

Interview, Audio: Illeana Douglas on Acting & the Film ‘Grace of My Heart’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on January 4, 2018 - 3:25pm

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CHICAGO – The acting career of Illeana Douglas began with director Martin Scorsese and flourished in her first lead role for “Grace of My Heart” (1996). She is best known today for hosting the “Trailblazing Women” series on Turner Classic Movies, and in Part Two of a three part interview with HollywoodChicago.com, she talks about her approach as an actor and how early influences defined that style.

Illeana Douglas was born in Massachuetts, the daughter of Gregory Douglas, who was the son of 1930s movie star Melvyn Douglas. She got the show biz bug as a young teenager, when she was able to visit her grandfather on the set of “Being There” (1979). After high school she moved to New York City to pursue a career. She studied acting while working various jobs, and met Martin Scorsese while he was editing “The Last Temptation of Christ.” She made her film debut in his segment of “New York Stories” (1989), and appeared in “Goodfellas.”



Actress/Author Illeana Douglas in Chicago

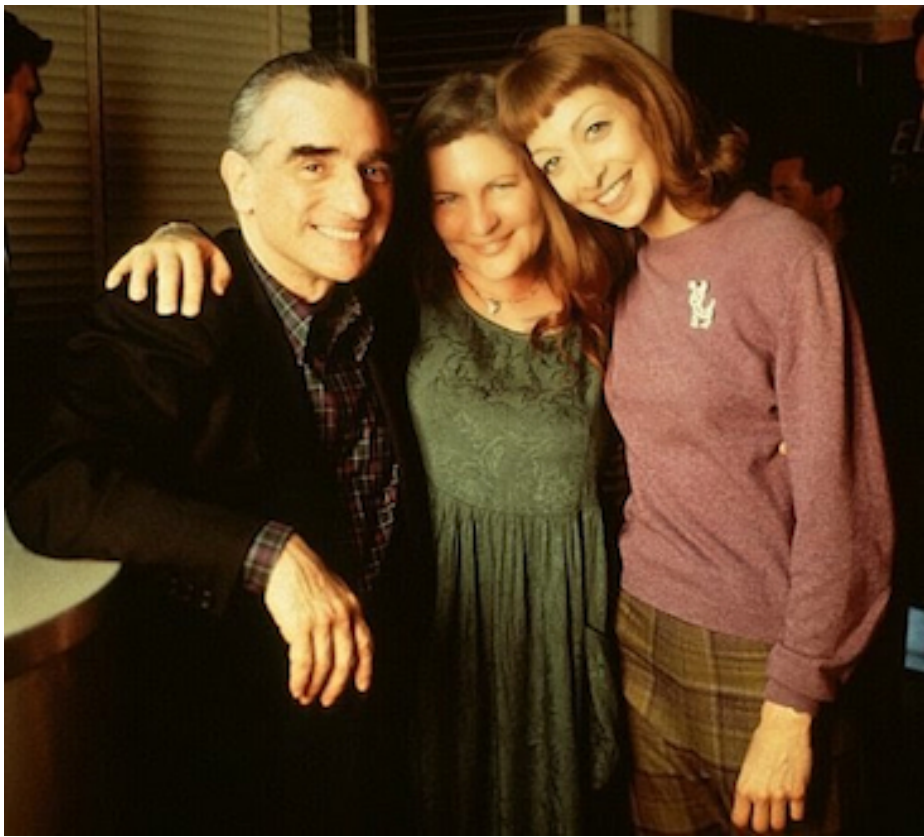
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After her Scorsese work – including “Cape Fear” in 1991 – she landed a prominent supporting role in “To Die For” (1995), and the lead role in the 1960s-set musical, “Grace of My Heart” (1996). Other notable films include “Happy, Texas” (1999), “Ghost World” (2001) and “Factory Girl” (2007). On TV, she has guest starred on “Seinfeld,” “Frasier,” “The Larry Sanders Show,” and HBO’s “Six Feet Under” and “Entourage.” She also was featured in the popular web series, sponsored by IKEA, called “Easy to Assemble.” In 2015, she wrote her memoir, “I Blame Dennis Hopper: And Other Stories from a Life Lived in and Out of the Movies.” Her lineage and acting career cemented her interest as a film historian and advocate.

HollywoodChicago.com: You primarily studied the Meisner technique in your early days as an actress. As your career developed, what essential element of that technique did you keep coming back to, and what other intuitions in the art of performance has served you as an actress?

Illeana Douglas: What I loved about Meisner, first it's very 1950s Marlon Brando-style, I don't think that has changed. The basic principle of Meisner always is 'listening and answering,' with no preconceived notions of your performance. You prepare emotionally, which the Meisner

technique equates to pumping water out of a well, you have to have some basis for a scene. But once you take care of the outer person of the character, you then give that all away and listen/answer with a point of view, and hopefully that creates the conflict within a scene. If you don't have conflict, a scene isn't very interesting to watch. When I was learning the Meissner technique, you had to prepare like that, otherwise you were ripped apart. It made it exciting.



'Grace' On Set: Martin Scorsese, Allison Anders & Illeana Douglas
Photo credit: IlleanaDouglas.com

When I'm on set, I do all that, but I also incorporate my own thing. There is a quality that puts me close to the director, and I observe what others are doing in performance, what they're wearing, etc... and what can I add to elevate this movie? That was something that was born in me the first day of my observations on the set of 'Being There.' It was the entire picture, not just my part. When I did 'Cape Fear,' one of the production assistants told me that I had more notes than Robert De Niro. Well, wasn't that what I was suppose to be doing?

HollywoodChicago.com: That's interesting, how do you categorize that type of observation?

Douglas: I call myself a 'rememberer.' One of my favorite movies and word is 'Amarcord,' which means 'I remember.' So in a sense my career as an actress and associated memories are very cinematic in the telling of my story, which began as a child spending time on the set of 'Being There,' which seeped into all the work I've done, and the people that I've met. It's all become one big movie.

HollywoodChicago.com: What do observe about the current styles of acting?

Douglas: What I don't like about the current state of acting is that I don't see a point of view... Bette Davis, for example, is someone whose point of view I understood. I think we're missing that right now, it's more of 'kitchen sink reality,' everyone is low talking and I can't understand them. [laughs] I'm not sure when that happened.

In the audio portion of the interview, Illeana Douglas relates her experiences on the film "Grace of My Heart," written and directed by her colleague Allison Anders [The "Brill Building" that Douglas refers to at the top of the audio was where hit songs were written in New York City in the 1960s, within the setting of the film]. To read and hear PART ONE of the interview, [click here](#). [24] For PART THREE, [click here](#). [25]

"I Blame Dennis Hopper: And Other Stories from a Life Lived in and Out of the Movies," by Illeana Douglas, is available online wherever books are sold. For more on Ms. Douglas, visit her website by [clicking here](#). [26]



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