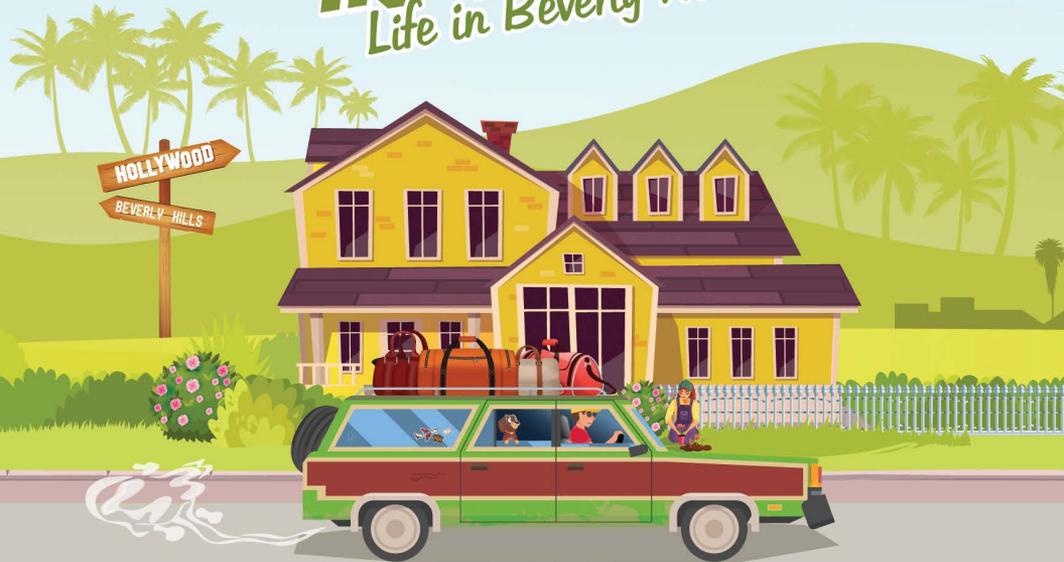




a Nobody *in a* Somebody World

My
HOLLYWOOD
Life in Beverly Hills



LORRAINE HOLNBACK BRODEK

A
NOBODY
IN A
SOMEBODY
WORLD

My Hollywood Life in Beverly Hills

LORRAINE HOLNBACK BRODEK

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A Nobody In A Somebody World

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Dedication

Erma Bombeck, 1927–1996

Humor columnist, Erma Bombeck, wrote her own obituary on a hot August day in 1976 on the Bright Angel Trail in Grand Canyon. I was with her and her family: husband, Bill; sons, Andy and Matt; and daughter, Betsy. It was all her idea. She had presented the plans for this *vacation* one evening while we were gathered in their living room.

We had been longtime friends when one night after dinner she said, “Hey, I know the perfect trip for all of us to do together.”

My husband, Tom, was part of this evening before he knew he was going to miss this entire white-knuckle experience by being on location for two months for the movie, *The Savage Bees*.

“How about the Grand Canyon!” Erma said excitedly.

“Hold the phone,” I said. “Is that where you see people screaming for their lives as they bounce down a torrential river and into the rapids only to realize they can’t swim?”

“It’s going to be fun,” declared Erma Le Bouche, which was French for “Erma, The Mouth,” my nickname for her. It appeared that the plans were now written in Grand Canyon

stone. She had made up her mind. There was no turning back.

We drove to the Canyon the night before the big six-day water rafting vacation and deposited our gear with Sanderson River Excursions. This included my five-pound Avon cosmetic case, which was important because it could also be used as a flotation device. All we had to do was hike down the eight-mile Bright Angel Trail to the rafts. We grabbed a quick breakfast, got an early start, and headed for the trail. Erma's outfit was not to be believed.

She was wearing every color imaginable on her five-foot frame, and in an incredible mix and match assortment. That was before the word *eclectic* became popular. She was electric eclectic: orange hat; Day-Glow yellow and white shirt; bright pink sweat top, tied around hot turquoise shorts; and a red paisley bandana—all crisp and new, including her shiny leather hiking boots.

“At least,” I said, studying her, “I’m not worried about the search team finding us if we get lost.”

We were off, flashy colors and all.

Bill and the kids took the lead and hit the ground running. As we headed down the steep, switch-backing trail to the river rafts below, Erma began limping. “I knew I should have cut my toenails this morning,” she grouched, “but I had to hurry and put my outfit together. Himself (as she often referred to Bill), wanted to *git ‘er going*. The front of these Godforsaken boots has jammed my big toe right up to my left knee!”

Anyone who has gone downhill in new boots with uncut toenails can relate.



The lower on the trail we got, the sandier it got. And the sandier it got, the less trees there were for shade. And the fewer trees there were, the hotter it got. The unrelenting Arizona sun was beating down. Our red faces matched our bandanas, which were soaked in sweat. The 120-degree sand under our feet was sending off a nauseating rubber smell from the new boot soles. Erma was having a difficult time picking one boot up after the other in the soft sand. The canteens of water were long gone with the *ironmen of the family*, who were probably at the rafts by now and well hydrated.

“Dontcha just love that?” Erma said, puffing. “They haven’t even noticed we’re missing and the vultures are circling.”

“That’s because they think you’re a peacock and out of your element,” I said.

I was worried about her. I was thirty-seven and she was fifty and suffering from polycystic kidney disease, the life-threatening genetic disorder that eventually killed her. I was concerned, because I knew that water was critical. Not a drop to drink anywhere! Not even a cactus to cut open.

The next thing we knew, our knees buckled and we hit the sand, as if an old miner had knocked us over with his pick ax. This was followed immediately by our stomachs throwing up whatever fluid we had left in our bodies—seasickness in the sand, not good.

“It’s Sunstroke 101,” I said. “Where’s a manual? We need shade! How about that low rock over there?”

We headed for the rock, hoping a rattlesnake didn’t have the same idea. We then rolled under the craggy crag (just as a scorpion skittered from underneath) and quietly groaned for a moment in unison. That’s when Erma mumbled her obit.

“I can see the headlines now...” She rolled her eyes with devilish intent. *“Famous Humorist, Newspaper Columnist, and TV Celebrity Dies on Trail with Little Unknown Person.”*

“Does ‘little’ mean I’m a size six? What are you—a ten now?” I chided, just to get in what I thought might be my last words.

We talked about angels. That must have been where the Bright Angel Trail got its name. Erma thought she heard them treading. I said, “All I hear is a clippity-clop.” And then, lo and behold, God said there would be mules! And they cameth forth in great numbers, one by one, around the bend. And they relieveth themselves.

“Water!”

“You’re the famous columnist, TV star, and humorist,” I said. “Stop them. I’m little and unknown!”

Erma rolled out from under the rock and, while lying flat on her back in the sand, yelled up at the old geezer on the lead mule, “Halt! Your money or your salt tablets!”

Then I, too, rolled out. The crotchety, weathered cowboy looked down and grumbled at us, “I’d give ya ladies a ride, but you didn’t sign none of them assurance papers. ‘Sides, these fleabags have riders waitin’ for ‘em at the river.” He was headed down to retrieve all the rafters (who had survived) and take them back up the switchbacks on the mountain.

What followed was not a pretty picture. Because Erma was so short, she went eyeball to eyeball with the lead mule. “I know Mr. Ed personally! You’ve heard of the glue factory? Well, I even know Mr. Elmer! Don’t you dare move a hoof until we’re on.” She was writing next week’s column as we stood there.

The wrinkled wrangler finally gave in. He actually helped Erma get her short little legs and tiny shiny boots into the stirrups. Of course, she wanted to know the mule's name and, of course, it was Killer and mine was Lightnin'. Some old cornball jokes never change. The jocks of the family had actually started backtracking on the trail to look for us. About time. They had finally become worried about our no-show. We met them about a quarter-of-a-mile down and the old cowboy let them hop aboard the mules too. We started humming the *Grand Canyon Suite*. And happiness pervaded the Bright Angel Trail again.



Erma died on April 22, 1996, after an unsuccessful kidney transplant. The night before, I had spoken with Bill, who was at her bedside following her surgery. He was cautious and guarded about her condition in recovery, trying his darndest to be optimistic. So it was a shock when I heard the devastating news on the radio the next morning as I was driving to work. Tears consumed me. I pulled over.

Bill asked if we would attend her funeral mass in Phoenix, Arizona, on the twenty-ninth and perhaps say a few words. I reminded him that Erma had already written her obituary and wondered if it would be okay for me to retell the story.

He started chuckling, and said, "Do we have to hear it again? Of course."

I followed Phil Donahue (who looked at me like the little, unknown person that I was) as I walked to the front of the church.

The Bombeck family, sitting in the front row to my right, all started smiling the minute I stood behind the podium. They knew what was coming, and the kids just started shaking their heads. I spoke from my heart— no notes—and ended with, “*Erma, the famous humorist, newspaper columnist, and TV celebrity left a legacy that was truly a bright angel’s trail.*”

To her, this book is lovingly dedicated.





The motley crew as we appeared in *Woman's Day* magazine (8/13/91). Front row from left: Matt Bombeck, Andy Bombeck, Erma and me (in white hat). Betsy Bombeck is peeking over my right shoulder. In back row at right is Bill Bombeck in straw hat with ribbon.

Credit: Bombeck family archives. Grand Canyon, Aug., 1976.

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To all the great people, family and friends whom I've totally embarrassed throughout the following pages. However, I am choosing not to acknowledge those who have complicated my otherwise crazy life...may they rest with their arms tied together in scratchy sweaters or be forced to sit on a cold, chair in front of the confessional box.

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And a final tribute to one of the funniest and best writers ever ...Al Martinez. He was the infamous Bard of L.A., Mark Twain look-alike, wise sage of the Topanga Writers Workshop and general hell-raiser ...without whose help and unbalanced kick in the butt this book would have stayed in my demented brain and not on paper. His contribution to my life went beyond what any words could say! (Single exclamation point!)

Introduction

I'm a Hollywood babe, born in Tinseltown and raised in the upper Hollywoodburg known as Beverly Hills. It's like saying I was born in Glitterville and moved to Twitterville—a town that boasts more iPods per hand, more cell phones per ear, more Botox per face, and more Ferragamo's per foot than any other zip code. I reached life's milestones in Beverly Hills: baptism, confirmation, puberty, graduation, marriage, virginity loss, motherhood, and menopause. I remember menopause distinctly because it happened at Gelson's, the upscale supermarket near Avenue of the Stars. I had my first hot flash at the ice cream compartment, and the clerk asked me to close the freezer door because I was melting the *Chunky Monkey*.

While Beverly Hills may be Upper Hollywood, Lower Hollywood would be Phoenix, where I had a fling with porno and public television. Now I just duck cows and wild pigs in our wilderness vacation home on Maui, which can be referred to as “Outer Hollywood.”

I went to school with Oscar Levant's daughter, Marsha; tossed jacks with Nora Ephron in our Brownie beanies; played tennis with Ricky Nelson and Wimbledon legend, May Sutton Bundy; went to Sunday School with Eleanor Powell and Glenn Ford's son, Peter, and Gloria and Jimmy

Stewart's sons, Michael and Ronald; partied with Ava Astaire; ate a Bob's Big Boy burger with Nancy and her dad, Efrem Zimbalist Jr.; and rode the down elevator with Elvis Presley, but that's as far as I went.

Columnist Erma Bombeck called me a "little, unknown person." The great thing about being anonymous was that *an unknownus can walk among us* and not be harassed by the paparazzi. Jonathan Winters once said to me, "Turn your brain into a camera and take little mental snapshots of all the going's-on."

Erma said if you don't remember it, it's not that funny, and Jonathan agreed that if the picture stays in your brain, it is.

The stories in this book are from my brain's overstuffed storeroom of the celebs and noncelebs I grew up with, worked, and played with and still remain friends with. My seventy-two years have been filled with fun and nonsense, from a jaunt into the Grand Canyon with Bombeck and her nutty family to an Iranian riot at our Beverly Hills home, where the most riotous we usually got was watching Mel Brooks being dragged down the street by his Yorkie-sized dog. I have reinvented myself a number of times, started a craft business with my stepmom, worked in the film industry, created the Warner Bros. catalog, cofounded a successful landscaping company, and wrangled boars in the jungle.

My husband, Tom, is a film producer who lists among his credits, or discredits, the TV movie *The Savage Bees*, which, Lord have mercy, you never saw. It lived and died in infamy; even the killer bees that normally love a good buzz gave it stinging reviews. Then there was *Transylvania 6-5000*, which Siskel and Ebert rated "one of the ten worst movies of the

year” in 1985. In fact, they didn’t even give it two thumbs down; they just sat on their thumbs.

I have put all of this and more together for a series of essays that I hope, against good judgment, will fascinate you. You will meet the Wicked Witch of the West, Hugh Downs, Dick Van Dyke, Jeff Goldblum, Geena Davis, Michael Richards, Ed Begley Jr., Lionel Ritchie, and a few Warner Bros. stars, some with huge egos and some with none; and perhaps someday, we’ll all enjoy a Bob’s Big Boy burger together. If anonymous is a woman, that would be me—a nobody in a somebody world.

A Nobody in a Somebody World

One of the most ego-leveling questions I've ever been asked was shouted at me one day as I was in my grubbiest of clothes, pruning roses in the front yard of our Beverly Hills' home.

As I hunched over with clippers in hand, a weathered station wagon slowly gear-grinded its way up the street. Kids and a mangy mutt were hanging out the sticker'd windows. Well-used duffle bags were piled atop the luggage rack. Mom was obviously copilot with a Hollywood star map spread out on her lap, while Grandma was in the backseat with a camera at the ready.

The car slowed, the pistons protested, fumes overpowered the perfume of my roses. A sort of *Eau de Exhaust*. The dad, a designated tour guide for this Beverly Hills *Lampoon Vacation*, tipped his Budweiser cap back on his balding forehead, leaned out of the driver's window, and hollered at me, "Hey! Are you somebody?"

Therein lies the bane of my existence growing up in Beverly Hills (i.e., Upper Hollywood) and then returning to live there in my adult years. When this city becomes your

address, the public-at-large automatically files you under one of four categories:

- (1) You are somebody
- (2) You live with (and/or are married to) somebody
- (3) You live near somebody, or
- (4) You know somebody (The terms *movie star*, *celebrity*, and/or *famous person* can be substituted for the word *somebody*.)

If you do not qualify for inclusion into one of these four categories, then you are either:

- (1) a *C-lister* nobody
- (2) a *wanna-be*
- (3) the dreaded *has-been*, or
- (4) a *name-dropper*

I could have sarcastically replied, “If you have a sec you can put your car in park, and I’ll go Google myself and print it out for you.” But it was much easier to respond, “No, I just work here.”



You can imagine the pressure of telling stories of one’s life in Hollywood without having it appear that you are a down-and-out *E-Lister* (i.e. *E* for *exploiter*). For example, as soon as I would provide my zip code to the operator taking my phone order for a catalog item, here’s how the conversation might go:

“Your zip code, please.”

“90210.”

This is what I get as a response: “Oooo-ooo, do you know any movie stars?” or “Oo-ooo, I just love that show!” or “Oo-oooo, do you live near anyone famous?”



Four generations of my Holnback paternal side of the family. At one month of age, I’m being held by my great-grandmother (Bena) along with my grandfather (Peter; aka *Pop*) and father (Charles) in the foreground.

Beverly Hills, 1940.



Sweetheart Soap Box Derby starring *Sweet Lorraine* in Westwood, CA, 1942.



This same routine would play out at a DMV window or during business sessions that would require reciting my address or when providing directions to the plumber, such as, “You head east past the Beverly Hills Hotel, turn left, and past Frank Sinatra’s place, curve right at Mel Brooks, turn left at the corner of Carol Burnett and Merv Griffin, pass the estate of Dino De Laurentiis, which he sold to Kenny Rogers and make a left at Lionel Ritchie’s gate house. which is just two doors down from Elizabeth Taylor and Mike Todd’s old place. We’re right across from Vidal Sassoon’s mansion. If you get to George Michael’s pied-a-terre, you’ve gone too far.”

Now if that isn’t name-dropping, I don’t know what is. Just think what that star-struck catalog lady could do with that information. Of course most of those celebs are no longer in

A NOBODY IN A SOMEBODY WORLD

residence due to social mobility and/or morbidity. It becomes *used to live here* information, but it still sells.



I was born in Hollywood and grew up in Beverly Hills. In those years, you really didn't focus on what your friend's parents did for a living. You were just kids doing kid things together without being bothered by the encumbrances of social status. School skipped over the debatable three R's: race, religion, and renown.



Fourth-grade class, El Rodeo School, Beverly Hills, 1949. Pigtailed and squished, I am fourth from left in front row. Nora Ephron is sixth from left. Marsha Levant is in second row; sixth from left.

In Memoriam: Comedy turned to tragedy with the loss of the irreplaceable Nora (1941-2012).



There's skinny, knock-kneed, pig-tailed me squished in the first row of fourth graders for our El Rodeo School class picture. Nora Ephron was one down from me in her uneven socks, saddle shoes, and tattered dress sash. I had not a clue that her parents were the famous screenwriters and producers, Phoebe and Henry Ephron. Nora, of course, went on to become an *A-Lister* as a best-selling author, film director, and producer. She wrote the screenplay for *Silkwood* and *When Harry Met Sally* then co-wrote and directed *Sleepless in Seattle*, *You've Got Mail*, and *Julie and Julia*.

In her novel *Heartburn* (later a movie with Jack Nicholson and Meryl Streep), she obviously parodied her marriage to Carl Bernstein, the Watergate reporter. He must have exposed more than political scandals, because she caught him having an affair with married British politician Margaret Jay. In *Heartburn* Nora gave Carl the name of Mark. (Personally, I would have named him Dick, but that would have been too obvious.) Anyway, she let the world know that "he was capable of having sex with a Venetian blind."

In the second row behind Nora and me was Marcia Levant. Her dad was Oscar Levant, the quick-witted, often bizarre composer, piano virtuoso, media personality, and well-known hypochondriac. On TV once, Jack Paar asked Oscar what he did for exercise. He replied, "I stumble then fall into a coma."

It would take a strong woman to be married to a man like that, and that would be the beautiful June Gale. She was one of the dancing quadruplet Gale Sisters (actually two sets of twins) and came to Hollywood to be an actress before meeting Levant. The interesting coincidence to me was that following Levant's death and after Phoebe Ephron died in

1972, Henry married June Levant in 1978. This would have made Nora and Marcia stepsisters, though they didn't know that as they stood a row apart in 1950.

The PTA mothers of El Rodeo School had to be creative in their fundraisers. One of these was the ER Cook Book. In the forties, some of the moms had to sit there and type out the ingredients, organize the food groups (cake, candy, cheese, etc.), and give credit to the cook who submitted it. My mom was one of these typists and also included her *Holiday Pudding*, which she had plagiarized from my great aunts, Nellie and Bessie.

All the ingredients and the amounts that my mom listed were exactly the same as my aunts' recipe, except in her homebound copy she had one last recommendation as a final flourish to the hard sauce...*add a generous amount of brandy. Use a match to light and stand back so the little ones don't get singed.* It's a good thing that Child Protective Services didn't exist in the forties. It would have put the Scrooge right into Christmas...though he might have enjoyed a little nip of the brandy.

Mrs. Arthur Rubenstein, wife of the famous pianist/concert artist, featured her Polish-liver pâté, which made sense because both she and Arthur were from Poland. Nora's sister, Delia, offered her own Toll House cookie recipe. If I calculate that correctly, that would have made Delia six years old and in first grade when she concocted those cookies. So maybe her mom just entered it under her name. With more than cookies to her credit, Delia became writing and producing partners with sister, Nora, on many projects for film and stage, the most recent being the hit play "Love, Loss and What I Wore."

Mrs. Glenn Ford was known for her American chop suey. She certainly had earned name credentials in her own right. She was Eleanor Powell, the celebrity dancer and movie star. Their son, Peter, attended El Rodeo and also the Beverly Hills Presbyterian Church, where his mom taught Sunday school. In fact, I was her student assistant on Sunday mornings. I had always wanted to learn to tap dance, and when she offered to teach me, my father put his foot down. “No daughter of mine is going to be tapping across the stage in little shorts.” So much for my Rockette aspirations.



My fondest memory at the church was when I was a seven-year-old student there. My teacher was Margaret Meserve. The kids loved her because she had the best sense of humor—not what one would expect when you’re supposed to be focusing on Jesus and memorizing your prayers. So she never would have become a reverend like Eleanor Powell did... more like an *irreverent*. One Sunday morning, she proposed that she would like to take us all to a movie.

And what was the movie, pray tell? *The Wizard of Oz*. Wow! Quite a leap from *Bambi*. Now, this was a hard sell to our parents, because we had heard that it might cause nightmares. But the date was set. We all arrived at the theater, and Mrs. Meserve sat next to me. The tornado was bad enough with cute Toto being sucked off into the sky, but when that ugly, frightening, green Wicked Witch of the West appeared, I started crying. I was scared witchless.

Mrs. Meserve put her reassuring arm around me. “Lorraine,

it's okay. Look...I'm the witch! Only they put green makeup on me for the movie. Don't be afraid."

The kids were speechless. None of us knew. Why didn't our parents tell us that she was the green witch in *The Wizard of Oz*? Outside, she tossed her head back as she cackled, "I'll get you my pretties and your little dog too, eeee-hheee-yyaackk-aaa." Her shrillness resounded through the lobby. Movies took on a new dimension for me at that moment. Margaret Meserve was better known as Margaret Hamilton, aka: Almira Gulch, Wicked Witch of the West—a great trivia question.

I can't remember if Peter Ford was in the audience that day, but I know he must remember Margaret. As part of his schooling, he recalls in his book that in learning any new sport, his coaches would be recruited from Hollywood as well as the sporting world. Johnny Weissmuller (Tarzan) taught him swimming. Pancho Segoo Segura (a world class tennis player) taught him tennis at The Beverly Hills Hotel. So much for the YMCA.

My tennis teacher was May Sutton Bundy, the first American to win the singles' title at Wimbledon and also Queen of the Pasadena Rose Parade. She taught me my forehand and backhand at the Los Angeles Country Club, where my parents were members—probably the most W.A.S.P.-ish club in Southern California. And in forties terms: no Hollywood-types, blacks, or Jews were allowed, and women could only play on Tuesdays and wear *appropriate dresses* to dinner.



The L.A.C.C. was directly adjacent to El Rodeo School. I always questioned this story that my dad used to tell because it happened on a Tuesday, and that would be Ladies' Day at the club, so what was he doing out on the links? I was in first grade then, but it was summer vacation. While he was golfing with his buddies there was the roar of a low-flying plane coming in over the ninth hole. Less than a minute later, a loud *kaboom* was heard, and you could immediately see smoke and flames rising nearby in what would have been the residential area of Whittier Drive where El Rodeo School is located.

Everyone started running either back to the clubhouse or in the direction of the crash. As depicted in the movie, Howard Hughes was testing his XF-11. Evidently there was an oil leak, which caused one of the propellers to reverse, so he was trying to turn the fairway into a runway. This didn't happen. The end result was severe injuries for Hughes, which caused his long addiction to opiates and his mustache (to hide a scar). Also, somebody got a new house.

My dad's business made aircraft parts for Howard Hughes along with auto parts for General Motors. His main product, however, was coil springs. The kids stopped teasing me when they found out where Slinky's (invented by Richard James) came from. My dad used to tell the joke that Slinky's reminded him of people who didn't seem to have a real purpose in life, but they did make you laugh when pushed down the stairs. It was these springs—big ones, flexible ones, and even tiny ones for Paper Mate pens—that were the springboard for our family moving to Upper Hollywood...otherwise known as Beverly Hills.

My Upper Hollywood *Hood*

In 1952 my parents finished building our new home in the hills above Sunset Blvd. It was country English in design: lots of used brick, cedar shakes on the roof, Dutch doors, and leaded glass windows. Not cottage-sized, however, as it was a two-story affair with five bathrooms, five bedrooms, and a maid's quarters. This move meant that I had to transfer elementary schools, thrusting me headfirst into a sudden explosion of more *children of the big names*.

By comparison, I got the same feeling when I opened those fake snakes in a can with the springs my father made. When you untwisted the lid, the thing popped out at you and seemed to keep coming as your heart rate raced to 220/100. It was the same shock that I felt with a burst of *A List* kids everywhere. Kaboom!

The new neighborhood where I was about to spend the next fifty years was in the estate area of Beverly Hills, featuring homes with acreage. This was a location considered more prestigious than the flats south of Sunset, sneeringly described as row housing for millionaires. It was not Mr. Rogers's neighborhood. You did not go up to your friend's house and knock on the door and walk in. You had to push the security buzzer at the front electric gate to gain entrance.

And that was only after you alerted *the manor staff* that you were on your way over to play. It was also the neighborhood where streets are not only named for the vistas, ridges and crests, but for the families who originally owned those hills.



The framing stage of construction for my new childhood home. Beverly Hills, 1951.



Doheny Road was the street just down the hill from us. Towering over this road is the fifty-five-room Greystone

Mansion built by Edward Laurence Doheny, the oil baron of Teapot Dome Scandal fame. His prestige and power was equaled only by the *Los Angeles Times's* Chandlers, who had owned the valley lands northeast of the Doheny's. Across the street from Greystone is Cord Circle. This is the street named after E.L. Cord, who was famous for the Cord automobile. Charlie Cord was his grandson and became part of our "hood."

Lucy (Dickey Dell) Doheny was the granddaughter of E. L. and grew up in the Greystone Manor. Her father was murdered by his close friend and chauffeur in the downstairs guest room of the mansion amidst a great deal of salacious rumors. Dickey Dell married Waldeman Van Cott Niven. They had two sons, Larry and Michael Niven. Larry Niven went on to become a well-known science fiction writer. There were a lot of Larrys in the Doheny clan. Dickey Dell's brother E.L. Doheny III had a son named E.L. Doheny IV (Larry). It's kind of like, "This is my brother Larry, and this is my other brother Larry."



Just around the bend from Michael Niven's house lived another classmate, Steve Pauley. His parents were Bobbi and Edwin Pauley, one more oil magnate family whose money came from the Pauley Petroleum business. Mr. Pauley didn't have a street named after him, so he donated tons of dollars for UCLA to build the Pauley Pavillion that houses its basketball games. I guess you could call all of us kids who lived mansions apart *the brat pack*.

On the weekends in the summer sometimes we'd walk over

to Greystone to swim in the huge pool with the underground changing rooms or over to the Doheny Ranch or *the farm* as we liked to call it. This was the humongous backyard (400+ acres) adjoining Greystone. It was home to farm animals, stables, and orange groves. We could find stuff to do there for hours from cops and robbers to hide-and-seek...a kid could just get lost in that place. Then we'd head back to Niven's, where he had a real soda fountain and share a root beer float or chocolate malt. Life was good.

It was, that is, until September came around and it was time to head back to the school that was now my new educational institution...Hawthorne Elementary...the alma mater of yet more *children of the big names*. Two graduates who put Hawthorne on the map were Pia Lindstrom, who was the daughter of Ingrid Bergman and was an Emmy-winning journalist in her own right, and Monica Lewinsky who was well known for the White House intern program rubbing off on her.



In the fifties, all the big-name fathers of Hawthorne kids would put on shows for Dads' Fundraiser night. Since mine was about the only dad not in oil or showbiz, he used to love participating in this event because he was a ham and because he could be on stage hobnobbing with movie stars like Van Johnson.

What I didn't realize at the time was that Van was the stepdad of Ned Wynn, who was also a fellow student. Ned wrote a rather poignant autobiography (*We Will Always Live*

in *Beverly Hills: Growing Up Crazy in Hollywood*) that told of his life's struggles and the Wynn family's close friendship with Johnson who spent as much time at their house as he did his own. Come to find out later—because this was something our families never would have talked about—when Ned's parents, Eve and Keenan Wynn, were divorced in 1947, Van practically married Eve on the divorce court steps. Of course, rumors must have been flying.

However, before Eve died forty-five years later she confessed that her marriage to Van had been a sham. MGM arranged it all because they needed their big star to be married to quell rumors about his sexual preferences. And it seems that Eve was the only woman he'd agree to marry. Now Ned added more info to this scenario. He claims that in 1961 they separated because Van had an affair with a chorus boy during the Broadway show *Music Man*. However, I don't think he was one of the seventy-six blowing a big trombone.

And speaking of same-sex preferences, Ned also takes some credit for "closet" decisions made by Cheryl Crane. She is younger than we are and is Lana Turner's daughter. My mother thought Lana was a hussy, and since moms had significant veto power over our choice of friends, I didn't know Cheryl very well. But Ned did. He claims that it was because of him that she "swore off boys forever" after a necking session. I can't make a personal assessment on this, because Ned and I never made out.

Also in the fifties, the *kids of the big names* still acted like kids. Steve Pauley used to sit behind me in Mr. Bal's eighth-grade class and was an insufferable pest. He seemed to have this fixation for putting the back of my hair into his ink well,

which would have been dry in those days. It was just amazing to me that he got good grades and we were valedictorians of our graduation together. He went on to get his MD (ENT), has done wonderful work with poor children suffering from cleft palates, and besides studying the effects of light pollution on the environment, I suspect that he might have also studied the effect of hair dye on follicles.

With Hawthorne graduation in 1954 came a transition in the hood. Paul Trousdale literally bought the farm from the Dohenys, and the bulldozers moved in the next year to begin moving the earth to create the world's most expensive subdivision—Trousdale Estates: home to Richard Nixon, Groucho Marx, Danny Thomas, Florence Henderson, Elvis, and Dean Martin. My parents decided that it was much safer for me to attend an all-girls parochial school than follow the boys to Beverly Hills High.

The ritzy neighborhood of Bel Air/Holmby Hills was the location of Westlake School for Girls—or, as we students used to call it, Westlake School for *Wayward Women*. But it couldn't be that bad; it's the Alma Mater of none other than *Good Ship Lollipop* herself, Shirley Temple. In those days, dorms were provided for those girls of wealthy families from the California wine country, the beach cities, Europe, South America, and Tahiti. After hours, the residential quarters were like a magnet for boys—particularly if it meant a good panty raid. As I recall, this was one of Pat Wayne's (John Wayne's son) favorite pastimes, and he would bring along his other showbiz buddies. The girls loved it. The spinster headmistresses did not.



A number of the *big name* daughters attended but did not board. We called ourselves outpatients—those who commuted from Beverly Hills, Pacific Palisades, and Malibu. I was on the tennis team, and two of my partners were Nancy Zimbalist and Ann Pearce. Ann went on to marry Peruvian Alex Olmedo, the top amateur player in the fifties (Wimbledon winner, the Davis Cup, and a graduate of USC.) He became the teaching pro at the Beverly Hills Hotel.

I used to go over to Nancy's house sometimes after practice. Her house was right around the corner from Charlie Cord's grandfather's, and it too was a quaint English country manor. Her dad, Efreim Zimbalist Jr., was heart-throb handsome and known for his acting on such hit TV shows as *77 Sunset Strip* and the *FBI* series. He had the neatest garage. For his collectible cars there was a turnstile in the floor. He'd just drive the vehicle into the garage and onto the turnstile. A button would be pushed, and lo and behold the car would turn around and then be facing forward so you wouldn't have to back out down the driveway and risk crunching used brick walls and climbing ivy. Nancy and her dad invited me a couple of times to sit in their box while attending the tennis matches at the LA Tennis Club. Sometimes we'd grab a Bob's Big Boy hamburger to eat. Sometimes we'd get in a few games ourselves with some of the boys from Black Fox Military Academy nearby, or even Ricky Nelson who used to play there frequently. He too was a top-ranked tennis player.

Ellen Powell attended Westlake. Her dad was Dick Powell (movie star and studio boss), and her mom was Joan Blondell (actress who went on to marry Mike Todd.) Then, when Todd went on to marry Elizabeth Taylor, they moved into a

California Spanish house just around the corner from us in the hood where they were living when he died in a plane crash in 1958. Ellen Powell usually wore a ponytail but saved the best coiffures to last and became an Emmy-winning hairstylist on many shows, one of which was *Star Trek*. Her brother was Norman Powell, and we shall visit him a little later in the chapter on my Phoenix, porno, and public television years.

Another friend was Ava Astaire. Fred Astaire was filming *Daddy Long Legs* when I started Westlake. This was a sad time for Ava and her dad because of the loss of her beloved mother, Phyllis Livingston Potter. Ava was one of the rare, levelheaded daughters of showbiz parentage and one who put the *class* into *classy*. Her dad's home was elegant to the max with a spacious marble floor entry—perfect for a renowned tap dancer.

Besides Eleanor Powell, a number of Fred Astaire's dancing partners lived very close to my house. Betty Grable and bandleader, Harry James lived down the street across from Michael Niven and later sold their home to Carol Burnett. Cyd Charisse and actor/singer, Tony Martin lived about six houses away from us just across from the See's Candy lady. Her house is still featured on the candy boxes today. I would see Astaire in the Beverly Hills Post Office often where he would go to pick up his own mail—always dapper, sometimes with an ascot, suave, and with an elegant stride to his step; and he never forgot to say, "Hello, Lorraine."



I was editor of the 1958 Westlake yearbook, and our theme was space travel. Sputnik was the first vehicle sent into the

wild, blue yonder. Russians made it small and round. It had to go up by itself because no one could squeeze in. Years later, they made a bigger one and put a monkey in it. Sally Ride* graduated from Westlake, and she became the first woman rocketed into space and then became an instant celeb (much better than a monkey). Candice Bergen graduated from Westlake, shot to fame like a moon rocket, and acted like a monkey when she became an *A-Lister*. Dara Torres also attended Westlake, swam faster than a little monkey, and became a famous Olympic swimming medalist. As a master swimmer and role model today, she continues to be an inspiring author and motivational speaker.



By the time I was accepted at various colleges in 1958, I was suffering from a serious case of FIBO—Female Institution Burn Out. I set my sights on Tommy Trojan and enrolled in USC as a major in telecommunications, the only female in the department. In the sixties, this course of study meant radio and television. The exploding *children of the big names* continued.

Jack Linkletter (son of Art) was just graduating, Murray Rose (famed swimmer with six Olympic medals) was a classmate, and my old friend from the hood, Larry Doheny, soon followed me onto campus. Of course, Larry came with name recognition since one of the main buildings at USC is the Doheny Memorial Library. I became the first female

* In Memoriam: The world lost Sally at age 61. She was a true pioneer who taught us all to reach for the stars. (1951-2012)

station manager of the university's closed-circuit TV operation, KUSC-TV— which later became the PBS Channel 28 in Los Angeles. However, upon graduation I had difficulty finding a job because I was a woman, so I did the next most honorable thing and got married. Tom Brodek had been my best friend in the telecom department. He married me because I knew what an orthicon tube was. I married him because of his sex and sense of humor, and he hasn't lost either.

As we started our life together within the showbiz space capsule, the explosion of the *big names* continued. History repeated itself in the lives of our two daughters when we returned to the home where I grew up in Beverly Hills and revisited my upper Hollywood hood.



As Station Manager, I'm seriously supervising the camera action at KUSC-TV. Los Angeles, 1961. Credit: *Daily Trojan*, Dec. 11, 1961; Photo by Steve Somody.



Tom and I are happily *cutting-up* after our wedding in Beverly Hills on August 18, 1962.



Tom's and my Christmas card photo featuring Kristin (2½ years) and Kerri Lynn (2½ months). La Cañada, CA, 1968.



B Movies: *The Savage Bees*

To *B* or not to *B*... that is the question. Some producers like Roger Corman set out to make *B* movies, but many don't; or at least, that's not their goal. Through the years, *B* movies have been defined as those of "lower quality" or "inferior to the glitzy high-budget projects" or "exploitation films where the subject matter is lurid and the advertising sensational."

"*Savage Bees* was really meant to be a good, scary flick, even though—yes—it did get classified by some as a *B* (pun intended) movie," said Tom *B*. This was one of his first television screen credits as well as the start of our "on location" life together when he filmed this project in 1976 with Bruce Geller.



Geller was incredibly brilliant except for his personal wardrobe choices: cowboy or combat boots and a rubberized fireman's jacket with all those metal buckles. He was well known for being the creator, writer, producer, and director for many Emmy-winning shows in the sixties and seventies. Most notably was *Mission: Impossible*, featuring Peter Graves,

Leonard Nimoy, and Martin Landau. Then there was *Rawhide*, the launching pad for Clint Eastwood, who played Rowdy Yates. Among other Geller classics were *Mannix* and *Have Gun Will Travel*.

Geller's credentials were to die for, as were many of the characters in his plots. *Savage Bees* was no exception. He was both director and producer of this TV movie, and Tom was his coordinator. As the video box tagline says, "A swarm of death is on the loose—and it's heading for New Orleans!" Or in Cajun-speak: *Nawlins*. The poster was stronger: "They're coming this way—not to make honey but to kill!" Anyway, bees—the killer variety—thousands of them are on the loose and they're really pissed because they just survived some rough sailing in a bunch of Chiquitas on a banana boat from Brazil. Since there are a lot of mint juleps served at Mardi Gras and honey all around, that's where they decide to file their flight/docking plan.

There's a fluency of bad accents in *Bees*: Ben Johnson as the gnarly town sheriff, McKew, of Crescent City; and Horst Buchholtz as the German medical examiner, using his own bad accent to parody a bad accent. Then there are a few nonactors trying to act: Dr. Norman Gary got the role as the bee wrangler. This wasn't a stretch for him because this was his real day job, which fortunately he didn't quit to make this movie.

His assistant was Kenneth Lorenzen, who got a bad wrap for playing the pirate flailing away at the bees with his sword. In midmovie, Dr. Gary meets his doom in the bayou covered with hundreds of bee welts. It took makeup four hours to accomplish this and FYI: it was not shot in the outback of

Louisiana but out in the back of Disney Ranch a few miles from Los Angeles.

Supposedly the thousands of bees that these two men handled were trained and friendly. You could have fooled me. The only happy bee I'm familiar with is the one on the front of the Honey Nut Cheerios' box. That's why, when visiting the set, I always made sure that I was within sprinting distance of one of the "honey wagons" (the appropriate name for the restroom facilities provided in trailers on film locations).

I got my Beeline-500-run down to ten seconds once those bees were released. It just seemed that it was a total buzz-surround as I leaped up the trailer steps, wrenched open the metal door and slammed it behind me. As the years proved, this was my least favorite set to visit during Tom's career.

Over a period of time, some *B*-movies' mediocrity can be raised to cult status, and *Savage* was no exception. It's always nice to see this happen before you die, but hopefully not from killer bee stings. As with many of Tom's projects, a number of the actors were also Oscar or Emmy winners or had achieved some degree of notoriety. Gretchen Corbett, who plays Jeannie the Dixie-chick entomologist was well known for her role as attorney Beth Davenport in *The Rockford Files*, and Ben Johnson won an Oscar for his role as Sam the Lion in *The Last Picture Show*.



In an early segment of *Savage Bees*, 'ol Sheriff McKew is filmed driving down a back road in *Wheeze-iana* when he spots a dog lying by the side of the road, and it isn't just taking

a nap. McKew pulls around to investigate, and then you realize that this is just no ordinary dog or just no ordinary road kill.

As the sheriff bends down to inspect his furry mutt friend, Bruce Geller cuts to an arty shot where he fades from the foghorn of the Coast Guard ship going in search of the lost crew from that banana boat to a little black girl blowing a party horn on her front porch. Though this was one of Bruce and Tom's favorite scenes, others put it right into the *B* category. There's a Web site called *The Agony Booth*, which recaps America's worst films. Here's what it had to say about what happened next to the little black girl:

“Her mother comes out and tells her to put the party favor away, and this woman is the worst kind of small-town, po' momma, black-folk, honey-child, lawdy-be kind of stereotype you're likely to ever see. Her dialogue informs us that the little girl is about to go off to church all by herself and sing in the choir. PoBlackMommaLawdyBe tells her to ‘*Mine that dress!*’ and the child walks off, still happily blowing into her party favor.”

It reminds me of that little girl in her ham costume going off into the woods in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. You just know that whatever comes next is not going to be good.

While the little girl fades off screen, Ol' Sherriff McKew is now at his house by his *po-leece* cruiser and has bundled his dead dog in a blanket. When his wife sees him, he cries out, “They killed Zeth! Poisoned him. They killed my *dawg!* He's all puffed.” Is this Emmy material or what? He then

establishes a reason to get him to Mardi Gras, because he has to take *po* dead Zeth to the coroner in *Nawlins*.

He's zipping along at such a pace that he zooms right past the little party horn girl skipping through the meadow. You can almost hear the church choir in the distance and then... that damn buzzing sound, then a scream. The little horn hits the ground. The camera zooms in on the little favor lying in the grass...and sweet *lawdy* be...there's a bee in it. Fade out.

Cut to: It's Mardi Gras time: big horns now, and the brass bands are blowing them with cheeks that are as puffed as poor dead Zeth's. *The Saints Go Marching In* is played until eternity. It really is a case of not *when* those saints would come a-marching in but how often. In fact, for years after making this film Tom suffered from Post Trumpetic Stress Syndrome. He couldn't get that song out of his head and would wake up in the middle of the night thinking he was Louis Armstrong.

Fat Tuesday is the reason for this carnival. It's the last in a series of days filled with this—uh—beehive of activity: eating, drinking, sinning, and the ultimate party parade. Then it's Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent when you repent for everything you were doing the day before. That is, if the street sweepers don't brush you out of the gutter first.

The movie's Mardi Gras spectacle has some behind-the-scenes action that the audience doesn't know about. Hundreds of extras are brought in to recreate all the dancin' and prancin' and struttin' and jazzin' to that damn *Saints* song. It's where the faux in wardrobe takes on new meaning: faux feathers, faux hair, faux satin, faux bling, even the ladies are faux. It's where *gay* and *guy* are separated by a vowel and not much else. It's where eat, drink, and be *Mary* takes on new meaning.

Costumes can be as scant as water in the booze. Bourbon Street becomes the main route for the flim-flam-glim-glam of the French Quarter.

The scene is set up, and Jeannie's car is a little red VW *Beetle*—appropriate because it's a bee movie. She's on her way back from picking up Dr. Bad Accent from the airport to get him to the lab. On their return, they pass a hot dog stand called *Broux Fine Eats*, where there is a reported bee sighting. Pirate-costumed revelers arrive just as the bees are swarming. Herr doctor gets in their midst, and his magic silver bee suit gets sliced open by the swinging pirate sword (don't ask how a rubber costume sword can penetrate a metallic bee suit). Jeannie is still in the car, freaks out, and hits her head on the horn.

It starts blaring but fortunately not the *Marching Saints* song. Since bees hate noise and the color red, they swarm all over her little red car. (The inside scoop: look closely and you'll see that the bees have formed themselves into a tiny square shape in the middle of hundreds of their drone friends on top of Jeannie's car. This is because they are trying to get into a real little box—with the queen bee inside. That's how the bee handler gets the bees to swarm the car. In addition, you'll note how convenient it is that Jeannie has a bee-less space on her windshield that she can peek through to drive. The bee wranglers made this a pheromone-free area to which the bees were not attracted.)

It is determined that any temperature below forty-five degrees will immobilize and kill bees. And where could one drive a car with hundreds of bees on it and have the thermostat lowered? No, not your local ice rink...the Super Dome, silly.

And what's the shortest way to the Super Dome? Of course, down Bourbon Street during the middle of Mardi Gras.

Tom's assignment is to shut down the main tourist street in all of New Orleans for the day, arrange for hundreds of revelers, floats, bands, and party beads and party hats. In the French Quarter, there are old family-run stores and antique shops. These owners have to be paid for the day because of lost business, but they still must look busy for the shoot.

Two of the extras could be doubles for Liberace in little Richard Simmons's shorts with big, shiny Elton John glasses. They are given flaming Creole red and orange satin dresses to cover their shorts. Thus the term *flamers* comes to mind.

When Jeannie comes driving down Bourbon Street in her Beetle covered with bees, the *flamers* assignment is to react to Michael Parks's (as Dr. Jeff) bullhorn announcement, "Attention! Attention! We have an emergency. Y'all are in danger. You have sixty seconds to clear the street. We're bringin' through a swarm of killer bees!"

Now if that kind of an announcement wouldn't get folks in a frenzy, I don't know what would.

In rehearsal, a test car comes down the street without the bees, the crowd is told to react, our *flamers* throw up their hands and scurry into the nearest antique store.

Well, the storeowner is the second generation of a very prideful, aristocratic family in Louisiana, and when the faux divas scamper into his store, he starts stewing hotter than gumbo. No girly-boys will populate his store, by God! He decides they should just go into another store. So he slams his antique, class door with the painted-gold lettering shut and locks it.





“Y’all are in danger. We’re bringin’ through a swarm of killer bees!” Thank goodness Gretchen Corbett (Jeannie) can conveniently see through the windshield of her little red VW *Beetle*. New Orleans, 1976.

Credit: The Savage Bees; Stock photo, 1976.



Four hours of welt make-up and the poor, dead farmer didn’t know what bit him. Disney Ranch, Canyon Country, CA, 1976. Credit: The Savage Bees; Stock photo, 1976.



The shoot is about to begin. The assistant director shouts, “Quiet on the set!” (Even though it’s a real street.) “Quiet! Cue extras.”

Now it’s director Bruce Geller’s turn. “Action!” he commands.

“Clack!” goes the clapper.

Dr. Jeff raises the bullhorn to his mouth and begins the announcement, “Attention! Attention!” (Which, with his bad accent, sounds like ‘Tent’s on. Tent’s on.’) The assistant director cues Jeannie to start driving forward in her red VW with the bees all over it, trying to get to the little box with their queen inside. And speaking of queens, our two drag extras immediately react to this sight, because it’s now for real and so are the bees, and they’re crawling and buzzing everywhere on that little car, and it’s coming their way. Those are not fake bees! They throw up their hands and, with a few very fast prancey steps, make a flash dash toward the antique store.

They turn the polished brass handle. It doesn’t move. They pull at it. They—God forbid—start banging with the palms of their hands on the glass, getting sweaty prints all over it and the gold lettering.

From inside, the very upset shop owner is shooing them away. He is desperately using his hand in quick downward wave motions to get them away from his door. “Shoo! Shoo!” This is definitely an unscripted reaction, but the cameras keep rolling.

Our flamboyants are now one Cajun minute away from complete nervous breakdowns. The bees are getting closer! “Please! Let us in! Open up! Let us in!” they scream.

Mr. Shopkeeper is now so agitated that his shooping motions become so dramatic that his hand goes right through the plate glass door. *Crash!* Shards of glass go flying and blood, spurting everywhere, squirts onto the orange and red satin dresses of our faux divas.

“Oh my God! Oh my God!” They’re now hysterical. One diva rips at his/her dress and tears it off. He/she is now in a total frenzy and continues with pulling off his/her wig and eyelashes, then his/her padded bra and little Richard Simmons’s shorts. He is now totally naked except for his patent leather heels and starts hopping and running in little circles. Our shopkeeper collapses in his store with his bleeding hand and wrist hanging out the door with a glass shard protruding...definitely wrist-slashing at its worst. Our other diva is now in total panic mode but keeps his/her dress and shorts on and starts screaming, “Help! Help! Someone’s dying here! Someone’s dying here!”



During any major crowd scene, there’s always a nurse on set, so that’s the first call that Tom makes from his walkie-talkie. The nurse immediately issues orders for an ambulance. No...make that two. Our naked diva has now fainted, and he cannot be put into the same ambulance with our seriously anti-gay, antique shopkeeper. Next, Tom grabs the little Richard Simmons’s shorts lying on the ground and immediately applies a tourniquet to our shopkeeper’s arm. He always knew his Eagle Scout status would pay off. Then he

tosses the remnants of the orange dress to cover the essential part of the naked passed-out queen.



Geller yells, “Cut!”

The sirens of the ambulances can already be heard as they get closer and arrive on the scene. The paramedics administer aid and then load up the two injured adversaries. Sirens wail, and the sound crew waits until they disappear.

“Quiet on the set!” yells the assistant director. “Everybody back for take two!”

“Clack” goes the clapperboard.

Fortunately, our shopkeeper survived and no one else got killed in the last thirty minutes of this *B* TV movie...other than by the reviews. As you can see, it’s definitely a fact that sometimes the behind the scenes action is better than the Bee movie itself, including the queens.

Justification always comes in the form of a television Emmy. Plus...the award ceremony is always fun to attend. Now this is a zinger of a trivia question: *The Savage Bees* won an Emmy. In what category? Hint: With all those thousands of bee’s a-buzzing and the trumpets blowing that damn Saint’s song and the party horn noise, who should be credited with capturing that effect? Of course...it won for best sound mixing!



A couple of other facts worth noting are that Ben Johnson

went on to appear in yet another bee movie, *The Swarm*, and fifteen years later, Tom was the executive in charge of production for ABC's two-part mini series, Dominick Dunne's, *An Inconvenient Woman*. Dunne had been friends with Betsy and Alfred Bloomingdale (department store magnate), but then he wrote about Bloomingdale's affair with Vicki Morgan, his mistress. Here's a perfect example of *with friends like this, who needs enemies?*

Jason Robards had the lead in *Inconvenient Woman*, and Roddy McDowall played the nasty Cyril. It was filmed on location at the mansion of Filoli Gardens, south of San Francisco. In the end, Cyril was in the rose garden as yet another one of those damn bees got into his mouth. With lots of throat clutching and gagging and eye-rolling, poor Roddy died quickly of anaphylactic shock. After a few takes of this shot, Roddy almost died laughing. And then we all celebrated with tea and honey and scones in the Rose Garden. Yet another bee movie wrapped.

