

Geraldine Page:

The Unlikeliest Star

A sweet-voiced, somewhat shy person who didn't try for the "big time" until she was 27—that's the strange success story of the actress who may win an Oscar this year

By PEER J. OPPENHEIMER

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OINTMENT OR SUPPOSITORIES

I HAD LUNCH the other day with Geraldine Page, a most unlikely movie star.

Geraldine has received her third Academy Award nomination—this time for "Sweet Bird of Youth"—and has a better than 50-50 chance of getting her first Oscar this year. Yet she doesn't look like a star, doesn't dress, talk, or live like one.

When I met her, she wore low heels, as she usually does (she is five feet, eight inches tall and quite conscious of her height). Her speech is a slow, sweet, almost Southern drawl that belies her Midwestern upbringing; and she seems prouder of her partly furnished apartment in New York's Greenwich Village than most Hollywood stars are of their grandiose mansions in Beverly Hills.

To my immediate recollection, Geraldine also is the only actress over 21 whose official biography gives her complete birth date—Nov. 22, 1924. Her birthplace was Kirksville, Mo., but when Geraldine was five, her father Dr. Leon Page, an osteopath, moved the family to Chicago.

Her parents had very different attitudes toward life. As Geraldine recalls it: "Mother was the disciplinarian; she firmly believed in the old motto, 'Eat it up, wear it out, make it do.' As a result, I still have every bit of clothing I've accumulated since I came to New York. Father was more of a nonconformist. To him, formal education was a lot of nonsense. As a result, I was more inclined to cut short such education and concentrate on acting."

When Geraldine wanted to go to a

Chicago drama school, her father convinced her mother it was all right. Later he encouraged her to go to New York to study acting.

Geraldine was 27 at the time and had 10 years of summer stock and little theater to her credit. But that wasn't enough to get her a job on Broadway. To support herself even meagerly proved rough—which she didn't mind then or in retrospect. "Sure, I went without meals and my teeth always needed fixing, but frankly I had a marvelous time," she recalls.

Geraldine wound spools in a thread factory, clerked in a bookshop, ushered at a theater, spent evenings as a hat-check girl, and modeled lingerie for Mamma Weinberg, who fired her almost every other day because Geraldine's mind usually was concentrating harder on trying to memorize lines for an off-Broadway performance than on the numbers of the negligees she was supposed to wear.

SHE WAS WORKING at Mamma Weinberg's when her big break came. While walking back to her apartment, she ran into a tall, blond man whom she had known at drama school in Chicago.

"Don't you remember me?" she cried out. He hesitated a moment. "You used to date one of my girl friends," Geraldine explained. He remembered. His name was José Quintero, and, luckily for Geraldine, he was on his way to becoming a famous theatrical director.

Thereafter Geraldine spent as much time as she could at Quintero's Circle in the Square Theater, hoping for a chance