

Film News: Oscar Winner & Stage Actor Olympia Dukakis Dies at 89

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 2, 2021 - 11:51am

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CHICAGO – I will never forget meeting Olympia Dukakis. It was in Chicago in 2009, and among all the pomp and sequins of a Greek American awards night. It was Dukakis who was, by her natural presence, the movie star. Oh yeah, and she was slightly tipsy. Ms. Dukakis passed away in New York City on May 1st, 2021, age 89.

She was known for her high level of performance on stage and screen, and resided in both for over 60 years. She won a Golden Globe and Academy Award (Best Supporting Actress) for "Moonstruck" (1987), and garnered two Obies (Off Broadway Theater Awards) for her work in outer circle and independent theater. She also was a prominent acting instructor, a political activist (her cousin was 1988 Presidential candidate Michael Dukakis) and wrote her memoir in 2003 entitled "Ask Me Again Tomorrow: A Life in Progress."



Olympia Dukakis in Chicago, circa 2009

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

Olympia Dukakis was born in Lowell, Massachusetts, the daughter of Greek immigrants. She was an athlete in high school (fencing) and graduated from Boston College with a Physical Therapy degree, returning later to BC to get her Masters of Fine Arts. She made her stage debut at the Williamstown Summer Theater, the beginning of a stage career that favored independent, classic and avant garde productions. She made her film debut in 1964, portraying a young mother in "Twice a Man," but maintained her stage career over film for the two decades prior to "Moonstruck."

Through the Whole Theater Company, founded with husband Louis Zorich, the plays of Eurpides, Eugene O'Neill, Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee and Lanford Wilson were prominent, and Dukakis directed such theater classics as "Uncle Vanya," "Orpheus Descending" and "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." After "Moonstruck," Dukakis flexed her performance muscle in films such as "Steel Magnolias," "Jeffrey," "Mr Holland's Opus," and on television, the magical Anna Madrigal in the Tales of the City series. IMDB lists over 80 screen roles after she won the Academy Award, including her final role in "Not to Forget" (2021). A major feature documentary about her life was released last year, called "Olympia" (available on discovery+).

She taught acting at NYU for 15 years, was a lifelong activist and feminist ("I recognize that the real pulse of life is transformation, yet I work in a world dominated by men and the things men value, where transformation is not the coinage. It's not even the language.") and worked on

the 1988 presidential campaign of cousin Micheal Dukakis, who was defeated by George H.W. Bush. She passed away after a short illness in her Manhattan home. Her husband, Louis Zorich, died in 2018. She is survived by three children and four grandchildren.

Published for the first time since 2009, here are both the Exclusive Photo of Olympia Dukakis by Joe Arce (above), and the interview I conducted with her on that special Mrs. Madrigal night ...

HollywoodChicago.com: What was different about the theater scene in the 1960s, when you were first starting out, as compared to the later eras, all the way up to today?

Olympia Dukakis: It was a lot more egalitarian back then, a lot more collaborative. People really believed that their work could make a difference and change things. There was theater in the streets, in the bars, in the coffee shops. There was kind of a belief in life.

HollywoodChicago.com: As an acting instructor of high academia and regard, what type of honesty in a performance can still turn your head?

Dukakis: Being honest is good. But practicing informed honesty is better. To be vulgar about it, a dog pissing in the street is honest (laughs). So it has to be honesty with an informed sensibility and – having made such a vulgarity – a refined sensibility (laughs).

HollywoodChicago.com: Your cousin was a presidential candidate and you are described as an activist and feminist. Why do you feel the descriptive feminist has fallen out of favor with women in the last 20 years?

Dukakis: There was a reaction and backlash that happened after the first wave with everybody, especially men. It became popular to denigrate women who felt they wanted to do something to raise the consciousness of other women and men.

I think what has happened now, in viewing the world and how badly women are treated in other countries, that it has really brought us back to a more sensible place regarding the concept of feminism.

HollywoodChicago.com: What kind of perspective did you gain in the process of writing your memoir, 'Ask me Tomorrow, A Life in Progress'?

Dukakis: That was one of the most difficult things I've ever done. They kept asking me to do it, three times in all. I felt like Julius Caesar, twice he refused and the third time his vanity was hit. So he finally said yes, and that is what he got killed for (laughs).

It felt that way to me. But the publisher persisted and I began to think that maybe I do have something to offer. But the writing of it was very difficult for me.

I did gain perspective about my life, I remembered things. For example, when I was 12 years old I began to carry a knife. I had forgotten that and why I did it. It simply was necessary on the streets of my neighborhood, to fight my way to and from school.

HollywoodChicago.com: Where did your personal best moment as an actor take place? Was it part of your stage or film work?

Dukakis: I have had wonderful moments on stage and some great film roles. It's hard to compare them because they are so very different. I loved them both because they are two unique experiences, two different ways to communicate. I enjoy them both.

HollywoodChicago.com: Finally, as an instructor and mentor, what is your best one sentence advice to student actors?

Dukakis: Patience, or get out.

Sources for this article were from imdb.com and wikipedia.com. [Olympia Dukakis, 1931-2021](http://OlympiaDukakis.com)



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Source URL (retrieved on Sep 22 2024 - 10:07am):

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