



Our EXCLUSIVE Interview with: Barbara Hall

By Diana Maiocco, Joy Chodan & Christie Taylor

On August 25th 2004, *Moonlighting Strangers* had the honor of interviewing Barbara Hall. Ms. Hall was a producer and 5th season writer on *Moonlighting*. She is also the creator of the Emmy nominated drama series *Joan of Arcadia* (on CBS). Diana Maiocco, Christie Taylor, and I (Joy Chodan) were lucky enough to conduct a phone interview with Ms. Hall just a few short, busy weeks before the *Emmy's*[®]. She was witty, fun, intelligent, and just an all around joy to speak to. In the interview, she talks about her experiences on *Moonlighting* and *Joan of Arcadia*, which fans of both shows are sure to love.

"Once you get a taste of doing something risky, it's hard to go back."

DM: How did you wind up on *Moonlighting*?

BH: I had done a show by Josh Brand and John Falsey called *A Year in the Life* and they wound up doing *Northern Exposure* and *I'll Fly Away* – I did all those shows. But it was a period of time when they didn't have a show on the air and I was just looking around for something to do and *Moonlighting* was the most interesting offer I got. It was the last year, I think.

DM: You were there during the last season of *Moonlighting*?

BH: Yes, I was there in the 5th season but my sister (writer/producer Karen Hall) had been on it from the 2nd season, I think, and Glenn Caron was actually one of the first people I met in Hollywood, so we had known each other for awhile.

DM: Oh great! So, going back to your sister – did you get to work with Karen while on *Moonlighting*?

BH: No, we never worked together until *Judging Amy*.

JC: What was that experience like working with your sister on *Judging Amy*?

BH: That was fascinating. It was great actually. The show was up and going. It was the first time that I had really run a show that I had developed, and I was sort of overwhelmed, so I talked her out of retirement to come and do the show. I remember talking to her and she hadn't even seen it yet and I said, "Watch it, you'll like it. You'll want to write the show," so she watched it and she sort of fell in love with it and came in and ended up running it after I left.

DM: Now getting back to Glenn. You said that he was one of the first people you met in Hollywood. Can you tell us what it was like knowing him, working with him and what your impression was of him?

BH: It was great. I mean, I came to Hollywood two days after I graduated from college so I was just this kid, you know? The first thing I did was lock myself in my apartment and write a novel, so the first thing I had to show for myself was this novel which got my agent which got me

my first job. And Glenn read it because his agent was my agent and Glenn really fell in love with the novel and wanted to option it, so that was like one of the first things that happened to me, and this was before *Moonlighting* obviously. I think that was probably when he was on *Remington Steele* so we just became friends. Then when he offered me a job on *Moonlighting* when it first got on the air, I read it and was really intimidated by it. I didn't think I could do the detective stuff, you know? I never thought of myself as that kind of a writer, so I didn't take the job and later felt very silly.

DM: By the way, do you still keep in touch with him?

BH: No I haven't. I mean, I think the last time I saw him was at the (CBS) upfront when *Judging Amy* got on and he got a show that same year (*Now and Again*). Yeah, so if we see each other we talk but I don't run into him that much.

DM: Ok, because he's out in LA now doing *Medium* for NBC which got picked up as a mid-season replacement.

BH: That's right.

DM: Now, when you worked on *Moonlighting*, what was your interaction with Bruce and Cybill?

BH: Almost none. I mean, I would see them. Sometimes Bruce would come up to the office. One time we went over to Cybill's house for lunch.

The guy who ran the show at the time was Chic Eglee and the writers were just in their rooms writing, and Chic would deal with going to the stage and stuff like that so I mainly hung out with the writers. I was there the Jerry Stahl year, you know?

DM: We also interviewed Kerry Ehrin. She was there in the 5th season, too.



If you act more like this, you can save your relationship! Fans thought as they saw this scene in *Eine Kleine Nacht Murder*.

BH: Yes. Kerry and I became really good friends and we've been trying to work together ever since, but it hasn't happened.

DM: She is supposed to write for *Boston Legal* now.

BH: That's right. Yeah, she's working with David Kelley and having kids. That takes a lot of time (laughing).

ALL: (Laugh)

DM: Now, we're also promoting a campaign for a *Moonlighting* motion picture. What

do you think about it?

BH: Oh yeah. Of course! Is that going to happen?

DM: We hope it happens!

CT: Yeah, we're hoping.

DM: That's why we're doing the fanzine and we're talking to everybody from the show and getting their thoughts. We're hoping we're putting an idea in Glenn's head to think about it. He said he has thought about it throughout the years but we're hoping through the fanzine and the interviews and feeling everybody out that he might really seriously think about it.

BH: That's a great idea.

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JC: We're trying to get the DVDs released also and we think that one of the real tests is if Bruce and Cybill would actually do a commentary together because they didn't do it together for the pilot when it came out.

BH: Um hmm.

JC: So what do you think of doing commentary for the DVDs?



Is Joan the new Moonlighting? Fans of both shows see similarities, especially how Joan handles Adam and Joan's relationship.

BH: Me doing it?

CT: Yes.

BH: Sure. I mean, in a way I feel unqualified because I was only there for one season but I'm happy to participate.

DM: Now, both *Moonlighting* and your *Emmy*® nominated show *Joan of Arcadia* deal with the issues of God and faith in untraditional ways. In *Moonlighting*, Maddie was an atheist and David believed in God, so do you believe that an untraditional

approach to religion touches the viewers in a more effective way?

BH: Yeah, I do. I mean, what I wanted to do with Joan, and probably with anything that I write, is just have the discussion and have it in a way that is intelligent and inclusive. I don't want to exclude anybody from the discussion, and I think that one of the problems that people have with religion is that they feel exclusion from it? And with good

reason. There are people who do try to exclude people from the discussion or not have the discussion at all, so that's what I really wanted to do. I just wanted to have a theological debate and that's what I tried to do.

JC: Well, it's working! Bruce and Cybill are forever known for their chemistry on *Moonlighting*. Amber Tamblyn and Christopher Marquette also have that similar kind of chemistry. Is this what you were looking for when you cast the Joan and Adam roles?

BH: Well, yeah. Casting is one of the most misunderstood aspects of the business. It's not about finding good actors. It's about marrying the right actors to the right roles and then it's about how they all work together, so that's always a consideration when you're casting. Then with situations like Adam, we cast her friends early on, like the second show or third show. Then

we waited to see what kind of chemistry they had together, and when you see stuff working then you just want to keep going with it. And that's how her world of friends emerged because they all really click together.

JC: Are you surprised of the popularity of these two characters? Because they're very popular!

BH: I'm always surprised by success. "Wow! That worked! People got that!" But no, they're so appealing. They're so disarming. Both of them. I think for a lot of people, it either speaks to teenagers now or people remember - what that was like. What I really wanted to do with her and her group of friends is to create a group of friends who don't really fit in, and the fact that they don't fit in is what connects them, so they're not in any particular group. They just create their own group.

JC: Yeah. They're more independent that way.

BH: Yeah. Well, I think high school is always about trying to find your place and what happens to the kids that don't have one. I mean, you're forced to form your own group.

JC: In the latest issue of the fanzine, we had a feature about shows influenced by *Moonlighting*. I wrote the article about *Joan of Arcadia*. I mentioned a scene in the episode *Recreation* at the end when Joan and Adam dance outside of her house and also in (*Joan* episode) *No Bad Guy* when Adam comes over in the middle of the night to visit Joan and it's raining outside. I saw

some similarities with two episodes of *Moonlighting*. At the end of *Recreation*, it reminded me of the pilot episode when David and Maddie dance in the bar. And *No Bad Guy* reminded me of *Blonde on Blonde* when David comes to Maddie's house and visits her in the middle of the night. Does this happen by accident or are you inspired by certain scenes in *Moonlighting* and kind of bring that into *Joan of Arcadia*?

BH: No, it wouldn't have been a connection to *Moonlighting* because those were not episodes that I was involved with. I would just say that there are certain dramatic moments or certain dramatic techniques that tend to show up again and again because they work. One is the tension of people dancing together, because at the end when they dance together, it's because they can't be together, and using that technique sort of suggests possibility and also creates a kind of melancholy, you know?

JC: Yes, the way that they look at each other and their body language are similar for me to the way Bruce and Cybill used certain body language and longing and that kind of thing in *Moonlighting*. I see that similarity.

BH: Yeah. I really like exploring relationships where people know they should be together but can't for whatever reason, and it's usually because they can't get out of their own way. It's a perfect device in high school because people don't know how to be together and that is absolutely a mature skill, you know? That's why teenage relation-

ships just look so psychotic.

ALL: (Laugh)

BH: You're just not equipped!

JC: What inspired you to write the disabled character Kevin, played by Jason Ritter?

BH: I wanted the family to have a very real crisis that wouldn't go away – that was in their faces every day. I wanted them to have to grapple with the concept of God in a dark universe, you know? I don't think God is interesting in a benign universe. Anybody can believe in that God. So I really wanted to have something present in their lives that wasn't going to go away and that they still had to grapple with the existence of God where Joan does.

JC: And that's also what you're trying to do with Will's (Joan's father) plot line also.

BH: Yes. In the beginning, I was always saying that he's the physical warrior and she's the metaphysical warrior. The main thing I wanted to do was to put him in a world where he had to deal with very literal issues of good and evil because it's crime. And yes, I also wanted to create a character who has a very strong sense of right and wrong but it doesn't come from a spiritual place because I know those people and it fascinates me.

JC: Since both *Moonlighting* and *Joan* take a lot of risks, did your experience on

What I wanted to do with *Joan*, and probably with anything that I write, is just have the discussion and have it in a way that is intelligent and inclusive.

***Moonlighting* influence you on how you created *Joan* in any way?**

BH: Sure. I mean, once you get a taste of doing something risky, it's hard to go back, and so that was the first show that I did that really kind of inverted the form and broke rules. And there were just very specific rules to the way we wrote that show especially in terms of dialogue the way people talked and it sort of taught me the music of language which I later used in other shows that I worked in.

JC: I think that *Silence* was a really risky episode.

CT: Yes, very.

JC: But I think it was really great because you really opened up a lot of possibilities. The audience is wondering what's going to happen with Helen (Joan's mother) now and God and what's going on with Will and what's going to happen with Joan. It was a really smart move