

Glenn Close Interview

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Glenn Close Interview

Glenn Close was an incredibly smart woman to interview; someone I immediately respected. A lot smaller than I expected. For someone who had been a bunny killer, I don't know - I just thought she'd be larger than life. (I think this is the common problem lots of people make with Hollywood stars - gasping in shock about how 'small' they are - when of course they're only somewhere between 5 and 6.5 feet tall rather than 3 metres tall as they appear on screen!

But Glenn - along with a handful of others - really was petite. Also reserved, mature, honest, guarded, almost scared.

She was a biggie for me to meet. She's just such a phenomenal actress, with or without her Oscars, and for me and my age group, she was almost an institution because of her character's notoriety from 'Fatal Attraction'.

The interview was with about 3 other journalists - the guy on my left was from a British magazine and already slanting towards the gossip-y angle. He came in with an agenda and didn't want to quit till he got the quotes he was looking for. Lots of journalists work like that. They already have the all-important 'angle' of the story pre-determined and have written most of the copy - and just want a few quotes to drop in to flesh out the story. I prefer conversations. I prefer discussions that have no map of where they're destined to end. I love that I don't know what I'm going to hear, and perhaps learn.

By the end of the interview I had made a real connection with Glenn and while the British journalist made her excruciatingly unhappy, I was the only one she looked up at when the interview ended to say (almost whisper) "thank you". I'm a big one for the thank you's. I always say thank you, and I appreciate when someone I've interviewed thanks me for the experience too. I am a total ANTI-autograph hunter, as a journalist. I have nothing against fans who ask an actor for an interview - absolutely understand that - and I had my own autograph book when I was a child - BUT I can't bear when journalists ask someone they've just interviewed for their autograph. It's just amateur, I feel, and demeans your own job. For me - while we're conducting the interview (and outside of the interview) - we're absolute equals - they're doing their fantastic job of interpreting other people's lives and characters for movies; and we're doing our job of writing about them and their film. [I also have an experience when I was in Std 7 about taping someone that maybe set me up for life...]

On the way to Glenn's interview, I read Premier magazine on the tube. It had excerpts from Glenn's diary, written during the filming of '101 Dalmations'. In it she mentioned that she had farted on set...something that in the pre-Britney Spears stepping out of a car with no knickers on era was not really spoken about - and it was about this point that I began the interview...

Notes on my notepad:

Glenn Close Transcript

Did 'Premier' magazine ask you to write the diary before you started the filming?

No, I always write a diary.

Oh, do you?

Mmm hmm. And I edited it drastically! [laughs]

And in one part, which most people must have mentioned to you, where you actually admit to farting...

Yes!

Has everybody hassled you about that?

Not at all! You're the first one!

No!

It's true. I thought about it, and they said they think it's very funny, so OK, it was very funny - one of those horrible, horrible moments!

It just made you more human for us...after Cruella. Was it easier to do this, because as Joely was mentioning [in an interview earlier this morning], you are theatrical. And you could handle all the props and the way you were costumed?

Definitely, yes. I was very grateful for my training in Theatre and I had to deal with all these props.

Would you do this movie again?

NO!...well, no I would never do it again as I would never have to, I hope. [laughs]

A sequel?

Oh a sequel might be interesting...Cruella in prison garb...ow would she design her costume. Cruella escapes!

This character, being so larger than life, was there any reluctance on your part to take it on?

Yes, I was very daunted by it, and my main concern. I don't know if I could have actually done it without Anthony Powell. because I felt from the beginning that she needed to be an amazing image. I felt that she had to be very, very witty in that kind of brutal way. Really deeply, you know, not this cheap humour - VERY witty, so I was very concerned about that. I used a lot of the dialogue from the cartoon. I put a lot of lines from the cartoon into the movie, because she was very mean in the cartoon.

So you watched it a few times?

A LOT, yeah.

[Years later Tony and I did a part-time course at NIDA in Sydney, Australia where this stupid director who was in charge of our Sunday courses, told us you should NEVER watch a film/video or stage show of something you're about to perform - because you may be influenced. I always resented her for saying that as if it were absolutely WRONG to do so - when such successful stars as Glenn Close clearly are into doing their research and watching previous material. The director should've rather said that everyone has a different approach and you should do what works for you. Hate when someone talks with such authority about something they are actually not an expert on. She had no great plays behind her yet.]

What about the accent? How conscious were you of the accent throughout the movie? Or did it come naturally?

No, no, it was very important in creating the character. It was Anthony Powell's idea to look at Joanna Lumley, so I looked at 'Ab Fab' a lot. [Joanna Lumley is someone I never got to interview - but I did once stand with my mother in a very crowded warehouse waiting to catch a glimpse of her and the other Avengers after their lunch during a trip to Durban, South Africa - Joanna was influential in our lives of course because she, Farrah Fawcett, Princess Diana (who was actually never of that title - which I learn whilst working on Royalty magazine - her correct title was Diana, Princess of Wales) and Jennifer Aniston all affected our hairstyles - remember the Purdey style...]

And then Joan Washington, who was my accent coach [and who is the wife of Richard E. Grant who I did interview] analysed what Joanna does, and it was "punching the consonants" - that was really the key, and it started to feel that that was really Cruella. And Joan was on set a lot to make sure that all the punches were there. There are some very tricky sounds for americans in the English accent that we don't always hear, and I like to have somebody there if possible.

Stephen Herrick said at the American Premier that he immediately wanted you because of the boiling rabbit scene in 'Fatal Attraction'. Does that feel good, and has that scene been a curse - or, like now - a blessing? Because everybody remembers when Glenn Close...

Boils the rabbit! You thought that if I can boil it then I can wear it! For me that is very ironic because it was the most difficult scene to accept when I read the script for 'Fatal Attraction'. I thought: "Oh, this is really going over the top", and when I gave the script to several psychiatrists - because I wanted them to analyse her behaviour - they said it was absolutely possible, which was shocking in itself...But Stephen didn't tell me that.

Did you at any times fear being upstage by the dogs? You know how some movie stars have a clause in their contracts that says never to work with children or animals?

Well, I didn't have to worry about children, thank God, and I just had two scenes with the dogs and I scared them! The female Purdy, when I did the scene of approaching them under the counter, she slunk off the set. Because I guess the vibes, the looks - dogs are very sensitive. It took about three takes for her to stay.

You said in your diary that your daughter - her and her friend - didn't really like your costume.

Oh it was terrible! I walked on set in this incredible costume and Annie's friends said "where is your white coat?" I thought "oh great, every child in America is going to be going 'where is your white fur coat?'" And then the other kid said "why is your car black and white?"

But did they love the finished product?

Oh yes, yes, they did - very much.

And is it not scary for them?

When Annie first saw it, it was not the finished version. It was the rough cut. She got scared with Skinner approaching the little puppy. It was: "is he going to get, will he get her?", but I guess she was there when we filmed it...but she doesn't like it when Cruella yells at people.

Did you at any point feel the weight of the film being largely on your carriage, because Joely mentioned that Jeff and herself are quite background, and they provide the part of the story for you to come for the dogs. Was it something that you ever felt?

No, I actually didn't because I was here for six weeks. Six very concentrated weeks. So I thought: just do it. They scheduled it so I could do it in one section, and they did the movie on a very long schedule.

So that was obviously a tough six weeks in part because the scenes with the animals etc. Were you well prepared? You had to go into that bath. I don't know what that stuff was...

It was a latex solution...

You were aware when you went in...?

I had just seen somebody...they had a test when they poured it all over one stunt lady just to see if they could wash it off, basically, and to see the quality of the stickiness. You can't really prepare yourself for that kind of thing. I just didn't think about it until I had to actually step into the Vat.

But we had four months of preparation to create Cruella. When we arrived on the set we were ready, and I was very proud of my team. We had basically created her in New York. That is where all the costumes were built, and we did all the make-up and hair experiments. We ran the gambit when you start with a cartoon character, you don't know where to go, and we did a lot of experiments with a mask-like thing. But it all came down to realistic make-up. Her soul destroys her face - that is what it all came down to...or rather relatively simple make-up. It wasn't any special effects or anything. But that took four months to come up with. We spent a whole week - I really insisted on it, as I knew the costumes were going to be very difficult to manage; and I needed time to really refine it; and we had a whole week in December when all we did every day was experiment with the make-up; and it culminated in a costume screen - putting everything on screen. It was the first time anybody here had seen the costumes, and it was a very exciting day. One costume after another - and everyone went "WOW!" But that day we experimented with red contact lenses, and I actually had, if you've seen the publicity shots, red dark glasses, and a big mane of hair. For us it was the first day on film and our last test. I had an extraordinary team...To get out of that car in that costume was a major engineering feat. They designed the seat so it would swivel or else there would have been no way I could have got out. The roof retracted so that the hat could fit, and even then, because I had this long fur train, there was a costume person hidden in the back seat feeding the train out of the car as I left.

Can you talk about the physical training that was taken for the role

Yes, because I knew from my experience in *Sunset Boulevard*, and before that, it is like any athlete or anything else, if you have a role that is very demanding you have to be in very good physical shape. Also my first fittings in that corset I could only stand it for fifteen or twenty minutes - this will never do for a movie set. They did provide a moving hospital screen, for corset emergencies!

What did you do to keep in shape?

I went on basically vegetarian, no fat diet, and I did yoga and weight training.

Did you go on with it?

NO, I'm not doing it right now, I'm on vacation.

Was that quite an exciting thing when the movie finished, or when you finished filming to know you could eat a full meal again? You kind of say that in your diary - how you were going insane eating all those sunflower seeds.

Yeah...Then I went on to make this movie about these women who are interred by the Japanese in Sumatra, who are systematically starved to death, so it hasn't been my year for diets! I now look at a plate of raw vegetables and feel like

throwing up!

What did you think when you read in the newspaper that the National Centre of Lesbian Rights in America described Cruella as a man-hating stereotype?

I think it is presumptuous of them. I don't think you have to be a lesbian to be mean and manipulative! her characterism in the original book was the devil. If anything I think she is asexual. Who cares anyway? I have to tell you, it never crossed my mind, so i was quite surprised. I have played a lesbian and been very proud to play a lesbian.[It's one thing about the media that can drive me insane - so often when a movie comes out, there'll be some small group that's desperate for attention, who'll release some comment about a movie in order to draw attention to themselves - and the media loves it - they exaggerate the controversy, turn it into a story, interview people who aren't connected in any way with the film, and turn it into pages that will sell more magazines or newspapers for them. And a large proportion of the public know no better - they trust their media and so they read it all and truly believe that there is some great controversy - when there's nothing.]

Tell us about the Norwegian song?

Oh gosh, she taught it to me actually - but I can't remember what it was.

On a career movie, you would do better as a serious actress. Would you want to follow it up with something of the same scale. Or even taking it on, do you like to mix your work up?

I've done three things since that. I did Tim Burton's 'Mars Attack' which is also quite...a satire. Then did a Bruce Beresford movie about the interment camps, and then did a little movie with Chris Reeves directing, and actually I'm finishing up this year playing the vice-president in a Harrison Ford thriller. So it's been quite an interesting year, and I do hope to have time off.

I think you also mentioned in another interview about not being able to pick your daughter up...

Well, that's in theatre, that's the hard thing about theatre.

So this coming year are you going to take things easier?

I have a lot of things in development. I produce as well so I have a whole slate of things on that side of my life, and I have some very exciting possibilities for acting projects. But nothing is going to come up for January, thank God! And I hope I have a nice time!

What was it like having Christopher Reeve directing you?

It was wonderful. He was very good.

Did you have to treat him differently?

He doesn't allow you to treat him differently. The only thing we had to do was, he could not be on the set because of the sound of his respirator - so they set up a rather ingenious hand-held lens really, that he could see on his monitor, and he could set up shots with the camera men as he was holding the lens.

I was very moved by Christopher, and everyone felt that it was thrilling to see him try another creative outlet. Even though he's in that chair - he is able to have this possibility.

Does it make you aware of your career and your life? And what you don't want to end up being like?

You know, I think I'm lucky. I've never lived in Hollywood, and I don't think that I ever will. I haven't been that type of movie star that my look is part of my legend. I remember hearing that Paula Negre (?) was asked by Billy Wilder to be that role, and she said I won't do that to my public [laughs]. So I think that that generation and some of them still exist might be more caught up in the obligation to maintain themselves in their legendary vision you know, and that I would find horrible, horrible.

Do you stay on a ranch?

I live outside of New York on what used to be a farm.

Do you get a lot of offers to play bad characters?

Not really, not more than Jack Nicholson! I don't know. I haven't asked Jack. Out of all the possibilities that I have now

that I am actually actively developing, there is only one. Very disturbed woman. But it is fascinating as well. I thought I would be, actually, especially after 'Fatal Attraction', but that hasn't happened.

You got [involved] to be a mother quite late. What happened in between - your personal life and your professional life?

Makes it more complicated, the balancing act is even more difficult. But she's the treasure of my life, I have a wonderful time with my child, and I'm so grateful.

What would you say to women who are nearing 40 who really want to have a child and are having second thoughts about it - what would you say? [It makes me laugh now to read questions like this - it seems so dated when so many women today are having children at 40 and over without a second thought - but this was only just over 10 years ago; and people forget that it was people like Glenn Close, Kim Basinger, [even Cherie Blair], who blazed the trail for others to follow. Their high profile births over the age of 40 made it not seem such a big deal for other women approaching that age who had previously been made to feel they were over the hill in terms of baby-production by then.]

Go for it!

And as a child yourself, did you dream of becoming this huge actress?

I dreamt of being an actress. I never thought of being this 'movie star' or a 'star'. I loved imagining, or pretending - which I think is a huge percentage of acting - imagination.

You've mentioned before in interviews that seven to 22 were years you regard as the 'dark years'. And you said then it's something you don't want to talk about. Would you say that it was that which nurtured the need...wanting to be an actress...to get away from...

That was before, even before all of that. I think about seven-years-old.

You said in the interview that those dark years are something you don't want to talk about - it sounds very intriguing... [This question was asked by the British male journalist on my left - I have nothing against asking personal questions, and I understand his curiosity, and I can admire a journo who is able to lead someone to open up about something they hadn't spoken about before BUT in this case it was quite obvious that Glenn would not like to discuss this period of her life and I just find it totally disrespectful to try to take somebody to that place when it's quite clear they don't want to go there; and when it's quite obvious that the journalist in question didn't care one bit about Glenn and her dark years except for what a fantastic angle it would give his story - he purely wanted to use her.]

You know, it's very difficult in interviews, because in five minutes you're supposed to, you know, and it's my life...that you're toying with...[laughs]

So something has had a huge effect on me, and my family, and might have repercussions, and might hurt them if it's put the wrong way - I'd rather not talk about it, unless it's really, really...and even then, it's dangerous because things are edited so...

One quote, when you quite openly spoke about 'Mary Reilly' and the fact that you did not like a huge part of it...[this was asked by the same insensitive journo on the left]

I said that? [The incredibly crazy and wonderful thing here was that Glenn had just mentioned how reluctant she would ever be to open up about the 'dark years' because of how things can get edited - and here the same stupid journo asked a question that he had absolutely misunderstood, misconstrued and misrepresented - just proving that you can't trust a journo to edit anything correctly, especially when it's something as precious as your life.]

Well, I saw a quote where you were talking about Julia Roberts...and John Malkevich...Maybe you were misquoted...

I think so!

That's just what we were talking about...[I said to stupid journo]

Yeah, I called up Stephen and said please can I be in his movie as everyone was in it who was in 'Dangerous Liaisons'. Even everyone...Christopher Henton had written it, Stephen was directing it, and John was in it. There was the same designer. I just wanted to be part of it. So I don't care what part it is - that is why he gave me really the only part left over - the brothel keeper.

This quote said that you weren't happy with them...[stupid journo again]

THEM? It's BULLSHIT!

Right, ok, that's fine [said stupid journo, now crumbling because actually he worships at the alter of celebrity...]

I had one week and I thought I had left 'Sunset Boulevard', and we closed it in California, and it was my hiatus, and I thought I'd go over and have a week and ski with my friends, and it was VERY difficult, because he wanted this Liverpudlian accent. It was very hard. In fact, I went and came back and re-shot a couple of things because I didn't get it. So it wasn't the lark that I thought it was going to be, but it had nothing to do with my joy with working with him.

Do you look back and think, "well, that did not work", or do you not look back at all? Some actors and actresses do not want to reflect and they just keep on moving on and believe it's not healthy to dwell...

Well, it's not healthy because you cannot do anything about it.

But are you quite critical?

Yeah, I think I'm pretty objective.

Can you enjoy your own movies, without feeling "that's me". Can you see the character when you watch the movie you're in?

I don't look at my movies terribly often. I'm pretty critical I think.

While you were filming '101', did you ever watch any of the rushes?

I think I watched twice, but I didn't want to because I did not want to be made self-conscious about anything, and I knew that there were some angles that they were using that might not be my best angle, but that really was not the point. So I had so much to contend with, with the costumes and everything else, I didn't want to make myself crazy with looking at rushes. I really felt instinctively that Stephen Herrick was somebody I could trust. I thought he was terrific.

And have you worked with Anthony before?

Yes, in 'Sunset Boulevard'.

Cruella hates family and marriage. Do you think that family and marriage is still an important institution in the modern society?

Yes I do, very much so, I'm not Cruella...!