***[Sesame Street](https://theweek.com/obituaries/1018963/sesame-streets-bob-mcgrath-dies-at-90)*['s Bob McGrath dies at 90](https://theweek.com/obituaries/1018963/sesame-streets-bob-mcgrath-dies-at-90)**

[**PETER WEBER**](https://theweek.com/authors/peter-weber)

DECEMBER 5, 2022

Bob McGrath, the actor and singer who played Bob on *Sesame Street* for half a century, died on Sunday, his family announced on social media. He was 90, and died of complications after a stroke, his daughter Cathlin McGrath [told *The New York Times*](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/04/arts/television/bob-mcgrath-dead.html), adding that the family had decorated his room for Christmas and sung for him on Saturday night. "We just knew that he wanted to go the way he lived," she said.

****McGrath was one of *Sesame Street*'s founding cast members, playing [perennially friendly music teacher Bob Johnson](https://apnews.com/article/entertainment-music-obituaries-f38bf6ecb5bcefee2d9335bcb143940f) from the [first episode in 1969](https://theweek.com/articles/454359/10-classic-sesame-street-moments-wouldnt-show-todays-kids) until 2017. Sesame Workshop mourned his death and celebrated his "many years of passionate creative contributions" that "brought joy and wonder to generations of children around the world."

When HBO, which [took over broadcasting rights](https://theweek.com/speedreads/571677/hbos-latest-brilliant-maneuver-acquiring-rights-air-sesame-street) to *Sesame Street* in 2015, declined to renew the contracts of longtime cast members McGrath, Emilio "Luis" Delgado (who [died in March](https://theweek.com/obituaries/1011187/emilio-delgado-sesame-streets-luis-for-45-years-has-died-at-81)), and Roscoe "Gordon" Orman, viewers were "outraged," [the *Times* reports](http://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/04/arts/television/bob-mcgrath-dead.html). But McGrath said he was grateful for his 47 years with the show and "really very happy to stay home with my wife and children a little bit more."

McGrath has said his favorite *Sesame Street* episodes include the 1978 Christmas Episode where Bert and Ernie [pay homage to O. Henry's "Gift of the Magi"](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2VFgHGKzx4) and the 1983 episode where the human and Muppet characters [process the death of Will Lee](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxlj4Tk83xQ&t=82s), who played Mr. Hooper for 13 years. Some fans repurposed Bob's thoughts remembering the dead to [Big Bird](https://theweek.com/speedreads/882988/caroll-spinney-puppeteer-behind-big-bird-oscar-grouch-dies-85).

Robert Emmett McGrath was born in 1932 in Ottawa, Illinois, the youngest of five children. He entered and won singing competitions in Chicago and on the radio during his childhood but planned to study engineering. After high school, however, McGrath was persuaded to pursue music, and he studied voice at the University of Michigan and New York's Manhattan School of Music.

In New York, McGrath landed a job on NBC's *Sing Along With Mitch*, a show where a cast of singers performed traditional Americana and Irish songs. When that show ended in 1964, the cast went on tour in Japan, leading "to an unusual chapter in Mr. McGrath's career: teenage idol," [the *Times* reports](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/04/arts/television/bob-mcgrath-dead.html). "Schoolgirls chanted his name at concerts and organized fan clubs," and he ultimately "recorded nine albums there, singing in both English and Japanese." McGrath's most enduring musical legacy, though, is from *Sesame Street.*

Bob McGrath is survived by his wife of 64 years, Ann McGrath, and their five children and eight grandchildren.

Thanks to [*The Week*](https://theweek.com/) magazine for this fine tribute to Bob.

 [Return to Main](http://www.phigams.org/ephliers/epfeb23)