

The Real Story Behind The Bain-Landau Split!

By Tena Swanson

Most Hollywood insiders knew about those “Mission Impossible” rumors long before the bid stories ever broke.

For months, there had been speculation that Martin Landau would be quitting the show and that Leonard Nimoy would be taking his place opposite Barbara Bain, the real life Mrs. Landau.

But Barbara crossed them all up. When Martin finally did resign from the cast, she joined her husband in the ranks of the unemployed, just as any loyal wife would do.

Barbara and Martin have a lot to look forward to now and perhaps the greatest burden fell on Nimoy, who was forced to take the place of his life-long friend.

At this writing the celebrated pair have decided to “split” from the series which has brought them unprecedented popularity and prosperity.

The conditions – financial and otherwise – laid down by Martin for repacting his one-year-at-a-time deal were so difficult that CBS decided to replace him. When Barbara chimed in and said, “Me too,” the problem got little more sticky. Unlike Martin, Barbara had a long-term pact, and when she didn’t show up for a wardrobe call, CBS bared its fangs and muttered something about “breach of contract,” they promptly hired Dina Merrill for the first show of next season – a two-parter.

This situation may very well present a real challenge to the integrity of the Landau marriage. “Togetherness” has been the constant theme of this pair. Teamed together for so many years in a situation in which neither of them had much opportunity to “upstage” the other, there was no question of disparage career prestige levels to could their union. Nor was there any problem of logistics – Martin being sent to Hong Kong for four months, while Barbara went to Cairo on a different location for a different picture. Their working time dove-tailed perfectly, which

naturally permitted their private time, their vacation time, to do the same.

Martin – admittedly the better actor of the two – is now at an important crossroads in his career. He has been offered three picture deals by two different studios. Both consider him a lifetime star of great dramatic magnitude, in the mold of Laurence Olivier, Richard Burton and others of that caliber.

Wherever the winds of chance take Barbara, there is good reason to believe she will never have an opportunity to progress beyond the “hep blonde” portrayals. Will she be able to rise above the widening professional breach between them?

Barbara met her first marital crisis, and faced up to her first momentous decision before the ink was dry on her wedding certificate.

This decision changed the course of her whole married life.

The courtship of Martin Landau and Barbara Bain has been widely chronicled in the press. All know how Barbara, flushed with scholastic triumphs at the University of Illinois, had come to New York to conquer the Big City, how she worked as a teacher until she discovered she could earn more money as a model in one hour than she could earn in a week utilizing her college degree in sociology. But modeling, in spite of its monetary rewards, was not enough to satisfy a girl of Barbara’s intellectual curiosity. Before long she followed the suggestion of a college mate and enrolled in Curt Conway’s acting studio.

One of the advance students, a working professional named Martin Landau, was assigned to work with her, to play scenes against her and provide a sounding board for her fledgling talent.

“He saw me at my worst to start with,” Barbara admits candidly. “And it was very, very bad. I could only get better from then on!”

Then they went for a historic walk in the park one day. He discovered that she possessed a university degree, that she had read omnivorously since childhood and that – most miraculous of all – she knew the difference between Paddy Chayefsky and Paddy the Welshman of nursery rhyme lore.

Barbara, by the same token, discovered that Martin, besides being an intense, dedicated actor or rare talent, was a compassionate, gentle man, a man who loved books and music and poetry, who understood her wild mercurial moods, her flights of fancy as no one ever had before. This was the understanding she had been longing for since childhood.

And so they fell in love.

But “happily ever after” only exists in the fairy tales. The courtship of Martin Landau and Barbara Bain was marred by the ugly fact that Barbara could still pick up, in an hour or so of modeling, almost as much as an actor could earn in a week – when he earned anything at all!

Martin was proud. For the entire period of their courtship the going was hard, financially. He was stubbornly insistent on spending only what he could afford. Consequently, there were no champagne dinners. When they went out, it was to a neighborhood hamburger joint where Martin demonstrated his devotion by dismembering and reassembling the hamburgers, giving Barbara both tops because they contained the sesame seeds, and keeping both bottoms for himself!

They were assured of at least one substantial meal a week because of their friendship with Shelley Berman, who invited them, along with a group of other close friends, to his apartment every Sunday night for dinner which he offered in return for their critical appraisals of his new comedy routines.

When eventually they were married there were two ceremonies – the first a spontaneous, hurried formality at City Hall, and then, 10 days later, a religious ritual to satisfy the two sets of parents, both of them closely knit and steeped in the beauty and tradition of the Jewish faith.

Immediately after the second ceremony Martin made a trip to pick up his

unemployment insurance so they could buy groceries and set up housekeeping.

This set Barbara to thinking.

Martin was an actor. More than that, he was an “actor’s actor”, one who lived, breathed, walked and slept theatre. He had gone the whole route – studied at the Actor’s Studio under Lee Strasberg and Elia Kazan, been praised by the New York critics and anointed the Second Brando.

He was an actor in the tradition of Barrymore, Olivier, one who looked upon acting not as a profession, but as a sort of Holy Grail.

But he was also a very proud man.

Barbara knew instinctively that he would be destroyed if he failed to support her, relying on the vagries of a stage career, which, up to this point, had been quixotic.

She could suggest that he return to his first profession. Martin had been a cartoonist for the New York Daily News before he decided to stake his destiny in acting. Barbara knew that he could earn a very adequate living returning to newspaper work. But she also knew that, once an actor, he could never be happy retrogressing, returning to the old routine of drawing the Gumps, illustrating Billy Rose’s newspaper column.

Barbara began thinking about Hollywood as a sort of compromise. She knew there was a much greater, less highly specialized market for actors on the west coast. She knew, also, that dedicated actors of the Broadway stage regarded Hollywood as a sort of freak by-product of the true acting profession.

Undaunted, she put out a few discreet feelers. How would Martin react to working in television?

His response was exactly what she would have expected. “It would literally kill me to be so restricted,” he said. “It would be like treading water and going no place but down, down, down.”

Martin’s theatre friends seconded this opinion. Martin could never fulfill his expectations in TV, they said. He would surely dissipate his vigor, Edward G. Robinson applied the clincher when he assessed Landau as one of the most interesting actors to come along in the past 15 years. “I think his qualities

of heroic presence are seen at their best only in the theatre," he added.

Barbara thought her own plans, but wisely said nothing. Just as a writer is no writer if he writes only for his desk, she knew, so is an actor no actor if he has no stage to display his talents. To be an actor, he must have a forum on which to act!

Moreover, Barbara knew only too well what failure would do and was doing to a man of Martin's proud temperament.

She laid her plans carefully.

Her break – the break she had been waiting for – occurred when Martin got a chance to go on the road show production of Paddy Chayefsky's "Middle of the Night", which starred Edward G. Robinson. Martin was to take over the role vacated by Lee Philips from the Broadway production, and Barbara went along to understudy the feminine lead, Mona Freeman. Barbara knew the tour would terminate on the West Coast, Los Angeles, and then San Francisco would be its final dates.

During the Los Angeles run – the next to the last lap – Barbara induced her husband to check into opportunities in the movie and television industry. Martin did so in a half-hearted way, but at the same time he shipped their trunks back to New York, so sure was he that they would return to Broadway and its limited opportunities. He had a nebulous plan to join Eva LeGallienne's repertory theatre.

But Barbara didn't give up. When the show finally finished in San Francisco, she induced him to return to Hollywood, and before he knew what had happened to him, he was discovered by Hitchcock and cast in a Cary Grant picture, "North by Northwest".

Hollywood seemed new, and strange and alien to them both in the beginning. "The sky was down on the ground," Barbara said, "and the sun shone too brightly." They took a house near Paradise Cove in the Malibu area and went out and bought entire new wardrobes to replace those which had been sent back and were now reposing in trunks in a warehouse. "Martin never wanted to unpack anything," Barbara recounts. "It was the longest time before I could get him to bring back anything more than a six-pack!"

Meanwhile, something else was happening to them. They were able to afford steak dinners! It was all very dashing to pour champagne over their cereal in a New York apartment when they were very young and crazily in love. But the Landaus were by now well along in their twenties – and a baby was on its way.

By the time little Susan Meredith (named for both her grandmothers) arrived, the Martin Landaus were a well established segment of the Hollywood scene. Martin was getting good roles regularly, and to his surprise, he was finding that there was no truth to the saw that Hollywood offered no opportunities to dedicated actors. He was enjoying his work, his financial self-respect and his growing family.

They celebrated their fifth wedding anniversary in Rome, where Martin had the coveted role of Rufio, Caesar's first general and Anthony's best friend in the marathon production "Cleopatra". Barbara had turned down tempting screen offers herself to go along, bringing the baby, and they spent some of the happiest days of their lives in the Italian capitol. Barbara learned to speak fluent Italian, and they did all the "tourist things" – threw coins in the Fountain of Trevi, traversed the Spanish Steps, explored the ruins and the catacombs. Both of them had a strong sense of history, and never had they been more compatible than now, lost in the splendor of their love in a glamorous new setting.

Never, Martin now realized, would they have such an opportunity in the Broadway Theatre to travel and at the same time earn their way so handsomely.

However, another crisis arose when they finish Cleopatra. Martin was offered a chance to star in Shimon Wincelberg's play, "Homage to Blinhold". Barbara announced at this point that she had found a dream home for them – a lovely, English style cottage in Westwood, complete with large pool and plenty of room for Susan to play.

Martin saw the home, and just as Barbara had anticipated, he couldn't resist it. The house is a warm and friendly one, built around a courtyard.

Everywhere is evidence of the pleasures and hobbies they share. The walls are covered

with Martin's oil paintings. He has ample opportunity to develop his second talent, art. Books and music are everywhere.

Martin is strictly the boss, but Barbara also functions effectively in her own role. She is the better business head of the two. It was she who insisted Martin employ a press agent to help advance his career, to be seen at important parties and participate in the complex social life of the film colony.

Barbara's chief concern is her husband. That is why she is putting her own career on the line right now the sexy "Cinnamon Carter" was perfect foil for Martin in his continually changing role of Rollin Hand, the counteragent of a million disguises in *Mission Impossible*. But when they go their separate ways, career-wise, problems may develop of which neither of them now dreams.

The only time they had any real career problem previously was when Barbara won her "Emmy" while Martin was nominated but passed over in favor of Bill Cosby. This was an ironic situation, since Martin is admittedly the more complex, sophisticated actor of the two. Barbara handled it with perfect taste and tact when she announced from the stage the great debt she owed her husband, who had taught her most of what she knew about acting.

The Landaus, now both in their thirties, celebrated their 12th wedding anniversary this year. Their two children are extraordinarily talented. Susan, the older, had learned the entire alphabet at the age of two and was reading by the time she was three. A year or so later she was writing and illustrating her own books. Now, at eight, she is enrolled in the Los Angeles County Museum art classes, and is given to reviewing paintings by Jackson Pollock and other abstract expressionists.

Juliet, four-and-a-half years younger, is musical. She started singing when she was 10 months old and listens to the radio constantly.

"Martin and I are continually amazed and fascinated by our two little girls," Barbara says. "They are so different. Julie is the cooler of the two. It's like she's from some other planet. Sue is a child who is very delving, socially. She's always got an eye out for who she's with. With Juliet, it's how she's doing,

and how what she's doing affects other people."

Barbara is constantly striving to bring up her children in love and harmony, as both she and Martin were brought up. "We both came from very happy, well adjusted homes," she says, "and we're determined to provide that same background for our children."

"We never pass up the chance to do things with them, and explain things to them, and to put everything within their reach that will stimulate their curiosity and creativity."

"When I was a child, I wanted to understand everything. I guess that's why I read all the time. I think that my reading gave me a great understanding of people, and probably helped me make decisions in my own marriage."

"I had a library card as soon as I could write my name, and I had a marvelous librarian in grade school. I would get impatient with the class itself because I'd finish my work fairly fast and the teacher didn't know what to do with me. But the librarian - I guess she was glad she had a customer. She worked it out with the teachers so that I could have an open pass whenever I finished my lessons. I was in the library all the time reading. I think I went through all the shelves. Reading showed me: 'Hey, I can be all the people in the world!'"

Barbara has very strong opinions on how to make a marriage work. "Marriage isn't 50 - 50," she says. "It's a 60 -40 proposition. The woman has to give more. Too many girls think about what they're going to receive rather than give. A wife must be understanding, and she must have a sense of humor. And she must always be proud of her husband."

"I'm still just as much impressed with Martin as I was when I married him. I'm never bored, because he never ceases to surprise me. He still has the same qualities that first attracted me. When we were courting, he used to bring me books and records, and he still brings me books and records. We have lots of memories together of precious years, well lived. Ours is a very special relationship of love mixed with laughter. There aren't many happy people in the world, are there? Our life hasn't always been what you'd call tranquil ... But it has given us both fulfillment."

One needs only see her with her husband, and to watch the adoring way she looks at him, to realize that here is that great rarity, a truly happy wife.

For a girl who was born on a Friday 13th, in a taxicab on her way to the hospital, Barbara Bain had done all right – so far! Their giant step from Mission Impossible may be the start of an impossible marriage.