

# Karolyn Grimes, who played Zuzu Bailey, shares her Christmas thoughts

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
December 25 2015 8:30 AM





*“Look daddy, teacher says, every time a bell rings an angel gets his wings,” Zuzu Bailey’s famous quote from “It’s A Wonderful Life.”*

*“That’s right. That’s right. That a boy Clarence...,” says George Bailey.*

*If anyone epitomizes the true meaning of Christmas it has to be Karolyn Grimes, who was the little girl who played Zuzu Bailey in “It’s A Wonderful Life.”*

*In the 1946 film classic, Zuzu delivered the famous line about an angel getting its wings to her parents in the movie, George and Mary Bailey played by Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed. That line has been repeated over and over again on Christmas Day throughout the world.*

*In many ways Grimes said she feels like she is an “Unofficial Ambassador of Christmas” and “It’s a Wonderful Life” to the world.*

*“Christmas has always been my favorite holiday,” she said. “I get started with decorating early. Now I live Christmas 12 months a year.”*

*One would think that Grimes might collect bells, but she actually collects angels. She started collecting in 1980 and has never stopped.*

*“Fans send me angels,” she said. “I have a lot of angels that I have given to a museum in Seneca Falls, N.Y. An ‘It’s a Wonderful Life Museum’ was started there in 2010.”*

*After a fairly sensational childhood acting career, Grimes left Hollywood to the confines.*

Grimes was an orphan at 15, losing both her mother and father within a year. Her mother died of early onset Alzheimer's complications and her father was killed in a car accident.

She then lived with relatives, who weren't big on movies and television and in fact, didn't see the movie herself until she was 40 years old, ironically on Christmas Day.

After she viewed the movie, she said all of a sudden this whole new world opened up to her and the stories were so poignant and meaningful. She has traveled the country and all over the world sharing stories about the movie and in return people tell her what the movie has meant to them.

*Grimes studied and became a medical technologist in Missouri after graduating from high school. Grimes has encountered her own tragedies, losing her first husband to a hunting accident and her son committed suicide. George Bailey's character played by Jimmy Stewart contemplates suicide and the movie is built around that premise.*

*Aside from "It's a Wonderful Life" Grimes said her other favorite movie is "Bishop's Wife." Grimes recalls there is a scene in "Christmas Vacation" where they are watching her with her most remembered line and that means a lot to her.*

*Grimes has traveled across the world spreading the word about "It's A Wonderful Life" and one person in his 40s stood in line and told her a story she never forgot. He said he was a teenager and was going to commit suicide in his bedroom and he obtained his parents' gun, but he didn't want to do it in the house. He said when he went up to his bedroom the movie, "It's A Wonderful Life" was on and it was the place where the stars were talking to each other. He was a science fiction buff, so he sat down and watched the entire film. When the film was over, he took his dad's gun and put it back in their bedroom and never considered suicide again."*

*Once she was told by a man that he and his wife named their daughter "Zuzu." Another story was that a person established a business called "Zuzu's Bakery."*

*“I have so much fun with the stories about how the movie has affected people,” she said. “It is such a privilege I can share this. I think you are given choices and like George Bailey you can take whatever path you want. A lot of people lose faith and I hope that is where this movie comes in. I think it kind of gives them a jumpstart and makes them realize the importance that not only is life important, but the fact that each one of us makes a difference. “*

*Karolyn Grimes said she believes she has had a remarkable life up and down and all around.*

*“People who don’t know anything about me believe I have had such a wonderful life,” she said. “Life is what you make it. I have had a wonderful life and I made choices to survive what I have gone through. I have tried to make it as a wonderful as I can.”*

*Grimes said if she had one Christmas message to deliver to people it would be taking the theme from “It’s A Wonderful Life” that no matter what happens in their life they can make their own lives as wonderful as they can, keeping positive and working through whatever difficulties they might encounter.*

*“It’s fulfilling to know we serve a purpose and we matter,” Grimes said. “It is huge that we matter.”*

**VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH KAROLYN GRIMES:**