

Actress Madge Meredith Was Framed For Staged Kidnapping To Steal Her House

Marjorie May Massow was 20 when in 1941 she moved from Iowa to Hollywood to pursue her dream of being a movie star. She got a job working as a cashier in the 20th Century-Fox commissary in Hollywood.

She was spotted by Nickolas D. "Nick" Gianacis, who was in the restaurant supply business. She agreed for Gianacis to act as her professional and business manager. In 1944 she made her movie debut in the musical "Take It or Leave It," that starred Jeanne Crain. On August 28, 1944 the *Pittsburgh Press*' reviewer wrote on page 10: "'Take It or Leave It' brings to the screen a new and engaging romantic team -- Edward Ryan and Marjorie Massow. ... Red-headed and photogenic, Miss Massow bids fair to become idol of movie fans." She appeared in another movie for 20th Century-Fox before her contract was sold to RKO. She adopted the stage name Madge Meredith, and appeared in several movies, including the 1947 western "Trail Street" that co-starred Randolph Scott and Robert Ryan.

Meredith's modest success enabled her to buy a house in May 1946. The house was high in the Hollywood Hills, and it had a spectacular view that stretched to the Pacific Ocean. The house and two adjoining lots cost \$10,000. She paid \$5,000 down, and Gianacis loaned her the other \$5,000. She took out two life insurance policies naming Gianacis as the beneficiary to ensure the \$5,000 would be paid back.

In the fall of 1946 Meredith and Gianacis became embroiled in a dispute over her business affairs that ignited a conflict over ownership of the house. Gianacis wanted to sell the house and split the proceeds. Meredith refused and asserted that Gianacis' only interest in the property was a trust deed for repayment of the \$5,000 loan. Their professional relationship was officially severed on December 6, 1946 when Gianacis evicted Meredith from the house.

In January 1947 Meredith sued Gianacis. Her lawsuit



Madge Meredith studio publicity photo

asserted she was the sole owner of the Hollywood Hills house and demanded physical return of it to her. After a ten day bench trial that began on June 9, 1947, the judge ruled Meredith was the legal owner and awarded possession of the property to her. The judge **ruled** **that** Gianacis "has no right, title, lien or charge, in, on to or upon said real property by reason of said mortgage or otherwise." The **judge stated** that since December 6, 1946, "by threats and other methods of intimidation, he has unlawfully kept the same to his own enjoyment and to the exclusion of the plaintiff till the present time."

Meredith was 25-years-old when two weeks after the judge's ruling her world was turned upside down.

On July 2, 1947 Gianacis reported to the Los Angeles Sheriff's that at Meredith's behest three men kidnapped and beaten him and his bodyguard, Verne V. Davis on June 30, 1947.

Meredith was arrested. She was released on \$5,000 bail pending her trial.

Her prosecution was based on the testimony of Gianacis and Davis. Her defense was the kidnapping and assault were a staged fake event she had nothing to do with, and she believed Gianacis orchestrated it to get her out of the way so he could continue to live in the house.

After a four week trial, on December 12, 1947 Meredith was convicted by a jury of two counts of kidnapping, two counts of assault with a deadly weapon, and one count of conspiracy in Los Angeles County Superior Court. Her three codefendants and alleged accomplices were also convicted of various charges.

Prior to Meredith's sentencing **she wrote** in a personal note to Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Charles W. Fricke: "It seems I am asking for my very life itself. From the

bottom of my heart I do not feel that I am justly paying for a deed that I am in any way responsible for." She was sentenced on January 22, 1948 to serve five years to life in prison. Albert Tucker was sentenced to five years to life in prison; Damon Klinkenberg was sentenced to 60 days in jail; and, James Hatfield was sentenced to 30 days in jail.

Meredith was held at the Los Angeles County Jail pending the outcome of her appeal. After more than 10 months in the county jail, she was released on a \$15,000 bond in October 1948.

On March 15, 1949 the California Court of Appeals **affirmed the** convictions and sentences of her and her three codefendants. The California Supreme Court declined to review her case on April 15, 1949.

Meredith was 27 when on April 25, 1949 she voluntarily surrendered to begin serving her sentence, and on May 9 she was transported to California's Tehachapi Woman's Prison. She **told reporters**, "I know in my own heart I'm innocent of any crime and some day, someone will believe the truth about what I say."

Many well-known people in Hollywood, including actress Zasu Pitts and film producer Charles Weinstraub, rallied in support of Meredith by circulating a petition for California Governor Earl Warren to review her case.



FIGHT FOR CAUSE—Two Hollywood men, Charles E. Wilson, left, and Herbert Schofield, carry on fight to free Madge Meredith, whom they believe is innocent. Times Staff

Hollywood Pair Seek Clues to Clear Actress

Charles E. Wilson & Herbert Schofield (LA Times)

Pitts was instrumental in two businessmen be-

coming interested enough in Meredith's case to conduct their own investigation. Herbert Schofield, a retired banker, and Charles E. Wilson, a real estate man, interviewed people involved in the case, and they visited Madge many times in Tehachapi. They discovered evidence of her innocence that was provided to both the California Parole Board, and members of the California Assembly.

In March 1951 the California Parole Board recommended parole for Meredith, although normally she wouldn't be eligible for two more years.

Meredith cont. on p. 4



PHOTOGRAPHIC SECTION - RECORDS & IDENTIFICATION DIVISION
SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - LOS ANGELES
Madge Meredith mug shot (LA County Sheriff's Office, July 1947)

Meredith cont. from p. 3

Then later that month, on March 26, 1951 the California Assembly Interim Committee on Crime and Corrections issued an official report [that concluded](#) that if she had been “properly defended in a court free of prejudice she undoubtedly would have been proven innocent.” The report noted there was evidence “the crime itself was a hoax” and that she was “the victim of a ‘frame.’” The report charged Meredith’s case is “a mockery of investigation, of defense counseling, of trial procedure, and of justice itself.” The report stated that if Meredith had been “properly defended in a court free of prejudice she undoubtedly would have been proven innocent.” The reported detailed, “...nor are the tactics of the prosecution above reproach. That witnesses were intimidated is a matter of court record. There is shocking evidence of perjury, suppression of evidence and an almost unbelievable reluctance on the part of defense counsel to



Madge Meredith outside of the Teahachapi Woman's Prison after her release on July 16, 1951 (Frank Q. Brown, LA Times)

investigate the cause of defendant Meredith.”

Meredith was released on her thirtieth birthday, July 16, 1951 — the day after Governor Earl Warren commuted her sentence to time served.



HOMELESS—Nick Giancalis, former manager of Actress Madge Meredith, walks glumly from Hollywood Hills home which the actress regained on court action. In doorway is Capt. Sheriff J. H. McWay, one of three officers who ordered Giancalis to go.
Nick Giancalis evicted (LA Times)

Gov. Warren action was based on the California Assembly report that determined she had been framed, and her conviction was the result of a biased judge, a vindictive prosecutor, and an incompetent trial lawyer. Gov. Warren’s [commutation stated](#): “This is a bizarre case, perhaps more fantastic than any moving picture in which the defendant acted — but certainly having many of the attributes of a scenario.”

Giancalis had never vacated the Hollywood Hills house because of Meredith’s legal woes. After her release she enforced the 1947 judgement and Giancalis was evicted. He appealed the 1947 ruling upholding her ownership of the house and he requested a new trial. On August 27, 1953 the California Court of Appeals [affirmed the](#) trial court’s ruling and dismissed Giancalis’ appeal.

Giancalis, an immigrant from Greece in the 1930s, was later denied U.S. citizenship because the judge determined he had failed to establish good moral character by perjuring himself during Meredith’s trial, and for failing to appear for his immigration hearing.

Meredith’s acting career was revived after her release from prison. From 1952 to 1964 [she appeared in](#) several movies, and many television programs. She was 43 when her last acting role was for a 1964 episode of the television series, “The Littlest Hobo.” Her last appearance on film is believed to be Kevin Costner’s “Water World.” She was

living on the island of Hawaii where part of the movie was filmed, and she appeared as an uncredited extra.

Meredith married, and gave birth to a daughter on July 10, 1955.

Actress Zasu Pitts was one of Meredith’s most loyal friends, and Meredith’s case is written about extensively in Gayle D. Haffner’s biography of Pitts — *Hands With A Friend: The Personal Biography of Actress Zasu Pitts* (Outskirts Press, Inc. Denver, 2011).

Madge Meredith, born Marjorie May Massow on July 15, 1921 in Iowa Falls, Iowa, is now 95 years old. She is living in Hawaii.

The three-bedroom house at 8444 Magnolia Drive in the Hollywood Hills of Los Angeles that was built in 1929, and which Meredith bought for \$10,000 in 1946, now has a market value of \$2,432,097 according to [Zillow.com](#). That doesn’t include the value of the two adjoining vacant lots that were included in her purchase price. Tax records show she no longer owns the property.

Sources:

[Hollywood Cinderella](#), Part 1: Deranged LA Crimes, By Joan Renner, March 13, 2013

[Hollywood Cinderella](#), Part 2: Deranged LA Crimes, By Joan Renner, March 17, 2013

[People v. Klinkenberg, et al., and Marjorie May Maslow, et al.](#), 90 Cal. App. 2d 608 (Cal. Court of Appeal, 3-15-1949) (Affirming all convictions)

[Massow v. Giancalis](#), 120 Cal. App. 2d 24 (Cal. Court of Appeal, 8-27-1953) (Affirming trial court’s ruling that the house belonged to Marjorie Massow.)

8444 Magnolia Dr, Los Angeles, CA 90046, [Zillow.com](#)

[“Baker’s Tune Film at Harris Has New Romantic Team”](#), *Pittsburgh Press*, August 28, 1944, p. 10.

Madge Meredith, [IMDB.com](#)



Vermont Gov. Peter Shumlin Issues 192 Marijuana Possession Pardons

On January 3, 2017 Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin [issued a pardon](#) to 192 people convicted prior to 2013 of misdemeanor marijuana possession.

In 2013, Gov. Shumlin signed a law decriminalizing possession in Vermont of less than one ounce of marijuana. Before the law was changed in 2013, possession of less than one ounce of marijuana was a misdemeanor crime. Under the decriminalization law an individual convicted of minor marijuana possession law can file a motion to expunge their conviction and seal their case record.



Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin (Pat Bradley - WAMC)

A pardon in Vermont [affects a person’s punishment](#): it can result in the release of an imprisoned person, or termination of their probation/parole. However, a Vermont pardon has no legal effect on a person’s conviction: neither authorizing expungement of the conviction or sealing of the case.

Furthermore, a misdemeanor conviction in Vermont does not affect a person’s right to vote or serve on a grand or petit jury, and it does not affect a person’s right to own or possess a firearm under Vermont or federal law.

Consequently, Gov. Shumlin’s pardoning of the 192 people had no effect on their civil

rights, and it had no legal effect on their criminal cases because their sentences are completed. The running of a criminal background check by a prospective employer, landlord, etc. to investigate any of those 192 people will result in disclosure of the same information about their conviction as before Gov. Shumlin’s pardon was issued.

If those people want to eliminate possible career or housing consequences from their conviction, they could have bypassed the symbolic pardon process, and filed a file a motion to expunge their conviction and seal their case record.

Sources:

[Gov. Shumlin Issues Nearly 200 Pardons](#) for Minor Marijuana Convictions, Press Release, Office of Governor Peter Shumlin, January 3, 2017

[Vermont: Restoration of Rights, Pardon, Expungement & Sealing](#), Collateral Consequences Resource Center, [www.ccrsourcecenter.org](#)

