



Profile & Interview: [Mark Ruffalo](#)

by Carlo Cavagna

<http://www.aboutfilm.com/features/ruffalo/ruffalo.htm>

LEFT: Mark Ruffalo stars in *We Don't Live Here Anymore*

Y

ou're a struggling actor/bartender. You appear in a smattering of dreadful straight-to-video movies. You work in the theater, and you try writing for the screen and the stage. You earn some higher profile opportunities, but the films tank. Finally, after a decade, you get your big break. A critical smash. Awards and nominations. You score a part opposite Robert Redford and a major role in a John Woo picture. You're all set to star for M. Night Shyamalan. Then, just as you're poised to become a major star, you're diagnosed with a brain tumor.

Man, that has got to suck.

For Mark Ruffalo's career, however, it was just a speed bump.

Ruffalo was born in Kenosha, Wisconsin, in 1967 and spent his childhood there before his Italian-American family relocated to Virginia Beach for Ruffalo's teenage years. He found his way to Los Angeles at eighteen, enrolling in the Stella Adler Conservatory, where he trained with Joanne Linville. After a few years, Ruffalo began venturing into L.A. theater and independent film, making his stage debut in *Avenue A* at The Cast Theater in Hollywood, where he went on to perform in several Justin Tanner plays, including *Tent Show* and *Still Life with Vacuum Salesman* (gotta love that title!). In film, his career began with bit parts in cult horror like *Mirror*, *Mirror 2: Raven Dance* (1994), *The Dentist* (1996), and who can forget the classic *Mirror, Mirror 3: The Voyeur* (1995)?

Ruffalo then tried his hand at screenwriting, co-authoring *The Destiny of Marty Fine*, which despite success at Slamdance in 1995 (first runner-up) never saw a theatrical release. At least by this time he began landing lead roles in these movies no one saw, like the Hollywood satire *The Last Big Thing* (1998), *A Fish in a Bathtub* (1999), a feature-film vehicle for real-life couple Jerry Stiller and Anne Meara (Jason Alexander's cantankerous parents on *Seinfeld*), and the romantic comedy *Life/Drawing* (1999), also never released.

Undeterred, Ruffalo continued auditioning tirelessly, and was rewarded with small roles in real movies, like *54* (1998) with Mike Myers, the Steve Zahn/Sam Rockwell comedy *Safe Men* (1998), Ang Lee's civil war epic [Ride With the Devil](#) (1999), and the Heather Graham comic vehicle *Committed* (2000). All of these films were box office failures, however, and failed to provide Ruffalo with his big break.

That break came with an off-Broadway role that took Ruffalo to New York City. The play was *This Is Our Youth* (for which Ruffalo won a Lucille Lortel Award for Best Actor), and the playwright was Kenneth Lonergan. Ruffalo persuaded Lonergan to audition him for Lonergan's directorial feature-film debut...