



once got a fan letter that read, "You have the kind of breasts I could take home to my mother." "Why not be the celebrity breasts? It's fabulous. There are so many great breasts around, it's nice to break through the ranks. But," she says, peering down the neck of her striped shirt, "I think my breasts are highly overrated."

**T**HE MICHAEL CAINE SCHOOL of script selection has it that if the project under consideration means travel to a good location, sign the contract. If the character you're asked to play figures prominently on the first and last page of the script, sign the contract. If you can have both, sign the contract—fast. "I'm with Mr. Caine on that," says Sarandon. "That's part of choosing a role. But you very rarely get everything you want. And it's rarely just the money. You take it if it's a fun character, if it's a good director, if you like who else is in it. Sometimes you react against what you've just done. When I finished *Witches*, I wanted to do something where I wasn't swinging from chandeliers, something about ordinary people and ordinary problems. So I did *Sweet Hearts Dance*."

But if *The Witches of Eastwick* was a study in one particular brand of bait and switch, *Sweet Hearts Dance* was another. What had initially attracted Sarandon to the movie was its portrayal of a stale, passionless relationship between two people who had married young and had a few kids and were facing grown-up crises in different ways. Sarandon's character is very competent in dealing with real-life responsibilities; Johnson plays her husband, who is a congenital charmer—always smiling and laughing and doing silly things—but who forgets it's the kids' bedtime. Now, all these years later, his charm has become threadbare; her competence has grown tedious. How do you get him to grow up? How do you get her to cut loose?

"That interested me. But things changed when I got there, and I don't know what it's about now," Sarandon says softly. "I was hesitant about taking the part. It's a kind of seduction. You all talk about what you believe in and how you see the movie and what needs to be changed. It remains to be seen if people even understand what you're saying or if they're capable of understanding or if they care."

In the late '70s, Sarandon had what she now refers to as dramatic serious difficulties—although she doesn't use the word. It was clearly some kind of breakdown. It had nothing to do with a romance, she says, or with her career, nothing to do with directors who didn't listen. But rather "it had to do with my view of the way the world works. It was an unusual reaction to the nastier things about life," she says. "I just had to regroup in order to survive. I'm grateful for it; I think it was necessary. I was lucky to be watched carefully by some very smart people. In a way, I feel a little mistrusting of people who haven't been through a major adjustment at some point."

"There's a time in everyone's life," Sarandon goes on, "when you have to see the world as it is and not the way you've been taught. I had been brought up to believe love conquers all. So

I had to rearrange my structure. I believed strongly in justice. This is one of the lessons I'll be teaching my daughter: Just because you're a good girl doesn't mean you go to heaven."

The memory of the "major adjustment" simplified Sarandon's decision to take a year off from her career after Eva was born. (Sarandon and her daughter do not live with Eva's father, Italian director Franco Amurri.) "The first year in a child's life is all about decoding," says Sarandon. "Being with Eva that year gave me a lot of confidence. It was also a lot of fun."

"Other people worried that if I took off for a year, I'd be forgotten, but I didn't worry," she continues. "This is what I felt I had to do. I don't worry about things when I don't have any

her companion every season and primes him for the major leagues.

"Susan was generous beyond what one could hope for in the sense that she didn't view the movie as circling around her, even though it did in many ways," says Ron Shelton, *Bull Durham's* screenwriter and director, who can't understand why Sarandon hasn't made the leap to major star. "Maybe people can't figure out how to use her. She's intelligent, and a lot of male directors are afraid of intelligent women. I just hope it doesn't prevent her from doing the films she wants to do."

One film Sarandon is sorry to have missed out on is the 1983 *Under Fire* (for which, coincidentally, Shelton wrote the screenplay). She would love to do a movie that reflects her social conscience. Her interest in *Under Fire*, which is set in Nicaragua, stems from a mission she went on in 1984 to the troubled Central American country, under the auspices of MADRE, a national organization of friendship with the women and children of Central America and the Caribbean. Since then, she has continued to be active in the group as well as in fund-raising for AIDS research, First Amendment rights, and the homeless.

"Yes, Susan is a movie star," says Kathy Engel, executive director of MADRE. "That's what she does professionally. But she recognizes that because she's in the public eye, she has the potential to play a special role in terms of peace and social justice. Instead of running away from the responsibility, she embraces it with seriousness and intelligence. Susan's a worker. Once she decides to get involved, she gives all she has. I think she inspires others."

One of those others is daughter Eva, who has already developed a social conscience. The day of a crucial Contra vote, when Sarandon was heading to Washington to make her feelings known, Eva was on the phone with her father. "As I was leaving," says Sarandon, "I heard her tell him, 'Mama's going to the president and tell him to stop dropping bombs on little children, because it kills them. Just because he's big and strong doesn't mean he has to be so mean.'"

What Eva doesn't know yet (but Sarandon will almost certainly explain to her) is just where acting belongs in the scheme of things. No doubt she will tell Eva it's only a means to an end. She'll tell her your name above the title is nice, but not necessary for fulfillment.

"I think Susan sees her career as a long-range thing," says Chris Sarandon. "While the power to choose big parts is seductive, my sense of her is that the work has always been most important. I don't think she sits and thinks, 'Why am I not a superstar?'"

"It's not like we're trying to be brain surgeons or come up with a global peace plan," says the actress. "You work and you learn, you benefit by meeting other people, you pocket some cash, you go to a nice location—it's an extraordinary lifestyle. There are times when I'm very disappointed or I say, 'How did that part slip away?' but it's not something that kills me."

She thinks about this for a minute. "Maybe that's why I'm on the brink and not on top." ■



SARANDON PLAYS A BASEBALL MOLL IN "BULL DURHAM."

choice. I used to worry, but you learn pretty fast that you can worry yourself sick and practically ruin yourself trying to control things."

**D**ESPITE MY REJECTION OF most Judeo-Christian ethics, I am, within the framework of a baseball season, monogamous," begins one of Sarandon's speeches in *Bull Durham*. "I won't sleep with a ballplayer hitting under .250," she adds later in the film, "unless he has a lot of RBIs or is a great glove man up the middle. A woman's got to have standards."

*Bull Durham* (scheduled for summer release) centers on a young minor-league player (Tim Robbins) who has the gift but not the passion for the national pastime, and a slightly older man (Kostner) who has the passion but not the gift. Sarandon plays a baseball fanatic ("but not a groupie," she insists) who chooses one player as

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