

Joan Rice Burroughs – brief bioⁱ

Joan Burroughs was born on January 12, 1908, at the Park Avenue Hospital to Emma and [Edgar Rice Burroughs](#). (Her name is pronounced "Jo-anne" in the Burroughs family). [...]

True to form, however, soon after the birth of his first child, Ed left this job to start his own company in the advertising business based upon a correspondence course aimed at preparing students in salesmanship. [...] The business did poorly and by the time Joan's brother Hulbert was born a year later, the Burroughs family was in a penniless state. Just when the Burroughs fortunes were at their nadir in 1911, Ed had success in pitching "far-fetched" stories to pulp magazines and for the first time in his life he watched the money roll in as fast as he could write more stories. [...]

Joan was especially close to her father and she remembered him as being a patient and attentive father throughout her childhood years. He called her his "little RoBud." He allowed the children to enter and leave his study at will and would often stop writing in mid-passage to play with them as they crawled all over him. In remembering those years, Ed once said, *"Were I literary and afflicted with temperament I should have a devil of a time writing stories, for now comes Joan with Helen in one hand and Helen's severed arm in another, strewing a thin line of sawdust across my study floor. I may be in the midst of a thrilling passage -- Tarzan may be pulling a tiger out of Africa by the tail -- but when Joan comes even Tarzan pauses, and he stays paused until I have tied Helen's arm to her torso once again for the hundredth time."*

Sometimes at night, after a day's writing, Papa Ed would read what he had written to his family. One of his reasons for doing this was to use them as sounding boards for his own evaluation of his work and he obviously got a kick out of watching their reactions.

[... When Joan was eleven years old, her father purchased a vast estate, which he named Tarzana Ranch. Burroughs added] barns, corrals, riding stables, scenic gardens as well as a golf course, ballroom, theatre and swimming pool. [...Burroughs] was an excellent horseman and passed this skill and his love for horses onto Joan and her brothers.

[... At the age of twelve, Joan entered the Ramona Convent in West Alhambra, but withdrew a few months later.]. In January of 1921, she enrolled in the Hollywood School for Girls [... and went on to reputable theatrical schools upon graduation ...] The Burroughs children had been exposed to the entertainment business from an early age, in fact, the family had a standing reservation for a theatre box each Sunday at the Majestic Theatre in downtown Los Angeles [...]

In the summer of 1926 Joan met her husband-to-be, Jim Pierce. He had been a star centre on the University of Indiana football team, who had moved west to the University of Arizona and California for coaching jobs. [...] By 1926 he was also quite busy doing bit parts in films. [...] He was invited to a fish fry and pool party at Tarzana Ranch [...]. Jim Pierce arrived in his "Whoopie" Model T and was somewhat in awe of the other guests. [...] He was perhaps most in awe of the host: Edgar Rice Burroughs, who was his favourite fiction writer. At one point Jim was thrown -- fully clothed -- into the pool. Burroughs who was chatting with friends in a row of lounge chairs by the pool observed Jim swimming laps and said, "That's my boy! That's Tarzan!"

Eventually Joan led Jim -- clad in swim trunks -- over to meet her father [...].

The party lasted into the evening with food and dancing. Jim was quite taken with 18-year-old Joan [...], Joan once said, *"To me, he looked like Tarzan, very trim and well-muscled and his face looked like Tarzan as my father imagined him to be -- grey eyes, something of a Roman nose, and a beautiful smile."*

Two weeks later a casting director from the Film Booking Office invited Jim, on the recommendation of ERB, to a screen test for the lead role in the next big-budget Tarzan picture: [***Tarzan and the Golden Lion***](#). Jim, somewhat overwhelmed by the proposal, was reluctant to pursue a full-time acting career. [...] At the insistence of Joan he agreed to make the test. Ed and Joan attended the test and were delighted with the results. Soon after, Joan invited the young Tarzan hopeful to the ranch for a horseback ride and dinner. [...] Jim sensed he was about to go through another test - a test to see if he could handle a horse. Luckily he had ridden horses at an early age on the farm back in Indiana and recently he had been tutored by the head wrangler of a western movie in which he had a small role. His horsemanship impressed the Burroughs family and Joan informed him, *"You're in! You'll never know how much of a step you just made with this family."*

Tarzan and the Golden Lion -- a silent film -- came out at a bad time -- it coincided with the birth of the talkies. Jim was typecast and his contract was not renewed. The work he found from then on consisted mostly of bit parts in B pictures.

She carried on with her drama and voice lessons, joined the Actors' Equity and the Screen Actors' Guild and registered as a singer for film musicals. She picked up numerous professional roles on stage as well as singing roles in films. Her numerous lead roles in stock company productions garnered excellent notices -- especially in Glendale where she became a regular with the well-established Glendale Community Playhouse. [...]

Jim's dreams of Hollywood stardom were placed on hold and he took a more dependable job as a coach at the University of Arizona. Feeling a bit more secure financially he proposed to Joan on July 2, 1928. He popped the question while they were parked in the driveway of the Burroughs estate -- under a full moon -- in Jim's old Model T. They were given the blessing of the Burroughs family and set the wedding date for August 8, 1928 -- Jim's birthday. The wedding became a top story throughout the world: *"Edgar Rice Burroughs' daughter to marry a movie Tarzan."* The huge wedding was on the scenic grounds of Tarzana Ranch on one of the hottest days of summer.

Following their return to California, Joan took on the role of housewife, while Jim made a decent living working in poverty row Westerns and serials and eventually worked his way into more prestigious films such as DeMille's *Cleopatra*, the Marx Brothers' *Horse Feathers* and a Buster Keaton comedy. On Christmas Eve, 1929, at Hollywood Hospital, Joan gave birth to a daughter - blonde-haired, blue-eyed little Joan (later they changed the spelling to Joanne to avoid confusion).

[Jim's career began to sag until Burroughs [...] sold the idea for a [Tarzan radio serial](#) to the Signal Oil Company. Under his recommendation, the roles of Tarzan and Jane went to Jim and Joan. [...] The Tarzan serial was one of the first radio adventures transcribed on 16" electrical transcription discs, quite a daring innovation at a time when all shows were done live.

The recording innovation was a major success, however, and started a trend that most major shows eventually followed. [...] The program was aired three times a week, ran 39 episodes per story, and went for a total of 354 episodes. Thanks to the new medium of E.T. discs the show was syndicated in almost every major English-speaking country in the world. Looking back on the show, years later, Joan reminisced: *"It was a beautiful love story. It was a clean story. There was no obvious sex, just pure love."*

Near the end of their Tarzan radio contract Joan became pregnant. The producer, afraid of potential production delays that the pregnancy and birth might bring on, decided to replace Joan. Jim wouldn't do the show without her and resigned, to be replaced by Carlton Kadell. They were able to live off royalties for years but the glory days seemed to be over. This downturn of events was counteracted by a very happy event, however: the birth of their second child, Michael. [...]

During World War II, Joan was largely a stay-at-home-mom, and Jim supported them as best he could. He owned a flight school, worked in the movie industry, and became a realtor in the San Fernando area.]

[By the late '40s, her father was quite ill...]. He phoned Joan every day and invited her over for their private cocktail hour during which they talked about old times, family and the war. He often said, *"Joan understands me and loves me dearly. I would rather have her near me than anyone I know."*

Jim retired in 1964 but Joan was still very involved with ERB, Inc. as she and her brothers were all on the Board of Directors. In her role as Secretary-Treasurer she had to be within a reasonable distance for board meetings so they chose a home in nearby Apple Valley.

Joan suffered a heart attack at her home and died a day later in St. Mary Hospital on New Year's Eve 1972. Her last words to her husband of 44 years were, "I'll see you in the morning, sweetheart."

ⁱ This was drastically cut down from the excellent biography supplied by Bill and Sue-)n Hillman. It may be found at: <http://www.erbzine.com/mag11/1102.html>