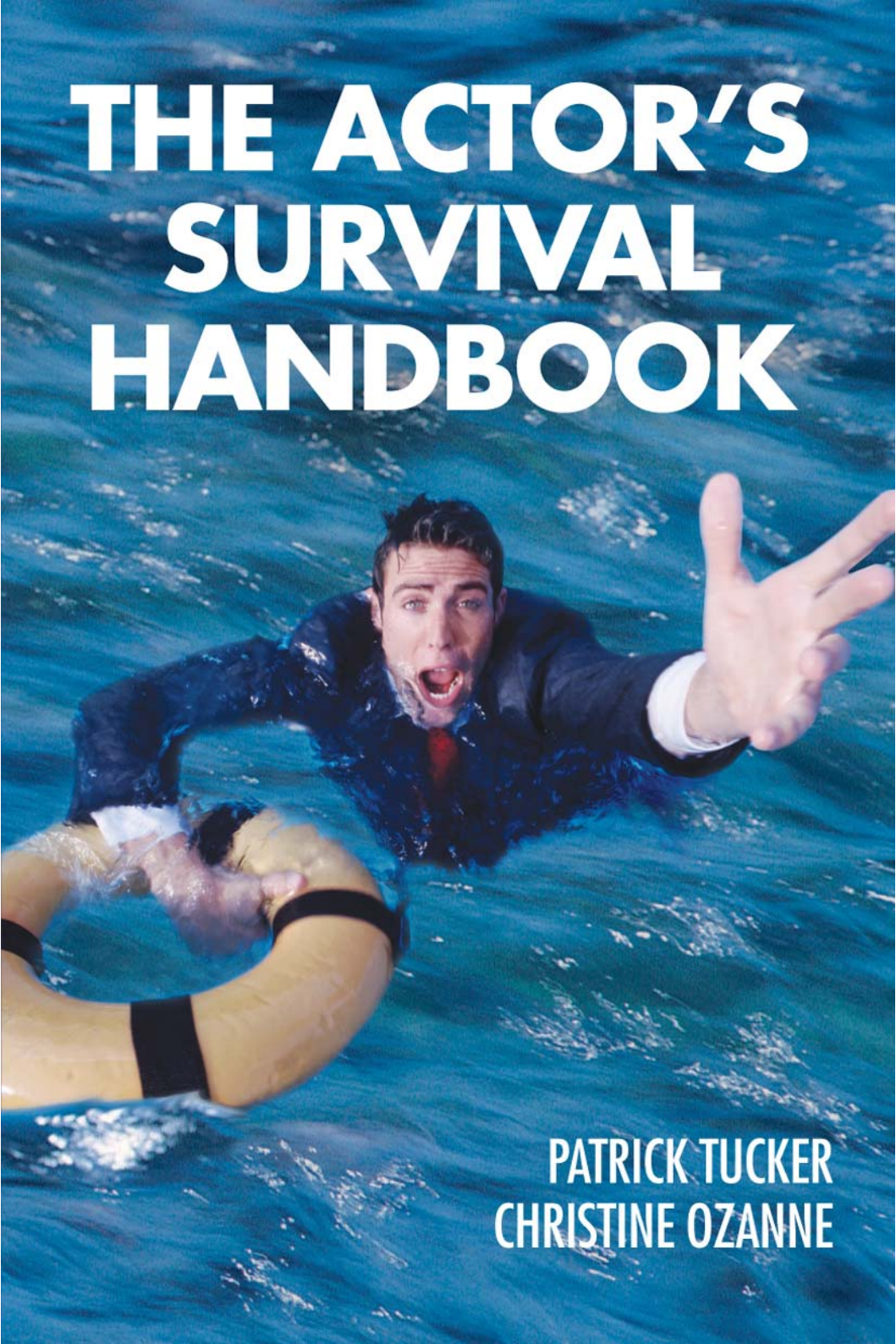


THE ACTOR'S SURVIVAL HANDBOOK

A man in a dark suit and red tie is floating in the ocean. He has a shocked expression with his mouth wide open and one hand raised in a 'V' sign. He is holding a yellow life preserver with black bands. The water is a vibrant blue with white foam from the waves.

PATRICK TUCKER
CHRISTINE OZANNE

THE ACTOR'S SURVIVAL HANDBOOK

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and
Christine Ozanne

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Dedicated to Artistic Directors everywhere
(in the hope they might give either of us a job)

SEE also: ATTITUDE and WHATEVER WORKS

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Introduction

This book is for actors who feel they are drowning in a sea of troubles and need a life belt.

This is also a book for actors who want to know more

About the craft of acting

About the techniques of acting

About *what to do when*

Whether you are starting off—the moment when you wonder if you really want to be an actor—or whether you are staring at the mirror wondering if you should continue, we designed this book to give you easy-to-understand articles full of facts and nuggets of information about how to tackle the realities of being an actor and of giving a good performance. This is not a book full of theoretical philosophies—there are many other books on the shelves that are concerned with those. We wish to tackle the practicalities.

We are not dealing with the details about how to lay out a resume or about which individuals to contact for various jobs, for that will vary from area to area and will change over time. No, we are dealing in this book with all those problems and the solutions to them, which are about the **craft** of acting.

We are writing jointly, but when we have a very different slant on a topic, or have a specific anecdote, then we identify which one of us is speaking.

The Actor Says:

My personal contribution to this book is based on continuous experience of being a professional actor since 1958. I have not only been employed to act, but have extensive knowledge of the trials and tribulations of being out of work and all that trying to get work entails. I have endeavored to cover the realities of being in the entertainment industry as well as the techniques required to produce the

goods under some of the most difficult circumstances. Professional actors have nothing but themselves to sell, and only their bodies as a tool. Look after it (the body that is), you will need it to be in a healthy state, even in old age, if you are serious about being an actor full time and all your life: Good luck!

The Director Says:

Actors often come to me for advice, even though they are working with another perfectly good director. When asked why they come to me, the answer is refreshingly simple and flattering: "You give us answers we can understand, and notes that we can immediately put into practice." I know this book will do that for you too.

The modern actor cannot know when suddenly she will be catapulted from doing a day here and a day there in a series of little acting jobs to a long run in the theatre, a continual role in a television series, or a role in a significant movie that can change her acting situation forever. The actor's job is to be ready for it, and part of the job of this book is to prepare the actor for these possible eventualities.

When we need to choose between using the words *he* or *she*, we alternate from topic to topic to share them out. There is no relevance to the topic being addressed as to whether we use the male or female, simply an acknowledgment that there is no good word to use that is evenhanded between the genders.

How to Use This Book

Any book that has an alphabetical list of topics runs the risk of being difficult to navigate, because you the reader will not always know the name the authors have given to the particular article you are looking for. So the first thing to do with this book is to look up what you are interested in, to see if it has a heading attached to it.

If you cannot find what you are looking for under the alphabetical headings, then consult the Family Trees. The various topics are sorted into eight different Family Trees, which have been arranged into branches, twigs, and leaves. Go to the tree that covers the area of your search, and you can follow a path along the branches to get to the section you are interested in and to find the name of the article that will help you. You also can see the headings of the other topics that are close to the one you want. If the article relates to several different areas of this huge subject of acting, then we included it in a different Family Tree—wherever we think you will look for it.

At the bottom of each article you can see which Family Tree you are in, so you will know which associated topics are near by. We also give the exact branch/twig/leaf location for that subject.

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Family Trees

The “Training” Family Tree

Training deals with all matters to do with becoming an actor, maintaining skills as an actor, and learning new ones. It has six main branches, with some twigs.

Tree: *Branches:* *Twigs:*

Training

- Amateur dramatics

 - Example: Mr. and Mrs. Noah fight

- Conservatories and drama schools

 - Teaching acting

- Further training

 - Radio acting

 - Screen acting

- No training

 - Be yourself (plus!)

 - Fellow actors

 - Jobs requiring acting skills

- Starting off

 - Acting: What is it?

- University courses

 - Qualifications

The “Getting Work” Family Tree

Getting work is the journey from first contact to actually landing the job, and has five main branches, lots of twigs, and four leaves.

Tree: Branches: Twigs: Leaves:

Getting Work

Agents

Photographs

Resumes

Auditions

Interviews

Anecdotes and jokes

Open auditions

Over the top

Readings

Rejection

Casting directors

Commercial casting sessions

It’s not what it used to be

Money is probably the answer

Hierarchy

Producers

Never say no

Typecasting

Know your image

Attitude

Versatility

The “Homework” Family Tree

Homework is all the preparation you do at home, the results of which you take into the rehearsals or to the performances, and has six main branches, with lots of twigs, and a cluster of leaves that includes examples from plays to illustrate the points made.

Tree: *Branches:* *Twigs:* *Leaves:*

Homework

Instinct versus intellect

Don't give up

Good and bad taste

Journey

Consistency

Less is more?

Example: Anna Christie and her dad

Step-by-step

Movement and gestures

Example: Signs of the times

Style

Comedy and farce

Text

Example: Broadway versus Hollywood

Gear changes

Learning lines

Let the words do the work

Example: Brother and sister act

Example: Lady Bracknell's handbag

Example: Valuable verbals

Example: You, thee — and the gold

Opposites

Example: Noël Coward on the phone

Pauses

Voice

Dialects and accents

Projection

The “Rehearsing” Family Tree

Rehearsing is what happens in the rehearsal room, if there is one, and how to maximize the benefits from this period. It has eight main branches, with appropriate twigs and four leaves.

Tree: Branches: Twigs: Leaves:

Rehearsing

Commitment

Don't ask for permission

Drugs

Improvisation

Role-play

Mistakes

Don't give up

Forgetting lines

Illness

Punctuality

Rehearsals (long, short, or none)

Directors

Notes

Discussions

Learning lines

Method acting

Step-by-step

Technical and dress rehearsals

Costumes, wigs, and shoes

Crew

Technique

Believability

Business (biz)

Gear changes

Example: Anna Christie and her dad

Opposites

Outside-in versus inside-out

Blowing your nose

Movement and gestures

Sex and violence

Thinking

Instinct versus intellect

Ten-second rule

Whatever works

Acting: What is it?

Truth

The “Performing” Family Tree

Performing is all that happens in a performance, and how to deal with the problems that come with appearing before those watching you — onstage or on-screen. There are four main branches, with some very important twigs and equally important leaves, including excellent examples.

Tree: *Branches:* *Twigs:* *Leaves:*

Performing

Audience

Good and bad taste

Journey

Consistency

Laughter

Pauses

Example: Princely business

Thinking

Problems

Battle of the sexes

Breaking up (corpsing)

Example: Kate and corpsing

Forgetting lines

Technique

Business (biz)

Comedy and farce

Example: Kate and corpsing

Eye-to-eye contact

Less is more?

Example: Al and Bob’s first meeting

Over the top

Commitment

Example: Plunging in the deep end

Projection

Properties (props)

Pulling focus

Truth

Believability

Sex and violence

The “Style” Family Tree

Style refers to the differences in acting when confronted with scripts from different backgrounds. Period style is what you do differently when performing in plays written at an earlier time, and acknowledges the different types of presentation, such as for Restoration plays or for Shakespeare. Modern contemporary acting is here, as it is a style too. There are five main branches, with many twigs and leaves with examples to illustrate the various styles and their peculiarities.

Tree: *Branches:* *Twigs:* *Leaves:*

Style

Medieval acting

Example: Mr. and Mrs. Noah fight

Shakespeare acting

Shakespeare: First Folio

Shakespeare: Prose or poetry

Example: The silence of the lads

Shakespeare: Simple or complicated

Example: Brother and sister act

Shakespeare: Verse

Example: Olivia’s ends

Example: Princely business

Shakespeare: What you call people

Example: You, thee — and the gold

Shakespeare: Wordplay

Example: Valuable verbals

Let the words do the work

Restoration acting

Example: Mr. Horner is exactly that

Melodrama acting

Example: Signs of the times

[Next branch on page xxiv.]

Modern contemporary acting

Method acting

Blowing your nose

Improvisation

Outside-in versus inside-out

Example: Plunging in the deep end

Ten-second rule

Radio acting

Voice

Screen acting

Example: Broadway versus Hollywood

The “Screen Acting” Family Tree

Screen acting is such an important part of the modern actor’s life (and finances) that it gets its own tree. There are five main branches, with associated twigs and some nice leaves.

Tree: *Branches:* *Twigs:* *Leaves:*

Screen Acting

Auditions

Casting directors

Commercial casting sessions

Photographs

Resumes

Interviews

Anecdotes and jokes

Readings

Text

Screen cheating

Eye-to-eye contact

Properties (props)

Screen reactions

Example: Al and Bob’s first meeting

Example: Noël Coward on the phone

Screen vocal levels

Dialects and accents

Shooting and acting

Editing and acting

Film versus television

Multicamera versus single camera

Punctuality

Stars

Truth

Typecasting

Be yourself (plus!)

Know your image

Versatility

“The Team” Family Tree

The Team covers dealing with all the coworkers you will come across, including yourself. There are six branches, with a lot of twigs and important leaves.

Tree: Branches: Twigs: Leaves:

The Team

Crew

Designers

Costumes, wigs, and shoes

Directors

Discussions

Don't ask for permission

Notes

Fellow actors

Battle of the sexes

Hierarchy

It's not what it used to be

Stars

Producers

You (your other life)

Drugs

Jobs requiring acting skills

Role-play

Teaching acting

Qualifications

Rejection

Attitude

Illness

Money is probably the answer

Never say no

Problems

Whatever works

Acting: What Is It?

What indeed?

Well, it is exactly that, it is **acting**. It is not being, it is **pretending** to be. It is portraying a character so skillfully that the audience believes that you are going through all the emotions of the character to the point where it is convinced of the sincerity of what it is witnessing. The audience, however, always knows that you are an actor and that you know it is out there watching you, and that is the only truth about acting.

A lifesaver:

Sincerity is not always your friend.

You are going through a highly emotional scene, your voice starts to quiver and the tears come; you feel genuinely upset by the situation; if it shows too much, the stage audience gets worried in case you are losing control. This is **not** acting, for you have distracted your audience by your personal indulgence. The screen audience, however, is allowed to see the whole emotional thing, because it secretly knows that it is being shown only the really effective take, where the tears roll down in the perfect way.

The audience can well be moved to tears by the emotion of the character, without being concerned about the performer's emotional involvement. We have noticed how the audience does not always laugh when the actors are having a wonderful time corpsing.

SEE also: BREAKING UP (CORPSING)

The actor must be in total control at all times; the trick is to **appear** to be emotionally involved. There is a difference and the audience will sense it; audience members do not really want you to have a better time than they

are having. After all, they are paying for it. For the screen, of course, the tears can as well be generated by the chemical tear stick as by the emotion.

The reason that audience members need and want a curtain call at the end of the evening is that they need to experience that wonderful change-over when they see before their very eyes the characters of the play reverting back to the actors who played them. Foolish indeed are the directors who deny the audience that very necessary cathartic act by finishing their productions with no curtain call. Again, the world of screen acting is different, for there can be no cathartic moment, and most of the audience leaves the theatre before the credits are shown.

To sum up what acting is, we offer the following:

All acting is cheating.

You need to use technique to recreate a character that is believable and real, night after night in the theatre and take after take in a film. It is your life belt:

Technique is your friend.

If you think that by becoming a professional actor you will feel wonderful each time you perform, cancel that thought right here and now. Instead, why not be pleased to create a wonderful moment for your audience and be proud of the technical way you did it?

An excellent actor is one who presents many more valid bits of information to an audience (about the situation, mood, characterization, etc.) than a merely good actor will. The methods used vary enormously from actor to actor, both in their preparation techniques and in the way they communicate all the good stuff to an audience. The techniques they use will vary from the arena of the stage to the challenge of the screen, but excellent actors will still be doing more for their audiences than their competitors will.

SEE also: METHOD ACTING and OUTSIDE-IN VERSUS INSIDE-OUT

First Family Tree:	Training
Branch:	Starting off
Twig:	ACTING: WHAT IS IT?

Second Family Tree: Rehearsing
Branch: Whatever works
Twig: **ACTING: WHAT IS IT?**

Agents

What they can and cannot do for you.

An agent is like a car. It gets you from point A to point B with varying degrees of comfort. It needs to be paid for, taxed, insured, serviced, and supplied with gas, and then you have to drive it. It is always there when you want it, but it will not move on its own.

It would be nice to believe that once you have an agent, you can sit back and let her do the struggling, the constant looking out for opportunities, and the matching of your abilities to the parts that are on offer; someone to guide and mold your career the way you want it to be.

It would also be nice to win the national lottery or to be left a fortune by an obscure relative; well, they **are** all possible but all equally unlikely. An agent will, as a minimum, answer the telephone and negotiate money; anything else is a bonus (so do not expect it). An excellent agent will do more, but in this day and age she is often not given the time **she** wishes to give her clients a better service.

Agents have to exist, have to earn a certain income just to survive, so for a start they are into a different way of thinking about acting than their clients. We have found that when it ever comes to a choice between two jobs (and you are **very** lucky ever to be in a position when you have a choice), an agent will always—**your** agent will always—choose the job that by an amazing coincidence generates the most income for you and for the agent.

So if you want guidance for a career, if you want to grow as an artist in certain directions, **you** make the call, **you** make the decisions. Until you are a star, and can have an agent and a manager looking after you in great detail, agents will have so many people on their books that the individual touch is not possible to the degree that you or they would like.

It is at the starting point in your career that the proper agent can make a difference, because the industry is always looking out for the new face on the block, and it is worthwhile to find out who has the contacts in the areas where you feel happiest.

The Actor Says:

I have had at least a dozen agents in my career, and the thing that occurs to me now is that the agent you have when starting out is the one who has the most power to help you and guide you into the right area of work. I should have made greater efforts earlier on to find out who would capitalize on my comedic qualities.

So, although everyone might think they are extremely versatile and do not want to get pigeonholed, it is a much better idea to decide on either a type of character, and pursue that, or an area of work, and pursue that. Then find an agent who specializes in that particular field, with the right contacts, and work together to promote you. Once you are established and become better known, you can afford to branch out into other areas of work.

Agents tend to expect all their clients to be available at any time for interviews. Should you find yourself in the situation where you get very short notice for a casting session—such as you need to be there in an hour and a half—just say, “I’ll be there.” Even though you know it is impossible to make the time given, be positive with your agent and then work out how late you are likely to be. When you get to within twenty minutes of the appointment, call your agent with a really stunning and believable reason why you are likely to be late and let her sort it out with the casting director. An agent will be more sympathetic to a train stuck in a tunnel, a broken-down bus, or a minor accident than believing you are not able to go because of alternative work or family reasons—remember, the truth is not always your friend.

Just think for a moment: if all agents worked for all their clients the way the actor thinks they should, there would still be the same (small) number of jobs available and the same rejection rate.

Family Tree:	Getting work
Branch:	AGENTS
Twigs:	Photographs; Resumes

Amateur Dramatics

When you are not paid.

This is a wonderful ongoing practice and ever-present tradition that gives a great deal of pleasure to actors and audiences. In the UK amateur world, the person who gives the actors their moves, discusses the interpretation, and decides the set and lighting is known as the producer, even though he is in fact directing the play (and this also happens in some radio dramas as well). In the old days all actors were amateurs, only coming out to act for festivals and the wonderful pageant wagon plays. It was only around the time of Shakespeare that it became possible to earn a living as an actor, although the actors he wrote about rehearsing a play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* were very obvious amateurs, with regular jobs elsewhere.

The Actor Says:

I was fortunate enough to be brought up in a city that sported three large professional theatres, and a main amateur company that still flourishes. I was a member of this company for five years, and I owe it a great debt, not just because of the opportunity it gave me to cut my teeth, as it were, by appearing in many of their quality productions, but because of the encouragement I received to go on and train for the professional theatre.

Amateur dramatics are often derided by professionals as full of poor or even bad actors and backstage backbiting, and there is probably a little truth in this, but there are some excellent amateur companies. They are a good place to start, to see if you really want to spend the rest of your life doing this sort of thing, and they are a good place to keep your talents up to scratch as you wait for your lucky break.

The problem with amateur work is the very reason it exists, which is for the actor to be seen. Very often, to be seen is more important for the

amateur actor than to produce excellent work. One such amateur group in the United Kingdom had a theatre built to their own specifications—not everyone in the audience could easily see the stage, but they could all very easily see each other sitting in the auditorium. The performers are sometimes happier to be seen as themselves in a wonderful costume than to create the character who would actively choose to present himself in that way with that set of clothes.

However, if you decide that the professional life is not for you, there is no reason why you should not join such a group and spend your life playing good roles in plays that the profession can no longer afford to do (large-cast classics, for instance), while keeping a regular, well-paid job to support yourself and your family in a way that a great many actors who struggle to be professionals are not able to do.

Family Tree:	Training
Branch:	AMATEUR DRAMATICS
Twig:	Example: Mr. and Mrs. Noah fight

Anecdotes and Jokes

Make sure they have a good time meeting you.

It is always a good plan to have some jokes or anecdotes in hand when you go for an interview or audition, as it gives you a solid performance to fall back on if required.

There is a distinct skill involved here. Do not attempt to launch a joke unless you have an absolutely rock-solid punch line and know that you can recall it with relish. Jokes are often broken into three elements; in fact the magic number three is something you come across all the time in plots and texts. Plays were, for many years, performed in three acts, and there is something pleasing, even comforting, about delivering (and receiving) stories in three distinct chunks. The old Englishman, Irishman, Scotsman jokes were, and probably still are, very popular.

Anecdotes, as opposed to jokes, are usually of your own making and based on a real-life experience. Never worry that they have to be completely accurate. We have (alas) often inwardly yawned our way through someone's long yarn interspersed with, "No, wait a minute it wasn't Wednesday, it was Tuesday, or was it Thursday, anyway it doesn't really matter." No, it doesn't!

The Actor Says:

I often relate a real-life experience, but edit it, wildly, down to the basic three things: setting the scene; depicting the highlight; and timing the pay off. I never try to labor an anecdote with unnecessary trivia, but just get on with it to get to the pay off as quickly as possible. I often change some of the details (no one will know) to suit the situation and audience, but above all, I practice it and time it to perfection—I even rehearse it in the shower!

The really important thing to remember with an anecdote is that, like a joke, it must have a witty, strong, and surprising tagline. The tagline should be considered with great care and chosen deliberately word by word for maximum effect. Never preempt any word from a tagline—in other words, do not use important tagline words anywhere else in the story.

Here is a brilliant example by Michael Billington, the theatre reviewer of *The Guardian*, in his March 21, 2003 review of a production of *As You Like It* at Stratford-upon-Avon, where the Swan theatre has the audience placed on three sides of a raised stage. The reviewer talks of the director thus:

And, although [he] seeks to evoke the Forest of Arden through persuading the entire company to pose as standing elms, or bleating sheep, he crucially neglects the sightlines. Thus in the vital scene where Rosalind discovers the plethora of love-verses left by Orlando, I literally couldn't see the wooed for the trees.

Being such a beautifully structured piece of writing, it is worth analyzing and noting that he is careful not to use either the word *wood* (Forest of Arden) or the word *trees* (standing elms) to produce the strong and witty punch line *wooed for the trees*. It is especially clever because it is obviously rooted in truth.

First Family Tree:	Getting work
Branch:	Auditions
Twig:	Interviews
Leaf:	ANECDOTES AND JOKES

Second Family Tree:	Screen acting
Branch:	Auditions
Twig:	Interviews
Leaf:	ANECDOTES AND JOKES

Attitude

How you come across to others— professionally and personally.

Why do you want to be an actor? Often actors have a talent to affect people's emotions from an early age. They have a gift for producing an effect on family and friends, and it is a natural progression for them to want to be an actor. Their attitude then toward performing will be set up as soon as they can walk. Others find that the urge to act comes much later in life, and they get their interest in acting from what they see, and this makes their attitude toward it all more of a desire than a need.

Either way, it is important to realize that your attitude will very much affect others, and it is only too easy to slip into a victimized or depressed mode. This is not helped when well-known, established actors are interviewed, and they say how much they love their work and how lucky they are to be paid to do something they enjoy so much. All very nice, but it gives the impression that an actor's life is and has always been like that. This is not true. Somehow, the more famous they are, the more they seem to forget the hard times, the disappointments, and the lonely and deeply uncomfortable times they have spent either trying to get work or doing the more lowly jobs when they started off.

All actors, no matter who you ask, will have tales of woe, rejection, humiliation, and panic; no one will have escaped these sinking feelings. We do not intend to depress you or put you off but simply intend to alert you to keep a positive attitude throughout what will inevitably happen should you launch into this most uncertain profession.

Your attitude then will be an important key to whether you will go through life constantly angry and sad at the cards you have been dealt or whether you recognize that you were never promised that it would be fair, and relish whatever comes your way. Yes, bad things will happen from