

TURNING POINT



KISS ME, KATE: Hepburn & Tracy carried on a 25-year romance.

NO REGRETS FOR 'MADAME'

HAM AND CHEESE. 12:30.' Click.

Those were the instructions from "Madame," as she is nicknamed by one life-long friend.

In ripped pants, a blue turtleneck, and a red sweater, Katharine Hepburn's still sassy at 81, currently finishing her long-awaited autobiography, titled, simply, "Me."



GLENN PLASKIN

How's work going?

"My work always goes well, and if it didn't I wouldn't tell you."

What lovely dhurrie carpets.

"All for sale. . . . How much will you give me?"

And so it began, an entrancing, seductive, hilarious afternoon in her East Side townhouse with the shrewd grande dame of Hollywood, who carried on a 25-year romance with the married Spencer Tracy, a turning point in her life that precluded marriage and children.

From their first film together, 1942's "Woman of the Year," to "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" in 1967, Hepburn not only worked with Tracy, but nursed him through his bouts of alcoholism and depression.

"When I met Spencer, everything changed for me," says the woman who in public had to play second fiddle to Tracy's wife — who refused to give

him a divorce.

If she has any regrets, she doesn't let on: "Taking certain trails in life fixes it so that you can't take others," she says simply.

"A husband would not have been compatible for me anyway. I was ambitious and knew that I would not have any children. Coming from a big family of six kids, I understood the obligation of time required. I wanted total freedom."

Now, 20 years after Tracy's death, surely Hepburn feels lonely at times, it's suggested.

"Nope," she answers, insisting, "There's no greater luxury than doing what you want when you want to do it. I've lived the life I've wanted to."

"Silence," she muses, lambasting Walkmans because they don't let people think, "is pure and true. What's wrong with it? Can't people use their brains?"

So she could recommend living alone? "The most perfect state imaginable," she responds. "The human animal naturally likes company and I would be lonely if I were forced to be alone all the time. But I'm not exactly average."

Stoic to the core, Hepburn tolerates a bum hip, a steel rod in her ankle thanks to a car accident a few years ago, a long-time eye infection, plus the tremorous shaking of her hands.

"I don't get down, even when I'm sick," she says. "Driving with a flat tire isn't ideal, and I do feel disgusted when I have to crawl up three flights of stairs — but I'm not depressed."

"Now pass the peanuts," she orders briskly.

ADVICE

Support for still lifes

DEAR READERS: ONE THING I have learned from writing this column is that no matter how weird something may seem to me, there are others who hold a totally different point of view. For example — photographing deceased family members in the casket.

"Upset in Michigan" wrote to say that she was appalled when her cousin sent several pictures of a deceased relative lying in a satin-lined casket with funeral wreaths all around. I said that I shared her sentiments and suggested she put the pictures away and forget about them. Since that column appeared I have received nearly a thousand letters in support of taking such pictures. If you'd like to look over my shoulder, be my guest.

From Evansville, Ind.: When my mother passed away I was shocked and appalled to see my niece taking pictures of her in the casket. I thought it was insensitive and disrespectful, but I said nothing.

My niece brought the pictures to my home. I put them away without opening the envelope. Several months later, I decided to open it. I had forgotten how beautiful my mother was. Those months in the hospital were so filled with pain and suffering that my last memories of the dear woman tore at my soul. Those pictures were a great comfort, Ann. I am so happy I have them.

Wayne, Neb.: We lost our baby daughter at birth. My mother asked me if I wanted her to take a picture of the baby before they lowered the lid of the casket. I said, "No . . . please don't." My mother

respected my wishes but now I regret terribly that I didn't give her permission to do it. Photographs are a wonderful way to keep beautiful memories alive forever.

White Plains, N.Y.: My wife and I were married nearly 50 years when she passed away. Mary was a pretty woman but for some reason she did not photograph well. Consequently she hid whenever family photos were taken. When Mary passed away the mortician did such a wonderful job that I asked my son to take a picture as she lay in the casket with a red rose in her hand. That photo turned out to be the best one ever taken of my wife and I wouldn't trade it for a million dollars.

Modesto, Calif.: I didn't take pictures of my mother before the funeral service and now I'm sorry. My last memories of her were agonizing. She was a living skeleton. I wanted a closed casket but the mortician assured me he could make her look beautiful — and he did. How I wish I had a picture of her as she looked then.

Biloxi, Miss.: In the deep South, people save for their funerals nearly all their lives. My kinfolk were all buried in outfits that were much fancier than what they could afford when they were living. We take pictures of all our relatives in their coffins. They looked better dead and dressed up than they ever looked when they were alive.

"Alcoholism: How to Recognize It, How to Deal With It, How to Conquer It" can turn things around. Send a self-addressed, long, business-size envelope and a check or money order for \$3.85 (this includes postage and handling) to: Alcohol, c/o Ann Landers, P.O. Box 11562, Chicago, Ill. 60611-0562. © 1991 Creators Syndicate



ANN LANDERS

ASK DR. BROTHERS

Explain war news to your kids

DEAR DR. BROTHERS: MY children, ages 8 and 10, have started to have nightmares about war, and I'm sure it's because they often watch the evening news with us. My husband feels they shouldn't be allowed in the TV room unless there are specific programs designed for children their age. Since we often watch during the dinner hour, this presents problems. — M.L.

Dear M.L.: Some children's shows are beginning to deal with youngsters' fears of war and are helping them to put this in perspective. It's impossible

totally to black out the war because, even though your children might not watch TV news with you, they'll undoubtedly hear stories from other youngsters at school.

It's better to talk with your children about what's happening. And if you watch the news together, take time after it's over to discuss it and reassure your family that this is happening a long way off, that they're in no immediate threat and that your family life isn't going to change because of what's happening in the Middle East.

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