Diane Keaton: "Just don't judge"

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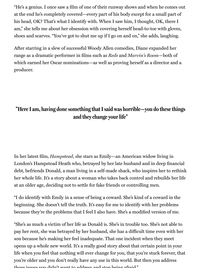
In the star and queen of quirkiness Diane Keaton speaks to Eva Markvic about becoming a mother in her fifties, her obsession with fashion and her latest film, *Hampstead*.

Diane Keaton's first major role might have been as Al Pacino's complex wife Kay in *The Godfather*, but it was after a string of comedies including *Annie Hall* that every Woody Allen fan developed a crush on the kooky, neurotic girl in the fedora hat and baggy trousers. When talking to Diane, it's safe to say that every single one of them would fall even deeper in love with her in person.



Delightfully chatty, bubbly and self-deprecating, she goes off on unexpected tangents and you never know where she might land in the end—be it Pinterest or her fashion idol Karl Lagerfeld.

"He's a genius. I once saw a film of one of their runway shows and when he comes out at the end he's completely covered—every part of his body except for a small part of his head, OK? That's what I identify with. When I saw him, I thought, OK, there I am," she tells me about her obsession with covering herself head-to-toe with gloves, shoes and scarves. "You've got to shut me up if I go on and on," she adds, laughing.

After starring in a slew of successful Woody Allen comedies, Diane expanded her range as a dramatic performer in films such as *Reds* and *Marvin's Room*—both of which earned her Oscar nominations—as well as proving herself as a director and a producer.

"Here I am, having done something that I said was horrible—you do those things and they change your life"

In her latest film, *Hampstead*, she stars as Emily—an American widow living in London's Hampstead Heath who, betrayed by her late husband and in deep financial debt, befriends Donald, a man living in a self-made shack, who inspires her to rethink her whole life. It's a story about a woman who takes back control and rebuilds her life at an older age, deciding not to settle for fake friends or controlling men.

"I do identify with Emily in a sense of being a coward. She's kind of a coward in the beginning. She doesn't tell the truth. It's easy for me to identify with her problems because they're the problems that I feel I also have. She's a modified version of me.

"She's as much a victim of her life as Donald is. She's in trouble too. She's not able to pay her rent, she was betrayed by her husband, she has a difficult time even with her son because he's making her feel inadequate. That one incident when they meet opens up a whole new world. It's a really good story about that certain point in your life when you feel that nothing will ever change for you, that you're stuck forever, that you're older and you don't really have any use in this world. But then you address those issues you didn't want to address and stop being afraid."

I wonder aloud whether her character Emily's bold decision to turn her life around resonates with Diane on a personal level. After a number of high-profile relationships with Hollywood stars such as Al Pacino, Warren Beatty and Woody Allen, she's currently a single mother of the two children she adopted in her fifties.

"Adopting my son and daughter late in life—and single—had a transformative effect on me. I'm not doing what seems to be the normal route of being 21. I have a 10-year-old son and a 15-year-old daughter. They're still forming in some way, so you have to stay really interested and energetic and open to new thoughts and ideas all the time because of them. Also, the fact that I never married makes me unusual and then to go and have a family on my own—it's probably not recommended, I don't think that a lot of people do that," she laughs.

Diane hasn't always been this positive about becoming a parent at an older age, and single. Just a few decades earlier, she considered it a crazy idea. "I remember when I was about 40, somebody told me about someone who adopted a baby at 50 and I remember saying, 'Well that's just ridiculous!' I feel like that was a lesson in itself. Don't judge...you know, just don't judge, because here I am, having done something that I said was horrible, or wrong, or a mistake. You do those things and they do change your life and attitude."

This is one of the many similarities between her and Hampstead's Emily, who also leaves herself to re-evaluate the issues that she stubbornly refused to address at first. Playing parts that resemble her in real life seems to be a familiar trope for Diane, who has frequently chosen characters that reflect her charming quirks and idiosyncrasies. "I'm a certain kind of performer. I'm a limited performer," she says.

Perhaps one of the most instantly noticeable connections between fact and fiction is that unique fashion sense. A huge style icon, Diane is known for her androgynous outfits: big, masculine power suits, hats, and high-collar shirts forever covering her neck. In real life, she claims, she goes even further than that.

"I think I've gone a more extreme route with my fashion interests. I go kind of fat, constantly covering myself. I love fashion, you know. I'm curious about all of it. Now my big idol is Comme des Garçons and I just like those big skirts and those big dresses—I'm totally into that. And there's also a woman in London whose work I really love. She has a store called Egg."

Fashion aside, Diane has several outside interests, mostly revolving around visual arts. She's previously edited a book showcasing her collection of amateur clown paintings, and her upcoming work titled *The House That Pinterest Built* is a how-to volume on creating one's dream home.

"I'm a big fan of Pinterest and many of my ideas came from there. Since I have no real education as an architect, I get all my ideas from images and I always have. I've done a lot of restorations of houses, I kind of moved around too much—probably not great for kids, but you know, they always stayed in the same schools.

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"Acting is a responsibility—and with that comes a set of conflicted feelings."

"If I'd had an education, I'd have been a designer. I would've tried to. Would I be an architect? I don't think my math skills are good enough. Could I have been a fashion designer? I don't know. I just don't have the education. My education is basically that I graduated from high school, and from there, I went to acting school. Because I think that the performing part came first."

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While starting out as a young actress, Diane also had a strong ambition to become a singer, regularly moonlighting at New York nightclubs with a singing act, which she subsequently recreated in films such as *Annie Hall* and *Radio Days*.

Yet she doesn't really think much of herself as a singer with artists like Adele around. "It's ludicrous to have a voice like hers, so amazing. So many people are so gifted—and then they can write music. So I'm not really a singer but I do love it."

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When I ask her if she loves acting just as much, I get a straight-up "No".

"Too much work. Because I do it, I don't think of it like it's love...it's my job. So all of these other things I was talking about—I love. Because I'm an outsider looking in, I dabble in them as best as I can and they thrill me and they're the fun part of my life. But acting is a responsibility. And with that comes a set of conflicted feelings.

"To me, the other actors are the most important people. It's not about me, it's who I'm acting with. And how I respond with them and they respond with me and how we together make something of these characters we're playing. To me that's the most fun—other actors."

I compliment Diane on *Hampstead*, saying that I found her performance to be warm and spirited, and she bursts out laughing in giddy disbelief. "What? Oh, this is the nicest thing anybody's said to me! That makes me feel great, thank you!"

While Diane Keaton's signature *Annie Hall*-style natter and eccentricity are thrilling to experience first-hand, it's her human kindness and sincerity that make up her unmistakable appeal.

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