

*Pin up*

# The Girl Next Door

The baby of the family, Frances Ethel Gumm was nearly 3 when she joined her older sisters on stage at her parents' Grand Rapids, Minnesota, movie theater in 1924. The trio sang a chorus of *Jingle Bells*. Not quite two years later, the family moved to California, where it bought and operated another theater.

By 1929, the sisters were part of the Meglin Kiddies dance troupe and were making their film debut in a short called *The Big Revue*. A number of film and Vaudeville appearances later, the Gumm sisters became the Garland sisters after their surname was met with laughter during introductions to audiences.

Soon after, Frances adopted a new first name and soon Judy Garland was synonymous with rainbows, ruby slippers and flying monkeys.

Judy Garland was born June 10, 1922, to Francis and Ethel Gumm. Before her untimely death on June 20, 1969, she had won the hearts of a nation—especially GIs serving during World War II. Many of them grew up with Garland, watching her in *The Wizard of Oz* and a series of films with Mickey Rooney.

“When Mickey and Judy Garland appeared together on the big screen, the audience felt good about themselves and their country at the same time,” author Terry Rowan wrote in his book, *World War II Goes to the Movies & Television Guide*.

Garland was the girl next door—and a pin up.

“I admit I am a little on the old-fashioned side. The home type I suspect,” she said during an interview that’s part of a compilation—*Judy Garland on Judy Garland: Interviews and Encounters*, edited by Randy L. Schmidt—that provides readers the closest thing to an autobiography.

The starlet was commenting on the fact she’d let her hair go back to its natural dark brown after lightening it for *The Wizard of Oz*, proclaiming she liked things natural.



Judy Garland autographs defense stamp albums for sailors A.L. Curlee and Ray E. Chatelain in Los Angeles in 1942. Office of War Information photo

Her looks and bearing reinforced the GIs idea of Garland as the girl next door, and they let her know it, even if some of the compliments seem a bit back-handed.

“You’re just like the girl next door at home,” and “Thank God, you haven’t gone glamorous,” are just two of the comments Schmidt included in his compilation.

The entry goes on to say, “Judy is hoping that the boys will like her latest pinup picture. It is a snapshot taken with a tiny brownie camera on her vacation. ... A typical picture the girl next door would take on her summer vacation.”

When she began performing for troops in 1941, she was one of the first. Her efforts took her to places like Fort Hancock, New York, in 1943 where she was photographed with Brigadier General Philip S. Gage, then-commander of New York City Harbor Defense. While her physical appearances were stateside, she made multiple appearances on radio programs like

*Command Performance*, lending her well-known voice to the goal of bringing home to the troops at the front. She also joined her co-star Rooney and dozens of other Hollywood stars to sell war bonds across the country.

In his Andrews Sisters biography, *Swing It!: The Andrews Sisters Story*, John Sforza noted that Garland enjoyed her work with the USO, putting her feeling into words for a 1942 Hollywood Reporter article.

“The immense thrill and gratification of doing what little I could to entertain came first ... the friendships made with the boys and the knowledge that we can never do enough for the soldiers who have left their homes and families to fight our battles.”

Garland wasn’t the traditional pin up, but she had the boys’ hearts from the first time she performed for them in 1941 until Johnny came marching home in 1945. ★ —Samantha L. Quigley is the editor in chief of *On★Patrol* magazine.