

Totally Useless & Stupid Facts About Classic Celebrities

Our Favorite Facts About Classic Celebrities



Original photo by [cineclassico](#)/ Alamy Stock Photo

Whether it's [Marilyn Monroe](#) or [Katharine Hepburn](#), [Paul Newman](#) or [Humphrey Bogart](#), the classic faces of the silver screen are familiar and beloved — but how much do you really know about them? For example, which starlet's first job involved building drones? What famously raven-haired performer was really a blond? Which leading man apologized for his first film role? Read on for some of our favorite facts about the sparkling stars of yesteryear.

Elvis Never Performed Outside of the U.S. and Canada



Credit: [Michael Ochs Archives](#) via Getty Images

[Despite being beloved](#) around the world, Elvis Presley [never](#) performed outside of the United States and Canada. The [prevailing](#) (though never officially confirmed) belief is that the King of Rock 'n' Roll had to turn down every offer he received to play abroad because his [controversial](#) manager, Colonel Tom Parker, was an undocumented immigrant from the Netherlands who didn't have a passport and feared he would be denied reentry to the U.S. if he left. (If Elvis ever had a fear of flying, he evidently got over it, as he purchased and customized several planes over the years.) Other than [three 1957](#) shows in [Canada](#) (in Toronto, Ottawa, and Vancouver, B.C.), Elvis only ever performed stateside ([also in Hawaii!](#)).

Humphrey Bogart Never Says “Play It Again, Sam” in “Casablanca”



Credit: [John Kobal Foundation/ Moviepix via Getty Images](#)

Despite being one of the film’s most oft-quoted lines, the words “Play it again, Sam” are never said in *Casablanca*. It’s been called “probably the most misquoted line in cinema history,” not least because it’s usually attributed to the wrong character. The 1942 film’s protagonist, conflicted Morocco nightclub owner Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart), is often imagined as the one saying the line, even though the closest equivalent — “Play it, Sam” — is actually said by Rick’s endangered ex, Ilsa Lund (Ingrid Bergman). (Rick does later instruct Sam, the piano player in question, to “play it,” however.) For all that, *Casablanca*, a noir classic set in WWII, still has many other memorable lines, including six on the American Film Institute’s [100 Years... 100 Movie Quotes](#) list, the most of any film. (That includes “Here’s looking at you, kid” and “I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”)

Paul Newman Publicly Apologized for His First Film Role



Credit: [Art](#)

[Zelin/](#) Archive Photos via Getty Images

[While many actors](#) dream of landing their first featured film role, the experience was a nightmare for Paul Newman. Tapped to star in *The Silver Chalice* (1954) as a Greek silversmith who fashions a cup to commemorate Jesus Christ at the Last Supper, the Hollywood newcomer butted heads with director Victor Saville and never found a comfort zone in matters ranging from delivering dialogue to riding a camel. He later called it “the worst film to be made in the entirety of the 1950s.” While Newman eventually overcame this early career hurdle, the rising star was aghast to learn that a Los Angeles television station was airing *The Silver Chalice* in 1963. As a result, according to Shawn Levy's [Paul Newman: A Life](#), Newman [took out ads](#) in two local papers begging people not to watch the movie. (The ads backfired, as curious viewers tuned in to see what all the fuss was about.)

Judy Garland's Stage Name Came From a Hoagy Carmichael Song



Credit: [Bettmann](#) via [Getty Images](#)

[Judy's legal name](#) was Frances Ethel Gumm, after her parents, Frank and Ethel. The couple had expected a boy after having two girls, and [planned to name him Frank Jr.](#), so Frances was both a compromise and an inside joke. In everyday life, she was simply known as “Baby” or “Baby Gumm.” The last name “Garland” came about while she and her sisters, then known as the Gumm Sisters, were touring. “Gumm Sisters” didn’t exactly roll off the tongue, and a popular comedian emceeding a series of performances came up with “Garland Sisters.”

“Judy,” however, didn’t come until later, and for a time she was known professionally as Frances Garland. The first name came along after one of her older sisters decided to go by a stage name. Sick of both “Baby” and “Frances,” she picked her own fresh moniker from Hoagy Carmichael’s latest hit, “Judy.” She was [especially drawn](#) to one line: “If she seems a saint but you find that she ain’t, that’s Judy.” She encountered some family resistance to the new name, but refused to respond to anything but “Judy” as soon as she’d made her decision, so it stuck pretty quickly.

Marilyn Monroe Had a Close Friendship With Singer Ella Fitzgerald



Credit: [Bettmann](#) via [Getty Images](#)

[At the recommendation of a music coach](#), Marilyn Monroe spent hours listening to Ella Fitzgerald recordings while trying to train her own voice. After Monroe first saw Fitzgerald perform live in 1954, the pair rapidly became friends, sharing a common bond through their life experiences. A year later, when the “First Lady of Song” had trouble booking a gig at legendary L.A. nightclub Mocambo — the owners thought Fitzgerald [wasn’t svelte and glamorous enough](#) to draw a crowd — Monroe used her star power to step in.

“She personally called the owner of the Mocambo, and told him she wanted me booked immediately, and if he would do it, she would take a front table every night,” [recalled Fitzgerald](#). “She told him — and it was true, due to Marilyn's superstar status — that the press would go wild. The owner said yes, and Marilyn was there, front table, every night. The press went overboard. After that, I never had to play a small jazz club again.”

Frank Sinatra Was a Member of Two Rat Packs



Credit: [Mondadori Portfolio via Getty Images](#)

The Rat Pack is best known as a group of entertainers including Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Dean Martin, Joey Bishop, and Peter Lawford. They frequently teamed up both on- and off-screen, most famously in the 1960 heist film *Ocean's 11* and as regulars on the Las Vegas circuit. But the Rat Pack most of us know was actually the second iteration of the group. The first Rat Pack formed in the 1950s around actor Humphrey Bogart, whose wife, actress Lauren Bacall, came up with the name after a wild weekend in Vegas with friends including Sinatra, Judy Garland, and David Niven. The story goes that Bacall took one look at the disheveled and sleep-deprived crew and told them they looked like a “rat pack.” The sobriquet stuck, and a Hollywood legend was born. After Bogie’s death in 1957, Sinatra took over the group and added some of his close friends as members, though they reportedly referred to themselves as “the Clan” or “the Summit.”

Bette Davis Failed Multiple Hollywood Screen Tests



Credit: [Bettmann](#) via [Getty Images](#)

[In 1930](#), a scout for Universal Studios saw Bette Davis in [Solid South](#) and invited her to screen test. It didn't go very well. Davis arrived in Hollywood with her mother, but the studio representative sent to meet her at the train [left because he claimed](#) not to see anyone who looked like an actress. A movie executive watched one screen test and announced she had [no sex appeal](#). In others, she was rejected because of crooked teeth. She even once recalled fleeing the room, [screaming](#), after seeing herself on-screen. Universal eventually offered her a contract, but she was given small, forgettable roles. Davis was preparing to return to New York when Warner Bros. offered her a contract — and then she was on her way to stardom.

Miss Piggy's Name Is Short for "Pigathius," From the Greek Meaning "River of Passion"



Credit: [TV Times](#) via [Getty Images](#)

[Not unlike Madonna](#), Lady Gaga, and other world-famous divas, Miss Piggy has never deigned to use her full name among us mere mortals. If she had, more of us might know that her first name is actually short for "Pigathius," which comes from a Greek word supposedly meaning "[river of passion](#)." Given her tumultuous love affair with a certain green frog, it's more than fitting. Her last name, meanwhile, is [Lee](#), which Muppets creator Jim Henson referenced in a 1974 note describing her as "delicate and lovely" (accurate).

Shirley Temple Was a U.S. Ambassador



Credit: [brandstaetter images/ Hulton Archive via Getty Images](#)

[If you're ever looking](#) for a counterexample to F. Scott Fitzgerald's famous claim that "[there are no second acts in American lives,](#)" look no further than Shirley Temple. The beloved child star, who was Hollywood's No. 1 box-office draw from [1935 to 1938](#), announced her retirement from film at the age of 22 in [1950](#). It was anyone's guess what Temple would do next, but it's unlikely that many predicted her eventual [diplomatic career](#). After she ran (unsuccessfully) for Congress in 1967, President Nixon [appointed her](#) as a delegate to the 24th United Nations General Assembly in 1969, and President Ford named her the ambassador to Ghana in 1974. Temple's foreign service didn't end there. In 1989, just before the [Velvet Revolution](#), President George H.W. Bush made her ambassador to the former Czechoslovakia, a post she held until 1992, as the country became a parliamentary democracy. [According to Norman Eisen](#), who held the same role from 2011 to 2014, the "sunny confidence and optimism" that made Temple a movie star also helped her "really infuse the United States' role — as our representative here, in the Velvet Revolution — with that good cheer and that hope."

Liza Minnelli Lost Out on the “Cabaret” Stage Role That Later Won Her an Oscar



Credit: [Silver Screen Collection/ Moviepix via Getty Images](#)

[Liza Minnelli](#) is perhaps best known for the role of Sally Bowles in *Cabaret*, but when the musical first [opened](#) on Broadway in 1966, she didn't have the part. Though she [auditioned](#) for the role, Minnelli [was rejected](#) in favor of actress Jill Haworth due to a perceived lack of experience. While it may be natural to feel pessimistic in the wake of a rejection, Minnelli [claims](#) her optimism remained undeterred, stating that she “knew [she'd] get the movie for some reason.”

When producers were casting for the 1972 film version, Minnelli was working in Paris and [invited](#) one of them to a show at which she performed the titular song, “Cabaret.” Though she initially struggled to convince the producers to hire her, that performance ultimately won her the part. The film version of *Cabaret*, directed by Bob Fosse, earned Minnelli her first and only Academy Award. She was 27 at the time.

Elizabeth Taylor Had “Violet” Eyes and a Double Set of Eyelashes



Credit: [Silver Screen Collection/ Moviepix via Getty Images](#)

In 1970, when *Hollywood Reporter* film critic Todd McCarthy first met Taylor, he was stopped in his tracks by “[a pair of eyes unlike any I’ve ever beheld](#), before or since; deep violet [eyes](#) of a sort withheld from ordinary mortals.”

However, while Taylor’s eyes are typically credited as violet, they were more likely a deep blue with an [uncommon amount of melanin](#) in the irises, which made them appear violet when she wore specific colors. This inspired her to often wear black eyeliner with blue, purple, or dark brown eyeshadow to bring out her trademark color.

Framing those famous eyes were Taylor’s double row of eyelashes, known as distichiasis, the result of a mutation of FOXC2, a gene responsible for embryonic tissue development. While this heavy, second set of eyelashes can cause complications for some, they quickly became a notable part of Taylor’s beauty at a young age. When she was filming *Lassie Come Home* (1943) at the age of 9, Taylor was accused of wearing too much mascara, and when production members tried to clean it off, they realized the dark shade was her own eyelashes. As Taylor’s *Lassie* co-star Roddy McDowall remembered, “Who has double eyelashes except a girl who was absolutely born to be on the big screen?”

Lucille Ball Was One of the First Women to Appear Pregnant on Network TV



Credit: [Archive Photos](#) via [Getty Images](#)

[Pregnant characters](#) are commonplace now, but in the 1950s, [Lucy's television pregnancy](#) was groundbreaking. Both CBS and the show's sponsor, Philip Morris, were so concerned about airing this seemingly suggestive idea that they had the production studio work with various religious organizations to determine how to most sensitively express this supposedly controversial plot point. Ultimately, the producers agreed to avoid the word "pregnant," going with the euphemism "expecting" (and similar terms) instead. The then-radical six-episode pregnancy arc paid off, as over [44 million](#) people tuned in on January 19, 1953, to see Lucy welcome her son Little Ricky. The episode, titled "Lucy Goes to the Hospital," aired the same day Ball actually gave birth by planned cesarean section to Desi Arnaz Jr.

The FBI Kept a File on Frank Sinatra for 40 Years



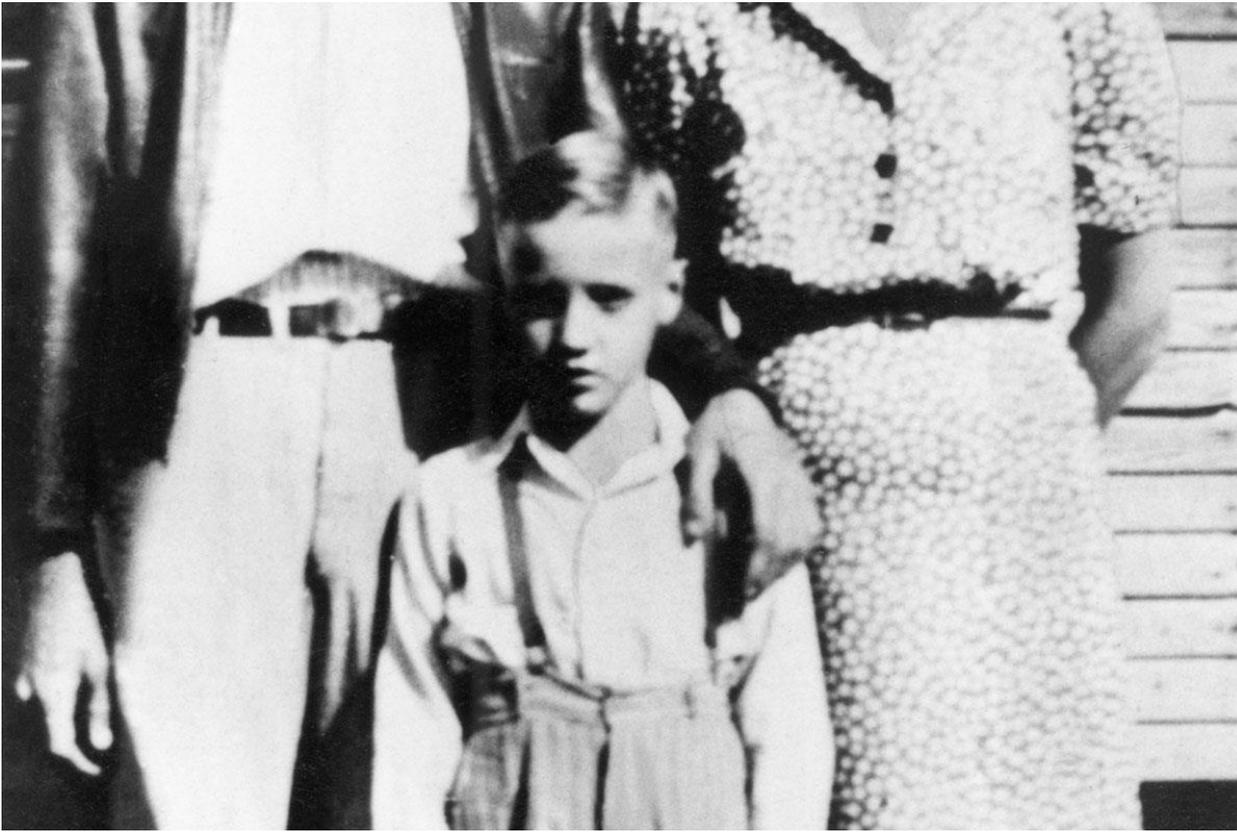
Credit: [Bettmann via Getty Images](#)

[Bobby-soxers weren't the only ones](#) who followed Frank Sinatra's every move. [The FBI kept a massive file](#) on him, detailing his life and relationships for four decades. They were especially interested in his alleged ties to people involved with organized crime. Sinatra reportedly had a friendship with Chicago crime boss Sam Giancana, and was also said to have received gifts from Joseph and Charles Fischetti, who ran an illegal gambling operation. The file even includes an account of him making an appearance in Atlantic City during the wedding of Philadelphia mob boss Angelo Bruno's daughter.

Sinatra wasn't exactly shy about his social interactions with mafiosi — they owned many of the establishments where he performed, after all — but he steadfastly denied having any close personal or business connections to the mob, and resented the many rumors implying otherwise. He famously [took issue with *The Godfather*](#) because of the perception that the character Johnny Fontane, a singer with ties to organized crime families, was based on him. According to author Mario Puzo, who wrote the novel that inspired the film, he and [Sinatra got into an argument](#) over the insinuation at a restaurant near Beverly Hills.

Sinatra's FBI file wasn't just a record of his own comings and goings, of course. It also included threats made against him by would-be extortioners and blackmailers, as well as details of the bureau's investigation into the 1963 [kidnapping of his son Frank Sinatra Jr.](#) (Frank Jr. was rescued, and all three kidnappers were caught and convicted.)

Elvis Was a Natural Blond and Used Shoe Polish as Hair Dye



Credit: [RB/ Redferns via Getty Images](#)

You'd be hard-pressed to find evidence of Elvis' natural blond hairstyle, as only one known photo exists, hanging on the wall of Graceland. From a young age, Elvis dyed his hair jet black with shoe polish — which was cheaper than hair dye — in an effort to make his blue eyes stand out. Elvis also began applying eyeliner to further accentuate his eyes around 1960, a trick he learned from actor Tony Curtis. As Elvis rose to fame, he continued to dye his hair to maintain his image, though he eventually shifted from shoe polish to a patented hair dye combination of Miss Clairol 51D and Black Velvet/Mink Brown by Paramount. Elvis later enlisted the services of Larry Geller, a beloved stylist in West Hollywood who also worked with stars such as Marlon Brando and Steve McQueen.

MGM Made Judy Garland Wear Nose-Altering Accessories



Credit: [Bettmann via Getty Images](#)

[Judy Garland](#) rose to superstardom with her doe-eyed look, but in her days at MGM, she was considered, however unfairly, a kind of ugly duckling compared to the more willowy starlets in the MGM stable. In her earlier years, when the priority was preserving her childlike look, she carried [rubber discs](#) in a small carrying case, along with caps for her teeth. She'd insert the discs in her nose to give it a more upturned look. Because the studio wanted to keep her looking as young as possible, her breasts were also often bound.

Once she was a little older and starring in less-childlike roles, such as Esther Smith in *Meet Me in St. Louis*, she started wearing a canvas and metal corset that required two people on either side to pull the strings tight. (It's a wonder she was still able to sing.)

Humphrey Bogart Loved Chess



Credit: [Archive Photos](#) via [Getty Images](#)

[Humphrey Bogart](#) famously [plays chess in *Casablanca*](#), and the scenes may have been written into the script to please him. In real life, as a young man, he was said to [hustle players for dimes and quarters in New York parks and at Coney Island](#). Bogart was also a chess tournament director, and active in a Hollywood chess club. In a June 1945 interview, he said that he played chess almost daily, and described the game as one of his main interests.

Marilyn Monroe's First Job Was Building Drones



Credit: [Hulton Archive/ Archive Photos via Getty Images](#)

[Monroe's late teens](#) coincided with World War II, and at age 18, she started [working 10 hours a day](#) for a company called Radioplane, which manufactured small, unmanned aircraft used to drop explosives. Her job was inspecting the aircraft parachutes and [spraying them with fire retardant](#).

It was here at the drone factory that Monroe got her start in modeling — a career she hadn't considered before. A photographer with the United States Army was assigned to take photos of women in war production (inspired by "Rosie the Riveter"), and one of those photos — of a smiling Monroe holding a propeller — was published in an Army magazine in 1945. Soon, Monroe became a [sought-after model and pin-up girl](#), and eventually that success led to a screen test with 20th Century Fox.

Elizabeth Taylor Was the First Actress To Earn \$1 Million



Credit: [Silver Screen Collection/ Moviepix via Getty Images](#)

[Elizabeth Taylor](#) was the [first actress to earn more than \\$1 million](#) for a single movie, for 1963's *Cleopatra*. When the movie was first planned, her \$1 million salary was half of the original budget. As the film's budget boomed to \$31 million, Taylor's paycheck did as well — to \$7 million (around \$54 million in 2022).

From her youth, Taylor had been a [bold negotiator](#) and wasn't afraid to ask for what she was worth or to end a negotiation that wasn't going her way. Originally, she had little interest in starring in *Cleopatra*, which inspired [her bold pay request](#) of \$1 million and 10% of the box-office gross, thinking there was no chance 20th Century Fox would agree to her terms. To everyone's surprise, they did. As she later [said](#), "If someone is dumb enough to offer me a million dollars to make a picture, I'm certainly not dumb enough to turn it down."

A Low Asking Price Led to Clint Eastwood's First Big-Screen Starring Role



Credit: [Silver Screen Collection/ Moviepix via Getty Images](#)

[In hindsight](#), it seems logical that Clint Eastwood made the winning leap from cattle driver Rowdy Yates on *Rawhide* to the (mostly) nameless gunslinger of *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), but success was no sure thing at the time. For starters, Eastwood received the opportunity largely because [he was cheaper](#) than other prominent American actors — not always a great sign for the overall viability of a project. There was also the matter of communication issues, as Italian director Sergio Leone spoke little English. And then there was the [lawsuit](#) filed by Japanese director Akira Kurosawa, who accused Leone of copying his samurai movie *Yojimbo* (1961). Despite the production troubles, *Fistful* and its sequels *For a Few Dollars More* (1965) and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966) became overseas hits before finally reaching American shores in 1967, paving the way for Eastwood's big-screen career to take off.

Paul Newman Earned Two Oscar Nominations for One Character



Credit: [Silver Screen Collection/ Moviepix via Getty Images](#)

[Paul Newman](#) is [one of just six actors](#) to receive Academy Award nominations for playing the same character in two separate films. He first earned a nod for the role of ambitious pool shark "Fast" Eddie Felson in *The Hustler* (1961), and later won his first and only competitive Oscar after returning as an aging Nelson in *The Color of Money* (1986). The other five actors with this distinction are: Bing Crosby, as Father Chuck O'Malley in *Going My Way* (1944) and *The Bells of St. Mary's* (1945); Peter O'Toole, as King Henry II in *Becket* (1964) and *The Lion in Winter* (1968); Al Pacino, as Michael Corleone in *The Godfather* (1972) and *The Godfather: Part II* (1974); Cate Blanchett, as Queen Elizabeth I in *Elizabeth* (1998) and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007); and Sylvester Stallone, as Rocky Balboa in *Rocky* (1976) and *Creed* (2015).

Lucille Ball Helped Get “Star Trek” on TV



Credit: [Bettmann via Getty Images](#)

[As the first female](#) head of a major Hollywood studio — Desilu Productions, which she formed with husband Desi Arnaz but took over by herself after their divorce in 1960 — Lucille Ball helped produce some of the most influential television shows of all time. She was particularly instrumental in getting [Star Trek on the air](#). There was apparently some trepidation by Desilu board members when it came to the budget of the ambitious series, leaving Ball to [personally finance](#) not one but two pilots of the science fiction mainstay. One studio accountant, Edwin “Ed” Holly, even claimed: “If it were not for Lucy, there would be no *Star Trek* today.” Lucille Ball truly allowed the show to live long and prosper.

Grace Kelly's Romance With Prince Rainier Got Off to a Rocky Start



Credit: [Keystone/ Hulton Archive via Getty Images](#)

[According to](#) Donald Spoto's [High Society: The Life of Grace Kelly](#), Kelly was in France to attend the 1955 Cannes Film Festival when she agreed to travel to Monaco to meet Prince Rainier III (part of a scheme put together by the magazine *Paris-Match* for a photo story). However, the prince was delayed by a commitment elsewhere, and by the time he rushed back to his palace an hour late, his fed-up guest was ready to leave. When Rainier asked if she wanted to tour the palace, Kelly coolly replied that she'd already done so while waiting. They subsequently relaxed while walking through the palace garden, their brief meeting giving rise to an epistolary friendship that turned romantic, and eventually led to their "[wedding of the century](#)" in April 1956.

Clint Eastwood Became Dirty Harry After Other Stars Passed on the Part



Credit: [Silver Screen Collection/ Moviepix via Getty Images](#)

Other than his Man with No Name antihero from the *Dollars Trilogy*, Clint Eastwood is perhaps best known for portraying “Dirty Harry” Callahan across five films. But that famous role also nearly went to someone else, as Robert Mitchum and Steve McQueen were reportedly among the big-name stars who rejected the offer. According to Eastwood, it was [Paul Newman](#) who first tipped off a studio executive that the erstwhile spaghetti Western star would be a good fit for the part. After Frank Sinatra pulled out of the movie, *Dirty Harry* finally moved ahead with the man who would become its iconic, magnum-toting lead.

Katharine Hepburn Performed Her Own Stunts



Credit: [Bettmann via Getty Images](#)

It wasn't quite Jackie Chan territory, but Katharine Hepburn insisted on doing her own stunts to preserve the authenticity of her shoots. Yes, that's her dangling from Grant's grasp off the scaffold at the end of *Bringing Up Baby*, and that's her tumbling into an unsanitary Venetian canal in *Summertime* (1955). Furthermore, advancing years did little to dampen her enthusiasm for such exertion: She endured horseback rides across treacherous terrain for *Rooster Cogburn* (1975), less than a year after undergoing hip surgery, and insisted on doing her own dives into frigid waters for *On Golden Pond* (1981), a few weeks after having an operation for a separated shoulder.

Grace Kelly Enjoyed a Running Gag With Alec Guinness



Credit: [Keystone/ Hulton Archive via Getty Images](#)

[Grace Kelly](#) and Alec Guinness engaged in a running gag that lasted more than two decades after their time together on the prank-filled set of *The Swan* (1956). After Kelly relentlessly teased her co-star about an overzealous fan, Guinness retaliated by having a concierge slip a tomahawk into her hotel bed. A few years later, Guinness was surprised to return to his London home and discover the same tomahawk nestled between his bedsheets. He later enlisted English actor John Westbrook to redeliver the item while Kelly and Westbrook toured the U.S. for a poetry reading during the 1970s, but her highness got the last laugh when Guinness again found the tomahawk in his Beverly Hills hotel bed in 1979.