

**DARLA (DORLA)  
JEAN  
HOOD  
1931-1979**



**LITTLE  
GIRL WITH  
BIG  
SMILE**

Dorla Jean Hood's mother introduced her to singing and dancing at an early age, taking her from her home in Leedey to the Duffy Dance Studios in Oklahoma City, where Katharine Duffy showed a special interest in her. Shortly after her third birthday in November 1934, Dorla accompanied Duffy to New York, where they visited the Edison Hotel Ballroom in Times Square. Invited onstage by the bandleader, Dorla was allowed to conduct the orchestra and perform a solo. Among the delighted revelers at the hotel that evening was Joe Rivkin, a casting director for Hal Roach Studios.

Rivkin was sufficiently impressed by Dorla's natural ability that he filmed her screen test – and sent it to Hollywood. After seeing it, Hal Roach brought her to Los Angeles, where a clerical error changed her name from Dorla to Darla. In 1935, four-year-old Darla Hood signed a seven-year contract at \$75 a week and immediately starred in "Our Gang Follies of 1936." She joined the "Our Gang" series, a troupe of kid performers whose comical antics lifted the spirits of American moviegoers during the Great Depression.

With her dimples, black curls and expressive Betty-Boop eyes, Darla became the darling of "Our Gang", holding her own against established castmates George 'Spanky' McFarland and Carl 'Alfalfa' Switzer. Coquettishly batting her lashes as she sang and danced, Hood was the object of affection for a generation of love-struck pre-adolescents. One of her most memorable moments was singing "I'm in the Mood for Love" in the episode "The Pinch Singer". With her big beaming smile, she appeared in 150 "Our Gang" episodes from 1935 to 1941.

While attending Fairfax High School in West Hollywood, she organized the vocal group Darla Hood and the Enchanters, who performed in films "Letter to Three Wives" (1948) and "Bill and Co" (1948). She was married twice – to insurance salesman Robert Decker in 1949 and music publisher Jose Granson in 1957.

In the 1950s, she transitioned into television and nightclubs where she appeared with ventriloquist Edgar Bergen, and as a vocalist for bandleader Paul Whiteman while headlining her own nightclub act in New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas. She recorded her hit single "I Just Wanna Be Free" and sang a duet with Johnny Desmond in "Calypso Heat Wave" (1957). On television, she worked with Groucho Marx and Jack Benny. She was also a regular on Merv Griffin's radio show.

In the 1960s, she used her three-octave-range voice to do television commercials for the Tiny Tears doll, Campbell's Soup, and Chicken-of-the-Sea Tuna. She also dubbed motion pictures, including "The Towering Inferno" and "Airport." When "Little Rascals" was revived through syndication in the 1970s, Hood participated in nostalgia conventions.

In June 1979, after an appendectomy operation, Darla died suddenly at age 47. An autopsy determined that she had contracted acute hepatitis from a blood transfusion given during the operation. It was speculated at the time that she was another victim of "The Little Rascals Curse".