

Rolling Stone



JANE'S ADDICTION®

ISSUE 597 • FEBRUARY 7TH, 1991
\$2.50 • CAN \$2.95

Sting

THE HEALING
POWER OF
MUSIC

Francis Ford Coppola

UNDER FIRE

Hall of Fame

THE BYRDS
TOP THE CLASS
OF 1990

How to Fix the Economy

BY WILLIAM
GREIDER



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PERRY FARRELL OF JANE'S ADDICTION
Illustration by Philip Burke



Francis

The ROLLING STONE INTERVIEW

In his last decade of disappointment and disaster, Francis Ford Coppola lost his studio and his audience and his fortune; lost his artistic instincts and his confidence; and lost, above all, a

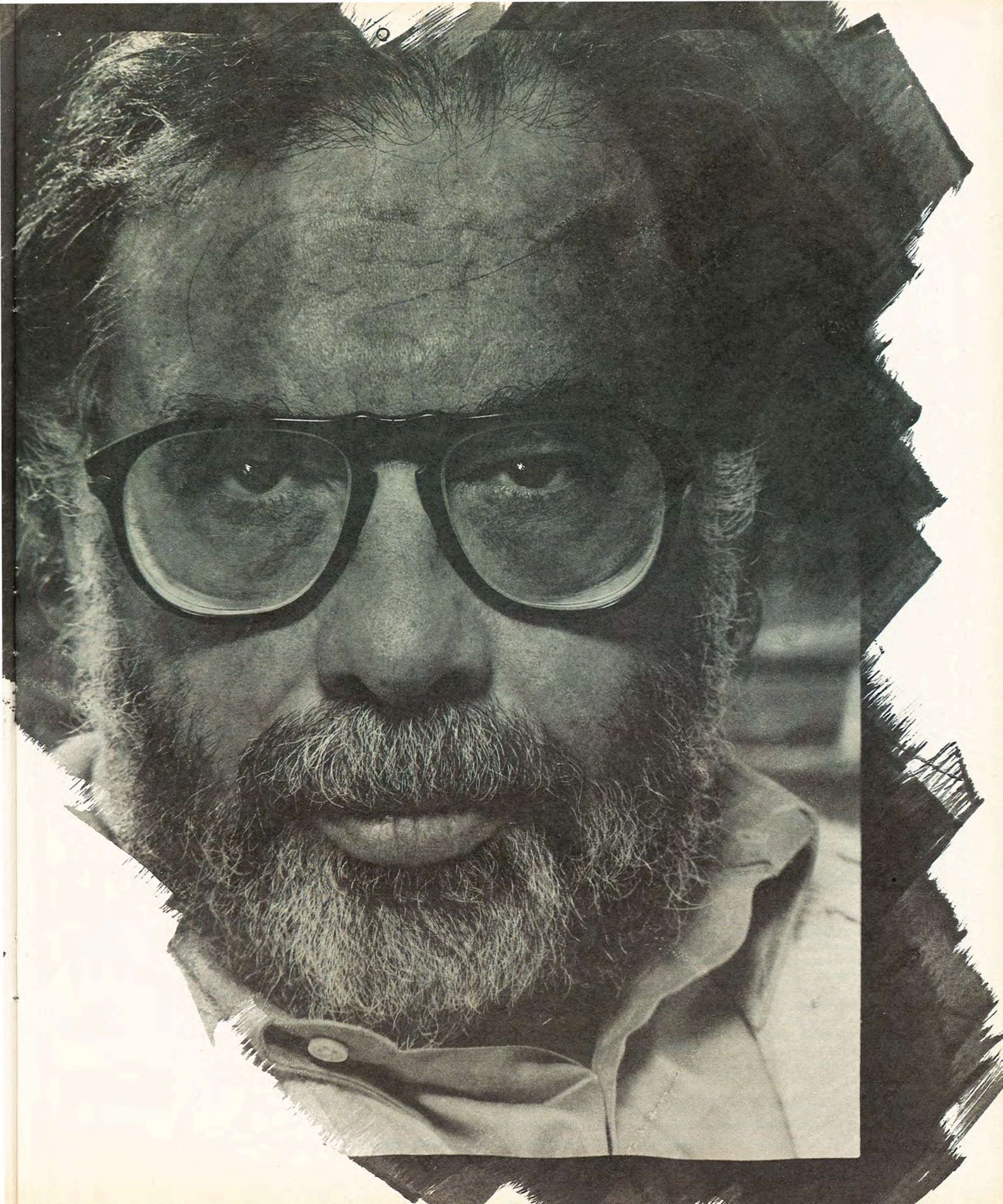
Ford

By DAVID BRESKIN

Coppola

Photograph by

ALBERT WATSON

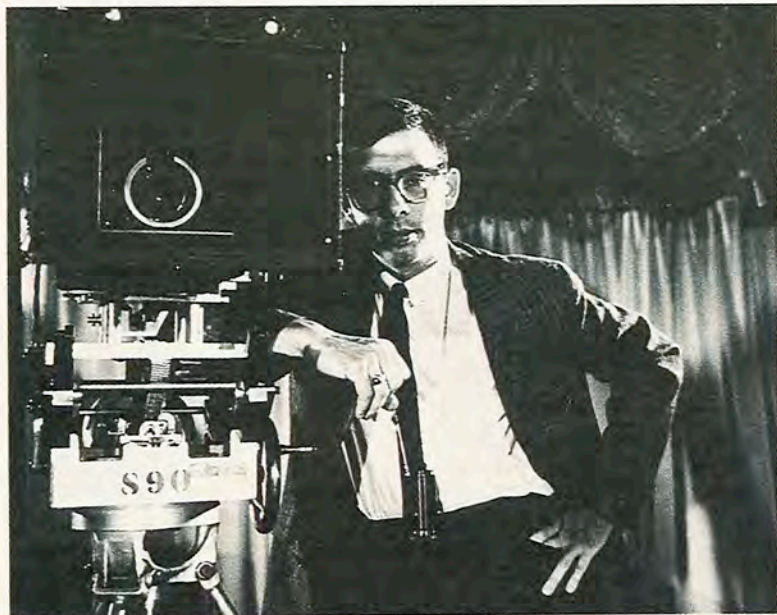


son. What he never lost was his desire to make art.

But given his position as a rusted boy wonder, he'd have to make more than art: He'd have to make commerce. Enter *Godfather Part III*, his bid for both financial and artistic redemption, his ticket to the third act of his own life. With the film released to a riotous orgy of opinion, Coppola found himself with a sharp stone in his shoe: The casting and performance of his nineteen-year-old daughter, Sofia, in one of the film's key roles, provoked a barrage of criticism. (In the reviews, his daughter was killed, but the bullets were meant for him.) That Coppola would risk so much on family – for family – says everything about a man for whom the border between life and art long ago collapsed. Coppola talked about such matters early last November in the penthouse office-bedroom of the building he owns in San Francisco.

In *'Godfather Part II,'* consigliere Tom Hagen, upon finding the dead prostitute, says: "The girl has no family. It's as if she didn't exist." And he repeats it, like a mantra. It's another sign of the centrality of the family in your work – that family is how you do exist – so I'd like you to start by talking about yours.

Well, I was born in 1939 and raised in a second-generation Italian American family, so my infant memories of World War II and that era were the first things to consider. Also, because my father was a musician, we traveled a lot. It was in my father's gypsy nature not to stay in any one place too long.



COPPOLA GOT HIS START AS A FILMMAKER BACK IN THE SIXTIES.

I thought that our moving every year, and the many schools I went to because of it, tended to let me encapsulate time differently. In some way it allowed me to remember things in a much more vivid way than kids who are just raised in one neighborhood. I went to twenty-five different schools before college. Each one was a little episode of my life – ages four and five and six and seven – like a separate movie with a separate cast of characters. My childhood, and my memories of my childhood, have always remained very vital to me and very accessible. I may have only been in a particular neighborhood for six months, but I still remember what the pretty girl's name was and what the bad boy's name was.

We were a family of five. A brother five years older

[Augie] and a sister six years younger [Talia Shire]. My mother [Italia] was an extremely good-looking woman, and my father [Carmine] was very handsome and in a glamorous profession – I saw him dress in a tuxedo. My initial memories of them were very idealized and very full of love. My brother was very nice to me, and we had all sorts of uncles and aunts in that sort of second-generation Italian family.

My first impression of family was that it was very much like a fairy tale. We were taught that Italians had great culture. And my father was the solo flute player for Toscanini. So there was always an element of glamour and romance to my family, and to this day, if I do gravitate to them or they are the wellspring of my fondness, it's because from when I was a little kid, they were.

Yet there was a lot of tension there as well. Your father dominated the scene, and there was always the risk that he was failing or would fail. He was dissatisfied as an artist, even if he was at a fairly high level.

He was at a high level as an instrumentalist, but in those days it wasn't like today – where a virtuoso flute player is on records and is a celebrity. He always had ambitions to write music, to do Broadway, to conduct opera. He longed for recognition in areas other than playing the flute. So he weaned himself off of that nice, comfortable career as a symphonic instrumentalist and started to branch off into other areas. One was movies. In fact, when I was born, he had just gotten back from Hollywood. He'd been there a couple of years and had tried to get started as a film scorer, making connections.

Was his level of frustration, what he perceived as his failure, painful for you?

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Literally, when we said our prayers, in the end we said, "... and give Daddy his break." Even before I knew what "his break" was. I thought it was the brake of the car! The way they saw things, getting your break was political – it was who you knew. Even to this day, I take great exception to this attitude. I always felt it

was your talent and your willingness to keep working; if no one will hire you to do a play, then to go do the play anyway. A glancing difference between my father and I is that I feel talent can be realized by hard work and imaginative application. It's not politics, it's not who you know.

It's ironic that he got his big break scoring your movies – he did know you.

[Laughs] I know. We were very involved in my father's talent. That was the focus of our family. If I went to school and said my father was a soloist for Toscanini, people thought I was special – even though I was new in the neighborhood.

You idolized your older brother, Augie [Nicolas Cage's father] – he was older than you, better looking, smarter,

more successful socially – but wasn't it hard not to resent him for that?

But he was always so kind to me. And so affectionate. And so generous. He didn't have to take me to the movies, and introduce me to his friends. Rather than be competitive with him, I just wanted to be like him. So my impression of my brother was always very golden.

Augie has said that you've often regretted your successes, because they were meant for him.

Without a doubt.

So that must have given a real bittersweet twist to the successes you've had.

Definitely bittersweet. Augie's always on the verge of some incredible success. I think he got trapped in the academic world, getting the PhD. It was a practical thing.

He was the first one to get one in our family, but like for many people, the academic world was a ticket to nowhere. I was lucky to get into drama, and when you do it for many years, you become expert at it.

Yeah, but Francis, a lot of people get into drama and don't do what you did –

But he had all the same ingredients that I did. A lot of feeling, strong feelings, a lot of imagination and ideas. Willingness to work hard. He has all that. He just hasn't found his niche – yet. But he was the prototype: the one who first looked towards creative literature, philosophy, things I would have had no way to know – I knew because I had an older brother.

You did something odd when you were fourteen, when you were working at Western Union that summer. You knew how much your father wanted "his break" from Hollywood, how much success meant to him, and yet you sent him a fraudulent telegram from Paramount Pictures telling him he'd been selected to score some big movie.

It's a true story. I delivered the telegram. And it was only after doing it and seeing how happy he was that we were going to go back to California that I began to sweat and realized, "My God, how am I going to tell him?" And I told him, and he was very disappointed. I thought I could just give him his break. Kids are sensitive to what's wrong with their parents. And I wanted my father to get that telegram, and I wanted my family to get that telegram – so that he would be happy and we would be happy.

But you knew it wasn't real –

That's the madness of it. It's sick.

Wasn't the madness that there was anger under the surface of your wish? That your dad and his "talent" was always the focus of attention and that you were not considered as talented as he or Augie?

I never had a big competitive thing. I just wanted to be accepted by them. I never had those kind of needs to be a famous person. I don't think there was any anger connected to it, because for me, my ambition was more to have a year's subscription to *Popular Mechanics*.

We're going to cut to the record, Francis. When you were nine, you wrote your mother a note that said: "Dear Mommy, I want to be rich and famous. I'm so discouraged. I don't think it will come true."

She has that note. I think I was older and already pursuing the drama and show-business world. I always felt I had a lot of gifts but that my gifts were somehow not easily showable. I was not good at anything, except science.

You had polio and were paralyzed for a year when you were

ten and described yourself as "a lonely ugly duckling, sad and sick and thinking." How much of that kid do you still carry around or did you carry in your formative artistic years?

Well, I would say that my childhood years are very vividly what I'm like now. And what happened after that didn't make much of a difference. Polio, and the fact that I was the new kid in school every year, and that my name was Francis, which was a girl's name. And I was very skinny and looked like Ichabod – gangly. And I had a very big lower lip – which was the bane of my life, my lower lip. Of everything, the thing most profound to me is the shape of my lower lip. Everything that happened came from this condition.

And in 1949 I was struck with polio, taken out of school and didn't see another kid except my sister. Sitting in that room, paralyzed, watching television, listening to the radio, playing with my puppets, cultivated a kind of make-believe private life, augmented by technology. I became obsessed with remote control. Obviously, if you're paralyzed, how to turn the channel of the TV is very important.

Do you ever think now, sitting off the set in the Silverfish [Coppola's Airstream trailer, from which he monitors the shooting], that the idea of "remote" and the idea of "control" have been realized in a quite substantial, quite personal way?

There's no doubt that it goes back to that year I spent in bed – looking at a monitor, listening to radio. I spent a lot of time with my puppets; I became quite a puppeteer. I'm sure that my taste for directing – being this person doing it all by remote control – probably comes from something I was comfortable with as a kid.

I wanted to have a TV studio. And not long after I recovered from polio, I went down to our basement and I built out of wood the sound booms and the television cameras and a window where you could "play" television.

I always lived in my fantasy life. I felt like an outsider at school. I'd get tremendous crushes on girls that I didn't ever get to talk to. You would see her, but you wouldn't have the wherewithal to meet her. So I lived a tremendous fantasy life, all my life. And I still do. I spend most of my time by myself. And I do the same kinds of things I used to do: I play with the technology, I edit, I make-believe. The same things I did in the garage.

Was there a Rosebud in your youth – something unrecoverable?

I would say that the five-year-old Francis, who was the best Francis that there ever was, is still here, intact, whenever I choose to be comfortable with that. I do still

ovation like that. But never again since. And I sort have reconciled myself that that will never happen to me, except maybe when I'm eighty years old and they trudge me out to give me some humanitarian award. In other words, I have taken myself "off the hook" on a number of issues that young people fantasize about. And that's one of them.

Was your son Gio's death [in a boating accident in 1986] a part of taking yourself off the hook, in a way?

Well, sure, but I'm not sure I even totally understand that event, because I've never been able to look at it in front of my eyes. I always look at it this way. [He looks out of the corners of his eyes.] And as the years go by, I realize I don't want to look at it.

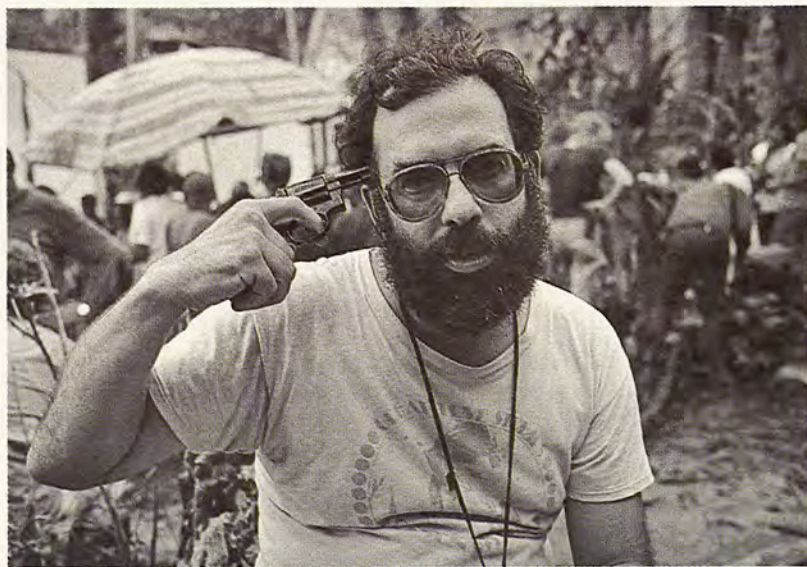
After that, I realized that no matter what happened, I had lost. That no matter what happened, it would always be incomplete. The next day, I could have all my fondest dreams come true: Someone could give me Paramount Pictures to organize the way I would do it and develop talent and technology. And even if I did get it, I lost already. There's no way I could ever have a complete experience, because there will always be that part of me missing. It makes you react to things with more of a shrug. If you told me that people saw my *Godfather* film and thought it was the greatest thing since chopped liver and for the first time in ten years I can go out and buy a car without figuring out how I'm going to pay for it, I would be happy, but in the end it would make me sad.

If *Godfather III* is a success, it would make you sad?

No. It's just that anything that makes me happy is always followed by a footnote of being sad. Because what I really wish could happen is already gone. You can see a picture of my two kids, Roman and Sofia, taken after that accident happened, and it's a picture of three kids. Because you can see on their faces the one that's missing. I try to understand. That's what makes us human beings. Would you

makes you realize that being a human being is not to have everything go the way a child wants it to go.

In a sense, losing a kid like that, that particular kid, the relationship we had, it will just be my story. [Pauses, teary] I always was shocked that Odysseus comes back and his son, Telemachus, rejoins him, and I didn't know that in the next chapters Telemachus is killed. Oh! You never told me that! It gives it another slant. It's your stripes for being a human being. You have to understand it in the bigger sense of things. And of course, I have two great kids, and we all share the vitality of that boy, and in some funny way he still figures into things; he's still around in a magical way. He was a magical kid. We



THE DIRECTOR MOCKS HIS ANGUISH ON THE SET OF 'APOCALYPSE NOW.'

got him for so many years. And for the twenty-two years he lived, he had a complete life; someone could live eighty years and not do what he did. It's not like I'm a broken guy. But in a way, there's always going to be that arm missing. It'll never come back, I guess.

If it takes the edge off the successes, perhaps it also might take the edge off the failures you'll no doubt encounter – they might not be as devastating from now on.

I'm less interested in successes or failures, quite frankly, at all. The thing about the failures: I still have that new-kid-in-school thing, I hate to be embarrassed. It's very embarrassing to be taken to task all the time in the newspapers, and all your neighbors see it and they don't want to bring it up. I never have been such a megalomaniac that it is not very easy to hurt my feelings.

Is that one of the reasons you've threatened to leave Hollywood filmmaking? From your second feature on, in 1967, you've been threatening to go make cheap, little "amateur" movies on your own.

My happiest thing is to be cozy. Just to have a little place, my own thing, a little shop. It could be opulent, but it would always be cozy. And I would like my career to be cozy. I envy people like Woody Allen, who has found a way to function: He writes a script every year, he makes a movie every year, and people find it interesting.

Weren't there times, at the height of your success, where you wondered, "Is this me?" It happened in such a hurry.

I was the first one! It wasn't like Hollywood was filled with young people. There had been Orson Welles, the boy wonder, who was an example for everyone. But generally, the motion-picture industry was closed – men in their fifties

SO PEOPLE CHOSE to SEE ME AS THIS GUY GOING MAD, but I DON'T THINK IT WAS EVER REALLY LIKE THAT.

approach things with that enthusiasm. And in a man, the line between enthusiasm and megalomania is very blurry.

Early in your career, you were a very ambitious, driven man – you felt like the greatest thing around if people liked a picture and an abject failure if they didn't.

Very much so. And now, at age fifty-one, in terms of my ego, I really have taken myself off the market in terms of ever really being gratified. Gratified in the way I saw, let's say, Peter Bogdanovich gratified once when I saw the screening of *The Last Picture Show*. I remember that very vividly. Boy, that audience saw that picture, and that audience was with that picture in such a fabulous way that when it was over, everybody in that theater, including myself, stood up and gave him a standing ovation. It was thrilling to be there. But I've never experienced anything like that. Except once, when I did a college play, the cast gave me an

rather be a rock? Would you rather not have those feelings? That's why tragedy is such an exalted art form.

Once the trauma wears off, you never experience the world again in quite the same way.

Aeschylus said something really beautiful, something like "This thing pours on your heart, drop by drop, until in awful grace of God comes wisdom." In a way, you can't experience things in a bigger, deeper way, until you understand or have some tragedy.

I was always a magical kid. All I had to do was say a Hail Mary, and it would come true. That story Fredo tells in *Godfather II* – every time you say a Hail Mary you catch a fish – that was me! I once caught twenty-two fish because I said twenty-two Hail Marys. And then all of a sudden, you say the Hail Mary and it doesn't work, in the most profound sense you could imagine. It just

who had worked in the studio system. So for me, not only was I one of the first young people in a generation that had fallen in love with film, but I was also one of the first young people to become rich overnight. And my attitude toward money was, you know, I wasn't in London with models, gambling, I was buying cameras and I was buying radio stations and magazines. I was ahead of my time in a way. I was interested in the communications age. What was my dream here twenty years ago? I bought a radio station, a theater, a magazine, a film company. Of course, I was seeing one day where there'd be a production that could be written for the theater, broadcast simultaneously on radio, that would become the basis of a screenplay that would be in the magazine and then be a film. I was already thinking about the kind of communications company that these guys are supposedly thinking about now, except I was doing it. And I was greeted with general resistance: Who is this megalomaniac and what is he doing?

Well, it didn't help that you'd compared yourself to Napoleon when you talked about power.

Yeah, but you can compare yourself to Hitler —

Which you also did!

I know. The fact is you learn from these people. When I talk about the fact that Napoleon was a person who understood that artillery was power in his time, and communications is power in our time, it's because I was the kind of person that read all those stories of Napoleon, Caesar, those people. I tried to learn. It doesn't mean that I'm Napoleon or Hitler by any means, but we do use the people who are the prime movers in the culture to inspire us. People confused the enthusiasm and the sincerity of what I was doing with megalomania. God, how many of all the filmmakers who have made money have put any of that money into their love? George Lucas,

We're living in an age where box-offices grosses are printed in the daily papers.

Why is that? Because people are more comfortable with sports. They want a score. A batting average. It will be announced soon that I'm taking steroids.

Also, it feeds into the notion that nothing succeeds like success. It tells you to go to the No. 1-grossing movie because other people are —

And don't go to the No. 6 movie, which really has value. It's such a disservice, this new attitude of scores, of grosses, in the paper. Even the obsession with how much a

movie costs. When you start to make a movie, really, ninety-nine percent of what people want to talk about is how much it costs.

I was very crestfallen during *Apocalypse Now* that America didn't see me there in the Philippines with an American flag, saying, "I claim this for the American film industry!" I wanted to be thought of as American and that America would be proud that if I had \$30 million of my own money that I would fearlessly invest it in a movie that had serious themes. I was crushed that they ridiculed *Apocalypse* because it seemed to be such an out-of-control financial boondoggle, and yet for *Superman*, which cost so much and was about nothing, there was respect.

Why were people rooting for you to fail?

Because I had had a big success with *The Godfather*, and then I tempted fate and had another success with *Godfather II*. That's enough. That's enough.

Was it painful that your marital problems became as public as they did? That your wife, Eleanor, published her journal?

Well, more I would have to say that it was all a state of confusion for me. I was very frightened. I had taken

ness — or "respect for the girl," as my mother taught me — the girl gets that vibration, and she behaves with you that way. Whereas she might be going out with your friend, who doesn't treat her in that way, and be doing everything.

So the more important it is in your own life —

The less able you are to deal with it in film. So, in a way, the director who can shout, "Okay, honey, get your shirt off! Get her boobs out!" may make the actor comfortable, 'cause it's no big deal. And I have the feeling that those few times I attempted to do love scenes in movies, I have not really been able to put on the screen my own attitudes about eroticism. I have never felt comfortable. Somehow I was never able to set that environment, even for myself. If I was ever able to do that, it could be that I might be able to make a real contribution to erotic film.

As far as your own sexual identity goes, you've said you're very "feminine, almost effeminate" —

Not effeminate, but feminine. Yes. I'm a feminine person, I really am.

And yet the point of view in your films is very masculine.

I don't know the answers to those questions. It would be interesting if I would really try to deal with a subject matter that dealt with masculine and feminine, and sex, and romance. I think that maybe I could do something very beautiful if I could find something comfortable. Something I had written and could be encouraged not to be shy about it. That's a new frontier for me. I'm a man fifty-one years old who always saw his life in terms of romance, and certainly the feminine ideal of women. I have many more personal feelings about that than I do about gangsters and violence. I am not the slightest bit interested in gangsters or violence. I am interested in power. But I'm interested in legitimate, constructive, Faustian power. Building cities and new systems that bring people together in some joyous way. I'm not interested in power to be Ming the Merciless.

Well, one could be interested in power and make a movie about relationships.

I might really be able to make a movie about relationships. I'm very moved all the time by things I witness. I would like to make some films that are more emotionally the way I feel. Sometimes I hear a piece of music, like a piece of Spanish music, and it rends my heart.

I would like to do a project dealing with eroticism, dealing with the subject of a woman's femininity; I would feel very pleased to study it, learn about it, do the research on it. That's the secret: Film directors choose their projects by what they want to learn about.

You explore a different type of male-female relationship — father and daughter — in *Godfather III*. Some of your associates were upset that you cast your own daughter, Sofia, as Michael Corleone's.

Look, we make decisions every day that my associates banter and argue about. What went on in this movie is no different. A lot of times I put people in movies that I have a gut reaction about that other

people don't see. Al Pacino in the first *Godfather* is the biggest example. There wasn't a chorus of approval.

I knew you had to fight hard for him. You had to fight even harder for Marlon Brando!

I could give you fifteen examples. All these Paramount guys were hovering around. And they didn't have the right to make the decision, to question me on the angle that they wanted to be sure I knew what I was doing to my family. It was bullshit. They wanted to have a famous chick in there with Andy Garcia! It got very weird. I said: "Look, guys, get off my set. Get out of here. You had nothing to do with the first two *Godfather* pictures. Don't bug me now."

What you must have figured out by now is that I made a casting choice. Sofia was right for the part, [Cont. on 90]



COPPOLA EMBRACES HIS DAUGHTER SOFIA.

SOFIA WAS RIGHT for the PART (in 'GODFATHER III')

...and TOUGH ENOUGH. I WOULDN'T

HAVE SUBJECTED HER to IT OTHERWISE.

that's it. And why George Lucas? Because he is my younger brother in a way, and so George did a lot of things that we cooked up together. I don't see any of these other fortunes going into anything other than hard securities. Now it's people saying: Let's make movies that have incredible chase scenes, that have violence, let's make *Die Hard*. That's not coming out of young men and women involved in something alive. That's not alive.

To be really respected in this culture is not about being courageous and having imaginative ideas, it's about being financially successful. The real decision on how good *Godfather III* really is will be made not on the basis of whether it has an independent life as a work of art but on the basis of how much money it makes. It's sad.

all the money I had, \$30 million, and had it all riding on this mad project. Two, I realized that I was starting to be portrayed as a megalomaniac surrounded by yes men, when in fact that's never been what my company [Zoe-trope] has been. Never. So people chose to see me as this guy going mad, but I don't think it was ever like that.

Given how out-in-front you've been in other ways, the absence of sex in your films has been remarkable.

I've thought about it a lot, and I have a theory: When I was young, I directed a couple of nudie films. My attitude is that when you're trying to portray erotic situations, it's almost a real advantage to sort of not care and be very blasé about it. It's like going out with girls when you're very young. If you radiate a certain feeling of shy-

Coppola

[Cont. from 66] and no one else on the horizon was. When you see the picture, you'll understand completely. That character has to do something very specific. I was thrilled to have gotten Winona Ryder [the original choice for the role]. I went way out of my way to accommodate her, 'cause she was coming late to the picture. And so when she couldn't do it, I had nowhere else to turn, and I reached out for my daughter, more as I always do with members of my family, because I knew I could count on her. The thing about Sofia is she's real, she's authentic.

Paramount was ready to just fly Madonna in there. It's got to be Diane Keaton's daughter! It's got to look like Al! If you've seen the stills, Sofia looks like their daughter. It was casting. If she had not been my daughter but had been the baby sitter that I had seen on the set, I might have done the same thing. If I had felt that the girl had enough stuff to come across.

There was a lot of commotion on the set. And Sofia cried. And I talked to her that night and said, "What do you think, Sofia? Do you have the guts to try this, 'cause I think you're right for the part, and if I don't cast you, I don't know who I'm going to cast. I'd rather cast you — and we'll do it together and nurse our way through it — than have them send some thirty-five-year-old actress because they want to put her on the cover of a movie with Andy Garcia." And she said she'd do it. She had the guts to do it.

If Sofia was a kid when 'Godfather III' started, she's certainly not anymore.

No, she's retained it. She had a big finger pointed at her, and she was tough enough. I wouldn't have subjected her to it otherwise.

At the end of 1987, you were still saying you had no interest in gangsters —

I don't!

— and you would not do 'Godfather III' because you'd just have to tell the story again, which you were loath to do. By the end of 1988, you were in. What changed your mind?

Over the years, I had heard about them doing scripts with different people being involved. And I was shocked that they would do that without consulting with me. That hurt my feelings, and I do everything by my feelings. And they said they didn't because I'd told them I wasn't interested — which was true. But still, the real reason they did that was because it was the cheaper, easier way for them to control it. So for sixteen years I heard of developing things, and they never once came to me and said, "You can do anything you want to do." They always said, "Will you do this

script?" and it was always some stupid script. I was the one that made the first film, and I made the second one just out of the top of my head. I was hurt that they never came and said, "Francis, we offer you *Godfather III*. Do it any way you want."

So, finally, when they came to me and said that, then I realized that if I could pull it off, I could once again have an audience. And I really felt that if they gave me carte blanche to do *Godfather III*, I might have an opportunity to do something artistic. All I needed was a concept to be interested in, so I wouldn't think it was just drivel. And then I started to think about all that had happened to me — now that I'm older — all those thoughts that a man has: God, I've made mistakes, will my children love me, am I leaving anything, really? And I realized I could approach Michael more as that kind of man. That he could be older, that he could be a kind of King Lear.

Are you still happiest when you're writing? Is that still your greatest joy?

I just enjoy imagining things. Daydreaming. Daydreaming is nice before it's checked. An idea can give birth to another idea before it's prematurely killed. I've found in dealing with people, with society, that you barely get an idea out into the room before there are four or five reasons why it should be killed. Sometimes good reasons, sometimes not. Nonetheless, if you kill off an idea too early, then you never get to places you would have gotten to. I like very much the imagination process. As I've gotten older, I've found I can do it much better alone.

One of the things you're known for is a more improvisatory style during the actual production of a film.

Yeah, I call it collaboration. All projects are a combination of structure and improvisation. There's the comment that a script by me is like a newspaper — you get a new one every day. On this film, maybe the script was a newspaper because the news was coming in every day: Robert Duvall will not be in the picture; we don't have enough money to do the funeral scene; Winona Ryder won't be there for this or that scene. So I kept trying to make changes, so that the script would hold water. I don't think if I was directing *Streetcar Named Desire* that there'd be a new script every day unless Blanche maybe will not be there for the nervous-breakdown scene. When we make something like *Godfather III*, we're not just trying to make a movie. Given the serious nature of this drama, we're trying to make a little piece of literature and do it on demand. So, of course, unlike an existing novel, it's going to go through all sorts of rewrites.

Let's talk about your decision to make this "little piece of literature." The end of 'Godfather II' feels as much like an ending

as one can imagine: Michael may have become one of the most powerful men in the country, but he's — as you once said — a corpse. And not only is he a corpse but all the thematic strains that you've worked through both films have been resolved — the immigrant saga, the story of American business and the entrepreneur, the sociopolitical tableau, the family saga — all have been beautifully resolved. Now here we are sixteen years later, and you're going to breathe life back into that corpse and make it walk. Did it ever strike you that this was something you shouldn't be doing, that there were great risks involved?

I didn't see it from the point of view of risks so much, but I did see it from the point of view that I made *Godfather II* to end the thing. For many reasons I wanted to end it, and given that it's not an episodic adventure along the lines of Indiana Jones, that I couldn't just start a new adventure, but that I'd have to do it with the human being — Michael Corleone — and he was effectively Richard Nixon. And I didn't know how to do it, and I didn't know you could do it. That was maybe part of the reason I didn't want to tackle it again.

But when I finally accepted the job, I thought I had one last card to play, which is Michael's dialogue with himself about his morality. Was he a good man or a bad man? If he was a good man, how does he feel about how he stained himself? If he was a bad man, how does he feel about his hypocrisy in relation to his children? With younger people, you want to portray yourself as a good person because you want them to believe in good. So, just in itself, that was interesting to me. And then I began to think I could do it in a Shakespearean play. So I thought if I work on it, if I stay up enough nights on it, maybe I'll be able to get a handle on it. And that's why I attempted to do it. And if I am able to bring Michael Corleone to life and he's a man in the third act of his life, then it will have been a success.

You said one of the reasons you hadn't done it was that your feelings were hurt they hadn't come to you and said, "Francis, it's your ball, play with it." But you'd announced any number of times that you had no interest.

That's true. And I didn't want to do the second one, either. First of all, understand the things I say: A lot of times — and maybe you can see this in my talking to you — as I discover things in talking, I get excited about them. And I may say, "And I tell you without any doubt that . . ." because I myself am in the moment of discovery. I'm an emotional person. I say things without thoughtful consideration. And nine times out of ten, there's truth in what I say, because it does come from intuition.

Let's go back to your period as a director for hire: 'The Cotton Club,' 'Peggy Sue Got Married,' 'Gardens of Stone.' Was that a dark period for you?

Well, I knew that I was in trouble.

And a lot of things in my life were falling apart. I was fighting to keep my home. And my response to trouble is to work hard. That's my conditioned response. I was digging myself out of a hole. I enjoyed making *Rumble Fish* very much, making a stylistic flight of fancy. Tucker was pleasant being with George Lucas again. I didn't like the script for *Peggy Sue Got Married*; but it's like with a girl and she isn't really "the one" — after you get to know her, you find something about her that you like. I can't say I dislike any of my films. Every one of them has something endearing, or interesting, or that I was able to enjoy.

Did you ever feel in those years like Natalie in 'The Rain People,' who says to her husband, "I used to wake up and it was my day . . . and now it belongs to you"? Did you feel then that your day belonged to the studios and the lawyers?

I've felt that throughout my career. I felt that on *Godfather III*. I thought there were unreasonable demands being made on me, as far as time. I thought if I could have made it over a slightly longer period of time that I could have finished the script before we were cast. I feel like that little bit of rush turned a difficult job into an even more difficult job. Every day I have to be worried about something? Would it really have been a less good work if it came out six months later? What's the difference? Paramount waited for sixteen years — they couldn't get it together — why do I gotta do it in sixteen months?

At the same time, I also know that pressure can bring out good things that wouldn't come if you didn't have your back up against the wall.

You said you're not interested in gangsters or violence. Of course, after 'The Godfather,' you vowed you were never going to make another violent movie. . . .

I said that? You heard me say it? You read it in some article?

They're all lying, Francis. Every journalist you've ever talked to has put words in your mouth!

No, but thirty-five percent are. That's why I think journalists ought to let you read what they write before it's published. You'd have an opportunity — not to change what they say — but to point out a mistake that they've made. But they have a fit about that.

It's the power of the press that interests you. It's power that really interests you, period, and your greatest work most fundamentally concerns its use and abuse.

I think all people share an interest in power because all people are subject to it. Anybody who's ever had someone park in front of their house wishes they had the power to say, "You can't park in front of my house." Children are very sensitive to power; men and women are very sensitive to power. Living in the world, your power relative to the other forces is a concern. But I don't think I'm obsessed with it. I'm [Cont. on 92]

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[Cont. from 90] also interested in other broad things: beauty, imagination.

What have you learned about power through your exercise of it?

I learned: Don't scare the natives. Don't let them be afraid that your power will be bad for things. I think after World War II, there was a movement in philosophy to shun the charismatic individual. In fact, to go the other way: to think about more generality and plurality. Yeah. And beware of the unusual individual. There will be another period where there are charismatic political leaders, until there's another Mussolini and everyone's hurt. But there is a distrust for people like me in this period. So therefore a person like me should try to be a little more prudent. Go slow. Don't frighten anyone. My exuberance is mistaken for megalomania.

But let's face it, as the great people that we have in our culture die, people my age are being promoted into being the kindly gray eminences. And people might like the fact that I don't have axes to grind and might want my opinions. And that's the kind of power I want. No one's frightened of it, and everyone loves that kind of person.

Give me an idea about 'Megalopolis,' the big project you've been thinking about for years.

It's very ambitious. It's a dramatic piece about society and the city of the future. I've always had a lot of opinions about that, but I've never had a dramatic piece I could put into that. It's based on republican Rome and contemporary America: Debt was the plague of both societies; both have a patrician class but are republics. And I've tried to imagine the Catiline conspiracy as happening in contemporary New York, and I've evolved an original screenplay based on that.

I'll be able to work on the scale of *Megalopolis* if *Godfather III* is successful, and my hunch is that it's going to be very successful, certainly like the other *Godfather* films. And I think the news will be that the big studios will want me to do another big event movie in the next few years. I know that certain Hollywood entrepreneurs think I'm good for that. I've already been offered. I can feel that they think I'm acceptable to big actors, that big actors like to work with me.

Do you see your life as a tragedy?

No, not at all. I have a great family. I have a wonderful career. Even if I was to be, with *Godfather III*, disgraced as I was in the past, I'm a very flexible kind of artist. There are a million options. I could direct a soap opera and probably enjoy it. I could write. I could do something technical. I love comedy. There's no project I couldn't direct. I love peo-

ple. I live in a great place. I live in a great country.

But everybody's life is tragic. That's why we read the Greeks. Human life is tragic. Everybody's life. And in that sense my life is a tragedy, but only in that sense.

How would you describe your own Achilles' heel? Can you do it in such a way, without giving yourself a backhanded compliment, like "I'm too generous with my time"?

I get terribly embarrassed. Terribly embarrassed. Very self-conscious. It was my lip, it was my eyeglasses, it was my weight. I'm very easily embarrassed. It's that new-kid-in-the-class syndrome; I get very, very embarrassed in certain situations.

Remember this? "I've been in the custody of my parents for twenty years, and they've taught me nothing but self-doubt, frustration and perpetual guilt."

That's *You're a Big Boy Now* [1966]. Of course, I derived that from my life.

But before you gave me such a rosy picture —

But talk to anyone about their parents. If they're happy people, they'll talk about their parents in positive terms; if they're unhappy people, negative. My parents have that typical Italian-previous-generation thing that makes you doubt yourself and lose your confidence and feel guilty about being alive. It's true that many of my complexes and embarrassments about myself, my insecurity about what I look like, come from that. My wife maintains that I've stayed overweight to "fit in" with that idea. Because if I lost the weight, I'd be attractive, and I'm not prepared to do that.

You're still conforming to their idea of you as a kid.

It's very powerful stuff you get when you're a kid. I used to go into school with my glasses off and face covered, I was so embarrassed about my lower lip. Everybody has one thing about them that their mother . . . She wanted me to get a lip job. Now people get lip jobs to make their lips fat. She wanted me to get a lip job to make my lip skinny.

Really? When you were how old?

All through — when I was thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. She was very good-looking, my mother. It's what I meant when I said I was an ugly duckling. I didn't have anything going for me as a kid. Except that I was affectionate. "Augie's the bright one, Tallie's the beautiful one, Francie's the affectionate one." And it was true.

It seems autobiographical when, in *'The Rain People'*, Natalie says, "Ask my mother, she'll tell you I'm incompetent."

Everyone's parent always seems to underline the bad. Is it the fear that they have? I'm sure we even do it to our kids. I'm always on Sofia for her diction and her speech. Parents' expectations for their kids are so taken to heart. Everyone's walking around with that stuff.

For a time, you said you wanted to leave the ending of *'Apocalypse Now'* vague, because you wanted your own life to answer the

question of whether Willard stays at the Kurtz compound, in the heart of madness, or comes back down the river. Do you feel you've come back down the river?

I feel I have really. I still get . . . I, I'm a depressive person. A manic-depressive person.

Have you been diagnosed as such by doctors?

Yeah.

Have you ever tried to take medications?

I did for a while, a few years. But I didn't like it, it made me nauseous all the time, and I felt I ought to be able to arrive at some sort of stability more through my mind. Although they say it's chemical. But I didn't like the thought that I was going to be on this medication, and I just stopped. They said, "You'll be depressed," so I said, "Well, I'll be depressed." They said, "Just don't shoot yourself."

My wife just gave me this William Styron book on depression. She said I should read it because I sound like him. I can get depressed. I can get sad. I wonder: "What am I doing? Am I doing what I want to be doing? Everything is so hard. Nobody likes me. I've done so much good, and yet I'm fifty-one years old and I'm in exactly the same situation as when I was twenty-five. I've got this little company that's always on the verge of bankruptcy." I can get pretty depressed.

Then on the other hand, I can say: "I have the most wonderful children. My mother and father are still alive. My father is working and excited. And all my family gets along now. No one's mad at anybody. It looks like I'll have some kind of financial peace now. And I have a beautiful company and all these nice young people."

And I can see it, the two ways. But mood is not a question of anything logical, it's kind of chemical.

Are you ever afraid that medication would take the edge off the creativity?

Although they say that it doesn't, you wonder about that. I'm such a person of such enthusiastic fits, I may stay up all night to do something. When I was taking it . . .

How long ago was that?

I haven't taken it for about maybe three years. But I took it after *Apocalypse* for about four years. This was lithium. I always maintained that if I could get the elements of my life into a little more reasonable harmony . . . I wouldn't have so many depressed times if I didn't have so many problems. But then my wife says that's not true.

That you would create them.

Yeah. So I'm hoping now if I get a breather — I'm in pretty good shape physically. I'm very strong. I've never, ever been sick. Even in *Apocalypse*, the so-called nervous-breakdown phase was more, I think, related to the fact that I was doing all these things that I hadn't done before. I was smoking cigarettes. I

never smoked cigarettes. I was smoking grass. I had never smoked grass.

There was talk you had a bad cocaine habit.

Never. I never was a cocaine type. The only drug I really experienced was grass. I had cocaine three times in my life, and it wasn't good for me. I don't understand its appeal. I'd tell you if I did. The only drug I ever used was grass. And all of it recently, during [and since] *Apocalypse*.

And I was in, you know, like love triangles, beyond my thing, and I almost — and I was tired, and Marty [Sheen] had just had a heart attack, and it was my own money, and I didn't feel good about my relationship with my wife. I didn't feel my wife understood me. She was always very conventional in her thinking, like everybody else. A lot of things I do at first are not popular, and I am hungry for some approval or encouragement. I felt she was meddling and lining up with the people that I . . .

What I learned was that when you are really overwhelmed with problems, it's easy to faint on the floor or have an epileptic fit.

You used to have convulsive fits in front of people to get what you wanted, didn't you? Back at UCLA film school, or trying to get Brando cast in *'The Godfather'*?

I am an epileptic, and these fits are real. I never did it to get something. But at a moment of weakness, it's always a voluntary option. I think even to a real epileptic. But the difference is it's an easy step to do it but a very hard step to get back. That was an interesting thing I learned.

I was exhausted. The cigarettes, more than anything else, were making me weird. The personal relationships were changing — up until the *Apocalypse* period, I'd been pretty innocent: The romances I'd had were pretty conventional, schoolboy kind of romances. No drugs whatsoever, no smoking, moderate drinking. My love life was extremely conventional. Mainly all I did is work. And on *Apocalypse*, being freed in that way — you know, I saw these sexy Italian guys smoking on a boat, so I started smoking, unfiltered cigarettes. And started smoking grass. It was like Vietnam — it was there, and everybody was doing it.

And I had a couple of romances that were sort of the-most-beautiful-girl-you-ever-saw kind of things, which all of us, when we're young, have that fantasy. All that stuff was happening to me, and I could fly a helicopter, and I lived in a volcano, and my life was becoming like a story. And then, like all good things, it was too much. And when Marty had a heart attack . . .

Also, the grass affected me a little bit: I was much more able to say how I felt. I also started getting very paranoid. I wrote a memo to my company. I felt my own staff was jockeying for political

position and trying to bring my wife into it. And I wanted to organize things more clearly, and I wrote this memo to set things straight – and they published it. And everyone made fun of me, and I was very embarrassed.

And that's when I got the idea that it wasn't fair what the press was doing. That I was doing all this stuff, and everyone back home was just laughing at me. And that's paranoia. And it increased because of the trouble I was in. I was scared, too. I was scared! I didn't know what was going to happen.

That so-called episode, I remember that night. It was over a girl, basically. And what I noticed was the next morning, I couldn't quite get back. I didn't have the energy. I didn't want to do anything. I would go for four or five days and look through the camera, but Vittorio [Storaro, his cinematographer] knew that I was lobotomized.

Like everybody, I take personal things really strong. Some little misunderstanding with a woman, or my wife, or another woman – there were two women involved – and I was devastated by the implications of that. I didn't want to lose my family. I didn't want to lose my children. A lot of men can do that. But I was just not the kind of person who could go and wipe out my family like that and do a second family or something. I'm just not that kind of person. I never will do that. I just can't.

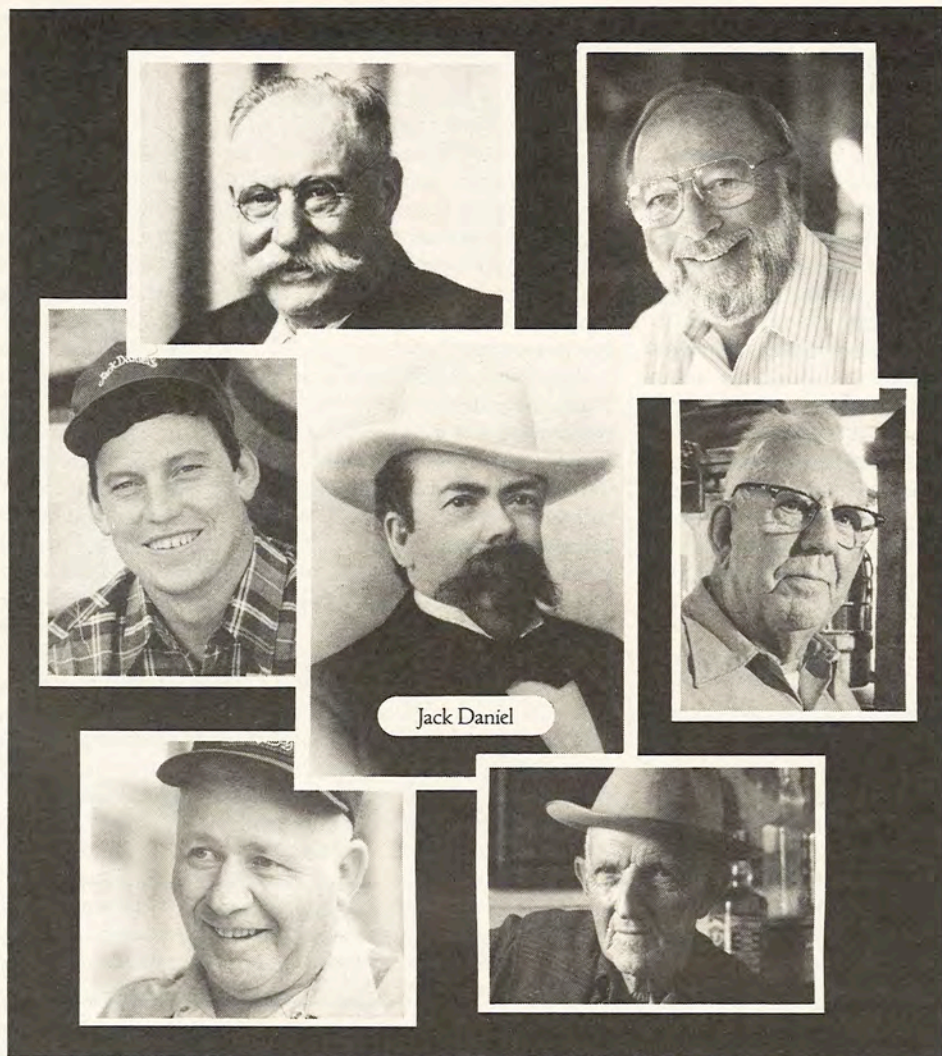
I can talk very comfortably about the great strengths of my wife. And of course, as you can gather by now, I really consider my wife like a regular person. So she has the same kind of doubts about me as you might, or the so-called "they" at large.

So now I'm very much at peace. We've been married so long, and she's so much my friend and stuff, that I don't need her to be everything to me. I can provide the other in my own mind.

A lot of young men go through things like that. Like for a long time I didn't want to be alone. If I was going to go to L.A., I would rather go be with some girl or woman. And after *Apocalypse* I spent two weeks in some little inn that was half the size of my bedroom, it was the first time where – not knowing anyone in Japan – there wasn't the option of calling any girl. I stayed by myself. When I go to L.A. now, I just stay by myself: I'll cook or I'll watch TV. I don't have any need for company.

But a lot of people, like my nephew Nicolas Cage, he's always gotta have friends or girls around. He can't just be comfortable by himself. Like when I stay in the city, when I don't go to the country, like last night, I just worked on my computer, had a little dinner and went home, listened to public radio and fell asleep. So different from what my behavior had been like.

Male artists often use the power or presence of a female to get them [Cont. on 94]



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[Cont. from 93] going, to help them create.

There is something to be said – whether it's real or just conditioning – for the idea that a girl can be a muse. Especially a girl who has confidence in you. See, I never felt that my wife had any confidence in me.

But there was one particular woman – one of the women in question – that thought I was really . . . like the girl who has a crush on her professor. And her confidence in me made me feel confident. And when I didn't have that, I didn't feel confident anymore. Confidence is a very important thing. When everyone is saying, "You're going to fail," you're likely to fail.

You internalize their doubts.

Yeah, you do. And that's why a girl – and at the time, the particular woman at the time of *Apocalypse* – always made me feel like a million dollars, in terms of "I was talented, and I could do it." And then when all that got disrupted, I was floating around. And there is the question of loss of confidence, in a ballplayer, in an artist. If enough people are telling you you're a failure enough of the time. I've seen people, very talented people, sort of lose it. And never

get it back. You can seem pretty forlorn. Even though you seem famous to people.

I have wept over the impossible question of dual loyalties. You feel loyal to your wife and your family, but you feel loyal to another person whom you have singled out for mutual confidence. This person was a writer, too. And she was a good person, and she was always on my side. That's probably the most destructive thing I've ever been through.

But also, as I look back, I don't think I was so much *in love*, and I don't think that was so much the issue; I thought after *Apocalypse Now* that I just didn't know where I was. The loss of this girl, who was always the one to make me feel really good – but I didn't know what to do with the movie and how to finish it. She was a great, wonderful girl; she's actually quite successful today. Do you know who she is? I enjoy that she's happy, and I see her once in a while, and I have no residue of feeling about what I might have lost. I'm very happy I made the decision I did. I think it was all about the project and needing that kind of muse to get myself together.

I kind of diddle around all the time, and some of the diddles become a project. But I don't attach so much importance to it all. Now I attach more im-

portance to how my kids are. It's more like an older person's point of view.

Values shift as you age.

You're not as *hungry* for stuff as you were. I'm not as hungry for that kind of woman – that kind of succubus. They're just real creatures. But as a younger man I always idealized them so much.

What saved your marriage?

I think the bottom line is that a man like me operates with a kind of lodestone of loyalty and commitment to his family that in the end is not easily disrupted. In the end, you do what you feel is right, and what you feel is right comes from your upbringing, your family. In the end, I realized you could change wives every ten years and be in the same situation. And that it's better to just have one wife. That marriage is best in the long term.

All your fantasies about being an artist involved beautiful women hanging around.

That was my big thing. That was all I wanted. That's why I got into theater. Women, girls were presented to me at a young age as extremely wonderful, goddesslike creatures.

Wasn't part of that because you looked up to Augie the way you did and he was very good with girls –

He was very popular. And oddly enough, even as the ugly duckling against the wall, girls have always loved

me. I never have had . . . I'm very affectionate. And the way I am with them they've always liked, so I've always been very successful with women, though I haven't portrayed myself that way. Women have always liked me. But I was always real shy. It's funny the way we perceive ourselves so different than what in fact is real. I have this great life, if you think about it.

It could all work out really nicely. I still have my company, and I like the company now more than I have. It seems to run more evenly, logically. I like this role of the gray eminence. People *want* to come see me, talk to me. The young director working on something wants my opinion. I like that. The grandfather.

Well, when you become a grandfather . . . you see what my granddaughter looks like? [He walks across the room to show a photo of Gio's daughter, born after his death.] This is Gia. [He then points to a photo of Sofia, removes it from the wall and holds it in his hand.] That's what I wanted for Michael's daughter. I wanted her to represent the part of Michael that was still pure. Any person, no matter who – Saddam Hussein, whoever the villain of the day is – there is a part of him that is sweet and kind, and it's when they lose that that they lose all. [He looks down at the photo of Sofia.] The real truth was the girl was like this. ■

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