

WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

A series of tributes to hometown people and events that have shaped our history.

Ross Ford

Hollywood film moguls appreciated the talent of Terre Haute actor Ross Ford while he was still a teenager enrolled at Indiana State Teachers College.

Ford's meteoric early career — encompassing over 40 feature films between 1943 and 1953 — led to his national recognition from 1952 through 1956 as handsome Johnny Boone Jr. on the CBS television comedy *Meet Millie*, the first series to be broadcast from the network's Hollywood studio. Then, as suddenly as his career catapulted, it faltered. Between 1955 and June 22, 1988 — the day he died at age 65 — he rarely appeared on the screen.



Ford's father Herschel died when he was a youth so Ross was raised by his mother Iva at 226 N. Sixth St. He graduated from Indiana State Laboratory High School in 1940. As an ISTC student, he was active in Sycamore Players, Children's Theater and Delta Lambda Sigma fraternity. In September 1941, Ford was featured in the Sycamore Players' world premiere production of William Saroyan's *Jim Dandy*, which was reviewed by the *New York Times*. In 1942 Ford signed a contract with Warner Brothers to play a juvenile part in the film *Air Force*. The next year, he had roles in three more films: *Mission to Moscow*, *Murder on the Waterfront* and *This is the Army*. Before joining the service in 1944, Ford made *Adventures of Mark Twain* and *The Last Ride*. He also married his college sweetheart Peggy Potter who stayed with his mother at 521 1/2 N. Seventh St. while Ross was overseas. In the two-year period following his discharge, Ford was among Hollywood's busiest young male stars. As a contract player with Warner Brothers and Columbia Pictures, he earned key roles in *Cloak and Dagger*, *Deception*, *Dark Passage*, *Deep Valley*, *My Wild Irish Rose*, *Nora Prentiss*, *The Unfaithful*, *The Unsuspected*, *The Voice of the Turtle*, *Blondie's Reward*, *The Fuller Brush Man*, *The Gallant Blade*, *Jungle Patrol*, *Manhattan Angel*, *The Sign of the Ram* and *Silver River*.

Though none of Ford's films were blockbusters, he continued to make five motion pictures each year — including *Challenge to Lassie*, two Barbary Pirate films, *Air Hostess* and *Frisco Tornado* — until landing the role of Elena Verdugo's exclusive love interest in *Meet Millie*, based upon the successful radio series. While appearing on television, Ford made several films, including *Force of Arms*, *Rough Riders of Durango*, *Street Bandits*, *Blue Canadian Rockies*, *Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder* and *Project Moonbase*.

In 1966 Ford appeared in the film version of Irving Wallace's novel, *The Oscar*. Following his death, film industry periodicals reported that he was survived by his wife, a son and a daughter.

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