

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB NEWSMAKER LUNCHEON WITH JOAN COLLINS

TOPIC: AGING IN TODAY'S SOCIETY

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MR. SALANT: Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. I'm Jonathan Salant, a reporter for Bloomberg News and president of the club.

I'd like to welcome club members in the audience today and their guests, as well as those of you watching on C-SPAN.

The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by ConnectLive and is available to members only through the Press Club's website at www.press.org. Press Club members may also get free transcripts of our luncheons at our website. Nonmembers may buy transcripts, audiotapes and videotapes by calling 1-888-343-1940. For more information about joining the Press Club, please call us at 202-662-7511.

Before introducing our head table, I'd like to remind our members of future speakers: On November 30th, David Paulison, the director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency; on December 1st, our Fourth Estate journalism award winner, Marvin Kalb, who hosts the Kalb Report and is a senior fellow at the Shorenstein Center. He will discuss "A Reporter's Lament: A Call to Arms"; and on December 7th, Michael Kaiser, president of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

If you have any questions for our speaker, please write them on the cards provided at your table and pass them up to me. I will ask as many as time permits.

I'd like now to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. Please hold your applause until all of the head table guests are introduced.

From your right, Gus Gallagher, president and CEO of Gallagher Communications International and head of our book fair that just happened earlier this month at our Costumes and Cocktails fund-raiser; LuEllen (sp) King, host and producer of TV's "White House Chronicle" and editor of "The White House Weekly"; Mark Hamrick, business editor with the Associated Press and also chair of the National Press Club's board of governors; Dinah Linewine (sp), a reporter for USA Today and treasurer of the National Press Club; Linda Carter, "Wonder Woman," an actress and singer and a founding member of the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure; Mary Lou Donahue (sp), producer and editor of "Artistically Speaking" and a member of the Press Club speakers committee; Percy Gibson, a producer and the husband of Ms. Collins; John Hughes, my colleague at Bloomberg News and chair of the National Press Club speakers committee.

Skipping over our speaker for the moment, Doris Margolis, president of Editorial Associates and the member of the speakers committee who organized today's luncheon -- and Doris, thank you very much; Jack Valenti, former president of the Motion Picture Association of America; Katherine Skiba, Washington correspondent with the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel; Peggy Eastman, publisher of "Medical Publishing Enterprises"; Clarence Page, Pulitzer Prize-winning syndicated columnist for The Chicago Tribune; and Jane Podesta, Washington correspondent for People magazine, and also a member of our Press Club speakers committee. (Applause.)

Joan Collins was born in London, but she's an icon of Americana. (Laughter.) She was the Sirent (sp), one of the special guest villainesses on the "Batman" TV show. She played Edith Keeler on what may be the greatest "Star Trek" episode ever -- (applause) -- "The City on the Edge of Forever." And she was the woman America loved to hate, Alexis Carrington on the primetime soap opera "Dynasty." (Applause.)

Ms. Collins wasn't the first choice for the role that made her a household name. Sofia Loren turned it down. But Aaron Spelling then insisted that Ms. Collins get the role, and he prevailed over the objections of others at ABC.

Still, as Ms. Collins told her family in London as she prepared to be shooting "Dynasty," "I'll be gone maybe five or six months, because I think that's all it's going to last." (Laughter.) "Dynasty" lasted nine years, and Ms. Collins was there until the end. And last April she returned for more, appearing again as Alexis in the "Dynasty" reunion TV special.

She has appeared in numerous other TV shows and movies. She's the author of 15 books, including two autobiographies and a book about

her daughter's accident and her efforts to bring her back to health. Today Katie is fully recovered.

She's won a Cable Act award from the National Cable and Telecommunications Association and has won two People's Choice awards. She's been named to the Order of the British Empire.

She's used her celebrity to help in the fight against breast cancer and to advocate for children. The Joan Collins wing of the Children's Hospital in Michigan opened 16 years ago. Today she has returned with her "Dynasty" co-star, Linda Evans, to appear at the National Theater in a play called "Legends." It is the story of two aging actresses who hate each other -- (laughter) -- but are tricked into working together again.

Ms. Collins says that it's hard to find work in Hollywood for actors and actresses over 50, not to mention producers and writers who are also eligible to join AARP. "I love to work," she told Larry King in September, "but they're going to give all the roles I would be good for, would be right for, to Shirley MacLaine." (Laughter.)

Not this time. Let's welcome Joan Collins to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

MS. COLLINS: Thank you, Jon.

Can you hear me? You can.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It's a great honor to have been invited here today, this afternoon, to speak to you. And I'm here today because I've been given a golden opportunity to speak directly to the press, whom I consider have developed today into the most powerful structure molding our lives and our society.

And I would like the press to consider that perhaps they are the unwitting accomplices to one of the saddest developments in the western world -- forsaking your elders and the desperate adoration of the young.

Currently one in five people in the western world are over 60, and today the life expectancy of many individuals regularly surpasses 100 years old, and also in women often averages right now 85.

Now, conquering heart disease would add another three years to life expectancy. Curing cancer would add two on average. And imagine what eliminating obesity and diabetes could do.

In 1850, life expectancy for humans ranged between 30 and 40 years. A person born in a developed country in 1900 could expect to live to be 50 years old. But by 1946, that expectancy had risen to 67 years old.

Currently 18 percent of the population in the world is over 60. And by 2050, the number will rise to over 2 billion. Now, that is nearly one-third of the world's current total population.

Unfortunately, though, aging is a horrible world, said by him --

(laughs) -- and it's often used in the most derogatory way by the media -- "aging rock star," "aging actress," et cetera. It's almost as though it's used to denote total uselessness in a person.

Now, I never give my own age much thought, and whenever I see it printed in the newspaper, which is quite often, I subconsciously think, "No, no, no. That can't be right. That's impossible," because I truly believe that you are as young as you look and feel.

And however much some journalists might snipe about me, which some of you do -- maybe not here, but is the Daily Mail here? Anybody from the Daily Mail? (Laughter.) I do know that I look and feel and behave several years younger than my chronological age.

You see, I don't really believe in chronological age or that, in this horribly ageist society that we live in, an individual's worth should be judged by the year that they were born. It's often an attempt at weak one-upmanship by those who are younger but who are often kind of overweight or unhappy and live a less than healthy lifestyle.

I sometimes suppress a rather secret smile when some young lady, considerably younger than myself but who's obviously not really taken care of herself, says admiringly, "Ooh, I hope I look as good as you at your age." (Laughter.) It's intended as a compliment, naturally, but I find that the arrogance of some young people in assuming that being young is superior is rather sad, because being young doesn't last. And, let's face it, with a life expectancy of 80 or more years, you will be young for less than a third of that time. And for most of your natural life, you will be classed generally as middle-aged or old.

People started telling me that I wasn't young anymore early in my career. At 25, a producer, when I told him my age in Hollywood, informed me sadly, "Twenty-five? Honey, that's not young in this town anymore." That made me think. At 31, when I wanted to start acting again after having two children, I was told by my agent, "Joanie, you're much too old to be in the movies anymore. Retire, dear. Go back to being a housewife and raising the kids."

Needless to say, I did not take her advice, except for doing "Star Trek," although she put forward a pretty good case for early retirement for actresses. So I managed to get back to work. And to my great fortune, I was able to play Alexis in "Dynasty" a few years later.

Interestingly enough, one of "Dynasty's" female producers tried hard to prevent me getting that part because I was over 40. Talk about the sisterhood -- not. But luckily, Aaron Spelling insisted on casting me. So against all the odds, I journeyed to Hollywood once more, and the rest is TV history.

At 49, I posed for Playboy. I took most of my clothes off, not all, because by this time I realized how terribly ageist not only Hollywood but most of the western world was towards women over 30 event. So I figuratively thumbed my nose at them by proving that a

woman could still look sexy and alluring at almost 50.

Now, many women have thanked me for this. And I was given much credit for proving that older women could still cut it. I was proud to demonstrate that in my way, that 50 is the new 30, although I'm not suggesting that you take your clothes off to prove it.

Bernard Baruk said, "Old age is always 15 years younger than I am." At 17 I remember thinking that 30 was ancient. And at 30, I thought that 45 was pretty old. But when I reached 45, I thought, "I'm in my prime." But I've always thought positively. Groucho Marx said, "Growing old is something that you do if you're lucky, but what's the alternative?" I think Billy Wilder put it most succinctly when he retorted to the question, "Who wants to be 95?" was "A person who's 94." (Laughter.)

Nine years of playing Alexis, a devious, lovable, hateable bitch in various stages of undress taught me a great deal about how to look as good as possible at any age. So I'm now happily married to a wonderful man who is more than three decades my junior, and it doesn't matter a jot to him about how old I am, and it doesn't matter to me either. (Applause.)

We are extremely happy and astonishingly compatible in every way, considering we spend 24 hours a day together, and on "Legends" too, at which he is a producer as well. He doesn't just love me for the way I look -- he says he does that too -- but for my enthusiasm, energy and joie de vivre, all of which I think I have in spades, but I was lucky enough to be born with, and I intend to hang onto as long as I can.

When people ask me sort of, "Well, gee," kind of shocked, "so what about the age difference?" I just shrug and say, "So, if he dies, he dies." (Laughter.)

We age from the moment we are born. Our skin changes -- our hair, bones, teeth, everything. Look at the difference between the skin of a newborn and that of a 10-year-old, and then compare the 10-year-old's complexion to that of a 25-year-old and see the difference, because, let's face it, aging begins the moment of birth and ends when life ends.

So why must we promote the outlook that youthful behavior in older people is ridiculous and wrong? We've got to realize this idea will soon be outmoded as people live longer and longer and longer.

Unfortunately, at the other end of the spectrum, magazines and popular culture are pushing girls as (young as) nine and 10 years old to emulate the fashion and foibles of their teenage sisters. And, boy, do those magazines for young girls exploit that natural desire for children to grow up, because the clothes aimed at these preteens are blatantly sexy, with their microminis and crop tops and suggestive slogans on their T-shirts.

And the trend seems to be more and more prevalent as, unfortunately, teenagers start experimenting with sex at an earlier and earlier age. Youth is fleeting, and it's tragic to me to see younger and younger girls participating in adult behavior. But it's

even more tragic to see preteen magazines encouraging this fast track to adulthood by discussing sex in such graphic ways.

Everything has really changed so radically since I was a child. At 15 I was an innocent still playing with dolls, which seems hard to believe when, less than two years later, I was playing in films. But the 1950s was a much more innocent age.

I remember reading about the princesses Elizabeth and Margaret growing up in the 1930s. They relied on their imaginations to amuse themselves, and they were only allowed one outing a year, to go to the Pantomime at Christmas.

As for most children pre-1960, treats and sweets were rare, and they had very few toys. Children today would go on strike if this were his or her life. Even the poorest children today have televisions, some sort of computerized video machine, many toys, and vacations are just taken for granted.

Today it's possible for children to entertain themselves by never even leaving home. And manufacturers, knowing that they have a captive audience, and captured by the most major advertising platform today, television, bombard children with commercials and commodities that are all geared toward them, as are the movies and TV series in which, more than often, a child has a really important role.

Childhood should be treasured as a precious time, and it goes by far too quickly. And it's also one of the shortest times in an individual's life, considering our expanding life span. If we're lucky enough to enjoy our full life span, we can expect to be middle-aged and older for the majority of that time.

So why does society insist that the old are useless and that the young act older? Do you remember a movie that was made in the 1970s called "Logan's Run"? In that, everyone over 30 was terminated in a bizarre ritual. And judging by the perspective of some of the media and society in general, we may not be far off. Live fast, die young, and leave a good-looking corpse.

But I don't want to live fast. There's a lot I want to savor in life as I grow older. And I always use the word "older" because I believe that one may become older, but we do not have to become old.

My mother kept her fridge for 30 years, and it was in perfect working order. As my father used to say when she wanted to get rid of it, "Why throw away something that still works?" And that is our attitude about older people today. They still want to work, but they are being thrown away.

It's tragic to me to see vital, intelligent people -- accountants, bank managers, teachers -- being forced into early retirement because they're over 50. If you can still do your job, why get the sack? And it's even more tragic to me to see the way the over-80s are treated in my country, having to live on a pittance when inflation is rising horribly, having to sell their homes to finance health care, and basically chopped out by a government that doesn't care. Sorry, Tony Blair.

Furthermore, if we keep promoting more and more products for the young and keep promoting the ideal that youth is it, while at the same time the birth rate is falling dramatically in the West and medical advances keep us living longer, well, then, Europe and the U.S. will just be a bunch of old, out-of-work people with nothing to do but play Nintendo.

History has taught us that many people have overcome the unspoken law that one must age gracefully in various pursuits, including, of course, most folks' favorite, sex. Many of the most famous women in history have still been sexually active well into middle age and even later. For example, Catherine the Great became empress of Russia when she was 40, and up to an advanced age was reputed to take at least one or two lovers to her bed every night, and in her youth maybe more than that. This apparently invigorated her greatly.

Mae West, who died close to 90, still had a constant live-in lover who was 45 years younger than she was, and she had a lot to say about sex. "It's not the men in my life that count; it's the life in my men," or "Too much of a good thing can be wonderful," and my

particular favorite, "I feel like a million tonight, but not all at the same time." (Laughter.) She had some great lines.

And Sarah Bernhardt, the greatest actress of her generation, had a voice that was likened to the silver sound of running water. And her motto was, "Life begets life. Energy creates energy. It is by spending oneself that one becomes rich." And she continued on stage until actually the end of her life.

But, no, this isn't all just about sex. I was just saying that to stop you all from falling asleep. (Laughs.) But consider the theory in a larger perspective. If you continue to do something you enjoy throughout your life, you won't find yourself with diminishing returns. So I'm a devout proponent of that theory.

So please let's try and get to grips with ageism and see what can be done to change the modern mind-set that everything and everyone old is bad and everything and everyone young is good.

Our values regarding old age have sadly changed. Up until the 1960s, old age was revered for the knowledge and wisdom that only a lifetime of experience can achieve. Now that concept of the wise old sage has all but disappeared.

Look at how our expectations of our leaders have changed in the last two decades. Sixty- or 70-year-olds are now too old for political office. Forty or 50 is now the ideal age, while in the 1960s one of the things that worried most people about JFK was that at 40 he was too young and not too old. After all, presidents only last eight years at best, so why shouldn't they start at 60? At least this way they've safely passed their midlife crisis. (Laughter.)

So, on another note, I believe that there are very many positive, positive things that come from getting older -- wisdom, tolerance, discipline -- and these all part of our value system, which is being

eroded every day by our instant-gratification society and, unfortunately, encouraged by the media.

Why should patience be a virtue if you can get anything instantly on credit? How can one teach conservation if everything is disposable? And how can you have respect for your elders if they are considered incapable of teaching you anything?

People, plastic, pop bottles, principles -- we encourage everything to be thrown away and replaced. It's impossible to imagine what life was like 200 years ago. And unless you saw "Titanic," 100 years ago is hard to think about. Events that happened 50 years ago, like World War II, Vietnam, Korea, are ancient history. A movie made 10 years ago is considered old. And even a television series made five years ago is now considered a classic.

But as history has taught us, one of the greatest dangers of forgetting the past is that it has a tendency to repeat itself. Millions of older people are facing a bleak and boring future without work. I can't imagine anything duller than having to fill your days watching television or going to the supermarket for your groceries.

I know that I'm very lucky as an older woman. I still work. I love to work, and I will continue to work until I drop from

exhaustion, which, with my schedule on "Legends" right now, seems imminent. (Scattered applause.)

But many older people aren't so lucky. And with all the knowledge and experience that they have accumulated, I just think it's downright cruel to expunge them from society. In our less simple and more stressful society, we need to nurture and encourage older people to take their proper place in society and to allow the over-60s to have some of the jobs denied them because they are no longer youthful.

It was gratifying a few years ago to see the respect that Britain gave to the queen mother at her funeral. At 102, she was a living testament to a world that had changed more in her century than ever in history. She stood as a reminder that while the world might change, human beings remain just that, human beings, and that no matter how old you are, you can still carry out that most sacred of all offices to contribute to the betterment of life.

The queen mother also represented the generation of people who deeply believed that their efforts would make the world a better place, the generation that lived through two world wars and didn't just pay lip service to self-sacrifice; the generation that were devoted to the concept that we were all in this together.

What will happen to these lofty ideals when, 50 years from now, our elders are from the "me" generation. We need leaders who, like the queen mother, advocate benevolence and values. And we need to give them a place in this world.

Older people's wisdom should be embraced and welcomed in our society. They should be encouraged to participate rather than to be tossed into the junkyard heap of the older and the worthless.

Well, I certainly don't intend to. And I believe that all of you can help by not asking someone over 50 or 60, "Oh, why are you still working at your age?" but rather, "Hey, what are you planning to do next?" One must always look to the future, and I believe that holds true if you are eight, 18 or 80.

So I have said my peace, and now I'd be very happy if any of you have some questions that you'd like me to answer. (Applause.) Thank you.

MR. SALANT: A reminder: If you have questions, please write them on the cards at your table and pass them up to me.

Our first question: This questioner says, "You're nothing like Shirley MacLaine. What roles do you want to play at this point in your career?"

MS. COLLINS: All of Shirley MacLaine's roles. (Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: Isn't your current production in D.C. and others like it indicative of an interest in actors who are over age 40?

MS. COLLINS: "Legends" is a play about two older actresses. But unfortunately I do not see that there is a huge amount of stage productions at the moment like that. Maybe my cohorts over there can think of one or two. Hello? Anybody who can think of another play that features two older people? Well, "The History Boys," but that was, like, two years ago. So that's your answer.

MR. SALANT: Please comment additionally on the lack of roles in the entertainment industry altogether for older women. And is it getting worse or the same or even trying to get a little better?

MS. COLLINS: Well, I think that one of the things that I've tried to say in this speech -- although I think I was probably rambling quite a bit, for which I apologize -- is the fact that we don't have the Spencer Tracys and the Katherine Hepburns and the Humphrey Bogarts and the Clark Gables and the Claudette Colberts, people who were older who had character.

And I think in that time, when we started making talkies, which I think was the '30s or the '40s, all of the audiences were older. They were grownups. Children were very rarely taken to the movies. So I think that these people represented their audiences.

Now the audience that everybody wants on television and the movie makers want is an audience of people between the age of 14 and -- I don't know whether it's 29 or 39, but it's certainly quite young. And so I suppose that is why they have to feature younger people. I mean, I see people like Kevin Costner referred to as an old man in movies.

And I think Kevin is, I don't know, 48 or 52 or something; and the same thing with Pierce Brosnan. He was chopped out of playing James Bond at 50-something, and he wanted to play it but they said he was too old. He didn't look too old. To me he looked a lot younger than Daniel Craig. (Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: Why aren't there more good roles for women in Hollywood now, even disregarding age?

MS. COLLINS: You know, these are all the same questions. "Why aren't there" -- ask Harvey Weinstein. (Laughs.)

I think I answered that question by saying that they want to appeal to an audience of younger, younger people. And it's the same with television. And I think that has a lot to do with the responsibility of the media. I know for myself there are very few movies I want to go and see. And as for television, there's hardly anything other than the news and the documentaries and "Desperate Housewives," which I love. There's nothing I want to watch. It's all -- you know, it's people having their hearts cut open and blood and gore and all that. I don't like all that.

So we -- you know, the other day Percy and I got the Spencer Tracy-Katherine Hepburn collection and watched four movies back to back. My God, they were good. And they appealed to what I call an intelligent viewer.

MR. SALANT: Is the film industry in Europe better about featuring older actors than in the U.S.?

MS. COLLINS: I think definitely. I think that European and continental people have always -- and Latin American, which is what my husband is -- have also appreciated people for what they are rather than how old they are. And I think that a prime example is Catherine Deneuve, who is 63 or 64, who never stops working in France, and also Sofia Loren, who's 70-something, who also never stops working. And I know, because I spend a lot of time in France, that women, older women, are respected and revered, and also in their film industry.

MR. SALANT: This questioner wants to know why you don't try starting a TV production company specializing in efforts serving a more mature audience.

MS. COLLINS: Well, I would love to do that, but you have to have the financial backing to be able to do it. And, you know, it's hard on the salary one makes in the theater, particularly touring. (Laughs.) But, I mean, it would be a great idea. I think they're trying to do that with a TV channel called My TV. I think I'm seeing that they had Bo Derek and Morgan Fairchild and Tatum O'Neal. So maybe there is. And I think Oprah Winfrey also tries on Oxygen.

But I think it's the people who are selling you the Colgate toothpaste or the peas or the stuff, the Tide, that want to get a younger audience so that producers say, "Well, that's not going to appeal to somebody, you know, that we want to appeal to. They're not going to buy Colgate." So I think it really -- it boils down to that.

MR. SALANT: Should the baby boom generation use its large numbers to pressure the entertainment and broadcast industries to hire older performers and produce programming geared towards people older than 45? If so, how?

MS. COLLINS: Oh, I think it's a great idea. I would like to be the poster girl for the over-60s generation, actually. (Laughter.) I would definitely like to do something like that, because I have many, many friends in the entertainment business, male and female, who find that they just can't get work. I mean, it's just really, really sad.

And yet -- and I'm not being bitter here, but you do see the same -- Percy and I go to the movies a lot; we try to see everything that's out there. But we do see the same actors in the same movies over and over again; good for William Macy and Alec Baldwin, but they are in everything. And they are older. But, you know, there are other people too.

There are other actors that could play those roles; you know, Dean Stockwell, for example, a fabulous actor. I mean, he started as a child actor and he was brilliant in that movie with Michelle Pfeiffer about the Mafia. What was it called? Oh, "Married to the Mob." And he's, like, 60-something. And I don't know; you never see him in movies -- never.

So I think what happens is casting directors get on a track for something. "Yeah, we'll have Bill Macy. We'll have Alec Baldwin. We'll have" -- the other one that's always in everything. I can't -- (laughs). And I think they forget that there are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of actors out there desperate for work. And, you know, I'm not just talking about the over-45s but the under-25s too. It's a pretty difficult profession to be in. Right, guys? (Laughs.)

MR. SALANT: Other than speak at the Press Club, how do you get the press to address your issues and reflect them and write about them?

MS. COLLINS: Well, I've written several books about that. I also write for the Spectator magazine in Britain. And I write articles for the Daily Mail in England and for the Times and the Sunday Times. But I don't necessarily -- this is the first time I've actually written -- talked about the aging issue, which I do feel quite strongly about. I mostly talk about what's happening to my country. (Laughs.)

MR. SALANT: This questioner says, "You raise excellent points about society's obsession with youth. But what's the 'why' behind it? And what, if anything, can make society change its values?"

MS. COLLINS: Well, I think the "why" behind it is what I just answered about everybody looking. And how do you make society change its values? Well, I think by letting people realize that people over 50 and 60 do not have to be decrepit old crones, and also -- male or female crones. (Laughs.)

And I think one of the things that's very important is for people to think about their health, because you cannot live an unhealthy lifestyle and look good or be fit over 50 if you've gorged on, you know, hot dogs and buns all your life and not done any exercise and not taken care of your skin. It's -- you do have to do that.

And I think that perhaps there are many older people who look really good, but unfortunately, there are some who don't look so good, who've allowed the fact -- "Oh, well, I'm over 60, so I'm going to let myself go." And you see them, like, giving up.

And I think that's really sad. And I think -- I don't have the answers, you know. I mean, I'm not a politician, but I just have the questions.

MR. SALANT: How do you persuade advertisers, desperate to reach the 18-to-35 market, they should support television and film that features older characters?

MS. COLLINS: You're all asking me for answers to this. (Laughs, laughter.) I don't know! (Laughs.) I honestly don't know how you do that. Perhaps if they'd bring out a program or a movie -- well, yes, they do. I mean, let's face it. There are some wonderful actresses that, whenever they appear on stage, everybody goes trooping to see them. Judi Dench and Maggie Smith, they appear in the West End, in the play -- you cannot get a ticket. That's about it. (Laughs.) I can't think of anybody else at the moment.

And I think that we need more examples of older people. I mean, Meryl Streep is a fantastically brilliant actress, and I guess she's -- I don't know -- what, 50 something -- and I do think people go to see her films. And the same with Annette Benning.

But on the whole, I think that -- I don't know whether people just don't seem to have the role models.

MR. SALANT: This questioner wants to know if you think this predicament mainly benefits -- mainly befalls female actors, citing Clint Eastwood and Harrison Ford and Dustin Hoffman and Jack Nicholson and Robert De Niro as older male actors who continue to land starring roles.

MS. COLLINS: Well, you're talking about, you know, the greats there. I mean, De Niro, Pacino, Hackman -- I mean, they are legends, icons, brilliant, and they'll go on. I mean, they're all playing character parts. They're playing, you know, grandfathers and old men. They make jokes about their age. When Clint Eastwood did that movie in which he was supposed to be a Secret Service agent who guarded President Kennedy's assassination that day, you know, there were many, many derogatory remarks made about his age throughout the movie, and I think -- I don't think he was even 70 at that point.

So I think it gets back to this thing that we -- you're not allowed to make jokes about people's religion, color or creed or where they come from or whether they come from Ireland or Wales or, you

know, the Caribbean. You're not allowed to mentioned that. The one thing you're allowed to do is constantly smite and jibe at the old.

LINDA EVANS: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: Yeah! (Laughter.) Yeah, Linda! (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: Changing gears, what advice can you give women as to how to retain and improve their beauty, health and enthusiasm as they age?

MR. : (Laughs.)

MS. COLLINS: Read my book, "The Art of Living Well." (Laughter, applause.) "Looking Good, Feeling Great."

No, I am quite serious. I wrote the book because I do feel I have a tremendous amount of advice to give on that subject, which necessarily doesn't have to do with ageism but basically has to do with health, philosophy and exercise and make-up and dressing well and all of those things.

So that's the best advice I can give, and a lot of the women that I know that have had this book keep it on their bedside table like a little Bible, to look up things.

(Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: This questioner wants to know if you've ever considered starting a clothing line for older women, especially career women, complaining, and I read, "It is so difficult to find stylish clothes for women over 35."

MS. COLLINS: I have totally considered it, and I have approached several manufacturers in the U.K. to try and do this, and I have been turned down -- rejected. They didn't want to know. But I design a lot of my own clothes, because I find I do not wish -- at my age, whichever that may be -- to go and wear a sleeveless evening gown. And when I go into Saks or Bloomie's or whenever and say, "I want a dress, you know, a cocktail dress with sleeves," they say, "Doesn't exist, doesn't exist." They do not make dresses with sleeves for women today -- for anybody, for anybody.

So I would definitely like to do this. Any clothing manufacturers out there that would like to contact me, my email is... (Laughs; laughter.)

MR. SALANT: How does the Hollywood of today compare with the Hollywood when you first arrived? How has the business changed the most?

MS. COLLINS: Well, I mean, it's almost like talking about the Dark Ages. I mean, I came to Hollywood when I was 20 years old, and I was the last person to be put under contract at 20th Century Fox, and it was a very rigid, disciplinary thing that they did. I was told how to dress, where to live, who was going to handle my money, what movies I was going to be in. I really, basically, wasn't allowed to think for myself, which was quite good because I was 20, I couldn't think for myself.

So I was just pushed into like, I don't know, 10 movies in six years, and went out on dates with people that they presumed were okay to go out on dates with. In other words, the studio was daddy and mommy and grandma and aunts and uncles. They did everything. If I

didn't have anything to wear, I'd go into wardrobe and they'd fix me something up. There was no such thing as stylists then. You went out and you bought your own dress, or they helped you.

But I think that this was towards the end of the contract system. There were -- I think Kim Novak, she was at the same time as me, she was under contract to Columbia. I was under contract at the same time as Jayne Mansfield, and we all had to toe the line and do what we were told. And I think that has changed totally. I think Barbra Streisand changed that in the '60s or '70s when she formed her own production company. Many other people did too, actually. Kirk Douglas did, and lots of people formed their own production companies and started saying, "We're going to do the movies that I want." And now I think that actors are -- they're on the roam. But they all have a lot more people around them than we did.

They have the agents, the accountants and the -- (inaudible word) -- the agents, the accountants, all the people that look after them. I mean, if they make a million dollars a movie, which a lot of them do, by the time they spend 40 percent to the government, 15 percent to the agent, 10 percent to the publicist, another 5 percent to the accountant, they're lucky if they have 10 percent of that million dollars to live on. So it has changed enormously. And of course, we don't have those lovely Technicolor musicals anymore, which I used to love. (Laughs.)

MR. SALANT: What do Hollywood and Washington have in common?

MS. COLLINS: Oh, my God! (Laughter.) I've only been here for a week! (Laughter, laughs.) I think there's probably a certain amount of devious manipulation here -- (laughs, laughter) -- as there is in Hollywood. I think a lot of -- in Hollywood a lot of what you do depends on who you know, and there's a lot of networking that goes on that is still rather important. And I suppose that's the same as here. But I will say one thing about Washington; it's a lot more beautiful than Beverly Hills and Los Angeles. It's a most gorgeous city. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: This is Washington, so you cannot escape without a political question. Legend has it that you are a political conservative. What advice would you give to the Republican Party? (Laughter.)

MS. COLLINS: What advice would I give to the Republican Party? Get out of Iraq. (Laughter.)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Get out of town!

MS. COLLINS: (Laughs, laughter.) Get out of town?

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: Ohhhh! Woo!

MS. COLLINS: Woo! (Laughs.) Well, Linda says it. She lives here, so she should know.

I think that -- it seems to me -- somebody said something the other day on television. They said that if they took one day of what

is being spent in Iraq and sent it to New Orleans to rehabilitate what Katrina did to New Orleans, they would have it redone -- just one day -- from the money that goes on the Iraqi war. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: How do you rate the legitimate theater compared to TV and film?

MS. COLLINS: Well, it's just completely 100 percent different. I mean, you have that whole buzz when you're in the theater, the excitement of a fresh, new audience every night. It's not just the five or six of you on the stage, it's also the five or six of you and the other entity, which is the audience, and your performance sometimes depends a lot on the audience. And if you don't like something you do one night, you can change it the other. You can do variations, subtle things that are different. Once you've done a movie or TV and you've done that speech or that scene, you can never redo it again.

On the other hand, I think that there can be a boring repetitiveness in the theater that is -- particularly when you're doing it for a long time, that you don't have with movies and TV.

But you know, I don't have any particular favorites. I'm doing the play now, "Legends," now playing at the National Theatre for another week. (Laughter.) And I'm enjoying it tremendously. And after this, I hope to maybe do a television series!

MR. SALANT: How do you conserve your energy for so many performances a week?

MS. COLLINS: I'm very lucky. I have a lot of energy, and it is very important to eat enough and to get enough sleep and to eat the right things. And I always try and have a nap in the afternoon, even if it's either for 10 minutes or an hour. I think it's -- I read about this, that Winston Churchill used to do this in the afternoon. He used to have a "power nap." So I try to have my power nap.

MR. SALANT: Do you and Linda Evans really hate each other? What is it like working with her again?

MS. COLLINS: Well, that's a really nasty question. I don't hate anybody! (Laughter.) Working with Linda is just like turning back the clock -- how many years ago? Twenty years. We managed to bring out that vile hatred in each other and the audience love it.

MR. SALANT: Are there any secrets you can share with seniors for memorizing scripts and speeches?

MS. COLLINS: Yeah. Play Scrabble -- (laughter) -- or chess or poker. It's very important to exercise your mind as well as your body. And Percy and I play scrabble a lot. We play poker a lot. We -- I don't do crosswords, but all of those things are very important.

You can't just sit and vegetate in front of a TV or even just read a book. It's really important to do everything.

MR. SALANT: You're an avid author, besides being an avid

actress. What book did you read this year that changed your life?

MS. COLLINS: No books are going to change my life! (Laughter.) I am afraid -- I'm trying to think. Oh, maybe it was by James Patterson.

All year practically I've been very busy. I did a one-woman show in the U.K., starting in March. Percy and I were -- we wrote it together and he directed it. So we were very busy with that, rehearsing. Then as soon as we finished that we had a little vacation. And I just read trash all summer. Paperback -- actually, I don't call it trash. I think, you know, the James Patterson and Dean Koontz and Stephen King -- those kind of things. But I know, they're not -- they're great, great authors, but a lot of, you know, more erudite people would call them trash, but not me.

MR. SALANT: I understand you have a new book out. Could you please tell us the title and tell us what the book is all about?

MS. COLLINS: Yes. Well, I think I mentioned this earlier. It's a book that hopefully is going to be helpful to women in every area of their life. It's called -- what's it called? Having a senior moment. (Laughter.) "The Art of Living Well: Looking Good, Feeling Great." And it has chapters on how to be glamorous, how to be groomed, how to get a basic wardrobe that can work with everything. I have pictures of myself putting on makeup from totally no makeup at all.

People say, "Oh, well, you know, you have so much money you can afford that makeup." I said, "Go to the local drug store and you can pick up the lipstick that you can find in Saks or Blooming's for, you know, an eighth of the price." And I think that most of the stuff that we pay for -- at the beauty counters, in any case -- is we're paying for the packaging and Elizabeth Hurley to have her picture in the advertisement. But you can buy just as good things for, you know, \$3 and \$4.

And the book also goes into my philosophy of life and also how to be healthy, how to be happy and how to give parties. I have lovely pictures of Percy's and my wedding and also pictures of me with my -- I have three children and I've had dozens and dozens of children's birthday parties, you know, with themes. It's an all encompassing book that everyone should have. (Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: You've been very active in children's charities. What's not being done that should be done to help children?

MS. COLLINS: Oh, my God! You can't even begin to -- I can't even begin to start.

First of all, I think that really somebody, and I don't know who, has got to address the Internet -- the fact that pedophiles and people who are in prison for killing children can have their own website, that they can talk to children, that our children today at the age of eight, nine, 10, 12 can go on their little computers and go and talk to these people.

I think that -- and we do not take seriously enough the abuse of children today. I know that in Africa a child dies like every minute. I think it's appalling that we don't do something about this. But you know, charity does start at home. And we in the West, our children, many of them are abused, starving, not taken care of and used horribly. And I don't know what the answer to that is -- maybe a new government. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: Can you speak about your favorite women's charity?

MS. COLLINS: Well, my favorite women's charity is breast cancer awareness. My mother died of breast cancer and she was only 52. So I feel very strongly that this is a disease that can be eradicated -- well, maybe not eradicated, but certainly prevented a great deal by the proper diet, by enough exercise and by eating things that are right, and also by having correct mammograms every year after 40. And I think that's something that it would be good if the government can provide for everybody. And I know that they do in England. I don't know whether they do in America.

Do they provide it? They do. Oh, that's good.

So a lot has been done, but apparently a lot has not been done by women themselves, because apparently a lot of it comes from diet -- you know, the wrong diet.

Somebody want to say something? (Laughs.)

MR. SALANT: Well, a lot of questions about what you do in your spare time. What are your hobbies and what do you do when you're not working?

MS. COLLINS: What spare time? (Laughter.) Eight shows a week, trying to get enough sleep and the proper food and naps and travel and packing, and you know. But what I do do in my spare time is I lie on the sofa or on the bed and I eat chocolates and watch reruns of "Desperate Housewives" or old movies and I just flake.

Percy and I try to play Scrabble sometimes, but we just haven't had the time. But after this show's over in May, we're going to take off to our little villa in the south of France and just flake -- I really like to do, you know, not a lot -- (laughter) -- because -- right now, because I'm trying to save my energy for the two hours a night that we are on stage at the National Theatre in "Legends." (Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: You've worked with many screen legends. Any particular memories about working with people like Bing Crosby or Gene Kelly or Kirk Douglas?

MS. COLLINS: I loved Gene Kelly. He was one of my favorite movie stars when I was a child. And he sent me an autographed picture. And when I first went to Hollywood he was like one of the first people I met. And I was lucky enough to be invited to his house several times, because we had mutual friends. And I remember his advice to me, which was that I was being taught at Fox to ride a horse for a movie called "The Virgin Queen," which was my first movie, and I

didn't like it very much because I wasn't -- I was frightened of horses. And he gave me some good advice. And he said, "Right" -- he said, "Kid, don't ever do your own stunts." He said: "If you do your own stunts, you're putting a stunt gal out of work and, second of all, it's dangerous. Look what happened to Ricardo Montalban."

So I said, "What happened to Ricardo Montalban?"

He said, "He was thrown by a horse in movie and he said he's had chronic back pain ever since."

And then he listed another -- a lot of people who had been hurt doing stunts. But he was so adorable and just like he was in "Singing in the Rain." And when I produced my own miniseries a few years later called "Sins" and I was the producer -- and also, I'm very good at casting. I cast all of this lot here. I was helpful with it. I insisted that maybe he could play my older husband. So we were in Paris and the other producer, Steve Krantz -- he was Judith Krantz's husband -- said, "Do you know Gene?"

I said, "Yes, I know him. He's at the Creole. Let's go see him."

And so we sent him a script and we went to see him, and I said, "Would you consider doing this, Gene?"

And he said, "Kid, for you I'd do anything." And he did, and we did that miniseries and he was wonderful. I was really sad when he died. It was very sad to me because he was like a childhood idol.

Another person that I adore is Paul Newman, who is a very good friend, and who in fact does a voiceover in our play as -- and he did it because he was my friend. So if you come to see "Legends" you'll hear -- actually hear -- Paul Newman's voice.

MR. SALANT: How does your husband deal with comments about being married to a woman three decades older?

MS. COLLINS: Well, ask him! (Laughter, applause.)

I told you, you know -- do you want to answer that question?

Yes! (Applause.)

PERCY GIBSON: When you're married to someone as beautiful as Joan Collins, you deal with it just fine. (Laughter, applause.)

MR. SALANT: Before we ask our last question, I'd like to offer you the National Press Club coffee mug.

MS. COLLINS: Oh, has it got coffee in it? (Laughter.) Thank you!

MR. SALANT: It'll be perfect for drinking a hot beverage while you're sitting at home eating chocolates and watching old movies on television.

MS. COLLINS: Yes. (Laughs.) Thank you.

MR. SALANT: And a certificate of appreciation for appearing here today.

MS. COLLINS: Oh, how lovely!

MR. SALANT: Thank you very much.

MS. COLLINS: Thank you, Jonathan. (Applause.)

Thank you, all of you. Thank you for coming out. It's been great fun. I hope I didn't bore the ass off you. (Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: One last question, and that is, what is it like to have played such a prominent role in American pop culture?

MS. COLLINS: Oh! Well, I never really think about it, actually, except that I do seem to think that -- I remember I spoke to Henry Winkler, who played the Fonz in "Happy Days." And I said, "Henry, I've just stopped doing Alexis. How long do you think it'll be before people stop me and say, 'Alexis, Alexis'?"

He said, "About three years."

Well, it's now 15 years later and they're still doing it. So Henry was wrong. (Laughter, Applause.)

Thank you. Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: Well, thank you.

I'd like to thank everybody for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Jo Anne Booz, Howard Rothman, the library for organizing today's lunch. Research is available to all Press Club members through our library. And good afternoon; we're adjourned.

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