

## Marilyn Monroe, 1926-1962: America's Most Famous Sex Symbol

The beautiful movie star had an exciting but tragic life. *Transcript of radio broadcast: 05 December 2009*

VOICE ONE:

I'm Shirley Griffith.

VOICE TWO:

And I'm Steve Ember with the VOA Special English program PEOPLE IN AMERICA. Today we tell about movie star Marilyn Monroe. She died many years ago, yet still is one of the best known American women.



(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

Her name at birth was Norma Jean Baker. Her life as a child was like a bad dream. She lived with a number of different people, and often was mistreated.

**Marilyn Monroe**

At age sixteen Norma Jean married a sailor. But she soon ended that marriage. She changed her hair color from brown to shining gold. And she changed her name to Marilyn Monroe.

She wanted to be an actress. And she succeeded. She appeared in a number of Hollywood movies. Millions of people went to see them. By the time Norma Jean had reached the age of twenty-six, her beautiful face and body earned her a place as one of America's leading movie stars.

But success and fame were not enough to make her happy. The troubles of her childhood days stayed with her. She drank too much alcohol. She took too many drugs.

At the age of thirty-six, she took her own life.

VOICE TWO:

She has been dead since nineteen sixty-two. Still, her fame continues to grow.

People born long after she died are watching her movies on television. Objects that belonged to her bring huge prices at public sales.

People continue to talk about what they feel is her strange death. Some people believe she was murdered. Two investigations showed that she died as the result of too many drugs.

VOICE ONE:

Why is the public still so interested in a woman who died so many years ago? A number of reasons. Her exciting but tragic life. Her connections with well-known people. And her image as an especially desirable woman.

In the nineteen fifties, many Americans believed sex was a very private subject. People often severely judged those who were sexually appealing.

Into this atmosphere burst Marilyn Monroe. As one critic said, her body was round in all the right places. She wore her clothes like skin. When she walked, she moved her lower body in a way that few other actresses had done. Her voice was soft and breathy. She soon became America's golden girl.

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:



AP Photo

The story of Marilyn Monroe begins on June first, nineteen twenty-six. Norma Jean was born that day in the West Coast city of Los Angeles, California. Her birthplace was not far from the Hollywood movie studios where she would someday be a star.

Her mother, Gladys Baker, suffered from mental problems. Often the mother had to be treated in a hospital for long periods of time. Her daughter was sent to live with a number of different people.

The actress later would describe her stays with these foster families as sometimes very unhappy. During the worst experiences, she would go to a movie theater. There the young Norma Jean escaped into the make-believe world of movies.

VOICE ONE:

By the time she was seventeen, Marilyn was trying very hard to be a movie actress. She finally was able to get an actors' agent to help her. He got Twentieth Century Fox Company to give Marilyn parts in some movies it produced.

Marilyn may have worked more to improve her appearance than to improve her performance in acting classes. Some people at Twentieth Century Fox said she

did not like to work at all. She appeared in only one movie. And she had only one line to speak in that. The Fox movie company dismissed her.

Soon, however, her agent got her a job at Columbia Pictures. She appeared in a movie called "Ladies of the Chorus." She sang two songs. Several critics praised her performance. But Columbia dismissed her.

VOICE TWO:

Marilyn did not stop struggling. She next won a small part in a movie called "Love Happy." It was a comedy starring the famous Marx Brothers. Critics said it was not one of their better efforts. Marilyn, though, earned praise for simply taking a short walk in the movie.

The movie called for her to say, "Some men are following me." Groucho Marx answered that he did not understand why. As he said that, he watched Marilyn walk her famous walk. His eyes opened very wide.

That short scene in the movie made many people in Hollywood talk about Marilyn Monroe.

VOICE ONE:

Marilyn got her first major chance when director John Huston invited her to act in a movie called "The Asphalt Jungle."

Huston said her performance as a criminal's girlfriend was good. It gained Marilyn her dream of a long-term agreement with Twentieth Century Fox, the company that had dismissed her earlier. Now its officials gave her a part in "All About Eve." The movie, released in nineteen fifty, was about a movie star. She played a golden-haired woman who did not have much intelligence -- "a dumb blonde."

In nineteen fifty-two, Marilyn again appeared as a dumb blonde in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes." This performance at last won her widespread fame.

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

Huge successes now followed. Between nineteen fifty-three and nineteen fifty-nine she appeared in lead parts in many popular movies: "How To Marry a Millionaire." "The Seven Year Itch." "Bus Stop." "Some Like it Hot."

Her part in "Some Like it Hot" showed that she was very good at making people laugh.

Marilyn's picture appeared on the front cover of many magazines and the front pages of many newspapers. She began to earn more money.

Life should have been good. But Marilyn was not happy. She was being asked to repeat her part as a dumb blonde in movie after movie.

She wanted to be accepted as a good actress. She went to the Actors' Studio school in New York City with many serious actors. She thought she could change the way people thought of her.

MARILYN MONROE: "What I'd like to do, that is, what I would like to accomplish, I would like to be a good actress. And it's not a matter of being on top because I think some of the best actors and actresses perhaps aren't on the top. So that's not the thing. I'm terribly grateful for everything that's happened because I remember when things weren't like this at all. But you do miss sometimes just being able to be completely yourself and some place and people just know you as another human being."

VOICE ONE:

But she did not succeed. People thought of Marilyn Monroe as "that blonde bombshell." Few people thought of her as a serious actress.

She also failed in her attempts at marriage. She admitted that she got married the first time only to escape from being forced to live in a group home for children without parents. In nineteen fifty-four she married again. Her

husband was the famous New York Yankee baseball player, Joe Di Maggio. They were together for only a few months.

Later, she tried again. She married Arthur Miller, a famous writer of plays. That marriage ended unhappily in nineteen sixty-one, after five years.

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

Marilyn returned to Hollywood. But things were different now. Friends said she was drinking too much alcohol. They said she was taking too many drugs.

She seemed to always be in trouble with the movie company. She had gained too much weight. Or, she had not learned what she was to say in the movie. Or she had arrived late for the filming.

By nineteen sixty-two, Marilyn's problems were threatening her work in the movies. She was to appear in the Twentieth Century Fox movie called "Something's Got to Give."

She lost weight for her part. She tried to arrive on time for the filming. She reportedly knew her part. However, she became sick several times and missed work. Fox company officials dismissed her.

VOICE ONE:

On August fourth, nineteen sixty-two, Marilyn Monroe died alone in her home. She was thirty-six years old. Reports said taking too many drugs killed her. But people who knew her said failed marriages, and the failure of her latest movie also led to her death.

Many people said Marilyn Monroe never escaped her past. She continued to suffer from the early, sad life of a little girl named Norma Jean.

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

This Special English program was written by Jeri Watson and directed by Marilyn Christiano. I'm Steve Ember.

VOICE ONE:

And I'm Shirley Griffith. Join us again next week for another PEOPLE IN AMERICA program on the Voice of America.