

Barbara Bain

How loving another man made me a better wife

By Ruth Waterburt

To the outside world, it looks like Barbara Bain and Martin Landau have a perfect marriage. They appear as two people who have never been in love with anyone but each other. But in a recent conversation I had with Barbara, she revealed to me that Martin is not the only man she has ever loved, that, in fact, she fell wildly and passionately in love when she was in high school, and came within a hair's breadth of marriage, long before she ever met Martin and married him.

"I was fifteen when love first happened to me," said Barbara. "It changed my entire life. But when our little daughters reach their teens and go through the agony and the ecstasy of first love, I hope that Martin and I will handle it as well as my parents did.

"I was a gawky kid, as tall at thirteen as I am now, and that was an awful disadvantage then. I lived in a complete dream world. My idol was Rita Hayworth and I tried to walk like her and look like her, and in my super-secret diary I confessed that I wanted to fatally lure men, just like her. That was my dream.

"So you can just imagine the incredible glory of it when the most popular man on our high school campus asked me to be his date at the spring prom. He was so tall, so intelligent, so handsome, and so very old – nearly eighteen. I knew he could have dated any other girl he chose for that wonderful night – but he chose me. As for me, I nearly died of bliss. Even my parents, who knew and admired his parents, were proud of me, going to the prom with this wonderful creature who was the hero of the school football team. A dream comes true."

The beautiful, brainy heroine of CBS-TV's *Mission: Impossible* shook her chicly coiffed head as she recalled the dreamy fifteen-year-old Barbara she had been in her hometown of Urbana, Illinois.

"If anybody brought in a love story script for our show that was as pat, as on the nose as the story of my first love," said Barbara, "we'd reject it as simply too ordinary.

"And I know now it was. But then, as with all first loves, I'm sure, it was all the power and glory and no one in all history had loved as deeply as I loved. Here was this young god, choosing me when there were older, richer girls he might have chosen.

"Now I had already been to one prom and it had been a disaster. In my attempt at glamour, I had bleached my own hair and made a mess of it. I had put on enough make-up to enrich an entire cosmetic company, and I must have looked like a psychedelic poster.

"But with Quentin, it was all flawless. I had the right dress, brand new, of course. My hair-do was really effective, and so was my make-up. Quent's ardent attentions let me know I was absolutely perfect – and I was not prepared to doubt that."

Barbara laughed. "My ego is so much healthier now than it was then that I can even concede that it's possible he has long since forgotten I ever existed. But no female can ever quite forget her first big romance, I guess. At any rate, from that first prom date on, we knew how wildly, breathlessly in love we were. We resolved to get married as soon as possible.

"Because I was pretty bright in school, I was only a year behind him in grades. In the fall, he was going on to the University of Illinois. So I, too, informed my parents that I was going to the University of Illinois at the start of what would be Quent's second year.

"Of course, while we were still in high school, Quent and I went to everything on campus, he the popular hero and I his girl. How either of us found time to keep up with our studies is a mystery to me now. We went

to all the athletic events, to all the dances, to all the extra lectures.

"Actually, I never gave a hoot for sports, though right then I persuaded myself I was made for such things. And was Quent reacting the same way under the hypnotism of romance? I mean was he really interested in my own highbrow tendencies? Right then I was reading the entire works of Victor Hugo. Somehow or other I had developed a crush on all things French of writers. Quent claimed that he adored Hugo, too. But did he?

"When autumn came and he left for the University, which is at Champaign, our city of Urbana's nearby rival, we became officially engaged. Daddy and Mom had to agree to that because they were afraid that otherwise we'd elope. They calmed us down by letting us plan our wedding on a vague but flawless future.

"However, when the following autumn came and I insisted upon enrolling at Illinois, then the fur really flew between my folks and me.

"I had very upsetting quarrels with both my parents and my brother all that second summer. The situation between us became so bitter that when the day came for me to report to the University, I didn't have one cent left to live on after I'd bought my train ticket to get there. My parents said if I refused to listen to their advice, then I could totally look after myself – and who could blame my parents for that?

"All that did was make me more stubborn. I decided to work my way through college and I did. First, I got a job in the cafeteria, which was a solid way of making sure I had enough to eat. As my major, I selected sociology, which is, of course, the study of people, of organized human life in fact. I wanted to learn as much as I could in college."

Today's vividly happy Mrs. Martin Landau grinned merrily at that moment. "The lovely thing about attending college," she said, "is that you get that double education: you learn from books and you learn from life, and how different are those sets of instruction!

"Quent and I were seeing one another every possible moment. We dreamed out loud about the long happy marriage we would have. Nonetheless, my sense of reality kept growing. I had thought of teaching as a profession for

myself, and it was rather a jolt to discover I could be a clothes model and make as much in an hour as a teacher made in a week.

"So I did become a local department store model, which taught me so much about style, and people and pressures. By way of a complete change of pace, I spent my summer vacation as a counselor in a girl's camp, which was another education. I still believed I was totally in love.

"But a small cloud began to darken my sky. Quent and I kept hearing from our group back home, the married ones, who were suddenly getting divorces. Right now, I know that of the eight couples we had known so well, only one pair is still married. So much for teen romance! A lot of the girls at the summer camp were from broken homes and I saw the effect of those emotional failures upon them. In the back of my mind the idea gnawed that I did want to achieve a good, happy life.

"Right then I came upon a book of Benjamin Franklin's. It was full of maxims on how to live. 'What you should seem to be, be really,' he said. 'He who would live in peace and at ease must not speak all he knows, nor judge all he sees.' These ideas made quite an impression on me.

"The more I read, the more bothered I was about my future. I wasn't really interested in sports – that was Quent's world. I was finally beginning to understand myself as a unique individual.

"Then I came to know I didn't want to spend my life in the world of college towns. They were friendly and exciting when you were in your teens, but later? I had a sudden yearning to see the Paris I knew from reading Hugo. That made me know I wanted to see the whole world. But if I married my handsome Quent, who probably would stay in the athletic world, how much chance would I have of that? Did I want to be like the other fellows and girls we'd known who had gotten married? That is, did I want to settle down forever in just the same locale or in one very similar to the one in which I had been born and bred?

"I returned to college for my second year, but I knew then that I had changed. My mother died that year, which changed me more. I finally leveled with Quent, and told him I wasn't sure we should get married. He was

wonderful about it. Maybe he was relieved. To this day I don't know about that for sure. My father remarried. I was at a personal crossroads.

"But the very example of my parents, who had been born in Russia and had had the courage to pull up stakes and come to this country, spurred me on to find myself. Right then, I got a bid from Hollywood to become a model there. My Rita Hayworth dream made me reject that. I didn't want to be a Hollywood model. But the dream burned brightly in my imagination once again. Could I possibly reach Hollywood someday and be a star?"

"I went to New York and I no sooner hit that big, noisy, wonderful place than I knew, somehow, I was on the right track. I got a job modeling and I couldn't believe the wages - \$ 50 an hour, at least, and there were some "hours" that paid twice that. Besides, New York was loaded with very nice dates and my first live became just a very delightful memory. I enjoyed several flirtations - but that is all they were. I was waiting for a tall, thin, dark man with great intelligence, even if I wasn't entirely aware of that.

"I began exploring New York and I was hardly aware of how the time flew by until with a sudden jolt I realized I was out of my teens. I was twenty and I thought, being that venerable, it was time I decided what more I wanted to do. Right then old Ben Franklin sounded in my memory again. It was a quotation from Poor Richard's Almanac: ' With the old Almanac and the old year, leave thy old vices though ever so dear.'

"I had been going occasionally to Martha Graham's dancing classes, and I was still in demand as a model, and it certainly was fun to see myself as photographers saw me in the pages of Vogue and Harper's Bazaar and the other high style magazines. And it was fun to dine with a handsome date in the most stylish restaurants - but that sociology major was still within me. The other models I met lived only for their figures, their facials, and their "chic", and the dancers at Martha Graham's, I thought, were entirely cut off from life. Then from back home I kept getting notices of more of those marriages that had begun in high

school turning into divorces. I had to find something else for myself.

"So I followed old Ben's advice. I left my old vices, though they were quite dear to me. I knew that what I did want was a really life-sized life, and even though New York was exciting and wonderful and my income was excellent, I just wasn't having real relationships with people. Franklin has also said, ' There are three faithful old friends: an old wife, an old dog, and ready money.' I could get the old dog, and ready money - but where was I going to find that perfect man who'd like to grow old with me?"

Barbara Bain stopped talking to draw a long breath. If you think she's beautiful in Mission: Impossible, let me tell you she is infinitely more beautiful in person, and if someday she makes a big movie, where they still light people fabulously, the world will then discover that her loveliness is absolutely startling. She is also very "high style" in that best-dressed-woman sense, and yet her most delightful characteristics are her warmth and her sense of humor.

So now she says, "It's an old, old story now how Martin Landau and I didn't like one another the first time we met. It's been told how he thought I was just another frivolous model and that I thought he was just another shallow actor.

"That's not quite true - actually I took one look at him in that acting class which was run by Curt Conway and I shivered a little and I thought to myself, ' This may be my Nemesis.' That was because he was that tall, thin, dark type I had always liked best and even on that first meeting, I felt the challenge of him. He was not the type of man whom any woman would ever lead around by the nose. And personally I think that is the kind of man that every woman is really searching for, if you really get right down to it.

"On our second meeting, one week later, I knew he was the man I wanted, and three months to the day, Martin proved it to me by marrying me.

"Last January we celebrated our tenth wedding anniversary and when anybody asks me for the secret of our happiness together I say it may be we don't have one drop ' nice' in

us in the morning. We flare up and let the sparks fly where they will, and since nothing is bottled up in us we can just laugh at one another, and realize how very much in love we are, and how lucky.

"For we have our work, and we have our lovely house, and we have our successful series, and then we also have our two incredible, beautiful, intelligent daughters, and their big sheep dog.

"So how can we possibly ask for more? What I am most grateful for is that I know Martin will always be a challenge to me, that he will always be a step ahead of me, and that is perfectly wonderful. And when I think of that first teenage love of mine, I am so grateful that I was privileged to live through it and grow up from it. And chances are that 'Quentin' feels the same way."