

SENIOR ADVOCATE

Prime News for Those in Their Prime

Good Ol' Days: Marlon Brando

Published 07/05/2008 - 11:40 a.m. CDT

Marlon Brando grew up feeling unloved and unwished-for. His parents, both of whom struggled with alcoholism, did not raise their son to have self-esteem. Born in Omaha in 1924, Brando felt a need to become something he was not, if only to be more accepted. His mother did some acting in community theatres and his father, whom Brando said was abusive, ended up sending his son to military school. Brando was considered a rebellious and unruly child. Through his life he felt a lot of anger toward his father, and some people have said this anger helped Brando play his more intense roles.

Rather than having the military school straighten him out, Brando was expelled. He moved to New York in hopes of making himself a life as an actor. By 1944 he was on Broadway with *I Remember Mama*. After impressing playwright Tennessee Williams, he was cast as Stanley in the production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Of course he would later play Stanley in the movie version, one of his most famous roles. Williams was blown away by Brando's portrayal of angry, vicious Stanley. Brando himself said the character had "the kind of brutal aggressiveness I hate."

He made it to movies by playing a paraplegic in *The Men*. Wanting to do the best he could at the role, he made certain to spend time in the hospital to get an idea of rehabilitation. Not long after this, the film version of *Streetcar* was made and he got Oscar-nominated for his performance. His scene with Stanley shouting up at Stella is one of the movie industry's most recognizable. More Oscar nominations came along; he won for the first time in 1954 with his part in *On the Waterfront*.

More and more movies came his way. Brando made his own production company in 1959, dubbing it Pennebaker Productions after his mother, Dorothy Pennebaker Brando. Now he had to the power to direct and produce as well. He did both for 1961's *One-Eyed Jacks*, in which he also starred. Brando had an uneven relationship with the press, preferring, for the most part, not to talk too much to them. Though much praise was given to him, some critics were iffy about the movies he was doing now, feeling they weren't all up to caliber. This changed with *The Godfather*.

Ironically enough, Brando had originally refused to be in this film. Though he was considered a rebel, Brando still felt he had certain ethics, and he did not want to be part of anything that romanticized the Mafia. It took a letter from Mario Puzo, author of *The Godfather*, to convince Brando. Puzo insisted that Brando was the only one who could pull off this part.

Brando was won over. He won an Academy Award for this role, but instead of accepting it himself, he sent up a woman dressed as a Native American. Brando considered himself a protector and was passionate about civil rights; he wanted to show his anger toward the negative way Native Americans were often portrayed in films. Though famous for his acting, Brando worked increasingly for issues he believed in. This doesn't mean he stopped being in movies. He continued to act all the way to 2001, his final movie being *The Score*. He passed away three years later, at the age of 80, from pulmonary fibrosis. He'd lived a successful, controversial and emotional life, but at least by then he could feel he loved and wanted by millions.

by Danica Davidson