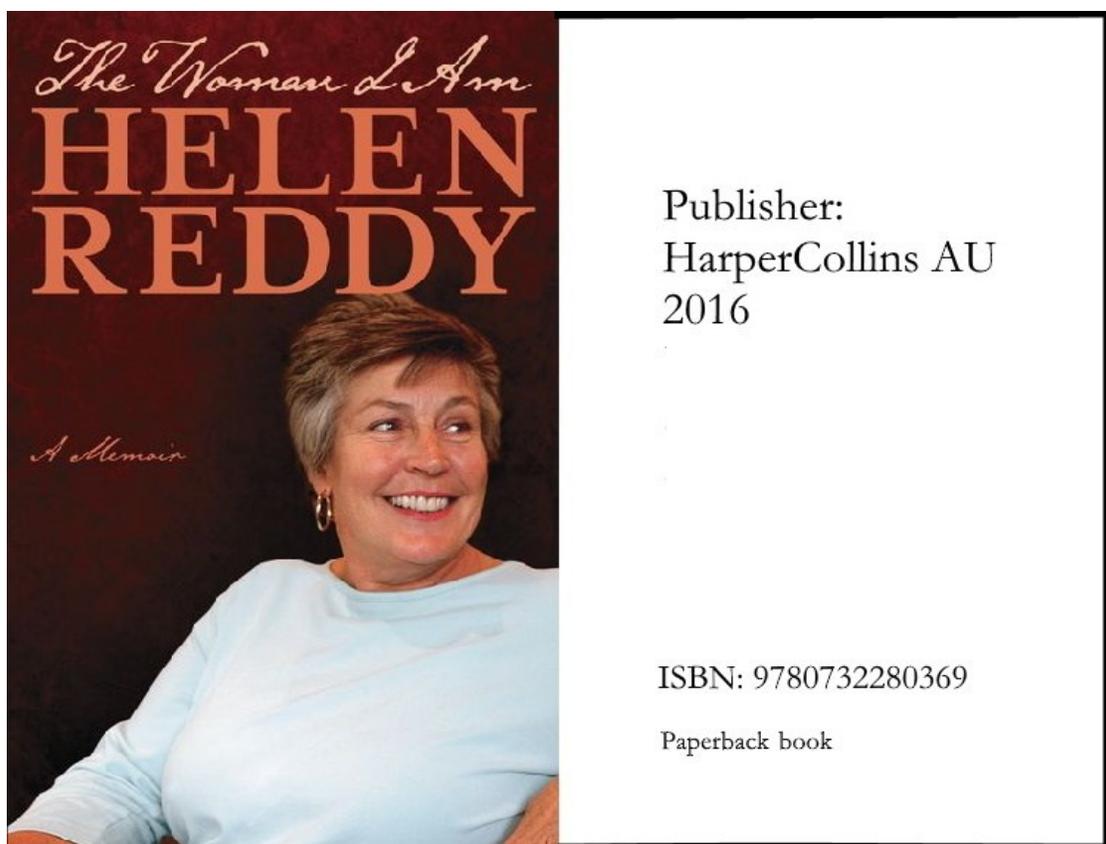
L-R: Max Reddy, Helen Reddy, Stella Lamond, Tony Sheldon, Toni Lamond. Photo by Chris Whitehorn. 1959.

The Reddy/Lamond Family. Stella Lamond is mother of Helen. Helen 2d from left. From Toni Lamond Collection, Performing Arts Collection. Courtesy the Arts Centre Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. Helen age 17 in this photo.



Helen Reddy moved to Norfolk Island, New South Wales, Australia in 2002. Norfolk Island (population 1,748) is a small, subtropical island two plus hours flight time from Sydney in the south Pacific Ocean. On a tour of the island in 2019, Aussie Bevan Bradford took this picture of her home. Courtesy Bevan Bradford. Visitors to Norfolk Island are encouraged to learn key phrases used by locals, such as: "Wats yus niem" What is your name, and "Watawieh" Hello.

Late in life at age 70 (2012) Helen commented to a reporter with CBS/AP: "I'm still very active, physically. I walk four miles a day. And I love the fact that I don't care so much about things -- things that were so terribly important when you're younger, they don't matter when you get older," she said. "And it's such a sense of freedom."



Book cover art for *The Woman I Am: A Memoir*. Courtesy HarperCollins AU.

Suggested Readings

Reddy, Helen. *The Woman I Am: A Memoir*. New York: Tarcher/Penguin. 2006. Also published in paperback by HarperCollins AU, 2006.

Wald, Helen Maxine Lamond Reddy. "Genealogy of Helen Reddy Wald Family, 1700-1972." Unpublished manuscript. n.d. 43 p. Copies in Family History Library, Salt Lake City; and Los Angeles California FamilySearch Library. Filmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah in 2003. Microfilm reel 35mm. Film 1162432. Location of microfilm: Family History Library, Salt Lake City.

White, Armond. "The Helen Reddy Biopic Brings Back a Self-Pitying Hit Parade." *National Review*, Sept. 16, 2020.

Book Reviews of The Woman I Am

Helen Reddy took considerable time in later life writing a book to chronicle the details, and ups and downs, of her years while growing up in Australia and as a professional musician in the United States, which often involved stretching her life to limits that other people with lesser strength and determination could ever endure, while entertaining millions over a period of several decades.

Unfortunately, reviews of Helen's autobiography, *The Woman I Am*, fall short. Sarah Ferrell delivers an empty and uncomplimentary take on Helen's book in a review written for the *New York Times Book Review* (July 2, 2006). Ferrell mostly ignores the challenges and triumphs in Helen's personal and business affairs during a remarkable and productive life. Rosellen Brewer, librarian at Sno-Isle Libraries, Marysville, Washington, writing a review for *Library Journal* (May 1, 2006), touches on highlights of Helen's life but does not provide much insight. The unwelcome dealings Helen experienced at the hands of a few associates in the music industry could have received some attention from reviewers. Her autobiography brings this and much more out in the open.

The storyline in Helen's book differs from what the reviewers write. In truth, Helen's book is a powerful narrative of a young and gifted woman, poor and penniless, arriving in New York City from Australia. In a flash, with perseverance and relentless determination, undaunted by obstacles ahead, she soars to the pinnacle of popular music entertainment in the United States. Readers should be grateful to Helen for her effort. Highly recommended.

Helen Reddy Personal

Height 5' 3"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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