



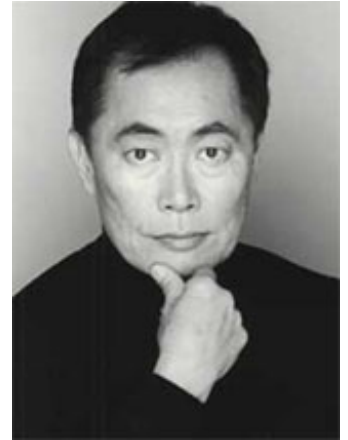
Interview with George Takei

By ChicagoPride.com

George Takei, best known for his portrayal of Mr. Sulu in the acclaimed television and film series Star Trek, has more than 30 feature films and hundreds of television guest-starring roles to his credit.

Recognized worldwide as a member of the original Star Trek cast, George received a star on Hollywood Boulevard's Walk of Fame in 1986 and he placed his signature and hand print in the forecourt of the landmark Grauman's Chinese Theater in Hollywood in 1991.

Among his credits is a music industry accolade -- a 1987 Grammy nomination in the "Best Spoken Word or Non-Musical Recording" category. George's distinctive voice is featured in Walt Disney Pictures' full-length animated features, *Mulan* and *Mulan II*, Star Trek audio novel recordings, Fox Television's *The Simpsons*, *Futurama*, and in numerous voice-overs and narrations.



George was appointed by President Clinton to the board of the Japan-United States Friendship Commission, where he served two terms. He is a member of the board of directors of the US-Japan Bridging Foundation. The Government of Japan recognized George's contribution to the Japan-United States relationship by giving him the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette. The decoration was conferred by His Majesty, Emperor Akihito, at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo in November 2004.

A member of the Human Rights Campaign, the largest national lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender political organization, George is a spokesman for HRC's Coming Out Project. In April 2006, he embarked on a nationwide speaking tour called "Equality Trek" in which he talked about his life as a gay Japanese American.

George and his life partner, Brad Altman, are residents of Los Angeles.

(Introductory biography excerpted from georgetakei.com)

CP: Mr Takei, since Star Trek is a pretty memorable part of your history, I thought we'd start with a question about the "trekkie" experience. As part of sci-fi writer Gene Roddenberry's forward thinking vision for tackling social issues in the 60's, Star Trek boldly went where very few mainstream television shows had gone before – diversity. Aside from the multicultural crew on the enterprise, Star Trek used the stories of alien people to help foster thinking and discussion about the different races and religions in our society.

CP: What made you decide to 'take a chance' and join the Star Trek TOS (the original series) cast?

GT: Quite simply, it was the prospect of steady work – if the pilot film sold. I was a free lance working actor going from one gig to another. Often, there were months between acting gigs. It wasn't "taking a chance" but a wonderful opportunity to work steadily in an exciting and imaginative science fiction series.

CP: Was diversity one of your considerations when you accepted the role of Sulu on Star Trek?

GT: Gene Roddenberry's basic concept of the show was revolutionary. He said to us that his vision was of the Starship Enterprise as a metaphor for starship earth. The strength of both starships lay in its diversity coming together and working in concert as a team. The role of Sulu was to represent Asia. He was a full professional pulling his weight on the leadership team on the bridge together with Africans, Russians (remember, this was during the Cold War) Scotsman, and even a pointy eared alien named Spock. Diversity was organically part and parcel of the show and I was proud to be able to be a part of such an exciting and pioneering television series.

CP: You've been out to family and friends for a long time, and you've been with your partner Brad for almost 20 years. What motivated you the most to "come out" to all of your fans and the media this past year?

GT: Arnold Schwarzenegger. The California legislature passed a landmark Same Sex Marriage bill. This was historic – no other state legislature had passed such a bill. All that was required was the signature of the governor of the State, Arnold S. When he vetoed the bill, playing to the most reactionary fringe of his conservative base, I felt I had to speak out. To do that, my voice had to be authentic. So, for the first time, I discussed my being gay with the press.

CP: How did you and your partner, Brad, meet? Was it love at first sight?

GT: I have been a runner all my life and was a member of a gay running club in Los Angeles called the Frontrunners. Brad, who was a young journalist, was also a member of the running club. As a matter of fact, he was one of the best marathoners in the club. I went for the best.

CP: Finish this sentence "Being gay is _____"

GT: "Being gay is a natural part of who I am."

CP: As the spokesperson for the Human Rights Campaign's "Equality Trek," you're sharing your story to college campuses and Star Trek fans everywhere. What is one of the most important personal messages you'd like to stress to all of our gay and lesbian friends?

GT: Gays and lesbians have been stereotyped by society. By sharing our experiences – both good and bad, enriching and unhappy – we humanize who we are. The lives and experiences of all of us are different and specific to each individual and by sharing those experiences we cease to be seen as the cartoons that were imposed on us.

CP: What is one of the most important personal messages you'd like to stress to the straight community?

GT: The richness of our communities, our cities, and our nation lies in recognizing and celebrating our diversity. That diversity is not only in our various ethnicity and cultures, but also in the diversity of our sexual orientations. We all contribute, each in our own way, to the strength, vitality, and the well being of our society.

CP: After all of the media and speeches, here you are now leading 400,000 Chicagoans and visitors as the Grand Marshal of the Chicago Pride Parade. Then, just a couple weeks later, you'll help us welcome the international lesbian and gay community during the 7th Gay Games. Have you visited Chicago before? Do you have any special memories or favorite places?

GT: Many, many times. As a matter of fact, I concluded my promotional tour for our new television series, "Star Trek's" debut back in 1966 in Chicago. I was at the old Blackstone Hotel, a wonderful turn of the century luxury hotel. I'm a historic preservationist so I really enjoyed that stay. Alas, that

hotel is now history. It did not "live long and prosper." But Chicago is a vibrant city for an architecture lover, which I also am. I think Chicago is the capital of innovative American architecture.

CP: Okay, now for the easy questions!

CP: What is your favorite book?

GT: "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil"

CP: What's ALWAYS in your fridge?

GT: Orange juice.

CP: What is your "theme" song?

GT: "The Impossible Dream"

CP: You've been in the tv business, you've been in show business and you've run for public office. What's your next adventure/mission?

GT: Writing another autobiography to follow up, "To the Stars."

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