

## ***DARK SHADOWS: A 50th Anniversary Tribute of Love***

Who would have believed that I have gotten to the age where I am commemorating the 50th anniversary of anything?! Part of the baby boomers' legacy is being the "eternal teenager." (And, as a typical Pisces, I am publishing this anniversary tribute just under the wire!)

Thanks to fervent and loyal fans, as well as technology, *Dark Shadows* has not only lived on to thrive and bloom but has influenced so many of the modern television shows dealing with the supernatural. Without *Dark Shadows*, there would be no shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Twilight Saga*, *True Blood*, *The Walking Dead*, *American Horror Story* and *Stranger Things*.

I was a super enthusiastic fan who was thoroughly wrapped up in the show during those young teenage years and I had an entire crowd who were just as enamored of *Dark Shadows* as I was. There had been nothing like this on television before and all the passion, drama and supernatural powers were intoxicating to 13 year-old girls who were too old for dolls and too young to date.

In the days before DVRs and cable, we did, indeed, *need* to run home after school every day to watch it and we had to depend on our memories to re-tell the story if someone missed an episode. Each day required a plan of action as I had thirty minutes from the final school bell to my front door. I could always count on the additional five-minute window of the opening teaser, crashing waves and first commercial break. I would tap my foot impatiently as I waited for the set to "warm up". My friend Rose and I got dropped off early at school by our parents on their way to work and we began each morning with a re-cap of the episode the day before. The fact that the park across the street from our school featured a majestic Victorian mansion ignited our imaginations. Rose and I prided ourselves on being able to paraphrase an entire episode. I paid homage to the show in so many ways during those years; choosing the class ring in black onyx, hair done up in ringlets for my cousin's bar mitzvah, adorning my walls with posters of Barnabas and company and even weaving heartfelt references about *Dark Shadows* into yearbook inscriptions. Already performing in plays and dreaming of an acting career in New York, I also harbored

the fantasy of being one of the actors on the show and came up with a character as well as a complete backstory!

As an adult, I echoed that popular sentiment, “*I loved that show!!!*” but always kept the real depth of my feelings to myself. I never mentioned the *Dark Shadows* actors I met at the stage door after a Broadway show or the unbelievable stroke of luck meeting Jonathan Frid walking up West End Ave during those first years in New York City. I was never comfortable with being an adult fan; it seemed to be something that belonged to my adolescent years. And as an actor, I never wanted to have a “Nurse Betty” moment if I ever shared a stage or film set with any of the cast! So I would secretly order some of the books and catch the re-runs but that’s where it stopped.

During the late 90’s, I was grateful to have the good fortune to study acting with George DiCenzo, who was one of Dan Curtis’ associate producers. George was a master teacher with a loving and charismatic spirit who became a big influence in my life and career. I will always treasure this experience and marvel that the man who meant so much to me was part of the show that meant so much to me.

Since then, I had not thought about *Dark Shadows* at all. And then, a year ago, I stumbled upon all the YouTube wealth while looking up another 60’s memory. (Clearly, YouTube could tell what I liked.) I couldn’t believe the explosion of videos that popped up! Everything from convention and interview tapings to tribute videos to the actual episodes themselves. I had not thought about the show for so long and now, all these presentations lay before me! I watched a few clips of recent interviews and felt like I was catching up with old friends.

I wondered what it would be like to revisit the show itself. Would it withstand time? Not only am I older, I have been working as a freelance casting director and producer in addition to being a performer. I was almost afraid to see if age and experience would weaken and stain the memory. Since it was almost midnight, I decided to pick one episode from the 1795 storyline which, as all fans know, was created when the audience wanted to know how Barnabas became a vampire. In a kindly, benevolent attitude, I thought, “Okay, this was always my favorite storyline, let’s see

what it's like to watch it *now*". The next time I looked up at the clock, it was almost 3:00 am!!! I stared at the clock for a long moment, quite stunned as my mind tried to grasp that practically three hours had passed in what had seemed like a few minutes. What. Just. Happened?

I kept staring uncomprehendingly at the clock as if expecting a different answer. I felt like one of the characters on the show who "came to" after being in a trance with the only evidence coming from the hands of that imposing grandfather clock in the Collinwood foyer. How did this happen??!

Well, obviously, I just kept hitting the next episode and then the next, and the next... talk about unconscious binge watching! I'm not sure if one can feel embarrassed when one is alone but I found this whole experience quite unnerving! How is it that these episodes still kept me captivated even though I had seen them all before? How is it that I was still mesmerized by the story line and my favorite characters? Was it because I was in my bedroom in the house I grew up in? Was it because I found it a comforting escape during the parental caregiving visits? It was so fascinating to watch these episodes on an iPhone and be just as taken in as I was as a young teen. I amused myself by thinking, "*I've been caught in a YouTube Dream Curse!*", which fans know was a continuing horror dream sequence created by Angelique, the witch.

I was astounded when I discovered that watching these episodes now, with an actor's eye, made me respect the show even more! I clearly heard all the complex dialogue that had to be learned during that era of live television. I was impressed by the passion and commitment as well as the character nuances that I might have missed or not have appreciated before. I so admired the utter commitment of the actors to their characters as well as the importance of chemistry in the casting. And knowing that for several actors, this was their first big professional gig, I was in awe of the enormity of *that* idea. My mind easily filtered out the so-called bloopers. Even back then, I empathized deeply with these actors for whom every day was opening night.

And so, I began from the beginning to watch all the *Dark Shadows* episodes in order which included some storylines that I had missed the first time around. Admittedly, I was no longer run-

ning home to catch the show every day during those last two years. My days had filled up with theater, dating, social activism and planning my future. Simply put, my own life became more interesting. However, if I found myself home on a rare afternoon, I would loyally turn on the show.

As befits the instant gratification age, I loved that I could now binge watch with no commercial breaks. I was so riveted by the 1840 storyline that, once again, *Dark Shadows* had become so addictive that I needed to chide myself to get back to work!

Unbelievable...I was hooked again!!! I still don't get it. What was it about this show that still had the power to engage me and hook me right back in as it did almost 50 years ago??

So after racking my brain for an answer to this puzzling question, I realized I was over-thinking the whole thing.

It was simply an incredibly captivating story that was told with the utmost passion and commitment. We were drawn into a world that was never before seen on daytime television. We passionately fell in love with or loved to hate all the people who inhabited Collinwood. And, like the crashing waves in the opening montage, we were swept up by the story that evoked such powerful emotions within us.

And isn't that the job of anyone who creates? To make the story compelling, provocative and to create characters that audiences will believe in, root for and have a stake in? ( no pun intended!)

To Dan Curtis and the entire cast and crew,

You have done all that.....beautifully.

You have created a legacy that will go on forever.

I salute you.

I congratulate you.

I thank you.

Happy 50th Anniversary, *Dark Shadows*!

Written by Helene Galek

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Stay tuned for my book, ***“I Ran Home From School to Watch Dark Shadows”***