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I WANT TO LIVE (United Artists, 1958) 120 min.

Producer, Walter Wanger; director, Robert Wise; based on newspaper articles of Ed Montgomery and the letters of Barbara Graham; screenplay, Nelson Gidding, Don Mankiewicz; music-conductor, John Mandel; art director, Edward Haworth; set decorator, Victor Gangelin; assistant director, George Vieira; sound, Fred Lau; camera, Lionel Lindon; editor, William Hornbeck.

Susan Hayward (Barbara Graham); Simon Oakland (Ed Montgomery); Virginia Vincent (Peg); Theodore Bikel (Carl Palmberg); Wesley Lau (Henry Graham); Philip Coolidge (Emmett Perkins); Lou Krugman (Jack Santo); James Philbrook (Bruce King); Bartlett Robinson (District Attorney); Gage Clark (Richard G. Tibrow); Joe De Santis (Al Matthews); John Marley (Father Devers); Raymond Bailey (San Quentin Warden); Alice Backes (San Quentin Nurse); Russell Thorson (San Quentin Sergeant); Dabbs Greer (San Quentin Captain); Stafford Repp (Sergeant); Gavin MacLeod (Lieutenant).

On June 3, 1955, thirty-two year old Barbara Graham died in the gas chamber at San Quentin prison. The four-time wed woman, who was the mother of three, had been found guilty of the 1953 murder of Mrs. Mabel Monohan. Some twenty years later, legal authorities and some of the public (those who remember) are not sure whether Barbara Graham was guilty or just a victim of circumstantial evidence.

Guilty of dope addiction, prostitution, shilling, and what have you, Barbara Graham (Hayward) insists to the very end that she is innocent of the murder of the elderly widow. But one of her gangland associates turns state's evidence and pins the rap on her, and she foolishly tries to buy an alibi from a cellmate's friend (who turns out to be a law enforcer). In the course of her hell on earth, Barbara wins one stay of execution after another. Finally, her appeals for leniency and a fresh trial are denied. She is led to the gas chamber and executed.

Anyone who has seen Susan Hayward's Academy Award-winning performance as the ill-fated Barbara Graham cannot forget her vibrant interpretation of a woman fighting for her life. "Why do they torture me?" she screams at one point, distraught by the legal system which tantalizes, and terrorizes the hapless prisoner.

Regarding this shocking feature, Time said, "... what is the meaning of the painful lesson.... Is it a sermon on the wages of sin? Not really. The heroine, according to the script, is not punished for something she did, but for something she did not do. Is it an attack on capital punishment? Possibly. But the script spends no sympathy on the two men convicted as the heroine's accomplices, who meet the same fate as she does. Well then, what is it? To judge from the far-out photography, real desperate sound track, and dragville dialogue that Krylon-spray the whole film with a cheap glaze of don't-care-if-I-do-die juvenility, Producer Walter Wanger seems less concerned to assist the triumph of justice than to provide the morbid market with a sure-enough gasser."

No matter what one's reaction to the script, the performances, or the thrust of the feature, it does make one very salient point.



Susan Hayward in I Want to Live (1958).

1976 Acacrow Pres. Metuchen NJ - THE GREAT GANGSTER PICTURES - JAMES PARISH & MICHAEL PITTS
Robert

People are judged by who their friends are, and having underworld associates is no recommendation in a tight spot.