

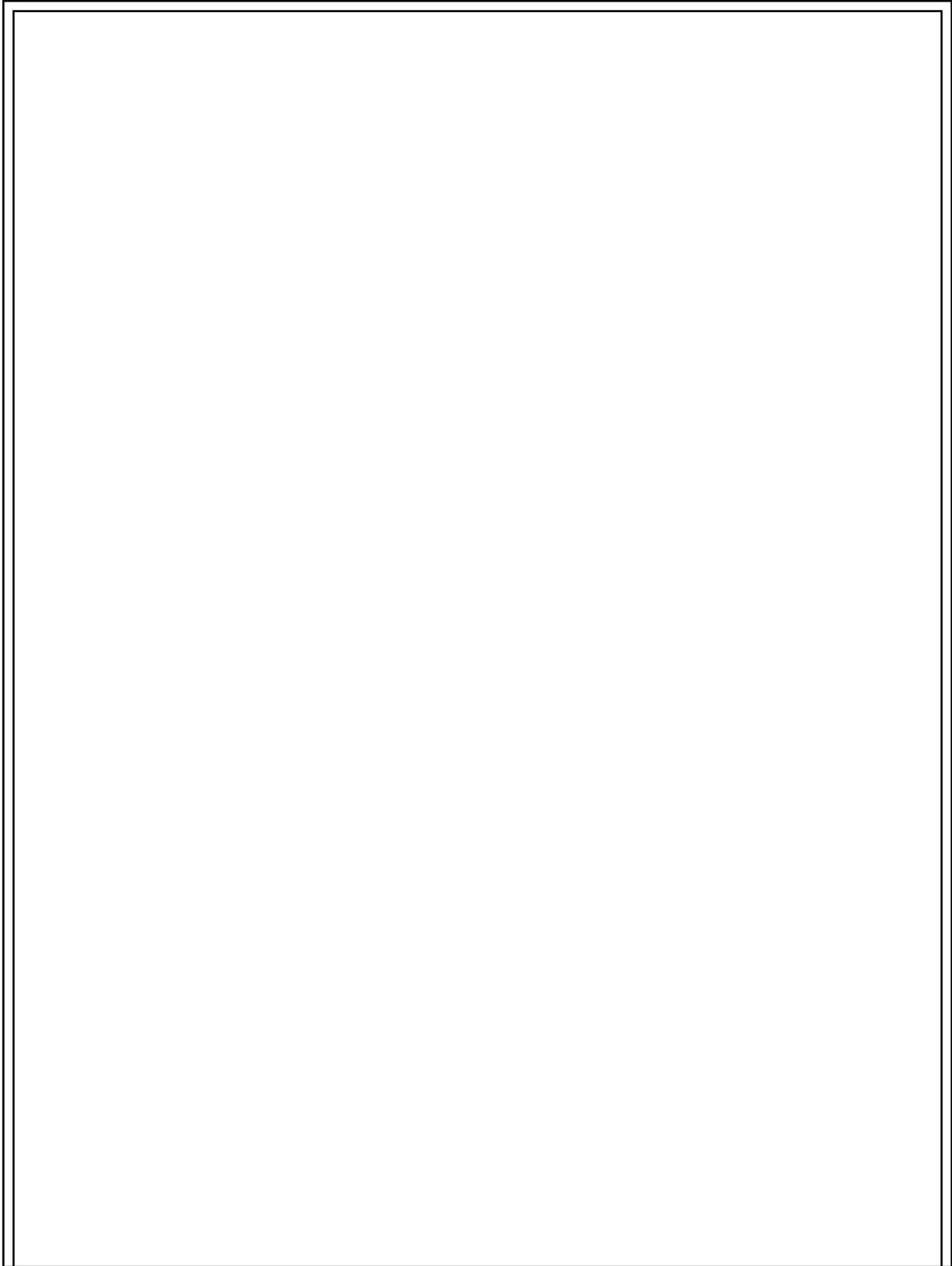
Interview: Iconic Actress P.J. Soles on Her Brilliant Career

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CHICAGO – If one actress can represent an era of classic and cult movies, P.J. Soles is a pretty good candidate. Her string of roles in high profile and familiar films from the mid 1970s to early ‘80s including “Carrie,” “Halloween,” “Breaking Away.” “Rock ‘n’ Roll High School” “Private Benjamin” and “Stripes.”

From rocking with The Ramones to getting the “Aunt Jemima Treatment” from a young Bill Murray, Soles stood out as a fun leading actress and best friend during a more innocent age of “Star Wars” Hollywood. She was born in Germany as Pamela Jayne Harden to an American mother and Dutch father, and in her father’s capacity working international insurance, lived all over the world. She ended up going to college at Briar Cliff in New York State, which led to an early modeling and acting career in Manhattan. She went by her initials, P.J., and has retained the last name from her first marriage.





P.J. Soles at 'Days of the Dead' in Chicago, November of 2012
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

It was during a joint audition session for directors George Lucas and Brian De Palma that secured her first major role in De Palma's "Carrie" (1976). From there, she met her second husband Dennis Quaid on the set of "Our Winning Season" (1978) and was married to him by the time they both were featured in "Breaking Away" (1979). That same year, she was the unforgettable lead in "Rock 'n' Roll High School" with The Ramones punk band, followed by "Private Benjamin" (1980) and the Bill Murray girlfriend role in "Stripes" (1981). And in "Halloween" (1978), she also had the distinction of being the first to fall victim to what is now a horror movie cliché – the individual or couple that is murdered in the film just after having sex.

Recently, she was in Rob Zombie's "The Devil's Rejects" (2005), and continues to work in film projects. P.J. Soles spoke to HollywoodChicago.com about her career in a phone interview, from her home in California.

HollywoodChicago.com: When you first meet people, and they connect you as P.J. Soles the actress and legend, what is the first thing they usually want to know, and when they ask or talk about it, does it make sense to you or does it surprise you?

P.J. Soles: There are two different groups of fans. Those who come to the horror conventions are obsessed with 'Halloween' and 'Carrie.' The most surprising thing for them is they look at my other pictures and say, 'oh yeah, you were in Stripes!' A lot of them know I was in all those films, but a lot of them don't know. If I just meet someone on the street, or their head turns at a check-out line, they usually say, 'did I go to high school with you?' [laughs] The other day I was in an airport, and a guy giving away tee shirts for a credit card company said, 'has anyone ever told you that you look like the actress P.J. Soles?' [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: As a child, it is listed in your biography that you moved around quite a bit and lived in some exotic worldwide locations. Which country has stayed with you the longest from childhood, and how do you think moving around so much helped you when you were older and starting your career as an actress?

Soles: I certainly think it factored into my ability to get it together quickly when I was on a movie set and had to meet everybody, because

when I was a kid we never stayed in a country more than four or five years. I was always looking forward to the next place, I couldn't wait to see where we were going next. My father worked in the insurance industry for oil companies overseas, and opened their branch offices worldwide, because he spoke so many languages. I had to learn the languages in each country we lived in.

I always had a tender spot for Morocco, because it was so exotic, even though it was when I was five to seven years old. I remember going to the restaurants, sitting on pillows and eating with my fingers. I kept asking, 'are you sure we can eat with our fingers?' There were also beautiful beaches and a couple scary air raids, when I had to get under seats on a bus. Venezuela was also great, because my Dad had a small boat, and we would waterski in the bay, and go to islands that had nobody on them.

HollywoodChicago.com: Before we get into a career retrospect, and since you've had a lot of role and voiceover credits in the last ten years, are you currently working on something that excites you, or of your most recent roles which are you most proud of?

Soles: I have a lot of small cameos in smaller films, 'The Devil's Rejects' being the most familiar, and Rob Zombie is a really cool guy. The casting call was for 'notable 1970s actors' and I thought I guess I am in that category now. [laughs] His memory of me was as the young ingenue, so that was sweet. I also was in Jonathan Zarantonello's 'The Butterfly Room.' [2012], which is still looking for distribution. Since I've been going to these horror conventions, people ask me to do small parts...but only in horror movies. [laughs] Something besides horror would be nice.

Also my boyfriend and my daughter's boyfriend have a country band called 'Cheap Rodeo,' and I've written lyrics for five of their songs. They are more deep and touching, like the tune 'First Night in Heaven.' Finally, after all these years, I am a songwriter.



P.J. Soles Reacts to Her Career in Horror
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: Of the four major directors you worked for when you started out – Brian de Palma, John Carpenter, Peter Yates and Allan Arkush – how did each of them interact with you while on set?

Soles: Peter Yates [“Breaking Away”] is a fantastic director, and has a great filmography, although I can’t exactly say I worked for him. Working with a character, of course, I have to say John Carpenter [‘Halloween’]. He had something magical that really made me think it was a collaborative effort. I brought a lot to the set when working with Allan Arkush [‘Rock ‘n’ Roll High School’], my clothes and my energy, because he wasn’t a teenage girl. [laughs] He wanted me to bring whatever I could, because he wanted a special movie. Brian De Palma was different, you knew right away that it was his set, his movie and his vision. There is a story about my wearing a red hat to the audition for ‘Carrie,’ and each time he told me to bring that hat when I got on set. Finally, I asked him whether he hired me or the hat? [laughs] It was even his vision to bring the hat.

HollywoodChicago.com: Of those five famous movie you were involved in – ‘Carrie,’ ‘Halloween,’ ‘Breaking Away,’ ‘Rock ‘n’ Roll High School’ and ‘Stripes; – which one did you have the most fun in after hours parties, and what is the wildest thing you’ve ever seen at any movie set party?

Soles: Well, that would be ‘Soggy Bottom, U.S.A.’ [1981], which you didn’t mention, because we had Don Johnson, Ben Johnson and Jack Elam on the set, that was a lot of fun after hours. ‘Stripes’ had John Candy inviting everyone over at midnight to eat pasta. On all the other ones there wasn’t any time. The wildest thing I saw was bleep, bleep, bleep. [laughs] I wasn’t really a party girl.

When I got to Hollywood in the earliest days, even before ‘Carrie,’ I was at a party where the band the Eagles were in attendance, and met Neil Young. He found out where I lived, and kept leaving notes on my door and my mailbox. I listened to some of his songs and thought, ‘this guy can’t even sing.’ [laughs] I did go out with him a couple times, but that’s another story.

HollywoodChicago.com: You were the first, in the film Halloween, to get involved in one of the great horror movie clichés of all time – the couple who is murdered right after having sex. Often critics have symbolized those type of deaths as punishment for doing the deed. What is your opinion about this cliché and have you seen a horror film that does it better than you did it in Halloween?

Soles: Is that in combination with a girl that says, ‘totally,’ for every other word? [laughs] I thought that was the determining factor. I remember it being so funny and silly. Of course, the bad girl should be first! It’s a strange concept in today’s world. I heard that John in interviews say he never intended that statement about that scene. That’s just what we were doing.

HollywoodChicago.com: You’ve done nudity in a couple movies. What was your attitude about it then, and how do you feel about it now with the proliferation of the internet and the ability to bring up those scenes almost instantly?



P.J. Soles Rocks with The Ramones
Photo credit: Shout! Factory

Soles: Yeah, my kids can see what I looked like back then and say, ‘hey, Mom was hot.’ [laughs] I remember in ‘Carrie’ we all had to be in the shower scene, and if you look closely I’m the only one who had a towel on and kept it on. I thought ‘my parents were going to see this.’ So when I did ‘Halloween’ and John Carpenter asked if I’d do a flash, I said yes, but he left it completely up to me. My parents still asked me what was I thinking. And in ‘Stripes,’ who knew the extended DVD version would come out in crystal clear Blu-Ray? [laughs] But there is nothing that I am terribly embarrassed about, and after breast feeding two kids for a year each, it’s nice to see what they used to look like.

HollywoodChicago.com: Yeah, not bad. [laughs] Given that the main frontmen of The Ramones have all died, how do you think you contributed to the legend of that band with your participation in ‘Rock ‘n’ Roll High School’?

Soles: That film took a long time to gain some steam, and it’s really in the last couple of years, after Shout Factory purchased the Roger Corman library, that it’s been his most successful film to date. Roger Corman finally at one convention praised my performance, after thirty years of not knowing what he thought, although he didn’t praise me with a check. [laughs] If you watch the movie today and don’t know The Ramones, you will become a fan. Even when punked-out fans of the band reluctantly watch it, they are captivated. I am so, so happy to have done that film. The boys would be proud.

One of the benefits of doing ‘The Devil’s Rejects’ is that Rob Zombie invited me to a party, and I saw Johnny Ramone again, a few months before he passed away. He set the record straight for me, because I had always heard that the band thought the movie had played down their street credibility. He told me, ‘no, now I can see now that it’s a good movie.’ I told him because of the movie he and I would live forever. And we look great. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: Old Boyfriends' is an oddball cult film that you had a role in. What was the circumstance of landing that role, and did you interact at all with John Houseman, John Belushi or Keith Carradine while you were on that set?

Soles: That was just a one day shoot, it was a scene in a pool, and I had to audition with a bathing suit, so that tells you what the role was all about. [Director] Joan Tewksbury was wonderful to me, but even though it was only one day we did 55 takes. I was used to doing one or two takes, in the light-is-fading type of movies, so to do 55 takes was odd for me.

HollywoodChicago.com: Didn't you have a similarly higher budget for 'Stripes'?



P.J. Soles Gets the Treatment in 'Stripes'
Photo credit: Columbia TriStar Home Video

Soles: 'Stripes' was eight million dollars, and Bill Murray was getting one million. I remember that distinctly because he had such a bad attitude, and I thought, 'what is your problem, you're getting a million dollars!' [laughs] The rest of us were paid much less. Bill is a genius, and improvised so much of that movie, including the Aunt Jemima scene. It was three in the morning, and he started the whole scene, I just followed along.

HollywoodChicago.com: It's too bad I didn't invest in spatulas during that time.

Soles: [Laughs] I've signed a few! I had a guy bring me an rolling pin, a spatula and an ice cream scoop and I signed them all. He was going to put them in a box and hang them in his kitchen.

HollywoodChicago.com: Finally, what is most gratifying to you regarding how hard you worked when you were younger, and which of those roles of youth give you the biggest kick when you see it again?

Soles: I'm always amazed of the longevity of all those films, especially 'Halloween' being a premiere horror film. It seems so strange because it was such a small set, and it's great that it lasted a long time, even with all of today's technology in films. They can't seem to surpass a simple movie with just eight characters. some lighting and creative direction. It's really cool, and I love that. And of course, 'Rock 'n' Roll High School,' because it meant a lot to me to play a classic American character after I had lived outside the country my whole life. I'm proud I made her so memorable.

HollywoodChicago.com: That is absolutely the truth, and now I will allow a tear of nostalgia to run down my cheek.

Soles: Well, if you were at a Hollywood party, somebody would lick it off.

P.J. Soles continues to make appearances at fan conventions all over the world. Click on PJSoles.com [16] for a schedule and more information. Her Chicago appearance was at "Days of the Dead" horror convention, [click here](#) [17] for more information on that ongoing event.



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