Scorsese was raised by Italian-American parents in Little Italy in Manhattan. His parents, Charles and Catherine, worked part-time as actors and contemplated priesthood before deciding to pursue cinema instead.

This idea was aided after he received a $500 scholarship to NYU for a ten-minute comedy short he created.

During the creation of his first feature film, "Who's That Knocking at My Door" (1969), Scorsese met Harvey Keitel who he would cast in more films in the future, and Thelma Schoonmaker, an editor he would work with for 40 years.

In Scorsese's 1973 film "Mean Streets," Scorsese used elements that would define most of his filmmaking, such as dark themes, the mafia, odd camera moves, and themes from his personal experiences. Scorsese's film "Taxi Driver" won the Palme d'Or as well as inspired John Hinckley's assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan five years after the film was released.