

An actress's view

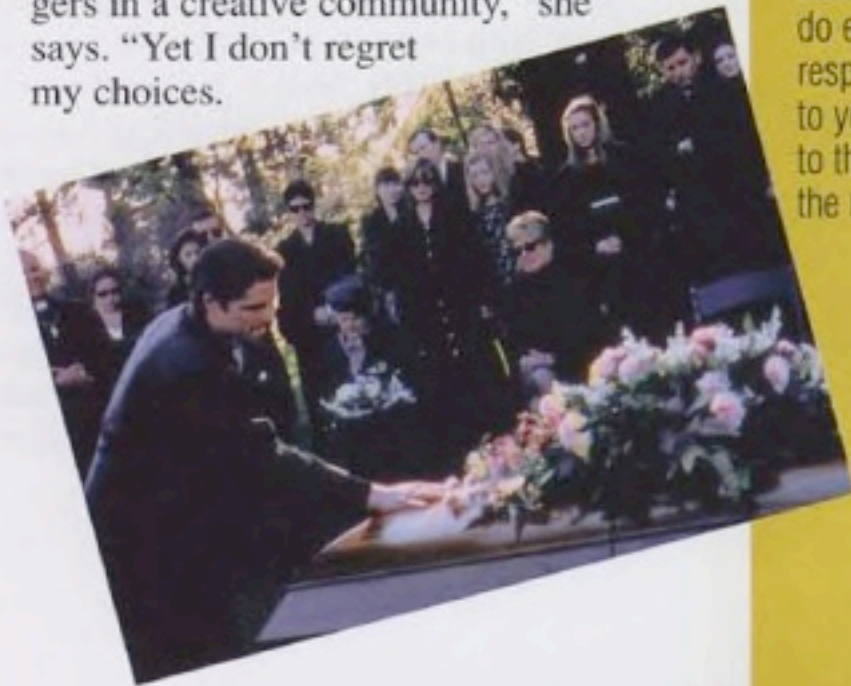
TWENTY YEARS OF SUCCESS AND SACRIFICE

"You have to be willing to starve, to sacrifice, to suffer bumps and bruises. You have to be able to grow another skin and hang in there for the long run. But it's worth it . . . if it's your dream."

Those words of wisdom, from actress Teddi Siddall, CCM '75, come packed with even more experience than Rodney Van Johnson's. Teddi has been working in film and television since moving to Hollywood in '77, with a wealth of guest appearances on TV shows such as "Wings," "LA Law" and "Hill Street Blues."

On the screen, Teddi often portrays prostitutes or "goofy" characters, she says. In reality, however, she's an insightful woman who readily shares the introspection she cultivated during her recovery from alcoholism nearly 14 years ago.

"Alcohol and drugs are real dangers in a creative community," she says. "Yet I don't regret my choices."



Coincidences are God's way of remaining anonymous. We're always on the road we are supposed to be on. Everything is a lesson for our spiritual growth."

Despite the rough roads she has traveled, she has found equally rewarding ones. Among them are her

successful career path and a fortuitous trip to San Francisco nine years ago. There she met her future husband, actor Gary Cole, while visiting a friend who was filming an episode of "Midnight Caller" with him.

Four years ago when she and Gary had their first child, Teddi spent a few

PROFILE

TEDDI SIDDALL

Partial credits: Film — "Prizzi's Honor." TV — "Wings," "LA Law," "St. Elsewhere," "Hill Street Blues," "Happy Days." Writer — "Midnight Caller" episode.

Most recent show: NBC Movie of the Week, "The Accident," aired last month (*pictured at left*).

Memorable quote: "If you're a successful actor, all of a sudden people do everything for you. No one responds to you the human being, but to you the celebrity. It's easy to begin to think you're the celebrity and not the real you."



years being a full-time mom. The year Mary was 2, however, a "Chicago Hope" audition enticed her back.

"How can you not accept an audition for 'Chicago Hope'?" she asks. "I'm a big believer in going through open doors. When they are there, there's a reason for them."

The last 10 years have led her to change her priorities, she admits. "I once thought I needed to be a successful actress to be happy. But Gary's got the career, now. He makes the money. I just get to go play once in a while (in a film) and have fun."

"Eventually, I'd like to learn production, but right now, I have a 4-year-old who needs a lot of production. I'm fine with that."

If Gary is filming on location for an extended period, she and Mary are likely to follow him. They've stayed with him in Santa Fe, Hawaii, London — "all over the world," as Teddi puts it. Last spring, Gary was home long enough to reciprocate, and he watched Mary for two weeks while Teddi filmed a movie in Vancouver.

"I like to do what I'm trained to do," she states simply. "I love auditions; I like the process, the cold readings, character development. That's where my roots are."

Fortunately, she has gotten over the fear of the "Equity police" (the actors union) waiting in the

wings to revoke her license if she botches a reading. "It's nerve-racking," she confesses, "but if I walk out of an audition and I did what I wanted to do, I'm happy — even if it's not what the director wanted."

"I'm disappointed, of course. The bottom line is they don't want you, but my self-esteem isn't damaged."

She sees a bigger picture these days. "The important thing is how we touch each other on a day-to-day basis."

She credits UC for helping to cultivate her appreciation of colleagues in the industry because CCM required expansive experience in all areas of theater. "UC is a great place to do your undergraduate work," she says. "I had

to take shop, build sets, strike sets. I once nailed a flat to a work table, and when the crew picked it up, the table came with it," she laughs. "There is so much value in studying all the elements of the craft."

In the last two decades, Hollywood has changed enormously, she says. Today, the key to landing a role is whom you know. Yet 20 years ago, Teddi came to town and worked without knowing a soul. "Everything is so different," she says.

Furthermore, rarely are auditions held for leading roles anymore. The networks simply select the star they want. Often a script comes in with an actor already signed on.

Making matters tougher, actresses enter a "black hole" between ages 35 and 45, she points out. "They don't know what to do with us. We're not young enough to play the girlfriend and not old enough to play the mother. What's happened is that TV has gotten prettier and prettier, and younger and younger."

As usual, she shrugs off the obstacle with her positive attitude: "I don't compare my insides to everyone else's outsides anymore."

The "younger and prettier" situation, though, can cause marital problems, she confides. "It's a very tough field to be married in," she states bluntly. "We're in the business of learning to recreate human behavior. Feelings can get confused when you're in a state of heightened emotional affairs."

"I figured out early on: don't read Gary's script with sexy love scenes, don't go to the set when he's filming them, don't watch it on a screen. Overall, I know Gary. The moment he leaves the set, he's not in the character anymore. What's going on in his life is separate. If you don't have your boundaries and don't know where you stop and someone else begins, you're in trouble."

When Teddi talks about the "journeys we are all on," she is happy with hers, the good and the bad. "If I had the chance to write the script for my life 20 years ago, this isn't what I would have written," she says frankly. "Yet, now, this is much better — in terms of spiritual growth. I'm really lucky and really blessed."



Teddi's husband, Gary Cole



photo / Larry Watson/Fox

An amazing amount of time, thought and simple hard work goes into "dressing" a set — work that hopefully is unnoticed by a "Melrose Place" viewer. Each individual piece, whether a tablecloth, champagne glass, bottle of wine or dress hanging on the rack, evokes a desired sense of surroundings. A checkered tablecloth and red wine may suggest an Italian restaurant; designer knitwear may elicit an upscale boutique.



photo / Gregory Schwartz/Fox