

LANE CHANGER

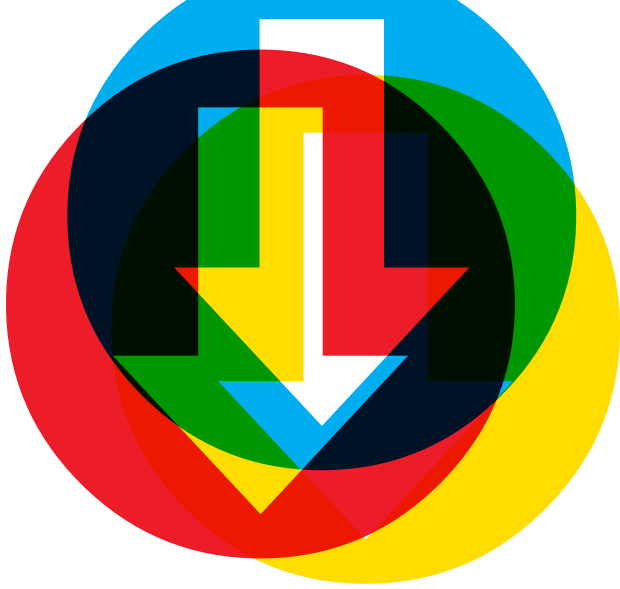




WHEN

A PRODUCER of the new documentary *Half the Sky* asked **DIANE LANE** to help expose the abuse of women in Somaliland, she leapt at the chance. Here, the Oscar-nominated actress talks about what she learned, the newly empty nest she shares with husband Josh Brolin and the difficult childhood that led to her extraordinary career > > > >





➤ **THERE'S A MOMENT** in the new PBS documentary *Half the Sky* that won't easily be forgotten. During a visit to Somaliland, in eastern Africa, Diane Lane is sitting on a floral sofa watching a video of a young girl undergoing the ritual procedure of female genital mutilation (FGM). The camera stays on Lane's face, sparing viewers details of the surgery, which is often performed without anesthesia, but the actress's horrified reaction tells us enough.

The video, which was filmed in 1976 to document the barbarism of the procedure, was shot without sound. Nonetheless, Lane says now, "I can still hear [that girl] screaming. The video was taken around the time I was nine years old, the age of the child on the table. I thought, Wow, that could be me. The chance of where you're born, who you're born to, your gender and color—it's so bizarre to think your fate is determined by such things."

In the documentary, Lane, 47, and five other actresses—Eva Mendes, America Ferrera, Meg Ryan, Olivia Wilde and Gabrielle Union—each travel to a different country in Asia or Africa to draw attention to cultures in which egregious mistreatment of women and girls is endemic. The film, which airs in two parts, on October 1 and 2, is based on the best seller by *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof and his wife, Sheryl WuDunn, a former journalist at the paper who now works in finance. "My role at the minimum was to be a witness and an ambassador," says Lane. "I'm guilty of the sheltered, privileged life of an

American woman. I was grateful to have the scales cleansed from my eyes about the plight of women in the majority of the world."

She read *Half the Sky* (the title alludes to a Mao Zedong maxim, "Women hold up half the sky") at the suggestion of her friend Maria Bello and leapt at the chance to join the project. "I felt dared, and I loved the book," Lane says. "I'm out of my twenties, I've been around a little, I thought, What am I going to care about when I'm 80? If I can contribute to something that stirs my heart, then it's all for something."

Appearing in a documentary is a departure for the actress, who has some 50 TV and feature movies to her credit, but she has long experience serving as the viewer's chaperrone into the knotty terrain of others' lives. From her first film, opposite Sir Laurence Olivier in 1979's *A Little Romance*, through a series of roles in her teens, including a trio directed by Francis Ford Coppola (*The Outsiders*, *Rumble Fish*, *The Cotton Club*), and into the more adult subject matter of *A Walk on the Moon* and *Unfaithful*, Lane has portrayed an assortment of complicated girls, wives and mothers grappling with the tangled messiness of life.

In Tony Goldwyn's *A Walk on the Moon*, she showed us why a woman who loves her husband (Liev Schreiber) would nonetheless risk a sexual adventure with an itinerant salesman (Viggo Mortensen). "If someone else had played that part, it would have been just a sappy movie," says Mortensen. "Diane was really the engine of that story—and it was a difficult part to play, to

make sympathetic. She may be the least vain actress I've ever seen."

When director Adrian Lyne watched her performance, he was "just blown away," he says, and subsequently cast her in *Unfaithful*. This time she was stepping out on Richard Gere for carnal afternoons with a rare-book dealer played by Olivier Martinez. Lane earned Oscar and Golden Globe nominations for her riveting portrayal of a woman at once ashamed and enraptured—and finally devastated—by her unlikely liaison. "She's a very courageous actor, kind of fearless," says Lyne. "She's prepared to examine what she's doing and doesn't have any ego about it."



ROBERT DUVALL considers *Lonesome Dove*, the acclaimed 1989 Western miniseries he made with Lane, one of his favorite projects. Duvall played Gus McCrae, a cattleman who takes Lane's prostitute under his wing. "I'll always think of her as 'Lorie darlin,'" he admits. Although Gus repeatedly asked Lorie for "a poke," Duvall didn't do the same. "Diane was with her French Tarzan husband [Christopher Lambert] at the time," he says, laughing. "So it was platonic, with good, warm feelings."

Despite decades of stardom, Lane seems devoted to keeping her own light at a more manageable level. She arrives at Red O, a snazzy Mexican restaurant in West Hollywood, dressed in white jeans, a rumpled man's-style linen shirt, flat sandals and no perceptible makeup; her only jewelry is a thick, etched wedding band. Jet-lagged after a vacation



ELIZABETH AND JAMES
feather blazer; saksfifth
avenue.com. PANACHE
lace bra; nordstrom.com.
WOLFÖRD *nylon blend
tights*; wolfordshop.com.
BOTTEGA VENETA *padé
diamond ring*; bottega
veneta.com for stores.
PREVIOUS SPREAD:
JIMMY CHOO *suede san-
dals*; jimmychoo.com. 



➤ **“I’M GRATEFUL** that with time I’m accepting my own true heart and the tenderness more. Things don’t last FOREVER, so you take care of them. I learn from WORKING,” says Lane. —

in Scotland with her husband, actor Josh Brolin, she is still thinking about Somaliland. “I’m daunted and humbled,” she says, “by the amount of work there is to do.”

» **LANE’S** « **SEGMENT** in *Half the Sky* centers on 74-year-old Edna Adan Ismail and the hospital she founded in Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland (originally northwestern Somalia). At an age when most people retire, Ismail, a former first lady of Somalia and an outspoken critic of FGM, sold her Mercedes and her jewelry and raised money around the world to provide a hospital and a midwife-education program to support the women of her homeland. Somali women and their babies have among the highest mortality rates in the world. Delivering, not to mention conceiving, a child when the tissue surrounding the vagina has been radically excised and sewn shut is fraught with complication. “How would you have a baby around a chastity belt?” asks Lane. It was Ismail, Somalia’s first British-trained nurse and midwife, who recorded the FGM video and, decades later, showed it to Lane.

“When we knew that a Hollywood star would be coming for the documentary, many of us, including me, were expecting the stereotype: an artificial, self-centered and fragile person,” Ismail says. “Instead, I found a warm, intelligent and naturally beautiful woman who was genuinely concerned about the poverty and ill health of the people she met.”

At the Edna Adan Maternity Hospital, Lane donned hand-me-down scrubs (most of the equipment and uniforms are donated) and attended the birth of a baby girl. She cut the cord and delivered the bundled newborn to her father, an experience she

recalls as “the biggest goose bump I’ll ever have. You feel like you’re part of the blessing of life.” Dressed in caftans and headscarves, she rode with Ismail and Kristof over miles of tracks (so bumpy, “they rattle the fillings right out of your teeth,” she says) to remote villages to visit Ismail’s midwives and check in on pregnant women who needed attention. “Edna was training me, because she can’t help herself,” Lane says with a smile. “She took me by the hand, and a woman let me feel her belly. Now I can tell some things about how the baby is positioned and where the head is. It is something to see these women. Some are on their 12th child. They’ve lost several others, either in childbirth or later.” She and Kristof also interviewed “cutters,” the women who make a living performing FGM in the villages. “We were talking about some delicate issues,” says Kristof. “Diane was fine crouching in somebody’s hut and making her feel at ease.”

“The majority of Edna’s countrymen and -women are nomads with camels out looking for water so they can grow something to feed their goats and have milk,” Lane says. “The women weave their houses out of fibers. They roll them up and put them on their camels, and they go.”

Half the Sky executive producer Jamie Gordon initially approached Lane partly because she knew of her involvement with Heifer International, a charity that donates livestock to the desperately poor. “Four years ago,” Lane says, “I went online and signed up with my [teenage] daughter to go on one of their trips, to Rwanda. No camera crews, no celebrity do-gooder thing. We just wanted to witness their work.”

The experience primed her for the *Half the Sky* project, for which Lane spent 10 days in Somaliland,

in bare-bones conditions. “Diane’s not a diva,” reports director and executive producer Maro Chermayeff, who accompanied her. “She’s thoughtful, an observer, but she didn’t want boundaries. She was physically warm with people and didn’t care about the camera or worry about how she looked.”

There’s a resilience about Lane that’s palpable, a sense that her beauty is something of a feint, an exquisite shield concealing a determined soul. As she talks, she tosses her hair back like a teenager, but her low-register voice is commanding. “She chooses her words with great care,” says Laura Dern, a friend since the two starred as punk rockers in 1981’s *Ladies and Gentlemen, The Fabulous Stains*. “Diane considers what she’s expressing and takes incredible personal responsibility.”

Onscreen she dares us to accept her characters at face value: In *Unfaithful* and *A Walk on the Moon*, she’s the picture of propriety while secretly immersed in torrid affairs. As Pat Loud in *Cinema Verite*—the HBO movie based on the 1973 PBS series *An American Family*—she’s an affluent Santa Barbara mom with enigmatic motives. “Diane’s elegant,” says James Gandolfini, who costarred. “She’s beautiful and refined and a smart, smart lady.” But check her out hammering on the storm shutters at the beach house in *Nights in Rodanthe*. The woman is profoundly capable.

“I have learned a lot from my characters,” says Lane. “They’ve made me more accepting of my own . . . the dreaded word: vulnerabilities. You must be vulnerable emotionally for the audience to care and feel for you. I’m much more the tough cookie. When I was younger, I didn’t want to explore that. I was more interested in protecting myself. I’m grateful that with time I’m accepting my own

true heart and the tenderness more. Things don't last forever, so you take care of them. I learn from working."

She's been at it for a long time. Her father, Burt Lane, was an acting coach and sometime cabdriver for whom the craft of acting was, she says, a religion. At age six, she performed with New York's experimental theater company La MaMa, playing a role in Euripides's *Medea* (she learned her Greek lines phonetically); later on, she toured in other ancient tragedies. "I got killed in every play," she wryly notes. But she saw the world, performing in the ruins of Athens, Persepolis and Baalbek, and traveling to Italy, Germany, France, Scotland and Finland.

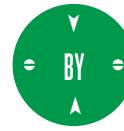
When *A Little Romance* began filming in Paris, Lane was 13 and had already been to the city five times: "I'd performed at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord. I knew La Rochelle and areas of France. People thought that was precocious. I realized I shouldn't talk about it."

dad. "You'd have made me an actress if I had two heads!" she recalls shouting when she was 12, before throwing a chair to drive the point home.

Because of rehearsals and performances, "I was missing out on a lot, sports and friend stuff," she says. "Normal childhood looked like a candy store and Christmas to me." It got further out of reach when, at 14, Lane landed on the cover of *Time* for a story about child stars that included Tatum O'Neal and Brooke Shields. "I was so happy to see other specimens," Lane says. "It was such a rarity. I don't think young people today remember there was a time when 14-year-olds didn't control the entertainment industry."

Burt Lane, who died in 2002, was determined that his daughter be able to take care of herself. "He would say, 'I did not raise you for bondage,'" she remembers. "He would elucidate this whole scenario: A guy is going to chain you to a chair, have his way with you until you're pregnant with

prior marriage, whom Diane first met in her twenties. "We didn't have that much in common to continue forward," she says. "But we did strip away the mystery.")



NECESSITY, Lane was a self-reliant child. Dern remembers going to stay with her friend at the Hilton in Los Angeles when she was making 1984's *Streets of Fire*, "just to make it feel a little homier." One of the foundations of their friendship, Dern says, was that both young women were intrigued by the idea of "being seekers. We didn't necessarily know what we were longing for, but we were interested in the idea of an internal search, a sense of self or connection to something larger. Trying to become a grownup in a healthy way was, oddly, a deep interest for both of us, even at 12 and 15." By 19, when Lane was starring in *The Cotton Club*, her first of three movies with Gere and the



VISITING SOMALILAND MATERNITY PROGRAMS WITH FOUNDER EDNA ISMAIL (WITH LANE, FAR LEFT), THE ACTRESS RECEIVED SOME RUDIMENTARY TRAINING AS A MIDWIFE. AT THE CLINIC IN BALIGUBADLE, LANE MET WITH LOCAL STUDENTS. —

At school in the U.S., her acting was "very much a stigma," she says. "Isn't that weird? But kids can be mean with whatever you offer them." Her parents had split when she was a newborn, and when Lane wasn't living with her father in a series of Manhattan residential hotels, she was in the South with her mother, Colleen Farrington, a former nightclub singer and *Playboy* centerfold from Georgia.

Lane's ambivalence about her career fueled a rocky relationship with her

his child and you have to have it, and that will be your life. It was a really toxic cartoon." In hindsight, though, she says she understands her father's concern about the potential traps of being female. "That is women's plight historically and today in many parts of the world, because women don't have any say over their bodies. [My dad] couldn't believe that would be the fate of his only flesh and blood daughter, his only child." (Actually, Burt had another daughter, from a

third of four she made with Coppola, she had a moment of realization. "I said, 'OK, I am now wiser than my father in every aspect of filmmaking.' I outgrew his ability to give me advice. He agreed." Coppola says he remembers Lane at that time as a "sweet and very hardworking young lady. From the moment I worked with her, I had a crush on her—as did many who saw those pictures."

Burt Lane moved on to the role of cheerleader, CONTINUED ON PAGE 165

Mountain Innocence Center, she was ready to return to the grueling, poorly paid and often frustrating cause that she now realized was her life's work.

BACK IN HER Salt Lake City bungalow, curled on the couch sipping green tea, Monroe is on a roll. She's helping a group of exonerated prisoners stage a rock concert for an upcoming Rocky Mountain Innocence Center benefit, and she's jetting around the West, talking to police and prosecutor groups about avoiding the errors that land the wrong people in prison. "No one wants to make these mistakes," she says. But fighting for innocent prisoners is a race against time, and Monroe often feels she's falling behind. "Look, all too often someone's being wrongfully convicted, right?" Monroe says. "There's no question that these convictions are preventable, if we could just get out on the front end and improve the way that law enforcement does its business. But getting that work done!" Monroe throws up her hands, then stops and laughs at her own intensity.

The new job she's just taken may make her work easier: This fall Monroe will start working for the national Innocence Project, expanding its outreach to victims' organizations, police groups and prosecutor organizations in D.C. "It's a great fit for me," Monroe says. For her, the move means going home—and that feels right. She looks up and smiles: Asher, 14, has come in wearing a T-shirt that says EXECUTE JUSTICE, NOT PEOPLE. They need to get on their way; *The Tempest* is being staged at the university playhouse, and Monroe, once again, is running late. But Asher doesn't mind a quick interrogation. "I don't see her as a kick-ass mobilizer person," he says. "I just see her as my mom." He gives her a hug and a sweet, braces-filled smile. "But if I were thrown in jail, I would definitely call her. Because I know she'd get me out." ❀

ALEXIS JETTER's last story for *More* was "Get Angry. Go Viral. Change Everything!"

but his fears may have colored Lane's idea of having children. "I thought, If I have a child, I'll be focused on the one and won't be able to do great things," she says. "In fact, it's the opposite: Because of having had a child, I have gone past my comfort zone and been willing to put myself out there."

When Lane married Brolin in 2004, they united their children—her daughter and his son and daughter—in a blended family. Barbra Streisand, who is married to Josh's father, actor James Brolin, is an active grandmother. "What I enjoy most about Barbra is how participatory she is in the family," Lane says. "She's a mensch. She comes to the kids' plays and graduations. It was never an issue or question. She wants that involvement."

Last year Lane and Brolin faced an instant empty-nest scenario: Within two weeks, all three kids moved out, two of them to New York and one to Asia. "I can still hear the sound of Velcro ripping, the tearing-away feeling," Lane says. "Wait! Where are you going? Was it something I said?" Being without them "is kind of chilling," she adds, "but I like straightforward showdowns with fate. I'm feeling good about it."

Until now, much of Lane's charity work has been done quietly, but this fall, with the airing of *Half the Sky*, she seems poised to ramp up the public aspect. In September she'll host an L.A. fund raiser for Heifer International. "It's the most rewarding thing to do with my time now," she says. A few days later she opens in a production of Tennessee Williams's *Sweet Bird of Youth* at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, and next year will appear as Superman's mother in the movie *Man of Steel*. She's also contemplating a theater project in New York. "Hey! Some people I love are in New York!" she says brightly, imagining a reunion with the departed children. "I can be, like, nearby... I'd be out of their hair, but available!" ❀

MARGOT DOUGHERTY profiled Madeleine Stowe in the June issue of *More*.