

Lucille Warner Capra

Behind most great men, there is a great woman. As we gather this weekend to celebrate Frank Capra's legacy and the ongoing impact of *It's a Wonderful Life*, we feel that it is also important to honor Frank's wife, Lucille Warner Capra.

Joseph McBride, a family friend, commented: "There's no question that she was the inspiration for the kind of women Frank had in his movies. Especially the characters such as Jean Arthur's in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* and the Donna Reed character in *It's A Wonderful Life*. He made the best films after they were married."

Lucille Warner was born on April 23, 1903 in Oakland, California to Myron and Florence Marr Warner. Her grandfather, James, had immigrated to the United States from England.

From 1921 to 1923 Lucille studied at U.C. Berkeley, majoring in English. She loved reading books. She followed her parents to Los Angeles and found work as a stenographer, a UCLA clerk, and as a secretary for a real estate broker.

In 1929 Lucille went to visit a college friend on the San Diego location of the movie *Flight*. Frank Capra was the director. Lu and Frank spent time with mutual friends and finally noticed each other after several days. In his autobiography, Frank said: "What a lovely voice, I thought," and described a long ride they took together under a full moon.

The two were married in 1932 in New York and spent their honeymoon in the Adirondack Mountains for Lake Placid's 1932 winter Olympics. Lucille and Frank had a daughter and three sons. Their second child, John Capra died after a tonsillectomy on August 23, 1938.

Lu was supportive of the demanding and long hours of her director husband. Actress Jean Arthur said of Lu: "She was a person with a most wonderful sense of humor. She was very pretty and very charming and kinda happy, like she was just going to burst out laughing. She always found a joke in something. You felt good when you were around her."

Joseph McBride commented: "She was the first woman, and the only woman, who had no enemies. Everyone was her friend."