

Interview: Actress, Activist Mariel Hemingway Navigates Life

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CHICAGO – The Hemingway name evokes an immediate visceral reaction, from the beginnings of Ernest “Papa” Hemingway’s powerful American literature to the Hollywood career of his granddaughter Mariel Hemingway. The actress was recently in Chicago to promote director Ed Brown’s documentary, “Unacceptable Levels.”

Mariel Hemingway is the third daughter of Jack Hemingway, who himself was the only child from Ernest Hemingway’s first marriage to Hadley Richardson. Her older sister Margaux proceeded her into modeling and acting, and the two appeared together in “Lipstick” (1976) playing sisters who are brutally exploited. Mariel’s career skyrocketed after that debut, as she appeared in Woody Allen’s “Manhattan” (1979), “Personal Best” (1982) and Bob Fosse’s “Star 80” (1983). She was nominated for a Best Supporting Actress Oscar for “Manhattan,” and delivered a classic ending line.



Mariel Hemingway in Chicago, July 24th, 2013

Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

Hemingway has worked steadily as an actress since then, but has also reinvented herself as a healthy living advocate and blogger, and in the footsteps of her father Jack, an environmentalist. She recently participated in the film, “Running From Crazy” (2013), which chronicles the strain of mental illness in the Hemingway family, which affected her personally with the suicide of her sister Margaux in 1996.

Mariel Hemingway was in Chicago on July 24th, and represented “Unacceptable Levels,” director Ed Brown’s film about chemical infiltration in our everyday atmosphere. HollywoodChicago.com talked with her about that film, and other elements of her varied and adventurous life.

HollywoodChicago.com: Since you once hosted a show called ‘Spiritual Cinema,’ what spirituality can be derived from the lessons of ‘Unacceptable Levels’?

Mariel Hemingway: My message is that lifestyle is everything you do, your spirituality, your food and your thoughts ... everything leads into everything else. Specifically what is the spiritual message? I think that anything that is not of nature or not created for us by the universe – and the stuff that we create in our desire to make money – does have consequences. I have a book called ‘Running with Nature,’ which is all about making choices based on ‘what would nature do?’ Anything outside of that is spiritually vacant, in my opinion, and it’s devoid of humanity.

HollywoodChicago.com: You have had a second career in expanding information regarding healthy living. And since this healthy living doesn’t seem to permeate lower income levels in the United States, how can people of all social economic levels get on board with both the information that is in this film and your advocating of a healthy living lifestyle?

Hemingway: Lower income groups don't think about healthy living that much, and cheap food is toxic food ... we're poisoning a whole generation of human beings. They don't see a way out. It's a difficult issue, and it's hard to feed people organic food when you talk about expense. But what I do know that those of us who can eat organically and can make that choice with our pocketbook, it will spread wider and organic food will become cheaper.

I also say when I speak to people, and they say to me it's expensive to eat organic. I always say number one, it's more expensive to get sick and it's also easy to make part of your lifestyle if you give up other very unnecessary expenses. If you're buying organic, it's not that much more money – a dollar here or there – but the value in it is your health. Think about how many times you go to Starbucks, for example. What you waste in some areas can be applied to the healthier lifestyle. It takes re-education and re-invention on what it means to live.

HollywoodChicago.com: Where in the world do you think it's working better?

Hemingway: In European cultures like Sweden and Germany, they refuse to eat genetically modified foods or use certain pesticides, they just refuse. It doesn't mean that everyone is rich, but America has this thing about cheap and bigger and more. We have to re-educate ourselves about what is right, healthy and decent for us to be doing.

HollywoodChicago.com: You were an early adopter of blogging. In the process of doing those updates, what did you learn about yourself as a teacher, communicator and most especially, a writer?

Hemingway: I didn't think of that when I was doing it, but being somewhat of a celebrity, I knew that people paid attention, and there was a sense of responsibility that you learn about yourself. In my opinion, it's not only a self exploration, but it also has to have a global effect in some sort of way. If it affects me, it can affect all of us, because spiritually I believe we're all the same. My education becomes everyone's education and my expression becomes expression for all. It's about taking responsibility – as Ed is doing with his film – and allowing people to think about their lives in a different way.

HollywoodChicago.com: Speaking of writers, I hear you have a few in your family tree. Since participating in 'Running From Crazy,' what further insights did you get regarding your grandfather, his father and your father and uncles that none of the hundreds of books written could ever encompass?

Hemingway: 'Running from Crazy' was not only a journey of self discovery, but it's also about understanding why my family is creative, crazy and troubled at the same time. It was really a journey of making sense of the choices I've made in my life. The title is appropriate because I felt I was running from that crazy my entire life. The choice of my healthy lifestyle, eating right and properly, becoming aware of nature and its effects, I also realized that choices that we make can create a mental balance.

And interestingly enough, in regard to chemicals and 'Unacceptable Levels,' I actually believe that there is probably some chemical poisoning that took place at some point in my family. There could have been some lead poisoning in the generations of my family, so I think all these things we talk about are interrelated. What is wonderful for me now is that I no longer feel I'm running from crazy, based on the choices that I've made. What is in your control, can make a difference in your mental well being. That freed me from the feeling that I could go crazy.



Woody Allen and Mariel Hemingway in 'Manhattan'
Photo credit: MGM Home Entertainment

HollywoodChicago.com: We all have grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, but none of us have had the privilege to read about them in volumes of written text, or gain insight to them through biography. How does your access to all that change your perspective on your family

tree?

Hemingway: You have to understand I've never been Mariel Jones, I've always been Mariel Hemingway. My life has always been under a microscope, and I always had the background fodder. It was weird in a way, but it was also my 'normal.' I never did think, 'well this is strange.'

What is interesting about it is looking at it myself, making it personal. I think because there is genetics involved there is a 'knowingness' about my family. I didn't know my grandfather, obviously, but I have read his books and biographies. With him and my grandmother, getting the opportunity to know them on the inside, gave me a sense of the reasons for the choices I made in my life. I would see certain aspects of the history and understand why I made the same choices. As in, 'I understand why I did that for ten years.'

HollywoodChicago.com: Since you are environmentally conscious, as technology becomes more pervasive in our lives, what don't you want to see in the future in regard to the overindulgence in that technology? How can we strike a balance between the convenience it gives us and what we have to give up to get it?

Hemingway: I do love technology, in the sense that it has made my life easier, and it's been extraordinary to make the world smaller in just seconds. It is, however, to the detriment of our interaction. When we're face-to-face, we have an exchange of energy. And people need to understand that they need to turn off that technology at some point during the day, because there has to be a time period when it's absolutely unnecessary.

And with children, although they can access so much more, it also has affected their attention spans, and their imagination is lacking. There were summers in my childhood when I went out the door at 9am and came back at 6pm, with just breaks for meals. Kids don't do that anymore, which means health issues associated with less activity. As parents, there is time for technology and a time to get back to nature. I think that's very important.

HollywoodChicago.com: But won't evolution interact with technology for kids within this generation, and could change things in the future?

Hemingway: I don't think there is anything that can replace being outside. We have to put technology into a certain place in our lives, but we have to remember that we are human beings, and are nature. We can't separate ourselves from the very thing that we are. We take in sunlight, we breathe air, we drink water and we can never not do those things. The danger is that technology will mean a lack of sunshine, air and activity in the future, as kids use it more and more. It isn't wrong, it just needs to be balanced.

HollywoodChicago.com: Now that you've actually experienced the age that Woody Allen was when your character dated him in 'Manhattan,' do you think such a relationship could ever successfully occur in real life? And I'm also curious how many times you did the classic 'Not everybody gets corrupted. You have to have a little faith in people.' scene?

Hemingway: I did that once. I pretty much did all the scenes in the film in one take. Maybe twice. I begged Woody when we did the transom cab around the park scene, in which he kisses me, that we do it just once. [laughs] When it was done, I ask him if we had to do it again, and was relieved when he said no.

In regard to the first part of the question, I guessed Woody himself has proved it can happen with the situation that happened with him. At the time, people were asking me if there was anything beyond the film. I was only sixteen. I'd never had a boyfriend before. Was I going to have an affair with Woody Allen? I don't think so. It was bad enough I had to kiss him. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: What do you think about that film today?

Hemingway: It was incredible to be in that amazing movie, and Woody is an eccentric and an artist. Do I totally agree with his choices? Not all of them. But I certainly admire him as an artist. I don't judge, it's too hard.



Mariel Hemingway as Dorothy Stratten and Eric Roberts in 'Star 80'

Photo credit: Warner Home Entertainment

HollywoodChicago.com: You altered your appearance and worked with a late career Bob Fosse on 'Star 80.' What insights did you learn about yourself in portraying a woman who literally died as a result of her objectification, and which of Fosse's legendary obsessions did you find most interesting to work with during the production?

Hemingway: Bob Fosse certainly was one of the most extraordinary directors I've ever worked with, he was very specific in what he wanted. He was a choreographer, and as a director he choreographed everything. Even as I was doing poses for Playboy as Dorothy [Stratten], he choreographed that as a dance. And he cut it to make it look like photographs, but he made me do it to music.

We rehearsed the film for six weeks prior to filming, which is a luxury that doesn't exist anymore. We worked in a theater, and he taped it out on stage. He would start a stopwatch, and Eric Roberts and I would do every scene in the film, start to finish. That was an amazing learning curve.

HollywoodChicago.com: What did you understand about Dorothy Stratten?

Hemingway: Playing that character, I really understood what it was like to be victimized by a business. I really understood what it was like to be judged by the way I looked rather than who I was. In retrospect, it was a difficult movie, and it did hurt me emotionally. Probably because it was so in depth, and we rehearsed it so much, that it became part of my cellular make up. It was hard to shake for a lot of years. It was also a rough movie for the audience, they loved it but they hated it. Hollywood didn't like it at all, it was like saying the American Dream that they promote was full of shit. It's a reminder that things are not as they appear.

The next screening of "Unacceptable Levels" will be Thursday, September 26th, 2013, at The Belcourt in Nashville, Tennessee. Written and directed by Ed Brown. Not Rated. Mariel Hemingway's website can be accessed by [clicking here](#). [17]



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