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A Girl's Guide to Aging Gracefully

Actor Mimi Weddell redefines life as we know it.

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The first thing I notice about [Mimi Weddell](#) is her white dress gloves. The delicate fabric covers her hands, inching up the forearm. Atop her head, a brimmed hat hides all but a few stray wisps of hair. Catching a glimpse of my own naked hands, I suddenly feel like I've been miscast in an Audrey Hepburn movie. "Why don't I wear gloves like that?" I think. "Why doesn't everyone wear gloves like that?"

Oh, that we could all be as elegant as Weddell. The subject of *Hats Off*, a new documentary from director Jyll Johnstone, Weddell redefines what it means to grow old. Forget bridge games and retirement communities; at age 93, she spends her weeks hopping the Manhattan city bus to auditions, voice lessons, gymnastics

workouts, and dance classes. ("If you don't dance, you cannot aspire," she says. "You do not lift up from this earth.") She avoids old people who talk about nothing but medical conditions and can't bear those who "shuffle" along. "I find if people walk slowly in front of me these days, I want to kick them," she says with a smile.

While that remark alone probably qualifies Weddell as one of the hippest members of the senior set, her journey into acting confirms it. At age 65, after her husband died "leaving nothing behind but bills, poor man," the mother of two quit her secretarial position to act full time. Braving 14-hour cattle calls during a time when her peers were retiring, she built her résumé and managed to stay afloat. She has since starred in several Off-Broadway productions and done guest roles on *Sex and the City*, *Law & Order*, and *Hitch*. She has also appeared in *Vogue* and modeled for Burberry, Louis Vuitton, and Nike. Three years ago, she was named one of *New York Magazine's* 50 Most Beautiful New Yorkers.

Weddell's success reflects her personal philosophy: "Rise above it." As seen in the film, the slogan plasters the walls of her East Side flat, scrawled between mountains of hatboxes and crammed bookshelves. Like her apartment, Weddell's personal life is a bit messier than her white gloves suggest. As revealed in *Hats Off*, her free spirit often causes conflicts with her more traditional children, who both lived with her at various points during filming. "I'm off center with these children," she admits in one scene. "I wanted them to be a little bit graceful. They're so earthbound." Shot on and off for more than a decade, Weddell didn't shy away from such exposure. "I was just going along the same as always," she says with a laugh.

Therein lies the magic of *Hats Off*. Yes, our heroine is sophisticated, witty, charming, and has fabulous accessories, but she's also humble. Her acting isn't about fame; it's about connection. Asked what advice she has for young actors, her eyes grow wide. "When you see the person who will be doing the casting, just look at them," she says. She lowers her voice. "Use their inner magnet to gaze into their eyes. After all, they are still the window to the soul."

Weddell's secrets of longevity are equally simple: Stay imaginative, dance, and flip upside down. "I can't wait to get back to New York to get to the ballet and stretch my legs on the barre," she says, "then go to the gym and stand on my head."

For that, she may need to lose the gloves.

'Hats Off' opens May 2 in Los Angeles at Laemmle's Sunset 5, 8000 Sunset Blvd., West Hollywood. For more information on the film and screenings nationwide, visit www.hatsoffthemovie.com.