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BIOGRAPHY MAGAZINE

Biography

Every life has a story.



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Hollywood
Style!**

**Salute to
26 Fabulous
Singers**

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**Andrea
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Voice of an
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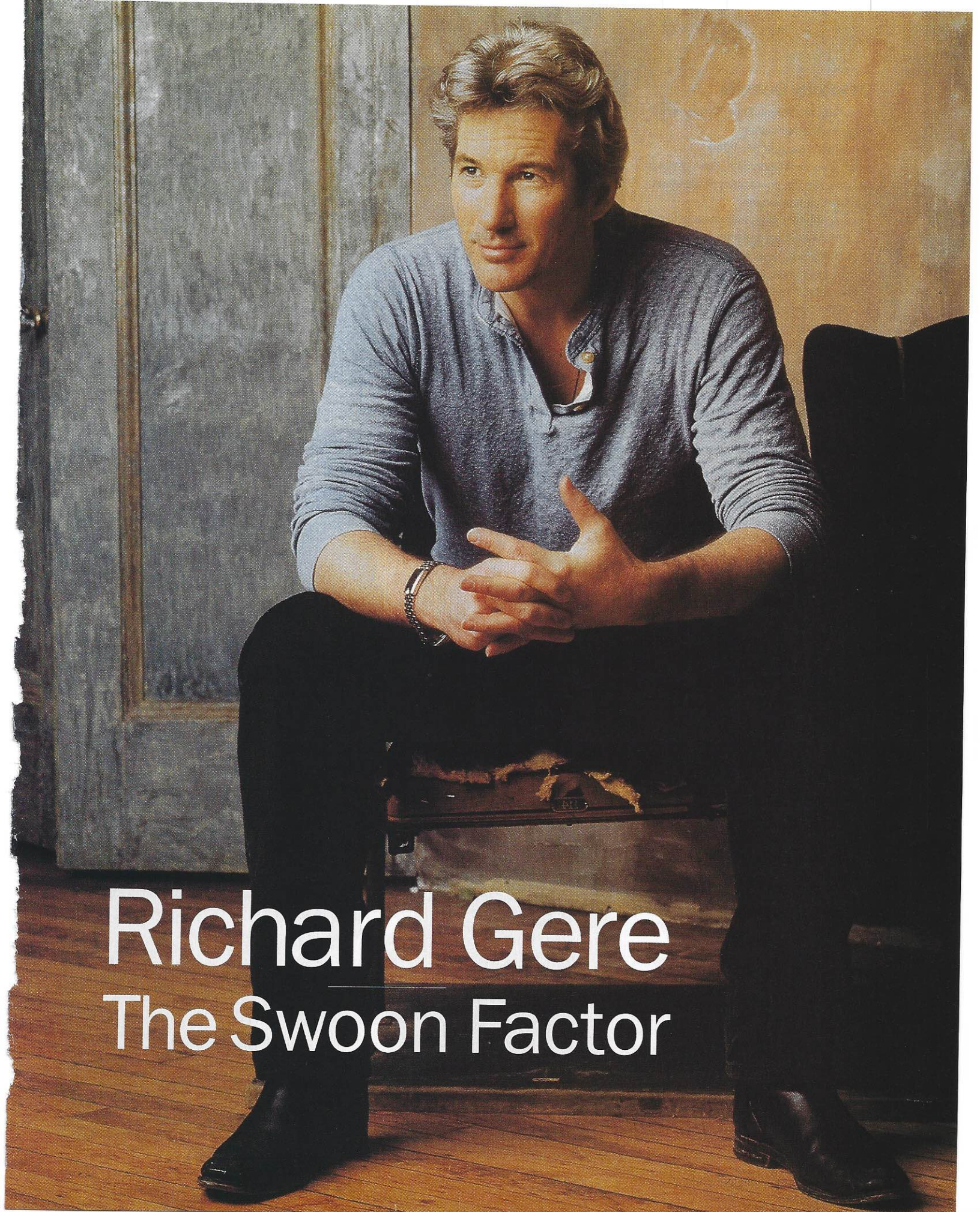
**England's
Prickly
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Richard the Great

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RICHARD GERE... PRINCE PHILIP... JOHN STEINBECK

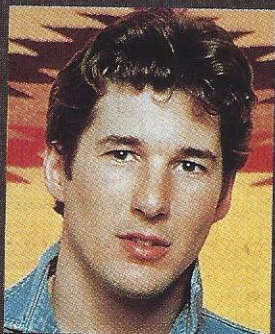
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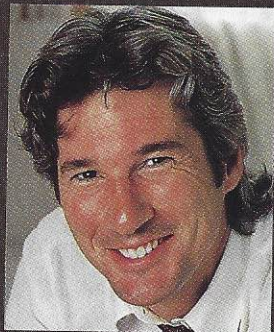
Richard Gere
The Swoon Factor



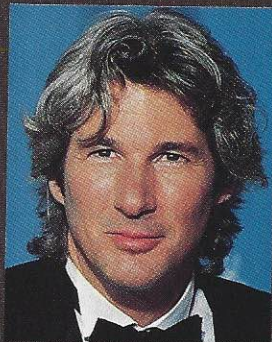
1967



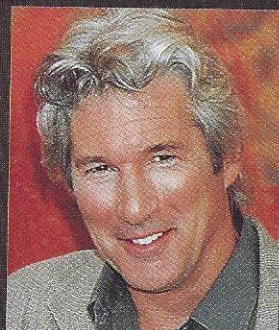
1978



1988



1993



2000

T I M E L I N E

Here's what Richard Gere does to grown women: They giggle like schoolgirls in his presence; they pass him notes in restaurants; they post passionate love letters on the Internet. "It happens everywhere," close friend Kate Capshaw has remarked. "The way women respond to him—the swooning, the sighs..."

You might think that at 52, with tarnished-silver hair and granny glasses perched on the tip of his nose, Gere would have outgrown such reactions. Not by a long shot: In 1999, just as he marked the Big 5-0, *People Magazine* voted him (yes, still) the Sexiest Man Alive.

"The entire 'sexy thing' eludes me," Gere confesses. "God, I have no idea, no idea why people think that! How could I possibly know? It's so *not* me. Believe me, I have a very simple life. When you have a home, and a household, and a kid, you're just the guy who takes out the garbage."

And the guy best known for sex-symbol roles: the swaggering

stud-for-hire in *American Gigolo*; the hot-headed Navy aviator in *An Officer and a Gentleman*; the lonely millionaire in *Pretty Woman*.

"The looks thing has never been my perception of myself, and the people I work with really don't listen to all that stuff," he says. "It almost never comes up, except like now, when I'm doing press." Other actors with this reputation might find themselves pigeonholed into Don Juan roles, but not Gere: "I don't think it's held me back. I've been extremely fortunate in the range and quality of things I've been able to do."

His latest movie, *The Mothman Prophecies*, yields yet another interesting character. Gere plays John Klein, a *Washington Post* reporter investigating paranormal happenings in a small West Virginia town. Based on the book by John Keel, it's a lot like *The X-Files*, but with a highly emotional and spiritual undercurrent. "I didn't just want to do a scary movie," Gere explains. "I think it succeeds in being that, but it's also more—it may deal with the poetry of existence."

BY SHERYL BERK

Celebrity Dossier

NAME: Richard Tiffany Gere (Tiffany is his mother's maiden name)

DATE OF BIRTH: August 31, 1949

PLACE OF BIRTH: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

PARENTS: Homer, an insurance salesman, and Doris, a homemaker

SIBLINGS: Three sisters and one brother

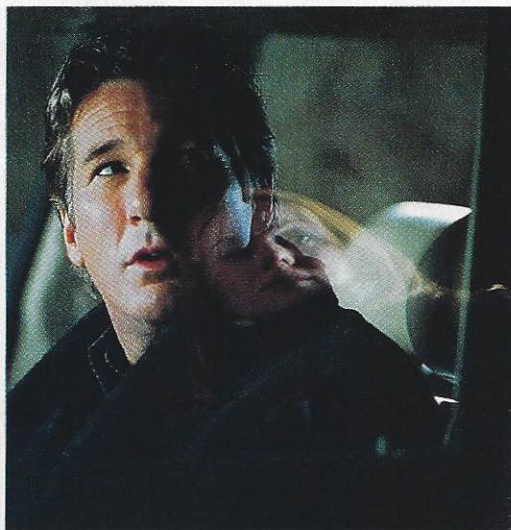
RELATIONSHIPS: Divorced from model Cindy Crawford. Lives with actress Carey Lowell, the mother of his 2-year-old son, Homer James Jigme

FYI: At the October 20 *Concert for New York* that raised millions for the victims of the World Trade Center attack, Gere was one of the celebrity speakers. However, his listeners—including a front-row audience contingent of firefighters and police officers who had lost friends in the attack—weren't pleased when he called for compassion and understanding rather than seeking revenge. "I wasn't expecting to be booed," Gere says. "I wasn't making any huge political statement. But it's so emotional, it's hard to find a venue where you can say anything that's counter to this violent drift of things and be heard at all. I don't know if the time is right for it yet."

Gere has been a Buddhist for almost 30 years, and it was the script's metaphysical qualities that convinced him to take on the project. "It's about a man who has lost his wife [she dies of a brain tumor]. The sense of loss—and literally being lost—is what motivates him. Years have passed, yet still all he can think about is her. He's looking for his wife, and he's asking the big questions we all ask of ourselves at some time or another: What is this all about? Why are we here? What's the purpose of our lives?"

Does Gere ask himself these questions? "Well, actually, I'm presently pondering 'what's for lunch?'" he jokes. But don't let the humor fool you—behind it is a man who's done a great deal of soul-searching.

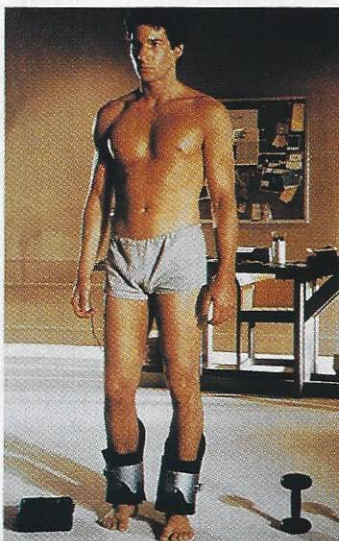
Richard Gere was born August 31, 1949, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the second of five children. He was raised on a farm outside of Syracuse, New York. His father, Homer, was an insurance salesman, and his mother, Doris, was a homemaker. At this point in going over his biography (what Gere jokingly refers to as the "This is Your Life, Richard," portion) he interrupts: "I have to tell you that this is my least favorite thing.... It's just the worst," he



In his latest film, *The Mothman Prophecies*, Gere is a newspaper reporter investigating the paranormal



Gere was riding high with the box-office success of *An Officer and a Gentleman*



The stud-for-hire in *American Gigolo*



Still a fan favorite: Gere and Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*



He re-teams with *The Cotton Club* co-star Diane Lane in the upcoming *Unfaithful*

laughs. "I'm thinking, 'Aw, God, do I have to talk about myself?' What do you really need to know? I was just a very, very shy kid."

Well, if he says so; but you wouldn't know it from reviewing all his activities. "Dick," as he was known to his classmates at North Syracuse Central High School, was a member of the Key Club, the varsity club, the band (he played trumpet), the glee club, and the ski team, not to mention being a star gymnast and student council vice presi-

forming reflects his early insecurities: "Stable people do not go into acting," he insists. "You have to have an overpowering desire to be someone else, and you have to dislike yourself, on some level."

After his sophomore year, Gere landed a summer-stock job with the Provincetown Players theater troupe. "I felt my life was in motion, and I didn't want to go back to school," he recalls. "The artistic director of that theater [Bill Roberts] was the produc-

He came to New York City in the '70s, settling with a girlfriend into a tiny apartment on the Lower East Side. He landed a part in the Broadway musical *Grease*, as the understudy to leading man Barry Bostwick (Gere played the lead in the London production). The tough leather-jacketed bad-boy image seemed to appeal offstage as well: He rode a motorcycle and partied hard. Yet he was virtually indistinguishable from dozens of other tall, dark, and handsome young actors making the audition rounds.

That would soon change. He made his screen debut as a small-time pimp in 1975's *Report to the Commissioner*. Then came a small but pivotal role in 1977's *Looking for*

Fathers at Fiftysomething

You might call men like Richard Gere late bloomers, but nobody called them "Daddy" until they were over 50 years of age. Here are a few other famous actors who waited decades to experience parenthood:

WARREN BEATTY: It seemed he was always a boyfriend, never a bridegroom. But once he decided to settle down, Beatty made up for lost time, having four children in eight years with his wife, actress Annette Bening. Their first child, Kathlyn, was born when Beatty was 54.

CARY GRANT: The five-times-married British star had only one child, Jennifer, by his fourth wife, Dyan Cannon. He was 62 years old when his daughter was born in 1966.

TONY RANDALL: If there were a prize for "oldest first-time celebrity dad," Randall might get it. He was 77 years old before his wife, Heather, who is nearly 50 years younger, gave birth to their first child, Julia, in 1997. Son Jefferson followed in 1998. Randall's first marriage had lasted 50 years but produced no children.

Mr. Goodbar, playing a violent hustler picked up at a bar by Diane Keaton. A year later, he secured his first starring role in *Days of Heaven* as Bill, a Texas wheat-field worker caught in a deadly love triangle. The film's lush cinematography—and Gere's raw talent—earned raves.

The acknowledgment was wonderful, but it wasn't everything. Gere, already a practicing Zen Buddhist for several years, was seeking more meaning in his life. He began to explore Tibetan Buddhism. "I remember I



Defending Edward Norton in *Primal Fear*



Shelley Long was one of Gere's many female co-stars in *Dr. T & The Women*

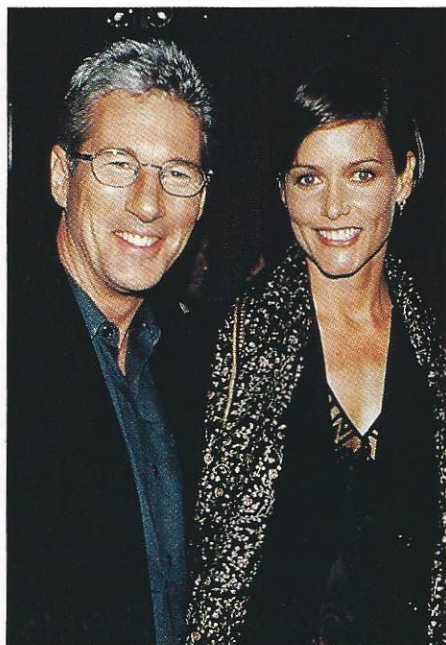
dent. He won a gymnastics scholarship to the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where he studied philosophy and drama. His theory on why he was pulled toward per-

tion designer at Seattle Rep, so I went there for a season. I was also singing and playing guitar in a rock band. I didn't know if I was going to be an actor or a musician."

was about 29, and I was at Cannes where *Days of Heaven* was opening," he says. "My girlfriend [Brazilian painter Sylvia Martins] and I decided to take a long, extended trip through Southeast Asia. The first time I met Tibetan refugees was in Nepal. I had no idea—just like the rest of the world—what had happened to them. The news media was not picking up the story and everyone just chose not to deal with it. So that weighed heavily on me for quite some time."

Gere returned to New York and appeared on Broadway in *Bent*, a controversial play about two gay concentration-camp prisoners who fall in love. He won the 1980 Theatre World award for his performance. A few months later *American Gigolo* premiered, with Gere strutting across the big screen as an often-undressed Beverly Hills male prostitute. Audiences as well as critics were seduced.

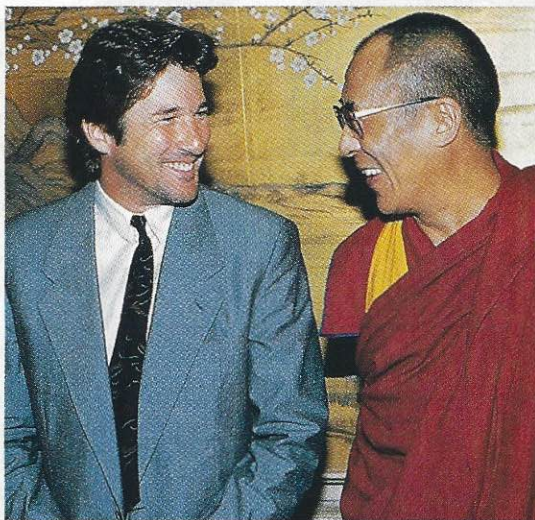
The rest of the decade, however, was hit or miss. He burned up the screen with Debra Winger in *An Officer and a Gentleman*, but



Gere and girlfriend Carey Lowell at a New York movie premiere

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Richard Gere crusades tirelessly on behalf of Tibetan refugees who were dislocated from their Himalayan homeland in the 1950s following the Chinese government's occupation. In 1991 he created the Gere Foundation, a nonprofit organization whose goal is "to alleviate suffering and help restore autonomy to the people of Tibet," says Gere. The Foundation contributes to numerous humanitarian causes, and their latest project (with Naz Foundation International) is helping to support an HIV/AIDS Care Home for Women and Children. For more information or to make a donation, visit the Web site, www.gerefoundation.org, or write to Initiatives Foundation, 341 Lafayette Street, #4416, New York, New York 10012.



With the Dalai Lama in 1987

"I'm not afraid of having an unpopular view," says Gere the activist. "Or maybe I just don't know better."

Cotton Club (1984), *King David* (1985), *No Mercy* (1986), *Breathless* (1986), and *Miles from Home* (1988) yielded only lukewarm reactions. Industry insiders began to speculate that Gere was so wrapped up in his social activism (issues related to Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador) that he had lost interest in the quality of his work.

Gere doesn't see it that way. "I don't have any regrets about the choices I made in my career," he says. "I've had a really high percentage of good experiences in films. There have been only a couple—which I won't name—which I won't even say I wish I hadn't done. They just weren't great experiences. And so what? You learn from them."

He has also learned a great deal from the man he calls "His Holiness," the Dalai Lama. The exiled Tibetan religious leader has had an enormous impact on how the actor lives and thinks. "When I went to see the Dalai Lama for the first time in 1983, it changed my life forever," he says. Gere now considers him "a spiritual friend," and helped organize the leader's 1999 speech in front of an estimated 200,000 people in New York's Central Park.

Gere's emphasis on enlightenment in the '80s seemed to make him a better, more focused actor in the '90s. Ironically, his most memorable role to date is one he initially resisted. "*Pretty Woman* was a type of movie that hadn't been made in a while," he says. It was a romantic comedy, but with a fairy-tale twist—Prince Charming was a playboy and Cinderella was a prostitute. Gere admits, "I was dragged kicking and screaming to make it—I had no interest at all and I was bullied into it by friends and agents. But as soon as I met Garry [director Garry Marshall] and we got together with Julia [Roberts] I thought, 'Okay, maybe this isn't so bad. This could be a lot of fun.' And it was. But I had no idea it was going to be so big; I was the last person to know. Most of it, I think, was Garry, and obviously Julia and I have something that works between us."

Their chemistry translated into box-office grosses totaling nearly half a billion dollars worldwide. Everyone from studio executives to fans clamored for a sequel, but it would take 10 years for Gere, Roberts, and Marshall to team up again, in 1999's *Runaway Bride*. It was less successful with critics but still a hit at the theaters. "We had no interest in just extending the same story," Gere reflects. "People wanted to see us do our thing again, and that seemed like a good vehicle to do it. So that's that."

Following *Internal Affairs* and *Pretty Woman*, Gere churned out films including *Final Analysis* (1992), *Sommersby* and *Mr. Jones* (both in 1993), *First Knight* (1995), *Primal Fear* (1996), and *Red Corner* (1997). But it was his personal life rather than his performances that tended to make headlines. In 1988, he met supermodel Cindy Crawford at a party thrown by photographer Herb Ritts. There was a 17-year age difference (he was 39; she was 22), but neither seemed to mind. After dating for three years, they were married in Las Vegas on December 12, 1991.

Almost immediately, the media began questioning the legitimacy of their union (Gere has long been known as an ad-



Gere greets his ebullient fans at the premiere of *Runaway Bride* in 1999

vocate for gay and lesbian causes). He also was not winning any popularity contests with his outspokenness: While presenting an award at the 1993 Oscars he lambasted the Chinese government and made an appeal on behalf of the Tibetan people. As a result, Academy officials made sure he wasn't invited back. "I don't know what an 'activist' means exactly," Gere reflects, "but what I think and where I come from is always going to be there. I'm not afraid of having an unpopular view. Or maybe I just don't know better."

In May 1994 he made another public announcement when the rumors about him and Crawford got out of hand. The couple took out a \$30,000 full-page ad in the *Times* of London declaring their commitment to each other and confirming their heterosexuality. Ironically, their rela-

tionship fell apart shortly after; in December they announced their separation.

Gere soon began dating TV's *Law & Order* star Carey Lowell. She was a fellow Buddhist, and for Gere, "a perfect match." In February 2000 she gave birth to their son, Homer James Jigme (the latter word means "fearless" in Tibetan). Homer is Gere's first child; Lowell also has an 11-year-old daughter, Hannah, from her marriage to actor/director Griffin Dunne.

"Parenthood— you think you know what it is..." Gere sighs. "All the clichés are true, but they don't really hit the point. What it does to your heart is pretty amazing." As for having another child, "it's definitely something we want," he says. But right now he's just looking forward to the spring premiere of his next film, *Unfaithful*, co-starring Diane Lane. "Diane and I hadn't worked together since *The Cotton Club*," he notes. Ever busy,

he's currently shooting the movie musical *Chicago* with Catherine Zeta-Jones and Renée Zellweger. His role is that of smooth-talking lawyer Billy Flynn.

"I haven't sung and danced since I was a kid," he groans. "My little ankles are just killing me right now! But it's a lot of fun. Rob Marshall, the director, has this great vision. The more cynical it is, the better it is, and that's where we're going with it."

His show-stopping number takes place in a courtroom, where Billy is demonstrating his charismatic ability to win over a jury. To illustrate, Gere begins singing a few bars: "Give 'em the ol' razzle dazzle, razzle dazzle 'em..."

Silver-haired and silver-tongued? Sounds like those ladies in the audience will be razzle-dazzled once more. ●

SHERYL BERK IS SENIOR ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR FOR THIS MAGAZINE.