

The Sexy Link Between Forbidden Planet and Mad Men

What do a 1956 science fiction classic movie and the 1960s retro hit [Mad Men](#) have in common? In my world, it's Anne Francis, the sexy blonde who not only became famous for her role in the cult classic [Forbidden Planet](#), but who also broke ground in the tv show [Honey West](#), featuring a hot female private eye in 1965.

Growing up in the '60s, I was very close to Sally Draper's age as she is depicted in *Mad Men*. In that show in 1965, we've seen the 10-year-old caught masturbating to the provocative image of Illya Kuryakin (David McCallum in [The Man From U.N.C.L.E.](#)) in bondage, held captive by the bad guys. The awakening of her young sexuality parallels my own at the time, but I am wired a little differently than precocious Sally. I adored *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* for its serious spy adventures – all the more compelling for its contrast with the farcical genre satire of [Get Smart](#) (which made me grit my teeth even then). How, then, could I not fall in love with Honey West, the gun-toting, karate-fighting, courageous crime-stopping private detective in the show of the same name? I had a crush on Anne Francis for years (although it took even more years to figure out why I had crushes like that in the first place. ;)

Honey West was the bomb for a young girl looking for female heroes as role models. The hero thing I “got”, and there were plenty of them on the media landscape - but almost without exception, they were men. In 1965 I practiced swimming underwater in pools and holding my breath a long time so I could do underwater spy work on the off occasion like Napoleon Solo (Robert Vaughn) did in *Man From U.N.C.L.E.*. The very next year I would be captivated by the dark-of-night adventures of the Green Hornet (with Bruce Lee as Kato); Adam West's heroics would compel me to don a towel cape and dragoon my (younger) sister into playing Robin to my Batman. I would soon have fits if I missed an episode of *Mission: Impossible* (where Barbara Bain would become my woman to watch).

But except for Anne Francis, at the mid-point of the '60s television offered a glaring dearth of women who were heroic and bold and adventuresome all on their own. I recall Barbara Stanwyck in [The Big Valley](#) as being matriarchal and commanding. And there was Miss Kitty (Amanda Blake), the saloon owner in [Gunsmoke](#) – she had an edge on her that was interesting. Action figures, though, these women were not. The memorable Emma Peel (Diana Rigg) of [The Avengers](#) would bump Honey West from the air a year later, but she was only half (and the junior half, at that) in a spy team, and the show came from England. Lynda Carter's [Wonder Woman](#) was a decade in the future, and Jaime Sommers, [The Bionic Woman](#) (Lindsay Wagner), a year beyond that. By then I'd be [in the Army](#) having my own heroic adventures. So, what was a girl to do in 1965?

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Swoon over Anne Francis, that's what. She was the first female detective to be featured in a weekly tv series. Francis described Honey West as a "[tongue-in-cheek, female James Bond.](#)" complete with hot sports car and spy gadgets. She had it going on, and looked damn good doing it, too.

Today, frankly, I don't remember much about the episodes themselves. And while I'm being confessional, I must admit I've never seen *Forbidden Planet* either: one of Leslie Nielsen's early claims to fame, and the thing that put Francis on the map as well (although the [podcast of the radio version here](#) seems an interesting way to catch the substance of it online.) But maybe those details aren't important. What matters is that Ann Francis captivated my attention (for many reasons!) at an impressionable age, and showed me what so little other media did in 1965: a confident, capable woman, risking danger and taking care of business and the bad guys, and relying mainly on herself, not others, to do it.

Hm. Sounds like many of my female protagonists, now doesn't it? Thanks, lady, for the inspiration.

Anne Francis [passed away](#) in January 2011 from complications of cancer. I'm sad to see her go.

UPDATE: [Here's an interesting behind-the-scenes article](#) about the authors of the Honey West books that spawned the tv show, Skip and Gloria Fickling of Laguna Beach, CA.

And how about you, readers? What heroines inspired you growing up, and why? Share your thoughts in the comments section.

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