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Biography

MEREDITH BAXTER

It could be said that Meredith Baxter developed confidence and appeal as an actress because she grew up in a show business family: her mother was an actress and her stepfather, an agent. Those who have seen her body of work know she is not only a consummate performer but a dynamic force whose career is more than the sum of her acting parts. Her signature roles are living proof that she invites courageous and controversial characters and always meets them head-on.

In preparing for her professional life, she definitely "did her homework." She began acting in the drama department at Hollywood High School and took classes with Frank Silvera. Even after her early success, she continued to study with Mary Carver who taught her the basics as well as the details. Baxter looks to other actors for inspiration and is particularly inspired by Kathy Bates, Judi Dentsch, Judy Davis and Vanessa Redgrave.

In 1970, when Baxter was looking for work, she was hired to audition young men in their screen tests at Screen Gems for *Butterflies Are Free*. In a right-place right-time scenario, she landed the part without even testing for it; after performing in countless auditions for directors seeking male leads, they eventually "saw" the talented Baxter for the first time. She was then cast in the television series, *Bridget Loves Bernie*, and there was no stopping her. The versatile actress quickly garnered leading roles in the critically acclaimed *Family* and the long running, easy-to-love series, *Family Ties*, with Michael J. Fox. Simultaneously, Baxter refined her image as a comedic and dramatic actress and continued to accept roles in both disciplines.

As the single mother of five children, including 16-year old twins, Baxter, who is often working and out of town, has mastered the balance of career and family. Her notable on-screen roles as a wife and mother include *A Woman Scorned: The Betty Broderick Story* for which she won an Emmy nomination, followed by *Her Final Fury: Betty Broderick, The Last Chapter*. She won a second Emmy nomination for her work in the provocative CBS School Break Special, *Other Mothers*, vividly portraying a teenager's lesbian mother. She also received an Emmy nomination for the drama, *Family*. In keeping with her championing of women's struggles, she breathed life into another extraordinary character in *Winnie*, a story about a retarded woman who carves a piece for herself in the world. In the true account, *Darkness Before Dawn*, she played a nurse who worked in a methadone clinic struggling with drug and alcohol addiction.

Baxter's work continues to resonate and influence audiences: her film on bulimia, *Kate's Secret*, is still shown in school health classes all over the country. She was equally indelible in *My Breast*, a black comedy and true story about journalist Joyce Wadler's triumph over breast cancer. Such portrayals awakened her to the seriousness of that impinging illness and moved her to action in this arena; she received a special award for

public awareness from the National Breast Cancer Coalition. Additionally, she staunchly supports Planned Parenthood, NARAL and, as a member of the Board of the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, she lobbied on behalf of the Brady Bill, the National Crime Bill and other gun control measures.

In order to develop projects and produce her own material, Baxter formed a production company. Out of this venture came *The Faculty*, a half-hour comedy series for ABC, *My Breast and Darkness Before Dawn*. Today, however, she is primarily focused on acting and continues to pursue rigorous parts.

Equally facile on the stage, Baxter's credits include: *Spine*, *Butterflies are Free*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Talley's Folly* and numerous performances of *Love Letters* in theatres throughout the country. As artist-in-residence at Dartmouth College, she starred in *The Country Wife* and appeared in and co-produced *The Diaries of Adam and Eve* that was ultimately taped for PBS.

After completing the independent feature, *Elevator Seeking*, and two movies for CBS, *Wednesday Woman* and *Miracle on the 17th Green*, Baxter is currently in Toronto filming *Crash Course*, based on the true story of a 19-year old boy hit by a drunk driver who suffers severe brain damage. As the mother, she steadfastly helps him heal and move out of the role of victim, enabling him to return to college. Shortly she will begin her 42nd movie for television, *Aftermath*, that depicts the impact on a family one year after incest has been discovered.

The industrious actress has also developed a line of skin care products, "Signature Collection," which was originally created to address her own dry skin problems. The business has now taken on a life of its own and when asked what makes her line different, she responds, "My products really work. I bring it on the set for Hair and Makeup to use and everyone likes it. I use it all the time because I have found nothing better." Though very much part of the process, she has a business partner who takes care of operations. "Every year in January and June I do trade shows and it's harder than acting," she quips. Though originally tested on the Home Shopping Network her 20 products can now be found in gift and beauty shops, Hallmark stores and online at www.meredithbaxterproducts.com.

In keeping with her character and remarkable commitment to women's issues, Baxter has found a way to "give back." She formed the Meredith Baxter Foundation for Breast Cancer Research to which a portion of the proceeds from her skin care line is donated. Funds will go toward prevention and research and provide free mammograms for low-income women.

Baxter's hands-on involvement with her family, film and television, women's rights, women's health issues and her own company is an inspiration, and in many ways, the qualities of passion, independence and intelligence in Baxter's characters reflect those in her personal life.