

BLAST TO THE PAST

A TRIP DOWN ANAHEIM'S MEMORY LANE

By *Daisy Vuksanovich*

ANAHEIM ALUMNUS, HOLLYWOOD LEGEND MARIE WILSON

She was known as Mabelle when growing up in the Colony at 115 W. Chestnut St. (now Center Street Promenade). But Katherine Elizabeth Wilson soon dropped the nickname when her family moved to Hollywood and she set her sights on an entertainment career.



Mabelle, who transformed into radio, TV and film star Marie Wilson, a blonde bombshell whose new moniker became a household name, left her hometown and Anaheim High schoolmates behind in 1932 to finish her senior year at Hollywood's Cumnock School for Girls. She ended up with three stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.



Marie earned national recognition for her role as the voluptuous blonde, scatter-brained secretary in "My Friend Irma," the title role of a radio series that became one of the most popular shows of the late 1940s.

She starred in the television series of the same name from 1952 to 1954, then played the character in two movies titled, "My Friend Irma" and "My Friend Irma Goes West" featuring the comedy team of Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis.

She earned her first Hollywood contract in 1934 to play Mary Quite Contrary in the Laurel & Hardy film Babes in Toyland (1934). Her real break came in 1942 when she was signed to play Ken Murray's glamour foil in an idiotic blonde in "Blackouts." The vaudeville production ran seven years. Miss Wilson appeared in 2,332 performances and perfected her command of the character that was to be her mainstay.

She later teamed again with her old vaudeville sidekick Murray in his television show, appeared in more than 40 movies including, "Girl in Every Port" with Groucho Marx. "Never Wave at a WAC" with Rosalind Russell and appeared with Angela Lansbury in "Private Affairs of Bel Ami." She was also a guest on "The Ed Sullivan Show" on four occasions.

An ambitious woman known to do crazy stunts for publicity, Marie took to the stage, nightclub and TV circuits once her film career bottomed out after the spectacular arrival of Marilyn Monroe.

Wilson's performance in "Satan Met A Lady," the second film adaptation of the detective novel "The Maltese Falcon," is said to be a virtual template for Marilyn Monroe's later onscreen persona.

Even when age overtook her, she continued working as one of the voices behind the animated television cartoon series "Where's Huddles?" Her career spanned five decades and she was performing up until her untimely death of cancer on Nov. 23, 1972, at age 56.