

STARVIEW

By EVAN LEVINE

Mary Wickes somehow finds the time to talk

Forget the film dictionary. Just talk to Mary Wickes, who, by her count, has starred in 44 movies and 17 Broadway plays. She currently plays Marie, the spirited housekeeper on "Father Dowling Mysteries" (airing Thursdays on ABC.)

"Ah, yes," she says cheerily. "Let's see. I did both the play and movie version of 'The Man Who Came to Dinner'; 'White Christmas'; 'Now, Voyager' with Bette Davis; 'The Music Man'; and a whole bunch of -- well, not a whole bunch, but four -- movies with Doris Day."

She has appeared with Rosalind Russell, worked with playwright George S. Kaufman, and done "tons and tons of summer stock." She sits on the medical board of UCLA, does hospital volunteer work and is trying to write a Master's thesis. We don't tell her that we can barely get dinner on the table every evening.

Wickes especially enjoys her role on "Father Dowling Mysteries." "I'm not Roman Catholic, but I've always been interested in the church and the liturgy," she explains. "Every now and then I run into a priest, or I get a fan letter saying that they really know someone like my character. Housekeepers in parishes are self-appointed guardians."

Wickes throws herself wholeheartedly into everything she does, which doesn't surprise us. "I like to get inside a character," she booms out. "Down to the kind of shoes she wears and what her posture's like. I have a feeling that Marie knits her own sweaters. And she gets completely involved in her work -- when she's vacuuming, you'd better get out of the way!"

Wickes is also awaiting the release of the movie "Postcards From the Edge," based on the autobiographical novel by Carrie Fisher. In it, Wickes plays the mother of the Debbie Reynolds character (Fisher's mother), who is played by Shirley MacLaine. (Got that?) "It's the first time I've played



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someone who's still living," she says thoughtfully.

By this time, we're a little reluctant to ask Wickes any more questions, because we're afraid that she'll tell us that she also runs a major corporation and dances the lead in the ballet on alternate Tuesdays.

"In film, I'm always someone's housekeeper, but in the theater, I tend to get dressed up more, if you know what I mean," she says. "In fact, there's hardly anything I haven't done."

We knew that. If you'll excuse us, we're going off to get ourselves a real life.

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