

# 'Forget being a sex symbol,

## I just wanted to work!'

Over three hit seasons of *Gilligan's Island*, Dawn Wells turned the character of sweet country girl Mary Ann Summers into a household name. And while decades have passed since the classic series ended, Dawn's passion for the show and its fanbase hasn't changed.

"It was an incredible experience," a smiling Dawn tells *Yours*. "I've done so many other things that were more challenging as an actress, but I can't say a bad word about the show at all."

An unlikely success story, *Gilligan's Island* told the tale of seven very different castaways. Marooned on an uncharted tropical island after their tour boat, the SS *Minnow*, was caught in a storm, the series revolved around the disparate castaways' unsuccessful attempts to escape their situation.

More than five decades on from its 1964 premiere, it's still airing worldwide in more than 30 languages, one of the longest continually running sitcoms.

"It was considered silly and nonsensical when it first aired,

but it has endured for so long. It's never been off the air, which is remarkable," says Dawn, who puts a lot of its success down to the on-set chemistry the cast shared.

"We all enjoyed working with one another," she says. "There was so much talent on that show – great comedy timing, a lot of ridiculousness... everything we did was with a tongue firmly in our cheek and with a grin, and Bob Denver, who played Gilligan, was just fabulous!"

Just as Gilligan became a favourite part of the show thanks to his endearing, bumbling, comedic character, Mary Ann was equally popular, becoming an unforgettable '60s small-screen sweetheart.

"She was the girl you'd want to marry," says Dawn, reflecting on her most famous creation. "She was a pin-up for the soldiers in Vietnam, she was your best friend... I really had no idea at the time that the character I created would have such an impact."

Her loveable Kansas farm-girl alter-ego had its roots very much in



**GOING TROPPO**  
Dawn credits the show's cult success partly to the bond the castaways shared. Today she's as glamorous as ever

reality. Despite growing up in Reno, Nevada (a city synonymous with gambling and legalised prostitution), Dawn was the embodiment of Mary Ann's good-girl persona.

"Mary Ann and I are very much alike," Dawn explains. "I was raised with discipline, good morals and good ethics. I went to church, got straight As, made my bed and always said, 'Thankyou'. I never dreamed of breaking the rules. People ask me if I went to any of the infamous media cocaine parties from those days, but I was never invited. I wasn't a party girl and I didn't go looking for that."

As the good girl among the group of castaways on a tiny island, she was often positioned against the glamorous and exotic Ginger Grant, played by Tina Louise, prompting women the world over to ask one another, "Are you a Ginger or a Mary Ann?". Not that being compared to her sultry co-star bothered Dawn.

"I wasn't in the acting profession to become a sex symbol or to be glamorous, and I didn't want to be a movie star or anything like that – I just wanted to work," she says.

While she didn't seek out sex-symbol status, it happened regardless, and the public fascination with her enviable good looks has continued today. At 77,

Actress **DAWN WELLS, 77** – aka Mary Ann from *Gilligan's Island* – charts the show's unlikely success and the valuable life lessons she's learned

the TV icon could easily pass for decades younger. With glowing, clear, unblemished skin and a slim physique that women half her age would kill for, Dawn still cuts a fine figure on the red carpet. But rather than genes or expensive beauty products, she credits her appearance to good habits developed at a young age.

"As a teenager I had a terrible complexion with really bad acne," she says, cringing. "So while my classmates were naturally beautiful, I spent a lot of time with medication on my face and being desperately conscious about what I ate to try to improve my skin."

"On top of that, I was always on the plump side, which meant I was always dieting. I worked very hard at trying to keep my weight down and my skin in good condition, and I think it just set me up into a good routine."

"I never thought I was going to be a beauty queen."

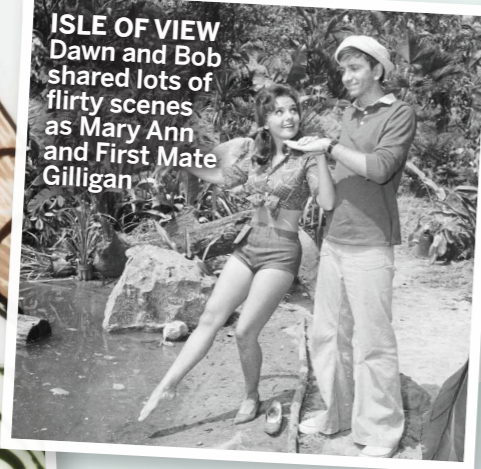
But ageing gracefully has only played a small part in keeping the talented LA-based star as busy as ever. As well as her ongoing acting career, she works as a producer, motivational speaker, teacher and author (she released part-memoir, part-self-help book *What Would Mary Ann Do?: A Guide to Life* in 2014).

"Getting older, you never like what's happening physically – whether it's aches and pains or wrinkles – but you learn as you age that a morality develops inside of you," she muses. "You learn to get over yourself – the world doesn't revolve around you." ●

Dawn will be a guest at Supanova Pop Culture Expo in the Gold Coast on April 9-10 and in Melbourne April 16-17. For more information, visit [supanova.com.au](http://supanova.com.au)



**PRETTY PIN-UP**  
Girl-next-door Dawn cut quite the figure!



**ISLE OF VIEW**  
Dawn and Bob shared lots of flirty scenes as Mary Ann and First Mate Gilligan