

THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

Dermatologist Relishes Cameo Roles

Writer and film director Woody Allen was about to leave Dr. Kenneth L. Edelson's dermatology office on Manhattan's Upper East Side in March of 1986, when he turned to Dr. Edelson and made him a promise.

"In his inimitable manner, Woody scratched his head and said, 'You know Dr. Edelson, you're a real funny guy,'" recalled Dr. Edelson, who did not know Mr. Allen prior to that office visit. "I'm going to put you in my next film.' I thought, 'Yeah, right, I'll be in the movies!'"

The next day, Mr. Allen's longtime casting director Juliet Taylor called Dr. Edelson to confirm that Mr. Allen's pledge was genuine and to inquire about his acting history. Dr. Edelson's "credits" included an acting and singing role in a summer-camp version of "Damn Yankees" and dancing to Chubby Checker's "Twist" in a high school theater production. "She just laughed, not having been forewarned that I was Woody's dermatologist and not really an actor," he said.

Dr. Edelson maintains that his sincere, warm bedside manner and quick wit caught Mr. Allen's attention during that first office visit. "It wasn't anything I said or did, it was just my persona," he said. "Woody is known for liking to take the normal regular guy from everyday life and put him in his films. My patients always get a kick out of me. They often remark to me, 'You're a real funny guy.'"

To date, he has appeared in 12 Woody Allen films—more than any other actor—most recently as a screenwriter in "Cassandra's Dream" (2007). He describes his roles as "cameo appearances with funny lines." His first character was a Christmas party guest in "Alice" (1990). Dr. Edelson filmed a scene for his 13th Woody Allen film last month in New York City that will star Larry David, Patricia Clarkson, and Evan Rachel Wood.

Other roles have included a doctor in "Husbands and Wives" (1992); the character Ken in "Mighty Aphrodite" (1995); a bar mitzvah guest in "Deconstructing Harry" (1997); a rabbi in "Celebrity" (1998); a party guest in "Sweet and Low-

down" (1999) and in "Small Time Crooks" (2000); a magician's volunteer in "The Curse of the Jade Scorpion" (2001); an eye doctor in "Hollywood Ending" (2002); a hotel desk clerk in "Anything Else" (2003); and a disco guest in "Melinda and Melinda" (2005). Along the way, he has rubbed elbows with scores of celebrities, including Helena Bonham Carter, Mia Farrow, Will Ferrell, Dustin Hoffman, Helen Hunt, Sean Penn, Cybill Shepherd, Peter Weller, and Uma Thurman.

Acting "allows some stress and tension release," said Dr. Edelson, who listed Jackie Gleason, Red Skelton, Steve Allen, Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, and the Three Stooges among his favorite comics/actors growing up. "It's fun to be

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DR. EDELSON

spontaneously creative and artistic in a film, especially when I am told to ad lib on the spot for a scene that has just been set up for me," he said. "That's the fun part, seeing how much I can stretch my lines! It's truly an avenue to express myself and be in a real different role than my normal everyday life in medicine. It's a nice outlet."

Months before the filming of "Alice," Dr. Edelson had memorized his one line for the movie: "My beloved, my dream come true." While walking to the set with Mr. Allen—a 10th-floor apartment in a prewar building on the Upper West Side near Columbia University in New York—Dr. Edelson told him, "I'm ready for my line: 'My beloved, my dream come true!'"

When they arrived in the lobby of the building ready to go on set, Mr. Allen caught Dr. Edelson off guard and said, "You know what? Forget your line. I want you to ad lib."

Rattled, Dr. Edelson collected his thoughts in the bathroom of the apartment being used for the set. When it came time for filming his scene, he parlayed his 1 line into 10. As a Christmas present that year, Mr. Allen sent Dr. Edelson a videotape of all 26 out-takes of the scene.

"It was an amazing gift," he said. "To see myself over and over again on that reel... and it wasn't reshot because of anything I did wrong, of course!"



Woody Allen (left) and Dr. Kenneth L. Edelson (standing at right) on the set of "Mighty Aphrodite" (1995). Seated are costars Peter Weller and Helena Bonham Carter.

On the set of "Deconstructing Harry," he spent a morning with Billy Crystal, Robin Williams, Demi Moore, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, and Richard Benjamin. "I'm treated like a celebrity because I'm Woody's doctor, so the stars were as much taken with me as I was with them," said Dr. Edelson, who has been a member of the Screen Actors Guild since 1990. "They got free skin advice, and I got free acting advice. It was a good barter system for me. Robin Williams did a whole number with me on how many places we could inject collagen on him for 'enhancement' purposes! Imagine hanging out with Billy Crystal and Robin Williams together! I had trouble catching my breath from all the laughter."

One of his favorite roles was that of Rabbi Kaufman in "Celebrity." For his main scene, Mr. Allen told Dr. Edelson that he is entering a green room backstage at a television station, where Klansmen and skinheads are already waiting to go on to a talk show, and to think of something to say as he enters the room. "So, jokingly I enter and deliver my ad-libbed line: 'What? ... did the skinheads eat all the bagels already?' This got a big laugh."

Filming for each movie usually involves a day or two of his time. Since most of Mr. Allen's movies are filmed in New York City, the impact on Dr. Edelson's practice is minimal. "My patients are used to it," he said. When they ask for an appointment "my secretary will sometimes say, 'We're

going to be closed these next 2 days.' The patients then ask, 'What, is he in another Woody Allen film?'"

Dr. Edelson always receives a personal invitation from Mr. Allen. "It's usually in the spring. He'll say, 'I'm writing something now. I think I have a part for you that you are going to like,'" Dr. Edelson said. "He knows that his movies could do very well without me, but he knows how much I love it, and besides, I know I will never wind up on the cutting-room floor as I once made Woody a promise. 'Woody,' I said, 'if you cut... I'll cut!' He is very faithful to his cast and crew and cares for me as his doctor and his actor. Besides, the residual checks for \$1.50 I get every 2 months help make up for the HMO fees!"

By Doug Brunk, San Diego Bureau

E-MAIL US YOUR STORIES

Do you trade in your lab coat on the weekends for two-wheeled transportation and leather? Is the highlight of your year bike week at the beach? Whether you enjoy taking leisurely rides on a cruiser or prefer the speed of a crotch rocket, we want to hear your stories. Send an e-mail to d.brunk@elsevier.com.

Are Wi-Fi, Latte, and E-Mail Physician Marketing Tools of the Future?

LONG BEACH, CALIF. — As baby boomers bulge the ranks of the nation's elderly population, physicians are going to have to adapt to meet their expectations, Dr. Alfredo Czerwinski said at a conference on leadership and management in geriatrics.

Coming from a world in which they can get a latte in 20 seconds, lunch in less than a minute, and an oil change in 45 minutes (or it's free), they're not going to like hearing that they won't be able to see a doctor for 3 days or 3 weeks, said Dr. Czerwinski, chief medical officer for Lawson & Associates, a consulting firm in Sacramento, Calif. Same-day scheduling and cohesive, integrated care

of chronic conditions will become necessities he predicted at the meeting, presented by SCAN Health Plan.

Dr. Czerwinski reflected on how times have changed since Marcus Welby, M.D., made house calls and saw one grateful patient per episode. These days, patients' trust and confidence in their physicians, which are considered "the traditional hallmarks of care, are at an all-time low."

Research shows that patients will switch doctors if it will save them \$10 per month on their insurance plans. To meet the demand of tomorrow's medical consumers, physicians would do well to develop clinical acumen and surgical skills. But they'll be more likely to achieve busi-

ness success if they think like business people, according to Dr. Czerwinski. Physicians need to look around at what baby boomers enjoy and expect from other businesses:

- ▶ If they have to wait, cappuccino and free wireless access would be nice.
- ▶ They're used to booking appointments on the Web.
- ▶ They appreciate valet parking, and as they lose their ability to drive, they're going to be more likely to choose the physician who subscribes to a transportation service.
- ▶ They want immediate access to their physicians and expect e-mail contact.

—Betsy Bates