

# Patty McCormack



Titles: 8      Sources: 4      Stills: 8

Born: Brooklyn, New York; 21st August 1945

It's interesting to speculate why such a physically attractive and talented child actress, who garnered much critical praise and several awards for her screen debut in "**THE BAD SEED**", should have been given only a scant handful of films to follow. Perhaps she preferred the live stage (perhaps her parents preferred it for her), and possibly being cast first as a cold-blooded murderess, and secondly, in "**KATHY O**", as a spoilt movie brat, tainted her in the eyes of studio casting directors, no stranger to the tantrums of starlets (of either sex).

The idiotic tale (below) by producer Sy Gomberg reflects a certain desperation to assuage misgivings about Patty's offscreen temperament, as did her famous joke spanking at the closing credits of "**THE BAD SEED**" (after the character she played had perished by thunderbolt). It seems unlikely that - as with Skippy Homeier (who similarly transferred a stage performance in "**TOMORROW THE WORLD**" as a full-blooded boy Nazi, onto the screen) - she was unable to adjust her acting technique from the one medium to the other. She was given her own TV series, so one could hardly say she was shunned, but it's mystifying why she should not have had a film career to rival that of Hayley Mills.

Halliwel's Filmgoer's Companion entry:

"American juvenile actress who went to Hollywood to repeat her stage role as the evil child of "**THE BAD SEED**" (56)."

The Universal Story on "**KATHY O**":

"Patty McCormack, who made such a strong impression in Warner Bros' "**THE BAD SEED**" (1956), gave another excellent account of herself in "**KATHY O**", playing Kathy O'Rourke, a famous child star "loved by millions, yet loved by no-one"."

Those Endearing Young Charms entry:

"Born: August 21, 1945. Brooklyn, New York.  
Blond hair, blue eyes.

The pig-tailed lass with the sapphire blue eyes started out in life as a model when she was only

four years old and continued at it for three years, up until the moment she received a television role in a Kraft Theatre episode.

Patty's first real professional break came when her elocution teacher recommended her to an agent friend. The agent, in turn, recommended Patty to Miss Elaine Perry, who was busy arranging a new Broadway hit called "Touchstone". Patty was given a dramatic test, and after passing it brilliantly she was awarded a role in the production. In addition to her elocution lessons, Patty was also occupied with dancing lessons, which she had to relinquish upon acquiring a movie contract at the age of ten.

Patty was an honest-to-goodness tomboy who could often be seen playing baseball with the little leaguers in the lots around her home town of Long Island. When she wasn't playing baseball, Patty enjoyed swimming or just relaxing indoors with her favourite hobby: sketching.

She was educated at the Willard Mace School for Professional Children in Queens, New York, the St. Victor Parochial School in San Fernando, and the Walter Reed Jr. High in Studio City, California.

Her screen roles were "**THE BAD SEED**" (10), "**ALL MINE TO GIVE**" (12), "**KATHY O'**" (12). Her stage credits were "Touchstone" (7), "The Bad Seed" (9). On television she was seen in an episode of "**Sparrows**" (10), a Chrysler special.

While acting in the three media, Patty was recognized many times. Among her awards were the Critics Award for top juvenile performances in "**THE BAD SEED**" he Bad Seed and "**KATHY O'**", an Academy Award nomination for "**THE BAD SEED**", and the Milky Way Gold Star Award as the nation's outstanding juvenile performer of 1956.

Currently, Miss McCormack is carrying on her acting career. She has appeared on television in "**Route 66**" and "**The Wild Wild West**". On the screen she was seen in "**THE BOLD GENERATION**" and "**THE RUNAWAY YEARS**"<sup>1</sup>. Just recently she toured the country in the stage version of "Barefoot in the Park".

Feature article by producer Sy Gomberg: "Kathy O' - the magnificent brat", from **The Film Show Annual** (1958?):

"A few minutes before the preview of "**KATHY O'**" was to start, a famous Hollywood columnist stopped me in the theatre lobby and asked me what Patty McCormack was really like. "**KATHY O'** will prove her to be one of our greatest acting talents" I answered. "And she is a wonderful child." "Stop talking like a producer," the columnist grinned. "I've never met her, but I saw her in **THE BAD SEED** and I want the truth. "

The truth? Well, the truth was that I, too, had felt the same way about Patty before I met her. In "**THE BAD SEED**" she had frightened me out of a year's growth by the horror of the crimes she committed while seeming as angelic

<sup>1</sup> Neither "**THE BOLD GENERATION**" nor "**THE RUNAWAY YEARS**" are listed in any film source I can find. He's presumably referring to "**THE EXPLOSIVE GENERATION**" ('61) and "**THE YOUNG RUNAWAYS**" ('68)

as a Christmas-tree doll. She had lied, cheated and murdered with such naturalness, it was impossible not to believe that she enjoyed it. So, when Universal Pictures signed her to star in "**KATHY O'**" for me, I must admit I was more than a little perturbed.

But then came the first shock. It was a week before production, and I had not yet met Patty. That day I was busy casting the other roles, when she suddenly appeared without any warning. She simply walked in behind a troop of little boys who were being brought into the office to read for minor parts. More surprising was the fact that she was barefooted, wearing faded blue jeans and that her famous yellow pigtails were soaking wet. I stared at her in surprise, and she giggled. When I was finally able to ask her why she had come in a week early, she pointed to a freckle-faced, red-haired boy, and explained that she wanted to help him read for the part. It seems that they were friends and had been swimming in a neighbourhood pool when the studio sent for him.

This was not the attitude of a "little monster". But even when she stayed the rest of the day to help read with all the other little boys, whom she did not know, I was still suspicious. I could not forget that I had seen her play games with her dolls after burning a man to death. During the next week, her costumes were designed and fitted, and shooting tests were made - since the picture was to be photographed in Technicolor and Cinemascope - but nothing happened. She was most co-operative, uncomplaining and sweet to everyone she met. But the very day we were to start shooting, she lost a tooth!

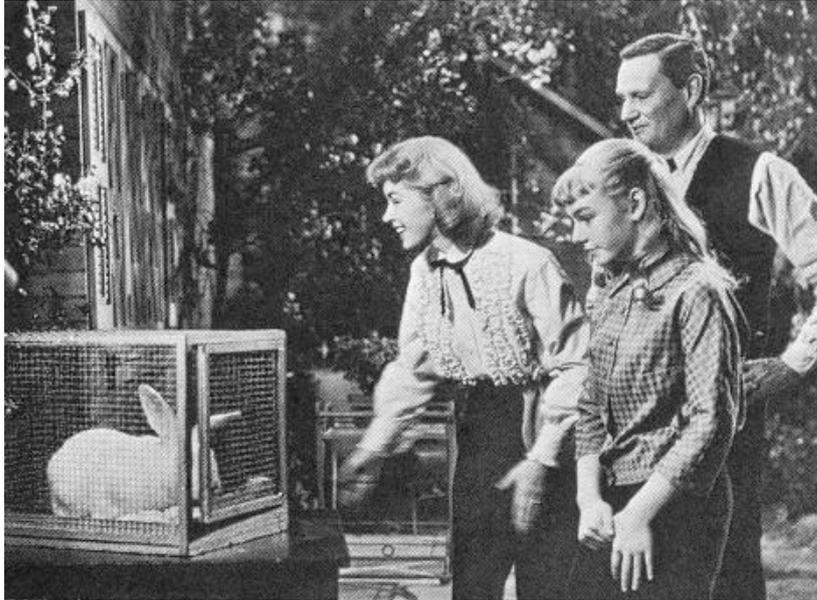
When the average child loses a baby tooth, it is hardly news. When that child happens to be a movie star, it is a crisis. I rushed her to a dentist myself, paced the waiting room while he fashioned a temporary tooth, then rushed her back to the studio for the first scene. The fact that I was in a panic did not seem to ruffle her - and now I was positive that she was diabolic, and that this was merely the beginning.

The next day confirmed it. I was on the set, watching. The director, Jack Sher, had rehearsed Patty and her co-stars - Dan Duryea and Jan Sterling - in a gruelling scene. But just as the cameras were to start, Patty's hand flew to her mouth, and came away with another tooth! A front one, this time, leaving a dark gap that almost made the cameraman faint! But before any of us could recover from the shock, she

began rocking with laughter and held out the tooth - it was fake one, and the gap was merely make-up gum! Everyone else seemed to think it a fine joke but me. I could not forget that she had laughed while describing how she had murdered an old lady.

For two more weeks nothing happened, except that her performance in the picture was absolutely brilliant, and I was beginning to doubt my own estimation of her. In fact, I was beginning to relax, when we set out for the coast of California and a tremendous fishing sequence for the picture. While the cameras were being prepared, Patty slipped away and dropped a hook and line over the side of the camera barge. A moment later she almost went over the side - for she had hooked into a six-foot shark! As we pulled her back to safety, she casually told me that she couldn't swim! I went back on the stomach pills.

But, a week later, Patty read the last line in "KATHY O". As the director called "Cut!" and the cameras stilled, there was a spontaneous burst of applause from the entire cast and crew - for she had done a truly magnificent job in a terribly difficult part. As for me, I applauded, too. For I had learned that Patty McCormack can make any part seem absolutely real, that she adores having fun, and that I wish she were my own daughter. After the preview, the same Hollywood columnist predicted an Academy Award for Patty McCormack's performance - the first for a child in many a year. See "KATHY O" for yourselves. I think you will agree."



*Peck's Bad Girl*

Source: *How Sweet it Was*

## FILMOGRAPHY

Year	Age	Title	Role
--		Kraft Theatre ---	(US TV - live? - drama slot)
56	11	THE BAD SEED †	in title role, Rhoda Penmark
56		AN EPISODE OF SPARROWS	(US TV)
57	12	ALL MINE TO GIVE / THE DAY THEY GAVE BABIES AWAY	as Annabelle Eunson, with <i>Rex Thompson, Butch Bernard, Jon Provost</i>
58	13	KATHY O'	in title role, Kathy O'Rourke
59	14	Peck's Bad Girl	(US TV sitcom, in title role)
60	15	THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN with <i>Eddie Hodges</i>	as Joanna
61	16	THE EXPLOSIVE GENERATION	
68	23	THE YOUNG RUNAWAYS	

[ † her performance received an Academy Award nomination]