

Martin Landau and Barbara Bain:

## “We do things other couples don’t dare try”

*When two people are as beautiful and intelligent as Martin Landau and Barbara Bain, they can dare the unconventional in life and love.*

By Roxanne Sheridan

“We have such a special marriage,” says Barbara Bain, smiling, “that we can do things ordinary couples wouldn’t dare try.”

What sort of things? Well, there are many ways of putting a marriage to the test, and the Landaus have tried most of them. Trouble is their marriage just refuses to show any marks of strain. It is said, and with some accuracy, that all an acting couple needs to do to destroy romance is work together for a few months. The Landaus work long hours together on their blockbusting series “Mission: Impossible”, and at night they are as pleased to be together as honeymooners. Martin is a temperamental, irritable man; Barbara is an explosive, strong-willed woman. Such a combination should, by rights, have the life span and the spectacular effect of a bursting firecracker. Instead, the Landaus enjoy a marriage that is ten years old and going strong. The Landaus’ romance got off on the wrong foot. It was a case of hate-at-first-sight. They first met in 1956 in an acting class. Both were out of work, but, whereas Martin looked down-at-heel in dingy corduroys, Barbara was as poised and perfect looking as she is today.

Martin recalls the historic first encounter with wry humor: “I took one look and immediately disliked her. First of all, she was late for class. Nobody seriously interested in the theatre is ever late. Secondly, she was dressed too well. White gloves, high heels, even a hat. And her make-up was too much, too correct. What I thought was, ‘There’s a girl who’s come to join the class not because she want to be an

actress, but because she thinks it’s the smart thing to do.’ But what I didn’t know was that she’d just got rushed over from a photographic session.”

Barbara’s reaction was equally strong and even more negative. “I certainly wasn’t interested in Martin,” Barbara recalls. “I took one look at him and thought to myself, ‘Now, there’s a real bum.’ You see, he was wearing black corduroy pants, black corduroy jacket, and he even seemed to have a black corduroy face. His hair was every which way. And there was an air of arrogance about him I couldn’t stand. Some time later I met him again at a party. He bumped into me – practically knocked me off my feet. It was a funny thing; there he was wearing his old black corduroy pants and jacket, but something was different. Something had happened.”

Once their romance took flight, it really soared. But one thing that kept the Landaus down-to-earth was the precarious condition of their finances. For the first few years they led a hand-to-mouth existence, but, surprisingly, they both recall these early lean years with the greatest warmth. In a ways, they were the best years of the Landau marriage. Barbara humorously recalls what took the place of a honeymoon in their life: “Right after the ceremony, we had to rush off, but in opposite directions. Martin had to go downtown to the unemployment office to pick up his check. I had to go uptown on an interview for a modeling job, which I didn’t get.”

The think that Martin treasures most about those early times, was the warm,

spontaneous camaraderie which he and Barbara had together and shared with their friends. ‘Most of our friends were budding writers, actors, directors. Budding meant out of work. But we were busy. I’d say we were the busiest out-of-work people in New York City. You see, we all had a common enemy – starvation. To keep our minds off our stomachs, we’d get together and talk about plays and movies. We’d read scripts. We’d act scenes and eat scenes. Shelley Berman, even though he was working, was part of the group. Shelley was one of my favorite buddies. He was such a crazy nut! I had known him for a long time, and he called me one night to say he was having a little party and I *had* to come. Well, it happened to be my first date with Barbara and I wanted to impress her. I didn’t think she was ready for Shelley, much less his apartment, a real fleabag in a terrible neighborhood. So we get to the neighborhood, and walked up five flights, and I’m thinking she must think I really have some swell friends, and then this madman comes to the door and pulls us inside and slams and locks the door. Barbara was convinced she had fallen in with a bunch of lunatics. Turned out Shelley just wanted to try out a new routine on us. He was hilarious, and we all practically rolled on the floor laughing, Barbara included. So the evening didn’t turn out to be the disaster I had feared.’

The Landaus have come a long way since those anonymous good times in the city. But one thing that hasn’t altered a bit is Martin’s admiration for Barbara’s cool, classic beauty. ‘After ten years of marriage, she’s still driving my crazy,’ Martin remarks.

Barbara has the sort of beauty admired equally by men and women. Women envy her chic, her poise, and the flair she has with clothes. Barbara was a successful high fashion model and this experience taught her to make the best of herself in the wardrobe and make-up departments. ‘I’ve always been interested in fashion, but modeling taught me how to effect the look

best for me. You gain a sense of the overall picture-hair, make-up, clothes – and how to make each compliment the other.’

Barbara is as clear-headed and decisive in life as she is as Cinnamon, the impeccably cool character she plays in *Mission: Impossible*. She has no kooky kinks or outrageous habits like so many other female stars. Barbara is a mature and competent woman, the sort of woman most men secretly desire even when they’re being bombarded by the noisy charms of some madly gay young thing. About the zaniest thing Barbara has done in a lifetime, though, was simply to be born. For Barbara came into the world on a Friday 13<sup>th</sup> in an automobile. Though Barbara herself cannot remember the day, there are many others who do vividly. ‘I have an uncle,’ says Barbara, ‘who has never forgiven me to this day, because I was born in his var. He still mentions it once a year. I think he is of the opinion that I owe him a car.’

History nearly repeated itself when Barbara’s younger daughter, Juliet, now 3, was born. She was delivered twenty minutes after her mother entered the hospital. The Landaus have another daughter, Susan, 6. Both girls, Barbara confides, are desperately in love with Daddy. ‘When I kiss another man in the show,’ says Barbara, ‘Susan pays no attention at all, or, if she does, her comment generally runs something like, ‘Oh, Daddy’s nicer.’ But when she sees her daddy kissing another lady she’s absolutely beside herself with jealousy.’

Barbara’s childhood was fairly normal, yet she describes herself as a ‘goofy’ little girl. ‘I was headstrong, sometimes outgoing, sometimes introvert. I read a lot. I was a cheerleader in high school in Chicago. I don’t think my family particularly liked the idea of my becoming an actress – especially since I had gotten my degree to be a teacher – but then they never knew quite what to make of my anyway.’

Martin was one of Barbara’s first acting coaches, and, according to him, she

was hopelessly bad at first. ‘She was bad at the beginning – as bad as any I’ve ever seen. Some can never learn, you know. The talent has to be there. And there aren’t very many good ones. I’m proud of here. I loved teaching acting. People are fascinated and people who want to learn to act are even more fascinating. They’re a little mad to begin with. I’ve never met a *good* actor who was simple person. Barbara is no exception.’”

Martin was part of the early Actors’ Studio, the group that spawned such talents as Karl Malden, James Dean, Ben Gazzara and Marlon Brando. The year that Martin entered the studio, he was one of two, out of two thousand, successful applicants. The other actor admitted was Steve McQueen.

There is absolutely no spirit of professional rivalry in the Landau home.

Competition is never very good for love, and it can be deadly when an actor and an actress marry. For Barbara, husband and children have always been far more important than star billing, and she’s anxious to play down her own career and play up her husband’s success. Barbara manages to combine two very beautiful feminine characteristics that are rarely found together. Outside her family circle, she is a competent woman of the world, smooth, professional, poised. But, at home, she’s unapologetically dependent on her husband to make the important decisions. She is living proof that a girl can be her own woman in the daytime and a man’s woman at night. Perhaps it is this extraordinary skill that allows the Landaus to succeed in ways that other, more ordinary couples are bound to fail.