

As actor ages, more roles come in for moms and grandmas in commercials

Description

default watermark

Maya Mahrer says she â??popped out of the womb wanting to be an actor.â?• She is still popping, finding herself at an age when â??Maâ?• and â??Grandmaâ?• roles in commercials are coming her way.

While many in their later years are finding jobs elusive, Mahrer, 81, said, â??Aging is providing me with more work.â?•



Maya Mahrer.

For most of her life, Maher has supported herself as a legal secretary and assistant. But she worries that her current employer, who is 76, might retire sometime soon. Her aspiration is to be able to support herself as an actor on a â??commercial that has legs.â?•

â??My dream is to get a national TV commercial for a product I love, like the Mrs. Olsen character for Folgerâ??s Coffee.â?• First aired in 1965, that commercial ran for 21 years. It featured the likeable Mrs. Olson, ever ready to bring a little happiness to young married couples with her freshly brewed cups of â??mountain grownâ?• coffee.

After a divorce in her 40s, Mahrer moved to San Francisco in 1978. Free of family obligations, she started studying acting seriously â?? mime and improvisational comedy, commercial acting and acting for stage.

Mahrer studied commercial acting for almost a year with the late Gregg Snazelle, a nationwide leader in commercial film production who ran one of the first large film production companies in San Francisco.

She started studying acting for stage and film with Jean Shelton in 1983 and continued, on and off, into the early 2000s. Open since 1961, San Franciscoâ??s Shelton Studios have been nationally recognized as one of the finest method-acting schools in the country for film and theater.

As every actor knows, talent and training need to be greased with a little luck.

â??When I was studying with Shelton, I got my SAG-AFTRA (Stage Actors Guild and American Federation of Television and Radio Artists) card almost by accident.â?• In the mid-90s, she happened to glance at a bulletin board to see an audition for a part in an American Greeting Cards commercial. â??This hot-shot director from New York liked me, and I got the job.â?•

default watermark

Mahrer played mother-of-the-bride and was in hog-heaven. â??I love getting my hair and make-up done and being fussed over.â?•

â??Acing lets me play â?¦ pretendâ??

With her SAG-AFTRA card, obtained from doing the greeting cards commercial, Mahrer thought more work would come her way. But she discovered the Bay Area is largely a non-union market. â??I almost lost a major film part because the director balked at doing the paperwork and following the rules union work required.â?•

Mahrer, who describes herself as quirky, eccentric and playful, had badly wanted the role of Madame Zoe, a zany psychic. (Maya is not her birth name: â??Judith never felt like me. You could say I was mis-named at birth, but my parents didnâ??t know that.â?•)

She got the psychic role, in 2014, after deciding to go for Financial Core status (Fi-Core), a legal option unions must disclose to potential employees. Although unions donâ??t like it, the status allows members to take non-union jobs.

â??I became a dues-paying non-member of SAG. I had to give back my card and couldnâ??t advertise myself as SAG,â?• said Mahrer. â??But they did allow me to keep my SAG-AFTRA number for any union jobs.â?•

Acting is much more than a paycheck for Mahrer. She loves to become other people and experience what they might feel. â??Acting somehow stretches me, letâ??s me play. Itâ??s a big pretend.â?•

She likes that her looks allow her to play different ethnicities. â??I can play Middle-Eastern women, as well as Hispanic and European.â?• Recently, Mahrer was a grandma in a CableLabs commercial, and a mom to an adult son in an Alameda County Senior Protective Services commercial. She has also done a couple of commercials for assisted living facilities and was a mother-in-law in a Northern California Honda commercial.

Commercial for Alameda County Society Services on Elder Financial Abuse

Daily, Mahrer checks for auditions on Casting Networks, which connects casting directors with talent, agents and managers in the San Francisco Bay Area.

It was through her agent that Mahrer won a part on â??Trauma,â?•a medical drama on NBC, featuring first responders from San Francisco General Hospital. Shooting one scene, Maher put her method acting to good use. â??My husband had a heart attack, and the director told me to keep talking, asking questionsâ?• of the emergency technicians. Maher followed the script but also spoke extemporaneously.

â??The principle actors were really good â?? my talking threw them at first, but they got into it, being the professionals that they are.â?•

default watermark

Acting eased a tough childhood

Whatever character Mahrer is asked to play, she works on it until it gets into her body, a core technique of method acting. â??I do that until I know what comes next, what to say and know why Iâ??m saying it.â?•

Mahrer embraced acting in her childhood. It was a way to escape an unhappy childhood. Her family had lived in five different states by the time she was eight. â??My father was a photographer and was always looking for a better work situation.â?• They finally settled in Denver. â??I acted in all the school plays and continued to act until I got married and had children.â?•

That was in 1957, when she was 19. She studied drama and English for a year at Colorado Womenâ??s College before the birth of two sons and, three years later a divorce, left her on her own to raise them.

She remarried in 1968 when she turned 30. But, the family soon left Denver so he could accept a teaching position in an Ohio university town. â??Everyone knew everyone elseâ??s business,â?• Mahrer said. Five years later, they moved to Canada, where her husband got a university professorship. â??It was Mennonite country, 62 miles west of Toronto,â?• she said. â??The most exciting thing that happened there was the farmerâ??s market at 5 a.m. on Saturday.â?•

That marriage lasted 10 years before Mahrer hightailed it to San Francisco. Her oldest son and his family still live in Toronto.

Forty years later, Mahrer still lives downtown in the apartment she first rented. Her younger son also lives in her building. â??I love my neighborhood â?? itâ??s so alive and convenient.â?•

Category

1. All Posts

Date Created
24/06/2019
Author
jrobbins

default watermark