

by Peer J. Oppenheimer

I Walked Out on Hollywood



In her last film, "Compulsion," Diane ended each scene limp. Her friends debated why.

man who showed any interest in her. They were married, but after only a few weeks Diane got an annulment; then she learned she was pregnant. Shawn was born in a free clinic. He had a step-father within a month, a "movie producer" who is now an ex-husband and cook in a small night club.

Professionally, Diane did much better. She says she "never wanted to be an actress," yet she enrolled in an acting school soon after arriving in Los Angeles. Her instructor, Jeff Corey, spotted her natural talent and sent her to producer Jerry Wald. Diane was cast as Lana Turner's daughter in "Peyton Place" and won an Oscar nomination for her performance.

She also did fine jobs in three other films, including "Ten North Frederick" which left her with a nervous breakdown. She earned \$500 a week but spent all of it on hangers-on, psychiatrists, and truth-seekers.

But she was never interested in money. She was searching for a way of life that offered more than inflated checks, gilt statues, and friendships based on how much your last picture grossed. So, as purposeless and bewildered as when she arrived, Diane left Glamourland for New England, land of the stern but loving father and rock-embedded loyalties.

"I hated every minute of my work in Hollywood," she says. "When I left the studio at night, I was sick knowing I'd have to come back. Even when I acted well, I was miserable.

"I can understand an artist going insane over a painting—I mean really insane—and when he recovers his senses, return to painting because he loves it so much. If I felt that way about acting, I'd continue. But I don't. I tried to, but nothing worked."

Diane's attempt to adjust to a demanding profession included such Hollywood remedies as vegetarianism, Yoga, and mysticism.

When these failed, she went to a psychiatrist who told her there was nothing wrong with her. He also gave her a logical piece of advice: if acting bothered her so much, why not give it up, quit?

Diane did, but whether she will find happiness as a bobby-sox coed is questionable. From what I could see, no prospective student has started out with more against her. This "worldly" woman from Hollywood doesn't even know how to register, or whether she can pay the tuition. She hasn't even graduated from high school!

I talked to some Bennington College authorities who suggested that Diane "sit in" on some classes while trying to catch up on her entrance requirements. Next Fall she might be able to enroll as a regular student.

But by then Diane will be flat broke. She headed for Bennington after picking up \$10,000 for a Playhouse 90 appearance, but by the time she paid her debts and settled in her tiny flat, she was down to \$1,700. Tuition alone at Bennington is \$1,600 a year!

DIANE DOESN'T SEEM to be thinking too far ahead. With an innocence that would make a sorority rushee sneer, she apparently feels that merely being in New England will give her security, and just the nearness of a campus will help her decide what new career to seek—writing, maybe.

The sneers of the rushees aren't half as cynical as those of the wiseacres of Hollywood as they discuss the popular question, "What's wrong with Diane Varsi?"

Richard Fleischer, who directed her last picture, "Compulsion," believes she is simply worn out, physically and mentally. "Whenever she finished a scene, she was limp as a rag," Fleischer blames this on eating only vegetables.

Many people agree with Eddie Albert who appeared with Diane in TV's "The Dingaling Girl." Eddie asks: "Why all the fuss? At option time, a lot of Hollywood stars take off. This girl is no more confused than the rest of us. Confusion is normal here."

Jerry Wald, too, thinks Diane's exile is a temporary thing. "She had it too easy, hitting the jackpot on her first film. She couldn't cope with success. She found herself trapped by a lot of hangers-on and phonies, and she had to shake them loose. Give her a couple of Winters in Vermont, and she'll be back."

Most certain of Diane's return to acting and Hollywood is her coach, Jeff Corey. "She's only 21, a baby. Give her time to find herself. I certainly hope she does. I would hate to see her talent go to waste."

But Diane obviously isn't concerned about wasting her talent. She's worried about wasting her life. Probably she will return to acting only if Vermont gives her the feeling of personal success that stardom could not. If this happens, both Diane and Hollywood owe a great debt to New England.

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