



## Dorothy Kilgallen

Dorothy was born in Chicago, on July 3, 1913, to Jim and Mae Kilgallen. Years later, she sat on the front steps with her younger sister and neighborhood friends and told them how she would someday “amount to something.” One of her friends called her “stuck up.” Dorothy shot back, “I’ll show you. Someday I’ll be very famous and all of you will read about me.”

Even though her IQ score would have put her in today’s classes for gifted children, her grades did not reflect her high ability, not even in English. But, she did write well. Dorothy’s writing was published in the high-school literary magazine.

Her father was very proud of her. He was an excellent reporter with Hearst’s International News Service. Dorothy spoke of him often.

She began her college studies in 1930 at the College of New Rochelle, a school for Catholic women. In 1931, one of her father’s colleagues offered her a summer job at the *New York Evening Journal*. She became a full-time reporter and did not return to school. Dorothy said she walked in her father’s footsteps.

Dorothy preferred to avoid looking at dead people, so her editor assigned her to the morgue and instructed her to describe the bodies there “in detail” so relatives could claim them. Later, she reported on murder trials, young victims of polio (infantile paralysis), and the

executions of criminals at prisons.

Dorothy interviewed the person who murdered Charles Lindbergh’s baby. (Lindbergh was the first person to fly solo across the Atlantic.) She had scooped all the reporters around the country to get that story. She also interviewed Jack Ruby, the killer of Lee Harvey Oswald, the alleged assassin of President John F. Kennedy.

Reporter Nellie Bly circled the globe in 1889 using ships and other land-based means since at that time there were no airplanes. In September of 1936, Dorothy’s editor told her to pack a few clothes. He assigned her to circle the globe by air. Two other reporters from other newspapers received the same assignment. Twenty-three-year-old Dorothy was in a race. The first phase was to cross the Atlantic by airship (the German *Hindenburg*) and then by regular airlines. It took her 24 days, 12 hours, and 52 minutes. She came in second but became an instant celebrity. The mayor of New York, Fiorello F. La Guardia called her the “1936 Nellie Bly.” A song was written, called “Hats Off to Dorothy.” First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt sent best wishes from the White House.

Dorothy moved to Hollywood and wrote a show-business gossip column for the *Evening Journal*. She also collaborated on a 1937 movie (“Fly Away Baby”) about her experience flying around the world. By 1940, she had married actor Richard Kollmar in New York City. They had three children.

Dorothy had her own radio program called “Voice of Broadway.” She and Richard began a radio broadcast in 1945 from their New York apartment called “Breakfast with Dorothy and Dick.” They discussed people, politics, and theater. CBS television hired Dorothy as a panelist on “What’s My Line?” The half-hour program reached into 10 million homes and caused the circulation of her newspaper column to double. She died November 8, 1965 of an accidental combination of alcohol and sleeping pills. Ten thousand people came to her funeral. She had become as famous as she had predicted.

### Language Arts

- Read this biography to older relatives or friends. Discuss with them what they remember about Dorothy Kilgallen and the times in which she lived. Take notes and compare what you learn with your classmates.

### Mathematics

- In a dictionary, look up the following words that appear in this biography – collaborated, colleague, morgue, scoop, solo. What percent of these words did you know before finding their definitions in the dictionary?

### Social Studies

- Read about the *Hindenburg* airship in a reference book or encyclopedia. What happened on its return to the United States?