

**VELMA
FERN
WORDEN**
1935-



**FIRST
LADY
OF
BURLESQUE**

From 1952 to 1978, April March was the highest-paid and most well-known burlesque queen in North America. She gained popularity for her classy and elegant striptease. But March's story is much more than just entertainment.

She was born Velma Fern Worden in June 1935 in Oklahoma City. She was raised by her doting grandparents. Velma began dance, skating, and acrobatic lessons at an early age and aspired to be a movie actress. At ten, she was an extra in an Our Gang comedy filming in Oklahoma City.

Her first job was as a copy girl at the Daily Oklahoman. After training her for fifteen minutes, the teletype machine went too fast so the stock market report didn't get in the paper. Called into E. K. Gaylord's office the next morning, she quit before she was fired.

At sixteen, Velma worked as a cigarette girl at The Derby Club, a striptease club. She was fascinated by the elegant women. When renowned Dallas club owner Barney Weinstein complimented her beauty, he told her he could get her started in burlesque, which might open doors for her. Three months later, she told her grandparents about a tap-dancing job in Dallas and they reluctantly let her go.

When Velma arrived at the Theater Lounge in 1952, Weinstein was not surprised. He changed her name to April March because she looked like a breath of spring. She became an instant audience favorite due to the mix of sensuality and innocence from the raven-haired beauty. March inspired two original songs written specifically for her, "Blues for April" and "Springtime for April" which became popular numbers in her act.

In 1961, an agent renamed her "The First Lady of Burlesque" due to her striking resemblance to First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy. April had perfected the elegant strip and became known for her class and grace. While performing at Miami's Picadilly Club, March met Saudi Arabian King Saud. The State Department convinced her to deliver a letter to Saud, but turned down his trip to Majorca, Spain. She never knew what was in the letter.

Starting at age fifteen, April March was married eight times. She was also romantically involved with Joe DiMaggio and many entertainers like Dale Robertson, Monty Hall and Hank Thompson. She also had a brief fling with U. S. House Ways and Means Chairman Wilbur Mills before introducing him to fellow stripper Fanne Foxe. For a brief time, March was engaged to singer Mel Torme, but broke it off to marry her fourth husband, an Oklahoma drugstore millionaire.

In 1961, she appeared in Jim Henson's academy-award winning short film "Time Piece", probably the only existing footage of her performing. She also discovered her love of golf. During a press party for her Broadway show "This Was Burlesque", March convinced a Sports Illustrated editor to put her in the magazine. He said he would think about it. With an eight handicap, she beat the associate editor in a round of golf by three strokes! In the June 1964 edition, she became the first burlesquer ever to appear in the sports magazine.

In 1978, March retired from burlesque due to its being too sexual but returned in 2006 after seeing a new burlesque revival. She began teaching the old style of the elegant strip tease act. April March took risks in her career, turning down straight acting jobs and a \$10,000 Playboy photoshoot in order to do it her way.