



**Executive Producer, Shelley Morrison
Biography**

When Shelley Morrison talks about the home she's lived in for over 67 years, the loving husband and soulmate who has been her partner for over three decades, and the deep connection to her community, you might mistake her for only a wonderful neighborhood grandmother who always has a warm smile and open arms to her friends and family.

What you might not guess is that Shelley Morrison has had a remarkable and fascinating forty-plus year career in show business, from co-starring in feature films with the likes of Hollywood legends Gregory Peck, William Holden and Anthony Quinn, to co-starring on one of television's most acclaimed situation comedies. Or that this talented woman of Hispanic descent, born and raised in The Bronx in New York City, whose first language was Spanish and whose parents were Spanish Jews, has embraced the spiritual tradition of the Lakota Sioux. But Shelley Morrison, better known as Rosario, the feisty maid on NBC's hit comedy series *"Will and Grace,"* reveals her compelling personality and her generous spirit in a life rich with experience, memories, and visions for the future.

"Rosario is one of my all-time favorite characters," enthuses Morrison about her role on *"Will and Grace,"* which ran for eight seasons on NBC. "She reminds me a lot of my own mother, who loved animals and children, but she would not suffer fools." Audiences have warmed up to the odd relationship between Rosario and Karen (Megan Mullally), and Morrison is thrilled with the way the show's writers and producers had approached her role. "It is very significant to me that we were able to show an older, Hispanic woman who is bright and smart and can hold her own," Morrison says, and credits the show's creators David Kohan and Max Mutchnik, along with veteran TV director James Burrows, with "creating an atmosphere where we could always discover things." *"Will and Grace"* earned the Emmy for Best Comedy at the 2000 Emmy Awards, and the cast was rewarded with a SAG Award for Best Ensemble in a Comedy Series in 2001. The show also earned a GLAAD Award for Outstanding Comedy Series, and Morrison herself received three ALMA (American Latino Media Arts) nominations for Supporting Actress.

But Shelley Morrison had a storied career long before *“Will and Grace.”* “My family had moved from the South Bronx, and I had a voice like Judy Holliday,” Morrison recalls today with a laugh. “Someone suggested I go to L.A. City College, which then had one of the best acting programs around. I was classmates with James Coburn and Robert Vaughn, and I started doing whatever I could.” This meant extensive work on stage, where as an actress she appeared in the national road company of Tennessee Williams’ *“Orpheus Descending”* and dozens of other major roles. As one of Los Angeles’ pioneering female stage producers, she also mounted the west coast premiere of Williams’ *“Sweet Bird of Youth.”* Morrison was honored with the “Eternity Award” for lifetime achievement at the Twelfth Annual Los Angeles Women’s Theatre Festival. Countless radio, television and film roles followed, beginning with a small part in the classic *“The Greatest Story Ever Told.”* One of her favorite television roles was that of Linda Little Trees on the western series *“Laredo.”* “She was a wily and brilliant gang leader,” Morrison recalls of the role, “who outsmarted everyone and was desperately in love with a gorgeous Texas Ranger, Joe Reilly (played by William Smith).” Another of her other favorite roles was as Sister Sixto on *“The Flying Nun”* starring Sally Field. “She was not too smart, but daffy and always sweet. I modeled much of her quirky and loveable ways on my dear aunties. And working with Sally Field was such a pleasure; even at her young age, you could see her vast talent at work.”

Eventually, Morrison was put under contract at Columbia Pictures, and worked steadily in such films as *“Divorce American Style”* and *“Funny Girl.”* She also had a role in *“MacKenna’s Gold,”* a western starring Gregory Peck, and remembers distinctly working with the majestic and dignified Oscar-winner: “We had a routine every morning in the makeup trailer. He’d walk in and say in that beautiful, resonant voice, ‘Good morning, Shelley,’ and I would say in my thickest Bronx accent, ‘Oh Lord, it’s Gregory Peck!’ He’d crack up. This went on every morning for three months, he got such a kick out of it.”

It was a hectic time in Morrison’s career. “I was on stage 3 at Columbia doing *‘The Flying Nun,’* then they’d let me go and I’d get out of my nun’s habit into my Native American costume and head over to stage 9, then back into my nun’s habit for the rest of the day on stage 3.” The long hours caught up to her on location in the desert one day, where the temperature reached triple digits and Morrison had to perform a stunt on horseback. “I was supposed to fall of a horse into the arms of Telly Savalas,” she recalls. “And the director was a perfectionist, so we over and over in the heat, and on the 11th take I passed out. I woke up and they’d taken me to a trailer, wrapped me in cold towels, and were waiting for me to go back out on the set for my close-up!” Fortunately, a friendly hand intervened in the form of Ted Cassidy, whom Morrison calls a “gentle giant” (best remembered for playing “Lurch” on *“The Addams’ Family”*). “He was my protector on the set; he picked me up, told the director ‘That’s enough,’ put me in his car and took me right to the hospital where I spent a week in bed with heatstroke and dehydration.”

In 1973, Morrison met Walter Dominguez, while both were working on a feature film. The two fell in love and married. “At that time, I decided to stop and smell the roses a little bit,” she says, and work as an actress became secondary to her new family. It was Dominguez, who has Spanish blood in him (along with Toltec, Irish and Norwegian), who began to explore his indigenous roots through the traditions of the Lakota Sioux, and Morrison found herself more and more attracted to this timeless spiritual tradition. “The powerful reverence for nature, and the philosophical simplicity of it resonated with me – that every living thing is sacred, and it matters how you are with every living thing. There is the wisdom that all parts of mother Earth are to be protected and honored.”

On her 50th birthday, Morrison decided the time was right for her to rekindle her acting career, and she soon found herself working regularly and making appearances in hit series like *"Murder She Wrote," "L.A. Law," "Home Improvement," "Columbo"* and *"Sisters"* and films such as *"Troop Beverly Hills,"* Neil Simon's *"Max Dugan Returns"* and *"Fools Rush In"* with Salma Hayek and Matthew Perry.

During that time, Morrison and Dominguez also adopted three sons and three daughters (adopted through a traditional Native American ceremony). They have a large extended family of grandkids, nephews and nieces that they dote on as well.

"I enjoy what I do because I respect what everyone else does. Everyone on the set is an integral part of what we do." Morrison became quite popular with the company of *"Will and Grace"* a couple of seasons ago when she gave each of the 91 cast and crew on the show a hand-knitted scarf or cap for a holiday gift, some of which she had partially knitted on-screen during filming.

In 2006, Morrison joined the cast of Disney Channel's continuing animated series *"Handy Manny"* as the voice of Mrs. Portillo, Manny's (Wilmer Valderrama, *"That 70's Show"*) kindly neighbor. The bi-lingual learning-focused series on Playhouse Disney embraces Spanish culture and language. No stranger to voice work, Morrison also provided the voice of Mrs. Sanchez in DreamWorks animated film *"Shark Tale"* starring Will Smith, Jack Black, Angelina Jolie, Martin Scorsese and Robert De Niro.

Beginning in 2001 and completing in 2013, Shelley took on the role of Executive Producer for a feature length documentary film that is entitled, *"Weaving the Past: Journey of Discovery."* Requiring an twelve year span to make, it is set to begin a series of screenings around the nation and in Latin America. Another documentary project that Shelley is executive producing is a four-part history of Los Angeles for public television entitled, *"Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles,"* which is currently in production. Both of these projects are being written, directed and produced by Shelley's husband, Walter Dominguez, under a production company they formed together – Chasing Light Pictures LLC.

Morrison has also become tirelessly involved in charities close to her heart. The first, A.N.G.E.L.S Day (Animals Needing Generous Endowments of Love & Support), is an organization dedicated to help senior citizens take care of their pets in times of crisis such as during hospitalization. "One woman broke her foot and was unable to walk her dog," Morrison explains, "and we had a volunteer come every day for a year to be sure that the dog was taken care of." L.A. Shanti is another organization that Morrison has dedicated time and resources to; it was the first organization in Los Angeles founded to help those with HIV and AIDS, offering support, prevention advice and volunteer training for the last two decades. Morrison, who has survived four bouts with cancer, has also raised money for the American Cancer Society and this year led the "Sea of Pink" Survivors' Ceremony to kick off the Ninth Annual Susan G. Komen "Race for the Cure" in Los Angeles. She also passionately supports "Animal Acres," a Los Angeles area shelter for abused and abandoned farm animals, that also educates the public on issues related to industrialized food production methods. Shelley was also a leading voice in the two-year battle in 2010-2011 to save a historic landmark church at famous Olvera Street in downtown Los Angeles– La Plaza Methodist Church. Not only did she help rescue an important part of early Los Angeles history from being destroyed by real estate developers, but she is leading the effort to create a history museum and educational center in a portion of the building

she helped save - The Los Angeles UMC Museum of Social Justice - dedicated to telling the stories of LA's diverse communities in their struggles and achievements of greater social justice.

Through it all, Morrison has lived in the same home since her family moved to Los Angeles when she was a child – a four-unit apartment building that she promised her parents she would always take care of. Two of the units now make up a townhouse that Morrison and Dominguez occupy (and a place to host their grandchildren). “The neighborhood is lovely and historic, but in the early 90’s saw some rough times. The mall behind us was burned down during the riots,” Morrison remembers, “and we had to build barricades on the street to protect ourselves.” In fact, Morrison and Dominguez received a commendation from the city for their “courage and caring in protecting lives and property” during the civil unrest. Morrison admits, however, she wasn’t too afraid. “I was standing with a neighbor at a barricade when a gang member came up and put an Uzi right in my face,” she recalls. Her response: “You don’t scare me. I’m from the South Bronx.”

Morrison recently returned to her roots when she was inducted into the Bronx Walk of Fame where a street sign bearing her name was unveiled on 159th Street and Grand Concourse Boulevard. Morrison has joined the ranks of past honorees Secretary of State Colin Powell, filmmaker Stanley Kubrick, and talk-show host Regis Philbin in the street naming tradition. Having the city of her birth honor her was an enormous thrill and emotional. Shelley adds: “Receiving this recognition has been one of the most touching experiences in my life, in that the sign bearing my name is in view from the apartment window where my aunt and uncle lived and where I spent so much time playing pinochle with them on visits there. The Bronx officials had no idea of this connection. Like so much of my life as been, it was serendipitous!”