A Special Conversation with Edward James Olmos

Interview by Stacie Seifrit-Griffin

Edward James Olmos is one of the most – if not the *most – passionate people I've met when it comes to sharing his film career. He seems to have carefully chosen each film to reflect his personal growth and passions. Like many, his family and friends play important roles in who he will become and why he's not afraid to take chances.*

This interview was conducted in 2021 with follow-up conversations in 2022 and 2023. Our time together is always very special, and he openly shares why some of his projects are so important and personal to him.

He currently has six films on the Library of Congress National Film Registry, including "Blade Runner" added in 1993, "Stand and Deliver" added in 20l1, "Zoot Suit" added in 2019, "Selena" added in 2021, "The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez" added in 2022, and "Alambrista!" added in 2023, and we may see more in the future.

You must be so proud of your career!

I'm very grateful. It's such a privilege to be in this industry. To live your life in the arts and be able to support your family and yourself, and to use it in the manner that allows you to not only entertain, but to really inform and help people understand themselves better. That really is the key.

Stand and Deliver (1988)

I would say "Stand and Deliver" certainly does that. It's such an important and beautiful piece of work, and so much because of your performance.

I was fortunate, and I was also prepared for the opportunity. My definition of luck is right there - prepared for opportunity. I had many years of experience using the craft and then finally something of this caliber came in.

It is a simple story. A teacher who really believes and is willing to take the time to make sure that everyone that goes with him on the journey will learn, and they will make it. It's a story about an inner-city schoolteacher who helps the inner-city school kids learn the language of mathematics.

Everybody was overwhelmed and couldn't believe that these inner-city school kids could qualify and comprehend advanced Calculus.

It's such a difficult examination. It's been stated that, I think, 3% of the students who are eligible to take the Advanced Placement test in the United States take it, and only 3% of that 3% passing with a 3, 4, or 5. Five being the highest grade and three is a very strong grade that gives you a passing grade.

These scores give you college credit. They are taking college level classes, and they are not only understanding them, but they are high ranking. That's why so many kids are now taking a lot of AP classes.

In this case, back in 1983, this was a minor miracle, because Advanced Placement Calculus had never been taught at that school. In 1981, teacher Jaime Escalante found a core group of students that wanted to learn math, and who were able to sustain the discipline it would take.

He guided them for two years. By the end of those two years, they knew their math and Calculus. He had to get them through remedial math, of course, then Algebra I, then Geometry, then Algebra II, then Trig, then Math Analysis, and finally Calculus. It's a lot of math, man. A lot of math.

And factor in their life circumstances.

That's what made the movie so wonderful. Not only were you with them taking the examination, which was enough because you saw what they had to prepare for, but then you went home with them. You saw where they come from, and the level of difficulties they had just existing.

The movie really brings you into their world.

It was a beautifully constructed piece of work by Tom Musca, Ramon Menendez and myself, but the key to the whole thing was Jaime Escalante. He created this event.

We produced the movie and bought the rights to his life for one dollar. This was just after they called the students cheaters and they had to retake the test. That was an ugly moment in time because they questioned the integrity of not only the teacher but the students.

When that happened, and as you see in the film, the students must retake the exam, and within 24 hours.

Now that happened in, I think, July. So, they've been out of the classroom since May and all of June. At the end of June is when Educational Testing Services out of Princeton came and told the students that their scores were not going to be eligible and that they [ETS] were going to notify all the universities and colleges that their grades had been denied.

That destroyed everybody. They got a lot of press when they first passed the test, but they got even more press when everyone thought that they had cheated. That was terrible. It was hurtful. So hurtful. I don't even know where to begin. It brings tears to my eyes just thinking about what these kids went through. It was so unfair.

As you see in the movie, the reason it was questioned as to whether they really did the work or cheated was the fact that they didn't miss enough multiple-choice questions, and that all the students answered the same question wrong and in the same way.

Of course, because the same teacher taught them. The students were guilty until proven innocent. It makes me so angry, but it also makes me love and respect teachers so much more.

Me, too. I have so much respect for teachers.

Tell me about Mr. Escalante. Tell me about the time that you spent with him.

He was an extraordinary human being. He was a genius, who really knew Physics, and he had an ability to give people the security and the trust in him to get them to the point of understanding this language. And it's like if you're going to study French, German, Slavic or Japanese and Chinese, it's going to take time. You're not going to get through this quickly, and it's going take a lot of hard work to learn the language. Or, like learning to play an instrument. There is no shortcut. You have to learn the basics.

He had an uncanny ability to teach and make you understand. The way that he would show his love for you and entrust you with a great sense of self-worth. He instilled self-worth, self-respect, and self-esteem which is a key ingredient to allowing people to become all that they can be and have a good feeling about themselves. And if you've seen the movie, there are times his kids say, "I can't do this," "I was always the dumbest one," "Calculus is not for me," and he says, "Oh, poor you." He makes a joke, and then everybody starts laughing, and even the

person who wanted to leave starts realizing that he can make it. And, in fact, all the kids made it.

Jaime had a great gift of communication, a great gift of understanding human nature, and an unbelievable love for inner-city school kids, minorities and people who really didn't get the chance that they should be getting. He called himself the great equalizer because mathematics is a great equalizer. You learn math, you can go anywhere in the world and talk to anybody.

How did he feel about the movie?

About six days before we started shooting, we had gone through a lot with the prescriptive of the two writers. Tom Musca and Ramón Menéndez co-wrote it, and then Musca and I produced it, and Ramón directed it. There came a point where I'd been with Jamie for so long that I really felt his spirit. Imitation is the greatest form of honoring somebody, imitating and really grabbing a hold that's what I did.

His feeling about the movie was that he was very proud of what we had done. Before we started shooting, he and I went through the script, word by word, and he had a lot of things that he added to the script in his own way.

What's an example of something he felt was important to be in the script?

His main thing was to make sure that we included the cutting of the apples, the dressing up in the McDonald's hat, and the “finger man.” These reflected the way he taught.

He told me the story about coming back from his heart attack. He was out for three days and went right back to the school. He didn't go home when he left the hospital. He went back to the classroom and relieved the substitute teacher. I asked, "Why did you come back so quickly?" He said, “Because I had too many kids who really needed me. So, I walked in, and I told the substitute teacher, ‘Thank you for taking care of my congueros,’ [kangaroos)] and have a nice day.”

I was writing down all these little anecdotes, so it would reflect the way that he did it. That was his speech. That was him talking, it wasn't a gifted writer. The key to the whole thing was capturing lightning in a bottle and it's almost impossible to do but I think that's what we did. And not only did he deserve it, but we as people on this planet deserved it.

You weren't doing a character of him, you were him!

Yes! He saw everything that I shot. He was behind the camera watching. And when I got done, he'd have his arms crossed with his little hat on, looking at me, and then he’d lifted one thumb from where his arms were crossed and gave me a thumbs-up sign, and said “Keep on going."

It must have been hard because you want to honor him, but you don't want to be a caricature of him. Those “thumbs up” probably meant everything.

Well, I couldn't have done it without his support. When he told me how he almost died, how he had his heart attack, then had to watch me do that scene, he wept.

He's in the night school classroom teaching English to adults and says, "I'll be right back," then they repeat it in Spanish, "Ahorita regreso," as he walked out of the room. He got to the stairs, and said, “My legs started to give out and my chest hurt, so my hand was up around my heart and the other hand was trying to hold on to the rail, and my feet were giving out, so my body was going forward. I slipped and I slid down the stairs and hit my head at the very bottom of the stairs.”

This scene became very personal…

Yeah. Really personal. I told the guys that we need a crane with a rig arm jib that sticks out. It can follow me down the stairs and then get in front of me down low following me all the way down as I'm going face first on the steps, and then I hit my head. You got to see me hit my head at the very bottom. I said, "We better get this, because I'm only gonna do it once."

I got to the bottom, and I hit my head, and they got it on camera. One take. I was very thankful.

What a wonderful cameraman, too.

Yeah, he was great, and he was also a great cinematographer. The editing also made the movie. Editing was the key to the whole thing.

I had to really understand that we're making a million-dollar movie, and that wasn't a lot of money then and it's really not a lot of money now. We had to pinch the money together from different perspectives. The largest amount came from American Playhouse, which is part of PBS-Corporate for Public Broadcasting, and they gave us $450,000 as seed money.

We needed to raise about $1.2 million. That's what it finally came out to be with all the editing and everything, but the actual production cost is a little over a million. So, we had to raise the rest of the money, and we did. Five thousand from here, 10,000 from there, 300,000 here, 200,000 there. It took a couple of years, so we didn't start shooting until 1987.

I also like that you focused on his personal life. Every teacher that I know brings the work home with them.

Being with him, watching him and watching the way he treated his own family, the way he treated the kids in classrooms, they were his kids. In the beginning, he committed himself to do nothing more than make sure that students who really wanted to be there got the full benefit. He made them sign a contract and, if you didn't agree with the contract, you had to get out of the room, and if you signed this contract and you're not living up to it, you’re going to have to leave. He committed himself to the contract, too.

It's life-changing on so many levels, and not just once. He did this year after year after year.

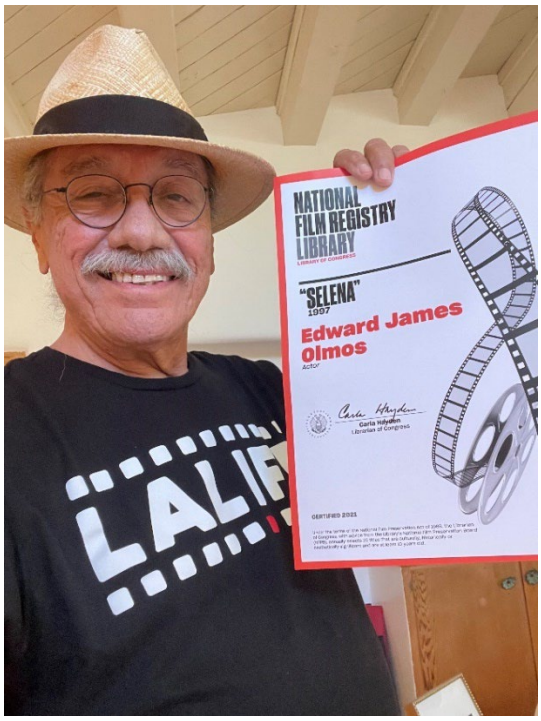
That's why people go crazy at the end of the movie. It was 1983, there were 18 students that passed. In 1984, there were 32 students that passed. In 1985, it was 57, and in ‘86, there were 68 or 69, and then in 1987, 87 students passed and that was the year that the movie came out. He wasn't messing around. In his final year of teaching, he was teaching in Sacramento at the time, he would teach in classrooms with 300 seats, because so many kids wanted to take the class with him. He was amazing. In his final year of teaching before he retired, he had, I think, 250 kids passing the examination in one year. That's a lot.

In 2011, and sadly after Mr. Escalante passed, the Library of Congress selected “Stand and Deliver” to be included in the National Film Registry for its “cultural, historical, and aesthetic significance.” How does that make you feel?

It's an honor. I've been very fortunate to be in this industry and for the accolades that I've received. I’ve had acting awards, directing awards, and producing awards but then, to be given the ultimate, which is to be put into the Library of Congress National Film Registry, that's what it's all about.

This is why we do the work we do so that people will have an opportunity to look at it and see it 100 years from today and 500 years from today. Maybe thousands of years from now, people will be looking at these archives and at this Registry and they will see why these films were so unbelievable and important.

Selena (1997)



Let's talk about Selena…

That story, the whole concept of the movie "Selena" was like "Stand and Deliver." These were people who gave of themselves to the point where they changed the course of human life in a big way. Anybody who saw Selena perform was very fortunate because she was 23 years old when she was killed. She was quite young and, like anything else, you hope that people will be around for a long time, but she didn't make it.

That was the hardest movie I've ever made in my life, to be honest with you. No harder film ever in my life and I've done some very difficult movies.

Why was this one so difficult?

The key to making films is to capture the moment-to-moment situation that gives the viewer the story. They get to see a story unfold in front of them and we get to watch this story go all the way through. In "Selena," we took the story from when they were children. Little people, little kids. She was six years or seven years old when she started learning to play the guitar and sing.

You played her father, and you are a father. That probably made it very personal.

Well, what made it really personal was Abraham Quintanilla, her father. He was the only member of Selena's family who was on set.

We started filming only 13 months after she'd been killed, and for the family, it seemed too early. Nobody wanted to make the movie. Nobody. But we had to. The father said, "We got to make the movie. There are five documentaries being made right now. There are eight books. I don't know how many magazines are devoted to this. Others are talking about making a movie of her life story, and so we must jump on it."

He met with Warner Brothers, and they were smart enough to help him and invest $20 million to make the movie. Thanks to Peter Lopez who structured the deal, and with producer Moctesuma Esparza, director Gregory Nava and co-writer Barbara Jitner-Martinez.

So, this really was the family's story.

I did my research with him the same way I did it with Jaime. I spent a lot of time with Abraham and got to know his idiosyncrasies, how he moved and even how he dealt with his glasses. I also studied his size. I got up to 250 pounds, so I could mirror his look and how he moved.

Be ready for this. Imagine I'm doing one of the scenes in "Selena" and it's a scene with all the kids. I'm teaching them how to play the drums and nobody wants to play music and everybody's arguing. It's funny, the humor, honest-to-good humor, and then I fall just like Abraham really fell with the children. I finished the scene feeling up and happy, and then I see him about 15 to 20 feet away from the camera over on the side by himself, with his back towards me in heaving sobs. He's shaking and quietly crying. I realized that he went through hell, and this is not about me, not about the cast and the crew, and not about the movie. It was about him having to deal with the death of his daughter. Not just his daughter, his everything. She was his everything.

And she was murdered by a trusted person.

In the back. By her manager. I think every seven years or so, they try to get her out. She tried to get out, and I vowed she would never get out of prison. Just like right now, they're trying to get Sirhan Sirhan out after the death of [Robert] Kennedy, and two of the Kennedy family members decided that they should let him out but the wife, Ethel and the rest of the family said, "Don't ever let that man out." What he took from us and to the world is too hard to even begin to understand. He should never step out ever. Same with this woman. This woman should never ever, ever see the light of day outside of her prison cell. Because of her, Selena's life was cut short and all of us suffered trauma. The whole planet.

Selena was just beginning…

She was amazing. Amazing. Her final album, which she completed, which we used, which was put out as their English album, was a masterpiece. It was so beautiful, and we used it in the movie. Everybody goes crazy because that was really her voice. And I will say this, in my understanding of my craft, which I have over 50 years of doing it now, I can honestly say that Jennifer Lopez's performance as Selena was the most unbelievably truthful and honest performance given by a woman in that year. She should have been nominated and won the Academy Award for Best Performance.

If you look at the movie and you start to get into it, you start to realize how deep the situations were, how honest they were, and how simple they were. When she [Jennifer Lopez as Selena] was singing in the studio, she was lip-syncing, but you couldn't tell. It was perfect. I mean, her movements on stage were perfect. She captured the soul and the spirit.

It was because of Selena that the doors for Jennifer Lopez and others were opened. Selena was called "Tejano Madonna." She really became first Tejano star. Nobody had ever paved that path before.

Not a woman. It was music that was dominated by men, and they didn't like her at all. Then she swept the world with her performance at the Astrodome in Texas. I think she put on three concerts that weekend and all three sold out. It was 80,000 people.

But I will say that this, that film gives you moments that are so funny and so enlightening at the same time. It is so beautifully done.

I especially like the scene in the van: "Do you know how tough it is to be a Mexican in America? It's tough. You got to be more Mexican than a Mexican, more American than the American. You got to be able to speak English better than Americans or speak Spanish better than Mexicans. You got to be able to eat American food which is way too bland, then eat Mexican food and you get the runs. Isn't it tough to be a Mexican?"

It was just a classic moment in writing and then we captured the moment on film. That became a mantra for so many Mexican Americans and Latinos in the United States of America. That's the truth.

You got to be more than anybody else. That's the essence of being a minority and being a person that is not given respect because of discrimination and prejudice. Selena broke the mold for artistry. Selena was one of the most gifted singers we've ever produced. She broke the mold for unifying the Latino Community because Puerto Ricans, Colombians, Central America, and South Americans all loved her. It wasn't just the Mexicans. Oh, the Mexicans were crazy for her, and for the Mexican Americans, she became their idol. In our world today, 20-some years later, she's an iconic figure. When you say the word, "Selena," people know exactly who you're talking about.

How did you find Jennifer Lopez to play the part?

We went through hundreds and hundreds of girls trying out for the role. Jennifer was a dancer, a "Fly Girl" on [the television show] "In Living Color." She is so talented and looked so much like Selena. She had done a couple of smaller roles, including "Mi Familia," or "My Family," which is another really stunning film, with myself and Gregory Nava.

We have a few projects that Greg and I have done that had a pretty strong understanding of how to use the medium to the highest level. I turned down more work than I've ever taken. Some of them, the things I turned down, would have made me an artist in the caliber of, say, Denzel Washington or Morgan Freeman. That caliber.

Don't sell yourself short. You chose some quality films...

Well, I went for stories that weren't going to be told by anybody. Nobody wanted to do "Stand and Deliver." Nobody wanted to do "The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez." Nobody wanted to do "Zoot Suit," or "American Me."

You directed "American Me" didn't you?

Yes, I did. That'll get in there [National Film Registry] one day, I'm sure.

“Zoot Suit” (1981)

I’ve spoken with [“Zoot Suit” Writer and Director] Luis Valdez. He has a lot of nice things to say about you.

He is such a genius. That man; wow!

What happened with “Zoot Suit” was once in a lifetime. It was the same thing that happened to Jennifer being at the right place at the right time for “Selena,” and really being prepared for the opportunity when it hit. It was the same way for me with this piece of work.

I'd done theater for 14 years, and in 1978, I was doing theater at the UCLA Community College. That's where I did my first acting class, but really I was a rock and roll singer. I put myself in school singing rock and roll starting in 1960. I was also a really good baseball player, and when I quit playing baseball, my family freaked out. My father didn't talk to me for a couple of years. I mean, we would talk but he never discussed anything with me about my career choices. I wasn't going to play baseball anymore and he just lost it.

That was his hope for you, or rather his dream for you…

Exactly. He knew that I was good enough to make it all the way. He knew that at 14 years old, I was playing with the pros. I was playing in the California Sun League which is a single-A-ball club. The A-clubs are where the pros go to stay in

training and stay in condition during the offseason. Now, the California Sun League used to play in Montebello Park and I was playing with Eddie Roebuck. I was catching with Eddie Roebuck, the famous Dodger pitcher! I was 13 and 14 years old and these kids were throwing hard. This is hardball. This is professional baseball.

Wow! You *were* good!

Yeah, I was good. I was very good, and they were already nurturing me. When you step on that field and they make you understand your life at 13 and 14 years old, you feel capable of handling that responsibility. You feel a sense of understanding about yourself, and you see your self-worth and self-esteem grow. But you cannot let your ego command decisions. That's the hardest part of living is dealing with yourself. It's really difficult.

Anyway, I ended up getting into theater and stayed with it, and staying with rock and roll, too. I was singing rock and roll in nightclubs and performing theater during the day.

When I was performing as a singer, in between songs, I would tell stories. I could see the impact of how I could entertain people and make them think at the same time. I would sing a three-minute story and I felt every word of it. I would just silently close my eyes and sing, and I'm not a good singer, but I was a great performer.

What was the name of your band?

The Pacific Ocean. Eddie James and the Pacific Ocean. You're gonna die laughing.

I just looked it up online! So fun! So good!

Oh, my god. Then you would have loved what we were doing. And then, I'll tell you, man, I was so dedicated that when I got into acting, theater, film, and television, I was looking at the impact of the things that I was creating.

I loved playing on stages either by singing or doing theater. And then, in 1978, I got the opportunity to create this character and I mean, create a character!

You are right about that. For “Zoot Suit,” Luis Valdez said you created that whole character of El Pachuco. It was all you.

That was me. Now that I'm in my 70s, I will tell you that I can honestly look at this and say to myself and to the world, I really created that character. The words came from Luis, the story came from Luis, and the situation came from history.

I was walking out of the Mark Taper Forum, and I hear this woman from across the room, "Hey, you, do you want to be in a play?" I said, "What play?" She said, "Do you or don't you?" I said, "Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Of course. Of course.” She tells me to come the following day at 2:00pm, and when I get there, it's a cattle call of 300 people. I didn't care. They gave me the scenes, and I realize that the dialogue is the language of the streets in East LA. I'd never seen anything like it. The way that I got to audition was just monumental, and I created the character right in front of my own eyes.

Luis put the time in, and really put his intellect to the highest level and has developed himself as an artist in a way that nobody else could. I mean nobody. If there's anybody that could have done that role, it would have been different. Luis could have done that role and it would have been unique. I think I gave the character style and the flare because every night, as a rock and roll singer, I was dancing, moving, doing the splits, and jumping from 20-foot-tall amplifiers.

The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez (1982)

The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez. How did that get on your radar?

That was a total gift. I had gone to help Bob Redford set up the Sundance Institute back in 1978 or ‘79. He brought a whole bunch of incredible storytellers and artists together, and in that process, one of the producers there was Moctesuma Esparza, a Latino producer. He said, "I have two films that I'd like you to help me with; one of them is “The Milagro Beanfilled War” and the other one is the book “With His Pistol in His Hand.” It is a story about Gregorio Cortez."

He said, "I'm a fan of ‘The Milagro Beanfilled War’ and Redford has the rights to direct it.” It’s a great book by John Nichols, and funny. He's a tremendous writer. He used a lot of Latino mythology in it. It was going to make a great movie. I wanted to play the role of Joe. I love that story and it was a very important part of our culture. Mocte said, "I want you to do ‘With His Pistol in His Hand’ first.” I said, “Okay, but I want to pick the director and I want to pick the crew and I want to produce it.” He didn't have the time to produce it, so he said, "You go ahead."

I was the only producer on the set, and I chose the director, I chose the cinematographer, I chose the editor, everything. I even wrote the music.

The music and the cinematography are so beautiful...

“The Ballad” to me is the finest film I've ever made. It molded and brought me to a full understanding of the craft in a way that I could never have understood had I not really been a part of that world and created that. I produced that movie. It was my first production. I was listed as the Associate Producer, but I produced it.

I got a great, great director along my journey, Robert Young. I worked with him first on “Alambrista!,” which is a brilliant piece of work.

Let’s talk about Robert Young…

The Cannes Film Festival gave Bob the very first Caméra d'Or award for “Alambrista!” It is a beautiful movie. We shot the movie in 1976, and it was an aesthetic masterclass that this man showed me when I was a young kid in my 20s. He said, “The key to storytelling is don’t indicate, don't gratuitize, don't romanticize, don't glamorize, and don't exploit the material.” He was truly the gift of my life.

He's in his 90s and still alive.

Yeah, I go to visit him. As a matter of fact, I'm going to go later today to say hello and to see how he's doing. I must tell you right now, Stacie, getting old is very difficult. It's so hard. It's the hardest journey you could take. It's flourishing naturally because he is not dying of any kind of disease. He's dying of old age. Just old age.

Bob Young was the man who brought documentary journalism to television. He did the first four NBC "White Papers" back in the '50s and he was one of the first men to go underwater with a camera. His father built the blimp that went around the camera so that it could go underwater, and he documented sharks for six years. He may be the first man to document a shark.

In 1947 or '48, during the second World War, he was out on the back of a dive bomber, and he would document the bombing. He also photographed it. An incredible man.

It seems you found a like-minded person with a similar vision, because "The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez" is so stunning. The cinematography, the acting, the story, it is almost a perfect movie.

It is. It's the most perfect movie I've ever made. And then people say, which movie do you like the most? It's like asking me which one of my six kids I like the most. That's impossible for me to comment on, but I will say to you, in all honesty, there's no film that I have made, and I've made some stunningly great pieces of work that I really am proud of, nothing compares to "The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez." It is the most exquisite artistic form and usage of film that I've ever been a part of, and I will say "thank you" to Bob Young.

You were just getting started, too. This was still early in your career, right?

I did "Alambrista" in 1977, "Wolfen" in '79 and "Blade Runner" in 1980. Then in '81, I did "Zoot Suit," and "The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez" in '82.

You were non-stop! Working everyday.

I was going crazy. I worked every day, seven days a week. I never took a day off. Not one. I'm not kidding when I say that I never took a day off.

It paid off.

When I left baseball, and my father was crushed, I knew that I had to commit myself to be the best that I could be inside of the world that I chose to do. I had to be able to have the discipline, determination, perseverance, and patience to allow myself to understand me, and be the best that I can be.

But now you're doing it without your father's support…

These were my choices and I had to live with the bed that I made. The world opened for me, but it was very difficult.

Of all your productions, which would you say was your father's favorite? Because he had to at some point say, "My son. Look at him. What a career!"

You are going to make me cry.

And I want to tell you why. He saw me go through the whole thing. He saw me become who I am today, and he was there when I received the Oscar nomination. He was there when I won the Emmy. He was there when I got my star on Hollywood Boulevard. He was right there with me through all the accolades and all the incredible adulations that I got from the world, and especially from the Latino people in this country. He saw it all.

On his deathbed, the final thing he said to me in a whisper, "Get a job."

Tears were running down my face, and I looked at my father and said, "Dad, don't worry, man, I promise you, I will get a job. I have a job and I'll take care of myself. Don't you worry about me ever." He worried about me 'til the day he died.

You're a dad now, so you get it…

Yeah, but people don't get it. People said, "Well, he didn't like what you did." No, he loved what I did. He was very proud of me. He just was afraid. That was his way of saying, "I'm leaving, and I won't be here to help you."

Most people say, "Oh, my god, Eddie, you really devastated him. You left him empty." No, he was full of the love for me, but he wanted me to be a baseball player.

The generations before us, parents, and grandparents, didn't live as we do with an entrepreneurial spirit. They grew up wanting security. Back then, you stayed with the same company for 40 years, you had a retirement account, and you lived in the same house. They don't always understand being a free creative spirit.

I think so, too. I mean, I get it, but I'm very grateful that I've lived *my* life.

I'm grateful you chose this career.

Me too. I could not agree with you more. I'm so grateful that I took my time and that I was able to really devote myself to being a storyteller. I wasn't trying to be a star. I didn't do this for money. I didn't do this for fame. That didn't enter my brain. Where I came from, I was told that you're not going to be able to make money doing this. “Eddie, this is crazy.”

I’m grateful for my life, and I wouldn’t want it any other way.