

# 'Star Trek' vet: It's never been better 'To Be Takei'



Bryan Alexander, USA TODAY 3:16 p.m. EDT August 17, 2014



(Photo: Starz Digital Media)

Corrections & Clarifications: An earlier version of this report referred to [George Takei's spouse as Brad Altman](#). He has legally taken the name Brad Takei.

LOS ANGELES — In October 2005, George Takei figured his long, successful Hollywood career would screech to a halt.

His reasoning? Then 68, the actor best known as [Star Trek's Hikaru Sulu](#) came out as a homosexual.

"I was in my 60s. I was prepared for my career to end when I talked," Takei says. "But the reverse of what I had expected happened. My career started to blossom."

After years of living in the shadow of his famed character and more prominent cast members such as [William Shatner](#) and [Leonard Nimoy](#), Takei emerged even stronger as a political activist, a regular on [The Howard Stern Show](#) and a social-media powerhouse (his Facebook page has more than 7 million "likes").

Takei observed that his career "rebirth" was bigger than mere fan nostalgia over his Sulu role. Instead, it was based around his own quirky, humorous personality, which is on display in memorable cameo appearances ([The Big Bang Theory](#), [Community](#)) and the documentary [To Be Takei](#) (out Friday).

"People are interested not just in Sulu, but George Takei — and he's gay," Takei says. "Life is full of twist and turns."

**MORE:** [Shatner-Takei feud spills into documentary \(/story/life/movies/2014/08/17/william-shatner-george-takei/13763545/\)](#)

The world is getting the full view of Takei, now 77, at a time when most actors are hanging it up. And his growing legions want more.

"He has become this iconic and beloved figure," says documentary director Jennifer [Kroot](#), who filmed Takei and his spouse, Brad (Altman) Takei, over three years. "He re-ignited his career going into his 70s. He's become this most-accepted outsider."



George Takei in his iconic role as Hikaru Sulu in the original Star Trek series.(Photo: Courtesy of Courtesy Pioneers of Television archives)

Takei has long educated the public about the injustice of growing up in a U.S. internment camp for [Japanese-Americans](#), where he and his family were forced to live during [World War II](#). As a teen, Takei noticed this dark chapter wasn't covered in history books.

"I read about these shining democratic ideals, (but) it didn't jibe with what happened to us," he says. "My father explained to me that it's a people's democracy. It can be as great as people can be but also as fallible."

This beginning pushed Takei to be politically active, but the working actor kept his sexuality under wraps. *Star Trek* cast members knew, but they kept the secret to protect his career.

"I was closeted, but I was not celibate," Takei says. "If I were going to a public event, I had a female friend with me. But afterward I might be in a gay bar where I'd bump into gay actors."

For years, Takei lived under the radar with Altman, his running-partner-turned-life-partner. The turning point came after California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed the state's same-sex marriage bill in 2005, prompting an "outraged" Takei to take a public stand and become a prominent LGBT advocate.

He and Brad married in 2008. They live in a ranch-style house where Brad sets up a lunch of sandwiches for an interview near a six-panel, 18<sup>th</sup>-century Kano Japanese screen before declining to sit down with Takei to talk.

But the documentary shows that even Brad, his manager who does everything from setting the daily itinerary to collecting autograph money at *Star Trek* conventions, is becoming a recognizable figure as his partner's star rises.

"Before, I would be walking down the street and people would say 'Hey, Sulu,' " Takei says. "Now, people see me and they say, 'Hi, George Takei.' Or, even better, they say, 'Hi, Brad.' We have our own identity now."



**George Takei, right, of "Star Trek" and acting grand marshal of the 40th annual Pride Parade, drapes beads over a Seattle Police Department officer Sunday, June 29, 2014, in Seattle. (Photo: Jordan Stead, AP)**

That recognition has been enhanced by the announcer work on *The Howard Stern Show*, which began in 2006. Takei believes the raunchy radio program also educates a huge untapped audience about his political causes. "It is a great mouthpiece," he says.

The same can be said of his exploding Facebook presence, which started in 2011 as Takei built publicity for the musical *Allegiance*, based on his internment camp experiences. But his daily updates quickly turned humorous along with the political comments.

"Who knew?" Takei says with a laugh. "I had no idea it would grow that fast or be this massive. I began with my core audience: sci-fi geeks and nerds. And I built that into a more diverse group. By trial and error I found that the best way was through humor. People want to start their day off with a smile, or better yet, a guffaw."

Takei takes this philosophy to heart, constantly laughing, just like his mentor grandmother, who lived until age 104.

"I do find things funny. When you see life through the eyes of someone with a good sense of humor, which my grandmother did, life is a human comedy."

About the only guy not laughing is Takei's former starship captain, Shatner, who appears in the documentary with no flattering words. The two have aired grievances in recent years.

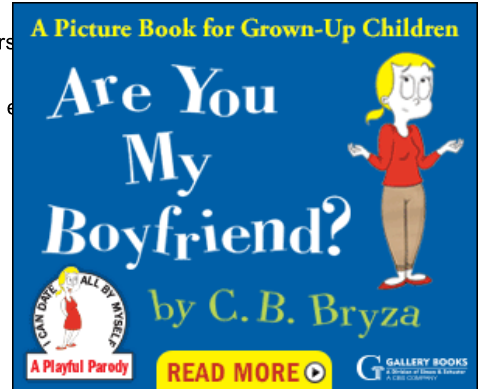
"I knew this actor briefly 50 years ago, and I have had no further, excuse the word, intercourse with him," Shatner says. "He's still going on about it."

Kroot has her own theory about the mini-feud. "I imagine Shatner only felt threatened by Leonard Nimoy for so long, and then here comes George Takei, with a much smaller part. Now he's becoming this trailblazer."

Takei says his crowning career achievement would be to bring *Allegiance*, in which he also stars, to Broadway (it had a sold-out run in San Diego's Old Globe Theatre in 2012). "We've been in line on Broadway for two years," Takei says. "There's an audience eagerly waiting on us."

But mostly the actor is enjoying just being Takei, the real George Takei, with his partner of 27 years

"There was a time in our lives when we didn't think we could have this kind of life," Takei says. "It's a great life and I love sharing it with Brad."



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George Takei in a scene from the documentary motion picture "To Be Takei." (Photo: Starz Digital Media)

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