

## December Bride Notes

December Bride began on radio in 1952 and made the transition to television two years later, debuting on CBS on 4 October 1954.

**December Bride** is an American sitcom that aired on the CBS television network from 1954 to 1959. It was adapted from the original CBS radio network series of the same name that aired from June 1952 through September 1953. Doris Singleton and Hal March played Lily's daughter and son-in-law, Ruth and Matt Henshaw.

Lily's daughter, Ruth (Frances Rafferty) and her husband Matt (Dean Miller), with whom she lived at 728 Elm Street (later 728 North Palm Drive) in Westwood, California.

December Bride aired in the coveted time slot behind *I Love Lucy* on Monday nights (Desilu co-produced it) and the show soon became a top-ten series, running for five seasons.

The character of Lily was based on creator Parke Levy's own mother-in-law.

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## December Bride - Cast

**Spring Byington** - In 1903, she joined a repertory company, Belasco De Mille Company of New York. Between 1903 and 1916, the company performed American plays, translated into Spanish and Portuguese in Argentina and Brazil.

Byington worked on Broadway in 18 productions in the ten years from 1925 to 1935. These included roles in George S. Kaufman's and Moss Hart's *Once in A Lifetime*, Rachel Crothers's *When Ladies Meet* and Dawn Powell's *Jig Saw*.

In her final years on Broadway, Byington began to work in films. She was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for *You Can't Take It With You* in 1938.

During the early 1940's, Byington began to work in radio and continued with it as her film career began to decline after the war. In 1952, she joined CBS Radio to play the lead role of the widowed Lily Ruskin in *December Bride*. In 1954, Desilu Productions produced a television pilot of that show which was successful. The new hit sitcom aired in its first two seasons immediately following *I Love Lucy*. *December Bride* broadcast 111 episodes through 1959.

From 1961 to 1963, Byington was cast as Daisy Cooper in the western series *Laramie*. Byington also guest starred in a 1963 episode of *Mister Ed*. She later appeared as Mrs. Jolly on the comedy drama *Kentucky Jones* and as wealthy J. Pauline Spaghetti in an episode of *Batman* in 1966. Additionally, she appeared as Larry Hagman's mother on *I Dream of Jeannie*. Her final role was in 1968 as Mother General on ABC's *The Flying Nun*.

**Verna Felton** - provided the voices for the Walt Disney animated feature films *Dumbo* (1941) as the Elephant Matriarch and Mrs. Jumbo, *Dumbo's Mother*, *Cinderella* (1950) as The Fairy Godmother, *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) as the Queen of Hearts, *Lady and The Tramp* (1955) as Aunt Sarah, Jim Dear's aunt (Felton's son voiced Jim Dear and the dogcatcher), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) as Flora, the Red Fairy and Queen Leah, Princess Aurora's mother, *Goliath II* (1960) as Eloise, *The Man From Button Willow* (1965) as Mrs. Pomeroy, Mother and Lady on Trolley, *The Jungle Book* (1967) as Winifred the Elephant (her final role, animated or live-action)

**Frances Rafferty** - was born in Sioux City, Iowa. At the age of nine she moved with her family to Los Angeles, California where she studied dancing which eventually led to work in the film industry.

After signing with MGM Studios, Rafferty made her film debut in 1942. Her only major film role was in *Abbott and Costello in Hollywood* in 1945.

During World War II she was a volunteer pin-up girl for YANK magazine.

From 1954 to 1959, she appeared as Ruth Ruskin Henshaw in all of the episodes of *December Bride*. When Harry Morgan and Cara Williams starred in another CBS sitcom, *Pete and Gladys* in 1960, Rafferty was subsequently cast in seven episodes in the role of Nancy.

She appeared in a number of different television programs throughout the 1950's and 1960's including two guest appearances on *Perry Mason* and *My Three Sons*. After her retirement from acting in 1965, she made a final appearance in a 1977 episode of *The Streets of San Francisco*.

**Dean Miller** - was born Dean C. Stuhlmüller in Hamilton, Ohio. He eventually moved to Hollywood, California making his film debut as Archie O'Conovan in the 1952 film *Skirts Ahoy!*. In 1954 Miller was chosen to work on the television series *December Bride*, in which he played Matt Henshaw, an architect.

After *December Bride*, Miller acted only two other times in a television series. In 1959, he appeared in an episode of the CBS series *The Millionaire* and in 1960, he was in the episode entitled "Happily Unmarried" of the sitcom *The Tab Hunter Show*.

He later went to work on *Here's Hollywood*, where he often interviewed movie stars and singers in their homes. In 1963, Miller was a guest on *Your First Impression*, hosted by Bill Leyden and Dennis James.

In 1965, Miller acquired the radio station WMVR-FM (105.5) of Sidney, Ohio. Later, he worked as a news anchor for Detroit's WDIV-TV station.

**Harry Morgan** - was born Harry Bratsberg in Detroit, Michigan. He began acting on stage under his birth name in 1937 when joining the Group Theatre in New York City.

Morgan made his screen debut (originally using the name Henry Morgan) in the 1942 movie *To The Shores Of Tripoli*. His screen name later became Harry Morgan to avoid confusion with the popular humorist of the same name.

He continued to play a number of significant roles on the big screen in such films as *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1943), *High Noon* (1952) and *The Glenn Miller Story* (1954).

Morgan hosted the NBC radio series *Mystery In The Air* starring Peter Lorre in 1947.

Morgan had never listened to the radio show *December Bride*, until he auditioned for the role of Pete Porter. He met Spring Byington in the movie *Dragonwyck*. Eight years later, he would later co-star as her wisecracking neighbor on *December Bride*. Spring Byington was Morgan's mentor.

On CBS, he played Pete Porter in *Pete and Gladys* (1960–1962) with Cara Williams as his wife which was a spin-off of *December Bride* (1954–1959). He is even more widely recognized as Officer Bill Gannon, Joe Friday's partner in the updated version of *Dragnet* from 1967 to 1970.

Morgan joined the cast of *M\*A\*S\*H* as Colonel Sherman T. Potter, replacing McLean Stevenson, who had left the show. Morgan would appear in 180 episodes of that series.

## **Lily Ruskin Arrives**

with Harry Cheshire, Moroni Olsen

Aired Monday, October 4, 1954 at 9:30PM on CBS.

**Harry Cheshire** (Gus) - A character actor who often played bankers and western townsmen, but could be an effective villain. His best known role was as Judge Ben Wiley in the TV series *Buffalo Bill, Jr.* in 1955. With his raspy voice, Cheshire also played the parts of bankers and western townsmen, but occasionally outlaws as well.

Cheshire was active on stage with the Hi Jinks Company and Liberty Players acting troupes.

Cheshire appeared as Judge Trager between 1958 and 1962 in fifteen episodes of the western series, *Lawman*, with John Russell and Peter Brown.

He also acted in 110 films from 1940 to 1964 including: *Dick Tracy vs. Cueball*, *Mother Wore Tights*, *Nightmare Alley*, *The Babe Ruth Story*, *Ma and Pa Kettle*, *Miss Grant Takes Richmond*, *Phffft!*, *The Seven Little Foys*, *My Man Godfrey* and *The Big Country*.

**Moroni Olsen** (Policeman) - was one of Hollywood's more popular performers of film during the late 1930's, 1940's and early 1950's.

Moroni Olsen got his start on Broadway in *The Cat And The Canary* which he wrote and starred in under the pen name John Willard. Olsen was also on Broadway portraying Jason in *Medea* in 1920. He continued in New York for a few years with a series of classical plays that included *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Mr. Faust* and *Candida*.

Olsen made his film debut as Porthos in *The Three Musketeers* in 1935. He played Buffalo Bill opposite Barbara Stanwyck in *Annie Oakley* in 1935. In between film assignments Olsen was active with the Pasadena Playhouse as both director and performer.

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## **Stan Loses His Nerve**

with Dick Elliott, Lisa Gaye and Jim Davis.

Aired Thursday, March 19, 1959 at 8:00PM on CBS.

**Lisa Gaye** - Her mother was determined that Gaye and her siblings make their careers in show business. Her siblings, Judith (Teala Loring), Debralee (Debra Paget), and Frank (Ruell Shayne), all entered the business as either cast or crew member.

At 17, Lisa signed a seven-year contract with Universal Studios and was enrolled in the studio's professional school for actors and actresses. Her first starring role was in *Drums Across The River* in 1954. She appeared in 13 films between 1954 and 1967.

Among Lisa's television appearances were three episodes of *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show* in 1956, 13 episodes of *The Bob Cummings Show*, five episodes each of *Hawaiian Eye* and *77 Sunset Strip*, two episodes of *Bourbon Street Beat*, seven episodes of *Perry Mason* and eleven episodes of *Death Valley Days*, along with several episodes of *Sea Hunt*. She retired from acting in 1970.

**Jim Davis** - was born as Marlin Davis in 1909. He worked in a variety of different jobs before pursuing a career in acting. In 1954–1955, Davis starred and narrated television series, *Stories of the Century*. He also appeared 13 times on *Death Valley Days*. From 1958-1960, Davis starred as Wes Cameron in the adventure series *Rescue 8*. At the same time, he guest starred on *U.S. Marshal*. His first major screen role was opposite Bette Davis in *Winter Meeting*.

Additionally, Davis appeared on *Gunsmoke*, *Daniel Boone*, *Wagon Train* and *Laramie*. He also appeared in an episode of *The High Chaparral* and in small roles in the 1971 John Wayne vehicles *Río Lobo* in 1970 and *Big Jake* in 1971. After years of low-profile roles, Davis was cast as family patriarch Jock Ewing on *Dallas*, which debuted in 1978. Davis died during season four of *Dallas*.

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## **Pete and Gladys Notes**

*Pete and Gladys* aired on CBS on Mondays at 8:00 PM for two seasons. September 19, 1960 to September 10, 1962.

This series was filmed at Paramount studios in Hollywood.

In this spin-off series, Gladys is married to Pete who is an insurance salesman. The couple resided in Westwood, California.



A carryover from *December Bride* during the first season was the character of Hilda Crocker (Verna Felton), who appeared in 23 episodes. Frances Rafferty, another *December Bride* veteran, appeared in seven episodes as Nancy (a different character from her role in the original series). Barbara Stuart had a recurring first-season role as Gladys' friend Alice and Ernest Truex appeared in six episodes as Gladys' widowed father, "Pop".

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### **Garden Wedding**

Aired Monday evening, January 22, 1962 at 8:00PM on CBS.

**Cara Williams** - first professional acting job was supplying vocal impressions of famous movie stars for animated cartoons. At the age of 17, she was signed to a 20th Century Fox contract. She replaced Judy Holliday in the Broadway production of *Born Yesterday*. She was nominated for an Academy Award for her portrayal of a sex-starved farm woman in *The Defiant Ones* in 1958.

With her flaming red hair and comic timing, Williams was touted as "the new Lucille Ball" on the CBS sitcoms *Pete and Gladys* in 1961 and *The Cara Williams Show* in 1964. She was briefly a regular on the late 1970's television series *Rhoda*.

She was nominated for a 1962 Emmy Award for Outstanding Continued Performance by a Lead Actress in a Comedy Series, but she lost to Shirley Booth of NBC's *Hazel*.

**Harry Morgan** - Cara Williams met Harry Morgan in the 1948 film, *The Saxon Charm*.

Morgan began his eight-year association with Jack Webb, and Universal Studios starting with *Dragnet 1967* in which he played Officer Bill Gannon. Morgan would later work with Webb in the short-lived series, *The D.A.* in 1971.

Morgan's biggest role was that of a tough-talking Army Officer, Col. Sherman T. Potter on *M\*A\*S\*H* (1972). In several episodes of *M\*A\*S\*H*, Col. Potter was seen painting portraits, mainly of the other characters. These portraits were actually painted by Harry Morgan.

He was nominated for Emmy Awards nine times and won his first and only Emmy in 1980, for Outstanding Supporting Actor.

Morgan reprised his role as Officer Bill Gannon in the film, *Dragnet* in 1987 with Dan Aykroyd and Tom Hanks.

Appeared on the front cover of TV Guide six times.

**Quotes from Harry Morgan:** "Loretta Swit called me from London, I think she's probably my best friend. She didn't even call collect."

**Bob Hastings** - got his show business start in radio as the voice of "Archie Andrews" in the show of the same name on the Mutual Broadcasting System. Hastings made the transition to television in 1949 in *Captain Video and His Video Rangers* and *Atom Squad*. His first semi-recurring role was on *The Phil Silvers Show* aka *Sgt. Bilko*. Most of his career in television made him memorable for roles such as Captain Binghamton's yes-man Lieutenant Elroy Carpenter on *McHale's Navy* and Kelsey, the owner of Kelsey's Bar, in *All in the Family*.

**Christine Nelson** - was married to Louis Quinn for 36 years. She was an actress and entertainer in television, film and night clubs. Nelson made guest appearances on *77 Sunset Strip* four times with her husband during its run and joined Quinn again as lighthouse keepers Mr. and Mrs. Keeper in the *Batman* television episode *The Joke's On Catwoman*.

**Will Wright** - San Franciscan Will Wright was a newspaper reporter before going to vaudeville, stage and radio. He specialized in playing crusty old codgers, rich skinflints and crooked small-town politicians. He ventured from acting to producing and staged shows on Broadway, eventually making his way to Hollywood. He appeared in over 100 films and television, including a recurring role on *The Andy Griffith Show*. He was also the voice of the remonstrative Owl in the Disney cartoon feature *Bambi*. His main source of income was his successful Los Angeles ice cream emporium, which was as popular with the movie people and local patrons. His ice cream shops provided temporary employment for many young aspiring actors.

**Olan Soule** - Over a 42 year career, Soule made 272 appearances in films and television. He began his acting career in 1926 on radio, performing for 11 years in the daytime soap opera *Bachelor's Children*. Soule was the male lead characters in plays presented on the evening radio show *First Nighter* for 9 years beginning in 1943. He made many appearances on *Dragnet 1967*, *My Three Sons*, *Arnie*, *Rawhide*, *Perry Mason* and *The Andy Griffith Show*.

**Charles Lane** - Among his cranky roles, Lane appeared in *Twentieth Century*, *You Can't Take It with You*, *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington*, *It's A Wonderful Life* and *No Time For Sergeants*. A mainstay for Frank Capra, the director utilized Lane for nine of his finest films, including *Mr. Deeds Goes To Town*, *Arsenic and Old Lace* and *State Of The Union*.

During the 1950's and 1960's, he could be seen on *Topper* (1953), *The Real McCoys*, *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, *Mister Ed*, *Bewitched*, *Get Smart*, *Gomer Pyle: USMC*, *The Munsters*, *Green Acres*, *The Flying Nun* and *Maude*.

Lane was honored on March 16, 2005, at the TV Land Awards for his long career and his 100th birthday. When he received his award, he said in his still booming voice, "In case anyone's interested, I'm still available!"

**Howard Wendell** - With well over 100 screen credits in films and television, he could be seen in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, *The Loretta Young Show*, *Topper*, *The People's Choice*, *Dragnet*, *Zorro*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show* and *The Adventures Of Ozzie and Harriet*. His final credited television appearance was on *Adam-12*.

During the '40s, Wendell began acting on Cleveland, Ohio radio comedy shows, soon finding work with a touring stage company. He worked with the Elyria Playmakers and was later an apprentice at the Cleveland Playhouse. Later, while traveling across the midwest as an actor, he also began directing plays and acting in summer stock. He transitioned to film and TV in the early 1950's.

From 1947 to 1951, Wendell could be seen on Broadway in plays such as *Make A Wish*, *The Curious Savage*, *Arms and The Man*, *The Show Off* and *The Great Campaign*.

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