

= Joan Crawford =

Joan Crawford (born Lucille Fay LeSueur ; March 23 , c . 1904 ? May 10 , 1977) was an American film and television actress who started as a dancer and stage chorine . In 1999 , the American Film Institute ranked Crawford tenth on their list of the greatest female stars of Classic Hollywood Cinema .

Beginning her career as a dancer in travelling theatrical companies before debuting as a chorus girl on Broadway , Crawford signed a motion picture contract with Metro @-@ Goldwyn @-@ Mayer in 1925 . In the 1930s , Crawford 's fame rivaled , and later outlasted , MGM colleagues Norma Shearer and Greta Garbo . Crawford often played hard @-@ working young women who find romance and success . These stories were well received by Depression @-@ era audiences and were popular with women . Crawford became one of Hollywood 's most prominent movie stars and one of the highest paid women in the United States , but her films began losing money , and , by the end of the 1930s , she was labelled " Box Office Poison " . But her career gradually improved in the early 1940s , and she made a major comeback in 1945 by starring in *Mildred Pierce* , for which she won the Academy Award for Best Actress . She would go on to receive Best Actress nominations for *Possessed* (1947) and *Sudden Fear* (1952) .

In 1955 , she became involved with the Pepsi @-@ Cola Company through her marriage to company Chairman Alfred Steele . After his death in 1959 , Crawford was elected to fill his vacancy on the board of directors but was forcibly retired in 1973 . She continued acting in film and television regularly through the 1960s , when her performances became fewer ; after the release of the British horror film *Trog* in 1970 , Crawford retired from the screen . Following a public appearance in 1974 , after which unflattering photographs were published , Crawford withdrew from public life and became increasingly reclusive until her death in 1977 .

Crawford married four times . Her first three marriages ended in divorce ; the last ended with the death of husband Alfred Steele . She adopted five children , one of whom was reclaimed by his birth mother . Crawford 's relationships with her two older children , Christina and Christopher , were acrimonious . Crawford disinherited the two , and , after Crawford 's death , Christina wrote a " tell @-@ all " memoir titled , *Mommie Dearest* .

= = Early life = =

Crawford was born Lucille Fay LeSueur in San Antonio , Texas , on March 23 ; the year is disputed , with 1904 , 1905 , and 1906 the most likely estimates , all cited in varying sources , the third child of Thomas E. LeSueur (died January 1 , 1938) , a laundry laborer , and Anna Bell Johnson (died August 15 , 1958) , neither of whose years of birth can be conclusively established . Anna Bell Johnson was of English , French Huguenot , Swedish , and Irish ancestry . Her elder siblings were Daisy LeSueur (? 1902) and Hal LeSueur .

Thomas LeSueur abandoned the family a few months before Crawford 's birth but reappeared in Abilene , Texas , in 1930 as a reportedly 62 @-@ year @-@ old construction laborer . However , after his death on January 1 , 1938 , his age was given as 71 . Crawford 's mother subsequently married Henry J. Cassin (died October 25 , 1922) . This marriage is listed in census records as Crawford 's mother 's first marriage , calling into question whether Thomas LeSueur and Anna Bell Johnson were ever legally wed .

The family lived in Lawton , Oklahoma , where Cassin , a minor impresario , ran the Ramsey Opera House . Despite his own relatively minor status as an impresario , Cassin managed to get such diverse and noted performers as Anna Pavlova and Eva Tanguay during his career . Young Lucille was reportedly unaware that Cassin , whom she called " Daddy " , was not her biological father until her brother Hal told her . Lucille preferred the nickname " Billie " as a child and she loved watching vaudeville acts perform on the stage of her stepfather 's theatre . The instability of her family life affected her education and her schooling never formally progressed beyond elementary school .

Her ambition was to be a dancer . However , one day , in an attempt to escape piano lessons to play with friends , she leaped from the front porch of her home and cut her foot deeply on a broken

milk bottle . She had three operations and was unable to attend elementary school for 18 months . She eventually fully recovered and returned to dancing .

Cassin was accused of embezzlement and although acquitted in court , was blacklisted in Lawton , and the family moved to Kansas City , Missouri , around 1916 . Cassin was first listed in the City Directory in 1917 , living at 403 East Ninth Street . A Catholic , Cassin placed Crawford at St. Agnes Academy in Kansas City . After her mother and stepfather broke up , she stayed on at St. Agnes as a work student , where she spent far more time working , primarily cooking and cleaning , than studying .

Later , she went to Rockingham Academy , also as a work student . While attending Rockingham she began dating and had her first serious relationship , with a trumpet player named Ray Sterling , who reportedly inspired her to begin challenging herself academically .

In 1922 , she registered at Stephens College in Columbia , Missouri , giving her year of birth as 1906 . She attended Stephens for only a few months before withdrawing after she realized she was not prepared for college .

= = Career = =

= = = Early career = = =

Under the name Lucille LeSueur , Crawford began dancing in the choruses of traveling revues and was spotted dancing in Detroit by producer Jacob J. Shubert . Shubert put her in the chorus line for his 1924 show , Innocent Eyes , at the Winter Garden Theatre on Broadway in New York City . While appearing in Innocent Eyes Crawford met a saxophone player named James Welton . The two were allegedly married in 1924 and lived together for several months , although this supposed marriage was never mentioned in later life by Crawford .

Crawford wanted additional work and approached Loews Theaters publicist Nils Granlund . Granlund secured a position for her with producer Harry Richmond 's act and arranged for her to do a screen test which he sent to producer Harry Rapf in Hollywood . (Stories have persisted that Crawford further supplemented her income by appearing in one or more stag , or soft @-@ core pornographic , films , although this has been disputed .)

Rapf notified Granlund on December 24 , 1924 that Metro @-@ Goldwyn @-@ Mayer (or MGM for short) had offered Crawford a contract at \$ 75 a week . Granlund immediately wired LeSueur ? who had returned to her mother 's home in Kansas City ? with the news ; she borrowed \$ 400 for travel expenses . She departed Kansas City on December 26 and arrived in Culver City , California on January 1 , 1925 .

Credited as Lucille LeSueur , her first film was Lady of the Night in 1925 , as the body double for MGM 's most @-@ popular female star , Norma Shearer . She also appeared in The Circle and Pretty Ladies (both 1925) , starring comedian ZaSu Pitts . This was soon followed by equally small and unbilled roles in two other 1925 successes , The Only Thing and The Merry Widow .

MGM publicity head Pete Smith recognized her ability to become a major star , but felt her name sounded fake ; he told studio head Louis B. Mayer that her last name ? LeSueur ? reminded him of a sewer . Smith organized a contest called " Name the Star " in Movie Weekly to allow readers to select her new stage name . The initial choice was " Joan Arden " but , after another actress was found to have prior claim to that name , the alternate surname " Crawford " became the choice . Crawford later said that she wanted her first name to be pronounced " Jo @-@ Anne " , and that she hated the name Crawford because it sounded like " craw fish " , but also admitted she " liked the security " that went with the name .

= = = Self @-@ promotion and early successes = = =

Growing increasingly frustrated over the size and quality of the parts she was given , Crawford embarked on a campaign of self @-@ promotion . As MGM screenwriter Frederica Sagor Maas

recalled , " No one decided to make Joan Crawford a star . Joan Crawford became a star because Joan Crawford decided to become a star . " She began attending dances in the afternoons and evenings at hotels around Hollywood , where she often won dance competitions with her performances of the Charleston and the Black Bottom .

Her strategy worked , and MGM cast her in the film where she first made an impression on audiences , Edmund Goulding 's Sally , Irene and Mary (1925) . From the beginning of her career , Crawford considered Norma Shearer ? the studio 's most @-@ popular actress ? her professional nemesis . Since Shearer was married to MGM Head of Production Irving Thalberg , she had the first choice of scripts and had more control than other stars in what films she would and would not make . Crawford was quoted to have said , " How can I compete with Norma ? She sleeps with the boss ! "

In 1926 , Crawford was named one of the WAMPAS Baby Stars along with Mary Astor , Dolores del Río , Janet Gaynor , and Fay Wray among others . That same year , she starred in Paris , co @-@ starring Charles Ray . Within a few years , she became the romantic female lead to many of MGM 's top male stars , including Ramón Novarro , John Gilbert , William Haines , and Tim McCoy .

Crawford appeared in The Unknown (1927) , starring Lon Chaney , Sr. who played a carnival knife thrower with no arms . Crawford played his skimpily @-@ clad young carnival assistant whom he hopes to marry . She stated that she learned more about acting from watching Chaney work than from anyone else in her career . " It was then , " she said , " I became aware for the first time of the difference between standing in front of a camera , and acting . " Also in 1927 , she appeared alongside her close friend , William Haines , in Spring Fever , which was the first of three movies the duo made together .

In 1928 , Crawford starred opposite Ramón Novarro in Across to Singapore , but it was her role as Diana Medford in Our Dancing Daughters (1928) that catapulted her to stardom . The role established her as a symbol of modern 1920s @-@ style femininity which rivaled Clara Bow , the original It girl , then Hollywood 's foremost flapper . A stream of hits followed Our Dancing Daughters , including two more flapper @-@ themed movies , in which Crawford embodied for her legion of fans (many of whom were women) an idealized vision of the free @-@ spirited , all @-@ American girl .

F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote of Crawford :

Joan Crawford is doubtless the best example of the flapper , the girl you see in smart night clubs , gowned to the apex of sophistication , toying iced glasses with a remote , faintly bitter expression , dancing deliciously , laughing a great deal , with wide , hurt eyes . Young things with a talent for living .

On June 3 , 1929 , Crawford married Douglas Fairbanks , Jr. at Saint Malachy 's Roman Catholic Church (known as " The Actors ' Chapel " due to its proximity to Broadway theatres) in Manhattan , although neither was Catholic . Fairbanks was the son of Douglas Fairbanks and the stepson of Mary Pickford , who were considered Hollywood royalty . Fairbanks Sr. and Pickford were opposed to the marriage and did not invite the couple to their home , Pickfair , for eight months after the marriage .

The relationship between Crawford and Fairbanks , Sr. eventually warmed ; she called him " Uncle Doug " and he called her " Billie " , her old childhood nickname . Following that first invitation , Crawford and Fairbanks , Jr. became more frequent guests , which was hard on Crawford . While the Fairbanks men played golf together , Crawford was left either with Pickford or alone .

To rid herself of her Southwestern accent , Crawford tirelessly practiced diction and elocution . She said :

If I were to speak lines , it would be a good idea , I thought , to read aloud to myself , listen carefully to my voice quality and enunciation , and try to learn in that manner . I would lock myself in my room and read newspapers , magazines and books aloud . At my elbow I kept a dictionary . When I came to a word I did not know how to pronounce , I looked it up and repeated it correctly fifteen times .

= = = Transition to sound and continued success = = =

After the release of *The Jazz Singer* in 1927 ? the first major Hollywood movie with synchronized sound ? sound films , or talkies as they became nicknamed , were all the rage . The transition from silent to sound panicked many ? if not all ? involved with the film industry ; many silent film stars found themselves unemployable because of their undesirable voices and hard @-@ to @-@ understand accents or simply because of their refusal to make the transition to talkies . Many studios and stars avoided making the transition as long as possible , especially MGM , which was the last studio to switch over to sound . The *Hollywood Revue of 1929* (1929) was one of the studio 's first all @-@ sound films , and their first attempt to showcase their stars ' ability to make the transition from silent to sound . Crawford was among the dozen or more MGM stars included in the movie ; she sang the song " Got a Feeling for You " during the film 's first act .

Crawford made a successful transition to talkies . Her first starring role in an all @-@ sound feature @-@ length film was in *Untamed* in 1929 , co @-@ starring Robert Montgomery . Despite the success of the film at the box office , it received mixed reviews from critics , who noted that while Crawford seemed nervous at making the transition to sound , also noted that she had become one of the most popular actresses in the world .

Montana Moon (1930) , an uneasy mix of Western clichés and music , teamed her with John Mack Brown and Ricardo Cortez . Although the film had problems with censors , it was a major success at the time of its release . *Our Blushing Brides* (1930) , co @-@ starring Robert Montgomery and Anita Page , was the final installment in the so @-@ called *Our Dancing Daughters* franchise . It was a greater success ? both critically and financially ? than her previous talkies , and became one of her personal favorites .

Her next movie , *Paid* (1930) , paired her with Robert Armstrong and was another success . During the early sound era , MGM began to place Crawford in more sophisticated roles , rather than continuing to promote her flapper @-@ inspired persona of the silent era .

In 1931 , MGM cast Crawford in five films . Three of them teamed her opposite the studio 's biggest male star and King of Hollywood , Clark Gable . *Dance , Fools , Dance* , released in February 1931 , was the first pairing of Crawford and Gable . Their second movie together , *Laughing Sinners* , released in May 1931 , was directed by Harry Beaumont and also co @-@ starred Neil Hamilton . *Possessed* , their third film together , released in October , was directed by Clarence Brown .

These films were immensely popular with audiences , and were generally well received by critics , stapling Crawford 's position as one of MGM 's top female stars of the decade , along with Norma Shearer , Greta Garbo , and Jean Harlow . Her only other notable film of 1931 , *This Modern Age* , was released in August , and despite unfavorable reviews , was a moderate success .

MGM next cast her in the film *Grand Hotel* , directed by Edmund Goulding . As the studio 's first all @-@ star production , Crawford co @-@ starred opposite Greta Garbo , John and Lionel Barrymore , and Wallace Beery among others . Receiving third billing , she played the middle @-@ class stenographer to Beery 's controlling general director . Crawford later admitted to being nervous during the filming of the movie because she was working with " very big stars " , and that she was disappointed that she had no scenes with the " divine Garbo " . *Grand Hotel* was released in April 1932 to critical and commercial success . It was the highest @-@ grossing movie of the year , and won the Academy Award for Best Picture .

Crawford achieved continued success in *Letty Lynton* (1932) . Soon after this movie 's release , a plagiarism suit forced MGM to withdraw it . For many years it was never shown on television nor made available on home video and is therefore considered the " lost " Crawford film . The gown with large ruffled sleeves , designed by Adrian , which Crawford wore in the movie , became a popular style that same year , and was even copied by Macy 's .

On a loan out to United Artists , she played prostitute Sadie Thompson in *Rain* (1932) , a film version of John Colton 's 1923 play . Actress Jeanne Eagels played the role on stage and Gloria Swanson had originated the part on screen in the 1928 film version . Crawford 's performance was panned and the film was not a success .

Despite the failure of *Rain* , in 1932 the publishing of the first " Top Ten Money Making Stars Poll " placed Crawford third in popularity at the box office , behind only Marie Dressler and Janet Gaynor . She remained on the list for the next several years , last appearing on it in 1936 .

In May 1933 , Crawford divorced Fairbanks . Crawford cited " grievous mental cruelty " , claiming Fairbanks had " a jealous and suspicious attitude " toward her friends and that they had " loud arguments about the most trivial subjects " lasting " far into the night " .

Following her divorce , she was again teamed with Clark Gable , along with Franchot Tone and Fred Astaire , in the hit *Dancing Lady* (1933) , in which she received top billing . She next played the title role in *Sadie McKee* (1934) opposite Tone and Gene Raymond . She was paired with Gable for the fifth time in *Chained* (1934) and for the sixth time in *Forsaking All Others* (1934) . Crawford 's films of this era were some of the most @-@ popular and highest @-@ grossing films of the mid @-@ 1930s .

In 1935 , Crawford married Tone , a stage actor from New York who planned to use his film earnings to finance his theatre group . The couple built a small theatre at Crawford 's Brentwood home and put on productions of classic plays for select groups of friends . Tone and Crawford had first appeared together in *Today We Live* (1933) but Crawford was hesitant about entering into another romance so soon after her split from Fairbanks .

Before and during their marriage , Crawford worked to promote Tone 's Hollywood career , but Tone was ultimately not interested in being a movie star and Crawford eventually wearied of the effort . After Tone reportedly began drinking and becoming physically abusive , she filed for divorce , which was granted in 1939 . Crawford and Tone much later rekindled their friendship and Tone even proposed in 1964 that they remarry . When he died in 1968 , Crawford arranged for him to be cremated and his ashes scattered at Muskoka Lakes , Canada .

Crawford continued her reign as a popular movie actress well into the mid @-@ 1930s . *No More Ladies* (1935) co @-@ starred Robert Montgomery and then @-@ husband Franchot Tone , and was a success . Crawford had long pleaded with MGM 's head Louis B. Mayer to cast her in more dramatic roles , and although he was reluctant , he cast her in the sophisticated comedy @-@ drama *I Live My Life* (1935) , directed by W.S. Van Dyke . It was well received by critics and made a larger profit than the studio had expected .

She next starred in *The Gorgeous Hussy* (1936) , opposite Robert Taylor and Lionel Barrymore as well as Tone , a critical and box office success , become one of Crawford 's biggest hits of the decade . *Love on the Run* (1936) , a romantic comedy directed by W.S. Van Dyke , was her seventh film co @-@ starring Clark Gable . It was , at the time of its release , called " a lot of happy nonsense " by critics , but a financial success nonetheless .

= = = Box Office Poison = = =

Even though Crawford remained a respected MGM actress and her films still earned profits , her popularity declined in the late 1930s . In 1937 , Crawford was proclaimed the first " Queen of the Movies " by *Life* magazine . She unexpectedly slipped from seventh to sixteenth place at the box office that year , and her public popularity also began to wane . Richard Boleslawski 's comedy @-@ drama *The Last of Mrs. Cheyney* (1937) teamed her opposite William Powell in their sole screen pairing . The film was also Crawford 's last box @-@ office success before the onset of her " Box @-@ Office Poison " period .

She co @-@ starred opposite Franchot Tone for the seventh and final time in *The Bride Wore Red* (1937) . The film was generally unfavorably reviewed by the majority of critics , with one critic calling it the " same ole rags @-@ to @-@ riches story " Crawford had been making for years . It also ran a financial loss , becoming one of MGM 's biggest failures of the year . *Mannequin* did , as the *New York Times* stated , " restore Crawford to her throne as queen of the working girls " . Most other reviews were positive , and the film managed to generate a minor profit , but it did not resurrect Crawford 's popularity .

On May 3 , 1938 , Crawford ? along with Greta Garbo , Norma Shearer , Luise Rainer , and John Barrymore , Katharine Hepburn , Fred Astaire , Dolores del Río and others ? was dubbed " Box Office Poison " in an open letter in the *Independent Film Journal* . The list was submitted by Harry Brandt , president of the Independent Theatre Owners Association of America . Brandt stated that while these stars had " unquestioned " dramatic abilities , their high salaries did not reflect in their

ticket sales , thus hurting the movie exhibitors involved . Her follow @-@ up movie , The Shining Hour (1938) , co @-@ starring Margaret Sullavan and Melvyn Douglas , was well received by critics , but a box office flop .

She made a comeback in 1939 with her role as home @-@ wrecker Crystal Allen in The Women opposite her professional nemesis , Norma Shearer . A year later , she played against type , playing the unglamorous role of Julie in Strange Cargo (1940) , her eighth and final film with Clark Gable . She later starred as a facially disfigured blackmailer in A Woman 's Face (1941) , a remake of the Swedish film En kvinnas ansikte which had starred Ingrid Bergman in the lead role three years earlier . While the film was only a moderate box office success , her performance was hailed by many critics .

Crawford adopted her first child , a daughter , in 1940 . Because she was single , California law prevented her from adopting within the state so she arranged the adoption through an agency in Las Vegas . The child was temporarily called Joan until Crawford changed her name to Christina . She married actor Phillip Terry on July 21 , 1942 after a six @-@ month courtship . Together the couple adopted a son whom they named Christopher , but his birth mother reclaimed the child . The couple adopted another boy , whom they named Phillip Terry , Jr . After the marriage ended in 1946 , Crawford changed the child 's name to Christopher Crawford .

After eighteen years , Crawford 's contract with MGM was terminated by mutual consent on June 29 , 1943 . In lieu of the last film remaining under her contract , MGM bought her out for \$ 100 @,@ 000 . During World War II she was a member of American Women 's Voluntary Services .

= = = Move to Warner Brothers = = =

For \$ 500 @,@ 000 , Crawford signed with Warner Brothers for a three movie deal and was placed on the payroll on July 1 , 1943 . Her first film for the studio was Hollywood Canteen (1944) , an all @-@ star morale @-@ booster film that teamed her with several other top movie stars at the time . Crawford said one of the main reasons she signed with Warner Brothers was because she wanted to play the character " Mattie " in a proposed 1944 film version of Edith Wharton 's novel Ethan Frome (1911) .

She wanted to play the title role in Mildred Pierce (1945) , but Bette Davis was the studio 's first choice . However , Davis turned the role down . Director Michael Curtiz did not want Crawford to play the part , and he instead lobbied for the casting of Barbara Stanwyck . Warners went against Curtiz , however , and cast Crawford in the film . Throughout the entire production of the movie , Curtiz criticized Crawford . He has been quoted as having told Jack Warner , " She comes over here with her high @-@ hat airs and her goddamn shoulder pads ... why should I waste my time directing a has @-@ been ? " Curtiz demanded Crawford prove her suitability by taking a screen test . After the test , Curtiz agreed to Crawford 's casting . Mildred Pierce was a resounding critical and commercial success . It epitomized the lush visual style and the hard @-@ boiled film noir sensibility that defined Warner Bros. movies of the late forties , earning Crawford the Academy Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role .

The success of Mildred Pierce revived Crawford 's movie career . For several years , she starred in what were called " a series of first @-@ rate melodramas " . Her next film was Humoresque (1946) , co @-@ starring John Garfield , a romantic drama about a love affair between an older woman and a younger man . She starred alongside Van Heflin in Possessed (1947) , for which she received a second Academy Award nomination , although she did not win . In Daisy Kenyon (1947) , she appeared opposite Dana Andrews and Henry Fonda , and in Flamingo Road (1949) she played a carnival dancer opposite Zachary Scott and David Brian . She made a cameo appearance in It 's a Great Feeling (1949) , poking fun at her own screen image . In 1950 , she starred in the film noir , The Damned Don 't Cry ! , and starred in Harriet Craig .

After the completion of This Woman Is Dangerous (1952) , a film Crawford called her " worst " , she asked to be released from her Warner Brothers contract . By this time she felt Warners was losing interest in her and she decided it was time to move on . Later that same year , she received her third and final Academy Award nomination for Sudden Fear for RKO Radio Pictures . In 1953 ,

she appeared in her final film for MGM , Torch Song . The movie received favorable reviews and moderate success at the box office .

Crawford adopted two more children in 1947 , identical twins whom she named Cindy and Cathy .

= = = Radio and television = = =

Crawford worked in the radio series The Screen Guild Theater on January 8 , 1939 ; Good News ; Baby , broadcast March 2 , 1940 on Arch Oboler 's Lights Out ; The Word on Everyman 's Theater (1941) ; Chained on the Lux Radio Theater and Norman Corwin 's Document A / 777 (1948) . She appeared in episodes of anthology television series in the 1950s and , in 1959 , made a pilot for her series , The Joan Crawford Show .

= = = Al Steele and Pepsi Cola Company = = =

Crawford married her fourth and final husband , Alfred Steele , at the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas on May 10 , 1955 . Crawford and Steele met at a party in 1950 when Steele was an executive at PepsiCo . They renewed their acquaintance at a New Year 's Eve party in 1954 . Steele by that time had become President of Pepsi Cola . Alfred Steele would later be named Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of Pepsi Cola . She traveled extensively on behalf of Pepsi following the marriage . She estimated that she traveled over 100 @ , @ 000 miles for the company .

Steele died of a heart attack in April 1959 . Crawford was initially advised that her services were no longer required . After she told the story to Louella Parsons , Pepsi reversed its position and Crawford was elected to fill the vacant seat on the board of directors .

Crawford received the sixth annual " Pally Award " , which was in the shape of a bronze Pepsi bottle . It was awarded to the employee making the most significant contribution to company sales . In 1973 , Crawford was forced to retire from the company at the behest of company executive Don Kendall , whom Crawford had referred to for years as " Fang " .

= = = Later career = = =

After her Academy Award nominated performance in 1952 's Sudden Fear , Crawford continued to work steadily throughout the rest of the decade . In 1954 , she starred in Johnny Guitar , a camp western film , co @ - @ starring Sterling Hayden and Mercedes McCambridge . She also starred in Female on the Beach (1955) with Jeff Chandler , and in Queen Bee (1955) alongside John Ireland . The following year , she starred opposite a young Cliff Robertson in Autumn Leaves (1956) and filmed a leading role in The Story of Esther Costello (1957) , co @ - @ starring Rossano Brazzi . Crawford , who had been left near @ - @ penniless following Alfred Steele 's death accepted a small role in The Best of Everything (1959) . Although she was not the star of the film , she received positive reviews . Crawford would later name the role as being one of her personal favorites . However , by the early 1960s , Crawford 's status in motion pictures had declined considerably .

Crawford starred as Blanche Hudson , an old , wheelchair @ - @ bound former A @ - @ list movie star in conflict with her psychotic sister , in the highly successful psychological thriller What Ever Happened to Baby Jane ? (1962) . Despite the actresses ' earlier tensions , Crawford reportedly suggested Bette Davis for the role of Jane . The two stars maintained publicly that there was no feud between them . The director , Robert Aldrich , explained that Davis and Crawford were each aware of how important the film was to their respective careers and commented , " It 's proper to say that they really detested each other , but they behaved absolutely perfectly . "

After filming was completed , their public comments against each other propelled their animosity into a lifelong feud . The film was a huge success , recouping its costs within 11 days of its nationwide release , and temporarily revived Crawford 's career . Davis was nominated for an Academy Award for her performance as Jane Hudson . Crawford secretly contacted each of the other Oscar nominees in the category (Katharine Hepburn , Lee Remick Geraldine Page and Anne

Bancroft , all East Coast @-@ based actresses) , to let them know that if they could not attend the ceremony , she would be happy to accept the Oscar on their behalf ; all agreed . Both Davis and Crawford were backstage when the absent Anne Bancroft was announced as the winner , and Crawford accepted the award on her behalf . Davis claimed for the rest of her life that Crawford had campaigned against her , a charge Crawford denied .

That same year , Crawford starred as Lucy Harbin in William Castle 's horror mystery Strait @-@ Jacket (1964) . Robert Aldrich cast Crawford and Davis in Hush ... Hush , Sweet Charlotte (1964) . After a purported campaign of harassment by Davis on location in Louisiana , Crawford returned to Hollywood and entered a hospital . After a prolonged absence , during which Crawford was accused of feigning illness , Aldrich was forced to replace her with Olivia de Havilland . Crawford claimed to be devastated , saying " I heard the news of my replacement over the radio , lying in my hospital bed ... I cried for 9 hours . " Crawford nursed grudges against Davis and Aldrich for the rest of her life , saying of Aldrich , " He is a man who loves evil , horrendous , vile things " , to which Aldrich replied , " If the shoe fits , wear it , and I am very fond of Miss Crawford . "

In 1965 she played Amy Nelson in I Saw What You Did (1965) , another William Castle vehicle . She starred as Monica Rivers in Herman Cohen 's horror thriller film Berserk ! (1967) . After the film 's release , Crawford guest @-@ starred as herself on The Lucy Show . The episode , " Lucy and the Lost Star " , first aired on February 26 , 1968 . Crawford struggled during rehearsals and drank heavily on @-@ set , leading series star Lucille Ball to suggest replacing her with Gloria Swanson . However , Crawford was letter @-@ perfect the day of the show , which included dancing the Charleston , and received two standing ovations from the studio audience .

In October 1968 , Crawford 's 29 @-@ year @-@ old daughter , Christina (who was then acting in New York on the CBS soap opera The Secret Storm) , needed immediate medical attention for a ruptured ovarian tumor . Despite the fact that Christina 's character was a 28 @-@ year @-@ old and Crawford was in her sixties , Crawford offered to play her role until Christina was well enough to return , to which producer Gloria Monty readily agreed . Although Crawford did well in rehearsal , she lost her composure while taping and the director and producer were left to struggle to piece together the necessary footage .

Crawford 's appearance in the 1969 television film Night Gallery (which served as pilot to the series that followed) , marked one of Steven Spielberg 's earliest directing jobs . She made a cameo appearance as herself in the first episode of the situation comedy The Tim Conway Show , which aired on January 30 , 1970 . She starred on the big screen one final time , playing Dr. Brockton in Herman Cohen 's science fiction horror film Trog (1970) , rounding out a career spanning 45 years and more than eighty motion pictures . Crawford made three more television appearances , as Stephanie White in a 1970 episode (" The Nightmare ") of The Virginian and as Joan Fairchild (her final performance) in a 1972 episode (" Dear Joan : We 're Going to Scare You to Death ") of The Sixth Sense .

= = Final years = =

In 1970 , Crawford was presented with the Cecil B. DeMille Award by John Wayne at the Golden Globes , which was telecast from the Coconut Grove at The Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles . She also spoke at Stephens College , which she had attended for four months in 1922 .

Crawford published her autobiography , A Portrait of Joan , co @-@ written with Jane Kesner Ardmore , in 1962 through Doubleday . Crawford 's next book , My Way of Life , was published in 1971 by Simon & Schuster . Those expecting a racy tell @-@ all were disappointed , although Crawford 's meticulous ways were revealed in her advice on grooming , wardrobe , exercise , and even food storage . Upon her death there was found in her apartment photographs of John F. Kennedy , for whom she had reportedly voted in the 1960 presidential election .

In September 1973 , Crawford moved from apartment 22 @-@ G to a smaller apartment next door (22 @-@ H) at the Imperial House . Her last public appearance was September 23 , 1974 , at a party honoring her old friend Rosalind Russell at New York 's Rainbow Room . Russell was suffering from breast cancer and arthritis at the time . When Crawford saw the unflattering photos that

appeared in the papers the next day , she said , " If that 's how I look , then they won 't see me anymore . " Crawford cancelled all public appearances , began declining interviews and left her apartment less and less . Dental @-@ related issues , including surgery which left her needing round @-@ the @-@ clock nursing care , plagued her from 1972 until mid @-@ 1975 . While on antibiotics for this problem in October 1974 , her drinking caused her to pass out , slip and strike her face . The incident scared her enough to give up drinking , although she insisted it was because of her return to Christian Science . The incident is recorded in a series of letters sent to her insurance company held in the stack files on the 3rd floor of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts ; it is also documented by Carl Johnnes in his biography of the actress , Joan Crawford : The Last Years .

= = Death and legacy = =

On May 8 , 1977 , Crawford gave away her beloved Shih Tzu , " Princess Lotus Blossom , " being too weak to care for it . She died two days later at her New York apartment from a heart attack . A funeral was held at Campbell Funeral Home , New York , on May 13 , 1977 . In her will , which was signed October 28 , 1976 , Crawford bequeathed to her two youngest children , Cindy and Cathy , \$ 77 @,@ 500 each from her \$ 2 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 estate . She explicitly disinherited the two eldest , Christina and Christopher , writing , " It is my intention to make no provision herein for my son , Christopher , or my daughter , Christina , for reasons which are well known to them . " She also bequeathed nothing to her niece , Joan Lowe (1933 @-@ 1999 ; born Joan Crawford LeSueur , the only child of her estranged brother , Hal) . Crawford left money to her favorite charities : the U.S.O. of New York , the Motion Picture Home , the American Cancer Society , the Muscular Dystrophy Association , the American Heart Association , and the Wiltwyck School for Boys .

A memorial service was held for Crawford at All Souls ' Unitarian Church on Lexington Avenue in New York on May 16 , 1977 , and was attended by , among others , her old Hollywood friend Myrna Loy . Another memorial service , organized by George Cukor , was held on June 24 in the Samuel Goldwyn Theater at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Beverly Hills . Crawford was cremated and her ashes were placed in a crypt with her fourth and final husband , Alfred Steele , in Ferncliff Cemetery , Hartsdale , New York .

Joan Crawford 's handprints and footprints are immortalized in the forecourt of Grauman 's Chinese Theater on Hollywood Boulevard in Hollywood . She has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame at 1750 Vine Street . Playboy listed Crawford as # 84 of the " 100 Sexiest Women of the 20th century " . Crawford was also voted the tenth greatest female star of the classic American cinema by the American Film Institute .

= = Mommie Dearest = =

In November 1978 , Christina Crawford published Mommie Dearest , which contained allegations that her late adoptive mother was emotionally and physically abusive to Christina and her brother Christopher because she only cared for her career instead of being a mother . Many of Crawford 's friends and co @-@ workers , including Van Johnson , Ann Blyth , Marlene Dietrich , Myrna Loy , Katharine Hepburn , Cesar Romero , Gary Gray , Betty Barker (Joan 's secretary for nearly fifty years) , Douglas Fairbanks Jr . (Crawford 's first husband) , and Crawford 's two other younger daughters ? Cathy and Cindy ? denounced the book , categorically denying any abuse . But others , including Betty Hutton , Helen Hayes , James MacArthur (Hayes ' son) , June Allyson , Liz Smith , Rex Reed , and Vincent Sherman stated they had witnessed some form of abusive behavior . Crawford 's secretary , Jeri Binder Smith , confirmed Christina 's account . Mommie Dearest became a bestseller and was made into the 1981 biography film Mommie Dearest , starring Faye Dunaway as Crawford .

= = Filmography = =

= = Radio appearances = =

= = Autobiographies = =

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