

True Hollywood Story

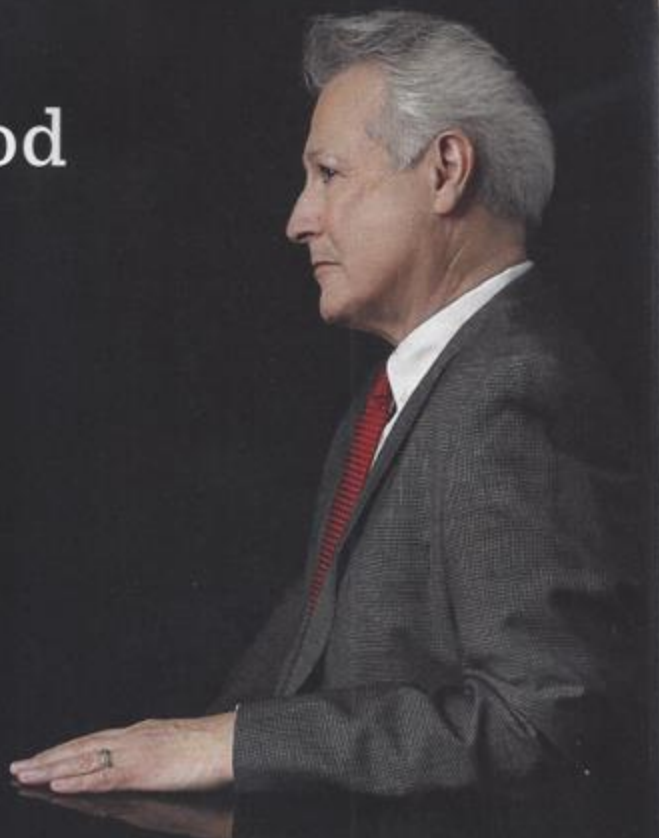
Meet movie star biographer Stephen Michael Shearer.

BY CHRISTIE DENSON
PHOTO BY YATE CARLSON
ONE LOCAL AUTHOR IS CAPTURING THE GLAMOUR, GLITZ AND GOSSIP of the true stories of old Hollywood one book at

a time, and proving you're never too old to begin anew. Woodbury resident Stephen Michael Shearer is a film historian and biographer of three books on the lives of movie stars Patricia Neal, Hedy Lamarr and Gloria Swanson, the first two of which have recently been turned into film projects.

Shearer says he got the film bug at the age of 10, influenced by his mother who scrapbooked clippings on actresses in early talking films. After receiving a degree in instrumental music, music history and music theory, he briefly taught in public schools in northwest Arkansas before moving to the Twin Cities where he began acting and modeling in the late 1970s/early 1980s, eventually moving to New York. His acting work included stage, film and TV, including appearances on the hit TV show *Dallas*.

Through the years, Shearer forged friendships with other noteworthy film historians including Leonard Maltin and Robert Osborn of Turner Classic Movies. Shearer contributed research to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts while he transitioned to corporate America. He worked as a trainer for 20 years in New York until the tragedies of September 11, 2001.



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STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER

"When 9/11 occurred, I lost 11 colleagues in the north tower," Shearer says. "At that point in time I was fat and over 50 and just miserable in corporate. I felt if I didn't change my life at that point I never would. The bucket list was quickly diminishing."

It was Shearer's close personal friendship with actress Patricia Neal—famous for her many roles including winning the Academy Award for 1963's *Hud*—which led to his first book project. "Pat and I became very dear friends," Shearer says. "We traveled together a great deal to different festivals. She always wanted to know if I was going to write her biography. I had never written a book before, but I had the time and the ambition to do so."

Following the success of *Patricia Neal: An Unquiet Life*, Shearer got a literary agent and went on to pen *Beautiful: The Life of Hedy Lamarr* and *Gloria Swanson: The Ultimate Star*. Shearer's biographies have been so successful that two of them are being used as the basis for films. A documentary called *Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story* premiered at New York's TriBeCa Film Festival last April and will air on PBS in April 2018. Shearer is the narrator and is interviewed at length in the 90-minute feature film which will be released theatrically in Europe; executive producers include Michael Kantor and Susan Sarandon.

There is also a yet-untitled feature film in the works based solely on Shearer's first book on Patricia Neal, set to star Hugh Bonneville of *Downton Abbey* and to be directed by John Hay for Atticus Films. Bonneville will play children's author Roald Dahl, to whom Neal was married for 30 years. Shearer is an associate producer and consultant on the film.

"I guess it takes some people a really long time to find their niche," Shearer says. "My contention is that motion picture is arguably America's one true art form. I'm a history buff and I've always thought it was important that we know where we came from, and this is why I write today." ■