



THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

'Ace' Hatem makes name for herself in Hollywood

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By Maureen Mullen, Globe Correspondent | May 4, 2008

Rosine Hatem has roughed up Hilary Swank in the boxing ring, worked alongside the dashing George Clooney, and absorbed the wisdom of the legendary Francis Ford Coppola.

Her stay in Hollywood is now approaching 25 years, and there certainly have been ups and downs along the way for the 47-year-old Methuen native. Her work as a stuntwoman is hardly glamorous, but she wouldn't trade her passion for anything else.

"I knew at 15 what I wanted to do, and that was 1975," said Hatem, who was back in this area recently for a movie shoot. "I wanted to be a stuntwoman. Don't ask me where I got it from. Don't ask me how."

The 1978 Methuen High School graduate described herself as a "real hyper kid" growing up who had no outlets for her energy, and her father, Tuffic, a gravedigger of Lebanese descent, often put her to work in the cemetery.

"It was before Title IX, and we didn't have teams like they do now for girls," she said, referring to the 1972 landmark ruling for gender equity. "I had to go to three different martial arts studios before I could find someplace to take me because they wouldn't take girls back then. That's how bad it was."

But Hatem persisted. Excelling in martial arts - she was the first female in town to earn a black belt - and other sports at Methuen High, she turned down a field hockey scholarship to the University of New Hampshire and trained her sights on the West Coast.

"I just knew I had to leave Methuen," she said. "I just knew there was something I wanted to do and use my physical abilities. But I knew if I stayed and went to a four-year school, I'd never leave because my family was there, I had a boyfriend, it was way too comfortable."

Moving to Los Angeles was a huge change, she said.

"It's a big deal now, looking back on what I did. I had so much ignorance, or naivete, or passion. If someone told me 'no,' I didn't listen."

After attending Dean College in Franklin, Hatem said, she left New England for Southern California and studied kinesiology (movement and physical education) at UCLA, but "was totally lost."

She eventually learned about a stunt school and began taking classes and making contacts, finishing her degree at Cal State-Northridge.

"I remember how I got my 'A' card, my union card," she said. "On my first interview, they were looking for someone who knew how to jump rope, and I could because I was boxing. That was in '87. I took lessons from one of the best kickboxers in the business."

"It's just been a series of events, and you just say as you get older, 'Everything happens for a reason.' It's been a wild ride. It's been a lot of fun, like a roller coaster. It's been a lot of emotions, a lot of agony and defeat and some victories, and a lot of personal sacrifices."

Hatem has worked in scores of movies, television shows, and commercials, and she has been used in all sorts of fight scenes, falls, and car wrecks.

Her favorite stunt is "any stunt I can get."

She's had her share of injuries - a broken nose, ripped hamstring, disc problems, shoulder problems. But "they come with the territory," she said.

Her nickname, Ace, is a tribute to Garnet "Ace" Bailey, the former Boston Bruins player who was killed on one of the planes that crashed into the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001.

Ace Hatem would land a role in Clint Eastwood's 2004 Academy Award-winning film, "Million Dollar Baby," in which she boxed against the star of the movie, Hilary Swank.

"I was her first fighter, her first opponent," Hatem said. "Her trainers put her in the ring with someone who was way above her level, and that was me. And I was happy because I worked with her, and I came up with some of the boxing sequences myself and she was phenomenal to work with. I was in the ring from 8:30 in the morning until 8:30 at night."

Landing a role, or a part, in any movie is not easy, never mind one with Clint Eastwood.

"In most movies there's one main female actor, and then there are a lot of what's called ND stunts - nondescript - where they can put in a guy or girl stuntperson," she said. "Most of those they'll give to guys. Yes, there's more movies being made, but they're being made in New Zealand, Prague, Canada. A lot of states are getting movies back again, but there are stunt groups popping up in those states, and they only want to hire people from those states. So it's really ugly."

Hatem said she enjoyed being back in her home state recently, working on the film "Mall Cop" with Kevin James and Adam Sandler. Some of the filming was done at the Burlington Mall, the set for the comedy about a mall security guard who becomes an unlikely hero when his mall is held hostage by a bunch of thieves.

"I did a hysterical fight scene with Kevin in a Victoria's Secret store at the Burlington Mall," she said. "It was great because it was the first time my sister was able to see my work. I hope to work at home more often. It's extra rewarding for me. My parents have yet to see me work."

Hatem, who tried for five years before she got her first stunt job, says she would not discourage anyone from pursuing a career as a stunt double. But she is candid about the job prospects.

"I would never stop anybody from going for their dream," she said. "But I would say these are your odds. These are the kinds of bumps in the road you're going to get into."

"Get an education. Have a backup plan. It's different for everybody. I've been out here 27 years; I still haven't got a quote-unquote big break. But I know a kid who just started last year, did a show with Adam Sandler, one guy fell in love with him, brought him into his crew, and he's off working. It's just different for everybody." ■