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Kemembering 'Mommie Dearest'

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ommie Dearest — the artist formerly known as Joan Crawford — has been gone from this earth for more than two decades now. But that wire-hanger hangup won't likely be forgotten anytime soon.

Especially since La Crawford's daughter is still dishing after all these years. Actress-turned-"Mommie Dearest"author Christina Crawford, now 58, has even come out with a new, self-published edition of her infamous 1978 memoir — just in time for Mother's Day.

"I had made my peace with her long before she died, which is how I could go on with my life, and that part of it is very clear in the 20th anniversary edition," Crawford says, of her relationship with her legendary adoptive mother. "It really says, OK, after the trauma ends, how does the person who experiences the trauma cope with it? How do they deal with the person who hurt them? How do they go on to find any kind of life?

"Yes, it was horrible when I was a child. She was sick. She was an alcoholic. But I changed. It was very hard and very painful and very slow, and that's all explored in this edition."

These days, she's also plugging "Mother's Day With Christina

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CRAWFORD: More is told

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Crawford," which takes place at New York's Town Hall Wednesday night. The most bizarro show-biz event to hit Gotham in years, this extravaganza includes a screening of the highly campy 1981 cult movie "Mommie Dearest" - starring Faye Dunaway in filmdom's most over-the-top performance — as information that came to me well as a "re-creation" of Joan after that book was published," Crawford by drag diva Crawford says. "It fills in the Lypsinka, and an appearance by comic Reno.

The high point, however, is daughter dearest — an Idaho innkeeper these days — who'll be "quite extensively" interviewed onstage by reviewer Rex Reed.

"It's quite an amazing event, and I'm just thrilled about it," Crawford says. "I was an actress for 14 years, and lived in New York for many of those years, and the only thing I was never able to get was a Broadway show. And now I get to, all these years later."

The production, part of a multi-city tour, follows similar, and successful, comically campy events in San Francisco ("Christmas With Christina Crawford"), Seattle, and Los Angeles. (Chicago's up next.)

They're the brainchild of producer Marc Huestis, and, as with those other events, partial proceeds of the Town Hall celebration will benefit an AIDS charity (in this case, the Gay Men's Health Crisis).

"Mother's Day With Christina Crawford" comes 25 years after Joan Crawford appeared at Town Hall - as part of a "Legendary Ladies of the Movies" series - and coincides with that updated, 420-page anniversary edition of "Mommie Dearest." Several years ago, its author bought back the rights from William Morrow, and recently, she republished it herself. The new book is not in stores, but available only by mail order (888 526-5487) or Internet (www.mommiedearest.com).

"It is taken from my original manuscript, a fair amount of which was not included in the 1978 editions, and then, I have

preview

MOTHER'S DAY WITH CHRISTINA CRAWFORD: 7:30 tonight, Town Hall, 123 W. 43 St., Manhattan. Tickets are \$35 and \$25. Partial proceeds benefit Gay Men's Health Crisis. (800) 789-8536.

eyewitness accounts, with blanks. It completes the picture. It focuses equally on the adult years with my adoptive mother as on the childhood years."

On this afternoon, Crawford is on the line from Seven Springs Farm, the country inn and 160-acre farm in northern Idaho that she has run since come from all over the world. ("Some do, some don't" realize who their hostess is.)

As an example of the type of new information in the updated "Mommie Dearest," Crawford cites an eyewitness account of an alleged early incident at Crawford's Hollywood home.

"People from the studio were there on a Sunday afternoon for a swimming party," Crawford says. "My brother had gotten in trouble for playing with matches. Our mother held his hand over a kitchen match until the skin blistered, and he screamed.

"The people who were there were so horrified, they were speechless. My brother never got any medical attention. My adoptive mother simply let the match burn out, and went on as if nothing had happened."

Is there NOTHING loving or kindly she can recall? Crawford pauses for a few seconds.

"When I was a little tiny girl, I think that she wanted love, but she was not very capable of either giving or receiving it," Crawford says.

She's well aware that she has detractors — and that her mother, who died in 1977, a year before the publication of "Mommie Dearest," has defenders — but Crawford writes that off to people's denial or feelings of guilt over not having interceded.

"I also received thousands of letters from people who were grateful for the book, who said that for the first time, they had been validated," she says.

As part of the Town Hall event, Crawford will be doing book signings, but she won't 1994. Her guests, she says, again be watching the 1981 flick "Mommie Dearest," which she feels turned her pain and suffering into one big campy joke, immortalized by the catch phrase, "No wire hangers ever!"

"It certainly wasn't helpful, but I had no control over that," Crawford says, adding that insult was heaped on injury: "Except for the initial advance, Paramount has never paid me. I've never gotten one penny in royalties."

Another sore subject is Dunaway, who's said to be as regretful as Crawford is about the way the movie turned out.

"She never wanted to speak to me, and I'll honor that," Crawford says, adding with a little laugh, "but as far as her being unhappy, the choices were hers, and since the rest of us have to live with her performance, I guess she does