

SOPHIA LOREN

There is only one Sophia Loren. Be it the Academy Award ceremonies, a movie opening or a charity event, all eyes turn center stage as the ever glamorous, ever loved Sophia makes her entrance. The presence of the legendary screen actress recently in Hamilton for the St. Joseph's Health Care Foundation helped raise needed funds for research, equipment, and care.

Sophia Loren has had a film career that spans five decades and includes an Academy Award winning performance in "Two Women", as well as "Marriage Italian Style", "Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow" and "Grumpier Old Men". The operatic turns of her personal and professional life, be it her controversial marriage to Carlo Ponti, the difficult bed ridden pregnancies she endured, the brief imprisonment in Italy for tax evasion, or the theft of her jewelry, have been grist for the paparazzi. Now at age 65, Sophia Loren reflects on life.

MM: What did you mean when you have said before that you were born old and wise and that being born into poverty gave you an advantage in life?

SL: I meant that when you are born poor you have to face the facts of life or reality very soon. This doesn't agree very much with you when you are 8, 9, or 10 years old, because at that time I think you like to dream. You like to think about things that may happen tomorrow. You like to live in a world of fantasy, which was not my case because I couldn't afford to dream and I had to face reality. Because of that I felt old when I was ten and I felt quite wise because I knew that soon I had to take care of my mother and sister.

M.M. When the movie studios first discovered you, they wanted to change your appearance, change your nose. Where did you get the strength to say "no" to them?

S.L. I felt very good in my skin. I didn't feel that I had things that were wrong with me. I felt okay. I had an image of myself that I liked, even though I knew I was not the conventional or banal beauty. I didn't have perfect features. I didn't have a tiny nose, a perfect face, but I thought this would make me look different from the others. At the same time, I thought that it was an advantage for me because I didn't want to be

like everyone else. I just wanted to be somebody that is picked out of a crowd because she looks a little special, because she doesn't follow the classical beauty. I look like myself. I knew also that by not cutting my nose and by not doing things that they were asking me to do, it was going to be a little bit harder for me. But I knew if I make it, I'm going to make it really big because I am...it's very hard for me to say...exceptional, and I was very different from the other girls who were around me. I have always felt, since the very beginning, that I had to face whatever challenges I confronted with all my personality, both spiritual, as well as physical. That is just part of my professional and human code of ethics. I believe, if I had accepted to alter my appearance, it would have meant that I didn't deserve to go on with my dreams.

MM: Your recent book " Recipes and Memories", is dedicated to your grandmother, Nonna Luisa. Why does she hold such an indelible place in your heart?

SL: Those of us who were children during the Second World War understood the real, visceral meaning of hunger. We were forced to face many dangers in those years, but it also gave us great courage, and even today I remain in awe of what we experienced. Waves of fighter planes and bombers, and almost daily explosions and crashes, greeted us just a stone's throw from my grandmother Luisa's kitchen. I'd clutch Nonna Luisa's skirts while we made the sign of the cross and waited for the din to subside and leave us unharmed. According to an old Italian adage, the best condiment for any food is hunger. No delicacies or frills can make food as appetizing as an empty belly can. We could hear bombs explode and the crackle of anti-aircraft guns. My grandmother stayed in her trench, behind her battery of pots and pans, and nothing in the world would have made me miss the delicacies that she cooked up. Whatever we had was meager and humble, but with a few sprigs of fresh herbs, Nonna Luisa could transform our stale bread into an elegant dish. I learned many things from my grandmother. One of the gifts she gave me, was the ability to transform the most ordinary food into something delectable.

M.M. Why are family and a sense of family unity so important to your well being?

S.L. Because I strongly believe that family is the answer to the many calamities that afflict the world: drugs, wars, and criminality. Growing up in the warmth of a loving

family keeps our children out of the many temptations that cynically the world of profits proposes to them. For me, the family is sacred. A strong family provides the mutual love, commitment, and honesty that allow us to grow up true to ourselves and to our fellow human beings. As a mother and as a citizen of the world, I am concerned that the collapse of this social nucleus is forcing us to become anxious, fearful and uncertain about the future. Today some families are defined differently, but no matter what its makeup, the ritual of the table is the family's strongest bond. Confessions, debates, advice, and resolution of the mini-tragedies that crop up in our daily lives all find their way to the table. It creates a small universe of peace. Love and security, when you can count on them, make you the richest person in the world.

M.M. Your fans were there during your pregnancies and the birth of your boys. We've periodically seen them grow up. Give us an update on their lives.

S.L. My family is always the priority in my life. The boys are very different. Carlo Junior is now 30 and Edoardo is 26. Both are still single. Edoardo is a movie director and Carlo is an orchestra conductor. Carlo follows a superior musical career in Vienna, Austria. He has been studying piano since he was eight years old and always played classical music very well.

M.M. It's not easy being the child of a legendary movie star. How did you protect them and give them security?

S.L. Fortunately, I'd say that Carlo Jr. and Edoardo have never shown, nor felt, to be privileged. They have nice, good friends who are as caring as my children are. To all of them; I am a diligent point of reference. For me, the values I've always tried to instill in them are respect and understanding toward others.

M.M. Your husband Carlo Ponti, who is 21 years your senior, has said of your 4 decade long romance, "It's a question of chemistry, you need something very strong to last."

How do you explain the bond the two of you have?

S.L. There is a mutual understanding in our communication. We also share the same passion for movie art. I don't know why people are surprised when a person gets married and the marriage lasts. I think it's absolutely normal. It all depends on you and on your partner and if it's worth it for you to be together, if you know you have

many things in common. I think this should be the normal thing to have. You get married and it lasts all your life.

M.M. Over a year ago you were hospitalized with cardiac arrhythmia. What impact did that have on you?

S.L. At the time, my heart was going a little crazy. I felt anxious. I went to see a cardiologist and had all the tests in New York. Once everything was fine; I just calmed down. It's bad when you don't know what exactly is wrong, that scares you. But when you find out that it's nothing to worry about, you calm down. Nevertheless, you don't forget these moments. I feel a little bit more fragile and I feel so much more compassionate with people that are sick. It is at a time like that when a person should probably rethink a lot of things, but you know you can't avoid facing life with its many obligations.

M.M. What haven't you done that you still want to do?

S.L. More than anything, I'd like to be a grandmother. The thing that would make me the happiest is taking care of my son's children.