

Marsha Mason — Why the Four-Time Oscar Nominee Walked Away from Hollywood

People **movies**

DANA ROSE FALCONE June 25, 2018 04:58 PM

Marsha Mason didn't plan on a career in Hollywood.

"I only thought about the theater," the actress, 76, tells PEOPLE in this week's issue. "I never planned a movie career. It was totally serendipitous and it was destiny."

The St. Louis native scored her breakout role in 1973's *Cinderella Liberty* while working at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco and over the next 10 years went on to earn three Golden Globe and four Oscar nominations for her work, including *Liberty*, *The Goodbye Girl*, *Chapter Two* and *Promises Dark*.

She also married and split from writer and producer Neil Simon in that time. "Neil didn't really want me to work, at least away from him, so we wound up doing movies together," says Mason, who worked with her ex-husband on five films during their 10-year marriage. "And then in the '80s we divorced and I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do."

Mason felt that she was aging out of the industry, despite trying to hang on.

"I tried to make a life for myself in Los Angeles on my own," she says. "I built a house out in the Palisades for about five years and I did some work out there, but the business was changing. It was getting very youth oriented. I was in my 40s when I did *Heartbreak Ridge*, so I kept it sort of alive. But it was not easy."

The Webster University grad decided to focus on car racing — a hobby introduced to her by pal Paul Newman — and tending to her New Mexico farm, where she launched a natural product line.

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But in 2014, she felt a pull to New York, sold the farm and moved back to the East Coast.

“I started to really think about what was I missing and I decided that I wanted to make a transition,” Mason says. “I’ve always loved the East Coast. I graduated college [in Missouri] and left that September with \$500 and came to the city. So I’ve always tried to work as much as I could in the city.”

Since then Mason has appeared on Netflix’s *Grace and Frankie* and ABC’s hit sitcom *The Middle* — and she loves the new attention. “I was at the Tonys, and two men dressed to the nines came up to me and said, *We love you on The Middle! Can we take your picture?*” she recalls of the June 10 awards show. “I thought, ‘Well, you finally broke through.’”

- ***For more on Marsha Mason, pick up the latest issue of PEOPLE, on stands Friday***

And that thought about Hollywood not hiring older actresses? Mason’s not letting it stop her.

“We’ve changed somewhat but quite honestly, it’s been a very slow, lethargic, lugubrious project,” says Mason, who will direct Tennessee Williams’ *Talisman Roses* at the Williams Festival in Provincetown this fall. “But with the

movements and the things that have happened in the last couple of years, I think we're changing everyday and that's very exciting.”

