



Shogun, 1991
She fell in love with costar Warren Beatty, who played melo-drama Buggy Siegel. Now they've been married 29 years—but she's not sure if any of their kids has seen the film: "They've started watching our movies more now that I've got older, but that's not big on their agenda."

ANNETTE BENING

My Life in Pictures

THE ACCLAIMED ACTRESS AND MOM OF FOUR OPENS UP ABOUT HER FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF HUSBAND WARREN BEATTY, GETTING USED TO AN EMPTY NEST AND NEVER FORGETTING HER KANSAS ROOTS *By LIZ McNEIL*



As entrances go, Annette Bening's first was an unplanned yet happy one. "My mom had four kids in five years, so when I was born, my brother wasn't even 1. She did admit that I was an accident," says the 63-year-old star with a laugh. "She said, 'We were going to have another one. We just didn't plan it quite so soon.'"

The youngest child of Grant Bening, now 95, an insurance salesman, and his wife, Shirley, 93, went on to make many more memorable entrances, becoming one of her generation's most acclaimed actresses. She's also Hollywood power-couple royalty, married for almost 30 years to actor-director Warren Beatty, 84, with whom she has four children. Still, the actress, who stars in the lavish new Agatha Christie mystery *Death on the Nile* (in theaters Feb. 11), has never forgotten her Midwestern roots: "Wherever we are raised is our point of reference and point of departure," she says.

Her early memories in Topeka, Kans., were sweet and carefree. "We didn't have any fences," she says. "We were all just running around wild in each other's yards." At 7, she moved with her family to San Diego and soon found her



A Mother's Love, 1959
"Since I was the youngest [of four kids], there aren't a lot of pictures of me as a baby," says Bening, with her mom, Shirley. "I have four myself so I know what that's like."

passion onstage (she played the lead in *The Sound of Music* in junior high). She pursued her acting dreams, earning a Tony nomination in 1987 for her first Broadway role in *Coastal Disturbances*. As a young actress, she helped read lines for director Mike Nichols as he finalized the script for the 1990 film *Postcards From the Edge*. In turn, she says, "each of us got one scene in the movie." Hers was with Meryl Streep as a romantic rival. "I was so giddy and



Kindergarten, 1963

Bening remembers "playing hairdresser" with her best friend, Martha. "Once she had been to our house and her mom called my mom and said 'I think you're going to find some hair' because I had given her a haircut down to her scalp. [But] Martha had no problem with it."



Birthday Girl, 1961

"I'm so in awe of her," says Bening (center, at age 3 with, from left, siblings Byron, Brad and Jane) of her mom. "She's looking great in her outfit and her lipstick. My parents would go out to dinner once in a while and hire a babysitter. Otherwise, she just did it all."

FROM LEFT: EVAN AGOSTINI; PATRICK FOLGATE/PIRELLA GÖTTSCHE LOWE; MATHY/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY ANNETTE BENING



→ **Budding Actress, 1975**
 Bening (second from right) was drawn to performing at Patrick Henry High School in San Diego.



← **College Comedy, 1977**
 She studied theater at San Diego Mesa College and starred in a play called *The Secret Affairs of Mildred Wild*. Her character "dreamed she was in these fantasies, and come to life. There was a King Kong arm that would crash through the wall."



American Beauty, 1999
 She played a tightly wound real estate agent unhappily married to Kevin Spacey in the Oscar-winning dark comedy. "There would be different reactions depending on the crowd. That movie is kind of on the knife's edge," she says.



← **Postcards From the Edge, 1990**
 Filming the comedy with Meryl Streep was an early thrill. "I remember watching her and thinking, 'She never does the same thing twice,'" says Bening. "She was willing to play around and do it differently. She was a real pro and it was so exciting."



↑ **The American President, 1995**
 Michael Douglas played a widowed President who falls in love with Bening's character, an environmental lobbyist, in the Rob Reiner-directed film. "Rob, his wife, Michelle, and I made a brief trip to the White House, had a meeting with President Clinton in the Oval Office, and then I had a wonderful talk with Vice President Al Gore," she recalls. "He was so ahead of everyone on the dangers of climate change."

→ **The Grifters, 1990**
 "It was very liberating," says Bening (with costars Anjelica Huston and John Cusack) of her breakthrough role as a sexy con artist. "I took my clothes off, yes. I'm a modest person, but I'd just been shooting in Europe, and there's such a different attitude towards nudity, and I thought it was healthier. And it's mostly comedic. It's another thing to do something serious, especially lovemaking, naked. I don't think I've really done that."





↑ *The Kids Are All Right*, 2010

"Sometimes when you've played someone, you're quite glad to be done," says Bening (with her costar Julianne Moore) of the film about a same-sex couple raising two teenagers. "But I really liked playing her [Nic]. She's got a strong center, but she's very easily hurt. She didn't seem like a stereotype of a woman. She seemed like a real person with flaws."

nervous. We did a couple of rehearsals together, and then I hear them say, 'Cut.' I was unaware we were actually shooting. It was so exciting. God, I got to be in a scene with Meryl Streep!"

She soon joined Streep as an in-demand actress and earned her first of four Oscar nominations with her attention-grabbing role as a con artist in 1990's *The Grifters*. The next year Beatty cast her as his love interest in *Bugsy*. "He was incredibly intelligent," she recalls of their first meeting. "I remember thinking this guy is so smart and so sharp and funny... and he was charming for sure." Beatty, famed as a long-single ladies' man, came back from their first lunch together and told *Bugsy* director Barry Levinson: "I'm going to marry her."

Beatty and Bening (who was previously married to stage-fight director J. Steven White) wed on March 2, 1992. Starting a family, she says, "was something I've always wanted to do, ever since I was a little kid. The minute I could start babysitting, like 12 or 13, I was the neighborhood babysitter. It just always felt very natural to me." Now that their four children, Stephen Ira, 30, Benjamin, 27, Isabel, 25, and Ella, 21, are all on their own and she has an empty nest, she says, "sometimes it's hard for me to let go and just remember, 'Oh, that's not my job anymore.'" Over a Zoom chat from her home in L.A., she reflected on her family life, marriage and memorable roles: "On-camera, so much of what you bring is just who you are." ●

'Having kids was the best thing in life. Nothing comes close'



← *Death on the Nile*, 2022
 "It was a blast," says Bening (with costar Tom Bateman) of the all-star cast in the new Agatha Christie whodunit. "It was like being at a cocktail party all day long, although we weren't drinking. Sometimes we would drink afterwards!"

A Lasting Love

The stars aligned when she fell in love with Beatty, with whom she raised four children out of the spotlight. "I'm so proud of these adult children—who aren't children but they're my kids," says Bening. "They're all so different and they're out there discovering themselves. We think we're there to teach them, and, of course, what we realize is that they teach us everything."



"The three of us cooked," says Bening (with daughters Ella and Isabel) on Thanksgiving 2021. "I was very proud of my biscuits."



Date Night With Beatty at the Los Angeles premiere of her 2018 film *Life Itself*.