

# WHAT'S ON THE SHELF

By Helen Marketti



## “What Would Mary Ann Do?”

*Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale...*

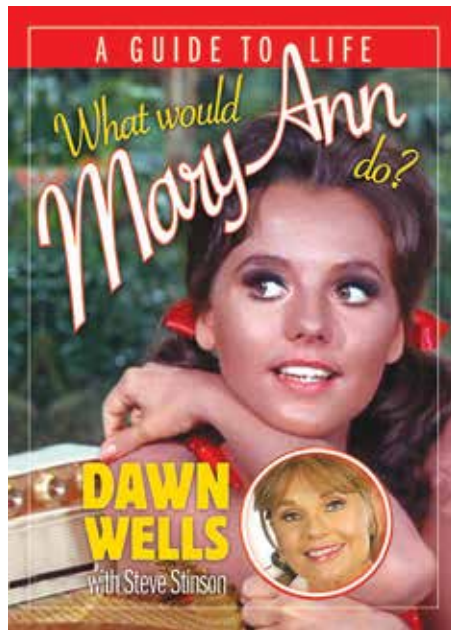
*A conversation with Dawn Wells who played Mary Ann on Gilligan's Island*

Gilligan's Island ran for three seasons on CBS from 1964 to 1967 but what a memorable show that is still appreciated and loved by fans old and new. One of the most beloved characters on the show was Mary Ann, who was played by actress, Dawn Wells. In a recent telephone conversation Dawn opens up about her time on the show, what it meant to her, current projects and great advice.

“You could look at Mary Ann as your friend, whereas Ginger was more high maintenance!” laughs Dawn. “I actually grew up wanting to be a ballerina. I took a lot of dancing lessons. Then during eighth or ninth grade I dislocated my knee and I couldn't continue. My knee cap would go out when I was dancing and then I would fall. After that, I started taking theatre classes. I even enjoyed being a public speaker. I was a commencement speaker.”

She continues, “I went on to attend Stephen's College in Columbia, Missouri which is an all women college. I majored in Theatre and learned what creating a character was all about. I then moved on to the University of Washington where I started doing a lot of stage work. I was on many television shows before Gilligan's Island. I played roles on 77 Sunset Strip, Maverick, Bonanza and Hawaiian Eye. When I went for the role of Mary Ann, I was chosen from 350 other actresses including Rachel Welch.”

“I think Gilligan's Island is still running because the show has an important voice. The setting wasn't inside someone's living room. We were in a jungle. I wasn't allowed to show my navel back then,” she laughs. “I think the show still appeals to generations because you are trying to survive on an island. It's a fantasy and you can use your own imagination. I think people liked to watch it because women had a crush on the professor. I did, too! And the young men had crushes on Ginger or Mary Ann. There were some finance lessons in there too with Mr. and Mrs. Howell and the true friend-



ship between Gilligan and Skipper. So, there were life messages in addition to being entertaining. Plus, you never know what year it is on the show. There's isn't a car of an era in a driveway because it's an island! It's a group of seven misfits all trying to get along, survive and make it work. That's what we are doing in present day. We are all trying to get along with each other. The show sends a message even though you may not realize it.”

When asked what her thoughts were on Hollywood, Dawn said, “I think Hollywood keeps changing. I think it keeps morphing all of the time. I believe television tries to keep up with where the world is going and at the same time educate people as well.”

Dawn's career has spanned over fifty years. She has a passion for keeping herself motivated. “I'm not married and I never had children. I took care of my mother before she passed away. I love doing theatre. I love being active. I've also taken up art although right now I am not

very good at it. (laughs) You need to have something in life that inspires and fulfills you. I would love to do a high-powered drama. I would love to be in a Broadway show and play a character with some real depth. Enough time has passed that I do not need to keep being Mary Ann. I can be a mean stepmother, a bad wife or someone who is crazy! I am always looking for something different.”

Dawn's new book, “What Would Mary Ann Do?” (Bear Manor Media, 2019) is a book inspired of the character she portrayed on Gilligan's Island. It offers memories, life lessons on manners, relationships, aging, business, work ethics, friendships and more. Dawn says because many people can identify with Mary



Ann's character, she decided to write a book because many fans send her letters on a daily basis seeking her trusted word. “At what age do we start to realize that in relationships we need to be drawn into more than just someone having a pretty face? Because sometimes that's all you get, which was kind of like Ginger's character. (laughs) Seriously, if you can be the best you can be and have support around you then you have a great foundation. I think we have gotten to be too much of a permissive society. I think there is a gradual moving back to realize that we need to have support around us because it changes our lives.”

Dawn is working on several projects. An exhibit celebrating the 55th anniversary of Gilligan's Island will be at The Hollywood Museum starting on September 25th. She is currently promoting an updated version of her book, “What Would Mary Ann Do?” And she is the new voice for Gumbalina (the Ghost) on Captain Underpants.

Dawn would like to thank all of the fans who have followed Gilligan's Island over the past 55 years and appreciates the new fans who have discovered the show and loved her character as Mary Ann.

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