

THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

Dermatologist Relishes Cameo Roles

Writer and film director Woody Allen was about to leave Dr. Kenneth L. Edelson's dermatology office on Manhattan's Upper East Side in March 1986, when he turned to Dr. Edelson and made him a promise.

"In his inimitable manner, Woody scratched his head and said, 'You know Dr. Edelson, you're a real funny guy,' " recalled Dr. Edelson, who did not know Mr. Allen prior to that office visit. "I'm going to put you in my next film.' I thought, 'Yeah, right, I'll be in the movies!'"

The next day, Mr. Allen's longtime casting director Juliet Taylor called Dr. Edelson to confirm that Mr. Allen's pledge was genuine and to inquire about his acting history. Dr. Edelson's "credits" included an acting and singing role in a summer-camp version of "Damn Yankees" and dancing to Chubby Checker's "Twist" in a high school theater production.

"That's my acting history," Dr. Edelson said. "She

just laughed, not having been forewarned that I was Woody's dermatologist and not really an actor!"

Dr. Edelson maintains that his sincere, warm bedside manner and quick wit caught Mr. Allen's attention during that first office visit. "It wasn't anything I said or did, it was just my persona," he said. "Woody is known for liking to take the normal regular guy from everyday life and put him in his films. My patients always get a kick out of me. They often remark to me, 'You're a real funny guy.' And I have also been told I looked a little like Chevy Chase when I was younger, [when I had] more hair!"

To date, he has appeared in 12 Woody Allen films—more than any other actor—most recently as a screenwriter in "Cassandra's Dream" (2007). He describes his roles as "cameo appearances with funny lines." His first character was a Christmas party guest in "Alice" (1990).

Other roles have included a doctor in "Husbands and Wives" (1992); the character Ken in "Mighty Aphrodite" (1995); a bar mitzvah guest in "Deconstructing Harry" (1997); a rabbi in "Celebrity" (1998); a party guest in "Sweet and Low-

down" (1999) and in "Small Time Crooks" (2000); a magician's volunteer in "The Curse of the Jade Scorpion" (2001); an eye doctor in "Hollywood Ending" (2002); a hotel desk clerk in "Anything Else" (2003); and a disco guest in "Melinda and Melinda" (2005). Along the way, he has rubbed elbows with scores of celebrities, including Helena Bonham Carter, Mia Farrow, Will Ferrell, Dustin Hoffman, Helen Hunt, Sean Penn, Cybill Shepherd, Peter Weller, and Uma Thurman.

Acting "allows some stress and tension release," said Dr. Edelson, who listed Jackie Gleason, Red Skelton, Steve Allen, Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, and the Three Stooges among his favorite comics/actors growing up. "It's fun to be

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DR. EDELSON

It's truly an avenue to express myself and be in a real different role than my normal everyday life in medicine. It's a nice outlet."

Months before the filming of "Alice," Dr. Edelson had memorized his one line for the movie: "My beloved, my dream come true." While walking to the set with Mr. Allen—a 10th-floor apartment in a prewar building on the Upper West Side near Columbia University in New York—Dr. Edelson told him, "I'm ready for my line: 'My beloved, my dream come true!'"

When they arrived in the lobby of the building ready to go on set, Mr. Allen caught Dr. Edelson off guard and said, "You know what? Forget your line. I want you to ad lib."

Rattled, Dr. Edelson collected his thoughts in the bathroom of the apartment being used for the set. When it came time for filming his scene, he parlayed his 1 line into 10. As a Christmas present that year, Mr. Allen sent Dr. Edelson a videotape of all 26 out-takes of the scene.

"It was an amazing gift," he said. "To see myself over and over again on that reel ... and it wasn't reshot because of anything I did wrong, of course!"

On the set of "Deconstructing Harry,"

spontaneously creative and artistic in a film, especially when I am told to ad lib on the spot for a scene that has just been set up for me," he said. "That's the fun part, seeing how much I can stretch my lines!



Woody Allen (left) and Dr. Kenneth L. Edelson (standing at right) on the set of "Mighty Aphrodite" (1995). Seated are costars Peter Weller and Helena Bonham Carter.

he spent a morning with Billy Crystal, Robin Williams, Demi Moore, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, and Richard Benjamin. "I'm treated like a celebrity because I'm Woody's doctor, so the stars were as much taken with me as I was with them," said Dr. Edelson, who has been a member of the Screen Actors Guild since 1990. "They got free skin advice, and I got free acting advice. It was a good barter system for me. Robin Williams did a whole number with me on how many places we could inject collagen on him for 'enhancement' purposes! Imagine hanging out with Billy Crystal and Robin Williams together! I had trouble catching my breath from all the laughter."

One of his favorite roles was that of Rabbi Kaufman in "Celebrity." For his main scene, Mr. Allen told Dr. Edelson that he is entering the green room backstage at a television station, where Klansmen and skinheads are already waiting to go on to a talk show, and to think of something to say as he enters the room. "So, jokingly I enter and deliver my ad-libbed line: 'What? ... Did the skinheads eat all the bagels already?' This got a big laugh."

Filming for each movie usually involves a day or two of his time. Since most of Mr. Allen's movies are filmed in New York City, the impact on Dr. Edelson's practice is minimal. "My patients are used to it," he said. When they ask for an appointment "my secretary will sometimes say, 'We're

going to be closed these next 2 days.' The patients then ask, 'What, is he in another Woody Allen film?'"

Dr. Edelson always receives a personal invitation from Mr. Allen to be in his movies. "It's usually in the spring. He'll say, 'I'm writing something now. I think I have a part for you that you are going to like,'" Dr. Edelson said. "That's how it happens. He knows that his movies could do very well without me, but he knows how much I love it, and besides, I know I will never wind up on the cutting-room floor as I once made Woody a promise. 'Woody,' I said, 'if you cut ... I'll cut!' He is very faithful to his cast and crew and cares for me as his doctor and his actor. Besides, the residual checks for \$1.50 I get every 2 months help make up for the HMO fees!"

By Doug Brunk, San Diego Bureau

E-MAIL US YOUR STORIES

Television sitcoms portray caring for prisoners in penitentiaries as a punishment handed out by hostile chiefs of medicine. In fact, physicians who tend to the health needs of incarcerated populations do so for any number of reasons, not the least because it is satisfying. Please tell us your story. Send an e-mail to d.brunk@elsevier.com.

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