Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Judy and I

Julissa Padilla · Monday, May 1st, 2023

A dusty house falling down into a colorful world of fantasy. I didn't know it at the time but it would change my life forever. When Dorothy walked into this world of fantasy, I saw myself in her. This innocent young woman exploring what life had thrust upon her and learning how to deal with the journey but ultimately realizing what you brought and where you come from are what's most important and what makes you unique.

That young woman was a 16-year-old named Judy Garland. You have to have been living under a rock if you have never heard of *The Wizard of Oz* but unfortunately Judy Garland is a lot less common than this iconic film.

The first time I ever heard of Judy Garland, I was 12 years old, almost the same age as her when she got her film contract with Metro Goldwyn Mayer. Instead of me performing in front of a camera like her, I was learning everything that was happening behind the scenes. Her next film I watched was *Meet Me in St Louis*. By the time this film was shot, she was used to playing roles more close to her own age. As Esther Smith, she was the embodiment of a naive young woman just looking for love in an indifferent world filled with dead ends at every corner. I was able to sing along to each of her songs and it made me feel an instant connection towards her. She expressed similar feelings I had about love and how she felt about herself. She would also sing a lot of happy songs just to be happy.

After class, I would do my own research on who Judy was, what she was like, just anything I was able to get my hands on. She was born Frances Ethel Gumm to a couple of parents who worked in vaudeville. She loved to sing at an early age and would be known as “the girl with the great big voice.” Her family moved to Los Angeles and there she was growing increasingly more popular. She signed up with MGM without realizing how much this would affect her life for the good and the bad.

An early tragedy happened to her when she lost her father to meningitis which affected her immensely, never really recovering from it especially since he was one of her biggest allies. Early

on she sang songs of love, losing love, being happy and anything in between.

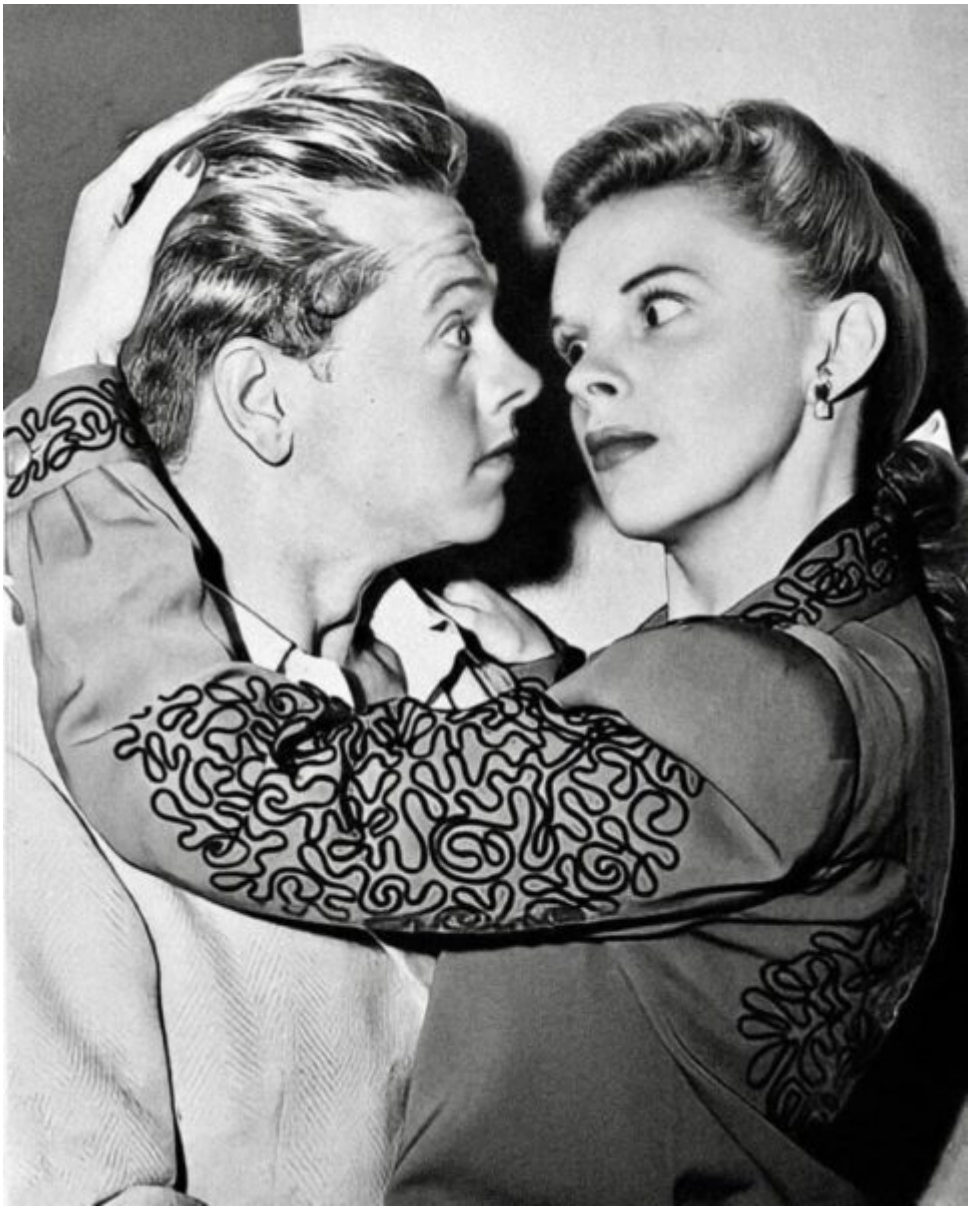
Most of her songs had a feeling of yearning for something more, something better. Take her most iconic song, “Over the Rainbow.” She is longing for that better world, why can’t she be a part of that world? This kept inspiring me to always try to get on the other side of success no matter the troubles that I may encounter ahead which has helped my continual optimism towards life.

When Judy was growing up at the studio, she was always compared to the other woman at the lot, never feeling like she was attractive or even pretty. She was brought on as a child prodigy so the studio had no idea how to present her to the world; considering she was too old to play a child star and too young to play adult roles. They would cast her as kid sisters or performance acts to highlight her extraordinary singing talent.

Judy came at a perfect time in my life when I was coming of age as well. There was a point where I was feeling so awkward in my body. Growing up from a girl into a woman, I felt awkward and I didn’t know how to react. When I was in elementary school, I was the complete tomboy. I didn’t like makeup, I didn’t like dresses (only shorts and pants), and I hated princesses. I pretty much only had guy friends, loved playing little kid sports, and just was obsessed with cartoons, Pokemon, and animation. Once I hit puberty, I was feeling awkward with my appearance. I had crushes with boys from my classes but I never felt I was ever able to get their attention.

Judy came at a time I needed her most. She sang songs of exactly what I was feeling. She felt she was the ugly duckling and that is what I felt in my early pubescent days. There is a song she sings in the film *Andy Hardy Meets Debutante* called “Alone.” It is about how much she loves the main character, Andy but he never sees her love for him but she will be there when he does come around with open arms. That was the same sentiment I was feeling when I liked someone in class. I will be there when they are ready. She would say lines like, “No glamor, no glamor at all.”

I connected with these lines when I was growing up. I never felt pretty despite my mother telling me I was. She sang songs of one day growing out of these insecurities and one day the boy will come to me. I didn’t have many friends growing up either. With my specific interests, I was only able to fully connect with my teachers. Whenever I felt alone, I would sing all these songs from her and it would always make me feel better. I would always tell myself there are brighter roads ahead.



Despite these insecurities, I would just keep watching all of her movies via Turner Classic Movies. She was so funny and tender in every role she played despite everything she was dealing with behind the scenes. Her and frequent costar, and my favorite actor, Mickey Rooney constantly had to be on for the camera, even if that meant a dose of amphetamines to keep them working long hours. This would eventually bring ruin to her life as she became increasingly hooked to the point of complete dependency.

I was always hungry to learn more about classic stars. I even tried to imitate how Judy sang. I tried learning how to sing because of her. She taught me how to feel a song and not just sing a song because it was there. Feel what you are singing. In one of my favorite songs she sang called “Smile” by Charlie Chaplin, it is about smiling no matter what and that you will get by.

This theme is a perfect song to sum up what Judy wanted for the world. She wanted everyone to know that there is a rainbow on the other side no matter what you are going through. That is why she is my favorite singer. She kept me optimistic even in my life’s darkest times.

She taught me how to love me for who I am and never bother with what other people tell you. I remember crying myself to sleep thinking I was never going to find someone who would love me in a romantic way. Though Judy was falling in and out of love, she always knew how to pull

herself up.

This is a message for every single person. We all go through hardships. It is how you deal with them and pull yourself up to help inspire others. That is what will always make me connect with Judy Garland to find my own path to my own rainbow.

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