

Newsmaker: Mariska Hargitay



Mariska Hargitay is known to many as Det. Olivia Benson of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*. Her works off-screen helping victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse are more noteworthy, though less known.

In 2004, Hargitay founded the *Joyful Heart Foundation* to “to heal, educate and empower survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse and to shed light into the darkness that surrounds these issues.”

<http://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/ourprograms.htm>

The Foundation’s mission is directly linked to Hargitay’s role on *SVU*; her fan letters included many from victims who reached out to her and spoke of the violence they had suffered.

<http://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/ourstory.htm> Hargitay

was moved to help, both by providing resources and by using her celebrity to advocate for victims.

Hargitay was born in Los Angeles in January 1964 to actress/sex symbol Jayne Mansfield and Mickey Hargitay, an actor, body-builder and former Mr. Universe. (You may recall the 1980 movie *The Jayne Mansfield Story*, which starred Loni Anderson as Mansfield and Arnold Schwarzenegger as Mickey Hargitay.)

In addition to Mariska, Mansfield and Hargitay had two sons together. The three children they shared were in the car during the June 1967 accident that took Mansfield’s life, as well as the lives of her boyfriend and the driver. Mariska, 3 ½ at the time, was left with a scar on her face.

As with most actresses, Hargitay held a number of roles before winning the one that defines her career. She began with beauty pageants and music videos in the early 1980s, before being cast opposite Christopher Meloni in *SVU* in 1999. *SVU* has been successful for more than a decade, and Hargitay has agreed to a deal for a 13th Season.

In 2004, Hargitay married Peter Hermann, whom she met on the *SVU* set. Hermann has a recurring role as a defense attorney. Together, they have a son, born in June 2006, and a daughter, adopted in April 2011.

You can learn more about the Joyful Heart Foundation at www.joyfulheartfoundation.org