

ELEANOR CHELIMSKY'S PEREGRINATIONS AND THE SHORT, HAPPY MOVIE CAREER OF HER SON THOMAS

By Douglas H. Frazer



In 1962 film director Stanley Donen cast Thomas Chelimsky,

age 6 and living with his family in Paris, as Audrey Hepburn's son in the romantic thriller *Charade*. Opposite Hepburn was Cary Grant and the supporting cast included Walter Matthau, James Colburn, George Kennedy, and Ned Glass.

Eleanor, 95, is Tom's mother. Eleanor's story begins in New York City with stops in Paris, Washington D.C., Cleveland, and finally with Tom and his wife Gisela in Fox Point.

Eleanor (né Fine) was born to a wealthy family in New York City. She was discovered to have perfect pitch, which led to the Manhattan School of Music, the Conservatoire de Paris, and ultimately a career as a concert pianist. She married Oscar Chelimsky, a painter, and in 1948 they moved to Paris to be at the center of post-war artistic life. Paris, although "a bit dismal" following the war, agreed with them. "So many places to feel



at home," remembers Eleanor. They had many friends and enjoyed the "work to live" way of life. They knew Albert Camus, and in the 15th Arrondissement were neighbors of Constantin Brancusi. Tom came along in 1956 and his sister Catherine in 1960. Eleanor concluded that raising small children while touring was too hard, so she took a job doing statistical analysis on the staff of NATO's U.S. Ambassador.

Little Tom was in the cours préparatoire at the prestigious École Alsacienne. Eleanor spotted an ad for an 8-to-10-year-old bilingual child for

an acting part in a movie. Eleanor brought Tom to the Joinville film studio to meet Donen and writer Peter Stone. They thought "he's too young, he can't possibly do this," until Tom responded in a heavy French accent, rolling his r's, that his favorite hero was Roy Rogers. He got the part. The experience, recalls Tom, was magical. The cast took a liking to him. But Tom also recalls that ninety percent of the time on the set it was "hurry up and wait."

That was Tom's first and last film credit. The family returned to the U.S. in 1970. Eventually Tom and his wife Gisela became physicians and in 2012 took up posts with the Medical College of Wisconsin.

Eleanor and Oscar resettled in Washington D.C. Oscar taught at the Maryland School of Art and Design while Eleanor worked her way up to be assistant comptroller general at the General Accounting Office in the field of evaluation methodology with many publications to her name. She retired in 1994.

Now Eleanor lives a stone's throw away from Richard Edelman's Little Dancer Aged Fourteen sculpture on Lake Drive and Bradley Road, modeled on the eponymous Edgar Degas sculpture, and conjuring the Paris that the Chelimskys had fondly called home.

Douglas H. Frazer is a Fox Point resident and neighborhood contributor as well as the village president. The views expressed are his own and not necessarily those of the Village, the village board, other village board members, or Best Version Media, LLC.

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