

I was looking at my picture at the head of this column the other day and realized that I looked as if I was growing a beard. I mentioned the fact to our esteemed publisher, Jerry Ledbetter, and he said he would fix it. But the photo brought back memories, mainly those of George Hurrell who took the picture several years ago.

So let us start at the beginning. In the late-ish '70s I got conned into doing PR work for the Laguna Art Museum's forthcoming retrospective on George Hurrell's photographs. Who was Hurrell? I asked. Only one of the most famous photographers of Hollywood stars, was the reply.

I got to work, aided and abetted by a book by the late Whitney Stine who wrote "The Hurrell Style" and "Mother Goddam," the latter a biography of Bette Davis. The Museum show was a great success. I had asked the Hurrells if they would like to stay overnight at casa Quilter which they did and which gave me a chance to know them better. Lucky me!

According to Stine, Hurrell and his chum, Edgar Payne, arrived in Laguna Beach in 1925 by means of an old Hudson touring car driving all the way from Illinois. Payne was fairly well known as a land and seacape painter and Hurrell aspired to become one, although he had been trained as a photographer under the aegis of Eugene Hutchinson back in Chicago.

Hurrell was young, brash with a unruly mop of black hair. He frequented Victoria Beach, the coffee shops and the studios of other artists. When he had a painting to sell, he enhanced the sale by offering to photograph the buyer for a modest fee. He had no arc lamps but learned to use the natural light and shadows with extraordinary success.

Among his new acquaintances was an equally brash person, Pancho Barnes, who lived in a house on Crown Point next to Smithcliff, and who was an avid aviatrix when she wasn't giving lavish parties for her Hollywood pals. Pancho admired Hurrell's photographic gift. She told him he should be shooting pix of Hollywood stars and that she would introduce him to Ramon Navarro who was a chum of hers.

And so it came about that George photographed Navarro at Pancho's San Marino estate. Ramon was dressed in some kind of tunic with seamed pantyhose (or whatever they called that sort of stocking in those days). George shot him standing next to an old white horse under an oak tree. When Pancho saw the proofs, she exclaimed, "Migawd, George, even the horse looks glamorous!"

Word got around and, to make a long story short, George Hurrell became the stars' most sought after



The Diary of Susi Q
by Elizabeth Quilter
GEORGE HURRELL

photographer. His career spanned more than 60 years and carried him beyond Hollywood and onto the New York scene. Paris loved him. I loved George. I let him bring his models down to the beach outside my house so he could photograph them for "Elle," the French fashion magazine. He wanted to repay me by taking my photograph. I told him I had a knack for breaking cameras. He "took" me anyhow and what you see at the head of my column is the result.

His remarks about some of the stars he photographed are typical George, who, in between shots, danced and pranced to the latest jazz records trying to get his stars to relax

Garbo: "I only managed to get her to smile after I tripped over some cables. Fortunately, I still had the camera in hand and squeezed the bulb as I hit the floor."

Joan Crawford: "Her drive, her ambition and her clothes horse sense of glamor were no doubt built up by a horrendous childhood."

Clark Gable: "In person he looked much as he did on the screen, but his manner was entirely different. He was almost shy."

Rosalind Russell: "The first time I saw her, she was getting out of her old Ford convertible on the MGM lot. She wore a beret and her wool suit was covered with dog hair."

Charles Laughton: "He had an obsession about his chin and would always sneak his hand into the shot, covering it."

Shirley Temple: "She fell asleep while I was shooting her. I begged her mother not to wake her. The old tyrant snapped at me, 'Tend to you photography, Mr. Hurrell! I'll tend to my daughter!'"

Bette Davis: "She had the extraordinary ability to switch from a gay, laughing pose to a completely dramatic attitude in a matter of seconds."

Spencer Tracy: "He felt he was not a glamor personality, but he had more inner spark than many of the 'pretty boys.'"

Katherine Hepburn: "She had a peculiar Bryn Mawr accent. She could change from slacks to an evening gown faster than I could adjust the lights. She was a take-command person too."

The list goes on. Marlene Dietrich, Gary Cooper, Errol Flynn, Humphrey Bogart, Mae West, Jean Harlow, the Barrymores, Myrna Loy, William Powell, etc. etc.. And oh yes, Elsa Maxwell, the famous hostess, hamming it up lying on a bear rug!

Dear George! I shall miss him and his gaudy Xmas cards. I can only imagine what fun he is having shooting angels in the celestial lighting of heaven.