



# Jennifer Jones

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**Jennifer Jones** (born **Phylis Lee Isley**; March 2, 1919 – December 17, 2009), also known as **Jennifer Jones Simon**, was an American actress during [Hollywood's golden years](#). Jones, who won the [Academy Award for Best Actress](#) for her performance in *The Song of Bernadette* (1943), was also Academy Award-nominated for her performances in four other films. She was married three times, most notably to film producer [David O. Selznick](#).

Jones starred in more than 20 films over a 30-year career, but she went into semi-retirement following Selznick's death in 1965. In 1980, she founded the Jennifer Jones Simon Foundation for Mental Health and Education four years after her daughter's suicide. In later life, Jones withdrew from public life to live in quiet retirement with her son and his family in [Malibu, California](#).

## Early life

Jones was born **Phylis Lee Isley**<sup>[1]</sup> in [Tulsa, Oklahoma](#), the daughter of Flora Mae (née Suber) and Phillip Ross Isley.<sup>[2]</sup> An only child, she was raised [Roman Catholic](#).<sup>[3]</sup> Her parents toured the [Midwest](#) in a traveling tent show that they owned and operated. She attended [Monte Cassino](#), a girls' school and junior college in Tulsa and then [Northwestern University](#) in Illinois, where she was a member of [Kappa Alpha Theta](#) sorority, before transferring to the [American Academy of Dramatic Arts](#) in New York City in 1938. It was there that she met and fell in love with fellow acting student [Robert Walker](#). The couple married on January 2, 1939.<sup>[4]</sup>

Isley and Walker returned to Tulsa for a 13-week radio program, arranged by her father, and then made their way to Hollywood. Isley landed two small roles, first in a 1939 [John Wayne](#) Western titled *New*

### Jennifer Jones



in *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* (1955)

<b>Born</b>	<div>Phylis Lee Isley<sup>[1]</sup></div> <div>March 2, 1919</div> <div><a href="#">Tulsa, Oklahoma, U.S.</a></div>
<b>Died</b>	<div>December 17, 2009 (aged 90)</div> <div><a href="#">Malibu, California, U.S.</a></div>
<b>Alma<span> </span>mater</b>	<div><a href="#">Northwestern University</a></div> <div><a href="#">American Academy of Dramatic Arts</a></div>
<b>Occupation(s)</b>	Actress, singer
<b>Years<span> </span>active</b>	1939–1974
<b>Spouse(s)</b>	<div><a href="#">Robert Walker</a> (m. 1939–45; divorced)</div>

Frontier, followed by a serial entitled Dick Tracy's G-Men. She failed a screen test for Paramount Pictures and decided to return to New York City.

## Career

While Walker found steady work in radio programs, Isley worked part-time modeling hats for the Powers Agency while looking for possible acting jobs. When she learned of auditions for the lead role in Claudia, Rose Franken's hit play, she presented herself to David O. Selznick's New York office but fled in tears after what she thought was a bad reading. However, Selznick had overheard her audition and was impressed enough to have his secretary call her back. Following an interview, she was signed to a seven-year contract.



Jones as Bernadette Soubirous in The Song of Bernadette (1943)

She was carefully groomed for stardom and given a new name: **Jennifer Jones**. Director Henry King was impressed by her screen test as Bernadette Soubirous for The Song of Bernadette (1943) and she won the coveted role over hundreds of applicants. In 1944, on her 25th birthday, Jones won the Academy Award for Best Actress for her performance as Bernadette Soubirous.

Over the next two decades, Jones appeared in a wide range of roles selected by Selznick. Her dark beauty and sensitive nature appealed to audiences and she projected a variable range. Her initial saintly image — as shown in her first starring role — was a stark contrast three years later when she was cast as a provocative bi-racial woman in

Selznick's controversial film Duel in the Sun (1946). Other notable films included Since You Went Away (1944), Love Letters (1945), Cluny Brown (1946), Portrait of Jennie (1948), Madame Bovary (1949), We Were Strangers (1949), Gone to Earth (1950), Carrie (1952), Ruby Gentry (also 1952), Terminal Station (1953; later released as Indiscretion of an American Wife), Beat the Devil (1953), Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing (1955), Good Morning, Miss Dove (also 1955), The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit (1956) starring opposite Gregory Peck and A Farewell to Arms (1957). The portrait of Jones for the film Portrait of Jennie was painted by Robert Brackman.

Her last big-screen appearance came in the disaster film The Towering Inferno (1974). Her performance earned her a Golden Globe nomination for Best Supporting Actress. Early scenes in the film showed paintings lent to the production by the art gallery of Jones' husband Norton Simon.

David O. Selznick  
(m. 1949–65; his death)  
Norton Simon (m. 1971–1993; his death)

**Children** 3, including Robert Walker Jr.



Jones' star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame at 6429 Hollywood Boulevard

## Personal life

Jones had two sons from her first marriage, Robert Walker Jr. (b. 1940) and Michael Walker (1941–2007). Both later became actors. Robert was the only child of Jones' three children who would not die before her. Jones had an affair with film producer David O. Selznick. She separated from Walker in November 1943, co-starred with him in *Since You Went Away* (1944), and divorced him in June 1945.<sup>[5]</sup>

Jones married Selznick on July 13, 1949, a union that lasted until his death at age 63 on June 22, 1965. After his death, she semi-retired from acting. According to media reports, Jones attempted suicide in November 1967 after hearing of the death of close friend Charles Bickford. She was found unconscious at the base of a cliff overlooking Malibu Beach; she was hospitalized in a coma before eventually recovering.<sup>[3][6]</sup>

On May 29, 1971, Jones married her third husband, multi-millionaire industrialist, art collector and philanthropist Norton Simon, whose son Robert had committed suicide in 1969. The marriage took place aboard a tugboat five miles off the English coast, and was conducted by Unitarian minister Eirion Phillips.<sup>[4]</sup> Years before, Simon had attempted to buy the portrait of her that was used in the film *Portrait of Jennie*. Simon later met Jones at a party hosted by fellow industrialist and art collector Walter Annenberg.

Jones' daughter with Selznick, Mary Jennifer Selznick (1954–1976), committed suicide by jumping from a 20th-floor window in Los Angeles on May 11, 1976. This led to Jones' interest in mental health issues. In 1980, she founded the Jennifer Jones Simon Foundation For Mental Health and Education. The Foundation pledged \$400,000 to be used exclusively for the world-renowned Mary Jennifer Selznick Workshop Program, named in honor of Jones's late daughter.

Four years before his death in June 1993, Simon resigned as President of Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena and Jennifer Jones Simon was appointed Chairman of the Board of Trustees, President and Executive Officer. In 1996, she began working with architect Frank Gehry and landscape designer Nancy Goslee Power on renovating the museum and gardens. She remained active as the director of the Norton Simon Museum until 2003, when she was given emeritus status.

Jones was a breast cancer survivor.

## Death

Jones enjoyed a quiet retirement, living with her son Robert Walker Jr. and his family in Malibu for the last six years of her life. She granted no interviews and rarely appeared in public. Jones participated in Gregory Peck's AFI Life Achievement Award ceremony in 1989 and appeared at the 70th (1998) and 75th (2003) Academy Awards as part of the shows' tributes to past Oscar winners.



Jones and second husband David O. Selznick in 1957

She died of natural causes on December 17, 2009, at age 90.<sup>[1]</sup> She was cremated and her ashes were interred with her second husband in the Selznick private room at the Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California.

## Filmography

Year	Title	Role	Notes
1939	<i><u>New Frontier</u></i>	Celia Braddock	as Phyllis Isley; film debut <sup>[7]</sup>
	<i><u>Dick Tracy's G-Men</u></i>	Gwen Andrews	as Phyllis Isley; 15-chapter serial
1943	<i><u>The Song of Bernadette</u></i>	<u>Bernadette Soubirous</u>	Academy Award for Best Actress Golden Globe Award for Best Actress – Motion Picture Drama Locarno International Film Festival - Best Actress
1944	<i><u>Since You Went Away</u></i>	Jane Deborah Hilton	Nominated—Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress
1945	<i><u>Love Letters</u></i>	Singleton/Victoria Morland	Nominated—Academy Award for Best Actress
1946	<i><u>Cluny Brown</u></i>	Cluny Brown	Locarno International Film Festival - Best Actress
	<i><u>Duel in the Sun</u></i>	Pearl Chavez	Nominated—Academy Award for Best Actress
1948	<i><u>Portrait of Jennie</u></i>	Jennie Appleton	
1949	<i><u>We Were Strangers</u></i>	China Valdés	
	<i><u>Madame Bovary</u></i>	Emma Bovary	
1950	<i><u>Gone to Earth</u></i>	Hazel Woodus	
1952	<i><u>Carrie</u></i>	Carrie Meeber	
	<i><u>Ruby Gentry</u></i>	Ruby Gentry	
1953	<i><u>Beat the Devil</u></i>	Mrs. Gwendolen Chelm	
	<i><u>Terminal Station</u></i>	Mary Forbes	Re-released as <i>Indiscretion of an American Wife</i>
1955	<i><u>Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing</u></i>	Dr. <u>Han Suyin</u>	New York Film Critics Circle Award for Best Actress (3rd place) Nominated—Academy Award for Best Actress



Ray Corrigan, Jennifer Jones and John Wayne in *New Frontier* (1939)

Year	Title	Role	Notes
	<u><i>Good Morning, Miss Dove</i></u>	Miss Dove	
1956	<u><i>The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit</i></u>	Betsy Rath	
1957	<u><i>The Barretts of Wimpole Street</i></u>	<u>Elizabeth Barrett</u>	
	<u><i>A Farewell to Arms</i></u>	Catherine Barkley	
1962	<u><i>Tender Is the Night</i></u>	Nicole Diver	
1966	<u><i>The Idol</i></u>	Carol	
1969	<u><i>Angel, Angel, Down We Go</i></u>	Astrid Steele	a.k.a. <i>Cult of the Damned</i>
1974	<u><i>The Towering Inferno</i></u>	Lisolette Mueller	Nominated—Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actress – Motion Picture

## See also

- List of oldest and youngest Academy Award winners and nominees

## References

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6. "Oscar-Winning Actress Jennifer Jones Dies at 90" (<http://www.myfoxla.com/dpp/entertainment/oscar-winner-jennifer-jones-dies-20091217>). *KCOP-TV*. December 17, 2009. Retrieved 2009-12-19. "Jennifer Jones, a best actress Oscar winner for 1943's "The Song of Bernadette" and known for her marriages to film mogul David O. Selznick and industrialist Norton Simon, died today at her Malibu home. She was 90."
7. "New Frontier" (<https://catalog.afi.com/Catalog/moviedetails/5143>). *AFI Catalog of Feature Films*. American Film Institute. Retrieved 2017-11-13.

## Further reading

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- Epstein, Edward (1995). *Portrait of Jennifer*. New York: Simon & Schuster. ISBN 0-671-74056-3.

## External links

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- Jennifer Jones (<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0428354/>) at IMDb
- Jennifer Jones ([https://web.archive.org/web/\\*/https://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/person/96480%7C\\*](https://web.archive.org/web/*/https://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/person/96480%7C*)) at the TCM Movie Database
- Jennifer Jones (<https://www.allmovie.com/artist/p36139>) at AllMovie
- Jennifer Jones (<http://www.jenniferjonestribute.weebly.com>) - Tribute site
- N.Y. Times Obituary for Jennifer Jones ([https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/18/movies/18jones.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/18/movies/18jones.html?_r=0))
- Jennifer Jones (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/45568560>) at Find a Grave
- Jennifer Jones (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/film-obituaries/6835654/Jennifer-Jones.html>) - Daily Telegraph obituary
- Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture - Jones, Jennifer (<https://web.archive.org/web/20101018203438/http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/J/JO021.html>)

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