

Joanne Siegel, the Model for Lois Lane, Dies at 93



Courtesy of Laura Siegel Larson, left; Joe Shuster, right

Joanne Siegel in the 1940s, left, and in a drawing by Joe Shuster, who with Ms. Siegel's husband, Jerry, created Superman.

By [BRUCE WEBER](#)

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Joanne Siegel, who as a Cleveland teenager during the Depression hired herself out as a model to an aspiring comic book artist, Joe Shuster, and thus became the first physical incarnation of Lois Lane, Superman's love interest, died on Saturday in Santa Monica, Calif. She was 93.

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DC Comics

Lois Lane and Clark Kent on a Superman comic book cover.

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Everett Collection

Noel Neill and George Reeves in the 1950s television show "The Adventures of Superman."

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TMS & DC Comics Inc., via Associated Press

Margot Kidder and Christopher Reeve in the 1978 movie.

Ms. Siegel was married to Shuster's partner and Superman co-creator, the writer Jerry Siegel. Their daughter, Laura Siegel Larson, confirmed her death.

A high school girl with an ambitious nature and stars in her eyes, young Joanne, like teenagers everywhere, was seeking a way to earn some money when she posed for the first time as Lois Lane. It was probably 1935, her daughter said, and "somebody had told her modeling was easy," so she placed a brief ad in the classified section of *The Plain Dealer*, declaring herself available for modeling work and confessing that she had no experience. Most of the responses to the ad were requests for dates, but one at least seemed serious, and she presented herself to Shuster and Siegel, who were then developing Superman. (The first Superman comic was published in 1938.)

By that point the character was well along in Siegel's mind; he knew he wanted her to be a journalist, and his model was a film character, a clever reporter named Torchy Blane who had been featured in a series of B movies, played by Glenda Farrell. (In the 1938 film "Torchy Blane in Panama," the title character was played by Lola Lane, a singer and actress who some sources — including Ms. Larson — say influenced the name of Superman's leading lady.)

In any case, during the modeling session Joanne struck various poses — draping herself over the arms of a chair, for example, to show how she might look being carried by Superman in flight — and she and the two men, who were barely in their 20s, became

friends. Shuster's drawings reproduced her hairstyle and her facial features, though in the most famous of the original drawings, Lois is considerably more voluptuous than her model was.

"Joe might have taken a few liberties," Ms. Larson said with a laugh. She added that her mother's irrepressibility, ambition and spunk informed her father's development of the character: "My dad always said he wrote Lois with my mom's personality in mind."

The daughter of Hungarian immigrants, she was born Jolan Kovacs in Cleveland on Dec. 1, 1917; classmates and teachers who couldn't or wouldn't pronounce her name properly — YO-lan — called her Joan or Joanne, and the second name is the one that eventually stuck.

After her Lois Lane debut, she was an artist's model in Boston and elsewhere. (For a time she used the name Joanne Carter.) During World War II she worked for a California ship builder, supporting the war effort. Returning to New York, she re-established a connection with Siegel at a fund-raising ball for cartoonists at which, according to family lore, the costumes were judged by [Marlon Brando](#), then in the middle of his Broadway run in "A Streetcar Named Desire."

Both had been married; she was divorced and he was soon to be. They married in 1948 and lived in Connecticut and on Long Island before moving to California in the 1960s. In addition to her daughter, who lives in the Los Angeles area, she is survived by a sister, Sophie Halko of Cleveland, and two grandsons.

Ms. Siegel worked at a number of jobs during her marriage — as one of California's early car saleswomen, she sold new and used Chevys from a lot in Santa Monica — but much of her life was taken up trying to reclaim the original Superman copyright that Shuster and her husband sold to Detective Comics in 1937 for \$130.

Of course, since then Superman as a character had become the central figure in comic books, television shows and blockbuster movies, not to mention the progenitor of legions of other superheroes. Ms. Siegel was the first in a long line of Lois Lanes, who have included Phyllis Coates, Noel Neill, Teri Hatcher, and Erica Durance on television and [Margot Kidder](#) in the movies.

The story of the plight of Shuster and Siegel, whose lives were marked by privation, is one of the cautionary tales in the annals of intellectual property. In a series of legal and public

relations battles that began in 1947, the families eventually won some compensation from DC Comics (the successor to Detective Comics), and in 2008 a federal judge restored Siegel's co-authorship share of the original Superman copyrights, though how much money the Siegel family is entitled to is still being adjudicated.

“All her life she carried the torch for Jerry and Joe — and other artists,” said Marc Toberoff, the lawyer for both the Siegel and Shuster families. “There was a lot of Lois Lane in Joanne Siegel.”