



WINCHESTER'S GOLDEN GRADUATES

MARA LYNN – FROM CLASSMATE TO CLASS ACT!

By Daly Walker

In 1960 a beautiful statuesque Broadway actor, dancer, and Hollywood star, gave acting lessons to Marilyn Monroe at Marilyn's New York apartment. She was coaching Miss Monroe for a role in an upcoming movie, "Let's Make Love." Marilyn's mentor was Mara Lynn who was also in the romantic comedy's cast with other stars that included Yves Montand, Bing Crosby, Milton Berle, Tony Randell and Gene Kelly. Mara was from Winchester, Indiana and a member of its high school's class of 1945.

Marilyn Mosier (Mara Lynn was her stage name) was of Swedish descent. She was born in Chicago, Illinois on July 17th, 1927. During the depression, the Mosier family moved to Winchester where her father Robert's parents lived. Mara's mother, Loretta, taught Spanish at Earlham College in nearby Richmond, and her dad served in the diplomatic corps. The family home was a white frame house on South East Street with a sprawling backyard bordered by Salt Creek, a narrow stream that Mara crossed, stepping from rock to rock on the way to school. Above the couch in the living room hung a big color photograph of Mara lounging seductively in a leopard skin bathing suit. In the master bedroom, Mara, as a teenager, practiced her dance routines in front of a vanity's large mirror.

Mara's closest friend in high school, Babs Hawkins, described Mara as being rather plain but extremely bright and athletic with a vivid imagination and terrific figure.

Another Winchester resident remembers Mara being anything but plain. "I recall her walking by the old Winchester newspaper office when a bunch of us carriers was filling our delivery sacks," he said. "There was a kind of awed silence as she slinked by."

Mara's show business career had its beginning in Winchester where she took piano lessons and rode the bus to Muncie for dance instructions. Her musical debut was a recital held at the Winchester High School gymnasium where Mara, in a white dress, played a piano duet with Babs.

"Mara was a normal laid-back teen age kid," Babs said. "She loved baked beans and attended the Presbyterian Church. It was her mother who pushed her constantly to excel." After high school, Mara moved to New York City where she was to become a star of the stage and silver screen. She studied classical dance with George Balanchine, the foremost contemporary choreographer in the world of ballet. Mara first gained fame in 1948 as the dancing star in the Broadway musical, "Inside U.S.A." The show ran for 339 performances in the New Century and Majestic Theaters. Roles in "Stop the World I Want to Get Off," "New Girl in Town," and numerous other Broadway musicals and road shows followed. The gorgeous actor and dancer took her talent to Las Vegas where she was a dance director and performer for many years.

Lynn's successful Hollywood career began in 1950 when she was discovered by the producer, Hal Wallis, and given a role of in the film "Prehistoric Women." When the risqué movie came to the Lyric Theater on the court house square in Winchester, local temperance groups protested and mothers forbade their children to attend, but almost everyone in town wanted to see the local star, and the Lyric was packed for every showing. Other movies Mara appeared in included "The Confession," "Artists and Models," the Kirk Douglas' western "Last Train from Gun Hill," "Leave it to the Marines," "Beyond the Law" with Rip Torn, and Phil Silvers' comedy "Top Banana. Late in her career in 1968 she acted with Norman Mailer in "Wild 90."

Mara got her start in television working as a zany straight woman for comedians Milton Berle and Groucho Marx. The screen writer and novelist, Budd Schulberg, once referred to Mara as "a one-girl riot." She partnered with fellow Hoosier, Red Skelton, in a TV ballet and appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show. Ray Bolger chose her to be his dance partner in his last national tour.

In 1948 when Mara was the featured dancer at New York's Hurricane Club, her show was seen by Harold Conrad, the legendary fight promoter and journalist who wrote a column for the "New York Mirror." Tall and dapper with a pencil mustache, Harold was a pal to famous Hollywood, Las Vegas, and New York personalities ranging from Ernest Hemingway and Joe Lewis to Lucky Luciano and George Plimpton. He promoted the Cassius Clay/Sonny Liston fight and Evel Knievel's failed jump over the Snake River Canyon. Harold thought that Mara was sensational and asked her out for dinner. They soon fell in love and were married, but life with the tempestuous Mara was often quite stormy. Once, when Harold was covering the second

Ali-Spinks fight in New Orleans, Harold and Mara had a terrific spat. Harold stomped out of the hotel room and found a French Quarter bar where he proceeded to get drunk. Later that night, he found himself in an all-night tattoo parlor where he got a tricolor fractured heart affixed to his bicep. MARA, was the artwork's caption. The tattoo accomplished what Harold wanted. Mara was swayed. She said of Harold's tattoo that it was the greatest tribute of love she'd ever seen.

Mara's love life was as legendary as her stage life. Interspersed with her on-again-off-again relationship with Conrad were liaisons with other men that included the film star Jason Robards, the famous composer Bob Merrill whom she nearly married, and movie actor Ralph Meeker. Harold and Mara divorced but eventually got back together and were remarried. They had one child, Casey.

Norman Mailer summed up the tempestuous Mara when he wrote of her: "She was a blond witch and a blond angel, she could be both, often at the same time, depending on her mood. She could get a guy agitated. Like every man married to a beautiful woman, Harold, I think, was always a little in awe of her."

In spite of her stardom, Mara never forsook her Indiana roots. She loved Winchester and often returned to visit high school friends and family. Her career in show business, that spanned 40 years, finally ended when she developed cancer of the liver. Harold spent a fortune trying desperately to find a cure for her malignancy. But his efforts were of no avail. The legendary life of the glamor girl from Winchester ended on April 6th, 1988 when Mara died in Freeport in the Bahamas at the age of 59.

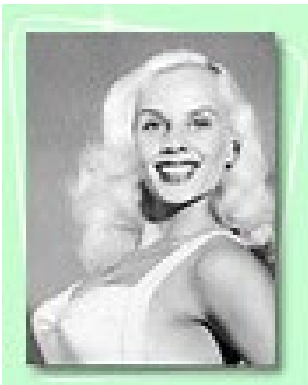
Editor's note. There are conflicting opinions and records about whether Mara Lynn actually received a diploma from Winchester High School. But the evidence is clear that her time as a student in Winchester greatly influenced her life and career. We decided to give her the benefit of the doubt and include her as a "Golden Graduate." Her story was too good to pass up.

(photos below)

Mara Lynn (Marilyn Mosier) in 1945



Professional photo of Mara Lynn



Movie Scene photo of Mara Lynn

