

# Batgirl Yvonne Craig Had Strong Illinois Roots

by Tom Emery

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The Batman comic book character has enjoyed a renaissance in recent years, particularly with big-budget movie remakes. Fans – especially men – are drawn to one of the secondary characters, the mysterious Batgirl.

Christian County can claim a piece of that popular role, as Taylorville native Yvonne Craig played Batgirl in the final season of the ABC television series Batman in 1967-68.

It was a signature role for Craig, whose movie and television career spanned five decades.

Born in Taylorville on May 16, 1937, Craig spent much of her first fourteen years in Columbus, Ohio, and trained to be a ballerina from the age of ten. As a high school student, she was accepted into the School of American Ballet, but later elected to tour with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. A dispute with that organization ended her ballet career in 1957, when she moved to Los Angeles.

Craig landed two minor movie roles in 1957, including *The Young Land* that resulted in a contract with Columbia. She also had some guest spots on popular television shows, such as *Perry Mason* in 1958. In that appearance, a co-star was Neil Hamilton, who would later play her father in the *Batman* series. She also appeared in 1959's *Gidget* and with Bing Crosby in *High Time* the following year.

Another 1960 role was in *The Gene Krupa Story*, where at 5'4", she was actually taller than co-star Sal Mineo. As a result, a scene that called for Mineo to hold Craig in his arms caused some awkward moments.

In 1963, Craig made the first of two movies with Elvis Presley, *It Happened at the World's Fair*. She was also in *Kissin' Cousins* with Elvis the next year. Increasingly popular because of her flowing dark hair and slender build, Craig was also in the cult classic *Mars Needs Women* in 1966, and, in a nod to her days as a dancer, played a ballerina in a starring role with James Coburn in 1967 in *In Like Flint*.

Other television appearances for Craig in this era included *Mr. Lucky*, *The Barbara Stanwyck Show*, *The Chevy Mystery Show*, *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, *77 Sunset Strip*, *Dr. Kildare*, *McHale's Navy*, *My Favorite Martian*, *My Three Sons*, *Wagon Train*, and *The Big Valley*.

In 1967, she took on the role of Batgirl, appearing in 26 episodes in the show's third and final season on the air. She reportedly did all of her motorcycle scenes without a stunt double. In the script, only the butler for

Batman knew her identity, and in turn, she never knew the identity of either Batman or Robin.

The Batgirl role is what Craig is best known for, and elevated her to cult status among fans of the show. After the show's cancellation, she continued to pick up guest-star work, playing in such TV favorites as Star Trek, in which she appeared as Marta in a 1969 episode.

Other television appearances in the late 1960s and 1970s came on Mod Squad, Love, American Style, Kojak, The Six Million Dollar Man, Starsky and Hutch, and Emergency!

Craig eventually pulled herself away from acting and became successful in real estate. Still, she kept a hand in the business, as she has voiced the character of Grandma in the children's series Olivia. She also maintained a sophisticated website describing her career achievements.

Like some other performers, Craig readily identified with her signature role and appears at Batman conventions and other functions. She once said that she "meet(s) women today who tell me that they grew up viewing Batgirl as an important role model. If they choose to know me in that context, well, I'll take it."

Craig died on Aug. 17, 2015, at the age of 78 at her home in Pacific Palisades, Calif. following a long illness. News of her death made headlines in print, television, and across the internet, a testament to her lasting popularity and cult-figure status.

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