



# Academy Award Winning Sisters: The Lives of Olivia de Havilland and Joan Fontaine

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\*Includes pictures.

\*Includes both actresses' quotes about each other and their careers.

\*Includes a bibliography for further reading.

"Famous people feel that they must perpetually be on the crest of the wave, not realising that it is against all the rules of life. You can't be on top all the time, it isn't natural." – Olivia de Havilland

"You know, I've had a helluva life. Not just the acting part. I've flown in an international balloon race. I've piloted my own plane. I've ridden to the hounds. I've done a lot of exciting things." – Joan Fontaine

Olivia de Havilland is one of the last few living actresses who worked during the Golden Era of Hollywood, but also one of the most decorated, winning dozens of awards over the course of a 50 year career. Among those, she most notably won the Academy Award for Best Actress for *To Each His Own* (1946) and *The Heiress* (1949), more than a decade after she got her start as an 18 year old in Hollywood. Ironically, de Havilland was in California in part because the young British girl who had been born in Tokyo stopped in the States for medical treatment.

Of course, de Havilland isn't well remembered for any of those accolades or other movies but because she played Melanie Hamilton in *Gone With the Wind* (1939), perhaps the most famous movie in American history. Although she was a veteran actress at the time, de Havilland's career hadn't progressed much since she started, and rumor has it that she eventually got the role after her own sister, Joan Fontaine, was asked to audition for the part and recommended Olivia instead. Olivia was ultimately nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress and became a household name in her adopted country overnight.

Having been typecast in light romantic comedies before *Gone With the Wind*, that performance ensured de Havilland subsequently had a long, productive and versatile career making everything from Westerns and dramas. Of those movies, she is perhaps most closely associated with the enigmatic Errol Flynn, another foreign-born actor who was more notorious for his roles off the screen than on it. Before his untimely death, they appeared in several films together and became one of Hollywood's most popular on-screen couples.

Although Fontaine and de Havilland would make history by becoming the only sisters to both win an Academy Award for Best Actress, that anecdote was just one of the various stories about the siblings that has shed light on their notoriously contentious and complicated relationship. As Fontaine once put it, "I married first, won the Oscar before Olivia did, and if I die first, she'll undoubtedly be livid because I beat her to it!" De Havilland herself once said, "Joan is very bright and sharp and can be cutting."

Of course, one of the reasons people have remained interested in the sisters is that both of them had such long acting careers, and Fontaine became best remembered both for a career that spanned 60 years and several high profile marriages. With typical humor, Fontaine joked about the fact she had so many husbands, commenting in jest, "If you keep marrying as I do, you learn everybody's hobby." But that attention has only served to obscure her very serious professional career, which saw her won the Oscar for Best Actress for her role in Alfred Hitchcock's *Suspicion* (1941). She also earned a nomination for her performance in *The*

Constant Nymph (1943), and in a television career that spanned several decades, she earned an Emmy nomination for her work on Ryan's Hope in 1980, nearly 40 years after winning the Academy Award for Suspicion. Fontaine even appeared on Broadway in a couple of productions that ran for several years.

This book profiles the life and career of two of Hollywood's most prolific actresses. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the sisters like never before.



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