



Jennifer Aniston Was Almost Written Off 'Friends' in the First Season



By Rachel Sandell

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Rachel Sandell is an experienced editor and proofreader with a love for language and storytelling. A graduate of the creative writing MFA program, The Rainier Writing Workshop, she is the author of five short stories and analyzes the different facets of fiction her spare time. She's also a huge...

SUMMARY

- Jennifer Aniston almost left *Friends* halfway through Season 1 due to her involvement in another sitcom, *Muddling Through*.
- Thanks to a strategic move by the *Friends* showrunners, involving airing Danielle Steel adaptations to attract viewers, *Muddling Through* failed to gain traction, allowing Aniston to stay on *Friends* and become a part of TV history.
- Muddling Through* struggled from the start with a disadvantageous time slot and ultimately only lasted three months, while *Friends* went on for 10 seasons.

Friends has been widely regarded as one of the most iconic sitcoms, even decades following its conclusion – and for good reason. The series was successful for many reasons, with the chemistry among its six leads being the most important. Arguably the most talked about relationship on the series belongs to Ross Geller and Rachel Green, played by David Schwimmer and Jennifer Aniston, who both recently reunited for a Super Bowl commercial. Both actors are now household names, and Rachel Green is often cited as Aniston's breakout role. Because she is such a prominent member of the cast, it's hard to imagine *Friends* without her. However, according to film and cinema studies professor Saul Austerlitz's 2019 book *Generation Friends*, the show had a close call during Season 1: they almost lost Jennifer Aniston halfway through.



Friends

TV-14 Comedy Romance

Release Date: 1994 - 2004-00-00

Network: NBC

Showrunner: Marta Kauffman

Directors: Kevin S. Bright, Gary Halvorson, Michael Lembeck, James Burrows,...

Writers: Jeff Astrof, Mike Sikowitz, Brian Boyle, Patty Lin, Bill Lawrence, R...

Franchise(s): Friends

Cast: Jennifer Aniston (Rachel Green), Courteney Cox (Monica Geller)

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Jennifer Aniston Was Stuck Between 'Friends' and 'Muddling Through'

1994 was a busy year for Jennifer Aniston. She ended up acting for several different pilots in the hopes that something would last. After shooting **five other TV pilots**, she found her sitcom family with NBC's *Friends* as **Rachel Green**, but not before shooting six episodes of a completely different series. At the time, CBS was giving a chance to a new sitcom called *Muddling Through*, and Aniston had a prominent role as the protagonist's daughter Madeline. The show was promised six episodes, and if the ratings were on their side, they could potentially land a full season. However, Aniston ended up being one of the top picks for *Friends* as



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my responsibility and I couldn't help but when she's going she's not going to make it well, meaning she was stuck between the two shows.

If *Muddling Through* managed to... well, muddle through and get its first season greenlit, then **Aniston wouldn't be able to participate in the filming of *Friends* after the first half of the season.** Rachel Green would either have to be written out of the show or replaced with a different actress, neither of which were ideal options. Aniston was the *Friends* showrunners' **top pick for the role of Rachel Green**, so her ties to *Muddling Through* put them in a tough spot. Scheduling-wise, ***Muddling Through* had to secure a good date and time to air** so that people would actually tune in for the show.

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By Shaina Weatherhead



Well, *Muddling Through* aired its first episode... in the summer, on a Saturday night. With a date and time when so few people would be tuning in, ***Muddling Through* was disadvantaged from the start.** Nonetheless, they could still hurt NBC's up-and-coming hit by depriving them of one of their lead actors. If the show became any more popular, Aniston would have to back out of *Friends* in order to continue with *Muddling Through*. The uncertainty got to a point where **Aniston had to sit out some of *Friends* early photoshoots.** If it turned out she wouldn't be able to continue on the show, *Friends* needed to have official images that didn't include her.

What Is 'Muddling Through' About?

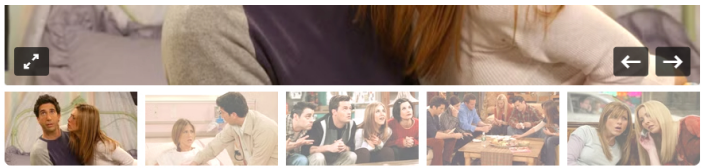


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Muddling Through, created by producer **Barton Dean**, follows the story of Connie Drego (**Stephanie Hodge**), an ex-convict who's trying to get her life back on track. She spends a few years in prison after attacking her ex-husband Sonny (**D. David Morin**) and now works at her family's motel and diner in an attempt to build a better life for herself. Connie isn't alone in her plight, though, because she has two daughters. **Aimee Brooks** plays Kerri and Aniston plays Madeline (Aniston) who is now married to Duane (**Scott Waara**), the cop who arrested Connie. The show also had a gallery of supporting and recurring cast members ready to go on the chance that it was picked up for a full season.

'Friends' Showrunners Needed To Win Over Jennifer Aniston





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Stuck with their competition, the *Friends* showrunners came up with a strategy to ensure that *Muddling Through* never got their Season 1. There wasn't anything they could do to influence CBS's decisions, but, thanks to strategist **Preston Beckman**, there was a way to tip the scale in their favor. What if *Muddling Through*'s already-undesirable time slot had steep competition? Beckman's plan was simple but effective. When *Muddling Through* was airing that summer, **NBC started airing a line of TV movies**, all of which were **Danielle Steel** adaptations. As a prominent romance author and a #1 *New York Times* bestseller, Steel already had a large following of fans, ensuring a substantial female viewer base for the time slot — all of whom would now be tuning in to NBC on summer Saturdays. Which would be more enticing, after all? A little-known brand-new TV series airing on a Saturday night in the summer months, or a line of films with familiar stories adapted from a respected and established author's work?

Muddling Through didn't stand much of a chance, premiering in July 1994 and only continuing through to its tenth episode later that September. (Episode 11 was left unaired when the show was canceled.) *Muddling Through* barely lasted three months, and ***Friends* aired for 10 seasons** and as many years, with reruns still playing as we speak. *Muddling Through* may have gotten their first pick with Jennifer Aniston, but *Friends* certainly had the last laugh. **Thanks to the strategic thinking of Beckman and the lineup of Danielle Steel adaptations** (of all things), *Friends* was able to keep the iconic character of Rachel Green without recasting. They didn't need to bother taking photos without Aniston — she stayed for all ten seasons and became part of one of the most **iconic couples in TV** history. It was a close call, and it took the sacrifice of another show, but *Friends* ended up being Aniston's breakout role, launching her career and investing millions of viewers in the lives of six friends in New York just trying to figure themselves out.

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Friends



Jennifer Aniston

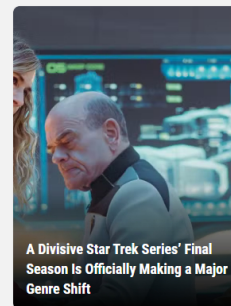
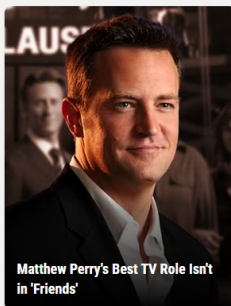
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