

# MOMENT IN TIME

September 14, 1982

GRACE KELLY DIES

Hollywood mourned along with the rest of the world when news broke that Princess Grace of Monaco had been killed in a car crash at the age of 52. A statement from the royal palace said the former Oscar-winning actress had sustained fatal head injuries when her car careered over a cliff and plunged down a 100ft ravine.

It was initially thought that the brakes had failed on the ten-year-old Rover, which Grace Kelly was driving. Her youngest daughter Stephanie (17) had also been in the car. Later examination of the wreckage threw doubt on the cause of the accident, and it was suggested the Princess had suffered a stroke, causing her to lose control of the vehicle. Stephanie survived the crash, although sustained a cervical fracture and bruising. She, along with her father Prince Rainier, and the couple's other two children, Caroline and Albert, were at Grace's bedside when she died.

Princess Grace was given a full royal funeral at the Cathédrale de Monaco, the same church where Miss Kelly had married her prince some 26 years previously. Mourners at the service included Nancy Reagan, the Prince and Princess of Wales and Grace's former co-star Cary Grant.

Grace's son Prince Albert felt his father never recovered from the loss of his wife. "He was deeply affected," Albert said. "He wasn't quite the same man as he was before the accident."

**Did you know?** Princess Grace's tomb in the cathedral's apse is often covered with fresh flowers and surrounded by queues of admirers.



"I pulled on the handbrake but it wouldn't stop. I tried but I just couldn't stop the car" Princess Stephanie



# Once upon a crime...

In 1984, a new TV sleuth was born when Jessica Fletcher made her debut in the long-running whodunnit *Murder, She Wrote*. Steve O'Brien remembers Angela Lansbury's finest TV creation...

In reality, the city of Colima in Mexico is the reigning murder capital of the world, yet on TV there's no place more dangerous, it seems, than the town of Cabot Cove in the state of Maine.

Created 39 years ago as the home of one Jessica Fletcher, it appeared, over the course of *Murder, She Wrote*'s 12 seasons and 268 episodes, that its residents were forever in danger of being bumped off.

According to the BBC, Cabot Cove had a rate of 1,490 murders per million, meaning you were probably safer holidaying in a war zone than this leafy New England town. ➤



Of course, Cabot Cove wasn't a real place. Instead, since 1984, fans have flocked to the town of Mendocino, California, to pay tribute to one of the most popular and beloved shows of its era. *Murder, She Wrote* is a series that, 27 years after its last episode aired, is still fondly remembered, and it remains a favourite of TV schedulers around the globe.

**AMATEUR SUPER SLEUTH**

Angela Lansbury was, of course, a well-known actress before 1984, but *Murder, She Wrote* turned her into a small-screen superstar in the role of a retired English teacher turned crime writer turned amateur sleuth.

One of the sharpest minds on TV, she is as wily as Sherlock Holmes, as observant as Miss Marple and as fearless as Hercule Poirot. This unassuming sexagenarian would, each week, help the local police (often Tom Bosley's Sheriff Amos Tupper) investigate a murder, usually beating them to the killer through her unique skills of detection.

Yet as perfect as Angela was as Jessica Fletcher, the role had



Co-star Tom Bosley (right) was best known for his role as Howard Cunningham in *Happy Days* before joining the force

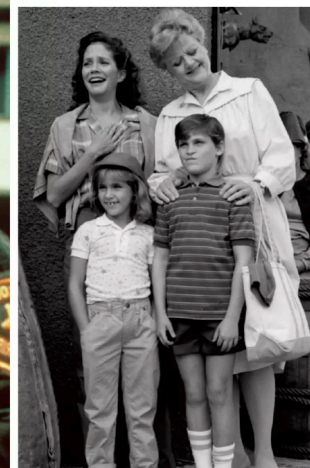
originally been earmarked for another actress. Jean Stapleton had made her name on TV in the Seventies as the devoted wife of professional grump Archie Bunker in the sitcom *All in the Family*, a

role that won her three Emmys and two Golden Globes. *Murder, She Wrote* creators Richard Levinson and William Link (who had devised *Columbo*), plus Peter S. Fischer, had created the role for her – only Stapleton, grieving after the loss of her husband, turned them down.

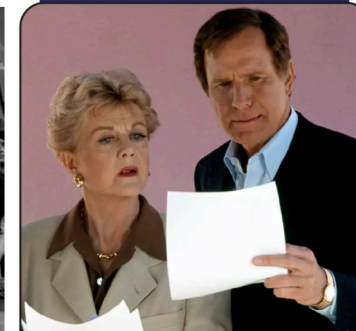
Looking for a replacement, Angela's name was brought up. Only a few years earlier she'd appeared as Agatha Christie's Jane Marple in a film version of *The Mirror Crack'd*, a part that almost looked like an audition for *Murder, She Wrote*. Nervously, Levinson, Link and Fischer sent the actress the pilot script and awaited her response.

"When I read it, I felt Peter's script could have been written for me," she told *People* magazine in 1984. "I was immediately taken by Jessica."

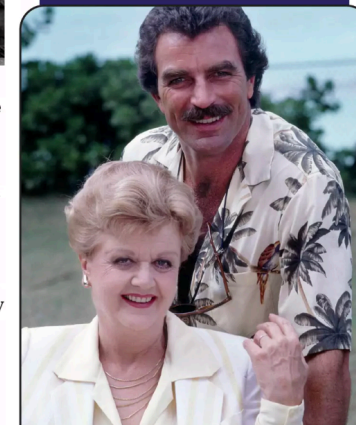
It's worth remembering how rare female leads were in 1984, let alone for women in their 60s. Now thought of as the ultimate in cosy TV, not enough is made of how radical *Murder, She Wrote* was in the Eighties. While most primetime shows were awash with car chases and gun fights, *Murder, She Wrote* prized intellect and intuition above punch-ups and shootouts.



Summer and Joaquin Phoenix were the child stars of 1984 episode *We're Off to Kill the Wizard*



M\*A\*S\*H star Wayne Rogers joined as shady private investigator Charlie Garrett from 1993



Jessica Fletcher helped Magnum when he was framed for murder in a 1986 two-parter



Mickey Rooney guested as Matt Cleveland in the 1993 episode *Bloodlines*

**A SHARED UNIVERSE**

Though the series eschewed many of the typical crime-show tropes, it did once hook up with a programme that embraced them wholeheartedly.

These days, shared universes on TV shows are commonplace, but in the mid-Eighties it was a rare thing for two series to cross pollinate. But in the third season episode, *Magnum on Ice*, the series guest-starred Tom Selleck as, yes, private investigator Thomas Magnum for a *Magnum P.I.* and *Murder, She Wrote* crossover that saw Jessica vacationing in Hawaii and getting drawn into a murder investigation after Selleck's character is framed for two homicides.

*Murder, She Wrote* had long been a box office winner for CBS, but when, for its 12th season, the network decided to move it from its traditional Sunday evening slot to Thursdays, going up against NBC's *Friends*, ratings nosedived.

CBS decided not to renew the series for its 13th season and *Murder, She Wrote* signed out on May 19, 1996.

However, this wasn't quite the end for the show. Jessica Fletcher

would return for four *Murder, She Wrote* TV movies between 1997 and 2003, with Angela finally bidding adieu in the 90-minute special, *The Celtic Riddle*.

Yet, although *Murder, She Wrote* is no longer in production, its legacy continues to this day.

Amazingly, two tie-in video games were produced in 2009 and 2012, and in 2013 NBC announced plans for a loose remake, starring Octavia Spencer as a "hospital administrator and amateur sleuth who self-publishes her first mystery novel".

Though that reboot failed to materialise, a series of *Murder, She Wrote* books, all of which are credited to 'J.B. Fletcher', is still going strong as of 2023.

"She was the sort of woman I like," Lansbury told NPR in an interview shortly before her death at the age of 96 in 2022.

"Being Jessica was second nature to me because she embodied all of the qualities that I like about women. She was valiant and liberal, athletic and exciting, sexy and all kinds of good stuff that women of a certain age and are not given credit for."



The show was one of America's longest-running scripted primetime dramas