

Interview: Mackenzie Phillips Lives Life One Day at a Time

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CHICAGO – The irony is, of course, that actress Mackenzie Phillips was in a notable 1970s sitcom called “One Day at a Time,” and that phrase often describes the struggles of living with addiction. Phillips talked to HollywoodChicago.com about living that life at the “Hollywood Show” Chicago.

Mackenzie Phillips was born in Alexandria, Virginia, the daughter of The Mamas & the Papas singer John Phillips and his first wife, Susan Adams. She was in a band at the age of 12, and was spotted by a casting agent. She auditioned for the breakthrough George Lucas film, “American Graffiti,” and won the role of Carol. Three years later, she won her signature role, that of Julie Cooper on the long-running situation comedy “One Day at a Time,” co-starring Valerie Bertinelli and Bonnie Franklin.



Mackenzie Phillips at the “Hollywood Show Chicago” in 2013

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

It was during the run of that series that her drug and alcohol abuse came to light. After two nearly fatal overdoses, she was fired from the show. In 1992, she went through a long term rehabilitation, but was arrested in 2008 for possession. After a drug diversion program, she has been clean ever since. She recently shocked the world with revelations regarding her father John in her 2009 memoir, “High on Arrival.” It was reported in *People Magazine* that she now works as a drug rehab counselor at the Pasadena Recovery Center.

Mackenzie Phillips appeared at the “Hollywood Show” Chicago, an annual event in which fans can mingle, take photographs and get autographs from the celebrities who make appearances there. The next session of the “Hollywood Show” Chicago will take place in Rosemont, Ill., on August 15th-17th. For complete details and ticket purchase information, [click here](#). [16]

HollywoodChicago.com: What do you love today about the innocence and comic timing you displayed in the George Lucas classic, ‘American Graffiti,’ and how aware were you regarding what Lucas was trying to accomplish in the film?

Mackenzie Phillips: When I did ‘American Graffiti, the only acting I’d done before that was Santa Claus in the school play. I had wanted to be a rock star, so I was performing at the Troubadour when I was 12 years old, and the casting agent for ‘American Graffiti’ was there. He asked me if I wanted to be in a movie, and I said [affecting a “valley girl” accent] ‘Oh my gawd, that would be so cool.’ I auditioned against 250 other girls and I got the job.

I remember thinking we were doing an educational movie or an after school special, and I really didn’t know what I was doing. When I see it today, I see this little girl who looks like the female version of my only son. It’s very bittersweet and adorable, and I’m filled with compassion regarding what is to come for her. Because that little girl up on that screen didn’t know. But I was very grateful to have been in that film.

HollywoodChicago.com: Do you think the atmosphere in Hollywood at the time of your youth contributed to the difficulties you would encounter during the run of 'One Day at a Time'?

Phillips: I firmly believe in a genetic predisposition to addiction and alcoholism. And I certainly don't blame the atmosphere of Hollywood. It may have exacerbated my addiction, and people always say that Hollywood is the hotbed of addiction. That's not true – it's the United States that is the hotbed of addiction. There are kids dying on the street corners while we're sitting here talking. I certainly don't blame Hollywood nor do I see it exclusively as a Hollywood problem.

HollywoodChicago.com: Let's talk about your career as a singer. How does that type of performing differ for you than being an actor, and how does the acting contribute to your success as a singer and vice versa?



Mackenzie Phillips and Castmates in 'One Day at a Time'
Photo credit: Sony Pictures Television

Phillips: When you're working as an actor, unless you're doing a night shoot, you're at work at 5:30 in the morning, and you work for 16 hours. When you're working on music, you're basically a night owl. You're working on the backside of the clock, at least I did because I was doing a lot of live performance. But I love them both.

To my family I'm a recording artist, like Chynna in Wilson Phillips or my sister Bijou, or my father, or my ex-husband. To all those people, I am an actor who could sing. I've done Broadway musicals, so if it comes up as an acting job in which I need to sing, I am ready. However, I don't aspire to be a rock star or a recording artist.

HollywoodChicago.com: The 1970s is a distinct decade for many of us. What story can you think of that really defines the 1970s for you, either as pop culture that you participated in or as part of your life?

Phillips: That's a big question. I think I've lived a bunch of lifetimes in my evolution – I'm going to be 54 years old this upcoming November. I remember in the early 1970s, Rodney Bingenheimer's English Disco on the Sunset Strip, hanging out with all the groupies and fans of Alice Cooper and Led Zeppelin. Everyone came through there, and they knew who my father was, and it was like 'Hands off the kid.' It was a rarefied existence for me.

I have people come up to me and say, 'Oh you poor thing, what you have lived through!' I don't look at it that way, I can be objective about it because I've lived through it. But I look back on a very abundant and beautiful life, that had a bunch of scary things go down in it. But I'm not just the sum total of my negative experiences, I'm the sum total of my positive experiences. It's been a beautiful life for me, in its own way.

HollywoodChicago.com: So what was the biggest misconception about you that you wanted cleared up when you wrote your memoir in 2009?

Phillips: I think people thought, "Why does this girl keep crashing and burning Why can't she stay sober, or keep it together?" But there was no real through line to my life. I think I had been haunted for many years by secrets I'd been forced to keep via convention. I made an informed decision to be honest for the first time ever.

People would say to me, "Well, you should have told these truths while he was still alive." Well, if I had done it while he was alive, they would have said why didn't you wait until he was dead. You cannot win for trying. I didn't demonize anybody in the book, I just told the truth as it occurred. Another misconception is that 'High on Arrival' is an incest memoir. It's not – it's the story of a life and all its components. And that just happened to be one of them.

HollywoodChicago.com: What do you find both ironic and comforting in the title 'One Day at a Time'?

Phillips: Well, that's how I live my life – I practice a program of recovery. People come up to me all the time and say, 'you do understand that your show was called One Day at a Time, don't you?' Yeah, I do.

Back in the day, when I would see One Day at a Time bumper stickers, I didn't realize it was part of a program of recovery, I thought it was about our TV show. [laughs]

The "Hollywood Show" Chicago will be August 15-17th, 2014, at the Hilton Rosemont Chicago O'Hare Hotel. 5550 N. River Road,

Rosemont, Illinois. [Click here](#) [16] for details, appearances and to purchase tickets. “High on Arrival: A Memoir” by Mackenzie Phillips, is available wherever books are sold.



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [18]
Senior Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [17]

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