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FRANCE

The



Rue Benouville Diaries

PARIS. OLIVIA DE HAVILLAND & THE ART OF AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE

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Bonjour!

Welcome back to *The Rue Benouville Diaries*. You're in for a special treat in this issue!

This month, I'm including a story that takes place nearly 25 years before I worked for Dame Olivia de Havilland. It was shared with me by the former owner of a large *Gone with the Wind* collection displayed in the Marietta Gone with the Wind Museum. He was also a friend of the late Robert Osborne, an author, actor, film historian, and Turner Classic Movies television host.

This story captures something of the legendary woman I knew and loved. I hope you enjoy it—and its lesson—as much as I did.

“Dame Olivia was invited to make a presentation at the 50th Academy Awards ceremony on April 3, 1978. She asked her good friend Robert Osborne to escort her.

Robert owned several rentals in Los Angeles, and he kept an old beat-up vehicle at one of his apartments. The day before the Oscars, Olivia called him.

“Bob, I want you to come pick me up at my hotel and drive me to the Dorothy Chandler Pavillion.”

“Olivia, don’t be ridiculous,” he replied. “I drive an old wreck, and you will be picked up by a limousine tomorrow night!”

“Please don’t argue. Pick me up at 1:00 p.m.”

So Robert did as instructed. He picked her up, and they drove towards the Chandler Pavilion.

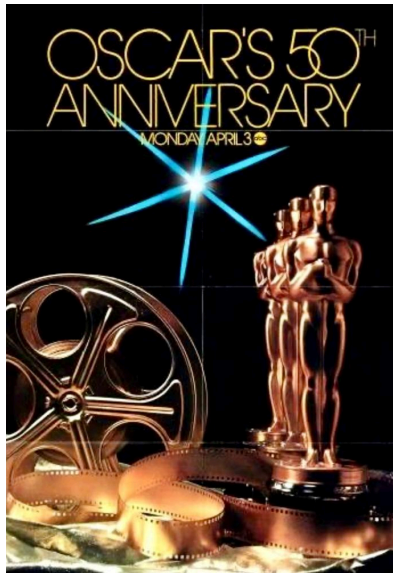


Olivia de Havilland, April 3, 1978

"Don't drive directly on Wilshire," Olivia said. "Take back streets once we are within a few blocks."

Robert didn't understand but followed her orders. She told him to park on a side street a few blocks from the Chandler, and they walked to the back of the building.

At a remote back door, Olivia knocked determinedly. Eventually a man answered. Olivia introduced herself and asked if he would be working the next night.



"Yes, Miss de Havilland."

"Good. I want you to find me an ironing board and an iron. We will wait here until you bring it," she said.

Eventually the man returned with the items. "We are going to leave these things in this back room. Promise me that you won't let anyone touch them."

"Yes, ma'am," he assured her.

The next night, Olivia and Robert were picked up by the limousine, and headed toward the Chandler Pavillion. Sure enough, traffic was terrible. Gridlock.

"Driver, please turn right up this street. Go two blocks and turn right. You can let us out there."

Olivia knew exactly where they were. She calmly walked the two or three blocks to the back door in her beautiful gown with perfect hair and makeup. No nerves. Total calm. Because she knew she would not be late.

She knocked, and her new friend let her in. She went to the small hidden room, removed her gown and pressed out every wrinkle herself.

Then she walked onto the stage and made her presentation in front of a worldwide audience with complete serenity.

And that was the lesson Robert took away that night: actresses of Olivia's era were complete professionals and took control of all possibilities. Being prepared was part of her duties.

If Olivia hadn't insisted on a dry rehearsal run, the evening could have ended very differently."



Excellence in all things was paramount to Dame Olivia. I can attest firsthand to her thorough preparations. From creating a detailed timeline for an afternoon of tea and cake with guests at 3 Rue Benouville to researching five Biblical

translations for a Scripture reading at the American Cathedral in Paris, she planned everything with remarkable precision.

Yes, she wanted to do good work, but it was more than that.

She wanted to create something special for those whose lives she touched. That was the magic of Dame Olivia: her attention to detail made everyone around her feel that the moment mattered.

My Year with Dame Olivia Book Update

There's no big news to report this month, except that my agent, Mary Elizabeth, and I are still hard at work on the editorial process. All I can say for now is that I'm excited about the refinements we're making! They are elevating the book, and I know that the finished manuscript will be worth the wait.



Thank you, as always, for your ongoing words of encouragement. They continue to put wind in my sails!

À la prochaine,

Gemma

P.S. I'd love to know if something about this month's story resonated with you. If so, simply hit reply and share it with me! And if you enjoyed this issue, feel free to pass it along to a friend.

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