

BARBARA BAIN

Barbara Bain plays Helena Russell, Moonbase Alpha's doctor, and, in real life, as they say, she is Mrs. Martin Landau. She was born in Chicago, making a dramatic entrance one Friday the thirteenth in the car that was rushing her mother to the delivery room. (Short confinements clearly run in the family; her own second child was born only twenty minutes after her first labor pains!) Her childhood in Chicago sounds like a middle-American dream. "I was just a skinny little kid who liked to read a lot." She went to local schools and spent vacations with her parents and brother exploring the lakes and forests of Illinois and the nearby states of Michigan and Missouri. At sixteen, she traveled 130-odd miles south of Chicago to attend the University of Illinois, where she majored in sociology, minored in philosophy, and never gave a thought to acting: "I was sure I was going to save the world."

Those were the days before student revolt, when such aspirations could be indulged in a comfortable armchair-academic sort of way without having to do too much about them. The campus had twenty thousand students, but it was pretty, full of elm trees and seemed to her "a very cozy and secure place". The nearest she came to acting was to dance and do a little choreography. Her two best friends were in the drama department, but it never occurred to her "to be so bold as to audition." The real irony is that she, who wanted to teach and save the world, is now an actress while the friends who wanted their names in lights have ended up as teachers.

She noticed when she was attending dance classes that none of the teachers ever stayed long. They always left for New York. When she graduated she followed them there. Sociology and its professional application could wait a little, she was going to dance, and how better than to enroll with Martha Graham. She found dancing a struggle. It wasn't just wanting to be brilliant and realizing that she

wasn't going to be better than good, it was the whole climate of modern dance. "It was exceedingly insular and depressing because we were always dancing for each other. You would go to some place like the YMHA and there would be a hundred people up in front and ninety-seven of them would be other dancers." Besides this, there was the problem of evolving what, in Space 1999 would be called a life support system. She was short of cash and she soon discovered that her precious degree was not going to bring in much of it. One day somebody said, "Come and do some modeling" and she went along and did just that. She modeled for *Vogue* and *Harper's* and all the top fashion magazines. "It was a very austere period, so I wore far too much makeup with very dark eyes and there was absolutely *no* smiling." She stuck in out for about five years, without ever feeling any great sense of satisfaction or even having much fun, and haunted all the while by the realization "that I could only earn in one week with my degree what I could earn in one hour in front of a camera." It seemed perverse and insulting that all work and preparation at school and university should be worth so much less than the good looks which had nothing to do than anything but God or genetics.

Then one day a friend happened to mention an acting class with an exceptional teacher named Curt Conway, and gave her the name and address. A few days later, Miss Bain was leaving a modeling assignment and as she climbed into a taxi, she gave the address of the acting class instead of her home. "It was really a mistake. For a start, I was hopelessly overdressed, by which I mean I was well groomed and made up with a heavy white pancake and I was wearing a Dior suit. It never occurred to me that I looked odd." Everybody else was in hair and denim but she was not in the least disconcerted. Instead she recalls: "My feet felt like they were on home ground. They were all doing improvisations and bits of scenes, and after a bit I was asked to get up on

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the stage and do something. I stood riveted on the floor. I couldn't do anything. I was awkward, uncomfortable, and miserable, and it was a tacky, dirty, rotten old loft on Fifty-fourth Street, but I still felt it was marvelous. I couldn't understand why I hadn't thought of this before and I told myself that I was going to stay there until I could do it.

Conway had a young assistant at the time, a star pupil whose principal role was to demonstrate what Conway was trying to explain. "He was in his exceedingly scruffy period", says Barbara, "long hair and all black corduroy and *very* intense." He was, of course, Martin Landau and, according to her, it was hate at first sight. "He obviously viewed me with alarm and I immediately made a very long list of terrible things about him, while he made a long list of terrible things about me, and we were both terribly wrong."

She discovered this two weeks later at a gathering -party is too formal a description- to which they were both invited. She says, "We started talking and never stopped. I kept going through the things on my list and crossing them out when I discovered I was wrong. I remember thinking. He's *not* arrogant! He's *not* insensitive! I was so absolutely wrong on every point, but I really enjoy discovering and learning for myself so the constant adjusting to what he was really like was fun."

For about eighteen months she continued with the classes, went on modeling to pay for them, and got to know Martin better and better. (She *thinks* it was eighteen months because she is hopeless at dates. One of the conditions of the Landau marriage is that Martin is in charge of everything to do with chronology while she is responsible for remembering telephone numbers.) Apart from the Conway class she also studied with Lee Strasberg and Lonie Chapman. The latter was particularly stimulating because it was Chapman's first outing as a teacher so that, in a sense, he was too learning.

At the end of this period she heard that Paddy Chayefsky's *Middle of the Night* was being cast for a tour of the States. Martin was already in the cast so she decided to audition herself. "I and 483 other girls read for the part, and then it got down to 275 and the 78 and then 20. In other words, I read for it an awful lot of times. And I got it, which was fantastic."

It was the first acting job she applied for and she got it, but she suffered. After the final audition she remembers. "I threw myself despondently into a taxi-cab. I was in a state of utter anguish. As the day went on I thought, Oh that was terrible. When I got home Martin told me the agent handling the show had rung and he wanted me to phone him back. I said, 'No, I was terrible. I've just got to lie down and sleep,' which is what I do when I'm in trouble. It's my great copout. I don't take drugs. I don't drink. I sleep."

Anyway, Martin patiently kept trying to explain that the agent would not be telephoning to tell her how useless she was. Agents don't do that. They only phone if they have good news; and eventually he persuaded her, she telephoned, and her depression turned instantly to euphoria. The tour, which doubled as a honeymoon, took in sixteen cities, including Canada, before they finally arrived in California. They had meant to return immediately to their apartment in New York. After all, it was home. But they began to be offered work in California, and they took it, and then there was more, and they took that too, and suddenly, "We said, 'We're here'" and they had all their possessions moved out West. "We found a place ten miles out beyond Malibu, on a bluff. It had belonged to Will Rogers, Jr., and we cozied up the house-but it was the spot that was the thing. We had three acres and our own beach." It was obviously a marvelous honeymoon home. Their first child, Sue, was born there, and life was generally pastoral and idyllic.

Actors, however, lead peripatetic lives, as they have to go where the money is. Martin's role in "Cleopatra" meant a year in Rome, which meant that Barbara had to become an

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Italian housewife. She found it fascinating because it was "a continual learning experience". They were not living in an American neighborhood and they took no American help with them. Initially, she spoke no Italian, "But I was fluent by the time I left and I had a particular sort of Italian than no other foreigner could match. I knew the Italian for diapers and baby rash and ' warm the milk for twenty minutes' and I found out than you bought everything in quite different places from America-salt in the tobacconist' s store, that kind of thing."

It took them a month and a half to have a telephone installed, during which time Martin had to answer his early-morning calls in the bar apposite. Every morning the proprietor would shout "Signor Landau!" from the street below. The phone was finally put in at about the time the Richard Burton-Elizabeth Taylor romance became big news, and since Martin was in the same film the press assumed he knew all about it. The phone never stopped ringing and they couldn' t get the number changed. The Burton romance affected them in one other way, too. They had taken some footage of Sue' s first tottering steps, on the cobblestones of the Roman Forum. But the same film also contained a sequence of Burton and Taylor kissing in public for the first time. The Landaus didn' t dare send it out to be developed because they would never have got it back, so clever and voracious were the paparazzi.

Back in the States, the Landaus moved in from their country retreat. "We had to bow to suburbia. It was too isolated and Sue needed friends". The first house they owned was an English-style place in Bel Air, and they were so fond of it that they never imagined moving again. However, the real estate agent was told that if something absolutely fantastic came up she was to get in touch. Just in case. Five years later she rang to suggest the house in Beverly Hills where they now live. I have only seen photographs, but it looks pretty staggering. It was built between 1904 and 1912 by the English architect Sir Elmer Grey and it' s Tudor with mullioned windows and a rose garden.

It' s only had three owners since it was built for the Mudd family, one of whom was the physician who attended Lincoln' s assassin John Wilkes Booth. The other owner was someone called Rothschild! The Landaus have christened it "Sous les Arbres" because the road outside is lined with Chinese elms and when Julie (now eleven) was a baby she would lie back in the car and laugh as the sun shone through the leaves, making shadowy patterns on her face.

Julie was born after the year in Italy, but in between and around pregnancies Barbara managed to fit in some work, mainly in television, until the big break came with Mission Impossible. Although Bruce Geller had written the part of Rollin Hand specifically for Martin, he had not had anyone in mind when he conceived "the girl": "In those days, ' the girl' was how the particular part was described," says Barbara. "It was really window dressing. The proportion of ladies to guys was outrageous. Still is."

However, as Geller thought about the part it grew and became a definite character. Barbara says, "In those days everyone was either Marilyn Monroe or the girl next door, and I wasn' t either which is why I got the part. I was a sort of combination of the two: a very unusual girl next door!" Once she had signed on, two more writers were hired and part of their job was to expand the Cinnamon Carter role, to develop into something really special. "It was a smashing opportunity," she says. And she grabbed it. For three years, she and Martin continued in the show. She won an Emmy Award in each of those years. One Sunday night that played to in an entire lifetime. The show still plays around the world. And it made her famous.

Which made the ultimate collapse of the series all the sadder. The financial setup that controlled the show had changed in a series of takeover bids; there were a number of disagreements, and "I ended up in litigation with Paramount. It was all very involved but it meant that I was not able to work for a whole year. It was a terrible way to end a fabulous experience."

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The year was made grimmer by Martin's continued absence on foreign locations. Their life together was conducted almost entirely by transatlantic telephone.

After a year or so, they started to get offers to work together, something they very much wanted, but the offers were not very exciting-except for one to do remakes of all the old Katherine Hepburn-Spencer Tracy movies. The Landaus watched some of them again, were reminded of how good they were, and couldn't see any point in repeating them. There was no way the originals could be improved. It was a pity because the alternatives would require that they scarcely see each other. Martin's films would almost certainly take him abroad. If they both did television they would inevitably be apart a lot. Barbara took on various assignments and quite enjoyed some of it. But most of the parts were unattractive. "It was the beginning of that period when nudity was all the rage, and hardly a script arrived on the doorstep which didn't require me to run around naked, and I don't even find myself tempted. The scripts were [mostly] awful."

Then, one day, three people they had never met before, -Gerry and Sylvia Anderson and Abe Mandell-came to the house and set about selling them on the idea of Space 1999. "It was terribly interesting, kind of fascinating. They had the stories outlines and the sketches. I was very concerned that it shouldn't disappoint visually because science fiction is primarily a written form and it can be difficult to translate onto the screen, but it looked as if their special effects would be unbelievable. They screened one of their films. And they began to convince us they could do it, both financially and-unusually-it got more exciting and it seemed increasingly likely that it would be a good idea." Naturally she worried about the proposal. It would mean uprooting the family and moving to London, a place she had visited once as a tourist. "I was excited, of course, but I also viewed it with some trepidation," says Barbara. "It could have been a disaster."

As it has turned out, the show has not been a disaster. The children have been found suitable

schools without too much problem. Their two houses in London-the first in Little Venice, near the Regents Canal, and the subsequent one in a fashionable Georgian square in Belgravia-may not be as home like as "Sous les Arbres", but she has enjoyed them both. The Pyrenean mountain dog had to be found another home in California because it started wandering off, but the two fox terriers have remained in Beverly Hills. Meanwhile Barbara has found a Lhasa apso, Pippin, which is now the Landau London dog. She soon discovered that visits to the West End Theater, which she adores, were impractical on weekdays, despite Britain's shorter working day. She once arrived for the ballet with daughter Susie and a friend, only to discover that the curtain had just gone up and they were not allowed to take their seats. There was no intermission and so she had the mortifying experience of standing at the back of the theater for two hours with the three empty-but paid for-seats within sight and easy reach. Theatergoing is now restricted to the weekend.

Just as Barbara delighted in learning about Italy and the Italians, so she enjoys learning about Britain and the British. More than any other American I have met, she is constantly picking over little linguistic differences. "*Moving house*", she said once, "I find that hysterical. We just say *move*. *Moving house* sounds as if you're picking the house up and putting it someplace else. You're not. It's you you're moving, not the house." Another time she was greatly amused when Tony Anholt came in and, in response to her inquiry about the health of his young son, replied that he was a little *off-color*! She explained that was an American adjective that covered the spectrum from racy obscene, while he explained that to an Englishman it is just likely to mean *unwell*. Too, she remains surprised to find that there are some cows grazing within the Greater London area. And so on.

As for work itself, there is no question that she finds Space 1999 a stimulating experience. For a start she actually prefers studio to location work: "I love being outside if you're not working, but not otherwise. I love the

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coziness of a studio. It's more comfortable and controlled. In a studio it's a whole world you're creating yourself. Outside people will say, 'It's a real tree, aren't you glad?', and I say, 'No, I'd rather have a fake tree. You can do something with it.' "

Her part as Helena Russell has evolved with the show. "In the beginning we had a very sketchy idea on the parts," she says. It is no secret that for a variety of reasons scripts for Series One were often late arriving, and the whole show was produced under conditions of tearing hurry and some stress. This meant that Barbara sometimes be up till 1 A.M sorting out problems with her script. On Series Two, however, the pace has slowed and the problems lessened."

"We had some battles over character definitions-not battles with anyone in particular, but battles all the same. It's one thing to get the original concept right, but it's another to get the individual lines right, to tell the story well, and let the character *breathe*."

Now that Dr. Russell is breathing satisfactorily, Barbara says, "I don't see her as too different from what I would be like in those circumstances. I'm not a doctor-I can take a splinter out, but that's about all. However, I do care about people a lot, which I expect doctors do, and I tried to bring this out. Also in this second series I've found there's been more scope for stepping out of the bounds which are acceptable in Moonbase Alpha... If you're affected by some evil atmosphere, for instance. In one of the episodes I've had the chance of being ill. I can't bear it in real life-I have no patience-but I loved getting deathly on film."

Most of all, Barbara likes working with a film unit: "There are eighty people whom you would never normally seek out, and you get to know them. The circumstances force an intimacy which can be quite real; I love looking at someone you'd never usually get to know and wondering how he got to that position. We're all doing something together and we have a nice respect for each other, and we have a nice respect for each other's skill. So I never get bored. It never becomes dull".

Boredom, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. In other words, Barbara seems to me to have a capacity for finding interesting things which other people would find dull. She possesses a degree of curiosity-and more specifically, *intellectual* curiosity-that I find surprising. (Journalists are always surprised to find that actors can produce lines of their own!). In May 1976, for instance, the playwright Samuel Beckett was in London to direct part of a series of his plays at the Royal Court Theatre. He is a notoriously cerebral writer, his plays universally acknowledged to be exceptionally demanding of an audience. His most famous, *Waiting for Godot*, was being put on in German, and Barbara was determined to get to it: "My understanding of the language is nil, but I know the play pretty well, and I have *got* to see Beckett's own production."

For some people, *Waiting for Godot* in German is almost a classic definition of tedium. To go out of one's way to submit to it says an awful lot about your interest and pleasure in what Barbara Bain calls "The learning process". Perhaps, if she hadn't decided to become an actress, she might have made a good journalist.