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Local Author Profile An Unbelievable Life

By Lou Fancher



Jil Plummer modeling in New York City

Photos provided

It's a good thing author Jil Plummer has no interest in writing an autobiography. If she wrote one, no one would believe it. They might even mistake it for another of her fictional novels, which include "Cara-

van to Armageddon" and "Amber Dust."

Growing up as an only child of parents who placed her in a Vancouver Island boarding school at the age of 12 and disappeared almost entirely to their native England, the 42-year Lafayette resident considers location when writing a book.

"I think about where I want to be," Plummer says. "Being in a boarding school kept me being a kid: I was never a teenager. The worst thing I did was have a midnight feast."

To stave off loneliness and a "horrible feeling" of abandonment, Plummer turned to Bishop's Cleeve, her beloved horse. Named after a charming village in the Cotswolds, she says the horse was like a brother during her school years. In many ways, Plummer's knack for following a side-winding trail and her fondness for fantastic adventure surely started on the back of Bishop's Cleeve.

After graduating, she went to finishing school in England and majored in horsemanship. Landing a job working on a large estate, Plummer rode horses on a nearby Duke's property and cared for an Olympic-level racehorse. Soon enough, the animal was retired from competition and sold to a faraway wealthy landowner.

"I followed it," she says, simply. "I liked the horse."

Horse care and training led to working with fox hunters, steeplechasers and champion show jumpers. "Working with horses teaches you to listen and understand people," Plummer says. "Horses can't talk, so you have to feel what they are thinking." Riding, she says, gave her a feeling of

"fire and power" to be "up, atop all that muscle."

Eventually landing in Toronto, Plummer was drawn to the drama of theater. "I always like to live the lives of my characters. What better way than acting?" she asks. Looking to escape from a boyfriend and learning of a hotel in Jamaica that needed employees, Plummer headed south.

"We went down there and were immediately let go by the hotel. I asked a taxi driver if he knew of any jobs and he got us an interview at a banana plantation," she recalls.

Plummer became a social secretary, picking up people at the airport, writing letters for her boss and escorting servants hired to sweep the beach when the family was to spend the day on the seashore. She taught horseback riding to guests of the hotel and one day, an American woman who lived in New Rochelle, just north of New York City, invited her to come and stay. "I don't know why, but she just kept inviting me," Plummer says.

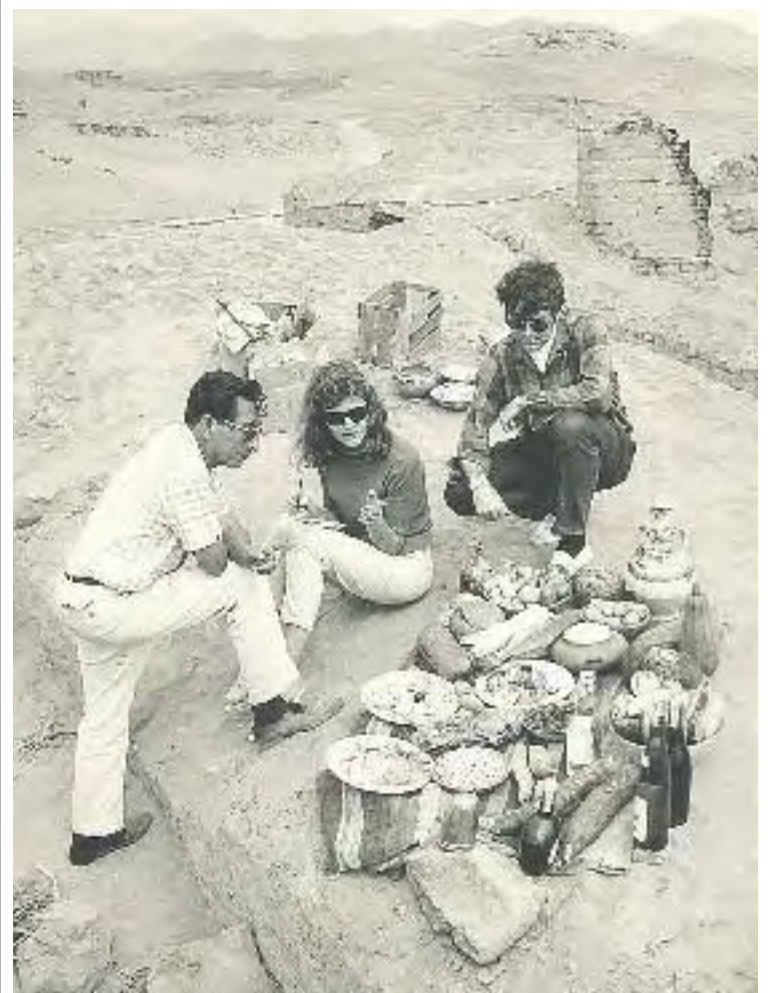
She lived with the family for months, obtaining a green card and acting in off-Broadway productions of plays like "The Balcony" (she understudied the principle role — "a warhorse in a brothel," she says, laughing at the memory).

Hollywood was next. Plummer wound up working for an ABC show featuring Chucko the birthday clown; arranging animal acts, including an elephant she booked. "It caused a panic, because they weren't sure the stage would hold up. They weren't too happy with me until I started picking smaller creatures," she says.

She met her late husband, Bil, a photojournalist, in Los Angeles. Traveling all over the world, and one time, south, along the coast of California, they stopped in San Francisco and never left. "We lived in North Beach," Plummer says, "and one day a woman we'd met called and said, 'I have a house on a horse trail I'm selling.' We went out to Lafayette, looked at it, bought it, and I'm still here."

Although she's intensely fond of England, especially the wild, mysterious corners of the Moors, Plummer's favorite location might be anywhere she can put a pen to paper. "I love writing and how different things are than their reality. You can see a man on a street and not know he writes beautiful poetry or once sent a rocket to the moon. I always tell people, no one really gives a damn about your biography, but use what you do (in your life) in your fiction. Do everything you can, then fictionalize it."

Plummer is currently working on "fictionalizing" the life story of Brenda Oum, owner of Lafayette's Papillon Quality Gourmet Coffees, and plotting her next adventure, be it real or fictional.



Plummer, with her husband Bil, on a photo shoot in Peru

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