

CLASSIC IMAGES

January 2010 No. 415

www.classicimages.com

USA \$4.00

Canada \$5.00

Mae West
the Darling
of Broadway

"SHE DONE
HIM WRONG,"

WITH
CARY GRANT



**IN THIS
ISSUE**

Mae West
Patsy Garrett
Marilyn Knowlden
Roger Mobley



Patsy Garrett

Adored by Cats, and Named by Dempsey

By Richard Sackley



Bubbly Patsy Garrett carved a successful career as a character actress, danced with hungry cats in her kitchen, befriended an iconic and lovable mutt, wowed The King of Rock 'n' Roll with her baked goodies, and was named by one of history's most popular heavyweight fighters. That's just for starters.

"It's way better to be a second star than to be the top dog a lot of times," Garrett said of her career playing myriad supporting characters, including Mary Gruber with canine favorite *Benji* (1974), and the sequels *For The Love Of Benji* (1977), and *Benji's Very Own Christmas Story* (1978). And it pays the bills too, thanks to being the "Chow-chow-chow" lady, dancing the cha-cha for a decade of famed Purina Cat Chow commercials (1974-84). Interestingly, she started out being a singer in a fascinating career that took many twists and turns.

Born May 4, 1921 in Atlantic City, New Jersey, Garrett's birth happened to coincide with a hospital visit by World Champion Heavyweight Jack Dempsey. "The nurse was bringing me down to my mother," Patsy recalls, "and he [Dempsey] peeked in the blanket and said to the nurse, 'Boy, there's a patsy,'" The nurse shared the story with her mother who favored Patsy over Virginia, her legal name which she has never used. "It was just Patsy from the day Jack Dempsey named me, and I don't think he knew it."

Garrett appropriately developed a Dempsey-like toughness, growing up in a show business family as daughter of "Mason & Gwynne," a standard Vaudeville act, in black cork makeup, that was constantly on the road with grueling 40-week contracts. The road being no place to raise a child, her parents Carl Mason Garrett and Fredda Gwynne Oxley dispatched her to Richmond, Virginia to live with her father's parents, Bertie and Mason.

An outgoing youngster at age four, she began dancing and by age seven had her own children's radio show in Richmond. Garrett proved popular, and the show's sponsor, an ice cream company, paid her by sending over a truck every week with freebies for her and the kids.

When Garrett moved to live with her mother and attend college at age 17, one of her mom's old Vaudeville friends lined up a job as a comic singer with Fred Waring & His Pennsylvanians on his *Chesterfield Pleasure Time* radio show with singer Donna Dae.

"From 1938-43 we were on twice five nights a week on the radio, except for Wednesdays, for 52 weeks a year," said Garrett. "It was such fun and of course it was during the war years and right in the middle of the Golden Age of Radio, but who knew?" In New York City alone, Tommy Dorsey, Frank Sinatra, The Pied Pipers and Jo Stafford were at the Astor Roof, Betty Hutton was at the Edison, and Doris Day and Les Brown at the Pennsylvania Hotel.

Garrett's success with the Fred Waring radio show was noticed by many of the those greats, including Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald and Dinah Shore, who wired congratulatory telegrams.

Good fortune continued to follow when Cole Porter asked Waring, who in turn picked Garrett, to sing the popular standard "Begin The Beguine," a ballad he had written for a new musical in the early 1940s. She also shared a page in the program with Dorothy Lamour promoting the personality party at the Mosque in New York (1942), had her name adorn the Loew's State Vaudeville marquee in New York in the mid '40s, and became the major public relations face behind reopening the Palace Theater in New York in 1949.

While never a household name, Garrett began demonstrating a con-

Publicity photo of pop singer Patsy Garrett, set to reopen The Palace theater at 45th and Broadway in New York City (1949). All photos courtesy of Patsy Garrett (except where noted)



Patsy Garrett joins other TV commercial icons at the 36th Annual Emmy Awards in Pasadena, California during the show's opening musical salute to the best commercials of all time. Garrett (far right), is joined by Dan O'Herlihy (Kraft), Virginia Christine (Mrs. Olson for Folgers Coffee), John Moschitta (FedEx fast-talking guy), Jane Withers (Comet's Josephine The Plumber), Avery Schreiber (Doritos), Dick Wilson (Charmin Bathroom Tissue) and advertising satirist Stan Freberg. (1984)



Patsy Garrett, Fred Waring and Donna Dae (1941)

sistent work ethic that gained the respect and admiration of industry peers. "I have never borrowed a penny, and I supported all my family---I had seven dependents while I was 18 years old," said the proud 88-year-old, who now boasts seven grandchildren and five great grandchildren. "I bought my houses, got my kids through college."

Garrett and late husband Alexander Kokinakis lived in

Northridge, California for 37 years before retiring in the early '90s to the Palm Springs area. Kokinakis, a musical composer who wrote under the name of Nick Alexander, collaborated with Garrett on *A Walk With Mr. Peeps*, a children's book and LP/cassette teaching various morals. The busy couple still managed to raise two children, Jeff, a hotel sales director, and Kathy, a housewife and retail rep, who still live near her in



Patsy Garrett and William Windom, who played Martha and George Wilson, take a break on the set of *Dennis The Menace* (1987)

the Palm Springs area. She also is close with stepson Nick, a seafood salesman.

Much to her surprise, daughter Kathy realized the fantasy of teenaged girls worldwide when her mom got her on the set of Elvis Presley's *The Trouble With Girls*. Garrett had just landed the role of Mrs. Gilchrist, the mayor's wife, through friend and director Peter Tewksbury, who she met while shooting on the classic TV sitcom *My Three Sons*.

"I had several scenes with Elvis, [and my] daughter desperately wanted to come to the set," Garrett recalled. Since Presley was known for maintaining the industry's toughest security to keep rabid fans at bay, she didn't even think of asking. But

during some downtime while crocheting, she happened to mention her daughter's name to Presley, who not only invited her to the set but fussed over her and said she was pretty enough to be in the movies. "He couldn't have been nicer," she added. "When we left that night [Elvis] gave her a rolled up movie poster. So we had wall-to-wall Elvis for a long time in her room."

Garrett also made a lasting impression on the musical icon, who often lamented about missing out on some of the home-baked morning treats she would bring to the set. Outside his trailer, she later surprised him with a cookie tin filled with a special batch of date nut bread and koulakria Greek cookies.

Years later while passing through Las Vegas on an annual driving trip with her husband, Garrett phoned Presley to request the return of her baking tin. He laughed, and offered her show tickets. "He was a lovely man and a delight."

While the roles of the Purina Cat Chow Lady and Mary Gruber in the series of *Benji* movies squarely placed her in the public eye, fans today also remember her work as nosy neighbor Mrs. Florence Fowler from *Nanny and the Professor* (1970-71), and school secretary Miss Hogarth from the Emmy Award-winning *Room 222* (1969-74). Those ABC-TV shows were very popular during their runs, although *Nanny* was cut short after the network unwisely placed the sweet family comedy as lead-in to ABC's Monday Night Football.

"We thought [*Nanny*] would go on for a long time," said Garrett of the show, starring the beautiful and enchanting Juliet Mills--Hayley's sister--as a nanny with magical powers. "We had high tea at four o'clock because Juliet was English."

As Mrs. Fowler, a widow raising young daughter Francine, played by Eileen Baral, Garrett had the *Bewitched*-inspired nosy neighbor Gladys Kravitz role down pat. She also had "a great time" working with the show's main cast including "The Professor" (Richard Long) and his precocious daughter (played by the up-and-coming Kim Richards, who achieved later success with several Disney projects).

Garrett's favorite episode, "Nanny and Her Witch's Brew," had her flying on a broom while accusing Nanny of being a witch. After crew members outfitted her with a flying suit previously worn by Raquel Welch in *Fantastic Voyage*, they jokingly created an actor's chair for her with the words "Raquel Squelch" and later raised her up to the top of a sound stage and pretended to leave her there during a coffee break. "They all walked off the left me hanging," she said. "I yelled, and then realized they were all laughing."

On *Room 222*, Garrett was at first heard, but not seen, as a voice from behind a filing cabinet in the office of principal Seymour Kaufman, played by Michael Constantine. But for the most time, she thoroughly enjoyed her screen time on the critically-acclaimed comedy/drama with ensemble actors Lloyd Haynes, Denise Nicholas and Karen Valentine.

While Garrett's acting roles were plentiful, her name and image drew praise and attention from agents as she "literally fell" into print and TV commercial work. "Remember, I was a singer and it never occurred for me to become an actress," she added.

And animation voice acting wasn't on her radar screen either when she landed two roles in Saturday morning children's series from renowned animator Hanna-Barbera. With no need for hair and makeup

artists, Garrett played Sheera on *Moby Dick and the Mighty Mightor* (1967), and Jill Carter on *The Banana Splits Adventure Hour* (1968).

She first appeared on a classic Chesterfield cigarette print ad from 1940, which led to roles plugging every kind of home product, including Surf's Up water softener.

"Most auditions I attended included a room full of character ladies who each had to read for about five people around a table," she recalled. "I did well because I looked like the lady next door, and I would manage to find some humor in each spot."

A poetry lover, Garrett would use that creativity to nab her signature commercial role. "The first time I read for a Purina Cat Chow commercial, I said 'chow-chow-chow' and then added the rhyme 'wait for me, 1-2-3.'" Other actresses just read the script straight up--the company



Patsy Garrett, son Jeff Kokinacis, and Fred Waring (1970s)



Patsy Garrett, who played the part of next-door-neighbor Maggie Quincy, holds hands with Buzz Blair, producer, with the cast of the CBS-TV daytime serial, *The Brighter Day*. To Blair's right is producer Hal Cooper, who went on to direct numerous classic TV shows such as *Maude*, *That Girl*, *The Brady Bunch* and *I Dream Of Jeannie* (1962)



Patsy Garrett photo (2007)

liked her improvisation.

The first year with Purina, she worked without a contract before a flood of favorable fan mail led to two five-year contracts that resulted in an estimated 40 commercials, all with the familiar "chow-chow-chow" jingle.

"We're on the all-time Top 10



"Chow, Chow, Chow" lady Patsy Garrett in a national print ad for Purina Cat Chow featured in *Better Homes & Gardens* and *Good Housekeeping* (1981)

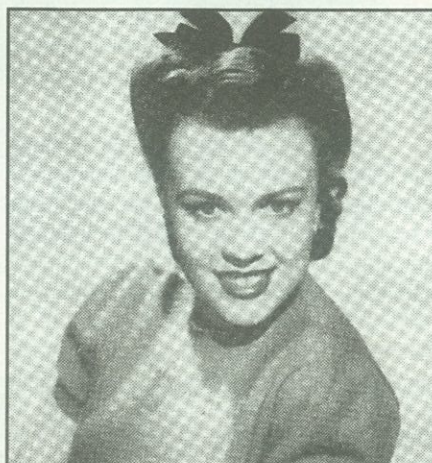
list for most memorable commercial," said Garrett, who joined many of her contemporaries, including pal Jane Withers (Comet cleanser's Josephine the Plumber), John Moschitta (the *Federal Express* "fast-talking guy") and Dick Wilson ("Please don't squeeze the Charmin") in a musical salute to TV's all-time best commercials that opened the 1984 Emmy Awards telecast.



Patsy Garrett and Tiffany, a female dog who played Benji, on the set of *Benji* (1974).

Professionally, agents categorized her as "homey--and not tall and skinny and glamorous--the average American housewife." Garrett knew she arrived when agents put out the word they were looking for "a Patsy Garrett-type."

Her success with Purina led to other spots, including a 1970s commercial for Yamaha motorcycles, even though Garrett had never taken one for a ride. The company created the Clio Award-winning ad to appeal to housewives, with her character



Dorothy Lamour and Patsy Garrett shared a page in the program promoting the Personality Party at the Mosque in New York City (1942)

receiving a Yamaha as a surprise birthday gift and joining male family members on an outing.

"I had one lesson and we were shooting up in Napa Valley [California], and I tried to take off, put my foot down and hit a big rock or piece of wood," she recalled. She was purple "from my neck to my knees" and never got on another motorcycle.

Garrett's other notable commercials had her playing matchmaker for her daughter while touting the benefits of Cheer laundry detergent (All-Temp-A-Cheer) and joining three other spinster friends (including famous character actress Mary Wickes) singing the praises of Kentucky Fried Chicken's "99-Center" chicken meal deal.

Acting in the *Benji* movies was a pleasure, thanks to Garrett's long-time working relationship with iconic animal trainer Frank Inn. "[Frank] did the pilot for *Nanny and The Professor*," she said. "He provided a lot of cats for the Purina commercials, and dogs for *Nanny*, including Fifi. We were just really good friends and would travel with them in their motor home."

And one of the perks was the



Patsy Garrett, who played the part of Mary, with co-stars Benji, Cynthia Smith (Cindy) and Allen Fuzat (Paul) in Athens, Greece during *For The Love Of Benji* (1977).



Patsy Garrett, husband Alexander Kokinacis (the composer who wrote under the name of Nick Alexander) and Bob Hope at a golf tournament benefit held at The Steel Pier in Atlantic City, New Jersey (1950).

first-class rock star celebrity status of Benji around the world: "Whenever you went with him through customs, I could have [smuggled] all of Switzerland in my suitcase."

Garrett's popularity in bit parts as neighbors and nurses on some of TV's most beloved series continued over the years, including *My Three Sons*, then featuring William Frawley as "Bub" (1962-63), *Ben Casey* with heartthrob Vince Edwards (1964), *Medical Center* with another heartthrob Chad Everett

(1969-70), *Columbo*, with guest star Leonard Nimoy (1973), *The Waltons*, where she knew creator Earl Hamner, as both had attended the University of Richmond (Va.) (1973), *Ironside* starring Raymond Burr (1974), and *The Rookies* with Michael Ontkean and a pre-*Charlie's Angels* Kate Jackson (1975).

Garrett's other TV highlights included a part on the pilot of Norman Lear's *All In The Family* spin-off *Maude* starring Beatrice Arthur (1982), a role on an Emmy-

nominated episode of *Sanford*, starring Redd Foxx (1981) and a guest appearance on an episode of the popular drama *Family* (1976), where she befriended actor/composer John Rubenstein and treasured working with the incomparable Sada Thompson, James Broderick and young ingenue Kristy McNichol.

Her many movie roles include *Dear Heart*, starring Geraldine Page (1964), *The Parallax View*, a thriller starring Warren Beatty and Paula Prentiss (1974), and the role of neighbor Phoebe in *Divorce*

American Style, starring Debbie Reynolds and Dick Van Dyke (1967). "When the film was over, [Debbie Reynolds] gave each co-star a beautiful white leather-bound album with a script and photos of the scenes they shared," said Garrett of the thoughtful gift she unfortunately misplaced due to several moves over the years.

She later landed a role in what became one of the era's highest-rated made-for-TV movies, *Happily Ever After*, starring Suzanne Somers, and

Continued on page 70



Patsy Garrett and Fred Waring following a performance at his Shawnee Inn golf course in Shawnee, Pennsylvania (late 1970s).



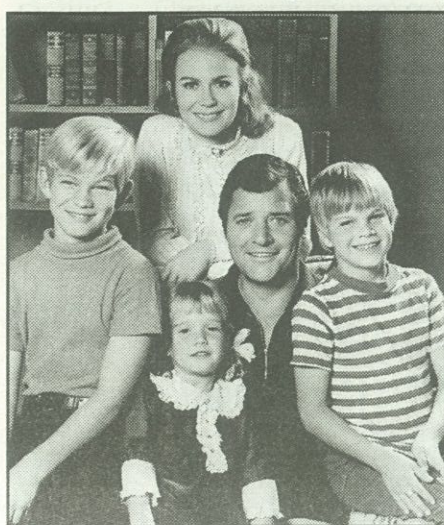
A 1940 photo of singers Patsy Garrett, and Donna Dae, with Fred Waring & His Pennsylvanians, who headlined the *Chesterfield Pleasure Time* radio show which stayed on the air five years with two live shows (7 p.m. east and 10 p.m. west) five nights a week for 52 weeks.



Patsy Garrett, playing the part of Mrs. Gilchrist, rides along with Elvis Presley in *The Trouble With Girls* (1969)



Patsy Garrett, who played next-door-neighbor Mrs. Fowler on the 1970-71 ABC-TV sitcom *Nanny & The Professor*, with Eileen Baral, who played her daughter, Francine Fowler (1970) Photo courtesy of Sherry Ledenbach & nannyandtheprofessor.com



(Clockwise from top) *Nanny & The Professor* cast members Juliet Mills, David Doremus, Kim Richards, Richard Long & Trent Lehman (1970) Photo courtesy of Sherry Ledenbach & nannyandtheprofessor.com



(From left) *Nanny & The Professor* cast members Juliet Mills, Kim Richards, Trent Lehman, David Doremus and Richard Long (1970) Photo courtesy of Sherry Ledenbach & nannyandtheprofessor.com

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Bruce Boxleitner. She was also in the *Dennis The Menace* TV movie, where she played neighbor Martha Wilson alongside William Windom as George Wilson (1987). She loved spending time on-and off-screen with the colorful Windom (*The Farmer's Daughter* and *My World And Welcome To It*) whom she called "a really good actor."

One of her least-heralded acting roles came in 1962, the part of next-door-neighbor Maggie Quincy on the final year of the long-running CBS-TV soap opera, *The Brighter Day*. On set, she had the pleasure of adding show producer Hal Cooper to her network of industry connections. Cooper later directed episodes of *Maude* and other classics such as *That Girl*, *The Brady Bunch* and *I*

Dream of Jeannie.

Approaching 90 years young, Garrett has "no regrets" when reminiscing about her career that spans radio, TV, film, music, advertising, and theater. She is most proud of her 2004 lifetime achievement award from the (Palm Springs) Desert Theater League.

Today, she continues acting in local theater productions staged in the Palm Springs area. Included are *Tale Of An Allergist's Wife*, *Thanks For The Memory*, written by friend and entertainment columnist Gary Walker, and a seasonal Saturday Radio Matinee, an hour-long show written for a live audience and performed at a Palm Desert, senior center.

According to her close friends, Garrett's longevity as an actor is a true testament to her intestinal fortitude. "And being a character actor means you don't have to keep up your beauty while other girls are lucky to get 10 years out of work," she maintains. "When you get to a certain age and there's nothing more for you, character actors can work up into their 70s and 80s."

Summing up her life and personal values, she added, "I've often said I would never change a single day of my life. I have been very lucky. I made my decisions early as to what my priorities were. So maybe I turned down a bunch of work and travel when my children were small, but we were a fun-loving family and I'd rather have that."



Patsy Garrett and Jane Withers during a monthly Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters monthly meeting held at Sportsmen's Lodge in Sherman Oaks, California.

CLASS OF SERVICE		WESTERN UNION		1201		SYMBOLS	
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1A79				Ship Radiogram			
R-NB067 DL PD-NEWYORK NY 1 1139A=							
MISS PATSY GARRETT, RADIO STATION WLEE=							
BROAD-GRACE ARCADE RICH=							
new york							
=HY PATSY/CONGRATULATIONS TO WLEE'S NEWEST DISC JOCKEY-							
ACQUISITION. AS ALWAYS I AM SURE YOU WILL DO A WONDERFUL							
JOB. LOTS OF LUCK-							
=ELLA FITZGERALD=							

Western Union telegram from Ella Fitzgerald to Patsy Garrett, congratulating her on the debut of the WLEE radio show (1950).

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RE83 PB592				Ship Radiogram			
P-SIA690 NL PD=S NEWYORK NY 3=							
MISS PATSY GARRETT=							
DLR SUNDAY MAR 5 RADIO STN WLEE BROAD GRACE ARCADE							
RICHMOND VIR=							
KNOW THE FOLKS IN RICHMOND ARE IN FOR A TREAT WHEN YOU							
DEBUT ON YOUR OWN SHOW ON WLEE TODAY. WISH I COULD BE							
THERE TO KISS YOUR CHEEK. BEST=							
FRANK SINATRA=.							

Western Union telegram from Frank Sinatra to Patsy Garrett, congratulating her on the debut of the WLEE radio show (1950).

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RA937 PB591				Ship Radiogram			
P-SIA689 NL PD=S NEWYORK NY 3=							
MISS PATSY GARRETT=							
DLR SUNDAY MARCH 5=RADIO STATION WLEE BROAD GRACE							
ARCADE RICHMOND VIR=							
ALL KINDS OF BEST WISHES TO YOU, PATSY, TODAY AND ALWAYS.							
I'M SURE YOUR LISTENERS WILL BE TUNING IN WLEE-MUTUAL EVERY							
SINGLE AFTERNOON=							
DINAH & GEORGE MONTGOMERY=.							

Western Union telegram from Dinah Shore and George Montgomery to Patsy, congratulating her on the debut of the WLEE radio show (1950).