

RALPH WAITE

Ralph Waite, Class of 1946, was a celebrated actor for more than 50 years. He is best known for his role as the warm-hearted family patriarch, John Walton, in the long-running TV series, *The Waltons*. He passed away at the age of 85 in 2014.

Mr. Waite grew up on Earwoode Drive, the oldest of 5 children who all graduated from White Plains High School. Although he later described himself as “a dreamer and a storyteller” in his youth, he did not immediately gravitate to the stage.

After high school, Mr. Waite served three years in the U.S. Marine Corps, graduated from Bucknell University and earned a master’s degree from Yale Divinity School. He became a Presbyterian minister with the United Church of Christ leading parishes on Long Island. Restless in the ministry, he left to become publicity director and editor of religious books at Harper & Row.

A friend invited Mr. Waite to sit in on an acting class, and, at 32, he found his true calling. He trained with Lee Strasberg at the Actors Studio and made his professional debut in 1960 in the Broadway production of *The Balcony*. He continued to perform in London and on and off Broadway and landed roles in high profile movies, including *Cool Hand Luke* and *Five Easy Pieces*.

In 1971 Mr. Waite joined the cast of a low-profile hour-long drama about a rural Virginia family struggling through the Depression. He appeared as Pa Walton in all 196 episodes of the nine-year run, directing 16 episodes. There were also six made for TV Walton movie specials. Mr. Waite’s character was voted third in a recent *TV Guide* poll of the greatest TV dads of all time.

Mr. Waite earned Emmy nominations for *The Waltons* and his role as slave ship mate Slater in the miniseries *Roots*. He was also featured in movies such as *The Bodyguard* and *Cliffhanger*, starred in the mid-80s TV drama *The Mississippi* and had recurring roles in *Murder One*, *Carnivale*, *Bones*, *Days of Our Lives*, and *NCIS*.

Mr. Waite was also a political activist, running unsuccessfully for Congress in Southern California in 1990 and twice in 1998.

He is survived by his third wife, Linda, his son Liam, his daughter Kathleen and a brother and sister.