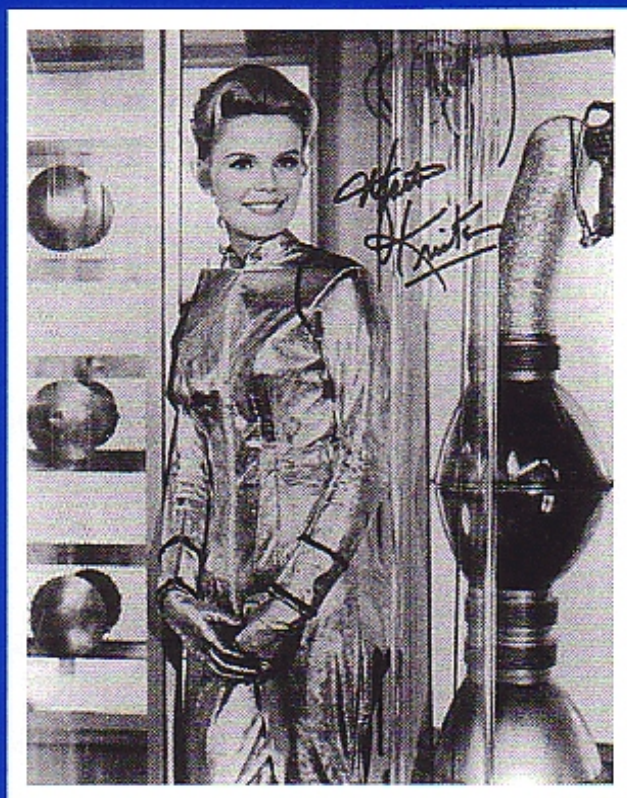


The Pen and Quill

Vol. XXXVI, Nº 6

Nov.–Dec. 2003

\$5.00



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MARTHA KRISTEN: A GIRL LOST IN SPACE

David Priol

In 1945, Norway was finally coming to the end of World War II. But for a young baby born of a German soldier and a young Norwegian woman, the battle was just beginning. Abandoned at birth and placed in an orphanage in Oslo, Marta Kristen's life changed irrevocably when she was adopted by an American couple in 1948 and moved to Detroit.

Living in a family which encouraged her participation in the arts, Marta became involved in acting as she grew up and acted in many plays during her early teenage years. However the big break came when writer/director/producer James B. Harris saw her in a restaurant and asked her to audition for the lead role in *Lolita*. While parental guidance dissuaded her from becoming involved in the then-infamous film, this chance of a lifetime did give Marta the confidence and the opportunity to realize her talents in roles on *The Loretta Young Show* and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*.

For Marta's adoring public, her role as Judy Robinson in *Lost in Space* remains her trademark role. This stunning beauty was involved in almost all of the 83 episodes of the hit series, which is still one of the most watched shows on mainstream TV and cable. Marta's signed photos from this series are highly sought after and the theme of our interview below.

Although Marta has been involved in many television and film projects throughout the last three decades, her marriage with her attorney husband Kevin, her daughter Lora, and granddaughter Lena have been of greatest importance to her. It wasn't until nearly 1970 that Marta had the chance to meet her sisters, and only as recently as 1997, Marta discovered her long-lost brother living right here in Australia. This reunion with her brother Seppe was one of the great highlights of her life. The beautiful baby once lost in Norway became the stunning blonde once lost in space, but who is now the lovely lady always found happy at home with her family in California.

DAVID: Hello, Marta. Let me say what a pleasure it is to chat with the most beautiful woman ever to be lost in space. However, before you landed the role in this classic cult series, you were actually up for the lead role as Lolita. What are your feelings now (and back then) about your mother having advised you against taking this role? Do you think your career would have been different if you had taken the Sue Lyon role? Strangely enough, Miss Lyon struggled for good roles after making her debut in what was then a highly controversial film.

MARTA: Hello, David. It is certainly a pleasure for me to chat with you and thank you for your gracious compliment. First, let me say that I think *Lolita* is an absolutely brilliant film. But, because it is a very black comedy about obsession, paedophilia, deceit and anguished lust, my parents regarded it as inappropriate for me. It is not too hard to understand why they made that decision! It is almost impossible to speculate about what path my life would have taken if I had played Lolita. It must have been difficult for Sue Lyon, who was terrific in the role, to break away from being identified with the role of Lolita. Perhaps that would have been my future as well. As matters turned out, my career took off after that in a number of very exciting directions, including eventually *Lost in Space*.

DAVID: Do you remember the circumstances of your first-ever autograph? Was this after one of your many television appearances before *Lost in Space* or during that series?

MARTA: I don't remember the first autograph I ever signed, but I do remember my first encounter with fans. I was in New York City for a CBS television network convention. When I walked out of the elevator into the main lobby, there were *Lost in Space* fans who recognized me and asked for autographs. Of course I was surprised and pleased, until they started following me. Now, I had wanted to be just another tourist visiting the sites of the city, but that was impossible with this group surrounding me! I walked a little ways with them and pretty soon a few more people joined us. After a few blocks we had quite a crowd! I have a feeling most of the people didn't know (or care) who I was, but their curiosity had gotten the best of them, so they





Stacy
Kramer

followed us. By then, a very nice young man, whom I had first met in the hotel lobby, sized up the situation and hailed a cab for me. Off I went to the Empire State Building—alone.

DAVID: During the four seasons that you made *Lost in Space*, did you undertake many signings for the producers, and if so did you do a lot of these with other cast members?

MARTA: I certainly would have been happy to do signings with the cast members during the time we were filming the show, but we never had the opportunity. In fact, it has only been about the past ten years since I have been appearing with my fellow cast members at these conventions.

DAVID: Could you tell our readers how you think things have changed with autograph hunters since the 1960s? Do you find people's expectations have changed a lot? Thinking about this, what do you remember as being your toughest-ever signing? To balance this what were your happiest and funniest experiences with autograph collectors?

MARTA: I think the market for celebrity autographs has grown enormously since the '60s. When I was filming *Lost in Space*, the studio received all my fan mail and I rarely saw any of it. They did, however, forward letters from servicemen and -women, many of whom were serving in Vietnam. Because of these letters, I started visiting the veterans' hospitals wherever I could. I'll never forget those times. I always came away with the feeling that I got more than I gave. One of the funniest experiences I had regarding autograph signing was in the State of Virginia. I had always wanted to see that part of the country, and when Mark Goddard called and asked if I would do a show with him in Fredericksburg I immediately accepted. I also scheduled another signing in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, thinking it was close and I could hire a car to take me there. During the show in Harrisburg, I met two really witty and nice guys, Dave and Kato, who were friends with some of the organizers of the show. When I told them I had to pack up and find a taxi to take me to Fredericksburg, they kindly offered to take me. It turned out that, just as I had suspected, Dave

and Kato were real gentlemen and their character was beyond reproach. Their sense of direction, however, was horrendous! What should have been perhaps a two or three hour drive turned out to be five. We did, however, see incredible horse country, rolling hills, quaint towns and historical monuments. We laughed and talked all the way to Fredericksburg. It was quite a tour! We finally did arrive and I have kept in touch with David Goudsward ever since. In fact, being the computer idiot that I am, when he offered to create a website for me, I readily accepted. So, this adventure brought me a friend and a webmaster!

DAVID: Can you recall any hilarious on-set happenings that your fans would enjoy hearing about? Which member of the *Lost in Space* cast and crew was the most fun to work with as far as pranks and telling jokes is concerned? Do you see the other cast members frequently these days or does it just tend to be at conventions?

MARTA: There were times on the set when we had been working for hours and were simply punch drunk. It was usually on a Friday night and we would be filming the last shots of that week's episode. I remember one show in particular. It was about miniature duplicates of our robot and I had to say something like, "Oh, look! Little mechanical men!" Every time I looked at a cast member, all they had to do was smile just a wee bit, or cock their eyebrow, and I would start to giggle. I simply could not get this line out without cracking up. I tried not to look at anyone, but then I would hear someone begin to laugh, and I would just fall apart. It wasn't until Irwin Allen came on the set and gave us all a stern talking to that we all finally got down to business and completed the shot.

I loved working with Mark Goddard. He was, and still is, I may add, one of the most irreverent people I know. He would make me laugh until I cried. Of course, Jonathan had the best jokes anywhere on this planet. The crew just loved him and he just loved the crew. He had a nickname for every member of the crew and he would give everyone a Tootsie-Pop at the end of each week's film-

ing. We try to get together as often as possible, but with our busy schedules, it is difficult. Our friend Kevin Burns will get us all together at Fox Studios for a luncheon a couple of times a year, and one of us will have the gang over for a party or dinner occasionally, but we never see each other as often as we would like.

DAVID: Given that you sign literally thousands of photos, do you collect autographs yourself? If you could ask one person from the past and another from the present to sign their photo for you, who would you ask and what would you have them write for you on their picture?

MARTA: I do not collect autographs, although I would if I had the time and the money. It is almost impossible to narrow my choice to just one autograph from the past. I mean, look who is out there! Moses, Gautama Buddha, Mohammed, Gandhi, William Shakespeare, Marie Curie, Martin Luther King Jr., Eleanor Roosevelt—the list is endless. But, I suppose Jesus Christ would be my first choice, not just because I am of the Christian faith but because he wasn't afraid to speak his mind and change the rules about loving one another and forgiving one another. I would have Jesus sign his photo to me, "Be the light. Your friend, Jesus." Jimmy Carter would be my choice for the present-day autograph. Not only is he a man of peace and reason, but he used his Presidency to aid the poor and helpless in our country and worldwide. I would simply have him sign his photo to me, "Your friend, Jimmy Carter."

DAVID: Have you ever co-signed a photo with any actors in shows outside *Lost in Space*? If so, do you remember which actors they might have been?

MARTA: I do not remember co-signing a photo with anyone other than the cast of *Lost in Space*.

DAVID: Finally, Miss Marta, are there any other stories, or personal thoughts that you would care to share with our readers about your experiences, not only with autograph collectors, but in the movie business in general?

MARTA: The movie business, like everything else, has its upside and its downside. There is nothing like getting up at the crack of dawn, driving to the studio or location and, upon arriving, seeing all the people and machinery that it takes to make movie magic. Then my heart will start racing, knowing that in a short while all my focus and energy will go into becoming someone else, that everything I do will be toward that goal and that it will all be immortalized on film—well, it really gets the adrenalin going. The downside is that it is over all too soon and that the moment I'm finished, I'm searching for another job!

DAVID: In closing, let me say how pleased I was to see you in the movie version of *Lost in Space* a few years ago, and I wondered if there were any plans afoot that you know of to remake the series at some future date? I know that your thousands of fans would never accept a new series as being the equal of the original, but if it meant getting some of the original cast members back on screen, then it would certainly be a worthwhile venture.

MARTA: There were plans for a remake of *Lost in Space*, which was to have had the original cast members along with a whole new group of characters. Since Jonathan's passing, that of course has been changed. It would be my hope, however, that in Jonathan's memory, we could do some kind of cast reunion. I am not sure how it would work without our friend, but I think Jonathan would have felt honoured to have it dedicated to him.

I have had, through *Lost in Space*, an incredible opportunity to find my birth family. My Australian brother, Seppo, feels like my twin separated at birth! One of the many things we share is our love of Australia and its people. So, I send my fondest greetings and love to all of you. Peace to you from your friend, Marta!

Be sure to check out Marta's great website: www.martakristen.com. And I thank her great webmaster, Dave Goudsward, for much of the information contained in my introduction. If you would like to add some great signed photos of Marta to your collection then please, e-mail either Dave or get in touch with me at bacall@iprimus.com.au.

