Interviews: Celebrities from 1980s to Beyond at 'The Hollywood Show'

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- Aileen Quinn Joe Penny [2]
- Annie [3]
- Dustin Diamond [4]
- HollywoodChicago.com Content [5]
- Interview [6]
- Jake and the Fatman [7]
- Joe Arce [8]
- Kick-Ass [9]
- Patrick McDonald [10]
- Saved by the Bell [11]
- The Hollywood Show [12]
- Yancy Butler [13]

CHICAGO – With roles as diverse as Screech, Little Orphan Annie, Jake (from "Jake and the Fatman") and Angie in the film "Kick-Ass," the era from the 1980s and beyond are nicely personified by Dustin Diamond ("Saved by the Bell"), Aileen Quinn ("Annie") Joe Penny (Jake) and Yancy Butler ("Kick-Ass").

They appeared last March at 'The Hollywood Show,' a twice-a-year event in which fans can mingle, take photographs and get autographs from the participants – like this nostalgic group of actors – who appear there. There is also a great opportunity to purchase memorabilia from a host of showbiz vendors, all in one room. The fall session of The Hollywood Show will take place at the Hilton Rosemont Hotel on River Road in Rosemont, Ill, on September 7th, 8th and 9th, 2012. For complete details click here. [14]

HollywoodChicago.com was there to interview all the actors from TV and film. Photographer Joe Arce took the photos of everyone at the event.

Dustin Diamond, Portrayed Screech in "Saved by the Bell."

Saved: Dustin Diamond at 'The Hollywood Show,' March of 2012
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

Dustin Diamond, like many of the teen stars before him, got typecast as the quintessential off-center high schooler named Samuel "Screech" Powers, in the various incarnations of "Saved by the Bell" (1988-2000). But the actor is also a musician, director and stand-up comedian. He shook up the halls of Bayside High in 2009 when he released the tell-all book, "Behind the Bell."

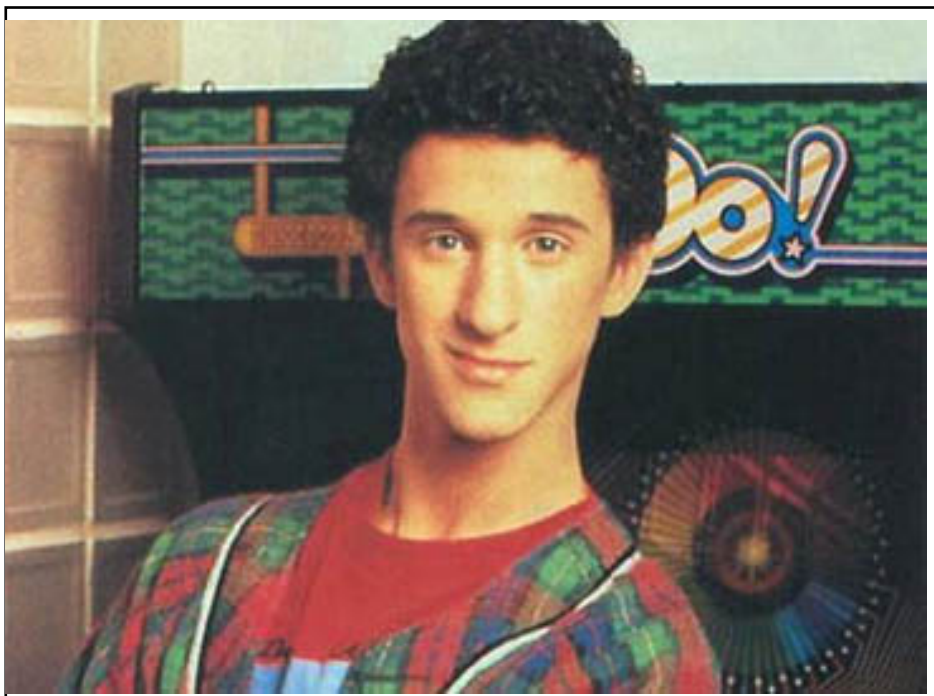
HollywoodChicago.com: You had the rare opportunity of starting out with a part as a kid and taking it all the way to young adulthood. Did you trust or mistrust the production team with the character and did you get frustrated at times as you were changing and growing, and that the character wasn't?

Dustin Diamond: We grow together with the character, because you're with it every single day. The biggest frustration was changing to prime time, 'The College Years.' Then it was like you don't want to change it too much, and not fix it if it isn't broken, but you also have to change a bit for an older audience. The College Years didn't pan out just for that reason.

HollywoodChicago.com: You wrote a book a couple years ago about the 'Bell' experience. How was that able to purge both the good and bad of the whole trip?

Diamond: A lot of the stories I put in the book were simply answers to the questions I had been getting over the years. People kept asking me who was dating who and what was happening behind the scenes. I got tired of talking about it, so I just put it in book form. I wanted to write a story of my life, but all the book publishers were interested in was the dirt. I talked to a ghost writer, and they put things in there that I never say, like 'douche-nozzle.' I've never said that in my life. When I read it, I laughed. I guess they fulfilled their 80,000 words.

HollywoodChicago.com: You've done stand-up comedy, what excites you about the tightrope walking of that particular experience, and how long did it take you to feel comfortable with what you were doing?



Dustin Diamond as Screech in 'Saved by the Bell'
Photo credit: Lions Gate Home Entertainment

Diamond: I've been in the business 27 years, but every time before a stand-up show, I get butterflies. I don't look at it as nervousness, but adrenalin. It's your energy, you have to wield it. Stand-up in general is the most raw form of entertainment. There is no pyrotechnics or back-up dancers, it's just live and die by your jokes, that's it.

HollywoodChicago.com: When you live in the show business community of Los Angeles, what are the best places to escape to, when you're trying to avoid anything to do with the entertainment industry?

Diamond: Gleenblatt's Deli on Sunset. They have a great rare roast beef sandwich that's awesome. They don't have a sandwich named for me yet, but I might change my name to 'Rare Roast Beef' Diamond. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: What projects are you currently working on that excite you?

Diamond: I'm working on a radio show currently, and I'm putting together an hour long TV special of my stand-up work, and going around the country doing stand-up has been fantastic, I love it.

Aileen Quinn, Title Character in the film version of "Annie"

Sun is Out: Aileen Quinn at at 'The Hollywood Show,' March of 2012
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

The first film version of the popular Broadway musical "Annie" – which features the adventures of comic strip moppet Little Orphan Annie – had an interesting interpretation by legendary director John Huston in 1982. A nationwide search for the little girl to play Annie resulted in Aileen Quinn, who had done regional theater in her home state of Pennsylvania and a couple commercials. Quinn beat out 8,000 hopefuls for the role. She continues to pursue theater, and recently got back into some TV and film roles.

HollywoodChicago.com: Your filmography abruptly stops in 1986, and only resumed recently. What is the reason for that gap?

Aileen Quinn: I'm so glad you asked that question, I never left the business. I've been appearing on Broadway, Off-Broadway and other theater for the past twenty years. I've been to Chicago, for example, with 'Fiddler on the Roof,' 'Peter Pan' and 'Saturday Night Fever.'

HollywoodChicago.com: So you were handpicked over thousands of auditions to land the role of Annie in that '80s film version. Did you ever find out what quality you possessed that won you the role?

Aileen Quinn as 'Annie'
Photo credit: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

Quinn: They never specifically told me. I was always singing and dancing from an early age, but I think it was the acting that John Huston noticed around my third audition. All we did at that one was talk about my family and my life, and he just patted my hand. He said later that it was the day he knew that I had the right spirit for Annie. It was Huston that made the decision on casting me.

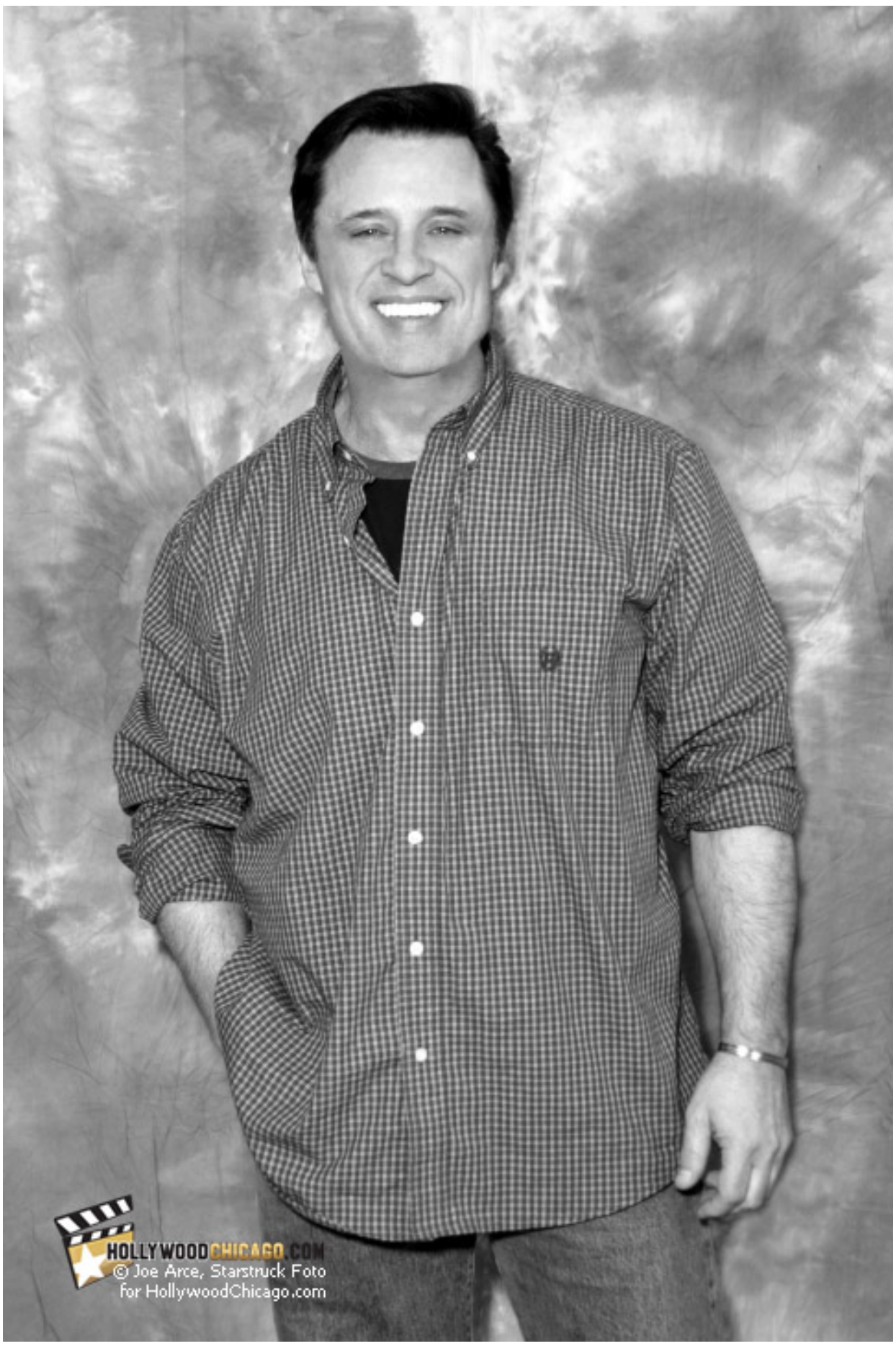
HollywoodChicago.com: As you got older and realized the legacy of John Huston, which film – besides yours – became your favorite?

Quinn: It's more an answer of what I haven't seen. I really want to see 'Chinatown,' because so many people have mentioned it to me. You'll appreciate this – Huston invited my whole family to his private cove in Mexico for two weeks, after the filming was done.

HollywoodChicago.com: If you could go back in time, and give some advice to your younger self, what would it be?

Quinn: I guess I would just say truly appreciate what you have, because I was very blessed as a child. Traveling the world, being in a movie with a great cast, truly appreciate it.

Joe Penny, Portrayed Jake on "Jake and the Fatman"



He's Jaked: Joe Penny at at 'The Hollywood Show,' March of 2012
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

In the realm of the truly unforgettable titles in TV drama history, "Jake and the Fatman" (1987-1992) weighs heavily. The Fatman was veteran actor William Conrad. Jake was character actor Joe Penny. Penny has done mostly guest spots in television since then, including "The Sopranos." He recently did a three episode run on "Cold Case."

HollywoodChicago.com: Reruns must seem like old home movies to a television veteran such as yourself. Any reruns of yours spur a particular memory or are there any you just like seeing again.

Joe Penny: I don't really go back over my old shows, but I'll see them occasionally, mostly I want to go back and change things about the character as I look at them now.

HollywoodChicago.com: What advantages do you think you had coming up through series television in the 1980s as opposed to now?

William Conrad, Joe Penny (right) in 'Jake and the Fatman'
Photo credit: MGM Home Entertainment

Penny: There was more of you had to earn it. These days, everyone is a writer, producer and movie star. You post something on the web, get enough hits, and suddenly you have TV show. [laughs] It is overloaded, and I don't see many people with longevity anymore. Everything was harder when I started, and you had to take acting lessons, do theater parts, work on connections and then get lucky. The technology is good, but it's also a hindrance for longevity.

HollywoodChicago.com: What is the best advice someone gave you about acting, and how do you apply it?

Penny: Know your job and don't fake it. It looks easy, but the ones that make it look easy know what the hell they're doing. They may tell you around the dining room table that you're funny and you should be an actor, but until you challenge yourself by getting on a stage or in front of a camera, that's when your knowledge of the craft separates you from the pretenders. The guys who gave me that advice was William Holden, Lee Marvin and Robert Mitchum. I'm grateful I had a chance to hang out with those guys. They were the real deal.

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

Penny: Everybody had the impression he was a gruff guy, but in reality he was like your lovable granddad. He was was like my granddad, that's the relationship we had.

Yancy Butler, Portrayed Angie D'Amico in the Film "Kick-Ass"

Yancy Butler at at 'The Hollywood Show,' March of 2012
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

Yancy Butler is a veteran TV and movie actress, and even did a bit part in a movie as a child. She had a lead role in the early 2000s on the TV series "Witchblade," as Detective "Pez" Pezzini, and is in pre-production for "Kick-Ass 2: Balls to the Wall"

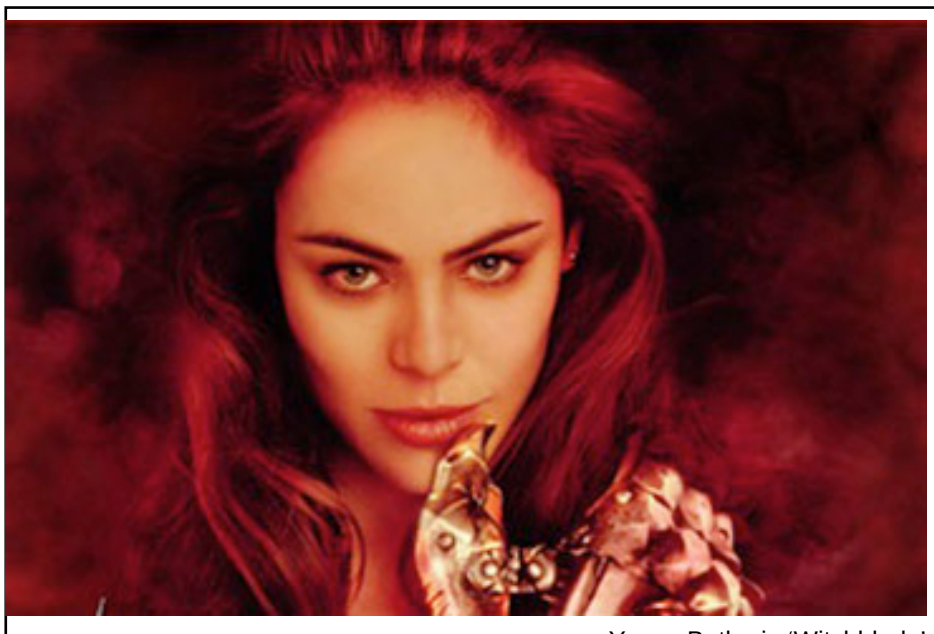
HollywoodChicago.com: What is the story about that small role you had in 1979, 'Savage Weekend'?

Yancy Butler: I did it as a favor for the mother of a friend of mine, as the 'girl at the top of the stairs.' At that time I had no idea that I wanted to be an actor, and when I was done with college I thought it would be a good way to pay off those student loans. I went to Sarah Lawrence and had massive student loans. My mother was in theater and my father traveled with the band 'The Lovin' Spoonful,' so that was the last profession they wanted me to pursue.

HollywoodChicago.com: What kind of visionary, in your opinion, is director Matthew Vaughn, since you worked with him in the film "Kick-Ass"?

Butler: I think Matthew is a genius, and he's visionary because not only did he do 'Kick-Ass' the film, but he created the comics books at the same time. I thought that was smart to build an audience, and start the marketing. He's great on a set, and has beautiful choreography with the camera. It was a pleasure working with him.

HollywoodChicago.com: What is your take surrounding the controversy of the film, were the rough edges appropriate?



Yancy Butler in 'Witchblade'
Photo credit: Warner Home Video

Butler: I think it's the fantasy element that made it work, and because it was over the top – starting with a scene having a girl in a cage, with a father that shoots her so he can train her to be a superhero – it's living in a world of fantasy, and people need to define it as such and calm down.

HollywoodChicago.com: What was the breakthrough audition or connection that landed you your first major television role on 'Brooklyn South'?

Butler: I had done an episode of 'NYPD Blue,' and I auditioned for that one because Kathy Bates was directing it, and I really wanted to work with her. I got that one, and I guess I caught [Producer] Steven Bochco's eye and got cast in 'Brooklyn South.' Starting with Dick Wolf, because I worked on one of his series ["South Beach"], I owe him my entire career. So I've been really blessed to work in television with all those heavy hitters.

HollywoodChicago.com: What was the best advice someone gave you about acting, and how have you used that advice?

Butler: To remember to breathe. I can't remember who gave me that advice, but I use that all the time. Leslie Caron, who I did a film with called 'Let it Be Me,' told me to always wash my make-up off every night.

HollywoodChicago.com: What role in your career best defines you as an actress and why?

Butler: I've been blessed to have done different roles, but I don't think people see me as funny. I loved the film 'Drop Zone' and the TV show 'Witchblade,' but I don't know if I've gotten that definitive role yet. I'm open and willing to do it.

"The Hollywood Show" comes to Chicagoland on September 7th, 8th and 9th, 2012 (Saturday 9/8 and Sunday 9/9 are celebrity appearance days), at The Hilton Rosemont, 5500 N. River Road, Rosemont, Ill. For complete details, click here. [14]

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By PATRICK McDONALD [16]
Senior Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [15]

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