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## Sharon Douglas, actress – obituary



Sharon Douglas

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**S**haron Douglas, who has died aged 95, was a minor but popular actress during the Golden Age of American film and radio during the 1940s and 1950s.

She was born Rhoda-Nelle Rader in Stevens County, Oklahoma, on October 16 1920 and educated locally. She arrived in Hollywood in 1939 on the invitation of an agent friend who had promised to find her work. Soon she formed an unlikely friendship with Hedda Hopper, who took an instant liking to the young starlet and made her a

protégé.

Sharon Douglas (her adopted stage name was a tribute to her mother's Scottish origins) was a regular on Hedda Hopper's popular radio show during the 1940s, which drew large audiences to listen to the actress-turned-columnist "dish the dirt". She persuaded NBC to hire Sharon Douglas to play Lana Turner in an early radio play based on the screen siren's early life. Later Hedda Hopper introduced the young starlet to Howard Hughes, who made her his personal charge under his reign as mogul at RKO; the studio pitched her as a rival to the popular femme fatale of the moment, Jane Greer.

Sharon Douglas's first film roles were mere bit parts, until she was offered a leading role in the crime drama *A Gentleman After Dark* (1942), the tale of a suave jewel thief (Brian Donlevy) who goes straight after the birth of his daughter, much to the annoyance of his greedy wife (Miriam Hopkins).

Other roles followed, in the short *Wedtime Stories* (1943), and in *The Navy Way* (1944) with Robert Lowery and Jean Parker, among others. She was then given the female lead in the spine chiller *Fog Island* (1945), about an aged father and former convict Leo Grainger (George Zucco) and regal daughter Gail, who live in an ominous creaking mansion maintained by Allerton the butler (George Lloyd), on a remote island. Sharon Douglas also co-wrote the film's title track *Liebesträume* ("Love's Dream"). In 1946 she was reunited with Brian Donlevy in the comedy *Our Hearts Were Growing Up*.



Sharon Douglas with George Zucco in the suspense film *Fog Island*, 1945

It was on radio, however, where Sharon Douglas really found her métier. Her radio appearances included *The Gallant Heart* (1944), described by *Radio Life* magazine as a “gritty and real look at today’s young people” and a continuing role in *The Second Mrs Burton*, about a housewife (Douglas) struggling to cope with a scheming husband and his controlling mother-in-law. *The Life of Riley*, broadcast weekly on the radio during the Second World War, and starring William Bendix, was a monumental success, running for 132 weeks.

Sharon Douglas became a frequent volunteer at the Hollywood Canteen, the club for servicemen, where she could be seen waiting tables with other noted beauties of film noir such as Marie Windsor, Audrey Totter and Gene Tierney.

Her career continued on radio throughout the 1940s and 1950s, joining Fred Astaire for *The Sky’s the Limit* (1949) and she was a regular stooge on *The Abbott & Costello Show* (1949-52). In 1946, she married Edward Nassour, a Lebanese-born producer, with whom she had four children. He and his brother William formed the Nassour

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