

San Bernardino High Alum was James Dean's mom in "Rebel Without A Cause"

By Harvey M. Kahn

Ann Doran graduated from San Bernardino High School in 1929 and, without much fanfare, built an impressive acting portfolio that included 1,500 performances. Doran was seldom a featured actress, however gained much notoriety portraying the mother of James Dean in the 1955 classic, Rebel Without A Cause.

Doran was groomed by her mother **Carrie Barnett**, a silent screen actress, who brought her daughter onstage and in front of cameras as a toddler. Though never gaining star status, Doran was respected by colleagues for her willingness to perform supporting roles. Doran achieved what most could not by transitioning from a child actor to adult actress, then from silent films to those with sound. She eventually adapted to the big screens, and onto the new innovation of television.

San Bernardino historian **Roger Schmidt** said that Doran had the chutzpah to run for student body president at San Bernardino High but lost to **Charles Nance**. At San Bernardino Valley College she was in the 1930 production of Richard Sheridan's 1775 classic, The Rivals, where she had the female lead as the mother, Mrs. Malaprop. The student producer was **Edwin Booth** and **Dr. Ellison** was the theatre arts instructor.

Schmidt admitted that he was not aware of Doran's local association until he read about her in the 1930 SBVC annual called the Oswet. Schmidt found that she was in the SBVC choral group and was in another stage play held



PHOTO COURTESY/WARNER BROTHER

San Bernardino High grad Ann Doran pictured with James Dean in 1955 Academy Award winning, Rebel Without A Cause.

at the Sturgis Auditorium. Before high school Doran had already appeared in the Douglas Fairbanks silent film, Robin Hood.

Doran was born in Amarillo, Texas in 1911 and actively performed from 1922 to 1988. Beginning with her role as the mother at SBVC until the end of her career, she was primarily typecast in a motherly role. She was not only James Dean's screen mom, but portrayed the mother of Natalie Wood, Vera Miles and had the continuous role of Jesse James' mom on a long running TV series. She had supporting roles with John Wayne, Bing Crosby, Cary Grant, Bob Hope, and Gary Cooper.

Reporters like **Syd Love** of the San Diego Union Tribune wrote in 1962 that it took someone with the true professional traits of Doran to understand the importance of strong character roles. Love wrote that, at 20, Doran already had the niche of playing mother, a role that most that age would not find glamorous enough

or simply could not do. Love reported that Doran never married nor had children but was everybody's screen mother.

"I probably had more synthetic children than anyone but I love it. It's been a good living." Doran told Love that she must have said the line "but officer, my son couldn't have done it, he's

such a good boy," at least 150 times. She said that she remained the surrogate mom to James Dean until the day he died. She told Love that Dean was full of vinegar, recalling one day on the set of Rebel Without A Cause: "I had just been made up and had my hair fixed before we were to start shooting when Jimmy coaxed me onto his new motorcycle. I told him to take it easy and he said, 'sure.' He took it easy as fast as he could go through most of the sets on the lot. I was terrified. Although its funny now looking back., it took an hour and a half to get me ready for the camera again."

Doran made the rounds in most early TV shows like The Three Stooges, Lassie, Father Knows Best, Wagon Train, Perry Mason and Little House on the Prairie. Her starring role came in 1938 on Rio Grande. While in San Bernardino, her family was close to that of Julie London. Doran and London both worked with SBHS grad and Academy Award winning makeup artist Edith Head in Hollywood. Doran and Head perhaps also worked with San Bernardino-native and motion picture innovator Marshall Neilan.

Doran told Hollywood reporters, "I never was a beauty of course. So I played the tomboy and later the girlfriend of the heroine."

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at the First Baptist Church, 5500 Alessandro Blvd. in Riverside. This will serve as the first rehearsal and orientation for the Christmas Chorus. Rehearsals will be every Tuesday, October 22 - December 3 from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. at this same location. There will be a \$10 registration fee to cover music and learning tracks. For more information, call 951-317-1365 or go to www.inlandempirechorus.org.

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