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MAILA NURMI OBITUARY

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LOS ANGELES (AP) - Maila Nurmi, whose "Vampira" TV persona pioneered the spooky-yet-sexy Goth aesthetic, has died, coroner's officials said. She was 85.

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Nurmi died Thursday afternoon at her Hollywood home, Los Angeles County coroner's Lt. Fred Corral said. The cause of death has not been determined, Corral said.

Nurmi created her Vampira character - reminiscent of Charles Addams' spooky New Yorker magazine cartoons - to host horror [movie](#) broadcasts on KABC TV in Los Angeles in 1954.

With darkly mascaraed eyes and blood-red lipstick, Nurmi appeared each week in her revealing black dress and slinky fishnet stockings to introduce such films as "Revenge of the Zombies" and "Devil Bat's Daughter."

"The Vampira Show" was canceled after about a year, but Nurmi remained a cult figure among B-movie buffs and is thought to have inspired the look of the vampish Morticia Addams character played by Carolyn Jones on the TV comedy "The Addams Family," which premiered in 1964.

But Nurmi's cultural resonance did not translate into long-term wealth. In 1989, she lost a \$10 million lawsuit that contended Cassandra Peterson's late-night horror hostess Elvira pirated her character.

"There is no Elvira. There's only a pirated Vampira," she was quoted as saying in an Associated Press story at the time. "Cassandra Peterson slavishly copied my product and made a fortune. America has been duped."

Among Nurmi's scattered film appearances following her TV career was a cameo in Ed Wood's 1959 cult classic, "Plan 9 From Outer Space." Nurmi was played by Lisa Marie in "Ed Wood," Tim Burton's 1994 tribute to the B-movie director.

Nurmi was born Maila Elizabeth Syrjaniemi in Finland on Dec. 11, 1922 and emigrated with her family to Ohio, said Heather Saenz, a friend.

In her late teens she went to New York, where she fell in with a clique of [actors](#) and artists and moved with them to Hollywood to seek a film career, Saenz said. She worked as a chorus girl and model before appearing as Vampira, Saenz said.

Nurmi supported herself late in her life by selling handmade jewelry, Saenz said.

Saenz and her husband, Bryan Moore, met Nurmi in 2005 when they recruited her to serve as grand marshal in a procession of hearses sponsored by Los Angeles' Petersen Automotive Museum.

Moore said he plans to transport Nurmi's casket in a vintage 1951 hearse that appeared in a scene of "Ed Wood."

"So that's going to be Vampira's last ride," he said.

Funeral arrangements are pending. Nurmi has no known surviving family, Moore said.

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- **Maria nieves** (Springfield, MA)

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