



STEEL
JUNE 23 - OCT. 23
MAGNOLIAS

A HEARTWARMING COMEDY CELEBRATING THE JOYS AND SORROWS OF FRIENDSHIP
BY ROBERT HARLING

A Closer Look

Compiled and assembled by Megan Hanks



Steel Magnolias

Presented by the
Commonweal Theatre Company
June 23 - October 23, 2017

ESSENTIALS

The Plot (*Spoiler Alert!*)

Act I, Scene 1: On a Saturday morning in Truvy’s in-home hair salon in Chinquapin Parish, northwestern Louisiana, Truvy evaluates newcomer Annelle’s salon skills using herself as guinea pig. Annelle passes and Truvy hires her on the spot, despite the young woman’s cagey responses to queries about her living situation and her background.

Soon the day’s customers arrive, including neighbor and regular M’Lynn and her daughter, Shelby (who, though not a regular customer at Truvy’s, is having her hair done up specially because it is her wedding day); Clairee, a mature widow with a wicked sense of humor; and, finally, Ouiser, an older woman who seems to be perpetually in a bad mood.

Conversation centers on the wedding, the bride, the groom and hair, clothing and colors. At the goading of all the ladies, Annelle reluctantly reveals the story of her husband (if he really is, in fact, such) absconding with their car and household possessions, leaving her penniless and alone. She is now living at a boarding house across the river. Truvy and the ladies offer sympathy, help and advice and eventually Annelle begins to feel at home.

Shelby, a diabetic, suffers a blood sugar crash and becomes momentarily unresponsive. The women (except Annelle) are familiar with her situation and rush to her aid, and she soon recovers. Discussion reveals that Shelby has been advised by her doctors against having children as it would put too much strain

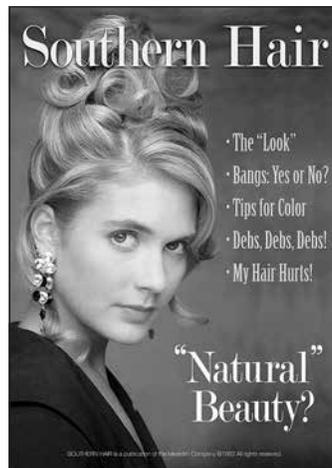
on her weakened body. She appears to accept this fate and says that she and her soon-to-be husband, Jackson, are perfectly happy to adopt.

Scene 2: Shortly before Christmas that same year, Shelby has returned home for the holidays. She announces, first privately to her mother, then to the others, that she is pregnant. M’Lynn is shocked and dismayed but realizes she must accept her strong-willed daughter’s choice. The ladies are delighted at the news. Annelle has straightened out her life and is living in Truvy’s guest house. She has connected with a church and is becoming very religious, and she has found a beau, whom she met at Shelby’s wedding.

Act II, Scene 1: Shelby is now mother to a boy who, though born prematurely, is doing well and is so full of energy he runs her ragged. Shelby and M’Lynn—too casually for the ladies’ taste—reveal that Shelby’s kidneys have failed, she is now

on dialysis, and that M’Lynn will donate one of her kidneys to her daughter. The surgery is set for the next day. The ladies are shocked at the apparent secrecy, but all are supportive and circle the wagons to prepare for the event.

Scene 2: A year later, Shelby has died after complications following the unsuccessful transplant. The ladies are heartbroken but find that, in one another’s love and support, life goes on. Now married and pregnant, Annelle reveals that she plans to name her child Shelby, to everyone’s delight.



A magazine prop created for the show



About the Playwright

Robert Harling was born in 1951 in Dothan, Alabama, one of three children of Robert M. Harling, Jr., and Margaret Jones Harling. He graduated from Northwestern State University in his hometown and obtained a law degree from Tulane University Law School in New Orleans. While in law school, he sang in a band which performed in New Orleans on weekends.

However, Harling never used his law degree: skipping the bar exam, he instead moved to New York City to become an actor, auditioning for bit parts in plays and television commercials, and working as a ticket seller for Broadway shows.

After the death of his younger sister, Su-

san, in 1985 due to diabetes, Harling wrote a short story and adapted it into the play *Steel Magnolias*, which was produced off-Broadway in 1987 to great acclaim and was subsequently translated into seventeen languages.

Harling also wrote the screenplay for the 1989 film version, starring Sally Field and Julia Roberts. He played a small role in the film as a minister. (*For more, please see page 9.*)

Harling went on to write more screenplays: *Soapdish* (1991), *The First Wives Club* (1996), and *Laws of Attraction* (2004); he also worked as an uncredited script doctor on a number of films. Harling also wrote and directed the sequel to *Terms of Endearment* titled *The Evening Star* (1996).

Susan Harling Robinson

Much more than just a fond memento of a time and a place for playwright Robert Harling, *Steel Magnolias* also serves as a tribute to his sister. The character Shelby bears a heartbreaking correlation to Harling's own sister, Susan Harling Robinson. At the age of 32, Susan passed away from complications of diabetes after a kidney transplant failed in October, 1985.

Susan was a pediatric nurse who, like Shelby, went against her doctor's advice and bore a son, which ultimately led to her kidney failure. In an interview with *People* magazine, Harling is quoted saying that Susan was "the fixer of the family," and that her death hit them all extremely hard. Shaken and unsure of how to cope with his sister's passing, six months after her death Harling sat down and wrote the play in about ten days.

It seems that, to Harling, the most important step in creating *Steel Magnolias* was constructing his characters with transparency and full identities, and to use honest storytelling. The characters collectively embody an unbreakable bond of support and friendship that is almost effortlessly maintained. Whether or not everyone's moods are happy or matching, there remains a constant sense of unity that is familiar and warming. When certain characters are confronted with darkness, as

an audience we are simultaneously guided and reassured with them by the strength and grace that the other characters display in such moments.

None of the characters in this play are flat or archetypal. Each is unique, with quirks and unexpected moments. We see these women choose their own styles and hairdos, and individually claim their favorite sectors of '80s pop culture. We see them struggle with and accept gender roles and social hierarchies of the time. And most importantly, we see them recognize one another's struggles as being a part of their own lives, carefully and honestly. It is for this reason that *Steel Magnolias* continues to resonate with audiences and readers around the world as a timeless story. We feel that these women are real people with real lives and families, doubts and dreams, mistakes and victories—like us.

Most of my work will be character motivated... Just people living life and getting through it, like they do where I come from. I have a real sense of responsibility about that. Through my sister's story, I've been given the chance to give back, to say thank you. ... Even in the darkest hours there's stuff that makes you giggle. That's what my sister would like more than anything—to know that we were able to laugh.

—Robert Harling

CONTEXT – THE 1980S

Politics – The Regan Era



President Ronald Reagan, 1981

From Hollywood star to Governor of California to POTUS—Ronald Reagan’s political life and presidency are still controversial and echoing today. In his younger years, Reagan was a member of the Democratic Party and campaigned for Democratic candidates; but his views grew more conservative over time, and in the early 1960s he officially became a Republican.

After making unsuccessful bids for the Republican presidential nomination in 1968 and 1976, Reagan received the party’s nod in 1980. In that year’s general election, he and running mate George H. W. Bush faced off against President Jimmy Carter and Vice President Walter Mondale. Reagan won the election by an electoral margin of 489-49 with almost 51% of the popular vote. At age 69, he was then the oldest person to be elected to the U.S. Presidency.

In his inaugural address, Reagan famously said of America’s then-troubled economy, “In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problems; government is the problem.” Just two months later, on March 30, 1981, he survived an assassination attempt by John Hinckley Jr., a man with a

history of psychiatric problems, outside of a hotel in Washington, D.C. The gunman’s bullet pierced one of the president’s lungs and narrowly missed his heart. Weeks later Reagan was back at work. That same year, Reagan made history by appointing Sandra Day O’Connor as the first woman to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In November 1984, Reagan was reelected by a landslide, defeating Walter Mondale and his running mate Geraldine Ferraro, the first female



Walter Mondale & Geraldine Ferraro

vice-presidential candidate from a major U. S. political party. Reagan, who announced it was “morning again in America,” carried 49 out of 50 states in the election and received 525 out of 538 electoral votes, the largest number ever won by an American presidential candidate.

After the more informal Carter years, Reagan and his wife, Nancy, ushered in a new era of glamour in the nation’s capital, which became known as Hollywood on the Potomac. The First Lady wore designer fashions, hosted numerous state dinners and oversaw a major redecoration of the White House. Many Americans thought of the 1980s as the time of the “yuppie”.

Politics – Reaganomics

Reagan’s time in office is forever book-marked by his domestic agenda. On this front, Reagan implemented policies to reduce the federal government’s reach into the daily lives and pocketbooks of Americans, including tax cuts intended to spur growth (known as Reaganomics). He also advocated for increases in military spending, reductions in certain social programs and measures to deregulate business. Economists have long

since disagreed over the achievements of Reaganomics. Although the majority of the 1980s economy was stabilized and showed much growth compared previous decades, tax cuts plus increased military spending would cost the federal government trillions of dollars. Reagan advocated paying for these expenses by slashing government programs. In the end, Congress approved his tax and defense plans, but refused to make any deep cuts to the wel-





fare state. Even Reagan himself was squeamish about attacking popular programs like Social Security and Medicare, which consume the largest percentages of taxpayer dollars. The results were massive deficits.

The national debt tripled from one to three trillion dollars during the Reagan years

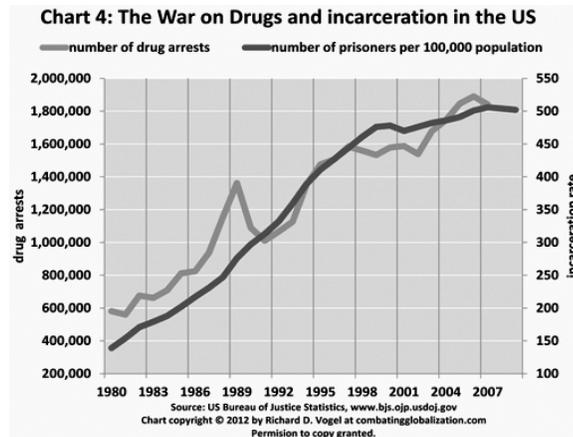
– the highest it had ever been. The President and conservatives in Congress cried for a balanced budget amendment, but neither branch had the discipline to propose or enact a balanced budget. The growth that Americans enjoyed during the 1980s came at a huge price for the generations to follow.

The War on Drugs Continues

Reagan's presidency marked the start of a long period of skyrocketing incarceration rates (which continued into the Clinton years), thanks largely to his unprecedented expansion of the War on Drugs (a term coined by Nixon). The number of people behind bars for nonviolent drug law offenses increased from 50,000 in 1980 to over 400,000 by 1997.

Public concern about illicit drug use grew throughout the 1980s, largely due to media portrayals of people addicted to the new smokeable form of cocaine dubbed "crack." Soon after Reagan took office in 1981, his wife, Nancy, began a highly publicized anti-drug campaign, coining the slogan, "Just Say No." This set the stage for the zero-tolerance policies implemented in the mid-to-late 1980s.

Los Angeles police chief Daryl Gates, who said that "casual drug users should be taken out and shot," founded the DARE drug edu-



cation program, which was quickly adopted nationwide despite the lack of evidence of its effectiveness.

The increasingly harsh drug policies also blocked the expansion of syringe access programs and other harm-reduction policies to reduce the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS.

The Cold War

Reagan's first term in office was marked by a massive buildup of U.S. weapons and troops, and an escalation of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, which he dubbed "the evil empire." Under the Reagan Doctrine America supported anticommunist movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. His administration was eager to provide financial and military aid to anticommunist governments and insurgencies globally. A massive arms race with the Soviet Union ensued, continuing to increase America's debt.

In November 1986, it emerged that the White House had secretly sold arms to Iran in an effort to win the freedom of U.S. hostages in Lebanon, and then diverted money from the sales to Nicaraguan rebels known as the Contras. The Iran-Contra Affair, as it became known, resulted in the conviction

(later reversed) of Reagan's national security adviser John Poindexter and Marine Lt. Col. Oliver North.

During his second term, Reagan forged a diplomatic relationship with the reform-minded Mikhail Gorbachev, leader of the Soviet Union. In 1987, the Americans and Soviets signed a historic agreement to eliminate



The fall of the Berlin Wall



intermediate-range nuclear missiles. That same year, Reagan spoke at Germany’s Berlin Wall, a symbol of communism, and famously challenged Gorbachev to tear it down. Twenty-nine months later, Gorbachev allowed the people of Berlin to dismantle the wall. After

leaving the White House, Reagan returned to Germany in September, 1990—just weeks before the official reunification of Germany—and took several symbolic swings with a hammer at a remaining chunk of the wall.

Pop Culture – Blockbusters & Big Hair Bands



At the movie theater, the 1980s was the age of the blockbuster. Movies like *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, *Return of the Jedi*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Ghostbusters* and *Beverly Hills Cop* appealed to moviegoers of all ages and made hundreds of millions of

dollars at the box office. The 1980s was also the heyday of the teen movie. Films like *The Breakfast Club*, *Some Kind of Wonderful* and *Pretty in Pink* are still popular today.

At home, people watched family sitcoms like *The Cosby Show*, *Family Ties*, *Full House* and *Married With Children*. The Bruce Willis/Cybill Shepherd private detective agency duo show *Moonlighting* premiered in 1985. People also rented movies to watch on their new VCRs, and a whole industry of VHS tape rentals and sales was born and thrived.

By the end of the 1980s, 60% of American television owners got cable service. Arguably the most revolutionary cable network of all



was MTV, which made its debut on August 1, 1981. The music videos the network played made stars out of bands like Duran Duran and Culture Club, and made megastars out of artists like Michael Jackson, whose elaborate *Thriller* video helped sell 600,000 albums in the five days after its first broadcast.

MTV also influenced fashion: people across the country (and around the world) did



their best to copy the hairstyles and fashions they saw in music videos. In this way, artists like Madonna, Prince and David Bowie became (and remain) fashion icons.

As the decade wore on, MTV also became a forum for those who went against the grain or were left out of the yuppie ideal. Rap artists such as Public Enemy channeled the frustration of urban African Americans into their powerful album *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*. Other songs that still ring out as life anthems come from this decade: Journey’s “Don’t Stop Believing,” “Landslide” by Fleetwood Mac, and “Eye of the Tiger” by Survivor—to name only a few.

Heavy metal acts such as Metallica and Guns ’n’ Roses also captured a sense of malaise among young people, particularly young men. Much music of the 1980s stoked a “rebel youth” spirit, which shone through the big hair bands of the day such as Bon Jovi, Van Halen, Aerosmith and Mötley Crüe. Even as Reagan maintained his popularity, pop culture continued to be an arena for dissatisfaction and debate throughout the 1980s, as shown in the huge popularity of Twisted Sister’s song lyric:

We’re not gonna take it
No, we ain’t gonna take it
Oh, we’re not gonna take it anymore!



Fashion & Fun



Can't touch this...until 1990.

The term “too much” simply didn’t exist in the 80s. The hair was almost as big as the Hammer pants, and it was all about bright colors and flashy patterns. Whether it was a wild baggy windbreaker, or a skin-tight neon uni-

tard—leg warmers, scrunchies, and enormous shoulder pads could accentuate any outfit. High-waist denims and big, gaudy jewelry were all the rage. The 80s marked an era of individuality: style with a statement. Mulletts and mile-high stilettos filled the clubs and concert halls. Both genders rocked crop-tops and huge, teased hairdos—and if the question

ever arose, the answer was always: Yes, more hairspray.

And for the younger generation that wasn’t swimming in hairspray fumes or buying their own cassette tapes just yet, there were plenty of great, classic toys to keep busy with. Although not all these toys were actually invented in the 1980s, many found their peak then, such as Rubik’s Cube, Transformers, G.I. Joe action figures, and cap guns. Another 80s toy phenomenon, Cabbage Patch Kids, had little kids giggling across the country. My Little Pony exploded on the scene in 1982, quickly followed by Care Bears, and then Polly Pocket. And in 1989, perhaps one of the most influential toys of all time was invented: the Gameboy Nintendo. The Gameboy created the face of portable gaming devices, and is still extremely popular today. Collectors everywhere are still itching to get their hands on the original Gameboy Nintendo. High-waist pants may come and go every twenty years or so, but the Gameboy definitely proves that some things truly never go out of style.

Design of the Times

There were some great cars and some not-so-great cars out on the road back then. Regardless of how those old models might look to us now, one thing is certain: angular, low-riding sedans were the big thing. People loved boxy Beemers, pointy Caddies, and square cabs with rectangular windows and geometric bodies. Every now and then, a real high roller could be spotted stepping out of his gull-wing De Lorean, or his Corevette “305” California. For fast and sporty types, Firebirds and Camaros were still popular. The energy crisis of the 70s was fading from view—and from design—in the properous 80s.

As for interior design, homeowners of the 1980s began to move away from the brown flower wallpaper and mustard-yellow 70s. Instead, home design became much more “clean” and stripped itself of busy wallpapers and couch patterns. Soft colors and clean



You should see the pastel colors in the original

whites became the new favored paint schemes: think *Miami Vice* pastels (the TV show debuted in 1984). With furniture and

decoration, some went for the preppy blue-and-white pinstripe, some for a Zen Japanese style and others for “shabby chic”—faux-distressed or antiqued finishes or driftwood/beach styles that are still very common décor themes. Overall, 1980s home design took on a much more open, modern concept. Like cars of the day, parallel lines and geometric shapes were very trendy.

CONTEXT – IMAGINARY PLACES, REAL LIFE RELEVANCE

A City by Association

Chinquapin Parish, Louisiana, is the fictional setting for the play. Robert Harling based the small town in the play on his own home town of Natchitoches (NACK-uh-tush), Louisiana, which is also where the movie version of the story was filmed in 1989. It is thought that Harling's inspiration for the name of the fictional parish spawns from the Chinquapin tree, which is native to the region. This species of tree produces small nuts occasionally referred to as "dwarf chestnuts." The only other real-life example of Chinquapin in Natchitoches is a county road that stretches between two highways: Chinquapin Drive. The city of Natchitoches, in Natchitoches Parish, was established in 1714, and is the oldest permanent settlement from the Louisiana Purchase. During the 80s there were about



Map of Louisiana, highlighting Natchitoches Parish and the city of Natchitoches

16,600 people in Natchitoches, and now there are about 18,385.

For our production, we assume that Chinquapin is "located" where Natchitoches actually is, in Northwest Louisiana.

The Deep South

The states of the Deep South are notorious for their warm, humid climates. Winters are mild, and the summers get very hot and sticky. Air conditioning and lots of water are necessary for "keeping your cool."

The warm weather, abundant rainfall and rich, moist soil, makes Louisiana a hub for farming and agriculture. The main crops produced in Natchitoches are cotton, pecans, corn, rice and soybeans. Lakes and waterbodies are littered with crawfish, and there are cattle farms at the end of every road.

The region is also known for social and political conservatism, with longstanding and devout religious associations. There are hundreds of beautiful, historic churches and houses of worship sprinkled across the Southern states. As in much of the Deep South, there is a large following of the Southern Baptist Convention in Natchitoches. As of 2015, 55% of the Natchitoches population identifies as members of this church. According to that same poll, the Catholic Church represents 24% of Natchitoches's population, the United Methodist Church 11%, with the last 10% falling under the "Other" category.



Bourbon Street at Mardi Gras

Of course, one cannot mention the Deep South without mentioning the lights, beads, costumes, alcohol, music, food and the all-around party that is New Orleans. That city has long held the title Jazz Capital of America, but the rich Mardi Gras tradition and celebratory culture does not stop at the New Orleans city limits.

Since 1926, Natchitoches has celebrated the Christmas spirit with their six-week Christmas Festival called "The City of Lights," which includes fireworks, parades, elaborate light displays, food booths, carolers and a beauty pageant.





Some other festivals include: The Krewe of Dionysus Mardi Gras Parade, Bloomin' On the Bricks, Jazz and R&B Festival, Melrose Arts and Crafts Festival, Cookin' on the Cane BBQ Competition and Festival, Celebration on the Cane, NSU Folk Festival, Cane River Zydeco Festival, Drake Salt Work Festival, Meat Pie Festival, Marthaville Good Ole Days

Festival, Robeline Heritage Festival and the Haunted History Tour.

A sense of celebration for art, music, food and culture is extremely prominent within Southern creeds and lifestyles. This old area of the country truly has a special sense of community and festivity that roots it to its origins.

Diabetes

Diabetes Mellitus refers to a group of diseases that affects the body's ability to metabolize glucose or blood sugar. A diabetic may have too much or too little glucose in the blood, which can lead to various health problems. It is a very serious disease that, if left untreated, can lead to blindness, kidney failure, loss of legs (from amputation necessitated by complications of untreated injuries due to loss of nervous sensation in the legs) and death.

Type 1 diabetes is characterized by the sufferer's inability to produce sufficient (if any) insulin, the master hormone of metabolism. Sufferers require replacement insulin. Shelby is a Type 1 diabetic. With Type 2 diabetes (a.k.a. "adult onset"), the body cannot use its insulin correctly ("insulin resistance").

Both types of diabetes greatly increase a person's risk for a range of serious health complications. Although monitoring and managing the disease can prevent complications, diabetes remains the leading cause of blindness and kidney failure in America. It also continues to be a critical risk factor for heart disease, stroke, and foot or leg amputations.

Diabetes & Pregnancy

Infants of diabetic mothers experience a disproportionately high rate of mortality, prematurity, congenital defects, larger birth weights, and neonatal respiratory distress syndrome. Mothers also risk ketoacidosis, hypoglycemia, an acceleration of microvascular renal, as well as ocular and neural, complications. But diabetic mothers are capable

of giving birth to perfectly healthy babies. It is achievable with a mindful lifestyle, and careful attention to maintaining glucose levels. There are also many health centers and facilities that specialize in diabetic pregnancies.

Renal Disease

Renal disease, or kidney failure, is most common among those who are diagnosed as diabetic before the age of about 20; about 50% of these cases lead to probable renal disease. When renal failure appears imminent, dialysis and kidney transplants become the treatment options.

Diabetes Types Compared	
Type 1	Type 2
"Juvenile-onset" or insulin-dependent	"Adult-onset" or non-insulin-dependent
Symptoms usually start in childhood or young adulthood. People often seek medical help because they are seriously ill from sudden symptoms of high (or low) blood sugar.	The person may not have symptoms before diagnosis. Usually the disease is discovered in adulthood, but an increasing number of children are being diagnosed with the disease.
Episodes of low blood sugar level (hypoglycemia) are common.	No episodes of low blood sugar level, unless the person is taking insulin or certain diabetes medicines.
Cannot be prevented. Sufferers require replacement insulin.	Can be prevented or delayed with a healthy lifestyle, including maintaining a healthy weight, eating sensibly, and exercising regularly.

Steel Magnolias on Film & TV



Shining Stars

The screenplay of the 1989 film *Steel Magnolias* was also written by playwright Robert Harling and directed by Herbert Ross whose other memorable film credits include *Footloose* (1984), and *The Secret of My Success* (1987). An all-star

cast made the film an instant classic, with Sally Field as M'Lynn, Dolly Parton as Truvy, Shirley MacLaine as Ouiser, Daryl Hannah as Annelle, Olympia Dukakis as Clairee, and one newcomer, Julia Roberts, as Shelby.

This was one of Roberts's first big roles, and the casting director trudged through turmoil deciding whether or not she would be right for the role—but in the end, it was not up to him. Robert Harling knew she was the one. “She walked into the room and that smile lit everything up and I said, “That’s my sister,”” Harling told the *Daily Mail*. “So she joined the party and she was magnificent.” Roberts went on to receive her first Oscar nomination, as well as a Golden Globe Award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role.

Leading ladies aside, many other memorable artists graced the screen in this first film edition: Tom Skerritt, Sam Shepard, and Dylan McDermott—to name only a few. Playwright Robert Harling himself was also cast in a small role as the minister.

Casting, Re-casting, and Hardcore Directing

Before Roberts, Meg Ryan was briefly attached to the film as Shelby, but dropped out in order to take on *When Harry Met Sally*. Winona Ryder was also a Shelby contender, as was Laura Dern. But the casting director insisted that the producers audition Roberts, who was filming *Mystic Pizza* at the time.

Once filming began, it is said that director Ross was notoriously hard on his actresses.

“Herb Ross was basically a choreographer,” MacLaine said at a 2013 screening of the film. “That means he could be sometimes very stern and sometimes very harsh. My deepest memories of the film were how we bonded together after he told one or all of us how we couldn’t act.” At the same screening, MacLaine and Sally Field recalled how Ross once suggested that Dolly Parton take acting lessons. “You don’t say that to Dolly Parton,” said Field. “Dolly Parton is absolutely the funniest, wittiest, and filthiest, and she will cut you to ribbons.”

Ross was particularly hard on the upcoming star, Julia Roberts. “He went after Julia with a vengeance,” Field recalled. “This was pretty much her first big film.” MacLaine added that Roberts “would come to my house every night and say, ‘I think I’m terrible. What am I doing?’ and she was really in tears.” Cinematic history has proven that Julia’s performance (perhaps as a result of Ross’s tough love) permanently planted her name on this role, and in the professional acting world as a star.

Writing & Rewriting History

The play’s immediate success led to fast and furious interest in purchasing the movie rights. “It happened so quickly,” Harling told *Garden & Gun*, “With the buzz around the play in New York, there was a constant stream from Hollywood coming to check it out. Ray Stark bought the rights and promised me he’d film it in my hometown of Natchitoches, which really clinched the deal.”

The film put Natchitoches on the map. It was important to Harling that the film be shot in his hometown on Natchitoches, and its impact is still being felt today. It has had a tremendous impact on the tourism trade and community in Louisiana. Visitors to Natchitoches who want to visit some of the film’s main locations can take an official tour, and even sleep in M'Lynn’s house. The bulk of the images of M'Lynn’s home were shot in the Cook-Taylor House, which was built in the 1840s. A residential home at the time, the family who lived there relocated to an apart-





ment during filming so as not to disturb the filmmakers. In 2003, the property was turned into a bed and breakfast and renamed “The Steel Magnolias House.”

Intent on filming the story as realistically as possible, Herbert Ross hired the actual doctors and nurses who looked after Susan Harling in her final days to do the same for Shelby on the set. The nurse who turns off Shelby’s life support in the film did the same for Susan in real life.

In 2012, the Lifetime Channel remade *Steel Magnolias* with an all African American cast, including Queen Latifah, Phylicia Rashad, Alfre Woodard, Jill Scott, Adepero Oduye, and Condola Rashad. This version ended up becoming the channel’s third most-watched original telecast of all time. But Harling was not a fan. Although impressed by the remake’s caliber of actors, he didn’t appreciate that the story needed to be cut up in order to make room for commercial breaks.

A Glossary of 1980s (or so) Slang

AIRHEAD	n. A stupid or unaware person; moron, dim-wit. Term implies that there is nothing but air in the subject’s head. (“He’s confused again. What an airhead!”)	NEW WAVE	A genre of pop/rock music from the late ’70s to mid-’80s that relied on heavy use of synthesizers, performed by groups like A Flock of Seagulls, Duran Duran, The Busboys, Thompson Twins and Erasure; also identifies the associated fashion style and aesthetic: lots of hair mousse or gel, makeup on the face, loud colors, etc.
BAD	adj. Very good, excellent; “cool,” awesome. Popularized by Michael Jackson’s album <i>Bad</i>	RAD/RADICAL	adj. Fantastic, great. Borrowed from surfing terminology.
BARF ME OUT	interjection. Used in “Valley Girl speak” to denote something offensive or disliked.	RANDOM	adj. Unexpected, unusual; especially something interestingly or delightfully so. “That band is so random!”
BODACIOUS	adj. An ’80s guy’s way to describe a woman who had a beautiful body. “She is bodacious with gnarly ta-tas.”	SPAZ	n. or v. Awkward person or someone overly excited; to behave that way. Used as early as 1950s to refer to a “square.”
the BOMB	n. or adj. Something favorable. “This pizza is the bomb!”	STOKED	adj. Enthusiastic, excited. “I’m stoked we’re going to the Duran Duran concert!”
CHILL (OUT)	v. To relax, hang out; calm down. “Dude, just chill out.” “Let’s chill at your place.”	TOTALLY	adv. Used to enhance various adjectives. Can be used by itself as a strong affirmative. “Your hair is totally rad.”
CHOICE	adj. Extremely good, “cool”. (Resurgence of an original meaning of the word.)	TUBULAR	adj. Something that is “cool.” Borrowed from surfing terminology, referring to the tubular shape of a wave as its crest falls over onto itself and through which a great surf ride can be made.
DINK	n. Acronymic of “Double Income No Kids”; used in reference to yuppie couples.	VEG	(<i>vêj</i>) v. or n. To vegetate (do nothing), or one who vegetates. Used to describe relaxing. A “couch potato” would “veg.” Today’s equivalent would be “chill” or “chilling out.”
DIPSTICK	n. A stupid person, idiot. Popularized by the character Boss Hogg on the TV show <i>The Dukes of Hazzard</i>	WICKED	adv. Similar to “to the max,” used as a modifier to add emphasis. “She is wicked smart.” “That is wicked cool.”
EAT MY SHORTS	Phrase used as a universal comeback. Heavily in use in the ’80s; also used on TV’s <i>The Simpsons</i> .	YUPPIE	n. Based on the acronym for Young Urban Professional or Young Upwardly-mobile Professional. A well-educated, career-oriented, usually white person driven by money. This person is also connected to the social scene, especially if it could better their business or career.
FRESH	adj. “Cool,” new. “Duran Duran’s new album is so fresh!”		
GNARLY	adj. Extremely bad or good. Borrowed from surfing terminology referring to badly breaking waves. Not commonly used today.		
GRODY	adj. extremely disgusting or gross. Sometimes emphasized by appending “– to the max!”		
HOSER	n. Loser, jerk. Coined by SCTC characters Bob & Doug McKenzie (Rick Moranis & Dave Thomas) on their faux TV show <i>The Great White North</i> .		
LAME	adj. Worthless, useless. Used to describe something or someone who is not “cool” or acceptable.		