

## INTERVIEW *with* JENNIFER EHLE

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### PART III: MOTHERHOOD & FAMILY

88.) How has motherhood changed you? What kind of mum do you hope to be?

~ I think that this may be why I feel more inclined towards theater just now — the nurture element of it appeals to me; the tending to something you care about.

I am more confident altogether, in all areas.

There is the confidence of feeling that I have justified my existence somehow.

I can be ferocious now, when I feel I have to protect my family and our interests. I like that.

89.) You mentioned in an interview that the only role that would take you away from your family would be Tracy Lord in TPS. How have your career choices changed as a result of getting married and having a son? [Tom] Have you found the balance between your private and public life yet?

~ Well, when I met my husband, I knew that I wanted to pay full attention to this relationship. I had not enjoyed acting for a lot of my twenties and wanted to step away and see how that felt; to see if the desire to act would return in full.

So as soon as my commitments exhausted themselves (*Possession* and *Design For Living*) I took that time.

Three years later, I was curious to see how it would feel to act again and it was fine. I liked it, but still wasn't sure.

Now, four-and-some years on from 'walking away,' I am really enjoying it and have not felt this unambivalent about working for at least a decade. It's fun being an actress. Who knew?

90.) Do you think being an only child is a good thing? Do you plan on having more kids?

~ I don't mind being an only-child; never have. I am lucky, though, that I have my friend Emily, who grew-up very close to me and so, there is someone I have shared memories with. I would miss that if I didn't have it, I think.

91.) Your and your parents seem to adore each other; did you ever go through the teenage rebellion stage? What were you like as a child?

~ I distanced myself, relatively, from my parents for a year or so in my late twenties. It was necessary for me to feel my autonomy. Other than that brief gap, we have always been a very close family.

92.) What's it like being the daughter of Rosemary Harris? Do you ever feel like you're in her shadow, or feel pressure to live up to her?

~ It's lovely. You should taste her fried chicken.

93.) You once said you never imagined yourself getting married. Why was that? Despite that, you seem to be living the happily-ever-after. Would you mind telling us how you met your husband?

~ Maybe I didn't imagine it on that particular day, when someone asked; or maybe I was just embarrassed to say otherwise ... or maybe I didn't say that at all ...

94.) Your father has been quite active politically, from civil rights to education policy. What influence has this had on you?

~ No effect that I am aware of; except great pride to be his daughter.

#### PART IV: GEOGRAPHY, NATIONALITY & ACCENT

95.) There seems to have been a shift towards America lately in your life and career. Do you identify as an American or Briton now? What do you prefer about living and working in each country? When you're in America, what do you miss most about England, and vice versa? [Steve] What cultural differences particularly stick out for you between the US & UK?

~ I am an American. I adore Britain and have a strong English half, but my roots are here in the US — it is not a matter of choice; it is simply fact.

Right now what I miss about the UK is friends, family, *Osteria Basilico*, running along the South Bank and the playground in *Kensington Gardens*.

Conversely, when I lived in London those 12 years, I missed friends, family, my parents' home, their cabin in the mountains, skinny lattes (this was in the pre *Starbucks* invasion), sugar-free ice cream, Big Gulps, NYC, snow and getting into a too-hot summer car.

96.) Do you regret your rootless upbringing? Was that why you insisted on going to Interlochen?

~ I love that we moved around as much as we did. It didn't feel rootless because we always had our home in Winston-Salem, NC, and a cabin in the mountains there. My parents bought them before I was born and still live in them.

My husband and I lived in the cabin for five months just after we were married. I never think of myself as being rootless, but being transient is something I enjoy enormously at times.

I asked to go to *Interlochen Arts Academy* as a last minute attempt to come up with an alternative to going to the public high school in NC. It is actually a very good high school, there in Winston-Salem; but I had just spent six months at school in NYC — having a great time sneaking out to clubs and such — and was under the mistaken impression that IAA was in NY state.

After asking, my Father called me back 20 minutes later and told me that I was enrolled at IAA. And that was when I learned that it was actually in up-state Michigan.

Oops.

97.) Which accent comes to you more naturally, British or American? What would you use when you first wake up, or is your natural one an amalgamation of the two? [Leslie] (See below)

98.) Is your current accent something you consciously chose? Do you find that different accents bring out different parts of your personality? What other accents can you do – North Carolinian?

~ My natural accent is American. I chose to speak with a UK accent when I was about to enter the final year at drama school in London. I was going to try to find a way to stay in the UK after I finished college and could not imagine trying to live and get work there with an American accent. I found London, at the time, far more xenophobic than I find it now — and so was very self-conscious having a foreign accent.

After those 12 years speaking with a UK accent it took me a while to revert to a US accent and I still have traces of a British accent and possibly always will. Alright by me. I probably now have the accent I deserve.

99.) Does your accent have anything to do with your location or the current part you're working on? [Leslie] What about the accent/nationality of your interlocutor?

~ What is an 'interlocutor' ...?

100.) Do you know any other languages, fluent or not? [Leslie] How's the French going?

~ Je parle seulement merde. Vous regardez, non?

101.) What made you choose upstate NY to settle in? Do you still keep a residence in the UK at all? [Steve] Does living in NY mean you're orienting your career towards the theatre? (Unanswered)

102.) How have 9/11 and the London attacks affected your sense of national identity?

~ Flag waving makes me queasy whomever is doing it, so I'm not sure that I have a sense of national identity. As for my human identity; it is saddened that any side could see death as a victory, let alone consider it collateral damage.

103.) Having filmed in many scenic areas of England, which location did you find particularly appealing? [Steve] (Unanswered)

## PART V: INTERESTS & PERSONALITY

104.) What did you do during your hiatus? What were your pastimes/hobbies/passions? [Steve]

~ I got married, adopted a dog and had a baby. My hobbies and pastimes were cooking, kissing, breast-feeding and washing diapers. It was heaven.

105.) It's obvious you have a keen sense of humour – what/who really makes you laugh? [Steve] What's your favourite joke?

~ Some people who make me laugh, written as they occur to me: My husband, our son, our dog, my parents, Eddie Izzard, Larry David, Lara Cazalet, Richard Lintern, Kevin Spacey, Matthew Broderick, Julianna, Rickey Gervais, Ellen Degeneres, John Stewart, Peter Sellers, Dustin Hoffman, Jack Lemmon, Margaret Cho, Stephen Fry, Maggie Smith, Steve Zahn, PG Wodehouse ...  
There are so, so many, I could go on and on, but you get the eclectic gist.

106.) What good books, music, films have you enjoyed lately?[Anon] What 8 songs would be on your "Desert Island Disc"? Which actors/actresses do you enjoy watching? [Steve] Favourite writer? (Unanswered)

107.) You bought a keyboard even though you're "tone deaf". What can you play now?

~ Um.

108.) We've mentioned your "chromosome glitch", and you've said you didn't have a very strong sense of self. Having taken time off to live in domestic bliss, do you have more of a sense of who you are and where you're going?

~ It's true that I didn't have a strong sense of self, not for the longest time. Now I do.

109.) When was the last time you attended the theatre - as an audience member that is - and what was the play? What made you want to see it?  
[Steve]

~ Last play I saw was *National Anthems* at The Old Vic. It was wonderful.

110.) After all that traveling, do you still enjoy it? You've been to lots of interesting places – Cuba, Hungary, a Benedictine convent - which have struck a chord with you? Where would you still like to go? (Sydney's nice this time of the year)

~ For the most part, I do not enjoy travel simply for it's own sake — but do love working places and getting to see things that way.

I did spend a few days in Sydney, working on *Paradise Road*, and it seemed like a great city. I look forward to being there again sometime.

111.) How have you adjusted to living in one place for a couple of years?

~ Having a home made it easy as pie.

112.) For the Prince's Trust " Masks " project, you painted yours plain blue with a signature. Why?

~ Ran out of time.

113.) You've also done charity work with AIDS and breast cancer. How do you pick your causes? (Unanswered)

114.) What do you consider your greatest success or failure? Do you have any "if only" moments? (Unanswered)

115.) What's harder, praise or criticism? (Unanswered)

116.) As a " self-confessed thriller fan ", in which Hitchcock film would you like to have acted?

~ *Notorious* or *Rear Window*.

*Notorious* is my favorite Hitchcock.

*Rear Window* just because of the dresses; and Jimmy Stewart.

117.) Being brought up in North Carolina where the Baptist church is dominant, I wonder what your views on God, Jesus Christ and religion in general are. I ask this because you seem to have your priorities in order: family first, friends then career. Where does God fit in? Thanks and I'm a big admirer of yours! [Bayne]

~ I distrust religion in general.

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