# Interviews: It’s the 1960s Again at the Hollywood Celebrities Show

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CHICAGO – The wake of the 1960s still resonates on our shores, and entertainment was a viable leader during the era for breaking new barriers. At the recent Hollywood Celebrities & Memorabilia Show, Shirley Knight, Barbara Parkins and Victoria Sellers were reminders of those special times.

The Hollywood Celebrities & Memorabilia Show occurred in September of 2010. The show is a biannual event that brings celebrities to Chicago to meet, sign autographs and interact with their admirers. Joe Arce of HollywoodChicago.com was there to add the photographic spice to the proceedings.

**Shirley Knight of “Sweet Bird of Youth” (1962) and “Petulia” (1968)**

Shirley Knight has been a working actress since doing an uncredited role in the classic “Picnic” (1955). She made a substantial mark in the early 1960s by being nominated for a Best Actress in a Supporting Role for her first two major films – “The Dark at the Top of the Stairs” (1960) and “Sweet Bird of Youth” (1962), which co-starred Paul Newman. She has done steady character work since then, including recent roles in “Desperate Housewives,” “Paul Blart: Mall Cop” and the upcoming “Idiot Brother,” starring Paul Rudd. Not only has she worked with many “Pauls,” she has encountered many show biz legends in her career.

Shirley Knight, Hollywood Celebrities & Memorabilia Show, September 26th, 2010
*Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You had two Oscar nominations very early in your career. What do you appreciate about having participated in those Oscar ceremonies in that point in history?

**Shirley Knight:** It was very shocking when I got those nominations, particularly the first time, for 'The Dark at the Top of the Stairs.' It was basically my first film. I brought my father as my date to the awards, and didn't win. At dinner afterwards, my father sat next to Shirley Temple. I sat next to him, and thought 'oh daddy, please don't tell her,' but eventually he did. 'I named my daughter after you,' he said to her. I was red in the face, of course.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Richard Chamberlain told me in an interview that he had no idea what director Richard Lester was doing in the film 'Petulia.' How was your feeling during production, and what did you think of the final film?

**Knight:** Oh, I love that film, it was so far ahead of its time. I loved [director] Richard Lester, I also worked with him on 'Juggernaut' [1974]. It was a very interesting script, and it was made during the Summer of Love in 1967, in San Francisco with Haight Asbury and all that. I had a boyfriend who was a rock star, so it all seemed to fit.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Who was it?

**Knight:** I'll never tell, but thanks for asking. [laughs] Anyway, it was a weird time, and I understand Richard saying that, because it was an unusual film and the way it was done was unusual.

I was friends with Joan Baez at the time. One night she said let's go to this basement and hear this band, because this girl in it is suppose to be unbelievable. I also asked Richard Lester to come, and that band was Janis Joplin with Big Brother and the Holding Company. So we go, and she happens. Janis Joplin has the power of a happening, and it was just amazing. It was so amazing, that Richard Lester said that he was going to put them in the film. That's how they got in the movie.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What energizes you about the Broadway stage that film and television can't fulfill?

**Knight:** It's very different, in the sense that when you work on a role, it's much more difficult when you're working in isolation, as in film or TV. I feel my best performance on film is in 'Dutchman' [1967]. That is no accident, I did the play for seven months. I knew that character.

For example, I've played Blanche DuBois in "A Streetcar Named Desire," which is a very complex and multi-layered role. I took on the role twice on stage so that the second time I could finish my work regarding her. I think if you only do roles on film and television, you can't possibly progress as an actor. For me, the puzzle of finding the character is the most fun.

I call film and TV acting a form of 'coitus interruptus.' You just get started to understand maybe what the scene is about that you're doing, and someone says 'cut' and 'print.' And you say, wait a minute, I haven't come yet. It's literally like I'm not done yet. It's a crude way to put it, but it illustrates the point.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Who was your favorite director, stage or screen, and why?

**Knight:** My favorite director is Lucian Pintilie, he was a Romanian and was also the director of that country's film commission. I did 'The Cherry Orchard' for him at the Arena Theater in Washington. He was a genius. I've been so fortunate to work with Tennessee Williams, Francis Ford Coppola and Ingmar Bergman, but Lucian was my favorite.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What motivates you to keep working at this point in your career?

**Knight:** People keep asking me to work. I think I'm one of the most fortunate people ever, because I started acting in the 1950's and I've never been out of work. I'm just like the Energizer Bunny, I just go and go.

**Barbara Parkins of TV's "Peyton Place" (1964), "Valley of the Dolls" (1968)**

If there is anybody who represents the zeitgeist of the 1960s, it's Barbara Parkins. The ABC-TV prime time soap opera Peyton Place, which was on the air from 1964-1969, was a sensation (and where Mia Farrow and Ryan O'Neal made their debuts). Parkins followed that up with the infamous film Valley of the Dolls, and her friendship with co-star Sharon Tate resulted in her participating as maid of honor at the wedding between Tate and director Roman Polanski.

Since then, she has done mini-series in the 1970s, and even came back for a reprise role in the TV movie, "Peyton Place, The Next Generation" (1985).

Barbara Parkins, Hollywood Celebrities & Memorabilia Show, September 26th, 2010
*Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** How difficult was the schedule for Peyton Place, which at its peak aired three times a week, and at what point was the schedule too much?

**Barbara Parkins:** From the very beginning. The reason I say that is when you do a series, you're up at five in the morning, you finish at eight at night. You take off your make-up, you get some sort of meal, learn your lines and get ready to repeat it the next day. When we did three days a week we were on overload, and didn't get paid for it.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Since you participated in their wedding, how do you think the tragedy of Sharon Tate effected her husband Roman Polanski, and do you think the authorities should leave him be at this point?

**Parkins:** First, what Roman went through with his family during the Holocaust was horrific [his parents died in concentration camps], and equally horrific was what he went through when Sharon was murdered in such a devastating way. Obviously it had an impact on his life.

In regard to the present situation, I'm glad he didn't come back here. It would have been a media circus and have gone on forever. Leave him alone now, he's been through hell.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Why were critics so cruel, in your opinion, when Valley of the Dolls was released, and do you feel vindicated that it has become a cult classic?

**Parkins:** I wasn't even aware that the critics were mean towards the film. I was just enjoying the ride because it was my first big movie, and I loved it. In retrospect, it is a big corny, the costumes and dialogue were over the top, but there was some drama with the pills and the fame, so it's longevity is extraordinary.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Finally, what can you tell us about Sharon Tate that the rest of the world doesn't know?

**Parkins:** Most people know that she was kind and sweet, and had an innocence about her. Her gentleness was very special, and it was a big loss.

### Victoria Sellers, the Daughter of Peter Sellers and Britt Ekland

Some children are dubbed royalty just by their birthright, and the whirlwind of the relationship and marriage of Peter Sellers and Britt Ekland led to the birth of Victoria Sellers in 1965. Sellers has followed her famous parents into performance, doing stand-up comedy and DVD production with the notorious Heidi Fleiss.

Victoria Sellers, Hollywood Celebrities & Memorabilia Show, September 26th, 2010
*Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You've had numerous job experiences, both in and out of show business, which career did you connect to the most and what about that choice made it particularly interesting to you?

**Victoria Sellers:** I liked doing stand-up, but it was more storytelling than doing jokes. It was stories about what I've been through, and that other people can relate to. I'm kind of working on that again now. When I did the first time, about 12 years ago, it was really hard, but now I'm working on a one woman show. And I will be revealing some juice. [laughs]

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Since you were the child of famous people in a whirlwind life, what aspect do you wish now was more normal?

**Sellers:** Probably just being a complete family, all together. I never had a close-knit family, that would have been something I'd like to have had.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What was the weirdest celebrity encounter you've ever had, either as a child or your later days in Los Angeles?

**Sellers:** Heidi Fleiss and Tom Sizemore. [laughs]

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Given that you did a stint on the reality show 'Rehab,' what do you want to tell people about addiction that those who don't suffer from the disease will never understand?

**Sellers:** That was the third rehab in my life, I'm sure most people have never experienced it. Every time I've gone in, I've come out a lot better. I feel like it's very good if necessary for people to go, it does help you get better, even if it doesn't happen completely the first time.

As far as what to tell people who don't have an addiction, I don't really know what to say about that. If I'm not addicted to a drug, I'm addicted to something else. It is always replaced with something else.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Going back to an earlier answer, what can you tell us about Heidi Fleiss that the rest of the world doesn't know?

**Sellers:** When she got out of her stint on 'Celebrity Rehab,' there was a side of her I hadn't seen in awhile, she was just herself and I thought that was excellent. I was touched by it. On that other side is she's not very friendly, and I can understand why, and she doesn't let people get very close to her. But she does have a good heart, I just think she's been screwed over so many times in her life she's put up a wall. We are best friends.

*The Hollywood Celebrities & Memorabilia Show is back in Chicago, March 26th and 27th, 2011,* Click here for details. *[15]*

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