

Mr. Rogers Cardigans



This red knit cardigan was worn by Fred Rogers, creator and host of the children's program, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (PBS, 1968-2001). For more than thirty years, Rogers began each episode by changing into a sweater and tennis shoes and singing, "Won't you be my neighbor?"

An ordained Presbyterian minister, Rogers dedicated his television career to promoting children's emotional and moral well-being. His show, with its friendly conversational style and trips to the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, encouraged young viewers to feel loved, respected, and special.

When the show debuted in 1968, Mister Rogers wore button-down sweaters. But by the second season, some zip-up sweaters were added to the rotation—much easier to fasten, says David Newell, who played delivery man Mr. McFeely on the show. During one early episode, Fred buttoned his sweater wrong, but he opted to use the footage anyway. "He wanted to show children that people make mistakes," Newell recalls in an interview. But zippers were easier to get into, and they did not bump against the microphone, so he made the switch.

A cardigan is a sweater that opens in the front and usually has buttons or a zipper.

Mister Rogers' Mom Knitted His Sweaters

Up until Nancy McFeely Rogers died in 1981, she knitted all of Fred's cardigans seen in "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." Every Christmas, she would give each of her children a hand-knit sweater. Rogers said that during WWII, his mom was a volunteer nurse aide and was in charge of making surgical dressings for the troops — but she also knitted sweaters for them too.

When his mother died in 1981, the supply of new handknit sweaters dried up. By the early 1990s, after hundreds of tapings, the yarn was wearing thin. What viewers of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* never saw was the frantic search his production staff underwent to replace the iconic cardigans before they wore out entirely.

For fans of the show, the sweater was a symbol of his connection to children and a reminder of our childhoods, but for Fred, it was also a symbol of his mother's love. As Bill Isler, former president, and CEO of the Fred Rogers Company, says, "Fred was very proud that his mother had knit a sweater that's in the Smithsonian."

Why did Mr. Rogers always wear a cardigan?

The cozy cable-knit cardigan seemed to symbolize Fred Rogers' warmth and relatability as the soft-spoken host of children's television show "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood."

The Many Colors of Mister Rogers Cardigans

Cardigan colors presented in order of appearance on the show



Data fanatic Owen Phillips designed a chart that tracks the colors of every *cardigan* Mister Rogers wore from 1969 to 2001.

Source: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/behind-scenes-quest-find-mister-rogers-signature-cardigans-180973283/>