

Joel McCrea
Patrick Andre

Joel Albert McCrea was born November 5, 1905 in Pasadena California. His father, Thomas McCrea was an executive with the Los Angeles Gas and Electric Company. Joel delivered newspapers to the home of Cecil B. DeMille and others in the early film industry. He was ten when he was an extra in D. W. Griffith's film *Intolerance*. Bitten by the performing bug, McCrea continued to act and work in theater through high school and college. He attended Hollywood High School with several future stars, such as Katherine DeMille, Jacques Tourneur, and Douglas Fairbanks Jr.

At 6 foot 2½ inches, McCrea had an impressive and good-looking appearance on screen. He would have several uncredited roles before having a significant part in the 1929 film *The Jazz Age* with Douglas Fairbanks Jr. By 1930 he had second billing in *The Silver Horde* and in *Lightnin'* with Will Rogers. He had second billing in several more films with female leads before taking the lead role himself in the 1932 movie *The Most Dangerous Game*.

In the 1933 film *The Silver Cord*, McCrea would meet his future wife, Frances Dee. She stated that once married, she wanted to give up on acting but McCrea convinced her otherwise, saying he didn't want her to blame him if she missed her work. She would eventually stop acting in 1954 with the birth of their third child, Peter McCrea.

McCrea was well liked by many actors, including Will Rogers, Randolph Scott, and Katharine Hepburn. Hepburn placed McCrea's acting skills on par with Spencer Tracy and Humphrey Bogart, although McCrea himself was very modest about his own ability. McCrea was the first person to play Dr. Kildare in 1937's *Interns Can't Take Money*. He was in Gregory La Cava's *Primrose Path* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Foreign Correspondent*, both in 1940, *Sullivan's Travels* in 1941, and *The More the Merrier* in 1943. Although his roles were wide ranging, his personal tastes were for American Westerns, for which he stated he was better suited as he aged. Some of his most successful Western films were *Wells Fargo* (1937), *Union Pacific* (1939), *The Virginian* (1947), *Colorado Territory* (1949), *Wichita* (1955), *The Tall Stranger* (1957), and *Ride the High Country* in 1962. Added to this, was a successful run in *Tales of the Texas Rangers* on radio from April 1950 to September 1952.

His final role was in the 1976 film *Mustang Country*. In all, he is credited with 95 film and television roles. Interestingly, he turned down a number of noteworthy roles, including *Spitfire* with Katharine Hepburn, *The Impatient Years*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Intruder in the Dust*, and *The Story of Will Rogers*.

McCrea was a successful businessman and rancher, having a 3000-acre working ranch near Camarillo California. He appears to have made more money in real estate and ranching than in movies, with a personal fortune estimated to be worth about \$100M in the 1970's. The McCreas had three children, all of whom would go into acting. Joel McCrea passed away from pneumonia on October 20, 1990 in Woodland Hills, California, the day of his 57th anniversary to his wife Frances.

Information for this biography was taken from Internet Movie Data Base, The Classic Movie Hub, *The Los Angeles Times* Online, and Wikipedia.