

An Insider's Look at the Oscars

By Michael Angelo Caruso

(as published in the "News Herald" newspaper, Southgate, Michigan)

I have attended the Academy Awards.

I still smile every time I think about what was probably a once-in-a-lifetime event. The Academy Awards may be the most prestigious happening on the planet. A ticket is very difficult to come by. Most people are invited to the Oscars, which means that you can't even buy your way in.

In Hollywood, who you know can be more important than what you know. My younger brother Joe, who knows a lot, is a business consultant with some interesting West Coast clients. One of those clients introduced him to someone who works at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. In a nutshell, Joe impressed who he knows with what he knows and the Academy offered him tickets to the Oscars, just like that.

Joe and I flew to southern California and convened at an exclusive hotel in Santa Monica called Shutters on the Beach. Shutters' expensive room rates certainly played a role in keeping the common folk from mingling with the celebrities. We discovered that the hotel had booked extra security to keep the lobby free of autograph hounds.

Shutters on the Beach doesn't look ostentatious. The entrance has a circular drive that is too small for limousines to negotiate without making a couple of passes. Yet, we noticed the hotel's marketing department definitely wants you to appreciate the building's proximity to the ocean. They didn't, for example, simply name the hotel "Shutters." When I called for room rates, someone in reservations seriously referred to the two different room classifications as "ocean view rooms" and "non-ocean view rooms," as if a "non-ocean view room" was somehow still associated with the ocean.

The hotel was packed with Hollywood people. We saw Peter Fonda, Robert Duvall and John Turturro, who had his family in tow. Joe met Spike Lee, who gave my brother a valuable tip on cell phone usage. It was a heady scene and we quickly got used to saying "hi" to everybody – just in case it was somebody famous.

The night before the Oscars, we went to dinner at an upper crust restaurant called *Ivy on the Shore*, which had apparently hired the same marketing firm as Shutters *on the Beach*. Seated at our corner table, we had a good view of the room and immediately spied Joan Rivers having dinner with a gentleman friend and another couple. The other couple turned out to be former Miss America Mary Anne Mobley and her husband Gary Collins. Later in the evening, we saw Gregory Hines, who has since passed away.

Since I was spending some time with movie stars, I decided to treat myself to a manicure and visited the Manicurist *on the Beach* at Shutters on the Beach the morning of the Academy Awards.

“I don’t want to put any extra pressure on you,” I said to the manicurist, trying to sound casual. “But I need an excellent manicure because I’m going to the Academy Awards tonight. You will do good job, won’t you?”

“Why don’t you ask Bruce Willis?” she smiled sweetly. I made a mental note to do just that.

As she worked, the nail technician mentioned that she did Joan Rivers’ nails at Joan’s daughter Melissa’s house. “Really?” I calmly said. “We had dinner with Joan at Ivy’s last night.” I was starting to get the hang of Hollywood speak.

At three o’clock in the afternoon, Joe and I assembled in the hotel lobby for a photo opportunity. Men – like babies – should be photographed right after they are dressed.

Putting on a tuxedo is a major production. The challenge lies in the sheer number of accessories. Women have the Accessory Thing down pat. Men have trouble remembering to wear a belt. Tuxedos as most men know, come with a twelve-point checklist including suspenders, a cummerbund, studs, cufflinks, a bow tie and special shiny shoes.

Looking good and feeling great, Joe and I sauntered out to a waiting Limousine *on the Beach* and we headed to a pre-party sponsored by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

At the reception, we had cocktails with various industry types, but alas, met no celebrities. We were introduced to a gentleman who does voice-overs for the television show *NYPD Blue* and had our pictures taken with a six-foot version of the Oscar statuette. We also met a couple of “fillers.” Fillers have the interesting task of rushing into the auditorium to sit in celebrity seats when the stars go to the rest room.

We headed back to the limo for the ride to the awards presentation, which was scheduled to start at 6 p.m. at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. The sun was bright and it seemed strange to be wearing evening clothes so early in the day. Rounding the corner at Figueroa and West Jefferson Boulevard, we found ourselves in a parade of limousines. Thousands of people stood at the curb on both sides of the street, many holding cameras or video recorders.

The excitement was approaching fever pitch. We exited the vehicle and stepped onto a luminous red carpet that seemed to be three inches thick. Television crews had flooded the area with artificial light, giving the bustling scene a surreal atmosphere. A public address system announced celebrity arrivals and we tried to take everything in, but there was just too much activity.

The security people were pleading with us mortals to stay to the left of a velvet rope. Celebrities were escorted to the right side of the rope for interviews. Paparazzi and media representatives leered from a grandstand on our left. I never knew cameras could be so loud.

On the way into the auditorium, we met Jeremy Irons, a big movie star by most standards. The fact is that for every “hot” celebrity in Hollywood, there are 100 “has beens.” In other words, for every Tom Cruise, there are 100 Ernest Borgnines. So we also met Ernest Borgnine. And his lovely wife, Tova.

The Academy Awards show is broadcast live, so the audience was occasionally prompted to applaud and it didn’t take us long to catch on to the rhythm of the commercials and such. Wide screen images helped people in the balcony see the action up close. The best place to be was in the large foyer where many people gathered to have a cocktail and watch the telecast on a pair of large screen televisions. It was the ultimate fashion show.

Over four hours later, we slowly walked out of the auditorium and somehow found our limousine. Starving, we finally found dinner around 11 p.m. and giggled about the magic of the evening.

Ever since that awards show, I’ve been especially nice to my brother Joe. For this, *I* may be nominated for an Academy Award. I guess that in the back of my mind, I’m still hoping that my once-in-a-lifetime opportunity will happen twice.

Michael Angelo Caruso is President of the Edison House, a Detroit-based communication company. He is the author of 5 Cool Ideas for Better Working Living & Feeling, Hmmm . . . Little Ideas With BIG Results and the audio book, Dear Michael Angelo – A Father's Life Lessons To His Son. Mr. Caruso delivers 180 presentations per year. Click [here] to request booking information. Mr. Caruso can be reached at 248/546-9140 and at www.EdisonHouse.com.
©2003

This article is available for reprinting and republishing in your corporate newsletter, e-zine, web site or advertisement. Please click [here] to request permission.