

Olympia Dukakis

Stage Icon & Oscar Winning Screen Actress



At 82 years old this year and she's still going strong. Born in Lowell, Mass., her passion for acting was sparked as a teen performing in her Greek immigrant father's theater troupe. After receiving a master's of fine arts from Boston University, she took the long road to success, distinguishing herself on the classical and contemporary stage, and finally making her Broadway debut at age 30. Dukakis did not become a household name and sought-after film actress until age 56. She won a best supporting actress Oscar in 1988 for her performance in the romantic comedy *Moonstruck*. Movie and TV fans since have discovered her versatility in everything from ethnic to cutting-edge humor and stark tragedy roles. *Steel Magnolias*, *Mr. Holland's Opus* and *Mighty Aphrodite* are among her other notable films. In 1962, Olympia married Yugoslav-American actor Louis Zorich. The couple co-founded and ran the Whole Theatre Company in Montclair, N.J., for 15 years. They raised three children and now have four grandchildren. She is also the cousin of one-time Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis.

DAVID: In your autobiography, *Ask Me Again Tomorrow: A Life in Progress*, you seem to have had it all: a long and thriving marriage, extended family with traditions and celebrations, children, grandchildren and the career and successes of your dreams. How did you manage that?

DUKAKIS: Well, nothing comes without a price. That price came concerning limited time with my children. That was the most difficult thing for me, although I chose not to travel until my kids were 17-18 years old. My youngest son was 18 when I left to do *Moonstruck*. Still, when I was running the Whole Theatre, I was gone most days and evenings, so I missed times with them. But I'm not constitutionally built to not pursue the work that I love, so for me there was no choice.

DAVID: To what then do you attribute having had it all?

DUKAKIS: I married the right man! Louis and I made a vow when we got married over 50 years ago to support each other's dreams. And we have never once strayed from that vow. He believed in, supported and encouraged me to achieve what I desired. He was also willing to share responsibilities; so when, for example, I

traveled for work, he drove the kids to school, hockey games and took care of whatever they needed, until I was back. I couldn't have done it otherwise.

DAVID: Please share your thoughts on being outspoken about women's and children's rights, the environment and your Greek identity.

DUKAKIS: Where I grew up, discrimination against Greeks was routine, so I was determined to stand proud with my heritage. I think that experience left me with an awareness for those who struggle to be respected ... and that includes the Earth!

DAVID: Tell us about *Rose*.

DUKAKIS: It's the riveting life story of a woman named Rose, who is a Holocaust survivor. She shares her complex journey, which begins in a tiny Russian village, then moves to the Warsaw ghetto, a ship called The Exodus, the boardwalks of Atlantic City, the Arizona canyons and finally Miami Beach, where the play takes place. There are husbands and children, triumphs and struggles, losses and gains in her life, all of which she shares candidly with the audience.

DAVID: What do you like about Rose?

DUKAKIS: I like that she is struggling to make sense of the terrible conflicts that exist for Israelis and Palestinians, especially in the face of the dreams that she had as a survivor of the Holocaust. I like that she questions all aspects of it, and wants us to get involved as well. She's also an incredibly decent human being.

DAVID: Rose remains seated on a bench for the entire performance. Why is the play staged that way?

DUKAKIS: Well, the director, Nancy Meckler, and I wrote it that way because Martin, the playwright, wanted to keep the relationship between Rose and the audience intimate and intensely engaging.

DAVID: Rose Castorini, your character in *Moonstruck*, states, "I know who I am." Does Olympia Dukakis feel similarly?

DUKAKIS: Every other day. That's why the title of my book is *Ask Me Again Tomorrow!*

*Olympia Dukakis appears in the production of **Rose**, by playwright Martin Sherman at the Smith Center on May 21 only.*