

VANITY FAIR

OUT TO LUNCH

All About Eva Marie

How Eva Marie Saint became a Hitchcock blonde and a Hollywood legend, but never a diva superstar.

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All movie stars of a certain age remain young in our eyes, for they still live in the golden age of vintage movies. It's impossible to believe that the vital, still-beautiful Eva Marie Saint is now 86. "And no Botox!" she tells me, laughing good-naturedly.



The restaurant where we meet says a lot about her. Sprazzo, which is found, eventually, on a nondescript block of Westwood Boulevard in Los Angeles, is her unstarry neighborhood hangout. She lives nearby with her husband, the director Jeffrey Hayden, and weekends are spent at their Santa Barbara beach house.

Eva Marie Saint famously won her best-supporting-actress Academy Award for her first film—Elia Kazan's masterly 1954 *On the Waterfront*, in which she played the shy Catholic girl Edie Doyle, who's seduced by Marlon Brando's illiterate longshoreman. "I didn't say I didn't love you," goes

one of the memorable lines she delivered in wounded innocence. “I said stay away from me.”

“What was Brando like?”

“He was the finest actor I’ve ever worked with. He was profound in the way he listened. He could change the thought behind the dialogue with an inflection—and make a scene come alive. He made you a better actor. And what a great-looking guy! I think it’s one of the saddest things that ever happened in our profession when Marlon lost the joy of acting.”

“Who were you wearing,” I asked, “when you won your Oscar?”

“I was wearing a maternity dress! I gave birth two days later. All I can remember saying was ‘Thank you—I’m so excited I might have the baby right here.’”

She reminded me how different the Academy Awards were then. Bob Hope was the M.C., and the comparatively modest event was telecast from Hollywood’s Pantages Theatre. There were no stylists to the stars, no rite of passage along the red carpet, no rambling speeches prompted by crumpled notes splashed with tears.

Two years ago, Eva Marie was warmly received when she appeared during the Oscar ceremony to introduce Viola Davis, one of the nominees for best supporting actress. “But I didn’t have a perfect time,” she explained amusingly, “because I was worried all night that I might lose the earrings I’d borrowed from Martin Katz of Beverly Hills.”

A waiter hovered. “What are you having today, folks?”

“I love the Caesar salad here, *merci beaucoup*,” she replied.

“Do you ever watch your own movies?”

“Sometimes I do. And I think, Well, gee. You did that? Good job!”

She takes acting seriously, not stardom. When she was on location in Chicago shooting Alfred Hitchcock’s 1959 thriller, *North by Northwest*, her co-star, Cary Grant, took her to see a show. “A buzz went up in the audience the moment he was recognized. It was like a wave of adulation rolling round the theater. I found it overwhelming and a little scary. I was thrown by it. And I asked him, ‘How do you handle this, because I know I couldn’t?’ It was almost as if he were talking about someone else when he said, ‘They’ll tell their friends tomorrow that they saw Cary

Grant. It makes them happy!”

“How do you know the buzz wasn’t ‘Look! There’s Eva Maria Saint with Cary Grant?’”

“As a matter of fact, I’ll never know!” she said, laughing again. “But I know I couldn’t have coped with that kind of fame. And I’ve never had it—thank the Lord! People recognize me, but I wanted a normal life. I remember when I was with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton on *The Sandpiper*—they were so famous they couldn’t go anywhere. They couldn’t have gone to Sprazzo!”

There are two theories about Alfred Hitchcock: one is that he treated actors like cattle; the other is that he didn’t.

“I adored him!” she said. “He didn’t direct actors much, unlike Kazan. The moves were all in Hitch’s head. He was a perfectionist. Before he cast me in *North by Northwest*, I met him with his wife, Alma, at his house in Bel Air. My agent set it up so we could have lunch together, and I was a little nervous. I called my mom, who was a schoolteacher, and she somehow knew that he liked beige. So I wore a beige dress. And Mom says, ‘And he likes ladies with white gloves.’ So I wore white gloves.”

“And he liked blondes.”

“He did. But Mom didn’t know that.”

Her stylish, mysteriously seductive Eve Kendall in the dining-car scene with the unflappable Cary Grant must surely rank as the wittiest, sexiest train scene ever filmed—without anyone taking their clothes off. “I know,” she said when I reminded her. “The cigarettes! Ooh, it was such fun.”

“The sexy spy lady”—as she refers to herself in the role—made her an eternal member of Hitchcock’s school of cool blondes, along with Janet Leigh in *Psycho*, Kim Novak in *Vertigo*, Grace Kelly in *Rear Window*, and Tippi Hedren in *The Birds* and *Marnie*.

Hitchcock made Tippi’s life a misery during filming, apparently. “But that was a different scenario. I was married and he really liked my husband.”

Eva Marie has been married for 59 years. “Holy Toledo!” she exclaimed when she did the math.

Her most enduring co-stars have always been her family and her work. When she made Otto Preminger’s 1960 *Exodus* with Paul Newman, she had it written into her contract that her

husband, children, parents, and mother-in-law all accompany her on location. The usually forbidding Preminger called her in Los Angeles to say, “You’ve created your own Exodus!”

From the meteoric start of her film career, she has always resisted a conventional Hollywood life. “Eva Marie, you’ll never be a superstar,” her despairing agent told her when she turned down three-picture deals to be with her children. Yet she’s scarcely stopped working over the years. (She was Clark Kent’s mom in the 2006 *Superman Returns*.) She has two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame—for her movies and her Emmy Award–winning TV work.

“I’m still proud of my Oscar,” she said. “Sometimes, when the children were younger, they would ask if their friends could go upstairs and just hold it. So I’d take them upstairs.” Now her grandchildren ask the same for their young pals. ““Can they just hold the Oscar?’ It’s so adorable,” she added. “And I say sure.”

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