

# Dame Judi Dench

*The British actress riffs on TikTok, teamwork and tattoos*

## Dance with destiny

I originally wanted to be a dancer. But my brother Jeff was so enthusiastic about acting, and my father could do readings of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*—he had a tremendous love for the theater, as did my ma. Growing up, they always took us to see plays, and we sang Gilbert and Sullivan in the car.

## Feel the fear

When I auditioned for *Cabaret* [to play Sally Bowles in London's West End, starting in 1968], I sang from the wings. I was very, very nervous. Still, if you commit yourself to do something, you have to get on with it.

## Run, then walk

I used to run everywhere as a young actress at the Old Vic—run to get onto the stage, run to get off the stage. I think it was Dame Peg [Ashcroft] who said to me once, "You could take that a bit slower."

## Old friends

John Gielgud, Dame Sybil Thorndike, Dame Peggy—I was the new girl, and they were heroes of mine. I was directed by Sir John; he was such a funny man. Gosh, I miss them all! How lucky I am to have these memories. I've had quite a journey.

## Hip to the new

I love to learn new things. I rapped with [British rapper] Lethal Bizzle a few years ago, and it was just heaven. I got my first tattoo six years ago. My grandson, Sammy, keeps me up to date with TikTok, which I didn't know anything about. He said, "You have to do this!" So, we had a go. It was very good for me.

## Laugh a lot

The greatest thing of all is to have a sense of humor. And if you're born with it, at least you've got that going for you. I'd be lost without it.

## The Bard's the thing

During the COVID lockdown, I promised myself I'd learn all the Shakespeare sonnets. I didn't get round to it, lazy me. But I do have a favorite: "When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes, / I all alone beweepe my outcast state ..." Do you want me to go on?

## Hungry eyes

I've always had a photographic memory. I could stop anywhere in a play and know exactly where the line is on the page that I need to look up. My macular degeneration makes this quite hard, so I have somebody saying them to me. But I just got a machine that may enable me to see the lines more clearly.

## A timeless message

There's a wonderful moment in *Belfast* when Jamie Dornan bends down and says to his character's son, "As long as people are kind." It's much better to be reminded about people's kindness than it is to be reminded about their bitterness, isn't it?

## Pulling together

A film or a play isn't just about the part you're playing; it's about the part everybody's playing and their interaction. If you don't remember that, then it becomes a one-horse race, and I'm not keen on that. It's not a competition.

## On aging

Sometimes you feel ghastly and old. I get terribly tired. Nap whenever you can! And keep thinking, *Tomorrow I'll look and I'll feel a bit better.* —As told to Natasha Stoyanoff

Oscar, Golden Globe and Tony-winning actress Dame Judi Dench, 87, stars in Kenneth Branagh's autobiographical film, *Belfast*.



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