

'Marilyn' and Susan Griffiths

For actress, being a legend is just a job, but TV movie is her last hurrah as Monroe

By Bart Mills

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LOS ANGELES — "Can we shoot a few stills over on Stage 9, Marilyn? ... I mean Susan," the publicist asked. The actress had just finished blowing a kiss to a dark, athletic young man, a dead ringer for Joe DiMaggio, and she skittered dutifully over to Stage 9 in her tight skirt to make smoochy faces. It's all part of the job.

For Susan Griffiths, the fun of being Marilyn Monroe is that she can turn it on and off. She doesn't have to experience Marilyn's neuroses. She doesn't have to drug and drink herself into insensibility. She doesn't even have to play the death scene, because "Marilyn and Me" is, as Ms. Griffiths says, "a love story, a charming look back at her rise, not her fall."

Ms. Griffiths, who stars in the made-for-TV movie at 9 tonight on WSB/Channel 2, has made a career out of her resemblance to Marilyn, from an early look-alike contest to years impersonating Monroe on stage.

"If I could have created a fantasy, what's just happened to me would be it," Ms. Griffiths says. "I was 17 years old when it first started. People started calling me Marilyn before I even knew who she was. They said I walked and talked just like her. All I knew was that she was a blonde and was dead."

"Marilyn and Me"

9 tonight on WSB/Channel 2 (4006).

Ms. Griffiths spent some of her early years in Utah. If she had to look like somebody, she thought, let it be Farah Fawcett or Jaclyn Smith.

"I moved to California and went to work at a department store in the cosmetics department," she says. "It was California, so I started weaving blonde highlights into my hair. The blonder I got, the more often the Marilyn thing came up."

One day, Ms. Griffiths entered a Marilyn Monroe look-alike contest.

"I came in second to this girl who had all the moves down," she said. "But I got the job that was the main prize: posing for a poster for a group called the Monroes. All the other girl got was an assortment of tapes."

Ms. Griffiths went back to selling cosmetics, but shortly afterward found herself playing Marilyn again, this time in Japan in a series of TV commercials for a hotel. She then posed for a Marilyn photo spread in Platinum magazine, and soon she was no longer in cosmetics. She went to Las Vegas and opened as Marilyn in "The Showgirl" instead of just posing, she sang and danced



ABC

Susan Griffiths portrays Marilyn Monroe and Jesse Dabson is writer Bob Slatzer in the TV movie "Marilyn and Me."

"I was making really good money and the job was fun. But I decided to get off the fix. I wanted to do more — be a real actress." But Marilyn wouldn't go away.

"I did an episode of 'Growing Pains' where Kirk Cameron goes into a restaurant on Halloween and finds all these people from the past. I was Marilyn and I told Kirk, 'But I knew that I could act and I knew getting anyone in this town to believe it was rough.'"

Ms. Griffiths says "Marilyn and Me" will be her swan song as Marilyn, and, she hopes, her calling card as Susan. The "Me" in the title is a writer named Bob Slatzer, who maintains that he was Marilyn's secret husband for five days.

Whatever the truth of that claim — and Marilyn's biographer Anthony Summers accepts it — there is no doubt that Marilyn and Mr. Slatzer were lovers for several years in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The movie ends with Mr. Slatzer bowing out for Mr. DiMaggio.

"I feel like a walking encyclopedia of Marilyn, whether I want to be or not, but I feel in no way caught up in her," says Ms. Griffiths. "I know how she must