

Hollywood's BOO ARNOLD
comes home to Texas for
family, golf, and the chance to
build life into others

FOR REAL



BOO ARNOLD (left) plays alongside David Gautreaux in "Rigged," a 2012 episode of Lifetime's *Drop Dead Diva*.

Boo, as a guy in his 50s, you've lived long enough to have experienced plenty of things. Maybe most surprising is that after time as a college athlete and seminary student and starting a business, you got into acting in your 30s. How in the world did that happen?

Well, I was still single, and I had always been a sports guy—I played baseball in college. Sports had taken up much of my free time and focus along with school, and there had always been some things that I had wanted to try and never really had the chance to try. Acting was one of the things. So I took an acting class at age 32—I have to believe God was in it—that was taught by a stage actress out of Chicago who loved acting and stage performance. I really gleaned a lot from her, and her enthusiasm and passion for acting was contagious.

Acting was the first thing since college baseball that felt like competitive sports to me, and it was energizing. When you audition or act, you are using your body and your voice, and you are performing, and it's either believable or not, or somewhere in the middle. I could perform and get good or bad results. Since baseball, I had never really found anything that satisfied that need in me. I discovered with acting that I loved to perform, because when you go in to audition, your performance is evaluated by casting directors, directors, producers, and if you're good there is a payoff, and it's competitive. Because it felt a lot like sports, I really grabbed hold of it. I had some talent, and some success early in Texas which took me to LA where the real fight began.

That is kind of a cliché, "I'm off to Hollywood," but you kind of have to go off to Hollywood if you are going to get into the business, don't you?

You do. I called a friend of mine, George Eads, who I grew up with. He was an actor on *CSI Las Vegas*, which ran for 15 years. At that time, he was probably in his fifth or sixth season of *CSI*. A friend gave me his number and he said, "Look man, you can try to call George, but I don't know that he will answer because he is busy and in demand." But that day, George picked up

his phone when I called (again I believe this was God's plan) and he said, "Sure, man, come out to LA. I'll bring you on set and introduce you to my agent."

That really cracked the door open to LA. I spent the day with him on the set of *CSI*. Of course, in my mind I'm thinking, *This is exactly what I want to do*, as if it's easy to be a series regular on the number one show in television—you know, the ambitious, naive actor that I was at the time. George did introduce me to his agent. She said she would "hip pocket" me, which means, I won't sign you to a contract, but I'll get you out on some auditions, and I will sign you if you start booking jobs. That was enough to get me out to LA. Funny enough, when I landed in LA, I called her, and she immediately told me that she could not take me as a client. Her agency was releasing some of their contracted actors already and they were cutting back, and I was thinking, *Oh great, welcome to Hollywood*, right? So, I had to start the long difficult process of finding a theatrical agent.

Acting is kind of this strange business. What you are doing isn't real, but you are making every attempt for the audience to perceive that it is real. What's the hardest thing about pulling that off?

Well, what might surprise you, in my opinion, is that if the acting is good, it *is* real. It's just that the words aren't your own and they are part of a story on a page. Actors funnel their organic experiences and emotion through lines on a page. That's what makes it believable—a very real, emotional experience embodied in a scripted character. There are a few actors that mimic behavior and emotion that I have heard about, but most actors use various methods that help them draw upon past experiences and their own pool of emotional resources. That's why when you observe good acting, it seems organic, real, and believable, because in most cases it is. My guess is that Ben Affleck and Matt Damon were incredibly convincing in *Good Will Hunting* because they're best friends off screen.

Is there a risk as an actor that in your regular life you're going to play an

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inauthentic self in front of people?

We all do it to an extent, obviously.

That's a good question. I don't think so and here's why: Any actor who is effective has a really good understanding of his or her personal history, of any trauma, insecurities, fears, feelings of happiness and elation, etc.—they have gone through a lot of informal therapy by means of reflection and contemplation. I worked this process for years in classes. So, when you are acting, it calls for such a big emotional commitment that it's not something you can throw around lightly—it's too personal. It should however, help you connect with others and make you increasingly empathetic to their life experiences.

Most of the actors that I have worked with, famous or not, are incredibly genuine people. There are a few that have had big egos out there, but most are very real and sensitive to other actors, because it is such a tough career and there is a lot of rejection and failure. It's always been a pleasure for me to move around in the acting community and relate to other actors.

Who are some people you have worked with who have their perspective right?

I worked with Tony Shalhoub on *Monk*. When I showed up, I loaded the van with Tony to head to set. He turned around and said, "I can't tell you how happy we all are to have you working with us this week." Tony didn't know me from Adam, but he was a wonderful and gracious host that week on his TV show. Any time I saw a principal actor, the star of a show, show guest stars and co-stars that kind of warmth and hospitality, it was a great encouragement. You find out that these people are human, and they have got their own issues and challenges like the rest of us, and they understand how difficult it is to make your way in the industry.

What about you? You have a commitment to your faith that isn't common in the TV business. How did you stay grounded in that environment?

I had a friend, Michael Terry from my church, say to me one day, "Come to this Friday morning Bible study up in Brent-

wood. It started at Bel Air Presbyterian Church 25 or 30 years ago and now meets in an old church off the 405. It's a bunch of FCA and business guys. I think you'll like the group."

So I went, and it was just ideal for me. I really appreciate getting together where people are honest and vulnerable. There were some older guys in the group, and I always appreciate older men who are encouraging and who have lived a lot of life, who can speak to any issues I might be struggling with. I was a part of that group from 2003 to 2016, 12 years or so, a long time.

Now you're back in Texas with your family. Tell me about how they help you maintain your perspective.

My wife is not anything like me. She's extremely extroverted and optimistic. I don't think she has ever had a bad day. She wakes up smiling at the world each morning. I am the one with the all the consternation and ambivalence, and I think far too much, so she is a great partner and she is the one who really sets the tone and mood in our home. She loves the Lord and people, so it's kind of a simple equation for her. He loves us, and this is what we are about. Let's have joy in life and have fun and love people—so she is a great example for me to follow.

I have two girls and two boys. The girls are 13 and 12, the boys eight and five. While in LA, we were involved in a lot of ministry—a church start-up through Bel Air Presbyterian, I was preaching occasionally, we were involved with Young Life, we housed Afghani kids in the summer who needed medical care. We were so busy with ministry, I'm not sure how we did it all on top of four kids. Since our move back to Texas, I am focused on my kids and family and less on ministry. Stacy and I do this together and it's now our top priority. We want to try to cram in all the memorable shared experiences we can while they are young, so they have great memories to draw from later in life.

You're a golfer. Let's talk a little bit about your golf game. How often do you get out to play?

About two times a week.

How would you describe your game?

I am a seven handicap. I should be better given how often I play! But, isn't that what we all think about our golf game?

What are your strengths? What are you good at in the game?

I drive the ball well, I chip the ball well, putting kills me. That is probably my greatest weakness.

Where are some of your favorite courses you have had a chance to play?

You can't beat the golf courses in Palm Desert. Stone Eagle and Bighorn. There are also some great golf courses here in San Antonio—TPC San Antonio, Oak Hills, La Cantera. I play at my course all the time: Fair Oaks Ranch. It's out my back door. But probably the best courses I ever played were in Palm Desert.

More than the golf, though, you've gotten connected with golfers through a Links Fellowship. You were part of the group in LA and you have been involved in some other small groups. How would you say that your Links Fellowship is similar to other groups and how is it different?

Well, it's very similar. I lead the Links Fellowship here and one thing I tell the guys is that we are going to read scripture every week and pray. Those two disciplines are a given. And then we get to the personal stuff, which comes naturally. The group in LA was run this way. We don't go into the depth in scripture here as much as we did in LA. We had PhD's come in and it was a more knowledge-focused study. Here it's a lot more life stuff. A lot of struggles with businesses or with personal issues, so there is a lot more sharing that is going on.

Sometimes guys will say to me, "Are you good with guys talking and sharing that much?" I say, "Man, those guys need to talk. Their house is on fire. They need some time to vent and then have us reflect back on what they are saying and care for them." There is probably a lot more listening that goes on with this group than in LA, but we did have men share out there too.

You've talked about caring for these guys that have real needs in their life right now. That's vision enough for a Fellowship, isn't it?

I think so. As I get older, I realize that I need to continue to reach out and care for people, but if God is not in it, nothing is going to happen. So, I also need to pray for the wide assortment of friends at the club—members and employees—and wait and see what God is doing. Often, it's a crisis that pushes people to God and forces them to ask some bigger questions.

For some at my club, it appears as if golf is literally their life. Their ego and their identity are tied up in their handicap, golf cliques, and net worth. It's such a small world; there is so much more in life. Jesus wants to open our eyes to his kingdom of reconciliation, authentic friendships, love, and healing. The best thing for me is to not get into any ego matches. And I am capable of this because pride is ever at my door, knocking. However, I do my best to try to defuse the ego thing and to truly enjoy the people I am playing golf with. I play golf well enough that I am accepted, but most are better than I am, so I am no real threat! I'll keep making myself available and we'll see what God does.

Sometimes you can get criticized as a Christian for trying to jam it down people's throats, but it sounds to me like you are willing to wait.

Yeah, I don't think I have ever jammed anything down anyone's throat and had it work.

Well said. But that is the reputation sometimes.

I learned a really good principle when I was working with Young Life after college, and it's that you have to "earn the right to be heard." I think that that is still true. You earn the right by hanging out with people in their world, showing up when no one else shows up, and I think that over time they are more open to hear what you have to say if they believe you really care. Young Life was really helpful in this way, and I keep reminding myself that if you keep showing up you'll earn the right to be heard, you will earn the right to be a friend. 🙏



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