

Playing Catch With Marilyn Monroe

Bus Stop was shot on location in Phoenix. There were many crowd scenes, especially at the rodeo where Vera and Cherie were in the stands together watching Bo compete. The extras were ecstatic to be sharing the same air with the sexiest, most glamorous movie star in the world. At the end of a long day of crowd shooting, everyone was tired and restless. Sweaty and exhausted, Mama and Marilyn started to head back to their trailers. As they walked, extras and locals who had been sitting in the rodeo stands all day started asking Marilyn for autographs and to pose for pictures.

“Hey Marilyn!” one of them shouted. “Look over here!”

Marilyn paused momentarily to indulge them and kept walking. And then a few more. And more still. With each request, those in the ever-growing crowd who felt they weren’t getting their fair share started to get hostile.

“Hey, wait a minute!” a young woman shouted, “I didn’t get a picture!”

Then a large man protested, “How come you signed *his* book and not *mine*!”

Mama had never witnessed an angry mob before and it scared her. Marilyn gave the appearance of total calm and never stopped walking. Finally, in an edgy whisper, she said to Mama, “Whatever happens, just stay beside me.”

She picked up her pace, scribbling autographs to as many of the outstretched arms as she could reach while she kept moving. Walking and signing, signing and walking, with ever increasing velocity. Through her panic, Mama thought, “How can Marilyn move that fast in four-inch heels?” She also wondered why there didn’t seem to be a cop or a security guard in sight. By this point, the malevolent crowd was screaming, shoving and closing in on them. Marilyn grabbed Mama’s arm and dragged her the last twenty feet to the trailer. Once they escaped inside, Marilyn locked the door and threw her body against it as the belligerent hoards pounded on the walls, practically overturning the Winnebago. Mama looked at Marilyn with panic. It was one of the most terrifying moments of my mother’s life.

Marilyn adored children. She was desperate to have a baby herself. My two older brothers, Mark and Philip, went to Phoenix and spent time on the set. Mark was recovering from a bout of meningitis he’d gotten earlier that year. The doctor thought the dry, desert air would be good for him, so Mama packed up Nanny and the boys and off they went to Arizona.

Marilyn was crazy about my brothers. She loved to play a little game with them at night. Marilyn was constantly receiving elaborate gift baskets from agents, publicists, and studio types trying to gain her favor. After a long day of shooting, she removed the grapefruits and oranges from the baskets and went out onto her balcony.

She’d call down below, “Mark! Philip!”

Four-year-old Mark raced out onto the balcony with two-year-old Philip tottering

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close behind. They looked up at the pretty blond lady on the tiered balcony above.

“Wanna play a little catch?” Marilyn asked.

“Okay!” Mark would reply.

And so began the nightly ritual of Marilyn Monroe playing ball with my brothers on the terrace, using grapefruits and oranges as their only sports equipment. First, Marilyn threw a grapefruit. Mark caught it with pride. Next, an orange to Philip. Of course at two, he couldn't catch anything, so the fruit rolled onto the balcony below and off the edge to the pool deck, five flights down.

“Marilyn,” Mama would say, “It's very sweet of you to do this, but really, you don't have to.”

“Are you kidding?” Marilyn replied. “It's my favorite part of the day! Besides, Vitamin C is very important for growing boys. They have to have their citrus!”

After a few days of this game, during her nightly phone call to my father in Connecticut, Mama remarked, “Oh, sure, Marilyn's playing catch with the boys on the terrace again. They're having the time of their lives. And guess who's gonna have her raggedy ass down at the pool at two in the morning picking up all those goddamn grapefruits and oranges? It ain't Miss Monroe, that's for sure!”