



## John Gavin

**Birth Name:** John Anthony Golenor

**Birthday:** Wednesday, April 8, 1931

**Sign:** [Aries](#) [1]

**Birth Place:** Los Angeles, California, USA

**Height:** 6'4"

John Gavin, the American film and TV actor, businessman and diplomat who was Ronald Reagan's first Ambassador to Mexico, was born John Anthony Golenor. The future "Jack" Gavin was a fifth generation Angeleno on the side of his father Herald, who was descended from the Golenor family of Spain. The Golenors were early landowners in Spanish California, but despite this proud heritage, Herald Golenor eventually changed the family's name to Gavin. John Gavin's mother was descended from the powerful Pablos family hailing from the Mexican state of Sonora, where she was born. From his Mexican mother, Gavin gained a fluency in Spanish that was to aid him in his future career in diplomacy. John Gavin graduated with honors from Stanford University, majoring in Latin American economic history. "Law, Latin America and diplomacy were my early interests," Gavin later remembered. Too young to participate in World War II, he did serve in the military during the Korean Conflict. He was commissioned an officer in the U.S. Navy in 1952, where he served in naval air intelligence until his 1955 discharge. After his hitch in the Navy, Universal -- the home studio of 6'5" heartthrob Rock Hudson, who was on his way to becoming the top box office star in America -- offered the 6'4" Gavin a screen-test and a contract with the studio. Studio bosses always liked internal competition to keep the pressure on their major stars; Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer signed 'Robert Taylor' as a young backup to the King of Hollywood Clark Gable, and similarly, Gavin was positioned as the "next Rock Hudson".



Tall, dark and handsome, Gavin debuted in *Behind the High Wall* (1956), and three years later, in 1959, he had his first major lead in Douglas Sirk's remake of *Imitation of Life* (1959) opposite Lana Turner. Sirk, whose Ross Hunter-produced melodramas of the mid-1950's made Hudson a superstar, first directed Gavin in the role of a German soldier in his adaptation of Erich Maria Remarque's *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* (1958) the year before. *Imitation of Life* (1959), which was produced by Ross Hunter in his typical lavish style, was a huge hit. Gavin was on the road to becoming a major Hudson-style heart-throb, it seemed.

The following year, Gavin achieved cinematic immortality by appearing in two classics in supporting roles, as Janet Leigh's lover in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and as Julius Caesar in Stanley Kubrick's *Spartacus* (1960). Of *Psycho* (1960) and *Spartacus* (1960), he has said, "I didn't have an inkling they would be classics. Had I realized that, perhaps I would have paid more attention." The momentum of his cinema career petered out after appearing opposite Susan Hayward in the 1961 remake of Fannie Hurst's *Back Street* (1961), though he did move on to star in two television series during the 1960s, "Destry" (1964) and "Convoy" (1965). Both series were produced by companies that were subsidiaries of the Universal-M.C.A., Revue Studios and Universal TV, created by the legendary agent and studio boss Lew Wasserman, the eminence grise behind Ronald Reagan's movie, TV and political careers. More importantly, in 1961, he was appointed special adviser to the secretary general of the Organization of American States, a position he held until 1973. He also performed task-group work for the Department of State and the Executive Office of the President. From 1966 to 1973, he also served on the board of the Screen Actors Guild and was guild president from 1971-1973. For the next eight years, he was engaged in business activities, many of which took him to Mexico and other Latin American countries. The producers of the James Bond series signed George Lazenby to take over the lead in *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971), until they convinced Sean Connery to reprise the role with a \$1 million charitable contribution and a \$1 million salary. Thus, Gavin lost out on what could have been his career break into the big-time. However, he did not lament the loss of the role. If he had been a more successful actor, it "might have prevented me from fulfilling my real childhood dream: to be U.S. ambassador to Mexico."

During the 1970s, Gavin made some more movies, toured in summer stock in a production of *The Fantasticks* (Gavin has a fine baritone voice), and appeared on Broadway and in the touring show of the musical *Seesaw* (1973). He ended the decade by starring in TV mini-series "Doctors' Private Lives" (1979); he left show business to pursue business interests. The 1980s brought America a new president, and on May 7, 1981, Republican Gavin was appointed Ambassador to Mexico by President Reagan, serving until June 10, 1986. The American diplomatic mission in Mexico, one of the largest in the world, employed more than 1,000 American and Mexican employees tasked by over a dozen U.S. government agencies in consulates and offices throughout Mexico.

Gavin married the former stage and television actress Constance Towers in 1974. Each partner had two children from previous marriages. Gavin's daughter, Christina Gavin, followed in his footsteps and became an actress.

Since leaving government service, Gavin has become a successful businessman and civic leader, co-founding and managing successful ventures in the U.S. and Latin America. In 1986, Gavin was named president of Univisa Satellite Communications, a subsidiary of Univisa, Inc. He is founder/chairman of Gamma Holdings and serves on the boards of Apex Mortgage Capital, International Wire Holdings, and KKFC, Inc, and is a trustee and director of certain Merrill Lynch mutual funds. He is also a member of the Latin America Strategy Board of Hicks, Muse, Tate & Furst. Previously he was a managing director and partner of Hicks, Muse, Tate & Furst (Latin America) as well as a director of Atlantic Richfield (where he had served as vice president of federal and international relations). He also served on the boards of Dresser Industries, Claxson and several other major corporations. Gavin also serves on the boards of several non-profit corporations, pro bono, including The Anderson Graduate School of Management at UCLA, Loyola Marymount University, and the California Community Foundation. Gavin also is a member of the Congressional Policy Advisory Board as a defense and foreign policy expert.

Gavin served as founding Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of The Century Council's from May 1991 until December 1994, then served on the Council's Advisory Board until 1996. The Century Council, a non-profit organization dedicated to fighting alcohol abuse, focuses on drunk driving and



underage drinking problems and is supported by America's leading distillers.

In addition to their four children, Gavin and his wife Constance have one grandchild.

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