

A woman with dark hair is lying on her back on a light-colored carpet. She is wearing a dark red, short-sleeved top with a white star pattern and dark pants. Her arms are raised above her head, and her legs are also raised. The background shows a blue wall and a window with horizontal blinds. The title 'Shooting Stars' is written in a white, serif font across the top left of the image.

Shooting Stars

Hollywood Behind Closed Doors

This may seem impossible to star-gazers today, but there was actually a time in the not-too-distant past when celebrities and celebrity photographers were on the same page. In this magical pre-paparazzi era, the top photojournalists were not just tolerated. They were courted. And in a few exceptional cases, they were brought into the inner circle as trusted friends.

New Jersey photographer Nancy Barr-Brandon counts herself among those fortunate few. Whatever it was that Hollywood megastars were looking for, she had it. Talent. Kindness. Character. Class. These were her tickets into a world that today's shutterbugs can only dream about.

Facing page: **LIZA MINNELLI** relaxes between rehearsals (1968). “Liza was making an appearance on a short-lived variety show called *That’s Life*. I remember she had a 102 fever and was just trying to keep her strength.”

EDGE: How does one become a celebrity photographer?

NBB: I was always intrigued by photography and was fascinated by the theater. I wrote my first fan letter at the age of nine and received many responses over the years. By 14, I was actually corresponding with several stars, including Joan Crawford, Marlene Dietrich, Gypsy Rose Lee and June Havoc. I was always a talented writer! I grew up in Asbury Park and Interlaken during the 1940s and 50s, so my parents were able to take me into the city to see Broadway shows. Afterwards I would wait outside the stage door with my camera. During the 1950s there was a summer theater nearby called the Neptune Music Circus. It was on Jumping Brook Road. Major musical comedy stars would come down and perform in shows. That is when I was really bitten by the bug.

EDGE: One of your celebrity pen pals was Bette Davis.

NBB: Yes and around the age of 15 she invited me to visit with her in New York. I became friends with Bette. She said she considered me her third daughter. She talked my mother into letting me study acting in New York while I was in high school. Then she was instrumental in getting me

BETTE DAVIS decompresses (1960). “I was staying overnight at the townhouse Bette rented in New York. She was always cooking and cleaning; there were never servants. The next morning she made breakfast for me and her daughter, B.D.”



into the Pasadena Playhouse College of Theatre Arts in 1960.

EDGE: When did you move behind the camera for good?

NBB: In 1962 I was studying acting at the HB Studio, with Uta Hagen. Liza Minnelli was a student there also. After watching her act in a student play I told Bette Davis, “I just saw the work of someone you watched grow up. She has that magic something....she will be a big star.” By this time the camera was more intriguing to me than the stage. So I made the switch, much to Bette Davis’s dismay.

EDGE: You were close with Judy Garland. Did this relationship begin through Liza?

NBB: No I became friendly with her exclusive of Liza. When Liza was a teenager she was very suspicious. She resented comparisons with her mother and worried that people were trying to get to Judy through her. It was only later that Liza gradually found out—but tested me to be assured that my greatest allegiance was to her! I often took care of Judy’s younger kids, Lorna and Joe. There wasn’t a lot of stability for the children. I tried to provide some of that. As well as clothes, toys, outings, etc.

EDGE: Was there a favorite moment you shared with Judy Garland?

NBB: Yes, at the Palace in 1967. She was preparing for yet another comeback. She asked me to do the lighting walk-through for the crew. I got to walk the Palace stage and pretend I was Judy! She sat in the front row with her feet up, making faces at me as I did the walk-through with Lorna and Joe, who were in the show.

EDGE: What was the business like when you got into it during the 1960s?

NBB: Totally different

than it is today. A press photographer felt included. You felt like someone who was needed, not a pariah, the way you are today. For instance, I moved to L.A. and got to know several celebrities very well. They opened doors for me. I wrote Dolly Parton and we became friends. She made me her unofficial personal photographer. She was wonderful, witty, smart, funny, caring, down-to-earth and generous. She took me to many events, sometimes we traveled together, went to dinner together. I also did personal shopping for her.

EDGE: What did you have that the others didn't?

NBB: I learned social graces from an early age. My father was a prominent Shore attorney. My mother owned a furniture store. They taught me to be a good listener, a good conversationalist, helpful, honest, hard working. Liza was the first to bring out my sense of humor.

EDGE: When did the business begin to change?

NBB: Two things initiated the change in the business. The murder of John Lennon and the shooting of Ronald Reagan by obsessed fans. Because of these events, in the early

LIZA MINNELLI and Nancy Barr-Brandon (1967) "This is a shot from Liza's wedding to Peter Allen. Peter had a wonderful, outrageous sense of humor. I enjoyed being with them. Peter didn't want to get married; Liza pursued him for years. Finally he gave in—and said Yes. Sadly, it was disastrous!"



DOLLY PARTON catches a nap (1978). "This shot was taken on her tour bus. I traveled with her quite a bit. That was a different era. There were no bodyguards and we often flew coach. Dolly always paid my way."

Nancy Barr-Brandon and **JUDY GARLAND** (1967) "Judy and I talk at Liza's wedding to Peter Allen. Judy and I were extremely close."



DOLLY PARTON and Nancy Barr-Brandon (1977). “Dolly and I hurry through the streets of Philadelphia. She was the ‘guest host’ on *The Mike Douglas Show* that week.”



BETTE MIDLER (above) with Melissa Manchester (1975). “I accompanied Bette to the Roxy in Hollywood, where Melissa was doing a show.”

BETTE MIDLER (right) at Korvette’s (1977). “She was signing her new album at the New York department store.”



LIZA MINNELLI on set (1969). “I visited Liza while she was filming *The Sterile Cuckoo* at Hamilton College in New York. While I was there they needed someone to double for her for long shots. They used me because, from a distance, we resembled each other. The scene ended up on the cutting room floor.”



BETTE MIDLER as Janis Joplin (1979). “Bette performs in *The Rose*. I actually was in this movie playing—what else?—a photographer.”



1980s celebrities started to hire bodyguards. We called them “goons.” They were incapable of distinguishing between the press, the fans and people who might actually do harm. They were physically abusive to everybody. In response, many photographers got more physical, pushy, defensive, competitive. It escalated and evolved into what you have now, with people jumping fences and hanging out of helicopters.

EDGE: You almost have to be an athlete to survive.

NBB: You do. You have to be physically and mentally tough, have a huge ego, be a private detective and pay off a lot of spies! There are no ethics anymore. The only values today are money and prestige. The antithesis of my day. **EDGE**

Editor’s Note: Nancy Barr-Brandon heads up the non-profit Cat Assistance Network (catrescue@monmouth.com), which provides food, shelter, spaying, neutering and medical care for homeless felines. Donations of food, funds, and time are always welcome.



BARBARA and FRANK SINATRA (1976). “I took this photo at a charity golf event in Palm Springs.”



MATT DILLON and BROOKE SHIELDS (1981). “I met Brooke in California when she was 14. Her mother, Teri, was very interested in good publicity and she would call me for exclusive shoots. I shot a lot of Brooke’s birthday parties. They were always very kind to me. They were lovely people and appreciated that I would never submit anything unflattering for publication. They trusted me.”



JODIE FOSTER at Yale (1980). “It had been a while since anyone had photographed Jodie, so I went up to New Haven and took these pictures during a performance of *Getting Out* in her freshman year. I wasn’t the kind of person who would follow her around campus. That wasn’t my style. A few days later John Hinckley shot Ronald Reagan and Jodie became a complete recluse.”



Nancy Barr-Brandon and **BROOKE SHIELDS** (2004). “This photo was taken on Christmas Day. Brooke was appearing in the Broadway revival of *Wonderful Town*. We remain friendly and see each other once in a while. She’ll also drop me the occasional note.”