

The Eighteenth Academy Awards “Calling in Sick”

With World War II over, the awards ceremony returned to the glitz and glamour of years past. It was held on March 7, 1946 at Grauman’s Chinese Theater for the third consecutive year and Bob Hope shared the hosting responsibilities with actor James Stewart. Bing Crosby was nominated for a best actor Oscar for a second year in a row, reprising the role of father O’Malley in *The Bells of St. Mary’s* (1945) but he did not think he’d win the award and did not bother to show up for the ceremony. Also best actress nominee and eventual winner, Joan Crawford suspiciously came down with the flu the night of the event and did not attend. In reality, the starlet was so nervous, she decided it was better to stay away than be disappointed. The best picture of the year went to Billy Wilder’s *The Lost Weekend* (1945), a glimpse into the desperate and haunting life of an alcoholic aspiring writer (played by Ray Milland).

Nominees and Winners

Best Actor – Bing Crosby, Gene Kelly, **Ray Milland**, Gregory Peck, and Cornel Wilde

Best Actress – Ingrid Bergman, **Joan Crawford**, Greer Garson, Jennifer Jones, Gene Tierney

Best Supporting Actor – Michael Chekhov, James Dall, **James Dunn**, Robert Mitchum, and J. Carrol Naish

Best Supporting Actress – Eve Arden, Ann Blyth, Angela Lansbury, Joan Larring, and **Anne Revere**

Best Director – Clarence Brown, Alfred Hitchcock, Leo McCarey, Jean Renoir, and **Billy Wilder**

Ray Milland (January 3, 1905 - March 10, 1986)

The charming but very private and introspective actor was born Reginald Alfred John Truscott-Jones on January 3, 1905 in Neath, Wales, England. The Welsh born actor often played the suave and romantic leading man during his prolific film career. He got his break in show business due to an accident, in 1929 as a then soldier in the British Calvary; he was chosen to replace an injured actor (who had been hit by a bus) in *The Informer* (1929). The bit part called for a soldier (Milland) to shoot into a target. The producers were so impressed by Milland (he had no previous acting experience) that he was offered another role in *The Flying Scotsman* (1929) and this led to a contract with MGM Studios and his Hollywood career was off and running.

During an award winning film career that spanned five decades (1929-1985), Milland appeared in over one hundred and seventy motion pictures and television programs. Some of his most well known films are *The Bachelor Father* (1931), *Bolero* (1934), *The Big Broadcast of 1937* (1936), *Beau Geste* (1939), *Reap the Wild Wind* (1942), *The Uninvited* (1944), *The Trouble with Women* (1947), *Dial M for Murder* (1954), *Premature Burial* (1962), *Love Story* (1970), *Terror in the Wax Museum* (1973), and *Escape to Witch Mountain* (1975).

His crowning achievement was in 1946, when he won the Oscar for best lead actor, portraying the alcoholic writer, Don Birnam in *The Lost Weekend* (1945). Upon accepting his award from

Actress Ingrid Bergman, Milland appeared to be nervous and unprepared; he simply nodded, smiled and left the stage without uttering a word. He was the first and last best actor Oscar winner not to utter a single word of acceptance.

He was a notoriously private person and stayed away from the glitz and glamour of Hollywood. He never appeared in the gossip magazines and often preferred to stay home with a good book. In 1984, Milland was diagnosed with lung cancer; he continued to work in film and television right up until his death on March 10, 1986. The veteran actor died in his sleep at the Torrance Memorial Hospital in Torrance, California.

Raymond Milland's remains were cremated and scattered at sea, near Redondo Beach, California.

Joan Crawford (March 23, 1905 - May 10, 1977)

"If you're going to be a star, you have to look like a star, and I never go out unless I look like Joan Crawford, the movie star. If you want to see the girl next door, go next door." Joan Crawford

One of Hollywood's most brilliant, unforgettable, and notoriously fickle actress was born Lucille Fay LeSueur on March 23, 1905 (some sources have the year as 1908) in San Antonio, Texas. Her parents divorced when she was very young. She and her mother then lived a transient lifestyle moving from city to city in the Midwest. Crawford did attend private school but unfortunately did not progress past a sixth grade education. She was a talented dancer and always dreamed of becoming an entertainer. As a teenager she was able to land employment as a chorus girl in Kansas City, Chicago, and Detroit. In 1924 during one of these shows Crawford was discovered by stage producer J.J. Shubert; he offered her a part in the chorus line of his Broadway play, *Innocent Eyes*. After several months of success in this play, Crawford was spotted by an MGM talent scout, she was offered a screen test and then was offered a bit part in the film, *Pretty Ladies* (1925). After several other small film roles, MGM suggested that she change her name, a public contest was held and Joan Crawford was selected. Initially, she hated the name wanting Joan to be pronounced, Jo-Anne, and thinking that Crawford sounded like crawfish but she had no choice in the matter, eventually she grew to embrace the new name and the opportunities she had been given.

In a legendary film career that would span forty-seven years (1925-1972), she would star in over eighty motion pictures. Her most famous film credits include: *The Taxi Dancer* (1927), *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928), *Grand Hotel* (1932), *The Bride Wore Red* (1937), *The Shining Hour* (1938), *The Women* (1939), *Humoresque* (1946), *Queen Bee* (1955), *Autumn Leaves* (1956) and *The Best of Everything* (1959). She won the Oscar for best actress in 1946, for her portrayal of the ambitious mother in *Mildred Pierce* (1945). She was not present at the ceremony because of illness and in a much staged and somewhat comical scene; she accepted the award from her bed, saying in the most theatrical way possible, "This is the greatest moment of my life." It turned out that she had faked being sick because she was afraid of losing. Crawford was nominated for two further best actress Academy Awards, *Possessed* (1947) and *Sudden Fear* (1952). Her film roles were quite diverse ranging from chorus girls and flappers (1920's), strong minded career woman (1930's and 1940's), and subdued older women (1950's). But by the 1960's, she was relegated to bit parts in B-movies and television appearances. She made a dramatic comeback in the thriller,

What Ever Happened to Baby Jane (1962) but this revival was short lived, subsequent film roles were unsatisfactory, and she soon retired from film.

She had a very tough persona, notoriously difficult to work with and was always at odds with studio heads. In 1938, she was labeled “box-office poison” by industry insiders. By 1943, MGM studio head Louis B. Mayer had enough, and fired the actress for refusal to accept roles and abide by her contract. Crawford then signed with Warner Bros. and other studios, where she got roles that were much more to her liking.

Crawford had an infamous ongoing feud with Bette Davis. The two actresses detested one another. Davis was once quoted as saying (about Crawford), “She’s slept with every male star at MGM except Lassie,” and in return, Crawford replied, “I don’t hate Bette Davis even though the press wants me to. I resent her. I don’t see how she (Davis) built a career out of a set of mannerisms, instead of real acting ability. Take away the pop eyes, the cigarette, and those funny clipped words and what have you got? She’s phony, but I guess the public really likes that.” Ironically, the two archrivals would appear together to revive their careers in 1962’s *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane*, Crawford would say that working with Davis in this motion picture was the greatest challenge of her career.

Did You Know – Crawford had a cleanliness obsession. She would often wipe her hands every ten minutes, and follow guests around her house cleaning door knobs and wiping down everything they touched. She always slept in white pajamas and never smoked a cigarette unless she had opened the pack herself. Crawford was once quoted as saying “I need sex for a clear complexion, but I’d rather do it for love.”

Her personal life was filled with heart ache and turmoil. She married five times, divorced four husbands, and adopted four children, one of which, Christina, wrote a tell all biography, “Mommie Dearest,” in which Crawford was portrayed as being neurotic, obsessive and abusive. Because she saw this book as the ultimate betrayal, Crawford left her daughter completely out of her will and in the last paragraph of this infamous will, Crawford wrote, “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.” In 1955, Crawford married Pepsi Cola Company Chief Executive, Alfred Steele; she became a goodwill ambassador for the company and traveled around the globe promoting Pepsi. When Steele died in 1959, she was elected to fill his spot on the board of directors and held this position until 1973, when she was forced out.

Due to her advancing age and ill health, the last years of her life were spent secluded in her upper Eastside Manhattan, New York apartment. On May 10, 1977, Crawford died from a heart attack. She had been suffering from pancreatic cancer and was in a weakened state at the time of her death. Crawford’s alleged last words, spoken to her housekeeper (who had begun to pray out loud) were “Damin it! Don’t you dare ask God to help me.” Upon hearing of the death of her long time rival, Bette Davis is said to have remarked “You should never say bad things about the dead; you should only say good things...Joan Crawford is dead. Good.”

Crawford was a devote Christian Scientist and her remains were cremated, a brief service was held on May 13, 1977 in which one hundred and fifty friends and family attended. A memorial service was held at the All Souls Unitarian Church in New York on May 16th in attendance were many Hollywood dignitaries that included good friend actress, Myrna Loy.

Crawford's ashes are interred with that of her late husband, Albert Steele, in the family crypt at the Ferncliff Cemetery mausoleum, Westchester County, Hartsdale, New York, unit 8, alcove E, crypt 42.

James Dunn (November 2, 1901 - September 3, 1967)

The award winning character actor was born November 2, 1901 in New York City. He worked in vaudeville (as a song and dance man), the theater, and as an extra in several silent films before being signed to a movie contract with 20th Century-Fox studios in 1931. Known for his boy next door roles, Dunn's film and television career spanned nearly four decades (1929-1967) and included over fifty feature motion pictures.

In 1946, he won the best supporting Oscar for his portrayal of the drunken waiter, Johnny Nolan, in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1945). His other notable film credits include: *Society Girl* (1932), *Take a Chance* (1933), *Mysterious Crossing* (1936), and *Killer McCoy* (1947). He also starred alongside Shirley Temple in her first three films, *Stand Up and Cheer* (1934), *Baby Take a Bow* (1934), and *Bright Eyes* (1934). In 1950, Dunn retired from motion pictures and began to work exclusively in television and he became one of the first Hollywood film actors to star in his own television series, *It's a Great Life* (1954-56). On September 3, 1967, Dunn died at the Santa Monica Hospital after undergoing abdominal surgery.

James Dunn's remains were cremated and the ashes were scattered in the Pacific Ocean.

Anne Revere (June 25, 1903 - December 18, 1990)

The versatile veteran character actress was born on June 25, 1903 in New York City. She was a graduate of Wellesley College and is a direct descendant of American Revolutionary hero, Paul Revere. She began her show business career on the Broadway stage and graduated to film in 1934's *Double Door*. During her film career (1934-1977), which included nearly forty motion pictures, she often played the role of the strong, maternal figure. Her major film credits include: *Men of Boys Town* (1941), *Remember the Day* (1941), and *A Place in the Sun* (1951). She won the 1946 Oscar for best supporting actress in *National Velvet* (1945), and was nominated for the same award for *The Song of Bernadette* (1943) and *Gentlemen's Agreement* (1947).

In 1947, a year after winning the Oscar, she refused to testify before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities, was blacklisted and did not appear in another motion picture for twenty years. Unable to find work in films, she returned to the Broadway stage, where in 1961, she won a Tony Award for her performance in *Toys in the Attic*. She also made numerous television appearances during this period and her last role was in the soap opera, *Ryan's Hope* (1977). Anne Revere died on December 18, 1990 at her home on Long Island, New York from pneumonia.

Anne Revere's final resting place is at the Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, Massachusetts in lot 11002, azalea garden wall.

Billy Wilder (June 22, 1906 - March 27, 2002)

”The smartest, most gifted people in the world live in Hollywood. Those who knock the town; 1. Never made it, 2. Have no chance to make it, 3. Made it and blew it.” Billy Wilder

The multi-talented award winning director, producer, and writer was born Samuel Wilder on June 22, 1906 in Sucha, Austria-Hungry (now Poland). His first foray into show business came at the end of a pen as a screen writer for UFA studios, one of Germany’s top movie producers of the 1920’s. He remained in high demand as a writer in Germany, but eventually fled the country in 1933, when Adolf Hitler took power. Sensing that dangerous times were ahead, he first moved to Vienna, then Paris. It was while in France that Wilder wrote a screen play for Columbia Pictures and his American film career was launched. Arriving in Hollywood in 1934, he was unable to speak English and soon found himself out of work and money. Sharing a room with actor Peter Lorre, Wilder taught himself English by watching baseball games and movies. In 1936, he landed a job as a writer for Paramount Studios and was paired with fellow writer Charles Brackett. The pair of Wilder and Brackett would produce 14 consecutive hit movies.

Did You Know – Wilder once told actor Billy Bob Thornton that he was too ugly to be an actor and that he should write his own screenplay for himself in which he could exploit his less than perfect features. Thornton followed this advice by writing and starring in *Sling Blade* (1996), for which he won a best screenplay Oscar in 1997.

In a film career that would span four decades (1936-1981), Wilder would write over seventy screen plays, direct twenty-seven feature motion pictures, and produce dozens of other films. His directorial career highlights include; *Ninotchka* (1939), *Hold Back the Dawn* (1941), *Ball of Fury* (1941), *The Major and the Minor* (1942), *Double Indemnity* (1944), *The Emperor Waltz* (1948), *A Foreign Affair* (1948), *Ace in the Hole* (1951), *Stalag 17* (1953), *Sabrina* (1954), *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), *Witness for the Prosecution* (1957), *The Spirit of St. Louis* (1957), *Some Like It Hot* (1959), *The Fortune Cookie* (1966), and *The Front Page* (1974).

One of the most successful film writer/ directors in Hollywood history, Wilder was nominated for twelve best writing and eight best directing Oscars. He won both awards in 1946 for *The Lost Weekend* (1945) and repeated the double victory again in 1961 for *The Apartment* (1960). Wilder also won for best writing in 1951 for *Sunset Blvd.* (1950). The acclaimed director died on March 27, 2002 from pneumonia at his Beverly Hills home. He had been in failing health for a few years prior to his death.

Wilder is buried at Westwood Memorial Park, Los Angeles in the chapel estates section near actors Caroll O’Conner and Walter Mathau. His tombstone epitaph reads; “I’m a writer but then nobody’s perfect.”