

Steve: as I remember him

STEVE McQueen was the chiselled American anti-hero whose good looks and daredevil pursuits earned him both box office success and a reputation as "The King of Cool".

But the man immortalised in films such as *The Great Escape* and *The Magnificent Seven* is a stranger to the woman he spent the last four years of his life with.

Barbara Minty was a model, 23 years McQueen's junior, when she became his third wife. The film star had her brought to his Los Angeles hotel, ostensibly to audition her for a film role. As she described in her 2006 memoir *The Last Mile*, she didn't even know who he was. She'd seen McQueen star with Paul Newman in the film

BARBARA MCQUEEN
The Space, Komedia, Gardner Street, Brighton, Tuesday

The *Towering Inferno* and admits, "I didn't know the difference. He found it very funny when I finally told him, but I waited a while to tell him."

Speaking to *The Argus* before her appearance in Brighton next week, Barbara explains: "We hit it off straight away. It was very interesting how it just worked with us. We liked the same things, shared the same values." By the time they got married, McQueen was bearded, grizzly and backing out of the limelight.

Their life together was spent very simply, riding his beloved motorbikes and feeding their animals. If Barbara doesn't watch any of his films now it's because the man on screen isn't the one she knew.

"It bugs me and hurts my feelings so I may as well not. I married a guy named Steve with a scruffy beard and long hair who liked to ride

around in pick-up trucks and drink beer. That was my guy."

Barbara was only 27 when, in 1970, McQueen died of a rare asbestos-related chest cancer called Mesothelioma. They had been together for four years.

Now 57, more than half her life has been defined by being Steve McQueen's widow. But she says that's nice. "He had three wives and each got a different part of him, I liked the part I got best. I got the easy part, that's for sure. He was more difficult the first two times around [when married first to Neile Adams and later to Ali MacGraw]. He tried to pull some of that stuff on me but I was like, no! You can talk to my dad or I'm going home."

Though Barbara remarried twice, she divorced her third husband two years ago. Living in such a long shadow can't have been easy for him, I suggest. When interviewed in 2006, Barbara had a framed poster of McQueen above her bed. "Yeah," she agrees. "Life is much easier now. But it's lonelier too - I can't eat all that popcorn by myself."

Thirty years on, she admits she still finds it hard to talk about McQueen. "It weirs me out. But it is what it is and you deal with it." Most of the time she doesn't have to, of course, but she's currently touring the

UK with biographer Marshall Terrill (who has written three books on McQueen already and helped Barbara with her memoir), promoting their new book, *Steve McQueen: A Tribute To The King of Cool*. A 384-page "coffee table book" filled with anecdotes and memories from those who knew the actor best, Barbara describes it as "a fine tribute, very sweet and kind."

"I don't know much about his acting career or the period before he was with me, so it's interesting to find out who he was then."

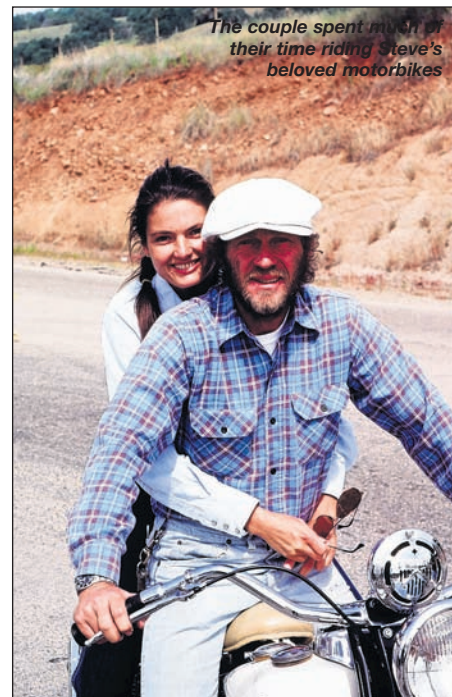
Was she surprised by anything said?

"Not really. Everyone has their own interpretation of what Steve was like. To lots of people he was this tough guy but he was never that way in real life, not with me. I wouldn't have wanted to cross his path, but he was very sweet and kind."

McQueen would be 80 if he were still alive today, how does she imagine he'd be as an old man? "Grumpier!" she laughs. "Definitely grumpier. But he'd be great. I know he'd be great."

Nione Meakin

■ *The event takes place this Tuesday at Komedia, Gardner Street, Brighton at 7pm, tickets £7.50/£5 from www.komedia.co.uk*



The couple spent much of their time riding Steve's beloved motorbikes



Steve and Barbara had been together just four years when he died

the guide exhibitions

Photo: John Tiller by Amelia Shepherd



BRIGHTON PHOTO FRINGE 2010

The Old Co-op building, London Road, Brighton, until Sunday, November 14

BRIGHTON'S biggest free photo fringe festival carries on into this month with new shows being added for the final fortnight.

Conceived in 2003 to coincide with the Brighton Photo Biennial, the festival has seen displays of photographs by traffic wardens, a photo essay on a troubled Brighton teenager as he tangles with the law, and new takes on seemingly familiar city scenes.

This week The Old Co-op Building launches *Undercurrents*: an exhibition by five artists exploring the unseen laws that control us and the omnipresence of nature in modern life.

And photographer Amelia Shepherd's *Peacehaven In III Parts* combines historical archives, contemporary photo books and portraits of current residents living in the town originally planned to be a garden city by the sea.

Open Fri to Sun noon to 5pm, free. Visit www.photofringe.org

FUNKY RED DOG
New Steine Hotel, New Steine, Brighton, tomorrow to Sunday, January 2

WORK by dog-loving street artist Funky Red Dog can be seen on walls around the world from California to Clapton, and Brazil to Brighton itself.

Now the Brighton-based artist's work is on show in the New Steine Hotel, continuing the venue's link with exciting new local artists.

Trained at London's St Martin's College, the Dog works with everything from ballpoint and marker pens to spray-paint for his distinctive images, which can be seen all over Brighton's streets.

Open daily, free. Call 01273 681546.



ARCADIA

The Circle Gallery, Sussex Coast College, Station Approach, Hastings, Monday until Friday, December 3

DANNY Pockets's exploration of the past, present and future of Hastings Pier was the winner of the New Sussex Arts Prize, before its subject was burned down last month.

The St Leonards-based artist explored the social and physical architecture of the town's former landmark, as well as its glory and vulnerability.

An associate artist at the School Creative Centre in Rye, Danny has been working on studies for a piece about Hastings Pier for years, describing the structure as: "A beautiful testament to our connection with the elements that reaches out to the horizon and allows us a moment's freedom from terra firma."

Since the destruction of the pier, Danny has said that he doesn't want the artwork to be a requiem for the landmark, but an homage to it.

Open 10am to 4pm, free. Visit www.sussexcoast.ac.uk

TIM KENT:
THE BEST OF TIMES
Moncrief Bray Gallery, Woodruffs Farm, Woodruffs Lane, Petworth, Wednesday to Saturday, November 20

INTERIOR spaces and the people who inhabit them is the focus of Tim Kent's new exhibition which comes to Petworth direct from Chelsea's 12 Park Walk Gallery.

The paintings range from the spectacular interiors of stately homes including Chatsworth, Castle Howard and Drumlanrig Castle, to intimate scenes where the viewer is almost a voyeur into a private world.

While the interiors may appear real, Kent has subtly distorted the architecture to exploit the tension between reality and illusion.

"The spectator can see my paintings as frozen moments from a play or a film, looking onto little stages of time and space in which I depict the issues that continue to fascinate me as an artist, a man, a citizen and a sign," he says.

Open Wed to Sat, 11am to 4pm, free. Call 07867 978414.



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