



From The Chris Hegle Collection

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Mary Evelyn Frechette, known to everyone as "Billie," was born in 1907. Her father was French; her mother was Native-American. At eighteen, Billie moved to Chicago. Working as a waitress, and also as a nursemaid, she married Welton Sparks (who received a prison sentence, in 1933, for committing mail robbery). She was still married when she met John Dillinger. Image online via PBS.

Not long before Johnnie and Red Hamilton got themselves into serious trouble, robbing a bank in East Chicago, Dillinger met Evelyn ("Billie") Frechette. The twenty-five-year-old's life changed forever that night in Chicago.

She tells us what happened, at a North-Side cabaret, during her first encounter with a man called Jack Harris:

I was sitting at the table with some other girls and some fellows. We were having a good time.

I looked up and I saw a man at a table across the room looking at me. He didn't look away when I looked up. He just stared at me and smiled a little bit with the corner of his mouth . . . I looked at him and maybe I smiled.

Anyway he knew one of the girls I was with and pretty soon he came over to our table and spoke to the girl and she said: "Billy, this is Jack Harris."

He might just as well have said his name was John Dillinger then because I didn't know any different. I didn't read the newspapers. I didn't know for a long time after that what his real name was. I didn't know then he was the John Dillinger everybody under the sun was looking for.

But to me that night he was just Jack Harris - a good looking fellow that stood there looking down at me and smiling in a way that I could tell he liked me already more than a little bit. He said:

"Where have you been all my life?"

In August of 1934, when Billie first told her story (in the *Chicago Herald and Examiner*), she said the couple met "in November" of the prior year. It wasn't long before they moved in together.

Johnnie was kind to Frechette (who'd been previously married) and bought her presents. One of his notable gifts protected her from Chicago's difficult winters. It was a coat which cost \$149. (That's the equivalent of \$2,500 today.)

The romance between Johnnie and Billie was intense but short-lived. How could she have known—when she wasn't even told his real name in the beginning—that her new friend was months away from being named "Public Enemy Number One?"

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/DILLINGER-AND-BILLIE-FRECHETTE-Public-Enemies)

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See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/DILLINGER-AND-BILLIE-FRECHETTE-Public-Enemies)

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Billie Frechette - Dillinger Girlfriend

Photo of Billie Frechette, online courtesy PBS.

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