

## Episode #7 Show Notes: The Girl from Missouri

In the 1930s Jean Harlow was possibly the biggest star the world had ever known. The original “blond bombshell,” her fresh, sultry look was one that drove men wild and women to peroxide. By her own admission, her acting ability was somewhat lacking. “I’m the worst actress that was ever in pictures,” she had said, and more than once. To her legions of fans, it didn’t matter. She had an indefinable “it” quality that drew people to her like a magnet.

Her assessment of her own acting ability was too extreme—she wasn’t the *worst* actress who ever lived. She wasn’t the best, either. She was an astute observer, though, and as she made a study of her co-stars, her performances did improve over time. In some of her later films, like *Wife vs. Secretary* and *Libeled Lady* (two of my favorites) she was quite good—and anything she lacked in acting ability she made up for in sex appeal. She was pretty, yes, but more than that, she was overtly and brazenly sexual. It was well known, for example, that she never wore underwear, which was, at times, shockingly obvious when she would walk on the set wearing diaphanous gowns. David Stenn, in his book *Bombshell: The Life and Death of Jean Harlow*, writes of one particularly memorable incident that occurred on the set of the film *Red Headed Woman*: “Most astounding to MGM crews was Harlow’s attitude toward her body. Told by Jack Conway [the director] to remove her jacket in a scene, she obeyed—and wore nothing underneath...Visitors on the set scarcely believed their eyes...but the resulting commotion puzzled Harlow. “I’m sorry,” she said innocently, “but nobody gave the order to cut.” This was not an isolated incident. To some, the public disrobing might have seemed like pure exhibitionism. But in reality, it was evidence of a complete and total comfort with her body and a natural detachment. According to Anita Loos, who wrote the screenplay for *Red Headed Woman*, “She had no vanity whatsoever.”

I’ve been interested in Jean Harlow for years. I first became curious about her life and work when I discovered that *her* hometown was *my* hometown: Kansas City. Then, of course, when I learned that she died at an impossibly young age (she was only 26), well, that lent an air of mystery to her life that I just couldn’t get past (how could someone have reached such enormous heights at such a young age?). One day I came across a beautiful portrait of her modeling a frilly pink negligee that had been designed for her by Dolly Tree. She looked radiant and feminine—literally the picture of health. It was taken in May of 1937. The caption read that a month later, she would be buried in that same negligee. Strangely, that caption made my stomach drop and my sympathy intensify. I wanted to learn more about her.

I've read everything I can about Jean Harlow, and while I don't love *all* of her films, I do think I might have liked *her*. By all accounts, she was a nice, down-to-earth girl who was nothing like the other big-name actresses of her day. She hadn't aspired to be a star—she would have preferred to have been a successful writer—but circumstances, and her calculating mother, tilted her life in the direction of Hollywood. She was manipulated and underestimated throughout her life, and lived perpetually under her mother's thumb. As a result she was often insecure. "Sweet" was how she was often described by those who knew her. Almost everyone—cast, crew, and studio executives—seemed to love her.

Jean Harlow lived a life of drama—both on and off the screen. She developed a drinking problem. She cycled through a never-ending lineup of men. She already had three marriages by the time she died, and one of her husbands killed himself only two months after the wedding. The love of her life, the actor William Powell, refused to propose. She longed for a family, and often wondered if she would have been happier having settled into domesticity. No, hers was not a charmed life—but it was a prominent one in Circa 19xx Land, and she was a kind, friendly girl from Missouri. I would have liked to meet her.

I can recommend a couple of really good resources if you would like to learn more about her life.

- Stenn, D. (1993). *Bombshell: The Life and Death of Jean Harlow* (1st ed.). Doubleday.
- Vieira, Mark (2019). *Forbidden Hollywood: When Sin Ruled the Movies*. Running Press Adult.

  
~ Jennifer Passariello, Circa 19xx

### [Dateline Hollywood, 1930s](#)

The 1930s is perhaps the most important decade in the history of motion pictures, and was truly the beginning of Hollywood's "Golden Age." Technological advances in sound and even color (though most films produced in the decade were in black and white) created a dazzling experience for theater-goers. These theater-goers *needed* a dazzling experience; this was the era of the Great Depression, and real life didn't look so good at that time. The filmmakers of this era did "escapism" really well. They produced some of the most famous—now classic—films ever made. What follows is a snapshot of Hollywood in the 1930s.

### *The Studio System*

The Studio System ensured that the major studios of the day had complete control over the films that they produced and how they were distributed.

- A central practice of the Studio System was something called “block-booking,” in which a studio would sell packages of films to theaters. Each package or “block” would usually contain one high-budget potential hit along with several lower-budget films. This was a smart setup, enabling studios to make a lot of pictures—most with low budgets (and of lower quality), and ensure all of them would be distributed.
- The biggest studios had controlling stakes in their own chains of theaters, which also ensured distribution of their pictures.
- The studios controlled every aspect of film production. Actors, producers, directors, and writers worked under contract. The studios also owned the film processing laboratories.
- Stars were employees of the studios, and the studios went to great length to manufacture stars’ images—which often bore little resemblance to their real lives. There were often morality clauses in their contracts, and if stars made it big, the studios controlled virtually every aspect of their lives.

### *The “Hays Code”*

The Motion Picture Production Code, commonly referred to as the “Hays Code,” was the precursor to our present day MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) film rating system. The Hays Code, established under the leadership of former Postmaster General Will Hays started with a list of “Don’ts’ and ‘Be Carefuls.’” that the studios could use to govern themselves in answer to growing concerns that films were featuring and glamorizing morally objectionable behavior. That list was loosely enforced, however, so the Code was formally established. Hays said this to explain the purpose of the Code: “The Code sets up high standards of performance for motion-picture producers. It states the considerations which good taste and community value make necessary in this universal form of entertainment...[No picture should ever] lower the moral standards of those who see it...the sympathy of the audience shall never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin.”

There is a marked difference between Pre-Code movies prior to 1934, and Post-Code films produced after that year. Pre-Code films, such as Harlow’s films *Hell’s Angels* and *Red Dust* contained near-nudity, sexual promiscuity, and—perhaps most importantly—a broad swath of morally objectionable behaviors without consequences. But by 1968, the Motion Picture Association shifted from restricting filmmakers to warning theater goers, as the rating system does today.

The “Big Five” studios in the 1930s:  
 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox  
 MGM  
 Paramount  
 Warner Brothers  
 RKO

The “Little Three” studios in the 1930s  
 Columbia  
 Universal  
 United Artists

### The Biggest Stars of the 1930s

Jean Harlow  
Clark Gable  
Myrna Loy  
Mae West  
Greta Garbo  
Janet Gaynor  
Ginger Rogers  
Fred Astaire  
Claudette Colbert  
Dick Powell  
W.C. Fields  
Joan Crawford

Marie Dressler  
James Cagney  
Bing Crosby  
Jeanette MacDonald  
Barbara Stanwyck  
Alice Faye  
Gary Cooper  
Norma Shearer  
Robert Taylor  
Wallace Beery  
Tyrone Power  
Alice Faye

Errol Flynn  
Bette Davis  
Spencer Tracy  
James Stewart  
Veronica Lake  
Katherine Hepburn  
Shirley Temple  
Deanna Durbin  
Judy Garland  
Mickey Rooney  
Johnny Weismuller

### The Famous Films of the 1930s

Some of the most famous titles in movie history were produced in the 1930s. Here is just a sampling:

Gone with the Wind (1939)  
The Wizard of Oz (1939)  
King Kong (1933)  
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937)  
The Lady Vanishes (1938)  
Charlie Chaplin's City Lights (1931)  
Top Hat with Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire (1935)  
All Quiet on the Western Front (1930)  
Stage Coach (1939)  
Stage Door (1937)  
Bringing up Baby (1938)

The Thin Man (1934)  
Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939)  
You Can't Take it With You (1938)  
Tarzan the Ape Man (1932)  
Wuthering Heights (1939)  
42<sup>nd</sup> Street (1933)  
Gunga Din (1939)  
Grand Hotel (1932)  
Nintochka (1939)  
Topper (1937)

### *Academy Award Winners*

1930 - All Quiet on the Western Front

1931 - Cimarron

1932 - Grand Hotel

1933 - Cavalcade

1934 - It Happened One Night

1935 - Mutiny on the Bounty

1936 - The Great Ziegfeld (Libeled Lady, starring Jean Harlow, was nominated for Best Picture that year.)

1937 - The Life of Emile Zola

1938 - You Can't Take it with You

1939 - Gone with the Wind





studio agreed that she was more beautiful with the darker hair, but the fans wouldn't stand for it. They liked their Jean platinum, and wrote in thousands of letters to say so. So platinum it is.

Hair styles are started by the stars, but not consciously. Each star is intending to get the best style for herself. She is flattered if girls all over the country copy it, but she does not set out to create a novel hairdressing for the benefit of the girl in New York. She is quite selfishly trying to bring out the best of her own beauty. The hairdressing is usually designed by the head of the beauty department of her studio....

Movie stars seldom have facials. The fact that they apply and remove grease paint every day gives their faces all the massage necessary. They do have body massages constantly, as a nerve tonic. The bright lights are hard on nerves. The emotional strain of acting is great. Nothing shows up quicker or with more detriment to beauty than nervous strain. So movie players almost universally find it important to have a masseuse at their homes after the day's work to relax the tense muscles and sooth their wrought nerves...Stars pay \$5 or \$10 a day for this treatment.

Make-up is important. All the beauty experts of Hollywood agree that it is make-up that finally produces the Glamour Girl. But, they say, make-up is the final touch, not the maker of beauty.

"I can do wonders with make-up," says Jack Pierce, head of Universal's make-up department. "I can thin fat faces, I can make hard mouths soft and appealing. But beauty doesn't come out of tubes. The girl must give me a foundation to build on. She must have health, good posture, and proper weight. Then I can make her look beautiful."

Perc Westmore, head of Warner's beauty department, says the ordinary woman uses too much make-up and uses it badly. "Fire-hydrants and danger signs are painted red," says Perc. "Anything you want to be noticed right now is red. Rouge on a woman's face calls for, and gets, attention. The trick is to put it where you want attention. A long narrow face should not be rouged up and down, unless the woman wants to look like a horse. Round-faced women usually put on round dabs of rouge—and too much of it. Women should look at the mirror, figure out what effect they are after, and apply their make-up subtly to attain it."

Jeannette MacDonald learned something about age as it shows in the face when she was made up for the part of the old lady in the film “Maytime.” She was told to wrinkle up her face and squint her eyes. Then light powder was dusted on her. She opened her eyes, looked into the mirror, and found fine wrinkles all over her face.

“Many women,” says Westmore, “make the mistake of using too light powder and then squinting when applying it. They achieve highlights on the top of their wrinkles, the little creases show dark against the light powder. It adds years to a woman’s face.”

“The first advice I give a newly signed player,” says Jack Dawn, head of the M.G.M. beauty department, “is ‘Go buy a full-length mirror for your bedroom. Then look at it.’”

When the full-length mirror is installed, the ambitious actress starts looking—first of all at her posture. “No woman can be beautiful,” states Jack Dawn, “until she stands well. I tell my beginners that they must think of their bodies as a series of boxes. Those boxes must rest exactly one on top of the other without any corners sticking out. They must be exactly in line. Stand naturally in front of your full-length mirror, look at the way your hips stick out, your stomach bulges. Now, lift up that drooping chest, straighten up the shoulders, stand on the balls of the feet. Get all the boxes lined up, one on top of the other. Your appearance has improved immediately.”

...Everyone knows that good posture is necessary for beauty. But, since her career depends on it, the young actress is going to work at it. She is going to remember, every waking moment, to hold herself well, she is going to sit up straight in her chair, whether she is before the camera or not, she is going to lift that head up and hold it up.

“When Jean Harlow starred in ‘Hell’s Angels,’ she was beautiful,” says Jack Dawn, “but her hips looked heavy. Today, at exactly the same weight, she has the most beautiful figure in Hollywood. This is entirely due to the improved posture. She had allowed the pelvic bones to settle just a little heavily into the hip bones. By raising them, her figure became perfect.”

...Movie stars have to keep their weight a bit below normal, because of the unfortunate tendency of the camera to add pounds. They can’t say “I ought to take off a few

pounds. I'll go on a diet tomorrow." They go on a diet and they stay on it, or they don't stay in the movies. The lemon meringue pies and chocolate eclairs are not for them.

The actress has to care, and care a lot, about her career to keep up the ever necessary diet and posture. As soon as she ceases to think it more important than anything else, her career ends.

Clara Bow was one of the greatest stars. Girls everywhere copied her. Then she stopped thinking of her career as the most important thing in the world. A baked potato became more necessary to her happiness than fan mail. This was not a tragedy for Clara. She has become a pretty, plump matron, living happily on a ranch with her husband and child. The "Brooklyn Bon-Fire" says the only fire she wants to light from now on is her own hearth fire. She's happier now than she was as a star.

Few stars feel that way about it. They want to stay at the top. They are willing to go through a lot to do it.

Hollywood stars become beauties by the expenditure of efforts, time, and money. The experts say that Mrs. Average Woman can achieve the same results, if she wants to. But to become a Glamour Girl, whether in Hollywood or Kansas City, demands an intensiveness of purpose twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. It's not a part-time job.

...The stenographer spends time and money acquiring and maintaining her technique and speed on the typewriter. The trained nurse spends years getting the professional knowledge by which she will earn a living. The movie star looks at the need for beauty with the same regard that the nurse has for her hospital training. It's a professional necessity for her career. That is the reason Hollywood stars are beautiful. It's their job.

End

### The Harlow Cannon

Jean Harlow made appearances in, or was the star of, 34 full-length films from 1928 to 1937. In researching her career, I found that ten of these films were mentioned most often, so I am referring to these as the "Harlow Cannon." One Harlow film that I particularly liked, *Wife vs. Secretary*, is not included in this list. It's too bad



that film doesn't get as much attention as some of the others. Her role (as the secretary) was a serious, mature role, in contrast to her usual comedy roles, and she played it beautifully.

### *The Cannon*

Hell's Angels (Big Break)	Dinner at Eight
Platinum Blonde	Bombshell
Red-Headed Woman	The Girl from Missouri
Red Dust	Libeled Lady (Academy Award Nominee)
Hold Your Man	Saratoga (Died During Filming)

### Libeled Lady

*Libeled Lady* is, perhaps, Jean Harlow's finest film. Interestingly, she was given top billing even though hers was really a supporting role. Myrna Loy is the central character—the "Libeled Lady" of the title. However, Harlow was at the height of her stardom at that point in her career, and, well, she was adorable in this film. Her performance showed, once again, that comedic roles were her forte.

In this romantic comedy Harlow plays Gladys Benton, the long suffering fiancé of Warren Haggerty, played by Spencer Tracy. Haggerty is the managing editor of the *New York Evening Star* newspaper. When the *Evening Star* prints a story falsely accusing wealthy socialite Connie Allenbury (played by Myrna Loy) of stealing another woman's husband, she vows to sue the paper for \$5,000,000 for libel. In an effort to make Allenbury drop the suit, Haggerty enlists the help of former colleague Bill Chandler (played by William Powell) to cook up a totally crazy scheme. Here's the plan: Haggerty coaxes Gladys to marry Chandler in name only. While married, Chandler will then woo Connie Allenbury and get her to fall for him. Gladys will "discover" Chandler and Connie together, and reveal to Connie that she and Chandler are married. Haggerty will swoop in, threaten to print a new story about this affair—unless Connie agrees to drop the libel suit. This scheme almost works, except for a few complications—namely that Gladys starts to think she might actually love her sham husband, and Chandler really falls for the Connie Allenbury.

*Libeled Lady* is a wonderful film for a number of reasons: the writing is really good, the storyline is goofy but completely draws the audience along, and it is genuinely funny. But Jean Harlow is truly the gem in this picture. She steals every scene that she's in. Her character is used and hurt by all three of her co-stars, and Harlow's response to their betrayals is both moving and comical. Jean is not the platinum blond in this film; her hair color is much more subdued—and she is at her most beautiful.

*Libeled Lady* is a must-see for anyone who likes classic romantic comedies. It was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Picture of 1936.

## Jean Harlow, the Writer

Jean Harlow was a voracious reader (she was reading the first edition of *Gone with the Wind* before she died; it doesn't seem likely that she was able to finish it). She also liked to write, using her own life as a model for her characters and plot lines.

### *Today is Tonight*

She wrote one novel, *Today is Tonight*, that her stepfather try to shop around to a few studios. Louis B. Mayer, however, prevented its sale, citing a clause in her contract that her services as an artist couldn't be used without MGM's permission. After Harlow's death, her mother sold the film rights to MGM, but no film was made and the novel remained unpublished until the 1960s. Set in the 1920s, the autobiographical novel tells the story of Peter and Judy Lansdowne, a glamorous couple living an opulent lifestyle in Hollywood.

What follows is a short story, "Extra Girl Gets her First Closeup," that Harlow wrote in 1935. It was published in the *Hollywood Reporter* that year. The story here is pulled from a really nice post on this subject that can be found here: <https://harlowheaven.wordpress.com/2020/01/16/extra-girl-gets-her-first-close-up-by-jean-harlow/>. Harlow's charming story reveals what life as an "Extra" at a studio—one who aches for her big break—is like.

### Extra Girl Gets Her First Close-Up By Jean Harlow

Suppose — oh, just suppose, it doesn't cost anything — suppose she should get a close-up today!

The thought warmed her. She had summoned it into mental existence many hundreds of times, just for the sake of that warming tingle which came in its wake. After all, it wasn't impossible! It does happen to extra girls — well, not regularly but frequently enough to justify the perennial visualization of its glorious possibility.

She thought about herself, very carefully. She surveyed her whole person, in critical analysis as if she were someone else, just as she had actually and meticulously studied herself that morning in the bleary mirror of her bathroom door — a smooth white body, unflawed, taut with youth, curved with promise, clean with hope.

She found nothing much to criticize — except that she did not have artificial eyelashes.

She tried to compensate herself with the assurance that at least her eyebrows conformed to the Hollywood convention. Of course it had been something of an effort

to shave the brows cleanly off this morning, and to pencil the thin, highly-arched arcs of unreality in place of the silky ash-blond hairs. She had postponed this for almost a year. It did not, however, give the complete effect. She must have the artificial lashes. Her own lashes upper and lower, were adequate – even abundant – but they were *real* and hence marked her as one of the rank and file.

She had stopped wearing stockings six months ago. Stockings cost too much, but more important was the reason that bare legs may not be classified so readily as stockinged ones and she was conscious that the curves of her calves were vaguely irregular.

Her mouth was her strong point. Mouth – which means, on only visual contact – lips. She had made her lips important by long hours of study in the mirror. The carmine lipstick now outlined the upper lip in a sweeping single curve so brutally false as to provoke a second and interested glance; it was a cheap lipstick; she had found it in a boulevard drugstore; but it made provoking the wet smear of lambent color.

For seven weeks she had planned to buy the artificial eyelashes. It was not a tragic necessity for food and shelter which weekly devoured the eyelash appropriation. It was the thousand and one other little things even more important to an extra girl.

- Shoes. Assistant directors always look at your feet first.
- Hair. No matter how simple a coiffure you evolve, the beauty shop cannot be dodged forever.
- Makeup. You'll never get a close-up unless your makeup is satin smooth with the very best grease and powder and shadings.
- Telephone calls. Not only the daily routine to Central Casting, but the three or four calls every day to Marcella or Red or Tommy, the several various persons in different studios who had manifested a degree of friendliness sufficient to warrant a call reminding them of your existence.
- Hats. You can't fake hats the way you can fake clothes. Hats change – irrevocably.
- Transportation. The cruelest burden of all the burdens. First National, way over in the valley. Metro, far out in Culver City. Fox, in Westwood.

Funny the way Easterners came out here and expected to find all the studios cuddled up in one handy group in the heart of Hollywood. Hollywood? Hollywood isn't a city.

Hollywood isn't even a district. Hollywood is the name of an idea, and its ramifications stretch expensively far and wide for the extra girl.

Her nose wrinkled delicately with the shadow of an impish grin — maybe she'd waive her spirit of independence long enough to accept that "hundred and a quarter" from Daddy and buy a secondhand Ford — maybe she wouldn't, either.

Even without the artificial eyelashes she knew she looked "hot" today. There were only—she counted—twenty girls on the set. She knew very well that at least twelve of them had been selected from the Assistant Director's list. The other eight had come direct from Central Casting.

That's funny too, and she remembered what that nice woman at Central Casting had told her. How the real problem was not only finding work for extras but finding the right extras for the work. How few really lovely well-dressed girls had she said were available?

She relaxed with satisfaction. Yes, she was undoubtedly the best-looking, best-dressed, best made-up extra on the set. And that without counting her hair. Her hair would get her a break someday, she felt sure. Its pale ashen loveliness was natural. She liked to announce the fact somewhat arrogantly to the bleached sisters.

As a matter of fact, it was not her hair which attracted the Assistant Director. His roving eye flickered about and settled on her because she was the one girl in the lot that he had not quite classified. He had actually nothing on her. He'd heard rumors, but rumors are nothing in Hollywood. His wife—who had secretly "worked extra" under an assumed name—had sniffed quite vigorously one night at "that blond dame" with her twenty-two dollar Fifth Avenue shoes. Still, he could comfort himself on his selection of her with the reassurance that she was really the most striking girl of all the twenty.

"You," he said to her curtly, "be ready for a close-up at three o'clock."

She looked at him dully, not quite segregating his actuality from the endlessly dreamed visions of this moment. Then she knew it was reality, because his eyes lingered on her for a second. His gaze was not lascivious nor acquisitive. It was kindly and gracious.

In a sudden warm flash of understanding she realized that Assistant Directors are human, probably dine on meat and vegetables rather than fire and brimstone, and even possibly might have been born through the ordinary human processes of life.

The Director was rehearsing a dialogue two-shot. From experience she knew the leading man would not acquire the proper emphasis for at least another hour. She walked proudly off the set with the sure knowledge that she was entitled to some time for preparation.

She was going to have a close-up!

The kindly hairdresser responded nobly. The ash-blond hair was done and re-done and done again. The make-up was removed and put on anew with loving care and trembling hands.

If she only had those artificial eyelashes! Why hadn't she yielded to temptation this morning – why hadn't she turned her steps into that drugstore?

Now there is a God, even in Hollywood. It was certainly one of His minions, this slim southern girl “in stock,” who overheard the lament and proffered—a pair of artificial eyelashes for the great event.

“Hop to it, kid,” were her words.

“Your first close-up may get you plenty. You're telling me! And what's a buck to me? I'm in stock! Of course nobody but His Nibs ... and the Cashier, and Allah il Allah to him ... knows I'm in stock, but I've been collecting that little check every Wednesday for five months. Here – good luck -”

They were ready and waiting when she came back to the set. It was more important than an outsider would think. They would make several takes of that close-up, and the Producer himself – to say nothing of his staff and secretaries and the Director and maybe even the Head Man who sat in his “mahogany hell” of an office – would be interested in that day's rushes and thus forced to look full into this lovely face of hers for several minutes.



With an approving nod the Assistant Director took her firmly by the arm and led her to a spot about which dazzling lights were concentrated. Her heart was bursting within her.

“Sit there on the arm of the couch,” the Director himself was speaking.

“Pull up your skirts, way up – above your knees!”

Then she understood. They were going to take a close-up of her LEGS.

End

### The Death of Jean Harlow

From Wikipedia: On May 20, 1937, during the filming of *Saratoga*, Harlow began to complain of illness. Her symptoms—fatigue, nausea, fluid retention and abdominal pain—did not seem very serious to her doctor, who believed that she was suffering from cholecystitis and influenza. Unfortunately, the doctor was not aware that Harlow had been ill during the previous year with a severe sunburn and influenza. Her friend and co-star, Una Merkel, noticed Harlow's gray pallor, fatigue and weight gain on the set of *Saratoga*.

On May 29, 1937, Harlow filmed a scene in which the character she was playing had a fever. Harlow was clearly sicker than her character. She leaned against co-star Gable between scenes and said, "I feel terrible! Get me back to my dressing room." Harlow requested that the assistant director telephone William Powell, who immediately left his own movie set, in order to escort Harlow back home.

The next day, Powell checked on Harlow and discovered that her condition had not improved. He contacted her mother and insisted that she cut her holiday short to come be at her daughter's side. Powell also summoned a doctor. Because Harlow's previous illnesses had delayed the shooting of three movies (*Wife vs. Secretary*, *Suzy*, and *Libeled Lady*), initially there was no great concern regarding Harlow's latest bout with a recurring illness. On June 2, 1937, it was announced that Harlow was again suffering from influenza. Dr. Ernest Fishbaugh who had been called to Harlow's home to treat her, diagnosed her with an inflamed gallbladder. Harlow felt better on June 3, 1937, and co-workers expected her back on the set by Monday, June 7, 1937. Press reports were contradictory, with headlines reading "Jean Harlow seriously ill" and "Harlow recovers from illness crisis." Clark Gable, who visited Harlow during this time, later remarked

that she was severely bloated and that he smelled urine on her breath when he kissed her – both signs of kidney failure.

Dr. Leland Chapman, a colleague of Fishbaugh, was called in to give a second opinion on Harlow's condition. Chapman recognized that she was not suffering from an inflamed gallbladder, but was in the final stages of kidney failure. On June 6, 1937, Harlow said that she could not see Powell clearly and could not tell how many fingers he was holding up.

That evening, she was taken to Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Angeles, where she slipped into a coma. The next day at 11:37 a.m., Harlow died in the hospital at the age of 26. In the doctor's press releases, the cause of death was given as cerebral edema, a complication of kidney failure.

MGM planned to replace Harlow in *Saratoga* with either Jean Arthur or Virginia Bruce, but due to public objections the film was finished using three doubles (one for close-ups, one for long shots, and one for dubbing Harlow's lines) and rewriting some scenes without her. *Saratoga* was released on July 23, 1937, less than two months after Harlow's death and it was a hit with audiences. *Saratoga* became MGM's second-highest grossing picture of 1937.

### [Favorite Thing of the Week](#)

This week's "Favorite Thing" is a sandwich! I've fallen in love with a sandwich that (I think) I invented: alfalfa sprouts on toast. So easy to assemble—and strangely addictive! I love alfalfa sprouts in salads and in sandwiches, but they're usually a minor ingredient. In my sandwich, the sprouts are the star of the show! Here's how you make it:

1. Toast two extra-thin slices of whole-grain bread.
2. Spread a thick layer of hummus on one of the slices of toast.
3. Layer on a LOT of sprouts—the more the better.
4. Add a slice of provolone cheese.

Done! Try it and you'll be surprised by how good this is.

Don't forget to visit Circa 19xx Land!

[www.Circa19xx.com](http://www.Circa19xx.com)

The Circa-19xx Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/vintagecentury19xx/>

Circa 19xx on Pinterest - Look for the Board for this episode!

<https://www.pinterest.com/circa19xx/>