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Esther Williams: Irrepressible



The public knew Esther Williams as a bathing beauty and a movie star.

But we should remember what a superior athlete Esther was as well. World War II stymied an Olympic career that held every promise to Williams becoming stellar multi-gold medalist.

With no Games held in either 1940, nor 1944, the years of Esther's athletic prime, she moved toward Hollywood but the competitive swimming world knew of Esther as a powerful, fast freestyler who left the rest of the field in her wake.

In her famous movies, such as Million Dollar Mermaid, Esther stroked with a grace and power that the other actresses simply couldn't fake.



I became a friend of Esther's in her later years. And she was a wonderful, larger-than-life, exuberant character, philosophical about growing old, wildly entertaining in her stories of yesteryear.

One night at a black tie dinner, as Esther stayed at the podium longer than the corporate types had scheduled, she was simply not to be repressed. They sent a drone up to touch her elbow and coax her to finish up. She jabbed the young man in the ribs and continued her hilarious story. They dimmed the stage lights, signaling her to finish up, followed by some loud music, as they use at the Oscar's to get a speaker to wrap. She deadpanned the audience and said: "Let's just see if they can get me off this stage". Esther went 45 minutes that night, more akin to a one-woman stage show than a short acceptance speech, each story more outrageous than the next.....and not one of us complained. She made the night. Esther was the night.



I interviewed Esther for a radio show when they closed down Busch Gardens in Florida, where many of her underwater film scenes had been filmed. She told me during the pre-interview NOT to ask what she's doing now. Said she had a mega-deal in the works to rekindle the old aqua shows, with a plan of 5,000 synchronized swimmers in a man-made lake in Vegas. Told me her lawyers had handcuffed her NOT TO SAY A WORD about it until the deals were signed. So we do the live show next day. We talk about Busch Gardens, the old days. And Esther says: "Diana, do you know what I'm doing these days?????" "What, Esther...what are you up to?" "Well, I'm putting together an old-world extravaganza in Las Vegas. 5,000 synchronized swimmers are going to...."

Esther Williams was golden age Hollywood all the way. Glamorous at every stage of her life. Irrepressible. Irresistibly irrepressible.

Now I'll sign off before telling stories out of school about the crazy parties she threw here in Los Angeles over the last couple of decades.....if you were looking for a good time, you needed Esther's private number.

We'll miss you, Esther. Things just won't be as fun any more without you.

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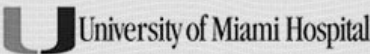
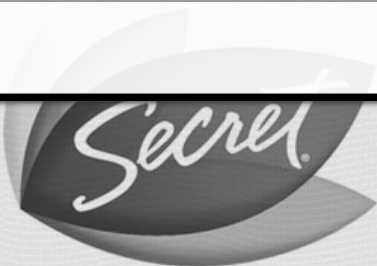
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