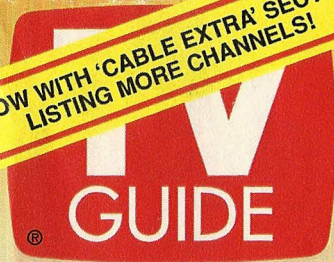


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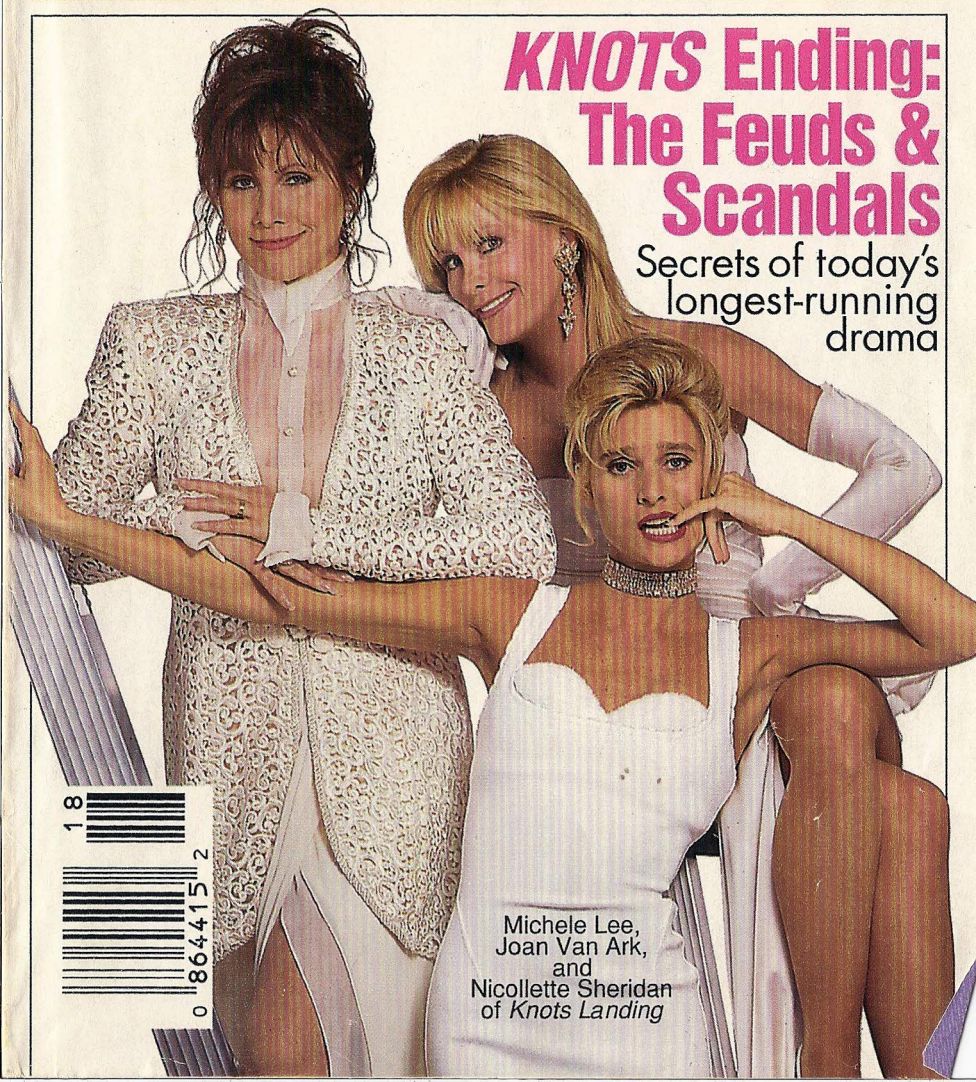
**DONNA  
MILLS**

No Regrets,  
No Excuses,  
No Knots!

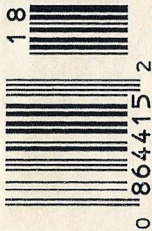


## ***KNOTS* Ending: The Feuds & Scandals**

Secrets of today's  
longest-running  
drama



Michele Lee,  
Joan Van Ark,  
and  
Nicollette Sheridan  
of *Knots Landing*



# Oh, Donna!

*After four years, she's back as Abby for the series finale, but Donna Mills still shares this with her Knots creation: no regrets*

BY MARY MURPHY

As she was driving onto the studio lot for her final appearance as Abby, Donna Mills rammed full-speed into an odd fear. The actress who pretty much invented the prime-time soap villainess, and then proceeded to take Hollywood on her own terms, was quaking behind her steering column at the prospect of being Abby one more time.

"I couldn't sleep," she now recalls. "I thought, 'Oh, I am going to feel like a jerk; I won't know how to do this anymore.'" "This" probably refers to her much-anticipated return to the part she played for nine years. (The series leaves the air next week, the last remnant of the *Dynasty-Dallas* era.) But "this" for Mills could just as well mean taking a role in an ensemble cast, or it could mean working for someone else. More than any other player who has passed through the crowded *Knots* cast roster, Mills has established herself as an above-the-title star, as someone who creates her own projects and hires other people to work for her. Could she now go back to Abby again? "But as soon as I started," she says, "I felt that thrill and I said to myself:

'It's OK. Abby's back.'"

Back, but the woman playing her couldn't be more different. By dint of hard work and sheer will, and with a succession of six TV-movies such as "In My Daughter's Name" and "He's Not Your Son," Mills, 49, has turned herself into a serious TV power. Says producer Leonard Hill, who worked with her on "The Lady Forgets" and "False Arrest": "She is a very smart woman, driven, demanding, and dedicated. Most actresses sit back and wait to be called. Not Donna." Mills' work on "Arrest," both on- and off-camera, so impressed ABC executives that they signed her for three more movies and a series as well.

"I've learned how to

*Donna Mills: A sometimes rocky road back to Abby.*

play the Hollywood game," is the candid way that Mills sums up her success. "My Hollywood game is not going to Spago. The game I play is business, maintaining relationships, following up every lead, going after every project you want."

But she wasn't always this way. During *Knots*, Mills was playing a headstrong, dominating woman in control of

her own destiny. Yet in real life, she had existed in a sort of cocoon, wrapped and perfectly safe. "All during the time she was on *Knots*," confides one of Mills' friends, "she didn't even have a lawyer." Leaping from the series in 1989 with only a minor TV-movie to catch her fall, Mills came face to face with the cruelest reality in anyone's career: She was unem-



THEO WESTENBERGER/GAMMA-LIAISON FOR TV GUIDE, DRESS: SALVATORE FERRAGAMO, STYLIST: CAMEL PASSANIS FOR CELESTINE

ployed. And unemployable, or so she thought. "Sometimes I would be so scared that it wasn't going to come together and that I wouldn't be able to make it," Mills says now. But she had learned a lot from Abby. Indeed, these three years later, Donna could probably teach Abby a few tricks.

The one way Mills always differed most radically from the much-married Abby Cunningham Ewing Sumner remains the same, though: romance. "I was once on the cover of a magazine and they called me an old maid. It might have panicked me if I had been unable to make my own way." The magazine cover did

president of development of her production company. "It is complicated," is all she will say about her on-again, off-again relationship with Holland. "I have never, ever put my life into someone else's hands. I am too controlling."

Those tendencies were apparent during the *Knots* years, during which Mills and her bosses battled often. She argued continually over the show's skimpy clothing budget, much smaller than *Dynasty's*. She was extremely fussy over the lighting. Her on-set demands never eclipsed her talent, though. *Knots* creator and executive producer David Jacobs says, "If I were doing a one-lead series, I'd pick Donna."

If her measurement of success is to have a life different from her mother's, Donna Mills has definitely achieved her goal. There's the house in Beverly Hills, the fancy car, the pool, and even a taste of political power. Mills was one of the most effective celebrities in support of Bill Clinton for Pres-

ident, traveling the country and lending her name to draw crowds. But her greatest talent may well be her ability to look back and smile—at Abby, at *Knots*, and at everything else since. "I tend not to regret things in my life," she says. "What if I had done things one way; where would they have led? I am a pretty happy person. How could I sit here and moan and groan?"

She looks at her watch. In an hour, she will have to pitch yet another movie. "I'll soon have 12 hours of movies in some stage of production," she says. "I'm moving away from glamour. I have a psychological thriller, a murder mystery, and...." Suddenly, she remembers glamorous Abby, the character that launched it all, the character to whom she now bids farewell. "I guess I'll never move that far away from her," says Mills. "No matter what I do, Abby will always be there waiting in the wings." ■

*Maybe I don't trust anyone else,' says Mills. The result is an intense need for control, which does not come easily to women in Hollywood.*

not cause Mills to lose any sleep.

"I've always been independent. When I was little, people would say 'Isn't she cute? She'll catch a rich one.' I felt it was an insult, as if I didn't have a brain, or didn't have abilities. My quest has been to prove that I could do more than just catch a rich one." It goes deeper than that, however. One friend confides: "Donna grew up with an unhappy mother who was too dependent. And so, early on in her life, Donna decided to make something of herself, to stand on her own two feet." Donna agrees with the diagnosis: "Maybe I don't trust anyone else—probably because I felt my mother didn't have the freedom she should have had."

She has been involved in a few serious relationships, however. The longest seems to have been with Richard Holland, whom one producer calls "the love of her life." Mills is reluctant to discuss Holland, whom she has recently appointed vice-